

Australians at War Film Archive

Noel Hardman - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1491>

Tape 1

00:36 **So Noel where did you grow up?**

Where did I?

Yeah.

Well I was born in Fremantle and then I lived in Belmont, from there to Caversham and from there to Guilford Road, Mount Lawley.

How long were you in Fremantle for?

01:00 I was born in Fremantle, we weren't living, my mother was living in Nanbarn [?] near Moora at the time and came to Fremantle to have me, you see, stayed with relations down there.

So what can you remember about your childhood, growing up in Perth?

Oh quite a bit, yeah.

Where did you go to school?

Went to school in Belmont School and then from there to Caversham and

01:30 then from there to Woodbridge College and then at the age of fourteen I was apprenticed and I started my apprenticeship so I didn't have any long term education at all, in that regard.

Got any brothers and sisters?

Yes, one brother and three sisters.

Where are you placed in the family?

Second last.

Second last?

02:00 **And what sort of subjects did you enjoy in primary school there Noel?**

Oh just about everything I think. I had a bit of an interruption. When I was five I got run over by a truck so I was out of action for a while.

Gee, how did that happen?

Well it was the last day at school and the children that were going to start next year they wanted to go to school you see, and we were going along and

02:30 there was a shop that sold pencils and bits and pieces on the right and someone said they were going to go over and get a pencil and I said "I'll get it for you", so I grabbed the money and shot onto the road, straight under a truck. The dual wheels ran over my head and luckily it had stock onboard and it bounced evidently over my head but I was in the Children's Hospital for I don't know how long but at that time I had the record for being the longest child being unconscious.

03:00 **How long were you unconscious for?**

I don't know, probably about a few days or a week or something but I wouldn't know.

You don't know because you were unconscious?

I don't remember, no ones ever really told me but they did say it was a long time. And we had a dairy there, Mum and Dad, and then from there we went to Caversham and we had a store in Caversham and I attended Caversham school.

03:30 **Just before we go to Caversham can you tell me, sorry where was the dairy?**

The dairy was in the Great Eastern Highway where the, near the, it's where the motel is now, on the left hand side.

Oh, okay.

On the left hand side, the whole of that area.

And how old were you when your parents had the dairy?

Well when I went there I would have been about three I suppose and I left

04:00 there when I was about nine, something like that. These are all bad, I don't remember them at all on that folder, all the dates.

That's alright, but I'm just trying to get a bit of an idea because at nine years old I'm expecting that you would have had a few jobs to do on the dairy?

Well long before that, milking cows and cleaning out, mucking out the bales and one thing or another, yeah.

04:30 And as we went to school we went past the blacksmith's shop and I was always getting into trouble because I'd go and watch the blacksmith. I was always interested in engineering, right from a kid. I'd go and watch these blacksmiths and be late home from school and get into strife, but it was worth it.

What sort of things would they be doing in a blacksmith's?

Oh welding, forge welding and shoes, horse shoes and ornamental work and re-tyring

05:00 wheels. There was a lot of horse and carts around in those days and there was a lot of work with that.

So you were quite fascinated by that?

Oh yes, yes and the blacksmith would always put on a show. If they wanted to make a loud bang they used to spit on the anvil and then put the red hot metal on and hit it and it was just like a gun going off. They were always putting on a bit of a show.

05:30 There would be about five kids ranged up on their lift up window, with their heads over the top and their feet over the rail, watching.

So you'd be doing that instead of going to school?

Oh no, no went to school.

I mean I thought you were getting a bit late?

Oh no, on the way to school and home. We had to come past it. It was a magnet. If the door was open I never went by, whether it was raining or what went on, I was there.

A magnet?

Yeah, we only lived about a quarter of a mile further on, on

06:00 the same side of road, you see

So that would make you late for some of your jobs at home?

Oh yes, but they knew where I was and they knew I was interested in anything like that. Dad was mechanically inclined and he was always doing mechanical work and I was there helping him, so they made allowance there for me I think. They knew I wasn't getting up to mischief, that was the main thing. I spent the rest of my days doing that.

Did you play any sport Noel?

06:30 Not a lot. I played cricket and tennis when I was at Caversham but then the war came. When I was fourteen I started my apprenticeship and that was in West Perth, and we used to bike from Caversham to West Perth and back. That was twenty-two miles in a day and we started at half past seven, so we left at about six o'clock and didn't get back until about half past six or seven at night, depending on the wind when we were biking

07:00 and Dean and I would often have to go in and get one of the sisters. They'd probably got a ride in and they wanted a bike so I often had to trail a bike in to get them off the train and bring them home, so by the time that went and working flat out, apprentices in those days weren't coddled. You got on the edge of a sledge hammer or whatever was required and so we just we, you were worn out and just wanted to get to sleep ready for the next day and that was six days a week in those days.

07:30 **Just before I get more into your apprenticeship, why did you move from the dairy to Caversham?**

That's a pretty long story.

Oh we've got plenty of tape.

Well the, my Dad came from Tasmania and over there they had the Kikuyu grass and he was on the first to bring it into Western Australia and we had beautiful

08:00 grounds there and beautiful ground in good condition, because he was always good at the farming too. So he put it in Kikuyu for the cows and had a beautiful crop of Kikuyu. The local racing crowd, who in my view were just a mob of mongrels, decided that the Kikuyu would be good for their horses, so they used to go and open the gate and put a dozen horses in on his paddock, you see. So he objected

08:30 to that and he went and saw them and told them to keep them out and they said "Oh no, Tassie, it's good stuff, the horses love it." They just treated everyone like rubbish and these were the top people in the trotting and racing game at the time.

This is why you say people in racing are mongrels?

That's right. So, you'll hear my reason for that in a minute. So anyway then he said "Right" and he put padlocks on the gate, so they then

09:00 came along and cut the gate and cut the fence, put their horses in, wired it up and when they took their horses out they left it open and the racing fraternity just about ran the whole of Belmont at that time. They ran the Shire Council, and the town and the whole lot. So in the meantime as they were taking their horses out, if they shooed a few cows out, well and good and the pound keeper would be there and he'd take the cows down and put them in the pound. So then Dad would have to pay to get his cows out of the pound.

09:30 So he said "Right", gave them a warning and said "If any more are put in there, I've got a gun and I'm going to shoot them". So they said "Don't do that Tassie, cause you've got a lot of kids go to school and a few of them might get run over on the way." So at any rate it came to such a state and then Mum used to get up and do the milking with us kids and Dad unless he was working somewhere else, and she'd take the milk and drive

10:00 in, we had an old car, she'd drive into Foy and Gibson, and carry it into Foy and Gibson's. They were really battling to get going, so the next thing was they had the health authorities around there saying that she had been watering the milk and these people had put water in the milk and taking samples, so that came on. So in the end it just got that way they drove them out, so they either drove them mad or drove them out, so

10:30 they sold out and got out.

That's extraordinary!

It is extraordinary.

You'd think that there'd be some sort of policing that could go on that would take over this?

Not a thing. They had seven or eight people, jockeys and trainers, saying their milk had all been polluted and not only water, there was other stuff in it as well. They took the samples in and that was it. I tell you they absolutely ran the whole of that area and that and you couldn't do a thing without them.

11:00 You had another example of the same thing, one of the cows died and I remember my brother and I went out, we went across the road and into the bush and actually it died over on the other side of the Great Eastern Highway. It went a bit mad and got out and hurt itself and died, so we dug a hole there and we went down six feet and we buried the cow, they watched us do it. And a week later the authorities came out and Dad had to

11:30 dig the cow up and take it somewhere. We couldn't do a thing. On the way to school the kids would pick on us and that sort of thing so we learnt pretty early in life to take care of ourselves.

So how did the kids pick on you, what were they picking on you about?

Oh, anything at all, just walk up to you and give you a push over, anything at all. They were determined that they were going to get Dad out of there and they were going to buy the land. And they finished up with it and we couldn't do anything about it, there was just nothing you could do. Couldn't afford solicitors

12:00 in those days.

Sure. Those kids who were giving you grief, were they the kids of the racing people?

Pardon?

The kids who were giving you grief?

Yeah, the relations of the racing people, yeah. They all thought it was a great joke. Everyone at school knew what was going on and what was happening. They knew before we did often.

Gee, that would make you wild?

Well it did knock Dad. He was never the same again after that. He was a proud

12:30 person and didn't like being beaten but when they threatened us he thought it was no good and to get out.

It was almost worth pulling up the grass?

No, well if they'd pulled up the grass they wouldn't have got anything for it. The only reason they sold it was they tried to sell it, they thought they'd sold it to somebody who wasn't in the fraternity, but then they found out all the horses were in there so it was a dummy

13:00 bought it for the crowd. I won't give names but they were big names then and still are.

Lovely, lovely behaviour. So what were you doing in Caversham?

Well in Caversham the, Mother had a shop there, a store.

What sort of shop?

Just a general store, food and groceries and bits and pieces and

13:30 we were going from there, my brother and I were going to Perth, biking in every day. The girls went to, well early in the piece there of course I went to school in the primary school there and then when I got older I went to Woodridge and then went we went to the apprenticeship. We used to live in the river, the Swan River was only about a mile away and we had our swimming hole down there and we'd dash down before and after school. We just lived in the river,

14:00 winter and summer.

How did you learn to swim?

A long way back. It would have been at Belmont because my sister got into trouble and I pulled her in. I think they just threw me in and said "Well swim or sink" so I swam, dog paddle, they showed me how. In those days there was no professional teaching, it was just the family taught you and kept an eye on you.

Sink, swim and paddle?

Ah?

14:30 **Sink, swim or paddle.**

Sink or paddle, dog paddle as they called it.

So were you relieved after all the problems with Belmont to move to Caversham?

Didn't affect us really. I was too young for it to worry about those things. It affected Mother and Father but not me.

But going to a new school you wouldn't have got picked on?

That's right. The only thing that affected me was what it did to them, from having a successful dairy and being successful

15:00 they were just had to get out at any price.

Sure. So what were your duties as far as the shop was concerned?

Usually pinching a lolly when no one was looking. No, we had chopping the wood and general stuff around and Mum was a wonderful cook and a wonderful person but she was a pretty strict sort of a person too. And I can remember she'd say in the morning "Noel, the

15:30 woods getting low, there's no wood chopped, okay", so my brother and I would have a fight about who was going to do it and we'd shoot off to work and come home and forget about it and you'd sit down to your meal of a night and hungry, all day on the go, and the next minute, slop, there'd be a piece of raw steak and some raw veggies put on your plate, so you got the message.

That's an excellent lesson.

Yeah.

16:00 No, they were wonderful parents and we learnt quite a few lessons early in life.

So how far away is Woodbridge from Caversham?

That was only, that was at Guilford, probably about four miles.

So it's not a huge distance. Is it a school that you went to there?

It's a prep, it's a preparatory school for Guilford Grammar. They still hoped to make something of me. They were wasting time and money.

16:30 **So your parents were obviously wanting you to get an education?**

No, they wanted me to follow the engineering trade because they knew that was what I was mad on but they probably knew that if I had better remedial knowledge and training that I would go further in my trade, but that wasn't to be.

Just also wondering, did the Depression affect

17:00 **your family in any way that you can remember?**

Oh yes, early in the piece, before I was born, Mum and Dad were on a farm and it was during the time of the Depression when wheat was worth nothing and there was three years of drought. Dad got quite a big stipend from Tasmania as it was his mother's,

17:30 on his mother's death and he put that into another place and did it up and got it just right and then they had these six years and that just knocked everyone and if it hadn't have been from the money coming in we wouldn't have been able to go to the dairy or anything. In those days there were thousands just walking off their properties with nothing, just with a suitcase, so that did affect us greatly, but not me.

18:00 **So you were fourteen when you start this apprenticeship, so with Woodbridge you would only have been there for a year, would you?**

A year, that's all.

So how did you actually gain an apprenticeship?

Well my Dad was always in the engineering and he worked on Bellis, which I just can't think of their name, (UNCLEAR), Bellis Estate,

18:30 it's up there still and he used to take work into Lewis, LC Lewis, where I served my apprenticeship, and when we became of age he asked Lewis if he would apprentice me. He said "Yes, send him in". So I went in there and I was apprenticed to it for fitting and turning.

How excited about this were you?

Oh very excited, yeah.

19:00 That excited that I got into trouble because I was always too boisterous and tried to do things in a hurry at work. They used to tell me to slow down, but I was told I had to please them so I did everything I could.

Well that's lovely. What sort of things were you learning as part of your apprenticeship?

Oh well, at Lewis' it was general engineering and whatever trade you went in as didn't matter, as I'll explain later they, first of all you

19:30 usually went down in the welding shop and that would be a hand forge for everything, heating up silver heads. They used to do a lot of silver head welding and that sort of thing, so you'd be on the forge and we used to dome half inch steel plate for receivers, air receivers, we'd make. They'd be red hot so you'd be on the mallet for about an hour and a half, two hours a big heavy mallet and all those sorts of jobs. And then you'd go on to preparing the jobs

20:00 for welding, for the oxy and then you'd do oxy welding and you'd have the job prepared by someone else, so you learnt to do things thoroughly. Then you went into the arc welding for a while and then after about your second year, you'd go onto the machines. By then you've got the run of the house and the general discipline and that sort of thing.

What sort of discipline was there?

Pretty strict in those

20:30 days, you didn't get away with anything at all. The first you did was get a kick in the backside and you'd ask what that was for or a clip across the ears. Oh no, it was pretty strict and I think we were all the better for it.

So the strictness, I'm assuming, is just respect and being on time and being diligent?

21:00 Oh yes, yes, yes. Not only on time but there was a whistle that blew when you went off and you didn't wash your hands a half hour before the knock off time. There was knock off time and then you did what you wanted to do. No, it was very, they had to in those days to more or less make it out, so then we progressed through there and then the war broke out and we went onto munitions.

Just before we get into that, how did the blokes who were teaching you as an

21:30 **apprentice, how did they treat you?**

Some very good, mostly very good but I was unfortunate again because the girl in the office who was a lovely person and her brother who was a lovely person, when I went there, as a rule in that shop you start as a messenger boy and you do the message work and then if you were satisfactory they gave you

an apprenticeship.

- 22:00 And probably because Dad knew Lewis and had been supplying him with work and instead of starting off as a messenger boy they put me in as a messenger boy, so straight away some of the crew that were there thought "He's a little pushing in" and they didn't mind taking it out on me, but all good training.

Were these the other apprentices or?

No, these would be the tradesmen.

- 22:30 No, there were probably about four or five apprentices there all the time.

How did you get on with those blokes?

Oh good, no trouble at all, no trouble but as I said some of the men there they were, because they were a tradesman and you were an apprentice they had to keep telling you about it, but you learnt.

Were you still living at home at this stage?

- 23:00 Yes.

What sort of things would you do on your time off?

Well very little, as I said because biking in and out took up most of the day and by the time you got home after a hard day and a twenty two mile bike you didn't feel like running around in circles. But we still found time to do a few things. I started to do a bit of boat building and a few projects like that. And I was always interested in cars

- 23:30 and there was nearly always somebody would bring their car along, even at that age. There wasn't a lot of people with mechanical knowledge and I'd always been interested in pulling bits apart to see how they went and if anyone had something they didn't want I'd take it home and wreck it and keep the bolts and nuts and the rest of it and learn how things worked. And there was always somebody, and there still is, asking around wanting me to do odd jobs. So by the time you got those

- 24:00 and I had a mate with a motorbike. We rebuild that and a few other things. No, I always kept busy and in between times when the season was on, not so much with the grape picking but other work I'd go and do some (UNCLEAR) work and before I started my apprenticeship I used to go into the local bakery in Guilford and spend two mornings in there,

- 24:30 up until eight o'clock. I'd start at four or five and then carry on with the rest, get a bit of pocket money. In those days the wages were seventeen [shillings] and eight pence a week, you see. Well at that stage a lot of that went to Mum and you didn't have anything for yourself, your board and your clothes, so anywhere you could make a bob [shilling] you made a bob.

So what would you spend your money on, on weekends?

Oh bike parts or tools or whatever you wanted.

- 25:00 **In other words you're spending all your money on bike parts and no money on entertainment?**

No, no we would bike into Guilford and go to a matinee there of a Saturday afternoon if we could, if we had the money and our own home was entertainment. All the family sang well and Mum played the piano.

- 25:30 And our home was always a centre for a crowd so the entertainment was in the home. You really didn't have to go out. There would always be something doing.

It sounds quite idyllic?

Yeah, we liked it.

Did you have any relatives that were ever caught up in the First World War?

Yes, Mum's brothers were. One was killed in the war and two

- 26:00 of her other brothers went to the war and came back, so they lost one and two more went.

How aware were you of trouble in Europe, the pressure keg that was building?

Well very interested and very aware. At that age I was getting to the age where I was thinking "What

- 26:30 would happen and what you would do" and you tried to plan things that way. But read the paper whenever, because we had the store we had the paper there so there was always plenty of papers left over. In those days you ordered the number of papers that you wanted and all you did was cut the heading out of it and returned it and you got a credit on that, so you always ordered more papers than you needed

- 27:00 and there were always papers available and we used to read them.

What did some of your friends think about this pressure cooker coming up in Europe? Did you discuss it with your friends?

About the?

About the possibility that war might break out?

Yes, we always did. Discussed it and talked about it and gave your opinions and that sort of thing.

27:30 I was a bit older when that happened so you followed things through. You couldn't very well miss it because I mean the papers were full of it.

At what point when war did break out, what were you doing and how old were you?

Well I apprenticed and at that time I was working in at Lewis' and I had twelve months to go to finish my apprenticeship and then as soon as war broke out they came around and they took note of every engineering shop with

28:00 turning and fitting and welding facilities and then they more or less commandeered them. You weren't allowed to sell anything or do anything and then gave you different jobs that had to be done. They allotted them to the places and we were making Bren gun [light machine gun] parts, that was a Western Australian made thing. The wheels mainly but other parts

28:30 and the parts for the pontoon bridge in the welding shop, pontoon bridges. We carried on with those and other different jobs that they'd bring along as they wanted them done, speciality jobs.

Did those sort of jobs get a higher priority than?

Oh they were the priority, nothing else. You had to get out so much. They'd come and assess you and say "Well you can do so much of this and so much of that," and they expected that to be out.

29:00 The only way you could get out of that is the castings were absolutely shocking and if you could prove to them that the castings were taking longer, than you would. And it was mostly all I think on cost plus, so the boss wasn't unhappy whatever time it took. At that stage we were working twelve hour shifts, day and night, then, so the twelve hours on, twelve hours off.

What did the bosses think of this commandeering of their

29:30 **business?**

They didn't mind in the least. If you had a business and someone put you on cost plus you wouldn't mind, would you? The higher the cost the higher the profit.

Sure, I'm seeing what you're saying.

What he thought about it was excellent because in between doing that job he'd be doing jobs for him and working on his boat, so it didn't matter.

So in fact his life got a lot better?

Yes, it took a lot of heat off him I should think. He was

30:00 a First World War man, a bonza bloke and he shouldn't have even been there because he only got six machine gun bullets through the stomach and he was laying with his intestines hanging out and a chap came up to him and said "Listen mate, I'm sorry, I've got other people I can take in" and he said "I'm alright, you take me". And no, they reckoned that he couldn't possibly live. So he

30:30 stuffed his intestines back into his stomach and he crawled and about two hundred yards through the mud I think to the first aid post and when he got there they realised they had to do something and he came out of it. He wasn't a well man. He still had the results of that thing because of his back bone, he was a great big strong bloke but he'd bend down to do something and he just couldn't stand up again. You'd have to go and get him. To tell you how tough he was we had a

31:00 like a gallows. It was a couple of things up on a bar up top and what you did was take him over and put a ladder underneath and he'd go up and hang onto this and then when he yelled out "Right", he'd let go and drop down and bang, you'd hear it crick and it would come back into place, but he was a tough bloke and expected everybody else to be the same.

That's an incredible story of survival.

Pardon?

That's an incredible story of survival.

31:30 Oh yes. I can remember one day I was giving him a hand, we were bending copper pipes for his boat for the water situation with about an inch and a half diameter pipe and to bend them you would kneel the copper pipe and then you'd fill them up with hot resin. And you'd put a wooden plug in the bottom and pour the melted resin in. I was pouring the melted resin in and he kicked the plug with his boot, well with his shoe, he never wore boots. He was dressed up, his shoe,

- 32:00 and the hot resin ran in and filled the whole of his left boot up. So he walked over the office and pulled his shoe off and pulled the sock off as well and half of his foot and sent the office boy up for another pair of socks. Didn't even go home, he was tough. So anything that happened to you in those days you learnt to be tough or you weren't there. I can remember one day, I was only a kid at the time but we had a big
- 32:30 hundred ton hydraulic press and we had a windlass with pins going in to raise and lower the main table and it was always very oily, because it was hydraulic. And as kid I was stretching out, I'd wound the table up in front of it and had my hand on the handle and putting the pin in and just then my hand slipped off. And I looked down and the handle's gone, just (demonstrates), just the weight of it, it just accelerated and rotated
- 33:00 and I was looking around to make sure no one would get hit by it and the next minute bang, it went straight up in the air and hit me on the head. It split my head open and knocked me out and I woke up and they've got some dirty water under the grinder and they poured that over me to bring me to. Of course the blood was gushing out so the boss came down and said "What the hell did you do?" And he was going crook at me for getting hurt, so he said "You're alright." Somebody
- 33:30 was going to put a pad on it, and he said "He's alright, let him go. He's right, he's up and about, now get on with your job all of you". So I went to get on with my job and I could feel the blood running down my back and down the back of my legs and the next minute he came over and he said "Noel, you'd better get up to the doctor" and I said "Alright." I remember I walked from Milligan Street right up into Murray Street and I left a blood trail all the way up there. And when I walked into the
- 34:00 doctor's office, nobody drove me up or anything, just "On your way, get up there, you alright?" Of course I had to say yes. If I'd said no, I would have been in trouble, so up I went and walked in and when they saw me they went berserk but the doctor was busy with someone so I sat in the chair and the next minute over I went with loss of blood. They went in and stitched me up and put me on and sent me back to work.
- 34:30 They were hard days.
- You'd really want a bit of a day off after you'd gone through that.**
- What?
- You'd want a day off?**
- No, no.
- So were you enjoying the time making all these parts for the war effort?**
- Oh yes, but about then I got the yen to get into the service. My mates had joined the air force and air crew and I was getting very dissatisfied with that and I thought "Right, I'll fix them."
- 35:00 went and put in, I could get a reserved occupation badge and you are not allowed to leave your job without notifying the department and you cannot leave the job without your employer's consent. So it makes it a bit hard but I snuck away and had a test for the army and they said "Oh yes, come back tomorrow." So I snuck away from work and came back tomorrow and they said "Get back to your job, you're in a reserve occupation", so I went back.
- How did they find out?**
- Hey?
- 35:30 **How did they find out?**
- Well straight away. I had to put down where I was working so they rang him and he said "No, he hasn't got my permission, send him back here." So I went back with my tail between my legs and I left it for a while and then the navy, I'd finished my apprenticeship in the mean time, and the navy wanted engine room artificers so I put in for that and
- 36:00 went down and did the trade test and passed that, which wasn't easy.
- What was difficult about it?**
- Pardon?
- What was difficult about the test?**
- Oh it was some machining to do and some filing and rather intricate fitting, but I passed that.
- So it was literally a practical test?**
- A practical test and theoretical test as well, so I thought "I'm right here" and the next minute I got a letter from them to say to continue on with my work and I found out after
- 36:30 that LC Lewis and the Commodore of the Yacht Club, who was a mate of his, was also the head of the navy crowd, so that got that out. I couldn't get out there so had to go back to work again. So back to work I went and I thought "Right only thing I can do is make it so the boss wants to get rid of me". So

when I was on the Bren gun wheels machining them, what they did was they bought the wheels in and the rough castings on one side and as you completed them you put

37:00 them over another side and any rejects you put your name on it and put it into a reject box. So what I'd do was get into work and go like mad and I'd get mine and I'd wheel my finished ones over and this was when the boss was coming to pay us on a Friday night or whatever it was and I'd wheel the one's I done over and put them in someone else's bay and when he came in I was asleep in my car. I had an old dodge car or he reckoned I was asleep. I wasn't. I knew about when he'd be in, so he'd go crook at me and

37:30 I said "I'm not working and you're in the war and you won't let me go and I want to get away" and he said "Get back on your job" and went crook at me, so I went back and the next time he came in, the same thing, so he came over and he told me just what he thought of me and he said "If I can't stop you, I'll help you. Where do you want to go?" I said "well there's only one, the air force now", so he said "Righto" and he rang them up and told them that I could go and gave me a beaut reference and everything and within a few days I was in the air force.

