Australians at War Film Archive

Ernest Holden (Ernie) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 4th March 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1504

Tape 1

00:36 **Give us a brief summary of the main points of your life.**

I can remember growing up around Paddington and Surry Hills with my real parents Gene and my father Ernest. We lived upstairs in a little room and everything.

01:00 I can remember tenors singing on the radio in those days. To get to it we had to go up a fire escape at the back. Gradually, as I grew up, I think my mother and father separated. My mother worked at a restaurant in Surry Hills. She used to take me there. I was born in '32 so this would have been about 1934 and it was the Depression years. She worked in a restaurant.

01:30 After a while the proprietor said to her, "You have to do something about Ernie because you're upsetting the people coming for meals here. He's running up and down everywhere." So my mother found a home for me, where I was going to stay with other children. I went there for a couple of years where I met a lot of children that I still know now. Then

02:00 a couple, Mr and Mrs Holden, came down to the home. Somehow they found out about me and they wanted to adopt a child and they had two children already, Ethel and Alan. Somewhere along the line they lost a child and Mum wanted another child and they saw me and thought what a nice little person I was. Little did they know much about me though. So after a while they said to my real mother, "Can we adopt Ernie?" My mother said, "No, I'm gonna look after

02:30 him later." After a while they said to my real mother, "We can give Ernie a good life because we're better off. We can school him okay and put nice clothes on him." Eventually my mother said, "Well, for a trial you can take him home to Normanhurst." So I went home to Normanhurst. My mother and father used to come and see me about once a month. Then after about a year or so Mr and Mrs Holden said to my mother,

03:00 "I think you'd better stop seeing Ernie because every time you go home he's all upset." So from then on I never saw my parents again. In 1939 my real father came to Normanhurst in his uniform to say goodbye to me. He was going to war. At that time I was only 7 or 8 and didn't understand what was going on. I can remember his going down the street at Normanhurst in his uniform ready to go to Palestine and everything. Never saw him again.

03:30 I went to Normanhurst Public School. In those days I had no shoes on. Somehow a lot of kids didn't have shoes on when they went to school. I remember all the war years because we used to help the teachers put up brown paper on the windows in case the Japanese bombed, the glass wouldn't get thrown everywhere. We used to have the sirens going once a day or week just for trials.

04:00 The whole of the Stanley Street, my street and Heaven Avenue in Normanhurst, we all put in to help build a bunker about 10–12 feet deep. But the war finished and we never got round to finishing it. I can remember the nearest the Japanese coming, my sister woke me up in the middle of the night, the sirens were going, and she said, "Are you all right Ernie?" It turned out that was the night the Japanese bombed Sydney Harbour and the

04:30 sirens were going everywhere. I didn't think much about it. Then I used to go on trips to Manly with mother and father and the zoo and everything. The Queen Mary was in the harbour in grey colours to take troops to England and also the Queen Elizabeth, I saw it there. It was all painted grey to take troops to England. Mum and Dad used to take me for runs out to Richmond aerodrome and in those days you had to

05:00 drive over 60 miles and hour not under, over, so that with the cameras, there's not much chance you could take photos of the aerodrome, if you were a Japanese spy. I can remember seeing Kittyhawks [short range fighter] take off there and Lockheed Hudsons [medium bomber]. They had full size rubber Lockheed Hudsons there. So that if the Japanese came over they'd bomb these rubber Hudsons and also they had plywood aeroplanes lying on the ground near the railway lines, which is still there, so that if the

05:30 Japanese were flying over they'd think they were real aeroplanes and waste their time and drop bombs on the plywood.

Let's step forward a bit more quickly through the other parts of your life. Give me more of a summary as you went on.

After I left Normanhurst Public School, I went to Hornsby Tech [College of Technology] on the Pacific Highway. I did about 3 years there.

06:00 After I finished there I went to Eastwood Post Office delivering telegrams. I loved that, going around on the pushbike everywhere. My parents thought it was a dead-end job and they decided I was gonna be a printer because I was recommended to be a printer compositor. So I ended up being a compositor in the printing trade. I wasn't real wrapped in it. I wanted to do electrical things so that was it. I did that and that was 3 years

06:30 before I decided to join up K Force [Special reserve force] force to go to Korea. What do you wanna do now?

Say you went to Korea and bring me through the rest of your life up till now.

Okay. About 1951 National Service was in and I said to everybody, "If I get called up for National Service I'll run away up the country. I'm not going in the army." About a year later I ended up joining K Force

07:00 Korea, which switched everything around. Saw the ad [advertisement] in the Sydney Morning Herald, posted it in and I was accepted after the medical to go to Korea. So I went to Marrickville and from there down to train to Wagga and Kapooka, where I did 13 weeks basic training at Kapooka. Then I went back up to Ingleburn to do a couple of months training before flying to Japan on the 5th December 1952. In Japan I did training

07:30 for 5 months including snow training up at a place called Hara Mura. Then in April I went on the New Australia, the liner, to Korea and there we went to a camp outside Pusan and then travelled by train up to Camp Casey up near the front line. Then I was posted to the 2nd Battalion [Royal Australian Regiment] and went up to the front line in Korea, where I was there

08:00 only 3½ weeks. After I was injured in Korea, I went back to Japan for one month to have operations and then they flew me back to Australia where I was in Concord [Hospital] for approximately three months. Then in September or October '53, I came out of the army and after doing a two week trip on a Vespa motor scooter around eastern Australia I went back and finished my apprenticeship.

08:30 **After that you got married? Where did you go from there?**

In '57 we got married and Beverly and me had 6 children. We lived up around Hornsby and Katoomba for 12 months. Then eventually we got a war service home, which is this one here at St Marys and we've been here 44 years.

09:00 (BREAK)

09:30 **Tell us about some of the things you can remember from your earliest times in Surry Hills.**

The main thing I can remember was I always used to like cats. My real mother had a basket of clothes and a black and white pussycat jumped on the clothes and made marks. My mother belted the cat and I roused on her. I said, "You don't belt cats."

10:00 **What sort of house were you living in? What was the domestic arrangement there?**

What I can remember of it was upstairs in an apartment. About one room. To get to it you had to climb like a fire escape. It was the only way. I believe one of my aunties lived in a room next to it in younger years. Everybody was pretty poor, this was '34, Depression years and I don't know where my father was then. I can't remember.

10:30 **Don't stop yourself if you want to keep going.**

Then I just remember playing with children down in the lane. No scooters or anything then. Just playing with kids. Then eventually being taken up to the home

11:00 at Thornleigh. I remember crying like anything and Mum had to come and pick me up and take me back home to Surry Hills. Then they took me back and I settled down for a while. I was home at Thornleigh for 2 years. I enjoyed it.

Why were you taken to Thornleigh?

My mother just didn't have the money to look after me and after she used to take me to the restaurant

11:30 and I used to play up there. I was only a two year old. The proprietor was probably losing patronage because I was running up and down. Couldn't have people with a child running up and down and annoying the people everywhere. So he said, "You've gotta do something with Ernie," so that's where

somehow Mum got hold of the people to take me to the home at Thornleigh to be looked after while she worked at the restaurant. I think she used to send money up to pay for me.

12:00 At the home in Thornleigh I got to know people everywhere. The Salvation Army used to come on every Sunday to sing and bang the tambourine and sing away. Then we used to go to the community hall at Thornleigh of a Sunday too and have a sing song. I can't remember what religion it was. I don't know. After a while Mr and

12:30 Mrs Holden came to see me. They liked me so much and they asked my mother could they adopt me. My mother said, "No, I'm gonna have Ernie back again later as soon as I can afford it." After a while Mr and Mrs Holden pressured her and said, "We can give Ernie a good life. He can grow up with good clothes and everything and good schooling. Education. We've got a brother and daughter," they were 20 years older than me, "That can guide him too."

13:00 Eventually mother said, "All right, you can adopt him as long as I come and see Ernie every now and then." For a couple of years my mother used to come and see me and then after a while Mr and Mrs Holden said, "You're upsetting Ernie when you come. He's upset after you go. I think it's a good idea if you don't see him any more." My real mother agreed to that and I just grew up in Normanhurst going to Normanhurst Public School. Meeting a lot of kids.

13:30 That was just near the end of the war years. Eventually I went to Hornsby Tech. I was good at woodwork, not maths, and metalwork, I was good at those kind of things. The war finished on 15th of August 1945. I can remember in the school yards down the back was the train shed, and all the steam trains sounded

14:00 all their whistles and blew everything. We wondered what was going on. Someone said, "The war's finished." That was it. After finishing 3 years there, I went and worked at Eastwood Post Office for 15 months, riding around on a pushbike delivering telegrams everywhere. Some of them were death telegrams and it was sad seeing people open the telegram to find out

14:30 someone had died, cos not many people had a telephone.

When you were in the home and Mr and Mrs Holden were gonna adopt you, were you old enough to have feelings about what was happening?

No, I can't remember how I felt about it. I just was told that I got upset and all that. I can't remember getting upset. Not that part.

15:00 **What were the other children in the home for?**

They were probably in the same boat as me. Families had to go to work and the parents couldn't look after them. Some may be orphans. They had no parents or something. Something had gone wrong. Maybe their parents had died in the war overseas. I don't know, but there could be 20 at a time

15:30 in the house at Thornleigh.

Were you well cared for there?

Yes. I was looked after. 'Military hospital Jones', that was her name. She looked after us. The only thing I didn't like was the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s running around the house all the time. There'd be messes on the lounges and everything. It was something you got used to as a kid.

What about the Holdens? What do you remember

16:00 **of growing up there?**

It was a terrific generation gap because they were more or less 40 years older than me and they had a lot of old ideas. I was young and I was a bit of a rebel and caused a lot of problems running around and all my mates and getting into strife and getting drunk once with a mate down the street. When we was about 15, a mate of mine that lived in

16:30 Normanhurst, one Saturday afternoon he came to me. I said, "What have you got in the paper bag?" He said, "I've got a bottle of rum. I got it off my father." I said, "What are you gonna do?" He said, "I'm gonna drink it. We'll go down the bush and drink it." So we went down the bush at Normanhurst and sat on a rock. It was a summer's day, had a swig of it. Ron a couple of moments said, "Do you feel any different?" I said, "No, I don't feel any different." So we went along and stopped again and had another swig. Eventually we finished the whole bottle of rum between us. After a while we started to trip

17:00 over rocks and logs. I said, "Jeez, it must be a hot day. We're tripping over everywhere." We didn't realise we were 'intipsicated' [intoxicated – drunk] by then. All these weird names we were using. Eventually we come to a friend's house and Ron fell over a tree and a great big piece of the tree went in his leg and we were joking, "You've got a tree growing out of your leg." As soon as the people at the house we knew, they took him straight to a doctor down at Pennant Hills where the doctor operated and took the 'log'

17:30 out. We thought it was funny. Other people saw it as serious. That was the first time I got drunk.

What was discipline like growing up in that era?

It was fairly strict. The teacher was strict. I used to get the cane now and then for playing up. I escaped the cane quite a few times. One of the times, in those days they had porcelain ink wells and I used to keep breaking

18:00 the pen nibs. Used to break them by the dozens and the teacher came up to me one day and he said, "What are you breaking the pen nibs for?" He was about to give me the cane. I said, "Because I make sparks with the pen nibs." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I make sparks." He said, "Give the class a demonstration." He thought I was being smart. So I got the pen nib and stroked it across the porcelain and little orange sparks came out and he said, "All right class, that's it." I never got the cane, because I proved I could make sparks. That was one of the things.

18:30 **Which primary school did you go to?**

Normanhurst Public School.

What was it like there? Some of the kids didn't have shoes?

I didn't at first. I suppose they were all pretty poor. There were a lot of Barnardo boys [Barnardo's Orphanage] there. They come from a home at Wahroonga and that used to have a fawn coloured shirt all the time. You could tell the Barnardo boys. We got on pretty well with them. They were boys that came out

19:00 from England and their parents were just not around any more and everything. I got on with the girls pretty well and the boys I grew up with. We got up to the usual tricks that any child gets up to.

What did you and your mates do for fun and games?

One time we went down to the Thornleigh brickyards, which is finished now, on a weekend. We used

19:30 to go down to the shed where they had gelignite or whatever it was and we used to pinch some and go down the bush at Thornleigh and try and light it to watch it blow up, but of course it didn't blow up. We started to light a fire and hide behind rocks, but it didn't blow up because apparently it has to be set off by another explosion and we would have been in trouble if we got caught pinching this gelignite, which was like butter in little packs.

20:00 **What about other entertainment things?**

Mainly movies we used to go every Friday, Saturday night to the picture theatres at Thornleigh or Hornsby. Hornsby Cabaret it was called the one we went to at Saturday night. During the week it used to be dancing and parties. Saturday night they had all the chairs set up to watch mainly old movies there as well as we used to

20:30 pick a movie at Hornsby picture show, which is still there. Pick a good movie and go to the Thornleigh one and sit with the girls up the back and roll our Jaffas [confectionary] down the aisle.

Tell me about being a child during the Second World War.

I can remember at Normanhurst Public School we helped the teachers put up strips of brown paper onto

21:00 the windows, so if the Japanese did drop some bombs the glass wouldn't break as much and hurt anyone. Also, at night time we had wardens coming around. We had to have all the blinds pulled down. The cars had hoods over their lights so no Japanese aeroplanes could see the light from cars. If somebody put their blind up, the warden would come round and say, "Pull that blind down." Everything had to be in darkness

21:30 at night time just in case the Japanese came. If they saw a big bunch of lights anywhere they'd think it was a city or a town and drop bombs. Luckily they didn't drop any here. The sirens going quite regularly for trials. Then down the back the whole street we helped build a bunker or trench. We were gonna build a roof on it. Every weekend everybody slugged away. I think we got it about 10

22:00 feet deep. But the war finished so we never ended up finishing and putting a roof on it. We didn't need it. We were gonna go in there in case there was a raid. How the whole street was gonna get in this little thing I don't know. That was one of the street projects to help on the war.

What other things did you see of the war with troops and equipment?

Quite often when I was at Hornsby Tech we used to

22:30 come home on the train. The troops trains came through there. Some of them had the Red Cross signs on them and the blinds were all pulled down and we knew there was troops in there coming down from probably Brisbane, Cairns, who were injured. Also, as the troops come in there they used to throw us pennies everywhere. We used to pick all these pennies up. They were so happy coming back all these troops. It was strange. Everybody

23:00 yelling and carrying on. The soldiers held their slouch hat out the windows. In those days the trains

used to pull all the windows up and lean out.

Did you find that exciting?

Yes. We were kids seeing soldiers throwing money at us. What kid wouldn't be happy picking up money to spend? One penny would buy a lot of lollies in those days.

Tell me again about

23:30 **the trips out past the airbase.**

Yeah. Quite a few Sundays my parents used to take me in their 1938 Vauxhall [motor car] up to Richmond aerodrome from Normanhurst. You had to drive passed at over 60 miles an hour, not under, over, in case you had a camera and were trying to take photos for spies for the Japanese. If you went slow someone would come along and told you to get

24:00 rolling along faster. In those days they had all Kittyhawks taking off. Rows of Lockheed Hudsons. We started to watch them go past and we'd turn around and come back again at 60 miles an hour and watch them. On the side of the road they had full size Lockheed Hudsons made out of rubber. They were about 50 feet wing span. That was so if the Japanese come over they'd see these rubber models and think they were the real aeroplane

24:30 and drop their bombs on it. Also they had plywood aeroplanes lying next to the railway line opposite Richmond aerodrome so that Japanese thought they were real aeroplanes if they were up 2 or 3,000 feet and dropping bombs basically on just plywood. It was so exciting seeing all these aeroplanes taking off. Mainly American pilots. Those days the Kittyhawks were taken across the aerodrome at 90 degrees to the runway there and some of them

25:00 would just get over the fence and another one, I remember a Kittyhawk went to take off and he didn't look like he was gonna make it and he slammed on the breaks and just pulled up in front of the fence next to the roadway. It was good watching these World War 11 aeroplanes everywhere.

You've always had a bit of a fascination with planes?

Oh yes. I've been interested in aeroplanes since I was a child. When plastic models come in I built plastic models before

25:30 that, ones made out of balsa. Then I went onto build control lined aeroplanes and join clubs and fly them. So I went into radio control for quite a few years flying aeroplanes, different models. Some of them had a 6 feet wingspan. They're babies to the ones now, some of them are up to 20 feet wingspan.

Your natural father was in the army?

Yes. He went to Palestine.

26:00 I've got a photo of him in Palestine. He ended up being a corporal. He was discharged in 1944, but I never saw him since the day he walked down the street in Normanhurst to go overseas in 1939.

Why did you never see him again?

Don't know. I can't answer that one. Maybe he wasn't interested in seeing me. I don't know.

Was he killed overseas?

No.

26:30 He died in 66.

Did seeing all this World War 11 happening around you influence you in the military?

No, not really, because in 1951 National Service was around and I looked like being called up within a year or so for National Service, when I got to the right age. I kept on saying to people, "I'm not

27:00 gonna go in the army. If I get called up, I'll run away. I won't hang around." Then in March 52 I saw the ad in the paper for joining K Force for Korea. I had no idea where Korea was in those days and I thought, "This looks interesting, I'm gonna join the army." I switched around completely. I sent the forms in and they gave me the medical and accepted me to join K Force Korea for 2 years contract then.

27:30 The day after Easter 52 I went and reported to Marrickville and then they sent me to Kapooka down near Wagga for 13 weeks training. I went on the train overnight with my new mates, I didn't know how I was gonna get on with them. I was only 18–19 then. At Kapooka I did 13 weeks' basic training before coming up.

28:00 **You finished school. Did you go to high school?**

No, it was Hornsby Tech College they called it.

Tell us about that.

That school, we did wood work, metal work, drawing. I used to like drawing mainly. We used to like it in the school yard to talk to the girls over the other side of the road because the girls were in the home science over

28:30 the road. That's when dates were made with them. The teachers used to come out and tell the girls to get inside the class or something. That was great. Used to travel on the train from Hornsby to Normanhurst every day, or Normanhurst to Hornsby. That's where I caught up with the soldiers throwing out pennies and everything. Made good mates at school. We used to go to the Roseville Baths to learn to swim. Then eventually it

29:00 was a bit murky, I didn't like it there, the water was very murky and eventually we ended up going to North Sydney where I learned to swim in the North Sydney Pool underneath Luna Park. We used to look at Luna Park and think how it would be nice to have some money to go in there. We had no money.

What subjects did you learn at school?

English, general math, I wasn't real good at maths, science, I used to like the experiments, but I didn't like the other side of

29:30 science; wood work, which I liked, metal work, and tech drawing. I loved tech drawing. I got on well with that.

Why did you go to the technical high school?

Because in those days that was basically the only school most kids went to. There was a high school somewhere but I don't know where that was. Most of my mates all went to Hornsby Tech cos that was the closest. There was no other high school near Normanhurst

30:00 in those days, there is now, but not in those days. I suppose that's why. We were basically just sent there.

Tell us about the girls over the road. Were there any dates?

That's an interesting thing what you said, 'dates'. All my mates lined me up with a girl called Elaine Date. They got her to write me a letter and everything and we ended up meeting each other and when I was working at Eastwood post

30:30 office, I went to the pictures one Saturday afternoon with her and when the lights went on in the interval, I looked around and her whole family was sitting behind us. So I never took her to the pictures again. Incidentally, an army mate, Laurie Date, who I met years later, it turned out to be the family remembers that happening. Laurie Date doesn't remember, but all his cousins and uncles remember sitting behind the theatre

31:00 when I was with the niece, Elaine.

So that wasn't a very successful date?

No, we were pen-friends for many years.

How long did you stay at high school?

Hornsby Tech College, three years. I did the intermediate certificate and passed that, somehow I scraped through it.

31:30 After that I went straight to Eastwood post office delivering telegrams for 15 months. We used to have fun skating up and down the road in the rain. One driver, this was in Row Street, Eastwood, we were coming down the road two of us and we were doing zigzags in the rain and a truck driver said, "What are you trying to do? Ice skating or something?" Another time I went out there to pick up telephone box monies. In those days the pennies were

32:00 in a big metal box. We used to pick them up on a bag in the front of our pushbike. One day a dog came out at me and bit me on the leg, only a little nip on the left leg. So when I went back to the post office the post master said, "We'll have to send you to Martin Place, the GPO [General Post Office] there, to have a medical test," even though it was a little nip. When I went in there the doctor said what was wrong with his report back. When I got back to the post office they said, "What did he say?" I said, "He told me I've

32:30 got 'doggabitis'." I thought that was what he said. They all laughed like anything because I had 'doggabitis'. Then after a while I got restless and I ran away from home. I had a bit of a row with my parents, with Mrs Holden and I ran away to Victoria for a few weeks. Caught the train, 10 past 2 from Central, catching the train to Nowra, every station we stopped.

33:00 Managed to get a lift to Victoria where I worked on a farm for two weeks. Cutting down chisels and help trying to milk cows, which I didn't like. Then one Saturday was recreation day for the people on the farm and they said, "Come on, we're going out shooting rabbits. You're not allowed to shoot because of your age, but you can carry the rabbits that we shoot." So we're going along, the first rabbit they shot

33:30 they said, "There you are. You can carry the rabbit." I'm carrying the rabbit by the ears and it kept on

slipping out of my hand. After a while they said, “Why are you carrying the rabbit by its ears?” I said, “Because that’s what magicians do. That’s how they pull them out of hats.” They said, “Carry him by the legs.” From then on I was carrying the rabbits by the legs and I never dropped any. Stupid me. That’s how magicians look after them. Kept on slipping out all the time. Then eventually I got on the side of the road. They said, “We can’t afford to keep you

34:00 any more.” It was a young family with three children and a dog called Tessa, that used to round all the cows up. So I left them. They gave me a bit of money. I thought, “What am I gonna do? Am I gonna keep running away from home or go home?” So I went on the side of the highway and I thought, “If a truck comes and picks me up going south, I’ll keep running away from home. If one goes north I’ll go back home.” A truck came along and picked my up going north, so I went back home after two weeks. I went back to the post office and the post

34:30 master wasn’t too happy because I’d run away from home and left him at the post office. He said, “Well, you’re due for 2 weeks’ holiday. We’ll class that as your holiday and you start up again.” So I ended up going there and finishing a couple of more months there before I ended up going in the printing trade. My parents said it was a dead end job delivering telegrams. I went in the printing trade to become a compositor. Norwood Press, 429 Kent Street, Sydney.

What age were you when you ran away from home?

35:00 15.

What were the working conditions like at the post office?

When I was there the hours were longer. While I was there the unions changed it and gave us one hour less. That was great. We were all going home one hour earlier every day. No, the conditions were terrific. I got on well.

35:30 We all had our own pushbike and if anything went wrong with it they had someone from the PMG {Post Master General’s (Department)] come round and fix them up. One thing that happened, I was the only telegram boy there, they couldn’t get any more. So at Christmas time there were so many Christmas telegrams, greeting and everything, cos no telephones, and they got a fellow to come out form the PMG from North Sydney, those that had the great big Harley Davidson red motorbike with a sidecar

36:00 and one clown to take me out delivering telegrams. He said, “No, sit on the box. Don’t bother sitting inside it.” That used to go around the corner on two wheels instead of three wheels. He laughed his head off. He thought it was so funny with me on there. He did high speeds and wheelies and everything. I’m clinging on there trying to hold on. He did it because he knew it was upsetting me. Then a week later he didn’t turn up. I said,

36:30 “What happened to him?” They said, “He had a motorbike accident.” I said, “I wonder why.” The next person to come along, I’d say he was a married man, slow, much more docile and everything. He looked after me, but it was very noisy cos you were in a side car with a roaring motor of a Harley Davidson next to you. It nearly deafened you. I did that because I was the only one in the Eastwood post office for a while.

