

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Harold Asmith (Len) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1541>

### Tape 1

00:30 **OK Len, in a nutshell.**

I'm Harold Leonard Smith at the beginning of my life. I was born in Coff's Harbour on the 29th October

01:00 1920, the eighth child of a family with 12 children. I lived there until was about 5 or 6 and moved to Sydney and then I lost my Dad. My life started from then on. I carried on and went to various schools and then I

01:30 went through the Depression days and got a job as an apprentice Cabinet Maker with Anthony Hood in Sydney. After that finished, after me and the other apprentices telling the boss and the union people where to stick their cabinet making I then meandered about and established several businesses. And I got so powerful financially that the government moved in and offered me three jobs,

02:00 the Postmaster's General Department, the Customs Department or Civil Aviation. I chose Civil Aviation because of the possibility of travel and the work appealed to me. I then went through and worked at Rose Bay and transferred to Darwin and got blown out of Darwin. I recovered from that and went into Gulan [?] and maintained the defence force supply chain of

02:30 bombers refuelling there until the air force trained sufficient men to replace us. I was then still bitter over the fact that I was blown out of Darwin by the little yellow man and I tried to join the army but being in a reserve occupation with the Civil Aviation Department they stopped me. But that was only the first challenge I met in those years. I then after a while settled down and was a

03:00 choir boy as far as the boss was concerned. I then joined the air force and I took six weeks' leave. They didn't find me until I was in the air force six months later. I was in Townsville and by then I was an air force trained man. So I got away with that one. We moved on in the air force to Merauke, Noemfoor, Morotai and did the landing at Tarakan and Borneo.

03:30 From Borneo I went to Labuan and then was evacuated out from there back home and spent many, many months in Concord Military Hospital where I seem to have been trained as a welfare officer advocate by one of my strange tricks of fate in my particular life. I then moved into many

04:00 businesses still practising the skills that I'd learned at the Repatriation department and have been consistently the welfare officer and advocate since 1946 up until now and still am. I've still got a few years to go. I'm only 83 now. It's interesting the many things that have happened between then and now. I have survived the

04:30 Darwin bombing. I have survived the submarines on Sydney Harbour. I have survived a big motor crash in Biloela. I have survived possibly a lot of things but my main objective in life is devoted to rehabilitation.

**Fantastic. If we can go back now and start from the beginning, what are your earliest memories?**

At about 5 or 6. I was only thinking about this the other night. My earliest memories

05:00 were at about 5 or 6 meeting living in the headland at Coffs Harbour. Mum had those long stick clothes props and I used to ride them like a horse. And one broke. I'm not sure if I still have the marks on my backside or not but that was one of my earliest memories. And the other delightful memory which I get great joy in thinking about was going down to the beach, because we were on top of the beach, and swimming in the tide at the right time and collecting pippies which we lived off to a certain

05:30 degree and then wandering around Coffs Harbour down to Boambee and back up to Park Beach, a walk along the beach and then walk back. That was my memory until 8. And then the next memory that comes to mind is we being bundled on the train, I think there were 8 or 9 of us, and Mum bought a ticket for herself and 3 kids and I think there were about another 5. I was one of those 5 hiding under

the seat

- 06:00 and there were that many we couldn't put all of our bums under the seat. But the guard in those days was more human than they are today and not as well paid. He came along and said, "Of course I can only see three, that's right madam. Thank you. Goodbye". And I thought that was a great deal. And then another feature was getting on the tram with all our luggage to go to Alexandra where we first started with the aunty. And there were quite a lot of adventures there with the aunty living with
- 06:30 her and all the families mixed up together. Then we moved from there and we got our own house at Erskineville and all sorts of things happened there. I started schooling at Erskineville. And then by some strange trick of fate they had a new suburb called Arncliffe out near Rockdale, it was on the Illawarra line then, and we got this house out there - I don't know the basis of the rent. There again my
- 07:00 memory has come to the fore - I had to look after the choko bushes and feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and grow rhubarb. That was my function. And I remember in the backroom we had two double beds and five boys used to sleep in those beds at times. Some really spectacular things happened. One of my brothers became the New South Wales boxing champion. And I had another brother who was like a big long stick and he would never, that man was called Pat,
- 07:30 he could never participate in sport because he developed the idea that it was a waste of energy. So he'd go to sparring with my other brother who was the champion and my brother who was the champion never laid a glove on him. He was the smartest, quickest thing I'd ever seen in my life. A waste of real talent it was. But that's another one. Caring for the family seemed to have been the major part of my life. At 10 years of age I was the best
- 08:00 blackberry seller in the Depression days, in that district. My brothers used to go down to the creeks and pick the blackberries because there was nothing else to do and I used to sell them. I realise now that most people would buy off a 10 year old kid than they would a man. That was part of it. Then there was going up to the church to pick up the cans of soup which we'd get regularly. I'd come home and change my shirt and push the bike up and get another can of soup.
- 08:30 The minister would look at me and give me a wink the second time. But that didn't worry me. Then when I got home from school I was still looking for the cash for Mum of course. I started in the morning with the milkman - no, I've got this back to front. I started in the morning with the baker. I worked with him on a round from about half past seven until nine o'clock and he would drop me off at the school. That got the bread for the
- 09:00 family. In the afternoon I'd be picked up at the school by the milkman and worked with him after school for so many hours and that got the milk for the family. Then I kept in an enterprising manner, I suppose you could use enterprise. Then I left school. But during school I had many fights with women teachers who would ask you to give them ideas or pose question to them and
- 09:30 they'd answer it. But they never could. I always had trouble with female teachers and still do because they know everything but they don't want to hear your side of it. That was a lesson I learned very early in dealing with the opposite sex. I'm still the same. I don't worry about it. My boss tells me what to do and I do it. Amen. And after that what did I start doing?
- 10:00 Yes, that's right. Then I applied for a job with the Post Master General's Department, and this is in the Depression days, and they said OK turn up at Sydney Tech College which I did. But there were 3,000 other people there and there were 14 people positions. I was too far back in the line. With the name "Smith" it starts with an S in the alphabet. I kept applying for jobs and
- 10:30 Anthony Horderns of Sydney had advertised for two apprentice cabinet makers. So again I applied and I was told to attend on a certain day. I attended and again I'm last on the queue because everybody's got their mum and dad with them. So I walked in last at about 5 o'clock after being there at about 7. No lunch, no nothing, and busting to go to the toilet etc. etc. You know, the usual problems.
- 11:00 And the manager said, "Who are you? Where's your mother?" He screamed at me "Where's your mother?" "We never had the tram fare, sir". He didn't know that I'd just walked six miles. And he said, "What do you want?" And I said, "You advertised for a job, boss". He said, "Cut it out, I'm a human being, don't talk to me like that". I was a bit feisty in those days. He said, "Who do you think you are?" I said, "I'm a bloke applying for a job and I just want you to
- 11:30 talk to me as you should". My mother was Scotch and had very severe discipline on us. He called his accountant and he said, "Come here, what do you make of this bloke," he says to his accountant mate. He says, "I don't know, what has he done?" He said, "He's just told me to speak to him properly and I'm the boss". Anyway, they talked and asked me a lot more questions about myself and he said, "Righto, you can
- 12:00 go now". And I looked at him and gave him a stare and I looked at him and he looked back at me as if to say, "I'd kick you in the bum mate if I had my own way". That was the thought I got about him. A week later I got the job to turn up for the medical - I'd got the job. Me and my mate, he took his mother along and he was about 150th. And we turned up and were medically examined and we got the job. So I had quite an eventful and enjoyable time as an

- 12:30 apprentice cabinet maker with Anthony Hordern in Sydney – a beautiful firm to work for. We didn't have the conditions of apprentices today. We finished our 8 hours work, grabbed a sandwich and finished up at the tech 3 or 4 nights a week in our own time. Got home at about 10 o'clock and we had to get a certain pass of marks. You had to qualify with a certain pass of marks. If you did you got reimbursed with a voucher which enabled you to buy tools. So we're all
- 13:00 trying our hardest in those days to achieve these vouchers to buy our tools. One nasty incident, in my last year I'd done particularly well at tech and got up amongst the first I'd say top ten, I don't know the exact figures, and I got a bit of extra wording on my report from tech. And the boss said to me "You've done well. We're going to give you a bigger voucher." He said, "What do you want?" I said, "Sir, I've got no chisels of my own. I've got old hand-me-downs
- 13:30 and I'd like a set of chisels." So I went into Anthony Horderns in Sydney and picked the chisels, brand new Swedish chisels, beautiful chisels, about 14 in all. I went back home. My boss let me off at lunchtime. And I went back home and I went back to the factory and I spent the whole afternoon sharpening them. Proud as a peacock I was and put them all back on the shelf and everybody chucked me. I went home very happy with myself and went back the next morning and there are no chisels. The firm replaced them. In those
- 14:00 things were still as current as they are today. The whole time after my third year as an apprentice me and the other apprentices were having a bit of a race between ourselves as to who could assemble a cabinet or make a table or a cot or bed ends or whatever was the requirement. And we were breaking records on time. If they give us two hours we would always finish in an hour and a quarter or an hour and a half. Well we got into trouble with the unions for that because the elder
- 14:30 tradesmen were complaining we were going too fast and jeopardising their work. So the union was telling us to go slow and the boss was congratulating us very publicly before the other tradesman, "You're doing a good job - very neat work," all the plaudits under the sun. But this caused us a lot of friction between the union in the morning and the boss in the afternoon in the last six months of my work there as an apprentice or of my apprenticeship. We had the two
- 15:00 factions fighting and of course we developed our own little clique between us. So on the last day of our apprenticeship, the day we finished officially - we'd already got our certificates that we'd completed our apprenticeship - we asked to see the manager and the trade union man in the office at half past four when we knocked off. We both went down there and looked them straight in the eye - I said to my mate, "Look them straight in the eye and tell them where they can get
- 15:30 off and they can stick their trade," which we were very proud to do. Of course we were unemployed at that stage. He went to ceramics - building those funeral domes in glasses, a pottery job it was and he went on very well. He became a very successful businessman in Sydney with a lot of money because if they were worth \$5 you could charge \$50 and get it. I wasn't so lucky but I'd done various
- 16:00 jobs. I'd done a bit with Chippy, they called him, the carpenter. I'd done various jobs but could never get on with the bosses because me being strictly trained with Anthony Horderns and the tech it had to me to be right. I couldn't cut corners at that stage because I'm too fresh in the trade. And the bosses would say, "Forget this, do that, don't worry about that," and I wouldn't accept that. However, I didn't last in too many chippy jobs. But in the meantime I developed a
- 16:30 business on the side. One business was the - girls around where I lived, including my own sister going to work, could only buy a weekly ticket on the railways which entitled you to and from work only. But then the railways introduced a quarterly ticket which you could buy for three months and pay in advance and that allowed you to travel backwards and forwards every day and all day, 24 hours a day. So I saved up enough money to buy my own
- 17:00 sister a quarterly ticket and she paid me off each week which was the same price to her as a workman's weekly ticket and the margin was one shilling which I got. From that one shilling grew quite a business. And having then a clientele of ladies I then - not having much to do because I'm not working. I'm more or less living on that and a few other lurks that I'm doing at the same time - far too numerous to
- 17:30 mention or I might say touch on a bit of illegality but that's another question. I decided then I would get this connection and buy ladies' stockings. So I bought the stockings wholesale, a minimum of 24 I think it was, and I sold it to the girls on the same deal and I'm making another shilling. So every time I called on anybody I got two shillings. Now this developed into quite a healthy business. I'll stop there and re-track or a moment.
- 18:00 One of my jobs in my last two years at school was on a Saturday helping a foodo. That's a man with a small truck, as you would a cart and a horse. I'd pick him up at 4 o'clock and go to the markets in Sydney and pick up oranges and apples and sell them around the district. You don't sell them by a case or a dozen. We'd put an apple and an orange, a pear or whatever together. Our favourite was
- 18:30 soup vegetables and that was a carrot, a potato an onion and whatever else we could throw in for five pence or six pence I think it was in those days. And we used to sell those like crazy. So I saved my money up for that because I'd given Mum everything else that I could give her. And that 1shilling a week I'd save up and then I asked the owner of the cart to
- 19:00 rent me the space in his car. He said, "You can have it for nothing". So I saved up and bought a case of

oranges and I sold them and I made a good profit. Then I bought two and he said, "You've got to pay rent now mate". So it's two cases of fruit that I was having and selling as well as selling for him I was selling the fruit and I built it up. To cut a long story short I finished up paying him rent on the horse and cart. And I was running the business and I was paying him to help me but that was included in the price of the

- 19:30 horse and cart. I don't know what happened. Either the horse died or something happened but that was part of the experience that I developed. And now I'm back to selling the stockings to the ladies. From that I developed such a big business that I'm sleeping by day and starting work at about 3 o'clock, walking in those days or with a pushbike.
- 20:00 And I'm calling around all these homes because I've got a massive book. It was big, big, money. I was the breadwinner of the house for about eight kids at that stage. I went successfully for about two years and I was laughing to myself as the bank account grew and we got better food in the house and all this. And I think this is the greatest lark under the sun. And one day two big gentlemen about 6'4" turned up in the afternoon, late in the afternoon, turned up and knocked on the door and
- 20:30 asked my mother to see this Mr Smith. Len Smith was the name. I must keep reiterating that for your benefit for later on. What does that mean? They wanted to see Mr Smith in those days. And she said, "I'll get him for you". "Len Smith" she said, "Are you sure you want to see him?" "Yes, we want to see him". And we had a big seat on the veranda,
- 21:00 on the front veranda, and they interviewed me there, one sitting on each side. And I'm a little tiny bloke and they're huge men. And I'm full of fear and I didn't know what to think or say. And they said, "We're from whatever government department it was in those days - and we've heard that you've got a thriving business". I said, "I don't know where you'd hear that from". And then they told me all what I was doing. So they'd been tracking me. And under the Money Lending
- 21:30 Act as they called it in those days you weren't allowed to lend to more than 3 people and I had hundreds. They said, "We should charge you and put you into jail," and all these nasty and fearful things they told me about. But they said, "We'll make a proposition for you. We'll give you lifetime security for your book". I said, "Wait a minute, I'm giving away too much". And they said
- 22:00 "But you can take your pick". And so they offered me the 3 jobs with the PMG Department in those days, Post Master General's Department, Customs and Civil Aviation. I then chose Civil Aviation which was a bit of a lark but they gave me a week to make up my mind and I got the book ready to hand over. That didn't take much because it was properly prepared. They came back and they said, "We're going to pick you up in the car and take you in".
- 22:30 It had to be a Commonwealth car because nobody had cars in those days or very few. And they took me to down to Rose Bay and introduced me around and said, "This is the new man". How that happened I don't know. How they pulled strings. I probably learned later on how you do these things but at that time I didn't know. So I spent a very happy time in Rose Bay at the flying boat base and learned all the skills and I think I taught most of the skills.
- 23:00 However, I've still got my young lady that I'd been going with for many, many years. At that stage I was about 21 I think but I'd known her for about 3 years. And she's talking about marriage which sounded attractive to me but I was treading cautiously and warily because I had a few bob and I didn't want to spend it. However, then I came up with the bright idea. They put up a notice, they were calling for people to transfer to
- 23:30 other areas, other flying boat bases in Australia, which include Brisbane and I think it was Bundaberg, I'm not sure of that one, Townsville and then we flew across to Groot Island and then Darwin. You could spend two years on there and then take overseas postings. The flying I'm talking about were the Sunderland flying boats - an excellent machine but obsolete now. So
- 24:00 I decided, after talking with my young lady, that I would go to Darwin for 2 years and because there was a tax concession on there and as much overtime as you could work, and save up enough money for a house which was an excellent idea. Amidst tears, I finished up going to Darwin which was quite a totally different experience to what I expected or what was advertised. I landed
- 24:30 there about late November. And the accommodation the Department of Civil Aviation supplied then was a unit which consisted of cement floor, cement floors, fibro walls and that's it - no bed, no blanket, no newspaper to lie on, nothing. But we were pretty busy because there were a lot of other aircraft, flying boats in particular, using Darwin all of a sudden. There seemed to be quite a
- 25:00 kaffuffle on. I didn't know at the time about the threatening war because we were too busy. And eventually of course we acquired beds and a table and what have you. And we ate where we could, mostly up at the base, the flying boat base at the end of Darwin jetty. So we got stuck into the work. My boss wasn't keeping overtime because we were on duty twenty-four hours, seven days a week. You could do
- 25:30 eight hours and think I'm going to have a rest and they'd pull you out at 10 o'clock to lay flares for the planes to come in. You'd finish at 4 and go back to sleep and you'd have to be back at work at 8 or whatever. But there was always - it finished up we always had a crew down there and those who could get the opportunity to sleep went to sleep. Mostly we slept on the hard planks on the wharf or in the

office if nobody else was sleeping there in between shifts. We worked colossal hours.

- 26:00 We continued that and the tempo of work increased in that the flying boats were becoming more plentiful and just about a twenty-four hour service. They'd come in anywhere. We'd just get about a half hour's warning that they were approaching and had to lay flares or have the tanker ready to fill them up with fuel and be up there to take the passengers
- 26:30 off and any cargo off and put whatever was on including refuelling them. This went on. It got harder and faster because you'd be asleep on the launch between the wharf and the boat which was only 10 minutes but you'd gladly shut your eyes as long as somebody was steering the boat. This work increased to the stage where rest was a thing that was like a bonus, a lottery win,
- 27:00 because you rarely rested in the many hours we put in there. And while one fellow was asleep you were trying to do his job and your own to give him a break. In a way it was a godsend because we hardly lived in the apartment we had although we managed to scrounge furniture everywhere and we could get meals wherever we could. On the subject of meals I remember advertised in what broadsheet there was which was the newspaper in
- 27:30 Darwin in those days where this restaurant was putting on green vegetables which was a thing you rarely saw because if you went to a restaurant you still got tinned meat. So we decided we would book in. And they'd only take bookings so up we'd go and two of us would take it in turns. Two went up and came back laughing and wouldn't tell us what the green vegetables were. We went up and you paid your money before you got the food in those days and we got the green vegetables. It was
- 28:00 M&V [meat and vegetables] out of a tin and five green peas carefully counted out. That was our green vegetables. I don't know what we paid but it was an awful lot of money, double the price of a meal. We kept going anyway and then we started to crack up because we'd been going six weeks and we were hardly getting any sleep so some of the boys went down with some fever. I'm not sure of the name of it, it might have been dengue fever or one of those tropical things. I used to laugh at them and say
- 28:30 "You blokes don't look after yourselves. You're not getting enough rest and all this". The next thing I'm down. I'm out, flat as a tack and they take me up in the back of the utility to the hospital and I've got this fever myself. I'm not very happy. But because we were short of men the boss gave you 3 days in the hospital and then came up in the Ute [Utility] to pick you up because he was short of men. So you went back to work it didn't matter whether you were fit or not. That's OK. So I went back for another two weeks and was really in a lot of trouble. I was really sick at that point. And then
- 29:00 back, I woke up in the hospital again. I'm starting to come good. He actually left me there for 4 days. And then he called in and he said, "I'm coming up to pick you up in the morning, Len". I said, "Good, I'll be there mate, I'm fit". But I wasn't because I kept wanting to go back to the bed to lie down. And one of the favourite things in the hospital for all the patients was to see the reinforcements of the air force coming in.
- 29:30 A DC3 would come in about 10 o'clock in the morning and would have behind it an assortment of anything up to 20 or 30 aircraft. And we'd think well we've got a lot of aircraft over there at the airport. But unbeknownst to us they'd fly them out of a night down to Batchelor and bring them back the next morning. I don't know whether that's typical military conning people or not but that's exactly what happened. So
- 30:00 this morning they said, "Come and watch these, Len". And I'm standing there in a doorway like this with both hands on each side of the door and looking up at these planes. They said, "What do you think of them? We haven't got the DC3 in front that's a bigger one". And I said, "Yes, but what's the red spots underneath?" And then I saw the bomb with my name on it. You could read my name, it had me, and Bingo that's it. Now I remember at one stage laying
- 30:30 across some sort of a gutter but then I faded out again. The next thing that I recall vividly is coming to on a train on a palliasse with plaster of Paris from above my knees to my neck. They reckoned my back was broken. At one of those days I really should have changed my mind about the girls. I had a nurse exclusively looking after me - beautiful - embarrassing at times but beautiful.
- 31:00 And then they put me on the train. They took me down to I think it was Banka Banka or something by military truck. No, by train to Batchelor and then by military truck to Banka Banka I think. It was one of those staging camps. And they take you off the back of the truck and the palliasse and put you and the palliasse, the palliasse in the tent and they'd put you in the tent. But I had a problem. I couldn't eat anything. That was my biggest problem.
- 31:30 My body wasn't functioning. And this is about 4 days later and I'm in lots of trouble. And I'm lying there lonely in this particular tent. And one of the happiest-go-lucky people I've ever met in my life, and I'm glad I met him, pokes his head in the door and says, "What's wrong with you mate?" And I said, "I don't know. I can't eat". He says, "I'm the doctor". And I said, "Well, doc, you're the bloke I'm looking for". And he said, "And you're the bloke I'm looking for," and laughed at me. And I thought "Strange doctor".
- 32:00 And I told him my problems and he said, "Good," and rubbed his hands with joy. I remember this particularly. And he said, "I've been looking for you". And he kept telling me this and I'm thinking, "This man's an idiot, troppo," as the saying was in those days. And he came back and he's got a bottle of beer

in his hand. And I thought "Bingo, this bloke's not only troppo he's a drunk". And he said, "I'm going to fix you, mate," and he said, "before I fix you today I'm going to

- 32:30 be here in the morning with eggs and bacon for you to eat". And I hadn't eaten then and I'd convinced myself I was in the hands of a madman. So I'm a bit restricted for movement but however he held me down and opened my mouth and put the bottle of beer in my mouth and would take it out every now and again until eventually the beer disappeared into me until half the bottle was gone. And he put it on the side and said, "I'll be back". So
- 33:00 then I'm lying there in plaster with all the funny things happening in my stomach like elastic bands exploding. And I'm thinking "This bloke's mad and he's drowning me". That's what I'm thinking. And he came back and we didn't quite finish the bottle because I had beer splattered all over my neck and head and that. And he said, "You'll be right, mate, you'll be comfortable and I'll be back in the morning and I'll have your breakfast. True to life I slept better that night than I had for a while and he's back there in the morning with this plate of
- 33:30 sausages and eggs. And I still think he's mad. And he started to feed me and it started to go down. And he's laughing and he thinks it's a great joke. However, when I'd eaten part of it, not all of it, I couldn't eat all of it, he said, "I'll tell you about me. My Dad was in World War I and he found the best thing to cure people like you that had been knocked about, and all your stomachs and innards are upside
- 34:00 down is to pour alcohol down your throat. The only thing we've got called alcohol here is beer and you've copped it, mate. Sorry to have been so rough but that's it." Well, he was back about a couple of hours later and he fed me and he fed me and he said, "What the hell are you doing with all this plaster on?" I said, "I don't know, doc, I woke up and it was on". So he gave the nurse a little note and when we got down to I think it was about Alice Springs or somewhere they cut the plaster off me.
- 34:30 But then it was getting me to walk which was a very difficult thing thanks to the young lady I had with me looking after me. So they took the plaster off and I'm back and I'm not sure how they got us there, whether it was by train or truck or whatever - they got us down to Adelaide Showground then - evacuees from Darwin. I thought it was a strange new name I had acquired. Then they fed us there for a I wouldn't know how
- 35:00 many days now, quite a few days, but I was a walking around almost normal. My body was functioning normally. I got on the train and eventually got to Melbourne and waited there half a day and got to Central Station. When I got to Central Station my girlfriend met me. The second word she said was, "We're going to get married now because you said when you come back from Darwin you're going to marry me."
- 35:30 I got a fairly long leave then, I don't know what they called it, but I was home for about three months doing nothing but I was sort of recuperating. I didn't realise that I never had gained my strength and it took me a long time to get over that. But then I went back to work at the Rose Bay Base and rather enjoyed it and of course arranged for the big wedding. And that was in the June of 1941,
- 36:00 I'm not sure of that date. I'd have to ask the boss. I eventually got married but then we had the same problem. We got a flat at Bondi Junction and we've got a double bed mattress and four food cases which I'd pinched behind the food shop. We sat on one each and the other one was a table. Cooking facilities were very limited but we'd
- 36:30 buy what we could and work out something from there and I used to get up and go down to the Base. And at one stage in Sydney in that particular flat I had my sister-in-law who had come to visit us. And it was the afternoon the Japs shelled Sydney. Well when the sirens went off and there was a plane in the air above our head and everybody was panicking, I had my
- 37:00 wife and my sister-in-law and myself underneath the double bed because that was a part of the training I'd received in Darwin. Eventually we came out two hours later and apart from the verbal bashing I got from the two ladies I survived that lot. Then I went back down - I continued to work at the Rose Bay Base and they called me in one night. We had a special mission. I learned about it later but the special mission
- 37:30 was to put out a flare path for this Qantas [Qantas Airways] plane which had just been pulled out of the water and put on dry land until we went out and searched the area with search lights for any debris or anything. We didn't know what we were looking for. And then we laid the path and then had to do a patrol around it with these big boats we had. Then they put the plane in the water and it took the shortest take off I've ever
- 38:00 seen. They warmed it up on land and that flying boat, Sunderland flying boat, took off in the shortest distance I've ever seen a plane take off. They hit the water and they were revving up and they took off like lightening. So then we picked up the flares and went back to base. And we learned that what was happening was that plane was loaded with gold bullion and flying to America to pay some of our war debt. And that explained why everything was in a hurry and it had to leave at that
- 38:30 time. That's one incident I particularly remember. A few nights later we were called in again and we didn't know what we were called in for. But they said you've got to go out on the harbour and search for debris. They're very secretive at times and they don't tell you what's going on. So we went out and we had to make sure there was a clear area where we could lay flares in a hurry, because we could lay

them in half an hour,

- 39:00 in case any planes came in or took off but this was an emergency. Everybody was hush, hush about it. So we went out and floating down the harbour came a cabin part of a boat. So we hooked that on and towed it in and secured it and then went back out again. But we could see on the harbour at that time all the searchlights going and boats running around and we thought, "Hello, every boat in Sydney must be out looking for debris," which was our instructions.
- 39:30 Then we found out on about the third visit back with the floating timber and debris we got. The boss said, "There's submarines in the harbour, there's midget submarines," which was true. And the debris we had picked up we now know was the wheelhouse of the HMAS Kuttabul. So we towed that in and because the mystery surrounded us and we were never ever briefed before we went out, we probably wouldn't have gone out if we'd been briefed,
- 40:00 my job was on the stern of the boat with a rope to lasso anything or tie up anything that was drifting. I put the rope on the top of this cabin or whatever it was off the Kuttabul which the torpedo had hit. I was trembling then. If they'd told me there was a sub in the water I probably wouldn't have been able to tie the knot. So then we went back. And of course all this time I'm doing these type of things I've got a very, very
- 40:30 heavy feeling in my heart that those bloody Japs [Japanese] hurt me. And they're not doing too well. Because we were hearing a lot about the refugees and the atrocities they were committing from the refugees that we were getting in from the islands. But we never had time to get an in depth on it at all we just listened to it. And I was determined then to enlist in the forces no matter what.
- 41:00 I've got to go.

