Australians at War Film Archive

Maurice Ryan (Maurie) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **So, Mr Ryan, if we can start from where you were born.**

I was born in a little place called Emaville, E M A V I double L E. Vegetable creek it originally was, a little mining place, right up in northern NSW near the border, near Texas. I don't know if you're familiar with Texas, Texas is Queensland across the

01:00 Sovereign River, we were, I was born on this side, a little tin mining area, town.

Did you have a big family?

I'm the only one. I was an only child.

And what were your parents doing?

Dad was a tin prospector and not a (UNCLEAR) but rather a clever man, and ah, he was a tin miner. Mum was well, just a domestics, twenty I think, or, no, twenty, she had me when I was twenty. No, she was

01:30 twenty actually, she was twenty years older than me.

And how did the depression affect your family?

First of all, I was born in 1922, and I think about 26 or 27 I remember we went from Emaville down to Sydney. We had my aunty, Dad's sister and grandmother and grandfather had a large house out in Leichhardt in Sydney, but it was only rented,

02:00 but it was an extended boarding house where relatives stopped, sons, and the daughter in laws and all that and we went down and stopped there, and things were pretty buoyant, like, when I say, Dad worked on the water front as a labourer, but what I'm saying there was always work. You know, everyone had a job until the thirties struck. When the thirties struck we moved up to a place called Granville in Sydney, and it was desolate, like those, poor as you could possibly get, I mean houses were just

02:03 vacated and overnight all the front fence went for fire wood and all that stuff. And there was no dole, just going getting dole, that just didn't happen. So you got the best you could, but people grew very close to each other, but they had nothing, nothing at all.

Did you have much school, moving around like that?

My life, I went to school, total in me whole life I suppose, about eighteen months. Yeah.

Whereabouts was that?

03:00 At Leichhardt, Saint Fiacre's school it was, a little Catholic school, well not a little, a big Catholic school, State Catholic school, Catholic school. And then I went to Granville Catholic School for a little while and then in 1931, Dad was out of work in Sydney, the Depression had struck, and he went across to Beechworth in the north east, because he'd been there in the twenties himself as a young man, doing a bit of prospecting

03:30 and mining, well he went down to a place called the Woolshed, down in the bush, total bush, and he got going and found a bit of tin and all that sort of stuff and he got us to move across, Mum and I, in the early 30's. And we had a humpy [a rough shelter] made out of not even tent, made out of bags, bags sewn together. And a fly over the top of that, you know like

04:00 what would catch, the top what wouldn't caught would drip onto the other. And sometimes, well the first night I was there it was the middle of winter, and the water got down into the little humpy bed they'd made me, I was about ten years old, something like that, and I remember Mum was sitting over open fire thing, and she had bag thing around her back and she come across, I woke up and I remember

she come across with a knife, and I thought, “Christ my bloody life’s over already.” No, she

04:30 cut it underneath and let water out and that. Very primitive, very, very hard. The thing that sustained me all through the young puddle like that, we never had anything but I always felt I was loved. There was warmth there, I suppose I did, maybe, I wanted to say this, it’s held me in good stead all me life. But I do, always had a, even though I

05:00 educated myself reasonably, I became a psychiatric nurse and all that sort of thing, passed exams and that, but I always felt that background of education wasn’t there, cause a big word came up, or a doctor said something that was, you know, maybe a plain speak to you if you went to university, but it wasn’t to me, I had to say “Oh yes, I know.” and go to a dictionary and try and find it in the dictionary. All me life it’s been a thing like that, cause you can spell something right.

And you started work

05:30 **very early, didn’t you?**

About ten years old. There’s photos in there.

What were you doing?

Well, mining, and one of them there was digging a shaft. Dig down say 20 feet, 10, 15, feet, get a windlass, you know a windlass, go around. I’d have that sometimes, Dad would put dirt into the, it’s a bucket like that and you have a hook and a wire and a rope. The windlass goes, you wind it up, well you wouldn’t put much dirt in it, but it was as hard as the road, chip it out and the bottom used to

06:00 call wash, that’s where thousands, millions of years ago a creek was, and there might be a bit of tin or gold in that. Well my job was to wind up that bucket of dirt. He took a risk with me doing it. I was about ten years old. I had little arms like that. Then I’d empty that bucket and lower it down again for him to chip it out with a pick and all that sort of thing, yeah.

And how many days a week would you do that?

Only seven. But if it rains you couldn’t do much but mostly about seven days, six

06:30 days. Six days easily, every day, every

Did you work with your dad the whole time?

Till I become about sixteen or seventeen, and we, we would clash with a little burble and I would take my little, I’ll show you the apparatus we used to use to fossick for tin and gold, and I’d take my little banjo we called it, you throw dirt in the top, you throw water onto it, it’d come down and the residue’d go away and the heavier tin and gold’d stop at the top. I would go and do that on my own you know,

07:00 bring a little billy full of a night, a little billycan full of tin and gold. And he’d say, “When you fill that.” He’d have a little bucket there you see, half a kerosene tin, the old kerosene tin, a few of them know them. He’d say “When you fill that up I’ll credit you with thirty shillings.” Cause he was a cunning old bugger, I’d leave a bit of sand in it to make, so I get good value and I’d put it in dry you see. Well he’d come along now and again, throw a little bit of water and give it a kick and instead of it being up there it would come down to, you know, so more

07:30 had to go in. Well that sort of. It would go down. I would say that was my pot, it was half full last night, quarter full today. But it was hard times. Along the creek where we were, Dad was an expert, at his field. At finding tin he was an expert. People used to come down to this Woolshed, it was a creek, and try and get a bit of tin and gold, just to sustain themselves, just to

08:00 live. Lot of them First War diggers too. And when I think back it was so tragic. A man name Wally Wilson, and a bloke called Ian Camon[?]. One was a bank manager, ex bank manager, sacked during the big Depression, and they were down there. They’re mining this stuff, , this rock like stuff, and there’s no water, have to wait for big rains to wash it. So each day

08:30 they’d cart all this stuff and put it in a big heap, big heap each day. Mr Wilson’d say, “Well I think we got two penny weights today Ian, yes, that’s good.” so they’d go and do it, and they done that for about six weeks, and then the rains came, and washed away, and it only come to about a quarter of what they estimated. So they had a stand up fight. This was all part of life for me.

Were both those men WW1 veterans?

One bloke was, machine gunned down, Wally Wilson was machine gunned down, he

09:00 used to walk with a, got bloody nothing, not even ten bob a week, for, …for, …no. They lived in the bag huts, some of them, we gradually got up to tents, you know, tents with the fly over, that was big mover then. And then I had one pretty awkward experience there. Mr. Turner, he was a First War man. He was a bit of a loner,

09:30 and he got to a place called El Dorado, it’s heading from Beechworth it’s half way between Beechworth and Wangaratta down the creek. I went down. I used to ride me push bike around and talk to any of the

older blokes. And I went down to his place one Saturday and he was sitting in what you'd call a baby bath these days, with his feet in there. And he'd cut his feet at the bottom, cross here, wanted to bleed to death.

10:00 and I was only about twelve or so, and I let a bloody scream out at him and got on the bike and got him assistance, and you know, I never seen that man again for, oh, don't quote me, three or four years later, and they marched from Puckapunyal to Albury, the army. The war was on then. And he marched through the town and there he was, as a sergeant, proud, had a bit of pride back again. Different man altogether,

10:30 Mr. Turner. Terrible, terrible times when you think of it. No dignity, total lack of dignity. Although I become the first young person in Beechworth to have a motor car. I know the cockies [farmers] and that could've bought em, but they didn't buy it for their kids. I had one.

And your uncle served in the First War?

On Mum's side. Three went, and two were killed. Donald and Harold, there's photos of them there, they were

11:00 I think they were decorated, I know the man that came back was a military medal winner. Alfred, cause his son, my cousin, went to Korea and he got a military medal, and the Queen was out and it was presented as father and son, with a medal. The Ryan side, being Irish, they weren't too keen about fighting for the British I can tell you, not too keen at all.

Was there a sense of that when you were growing up?

The Irish and the others. Absolutely, even when I was a

11:30 kid at Beechworth. Oh, they'd say to you, well not to me so much but to older people, "There's some jobs going at Benalla rail yards." say, and they'd finish off the conversation, they'd say, "That's providing you're not a Catholic." This was true. And then another one'd be, "You could get a job up at the mental hospital at Beechworth, you've got more chance if you're a Catholic." I'd a gone and, til after the war I was a Catholic, well am a Catholic,

12:00 I'm not practising, I practise, I pray to God he's up in the light globe. One of my mates died after I joined the mental hospital, the tradition was so deep even then, this was 1950 that a lot of Catholic people of my age in their twenties, would not go into that Church of England because it was not sacred ground. Course I didn't, I did the opposite and went in and everything. But it was so bad, you know

12:30 the Protestants wouldn't go into the Catholic Church and all this stuff, and it was just. It went on "til. It was really broken down after the Second War. But before that, something fierce.

Did that affect your feeling of being Australian or being part of the British Empire at all being of Irish heritage?

Yes. I always, since I was that high I was always, well, since as long as I can remember, I was always what they call a

13:00 Republican. I was so proud of Australia, although I didn't own one, I didn't have two bob in the bank, or anything, totally proud of Australia, still am. It's a great country and I thought well I know we have to have allies, I know that, but I thought we deserved our own flag and our own national anthem, that's been all me life.

13:30 That was deeply embedded. Cause when I first joined the army I went up to Sydney to Maroubra to see my grandmother on my Dad's side, Ryan, Grandma Ryan, lovely old lady, a bit deaf. She wasn't Catholic strange enough, but she changed to become a Catholic after my grandfather died. But she said to me, and I thought I looked bloody beautiful, had me new army boots on, me red boots, and me stiff hat, and you look something shocking, you know, you'd make anyone laugh to death,

14:00 I went out and gran said "I'd never think I'd live to see the day that one of my grandsons would join the army." And I went to chocolate, to boiled lollies in about two seconds. If gran didn't love me then what the bloody hell hope have I got? It was a strange old time. When you got to the army I didn't find any of that there, although I did find favouritism. Some sergeants,

14:30 which in my opinion weren't that crash hot, were picked for officers' school because they were Masons [Freemasons]. I know that because one of the men I joined with was the same. He was definitely picked above hardened sergeants who had proved themselves in action, he was picked over them. It was just the old boys; it's like today, like anybody else, like the politicians. It's if somebody knows somebody.

Could you go back a second and talk about

15:00 **your uncle, who did come back from the First World War. Did he have much to do with you?**

Not a lot, but some, some. We called him "Daffy." He was always known through the family as Daffy, Alfred. Daffy. Very quiet man, very. There was a thing about the First War men. It don't matter how poor, what sort of clothes, they always had their clothes to the best they could be. Trousers like that they'd have them ironed. And if they went up the street they'd

15:30 have their white shirt on. They always had immaculately shaven, hair always done, slicked down, always kept themselves in good condition, the best they could. It was sort of instilled in em. He was a quiet man, a blue [fight] Dad told me, “My Dad couldn’t fight.” but he told me this. That was his brother in law you see, “He could fight like a thrashing machine, but never drank and was a quiet man.” A good worker, just a moderate build, about our height. Something came out

16:00 that stuck in me mind about how his mind must have been tortured. He lived at Glebe. I think it was Glebe in Sydney. Anyway, he had a keen vegetable garden. And he had it all done up and it was growing nicely and everything. His bloody dog got in and scratched it all to pieces, the lettuce went that way and like that Dad says his arm went that way, and he didn’t get into a flurry at all Uncle Daffy, he just got a shovel and chopped it up. Buried it.

16:30 **The dog.**

Yeah. Just didn’t think a second of it. That’s how it, and yet he was a quiet man, humble man. Just that it was enough to tip him over the edge, well I reckon it’s over the edge, isn’t it. Buried it. That sort of thing.

Did your mother or father talk about his war experiences at all?

Did Dad and Mum, Mum only,

17:00 Dad didn’t go to war. Only Mum. Mum used to talk about more or less the two brothers that were killed. Donald and Harold. I know one was killed I know Don was killed at Menin Gate, I’m not certain. I think that’s near Belgium, I’m not certain. Menin Gate. And the other one Harold was a runner, used to go from trench to trench with messages. And from what she knew, she was only, she was born in 1901, she was only been about fourteen or

17:30 fifteen. She said “He run back into a trench that was already occupied by the Germans like the Australians had been kicked out and the Germans had come in, well they just shot him.” That’s what she knew of those two. And then the other one came back, Alfred. Yeah.

Could you talk us through your work years up to enlistment?

Well that’s all I done from when I enlisted. That was me work.

18:00 Tin and gold and that stuff and wood chopping on the side, which was a nice thing. There’s no seats on axes, that’s the hardest work in the world. That. I went to Sydney. There’s a story in it, my wife and why I left and all that sort of stuff.

You met your wife in Sydney.

I met her here. It’s in the book. I met her in Beechworth. I met her in strange circumstances. I’ll go back a bit. If I repeat

18:30 meself you stop me. I was down the Woolshed. I was about sixteen then, just starting to think about girls, you know, that sort of stuff. I’d been very shy and I come past, coming past where we had all these old huts and that sort of thing. And there was a group of school children, oh, fifteen or sixteen, and they were doing the, it’s a Arbor Day or something, where they go out to the bush and look at all the trees, and all that stuff and carry on, and I seen this pretty girl there but I

19:00 was too shy to speak to her or anything and they asked me something. I said something and I got going all flustered or something. And bout two years later, there was two main sports meetings in Beechworth, Easter Monday and Boxing Day and it was Easter Monday and I was standing by the fence watching the bike rides and the foot races and you know, I go to country meetings and all that sort of stuff, and this girl behind me said “How are you?” And I looked around behind me and after those years it was her. Next minute we were walking around holding

19:30 hands and I just felt, “Oh, Christ, you know, this is…..” You know I always thought she was reasonably educated for those days and sort of, she was a pretty girl. I always put her on a, she said to me one time, after we were married and everything, she said “Don’t put me on this pedestal; I can’t live up to it.” But I just thought that she was so much superior, it’s a terrible word to say, but I did, I just put her on the pedestal. We had a rough old passage through life.

20:00 We stopped together, but a lot in between. She died three or four years ago. Yeah, I’ll never forget this experience, I looked around at her, and I thought, “Yeah, this is the one. Yeah.” Then, well to be quite candid she got pregnant. Being a coward I went around to her mother’s place, and her mother said “She

20:30 doesn’t want anything to do with you.” She was working up this mental hospital at the time. She was 18 or 19. She said “She wants nothing to do with you. She’s finished. We had a good talk last night.” she said. Me being a coward, I went across to Albury and went to Sydney. And I went there; I worked for a while on concrete construction.

21:00 And I went to Sydney, I worked this concrete construction, it was so hard, building, there was some Italians there, they were massive men you know, pick and shovelling all their lives. They give me a hand, you know, mixing cement all that sort of stuff. You’d have twenty minutes for lunch, so you didn’t have

to work Saturday morning. So you'd sit down, buggered like, and 20 minutes later you're going again. An old bloke, to me he might have been 40 or something, he said "This is no good for you son. A shovel this big with a short handle, you don't want to be

21:30 doing this for the rest of your life." and I looked out at the railway line and I, this would be at the end of 41, and I see these soldiers going along on a trains, and I thought "It can't be much bloody worse than this." I wasn't actually, til the Japs come in I wasn't that interested, to be quite candid. When that come, I went down and I said "Yeah, this'll do me." And I'll tell you something,

22:00 I went, "Oh God it's cruel." I lived at Granville, staying at Granville with my aunty, and I went up to Parramatta to join up. And there's an old doctor there, I'll never forget it, and being bloody nineteen years old and that I thought, "What could you be in? Intelligence sounds all right, and it sounds like it's away back from a lot of that noise and that shooting business you see." So I go in and he's sitting, I can see it now, he's sittin roughly where you are, he's sittin there, and he said well

22:30 you see, he's asking questions. He'd have to be sixty, retired, seventy. He says, "Yes." he said, "Make water, make water." I'll never forget it. Well I blush when I think of it. I thought "This is a trick question." There was a bowl behind him, a little sink thing, a little enamel white thing, and a tap, I went around, turned the tap on. And he said, "Are you being smart?" I said "No, you said make water."

23:00 "Jesus no! He said, "Piss in a jar!" And I could see the jars back where the lady is and I said "What? From here?" And this was true, the Japanese was comin, and you know he told me to get out. and I thought "Christ, you're desperate and you don't want me." And that's true, he wouldn't, he hunted me out. That was Saturday I think, then on Monday morning I went to Martin Place in Sydney and they were recruiting. And they yelled out "Who wants to join the army and this?" and somebody'd be parading around,

23:30 drums'd be beating and pipes playing and so on. Somebody'd just walk up, there'd be a truck, something like your truck but with an open back on it, and it took about eight people, and as it got eight they'd take it out the showground. Do the swearing in ceremony and the doc'd go over you, touch and all that sort of stuff. And just say, well, if you had one head and two arms, you were okay. We went there and we were camped in the Sydney Showground, the pavilion, I'll never forget.

24:00 We got little beds and I thought "This is bloody lovely." and there was a bloody bloke, he's a lot older than me and he's got a bed alongside me, a big open space, and he's got one of those tin trunks, tin trunk, you carry them overseas. Something similar to that only made of tin. We're getting undressed to hop into the cot, and he takes off his bloody leg! And chucks it in the box, and I thought "Christ, we must be in a terrible state here, when the Japanese

24:30 are comin and this bloody bloke but he must have been doing some clerical work, well I hope he was." Well he, I can still see it to this day; he chucked the leg in the box. I thought "Good God almighty, this is desperate times."

Why did you choose the army over the other services?

Well, I did think of the navy, but I thought, there's a bit of a story, that you, you, get turned in the barrel there.

What do you mean?

Well,

25:00 sexually, but, the bloke, but it's an old story, just a made up one, but they used to have a drum, a drum like that, and they had a hole in the drum, and the bloke says "Do you want to relieve yourself?" So you say "Yeah, no worries." You just go over and put your business through there. And the mate says "Jesus, that's all right, isn't it?" Yeah, it is, until you get your turn in the drum, so that's how that come about. And I didn't think the air force cause I wasn't quite up

25:30 to want to be a pilot or anything, I'd never been. I wasn't mechanical minded or anything, so I thought the army. I said to the bloke, he said "Where do you want to be?" I said "Artillery, that seems to be a fair way back. And he said, "Nah, you've used gelignite and stuff." I said "Yeah." he said "I'll try and get you in engineers or pioneers." I didn't know what it was, I didn't know what it meant. Meant nothin to me, but we used as infantry all the time.

26:00 Bar a little bit of the time, we done corduroy, you know what corduroy is. It's in the jungle where the mud's that deep in a track, and you want a jeep to go up it, you throw logs in there and you keep splitting logs and putting them across so the truck can move up slowly, but they do move up. And, that went from there to a training battalion. Is this too far ahead?

No. This is exactly how we....

26:30 I went from there to the showgrounds and done a little bit of, all the needles and all the things that had to be done. Then we're up to Dubbo, NSW, and we done training up there. When I did join it was the 5th January 1942. Just as the Japs come in.

27:00 Training at Orange, and a lot of screaming and going on, unnecessary I thought, the sergeant majors'd scream at you. "You might break your mother's heart but you're not going to break mine!" and all this.

They'd look at you and they'd scream at your face, you know. I couldn't help meself, I was always a bloody stupid kid. I'd say, "Don't get so nasty, I'm on your side you know." oh that didn't help either.

27:30 Yeah, we went, then we went and finished it off at Bathurst, went down to Bathurst. And went to another training battalion. They trained us to walking 20miles a day, and bayonet practice, and explosives and all the things they do, shooting on the rifle range and all that sort of stuff. Then we got a call that we were going overseas, and that was only about five or six months and even

28:00 the old sergeant major, pommy bloke, I don't know his name. He called us together, he said "I want to have a talk to youse, you might reckon I'm a bastard and all that." he said, and he had tears in his eyes. He said "You know you blokes are not ready for anything, you're not trained enough, you're not ready." He's a First War man, he says. He must have known something, cause we get on the boat, HMS Devon, no, Majesty's ship, steam ship, the Devonshire,

28:30 that was about 20,000 ton. It was sixteen/twenty thousand ton. We don't head for the Japs at all. We head off to bloody Middle East. We got half way, half way across the Indian Ocean. Perth, we had to go to Perth first. The boat sprung a leak going across the [Great Australian] Bight. Used to come out of the water at night and used to come down, bang, and the whole thing'd shudder and split one of the plates on it, had to go into Fremantle to get fixed

29:00 and anyway, we got trampin across the Indian Ocean then. It was all okay, we were escorted, by cruisers, destroyers, that sort of stuff, I don't know what they were, they were bloody boats anyway. We're getting to what is now Sri Lanka [Ceylon], and all of a sudden I see these boats, these escorts, they're rollin these depth charges off the back of their boats, they're just rollin them off, they're just rollin them off.

29:30 and they're blowin up everything, and then I see another one going and they've got a Y shaped thing and they're throwing them out that way, two of these big drums, bigger than that, like, one that way, but together, but out. I said to a bloke, I said, "What's going on?" He said "Oh, they're only practising." Now you don't practice, we never had a bullet over, you never practise cause I knew afterwards what happened. We were going into Colombo it was then,

30:00 they attack us properly, submarines. Because there was a Tromp [?]. One of them was a Dutch destroyer, which was escorting us. It went around us, just like, excuse me, it was just like, we're going along like this, this one come right along

30:30 come along the boat, we're proceeding the boat and it come along right close to them, and it's got the claxton horns, you know like the movie, brrrrrrrrp. Aaaarrrruuaaarrrrruuaaaarrrrruu. And they were pasty faced I could see these Dutch people and they're goin close to us and they're dropping those torpedos, and anyway, the torpedo went underneath us, went underneath it.

31:00 And we got in and we were only a couple of days in Colombo and I went on leave there and I met some of the people off the Dutch boat. They were army and navy, all nationalities, they were British, there was Ghurkhas, there was any amount of people. They told us they thought we were gone, thought we were blown up anyway. That was close. We got into the Red Sea. That was good. You've got the Red Sea, it was very hot and

31:30 you've got the sand on each side of it and you got up to, up to eh, oh my God, we didn't go as far as Port Said, Port Tewfik. Port Tewfik, and we got up there and we had two camps. Both in Egypt they were Ismailia and El Kantara. And we were reinforcements, last lot of reinforcements to go to the Middle East

32:00 and we headed off then, up that way was the war, headed off up this way, down to Palestine, to a camp about twenty mile from Tel Aviv, near Gaza. We trained there and I went to schools there and I never did get to Alamein. Well I got paraded to the, I think it was Sandy Roberts, you know that does the TV work; it was his father, Peter Roberts, was a captain.

32:30 And I went down and asked why I couldn't be sent up there? I've just, patriotic, I thought coming all this way. Well I didn't know, nobody tells you anything. You knew nothing in the army, nobody told you anything. I didn't even know that the battle of Alamein was almost over. I just said "I would like to volunteer and go up." The word he said, it rings in my ear to this day, he said, "Wouldn't we all." I said "Well I've just made my plea; I can't embellish any more on it."

33:00 That was it. Then we came back after it was over we had a big march at Gaza, all the 9th Division lined up and did a big parade. The head of the whole thing in the Middle East at that time was Field Marshal Alexander. And he done the salute to march past and oh, twenty, thirty thousand troops there.

33:30 They got us on the train. We went back down to the Suez Canal. We'd done a bit of guard duty along the Suez Canal. We went the Suez Canal back to Ismalia, and we got the Queen Mary was waiting, big ship the Queen Mary. I think we had eleven twelve thousand troops on that. We came back up. Biggest convoy they reckon at that time that ever left the place. Took six weeks, zig zag

34:00 to get to Australia, to get away from the Japanese, zig zag you know. The Queen Mary would be in convoy all day and all the ordinary ships would be there and all the fighting ships would be around you. And at night time the Queen Mary would rev up. You could feel it vibrating, to eighty thousand ton. And

she would take off on her own. She was fast, she was 38 knots, she was over forty miles an hour. She could take off on her own cause she could out run any

34:30 submarine but then it, morning, it was almost, great navigating, anyway. The morning come east there come a thing, the smoking lamp is lit. That was when it was daylight, you could light a smoke. I didn't smoke, but they did. And you'd see it, just on light in the morning, this great big ship would come into line again, the nest of all the other ships. The New Britain, the Ile de France, the Normandie and all those ships.

35:00 and they say the smoking lamp was lit and everybody'd light up and everything was kosher [fitting]. And we come down, and I didn't know where we were, and it got bloody cold you know, and I said to this bloke, "What's that down there?" and he said "They're ice caps." I said "Oh, ice caps." "The Arctic or the Antarctic's down there." he said. "See that way up there, that little, little dot." I said "Yeah." He said, "That's Tasmania." So we come right down the back of Tasmania to dodge

35:30 the Japanese. We come round and we ended up in Sydney Harbour. We couldn't go under the Sydney Harbour Bridge, it was too big, so we had to be taken off in ferries.

Just to clarify. They took you to the Middle East and you basically camped and trained.

Camped, no action at all, no action. But, well, no, no, no, no, no nasty men, no.

36:00 All of our reinforcements didn't see action. Even the ones who went up. Some went up and some didn't you see. Half might have gone up and half was left. It looked like [Field Marshal] Rommel would break through and if Rommel'd break through he'd join up with Turkey and, end of the penny section. All of the Middle East would have been joined to Europe. But anyway, we weren't needed, and that was that. We came back; we had a ticker tape parade through Sydney,

36:30 in 40, 43, yeah, 43, yes. We went on leave, had leave then, and then we joined up again and the tablelands in Queensland, Atherton tablelands. Oh, there was 9th Division, 6th Division, 7th Division, all the artillery, all the

37:00 machine gunners, engineers, corps troops, hundreds of thousands of troops up there, and Americans, they were more down at Townsville, the aeroplanes and all that sort of stuff. The Yanks were there. We done training there for the islands.

Heard that training was quite hard, how did you….?

It was, it was jungle

37:30 training, different altogether. Jungle training. There is a place called Canungra, that's where reinforcements to us, after that I was accepted into the battalion you see. But reinforcements come after that I went to this place called Canungra, which was very hard training. You learnt to walk hard, you didn't have to walk very far, they bloody wouldn't let you. To come back they had you. We were more or less waiting to go to New Guinea.

38:00 And I had a crook [injured] knee. I couldn't walk. They decided to operate, done it there. And they operated on that and while I was on that they were going to New Guinea, and as soon as I was better I was going to catch up with them. I think a week or two after. I didn't do the landing.

38:30 And I got into a thing I never do, because I'm pretty touchy about me face, I got into a fight, a fist fight. In the main street of Townsville, with an American. Because he had a girl and I didn't. Pretty bloody drunk too to tell you the truth. And there's me knuckles still up there. And he was a silly man. I was abusing him you see, and he's copping it sweet. I'm getting away with murder you see, calling him anything you know.

39:00 And I thought this is all right "I'll have a go." and I swung one at him and hit the bloody telephone pole behind him. With that he got excited and he got off the thing and he belaboured me. He belted the piddlin pick handles out of me. But I've got this on me hand and I got back to the little staging camp where we were goin, and I showed it to a bloke and they're all under little tents like that, I don't know what you call them, just a one man little tent thing. They're packing up he says, "No good trying to get into bed." I says

39:30 "It's two o'clock in the morning." I says, "I'm crook [sick] on the grog [alcohol] and everything this is bad." "You've broke your arm." he says, I said "No, I'm not stoppin here, I got no money, I'm off." I says, "I'm getting on that bloody boat." Got in the boat and they took us to Port Moresby, but while I was going across my hand blew right up you know.

Tape 2

00:30 **You were telling me about New Guinea.**

I broke the hand, I broke me hand, they were gonna across that night, it's only Queensland across, I

think it was only in it. The next day or something we got to Port Moresby. When I got into the boat the hand started to throb and come right up thought “I’d better do something.” so I went in and saw the ship’s doctor. “What happened?” I said oh, you know, in the army there was steel cleats put on your shoes, there was brass cleats so that it would grip, you know you wouldn’t

01:00 slip so much and of course the ships all had steel planks, steel stairways. What happened? I says “Oh I was walking down that stairway.” I says “And there’s that steel thing and I slipped and me hand went back, like that and goes, my head went that way.” and he says yes, he went. When he finished he says “How’d the other bloke get on?” cause I had blood here and down. I says “I never soiled his shirt.” He just got very cross with me.

