Australians at War Film Archive

Edwin Medlin (Harry) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Thank you for joining us today, can we just start with a brief overview of your life from when it started until today?**

I was born on the 4th of January 1920 in Orroroo in the north of South Australia, so I am eighty-four years of age. We came to Adelaide because my father was

01:00 injured in the First World War, when I was about ten or eleven. I got entry into Adelaide Technical High School which is a specialist school; I was apprenticed at fifteen to the Adelaide Electrical Supply Company. I became a qualified electrician and I have my electrical worker's licence there. I joined the army at eighteen, I worked hard and I was commissioned. I was the youngest captain in the Australian Army at the age of twenty. I was commanding officer of

01:30 Fort Largs [Police Academy] at the age of nineteen. Stupidly I went into the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and we were sent to Timor and I worked there in the Combined Defence Headquarters and our briefing was at best stupid in my opinion. We attempted the defence of Timor, Japs [Japanese] landed twenty-three thousand people to our thousand, we were therefore captured by the Japanese, and I was three years and seven months a Japanese prisoner of war. At the end of

02:00 the war we were invited to enlist in the permanent army, I had had enough of the army I can tell you, got out of it as quick as I could. Went back to university as part of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme as a student, had a period in Cambridge, my sister got an ovarian cancer and we had to come back and look after the children. I finished my PhD [doctorate] here and I was a lecturer in Physics at the University of Adelaide. Rose to be an associate professor, retired at the compulsory age of sixty-five. I have been in the

02:30 State Library of South Australia on the board, I have been chairman of the Performing Arts Collection, I have been president of the University of Adelaide Theatre Guild where we print, and go to the world premieres of the plays of Patrick White. I am TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pensioner], I am a member of the TPI Association and the RSL [Returned and Services League]. I am a member of the Japanese ex-POW [Prisoner of War] association. And that's about it,

03:00 I live here on my own, my wife died seven years ago with leukaemia. I have got two kids close by and help when I need it. I have just had my right big toe cut off so I am fairly immobile at the moment. That's me.

Thank you.

Is that great?

Lets go back to where you were born... in Uluru?

Orroroo.

Orroroo excuse me, what memories do you have of growing up in Orroroo?

03:30 I have got very little memories of Orroroo, we were country kids, my father was actually a 'townie' [city dweller], he was a plumber and gas fitter, but as country kids we were very independent and quickly learned how to live in the bush. We knew 'which side the sun was on', as distinct from European migrants that come to this country and get very confused. I found as a physicist that I could just

04:00 go into a laboratory and pick country kids by the way they behaved, not arrogant but self-confident. Not necessarily any brighter, although they were inclined to be more industrious than city kids. It is a very interesting experience to grow up in a country town. As I say we could find our way around the bush. I have fond memories, my wife and I have

04:30 taken our children back there and watched them very closely in the bush. They could be lost within a 'nanosecond' almost, with no natural abilities to survive they would just get lost. And the Australian

bush is a very rugged place you know, and you do need to get experience with it very early I think. But to summarise

05:00 I think it makes you much more self dependent, confident, without being arrogant, although I like being arrogant every now and then.

What sort of games did you play in the bush?

Games? In the bush. Just walk around surviving. We used to work in the

05:30 'rifle butts'. Country towns have very experienced rifle shooters, and indeed there was a family at Orroroo, the Abasent family, Walter and his son Gerald I remember them. Both of them won 'King's prizes' [award] at Bisley in England. And if you know what I am talking about that is a very accomplished thing to have done. We started to work the 'butts', the target comes up and you flag the bottom right hand corner for a 'bull',

06:00 the bottom left hand corner for what's called an 'inner' which is four, top right for three, top left for two. This is a wash out and you would have to paste the paper over the holes where the bullets had gone through, it was quite fun. We used to collect the lead and melt it down and there was a reservoir in Orroroo on the creek and there were Aboriginal carvings on the rocks. And there is a set of carvings done

06:30 about the time of the First World War and before, up the Pekina Creek. I don't know if you call those things games, but survival skills.

And did you actually play any conventional sports like cricket and football?

I played football until I was about fifteen and I had trouble with both meniscus ligaments here. Also played tennis but I came not to like

07:00 competitive sport. I came to realise quite often that the people that were attracted into management of sport were not very attractive to people, at the risk of, I don't know whether I am allowed to say this, but Arthur Tunstall [Australian sporting official], with the Olympic games, with Cathy Freeman [Australian Olympic athlete], I think he was just a clown, an arrogant, ignorant twit.

07:30 And he is the epitome of the sort of clowns that seem to get attracted into managing competitive sport. So I preferred when I was a young fellow to ride a bike. And I had a cousin who was an expert bike rider, and as you know Australians are very skilled bike riders even in the Tour De France but I was dissuaded from doing that competitively

08:00 because of the 'aggro' [aggressive] nature of the thing, it is a very rough game. So my mates and I used ride all around the place, down to Victor Harbour at Port Delungra, chasing girls. As I say when I was a lad you couldn't catch any girls, I don't know whether you can catch them now or not but you couldn't catch them when I was a lad. Never the less it was good fun trying.

Can I ask about your siblings? You said you had a sister?

08:30 I had, my parents were married in May of 1916, my father was already in the 43rd Battalion [AIF] and he used to get out of camp and I think my mother had a flat or something there. He was in France in December of 1916

09:00 and my mother had a still born girl, no in those days, and you might know about, the commotion now about the number of still born children that were just chucked in a hole in the ground in West Terrace, I believe that's what happened to my sister. Whether you call a 'still born' a person or not I just don't know. I think it must have been premature because my mother came from Mount Barker and had a very supportive family, she had eleven siblings.

09:30 And I think that if it had been a full term pregnancy, I think she would have been in Mount Barker with the support of her family, so I suspect that it was premature. She still has one surviving sister the youngest one, that must be older than God I think. She told me once that she was a youngster and this cable came to Mount Barker, 'Baby girl stillborn. Love Myra'. And you know

10:00 that's pretty rough, but cables were pretty expensive. Then I came along the minimum period after my father got back from the war. I had a brother who also was a prisoner of war, fifteen months younger than me; we were in the same unit in Timor. And a sister, second girl, three years younger than me. Another brother, he was a professor of philosophy

10:30 at Flinders University and he is seven years younger than me, same age as my wife. Those are the siblings.

And growing up, did you all play together?

No not really, not at all I don't think. I think probably, well after we came to town it was

11:00 different and as I say, I went to Adelaide Technical High School and the siblings all went to Richmond Primary School. and then my brother went to what they call Goodie Tech, now governments have got rid of technical schools and they made them all high schools and now they wish more people would go into

apprenticeships and get decent trades and go to TAFE [Technical and Further Education College], rather than aim for university. I think we pretty well grew up

11:30 independently of each other. Why do you ask that?

Oh, just trying to get a picture of your childhood and your relationship with your siblings. So would you say you were closer to your mates perhaps?

Yeah sure. I know I have written my reminiscences, I have got about half a million words here somewhere and I have said that I don't really think I knew my brother even until we were in prison camp, and

12:00 he was just fifteen months younger than me. Even then I was an officer and he was just a sergeant, but when we got in prison camp to hell with rank. There were people who wanted officers to go around saluting senior officers and troops to salute, indeed even in the war diaries of [Edward] 'Weary' Dunlop he talks about how in prison camp people were still subject to AMR and R he calls it, Australian Military Regulations and Orders, AMR and O.

12:30 Which says something like even if you're taken prisoner, you are still subject to military law, but prison camp is a situation, well, it is impossible to describe it is so horrible, but it was there that I think I got to know my brother better than I ever had before.

And we will talk about that later as it comes up. Back at Orroroo, who were your mates there?

13:00 I had a friend called Lyall Hall and he lived at Eurelia, Eurelia as you go on the railway line up from Orroroo to the old railway line Walloway, Eurelia, something or other all of the way to Orroroo, I have forgotten it. Anyway they were on a farm. Anyway on long vacations and things got a lot of

13:30 pleasure from going up there, I worked as a country boy on all of the farms, you know loading hay, tossing wool, learning how to class wool, saddling the horses, getting the horses ready. We're talking about the mid '30s, I am an old fellow. We're talking about the mid '30s, we had to harness the horses, drag the wool all of the way to Orroroo,

14:00 the only railway storage there was at Orroroo, so we used to say bale this stuff and lug it up into the storage sheds and I was quite a strong fellow when I was sixteen, seventeen ,eighteen and then when I got in the army I was always pretty strong. He was my best friend. I had trouble because I

14:30 was fairly able at school and I kept getting put up and I was put up two grades and it is a bit, and my wife was the same too, she first matriculated at the age of thirteen. And I think it is harder for a girl than a boy because you find a young pre-pubescent girl mixing up with pubescent girls and girls suddenly become women.

15:00 There are the same sorts of problems with pre-pubescent boys and I found myself in a lot of fights because they would pick on you. All of this talk about bullying, I was bullied witless at school and had to learn how to fight and my father taught me how to fight. You get your thumb in your hand there so you don't get it knocked off. And when you hit, you imagine you're hitting the back of the head right? So you haven't delivered the blow too

15:30 early so you are really hit on the nose, and as you hit you turn your fist and crunch, and it works like a charm. It makes eyes stream, I won't do it to you but I think you can guess what would happen. So even though I was a little kid, I could fight and I taught my youngest brother how to do the same thing, and I think he won every fight. You also had to learn how to run and I could run.

16:00 You had to run to get away from these bullies. I will jump a few years, one of them was a fellow called Haynes and I saw him in Jetty Road, Glenelg when I was a full captain in the army at the age of twenty, well set-up, strong fellow. And I said to this fellow, "I ought to knock your fucking block off!" He was a little runt and I could have murdered the fellow

16:30 but I couldn't be bothered knocking him about. But you learn a lot of things in the country.

What were you bullied for?

For coming top of the class, and not getting as many handers [punishments] as the others. We had, as I say I was put up two years, there was a woman called, her name was Murdoch and I loathed

17:00 and abominated her. I now recognise that she was a bullying, lesbian bitch. I didn't know what her problem was at the time, I recognised when I hit puberty what was her trouble. Any errors that you made whether it was spelling or arithmetical errors you got a hander, so I didn't used to get as many handers as these other kids. But I was top of the class even though

17:30 I was two years younger than them so you're a sitting shot to be bullied. Furthermore, the lavatories or the dunnies, are you Australian?

Yes.

So you know what a dunny [toilet] is. Okay. The dunnies were pretty crude affairs, just tin sheds, and of course if you're urinating with blokes a lot older than you, you can really get into terrible

18:00 trouble if you're not as well developed as they are. So it is like they say of the shearers' cooks, I am allowed to be myself aren't I?

Of course.

You have got to fight, fuck or run. There is a lot of truth in the Australian bush particularly around shearing sheds. I learnt very quickly about shearing sheds, I told you I used to go to Eurelia.

18:30 I am sorry to be a bit crude but nevertheless that's part of the game.

So this is when you were growing up, you were still in Orroroo around the Depression years?

Well they were the Depression years yeah.

So what signs did you see in the country of the Depression?

19:00 Well Orroroo was a town at the time, the whole population of the area was five hundred, perhaps a bit more. Things did slow down. The Depression was worst felt probably with the farmers, apart from which, see that country Orroroo

19:30 is actually north of Goyders Line [a geographical line indicating that the country beyond has insufficient rainfall for successful farming], do you know what I mean? Rainfall, ten inches. Twenty-five millimetres a year, it is north of that, in the 1870s there were three very good seasons and a bloke called Goyder surveyed and they encouraged people to spread their farms further out, and you get to Gladstone and Jamestown and it is pretty soft country

20:00 by comparison with Orroroo and they settled blocks there, small, a couple of hundred acres, well there is six forty acres to the square mile and a lot of those people went broke. If you drive through that area, say you drive up to Quorn and you can see these farmhouses that are just falling to bits, in fact they used to be good sources of decent rock,

20:30 you could go and mine your own rock for your own house. Well that was going on at that time in addition to the hard times of the Depression. So a lot of people left the country and came to the city. There was a lot of 'swaggies' [swagmen – itinerant country wanderers] walking through there. One of the good things about Orroroo was the 'Ghans', you know the Afghans with their camels? And they were beaut to us kids.

21:00 It was funny we were told to keep away from them, I don't know what they were supposed to do to us, but they were very kind to us. And you still see the Afghan names up there, in fact the crowd that have the lease for Wilpena Pound are called Rasheed. That's an Afghan name, and I was in the same class at school as one of the Rasheeds.

21:30 And as I say the old railway line ran from Terowie, through Peterborough and right up through Walloway and Eurelia and right back through Quorn into Port Augusta. Then the Ghan [locomotive] went from there up to Alice Springs, which is what I went on, when we went to Alice Springs, not the present 'Ghan' but the old narrow-gauge Ghan in 1941. I was going to say something else, it slipped my

22:00 mind.

You were just talking about the Depression years in the bush.

That's right. The farmers were in trouble. And the farmers did get relief, there was special relief for the farmers but we townies seemed to think the farmers were better off than we were, anyway because although we all had geese and chickens and cows, we had a fairly big town block and I learned how to look after

22:30 geese and chickens and rabbits. Although the rabbits that we ate were the wild rabbits out in the bush, I very quickly learn how to use a rifle and how to be careful of snakes and scorpions. You get very nice scorpions at Orroroo, six inches long. The farmers did well need the help because as I say there was trouble with the people having blocks that were too small.

23:00 The farm at Eurelia was three thousand five hundred acres so it was what? About five square miles. And you could live on that but not six forty acres.

So what was your father doing at this time? When he came back from the war what was his vocation?

He was a plumber and a tinsmith and he

23:30 worked for a fellow called Fred Bills and Dad was the senior plumber. He was younger than Bill and a couple of other labourers who were unskilled, one of them was a fellow called Cyril Hutchens who subsequently became the Labor MP [Member of Parliament] for Hindmarsh in the South Australian parliament. Strangely my parents were both ultra conservative and I could never understand it.

24:00 They were both working class, they were members of what was called the LCL, Liberal Country League, it has become the Liberal Party, the United Australia Party. And they held poor old Cyril Hutchens in

absolute contempt because he was a Labor man. They had to learn to live with it when my brother and I also became Labor people.

So were your parents religious, were you brought up religious?

24:30 I was yeah.

What denomination was it?

Methodist. You can tell I think. Methodist. And I could sing Charles and John Wesley hymns and Sankey and Robinson stuff. Methodists were very good. I remember when my father died, I was with my brother who has got a very

25:00 strong, fine, bass voice and he said to me, “The trouble with the bloody Methodists, they got all of the best songs.” And a bit later, I was still a Methodist; I became a Knight Commander of the Methodist Order of Knights, ever heard of it? The girls had the Methodists Girls’ Comrades and the boys had the Methodist Order of Knights. I am told it was based on the Masons, there was a ritual

25:30 in a square place and officers and we actually won the Arthur Welch Shield for the best Methodist Order of Knights in South Australia. I was eighteen at the time I was Knight Commander but I quick and lively got shot of it [tired of] when I was a prisoner and had time to think a bit about the unworldly and unholy

26:00 way people conduct themselves. How selfish they are. How they don’t really care about Africans and AIDS [Advanced Immune Deficiency Syndrome], certainly in prison camp I remember saying to myself, “Well if this is His idea of a bloody joke, He can stick it.” I remember distinctly, the day I went outside and said, “I do not believe that Jesus Christ was the son of the living God and you can do what you bloody well like about it!”

26:30 Now if that had been Judas he would have hit me with a thunderbolt, but nothing happened, so it’s not a terribly smart thing to do. And I am a little bit embarrassed telling it to you, but they were times different to anything you can possibly imagine. Yeah I was brought up a Methodist; the answer to the question is yes.

And was it a strict upbringing, was there a lot of discipline involved?

27:00 Not really. We just did it. My father was local lay preacher; he had to ride his bike all around the place. Ride his bike out to Morchard to conduct church services out there. I remember once, he had a very strong, there he is there, and there he is with my mother when they were married.

27:30 He had a very strong voice. He had two years at school, he went rabbiting with his father, his father was a fettler [labourer] on the railway they used to have these trucks and he fettled into Orroroo, impregnated my grandmother and that was the end of his fettling. So he survived by rabbiting and catching rabbits and foxes,

28:00 and Dad, who was the youngest boy had to go with him and went with him until he was nine. Then they put him into school and his father died when he was eleven, and eleven was the leaving age, he had two years of schooling, but he was literate, he was articulate, he was vocal, and he used to give them hell, when he was giving a sermon I tell you, we were quite proud of him.

28:30 **Speaking of your father what did he tell you of World War I as you were growing up?**

Nothing. He told me as much about World War I as I told my children about World War II. He, I have his pay books here, he was injured, he was a stretcher bearer. All country boys played in the band

29:00 and he was a superb cornet and bugle player, so when he joined the 43rd Battalion he was put in the band and he was the bugler. I have still got his bugle. He tried to teach me to play it but I wasn’t any good at it. He used to play the Last Post and Reveille every Anzac Day and Memorial Day, Empire Day. I can tell from his cheque book that he was wounded in April of 1918

29:30 and he went back to the trenches and he was wounded again, and I can fix the date from Trevor Wilson’s Million Faces of War, now have you people interviewed Trevor Wilson? Professor Wilson? Well you ought to. That book of his the Million Faces of War is terrific. He is an Emeritus Professor of History in the University of Adelaide. I can tell that it was August the

30:00 18th I think, when my father was blown up, when the Australians and the Canadians attacked, 1918, the Australians and the Canadians captured Villers-Bretonneux, and that was the start of the German collapse that led to the armistice on November the 11th 1918. He was blown up, his back was smashed. He was taken out of the trenches and

30:30 he was largely immobilised until he got back here, as I say March 1918, just in time to impregnate my mother with me and instantaneously, I think. So what did he tell me? The thing I remember him telling me most was that they used to have truces. The First World War was such a shocking shambles, the casualties were enormous.

31:00 No man’s land would be covered with dead and the stretcher bearers, they would have these truces, and the stretcher bearers would go out, meet with the Germans, mix, talk, fraternise with them. Swap

cigarettes and tobacco and stuff. And of course the nobs, the bosses, nowhere near the front line of course, miles back there, were very irritated. I came to conclude that there is more camaraderie

31:30 between people at the bottom, even though they are supposed to be mortal enemies than there is elsewhere. And I will give you two other examples and you might want to come back. One is when the Japanese captured us, we were buggered, we were, you know, and so were they. We were without water, food, and yet we killed over a thousand Japs

32:00 and we had eighty killed and they thought that was marvellous. Now they are very funny people and when they came through us there was a lot of fraternising. We had been mortal enemies and all of a sudden it was finished and they held us in this wreck. And while we were in Timor with combatant Japanese, we were treated as well as they were, we were given the same rations that they had, now our metabolism couldn't handle it, in particular we got scurvy and scurvy is a bit

32:30 unfunny, let me tell you. But there was fraternising between people who were at the bottom. Also one of the best jobs to get as a prisoner of war was cleaning out the brothels, the comfort women. There again, you have got women at the bottom, you have got blokes at the bottom, and there was more friendship, swapping of, well there was no swapping of favours, we weren't interested in their favours we had no interest whatsoever let me tell you. But swapping food and fags [cigarettes],

33:00 it is strange. I can understand Princess Diana with those AIDS people. I mean you look at what she did, I can understand it, I think she was fair dinkum. The big brass is not fair dinkum. Johnny Howard [John Howard Prime Minister], he could have gone to Vietnam, why didn't he go to Vietnam? He is just the age.

33:30 **Just going back to your father if I may, he sustained it sounds like, quite serious injuries in World War I so what treatment did he come for in Adelaide, in the city?**

He also had a VDH,

34:00 Valvular Disease of the Heart. He had some sort of heart problem. Nevertheless he lived to be ninety-three and as my mother would have said, "The war got him in the end." His back, he had shocking sciatica, the fourth or fifth vertebrae or whatever it is and he had to be manipulated by the chiropractors. Ordinary doctors couldn't do it, but the chiropractors could. He had shocking sciatica; I have seen him crying with pain.

34:30 And his left leg just withered up. But he bore it fairly stoically. I had a twinge once I was turning a corner and you learn in the army that when you turn to the right you turn on your left leg, did you know that? You turn on the outside leg, anyway I did a stupid thing I turned on the inside leg and I felt a sciatic shock

35:00 go down my leg. It is the only time I have ever had it but it makes me understand what my father, in other words I tweaked the spinal cord between the fourth and the fifth, but that was his problem.

And do you remember moving from Orroroo down to Adelaide?

Oh yeah.

And what do you remember about that day?

We regarded ourselves as working class and poor and frugal.

35:30 We carried everything that we had. Everything. So there was my mother, father, me I was nine or ten, and my brother was a year younger and my sister who was a year younger than that and my youngest brother who was two or three, well he couldn't carry anything, including himself ,most of the time. We lugged everything. And my mother's sister

36:00 got us a place at Henley Beach and we just moved in there. They left all of their house, they owned the house at Orroroo and left the furniture, and so we moved into places that were furnished, again frugally of course. We didn't have any money to hire taxis, so we lugged all of this stuff in the tramcars,

36:30 and of course there were plenty of tramcars in those days. So we came to the Adelaide railway station and got a tram car down to Henley Beach and there we were.

Was this your first experience of the big city?

No, as kids we used to come to Adelaide principally to stay with my mother's family at Mount Barker. And get the train, come down to town. Saw my first talkie [talking motion picture], Harold Lloyd [movie actor],

37:00 my first Adelaide talkie, that would have been probably 1927, before we came to town. Obviously we lived in Orroroo.

And so how did you feel now that you were moving to the city?

Well you suck it and see I suppose. Didn't feel,

37:30 it was just another experience of life. We just had to learn to live with it. I was in a sense disappointed because we shifted from Henley Beach to Blackwood and then back from Blackwood to Henley Beach and my schooling was interrupted and I felt I didn't do as well at school as I should have.

38:00 I was in grade seven, so I lost the two years that I had been put up, which wasn't a bad idea in some respects because I was more with my own age group. by the time I got to grips with myself again I was in grade seven in Henley Beach and did pretty well and got myself into, as I said Adelaide Technical High School, which was an opportunity school,

38:30 we matriculated in three years. I did I think ten subjects in the Intermediate [Certificate]. You have probably never heard of the Qualifying Certificate, the QC? Everyone did the QC at year seven, and generally it then took three years to do the Intermediate, and we did it in two at the Adelaide Tech and another one year to do Leaving [Certificate], and in those days that was matriculation provided you had done an Intermediate foreign language, and

39:00 as I say I did Intermediate French. And I can remember when I finished Intermediate; my father wanted me to go and get a trade then and leave school. And I remember my mother having quite a serious argument with him saying, "This lad is educatable and he is going to go back for a final year until he matriculates and then all sorts of things can happen." But when I did matriculate I had to be apprenticed

39:30 and I started night school, started an engineering degree at the old South Australian School of Mines and Industries. And it was just as well I did matriculate, so the world was my oyster.

So how old were you when you matriculated?

Fifteen.

Tape 2

00:30 Adelaide, Cambridge, Singapore, Royal Australian Engineers. Gonville [?] and Caius College, Cambridge.

We will talk about that later. Just picking up from when you were fifteen and

01:00 **you matriculated, where did you go from there, did you go straight to your apprenticeship?**

I went to this school; it was a very special school. Even though the Depression was on employers were seeking people who had just finished their matriculation, I was offered a job with an analytical chemist on North Terrace, would have been close

01:30 to the university and School of Mines. But I found out I had to deliver chemicals with a bike and the bike had this advertisement for this company on it, so I declined that job. And then I was offered a job as an apprentice electrician in the Adelaide Electric Supply Company called 'the Company', and as I say, you're expected to go to night school and as I say, for two years I went five nights a week to night school.

02:00 I got an engineering degree in electrical engineering, qualified as an electrician. As I say I have my, out of date now, electrical worker's licence. I kept it while it was gratis [free] but as soon as I had to pay for it, I let it slide. So I started that and it was at Hilton, and we used to ride our bikes from there up to the School of Mines which is on the corner of Frome Road

02:30 and North Terrace. Started immediately. And I started work on the day King George V died. We were working in a place in King William Street, opposite the town hall, and all of a sudden the bells started to ring, the King had died.

And how did you feel when you heard that news?

What?

That the King had died?

03:00 Couldn't care less. We didn't get a holiday. It didn't really affect us, every day at school we had to salute the flag and the flag was the Union Jack and what was it, "I love our country, the British Empire." and our country wasn't the British Empire, it was Australia. "I love our country, the British Empire, I swear to my flag the Union Jack."

03:30 So you can imagine what we used to mutter. So how did I feel? I mean the King wasn't part of our life at all. Although the oaths I swore when I joined the army, and I did swear it, "I, Edwin Harry Medlin swear that I will well and truly serve our sovereign lord the King in the military forces with the Commonwealth of Australia at home or abroad and I will resist his majesty's enemies and cause his majesty's peace to be kept and maintained and

04:00 that I will, in all matter appertaining to my duties, faithfully discharge my duty according to law." So I didn't think too much of him, if you have to say that stuff.

Well then I might just move ahead and talk about when you decided to join the militia [Citizens' Military Force] then, what was your motivation to join the militia?

My father said to Arthur my brother and me, and Arthur as I said, was a prisoner of war and died as a prisoner of war,

04:30 "If there is going to be a war, and there is. And if you're going to go to it and I suppose you will, then don't be in the infantry." like he was, "And don't be either a private or a second lieutenant. Privates do the fighting and second lieutenants lead the platoons and they have the highest casualty rates." So I looked around as soon as I turned eighteen, looked

05:00 for different units. And seeing I was doing an engineering degree I joined the 3rd Field Company of the Royal Engineers. And I ceased then going for five nights to night school and went, for the first year, four nights a week and the second year, three nights a week and just about half finished an engineering degree before the war started. So I joined the engineers. I found it very interesting, I worked very hard.

05:30 I became a sergeant within a year and joined an officers' training thing in Easter of 1939. And sat for my commission and was commissioned, passed my commission in June and was commissioned in October of 1939. because we had passed the exam we were allowed to put our 'pips' up [lapel insignia],

06:00 I was a second lieutenant; I had to have that rank even though my father had told me not to.

What did you enjoy most about the militia?

There is camaraderie in the army. There is. And I said to you before that when you're at the bottom, when you're in the mud there

06:30 is a friendship. And the mateship that people talk about in the army is real. You know damn well that you depend for your very lives on each other, and you have to learn those skills and you have to pass those skills to each other so you don't let each other down. I am just reading a book written by a friend of mine, you ought to interview him

07:00 too, Pat Bill, DSO [Distinguished Service Order], MC [Military Cross], brigadier in Vietnam. And he is talking about the fear of showing fear. Now I didn't have that, I experienced fear of course, but you asked me what did I like about the army, you learn that you are going to experience fear and

07:30 you learn that you have to do your duty whether you're frightened or not. What are you frightened of, you're not being frightened of being killed, you're frightened of a serious injury, a bullet in the guts as they described it, that's a bit unfunny. No, it is that mateship and the interdependence on each other

08:00 free of any homosexuality. I spent a lot of my life in the army, spent a lot in the theatre and a lot in universities, and I used the word homosexual then. Even in prison camp I saw no homosexuality, although I am sure there was. There was a Royal Commission

08:30 in England years ago on homosexuality and prostitution. And it distinguishes between individual homosexuals. I have seen in the theatre people who carry on in a camp way but I am sure are not individual homosexuals. Conversely I have seen in universities people who are individual homosexuals but who pretend who are not. It is weird. Last night I watched bits of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Did you?

09:00 **No.**

It's weird. A lot of them carrying on as lesbians and homosexuals, that are about as straight as I am, I think, it is just a big act. Why did I say that? I wanted to distinguish between mateship and curious interpersonal sexual relations.

So what do you recall of the men

09:30 **that were in the militia with you?**

Most of them are dead. I said I sat for my commission in June of 1939, six of us passed it and I remember the order, we were commissioned in the order which we came in the exam. I remember Jim Bridgeton, Ron Charlton, George Parker,

10:00 Harry Medlin, Dick Wegner and Nigs Chapman. That was the order of seniority. And Nigs Chapman who was a qualified engineer was the eldest. He was a hopeless soldier. We all saw active service and we all survived which is a bit unusual. Bridgeton is dead, Charlton is dead, I think Parker is dead,

10:30 Chapman is dead, what happened to Wegner I don't know, but I am not dead. There is another fellow, Jack Holten, he was junior to me in the 3rd Field Company. He became very sick and he might be in the process of dying, he is about eighty-seven, eighty-eight.

11:00 What do I remember? Those in my unit, South Australians there is only one left and he lives at Murray

Bridge. Cec Foster. His younger brother was Stormy Normy Foster; have you interviewed him? Well you ought to. He was a Rat of Tobruk so he was in Tobruk [Siege of Tobruk, April to December 1941].

11:30 He was a member of the legislative council in South Australia, Labor Party; he crossed the house and allowed the building of Olympic Dam and the uranium work to go ahead, so he got expelled from the Labor Party. Stormy Normy Foster. I am recommending a few people to you. So there was a staff sergeant in our unit, you asked me whom I remembered.

12:00 Staff Sergeant George Adams, he has just had a bowel cancer and he is as tough as guts, he lives at Griffith in New South Wales. He has just been down to the opening of the prisoner of war memorial thing. And the patron and chief, Bill Schmidt, have you interviewed Bill Schmidt? There's another one. 2/3rd Machine Gunners ex-POW, he is the South

12:30 Australian secretary treasurer of the ex-POW association. He took a photograph of the names Medlin EH and Medlin AJ, 'AJ' was my brother and as I say, died as a prisoner. So I know Bill Schmidt, I know George Adams, as I say George despite having just recovering from bowel cancer he went to Ballarat. Are you going to?

I hope to at some stage, yes.