What were you delivering?

In those days it was mainly

37:00 greetings. Happy birthday ones, anniversary and also death messages. They used to print them out on a black sheet instead of the red sheet. The telegram form in those days were white paper with read around the border. A death one was black. I can remember delivering a few death ones to families. They’d open the door and they’re read it and you could see them going white. It was a

37:30 weird feeling knowing that these people just found out someone had died. Other places, at Christmas time, it’d be really hot and you’d ask them for a drink of water and some would give you cordial. One place out on Epping Road was called, like a Mexican name on Epping Road. These people were very well off and they had these South American birds sitting up on perches inside.

38:00 Beautiful coloured birds. Worth thousands of pounds in those days. So I used to go in there and say, “Can I have a drink?” And they were very well off these people. They’d give me a drink of water and I’d think “Rats” instead of nice cordial or something. People used to give you little gifts. Push biked everywhere. I loved it. Miles out to Eastwood on Epping Highway. Sometimes I’d have 20 telegrams. It might take a few hours to go around the tracks delivering

38:30 everything. I had to give it away after 15 months cos Mum and Dad said it was a dead-end job.

What was the salary like?

I can’t remember what the wages were at the post office. No, I can’t remember. I was probably happy with it.

But your parents weren’t happy with it?

No, because it was more a dead end job. I could have learned the

39:00 Morse code and gone further, but it didn't grab me, learning Morse code. They said it was a dead end job and apparently in my report from the school it said that I'd be good as a bricklayer, which wouldn't grab me much, and a printer, so that's why they decided to take me to a place that was advertising for an apprentice in Norwood Press, 429 Kent Street, Sydney. When I went there I said, "Okay, this looks all right." I was half hearted. They said, "Do you wanna start in a week?"

39:30 I said, "Okay that'll do me." I couldn't care less. I gave my notice at the post office and started my apprenticeship. Doing the lunches first, the morning teas and I can remember all the tricks they used to play and you felt long faced and all these kind of things. One of the things they sent me to the shop for was to get the morning teas. They used to write funny things on the bits of orders. One of them was I read out, "So and so wanted a randy

40:00 tart." The girl paused and said, "Tell them we've got none till tomorrow." I was innocent. I didn't know what they were talking about.

Tape 2

00:34 **Can you tell us about a typical day working for Norwood Press?**

Norwood Press I was a compositor in the printing trade. I used to set up the type on a setting stick. One letter at a time out of a compositor's case. Then put it in a row and lock it in what they call a chase in the

01:00 printing trade. Used to ink it up on the press, put paper on it and pull the lever down and it'd print like you see in old movies, westerns where they're printing brochures and everything. That's how it was in those days. Later on they had what they call hot lead, which was on a liner type machine. They wanted me to learn that, but I got scared of the hot lead for some reason and I never went into that.

01:30 Over time all the type, instead of hand-set type it was mainly a linotype, lead type, which came out in a row about 6 inches long. I used to make up colour pages with all the little pictures. When the black was printed first, might have been yellow printed in those days, it was all printing different colours, yellow,

02:00 black, read and blue. The yellow and blue makes green. We used to have little blocks setting up. You had to register them. When you pull a proof of them it didn't match up you had to move each little block a fraction of an inch. Today it's all done on computers. It was hours and hours doing catalogues. We used to do one of the main catalogues which was for June Millinery to do hats.

02:30 We used to do brochures for a place called Wolf's in Liverpool Street. Mark Foys catalogues. I liked it in a way, but a bit boring.

Were you living in Normanhurst?

Yes, I was living in Normanhurst with Mr and Mrs Holden.

Did you take the train down?

Train every day to Town Hall Station. Walked from there

03:00 down to Kent Street, Sydney to Norwood Press. 429 Kent Street. Every day. Eventually I ended up going to tech at Ultimo at night times. One night was learning the theory of printing and the other night was doing maths and English to do with printing. In those days you weren't paid to do the tech courses at night, you just had to do it. That was it.

03:30 The apprenticeship was 5 years in those times.

How much of the apprenticeship did you do?

What happened was, I did about 2½ years before joining up to go to Korea. After I'd been to Korean War I came back and finished my apprenticeship. One of the good things that I didn't know was gonna happen, when I came back, instead of getting apprenticeship wages, because I'd been to a theatre of war, I was given full

04:00 wages, the government made the balance, instead of apprenticeship wages, which was super. So for the next 2 years or so I got full wages. I didn't plan it that way. At one stage while I was overseas in the war, the bosses at Norwood Press wanted to have my indentures cancelled because they wanted to get another apprentice. The union told them they couldn't get rid of me like that. They had to take me back because I was in a theatre of war. I didn't know all this was going

04:30 on, which was good.

Tell us about signing up.

Signing up for Korea? I just happened to see an ad in the Sydney Morning Herald. I was bored, I had no girlfriend at that time. I saw this ad, "Join K Force Korea for 2 years." I thought, "Where's Korea?" I

didn't know where Korea is. I probably got a map and found out it was near Japan. So I

05:00 Sent in the form and first of all my parents said, "No, we're not gonna sign it," because in those days, when you're under 21, you had to have your parents permission to do things. They said, "We're not going to sign it for you to go to a war." I told them, "If you don't sign, I'll join under a different name." Apparently they had a conference somewhere and decided to sign the papers cos they though if something happened to me it was better to be under my name than someone else's name. So that was it, sent the form in

05:30 and I was accepted, had a medical. Eventually the day after Easter of 1952, I went down to Marrickville where I was sworn into the army, allegiance to the Queen and everything like that. Three days later, on the Thursday night, we travelled to Wagga on the night train at half passed 10 at night. Travelled all night then, by army trucks

06:00 to Kapooka army camp, which was about 8 or 9 miles out from Wagga, where I did 13 weeks' basic training.

Tell me about the 13 weeks.

Basic training, I liked it. It was the only part where it was forced marches, we had to march 10 miles a day. I used to get blisters, but gradually, I was kind of a weakling when I went in the army.

06:30 I went home on leave in June 52, it was a long weekend, and my family was amazed at the weight. I'd put on a stone in the short time, in about 6 to 7 weeks with all the good food the army gave me. I liked it there because there we learned to fire a .303 rifle [.303 calibre rifle] with a .22 bore. I used to get top marks. Lucky I had good eyesight in those days. Gradually we went over to .303 bullets and learned to

07:00 fire Owen [light] machine guns and Bren [medium] machine guns and throw hand grenades and that was a bit dicey at first. Those hand grenades had an 8 second fuse and you had to count to about 6 or 7 before you dived down. The sergeant that was looking after you, if you dived down before that 8 seconds, he'd pull you back up and then it was close to the time the hand grenade would blow up, then he'd push you down.

07:30 After time we did all different weapons there. I loved it. On a Sunday I used to have leave and I used to go for a walk up over the hills at Wagga. I loved walking up the hills and exploring. I did two trips back home while I was there 13 weeks, to my parents. We'd leave on a Friday night on a train and get to Strathfield Saturday morning, go home and then by Sunday night back on the train

08:00 back to Wagga. I did that twice. I was offered a flight in a DC3 [small passenger plane] to Sydney, but it was gonna cost too much and I didn't fly to Sydney. I took the train once and that didn't cost too much. I can remember both trips back half my mates would be zonked. They used to sleep in the rack up on the side of the roof. Some of them would climb up there to go to sleep where the

08:30 luggage was supposed to be. They'd have fights and everything. I'd be trying to calm them down cos I very rarely ever had anything to drink. There was fighting everywhere, all the way. RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] fellows, there was an RAAF camp, I think it was Forest Hill out from Wagga. They used to travel on the train. The air force fellows, they'd be against the army and the army would be against the air force when they had too much drink. I used to

09:00 sit there and watch all this going on. I was only a young person.

Were you wearing uniform on those trips home?

Yes, always had on your uniform home on leave. I had my beret on or slouch hat and as soon as I got in the door, up in Normanhurst, I changed to civilian clothes and get on my pushbike and go for a ride up to Hornsby and go around and see all my friends and mates for the weekend before putting the uniform back on to go back. You

09:30 always had to travel with the uniform on.

Describe your uniform.

It was a khaki jacket in those days, that went to your waist and your khaki pants. We had black shoes that you wore. Never bothered to wear your boots on leave, they were too cumbersome, but black shoes. You're allowed to wear either your beret or slouch hat, and your tie, just look respectable.

10:00 I was proud of it.

In the training camp, can you describe a typical day?

A typical day was being woken up by Reveille at about half passed 5 in the morning and the march was playing over the loud speakers. I loved that. I always loved marching. My army mates would grizzle and growl and they'd turn it all off. You'd get up and have a quick shower and get dressed. Assembly out in the parade ground.

10:30 It was the middle of winter then, it was June/July. I passed out one morning and a mate of mine, Brian O'Reilly, 'Lofty', he lives just by me now, he picked me up and took me to the side, but I recovered, I was

okay. I never passed out again. Just a cold morning at Wagga. Then we'd go and have breakfast. Then parade probably at 8 o'clock in the morning and probably had to go for a march for 10 miles or something, or we'd be out on the

11:00 parade ground drilling. Left turn, right turn, whatever. We had a person I was scared of. He was called 'the Red Rooster', Corporal Hockey. I was scared of him, but he belonged to the Queens regiment in England, the Royal Fusiliers or something. He was regarded as very high up, Corporal Hockey. He taught us for 13 weeks. In the end when we finished our basic training

11:30 they were all in the pub there at army camp and he was having a drink with us. Then I looked at him and he said, "Hello Ernie, how are you?" or, "Private Holden," or whatever he said. I thought, "He's nothing to be scared of." He was just like one of us when we finished our basic training. I was scared of him when we were training cos he had a loud voice and he really, he had like a British Army officer kind of thing. A really major step into line kind of thing. I

12:00 liked it. For a while they wanted someone to paint, "Can anyone paint a sign?" I'd done painting and sign writing for a hobby at the local church. I always volunteered for everything. I said, "Yeah, okay. What do you want painted?" They said, "We want our coat of arms, black with gold in it, that's on army badges, to put out the front gate." I said, "Okay," so it was about 5 feet

12:30 long. So they sent me up the paint shop and I was doing painting there. I did the sign and when I finished up they said, "We can get you to do the signs around the place." Little signs they pushed into the ground that might say 'To Latrine', that's what they called it those days. Or, 'The Officers' Mess' and all that. So for weeks and weeks I was doing this painting at night time. My mates are all going out in the rain, training and they were grizzling because I was in the paint shop most of the time. I had a good time with it. I loved

13:00 firing the weapons. I had good eye sight and I really got high marks firing the Bren machine gun. I loved that. Throwing the hand grenades didn't worry me that much. That was it. Then we left there after 13 weeks. While I was down at Wagga too, they put me twice on picket in town. The picket in town was you wore a bayonet on your side and a truck or van

13:30 took you into Wagga and you were supposed to walk around the town, two of you together, all night to make sure it was peaceful, no army fellows playing up. I was only a little fellow, goodness knows what I'd do if someone was playing up and they bashed me first. Lucky that didn't happen. We used to have to walk around till midnight. A couple of times I went into the picture theatre and I'd say to the usher there, "Town picket," and straight away put me in a seat in the back of the theatre. I'd sit there an hour or so watching movies

14:00 for free. Then when the movie finished, or just before, you'd go out and make sure all the soldiers were behaving themselves. Midnight they put you back on a truck and took you back into town. I did that twice. I liked it, it was great. I'm glad no one picked on me, I would have been in trouble.

Tell us about the Bren machine gun.

The Bren machine gun, it was a .303 bullet and you had a magazine on the top, which held about 20 bullets. You had a spare barrel,

14:30 when the barrel got hot you unclipped it and put the second barrel in. I used to love firing that. Sometimes I was number 2 on it. Number 2 was, you laid down beside the Bren and changed the barrel and held the magazines ready for the person firing it. It was ear-splitting when you were lying on the ground and the Bren was firing its bullets. 'Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang'. That was about the speed they come out. I loved firing the Bren. I always got high marks when

15:00 the target at the end of the mound they'd put it up and I'd get very high marks. I loved it. When I went to Korea I was only a little fellow and I loved carrying the Bren machine gun on patrols, even though I was struggling with it and you had magazines in your pouch with bullets, 20 in each magazine. I just, maybe I had muscles then. It was great.

Did you have to clean the gun?

Oh yes. You had to pull it to

15:30 pieces blindfolded and put it back together. Bren machine guns might have say 12 parts or something. Owen machine gun. You had to be blindfolded and you had to put it back together in half a minute. I've forgotten how long a time. I got on all right. I loved it.

Did you have to clean your uniform?

Yeah, I learned how to wash and everything, clean. In those days your belt and gaiters you wore, you blanco-ed them in this

16:00 pastel green, it was a mixture of stuff that you used to put on with a little brush. Also you had to polish the brass on your belt and different things. You had to make a good job of that. They don't have to do that any more now. One of my mates that lived at Wagga, Roy Stockley, he's dead now, he guided me, cos he was in the Second World War too in the occupation forces. He guided me how to do things to keep me out of trouble. Army mates used to

16:30 play tricks on me everywhere, but I got on all right with them. I was the baby of them.

What kind of tricks did they play on you?

I'd rather leave that till I go to Japan. It's a lot of little ones that I know. I'd rather leave that one because I can't remember much down at Kapooka. I'd rather leave that till I go to Japan. There's a lot of little tricks they played on my in Japan.

17:00 **What happened when you finished your training?**

Then we went to Ingleburn army camp for about 12 weeks. Also for 5 weeks we went out to 5 weeks training in the bush where it was all tents and they called it Green Hill. Used to go out there. Living in tents the

17:30 whole time. That's where we did all the 20 mile marches in the national park. One day we did a 20 mile march and we ended up near Sutherland somewhere and they said, "You can break off for leave now." I ended up coming back to camp and half my army mates went into the pub at Cronulla or something. Another time I remember I got blisters and it was a Friday and the lieutenant said to me,

18:00 "All right, Private Holden, your blisters, if you'd like to make your way back to camp now, you may." I said "Okay," so I hobbled along and when I got around the corner where they couldn't see me I took my shoes and boots off and ran like a rabbit back to camp and had a shower and I was on leave before all the other ones got back to camp. Once I took my shoes off, I didn't worry about blisters.

Did you carry your pack everywhere you went?

Yes, and water bottle, it was

18:30 about a pint of water, and that had to last you all day marching. So you learn how to reserve water and not gob it all down together. It was all part of training. It still helps me today. I drink a lot. After Ingleburn, oh that's right, one of the funny incidents happened. About a

19:00 week before we went to go into Japan they took us to this big barrack at Ingleburn and said, "Right, all stand here this side. You're going one at a time and you come out the other end and you don't talk to the others out the other end." I didn't know what was going on there. When it come to my turn I went in there and there's a policeman and detective in plain clothes, sitting down and standing around, plus majors in the army. They had a table. They said, "All right Private Holden."

19:30 And they've got these papers on the table. They said, "Private Holden, have you've been in trouble with the law?" I said, "Yes, sir." The lieutenant looked, "What's he been up to?" "Tell us about it, Private Holden. What trouble have you been getting with the law?" I said, "I got on a train without a ticket and got fined 2 pounds." Well the majors nearly collapsed and the policemen said, "All right, Private Holden, you can go." What they try to do is weed out people who are criminals before they pay the money to fly them to Japan for more training.

20:00 One of my army mates, he got bugged off, but I can't mention his name. I just said in my book later, "Maybe he got on a train without a ticket too." But apparently this guy had been in the occupation forces and something had gone wrong. That was one of the funny things that happened. A mate of mine that lives at Blacktown now, Fred Speed, he was a prisoner of war in Korea,

20:30 he's given me a story where he said, "You're all as mad as two bob watches said the policeman. The policeman told me to get home after I was drunk, but I said that's all I did, so they let him go too."

Then did you go to Japan?

Yes. On the 5th December they took us on trucks to Mascot aerodrome and the plane was gonna leave at about half passed 10 at night, a Qantas

21:00 DC4 Claymaster New Guinea trader, registration VHEBN. Carries 44 passengers the DC4. My brother and son-in-law came out to the airport with their four children, Ruth and Robin and my girlfriend at that time was out there too. We got on the plane, it was running late. It started the motors at 5 to 11

21:30 and we got on the plane. I managed to get a window seat. We took off heading north. I remember the lights of Newcastle down below. About an hour later I fell asleep and woke up near Cairns somewhere looking at the sun coming up. It was beautiful. All the sunrise. While we were flying along there I suddenly had a cold feeling going over. I said, "I wonder if I'll ever come back." So I shook myself and said, "No, that's forgotten," so I just enjoyed the scenery.

22:00 We flew to Port Moresby. Before we got over the coast of New Guinea we come over a little island. Down below us on the island was about 5 miles along the island and there was a boat half out of the water. It was a boat that had been blown up or damaged when the Second World War, which was on only 7 or 8 years earlier. When we got to the coast of New Guinea down below was a B24 consolidated Liberator [heavy bomber]

22:30 lying in the water about 20 feet under the surface and it was like nothing was wrong with it. Tail, wings and everything there. Four motors still sitting on it under the water. It must have just crash-landed in

the water and was left there after 7 or 8 years. Landed at Port Moresby. At Port Moresby they took us off the plane. It was really hot there, it was in the middle of summer in the tropics. We were in our uniforms and slouch hat and everything.

23:00 I straight away headed over to look at aeroplanes while the others went to have a drink or something stronger than water. I went and talked to a Papuan who worked there. I tried to talk in Pidgin English and he was trying to talk to me. After an hour they got us back on the plane and they said, “There’s some blankets up there, you might need them before we get onto

23:30 Guam.” I was thinking, “Why would be need blankets? We’re only flying at 1,000 feet.” After the plane took off it did about 12 circuits slowly climbing, climbing, climbing and then when it got to 12,000 feet it headed north and then I realised why I got the blankets. When we went north we were just going through passes. Hills either side at 12,000 feet. That was the idea because it’s un-pressurised the DC4 and if we got cold we

24:00 pulled a blanket down. I was okay. I didn’t need a blanket. Then as we flew over the ranges you could see little huts down below us where the natives lived. Then we got near the coast of New Guinea the land went away again and we were down to 9,000 feet. That was when I saw that boat on an island off the northern coast of New Guinea. We come into Guam later in the afternoon and

24:30 landed. We were gonna stay there overnight. I can remember as the DC4 taxied in, I looked up and there’d a Boeing B17 Flying Fortress [heavy bomber]. I thought “Beauty.” I said, “There’s a B17.” They said, “It’s only an aeroplane, don’t worry about it.” I’m so excited, never seen a B17 in my life before. I never seen one since either. So we taxied in and they took us off the plane and said, “We’re going to the American barracks for the night. There’s a bus over there.”

25:00 We get on the bus and we’re running around the bus we couldn’t find the door. Eventually we found the door on the other side. We’re used to buses in Australia with the door on the left-hand side, this was on the right-hand side and the people in the bus was wondering what was going on cos we couldn’t find the entrance, it was on the other side. We got on the bus and they took us back to the barracks. Most of the men went and found somewhere to have a drink. I ended up going to an outdoor movie

25:30 and I didn’t have any money. I went to have a drink or something and all I had were penny stamps in my wallet and I didn’t have any American money to buy a drink. So I’m at the counter trying to buy a drink. I said, “Here’s penny stamps,” and an American Negro wasn’t interested in serving me. He wanted money for the drink. Two young Americans came up to me and said, “What’s the trouble, Aussie?” I said, “I’ve only got penny stamps to buy a drink with.” “We’ll buy you a drink.

26:00 What are you doing?” I said, “I’m flying to Japan tomorrow morning, I just don’t know what to do.” They said, “Come on, we’ll take you to the movies.” So they paid for me, 25 cents American, to go in the outdoor movie. The first one was a cartoon with Tweety Pie in it. The explained to me about the cat, Sylvester, trying to catch the bird. They explained it and I didn’t have the heart to tell them I’d seen it back in Australia already. I said, “Oh, okay.” After the

26:30 movie finished, about midnight they said goodbye to me. I went back to the barracks and the next morning I went to the plane. We all boarded in the dark. It was about 5 o’clock in the morning. One of the fellows didn’t turn up. Apparently he really got drunk and ended up in the wrong barracks. A couple of days later he caught up with us in Japan. He was lucky they gave him a ride on a US [United States] plane to Tokyo and then put him on a plane to our camp in Japan.

27:00 He was getting classed as AWL [Absent Without Leave]. When they heard the story of when he got drunk in the wrong camp and managed to get a lift there that they let him off. I can’t remember who it was. We left Guam and were flown over the Pacific to Japan. Late afternoon we flew over the first southern islands of Japan looking down on all the paddy fields. It’s so different to Australia. We landed at Iwakuni and from there we were taken to

27:30 a small boat to cross over to go to Kure. There the Americans gave us all sea rations. I thought they were great, I loved the sea rations. The others all had cans of American beer everywhere. I might have had lemonade, I don’t know. So we crossed there and got to Kure where we were taken on buses to camp at Hiro for the night.

28:00 I went to bed at about 11 o’clock that night in a tent, 4 of us in a tent.

What was in the sea rations?

Goodies. Chocolate and food that was kind of condensed. A lot of my mates didn’t like the sea rations, but I loved them. Bully beef or whatever it was the Americans had. It was super some of the stuff they had there. A lot of chocolate. I loved chocolate. I liked

28:30 it. It was nice food.

What did you carry in your pack?

In our pack was just I suppose some of our clothes and we had our kit bag, cos we only carried Bren machine gun magazines only when you’re going into battle training or something. I didn’t carry my bullets or anything on the plane. We got our .303 rifles the whole time on the plane to Japan.

29:00 I think we had to take the bolt out of the .303 that was the only thing. I can't remember whether I had the bolt or whether that was all put somewhere else.

Tell us about the boat trip to Hiro.

Everybody were singing and the Americans were teaching the Australians different things in singing and the Australians were probably teaching the Americans songs. They were drinking more cans of beer. It would have been a 45 minute

29:30 trip. I'm just enjoying the scenery and looking at all the aeroplanes and flying boats out in the water that used to do air sea rescue, mariners. I was wrapped in all those kind of things. You saw all the boats as we come into Kure harbour. Probably aircraft carriers and everything that were gonna go to Korea later. Probably there being services at Kure harbour. I remember it looked good. I liked the scenery. Most of them wanted to drink and I just liked to look at the

30:00 mountains and hills and different things. Seeing the Japanese coast in the distance. It was great.

What was it like being in Japan so soon after World War 2?

A lot of the buildings were still flattened. Not many multi-storey buildings there. You had a policeman stand on a corner on a pedestal and directing traffic.

30:30 Amazed me how the houses in Japan never were painted. They were all just like dark bare wood. Why they never painted them I don't know, maybe the wood was preserved the way they did it. Maybe they didn't have the money to buy paint. It was just all like dark brown houses everywhere. It was different. Looked at it. Japanese people going to the toilet in the street. Didn't worry about any soldiers going passed.