01:30 But when I got to Port Moresby and I was there for about a week, a bit more than a week, and my arm was still up a bit and they said “You can go back, but you’re not fit for front line, you can give them a hand if they want to roll some oil drums off or whatever, give them a hand there you know.” They flew me across with a group of other blokes from Port Moresby to Buna, and we went by barge from

02:00 Port Moresby to Buna up past Gona and Sanananda and those places to Finschhafen. And the worst of it was over, so lucky again, lucky again. There was some about but not many, the Japanese, it broke me heart there I wasn’t with him, there was a bloke I joined up with, Harry Drummond. We were only kids together, but we formed a, good mates. I went up and seen

02:30 where he was buried, tin hat put on a cross, you know that sort of thing. Broke me up a lot. But what broke me up more when I found out from another mate, he was tortured. He was shot, wounded, and they took him, and they tortured him overnight so that somebody else would come out, so they could shoot them. And that stuck in me mind. Cause I felt guilty I feel, cause I would’ve been with him. We were,

03:00 like you and I are mates, if you went that way and I went that way, that is how it always went. So we followed him as far as we could until they started to disperse and we went up towards Wewak. This is where we done all this corduroy road, for the engineers, for the troops to go forward. And we killed one of our own blokes; we felled a tree on him. Well that comes out as official war things as a war injury, no, injured.

03:30 That was that, we went up by barge to a place called Sio. It’s up near Wewak. It’s like pampas bushes all the way; it’s not like a real jungle. And I come home from there. But after the war I really copped it. I copped Tarakan from day one. That, when I come back from there,

04:00 we had, 1944 was really a lost year. Like we only trained and we went on, we didn’t seem to, the Yanks was takin’ over more, and more, so they decided we had to be in action, so they decided in 45, we went to a big island called Morotai, and there was hundreds of thousands of troops there, Americans, Filipinos,

04:30 everything you can mention. And said to Ruck, I said “Where are we going?” He said “I dunno where we’re goin but we’re goin a long way.” We gone in barges to do a landing. I says “That sounds pretty kosher.” So, we start off and strange little inc, tell me if I shouldn’t be saying anything, but little incidents going on, we’re lined up, you’ve gotta line the barges up to get goin, like trucks, you gotta get everything ready and everything, and putt, putt, putt, it was about

05:00 oh, from here to say, 200 yards from the shore, these are lining up. A bloke leaned over the barge and shook me hand, and another shook me hand. I said “What’s this?” They said “We’re not going, we’ve had enough war.” Soon as the barges started to go they just jumped back like that and swam to the, they’d had enough. Their nerves had went, you know. Said “We can’t face any more.” Don’t know what happened to them. Some said they had two years gaol. I don’t know whether they did or not.

05:30 Anyway, we got going, we went about 700 mile down, and we landed at this island, it was only eleven by five. But I never seen anything like the artillery and the dive bombers, mostly ours fortunately. But I thought it was going to sink the place. I thought “There’d be nobody here.” I don’t think it killed one bloody Jap. They’d been there for years. They knew where to go

06:00 back, they had tunnels, they had their big guns in the tunnels on rails. And all this stuff you know. When we landed there that morning in May. We landed there that morning, and there was little, just ahead of us was a little group went in, they’ve gone on about 200 yards, but there was like shelters put up, like canvas shelters, and there was Indonesians, little people, with men and women with little legs like that,

06:30 been shot through the ankles and that by the Japanese so they couldn’t assist us in any way. They were sort of sick and vomiting, and just in me own little, you could see, twice as big as this room, that’s all you’re interested in, that’s where you’re goin. And that line there’d be about 20 people. That was a pretty ordinary start. Down the bottom of the thing was heaps of bloody Japs, but there was hundreds of oil wells, with the derricks,

07:00 up the big derricks, they were all in them sort of things and everything, and it was all sort of. The first part of it was like the First War sort of thing, you fight in trenches sort of thing. You know, because they had all the gear. We had as much gear as them, but they knew exactly where to go. When they vacated the beach, they could go back 400 yards. They’d know exactly where to go, because they’d measure it. And then they could drop mortar bombs in that one spot,

07:30 we would be up there of a night trying to unload ammunition and stuff and they'd have fairy lights they'd go up and light the whole sky, and then they'd start these mortars on you, with the things. They finally got through, oh, a long time, a fair while, to, before we got up into, and it went from where it was flat, and no trees, just these oil wells and we went up into thick jungle, thick, thick jungle, there it is there.

08:00 That's official war photo, and that's the sort of jungle you went into. That's where we went to this Helen Hill and we got posted there and where Bluey Mackey, one of our fellows, got a Victoria Cross. Captain Jack Travers got a Military Cross, and Yorkey Reidy got a Distinguished Conduct Medal, and we still didn't take it.

08:30 A lot of our blokes were left dead there. One morning there we got out there, we got out there, we're waiting for the Australians or the Americans to come and drop, we called it jelly petrol, it was napalm. Dropped that on it, cause we couldn't take it. We get back up the hill from there you gotta get back in and you get to where this hill was, and

09:00 they said "We want about nine blokes, nine, ten." and I happened to be one, they said, to walk up this hill. A hundred went in first and they got knocked out. Not killed, they just got forced out with machine gun fire an" all that stuff. An they said, the lieutenant was with us, and I was there and the corporal, they said, "All we want to do is draw fire, see if there's

09:30 anyone there." It literally means turning a card, if they're there, you're dead. If they're not there, you're kosher. You first, you start to take a, that's what they call a short step. You're not actually steppin' out, you know, you're moving" with everybody, but as soon as somebody's hit you gotta try and get him out but you gotta try and get yourself out, because we were no hope. They got up there, half way up, and Christ we come amongst the bloody,

10:00 our dead and their dead, they're layin everywhere, machine guns, where the Japanese were, the artillery had pounded them. Cut one bloke's arm off there and maggots that big! Billions comin' out. One of our blokes was layin" there, he'd served a mass before he went in, layin" on his back. His trousers were down, I don't know to this day whether it was blown or what was done, it looked to me like the back of his bum was cut off.

10:30 Cut off because the Japanese were starvin." Maybe it wasn't, maybe it was something else, but as soon as I looked at it I thought that's, you walked amongst that and we still didn't get any fire, and luckily we got to the top and they'd gone. We done patrols after that which made me a little bit, you know. When this attack went in when they got these decorations, we were in the centre, like that,

11:00 the section I was with the, they were in the centre, of the hill like that, small hill, but a hill. Each side, that side Bluey Mackey went and this side a bloke named Ray Lawrence, he had a course, two sections went up. And us being higher, they couldn't see each other of course, Bluey Mackey, he's the bloke got the VC [Victoria Cross], he yelled out to me, "Tell us when we're level." you see, and I was a bit tardy, I know he was crooked on me this day, but as soon as I got up at all there was a machine gun

11:30 trained on her, anyway, I had to get up, and I said, "You're level now." And as soon as I got down like that a machine gun came over, there was little shrub like that, a machine gun came and cut it off, just like you would with a motor mower, would have got me across there, would've cut me in half, you know. One of those things, you're not supposed to be killed there, are you? Soon as you got down. We gave covering fire there, we kept firing at the,

12:00 where we thought the Japanese were, while the others went in and went around it. Then we done patrols. How you're not supposed to be killed. I went on every patrol. Bar one night. And we were down on the flat where the oil derricks were, and we were guarding, we're told it was heavy water. We didn't know what it meant; they said it was heavy water. We thought "It was drinkin' water or something." got a big hole

12:30 and we're minding that. And of course the Japs are still intermingling in the dark, getting through and cutting a few throats and throwing spears, and all that sort of stuff. I'm sittin there takin my two hour shift, in behind a tree or wherever I was, just there like that. And all of a sudden I got terrible pains, driving pains, it's amoebic dysentery, all that comes away is pure blood, it just comes away, and I didn't, I didn't know anything then, I didn't know anything for about twelve hours.

13:00 I just collapsed, and when I woke up I was in a Casualty Clearance Station, that tidied me up and they tried to force these sulphur drugs into me and that sort of stuff, I remember that. And that section that I was with, a bloke come in to me, this is like the next day an' that. This bloke said to me, "You're from 18 Platoon, pioneer." I said "Yes." He said "Jesus." he said, "They've had a bloody accident." I said "What happened?" He said "They went down the beach." he said, "And" they

13:30 tripped over a, tripped a wire, you know a sea mine, but it was planted on the beach. And it blew em to pieces." Half of those blokes were blown to pieces and I was always with them. And that's the only patrol I never went on. I went on every one before and every one after. It was just as though something wasn't meant to be killed there. You know,

14:00 more or less, how it happened. You think of em all. There's blokes there. One bloke from Port Lincoln,

he had a little girl, who used to write to him, yeah, you always have a sense of guilt. You know, “You shoulda done more, you shoulda done that, or you shoulda.” Can’t help blame I think. You can only

14:30 go where you’re sent, go where you’re sent, that’s the thing, nobody. There is better soldiers than others too, there’s no doubt in the world about that. But they’re a rarity. There’s only about one in twenty soldiers who have ever been fired at. Because you gotta have so many. You gotta have that many to keep one person in the front line. You’d be here of a night and you’d be trying to get a bit of sleep, and a bit further than that room there you’d hear the Japanese there and they’d have

15:00 the gramophone playin.” And they’d be singing in that screechy silly voice, God, kill tone, I know I shouldn’t say it but that’s the way, I don’t like “em anyway. “Aaaaheeehhaaah.” goin’ on, I thought “Oh, Christ, it’s ah, he got killed there, Terry Armstrong.” They always liked to be two in a hole, you dig a hole you see. If it rained, for three weeks we never took our boots off, and then your bloody skin fell off your boots, feet. But we were, everyone liked to dig holes

15:30 where two blokes could get in, for company and all that sort of stuff. When it rained you were up to there in water. So they’d dig around this bloody place where I am, bugger me, I’m on me own. And he said “You’ll be all right Ron.” I said “I’m not too bloody right.” I said “Make it bigger, for three.” And he said, “You’re right.” he said, “What I’ll do.” he said, “I’ll put a bit of string on my arm, and I’ll tie it on my arm, and if you get a bit restless during the night.” the Japs used to sneak around. What they’d do, you know you’d

16:00 be up there in water, tropical rains, you can imagine. And they would, there’d be bits of mud thrown, they’d just go plot, plot, plot, I didn’t know at the start what it was. They would do this so you’d fire, then they’d throw a grenade in. You know.

They were testing to see if someone was in the hole?

Yeah. They’d know somebody was there if you fired, or anything, but they’d plop these things, things, things in the bloody thing. Anyway, he put this bloody bit of string on his arm.

16:30 And I get a bit panicky, I think “Hoo, hee.” What’s going on here, give it a bit of a pull, and it comes away! It’s comin’ in like, you know, there’s no fish on the end. And what they used to do, they thought, the Japanese, that it was either a signal wire, which they would cut, or it’s a booby trap, they cut. The next morning the bloody mongrel went to sleep and it fell off his arm. But I didn’t know. I spent a restless bloody night I can tell you. You know, you, you only

17:00 close together, but it doesn’t matter, you get a bit, your nerves start to go and another thing there, we’re walking along this track up in Borneo there, and there’s a bloke layin on the side of the track, there’s tracks that wide and mud you know, about that wide, and he’s layin there, no rifle, no pack, he’s vomitin’, he’s green in the face, from shock,

17:30 and he’s vomiting. Bloke said, “Blokes walkin” in front of me.” he said, “Pheeeth, like that to him.” I said “What’s goin on? I’m always the last to know.” I said “What’s goin on?” He said “This bloke shot himself, but through here where all the bones and that were.” Yeah, but his nerve went. People didn’t think of it in those days, they just thought he’d dingoed out of it [been a coward]

18:00 but he wasn’t. He was terrified. You’ve only got so much to give. Something snaps, I don’t give a bugger what anybody says. Another bit of trivia there. We were doing this patrol, standing patrol, where you left one place with a platoon and you went around and you stopped the night and you went and done another patrol looking for where they were and that, we got a message through that the whole of the Japs. We were about five or six

18:30 mile from the mainland of Borneo. The message was that the whole of the Japanese that were left there had had enough, they were going to break out, and this was the only track where they were going to get out and go from there, and could we hold it for an hour or so until the 48, they were the crack battalion, till they could come around. And I don’t know why the officer said to me “cause I didn’t know bloody much. He said “You set up three Bren guns, set them up” and we set them up as it was, anyway, they didn’t come.

19:00 Forty eight come around and they consolidated and I think it might have given em a bit of a scare and they went somewhere else. They wouldn’t do any good because the Dyaks there were fierce tribes. Don’t know whether you’ve heard of em have you, Dyaks? Bout that wide and about that high and very fierce, they have a curved knife like the Ghurkhas have, you know. Even now the Indonesians leave em alone. No. They would, I suppose they done it to our

19:30 blokes when they were winnin. The Japs were winnin. They would get a load of Japanese on their canoes, cut their heads of and bring their heads back in a bag, claim so much. I suppose they done it to our blokes too. Well they had nothin to lose. They were independent people.

What did they claim, money or goods?

Money or goods.

20:00 Whatever, yeah, yeah. There was a little town in Tarakan, little town. And we got to go through and clear it all out, but I couldn’t tell whether they were bloody Japanese or Chinese, they got Chinese and

Japanese. You gotta kick the doors down and if there was anything there you sprayed it or threw a grenade. But it was ordinary,

20:30 all ordinary, yeah. That much, that much.

These were local villages or camps.

It was local village there. That was the main village of it. The Dutch had had it before. It was Dutch East Indies before, all of that. They had a swimmin pool there, and for the gentlemen and ah, yeah.

21:00 I think I need a spell, just to rejuvenate me memory a bit.

Talk about your dad then.

Well I go back with Dad to I suppose the late twenties. Dad was on the Water Board, water works here, good worker, mining and that, they were diggin, he told me, this is was what he told me,

21:30 “They were digging under the Rosehill race course where the train used to go for some reason and a man came round to pay em on the Friday and he said “there’s no more work Jack.” Dad was Jack. “There’s no more work Jack.” cause the grant, they got a grant for this and a grant for that, it’d cut out. So what does Dad do? He got Mum and I, he’s like Irish. He gets Mum and I, goes and gets drunk, plays cards, and does the lot.

22:00 Does the lot. And that was a. But he would go, sometimes in later life he’d go two years, eighteen months without a drink. But once he had a drink, he always get drunk, and get abusive, not physically abusive, but I know he used to, him and Mum’d, she was very placid, he would abuse her. Not physically, I never ever seen him strike ‘er. But say nasty things you know. I used to hate the idea of him being drunk.

22:30 I just hated it because he was two different men. You know. Funny man, but you see that mud hut where we lived. Did you see that? What’s he do? He goes up to sell our tin and gold. We used to send the tin to Melbourne, the gold you used to sell at a bank. He’s drunk and he buys Mum a bloody fur coat. A fur coat, have a look at it, you know, really, when you think back, only an Irish

23:00 man could do that, couldn’t they? You know, a fur coat. That’s still a joke in the family. Yeah, Dad and the fur coat, we had to take it back and redeem it of course. But even there you’ll see around the car and that. We always had a sense of dressin well. No good being poor and looking poor. Even when I got sixteen and seventeen, I wanted a tailor-made suit believe it or not. They were hard to get in those days. If you got two pound a week, two pounds a

23:30 week say at my age, you wouldn’t get two pound, but you’d get a quid, one pound a week. And a suit was eleven pound. That was eleven weeks” work. But on today’s salary, even a measly salary of six hundred a week or something, six elevens are sixty six, it flows it into bloody, that’s up at six grand. So I got this suit, Mr Parry made it, a little pommy tailor I met, oh, this is how innocent I was. Standin’ up and he said,

24:00 “Which side do you dress on?” And I said “I don’t know, I just get the buttons and just go across like that with it.” “No.” he says, “Which side do you dress on?” And I said “Just what I told you.” He said, “Where’s you put your dick?” I said “Just hangs in the middle.” I didn’t know what he bloody meant. Oh God I must have been sick all my life.

I didn’t even know they tailored for that.

Oh, right up into the

24:30 groin, oh yes, oh yes. And tuck it down all the measurements they were to be done, hand stitched and everything a lot of them, it was good. “Oh Christ.” I thought, “I was good then.” But we always would never go up and, even after the war. See I come out of the war, we had an illegitimate child, what they call them in those days, lovely name, that’s her now, the one sittin on the

25:00 right, sittin on the right. But then I had Max, he was born in 1945, when still the war was on, in January. So I come out of the army. I’ve got no education, no qualifications whatsoever for anything. And I got two kids. So from being in the army where your hands are soft and all that, I get an axe, that’s all I know what to use.

25:30 I go out into the bush and dry wood. I don’t know if you’ve ever cut. Dry wood is torture. Your hands. All the blisters go off your hands, they all break, you end up peein’ on ‘em, to harden ‘em up. I done that for, 12 months, then I got a job on a pine plantation. Down at Stanley, just out of Beechworth, it was in the fires, and I got on all right with me prunin

26:00 the trees and cutting down bushes an” that. And I got sort of leading hand there. Come to the top a little bit. I was the best axeman in the bush, up around the north east in the bush, not on the log, not on the log, I couldn’t cut on the log, I wasn’t quick enough, but getting” the day’s wood, I could cut about five quart of wood, it was a lot of wood in those days. An anyway, I done that, and a bloke said to me, “Why don’t you go put in for a job up the mental hospital? It’s easy work you know.”

26:30 It’s a brutal place to work when you think about it with respect in those days, brutal. I said “I’ll put in

for it." I got the job. You were sort of just a woodsman. And you had to pass these exams and I, they gave me a book, an" they've got things, you can imagine you've never went to school, you've got hemotemasis, hemoptysis, and

27:00 diarrhoea, an all this, it's like me looking down a deep well, I don't know even when to start. The people who were educated at least they knew how to spell these things. Even a word like roll, I didn't know whether it was r o l e, r o l l, you know, I had to go through all, I had a go, I said "No, I can't do this." and anyway, the bloke that's secretary up there Jesus, he said "I got as much bloody brains as these people that are doing it. Well." he said, "I'll get somebody." Well he got a bloke that had passed his exams, a bloke called Jack Palmer, and in his spare time I'd go over to him.

27:30 he would read me out what was going on and I had to feed him back what I knew. Went on. And I got through, I had six exams in three years and I got them. After that I never looked back. But eh, charge nurse and that, and I got my confidence back. But even then, I had to have a medical dictionary in me drawer and I had to have an ordinary dictionary, because I was never cert[ain]. It's a bugger when you're not certain.

28:00 It's always, have I spelt that right? It mightn't worry people that, who can spell, you know, even Sandra, she's a school teacher now, not working, she was a high school teacher, she says words I don't know. I didn't know for a long time, what the, genre. Genre, a genre, I says "I never heard of it." I says, "Somebody made this one up." She said "Oh, Dad." But even now, as old as I am, I'm interested in words.

28:30 I reckon anybody, I was always a terrific reader. I read everything from my first little cowboy books right through to War and Peace and Tolstoy stuff. I'm not saying I absorbed it all, I read it all. The one that's right now, what's its bloody name, oh God, South African bloke.

29:00 Bryce Courtenay, yes, Bryce Courtenay. I like [Jeffrey] Archer too, you know, the bloke that was in gaol over there. I don't think he was a great writer, but he was a great story teller.

Did your parents teach you to read then?

No

How did you pick up reading?

We tried. Mum had, in those days what you would call a reasonable education. Mum couldn't even write very good and Dad could just write his name, he had more clue up there. We tried, it used to be called

29:30 correspondence, where they sent it from Melbourne, they sent you up a heap of papers, but nobody could, Mum couldn't explain it to me you see. I just started readin bloody little cowboy books, little books like that. Riders of the Purple Sage or something, and for years those Indians, the Sioux. I used to call them "Soyex." they were the "Soyexes." my word they were. And no one was getting away from that. But you'd be frightened you'd bring out this

30:00 word in front of somebody, you're always, lack of confidence.

But you learn techniques to get round this socially though?

Oh yes, you do learn techniques. I remember when we were in Fremantle. That poor bugger, Harry Drummond got killed I told you about. We wanted to send a telegram, so, right, I'll send a telegram and I looked over and he's writing and I said

30:30 to this bloke, we're both 19. I said, "How do you say "following"?" I was going to say to Mum, "Letter following." He wouldn't tell me. I says, "You're a bastard." He said, you know, "You're putting me on." I says "No, you're a bastard." I don't know. And I said, "Letter later." You gotta be like somebody that can't, we had one bloke, Bluey Smith. Bluey would talk politics to you, well today if he was alive, as good

31:00 as anybody ever seen, couldn't read or write. But he'd be going down to play, going down to the training camps and that. And he'd say, 'Left the old glasses out there. What's in the headlines and what's there and what's that?" Great memory, great memory, he had it all. I used to, I got very good in me job though, like as a psychiatric nurse. I'm not just being smart, but I,

31:30 the thing that, I had a heart attack when I was fifty. I worked forty years. I said "That'll do me." I had a heart attack; they said "Do you want to get out or not?" They said, "We'll carry ya. Do as you like more or less thing, charge nurse like." I said "No." I said "I'll get out." But they said over there, I've heard different, blokes that went as the charge nurse, but the cook, one of my mates was a caterer. And he said "You got a good wrap Ron." I said "What's that?" He said "I was having a drink with Dr

32:00 Pearce and he said "We got the best charge nurse in Ryan but we can't keep him there, he's down the pub most of the bloody time." cause, I drank a lot a grog. In the book you"ll see it, you"ll see this one day, you'll have a laugh. I won't make money, but it"ll be something to read. My old grandfather, no, I tell you a lie, my great grandfather, this is what comes through the story, I don't, whether he was dying,

32:30 he was, for a Ryan, they died in the 40s 50s and 60s. Dad was 46 when he died. I said, the doctor said,

old grandpa Ryan in those days, what they said, “What’s wrong with him, what’s really wrong?” “There’s nothing wrong with him, he’s just worn out, like, old and all the organs are worn out.” And they asked him “Did he drink?” And there was a dredge up there, a dredge, I don’t know if you know a dredge, it’s a big thing that dredges all the dirt up.

33:00 Thousands of yards of dirt and you get the tin out of it and it leaves a big hole in the ground which is unsightly. You come from Tasmania; you’d know bloody dredges and that over there. You’ve only gotta look at that Mt Lyell, Mt Morgan and those places. An anyway, he said you know that big, Wire water dam they used to call it, wire water dam. But he’d, being an ole” bloke they used to call it the “Wirey.” He said, “You know that old Wirey.” he was an Irishman, “You know that ole Wirey.” he said, “I drank more whiskey than in the Wirey dam.”

33:30 so I carried on. I drink whisky. I mean I get a laugh out of “em. I’m a connoisseur you see, of whisky. You’d better not believe this but it’s true. I’d had some white wine. So I thought “I don’t care, that’s pretty bloody, not very potent that bloody old white wine.” So I made meself a shandy, put the whisky in the wine. I still do it. But nobody else in Australia drinks it.

34:00 **I’ve never had it before.**

And you won’t again, but it’s bloody potent.

Did the army teach you to drink? Or were you drinking before then.

No, I’d a drink before then, I used, I drank before then, yeah, yeah. I drank ever since. I’ve drank less in the last few years, because I haven’t been that well, you know. You get old, but I put a couple of drinks in me of a night and I talk to the dog.

34:30 We have a little discussion me and my dog. And of course they all laugh at me, but up in that light up there you see, there’s still a bit of religion left in me. I say a prayer night and morning. I don’t believe anybody pushing it down me neck that religion or whether there’s God. I don’t care if you’re an atheist or what you are, as long as you believe it and keep it to yourself. That’s kosher, you know. If anyone comes to the door I’m never rude, I say “Look I’m sorry, I’ve got me own religion, thank you.” And if they don’t go you’ve gotta say well, shut the door.

35:00 I don’t wish to be rude, but I put the light globe up there you see, when it’s on, say me prayers to that. Just a focus point you know. Said to San [?] and them, he’s up there, he says “Jeez, you’ve had it, we’ll get you bloody certified.” Well if there is a God, if there is, I’m an each way better. You better, whether there is a god, you take, well he might be. So I said “If the God that I know is around, he’s not sittin in the Vatican either. He’s as much

35:30 as being in there, as he has sittin in a bloody gold chair at the Vatican.” You know. I still think that there is.

Did you think that when you were serving?

Did I ever, did I ever, but each way. When you got out of a bit of trouble you used to say just report that, might have been, it was there. Say you were one of the

36:00 blokes standing there, come up and said, “Hey, Max.” there’s no Max now UNCLEAR, and he said “Catholic.” I said “Yeah.” he said “Big log about that big, down the back, beside the track and there’s mud there.” He said “There’s a priest there if you ever wanna go and have a talk to him.” I said “No worries about that.” So I go and kneel down, “Bless me father.” you know. He said “You’re scared son.” I said “Not really, I’m petrified.” I said “I’m petrified about this.” and he said “You’ll

36:30 be all right.” But you’d say, “Oh God, let me out of this and I’ll never do anything wrong again, I’ll be so bloody good I’d be sanctified I think.” But when you got away from it like you fell by the wayside again. As normal people do. But I still, it’s just a comfort to say a prayer, that’s all. I have a word, it keeps my family all right.

And when you did come out of something that someone else didn’t,

37:00 **like that patrol you didn’t go on, what did you think about God then? Did you think of him then?**

Ah, I thought “There might be a reason, but he’s not a very fair God, not a very fair God.” But then again he’s not is he, when you see Iraq and that sort of stuff , I was physically sick about Iraq, believe it or not, because I don’t think it’s a just war.

37:30 I do not think it’s a just war. We went in there with a sledge hammer to crack a walnut. They had nothing, bloody nothing. And the might of the world. It’s all right to say “Clear up.” Saddam Hussein is a bad man, I’m not that stupid, I know he’s a bad man. But what are they going to fill that void with? I mean if they go like Iran, they’ve got

38:00 suppression there just the same, that’s all right.

What did you think of the motives of the Americans?

I still, I'd like you to explain what their motive was, their real motive, never mind about the smokin gun crap. Cause I just don't believe that. I don't believe that for a minute. They give the Jews more than the, the, Israel's got more than they'll ever see, Pakistan's got it, India's got it, North Korea looks like they've got it.

38:30 They didn't go for that. It's something to do with oil, I don't know, that's what I think it is. I wish someone could explain it to me.

And how does that compare with the war you served in?

Well I thought statistics show that no one got killed so I thought it was a bloody good war. This is a bum war that shouldn't have been because they'd bypass this island but it was just as real to us. We lost hundred, not just us, but the troops that went in there lost

39:00 180 killed. And we never lost one in Iraq. You've got to be doing something right haven't you, not to be hit at all. Jeez they gotta been doing something right. I woulda liked to, I woulda went for a trip to this one on a boat. I reckon they had it kosher. Good luck to the kids. I have a great,

39:30 great feeling for once a month, every second Monday of the month, there's a group, you couldn't call it a group, go into Duckboard House in Melbourne, do you know it at all? It's a little, a branch of the first RSL [Returned and Services League] in Melbourne, it's an old building, it's in Little Collins Street. We meet there from the pioneers, the 2/3rd Pioneers. Some times there's four of us, sometimes there's five, sometimes there's three.

40:00 You find a great strength in each other. You go after all those years, sixty years. But you sorta have the same speak. You might kill a few more than you did, not a problem. But you are on the same level. Nice company, you have a few drinks and a bit to eat every month. I went in to Anzac Day, got a ride in a jeep, I

40:30 couldn't walk the distance.

Tape 3

00:30 **I just want to jump around. You came back from the Middle East on leave. Were you reunited with your wife-to-be then? Was that when you ...?**

Ah, good one. When I came back from New Guinea, I went to Beechworth. See, this wool shed, we lived in this scruffy, drab place, that's about six mile outside of Beechworth. but I actually went into Beechworth. No, I tell a lie.