## Tape 2

- 00:30 **Do you want to go back and tell us about when you were under the bed?**
- Yes, when I put the two ladies, my wife and my sister-in-law, under the bed and climbed under there myself that was a time when the Japanese shelled Sydney from off shore. And that was the reason for all the alarm and the panic and the sirens and all that going on. That was the true reason for it and I didn't learn it until later.
- 01:00 They hadn't put the shells anywhere near us but they did put them in Rose Bay and they smashed into the side of a building there, a block of flats. But getting back to my story, I still had that heavy pain in my heart where I was mentally wounded because the Japs had king hit me. That's probably the best way of putting it. So I was still determined to join the services after all of this and more
- 01:30 so it was strengthened when the Japanese got into Sydney Harbour with their midget subs. So I started working on enlisting. My boss was a former navy commander and a stickler for the rules and he said, "No way in the world". I'd made an application to enlist and he said, "No way in the world. This is a reserve occupation. You're too valuable to us. You do as you're told and shut and do that." So I joined the army but somebody in the Army Recruiting
- 02:00 Services put me in to the boss and he put the kybosh on that so I was dead as far as the army was concerned. But then, because we worked shift work, I had ample time during the working business hours, to join the air force. And I told them my job was on the water and all this type of thing but I didn't tell them who I was working with when I was there to enlist. So I passed all the trade tests and I took my six weeks leave and I arranged to go in the air
- 02:30 force on the first day of the six weeks leave. Lynne wasn't very happy about it but again we were looking at saving money to buy the house that we wanted. Then I was in there and I went to Tocumwal and Wagga Wagga I think it was. And then I went to Melbourne and then I went to Mount Druitt and the unit was formed up 29 E Stores Park.
- 03:00 I joined up and there were 3 of us there and we were getting food for about 80 men at one stage. But eventually the unit was formed up and I went out on a few jobs picking up damaged aircraft and building the framework around them so they would be held together while they were being transported back to the workshops as a part of the training campaign for what we could possibly be doing. From there I was transferred to Townsville
- 03:30 and there were a few incidents at Townsville but hardly anything worthwhile. The paramount thing there I think was the girls were all parked up on the hill somewhere at the back of Townsville and some of the black Yanks [Americans] got up there and raped a few of them. And one of our camps was investigated by the American military forces but they found them and they didn't take them to court. They shot them dead on the spot. Then we got
- 04:00 moved to - from Townsville after many, many months up there working with the air force I got on the plane and they said, "We're going to send you to New Guinea". And so they did that. We landed at

Merauke and refuelled and waited so many hours until they refuelled again. Then they flew us to Noemfoor Island and we were there for about 5 days again allegedly

- 04:30 collecting stores to take with us. Well there were no stores to take with us but we had to go anyway on to Morotai which was on the equator. What we started out to do -we had a plan from the boss - we had to build huge igloos, 100 ft long by about 30 ft wide and the air force sent us with all the equipment they had which was 1 tomahawk and a hundredweight of nails.
- 05:00 So they sent us to Morotai and we got there and there was nothing there - nothing at all. Somebody arranged some transport from the aerodrome and we were taken to the block of land we had at the end of the airstrip. Eventually, by fair means and foul, we acquired a tent and set ourselves up. But still we've got nothing to build the plan and the boss was coming up within 6 weeks he said.
- 05:30 Then we got a shook of timber, about 30 or 40 lengths of timber and nothing else. That was our quota at that point. But being enterprising we then acquired axes (I'm not prepared to put it on film how we acquired axes and saws but I can assure you we would have been jailed if we had been in Australia) and we then cut down trees. Once you get into the
- 06:00 warfront as in the Pacific War up there they landed a petrol depot - no coupons and no nothing - you take your vehicle along and you fill it up with petrol and everybody and anybody. And during one of our lifts along there, there was a spare 4 x 4 Yank left there. And one of our boys was an amateur mechanic and he fixed that truck and so we had acquired a
- 06:30 jeep, an American jeep. So we carted a bit of timber on that until we acquired, no reason given, a big 8 x 8 truck, it must have carried about 8 tonnes. So we had two vehicles that weren't on the regimental charge sheet at all. And we had acquired a tent and built some huts and what have you. But then we're still short of the master plan buildings. So have transport we
- 07:00 run around Morotai where we could, on areas that were safe, to look and see what's happening. And down there on the wharf there are two huge big igloos and that's the type of building we've got to build. And we had to inspect them but they had USA [United States of America] stamped all over them and burned into the wood. So the boys said, "Righto, Len" (for some strange reason I was always the ringleader, I can't tell you why). The boss always when he discussed
- 07:30 plans and we had an officer and a sergeant with us and the officer was absolutely useless and the sergeant was a good bloke but he did as I told him. He said to me "Len, we're going to go. I want you to sit down and look at those huts and work out if there's anything we can do with them to put them on our side. It's what we need and nobody's in it". I said, "Fair enough". So he left me there with another mate and we were sitting around and walking and talking and that and he came back.
- 08:00 "What do you reckon Len?" I said, "We'll get the big truck up. We'll come here today and undo all the bolts and take the nuts and the washers off and we've got to get something to knock the bolts out. But as we do it we've got to have the truck to put the bits on and when the truck gets loaded shoot down to the site we had and then I don't care what by what means we do it but we've got to get all the US [United States] marks off it so it doesn't belong to the US any more." So we'd go up every day and we'd
- 08:30 take about an 8 or 10 ft length of this shed until it got smaller and smaller. But we didn't put it up in the manner that it was previously built. I changed the plans and instead of it being a stumpy shed I became a long shed. Of course we were busily taking the US markings off it and putting dirt on it and so we got our sheds up. And the boss arrives and we're happily going on and he said, "Smith, I know you, I'm not going to ask where they come from."
- 09:00 I said, "Thank you, sir," but in about 10 days time he had to. He gets a visit in a jeep with a bloody big Yankee colonel in it and one of our hierarchy in the air force. They said, "We're missing sheds made of the same material that your sheds are made out of". And the boss said, "Oh yes. And why are you coming to us?" "Well" they said, "We think they might be ours". And so they inspected it and some of the places we couldn't get the
- 09:30 mud on to cover where we'd shaved it. There was no US sign on it anywhere but we had the mud to cover up where it was. They said, "Some of those marks look new". The boss said, "Look, I can't tell you and our chief carpenter he's not here at the moment". And I'm standing beside him. And he said, "I don't know where they come from. Apparently they were here what do you reckon LAC [leading aircraftsman]?" or whatever it was at the time. I said, "I don't know, sir, this was our land and they were here".
- 10:00 "You don't know anything about it?" "No sir, not me". And I felt he could have kicked me in the backside when I said that. And the other officer said, "Well, it's a thorough investigation, we've checked them out and that's OK". And the Australian Air Force bloke winked at my boss but the colonel's got his head down worrying. Nothing happened about that any more and they didn't ask about the trucks we had. And the boss didn't ask either he said, "No, I'm not interested," because he got what he wanted. So we built this huge store there and we carried mostly
- 10:30 fighter plane spare parts and any other planes operating in the area. We seemed to get the spare parts in or essential parts of them before the planes arrived. We had one incident - we were in the woods chasing around big trees to use as pillars for the sheds and that's what helped me camouflage those sheds because we had jungle timber. Out of all the timber they were made of we added to it a very



- 11:00 mild camouflage. Anyway, they went away quite happy and we acquired all of this. Getting back to where I was a second ago, we were in the jungle cutting these big trees down and we were there the night and had to cut a certain number down before we brought the big truck up to put them on. And the Yanks had come in and were clearing the jungle with a bulldozer. And we went away and when we came back the next morning I wouldn't let the blokes
- 11:30 get off the truck until I'd walked around the place to see if the Japs had been there. And true, they'd been there too because they had a peculiar boot where the big toe was separate to the rest of the foot and that was for tree climbing. I said to the boys, "Whatever you do don't go near the bulldozer, I think it's trapped". And then they said, "Righto then, whatever you say, bugger them". So when the Yanks arrived, and you could hear them coming from miles away they way they carried on, I went to the sergeant and I said, "If I were
- 12:00 you I'd check that bulldozer out because I think it's booby trapped. The Japs have been here". And I showed him the footmarks all around. He said, "You're an Aussie, eh? Well I'm the chief sergeant," of whatever his rank was. He was a high-faluting [high ranking] sergeant of some sort or NCO [Non Commissioned Officer]. "I'll give my men the orders". So he said to one of the blokes, "You'd better get on that and let's get the job done," and ignored me, I was nothing. So I went back to the boys
- 12:30 who were about 30ft away and I said, "Righto boys run like hell and give yourselves 10 seconds and hit the dirt". We hit the dirt right enough as the bloke hit the accelerator on the bulldozer and it blew it to pieces. So again we escaped. It knocked a lot of Yanks about. What we did was we cleared out because when the Yanks start coming in on a thing like that they don't bring 2 men they bring 100. And I said, "We'll have the day off". So we shot through.
- 13:00 That was just one of the many incidents we had. Then we got to land in Tarakan. The powers that be in the army, [General Douglas] MacArthur and his mad mob, decided that they'd put 3,000 men to take Tarakan, the richest oil in the Pacific probably, that we would go in and invade there. But nobody told him there were 30,000 Imperial Japanese
- 13:30 Guards there, all big blokes, bigger than me. And they decided they wouldn't let us in. However, they got us in at one point and we were in D plus 1. We were the second trip in by the HMAS Westralia. She took the first lot of assault troops in, I think it was the 48th Battalion - Derrick VC [Victoria Cross] was amongst them - and she came straight back, dumped them, and came straight back and picked us up and we were the next lot
- 14:00 in. Now the air force was never, ever used as reinforcements for the army. But in the Battle of Tarakan that's what we were, the reinforcements behind them - at one stage we were only 100 yards, 50 yards from the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and 100 yards from the Japs. They were closer than that but we were well organised and we were waiting for them. But landing at Tarakan was a wonderful thing. I'm
- 14:30 told by a lot of the members of the Westralia that were on that ship that delivered me that they had no idea about the sea although they were sailors. They put nets over the side and they put as much stuff as they could on your back which was a haversack. And across the haversack you had your kit bag and you had your hat and you had your rifle and you had pouches on and you had all sorts of ammunition and grenades and all sorts of nonsense - no I don't think we had grenades on that.
- 15:00 And they dropped us over the sides. And you clambered down this net on the side of the boat and then there's a bit of a six foot drop from the boat except that when I'm coming down I've got half way down and they stopped us and they said, "You can go now". But there's no boat there. By the time somebody hauled us out of the sea we were absolutely saturated. But you were put on the boat and you landed on shore and that doesn't matter, that's only part of the world.
- 15:30 When I went in I cried when I saw the atrocities. Oh boy could I tell a story on those but I won't be. And we pushed in a bit, I'd say about a quarter of a mile. And we've got dead Japs and all sorts of things happening around - it's a real battlefield. And what surprised me was I couldn't believe they were Japanese because they were so big. Now they were lying dead everywhere and some of our blokes or the remains of some of our blokes were lying there. And we went
- 16:00 in about 3 quarters of a mile, no it wouldn't be that far, and we settled down for the night. And we made some sort of a camp but it wasn't to be permanent because we kept pushing on. Before you go into these areas they generally say, "Your area is in there," and you've got to get to it. Eventually I think it was late in the day we got to the site that they said was ours. It was 3 houses with the roofs blown off. They said, "You're in this area you're just lucky those houses are there". And we
- 16:30 pushed through bamboo and cane growing up about 6 to 8 ft high. And you've got to make your own tracks for a lot of it or you follow the man in front or you go beside him and make your own track. Very seldom were there any made roads or tracks in the areas we had to go to after we left. There was a main road there but it only went a certain way and I think it went from one end of that island to the other. I'm not sure how far it went I never went to the other end.
- 17:00 We settled down there we thought for the night. So then one of the boys, unbeknownst to me, decided he wanted a clothesline. I don't know what he wanted it for probably to hang some clothes up inside this shell of a house. So he went out and thought "There's a wire there, I'll cut a bit off that". You know,

the usual story, in Australia you'd cut a bit off the farmer's fence. He brought it back and hung it

- 17:30 up and everything's going well and then all of a sudden we're getting bullets thumped into the place. And I'm running around putting everybody down below the window sills and telling them to sit still and not do anything but make sure your gun's loaded. And we were being peppered with a bit of mortar fire but not landing fortunately for us in the house. Along the way we got the army coming back to us and then one of the army blokes, this was about 20 minutes or half an hour later said
- 18:00 "We lost communication with our reserves". This bloke had cut the communication wire down for his bloody clothesline. I said, "Well, I know your problem and there it is". They patched it up but by this time the Japs had pushed back on them. They were awful big blokes and in great numbers. There were far too many of us. And that's where, on the next section of that, where Derrick VC got cut in half with the machine guns. They were waiting for him on the track, not for him but for anybody, and he
- 18:30 walked into it unknowingly and he got cut in half there. They killed him there. That was about 200 yards from us forward. So what we were told by the army was to sit tight and be prepared for anything and do not go to sleep without guards on. So as usual I drew the midnight shift, the dogwatch, 12 until whatever, or probably 10 o'clock. So we go out and I'm on the back end in a bit of a
- 19:00 drain. The back end of where the houses were, there were two ways that you could get to them, and I'm on the back end with another air force bloke that was with us, a hard worker and everything. And we were sitting down there and when you're on duty there you face each other. So I'm looking over your shoulder and you're watching mine and we're covering a fair field of view or fire. And he's sitting there, closer than you and I are sitting now, and
- 19:30 somehow or other his rifle finished up under my chin. I was about to push it away when he said, "Where's the safety catch on this?" I didn't have to sit in water, I was wet, I'm not kidding you. And eventually I straightened him out and I showed him. And then I said to him, and you've got to talk quietly, "Did you do any training?" "Oh" he said, "I never had time for that". So they'd given him basic training and given him his kit and he was the reinforcements coming to us from Townsville.
- 20:00 And I then showed him how to operate the rifle and I said to him, "Whatever you do tell me if you see anything for Christ's sake. You nearly shot me". "Well" he said, "I didn't know". That's just one little incident up there. We did many things in Tarakan. We had to set up the camp and we had to convert these brick or mud houses
- 20:30 and put a roof on them of some sort and eventually we did. However, at that point I must digress and tell you the supply system that I'd earlier explained about the lack of supplies in Morotai. When we got to Tarakan it was a few days before we got rations. When our rations came around for our unit, there were about 14 men I think, we were getting rations for about 60 or I forget our total number of people in the
- 21:00 unit. We were getting our total rations but we got all tinned fruit and we got it by the truckload. The blokes down the road got all bread and the blokes down the road got potatoes and the blokes somewhere else got tinned meat or whatever, bags of carrots or whatever, but every unit got his quota in tonnes or bags or boxes but it was only one thing. As it came off the ship they dumped it.
- 21:30 So we spent a lot of the days after we'd stabilised our own particular area running to each unit and swapping our food. That was part of our day. You got up at 8 o'clock you started to drive the jeep around and a couple of you went around and swapped. We were in a good position because we had the tinned meat. And we lived like that for quite a while until eventually about a month later they stabilised the supply system and then got enough
- 22:00 men. That was our trouble it was man shortage and that created the food disruption. We had plenty of ammunition. We were never short of ammunition and so it went on. We covered these big buildings. Those houses, when we originally went in, we put canvas cover on. But then we moved further inland as the army pushed the Japs back and we'd be covering long rows of houses which had
- 22:30 been used as brothels. And we spent half a day getting rid of the heaps and thousands and millions of bloody condoms that were in there. So they had all their roofs burned off so then we had to put the roofs back on them again and that became our permanent base. Then we got invaded by one of the Japs and we got rid of them in a hurry with the way we were
- 23:00 trained. We chased one fellow up a pipe, a water pipe, well we chased about 4 of them up there. It was as big as this room and it must have been 8 or 10 foot pipe, huge pipe, a drainpipe or whatever. And I suppose we would have fired a box full of ammunition in after those Japs. And we reckoned - the sounds had all stopped and we reckoned we'd cleaned them up. And then we heard
- 23:30 a voice in perfect English say, "Are you all right now? Can I surrender?" And of course some idiot fired shots at it but it didn't hit anything. And anyway, we quietened the boys down and settled them down and said, "Be ready, we don't know who it is". It was the biggest Japanese I've ever seen and he was a Japanese Olympic swimmer. He said, "Mate, I laid on the ground and let you buggers fire your hearts out. I'm not going to die for the Emperor". A terrific bloke he
- 24:00 was but we took him prisoner and he disappeared. Another time we had a band over, I don't know what

the band was doing, entertaining us or something, and we were asked to supply a driver and transport to take them back to the 48th Battalion, I think that was the battalion. And you had to go about two miles one way and then go past the bottom of the air strip and then two miles the other way to their camp and then come back.

- 24:30 Well, nobody would volunteer for it because it was midnight and the snipers were on the road. So, they've got to go back so I get the job. I got these blokes going back and I'm quite happy because I've got a bit of firepower with me. But then coming back alone I don't know how fast those machines go but the boys reckoned they could hear me and they thought it was a plane taking off. A Jap would have to been good to pick me because I didn't travel on those roads I flew. I never hit a pothole. I
- 25:00 don't remember hitting a pothole. Another incident happened while we were there. The word got out that they wanted prisoners for interrogation. We weren't involved in this but we were party to it, the aftermath of it, getting the people and the Jap prisoners to where we had to take them. We were next to the detention camp to be quite frank. The word went out and these two blokes were walking up the road and as always on the alert with their guns
- 25:30 cocked and two Japs came around the corner and they shot them dead. Then behind them were two Australians bringing them back. So there was quite a pandemonium about that but that's just one of the things that happens in war. One of the reasons we won the Battle in Japan is because we had [General Leslie] Morshead, he was the commanding officer who later became the Manager of The Bank of New South Wales. And he illustrated to us every day, his headquarters opposite our compound or our
- 26:00 area, and he used to put a big blackboard up every afternoon and tell him and all his other commanders what the state of the land was. Where the enemy was and what they were doing. All we had there was anti-aircraft guns, mainly anti-aircraft guns, so he used them to drive the Japs into a certain area and with these aircraft guns firing up the mountains and over them. Then he put them down and used them as
- 26:30 straight artillery when he got them lined up. And I reckon he wiped out thousands of Japs but that was just one of the tactics. At one stage there we developed our own chufas which is a little fire we made for ourselves to heat our washing up and hot water and all that. The word came out that we had to not have any chufas going because they were flares. There was a big action going on and they'd be shooting up flares. The pilot up in
- 27:00 the air would see our chufa going and think it was a flare. Somebody in the unit next to ours forgot to put the chufa out. And they were in their slit trenches like we were. And this bloke up there decides he'll drop a bomb on it, a fighter pilot. It caused a bit of pandemonium. I can't answer whether there was anybody killed or injured in that unit but that's one of the things we suffered. And generally we had a bit of fun there. The natives up there
- 27:30 were Dyaks and the water drains up there are about six foot deep by about eight foot wide - big and huge. And that's where the water flowed and it was more or less no doubt I think the locals with canoes would spend a bit of time there. I don't know whether it was a drain or spring water or whatever it was but they were there mainly. Then the road was sort of next to it and it usually followed this along or the canal followed the road along. And along comes a crowd moving house or
- 28:00 moving back into the house. The fellow is walking along behind them with a stick, a big long stick, smoking a pipe and carrying nothing. The first lot we get are little women - and they're only little women, Dyaks, and little men - coming along with a bamboo pole with a sewing machine on one end and a package on the other and on her back she had a pack. So there's about 5 of them and this bloody fat bloke wandering along with a
- 28:30 stick. So by the time we finished him up we had the girls with the stick and he would get the pole with the sewing machine on and the big load and move it a hundred yards and go back and get the next one until he got out of sight. And the girls were giggling and enjoying it and so were we but God help them when we weren't there. That was just one of those little sideline instances. From Tarakan we went along pretty well. I picked up amoebic dysentery
- 29:00 in Tarakan. I was in and out of hospital with it until the hospital finally decided or the boss decided that I was no good to him because I was only there for 2 days to tell them what to do and then back in hospital because they were treating me with this atebirin. Then they took me to Labuan. They flew me to Labuan because the hospital wasn't big enough to treat my condition and it was worsening. The bug gets into your bowel and your
- 29:30 intestines and believe me it took months and months and months to get it out of me. While I was in Labuan the hospital up there mainly consists of camp stretchers. So we are there and then we get word we're going to get a few casualties coming in. And maybe they weren't certain about it they thought it would be an evacuation of prisoners of war. Oh, the war finished in Tarakan I missed that part. The war finished in
- 30:00 Tarakan and as I previously stated the stores supply from the mainland was lousy. But the night we got word that the Japs had surrendered after the bombs had dropped we had two bottles of beer in each unit for every man that night to celebrate. Now don't tell me they are not good organisers the Aussies - everybody got his two bottles of beer. I didn't drink and the boys shared it amongst themselves. At the same time, I missed this

- 30:30 part, it started in Morotai and then Tarakan and we got comfort funds. The comfort funds consisted of a carton at least of cigarettes and 6 to 8 cigars and these lifesavers in cartons. And everybody got a big issue until the rackets began but I'm not about to talk about that.
- 31:00 I had chocolate and I'd trade my cigarettes to the boys for chocolates and keep the chocolates and then give most of them back anyway because I didn't smoke. But we didn't get any grog until Japan surrendered. And I used to send the cigarettes by mail to my brother further down in New Guinea. He was in the army. That's another story it's not mine. And I didn't mention this that for something to do
- 31:30 the Salvation Army set up a boxing match at Morotai. So for some strange reason I'd become king of the mob in my weight division. But while we were waiting at Townsville also a boxing ring was set up and one of the heavyweight boxers that had been at my home when my brother was training as a boxer earlier sighted me and said, "Hey, Len, you're the bloke come in here".
- 32:00 So he put me in the boxing ring for a spar and I'm 10 stone and he's about 8 stone. Well on that first boxing match I had for the air force against the army I hit much open air and he never missed a punch on me. I got knocked down a few times and this bloke came along who was the referee who was the sergeant who knew me and picked me up and said, "Come on, Smithy, you can do better than that". He was too
- 32:30 fast and he'd been training and like mad and I hadn't. So when we get to Morotai we were going to have the boxing ring set up by the Salvation Army and at Morotai we had with us - the sergeant was, I'm not sure whether he had actually had competed in the Olympic Games but he was an Olympian he called himself and a smart boxer. And his reputation was that big that he wouldn't
- 33:00 get into the ring with anybody or spar with them. Anyway, I had a fellow in my unit who turned out to be a thief later on, a real murderer, and made his money that way. I'll deal with him later on when I get to it. He was my trainer and we trained for about - in Morotai we must have been training for 4 or 5 weeks and this Olympian is training us. But our manager, self appointed
- 33:30 manager, was this big fellow, "The Burglar" - a terrific bloke. He got me in pretty good nick because I liked to do things harder than anybody else. And then they had this boxing match and they'd put your name in a hat and draw it out. And of course it seems obvious I am picked to fight my Olympian. So I say to my trainer, "What am I going to do? Run all the time? He said, "No, I've got it worked out." He said, "His ego is that
- 34:00 big and when the bell rings he's got to pose to everybody and when he poses to everybody and puts his jaw up run out and hit him". So I did and he never got up. And then when we got to Tarakan we did the boxing again. And I had beaten two blokes and then they put me in against a fellow who had trained as a boxer in Newcastle who when I went out to shake hands with him he hit me on the head and an egg came up on the side of my head.
- 34:30 And he drove me from the centre of the ring to where I'm hanging on the ropes. I saw him coming and I poked out my left and he ran into it. We had 60 pounds in guilder money on me and anyway I survived the fight and it was a draw. They had to give me a draw because I was belting him in the third round. So the boys spent all night getting this lump on the side of my forehead down
- 35:00 and then we put all our money back in the kit bag and locked it - very, very good. And then we went about our work. We didn't touch the kit bag for about a week. And we went to get the kit bag and the money out of it about a week later and somebody had cut a neat cross in the bottom of the kit bag and stolen all the money so all that work was for nothing. Then they abandoned the boxing ring because we had to prepare to move on. After
- 35:30 that, or two or three weeks later, I started to get crook and was going to hospital with this amoebic dysentery. I couldn't stop my bowels from working. And I've got back up to Labuan now and they expected that an intake coming in could be some prisoners of war what they failed to tell you was that they were all prisoners of war. And of course the airstrip is next to the hospital. I have never in my life was so shocked ever, ever - never,
- 36:00 ever before and never, ever since to see the prisoners of war brought off that plane. They carried them off and some of them were tall men that you could carry in one hand. There was nothing of them. To say they were two stone - one fellow confessed to me that when they first weighed him he was two stone and he's bigger than I am now. That somehow hit a chord within my head I thought, "Never let that happen again".
- 36:30 Anyway, eventually we recovered from that. We slept on the dirt and they slept on the bed. Eventually we got back and my number came up to be evacuated to Australia by air. So up I go and the bloke who was ever in charge of the despatch of people in
- 37:00 Labuan - and at the airport I was going to be flown back - but it is alleged - I've got no proof of this - but I was there when the little cock-hoop lieutenant colonel came up and this sergeant is working me and another bloke on at the last minute to fly out to Australia. And this bloke comes up with his aide-de-camp or whatever, his adjutant, and says, "He's not going I'm going". Now how much of this story is true I don't know - I'm told

- 37:30 because we got shot through back to the hospital. This fellow demanded to get on the plane and it's got to take place because he said so. The plane when it took off crashed into the nearest mountain so he did me a wonderful job. I always salute officers from now on, mostly the idiot ones but never the others. Then I eventually came back by ship from Labuan on some rusty old Liberty ship. Because of my condition I
- 38:00 couldn't be given a berth down in the holds I had to be up on the deck so I could put my bum over the side. That's how I came back. And then they put me into Concord and I think I was in Concord for 4, 5 or 6 months. I don't know but it was a hell of a long time. And they used to put this thing - fill me up downstairs with this atebrin treatment. It was a bucketful of yellow mixture and they'd pump it into me and I'm
- 38:30 supposed to lie with my head down and the bed stuck up as high as it could with my feet in the air for four hours. But I never lasted 4 hours because the pain would beat me. And I'd have to yell out for the bloke and the bucket to follow me to the toilet. And this went on for months and months but eventually they got me to the stage where I could be discharged. That was the part of my health story. Now while I'm there I was put in a
- 39:00 bed which was handy to the door and handy to the toilets. Being near the door wasn't as important as being near the toilets because if I never had this stuff in me I'd be backwards and forwards to the toilet. And every time the wardsmen came in he'd have to clean the floor up because I always left a trail. Anyway, I am now reading everything I could read and this big fellow, he was the senior army medical officer
- 39:30 in Sydney. I don't know what he was, he'd be above a colonel, he'd be well up in it for medicine. And he made his inspections two or three times a week. And he went through one time and he never missed a trick. I used to watch him watching things. And he looked at me and he gave me a second glance and I didn't know why but the nurse that was with him was giving him the
- 40:00 details on the paper. He came back another day and looked at me and nodded. And I thought, "Len, you're in trouble". And then the third day he came back and he spoke to me and introduced himself. And I said this bloke's up to something - I've always been suspicious I suppose particularly of rank. The fourth time he came in he said, "You like to read?" And I said, "Yes, I do sir". He said, "I wonder if you are
- 40:30 well enough and fit enough to come and have a yarn to me in the office after I'm finished". And I thought, "This is really big trouble". So I said, "Yes sir". So I put my dressing gown on and wandered up and I told him the interview would only be about 10 minutes as that's the only time I had on leave from the toilet. He said, "Well, I'll put it simple" he said, "As you walked to my office what did you see?" I said, "I think it's bloody funny - a clean hall with all those garbage bins". There were only about 3 or 4 of them but they were out of
- 41:00 character you see. He said, "I tell you why. We get the fellows in here and we assess them and we give them forms to fill in to put in for a pension from Repat [Department of Repatriation] and when I come to work here I find them all in the rubbish bin". He said, "Now, we want a counsellor" - he didn't use the word counsellor - he said, "we want somebody to help them". He said, "The way you read I think you might be the fittest one anyway in the ward". He said, "Would you help me? I'll send the bloke along to give you the
- 41:30 forms and give you some training and then come along and collect the forms every day and see that they're filled in right".
- I'll just get you to stop there, Len, the tape's just about to end and I don't want you to be half way through.**

## Tape 3

- 00:40 **Len we'll just start from where we were at the last tape - so you were in Concord Hospital?**
- Yes. I was in Concord Hospital and I'd just been interviewed by the Senior Medical Officer there would I be prepared to talk the boys into signing the forms handed to them by the hospital for them to
- 01:00 get - the form was an application form for them to qualify for a pension and they had to be filled in by the veteran and I was asked to see that they filled them in and in particular signed their name because we could get the rest of their details off their medical records. And then a person from the department of Veteran Affairs would come along and check what I was doing that the form was correctly prepared and signed before
- 01:30 it went to the Department itself. As a matter of fact he took them himself. He took them with him and took them into the Department. I don't know who arranged that but it was apparently this doctor who was a very, very nice person. The education I received there has actually stood me in great stead ever since. The paramount thing was, I remember it in particular, it was that you had to put it down as the

truth. It had to be the truth. And if you had to spend an extra few minutes checking it and

- 02:00 challenging what the veteran said you had to do that to be sure. And if you asked him 3 times and he gave you the answer 3 times then it would be near enough to be acceptable as the truth. However, from there I was eventually discharged after being there for many, many months. I'm not sure if it was 5 or 6. I then returned to Byron Bay where my wife through the war had lived with her mother at
- 02:30 Byron Bay. And I returned there to the family home or her family home at that time. I then set about - I bought a disposal army truck because I'd learned to drive in the air force. In Townsville and all those places they'd taught me how to drive because it was essential I drive. So I bought an army truck. And the first thing that happened to the army
- 03:00 truck on the day I'm on the train coming home - my brother-in-law had got a load of fish and that's what we were going to do. I'm a little mixed here for a minute but I'll straighten it. We were going to buy the fish at Byron Bay and take it through to Tenterfield and offload it on all the towns through which had already been surveyed and the customers were organised. So he put his first load of fish on the first trip with the truck and drives about twenty-five
- 03:30 miles and got hit by a train at Eltham and smashed the truck and the fish up - a very bad start after discharge. I arrived home and got this mess and anyway I sorted it out. I eventually got some compensation from the insurance people and naturally bought another truck. So we did that for a while and in the meantime, you won't believe this, I was getting two or three
- 04:00 boxes of fish at Byron Bay and putting them on the New England bus. That would go to Tenterfield with my bike and the fish on and me as a passenger. I would leave the fish in boxes at Tenterfield and then pedal around the shops to ask them how much fish they wanted and go back to the fish depot and deliver it. That was what I was doing at that particular time. That didn't last long of course. The fish company or the bus company objected to the water out of the fish causing their buses to
- 04:30 rust. And I was a bit of a pain in the neck to them anyway but that didn't worry me because I established some contacts. I continued on with the trucks and picked up general carrying and did all sorts of things of which there was no such thing to cater for Byron Bay needs. So I started to cart cattle from Byron Bay through to Casino sales and Lismore sales and back load with coal from the Menalbo [Comalco?] Coal Mining Company where, I'll
- 05:00 dwell on Menalbo for a moment - I read in the Northern Star, the Lismore Paper, where 5 diggers had started to dig for coal and prospect for coal in Menalbo. And they struck coal but it wasn't a good coal it was called a green coal. It wasn't the powerful coal that we are producing now and selling. But they couldn't sell it they had hundreds of tonnes on grass. So I turned up with my truck and at that time I might add it did not have a tipper on
- 05:30 because there was a shortage of supply. They were supplying about one in a thousand a month, there was a very slow supply of tippers. I turned up and threw 8 tonne of coal on the back and drove into Casino to the meatworks and sold it. And then on I sold it to the gasworks in Lismore and continued on to Andersons Meatworks and Norco Meatworks down at Byron Bay. And I developed quite a good business in that way and finished up with 2 or 3 trucks. I'm not going to dwell on the trucks at this point because that's
- 06:00 one of the jobs that I did. I'm just not sure where this fits in. I'm pretty sure somewhere along the line - I was still in trucks I still had transport and one truck operating but I wasn't making enough money - that's right. So I bought a Volkswagen camper van as a supplement to the trucks and couldn't get enough
- 06:30 work for it. And it is starting to eat its head off and I'm starting to lose money. So I applied for and got a job as a contractor delivering parcels from the post office in Lismore. And then I expanded it to deliver parcels to New England and the bus company. And then I expanded it and delivered parcels for Butler Airlines. And then the post office gave me two more contracts including the
- 07:00 telephone coins out of the coin containers out of public telephones and a couple of other short mail runs and the parcel contract. That became a full-time business. At the same time when my other truck came through it would drop the fish off behind the fish shop and I would then deliver his fish in my little van to that shop and to the other shops that were buying fish too. So I did a little bit of part-time work
- 07:30 there for my own business. That went particularly well and I was very successful in that. But then came the time where the green coal, the price of the green coal, was being undercut by the price of the good coal from Newcastle area. Before I leave that I must tell you one incident. One of the big major floods in
- 08:00 Lismore - the lines were flooded in New South Wales and they couldn't get coal to the gasworks and they were running short of it. So they said to me "We use so much coal" (I think it was 30 tonnes a day or some astronomical amount) "can you keep us supplied?" I said, "Well, I don't know how my costs will go. I can't do it for nothing". They said, "We'll pay you so much surcharge while the flood is on and we can't get coal to deliver it." And at that
- 08:30 time of course I didn't want to put a driver on with all that entails so I decided to do it myself. So I'd go day and night and spend two hours on the road mainly eating out of a café in Casino where the old

fellow, a Greek bloke, used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and if I told him I was coming through he'd have my breakfast on the table when I got there because I was very strict to time. Coming back one time about the fifth trip with very little sleep I

- 09:00 woke up under the viaduct at Lismore and here I've got the police car jammed up against the wall with an inspector and a sergeant driver. And I was asleep. Well, the best way to say that is to tell you the conclusion rather than the detail. I was going to jail for the rest of my life if they didn't hang me in the meanwhile. But when the true story came out of what I was doing the inspector handed it to the Clerk of
- 09:30 Courts at Lismore and he had me going there every week while he was preparing the papers as he said and reporting here. "You've got to be here next Wednesday at 10 o'clock," and I would be there religiously. And about the 6th or 7th week from that period of the incident I went there one day and he said, "I've got bad luck for you today, mate, you're gone". And I thought he meant I was gone, I was finished. But what he went on to say was, "They had a bit of bad luck. They opened the doors at the front of the court and this was at the back of the
- 10:00 court and the river is down there and the papers got blown off my table into the creek and I've got no evidence". He said, "I don't know what happened. I'll call you when I want you". So something prevailed and I got out of that. But I kept going and then back to the story where the green coal wasn't being matched by the superior coal they were now mining in Newcastle. So the coal waned went off to the degree where I was only getting about a load a day which wasn't enough for me,
- 10:30 for my costs and all that despite the back loading. So I said to Lynne, "This is no good". And they were opening out the Calais Coal Mine up near Gladstone through Biloela in that area. I think it was the background at Biloela. And they had no railway as they had today. So they called for trucks and I thought, "This will do me". And the price these brothers offered was a particularly attractive price so I put Lynne - no I didn't I got two spare
- 11:00 drivers and then two trucks I took at that time. I sold whatever trucks I had. Mind you at this time I had not dropped one Repat case. I was still doing the Repat cases that came in. You won't believe that, through the RSL [Returned and Services League] - I'll come back to that in a minute. However, I get to Gladstone and we're doing - I've got the big Diesel Comer and I've got the big Ford and I'm doing trips from I think it was about 80ks into Gladstone from that coal mine. I'm doing them very well indeed. I broke an
- 11:30 axle but I got out of that one. When the axle was broken I had to go to town to pick up the new axle, that is into Gladstone because we'd arranged for it to be there. And I'm in a forward cabin Comer and there's three of us. There's a driver and myself sitting in the middle. And a big bloke got in and he must have been 6ft 4" or 6ft 6" and the only way he could get in is if he
- 12:00 jammed his knees up against the dashboard. So we were hurtling along with a very big load of coal behind us. And this is not a semi this is a straight out 8 tonner, a big heavy truck, and there's dust everywhere because those roads were not bitumen. And around the corner comes a Mack semi trailer and it hit us head on. Well, it killed the driver. It hurt me a bit but not much but what saved
- 12:30 me was the big fellow sitting next to me with his knees jammed up against the dash board and instead of sliding straight across the front of it, it met this resistance and went back the same way and that's what saved me being killed. But they rushed me to hospital anyway and they pumped a drug into me with sulphur. And I thought I was going all right for the rest of that day that I was there. But I woke up the next morning and I'm like the Indian rubber man I'm blown up, I'm poisoned, because they'd used a
- 13:00 sulphur drug on me which I'm allergic to. It took me about ten days to recover to get me back from that. Anyway I recovered from that but then the wets started to come in, the wet season. So I said to the boys, "This is no good. I've got a mate down at the Snowy Mountains who can do with trucks". So I went back and spent a period of time in Byron Bay and packed up the goods all on the back of the truck and mattresses and what have you. I took 3 drivers with me and two trucks down to the Snowy
- 13:30 Mountains. But when I got down to the Snowy Mountains the price that they offered me - of course the trucks could have gone 24 hours a day and they would have made money - was not sufficient. I couldn't see any money in it for me to replace my trucks. I could see living in it and I could see running expenses and a few bob but there was nothing for me to replace my trucks with. So I said, "I'll think about that and I'll be down tomorrow to see the bloke".
- 14:00 And when I was where we were camped some bloke said to me "I'm going down to Morwell on the brown coal". He said, "There's good money down there". I said, "That sounds all right to me. What's the good money?" And they were paying double down there on the green coal at Morwell than they were on the hard rock, the very hard difficult conditions in the Snowy Mountains. So I pulled out of the Snowy Mountains afterwards and went to Morwell. Then the rains came just as we hit there.
- 14:30 We had nowhere to camp and no accommodation whatsoever in Morwell. There weren't motels like there are today. I went around door-knocking and I found a garage that was partly furnished and the people had lived in it prior to them building the house. And I moved in with the young fellow, by that time we had our son, was in there with me. The bloke was a drunk who owned the place and I finished up putting him in jail but that's another story.