31:00 That amazed me. Just weird.

Did you ever feel frightened at that stage?

No I thought it was great. It was super. Nothing to be frightened of. It was great being in Japan. I felt proud, I was doing something useful. I can remember the first couple of nights I was on guard down at the canal. We weren't allowed to leave for 5 days because they wanted to give us lectures on

31:30 VD [venereal disease] and goodness knows what, the women of Japan and everything. I sat and listened to all this, but some of my mates used to pay for a boat at the canal and sneak out on leave and come back, pay for the little rowing boat to come back. They wouldn't wait 5 or 6 days before they went out on leave. They went out. I didn't.

Do you remember any of the songs you sang on that boat trip over?

No. Probably

32:00 just Australian songs and probably American ones. No. I can't remember any of that. I was more interested in the scenery and looking and the aeroplanes in the harbour there.

How long were you in Hiro for?

I was training in Japan close to 5 months, but on the 1st of January we went up to a place called Hara Mura up the mountains to do mountain training, in snow, for 4 weeks. That was pretty hard, cos we'd do

32:30 marches up hills. Got called out in the middle of the night to do a march pretending the enemy were attacking. I loved it. One of the things that happened was, if you went out on leave you had to get a leave pass at the gate and you had to sign the book. Also, if you wanted to, how do I put this? Today they call them condoms, I those days they were called 'French letters' and if someone wanted to

33:00 get some on leave they signed the book and went out on leave. I went down one day and I happened to go through the book and my name was on every day. My mates had put my name in. They used to play tricks with me. Up at Hara Mura we were learning to fire the American bazooka, which was called the rocket launcher in the Australian army. We had our slouch hats and we were on top of this hill and one of my army

33:30 mates, you had to take your slouch hat off while you fired the rocket. One of my army mates said, "I'll look after your slouch hat." I put it on a tree behind me and I didn't know when I fired the rocket the blast of the rocket threw my slouch hat right down the mountain side, cos the mountain side was steep. They used to play tricks everywhere with me. Weird things they used to do to me, cos I was the baby. I got on all right with it okay. Can't think of anything else at

34:00 the moment there. That was the main thing about the slouch hat.

What was the training in the snow like?

I loved it. First time I'd ever seen snow. Most of my army mates grizzled about it the whole time. Another time we were coming down the hill and I decided to slide on my pack and I had the bayonet in my side. As I was sliding down the hill somehow the bayonet hit a rock and it pushed the bayonet in my ribs.

34:30 For about 4 weeks I had a great, big bruise in my ribs., Maybe I'd cracked them, but I never reported it or anything. Gee that hurt. So from then on when I slid down hills I took my bayonet off and held it. Just marching through the snow. Then one morning we got up and the Pommies [British] were camped there at Hara Mura and they challenged us to a snow fight. We ended up beating them. We ended up yelling and screaming and they took

35:00 off, they were frightened of us. I remember that, and the hill. Got photos of that hill still. I loved the snow, it was great. The only trouble was they used to call me 'Spring Heel Jack' [fictitious Victorian-era character that terrorised London] because when I was marching I used to bob up and down. Apparently it's got something to do with I've got high arches and what happened was we had boots on that had like truck tyres on the bottom. It was all grooved.

35:30 it only used to happen to me, the snow used to build up underneath this and every now and then I'd have to stop, get my bayonet out an dig the snow off from the bottom and then I'd go along further and it'd all build up again. I was the only one. The only thing I can think of was because I was a 'Spring Heel Jack'. Somehow it mounted cos I was, I don't know. Nobody else had problems, only me. I loved the snow. It was great.

Did you camp in the snow?

Oh yeah. In tents and everything and in trenches. It was only

36:00 in Hara Mura 4 weeks and I'd say two of those weeks we had snow overnight. It was great. It was a fairy land. I loved it. My mates didn't like snow. Some of them too had come from England and they'd seen snow all their life and didn't wanna see snow any more, kind of thing.

How many in a tent?

Probably only two man tents up there. When we were back down at Hiro camp it was 4 in a tent. They were fairly big ones.

After

36:30 **the time in the snow, where did you go?**

Then we went back to Hiro for about 2 months. Then in April we, one of the things I remember, I used to love to go and see movies. One of the movies which they showed during the day was, High Noon with Gary Cooper. I went into a Japanese theatre and it was in English, but it had the subtitles underneath in Japanese. So I was fortunate

37:00 I could hear what was going on, but the Japanese in the theatre had to read what was underneath. Another time I went to see Down to Earth with Jennifer Jones. It was about a pet fox she had, that ended up falling down a well. I was amazed, it was in colour, how clear the movie was. It was like the Japanese then were copying the Americans and the lens was perfect. It was so focused, like out here it was kind of blurry, but this was

37:30 so crystal clear it must have been the good Japanese lenses they had. I never forgot that.

What else did you do to relax in Hiro?

Go down to the hobby shops and buy motors for model aeroplanes and that, while my mates used to go to the pub all the time. I used to go to the hobby shops all the time. Or go down buying gifts for people back in Australia and sending them back was the main thing. I used to go down to Kure House and have meals. It'd only cost you about 2 shillings

38:00 a meal. Go down there regularly. I used to go with some of my mates to beer halls. Christmas we even went to a beer hall and I had a photo taken with my mates and Japanese girls and I sent the photo home to my mother and she panicked. She thought I was gonna marry a Japanese girl cos in those times, 7 years after the war, the Japanese were kind of hated back here in Australia. She panicked. She thought I was gonna marry this Japanese girl. Just a picture of a girl in a beer hall.

38:30 The time I remember was New Year's Eve 1952, two of us were sitting in the beer hall, lonely, reminiscing. It was about 10 o'clock at night. He was telling me what he thought he would be doing back in Australia and I'm telling him. I'm sure it was Ronald John McCoy, got killed in Korea later, [Killed in action, 26 July 1953]. He came from Norfolk Island. He was a descendent of the McCoys from the mutiny on the Bounty'. He got killed

39:00 the last day before the truce. We were sitting there and I was telling him what I'd be doing back in Normanhurst. At 11 o'clock we ended up going back to camp. Why I can say 11 o'clock was because back in Australia it was 12 o'clock midnight. So we got in a taxi going back and all the Japanese cars then were black, and the taxi driver had been drinking. He was merry as anything. My mate sat in the front and I'm sitting in the back. The Japanese said,

39:30 "Here, you have some wine." I didn't like the look of it, I didn't wanna have some, but I think my mate had some. So I knew he was gonna be offended if we didn't drink his bottle of wine. I got the bottle of wine and tipped it all down beside the seat to empty it. Then I said, "That was beautiful." He was happy because I'd drunk all the wine. I don't know what his taxi was gonna smell like later.

Tape 3

00:33 **What happened after you poured the wine out in the taxi?**

We got back to camp and that was it of a New Year's Eve. Thinking about our friends back at Normanhurst and Hornsby, what it was like. I suppose that was it. Then we probably got leave the next day, New Year's Day and went down to Kure House.

01:00 New Year's Day was the only day the Japanese had off. I went to go to a hobby shop and it was closed and I realised it's about the only day they have a holiday in Japan. One of the interesting things was they used to call me Marconi when I was in Japan because before I left Australia,

01:30 can I go back a second? I've got an interesting story about the electrified cookhouse at Ingleburn. Do I just start to tell you the story? When I was at Ingleburn apparently someone was pinching food out of the cookhouse. So they wanted a volunteer to sleep for two nights in the cookhouse. Guess who got volunteered, me. So they put me in the cookhouse and I had a

02:00 stretcher bed to lie on. I'm lying there and thinking, "This is boring." I thought I'd go and get my radio. I had an AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] radio, 'four valve optipower' [AWA slogan]. I went back to my barracks where other three mates were, got the radio and took it back to the cookhouse. When I got back to the cookhouse I looked for a power point. No power point. I thought, "What am I gonna do now?" So I managed to find a

02:30 screwdriver and undid the plug on the radio. Those days it was only two wires, no earth ones on the plug. I undid the wires and I unscrewed the switch on the wall inside the cookhouse for the light switch and I pushed the two wires from the radio into there and as soon as I did that the radio come on, half power, in other words probably 120 volts and the other 120 volts went through the lights. So the light in the cookhouse was half dull.

03:00 The 240 was split in half. I turned the volume up and had the radio going. About an hour later one of the majors decided to come around and check the cookhouse to see if it was all right. He had a cook in tow. The cook got to the door where I was first, on the outside, and the major pushed him aside after he opened it cos he was a major he wanted to be the first in there. He put his hand around the corner to switch the light on. When he put his hand around the corner he touched the wires

03:30 and he jumped back. He looked at me with the radio going. The cook looked at me, shaking his head. The major never said a word. He stood there for a minute and walked back out. Never said a word. The cook looked at me and shaking his head. They never come back again. He must have been in shock. I call it electrified cookhouse. That was my radio.

Did you take that radio?

04:00 Yeah, I had it in the camp at Ingleburn the whole time. Before I went to Japan I took it back to Normanhurst for my parents to listen to. Before I went to Japan I bought a one valve radio at Radio House. I loved electrical things. It had two batteries to keep it going was an A battery, which was 1½ to 3 volts and

04:30 a B battery that was either 45… I bought this one valve radio in Radio House as I said. It had either 45, 67½ or 90 volt battery B pack and I bought a

05:00 spare one valve for it at Radio House. Took it with me to Japan. When I got in this 4 man tent, I set up my radio. Didn't have speakers, you only had earphones. To make it go properly I had to have an earth wire into the ground and also an aerial up. I got a great big piece of metal, pushed it into the ground, put plenty of buckets of water around it and

05:30 tied the aerial to it. The aerial I had sitting on a lump of wood up through the tent. It's a wonder someone didn't go crook about it, but no one said, this aerial wire sitting up, I was the only one to have a radio like that. I used to listen to all the Japanese music and sounds, get to know the news from the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and everything. Little one valve radio'. One day, when I went on leave in Japan, by Hiro or Kure I bought a little

06:00 radio, 4 valve RCA [Radio Corporation of America] batteries. So I used to go on marches all around and I had the radio tucked down my shirt, cos it had a speaker in it, and I used to be playing music as we were marching along everywhere. That's why I got the nickname 'Marconi'. I was lucky. It cost a lot of money, but I was single and most my mates were married and had to send money back home to their wives. I was

06:30 fairly well, off being single. That's why I bought the red radio. I used to have fun with that.

Tell me what happened at Kure House.

Kure House was more or less like a miniature Panthers [Sydney sports and entertainment complex] of

today. You could buy cheap meals there. They used to have movies on at different places, probably had a theatre there. You can play

07:00 snooker, whatever you wanna do. They probably had a beer hall thee you could dance with the Japanese girls. It was just our recreation to go there for a cheap meal or something. I didn't use to hang around there much, I used to like to go and look at the shops and buy presents. I loved the shops in Japan. They were terrific. Used to be able to bargain with a lot of them. Got on

07:30 real well.

Did you eat Japanese food at Kure House?

No, I've never been very interested in Oriental food very much. You buy western food. You could probably buy Japanese food if you wanted, but I was into western food and drank a bit of beer.

What were the Japanese shopkeepers like?

They were friendly. They knew that people were on leave from the Korean War

08:00 that we were the people that were gonna spend a lot of money cos the Japanese never had much money. All the gift shops there were rows and rows of them. It was where they made all their money from the troops cos they knew troops had plenty of money.

What could you buy from the gift shops?

Music boxes, silk scarves, cigarette lighters,

08:30 cigarette boxes cos a lot of people smoked in those days too. Just general souvenirs. The music boxes they had beautifully engraved. They had Mount Fuji on it and different parts of Japan. Everyone back in Australia, even all around the world, they loved these gifts with these beautifully embossed

09:00 cameos they call them on the top. I used to send a lot of those back over here. Silk paintings too. For about 2 shillings, I bought 2 from Kure House. They're hanging up here in another room, 2 of them. That's all they cots, 2 shillings. Less than a dollar in those days. They don't fray. Beautiful.

Did you keep those silk paintings all through the war?

09:30 I sent them home to my parents, then after a time I got them put in a frame.

Tell us about the first aid training.

First aid training, if someone got injured or anything. One of the main things happened was, you always had with you bandages and two great big safety pins. These two safety pins,

10:00 if a mate of yours was injured and he was unconscious, you were supposed to push the safety pin through their tongue and put the take through the safety pin so as you pull their tongue out and you tie it down so there's no chance of them swallowing their tongue while they're unconscious. Luckily I never had to do that. I wouldn't have liked to do that, but that was what the big safety pin was for. It was one of the main things I remember with the first aid.

10:30 **After you'd been in Hiro, what happened?**

We sailed on the shore saver liner New Australia, a day trip through the Sea of Japan through to Pusan in South Korea. This was early April 1953. I was super on this liner. I loved every bit of it. Most of them went drinking on the boat, but I just stood on the side and looked at all the boats going passed and

11:00 Merrick and Liberty [supply ships] ships and Americans waving at us, sailors, and aeroplanes flying over going on their way to Korea, especially Fairchild Packers. They had a twin boom that used to do all the deliveries from Japan. One of the Fairchild Packers [international hauliers] they used in a picture called "The Flight of the Phoenix" where they crashed in the Sahara Desert. It's been on television a few times. They ended up making one of the bombs, they fly

11:30 it out eventually just one fuselage instead of the twin one, and they fly it out. It's just a movie they made with Fairchild Packers. A lot of America planes flying, jets flying to Korea. I took notice of them all the time, straight away. At night time I went down and had a few drinks with my mates. I had the red radio. I sat it on the railing on the ship because the ship was earthed so well I was getting music from all

12:00 around the world. It was terrific with this little red radio. Then I went downstairs in a bunk somewhere and I went to sleep. I woke up late, I wanted to be up early so as to see when we come into Pusan Harbour, but I got up late. We were already at the wharf when we got there. I looked out and there was all trucks everywhere, and soldiers everywhere, and bits of ruin everywhere, because Korea then was in a mess. They got us up

12:30 to breakfast and we disembarked. They took us on trucks to Pusan to an army camp about 10 miles away, nor far from the United Nations cemetery. As we were going passed I was amazed at all the ruin everywhere. It was raining earlier. What amazed me, I saw a lady climb out of a cardboard box. That was her house, just a cardboard box. An old lady climbing out of that.

13:00 Nowhere else to live. That really set me back, the first part in Korea as we went to this army camp.

Was it cold?

No, this was April ’53. Most the snow had all finished. It wasn’t real cold. It was a little bit chilly of a morning, but not real cold. There wasn’t much rain around then when I was there in the early days. You went to this army camp about 9 miles

13:30 north of Pusan and stayed there for about 5 days. Lapping it up, in luxury cos we had American food. There was turkey every day. Ice cream. I used to get out of bed at 11 o’clock in the morning cos we didn’t have to do anything for 5 days. It was great. Super. I was really being fed up well with American turkey. It was so juicy. I’ve never tasted turkey like it, even in Australia, it’s kind of dry out here. This American turkey, it was super.

14:00 We just stayed there for 5 days and we were taken on the train to travel north for a night to Camp Casey, not far from the front line. We got off the train. As I got off the train I looked at the mountains ahead of me and the snow was just a little bit on the top. Within a couple of hours it had all gone. It’s the only snow I saw in Korea.

Tell me about that train journey.

Train journey was a strange one. As

14:30 we got on the train they told us not to go and give gifts to the children. All the Japanese children, probably their parents were not alive any more, they were like little orphans. They were putting their hands out for food. We were warned about not having a watch on our hand because they knew how to instantly get that watch off you, so they could sell it for a meal or something. They told us, “Be careful before the train. Don’t give the kids anything because they wouldn’t understand. They’d run under the train and try and get things

15:00 and they get run over.” So we were warned not to do that so we just stayed there. I had the red radio on the window sill. About 10 o’clock at night I went to sleep and the radio was on the windowsill. The next morning I woke up and the radio was gone. I more or less blamed an army fellow. But when I went back to Korea last year, July 2003,

15:30 one of my mates, John Breer that I joined the army with, he told me how on the train he was sitting opposite and he said he saw the radio there and I was going to sleep. He said Korean workers were coming through the train and they tipped forward and they looked and he said he’d got an idea that they pinched the radio later on. I was always blaming an army fellow. The next morning we just got to Camp Casey and off the train.

16:00 It was an old carriage train. We probably had blankets around us because it got cold in the middle of the night. Wasn’t a modern train anyway.

Describe arriving in Camp Casey.

Camp Casey was one part of it had all barbed wire along a little narrow air strip. The airstrip had DeHavilland Beavers and Cessna Bird Dogs [observation aircraft] all parked. They did all the

16:30 observation work and spotting over the Korean front. I can remember when they got there, after a day or so they said, “You can go and have a shower and you’ve gotta pay 10 cents at the American camp.” The Americans had their showers all set up, you paid for them. We crossed the airstrip and we had to wait while these observation aircraft took off every now and then. All barbed wire either side of the runway. We’d go and pay our 10 cents and have our shower and do any washing,

17:00 then back to the camp. You wouldn’t have another shower for a few days again. You took it in groups to pay at the American place. I can remember one thing that happened there while at Camp Casey. We were just on guard duty or something and one of the Australians, he was a bit of a villain, he was all right, but a bit of a villain and one day he was walking passed and he had little bullets in his jacket pocket and they had 44-gallon

17:30 drums there to warm your hands in cos it was a bit cool. I remember him pull out a handful and threw it in the drum. After he walked away, ‘bang-bang-bang’, all the sparks coming and bullets going everywhere. They weren't dangerous because a bullet to be dangerous has to be in a barrel to be fired in a direction. It just broke out of the case and sparks going everywhere. Apparently that was done a lot, just for fun. I didn’t do it.

18:00 While we were down at the army camp, before to go in Camp Casey on the train, they took us on a march one day to the United Nations cemetery. In those days it was only little crosses everywhere. They took us round and showed us where all the Australians were buried. I’d say at that time there would have been about 200 Australians buried because it wasn’t filled in all 339.

18:30 What hit us was, you’d look at these graves and think, “I wonder if I’m gonna be here one day.” Just kind of shook you up. That’s back down at Pusan. While we were at Camp Casey the North Koreans or Chinese used to send what they call aeroplane ‘Bed Check Charlie’. Generally a YAK18 [Yakovlev 18, light reconnaissance], it was a Second World War aeroplane. They used to have hand grenades or small

19:00 bombs. They were just nuisance to make us stay awake all the time. They used to drop these around. At night the air raid siren would go and they'd say, "Bed Check Charlie's around." One night I heard this 'Wawawawawa' in the distance, but never dropped anything near me. It was just interesting little things, 'Bed Check Charlie', that's what they called the plane. Whether the Americans named it that, I don't know. Just a nuisance to keep us awake.

19:30 **What was the smell in Pusan like when you arrived?**

I'll go back in time. When I got to Japan, one of the main things that hit me was that it smelled like brown boot polish everywhere. It was weird, but just a strange smell. Korea, maybe because of the smells in Japan I didn't take much notice of Korea. Maybe I got used to the smell in Japan. Going to Korea, all these strange smells I

20:00 didn't think much about it there.

When you arrived in Pusan, what did you think of the enemy?

I hadn't met any. I don't know. I suppose I never thought about the enemy. We just knew we were going to a camp before we went north and the enemy were something we were gonna face in a few weeks. I suppose we kept on brushing it out of your mind.

20:30 If anything bad you think about you pushed it out of your mind straight away and tried to think of good things. I can remember one night I went to see in a tent. It was called The Merry Widow, the movie. My mate Morrie Sharpe that I got injured later in a minefield, said to me, while the movie was on we could hear in the distance all this boom, boom. I looked at Morrie and Morrie looked at me and he said,

21:00 "We're gonna be in amongst that in a few days' time." I got the shakes again. Just watched the movie then. We were sitting on sandbags holding our rifles watching the movie. That's the way it was. Everywhere in Korea you had to carry your rifle with you. It had bullets in it too. It was fair dinkum then.

Tell me about your mates.

I got to know a lot of mates that I joined up with in Ingleburn,

21:30 sorry at Marrickville from there on. As I said Roy Stockley was the main one that come from Wagga, he guided me. Brian O'Reilly that lives at Thornleigh now, 'Lofty', he died on me. Then gradually Bob Evans, Barnsey, died six months ago, he used to guide me. All they used to do was like sing old tenors' songs, 'O Sole Mio' and all that, they loved

22:00 all those kind of things. I got divided up with them because two of them went to 3rd Battalion [RAR] and then I was in 2nd Battalion. One of my best mates was Morrie Sharpe. He joined up from Victoria and I caught up with him at Kapooka. We always ended up together everywhere and that's when he went with me to see the

22:30 movie The Merry Widow. We used to do guard duty together, we seemed to get on real well. We ended up in the front line in Korea together. I'm not sure where to go.

I wanted to hear about what you did with your mates.

Do you want me to go onto the next part with the front line?

23:00 Eventually I went up to the front line. I was only there 3½ weeks, but when we got to the front line we used to, at night time, stand guard at like a truck stop, just to get us used to it. Then after a while we used to go out on. The first night patrol I went out on with Lieutenant Frank Crowe, he's an original from 2nd Battalion, he didn't join up with

23:30 me. The first night we went out on patrol, we had all our boots on, making a lot of noise, fellows were coughing everywhere. I'm lucky I never seemed to cough. I was lucky. The lieutenant said, "Stop that coughing because the Chinese can hear us miles away." They knew we were there. Over the loudspeaker they used to say, "Welcome 2nd Battalion to the front line." Loudspeakers in the valley up in the hills. Two loudspeakers about that round or

24:00 something. They never found where they were, but they used to play music to us, of a night time and sad songs like Diana Durban singing 'Lights Are Home' and 'Harbour Lights' and something. Just to make you feel homesick. Then when the 2nd Battalion first got there, "Welcome 2nd Battalion, I hope you enjoy your stay here." This is the Chinese over the loudspeakers. They would play some music that you liked to make you feel homesick. Other times

24:30 they'd say, "Wouldn't you rather be home with your wives and sweethearts?" Japanese did that in the Second World War much of the time. They used to send patrols out to try and find these speakers at night, but the Chinese then, there were more Chinese than North Koreans, they used to move the speakers around every night. So they never found where they were. The first night when we went out on this patrol making all this noise,

25:00 someone accidentally fired a bullet somewhere. The lieutenant said to me, "Was that you, Private

Holden?" I said, "No, I didn't fire it." I was the baby of them and I always seemed to cop everything. We went out on patrol and sat out in no man's land before dawn the next morning, come back in and flare. Went out on other patrols. One patrol was a standing

25:30 patrol at a trench, out front. Two of us were there and it was about midnight. Everything was quiet and you had a wind up telephone to report back in anything going on. We were sitting there, next thing I hear all these noises. I radioed and said, "They're bringing artillery up. You can hear it." We found out later it was the lift up [supply]on 3rd Battalion on our right

26:00 about 2 miles away. They had a Flying Fox that went up and down and made a noise. We thought they were artillery. cos we were panicking, we're all thinking. Another night I was out there I had the Bren machine gun and had the safety off and I had hand grenades sitting there ready to throw if something happened. I could see these lights in the minefield next to us. There was a minefield all around us. Sparks of light. "What's that?" I'm thinking.