01:00 When I come back from the Middle East I went up to Beechworth. And I still never forget her. You know, how could you, but I didn't forgot her. I rang the hospital, the mental hospital, we always called it the hospital. Miss Knight. Knight was her name, Wilma Knight. I said, "Could you leave a message? I said, "It's Maurice Ryan, if she wishes to see me, I'm down the pub. Such and such a pub. I'll be having a drink there."

01:30 And I don't know whether it was that day or not. I know it was soon. I think it was that day. She come down with the baby in a pram, and herself all dressed up. We sort of went on from there, and I, we didn't get married then, and then when I went to New Guinea, when I come back from New Guinea,

02:00 I asked her to marry me. I said to her, "When are you going to marry me?." I said, so it was a pretty big workup this was. And she said "When you ask me." I said, "Well, I'm asking you." So she, her mother, well, there is such a thing, I hope this is on tape anyway. If there was such a beast, and she was a beast of a woman. She was, really. If I've got to meet her in the after world, I'd say the same.

02:30 She, any rate, the wife to be, she come around and met her, and we went for a walk and that sort of thing, then when I come back from New Guinea, I said, "We'll get married. She said, "Yes." So she had to leave home. She was sort of kicked out. I said, "I'll meet you on Monday morning, and we'll go down to Wangaratta and get married." And the bloke with me, knew her and knew me,

03:00 he ended up marrying her sister, afterwards. Anyway, we went down to Wangaratta, because with the Catholic Church you had to give so many weeks in advance, even then. You know, and all this, and she would have to have Catholic instruction and all this, so anyway we go down to Wangaratta, and we got to two or three places and they don't want to marry us. She mucks up her age, because she's not twenty one and you've got to be twenty one to get married in those days. So anyway we finally get to the Presbyterian place,

03:30 and I said, "Now you get your bloody age, you were born in 1922." Anyway, we got that kosher and we got married there. At Wangaratta. And we had one night honeymoon at the Princeton Hotel, Wangaratta. I remember that. I got half shickered [drunk]. Didn't do much good. And anyway, that was it. I went back shortly after that, up onto the Tablelands of Queensland,

04:00 and that was in ‘44. Yeah. Max was born in ‘45. We had a good marriage. Whether you believe in gypsies or not, my mother was a bit of a mystic and things. She believed in things, you know, little omens and things like that. There’s a game where the table would rock, when people would put their hands together.

04:30 Don’t know if you’ve played it. Or tried it. Well, this was before we were married. Me and Dad and we were playing this, you know. “Yes, you’ll get married.” This is true. I don’t know who was tapping the table. And “You’ll get married, and you’ll be married a long time.” “Would I have a happy marriage?” And it wasn’t too good on that.

05:00 “Would there be other interference, like another woman, or anything? It said “Yes.” But it said, “Would there be a divorce?” And it said, “No.” And all that come to fruition, all that. I played up and got caught, and paid the piper. But I always pray to her every night. A long time ago.

05:30 We had some good times. That’s when we’re going off to tennis there. That’s my mother. (Points to pictures) We had a reasonable social life, and then she got a bit embittered. Well, I suppose, I always thought it was half each other’s fault, you know. We were married young and not a lot, very hard. Up till the last, oh, say ten, fifteen years or so, we never as much

06:00 as had twenty cents in the bank. When you’ve got kids growing and they’re going to school, and they want uniforms and all that, and you’re working for a government wage. It never left anything. I was trying to pay, this is an old war service home, at least it was cheap rent. You know, paid it off and that sort of thing. Then I got superannuated out of the government job, psychiatric nursing.

06:30 I took up a bit of cleaning around a factory at Reservoir, and doing first aid, for twelve months. That was all right. And that fell through, and then I went cleaning up at La Trobe University. For about, nearly ten years there. Used to get up and go over there of a morning. It was an extra supplement coming into my wage. Then I got a bit worse and that, and I got a totally incapacitated war pension. Which was all right for money.

07:00 With my superannuation and it, I’ll never be rich, but I’ll never want. I’m comfortable. Now they give you a gold card. That pays all doctors and anybody, and all that. But, yeah.

Now, when Wilma, wasn’t it?

Yes.

When she met you at the pub, was that the first you’d heard of your child? The first you knew? Did you know she’d had …?

I knew she’d had a child. A daughter. Yeah, yeah.

07:30 Because it got to the point, we did get married, and then the old priest at Beechworth, he was Father Ryan, too. Not my father, Father Ryan. I wasn’t there, but he sort of told her that in the eyes of the church, we weren’t married, you see. Because we wasn’t married in the Catholic Church, and the fact that she wasn’t Catholic. Well, I never asked her. I never believed in that. I never asked her. But she went and had Catholic instruction, which was nice,

08:00 and we went down and we just had to kneel at the altar, and he remarried us. Very antiquated and stupid. Bloody thing. I’d be married in a park now, if I was getting married. Really, I don’t believe in all the bullshit. It’s only for the family, really, isn’t it? You know. And I always got, like, I felt with religion, when I was a little kid, I told you that, that little photo there. When I was at St Fiacre’s at Leichhardt.

08:30 And no money then, either. Like, no money at all. No school money. And the Catholic Church were buggers for money. And they’d get you in the hall. And all the little girls would be sitting separate. You’d think you were going to impregnate them or something, and all the little boys would be sitting up the other end, and they’d say, “Stand up those that did not bring their school money.” And, oooh, I’d stand up and I’d go red in the face,

09:00 and these little girls are going “Heh heh heh heh.” and I thought, I wrote it in the book, and I said, “Some of those mustn’t have brought it in, because they would have been just as bloody poor as we were.” And I couldn’t give them my school money, because Mum didn’t give it to me. But then I got a bit embarrassed about it, and I used to, not wag school, but down near the Leichhardt stadium, we used to be at this school, so Mum would take me, across Norton Street, she’d take me,

09:30 and when she started to walk, I’d walk. I’d be behind her. Stalk her. She’d come back, I’d go back. She’d walk twenty, thirty yards ahead, I’d walk too. I wasn’t having this school on, I was getting too much cane, you know. We went past the fire brigade, and Mum must have said to this fire brigade blokes, they were on the opposite side of the street to what I was, and they used to try to frighten me to go back to school. And I used to tell them to go to buggery, I was going home.

10:00 Go home to Mum. Because Mum’s idea, she was a psychologist, she’d let you have the morning off, then she’d fill you up with bloody medicine so you’d go to the toilet all afternoon, so you didn’t have much fun, but I didn’t like school. But I had an aunty that lived at Maroubra. Kingsford, actually. Out near the airport. She was Dad’s sister, she wanted to take me away from where that old Hudson, that work.

10:30 She wanted to take me and educate me. And I was too sooky la la. Wouldn't have that on. Wouldn't leave my Mum. No. No Mum, no bloody school. So, I didn't go. But it would have been a chance. But what I'd have gained there, I would have lost in other ways. Because in my old age it's been a comfort to know that my mother and father loved me. You know, it's been a great comfort. And any little goodies, you know, at Christmas time.

11:00 It's so hard in those days. At Christmas time. You know these blocks of chocolates, about this big, they were two shillings then. That was it. Total Christmas. You know, never mind about, I never seen a turkey till I was in the Middle East, and they had turkey for bloody Christmas dinner. I thought, "What the bloody hell have we got here?" No, never had anything like that. But you can make up a lot. Well, I did, I must have been just a sooky la la, if you feel you're wanted, you know.

11:30 **I wonder if you could talk me through your time from Tarakan to coming back to Australia?**

Well, we went, we kept doing patrols, even though the war finished. There was still Japanese wandering around. The last one I had anything to do with killing was after the war And an officer come through from one of the other battalions,

12:00 with a couple of blokes and he said, "We're looking for someone prisoners, to take prisoner, to see what's going on. To see if we can get some information. "Is there any Japs around?" And I said, "There's one just down the road, I can see him from here, if you want to, you know." He said, "Jesus." he said, "I don't think he'd know much." And I said, "No. He wouldn't know bloody much." He said, "He had a Bren gunner, you know, the Bren guns, like sub machine gun. Bit bigger." And he said, "Do you want to shoot him?" I said, "No, I don't want to shoot him."

12:30 He said, "Use your shoulder?" I said, "Oh, yeah." The bloke put it on his shoulder and Bang!! This bloke, the Jap, he was bloody hungry, he had a long stick with a bit of dried fish on the end of it, and another stick to help him walk. And he was just walking across the track. He just blew him to bits. Another little episode, when we get further on to Tarakan, it was at Tarakan, near these places, and we'd do patrols,

13:00 like sitting where we are, here's the middle of the island. And we'd do patrols, do patrols from that way, and do patrols from that way. But you'd stop there. This was our base camp. And we were lining up one night and they've got this bloody baked beans or something like that. You know, you're in a line. There were about ten, fifteen blokes. And you know, you're looking. You're shit frightened of the bloody Japs. But you look around at your mate at the back, and you say, "How are you, Terry?" and one bloke looks around, in the line, there's a bloody Jap. In the line.

13:30 He's starving, and he's in the bloody line. And this bloke, he couldn't get out of it. He couldn't pick up his bloody gun. He's saying, "Wha, wha, wha." Anyway, we got hold of him, and they didn't do too good. Feeding him. And it was just on dark, you see. And somebody said, "Well, he's got to be taken back to the beach." Which is about halfway along, about five miles, because that's where they had a few prisoners they'd got. They go out, about twenty, twenty minutes out.

14:00 And I hear "Brrr, Brrr, Brrr." And the bloke comes back and says, "Gees, you wouldn't believe it, you know. Tried to escape." But that didn't count. Because we didn't count with them either, you see. It was a hate business. And when the war, we went down, we were guarding a radar system. It was new in those days, to me any way. Radar. You know, the planes would come in and all that sort of stuff.

14:30 One old Betty bomber come in and bombed the islands. Anyway, we were guarding that, and we walked down the beach. We had to go down a bloody great hill like that, and you had to walk down to the beach like that, and they had a set camp there, where you got your breakfast and that. And all of a sudden they put up this pole, and they've got a thing like that with a speaker on it, you see. And they said, "Peace has been declared."

15:00 And you know, everybody, sort of numbness goes over you. You don't sort of know, everything drains out of you, and all they said, "There's some big bomb." that's all they said, "Some big bomb been dropped on Japan, and as from such and such a time, the war is finished." And, just as it left, I don't know, it was a sort of a, relief it was over,

15:30 and we had about three hundred prisoners in the compound. Well, just close to where we were. It's funny with war. Some officers would have said, "Go and shoot all them." You wouldn't have thought anything of doing it. But then after a while it settled down and they, we used to take them out on working parties.

16:00 They might be digging on the road. We had a little amphitheatre there where Gracie Fields, you might have heard of her, she was a great singer in England. You know, war songs, and that, like Wish Me Luck, and all that, she come and performed and then we cleaned it up next day, there was all butts of cigarettes and the Japanese would come and pick them up. And they'd be dying having a cigarette and all this crap, then all of a sudden. And you were mean to them, like, just hated them really.

16:30 Then all of a sudden, I thought, "Hate's useless." I've got no time for them even now. Just, I don't feel anything for them now. Just let that drain out of you. Sort of, you know, it's over. Yet, when I told you, I was wood chopping. I was down the bush, chopping wood, and it was a green paddock, greenwood paddock, you know, where the trees were green. But some had been cut previous, and you know how the bushes spring off the side of the tree,

17:00 brush, Tasmanian great for bush, I was there one day on my own. It was a thousand acre paddock. And all of a sudden I started to get the shits, not literally, but I started to get the shits, because I thought, "They're moving." It's like the Japs are moving. There's somebody here behind these things. Like, this sort of thing, they'd put on themselves, you know, to move. And I got on the bike and rode home, on the pushbike. Lather of sweat. Stupid thing when I settled down, but ...

17:30 **How long after the war was that?**

Six months. Twelve months.

Any other sort of things like that, incidents that ....

Oh, I used to wake up of a night, with terrible dreams and have sweat pouring out of me. I went into a psychiatric ward used to work there with the Repat [repatriation], 15A. I didn't say to the priest I got agitated. They used to call it Agitated Melancholia. I couldn't sit here. If you said, "Sit here." no, no. I'd have to walk.

18:00 I had to be on the move all the time. And I went to see my doctor and he said "This is no good." I said, "No." He sent me in. It was night time too; he got a car to take me in town, one of the specialists in there. He was head of one of the psychiatric division, for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. "Repat" they called it in those days. Doctor Eyles. And he'd got a big desk to impress everybody.

18:30 The big head man. And he said, "Sit down, Mr Ryan." And I said, "Excuse me, doctor, I can't sit down." Couldn't. Like I'd go and lay on the bed in here, and next minute I'd be up pounding. Get walking. They put me in the ward there, they were going to use shock treatment. But I'd seen that given and I said, "No way. No way known." Old shocko, old sparky. And I've seen it given cold, you know. Without injections, or anything. Just take you in, Bang!! Up in the air you'd go, and, no.

19:00 But after a while I settled down. That was, part from the war, and part from booze. And I don't know which, which was which. Which was doing which. Because the only time I felt good was when I was half blotto [drunk]. Or fully blotto. I could drink a lot. This is all going to tape, isn't it?

19:30 Well, all right. The last years, before I had this heart attack, and that. On the booze. Yeah, well, I got on the whiskey. I was carrying an attaché case. I don't know what I wanted it for. Didn't take a sandwich even. But I'd drink the best part of a bottle of whiskey a day, and look after my, and do my work, too.

20:00 But I'd have that much left in the morning. And say I got it today and took it to work, first thing I'd go in my own office, in the room, I'd go in the room, I'd get the medicine glass. And you know what a medicine glass is. Give myself a couple of them. And suck a Steam roller [a mint] to take a bit of smell away, and go in and sign the report book for the night staff, and I'd get going, I'd get going, get the white coat and all that sort of crap.

20:30 And all day I'd be having a tipple. Go down the pub at lunch time. Oh, yes, couldn't miss my lunch time. And then I'd knock off at half past four or something. But I'd leave enough for next day. See me through to, say ten or eleven o'clock, or whenever somebody was going down the thing. But that went on for a long time; I was always in a haze. It was a hard job on your nerves, too, psychiatric work.

21:00 You never got a good result, you see. Over there were chronic. And I had thirty six old men and all you ever got was, you never cured anybody. And sixty, Jesus, when I look back. Sixty was the criteria. You had to be sixty. And I had one experience there. These was a bloke Strachan, Bert Strachan. And he was a First War soldier,

21:30 and he was down the wool shed where that, you know, where I told you we were mining and that, Dad showed him how to pan a bit of gold, and that. Enough to get a sort of living, you know, out of it. And he had his little dog. But he was such a kind man. If he had one egg, he only had the dog, you know, he'd share that egg with the dog, and all that sort of stuff. He was eccentric, he really was, because he'd cut the butter and he thought the crystals in it was bloody cyanide and all of this.

22:00 But they were on their own, they had nobody to talk to, nobody to back them up. Bugger me, later in life, there's an admission comes into the ward, and as soon as he comes in, old Dr Davies was the admission doctor, he was an old bastard. Anyway, I said, "I know this man." And I said, "His name's Strachan, I bet." I didn't know who it was because there was a paper down there, a folder. I said, "That's Bert Strachan." and it was him. After all those years, and yeah.

22:30 **And who did you talk to when you came back from the war? Did you tell anybody?**

No, no. when I come back, didn't talk to anybody at all really. And I was never one for RSLs and that, because, I don't know, they were pretty cliquey to me. I don't know whether I'm insecure, or I've got to be centre of stage or something. I don't know what it is.

23:00 But then when I've got up to work at the mental hospital, whatever it was, the psychiatric hospital, most of them were, would say eighty percent, we were ex-servicemen from the Second War. They started to filter out the old people, you know. That was a dastardly place, Dastardly. See, things like, you see, you never got any leadership from the top in a psychiatric hospital at that time. There was a man came out, he was from Hungary or something,

23:30 but he was a superintendent, head of the whole place, and there was a man there, one of the patients, and he was ill. And the charge of the ward said to me, “When the doctor does his round, would you present Mr Sonenberg to the doctor?” You know, for treatment. And I said, “All right.” And he come around and I said, “Doctor.” I said, “This is Mr Sonenberg.” He said, “Mister? Mister? Huh. I don’t see any misters here.”

24:00 I said, “You misunderstood me. This is Mr Sonenberg.” And he went on with this same bloody charade, you know. He said, “Just Sonenberg to me.” he said. I thought, “You’ve been in a bloody prisoner of war camp.” This was exactly the way he treated this bloke. He was Jewish. “Sonenberg.” I thought, “This is horrible. This is bloody demeaning.” you know. That were the words. “Mister, I don’t see any misters here.”

24:30 Another one was a man, they used to, if they played up, you know, tore their clothes and that, there was a blanket they used to make of canvas, and it was like a stitched quilt, stitched in and out so you couldn’t tear it. And then all there was was the wooden floor under you, and that’s where they slept. In winter too.

25:00 And I walked in there one night. You had to, the windows were there, and they had wooden slats, and you used to, and you’d get a key, so they couldn’t get out, and so I put my foot on the canvas rug, as we called it, for them, and urine came over my bloody shoe like he’d peed on it, and all that, and wet. And the boss was in his little den, his little office, and it’s winter time and

25:30 he’s got his fire going, his big log fire, and I said, I won’t mention names, “Mr so and so.” and I said, “The patient down there, he needs a new canvas rug. He said, “How? When have you been in charge of this place?” I said, “I’m not in charge of anything. I’m just telling you what’s going on.” He said, “Get out of here.” He said. “He’s all right.” And I’ve got that stuck in my mind, how barbaric it was.

26:00 You know, the change when a Dr Cunningham Dacks came out from England. He sort of modernised it a lot. He was crucified a lot too. Because he tried to bring a bit of gentleness into the place. A bit of kindness into it, you know. As much as to say, “How would you like your father brought in, and strip off and his dignity’s gone?” All that sort of stuff. Or the ladies come in, and you strip off and just get into this gown, and all this sort of stuff. Locked in the room with a pot of a night,

26:30 and all this sort of stuff, you know. Best thing they ever done, getting rid of it.

You were telling me about dreams you were having, in the first year after the war. What would you dream of?

Well, usually, it was war things. But usually bad things. I was always getting the bad end of things. I never had a happy dream. Oh, once I did. I woke up laughing, but bugger if I know what it was about.

27:00 Always just, some was in sheer terror. Some was in sheer terror. It was as if you was almost awake. You only wanted someone to touch you, and you’d be in fear, and it gets a smell when you sweat. Night sweats, and it’s a sweet odour, or smell. And I used to get them a lot and, oh, they were always going to give me the old shocko. I wouldn’t have that.

27:30 And in later years, no. I’ve settled down all right now.

How long did it take for the dreams to stop? The war dreams.

Oh, I suppose, ten years. But it wasn’t every night though. Not actually every night. But they did occur, and I’d get in a hell of a mess. And I was good mates with a bloke at Mont Park, too. He was a psychiatric problem too, and we used to, I think we depressed each other.

28:00 You know, talk about. Old Jack would always to say, “A good clean bullet would have been better than this, Ryan, wouldn’t it?” And I’d say, “Couldn’t be any bloody worse.” You know you got depressed and that. But, oh, as the kids grew up, and got grandkids and great grandkids around me, and that. And they’re all pretty good, you know, they. If I want anything they’re always there.

28:30 Not that they swamp in on you all the time, you know, but they’re just a phone call away. Couple of them have shifted. One’s at Kilmore, and up that sort of way, but always pretty good.

How else do you think the war affected you?

I reckon, some ways it made me a bit of a coward. Before the war I was never frightened of, I was never a great fighter, but I was never afraid of physical confrontation.

29:00 That was the last thing I thought, you know. You can only get a job [punch] in the mouth. Whatever it was. But I got more, more talked myself out of something, you know. I had to be. Some aggression was knocked out.

Why do you think that was?

I don’t know. It was, well, I think, I remember walking through these dead people, and our people, who had just served mass, and just left you, and you’re looking at them.

29:30 And these bloody Japanese laying everywhere, and the total stupidity of the whole lot sort of hits you,

though. And when they said “We had to walk.” I got a fear from that day they said, “You’ve got to walk up there and draw fire.” That bloody stuffed me. Because I knew what they meant by “Draw fire.” It’s you walk there, because you’re down here.

30:00 You’re walking up like this. They’re up there, see the height of those trees. They can be up in them, or they’re up, naturally the ground’s up higher, and they’ve got machine gun nests there. And they’re going to knock you off. You can’t do anything. It’s all right to say you can do things. We tried artillery. The artillery fired till I was up there like that, and the artillery fired some marking shots, and they said to me, “Is that close enough?” And I said, “Go, get right on to them.”

30:30 because the shrapnel was coming back, and you knew, you knew, if they’re there, you’re dead. And if they’re not there, you’re not. It’s like the toss of a coin. Just like, what card did you draw, what card did you draw? Well, they were bloody gone. But that walk up there was the longest bloody walk I ever walked, and I started to put in short steps. You know. That one went all right (meaning leg), I’m trying to get this one to go.

31:00 Because you know, you know perfectly well, and when we were giving covering fire, when they won those medals, and done a terrific job. Those two sections that went up. You know, each side and that. The noise of the battle. And the screams of the bloody wounded being dragged out by the hair. One bloke was dragged out by the hair, because if you’d gone up to help him you’d have been blown to pieces yourself. And the screams and the noise and the sheer terror of it all. You haven’t got to be,

31:30 you haven’t got to be Saving Private Ryan, you know, where they go on for hours at it, you’ve only got, you only have twenty minutes. Put you in that room there and terrorise you for twenty minutes. It will stop you for all your life. Because I had a bloke, I told you about, I was talking about when they were going to break out. Remember, I said one night they were going to break out, and the squadron had to wait for the 48th Battalion to come around, there was a little fort was dug on the beach there by the Japanese,

32:00 it was just dug in the sand. It was made of like, cane. Cane. Down below was like a little office thing, if you wanted to be in an office, and a little bit higher where you could have a little gun placement thing. Well, I had a bloke who was a good fighter, good physical fighter, Western Australian, and well, the officer said to me, I was a corporal, he said, “You can set up the machine guns and that, Bren guns and that.” So I said, “I’ll do what I can.” Set them up.

32:30 And he’d had enough, this bloke. He got me; he knocked me down and had me by the leg. He said, “Don’t make me go up there. I’m gone, Max.” he said, “I’m gone.” He said, “I’m buggered.” I said, “No, Jack.” I said, “Is everything kosher?” you know. But people could only go a certain distance before “I don’t want any more.” you know. Maybe they get more help now,

33:00 but even when we come out, nobody got any help. Because you didn’t want to be, well, sooky la la, as the grandkids say. You don’t want to be seen to be, but that’s when they should have got you, because you know, I only had four years, I had four years neat in there in the army. From the fifth in “42 to the fifth in “46. but as soon as the war finished, like, when the war finished, like I said, I got to the stage where they told us on the speaker it was over,

33:30 then you got percentage points. There were so many points if you were married, and so many points how long you’d been in the service, they were written up and that. You were, that was your going home time. If I was there longer than you and married, I’d go home before you. They got us on these. I got picked to go at the time; there was a group of us.

34:00 We got on one of those old lakatoi [dugout canoe] things, the natives, I thought it was going to ruddy sink. I was a bit frightened of them. Anyway we got out and all of a sudden this great ruddy ship comes around, it’s an English ship. It’s the aircraft carrier, the [HMS] Formidable. Magnificent sight. Oh, my God. And they threw down all the ropes, you know, squares of rope that you climb on. For want of better words. And we had to get those and climb up. And we got on.

34:30 And God, they treated us like whatsaname. You wouldn’t believe it. I had dengue fever before I got to New Guinea, but they had me with dysentery in Tarakan, and I got bloody, what do you call that, ptomaine poisoning, on the ship. Jesus, talk about crook. I thought, “Gees, the old Poms [English], they don’t give up on you.” They’re not a pretty sight. We ended up in the toilets. There was about twenty of us in there. Shit and there’s vomit, and there’s bloody everything.

35:00 And I wake up, and there’s like weld decks. Big decks like this, you know, where the planes used to, well, they mightn’t now, and the planes would come in, and when the planes came in they had a place to lower them. And they could send them down and they could do work on them, see. When I wake up, I didn’t wake up, I just had this poisoning, and we just, next morning, we were found in the toilets, where we’d all dragged ourselves into. Near the toilets anyway. I wake up and there’s nurses, women, looking at me.

35:30 I thought, “My God, I’m gone. I’m gone to heaven” And they cleaned us up and we were ok. And it seemed so strange that you could have all the lights on at night, coming home in the boat, because the war had finished, you see. So much, and then they had a two-way radio to Sydney. Sydney could talk and tell us what was going on. It was a beautiful big ship. I had a photo of it, the Formidable. But then we get, this is one of the things that stick in my mind.

36:00 We get to the Sydney Heads, and it's a beautiful day. Beautiful spring, what would it be? Late spring. And it's beautiful. You can see, coming in from the ocean, you could see the Sydney Heads going, you know, and the Pommies, that was their ship, and they said, "All troops line up on deck." And I thought, "Oh, Jesus, they never give up, do they. I mean, they know you're Irish and they never let up on you."

36:30 And I thought, "This is bloody bedlam. This is stupid." Well, they got us up on deck there like that, and as we started to go through the Heads, they played "Waltzing Matilda." And I could cry today, and I cried then. We all cried. Nine out of ten cried. That, I don't say the words, but the music of it, is the best anthem we could ever have. You know. They wished us all the luck in the world and that, the old Poms. They went from boiled lollies to chockies [chocolates] in no time.

37:00 You know, you'd look at blokes and the tears was rolling down, and the blokes that, I think another thing was, I know, I'm mumbly jumping from one thing to another. But coming home, the Queen Mary, I'd never seen it before, two or three of our blokes died, coming home, with different things. Maybe injury, different things. Should have been on a hospital ship, but they died anyway. And you do a burial at sea.

37:30 And they stitch them up in a big canvas bag, but at the bottom of the bag, you see the old pirates, and that, the balls they used to fire. The cannons, the balls. One of those at the foot of each canvas. They're carried on all the troop ships. That's because you go, when you're buried, you go off a plank down the end, they shoot you off the plank.

38:00 Well, the ceremony and that, and you go down on that. You stand up actually. That's the traditional navy burial. And that took a bit of juice out of you, too, you know. To think that someone could be so close to coming home, and then the generosity of them. The generosity. Just before the war finished, before I went to Tarakan, Dad was dying, my father.

38:30 He got Hodgkin's Disease, cancer of the glands. And they gave me, from Queensland, they gave me leave. Compassionate leave to go and see him. And I was going up past, like one company would be, like say Don Company, would be over a hundred and twenty men, and then there'd be A Company and B Company, E Company, Headquarter Company. And I was walking past and different blokes come up to me. Said, "Are you the blokes going down?"

39:00 "Where would we be going? Wouldn't be going north would we?" "Going down south." and I said, "Yes. That's right." "Here's a quid, pound, pound, nearly a week's wages, ten bob, pound, give me about twelve pound." I said, "No. I won't ever see you blokes again. I wouldn't know youse if I fell over youse." "Oh, that's all right, you'll need it down there." Said, "We've got nothing to spend it on up here." And the generosity of these people. You know. It's just like somebody today giving you five thousand, you know. Just that they were so, didn't want anything in return.

39:30 That was when people were gracious. When they can just give you something with no thought of, "What am I getting out of it." you know. Yeah.

Tape 4

00:30 **I wonder if you could, just to go back again. Describe to me what you were thinking about, or who you were thinking about when they played "Waltzing Matilda." coming back into Sydney?**

Yes, it was, of all the ones that were left behind. Yeah.

01:00 All right. Yeah, think of all the ones that were left behind. See, they were so young. See, I was only twenty three when it finished, and some were younger than that. One little bloke, gee, he was a lovely little bloke. I told you, I ended up, after they went and done this patrol I didn't go on, and they got blown up on the beach,

01:30 I went, I had to come out for my dysentery, you see. Diarrhoea. And I went back to base where it was, and Ted Euliff was the officer there, lieutenant. He died a little bit later. And he said, I was a lance corporal. I wouldn't accept it like, I said, "No, no. That's like being a wine drinker. That's no good." So he said, "Well." he said, "If you don't become a corporal,

02:00 the reinforcements are coming in tomorrow to take up the slack from the ones that's gone and dead and that, and they'll be over you." And I said, "Well, I'll be a corporal. I'll be a corporal." So I done it and I handled it all right, with him. But see, even then, I wasn't, I went to schools in the Middle East, Tank Attack schools and all that sort of stuff, but I couldn't write an exposé,

02:30 see, I couldn't write. I couldn't tell them that. I sort of knew it, I had to get it in my head, but I couldn't put it down. Couldn't put it in a report. Couldn't write bloody, "Tiger tank." I suppose I could put in. You know. The old Poms played it so hard. And there was one thing I'd like to clear up. They used to say Australians got no discipline.