So how did you actually sign up?

38:00 In the air force? Well no trouble, you just go along for a medical and if you're what they want, they put you straight on. But I had a little problem there because when I went in they were desperately wanting air craft fitters. They called them 2E's engine and 2A air frame, so they said to me "Yes, we want you and we'll take you in and we'll give you a course and then you can", a three

38:30 month course or something "And then you'll got onto an aircraft". And I said "No, I've just finished my apprenticeship and I want recognition and if you don't want me as a tradesman I feel it's wrong to go back in and start training again with a file and a hammer, that I've been doing for years."

So what you're saying is the training would have been very basic?

The training was basic until you got to another course and then it was very concentrated on a particular aircraft

39:00 or a particular type of thing, which would probably put me six months before I actually got into doing anything that was worthwhile, so I said no, wouldn't do it and they said "Well that's all we've got for you", so I said "Okay". I got to the door and he said "Come back here you young son and here, group one fitter, general."

So you basically threatened to...?

I went in as a tradesman.

But you threatened to just pull the pin?

39:30 That's right, I started to walk out. I would have gone back and had another thought and worked out what to do but I wasn't going to go as that. I didn't think it was fair to leave one job to go and be trained for, well not to be trained but to do training that I'd spent five years doing, to fit another job and be out of action for six months and I wanted to get away and I knew darn well that if I went through that I would be in Western Australia for six months

40:00 at least.

So did you still have to do any training?

No, only admittance to the rookies' training, like the air force training. Went to Busselton for that, for two weeks or something I think it was.

So how long was it before you well, how long between joining up and getting fitted out was there?

Oh days, that's all.

40:30 **Pretty quick turnaround?**

Yes straightaway, once the boss put the letter in and they found then that they wanted fitters general, not as badly as they wanted the others but they were grabbed quick smart. I went down to Busselton and they give you all your needles and all you, another medical check and then you do your drill and rifle training and all the basic training .

Before we get into all that rookies' basic training

41:00 **we'll just change a tape because I know we're coming to the end of this one.**

00:32 **Can you tell me about your rookies' there in Busselton?**

Not a lot there at all really. You just go in and as I said they give you another medical test and then they line you up for your needles and in those days it wasn't any beg pardon. You went and had one needle and as it came around they gave you another needle and another needle and another needle, then a vaccination.

01:00 And then they got you out and the drill sergeant got you and he ran you around until you dropped and when you dropped they reckoned you were alright, that worked them through your system, all of them together. When you dropped you stayed there and the others kept running and the idea was to see who was last man up I guess. At any rate they gave you an hour or so to get over that and then back into the work, but one of the troubles was the vaccination with nearly everyone of just came

01:30 up into like a big boil, the whole of your arm, so when you were doing your drilling, they wouldn't listen to anything, that was it, you did the drill just the same. Then it was just a matter of drill work, rifle work, learning a bit about the air force orders, what you could do and what you couldn't do. Learning the saluting to the officers and that sort of thing, just general round and

02:00 settling in.

Whereabouts in Busselton?

I wouldn't know now, wouldn't know.

That's alright. Was there any skylarking?

No, once again you didn't have time for that. You were up at six and in those days they were dirt floors and you had to sweep your floors, make your bed and it

02:30 wasn't a matter of making your bed. You had to fold all your blankets the air force way and sweep out your tent, water it down and tamp it down like a flat surface and then go and have a shower and have your breakfast. Get into a queue to have your breakfast, go and wash your things out and then probably there'd be a route march or something else or on the drill square.

03:00 **Did you know any of the other rookies when you enlisted?**

No.

Did you make a few mates in rookies' camp?

Oh you soon learnt it. Got to have someone to complain with.

What were some of the common complaints?

Just a lot of drill instructors I don't know why but they seemed to get the bit between the teeth and they wanted to treat everyone like dirt. They reckoned they had to give you a real

03:30 hard time to make a man of you but luckily I'd been through some hard times and it didn't worry me very much at all. And occasionally they'd strike someone that knew a bit more than they did and they got into trouble then. One account of that that was quite interesting was we had a chap, I still remember his name, Jack Hatty,

04:00 and the drill instructor didn't know it but he'd been in the army and done army jungle training and everything and he wanted to get into the air force as air crew so he re-mustered to air crew. And he was in the air force and the air force had a habit, if you couldn't pass as air crew then you had to stay in the air force, so you found somewhere else so they put him through the general run and we knew through talking to him on the track down that Jack had been in the army. You got talking round about in your billet at

04:30 night and he'd been a drill instructor and we had this one bloke, I won't mention his name, he's well known, great big bloke and he had a fancy habit of wanting your rifle. So you'd pass him your rifle and you'd be standing there at attention and he'd just shoot it straight back at you and of course if you didn't catch it, you copped the rifle and if you dropped it on the ground you had to clean the rifle twice and bring it to him at night or something to get your

05:00 reflexes right and that sort of thing. And the interesting and funny part about that was we had bayonet training and he was an unarmed combat expert, I don't know if he's still alive and it came Jack Hatty's turn. So Jack Hatty got the bayonet and got up to him and he said "Right, make a shot at my arm" and Jack said "I don't want to sergeant", and he said "why?" He said "Well I will hurt you".

05:30 He said "You won't hurt me". He says "You make a shot at my arm" so he made a bit a bit of a shot and he said "Oh half hearted attempt, make it dinkum", so Jack went boonk, put the bayonet straight through his left shoulder. So we didn't see him around for a little while.

So it was pretty fair dinkum in the rookies training?

Oh fair dinkum right through. You had people that had, luckily I'd owned guns and had done a fair bit of shooting and hunting but you had people there that had never handled a gun before but the things that happened were absolutely amazing. Right through the whole of the services you had the village idiot

with a loaded rifle saying "Good day, what's going on", with his finger on the trigger and you're looking down the barrel. You had to put up with a certain amount of that.

What happened when your rookies' was over?

- 06:30 Rookies' was over I was posted to Cunderdin with 17 RSU [Repair & Salvage Unit]. What you'd do is you've got 5PD, personnel depot, and you're sent from Busselton back to 5PD and then they have the posting for you and they arrange for you to go there. That was rather interesting to because Cunderdin airport at the time or Cunderdin aerodrome was 9 EFTS, or 9 Elementary Flying
- 07:00 Training School, and that had all the pilots, would be pilots, training in Tiger Moths, but also on the airfield there was a Liberator Squadron and they had been parked there, and they used to park their aircraft away from the others because if anyone came over after them they would have got the training pilots and all those aircraft as well. And they also had bomb disposal places and that and one
- 07:30 of the places that they had their bomb disposal was a house and when we first went there we were supposed to take over this property off the farmer. They had evidently told him to get out and we were going to form our 17 RSU there. Well his wife and daughter had gone but he hadn't and his WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s hadn't and his cow hadn't so we used to give him a little bit of milk every morning and a couple of eggs and every time a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK cackled he'd take off but he was always last, so
- 08:00 that was that. The meals up at 9 EFTS were absolutely shocking and we were just, I think there was only about twenty of us there for a start to form this 17 RSU and so what we used to do was go out and run rabbits down of a night. We'd go out onto the aerodrome and wait until you saw about half a dozen rabbits go out and then you'd take off after them and when you were tired someone else would take after and then in the end the rabbit would just be walking, knock him on the head and
- 08:30 take him home and light a fire. Instead of going up to 9 EFTS we were self supporting. We had eggs and milk and whatever we wanted there and he had a bit of a garden as well but on the same token we used to do things for him on the engineering side and we always slipped him something he wanted out of our stores if he wanted it, so it worked it fair enough. He was quite happy with the arrangement.

What kind of engineering things would you do for him?

Well he'd have a magneto that wasn't working

- 09:00 or a tractor that wouldn't start or a carburettor wouldn't go or something or other. We had a bit of a welding shop there as well, building it up. There was no building there other than that.

Noel, can you describe what you set up for the RSU?

What the setup there was? Nothing.

But didn't you set something up?

Yeah we did set it up. We built sheds and took over a couple of his farm sheds and then

- 09:30 bit by bit it was built up to all the different areas that we had. We had a plumbing shop and a sheet metal and a spray shop and then the aircraft and a rubber for someone to do the tyres and we kept on getting new members coming in as we built up.
- 10:00 But apart from everything else the conditions were very rough. We just had tents and bed boards. I don't know whether you've seen them or not?

No.

Well all they are two frames with a couple of legs on them and then they are cut down like that on the cross and you put three planks on them. Well they are very good except when you turn over at night and a bit of your backside or something goes in between them or something like that and then we had palliasses that went on the top full of straw, well after about a month of sleeping on them all you had

- 10:30 was dust. There was no hot water, just a cold shower. Once again good rough conditions, good for young people.

Was the RSU adjacent to the aerodrome?

Yes, it was right at the end of it. As you go to the aerodrome it's on the left hand side and it was the continuation of the aerodrome where this farmer had his house there, so we took over the whole lot of that and I suppose there

- 11:00 were two or three hundred bombs there that were left from the Americans. They were all scattered around as well so when you were driving your vehicle you had to make sure that you didn't back into one of them.

How long were you there Noel?

I was only there for about three or four months I think.

Sorry before we leave there, did you do any training while you were there?

No, just worked. There was a lathe and drill

11:30 and milling machine and I was busy making up things and working on that and also they, 14th Squadron was the, I forget now, at Pierce, because I had had training at repetition work and they had the record that I was working on munitions

12:00 I set the lathe up so I could automatically manufacture bushes and things for the Oron [?] controls and everything like that. So at one stage, which I had forgotten about, I went down to Pierce, I had a truck and a trailer and all of this was set up on it, and you had your own power plant if you wanted it and you plugged into the power. So you just worked off the truck and the big trailer. At one stage of the game I took that down to Pierce and I was machining

12:30 and making up bits that they wanted down there that either they didn't have the capability or they didn't have the time to do and then I came back up to there and I'd just be doing that or general work on it.

So you were looking after the EFTS at Cunderdin?

No, we were just forming, we weren't looking after anyone. We were just forming 17RSU. Now 17RSU was a repair and salvage

13:00 unit, so the idea of the RSU was you are out in the field and you go into an area and any crashes or anything that requires doing you're supposed to look after them and that's what we did.

Did you have any repair or salvage work in Cunderdin?

Yes, they bought parts of aircraft in. I didn't do it. I did some machining for it but mostly the 2E's and 2A's worked on that.

13:30 But our first priority was getting the unit formed and getting accommodation. For instance we finished up getting a boiler from somewhere, I don't know where, and we made our hot water system and we made things a little bit more liveable there.

Did you take any leave while you were there in Cunderdin?

Oh yes, yes. I had an old, when I joined up I had an old Dodge car and petrol was rationed so when I was at Lewis' I made a gas producer to go on the back of

14:00 that, charcoal, and I used to run the boys up. When we came on leave for a day or two I'd bring them down from Cunderdin and drive them back up there again but there wasn't a lot of leave.

It sounds like you had to be pretty innovative with the shortage of materials?

Oh yes, you had to get it where you could and how you could. If you were in a truck and you saw a sheet of iron somewhere you didn't go by it. If it happened to be just inside the fence you reached

14:30 over.

What was the American squadron doing in Cunderdin?

They were bombing, out from there they were bombing out into the islands but the Liberators weren't operating while we were there. They had come and gone and just left there gear behind.

So there were no Yank airmen?

Yes, well from there what happened I was then sent up to Potshot, Exmouth.

15:00 76th and 77th Squadron had just come down from the islands, and they got pushed out. They thought they were coming home on leave, they'd been away for a long while, that was the Kitty Hawks and they came down to Onslow or Exmouth or Potshot, as they called it, and there was an American base at Potshot. You didn't know about these things until you hit them and the base was mainly for they had a submarine chaser called the Authelias or Authenias [?] and

15:30 the submarine chaser was made like whale chasers. They could at sea pull a submarine up onto the dry deck, or what they did was lower the deck, bring the submarine, brought it up and completely overhauled it. The crew had a spell, they refurbished it and put all the maintenance and re-munitioned the submarine, then let it down again and go on and the Japs were after that. So 76 and 77

16:00 Squadrons came down to combat that, but before they came down, at any rate we went up there. There was an officer and about six of us I suppose started off on that set up once again, start a base going and to do what we could at the time. Unfortunately 76 and 77 Squadron, that was Bluey Truscott's squadron, had had it.

16:30 They thought they were coming home on leave and when they got stuck up there they went berserk and they lost Bluey Truscott and three others in no time.

What do you mean “they went berserk”?

They just went berserk. They got up in their aircraft and they went mad. Bluey Truscott, well for instance they were there in case the Japs in but all they used to do was put a belly tank on the aircraft and fly down and get some beer and sitting there doing nothing after

- 17:00 they were right in the thick of everything and they thought they were coming home, they were just absolutely devastated but they were needed there. They’d just get up in the aircraft and for practice just do stupid things, in our book at any rate.

What sort of stupid things did you see them do?

Well two aircraft would take off and you’d watch them and they were up to all the silly tricks, so you’d watch them if you could, had time. They’d go out, one would turn left, one would turn right, come out over the strip at about ten feet, head

- 17:30 on and at the last minute just veer up. Well one bloke did that and as he veered up he took half the main plane off one of the aircraft. He went ahead and crashed and got killed. The other bloke went out into a swamp and lost control and dived into the swamp and got killed, so we were there so we had to do our repair and salvage unit then.

So they were providing you with a bit of experience that you weren’t expecting?

Pardon?

They were providing you with a bit of experience?

Well not

- 18:00 experience we wanted, no and Bluey Truscott was killed much the same way, an absolute waste of a wonderful life. The American Catalinas were up there and they used to take off on patrol and go right out to the Islands and Bluey Truscott and his crowd they had a fighter control there. And the fighter control was run by the Americans but the radio shack listened into the Americans
- 18:30 or was coupled to them, so they knew exactly and fair enough when the Americans were taking off or landing or what was going on. So a quarter of an hour before the Catalinas took off Bluey and his crowd would take off and just get way up high and as the Catalinas would just get airborne, they’d just come swooping down and how they never got shot at I don’t know. Luckily the Yanks evidently recognised that it was a Kittyhawk or expected
- 19:00 them to be shot up and they’d just come shooting past the top of them and then roll and up underneath and harassed them until they got out of range. They did quite a bit of that. This one particular day the Catalina took off and evidently one of the gunners or something spotted Bluey and so they came down. It never happened again. It was a dead still day. There wasn’t a ripple on the water anywhere and as you know from a height you look through and you see the sea bed and you can’t see the
- 19:30 level of the water. So the Catalina came right down over the water but he wasn’t low enough that his prop wash would show on the water, so he was just high enough and Bluey came screaming down and then when he was two or three hundred feet above, he suddenly realised that he was over the water, low over the water. So he pulled out and went up and then straight into the water. Pulled up and went out and then dropped
- 20:00 over and straight in.

Is that the accident that took his life?

Pardon?

Was that the accident that took his life?

Yeah, that took his life, yeah, which was very unfortunate.

Apart from watching the shenanigans in the sky, what kind of relationship did you have with them on the ground?

None, none at all other than the mechanical side. Some of their engineering officers would come around

- 20:30 and ask us to do something if we wanted to but we did have to go over to Potshot to the American and I might come back to when we landed up there. We went up on the Linda from Fremantle and on board there was a heap of army gear. We didn’t know where we were going or what we were doing, a heap of army personnel with all their trucks and gear and everything and
- 21:00 because there was only a few of us they just put us under the care of the army. The army didn’t want to know anything about us and when we got up there, went to the army and wanted to know where we had to go or what the score was. We knew what we had to do or there was no land or anything allocated to us. It was left to the army to do that and they said “We’ve got nowhere for you to go”. They said “We’ll put some gear out in the sand hills”.

- 21:30 So out in the sand hills in the middle of summer and they just drove us out there in four wheel drives and dropped us. We had two forty four gallon drums of water and that had had, one had had diesel in it and one had had petrol in beforehand, so you couldn't drink it. That was our drinking water and our washing water and because we were air force also the army always liked to bring the air force down a bit if they could, the bully beef and M & V [meat and vegetables] and
- 22:00 tinned stuff was all blown up. It was their rations that they didn't want, "We'll show these air force how to tough it out". So we were there for half a day but luckily our officer in charge knew the Mindaroo Station owners, so he borrowed a vehicle and went over and saw them and arrangements were made for us to go into their shearing quarters.

22:30 So we shifted over to their shearing quarters and that was beaut over there.

Sounds a bit more civilised?

Oh much better. We even had beds with that on it and pillows and oh it was beaut. Had our own mess, we could cook our own and while we were there we used to go out in the. We had a chap with us called Bill Young. He was a racing bike specialist and Bill and I went up to their scrap heap. Every station's got a scrap heap

23:00 where they throw their old vehicles and there was three broken down motorbikes there that they didn't want and we took them back and there was a BSA [motorbike] was the motor and the other one was a bit of Triumph [motorbike] and they were all old ones and Bill later had a bike shop in Perth for years and years and he was an expert on them. But the piston was missing. It had been send down to have something done to it on this thing, so there was an old

23:30 V8 there so we took a piston out of that and I built it up with aluminium rod and machined the ring grooves and made up some pistons up out of a bit of old cast iron and we used to go out with that hunting roos, shoot the roos and bring that in for meat, fresh meat.

Must have been a bit more palatable than bully beef?

Oh yes.

24:00 While we were there we were there to look after 76 and 77 Squadrons, or anyone else that had trouble or had crash landed so we built up then. We got all our gear, it came up by road, trucks and big trailers and semi trailers and things and the idea was when they had a crash somewhere you'd go out to the site and had body bags if you needed them and it would probably take you three or four days to get there and a week to get back, so you needed good ones.

24:30 And then you'd pull the wings off the aircraft and load them onto the trailers and bring the lot back and then we'd have that aircraft to repair and be working on that and others to get them back into service again.

What about the aircrew of the crashed planes?

Well usually only single engine

25:00 and if they survived well and good. They'd usually send something out to pick them out. They'd usually find somewhere where they could land or somehow or other get onto them or immediately send we used to call them 'pigs', a six wheel drive vehicles because there were sand hills. What you did was went out on a compass reading and then an aircraft would take off and go over to the aircraft and then fly, it would pick you up on the way, and then fly straight back to you and then he'd do a circle and

25:30 come back and give you the direction to the aircraft and you'd just take a reading again on that and you'd continue on that reading. And you were usually told how many miles it was out and you just kept going but we had one very close shave there. We had a medically orderly and you always took him with you to attend to the chap or the body and on this occasion it was about a hundred and ten in the shade and we had Marsden matting. I don't know if you know it? It's a

26:00 matting you put down on a strip for bog matting, anti-bog matting and you had a heap of that on one of the trailers and all you'd do is built that ahead and keep on going. Well every now and then one of them would get off the matting and tip up and down it would go, the vehicle, so we were all there digging away in the sun and we had hats on but just shorts, no shirts or anything. Hats on and digging away and all of a sudden I just passed out. We got sunstroke on the back of our neck. We hadn't

26:30 realised we were dehydrated at any rate and luckily this little chap pulled us in under the shade of the trailers and we came good. We had a stinking headache for a couple of days but he earned our respect after that.

Sounds like a pretty hard slog?

Yeah, it was at times, yeah.

I'm just wondering if you could tell me how far away from the aerodrome was the Mindaroo Station?

Was the...?

27:00 **Mindaroo Station?**

From Onslow, not from Onslow, from where the Yanks were that would be, that's Exmouth, would be probably thirty miles or something like that, thirty or forty miles.

And what kind of a setup did you have there?

27:30 There? Nothing. The Yanks had it all. It was just like going from hell to heaven. Whenever we could we'd always find an excuse to go over there for the messing because they'd give you, I've still got some of the stainless steel plates, I've got some out there. Like a tray and you'd go in and there'd be beef

28:00 and turkey and this and that and oh and ice cream. They'd have a tub of ice cream so you'd just shovel in what you wanted. We'd always come back feeling very sick after being there for a day or so.

You'd overdo it a little?

Yeah, but they had great freezers and because of the boats coming in, the supply ships in to supply that, they had plenty of everything, everything they wanted. They were well and truly looked after.

28:30 While we were there we had a raid come in, over Mindaroo, Athelius, evidently the Japs had sent a reconnaissance over and they knew that it was going to go into there, it was evidently steaming towards there, and they knew that was the base. A lot of the Japs were working up there during the war and they knew as much about Australia as we did, more probably. So they were

29:00 watching on it and they had a recce come over one night and that was just before they went in and the next night, or two nights later they came over and we had a couple of Lewis guns, antiquated old things, and our rifles, that's all we had. And we had pits, fox holes and sand bags up so you had some protection, so we hopped into there and I'll never forget this,

29:30 I think seven of these flying boats came over, flying boats or I forget now. They came over in formation and then one would peel off and here they are coming straight down at you. They must have been sitting up there laughing their heads off because they'd pull out and you'd wait for the bomb, nothing happened and then the whole lot of them did it and shot over. And they were a bit silly because we were in radio contact and we warned them over there of what was going on but from somewhere or other intelligence or because this recce

30:00 plane came over they shifted the Athelius round about four bays round so they came over and missed her. They bombed over there but missed her and she came back in later. But these blokes then did the same thing coming back and they came back and we thought anytime. All they were doing to us was "We know you're there" because they could see the army vehicles around the station or around the shearing shed, which was probably about a quarter of a mile

30:30 from the station. And on the way back they did the same and instead of coming in high, they came in low and just zoomed straight over us and away out to sea. They used that as a point to come in and find the other one, as a staging point to find their way to the other place.

During the time that you were up there how many planes would you have rescued or salvaged?

Oh, we only did probably two or three.

31:00 Well that carried on but I wasn't left there. I was there for so long and then a posting came through and I flew down to 5PD again and I went over to Sydney.

Before we discuss that next posting there's a few questions I'd still like to ask you about Exmouth and Onslow. Listening to you speak earlier about Bluey Truscott. You spoke with quite a lot of respect for him, what was it

31:30 **that earned your respect for him?**

Respect for Bluey Truscott, apart from the fact that he was a war ace, and he was a war ace not because of his flying, he admitted it himself he was the worst pilot in the air force but he evidently had a wonderful eye for air gunnery. And when he got onto somebody they didn't have a chance.

32:00 The other respect for Bluey was he was a larrikin, he was a squadron leader and if somebody did the wrong thing he was down on both teeth but he treated everyone like an equal and that wasn't normal in the air force.

What encounters did you have with Bluey?

I didn't have much at all other than probably to say good day or something like that.