13:00 It is just in a park in off the main road. I would like to have got there but I was immobilised with a missing toe.

When you became second lieutenant what were your responsibilities?

I was transferred to Fort Larg's from the 3rd Field Company to the 38th Fortress Company [Royal Australian Engineers].

13:30 So we were a fortress engineering company, searchlights and the engineering of the fort and that was at Fort Largs. Now Fort Largs stands some thousands of yards away from Osborne and Osborne was the gas company and the electricity company. Now there were German raiders around the south coast here in the early days of the war, now if they wanted to bomb or shell either the gas company or the electricity company at Osborne, they would

14:00 Have to come under the guns at Fort Largs. We were called up there and I served on full time duty from the very first day of the war, the 3rd of September 1939 until the 25th of February 1946, and from September through to October they called everyone up and we were in camp for about a fortnight, and then everyone went home for about six weeks.

14:30 I was the sole officer at Fort Largs, I was a militia, second lieutenant, I was the commanding officer of Fort Largs as an engineer officer, and there were permanent sappers and gunner and also militia sappers and gunners and we manned the fort. The guns and the searchlights. And here is a nineteen year old engineer, commanding officer of Fort Largs. We had a marvellous time

15:00 because as I say, you don't have to go around saluting people all of the time if you know your job and you do it. and you respect this comradeship, and you deliver when you have to. People will respect you no matter what rank you are. I will tell you there was one interesting gunner, sergeant, permanent. His name was Aubrey Lobb.

15:30 They came from Kingscliff to Fort Largs, there was a number of them Kingscliff, a number of these permanent fellows and they couldn't believe that they were under the charge of a militia second lieutenant but they were. Anyway he was one of a group of people that went on a 'gang bang' in Kingscliff that became a pack rape.

16:00 And they all got gonorrhoea, now if you get a venereal disease in the army that's a crime, there are plenty of criminals in the army, I tell you. And they all admitted that they had been on this 'gang-bang' all except Albury. And so they all forgot about them and Albury got the nickname of 'Poxy'. So Albury was 'Poxy Lob', and as I say

16:30 the others in this thing were forgotten, so there is a lesson in there that you are supposed to tell the truth and own up.

Being so young what was your relationship like with your other officers?

Well, it is funny, the commanding officer there initially, was a fellow called Serong, he was a staff corps lieutenant,

17:00 he became a staff corps major. He was in charge of training the training camps in Vietnam. He was superseded by Major Athol James McLaren Wilson who was a typical Melbourne graduate. He was a triple graduate and a triple blue from Melbourne; I became very friendly with him. I was nineteen, he was thirty-five, I thought he was an old man.

17:30 The next youngest people were two cousins, one was twenty-three and the other was twenty-seven, and I can remember distinctly thinking how middle aged these people were, twenty-three and twenty—seven. And as for Athol, he regarded me as a decoy. He was a ladies' man, he was a womaniser. And I had to catch them as it were, and

18:00 as a working-class lad, I didn't go to St Peters College, but as a young lieutenant who didn't look all of that bad, I suppose I was a decoy and we had a marvellous time. I was naïve but I wasn't stupid, I knew what was going on. And that was my

18:30 relationship complex. There was a gunner captain who I despised, I won't tell his name, he was just a bloody snob. And I think he managed to avoid active service. You can tell you know, I am a firm believer that leaders are born, they are not made.

19:00 You go to a school in leadership and when the heat is on, in prison camp, there were leaders from all walks of life, there were a whole lot of senior RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] air force people who were just useless. Managerial class, they came from four, they were called the 'four hundred group', four hundred pounds a year would buy you a commission in the Royal Air Force.

19:30 Now four hundred pounds a year in 1939 was a lot of money, but you're not a natural leader of men just because you have got a lot of money. I mean that Tom Derrick, he got a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], a VC [Victoria Cross], just a sergeant.

20:00 **So when you became second lieutenant did you think that you were a born leader?**

I don't like to answer that question but I will. I have always had a lot of confidence in myself; I wouldn't have put it in those terms. But at that stage I was very confident and I could do my job,

20:30 I was just about the youngest in our unit, not just the youngest officer. In fact one of the troops we had there, a fellow who had been a sergeant in the First World War, another had been an electrical inspector under whom I had worked in the Adelaide Electrical Supply Company. But I never felt any diffidence, I didn't feel

21:00 any arrogance either. I don't think it affected my friendship and my loyalties. His name was Peter Coughlin and there he was, became a corporal and a very good one.

So when you were in Fort Largs on the Fleurieu Peninsula, I have to ask what kind of fraternisation went on, you have alluded to some

21:30 **now and I am intrigued.**

What sort of which?

Fraternising went on with the troops?

There was a saying in the army, "On parade, on parade. Off parade, drunk." As I say I was a pretty fit young fellow, I have got a punching bag in there and I am not as good as that original fellow. I used to engage

22:00 in the wrestling and the boxing. I tell you if you are an officer; amateur boxing, there are very strict rules, three, two minute rounds, none of this fifteen, three minute rounds for the pros. And if you're an officer you can get the hell knocked out of you. In three lots of two minutes, if you get in there with the troops they take a great delight in giving you a hiding, if they can.

22:30 I would call that fraternising, wrestling was a bit more couth I think, but amateur boxing, I always went in for the amateur boxing competitions. Also played badminton, I joined the Largs Bay Badminton Club and I used to be able to play badminton a bit and used to also play that in the drill hall at Fort Largs.

23:00 And in those days there were sand hills between Fort Largs, do you know where it is?

Vaguely.

Well it is north of Largs Bay, you have got Semaphore and then Largs and Largs Bay and Fort Largs is a mile north along the beach on the way to what is now called New Haven, I think. Well anyway there was nothing in those sand hills except an old goat farm and I used to take the troops

23:30 for cross country runs, five miles through the sand hills. And when you are doing that sort of thing, there is no lieutenant, captain, it is just Harry, as I say, "On parade, on parade. Off parade, drunk." That's an extreme way of saying, there is a time to fraternise and a time to be formal.

So where was the local

24:00 **pub if you were out so far?**

The local pub? Well I was a teetotaller Methodist at that time. I didn't worry about pubs. At Largs Bay. Mind you we had canteens in the fort. It is not an offence in the army if you're in camp to be drunk, it is an offence if you misbehave, but just to get drunk

24:30 is part of the thing. I was a teetotaller until the Japs actually landed in Timor and there was an English ack-ack [anti-aircraft] crowd there and they had some rum. And they gave me some of this rum and I realised I had been kidded all of my life about the evils of alcohol. With a canteen a pub wasn't such a great consequence.

25:00 I will tell you something about pubs, I took a group march from Fort Largs, we felt a bit ashamed, I had volunteered for the AIF and this was a reserved occupation because of the danger to the gas supply and the electricity supply. So I took half the company on a march from Fort Largs to Victor Harbour. We bivouacked at Port Noarlunga; we bivouacked in the Hindmarsh Tiers

25:30 and I marched on a compass bearing. When we got to Aldinga it was a Sunday morning, and commissioned officers had certain powers and also responsibilities, and because we have marched over twelve miles, I opened the pub at ten-thirty on a Sunday morning. Well the locals were all there and they all wanted to join the army. I opened the pub

26:00 and we had a marvellous time, the owner didn't mind his pub being open. Then we marched on and we had lunch a bit later at the Sellicks Hotel, do you know Sellicks Hill? There is a hotel there, I opened that. And some of them drank more then they should. I then marched on a fixed bearing from the Sellicks

26:30 Hotel to the Hindmarsh Tiers. Up and down the hills, and some of them had had too much to drink and they were really grumbling. But there is a lot to be said about soldiers that have a bit of a grumble and then forget about it. they had to forget about it, they were out in the bush, there was no one to pick them up, they just had to walk. We marched around to

27:00 Victor Harbour, met a group of girls and I have got photographs to prove it, caught the train back home. I intended to do it again with the other half but then I got in the AIF and away I went.

So you were instruction at Fort Largs?

Oh yeah.

And what were you instructing, what were your duties?

The second in command of our unit, it was my responsibility to train the recruits.

27:30 And there was conscription in the early days of the war. And you used to get batches of thirty-two to make up a platoon. Thirty-two recruits. They would come in and they wouldn't know how to march, how to dress themselves, how to keep themselves clean. So you would have to teach them all of these things.

28:00 Teach them how to wash and press not only their own clothes, but also mine, because officers have batmen [servants]. How to polish boots, and when you polish boots you also have to polish the instep as well so on parade they have to stand on one leg and put their feet back and if they get caught, what you could do, you could confine them to barracks and that's called a company offence.

28:30 It's a regimental offence, if you hit an officer or senior person you can really be in trouble, but if you dish out these company offences. If they're not attired properly you confine them, to barracks for a day or two days. They can't go and see their girlfriends. And it is a game, men they will put up with it, again they will whinge and

29:00 do terrible things. I had to teach them how to march, there is a photograph there of troops marching properly, We got into terrible trouble with the Japs, standing at attention because that's a sign of you being a thief, and you would have to open your hands standing at attention for the Japanese. Have to teach them how to slow march,

29:30 how to fix bayonets, how to throw Mills grenades, how to use a machine gun, Lewis gun [light machine gun], how to do it blindfolded. How to crawl along on your knees, it took about six to eight weeks for each cadet group. and then we would march them from Fort Largs through Largs to Semaphore

30:00 and back. They also had to do; a recruit had to be able to run a mile in six minutes. Now I doubt if you could run a mile in six minutes, it takes quite a lot of practice and training, you have to learn how to breathe, how to breathe properly. There is PT [Physical Training],

30:30 you know up right, out and down, standing on one leg with your eyes closed, touch your fingers. Can you touch your fingers with your eyes closed?

I haven't tried. So how long were you doing that before you joined the AIF?

I was there from 3rd of September 1939 until the 7th

31:00 of August 1941. So you know rising two years. I was also the intelligence officer there. The senior intelligence officer in South Australia was Brigadier Wills, Ken Wills, who subsequently became our chancellor.

31:30 There was an interesting experience, there was on occasion once where some of our troops on the Adelaide railway station were talking about the security movements of a ship, and as I say with raiders and submarines of the south coast here, ships being mined over at Port Lincoln and having to struggle

32:00 back here to be fixed up, security is very important. So I was given authority to put phone tabs on the public phones. I have written about this too. It is quite an art to listen without hearing.

32:30 There are doing words and winning words if you memorise, and you can memorise now they connote different things. Many listen but few hear. There is a difference between listening and hearing. Listening is done with your ears and hearing is done with your brain. There is quite a branch of philosophy, and my brother

33:00 is involved in it, that distinguishes between doing and winning words. Now when you listen, I mean eavesdrop on a phone to see if people are giving out secured information you deliberately don't want to hear personal confidences between say, a bloke and his wife.

33:30 and after a while it is possible to teach yourself to listen but not hear and to hear what you want to hear and hear what you should hear. I am convinced that this is quite different to what happens in a lot of places like ASIO [Australian Securities and Intelligence Organisation], now this intelligence, that Howard is said to have got, that was imperfect

34:00 requires a lot of skill I think, to pick the sense out of something and then do something about it. Many listen but few hear. That was one of my jobs as intelligence officer; I was also intelligence officer in Timor.

So just at Fort Larg, what were your other duties as intelligence officer?

34:30 Well when I was a junior officer there I was Mister Vice. Every officers' mess has a president who is a senior officer and a vice president who is known as Mister Vice who is the junior officer. The junior officer duty is to run the accounts, to order the stuff, to make sure that there is no improper behaviour with females in the mess.

35:00 And I started to practice, everybody had to deliver a pewter tankard, and I got mine upstairs, Captain EH Medlin, and after I came home I went down and got it back. Every officer had to contribute a tankard. There were two,

35:30 a lot, of women used to come down there. As I say I was a decoy, but there were two women and I had to be really quite strict with them, they should have behaved better, they were the wives of very distinguished Adelaide legal people. I am not going to mention their names, they are both almost certainly

36:00 dead. I taught physics to the son of one of them but I didn't tell him what his mother used to get up to. You know, as you go through this world you meet a lot of surprising situations. So as Mister Vice it was my duty to maintain and restore decorum and as a snooty young Methodist I used to do it, and I

36:30 hope without causing offence to anybody. Also you would have to take your turn as officer of the day. There you had to look after the guard, make sure that the guards turns out properly, regulates the traffic and behaviour. Controls those who are confined to barracks. Controls those who are confined in the pokey. And I might come back, well you

37:00 might bring me back to being officer of the day in Darwin.

You said that women would come down and visit at Port Largs, were they wives and girlfriends or were they?

The bulk of them were the Adelaide

37:30 social elite. I have got a little black book here I am not going to show it you, and I have listed all of their names. And their names are all embargoed, I have got embargoes on a certain amount of material and a lot of people have to die, including me, before my reminiscences get published. A lot of girlfriends, a lot of them used to come from interstate.

38:00 There was a lot of mobility in those days between the Adelaide elite, I will tell you the name of one of the women, her name was Barbara Matters, she is now Barbara Garrett, mother of Andrew Garrett, you know who I mean? And she and I were quite friendly with each other; there was no nonsense of any sort. She was a marvellous woman.

38:30 I learned later from her sister-in-law that her mother, who was a dreadful dragon, was petrified that Barb and I were going to make a go of this, this young Methodist socialist, oh she couldn't bear the thought of Harry Medlin. But it was all quite harmless; I have got beautiful photographs of the pair of us. She was in the services; I am not sure what she was,

39:00 but she is a social worker. And she is still; she is on the economic development board chaired by Decrespigny [Robert Decrespigny] advising Mike Wran [South Australian Premier]. Barbara Francis Matters. Her father was Sir Francis Matters, he was Rex Francis Matters he was called by all of the people

39:30 around the Adelaide hospital 'Sexy Rexy' because he used to tweak women's buttocks. Now if you do that these days you could really get into trouble, but my days there were always fellows like him around. Sexy Rexy. And he got knighted and he became Sir Francis Matters, they were an interesting family. We used to play tennis

40:00 they lived at College Park. Beautiful house, big tennis court. I played tennis, played with Don Turnbull, the Davis Cup player. But it was all part of a trap for Athol Wilson to meet young girls.

Tape 3

00:30 **Before we move on Harry, I just want to talk to you a bit about the Bachelor of Engineering degree you started, can you just tell me a bit about what you were starting to specialise in before you went off to war?**

Well I was interested in electrical engineering; this is before the days of electronic engineering of course because the transistor wasn't invented

01:00 until 1954. Subjects I did were; mechanical drawing, freehand sketching; I did three years of fitting and machining, electrical wiring and machinery management. Electrical wiring one and two, mechanical engineering one. Strength of materials. That sort of stuff. But I was interested mainly in

01:30 electrical engineering, and I did a lot of that with my mentor in prison camp but we will get onto that a bit later.

I was just interested to hear what stage of engineering you were up to.

Well I nearly finished half of my bachelor of engineering although I enrolled through in the then South Australian School of Mines and Industries, and they ran the engineering course.

02:00 Their course was the FSASM Fellowship of the South Australian School of Mines. If you matriculated you got not only the FSASM but the BE, the Bachelor of Engineering was identical, as I say the School of Mines ran the engineering courses for the university. As I say, I had completed nearly half; I think I had done twelve out of the twenty-three or four subjects. Of course they get harder as you go

02:30 through third year and fourth year. I don't know how observant you are but I did two things while I was there as an apprentice; transformers which transform from high tension to low tension, you see them on poles; it is I who invented the 'A' frame. On the stoby [telegraph] poles, you know the concrete poles?

03:00 You get this 'A' frame, that's the strut and this is the platform. You can collapse it, pull the transformer up with a block and tackle, put the frame up, lower the transformer back onto it. I, Harry Medlin, designed those things, designed and invented them when I was sixteen or seventeen. In those days there was no intellectual property so I didn't get a brass razoo [no payment] for it and I sometimes say

03:30 I must write and ask them for a dollar for every one that they used. You don't see too many of them around and you only ever see them in South Australia, so next time you're driving along and you see a transformer see if it has got an 'A' frame. But they're disappearing because the core used to have to be soft iron and it had very high magnetic hysteresis

04:00 losses. There is now pherite material that is a lot less dense, so these piddly little 'trannies' [transformers] now you see up on a pole they don't need a Harry Medlin 'A' frame to hold them up. Another thing I did, I became the technical assistant to the country line superintendent. In transmission lines there was the main superintendent, the transmission line superintendent and the country line superintendent. I was the technical assistant to the country

04:30 lines, he was a fully qualified engineer, Arthur Thurdy, who was killed in Tobruk. We took over in 1938, 1939 country electricity generating things. Now they all used to be direct current, do you know what I mean? DC. Alternating current is so much to be preferred because you can transform it, high voltage you can't transform

05:00 DC, transform it from high voltage and distribute it with low current losses, and then when you get there you transform it back down. Anyway we were taking of Strathallan, now to get to Strathallan, outside Macclesfield there was a huge valley and they wanted the transmission line to go across the valley. I designed it, the surveyors took the topography and there were two poles,

05:30 the span was one mile, never been a one mile span anywhere in South Australia anyway. We cabled, the cables were '1 core', the next one is six which makes seven, and the next is twelve which makes nineteen. It is a nineteen core cable but the middle one was steel for strength the other eighteen, six and twelve were copper for conductivity.

06:00 The tension was a thousand pounds and on the hottest day it was not to come closer to the ground than sixteen feet. Anyway I learnt something there, and it is this and I will tell you. There are many circles right? Different radii. There are many ellipses, there is one ellipse, there is another one. There are many hyperbole, there are many parabola. There is only one continuum…

06:30 ball right, when you hold a thing under its own weight it sags in a certain shape, and the shape of that thing is a catenary, and there is only one catenary. If I stretch it a bit all I have done really is just change the axis, there is just one catenary for a thing hanging under its own weight. And if you have got a

catenary you can stick the pole anywhere you like.

07:00 Anyway I got it dead right. So you asked me what I was aiming at, we had two different things, one mechanical and the other was electrical. I liked the work there. I learnt a lot of things, I learnt a lot of things about women, I tell you. When I started it was a forty-four hour week. We used to go to five houses in the morning, five in the afternoon, every day.

07:30 That's fifty, and five on Saturday mornings, that's fifty-five places. You don't have to go too many weeks before you meet everybody that is there. Now I said earlier I might have been naive but I was not stupid. And when it was on offer as it were, I could tell as quickly as the inspector and the inspector would say, "Oh Harry, you go and wait in the car."

08:00 You wouldn't believe it. I have told this story to people and I was telling it in front of a piano tuner. And all women I have told it to said, "Oh you're 'skiting' [showing off]. It is not true, women don't behave like that." Anyway this piano tuner said, "They do, he is dead right." This is Depression time; they would do anything to have you fix up their stove, whatever, anyway. And I learnt like Rudyard Kipling [English author] says,

08:30 tribute to women and I learnt about women from 'er'. E R. I learnt about women from 'er'. So if it hadn't have been for the war I would have probably finished up an electrical engineer. Thank God for the war.

Well that's something we might talk about later, that's given us a bit more of a picture of your own personal

09:00 **interests going into the war. You said that you were a teetotaller when you joined the militia but how did you adjust to the discipline, how did you take to it?**

Discipline of what?

Discipline of the militia when you…?

09:30 Provided you did your job you were not required to be either a womaniser or a drunkard. In fact after parade, see most days, the army was at Keswick, Keswick Barracks and our engineering place was right at the back, just about back to the railway line that runs east of Keswick Barracks. And afterwards we would go down to Gibbs,

10:00 Gibbs had a 'pie floater' [a shop selling pie and gravy dinners] place on what I call the Bay Road but which is infamously called Anzac Highway. We would just ride our bikes down there and get ourselves a pie floater and a glass of lemonade. So I was part of the process without being converted.

10:30 **I am also wondering if you heard the very famous Menzies [Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia] speech?**

I heard it. 'It is my melancholy duty…' that one you mean? Yes he starts off by saying that Great Britain had warned Germany to get out of Poland and had given them two days and that they had not done so and they declared war and 'as a consequence it is my melancholy duty to tell you, that Australia is also at war'.

11:00 I think that was how I heard it.

And where were you?

I was actually at home, we lived at Beacham Street, Coralba Park, I think it was a Sunday night wasn't it? Sunday night? Yeah. Been to church probably and,

11:30 yeah, 'melancholy duty', the Honourable Member for East Sydney, Eddie Ward said of Robert Gordon Menzies, that he had a brilliant military career, cut short by the war. These prime ministers that won't go to war themselves and send others, Robert Gordon Menzies, 'Honest' Johnny Howard. I like their cheek.

What did your parents think of you joining up?

12:00 Well I said before see, I read Mein Kampf when I was about fourteen. You know Hitler's Mein Kampf, 'My Struggle', My Life. I believed him; I knew what he was going to do. His anti-Semitism was direct. His appeals for lebensraum [living space] and I was just a kid. And I believe that there was a

12:30 witting conspiracy through the west in the expectation that Hitler would attack Stalin, and that the Japanese would be on our side, as they were in the First World War. It got tricky with the Molotov-Ribbentrop [Vyacheslav Molotov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Soviet Union; Joachim 'von' Ribbentrop, Foreign Minister of Nazi Germany] pact 1938 [August 23rd, 1939], between Russia and Germany,

13:00 which Hitler of course, abused. As a result of that pact Russia and Germany came in and occupied Poland. I can remember distinctly my cautiousness about our attitude. It seemed to me one of the most sensible things for the Russians to have done to have come that far.

13:30 And it is just as well they did, it stood the Germans off sufficiently that they lost Stalingrad [Battle of

Stalingrad, November 1942 to February 1943] and the Balkans [May to June 1941] and from the time that Hitler lost Stalingrad that was really the end of it. And the Russians were accused also of laying into Finland but they only went in far enough to stop the Germans, they stopped the Germans from going through

14:00 Norway and Finland. Sweden remained neutral and so did Portugal. What started me on that?

Well interestingly I was going to ask you what rumblings you heard of war?

Yeah I sidetracked

14:30 myself because I did say earlier, while all of this was going on my father who had been in the 43rd Battalion in the First World War, said, “If there is going to be a war and there is, and if you’re going to go to it and I am sure you will, then don’t be either a private solider or second lieutenant.” So it was pretty obvious coming from that sort of background

15:00 that I was going to be in it and furthermore, I was going to prepare myself to be in it, so that I could provide the best possible service, as it was within my capacity to do so. And I always thought it was an honourable thing to do. When you’re mixed up with a mongrel like Hitler and Mussolini, in 1936 Mussolini went into Abyssinia.

15:30 and both Hitler and Mussolini were following very carefully the Spanish Civil War [1936 to 1938]. They didn’t send troops but they did send observers and provide munitions for both sides. The same way, as it seems to me, that we have all been caught providing munitions to all sorts of phoney causes. The morality of big business

16:00 is unfunny.

And what about your mother, what did she think of you going off, she had two sons that were…?

Yeah I had a very interesting mother. After we were captured, I think it was not for well over a year that they knew that anything had happened to us and they didn’t

16:30 know that my brother had died until the end of the war and he died in June of 1944, so she was a very strong woman. She came from a family, I said before, eleven siblings, eight of whom were quite remarkable women. Her father was a cobbler; her mother was a breeder of children, as

17:00 far as I can make out. Her mother, after the birth of her last child confessed to one of her eldest children, females, that she had bled, menstruated and they told her, and she said, “I have been worried all of my life, I did that once before.” She menstruated before her first kid; she was always lactating and breeding

17:30 and then once more after her last one. Yet that family, those women were incredible, had very little schooling. My mother actually went to the Mount Barker School which is on Adelaide Road at Mount Barker. Do you know it they have just done it up? Beautiful stone building, glorious. She was in the same class I think as Lloyd Dumas who became editor

18:00 of the Advertiser, the owner of the Advertiser and the chairman of the board of governors of the Adelaide Festival, with whom one Harry Medlin had violent arguments when we were trying to do things like Patrick White and Allan Seymour [playwrights]. One Day of the Year [an Allan Seymour play] was banned in the 1960 festival, the first one. And The Ham Funeral [a Patrick White Play] was banned in the second one. But to be fair again to Lloyd Dumas, he must have got a good education at Mount Barker with my mother because I started to catch him sneaking

18:30 into our productions, “Hello Sir Lloyd, did you enjoy the Patrick White?” Yeah it is incredible how intelligent those women were, they were very crafty. Feminists every one of them, different personalities, they married men who

19:00 they took charge of. Very interesting, and so was my late wife, you probably have a corpus callosum [a section of the human brain] about that big, you know the thing between the two hemispheres, and mine is probably much smaller than that, women are capable of doing many more things at once, than men. Especially country women, they can do all sorts of things and ‘Didi’ was aware of it, my wife, and so was I.

19:30 When she was, she was a founding principle of Pembroke School and she knew that if you got girls and boys before puberty and had them believing then that you could use your other hemispheres more then you could do it. She had ten girls who got PhDs in mathematics from PGC [Scots PGC College]

20:00 when she was senior maths mistress, and also boys who wanted to go into ballet, they were left/right hemisphere balanced so that they knew they could be ballet dancers without being homosexual. It is very important. And I think my mother probably caused me to have a corpus callosum that is a bigger diameter than it would have otherwise been if I can put it in those terms.

20:30 **I understand your sister joined or became a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] during the war?**

How did you know that?

We have got some notes.

Yeah she did.

20:46 **NB. NO AUDIO OR VIDEO FOR THE REMAINDER OF THIS TAPE**

Tape 4

00:30 **Well good morning Harry, I would like to start off this morning by asking you about your posting to Larrakia Barracks in Darwin, what were your duties there?**

We were really stationed there in

01:00 anticipation perhaps, of the Japanese coming into the war and invading the Netherlands East Indies as they were called at that time. It was an open secret that we were headed ultimately to Timor but there was a massive conspiracy to conceal this known fact from everybody. And our duties really were just to sit there

01:30 and wait until we were called. But, as I have written in my reminiscences, that was not satisfactory to two of the officers in my unit. And we tried to engage the troops; we were fifty, fifty-five in activities that caused them not to be quite so depressed about not being in an active service zone, while friends of theirs were in Africa and other areas.

02:00 And of course other parts of the 8th Division [AIF] were of course in Malaya which was then part of the extended British Empire. But as an officer I had to take my turn as duty officer and did a couple of times.

And what did that involve?

On two occasions it involved closing the canteen at ten at night. And I can tell you that's not a terribly easy job.

02:30 It also involved as officer of the day going around the messes and asking if there were any complaints. On the first occasion I did it, there were complaints that the troops were short of rations. Now young men of that age eat an enormous amount and they can expect to be provided with what they were issued to them and we found that there was actually corruption going on, I actually put a guard on

03:00 the one road out of Larrakia Barracks into Darwin and caught a truck taking food into the town. Second time I was orderly officer, there was no such complaint about shortage of rations. Another incident occurred there were riots there in consequence, in part of the purloined food, the troops would go around, see there was about eight thousand troops there at the time and the population was only about eight hundred. And they would,

03:30 they would go around smashing the place up, they would smash up the shops that they thought was selling the purloined food back to them and it is quite tricky handling a bunch of troops on the rampage without doing them terrible damage and especially if they're half drunk.

And how did you deal with them?

Well we were very lucky, the one time that I was involved and I can't remember how I was involved,

04:00 the one time I was involved, the captain of the guard was a fellow called Norman Roth. He was headmaster of an independent school in Tasmania and he was a company commander of 'B' Company in the 2/40th Battalion and he was really quite a remarkable man. He told us when we dressed to go on guard, not to be aggressive with our dress. Don't carry bayonets even,

04:30 certainly don't carry pistols which officers are allowed to do. The only thing we should carry that was likely to be aggressive was our tin hat, the helmet, and if you struck any villains; take the helmet off and let them have it. and it worked very well. In my experience most people will react sensibly to reason, I mean they knew that they were misbehaving.

05:00 If you get eight thousand young men in a town with very few women, no social contact; there is going to be trouble from time to time, but handled properly it is manageable.

And what did you see of gambling or…?

Well in my reminiscences I said that I find that I don't recall any two-up.

05:30 Mind you I was a sanctimonious young Methodist in those days, but even so I was not silly. I just don't remember seeing it. the Chinese used to run this 'ins and outs', a big board and you bet on the roll, two dice, two sixes or whatever and I paid a tribute to the Chinese there, in the sense that the odds were

even. And they would make

06:00 their way as the holder of the kip [the bank] by the fluctuations. I don't suppose you have done too much mathematics, but you will know that if you have distributions of things where gambling is involved even where the odds are even, that the little person will be ironed out by fluctuation, the gambler, the person that holds the purse can stand the fluctuation, the little person can't. So the Chinese would make it worth their while by ironing out

06:30 the little bloke. We used to gamble on fights, and there was a sergeant there in the artillery, the 2/1st Heavy Battery called Tom Uren, he subsequently became a federal member of parliament and minister in the Whitlam government. He was about my age I think; he might have been a little bit younger than me, maybe twenty. And he was a pretty well known professional pug,

07:00 pugilist. And he fought under an assumed name in Darwin and we had a lot of money on Tom and he won and it was pretty obvious and we had to run for our lives, he was pretty obvious that he was a professional boxer and not just an amateur from the army.

Well you have mentioned a little of why the troops weren't happy, but why?

07:30 **was Darwin an unhappy?**

Well you see we were in the 2nd AIF but we weren't in a combat zone and young men are very impressionable, and I am not so old that I can't remember what it is like to have been in the army at twenty or twenty-one, you want to be in a fight.

08:00 It really is not terribly logical and when you think about it, it is dangerous; politicians can manipulate the minds of young men and young women. Women now want to be in the army, women want to be involved in combat. Why I am damned if I know, it is a terrible thing. But as I say when you're friends are elsewhere and they are getting killed, you want to be in action too.