- 15:00 I then got the boys settled in a hostel and then I went down and got them jobs at the Morwell Brown Coal Project. And that's where I did do a lot of Repat work. One of the fellows I've got a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] for who is travelling around Australia at the moment - his dad died on that lounge. I did a hell of a lot of work down there in Morwell and I did a bit of work up there in Gladstone. Wherever I went - at
- 15:30 Byron Bay I was still looking after the people in Byron Bay and got a lot of people three - one from Bangalore and two from Ballina and all this. That was still going on and when I look back I think I was either an idiot or was a super human. I don't know but I got through all of that work. I got involved with the Minister down at Morwell and once they knew my capabilities and I'd helped a few blokes it was like a wild
- 16:00 fire. Everybody wanted my help but they got it as I could afford the time but I seemed to satisfy them all the time eventually. One fellow who died on that couch I got his two sons TPI. I got him a TPI and I got his wife a War Widows' Pension.

**Len, sorry, can I just ask what a TPI is?**

Yes, that's the top pension they pay you. You've got to be an incapacitated veteran. You've got to have something that prohibits you from working a full day's work. You are only fit to work 8 hours a

- 16:30 day but you've got to have something really seriously wrong with you. They don't hand it out. You've got to go before a Royal Commission or it's almost Royal Commission. And as I say information - you've got to supply it that would satisfy a Royal Commission before you qualify for a TPI pension. Or you can have one limb off and that will stop you from working more than 8 hours a week - that's the correct term. Anyway, I'm in Morwell
- 17:00 and eventually after I get this bloke put in jail who owned this garage I'm living in I then acquired a Housing Commission house. And it was still raining and my trucks are sitting on the banks of the Morwell Project. I got the boys jobs and I said they'd got to leave the Morwell Project as workers to come back and drive for me if the trucks were right.
- 17:30 We never got more than about 2 or 3 days work and then it was hopeless because it was wet clay because in Gippsland it was always very wet. It was a disaster from that point of view. So I had to find income and I started out as a motor mechanic would you believe it in the Morwell Project, or the Brown Coal Project in Morwell. I was in that two days and along comes a big tall bloke
- 18:00 talking to all the workers. And I thought, "What's going on here is he from the police?" I've always been suspicious that I'm in trouble when I know I haven't been. He eventually came to me and said, "What do you do?" I said, "They listed me as a motor mechanic here." He said, "I can see by your condition that's what you are," because I had grease everywhere. And he said, "I'm looking for somebody to help me out". And I said, "That depends on what you want doing". He said, one of the boys over there said, "You want that smart little
- 18:30 bugger over there". That was me at least that's the words he used. And he said, "I've been appointed the transport officer of this Morwell Project" - that was the State Electricity Commission of Victoria - it's still going in a very modified fashion. He said, "I will be responsible for everything that moves on this project," he said, "everything from the bicycle upwards". He said, "What I want to do is set up a system (he'd just started there this
- 19:00 week) is set up a system in this office whereby when I get a telephone call from head office in Melbourne I want to tell them in 3 minutes the full answer, and I mean the full answer, to their question". He said, "I want somebody to set up a system in my office with an open cheque from me so that I can do that". He said, "What do you think of the job?" I said, "A piece of cake". And he looked at me and he thought I was lying or billowing or whatever.
- 19:30 He said, "I tell you, you said that with that much confidence I'm going to give you a go." I said, "Good," and I couldn't get the filthy overalls off quick enough. So I went over - this by the way is just another sideline to my Repat work. I'm still doing Repat work through this minister and all the people that I got to know. I'll add further to that in a moment. And I walked in and he had one chair and one table. And the building we're in is about 40 feet
- 20:00 long and he's got 10 feet of the office which gave me 30 feet of space - one chair and one table. And he wants a first class record kept to let him answer Melbourne in 3 minutes. And I had the key to anything I wanted. So I finished up with 5 girls and he finished up being able to give a report on any one of the 365 items of machinery on that project in 3 minutes.
- 20:30 My job then, after I'd set that up, he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Not too much". He said, "I've got another job for you. I want a physical check on every machine on this project and I'm going to give you a brand new Land Rover and when you come in of the morning you drive over the project and you know where every machine is. And then in the afternoon you do it again". He said, "I just want a bit of a
- 21:00 security check," because security wasn't as thorough as it is today. So I did that and it proved satisfactory. I introduced a lot of safety measures and what have you. One fellow didn't turn up to work and they couldn't find him but I found him dead in the hostel. That's just a side instance. One of the



machines got the motor stolen out of it. A brand new Ford was put into a

- 21:30 compressor, a portable compressor on the Thursday and the Friday and they came to start it on the Monday and it's got no motor. So I fixed that up with the police and pin-pointed who stole it and all the rest of it because I knew just about every truckie and every truck and every bit of machinery on the project. Then again after I'd done that with a while I was still involved with the Repat. Don't ask me why I still stuck to that or it stuck to me. Everywhere I went I met
- 22:00 somebody who I'd met years before they knew me and they doxed me into their mates as soon as they saw me. It was like a rolling stone. Then I found that I'm authorising bulldozer drivers and truck drivers and crane drivers and a Euclid loader, that's that big machine that goes along and scrapes and throws it up onto the conveyor belts and drops it into the trucks - all those drivers were on overtime and they're getting a hell of a lot more money than me
- 22:30 because I accepted a staff position. And I'm on about say \$300 a week - these are just figures to give you an idea of the difference in these salaries - and they're on \$1,000 a week. They're pulling \$1,000 a week and I'm pulling \$300. I'm lending them money to pay off - thanks to my partner out there and myself we had a very thrifty plan. We'd always never buy anything unless we paid cash. We'd
- 23:00 never take anything on time payment except the house or the houses that we had. Anyway, I'm finding that I'm not getting enough money although I'm saving money but there are still things I'd like to buy like carpets for the floor. We lived on a hill and the westerly winds used to blow up underneath and when the log fire went out you had to either go and stoke it up again or put an extra blanket on. And I wanted carpets on the floor and things for the house.
- 23:30 So by some strange trick of fate, and I can't give you the true story there or what was the true story that led me into this. I think one of the fellows died - that's right. The bloke I found in the shed, that's right, we had to bury him. The workman that was missing and I found him in the workers' hostel dead - when I met the funeral director we got talking. And then he came back to see me after we had buried this
- 24:00 fellow and he said - I was mentioning one or two things and he said, "As you're moving around look for someone to give me a hand out in my mortuary, it's only one or two hours a week and it can be done after hours," he said, "and I think they're looking for a new grave digger". So you won't believe this I got to help him out after hours and dig graves at Morwell Cemetery run by a Cemetery Trust Secretary. So
- 24:30 he would wait for me - and this was the thing I started getting annoyed about - he would have the hearse outside for me when I knocked off work at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and would drive me out to the graveyard. And Jimmy with a bundle of sandwiches and a thermos or a pot of tea or a billy of tea or something. I would dig the 6 or 7 ft graves and did very well out of it thank you. You get double time on Sundays and you do all sorts of things but I mostly did it at night. It was a bit cold at times but nothing else.
- 25:00 That's one of the jobs I got to earn money on and did particularly well. Then it reached the stage where they discovered oil off Bass Strait and they were developing it and it was a good yield. So Menzies at that time ceased the subsidy on brown coal because they were going to use the Bass Strait oil. So they didn't want to sack me. They said I was valuable to them. But I
- 25:30 could be the mechanic half the day and check the office staff the other half. Now that's very good except you've got to change clothes and you've got to wash. And it got to the stage that while I'm doing the mechanic work and helping out in the workshop my mind is on the office and when I'm in the office my mind is on the mechanical work. And it reached the stage where this was beginning to bother me and we were getting the nod like this bloke that died here - him and his mates I'm handling them as
- 26:00 well. I'm beginning to think this is no good, "You can't settle down". And later on I'll tell you more it's happened again recently. While I'm doing this job along comes a smart Alec that sees the two trucks sitting on the bank. And he is the son of the manager of Mobil Oil Company. Money wasn't an object with him.
- 26:30 And he wanted to know who owned the trucks and they sent him to me and I said, "Yes, I own them. They are right and everything's paid for," because I didn't know if he was from the police or not. "They're registered and they are just sitting there because at the moment I'm waiting for the right work to come along". Anyway he said, "Would you be interested in selling them. What do you want for them?" I said, "What am I offered?" He said, "I don't know". So I said, "Well you find out and make me an offer and I'll think about it". He came back and made me an offer that nearly made me the richest man in the world I thought at that
- 27:00 time. His father with the Mobil, the manager of the Mobile Oil Company, money was no object and he offered me this figure and I said, "I might have a word to the wife before I sell it to you. I'll be here in the morning". When I went down in the morning he was waiting with a couple of other blokes, they were the two drivers I didn't know that at the time, and he offered me the money and he said, "Here's the cheque". I said, "I won't accept it - I'll give you a receipt, mate, I'll go to the bank". So I went to the bank and the money was good and they

- 27:30 transferred it to me. And I said, "They're yours". He put them on to semi trailer work, converted them on to semi trailer work inside. He lasted six months and did the lot but I was safe. Then I get back to my story where I was doing the jobs at the Morwell Brown Coal place and I suppose - they called me something else, the Assistant Transport Officer I think they called me but that didn't matter I still had to do all the
- 28:00 jobs. There was no glory and no money in the title. At that particular time the wife's brother got killed at Lismore. He bought a new sports car and put four of them in it and they turned it upside down and the only one killed was him. So I sent Lynne home and when she came back of course she's unhappy because she's away from her family and the loss of her brother and all
- 28:30 this. But just at that time I had another fellow approach me who had been retrenched from Morwell Brown Coal and his uncle had the Royal Milk Delivery. That's in the old jug - you know running around and, "Bring your Billy out" - before bottled milk came in. And not only is he the richest man in Morwell but he's also a cocky bloke. He said jokingly to his nephew, "Do you know if you had any bloody brains I'd sell you this milk
- 29:00 run but," he said, "you couldn't handle it". He said, "Len, I've seen how you work, mate, come into partnership with me and I'll buy the thing, I've got money available," (he was from in the timber country somewhere). And he bought it and I was full partner with him. But then he started to get tired and I was it. That went for six months and I sold it out. I'll go back a bit there. We bought our milk at
- 29:30 Traralgon which was 12 or 14 miles up the road and started selling bottled milk in Morwell. Now the old fellow guaranteed us he'd keep delivering raw milk until we got it established (that's this bloke's uncle or whatever he was). And I used every gimmick under the sun to market this milk and so we put the bottle milk into Morwell and called it the milk supply. I sold out and signed the sale one minute to
- 30:00 midnight on the 30th of June or whatever year that was. I got cash for it. The people who bought me out were the Traralgon Milk Supply Factory when they saw what I had done. And they couldn't let me carry on because Morwell was expanding. They were building houses up there and bringing the workers in by ship from England. Of course it was growing all the time and they thought this is too good for these blokes. So they made an offer and combining their offer with the fact that the wife was
- 30:30 homesick and the little bloke was just that, a little bloke I said, "OK we'll dice that". So I sold that and put our furniture on the train and drove up. What did I have then? I had some sort of a car. I can't think of what I had at that particular point, an Austin or one of those things. And I drove up to Byron Bay. By this time
- 31:00 I'm in trouble with the RSL at Morwell, or the blokes running the RSL, because I've got one or two cases that were waiting vis-a-vis hearings. So I set it all up and sent all the whole thing on paper in to the Veterans Affairs Department Veterans Review Board and all they had to do was turn up. But they were too scared to turn up on their own. So I said to the bloke, "You've got the loud mouth, you go with them, because I'm gone". So that's where I left Morwell. I tried to get
- 31:30 some evidence from them in the future and they said, "No, not you". So they wouldn't deal with me. I got back to Byron Bay and again I'm involved with the Byron Bay RSL and I'm still doing that work. But I'm having a holiday, that's right, at Byron Bay and thinking about buying a house and all the rest of it. And the manager of the Milk Factory came around and he
- 32:00 said, "I understand you know the bottled milk trade". I said, "Well, I was in it for a while but I don't understand it but I'd like to". He said, "I want to put bottled milk into Lismore, Byron Bay and Mullumbimby". He said, "I'll make you a proposition if you're interested". I said, "I'm here on a holiday give me another week will you". And then he came back in another week and said this is the proposition. He put it to me. So I put bottled milk in
- 32:30 I picked it up from the Lismore factory and took it to Byron Bay and converted Byron Bay over and put the bottled milk in and organised that. Then we did Bangalow. And then I organised and for a while worked in the bottled milk in Lismore until I trained them and then I trained another fellow to put bottled milk into Mullumbimby. But all this time, throughout all of this, I'm still
- 33:00 having trouble with the amoebic dysentery I've got. You won't believe this but I'm 83 and the young fellow is about 55 or something like that and he was home here at Christmas time and he said to me, "Hey Dad, are you still crawling around on your hands and knees crying". I said, "No, son, I eventually got rid of that". He said, "About bloody time." He said, "I was only a little bloke and I couldn't help you". That gives you an idea of how this amoebic dysentery belts the hell out of
- 33:30 you and at times flattens you. But if you're in your own business you can't be flattened. So I put the bottled milk in and at this time I'm in Byron Bay and I'm going backwards and forwards to Greenslopes Hospital. The one time I came up here I was in for quite a while, 2 months or 3 months. And Lynne is occasionally coming up to visit me and this is no good. So about a fortnight before when they told me I was improving
- 34:00 tremendously and I would be ready to be discharged and I got a day's leave or something and got Lynne up here and we went and got a flat. I think we got it in Peach Street, Greenslopes. And I'm in there doing nothing. I'm now out of hospital and in there doing nothing but still am running into Repat in at, what street was it, in town, Ferry House it was, that's where Repat was in

- 34:30 those days. I'm still doing a bit of that inside and the longer I stayed in hospital my list of people got bigger and bigger - nothing like it is today of course. And I'm sitting on the veranda one day and the bloke in the other flat next to me came home in a Tramways uniform. "What are you doing?" I said, "Nothing". He said, "Would you like a job? They want tram drivers". I said, "I'd be
- 35:00 interested but I want another week or so I've just been out of hospital". "Well" he said, "come over and see me one day and I'll introduce you to the boss". So about a week later I took him up and I went over to the tram depot and looked for the job as a tram driver or as a bus driver - they were bringing the buses in then. I had all the licences necessary for that. But the employment officer over there said, "Look, mate, I can't put you on a bus at the moment," he said
- 35:30 "but we need tram conductors would you go and help us out for a few days?" I said, "Yes". After about a month I'm still a tram conductor and every day I'm asking him when's the bus coming up that I'm going to be able to drive. He said, "Soon, mate, you're near, is near the top of the list". But in the whole month I'm there, particularly migrants are coming in, and getting bus drivers jobs. I later found out that I didn't have the \$100 cash to get it.
- 36:00 So anyway after about 5 or 6 weeks I turned up one morning at about 6 o'clock and they're short of staff. And this fellow is in charge and he's an ex-tram conductor and he's got no reserves and I think, "This is it". So I went and collected my bag and walked to the tram and said to the driver, "Hang on a minute," because we were about 10 minutes early. I went back and I said to the bloke behind the counter, "Hey mate I want to see you". He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Here you are. Here's the bag, here's the coin thing
- 36:30 you have and the ticket books," I said, "you're the conductor of my tram". He said, "Who do you think you're telling, get back to work". "No," I said, "mate, that's the finish". I said, "I haven't been asked to give you any money for the bus drivers' job. There are 22 people (and I've checked all this out) got bus driver's jobs while I'm here waiting and you've got me as a tram conductor". Well didn't he perform because he had to get on that tram there was nobody else. Anyway, that didn't worry me. I went back home and Lynne said to me, "What are you doing at home?"
- 37:00 I said, "I've just left". "What are you going to do?" I said, "Don't let that worry you, lady." Anyway, I was still a bit crook. I'm still not 100% and that's one of the reasons the tram conductor's job was knocking the hell out of me. So I walked down Queen Street and I walked into the GPO [General Post Office] in Queen Street, Brisbane, and had a yarn to the employment officer. He said, "No, I've got nothing here for you, mate". I said, "I only want that
- 37:30 job," it was around about Christmas time. I said, "I only want a job to get a few quid for Christmas". I said, "You haven't got anything in the place that I could do?" He said, "No, son, but pop in tomorrow". So I went back for about ten days. And the last day he said to me, "Can you drive?" I said, "Yes, what licence do you want I'm up to semi trailers". And I showed them to him. He said, "Why didn't you show them to me the first day". I said, "You didn't bloody well ask me". He said, "I've got a job for you starting tomorrow morning". I started driving trucks around for
- 38:00 PMG [Postmaster General's Department] in those days, now called Australia Post, around Brisbane and picking up the mail at the airports and clearing the letter boxes and pillar boxes as they called them. I was eventually promoted after they found they could trust me to clearing the money out of the telephone boxes. I did that and then I'm embarrassed that I can't meet my obligations at the Repat. They had a
- 38:30 midnight shift so I became the midnight shift driver or one of the, there were two of us. You'd go out at 11 o'clock at night and knock off at 6 but you'd go in at 10 and knock off at 5 or 6 never later than 6 because you had the other two blokes coming in a bit earlier to cover you. Your first hour on the shift you don't go in and straight out. The Post Office doesn't do that they give you time to have a snack and go to the toilet and do all the necessary things and generally an hour because it happens like
- 39:00 that whether you want it to or not. And I became the midnight shift. Now I think I've done more midnight shifts at the Australian Post Office in Brisbane than anybody else. You take the airmail down at 11 o'clock and 4 o'clock from the GPO or the mail exchange to the airport. Then you come back and you take some mail out to the post office - the ones that start early, the bigger ones - and then you knock off and used to be home here at half past six of a morning.
- 39:30 and that enabled me to be able to fit in the Repat work. I was right then. I could go to the Repat and I could go to the Veterans' Review Board hearings and I could do whatever I had to do with them. And I hit some real high figures then in advocating for the damaged war veteran. But at the same time I used to get home at half past six have a cup of tea -
- 40:00 in later years or some of the years - and run my son to school - no - get him out to the tennis courts at Milton and come home to Cannon Hill from Brisbane - get him out to the tennis courts at Milton and he'd have an hour's hit and then I'd pick him up from there. He would come home and rest and then I'd run him to school and then I'd come home and go to bed or do my Repat work whichever I fitted in between. In the afternoon I'd pick him up at school
- 40:30 I'd run him to the tennis court and he'd have an hour's hit or whatever. I'd come home here and he'd

have his tea and I'd either do Repat work that night or go to bed until 10 o'clock and go to work at 11 and get up. It was a pretty busy life generally speaking. But it was during those hectic years, you won't believe it, I got an invitation from the manager of the Medical Benefits Fund

41:00 to report to his office he'd like to talk to me.

**I'll just get you to stop there.**

## Tape 4

00:30 I got this invitation from the Manager of the Medical Benefits Fund to come in and see him in his office. So I present myself at the office and he offers me a cup of coffee and I think I'm in trouble again. You see I've got a suspicious mind about my own activities. He said, "I wanted to meet you," and of course I found out in the course of the events that he was a colonel in the army, an ex-colonel. He said

01:00 "I am the reigning advocate in Queensland. I am the best there ever was," he tells me. "Have a cup of coffee". I had a cup of coffee and I'm listening to him and I'm thinking, 'You know, I'm in trouble here,' when he started telling me what a great advocate he was. He said, "I've just got the figures. There's a bloke in Queensland that's beaten me with successful figures at the Repatriation in

01:30 seeking pensions for war damaged veterans". He said, "Do you know him?" I said, "No I don't". He said, "Well you are bloody well him". I said, "I'm sorry about that, sir, and yet again I suppose I'm not sorry I'm just doing that I think is the right thing to do". He said, "You're it. Where did you get your experience and what was your rank in the service," and really tried to belittle me. Anyway, I finished up laughing at him and he got another cup of coffee and he said, "Good on you mate," as we left. But

02:00 going home I thought that was a very strange thing to happen to me in my life. To complete the story as it was is to tell you the same man was getting many, many pensions for war widows and talking them into investing their money into his bank account and getting them nothing. There was no investment - so much so that after about 5 or 6 years he had to commit suicide to get himself out of trouble.

02:30 So much for your top man. I'm only a humble battler so I don't get into those things. Now, on the Repat work - apart from me learning the trade in the Repatriation Hospital at Concord and having that horror in my mind of being at Labuan when the POWs came back sort of

03:00 drilled something into my inside that has never gone. That drove me on with a steely resolve that I would never, ever see a veteran, but particularly a war damaged veteran, not gain his entitlements. Whether that puts me in

03:30 a position to be described as a crusader or what you like, that's me. I could give you a thousand or two thousand or three thousand maybe more, I never kept a history book of it because I never had the time or I never thought of it but I could give you many, many cases of that sheer

04:00 disaster. One that troubles me is a Vietnam veteran. He finished up going for a holiday to Stanthorpe to his brother's place that had an apple orchard. And I did his case and I through my grapevine got word that he's got the TPI granted to him. So one of the things I must do

04:30 and that is whatever I do, be true. Straightforwardly act and be honest in fact and be nobody else but you. So I tried to keep my people informed

05:00 so they don't dream and get ideas or get off track or change their mind particularly when you prepare a case. You've got to have everybody settled down and together so that when you reach the decision stage by the authorities or the law or in our case the Veterans' Review Board or the Administrative Appeals Tribunal which is manned by judges in waiting for the High Court

05:30 Bench. They are very, very talented people and you can't fool with them. So I would insist that everybody be informed of what is going on and how it is going on and in other words I give them a guernsey and make them a part of the team. So I'm anxious to do this with this Vietnam veteran fellow that's holidaying in Stanthorpe on his brother's apple farm. I got word about eight o'clock or half past eight in the morning on my phone that it had been

06:00 approved and that I'd get the paperwork notifying me of the favourable decision within a day or two. I thought I'll do the right thing and ring this fellow up and give him a bit of joy. So I rang up his brother at Stanthorpe and said who I was and he said, "I know all about you". He said, "I'll go and get him, he's just gone for a walk". He came back and he said, "Len," and then he stopped talking for a while and I keep talking to him and asking him and I couldn't hear him for a while

06:30 and then he finally blurted it out. He said, "I can't get him, Len". I said, "What's the matter?" Silence. And then he said, "I've got to tell you the truth. He's hanging dead on an apple tree". He couldn't wait for his TPI. I get a lot of that. Probably I'm not as tough as I thought I would be or could be. Then I had the other case and if you want Repat cases I'll give you a series of them which will give you

- 07:00 my true work. I got another man, another Stanthorpe case, I got word through my grapevine - I think it was a medical specialist in Toowoomba that was how this information came to me. He said, "Righto Len we want you up there looking after this bloke". So I go to Stanthorpe but then outside of Stanthorpe is a place called Applethorpe, that's a little suburb of Stanthorpe about 5 or 6kms this way. And the postmaster and mistress there,
- 07:30 both of them had the contract. He'd come back from the war with a very, very great - wonderful war record in the Middle East and New Guinea and he'd called me up to talk to me about a pension. I couldn't believe this story to be true but it brought tears to my eyes. So I called on the house and she said, "Meet my husband". And she's got him propped up on a big chair, a semi high chair with a fold back - I suppose it would be like our
- 08:00 lounge chairs where you kick the thing out in front and push the back back. He was a skeleton of a man and she introduced me to her husband and he couldn't put out a hand to shake my hand he was that weak. And in the course of my period there he wanted to go to the toilet. She's a woman about 5'4" and she picked him up in her arms and took him to the toilet. This was an ex-sergeant of the AIF. So they told me the story and he had what was
- 08:30 called Motor Neurone Syndrome. At that time not properly researched and not properly compensated for or listed for compensation by the Department. So I got his story sitting there with him and almost weeping there with them. And I went away and set it all up and took the case. The first thing the
- 09:00 Department of Veteran Affairs did was knock it back because they didn't understand enough of it. There hadn't been enough Motor Neurone diseases in the world. As a matter of fact the case that was advanced to me by the leading medical specialist on that particular disease was that you could only get Motor Neurone disease in two places in the world, an Island of Japan and Mirrorki [Mirani?] in Queensland. It was because the chemicals were washed down the mountains and got into the drinking
- 09:30 water and you got it that way. That's the only information they had. So I had to convey that back to the veteran and his wife in Stanthorpe and I said, "Leave it to me, I'll fix it" - one of those stupid, foolish statements that I made. Anyway, I set out to investigate it and research it. And I did so to such a degree I then had to have my findings and take it back to the newly established Repatriation Medical Authority. I
- 10:00 went into the Medical Authority and met the girl at the counter and finished up being interviewed for 4 or 4 and a half hours by 3 different doctors and I had about six cups of coffee. I advanced my theory and I said, "I believe smoking contributed to this Motor Neurone disease because everything in your body collapses," and they poo poohed it because it hadn't been examined medically. And they said, "Thank you for your time. Your comments are
- 10:30 interesting. What we're going to do is write a paper on you and we're going to send it down and have the newly formed Repatriation Medical Authority investigate it." I informed the person up in Stanthorpe and a few months later she buried her husband. And I said, "I don't know what it is. I'm prepared to take it to the High Court but I must wait for these people to examine it". Five years later, five years later would you believe it I get a
- 11:00 call from the Repatriation Medical Authority to come in and talk to them. They have changed the statement of principle on the matter and they have included in that, apart from that you could get it in these other areas, that smoking contributed to the development of Motor Neurone Disease providing you smoked 10,000 cigarettes over a certain period. And they put it out then as a
- 11:30 statement of principle and thanked me very much. And away I went to the phone as soon as I got home to tell this lady "Your case is finished. I'll tell you about it if you want to hear it. If you don't - if you want to weigh everything out in your mind". She said, "Yes, I'm curious, please tell me". Anyway she was then coming down to her daughter at Petrie who'd shot through after she'd had three kids with some other floozy, but that's another story, and I told her and she said, "I don't believe this".
- 12:00 She said, "The doctor told me this is the best you can get as advocates". That's the story she said to me. I said, "All right, when I get the paperwork I'll see you. Where will you be?" She said, "At Petrie". So I took the paper along where she'd been granted the War Widows' Pension because her husband's condition was contributed to by smoking. Now when you put a case the department of Veteran Affairs or the government it has got to be caused by, contributed to or
- 12:30 aggravated by your war service. So we won that one. I haven't heard a thing from her since but it doesn't matter it gives me great satisfaction. The second one was in my duties as a postmaster and delivering mail to the post office I struck a fellow at South Brisbane Post Office that was always outside smoking waiting for his mail to come in. I was on the mail truck. And after a few months I got to know him pretty well. And then he was short of money so I lent him a dollar
- 13:00 and he paid me back on pay day and then two days later borrowed it again plus more. Eventually he wasn't paying me back as fast as he was borrowing and I was only a worker anyway but I still didn't want to let him - he finished up he was the breadwinner for a wife and daughter who was incapacitated. She had a mental illness and had to be cared for full time.
- 13:30 And he was the breadwinner and his job was only a low paid job with no real overtime and consequently

his wages were low so I used to lend him a dollar or two dollars or a quid or whatever I had in my pocket. And it became a costly amount so I said, "Wait a minute, Bill, enough is enough". The story about your wife and your mother and your sister, I want to find out more about this because you owe me too much money. It's hurting me but I'm still doing it because

- 14:00 that's me. So I went home to his home and I met his mother and his sister and what he said about them was true. I won't go into her stories because it will take you another 5 tapes. But I eventually found out that their father had suicided in the course of business. I used to go there regularly - he preferred to take his pay packet home and show his mother and give her all he could give her and then give me so much of it so that
- 14:30 she knew what was going on. And I was there one day and the minister was there as I was going out and I said, "How long have you known the family?" after I introduced myself. He said, "All my life". "Good" I said, "Can I talk to you one day about them". "By all means, here's my card". I did that. And another day I met the doctor and he'd known them for X number of years or a lengthy time. And I wanted to find out about the death of the
- 15:00 husband, why he'd suicided. However, to make this story brief what happened is I got the case and put it together and took it in and the Repat knocked it back. The first instance, the first screening they knock it back. That's routine with them now almost because they've got all the bloody women in there instead of returned soldiers. They knocked it back so I put it to the Veterans' Review Board
- 15:30 and by this time they'd changed office, they were in Adelaide Street by the Gresham Hotel. And by God that's a long time ago. When I went in to this one - oh while I'm thinking about this case - briefly the case of the veteran was, I'll have to deal with that to give you the picture, was that he was a baker. In the Depression days he'd become a baker. The only job that was available in the town that he lived in was a baker. So he went to work at 7 or 8 o'clock at night and worked with the
- 16:00 baker until they'd made all the dough and baked the loaves. And when they came out of the oven the baker put it on the baker's cart and went and delivered the bread. That left the lad for 4 or 5 hours in the bakehouse on his own. Take that over 5 years and that's prison. So, OK, the minute his apprenticeship was up he left it and went out digging ditches for the council. He couldn't stand those four walls. Then the
- 16:30 army came up and being a little Scots bloke he decided he'd win the war on his own so he joined up. And he's fully trained and did all the tough training possible to be sure he would be right and really win the war. He was going up to Townsville on this troop train to go to New Guinea and it was Charters Towers where the big bake house was - it wouldn't be Charters Towers it would be one of those other places because - well, the bakery might have been Charters Towers but he was on the train when they asked him - it must have been Bowen or somewhere.
- 17:00 And they said, "Does anybody on the train know anything about baking?" Of course "I do" he says the little cockatoo. So they said, "Right". They grabbed him and they put him in the bakery. And many times in the shift they put 3 or 4 men in the bakery to do the shift and then as the loaves come out they had to do other things and he's left in the bakery on his own. So this revived the memories of being isolated or being in jail in his apprenticeship as a baker. And he used to hate it. And when he came home of a night he would bash his wife and kids up
- 17:30 and be crooked on the war and crooked on the government and get drunk and do all sorts of silly things because he's being tortured now by the government, by putting him in that job. This is just life. Anyway, they discharged him. And he went home and carried on with the nonsense. But then one day he got sick of himself and he committed suicide because he was depressed. Now I built the case up on the depression for him on
- 18:00 his life story and what the doctor and minister had confirmed and built it into a depression case and eventually post traumatic stress. But it wasn't in at that time. Post traumatic stress didn't come in until - in America 1975 and here in 1980. I went up into Gresham Chambers or next to the Gresham hotel in the Waterside Workers Union
- 18:30 building and I took this woman up, her name was Mrs Watson I remember it particularly well. A fairly robust and well built woman and not a well woman at all. I took her up and as I walked into this Veterans' Review Building they had an admiral, I've forgotten his name, he was in charge, he was the chairman. I presented the case and he cut me off before I could completely finish because he'd heard enough. He said
- 19:00 "Mrs Watson, we see a lot of Mr. Asmith here and we hear a lot of stories and I'll be quite honest" he said, "he's successful. But this time he's gone too far. He has told us a story we do not believe. Let me get that straight. We do not believe him. But out of respect to him and to you we are going to take his presentation and send it to Canberra to the Department of Veteran
- 19:30 Affairs who in turn will send it to the Canberra University. And if he's right, Mrs Watson, you've got a war widows' pension. But if he isn't then" he said, "you blame him". "Thank you" he said, "and goodbye." He dismissed us, no trouble at all. Six weeks later I'm called back in and I walk in with this Mrs Watson who was a very nervous woman because of the bashings she got through her domestic life. And he said,