It's interesting that you mention the word larrikin, did his

32:30 **larrikinism in the sky appeal to you?**

Oh I didn't really mean he was a larrikin, I meant he was one of the boys and he'd always have a joke

and that sort of thing and he knew how to take it and he knew how far to go, which was unusual. He'd come and he'd say "At ease", in other words he didn't want any salutes or any messing around if he happened to come around. He'd come over to Mindaroo sometimes with the other officers

33:00 and just see what we had there and how we were progressing. He'd probably been told by the air force to keep an eye on us and see that we were going alright and what the score was.

I'm just curious what your thoughts might have been when you saw them getting up to those antics?

Nothing, not a thing, unless we were over at the base, Potshot was what I was trying to think of. Unless we were over at the Potshot base we

33:30 wouldn't know anything about it but as I said at times we were sent over there to do jobs or to pick up gear or to take gear over or something or other and when we were there of course we'd be interested in it. It was everybody stopped work if they could see them to see what they were doing. If they were out at sea you wouldn't know anything about it but the antics on there but as the airfield was there and we were camped on the airfield and if anything happened

34:00 on the airfield you automatically knew about it.

So they were applauded for their antics?

No, I don't think so. No, it was just a matter of they had so much inner emotion stored in them but you realised why they were doing it even if you didn't agree with what they were doing because they were putting their aircraft at risk and their lives at risk when they were very valuable.

34:30 **Did anyone disagree with what they were doing?**

I don't know. See when you're in something like that there's no general meeting or general intermingling of anyone. You're sent to do something, like you are here today, you do it and go and the same over there. People often ask me what happened to certain places and I've been camped on places and there's been army camps

35:00 and that all around and you'd no more think of walking into the army camp than fly to there. You might get a bullet in your head and as far as asking someone what they were up to even if you were in uniform that was a no-no. You just did your job, minded your own business, and asked everyone else to do the same. So you didn't really know a lot about what was going on around you.

So there wasn't even so much as a buzz around the place?

35:30 No, that's right, you just had to do your job and get out. You just didn't go somewhere and decide to stay a couple of days you were sent somewhere and told to be back at six o'clock at night or whatever it is and it was about half the time it was usually required to do the job, to make sure that you didn't muck around.

So you were kept on the go?

Yes, kept on the go.

Can you describe the equipment that you amassed for the RSU?

Well mainly it was

36:00 as I said lathes and that sort of thing, benches, sheds, painting booths and sheet metal shops, benches with tools on it and probably an oxy torch and that and blowlamps for annealing duro [duralium] and aluminium and air compressors for riveting,

36:30 general aircraft maintenance parts.

I'm just curious to know because you had to be quite mobile didn't you Noel?

That's right, I had to be but not the rest of the unit.

What kind of rig did you have?

What kind of?

What kind of mobile rig did you have?

I had a Chev [Chevrolet] four ton truck with a big flat floor on it and it was eight foot wide and probably twelve or something long

37:00 and a big canvas cover canopy right over the top and the sides opened out so that you could let the light and air in, through the back and the two sides. There was a compressor on board, there was an alternator on board.

Hang on a minute, sorry. Pause there, check framing.(TAPE STOPS) Sorry about the interruption Noel, can you describe your rig again?

37:30 A Chev truck, about a three ton Chev truck with a big tray on the back, about eight feet wide and about probably ten foot long and as I said a steel canopy over that with a canvas cover on it that opened out to make a wider area, a ground area for both the light and ventilation. In there, there was a lathe and a compressor and a grinder and a drill and

38:00 then the trailer had metals stored on there and a guillotine and again benches with hacksaws and benders and pipe benders, anything just to do general engineering.

What kind of, I suppose convoy would you take when you went out to salvage a plane?

Oh gee, you'd probably have a couple

38:30 of jeeps. Probably four semi trailers and what we used to call a pig, which was a six or eight wheel recovery vehicle with a winch on the front. And sometimes you'd have a motorbike who would scout ahead to find the best path to get over a hill

39:00 or sand dune or around something.

Sounds like quite a party of vehicles?

Oh yes, we had the capacity to do it, but we didn't. Most of the action that we had was mostly around the strip and that at Potshot, but while we were there we were also operating off the city strip, in Onslow and we finished up, and I finished up there for weeks and we were there

39:30 when the main cyclone came through in 1943, was it?

Just before you tell us the story about the cyclone Noel, how would you tackle a crashed plane when you had to salvage it?

Well obviously the plane would be damaged badly. It could be that they landed with their undercart up and it was only a prop and undercart. But it was just a matter that the first thing was the pilot

40:00 as I said, disposing of him if he was there and then you got to work and you jacked it up far enough so as you could pull the main planes off and then you had a special trailer, long trailer with the racks in it to take main planes and that would pull up alongside and you'd lift them on and strap then up. And then you'd get the recovery truck to pull the aircraft or to lift it,

40:30 that also had a jib out the front for lifting, like a gantry, to lift probably the nose on and then you'd put something under that and slide it on with man power. And then you'd rope it all down and turn around and head back on your tracks.

Sounds like hard yakka?

Yeah, it wasn't easy.

You mentioned disposing of the pilot, what would happen if the pilot was dead?

That's what I say, you had a medical orderly

41:30 with you and he'd be put in a body bag or a couple of body bags and at a hundred and ten in the shade and five or six days later when you got back, it wasn't nice and he always went in the last trailer.

For which reason?

Smell.

Alright, on that note we'll change tapes.

Tape 3

00:31 **Just a couple of questions that I thought of while Julian [interviewer] was here, you mentioned M & V rations, what is M & V?**

Meat and vegetables and that's meat and vegetables was packed especially for the services. The ingredients were alright but in those days everything tasted of a tin. I don't know if it was the solvent that they sealed it with or what happened but

01:00 you got this tinny taste and sometimes you couldn't take it. That wasn't so good. The bully beef we loved, there was nothing wrong with that, even when it was hot and fat was oozing out of it and it was all you had to eat. The other one was bully biscuits. They had a biscuit about sixty mil [millimetre] by forty mil and about six mil thick and that you could hit it with a hammer and they wouldn't break but they were good. You'd soak them in water and you made porridge out

01:30 of them and the cooks even when you were in the home base they'd soak them in water and make sweets out of them and pastry and everything.

What sort of recipes could you do with bully beef?

Nothing much. You might fry it in your pannikin. We had pannikins like that for your food with a handle on it and you could put them over and make a fry pan out of it, you ate out of them, did the lot out

02:00 of them and you might fry it. If you got onto some onions or any vegetables you put them in and make like a bit of a stew but other than that not much you could do.

How did you cook a kangaroo?

Oh just stuck it straight onto the coals as a rule or a shovel. Just give a shovel a bit of a wipe off and put a bit of fat on it if you had some out of your sausage tin or something like that and

02:30 just throw the kangaroo on it, steaks.

Steaks!

Emu also is a very good food, better than kangaroo actually.

What do you do with an emu?

The first thing is you want the meat to set and you hang the kangaroo up unless you were hungry and the same with the emu. But with the emu you don't cut a joint anywhere because the oil's in that and the flavour goes through it. You break

03:00 a bone in between and leave the joint and the oil solidifies and then when you carve the meat off there's no flavour in it at all and it's better than baby beef if you get a nice young one, absolutely beautiful and occasionally we'd get a scrub turkey, a big turkey.

That's pretty handy to have that sort of, what do you call it, meat walking around within easy catch.

03:30 No, it wasn't walking around, you had to go and get it, had to go and find it, they didn't come into camp very often. And I was talking about Bill Young and we got this motorbike and made it up and we used to go out onto the clay pans. We'd do a big circle out and come back in and we'd have about ten or fifteen roos on a clay pan, just break cover as we came behind them, so

04:00 he'd open it up and I've got a sketch out there that he made, he was good and I'll bring it in later just for the fun of it. And I had the rifle or the Tommy gun [Thompson submachine gun] and you just poked the rifle in a nice young one and let him have it and then get off and put him over your shoulders, but I've got the sketch of it out there, his actual drawing. I'll go and get it later on if you want to have a look.

Did you ever go to rubbish tip dumping areas and see what you could scrounge?

No, there

04:30 wasn't any. I suppose the Americans would have had one but every Australian camp was a rubbish tip because you collected it. You didn't leave it round for anyone else to get and neither did anyone else. The only scrounging we did was on the station, as I said the station rubbish tip for vehicles and that and obviously it wasn't something you could take away. We left it there when we left.

You mentioned the cyclone, what actually happened, there was a really big cyclone that came through?

05:00 Yes, we had a DF station, a direction finding station on the edge of the strip and the city strip at Onslow is an old coral reef and the highest tide of the year will almost get flooded, water comes in. But as the water receded you've got a coral hard base

05:30 which was good for the aircraft. It wasn't very long but it wasn't bad and around the edge of that we used to have our camps and our dugouts or whatever it was around it and this particular night I'll never forget it. All day it had been muggy and thunderstorms and that sort of thing but there was a lot of noise, thunder and things but all of a sudden it went completely quiet and you could hear a pin

06:00 drop. And at the time we were outside doing something I think and we went into the tent because it was so muggy, had the sides up a bit, and I remember hearing this terrible roar and I woke up to what it was and I remembered there was a pair of pyjamas out on the line we had outside. They were hanging out and the next minute they were out and there wasn't even a movement

06:30 in them, so we knew it was cyclone season so I dived for the centre pole of the tent and it wasn't there, it was gone and our gear went everywhere and so we crawled over, you couldn't see a thing. You were getting sandblasted and couldn't have your eyes open, crawled over and dropped into our slit trenches. And I remember I had my hand on it and I had to keep bringing it down as the dirt went and there was about a foot of dirt came off the top of it and we finished up we were getting

07:00 sandblasted on our shoulders and the top of our head, as it took it down to the coral underneath. We had a forty four gallon drum cut length ways that we used to use for a bar and we found that about a

mile and a half away. The aircraft were all tied down whenever the season was you had forty four gallon drums of fuel of water and you had them tied to the main planes. They were all tied down and snubbed down ready

07:30 for the storm and it just flipped them over and did a lot of damage and went through. And the DF station the ground, I remember the ground under that was not disturbed and where it came through, it came through a foot deep and then just went up a little baffle like that and it came through in a very narrow range. And the DF station I think registered a hundred and forty mile an hour or something and that wasn't damaged, so what it was in the middle I didn't

08:00 know. But we finished up we could drive where before it was all sand, you could drive about a mile and a half down to pick up your gear, sheets of metal and duro and aluminium and tools and gear. You didn't find half your gear, it was gone forever, your clothing and all that was all gone. But luckily we didn't have any of our trailers in there at the time.

How did you get resupplied with gear?

08:30 Oh we just made do with what we'd got. They put in a requisition for it and it came up from south about a fortnight or three weeks later at the most. You didn't need much gear. All we got around in up there was shoes and gaiters and shorts, you'd hardly ever wear a shirt, and a hat and a fly net if necessary.

Did you ever manage to have a few beers? You mentioned that you had a bar?

Who had a bar?

The gallon, oh bath.

09:00 A bath we had, a forty four gallon drum as a bath. That was all you could fit in a bit of water. The sea you didn't swim in because of the sea snakes and the stingers so you didn't go in there.

Really around Exmouth?

Yeah, round this coral they used to be pretty thick. No the bar, the only time we ever got in we got in once to Onslow and went

09:30 into the bar there and we couldn't drink the darn stuff. The locals could drink it but it was just like soapy water the beer. I'm no connoisseur of beer but it was absolutely shocking. Just tasted like soapy water out of the thing and I asked why and it was because coming up on the ships it was shaken up all the way and evidently it went more or less sour and you'd have to be dying of thirst to drink it.

Bit of a failure then.

10:00 **So what happened after you were in Onslow and Exmouth?**

Well then I got recalled back to 5PD and I was sent over to Sydney to establish on Randwick Racecourse, we established 9ACS, 9th Airfield Construction Squadron. I'm sorry, 9th Works Maintenance Unit at that stage, 9WMU. The idea of a works maintenance

10:30 unit was to go onto the airfields. As they were taken you were supposed to set up a guard, a military of defence in case you were attacked, some guns around in case of aerial attack, machine guns and then you started to do the same thing again, build a unit up with all the gear and everything on it.

11:00 So we were at 9 Works Maintenance Unit Randwick. We were allowed to find our own accommodation there and a mate of mine lived there and there was an old lady that he knew there so we went and slept and boarded with her and she was absolutely wonderful. She just spoilt us rotten and after the food and what, Graeme hadn't been with me but after

11:30 what I had it was just heaven. And we'd go over to Randwick Racecourse and what they were doing was bringing in the new and used machinery and we'd get that right, big tractors and dozers and torna-pulls and rippers and the whole lot of it and then we had to get that in order, make sure everything was right, ready to go away. And then that was all shipped up to Darwin and we then went up to Darwin.

So how

12:00 **long were you in Randwick for then?**

Oh probably three months, three or four months, something like that. I could tell you exactly in my papers.

That's alright, I'm just trying to get an idea. So your job essentially at Randwick was to get collect new and used items, make sure they were in working order and?

No, they'd be delivered to us, the items would be delivered to us to make sure that they were in working order ready to go away.

Were they mostly in working order?

Most, some of them were new, some of

12:30 them were old, some were just used for spare parts for other machines. Where they could they tried to standardise on different machinery, so that you might have eight or ten of the one thing. That meant that if one part broke down you could interchange it and do it. Didn't always work that way but that's what they tried to do.

And so then you had to escort the equipment up to Darwin?

No. The equipment went up. I don't know whether it went by, it would have had to have gone by sea I should have thought

13:00 so to Darwin and we went by road and that was the Spirit of Progress or Spirit of Protest as they called it in those days and all they were cattle trucks that were as old as the hills and the train at a top speed of about twenty miles an hour and the whole thing was that open that if you weren't careful if anything went down the sleepers or moved as it went, it

13:30 was a bit of a mess and the other thing was most of them smoked and you were just as likely to have a fire at anytime. Somebody would throw a cigarette butt out and it would come back two carriages and land in a kit bag and the next thing there'd be a fire. That was funny and the rations we got weren't too good so whenever they got to a hill the boys used to get off with a rifle and run ahead and if they could

14:00 would shoot a roo and then get into the next carriage and work our way along on the couplings, well they would and bring the roo and the bit back. As it came along everyone took a slice off. There was only navy and air force on that and we went through to Lorimar I think it was. Oh yeah, or to I think it was Lorimar, no, Alice Springs, Lorimar near Alice Springs.

14:30 And at Alice Springs we disembarked and it was right in the middle of a sand storm there and that was rather hectic and from there we caught the road transport up to Darwin and that was much the same, a big long transport, only dirt roads and you were covered in dirt and dust and it wasn't a good setup.

Sounds quite tedious. Did you do any jungle training during this time?

15:00 Yes, when I was at Randwick I was sent to Ranford, Victoria for an army jungle training school and that was run by the air force, so that wasn't very bad and then at a later date when I came back from Darwin and before I went to Borneo, or it might have been before I went to Darwin, I went

15:30 to the Army Training School in Canungra And that was a real wag of a place and it was run by the army and the idea was they bought people from the front line back as instructors. They didn't even get any leave, they came from there straight in to let people know just what was happening in the different areas, what the latest

16:00 Jap booby traps and their latest ammunition and all the rest of it.

Before we go to Canungra can we find out about the jungle training with the air force?

Yes, that was merely rifle, machine gun, acquainting you with different weapons. Point 5s we had and route marches, instruction on probably

16:30 map reading and general planning, tracking, just an upbeat on what the air force expected you to have, which was way below the standard of which the army expected you to have.

It just seems a bit of a waste of time really considering what your profession is?

No, I don't think so, no, because

17:00 in the usual work that we were doing we didn't get anymore arms training, so for grenade training and automatic weapons and all that thing and the other thing they were always bringing up to were the latest booby trap devices and that. It upgraded you on those. They had various ways of doing things there the Japs.

How much effort was put in with the air force jungle training was put into fitness?

Into fitness?

17:30 **Yeah, how important was that as part of the course?**

Not very much at all for the simple reason that they reckoned you were kept fit with the work you were doing. I don't think anyone other than a clerk or someone like that reckoned they wanted any workouts and by the time you had your time off and you did your washing or whatever you had to do and wrote letters home, you didn't have much

18:00 time.

So how long were you doing the air force jungle training?

It would have been a fortnight I think.

Right, so it was quite brief?

Brief, yeah.

And then so you head up to Darwin on the train? And what is your job description for when you get to Darwin?

Up to Darwin? Well we were sent down to the Forty Mile and once again we had to establish a camp. Our gear had

18:30 come up from down below, like the mobile gear, the trucks and heavy equipment. Some of the lighter gear came in by roads and the Forty Mile is where the Acacia Store is now. We've been back two or three times and we've found it. A lot of the original concrete foundations and everything are still there. I even found the one under the tent that I lived in and the idea was to set it up. Now

19:00 9 Works Maintenance Unit then was converted to 9 Air Field Construction Squadron and the idea of that was to be in Darwin as the war was coming towards a bit of an end then, or they looked like it was and the idea was to build something that could handle anything that was required in

19:30 bridge building, strip building, repairs, maintenance, the whole lot. With the result of that we had a diesel shop, a motor shop, a tractor shop, a tyre retreading place, a sawmill, a cabinet shop, you name it. You had to be everything that was self contained through the whole lot. So they were gradually built up and you worked on those until you got them mobile and everything right.

20:00 **How many fellows were a part of that huge operation?**

That part of the operation.

How many fellows in that?

Oh there would have been about fifteen hundred I suppose or something.

That's a pretty big operation.

Oh it was a big operation. Covered about ten or fifteen acres I suppose.

Gee.

And hot water systems and everything, sewing shop, barber shop,

20:30 tailor, aircraft stitching, doping, panel shop, aluminium and dural parts, had the lot.

What would an average day for you be like?

Well probably there it was work and no, I won't say the word, no

21:00 discipline. As long as the work was got out nobody worried much so if you made your bed, you made it and if you got out of it you didn't. And you didn't have to get dressed up and there were very few parades because you were needed all the time for work. So you'd probably get up at six o'clock and once the messing got going we'd have a fairly good meals

21:30 and before that it was a bit of catch as catch can. Then you'd go over to your workshop and work until midday. Probably have half an hour off unless it was a rush job in which case you'd keep going until it was finished and then you'd go and have a meal and then back to the job again. And if you finished the job or you could you knocked off at five or six, if you couldn't you carried on until it was finished. And there'd always be a meal, there was a meal available

22:00 for twenty four hours in the mess, so that all you had to do was go in and tell them that you'd been working and you'd get a meal and you'd just go and hop into bed boots and all, or take your boots off and that would be it. Wake up the next day but the whole idea of you being there, the reason for you being there was for work.

What were the most common sort of jobs that you'd be doing in a day?

Well once again they had a workshop and I was in the

22:30 workshop on the lathe and the drilling machine and all that sort of thing. There was one thing there that happened was when the D6 Caterpillar first came out and the D7s, the D6s no one had seen them in Australia, these were lend lease stuff from America. Do you understand the lend lease?

No.

Well lend lease was America was supplying Australia with all the munitions, and machinery and tractors and things

23:00 that they required for the defence of Australia but it was on the understanding that the stuff that was sent out here and as soon as the war was over it had to be destroyed. It couldn't be sold, or used or anything, it had to be destroyed. And the idea for that was the firms that were helping to donate this stuff, Caterpillar for instance, didn't want to lose Australian sales on their stuff. It made sense, so that with everything, ammunition, guns, aircraft,

23:30 the whole lot, had to be destroyed and a certificate shown straight away afterwards.

How would it be destroyed?

Pardon?

How would it be destroyed? Blown up?

Oh blown up, taken out to sea and dumped. In Darwin we had barges and in Borneo, barges that the Americans had supplied so they just fill a barge up with everything, take them out and pull the plug, hop in a boat and come back and take another one out, tractors, the whole lot, just went straight.

24:00 Of course there was a few that didn't get out but still.

Liberated?

Well reallocated they called it here. So that went on but most of the day I just worked in the workshop. I was saying about these D6s and they had a clutch plate and because the production was so high and so needed in

24:30 America they were rushing them through. Now a clutch plate is made of cast iron and normally cast iron is allowed like a bit of timber to mature. Green cast iron moves and is unstable. It is allowed to mature before it is machined finely and put into service and particularly a clutch plate, it is subject to terrific heats and particularly on a dozer where it is extreme heats and these were blowing up. And they were a big plate about

25:00 eighteen inches diameter and about an inch and a half inch out of cast iron with big things on them and all machined out and so we had not only ours but army and all the D6s which were the backbone of it. We had D7s as well but not many of them, they'd only just come out were US. So the

25:30 MEO [Mechanical Engineering Officer] went down to the wharf and someone had told him and they had plates of cast iron that were used for ballast in the ships. When they were poured in the foundry, they'd pour out the metal and then whatever was left they'd just make into a big slab about two inches thick and they could be six by four or three by two or anything at all when they emptied out of the ladle and they'd laid there rusting for years and years, so these were bought

26:00 back. And we had to drill through the two inch and then break off the pieces and machine them up and once we put those in with the new connectors, they had big rubber connectors to them, never had anymore trouble. So once we got ours done of course the rest of the air force wanted them and the army wanted them so that was one of the things that we were flat out on all the time.

That's amazing that just that little thing can?

Stop the whole lot.

26:30 They weren't available as spares because there was such a demand in the United States. It wasn't only us that was getting gear, it was other nations as well.

Sounds like that that would require quite a bit of organisation? You've got bits coming out, bits going out, the administration?

Well you had your different sections and you

27:00 had your person in charge of the sections and you had a mechanical engineer officer in charge of the lot and then the tyres would go off and go to the retreading section and they'd check them for holes or service and change the tyres, or repair them or retread them. We had our own retreading gear. The engines would come out and go to the engine shop and the rest of the tracks, the specialists on the tracks would get in and fix the tracks and then the whole lot would get back together again and out it would go.

27:30 Mostly they were our own gear because we were putting in strips all the time that we were there. In Darwin in the early days and the time of the main raid there was two strips only in Darwin. One was the civvy strip and the other one was the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] strip and when they bombed they flattened the RAAF, there was nothing much left of that at all and they bombed the civvy [civilian] strip a bit

28:00 and most of the aircraft had to land on the road. They had, you might have heard of them? They had Pell Field, Gill Field, Truscott, right the way down, named after different pilots and they were on the road and if you were on the road and you didn't keep a good eye out, you'd be driving along and the next minute an aircraft would be on top of your truck. So you usually pulled off and had a good look first and then shot through to the next one. There was quite a few mishaps on those two because the aircraft, particularly when the Spitties [Spitfires] came in, were

28:30 very narrow wheel centres and they couldn't take, it was rough strips and they weren't made for modern high speed aircraft, the roads rather and they'd be a bit of a lift in them or a bit of a rise in them and they'd be nearly down again and they'd take off again. Had a lot of accidents there with that. The main raid that came over it flattened the harbour and the township and did a lot of damage there and

29:00 we, I think we probably had about six or seven raids while we were there. We only had two at the Forty Mile. They knew we were there but they didn't know where and they weren't after us. I found out afterwards just over the road, the main highway, there was a Mosquito night fighter squadron but we didn't know. You knew your own unit and your

29:30 own area and that's all. They did have pictures in town and you could go into Darwin now and then. Took your own seats and your own bottle of grog and sat and watched them and if an air raid came you just made for the trees. But the aircraft, or the tractors generally were, everything fell into place and you had someone in charge of their own, a sergeant or someone in charge of each section and he had the

30:00 men under him and they just specialised on what they were doing and that was it.

What were the main targets that the Japanese were targeting?

Well the main targets were the RAAF again. They always kept that pretty well out of action. The idea was to, they flattened all the buildings and then they were trying to keep that out of action and the civvy strip and then there was the dams and the railway yards and the town and the wharf, of course,

30:30 was the main one. People don't seem to realise how many boats were sunk and how many lives were lost in the Darwin harbour.