08:30 There we were stuck in Darwin, and it wasn't a terribly attractive place at that time. One of the interesting things there at that time was the young aborigines who worked around Larrakia barracks, I was very impressed with them, I have written also a little bit about them. They knew that that was their land. They did not seem to resent

09:00 co-occupation. They didn't seem to resent the army being there and Larrakia barracks was on Larrakia tribal land. It was in fact there, that I first heard about land rights for aborigines and traditional owners; they were fine young men. Incidentally it was years later when I was presiding a commemoration in Adelaide University

09:30 and we were giving a masters degree to a Darwin aborigine who worked at the then Institute of Technology and I saw in the audience a full blood aborigine and I sought him out afterwards and found that he was one of these very young men that we knew in Darwin working in Larrakia barracks, cleaning out grease traps. We used to play football with them on the Darwin oval, Darwin oval was a pretty crummy oval I tell you.

10:00 We played in boots they played in, have you ever seen an aborigine's feet? They have got calloused pads a centimetre thick, playing on gravel in bare feet. They were marvellous young people and I have always felt guilty, on behalf of white Australians, in our careless attention to their land rights.

10:30 **And where were you when you were sent the news that the Japanese had entered the war?**

Interestingly in trying to get things to do I was fortunate that the adjutant, the chief engineer of the 7th Military District as the Northern Territory was called, Brigadier Bill, DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], MC [Military Cross], I think,

11:00 Distinguished Conduct Medal, Military Cross I think, from the First World War, he subsequently became town clerk for the city of Adelaide, and he was as I say the chief engineer. His adjutant was a staff officer called Fraser and he got into the AIF and went south and they needed an adjutant and I was chosen. So I had something, we were responsible for

11:30 all of the engineering efforts of the 7th Military District. Now that did not mean that the chief engineer, Brigadier Bill, was in charge of the civilian engineering workforce, we worked in paralleled. A lot of the road making was done by civilians, but a lot of the other engineering work was done by the engineers that were there, 2/3rd Pioneers, became the 2/4th Pioneers [AIF]. Our own engineers were involved in a certain amount

12:00 of engineering work. So as I say I was lucky that I had something to do and I was the acting adjutant to the Chief Engineer of the 7th Military District and very proud of myself, when we heard that the Japanese had attacked both Pearl Harbor [Battle of Pearl Harbor, December 7th, 1941] and also Singapore [Battle of Singapore, 8th to 15th February, 1942]. It was known however a good week before, that the Japanese were moving

12:30 they had occupied Siam as it was called; Thailand, and there were troop movements in the Gulf of Siam. Well it was pretty obvious that it was coming, it came really as no surprise to anyone I suppose, except

to the English who were occupying Malaya at the time. So that's I how I heard about it and

13:00 immediately we were then embarked on the convoy to go to Singapore. There are curious stories in war histories about the uncompromising resistance of the wharfies in Darwin, none of which in my experience was true. It is said in some places that the ships didn't leave until the 12th of December; well we actually disembarked in Kupang on the 12th of December.

13:30 So what happened on the 12th of December between the so called leaving of the convoy and us arrived six hundred miles away is a mystery. We were actually at sea when we heard of the sinking of the [His Majesty's Ship] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse off Nicobar. And so it was a rude awakening. We were the victims really of English

14:00 misplaced self confidence, and to hear that two battleships had been sunk by aeroplanes is really incredible, they shouldn't have been there anyway. So where was I you say, well I was in Darwin and we were quickly on the ships, on our way to Timor.

14:30 **And which ships were in your convoy?**

I was actually on the armed merchant cruiser [HMAS] Westralia. I have forgotten the name of the other ship in the convoy. There were two escort vessels, I have misplaced their names, I have them in my reminiscences but I was actually on the Westralia.

15:00 As I say it was an armed merchant cruiser. It was, the sailors on board were all Royal Australian Navy and you might be familiar with how contemptuous sailors are about having landlubber soldiers on their ship. We were advised as to how to conduct ourselves. We slept on deck because it was the war on

15:30 there was to be no smoking, no lighting of matches. On ships cigarettes are lit by slow rope, you have a rope that burns slowly and that is not all together entirely safe either because sometimes the rope will fizz a bit and show light. We were, I repeat,

16:00 firmly convinced that we were a confounded pest to the Royal Australian Navy. In the navy with a ship there is a captain and then a number one, second in command. The captain is not seen so much as the number one, the number one really runs the ship, except in action. This number one was lieutenant commander of the Royal Australian Navy and he made it abundantly

16:30 clear to us how we were despised by the sailors. And of course they would get up in the morning at break of day and swab the decks and if you happened to have you palliasse on the deck you get swabbed with it if you're not up and packed up. And then he told us how we were to behave or how we were not to behave if we were shelled. And in particular he said, "If we are attacked by

17:00 destroyers you will have no idea whatsoever of the arms they are using. Whether they are contact fuse shells or armour piercing shells. So you will have no idea which is the safer side to be on, so just stay where you F'ing well are and stay out of our way." The Royal Australian Navy, in fact all navy in my experience including the Japanese

17:30 navy seem to have personnel who more understanding, I won't say less contemptuous but more understanding of human frailty. If I could skip briefly to the Japanese navy, one of the jobs we used to like to get in prison camp was working with the Japanese navy, they were good. It is a very different service

18:00 from the army.

And what was the mood on board ship?

I think it was one of well concern, apprehension, perhaps, uncertainty about what was going to happen. But pleasure to get out of Darwin, pleasure to be likely to be involved in action and to be able to do the job

18:30 that we had voluntarily enlisted to do, horrible and all, as it might well be. So it was a mixture but our troops were well trained. They knew that they could be expected to be in action. It is funny really. You know that you're likely to be killed but that's part of

19:00 the game anyway. I have read a, in fact I think I spoke to you earlier, about Brigadier Bill [?] who lives here and he was involved in the Malayan campaign and also in Vietnam and I have recently read his book.

19:30 He talks about fear and he has something of an essay in there about the fear of showing fear. And I talked about it to him recently. Personally I don't recall that I ever had a fear of showing fear, I was aware that there was going to be a fear. And I have been frightened, scared stiff.

20:00 But I think if you have been properly trained to be a psychopathic killer then you know that you don't show fear, especially say if you are an officer or likely to be in charge of the troops then you must not show fear, and it never occurred to me that we should be fearful of showing fear. But, you say what was it like on the ship, there was an apprehension, a joy as it were

20:30 to be out of Darwin and going somewhere where we could do something. I don't think we ever expected

that we would be so quickly over run or that the Japanese would be so successful. I think had we really realised that there might have been quite a different reaction.

And what was your landing like?

21:00 Terrible. We landed in Kupang Bay, there was said to have been a submarine scare and the Royal Australian Air Force were there at Penfui aerodrome and they were there bombing something in the bay, said to be a submarine, whether they scared it away or not, I don't know. There was sufficient of a scare anyway, we were in barges and we were slung out into the water and the water was about

21:30 here and we had to carry our gear and our arms and carry the stuff high, so it doesn't get wet. And all beaches in the tropics are terrible, because of rainfall you get run off and they are thick with mud and so on. I have often reflected subsequently what the Japanese spy, who must have been there and who must have seen this,

22:00 what he must have thought of this bunch of troops coming to defend Timor. We had a casualty there ,the first casualty was this Tom Uren I was talking about, he jumped off and he didn't have his boots on and he cut his foot and he was the first casualty from our medico, Doctor Les Poidevin, who turned ninety the other day and is still living here in Adelaide. It was terrible.

22:30 Our equipment was put on barges and it came ashore and a lot of it was broken. It was a shambles.

What was your first task?

We were sent to Klapalimi, Klapa is coconut, Limi is five. It was a little village there with

23:00 five coconut trees and it was called Klapalimi. And the fort was just in back of Klapalimi and it was on a bit of a hill. And it was supposed to protect the sheltered waters of Kupang Bay to the enemy. When we got there, the preparations were hopeless, the guns were there but they had not been mounted, they had not been tested. The huts had not been built, there were no latrines. Timor is a coral island

23:30 and it is almost impossible to dig slit trenches or to dig latrines and in conditions like that what you aim for is what is called a deep earth latrine and it needs to be deep enough so that the flies and maggots and things that get there cannot climb to the top so it needs to be something like twelve or fifteen feet deep. Well there is no way known you can dig into

24:00 that depth in coral. And our slit trenches were actually built above the ground, by Timorese, not by us. We were hopeless at packing coral and a slit trench is four or five feet deep and about two and a half feet wide and at the top it was level, and so that's how it was built, above the ground with coral.

24:30 It worked very well. And after the fort was bombed, you could see these things, the whole thing had come up and then just settled back into place, where as if we had tried to pack the coral, bombs would have just flattened the thing. So our task was to prepare the living and fighting conditions for ourselves, something that should have been done

25:00 well and truly before we ever got there. And as a matter of fact the guns had never been proofed up [tested] until the time that we were bombed and the Japanese had landed, the whole exercise was futile. Designed by incompetent generals in Victoria barracks down in Melbourne which is a long way from Timor, I tell you.

25:30 **Well you say the camps were not ready, what were the general conditions in terms of food?**

I will come back to the

26:00 food in a minute but the general conditions well they were not too good. As I say, we had not been trained in how to survive in those conditions. In spite of the efforts of Don Junior and me to find out where we were going and prepare ourselves for how we would survive. Within days, troops are getting gonorrhoea, we started to get dysentery and malaria.

26:30 Our uniforms were really ridiculous, tropical uniforms, short pants, long socks, short sleeves; we had no immunity to malaria. We had no immunity to dysentery. There were flies all over the place so we all got basilaris, dysentery and malaria, the anopheles mosquitoes, we didn't even know what an anopheles mosquito was.

27:00 And we used to see these things on our arms standing up on their heads and used to think it was funny, until we realised that these were the carriers of the malarial parasite. The Japanese on the other hand, when they came, had long sleeves, long trousers, they were much better accoutred to tropical conditions. There we go with dysentery and malaria, no

27:30 proper, deep earth, latrines. The flies were all over everything. The ablution conditions were really atrocious. The food, the provisions were there. I am not aware how they came to be there, they probably came in one of the escort ships with us.

28:00 But again as in Darwin, we hadn't been there very long before the troops were complaining about being short of food. I had a young corporal and we went up to the store in Penfui and I engaged the officer in

idle talk while Robbie went around the back and looted the store. And Ian Scot said to me some time

28:30 later, “Medlin why don’t you tell me what you have taken, so I can balance my books?” So we had enough food, as I say just as well we did pinch it, otherwise the Japs would have got it. The other problem was, as I said, gonorrhoea and it really is remarkable to me how careless troops can be. It got so bad,

29:00 I was officer of the day at Klapalimi and the CO [Commanding Officer] Athol Wilson said, “Look, go into town and shut down the brothel area.” And I got a Dutch group to come down because again, we had not learnt the language. I got a Dutch group to go with us and I have never seen anything so disgusting, and how people could involve themselves with harridans and prostitutes.

29:30 It is quite beyond me. So we shut it down and put it out of bounds and that fixed the spread of gonorrhoea. It is an offence in the army to get venereal disease. Mind you that doesn’t stop the people offending and getting the condition. I remember in the early days in the army at Fort Largs they had these blue light clinics. Have you ever heard of a blue light clinic?

30:00 They used to have films and pictures of people with gonorrhoea and syphilis and you know the tertiary stage with syphilis? Now those tactics, even at the time when I was a kid I thought they were counter productive because people say, “I can never get that.” And they go on and they get gonorrhoea and syphilis. And it is the same with HIV [Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus], do you remember the early propaganda here with HIV?

30:30 These terrible photographs of people who had developed full blown AIDS and HIV is still be spread around.

Well what advice about diseases like gonorrhoea had you been give before you arrived?

Plenty, there was plenty of advice and in the army there are regular, what they call short arm parades do you know what I mean?

31:00 **Perhaps you can explain?**

I can explain all right, the medico and the assistants get in the clinic and the troops walk passed in single file and you have to expose yourself and milk your penis to see if there is any material, it is called a short arm parade, penis being the short arm. So there is an awareness but again it doesn’t seem to prevent it.

31:30 We are not a very intelligent animal when you come to think of it. The big brain doesn’t seem to have served us sufficiently well.

And how often would you have short arm parades?

Once a week.

And when you went into town to clean up that brothel that you had heard about, what did you find there?

32:00 Well huts in the place like Timor, they’re just bamboo and atap [palm], they are not clean, it is filthy, it smells, the women are not attractive. Certainly nothing like the brothels that you would expect to find allowed in Australia,

32:30 or occurring in Australia. In fact you see advertisements in the paper and I think every effort is made to have them presented as clean, safe. Nothing like that. It was just disgusting. As I say as a smooth nosed young Methodist, I was really appalled. And it is a real awakening when you think that your fellow men

33:00 can engage themselves in that sort of activity. Incomprehensible to me. Anyway we shut it down, put it out of bounds and as I said, we left it for the Japs and the Japs I have written about a fellow called Masanobu Tsuji who was the Director of Military Operations for the whole of the Malayan thing, and he was very strict about venereal disease and he actually says at one stage in his book

33:30 that material that was given to Japanese troops, ‘Keep away from the native women because pretty well all of the native women have venereal disease.’ Which is an overstatement of course, but if they got it, they got it from visitors.

Well I would like to go through, in your writings you

34:00 **listed about fifteen points of personal recollections leading up to action, so this is the pre-action that I now want to move into, where was 2/2nd Independent Company sent?**

To Dili. As I say we arrived on Timor on December the 12th and I think it was within, about a week,

34:30 I think I have given the date in my reminiscence when the conference decided to send men to Portuguese Timor and off they went.

And why was that felt?

Well there were Japanese in Dili, and Dili at that stage was the capital of what was called Portuguese Timor. Portuguese Timor was part of the Empire of Portugal,

35:00 Portugal was neutral and it suited the antagonists in Europe to have a neutral country like Portugal. And so there were English and Americans in Lisbon and they went on with all of their spying, and so I though they would be able to do the same thing in Portuguese Timor if there was ever any trouble. So it was occupied for

35:30 that reason. It caused trouble and anxiety because there had been negotiations between the Portuguese and the Dutch about that island and the Portuguese were apprehensive that the Dutch being involved in the occupation would come to assume control of Portuguese Timor. And they actually sent ships from Lorenzo Marques, which is in Africa, to take it back, but

36:00 the moment the Japanese came down they didn't give a two-penny damn about the independence of Portugal and so they just occupied it and the ships went back. We were, it was a big lose when the independent company went to, I believe that if the independent company had stayed with us

36:30 that the whole lot of us would have escaped the Japanese net in Dutch Timor and the whole lot of us would have got into the hills. Instead of which we were trapped in a ring road there, and the independent company realise, two hundred men right? You can't fight a division of twenty thousand, they put up a bit of resistance, we should have retreated into the hills,

37:00 got up into the high hills and the hills in Timor are nine thousand feet high. No roads, just bush track through the jungle. And of course they would make sorties with the Japanese and go back, the Timorese were very supportive, they didn't like the Japanese either, and that should have been our fate. And I believe that if the independent company had stayed with us that we would have

37:30 escaped into the hills. I also believe that if I had been the commander instead of the fellow that was there, that we would have.

Well how did you come to test the Australian security and how seriously the Australians were taking security?

38:00 Well we had nobody who could speak Bahasa Indonesian, Malay if you like. We have recognised Japanese. In fact I said at one stage that as the security officer there, I

38:30 suddenly became suspicious of a fellow that used to sit by the telephone up at Penfui, the aerodrome, where the battalion was. And he would sit there with a few Timorese and one day I asked about this fellow, about who he was and where he had gone. I had learnt a bit of Malay at that time, there was nothing but amused silence and he just disappeared, I believe that he was a Japanese

39:00 or a Japanese agent who was just listening into things. And they weren't bad, perhaps I will come back to this later but I was on a working party after we were captured and the corporal who was driving the truck and I was in the front of the truck, I was whistling or humming an operetta called Le Capitaine Craddock. And this fellow said to me, "Le Capitaine Craddock."

39:30 Now have you ever heard of it? No. And I still can't find it, and I have forgotten how the thing goes, so they had a network there that was so superior to ours and we were absolutely incompetent at comprehending the local situation. Security was non-existent.

Tape 5

00:30 **Harry, perhaps you can tell us what kind of aerial reconnaissance was done of the area?**

You mean before we went there?

No, once you were there.

01:00 I was not actually involved in any aerial reconnaissance except that I did go as aide-de-camp to our CO, [Commanding Officer] Athol Wilson, when there was an enquiry in Dili. Is that what you mean?

01:30 Yeah look, that happened following the occupying of Portuguese Timor or Dili by the 2/2nd Independent Company. And because of the concern in Europe about the neutrality of Portugal, a telegram came and it said the highest British political authority demands to know what the bloody hell is happening in Portuguese Timor. And this is [Prime Minister Winston] Churchill,

02:00 and I checked it out in Churchill's memoirs there, and he didn't seem to show any real concern when he wrote his memoirs about the occupation of Portuguese Timor. Anyway an enquiry was sent and it was the CO of our fixed defences Athol Wilson who was a Melbourne lawyer, who went up to Dili to conduct those enquiries and I went as his aide-de-camp.

02:30 Senior officers always have to have junior officers around, looking after there needs and what not, so I

went. We met with Major Spence who was the commanding officer of 2nd 2nd Independent Company, and the governor of Portuguese Timor, and as I say I have taken photographs in the plane and we flew very low because we were camouflaged from above, not below

03:00 and there was a risk of being shot down by Japanese fighters. And I believe that the conclusion of Athol Wilson and of the governor, and of the Dutch was, that although Dili had been occupied there was no long term risk of the sovereignty of Portugal over Portuguese Timor. Now I have tried myself to find a copy of that report, I knew Athol Wilson

03:30 well enough to know that there would have been a report, but it could find nothing. But you having triggered me into remembering this, I will look again, there will be a report somewhere, and I know enough about the army to know that they never destroy anything, not openly anyway. So that was that. Well I think I said before, when the

04:00 Japanese landed they took no account of Portuguese neutrality and the Independent Company just withdrew and harassed them from the hills. I was engaged in another activity there, but that was on the ground. After we were attacked by the Japanese the 26th of January 1942, Australia Day,

04:30 the Royal Australian Air Force with their Hudsons [Medium bomber] just flew back to Darwin and we were at risk and we needed a place where we could signal when the planes came down from Ambon or Kendari down to the aerodrome into the fort that the attack was on. Signal visually by Lucas lamp [Morse code lamp]. That was quite remarkable

05:00 and it was there that I have seen, and we found such a place which was in visual contact of the aerodrome and the fort. But by the time I got back, that was the evening of the Japanese landing and so no actual post was put there. So I say again there was very little pre-planning and we arrived there, we'll say sacrificed on the alter of

05:30 international diplomacy.

When the air raid started on the 26th of January, what happened?

What happened? The day before there had been a 'Betty' bomber flying around [Japanese Type 1 Attack Bomber], just flying around having a look. And the RAAF commander there, Wing Commander Headlam

06:00 said, "We will be raided tomorrow." Which was the custom, they would have a look around and see what defences there were if anything, and anyway I had been transferred to this combined defence headquarters by this stage because of our break down in communications, so that if there were a raid on we could notify people by either radio that worked or telephone if the lines had not

06:30 been cut. Anyway I was in the command post there and an aircraftsman rushed in and said, "There are seven planes coming!" And Headlam said, "Well they are not ours." And the words were hardly out of his mouth and they were shooting us up, and they went around and around. And there were planes on the aerodrome, stupidly, having been realised the day before that we were going to be attacked they shot them up, they shot up the hangers,

07:00 and they shot up the command post. The command post again was a bit like the slit trench and there were these coral walls built up all of the way around it. Anyway, there was a fellow there called Brian Rofe, he is now dead, he is the father of Paul Rofe. Does that name mean anything to you? He is the Director of Public Prosecutions in South Australia, the lawyer,

07:30 DPP [Director of Public Prosecutions]. Brian Rofe, he and I were there and we looked around watching these things come around after we had done our jobs and when we thought it was clear to make a dash for the slit trenches, well the slit trenches were holes in the ground full of water. That time of the year, it was the wet season, but we raced and jumped into these things, saturated. That was the

08:00 26th of January. That proved that Penfui as an aerodrome was useless, the purpose of it was said to be to allow the passage of aeroplanes from Australia through to Java, see Java was the real part of the Netherlands East Indies that they wanted to defend. It was no longer possible to fly planes. So our role there was finished.

08:30 And the thought of the fort facing out over Kupang Bay to protect the sheltered waters of Kupang Bay from the enemy, it is just ludicrous, the pomposity, the idiocy of the military mind, especially when it is safely ensconced down in Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, is hard to, well it is impossible to

09:00 anticipate. If you could anticipate it you could do something about it. So what happened, the air raid started and then they kept coming and as I say, we were defenceless; we should have got the hell out of there.

Well, you mentioned that before the air raids begun you had been detached and moved from Klapalimi to Penfui, can you describe where you were living at Penfui air strip?

09:30 Initially I was in one of the huts that the battalion was in, on the air strip but the moment the air raid started, we moved out of the hut and my batman and I, moved down closer to the coast on the aerodrome in the Ulu, we just had a little tent

10:00 there and a couple of sleeping bags, we were invisible from the air, it was safer there than in a hut with, they were all shot up of course, the huts were all shot up. It was the wet season of course. It was funny because my batman, he shifted the stuff there and he put it in a creek bed, and now

10:30 I am a country boy and I learned very early in life you never put anything in a creek bed because next thing you know you are washed into the sea. So we pulled it out of the creek bed and put it up on the land, sure enough the creek filled with water at the next downpour. Have you ever been in the tropics? It is hard to visualise what a rain storm is when it comes down.

11:00 So we moved it into safer territory but under jungle cover.

And who was your batman?

His name was Ernest Orth, he was called 'Sluggo'. And he has got a club right foot, has got a twin brother. They were fraternal twins, and Sluggo I found

11:30 out afterwards never did his medical examination, his brother did his medical examination for him. And we got to Darwin and people were sent back from Darwin, tropical conditions, hookworm and ringworm and lord knows what. And Sluggo really should have been sent back, he couldn't really march properly. And he had a funny throat,

12:00 he speaks like this. I am not too sure what was wrong with him. Anyway he said, "Don't send me back Harry, I want to stay with you Harry." So we kept him there. He has visited me here. Very enterprising fellow. He met an American woman, he met her here and he has been to this house here, and he sort of fell in love with her and he chased her to America, and got her to separate from her husband

12:30 married her and came back here. Sluggo. He was a good batman, but as I say after the war he has told us of all of the things that they used to pinch from our tents.

So in what way did you used to rely on Sluggo?

To do my washing, ironing, cleaning.

13:00 And pack, if we had to move, it is essential, they are often misunderstood batmen, but it is essential for an officer with extra duties to have someone like that. And it is essential to have good relations with them too, even though you suspect they are stealing from you and now I am certain he was because he has told me he was.

13:30 **Do you know what he stole?**

No.

Going back to being in the control room, you have mentioned that the task was to maintain communications with the whole force, how was that

14:00 **done from that control room?**

Initially with radio but the longer we were there the worst the radios got, they had not been tropicalised and the rate at which fungus grows in the jungle is quite incredible, they are not sealed and they just got full of fungus. And the telephone lines, as I say, these Japanese agents were cutting the

14:30 telephone lines so we had a signals unit there that used to try and repair that stuff. In fact I have got a book upstairs that I have just been given. A whole lot of short stories written by a fellow who was in the signals unit in Malaya, and they had the same problems there that we did. They had to go out re-servicing. And if there were depots out in the scrub

15:00 you would have to have guards on them because these people would come along open them up and shift the contacts around. So it was a never ending job, and towards the end the contact had to be made by what's called Don Rs. Despatch Riders, DR, Don R. Motorbikes. They are not all that useful either in the tropics with the tropical downpours

15:30 so communications were very difficult.

And who else was working with you apart from Brian Rofe in that control room?

Well Wing Commander Headlam, he was the CO he was really in charge of the thing. There was a fellow called

16:00 'Jock' Birchall. And I think he was in the Royal Australian Air Force and I think he was probably a flying officer or a flight commander, he had been in the First World War, and I spoke a bit earlier about fear, when you first get shot up you think that they are aiming at you personally, that everything is going to you. After a while you get used to it and you think you're leading a

16:30 charmed life, and it is people like him, Jock Birchall, that had been through it all in the First World War and they well they help you get composed and you copy them. if he is not scared, neither am I. You kid yourself, I think that was the extent of my group there, there might have been a signaller or two that I can't remember.

17:00 **And I understand you were asked to reconnoitre a base at Champlong, is that correct?**

To which?

To reconnoitre the base at Champlong?

Yeah I was. The battalion had a second in command a fellow called Ron Campbell, Major Ron Campbell, he came over with the reinforcements, he did not come with us originally in December. I think they got there in

17:30 the middle of January, and I saw a lot more of him in the command post once he got there. I never saw the CO never saw the adjutant Madden, but I did see Campbell. And I got fairly friendly with Campbell. Campbell realised we were in a perilous position in this ring with only one road up. Now Champlong is up on the single road

18:00 into the hinterland. It was the base, our base hospital was there and the headquarters of the army service corps, you know providing the provisions, signallers and Campbell could see that we might need an escape route and I was asked to reconnoitre Champlong and I did. And I have written elsewhere about it, I was able while we

18:30 were trapped and caught by the Japanese to explain to the CO, I don't think he had ever been there or if he had been there he didn't realise anything about it, how we could have gotten into it, if we could break through the point where the Japs had landed, how we could get to Champlong and what sort of roads there were and what routes there were and how you could get to it up the, I thought I reconnoitred it very well,

19:00 and indeed while we were trapped on the road by the Japs the colonel asked me about how we might get through and I told him, but he didn't take any notice of me because he was more concerned with the idiotic advice he was getting from his adjutant. I reconnoitred Champlong, I can still see it.

19:30 **And what were you seeing of aircraft crashing on the air strip? Were there any aircraft crashing on your airstrip?**

Yeah one did. What was the pilot's name? One day, Headlam and I we were the two in the

20:00 combined defence post, a plane took off and you get used to the noise of the panes taking off and all of a sudden it was funny, you could tell from the noise that it hadn't taken off. And I can still recall Headlam and I looking at each other and all of a sudden 'bang'. And what had happened, it was a DC3 [transport plane] and it had a lot of stuff in it and

20:30 troops and they were not strapped in apparently, and it had tried to take off and it was overloaded apparently, and those strips were always very short and they would get to the end put the brakes on, get full throttle, let the brakes go off and just clear off and always at the end of these strips there were coconut plantations and palms. Anyway he yanked it off and the load must have shifted

21:00 and it turned and by the time Headlam and I got outside to see what was happening there was the plane and it was on its back facing the other way, so it had turned right over and it was a ball of fire. You know, you worry about the people who were in it, I am not too sure how many were in it, I think I have written about,

21:30 there was a package of mail in there and I don't know if you have ever read that book Fahrenheit 451? Supposed to be the burning point of paper, four fifty one degrees, is was about this big and it was sitting on the outside and you wonder what, I have wondered what happened to that mail. We had to put guards

22:00 around it because I think I have written about there were ghouls coming and seeking mementos. People are very funny. You lose confidence in them after a while. But there were no other casualties of ours, there were casualties of Americans planes because after we were shot up there used to be orders and which direction to approach,

22:30 and these young Americans would come in and they wouldn't care, they didn't take any notice and we shot down a whole heap of them one day, they thought it was funny. The P40s you know, the Kitty Hawks [short range fighter]. They had no navigational staff they would take off from Darwin and just fly north west to Timor, hit the island, and the navigating was done by mother ships, bigger planes, and sometimes they

23:00 bring a dozen or so of these people. This was some sort of storm and they got isolated from the mother ship and they weren't too sure where they were. I have got some of their badges out in my trunk in the back there, we swapped badges with these fellows. Americans in my opinion are psychologically unconditioned for war.

23:30 They have units like the Marines that are specially trained, but you meet an ordinary American serviceman, airman, soldier, makes me worry about Iraq.

And when did you hear about the

24:00 **Darwin bombing?**

That's hard to tell. Probably the next day or so, we certainly knew about it before we were captured, because it was on the 19th wasn't

24:30 it? the 19th of February. The day that they landed in Timor. And we certainly knew about the bombing of Darwin afterwards, because they would send Japanese planes to Penfui every full moon, we used to count them as they took off and count them as they came back, they rarely lost any, and I think Darwin was the main place bombed

25:00 although there were other places weren't there? Broome? Derby? Yeah. You know, if only they had known they could easily have landed in Darwin. But that fellow Suji that I told you about, he turned them around and they went to Burma, India.

25:30 **Well I am not sure if this was your actually to reconnoitre to Champlong when you volunteered to do a patrol into the hinterland and you took Sluggo and the Timorese, can you tell us about that?**

Yeah, well that was the attempt to find, when our communications really broke down, it was an attempt to find a place from where

26:00 we could signal via Aldis lamp [Morse code] to the aerodrome and to the fort when planes flew down from either Kendari or Ambon. Timor was a couple of hundred miles long, they didn't need navigation aids, all they had to do was fly down, hit the island turn right and shoot us up. And often they were on us before we knew they were there so it was decided to find this point from which there was a line of sight both to the aerodrome

26:30 and to the fort. I volunteered. Again it was Ron Campbell. I volunteered to do it and we moved to Champlong with Sluggo and all of the gear, and the gear that I saved, I have still got there in that store in there. And I recruited a fellow called Lopez and a few bearers and some Timor ponies to lug all of our gear and

27:00 off we went. He knew his way around, he could speak the local dialect, he could speak sufficient English and he was good. We fed him cigarettes and everything was fine. We found this place, it was right up in the hills and I believe we went through territory that no European had ever been through before, it was just straight jungle, we slashed our way. We all had

27:30 machetes. Slashed our way through. The problem was the rain and the mosquitoes. The other problem was the monkeys.