26:30 I radioed in, "The Chinese are sneaking up." "Well, report back if something happens." I'm looking at the hand grenades, which one would I throw first. It was pitch black. I'm watching the Bren and, "Okay, which way do I point it first?" My mate there probably had another Bren machine gun, or an Owen or something. It turned out it was squirrels in the minefield running around and fireflies were flying around and it looked like the Chinese had lights in the minefield.

27:00 So it wasn't the Chinese.

Were there birds?

No, never saw any birds. I'll tell you something else. One day I was in the trenches. All the trenches were blown out here, there and everywhere cos the bombs had been dropping for months and months. Along the trench comes a snake. It's about a meter long and he was the brightest iridescent green and orange. He was

27:30 about 20 millimetres thick. He was just going along the trenches there. I was thinking, "How can a snake like that survive after all the bombings and things?" It was so pretty, beautiful iridescent colours. It just went along the trenches. I don't know whether someone killed it later, I don't know, but I've never forgotten that iridescent snake. Orange and green, dark orange and green. Iridescent, so bright coloured. How did it survive? The bombs going off all the time.

28:00 Another thing that happened to me that affects me today. You'll probably see squirrels everywhere in the cabinet there. Everywhere squirrels. When I was up the front line one Sunday we weren't going out on patrol till night time. I had to clean my rifle and an Owen machine gun. I got lazy. Instead of pulling through the barrel, I decided to fire a round out of the .303 rifle. What happens is, with

28:30 machine guns, every 5th bullet is a tracer bullet. It has phosphorous on the front of the bullet that is so when it's fired the phosphorous lights up and you could see roughly where the bullet goes so you can see that you're firing in the right direction. With your rifle it was every third bullet you put a tracer in. I had the magazine with the bullets in there. Apparently the traces bullet was in the breech and I looked down about 100 feet away was this movement

29:00 and I thought it was a rat. So I fired at this that I thought was a rat and it turned out to be a little grey squirrel. When the tracer bullet, it was only a couple of hundred feet away or something, it sent the tracer off and this bullet hit this poor little squirrel and all it did was white smoke come out for about 2 minutes until the phosphorous burned out. To this day it upsets me about the poor little squirrel I shot. The lieutenant saw that I fired the bullet and he went crook at me because you're not

29:30 supposed to fire bullets unless you're told to or there's enemy or something. It wasn't a rat, it was a poor little squirrel. I've got squirrels everywhere. I never forgot the poor little red, it wasn't a red one it was a grey squirrel. I thought it was a rat. But it was definitely a squirrel this big and a tracer bullet.

What about rats?

Never saw many cos I was only in the front line 3½ weeks. You had rats, mice and

30:00 lice and everything. I can't remember seeing rats or mice cos I wasn't there long enough. To stop fevers they used to give us this white powder and you had to put it all over your clothes and in your sleeping bag, cos you had a sleeping bag on your bunker when you were underneath the ground. This was to help stop the vermin and everything because the haemorrhagic fever that affected the heart, that was the main fevers they had over

30:30 there. This white powered everywhere. In the short time I can't remember seeing any mice or rats, but I've heard stories of people firing their Owen machine guns while they were in a bunker on a rat going around. I never struck anything cos I wasn't there long enough. I was lucky.

Did the powder smell of anything?

No, just a white powder. It got up your nose and you just had to sprinkle

31:00 it everywhere. I can't remember what the powder was. I was told too the other one we had was a green canister. Used to spray that too as well as the white powder we had.

Were did you keep your food in the trenches?

No, that was Korean porters used to bring it up from down below, every day. Had all these packs on their back and it was hot food. They did all the carrying everywhere. I think it was only

31:30 two meals a day then. A small one might be at lunch, but mainly it was hot food. The Koreans did all the carrying. We'd get in line at the cookhouse and go down there and you were supposed to stand about 5 feet apart because if the enemy sent a mortar bomb down it wouldn't be as many people injured. One of my mates got injured later and shrapnel in the head. He was on a meal queue and

32:00 16 in a row and the Chinese knew what time the meal would be on and fired a mortar and it killed a Korean porter straight away. 17 of the others got all injured just in a meal queue with one mortar bomb cos the Chinese knew what time the meal was on. They had spies everywhere. The North Koreans and Chinese look a lot like South Koreans. So they infiltrated. They probably radioed back what time the

32:30 meal was on and exactly where the meal was and sent mortar bombs over.

What did you eat for those meals?

The only thing I didn't like was powdered egg. They didn't have fresh eggs or anything like that, it was powdered and I never liked that. Most the meals were good I suppose. Probably Weetbix. I can't remember much of it in Korea. Probably a bit of chicken. Not much steak or anything.

33:00 I can't remember much about the meals. I used to buy bottles of lemonade and we made strength beer on Friday if we were going out on patrol or anything.

Did you feel frightened?

You were frightened because you'd come in off the patrol and then you'd go and look at the list and had the list of those killed the night before or those injured the night before. You'd look at that time the list and think, "yeah, I remember him.

33:30 I wonder if that's gonna happen to me tonight." Then you brush it out of your mind. You were scared. What scared me was when I first got to the front line I wasn't frightened of mortar bombs. A couple come down, and one burst about 200 feet from me and a mortar bomb coming down you'd hear 'Whowhowhowhowho', and if it was louder it was close. If it wasn't too loud it was further away. The first one that I experienced was

34:00 I couldn't run anywhere, there was nowhere to run. It would have been 100 feet to get somewhere, so I just crouched down. As I crouched down the mortar bomb landed about 150 feet away and all I saw was grey dust going everywhere and little pieces of stuff everywhere. I heard the whizzing noise of a little bit of shrapnel going overhead. Somehow it didn't worry me. It didn't scare me. Then a couple of days later I

34:30 Talking about the mortar bombs when we come back on.

We're going now.

I wasn't scared of mortar bombs, but then a couple of days later I went to the toilet and after I'd been to the toilet I walked back about 100 feet and a mortar bomb landed right next to where I'd been to the toilet. From that day on I was shaky with mortar bombs. I thought "Gee, that was close." Didn't worry me till then. It was so close, I just walked away. That's it.

35:00 I was scared. I'd be ready to jump down quick if a mortar bomb came over. My mate Morrie Sharpe, one day he went up to the trenches to dig. We often used to go up to the daylight to help dig the trenches out. If the Chinese saw shovel falls of earth coming over they used to send mortar bombs over to slow us up. One day he was in a trench there and the mortar bomb burst on the side of the trench and the mortar bomb tail fell into the trench next to him. He got

35:30 out of there and said, "I'm never coming up here again," cos it was so close. A mortar bomb falling, the tail sitting next to him. It was so close. I never experienced a mortar bomb while I was digging trenches. I was only there 3½ weeks and I didn't get to do that much. Mainly night patrols. A weird thing that happened was, I used to go on night patrols every second night and I never run into a Chinaman. Never come across them.

36:00 The night I didn't go out, all my mates used to run into Chinamen. It was almost like, "Oh, Ernie's going out to patrol tonight, we won't go out," like they were scared of me or something, I don't know what it was. It was weird. On Sunday the 21st of May '53, I was up the front line and a British Auster [Auster AOP observation] aircraft dropped some surrender leaflets. I've still got the original ones here.

36:30 Dropped hundreds of them out of the plane, so as to blow over the Chinese, to ask them to surrender. If they surrendered they'd get paid so much and looked after. But the wind blew them our way. In front of us was a Centurion [Medium battle tank] tank set up the front there. It used to throw out cardboard canisters the shells come in out the front. There was a big pile of them out the front. One fluttered down, one of these certificates, and I thought, "I'm gonna get this

37:00 for a souvenir." So away I went up there, picked it up, and I'm standing up there op top of the trench

looking at it and I heard this funny twinging noise. “What’s that?” And as I was thinking about it, this twinging noise was going over me. One of my mates yelled out, “Get down, you silly so and so. A Chinaman’s got you in his sights.” As he said that I looked and another bullet landed about 10 feet in the dust next to me. A Chinese sniper with a

37:30 telescopic sight. A second bullet. As I got down the third one went over the head. I was lucky and I’ve still got the souvenir. Sniper had a go at me. I wrote in my diary ‘Snipers active today’. That’s all I wrote.

Was the leaflet written in Chinese?

It’s in English, Chinese and Korean. I can show it to you later. Just trying to think of what else happened up the front line. We used to do

38:00 stand to, cos I was in D company and we were behind the front line about half a mile. We just used to go to the front line to do the patrols at night. Every morning we used to do stand to about 5 o’clock and one of the clowns with me used to play practical jokes and picked on me. What he used to do, we’d been standing to for an hour. Just standing there. He’d pretend he’d dropped a hand grenade and the pin was out of it. He’d say, “Grenade!” I’d tear around the corner of the

38:30 trench. All the trenches were zigzagged, so if a mortar bomb come down here it wouldn’t hurt anyone around here. I used to go like a rabbit around the corner and he’d laugh his head off. He was joking, see? He did that about three times to me. Every time I took off because I didn’t know whether it was cry wolf or whether he really had the pin out of it. The lieutenant heard about it and told him off and he never did it again. He thought it was funny. He’d yell out, “Grenade!” and I’d go ‘shooong’, cos it’s three second fuses

39:00 then, when you’re at the front line. Three seconds was a long time. One, two, three, but I used to take off. I wasn’t going to in case it really was and he let the hand grenade off. The lieutenant told him to stop it, it wasn’t the right thing to do.

Tape 4

00:32 **Tell us about the equipment you were carrying with you on night patrol.**

We all used to pick up a bullet proof vest when we got up to the front line to where C Company was then. They were all on a big pile and you picked out your size, whether it was small, medium or large, I can’t remember that part. Before we got up there we had our packs on with whatever bullets we needed.

01:00 If we carried an Owen machine gun we carried a pack of magazines with 9 millimetre bullets. I used to like taking the Bren machine gun out on patrols even though I was a little fellow. I used to have my .303 bullets in the magazines in the pouches. I always carried two hand grenades. Most of them had the hand grenades on their belt. I found out after

01:30 a while it was no good to me because I was ‘Spring Heel Jack’ and as I was going along the hand grenade used to jump off the belt and fall on the ground. So I found it was better to put both hand grenades on my jacket pocket. We had a blanket on the back of a pack. So when we went up on the front line you didn’t go out till dark. Sometimes you used to have a sleep and have our blanket over us or lie on it. When I used to go up

02:00 the front line and I only had my .303 rifle, but if it was a patrol, either an Owen or a Bren. Every time I went on patrol it was always a Bren machine gun. I only did about 10 patrols at the most in the 3½ weeks. When you got up the front line, picked up a bullet proof vest, put it on and just waited around till it was dark and they said, “Everybody out on patrol.” You’d go down the trenches and out the front passed minefields. Most of them was

02:30 sitting out in no-man’s-land to listen to see what the Chinese were doing and give a report. I never ran into a Chinaman all those nights. I think it only rained one night. One night before I went on patrol it was raining like mad and so I ended up sleeping under the gun turret of the Centurion tank till we went out on patrol. The wind was coming, the

03:00 rain was coming from Manchuria, from the northwest, so I was under the tank turret on the south eastern side, so I stayed dry. A bit hard though on the tank. That was the only night I slept under the turret of a centurion tank. Then away we’d go out on patrol and do whatever we were supposed to do, looking for the enemy. You always kept about 5 or 6 feet apart at least, so that if any mortar bomb or the enemy

03:30 fired at you, you wouldn’t be in a close group to get injured or killed. Sometimes it was so dark you could nearly not see the person in front of you. You had a bit of trouble and someone got lost and off the track. One night I got off track and I ended up on the barbed wire on the wrong side. Next minute there’s no one around me. I thought, “What am I gonna do?” So I started to crawl along the barbed wire

to see if I could get back to my mates. As I was going along

04:00 I had a .303 rifle that night. Someone yelled out, “Password!” and I was scared and I forgot the password. Every night you got issued with a new word. It might be ‘Sydney’ one night’ it might be ‘California’ another night, whatever it was. Every night it got changed so the enemy wouldn’t know what the password was. I forgot it, I was scared and frightened. They yelled out, “Password!” and I didn’t know what to say. Next minute I heard

04:30 all the weapons on our patrol being cocked ready to fire. They thought it was a Chinaman. In the end Morrie said, “Who goes there?” I said, “Only Ernie.” I’m shaking like anything and they didn’t fire at me. Luckily I got saved. I lived for another night. I was scared. I’d forgotten the password. They thought I was a Chinaman cos I didn’t give a password. So I got into trouble with the lieutenant for getting the other side of the wire somehow.

05:00 How I did, I must have been right at the end of the patrol in the dark, I just lost them all. That was a scary night for me.

In general on those patrols, what were your nerves like walking around in the dark?

The thing is you were scared, but all the time you’re thinking, “I wonder what we’re gonna run into soon,” or something and watch to see where’s there and who’s there. I suppose you’re pushed out of your mind all the time being scared. You were there

05:30 to do a job. When we first got to the front line you were glad. You’re thinking, “After all this training, at last we’re there. We’re doing what we’re supposed to do.” I used to come in from patrol and look at the list who got killed and injured and just think, “I knew that person. Hope it’s not me tomorrow night.” Then you brush it out. You push it out of your mind. You have to, otherwise you go crackers [crazy].

What was the relationship like between you and your fellow soldiers?

Pretty good.

06:00 I got on well with them cos they knew I was the baby of the group. I was a year or two younger than most of them. Some of them might have been in the Second World War and was older, wiser and more experienced. You had to communicate. You’re men together and you had to get on cos you’re relying on each other. Something went wrong you had to rely on each other to save each other or

06:30 get rid of the enemy or whatever. In fact, somewhere in my army career I found a couple that didn’t get on and they got out of the army, they’re gone. They were troublemakers or something like that. They didn’t want any of that down there.

What did you learn about life from the older men?

About women. They were all experienced.

07:00 They used to tell me about their families and their troubles and their children back home. I’d listen and I was thinking, “What’s it like to be married and have children?” I was thinking more or less girlfriend kind of thing. They tried to wisen me up quickly. It’s hard to picture that part all again now. They were just all good friends to me. Once we got to the front line they

07:30 didn’t play tricks. Only that one with the hand grenade business.

What were your sleeping arrangements on the front line?

When I was in D company behind the line, we were in a bunker with 3 of us in there. If I went out on patrol the other two probably slept in there at night. When you come in off the patrol you used to generally go straight to bed for about 3 or 4 hours and then

08:00 some out and have a bit of breakfast or dinner and clean your weapons. I remember I had a top bunk and the other two, one below and one below on the other wall. I can remember on the wall next to me I had the film star Wanda Hendricks, my favourite film star on a poster on there. I was disappointed when I got out of the front line that I never got my poster.

08:30 I didn’t experience rats or mice like others. Maybe because it was near the end of winter. As summer came along it probably would be more with the heat of those kind of things, rodents around. I never experienced the rodents at all. I was only there 3½ weeks. Maybe a few crept passed when I was asleep, I didn’t see them.

What facilities were there for hygiene?

Down the back there was a toilet

09:00 system all made up of sandbags and go to the toilet in there. At the front they had a pipe on the ground for the men, it was all men actually, to save going to the other ones inside. When I said I was on a toilet on the pipe outside, I wailed away and the mortar bomb come down. That was basically it. They had all this lime all around it, everywhere, to stop the smell.

09:30 It wasn't too bad. I think they had newspapers in there that you could read while you were sitting on the toilet, something like that. It was well covered. The sandbags and logs would probably be 5 or 6 feet above ground. They're meant to protect you. Hygiene seemed all right, except for when they made us put all this powder all over us when they were worried about haemorrhagic fever and to kill the lice. Quite often you'd go for a week without having

10:00 any kind of shower. Wash your hands and face all you had was your dixie with most times cold water and some. Clean yourself up a bit. I can remember that part. You never seemed to smell of anything I don't think. I don't know. Maybe it was the powder.

If you weren't going out on patrol, what daily duties and tasks did you have?

Lots of times I used to

10:30 go up the front line during the day to help dig the trenches to improve them. The night before mortars might have hit a trench or a bunker and it got damaged. So we'd go up there. Quite often we had to dig the trenches a bit deeper. That's when the Chinese used to see these shovelfuls of earth. Quite often we used to do that in the dark so the Chinese wouldn't see you doing all this shovelling. Sometimes shovel all night until that

11:00 was it. That was my main duties. Or down at where the trucks used to come through at the barrier and monitor trucks coming through. Make sure they hadn't got a Chinaman onboard or anything like that, or a North Korean. It was kind of guard duty at the barbed wire gate. Things like that. Another time I got on leave and most of them hung around and I ended up deciding to

11:30 hitch hike south, like I did when I ran away to Victoria. I hitch hiked south for about 10 miles. An American picked me up in a jeep. Naturally you had to have your rifle with you everywhere, with bullets and everything. The American said to me, "Young fellow, where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to have a look at the scenery." He thought I was a deserter. After he'd gone he looked concerned and I couldn't, I was only young, picture what was going on. After he'd gone a couple of miles he said, "I've gotta go to this

12:00 camp up here, so I'll let you out here." I said, "Okay, all right." So we went up to the camp and I started walking south again to get another lift just to have a look at the scenery for the day. Next minute he came passed me again like a rocket. Didn't want to know me. It took years later, he thought I was a deserter and I had a .303 rifle. He thought if he challenged me at all, I might have a go at him. So that was it I'd say. I got south for a couple of miles. Then, after I got sick of looking at that time, eh mountains, half the day had gone. I turned

12:30 and had another lift back north to the 2nd Battalion, back to where the fighting was. Just for a day trip. Look at the Korean scenery. That's what it was.

What were your impressions of the other UN [United Nations] troops from other countries?

I really only saw American, Canadian and a few British. They were all okay. They were much the same as us. What we found out was the British only got two meals a day. They didn't have good meals like we did.

13:00 I don't know why. We had really good meals. The Americans I believe, had better meals again than us. They had ice cream up front and turkey. We just had the meals that the Korean porters used to bring up to us. I was happy with it. We got issued with bottles of beer. I used to sell mine for a little bit to my mates so I could buy a bottle of lemonade cos I wasn't a beer drinker. Never was. Originally I was giving it to them and I found out, "Hey,

13:30 they get it for nothing off of me and I've gotta go and buy lemonade" or whatever it was. So I ended up selling it at, might be, 2 shillings a bottle or something. I'd go and buy if off the American, what's it called, a caravan that used to come around, PX [American canteen unit] or something like that. I used to buy a bottle there.

Now you were at the front line, what were your feelings about the enemy?

The only contact I really

14:00 had was when they used to send mortar bombs. The hill in front of us was called 'John'. There was 4 hills, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, named after the four apostles. The main one in front of us was John' was Hill 227, that's metres they get it from. Every day I looked at that hill and took photos of it. I never saw the Chinese except for the night before I got injured. You'd see the bombs dropping

14:30 on 227. Because I was an aviation buff, one day they yelled out, a couple of times this happened, I'd be in my bunker asleep and they'd yell out, "It's a raid." "Oh beauty, aeroplanes." I used to dive out and I used to watch the North American Texans, they call them Mosquitoes [fighter bomber], and we called them Canadian Hubbard. I used to watch them coming out of the sun and they used to come down, throttle back and fly

15:00 over 227, drop an orange marker for the jets to come later. This orange smoke would come up. As soon as they dropped the marker you'd hear the motor full power. As the Texans were climbing out you'd hear this 'bang-bang-bang-bang' – the Chinese were trying to shoot it down as it climbed out. Then you

watched. About three or four minutes later with this orange smoke, two Grumman Panthers – they always go in twos – used to come down and drop their bombs on 227. While this was on the Chinese were deep

15:30 down inside, they knew it was gonna happen. I got photos of the bombs dropping on this 227. Another day I took a photo of four bombs dropping. Both Grumman Panthers coming together and they dropped their four bombs so you see four blasts. Most times they were only two coming in at a time and they go away again. That was fun watching all that. Another time I was watching two aeroplanes going south. I couldn't work out what was going on. It turned out to be, I think they were Lockheed Shooting

16:00 Stars [fighter bomber], but they were captured by the Chinese. I watched them go south towards the Imjin River, where the bridge was, and I saw them peel off and go down. Then fly back north. I couldn't work out what was going on. I found to later they were two captured ones the Chinese were flying, or North Koreans, probably Chinese. They put the rockets on and they bombed this Imjin River bridge and all they did was knock out one railing before they went back north. So I witnessed all this.

16:30 **Did you have much contact with the South Korean people?**

Yeah. Some of the friends I had there yes. I took photos of them. Four of them, there was three brothers; Unsak, Chunsak and Nosak. Three brothers. There was a fourth brother that actually shot himself in the leg, I don't know what his name was, he never went to the front line. Another one was Ruka Chu and the other one was Lita Bong. These Koreans and I got on well, had photos

17:00 with them. They were called KATCOMs [Korean Army Troops attached to Commonwealth Division]. They would come in with the 2nd Battalion. They used to eat like anything, because they didn't have the food in South Korea. So it's like a stray cat. They come in there and as soon as they've been fed, they'll keep eating all the time. The South Korean KATCOMs were like that. But when we got to the front line they slowed up eating. I know why, cos they were scared. I got on well with them. I got all group photos of them and everything.

17:30 One of them, his nickname was 'Shoulders', I got on well with him. The night before I got injured he had a sore eye and I gave him some tablets and I said, "Take it easy and rinse your eye out every now and then. When I come back from patrol I'll give you some more tablets to take," because he had a headache from the eye. Never got back to see how he got on. It was sad. I never got to say goodbye. These South Koreans I got on so well with.

18:00 **How were those South Koreans integrated with your battalion?**

They were integrated with all the Australians and Americans and Canadians. I suppose when the war started they were trained mainly by the Americans and then instead of just, some of the Koreans were their own battalions, but some they thought it was best to put them in with all the British Commonwealth, the Americans and Canadians and British. Because that way they're getting the proper training with those other

18:30 soldiers. It's like putting someone in your family and they get to know what you do. They got on real well. They were okay. But they were very scared when they got on the front line. They seemed all right. I went out on patrol with a couple of them, but we never had any skirmish for them to worry about. Maybe later something happened. I was there only 3½ weeks so I didn't get to know them properly. We used to have photos. We'd joke with them. They could hardly

19:00 talk English. When they did learn English the first thing was always swearing. So I knew. We got to know each other. Broken English. Got on well with them.

What can you tell me about your superiors on the front line?

The main superior was Sergeant Keith Wren. Before we got to the front line two of us were in a

19:30 two man tent. cos I was always interested in electricity, Spike Watson was the other fellow with me, so I ended up finding a light bulb and making up a bracket and some batteries, and making up a little switch. We were the only two men near the front line that had electricity in a two-man tent. Sergeant Keith Wren came round one day to me and inspected everything. He looked at the electricity I had on there

20:00 and he said, "Private Holden, you'll never make a good soldier, but you'll make a good electrician or a mechanic." Guess what, 3 weeks later he got killed in a minefield, Sergeant Keith Wren. That's what he said.

What about officers?

The main officer was Frank Crowe. When he wasn't listening in the distance, everybody used to go, "Crah, crah, crah." He used to walk around, he had a crooked

20:30 like a stick, but it was all bent, crooked. I suppose that was his, what do you call it, like Linus in the [Snoopy] cartoon, he had the blanket on, security blanket. That was it. He had that all the time. I got on reasonably, except the time he told me off when I fired the bullet at the squirrel. He told me first patrol, "Private Holden, did you fire that bullet?" "It wasn't me."