Was that something that you fellows would talk about at the time?

Oh yes, we'd go and see the results of it if you had time or had to go into town on something or rather, you'd spend some time and go and have a look and do that. I had a little mate with me, Shorty Lawson,

31:00 he was a little, his mum was a Jew. He was a bonzer little bloke but he had the cheek of old Nick and he'd get anything he wanted at anytime, just walk in and get it and he had a camera, which was illegal for us but film they used to send up inside a cake. If you asked your parents they'd send you up a cake and inside was whatever you wanted inside. I used to get film sent up inside the cake and we used to go and take this, secretly

31:30 we'd go and crawl through the bush and take mainly the aircraft we were after, or if there was a crash or something like that and then we'd go back and a hundred and ten in the shade and you'd be under the bed in the dark developing this. And then for some reason or other they shot the films out, or they warned the people back home not to send them or something and they got a bit frightened because what would happen to the person concerned who

32:00 got caught with them. They cut that out but we had a PR unit, a photographic reconnaissance unit, and they had stripped down aircraft with cameras on them that used to go over and reconnaissance different targets and how things were going. So Shorty used to breeze in there and go and make himself known to someone and he'd finish up coming out with some I think it was nine inch wide film that used to go into the aircraft cameras

32:30 and he'd get in under the bed at night and we had boards cut out the correct width, so cut the film off to the width and in the dark roll it off and we'd use that. Another thing where we nearly got shot was when we developed it we had to have somewhere, he'd get his Mum to send up the developer and the hardener in bottles or packets or whatever.

Yeah, you need the chemicals.

Hey?

You need the chemicals?

You need the chemicals and he knew all about it

33:00 and I didn't know anything about photography. I was just the mug that came along and kept him company and of course we had nothing porcelain to develop them in and the only thing we could find was the CO [commanding officer] had a dog and he had a doggie dish about that big, so one night the doggie dish disappeared. So what we used to do was go over when no one was around and where the water was in your troughs to do your washing and he'd develop and do them over there and we'd always have our washing in

33:30 one of the big copper boilers, so if anything happened we'd just throw the film in there, so we weren't caught with it. And there was a hell of a do about this missing doggie thing, so ever if we'd have been caught with that and the film, we'd have been in trouble but luckily we'd didn't.

How did you get, because you need a dark room as well, you'd have to?

No, no, the bed, we

34:00 had our bunks and he used to put the blankets down at night and crawl in there in the dark and he'd do everything in the dark, without seeing anything, he'd do the lot. He'd cut that film off and you'd see bits of sweat, I've still got some of them here with the drops of sweat and thumb prints on them and different things, rolled up.

And what were the kinds of things that you really wanted to take photographs of?

Aircraft mainly.

Why was the interest there with that?

Well different aircraft that came in and then there were

34:30 aircraft accidents. I've got one of a Catalina that came in with half its wing cut away, blown away and it landed. You hear about these things and this was just over the way from us so crept through the scrub and photographed that. That was on the civvy strip and there was Liberators and different bombers and different in aircraft. We didn't go much to the civvy strip

35:00 because the aerodrome defence was a bit good for that, particularly the Yanks. They shot first and asked questions afterwards. If you were creeping through the scrub you copped it and if you were standing up they'd want to know who you are and what you are doing there, so you just had to take the chance on that.

Did you have much interaction with the Americans?

No. Didn't want it mainly.

What did you think about these Americans?

35:30 Rash, very efficient, they had the gear and they did things wonderfully well but swollen headed and moody, no, weren't my cup of tea.

Did you manage to, well shaft them I suppose?

36:00 Well we did have things, the beer and scotch and those sorts of things. They'd go mad over it because they couldn't get enough of it and I didn't drink, well very little of that stuff so I'd save my beer ration and go over and trade it for cigarettes, American cigarettes. We did a bit of trading like that and also any souvenirs you had they wanted to buy them. For instance I think I've still got the altimeter

36:30 out of Bluey Truscott's Kite because that came in and that was scrapped as it had been in the salt water and I think I've got that down at another workshop.

You've got another workshop?

Oh yes, with a mate of mine.

Right.

There's a workshop on the estate here. We've got a lathe and all woodworking equipment and everything on there but this is one with a friend of mine. He's an architect and we've got a full workshop about three or four kilometres away.

Right, so essentially within where you live

37:00 **you've got about three workshops that you can attend?**

Yeah. One illegal and two legals.

Yeah, great, good work. You mentioned also that you'd go and have a look at some of the damage around Darwin. Can you describe some of that damage for me?

Oh yes, the Post Office, you've probably heard about that, did you?

Well we need to find out about what you actually saw

37:30 **as an eye witness.**

Well the Post Office was bombed and all the staff were told to get out other than the girls that were on the phones for security and for information. A bomb hit them, no, a bomb hit alongside of it and they dashed out and got in a slit trench and as they got in a bomb landed in the slit trench with them, so they were both killed. Nearly the whole of them had their roofs blown off and walls blown

38:00 down and it was just utter devastation everywhere because they didn't only have one raid, they had about forty raids in Darwin. They just kept on and on and on because the Catalinas and Liberators were taking off from there and bombing them up in the Islands, so they had to try and stop them.

What sort of damage could you see in the harbour?

Oh total,

38:30 at low tide there was probably I think about twenty-five battleships [warships, presumably] and stuff that were sunk. One of the American ships had just pulled in and they hit that centre and she blew up and they lost three hundred and fifty on that, and other ones were strafed and bombed and it was just utter chaos. But I wasn't there then. I didn't go until after that main raid.

But you could still see the damage when the tide was out?

Oh see the damage, you could,

39:00 nobody worried about it. If an aircraft was shot down it was left where it was. Who was worried about that when they wanted to get food and hospital gear and get things moving, they just didn't worry about it., so it was all plain to see, the whole lot of it.

There's been some controversy around about how many people were killed as part of the Darwin raids. I

39:30 **think the official figures were something like fifteen servicemen. What do you think happened?**

Well not two thousand servicemen, two thousand people probably. A lot of those were civilians but a lot of them they used to get a feel about what was happening by the recce planes coming over. If a reconnaissance plane came over at night and the searchlight picked it up and they would know it was a Jap

40:00 because the air traffic controllers used to keep tabs coming in or out unless it was something that was damaged and then they'd get on the radio and identify them or they'd start shooting. So when they came over they knew very well that they were coming in to take photos, because a moonlight night, moonlight photos or in the day time to take photos that there was something on. So they moved a lot of the population from Darwin south and

40:30 the women and children, but not all of them but they didn't really expect the raid at all. Well they didn't expect it on that night, I don't think. They knew it could come at anytime. They were more worried I think about an invasion at that time and we were told the same thing. The perimeter defence had to be in place and this is what often happened to, you'd work all day on a job and then you had to do guard duty at night and then go back to

41:00 work the next day. That happened with us but because we were working such long hours they didn't call on us unless they had to.

What did you think the chances were that there could be an invasion?

Oh plenty, couldn't see anything to stop it really. Other than aircraft Darwin really didn't have, the big guns that were there, they didn't really have a lot at all.

41:30 And the other thing that they would do and they didn't use their anti-aircraft defence a lot of them because as soon as they did that they were pinpointing to whoever was taking photos of just where everything was. And sometimes they'd even take the anti-aircraft and put them out in the middle of the bush somewhere where there was nothing around and isolate them so that the bombs would be pinpointed at that point and not at something they wanted to cover, so there was a lot of funny business went on.

Tape 4

Was the 9EFS given a nickname by anyone or?

No, I don't think so.

Weren't you called the "Hydraulic Squadron" or something?

Not there, no.

Was that later?

No, that was later.

Okay then. How hard was it for you to keep the airstrips operational in Darwin?

Not very hard. It was an all out effort.

01:00 A few bomb craters to fill in and that sort of thing, slight damage but also they used to damage the equipment if they could. They had a bit left and they didn't want to take it home, they'd leave something there on the equipment so sometimes you'd get that had been bombed or turned over, a near miss. And we had them often with a near miss where the tractor would finish up in the hole upside down. We had big cranes, we had all the gear to do that.

01:30 One of the big problems up there was tracks coming off. There was so much heavy work and turning work that the tracks would sometimes get a bit worn and they'd come off and you had to put them back on again.

How would you do that?

Well you've got to take the tension off the track, great big springs and pull them back and then you've got the disconnect the track if you can't move it, if it's under the vehicle,

02:00 get the vehicle up and then get the track onto there and reconnect the pins and let the tension off, so it's quite a decent job and if the tractor's on an angle of about thirty degrees or something it's even harder.

What about the rollers?

Rollers are no trouble as a rule.

Would they often need maintenance as well as the tracks?

No, just greasing as a rule.

02:30 **So what kind of maintenance were mostly occupied with?**

Well as I said, the vehicles, and tractors, all that part of it. We didn't do any aircraft work.

What would be your daily routine then Noel?

Hard to say. If we were on the base at the Forty Mile it would be in the workshop mainly or if you were installing

03:00 some steam or hot water system or diesel plant or something you might be around playing with that. Out on the bases it was usually individual vehicles or tractors that had broken down, go and work on them but mostly I was in the workshop.

What did you prefer to be doing?

Didn't worry mainly. You'd get interested in a project in the workshop and you didn't

03:30 like to be taken off it, for instance, probably the first clutch plate we made up took us probably two or three hundred hours work but then bit by bit we got it going, so some of us were doing the drilling and some of us were doing the chiselling and some were doing something else, the grinding and we got it down to a respectable time. So the whole thing was you were concentrating on getting the job out, a good job in the shortest possible time.

And what was the morale like in

04:00 **your squadron?**

Mainly good, but the air force used air field construction squadrons and work maintenance units to get rid of all their criminals, that's probably why I was there. If anyone had had a court martial they were given their punishment, twelve months or whatever it was and then they would post them to an air field construction squadron where they were out of Australia and away from the beer and the women or

04:30 whatever had caused their problem and there, and we had some pretty tough customers. There was three of them there that carried a gun all the time, they were Sydney gangsters. And their mate would go down to the shower and see if one of the others was in there and if he wasn't he'd go back and the pair of them would then come in and he wouldn't have a shower, he'd just stand there. His mate had given him the gun, he'd stand there while they had their shower and then he'd go off and then you'd see another one sneaking

05:00 in, it was real funny really.

Did they cause any problems in the squadron?

Any problems? Oh yes, plenty of problems, always. Always problems when you've got that. There was one young chap who was illiterate. I don't know how he got into the air force, he was a bonza kid and he went AWOL [Absent Without Official Leave] on the way back from leave, so he got field punishment.

05:30 And there was another real mongrel of a bloke that was on the field punishment and evidently he knew him, lived in the same sort of suburb in Sydney and he used to give him hell. I was a sergeant at the time and I used to take the field punishment sometimes. So he used to give this young bloke hell about his wife and him and the rest of it and the whole lot. The young bloke used to take it all but you could see that he was

06:00 really getting at him and anyway there was a call went out and I went down and on the field punishment you had them digging holes in the hard ground and then they'd have to put that into sandbags and go over and fill another hole that they'd already dug and bring the sandbags back and then when they'd got that hole out they dug another hole and so on. Unless you wanted latrine pits and then you'd put them down digging the latrine pits for

06:30 you. At any rate I went over there and here's this chap that's the real mongrel and he's sitting in the bottom of there and he's got a pick straight in the top of his head and out under his chin, so the little chap went up on a manslaughter charge or a murder charge then but there were quite a few of us that testified on his behalf at the court martial but he got away with a prison sentence, where he could have

been shot quite easily.

07:00 **Where was the court martial held?**

On the estate, on the thing. They bought in officers from other places, or they might have even flown them up from south, especially for court martials. I didn't know who they were at all, weren't supposed to know those things.

Apart from the Forty Mile camp how many other bases were you servicing at Darwin?

Oh quite a few.

07:30 We went to Carmarlie Creek and the RAAF Darwin, up at the RAAF. You worked up there. I'll tell you about that later because we shifted to there and from that unit I think there was about three hundred personnel went over to Bathurst Island and out of the jungle and scrub made a landing field there. The idea was that that was an

08:00 alternative place if Darwin got wiped out, if they could hold that they had an alternative place to bring the aircraft in and out and also they were trying to bring them so the base was away from Darwin township. They got plastered, the civilians and the loss wasn't so great and the other thing was keep hedge hopping towards the target so they didn't have so far to fly. Cause in those days they had the Catalina's up there, the flying boats, and they were in Doctor's Gully and they

08:30 flying right over, they were doing twenty six hour flights or something, tons of fuel and everything on board. Terrific work right over there, mine laying and bombing or one thing or another.

Did the work that you were doing vary between bases?

No, much run of the mill. You didn't know what you were going to do, whatever you were required to do. The

09:00 MBO's [?] usually knew who was good at what and they gave them that job.

And when you were moved from base to base what kind of accommodation were you given?

Well at the Forty Mile we were given tents so that was it. So what we used to do was get the palliasse covers, which was just a long hessian bag in other words, with a flap at one end, like a pillowcase, which you stuffed your straw in, or whatever you had, and what

09:30 we used to was go and cut some timbers, four forks and two long ones. And you threaded that through and you had that on there and you got the long ones with the bow out and when you laid on them they were beautiful and of course, you'd just sleep naked at night and the air would come through the hessian and you kept cool and so on, and that was probably just the same right through. Well then when there was a bit of concrete over you'd get

10:00 the boys to drop it into your tent and you got a concrete floor and then when you had time what we used to do we'd either get rocks and cement and build them up so that you had about a two foot wall all the way around, other than one doorway and the idea of that was it raised your tent up, so instead of it being red hot on your head, it would be up higher. and you'd also if you could get another fly, you'd put a fly

10:30 over the top of your tent to give you more insulation and the other things was to keep the snakes, and frogs and everything from getting in your bed at night. That cut down the room that they could come in, other than that if you were on the floor low down, they'd just come in and hop up on you.

Did you see many snakes?

Well the main snake or the trouble that we had was in our air raid pits or dugouts, little fox holes. We used to

11:00 just dig a trench down like a grave and a few sandbags on top and you could drop in that in the case of a bombing raid. Well before we put the sandbags round of course it was just level with the ground and it was the most wonderful animal and reptile trap you could get but when the noise started up you didn't worry about what was in there, you just got in. If they didn't like it, they could get out.

How frequent were the raids?

11:30 Well we didn't really have a raid on our establishment at South. We had them near and when they bombed like that you always had an odd bomb going off close because they'd come in and bomb and as they turned away something might happen or they might think they see a fighter or something and they just jettison their bombs, so they can climb and get out of it.

12:00 And also when they come in on a bombing raid like that they drop early and then they drop where they reckon, they try and straddle the target, so you get them before and after and occasionally you get a bomb that won't come down straight. It will porpoise and take off somewhere, something wrong with the tail fin or it's been damaged or something like that but we didn't have much in the way of bombs. About the most frightening thing would

- 12:30 be you'd hear the aircraft over and you could always, they had a funny noise the Jap aircraft. They had a (demonstrates) and they had a pulse with them that ours didn't have and being up there all the time you could almost tell straight away what type of aircraft it was, the whole lot. You were listening to it all day long more and less and watching for it. To give you an instance of that we were on the strip, on the road
- 13:00 from Darwin to Perth one day and we were standing up on the back of the truck and someone said "What the hell is that aircraft?" And this bloke came in and he turned around and we said "He's going to land", so we pulled off the strip and just as well we did because he was a Jap and he'd come over on his own and he just ran down the strip down the aircraft that were there and took off again. So if you get to know the tone, it helped but also what they used to do, there'd be dogfights up there
- 13:30 and the empty shells as they came down used to whistle just like a bomb, so you'd do that and all of a sudden a rattle and someone would say "Ouch" and one of the shells had hit him on the head, on the tin hat. That would be something and you never knew when they would jettison anything at all from up there, so until it hit the ground and we knew what it was, we weren't sure.

Did the raids create a lot of fear?

A lot of?

Fear?

Well I suppose so but

- 14:00 usually it was that quick you didn't have time to be frightened. You were that busy getting out of the way or doing what you could towards what had to be done that you didn't have time to be frightened.

Did the threat of raids always linger in your mind?

No. No, you were more thinking of the next one.

That's what I mean, like the threat of a coming raid was it always in the back of mind?

No, but just a natural caution.

- 14:30 When you heard about certain things being done and you were in that area but naturally you took it. But mostly things happened at the most unexpected time, you see. You wouldn't realise, you wouldn't expect it until that was over and that was that but I didn't have a hell of a lot of raids and things like that, not like a lot of them because we were never at that time in town. Later on we got a bit more and I'll explain that, when we shifted.

How did the heat affect

- 15:00 **your ability to work?**

Oh shocking. The diseases and the problems that you got up there, for instance you've got twelve hundred men and nine hundred of them go down with dysentery, and it's shocking and that's just something that, the latrines were just open pits with a two fork sticks and a bar along and you went and sat on there and periodically they put diesel oil or old oil on there and burnt them out

- 15:30 and when they filled up they just covered them up and shifted the poles to another one, so you learnt not to be too fussy. There was no privacy about anything there at all.

No modesty?

False modesty, no place for it, either in the tent, in the shower or anywhere else. We had no women on our establishment so you didn't have to be careful.

Did the absence of woman, did you worry about there

- 16:00 **being no women? Did you miss women?**

One woman I did.

So you had met Ann, I mean not Ann, sorry, Olga at this stage?

Not before I went to Darwin, did I? No. Back from Darwin. No, didn't really worry me a bit because I was never one to chase the girls. I was never a good dancer or

- 16:30 never was the right size that the girls liked, or anything like that and I was too busy doing my own thing to worry about them. We used to treat it as a hell of a joke because when ever any women came up there, the officers all nabbed them and carted them around and be nice to them and the rest of it and we'd do a bit of a giggle at them.

We'll weave Olga into the story when she comes into the picture later on.

When I come back from Darwin, yeah.

So you were moved to Darwin to which base?

To the RAAF

17:00 base. It wasn't at the base. We were then shifted up there because there were more Liberator's coming over and they wanted some more airfields built and repaired right in Darwin. At that stage we'd been going up for a day or two and repairing it but they wanted someone up there to build them and to be on hand, so we shifted up onto a vacant block, just on the north

17:30 side of the RAAF base. The RAAF base as I said was almost non-existent. That was just bombed out and we set up camp there.

What kind of camp did you set up?

Oh another, the whole of our unit more or less shifted up to there. We abandoned that and shifted up to there but I was in the initial shifting up and before

18:00 we really got to full strength, we were operating, but they would send them up from the other base what we wanted, the vehicles or trucks or whatever we wanted and we were there on the base to do whatever they wanted. The workshop shifted to there and the fuel dump was there and anything that they wanted to shift and instead of delivering it to the Forty Mile, they'd deliver it to there to build it up slowly. And before it really got operational I was shifted. I was posted back

18:30 to Sydney.

Can I just ask you why you were shifting up to the RAAF base?

Well I just explained it, to service new airstrips that were going in for the Yanks and other ones. There was airstrips put in everywhere see.

How many new airstrips were being built?

Well I don't know, I wouldn't know. We were involved in two, one there and one on Melville Island.

19:00 But we didn't know what others were being built. The army could have been building, the Yanks could have been building, the Dutch could have been building, anyone could have been.

Can you explain what kind of work you were involved in while you were building those couple of strips?

I was again in the workshop on repairs and maintenance and vehicle and plant and making up new gear or repairing things that were damaged.

So why were you

19:30 **posted to Sydney?**

Why? You ask the air force that. They don't give any reason for anything. What they decided, no, then it was decided that 9ACS, we were 9 Works Maintenance when we went there first remember, was wanted in Borneo so they said "Right, we're going down to Sydney and then back to Borneo". Now that meant that, I'm not

20:00 sure, I don't know whether the plant from there was taken down to Sydney and then to the Randwick Racecourse and then up to Borneo, or whether it went the other way, whether it was delivered up there. But at that stage I went down to there and because they thought they thought me suitable for aerodrome defence, because I was in the workshops and round about, I was given twenty two

20:30 or twenty three blokes and sent up to Canungra Army Jungle Training School to do a course for aerodrome defence because we were now moving into an area where it was, the army having their ack-ack [anti aircraft] and doing the defence for us, we might have to do our own. Remember the war was coming to a finish but they didn't know that for sure.

So what did you think when you learnt that you'd be providing your own defence?

Our own?

Defence?

Didn't worry me in the least and I was always interested in guns and gave me another opportunity

21:00 and at stage I was really well, I was in good nick. I went up there but I didn't know what was in store for me though.

What was in store for you?

Well the first thing was I left there with twenty three and after a month with these two gangsters they decided to put them in close proximity so they'd shoot one another or get it out of their system or something and what they had against me to send me in charge of them I don't know, but they did and so I left

21:30 with twenty two or twenty three and I got up there with fourteen. The rest went ack willy [AWOL] on

the way, as they got near a station near home they'd just take off. They weren't going to Canungra to the army, they knew what was in store for them. So we got up there and the first thing again was medical inspection and then unfortunately they said to us "Right, what size do you take?" And they, the army took over your rank and you were a private as far as they were concerned, whether you were an air commodore, you

22:00 were a private. And a little lance corporal in the army could tell you what to do and make you do it and if you didn't do it, you were in trouble.

How did that rest with you?

Eh?

How did that sit with you?

Alright. I was going to do the course and it was their rules and you obeyed the rules. So the first thing that they did was outfitted you with their gear. Now when you do a lot of marching or anything, you usually do it in boots that you've worn in and

22:30 everything good and once again I couldn't say that the army did anything against us but they didn't do anything to help us and they had their tongue in their cheek all the way through because here's a group of Menzies mannequins [air force personnel] and the sergeant in charge couldn't even bring all his men here. He lost half of them on the way, so naturally we were the butt of the joke and the centre of a bit of mud slinging. But

23:00 we got there and went through the medical examination and then Canungra at that time was the last place that anyone went before they went overseas. And the idea was again that they bought all the latest expertise over there of exactly what the Japs were up to and what you had to do and what you had to watch for and all the rest of it, the latest in arms and defence gear and booby traps. But more than anything they wanted to see if they tried

23:30 to kill you whether you'd die or not, and that was the main object I think.

How did they try to kill you?

Well the first thing was we were there for twenty-eight or thirty-two days or something and the first thing in that day you had a five-hour march, a ten-hour march and a twelve-hour forced march and a three-day march, so that took up a bit of the time. Now the marches were marches. Now remember that we'd just come

24:00 from other than the south and probably one other and a life of, I'd call it luxury or no discipline or no great exercise or special exercising other than our work. We hadn't been marching miles and we hadn't been doing this and that was one of the things the army was crooked on is when we went anywhere we had vehicles and we drove and they'd be marching along. These Menzies mannequins they used to call us. They were always trying to take a penny out of our pocket.

24:30 So we got there and the first thing they did of course was issue us with the boots and I'm sure if you asked for a size nine they'd give you a size twelve and if you asked for a two they'd give you an eight and if you asked for a twelve they'd give you a two. Because the boots that you got didn't even fit you and the uniform didn't fit you. They were either as tight as hell or they fell all over you and uncomfortable and chaffed you so we said "Right, we'll fix that", so we carried on with that.