- 20:00 he had a voice like a bull, he roared at her and he said, "Mrs Watson, Mr Asmith don't you sit down". And I thought "Len, you're in big trouble". We didn't sit down and he said, "Mrs Watson, we've asked you not to sit down because it'll only take a few minutes. Mrs Watson you have a war widows' pension." He said, "Don't think me," he nearly snapped her off, "thank Mr Asmith. He's done it again, goodbye". He dismissed us. And I took her outside and she was so
- 20:30 bloody shocked, we're on the sixth or seventh floor, and I took her downstairs and I'm across the road in Adelaide Street and I'm near a pole. And I put her hand on the pole because she was shaking like a leaf. I said, "Don't move. I've left some papers up there". I had to go back and get my papers and come back down and you know what she was still shaking like a leaf and hanging on to the telegraph pole. I remember that one in particular. And I'm reminded of it constantly by the people who are aware of it, my wife in particular. That was one of the great ones.
- 21:00 I've got a couple at the moment that are similar. But that's the type, on the Repat work - we can go back further. My wife and I were holidaying in Cairns and Repat work again. We're walking away past the RSL Club thinking in another ten minutes we'll come back for lunch - we'll just walk along the Causeway. And I see a couple coming towards me and the wife's about the size of my wife,
- 21:30 5 ft 4" or whatever and a very, very thin lady. She's trying to hang on to this bloke that's drunk hanging over a fence. And he was drunk. I said to the wife, "Hang on a minute, there's somebody in trouble". She said, "Not again," she wants me to herself and all this type of thing, the usual thing. And I go up and I say, "Are you in trouble, lady?" And she said, "Yes, I'm trying to get him to a feed up at to the RSL". I said, "It's only one hundred yards up I'll give you a hand. What's his name?" And I met him and his name
- 22:00 was - I've forgotten it for the moment it will come to me in a minute. So I took him up and I said to my wife, "We'll have a meal with them". And he's all over the table and I eventually straightened him up to where he had part of a meal. And then I got him back to the hotel and said, "I'm going on a bus trip tomorrow I'll see you when I come back". They said, "You won't, we're going on the same bus trip". So anyway, we went on the bus
- 22:30 trip and then I decided to straighten him out. He was World War II, Middle East and New Guinea - a right champion. And he is on holidays and he is constantly drunk. Even when he was on the job. He was in the New South Wales Transport Department and they couldn't put him on a bus because he was too drunk. So they made him the Depot Master. So when he was drunk he could have a sleep and the buses could come and go and then he'd come on and bawl them out and do whatever he has to do and get
- 23:00 drunk with them again. Anyway, I finished up getting him treatment with a doctor and I got him with a psychiatrist and then I got him a 100% pension. And with the medication and the psychiatrist he cut the drinking down to where it was sensible. Tom was his name and I'll think of her name in a minute.
- 23:30 Anyway, in the process I found out his wife was also an ex-servicewoman. But anyway, when I finished with them Tom had a 100% pension and she had 100% pension because she was a chain smoker. Then he retired and I got him a Service Pension on top of that. Then I got her the 100% pension because of the smoking. Then she died and we went to Sydney for the funeral. Then I got him a Widowers'
- 24:00 Pension. Repatriation is not one-sided. If the wife loses her husband she gets a widows' pension. If the husband loses the wife and she's an ex-service person he gets a widowers' pension of the same amount. So Tom's on his Service Pension, 100% pension, he's on a Widowers' Pension as well - sweet - never so well off in his life. Of course it eventually caught up with him, the nerves. He couldn't stand living on his own.
- 24:30 And his daughter is high faluting [high up] - she and her husband are high up in the business world in computers. They drag about two and a half thousand dollars each per week. She was trained as a school teacher and went to computers and got in early and got the big jobs. Anyway, that's that case. Then I have another fellow, this is a sad one. I don't know how he came to me, I haven't got a clue but he
- 25:00 finished up here. But he said, "God be with you". He salutes me. I said, "Sorry, mate, he just went that way". Anyway, he said, "I'm so and so and I've come to see you because I might get a pension". And I said, "What's wrong with you?" And he said, "I was called up for Vietnam and I am considered a nut". I said, "Who considers you a nut?" He said, "I do". I said, "What are you after?" He said, "I want some help". So I did get him some
- 25:30 help but it took me 4 psychiatrists before anyone would take him. He was mad and he could quote the bible to you backwards. He was that far gone. He wasn't in this world. Anyway, I processed his case and processed him. I take people to doctors and I always make sure I take them first once so they know where to go and, two, always make sure that the doctor knows I'm going to do the job right for them. Then I check to see he goes every time.
- 26:00 And that takes a lot of time and petrol and what have you but that's just part of me. I do it purposely because when I take their case down and they're talking to me and telling their story it all goes down. If I write it down it sticks itself in my memory. But by taking him to the doctors or taking him to be x-rayed or glasses done or hearing or whatever it is I do that purposely because I talk to them. I talk to them and if their story

- 26:30 differs to the one I've taken to the doctor to what they told me then I've got them trapped. Then I get the truth out of them because when they're confronted with it that is it. So this fellow, they got him, but in the process we were on one of our trips around to see the son in Broome at that time he was. So I'm in Broome and this fellow's case is pending. But my network tells me when I'm in Broome, the phone rings and says, "So and so, he's right," and that's all I get from the
- 27:00 Department and then the official thing comes through where I can ring back. Then lo and behold this fellow in Brisbane with his two dogs and one-tonne truck turns up at Broome. He drove from Brisbane to Broome to get me to find out why his pension hasn't come through. I said, "Well, it's a funny thing a couple of days ago I got the message, the good lord sent it to me," because I always spoke his language if I could, "you've got the pension". He said, "That's not good enough. I
- 27:30 believe in the lord," he says, "but he didn't tell me". I said, "How about I ring up for you?" I rang up and I said, "I've got him here. He's asked me to ring you up". He said, "Well just a minute, Len, only for you Len but not him. He'll have to be here and I can't see him". I said, "All right. Well you wanted to talk to him so I got him to talk to him". He said, "Yes, your pension is through mate." He said, "I sent you a letter. Where are you?" He said, "I'm in Broome". He said, "Oh no, you're supposed [to be] in Sutters Corner." He'd sent the letter there. Anyway I got him out of trouble there. He gets back here and
- 28:00 he gets the money and he's King Kong. And then he moves to all the places he would like to live, Bowen, the tomato capital. But he doesn't buy a house or build a house in the middle of town he builds it say 2km out in an area where they grow tomatoes. And in the process of praising the lord he gets drunk and praises the coppers and tells them they stink. So they run him home as a courtesy. But when
- 28:30 he kept it up they put him in the bib. So they pick him up for language and all sorts of things. So my grapevine gets through to me and says, "So and so is in trouble at Bowen, could you ring constable so and so" which I did. I said, "I'll vouch for the fellow. He's a nut". I didn't even say at the time that he's on the TPI. They said, "All right. What we're going to do is fine him this time but not a heavy fine and a bit of community
- 29:00 work. But what can we do with him he's a nut?" That's all right. The next time they pick him up he's drunk. And then he wants to condemn the world because God has sent these, whatever you like to call them, bad guys in to disturb my life. I own this place, Bowen. I left him because I got tired. I said, "I don't want to be saved because I'm already saved. I don't want all your paraphernalia with all those pages telling me about
- 29:30 God. Forget it". So that's why I've left him but that's another one of the cases. It goes on and on. I picked up another fellow - as a matter of fact he did those tiles over there - he was a tiler. This is a World War II man. He spent most of his time in New Guinea. I consider him to be the best forward scout in the army of all the forward scouts I've met. If I tell you
- 30:00 this you will be a sceptic like most people are. A hundred to two hundred yards away he could smell a Jap in the jungle of New Guinea. Now it is pristine up there with beautiful air. The Japs don't wash or didn't wash there. He could smell it with his nose. And he was the best forward scout they ever had. His men never got hurt. He was right on top of it all the time. And what disturbed him mainly is he used to train young fellows to be forward scouts yet they never had the
- 30:30 smell. They'd get killed and their troops would get killed and everything and that was the one thing that bugged him. I looked after him too but he died of cancer through smoking. His lip was burned with cancer through smoking and the top of his nose was burned through smoking but he was one of the nicest blokes you'd ever meet. He did tiling. But to do that there took him about 6 or 7 hours to do that because that was his working capacity when I got him. But he said, "I've
- 31:00 got to do something for you, mate, I've got to do something". So I said to the wife "What do we want doing?" And she said, "If he's a tiler I want a bit of tiling". So that's who did that. But he passed away and I organised his funeral. He bought a place near Bribe Island, this side, I can't think of the place, a magnificent place on the water. And he just had a bit of trouble with the Repat on assets and that but I fixed all that and that wasn't a problem. A few others. I'm in Charters Towers and my
- 31:30 friend happens to be a 6ft 8" or in that area, I don't know exactly he never told me "Over 6ft 6" [6 feet 6 inches] he'd say - and he used to tower. We were up there walking the streets and I see a fugitive come out from behind the shops near an alley way and around through the rubbish bins. And we were about 200 yards down the road and I said to my mate "Did you see that?" And he said, "Yes, that's strange". I said
- 32:00 "Yes. That man's in trouble". He said, "How do you know?" I said, "Well, I just know". So I went down to talk to him and he's got his head in the bin and I surprised him. And he jumped up in the air and he ran into a shop which was a taxi office. And I walked in after him and the manager stopped me. He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want to talk to that fellow". And he said, "You can't talk to him. He's a mate of mine". And I said, "Why?" And we had a few words and
- 32:30 I said, "If you're a mate of his, what's he doing scrounging in the garbage bins". He said, "That's how he lives". I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "That's right. He's an ex-navy bloke. He came back here after the war and his family had gone and he had nothing. So he built himself a humpy on the river



bank down here". He said, "He scrounged to live". And he said, "When his humpy got

- 33:00 swept away the townspeople built him another one. He's the town mascot." So I went back to my mate and I said, "I think I've got a job here". And he said, "I knew that would bloody well happen, I can't get you for 10 minutes". Anyway, the result is I went around to the RSL and found out who the secretary was and I went around to see the secretary at his home and I said, "Why are you letting an ex-serviceman
- 33:30 be the local rat. What are you talking about?" "Oh yeah" he said, "I know him. I talk to him and I see him occasionally and he lives down the bank." I said, "Did you know he's got serious trouble from his naval service". And I'm guessing a bit at this time and bluffing. And he said, "No." I said, "Why don't we have a talk to him." So we went down to see him and after he'd settled down and he'd got the fear out of him he was a very nice bloke. But he was so scared. I found out enough and I said to the
- 34:00 RSL bloke "We've got to put a form in for this fellow - have you got a form?" And he said, "Yes, I have." Why haven't you filled it in?" "None of my business mate." And he's the RSL secretary. So I filled the form in and I said, "Look, I can sign it or you can sign it. We don't need his signature. And we'll get the investigations. He's a good sailor," I said. "When he gets an instruction or a letter to be somewhere, it will be addressed through you, and you take it down and show him and he'll get taken in for treatment". They
- 34:30 did. I don't know where he is today but he's not scrounging rubbish bins. People say to me and I say to you also I don't know where they come from but I pick them up in the streets and I've been doing it all my life. I can't tell you why I do it and I don't know why but I do it.
- 35:00 Who else can I think of? I could give you a thousand cases. I got up one morning and I've just finished breakfast and I'm putting out the garbage or something and I see a bloke laying over the fence, that fence out there, and he's drunk. I said, "Are you sick, mate?" He said, "No, I'm drunk". I said, "What's the trouble?" He said, "I'm looking for a Lenny Asmith". I said, "You've found him. What do you want?" He said, "I
- 35:30 want to talk to you". I said, "I'll tell you something, mate, you'll never to talk to Lenny Asmith while you're drunk. I'll write this on a piece of paper and put it in your pocket. You go home and when you're sober you come and talk to me". Now this fellow was ex-air force. I just buried him a while back and did his funeral service. He is on parade in Malaya - when they went in for that insurgence, actually the Indonesians were causing the trouble, and the British
- 36:00 put our troops up to Butterworth in Malaya to quell this disturbance with the Indonesians crossing the border and play it up - invading the country as a matter of fact. And he's out on the parade ground standing waiting for the Duke of Gloucester - was it Gloucester - it must have been Gloucester - or the present Prince Phillip to arrive I'm not sure which - I think it would have been Gloucester. And they're standing in the hot sun. And of course they'd been on a bit of beer the night before and this particular
- 36:30 individual who was laying over my fence was standing on parade and to break the monotony of it - it was stinking hot sun and a very hot day- they got them doing a bit of drill with the rifle. And this fellow, as I say, was affected by the alcohol and he falls over flat on his face but underneath him he's got his rifle with the bolt sticking up and it broke his sternum.
- 37:00 He was taken to hospital and they said, "We can't do anything with it. But stay in the air force and finish up your period here and report it when you go back". But somehow he got lost and didn't report it. But it was on the records of the air force in Malaya. I finished up getting him a TPI because he smoked. He would smoke 100 or 120 cigarettes a day - ridiculous. And of course he is on his backside because he's getting drunk because he can't
- 37:30 work. He must have been getting the dole. I'm not privy to that. But anyway I processed him through the Repat, through the doctors. He just died recently. And getting him the TPI and getting him rehabilitated. He finished up walking around his house with a big chord with oxygen on it wherever he was. And if he went in his car I had to get him oxygen bottles to fit his car and arrange to have his car fitted up and his wife to get a licence to drive him around.
- 38:00 He finished up - he rang me six months before he died. He said, "Hey, mate. Thanks very much". I said, "What's up with you Stuart?" (Stuart Welsh was his name) and he said, "I've just paid my house off, mate. I never thought it was possible but thanks to you and your bloke who made it possible I just wanted to say thanks, mate". And as I said it's only six weeks I buried him. And his wife said when he died she got on the phone and she said
- 38:30 "Len, I've got to talk to you". I said, "Why have you got to talk to me Daphne". She said, "Because Welshie told me" (that's what she called her husband, Welshie) "that if I was in trouble I was to go to you first". I said, "What's happened, Daph?" she said, "He just passed away". So that was the holiday weekend - when was that in January - I spent Saturday, Sunday and Monday organising the funeral. I got the
- 39:00 Minister and I then prepared the form of service. I got a pamphlet put on and I got his photograph put on the thing. I did the lot. I organised the whole funeral and I was there when the funeral bloke was called in. I told the funeral bloke what to do and had several arguments but I straightened him up. I'm his best mate now he reckons. I then did the funeral service and did the RSL part of the service and

then organised the sandwiches back at

- 39:30 home for her and then I left. I've seen her since but I said, "Don't come near me unless you have to mate". I've got to ween them off at the moment because I've got to look after my lady. That was another one. Then I had a strange one happen to me late last year. Lynne and I were in the garden doing a bit of weeding and a car pulls up and a couple got out and at a
- 40:00 quick glance I said, "I know those people". And that was it. And they came over and introduced themselves and the fellow said to me "You don't know me, Len". And I said, "No, I don't". And he said, "You looked after me 15 years ago". I couldn't believe it. And he said, "You took me all the way and you said you'd get me a TPI because I can't work". I said, "How did you go did you get it?" And he said, "Yes". But he said, "I got sick and tired of
- 40:30 waiting". This was not my fault this was the Department's fault while they investigated. He said, "I had no work here so we decided to move up to my mother-in-law's place, the wife's mother's, at Townsville". He said, "We were packing the furniture and the postman came. And I said I'll pick the mail up before we leave. So we got the furniture on and got in the truck and we're on the way to Townsville and I remember the mail and I opened it up and I've been granted TPI. I never got back to you". He said, "I wanted to come back and say
- 41:00 thanks". I don't know what the case was. I've completely forgotten it but there's that many thousands of cases. I had a truck driver in South Australia.

**We'll just have to stop there that tape is about to run out.**

## Tape 5

- 00:30 **You told us of your earliest memories as a kid, what was Coffs Harbour like?**

Well it was deserted. Compared with today it was deserted. I think there was a wooden pub at the jetty and there were no houses. There were no houses on the hill near the jetty and there wasn't anywhere near the homes that are along there until you get to the town, the top town. It was sparse but it was a beautiful place to live in.

- 01:00 No matter where you went it was just comfortable and the humidity and everything was just right. That's what I remember as a kid and when I've gone back since when I go into the town I get the same feeling. It's probably one of the most beautiful little towns on the coast it really is. I spend a little bit of time in the Historical Society there now because I'm rebuilding the family history when I get time - my typists have given me away because I'm too far in between the next chapter. No, I found it
- 01:30 beautiful and the people were absolutely beautiful. There was no question about it. The old idea of - when you went away for a day you didn't close your doors or lock your windows. You just went away and you'd come back and it was absolutely the same - no worries. The bloke would come along in the cart and pass the bread up through the window. When I was born - my mother used to tell me this story - the doctor used to come every day and he would sit in his sulky out there and call in through the open window and she'd answer him. "How are you going?"
- 02:00 "Not too bad thanks doc. Thanks for calling." The next day - one day he called and he said, "How are you going?" She said, "Very good". He said, "That's good, I'll see you tomorrow. She said, "Do you want to have a look at the baby?" That's the type of thing that went on. It was so casual. But now there is still a bit of an upbeat where the cars seem to speed your life up. It's as though you want to keep going at a higher speed for some reason. And people have a tendency to say, "It's my
- 02:30 right today," and they'll walk across the road in front of you. And the kids, there's no discipline, there's no responsibility. Let's not talk about discipline, you've got to get responsibility first. That's what I find in today's world because everybody says, "The good old days". Well I was born into the best period in the best history of Australia - as a matter of fact the best history in the world - we had our problems but we sorted them out and we went along quietly. And there were less lawyers and there were less doctors. People weren't getting
- 03:00 sick. But today I find with my tribe as I call them they go to the doctor (1) for the air conditioning and (2) because they've got nothing else to do. So they go and see the doctor and it's just wasted money. They're not sick half the time they're only lonely. That's absolutely true. I fight this all the time. I'm a recruit for the bowls club. And I spend when I'm right, I haven't been right just recently - I go over to Chandler's Pool I think it's about 8k,s
- 03:30 over. And I'm in the pool for an hour and I swim a 50 metre pool up and down and up and down. When I had my first heart attack or had a heart problem and didn't know it I was doing 10 or 50 metres straight off, one after another, and I reached the stage where I could only reach half way of the pool and I'd stop. I did it for two or three mornings and I thought, 'God what's up with me. I'd better see the doctor'. So I saw the doctor and he said, "Go and talk to a mate of mine in town - Dr Rose, a heart man".

- 04:00 He looked at me and he heard my story and he said, "What are you doing today?" I said, "I've got a job to do". He said, "What are you doing tomorrow? You've got to be here tomorrow whether you are doing anything. So I was there in the morning and he took me up to St Andrews and they put me on the treadmill. He took me off in about 10 minutes flat and put me on a table and said, "Don't move". And two days later I was in getting a new aorta valve and four bypasses.
- 04:30 I had no idea. No idea whatsoever. I'm going back on Monday to see the same fellow which I do every six months now. But then I went back to my swimming. And after I had that big major operation they had the Bridge to Bay walk here, about 12ks [kilometres]. And I'm sitting there thinking and they're saying go easy, go quiet. "How do I know he's done a good job?" So I entered the Bridge to Bay and four months from the date of the operation I did the Bridge to Bay. It was a struggle but I
- 05:00 did it. So I rang him up and I said, "Are you all right doc. You can stay my doctor". He said, "What's up, Len?" I said, "I just finished this". He said, "I thought so. I meet them every day" and hung up the phone. These are things that you've got to prove to yourself. To thine self be true. Those are the things I do. When I'm not swimming I go for a 10k walk. That's no trouble at all. I've got my little pedometer there and I know how much I do and how much I don't do. But over
- 05:30 recent years I've found out where every low fence is and every bus stop is. And guess what? "Bum down, feet up". I don't drink or smoke - well, I can't say I don't drink. I think I'm heading to become an alcoholic quite frankly because I have one stubby a year. That's my total vice apart from getting roused on by the wife of course. That's par for the course. "Do this, do that". "Yes, dear, put it on the list".
- 06:00 That's generally my lifestyle.

### **What was it like growing up and having 12 brothers and sisters?**

It's a hard question to answer but it was full of joy and fun. And somebody in the family was always organising fun or else there was a bit battle on. My Mum had a bit kitchen table and she scrubbed it like mad keeping it clean. It was absolutely spotless. It was a big pine table and 12 of us could sit around us. And when we got it in the kitchen -

- 06:30 there was a hell of a struggle getting it in and out of the kitchen because of the length of it and the doors you see. We'd sit down and have a family argument or debate, call it what you like, and we'd come to a solution. Whatever the family decided on as a family we acted on. If it was a disaster it was a disaster but it very seldom was because if you were doing something that the family had planned and you fell over you had somebody behind you picking you up.
- 07:00 That was probably one of the best times in my life was going to Sydney and particularly after we moved into our own house in Arncliffe and they started to put the electric lines through. I would say from the period of about 10 to 12 years of age, until I started my apprenticeship when I did become regimented, it was an absolutely glorious life. I look back with great joy at the memories because without a doubt that was the time. And I believe until
- 07:30 the advent of the trade union this was the most wonderful country in the world. Because whether you like it or not, now I have a great respect for some of the things that the trade union has done, but if you look back and you study our world as it is in Australia today and you go back to the core of it you will find that it is brought about by the trade union. Let me just give you one glaring example, and I mentioned this
- 08:00 earlier. In the apprenticeship I went to work and of a night did my tech and I had to get my figures to get the help I wanted with tools. That was a system approved by the trade union. They've changed that. Now they go to work on Monday morning for an hour and go to tech all day and go to tech the next day for two or three days and then they go back to work and they expect to be experienced tradesmen. Where you learn your trade is at the trade. The studying is very important and it taught me a tremendous amount of things I'm most thankful for.
- 08:30 But if you go through on everything they brought in - equal status for women, I've got no objection to it - that meant women are working. Women working today are neglecting the family. The core of every nation is a family. And without a doubt the kids are not doing the homework they should because they are mucking about or glued to the television, a television or computer, which is driving them mad. They're getting fat and they're unhealthy and they're all sorts of things. That's where your
- 09:00 problem is right back to that where you took the governing power of rearing children from the ladies out of the equation. And they come home and they're too busy or too tired and they're doing most of the work. Now I've got in my circle of - how will I put them - it doesn't matter - circle of friends will do that the man gives up the work because wife's getting double the pay and he looks after the kids. But when she comes home she's got to put the
- 09:30 supervisory hours, which is two or three hours, particularly with a family of two or three kiddies. Or if she's working she's paying it to the childcare centres. They're no further in front other than the fact that they can meet their high mortgages and high credit card debt. That's my point of view. All my life when we kicked off we had zero, zilch. When my wife and I got married we wouldn't have one pound between us cash. And we decided there and then we were going to do it this way. And if you
- 10:00 sat down quietly, and I've got to educate a lot of blokes on this, and you worked out what you were

paying out to your debt on credit card alone, credit card alone. I've got one fellow I'm doing this case for at the moment, he's ex-navy and he lives down at Bulimba. The ANZ Bank closed their branch down at Bulimba and it cost him \$1.50 to go and get his money or \$1.50 to come over here one way and then go back and pay \$1.50. I said, "Bill how much are you giving away?"

10:30 He said, "Oh, only about \$7 or \$8 bucks. What's \$7 or \$8 bucks?" I said, "How many times a year?" "Oh, well now that's different". But a sense of latitude now previously when I talked about travelling around Australia in particular I drove - and I had been taught by experience to drive through the town and check on all of the petrol stations. And nine times out of ten, or most of the hundred mark, anywhere in Australia there is a cheaper service station.

11:00 And you might only save \$2 but in our case a 120 day holiday that is \$240 bucks - simple. Accommodation is the same thing. The person that doesn't advertise, get their address and go and check on it. You'll find they don't advertise because they're cheaper. But not only cheaper it is a mum and dad show and you'll get as good a deal or in fact a better deal than where they have the hired help doing the work. My life has taught me this much

11:30 that when I've got change in my pocket these days I throw it in the bin. I'm surprised what I save for year. And I go shopping with the wife and I go the other. When I think she's got her arms full of groceries I turn up with the trolley and I take the trolley to lean on because it helps me. But I keep telling her "OK, action. You usually get \$1 to \$2 on every item.

12:00 The same brand". And some of the stuff in- I forget it, it's a plain brand anyway - and it's the same product and it's under their label which is another 2c or 1c, 122c. You know, it's money. I'm not lousy but then if you buy at Myers on the genuine Myer's sale for menswear and it's on two or three times a year you will generally find, and in my case underpants,

12:30 and I've got a ticket with those with 5% discount. They were \$7.90 and I went across to the sale at Myers and bought the same article exactly, made in Australia, both the same, for \$5. So I save up and buy at the sales. I'm in front. Not that I buy many clothes these days.

#### **Do you think that is a result of growing up in the Depression?**

Definitely. I have to agree with that. That's definitely the correct thing. You've got no money so what you've got you've got to save. An illustration best

13:00 describes it and I mentioned it earlier in this. My brother was a champion boxer. Todd Morgan from America was out here running boxing up and down the east coast from Coffs Harbour down to Wollongong. So he rang Frank up and said, "Frank, I know you keep yourself in good nick I want someone to do 8 rounds in Wollongong on Friday night". So Frank goes down there. He gets one pound a round, I think they're only 3 minute rounds. So he comes away with 8 pounds. He gives his trainer two, his fare is two, he gives mum two and he's got two.

13:30 That is out of his eight pounds. So he goes down the park and at Arncliffe Park every day they played cards for not much money at all they're just filling the time. And he's standing there and along comes a police car and they went straight to him and picked him up and took him along to the cop shop and fined him two pounds. And he said, "Why me? I know other blokes there". "Oh yes, but you've got the money". Why wouldn't it teach you, you have to. You know, you grow chokos and you're walking for

14:00 miles. When I was serving my time in apprenticeship I used to go from Arncliffe to Redfern by train but from Arncliffe to Tempe I used to walk to save one penny each way. That meant I got up earlier and it was a longer day for me but that's where I learned. But without a doubt, in my mind, and if you closely watch the world economy in about three or four years time you've got to have a lot of money to

14:30 stay with it. I'm not kidding you. America's borrowing on credit now but they're broke. But they're trying to show a big face and they've got a huge population and big taxable income but they've got now a huge worldwide commitment. We were lucky here to follow the pattern. Much as I don't like it but the GST [Goods and Services Tax]. Everybody pays tax whether you like it or not. And if you sat down for one year and noted everything with the GST you paid you would get a shock.

15:00 So your wages have gone down that much and you haven't got the money. I do some things that would absolutely disgust you now but the training in the Depression days with no money is the biggest teacher. I remember I used to sell New Zealand fried fish when they were putting through the east [eastern railway] lines. And my brother would walk from Arncliffe in to the city, about six miles, and get a load of this New Zealand fish in plastic packets and bring it back

15:30 home. But he couldn't sell it because he'd be too buggered because he'd just walked 12ks. I would get it and go down and sell it to the boys on their payday down at the eastern line and sell them the lot. I don't think he got anything. I didn't get anything but Mum got the lot. When I worked on the bread cart I got paid in bread and Mum got it. When I worked on the milk cart I got paid with the milk and Mum got the milk and I got nothing. When I joined the air force I lived on

16:00 one shilling a day. The army was \$6 a day but being a tradesman I got \$10 in the air force. The wife got nine shillings out of my ten dollars and I had one dollar and I then used to send her money. And going back to Victoria where I said I had that job and they wanted to give it a fancy name, Assistant Transport

Officer - I'm arranging for the others to get big money to work overtime. And a lot of them, I remember this in

- 16:30 particular the barmaid in the pub told me, they would go in and change a ten pound or a twenty pound and put the money in their pocket. And when they'd next shout they'd bring out another ten or twenty. And if they bought cigarettes they'd buy 20 pounds worth. And I said, "I don't know how they do it. I'll be quite frank. I don't know how they do it". I've just changed some banking accounts here. I'm with the Australian Credit Union and they were paying me 2.5% interest on a pension account. Then they introduced another
- 17:00 account which is a savings account and they pay you 3% another 1% interest but you must put in \$50 a month. And the month you draw any money out you don't get any interest but your interest is paid monthly. I'm not half a per cent better off I'm about a quarter of a per cent better off because I lose it when I draw it out. But I haven't drawn it out for two years and each time I put it in it is more money.
- 17:30 I'm watching those things all the time and I just can't help it. It is just built into me - but the average fellow with a credit card at Christmas "Oh yeah" and then in February with the long face. That's what we do when we travel around Australia. I've already done my research on the accommodation from books, 2 or 3 books, and arranged everything and know exactly the price what I'm paying. But I exaggerate the meals to about \$60 a day when I know it will cost us about \$30.
- 18:00 I say I'll only get 10 kilometres to the litre on my car when I can get on a good run 14.2. I can't get all that time but I'm doing well above the 10. I estimate my figures on that. I have not booked one night's accommodation anywhere, not one, because I always have two accommodations. I've reduced it down to 300 kilometres a day. But half way in if there's a
- 18:30 motel I've got them down on the price and everything. If I drive an extra 100ks or stop 100ks short I'll save \$6 or \$8 or \$10 or \$12 a night in accommodation. And this is the thing you've got to do. You don't have to do it but I do it because it gives us what we want. I had the grandson over here late last year and he's just out of uni and short on clothes. So he said, "I'd like a suit like this". I said
- 19:00 "Good". I think it was about \$420 or something. So I rang a few mates of mine up and I looked at the paper and I said, "Ron Bennett has opened a shop in the Winter Garden go in and see him". He got two pairs of pants and a suit out of the same cloth for \$225 - two pairs of trousers instead of one pair of trousers to the suit for \$425. And I said to the fellow, "This is what the ad says what have you got?" And he says, "The same thing". But you've got to watch it. The only genuine sale in my mind is
- 19:30 Myers. I haven't got a Myers card or anything like that. But it's your dollar. You might as well give it away. I have a long history of lending out money free of interest to put somebody on their feet particularly or mostly all veterans. I have never lost one penny but I have never got one cent of interest. And I have never signed a
- 20:00 contract with anybody. I've never put a signature to anything. It's a gamble I've taken in life and thank God it has worked. But it comes back in other ways. To give you an instance I helped a bloke out a while ago and finished up getting him a pension. And one of his sidelines is picking up pineapples from his plantation and taking them somewhere and selling them at a flea market. Every time he gets a load of pineapples he gets 10 here. I know when they arrive and I get in my car and distribute 8 around widows and people I
- 20:30 know that are having a hard time. They say, "What do I owe you?" And I say "Nothing. It's my joy, my fun". I could be spending it on cigarettes or beer or horses but that's how I live. I don't make apologies for it but that's me. They don't come every day like me. I've never lost anything. My garage down there, if I took you down there, I've got four wardrobes and two dressing tables in tiptop condition. I just made a deal and got another
- 21:00 veteran in - a real good deal - I'll tell you about him later. He said, "Righto, I'll leave it to you". I'll have them there for a two or three weeks and a young couple moving into a house will appreciate it. A stopgap, you see. I've got some neighbours must moved in down here and the whole of their furniture came in on a trailer. I'm just waiting for a chance to slip down and introduce myself and give them a pineapple and a say, "A goodwill gift now, I've got this in my shed do you want to look at it?" I've just sent to Miles, you don't read this in
- 21:30 copy books, I just sent to Miles two car loads of clothes to be put in their Opportunity Shop but before they do if there is anybody that lives in Miles, or a farmer out there, that hasn't got the clothes get him to have a look at it. If he won't and you think you know his size put it in a box and put it in his green box. And then the rest give it to the Opportunity Shop. I'm doing that constantly. I put fellows into the RSL homes up here. Caboolture, is one in particular I've got.
- 22:00 Burleigh Heads is another one. There's another one at Currumbin. And I go up there every chance I've got. And there are many people up there going without clothes and the staff is very good if they are the same size. But you get one in there that haven't got the same size so I see what I've got down here in the garage. I've got a refrigerator to take from Greenslopes to Redland Bay. The person's refrigerator down there has
- 22:30 broken down. It's bugged, it's too old. This one - the wife just liked a new one and the other one has been completely done up and the wife wants a new one and they can afford it. I could go on with a

thousand things like that. I'm not kidding you. That's how I live. And I believe it comes back to you in different ways. It's probably my good health. I don't know. I'm saying that because it could be a contributor to it. But my mind is full. I

- 23:00 haven't got time for smoking it absorbs too much of my time. I haven't got time for boozing that's how I go on. And yet every now and again something happens to me and it's good. It's just one of those things in life. It's a lifestyle and I'll agree developed from the Depression days. And the responsibility of at 10 years of age being a breadwinner to a family of 12.