03:00 Australian troops, oh, they got away with murder. Didn't get away with too bloody much, because the officers say was sacrosanct. They were the top of the berth. In Australia, if you were a lieutenant and

they called you “Bill.” you know, like I’d be up on a charge. But when you were going into action, they’d say, “Whatever you do, call me Bill.” You know, I thought, “This is a little bit strange.” Yeah. But all in all...

03:30 **How did you feel about the officer that ordered you to draw fire, on that particular occasion?**

I thought, “All right.” Yeah. I thought, yeah, I didn’t think anything of it. Yeah. And another one, come around the beach. We were just finishing a patrol, that’s right. And we’re just getting back to where our base camp was on the beach, seen a log of wood come, a huge tide. It was a twenty foot tide. The tide would come in, and it’d go out twenty feet. You’d see the bloody, anyway, this was coming in. And one of the blokes said,

04:00 “There’s somebody hanging on to the bloody log.” Had a look, and it’s a bloody Jap, all right. And it’s coming in towards where we were. And he got in, and he was naked. And he got to the beach, and bloke said, you know, like showing him, hands up, hands up, like that, and he goes like that and he walks into the scrub, you know.

04:30 They shot him through the back. You know. Just, so what. I mean, he might have done some damage if he got in there. We don’t know. But it didn’t affect me, that way. I still don’t like them. Still don’t trust them. If you’d have known the fear of the public here,

05:00 in Australia in “42, it was, you could almost smell it and touch it, the fear. The fear of the ordinary people, not so much soldiers, so much, because the Japanese took everything so easy, didn’t they? They were so powerful. They took Singapore. They come right down, they took the islands. They got to a place called Koitaki, in Port Moresby, just overlooking Port Moresby.

05:30 Only for those kids that were militia battalion, and we used to call them “Choccos.” you know, Chocolate Soldier, the musical, because they didn’t join up. They weren’t volunteers. Buy they were the cream of the cream. They were great kids. Great kids.

Were there ever orders to take prisoners, or to not take prisoners?

06:00 No. Just a general order was, the general consensus was that nobody took prisoners. The Japanese, the only way the Japanese took prisoners was en masse. They never took another prisoner. They never took one ever. Never took anyone. And they just tied them up at Rabaul, tied them up to the palm trees, and used them as bayonet practice. So we never had any thought of,

06:30 didn’t matter, you know. Just worried about your own, worried about your own. A lot of times, you felt fear. Everybody, now that we’ve got older says they didn’t feel fear there was something wrong with them, you know. There was certain people would. It’s like you say, in a game, their fear level was higher, was less than some people.

07:00 You know. We had one bloke, Bluey Minter, he got a Military Medal in New Guinea, but he’d always crawl around where he shouldn’t have been. He didn’t seem to care. Didn’t mind. But I was always pretty wary. I thought you can be killed. I was always frightened of being, you know, if you’re on a patrol, and you’re the one in the front. You know, a few halfway across the road, in front,

07:30 so that you’re more or less just a clay pigeon, aren’t you. You know, if they shoot you the others know not to go. But then, if you’re the back man, he can be knocked off too. They used to have a bloke, I didn’t see him. But he was well known through New Guinea. “Piano Wire Joe.” They used to call him. A Japanese. He had, you know, the thin piano wire. He used to garrotte them at the back, anyone that was at the back line.

08:00 Just straight around and, skrrt. In the middle was good. That was about the best.

Did you have anybody killed on your patrols?

Yeah. Once.

What happened?

Oh, just run into a place we shouldn’t have been. One bloke got necked, got it through the artery.

Was it a sniper or something like that?

Yes. More or less. Didn’t see.

08:30 If you, face to face, I never really faced. We had a bayonet on when we went up to that, that’s the only time, you carried a bayonet in the jungle, but not much to run into. I did see, I was up on a hill like this, and I was looking down, and there was a hill there, small hill. Sand hill. And the Australians, we had a tank there, one tank. And it was firing these Brownings, big automatic Brownings,

09:00 and the Japanese were in trenches along there, and we were here on the side, and these infantry were coming in, Australian infantry, and all of a sudden these Japs jumped up out of the ground and raced towards the Australians. The Australians kept advancing towards them, too, with a bayonet. And with that the Japanese went underneath these holes that they had dug, and it went under this hill, you see.

09:30 Went from there, went through there. But up on the hill where I was there was two Vickers, you know, the Vickers heavy machine gun. And they cut them to pieces as they come through there. It was just like a bloody movie. You know. Just like a movie.

Were you on one of those guns?

No, I was firing with a rifle. But the machine gunners were there, we were sort of protecting the machine guns. Just in case something come around. Not likely, but we were there. They set up these two Vickers, ploughed it up.

10:00 **Did you hit anyone with your machine?**

I don't know. Wouldn't know. Just fired at them. I wouldn't have a clue. You just fired where you thought they were, you know. Wouldn't take any scalps. But then you don't know. A soldier, down on the hill, down on the flats, when it first started. It was very strange. It was just like along here,

10:30 and little places where you could hide, and you could fire at them, and they'd fire at you, and you'd fire, but in between, walking around, was a bloody, I thought it was a bloody Jap. But it wasn't a Jap. It was, they didn't try to kill him either. He was a Chinaman. It was the first bloody lunatic, if there's not a better word, I've ever seen. The next time I see this bloke they had him, we had him, in a cell. Like he was a sick man, in the head.

11:00 But he seemed to be walking amongst. Well, nobody would have walked there. They never killed him. Don't know if he was bloody pre-ordained for this caper, maybe he was one of the big fellows. But they didn't kill him, no. no. Didn't kill him.

You mentioned before, some people were saying,

11:30 **they thought, "This is it. I can't do it any more."**

Yeah.

What would people do? Were there desperate people who just did things to get out of it?

Yeah. Well, I had a good mate. He was hit with a bomb. A bomb went off near him in New Guinea, and he was covered with sand. And they thought he was dead, he did himself, and they dug him out.

12:00 His nerves went. We come back from New Guinea, and we were up on the Tablelands. I told you, 1940 was sort of a year of nothing. Just doing training and all that sort of stuff, drill and that. So anyway, but we still had the pickets on our trucks and mess rooms, every night, to see it wasn't pilfering and all that sort of stuff you see. Well, there might be say twenty of us picked to do that tonight, and we'd do that all night,

12:30 say two hours on and two hours off. Four hours on, four off. And this fellow come to me and he was crying. And he said, "I've been to the doctor. My nerves are gone." he said. He said, "I've been to the doctor and the doctor said I'm a malingerer." And I said, "Well, that's not right." No education, no nothing, but I know it's not right. So we do that night sight and then,

13:00 go back, he wasn't in my tent, he was in the next tent. And he's found to be missing. A bloke said to me, "Oh, he could have met some of his mates over at the machine guns." And there was rows of pioneers, rows, integrated rows of machine guns. And he said, "He could be over there with his mates in one of those places." And I said, "This bloke wouldn't go twenty yards without telling somebody."

13:30 I said "He's too disciplined a man. He wouldn't do this." They found him, because I said "He's around somewhere." And they found him up the back of the ablutions, say he was right there up the back where we used to have a shower, and the toilets and that were there. He'd leant down and he'd put a .303, you know how big they are, put one of them in his mouth and blew his head off. And they said to me,

14:00 about how it happened, and I told them what he said to me that night, on guard. Did I put a bloody can amongst the pigeons? Didn't I? Oh, Jesus. You'd think I was a criminal. Because a thing like that comes under the civilian police. If it happens like that. Next minute the major in charge, second in charge of the battalion,

14:30 said to me, "Do you want to change that?" I said, "I don't want to change it." I said, "Why? I'm just telling you what he told me. I don't know if it's right or not." But I said, "That's what he told me." He said, "You don't want to change it?" I said, "No." Aah. Then the bloody sergeant of police from, you familiar with the Tablelands of Queensland? Mt Garnett's the place, a bit bigger than where we were. The sergeant of police, a civilian,

15:00 comes and collects me. I thought, "Jesus, this is bloody cheesy." like, you know. So I get up there and he sits there and he's glaring at me. He questions me all about it and everything. He says, "Is there anything in this deposition you want to change?" I said, "No, no." I said, "I'm not saying the doctor said it to him. I'm saying what he told me."

15:30 And I said, "I would rather be shot then tell a lie." I said. "I owe him something, to just tell you what he told me." And that's what I stuck by, and that was as close as I'd be. And they could have shot me, and this was true. Because I wouldn't change what he told me? It was like a bond. You know. I'm not

aspersion, I know the doctor's name, I'm not aspersion that the doctor did say it,

16:00 but I can only say, like, you telling me in good faith, that's all I said. I said, and they let me go from then on. But I don't know if it done any good. You couldn't go back on it.

And was any action taken against the doctor, or anything?

No, just in the official pioneer war book, "Accidental death."

16:30 Anyway, I'm one that knows it wasn't an accidental death, because I can see him now, you know. Crying and telling me. Well, you couldn't go back if he told you. I mean, you know what he told you. I mean, no aspersions. I couldn't say aspersion then, I didn't know what it meant. I'm just saying what he told me, and I said, "That's it." But they kept asking me to change it. Everyone bar the doctor. I never seen the doctor.

17:00 He kept out. That was all swept under. I think I told you, the official history of the pioneers, he died of injuries. But very sad, because he was a good man. That was more than breaking point, but it was breaking point. Some reckon, well you don't know what happens, do you? Don't know what happens after, either. You don't know how it happens with their family life or anything, do you, not really.

17:30 Sometimes when you think, you're sad about it all, and other times, you think, "Well, there for the grace of God." You see, a lot of people feel pretty guilty after the war, because they never seen any action at all. I know plenty of blokes. They feel so guilty, for no reason at all,

18:00 but you only go where you're told. You're just a cog in the whole machine, you know. But we were 18 Platoon. We were holding this position. And the other platoons went around us. If it was vice versa, if 17 Platoon would have been holding that, we'd have been the ones to go around and do the attack. It just depends where you are. I can still see that old colonel having a shave. And I thought, "You're going to be here tonight, you bastard."

18:30 And he's having a shave, and he said, "I only want to draw fire." Not many colonels ever got killed. And I thought, "Jesus, you're going to be here tonight, you bastard. I'm not sure about myself." Yeah. It reminded me of things that happened a while back, it's like the turn of a card. May not be an apt description.

19:00 A while back here I was very sick here. I'm big enough now but I lost twenty, eighteen kilos. Been crook. And they thought I might have cancer on the lung. And I had to have this scan and all that, you know. And losing the weight and everything, which I never ever lost before. I get the developed thing to take back. And I've got to take it to my doctor. It was like the toss of a card. It's good or it's bad. It turned out, I said, "Well, how am I going?"

19:30 He said, "It's not cancer." "Good." Then I went to him another time and there was a big black spot on my lung. Big black spot, like this. And I haven't smoked; I haven't smoked for twenty five years. And he said, "No, you haven't got cancer. You've got emphysema." I said, "That's good." He said, "It's not bloody good." he said, "It'll get you in the long run, but it's better than the other one." But I'm pretty right. During the war, the only time you'd have a smoke,

20:00 you'd come home on leave, I never smoked in the war. You'd come home on leave and you'd get a few beers in, like, and you'd think you're piss hot. The little Turf packet out and you'd have a couple of them, but I'd get sick of that and I'd give it to someone. I only wanted grog. But then I went to Mont Park, and a bit of stress, you know, come on and drinking too, and I started to smoke twenty a day and all that sort of stuff, and there was doctors walking towards you in those days, and throw you a cigarette. Everyone in those days was lighting up. They didn't know.

20:30 Funny thing, if a bloke was wounded, they'd just put a cigarette in his mouth. No matter how bad or light he was wounded. Comfort you. But now, it's a real stinker. Yeah. So. And I had dengue fever in New Guinea. They had to tie you down. You'd go right off your nut. Like malaria, they'd tie you down. I wanted my mother. I was still a mummy's boy.

21:00 Oh, God, it's sad. It's sad really. Yeah.

Tape 5

00:30 **So perhaps if we could start back when you were younger. You were telling me about a man you knew who knew Joe Byrne.**

Well. He was old Mr McIntosh. He lived down the wool shed where I showed you where we lived under pretty rough, primitive conditions, and we did fossicking for tin and gold and stuff. And he was an old man. Well, to me, he looked seventy five to eighty years of age. Big moustache and everything. And I was a kid about eleven.

01:00 Down the creek I used to do a bit of prospecting and tin mining. As we called it, prospecting really. And he would come along the creek and say, "Are you doing anything, son?" And I'd say, "No, Mr McIntosh,

not really." And he'd say, "Come on and we'll have a yarn." And we'd go up under the tree, the wattle tree, whatever was along the creek. Very pretty in those days. He'd say, "Well, are you interested in Ned Kelly. Do you know how Ned Kelly is?" I said, "Oh, yeah." Because I could hardly read or write then.

01:30 But I said, "Yeah, I've heard of him. He was a bushranger." And he said, "Oh, I think a lot more than that." he said. "Because you know, just up on the right hand side there, on the hills, where Joe Byrne and his mother used to live, and family. And on the other side of the creek." he said, "Aaron Sherritt. He was the one that was shot." He said, He lived there." and he said, "We own that property now." And I said, "Oh, yes." "Yes." he said. He said, "Joe and Aaron Sherritt were schoolboys together. Went to the Woolshed School."

02:00 He said, "I was a bit later but I went there too and I did know them and I knew the family. Byrnes's Gully." and he said, "They used to be up high, and they could overlook all that went on in the wool shed. And also there's a little graveyard there." And he told me some stories. He always said that Aaron Sherritt was an innocent party, in his opinion. Old Mr McIntosh's opinion. He said in his opinion, he was trying to be a double agent. He was trying to pretend he was in with the police, and pass it on to the Kellys.

02:30 But Kelly's wouldn't buy it. They thought he was a two-timer, and that's when they had the conference, and they went from, forget where they went from now, but they went over one night from Glenrowan. They went over the hills one night to the Woolshed and knocked at the door. And, oh. The old fellow, the fellow that was mining with my father, Bill Knowles was his name, he was a property owner there.

03:00 But they had a little dredge going together. And it was his grandfather, Anton Wicks, he was an old German worker, and he was walking along the creek, drunk, this night, and Joe Byrne and Dan Kelly pulled him up. And said, "Mr Wicks." they said, "We want you to go and knock at Aaron Sherritt's door." And this German, guttural like, he said, "Oh, I'm not interested." They said, "Well, you better do it." Anyway. So he went and knocked at the door,

03:30 and when Sherritt come to the door, they just, Joe Byrne was the one that shot him. They just shot him straight through the head. And there was police under the beds and everything inside. They never come out or anything. You know. And that was one of his stories.

So that was your dad's friend's grandfather, or father?

It was his grandfather. Anton Wicks, a German. If you read the history of the Kelly gang, he'll come out. Yeah, Mr Wicks.

04:00 **Did many people talk about the Kellys in that area? I mean, it's Kelly country.**

Yes, yes. They did really. More so at a place called Greta. It's just outside Wangaratta. That was the main place. But oh, yes, Beechworth was studded with it. Kelly's Caves. Whether he was ever there or not. But there was Kelly's Caves and all that sort of stuff. And the hotel up there, where he had a fight with someone. Kelly was a good boxer. Very good boxer. And the jail.

04:30 He done his first term in Beechworth. And the policemen that were involved. They were there. And they used to tell me about those sort of things. They told me about the mine up there. It was all what we call alluvial gold. It was never real deep, this is in the early days, what '56 or '57. Or whatever that year was. Twenty, thirty feet was as much as you'd go down, and there was a bloke named Johnson, he said, there.

05:00 He showed me where it was. He said he had five men working for him, and they're digging a hole down to see if there was gold there. And they had to go down to find the granite. Granite was the bottom, what you got, there was no gold under that, but you find what was above it. So he said, they dug this down, he said, so far, and Johnson come to these blokes and said, "Look." the water used to come in. You know, water from the creeks and that come into it. He said, "I'm running out of money. I can only pay you this week and then it's finished.

05:30 I think there's gold here but I can't get down." And anyway, they had a conference between themselves the five or six workers. And they said, "You've been good to us, Mr Johnson, we'll give you another week. If we don't get it, well, we don't get it. But you don't owe us anything." And they got down and they found this petrified log. And have you seen fine gold? The real fine gold. It's very fine, like dandruff for the want of a better word. But they found two ton, two ton of fine gold,

06:00 behind this petrified log. And it made this Johnson, well, in today's reckoning, a multi-millionaire. Which I believe, in history, he went and bought a hotel up in Dandenong, and flashed it around, and he was back on the seat of his pants in about six years. But they were miners. And miners were more like speculators on the stock market, you know. It come easy, go easy, and all this sort of stuff.

When did that story happen? When was that?

That was about the 1850s. 1850s.

06:30 And also from there, he said, "We'll go to Beechworth in the north east. They have the Golden Horseshoe." They've got a big nugget as you go in the town, it's like the Big Banana somewhere and the big, they've got a big golden horseshoe, and that was about a man named Cameron. He was a politician in the town. For the Ovens District, he was a politician for that.

07:00 But the miners. This would be in the 1850s, decided that he was their man, so they would throw in so much gold, and they would shoe his horse with golden horseshoes. Which they did. And he rode it for about a mile, and gold is a very soft metal as you know, and it wore so much. But that's the history of the Golden Horseshoe. So if you're ever up that way, or you're ever talking to anybody, you'll know it's from, Mr Cameron was the politician.

07:30 And the miners all threw in half an ounce, half an ounce, or whatever it is, and they made him the horseshoes and put it on.

Were miners famous for telling stories, when you grew up?

Pardon?

Was it part of your learning about story telling, and stories, being part of a mining community?

Yes. It was like a kid being amongst old men. I mean, when I say old, some might have been thirty or forty or whatever they were. Some were in their seventies, and they come to where we had the camp up there,

08:00 if you've seen those photos and that, and a lot of them would come there at night, just after they'd had their damper and some jam or whatever they had. And they'd make a billy of tea, and we'd sit outside if the weather was OK, and we'd build a bloody big fire. Even my mother would sit there, and you'd hear people telling stories. And it was just magic. People walked, I told you, from the Oven River to the Palmer River. That's north-eastern Victoria to Northern Queensland. Just looking for gold.

08:30 Some would wheel a barrow. Put their stuff in a barrow. Might go ten, fifteen mile a day, and they'd do that.

So, you'd meet lots of travellers coming through, as well?

Well, even the police come down, and they would bring people down that were in the town. There was terrible, terrible unemployment in the big Depression. I don't know if you ever read Steinbeck"s Of Mice and Men. It was something like that. It was a, it was, like,

09:00 if you didn't work, you didn't eat. No one give a bugger. And they used to come down, and my father was an expert. He mightn't have been an educated man but he was an expert in his field. And always knew his stuff. And they'd say, "John, will you give so and so an idea of how to use a panning dish?" You know, gold panning dish. Or a cradle. You may have seen them in books where you put the dirt on and then you pour the water on. And the heavy stuff sits at the bottom and the residue goes away.

09:30 He showed them that. Dad used to show them what to do. Give them a hand. And it was a, a trickle of people come through.

And so you said, "If you don't work you don't eat."

Well, if you don't shoot a rabbit, or knock off a sheep, or, you know.

Did you do a bit of that as well? Shooting rabbits and knocking off sheep?

Never knocked off a sheep. Not that I know of. I was a kid.

10:00 No, shoot some rabbits. If you done some work for a farmer he'd give you half a sheep or something. You know, when they kill, they'd give you half a sheep. And all you had was an old safe, what you call it, with wires around it to keep the flies out. Nothing. And they had one with water, drips of water. Keep butter a little bit from running out the door, and all that sort of stuff, but a hard life. It was a hard life.

Did other people in the community help you, and did you help other people?

10:30 Not much. One side of the creek, where Mr McIntosh was I told you about, they was sort of little farmers. Twenty or thirty acres of bloody old ground you couldn't grow a parsnip on, but they thought they were a little bit of the elite. And anyone that come on the other side, they used to give a bit of a bad time, because they were there from the early days, in the 1850s and so forth, and we were all interlopers, you see.

11:00 And they'd try to run you out of the place. Literally try to run you out. Big floods used to come down the creek. The creek used to be like a torrent, a river, like a big river. Logs that big would be washed down. That wide. And if they didn't like anybody, they would go and throw their shovels and all that stuff, you know, you couldn't replace them. You had no money. They'd throw all them in the things to get rid of them. And it was hard. Hard times. Do a bit of wood cutting on the side.

11:30 But it was all physical work. I done all that sort of work till I was, till I went in the army, yeah.

What sort of jobs were you doing when you were a kid? You mentioned before that, was it a well or something, bucket in a well?

Windlass they called it, where you wind up the bucket. Had a little, it's a box; I'd have to have something to show you. Is it possible to get those two things?

Yeah.

12:00 Something similar to this. This was a box. You'd have forks down, into the sand, where you were digging in the creek, and little slats across so you could hold that box up like that. And you'd fill that box with dirt, and you'd have another, under here, on this side you'd have like mesh with holes, let the fine sand go through, and the bigger stones would fall to the side. Well, you'd have to fill that up. One would fill that up, if there were two of you working together,

12:30 one would be filling it up, and one was there like that. This box would be where the tine and gold would stop here, and the residue would come out here. Well, the one that was down here, the one that was shovelling would fill that. And the one that was, he'd have a half a kerosene tin. You know, a kerosene tin cut across, with a stick in it so that you could scoop water up. And you would throw the water up into this, this would run the dirt down onto there, and then you'd throw in there

13:00 to get the rest of the water and the residue would go away, and the tin and gold would stop there. That way, you could treat up to about twenty cubic yards a day. And the tin and gold would stop in there. That was what their main, that part was.

That's a lot of dirt.

That's a lot, mmm. It's a lot of work. But that was the main thing. I was either doing that myself. Filling the box and then going and sluicing it down, on my own.

13:30 Dad would be working with his brother, or Mr Knowles, who was the grandson of that Mr Wicks. And I'd be on my own, and what tin and gold I got, I sort of sold it to Dad, he knew the value of it better than me, and he, at the end of the week he'd give me something. Might be a pound note, or when I got to sixteen, seventeen, I had to go out. Well, I could go up to Beechworth, go to the hotel, and I could book a room for the night and have a meal for two shillings. Twenty cents.

14:00 You know. And I used to think, "Geez, this is all right." Get the Brylcreme [hair dressing] on and the pimples and everything. I thought I was bloody Don Juan. But that went on right up to the war time. Most I ever seen in money, we, Dad, we walked down, Dad said "We'll walk from the Woolshed down to place called El Dorado." It's half way between Beechworth and Wangaratta.

14:30 Used to be an old tin mining place. Gold and tin. Big dredges, big dredges. Massive. Big dams. Half as big as here down to Plenty Road, where they hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of yards of it. And they treated their tin like, and treated, and there was a black sand used to come away, and the tin with it. They couldn't do it so good in those days. Dad was an expert at it, so he said, "We'll walk down to see it." Walk down.

15:00 It was ten miles there and ten back, and I'm only about eleven year old. And I'll never forget, just a funny little aside. We walked down, and of course, on the way back, I'm buggered. I'm really stuffed, and we get back towards the, and we're about three mile from where we had our hut, where we used to sleep, and I said, "I can't go any further, Dad." And I said, "I'm buggered." It was just on dark and it was near the creek. And Dad was a funny old man. Well, he was only forty six when he died, but he said to me, "Well, son." He said, "You're buggered are you? Well, I'll go on and tell your mother you're ok."

15:30 He said, "But just be careful, because there's a tale of Fisher's Ghost. Fisher's Ghost comes along this creek every night, and he won't hurt you. But he's eerie, you can see him. He makes noises and all that." Jesus, I started to get bloody adrenalin back. It started to come back, you know. I said, "I don't know about this. I think I'll go a bit further." Anyway, I gradually dragged myself home, but the old bugger frightened me.

16:00 He says, "Fisher's Ghost. He's not a bad bloke, but he's still about." We done that. So we went down, and Dad, the mine was defunct at the time at El Dorado, it was called a Cox Pioneer. And the mine manager's brother was like caretaker of it all. There was still machinery and stuff there. And all this black sand as they called it. And Dad said, "Could I buy that off you?" And the bloke said, "Yeah, what do you want? Do you want to put it on the roads or something, do you?" He said, "No." he said, "What I want to do." he said, "Give you sixpence a ton and whatever,

16:30 I can't, whatever." Only a minimum amount, so Dad got a dray, hired a bloke with a dray, horse and dray. You know what a dray is? Dray? It's like a box cart on the back of wheels that the horse pulls. It'd hold about five yards, four yards of dirt, and you'd just flip the back down, tip it up, and away it would go. They got this down to the edge of this big hole,

17:00 and then Dad used to get them to pour it down on the sand below, and treat it. He used to treat it. None of these people down there could treat it. Not even his brother could treat it. This black sand, it was a residue of what was left from the dredge. Dad got five ton, five ton in those days, of fine tin out of it. Which was worth about a hundred pound a ton, which was a lot of money then. It would have bought, I don't know what they done with the money. They didn't buy any bloody thing I could see.

17:30 But it would have bought two houses in Beechworth. Five ton. Of course, they had to share it up, you know. But he was very good at his trade, very, very innovative. He'd make a race of water; we'd bring the water to him, like. Where it would take an engineer today to do it. And he could just write his name. But with an education. He was offered a job in Malaya

18:00 as a mine manager. Without education or anything. But they were going to take him over there, set him up in a house in Malaya, you can imagine in the thirties, servants to wait on him, all that, you know. And manage the tin mines. Because Malaya was one of the biggest tin mines in the world. And Mum wouldn't go because she was frightened the black people might eat her or something. But Dad would have been ok as a mine manager, yeah. Well, it would have been a bit of kudos [glory]. Well, would have made us, yeah.

18:30 **Do you think that served you well in your army service? That sort of bush mechanic…**

Yes. Yes, it did a lot. I've got to laugh. You can't help laughing sometimes, but I told you, I think on the last interview, but they used gelignite a lot. Well, not a lot, but we used a fair bit. It's a thing they called a jumper. It's a long bar like a crowbar, and it's got an end on it like that, the bottom of it, and you'd dig a round hole, and that brings out the dirt and you could going down.

19:00 That, instead of sinking a great big shaft, that will tell you if there's anything down there and get a sample, you see, but that's how you used to do it, dig it out like that. And if you were mining, and you wanted to blow something up, you'd put this down that deep, and then you'd get a cap, they'd call it. That's the thing that can blow up. And you put it into a stick of gelly, gelignite like that. And you'd put a hole in there, put that in there with a cord, would burn, you know, long fuse.

19:30 Put that in there. And Dad used to bite it. Bloody awkward. Bite it, your head would be in little bits like that, if it went off. But the mercury, the stuff that really blew up, was only about that far down in it. That part you could cap down. We'd cap that. But when I got in the army and they said, up at Dubbo, they said, "We're bringing in a mining expert." he said, "To show you all about this dynamite and gelignite and all this."

20:00 I go in. And I always think, Noakes, names don't matter now. Errol Noakes was his name. And when he got there, the first thing, I started to laugh. You know when you can't help it. He's the expert and he's got three fingers on his bloody hand. Like, I don't believe this. "If he's the expert, we're in bloody trouble." This is true. He said, "Hello, chaps." and he shook hands, and I thought "By God almighty, this is a bit of irony if ever I've seen it." Wasn't a bad bloke, but, it seemed a bit funny at the time.

20:30 **At least you knew you had experience, I suppose.**

Well, I thought, "Jesus, he's the expert."

So, what other tasks?

What other tasks did I have? That was it, that was it. There was no fun days. I never had a chance. Oh, one chance I did. They built a tennis court down there. They used to call it Ant Hill. You know you see ant hills up the bush. You ever seen ant hills?