And how had you managed to find Lopez where did you find him?

Well, I found him in Champlong. I have speculated from time to time whether he was a Japanese agent,

28:00 he was not Japanese. He might have been part Portuguese, but he could well have been a Japanese agent and he could have been well, hanging around there seeing what he could find, but he was good. And he knew the area. I just got there and started asking people if somebody knew how we could get through Mena and up into the hills and there he was.

And what gear did you take with you?

Well,

28:30 the ponies carried the food and water because you know you wouldn't drink any water other then was declared safe. Blankets, sacks, as I say I had my rucksack and haversack. And it is all in there. Machetes of course.

29:00 **And what problems of the terrain did you encounter?**

Terrible, it is a very hilly country and we knew roughly where we wanted to go and we made pretty well a b- line through the jungle, up and down across creeks and rivers, tropical islands like that have got creeks and rivers all over the place. We needed to make sure there was no big rivers.

29:30 There was a big river at Mena and it was out about there that we found this place that we had a line of sight. It took about two and a half days to get here and we got back a lot more quickly because we came back through a route that we had, we cut through the jungle, we, in realty, cut an arch,

30:00 I can hardly believe it when I come to think of it. Sometimes, a couple of times, I rode on one of these ponies, oh terrible. But Timor ponies are only about this high, they are very small and very heavy backbones, no saddles, and it was terribly uncomfortable, and feet just about on the ground, and the pony is squealing all of the time.

30:30 Anyway we found it and I got back on the night of the 19th and Lopez wanted to stay at the first village outside Champlong and stupid me, I insisted on going back to Champlong, then I found out about the landing and if I hadn't, well I might not be here, I might have been somewhere else.

31:00 **Well before we go on, I also understand that there were problems with leeches and monkeys**

on that trip?

Leeches yeah. It is the same pretty well through the tropics, anywhere uninhabited is full of leeches and we would have leeches all over us. And the best way to get them off is to get a cigarette and put it on their tail and they drop off. But the monkeys,

31:30 they were incredible. I was not used to monkeys and I think we were probably the first people like that the monkeys had seen, as I say, we were going through a real version of the country, Monkeys are tribal, and I believe the troubles came when we would go from one tribal group into the next. And they would be with each other, they would be quite prepared to fight each other anyway, but they would scream their heads off.

32:00 But they never ever attacked us, they would get very close. What were those monkeys called? I have forgotten their name but you find them all over Asia right up as far as Japan. India.

And why was the passage back easier?

32:30 We came back through the stuff that we had cut our way through, so we just retraced our steps. Mind you, wouldn't want it to take a week, the speed with which the jungle grows is incredible but we pretty well had an archway to go through.

33:00 **And where did you go when you got back?**

Well as I say, I made one of the biggest mistakes of my life, we should have taken Lopez's advice and stopped in that village but I came back to Champlong and heard there that the Japs were landing on the south coast. So I got on the back of a Don R I think, I can't remember actually how I got back to

33:30 Penfui, got back to combined defence headquarters late at night, couldn't find it. Can't quite remember where I slept, but found it the next morning. They had shifted from the aerodrome and there was a big cave there and they were in this cave. The colonel, the adjutant and Wing Commander Headlam, he was just about to leave the place, yeah silliest thing I ever did.

34:00 **And you mentioned they were in a cave, what sort of cave was it?**

I have said that it was a coral island, I am inclined, it was quite a big cave, it was as big as this part of the house.

34:30 It, yeah, it was not limestone; it was pretty rough I can tell you. I don't know how they ever found it; don't know how I found it for that matter.

And how badly had the drome been shot up by this time?

35:00 Oh it was finished. And that morning they had finished blowing up the petrol that was there, and the party that left to do that had finished its work and they were on their way to Champlong and they had just passed that road junction when

35:30 the paratroops landed, in fact they saw the paratroops landing. They were through; in fact it was Brian Rofe that led that led that party. Apparently he and a fellow called Shields, after our planes left there to do the destroying of the material and the story as I understand it is, they tossed a coin to see which one would leave and which one would stay,

36:00 and I think I said, I seem to remember that Brian Rofe won the toss and decided to stay. Anyway he led the party and as I say, they were on the other side of that road junction that morning. And when he got to Champlong, Veale, who had been sent there a few days before to take command of the place and with the extra troops that were sent from Darwin

36:30 who were bombed in the Timor Sea and turned back and were still on their ships in Darwin on the 19th of February the day Darwin was bombed. Why did they leave them on the ship? Why didn't they get them off? Anyway Rofe went to Veale and said, "Look, we're non-combatant troops, none of us knows how to fight we will go off into the jungle." And they went off into the jungle and a couple of months later he was picked up by a United States submarine.

37:00 Yeah.

Well what was going on amongst the men when you found them in the cave, what were they saying or talking about?

37:30 Well battalions have five companies, A, B, C, D and a Headquarters Company. The discussion there was where the companies should be deployed and I can't remember now exactly

38:00 how it went but D Company had been in Kupang I think, that was Trevena and then he went to Babau, Babau was on that ring road before the junction and the Japs had captured Babau He went in there and then B Company went in and kicked the Japs out. So it was coordinating the resistance to the Japanese.

38:30 And then when the main Japanese force landed right down the bottom of the island, they didn't come into Kupung Bay at all, they landed at the bottom, you have seen that map I drew roughly, and came up

one of these two ways, most of them came around the western branch and back into Kupang. Several battle-hardened companies I think, I have given their numbers at one stage, came the other

39:00 way and joined up with the paratroops at Asode. Well what the colonel and the adjutant and the second in command were trying to do was how do you deploy roughly a thousand men to resist twenty-three thousand? And it was there that Leggatt said, “Penfui means ‘under another flag’ and I will never allow it to be captured.” How stupid can you be?

39:30 As I say younger people like me were in favour of cutting and running, hit and run tactics and that was exactly what the Independent Company had done up in Portuguese Timor.

Tape 6

00:30 **Harry, I just wanted to ask you what the discussion amongst the men was for the next course of action?**

Which men?

In the cave.

Well, there is conflicts of course, you have these dispatch riders, that was the way the

01:00 information was getting back. They would go out to the companies and go back, you can imagine how delayed everything is and how uncertain and who would be where. The general criticism of the strategy, or lack of it in hindsight, was that the use of force was far too conservative, instead of worrying about what company was going to

01:30 do what,, which is what Leggatt and Madden were on about, the whole battalion should have been thrown into the fight with the paratroops, when a thousand paratroops landed instead of mucking around, a company here a company there go into Babau, come back out of Babau, they should have got stuck into it. So discussion in my opinion was misplaced. And it is not only my opinion.

02:00 You read from my stuff that Henning, who wrote The Doomed Battalion, has taken reports from people who were not actually in the combined defence headquarters but who were the victims because they were out with the different companies with the lack of resolve and inadequate use of maximum force.

02:30 I have said many times that in my experience the CO Leggatt, was prepared only to listen to Madden. The adjutant took almost no notice of his 2IC [Second in Command] Campbell, very disheartening. And elsewhere when it was I and the other

03:00 engineers who were with me, in that armoured car, in that action and came back and told the CO as I say, my estimate of the number of troops we could see running around and the officer commanding B Company, Roth, Norm Roth said, “Throw in the battalion.” There was very little of that sort of advice. But even when Roth gave that advice and

03:30 young people like me and others knew that we had to break through it, no, the discussion was unsatisfactory. Several times I was called back from action to that group, headquarters ,wherever they were, whether they were on the road or at Babau or whatever and efforts were made to try and persuade them to use the

04:00 whole battalion. Nothing, until it was too late.

So what orders did Leggatt give out to the men then?

Well I am not sure that he gave out any orders direct to the men. They were supposed to be trained soldiers and the orders would go to company commanders and, Trevena had been right around the other end of the island, he was brought back.

04:30 He was just shifting the companies around. Fighting fiercely

So, strategically, how did he move the men?

Shockingly. Yeah. You use the word ‘strategically’,

05:00 I doubt there was any, what you would call strategy, in the exercise at all. It was tactics and even then the tactics were far too modest, it was known for some months that the Japanese were attacking in division strength, twenty-twenty-five thousand men, what can a thousand men do?

05:30 It is futile to try and take them on. A company of say two hundred, or two fifty, and shift companies around. There was a lack of appreciation of the gravity of the situation. As I have said before we were lucky we weren’t all killed, it turned

06:00 out it was the same group that came to Timor as had been to Ambon. And the conducted the massacre

at Laha Airfield. We didn't know at the time, I will perhaps come back to that later, we killed so many Japanese in Timor, the figures I gave, we killed between nine hundred and eleven hundred Japanese where as, in the whole of the Singapore-Malayan campaign there were only three thousand five hundred and seven Japs killed.

06:30 And they thought we were good, and they treated us while we were in Timor pretty well, we were held by combatant Japanese who we had fought. And we could have killed even more if we had been properly led.

Well it is an interesting point that you said it had been known for months the strength of the Japanese

07:00 **Army; what preparation was there?**

None. I was saying to Kathy [interviewer] earlier, when we arrived in Timor nothing was prepared, the camp was not made, the guns were not in place, the mountings were not in place they had not been proofed, the aerodrome, the living facilities at the aerodrome were inadequate.

07:30 There had been reconnaissances, and I only found this out after the war, earlier. I think one in about May '41, and one in about October of '41, some of our senior officers going there, and they could see the lack of preparedness and yet, if there was going to be any serious

08:00 attempt to resist a division of Japanese people, Japanese troops, preparations should have been concluded by the time we got there, they had hardly even been started. I have got photographs in my album there of trying to build the living accommodation after we were there. And I spoke to Kathy earlier about when we first landed and had attacks of malaria and dysentery. Our

08:30 uniforms or course were inadequate in a sense, as I said before, short sleeves, short pants, vulnerable to mosquitoes so you get malaria. What preparations were there? Nothing. I was part of the 23rd Brigade

09:00 that was one of the three brigades in the 8th Division [AIF], you have an 'army' and then you have 'corps' and then you have 'division' and then 'brigades'. The 8th Division, two brigades of it were in Malaya, now that was a British dependency. The 23rd Brigade had three battalions and they went to three forces; Gull Force in Ambon, Sparrow Force in Timor and

09:30 Lark Force in Rabaul, now to have something like three thousand troops in the forward defence of Australia from Timor through to Ambon through to Rabaul, it is idiotic. You asked me, it was known for months about the strength of Japanese invading forces

10:00 being division strength. I can only think that we had fallen for the British trap of the invincibility of the Europeans. That's not true.

10:30 **Well let's talk about the combat that ensued then. Where were you when it began?**

Well as I say, I just came back from that reconnaissance and came immediately to Penfui and was in that cave and then I was sent by the CO to Klapalimi because communications

11:00 had broken down. I went down there by dispatch rider to see what had happened. They had evacuated the guns, or had been blown up, the whole joint had been blown up, there were dead people lying around all over the place. So I came back and told him that the fort was no more and they had left independently, the CO had been killed in an air raid, the CO of the fixed defence, Athol Wilson. I have got a

11:30 photograph of him somewhere, they left and headed toward Babau and some of our troops, two of them, three of them actually, had got a hold of a machine gun and were in a scrap with the Japs , two of them got the Military Medal got a pump going, two of them got a Military Medal, they killed seventy-five Japanese. And then later that night those of us at

12:00 combined defence headquarters went back onto the road around to Taroos and it was there that I got an abandoned armoured car and four of our unit and I were in this armoured car and spent the rest of the scrap with the Japanese doing this with the armoured car as I have described. Took

12:30 the battalion into Babau, contacted the Japanese the next day and was at the rear of the convoy on the 23rd when the Japanese finally caught up with us the other way.

Can you describe some of those scraps that you had on the way?

Well,

13:00 after the capture of Babau by B Company, Captain Roth, it was decided to shift the whole battalion into Babau, that would be the night of the 21st of February.

13:30 And we worked all night in shuffled shifts with about eight lorries and this armoured car. I was instructed by Leggatt to take A Company

14:00 first into Babau and take them to the edge of Babau, Captain Johnson who was the officer commanding A Company wanted to go further, Leggatt, he wanted to just go on as far as we could go until he found the Japs because it was thought by some of us, that the Japanese paratroopers had all been killed. About probably a thousand of them, it just wasn't cleared. Anyway Leggatt said,

14:30 "No you are not to take them any further than the edge of Babau." But I actually went some hundreds of yards further and there was nothing there. And we shuttled backwards and forwards all night until about five o'clock on that morning, we had the whole battalion in Babau, right? There was no action that night. It was the next morning that I, in our armoured car

15:00 with our engineers with two Bren [light machine gun] gun carriers went ahead, and it is claimed in reports that B Company led across what is called the start line, well they didn't, we led across the start line and we were at least a mile ahead before we came to this bridge across the Amaabi River,

15:30 where there were Japs running all over the place and they had a temporary road block on the bridge. We were lucky to be able to turn around because those road s are pretty narrow, if we hadn't have turned around we would have been killed there and then. We came back to the battalion and by that time they were about a half a mile behind us. We were way ahead of the battalion. I will just

16:00 digress a bit and say had we gone ahead the night before we would have got right through them. Because the people who are on Asode Ridge were the people who had landed on the south of the island around on the right hand loop and joined up with a few surviving paratroops, but these were but these were hardened Japanese army soldiers from China, hardened from China and Ambon, they were the ones that were there. It was there

16:30 that the CO asked me about how many Japanese were there, and I said, "Probably about three hundred." It is very hard to tell when you're trying to keep your head down anyway and there are fellows running all over the place. Shooting at you, I said, "About three hundred." And it was Captain Roth who said, "Throw in the battalion." Now had we thrown in the battalion we could have broken through, they were very disorganised.

17:00 Instead of which we dithered and B Company went in, it was on a ridge and there was a bridge over the river and a ridge and they were really dug in. In the meantime battalions had been shifted around, B came out and A went in, I am not too sure what the arrangement was, but we were the armoured car

17:30 were ferrying mortar bombs from Babau, we would stock with the mortar bombs, ferry these three inch mortar bombs and ferry them up to our mortar guns on our side of the river and they were shooting these mortar shells at the Japs and softening them up. And that went on pretty well all day

18:00 until about five o'clock and then the colonel did put in the whole battalion and we went right through them. That was the end of it, we had broken through and by that stage the armoured car was now at the back of the convoy and we were being shot up by Japs coming around from Kupang. So we had broken through their forward lot but we were being attacked from behind. So those of us that had any

18:30 sense knew that we should just keep on going and try and get to Champlong. Anyway it was that night when we stopped on the road at whatever the place was called, the colonel asked me about the layout of Champlong, now he is the commanding officer, not me, but I was the one sent up there to reconnoitre Champlong, So I knew how it was laid out and could tell them about the big sweep in the road and the bridge and how if the Japanese

19:00 were there we could go straight up through the ulu, the bush, to Champlong village but if we did go that way the hospital, our base hospital would have been in the line of fire, but if the Japs were in there anyway then the hospital would have been finished, they would have shot everybody in the hospital. So we just mucked around there and fooled around all night until we were encircled by them the next morning.

19:30 But I will come back to that a bit later probably if you want to quiz me about the contact with them on the morning of the 23rd. but the 22nd was a disaster.

After breaking through their line and making your way past it was there a sense that you could actually get through this that you could make it?

There certainly was, especially among younger people.

20:00 I will describe how there was this ring road, we broke through it at the junction and the base was up beyond that at Champlong. I think it was pretty obvious that they had captured the junction with the paratroops and as I say they had been coming around both ways. The main force came around through Kupang, the crowd that we

20:30 struck up on the ridge came around the other way and they had you know machine guns, proper machine guns, not toys that the paratroops had. And I think among the younger people it was felt that well we had broken through and just go as far as we could and in any case we were sort of thirsty and tired and hungry and if you

21:00 stop you go to sleep and that's exactly what happened. So yes there was a feeling that, and especially as Henning in The Doomed Battalion has recounted by talking to younger people, people about my age,

who were in the battalion.

And what discussion was there about what action should be taken the next day?

21:30 I was called at about midnight or something, called to the colonel, he asked me what Champlong was like and I gave it to him as my advice, that if the Japs were there, we had to have a shot at them and if we had a shot at them as we say, and if

22:00 the bridge over the river just to the right of the town as we approached it, was occupied we could go straight in and there weren't likely to be many of them there, but what was known was that the main force were behind us and getting closer to us. And it wasn't many hours after that that we could hear the Japanese actually in the jungle. They were surrounding us. So

22:30 we knew they were behind us, some of us thought that probably we had really broken through but even if we hadn't broken through we had to go on and really break through or we would be encircled and have them front and rear. So anyway, he sent a Bren gun carrier off at about seven o'clock in the morning,

23:00 with Trevor Sharman in charge and he actually got through to Champlong but there were no communications radio communications had broken down, so he was not able to let the main force know that Champlong had not been occupied by the Japanese. And by the time, well we mucked around for another two hours or hour or so and as I say by eight o'clock

23:30 the main force of the Japanese came up behind us and furthermore as I say to Louise [interviewer], we could hear them in the jungle. They make a lot of noise these Japs when they were talking to each other and carrying on, calling out. We knew we were surrounded.

I am sure you weren't the only one that could hear the Japanese surrounding you,

24:00 **what was the feeling amongst the men as they could sense this surrounding?**

Well half of them were asleep at that stage. If you have been fighting night and day, for three or four days, you get pretty tired, my argument in hindsight would have been if you keep going you can stay awake but if you stop there is no way known that you can

24:30 keep people awake. You put out sentries and the sentries will go to sleep. So shambles. Shambolic.

Did you ever suggest that you continue and not stop that night?

Yeah I did. As I said when the colonel called me up about midnight my suggestion was, I told him the layout having reconnoitred it and in my

25:00 opinion there was a fair chance we could go straight through and we should go straight through, and if the Japanese were in Champlong how we could attack them. Now, I think I have said in my reminiscences this was interpreted by the adjutant as an impertinence and that was exactly what it was intended to be. He didn't take any notice of it, and as I say, the younger officers were arguing the same thing,

25:30 Bas Billet in particular and second in command Ron Campbell and my complaint was, and my complaint continues to be, that the CO took no notice of me, took no notice of his second in command, the only one he took any notice of was this adjutant. Captain Norman Peter Madden, who was recommended incidentally, for a Military Cross, why, I am buggered if I know.

26:00 And the colonel got a DSO, the colonel should have been court martialled; war is a messy business. So when you ask the question about it was known for so long, we should really have been awake to the better practice of hit and run tactics as I was saying to

26:30 Kathy, which is exactly what the independent company did at the other end of the island. We were contaminated with World War I attitudes; the senior officers had a World War I mentality. Yeah. Have you done much of this interviewing with clowns like me? And do they all say the same thing?

It varies.

27:00 **Everyone's experience is different.**

I know, but not too many of them have much respect for senior officers.

Well, that leads us now to the morning of the 23rd, 8 a.m. you're surrounded,

Yeah. I say again that stuff by Holloway is lies, it is absolute lies.

27:30 And I have got a statement from one of the surviving people who was with me, I don't know if I sent it to you did I? Copy of Leeman's statement?

Yes.

Armoured car and took the troops into Rabaul that he contacted the Japanese the next day at Asode

28:00 and that he was at the back of the convoy when the Japs came around the corner at eight a.m. on the morning of the 23rd, well it's just lies. The armoured car was the very last thing, we had one anti-tank gun and it was on the ground, Robson was there and there was no firing, had there have been any firing, we would have just been massacred, I mean they were all around us.

28:30 And I believe I have tried to answer the question as to why they didn't do it anyway, and I believe the answer is that we put up such a good fight in killing nine hundred to a thousand of them, they thought that was good, they thought we were good, they are very funny people. Anyway this tank came around and there was this fellow standing out there and various reports talk about four hundred metres, four hundred and fifty yards,

29:00 it was nothing like that. Those roads are very windy and it was no more than two hundred and fifty yards. And you could see it was a Japanese officer and he was waving a white thing, which I think is a handkerchief. And he actually said, and I have quoted him, "Gentlemen's, please no shoots." Now I remember that as well as it was yesterday. I heard him. "Gentleman's please, no shoots." And when Holloway talks about how we fired at them and

29:30 then, we couldn't fire at them because they weren't returning, I mean he must have heard the story from our troops in prison camps and wrote it down for his parents and after he died his parents, after he died it was given to Patsy Adam Smith [author] and it was just a fairy story. Holloway was not there at all, I was the closest person

30:00 to this Japanese officer and we sent a dispatch rider to get the colonel. Colonel came. The, Henning story said that one of the fellows, this Jap said, "Good morning." And this fellow said, "Good morning." back to him. I have no recollection of having heard any exchange of 'good mornings'. We got our interpreter, Terry East who was as deaf as a post,

30:30 he spoke to this Jap officer and he came back to the colonel and said, "They want to surrender." Now I am one of those who said, "I think they want us to surrender." So East was sent back and confirmed that they wanted us to surrender. And I think I have quoted out of Henning's book, "You put down." "Yes, but you put down first."

31:00 So anyway the colonel said, Leggatt said, "I will never surrender." He was just stupid. And I am at least one of those who said, "Don't you think we should consult the troops?" They gave us until nine o'clock and there was unanimity that we had had enough, had no way of defending ourselves, we were surrounded,

31:30 there were aeroplanes flying around. So we surrendered, capitulated at nine o'clock. Then it was quite curious, and I have written about this, there was a sense of camaraderie between the Japanese and us. I compared it with what my father had told me about the First World War

32:00 where they would have truces in no man's land so that both sides could collect their dead. And they would exchange cigarettes and stuff, and there was quite a sense of camaraderie between Australians and Germans, and here there was a sense of camaraderie between the Japs and us. Worst thing was, and I have written about this, they thought we stank and we thought they stank and we were both right.

32:30 It was terrible, the smell was awful, and they forgot to tell their planes that we had capitulated and they bombed us. Now that changed everything. They got their 'fried egg flags' out and the bombers went away and we marched back into prison camp.

Before we talk about the prison camp, what contact

33:00 **had you sustained prior to the surrender?**

How do you mean?

I am talking about action, what fighting had you sustained prior to surrender?

On which day?

Before the 23rd?

Well I thought I had talked about what happened on the 22nd?

Going through, I am curious about…

33:30 Well what happened there, we made the first contact about half past eight in the morning and then I came back and reported there were something like three hundred troops up on the hill. Captain Roth said, "Throw in the battalion." And the colonel dithered all day, there was scrapping and companies were being changed A to B and D Company and so on.

34:00 That weren't on all day, we were carrying these three inch mortar shells and they were being shelled, we were being machine gunned. And it was really a stalemate.

Well, during that time how many wounded men were there?

Well we had eighty killed. Nine I think of my unit, yeah there were eighty

34:30 killed, how many were wounded I don't know, hundreds. Even I got a little wound.

Well how did you treat the wounded?

Well you all carried first aid kits and the hospital itself was up at Champlong. But there were RAP, Regimental Aid Post people scattered throughout the battalion. I actually got a machine gun, I got it off a fellow who got his left arm shot off and we put a tourniquet

35:00 around his arm and the bandaged the thing up. I don't know what happened to him finally but I got his Tommy sub machine gun. Yeah. There was a hell of a mess. And when we broke through finally on the bayonet charge, the word went around that every Japanese soldier on the ground had to be bayoneted.

35:30 Because, they would make out they were dead and as you go through they would shoot from behind. They were funny, they were combatant soldiers and as I say before, they thought we had done such a good job. But one of the things they wanted to know was why so many Japanese had so many bayonet wounds. One had seventeen I think he scored the highest.

36:00 Anyway the answer was, and the Japs thought this was great, we said that they were so brave that when we went through them, they would make out they were dead and shoot from behind. They thought that was good. And so it was, they were very brave soldiers. And as part of our non-preparation we were told stupid things about the Japanese, they were all bandy legged

36:30 and cross eyed and couldn't see, they were blind, couldn't march at night. All of this ludicrous nonsense. But they were very brave fellows and they thought we were.

I am just trying to; my questions are leading towards trying to get a picture of what the battalion looked like at the time of surrender, the state, what was the morale like?

37:00 Well it didn't look too good. It was, we had the wounded, we collected the dead later, the wounded were in trucks. Otherwise most of the people were either sitting on the ground or sound asleep. Dispirited, hungry, tired, thirsty.

37:30 When it was put to them at about half past eight on the 23rd, whether or not we should capitulate, the answer was virtually, unanimously yes. I think we felt that, we had had it. We would have been massacred anyway if we had have attempted to carry on.

38:00 And we couldn't have carried on, we were exhausted. So, I don't know if I can paint you a different picture than that, it was pretty depressing. I think we were pleased to chuck it in frankly. We were the ones that had been betrayed. It was strange because

38:30 I had no guilt feeling about being a prisoner of war, none what so ever. I will jump a few years, when we were coming back on the hospital ship, all of a sudden over the tannoy, you know, the public address, system we heard, "You Japanese prisoners of war should not feel guilty about being captured. Your country is proud of you."

39:00 Why the bloody hell should we feel guilty? We were the ones that were betrayed and let down. Why tell us to feel guilty? Very funny attitude. I was staggered, because with the Japanese there is a guilt feeling, they are told you have to die for the Emperor, but none of us believed that. If you go into war

39:30 you know you have got a chance of being killed anyway. But just to stand there and get massacred is ludicrous. And with the Geneva Convention for the rules and usages of war on land and the treatment of prisoners of war, the Japanese had said that they would observe the Geneva Convention even though they didn't sign it. They did not observe the Geneva Convention of course.

40:00 **This mis-leadership that was happening at the time, how did you justify it to the troops?**

The mis-leadership, I didn't attempt to. If we had got through there I think we would have done a bunk [attempted escape] and the troops who were with me were talking quite openly about the shambles that we had been

40:30 allowed to get into and that we ought to nick off up into the hinterland. I can't speak for anybody else but as far as I, and the troops I was with, were concerned we were convinced we have been totally let down and if we could clear out, then try and clear out. Now I have tried to distinguish that from desertion, and it was desertion. But that's a different thing. When you

41:00 clear out because you're too scared, that's something else, but clearing out because you have been betrayed almost is a different thing.

Tape 7

00:30 **So Harry, you have read widely and vastly and also written about the 'why' question, but I am**

interested to hear your point of view on, first of all, who do you think let you down?

Well, the individuals I have blamed have been Wavell [Archibald, 1st Earl Wavell, Commander, American, British Dutch, Australian Command], Blamey [General Thomas Blamey, Commander Australian Ground Forces],

01:00 Leggatt and another one who was head of the services in Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, name I forget. The conceptualising of the mounting hostility

01:30 through the world in the 1930s was atrocious. My father had been in the First World War and he used to say to my brother and me, "If there is going to be a war and there is, don't be a private in the infantry and don't be a second lieutenant." Now if people like Dad

02:00 see that, why couldn't our leadership see it? My explanation is that we were so befuddled by the English and Robert Gordon Menzies' adoration of the monarchy, so befuddled by the 'master

02:30 race' mentality of the Poms [the British] who couldn't believe that anybody could menace them in any way what so ever. And a cowardice at the time of the rearming with Germany. The treaty with Germany at the end of the First World War was such that Britain and France could have occupied Germany in 1933, when it was obvious

03:00 what Hitler was going to do. I, as a young fellow, about fourteen or fifteen read Mein Kampf, and it says what he is going to do. And I questioned why the people, in some of my reminiscences, why people did not believe Hitler or Tanaka, Tanaka was saying the same thing as prime minister of Japan, and Hirohito [Emperor of Japan], I learnt how to pronounce it, Hirohito was allowing

03:30 him to get away with it. Grabbed south-east Asia, grab the Australasian peninsula, why didn't they believe it? I think we were so befuddled by our master race invincibility attitude, that we just couldn't believe it. Furthermore, in the case of Japan, Japan had been on our side in the First World War, and there was this treaty, the 'fifty, fifty, thirty treaty', do you know it?

04:00 Great Britain fifty, let's say a figure of fifty for ships and armaments, United States fifty, Japan thirty. Now Japan winced under that, the purpose of it was to stop Japan's imperialistic attitudes in the Far East, as it is called, it has very limited natural resources. In fact if you go to Tanaka, they went into

04:30 China and the 'Rape of Nanking' was 1936, and as a young officer I had seen videos, restricted videos, made by Japan themselves of the 'Rape of Nanking'. Bayoneting pregnant women, unbelievable. We were so,

05:00 Well, lied to is perhaps too strong an impression, I tended to say lied to, that connoted a misrepresentation. I think we were fooled by the invincibility of the English. And I have quoted that Veland appreciation regarding the use of 'Matador' [alternate plan for the forward defence of Malaya].

05:30 Once the Japanese had moved, why, once the decision not to implement 'Matador' was taken, it was inevitable what would happen. Yet the Poms, I will quote Suji's figures for the number of troops that the Japanese used, half the number for the conquest, an occupation force is supposed to use two or three times the number of defending people, but they had half of the number of seasoned

06:00 people. Perhaps I am getting on to how; I don't know whether that's how or why. And by not to use 'Matador' the Japanese could then get in Malaya, onto the western plains and ride bicycles twenty kilometres a day and the Poms had just fallen over. And to think Kathy, that they only lost three thousand five hundred and seven troops, that's their own figures, in the whole

06:30 of the Malayan thing, it is really remarkable. So who do I blame? I have given you the names of the prime leaders. I will say one more thing about Blamey too, I have got a book there 'Project Kingfisher', 'Kingfisher' was the project – do you know? – to save the POWs at Sandakan.

07:00 And what did they do? MacArthur wasn't interested and MacArthur influenced Blamey and Curtin [John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia] and only six, of the two and a half thousand of them ever survived.

Well, in what way do you think the military policy of defending fixed positions was out of step with the political objectives of Australia?