#### **Just speaking of all the little**

- 23:30 **tricks you did to save money. Can you remember any of the tricks your mum did to save money and make it stretch?**

No the only thing I remember vividly about my mother is from the time I was born – she must have been a good reader – it was something to do with J.C. Windeyer who was a big barrister in Sydney in those days. She's one of that family and connected there somewhere. And from the earliest time,

- 24:00 before I went to school, she had me reading jam tins, the label. And she'd give it to me for a half hour and if she came in and I couldn't recite every word on it she'd go crook on me. "You'll never get anywhere in life unless you can read and read properly". And I think that was a wonderful thing that I developed over the years because she kept at it. The other one is I used to get into trouble with my mother. I remember one time I was going to Arncliffe school
- 24:30 and I can't help being what I am. I used to see a big kid there belting everyone up and he picked on everybody in turn so he could prove he was boss. He came to me and said, "I'm going to belt you up when you go across the overhead bridge." They'd just put an overhead bridge across a busy street. And he did. He gave me a hiding every time I crossed that street for 30 days. In those days I had one shirt. You got to school in it and you come home and you wash
- 25:00 it and Mum irons it the next morning and you'd take off again in the same shirt. I used to come home with blood stains on it. So she said to me "Well, you're going to fight again today I know you are." So this bloke beat me for 30 days. I got tired not only of him beating me but of my mother sounding off on me. I got up one day and I said, "No mother, he's not going to beat me today." He wasn't waiting for me over the bridge that day I was waiting for him. And I kicked him when he was
- 25:30 down because I knocked him down so many times. He didn't lose the fight because he had no guts once I started to score on him. But when you've been fight a man 30 times you know where he's going to hit you and you know what to look for. My bloody nose and bits of skin off me that taught me that lesson. You stick to a thing – and it's the one thing my mother impressed on me – you stick to it until the end and you make sure you win. And you correct your mistakes on the way and don't make a fool of yourself. And the biggest thing of
- 26:00 making a fool of yourself was telling lies. She was a hard master. But she raised 12 kids so I'm very proud of her at that time. But somehow all through my life I was the breadwinner until I got married. I never had any money and still today I probably haven't got a dime in my pocket but I've probably got a dollar somewhere. But I don't have massive bank accounts or anything like that. I go day to day. But when I got today I'm now in preparation for
- 26:30 my trip away paying things in advance. Instead of putting it in the bank I'm paying them as they come up. And I'm doing that easily and each pay it's worked out that this one is in advance. I'm doing that all the time. I'm trying to think ahead and manipulate around. Instead of going through this town I'm going through that one because the hotel is cheaper. There is a better meal here for less than the price than that one. And that's what life is all about I believe. The way I'm living life I believe is how you should live
- 27:00 life. I could be totally wrong but it comes back to you in other ways.

#### **What can you remember of your dad Len?**

Very, very little - very little at all. I don't know whether this is true or not. I can't answer whether it is or not because I've never been told otherwise. In Coffs Harbour they started to make the breakwater and they had the big nob out there of iron ore or blue metal or something. It was a big quarry and selected people out but they never had the tools that they have today so it was all hard work.

- 27:30 They used to go through the cutting and they'd cut here to get to the other end. And somebody was walking ahead of him, two people were walking ahead of him, and he was a fair bit behind them and a rock killed him. That's the story I've got but whether it's true or not I can't tell you. But I don't remember him.

#### **That must have had a tremendous effect on a large family?**

I think so. I think my mother grew up in about 6 seconds according to people I spoke to in Coffs Harbour and I do that whenever I can if they're still alive.

- 28:00 Yes, it had a big effect. If you had any go in you at all you were it. In the Depression days my brothers

would collect their dole docket but wouldn't go to a grocery shop and cash them to buy groceries so I did and they'd wait outside to cart them home. They couldn't sell anything - the fish for instance and the blackberries they picked I sold them. It was always, "Get Lenny, he'll fix it". And today it's the same thing. I've got a letter there from my

28:30 nephew, urgent marked all over it, will you do this and do that. It's a simple thing to do but he hasn't got any idea so he sends it to me. I ring him up and say I'll do it in a couple of days' time because you can't move me. If you say it's urgent don't come near me. I've got to think about it. But there is a lot of teaching in hard times that you won't get in good times. I think there are things - things killing the young people. One is credit card and the other is mobile phones.

29:00 I can say nothing of computers. Computers are killing their thinking. I laughed many years ago when they showed you at the movies- I think we used to go to the movies for 5 cents or something - for sixpence on a Saturday and they showed them teaching these monkeys how to push these buttons. Where are they in 2002 no monkeys. We're all monkeys pushing buttons. I've never had a computer but I think they make you lazy. I find it terrible when you go in a

29:30 shop and the girl says, "\$2.20, \$2.20, \$2.20 - Oh yeah, that's \$6.60". It's a horrible waste of time. And plastic cards are killing life. The number of times you wait in a queue. That's only some of the things that I watch and I avoid.

### **Do you know if your dad had served in World War I?**

No. My father was never an ex-serviceman. I did get that out of my mother.

30:00 He'd never served in the war and I've been told by people in Coffs [Harbour] that they didn't know of his service in the war.

### **Do you know of any family relatives that served in the war?**

Yes. My eldest brother Lyle served in the war and my elder brother Jimmy served in the war. My other brother, Frank, served in the war and my other brother Pat served in the war. My youngest brother had joined up and got into a

30:30 pub celebrating being accepted and he goes down to a park with some bloke and he got drowned. He was on his way to Korea I think that was. That's another story. But anyway, that's what I know. I know about that because I handled their cases.

### **Were there any sort of uncles or things like that that served in World War I that may have influenced your brothers?**

I can't answer that. I really can't answer

31:00 that. I think the sport of boxing, which was the only thing left because it required no equipment, inspired them because they were all tough roosters. And a gang of men getting together they'll son get someone who is a sucker to go and do something they don't want to do themselves. I would say the Depression itself brought it on. Jimmy, who was the most famous of my brothers, would never take any notice of me and wouldn't be like it today probably if he had have.

31:30 In the Depression days you had no clothes and you had no food and you wandered around like a pack of lost animals. Now Arncliffe Park was the gathering place where I said earlier they played cards. Now the word got out that if you joined the Scots Football Club, that was in another suburb, you would get a jersey and boots and socks and shorts. That's right, you got the uniform. So they got millions of recruits. Everybody joined Scots. Everybody was a

32:00 Scots player no matter what else because you got this free. Now when the war came along I had done militia time when I was old enough, I'd done a couple of years in the militia, but the army came out and said, "If you join the militia you get a great coat". And they were great blankets. You'd get a uniform and you'd get boots. Well the military boots were seen around many work sites, the overcoats were on in the winter and many a time you saw the army clothes in the work place.

32:30 That helped. There wasn't conscription and that, that was the militia. But today, I had a case the other day, I had a big bloke walk in here and he couldn't get through my door he was that tall. He was only a very young man with a little baby daughter. I said, "What's the matter? Who sent you?" He said, "I doesn't matter who sent me, mate, if you are the bloke I'm looking for you're the bloke I want to talk to." And I thought I had a bit of talent in my hands. I got talking to him and I said, "What have you come to see me about?" He said, "I've been treated unjustly". I said, "What's the matter, son?"

33:00 This fellow is a big Italian. He was born in Australia but he's a huge big man, a first class soldier. I said, "What's the trouble?" He said, "I joined the army and guess what? They've got women in the army and they told me what to do." I said, "Well, that's standard, mate. That's just normal life". He said, "Yeah, but then they got a lieutenant, a little woman lieutenant, and she made a fool of me all the time. I couldn't stand the army. They are telling me what to do".

33:30 I said, "Well, all right. How's the child, all right?" And I moved to the door and I opened it and I said, "I'll see you again, mate, some time". The same time I had another fellow come in and I said, "What are you looking for? Who sent you?" He said, "Don't worry about the bloke who sent me if you're the bloke

I'm looking for". He said, "I'm looking for a TPI". I said, "Oh yes, that's permanently totally incapacitating". And he looks as good as Tallis the footballer. I said, "Why do you think I'm entitled to a TPI?" He said, "Because my mate has got one".

- 34:00 I opened the door on his way out. Those are the elements on that. Those are stories told only for one reason to show you where you become case hardened. But when you get the - I got an SOS [distress call] call from the Gold Coast because I do a fair bit of territory. This fellow finished up a TPI and they're living in a mobile home on a beautiful estate down there. So I went and knocked on the door and introduced myself and Lynne was sitting in the car and I said, "I've come to
- 34:30 see your husband". And I'd heard a scurry before when I knocked on the door or was about to knock on the door. She said, "Come in, I've got to get him". And she brought him out and she was leading him like he was a dog. And she introduced him and I said, "Gee, you're in a bit of trouble, mate, have you been a POW [prisoner of war]?" "Yes". And you could see he was brow-beaten. He was beaten completely. Anyway, the story was that when I knocked on the door he'd run away and hidden under the bed. I finished up getting him a 100% pension and I'm ready to take him all the way to the
- 35:00 TPI because he's gone and he's lost everything. "No" he said, "I can't stand that. Too much worry. No I can't stand it," and then he walked away. I said to his wife "Unless he agrees - I can get him treatment if he agrees". She said, "You won't get him. He'll run and run". That's one. And then I had another fellow knock on my door and come to see me and I said, "What's your problem?" And he said, "Can I sit down for a moment" and I said, "Yeah, mate, help yourself". And I got him a drink because I could see he was a bit depressed. He was
- 35:30 gun crew with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Airport Guard or Air Defence guard I think they called them. And he was in a helicopter over Vietnam and they got shot down and the helicopter finished up on him. And he had a job but he could only get to the job one day some weeks. And he's got 100% pension and he can't work. And he said, "I don't know what to do". He's on a TPI now.
- 36:00 I had another fellow. Terence [?] Brothers College - I've never been in the place in my life - I know very little about it simply because it just didn't have to be in the length of my cable or chain or whatever you liked to call it. A voice gets on the phone and says, "Len" and I said, "Jesus, that bloke knows me". Because as I said I've got a suspicious nature I always think I'm in trouble because I've been taught to avoid it as much as possible.
- 36:30 He said, "You don't know me. I'm Monsignor or somebody." He said, "I'm the principal of the catholic college up on the terrace," that's how he put it. I said, "Yes, I'm very happy to meet you and thank you for ringing me". And he said, "I've got a problem". And I'm thinking what the hell would a man in that position have a problem about. Well, he's got a teacher there that is one of the best English teachers. And he told me himself, he said, "He's the only Protestant in this college and it's a catholic college and
- 37:00 why is he the only Protestant in this college? Because he's the best English teacher available." "But" he said, "he goes mad". "I put him in charge of the playground and the kids are making a fool of him. I put him in charge of a class and he starts on a subject and he just stares into space and the pupils are waiting for the next words". He said, "He's crook," but he said, "he's ex-air force". He said, "Frankly, I've never had anything like this in my life. I've been talking around and somebody said to ring you."
- 37:30 So up Len trots and I didn't know whether to put on rosary beads or carry a bible or whatever it was. I don't know the procedure on that when you see these people. I sat down he was a nice fellow. He said, "I don't want you to tell him that I told you to go and see him but he's on playground duty tomorrow. I've arranged with another teacher to stand by and when he sees you walk over and talk to him he'll take over his duties without saying anything". I walked in and I met him and I said, "How are you going, mate?" He said, "Not too bad. Do I know you?"
- 38:00 He is miles away. I said, "No, but I want to have a talk to you". "Oh, not here" he says, "I'm on duty". I said, "Righto, mate, where do you live?" And he lived at Ashgrove. So I arranged to meet him but he couldn't come to see me I had to go and see him. We got talking while his wife was there drinking coffee and everything and we were talking and I thought, "I'm not here for this chat, I haven't got time". And I said, "Look, I've only got a limited time do you mind if I shoot through and come back another day". "No, I don't mind at all. Thank you for
- 38:30 calling." Before I got out of the door he was right behind me and whispered in my ear, "Sit on the veranda for a while will you mate, I want to talk to you". His duties were as an air force man as the crew of a Lancaster flying over Europe. He only did it 39 times over. He was a wireless air gunner but he didn't tell me what position he had on the aircraft. But he was sitting there with a gun in his hand and of course they were bombed those boys. They gave them
- 39:00 drugs to keep them alive for 30 hours and that's why they got back to base after a 12 hour trip they were so hyped up they had to drown the drug and they drank a lot of beer. He said, "And I'm sitting there and there are about 200 planes in the air." And he said he was sitting there and he thought "No, I don't believe that. Did I see that?" I said, "What was it?" He said, "Here's a pilot without his aeroplane hanging on to his wheel and falling down in front of me and he's got no head". I said
- 39:30 "Oh yeah". He said, "I'm still thinking about that. I still see it". Then he told me a few other instances where the bullets were at each side of his position but not at him. And they sent him home after 39 trips



or whatever the number was. He said, "I can't stop seeing this. Every time I'm sitting down here and I'm not active, my mind is not active, watching the kids, even when I'm watching the kids I'm back watching that bloke fall down beside me." So I got him fixed. He's on a TPI now. But there's a lot of work

- 40:00 in it. I could give you the fellow from Perth that owns hotels in Broome who I met in Broome when I go there. He rang me up one night, at about half past nine. He said, "Hello, mate, do you remember me, I'm so and so?" I said, "Yeah. I drank in your bloody pub and you didn't even shout me," which is a standard reaction of these blokes who think they're God Almighty. He said, "I've got a problem". I said, "What does your (UNCLEAR) son, he'll fix you up". He said, "No, he can't, you
- 40:30 will". He's a multi-millionaire of course this particular person talking now. He said, "I've got a fellow working as a yard man. He's a first class worker but," he said, "when he gets on the grog he's horrible and I can't have him with guests here. He abuses them. He only needs one or two beers and he's off. I've taken him off the gardener job and I've put him on the midnight shift as the manager, the midnight manager. He said, "He
- 41:00 sleeps most of the time" - rarely does you get woken up in isolated country like that. But he said, "I like the bloke. He needs help of some sort and what do I do?" I said, "Give me his name and get him to ring me." He never did ring me but this bloke was backward. He's on a TPI today and he was in Vietnam and he was a forward scout and he got knocked about pretty well.

**I'll just get you to stop there.**

## Tape 6

- 00:30 I told you I was in the Civil Aviation department. I was up there as the flying boat crew - no I wasn't a flying boat crew I was the motorboat crew. I was with them on the books as a carpenter but I was motorboat crew because the carpentry would take about 2 hours - in southern states a week - but in Darwin it didn't exist.
- 01:00 Because of my apparent eagerness to do the job properly I got the transfer to Darwin. I mentioned also there that our job was to man the motorboats but we had nowhere near the sophisticated boats we had in the southern states. And we'd meet the flying boats as they'd come in and take the passengers off and take them to the jetty and make sure that the crew came off. We'd go back for the crew. They were the last to leave the ship. And then we'd take the supplies back out to them - the food and all the luggage and
- 01:30 everything that was required to take the passengers back. We'd lay the flares for when the flying boats were coming in at night and also despatching and check the water to see there were no objects floating around that would damage the flying boats. That was our principal duty and mostly our duty. I arrived there at the peak hour in Darwin when every day the business increased. We got more and more flights in and they were all nationalities. The Catalinas
- 02:00 and Sunderland flying boats, the British Empire flying boats I think they called them. They were seconded by the government from Qantas Airlines and they flew exclusively out of Darwin unless they went in for a service and they'd have to fly south for that which was once in about every six weeks. They were doing short hops from Darwin across to Ambon and all those areas close to there mostly after refugees. A lot of our own
- 02:30 staff were coming out, not military. They were taking military forward like commandos and that and our other defence personnel and they'd be bringing back civilians on the way back. We struck some of the most arrogant people in the world and they were all Dutch nationalities. They owned the world and you didn't exist except to serve them faithfully and well. We worked day and night. The first week was comfortable. We only had two or three planes in the day.
- 03:00 Then it started after about the first week up to six. And I think some of them were in the air waiting for the others to land at one stage there before the bombs came before I got sick and was taken to hospital. But I would say it was the most harrowing time I've ever worked in my life because there was no such thing as hours. There were no such things as meal hours. If you wanted to go to the toilet well bad luck. You had to make your own arrangements.

### **How did the blokes cope with that?**

Well we didn't until we all cracked up.

- 03:30 There was not one of them who served up there that wasn't in hospital, that didn't have a few days in hospital. Our CO [Commanding Officer] was a little fellow, terrific and a hard working bloke. He said, "Bugger the paperwork we've got to get the job done and then we'll worry about the paperwork". So our overtime - we never ever got paid for overtime and that was ridiculous. And our pay was being paid into whatever it was. I know Lynne was getting her money. It was really hectic. Darwin in those days was an outlaw town.

- 04:00 Rarely did we get to walk around the town. And I can honestly say until I made visits of recent years I never ever covered every street in Darwin and it was only a small place. You were so busy. If you went for a meal that's what you did. You went for a meal and then straight back to work which was rare - about one in three days and that's the most. And then you had to tell them where you were. Many a time the meal had been left on the table to go back to work because you had to be there. Somebody had to be there.
- 04:30 Flying boats you can't just get out and walk away you've got to have somebody to service them. Rarely did we get a night off. I remember one night in particular in Darwin. I suppose you could call it a wild west town in those days. The Yanks arrived in various shapes and forms, navy, army and air force, and we had one fellow in particular that had two pistols of real silver and two on his side. And he goes into the gambling joint which was about every second shop, they had all sorts of games in there. And he walked in and he told everybody
- 05:00 there. "I'm here to take your money and win your money and nobody will ever take me for it. These things talk". And we were in there this night and I thought "Jesus". OK Such was the lawlessness of the state in Darwin at that time that the police hid. I say hid because they were never seen. So this bloke at the gaming tables and he was a lucky codger, he won a lot of money. And we were
- 05:30 fascinated by this character - it was like a wild west movie. And he patted his guns and he walked out and he said, "Nobody will take this money off me. These speak for themselves". You know, a typical Yank [American]. Everybody talked about him and spoke for a while and then somebody came in and said, "What's this bloke doing outside? There's a bloke out here down and we don't know whether he's dead or what". So we surged outside and here's the Yank down on the footpath. Nobody walked up to him and said
- 06:00 "I'm going to shoot you". They hung over the balcony, over the veranda, and hit him with a bit of 3 x 2. He had no money and no guns when we got him. Of course we got the military police in and they took him away. I tell you that story to illustrate the lawlessness of Darwin in those days. Everybody did their job like we had to. I found Darwin was a wonderful place. I was starting to get the feel of it and a great respect for it - apart from the heat but the humidity is not as bad as here
- 06:30 at its worst. It is a beautiful town. I rather enjoyed it and every time I've gone back I've found the same. And I've never had any trouble getting accommodation there. And beautiful people, they're absolutely beautiful people. I did have a Repatriation case up there in Darwin. Apart from the others this one is outstanding in my mind. I went to the RSL Club for lunch. And somebody said, "Giddyay, Len." And he said to his mate, "That bloke is Len over there". And he said, "Whatever his name is I want to talk to him."
- 07:00 And this fellow had a case before the Repatriation and Darwin was dealt with at the Adelaide Office. And they were saying "No, no, no to him". And I had him in there over lunch and he had a few beers and he gave me his case. I said, "Don't muck about with the Department when you're this far up, mate". Have you got any money?" He said, "I'm pretty well healed" he said, "but I can't work and I won't have my savings for long." I said, "Well look you see this fellow or ring him up or talk to him or write to him. He's a
- 07:30 barrister in Adelaide and tell him you've spoken to me and he'll handle your business for you". So the next visit we went up there. For some strange reason I struck him again, he was going into Woolworth's up there. And I said, "How are you going mate?" And he said, "Not bad". And I said, "Do I know you? I'm sure I do". "Remember," he said, "last time you seen me you put me on to a barrister in Adelaide and I've got my TPI". He had to go through the
- 08:00 Administrative Appeals Tribunal. The problem that man got into was because the Department of Veteran Affairs established an office in Darwin and they put one man in charge with two women. If you were in as a Repatriation man or a soldier looking for help he would say "Yes or no" himself and make the decision on the spot and wouldn't fill in the forms. So I'd heard about this after I was speaking to the chap I just mentioned who saw the barrister. And I said, "Where's this bloody office". So
- 08:30 Len gets Mum and him in tow and goes up. I saw him and I abused him that much that the office girls walked out. I said, "I should put you in, you're a mongrel". "Who gave you that authority?" I said, "No, you're the bloody agent, mate. You might call yourself a representative but you think you're the dictator here and you're telling them. All these blokes are good blokes". "Who are you? Get out of my office". I said, "I'll be back tomorrow". So one of the girls when I went out they winked at me and
- 09:00 Lynne said, "You get on with the girls". Anyway, I did go back the next day and he's not there. And I said to him and the girls, "I'll be back at 10 o'clock". He wouldn't turn up. The girls said to me "He's not going to talk to you. You got into him". So I got into the blower and I spoke to somebody and he lost his job. They've got a very good office up there - very sound and well staffed and particularly good because I get glowing reports back to me from time to time when people go there. So that's one fellow.
- 09:30 I had a similar incident in Broome of a different nature but he also got transferred to Perth and he struck my young fellow in Perth and he struck my young fellow in Perth one day and he said, "Hey, Dougie" he said, "Have you ever heard of a young fellow called Asmith in Brisbane". He said, "Say that name again, what is it?" He said, "He's responsible for me being demoted". He said, "Bad luck, son". But he was in a government job running a private business and the government job wasn't getting done

but he sent down glowing

10:00 reports and it was just wrong. The Darwin incident was pretty good and since then I've had two or three from Darwin. One fellow couldn't work and he and his wife set up a carpet business but he was killing her with her doing the work and he had to sit down all the time. He is looked after now. I couldn't tell him what pension he's in because I had him all set up and then left him and the Department took over. There is a lot of that going on. Early in the piece, going back to

10:30 Darwin - are you satisfied with what I've told you about Darwin? Are there any other comments you want?

**Yes maybe a few more things because a lot of people of my generation don't know anything about the flying boats. Can you describe what a flying boat looks like?**

A flying boat is a huge big Sunderland. I haven't got a photograph here of it but I probably would have downstairs in some of my reference books. It's a huge big plane that is built as a boat. It's the hull of a boat with two wings on it and two floats on the end of the wings.

11:00 Qantas or British Empire Airways brought them out and Qantas leased them when they started out early. They had a short distance they could fly. They could only fly - well most of our bases were up to 600 miles apart, that was their limit in those days. They were very luxurious and comfortable. They had huge big seats in them. They were most comfortable to fly in and they were very good at doing the job they did. They used a lot of them through -

11:30 covering naval patrols and submarine patrols out of Britain and Gibraltar they operated out of. They operated at a lot of places and they did a lot of good work and had some excellent fliers and skippers and crew. But up there they finished up because of the long hours they had to split the crew in half and they still flew them very, very well - big four-engine jobs. They were too costly to build and not a long enough fuel range

12:00 and the cost of the maintenance of each plane as it touched down and took off was just too great. As we've progressed now we've got two-engine planes flying between here and New Zealand. I remember when they wouldn't let them fly anywhere because they didn't think they were good enough. And the Israelis flew from New York up to Canada and across to Israel that way and that exceeded the 5,000

12:30 limit on aircraft flying with two engines. They did that for two or three years before the government approved two engine planes flying over a certain distance because they've got to be allegedly be within 100 kilometres of an airport. That doesn't exist today because of the wonderful engines they've put in them. The first Pratt & Whitney engines before the jet came in were fitted to British Empire Flying Boats or

13:00 Sunderland Flying Boats as we called it. They were a real luxury. They were beautiful things to fly in. I remember on my last trip out of Groot Island when the air force took over they flew us back to home base at Rose Bay in a Sunderland Flying Boat. And we came down into Rose Bay and it was choppy seas and we smashed a float. We were supernumeraries [extras] and we were carried in the front seat which was the worst seat in those days for passengers because they got more

13:30 luxurious at the back. It's the reverse in modern planes. So the skipper said, "You blokes out on the wing". He smashed the float in Rose Bay and he took to the air and climbed the hill and came down in Botany Bay. And he's taxiing along Botany Bay towards Ramsgate from the Heads, the Botany Bay Heads. And he said, "Righto, you blokes out on the wing because I've got to counterbalance that broken float on that side". So we climbed out on the wing and one of our blokes nearly lost his hands. The first thing he grabbed was a red hot pipe,

14:00 exhaust pipe, and we had to hold him there. And he was screaming his eyes out but we had to get along the wing to balance the plane until he beached it at Ramsgate. And the first bloke we got off of course was the bloke with the heavily blistered hands. They were beautiful planes to fly in.

**You were talking about the maintenance on them. When they came in what was the turn around on them before you could send them out again, how long?**

I think we could do it in about an hour and a half.

**And what exactly did you have to do in an hour and a half?**

In that hour and a half they land. The minute they

14:30 tie up to the buoy - we indicate and they come down our path. Day or night we put the path down but at night time it is lit with flares. And when they tie up the minute they tie up we're at the door. We were following them in as they tie up to the buoy. And we'd take our first lad on. As we pull up and we're pulling away with our first passengers the fuel tanker comes in on the other side and pumps the fuel in. While he's pumping the fuel in we're the shuttling service to the jetty. We're taking passengers and their luggage and bringing them back.

15:00 Each trip - we didn't take any load out first. We went out and got our passengers. We brought a load back and then we were putting on the people that were getting on and we'd take them back. We'd do a shuttle. By the time we'd done about 3 or 4 shuttles, and it would take about 10 minutes for the return

trip, it was only a short distance from the wharf, he'd be ready to take off again. We had an amazing turn over up there on speed. Some times it would take four hours, it depends. And you might have to get the engineer to go out and work on the engine if one was faulty. But only when they had a big

- 15:30 service - the engines have to be overhauled. They are very precise engineering on any type of aircraft. They've got to be right on the dot on the hour. They disregarded that later in the evening if the plane was still flying and not have any trouble - later in the evening - later before the bombing. And that's the job we did. We did that tremendously like that talking about Darwin that is. But when we got down to Groot Island doing a similar service of an aircraft we serviced very few Sunderland Flying Boats. They brought out the
- 16:00 Catalina and the Catalina is the best long-range aircraft ever produced in the world. It was a flying boat. It had two engines and two big blisters. It could carry a crew of about 8 or 9 I think. I'm not sure. I never got really on board. I was all over it but not inside. And they had to load up with bombs at Darwin as you were. They would load up with bombs and petrol at Townsville and take off from Townsville and fly across the cape and land it in the
- 16:30 gulf of where we were at Groot Island. Then they'd touch down and we'd have to go out and top them up with fuel mainly. While we topped them up with fuel the first thing we did was bring the crew back for a feed while the plane was being refuelled. That would take about an hour. Mostly we knew when they were coming and the food would be there straight away and they'd get back on the plane and they'd be gone within an hour with more fuel. That would give them greater distance to travel towards Singapore and the other areas up there where they were
- 17:00 loading marine mines. They were dropping them in and the ships were coming over and picking them up and blowing them up. This was in Surabaya and those islands around Java and Bali now as they call it. That's what they were doing and when they'd finished that they'd then do reconnaissance. And then they'd come back to Groot Island and we would fill them up with enough petrol to get back to Townsville to get another load of bombs to do the same thing. And when they'd come back frequently we had to beach them
- 17:30 because they had holes in them from bullet holes. I remember when the HMAS Centaur was sunk off the heads of Brisbane somewhere and that was a deliberate sabotage attack that's not according to international law. The boys were so mad that they took off one time and when we were having a meal I heard them say "Well, that cleaned that hospital up didn't it". But we couldn't read the sign like the Japs couldn't read the sign on our ship. We had
- 18:00 these Catalina planes they had a 22 hour range. That may not be the exact figure but it's very close to it. They were away a long time. And this one was away for 24 hours missing so we assumed he was shot down. So we tied the boats up and started to have a meal. And all of a sudden he's coming in because there is radio silence you see. It can't be him because he hasn't got enough fuel, it's got to be somebody else, but it was him. When they get up to a
- 18:30 certain height they've got such a huge wing span with favourable winds he can fly around with the engine off. And the crew told me they thought he was mad. Frequently in a big Catalina they'll switch one motor off and cruise on the other to save fuel. But in this case he had to cut both off to save fuel because he'd gone too far. And he floated in. And getting back to - another one that comes to my mind is Scotty Allen the famous
- 19:00 flyer, I'm sure you've all heard of. He was flying flying boats and he took off from Gladstone to fly to Townsville and there was a strong wind beating. He used up too much fuel and he couldn't get back to Gladstone and he couldn't land at Townsville. So he got as high as he could and floated into Gladstone and they reckoned he was mad. "Oh" he said, "I do it all the time". So it was a non-event. But that's the wingspan on those beautiful machines.
- 19:30 They were wonderful. If you get up to the right height with the right wind you can stay there but you are gradually losing height but you can go a long time before you lose height. That's what we found out when we were doing that job at Civil Aviation. They booted us out once they had trained men. But no question we had a very busy time in both places, that's in Darwin and Groot Island.

**Len, what was it when you said you went out and laid a path?**

That's a path. You go out on a motorboat and you've got like

- 20:00 crab pots to a degree that float. And you lay them in a line so the flying boat comes in hits the water and travels along that line and doesn't travel anywhere else. He knows that that area within those two rows of flares has been cleaned, as clean as is possible to do, and he can land there with safety. And of a night-time you had flares in these pots with these floats and we'd have them all put out all the way. As soon as we got eight in and in Darwin many times we only got one up and the plane is on top of us because he had to
- 20:30 land. He was either running short of fuel or he was too heavy or he'd misjudged the distance but many times that happened. We had many close calls when we had to go like hell and pray that we were going to get out of his road before we finished the job. But that was par for the course in those days and now it would be on the front page of the newspaper. That is what you had to do in those days.

**Were there ever very many accidents?**

Never that I know of any accident with our operation in Darwin or Groot Island. We were well disciplined in that

21:00 regard. I cannot recall any accident of any shape or form to the crews performing that work. I'm not kidding you. Never. I have high praise for those flyers particularly the air force blokes in the Catalinas. Those blokes should have been given a million dollars an hour for what they were doing. That was one of my joys was Groot Island. Darwin, tough as it was, they use the word fun today – it was tough work but you made light of it because you had to.