25:00 And then apart from these route marches you had weapon training, lectures and it was very good but the whole of Canungra was built on a, the camp on a hill, or two hills with a little parade ground in between and your tent is on that angle, so everything that you do you're either walking uphill or walking downhill and that on itself if enough to give your legs hell in bad

25:30 boots. But with these route marches and so the first thing they do is night route march, so off you go. You don't know what you're doing or where you're going, so you just march. You don't know how long you'll be away or anything. This is their four hour route march, so you march for four hours without a stop. There's no excuse. If you want to wet your pants, you wet your pants and that's it. You march for four hours, carrying all your gear, your respirator, your pack, your rifle, spare ammo, Bren gun and split up as a unit. And

26:00 what they did was make a section out and the idea was every section went there and was allotted marks for the way that they got through the course, their attitude, their aptitude, the number of victories they had over the other ones and you were immediately opposed to another section and I'm sure they didn't pick the worst section out to oppose us because they gave us hell. At any rate these marches went on and then,

26:30 the first thing in the morning you'd get up and reveille was about six o'clock I think, no showers, icy cold pools and you had to run about three quarters of a mile down, lose your towel when you got there and in and have a swim and back out. If you didn't swim tough luck Charlie, back out, towel on, run back to camp, do your bed up, do that up, clean your weapons, go and have breakfast, back and then it was either the lectures or more route marches or unarmed combat or rifle training

27:00 or whatever but arms training. A lot of it very interesting and then they'd have, as I say, the lectures on

the different things that were happening up to date, which was interesting but right through it we always were on the collecting side, and the little lance corporal, they had Mount Tamborine and that was about one thousand, four hundred feet and it was like that. You couldn't walk and you couldn't crawl but you had to use both hands.

- 27:30 And if the little lance corporal didn't like the look on your face or if you gave a bit of cheek or your gun was, he'd say "Right tonight, Mount Tamborine, once", so when you knocked off at night at nine or ten o'clock after your route march, you were given a lighted lantern and you had to carry that up to the top and back again. And if you fell over and the lamp went out, you had to come back, get it re-lit and do it again and it didn't matter who you were, that was the punishment. And anyone could inflict that upon anyone and there was no questions or anything. They were allowed two and a half percent deaths
- 28:00 on the course before there was any inquiry what so ever. They were using live ammunition over your heads, and they were using gelignite. You'd go to walk into a creek and it would blow up in your face, blokes would get big bits of rock and everything through them. They'd have you on parade and someone would come and throw a plug of gelignite behind you and you'd get peppered again and blasted to see what your reactions were. They'd
- 28:30 tell you to keep your head down and fire live ammunition six inches over your head and you could hear them whizzing and anyone that popped their head up didn't have a head. They had creek crossings, on the route marches, by the way, to make it even better you'd probably go in and out of a river or a creek or a stream twenty times. That mean you went in, your boots were wet, before they were dry you were back in again and so you had socks, wet boots, wet with the result that after about four days you had blood coming out of your
- 29:00 shoes with all the things. But if you wanted to go to the medical you had to go when you'd finished everything else at night and they'd have a look at you and say "Can't see anything mate, on your way", so there was nothing done there. So with all this live practice and one of the things was they had wires, you might have seen, two wires strung across, full gear, rifle, the whole lot and you had to walk across on the wires. I can't put this arm up, it's bad, and you had those and you had to walk across sideways with all of that.
- 29:30 Now if you were six foot long and light, it wasn't bad because you could take the weight on your feet and your hands but with my weight and size, I wasn't as heavy as I am now, all the weights on your hands so you're literally going over on your hands for about thirty feet. What they found was that the blokes would get that fed up with it they'd just let go and drop off about thirty feet into the stream down below and that's no good, so they put a pontoon bridge underneath. So if you fell off you fell thirty foot onto a pontoon bridge and
- 30:00 so it went on and they had stupid things. You had to go up a big ramp up about twenty feet, all gear, and the idea was to make sure that if you had to jump into water you didn't have your tin hat or anything so that it came up and hit you under the chin and knocked you out, into this pool that they had and the pool had rushes in it and they lost two blokes in there. They just went down and got caught in the rushes and drowned, no worries, that's it, on you go. And any rate all this went on and
- 30:30 it was quite interesting and we were really getting into good nick with the tucker and the exercise and everything, but out on the patrols and on the marches that you went one section would be against another section. And there'd be two people, two army sergeants go out with you, one on each to observe what happened and the whole lot, to allot the marks for your efficiency as a soldier.
- 31:00 Well I went out and of course normal ways we'd get away with things but our crowd would not shut up of a night and the army they were used to it, they were doing this all the time. And we'd go into camp and I'd say to them "For God's sake, shut up, not a word" and the next minute "Oh that's my cup" or something like that and the army knew exactly where we were all the time. And they were allowed to come in and pinch your rations and give you the gun butt if you resisted, take your gun and for every gun that you lost that was about ten points that you lost.
- 31:30 But that was a soldier out of action and your ten were probably down to two. I had one bloke, they had the habit of going in and when they wanted to cut a bit of clearing they'd just get the machete and they'd cut down and they'd leave a spike and one bloke bent down and knocked his eye out. It took him three quarters of a day before he got into hospital, that was one of my blokes and another bloke fell on a climb and broke his leg, so that was two of them and I was down to eight and the
- 32:00 army was giving us hell, dinky di. So at any rate this particular time I got in and I despaired and as I got in I touched a Gympie bush, do you know them?

No.

A Gympie bush in Queensland are a real bushy tree and the leaves have tiny little spines on them and as soon as you touch them it's just like fire and immediately it comes up in a great big rash and I touched one of these. And I was trying to keep these blokes quiet and there was no way and I could,

- 32:30 I knew where the army would be, their section, which was the best spot. And I said to them "Right, now you can make a bit of noise now and then after that, everyone shut up", so they did and when they shut up I'd been for a walk and I had a path through into the middle of this Gympie thicket. So I said "Right" and away we went and after that they were quiet and we snuck over into the thicket and the next

minute we hear the army charging to where we were,

33:00 "Oh, not here", or something and someone said something, so someone in our mob laughed and I said "Shut up", so they knew where they were. Pitch dark of course in the jungle, so they came charging up and what we'd done in the meantime I'd got them to cut off, we'd made a circle in the middle and I cut off all the Gympie bushes and we put them up that high round and they just walked straight into that. Well they were blinded and they got down to about three men that were serviceable the next day and that was the only reason why we didn't have to do

33:30 the whole course again.

What they actually thought it was a good ploy?

Oh yeah, well they must have because we were expecting to have to do it again with all the things that we'd done wrong but no, they said, or either that or they were that fed up with and they wanted to get rid of us, one of the two.

Sounds like they might have met their match actually?

No, I think they might have wanted to get rid of us, we were a pain in the neck.

Well they certainly put you through your paces there?

Yeah,

34:00 but we were in good nick. I used to, well I tell you when we left Canungra to come back to Sydney everybody, I've never heard anything like it in my life. We were in a big truck and we got out on the road and everybody automatically yelled out "Stop, stop" and the driver said "Oh not again", he was an army driver, and we all got out and we ran up and down on a level bit of road. That was the first bit of level road we'd seen in twenty eight days.

So level that you had to stop and run around on it?

Yeah, run and around on it and it wasn't just me,

34:30 it was everyone, straightaway, it was a bit of level road and I might tell you there is a, on the route march, after two days, on the four day I think, there is one thousand, nine hundred and seventy feet straight up and if you don't get up to the top of that you come back again and try it again. And we had one of our blokes, I was only young at the time but he was a more mature bloke and he sat down and cried and he couldn't go any further. That's

35:00 what they do, they just push you right to the end.

Did you see many men break?

Yeah we used to have a couple that went troppo, we'd say. They used to have a pen for them. Because we were an ACS and away as well as the crims they used to send all the homosexuals up there and often because we were isolated they'd do their time up on the unit, so we had two or three pens

35:30 made up out of barbed wire and out of wire mesh rather. And these young kids would go troppo, they couldn't take it and they'd just mumble and cry and yell and go mad until they got them south, not many.

Were your limits put to the test?

Pardon?

How about your limit?

My limits?

Yeah.

I was often running on the rims.

36:00 **Where did you go when you left Canungra?**

Came back to Sydney and as I said then I was posted, while I was at Canungra the unit was forming up ready to go to Balikpapan and we went up by boat up to there. Boat? Yeah, boat to Balikpapan.

Where did you board the boat?

Sydney.

36:30 We sailed out.

How long were you in Sydney for?

Oh two or three days or something, I don't remember.

Whereabouts were you camped?

At Randwick, went back to Randwick and what they did was, see they were shifting all the personnel up. We'd been up there, the personnel that had been working on the job, some had gone up with the equipment and some were at the thing and they just wanted to get rid of us out of the way because we hadn't dropped in on anything so they just shot us straight up there with the equipment on the boat.

37:00 And most of us went on the boat at the same time but we sailed out under Sydney Harbour Bridge on the day that was peace was declared on the islands.

Really?

Mm.

How did you receive that news?

Oh we were quite disappointed in some ways, in other ways relieved. You don't have an opinion in those days, you just

37:30 take it as it comes. You just do what you're told and that's it and you might have an opinion of a certain person you don't like but other than that, or someone you do like but other than that you don't worry much.

How were you informed that the war was finished?

None.

But who actually told you as you were sailing out?

That we where?

Who actually told you as you sailed out?

That I was going out?

No, as you were sailing out, who actually came and told you?

We were onboard the boat and the crew of the boat were in wireless contact and they told us that.

38:00 **And what was the reaction across the whole boat?**

I don't know. You went onboard the boat, you were put down a hole in the corner and told to bloody well stop there. Now you didn't know what anyone else thought or did because you weren't allowed to. You were just a piece of machinery being sent away, that was it. If you'd gone asking questions someone would have thrown you overboard.

So there was no cheering or celebrating?

No.

38:30 No, you didn't know what was coming. There was no reason to cheer or celebrate. Mostly I think that everyone was a bit disappointed that it had been declared and we would miss some of the action or some of what was going on. It seemed useless to us to go all the way up there, as we thought, to do next to nothing.

And did you discuss that amongst yourselves?

Oh you would probably, over a mug of tea or something

39:00 but once again you never had any big discussion. If an officer came down and fifty people were together talking, he'd bring the riot crew down straight away and want to know what was going on. You didn't do things like that.

Sounds like you were well and truly kept in your place?

Of course you were, they had too. If you had a whole heap of men, I'll give you an instance. Anytime the air force had men waiting and we very seldom did it but at, was it Darwin?

39:30 Yeah, Darwin, we were waiting for a few days for something to happen, to get on the boat or something, we'd done a job and they send you out emu bobbing. They give you a bag and a stick and you go out and you pick up every bit of paper and every leaf and everything on the whole of the area, through the bush and everything, bring it back and empty it in and go back and get another lot. They keep you busy see because they say idle hands find mischief, and they do.

40:00 **It's a good saying. What route did you take to New Guinea?**

What?

What route did you take as you sailed up to New Guinea?

Well I got on the boat there and I got off at Balikpapan. We went past, we went to the main port of New Guinea. We pulled in there to unload something and to take something on.

Moresby? Moresby?

Moresby.

So you stopped at Moresby before Balikpapan?

Yeah, but didn't get off the boat.

40:30 **What were your first impressions of the skyline and the landscape?**

Not bad from what we saw of it.

It would be the first time that you'd seen a foreign island?

Yes, but they didn't take us on a ship's tour or anything. Once again you were ordered down below decks because they were working on deck and nobody was allowed on deck, so if you happened to poke your head up and have a look, that's all you got. You didn't get a great opportunity. You were there to be transported

41:00 from one place to another place with your gear.

Which takes us to Balikpapan?

Pardon?

Which takes us to Balikpapan?

That's right.

And I think we're getting the wind up so we'll have to...

Tape 5

00:31 **Just before lunch we got up to when you were on the ship on your way to Borneo, what were the conditions like on the ship?**

Alright as long as there was calm weather. In the rough weather we were put down the hole and allowed out after dark and no smoking. And sometimes if it was sunny and everything was clear we were allowed for half an hour or so during the day but we were all on camp stretchers.

01:00 You know the fold up camp stretchers?

I'll just pause you there. The fridge has just kicked in.

Mmh?

The fridge has just kicked in.(TAPE STOPS) You were just saying about?

In the rough conditions because we were on these unsecured stretchers as soon as we got to some bad weather and all of them would finish up to one side and all over the side and dark. It was in black, blackout down the hole, so you'd feel it start to go and you'd try and grab the floor, nothing and the next minute, crash and there'd be yells and screams and then

01:30 crash, over the other way. So that wasn't so good and in the morning you saw some strange sights and one bloke would be sleeping up on three blokes high in the corner where they'd be piled up sleeping one on top of the other or something but it was all part of it.

How long did it take to get to Borneo?

Wouldn't have a clue, two or three days I think, two or three days I think.

Any seasickness on board with the rough weather?

Oh yes, yes, seasickness on board and we nearly

02:00 shot an officer.

Oh what happened there?

Well he came down, he was actually one of the transport officers I think and he came down and "Attention everyone", so everybody lifted their head to have a look and he said "Look when you get over there, see these, they are a new type of Japanese hand grenade, so look for it." And he said "See that little button on the top", he said "When you press that it will start hissing and you've got two seconds before it goes off."

02:30 So he said "Make yourself scarce", so he's waving his arms around and the next minute out comes the

spray and the things hissing and anyway one of our blokes had his Tommy gun with him and he put it up and he said "Out the top quick before I shoot" and he said "Alright, alright, it's a new sort of can of aerosol spray" and it was the first time that anyone had seen one but he was lucky he didn't get shot.

03:00 **Inappropriate joke.**

Oh no, he thought it was great until he was looking down the barrel of a gun and then he didn't think it was so funny.

What sort of information were you given about things like booby traps, what to look out for?

There, nothing. You got that at Canungra or back at the general training.

Cause you didn't mention that with Canungra. What did they tell you in Canungra?

Well what happened was the Japs would have a log

03:30 that people were treading over, were hopping over on a trail and there would be jungle either side so it would be hard not to step over there so they'd booby trap it on the other side. And then people got caught with that so they'd say "Right" and so what they used to do was go to there and hop up on the log and hop over, so they booby trapped it before you stepped up and this is the sort of things they got up to. And they'd leave fountain pens or revolvers, one of the automatics laying there and as soon as you picked it up,

04:00 up went the lot. They had explosive hand grenades wired to it underneath and they also came on some pretty mean ones in the jungle. They used to get a couple of palms that were going up and cut some long green bamboo and tie them to the palm and then on the front of them they'd make stakes about that long, pointed, and they'd spring those back to the trip wire and as soon as somebody walked through, they'd just walk and they'd be hanging there and all those sort of things they came on. Poisoning water and

04:30 all things where they changed their routines for one thing or another. They'd even make it so there was a little path where you could get through, squeeze through and walk round a tree rather than over the fallen tree and of course the booby trap was round the tree then, not round there at all. They kept up to date with those sorts of things in case you went over there but we didn't go into

05:00 Japanese held territory except for a while up at Borneo.

Okay, so when you arrived in Borneo, what did the campsite look like?

Nothing, we didn't have one. Once again we were air force in an army domain. But our officers in their wisdom saw a beautiful bit of level ground

05:30 right near the Mango River and it was slightly higher than normal tide mark so they decided to camp there and so the equipment was all stacked there and then we came along and as soon as we started to dig hole we knew why it was bare because it was where the Japanese and the people that were killed in the main thrust were all buried. So you'd dig down and find a skull or an arm or something down underneath and in that and

06:00 we should have known by the stench but you get a lot of smells in those rivers and you couldn't pick it out.

Why didn't they just move site?

No, didn't move site, we'd set up, we were there and that was it.

You'd think it would be less effort to go and cut down a bit of jungle than to put up with those sorts of?

No way, cut down a jungle and you're absolutely open. Anyone can come in on you and you don't know they're there. I'll give you an instance there. We were in a camp about

06:30 the, I think it was about the forty mile and down one end of the camp we'd cleared a bit of ground in to park vehicles.

Is this in Darwin?

And there were tents on either side of us and those that were working in the workshop used to get their tents down near the work and there were four or five of us sitting there one day and a couple of blokes walked out of the jungle and sauntered down and I was looking at them and I thought "They're strange" but bear in mind that we had Yanks,

07:00 Dutch, all different breeds up there, the whole lot. And I was looking at them and then I noticed that one of them had a sword and what it was a couple of Japanese officers and they had evidently camped near us, and they'd walked in, walked down there and suddenly realised where they were and if they had of run they would have been shot and they just walked back in and away. So when you're in the jungle, if it's like that, five feet away you don't know what's there, so you naturally try and get an open ground so if for any reason you've got to do it. And the other thing is

07:30 cutting paths through the jungle to put all your machinery and plant and everything up would be murder and the jungle grows so quickly. You put up a shed today and you couldn't get into it in three months because everything would have grown up underneath it so you had to pick a site that was suitable.

And where was this site exactly?

Right near the Mangar River bridge, north of Balikpapan is a place they called Mangarvisa and the bridge goes over

08:00 the Mangar River there and this was a site right on there and when we got there, there were tanks blown up there and the whole of the result of the fighting was there still. And while the Japanese had capitulated the Japanese themselves didn't know about it. They had no wireless, communication or anything, they'd cut all those things off them so they were still a potential danger.

08:30 **What did you do as far as guard duty was concerned in order to make sure you were looking out for this constant threat?**

Well that was one of the reasons why the officers picked that as we had army camps over the bridge, on this side of the bridge and almost all around us. So we were there to work, the army were there to work but mainly to do the fighting and the idea was to let the army look after us. They had to get through the army before they got to us. I was never told that. That's what I took as a

09:00 **It would seem to make sense. How did living on top of a graveyard make your life difficult?**

You weren't in your camps long. You were at work and that was it. We were living on this campsite and sleeping on this campsite and working on it so it didn't make much difference.

Wouldn't it have been a bit of a threat with disease having rotting bodies around the place?

Could have been quite easily.

09:30 **What sort of medical facilities did you have on hand?**

Oh, we had a doctor with us all the time. You had at least one doctor and three or four medical attendants, what do they call them? Medical orderlies and the doctor was supposed to monitor all those medical things but in a case like that the doctor could have gone to the CO and said "Look this is not healthy" and he could have said "No, neither is living out in the bush with the Japs knocking your heads off." Anything like that could have happened.

10:00 It would have been a general opinion and by then it was over, near enough, so we didn't worry.

What sort of health problems were there?

There? Malaria, dengue, quite a few of them.

Were you given anything for malaria?

I thought I had malaria as Og will tell you. For about ten years after I came back I was still having sweats and

10:30 everything but it's a bit hard. DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs], see while we were there we were on Atebrin, you know Atebrin? And Atebrin doesn't prevent malaria at all. It might prevent a certain number of the mosquito biting you because of all the yellow muck you've got all over your skin, the yellow dye exudes out of your skin. But if you have been bitten what it allows you to keep working. You don't get it very severely at the time but when the Atebrin wears off that's

11:00 when it coughs it back up again so I was one of several thousand ex-servicemen who probably got it, worked through it and when we came back again, got off the Atebrin and it worked up it came up again. But I had, well the time I was working on a pumping station and the only way I could get any medical aid was to, they send me some slides to take myself when I had it. When I had it to take it myself, a blood sample, put it between the slides and post it up to them and

11:30 every time we posted it up, someone along the line hit it with the stamp to post it and it broke the slide, so they couldn't do anything about it. So in the end you just give it away, you don't worry.

So you're on this campsite and you stay within that area all the time?

No, no, once again you had jobs outside if there was something broken down. All our equipment was working then on roads and

12:00 excavations and that sort of thing so if there was something to be done outside, you'd be out on that. If not you'd be in the camp.

So can you give me some examples of what you found when you went out and ventured to go and fix things?

Well there was a swamp only about two hundreds just over the other side of the Mangar road and one of the natives told me there was an aircraft that had crashed there

- 12:30 during the flight and we waded out, there were leeches and everything and you didn't know what you were going to cop. There was myself and two others, waded out in there when we had some time off and we found the aircraft and it still had the pilot in it and of course the swamp had taken its toll on the aircraft and the things, but there was stuff like that all around. We put up a logging camp and Borneo's the home of the cedar and all this most wonderful timbers but because of all the
- 13:00 shrapnel that was around you had to be very careful what you logged and right on the Mangar River was a logging camp. What they used to do was cut the timber up river and let it float down to the logging camp. There was one other thing that we had there that was rather shocking was while someone came in, you had natives come in with stories all the time and telling you where there was any Japs or
- 13:30 what was dangerous and what wasn't and there was a missionary had put up a bush hospital about six or eight mile up river and along the river the jungle was always impenetrable, you couldn't very well walk up there, anyway it wouldn't have been very safe. So we decided to, it was fairly wide at that place, to get a old boat that we had and to go up in this and the boat that we had was a float off one of the Japanese or the bottom section of a Japanese
- 14:00 flying boat, small flying boat. So the army actually did it, put a V8 engine in that and they had a shaft and they had a fan blade off one of the D6's or something. That was the propeller and it used to go like the hammers too, so about six of us went up to find out, the news came in that he badly needed medical supplies of any sort, so we went up there and
- 14:30 he said they'd have a native watching and as soon as they knew it was us coming he'd make himself visible to take us into it. And he took us into it and I've never seen anything like it in my life. There were just like pigsties. There was a bit of a partition down, mud, there was a sloping mud side on either side and there'd be a bloke lying with elephantiasis or dysentery or a woman with her stomach or everything hanging out and all they had was a drain down to take away the faeces and
- 15:00 water, absolutely shocking. And this poor chap and his nurse were there, so we left the supplies with them and he was very agitated because he said if the Japs had seen us, about us coming in the boat, he didn't know we were coming in the boat. He said if the Japs knew we'd been in there it would be bad for them and so we had to carry onto another place, oh to drop the chap back while we
- 15:30 had the boat. Instead of him going, we took him up and dropped him off about a couple of kilometres further on.

The native?

The native and then when we came back we decided to call in again and called in and walked in there and the Japs had been in and butchered the lot of them, the whole blooming lot of them. So they evidently knew we were there. They'd followed us up or seen us land and they thought he was collaborating with us so they just knocked them all off. For most of them it was, other than he and the nurse,

- 16:00 the rest of them with one exception, it was a good release, it was a good thing but they made a shocking mess of it.

Where was he from, this missionary?

Germany or Hungary or somewhere. I don't know exactly where he was from, somewhere up that way and I think he had a French nurse or the person that was with him was French. Whether she was a qualified nurse or not I don't know but they were missionaries.

It seems crazy that they had absolutely no facility whatsoever?

- 16:30 No, well before the Japs got there they would have been missionaries in Borneo doing their job, up the river, for the natives and as far as the fighting went they probably knew very little about that. It wasn't until, probably the natives told him or I don't know how he found out about it that there had been fighting going on. Probably heard that many aircraft over or heard them,

- 17:00 I don't know quite what that was but

I just find it odd that anybody's going to set up some sort of a mission where they have no stretchers, no medical supplies, no nothing?

They had medical supplies in the early days. They had no stretchers, they had nothing there at all. The natives there were very poor and very backward. They hardly had anything. Most of them were just living in huts over the river and they got what they could to eat, that sort of thing.

- 17:30 The Dutch had been in there and NICA Civil Administration had been in there and they didn't make things any easier either I don't think.

Yeah, what happened there?

Well when the, before the Japs went in, Netherlands Indies Civil Administration it was, NICA it was at any rate, were evidently in control of the civilian population there.

18:00 How or why I don't know but they treated the natives pretty roughly and they continued to do it after we landed there. We had a lot of trouble with them.

This is the Dutch?

Yeah, they weren't the Dutch from Holland, they were the Dutch from in Borneo, a different breed altogether.

What were some of the complaints that would come across?