21:00 It wasn't either. I was always copping everything. But I got on well with him. It wasn't till the Canberra reunion in 2000 I caught up with him again, Frank Crowe, and he clung onto me like he was glad to find out what happened later on, because everybody that were in the patrol that I got injured on, later on I'll tell you about it, they all went to hospital. So he could never find out what happened. It wasn't till he met me in Canberra he got the whole story.

21:30 Then two years ago he died. I said, "Do you mind if I write in my book about calling you 'Crah-crah'? Did you ever hear us saying that?" He said, "No." I said, "Do you mind if I put it in the book?" He said, "No, I don't mind." He never heard us he reckons. It was a joke. Crowe. I was well with him, other than that time with the squirrel.

22:00 **Were there any other real characters amongst the men you were up there with?**

Mainly that one with the hand grenade. That was the main one. No, a few practical jokers, but I didn't have much to do with them. You had to be serious then, pretty well. If I was there another 6 months I probably would have met more practical jokers, but no.

22:30 **Was there any training done while you were at the front line?**

Yeah. Quite often we used to have to go in the field out back, if there was a day off from the front line. Parts of my diary I've got, where we fired Owen machine guns, Bren machine guns, threw hand grenades and firing rifles all in one day. Just practise for something to do because when you're at the front line you're not firing at anything unless it's the enemy. So you still had to make sure you shoot straight by practise. That was regularly.

23:00 It might be once a week you'd go back and fire weapons to keep trim and maybe throw a hand grenade or something like that to keep in trim.

What did you think of the Owen gun?

It's a very nice little, no kick back [recoil]. Something that nobody ever knew of, when I did my first training at Kapooka, because the kick back they said with the .303 rifle, it could break your shoulder if you don't have it in the right place, knock it back. So from them on

23:30 I had two handkerchiefs for packing underneath there the whole time I was in the army, even when I was in the front line in Korea. Nobody knew I had it there. I used to pack it under there. If I ever fired the rifle that'd help it. I kept that quiet the whole time. It had a kickback the .303 rifle. If you didn't have it pulled back. I got used to it, but the Bren I learned to fire the Bren from the waist. You had to lean forward. If you didn't lean forward when you fired about 6 rounds it'd throw you over

24:00 backwards and all that. The Owen used to swing to one side. You had to learn to hold it to one side. The Bren that was great, firing from the waist. Used to practise firing going to a target up ahead. You have to be advancing and firing the Bren machine gun and the Owen and the rifle. All this, all practise, as if you were advancing on enemy. One of the things we

24:30 learned, which all soldiers do, was bayonet practise. This is right back at Kapooka. We had to practise, I don't know if you know in the bayonet there's a groove in it. That's there for a reason. When we attack the enemy and went to kill them, you had to put the bayonet in, turn it so that air rushed down this groove to kill the enemy quicker, and then stomp on their head to try and kill them. That's all part of the training.

25:00 Luckily I never had to do that. I'm glad I didn't.

Did you do any training exercises in Korea?

No, not really. Just sometimes mock battles a couple of times of a night time just to keep us in trim. Stop us getting lazy sitting around. A couple of mock battles and basically what I said, just going out firing weapons during the day. We might have fired them at night, I can't remember that. Mostly day time.

25:30 Just to keep in trim, keep things going. Cleaning weapons all the time. We had to learn how to arm hand grenades, take the base plate off and put a detonator in and then screw it back on with a little spanner. I can't ever remember doing that. I don't know why. My army mates explained to me how we used to do it, but I can't remember ever doing that. The hand grenades in the front line were three

26:00 second fuse, not 7 seconds like we used to have back in training. When we first got the hand grenades they were all covered in a real heavy grease to protect them. They came in boxes about 12 or something in a box. We had to take them out and clean all the grease off ready to take them out on patrols. Probably spend hours cleaning them all up. When we cleaned them there was no detonator in them, the detonator was in the little box next to it.

You have a story about pushing some

26:30 **young bloke down a hill?**

Yeah, when I first got to Korea, up on the Kansas or Wyoming [section of the] line, private Spike Watson, he was a bit younger than me and he was an original from 2nd Battalion. I got on reasonably well with him, but I was a bit of a bully because others bullied me. One night we had to dig in up the top of the

Kansas line or Wyoming line and we were broken up in two parties. One party had

27:00 to come up the hill and try and attack us and get us out of the trenches. We could do anything to stop these others come up except fire bullets at them. Spike Watson was in the other group down the hill. I could see him creeping up, I knew who it was, I could tell by his facial features and I knew who it was, 'Spike' Watson. He came up the hill and I challenged him. "Halt, who goes there? Halt." He kept coming and I said, "Halt." He wouldn't budge. He kept coming towards me. "Is

27:30 that you, Spike?" He wouldn't answer. It was Spike though. I ended up… You want me to start that part from the beginning?

Just say you could see it was Spike.

I could see it was 'Spike Watson', but I said, "Spike, is that you?" He wouldn't answer because he didn't wanna give in. He came right up. I said, "Spike, is that you? Give me an answer. Halt." He didn't, so I got my rifle up and I pushed into him, which

28:00 I had do to cos I had to pretend he was an enemy and he went rolling down the hill. He never made a sound. Never yelled out, "Help!" like crying or anything. I always felt guilty that I did that to him. It was what I had to do. He only had to say, "Yes, I am Spike. I give in, hands up," and that was it. But he wasn't gonna give in, so I pushed him all the way down the hill again. We never got on well after that. We were okay in the tent earlier, but after that. I can remember when I got

28:30 injured he was standing on the side. He looked at me and was probably thinking, "Oh well, I'll never see Ernie again, the bully." Something like that. I don't know. I never saw him again.

Did you have any thoughts up there about being part of an Anzac tradition?

No, not really. I was just a soldier in the United Nations. I don't know. I never thought of copping

29:00 anyone from Australia. I just did what I was trained for. No, I never really thought of all those kind of things. Because we had our tin hat all the time with all the sticks in it that were camouflage and everything. The Red Cross sent a parcel a few days before I got injured and there was beautiful pastel blue socks in there, woollen blue socks that someone had knitted back in Australia. So

29:30 I put it in my tin hat because it was always hitting hard on me. When I got injured I damn well left my socks in my tin hat. I was so upset later. Those woollen socks, I wish I'd brought them out with me. But they went. Woollen socks. I shouldn't worry about woollen socks, I'm injured. Don't worry about woollen socks.

Describe the defences you had in front of your positions.

Basically we were all

30:00 in trenches. Down in the front it was all barbed wire everywhere. Down in front was a minefield fence. There were gaps. So that the enemy couldn't come through there .The gaps were so when we went out on patrols. Also they had a machine gun always trained on the gaps so that if the enemy came through, 90% of the enemy wouldn't come through a minefield even though some Chinese I believe they do, they'd have to go through this gap and there'd be a machine gun on them. It'd be generally

30:30 a Browning [medium] machine gun most of them up the front. So .30 calibre Browning machine gun. I fired a few rounds through that, training. That was it. Just minefields out from and barbed wire. We were on the side of a hill and you could look down and see no-man's land. Course, you kept your head down most the time, the Chinese could sniper at you any time. cos the trenches were about 6 feet deep. You could get up and look over the top if you wanted to.

How far was the

31:00 **wire and the minefields from the trenches?**

The minefields could have been say 10 or 20 feet in front of us because that'd be this side. Then the minefields could go for 200 yards down with a minefield from the other side. The barbed wire was just straight down just in front of your sandbags so the enemy had trouble to climb up through this barbed wire. They had 10 feet barbed wire in front

31:30 of you all tangled up everywhere, with just a couple of gaps everywhere to go out on patrols and to go in the trenches down to the outpost, where I told you about the squirrel and things like that and the fireflies. That was a trench down to the outpost. That's what I meant. Two man outpost. That was the most loneliest thing out there was that outpost at night. Only two men way out. If hundreds of the enemy attacked you, you had no chance cos all your mates are back here hundreds of

32:00 yards behind you.

How far away was the enemy?

One mile on the other side of no-man's-land. It was a creek down the bottom and a part of the Semochon River, Creek. When you went out on night patrols, I can't remember crossing the creek cos I never went down that far. Some of them crossed this creek and ended up going up the hills towards the

Chinese. Be about a mile away from 227.

32:30 Close enough for them to send mortar bombs over at you. But the mortar bombs wouldn't reach where we were at D Company, be another half a mile behind.

Was there mortars being launched by your own side?

No I never saw any launched from our side to the enemy. So a mortar platoon would have been down over one side, could me a group of maybe three, you have to talk to the mortar men about that. There might be three mortars,

33:00 four or six, where they would fire all the mortars. They're given the direction of what exactly where to send them over and there might me some over there. There were no mortars exactly where the front line and the trench was. No, I never saw any.

In the trenches, were they bare earth or fitted out?

Pretty well just bare earth because it's gonna be blown up all the time by mortars coming over. Just bare trenches basically. If they get damaged by mortars

33:30 we went in a couple of days later or a day later and just dug out the bit and fixed it up and things like that. Every now and then you might have a bunker here and 200 feet that way another big bunker. That's where the machine guns were. Then you just stood in the trenches. Looks like something's going on they could probably take off and go under where they're under protection.

How were the bunkers constructed?

34:00 I'd say they were the same level as the bottom of the trenches, but they used to have great big trees, probably railroad sleepers, all crisscrossed across the top, Maybe 2 or 3 feet deep and then sandbagged all on the top. Big logs to make them up so if mortars came over it wouldn't get through, it'd send all

34:30 dust on you. They had the slit where the men could look out and have a parapet or something a machine gun pointing so if anything camp over you could fire all through along there.

How was where you slept constructed?

Just slept in the bunker on the ground. The night before I got injured this other fellow and me, I don't know his name, I was the one to be on

35:00 the first watch. I was supposed to stop at midnight and wake him up, but I was just standing there with the Browning machine gun in front of me and I had a rifle and hand grenades. He was just sleeping. He had his blanket and I remember him snoring. It was about 5 minutes to midnight. I'm happy. 27th May there was a full moon. It was beautiful

35:30 just looking. It's hard to believe it was enemy territory looking over towards 227 John'. I was so happy. I'm a hero back home and everything and nothing's happening. Just standing there. I'll just stay here and have a sleep soon and go back in. 5 minutes to midnight I looked at him and thought, "I'll let him sleep for an hour. I don't care. I like it here." Right on midnight the Chinese sent in a barrage for one hour, right over all.

36:00 It was mortar bombs and artillery shells going off everywhere. I'd say within one minute he was fully awake and standing up. On the left you could see artillery shells or mortars land in the minefield and all you saw were little orange, never see a ball of flame, was always little orange sparks going up everywhere. I was mesmerised. I was just watching them like this. I was just mesmerised somehow. Then a little while later they were sending patrols out. In

36:30 the moonlight I could see this fellow jumping up and down and as far as I know they were Chinamen. Apparently they were gonna try and put an attack in, but it never eventuated.

What facilities were there for getting mail from back in Australia?

I don't know, we seemed to get mail every two days or something. It was brought back from Battalion Headquarters somewhere and brought up by porters. Bags of mail. "Here you are, here, here, here." I seemed to get letters every couple of days from home.

37:00 When people sent letters from home it was only a penny. That's all they had to pay. If we sent letters back it cost nothing. We didn't have to put a stamp on it. I used to get mail every couple of days. Back in my hootchie they called it, bunker, hootchie that was the word, hootchie, I used to write letters all the time back home to friends. No ballpoint pens then, it was just ordinary pen and ink or pencil. I'd write in my diary, which I wasn't supposed to have on the front line. Every

37:30 day I'd put the weather and what I was doing the whole time.

Why weren't you supposed to have diaries?

Because if the enemy overran they could capture those diaries and they could use it as propaganda. When you went out on patrol you didn't have any identification, only your dog tag, but no wallets or photos or anything. Weren't allowed to take that cos if you got captured they could use that as

propaganda. Just the dog tags, all you were allowed to have.

38:00 **What would the penalty have been if you had been caught with a diary?**

Don't know. I didn't find out for years later I wasn't supposed to have one. Don't know. I never know. I don't think, no army rules say, "Do not write a diary while you're on the front line," but I suppose many soldiers did it. I never told anyone, I kept it quiet. I just sat down every day and put it away and I'd write more. Never told anyone. Probably if I'd told Lieutenant Crowe he would have told me off.

38:30 I don't know. I can't answer that one.

Why did you keep a diary?

Because in 1952 my sister Ethel gave me a diary and said, "Why don't you keep a diary of what you do every day?" I said, "That's gonna be boring." So I started to do it and I put in every movie I went to in '52, where I went, what time I went to bed, where I went on my pushbike, going to work, everything. Just kept it going. I didn't realise then, I was gonna be in the army in another

39:00 4 months. So I just kept it up and then before I went overseas I think my sister gave me this second diary for 53 and I just kept writing every day, everything that I did, time I went to bed, what the weather was like, whether it was raining, nice fine day or whatever, snow, everything. Just kept it up until I came back to Australia. I didn't bother putting any more in when I got to Concord Hospital.

Do you often look at those diaries from those days?

Yeah, because I use it for reference for writing a book.

39:30 It helps. It might be just one line saying something and that can make 20 lines on a story. Just jogging my memory.

Tape 5

00:35 **Talk us through the fateful night that you were wounded.**

On the 27th of May we were gonna go just up the front line just to man the trenches. That's all I was supposed to do. I've mentioned about the Korean with the sore eye and I said, "I'll fix you up when I come back." So we went up to C Company. Everything

01:00 was going all right. Had a sleep and then darkness came.

Start from the top there.

On the 27th of May I said goodbye to the Koreans, cos I was going out on a patrol. Shoulders, the Korean KATCOMs had a sore eye. So I gave him some Aspros [painkiller] and said, "When I come in off the patrol tonight I'll give you some more." So off I went up to C Company.

01:30 The job was just to sit in the trenches all night to make sure the enemy didn't come through or anything. When darkness come I was standing there. The mate in the bunker next to me, we had a Browning machine gun in front of us, I had hand grenades lined up and I had a .303 rifle. You only had a bulletproof vest if you were going out on patrol. I had no bulletproof vest. Standing there, it's

02:00 11 o'clock at night, it was beautiful, full moon on the 27th May 1953. You could see the Chinese hills up the front all lit up with the whiteness. I felt so proud, pretty proud of me back in Australia. I was so happy. I was supposed to wake this other mate up at midnight. 5 minutes to 12 I thought, "No, I like it here, I can stay another hour. I won't wake him up, I don't mind." He was snoring on the ground there

02:30 with his blanket over him. Right on midnight the Chinese sent a barrage over for one hour. Mortar bombs, artillery, they kept on coming over us all the time. Every minute kind of thing. My mate woke up straight away. I'm looking out, you could see explosions in front of you. On the left was a minefield and I was mesmerised cos I could see little yellow orangey sparks shooting up everywhere were shrapnel had hit or something

03:00 a mine or an explosion from a mortar. I was mesmerised. I just kept looking at it. After one hour this barrage finished and some of my mates got injured in the trenches. I don't know if anyone got killed. I don't know. About an hour later we got a call to say we've gotta go out on patrol, which wasn't planned, there was 3 men missing on a patrol on a lay-out that went out the night before. They were trapped somewhere in a minefield by the

03:30 Chinese. The three men were corporal Jack Ashe, the leader, Jack Bardon from Boggabilla in Queensland that joined up with me, and another one was Bob Hipworth, he now lives at Sapphire in Queensland. These three were missing. So they said at 1 o'clock, "Right, out on patrol." I only had a .303 rifle, no Bren or Owen, and all the bullet proof vests had been picked up. So away I went on this patrol. We went looking

04:00 round the valleys for about an hour and couldn't find them. At one stage I walked up the front and saw a group of bushes and I said to Lieutenant Crowe, "I'll go and have a look in the bushes to see if there's any sign of anyone injured there." Not thinking that the Chinese could be hiding behind there and I only got a .303 rifle, one bullet to fire at a time. If they had machine gun bullets to fire, they could have fired 100 at me straight away. Luckily there was no enemy behind them. Never found one. I came back. After one

04:30 hour we trudge back in, hopefully good, can't find anyone, don't know what happened. I went back to my duties in the trenches. About 5 o'clock in the morning we got a phone call to say we had to go out on patrol again, near daylight, which everybody was frightened of because the enemy could see us. They got another call from these three men missing. Away we went out on patrol again with my .303 rifle, no bullet proof vest for me, and just two hand grenades in my jacket pocket. Went out in

05:00 daylight, and we found two men up near a minefield, Jack Bardon and Bob Hipworth, but no Jack Ashe. So I came up on the tail end and they said that Jack Ashe was down in the minefield injured still somewhere. Morrie Sharpe, he wasn't too happy that they hadn't found the third one. He said, "I'm going down the minefield to look for him." Me being an adventurer said, "Can I come with you, Morrie?" He said, "Yeah, come on." So he had an Owen machine gun, Morrie did. He was on my right. He had a radio on his back to radio in if

05:30 he wanted to, and I had the .303 rifle and two hand grenades, that's all I had. Away we went, down the valley, looking for Jack Ashe. It was just about right on daylight then. Morrie Sharpe said to me, "I'm going down the minefield to find Jack Ashe." I

06:00 said to him, "Can I come with you?" cos I was just adventurous. He said, "Okay." So the two of us started walking down towards a minefield. As we're going along I saw a bin lid on the ground about 3 feet long. It had a skull and cross-bone on it and said 'Danger, mines'. I said to Morrie, "We'd better be careful. Looks like a minefield around here." Because when the Americans laid their mines they used to lay the mines and just throw the boxes away. This was a lid there. I says, "We'd better watch out there's a

06:30 minefield somewhere around here." As I did I looked up and about 200 feet down the hill from us, I saw these red triangles on a fence. I said to Morrie, "We're right. There's a minefield down there, we'll go down there." Little did we realise then that the top fence of the minefield had been washed away or something. We were already in the minefield. So we just kept walking, thinking we're going to the outside, we were on the inside. We were about 20 feet apart. As we were walking along, somehow we went passed 7 to 8 mines we

07:00 missed tripping up or something. Then between us we tripped a mine up and I was thrown, luckily it was between us, probably 10 feet either side of us or something. I got thrown to the ground by this blast from the landmine. I could smell the cordite and everything. As I was lying on the ground, 3 seconds later I heard a second explosion. I was puzzled what was going on. I'm lying there and Morrie

07:30 yelled out, "Quick kid, grab your rifle, the Chinese have attacked us." I said, "I can't, I'm lying on it." I'm lying there and I'm trying to puzzle about this yellow powder and everything. The only theory that come was I still had the hand grenade in this left pocket, but none in the right. My jacket pocket was all shredded and apparently a piece of shrapnel from the mine hit the hand grenade, maybe broken it open somehow, unless the base plate had come out, and the yellow powder

08:00 Amatol inside was thrown all over me. Three seconds later the detonator went off. If it hadn't broken open I wouldn't be talking here now because you don't survive a hand grenade right next to your leg. Morrie got on the radio. I was in shock and Morrie was in shock. He went to put a bandage on his left leg. He pulled the bandage out, as he pulled the bandage out he couldn't unroll it. A piece of shrapnel from the mine had gone in the bandage and embedded itself. If he didn't have that bandage there it would have probably

08:30 cut his leg off, this piece of shrapnel. He managed to get on the radio and tell them we were injured and they told him to get off the air because they thought we were the Chinamen talking. Eventually we managed to get through and he swore over the radio, you're not supposed to, but he did. Eventually they sent the patrol up and all the mates that were with us on that patrol were standing up near the fence up there watching us in the minefield. They couldn't come down to us cos they knew we were in a minefield. Two stretcher bearers come

09:00 up, sappers they call them, two rescue people. The Chinese saw now, in daylight, some people all standing there. They fired three bullets through the trees. I thought, "oh, gee. We're gone. They know we're here, they can mortar bomb us. We'll be all gone." The stretcher bearers just got the stretchers and waved the two stretchers to the Chinamen like that. They never fired another round. Never did anything. They just didn't hate Australians. It was the South Koreans and Americans they hated more that Australians. They weren't worrying about us.

09:30 So they put the sappers in. I was lying on the ground there in shock. The sappers came in, two of them, with their bayonet prodding to find more mines. That's when they found 7 to 8 mines on the way to us, and marked them with some little flag or something. Then they got to me, the main sapper, I think his name was Ford, I found out later. He gave me two injections of morphine and within two minutes I'm as high as a kite. Got over my

10:00 shock and everything. They're patching me up the best they can. They got to Morrie and gave him a morphine injection. They took us out on the stretcher. As they take us out on the stretchers the Chinese never fired any bullets. They could have killed the lot of us. I was so high as a kite I'm telling them which way to go over the hill. "No, go around this way. Be better going this way." I'm lying on the stretcher half dead. When they got me back up to where the others are Frank Crowe said to me, our lieutenant, "Private Holden, you could never look after

10:30 yourself." When we got back further down I was on the stretcher and I said, "Gee my back's hurting. There's something there." Des Fitzgerald, the one who played the tricks with me with the slouch hat with the bazooka back at Hara Mura, he says, "You've got a hand grenade still there?" I said, "Yeah, it's in my jacket pocket." They were worried that the pin had been pulled out and if it come up it'd go off in three seconds. But

11:00 luckily they gingerly got it out and I hadn't pulled the pin out cos it was still in my jacket pocket. They put that away somewhere. Then a jeep come and took me on the back. He was crawling at half a mile an hour in the first gear. The driver was apologizing to me as my back was hurting. I had shrapnel in my back, I didn't know that then. He's apologizing at every little bump. They got me back to the Battalion Headquarters. There Joe Philips, a padre for the, I was Church of England but he was

11:30 so helpful, padre Joe Philips. He was Roman Catholic. He took my name and address and name of my parents, doing everything for me even though it wasn't my religion. It didn't worry padre Philips. They turned me over and they were worried. They said, "Where else does it hurt?" I said, "my back hurts." They turned me over and I could tell by the look of the, apparently I had a bit of a crater in my back where the shrapnel had gone in. So they called in helicopters to take Morrie and me back to the MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Unit]

12:00 hospital. Somehow it all got mixed up cos normally they bring one helicopter and have one in each side, but they brought in two Sikorsky H5 [transport] helicopters, big ones. I got a ride on the left side of one and Morrie in the other helicopter. They put me in the helicopter and I had blood coming down me. I was high as a kite, happy as Larry'. I'm sitting on one elbow enjoying the scenery. I thought, "This is great," because before I left Australia I told everyone I wanted a helicopter ride. I got it all right.

12:30 Got down to the MASH hospital and they took me inside and I suppose I started to feel groggy then. A big American Negro come up and says, "X-rays, hold still," and he picked me up like a lump of meat, big American, and put me on the X-ray table and says, "Hold still." When the X-rays were finished he picked me up, like a lump of meat, like I was only 1 pound weight, put me back on the stretcher. They took me away and I was operated on. I was out till the next day probably. 148 stitches I had in me.

13:00 The next morning they took me to the American hospital train. I was put on that and taken down to Seoul. On the hospital train I had shaky hands. Luckily this hand, I could write with it, this one was out of action like that cos I had shrapnel all up here. They got me to sign for books and stuff to get me on the train. I said, "What am I signing this for?" "This is so we can give it to the Australian Government." They had to pay for what

13:30 they gave us. All the things. We got back to Seoul on the train. There they put me in a Blitz Wagon, on my back. My back was so sore I ended up lying on my tummy and a matron from the RAAF hospital opened and said, "What have we here? Why are you lying like that?" I said, "My back hurts so much," and they realised I had injuries. I was in the RAAF hospital for one day. The next day they flew me on the DC3 back to Iwakuni.