21:00 **Mmmm.**

Well, it didn't make a bad court, it was like a, I don't know, earth court. Tennis court. And I took to this. I wasn't a bad tennis player. I ended up playing A grade, not A grade, country tennis. You know. That sort of stuff. But couldn't, you couldn't get enough people to teach you anything. You had to basically pick it up and play yourself. The racquet.

21:30 There was no one to tell you how to hold the racquet, or how to smash a ball or anything. But I enjoyed it, I loved it. I would have walked miles to get, but I never had enough to go and join in the town. You see, by not going to school or anything, I never got in cricket teams, I never got into tennis teams, I never got into football teams. You know, and by the time I was nineteen I was in the army. Like, I had no young life. You know.

22:00 It was either work, you'd work, the best you'd do was five and a half days a week. You now. That was the best. Most times Dad would say, "Oh, you can, Saturday afternoon, you can go and cleaned up and go up the beach, whatever you want to." That sort of stuff. And whether or not, I used to take notice of my father. He wasn't a "crack the whip" man or anything, but I suppose he liked the pound of flesh.

22:30 Good worker. If you were a good worker you were all right. He said to me one day, it might be a bit rude. I was standing around and he had this little dredge going. The tailings as we called it. Tailings is like the sand coming out, that's not wanted. They called it the tailings, but you had to get rid of it. This little dredge he had, they'd treat two or three hundred tons of sand a day with this dredge. This little dredge they had. I was standing there,

23:00 and he said, "Yes." he said, "You'd make a good dick, Maurice." I said, "Why is that, father?" He said, "You're always standing." I said, "Well, that's it." I said, "I sack myself." And I remember I sacked myself and away I went and done some work for myself. So John wasn't real, not full of couth and culture, but we, we always had boxing gloves down there. He taught me to box. But he used to hit a bit bloody hard, and one day we got fair dinkum.

23:30 And he got bloody harder. I remember Mum came out with a broom and stopped that. Because he was just a bit, there wasn't a lot of science, but he hit a bit hard. Yeah.

Did you sack yourself very often?

Pardon?

Was that just the one time you sacked yourself?

No, oh, no. No. It would happen. And then other times he'd say, "There's not a lot of work here, son." And he'd go off prospecting. After every big flood that went through the creek, big flood,

24:00 it would wash certain banks away. Wash it away, and it would leave some stuff there that was worth working on. Worth the shovelling, and pushing up again, you know, we'd sluice them out. And he'd say, "There's enough work down there, son, it will do you three or four weeks." Well, you know, it'd be keeping me in a job, and he had his own little job to do. And that's where I used to do it, and come back. And then I'd go and cut a bit of wood on the side. Five foot wood for the tannery, and that sort of stuff.

24:30 It was all hard work, no joy. And I used to go to the pictures [movies]. I never learned to dance. I was too bloody shy, believe it or not, yeah. Learn to booze. But of course, you couldn't booze that much. Never had any money.

You were saying you were mostly spending most of your time with grown men. Did you find it hard to socialise with people your own age when you went up to Beechworth?

Not really. In fact,

25:00 I was a fairly confident young man. Fairly confident. Not around girls, oh God. I was shy. Oh yeah, unbelievable. Because in those days it was, I suppose it's the same today, no, I could along with most people all my life. Most people. You know, people I didn't like I just got away from,

25:30 left them to their own devices. I've had good friends all over the years.

What about your army colleagues? Did you have any fallings out, or disagreements with people there?

Not really. No, that was remarkable. Remarkable. You could dislike people. Some, just, you know, it you've got a thousand men there's certainly going to be somebody there that don't fit the pattern, you know.

26:00 But you gravitated to more or less your own, there would be eight or ten people, they become like a family to you. And then you'd go into your platoon of a day, there'd be, say, twenty men there. And then you'd go into a company of a hundred. And that was about the extent of it. The next hundred people that was in the next group, you'd hardly know them to this day. They'd say "Bill Jones." Oh, yeah, I've heard of him, but I don't know him. But not many fights. Not many.

26:30 Because I think, you were all on sort of the one level, and everyone depended on each other. You know, like I'll give you a little example where you depended. We had a, you would never, you might have a little box, this was in Queensland. In the training, when we came back from New Guinea. You'd have your tent. You'd have a little bunk. You'd have a little table there, might be a little bedside table, sort of thing, a box.

27:00 You could leave your money, nobody would ever touch it. Your tobacco, everything, it was always left there. While you went, you could be away two days or something, in the bush, and if anybody pinched anything, even the old colonel, which was a placid man, he called us up one day. Somebody had pinched something, had cut the bum out of those bags they used to carry, duffel bags. This bloke had his tobacco and stuff in that, they'd cut that and pinched the tobacco. And he said, "I'm not giving you licence to do." he said, "But I don't want to know what you do with the person if you catch him.

27:30 I don't want to know." Because that was the ultimate sin. If you thieved off somebody, you're dead. They would cut you dead then. I don't know anybody that done it, but you'd be cut dead. At one, funny little escapade again. A bloke up there, Wilson was his name, he'd be gone and dead, anyway, you'd get parcels sent from home,

28:00 and it'd be a round tin with a home-made cake in it. It may be anything, but the tin would come, but the first thing you'd do, there'd be eight blokes, you'd get a knife, get a bayonet and first thing you'd say. "Here, come on boys, let's get rid of this." you know. But this bloke didn't. This bloke got his. He whacked her under the bed, you see. We all knew. And he'd wait till it got dark, and all of a sudden, you'd hear the tin, somebody, "Jesus, the bloody mice are at it. Light that bloody light." You know, we'd give him hell, we never got it, you know.

28:30 But just the odd one would be like that. You naturally shared everything. I never found any disharmony really. Some of the officers you didn't like, it was only natural. It's like a boss, isn't it? Good people, they were mostly good people.

Did they do anything that you thought crossed the line, just wasn't right?

29:00 In what way?

In action, or ...

Cross the line.

Did something you just didn't approve of?

No, only as I said, this bloke shot this bloke on the track one day, with his Bren gun. And shot this bloke coming out of the water. No, I didn't see anything wrong with it. Because they were going to burn us out that night, holus bolus. If they could have burnt all of us to death, that was kosher.

29:30 I seen the Japs, he was a Jap officer, and I seen the bloke with him. I fired at the bloke that was with him, I don't know whether I hit him or not, but they set it alight.

Could you tell us about that? You were going to explain. Was that the oil field?

The oil, yeah. They told us, see, I can only go on what I'm told. It was the richest, not the biggest, but the richest oil field in the world. The most pure oil. It didn't have to be treated as much as others.

30:00 I don't understand it, but, I know that you could see the black oil on the surface. You didn't have to go looking for it. And there was hundreds and hundreds of oil derricks in a small area, and they somehow flooded it as much as they could, this oil, and they were coming through to burn it. They did burn it. They burnt the town down, but they wanted to burn us all at the one time, and I seen the bloke, he was on the left hand side from where I was, and I fired at the bloke, but I fired at the bloke alongside him.

30:30 I don't know why. But I thought the other bloke was the main bloke, because he had a bandage, like a handkerchief tied around his head. And he had the little puttees on, up to about here. But I know they got him, because I seen him afterwards. They got him up on the hill, and it was too hard to bury him, so they burned him. And it was like a barbecue.

Were you there for that? Did you see that?

Yeah. Yeah.

31:00 And then of a night, I was talking about, you'd be in action of a night, and you'd be back down on the flat ground, and then it would go up into the jungle, and right on the edge of that, it was all the troops and everything, and the Japs used to come out and probe all night. You know. You'd know it was the Japs, and when you looked out of a night, you could see as far as you could see, four or five mile, and the whole line would light up. There'd be Verey pistols, there'd be Bren guns, there'd be Vickers guns, there'd be Owen guns, there'd be all sort of guns firing.

31:30 And hand guns and so forth. And you'd know next morning, you could be, you wouldn't believe it, but, say right around there, the area around there, you could see where the Japs had been. Because they had a shoe with a toe in it. And you could see the toe mark. You know, they'd be looking around if they could knock somebody off.

They'd come in overnight.

32:00 They'd be trying to infiltrate, and all that. Because you were there to try and stop them. That was the function of that, you know.

Can you tell me about, how did you burn the bodies that you found? Was it just with kero or petrol or something?

All the old timber we could find there, and petrol and oil and stuff. Whacked it on.

Was that common? Was that easier to do than burial?

Well, we would have buried him, but it was called Tank Hill. It was right near the sea. And it was rich for oil, and they built this hill,

32:30 and it was a bitumen road, and on top was this big thing, they used to put this oil in, and, I don't know, ten times bigger than this house. They'd get the oil up into that, like, with the, then it would run down into their tankers, they'd take. And it was too hard. You couldn't dig there to do it. You know. And on this tank, it was funny. There was still Japs sniping from these oil derricks,

33:00 you know. A good place for them to get. Because there's hundreds of the bloody things. It was just bloody sheer boredom but we done it. There'd be a big tank here, oil tank, on this hill, and just across the road where those houses are, would be another big tank like this. And one bloke, I've done it myself, and one bloke would say to the other, "Go." And you would go for your life, run to the other one.

33:30 And sometimes they'd ping you, you could hear it go. And the other bloke, he'd take his time, and then he'd go. And then, we had, it was bloody pathetic. But we had one bloke watching to see if he could see where it was coming from. We'd do this, just to sort of, I don't know, it was like the old loaded gun thing. You know, throwing that around, but hoping you didn't get hit. But you used to do that. Run across.

Did anyone get hit, do you know?

No. Not that I know of.

Did you ever see a sniper and get a sniper?

No, I don't think they ever did. I think it was an exercise in futility.

34:00 And we went down, this is funny. At the bottom of that hill, that photo up there. At the bottom of that, further on, there's a little creek, and I was down there with a Lieutenant Hammer. He was a lovely little man. He come from Tasmania. Nice little man. And he was an engineer officer. I don't think he was much of an infantry officer, but a terrific man. And a terrific engineer. And we were down the bottom of this bloody hill.

34:30 All there's little trees along it. And all of a sudden, pit pit pit pit pit. Rifles, not rifles, small arms fire, goes along, and chops all the little bits off the trees, like that, just above your head. And he said to me, "Is that ours, or theirs?" I said, "By Jesus." I said, "I hope it's theirs, or every bastard's against us." you know. "I hope it's not ours firing at us." Yeah. It was just cutting off the little things, so when your luck's up you're doing all right.

35:00 Yeah. That was about my go there.

Were you afraid very often?

Yeah. Night time was terrible. Day time you could cope. At night, well, you couldn't sleep. Where could you sleep? They were walking around all the time, the Japs. And you'd look up on the hill, and all you could see,

35:30 if it was only raised up twenty or thirty feet, where you knew a platoon was resting, you'd see someone walking around, well, you didn't know, you could see a silhouette, but you didn't know who it was, you didn't know whether to fire, or not to bloody fire, and I told you, I was in the hole this night with Tiny Phillips. A bloke, he got killed in that big bomb thing, and they used to drop that mud into your hole with your water. So it was going on all time. Your nerves was pretty well on edge, all the time. Yeah.

36:00 **How did you relax? How did you offset those nerves?**

I don't think you did till you come out. When you got a bit of a rest. We was three weeks doing that job. When we come out, when we come out, the engineers of the other pioneers had rigged up a shower for us. Some warm water, where we could have a shower and everything. And I don't know if you've stopped long in a bath.

36:30 You know how your feet get from a lot of water? Well, you imagine, three weeks, never getting your boots off, and they're wet all the time. All that pulled away. You know. Yeah, all that. And the bloody smell of it would knock you down. And all between your legs here. Around here. I still use bloody ointment now. It never ever healed right up.

The same condition never ...

The same sort of, well, it's never healed.

37:00 And then I got amoebic dysentery. That was a shocker. That was a bloody shocker. Doctors told me, he said "I'd never be right for twenty five, thirty years." Dutch doctor. Oh, he was cruel. Cruel.

What do you mean?

Well, when I had this amoebic dysentery, I was out, guarding this hot, not hot, heavy water they called it. We didn't know. It could have been anything. Bu they said heavy water. And I'd just got this amoebic dysentery,

37:30 I didn't know what it was at the time, I just felt I had to go to the toilet, you know. Well, as it happens. The whole bowel collapses, and all that comes away is blood. As much blood as possible. Because you faint. You go right out. I went right out to it. It was about twelve hours. I didn't know. I could have been killed. I didn't know where I was. And then when I got over that, they give you some, there was, Diver Derrick was in there. He got shot.

38:00 He got killed. He was a VC winner, and a Distinguished Conduct. He was the highest decorated soldier. He got killed. He was in there. Anyway, when I healed up, and about a week later, this Dutch officer, Dutch captain he was, doctor. He wanted to have a look at the bowel. Well, if you know a bike pump? It's like that, sort of a bike pump. And he put that into me bottom. This is true. Oooh. Unbelievable. He said, "I know it hurts."

38:30 he said, you know. As he laughed. And he said, "It could be twenty five years before it heals." Well, I was a long time with bowel trouble and all that sort of stuff. But lucky in all, I suppose. Yeah.

Tape 6

00:30 **I wonder if you could tell me about a couple of these guys we were talking about. Sir Reg Earth?**

He was the one I told you. Well, he was, when I met him he was a reinforcement like I was, to the Middle East, Reg. Very much, seemed to be a loner bloke. But he was a nice bloke. Inveterate gambler, loved his gambling. Not a cheat or anything. But loved to gamble, like playing cards. They formed a, we

used to play cards. But it was only for matches or pennies,

01:00 but they played for big money. We were only getting six shillings a day. Well, six sevens are forty two. That's two pounds two a week. That's if you didn't make an allotment home. Some of them did that, sent some of that to their wives, and kids, and all that. Well, they were getting a couple of pound a week. Well, they played cards for two shillings a hand, which was a lot of money. Well, old Reg was there, and I used to sit,

01:30 they used to play serious. This was serious money, see. They used to sit there, no smiles. It was just like you'd see on the movies. And I used to get a chair, or wherever I could get, and I'd sit behind him. Because I knew I'd get on his bloody nerves. I wouldn't give a sign to anybody what he had. You just didn't do those things. But anyway, he'd look around and say, "No wonder I'm losing, Ryan. You're sitting on my bloody shoulders. Here's two bob. Go to the canteen." on the ship"s canteen, like, "And buy what you bloody want." Well, two shillings, you could get a nice array of stuff for two shillings.

02:00 Nice chocolate and a drink and all that. And he done all right. And we came back and the irony of it was that he lost his life through gambling. He was in the, we used to call them little pits. Little dug outs, you dug out for yourself, two a time, you could live in them when you could. If the water wasn't up, that was your cover. And they wanted, well, one bloke,

02:30 they wanted six or eight to go out on patrol, or ten, but they wanted one from each hole to go. So what would Reg do? He wouldn't, no other way, but they had to toss up. So he tosses a coin, and whoever won it, anyway, Reg won the bet. And he stopped in the hole, and one single, just one single clear mortar, come up and over and went into his hole and he was killed straight away. Just, he was fated.

03:00 That's like a Tattslotto [lottery] draw. In reverse of course. If it hits someone alongside else, even in the mud, you've got a chance, but right in the hole like that, that's. Yeah. He was an honest man.

Whereas if he'd won the bet?

If he'd went on the patrol, well, bugger, that's better than sitting in the hole, he would have read a paper or anything. I had one bloke, one time, while you bring it up. I'll get this cleared up.

03:30 We done a patrol and, I don't know whether I told you. Did I tell you about this bloke put a gun to my head?

No, I don't think so. Did you? What was the story?

Anyway, bears repeating I suppose. But we used to do a patrol, and half way up the island you would set up your base. Your camp would be there, they'd cook you a bit of tucker there. Go out and do patrols that way, or that way, or whichever way from it.

04:00 But each end, you would have a sentry watching down that part of the track, and down that part of the track, to see that they weren't surprised in the centre. Well, I was down this side, behind a big log about that big, about two foot, two foot six, and looking down the track. The track was about two to three foot wide. Mud, about that deep. The other side was jungle, real thick jungle, like that photo.

04:30 And a piece of paper went past. You get bored stiff hour after hour. About two hours there. And it was like somebody wiped their bum on it. I don't know what it was. It was a bit of bloody paper. I wanted something to read, you see. Anyway I just went over, just bent down to pick up the bit of paper, next minute bloke puts his foot on the log, and he points this gun right at my head. And I, all of a sudden, I just thought,

05:00 some sort of thing in my mind, I hope this is quick, you know. It was an Indonesian. He was with us. Indonesian. And he could speak English, because he said, "That'll teach you, Digger." That was the only words he said. By gees, I wasn't much good after that. I had to go change my pants. And I always remember what sort of gun it was. It was a Sten gun. English sub-machine gun. But right on my temple. He was waiting, he was just waiting for me to move.

05:30 He was good. He was good. Because I never seen him. See those sort of things. No wonder they say "Killed with friendly fire." If I'd have seen them moving up that jungle, I would have fired. What else can you do? You can't wait till they get there. And they're dark skinned like, too. But by Jesus, it set me back. I thought of that for a lot of years. Put it right on the temple, and he said, "That'll teach you, Digger." Oooh. Mama Mia.

06:00 **I bet you can still remember exactly how that felt.**

I can see it now. See the log and everything. Ah, Jesus Christ. You don't have time. It wasn't fear. I thought, "This is it. This is it. Everything will go black here in a minute." Only for that flat second, you know.

Had he thrown that bit of paper? Was that just a decoy?

06:30 No, no. He was just waiting for me to turn my head, or anything. You know. If I'd have got up to just walk away, perhaps, or something, he wanted to show the example. And he was a good soldier, this bloke, to be able to do it. I reckon. Because if you're alert, well, I wasn't too bloody alert. Done my best. Stuffed up as usual. Non-adjustable stuff up.

Was that the phrase?

Yeah. “Snafu.” Non-adjustable stuff up.

07:00 One of those things. The officers used to say it. Like we come there one day and the officers, geez, I don’t know how we won the war. He come there. He was an engineer officer. I can always remember the name of the bloody thing. I don’t know what it means. He said, “We’re going to build a tetrahedron.” I thought, “Well, this is good. Because nobody ever seen one unless they was a war or anything.” So he spent the full day with us, and we’re cutting bloody limbs,

07:30 this is up in Queensland. We’re cutting limbs and trees, putting them together. It’s supposed to be a big thing with points, speary points, on the wood. And you’re supposed to throw it in the water, where people, if they’re jumping out of boats or barges or anything, will impede their progress you see. But you’ve got to pull it so it comes together. So, after spending about eight hours laborious bloody, with the tetrahedron, we pull it to bloody pieces. I thought, “Jesus.”

08:00 I’m nearly bloody wetting myself, you know. He said, he was pretty good. He said, “Well, that gives you some idea of it.” I don’t know how we won this war. The Japanese couldn’t have been that clever, if we could. It was like Hogan’s Heroes. You know. Unbelievable. You think. They couldn’t have been all that good.

Did you think that, when …

I did.

Up in Borneo and Tarakan, did you think, “Are we going to win this”?

08:30 No, I thought we had it. I felt confident then. Always on me, you can see it there, always had about three grenades. Always had grenades ready. Threw a few now and again, yeah. And I thought we were right then. And the worst of all, the irony of it, I think it was two hundred and eighty men. Not just our unit. The whole lot, that was useless, because the island had already been bypassed. It should never had happened. But it was one of those things. Non-adjustable F up, you know.

09:00 **There’s talk of that in a lot of those island campaigns. Did you know that at the time?**

No. Oh, no. We were most important. We were supposed to take it, because there was an airfield there. And it was supposed to be built. Like we’d have a land aircraft carrier there. But it would be land. They would go from there and bomb the Philippines. No, we were never told nothing. Nothing at all. You’re just a mushroom. You’re told nothing. Feed you with crap up the back.

09:30 **Kept in the dark.**

They tell you nothing. Nobody knew much. But we, when, a nice little bit of irony. This Major Rosevere, he was a Military Medallist in the First War, Worked his way up through the ranks to become a major, in the Second War. And he was a great man. “Punchy” Rosevere. He became head of the South Australian railways after. And he called us, as the war finished, or just before the war finished. He called us down to this gully,

10:00 oh, about forty or fifty of us, and he gave a lovely little speech about it. He said, “I’ve served with you all this time.” he said, “And you’re infantry.” he said, “And I find you the salt of the earth.” You know. I felt like crying again. I thought, “I’d cry again if I had a hanky handy.” But I didn’t. So, but he was a nice man. Only when he tried to not tell me about my mate blowing his bloody head off. But, that’s about all about that, I think.

10:30 All so long ago.

There’s another fellow you mentioned, Terry Armstrong. What was the story about that?

Just as he struck me as, it’s like a football team, you know. I reckon, most of us were fairly good players. Then you’d get somebody that you’d know was a bit more competent, and a bit better, on a football team. He’s a bit better. He’s not the star, but he’s always there and he’s always doing the right thing.

11:00 That was him. Dependable was the word I was looking for. He was dependable. If he told you something, it was as good as done. If he told you something, he expected you to do it. He didn’t question, he just expected you to do it. Not in a brash way, but he’d say, “I want you to do such and such.” Well, he’d leave it at that, he’d expect you to do. I think he came from a pretty well to do family. Came from the northern part of New South Wales. Up towards Lismore, those places.

11:30 People had a stud farm, or something. I know he came from a country background. But always, if the officers told him to do something, Terry didn’t go, like, gung ho about it, but he done it, everything was done. And I found him; he got killed where that big thing blew up. That big thing blew up. And actually, I got his job. He was a bloke I looked up to. And I often think about him.

12:00 And I’d like to go, I think it was either Lismore or Armidale, I’d like to go up and just see if he’s on the notice board up there. You know.

The Honour Roll?

Honour Roll, yeah. Because he was a good, a real good man.

Was he the bloke who set the booby trap?

Yeah, same on.

Could you tell us about that? That was off-tape before.

It was off-tape.

Yeah. Could you tell us about how he set that up, and the story there?

I told you. Didn't I tell you that one here, this time?

12:30 **I think that was before we started recording. Yeah, it was before we started recording.**

Oh well, yes, we went down, It was a Chinese cemetery, and one of the officers said, "Would you take?" Not to me but to Terry Armstrong and the lieutenant. I think, Hewlitt. "Would you take the platoon down and guard the squadron of three machine gunners, three Vickers machine guns?" You know the big ones that sit around and play hell, and they stretch them out.

13:00 We said, "Yeah." And we went down and it was, then four or five o'clock. And it was down the bottom, we were up, raised a little bit and the cemetery was down, this old Chinese cemetery, and there was a bit of a depression down below that. And some trees, not real big ones. Enough trees, bush. Enough to give cover if any enemy get in of a night and maybe do a bit of damage.

13:30 So Terry decides he'll put some grenades in there, as a buffer. He went down, and I went down. He said, "All you've got to do is give me the Owen gun." he said, "And you just watch and see I'm all right." So he goes and he ties them up, each one, five or six right along, loop through the pin, so if the pin pulls out the thing goes up, and at least you know they're there, and it might get somebody and well, the Vickers guns would take care of it then. Because you wouldn't get past that.

14:00 **So, set up with a trip wire and a bit of string?**

Yeah. Sometimes up as high as your light there. And right down, and down further, and that, and if you pulled on a limb or something, it could pull it out. They're all pretty finely set, and up goes the trip thing on the grenade, and there she blows. Well, that's a bloody brilliant idea, you see. And then we were sitting around there and watching these machine gunners. Seeing they're all right.

14:30 And it gets to about ten o'clock at night, and it gets bloody dark. And the message comes through on the Morse code thing. "Yes, well, you're wanted somewhere else. You're wanted over at Tank Hill or whatever it is, we're sending somebody else to relieve you." And I said, "Yeah." I thought to myself, "You might as well tell those blokes when they come, what to do." Terry being a soldier, he said, "No, that's no good." He said, "They don't know exactly where they are. We'll go down and get them."

15:00 I said, "What is this, white man? What's this 'we'?" And he said, "Well." he said, "You was with me." I said, "Well, away we go." And he got them. He was up there, that's what I'm saying is a dependable soldier. He could have left then and just said, "Well, we'll come back when it's light if nothing happens." No. Because I know I would have been killed if I'd went on that patrol, because I was never far from his bum, you never leave your mate's behind, they say.

15:30 Well, that's what they used to say. I think. Or maybe picked that up on the way. No, like when somebody sticks in your mind like that, after sixty years like that, he's got to be a good bloke. And done the right thing, you know. Just so dependable. Well, I wasn't dependable. He was. I'd do it, but I'm a bit of a bungler.

Anybody else stay in your memory, as clearly?

As a superior people?

16:00 **Or as inferior people, even? Overall.**

Yeah. Yes. Some you couldn't depend on at all. Even up, when a few Japs were getting about. You couldn't depend on them if they said, "You've got two hours over there where the bathroom is. You just stop there and we'll have a bit of a sleep and if you hear any noise, wake us up." You could bet your life they'd be asleep. You know, you couldn't depend on them.

16:30 I told the officer. I didn't like to. I told him. He didn't do anything about it. I reckon they should have been booted out. I mean, they were a menace to the bloody people who were trying to do the right thing. You're entitled to, if you go and do your two hours, you're entitled to feel a bit free when their turn come up.

Did you try to get them in line? Just talk to them?

I just tried talking to them. Went over their heads. I reckon they were a bad type, I really do.

17:00 Totally unsuitable. In all phases. Even in their dress and their demeanour. You know. Didn't come up to bloody scratch, I don't think. Not that we, we weren't the Grenadier Guards, but we, you know, expect a little bit better than that. But they go out of your mind. Like, the good impressions stay more. And some

of the officers, like I said, that Major Rosevere. He was a real soldier, a good man.

17:30 **Seems to be the positive things are remembered, in memory, especially with war stories.**

Oh, I think so. Although I can go back when I was a kid, and think of positive things. I can remember, I told you, how stark it was when I first went there. The first night, it rained. And you've got it on your tape. And Mum was going to come with a knife, and I thought, "Christ, she's going to kill me." and let the water out, and that. Well, that spring, like I told you, Beechworth in spring is beautiful. And I'm only a kid, about eleven,

18:00 and it was a cold wet winter, and all of a sudden it comes out this beautiful day, and I went down to the creek where they were mining, fossicking, Wind bird of Thomas, whichever suits, and I get down there, and the sun, it's about ten o'clock in the day, and the sun come out, and you can imagine it's like the virgin bush. The wattles coming out, the bottlebrush is coming out, the blue wrens, the Robin red breasts, the kingfishers,

18:30 and all the other little birds, and all that. And myself then, like you're in town, I don't know whether you've seen the slums, Fitzroy used to be, Leichhardt used to be in Sydney. Granville used to be. Little old lanes, where you went up and begged for a bit of fruit that was bruised and all that. When I saw this, I thought "This is Shangri La." This is, I can't believe, and the water running freely and the smell of the air. It was just magic. It was, you know, like a Harry Potter movie, this.

19:00 You know, when you see all the beautiful little birds and they're twittering around, and they're not frightened or anything because they've never had anything thrown at them. Yeah. I thought it was wonderful. That sticks in my mind. I thought after all that, "This is bloody beautiful, this is." There was sort of a serenity about it. I hope these words are right. I didn't go to school. Just whipping them in to see how they fit.

That's an amazing description. And also from your war time. Do you remember positive stories, or do you, and people seem to recount stories that are funny and happy and good times?

What? Wartime? Yes, I try to think of things that are funny, too. I don't know if I told you, the bloke used to always come around with that stick, you know, he was, I think I might have told you, yeah. Give you a touch on the bum and say "You've been knighted." you know, and all this sort of stuff.

20:00 And then he could do his magic trick by looking at you. He could tell. He could say, "Yes, I can see you're coming home, you're coming home from the war." He said, "I can't see your legs. Your legs are missing." All that sort of stuff. But he was a funny man. Yeah. And there was some, some people, one bloke we had. This is a bit of an aside. He was a quiet man,

20:30 only a little bit thicker set than you. Not a big man. I used to. Just, this was in Tarakan after the war finished, and I used to wrestle him, and play around. You know, just wrestle and see. He was older than me, ten or twelve years older than me. In his thirties. I used to get these holds on him and reckon I was doing good. And a bloke said to me one day, he said, "I know him very well." He said, "He's come from Wagga. Wagga, NSW." and he said, "He's the best bare knuckle fighter in Wagga. And there are sixty hotels in Wagga." he said, "And he's never been beaten."