21:30 There was nothing else you weren't going anywhere and the job's got to be done.

**What sort of things did all the guys do to make light of it?**

Well once a month on Groot Island a ship came in from Thursday Island, our supply ship came in. And when the grog came in you didn't order it by the carton you ordered it by the case – 48 dozen. That would be 2 or 3 cases of that and then you'd get the

22:00 spirits that would come in another case in various quantities. Usually when we had a clear day we would get on the grog. So that meant we went to the furthest house on Groot Island and had a party. And that usually ended in a fight. I won't tell you some of the dreadful things I got away with. Then you'd have that and the next day you knew you had to be sober and manning the boat at 10 o'clock and you would be there no matter what.

22:30 And the sand was that hot you had to have planks down to all the houses like footpaths because you could not walk on the sand. Groot Island was a fascinating story entirely of its own in many ways. We used to train the aboriginals. We'd spend six months training them and get two weeks work out of them and the next thing they'd go walkabout. You'd get up the next morning and there are no black fellas. They're out catching turtles. That's just part of the world you've got to live in. You've just got to buckle in and do what you have to do and get out of the trouble because you've got air

23:00 crews coming in for a feed. We made sure they had a feed and grog if they wanted it. It was a good life those periods I spent in those places. I don't believe I've ever worked so hard in all my life as I did in those areas. And that was a wartime, it certainly was war time. Strangely enough, you know, a little while back they brought out a civilian medal only for those people who worked – doing the job of service people that weren't in the

23:30 service and I fell into that category. That's when I met this strange research officer, newly appointed, in Kembla. He rang me up and asked me questions and I asked him why did he get the money and not me. He said, "I'm new. I just finished university and I got this job". I spoke to him for hours. I wouldn't have liked to have been paying the phone bill. But he was happy to be getting it and I think he was taping it although he didn't say so. But that is the type of life we had.

24:00 and if you take the serious parts out of it and there's a lot of that – 50% would be serious – service in the north, Darwin and particularly Groot Island – Townsville was nothing. Nothing really happened there. And in New Guinea it was a whole new experience. It was a bit of fun at times but you worked so bloody hard the fun was

24:30 magnified many times when you did get the break because the hours were so long. In Darwin I saw the sun come up and go down and come up and go down and come up and go down before we stopped. And we were like zombies. So you two out of the four, if there were four there, you spell and go to sleep anywhere and we'll do the job. Then they'd come back and give you a spell. But in the

25:00 meantime although I saw the sun come up and down they'd be doing something to the boat and you'd get onto the wharf with nothing underneath you at all and you'd just put your head down and you were asleep. You were that buggered. On the office floor I slept there many times until somebody would come in and knock the fan over and wake me. And that would wake a couple of others. We slept anywhere. In Darwin, apart from the hospital beds, I think I spent the equivalent and that's about

25:30 six days in any sort of a bed until I was evacuated. But you accept that and that's life. You're there doing a job for the country and in this case we were employed by the government. One of those medals I've got there they finished up with that Research Officer approving it. And I said, "How can you approve it? You know nothing about it". Anyway, he is a good mate of mine now. The world was different. The enthusiasm

26:00 was greater than what it is now at work. The camaraderie was excellent and you looked after your mate. I learned that – I was always that way inclined because I come from a big family. You looked after your mate when you were in Rose Bay in Sydney when you were in those bases. And when you got to the north bases it was us against them no matter who they were. And we'd stick like a blanket and there's no question about it.

26:30 We did things that if you asked people to do it now they'd laugh at you or want a million dollars for the overtime. It couldn't happen in this generation but it can and does happen in war.

**When you were talking about Groot Island and the aboriginals that you trained how did it come about that they were working with you?**

Well the English, through a crooked Englishman who was a refugee from being married three or four times and paying nobody,

27:00 got out of England and somehow conned himself to become Manager of a Missionary station up there to teach the primitive people how to live. They'd been living there a thousand years but he was going to teach them. Well, he exploited them in every way possible there was to exploit them. And somehow or other because it was within the required fuel distance of the flying boats it was picked up as a half way stop between Townsville and

27:30 Darwin for a refuelling base. And the government and Shell established the refuelling base and the aboriginals lived across the way. To give them money and to try and help them in some way we got this missionary to send across prospective workers. And the first thing we did of course was put them under the shower and cleaned them up and scrubbed them up and put a napkin on them. They walked around naked. The big black fellow with a bloody

28:00 napkin on I think about it now and I laugh about it. We tried to train them as cooks but they weren't interested in it. I remember talking to the cook and he said, "I've got to go away for a minute, Len, keep your eye on that black bugger". So I'm in the hallway watching him and I could see him looking at the fan and looking at the eggs. And I could see those eggs were going to finish up in those fans because he wants to know what happens, so about 24 eggs went up into the fan. I was out in the hallway. Well I can't tell you what

28:30 went on with the cook and him afterwards but he didn't last long. You'd give them training for about a fortnight and they were very good they lived under the house just on the sand and they'd come up and we'd make sure they had a shower and taught them things but then they'd go for a while. They would just go walkabout and you had nobody. But the government didn't pay you to have servants. You were it.

**What was your relationship like with them?**

I got on particularly well with them.

29:00 I even went turtle hunting with them one day. They could understand me because - I don't know whether it was my voice or what it was but I got on with them very well. But I treated them as equal, I can't tell you why I did that, and everybody else used to scorn them and the contempt would show in their face. I got on with them very well and they invited me to this turtle hunt. They were after turtles. It was the season and you'd got out and you'd sit on the hill there and you'd wait for the turtle to lay its

29:30 eggs and it goes down to the sea and the minute it does you pounce on its eggs and it the minute it does you do you kill him and that's good meat. And they cook it there and then. The only thing I didn't like with the aboriginals at Groot Island was the chief of the tribe had anything up to 14 wives. They were from about 10 years of age onwards. And the younger one did all the work and all the others took it in turns to do the work but they looked after him.

30:00 And he's sit on his big fat backside and give them a spear to sharpen and they'd go away to sharpen it or fix it if the handle was broken. And he just sat there. He called all the shots and I thought, "I've got to get back here as a black fella". That's a different style of living and you respect it. We didn't like it but we respected it. That was their custom. That was very good. At Darwin we had a lot of trouble with the blacks but the blacks have got a funny instinct about them. If there's any danger they disappear. It's self preservation.

30:30 We don't know what it is. Because before the raid, before I went to the hospital, there wasn't a black to be found. They must have known it was coming. They had some sixth sense. I can't explain that - I'd love to. No, Darwin was an excellent place. Don't let anybody kid you but you've got to get used to the heat.

**So, Len, you were working there with the Civil Aviation Authority and that was a reserve occupation wasn't it?**

Yes a reserved occupation.

**31:00 And what was that like being part of a reserve occupation?**

Well it was a delightful job and you were very well looked after by the Civil Aviation Department and in the reserve occupation at Rose Bay Flying Bay Base. But then your whole life and your whole working system changed when you got up north. You didn't know it but the country was on a war footing and not prepared for it so you were filling in. And possibly there was some satisfaction in

31:30 knowing that you had a job for life if you wanted it and with money you were being well paid and all the awards were being strictly adhered to. In those days the public service in Civil Aviation was well run because they had mostly retired leaders in the military or navy in those jobs. And while they were stupid in some sense they were excellent in what they were doing. And they maintained excellent discipline and supply and care of their people.

32:00 I've got to say that although we could have said no. But what would have happened to the planes? They'd have been flying around and run out of petrol. You just were picked for your responsibility and you got the job and you had the people looking after you while you did the job. We never had one person

falter anywhere. Nobody went down except when we got sick in Darwin. Nobody went down in Groot Island. That was probably one of the best parts of that job. It was the

32:30 camaraderie on the one hand but knowing you were being looked after with almost an open cheque book when you wanted it. Whilst we weren't getting paid we could go to the boss and if it was his own money we couldn't have cared a less as long as we got money to go and buy a feed or pay whatever we had to pay. As I said I never saw a time sheet and he had everything under control. And the fact that they re-employed me must have meant that I did everything that I was supposed to do. It was a great life.

33:00 The pressure was colossal. I've never had the pressure since unless it was fright to come out of the five days out cold waiting to recover from the heart operation. It was a joy to work for people who were all responsible. That's the best way of putting it - all responsible -and you can't get that today.

**What about when you were sick, when you said the blokes around you started getting sick in Darwin with Dengue**

33:30 **Fever or something like that, what happened when you went to the hospital?**

We were taken to the hospital moaning, half out to it, and we were admitted to the hospital straight away. They knew what we were doing and why we were in and they knew the boss would be up to pick us up in a few days whether we were well or not which was the case. But that was no trouble.

**Can you describe the hospital for us?**

It was like a large size 24-bed - in the wing I was in. I think there were two or three wings to it. I was only in the one

34:00 wing each time I went in. It was very well run and very similar to the manner in which the military hospitals are built today like Yeronga Hospital out here in Brisbane. A low lying place with all the facilities built into it. There was an excellent staff - there was about a 30% - and this is purely a guess - 30% aboriginal staff but all well mannered and well dressed and well disciplined. No matter what you say about it

34:30 it was excellently run. As a matter of fact I visit Brisbane General Hospital here - I was there for about 4 or 5 days visiting people and checking out problems - and the Brisbane hospital here has got too many staff and too many bosses and not enough workers and they couldn't care a less. So the service life or the service industry has gone backwards, a long way backwards. But they all wanting more

35:00 money and that's what they are sitting down talking about instead of doing their job. I think there were something like 20 people in the office and looking after the few wards that I was in one time. And I said, "What's all the traffic jam for?" "Oh, they're talking about last night's party or what they're going to do at the weekend." You never got that in Darwin. Everybody seemed to be too busy. I can't tell you why. It was probably the nature of the thing because up until the bombing they weren't bringing a great number of

35:30 casualties in to the hospital. If they did they got them out of Darwin in a hurry but I thought it was well run up to that point.

**You were in the hospital when Darwin got bombed?**

When the bombs were dropped I was standing in a doorway like that.

**Can you describe what it was like seeing the planes coming in?**

I said, "What are the red spots on it? They look like bombs". And then I got a little nurse, I'm looking on a palliasse on a train and I've got a little nurse

36:00 looking after me. I should say, "What a wonderful thing," but not in the condition I was in. I didn't enjoy it. She was a lovely person. She lives in Cairns now I'm told.

**Did you find out what happened to any of the other people that you were in hospital with?**

I couldn't tell you what was wrong with the other people. A lot of them were suffering from the same problem that I was suffering from either dengue fever or whatever the fever we had or picked up. Some of them could sit up and some couldn't. There was one

36:30 broken leg that's the best I can tell you. There was a Dutch woman out on one of the verandas who wouldn't shut up day and night. I don't know what happened to her but that's the way they were. They wanted attention - nobody else existed with the Dutch they wanted everyone looking after them all the time. Everybody spoke about her. But, no, I can't tell you any more about that about Darwin in the hospital. All I know is that the bomb - I've since read in books - the bomb that hit the

37:00 front of the hospital where I was - it didn't hit the hospital itself. It did enough damage but it hit the front just in front of me and it was meant for Larakia Barracks which was in the same line just across the hill. And they just pressed the button too early and the bomb fell on us.

**When you came to after you'd been knocked out and you realised what had happened that**

**you'd been bombed by the Japanese did you remember what your first thoughts were?**

- 37:30 Not on that day I wouldn't have. It was the second day I think before I was getting the full story and I said, "Them bastards, I'm going after them". Those were my thoughts at that time and I don't think I ever lost it. But I had to get up with it and keep them away from Australia. Those were my thoughts. I couldn't buy that at all. That was an insult to us. Yet there was a surprising thing I haven't got it now I think because I lent it to somebody at some meeting and they took it. When we went to
- 38:00 Darwin we got belt buckles available to us with a big 7 on it. I'm sure it was a 7 because they'd bombed Honolulu or something on the 7th of December I think it was. It was that date, if it was the 7th I can't be certain now, but everybody got these belt buckles and they seemed to get them for free. Why and how? Nobody can explain why that happened.
- 38:30 We all got these belt buckles with the big 7 on it and that was the day they hit Honolulu. So it must have been planned a long way ahead. I wouldn't know but that's my guess. I had one and I bought it home with me. I finished up with it here - I don't know whether I got it in Darwin, I think I got it in Darwin, I'm nearly sure I got it in Darwin but how it finished up with more I don't know. I could have got it in Groot Island because they had them on Groot Island. They were distributed up the north everywhere. They must have printed millions or made millions of these
- 39:00 buckles. It's something I can't understand it and nobody has satisfactorily explained it to me. But they were bringing all sorts of ships in to Darwin Harbour. It had become a refuge harbour. There were a lot more people that got killed. They told us 19 I think it was. It was a low number - it could have been 29. But there were five or six hundred actually killed in Darwin it was an absolute debacle.

**People that you knew?**

- 39:30 No. Well I'd never know. I've never been told of anybody I knew. I think our boys were on the water. And their launches were big enough to make a target but they were picking up the people jumping from the burning ships. There were a lot of wrecks up there in Darwin Harbour as likewise there is in Broome. The big flying boat when it flies out you can see the flying boat that they flew in. But they had open go the Japs [Japanese] and there's
- 40:00 nothing there. And we had officers up that they wouldn't even allow them to be put in the boy scouts - lack of brains and lack of intelligence and too much grog and they wanted each other to accept the responsibility. The records tell me they knew a half hour to 40 minutes ahead that the Japs were on their way to bomb Darwin and they said, "Oh, cut it out what do you think this is?" They cashiered them. They took them down south and they cashiered
- 40:30 them I understand but I've got no proof of that.

**What does cashiered mean?**

Kicked out - kicked out of the services because both people were responsible jointly. And everyone said do it and the other one said no you do it and, "Hello, what are those bombs doing?" Stupidity but it was a frontier town Darwin. It was really a frontier town in every respect. The wild gunman and the fabulous green

- 41:00 vegetables - I'll never forget that. We spent a lot of money for it and laughed all the way back to the launch. A lot of things happened. Some of the women came off and they were all Queens of England, particularly the Dutch. I felt honestly, I said to one bloke, "I'm going to push that bitch in. If she gets in I'm going to push her over the side". He said, "I feel like that too, Len, but we won't do it today". You've got no idea.

**We're just about out of tape so that is perfectly timed.**

## **Tape 7**

- 00:30 **Can you actually remember when the announcement came over that war had been declared?**

No I can't. I just can't remember that. No I can't.

**That's all right. What can you tell us about your militia service and how that came about?**

I think it was the issue of

- 01:00 boots uniform and great coat. We used to have to go from Arncliffe to Hurstville but you could walk up Wollongong Road I think it was and into Hurstville in about a half hour or so. Half the time we'd run up and walk back to get there. And I remember being in the grounds of the Hurstville Hall and I did mortar training machine gun training
- 01:30 and they tried me on range finding and I never left that job from then on because they always wanted me as a range finder. I can't tell you why but I always got that job. I wanted to get other jobs but they said, "No, that's your job that's it". After two years I don't know how I got out of that or why. I couldn't



answer that. But I did it because I wanted the great coat. In the back room that the boys had there were two double

- 02:00 beds and five were sleeping in them toe to head sort of thing. We had 3 army great coats in the wintertime on top of us and we needed them because we had nothing else. I can't tell you too much about the militia. I know we did a camp at Bulli and we had to climb Bulli Pass and carry all the mortars up. And we were half way down - no, we'd just started to hit the streets - and everyone for some
- 02:30 reason got an attack of dysentery. Oh boy wasn't there a scatter then. There wasn't anything you could do about it you had to relieve yourself. And they took it down to some of the food they took up or something. It caught all of us. And I remember that in particular. And I remember doing a range finder's course at Randwick Rifle Range. And I top scored there and I can't tell you why. It must have been better eyesight than I've got now. But it was great fun. It was enjoyable time. Again we had that
- 03:00 esprit de corps that you don't get today. You stuck like steam no matter who you were - even though you hated the bloke in civvy life it takes on a different character of life itself when you're with a mate that you could depend on for the rest of your life. It's a hard thing to say but you've got to experience it to know it. A football team is one thing because you know you're going to finish the game but a war you don't. And probably one of the hardest things to is to be with a
- 03:30 team and one of your mates are dead and you've got to leave him to protect yourselves. And that doesn't hit you then. You just do it because that's your job. But like the aircrews when you come back it hits you then and you realise what's happened so you get on the booze. But in our case there was no such thing as booze. You just put up with what it was and a lot of them cracked up, a hell of a lot of them cracked up which you don't hear much about in war. When the
- 04:00 Japs attempted to cross the Owen Stanleys [Owen Stanley Ranges] they struck our ill-prepared troops while there were arms and couldn't beat them with strength to strength like both sides had bullets and rifles it was OK. But when we'd run out of food and kept going and then we would run out of ammunition and we couldn't keep going so you'd have to retreat. They label those particular people as deserters some of them. They had no idea what they were
- 04:30 talking about. They just had nothing to fight with and of course they were hungry as well. I don't know. You don't leave your mate behind unless you have to. The Yanks have got a very strong policy which I admire very much and they take all their troops home no matter what it costs. I think that is one of the greatest things. I won't go into that because it gets away from what we're saying but the way the different nations treat their soldiers or ex-
- 05:00 soldiers with some of them it's a national disgrace. In certain parts of Repatriation Act Australia leads in the world. But in caring for the individual and the body it takes on a greater note of importance in America than it does here because we'll bury them in the fields where they are. Of course we can't blame the authorities for that because what we might have is impossible to identify them but we know they were there. It's just amazing.
- 05:30 **Before the Japanese came into the war did you remember hearing much about the war against Germany?**
- Yes. I heard a lot about Germany. We heard a lot of propaganda about Germany but we didn't take them seriously because we felt we could contain them. In later years I've learned that the way Germany and Europe got out of the Depression was to back Germany and the only way they could create jobs was to build up arms and then if you've got arms you can't do anything with
- 06:00 them. In Australia today Warangarra underground has got shells from World War I that are part of our national treasure and huge underground storages there but they'll never use them because they're obsolete but they can't dispose of them. They are Australia's national treasure. It's amazing. But in Germany of course Hitler said, "I've got to spend money" - like the mad mob here in Queensland they're building
- 06:30 sporting fields instead of the other super structure. They have to. But in another 3 or 4 years because private dwelling construction will fall off you will find the government will then spend its money hoping that it's at a much lower price than now. And that will be on roads and bridges and all that's good for Australia. No, I didn't hear much money for Germany. I knew - it
- 07:00 started before I finished my trade. The good tools you got were European but mostly made in Germany. Then you got it made in Japan too when Japan tried to break America and now we're getting it made in China. And we're putting the Olympic Games into China and we're building up China for war because they can lose 20 or 30 million and not worry about it. It's part of the economy of the world - boom and bust sort of thing. And after bust you have a nice little neat war.
- 07:30 This war in Iraq and those places is untimely but we've got new weapons we've got to try out anyway.

**Did you ever hear of any blokes working with yourself who got the whole white feather business?**

No. I've never experienced any of that nor know of any of it. It didn't come into my circle of friends or my life at all. I've never experienced that.

08:00 I feel that people have spoken about it but I couldn't because that would put it forward as I knew all about it and there'd be a reason for it. I know a lot of politicians did.

**At what stage had your brothers joined up?**

Jimmy - 4,304 was his number. He couldn't get into it quick enough because he was military minded from the day he was born. He always had to be in the military.

08:30 And he had a great service in the Middle East and New Guinea - a wonderful service. He was 2/3 Battalion which was one of our best fighting units. He loved it. He would still be in it if he was still alive. He would still want to be in it. He couldn't help it he was always a soldier from the time he was born. I can't tell you the reason for that. Lyle went in and

09:00 became a cook and Frank went in and became the guard for I think Bennett at one time - the man that should have got a white feather, Bennett, the man who ran out at Singapore. Frank at one time was his bodyguard because he could handle himself. Then he went to New Guinea as body guard for somebody else and he mostly spent his time looking after the commanding officer. I can't tell you why but he was very well built and really knew how to handle himself and was very well

09:30 co-ordinated. Pat went in and they wanted somebody to look after the furnace at Duntroon Military College, the hot water furnace. He said, "I don't know what it entails but there's no boss, no discipline and no parades. That'll do me." So he took the job and he tried to get overseas 3 or 4 times. I've seen his applications. And they rejected him because he was the only one who could keep the hot water hot in

10:00 Duntroon in that period of time. He'd got the best record and they wouldn't release him. They couldn't get anybody else who was reliable. But he got that because he was his own boss. All he had to do was keep the water hot and that's what he did. Lyle, he finished up a cook and finished up at Duntroon and at Cowra in the prisoner of war camp when the Japs broke out. I don't know where he finished - he was the eldest one.

**Do you know how your mum felt about having so many of the boys?**

10:30 Proud. She was always proud of her boys. "My boy Jimmy the soldier." No, she was very proud of that she wanted them to make them something. I suppose that's why she taught me to read jam tin labels and memorise them. I've got a cow of a memory for most things but if I get something like these Repat cases where there's a lot of heavy reading and memorising I don't forget a

11:00 thing and I get all the angles. Somebody called me in a Repat Veterans' Review Board Case and the fellow came out and he said, "Righto, billiard table, inside." And I thought he was insulting me and still do. And afterwards we came out and we were talking about something and I said, "By the way where do you get this business billiard table label for me". He said, "Mate, I couldn't think of anything better. You're all angles. You've got every angle in the book". I then took it as a

11:30 compliment and I assumed that's how he meant it but I don't like surprises.

**When you decided you want to have your own personal chop at the Japanese and try to get into the army and the air force did you have to lie to get into the air force?**

No. At no time - except that I had a bad memory and I forgot to tell them I was in a reserved occupation but I didn't lie. I put it straightforward. I put my

12:00 credentials and my apprenticeship papers on the desk - no worries. They sent me down to Sydney Tech to have a trade test and I walked in and I said, "Where are the tools?" And he said, "Here they are." This is the sergeant in the air force, the testing sergeant. And he gave me a saw and so many chisels and a hammer and said, "I want you to make that on the plan". And I said, "I can't make that." And he said, "Why can't you make it? You applied for the job."

12:30 I said, "Look at the bloody tools you gave me, they're blunt". He said, "You're passed. Hooray". I couldn't use the tools they were blunt and I think that was the test. Some people, it wouldn't matter what state the tools were in, would try and use them. But I couldn't use them I would have spent all day there just sharpening the tools and I told him that. He said, "Hooray, mate, you're passed". But he'd already seen my apprenticeship so he knew it was no using fooling with me because that's the first thing you learn in any trade is make sure your tools are all right. But, no, I

13:00 didn't have any trouble there.

**Did you have to do a medical and other things like that?**

Yes I had to do all those things and I passed fit 100% at that time.

**And what did basic training involve?**

Sorry?

**Did you have to do rookie training?**

Yes I had to do rookie training. The first thing I knew we were at Tocumwal. I went to Tocumwal in the middle of winter and I swam across the Murray River at six o'clock in the morning in the middle of winter whether you liked it or not. And you thought,

- 13:30 "That's good they'll send the truck around for us". Like hell! You had to swim back. That's what I remembered about Tocumwal. And then we went into Wagga, they'd just opened up Wagga Recruit Training, and we went down there for about a fortnight until we got posted to Melbourne. And then from Melbourne we went on to Mount Druitt and from Mount Druitt we went on to Townsville. And I think it was about 3 months of that and then I was in Townsville - oh it would be for 6 or 8 months before I was in Townsville and
- 14:00 that's where the military police caught up with me and tried to take me back. And my boss said, "No way, you're not taking him, and furthermore he's trained - take me instead". And he told me about this later but I just laughed at it. He said, "No way, you're not going. You're useless around here but I need you" - a good bloke. We had one of the best commanding units ever in that unit we had. I'm corresponding with another 1st Australian
- 14:30 Psych [Psychiatric] Unit -he lives outside of Wollongong. I'm corresponding with him at the moment on another case and the official reports I've seen he was a well-educated university man, he was a psychologist of course among other things, and they put him in charge of this unit into Vietnam. And it was the first unit and nobody knew what to do and he didn't. And they called him the most efficient man in the unit or in the army - brilliant, brilliant academic.
- 15:00 And he laughs at them. He says, "I couldn't say the same about them because they've got no qualifications". So they made good politicians but no qualifications and that's what the constitution says with politicians.

**You were telling us off camera at all about promotions or lack of?**

Yes. My promotion - there I am I entered the air force as a leading aircraftsman and got discharged a leading aircraftsman. After my prowess was developed

- 15:30 and I did things and got away with them but I did things, I achieved them. I had another fellow in the air force with me but he was not a carpenter he was the carpenter. He spent more time telling you how good he was than any time working. And I'm buzzing around getting things done and trying to hide him because he's useless. I don't know how he got into the air force as a carpenter I think he was a clerk. We're in Morotai and that's where we built that
- 16:00 mysterious big building that had no origin. So it comes up for promotions and the boss lines us up on the parade ground and says, "I've got to make recommendations for promotions". So we get to Tarakan when the promotions come out and my mate, the useless clot, becomes a corporal. And my gang - well the boys that were with me - said, "Listen, Len, there's something wrong. They've made a mistake. Front the commanding officer". I said, "I will but not on your
- 16:30 choosing on my time". About 3 weeks later I don't know what it was but I had to see him and I said, "By the way, sir, what happened to the promotion list you recommended". He said, "I don't know how to tell you this but have a coffee. I've got a whisky there if you want it". This is when we were in Tarakan, there's no rank, nothing. He said, "It's difficult for me to phrase it but let me put it to you this way am I getting into bed with your sister?" I said, "I don't know, sir". He said, "Well I'm getting into bed with his and he's a Corporal, shut your mouth." "All right."
- 17:00 I went back to the boys and what can you tell the boys? I said, "He thinks there's a mistake at headquarters." That's the end of that story - that's simple. I don't know whether he married the woman or not but that was as simple as that. Later on I was having a meal with him in Sydney after the war and I said, "I'm in shock by what you were doing up there and that other bloke got the promotion." He said, "Yes, I should have given it to you, Len. Ah but" he said, "you know how these things happen." We went out to his car,
- 17:30 over on the north shore somewhere, and it is on bricks. While we were having a meal somebody got on to it. A brand new car and that day or the day before he got it and somebody came along and stole his four wheels. Wasn't he jumping up and down. I saw sides of him I never knew. But that's how life is and you just accept it. So I laugh at it now because I've done better than all of those blokes.

**What sort of advance warning did you**

- 18:00 **get of being sent overseas?**

About a fortnight - that we could be going overseas soon and to pack your kit. "Be ready to move at five minutes notice," was the word we got passed around to us. And then we started to get bored because it was really a fortnight before we went and over a day we had everything spic and span, clean and ready to go and nothing happened. Until about 4 o'clock one Friday they said, "You're getting on the

- 18:30 plane in about an hour's time." And we were camped not far from Garvin Airfield in Townsville. I said, "You give us a fortnight's notice to tell us that you're going to give us an hour's notice." "What's up with you? You get on that plane or you're not bloody going mate." So we did. We got on a DC and flew across to Moresby and then on to Morotai. Don't ask me why they flew us across but apparently there was a

big push on – they were leaving Morotai, Noemfoor and Morotai and pushing up to the

- 19:00 Philippines somewhere and preparing for the push across to Tarakan. They give you a lot of notice but it's not serious and then when they give you notice you've got to be ready to move because they gave you a fortnight to get ready. You accept it.

**What was the correspondence like between your wife and yourself?**

I can't really answer that but it was very sparse, very scarce and when you got a letter it was

- 19:30 chopped about so much that you had to try and fill in the spaces. And we knew when it was going out, they had an Indian officer up there that was the censor man. Somebody should have censored him on common sense because he had no brains. I never asked Lynne what the correspondence was. Maybe once a fortnight or once a month. You could never depend on it, never at all. When I was sending these cigars I got free in Tarakan and Morotai
- 20:00 in the parcels issued by the government, or it was supposed to be the Red Cross or somebody, I sent the cigars to my brother in New Guinea further down the road. He got prompt delivery and almost knew to the day they were coming because there was no mail going that way and it might have been the only letter on the plane because nobody was writing to anybody in New Guinea except me. And he used to walk around smoking these cigars and they said, "Where did you get them?" "I've got a sheila [woman] in the bush that comes in every day". He was
- 20:30 skiting about getting these cigars when nobody else was getting them. But when you're talking about mail that's one of the things that happened. I never had any problems with mail but I used to wait for it anxiously and you get worse and worse you get very lonely. And then you might get four or five letters at once. And then you got part of letters because they are chopped up or they are blocked out. You got the mail. That's all you can say but don't ask on delivery times.
- 21:00 Sometimes in Noemfoor we got mail. Don't ask me why we got it in Noemfoor. Then we went to Morotai and it was weeks and weeks before we got mail. I don't know about the service or the shuttle. I can't answer what was going on there but mail would be offloaded for ammunition or any vital part and we knew that because that was our job to get it.