14:00 I was upset because it had two litters on either side. Instead of putting me on the top one they put me in the low one I couldn't look out the window. I was upset for the 3-hour flight to Japan. When I got to Japan they put me in the British Commonwealth hospital. I was there for a month. They operated on me again to get some shrapnel out of my leg. I was on crutches. Morrie, my army mate, was next to me. We didn't speak for 3 or 4 days we were so sick. When we did talk to each other we kept on arguing, who tripped the landmine

14:30 up. We still argued till he died, who tripped it up. We'll never know anyway cos it's a very thin string nobody sees. Eventually the matron said to me, "Do you wanna go to the sacred island of Iwo Jima or back to Australia?" Stupid me said, "Australia." My mates went to Iwo Jima. So I said goodbye to my mates Jack Bardon and Morrie Sharpe and I was flown back to Australia the day after I was 21. I wrote in my diary, '21 today, don't feel like it'. It took me 2 or 3 days to fly

15:00 back to Australia. I was put in Concord Hospital and the next day I had my photo on the front of Sydney Morning Herald. I was in Concord for three months patching me up, trying to fix my leg up. The back they couldn't sow up, they had to let it weep so it corrected itself. That was it. I was there in Concord when the truce was signed on ward 610, that's the 6th floor.

15:30 **Describe what it was like when the mine went off. What do you remember?**

All I can remember as I found the ground, I remember yelling, "Oa! Oa!" That's the only thing I said out loud. I remember saying that. That's the only thing I could ever think of saying. Lying on the ground I know now when people go into shock, I know what it's like. You feel like you don't know what to do with yourself. It's a weird strange

16:00 feeling. You feel white and you're not sure whether to roll around or anything. It's a weird feeling, shock, and I was in deep shock I suppose, with all these wounds and losing blood. Luckily I didn't cut an artery otherwise I wouldn't be here now. It was just something like you don't know what to do with yourself. People have asked me what shock is. I said, "It's like as if you're told some terrible bad news, deaths in the family or some bad accident.

16:30 It's something like that. You can't describe it." As soon as they gave me the morphine injections I was right. I came out of the shock. I was high as a kite. Happy Larry. Couldn't care less about anything. It's just a weird thing you can't describe. You just feel like you're not sure what to do with yourself. You don't know. You're in very deep despair in a short time. It's weird. I don't understand it. Only people who have had shock would understand the same thing.

17:00 I don't know properly how to describe it. I could smell the cordite and I could see the yellow powder all over me. I looked at my .303 rifle. The butt had all chops out of it, bits and pieces. I don't know how I didn't get hit in the head. I was lucky. It was basically only from here down. I was lucky. The American Jumping Jack [mine], that was what it was, when they explode they're sent up by an explosive to about

17:30 shoulder waist level and then they go off. Morrie reckons he saw it, but I don't, cos I was probably looking that way when it went off. It's meant to throw shrapnel in all directions. How come none of us got hit in the head or something? We copped it round both legs mainly. I just copped it from where down. Just lucky. No bullet proof vest. If I had a bulletproof vest I wouldn't have got the injuries in the back and shrapnel here and things like that.

18:00 **Describe the injuries you got from that explosion.**

Shrapnel above the knee, in the back of the leg. Incidentally, when I got hit with the landmine the only thing I felt was like someone had stuck a pin in the back of my left leg. That was the only thing. I felt none of the others because it happened so quickly and I was trying to catch up with it. That's the only one. Just as if someone stuck a pin in my leg. It's the only one I felt. All the rest. I had injuries on the right leg where I think

18:30 the hand grenade might have dug a groove in or something. My left arm, the watch was all right, but the left arm was bleeding. Dirt and rubbish was all over it. My back wasn't hurting at that stage. I think that was basically the only ones I noticed was left arm and leg and everything. Jacket pocket was all peppered by the detonator going off and that was it. And the yellow powder everywhere. Just lying on the ground working it all out. Morrie yelled out to me, "Quick kid, grab your

19:00 rifle, the Chinese are coming," and I said, "Can't. I'm lying on it."

Were you able to move at all?

Yeah, but I was kind of rolling around. I don't think I could have got up. Morrie couldn't have got up either. That's why they radioed in and when the sappers came down they said, "Don't move around." I was moving around a bit and they said, "Don't move any more. There could be another landmine near you." When they got to me there wasn't any just near us, so we were lucky.

19:30 **What are your feeling towards those men who had to come into the minefield to rescue you?**

The training they got, and the braveness, I mean imagine, you've only gotta have one slip up and you could trigger a mine off while you're trying to just find where it was and mark it. they could miss one or something and stand on it. So when you trip them up and you're at distance, okay, you're lucky, you're okay. If you stand on a landmine it's not when you stand on it, when you

20:00 take your foot back off, that's when the trigger goes off. You stand on a landmine you're gone, because you get the whole blast, not just part of it. So I mean they're brave, these sappers, what they did. All I know, I found out years later his name was Ford. I believe he died a few years ago. I always wanted to thank him. That's the fellow, cos he remembers bringing me in, told the members in the 2nd Battalion in Queensland. They said, "Remember when Ernie Holden was rescued." They're brave fellows what they do. They're trained to

20:30 do it, but I would never be a sapper, Jesus, near explosives. Not only that, the sappers, I think they lay the landmines. Sometimes there could be an accident. Boy. If it wasn't for them, I don't know if I'd still be active.

What were you thinking about while you were lying there before you were rescued?

I don't know. "What happened? Was it Chinese?

21:00 What happened?" Both of us didn't realise it was a landmine at first. We had no idea till the sappers come down. We just thought the Chinese attacked us first. It seems strange cos we couldn't see any Chinese, might have thought they sent a mortar bomb at us or something. No, we didn't know what was going on. Thoughts? I don't know. When you're in shock you don't think very much I suppose. Blank out. I don't know. I was conscious, both of us. You generally only

21:30 go unconscious if you get hit in the head. No, we were both talking to each other. He wouldn't stand up either. He's talking on the radio and telling them off for not believing him. He was about 20 feet from me. He had an Owen machine gun. You couldn't carry a .303 rifle very well with the radio, so he just

had the Owen machine gun. That was it.

You said he had to swear at people on the radio?

Because

22:00 it was Canadians at the other end and they thought they were Chinese trying to cause problems saying, "So an so is down a minefield," just so as to attract men to go to the minefield so they could attack them. They said, "Get off. Get off." He said, "We're injured in a minefield." I don't know what he said to them. "We're powerless, we're injured in a minefield. Come and help us." Something like that, I don't know cos it was too far away for me to hear what he said. In the end he swore at them. When he swore they

22:30 realised he was an Australian. He wasn't a Chinaman. That's when they got the others to come up to the hill. I can remember them all standing in a row along the hill with the two stretchers waving. That was it.

The man you had gone out to find, Jack Ashe, what happened to him?

He is still missing today [Corporal Jack Ashe, Missing in action 28 May 1953]. Apparently when 60 Chinamen attacked this three-man patrol and they tried

23:00 to get out of the minefield and ended up running back through a minefield following their footsteps. How they followed them in the dark, well, it was a full moon that night anyway. They managed to, somewhere along the line one of them tripped a landmine up and then the Chinese attacked and threw hand grenades at them. They were on the side of the hill so they rolled hand grenades down to the Chinamen to slow them up. Eventually Jack Ashe got injured. Jack Bardon and Hipworth went back to

23:30 Jack Ashe and Jack Ashe had the radio. He said, "Take the radio, I want you to bug out. That's an order." He didn't want the Chinamen to get the radio cos if they got the radio they could monitor all funny things to help them later. He said, "That's an order," so they had to leave Jack Ashe in the minefield. He was injured in the minefield and they had to leave him. Patrols went later and they never found his body or anything. The theory is

24:00 the Chinamen took him away. Whether he was dead when they took him away or he died later we'll never know. That was it. Can you stop a second? I'll tell you something. This is not to go on camera.

What were the feelings about leaving a man out there?

24:30 I don't suppose they'd be very happy about leaving him, but it was an order and they knew they couldn't do anything cos they had 60 Chinamen still chasing them. There was a full moonlit night and they were trying to hide behind little bushes. Apparently they got a bit lost in the patrol and eventually they got on the radio and that's how they radioed in to say where they were. That's how come we ended up on that patrol at 5 o'clock in the morning and finding the other two.

25:00 No sign of Jack Ashe. Morrie and me never got far enough down the minefield to see. If we went further we might have found his body lying there. But the Chinese were pretty smart. They cart them off pretty quick. Don't muck around. They'll cart someone off and might patch them up if they want to, maybe they don't. If they're good enough they get them to help carry their stretchers. Jack Ashe I'd say, hand grenade and landmine, that would have done a lot of damage.

25:30 Don't know.

You said that was a lay up patrol. What does that mean?

The three men, yeah the lay out patrol. They go out after darkness the night before. They go down to no-man's-land somewhere in amongst bushes. They just lie there all day, hidden, and they could be near the Chinese line and they monitor whether the Chinese have got any movements, what they're doing and how many men they've got up on the side of their hill.

26:00 When they get a break they'll radio in their information, it mightn't be till darkness again. Then that next night they come back in when it's darkness. It's called 'lay out patrol'. Just three men. Two privates and corporal, Jack Ashe. Lay out patrol. Just lay out all day and basically that's it, monitor things. Hoping they don't get spotted. I wouldn't like to do it.

26:30 **Did you ever have to do it?**

No. In the 3½ weeks I only did mainly all patrols out the front, about 6 or 7. Oh and two nights in the forward outpost. That's scary cos it's only two of you way out in front. If the Chinese come up there's a good chance they'll get you.

After you were stretchered back up, what

27:00 **First Aid treatment did you get?**

They probably just put bandages on my arm, bandage on my leg. They didn't know about my back then, I hadn't said anything. Just tried to clam me down to out me on the stretcher to take me back to Battalion Headquarters where they gave me a bigger examination. They've gotta make the decision

there whether to send you out on a jeep to wherever to be fixed up, or helicopter or whatever, when they saw the injuries that both of us had

27:30 they called in, somehow two helicopters. How two, I don't know. A lot of money on two helicopters, big ones. That was it. Down to the MASH hospital.

How were the stretchers secured in the helicopter?

On the pods, much the same as you see in the MASH movies except I never had anything to do with the Bell helicopter, this was a Sikorsky one, a bit bigger. There was just a pod and they put the cover over you, but

28:00 plastic and you can see out. I must have been with my head to the rear cos I remember sitting up on the left side of the pod on one elbow and watching the blood come down in the bottle to me. How great is that? Super.

You didn't have any fears about falling?

No. Why? I always wanted to ride a helicopter. Why would I be worried about falling?

The helicopter ride took you where?

28:30 About 5 miles down the valley to the MASH 4344. That were all tents, I can vaguely remember seeing all the tents and taken inside and some minutes later the American Negro picking me up for the X-Ray. Probably 90% American people there. I don't mean the nurses and the doctors, I mean American troops that'd be there. The other 10% would be Canadians, Australian, British

29:00 or whoever got injured. There was also Indian MASHs and Norwegian MASHs. This was an American one, 4344.

What was the standard of care you got there?

I don't remember much about it, but I imagine it was super, because I've got all the records of the nurse helping the operation, what they gave me through Veteran Affairs. I'd say super, but I'd say after I was operated with and come out of it, I was so

29:30 groggy I just vaguely remember being taken to the American hospital train where I would have been more woken up on the hospital train. I remember them giving me all the stuff and getting me to sign, to charge the Australian government. That's all I can remember there. Once you've been operated on and are coming out of it you just can't remember a lot of things. I was probably groggy.

What contact did you have with other wounded men on the train?

30:00 None really. There could have been a mixture of some Australian, Americans, anything, I don't know. Apparently every morning this travelled back down to Seoul. It used to be 'Seoul' in those days, now they call it 'Soul'. It could have been more Australians. I don't know, I was just in a bunker down low. I remember that. All the curtains pulled down. Dark. Maybe they had head injuries and it had to be dark. I can't remember talking to anyone else, only just a

30:30 nurse or something that looked after me and gave me these things. That's the only thing I can remember on that one. Then the doors would have shut and it would have been all dark travelling I think 30 miles or something on the railway line. It took about an hour or so.

Where did you go after that?

On the Blitz Wagon into RAAF hospital in Seoul. I can remember the Blitz Wagon bumping across tramlines, cos it was all shut, I couldn't see anything. That's where I turned

31:00 myself over cos my back was hurting so much so I was lying on my tummy. There was tramlines bumping everywhere. The doors opening and the matron standing there, "Hello, what have we here?" like that. Then taken inside the RAAF hospital for the day. All pretty pastel blue room where they put the Australians before the flight the next morning back to Japan.

Why was it an RAAF hospital and not an army hospital?

31:30 I don't know. It was just an RAAF hospital that they had there in Korea. I'd say it was just about all Australians in it, but there may be some other there. I don't know. I just remember a big room with about 10 of us in there. Nurses coming round and checking us up and talking to us. That's all I remember. Pastel blue. It was an RAAF hospital.

How long after you had been wounded is this?

One day.

32:00 Because there was the train the next morning. This would have been midday or something. I was there from about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and about 6 o'clock the next morning I was taken to the airport to fly back to Japan. I can't remember much of going back to the airport. And a three hour flight to Japan in a Dakota DC3.

Were you comfortable during that journey?

Yeah, except I was cranky cos I wasn't on the top

32:30 litter to look out of the window. So I must have been all right if I was cranky cos I couldn't look out the window.

What feelings did you have at this point?

I don't know, just, "I'm having an aeroplane ride," I suppose. I can't remember much about that.

You don't think you had feelings of being upset or disappointed?

No, nothing really. Yeah, disappointed cos I couldn't look out the window. That's the only thing.

33:00 There was an RAAF nurse there looking after us. Or army nurse might have been, looking after us, making sure we were all okay. I can remember some other soldiers there, they might have been, I remember a lieutenant was going back on leave to Japan. They had sit-ups [low raised-back chairs] too as well as the stretchers.

Describe arriving back in Japan.

In Japan we were put in the ward

33:30 with Morrie next to me. There for about 3 or 4 days all we had was orange drink, we didn't feel like eating. We couldn't even put the glass up to us, we were so sick. We had a straw to drink. Morrie was on my right and we never spoke to each other for three days. Gradually they come around and checked on us. The British doctor decided he wanted to operate on my leg again. I had more shrapnel in there he wanted to get out.

34:00 Cos I was too sick they didn't wanna put me out. So they gave me a local and I watched him digging in my leg. The matron was standing there. I'd say for some reason they couldn't even put me out. Maybe even half put me out. I don't know. Then I ended up running around the hospital with crutches. While we were in the hospital in Japan Morrie

34:30 was on crutches too. We went downstairs. For recreation they gave us some gliders to make and a model of the Santa Maria boat fix kit [model]. I made that up and we made gliders. So we used to hobble around on our crutches, go up on the roof in the lift another two floors, get out the lift and thrown the gliders off the roof, go back down the lift, retrieve them, back in the lift, back

35:00 up, throw the gliders off. We were doing that all day sometimes. Just for fun. Another thing was we were in the lift one day and the Japanese lift driver, between floors, this all happened in about 30 seconds. The lift door shut, it was going and he pulls out all these photos and things. Pornographic or whatever you wanna call them. He says, "You buy? You buy? You buy?" Before you got to the next floor he'd have them all back again. Lift driver. He wanted you to buy his wares. We got the shock of our lives.

35:30 All happened in 30 seconds. When we were going back to the floor matron saw us keep going in this lift to the top. Then she'd see us going back up again. Down and up. Didn't know why. Then she worked out what we were doing. Throwing aeroplanes off the roof of the hospital in Japan. Then Morrie and me, we were bored stiff we were, we went out to a big fishpond there with koi and carp and we thought we'd try and catch these fish. So we got hold of bend pins and cotton string.

36:00 We put something on it, I don't know what kind of bait, meat or something. The Japanese gardener was over there and he cottoned onto us trying to catch these fish. So every time we'd go fish he'd come with his rake right next to us so as we wouldn't do it. So as soon as he'd bug off somewhere, straight away we'd try. But we never caught them. What would we do if we did catch them? It was something to do to pass the time, these koi and carp. He wasn't too happy this gardener, we were gonna catch the sacred fish. Never caught them though.

36:30 We had fun there.

Obviously you were recovering at this point.

Yeah, still on crutches. My army was still like this, hand, because the nerves were damaged there. About the third week the nurse said, "We've gotta do something with you. Send you back to Australia or go to Iwo jima Island to recover." About three weeks later my thumb went like that. "Look, it's working."

37:00 About three months later, over three months, gradually, and after three months, back to. This arm and hand is stronger than my right hand now. The matron said to me, "What do you wanna do? Go back to Australia or sacred island Iwo jima?" I said "I'm going back to Australia." Stupid me. I shouldn't have said it. My mates decided to go to Iwo jima, so I said goodbye to them. On the day after, the 27th June, the day after I was 21 I went on the

37:30 train to Iwakuni from Kure and was flown the next day back to Australia. My mates went to the island of Iwo jima. Last July August I went to the island of Iwojima after 50 years. I always wanted to go there. Where the giant Tori [volcano] is. I was there after 50 years.

What was at Iwo jima? A hospital?

Yeah, for people to recover. Apparently it was used by the

38:00 Japanese that did the kamikaze raids. They went there to rest up about a week before they did their raids. Also, the Emperor of Japan had his white horse there. People used to have a little dish of bread and each person used to lay this dish of bread. If the white horse went and ate theirs they were blessed. He picked the right person. Apparently, even the Korean War

38:30 the Emperor had his white horse there. Maybe he came down there and rode it, I don't know. One Australian got drunk and got on it and got the horse to prance up in the air with his slouch hat. He got buzzed off the island. Another mob threatened to paint this white horse with black paint. My mate Morrie and him he caught up with another Canadian fellow. They got drunk all the time, they were happy.

39:00 Apparently this giant Tori was bad luck to go underneath with a sailing boat or anything, any kind of boat. What they did, they hired a little yacht or something that was there and they went underneath it. When they went underneath there was a great storm came up and blew them upside down and they had to be rescued by the Japanese in the water. Just for fun. They did everything you're not supposed to do. So I just never got to Iwo jima. I got there 50 years later.

Tape 6

00:32 **When did you leave Japan?**

I left Japan on the 27th of June 1953 and travelled back via Guam island and stayed at Guam American airbase overnight. The next morning we left and flew to Port Moresby to refuel and have an hour's rest. Then took off from Port Moresby and

01:00 we got over the coast of Australia, I think it was 5:30 at night. We arrived at Sydney about 9 o'clock at night in the darkness. We went to Mascot. The news crews were there to take photos and everything like that. There six of us on stretcher cases in the plane, they took us off on forklifts instead of taking us down the stairs.

01:30 They put us in the back of the ambulance and we were interviewed in the back of the ambulance. A Red Cross nurse, Trudy Chan, interviewed me. One gave me cigarettes and packages. My mother was upset because she thought I was taking up smoking just cos they were giving us packages. They took photos and the next day the photo was in the Sydney Morning Herald. After that the ambulance took us to Concord

02:00 hospital. I was taken up to 610, the 6th floor. We went to bed at 11 o'clock or something like that. The next day nurses came around and doctors to see what was wrong, go through my records. From then on I was on Concord for about 3 months.

What happened during those three months?

Basically they wanted my right leg to heal up because the skin graft they did in Japan didn't

02:30 work. So they wanted it to heal naturally, which it took nearly 10 years for it to heal up. Also, my back injury. They couldn't stitch it up, they wanted it to naturally weep for a while until it stopped weeping. For some reason they can't stitch it up if everything is trapped in there. They basically just gave me this treatment for three months. I was walking around and going around in a wheelchair. Mainly all wheelchairs.

03:00 They didn't want my leg to be moved too much. While I was in there I never caught up with any army mates I knew, but while I was in there on the 27th of July, the truce was signed and the war was over in Korea. While I was there, one day I was standing at a railing talking to a National Service fellow that had been shot somehow with a .303 rifle in the left arm. While we were talking there we started talking

03:30 about watches. He said, "I've got a new watch that's shockproof." I said, "What do you mean shockproof?" He said, "It can be dropped or stood on and it won't break cos it's moving and it won't stop. I could drop it off the floor here, 6 floors and it won't break." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll give you the watch. I'll go down the lift to the ground floor, out onto the grass. When I tell you, you drop the watch up here over the side of the railing." So

04:00 away he went downstairs and I yelled at him, "Are you sure you want me to drop it?" He said, "Yes." So I dropped his watch. I watched it go down, but instead of landing on the grass it landed on a grate about 12 inches round. All I could see was bits of watch was going everywhere. He picked up what he could, came back up in the lift and never mentioned shockproof watches again. Another time, for something to do, cos we used to burn around in wheelchairs and knock people over, down in Concord Hospital, down all the

04:30 walkways and everything. We used to have a derby. We used to go down outside the mortuary in Concord Hospital down near the mangrove swamps. We used to dare ourselves at 9 o'clock at night,

alone, to see how long we could stay outside. We didn't know how many bodies were inside the morgue, we didn't know. I can't remember whether we ever really took up the dare and stayed there. It was a bit

05:00 eerie. Other trips we did was they used to have Italian migrants then who'd do cleaning at the hospital. It was all polished wooden floor up that side of the lifts near where ward 610 was. The Italians used to polish these floors and we'd be sitting in wheelchairs watching him. When he finished the floor he'd look at it how nice it was, get in the lift and take his stuff down to do another floor. We'd get in our wheelchairs and do derbies all round to make

05:30 tyre marks all over the woodwork. Later on he'd come up and look and he'd see all these marks everywhere and he'd give us a dirty look. We'd be sitting there looking out the window. So he'd have to get all his equipment and come and polish it all up again. We were terrible sometimes. Another time one Sunday, a whole mob of friends of mine came from Normanhurst and Hornsby to see me. I was in the wheelchair cos the doctor didn't want me to move my leg too much. So I used to go out to the main gate to say

06:00 goodbye to them and then go back in the wheelchair, back up to my ward. One day when we were walking across going out with them, and there's all people going out, their visiting had finished, and the people were probably looking, "Look at that poor digger in the wheelchair." We come to a gutter so I thought, "I'll get over this." So I got out of the wheelchair, picked up the wheelchair, put it over the top of the gutter and then got back in. I don't know what the people thought of me. I could hear them going "Oh, there's nothing wrong with him."

06:30 I just wanted to get the wheelchair back off the gutter. I don't know what they thought of me. A poor old digger getting out of the wheelchair and moving it. What next?

What was the treatment in the Concord Hospital?

Terrific. The nurses really looked after us and the matron used to come around every day, doctors and everything. One time I upset the

07:00 nurses because I had a big crater in the right side of my leg and when the nurses come around to put a patch over it and fix it up or swab it I said, "It looks like strawberry jam," and I knew that'd make the nurses sick. "Looks like strawberry jam." And you could see them nearly get sick, nurses. I used to bill them. They were terrific. They were real good to us. We used to go down and watch pictures

07:30 in the ward or down a theatre down there. Another time they had South Pacific. Apparently it was on stage in Sydney somewhere that time and they came for a visit one night and put on the stage show in one of the wards, so we all went down there and heard all the people who were in it in Sydney. They might have paid 50 pound to go and watch South Pacific and they came and sang to us, and sat around us, and got us to sing with them. All songs from South Pacific.