21:00 I said, "Oh, Jesus. I better not put any bloody mystery holds on him." you know. He was such a gentlemanly quiet man, you know. And he was the sort of bloke. We thought we were playing jokes with him. We'd say, "Righto, Bill. The mail's in. I've heard the mail's come in." You know the mail would come in and then they'd sort it. "Would you go down and get the mail?" They wouldn't be, silly jokes you know. But he never come back and, just nothing would throw him.

21:30 And I was talking to him just as they war finished, and I said, "What are you going to do, Bill." And he said, and I nearly done it myself, he said, "I'm going to stop in the army. I've got no trade." he said, "I just work for the cockies around Wagga, you know. Hard work, building fences and pig sties and all this stuff." He said, "I want to stop in the army." I nearly stopped. You see, going out with no trade, no education.

22:00 I could have went back with the rank of sergeant, well, that would have done me. I would have went to Japan, and possibly went to Korea. And I was going to put in for that turnout, insurgence in Malaya. In the sixties, I think. Where you could go back with an extra rank. I was a corporal. I could have been sergeant, and the missus wouldn't let me. I was going to put in for it. And I thought, "I don't know."

22:30 **Was there much recruitment for the people to stay in the army? I mean, much of a drive?**

Not a lot. It was there, for you, to pick up. But what threw me; it just seemed to be a bad time with all the things. Just as the war was finishing, or just finished, my father died, you see. And he was only forty five, forty six. And I come back, and I've got no brothers or sisters, and Mum was there, and I had two children.

23:00 One child was brought up by the wife's mother, and the other one was with us. Max. He's the only boy I've got. And I just feel I couldn't of went, you know. She wouldn't go. The wife wouldn't go. I would have went. Well, at least to Japan, and have a look around. That was all right. Pretty good there, I think.

That would have been quite an experience, would it?

Oh, yeah. Be great.

23:30 I have regrets that, I have regrets that I never got to Alamein. I went and paraded, have I told you? And they took all they wanted and they left all they didn't want. So that was it and I've always been shitty about it.

How come?

I just thought, I'd come that far, and I'd have liked to have seen what went on. I know it was fierce, what went on.

24:00 Don't know whether I could have held my end up or not, but you don't know till you try, do you. I think failure is better than regret. You're better to have a go, and if you fall short well, at least you fall short. But if you've got regrets about it, you regret after all these years, I regret. Yeah.

24:30 Aah, I seen a bit of the Middle East and the Suez Canal. Had a swim in there. Mediterranean, and Gaza and Tel Aviv and that. Around the Red Sea. Ceylon. Ceylon, that's a nice place. See they got flooded out, Ceylon. Colombo.

Did you stop over in Colombo?

Yes, yeah, we stopped there. I remember. I don't know whether I've told. I think it was about this Bluey, Bluey Smith that couldn't read or write,

25:00 and he was good on politics. I told you, I think. Yeah, well he, he was a funny man. He was a con man. Not to hurt you, but he was good. So we pulled into Colombo and they give us leave for the day, but the boat was only pulled up from here, from here to out where your car is out there. On the wharf. And we got nice and piddly that day we were off, and NAAFI canteen, Navy/Army/Air Force canteen.

25:30 And all the nations of the world were there. First time I'd ever seen the Ghurkhas, the Indians, and the Filipinos. And we get back next day, and the boat's still there. And everybody's dying for a drink. But old Bluey. Now if you'd seen it in a script you wouldn't have believed it. There's Bluey, we look over, we're all looking over the edge of the boat, you know. We can see the wharf, see.

26:00 We see this bloody little canoe thing, little row boat thing. And below us, there's Bluey sitting in it, with a white coat thing on, and a white hat like a cook. And somebody said to him, "What are you doing?" Nobody give you up, you know. Like they said, "What are you doing?" and the bloke with him, you know, from the ship or something. And he said, "I'm going to get rations." he said, "You don't want to starve to death, do youse."

26:30 He said, "If I don't go and get rations fixed up, there'll be nothing on the boat." And he got away with it. About three o'clock in the afternoon, there's a screaming maniac and about six bloody military policemen, dragging this heap come along, pretty fat he was, in this big boat, and they put him in the slammer. But Bluey got away with it. "By Christ." he said, "There'll be nothing on this boat if I don't get ashore and get the rations in."

27:00 He was very good. Couldn't read or write. As I told you, he might come up to you, you might be reading the headlines of the paper, "Oh, I've left the old glasses up there again." And he's talking politics. Which he'd listen, inveterate listener. The poor bugger got shot in New Guinea. He couldn't do right. He done for a bloody cartoon character. The bloody doctors went past and they're saying,

27:30 "Yeah, well, he's all right. He's buggered. He won't live." And they said, my mate was telling me, and they got to Bluey Smith and they said, "No, he's buggered." "Buggered, my arse." he said, "I'm bloody all right." he said. Anyway they got him back and he's got about six bloody bullets in him. But you wouldn't want to know, they're all Owen gun bullets. They're our own. Somebody else, you know in the melee went on, had fired and shot poor old Bluey.

28:00 He couldn't only read or write, he couldn't get shot by the bloody enemy. He had to get shot by his own. But oh, he was a funny man. Sticks in my bloody mind. He was an ex wharfie. Wharf labourer. But a good, a gentleman.

Did you talk the politics of the war with him? Did you have much of an idea of what was going on there?

I'll say something. They can't do much to me now. I became a member of the Communist Party, up on the Tablelands.

Mmmm.

One of the few. It was a mortal sin.

28:30 **For a Catholic.**

Not a Catholic. In the bloody army, for an Australian. The bloke, Tony Phillips, I told you, I was in the hut with him, and he was throwing the stones at me. He said one night, "You're pretty left wing Labor, aren't you?" and I said, "You could say that." He said, "Are you interested in a bit of knowledge?" I said,

"Oh, yes." So we got up the back a bit, about a mile up out of the camp, and there was a bloke there, a bloke named Sullivan, he was from Queensland,

29:00 he was a Rhodes Scholar. And they're up there, and there's a few other sitting there, and they're fanatics. You know, that zeal in the eyes. I'm not up with this, you know. I'm a run-of- the-mill lefty. Like, you know, having no money, I wanted everything to be equal, which it's never going to be. I joined up the thing. They said, "Where do you actually live?" I thought, "I'm not going to tell you that." I said, "The Hume district." The Hume, that's Albury district. It's a bloody big district.

29:30 I thought. I went to a few of their meetings, and they used to, there's a Tribune used to come out. I got it sent to me, and nobody ever woke up, because there was a Catholic Tribune used to come too. And no one ever, ever looked. And I used to get this thing. The fighting on the Russian Front, all this stuff. But as soon as the Russians come in, it become a bit more fashionable. Because the Russians came in on our side, actually, they won the war. They lost twenty million people, so they had to contribute a lot. But, yeah.

30:00 I told a mate, lately. He couldn't believe it. He said, "You were a Pinko [a communist]?" I said, "Yeah, I was as a matter of fact." Yeah.

And that was just in Queensland?

In Queensland. And I met some people down here. Had to go to a bookshop, it's like The Quiet Man [spy movie]. Here's me, bumbling around. I couldn't have wrote anything down if I wanted to. If they give me the secret of the bloody atomic bomb, you know. I couldn't write properly. And they're going in there and they're looking around cupboards, and they got books turned upside down. Oh, dear oh dear.

30:30 **What happened at the bookshop? You had a meeting there?**

You could go in and say the magic word, or something, and people would know that you weren't against them, you know. But the other young blokes up there, they had such zeal. They'd get up and give their talk. And they were all for the communist system, you know. Nothing else. And after the war, you know, get rid of the bosses, and all this, you know. It was a bit over the top for me.

31:00 I've always been a Labor man and I always will be. I want a fair shake for the worker. I know, I've still got no time for these bludgers at the head of these big companies, getting millions of dollars, and sitting on their bloody fat jacks and somebody else gets caught for a few bob for taxes, a working man, and they want to put him in the slammer. Oh, no. Maybe there's a little bit of fire left in the belly.

Sounds like.

31:30 There is when I went and had my, I thought, coming from the Woolshed and that Depression, and then going eating with the Governor, and the Premier. Which was very nice. I found that a little bit uplifting. I had a little bit of chamber music, I might say. Let me say.

Did you have any contact with other Communist Party members in New Guinea? Or did anyone ....

No. No. They thought they'd try one step from me.

32:00 This Sullivan, the Rhodes Scholar bloke, he was brilliant, you know. Because that wasn't Sullivan at all. Patterson was his name. Patterson. He come and give a lecture, or a talk, an open discussion. In the, in a hall they built in Queensland. Officers and all were there. They were taking him, it was like arguing with Bob Hawke [Australian Prime Minister]. You know, they were officers, and they were university trained, most of those blokes.

32:30 But he was a better match than they were. At his, he knew his caper. But Bob Hawke would beat most people in an argument. You wouldn't beat him anyway, because he was an arrogant little bastard, wasn't he? My wife always thought the sun shone out of his bum, but he was the most self-serving bloke in the world, everything was for Bob.

And did you talk the politics, well, generally about the war effort and what was going on there?

33:00 In the army?

Well, with this Bluey guy especially?

No, not so much. He would have been a Pinko. He wasn't in that group with us, but his leanings were. Definitely, and then you'd get the bloody real right wings. Jesus, they weren't funny. They didn't want to pay anybody anything. Most of them reckoned we should have started a union in the army. I said, "Anybody gets in the front line should get a pound a day."

33:30 I said, "Worth a bloody quid to be here." This being frightened and giving you six bob.

Risking your life.

Poms used to just get a shilling. One shilling. And they done some hard yakka [labour]. They were good people, the old Poms. Good people. The ones I met along the Suez Canal, they were nice. They were the

conscripts. Like the rest of us, they were just there making up numbers. But they were kind and decent people. Yeah.

34:00 They thought the Australians were bloody marvellous.

Really?

I said, “You’ve been here longer than me.” but they could never get it. They thought if you were an Australian you were a bloody Anzac or something. Not the guards’ battalion, like the Grenadier Guards, the Irish Guards, the Scots Guards and them. They were brilliant soldiers. They were trained to the minute. Like our top blokes are today.

34:30 **Did that inspire you? Their opinion of the other Australian soldiers. Did that make you want to live up to a tradition or a reputation?**

Up to a point. I always wanted to get home. I wanted to be like that bloke that gave me the order of the dating stick. I always wanted to be a returned soldier. I admit that. I wanted to do what I could do, because if there was any just war, but there’s no just war. That was it. When the Japanese were coming here, that was the point. That was the total point of it. We all fell in line then, because no matter what persuasion you were,

35:00 I didn’t want them coming here, because they would have done things here. They’d done it everywhere in the world. And there was no reason they wouldn’t have done it here, to our women, our kids, our men. That was the end of it. But then, you know, it’s funny. Get a few beers in you in the pub, and blokes, we’d hear bits of news would come through, about their raping and killing, Singapore and those places. They were doing it to the Dutch and that.

35:30 Bloke would say, “By Jesus, I’d like to stand there and those Japanese do it.” he said, “To my mother and father, or my wife.” what they were going to do to the Japanese. “You’ve got nothing. They’ve got a big sword.” I said. I’d have to save them. If you think of today’s rationale, you’d have to lay back and think of Mother England. I can’t do much. Because they’ve got the bloody big sword. You know. But we always thought we could, it give us, the lowest ebb here was when,

36:00 the lowest ebb we were was in ‘41, I think, when Russia signed a pact with Germany. There was Italy, Germany, Spain. But Spain put more in than people think. And Russia. And Japan. Now, there’s a nice, what have we got? We’ve got England. England’s buggered, they were on their knees. And we thought, honestly, all the guts went out of you. You thought,

36:30 “Well, there’s no hope here.” And then all of a sudden, Hitler attacked Russia, you know. When that happened, it give us a ray of hope, because we always knew that Russia, we always hoped that Russia could absorb, well, they absorbed twenty million lost, twenty million people. No one else could have done that. I don’t think anyone could have done that. That’s, they actually swung the war.

37:00 I’d say, more so than the Americans. And we, we get the swing back the other way. You were saying we disliked the Japanese. We didn’t dislike them. And I wasn’t a bit, I’m still not a bit shocked about the atomic bomb. Because we never, like when, like when Tarakan finished, before the bomb, like, we were to go straight on and invade Japan. We were asking a lot more, and the conservative estimate was the loss of a million people.

37:30 Well, I didn’t see the odds there. Bugger it. I thought, like, if they’d have had it we were gone. So, I’m not saying it was a pretty sight or anything. But the loss of a million people. Somehow, sometimes, in my own stupid way, I don’t think we would have had to do that, because I think, with the Russians coming down into Japan, we could have cordoned it off, and it would have choked in their own juices, like,

38:00 we could have seen that there was nothing coming into it. You know, with all the Russian troops there, all the Americans, all the whole lot. They couldn’t have done much, could they? I don’t think. Sandra used to go and march every atomic day. She was at the university, and I used to go crook, and, oh well.

Tape 7

We were just talking before about the difference in opinion between yourself and your children about war. Or about ...

Yes, well, Sandra was the one with the university, you know, because I think it was the in thing, wasn’t it? They say “If you’re not an angry man when you’re young there’s something wrong with you.” And “If you’re not conservative by the time you’re thirty, you’re not too bloody bright.”

01:00 Sandra used to march with anything, like anything that was going. And she was something to do with the teacher’s union, or something, and I think that’s why she’s out of the bloody thing. Talked herself out of it. But the others are not. Toni, the youngest one, she’s, no, they all think Dad done the right thing. Yeah.

01:30 **Have you talked much about your experience at war with them?**

No, not much. Told them a lot of bullshit, sometimes, but no. If they ask something I try to answer the best I can. I've told Max, my son, more than the others, because him and I, we were drinking mates, we used to go down the pub and have a few drinks, and somebody would come in with something, might be another soldier, and he'd say something, and we'd dispute it or wouldn't, or talk about it or something like that. And, no, we have a tree. A tree.

02:00 I don't want to repeat myself. We have a tree at the foot of the shrine. It's a pine tree. And we have a plaque there. It's about that, where we went from there. It's called Helen Hill. Famous for us, anyway, there, that hill. That's where the action went, and the medals were won, and the killing and all that sort of thing.

02:30 And there's a bit there where a message went through. It went through as far as Morotai, which is about six hundred mile up, and immediately they went through, we got up through this hill. And this officer said, "We're up Helen." so that caused a bit of a laugh at the time. Bit risqué for those days, but he meant we got up the hill. But yeah.

Could you describe that particular, what do you call that, a battle?

03:00 Well, that was the time we, well, we couldn't take the hill, and I have this on the tape, where they said, I think there was about eight of us. They want eight to go up and draw fire, and well, I said the old colonel having his shave, and you knew bloody well it's an even money bet. Like, if they're there, they're entrenched. They've been there for the last three years, they know where to go and what to do,

03:30 and they're higher up than you. And you've got to walk across this clear patch. So if they're there they kill you. And if they're not there, well, you're lucky. Well, we was bloody lucky that they'd gone.

You described that on Friday. And going up and seeing a lot of dead bodies.

That's right. You could see where the artillery of our stuff had got in amongst the Japanese machine gunners, and they were cut off there (indicates arm) and the volume of maggots was that big.

04:00 They'd be eaten away in a day, through that, and through that. And our blokes were laying there, they were laying there. And the bloke that served the mass, he was there. And we just couldn't take it. It was impossible to take. Like, with what we had. Well, a hundred people went in before and they got knocked out. And we got this bit of, we didn't know about napalm, but they called it "Shelley's petrol" then. They dropped that on. We blew that. That's the thing that disengaged them,

04:30 because after the war, a senior Japanese officer was captured or give himself up, and he told them that was it. He said "The Australians fought well." But he said "They were too well entrenched." The Japanese at the time, there. It was just a shooting field. You'd had to go there, go over this little creek, and there's some bush, timber like that, then you go through it and you've got about fifty yards all cleared,

05:00 where the timber had been cut away, all clear, and then above that, there's timber like that, where they can be up those trees. And they're up those trees in two seconds. Like looking down at clay pigeons. When we were just a bit further on, where there was a creek, we dug in there. Just digging in, just get a toe hold. Every five minutes, you'd hear "Stretcher bearer!" Someone was shot through the back, some was shot through the neck, and the point is, you never seen anyone.

05:30 They say, "Did you see a Japanese?" You never seen one. "Stretcher bearer!" One bloke, would be fair through his shoulder, through his bloody neck and somewhere. And you're trying to dig a bloody hole.

What's it like to see someone being shot, next to you?

Only thing that's better than me is being you. That's the only thing that's not good. I seen one simple, oh, about there, an air force officer, up on this tank. Remember I told you we were running between tanks, to draw a bit of fire, and all this bloody bravado.

06:00 And just looking down from that you could see the beach, and it's like pontoons built. You know, big floating things, like that, but lots of them, and you walk on them. Well, this air force officer, just seen him walk past where I was, and there wasn't much going on. And he walked on these platoons, and he's walking, and all of a sudden, I don't know to this day whether it was some sniper, or if it was a lucky shell or what it was,

06:30 all of a sudden he was hit in the back with something. Like a piece of metal. And it was just like a film unfolding. He just sort of lurched and he just simply went over, and that was the end of a life. Sort of just, he doesn't know, he's walking away from it, see. Not like it was a sustained thing or anything, just, and it seemed to be in slow motion, looking at it.

07:00 I thought, "Well, it's so bloody, so quick, in a way." That's why you hear a lot of the old soldiers, they get old and depressed, and they say, "Clean bullet would have been better than this." Because some got terrible depressed. Terrible depressed. Cry at the drop of a hat. Cry all the time. Get on the booze, too. Get the old La Perouse in, you cry more.

07:30 **Did that affect you in that way?**

Only when the beer run out. I used to get depressed to buggery then. No, I was a pretty happy drunk. I used to get shitty too. I was too, I'm told. I tell you, my kids, now I still get on good with them, which is something after all those years. We get on good. But Maureen, that's the baby. Can't think where she runs now. She runs third in the family.

08:00 She said, "Love you to pieces, Dad." she said, "Still do." And she tells me that. She tells me she loves me, but she says "There's only one day of the week I didn't like you. "What was that, Maureen?" She said, "Saturday." That was pub day. She said, "You'd come home and have a row with Mum and all that sort of stuff." you know. She said, "Other than that." she said, "We thought you were wonderful." Still did. But she said, "We just didn't want." And I can understand, because when my father got drunk,

08:30 and him and Mum would have, or he'd growl at Mum, never physically, but I didn't like him then. Because he wasn't the real Jack Ryan. You know. Because he had the sauce in. And I must have been the same. And my son's the same. He can be one of the funniest, wittiest, one of the nicest men you'd meet, even in drink, up to a point. That extra drink, and he can turn and be a bit of a poo.

09:00 You know. So it must be in the genes. I don't understand all this genetic factor, but maybe.

Maybe the Irish factor?

I think it is, I think, oh, yeah. A good drinker.

What do you think depressed those men that talked about suicide? What was it?

What depressed them?

Yeah. They were actually considering suicide?

09:30 Well, even, the ones I'm talking about, Andy, they would do a job. Some of them worked at Mont Park with me in the psychiatric business. Some of the men. But they were like men that were, sometimes like the walking dead. They were doing a job but there was no enthusiasm in their eyes or anything.

Was it related to their war experience, do you think?

Yes, I believe so.

10:00 **Do you think it's what they'd seen or done?**

Yes, I think it was. What they'd seen. And a lot of them had it up to a point, where they couldn't explode it and get it out of their guts. There was no one like then to say, "Oh, geez, I think you need a psychiatrist, or something." But General Patton, you know, we hear about him in Italy, where he went into a ward where these psychotic people were, and he slapped one of them with his glove, and said, "You're a bludger, go back."

10:30 And he nearly got sacked. Only for Eisenhower, or one of the big nobs, they were going to get rid of him. Like the public opinion just, in America, just went haywire. There was not sympathy. I don't care who you are, you can only stand a certain amount. And some of us has less tolerance than others. You walk out there to go and get in your car, or something, and someone points a gun at you, or something, you're not going to feel too good for a day or two, just for that.

11:00 You know, there's a great hullabaloo if someone robs a bank now, isn't there, but you try it every night like, for two months or something, every day and night, twenty four hours a day, you're not going to feel too bloody crash hot. Some of them done it for years. Some of them went through Alamein, they went through New Guinea, they went through Borneo. And the poor buggers who were prisoners of war and all that, you know.

And you yourself saw people killed,

Yes.

On both sides.

11:30 I never, well, I told you I got like an agitated melancholia, they called it, where I had to walk. You had, it was the worst feeling I ever had. I'd walk into the front bedroom, then there was a bedroom, and I'd get down, I'd lay down for about that long, I'd have to go. No way known I could do it. I'd have to get there and walk, keep walking, walking.

12:00 Went in and seen the psychiatrist, they wanted to put me in a ward. They sedated me and all that sort of stuff and got around a bit. I was drinking a lot of booze, too, with it. Not at the time I was walking. Just felt I couldn't settle. Couldn't settle at all. No, it's still, there's some sad cases. And I think it's like all wars, isn't it? All wars seem to be.

12:30 **You didn't ever become suicidal yourself?**

Yeah, once. Once. But I don't think, I think it's a fleeting fancy. I, yeah, I had enough tablets to kill ten people. I run a ward, you see. Every tablet that was in the book, I had them under lock and key. You know. If I wanted a hundred Ritalin,

13:00 or two thousand Ritalin, or Benzedrine. That's the same that lift you up, now. Amphetamine Sulphate. Could have got bottles of that, you know. But I only took anything that was prescribed for me. No, I wasn't quite that bad. Fleeting thought. When I couldn't sleep and lay of a night and think of a lot of rubbish. And have hot sweats and all that sort of stuff.

13:30 **Did you think a lot of the war? The things you'd seen in the war.**

Well, that was, yeah, I got a bit nervy. But I don't know, I think it's a build up. You see, when you start work as a kid, at ten year old, working hard, you miss an education, you go to a war. Your whole, your young life is stuffed. I had no young life. Where did I have anything? I was married at bloody twenty one.

14:00 You know, I mean, I never got about. Never seen anything. Missed the boat, sort of. That's why I would have been better off stopping in the army, because I would have seen something. You know. Went to Korea. Went to Japan, Korean, Malaysia [Malaya]. Might still be there, mightn't you. I'm happy in my old age now.

14:30 My wife died, she'll be dead five years this year. And I think, we had two good days, and I think we fought the rest. But, I miss her all the time. As I said, I say a prayer to the bloke up there, He's up there. Not there at the moment. The light's not on, you see. But I say a prayer night and morning. And I even had her name etched on the butt of my rifle.

15:00 With my pocket knife. It's a bit like Beau Geste? Ever see Beau Geste? At the pictures. They were three brothers went away and fought in the Foreign Legion. They were heroic men, but fought to the death. And I thought, "If I go down, I've got the, oh, Christ, make you sick." Yeah.

15:30 Oh, you sit back in your dotage when you're old, and you go through everything again. I sit there of a day, and it can be a lonely pad. I go to an old people's group tomorrow and they're pretty good. Now and again go away for a couple of days. Went away to Mt Gambier, not Mt Gambier, oh, I don't know. Grampians, that's right. And down around Healesville. They have days out and all that sort of stuff. Bit of a break.

16:00 Other than that, I've been pretty fortunate in my health in some ways. Had a heart attack, and emphysema, and that. But I've got no arthritis or anything, which is good.

Was it important to have a memento of home? Like, a name on a butt of your rifle?

Yes, important. Important. I always had a photo, too.

Who did you have a photo of?

My missus. Yeah. Everyone had a photo. Everyone I knew.

16:30 **What other items or tokens of home would you have?**

Pardon?

Items, or tokens of home?

Not a great deal. You see, you had to carry everything. You had that, and the big days were letter days, when mail come from home. You know, in the back of a truck. They'd pull up in a little truck, this is, say, in the Tablelands, and somewhere like that, and so many for you,

17:00 and some poor buggers would get none, you know. My missus used to write every day. I had stacks of mail, which was beaut, you know.

Did it come fortnightly or monthly?

Sometimes. I think Max was, he was about three weeks old when I got the thing, everything had to be censored in those days. Yeah. Had to be censored. And the officers used to have to read it. That was a bit embarrassing.

17:30 **I was going to ask you that. Did that affect your letter writing?**

Well, yeah. You couldn't put the little saucy bits in too good. I laughed one day. There's a row of tents. You can imagine going along where we are, here's a row of tents, and then there's a parade ground, and then there's a row of tents on the other side, where the officers were, you see. And I'm sitting with this bloke, we were just talking like you and I, and the tent opened there, and we're looking out there like that,

18:00 and I could see the officers over there, and they're censoring letters. And I don't know if this bloke got a touch of paranoia, but he said, "Yes." he said, "That bastard's censoring my letters, that bloke that's laughing." And he's straight across and he had a go at him. I don't know if it was or not, but he said, what they're supposed to do is sort of fold a quarter of the paper down you're supposed to read it, and not be able to keep the continuity of the sentence and all that sort of stuff.

18:30 But you could go to an officer, if you knew the officer, and could sort of swear. Like he knows that you're kosher, he'd sign, there was a brown letter, he'd sign it beforehand. All he had to do was initial it across

the bottom of the envelope, Lieutenant Hilly or Lieutenant Smith, across the bottom of it, and then you sealed that. That didn't have to go to the, you got one of those, about one a month. But if the officer done it for you, well, good.

19:00 You couldn't tell them, I couldn't tell them anything they couldn't read in the bloody newspaper, but the little saucy bits, you might say. Yeah. But otherwise it would be in the newspapers, because you had newspapers, you had correspondents there, and war artists on patrols. I remember the day that was taken, and we didn't know till afterwards. He was an official war photo photographer.

19:30 Yeah, they were the big days, the letter days.

When would they come when you were in the islands?

Letters? Oh, more infrequently. They used to be flown in by Catalina flying boat. To Morotai. Oh, you'd get them in a job lot. You know, build up. You might get them fortnightly, you might get a big heap of the bloody things. Me, I'd think that was great. And I'd write when I could. Oh, everything was kosher then.

20:00 **Did people share letters, with people who didn't have letters? Or talk about what you'd read?**

You would share, you wouldn't share your letter. You'd share items of it. I nearly got my head knocked off. You remember that bloke was so bad one night, one day, that he grabbed my leg and asked me not to put him up on the beach. Remember I said his mind had given up on him. And he could fight this bloke, and it was just on dark.

20:30 And everyone was reading little bits from their letters, you see. And I got to it where I think it was Max, yeah Max. The missus wrote and said "He got chicken pox." You see. And we're standing around, a ring of soldiers, and I said, "Yes." I said, "My little bit of news. My son's got chicken pox." And this punch went past. I could feel the wind as it went past. He must have just missed my chin. Because he could fight, you see. We'd had a few beers.

21:00 And he said, "Lovely saying your kids got the pox." This is true. Nearly knocked my head off. I said, "John. Settle down, settle down." He said, "Yeah, a lovely thing to say. You're a mongrel, Ryan." Yeah. Yeah. He said, "Saying your kids got the pox." I said, "He's got chicken pox." Aaah. Jesus, I was lucky.

21:30 **Was VD [Venereal Disease] much of a problem? You'd been to the Middle East ...**

VD? Yeah, because there was. Yes. In the Middle East, I went past this hospital. There was a big hospital of it. And they used to have special, now don't mark me down for this. But they had a different coloured dressing gown they wear, and the matron used to call them "Her naughty boys."

22:00 But, the privates and non-commissioned officers, they got the pox. Padres, chaplains and officers, they got a strain. They didn't get that, because actually they wouldn't get it, see. Wouldn't live on them. That's what they tried. And a bloke, he was unlucky. The bloody war had finished, too. And they got a woman in Tarakan,

22:30 and she was badly affected with. First of all, I'll tell you, I went to this building, it was two storey. Not a bloody big storey, but two storeys of bamboo. You went up and there was a room in there, and you walked out onto a veranda, and the steps went down like that on the side. There was at least two barrow loads of condoms. That was a Japanese brothel.