Well we were ferrying stuff down to the wharf and from the wharf back with our trucks and NICA took over the rationing, which I

18:30 think was supplied by the Allies, to feed these people and they had it so that every person had to front up for a meal, man, woman and child, young, old and whatever it was and the people from down at Mangar had to go to Balikpapan

19:00 for their meals, for their supplies, such as they were and the people of Balikpapan had to go to Mangar to draw their meals. And the idea of that was they kept them on the road all the time and they wouldn't get up to mischief or interfere with the Dutch in any way. What happened was they used to get out on the road and as our truck drivers went by they'd want a ride, so our truck drivers started picking them up, so the NICA had about half a dozen or a dozen jeeps there with machine guns

19:30 mounted on them and everything and they were military police right through. And they told our truck drivers not to pick them up and the truck drivers said "Who the hell do you think you are?" "We're telling you." "Well you can go to hell" and drove on. So one particular bloke, they put a road block up and stopped him and when he refused to stop it, well as soon as they stopped the natives used to hop over the side of the truck, no matter how high it was, and into the scrub because they knew what would happen to them. And

20:00 this bloke was on his own and the native police told him to cut it out or else and he said "Or else what?" And they said "You'll get a beating up." He said "You try it" and they did and they beat him up well and truly and nearly killed him, so that didn't make the army and the air force any too happy at all. So what we did then, with the big semis, Balikpapan, the road from Mangar to Balikpapan is like Kings Park, only higher. Just a little track that winds right around as it goes up and down and

20:30 it's not very wide at all and straight down, one hundred, two hundred, three hundred feet or fifty feet. So what they did then was put an observer in the back and loaded them up with these chaps and when NICA came dashing up alongside of them to pass them, they'd pull over to the right hand side of the road.

Oh pause for a second.(TAPE STOPS)

Instead of allowing them to pass on the right, they'd pull over to the right, they had to pass on the left and

21:00 as soon as they were right, the chap in the back would hit on the cabin and they'd just do that (demonstrates). And when they did that the semi trailer did that and straight over the side and down so they left us alone after that.

Were there any physical skirmishes between...?

I believe the army did but we didn't have any because we weren't doing it as much as they were.

What was their problem?

Their problem, their problem was that they're the master race and they're got possession of the place and they're well known

21:30 as brutal people to take over any country. I've seen, I felt like hopping in myself. One would be walking past the villagers and one of the women or someone would have just made themselves a lovely straw hat and they'd just go over and grab it if they do and give them a backhander and take it off them. They just treated them like dirt and that didn't go down too well with the Aussies. And actually when their commander came over and put in a complaint about it they told them the next time they went they'd have a machine gun on them and as they came up behind it they'd wipe it out

22:00 before it got there, so they kept to themselves then. But we evened the score.

What with the trailers falling off the?

No, other ways. The equipment was all on lend lease but there was a certain amount of our equipment that we bought up there from the south, that belonged to the RAAF, or belonged to Australia that was evidently negotiable and they badly wanted jeeps and

22:30 trucks and all sorts of equipment and tractors and boats and engines and everything. And one of things the boys used to do, they'd do anything to get a jeep these chaps because this is what they loved to do, dress up and swords and guns and parade around. So what they arranged was that they'd go to the

pictures and where the CO had his jeep parked or the adjutant,

- 23:00 they'd grab that. They were always left with the keys in it and everything, take it down to the NICA compound and sell it and as they drove out the gate the MPs [military police] would drive in looking for it and repossess it but they got tired of that after a while.

Sounds like it took them a little while to figure out though?

Oh not long, they were pretty cluey but the other one was, they also bought

- 23:30 a heap of our trucks toward the finish of it and they couldn't shift them onto their own compound because they weren't to be released until the time came, so they insisted that we build a compound and put their trucks in there, this is trucks and bikes and jeeps and whatever belonged to them, all sorts of equipment. So they built the compound and put them in there and then they came around and they decided they wanted spares, so they came around

- 24:00 to the workshop and asked if there was any spares for the trucks and they said "Well what do you want?" And they said "Wheels, engines, tyres, diffs, gearboxes, anything at all." And they said "Yeah, I think we know where there's some, how many do you want?" Oh they wanted a dozen tyres and wheels, good ones, and "We'll have a look over the store because when we go we don't want them". So they'd come along and sell them the tyres and wheels and they wanted a jeep, so they'd sell them a jeep. Then they wanted gearboxes and this, that and

- 24:30 something else or a winch or batteries or whatever, sell them that. And we sold them a bit of petrol down there and that was quite aboveboard and then of course when the time came for them to get their gear out they found that their jeep wasn't there and neither was the gearboxes or the wheels or the tyres. The only ones that were on were the ones on the outside of the row that they couldn't see, so they woke up to leave us alone a bit.

So literally what they bought was stolen from them?

What?

- 25:00 We didn't steal anything, we just, what do you call it? Reallocated it, relocated it.

Very nice, do you want to come in and sit? These, is it NICA that they're called?

NICA,

- 25:30 Netherlands Indies Civil Administration.

So it wasn't actually a military body that these?

No, it was a government or a governing body. Now how they came to take over and be in charge there I don't know but and they evidently when the Japs took over they stood on their dig and there was some terrific atrocities against their women and men folk of them too. When we landed there they

- 26:00 were terrific but the Japs didn't...

Sorry, the Japs?

The Japs to the Dutch that were there, most of them went bush. They used to get annoyed too. They'd come into your tent and "That's my wardrobe there" or "That's this". We used to go out and if you saw a good wardrobe or chest of drawers in one of the houses, it was all abandoned, we used to just grab them, put them in, take them in and put them out and, "My wardrobe I've lost."

- 26:30 **Were there lots of abandoned houses around?**

Oh yes. They took, you know how they took Balikpapan? They took Balikpapan refinery, see there was an oil refinery there and that's what it was all about. That's where I think the Dutch came into it and the oil refinery was down near the wharf with the pumps and the tanks were right up on the top of about a thousand foot hill, and

- 27:00 the idea was they used to find the oil and pump it up into these tanks and then when the boats came in they had big pipes going down and they could fill the boat up with the crude oil very quickly. When the Japs took over they got into this hill and they bored in tunnels and gave them a right angle and back again and round again somewhere else and they had mobile cannons. They were forty mil cannons, quick firing cannon and

- 27:30 when the Allies came in to take the place these cannon were just sitting there and then bang, bang, bang and then they'd disappear. So the navy and the army would plaster the joint and there was a dirty big hole there and that was the end of that one, onto this one. The next minute bang, bang, bang and they'd just bring them round the corner again and get another one and back round again. It was costing lots of lives and everything and the tanks that got knocked out on the shore, I suppose there were about forty around where we were, in the water and

- 28:00 they'd just get off the assault craft and onto the beach and they'd knock them out.

Could you see a lot of wreckage there?

Oh yes, tons of wreckage. So what they'd do was, what they did the army or the air force or the navy or whoever it was or the Yanks, no, I think it was the Australian air force, they went up and they bombed the tanks. They also had air holes and vents going up through the hill, they were in there for years. They had these Islanders doing all the work

28:30 and they stood over them with the stock whip and of course the oil ran down there into there and then they dropped napalm down on them and as soon as they did that up went the lot. And you reckoned you could see these flames shooting up there and every now and then there'd be a white thing and that was a bloke who was drawn in and shot up the top and they burnt them out. That's the only way they got them out of that mountain.

Gee.

Cooked them.

Indeed.

One other thing they had a habit of doing

29:00 was we found too, just near us, during the war they used to use a lot of money, Japanese money. I've still got some somewhere. My daughter's got it but on the beaches up there you have a, a tree would get blown over or something and it would go on the beach and it would bed on the beach and then with the tides gradually all the rubbish would build up and you'd have something as big as this house sitting on the beach, with the beach all around it. And what they did was get into there and burrowed into them and opened them

29:30 out and made caves and they could sit in there and through the screens out, it was dark, they could see what was going on around them and often people were camped within a chain of them and didn't even know about it. Well then they evidently got these, thinned out the ones with people there but we got a bit curious so we went around and we found some of their holes and when we got in there were printing presses, complete set up, printing this Japanese money. But they booby

30:00 trapped them too, you had to be careful. When they got out they booby trapped everything, so you had to be very careful. What you usually did was got in far enough to see what it is and then did a lot of weapons and came in from the other side and didn't use their hole at all.

What did it look like inside one of these things?

Quite good, it was all, they were very hardworking and clever people, the Japanese. No, as they broke the stuff away, they'd pack it away and make a wall out of it and then seats out of it. They used all the material inside and didn't take anything outside and they made sure

30:30 they went out when the tide was coming in so their footprints were gone. Oh no, they're very clever people.

I haven't heard of that one before.

Haven't you? What, what about the aircraft during the war? What about the Zero?

Yeah, I've heard about that.

What about it?

What people have done.

Yeah, okay what happened is the Allies

31:00 made fighter craft and to protect the pilot they put a big steel plate behind and a big steel plate beneath him and he had armour plated glass on top and he had all the flying instruments that he needed and he had spare this and spare that and oxygen tanks and everything else. And then when they got up there they found that the Japs could turn inside them and do anything. And then they found out that the Japs when they went on, when eight Japanese aircraft took off there was only one had instruments. They had no armour plating and they reckoned

31:30 if you weren't there when the bullets were there you didn't need armour plating and that the Zero for a while knocked everything that we had out of the sky and they are very innovative people and we were made to think that they were that way and propaganda, nothing else and after the war it's the same. We had a product here that was selling for a shilling, someone would get it from Japan, they'd sell it for nine pence and it would cost them a penny. They bought the lowest end of the market in Japan to make the

32:00 maximum profit here and then when it came to it, the Japanese binoculars particularly, their gun sights, everything, absolutely beautiful and immaculate. No, there was nothing bad about that part of it, they were very efficient.

Well what were you told before you headed up to Borneo? What to expect of the Japanese?

Same as always, nothing.

What

32:30 was your impression of what the Japanese would be like?

Well I'm a rather thinking sort of a person and I'd heard all these stories about what they'd do and what they wouldn't do and during the war we had campaigns "Don't let it happen here. There will be a Jap eating a girl" or something, terrible things they put out. And I thought "Surely a nation can't quite be like that, there must be good and bad in them, like there is in every nation", so

33:00 I more or less reserved my decision until I got a chance. And I found out as we used to have the prisoners of war come in, I'll tell you about that in a while, when we were up in Borneo to look after the camps and do that and these were marines, good, high class people, university students a lot of them, that sort of thing. Some of them educated in Australia and spoke English better than we did. So they were there and you got round to asking them questions and when you had you found out

33:30 things that you didn't know about or you even found out just their side of it and one of them was a university student and I said to him "Why is it that they attacked Pearl Harbor in such an awful way?" And he said "Why not?" He said "America and England and everything was blockading our people and if we hadn't they'd cut out all our trade and millions of people were going to die if we hadn't of gone to war, we had to go to war." And he said "Ask someone where the Minnesota and this" and

34:00 he named about six battleships of the American Navy and he said "They were sitting off Japan waiting to start blasting." Whether that was right or wrong I didn't know but they definitely had their own way of thinking and the Japanese prisoner of war I've seen them, they used to get a round bowl of rice about that big, that's the only meal we saw, which was the lunch meal when they were there. And the little kids would come running in and you'd see them break it in half and half would go to the kids and they'd eat the other

34:30 half. They'd come around our tents and they'd clean up our tents just to pick up the cigarette butts and in case you had an old brush, toothpaste or soap. Now they got all the dirty jobs in the world but soap was probably number one they wanted, to clean their uniform, to keep their dignity. No, they're just like anyone else as far as I'm concerned. And it's a matter of if the commandant of that group was cruel, cruelty reigned and

35:00 if he wasn't, nothing reigned.

So how do you get that in your head that you saw these POWs [Prisoners Of War] who you thought were actually decent people up against the Japanese who went and slaughtered the missionary and everybody in the hospital?

How do I?

How do you say well, you've got this group of POWs who...

Yes?

...are just Japanese and then there was this other group of Japanese who went and slaughtered

35:30 these missionaries?

Exactly as I said. I'll tell you another one. There was this nurse in Borneo, an American nurse, and she got into trouble, got in the family way, and she shot through to the American Embassy and shot out, probably wandered out to the jungle and the Japs grabbed her. And when later on they bought her back and she said she had never been molested, the baby had been looked after and they had been coming in to get

36:00 fresh water for her, into where our water supply was that we had mined and booby trapped and had people on there to shoot them when they came in. Now that's just a matter, the commandant was a family man, he was a decent man, he wasn't an animal. Now you don't only have that in the Japanese, you have it all through. Some of our Australian chaps were brutal. We had one chap in particular who had just lost his brother

36:30 over in the desert and every chance he got he'd ill treat the Japanese. I didn't think it was right but it was up to him.

What would he do to the Japanese?

Oh bash them, take something off them, kick them, anything at all.

These the POWs?

Yeah, and the POWs, I used to talk to these officers and I said how come they are so inhuman and he said "Well if you've got a dog that you want to protect your house, you get a vicious dog. You don't get a lapdog." He

37:00 said "And these blokes have been taught to fight and to do exactly as they are told. We don't want them to think, just do as they are told, what the officer tells them." He said "And that's it." These were the

lower class of Japanese.

How far away were the POW's from the rest of your camp?

A kilometre or so I suppose, a kilometre, just over the bridge, a kilometre or two kilometres.

So you probably would have seen them everyday?

37:30 Pardon?

Would you have seen them everyday?

No, no, I didn't go near the camp, I didn't leave camp. We, our chaps had been working flat out and they were getting run down and these marines, most of them were fitters and turners and welders and aircraft engineers and everything. They were the elite of the navy and as prisoners of war they were asked if they wanted to go and work.

38:00 I don't think they paid them anything, so they allocated them so many. The army would come around and say "What do you want?" And you'd say you want some fitters and turners and a welder and there's a car kettle got to be cleaned out and this and that and something else, so around would come two scruffy looking blokes and the interpreter would shove them into the car kettle and the others would come into your lathe, clean it down, oil it, do the work beautifully, leave it clean and walk out again. One instance that we had there was when the

38:30 Japanese started giving themselves up to the army, a lot of the Japs, these are the radicals, believe once they were taken prisoner they were dead. They've got nothing to lose and they've got to take as many others as they can with them and they've got to die. They mustn't go back to the homeland because they are in shame. Others that thought a bit better did have different ideas. So the army did have a road block and as they

39:00 came in, they'd come into that and they had a fair bit of space in front of it but these Japs would come in with a machine gun down the back of their neck, with the strap underneath, one walking behind the other and when they got close he'd fall flat and the other bloke would just open up on the guards and they killed a few of them. So then they said "Right" and they put two foxholes along each side of the road with chaps with Tommy guns in those and they told the Japanese that if anything happened like that the next one through

39:30 the, and they had two tanks and they had to come in between the two tanks and alongside the two tanks they had some Ghurkhas [Nepalese troops in British service], who had been prisoners of war and badly treated by the Japanese and they had waddies that big and as heavy as a baseball bat, and they weren't little blokes either, they were big blokes. So what they did then was, they said "Right, the next one that comes through after that gets the bayonet, finish, right?" They send someone back,

40:00 one of the natives back to tell them and so they'd pick it straight away. There would be two coming and there would be no one behind at all and so these blokes would just fire a few shots at them and they'd fall down and everyone was undercover and they'd just run them over and kick them off the embankment. But those that came through, came through to the Ghurkhas and the Ghurkhas would come and say hello to these men and officers, they knew them and they were decent blokes and then all of a sudden they'd go absolutely berserk and they had six big Aussies there to hold them and they'd just start to try and kill a bloke.

40:30 It would be an officer and he'd be in private clothes or something and they knew him down to a fine art, so he'd go into the officers' compound and the suspected, we had one for the war criminals, the suspected ones. You couldn't prove anything. You only had their word for it and the officers had another part of the same compound and the privates were in another one and when these chaps came in, I'd notice, I'd be sitting up,

41:00 standing up on my lathe working that they went over to guillotine that we had and they always cleaned the guillotine up first and I thought "Well that's funny, I wonder what's going on over here?" And then I remembered that the day before I had cut up a lot and I had some big long slithers of eight plate, like that, just like a dagger. So I thought "Gee, I'd better see the guard about this", so I didn't want to leave there because I watched them so I sent someone over to ask the guard and the interpreter if he'd come over and they came over and I said "Look

41:30 see the blokes over at the guillotine over there?" And they said "Yeah, what about them?" And I said "Well there was a lot of cut up scrap there yesterday and when I looked in the bin it wasn't in the bin, some shaft bits." And they said "That's alright, how are you off for plate?" And I said "Why?" And they said "Will you cut some more up?" And I said "Why?" He said "Well during the night the men jumped the fence and hammered them through the war criminals' head while they were asleep and they're doing a wonderful job, cut up as much plate as you can." That's what I tried to show you is...

- 00:31 **So what was your reaction Noel when you learnt that the Japs were taking those cutting and killing those officers?**
- A pleasure because there was too many of them had committed terrific atrocities and then had changed out of their uniform into privates uniforms or even civilians and they were actual war criminals trying to get away.
- 01:00 And also I felt in fair play why should the general Jap officer be punished for what these mongrels had done?
- What did you learn about those atrocities at the time?**
- What they'd been doing?
- Yeah.**
- Well some of them, the Ghurkhas were forced labour and they were starving them, like the usual Burma Railway lot, like the rest of that.
- 01:30 The Dutch and the Japs too, if they get another country they consider them inferior and they are just to be used as work horses or animals. That is the general thing. There are compassionate people amongst both of them and good people amongst both of them but in war the Japanese are taught for their anger and hatred to predominate and we were taught the same, exactly the same.
- 02:00 **So a blind eye was turned towards those killings?**
- Pardon?
- There was a blind eye turned towards those killings? There was a blind eye turned towards those killings?**
- Well yes, as far as I know. I wouldn't know what happened to them at all. I can only go on what they told me. Whether they were joking or what the score was, I don't know but why else would they be taking them and if they were taking them,
- 02:30 their Australian guards would have been worried about what was going to happen to them and they weren't in the least bit worried. They wanted more of them because they probably had their suspicions or natives or someone had told them about these. See the native population when the Dutch were there were with the Dutch, when the Japs were there we got captured films. When we captured a prisoner of war, a Japanese, they'd usually have a camera and you'd take
- 03:00 the camera off and we'd get their film developed and you'd see there the same girls sitting with them drinking sake that were around the camps now. We had to do that and alert people to disease and that sort of thing. And the food situation there was horrific as far as the Javanese. See there was a mixture of everyone. When the islands fell, they didn't just grab one nation, they grabbed about five or six different
- 03:30 countries and just grabbed their people, put them on boats and took them there for forced labour and the conditions were absolutely awful. We used to have women coming into the camp wanting to prostitute themselves for half a tin of condensed milk or a bit of condensed milk to feed their babies to keep them alive under the Dutch.
- How would they attempt to prostitute themselves?**
- Pardon?
- How would they attempt to prostitute themselves?**
- Just (demonstrates)
- 04:00 milk and we learnt to speak their language a bit and that sort of thing. I can still tell you the word for it I think but I won't.
- Well you won't offend anybody here because we don't speak the language.**
- No, no, no, well when you live amongst people like that, different people, you soon learn to get your thoughts put across with a few words or actions or something but there are others that came in just for the money of it and I
- 04:30 was surprised a lot of the Australian soldiers proved to be just as big animals as the rest of them.
- How did they prove that?**
- By associating with the prostitutes or even young girls that were, obviously they wanted money, young girls of fifteen or sixteen would be offered to them by their parents to get a bit of money to buy food or something. Instead of giving them the money or the food and leaving the girl alone, no they had to get their money's worth, so that didn't go over well with me.
- 05:00 **How was that looked upon by other Australian soldiers?**
- Some thought it funny, some thought it good, but on the whole they thought it was pretty awful I think.

It didn't sit very well with you, was there anything you could do to prevent it?

Nothing, only thing you could do was if you had enough money or stuff was to give them the milk and then they'd go to someone else to get it but.

Did it bother you?

No, well it bothered me about the babies, yes it did because I've got photos

05:30 in that other album and you can see some of the children are that malnourished it was a shocking sight some of them and not only that, it was not only the food, it was all the diseases that were rife, malaria and dengue and what's that they call it? The worm that, so many different diseases up there.

What did you think of the Japs at the time?

The Japs?

What did you think of them?

06:00 Well good, bad and indifferent.

You didn't have a strong opinion of them?

No, no, as far as I was concerned they were the enemy. We were sent to do a job and we could if we killed them. They could if they killed us.

At this stage the war was over but do you think all the Japs out in the isolated areas were aware that the war was over?

No they weren't, that's why we were still under threat and

06:30 that's why things were still happening. They cut off all their communications and they isolated them and what we really had in the jungle was remnants of each unit that had fled and got away from a trap or a booby trap or an assault or an ambush and fled and got together again. So when they fled they wouldn't have had any of their wireless equipment or anything like that, just had what they stood up in.

07:00 So while they had their arms probably still, the rifles, and swords and bits and pieces but nothing in the way of sophisticated equipment.

So how busy was your squadron at the time?

Very busy, we were always kept busy. Keeping busy and keeping out of mischief was our job.

What were you kept busy with given that the war was officially over?

The same as if the war was carrying on, doing what

07:30 ever work was bought in, whatever had to be done and then towards the end what we had to do then was get all the equipment ready to be ferried down south, to go back on the boats down south. And another thing that happened was when they burnt the chaps out the flaming oil ran out and burnt all the oil off, burnt all the wharf down, so there was no loading wharf there, so all they had were pontoon bridges, like we were making up down below, pontoons.

08:00 Everything had to go out on pontoons and that was a, driving tractors onto pontoon bridges which was steel on steel and that was a pretty shaky experience because I had a shaky experience taking some gear in. What we'd do was have a big D6 or D8 and then you'd have a scraper or maybe you'd have a hundred or two hundred tons of gear behind you. And around these as long as you anticipated, as long as they were hooked up so they trailed, we'd do that. We'd hook them up and then take them out on an open,

08:30 make sure that the everything would trail and if something didn't somebody would be watching and you would alter the point so it would trail like shorten the length in the draw bar so it had to trail then. You had to so it would get round the ups and downs and everything. I had driven a tractor a fair bit but I had never had an experience like this before. I don't know if you know the tractors, do you? The crawlers? Right, you pull on that and you've got the clutch releases, so you if you want to

09:00 go to the right you pull in that and touch your brake. If you want to go to the left you pull in this clutch and touch your brake, okay. That is when you're under power. When you're going down hill and because it takes a certain amount normally on it's own, it's negative and it doesn't matter but when you've got two hundred tons behind you, as soon as you release that clutch the weight just swings you straight round. And I came to a corner and I was going to go right and I was going to release this clutch and brake on that one

09:30 and immediately I did the thing just shot like that and hung over the precipice and I got two hundred ton behind me. So I just left it there and of course I've got trucks and people following me and they came belting down and they then there was another lot a couple of kilometres behind me and they got a couple of tractors off that and hooked onto the back and pulled me back. But as I came back I started to slide along and it crumbled away but we got

10:00 back on and I learnt a lesson. I didn't do it again.

How high was the precipice?

A couple of hundred feet I suppose, I don't know. They weren't worried about that. They weren't worried about all the machinery.

You were expendable were you?

That's right.

How long did it take you to remove all the equipment and pull out of that one?

Well I don't know because I didn't stay to the finish. As soon as they found they had more men in one area than they wanted, they bought you back to demob.

10:30 We signed up for the duration of the war and twelve months after if required but they weren't going to pay you to be up there if your services weren't required so once the things were ready to be driven down and put on the wharf and all the mechanics were right the engineering side wasn't wanted and they only wanted the drivers and the BMTs [?] and the plant operators. So we were not required there.

11:00 What was your reaction to the news that you were coming home?

Oh awful, I had to come home to Olga, wouldn't that be awful? Absolutely wonderful and we flew.