08:00 It was quite good in a way. Different things happened. I had plenty of visitors come to see me. Where I was on the 6th floor you could see the railway lines at Meadowbank and I was thinking, "Gee, I'm looking forward to the day when I get out of here and get on the train and go home."

Were you a hero?

I suppose I was. For Normanhurst, yeah. I think I was the

08:30 only one in Normanhurst who went to the Korean War. There was a lot of fellows around that had been to the Second World War and they would have, if they thought about me cos they'd been in the Second World War, they'd know what they'd experienced, and they would know partly what I went through.

Going back to Korean, what did you think of Communism when you went there?

When I joined up Communism didn't mean a lot to me.

09:00 I didn't understand it properly, but it wasn't till we more or less had lectures about what the Chinese and North Koreans were doing, how hard pressed they were in those countries, we started to get a bit of an idea. Remember I was only 19. That kind of thing didn't particularly worry me.

How did you cope with living without women in Korea?

All right. I suppose I wasn't there long enough to worry. I'll tell you what, a lot of the men though, there was a

09:30 place in Korea called 'Little Chicago', a little town outside Camp Casey. We were all warned not to go there because diseases were rife. A lot of my mates I believe, went there. They didn't care. I didn't. It didn't worry me really. I wasn't really worried.

Did you hear of other men getting diseases?

Yeah I heard a couple, at least one I know. It's been kept very quiet, I can't

10:00 mention anything. One that ended up in hospital in Japan for a week or two and then coming back to us and we were listening to his stories. I can't tell you more about that. Only a few people ended up getting it, I knew anyway. I can only remember one person, but I know there was a few, but I wouldn't know

who they were. All the others. We always had lectures

10:30 all the time. I used to take notes. I was a scared kid I suppose.

What did they tell you in the lecture?

Basically the hygiene in having sex with Japanese women. Come back and have a shower and special soap and all that kind of thing. That scared me.

11:00 **When you were treated in Concord, tell me about your wound healing.**

The one at the back at trouser belt level had to automatically weep, they couldn't stitch it up and just let it, the moisture was there and they had to wait a couple of months for it stop; heal itself weeping. The right leg was a great big mess. Like I said, it was strawberry jam. They were swabbing it every day to keep it clean

11:30 because there was no skin there. I suppose they worried disease would get into it. Basically all the other injuries were pretty well healed up, the stitches were out.

Were you in pain?

No, not really in Concord. Can't remember it. No, just sore. I still protect it today if grandchildren go to run up to me I automatically put my hand like that to protect it or turn around

12:00 so they can hit me this side, never on that side. For 40 years I've automatically, 50 years, protecting myself on that side, because it's sensitive and plays up if it's cold. Especially at wintertime and I've gotta put pong pants ['Long John' thermals] on to keep it warm. That's the only trouble I have, really.

Over the 10 years when your leg was healing, how did you cope with that?

I put cottonwool on it and sticking plaster all the time to protect it. About 10 years, wasn't it? Yeah,

12:30 till it healed up. It was like that, a big hole. It's still sensitive to touch. It annoys me just to touch it. But I was all right. In Japan they took a bit of skin out of here to put a skin graft on it, but it didn't work. The reason I think it didn't work was, I wouldn't stop still. I suppose I couldn't move for a couple of weeks, but me, I was all over the place. So it didn't

13:00 work. I'd say it's my fault it didn't work. When they operated that time, I heard when you have skin grafts they can't put you out when they do it, I've heard, I don't know whether that's true or not, I'd say when they operated on my leg in Japan, again to get more shrapnel, they might have taken that out while I was not under, but conscious, and put the graft over there. I've heard over the years that they can't do skin grafts if you're out to it, for some reason. I don't know whether

13:30 that's true or not.

Tell me about leaving Concord.

Just a few weeks before I left Concord hospital completely they gave me weekend leave. That was super. The first time I went home on leave was a Tuesday. Home to Normanhurst. All the time in Korea I'm thinking, "What's it gonna be like when I walk down my street at Hammond Avenue at Normanhurst? They'll all be running out, 'Hello Ernie, how are you?'" and all this.

14:00 Tuesday, get out of the train at Normanhurst. No one there. Walked down my street, not a person in sight. cos everybody's at work. So I was a bit disappointed. I was waiting for everybody to rush out. No, no one. I think I went home for a day first, overnight or something, from Concord. Then back to treatment during the next few days. I might have got leave a week later or something and went home to Normanhurst to see all my friends. Then in September I was discharged from Concord

14:30 hospital and stayed in the army because I was advised to go for a war pension, before I left the army. So I was basically stationed at Marrickville for a while. Go on day leave and weekend leave. I went before the medical board for the war pension and I got 30% straight away for injuries and then after that, I got my discharge on a Friday and went home for the last time in my uniform.

15:00 Very sad. Most soldiers go, "Beauty, I'm out of the army. That's it." No, sad for me because I was going out was the last night and all my mates were still back in Korea. I missed them.

Why were you sad to hang up your uniform?

I don't know, I suppose I felt proud wearing it and I was lonely. My brother and sister were both married and Mum and Dad were fairly old, they

15:30 went to bed early. I was so lonely. I missed all the noise and people in barracks. All of a sudden completely on my own. Even at Marrickville I was waiting for my discharge, there was always men there at night and someone to talk to. All of a sudden it's all gone. The shouting was gone. Kings were gone or whatever you call it.

What did you do then?

The next day I was in civilian clothes and I

16:00 probably got on my pushbike and went for a ride somewhere. Then when we were discharged they wanted me to finish the apprenticeship, they had no one at work at Norwood Press, Kent Street, Sydney. They wanted me to start that the next week and I said, “No, I wanna go for a trip around Eastern Australia for 2 weeks. I just bought a Vespa motor scooter.” So I went for a trip for two weeks on my Vespa motor scooter before I started back to finish my apprenticeship.

16:30 **How was it being back, finishing the apprenticeship?**

A bit strange at first because I missed everyone. It was a new life and going back to an old kind of thing. I missed the army, I liked it. The discipline and the friendship and all that kind of thing. It was hard. It took me years to settle down. I know I was suffering from post traumatic stress, but in those days it wasn’t known as that, it was called shellshock in those days.

17:00 No one knew much about it. I know now over the years that I missed my mates. All of a sudden you go back to work, it’s all quiet and not something happening every day, all the time.

How did the post traumatic stress affect you?

One time I was back apprenticing and the [Department of] Veterans’ Affairs sent a letter to say I’d been paid a bit too much in my

17:30 pension and I broke out in tears in the office at Veterans’ Affairs, Grey’s Building in Sydney. I couldn’t stop. They sent me back to work and they got someone to take me home. I don’t know, it took me days to settle down. I didn’t know what was wrong with me. I couldn’t work it out. Eventually went back to work, but I couldn’t work out, “Why is this happening?” Suddenly I realised I must have had a bit of a nervous breakdown and didn’t realise it.

18:00 Didn’t know anything about those things in those days. That just settled down all right. Going out every night on my Vespa and a Lambretta [motor scooter] and pictures nearly every night and out to friends places every night. Out to pictures with girls all the time. I just had to keep myself busy and make sure I got home after midnight so as I was real tired and I’d go to sleep straight away for ages.

For how long?

A couple of years.

18:30 **When you were on the front line in Korea, did you cry there?**

No. I was happy there, kind of. A bit scared, but I was happy. I was doing something useful. I was getting letters from back in Australia. They were probably thinking, “Ernie’s a hero over there.” I don’t know. I was happy. I was scared with what’s gonna happen next,

19:00 whether you’re not gonna come back in the patrol the next night. No, I was doing something useful, first thing I’d ever done useful. No, none of that. I was very naïve. I was only 20 then. The baby of the whole group. They all looked after me. The older ones who had been in the army before, were advising me on different things, “Don’t do this, don’t do that,” whatever they were, I can’t remember. No, I was

19:30 happy as Larry in Korea. Scared, but I was happy as Larry. I was useful.

When the Chinese played songs, how did you feel?

That was their idea was to make you feel homesick. It wouldn’t be so much for me, but the ones who were married and all that. It’d make them think of their wives back at home and maybe they had children. Things like that. They

20:00 were the ones that would feel that. It was propaganda to make them feel terrible. That was their idea. They played music and telling that your girlfriends at home are going out with someone else. All different things like that to upset you. I was single so that wouldn’t have worried me.

In Korea, did World War

20:30 **Two veterans tell you stories about World War 11?**

Yeah, I used to hear lots of stories, different, World War 11, like the friend down my street that I got drunk with, he was telling me how his father was talking about how he was in the trenches in New Guinea, somewhere in the jungle. He was standing next to his mate and the next minute his mate, there was only half of him there. A shell got him. Different stories I’ve heard from different people have been in the Second World War.

21:00 I never met my father again, so he couldn’t tell me. I don’t even know, I know he was on a war pension before he died, but what for, whether he got injured in the Middle East I’ve got no idea. Probably be on Veterans’ Affairs records. One day I’ll try and find out, but I’ve got no idea really. Different people told me different stories. Little bits and pieces that happened to them and all that. Morrie Sharpe, who I was in Korea and Japan

21:30 with, and joined up with in Australia, he come from England, around Southampton. He was telling me

all the stories with the buzz bombs [V-1 flying bomb] in London and how the Germans dropped one big bomb on a department store and there was so much of a mess after they didn't get any bodies out, they just filled in the hole. They couldn't do anything cos it was in the middle of the war. They covered it all up, all those people there, 200 they reckoned they lost in the department store. Different

22:00 stories you hear.

Why did you choose to come back to Australia when you were injured?

Maybe I was homesick? Because in my diaries for about three weeks, when I was in the front line, the full two weeks I used to put underneath pretending what I was doing back in Australia; "I went to the pictures at Hornsby. I went and saw…" I've even got authentic movies in there. How I did it, I don't know. And some of the film stars, it's all in the diary. But how I

22:30 did it I don't know, because they were authentic pictures. Then, "I walked home with so and so," one of the girls I walked home. "Went to bed at 11 o'clock." There's a part underneath like I'm living in another world. The top of the page is about Korea. What time I went out of bed, what time I got on patrols and all that. The bottom half is as if I'm back in Australia going to the pictures and going to the church on a Friday night for fellowship they called it. Went to church on a Sunday night and walked home with so and so. It's weird. I don't know how I did it.

23:00 It's all in the diary for about two weeks.

When you were in hospital in Concord, did you hear from your friends in Korea?

Not really, cos mail would have gone direct to my home. I got cards and mail from different mates, but they would have gone all to Normanhurst where I lived. I got letters from mates that were back in what's-its-name. Brian O'Reilly that lives at Thornleigh now, he went to the 3rd Battalion, I was

23:30 in the 2nd. He heard I got injured and he wrote a letter straight back to my parents to tell them that he'd heard that Ernie was all right, he's okay. I was in hospital in Japan then. "I've been talking to his mates. They say he's being looked after well in Kure Hospital," and all that. I've got the letter there. I've showed him the letter and he can't believe that he wrote it. It's his writing and he can't remember writing my parents. That's how things happen.

24:00 Got Christmas cards form the 2nd Battalion and two of them that were with me in Korea, Horse Henley and Kenny Paget who come from Epping. Different things. They kept in touch. I was so pleased when I went back to the apprenticeship, the 2nd Battalion came back in April. I think it was 16th of April they marched through Sydney. I left work at Norwood Press,

24:30 I said, "I'm going out to see my battalion." They said, "We can't spare you." I said, "I'm going." I went up into George Street and watched the battalion march through Sydney. Then they disbanded at Belmore Park at the Central Railway. I went and met all my mates I'd joined up with, that were still coming back with the battalion, and talked and everything. I went back to work happier because all my mates were back. Before that they were still in Korea. Christmas time it was snowing and I'm back here and thinking how they're getting on. Even through the

25:00 truce had been signed, there was no fighting, but they were all mates I'd joined up with in Korea. I felt happier when the battalion came back.

Tell us about hearing about the end of the war.

All I can remember was I was in hospital in Concord and 27th July they announced it on the radio, no television those days, that the truce had been signed 10 pm. The war was finished at 10 pm on the 27th of July.

25:30 I said, "That's good. All my mates will be okay now." I was happy. I knew then that it was now use staying in the army because I only joined up to go to Korea, so I knew that when I finished at Concord I'd be getting discharged even though I knew I wasn't due for discharge until April the next year because it was a 2-year contract. But the army doesn't want you once the war's finished. I had injuries and everything. So

26:00 I was only in the army 19 months instead of the contract for 2 years. No sense in keeping me.

Once you finished you apprenticeship, what happened then?

I went round and worked for different printing places all around Sydney. Penrith. Lived at Katoomba for 12 months. Worked at Penrith Press, up at Penrith for about a year. Moved around to different printing places. About 10.

26:30 I finished my apprenticeship. The first one I went to was John Sands down the bottom of Bathurst Street in Sydney. Or Druitt Street? Druitt or Bathurst Street.

How did you meet your wife?

Church dance up at Hornsby. I belonged to the Church of England Fellowship at Normanhurst. We used to go to different places, invited to different dances at church. Up at St Peter's Church at Hornsby I met her and

27:00 asked her to dance and tied a balloon around her leg. I did that right?

I understand you met your mother again.

Yes. About 1962. One of our sons was born. We put the ad in the Sydney Morning Herald and some relation of my real mother saw the ad and showed it to my mother. She saw our Gregory's name was in it, he was

27:30 born. She said to my father, maybe they were still friends then, 62, he died in '66, "I'd like to meet Ernie again," and my real father said, "No, don't upset him. It's all finished, don't worry." So my mother, she went against Dad and she contacted Mrs Holden, my mother, and also my sister, and said how she'd like to meet me again. Ethel and my mother said,

28:00 "It's up to Ernie if he wants a meeting." So a letter came and straight away I said, "I wanna meet my real mother, I might have some brothers and sisters." So I arranged it and I met her outside Bether Falls Corner, which is Woolworths now, at the town hall one Saturday afternoon. I didn't have a photo of her, but as soon as she was standing there, I knew it was my mother. I could tell straight away. I've never seen a photo or anything. Knew her straight away. So that was it. That was in '62.

28:30 We had a reunion later at Centennial Park with all the families, her ties, aunties and uncles. We took our kids down. We had about 4 then, I can't remember. I've kept in touch with her. She was in a home at Gymea and I used to go and see her every couple of weeks till she died at 90, nearly 91, two years ago. Mr and Mrs Holden died about 30 years ago cos they were

29:00 40 years older than me. My mother would have been only 20 years older than me.

How did your parents hear about you being hurt?

A major in a jeep come with a batman [servant] driver and the major went to my parents house at Normanhurst and handed her a little slip of paper like a telegram to say I was injured. That's how they knew.

29:30 I've got the original telegram. I've got plenty of copies of it. I just look after it.

How did they react?

I don't know. I was in Korea in hospital. I have no idea. I'd say when they got the telegram I could have been on the train on the way to the hospital at Seoul. I don't know how they reacted. I didn't see them for 5 weeks later. Didn't bother

30:00 asking them. I know the fellow over the road came rushing out. He saw the jeep and thought, "Hello, I wonder if Ernie's been killed," or something.

You talked about North Korean informers infiltrating.

Yeah, it was well known, because they looked the same. They could cross over in the night, somehow sneak through. How they sneak through I don't know. They used to get the information and one of the stories I

30:30 got when I was in Canberra, one of the fellows gave me a photo and told me the story how like a friend of mine was injured in a lunch line or breakfast line. Apparently these North Koreans or Chinese were in the camp where they made up the boxed lunches that the Korean porters brought up to us. Apparently they were in

31:00 there, Chinese and North Koreans, pretending they were South Koreans. Apparently they had a hidden radio and they'd radio the Chinese on the other side when the lunch queue was there, and things like that. That's why they used to send the mortar bomb over at the right time for a lunch queue, breakfast queue, tea queue or whatever. Apparently they found this bloke with the radio and the South Koreans just grabbed him, took him over the side of the hill and he was never seen again. Shot him dead, finished. That finished that radio

31:30 messages going back. That happened quite a bit, but you could never, cos they looked the same. They had no identification. That's well known. Probably all wars are like that where they infiltrate. I suppose Second World War Germans and that would be hard. I suppose they could pick them easier against a British soldier. But North Koreans and South Koreans, in the mix they're the same kind, so nobody would know that

32:00 they were the enemy spying. I never had any personal occasions where I've known if it myself, just different stories I was told.

After the war finished, how involved did you become in Anzac Day marches?

First of all I used to go to an Anzac Day march about every two years. As the men got older and I got older and a lot of them died young, so the last 10 years I'm going every

32:30 year now, because a lot of my mates are gone now. I've got a photo that was taken at Burwood RSL

[Returned and Services League] three years ago. Lieutenant Crowe, he was there, Bob Evans there and Jack Bardon. I've got a photo that Beverly took of the four of us. I'm the only one left now. The others are gone. So I keep on. I belong to the Korea and South East Asia Force Association. They have a meeting once a month in Paddington

33:00 RSL. I go next Wednesday. I'm giving them little things to put in the newsletter and things like that and try and help. Every Kap'yong Day [Battle of Kap'yong, 23rd April 1951], which is a week before Anzac Day I lay a wreath at the Cenotaph for the 2nd Battalion Association. They asked me to do it about 10 years ago. So every year I lay a wreath with a card for the 2nd Battalion at Martin Place. I wanna keep doing that for many years.

33:30 I keep up with the association. I've got a lot of friends who are in the army I keep up with. Giving them help with writing a book and advice and photos.

You've been back to Korea several times.

Six times. Went back in '91 and went back to Japan too, in that trip for 5 days in Japan. Then I went in '93 for the 40th anniversary. Then I went in '98.

34:00 '98 we went to China for 3 or 4 days to Beijing and climbed the Great Wall of China. That was great. Then 2000 and 2001 and then last year was the 50th anniversary of signing the truce. I went on a tour back there and we went to Japan for 3 or 4 days too, and I gradually caught up sacred island of Iwo jima after 50 years. I always wanted to go there. The trip was there so I went. I'd like to go back to Korea in

34:30 2028, the 75th anniversary. But I'll be 90 something then. That's 26 years away. 24 years away something like that. So each time I go back I take wreaths and put on the 5 graves that I know over there, plus the memorial wall for Jack Ashe with a card, and any of the families

35:00 give me a wreath to take over, I take photos. I've done that every time I go over there. I look at it this way; if something happened to me I would have liked someone to go over there and put a wreath on my grave. It's weird, when you go to the UN cemetery and a couple of the fellows, Keith Wren and Ron Rackley [Ronald Charles Rackley, killed in action 21 May 1953], their graves are not next to each other but one apart. Because of their date of dying, on the 20th and 21st May I can pick out roughly, within 20 feet, roughly, if I'd died on the

35:30 28th of May, roughly where I would have been in the ground, and it's weird standing there thinking, "I could have been just there." It's a weird feeling.

When you were there, did you think much about dying?

In the Korean War? Yeah, sort of now and then. But you had to brush it out of your mind because you can't think, "I'm gonna die tomorrow. I'm gonna die tomorrow." You've just gotta push it out of your mind and just keep going. That's what our training was

36:00 for. Our training wasn't to think we were gonna die all the time. It was what we've gotta do, our part in the war and all that. That's what you did. You looked at the list and those that died and those that were injures and think, "Hope I'm not tomorrow." Just push it off, brush it off, cos you had to otherwise you'd go crackers. Start crying like you say.

Did anything happen there that you've never told anybody about?

In Korea? No, not really.

36:30 Nothing really. Only with the padding in the shoulder right from first training. I kept the quiet cos no one else would have done it and they'd probably think I'm a wuss [wimp]. I always kept the padding, all that time, cos the first time I fired the .303 and it really hit me in the shoulder. They said how you could break your shoulder if you don't hold it right. From then on I always had a padding there. No one knew. It was there all the time. They said, "We're going out to fire the rifle today," and I'd straight away get a couple of handkerchiefs

37:00 or a singlet or something, and shove it up there and they never knew. I did it in Korea too. I didn't know any time when I'd be firing my .303 rifle. So nobody ever knew. I kept it quiet.

Did you ever talk with Morrie about it?

Yes. What happened was, I didn't catch up with Morrie till 30 years later. This is another big long story. He ended up catching up with his childhood sweetheart that lived in England. They moved to

37:30 Inverell to live and I went up and met him twice at Inverell. He died three years ago. He helped me. Told me stories and I'd ask him, "What happened here or there?" The same thing always came up. He reckons I tripped the landmine up and I said, "No, you did." It was kind of a joke. We'll never know. He filled me in to help me with lots of parts I couldn't picture like, "How come we went looking for Jack Ashe?" and things like that.

38:00 He was always helping. He was reminding me about how we saw the movie, "The Merry Widow" and how the boys said, "We're gonna be in amongst that soon" with the noise that was going on. We got on pretty well together. I was glad I caught up with him. It was only more or less for a few days each time.

it was a long way to Inverell, but caught up with him, got the stories. I got him back with Jack Bardon who died two years ago. He went up there too once. How he found me was, when

38:30 I got the TPI in ’88 [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension]. My name was in the TPI newsletter. Morrie was already on a TPI and he saw my name in the newsletter for TPI and he contacted the TPI Association in Sydney and said, “Can you give me the address of Ernie Holden?” They said, “No, but what we’ll do is, if you write a letter to us, we’ll pass it onto him.” So the letter come here and that’s how I knew Morrie lived at Inverell. I thought he was back in England. After all these years he turned out to be, all his life

39:00 with his family, had 13 children from his first wife, living at Huxton Park. I didn’t know, I thought he was in England, otherwise I would have contacted him.

Tape 7

00:33 **One thing we haven’t talked about is the camera that you won in Japan.**

Yeah, when I was in Japan, the Hiro camp, we played bingo about once a week, might have been twice a week, up at the recreation room. I don’t know whether it was called ‘bingo’ or ‘housie’. The Americans had one name and our name’s the other. I won a little box camera at this. From then on, while I was in Japan and Korea I was able to take

01:00 all the photos. If it wasn’t for winning that camera there wouldn’t be the photos. I’ve got about 30 or 40 that I took in Japan and Korea. While I was at the front line, I was taking pictures. Mainly from D company behind the front line. I never took any photos exactly at the front line cos you could have a Chinese sniper looking at you while you’re trying to take the picture. I took them in D company cos it was safe there. Even though there was no telephoto lens it was okay. Black and

01:30 white they came out beautiful.

Did you ever get yourself into danger by taking pictures?

No, because all the photos in Korea were taken back of the D Company, which was half a mile behind the front line. No, never in any danger.

Describe how you’d clean a hand grenade.

You just get it out of the box and had all this grease all over it. No detonator in it.

02:00 The explosive’s inside it and all you did was; first you’d undo the base to make sure there wasn’t a fuse inside it. You could pull the striker arm off probably. You’d pull the pin out, take that off and get a knife and clean it. Maybe we had benzene or something like that to help clean it, cos you didn’t wanna carry a hand grenade that’s all greasy, like it’d slip out of your hand and everything. That’s it. You’d do a whole box of them.