23:00 And this poor bugger, this poor Indonesian woman, she was so badly infected with syphilis. All eaten away down the genitalia and that, and the officer, our officer, one captain one day give her some medication or something, and she slept, and to frighten us he told the soldiers, he said, this is how they frightened you. "If you get this." he said, "You don't go home. You stop on the islands for the rest of your life." If you get this disease.

23:30 Well, we had one bloke, he was a very cunning looking bloke, he knew his, he knew what to do, he was a bit of a Don Juan, he was. And he was wandering away of a night, and he was wandering away, then one bloody morning I see him, he's packing his gear. And I said, "Bill, or Joe, or Harry, where are you going, Harry?" "Where am I going?" he said, "I'm going back to Morotai. I've got a load of the old jungle juice." He'd been out with the natives

24:00 and got the thing, you know. Yes. They used to say it was better to hand feed.

Better?

Better to hand feed. Be sure. And all the, in the thirties and forties, every toilet on the railway station,

24:30 had a thing up about syphilis and contagious diseases, and to be careful and report it. And the condoms they give you in the army. I reckon if you put them on your car you'd go to Sydney. You'd have no trouble, whatsoever. I tell you what we used to use them for. And this is true. You know in the jungle when it rains, you'd get three feet of rain overnight; we used to put it over the top of our rifles.

25:00 You know, keep the rain out of it, and you could shoot through it. And no water, no water! Lucky a bullet would go through it. Not refined they were. Not refined.

How would you attach it, a rubber band, or something like that?

No. Just pull it down over, right down over. And that used to hold, keep the water out. No, they were no good. But it was a big problem in the Middle East apparently.

This brothel you came across, was that after the Japanese had been pushed out of there?

25:30 Yes. they just used them. And so did the Dutch too. The Dutch. All that area was Dutch, you know. It wasn't Indonesian. It was Dutch. And you could see from the day one, that there was going to be an eruption there, between the Dutch and the Malaysians. Because the Dutch treated them like pigs. Which is, when the war finished, we got some beer

26:00 and I was having some drinks with some Indonesian soldiers, and some sergeants, and privates and that. And an officer come up and went crook. He said, "What are you doing?" "What do you mean what am I doing? I'm having a drink with them." So the officer said, "What do you think we're going to do with them when you go back. You're treating them as equals." This is how they thought. This is really how they thought. And it proved, well, they got kicked out. More arrogant than the Germans, really. Dutch. Very arrogant people.

26:30 **Did you have much to do with them, besides that scene?**

Just a little bit to do with them. They were there. And yes, I'll tell you a funny one. I should have got a Purple Heart for this. It had been an old Dutch barracks before the Japanese got it. They had toilets; the toilets were built up about so high, about five foot high, six foot high,

27:00 and there'd be a row of them. A row of them from here to the other side of the street. Well, I'm telling lies. Half way, three parts, it was. And what they used to do, you'd be sitting up like that, that's the throne there, the seat there. One there, one there, right along. And they, of course, there's so much oil there, and oil on the surface, to get rid of it in the finish, they used to burn it with oil, all the poo and all the, and I go down there one night,

27:30 and I'm on my own, sitting on the toilet there, contemplating what's going to happen in the world, and somebody must have went up the other end, to go to the toilet and threw his cigarette butt down, and it went whooof! And it de-furred me. Here I am, hanging on to a rail, there's a rail there like that, and my heart's going, and I'm hanging on to this rail. I was de-furred. I had to go to the doctor. He said, "What's wrong?" "My arse is burnt."

28:00 I'm hanging on to it. It went whooof! And the bloody flame come up past me, Jesus. I reckon, talk about bloody Kleenex. I'll never forget it. So I said, "I should have got a Purple Heart. I was bloody wounded." Never got it in the paper. I was hanging onto the bloody thing. Yeah, he lifted the seat and threw the bumper down, you see. And when it went whooof! Oh, pain. Pain. Excruciating pain.

28:30 And I was hanging on. They had a rail went along. I can see it now. I'm hanging on to that. And he said, "What happened to you?" And I said, "You stupid bastard. I've been de-furred." Right up and, oh, geez. Up along Peter and stuff. Needed ointment. Yeah. Oh, dear. Yes, it was all long ago. But one thing about it you learn.

29:00 They were good people, good people. Couldn't make mates like them, I don't think, in so-called civilian life. I don't think you could make mates like them. They were always so generous to everyone, generous to each other. You know. But it was a matter of sharing, you know. And as you asked before, there wasn't much they wouldn't do.

29:30 They was always, I don't know whether it was right or not. I didn't see it, and I don't know anyone who did see it. They reckon they caught somebody at the Caulfield Race Course. I wasn't there. I was in NSW. The Caulfield Race Course was a place for soldiers, you know, in the stands, the grandstands, you know, with a grandstand and that, they reckon they caught somebody thieving and they made him walk off the end of the height, you know, great big high building. They reckon the troops made him do it. I don't know if it's bullshit or not, but that was always said.

30:00 **And it killed him?**

Killed him, yeah. I told you the officer said when we lost the tobacco, "I'm not telling you what to do, but I don't want to know about it. I'll just leave it to you." He said, "I don't want it reported. I don't want anything, if you find out who done it." They never found out that I knew of. Thieving like, thieving off you're your mates, you just don't do it.

30:30 **And just going back to that brothel. Did you see any signs of ill-treatment these women might have suffered?**

You couldn't. It was just like a, one was just a little cabin thing, off like this, with a cane bed on it, and opposite, you'd go out on this little balcony, and take off the condom off and just throw it over the side. And there was a heap there, oh, big mound, two foot, two foot six high.

31:00 You know, not very hygienic with any of it, was it?

I'm guessing they were forced participants?

Oh, yeah. But they'd be too frightened to do anything. I know, they're spotlessly clean and naïve people.

There was a lot of Eurasians. You know, the half Chinese ones. And they were very pretty. The only time I ever carried a bloody revolver. Felt like Wyatt Earp.

31:30 I was going through, they sent us through this town this night to see everything was kosher and no Japs in there or anything. This girl about sixteen, I used to call her Cherry Blossom. I seen her a couple of times. She was the prettiest bloody girl I'd seen, I think. Eurasian. Bloke said, "There you are, Ryan. You can be missing for twenty minutes if you want to?" I said, "Not on you bloody life." I said, "I can love her from afar." No, nice people they were, they were only,

32:00 they'd had enough. They were so gentle. The bomb craters, you know there was a lot of bomb craters around. Dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens. And the water would settle a bit. They'd go in there and they were spotlessly clean. They'd go in there and have a tub up with their little babies and that, and just put a sarong around them.

32:30 Yeah, so gentle. Oh, those Dyaks. By Jesus, they were a vicious crowd. That was the short ones I told you about them. They still maintain their own bit of territory in Indonesia. I think they're left alone. They don't interfere with anyone else, and you don't interfere with them.

So you'd go into villages for patrols and things like that?

Yeah, yeah. Well, not a lot of villages because Tarakan was only a little village you see.

33:00 It was only there for oil. It was that bloody commercial. As the saying is, we didn't even bury our dead properly, before the Shell Oil Company was in there when the war finished, getting it. Getting the money coming in again. It was owned by, that's why the Dutch were there. The Shell Oil Company. Queen Wilhelmina and all that.

You mentioned something on Friday about having to go into a village …

33:30 Where we had to…

Kick some doors down.

Kick some doors down and throw a grenade in.

What was the story behind that? Can you tell me about that?

Oh, just cleaning up the village when we first landed there. Jesus, I was a poor bloody thieving thing. Went into a chemist shop. And all I got was a great bloody big vacuum flask. You know, vacuum flask. Now that would come in handy. You could either pee in it. There was nothing you could do with the bloody thing. I'm carting this thing around. And the old padre, Church of England padre, nice man.

34:00 He said, "You don't want that, son, do you?" I said, "No, I can't think what to do with it, Sir." He said, "Can I have it?" and I said, "Yes." And he used to give the wounded a drink from it, go and make some coffee in it. Another bloke pinched a typewriter. And he was like me, couldn't read or write, and he pinched a bloody typewriter. And we, we come to a mint, a mint, money mint. It had been bombed out. And we couldn't carry anything. The notes were burnt.

34:30 The notes were, they were Japanese money, I had some, but the silver money was guilders, Dutch guilders. Each one was worth three and sixpence. And there was blocks of them, twice as big as your case there. That by that. They'd fused together. Well, we couldn't even get a handful of them. If someone had come along, could have got a big quid. We couldn't carry anything you know.

35:00 **So you were able to loot, and get around and…**

No. No. Well, if, I suppose we did loot, I suppose. We took the stuff that was there. It was minimal stuff. Just a little old town, and the Japanese had taken most of it. And they had a club there. I think the Dutch might have had it before and they had a nice swimming pool, of all things. With tiles around it and that. They eventually got it cleaned out. And I had a swim in that.

35:30 They eventually, once the war finished, they cleaned it out. And a tank, the only tank I seen there, with traction blown off it, near the baths. That's the only place I seen that looked any good.

What were your exact orders? To go into that town to …

Just to clear it out. See there was no Japs left behind. You know, clear as you go. Try and get them to go back to the hills. You only take it yard by yard. I never seen where they wanted to walk.

36:00 And you'd have to route march twenty mile. You'd only walk ten yards and somebody would want to bloody shoot you. So I see, no great hurry. Unless you wanted to retreat.

And were there many Japanese there?

Oh, there was enough there. Enough to make it awkward. Yeah.

Was there fighting? Like a bit of gun fighting?

Yeah. Some fire power. But they'd fire and they'd scamper, or you'd scamper. Yeah.

36:30 **Sounds pretty chaotic and …**

Oh, it was all chaotic. When, just up there at Helen Hill, before we done that walk up the hill, you could sit there of a night and the Japanese were talking. You could hear them talking. That's how close they were. And they'd play an old gramophone. Scratchy thing. Yeah.

Did it worry you, in that village, that some non-Japanese would be killed or injured?

That the Japanese would be killed? Non-Japanese?

There were locals in there?

37:00 Yes, I was always a bit tardy that it might be a non-Japanese when you fired. You know, when you first got there and you landed, and you'd point. It was more or less like trench war fire for a start, because you'd go down this dale and up that dale, and I thought "I wouldn't like to shoot some poor bastard." Because they'd done a few on the beach, I told you, they shot them through the legs and that so they couldn't work for us and all that, you know. Because they'd been there for years. They had cannons, for want of better words.

37:30 Field pieces. They had them dig into the hills on rail lines, you see, and because you go over it and bomb it and nothing ever happened to them. Because they'd just take it back in and they they'd wheel it out and fire a few shots and then go back in again. Well, they asked, I was with one of them, there was two of us escorted this young naval officer up one day. They said, "Go with him." And I went with him, and we went up to this bit of a hill like that, and then there was a valley down like that, and then there was a hill opposite it.

38:00 There was a hole, a cave in this hill. And he was the observation officer, for the ship, it was out, I don't know, two mile out, three mile, however far it was. And he said, "I'm here to crack that tunnel." He said, "There's a field piece in it." And I said, "Oh, yes." Poetry in motion really, he give the word back to the ship, fired one shot, it landed, oh don't quote me. Well, quote me.

38:30 Say ten yards to the left and the next one about ten yards to the right, and the next one was straight down the hole. Straight down the thing. And they used to, the only other way they used to get them out was to use flame throwers. They were the worst thing, flame throwers.

How come?

Well, you couldn't get them out. You wouldn't want to go in there looking for them. They might shoot you. So they used to put a flame thrower in.

39:00 They'd just suck the air out, or burnt them. That's the way it went.

When was the first time you saw someone killed?

Actually, visibly saw one? That was the first day I landed at Tarakan.

In that village?

Yeah. That's the first time I'd seen them killed.

39:30 I'd see dead. I'd seen dead in New Guinea. Bobbing about in the water, and all that sort of stuff, and in the mud. First I'd actually seen. That's about all my war stories. All over. You think what you done, what you didn't do. You always think what you should have done. Comes back sometimes. I always say, even though I met this Bluey Mac [John Mackey],

40:00 I told you, when I had to stand up and tell them when they were level, I told you. And he said, "For Christ's sake." I told you, I stood up and the machine gun cut off the thing, nearly cut me in half. I always reckoned he was crook. The poor bugger got killed after, he got the Victoria Cross, but it was no good to him. I always thought he was crooked on me. Like, I should have got up quicker. Reacted quicker. I even told his sister. His sister comes down to our march, and she wears a medal, a replica of the VC.

40:30 And she said, "Ah, I don't think he would have been." And I said, "I never pressed it. I just got a feeling, you know." I should have reacted. I was a bit tardy. Because I knew there was machine gun trained on me. Because they had been pecking away at it. But I couldn't believe that I just got down and it shaved it off. Shaved it off just like you would with hedge cutters, not hedge cutters, but with the whipper snipper things. Just took it off like that, and that would have been there.

41:00 Would have cut you in half. I thought, "Ooh. That's not good. That's not treatment."

Tape 8

00:30 **I'd just like to ask you about the first time you had to fire a gun to defend yourself? Remember that occasion?**

Yeah, that was at Tarakan, when we landed there. They were firing at us, and we were firing at them. I couldn't see much, but I was firing, everyone was firing. I thought, "This is what we do here." Don't you worry about that.

Were you surprised at your reaction under fire and having to …

Not so much. Not when I went up to that hill and they started to say, "Stretcher bearers."

01:00 Like, it was close. It's like you're sitting there, and the lady's a little bit further towards the wall, and just digging in like, and suddenly, bang! You're shot through the shoulder, somewhere. She's hit in the arm. You start to think, "Jesus, this is…." That was the first time I actually fired. The first time, that was the first time. Then we were giving covering fire to those blokes that went in, you know, even though they fired, and where we would have been cut in half,

01:30 I got behind a tree, like thing, you kept firing, And you can't see anybody. That's the thing. Nine out of ten people never see anybody. They either shoot you or you come across them. Yeah.

What weapon did you have in that village? That landing?

Mmm?

Sorry. What weapon did you have at Tarakan?

What did I have? An old .303.

02:00 Threw a couple of grenades, hand grenades. Then they had the Bren gun was with us. We had a Bren gun. Owen gun. Don't know if you're familiar with the Owen gun. That was a great invention. The bloke never got anything. Ended up losing everything he had. They took him for tax and everything. But if it had been an American, he would have been a multi-millionaire.

02:30 That was good. Of course, you had your attachments. You had your Vickers machine gunners, you had, and that's about as big as we had, was the Vickers.

And did they set up somewhere in that village on that particular occasion?

Yeah, they did. That's it, yeah.

And they gave you covering fire?

Gave you covering fire. You only have your own little slot, you know, your vision's that, you know, what's gong on around you.

03:00 Because these four, where they landed, say, half an hour before us. The real crack battalions landed. The 48th Battalion, the 24th Battalion, they were hardened infantry battalions. That's all they done. And they were good battalions. You know, about seven VCs. In the battalion. So they were, and highly trained and disciplined. Makes all the difference.

03:30 And magnificently led. Nearly every officer in there was decorated. Oh, I mean to say, nearly every officer, half of them would be decorated anyway. They were good infantry battalions. Can take your hat off to them, you know.

How did you respond in that landing, at that village we were talking about? Did you find you were you able to go about your job easily?

Yep. Yep. It was, to me see, it was all relatively new.

04:00 I think you'd be a little bit more affected the next time. The first time every time's a bit new, isn't it? Like a new game. And we were all together, I don't know, about six weeks we were battling around there. Bumbling around. Finally cleared it. We ended up with about three hundred prisoners, I think.

04:30 **Their losses were quite high generally, those island campaigns.**

I can't think of their losses. They did lose a lot. They lost a lot, because as I said, a lot of them tried to get back to the mainland. Which you could see, but they had no way of getting there, and they run out of food and everything. They were getting around in the fennies, they were starving, really starving.

05:00 I think, I know that the day the war finished, and they went and told these Japanese prisoners, behind the compound, they let all that stupid laughter out they have. Well, it seemed stupid to us anyway. The laughter, you know, the high-pitched laugh, as though it couldn't happen. Not till the Emperor came on himself. That's the first time anyone ever heard the Emperor speak. Anywhere.

05:30 Bar say in Japan. Well, the first time the ordinary Japanese ever heard him. And he spoke. And he told them that all was over, like. To lay down their arms. We still done patrols. The Japanese still fought and that after the war. Because I couldn't see any value in that. So I used to lead a patrol out and I didn't want to get near them. Well, what, it's a non-event. You know, all round.

06:00 I used to go out sometimes. I plotted on the bloody thing. What do you call the thing you carry? The compass. I'd say, "We'll do it from here." Sit down in the bush, and have a spell. And then one day a

sergeant said, “I’ll go with you.” I said, “This’ll be bloody good.” Got down a bit, and de wasn’t a bad bloke. I said, “Do you want to go the distance?” “What do you mean?” “Oh,” I said, “Not much in this, you know. Kill one of them or they kill us.”

06:30 “What do you do?” I said, “This is as far as we’re going.” So that was it. We were ready to go home by then.

You were saying before, generally you didn’t see them. Did you know when you would hit someone?

No, I didn’t know. No.

Didn’t see anyone that you’d hit?

No.

07:00 **Did you think much about that? Having killed?**

No, I thought, no just fired away in the general direction and hope it’s doing some bloody good. Hoping you were doing all right. Wish it was over. Yeah. When you work it out and you look around, you were all only bloody kids, really. More so than even today. We were all so naïve.

07:30 I’ll guarantee out of that the ship that went from Sydney to the Middle East, eighty percent would have never seen the sea. Or I’ll say fifty percent. They come from the country, they come from outback, there was no holidays in those days for anybody. Nobody had any money. And I guarantee there wouldn’t have been anybody went outside the Heads. Sydney Heads. Nobody. Maybe one or two, maybe First War blokes.

08:00 But that’s about all. Yeah, it was, they all looked so young. They were still fighting around there. I told you, when the hills used to open up of a night, and you could see all this firing and everything. I had a young bloke with me. I can never think of his name. Ian somebody. He was, I was twenty two, and he was young. He was about eighteen. Seventeen to eighteen. But he used to wander away of a night.

08:30 He was a funny boy. Good intentions, like. And you’d be standing there in the bloody dark, near a tree or something on your own, and this voice come along. “How you going, Cook? I’ve been up around. I seen where such and such is, and I’ve been here.” I said, “Something wrong with you. I just like staying here, like peaceful.” “No, I like to go around.” he said. Away he’d go. Good little soldier.

Did he survive the war?

09:00 Yeah, yeah. Good as gold. Go for his little walk. Yeah.

In battle situations, or under fire, did you see any acts of bravery or desertion?

Yeah. Acts of bravery. Some excelled a little bit. Well they, like, the platoon that went in and tried to take the hill, but didn’t get it. But they got the VC, and they got the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and they got the Military Cross. Jack Travers, the captain, got the Military Cross. And he came back. He was in a hell of a bloody lather. Good looking man. He come back and was half way down the track, and there was bloody mud and shit and stuff, and everything, and he said, “Those bastards can’t do that to us.”

10:00 He said, “They’re only little.” he said, “Come on. We’ll all charge it.” And I thought, “Jesus Christ, this seems a bit of a desperate measure.” Anyway, common sense prevailed and they didn’t do it, because they were just walking back into machine guns, you know. But he got decorated. He was a brave man. Situations. See, whoever’s turn is to be there. See, our turn was to hold the place and stop there.

10:30 But the other two’s turn was to go up. You know. It’s where you’re told to go. And then it shines. So, you know, it’s like every instinct. It’s either fight or flight, isn’t it? You know, no matter what you run into. You run into a bloody dog that’s barking. You either take off or you bluff it out.

11:00 But I don’t think I’d have run under heavy fire. You know. Had a bit of fire when we first landed. No, I don’t think so. I don’t, no heroics either. But then, conditions might make things a bit different.

I was wondering also, about those prisoners of war. You said about three hundred?

Roughly three hundred.

Did you have anything to do with those?

I didn’t. I know blokes who did. I know blokes that used to go in and they had a ball.

11:30 They were supposed to be guarding them. But they reckoned the Japs used to come in with hot cups of tea for them of a morning. I said, “It wouldn’t do me. I’d sit up and have a bloody fit. Looking at those moon-eyes looking at me.” So I declined the offer. But they reckoned it was a good bludge. Good bludge. They had enough sense, the Japanese, to know it was over.

12:00 And they’d come around cleaning up around the mess rooms, and that sort of stuff. I just wrote them off in my own mind as a non-event. Like. It’s over, it’s over. But I never respected them ever. Ever.

It must have been hard with so much bitter feeling towards Japanese, for the men to look after prisoners of war.

For them to look after them?

Well, to have them there and …

Well, I know an old mate of mine.

12:30 Four of us still go into Anzac House and have a few beers every Monday. And one, his job was in there with them. He ended up cooking. Yeah, he ended up cooking for them, and learned a little bit of Japanese. And he thought they weren't too bad. I suppose a lot of them was forced into it, like everyone else. But they're ruthless.

13:00 **It must have been pretty tempting to make reprisals, or get revenge in some ways. Depends how vulnerable, I suppose.**

Yes. It just was like a great relief come off your mind, that I want to get away from this. That's why you just couldn't wait to get out of it. You wanted to get back into civilian life. And you just felt some relief coming off you.

13:30 I don't know. But there was always, no, I never heard anybody say, "I'd like to go in and shoot a lot of them." Just ignored them. You know. They'd had enough. It's like two blokes have a fight, they get to the end of the fight, and they're both buggered. Had enough.

14:00 **Well, I might just ask you on tape then, about what we were just speaking about. Do you think that the mates that you know, the other veterans from the war, do you think they reflect upon their experience as much as, perhaps, you do?**

The ones I know do. The ones I know, which is a dwindling amount at the moment, but they, as I said, we go in each, once a month

14:30 and we have our few beers and a little bit of nosh. We all have our turn to speak, and, yes, some of them have seen a little bit more action than me. Some didn't, but we all, they all have their reflections. What might have been, or what should have been. Yes, I would say, absolutely. And then there's always, one great little mate of mine, Siddy Braymore, he was in my section,

15:00 and he died a while back with cancer. But old Siddy would, a real Australian, you know, rolling the quirly. Putting a quirly in the corner, and he'd just say nothing. "Yep, yep, that's right." that's how he'd reflect. But he was still a deep thinker. You could ask him something, I'd say, "Listen, Sid. Bloke that come up, that Queensland bloke that come up from Cunnumulla. What was his name?"

15:30 And he'd rattle it off just like that. Seemed to have it all, never, he was a rare one. Yes. Very good though. Pray for the man. It's like, it's something like a war movie like you see, not a war movie. It's like people walking past.

16:00 See, when I talk about Sid. I can see him as he was then, a young boy, and all that. It's just like a, no wonder they say, "At the going down of the sun, those that grow old. Shall never grow old." Because they died as boys, a lot of them. You know. Only boys. Yeah. Well, to answer your question, the ones that I know, they have good reflections or good recall.

16:30 Pretty good. I hope they're not bullshitting to me. But could be.

And what do you think that reflection provides later in life?

Collectively, or just . . . .

Well, speaking for yourself, I guess.

Well. Sometimes we go in there and have a fair bit of juice, as much as old blokes can drink, and I come back, and I sit in the chair and I think about all the things they've said, like I don't get all of what they said,

17:00 but I got some, and there are about four of us, so some of what you said, and you said. And I found it interesting, or I found it wasn't. Or sometimes, yeah, sometimes like all old people we repeat ourselves a bit. But you get some good stories. And you get some truth, too, you know. Comes out. You wouldn't want to bullshit too much, because they would know.

17:30 You know, like they always say don't bullshit a bullshitter, because he knows. One old bloke, old Jim, he was over there before me. He was up in Syria, but he wasn't in the war up at Syria, and then he come back and he joined the cavalry. They were like, they were in little tanks, and that, but he's got a terrible good recall. With football, races and everything. And he's eighty four.

18:00 Total recall. He'd fill your tape with good stuff. Yeah.

Do you think more truth comes out later in life than it did straight after the war?

Yeah. More truth, yes. Oh, yes. Nearer my God to Thee. See. Oh, yes it does, I'm sure it does. I mean,

you don’t, well, I’m not too bad for my age,

18:30 but you know there’s a limit to this caper. I’ll think of that when you go.

And what do you think happens when the limit occurs?

When you die? Deep down, I think we just die, and there’s nothing. But I still hold that little bit of faith. Because I’m an each way better, you see. I’m a punter, have a bet each way. Because I am brought up a Catholic.

19:00 When I say Catholic, it’s not a Catholic unless you go to church, is it, really. But I’ve always said my prayers, never been ashamed to tell anybody, I say my prayers, but I never say you’ve got to say your prayers, or you’ve got to say your prayers, or you’ve got to go to church, and I don’t want anyone telling me. I just quietly want to say my prayers. Ask God “Can he help me, or if I want something?” And I found that a help to me. I pray if my old mate’s sick or something.

19:30 For God to look after him, yeah. But that’s, because I told you, He’s up in the light globe. Because he’s just a likely, if there is such a thing, a superhuman being, he’s as likely to be there as anywhere else. But religion. When I see over there, in this last war, or slaughter or whatever you want, that fundamentally they’re both talking about the Supreme Being and that, aren’t they?

20:00 You know, Allah, and going to Mecca, and the Pope, and there’s the Church of England, and there’s all the other religions. And, I think religion owes the world a lot. I think it’s been the devil of a thing. Read a book a while back, The Last Man out of Spain. Goes back to the fifteenth century, when all the Jews got kicked out of Catholic Spain.

20:30 You know, just by word of mouth. You know, religion’s done some terrible things, and in the name of religion. Yes, that’s where I stand on it. But I believe everybody’s got a right. If you go to church or anything, that’s your business. Nobody should say, “She’s a holy noly, or she’s a do gooder.”

21:00 As long as you’re not cramming it down somebody’s gullet. That’s my creed.

You’ve mentioned views about pacifism since the war. Can you tell me more about that?

What do I think of pacifism? Yes, I believe I could be myself. I don’t think you can just keep turning your cheek, or something.

21:30 You know, there’s a limit where you can come to it. I was never behind this Iraq war. I thought, “There’s got to be a better way than this.” because it’s sending a jackhammer to crack an almond. I mean, the greatest force that’s ever been known to the world, and they’ve only got twenty six million people, six more than us. Little bit rude. You know.

22:00 That Saddam Hussein’s not much good. I think he’s a bad man. What have they got in his place? You know, you’ve got to fill that void now. Got to fill it. And those poor bastards over there, I mean, you know. One thing you can say, if there was no oil there, I’m not saying it is oil, I’ve got, if there was no oil there, and that was a poor country,

22:30 no one would ever know where it was. You can go to the Congo, some of those places, they can starve by five hundred thousand, or something, no one even bothers to give two hoots. The Hutus and Tutsis, whatever, a while back, slaughtering each other left, right. Nothing. This is bloody different. And also, Israel being there. When I was over in Palestine and Egypt I knew there would be war, they were lining up then. They were offering us,

23:00 the Israelis were offering us five pounds for our rifles. And they were the ones that run shops, little shops I’m talking about. Little shops. Any mercenary. Like they would be, don’t get me wrong, everyone’s a racist if you scratch them. But they would be selling stuff. The Palestinians would be digging on the roads, growing oranges, grapefruit,

23:30 that type of thing. And the hate was there then. Because I walked into Gaza, one Sunday afternoon, with a bloke, and what I remember of Gaza was all these great, high, what do they call them, mosques and that. Where they’re doing their prayers and all that. Sunday afternoon. And I walked in. To be quite candid too we’re thinking we were going to get a girl.

24:00 This is so naïve. It makes me blush even. There was two or three blokes come up. Serious looking people. “What are you doing down here?” And you could smell something not kosher. And I said, “We were just interested to see what’s going on.” I said, “I suggest you don’t go any further.” I said, “No, I think that’s a good idea.” We just went. Because you would have disappeared, you could have disappeared in there, you know. Right down in amongst hundred and hundreds of people,

24:30 this mosque whatever, down there licking rugs. I don’t know. But that was it. The hate was there. And the hate was in Borneo, with the Indonesians and the Dutch. The hate was there. As soon as I come home, I’ve always told Max, my son, I said, “And don’t ever underestimate Indonesia as a force.” I said, “They’re good soldiers.” They’ll fight. They’ll fight all right.