Sorry, how long were you away?

What altogether?

In Borneo?

I wouldn't know, eight months, six months, ten months, it's all there on the thing. I don't know exactly. We can check that afterwards. I'll give you a copy.

No, I just wanted a general idea?

No, six months or eight months

11:30 or something like that. So I got a flight down in a Dakota that had landed up there, that was due for overhaul and boy was it due for overhaul. And we were coming down over the mountains in New Guinea and we were just sitting in the back on the floor, there were no seats or anything. When it bumped you were airborne and down you came again with a crash and we could see out the side and I could see these hills coming up and up and up and up and a little gap ahead

12:00 and then these hills came up and up and up and then there was no gap and of course this was a few miles away where we had to get over and there was no other way round the mountains because we were locked into them. So the next minute some of the crew came down and opened the side hatch and out went the trestles and all the spares and anything, machine guns, the whole lot just got chucked out to lighten them. They went back in again and bit by bit we got up and we just scrapped

12:30 over the top and down. If they hadn't of chucked it out we wouldn't have made it. They threw everything out, everything that was in there.

Why was the plane overloaded?

It was underpowered, it was due for repair. The efficiency of the motor was gone.

So it was a pretty hairy experience?

Yes, you just accepted it. There was nothing you could do about it.

13:00 What kind of things were thrown out?

Oh steps, fire extinguishers, machine guns, water, fuel, tools, ramps, whatever was loose. I was sitting on my kit bag so they wouldn't throw that out or me out.

How many men did you say were on board?

I think there was about ten or twelve of us but that was no

13:30 load for them at all. There was nothing wrong with the loading or anything. It was just the height. When you get up to high the motor loses efficiency and the fact that it was absolutely worn out.

So did you have any doubts that you were going to make it?

Oh yeah. What could you do about it? You had a pilot who should have been a good pilot, nothing you can do about it, just sit it out.

Did you land in New Guinea before returning to mainland Australia?

14:00 I came into Darwin, was it Olga? Oh Brisbane, went straight to Brisbane, that's right and from Brisbane

caught the train down. We're back in Australia now. Anything else you want to know about Borneo?

Well have we left anything out?

Not very much I don't think.

Have we left anything out?

Oh yes, the terrific waste

14:30 of gear I saw before we came home. They had these barges and loading them up with absolutely brand new things, rifles and machine guns and oils and spare parts. There'd be half a million dollars worth of stuff on each barge and a lot of it had never been opened, just taken out and sunk and I thought "Gee if only I could have that in Perth, could I get rid of it of every bit of it",

15:00 but there was no way, so that was that. We came back to Brisbane and then it was by train across, I think, I'm not sure and anyway the crux of the matter was Olga and I had been engaged and we were waiting to be married. We'd had some time together and with our letters we'd gradually grown very close.

If I could just interrupt here Noel, you haven't mentioned at all when you met Olga and became engaged?

I did, when I was home on leave,

15:30 October the 24th 1945.

Right, can you tell us the story behind that Noel?

Yes, as I said I was on leave and my eldest sister said "Noel, are you going to be home tomorrow?" And she said "Good, because I've got a lovely girl from the exchange, I'm bringing home for dinner and I want you to be here so you can meet her." And I said "Yeah, okay, okay" and that was that.

16:00 So Olga came home and of course naturally I gave her the once over and I thought "That's not bad" and then I decided that we'd have some fish and chips in the afternoon and I hadn't been home for a long while so I wandered down to fish and chip shop to find it had been sold or it was shut, so I got into trouble for that. I was supposed to be decoying her away somewhere. But at any rate things blossomed on and on and on and so when we went away we were well

16:30 and truly in love and wanted to get married and started making plans.

How often were you writing to one another when you were away?

Olga wrote every day and I would right every second day, third day. It depended on what I was doing, how busy I was but every time I had a chance I would wrote. We've got them all there, well most of them, the letters. We had to cut the sporting pages out of a few because the kids read them.

17:00 **So the mail service was pretty reliable?**

No, no. And some of it didn't even arrive. I'd write to Olga and well Borneo, how do you get that on an aircraft, where does it go to? It lands in Brisbane and gets on another aircraft to come over here and that's diverted somewhere else and I think there was a heap of mail went out of that plane

17:30 by the way. They had bags and bags of something. It was probably the mail for down here so probably some of my mail didn't get there either. Oh no, it was spasmodic and I'd get nothing for a week and I'd be screaming my head off and the next minute I would get four letters. There was something very touching about that too. We had a lot of blokes up there who had no one to love them and some of them had parted from their wives and that sort of thing

18:00 and the mail would come and you've never seen anything like it, blokes just yearning for a letter from home and they'd call out all the names and it wouldn't be there and there faces would drop so I used to say "Here mate, read this sporting page."

Were any of the blokes getting Dear John letters?

Getting?

Dear John letters? Letters explaining that their fiancée had met an American?

Oh yes, yes,

18:30 quite a bit of that, yeah. That was pretty common.

Any stories associated with those letters?

A lot of them would come home to find that the nest was empty and the bird had flown but that was just part of war. A lot of the blokes that I saw over there didn't deserve to have wives when they came home either. I told a few of them that too.

19:00 Twelve months, I wasn't far out.

Can you tell me the kind of things that Olga would write to you about?

Yes, she would just write of family affairs and my family used to write too, but not as regularly and tell me about what was going on at work or whatever they had. She didn't have a lot to but I always got two big pages but

- 19:30 my only complaint was that when she wrote she got about four words to a line and I used to get twelve. Her writing's very open and mine is very close, so I never complained about it, I always loved getting them. But I'll tell you a funny story when we got back to Kalgoorlie, okay?

Wait a moment, I'll just ask you a few quick questions. Did the army censor any of your letters?

No, the army doesn't, the air force does.

Or air force in that case?

Yes, definitely.

- 20:00 They censor your letters and the air force is not as strict as the army were and once you become a sergeant or anything like that I don't think they censored any of mine, did they? No, they wouldn't. There was nothing cut out of any of mine. They're living with you and they get to know you and they probably read a letter or two and don't mark it and after that they don't worry because they know you're not writing on that and what

- 20:30 you're writing about is personal stuff and they read that much of it, it must send them sick.

When did Olga know you were coming home?

A couple of hours, or a couple of days before. I rang you from Brisbane did I?

What train did you come home on?

I don't know.

Was it a comfortable train or were you stuck in a cattle truck?

Oh it had to be fairly comfortable to,

- 21:00 we went to Sydney I think, Sydney or Melbourne and then we came back over on the darn old Prospector, oh not the Prospector, the Overlander, east-west, which wasn't like it is now and naturally you didn't get first class or second class. What they used to use you weren't in trucks, you'd know the carriages that used to have two berths in them and a toilet? There would be five, this is not with the bunks up top,

- 21:30 this is just the ordinary passenger, not the sleeping, there would be five allocated to each of those, so one could sleep on each bunk, one on the floor and the little blokes would be put up on the racks and if you were too big for the racks you slept on the toilet and someone walked over you, in and out all night, or in the passage way outside. No, just a blanket, nothing to lay on, nothing at all.

Gee the bloke sleeping in the toilet was doing it a bit rough?

It depends how good the blokes were that came in and what their shot was, what their aim was,

- 22:00 doesn't it?

Do you remember where you slept?

On one of the benches. I was a sergeant. When I got in I used to put my backside on one and my gear on that and I wouldn't say a word and for some reason or other the boys let me have it. The officers would be in a first class compartment with sleepers and of course, okay, no trouble.

What sort of things did you do to fill in time?

We had a game of cards or sleep, most of us wanted a lot of sleep.

- 22:30 Just wanted to rest, you were home, you could relax and let yourself go.

Were you talking about your plans when you got back to Western Australia?

You might have if there was a good mate but other than that you didn't much. Mostly people would be sitting there with their own thoughts. It was over, you were relaxed and you didn't worry about anything but there were others that were looking for grog or something else all the time but no

- 23:00 worries with that at all, no. They had stations of course and when you got to the station you either had to get a sandwich or a cool drink or something which you hadn't of been able to have and the others would shoot down to the bar or across the road to the pub and have their mate there ready to stop the train if they weren't back in time and half of them would be belting along for half a mile to catch up

with the train to hop in the back carriage, they were mad. Then again at different stations,

23:30 see ACS 17RSU was a Western Australian squadron but ACS wasn't, so there was only about nine or ten Western Australians in 9ACS, so most of those blokes were dropping off on the way or there would be someone at the station to meet them long before they got near home to pick them up and take them to a car or whatever. So they were dropping out on the way.

24:00 As they dropped out you could get a better seat or thing at night.

So would you farewell them as they went on their way?

Oh yeah, "Ta-ta mate, see you". Wasn't much else you could do.

So where did you arrive in Perth?

I arrived in Kalgoorlie.

Oh sorry.

Got that, the 9th of February 1946.

24:30 That was after the Kalgoorlie episode. The Kalgoorlie episode was I got in there and I was all yellow from the Atebrin and obviously had just come in from overseas somewhere and there was an army RTO there, railway transport officer, so I went up to him. You had to book, you had to book with him because the army looked after all that as well and I waited until the others had all gone through and

25:00 he said "What can I do for you?" And I said "I don't know but I'd like you too" and he said "Yeah, what's that?" And I said "The girl I want to marry is here, I've just come back from Borneo and I want to know if I can get a day or two here?" He said "What's your girl's name? Where is she, what does she do?" And I told him and he said "Yeah, okay, take two days but be back here in two days ready to go will you?" And I said "Yeah, of course I will. Thanks very much." So off I went and were you waiting for us or? Yeah she

25:30 came up in a taxi with her brother and so we went and of course I just collapsed in there and had a darn good time and at the end of the two days I came back again and he looked at me and said "How are things going?" And I said "Wonderful, thanks very much for that, it was beautiful." And I told him that I had been away for months or so long and I was very unhappy about. He said "I'll tell you what sergeant, take one more day but be sure you're here to go" and I said "Yeah, okay." So I took another day

26:00 and came back all kitted ready to go and he said "On your way" and I said "Thanks very much for that", and I threw him a salute and shook his hand and went back down there. End of story that part. Later on when I was out for a while I got my records and you get through Freedom of Information all your war records, your service records they called it and your medical records. And going through the service records there is a signal from

26:30 5ED [Embarkation Depot] in Perth to the RTO in Kalgoorlie "Hardman NC81555, Sergeant, N T Hardman, do you know the whereabouts?" The next day, not that day there is a signal back to the air force "Have been flat out with arrivals, looking into it, will let you know further." And he didn't let them know. The next day another signal, "Urgent, immediate attention, Sergeant Hardman, do you know his whereabouts?"

27:00 And then the signal he sent back "Sorry got misplaced, is on the train, will be there tomorrow". He put his job on the line for me and I didn't even know about it. So it shows you there is some good things around and I wasn't even army.

Why do you think he did that?

Well he generally felt sorry for me and I guess in the meantime he might have

27:30 asked around and found out that what I'd said was true, but I don't think he had any reason to doubt me. Why would I want to stay there for two days when my family is in Perth? That was where I enlisted and that was where I was going to be demobbed. I think he just took me on face value and did that and it was near the end of the war and he probably reckoned he was only going to have the job for another few months so what the hell.

28:00 He was very good and I'll tell you what it was beaut to read that and see what he'd done for me. That was worth a million dollars to us, wasn't it?

Must have been an emotional reunion?

Yeah. Has been ever since, 57 years? 58 years.

Did you propose when you were in Kalgoorlie or did that come later?

That came later.

Well let's discuss your family reunion. You get back to Perth and you

28:30 **reunite with your family. Did they come to greet you off the train?**

No, nobody knew I was coming home. I might have rung them and told them I was home but I didn't know when I was home, so all I probably told them I was at Kalgoorlie and had called in to see Olga and that probably put their noses out of joint because me stopping in to see her when I should have been back to see them, so that was that. It didn't affect me in any way but still.

- 29:00 I got down there and then, how long was I down there Olga? We were married in April and then I went back to work. I went back to work and I served my time at LC Lewis' and when you came out of the services then they have an order, they give you an order on your employer that he must
- 29:30 re-employ you so you're not without a job. They asked me if I wanted one and I wasn't that well and I didn't know what I really wanted and I didn't want to work there for the rest of my life but the big point was housing. At that time in Perth you couldn't buy a nail, a tin of cement, let alone a bag of cement or a hammer or anything. And the housing, I had all my deferred pay and
- 30:00 between Olga and I we had enough to buy a house but you couldn't buy a house and if you bought a house you wouldn't stay there because what they used to do was sell you the house and then put some mongrels in next door until you got out and sold it back to them cheap, and sell it to someone else. The same thing happened with rent mostly. You could rent a house and they'd take you in and the next thing someone would move in next door and the same thing would happen again. There were a lot of unscrupulous people around that were having a go at the ex-serviceman so I got onto the DVA and asked them and the best they could offer me, this
- 30:30 was when I was married, this was the middle of winter, was to put a tent on Scarborough Beach and they would allow me to use the toilet facilities there.

Great.

We didn't want to go and live with family because we reckoned that was a recipe for disaster, mainly because my family were a bit too much like me probably, and so we said "Right, we'll look around."

- 31:00 We went back up to Kalgoorlie and got married and then we came to Perth on the train and we looked around and a friend of ours found a, out of Scarborough, Mon Repose, a house. In those days, you wouldn't remember them, they had bungalows. They had about a six bedroom house with a verandah all the way around, wooden asbestos and they had quite a few of them along where the hotel is now. Well
- 31:30 somebody either owned that or they had bought it and they had nine families in there, living there and because we were newcomers and the only place we could get was a dugout underneath the main thing on the downhill side and it had dirt on three sides of it and a little door and it would have been as big as from here to there. You wouldn't even get a car in it I don't think and that would be about the size from there to there. I was getting three pounds fifteen a week and that
- 32:00 was costing us thirty shillings a week. The toilet was for nine families, down the yard, about a hundred yards, the wash house had no panes in the windows and it was left filthy dirty and on top of us was just boards and in the morning you woke up and across everything was big streaks of dirt where people would be walking across during the night. Or you were about to eat your egg and there was a big streak of dirt across it, shocking.
- 32:30 So Olga put up with that for so long and every time the chap came I complained. I went back to work. Was I biking in at that time? Caught the bus into Perth for my work while Olga got to and made something of it under there, made it liveable. For two pound a week we shifted upstairs and we were absolutely thrilled with this. It would have been about this space here but it had been a great big
- 33:00 room and on two sides of it, it just had a partition up about seven feet. We didn't realise what was wrong with that, so the first night we got there we settled in, this is lovely, beautiful, heaven. We're up out of that dirty, dingy place and we could see out to the sea from a little dirty window, and we got it all fixed up and about nine o'clock I woke up and I said "What's going on?" And the next minute we get from next door "Mum, Gloria's pooped
- 33:30 her pants again" and alongside us there were three lots of kids there, so all night we had these kids yelling and screaming and going mad and yelling for their mums, but we put up with that for what? A couple of months, a month and then another friend found us a house out in Maylands, the use of a kitchen and a bedroom and we reckoned we were made then. In the meantime I was looking around for a job
- 34:00 with a house or a house with a job and the Goldfields Water Supply wanted second engineers on the pumping stations, so I put in for that job and I got it. We'd been married how long? Dale was thirteen days old when I got the job.

So you went up to the Goldfields again?

Yeah, wait a minute.

- 34:30 **Actually before we go there I'd just like to stop and go back and ask you a few questions.**

Good, okay.

What was the first thing you did when you got off the train in Perth?

Grabbed hold of Olga and gave her a, no, in Perth?

Yeah.

I didn't get off the train in Perth. I got off at Maylands, Mount Lawley. I arranged with the guard or someone to stop at Mount Lawley because we just lived up past

35:00 the subway, 70 Guilford Road and I humped my bags up there I think, walked in and they didn't know when I would be home, neither did I. And of course Mum was there and of course there was a mad reunion and everything.

What was her reaction to see you at the door?

Well what do you think?

I don't know, you'll have to tell me.

Joy to see the young.

Did she throw her arms around you?

Oh wait a minute, I'm sorry, I'm wrong. I remember something now. They took us down on the train and we were taken to 5PD [Personnel Depot] and then there was a truck delivered us to our homes and how I remember that now

35:30 is I was about last in the line and we had about five blokes and every time we stopped outside somebody's house we'd all get out and run over to the fence and say "Mrs Smith your favourite husband's home". Nobody did it for me because I was the last man out but all the neighbours would look and go mad but we wanted to do something like that.

36:00 **So tell me how your mother greeted you?**

With a big kiss and a big kiss and of course "You want something to eat?" And of course I was always a good eater and she couldn't understand it. She reckoned I was ready for the hospital because I couldn't eat what she wanted. When you're away and you're used to hard tucker, you're used to eating a certain amount and that's it. And luckily that habit hasn't stuck with me but still, so she cooked me up a great big meal of what loved and I'd just looked at it and said "No thanks"

36:30 and of course she was very hurt. But the family all came there, Dad, everybody came and of course there was a big reunion and then when I told her I was getting married in Kalgoorlie their faces dropped a bit.

Why?

Well it was a long way a way and I suppose they reckoned I'd be married in Perth but as far as I was concerned and what she said went.

37:00 I wouldn't have dared to do anything else anyway.

So how long did you spend at home with the family before you returned to Kalgoorlie to marry Olga?

Would it be a week? Oh more than that. No, I came back to Kalgoorlie (Olga - no I went back to Perth and stayed with Joy) and I went back to Kalgoorlie on the train, remember? To get married.

37:30 Cause I remember you reckoned I got card sharked on the way. (Olga talks)

They rolled you for some cash did they?

Rolled me for about two pounds or a pound.

38:00 **So where were you married in Kalgoorlie?**

In Kalgoorlie.

Where?

In the Cathedral.

Did any of your family come up?

Yes, my eldest sister came up. She was the bridesmaid but to tell you how things were then, I'd just came back from overseas, it was funny but I believed that I was Church of England, I believed that I was Methodist and I was Church of England. So we went along to the Church of England, was it? Or

38:30 the Methodist Church? Anglican Church and I said I'd just got back from overseas and we wanted to get married in a hurry and the old priest looked Olga up and down and said "What's the trouble, what's the hurry?" And so then when we said we wanted to get married and to hell with him and everyone else he

said "You can't have flowers, you can't have music and you can't have this because it's Lent". So these were the sort of things that happened to you in those sort of times,

39:00 but we got married and we've been happy ever after.

Where did you have your reception?

At Olga's parents place.

Do you remember the reception?

Oh yes.

What can you remember of the reception?

Oh everything, like I can remember the ceremony and the reception and the whole lot right through. The boys tried to get me drunk the day before but I refused. They wanted me to have a drink and I said "Yes, I'll have a drink as long as it's",

39:30 with this malaria once you have a couple of beers, more than that it just flares up on you and so I said "I'll have two drinks and that's all". "Oh yeah, that's alright, come in", so I went up to have two drinks and there was more and I said "I don't want them", and they got quite, this was her stepfather and her brothers, Larrikins, and I said "That's it, no more, no more". "Oh you're a disgrace." "Oh yeah, whatever you like, I don't care." I wasn't going to get drunk and go home to Olga, so at any rate

40:00 they said "You're a piker", so I said "I'll tell you what I'll do, after the ceremony I'll have one drink of whatever you like" and they said "That's good" and they're looking at each other. So after the ceremony and everything was over they bought me along this drink and I had a look at it and I thought "Gee, that's a bit good" and what the cows had done was get vodka and beer and everything and put it in and the sweepings off the bar or whatever it was and made a nice big mug of it and I drank it but I was still on my feet,

40:30 wasn't I? So we hopped on the train and came to Perth.

How long after the reception?

The wedding was at two thirty in the afternoon and we were on the train that night. We left about five or half past, the East West train. We just wanted to get away on our own.

I'll bet.

So we went to

41:00 Rockingham for our honeymoon.

That sounds nice.

Very nice, had a lovely, quiet honeymoon down there. As usual the bus broke down on the way down and we sat in the sweltering heat for a while but that didn't worry us. And that was that.

How long did you spend in Rockingham?

I think about ten days. Had to go back to work.

41:30 **Okay, we're getting the wind up, we'll change tapes there Noel.**

Tape 7

00:31 **You mentioned that your mates are pretty important to you, can you extrapolate on that?**

Well you live with them, work with them, sleep with them, shower with them twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and you soon work out the people you don't want to associate with and you work out the people you do want to associate with. And I suppose it's a bit like a marriage in a way because you work late and when you get back there's your bed knocked back and somebody's done something. Somebody is thinking of you and done

01:00 something for you and there is nothing other than outright mateship with you and you go through certain things where there's a bit of a close shave. It could be a vehicle or something like coming home in that aircraft and it seems to be that you've got something in common, in other words, and it brings you closer together and there are so many chaps that you can rely on. When you get to know them, particularly if you're in charge of some of them, you get to know certain chaps and

01:30 you know if you ask them to do something it's done. Others you don't even have to ask them, it's done. They see it and when you get that reaction it's very good and you get to really like and admire people and respect them.

And did you miss that companionship after you left?

Oh yes, when I got home I'd say to Olga "I don't know what's wrong with me, I just feel lonely" and it was not her. She'd go "Not me, no you". Couldn't get enough of her but I just, there was something missing and I was honest enough

02:00 to tell her. She'd see me looking and say "What are you thinking about?" And I'd say "Just thinking about the men" or something like that and then it gradually wears off and wears off. You lose touch with them and then the thing goes.

In those early stages did you manage to get in touch with them a lot?

I didn't, I couldn't very well because for a start I went back to Lewis' and I was out at Scarborough and then I was at Maylands. I went to the RSL [Returned & Services League] in Maylands but there wasn't any of our

02:30 crew there and then I went up to pumping stations, and no one up there.

So you did feel lonely for quite so many years?

Yeah, well some of the chaps I knew like Bill Young, the chap that drew that sketch of the motorbike, I knew him and occasionally I'd run across him but I didn't go to hotels. I was happy with my lot at home and I didn't,

03:00 social life didn't mean anything to us, did it Olga? We were happy in each other.

And when were you demobbed?

The 4th of March 1946.

Okay, did you celebrate that at all?

No, I was neither happy or unhappy. I was happy to be out of the service and happy to be with Olga and in a way but it wasn't as if I had been at

03:30 home I wouldn't have been in any hurry to get out of the services, wouldn't have worried me.

Did you actually go back to your old job for a period of time?

Yep. There was an order given to go back and I went back to that just to settle in and then I said we were looking around for a house. That was the main thing, was to find somewhere decent to live so I saw the job advertised in the Water Supply for second engineers on the pumping

04:00 stations and put in for that and got an interview and they took me on straight away. And as I said Olga was expecting by then and the only thing that I'd like some of the young people that had to do, it was in the Government and they said "You'll have to go as a single man for three months before your wife can come with you."

Why was that?

Because that's what the law said, what the government said. No other reason, if you want

04:30 the job that's what you do, you're more or less on probation. You're not made permanent until you've been with them three months. I wonder how some of the young people who got married would feel about that lot?

What sort of things did you have to do as part of being on the pumping station?

Well first of all we went to Cunderdin which is the workshop is at Cunderdin. That's one of the reasons that they wanted me was for my fitting and turning and general engineering, so I went and worked in the workshop. They were way behind in

05:00 some of their work and the workshop had mainly had men from Midland workshops who had the old method of doing things and they also had the government stroke, which I didn't have then. I hope I never got it and I had modern tooling ideas, and repetition ideas and things like that, so they put me over in the workshop for a trial and then the engineer in charge said "You can stay there and clean some of that work up" and then I came over to the pumping station. I had to get the experience on the engines,

05:30 the steam experience to drive them if you are in charge of them and the boilers. So I had to do a bit of study there while I was at it and I spent a lot of my spare time because Olga wasn't there. I'd go back to the pumping station and trace lines through and do things to get as much experience as I could. And then after the three months we were allocated Number Five Pumping Station and Number Five Pumping

06:00 Station is south of Merredin, north of Merredin, east of Merredin.