02:30 Once they were clean, if you had to take the striker arm to clean underneath it, you put the striker arm back and the pin. The pin is like a little cotton pin in a way. Pull them over a bit so they won’t actually pull straight out. You didn’t arm them until you went out on patrol or something. The detonators were in the end of the box, probably 12 in a little packet of 12 hand grenades. They were soaked so you put the detonators in

03:00 it. That was it.

Which of your daily chores did you enjoy doing the most?

Other than sleeping I suppose writing letters and things like that. Taking some photos. Nothing else really. A bit of washing I suppose you have to do now and then. I can’t remember doing a lot of that. Maybe we just kept our washing till we went back on a break for one day a week or something like that.

03:30 I can’t remember doing any washing at the front line. I remember shaving with cold water. With a razor and cold water and washing my face with cold water on a cold morning. It wasn’t really cold then, when I was in Korea. April and May was warm compared to around Christmas time when all the snow was there.

The Korean War has sometimes been called the forgotten.

The Forgotten War.

04:00 Because when the Korean War was on, because it wasn’t a big war like the Second World War, see, the Second World War was a threat to all around the world. Everybody. Japan coming down here and Germany attacking England and all those countries, Norway, taking them over and everything. But the Korean War was strange because it was the first war that the United Nations come into and there was just basically to stop Communism from the

04:30 North Koreans moving into South Korea, which they did for a while, but were sent back. Nobody took it as much, because it wasn't a world war. It wasn't as if Australia was threatened by North Korea, so it just wasn't known. They used to call it 'a police action'. Then different things Americans called it, "The war that's be home by Christmas," that's what they called it 'Home by Christmas' because they thought when the war broke out on

05:00 25th of June 1950 they thought by Christmas they'd have the North Koreans back over and everything sorted out. It went on for three years. It's the Forgotten War because it's not a world war. It didn't mean anything to most people. They weren't threatened. They were probably going, "Why are they sending people to a police action?" That's what it was called here, 'a police action'. It was wrong, because look at all the people that died in it. To stop

05:30 the North Koreans taking over South Korea. Basically that's what it was. If it wasn't a United Nations formed, I think in 1945, where the United Nations appealed all 16 countries around the world, including Australia, and Bob Menzies [Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia] agreed to sign the contract that Australians go on action in Korea cos it's part of United Nations. Just like if Australia was attacked now, the United Nations would appeal to all the other countries in the United Nations to come and help

06:00 if anything happened here. That's basically it. That's what the United Nations was formed for, partly. To help people with trouble in war.

When you wrote letters home, who did you write the most to?

My parents, my sister, my girlfriend for a while, friends around Normanhurst I grew up with who I went to this church fellowship with, mainly.

06:30 **Was there something in particular you were really looking forward to eating or seeing when you got home?**

No, I come and look at the pictures, we called them pictures in those days, things like that. Mixing with my fellowship mob, because I used to go out with the fellowship on a Friday night. We used to go to church on a Sunday night and have fellowship before that. We used to go on outings to Bobbin Head and

07:00 Lane Cove National Park. Used to look forward to all those kind of things with friends at Normanhurst, I suppose I missed them a bit. I was getting letters all the time from them. I was a hero to them I suppose.

Did you do anything involved with the church while you were overseas?

No. Just wrote letters back. Minister Pat Feely wrote letters to me and I wrote back. Not really. There was nothing I could do.

07:30 **Did you ever pray?**

A couple of times I suppose. I suppose I was a bit worried a couple of times. Not often, no.

Do you remember any time when you did?

No, I don't. Wasn't that keen really. I never come in that situation. No.

Are you troubled by any of your memories?

08:00 I still wonder what happened to Jack Ashe, exactly what happened to him. I'm now starting to think of some of my mates that have gone now. Ones I knew. I think of my South Korean friends and I wonder how they all got on. I tried to make contact with them in South Korea a few years ago. One of the ladies who's husband got killed in Korea, Owen Greene, she's sent letters and had me on television in Seoul

08:30 South Korea to try and find the three brothers and others. Nothing turned up. Mightn't be alive now. I don't know. I would like to say hello to them again, but never got the chance. I just miss my mates now. Some of them are gone and I'm still here. It's only a few of us left now. In fact, on Anzac Day, I will be the only one of our group that joined up that will be marching there because

09:00 one lives at Coffs Harbour, Brian who lives at Thornleigh never goes to a march, one lives at Blacktown, he never goes out, another one lives in Melbourne. So I'm the only one of our group that marched on Anzac Day. It feels strange. The photo three years ago, four of us there and I'm the only one left. I cross my fingers. I'm okay.

Back to the incident in the minefield. Tell me about the trip down in the

09:30 **car.**

Trip in the jeep? It was a stretcher on the back of an ordinary jeep and they somehow tied it in. I was just lying on there and I was feeling sick and sorry for myself. Still with the morphine making me high as a kite. But as we started off I remember the jeep driver looking behind him. He's having the jeep in first gear riding out. It was all rocky roads down to the Battalion Headquarters. Might have been only

10:00 from 500 yards or something to Battalion Headquarters, I don't know. He was going so slow and turned

around to me and I probably looked in pain cos I didn't know what was wrong with my back cos I was lying on my back and probably every bump was upsetting me. He just apologised the whole time, turning around and saying, "Sorry, sorry." You could hear him riding the clutch. You imagine first gear riding it so it was only riding the, like that real slow. A rock, real slow,

10:30 apologising the whole time. Battalion headquarters, taking me off the jeep and the doctors there just checking me over to see where I was injured. Probably put padding on me. Then the last one was looking at the sore on my back. I remember the strange look on their faces. They must have thought it was pretty bad. cos the shrapnel went in and went between vertebrae. If it had gone another quarter of an inch I'd be a paraplegic. I was lucky. It just stopped like that. Others

11:00 went straight through me and across my backside and in there and out there. This one just stopped right next to between the vertebrae. Just lucky.

Was your back the most painful?

Yes. When I was on the jeep. Cos I didn't know anything was wrong. I couldn't see.

Tell us about being in hospital in Japan.

Well, as I

11:30 said before, they took me to the hospital in Japan. I didn't speak to Morrie next to me for days on end because we were both too sick. I don't think we even had any food. I can remember orange juice out of a straw because we were too sick to even, even though I had nothing wrong with my right arm, even though the shrapnel come from the mine, was that way, we were just too weak to even hold the drink up. I was drinking out of a straw.

12:00 Orange juice, lots of it. I must have been thirsty. Maybe when you get injuries like that you just wanna drink all the time. I don't know. Gradually we got better and we started arguing with each other, who tripped the mine up. That's it. Then gradually on crutches and getting around and trying to find things to do. Throw aeroplanes off the roof and that. Go trying to catch koi and carp. Just always looking

12:30 for something to do cos even though we were both on crutches we wanted to do things. There was a recreation room that the Canadians run there. We used to go down and play records and this. No movies or anything in those days. No television. Nothing like that. There wasn't a place where you could watch movies or anything. One of the stories if you'd like to go back, when I was in Japan earlier.

13:00 When I got to Japan, a couple of days after, this was December I got there about 7th December '52. When we got there the Japanese had gone on strike down at the British Commonwealth hospital where I eventually ended up later. They were on strike, which was unusual in Japan. They were probably scared for their job, might lose money. So they put a group of us in the boiler house at the

13:30 hospital to keep steam going in the boiler house for the operating steam in the hospital. We got there. All we had to do was shovel coal into the boilers. That's all we had to do for a five hour shift, or whatever it was. We were shovelling away there, we're trying to get the steam thing up and we couldn't get it up. We were there for about five days and we couldn't go out on leave,

14:00 but we used to sleep in one of the wards. We had nothing to do. So someone dreamed it up, it wasn't me, someone else dreamed it up, there was electric fans, like houses have now, a big one, they had them all in the wards there, cos it was in the middle of summer then. For something to do someone got hold of a whole bag of condoms, or French letters as they called them in those days, and blow them up and throw them in the

14:30 fan. They were going everywhere. One of the nurses walked passed and saw what was happening and complained to a matron. They came through later and said, "You have to cut out doing that, you're upsetting the nurses." So we had to stop. Nothing else to do. Back to the boiler house. We couldn't get the steam up. The Japanese had a knack. They got the needle right up the end and we had it right down low. After about five days, we're shovelling away and they

15:00 sent a message down, "More steam. More steam, you've gotta get it up." At 12 o'clock the Japanese were finishing their strike. At about half passed 11 the Japanese were all standing there ready to go and work in the boiler house. We were shovelling away. We couldn't get this steam needle up. At 12 o'clock the hooter went and we walked back and we watched the Japanese. Within 10 minutes they had that steam needle up. How they did it, I don't know. They were experts. We had no hope.

15:30 That was the story about the boiler house. About a week or so on strike.

Did you notice the beauty of the countries you visited?

Japan yeah. Beautiful country. All the way the paddy fields were laid out, It was pretty well winter and they was nice and crystal clear. I used to like the marches around. We used to go around all side of the water. Every

16:00 morning they made us climb this mountain, they were called the Yamas [height acclimatising] in those days, before morning tea, climb the top of the mountain. Then come down for morning tea. That was just our exercise. I used to love mountain climbing, I still do. I used to be the first to climb the

mountain. When I won the camera I'd climb up there first and take photos of the other mates coming up. I used to love climbing mountains. I was always first up there.

When difficult things happened, when

16:30 **men were lost in battle, did you talk about it with each other?**

Not really. They just wanted to brush it off. I suppose if you thought, "So and so and so and so," you'd probably feel sad and you might start feeling scared and panic and go into shellshock, they called it. I don't know. You just pushed it out of your mind. You had to because you knew you were going out on patrol the next night or next day or

17:00 whatever you're doing. So you just tried to push it out of your mind. You had to forget it.

Did you ever see or hear about anybody who went into shellshock?

Only one person. The night I got injured, after the Chinese had put in the hour barrage, as I told you I saw these people who looked like Chinamen jumping up and down in front of us. One of my friends, dead now, he come in and he was shaking like anything.

17:30 He said, "There's hundreds out there. There's hundreds." He was in a really bad way. He was shaking. He said, "There's hundreds out there. There's hundreds." I didn't know what to say to him. I just stood and looked at him. I believe he came back out of the front after that, he was in a mess. I caught up with him later, but he's all right. I know his name, but I'd rather not, he's dead now. He lived

18:00 down the south coast. That's the only person I knew that looked like it. I don't blame him cos you were out the front and all of a sudden seeing hundreds of Chinese when you're out on patrol, all around you. I never had any experiences like that. I never run into a Chinaman, luckily. That's the only one I can think of.

Do you have a message for Australians now?

18:30 Hopefully we won't have another war to go to, one that comes to our shores or anything. Who knows? Now, warfare, if it comes up it's all done on computer and people are gonna fire things from 20 miles back and all that kind of things. It'll be a completely different war, I imagine. I don't know. They said

19:00 Korea was like the First World War in trenches and all that. If someone attacked Australia I think it'd be a different set-up, but let's hope it never happens. The only thing is there's no more wars, but Australians gotta remember what did happen over time. Basically, the main reason for war, some are religious wars, but mainly it's people wanna take over the land,

19:30 extra land and all that. Goes back in history hundreds of years. The Romans going to England. It's all to do with taking land. That's it. North Korea attacked South Korea to take land. It's the same thing. Before the truce was signed there was a great battle. Luckily I wasn't there at the place called The Hook [Battle of The Hook, July 1953] where my friends were there. The Chinese attacked by the thousands trying to just take land and Australians somehow beat them all back. Sometimes the stories I heard of my friends

20:00 that there's hundreds of Chinese coming over the hill to try and take the land and they'd fire the machine guns and they'd have to move the machine guns down, cos they couldn't fire through all the Chinese bodies everywhere. It was just they were fanatical at the last. They knew the truce was coming up, but they had to, even if they grabbed 10 feet of land, that's 10 feet that belonged to North Korea. That's basically it. It was basically grabbing land. So if someone tries to

20:30 take Australia, it's to take land, naturally. I imagine. Let's hope it never happens. Let's hope we live in peace. I hope so.

Why do you think they hated the Americans?

I suppose because America is a big country and they have more power. I suppose they just hated it because Americans had more power. Australians there were just part of a

21:00 peacekeeping kind of thing, United Nations, and we were only there because we were asked to go, and it wasn't serious to them. The South Koreans, they hated the South Koreans. They're the ones they were attacking. They used to attack the South Koreans. They were not even kept as prisoners of war, they were killed straight away by the North Koreans. One of the generals, pretty sure he's a general, that I've been back in South Korea and I've known for many years over there, he, I think it was

21:30 3,000 of his mates, he was in command of them, I'm pretty sure this story is correct, they were captured by the North Koreans and as far as I know they were never seen again. They just wanted to get rid of them. They didn't wanna keep prisoners I suppose. I don't know. That's a part of someone else's story. That's what I've been told. They just didn't like the South Koreans. We were just there and, say a bit of a joke or something,

22:00 playing music to us, make us feel homesick. Look at the example when they waved the stretchers. If we were South Koreans they would have just kept going and got rid of the lot of us, but, "They're

Australians, let them go, that's all right." Nothing else happened. What's that prove? They weren't against us, in a way. Just, "let them go, they're all right."

Are there other stories you'd like to tell us?

I can't think of

22:30 any more. I don't know. You'd have to ask me a question. I can't remember any more. I just gradually settled down over the years. Never regretted I went to Korea. There's no way. People say, "Aren't you sorry you went to Korea?" I say, "Look, I'm still here. I'm okay. I'm walking." The doctor said to me 40 years ago, "With your back injury you could end up in a wheelchair with arthritis." I said, "What's the secret?" He said, "Walk everywhere." I've done that for 40

23:00 years. I work down at the school crossing. I'm a school crossing supervisor, lollypop man, at St Marys South Public School. I do that Monday, Tuesday, Friday and I've been doing that for 16 years. I walk down there. I can get the car but I don't, I walk down there. I walk down to St Mary's now and then. It's paid off. 40 years. I'm walking everywhere. That's the secret. Walk everywhere.

Did you ever carry lucky charms?

No, I can't remember. Only had my dog tags

23:30 on. Not really. Not in Korea. I can't remember anything., I wasn't superstitious like that. Just had my diary my sister gave me for '53, I took over there. No, not really. No serious girlfriend to give me a charm to carry. No, not really.

Did you draw in your diary?

Draw? Not really,

24:00 but I used to do a lot of drawing. That's one I did there in 55, that one there. I used to like doing drawings, I was good at school with drawing at school. Art tech work and all that. I used to love all that kind of thing. I took up drawing things for a while, but I gave it away. I did all the drawings for the book. 140 illustrations.

24:30 Can't draw people, that's the only thing. Used to draw mountains and mechanical things.

When you were 15, why did you run away from home?

It happened over a bit of film. In the old days you can remember the film that used to be for the movies? Like it was 8 millimetre and 16, I think 8 had no sound and 16 had sound. I don't know if you've seen the old films.

25:00 I always wanted to be the projectionist. I liked that with the movies. I always wanted to do that and I used to love westerns. Someone gave me a bit of film. It'd be 10 feet long rolled up in a ball. I kept that. I used to study it. It was a western, horses running along and Merrick and West and that. I used to treasure that. One day my mother and father, Mr and Mrs Holden, said to me, "You've gotta get rid of that, it's a

25:30 danger." They were half right, and I was half right, because if you unrolled that film and set fire to it, it'd go up in a great big ball of flame. But if it was rolled up and kept rolled up, it wasn't a danger. So we had a row about it. They wanted me to get rid of that. I wasn't gonna get rid of it and I decided to run away from home. Just over a lump of film basically. Now it's new film. It's no danger. They make it with some plastic now, won't catch

26:00 fire. That was nitrate film or something they called it. I don't know.

Were they angry with you when you got back?

No, I suppose they were relieved I got back okay. I suppose everybody was worried. The police hadn't found me up at Brisbane railway station. No word about me or anything for two weeks. I suppose they'd be worried. I was 15.

In Asia, were you very proud to be Australian?

26:30 Yeah. I was part of United Nations. We had the Royal Australian Regiment out there. Yes, I was proud. I loved it. I loved the Far East. Just something about it. Japan was a beautiful country. It's so green. No graffiti or anything. Nothing like that. They'd go to jail if you did that. Here you don't worry do you? You see it everywhere. Someone puts a new fence

27:00 up and a week later it's got all spray on it. Nothing like that over there. In Korea, none of it. It's different. Something about it. Clean. Pride. They've got someone with a little broom sweeping the trains out as they're going along. Everything's tidy and people sweeping the streets every morning early. You don't see that here very much. You might see one of those mechanical things now and then going through, but not every day. We used to come out of the hotel

27:30 at about 5 o'clock and you see all these people working the streets, sweeping it all up nice and clean. Different set-up. I always like going to Asia. I've been to Japan three times now. Actually four times, cos

the first time was 5 months and a month when I was in the hospital there, but I didn't get out on leave, I wasn't allowed to. I was probably too sick anyway. Then I've been twice back to Japan since then.

28:00 China once, three years ago. I like it over there. It's different. There are other places I'd like to go to. The United States and Canada and Alaska and all that kind of thing. And Nepal. I'd like to do mountain climbing around Nepal. The easy ones. I always wanted to do that. I'd like to do it in 10 years time. I'll be 80. There's three levels. There's the light one and then the middle one and then another one climbing with ladder and

28:30 ropes and all that. I wouldn't do that though, but I'd love to do the middle one. Get to where you look up at Mount Everest and things like that. I know a few people that have done that and I've always wanted to walk to the top of the bridge [Sydney Harbour Bridge] and I never got round to that yet. Find someone to go with.

Did you get your love of mountains from being in Japan?

No, I always liked mountains before because an article was in the

29:00 Telegraph when I was 16–17. It was about how I was gonna climb up to the top of Mount Kosciusko and put an Oregon sign at the top that, "Ernie had been to the top of Australia." Never got round to it. It wasn't till I'd bought my Lambretta in '54 and I went to the top of Mount Kosciusko and it took me till

29:30 1954 to get to the top of Mount Kosciusko. Did I say Mount Everest in the first part? I was always going to go to the top of Mount Kosciusko and put a sign when I was 17. An article was in the Telegraph about it. I never got around to doing it. I bought a Lambretta and went to the top there in '54. Something I did, but it took a long time to do it. I was gonna walk there when I was 17.

How do you

30:00 **feel when you see war on television today?**

I don't watch a lot of it. The other night I watched The Guns of Navarone that I've seen a few times. Basically I don't like to watch it too much cos sometimes you think how close it is, too real and all that. It makes you feel strange, some of them. They look authentic and makes you think. I've watched some

30:30 of them, but I don't go out of my way specially to watch war movies cos you know.

You helped win the war in Korea. Do you think since then Australia's won the peace?

What do you mean? Not only Australia. Think of the 16 nations that helped in Korea. Australia was only part of it. Like there were Norwegians, I think they was all medical,

31:00 MASH hospitals and India. New Zealand had artillery there. They all did different things there. We had the three battalions there. Not all at the same time. We had 3rd Battalion there first and then the 1st come over to help with the 3rd Battalion and then when the 1st Battalion came back the 2nd Battalion went. When it went I think the 1st Battalion went back for a while. All just part of it all.

31:30 We helped a little bit. Maybe if Australia wasn't there it might have been worse. North Koreans and Chinese might have grabbed more land. I don't know. cos the last, the Battle of the Hook, well, I wasn't there I was in Concord, they could have. Imagine, thousands and thousands of Chinese attacking how easy it would be for them to get land, a couple of hundred meters. It'd be part of North Korea, but it didn't happen. Australians beat them back. And Americans beat them back. Canadians.

32:00 It was just all an effort. Australia was there to help, but you can't say they did it all, cos America had the most troops there. Like any war. They're always there. At the moment there's 37,000 American troops in South Korea now, to help with peace. To help the South Koreans. There's about 1,000,000 North Koreans on the other side. That's a lot of troops.

32:30 37,000. How many troops have we got? Not that many. That's only in Korea and America's got troops all around the world. They've got them peace keeping down in Haiti and they've got them in Afghanistan, Millions probably, helping. We haven't got that many. We're only a small country to what they have in the United States. We helped a little bit.

Did you ever think about going to Vietnam?

No, I was married then, with family and all that. No.

33:00 They wouldn't take me anyway, for medical reasons. No, that's 20 years older. I'd be 40. No, too old. I followed it on the news, but it was a different war, because it was on television every night. They were sending reports back. Korea I believe the Australian parts used to go through the United States and they used to censor it before, they let Australia see what they wanted them to see. They wouldn't, something

33:30 they didn't like, the Americans wouldn't let it come out here. It wasn't as if you had a TV coverage direct to Australia like you've got now from a country, from Australians. It all went through United States. I'd say it got censored a lot of it before it come over here. I don't know, that's hearsay anyway.

34:00 **Did you ever watch MASH [US comedy]?**

Yes, regularly. I liked MASH. I'm disappointed it's not on Channel 7 at 5 o'clock now. I watched most of it. Some of it takes you back. Even though I was only there a day

34:30 and I was out of it most the time, but seeing the doctors working, nurses on the MASH, the way they're making it real humorous, which was possibly correct to how it is, then, how different parts of it they take you back to the real doctors and nurses. That's made in the United States and not the authentic MASH in Korea unless it's showed parts that are authentic parts. I always liked that because I was proud, I went to MASH.

35:00 They saved me. The MASH hospital saved me. If it wasn't for the MASH hospital where would I have gone? Second World War you probably might have died of the injuries. I don't know. I had all this shrapnel in me. For 148 stitches I must have had a lot in me. Most of it got taken out in the MASH hospital. I loved watching MASH. They saved me, the MASH hospital.

35:30 And of course the hospital in Japan and the RAAF hospital in Seoul helped too. Then back in Australia for three months. That was all part of the team. Today, if you went to Concord hospital with the same injury as me you'd probably only be there a month cos things have changed so much now. Three months sounds a lot for people going to hospital, but by today's standards with how they patch you up so quickly, plastic things and I don't know, whatever

36:00 they do. If it was today, this year, and I was going there straight from Korea I probably would only be in there a month instead of three months, but it's all different now.

How much shrapnel is left in your body now?

One piece here, one piece in the elbow, the biggest piece is just behind there, it's halfway between there and there. A couple of years ago they took a piece out of there. The doctor,

36:30 when I come back he took two pieces out of the left arm there. I've got one piece still as a souvenir, the second one I lost. I've got some small pieces around the hip area. About 11. The biggest one would be there and it'd be about a half of a 5-cent piece or something like that. They don't operate on them because they cause no problems. Cause more problems if you try to get through to them. Just the one in my right leg there was annoying me. Took it out to help.

37:00 Doesn't worry you.

Are there other stories you've thought of?

Don't know, you'd have to ask a question. Do you wanna stop the tape and ask? I can't think of anything at the moment.

Did you

37:30 **have problems with hygiene in the trenches with your feet?**

No, I wasn't there, cos I was only there 3½ weeks. No, my mates would have suffered more because when the snow came up and all that, and rain. In fact, when I left Korea I only had about two days of rain in 3½ weeks. But when I was in the hospital in Japan the rainy season came over for the Far East and in Japan it rained for two weeks. Just kept raining for two weeks.

38:00 I'm thinking of my mates back in Korea, paddling around in water everywhere. No, I never suffered any ways like that. I was in the hospital in Japan watching the rain fall. I was okay.

INTERVIEW ENDS