25:00 And they’re on our doorstep, aren’t they?

You helped win the major war of the twentieth century. Do you think the world will ever find peace?

No. No. Because I think as long as history goes back, there's never been total peace, has there. And I think it's more shabbier and grubbier now than ever. I do.

25:30 I think it's shabby and grubby and money-eating bastards now. You'll be the most respected woman in the world if you've got plenty of money. Doesn't matter what you do. Doesn't matter what. If it's laughter or chafter [?], you do something a little bit out of the ordinary, and you're only human, and you haven't got any money, you're crap. And I am a bit, I'm a socialist. Socialism don't work, but I know what I mean.

26:00 See George W [Bush] getting around there like a bloody cowboy and that, makes me want to throw up. You know. I just want to throw up. I think, "Jesus Christ, have we come to this?" You know. And I know Australians, just ordinary people like myself, and they're saying, "Oh, they've done the right thing." you know. "Those old Yanks won't take any shit, you know." They haven't even got the guts, at that Guantanamo Bay, they won't even torture the people in America because it's not done, but they grab a bit o1d Cuba, and put it up,

26:30 eleven or fifteen year old kids and that there, and they've got no rights. What's all the war about? I don't think there's any humanity left. I really don't. No I don't think there's any, do you think there'll be any peace? Don't look good.

Do you feel pessimistic, then, about human nature?

Yes. Very much. See, I used to be, I don't know what you'd call me.

27:00 I tried to make a reason why I was a little cog in that war. May have been some help, may have been no help, but at least I tried. I used to go out to my front gate there, round about New Year's time, when I seen all those little kids going back to school. And I thought, "Isn't this wonderful that at least these kids can go back to school, with a little face on, black, white or brindle, and they won't know any different till some bastard gets to them and teases them?"

27:30 She's black looking. She's a nigger. Oh, that's a dago. That's a wop. Or that's a chow." I said, "They won't know. They've got off on a good start. And have a good life." And they have had a good life here. I don't care how bad it's been, it's been better than in most places." That's all. Jesus, I sound like Bob Hawke.

28:00 Yeah, I used to see all those kids, see them now. Going along. And they don't know hate, do they, till somebody teaches them. They don't even know they're black or white. I got one little great grand daughter now. She's quarter Indian. Yeah, little, lovely little thing, you know. Yeah. Oh, yes.

What is your perspective on forgiveness?

28:30 Well, I'm a bit hypocritical about this, because the Japanese, I thought hate could be a good thing. Even that atomic bomb didn't affect me. No. Because, just it was total war, and they were so brutal.

29:00 Read about rape and Nanking, and go and see what they were doing in that special division up in Manchuria, and putting botulism into all the natives, and see how they react, and the Japanese officers used to come out in the afternoon and see how many heads they could chop off before they had lunch, and tea and dinner, and all this. I thought, "No, you're only sub-human. I've got no time for you." Not my cup of tea. I had hate there.

29:30 But otherwise I think, no, I could never hate anyone for long. If I don't like a person, I'll never make a mate of them. I'll never joke with them. If I joke. If I was to be a friend of you, and I joke, personal joke, but I'm your friend. But anyone else, I couldn't be bothered with, I couldn't even have the energy to work up a bit of fun, or anything I thought was funny. I just put them on the back burner. Say "G'day" and leave it at that. If you get in the pub or something,

30:00 and I'd say, "G'day Bill, g'day." and you gravitate towards blokes that you liked or respected, or whatever it was. Yeah.

How should, do you think, how should Australians look upon forgiveness in relation to the Second World War?

How should they look on it now? Oh, I think it's got, got to be, like the Japanese.

30:30 It's not even in their history books, you know. Nothing. Nothing's written. If it was in there, where you could mull it over and say everything, I think they've got to just forget it now. I think they've got to forget it now. It's too long. Because the world's changed so much, and it's too long. But it don't say you've got to think anything of them.

Do you think the Japanese should forget, do you think?

31:00 Certainly. They should ask forgiveness from the Chinese and Koreans. I can understand they were ordinary soldiers. Even our people. You do as you're told. That's the backbone of an army. But somebody up there, and the Emperor, they were bad people. Like this Guantanamo Bay and that, that's not

showing much spirit, is it? That's showing a lot of hate.

31:30 And they're not even charged. I don't understand it.

How should Australians, do you think, look upon the Second World War, now?

Australians. What generation? That's the thing.

I was thinking generally. But you can elaborate on different age groups.

I can't elaborate. It's funny on Anzac Day.

32:00 You know, people would line the streets. We get a great reception, our old blokes, off the young. People your age I'm talking about. "Thanks very much" and "Thanks Digger." I've had them come up to shake hands. That's very nice. Very touching. That's what gets you. You know. I like to think we ended up stopping them coming in. I like to think that. You know.

32:30 I feel that was the greatest thing that happened in my lifetime. That they didn't get here amongst our people, anyway. Because they certainly wouldn't have done any good. Would have put us back a couple of years. We didn't need it. We were a naïve people, and we had to go because Mother Britain was there. And I read something. I went to the university. I was a cleaner over there.

33:00 I used to get into trouble because I got into their bloody library. And I read this maiden speech of Sir Gordon Menzies, Robert Menzies [Australian Prime Minister]. And one of it was about the First War. "I would rather see every man, woman and child in Australia starve to death, than renege on our due and just debt to Britain." You can punch that up on your machine and it's written. In 1929. Robert Gordon Menzies.

33:30 Because he was, "As I saw her passing by, I shall love her till I die." He said to the Queen. He even embarrassed her. He went to England, you know, when the war was on, he wanted to sit with Churchill. He didn't want anything to do with it here. Give this away. He couldn't understand why we were brought back from the Middle East. We were supposed to go through, from Egypt; we were supposed to go, like the New Zealanders went,

34:00 they went right through Italy, right through into, with the Germans. We were going to go, and we were called back. Curtin [Australian Prime Minister] never slept, they said, while we were on the seas coming back, and we were six weeks coming from Egypt to here. Because we had to zigzag from the Japanese submarines all the way. Yeah.

You mentioned that you had some pretty strong view about Australians' relationships with the Royal Family and to England. Can you elaborate on that?

34:30 I have, I find the English, I just, with the history, and with the Irish, I find they done some dastardly things, England, and most nations did, but it's part of my Mother country when you go back. The Royal Family I think is a parasite. But no more parasite,

35:00 I would sooner live under the English rule than the American rule. Myself. America is a wonderful place if you're bright and wealthy. Ooh, she's a go there. But then again, what country's not? You can live anywhere if you've got plenty of moolah [money]. But England's a little bit more compassionate. I mean, if you're sick in America, you can bloody die for the want of a bit of treatment there. From what I read. Is that right?

35:30 No, I've got no great grind. Even with the Royal Family. Well, the people seem to want them, that's the thing. I can't get it. I don't know that, like our Governor General. He's a silly old man. He was a bad choice too. I got away from the story. But that's it.

Should Australia be a republic?

Pardon?

36:00 **Should Australia be a republic?**

Yes, definitely. I always wanted to live long enough to see us have our own flag and our own national anthem. That's all. Because we were always just classed as part of the British Empire, and the only flag you ever seen was the bloody Union Jack. But the nicest tune for the thing is Waltzing Matilda.

36:30 It's not the words, but it's a beautiful tune. Stirs you up wherever you go. The other one leaves you, old "Girt by sea." leaves you a bit flat at times. I never knew what a girt by sea. Yeah. Tell you a funny little thing happened during the war. Didn't happen to me, but I was right there. Just a funny one. Quick. This bloke was coming back, two of us was sitting, like we're sitting here. And he said, "Got to go to the toilet, got to go behind the tree over there."

37:00 "Ok, away you go." And he come back in a while and he was in a lather of sweat and he said, "Did you ever sit there contemplate sometimes, and all of a sudden feel someone's looking at me?" I said, "Oh, well, you do get this." you know. He said, "I looked up and there's a moon-faced bastard." and he said, "He jumped and I jumped and we both run opposite directions." A Jap. Fair dinkum. He said, "I got the shock of my life and so did he."

37:30 He said, “I went ‘Oooh’.” He said, “He let a squeak out and he went.” He said, “Talk about frighten poo out of you.” He said. “He did.” That was true because I was there. He said, “Yeah, just as well he bloody run, because I did.” Yeah. What else have we got? Mrs Chermside.

We’re just at the end of this tape.

Tape 9

00:30 **Let’s begin with speaking about your experiences of the treatment of the mentally ill from the fifties until the present.**

Well, I can’t talk, actually, of the present time of it, I can talk back to the fifties. I started in the fifties. The ward assistant, they called it. Just a dog’s body. And it was barbaric. I suppose you’re familiar with Beechworth, and how cold it is in the winter. It’s up near Mt Buffalo and that sort of thing I’ve seen cases there where a patient would tear up his clothes,

01:00 or take his boots off, throw his shoes away, because he was a mental patient. He would go for years without having a pair of shoes, a pair of boots. Old Solomon Gundy, I’d say to the charge nurse. “He hasn’t got any boots.” “No, he won’t have any boots either. He threw them away two year ago.” Oh. The main thing of being a charge nurse in those days, was to have your stock right. Can you understand what I mean? You’re issued, we’ll just take it right off the top.

01:30 You’re issued with fifty shirts, fifty socks, when the big chief comes around and wants to check you store, as long as you’ve got them you’re a good charge nurse. And everybody knows, If you didn’t thieve or something, you couldn’t have your stock. You know you have to lose some, or they wear out or something like that, but the stock had to be right. I was down helping in an old men’s ward at that time, and at lunch time,

02:00 you’d have like a big baby’s bath. You know, baby’s bath. You’d have five, six, seven, eight loaves of bread, dump them in there, bit of hot water over it like that, just sop them down a bit, then some milk, some butter, and a tin plate. Chop, chop, chop, chop. Chop it all up like that.

02:30 And a cup of tea, and that was it. That was their dinner. That was their lunch. Just porridge and a cup of tea for breakfast. Rugged, Bloody rugged. And they used to have wards and that, you’d open a door like that, and there was a big courtyard and a big high fence around it. They’d call that the yard, or the airing court, when it got a bit classier later on.

03:00 Well, unless it was bloody freezing, and too wet for the staff to go out. They had a bit of a shed out there, they’d be all kicked out there. And you’d be brought in at bloody dark. And you know how cold it would be. Can you imagine at Beechworth, with the bloody wind blowing and you’d go in, the charge would have an office, about half as big as this, and he’d have roaring logs going. So bad. So bad. And I told you about,

04:00 they used to have quilts made out of canvas. To sleep, to put over you to sleep, and they were all stitched. So it couldn’t be torn, like, and you’d open the door for the patient to go in, and there’d be windows there, and a wooden lock there, and you’d push them together, and keyed them, and you put the rug there, and then you got out and you locked was another big door behind, and I was leaning over to shut this big locker up,

04:30 and put my foot down, and I could feel the urine come up on my foot. And I went to the charge nurse, and I was only new at the time, and I said, “Mr So and So, Mr So and so down there, his canvas rugs full of urine.” He said, “What do you want me to do about it?” And he said, “How long have you been boss of this ward?” I said, “I’m not boss of anything.” He said, “Just mind your own business, just get on and put them to bed.” That was it.

05:00 That rug, stripped off with nothing, a man about sixty, and a wooden floor underneath and that pissy rug. That was it.

What do you think allowed those people to treat others in that way?

This man that done it, was an educated man too, for those days, which was worse. Very well educated. Book reader. Knowledgeable man.

05:30 I don’t know. I think it was just part of a system that come through from one generation to another generation. You know. There were some kind people there, and some of the old charge nurses. They were too hard. Too hard altogether.

Did you see similarities in your experience at the hospital, to war?

Oh, they treated them worse than a prisoner of war. Just as bad as a prisoner of war.

06:00 They were treated bloody dreadful. I seen one one night, he was making a lot of noise and he wouldn’t go to bed. The bloke just using him like a punching bag. I didn’t think I could stick it for a long time.

Then I started to do, I told you I had to try and get through the exams.

06:30 I had to get somewhere, I had to for my family. So I started to get into that, and I thought “The best way I can do anything is at least to become qualified. Then I’ll have a say.” You know. “If I’m qualified, at least I’ll have a say.” And I managed, with a bloody lot of work. Three years, six exams. I passed them. I got my nursing certificate which qualified me to go anywhere in the British Empire and get a job,

07:00 and I felt I, I was always kind to them. And I found that that done some good. I ended up with thirty six old men in Mont Park, and I treated them with kid gloves. I got one bloke the sack because I saw him walking around, he was lifting blokes out on a veranda, and as he was lifting them up, like you’re sitting there, he’d put his foot over the top of yours, like that, and ground it down like that, and lift it up,

07:30 and I watched this for a while and I said to another bloke, “Can you see what’s going on here?” “Yeah.” I rang up the head fellow, I said, “I’m sending a bloke up to you. I don’t want him.” I got rid of him. Just put his foot on there, and grinding. Didn’t have to, these are old men, for Christ’s sake. Bloody old men. But some of them were lovely old men,

08:00 but some of their stories. I used to listen to them, too. Some of their stories would break you down. One old bloke said to me one day “Is this all right?” One of these old blokes said to me one day, he wasn’t old. Not as old as I am now. He lived at McLeod, down at the back of Mont Park. And he said, “Do you own your own house, Mr Ryan?” I said, “No.” I said, “I’m paying it off. War service place.” I said, “I’m paying it off.” He said, “Got it in your own name?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “You keep it in your own name.” Don’t ever forget that. He was as sensible as I am now. If that’s sensible.

08:30 I said “Why?” He said, “I was living on my own, my wife had died.” And he said, “I got my own house down at McLeod, which today would be worth half a million.” And he said, my son said, “Look Dad,” he said, “Big house and that.” he said, “Me and my daughter in law could come and live there, and the kids, we could pay. Like you could have your pension, we’ll charge you nothing. If you sign the house over to us.

09:00 You’ll just have your pension for yourself. That’s your spending money.” After a while, something I’d been doing for thirty years.” He said, “Down the back I’ve got a shed, garden and everything.” And he said, I’ve got my garden.” He said, “No one about, I go and pee behind the shed.” Which I do by my bloody self. You know. Up that back, up there, when there’s no one around. “No.” he said, “That don’t suit them, after a while they went to a doctor

09:30 and said, “Dad’s starting to expose himself in front of the children.” And the tears are running out his eyes. And I could have cried. I thought, “You bastards.” And he said, “And they used to come up and visit.” Like I used to send, when visitors come, you’re supposed to check them in, sign them in, like “Mr so and so.” I couldn’t look at them. Couldn’t go near them. I used to send somebody else up. And they took that poor old bastard, and they put him in the hospital. Who would do that? He was as good as most blokes of his age.

10:00 And I thought, “This is so callous. This is so bad.” You know. But those old days, they were sad. I often think of them. They were so sad. Even blokes who come back from the war were there. And they could talk, I knew that they were like, I knew that they were talking war talk from the First War, which was right.

10:30 Bullecourt and Mont St Quentin, and Armentieres and all these places. Menin Gate. And you know, they were treated like dogs, too. Treated like dogs. I don’t know where Veterans’ Affairs were, or Repatriation. “Go away you silly old bastard.” and all this. This is from some of the soldiers from the First War were working there on staff. And they were, like it’s man’s inhumanity to man, isn’t it? It all just didn’t gel.

11:00 It all seemed so. I’ve been up to Ararat. Have you heard of infamous Ararat Mental Asylum? Well, I went up there. Escorted a patient up there one time. Jesus. Twenty foot walls. There’s a big ring put around the yard where they walk. They walk there from daylight till dark. If they step over the white ring they get thumped, with a baton.

11:30 And then when we got down here, I come to Mont Park, and this Cunningham Dacks come, before I come down here, he become Head of the Mental Hygiene. He was from England, and he had, he used to preach, we said it was preach. How we had to love them, we had to be kind, it was just another sickness and that. But a lot of it got through, and he was the start of it. He was very bloody good. We put a lot of shit on him, but he was very good,

12:00 and he never knocked any of the qualified nursing staff back for a pay rise. The government may not give it, but he always sanctioned it. He said, “You earn your money.” and all that sort of thing. But he brought a bit of humanity back. When I left Mont Park, I got a heart attack, and that, the ordinary patients in an open ward, it was more or less like a motel. They were ok. They come and went as they liked,

12:30 and done a bit of work around the ward. Some would work in the kitchen pouring tea, and making toast and all that sort of stuff. But they had their pictures, and they had their dances. And they weren’t supposed to drink. But I used to go up, a couple of them used to sneak down and get a couple bottles of beer. I used to love going up Friday afternoons. I’d walk around the wards and see that the beds were made right, and look around this door. I knew they were there. And they would shit themselves. Because

they could be put into a closed ward, where you're not allowed to walk in and out, you see.

13:00 And they'd offer me a beer, and I'd say, "No, it's right. She's right. She'll be kosher. Don't have any more, will you?" "No, it's right, Mr Ryan." Yeah.

So there were some remarkable changes between the fifties and the sixties.

Even in that time. Yes. there's a lot that goes on now I don't agree with. I know, there's one, house is just down below here. Intellectual, disabled people, or whatever they call them now.

13:30 And I don't here anything of them, and if I did, they're ok and everything. But the people are just flogged out and, look at the ones that's been shot by police. That bloke in Bondi Beach that was shot by the police. No need. There was one woman up around Numurkah or somewhere. She was mental. She had a knife. She was in the middle of one of those roundabouts. And they shot her. Why would you have to do that?

14:00 I was in a room this big one day. And we used to have to shave the patients in Beechworth. With an open razor. You know, the big, they're a horrible instrument. You know, the old cut throat, as they call them. And it was a wet day. Mostly with the patients, when we used to do it, you see. And I can remember the bloke. Bill Bowes he was, he was about six foot. And I'm shaving him. And he didn't like being shaved, you know. I said, "Mr Bowes, I've got to shave you." And bugger me, for some reason,

14:30 I had to go to the toilet or something, and I put my bloody razor down. I look around and this, he was a maniacal bastard, here he was walking around with the bloody razor, big razor, and three of four of the other staff there, with me, Jack Rosenbaum and I don't know who the others were. "It's your problem, Ryan. We're getting out of here. It's your problem." And he's waving this around. And you know what they're like. They'd rip you to bits.

15:00 Well, I'm talking to him. "Mr Bowes." Well, I finally conned him to give it to me. I said, "You don't have to have a shave at all. If you don't wish to have a shave, you can grow a beard. Don't do any harm with that razor. Just, I was about five minutes talking to him, until he put it down. Learnt me that, you know. But I got on all right with them. So one of the head superintendents up there,

15:30 the superintendent's a doctor, he's all powerful. He can do anything. And I was there one day, and told by the charge nurse I had to go out and present this patient for treatment, and when I said, "Doctor, this is Mr so and so here for treatment." And he said, "Mister, don't see any mister's here." he said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

16:00 A college educated man. University man. I said, "There he is there." He said, "They're patients." he said. I thought, I thought to myself when I started to add it all up. I thought, "What the bloody hell's all this about?" You know. Nobody was treated. They were just treated like bloody, like if you seen it, you'd put it on movies. It would be horrific. It would be so bad.

16:30 And the female side of it was just as bad. The females were just as hard and as callous and brutal. It was sheer brutality. It started to ease down a bit after our blokes came back from the Second War, when we started, it started to ease down, because some of those blokes got to the top a bit. So, you know.

You think, having been in the war, you had a greater sympathy for people than prior.

I'm certain.

17:00 I'm certain of it. Or I had some idea of summing up. Even my background, political background and all that. You sum up life. You know try to make a balance. I'm not saying I was the perfect Joe nurse or anything. I know I used to booze on the job and all. But I never, I only got into one fight when the bloke hit me, and I thought "I'd hit back." That was all. No it wasn't. I tell you what I done.

17:30 There was some bloke in the admission ward. And it was a rough ward. Where you admit people all the time. The doctor came to me and he said, "There's been a blow struck around here, Ryan." I said, "Has there?" And it's my staff you see. And I know one or two of them would go the knuckle behind your back. And I got them together and gave them a good talking to. "Not ever to touch a patient." I said, "If there's any of that to go on." I said, "I'll do it." And they all stand back at mealtime, you see. And you walk through, and I'm up to there, like they can only see that much of me.

18:00 I'm walking around all the tables and whatever. One bloke had just been admitted. Eric Pink his name, and he walked out and got away, you see. Well, he was picked up and brought back. I said, "Mr Pink, you can't just walk out of here." I said, "You must have your treatment and then you'll be able to go." And with that, he had leather boots on, and he run them down my shin. You know on your shin, with the heel. The blood was pouring out. With that, I went bang!

18:30 They can't see what they've done to me, all these ones I just told not to touch them. And they're saying "Oh, you handle yourself ok." you know. And the doctor said, next day, he said, "Mr Pink reported that you hit him." I said, "Yeah." It was a sackable offence. I said, "I did." I said, "Automatic reflex. I couldn't help myself." He just got the heel, you know, the real leather hell, and run it down my shin.

19:00 And this Pink came into my office that day, too, and he said, "Can I ring my brother?" You're not supposed to ring, you know, a patient. And I knew his brother was a lawyer. And I said, "Yeah, you can

ring him." I'd met his brother, and I knew his brother had a lot of trouble with him. I said, "You can ring him." I said. And he rung him, and he said, "Put me back to, Mr Ryan." He said, "Don't you worry about him. There'll be more than that coming to him." I never had any interest in touching him again.

19:30 It was just an automatic bloody reflex. But this doctor couldn't help having a go at me, which is fair enough. But now, as I said before, I do worry about the ones that's out in the cold and that of a night now. That are disabled, and mentally. There must be a lot. Because you couldn't cure. We had over a thousand patients at Mont Park, and you can't cure them overnight. I mean with the drugs.

20:00 These drugs are a terrible thing. So.

I could, if it's OK with you, ask you a bit more about when you first got home.

Yes.

And can you tell me about, you told that wonderful story about coming in on the boat. Can you describe when you actually landed from the boat and they'd been playing Waltzing Matilda on the boat? The series of events that happened then to get you home.

20:30 Yeah, well after, it was a bit of a letdown if anything. That was the most emotional thing, but I still cry when I think of it. Anyway we pulled into Sydney Harbour, and it was the Queen Mary, that's right. So we had to come off in the Ferry. Wouldn't go under the bridge. And we get on this bus, and it's got written on it, "Welcome home, Heroes." and all this, and somebody waved, and all that sort of thing, and then we went out, I don't know, the Showground or somewhere, and see,

21:00 me being a Victorian, I was a New South Wales number, I joined up in New South Wales. They despatched me to Royal Park, in Melbourne here. And I got leave, a week's leave to go to Beechworth. I was married and I went back to Beechworth, you see, and when I got off the bus.

21:30 We used to get a train from Melbourne to Wangaratta, a bus from Wangaratta to Beechworth. It was full that night, the bus was full, and they said the only place you can get is up on top of the bus. Well, I said, "That'll do." And another soldier and I got up on top of the bus, and we went twenty six mile on the top of the bloody bus. When I got off, my father was very ill. When I got off the bus at Beechworth, my wife was there, no, tell a lie, my wife met me at Wangaratta,

22:00 and she went up on the bus. When I got to Beechworth, the doctor said, "I want you to go out to the hospital and see your father any time. He's dying." And I went out and Dad was just about to die, and I think, I don't know whether. I kissed him, I don't know whether he knew who I was. I just, you know, said some prayers with him and that, and sat with him a long time, and a few days later, Dad passed away.

22:30 And you wouldn't want to know. I went back to the doctor. He's the area doctor, you see, like a captain in the army. I'd overstayed my leave. He said to me, "Don't you go back whatever happens, because you're father's going to die." So I went to him, and first of all, I had a sore throat, and I slipped and I swore. I didn't know he was a religious man.

23:00 He said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "I've got a f…. sore throat." He said, "I don't believe in that." and he didn't even admonish me, you see. I said, "Anyway, I want a script to say that my father had passed away because I've to take it back." And he said, "You don't need that." I said, "Yes, I do." Anyway, he wouldn't give it to me. So I went back to Royal Park, and I was a corporal you see, and over the bloody megaphone thing comes, "Corporal Ryan, wanted in the Orderly Room. Wanted in the Orderly Room."

23:30 Next thing I'm escorted in with two bloody blokes with bayonets on the side, "What's this?" And I told him. He said, "What happened?" And he said, "Oh, I've heard a lot of good tales." I done my block, you see. I said, "My father just died." and he as much as said, "Bullshit." He said, "Only for the war being over." he said, "I'd have those two stripes off you." "No you wouldn't." I said, "You'd have to take me to a court martial." I said, "First of all, I won them in the field,

24:00 and you can't take them off me without a court martial, and the second thing." I said, "My father died. You would only have to do the courtesy of ringing the Beechworth Hospital or ring the doctor, and you would find that out." But oh Jesus, that hurt. I just buried my father, you see. And this bastard, he said, like, you pulled this one out of the hat. That's a low trick, you see. I thought, "Jesus Christ." Well, that set me back my arse.

24:30 But anyway, I got out. Went back and didn't much at all for a couple of weeks, and one old girl up the street said to my wife, "You want to get that husband of yours working. Or he'll end up one of those bums who won't work around the pubs." Geez. I'd been away for four years. And I thought, "Jesus Christ." That's when I got an axe and went cutting bloody wood. That was hard. Jesus Christ, that was hard work. Nobody knows.

25:00 Dry wood up that big. Got a bloody axe. You're right out the bush on your own. And you only get paid for what you cut, you know. And I done that for twelve months. Paid monthly. Monthly, mind you. Then I got a job at a pine plantation. That wasn't bad. Those big pines. You know pines with the myrtle. We were working in them. That was good. A good outdoor job. And I got myself. I worked myself up there, leading hand. Not a foreman. Leading hand.

25:30 And there was a big shemozzle out there, big blue anyway. And anyway they were going to sack some other bloke, and I said, “No. I’m not interested. If this is the way they’re going to carry on out here, I’ll see what I can do.” I left there, and I got the job at the mental hospital. A bloke said to me, “Why don’t you go up the mental hospital?” I said, “Oh, you got to pass exams and I can only just read and write.” I said. And it was the secretary of the hospital. He got me to do the exams. I was rather proud of myself, actually.

26:00 Because blokes that had finished their ordinary schooling, at Beechworth, couldn’t pass the exams. And I thought, “That’s not bad.” Not bad. But I done a lot of study. And it done me good. I still get superannuation off. Still get it. I’ve outlived them all.

It’s amazing what you’ve achieved.

Oh, I think so. I’m going to put that little thing away.

26:30 The invitation I got from Bracks [Premier of Victoria] and the Governor. Have luncheon with them. And that. I don’t, not one to move in big circles. But it was all right. The wine was free and it was for me. And I thought it was very good. Yeah.

Is there anything about your war experience that Ianto [interviewer] and I haven’t asked about that you’d like to talk about?

27:00 Oh, not really. Not really. Only, no, I never docked it or anything, I put in short steps they might say. You might hear it in football terminology. Where you don’t go in as hard as you might. That was going up that hill when I thought the machine guns were there. You walk a little slower. You’re not letting the other bloke get ahead,

27:30 but you’re not letting him get behind. Just level pegging. Because you expect any minute. You expect three of four’s going to get knocked. You expect it. That’s the norm and I was a bit of a sooky la la, I think. No, it goes through everyone’s mind. Blokes told me afterwards they were shit scared. I said, “Did you shit yourself?” I said, “I half pissed myself many a time.” Frightened.

28:00 That’s a natural function of you body. You know. And of course, at Tarakan, they used to call it the mile strip. It was a road. It had thousands of mines on it. Thousands of improvised mines. Just little ones that go off with nails in them. And some of them would jump around and some would come up about testicles high, and face high, and all that sort of stuff. You were always a bit tardy where you put your foot, and all that.

28:30 But I couldn’t have done any better. In your summation. I should have been better, but it wasn’t my capacity. I done it the best of my capacity. You know, if I could have had the genes that some of these heroes had, maybe I would have done better. That’s about all I can make of that. That’s it.

Well, we’ve just been so fortunate to get to speak to you. We really feel very lucky.