Somewhere near Merredin.

West of Merredin, it's at Carabin, near Westonia and that consisted of the pumping station, about eight

or ten houses, all old fashioned but quite alright. To us it was a castle.

06:30 You had shift work and you got really good pay, water, kerosene, free, so it was ideal and we just settled down there so we had seven years there.

Was it a really tight knit community there?

Yes, very tight knit but once again isolated. There wasn't

07:00 a motor car on the place. If you wanted to go into Merredin for shopping or anything you caught the train at two o'clock in the morning, if it was on time and you might stay there to eight o'clock and it didn't turn up. If you had an emergency or anything the only way you could get anywhere was with the wood contractor when he came, once or twice a day.

What do you see as some of the benefits of living in such a small community?

Well you get to know people and you

07:30 probably learnt to live in your own backyard. You can't get too close to some of them.

What do you mean "you can't get to close to some of them"?

On the pumping station you were the engineer on shift and your firemen is under you and there were some chaps that when you get close to you they take it for granted and start to take liberties. Others just accept it and are as good as gold, so you've got to pick your mark there.

08:00 The engineer in charge kept an eye on everything there, but that was it.

What was it like going into both these jobs after coming back from the war? How did people treat you being a war veteran?

No trouble at all, they were all very helpful, except for one, the foreman when I went back to Lewis'. Because I'd been there as an apprentice and because I had left to go to the services, the then foreman when I

08:30 went back who was one of the tradesmen when I was there, decided that Lewis had maybe bought me back to take his job, so when I went in to see Lewis I told him I wanted to come back and "Yes, Noel no trouble. I'll just see Jack as a matter of routine and start tomorrow. Whenever you're ready start" he said, "Tell him when you're ready and start." I said "Okay."

09:00 He called Jack over and he said "Well Noel's back" and he said "We're a bit slow with the work Lew, we haven't got much on" and this, that and something else and umming and arrhing and he obviously didn't want me to start, so I said "Here you are Jack, read this" and walked out the door. So he wasn't very happy with me for a while but he got over it. I didn't care what he felt like because I didn't intend to stay there at any rate. I intended to do something else.

Was there anything else that happened of any significance while you were

09:30 **at the pumping station that you'd like to tell us about?**

More children.

You got busy with the family situation then?

Yes, yes, we always reckoned we'd have four and we had four. No, it was a happy place there. Just to be together with the family and have our own place was all we really wanted.

10:00 **So seven years there and then did you move to Daglish, did you mention?**

No, no, from there we went on, what happened is the steam powered stations were being put out and they were putting in electrification, so I was acting engineer in charge a few times and I should have had an engineering charge job come up within about twelve months because the chap was going to retire and that was a really cushy job. Good pay and

10:30 nothing much to do but with electrification that cut that opportunity out, so I looked around and Cranmore Park (UNCLEAR), that's the Lefroy's wanted a mechanic up there, and the housing was supplied again. The housing still wasn't good after seven years, so we said right and we shifted up there.

And sorry, where's that again? Where is that?

11:00 Where is that? It's up near Moora.

Okay, so you're still in the country?

Still in the country, we liked the country. We stayed there for approximately seven years and then the children, the eldest daughter was at a stage where they wanted higher education so we pulled the pin and came down to Daglish.

What can you remember most about Moora during those seven years?

The fact that I didn't see it very often.

Was that because of the shift work?

No, it wasn't shift

11:30 work at Moora, it was on hand twenty four hours a day. No as a mechanic and later on they gave me the farm manager-engineer's job and as that I was more or less on tap all the time and often I'd leave home at four or five and go out to the paddocks and do something and I'd get home at eight or nine o'clock at night or something. Just a matter if the work was there you had to do it and unfortunately for me because of the workshop, I had a workshop

12:00 there and a couple of chaps in it, when the paddock work was over, then all the machinery wanted fixing up. It was a round the year job. There was no real let up, even had times when we had our holidays all arranged and they wanted me to cancel them.

How come there was so much work?

No, it was a fourteen thousand acre stud farm, and as a stud

12:30 farm they did all their own cropping, we made insulage and hay and without all the grains and things. All the grains were carted in for feed for the sheep, the stud sheep, and they'd been on that for years and years, but insulage bits and insulage machinery and there was machinery going all the time, all the year around. And at seeding and harvesting and ploughing it was round the clock and

13:00 to keep the stuff going we used to go out when the shifts were changed or in between shifts when a meal was wanted and while a chap had his meal we'd grab his machine and change points, grease up, fuel up, check everything over and make sure it was right and send him on his way, pull another one out and do the same so that might be at eleven o'clock at night. You get home at one o'clock at night and four o'clock you're back out on the other shift, so I didn't see much of Moora, or Miling or anything.

13:30 As a matter of fact my boss asked me one day, he wanted me to look at something down one of the paddocks and I said "Where's that?" And he said "Do you mean to say you've been here for four years Noel and you don't know where South Coogie is or something?" And I said "Yes, I don't know where it is and I don't know where Miling is and I don't know where Moora is and I don't know where Round Hill is", and he said "Oh" and walked off.

14:00 Sounds like a pretty crazy job, were you paid reasonably well for these incredible hours?

Paid well but they treat you, when you get in with them, they treated you like one of the family. You're expected to work all hours of the day and night. They gave me a fair pay but every year there was a dirty big bonus. So we were, we were paid pretty well but had I been on tradesmen's rates, on overtime,

14:30 no, I would have got far better that way but the agricultural area doesn't work that way. None of today's unions or anything but I was never a union man anyway. I believed if you did your job you didn't need a union. The boss needed you so you had someone on your side.

That's great that they managed to give you a bonus at the end of every year?

Yeah, two hundred and fifty, three hundred pounds or something, which was a lot of money in those days,

15:00 and I earned it. And I saved it for them and they admitted that. I've still got the letters from them, their letters of appreciation every year that they used to give me.

You had four children to support so?

Yes, I've never drunk much and I've always looked after my own mechanical gear and sewing machines, washing machines, always done that and Olga's always been a wonderful housewife, thrifty and saved money there. We've never gone without much but

15:30 we've never wasted much either and that's why it's paid in our long run here now.

So what was it like going back to the city after being in the country for fourteen years?

Not bad, what happened was while we were there, Dougie Grey of David Grey and Company, he had a crop dusting business out at Maylands and he also had the Cessna agency and because I'd worked on aircraft

16:00 every time he came up he'd get me to look over his aircraft and "Noel, will you just go and check the aircraft over." He had a Cessna 172, so I'd just go and look it over for any faults or anything and I'd sometimes pick up something that the service mob had missed and he reckoned that was great. So when he heard that I was going down he said "Well what are you going to do?" And I said "I don't know" and he said "Well I'll give you a job out on the aircraft" and I said "Okay". So I went out on the aircraft as

- 16:30 unauthorised aircraft engineer. Someone had to sign my work off and everything and first off, they wanted all special tools made up for overhauling and everything so I made them up on the machine shop. They had a machine shop and none of them, they knew how to use a lathe but they weren't expert at it and then they had troubles in at the factory. They had machinery that was broken down and stuff that wouldn't work and that and couldn't get stuff done so
- 17:00 he used to come out and say to me "We're having trouble Noel, will you call in on your way home?" And I used to call in on my way home after I'd been working there and lo and behold it was four hours work to get them going again and that was only a patch up job and I'd tell them what they wanted and they'd say "Get it made" so on the weekends I was making stuff up to supply him with it and this carried on until they shifted out to Jandakot and I wasn't going to travel out to Jandakot every day for that job, so
- 17:30 I told him. I said, "Well I'm not going to transfer to Jandakot," and he said, "Well that's good, you can come and work for me". I said, "I'm going on my own" and he said, "Well, that's alright." And so he said "Yes, I'll give you two days a week" and I said "That's alright, that's sixteen hours?" And he said "Yes" and I said "What's the hourly rate?" I was letting him know that I was no longer an employee now, I was on my own and he said "What do you want?" And I said "Twenty-five dollars an hour" and
- 18:00 he said "What?" And I said, "Yes," and they'd been paying me about eight or ten I suppose, "Twenty-five dollars an hour." And he said, "What?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Oh, you don't think that's too much?" And I said "That's what you pay the people to make things that I've got to fix up afterwards." He said "Fair enough Noel, you're on." So immediately he did that I started work for two days and he wanted me back the next day and the next day and then I had to go in on Saturday
- 18:30 and at the end of the financial year we put our return into the tax department and they refused to accept it because the gross amount, with no deductions, they didn't believe it, so that gave us a boost along. Then bit by bit I got the whole plant in good order, going. I made the machines that he wanted made and I still continued to do that afterwards, so then we decided to, there were railway blocks up at Shenton Park, from the railway
- 19:00 so we leased a block from them and put a building up and started Nango Engineering. Barry, my son, from when he was two years old, he was always in my pocket or round about and anything mechanical I couldn't see what I was doing because his head was in the way and he was always helping and he was always pulling things to pieces and putting them back together again. He was a natural and so we took him on as an apprentice and he stayed with us until he finished his apprenticeship.
- 19:30 And we mainly did specialised work. We had the agencies for Holimatic Machines, that's patty making and hamburger machines and all that sort of thing and we serviced them and then I did work for Peter's and people around but mostly I'm like I am now, I was a real gatherer of rubbish and people or Peter's would ring up and say "Look the compressor's broke down ,
- 20:00 can you come out and get it going and fix it? We've got so many tons of ice cream" and we'd go out as a team and because it was a breakdown they didn't mind you charging, I'd say "Look I've got a ton of work" and they'd say "Look charge us overtime and do the work on the weekend" and I'd say "Alright". So we'd go out and get them going and keep them going and then arrange to put the new bits in and when we were ready they'd stop and we'd put it in and kept everyone happy, so we had a client that needed us as much as we needed them, which was very good
- 20:30 because we never had any money troubles and if I ever had any trouble with any of these accountants, which you always had, I'd just ring the manager up and say "I'm not going to do anymore of your work" and "What? What's the trouble?" "The account." "That will be out there by hand in half an hour," and the cheque would be there in half an hour and you never had any more trouble. But it was very interesting and how long were we there love? Ten years, twenty years we had the place and then it gradually built up and then the Americanism came in where
- 21:00 if you, everyone else is trying to work on everyone else's capital. They'd run up a bill and then say, "We'll pay you next month, next month, next month" and they'd be using your money to finance their own business and it got to the stage where I wasn't happy with the people we were working with and I said "Right, we'll get out" and we didn't want to sell it as a going concern because if we did our customers would have been back to me all the time. I
- 21:30 wanted to cut it off completely so the chaps that had working there took over a couple of the businesses that we had with different people. We were doing a lot on hard facing and that for Hawker De Havilland's and the aircraft industry, some work for them and the mining industry. Barry was in the mining industry and he saw the need up there for what we had so he pushed jobs our way and we'd get on their computer and it was there and when they wanted anything they automatically
- 22:00 ordered them and we'd supply them. But that got to the stage where it was getting a bit hard and we'd had enough so we said "Right" and we pulled the pin. We sold some of the machinery and kept the rest and a lot of it is what is down at the place down at Craigdown Park, the rubbish as they call it and materials and steel and stuff. I've got a mate that rents a place, he owns a lot of stuff and I just go down and help him now or then or if I get a job here and I want to use that machinery
- 22:30 for, go down and do it and come back again and makes it lovely.

When you say the American attitude came in, was that the 1970's?

Yeah, about that. When Kentucky Fried Chicken and Hungry Jack's first started. They sent people out here, we had to do with Hungry Jack's because Darling Investments was their firm and Hungry Jack's was the people and they sent people

- 23:00 out here and they got land on a piece, or it had to be so long before something was done and they did, they promised to pay when the building was up and what they would do was they wouldn't build for three months and the person sort of lost their land. They said "If you want the money of course we'll pull out of the deal." They had lawyers doing things right and they had everything
- 23:30 sewn up and they just came out and I think they sold their patties without ever paying a penny and they got cash for it, that's the sort of business it was. They leased this and leased that and promised this and promised that and they'd have done the same with me but when their machines stopped they stopped and we had two lots of trouble with them and finally I pulled the pin and they said "No more, no more" and okay, they were one of our best payers, weren't they? Olga would send the invoice and it would be back the next
- 24:00 day. But it was a worry all the time and you had to fight people. You'd ring up people about money that was owing, in the old days if you were a bit short you'd ring up someone you owed money to and say "How are you holding?" "I'm right, why?" "Well I owe you so and so and I haven't got some money yet." "Well leave it, give us a yell when you've got it" and you'd co-operate like that. When the American's came around "Haven't you got that cheque yet? Miss So and so, what have you done with that cheque and
- 24:30 Nango Engineering is screaming out and going mad" and you knew it was all a front and two months later when you got the cheque you knew it was written out that day and they didn't have the sense to backdate it. When you're battling with things like that and you're getting old it's just not worth it, so we just got out.

You don't want to fight a system where you deserve the money in the first place and then you've got to fight for it?

No, I don't ever want to have a fight where I don't win.

I can tell.

If he's bigger than me I don't fight him.

25:00 So you're still tinkering around with things?

Yes, still tinkering around. We've got a workshop on the estate and everything works very well. They go to different firms and all their timber that they, a lot of the wood firms now like shop fitters and that and they're going to do something and they want twelve sheets, eight by four sheets of a certain ply or something, the customer pays

- 25:30 for them and they used part of the twelve but there's three sheets left in bits and they can't store them so they just chuck them out. We've got chaps that go around and pick that up and bring them here and I look after the mechanised, the mechanical side of the workshop, the buzzers and the thicknesses and saws and do a bit sharpening. That's why this is here and for other people. I got behind yesterday. One of the neighbours came in with a blender that wouldn't work, so instead of finishing my job

- 26:00 I spent three hours on that. When I want something and he's got a ute, he'll go and get it. It's wonderful, I find it good, but no complaints at all.

So basically there's nothing you can't fix?

Yes, I can't fix my eyes without my glasses. There's a lot of things I can't fix.

I was talking about mechanical phenomena.

There's not much I can't fix.

Just going backwards

26:30 to some of the things that we've talked about before, did you actually make any good mates when you were in Borneo?

Oh yes, I made a lot of good mates, but as I said, mostly they were Eastern Australians. They got off the train on the way and you carried on here and you never saw them again, and that was it. See in the army it's different. The army go into a battalion and they stay in that battalion for the whole of the war. The air force is

- 27:00 not, with the air force you never know. You can be in the shower just finishing your day's work and somebody will come up and say "You're wanted in the orderly room" or over the PA [public address] system "Report to the orderly room, report to the orderly room" and they say "Go and get your gear, you're posted to 5PD and the plane or the train leaves in an hour." So you go back to your tent, grab your necessities, give away the rest and walk out. That's the end of that life, so you've got to be

prepared for that at anytime and just accept it, it's part of the air force.

27:30 When they want you, they get you.

Well it must be a bit traumatic if you're really happy where you are and getting posted to somewhere else?

No, cause you're thinking "I'm going somewhere else, there might be something better there", you've got a better challenge.

There was also, obviously the climate in Borneo was much different to what it is here, what was it like and how did that make your job difficult?

Well when it rained, it rained,

28:00 as it does in most tropics, when you got off the main road the jungle around Mango was very thick. You wouldn't get anywhere without a machete unless someone had been there before you. The weather was like all tropics, trying at all times, and when we were there part of you was very trying. You get things like leeches and sandflies and mosquitoes and gnats and flying bats and all sorts of things.

28:30 You get a lot of those things at night in a camp that you'd never know if you lived there because with a hurricane lamp the next minute, bang, something hits the hurricane lamp and cicadas and all sorts of things. They were all attracted to the light. You can't eat without the light very well so you just accept them all and that's it. Flies were terrible at times and as we said the camp wasn't very hygienic so you'd have a few flies there and you just accepted it.

That's the thing, where you were the flies

29:00 **would be attracted probably to the smell?**

Oh yeah, the skulls on the tent pegs kept them away from us a bit, they were busy with those probably.

What you stuck the skulls on the tent pegs?

Oh everyone did, you had four big pegs on the corners of your tent and there was a skull on each one.

Sounds a bit gruesome?

Plenty of them around. One of our chaps was a medical student and if anyone found some "Hold on, hold on, don't touch it, don't

29:30 touch it" and he'd come over and have a look and say "Right, I'll have that one" and he'd dig it up and take it over to the trough, to the copper that we used to wash our clothes in, and he'd put it in some water and he'd boil it all up and get the bits of flesh and everything off it and then put it out in the sun and dry it and then he used to box it up and send it back to his mum. He was probably selling them to medical students over there and making a fortune out of them or getting different ones with different things for

30:00 himself. I don't know but there was all sorts of things happened.

That's quite bizarre?

They're dead, there's nothing you can do with them, nothing wrong with it, it's there, that's it, accept it.

And these bodies were they Japanese or were they?

As far as we know most of them were Japanese but they could have been civilians. They could have even been army, we weren't there. We don't know. From what we could find out it was a communal burial site.

30:30 Most of them were Japanese by the clothes and boots and most of them wore those double toed boots and you could pick them up by that or something like that but others they weren't bodies, they were bits and just whatever there was but you weren't doing any harm. You couldn't harm them and there was only the ones that were close to the surface, probably where the tide had come in and washed a bit of soil away and they would have probably put them down four feet, so they had to be two or three feet come off before they were visible.

31:00 They probably got machines in and dug big trenches and dropped them in, I don't know. But that didn't worry us at all. Never woke up with ghost stories or anything.

How about souveniring? Was there souveniring going on from the Japanese?

Oh yes, yes.

What sort of things?

I bought two Jap swords back with me, well one and I got another one here and I bought a thirty-thirty American carbine, brand new, back with me

31:30 and other little things. We used to make up a lot of stuff out of the Perspex, make up brooches and

things like that. I even traded some milk for a gold ring and made Olga a little gold heart and the skill levels, there was engravers and painters and etchers and carvers. When you get a mob of men, there's some very clever people amongst them but unfortunately this gold ring was half copper or brass,

32:00 wasn't it? Whatever it was you've still got it in there at any rate. It wasn't high quality because it stains.

What other sorts of souvenirs would men pick up?

Oh, I got buttons and badges and insignias and I bought back a box, that I've still got, that a Jap had made out of some ammunition cases. I've still

32:30 got some tools in it down there that, but with the flying you couldn't bring much back. If you bought something back, you more or less had to leave something behind, so you'd didn't, you had to take your pick.

Did you ever go back and visit any of these places?

No, I've been back to Darwin definitely.

And what happened then?

Oh it was good, they had a back to Darwin year centenary and they invited anyone who was there to go back up

33:00 and we went back up and I took the photos up that I had of the mechanical engineering officer of 9ACS gave me the official photos of 9 Works Maintenance and 9ACS and I've got them, not here, I couldn't find them, down at my son's and in those there was a lot of really good stuff. But generally we got back up and I knew

33:30 it was at what they called the Forty Mile, so I knew it was about forty miles from Darwin and I cruised up and down and I said "No, it's wrong, there's something wrong somewhere."

Was it just you?

Aye?

Just you?

Olga and I, no, wouldn't be allowed to go without Olga and we cruised up and down and I said "No, there's something wrong here", so I saw an opening into a place and a chap in there, so I went in and I said I was after the old RAAF thing and he said "Oh you're on the wrong road, that's on the old road." Because the strips were on the

34:00 road, and they wanted the, the civvy aircraft mob wanted to keep the strips and then they'd put a new road out further and he said "Just go through here and you'll find the old road" so I went back and there it was. And it now's the Arcadia Store is there. It's just near Mountain Dam and we went in and I walked over and what had happened is after the war, a mob of hippies shifted into the places, the buildings and everything, and they had a real

34:30 commune there and they were becoming the bikies and hippies, a real menace, so they took the dozers out and dozed everything and put a fire through it but from the concrete pads and the size of them I could pick it out and I got back to our own tent one and I found the workshop and where the lathe and all the concrete and stuff was all there. And then we went in and we had good ceremony there. They welcomed us back and it was really nice and then we've been back again.

35:00 What, twice or three times? Twice, been back again and we might go back again next year.

What do you get out of going back like that?

Well the next time what we'll get out of it is we'll be visiting our granddaughter that lives up there. That will be the main thing. Don't know that I get much more out of it now because I found that and I found the, it's now a water supply plant dump,

35:30 where we were because there was the fence and the stuff around it I suppose, where we were at the RAAF Darwin. I found that by the concrete slabs, so there's really nothing much more to find. All the, I couldn't find the scrap heap at the RAAF. I was looking to see if there was any of the old plates and things around but I couldn't find that. I think somebody probably shifted in, loaded all the scrap and cast iron up and sold it, got rid of all that stuff. There was an old boiler there that we had for hot water and a few things.

36:00 And found different things like that that were almost indestructible, but no it was just nice to find it and know that you had it right. But memories of those sorts of things are neither good or bad, they're just memories, they're just something that happens.

How do you usually celebrate Anzac Day?

Go to the ceremony over here. I don't go to the ceremony down

- 36:30 there. I've been in the RSL from 1944. My good wife the other day got lousy and wrote away because they hadn't made me a life member, and told them it was about time they did. After about thirty years you're supposed to be a life member and so they've admitted that now and they're fixing that up. I found that when I came back a) one I wanted to be with Olga. I didn't want to be going to meetings and going out. She didn't
- 37:00 ever want to go out so why should I go out. Number two, the RSL in those days was mostly just a booze up. I couldn't drink, I didn't want to drink. When we were at Cranmore, the Bindie Bindie RSL was good and I did take an active interest in that and attend and that was about my only pressure let off on that place and there's on here at Quinn's Rock. I don't go to that but I am a member of it but I don't go to it. No, I
- 37:30 just don't find the need for it. If there was mates of mine living here and going, I'd go with them but there's no one I know here really. There's people on the estate I know but they are not like real friends or air force friends so I just don't worry. I joined the ASC Association and they have formed an association for all the air field construction squadrons
- 38:00 but they're as I said, nearly all eastern staters. There was no Western Australian ASC and I've been to the meetings and while they're trying to be friendly, there's just no one I know and they'll talk for a while and then Olga and I are sitting there and everyone's, so we just don't get much out of it, so why worry.

Considering your experience during the war is there any great thoughts of wisdom that you have after that experience that you can apply to life?

No, no I don't think so, except just take it a day at a time,

- 38:30 like we're doing now. The general call here is "Who's fallen off the perch this week?" And they're going to get more and more.

Do you think you've changed because of your experience during the war?

Yes, I was very young for the promotion I got and because you're very young some of the

- 39:00 older members keep on trying you out. If you don't let them know if they step over the line, you'll be as hard as anyone else, once they know that, you get on alright. But if you come into another squadron, of course you start afresh again. Also I've always been pretty outspoken, particularly about work, and I've probably made
- 39:30 a lot of enemies that way because if I see anybody doing anything in the engineering line which I know is due to fail or I don't think is a good idea I let them know, and that doesn't go over well because an officer doesn't like a junior telling him or suggesting to him what he'd done is wrong, even though he goes and changes it afterwards and gets the kudos for it.

Anyway at the end of the day you managed to end up with a fabulous business and

- 40:00 **I just wanted to thank you very much Noel for talking to us for the Archive.**

Well thanks so much for being so nice and co-operative about it.

That's alright. We're usually pretty nice and co-operative.

INTERVIEW ENDS