**What about comforts and things like that - Red Cross parcels?**

We got them on a fairly regular basis. We had a fellow called Chips

- 21:30 Rafferty, the Australian film star, and he was in charge of the parcels. Lots of times you got parcels with no cigarettes in. It is rumoured, rumoured I said, that he was taking them out and selling them - I couldn't believe that - particularly to his air force mates who were flying them back on empty planes to the mainland and getting a good price for them because there was tobacco rationing. We wouldn't believe that. That couldn't happen, not in Australia but that's
- 22:00 what was rumoured. And then all of a sudden you'd get too many cigarettes. He couldn't get that batch out or something like that would have happened. They were very regular and ammunition plentiful - food maybe. We had a good cook that could cook M&V in a thousand different ways or baked beans he could do baked beans up that you could eat. And dried egg powder the
- 22:30 things he did with that. He was an excellent first class cook. The meals were very good and the food very scarce at times and other times you had an abundance. It would be a difficult job getting ammunition into areas and you couldn't get enough food in as ammo was priority one. It was a good life but you would run out of clothes occasionally. I don't know whether it was the water or the way we washed them in these chufas, this hot water on a pipe
- 23:00 leading to a tank with a small tin with petrol in and it was firing this thing and would boil it up. I don't know whether the various washing powders we'd put in did the job but they also ruined the clothes. They didn't last long. The green came out of our uniform in about two washes. They put - the uniforms were dyed green, parts of them, or a khaki colour. And that would come out
- 23:30 quick smart. You had shirts nearly as good as the one I've got on - a clear white - and it'd have started out as a camouflage shirt. And also if you had a brand new shirt on even though you washed it all day with the sweat you'd finish up with a pattern on your body. And you'd get tinea and dermatitis and all sorts of things you were always plagued with that. But that's par for the course. It's par for the course. You get sick and tired of it but that's there and you accept it.
- 24:00 Now what was the other one you were going to ask me about? Some cases - I thought of two out there. Two air force blokes. I got quite a few Korean blokes. I've got hold of them. They're deadbeat but I've rehabilitated them as far as I can go. They're too old to get TPI, Totally Permanent
- 24:30 Pension. I got them an EDA [Extreme Disablement Adjustment - Pension] which Mr Keating brought in to save paying out on the TPI because he said if they get over 65 they don't need a TPI any more we'll only give them an extreme disability assessment pension which is about \$150 a fortnight less. He didn't like soldiers because they cost money. That's only my personal opinion. I could go
- 25:00 on with countless stories now. I told you one fellow down the Gold Coast was running way because he

was a POW and would hide. It was very hard to get him to do anything and he finished up with a very low pension. I had another fellow that his father kicked him out of his house like a mongrel dog when he was about 10. He finished up over at Hammond here living in a shed at the back of the house and living like a

- 25:30 dog. And the people next door saw him and took him in and reared him. He joined the 8th Division and was taken prisoner of war in Singapore and had a hell of a life but survived despite the starvation and all that. He came back here worn out, dead beat and useless and managed to get a job with the Postmaster General's Department - most of our soldiers got jobs in Government Departments because there was preference for returned men at that time. And he
- 26:00 survived in there with the help of a lot of blokes that covered him up while he's lying in a hut somewhere bugged. But they're doing his job and he's on the payroll. Merv, I've trained him to be an advocate and a welfare officer, he's still on the coast. I finished up getting him a TPI and it changed him because in the process of getting the TPI he goes to a psychiatrist and gets counselling from psychologists and all that and he's sticking with his tablets and he's leading a
- 26:30 pretty good life. That's one of them and I've got a lot like that. I've got another fellow I got here - I think he came from Doctor - he's a Greek Doctor over near Annerley, Willis Hill. He rang me up one day and he said, "I've got a woman here that's nearly off her head and it's caused by her husband not by illnesses". And he said, "I want to send her husband to
- 27:00 you". I said, "Oh Doc, cut it out, I've got too much". He said, "Have a look at him for me will you, Len?" So I did. He was in the Port Moresby Jackson Airfield disaster. That's the one where the plane came in on a load of trucks. And he was standing not far from the trucks and they missed being hit with the blast. He was standing there with his mate and then a bomb exploded. And it split his mate right up the
- 27:30 middle next to him. He doesn't know what hit him but he came to lying on the floor wrapped up in a blanket. Wasn't he lucky. This part of the bomb or part of the plane blew his mate in half, straight through the middle. He couldn't get that out of his mind so Dr Conomos, I thought of his name then, sent him to me and I got him to other doctors and psychiatrists with Conomos' referrals.
- 28:00 He's on his feet now. As a matter of fact I think he's away on holidays at the moment. And I got him an EDA. But he would either be drunk or unsociable both to himself and his family. It was a very sad case and he was beaten by himself. He couldn't understand himself or what was happening to him or why until I sorted him out and now he's a pretty good bloke. He doesn't drink grog and he doesn't smoke and that's where it is.
- 28:30 He's a very, very happy fellow at the moment and so is the family. I've got a fellow up at Maree here and he was in the front line doing infantry work the hard way and a lot of terrific shows in Vietnam and a lot of real good battles and he survived them. He gets back to camp and they tell him his brother, in the unit next door to him, was shot dead. And then they told him a week later he was shot by friendly fire. He went out to the toilet outside the
- 29:00 boundaries and they changed sentries. The sentry who knew he was going changed with somebody else. When he came back he didn't know the password of the day and the bloke shot him dead which was right, he did his job, but it was one of his mob. And this bloke went off his head. If a helicopter went over, particularly of a mate that was in Vietnam, he'd go off his head. They'd have to send him home or take him home. I had five jobs in one day - another fellow that punched
- 29:30 everybody in the nose that he met. He was driving backhoes and all sorts of things. His wife rang me and said, "I don't know, somebody suggested your name or gave me your phone number," but she said, "I need help badly". When I went to see him I didn't know who he was so he threw the microwave out the door at me. And when I went in he had a beautifully decorated wall. It was a fibro wall and he'd punched it all in with his fists. A complete ratbag.
- 30:00 I mentioned earlier the fellow who took the 3 psychiatrists, he's the one. I took him to the psychiatrist that handles policemen and ambulancemen and he was the one. Now if he doesn't take his tablets for two days she's got to call the police. He goes mad. I haven't settled him down but I've got him reasonable and she can handle him.

**What about yourself, Len, did you find that you had problems?**

I mentioned earlier where the young fellow

- 30:30 told me last year, or asked me last year was I crawling around the floor with tears running down my eyes and wouldn't have anybody near me. I remember those times. That's before I went into hospital after I'd done all that work with the trucks before I moved up here in about '57. That would be about '55/'56. But there's a local doctor, a specialist in Brisbane, and I would see him occasionally and he would come down and shake his head and the wife would say "No, don't give him injections. He'll die on us." I was in lots of
- 31:00 trouble, a lot of trouble. Through the war I developed this. If the pressure is on and full of danger and full of deadlines I get the job done, four days later I'm a cot case. I'm not interested. The world just disappears from my mind. I've got to pick myself up. And that's why in doing this advocacy work, welfare work, I don't let my mind get idle.

- 31:30 I can't afford it. I've got it fully occupied all the time or I try to fill it up but lately I'm dropping it off. I've been forced to with the wife's eye operations. For 3 years I've been going at a very go slow pace because once I get stuck into anything I don't want to talk to anybody for four or five hours I just want to be left alone to think it out. But with my wife and her eyes at one stage I was putting drops in her eyes every hour over 72 hours. I'd have the alarm clock going on
- 32:00 me and I'd get her half away and put the drops in her eyes and go back to bed for twenty minutes or half an hour and then get her up. She didn't even know I was putting the drops in her eyes. She was out to it. I went to the chemist one day and had to get some more drops and I'm hanging on to the counter like grim death, my knuckles went white according to the pharmacist, and all the things on the shelves were dancing around. And they gave it to me and they said, "Will you be all right, Len, will we drive you home?" "No, my car is here I'll get home".
- 32:30 They told me 3 weeks later that I was out on my feet. I don't know but I survived that one. And the worst period apart from the drops every hour was she had to have them every 3 or 4 hours then. I couldn't put my mind down to concentrate on it because I'd get it broken up. I tried to do other jobs around the house and bring the tools out and then I'd have to tend to her and put the tools away because the time had gone that I'd allocated. I've had a lot of problems that
- 33:00 only I know about. I have great difficulty if I have two or three 2weeks with no heavy concentration. I'm a ratbag. And on the anniversary of the bombing of Darwin, the 19th of February which has just passed, either before, during or immediately afterwards I'm a cot case. Every year is the same and I can't tell you why. Just recently I lay in that bed and I thought I was dying for two and a half days.
- 33:30 And when it was all over it passed away. And I was certain I was dying. I was going stiff and I was paining and I couldn't lie to the left or the right. I was flat down looking at the ceiling for 3 days. I came out of it with terrific pain. And that's the kind of thing that affects me around the 19th of February. I hate the day. Also I hate tremendous pressure and I survive it but I'm no good. If I have a half a day in
- 34:00 court I come home and go to bed which is my cure. If I have 2 days heavy work I have two days off because I have to not because I want to. And this work doesn't give me time, or doesn't permit me time, to get at those evils in me. At one stage, I think it was when I was crawling around the floor they said he's got anxiety hysteria. I don't care what they call it -
- 34:30 that's what they said it was but they've changed it since. That's why I, along with many, many people in the world, were pleased to see post traumatic stress come in, or it's known as PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder]. The world health whatever it is got sick and tired of requests from specialists all around the world asking couldn't they give them a better name for bomb happy, battle fatigue
- 35:00 anxiety hysteria, anxiety, neurosis and 3 or 4 hundred different names for one thing. So the world health department of the United Nations called 12 psychiatrists from every western nation and they were in New York for 12 months to study and get a common name that they could use to describe war stress
- 35:30 combat stress, call it what you may, or bomb happy or whatever you call it and give it a name. And they came up with post-traumatic stress. Now the government is trying to beat that because civilians are now starting through their solicitors claiming post-traumatic stress and winning because it has no criteria. Nobody can give you a positive test. Only psychiatrists can assume from what you tell them. I tell psychiatrists what it's all
- 36:00 about particularly the history of it. I followed it from when it was introduced in America in 1975 to 1980 and made a study of it and that's enabled me to win so many cases because a lot of people that are in authority and are sitting on tribunals only hear of the name but don't know the import of it. The exact meaning and what it can label - I made a specialist study on it. I deliberately
- 36:30 did that. I got all the books on it I could get. I got them off doctors I got them off the New Scientist I got all the Commonwealth books on it. I was quite disappointed how our government had to test it for five years while the Yanks were already using it but that's our laws and now I approve of it. But I was labelled PTSD then because they couldn't tell me whether it was anxiety hysteria, anxiety stress or one of the anxieties. Everybody kept giving me a different
- 37:00 label. So I gave up on them then. They gave me shock treatment and all to try and unload it. They weren't successful in my case so I had to give them away and develop my own scheme. I'm on no tablets for stress or anxiety or anything like that because I believe I have balanced my life out with the help of the welfare work and the advocacy. And the harder and tougher the challenge the better I like
- 37:30 it because it absorbs me more. I don't have the problems that I used to have with the wife and the son - all mine. You could walk away and sit down in the back yard and just sit there and do nothing, don't move, and then come back and you're all right. You've got to have an oasis to go to. But no I'm nowhere near affected now with it. If I have a light day and I don't exercise my mind and my body I can get into trouble easily.
- 38:00 And that's true and that's why I'm a strong advocate that the rehabilitation of troops must include physical exercise. If I'm doing very heavy work which I've got a couple of cases on at the moment - Monday all day in research and Tuesday, that was yesterday, I started at about 4 in the morning and

finished at about 9 at night and slept and I had a good night's sleep and nothing else.

- 38:30 disturbs me. I've got to control my mind and that sounds so silly to say but I've got to do it. I can't let it control me or I'm off the planet so to speak. I don't take any tablets or any of that now because I've got a world-class psych up in Ipswich. That's another story about him. He and I are pretty good mates and I went for a check before Christmas bearing in mind I'm going on a trip and you can't be foolish behind the wheel of a
- 39:00 car or have these types of attacks. I said, "Doctor, do you think I ought to take tablets. Do you think I ought to go on tablets and prepare myself". He said, "What's wrong with you?" I said 'Nothing. But I'm taught to be cautious and you're the one that taught me." I said, "I've come to check out with you." He said, "Go on your bloody holiday, mate, and if you get into trouble ring me." I don't have those problems now and being involved with other people's problems absorbs me. And that's what you have to be in life - be absorbed. You don't
- 39:30 want to be, you're dead tired, but you've got to do it. If I walk 7,000 steps of a morning, from 4,000 to 7,000 most mornings when I'm not swimming I don't have any problem all day. But if I don't walk say for 3 days I'm wondering what's up with me. I can't start. I've got no energy, I've got nothing. But that may be contributed to by my major heart surgery. But I don't have any problems
- 40:00 now. I've got a bit of arthritis and nothing else. I'm deadly serious when I get into court. I can't understand myself in court. I scare the veteran that I'm with because I've done his case and I've locked my mind into it. I've also locked my mind into countering any questions they ask and I nearly snap their heads off when I come back fast. Old Judge Green, the state judge, said to me one day outside he said, "Jesus, Len, you get on fire don't you when we
- 40:30 attack you?" I said, "I think it's a lack of common sense. If somebody doesn't read the précis that I've presented." He said, "I did and I understand it but watch yourself buster." And I laughed at him and he laughed and walked away. But I can get very irate when I'm backed up because I feel that I've done that much work that I shouldn't have to field these questions. But then in these Tribunals and Administrative Appeal they have to have something on
- 41:00 tape to justify their existence - that you were there and they did ask you the questions. I spend a lot of time presenting a case so there are no questions. I tell everybody if I'm in there longer than 20 minutes we've lost. And I'm never there longer than 20 minutes.

## Tape 8

- 00:30 **Can we maybe talk about when you first went overseas as part of your service. What was it like when you first went to Noemfoor?**
- Noemfoor, yes. Well, we approached it this way. We had been ordered a fortnight before to prepare and got about an hour's notice and got on the plane excited and full of
- 01:00 fear. I have to say that because while we were laughing and joking and the fun and gestures and remarks and all this type of thing was to cover up our nervousness. We landed and refuelled I think it was at Moresby and had to leave the plane while they refuelled it. And we got on again, we left our gear on the plane of course, and then we landed at Noemfoor and we got stuck there for 2 or 3 days. No, we didn't land at
- 01:30 Moresby I got that wrong, it was Merauke - I've got myself tied in knots. It was Merauke we landed at and then we refuelled there and then went on to Noemfoor which was only a short hop. And we got to Noemfoor and we got stuck there I think it was 2 or 3 days until we collected a few more stores but nowhere near where we wanted. And we were still excited but highly nervous. And then somehow or other the mixing with the
- 02:00 Yanks and being a part of the war scene instead of an isolated unit stuck in the back blocks packing boxes and getting ready we were a part of the scene. Then we started to lose our fear and say well we're not alone. That seemed to be the thought that was pervading our minds. When we got to Morotai we just got too busy and if anybody started talking about the war or the Japs next door in the trees over there we shut them up quickly and got onto another subject. We just
- 02:30 didn't talk about. We just got on with the job. Then we built the shed there at the end of the airstrip and stole - well we didn't steal anything we just happened to have Mandrake with us who produced some sheds for us that happened to be at another place on the island. And then we had to pack up and get ready to take our gear across to Tarakan which we didn't take - probably the most apprehensive fear that we developed was going into
- 03:00 Tarakan when we were leaving Morotai because we, the 14 of us that were the advance party, went in ahead of the others to prepare for their coming. We didn't know that we were going to be landed with the 2nd wave of troops into - I think it was on Day 2 - into Tarakan. And we didn't know we were going to face what we were. And of course we had a lot of soldiers with us and a lot of the naval blokes and

although it was a short trip it was a very happy one. But then you get

- 03:30 dumped in the sea and clambering down the Westralia's side and landing all wet but nevertheless get on with the job and carry your pack like a real donkey - and then being met with the atrocities. By the time we got to our first overnight stop we were completely bewildered. Nervous, yes, but bewildered. We didn't know what world we were in, what country or where.
- 04:00 But somebody called it Tarakan. When the pressure came on when we moved forward again to the next houses where the fellow cut the telephone line and we had the troops about 200 yards up and the Japs counter attacked - then the fear started to hit us. But it was a fleeting fear. It was only on for seconds because we were that busy making sure everything was right and getting
- 04:30 ready to either push ahead or be attacked. We were fully prepared and we were so preoccupied and all we were interested in was to make sure that the Jap bloke didn't get past us. It meant that if they got to us - hammering us hard - although they had fired mortars at us and bullets we knew that our troops had either lost or were in trouble. But for some reason we didn't develop fear at that
- 05:00 point. I remember we did a reconnaissance back to the end of the trail to see how many we had behind us when there were not too many troops, a few stragglers, and we must have walked a mile. We were in a paddock here and we walked back about - it wouldn't be a mile - there were big palm trees, this was a hill with palm trees on, and we turned around to walk back. And I said to my mate, "Geez those march flies are bad aren't they," because the flies up there are
- 05:30 really big. As big as the biggest bee we see here. And they go "Zz. Zz" and you'd hear them. I said, "Listen, there's one over there and another one there." And all of a sudden we're lying on the ground. We'd been hit by a couple of commandos. I don't know what they were doing but they were lying in the grass. "Keep down and shut up and do as you're told and don't put your head up. There's a couple of blokes shooting at you". We didn't know where they
- 06:00 were but they were tied to a couple of trees. The Japs had a habit of getting up there with plenty of ammo and they'd snipe you. These blokes disappeared and we lay there I can tell you full of fear at that moment because we didn't know whether the Japs were going to come from any other direction at us. And then we heard the burst of machine gun and the Jap fell out of the tree but not far because he's hooked up to a rope on his ankle. They shot them both down. They shot them dead. And they hung there and they came back and
- 06:30 they said, "Come on you silly mongrels. Come on with us". The two blokes picked us up. I tell you what it was the greatest thing we ever heard, "Come on with us". We didn't know the so called march flies were the bullets missing us. And we can't tell you why. The only thing we reckoned out later on was the palm tree just swayed the wrong way and they didn't pick the swaying up when they were firing. They knew the swaying was on but they couldn't pick it. And that probably saved our lives.
- 07:00 There were a few other nasty incidents but until I developed, months later, this amoebic dysentery I picked it up and it is brought about by water in that Tarakan area - they suffer from it a lot with it, it's a popular disease. We never experienced fear and I can't tell you why. We didn't. It hit me later on after the war more so. I think it hit me half way through the atebirin course when I was in
- 07:30 Concord Hospital down in Sydney. I was going on taking treatment like mad and all of a sudden I started shaking like crazy. I don't know what they hit me with, a needle of some sort, and quietened me down. And that happened two or three times when I was in there but they settled me down. It came back later on when I was in Byron Bay. I would work all day as hard as a bugger and start at probably 2 o'clock in the morning and have tea and I'm going well and all of a sudden I'm on the floor. I didn't know what had hit me. And
- 08:00 today I still don't know the incident the other day when I was 2 ½ days in bed and I didn't know what hit me. As you can see by this paper chart here of the heart - they took the top off here, cut it off and replaced it with a pin.
- 08:30 I forget the name of the darned thing now and they put the bypasses in and they report up here that I've got a little tiny black spot behind the heart. Now in the recent attack that I had in there the other day that I put down to nervous fear or post traumatic stress or whatever you like to call it I had to go to
- 09:00 hospital and have a scan and it has picked up the black spot again on the scan. And what they're going to do next Monday is we're going to talk it over and compare it with the size it was then and the size it is now. Now he doesn't think it has grown but we're going to discuss it and I may have to go in and have a check to see if it's moving. It's probably not. But that's a legacy from either the bombing or something but he wants to identify it. The
- 09:30 thought of that doesn't worry me at all. That's the aorta valve, that's the main valve there of the heart, and they just cut it off and they have [a] disk full of aorta valves, some are human and some are pigs. And they've got to get the right size, the same as they took out. And I was lucky I got an aorta valve from a pig which is the closest to human beings. So they fitted that to me
- 10:00 and as a result, after initial doses of warfarin, which is a deadly medication, I was taken off it. And



because I've got a pig valve in that is closer than a human valve my heart didn't reject it. I don't have to take anything for my heart at all. Not one single thing. That's a brilliant operation isn't it. They rip you down here with a saw, and it's an electric type of saw that's got a stopper on it,

- 10:30 and as soon as it hits the wrong type of flesh it stops and then they pull your bones apart and they take your heart out and cut the top off it and put another bit on. The glue has got to be good - better than what Coles sell. Then they put it back and they fix it up with all these transplants that they take out of your legs. I still have a little bit of trouble with these legs down here where they've taken all these veins out. Other than that I've had no trouble but they've told me not to do any
- 11:00 heavy lifting or anything like that. That could have been caused by the bombing or it could have been caused by other things like the food I ate. But he seems to think stress caused it because that seems to be a popular reason for developing these things. That's the only serious illness I've had and apart from the bombing and the dysentery and all those things no other major illnesses. I'm quite happy in the situation I'm in health wise now because at 83 I can skate can't I. I
- 11:30 get called a liar so many times when they ask me my age. I attribute quite frankly and quite honestly and all the things I've done about it that if I wasn't doing the welfare work and the advocacy I wouldn't be here because that's kept me sane. It's given me something to lock onto 24 hours a day if I have to. If I wake up of a night I have to have a notebook
- 12:00 beside me because my mind is racing with all the problems that I've had to sort out. And I find it is great medicine for me. Now you'll say, "That man is a rat bag". Well please yourself but you've got to sort your own life out. While I stay on water and light meals and exercise mentally and physically I'm good. How long I'll last for who knows? Do you know any other 83 year olds that drive around Australia? I don't have any problems with anything. And through this
- 12:30 network with all the people I've helped if I'm in trouble I've only got to pick up the phone and I've got 3 or 4 people here to help me if I want it. The network of friends and likewise for the wife I've got a really good life as a result of the work I'm doing. Not the result of a good job but of the work I'm doing. It occupies this. Maybe I'm wrong but I think occupation and exercise is the greatest thing they could do to rehabilitate soldiers. And if they
- 13:00 don't do it - for instance not so long ago you were being discharged from the services and you'd get one month's rehabilitation training. The boys sign the book and disappear for the day. They don't get any. It's not mandatory. It should be. The services should make it that you've got to be there and you've got to listen. They don't they go and play golf and come back and sign the book in the afternoon. That has been happening quite a lot. That shouldn't be allowed because you're still in the services and you should be
- 13:30 made to attend these parades and listen. I've chosen my path of life and supported it by the work I do. And it's the work I do that's given me this life I've got now. You probably think I'm sounding off now but that is absolutely the truth. I know when I haven't walked of a morning because sometimes I get tied up with visits in town and that. I know when I haven't got my mind full of things I've got to go and get it full. So, you know, you're probably looking at an
- 14:00 utter insane madman but I'm 83 and I'm in pretty good shape. But I can't do the work that I want to do. I just get so buggered but that's life.

**When you were going from Morotai to Tarakan you obviously didn't think you were going to have to fight?**

We had no idea. We just thought we were going over there to do our usual thing to put up the stores and do the material. We didn't think we would

- 14:30 be involved in any military action whatsoever. We were absolutely certain we weren't. It was just "It's OK boys, they've landed and you can go in and everything is cool." It's really good. No worries at all.

**At what point did you realise you were going to have to fight?**

Well when we finally got ashore wet at Tarakan - absolutely wet, everything wet, from being dumped in the sea - and we started to see the atrocities. And I said to the boys,

- 15:00 "Boys this is going to be a real sticky one, expect anything". And they said, "Are you psychic". And I said, "I don't know but have a look at that, have a look at that and have a look at that". They said, "We've got somebody here that's a real mean (I think they called him a mean bastard or something) but don't give him anything. Just go for him". And that was true because all the things we got involved in I've never fired so many shots out of a rifle in my whole air force history than I did in the first two or three days.
- 15:30 And sometimes we'd be firing at a person we couldn't see and he'd be firing back so there was somebody there.

**Can you talk us through that first couple of days when you arrived? Can you describe what you saw when you first came ashore?**

No I'm not going to do that. I don't want to relive it. My mind won't take it. But imagine the most

horrific atrocities you could read about or see in the films and multiply it a hundred times and that's it.

16:00 It was like going into a butcher's shop a lot of it. some of it I can describe - women with their breasts cut off, hands cut off, heads cut off, disembowelled. Blokes with the main thing there cut off behind them because they were running away from the Japs. People with their noses cut off because they were sticky-beaking and people with their ears cut off because they were sticky-beaking. Heads,

16:30 ears and body parts and a lot of other things. It just gets worse as it goes on so I just throw it out of my mind. I'm not prepared to talk about it. It is in plenty of books if you want to read it if you can find the books that it is in. They don't publicise that. War is a beautiful picture and makes a good movie and everything ends happily which is movie style but not real life.

**Can I ask you how the guys around you reacted coming ashore and seeing that?**

They didn't want to look. They'd seen that

17:00 much of it in the first couple of hundred yards that they just fixed their head at the palm trees and walked straight and never looked around. They were all horrified exactly like I was.

**So when was the first time after that that you actually had to fire a shot?**

That was about 3 or 4 o'clock we were there, at about 3 or 4 o'clock the next day. We hadn't gone far before we were firing guns and I mean firing guns. You could pump out

17:30 a magazine full of bullets in a second and you didn't know what you were firing out. And we tried to liaise with the army but they were too busy. They weren't interested in us. It wasn't a pleasant situation Tarakan in many ways. You rarely went - well I don't remember going anywhere unless you were armed and had a pocketful of bullets as well. It was a hell of a dangerous place I'd

18:00 say for maybe up to six weeks. But I know that the four or five days they were dragging the wounded out from just the end of the road, about the end of this street, and they were pulling people out on jeeps with stretchers on them and the people weren't moving on the stretchers. We saw blokes come out with all sorts of

18:30 injuries but they were walking wounded. And a lot of them were being forced to come out because they didn't want to leave. And I take my hat off to the 48th Battalion who were doing most of the work and what we saw and things that were happening. You'd go from a messenger boys in the Depression days to be in the middle of a military battle and if you allowed your mind to think, which you

19:00 didn't as much as possible, realise that you're it. You are the target. And that's a very difficult thing to comprehend. You try to walk away from yourself but you can't so you've got to stop and do your job. My point of view of war or life changed dramatically in that period. It was them or us and we were all determined it was going to be us no matter what. There would be

19:30 countless little incidents that of death threatening but we somehow got around them. I'm not kidding you on this one. I'm absolutely spot on with it. And later on, particularly the period just after the Japs closed, we had a lot of social functions or booze ups or whatever and we could do amongst ourselves, just for something to break the monotony of talking to our own selected mates,

20:00 we got some terrific stories from the army and they went through the same thoughts in the field. You had fear through you and through and through you but you kept a lid on it. And when the war was over that's when you exploded. But apart from that one of the things that was more apparent in the Vietnam war than in our war, they brought us back in ships and put us standing up in trucks and drove us down Queen Street. And I couldn't

20:30 understand that at all. With the Vietnam veteran they brought him back in the middle of the night and made sure he didn't go out in uniform and sent him home hidden away from the public and told him not to wear his uniform in public. It was a disgrace. And we came back as so called heroes and the last thing we wanted was people crowding and cheering and carrying on. You couldn't even raise your arm. You were morally and physically and mentally weak. You'd just sort of give a bit of a nod and

21:00 everybody's happy to see you there but you weren't happy to be there. I would say that you were morally exhausted because I cracked up pretty soon after that and I finished up again in Concord Hospital. I came back on our ship and we as patients shouldn't have paraded through town. We should have been put into hospital. And they sent us home but it wasn't too long before we were back. They didn't put us

21:30 straight into Concord Hospital. I don't know how I finished down there and I was supposed to have done the parade in Brisbane. I didn't do it in Sydney I know that. But that's where I finished up in Concord Hospital and I was there for 4 to 6 months. Unless I see the records I couldn't tell you exactly but I was there for too bloody long. I did get my mail from the wife there regularly. "When are you coming home?" I think was in every letter. That's another bitter pill.

**Where was she at that point?**

22:00 In Byron Bay with her mother. I remember when they eventually discharged me at Bradfield Park we

went through all the medicals and the first thing they got was all your hospital records and they said, "Well," – they said to me – this is why the rest of my life it is puzzling to me why I got involved – "Here is your form. You've got to sign it for a pension". And I said, "No, I want to go home," like we all did. "Well you've got a discharge from the

22:30 hospital but you can't be discharged from here until you sign the form". And I had a squadron leader lady, which upset me anyway, and she said, "You've got to sign that form before you leave here whether you like it or not. Go out and sit in the sun and think it over". I said, "The train goes at half past six". She said, "You sit in the sun". I came back at half past four and they called me in because there were only two of us sitting out there. I said, "No, I want to go home". And this Sheila said to me

23:00 "You have got your discharge. Get on your plane and get out of here". Now I was the victim of what I later got involved with in the hospital - not later – yes, later – no, where was I – I was in the hospital that's right – I was a victim of my own stupidity which I'd been training to sign the form. And I refused to do it because I wanted to get home. I was of a fixed mind. I'm not interested. I wanted a discharge.

**Len just because it's so far removed from**

23:30 **anything that I'm likely to experience in my lifetime can you tell me when you were at Tarakan and you first started fighting in that first couple of days and you went ashore and you weren't expecting to fight who handed you a gun?**

You carried your own gun. You had your own rifle with you. Everybody had a rifle. Don't ask me why everybody in the air force had a rifle at that time. We had a rifle and ammunition and had been trained fully in it. When we got into hostile territory you didn't carry it across your pack you carried it right in front of you.

24:00 You followed the gun. The gun was in front of you. And you never left it. You were no more than 2 ft away from it at any time for the first 3 or 4 weeks in Tarakan.

**Can you remember the very first time you saw the enemy?**

Yes we saw dead enemy in Morotai that was the first time we saw dead enemy. The first time we saw live enemy, and this will absolutely surprise you, as it did us,

24:30 they used to at the end of the airstrip put up an outdoor movie. That meant people came along with a contraption like you and set it up and everybody brought your own seat or sat on the ground. And we'd been at the movie 3 or 4 times in the few months that we were there. And one night we saw all the trucks coming forward with their lights on surrounding us. But you don't take any notice of that because you parked anywhere when you came to the movies. All of a sudden a whistle went off and the lights went on and they picked up all the Japs at the movie

25:00 with us, our enemy. That's true. They just picked them up and hauled them off. They were guys attending the movie and they were our enemy on the spot. They didn't shoot them on the spot. If they had have moved they would have. They just came in and picked them up and took them out. We didn't sleep well that night. And then in Tarakan we started to see the live ones come through. I was sorry for some of the smaller blokes but the big blokes I wasn't because they were big enough.

25:30 It was some Japanese Royal Guard or something that went to Tarakan because it was a safe spot. They didn't think the war would get into there. And that's where they sent all the people that were going for war service from the Japanese army and they had to protect these. They were sort of hiding them there. And then [General Douglas] MacArthur decided to go in after them. But the most devastating thing that affected us in Tarakan with all the fighting and everything else – as soon as the fighting was over we had to

26:00 send 16 44 gallon drums of Tarakan oil to Wilhelmina in Holland to prove that we were there and that was the quality of oil that was there. And in Tarakan in parts where we were there you put your foot down and oil was coming up in your footprints. That was Tarakan. A filthy dirty place and looking back I'm not surprised I picked up something there. But I could have picked up malaria and sorts of other

26:30 nasties but I only picked up the stomach wog, the bowel wog, and we don't know what caused that.

**What effect did it seem to have on most of the blokes the first time you saw dead enemy?**

Utter shock followed by fear. Utter shock. You couldn't believe it, expected it but not what you saw. And after about ten or twenty seconds if you didn't shake your nerves inside did and

27:00 then you suddenly steeled yourself and got rid of them and said right we're in it we've got to go for it.

**Was there ever do you think amongst the guys a feeling somehow of something akin to joy that they'd done their job?**

Never did I see that at all. Happiness when the war was over, glad it was

27:30 over. I never saw anybody display any emotion of joy or happiness over the fact that now we're going home or we've beaten the enemy or anything like that. That never ever came into it. It was just utter relief. I never heard anything expressed in my lifetime since the war of that "Righto, we're going home now bugger it,

- 28:00 it's over". It was just like a game of football. It had finished. You were glad it was over. I didn't see any real emotions displayed. I just didn't see them. That just didn't happen for some reason. You know, with the end of the war being announced and after the jubilation of the celebration of peace our mind was on packing up and how soon could we leave. It's a strange thing. But there was
- 28:30 none of the happiness and emotion that you would expect there. There wasn't. It was probably more relief and, "You beaut, have another beer". Or, "You beaut, let's get on and finish the job here," and that type of thing. We didn't go through the emotions that the average person would because, one, I believe we'd been too long in it. We were case hardened and that is why rehabilitation is important. You start to feel the
- 29:00 effects after. After you've got all the things in your mind done then you settle down and that's when it sets in. A tremendous lot of people are affected like that. I got a fellow a TPI pension the other day and this will be to the average person bordering on ridiculous. He was a steward serving on the tables in a hospital dining room and the only time he saw was or the
- 29:30 effects of war in Vietnam was when the choppers came in with the wounded and they put them on an ambulance and took them about a hundred yards or pushed them on trolleys and took them into the hospital beneath him. But that sight turned him. I'm not kidding you. I've got another fellow who survived the worst that Vietnam could throw at him. He came back and he saved his money up with the help of his father and became an aviator and was a
- 30:00 crop duster. He can no longer fly planes. Every stump of a tree the enemy is behind it or every tree that is up he's got to fly around it and get off his course with his crop dusting. He learned that the hard way in Vietnam. And he doesn't think now - I know he wouldn't pass now to be a pilot because you've got to have a very solid mental situation with yourself under control. I've got him going up
- 30:30 soon. And in the process of my research two or three other people that went into the aviation industry afterwards can no longer fly planes because they are going along and the minute they relax this figures in their mind and they've lost concentration particularly with crop dusting. And the first fellow I mentioned has crashed two planes and the other fellow crashed one and that was enough for him. It was too close. I have many other
- 31:00 trades I could go on and on and talk about. Some fellows can't even operate earth moving machines they used to. Some went long distance truck driving to be on their own and the thoughts keep intruding and they're not concentrating on their job and they've gone 3 or 4 hundred yards, a kilometre, still on the road luckily but they haven't been with it. So they've had to give up the job because their mind wanders.