I don't know what political objectives we had except that we were craven

07:30 I think, in the defence of colonialism. I don't know what the political thing was, I mean Curtin bravely turned his back on the British and went to the Americans, which is the only way this country could have been saved, but it was, you might have read, that I said it was Suji that saved Australia, not

08:00 Sparrow Force. He was so egotistical, egomaniacal perhaps, and used his influence with the Imperial household to go west rather than south. I think it probably wasn't all that hard for him

08:30 to do that because they had got what they wanted, they were after oil, what they were really after was oil. And as I say, our policy seemed to be to go along with the British and the Dutch to recover previous colonial empires.

Well, you have said and I am wondering how you feel now, thinking that the

09:00 **23rd Brigade might have been sent there for political rather than military reasons, can you explain a bit more about why you think that?**

Well it couldn't have been for military purposes, spread three thousand troops over such an area. I think it was a gesture probably to the Dutch

09:30 and the British. Dutch in Timor and Ambon and the British in Rabaul, completely ineffective forces, except if you practiced hit and run guerrilla tactics, the Independent Company in Portuguese Timor was effective.

10:00 Why Major Spence had more sense than Colonel Leggatt, I can't tell. Except that Spence was not a World War I fellow but Leggatt was contaminated with World War I attitudes of fixed defence. Kathy, I think

10:30 the way the war developed out here shows that our attitude was the preservation of colonialism, the fact that Sung was coming down the then Malayan archipelago, the fact that we were, the Australians, were fighting their way out of the north coast of New Guinea and then coming around to Balikpapan, Tarakan, where was MacArthur? Thousands of miles

11:00 away bombing Tokyo. And we're losing lives recovering colonial territories! Sandakan was in what was British North Borneo, British North Borneo was a private company, what is now Sabah was run by a private company until it went broke in about 1948 I think, and became a colony.

11:30 We had a pro-colonial mentality and I think we were subservient to the English. The English had fooled themselves about their own invincibility in Malaya, Singapore was to be impregnable, the guns were pointing the wrong way. How stupid can you be? And Wavell, where did he go? He nicked off.

12:00 Blamey got out of Greece, Wavell got out of south-east Asia, MacArthur skipped the Philippines, you have seen what I have said about that. [General] Gordon Bennett escaped from the Singapore after the capitulation, and came back here and tried to tell people. Suji says, "We [the Japanese] didn't know what resistance was, until we struck the Australians at Muar and Bata Pahat." and I

12:30 think if Gordon Bennett had become the commander of the Australian forces instead of Blamey it might have been a very different war. Where was Blamey? What was he anyway? He was a blooming copper [policeman] who got caught in a brothel. Badge number eighty. Yeah.

You have said a couple of times

13:00 **that you should have employed hit and run mobile tactics, how do you think that would have helped or aided your situation?**

Well we wouldn't have been caught. As I said before the hills in Timor go up to nine thousand feet. And the way the Timorese, Indonesians or whatever we want to call them,

13:30 they way they helped our people against the Japanese, I think would have been the same around Atambua, Atapupa and those places if we could have gotten up there. And that was the idea of Bill Veale, Brigadier Veale he was preparing back bases but he just go there too late. See those

14:00 commandos in Portuguese Timor did a marvellous job scared the living hell out of the Japs, they would do a hit and run raid, well that makes them keep their troops there. Well their troops, like I said before, when we were surrounded they were yelling at each other all of the time, they seemed to be, they seem to require to be in close contact in a country so dense anyway. Kathy, I have worked with

14:30 Japanese physicists and Japanese students and I have got nothing against them. Get a Jap my age and I have got something against them, but they have to be 'packed in'. For example one of my colleagues in Penang, when I was at the University of Science in Penang was Japanese, he and his wife and two kids, they were put in a university apartment and they were scared stiff,

15:00 it was on two levels with stairs and these little kids would cringe as they went up the stairs, they were just frightened of the open space. So that's why I think hit and run tactics against them were very good, because they were not able to get out into the jungle and mix with the jungle like Bill Veale and those people could.

15:30 And you could, I could, but as I say when they were surrounding us, they were yelling at each other and talking, keeping contact, different sociology.

Well, going back to that day that you capitulated or were captured, what did you see of men

16:00 **deserting?**

I didn't see any. I really don't think it would have been possible, we were surrounded. I was talking to Louise a bit earlier about it, if we had broken through then things might have been

16:30 different, but I wouldn't have called it deserting, I would have called it fighting guerrilla tactics. The way we lost the United States, should have told us centuries ago.

You mentioned that there was quite a lot of fraternising on both sides, what was the protocol

17:00 **of surrender?**

Well, after surrender they just walked right through, we chucked our arms and stuff into the jungle rather than just let them take them over. We all intermingled with each other, and people talked to each other swapped cigarettes,

17:30 it was out of control, if there had been any attempt either side to be uppity about it or establish a pecking order, I think the troops just wouldn't have taken any notice of it. You heard me talking to Louise about my father's experiences, in the truces in no-man's land in World War I,

18:00 I might have said to you before, there is a lot more camaraderie between people at the bottom than there is between generals who are way back here, issuing orders. I don't know whether I said to you before or not but one of the interesting jobs as a POW you could get was working at the brothels?

Not yet, but perhaps we will come to that, I will make a note of it.

18:30 **Where we were you taken?**

We were captured at Airkom and after the bombing was an entirely different attitude the Japs said, "Osh osh!" you know and we were made to walk back as far as Usapa Besar, I have no idea how they took the decision to put us there, except that there had been a village there, there were a whole lot of huts

19:00 and things. So we wrecked the huts and made quarters, just with atap roofs, they were all open of course, bamboo slats. I have no idea why that spot was taken, but we marched back there. I, the second in command of our unit, the CO was in front, second in command at the back. And I had these fellows singing songs,

19:30 all of the wild, rude, army ditties. It is a bit dispiriting to be captured. Firstly you don't want to be dispirited and even if you are you don't want to seem to be. And you can quick and lively get troops singing, and when they sing songs, the right songs that only Gracie Fields [wartime singer] knows, it does them good.

20:00 **What songs were you singing?**

\n[Verse follows]\n"I don't want to join the army; I don't want to go to war.\n I would rather stick around Piccadilly underground\n Living on the earnings of a second class whore.\n I don't want a bayonet up my arsehole; I don't want a bullet in my guts,\n You can take my bleeding mother, my sister or my brother\n But for Christ sake don't take me!"\n

That sort of stuff. It makes me feel good just now.

20:30 Gracie, when she visited us after we were released, she sung a few. One that finishes up ,"One day if you're lucky sergeant, you'll have a father too."

You spent about seven months at Usapa Besar,

21:00 Besar…

Besar?

means big.

Why did you personally, or why were you keen to go on the working parties?

Well you are always supposed to be active I think, if

21:30 you can be. Well you can steal things. Medicines to bring back to the doctors. Food, bags, booze. Kupang got looted of course and surprise, surprise they are finding out in Iraq that looting has gone on, looting always goes on.

22:00 Looting and raping, why be surprised? It is a degrading business. We found in one shop there a crate of Fosters export larger, and I tell you, we didn't clean that shop up, we left it all untidy and we could go in there and get this booze and go back to camp pretty well blind drunk and the Japs would wonder what was going on.

22:30 **And apart from it being more interesting and the opportunity to steal, why else did you personally want to go on the working party?**

Well, officers can always look after the men for whom they are responsible and I believe you have a duty to take whatever care you can.

23:00 That was one of the reasons; it became more important in Java than Timor, where our guards were non-

combatant Koreans. They didn't hold us in any respect at all, in Timor we were held in respect. Even so, there could be difficulties and I think it is an officer's duty to take care of their troops. Although as I say, it gets a bit boring after a while

23:30 when, if, there is a how-to-do on and you intervene, you get belted up as well. We usually invite beltings, it relieves the monotony. Seems a funny way to put it. you had to be very careful, they would go for your eardrums and so you learnt how to ride a belting, so they would hit you on the face

24:00 and not across your ears. When we got very weak, towards the end of the war, when we were very malnourished and had a lot of malaria, your spleen comes out, my spleen only ever came as far as my naval, but I have seen spleens that have come right down to the groin, well Japs would try to hit them, if you ruptured your spleen of course, that's it. So if you have got an

24:30 obvious spleen it is not a wise thing to do to invite a Jap to belt you. You can easily invite them, just fail to salute them and you get beaten up. Well there is another reason too, I was interested in the possibility of escaping so you look around and see what opportunities there is. And that

25:00 is that sextant, I made two lenses from a rapid rectilinear eye piece. And do you want to see it? We can wait.

Just explain in your own words, where did you get the pieces?

I can't remember but I must have got an eye piece somewhere and stole it. It probably was,

25:30 I don't know it might be from a telescope and the eye piece, it was rapid rectilinear, now there are two identical lenses. Both five centimetres focal length, positive lenses. And of you separate them by twice their focal length, you get a real image, and a real image of a real image and it is inverted, so if you separate them by twice their focal length which is what I have done there across that tobacco tin,

26:00 when you look at the star, and whenever you use an optical instrument you should keep this other eye open and teaching physics students, it's one of the hardest thing to teach, they want to close the eye that is not looking through either the microscope or telescope. Look at the star with this eye, and gets its unit magnification image with the other eye and get them together. And I have got a wire that hangs there and tells you the rough angle and so you can get the altitude of the star and therefore

26:30 the zenith distance when it crosses the meridian. If you then know, and I did know, what is called the declination which is the celestial latitude of the star, you can determine your latitude. Well we though, in fact there was a fellow Tasmanian lieutenant, Bas Billet and I, we were on a working party down at the western end of the island, they had these motor torpedo boats and we romanced with the idea of perhaps escaping

27:00 from the camp. Although you would have had to escape in a working party which would have been dangerous at that stage to try and walk through Timor to Nau because the Japs were offering thirty guilders [Dutch currency] for a pair of white ears. Mind you, the Indonesians quickly became disillusioned with the Japanese but in the early days it was tricky. So we would have to escape

27:30 if we were in a working party there and try and get one of these things and try and scoot down to Australia, if you are going to come to Australia you need to know where you are. You don't want to allow one of those, so that was the idea of that. And I nearly had the opportunity to use it; I thought we might have the opportunity to use it when we were being shifted from Timor to Java.

28:00 But we went first to Dili and then went along the bottom of Lesser Sunda Isles, we could have easily have captured the ship the Dainichi Maru but there was an escort there.

Well, before we move on to your move to Jakarta, what happened first to your batman?

He came, well you didn't have a batman in prison camp of course, he came to

28:30 Java with us and then he got shifted to Singapore and he tells a story of how he was on the Burma Thailand railway line. Now other members of our unit have told me that Sluggo was never on the railway line but that he was always in Changi, Changi was the best place to be, there are terrible stories about Changi, but Changi was better than any place I have ever been in.

29:00 Sluggo after the war, I am prepared to believe the story, that he was not on the railway line because after the war he used to drive munitions trucks between Sydney and Penfield here and he used to come and see me at the university and I would have him work around the theatre or something or take him up to the Botanic Hotel

29:30 you know the corner of North Terrace, East Terrace, there would be a lot of people around there for the six o'clock swill [early closing of hotels]. And I heard Sluggo tell this story about Harry and me, what Harry and me done in Timor, when we were fighting them Japs. And he would go on like this; the one person who knew that he wasn't there was me, because when I got back to Champlong, I couldn't find him, he had shacked

30:00 up with some woman. Timorese girl. And he was left there, so he was not in our fight with the Japs. He

was caught about three months later in Timor and put into the prison camp. So the one person who knew that he was not there was me and he was telling this, “Harry and me stuff.” Well, when he has been here and told me about and told me about his experiences on the railway line, I am quite prepared to accept that he confused

30:30 himself there as well. So what happened to him I don’t know, I think that he spent the rest of the war in Changi.

And where were Leggatt and Madden taken to?

Changi. And they both assumed administrative jobs in Changi and if you read about or hear about ‘Black Jack’ Galleghan [Australian commander in Changi prison], people have to go around saluting, I

31:00 am very pleased I was never in Changi.

Well before we move onto Java, tell us or describe some of the jobs you had to do on the working parties at Usapa Besar?

Clean up the town. We stuck that out as long as we could. We used to be taken back to the surrender place, to

31:30 salvage whatever could be salvaged. There was a lot of tinned stuff that was left there for reasons I don’t understand. It is not easy to find things in the jungle. These roads are just roads, jungle right up to the road and hanging over the top, we were never able to find any of the arms and ammunition that we had thrown away.

32:00 I used to go to other places trying to find Lopez; I thought if I could find Lopez he might help me to escape. And he seemed to know his way around, but I could never find him, never ever found anyone who knew anything about him. it surprised me because when I came back to Champlong that night, we would have to have paid them the next day, so they had not been paid, the people on the party,

32:30 so I thought Lopez would be hanging around for his money and that it might have been possible to find him. Yeah we used to have to sweep the streets in Kupang. Load and unload ships, I forgot about that. I tell you, that was, God, a bag of rice would weigh about, I think it was two hundred pounds,

33:00 and they would bring it from the ships onto the barges, and we used to have to put it on your shoulders and lug it off to the go-downs [warehouses], I had forgotten that.

And how many were there in your working party?

About twenty, enough to pack onto the back of a truck with everyone standing up and hanging on to each other.

33:30 The officer could ride in the cabin with the driver.

What clothes did you wear when you went out to work?

The only clothes we had, we still had just a uniform. Shirts, we quick and lively got converted into thongs,

34:00 in fact I kept my boots, I have still got my boots. We were determined, and those women who, what’s her name Simons, written about Wyconies, the two women nurses from Sumatra, I think I quoted one of them Elizabeth Simons, saying,

34:30 “The men were scarecrows but they were clean.” We darned our clothes until the end; we just put our clothes away and just wore our lap-lap, the sambuchi thing. And she said, “They were determined to look their best when the war ended.” So in the early days we used to wear our clothes but as I say we kept them and got onto the sambuchi.

35:00 We were as black as the local Indonesians.

You mentioned that you could steal medicine from Kupang, how were they useful to you?

Quinine.

35:30 Morphia. One of the funny things about Timor, the Japs gave us their rations. They thought they were treating us all right, but our metabolism was such that we couldn’t make proper use of the stuff that they were using. And the problem we really got was scurvy, beriberi and pellagra and those other things came on in Java when we were really

36:00 starved. Scurvy is a shocking thing, and the only way you could get to sleep at night, you know your tongue cracks and your teeth get loose and big sores in your mouth, get the water bottle and get the cork out a bit and let the water dribble into your mouth and you could go to sleep. But morphia, the doctors used to ration it. You could get half a pill,

36:30 I know that it came my time to have half a pill and I resolved that I would never ever take morphia unless it was medicinally given. It was glorious, just half of this morphine pill and all of this scurvy

disappeared. But the funny thing about scurvy, you probably know that if you get it at sea it just goes, again when we got on the ship we were much better fed, again because they were sailors, treated us

37:00 quite well. They brought out what looked like a great lump of wood and it tuned out to be a lump of whale meat. It was frozen solid, we thought it was wood, but it was whale meat. Anyway we chopped it up with the axe and they had vegetables and the scurvy just went, but it came back again in Java.

37:30 Well morphia was very useful. There was another drug that involved quinine, I have forgotten what it was called but Les Poidevin, Doctor Poidevin has written about you know, Samurais and Circumcision? We had cases of cerebral malaria, 'blackwater' fever.

38:00 Generally you just die. Gets in the spinal thing. There is a drug that involved some quinine that they inject into varicose veins in the army, because varicose veins in the army are bad news. They inject them and it collapses the, and Poidevin spoke to another doctor and said, "I wonder if we injected that if it would cure, because of the quinine, black water fever."

38:30 And there was a patient that had it there in Timor, temperature a hundred and six or something. And Poidevin injected him with this stuff, I think in two hours he came out of it, came around. And recovered and we never lost a single person in Timor to black water fever after that. And yet of course they were still being lost in New Guinea to black water fever. But there it was no way known

39:00 that we could get the information out about the benefit of this particular drug. So anything at all, we could find we would pinch and bring back. Generally stick it in my underpants or one of those. They never ever tumbled that people might hide stuff, they were very

39:30 prudish in that respect. Although not necessarily prudish themselves, I have seen them, we had to put barbed wire around ourselves at Usapa Besar and it was a barbed wire enclosure, and then to get to the hospital ground there was a guard, the guard was outside the gate and you would have to bow to the guard and all of this sort of nonsense, to go and see people in the hospital.

40:00 And I have seen them there masturbating each other. So they were prudish in their dealings with us, but apparently not with themselves, quite odd.

Tape 8

00:34 **Harry, before we move onto Java, I am just trying to get a clearer picture in Usapa Besar.**

Usapa Besar.

Thank you.

Big Usapa.

And how would you describe the camp?

Well, it had been a village and there were a lot of atap huts around and we wrecked them and

01:00 converted them into military type huts where you know, we sleep, the officers were separated, there were different officers' lines. Deep-earth latrines and as an engineer officer, I knew how to make troops dig deep-earth latrines. Eight feet I think,

01:30 you can get flies and maggots and you have to dig it deep enough so that the maggots can't come to the surface, so that they die before maturation. It is quite an art, digging a deep-earth latrine. It was open to the beach. I have got a book of sketches here by Geoff Tyson, ever heard of him?

02:00 Tasmanian, he was in the 2/40th Battalion. I can show you, I will pull the thing out; it gives you an idea of what the place was like. We built chapels. I think I said before, the Japanese were very

02:30 considerate of religious matters. They were quite observant also of funeral cortèges, they didn't care whether you died or not but when you were dead they were respectful, they had this notion of the shrine of the ancestors. So we got chapels there, had chapels in Timor, Catholic chapel,

03:00 and graves, they would let us have gravestones for the graves and hospitals. And it was open on the beach and there are some sketches by Geoff Tyson of people on the beach. So we could keep clean by washing in the sea. And we could have walked out of the camp around the edge of the thing along the beach. But the problem was as I was saying earlier, in the early days

03:30 the local Timorese had been corrupted into getting twenty or thirty guilders for a pair of white ears. That's why if I had been able to get out I would have wanted to contact Lopez to have some sort of right of passage. In one of the huts, all of the huts

04:00 have ceilings and sometimes the kids or the pig will sleep in the ceiling. I found a Kiwi [brand] boot set, an Australian Kiwi boots set that apparently were pinched from the camp. I also found a little vial with a half a dozen pearls in it, and I have still got the pearls, natural pearls. And I suspect that the owner

04:30 of the hut was what was called a Kupanger. You know the Japanese, the pearl fishery people used to use these Indonesians and a lot of them came from Kupang so they called them Kupangers and they were the ones that did the diving for the oysters and the pearls. And I suspect he probably swallowed them and put them in this vial. I will dig them out at lunch time and show you.

05:00 Yeah. It was in a coconut plantation, you had to be very careful. And Geoff Tyson has got one of the sketches of a fellow stupidly sitting under a coconut palm, because if a coconut drops it's termination time if it gets you on the head. And they had scorpions, now this is the season for little

05:30 scorpions here and I found one here the other day. They're not terribly lethal and they are only about this big. But where I came from, Orroroo, you get really big, dangerous scorpions and there are dangerous scorpions in Timor. One day I put my hand in the rucksack and felt this shocking, stinging pain, pulled it out and there is this great scorpion attached to the anxilla[?]. And it was quite interesting; my arm went dead up to about here.

06:00 Then it stopped, so they ware not as dangerous as the Australian ones which can kill you, especially if you get bitten here. So that was one of the hazards of Usapa Besar.

And how did you treat your arm?

Didn't, just took it off, threw it away. Didn't eat it even, I was

06:30 interested to see how far it would go, it went to about there.

That's an interesting point you raised about the Timorese, that if you escaped then there was the threat of being killed by them, or at least having you ears chopped off, what was your relationship like with the local Timorese before you were captured?

Well it was fine. We were

07:00 not regarded as an invading power. In fact we were quite friendly with them, used to get them to try and teach us a bit of their language. The village at Klapalimi was near the fort and their children were fascinated, they wanted to talk to us and count in English and tell us how they counted.

07:30 Education, the Dutch were bad colonists with the educating of the people, there were only primitive, primary schools there. The children were eager to learn. The women were all bare-breasted, and the women suckled both their infants and their baby pigs. I think I have written in one place I have

08:00 seen an infant on one breast and a baby pig on another. Pigs are very valuable animals. In Kupang itself, well townspeople are always slightly different from country people. Kupang was largely shops and there was a Dutch quarter as well, they had

08:30 two industries there, there was a carpet making industry and they made their own local vegetable dyes. But the best industry I think was the filigree; you know filigree, the silver? They got the silver from Mexican dollars, now Mexican dollars were sterling silver, ninety two point five per cent silver. And they beat this up and they make glorious filigree stuff, nice badges and

09:00 I sent stuff home to my mother and sister. The carpet I tried to send home never got there for some reason. But otherwise yeah, they were friendly enough. We were not regarded as; I think they cared more for us, than I think they did for the Dutch. The Dutch had a strange attitude.

09:30 They were like the English; they regarded themselves as superior people. As I say they were bad at education, English colonists were better at education. But the English had a colour bar, the Dutch strangely didn't. You could have very little Dutch blood in you, but if you describe yourself as orung blunda,

10:00 Orung is man, blunda is Dutch, then you were. In fact in one prison camp the Jap guards came in and there was a Dutch officer there, his name was Casinghouse. And the Japs looked at him and said, "Anko suma suma sia." "You are the same as I am." In other words he was an Asian.

10:30 And he was furious this fellow. And when they left he said, "After the war we will teach those yellow monkeys to make funny with us Europeans." He regarded himself as European and yet he was pretty well indistinguishable from Javanese. In fact in Java at that time it was said to be about twenty thousand Dutch,

11:00 but about two hundred thousand who were described as orung blunda. So ten times the number of people who were classed as Dutch who were really Eurasian. That would never do for the English. If you're a half caste, you're a half caste.

What do you think it was that made this relationship with the Timorese turn against the Australians?

11:30 When?

While you were in prison camp?

One, money. They would be paid. I wouldn't think that every one of them would do it, but thirty guilders was a lot of money, it was equivalent then to five pounds sterling, now we are talking about

12:00 sixty years ago, the value in present day terms would be about eighty dollars? A lot of money. But that quickly changed. I was never one of those who could not understand why Asians would welcome the Japanese to release them from centuries of

12:30 European colonial oppression. So it was understandable to me that the Malaysians and Indonesians would welcome the Japanese, get rid of the English and Dutch. Neither could I understand, in six months the Japanese alienated whatever good will the Asians had for them. They treated the people worse than the Europeans

13:00 ever did. And they came to realise that colonial mentality is nothing to do with ethnicity, all sorts of people have colonial, exploitative mentalities and the Japanese were as arrogant a master race as the English ever knew how to be. So I think it was money, to answer your question.

13:30 **When you were talking about the layout of the camp and you said that the officers slept separately, how were the men organised within the camp?**

They were in units, the engineers had a big hut, the sigs [signals] had a big hut. The battery, that's the gunners,

14:00 they had two huts, they had about twice the number of people that we did. There were probably about, let me see, eight or ten huts for the infantry, the 2/40th, there were five companies of them, eighty all up were killed, so yes they slept and lived in the units in

14:30 which they were in the army. In fact the engineers' hut, I used to spend a lot of my time there, the engineers' hut was right next to the guardhouse, one day or one night rather, one evening, you don't get much twilight in the tropics, you know, in fact on the Equator you don't get any twilight at all, when the sun goes down it is dark, not like here at all.

15:00 Anyway one evening a plane, a Lockheed flying low over Kupang Bay and right over our camp and over to the aerodrome, it was going to drop some bombs. Whether it would have come over again I don't know, but the lights had been on and the Japs in the guardhouse went absolutely mad, "Light out!"

15:30 and I happened to be going there and most of the lights went out and I walked up to the colonel's tent, Leggatt and Madden were playing cards, and the lights were on and I said, "Look, I think you had better put the lights out, the Japs are going mad." And Madden, my friend Norman Peter Madden, said to me, "If you're too bloody frightened get out and go up the beach." Well I wasn't going to take that so I said, "If somebody is killed down there, who is going to be responsible?"

16:00 So Leggatt put the light out. I have gone on a bit from how we were living, but we were living in units, engineers, sigs, gunner, infantry. And the Red Cross people were living in the hospital. We set up a hospital; I think I said that before, outside the camp.

Speaking of Red Cross, did you see any care packages?

16:30 We saw a lot in Java at the end of the war when there was a barn full of them but we never got those. I didn't get any, none. And in fact I have seen the International Red Cross people come into our camp in Java, escorted by the Japanese.

17:00 Never talked to any of us, they could see the deplorable state we were in, I have always been very wary of the Red Cross, they certainly weren't prepared to stand up to the Japs. I don't know anyone who ever got a parcel in prison camp.

And what possessions did you have on you in Timor?

17:30 I had a wallet which is still in there. I had some photographs in there of a one time girlfriend, married somebody else. Other stuff. I have still got my military driving licence. I kept in there, in fact I have got a copy of it here, a copy of the written oath, we were commanded to...

18:00 We were commanded to sign a statement to say that, "I swear to obey all of the orders of the Dai Nippon Gun " and that, "I will not to attempt to escape." And we said, "We are not allowed to sign that." And they said, "Well if you don't sign it there will be severe punishment." Severe punishment means death,

18:30 so we said, "We will sign it under duress." And that excuses you, and so he certified that, "I order you to sign this under duress." Can you see? So we did. So papers like that, I slipped in this wallet, and I have got other stuff in there, and whenever we went through

19:00 a search, I pointed at their Buddhist charm thing that they used to carry on their belt and make the sign, and as I said earlier, they are very respectful of religion. So they wouldn't bother about it. You

were not supposed to do any of that stuff at all.

19:30 And that book I showed you that I made, I was able to secrete that in those books that I got them, books about electro magnetism that I was able to get them to frank. So they were about the only possession I had. My number there and my lighter tin.

20:00 Very valuable, trivial ephemera.

Just before we moved to Java, I am interested because you actually had chapels built at this prison camp, what happened when a man died?

You hear some funny stories about that. The business of dying. You hear that nobody dies alone, but

20:30 within my experiences that is not quite true. Dying under those circumstances is not terribly pleasant, and people will death rattle. Death rattling can be a very unsatisfactory experience for those that are close to it. And in my experience if you were likely to die you would likely be put outside of the hut

21:00 so that you didn't disturb those you were with, you know? And I myself have been put out to die on at least one occasion, I had a shocking bout of ancillary dysentery and how I survived it I don't know. But I don't recall anybody being there holding my hand, as I crossed the great divide. But when it has happened then things are very different.

21:30 As I say the Japanese were very respectful of funeral processions, and if you knew the person, you would go to the ceremony, we always had padres there and they would run the ceremony and they were allowed to keep their ceremonial books. You might, I find that one of the many incongruities of the Japanese.

22:00 I have said before, that they were quite respectful of the process of being dead, not so much the process of dying, but the process of being dead and being buried, and as I said, going to the shrine of your ancestors. And we were allowed to build our cemeteries and put stones and things. And I can show you photographs of that.

22:30 **And how did the men take to death, the men that were left behind, how did they take to the death of men around them?**

Well you get used to it after a while. Have you ever heard of Haruku? It is in the Malaccas.

23:00 The Japanese took people from Singapore and Java to places like British North Borneo and Sandakan, and they took them to Haruku, they were building aerodromes at Ambon and Haruku. And they brought several drafts of these people back to cycle camp, and they were just

23:30 walking dead, they were zombies, it was the parade of the walking dead. And most of them did die. There was so little food anyway and they were in such a shocking state of ill health that, unbelievable. But you became inured to it after a while, you have to. You of course feel sorry and you feel hostile

24:00 that the Japs could do this. And these Red Cross people come into the place and really take no notice of it. But there is a great determination in most individuals for self survival, not necessarily at the expense of others but by

24:30 generating an inner strength. You can do things if you are determined. You can, well if you are so crook that you are going to die then you can't do anything, but you can be seriously ill and refuse to die. I might have told you before that I have seen people

25:00 who would just sit down and die. I have seen people who should have died and didn't. I have said many times that if a person wanted to, if I wanted to go and sit in the corner and in five days you could shut yourself down. We have inner processes that we really don't understand,

25:30 both inner strengths and inner weaknesses and some people just die when they shouldn't. In those circumstances you can't feel terribly sorry for them because if you start feeling sorry for them you get like that yourself. The

26:00 phrase 'the survival of the fittest' has a complex of meanings. Ç'est la vie. That's the line. I don't know that I can put it any clearer than that. Except perhaps to say

26:30 that in the long run you're on your own. There are all sorts of devices that can be exploited, like religion, but ultimately that is not going to save you. It is what is in your inner being. And I might have said to you before about leadership, I disagree

27:00 with Pat Beal who seems to think that leaders can be made but you don't go around making leaders, if the chips are down, leadership potential and ability will come through. And that's part of survival and part of the obligation of feeling a responsibility for others.

27:30 I don't know if you are following what I am saying or not. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. I know that's a truism, but it is no less true because it is a truism.

28:00 **And amongst your own men, how did you keep them going?**

Teach them to play bridge or chess. Teach them to try and play chess without a board. I could play chess without a board, I have forgotten now but I could do it. You can't play cards without cards, there are too many of the damn things. But you can play chess.

28:30 Well even though you might be apart from them you try and remain a part of them, it is a bit of a subtlety. I think.

29:00 I have good relations with those of our unit who are still surviving. I was one of the South Australians that came into a unit that was essentially New South Welshmen; there was a few Victorians in it. But I and four others including my brother joined the unit,

29:30 I was the senior of the lieutenants. I have been a captain in the Australian Army but I went back to lieutenant. But my seniority was earlier than that of the other two lieutenants so I was the second in command, and the second in command is like that fellow I was telling Kathy about, the number one on the ship, made to do all of the dirty work. You have got to be very careful.

30:00 Some of them resented me because I was younger than a lot of them and I was senior to them. I had to be very careful never to ask them to do something that I could not, or would not do myself. So you had to buy their respect as it were, I don't mean by money, I mean behaviourally buy respect and I believe that I did.

30:30 But in the early days I know what they used to call me, the used to call me 'The Book'. They used to think I was a smart aleck, well educated, and knew all about Australian military orders and regulations, and I did. And I expected them to behave in accordance with the army catch-cry, "On parade, on parade.

31:00 Off parade, drunk." In other words when you are on parade, you bloody well are on parade, behave yourself and do it properly, off parade forget about it, everybody is mates. You have to keep a little bit apart from, I come back to it, apart from but a part of, I used the words apart in two

31:30 different ways. One is apart, and the other is a part and I think it is part of the trick of being able to provide that leadership that was needed in those circumstances, without being too up yourself, to put it in the vernacular.

32:00 So that's how I tried to conduct myself in the army with respect to my troops anyway and I think it worked.

That's an interesting point that you tried to gain this respect and show leadership but you weren't getting this from your own superiors. When you were sharing huts with them in Timor was there any discussion about the way in which you had gotten into this situation?

Oh yeah.

32:30 Plenty. If you read Peter Henning's book The Doomed Battalion, he talks about people who I knew and people who I say I respected. I respected Ron Campbell; I respected Basil Billet, Scotchy Morrison, Trevor Sharman. And these were people about my own age. Campbell was not, Campbell was older, but these were people about my own age

33:00 who had the same as ideas about our dithering, blithering idiots who were so tied up with the World War I mentality that they couldn't see the bush for the trees. There was plenty of discussion and with our troops too. A man is not silly

33:30 just because he is a private soldier. I will just say again, leaders are born. In prison camp you see just ordinary privates who have those leadership skills and loyalty. We had a lot of RAF [Royal Air Force] senior people who escaped from Singapore and were in Java,

34:00 and in prison camp they just went to ground. The moment the war ended they put all of their pips, stripes up and expected us to salute them. Well it was too late for that.

Well let's talk about moving over to Java now. What happened there, how did that come about?

34:30 There were several waves; I don't have the dates at my fingertips. But the senior officers went off early, and then there was another smaller wave that took some of our troops. But the bulk of us went off on the Dainichi Maru on the 23rd of September 1942. We were taken from there up to Dili

35:00 we took bombs and petrol, which was bombed by the Royal Australian Air Force and missed, and then went along the lesser Sunda Isles, went between Lombok and Bali. And those lesser Sunda Isles are on the Australian plate and in fact when I first went to Timor, I was astounded at the cockatoos and parrots and gum trees and wattle trees. So if anybody owns Timor we do, not Indonesia.

35:30 Between Bali and Lombok there is a big rift. Bali, Sumatra, Java, all on the ocean plate, and that's all volcanic stuff. And there is a huge difference in the sea level. Here is Lombok and here is Bali. And the way the tide comes out from the south Java Sea is incredible and why we attempted to go through

36:00 there I really don't know, because, well there was a submarine, probably an American one that had shot at us but missed. Took us an enormous while to get through. Anyway there is a line that goes through there, it is called the Wallace Line, it is named after Alfred Russell Wallace who in 1854 wrote the first paper about the origin of the species. He wrote it in Santubong and Sarawak.

36:30 And in 1856 he wrote the second paper, years before Charles Darwin wrote The Origin of the Species 1859, that line runs up between Bali and Lombok, goes up above Sulawesi and is below Borneo, or Kalimantan Indonesia now calls it, and Kalimantan is volcanic and is on the ocean plate.

37:00 Anyway we got through and up the Wallace Line, into Surabaya and disembarked there. Went by train overland to what was previously called Batavia, now called Jakarta. Is that what you were asking me about?

And did everyone from the camp go over to Java in that shift?

No, there had been two earlier ones, one with the

37:30 the senior officers, like Leggatt and Madden. That was sometime in July I think, and in August there was another one that took a smaller group, but the great bulk of us went on that. And we were all on the Dainichi Maru and we had malaria and dysentery and were down in the holds, and I tell you it wasn't a very pleasant place to be. Can you imagine about eight hundred men with dysentery and

38:00 diarrhoea, oh God. You learn to live with it. We could go to what they call the heads, do you know that naval term the heads? Lavatory, where all of the big heads hang out, it is just a rail at the back of the ship. And you could go in turns to the heads and do your business, and it was customary

38:30 for people who had been to the heads to come back and say where the nearest land was. Because if we were sunk and were able to get out it was a good idea to know which way you ought to go. The senior officer was an English major who was in charge, he was commanding officer of an anti-aircraft Bofors [Heavy machinegun] group they landed in Timor

39:00 just two days before the Japs landed. I think I said earlier, it was there I got my first taste of alcohol; I got a rum issue from them. Anyway this fellow, John Dempsey had been up to the heads and came back. And they said, "How far is the nearest land?" and he said, "A mile." "Which way?" which as I say it relieves the monotony to get a thing like that, the nearest mile is down.

39:30 **And how long were you at sea before you landed in Jakarta?**

About six days. No we landed in Surabaya at the other end.

And what knowledge did you have of where you were going?

None.

40:00 They never told you anything. In all of the moves we had, nobody ever knew, we didn't know if we were going to Japan or Singapore, the bottom of the sea or Bandung. They used to shift us; well you have probably seen that movement list of mine. They would shift us every now and again. Principally I think because they didn't want us to get used

40:30 to the area, or know where we were or have anything too much to do with the locals. But we had nowhere to go. As I say, we were about as black as the local Indonesians, our faces were a bit different, so it was tricky. One of the things that irritated at the end of the war; there

41:00 were two Australian sergeants that walked into the camp, they had been at a secret place down on the south coast of Java, we never knew, I wish we had known, especially if we had have been at Bandung which is up in the hinterlands. We could have made an effort to get there.

Tape 9

00:30 **Well Harry, when you went to Java you were in camp at Tanjung Priok, I am wondering if you can recall that first Christmas Day at Priok?**

Yeah vaguely, there was a concert party. The English were great at musical

01:00 stuff and they had a comic there, he used to mimic, the name has left me, but he was a real cockney. And they also sang that song that is in Poidevin's book, it was quite soulful because people like me knew that when we left Timor, we were in for the long haul.

01:30 In fact on the day we marched out from Usapa Besar to the boat I was walking with Doug Gilles, who was one of our officers, and we said, "If they take us off the island it will be three years." Well it was three years to the day that Edwina Mountbatten found us in Batavia.

And why did you think it would be three years?

We were ill prepared, the speed with which the Japanese came down

02:00 showed that it was a real problem. It was predictable that the Axis had lost the war, from the moment the Germans turned on Russia and the moment that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor it was over, but it was going to take a long while. And from our point of view, it did take the three years. See, we had nothing.

02:30 The Japanese were trying to find out in Priok what there was in Darwin, and you might have read where I said I am glad I never ever discovered I was adjutant to the chief engineer of the 7th Military District or I would have got the bamboo slivers under the fingernails and the water treatment and all of that. But it was an instantaneous conspiracy, they wanted to know how many troops there was in Darwin.

03:00 And we said, “Oh got no idea, must be a hundred thousand, eighty thousand.” Well that scared the life out of them a bit. But as I said it was somebody else who turned the war around. I couldn’t tell you any detail about that Christmas, except that the English who were the predominant group there, for some reason, that we came up against anyway, perhaps it was because we were put with them and not with the Dutch.

03:30 And they went out of their way to welcome us, welcoming parties, they still had clothes and things, it was, again it was embarrassing from our point of view because we were made to feel inferior. You were supposed to salute their senior officers and all of this ‘how do you do’, well a joke’s a joke, but.

04:00 I was just starting to lose my faith in my Methodism at that stage too, so religious festivities were not my cup of tea.

Why did you find the British attitude so irritating?

04:30 Well I have spoken before about their seeming superiority and their over consciousness in themselves. As I say they were polite and welcoming but we were made to feel like colonials, in fact they were still using that sort of language. To hell with 1901 independence of Australia, we were just colonials.

05:00 Descendants of convicts.

And how did that possible tension between the Brits and Aussies manifest in camp?

I think there were three different conditions applied to Australians, British and Dutch.

05:30 The Dutch had stomach problems because a lot of them had money and they were overfed and they were careless eaters too. They were gormandizers, they were gutses, they had a saying, “Neich for Engels,” which means nothing for the English. They were very selfish, colonial Dutch. The English, the problems with the English were skin problems,

06:00 they were dirty. I mean we would do anything to get ourselves as clean as we could. We would still go a week without bathing. But see it wasn’t until after the Second World War that showers were common in England. In fact when I first went to Cambridge, we went there in 1949 and we had ‘digs [accommodation], and in the hotel we were put in the shower was a water pipe

06:30 that went up and around and down again and they had drilled holes in it. And in the place in Cambridge where we got digs we were told we could have one bath a week. And we said, “Hang on.” And we made them get one of them newspaper heaters, are you old enough to remember them or know what I am talking about? The pipes run through the heater and you just chuck newspaper in there

07:00 if you, well both of us used to use this every day, old Mr Hayward used to grumble about his water bill, “Confounded Australians using all of his water.” So the Dutch had stomach problems and the English had skin problems and our problems, those of us that had come from Timor, were malaria and dysentery. Although Tanjung Priok was a terrible place. It is on a flat

07:30 and it was the place where the mutiny on the Bounty people lost their first sailor, where Captain Bligh, where the first bloke died. It come a four thousand mile trip from where they were cast off the Bounty. Touched in Timor and then touched in Tanjung Priok and then the first sailor died from malaria.

08:00 And we got a lot of malaria, so we saw ourselves really as different communities of homo sapiens. Dirty English, greedy Dutch and malarial Australians.

Well how were your conditions different compared to Timor?

Very. Momentously.

08:30 In Timor as I say, our guards were combatant soldiers with whom we had fought; both sides had a respect for each other. We were short of medicines but they fed us with their own rations and I said earlier to Louise, our metabolism was such that we couldn’t make use of it. It was the same sort of problem with the Italians, the Italians were made prisoners of war in the Middle East, came to

09:00 Australia, were put on balanced Australian army rations and developed pellagra. Because their metabolisms weren’t up to making maximum protein use out of the stuff they got. They had to be put on

their sour mash and whatever. When we got to Java our guards were Korean civilians, and you know that Japan captured Korea in 1904

09:30 and pretty well enslaved the people, treated them abominably. Also it was known there was a contempt through Japan and Korea for people who surrendered, or were captured, capitulated. Therefore we were objects of ultimate contempt for not having died for King and Country or whatever it was. Also we were starved.

10:00 From about, I think it was March or April of 1943, the instructions from Tokyo were that the rations for prisoners of war would be one hundred and forty grams of rice per day. Now a hundred and forty grams is five ounces. The level is below the 1900 kilocalories a day necessary to survive.

10:30 So we were really in a bad way. They used to give us a vegetable now and again called kankung, it is like spinach, it is disgusting. Its very good for kidney stones, it is a calcareous material and a lot of people did get kidney stones. It is disgusting. We sometimes were able to buy

11:00 stuff over the fence, in the camps in Bandung we were fortunate in the sense that were provided with soya bean and we learnt how to make tempe. Tempe is like bean curd, you know bean curd? But it is a better source of vegetable protein I believe, than bean curd,

11:30 there is a fungus. Tempe is about fifty-five per cent of that bean, soya bean, it is about fifty-five per cent protein, but the trouble with it is that every single cell has a very thick coating of cellulose, now we can't digest cellulose. It remains in animals that have second stomachs, they regurgitate it and you can see them frothing at

12:00 the mouth as they digest cellulose. I believe that those of us who survived, in fact you might have read that one of the things I told my troops was, "Don't wolf your food, chew it and chew it. And if you can regurgitate, bring it up and chew it again." Now if you go to a zoo and look at an orang-utan, or orangutan as we call them, look carefully at them you will see that they do that.

12:30 Now they don't have two stomachs. But the old fellow will sit there, bring all of this stuff up, re-salivate, saliva is running down of his mouth, and I believe and I have tried to find out whether it is known whether they have developed gut flora that allowed them to digest cellulose. I will come back to the tempe, there is a fungus and when you get the fungus you can keep recycling it. We used to be able to put it in,

13:00 smash the soya bean up, mix it with the fungus, put it in a bamboo about this size half full, put the top on, put the top out in the sun and water it every two or three days and the fungus will explode to double its volume, by that stage it has pretty well digested the cellulose and it is very good. It gives you vegetable protein. Now they were officer's camps at

13:30 Bandung, And I think for some, I never got it, I have got a paper here, they asked us in Bandung to tell them what we thought of our treatment, and I have got a copy of the paper here that I kept in that wallet. And we said that even though they had not signed the Geneva

14:00 convention they did say that if we capitulated they would observe it, now they never did. And that after the war we would find it difficult to excuse them for their rough treatment of us. And whether than had any affect Kathy, I just don't know. But as I say, they did separate the officers like the Germans used to. And I think in their own curious way tried

14:30 to do a little better for us than they had done before. Nevertheless, the senior people in the camps were Japanese and the ordinary guards were Koreans, so if there was any belting to be done we were the last cab off the rank, and they have that disgusting habit where the Japanese officer in charge of all prison camps comes to your camp and

15:00 he will find something wrong with the camp commandant and belt him, and the moment that happens you know it is going to get all of the way to the bottom. That was going on in spite of this separate treatment for the officers.

Well you were given a belting on your second time in Priok, how did that come about?

I can still see that too. I had dry beriberi which,

15:30 disorganised business with my heart, it has a name now, arrhythmia? Well if you get it when you're twenty-one or twenty-two it is a bit tricky and I actually couldn't stand up. And the guard came around and everyone had to stand up and salute and bow and I just couldn't do it. So he just belted the hell out of me, why he stopped I don't know. Boots and all.

16:00 Every prisoner had to salute every Japanese or Korean guard irrespective of rank. So it is part of the Geneva Convention that rank is recognised, and of course Germans did recognise the rank, but not the Japs. A brigadier would have to salute and bow to the lowliest of the Japanese and I tell you bowing is a bit of an art, it doesn't come easily. Furthermore if you stand to attention,

16:30 kioskie is attention. In the Australian Army you keep your fingers like so, that is the mark of a thief in Japan, so we quick and lively got belted for having our hands, you have to smooth them out. Kioski and

kishira miti eyes right. Kishira miti, kishira nota. Eyes right. Nowri.

17:00 Anyway we knew all of these commands. But as I say the most senior person had to do that to the lowliest Korean guard. Some of us actually felt sorry for the Koreans because they were civilians and the came to the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere [Japanese euphemism for empire] in the expectation of being farmers. They got down there and they put them in the army and made them guard prisoners of war, the object of ultimate contempt.

17:30 I met one Korean, Gigawa his name was, Gigawa said he was a sergeant. And he turned out to be a Christian. And if he was on his own, he would treat us quite well but he had to be very careful not to be caught doing that.

You mentioned earlier that you began to almost invite beltings. What did you mean by that?

18:00 Well you could pretend that you were slow in seeing a guard come along and so long as you didn't commit a real disgrace they would just smack your face. Part of a new skill to avoid getting your eardrums broken. We had an English naval lieutenant commander, he had four or five or six midshipmen in

18:30 the navy, these young kids come on fourteen, fifteen or sixteen. Somehow or other they were either on the [HMS] Renown, the [HMS] Prince of Wales or the [HMS] Repulse, sunk, they got to Java and he was like a mother hen with these chickens. He had a saying, he was about six feet eight and he had a saying, "The prerogative of an English naval officer is to be arrogant." And he was.

19:00 The Japs would come along and he would do nothing, stand there, to belt him he had to kneel down. They would make him kneel down, so that was part of his arrogance, incredible fellow. "The prerogative of an English naval officer is to be arrogant." He was.

And who did you begin to stick with in camp?

19:30 Well I was in Mater Dolorosa, that's Latin for mother of sorrows, and it was a home for fallen women. Girls who got pregnant and the family couldn't stand the disgrace came into the Mater Dolorosa, the Japanese in mid '43 I think it was, set up

20:00 two hospitals and Les Poidevin, 'Samurais and Circumcision Poidevin' he was, that was a surgical hospital, and I have forgotten what this one was called, but this one was Mater Dolorosa and that was infectious diseases, I got a terribly bad bout of bacillary dysentery.

This is after being in Cycle Camp?

Yeah. I got it in Cycle Camp,

20:30 why did I start to talk about Mater Dolorosa? It was there that I met engineer, Doctor Felix Van Wijk.

Right, well we will come back and talk about Felix, but first perhaps tell us about Cycle Camp, can you describe the camp?

It was just off what was called the Koonig Wilhelm Platz,

21:00 King William Place. Huge square in the centre of what is now Jakarta. The parliament building is on the place facing the place, the Lister Cornelius Station; we are talking about a thing probably about a mile by a mile and a half. It was big and at the end of the place

21:30 was Lister Cornelius Station and if we had to go anywhere like when we worked on the docks we had to walk to the train at the station and as we walked back we could come past parliament house and turn away from the place into this big camp. It had been in the past, part school and part military camp. There were special quarters as you came in the gate and these then were

22:00 occupied by the Japanese and then the guardhouse and then rows, pairs of long huts. And I guess there was something like ten pairs, and they probably were designed, perhaps designed for something up to a thousand people and the Japs had put ten thousand in there. You really got squashed up.

22:30 There were ablution blocks; well there were toilet facilities at one end of the block and ablution showers at the other. When I say showers for the Dutch a shower is a basin, you know? And they don't use toilet paper either, they use a basin and in some respects it is cleaner than our practice.

23:00 But you bail the stuff out over you. Generally we kept fish in there to eat the mosquito larvae. Still when you go there you will see in the back of some cafes features like that at the lavatory with a big pedestal thing full of water with the fish swimming around and there is a dipper

23:30 there for you to clean yourself up, should you need it. That was about it, except right down the bottom of the camp there was a curious structure and I am not sure what it was intended for. But one of our officers there, a chap called Captain Vince Henry who was a scoundrel from way back,

24:00 conned the Japs into letting him use it as a soap factory and a tobacco factory and he got all sorts of things and he persuaded them to make soap and tobacco, he needed coffee, so he could get coffee out

of the Japs. And you might have read that I met him in Melbourne once and he took me to see this very funny film,

24:30 it was called ‘Calling Australia’, propaganda film actually made by Koreans. To show how well they were treating the prisoners of war and why, therefore when they came to Australia, Australia should capitulate and let them occupy the place. It never ever got dropped over Australia, but I saw this thing. And there was a Dutch in a Melbourne unit that made a reply to that, Arthur Blackburn, Brigadier Arthur Blackburn VC [Victoria Cross]

25:00 was saying, because people who were in the film there was talk of them being traitorous because they were playing up. The Japs took people including my brother to a place called Bandung and Bogor I don’t know if you have ever seen the thing, but they were all shaven and skinny funny looking people supposed to be drinking milk.

25:30 Well one fellow did get the milk and just drank the lot before they could take it away from him, because they would just put it there in front of you and all of these nurses coming around and there was a pay counter there, they were paying. You would have to be, mind you when there is a war on it is true that ‘truth is the first casualty’. The information that was released about the bombing of Darwin for example was just nonsense.

26:00 The information we get now about the war in Iraq is just lies. ‘Weapons of mass destruction’. Which country has got the most weapons of mass destruction? Tell me. And which country in the Middle East is the only country that has them? Israel.

And who were you sharing a hut with or a cell in Cycle Camp?

26:30 People like Ted Howard, EDG Howard who is now dead, he was shot down in Celebes and he was brought from Makassar to Java about the same time I was. I became quite friendly with him. He was a sook of a fellow, he used to sit and cry about his wife and daughter, well I couldn’t understand it. His wife lives, she is down here at

27:00 Goodwood. And his daughter runs a fashion shop, one of these boutiques for people like you. Ted Howard I got very friendly with him and for some reason or other I agreed to let him be my bridge partner, he was hopeless, absolutely, he was not, he was a very mild fellow. He was not at all ruthless enough. So he was my bridge partner. Don Junior one of the other

27:30 officers in our unit. A fellow called Wally Simpson, Royal Australia Air Force, flight lieutenant. He used to tell us about his wife and his two young daughters. As a matter of fact I came back on the ship with Wally Simpson, hospital ship, the Manunda, and we landed first at Fremantle and three women, you have read it have

28:00 you? Three women, Wally Simpson, he had told us so many lies about these girls, they were nice, ordinary girls. One of them is married to a doctor and lives on the cross roads, Val Simpson.

What was your daily routine at Cycle Camp?

I used to go out on working parties whenever I could. We used

28:30 to, we tried to, run universities, we had nothing like the privileges of German prisoners of war, we just had discussion groups. I learned about the United States constitution, I knew about the North American Act. I knew why the Australian constitution on federation followed the North American Act and not the United States. The North America Act was for Canada, Canada is a

29:00 country with a range of provinces, and Australia is a country with a range of states, it is quite different from the United States Constitution. I learnt for example that when the Americans fought for their independence against the British they took account of a French social scientist called Montesquieu.

29:30 M-ON-T-E-S-Q-U-I-E-U. He completely misread the English constitution, there is no such thing as an English Constitution, a written English constitution. It is a mobile thing that changes. He caused the Americans Hamilton, Madison and Jay and I went and studied this formally after I graduated in physics, Hamilton,

30:00 Madison and Jay and all the books are there; put in place a president, as a latter day George III. Now the president of the United States has the powers and responsibilities of George III of England, quite different from Elizabeth II of England who is now accountable to the parliament. The president is not accountable to the parliament except for money matters.

30:30 He has his own administration. With our constitution following the unwritten English constitution is a written constitution and modelling it on the North America Act we have an executive which is made up of members of parliament. The cabinet is all members of parliament right? That’s not the case with the United States. ‘Dubya’ as I called him, George W Bush, can’t say W

31:00 can only say ‘dubya’. ‘Dubya’ picks his own administration and Rumsfeld, neo-fascists like Rumsfeld, and now Colin Powell, my skin specialist calls him – did I tell you? – Conan Bowel. They are quite

different. And the separation of powers in America, see we have separation of powers here, the legislature, the judiciary and the executive.

31:30 The judiciary in particular is very separated, in America it is only mythically separated. After you have an election, say a state election all of the judges get the sack and they bring in a new lot of judges. But there is a very sharp separation between legislature, the congress and the executive which is the president,

32:00 with his cabinet, they are completely separated. As I say except if he wants money, to fight a war in Iraq, he has got to go to the congress. But the curious separation of judiciary is really quite strange. You can get for example what happened in the last election of the president, what happens? They rig the vote in Florida, his brother is governor of Florida, he gets that woman who is Secretary of State and then they get the

32:30 High Court of the United States to back up the decision, oh God.

Well we had better get back to talking about Cycle Camp.

You asked what we did in camp. We tried to learn things, let me put it like that. Sorry.

And why was Cycle Camp so bad?

33:00 It is hard to answer that question, as time went on, things got worse. But in some respects perhaps it wasn't as bad as your question would seem to suggest, because it would be only rarely that the guards would come in systematically,

33:30 they would stroll through the place but it was so big and so frightening for them I suppose. They wouldn't come into a gaol, they didn't used to go into Changi, I had been in Boei Gloddock in Batavia and they wouldn't go in there because a gaol, cells and things and they

34:00 were scared of being enclosed in there. They would come into Cycle Camp but it was such a big joint, I don't know they might not have felt safe. The worst part of it was the food and starvation. And then the horror, as I was saying to Louise, I think seeing those people back from Horuko and

34:30 watching things go from better to worse. And then towards the end, digging what they said were slit trenches but they weren't slit trenches at all, they were tombs to machine gun us into.

And you can you describe your cell?

Cell?

The place, room you were living in?

35:00 A bit like this, just long and thin with a bit of a passage up the centre, all open, palliasse; you know what a palliasse is? And the blanket, in fact I have got that Dutch blanket there, and put a bit of straw if you can find it, in your palliasse. I got very skilled even when I was skinny of sleeping so that my hip bone didn't crunch the ground, and we were

35:30 very close together, you get sick of people after a while. On the other hand I was in what was a cell in Jamai, in Bandung and there were eight of us in one room which was probably made for two people.

36:00 John Fode who was a New Zealand Royal Navy volunteer reserve and somehow or other got caught. John Wright who was an Australian flight lieutenant. Hugh Weir who was a 2/3rd Machine Gunner, lieutenant, Don Junior who was the same unit as me, me, a

36:30 fellow called Lionel Breakway who was the padre of the 2/3rd Machine gunners, and there was two others. Two others and I don't know who they were. Anyway we have a Japs officers lunch close to August the 17th of August each year, at the Naval Military Club and of those people, three of us, Jon Wright, Hughie Weir and Harry Medlin

37:00 who were in that room and who are still alive. Again you get sick of people when you're as close as that even if you like them.

What could you do to get a bit of privacy?

Sit over the open trench loo or,

37:30 can't really get privacy. The privacy I got was with Felix; we worked together and did all of that stuff that is in that book. For me that was very exhilarating. And I think for him, he got pleasure out of being able to, it is remarkable when I look at that thing what he was able to do and what I was able to understand.

38:00 Just got it right out of his head.

Well we would like to explore how you came to meet Felix, you began to tell us.

Well I went to this Mater Dolorosa treated as a hospital for fallen women. It also had a church, it was a

Catholic thing, had a church attached to it. The fallen girls used to be here, they couldn't see each other they could see the priest out here and there was a big wall and one of those

38:30 spy chutes like they have in castles? And anyway I was able to get a bed in there on one occasion, but when I first got there as I say, they put me out in the corridor to die and to D-I-E not D-A-Y, to D-I-E, but I didn't die, I got put in a ward with a lot of greedy Dutchmen, and Felix. And there was an Australian, Mathew Allan

39:00 and he had shocking gall bladder pains and I used to have to hold him up. Have you ever seen anyone with a gall bladder? God. I don't know whether he lived or not. Anyway that's where I first met Felix. And it was that fellow Casinghouse who the Japs said, "You're the same as me." And he said, "After the war we will teach these yellow monkeys to make funny with us

39:30 Europeans." That's how I met Felix. And then when they shut down Mater Dolorosa, we went back to Cycle Camp. Then we moved to Jamai and Lansop. So I was with him for about sixteen months I think, and I think I have told you, I used to be able to go outside and work in the sand. I am lucky to have a fairly good memory then, and my memory then was really incredible.

40:00 I could just come back then and write it all down, and I wish I could still do it, but I can't even understand half of it. In fact there was a farewell at the university last week to one of our professors who is going to be head of the sub-atomic structure at Rhode Island. And there in the physics department is a student I used to teach, honours quantum mechanics.

40:30 And I said, "I will give you a test. Tell me what is the grand partition function?" and he said, "I have forgotten." And I said, "So have I."

Tape 10

00:30 **So talking about Felix, describe how you met him.**

Well as I say, he was a patient in that Mater Dolorosa hospital for infectious diseases, and after I didn't die, out in the corridor, they put me into his room, ward, with a lot of Dutchmen

01:00 some of whom had been very fat indeed, and were sort of very colonial Dutch. And when someone is very fat and gets as skinny as we were, the skin flap on his belly comes down to about here, they have got a skirt, elasticity is gone from the skin. Well Felix wasn't like that. He was a young fellow, he was bright, he was eloquent.

01:30 We came to realise that we had common interests. I was younger than him, he was about eight years older than me, and had a job at the sole tertiary education institution that the Dutch had in Indonesia. It was called the Institute of Technology Bandung, and it is still called the Institute of

02:00 Technology Bandung, but it is a tertiary institution and Felix was teaching there. And I was saying to Kathy, he seemed to get enjoyment out of teaching me and I certainly got enormous enjoyment out of being privileged to be able to learn and as I sometimes say, perhaps stay a bit sane.

02:30 **And how would you describe his personality?**

His? Scholarly. He was scholarly; he was erudite without being arrogant. Even though I am an academic myself I recognise

03:00 arrogance in my colleagues and perhaps in myself sometimes. He was gentle. He was very distressed over his wife who was there and he had no idea how she was or where she was, as I said a little earlier and that worried him. He was effervescent, he had a sense

03:30 of humour, which was somewhat unusual in the Dutch. The Dutch are a very solemn people; they take themselves very seriously indeed. Holland is a very accomplished country when you think about it. Country with a population the size of Australia, and yet the things that they have done, really quite remarkable. Surrounded by enemies, Britain, France, Germany, Spain. All

04:00 have been at them and they have survived. Italy is about the only country that didn't have a go at them, I think. Yes, he came from a family that had heart difficulties. His father had died of a heart attack, his brother, I can't remember if his brother died

04:30 before the war or after, but his brother had a professorship at Yale and died very early and so did Felix. He was a lousy solider, didn't look like a soldier. He had a slovenly walk to him. And we all had to have our heads shaved, if you couldn't past the pinch test,

05:00 if a guard saw you and he could pinch any hair you got a belting. So as I say, we used to let it grow a little bit long in order to get a belting. Felix van Wijk, and I learnt how to pronounce his name, W-I-J-K, the phoneme does not exist in English, wijk. Can you say it? Wijk?

05:30 **I would like to ask you about the working parties that you went on in Jakarta, can you describe some of the working parties that you were involved in?**

Yeah, we used to have to clean up the streets. Clean up a railway station, well all sorts of places. Dumps. Work on the docks. Work around

06:00 aerodromes. Japanese had a, they carefully kept records, and it was a pretty boring working party to get on that one, I have been there a number of times, and when my brother's ship, the ship that he was on, was sunk, I made it my business to get on that working party, to find out if he was one that was lost and he was.

06:30 It surprised us that they were so careful in the records they kept, because in dealings with us they appeared quite careless, but they really were quite careful. A bit more careful than us in reporting on Athol Wilson and my visit to Dili in Timor to sort out the problems with the Portuguese, a record of which

07:00 seems not to exist, or won't be released anyway. Although there is a statute of limitations isn't there? Thirty years I think. And the brothel, mind you that was very heavily competed for. I will say again there was no funny business about it.

07:30 I think I said before we had no libido anyway, but as I have said before, when people are near the mud like the Australians and the Germans and the truce in the First World War, the Japanese and us, when we were first captured, and prostitutes, especially those comfort women. That's something I can't understand, why did it take until 1996 for that Dutchwoman who lives here to come and declare the comfort women

08:00 brutalities of the Japanese? It would seem to me to be very well known to everybody, but no. Japanese, they weren't going to tell anybody, they don't even tell their own people about their involvement in the war. We could get anything, drinks, fags-cigarettes, were the things that people really wanted.

08:30 Nobody realised the extreme danger of smoking. In fact we would go to any lengths to get tobacco. Including putting sieves on the street drains. When I think of it now, all of the things that were in those drains catch these things, put it out in the sun and let the sun dry it off and kill all of the organisms and then smoke it.

09:00 **So what was your work in the brothel?**

Just clean it up. Mop, scrub. Make it look tidy. Yeah, wash the walls and the doors and beds, bedding.

09:30 I guess a brothel is a brothel. There was not the secrecy that you might expect. You would think you would want some sort of secrecy if you were going to go into a brothel, not having been into one, other than that, I am not too informed on how they operate.

10:00 **Well what did it look like?**

Looked all right. It was better than the stuff we had.

Can you describe it for me?

Well, they were just single rooms with partitions, old, colonial, Dutch houses that had been subdivided

10:30 so that you could house more activity than would happen in a ordinary extended villa. Yeah, I don't know that I can describe it any better, the partitions were probably asbestos, I can't remember now, probably were asbestos come to think of it.

11:00 **Who were the women that were working in the brothels?**

Well they were a mixture, some of them were Japanese but others were Eurasians. Comfort women I think they called them, and I think the woman who actually blew the whistle, I think she was actually Dutch. But, as I said, it is hard to tell what being Dutch means, there are all grades of Eurasian mixtures.

11:30 You have heard me talk about Les Poidevin with Samurais and Circumcision? Circumcision refers to the fact that as a surgeon he was in great demand to circumcise Japanese guards around our camps. Because if you were circumcised you could get to the head of the queue, that's another thing. These queues were really quite incredible,

12:00 how you could be on a queue was beyond me but there you go.

Can you explain that to me a bit more, the queues how long were they?

Well they were not as long as I have seen them in Jakarta since the war. I have seen the complex, in fact I think I put something in one of those things about a complex of huts in an

12:30 area where it was either legalised or condoned. And I guess there might have been twenty of these huts with perhaps four or five prostitutes in each one and queues outside, queues ten to twenty people long. Driven around, they weren't like; the Japs were not like that.

13:00 Whether they were forced to use condoms or not I simply wouldn't know. The fact that a circumcision would get you to the head of a queue would imply that they were not using condoms. Incidentally I heard on the news today they are finding that circumcised men are less likely to contract HIV.

13:30 Which would make a lot of them turn Jewish.

What other working parties were there?

Well on the docks, on the aerodromes, railways stations,

14:00 it is strange, someone the other day was talking about it. It is curious; the Japanese in Japan apparently are so fastidious with cleanliness. And yet as an occupying army they were dreadful. I am talking about the army, not the navy. Careless, untidy, unkempt. I think it probably came about because it was ill

14:30 educated farmers, farming people. See in the Japanese army, the division that came to Timor, the officers were a bit different but the division that came to Timor, they were about five feet one, so they didn't have any problems with uniforms, all uniforms were the same size. Coats and pants and those funny boots they have with the split

15:00 toe. And I think they were ill educated. And indeed, Suji in his book tries to explain the 'rough' behaviour of a particular regiment. And I think I quoted a little bit from it. He said, "They were inclined to be violent, but what's wrong with that?" Suji himself could be pretty brutal if he needed to be. For example the rape and massacre of

15:30 the people in the hospital in Singapore in order to hasten the capitulation there. So there was a lot of tidying up to do. And everywhere we went was dirty and unkempt, furthermore, in Jakarta in particular, Batavia as it then was, the population went up from, I think it was a million before the war, to four million. The Dutch, wherever they went

16:00 they had canals, and a lot of their traffic around the place, they had it in Kupang, a lot of the traffic they had on these canals. Now the canals just got absolutely polluted. The Dutch used to keep them clean, there was a big canal at the back of Bui Gludock, bui means gaol. I went back there with my wife one day to show her where I had been interned, and they had knocked the damn thing down. All that was left was a

16:30 front gate and the porch. At the back of it there was a canal and I used to like when we were in there getting out in the garden out the back because as I say, funny things happen. We could bury a forty-four gallon drum in this banana plantation. Bury it. Bananas you know they grow and then they seed and fruit and drop dead, and there is stuff all over the place.

17:00 So there is plenty of litter around, so we could bury these drums. Now a forty-four gallon drum is about that round and about that high, you wouldn't think you could steal it let alone bury it and not be seen. Well then we could cut green bananas down and stick them down in the barrel because if the Japs saw it getting ripe they would cut them down. And they used to wonder where these things would go.

17:30 Anyway it was right on the banks of the canal. It was not a concreted canal, it was an ordinary canal, kept clean, it smelt. We could wave to the women across the canal, they would do their washing they would have these stones and belt these stones and it was really quite nice. But not any more, it quickly went rotten.

18:00 You go there now, the population of Jakarta now I think is twelve to fifteen million, so to go from one to four million was bad enough and there were people dying all over the place as well. To see it now is quite sad.

You have mentioned your brother Arthur a few times, what was going on with him?

I think we only, well

18:30 the times we were separated was when I went to Gludock, and the Japs used to pay the officers a bit of money. And there were people going backwards and forwards and I used to get half of my money back to him, and he could look after the other troops. He was on working parties, he was a sergeant. So he had a bit of responsibility too, to care

19:00 for troops who might need morale stirring up. So we were separated then, and we were separated when I was in Jamai, otherwise we were back in Cycle Camp in 1944 when he and Arthur Jones and Bob Armstrong were put on that ship

19:30 to go Japan. I actually got out through the wire early in the morning; it was about half past two, three o'clock or something, to see them. Nobody knew where they were going; they could have been going anywhere. You might have read that the ship went from Batavia to Singapore, changed ship and went from Singapore to

20:00 Manila. And from Manila went to Hanoi and I think that same one sailed for Nagasaki before it was sunk. I saw quite a lot of him. He had a trade, he was a gas fitter, had he lived he would have become a photographer, he became very interested in photography.

20:30 He was also at Fort Largs, and in fact I have got some of his photographs of the notices forbidding people from taking photographs. He was a bit of a daredevil.

So that morning that you got up to say goodbye to him, can you tell me what that was

21:00 **like saying goodbye to him?**

Well you don't predicate it is going to be forever, so I gave him what money I had, I had to be very careful if they had caught me, I might have been on the bloody thing too. And then there would have been one missing from Cycle Camp and there would have been a row about that.

21:30 You get a bit hardened over time to people coming and going and the vicissitudes of, I don't remember it being any more significant probably than saying goodbye to other members of our unit.

22:00 I mean if I started to show him special, it would have been no good for either of us. Except I did give him the money as I said, probably at the bottom of the Sea of Japan.

Why did you give him money?

What do you mean?

Well you didn't really

22:30 **know where he was going?**

You see they weren't paid anything, he was going somewhere, we got, in fact I have got a sheet around here that purports, so much for salary, so much for rent and so much for lodging and food and we would get about ten guilders a month or something, a couple of pounds. But they weren't getting anything.

23:00 I did have an earning potential and imagined that they might still be, I think they stopped it eventually, it was pretty irrelevant anyway. But there were plenty of black markets around those camps. I might have said before that the locals, especially the Chinese but also the

23:30 Indonesians became totally disaffected by the Japanese and did all sorts of things to help us. Smuggle food and food was pretty important. Funny thing, I talked to Kathy earlier about scurvy and what a dreadful thing it is and how quickly you can get rid of it. Java is a very rich country even though there are a hundred and twenty million of them there or whatever,

24:00 no one needs to starve. But during the war they forgot, they forgot about soya bean and they planted a lot of cassava, cassava is sago stuff, very low in protein. And if you go around east Java around the villages you see little kids with beriberi, the belly beriberi, the wet beriberi, they have forgotten how to ferment the soya bean.

24:30 That was going on while we were there and as I say they got disaffected by the Japs and were prepared to do all sorts of things to help us if they were able to. And for a long while the Dutchwomen were allowed to ride around on bikes so long as they rode back to the internment camp. And they would ride past the camps and yell out in Dutch about the news what was happening in Europe.

25:00 Whether France had been retaken. So the attitude of people changed a lot towards the Japanese.

You made a passing comment before that things were starting to go bad, at what stage did things start to go really bad?

For whom?

25:30 **For yourself and other men in the camp.**

Well food went bad in, I said earlier, I think around March or April, sometime at the end of the first third of 1943 when essentially the instruction was that the rice diet was to be restricted to a hundred and forty grams of rice per day, that's about five ounces. You can't live on that.

26:00 You have got to be able to scrounge or steal. And there was other, this kankung that I talked about, this kidney stone producing vegetable. Now and again in Cycle Camp, I will start that again. At one stage the officers became the cooks, it is very tempting to become corrupt if you're hungry. And I worked in what we called, dapar tega. Dapa is kitchen,

26:30 tega is three. And the head of it was Don Junior and although he was junior to me as an officer nobody cared about that, he was the head of dapa tega, and I was one of the cooks. And we learnt how to steam rice properly. We kept asking the Japs to give us unpolished rice, but they were so perverse, I don't know what they did with the polishing, the polishing has got all of the germ cell in it and the

27:00 big protein content. And good rice is only about seven per cent protein at the best, so we were hard up for protein. I did talk about when we were at the officers' camp in Bandung where they let us make tempe out of soya bean which is very high in protein. But sometimes on occasions the Japs used to bring in a truckload of offal.

27:30 I can still see it. They would bring this truckload of offal in and dump it on the ground, rotten with

maggots; it would have the lot, intestines, stomachs genitalia, the lot. As a cook we had to clean it. It was sometimes said that the cooks could be better off, it was suggested that they might steal the food like

28:00 the ordinary soldiers. That was not so, we were scrupulously honest that we took no more than our share. And in fact we took less than our share because having cleaned this offal out on the ground in the stinking sun with flies and maggots all over it, I couldn't eat it. I could never eat it. We had nothing to disguise it with. Sometimes we could get a bit of chilli, but nothing like what was needed to disguise it.

28:30 Whereas if you mince it up and mixed it up with the rice, people who hadn't handled it or hadn't had to see it could eat it. So things started to get bad when the quantum food got short, and it just got worse.

Was it just the food that was getting worse?

29:00 Yeah I think that's so. I n the early days there were these people, "The Yanks are coming we will be home in six weeks." And all of this idiotic nonsense. Well I never believed that. But as it wore on, I think there was a great awareness

29:30 that we were probably not going to make it. At the rate at which, well Europe finished in June of 1945, and there were landings at Iwo Jima but not on the Japanese mainland, if the Japanese stuck to their guns, they were not going to surrender, it was going to be a hell of a war. It is allowed to kill prisoners of war, allowed under the convention

30:00 if they are likely to be recaptured, it looked to us in fact, on one of those papers that I let you have I had a series of quotations from different authors about what instructions had come from the central high command in Japan about the treatment of prisoners. One of them said, "They should be taken into locations which is subject to enemy bombardment, but

30:30 should be kept while their labour is needed." I think that was about the core of it, we were kept because we worked. In fact I have heard, I haven't seen any documentary proof of it, I have heard that it was intended in Java, because the Australians were coming around North Borneo and down into what is now Kalimantan at Tarakan and Balikpapan, after oil,

31:00 and recovering colonial places for the British and the Dutch, I have heard that it was proposed that there be a march from Batavia to Bandung starting, and I have a date, the 23rd or the 24th of October 1945. Now if we had had to walk from Batavia to Bandung about as many of us would have got there as got to Renau from Sandakan. So that was part of the getting

31:30 worse. But after a while you get philosophical. I had my work to occupy me and as I say, stop me from going insane. And I think we were pretty well prepared, although not entirely. See one of the things I learned from Felix, I learned about the Hahn Meissner experiments

32:00 in Berlin in the mid-1930s where they split the atom. It was then carried forward by Fisch who was a German Jew and escaped Hitler and was in Cambridge and they had accelerating machines in Cambridge and Cockloft Walton accelerators, I knew about that. I knew about the controlled splitting atom.

32:30 It is one thing to split an atom; it is another thing to have a controlled splitting. I knew that with a fusion, fission rather, of uranium 235 and that's a less abundant isotope with the fission there was an average of two point three neutrons per fission.

33:00 And the trick is, and I have taught physics to students, the trick is to have the material in such a dense situation where the two point three neutrons cause fission as they go on and you get an explosion. But the trick with the atomic bomb, the material has to be fashioned so that the explosion is an implosion.

33:30 And that was the trick and once Claus Foops heard that word, 'implosion' the secret was out and Foops gave it to the Russians. Well everybody knows about it now. I knew in prison camp at that time about the two point three neutrons, so it came as no surprise either to Felix or me when we heard about the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The surprise was this, the abundant isotope in

34:00 uranium is uranium 238, now for a trans-uranic element to be fissile it has to have an even atomic number, in other words an even number of protons and an odd atomic weight, that is an odd number of neutrons, so uranium 92, 235 is fissile, but that's a very weak component. The abundant component is uranium 92, 238,

34:30 even, not fissile. The first atomic bomb was uranium 235; they had a scientist there who could tell from the daughter fragments what the parent nucleus had been right? You get the distribution of the uranium fragments and they could tell it was uranium 235. They knew that it would take a lot of work to separate

35:00 that by diffusion, because atomic weights are very much the same. So they advised the Emperor to sue for peace. Now the Nagasaki bomb was plutonium which is 94, 239, that's an even odd isotope. And so they said to the emperor they can read plutonium from the prominent non-fissile component

35:30 isotope like uranium. Well as I say, people like me were not surprised. I was surprised to hear about the

plutonium bomb but I was not surprised to hear about the uranium one. So anyway when the emperor was told about the plutonium one, he was advised to sue for surrender because they said, “Well they can make dozens of these things and

36:00 they can get them all over the place, you might even get one on the Imperial Palace.” It is all written up in the Smyth Report. Fascinating. So even though you started to feel pretty confident that you’re not going to make it nevertheless there are things that can keep your mind going, and as I say, keep you sane.

Well, that leads me to now question

36:30 **about uncertainty in an uncertain place in an uncertain time. What makes you get up every day and keep going?**

I was talking to Kathy a little bit about that sort of thing. We’re a complex animal. What makes that thing get up, wandered off last week for three days and got a hell of a shock and yet look at it, it is cheeky as all

37:00 get out. We’re so complex that what this inner strength is I don’t know and I don’t think anybody does. Religions try and make out that they know, you prey to God and all that. Ultimately you know as well as I do that finally you’re on your own and what drives you, I don’t know. It drives a lot of people who don’t even like it.

37:30 You have asked an unanswerable question I think. Bits of doggerel I quote every now and again from WE Henley in Victus, “I thank whatever gods there be for my unconquerable soul.” Now if you look at that sentence, “I thank whatever gods, whatever gods there be,

38:00 for my unconquerable soul.” It is ‘my unconquerable soul’ that drives me, but I don’t know what it is. If you do, tell me.

You had a responsibility to your men still and keeping their morale up, I am just trying to get my head around how you could do that when you’re questioning your own existence and how long you are going to be in this place,

38:30 **and you have got a responsibility to these men as well?**

Well in the case of a soldier it is part of the training of a solider. And I did write a bit at the end of that paper I sent to the members of parliament about compensation for Japanese POW,

39:00 there is nothing, in my experience anyway, to compare with the proper training of a psychopathic killer as a soldier. Who is trained therefore to bear the rigours of war, the very abomination, that is war?

39:30 Who laments loss of freedom, rejoices in freedom and then is saddened by the subsequent breaches of promise that, see you become a trained psychopath you believe you have a duty, you try and discharge it and then it is over. People like my father

40:00 who were absolutely betrayed, three years in France, and then when he was sick, the doctors pleaded for him and he was told, “Oh those doctors are your friends.” Treated abominably, and I think we were too. And in that letter I wrote to the ministers, I drew attention to the fact that in 1952 that the then Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies ,

40:30 sold away our rights to compensation, without our consent, without even consultation with us even. And then we get told that we can’t sue, and you might see that stuff I wrote to the Japanese ambassador. I got a nice letter back from him finally telling me to go and get lost. And I knew that’s what would happen, because I pointed out to him that Menzies signed away our rights. But it was a nice letter,

41:00 I am pleased to have it. But so, [Prime Minister] Howard was shamed into Australia paying the compensation. I was in America in 1976 when the Americans and Canadians did it, it took a long while, in fact it took here for the British and New Zealanders to do it before Honest Johnny Howard gave in. And that was just an electoral stunt anyway.

Tape 11

00:31 **Harry, before we move on in the story I just want to spend a little bit more time talking about Felix. Why was Felix a good mentor for you?**

Well we liked each other for some reason.

01:00 I think I found him an enjoyable person to be with even before we buried deep, when I was asked earlier about his personality, he had a sort of fiendish sense of humour, I don’t know that I can give you any examples of it straight off the top of my head but he had a sense of the ridiculous and I

01:30 respond to people with a sense of ridiculous, I mean, this is a ridiculous situation, lets' be clear about it. And he comprehended that. I mean, I agree with Birch and Russell, if I had all of the powers that the, all being, all loving, all person, God had, I could make a better animal than you and me. I could make someone who could understand the universe, had a better brain.

02:00 A lot of people get offended if you talk like that. Felix, he was a good Catholic and I was in the process of becoming an un-good Methodist so we got on well together.

And how did you tell what day of the week it was?

Fancy getting asked that.

02:30 I don't really know. Because we had our watches taken. We had nothing. We didn't bother to make hour glasses, sand clocks. We

03:00 had access to secret radios. In fact I have got a photograph here of a secret radio in the heel of a thong. It wasn't mine but it was with us in Jakarta. I don't know that I can answer that. Probably there were people around like parsons,

03:30 ministers of religion, padres who kept track of Sunday and probably we were reminded. That could well have been it. There used to be church services, I said before that the Japanese were very respectful of religion and you could have church services, you couldn't go around having gatherings. And at that time I became an atheist. I used to attend these church services

04:00 and you would sit next to somebody, do you know the Apostles' Creed? 'I believe in God the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ his only begotten son born of the virgin Mary suffered under Pontius Pilot until crucified dead and buried, he descended into hell and on the third day he rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, from whence he sitted on the right hand of God the father almighty. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen'. Stand next to these people and I would say, "Do you?"

04:30 "Do I what?" "Do you believe in what you just said?" "Yeah, course I do." For good young Methodists we had to really learn that off by heart, and at one stage I knew the Affirmation Creed too, but I can't tell you that that's the Apostles' Creed.

Well what about, how could you mark the passing of time?

05:00 Well we had our own circadian rhythms anyway and the sun comes up and down and so did the moon. We had to be up, the Japanese worked to Tokyo time, which is a whole lot of daylight savings, and when we were working on the docks they would get us up at what was effectively three a.m. by the sun.

05:30 And we had to have roll calls, tenko it was called, have you heard the word 'tenko'? Well there was a film made about that. In the early days when they used to number us they used to count the feet and we would get someone to stand on one leg, they couldn't figure out what was happening. So you got belted if you got caught standing on one leg.

06:00 So, ichi, ni san, chi, go, roku, schich, hatchi, ku ju, ji ichi, I can count to a million. But that's all they ever compelled us to do, oh except to kioski and cari and nasmi and all of that stuff. But to converse we essentially conversed in Malay, they wouldn't want to speak English either, although I think I said to you earlier, there were guards there that could speak English very well, like that guard that said,

06:30 "La Capitone Cradic" to me. Passing of time, there were parades and at tenko you are supposed to make abasits to the God emperor, the rising sun. And sometimes these penalties involved looking at the sun, and they gave these penalties to themselves, gaze at the sun. You can't look at the sun for longer for more than ten seconds without burning a hole in your eye. But there are ways of pretending you are looking at the sun when you are not, I tell you.

07:00 So I guess that was the passing of time. Sometimes we were allowed candle lights and played bridge and that sort of thing at night, but generally it was lights out after the sun went down. You know the play Waiting for Godot? "Time passes."

Well I have heard from other POWs

07:30 **that sometimes people would pretend and play games of make-believe, I am just wondering if you saw any of that?**

Like what?

Like creating a garden and pretending there was a garden there.

I had more real things to do. I would have, were these people sane or...?

08:00 No I never saw any of that; I saw plenty of people go loony. This compulsive stuff, washing your hands. It is a funny thing; you would never go around in those circumstances trying to anticipate who was going to go crazy. But when they did, it was obvious they had been going to.

08:30 Psychopaths or extreme neurotics, or of this compulsive washing of hands, did you strike any of them doing that? That was very common. And if they started that there, it is bad enough here, you have to go to a shrink, but if you started that there in prison camp, you were going to be dead in a few months, no way out of it.

09:00 I will chip in on you, Felix and I used to play games, as I said I could play chess without a board and I learnt the tables, we would have a group of people and you would say, “What’s your birthday?” and it has to be after the Gregorian Calendar which I think is 1592,

09:30 well there were no people there born before 1952 so, you learn four tables and one of them is quite complicated, and you can work out the day of the week. I mean I was born on the fourth of January 1920 and that happened to be a Monday. Now if you use these tables, 4 January 1920 and give the proper integers to the 4, to the January and 1920, 1920 is a leap year, you have to remember which is a leap year or which is not,

10:00 you can give them the day. Well it was put over as some sort of telepathic act. That magician who is, what is his name? I got sent an email the other day. Six court cards,

10:30 and he says, “Select one and I will read your mind.” “Select one, look at it, look at my face.” This is on television and he goes on with all of this garbage. And they go away. And he said, “Now are you thinking of that card, I will tell you, I don’t know you but I will ready your mind. I have taken one card away.”

11:00 And he put five up there, and I could tell immediately that the five he put up there, not one of them was in the first six. So he has to be right, he has taken your card away because they have all been taken away. Anyway we used to make out that telling this day you were born was part of this, and we also used to play a game

11:30 where you would go around and get an article, and we learnt a code and you would give me a ring, I have forgotten it all now, and by his talking I could tell that it was a ring that he had. There was a fellow in Changi did it a lot better than we were able to do. He was a friend of Russell Braddon [Australian author], you know Braddon? Yeah.

12:00 **And when men would go slightly mad and start acting with obsessive compulsive behaviour how would other men respond to that person?**

Well we were unskilled in any treatment. I think probably they were pretty well avoided except by the padres. And they used to finish up with some sort of clinic where possible, Cycle Camp it was possible to have a bit of a clinic. But other

12:30 places not so. I think I said a couple of times Kathy, that in spite of a desire to give everyone a hoist up, it had to be done collectively. There were no intense, interpersonal bonds.

13:00 I saw for example, no single example of homosexuality. Well certainly there was no libido, but no certain examples of homosexual contacts, and homosexual interpersonal contacts I mean, and extreme dependence. Although I will not be generous enough to say that I have excluded

13:30 Laurens Vanderpost [philosopher and author]. I think Laurens Vanderpost was a multi-sexual, you might have read some of the stuff I wrote about him. I believe he was a traitor and I think that he was inclined to exploit any sexual opportunity that might come along.

14:00 **Well you and Felix spent a lot of time together, what was he teaching you, without going into everything that you learnt from him? Just generally what were the highlights that you learnt from Felix?**

Did you flick through that book?

14:30 Well the ability I think to get my brain, and I think I had a brain that was ready for it. I have got to say he wouldn’t have the faintest concept of what any of that is about, he has got no concept even of density, you give him a gold ball and a wooden ball he knows that one is a lot heavier. But the notion of mass per unit volume, so that stuff in there

15:00 anyway I think I had a brain that was receptive to that sort of analytical process. And that was the, I suppose a bit of hedonism, hedonistic satisfaction that I was fortunate enough to be able to, as I say on an inter-personal basis

15:30 we sort of liked each other, respected each other, there was no great emotional tie, that was the great benefit that I got. And then knowing that he became a professor of metallography, which is a highly skilled discipline, at the Technical High School in Dili. And I think I have written ‘what’s in a name?’

16:00 It is one of the best universities in the world. And the poor old fellow died.

Well we do need to move on, you mentioned there were secret radios in camp, how were you hearing about what was going on in the war?

Had to be very careful, very careful, you will have read that both Poidevin and I suspected Vanderpost.

16:30 He was well dressed, and admits into his own book, The Seed in the Sower how he brought quinine tablets in to the camp. He claims to have been able to speak classical high Japanese, a bit of it. There is a book written upstairs that I have got about him, The Teller of Many Tales. I think I have quoted the book. And

17:00 the author of that is not quite as stridently critical of Vanderpost as I have been. But you had to be very careful. If it were known, I, for example, have smuggled in radio parts in my lap-lap, I never knew where they went, I never knew who the owner of that was, and it wouldn't have paid for anyone

17:30 to know, so the word would get around very slowly and carefully among those who were trusted, none of us would have ever told Vanderpost anything about the news. None of the people who I know anyway, would have told him anything. We believe, I said in those letters, he used to go down and talk to Sonei

18:00 and then we would be raided. Funny thing, if they were looking for radios when they came in on a raid, we could have knives there and they wouldn't touch them. If they came in on a raid looking for knives they would pinch the knives, they were after particular things. Also I think some of the people in the camps

18:30 were plants. You couldn't tell even with some of the Dutch, and you certainly couldn't tell with some of the Eurasians who were plants and who were legitimate, so it was a very treacherous situation. And I have written how disappointed we were, when two fully-fledged Australian sergeants who had been down at a base on the south coast

19:00 and we saw these fellows and the contempt with which they treated the Japs and we were so browbeaten, it staggered me that we didn't know of that secret thing on the south coast of Java, and it would have been unsafe information to have let abroad.

Well how did you get news that the war was over?

We knew about,

19:30 I am not sure about the second atomic bomb but we knew about the first one. Now they had us in Cycle camp working on the docks at Tanjung Priok, so the Australians were bombing these docks so the workers ran away. I was in a party actually that dug slit trenches, we refused, we were threatened every day with being executed, and at this stage we couldn't give a

20:00 damn whether they executed us or not, I mean what the hell is going on? So we persuaded them to allow us to dig slit trenches, did you read that? We dug it with a big US. And I thought I had a newspaper report on it and I thought I had it, I must find that report. It was sighted as US; if the Japanese had picked it up we would have really been in trouble.

20:30 Anyway I have been in touch with the United States Navy because the senior officer there was a fellow called Richard Antram. And the second one was John Thobe the New Zealander, they are both now dead. We were the three officers on this work party. Dick was the officer in charge of the working party and I as an engineer party was the officer in charge of the work. So I showed them how to dig slit trenches and where to put them. We would have been in terrible trouble. He got

21:00 the Bronze Star for that. Australians were not allowed to take foreign awards at that stage so I don't know what else happened, but he also got a Congressional Medal of Honor. He was captured; his ship was sunk off over Hu Chong Pandung which used to be called Makassar. And he was in camp in Makassar and they brought him to Java, anyway the Japs were beating up one of his seamen one time,

21:30 giving him a hell of a hiding and this fellow went and volunteered to take the hiding in place of the sailor from the Japs and the Japs were so shocked and surprised by this that they let them both go. Anyway he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, which is the United States' Victoria Cross. So we knew about the first atomic bomb on

22:00 Hiroshima, as I say we were working to Tokyo time, so we would get up about three o'clock by the sun and go down get to the station Mister Cornelius, they would take us to the Tanjung Priok station and we would have to walk along the docks with all of these people dead in the streets, it was terrible, to this General Motors factory.

22:30 And you wouldn't credit what they did in there. The senior officer had a big Packard and it had to be fixed, and do you know what the crowd working in there did? They took it apart every bit, they spread it over an area bigger than this house, and they got into a hell of a row, well they could have never got the things together again. So they were as much at risk as we were out there digging slit trenches. We woke

23:00 up on the morning of the 15th of August and it was daylight, and we were still asleep in Cycle Camp and we knew that something was on. We guessed that it was over. And I think it was probably not until the next day or something that we knew it was over. Then, as I have written there were about a million, I think there were about a million Japs in Java,

23:30 And of course it was such a contemptible thing to be captured, they didn't believe that they had capitulated. The Emperor had to send members of the Imperial household, and they sent that, I don't think I have said this to you before, they sent Count Yamaguchi. I met Count Yamaguchi. Our

commanding officer at that stage was Wing Commander Ramsey Ray, very straight backed Australian

24:00 wing commander and we called him to his face, “Yes Count Gumeruchi, no Count Gumeruchi.” and if you don’t know what a gumeruchi, is I am not going to tell you. He knew. Good Lord. And he had to explain to them, whether or not he brought a copy of the rescript, have you ever heard the rescript, the Emperor speaks in that Imperial voice, that silly little,

24:30 and of course the moment they heard that, well they would have frozen. And as you probably know, the Emperor to issue that rescript, had to escape from the army, the army didn’t want to surrender even after the second atomic bomb. So Count Yamaguchi came to Java and convinced them, then there was terrible confusion.

25:00 As I have written they tried to make out it was a draw, well we daren’t tell them it wasn’t a draw. And that was when we got out, with a slouch hat which is up there on a model of my head, to walk around the street, merdeka means freedom, tutap means now. Everyone was saying merdeka tutap. And Mountbatten turned up there.

25:30 And Sukarno went down to meet him, “What’s happening?” “We’re here to take the Netherlands East Indies back for the Dutch.” And ‘psst’ up she went, and it took them five years. And we Australians were on the side of the Indonesian nationalists, and as you know we supported their case in the United Nations and promoted it and they won it finally. And Sukarno, until he went mad with

26:00 Syphilis, I think as a really quite remarkable leader. They have embedded in their constitution the principles of what are called pancasila, and if you’re on the web, P-A-N-C-A-S –I- L

and it is superb. It guarantees democratic process, it guarantees freedom of religion, it actually names Christian Catholic, Christian Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu

26:30 Hinduism, Islam. The five of them explicitly. And most of the time it works fine, although recently those people who made trouble in Bali were making trouble against the Catholics in Ambon, the Ambonese are Roman Catholic. Orung Ambon sua jau, I used to know their song, ‘Ambon far away’ and to hear them sing it.

27:00 It is a lilting song, ‘Ambon Far Away’, they are beautiful singers, they are natural harmonisers like the Buta people in Sumatra. I have got some records of their stuff up there. And in the Dutch Army, the Ambonese are like the Ghurkhas in the British Army. Savage little fellows, innocent looking little blokes but cut your head off as soon as look at you.

27:30 **What happened to you after the war was officially over?**

Well when we knew it was over and the Japs were giving us Red Cross parcels Don Junior and I moved out of the hut and built a little camp for ourselves between two of the huts and had our own campfire and cooked our own tucker. And we used to get out of the prison camp

28:00 as I say. Then I got a very severe case of malaria. See it finished on August the 15th, merdeka was August 17th, it was well into September before Edwina Mountbatten, she found us as Les Poidevin describes in his book, and she had a Dakota DC3 [transport plane] and I got this particular serious bout of

28:30 malaria and was one of twenty or so people, two officers flown out of Batavia and taken to Singapore and put into army recovery hospital. And that was, as I say September the 23rd. So it is a good five or six weeks after the end of the war, and Edwina, she had a ton of guts, she used to fly into those places while the Japs were still there, first woman, and the Japs were not used to

29:00 dealing with women. She used to boss them around. She had a uniform which she had designed herself. Very impressive. And then she brought as I say, Gracie Fields to the hospital and Gracie sang all of her dirty songs to us and that’s where I first heard Lily Marlene in English. I learned in prison camp Ambon suda jau.

29:30 Saoi Morose[?], that’s a South Africa song. Saoi Morose. I also learnt the Pahata Ra you know the Maori’s Farewell?

30:00 And then when we got to hospital the nurses sang Lily Marlene. Everyone was just in tears; it was the most moving thing. And for the Germans to sing it, outside Tobruk and then it was translated into English words and it has become

30:30 beautiful. “Underneath the lamplight by the barrack gate…” I can’t say it.

Can I just have a stop there for a moment. You have just described

31:00 **a very moving account of Gracie singing songs in hospital, but I am wondering even before you got to hospital was there a moment, even in camp that you and the rest of the men were able to celebrate?**

What after it was over? Oh yeah. Yes although we didn’t have

31:30 access to alcohol, it wasn't until we got to Singapore and the Roman Catholic Church gave us a couple of bottles of beer a day and that, when a new day dawned. There was plenty of us celebrating. Mind you we had to be a bit careful, as I say we could get out of the camp and feel a little bit free, but with the instability. But I think as Australians, I think I have said before

32:00 as Australians with a slouch hat, we were pretty safe and the Indonesians knew we were on their side. Although once a rebellion is on, things are likely to get out of control very quickly. Like that rugby match the other day, friends are fighting each other. So the celebrations didn't really occur until we got out of there. And I think I have said, as far as feeling free is concerned

32:30 I never felt free until I got into Heidelberg Hospital, back into Melbourne. You were very loathe to give up on mechanisms that can keep you going, survival mechanisms and it was, on the hospital ship it was quite strange. I have told the story that we were so used to being naked or with just lap-laps that

33:00 we just went around like that, and this nurse complained and we said, "Well we don't need her anyway." We were very loathe to be mollycoddled, and I think we still, I think a lot of us still are. The ex-POWs I meet are not whinging all of the time like the damn Vietnam vets,

33:30 they are the ones that don't want repat [repatriation]hospital to go into this regionalisation thing. They're mad. And I have spoken to the medical staff down there, regionalisation will occur, they have to go into it otherwise it will cease to be a teaching and research hospital and the moment that happens, it is nothing but an old folks' home. So I think our survival mechanisms were better honed than the Vietnam vets, I mean I am sorry

34:00 for them but in this world you have to have something decent to worry about, or you will invent it. You take notice of that.

Perhaps you can tell us about that trip back to Australia on the Manunda?

I got to know Viv Ornicle, got to know him very well. And Wilma Orum her friend. Cecelia May Delforce,

34:30 Queenslander. Jean Ashton, Jean died, what about six months ago at the age of ninety-seven I think. So I got to know the South Australians and Wilma Orum was a Victorian she was a friend of Viv's and there were only a couple of officers on that ship and we got to know the nurses very well because in St Patrick's Hospital which was the

35:00 recovery hospital in Singapore on East Coast Road right on the beach, and the first floor they were down one end and we were down the other. Mind you there were guards here to stop us getting at each other. But we were so skinny anyway it really wasn't funny. But it was beaut to be with them on the ship, and I think they enjoyed our company. How they survived God only knows. In Jessica Simons book she tells the story of how the Jap officers

35:30 wanted to make comfort women out of them, have you ever read Jessica's book? And so they were invited to this party in the officers' mess in Banka in Sumatra and they all dressed scrawny like, they made themselves the ugliest things on earth and the Japs wouldn't have a bar of them so they succeeded, they were still pretty scrawny and she talks about, I think her

36:00 weight was down to five and a half stone, my weight was down to six and a half stone, putting on weight daily. There is a book, Light Blue and Grey about the Australian Army Nursing Service and there are photographs of those Sumatran nurses in the front of it. Well to start with we left Singapore, the

36:30 Malacca Straits, you can imagine Malaysia and Sumatra comes up the Malaccan Straits in between. The ship went through the Malaccan Strait and to the top of Sumatra, hit Aceh which is at the top and turned, we had to be escorted by the Japanese Navy, we wanted to come the other way, we wanted to come to Sydney but they had an argument in West Australia and we came to Western Australia, we had to be escorted by the Japanese Navy to the top of Sumatra, then it hit the Indian Ocean and we came

37:00 straight down. And we some hours off Fremantle when we could smell it. The dust and the eucalyptus. And Jessica describes how we saw our first glimpse of Australia. She talks about how everyone was quiet, nobody said anything. Just stopped and we said something a bit later, because the Hollywood Hospital organised a reception for the nurses and we were pleased to see that.

37:30 And I said, "What's happening to us?" and Lieutenant Colonel Charles Fortune, I will never forget his name. He said, "The Red Cross are coming to pick you up at ten o'clock tomorrow." And I said, "We're going ashore." And you probably read it. He said, "There is an armed guard on the docks." And I said, "I will give you five minutes to get rid of them." And we all went ashore and a group of us found our way up to Perth and got into the Esplanade Hotel. Knocked on the door, six o'clock closing, nine o'clock at night

38:00 and they gave us a great feed and how we ever got back to the ship, I have no idea. But you wouldn't credit it would you? We had been away four years and they were going to keep us on the ship in the docks at Fremantle until ten o'clock the next morning! Anyway we got up the next morning, did you read what I wrote about the next day? What Diggott said to that girl?

38:30 "There is a war on. Don't you know there is a war on?"

Well how did your bodies which had lost so much weight, how did they take to drinking alcohol and…?

Didn't. We couldn't handle two bottles of beer a day and we weren't supposed to and it was silly. We couldn't handle the food either.

39:00 Our stomachs had all shrunk and you would eat something, and if you ate too much you would vomit it all back up. It was really worse I think for a while, than being there. The war finished in August and it was not until October the 25th, three months later I got home and I was still only about ten stone. And it takes a while.

39:30 And it doesn't come back properly either, it comes back as fat, and you have got to exercise to make it muscular again. At least that was my experience. I mean I have been pretty lucky, I have a good set of genes I think, most of my family go to about, ninety, ninety-three and die in their sleep, which is a good way to go.

40:00 How do you recover? It takes a long while and I reckon it took, I got credit at the university for that work, but I really couldn't take advantage of it because I was just not fit enough, I had to go once a month to the repat; had a place up in one of the buildings in North Terrace, for vitamin B injections into my behind. Still had, in fact

40:30 I still had problems with my heart for quite a while from the dry beriberi. But that's just completely cleared up. I remember once there was a lavatory up the back of the physics department, I remember once, I thought I was going to die, it just stopped. Sometimes it used to miss a beat, and it went on and on, I reckon about ten seconds.

41:00 And then it went bang and it just about knocked my head off with the pulse that came up through my carotid artery. It has never done it since. It will do it again one day and wont start again.

Tape 12

00:30 **I just want to go back to the camp for a second and ask about Lieutenant Soni, is it?**

Soni, yeah.

After the war he was actually on trial for war crimes, what atrocities did you see whilst you were there at the camp?

Well there were brutal beatings.

01:00 At the end of the war some of the Dutch stole some sacred carp out of their sacred pond and ate them. They were executed. There were people outside the camp, got through the wire outside dapa tega, who were executed. Summarily executed. He, I have seen him,

01:30 beat people up ferociously. He was mad, there were several of them who were mad and they were executed. I think someone worse that Soni even, was Sergeant Major Mori who appears in Vanderpost's book, Seed and the Sower, and claims to have spoken to Mori after the war when he was in

02:00 gaol and says, "If it were left to me I would send you back to your family in Japan." And he gives Soni and Mori different names. If you read any of that letter that Poidevin wrote to me about The Seed and the Sower. Poidevin says, "Why doesn't he call Indonesia, Indonesia and Insidlada?" And Soni is called something else and

02:30 Mori is called something else; they were the names of proper people. The brutality, well it was just universal, there would be search parties coming in to form work parades and he would just wander over and belt somebody for the sake of doing it. The fellow was a lunatic.

03:00 As I say his crimes were worse I think than Mori who was really insane because he was better educated and he should have been able to better control himself. Did you ever see the film Merry Christmas Mister Lawrence? That's supposed to have been about the Christmas in Gludock where

03:30 we were interned, at one stage and Laurens Vanderpost was there and Mister Lawrence is a corruption of Lawrence of Java, like Lawrence of Arabia, Lawrence of Java. He was very egomaniacal. And he then was with us in Jamai camp in Bandung

04:00 when we were required by the Japanese to declare to them our pre-war professions because they wanted to get people with engineering skills to go and work on these docks, which they eventually did. Well we refused to do, and there was a parade and Soni and Mori and Kasiama, the three of them there, we were made

04:30 to stand there something like forty-eight hours without any food or water or anything. In the sun, day and night. Had to kneel down with bamboos behind and if you want to have a horrible experience put a bit of bamboo back of your knees and kneel down on it, it is horrifying, it is horrible. But in The Seed

and the Sower he tells the story of how this fellow Lawrence,

05:00 and there is three personas, different personas of Laurens Vanderpost; how to break the spell he, when Soni was coming along the line stepped forward, grabbed Soni and kissed him. Now I am here to tell you, that if that happened 'phht', his head would have been off that quick. Then another of the persona is buried in a sandpit,

05:30 well this is all in the film, Merry Christmas Mister Lawrence. Well Les Poidevin, who was a medico, he was there twenty-four hours or something, but you couldn't possibly live more than an hour or two. Fully immersed except for his head. And the fellow who was playing him had hair on his head, well none of us had any hair on our head, we had to pass the pinch test, and it was good not to have any hair because

06:00 we were lousy, we couldn't get rid of lice. We couldn't get rid of scabies, so it was good not to have any hair, well to be bald there, buried in sand up to your neck. Well you asked about Soni, that was the sort of caper that Soni could get up to. I understand that he was even worse, because he did something towards the end of the war and he was in disgrace and they put him in charge of a women's and children's

06:30 internment camp, which was the ultimate. At least he was with soldiers when he was with us. He was executed, I am not sure whether it was hanging or shooting, in July of 1946.

And when his trial came up how closely did you watch it?

Didn't, I was home. I made depositions to, there was a major

07:00 something or other, I couldn't possibly remember his name. And when it was all typed up and I signed it, it was brought to my parents' house where I was living, by Captain Henry Earnest Wesley Smith who became the guidance officer for ex-servicemen at the University of Adelaide. And helped us a lot in finding our way into the university and helped us in a lot of

07:30 ways, for example we never enrolled on time because there were big queues outside the front office and I refuse to join any queues any more, so we would just go into the class, sign our name on the class list and the late fee expiation thing would be sent to Captain Harry Smith and he would fix it up for us. We enrolled in the subjects we wanted to do. So having signed the thing,

08:00 part of it would have gone to the trial, that would have been December 45, so part of it would have gone to the trial in Jakarta, and part would have gone to Tokyo War Crimes thing, I think that was 1947, Soni. Yet when we

08:30 left finally Bandung to come back to Cycle Camp to work on the docks, Mori had a great big motorbike with a side car and he came to farewell us and with Kasiama, these brutes of fellows ,they were very friendly and wanted to shake hands, the Japanese are very funny people. And he was giving people cigarettes; anyway he got topped.

09:00 Had you heard of Soni before?

Well now moving back to your coming home and you described before your first sights of Australia, what was it like arriving back in Adelaide?

Well the ship didn't come to Adelaide after Perth; we were a bit annoyed about it. There weren't many South Australians,

09:30 went from Perth right around through the Great Australian Bight, and we managed to get a hold of some of the fire water Corio Whisky, which kept us warm coming through the Bight. We came into, through – what is it called in Melbourne? Not the heads, that is Sydney, but

10:00 there is a gap in the cliffs and you come into Port Phillip Bay [The Rip]. Came into Port Phillip Bay and up Port Phillip Bay and landed about eight o'clock at night I think and were taken to Heidelberg Hospital, where we were virtually still imprisoned, and I think we were there about five days, I have given the days where I have written. But I went to them finally, and said, "You will get us on the train to

10:30 Adelaide tonight or we will jump the train!" And we would have, about half a dozen South Australians could have jumped the train, get on the 'rattler' anyway, you know the carriage, under the thing. We turned up at the crossing at Wavell, just next to the Wavell showground and there were then buses that took us into the Wavell Showgrounds, where the army had a reception area

11:00 and the parents were there and my brother and sister, it was pretty moving. Hadn't seen people for a long while. And they hadn't heard all that long before, that my brother who was a prisoner had died, because the Japs didn't tell anybody, they found out after the war was over and he had died something like

11:30 fifteen, sixteen months before. It was, relatives had been told, I believe, not to ask us about it and they didn't. The people who did ask things we thought were pretty nosy anyway.

12:00 Especially at that time, and would have been unable to comprehend. I mean things have been written in

that Lifelong Captives about prisoners of war of the Japanese experienced conditions that were almost unbelievable today and that's true I believe. And I quoted for you that Panoite thing. That, "When we get together we say we wouldn't want to do it again, but we wouldn't have missed it, and we can't tell

12:30 anybody about it because they know nothing about it." I think he says, "Not that you want nobody to know nothing." It is very curious English, because we are unique. That was certainly the situation and I couldn't possibly have done anything like we're doing today, then.

13:00 In fact things sink so deep that I can hardly believe it happened. But it bloody well did I tell you. And we are unique. So what was it like coming home? It was unreal and I sought, especially after Felix's intellectual stimulation

13:30 my other brother Brian took me to Mary Martin's Bookshop, you know Mary Martin's Bookshop? It used to be in Coromandel Place off Grenfell Street. And it was a very selective place for people like judges, John Bray you know, the chancellor and chief justice of the university. Max Harris, Brian Medlin,

14:00 Neil Lovett, Lex Cohen. Anyway Brian took me there and that was really good, it was intellectually stimulating. I had to go and see family and my mother has a very extended family, that was weird and one of them was very nosy, and when I refused to

14:30 answer his questions he wanted to play me chess, he was the champion chess player in Broken Hill and I beat him twice and he didn't want to play any more. It was odd, but it was great to get back to the university when it started. And they asked me on demobilisation what I wanted to do and I said I wanted to get back to university

15:00 and switch from engineering to mathematics and physics because of Felix. So I had to do an IQ [Intelligence Quotient] test, and IQ tests are silly things at the best of times, but I passed that. Then as I say Louise, it was great to be at the university, and we were six to eight years older,

15:30 I was eight years older than my wife, and we turned the place upside down, we doubled the student population. We revolutionised student politics, we took control of everything, we were used to being bossy. And we brought the young kids along, I think. But they used to have three terms it is now two semesters and they used to have examinations

16:00 after the 'swot vac' [study vacation], it was called the 'swot vac' between, well we refused to do the examinations. We said, "We will do them if you hold them on the last Friday or Saturday of term, we will do them then. But if you expect us to use the break as a so-called 'swot vac' we're not going to do it." And we used to go all over the place, Sydney, Melbourne, Victor Harbour, as I say chasing girls, but in my day you couldn't catch any girls. I don't know whether you can catch them now or not,

16:30 but you couldn't then. It was a very different. And girls then were, have I said anything about the first review after the war, I stage managed? The Seat of your Pants, it was a skit on The Skin of your Teeth. The Oliviers [actors Laurence Olivier and his wife Vivienne Leigh] were here, I was the stage manger and my wife was the lead female comic.

17:00 And it was only after we were married that I explained to her what all of these jokes were, she had no idea. And her friends had no idea, I am going to tell you one, I put it on a video recently. It is an on track between two parts of the review, curtain comes down, blackout, there is a table set there, reception desk for the hotel. Did, my wife-to-be, wasn't even to-be then,

17:30 but the woman I married was the receptionist, the fellow came on, the comic, he said, "I'd like a room for the night." "Yes sir. Here you go." Light out, lights up and comes in the next morning to hand in the key and pay his bill and he said, "It was a very nice room, room sixty-nine." She says, "I beg your pardon? I gave you room sixty-eight." "No, room sixty-nine." See she didn't even know, never heard of 'soxi en neuf'.

18:00 "No," she said, " I gave you sixty-eight." "Sixty-nine." "But there is a woman in there." And he said, "Yeah I know." And she said, "But she is dead." And he said, "My God, I thought she was English!" You wouldn't get a twenty-year-old now who didn't know exactly what that was all about. And as I say, there were all sorts of things like that. And as I say we had to be married before I could tell her what dirty jokes she was doing.

18:30 **You said before that family and the public were told not to mention your experience as a POW, what were they told about your experiences?**

I am not sure that they were told anything. I have got some stuff here; they were told by telegram that my brother and I were missing, then

19:00 they were told that we were missing, believed prisoner. And then after about two years the Japanese released the names and they were told that we were prisoners somewhere in Java. And at the end of the war they were told that we had been recovered in Java, now that would have been after the 23rd of September a good five weeks after

19:30 the war finished on the 15th of August. I don't think anybody came and said anything to them apart from these telegrams, which were pretty crude. "Dear Mr Medlin, your son, Lieutenant EH Medlin, is a

prisoner of war in Java. Yours sincerely, Joe Blow." It was a different world.

And your family were told about Arthur's death before you got home,

Before I got home, yes.

20:00 **When you got home did you discuss any of those last days or times with Arthur?**

Nothing no, it is hard to believe isn't it?

Did you ever go through a mourning period?

No.

20:30 You will grieve of course but you don't have to make an institution out of grieving, I don't think. I think it was Kathy who asked me when you were here before, what did your father ever tell you about the war, and I answered, nothing, much the same as I didn't tell my kids.

21:00 I think it is a bit strange though, it seems to me that my grandchildren and children of that age are more interested in Anzac Day, Anzac Cove, the Ballarat memorial that has just been opened to prisoners. And I think probably

21:30 we're starting to get a bit more sense about all of these things. You have heard what I said about the Vietnam thing. When you think five hundred Australians killed in Vietnam and yet we killed a thousand Japanese in Timor, the Vietnam thing was really just a bit of a romp. So I think I don't know whether it is cyclic or whether it is

22:00 oscillatory or what it is. I don't think it pays to tell too much to people about wars. Wars stink, and I think I said to you when you were first here, if Johnny Howard is so keen on war why didn't he go to Vietnam, he is just the right age to have gone to Vietnam, but the only one of them who was in Vietnam is

22:30 Tim Fisher. [Foreign Minister] Alexander Downer's father was a Japanese prisoner of war in Changi. Do you think it is funny not to talk about it? Or unusual or?

I can't really say.

I said earlier to Kathy I couldn't talk like I have today

23:00 back then, couldn't possibly.

Well you did speak about going back into university and setting yourself on a new career path and a new vocation. What parts of civilian life were becoming a bit difficult?

None. Of civilian life difficult? Well

23:30 I have done a lot of things in this world; the things that I have found to be frustrating have been dealing with Veterans' Affairs. You will have read that after I retired, we never asked them for anything, and when things started to happen and things had been happening to me, because we hadn't asked them for anything they seem to think

24:00 oh well they had gotten rid of us. So as I say, I can prove I have documentary evidence in there, that I have been offered jobs in Jakarta funded by the World Bank to teach physics and teach physicists in Jakarta in about 1987, that was seventeen years ago, it was either five or six thousand US a month tax free. And I simply couldn't do it and I couldn't do it because Indonesian academics

24:30 have to take two or three jobs to survive, so they do a bit here and there and somewhere else, sell examination papers to students and they are making money. Now if you go there, as an expatriate you have to be there all of the time. Now I couldn't possibly, I wasn't fit enough to have been able to do it. Because you mightn't believe it but university

25:00 lecturing is a very demanding exercise and kids get pretty smart and you have got to keep ahead of them. And it really is, it is quite demanding, and if you want to do it honourably, it is hard work. Anyway I could prove that I couldn't accept the invitation to do that. Therefore I had been denied remunerative employment on account of my war caused disabilities. And that was one of the sections of the Veterans'

25:30 Entitlement Act, that provided you had a hundred per cent disability you were entitled to TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pension]. Well they knocked me back and I took them to the Veterans' Review Board and I fought my own case and I won it. But the only other surviving member or South Australian member of our unit was worse off than me but he had been a market gardener at Murray Bridge he was not as

26:00 able to mount his own case, it was mounted by the Murray Bridge branch of the RSL [Returned & services League], he should have been TPI, totally permanently incapacitated, well before me, and he has still not got it. and he has just given up the fight. That was the part of civilian life that I found difficult and especially difficult because that was the very part that they

26:30 should have been so very willing to protect us when things did go wrong. But my dealings with people around the university, and universities both locally, nationally, and internationally have been superb.

You also mentioned earlier about seeking compensation and your rights being signed away without consultation, how did you react to that day when Menzies signed?

At that time?

27:00 Well I have loathed and abominated Robert Gordon Menzies ever since I ever knew him. Nice story told him about him, the honourable member for East Sydney was a fellow called Eddie Ward who was a pretty left wing Labor party member of the parliament. Menzies in the First War had been a colonel in the army and I heard actually on the radio once in parliament Eddie Ward saying, "The Honourable Prime Minister had a brilliant military career cut short by the war."

27:30 Now he just got out of it, when he, in 1952, see we were crawling to Japan, why were we crawling to Japan? Japan was being reorganised by the Americans, it looked to be a market for wheat and wool and stuff and we were well intent on establishing good relations. So it was just signed away, the San Francisco

28:00 Peace Treaty, the Americans and Australians absolved the Japanese from any blame. My argument was, as you might have read, that by absolving the Japanese of any blame the responsibility devolved on the Australian Federal Parliament to pay the compensation, as they did finally.

Well when monetary compensation

28:30 **was becoming difficult to attain, what other compensation did you seek?**

I said that every surviving Japanese prisoner of war should be TPI and that quantum, it wasn't the money, I did say that really the money is an earnest of integrity, to hell with the money. I have got a lot more money than twenty-five

29:00 thousand dollars, I gave it to my kids anyway. I don't need it. The other compensation was as I say, that every surviving Jap POW should be TPI, you couldn't go through that and not be affected, and further that the widows of all Jap POWs and internees, the surviving widows

29:30 of all of those people should be made war widows. That's another thing; a lot of widows have a terrible fight to get war widows' privileges like a 'gold card' and complete and free medical and pharmaceutical attention. I know a couple of widows now who can't get it, it is dreadful.

30:00 And if you try and remember, well the agony that they went through while we were locked up and they didn't know where the hell where we were, alive or dead or what. And a lot of ex-Japanese POWs went a bit loopy, that's why I used to quiz Kathy about it, and they used to beat their wives up.

30:30 What makes men beat up women I don't know either. There has been quite a lot of it, and now these Aborigines beating up their women and kids. Anyway there was a lot of that. So and I have heard widows who are not officially war widows talking about that. And for a long while I used to have nightmares, I don't have them

31:00 any more, perhaps I will have one tonight. Thank you, they are a bit unfunny when you're right back there and, that's rough on wives.

Can I ask what your nightmares are?

About Japs, prison camps, being

31:30 on a ship, it is frustration, they are frustration types of dreams. You're on a ship and it is being sunk and you can't do anything about it and you're just frustrated. I am no expert on the theory of dreams but I think we all have frustration dreams of some sort or another,

32:00 but if you have had experiences that are a bit unusual then they become a bit frightening. The trouble with the damn things is you can't wake up, I hope I don't have one tonight because when my wife was still alive she could wake me up. Yeah.

Well can I just start to look at a few things in reflection, I would just like to ask you

32:30 **when you were discharged from the army, was there anything about the army that you missed?**

Missed? I was very pleased to get out of it, I tell you. We were all offered places to stay on as commissioned officers in the army; well I was fed up with the army.

33:00 You have heard me talk about my ideas on leadership and I wouldn't care to be in a peacetime army lead by people like Blamey. I don't even care for [General] Cosgrove, the way Cosgrove sucked up to John Howard the other day, army people should keep right out of politics. Increasingly the Australian Army is being involved in politics and for Cosgrove to

33:30 criticise, what was his name? Keeley? The fellow who spoke out about our involvement in Vietnam. Kelty, Kilty [Head of the Australian Federal Police, Mick Kelty]? Anyway for Cosgrove to enter that

argument, that's the sort of thing the involvement of the army in politics, when I was in the army you were supposed to be right out if it, but I believe during the Second World

34:00 War the army started to get itself more and more involved in politics. Blamey, I have said before, with Curtin. They refused to get those POWs out of Sandakan, 'Project Kingfisher'. No, I didn't miss anything, pleased to be rid of it.

Well then can I ask how did the army change you?

34:30 Change me? Well I went from being a youth to a man, in fact I wrote to my parents, "Don't expect the youth Harry home. I really am a different fellow from when you last saw me." But if you take your responsibility seriously, it is character building.

35:00 I liked the, I think I have written about it, I liked the comradeship in the army. I liked the notion of loyalty, loyalty to your colleagues, willingness to sacrifice on behalf of others. The mateship of the army which is, and has been since the early days of the settling of Australia, I think.

35:30 I hope it made me a better person and perhaps less selfish than I might have been, had I never been in it. I don't know, it is hard to judge yourself. Stronger person than I was. Not physically, well physically I was too, physically now, I am a bit of a scrap heap.

36:00 How did it change me? Hard to tell you had better tell me.

Well what was your proudest moment during the war?

Proudest.

36:30 I don't know that I ever thought of it in those terms. Pride you know is one of the seven deadly sins, and I have had satisfaction through being in the army, but I don't know that I ever thought of it as, I don't think I,

37:00 if I put my medals on Anzac Day, I do it because I feel it is a duty, I don't feel particularly proud, I think I have got more of what might be called pride out of my university work.

And how would you like the 8th Division to be remembered?

37:30 Well I think what's happened in Ballarat, I was one of those who contributed of course to the erecting of that structure there, I wasn't able to get to the opening but Bill Schmidt who is the patron in chief of the ex-prisoner of war association took a photograph of that part of the panel that shows

38:00 Medlin AJ and Medlin EH. I think people should understand the sacrifices that were made. That doesn't mean that you require adulation, I mean if I were given the choice initially, I would have preferred not to have made those sacrifices.

38:30 But they need to be understood and it does need to be understand as I wrote in one of those papers to you, what happened to the 8th Division was the greatest disaster ever to have happened ever, in Australian history, and it is true. It is much greater than the First Fleet and the settling of this country, there has never been anything else like it. Greater disasters have happened in Russia of course with the slaughtering of the Slovaks

39:00 by Stalin. But nothing like it has ever happened here. And an awareness of the brutality of war and an awareness of the dangers of interfering in other peoples countries is something people I would like to think might be learnt out of the tragedy of the 8th Division.

39:30 But it doesn't seem that we will learn. We interfere in Afghanistan, we're interfering in Iraq. And if 'dubya' Bush has his way, he will interfere in Iran.

Will this leads me to my next question which is what advice would you leave for future generations?

40:00 Well I try to have my kids and my grandchildren understand that societies and countries are different. I mean your background country Italy, is different to mine. We need to comprehend that Italy and Germany were principality states until as recently as 1970, we need to comprehend that African nations are based on tribalism, as is New Guinea.

40:30 We need to comprehend that the problems in the Middle East and the Near East are really nothing to do with religion. If you understand history those ethnic problems have been going on for millennia, way before Christ, way before Buddha, people now with this fight going on in Afghanistan between Shiites and the others,

41:00 they are just labels that they hang their ethnic differences onto. I think [UN Secretary General] Kofi Annan is right to try and get people to comprehend that. When I was first invited to be a speaker, there is a Probus Club, ever heard of Probus? It is like Lions and those other things. Well I had no idea who Probus was, so I looked up my Scientific America and I found Marcus Aurelius Probus,

41:30 head of the Holy Roman Empire, way before Christ, six centuries before Christ. He came from what is now part of the Near East on the Adriatic, Yugoslavia, which Tito held together uniquely for the first time ever in human

42:00 history.

INTERVIEW ENDS