**You've been great about telling us lots of stories about how the war has affected people when they've got home.**

- 31:30 **Did you see many cases of people cracking up while they were there?**
- Oh yes, many. And history is strewn with it. I had a case some time ago - I couldn't take him to the Veterans Review Board and the Chairman said to me, "Where is your Veteran?" I said, "Sir, for the safety of you and your members I haven't brought him". "You can't do that. We ordered him to appear here". And he said, "Why haven't you brought him?" And I said, "Sir, you have
- 32:00 not got an iron cage in this room". He looked at me and thought this bloke is on the way out. He said, "What do you mean?" Is aid "Well, sir, if I brought him here and you asked him a question he'd be across this table and bashing you and the other two members up as quick as lightening. He's very, very quick and he's a big man". "Why do you say that?" I said, "Well, I know him. I've interviewed him and I've had him to psychiatrists and I've had him to doctors and they all don't want to see
- 32:30 him, the doctors or the psychiatrists. They want nothing to do with him because you ask him an innocent question and it blows his mind. And he said, "Oh, wait a minute, this happened in World War I and World War II but not in Vietnam". I said, "There is his whole history. I've got his story there and I vouch for the whole lot of it. I've no worries about any challenges. That's it. What I'm telling you is true now with your permission at your full
- 33:00 responsibility I will arrange to bring him in here." "No, no, no" he said, "I know too much about it". He said, "I remember reading the books about it when they brought the veterans back from the Middle East and World War II after they'd been bombarded by the Nazis". They had to put cages on the deck to keep them there because they were out, they were gone - the bombardment - and this fellow was the same. He'd gone the same way. Once you put - if you came up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder he'd be on your
- 33:30 back. I can't tell you what the trigger is that does it. There's odd times when I'm having a low here and anybody comes up to talk to me I freeze. I absolutely freeze. I don't know what I'm going to do and I've misread the intentions of why they've touched me or spoken to me. That seems to be disappearing after many years now. It's a long time since it's happened to me now but it does happen to me and it can happen to me but I can't tell you why.

34:00 Again I'm on no tablets or pills for nervousness or anything like that. That's all I've got. I'm not taking anything of that.

**On a more light hearted note than the things that I've been asking you about Tarakan - you were telling us before that you went to set up a base and there were some buildings that used to be a brothel?**

That's right.

**Who was using the brothel?**

Jappos [Japanese]. The Japanese used to use the local women and the troops used to be rostered, hundreds of them.

**What do you mean rostered?**

Well, it's your turn to go to the brothel. "Away you go.

34:30 Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock". And they had thousands of troops there. No worries about it at all. Where the women went to I don't know. They probably shot them when they were finished with them I don't know. There are cases before the - I don't know the authority - some United Nations thing - trying to get compensation for a lot of Korean women that were in that situation. The first thing the Japanese think of is putting a woman there for the

35:00 men's convenience. We in the western society don't believe in those things. Then they treated them like dirt and lots of times they shot them. I didn't matter. In Asia human beings are very cheap. It was devastating some of those things. I know it took us about 3 days to get the thing clean so we could work in there. And it's a problem - Work it

35:30 out. There were thousands of bloody condoms and what do you do with them. So we finished up burying them. I don't know whether they are marketable now or not. I should go back and get them and I might make a killing if I can get somebody to buy them. But that's true what I'm telling you about it is absolutely true and not only us, other units found the same thing. Next question.

**When you were in Tarakan obviously it was a very tense time because the**

36:00 **enemy was close around you?**

Yes, surrounding us at times.

**Was there any down time - time to have any relaxation?**

No. On guard, on guard, on guard. And you'd try and scrounge a meal between yourselves - at this time you were living off rations. You'd try and scrounge a meal in between times when you were not on guard but you were full of fear - absolutely full of fear. And yet it was a controlled fear -it wasn't loose.

36:30 You were sort of holding it back. And even though he declared, or the commanding officer of that particular unit the 48th battalion and all our troops, told us that he had it under control and we had buried most of the Japs there by using the anti aircraft guns for artillery guns - even though he said that the fear was still with us. We sort of never got there even - when

37:00 we came back in the Liberty ships the boys were starting to relax a bit then. They sit back and look at a thing and even now today if we go social you'll always find Len sitting back in the corner. I'm trying not to miss a trick and I'm trying to understand it and I'm watching different people. They invited me especially into the Department of Veteran Affairs for the Christmas party - the first time since I've been associated with them since the war, my

37:30 war, World War II. And I've seen blokes come in there and they've done nothing else but drink free grog. I shared a stubby with a bloke and one fellow, his picture is in the paper in the Courier Mail today, he walked in the door and the grog is handy within reach of the door, he drank 8 stubbies and never went to the toilet. And I thought, "No wonder you're a

38:00 bloody big man. Your bladder is bigger than you are". And when I left there he was still drinking beer. I couldn't stand it. There were too many freeloaders and it's not my scene. I won't fraternise for the sake of a beer. Probably my mother taught me different but I can't tell you. But that's true. There are too many parasites and it is typical of Australia generally. There are too many parasites, bludgers, they want everything for nothing. It is not my style and I told them I won't go back again. But they took me into the

38:30 Department to present me with a medallion for the years' work that I done. And the Deputy Commissioner told me he had never heard of me. Now you missed one vital point we mentioned we had to get back to before we finished the tape or finished up here. We are talking about my political career. Whilst I've been a keen student of the activities of politicians I had never become

39:00 involved in it until 1975. And I've got a pensioner looking for an old age pension. To do it in those days you had to get a politician, a federal politician, to sign the form. I decided to get the local member and visit him in the local office in town, the federal parliamentarian's office. No, he can't see you tomorrow. No, he can't see you tomorrow or this week or next week or the week

- 39:30 after. "Oh yeah." So I said, "I'll stop you". Through another means I found out what days he went there and what time he got there. The next time he finished up in the garage and he gets out of his car and I'm there. "What are you doing here, Len?" "I want to see you and I haven't been able to get anywhere near you through your girls upstairs probably until next week or the week after." "That would be right" he said, "I'm a busy man".
- 40:00 This man's a doctor mind you and a federal politician. I said, "Are you too busy to give me a signature?" I said, "Here I'll put it in the car and you sign it". He said, "I can't do that. You come and see me. I can't do things in the garage that I can do in the office". I thought "Oh God". Anyway, the conversation carried on not in endearing terms but in real spite and vengeful tones, you know. And he said - I said, "Why don't you do the job that you get
- 40:30 paid for? This is what you get paid for and this is your duty. You're getting good money. Hand the money back and the job back if you can't do it". I said, "You need good opposition". This was apart from any other words. And he pulled himself up to his full height, this was about 6ft 6" and said, "Huh, you talking about opposition. You wouldn't be thinking of doing it with a name like Smith". And he did it in such a manner that I couldn't repeat it and give the full impact of the way he put it. In other words I
- 41:00 was nothing. I said, "You might get a surprise". He said, "You surprise me? Oh. You're not educated enough. Don't forget" he said, "with a name like Smith you're carrying a burden". "See you later mate". I went around to the Public Trustees Office and made an immediate application to change my name from Smith to Asmith by deed poll.
- 41:30 Just before the poll they couldn't find my form already approved so I went to another office and saw another friend of mine that organised a powerful person to go down and check the last person who handled the approved form to be handed to me for the election. It was in the bottom drawer under all the papers. Accidental I suppose they call it. Anyway, I got it in time.

## Tape 9

- 00:30 They found the form in the government office hidden in the bottom drawer under everything else. I don't know how it got there but anyway I got it in time to get down to the Commonwealth Electoral Office to lodge it to contest the seat where this particular federal politician was standing and was a sitting member. A sitting member and remember the figures he had a majority of
- 01:00 800 voters in his favour. He was out in front with a huge majority which is a huge majority in any electorate. Changing my name to Asmith meant that I went on to number one position on the ballot paper, I knew this, and he went on number two. Being number one gives you a majority of idiot votes they call it, people who can't vote and just put number one and are not interested in the election.
- 01:30 So I took a fortnight's leave and I never worked so hard in my life. I got a mate to drive a car and we did the electorate door knocking. I would think I did 60 or 70% door knocks. I was standing as an Independent mind you, I never had time to affiliate with anybody. And I door knocked and I have never worked so hard in my life. I would get out of bed about 6 o'clock in the morning and I would get into bed at about 12 o'clock and I'm staggering at the end of the fortnight.
- 02:00 My knuckles were raw from knocking on doors and I had this fellow that was driving me. I got somebody else to go and knock on the door and say that a fellow was coming up along the road and would love to meet you personally blah blah blah. I couldn't tell you exactly the number of doors I knocked on but I used to get rushed home here and while they had lunch I'd go to sleep for an hour and then go back again. And that's how we had a few meals except at night you forgot about that when you'd get home late. So the
- 02:30 results came out and this fellow hated me because I'm a real challenge because I've not only changed his name but I've taken his spot. The results came out and I only got 1180 votes which was excellent I thought for the time I had. He is now behind the labour man. The labour man's figures stayed whatever the number was and put him in number one and put my vote on number two and I'm the last one.
- 03:00 But my votes are all to the labour man. I'd recommended it to the labour man. And of course he got defeated and he was skiting to everybody what a safe seat he was "That mongrel, Asmith or whatever". He wouldn't turn up at the declaration of polls where you have a few words to say. And he sent word up to the electoral officer, "Is that Asmith going there?" He said, "Yes" And he said, "Well, I'm not". And he's never spoken to me
- 03:30 since. And I've lost probably a good friend and he's lost his seat because he wouldn't sign a form for a pension application and he thought I was an idiot and abused me. I was happy at that but believe it or not, and this is the beautiful part of it, within a month there was legislation going through the federal parliament to say that you can't change your name just before an election. You must give 12 months notice and change it
- 04:00 definitely before 12 months. No more surprises. So that didn't worry me at all. I found that the word A

in front of the Smith instead of being at the meal line at the other end getting a cold meal I was at the front end getting a hot one because A is in front of everyone else. This proved very worthwhile but costly. It cost me \$7,500 of very hard money and I went back to work definitely worn out.

- 04:30 I bludged at work and picked all the easy jobs that I could so that I could have a bit of a spell. And many times of a lunch hour they'd have to wake me up for about 3 or 4 days at last when I was back at work. That helped teach him a lesson but it gained me a lot of respect. If you want to fool with a anybody don't fool with an Asmith because I'll go all the way. And that's how I'm winning cases now with Repatriation, the same spirit that says, "You want to challenge me. Let's go all the
- 05:00 way". The same thing as war. The same thing that's got us out of trouble in the wars. You didn't back off because you saw the enemy coming you had to do something to beat him and stop him from coming. It didn't matter how you did it whether you set a trap or whatever. It didn't matter you set up for him. And probably the animal instinct in man made me do that. But above all it makes you pick up the challenge and fight
- 05:30 it. I got the name of the Aussie Battler. I got all sorts of funny fancy names since. But you won't believe it that was 1975 election year - in 1980 out of the blue from the Governor General's office to state that I had been nominated for an OAM, the Order of Australian Medal, for my service to the veteran community and the general community. And they gave me an Order of Australia Medal. I
- 06:00 wonder whether they were buying me off - who knows. And they gave me an OAM. And then if I want anything I've only got to mention the magic name of Asmith. I went into a government building since that instance, the same building he was in, and I was in on a housing commission house business for one of the veterans to who they were giving a hard time. And I said, "Can I see so and so?" They said, "You can't". I said, "You're not answering
- 06:30 correctly, giving me the right answers". "No you can't see him. What name will I give?" I said, "Tell him Len Asmith is there" And she went behind the counter and I heard the bloke tell her yo go and tell the fellow that Len Asmith's here because if you don't you'll lose your job because he'll go for you. And I thought, "Jesus, that's good. I'm in". And the fellow came down and sat down and saw me and said, "What's your problem, Len?" I said, "I want this fixed up". And he said, "Well, it might be a bit irregular but she'll be right. Leave it to me, mate.
- 07:00 It should be right". And he patted me on the back and away I went. And later on I was getting one of the diggers out of trouble, he was in the trouble with the police, and I went to the court and got him out but then they had to make me his parole officer. So I got to the parole officer over at Woolloongabba and I knew a few blokes there but they had a lady at the counter and I said, "I'm here on the McDonald case". "No," she said, "What's your name?" And I said, "Asmith," and she said
- 07:30 "I've never heard that before," but she said, "I'll check with Mr so and so if they'll see you". The same thing - I heard the bloke say you look after him mate or you mightn't have a job today, he'll go for you. And the bloke came down and saw me and I got the parole job and I looked after the fellow and I think it was six months he was on parole. But, you know, that's what you get when you gain a reputation and everybody gets threatened of you and I'm just a kitten, you know. I'd sooner give you a
- 08:00 dollar than fight you for it. But when you're challenged that's what the Australian spirit is like. I had a couple of big business people wave at me in the street and a couple of barristers and if I'm with company they go past and they say, "That's the Aussie Battler." So my company will hear about it and one bloke said to me, "What's he talking about?" And I'll say "I don't know. What did you hear?" So you get a bit of a bad reputation but then again it opens doors. And I was quite happy when I got over the
- 08:30 cost of the thing which was bloody foolish on my part but I didn't care. I was lucky that I was able to pay all the bills when they came in but it took me a lot of time to replace it in the bank account. I could go on and continue to tell you about another fellow who was a terrific sergeant, at Montville, that's around about your area. He was first of all a wheat farm out from
- 09:00 Rockhampton - wheat country - you go out from Rocky straight through - anyway it doesn't matter - Emerald - a big businessman and everything when he came back from the war no problems. And then he sold that and bought some land at Montville and planted avocados. And then just as he was starting to get a
- 09:30 harvest and really getting money from it he cracked up. And I got an SOS from I don't know who it was and I said, "The best thing to do is him talk to me because you can't tell me much about him". And he came down here with his wife who has almost got him on a chain to control him. He doesn't want to go anywhere and he doesn't want to do anything and all this. So I finished getting him a TPI and he's now sold that Montville Orchard and on the drugs the psychiatric drugs that he's
- 10:00 on he's a normal person now. But I've got to handle him very gently and she says he's 100% to what he was. A first class sergeant and he saved a lot of people's lives. And so it goes on. I've got a fellow out at Rockhampton. He's in a caravan park now. Somebody financed him into that. He's going pretty well because he doesn't have to work if he's crook he can lie down and his wife can run the business. I could go on and
- 10:30 on and on. I've got about five or six down the Gold Coast. I've got some real good stories on war widows. I'm not real keen about them unless they're a good challenge because there are a lot of women

that won't tell you the things you want to hear particularly how bad the husband was because the husbands are never bad. But you know bloody well they are and you check with the

- 11:00 doctors. And that's one of the things with changing my name because most of the doctors that know me and my history will talk to me unofficially which they're almost breaking their own oath to do so but they give me guidance. And then I go back and tell this fellow well I know so and so and I get him to sign a freedom of information form so I can go into Repat and read all his history, military history. But I've got to dig very deeply to get a
- 11:30 current history, civilian history when he's come back and it's never a pretty picture. But in the procedure to go to Repat and I've learned this over the years first of all the Repat is an investigative body and they're not there to give you a pension. You have to be entitled to it. And if you make a slip up in your application you're not. So you get their story and get them to fill in a form and you know it's going to get back because they've got all women delegates in there and not men any more and not returned
- 12:00 servicemen and they go by the book. So they knock it back. And then you've got to put together a pile and apply to the Veteran's Review Board and before you do that you've got to get the veteran's permission to go and search his file through freedom of information. Then you make the application on the decision from the department of veterans' affairs delegate. You've got to study that and what they said and where they got their information from. Then you've got to prepare a case by searching the records
- 12:30 yourself and giving your own interpretation through freedom of application and make the application to the Veterans' Review Board and prepare the case particularly challenging what the decision was of the delegate. Then if you're not happy with the Veterans' Review Board you then apply through the Legal Aid Department to get Legal Aid part finance to go before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Now unless your case is right you've got to change it all for the Administrative Appeals
- 13:00 Tribunal and they can tear it to shreds and they know the law backwards. So what I do is I do all my freedom of information work and I then go to - if it's the Administrative Appeals Tribunal I go to their library and check up what I'm looking at or check their past decisions. That's not a five minute job or a five day job it goes on for weeks. Then you put your case and then you check with the veteran and then you've got to educate the veteran so he puts his story
- 13:30 straight and have respect and how to get dressed before the court. The Veteran's Review Board is still a court. And then you've got to present his case so he's not there too long. When you submit a certificate of readiness for a hearing you also submit the written case and in that you've got to detail it so finely. A lot of people can't be bothered doing that so a lot of advocates are in name only because they're not much value to the veteran
- 14:00 community. Then you get that and then you train the veteran. You might have to chase witnesses up or doctors up and get JPs [Justice of the Peace] to sign their forms and all this. And then you prepare it for the Administrative Appeals Tribunal on the adverse finding of the Veteran's Review Board. Having done that you've got to check back with the delegate and see that somehow it hasn't been switched, the argument. Then you prepare yourself for the
- 14:30 argument. But now, what I do if you come to me now before I put your application to the first port of call The Veterans Review Board, as you were the Department of Veterans Affairs, I have prepared it ready for the AAT [?] so I don't have to double and triple the work up. No matter what anybody else says that's the argument and the way I'm putting it for the AAT. When I get to the AAT or the VRB [Veterans Review Board] I'm never there very long. I'm never there very long at all
- 15:00 because the argument has been put. But now anything I do runs into anything like 3 or 4 weeks' study. What would that be worth in today's language? It's a rat bag job isn't it? The torture I'm putting me through in a sense as I told you earlier is my rehabilitation. It's the thing that's keeping me normal. And they say, "You're a beaut advocate are you a beaut fool too?" But you get the end result. And all the things the medals and all that they've given
- 15:30 me is a sort of a thank you but there's no cash. And that cash or reward is very hard to come by. At one stage here I had a brewery fellow who happened to be the President of the Liquor Trades Union - powerful - and every time he came here he had a boot full of whisky. It's in that fruit cake and I think I've still got bottles out there. And he's always given me a case of beer or two of whisky or two cases of beer and one of whisky.
- 16:00 He came here quite a lot. That was a soldier's story that should be heard. And I got him a TPI just before he carked it and he carked it in a hurry. He just collapsed. A very tough man and a good man in the liquor trade and has to be with the hotels and the breweries to deal with. He was never challenged in his life when he made a decision which was wonderful. In the Middle East the bombardments were coming and they were creating big shell holes. And John Murphy was his name and I met a lot of his
- 16:30 mates because I had to get statements from them and they said he was uncanny old Jack. He said they were in a fox hole and they were quite happy there relaxing and letting the bombs fall where they may and if they hit us OK well and good. And he said, "Jack's half asleep and he says, "Everybody into the next hole". He said we were in there in a minute and we started to think, "What does old Jack know that



we don't". And a bloody shell landed in the one they were in.

17:00 And there were three or four instances like that. He said, "Out of here mates it's too dangerous. Come on, the lot of you get to buggery". And each time something happened that would have killed the lot of them. Amazing - I don't know whether it was instinct or not - a big powerful Irishman but humble as a kitten. When he came to me he didn't have a great vocabulary so we had to extend that a bit and we had to teach him that when we put the case before the courts we had to change it again to certain words.

17:30 But although he was illiterate 90% of the way - the only language he could talk was the labor party or the liquor trades - but he was a good pupil and he learned quick. And he didn't get into his abusive labour party or union language when I got him in the right spot. And he proved great and I went and did the RSL [Returned and Services League] service at the funeral. And about 3 days later his wife said to

18:00 call in and see her. And she gave me a big kiss and a thank you card and told me she said, "I'll never understand it. Jack would listen to nobody but he listened to you and we got the result we wanted and we're thrilled and thank you very much". I thought that was terrific. But you've got to understand each and every person. If you get a half-caste person in or an aboriginal you've got to be down to his level and talk his language. And it is something that years of experience has taught

18:30 me but it's also taught me to be humble because it's got to be a god given gift for me to interpret you or to pick you up in a street and tell you you are in trouble and 99 times out of 100 I'm spot on. Like the fellow in Townsville that was robbing the street bins. I said to my mate, "He's got to be an ex-servicemen". He said, "Why?" I said, "He's probably an old sailor". He said, "Why?" I said, "Look at the way he walks". If you're on a ship a long time you walk a certain

19:00 way and you develop the gait. And then you can read a bloke's eyes and then you can see the way he carries himself. A drunken soldier will walk straight and throw his arm in the right manner or hold his hands in the right manner. These are little tricks that you learn only through knowing persevering with what you're doing and having that deep down desire to win that case to give him justice and to give him what he's entitled to. It must sound like I'm a politician on a

19:30 platform but that's what I believe.

**I've just got a handful of questions I want to ask you while we've got a little bit of tape left. The atrocities you saw at Tarakan how was that different to what you saw with the prisoners of war at Labuan?**

A different matter altogether. Those were atrocities. That was slaughter. The difference of the people coming in at Labuan it was more shocking. I can't tell you

20:00 why it was more shocking but the fact was that you could have picked them up and carried one on each arm and they're grown men and there's nothing left of them. All the prominent features were the bones sticking out everywhere. It was a skin full of bones. And they only had trousers on and some only had lap laps. They'd picked them up and put them on the plane and got rid of them and tried to dress with what clothes they had on the plane. But to see walking skeletons and realise they are your men. It's a big impact you never

20:30 get rid of. It beats me that one. It had a bigger impact on me than anything else. I could put up with the dead Japs and all the slaughter and all I just explained but I couldn't put up with that. It was just inhuman. Yet the other - you didn't expect it and it was horrifying but it didn't have the impact. I could never tell you why and the other fellows that I've met

21:00 since it has been the same thing. It was something you expected, the slaughter, but you didn't expect this. It's probably hard to define it exactly but you just didn't. When they brought them out of the planes you weren't in this world. It doesn't happen. The slaughter happens, yes, and you've sort of conditioned yourself through life for these things particularly if you were delivering cold meat like I was and having to

21:30 walk through the slaughter houses. But you couldn't see these men like that. They couldn't walk because they had no strength. And when they got them into hospital when we were sleeping on the ground and they were sleeping on our beds you'd look at them at 8 o'clock that morning and at 6 o'clock that night they'd put on half a stone. They were feeding them all sorts of drugs and all sorts of foods and they were doing nothing and they were resting and they were more contented and the

22:00 meat was coming on them. I would say that it might sound silly for me to say it and it sounds silly when I do say it when they were discharging them from hospital those men were two or three stone at least heavier. They then had flesh on bones and not skin on bones. And they did it miraculously. They had a special tablet up there full of vitamins. I've never seen them ever in a chemist since.

22:30 They were a black tablet in a plastic cover and they were pumping these in. You'd take one about every three days or one a week to give you a kick but they were pumping into them two or three a day as well as good food. And the food kept coming. There was no breakfast, dinner and tea time. There was food coming. There was always somebody walking past with

23:00 food offering it to somebody. But the impact - it'll never change me on that on.

**What do you think about on Anzac Day?**

I think it is a very important thing for the population to retain that spirit of Anzac. There are a lot of people who shouldn't be in Anzac Day and there's a lot of money spent on it and there's a lot of organisation and a lot of time spent on it. I used to be on the Anzac Day Committee but I gave it away because there are too many fights. They've cut all that out now and got

23:30 rid of the troublemakers but I don't go because I haven't got time. But Anzac Day is the greatest single day that we have in Australia because we're not honouring war we're honouring the one day. I haven't been to one for five years. But they're trying to talk me into it with the medals - to wear my medals and go with the air force this year because I'm so well known. And they said,

24:00 "Well, we'll feel happy if you're there, Len. We've got somebody that will help us". I'm chewing it over. I don't go to them lately not for five years at least.

**Where do your thoughts go on Anzac Day?**

I don't think about anything on that day. I try not to. I try to get through the Anzac march - I don't even hear what's being said and I get out of there quick and come home and have a cup of tea and go to bed. I won't

24:30 do anything else if I have Anzac Day. I'm the same when I do a funeral service, an RSL funeral service. There's that much goes into it that you're in another world. They beat me if I let them and I'm very close to letting them too.

**What about when you first came back from the war did you join the RSL straight away?**

Yes I was in the RSL from the word go, the minute I came back.

25:00 I joined the RSL at Byron Bay which was the first place I was in. Now I've got that membership now and I'm waiting on a gold badge. They said they'd give me it and that's probably a fairy story but anyway it might turn up. I'm a strong supporter of what the RSL stands for because even though they need a lot of pushing and even though we've got a lot of rogues in it and we don't prosecute them when they pinch the money and all these things

25:30 they do overall do a good job. I epitomise the RSL they tell me but I don't get much help from them because I've scorned them because they don't know what they're doing. They start projects that have no chance and I tell them and warn them and almost batter them into the floor and tell them you're totally wrong and they go ahead and they've spent \$30,000 or \$40,000. I've set up the

26:00 Morningside Services Club, the RSL set that up, and when they set it up they called me in because they couldn't make money. Every Friday after the veterans' pay day they started a Saturday night in the RSL down at Colmslie which is half way to Bulimba and every Friday night they run a night to develop club money. I think it cost them about \$400 and they were getting profit of about \$28 a night.

26:30 The amount of grog and cigarettes and that that went on was ridiculous. So one bloke sat down and said there was only one bloke that would fix that and that was me. So I had a deputation here and I went over and attended a meeting and they said, "The Secretary of the Club has become vacant and we want somebody who can do it". And they picked me into it. And then they tore into me after the first two meetings when I sat in a chair in the far corner of the

27:00 hall and watched what went on for two Fridays. And then the next meeting they switched from RSL Meetings to RSL Club Meetings and they got up and roasted me. I said, "Fair enough". "You've only sat in the corner, you don't know". I said, "That's right mate. I'm not going to take you on for another hour and half and tell you how you stink and the club stinks and how you couldn't run a mousetrap even if it had wheels on". I said

27:30 "Now I'll give you a brief report. It goes like this. You've been taken right left and centre. I want somebody to volunteer from you loud-mouthed mob to come in behind the bar on the next night and serve the grog and serve everybody and control the cash with me". Dumb silence and not a word was said. So the loud mouthed

28:00 bloke that dobbed me in and came to see me with has deputation I said, "I'm going to name you. You're going to come with me". He said, "I know nothing about it". I said, "You're going to bloody learn. I'll teach you in ten minutes". I knew nothing about it and had never been before a bar in my life. We got there about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and left there about 1 o'clock. We made 284 pounds or dollars or whatever it was. And he said, "Geez we've got a lot of money in the town". And I said, "Yeah how much of it is profit?"

28:30 So we counted it out and that's what we finished up with for the night. And I got home at about 2 o'clock dead beat and so was he. I went back and there were a lot of members missing because when they'd come to the bar for their free bar and ordered two schooners and had no money they didn't get the bloody beer. What they were doing is bringing a tray up and saying "I've got six mates I want seven schooners". "Thank you. Goodbye." No pay. When they left that club that night they came up and they said I want twelve packets of 50 cigarettes "Goodbye. Hooray". When the girl run the

- 29:00 raffle she put nine dollars out of every ten in her own pocket, from the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK raffle. Any other raffles the person that got paid collected the money and went home with it. It didn't happen and that was only the first night's bar takings. Then I sat on the raffle and I sat on everything else and in 8 months they had sufficient money to talk the bank into a loan to put them up there. I pummelled the hell out of them. In the finish the blokes that didn't get it for nothing didn't turn up because they never had any
- 29:30 money in the first place. And I went sponsor with them with the ANZ bank and I also established a scheme by you would lend the RSL \$1,000 or \$10,000 or whatever at interest and you came up every month and got paid cash on your interest but we used the money for collateral with the bank. And I set it up and we built the hall. And then it came up where they wanted a Secretary/Manager and I had everybody telling me put your name up because you're the bloke we want.
- 30:00 But, no, the RSL at Colmslie decided by one vote, the bloke I put behind the bar was the bloke who didn't vote for me, that they would pick this hero up. I said, "Righto, that's fair enough". They said to me, "He is a commander out of the British navy, he's got 3 VCs and he's got all these medals". I said, "Fair enough". I said, "I reserve judgement". Anyway, he got the job and I wasn't interested because I was still involved with the
- 30:30 Repat work and it would have been a bit of an embarrassment but I made do. And then 3 months later they came up and they said, "Guess what? We've been robbed". The manager got one of the bar staff to help him make up the pay and they put the pay in the cold room and they go there the next morning and he's got staff with him and all the money has gone. I said, "Fair enough. That sounds all right to me. Somebody is a good smart robber".
- 31:00 Three weeks later, or months I think it was not weeks, the same story. I said, "What do the police think?" They said, "They think it's an inside job". Only one man had the keys and they couldn't nail him. And then another time they put some money in and they cleaned out the poker machines or something and that went too - the same thing. And during the period that he was in charge he decided he'd start making sandwiches. So they would have ham sandwiches and the
- 31:30 committee approved of it. So they had ham sandwiches and she made one for him and sold one but bought a huge big ham and took it home. That was the end of that. And then they'd have a meal on certain nights but that started out pulling about \$300 and ended up only taking \$40 but they were serving the same meals. So then they came to me and they said, "What's wrong, Len?" And I said, "Wait a minute you kicked me out remember".
- 32:00 They said, "Well first of all do you know anybody who could investigate this bloke?" I said, "I can't answer the question but what do you want". So I had a connection in the right place and Interpol return was, I saw it on paper, he was not the British commander the great hero with all the VCs he'd won and all that. He was in the Royal New Zealand and survived for 8 years and got kicked out for stealing and generally misbehaving and not doing the job. But his
- 32:30 father owned a hotel and was managing a hotel in Auckland so he put that on. So I put it on to them and they said, "We can't tell him all that can we?" I said, "I told you and you please yourself who you tell". They went away and talked about it and they came back and said, "OK, we don't know how to handle this, what would you do?" I said, "You blokes you kick me out and then you come back to me". I said, "You buy the biggest silver platter you can get, a big silver tray, call him into one of your meetings and say we're
- 33:00 sorry you've got a week's notice. No, better still you can go we'll give you a week's pay and here's a platter and wonderful but we're going that short of money with these continual thefts we've decided we'll roster the manager's shifts among ourselves". And that's how they got out of it. The police didn't pick him up but he was persistent.

**Can I ask you Len - it's pretty obvious from what you've told us the impact that the war has had on your post-war life.**

- 33:30 **Can you tell us in your own words what sort of impact that has had?**

Well, I can't afford to let my guard down on me. Not on anybody else but on me. I learned to shrug my shoulders and I've learned a way and I've learned to be rude to people when I walked away and it's charged my batteries. And if I don't keep going at a flat pace I'm in trouble - mentally. I'm mentally in trouble. And while I've

- 34:00 set a target and I maintain it particularly with the exercise and the mind training and the work that I do here I'd be ratshit, if I'd be here alive at all. I've got a guard up and I've probably always had a guard but more so as I get older I find I've got to keep fully occupied. Whilst my work with the Repat is retarded and I've done very few in the last three years and a half while the wife had her eyes renewed -
- 34:30 transplants put in the corneas and all that - I didn't do a great deal of work then. I toned it down and I stalled it and all this type of thing but I was fully occupied with her and what little I did was enough and was too much at times. The funerals were sad features. I reached the stage where I didn't do another funeral - I won't - but because they keeping asking me I won't knock them back. But I'm very
- 35:00 fragile despite all that I'm personally a very fragile person that has to keep busy particularly both the

mind and the body and not have any worries. I'll go in for a sleep and get a half hour and then I won't go back for eight hours. And I'll wander around this house and the back yard in the middle of the night - I had to stop doing that when the dogs started barking - and then go back to sleep and try and get some sleep. I'm so fragile if

35:30 I have a heavy day. Although I spend weeks putting it together I go into the court but I must be so full of fear or nerves that I can stand up and barter with the best of them. A lot of people I take before the courts tell me they hate me when I go before a court. I am a different personality. I switch on and I must switch it on in a bastard of a way because I scare them and I scare the people I'm talking to.

36:00 They all understand because most of the people are repeats now in the review boards. I know all the people that I have to know in the AAT and most of them are senior intelligent ex-service people and very good people. If I want help I can go to them but I don't take the opportunity of that. If I want to represent myself and not get a barrister I can go and make an application to the AAT and I have no trouble getting 3 signatures because I'm

36:30 not a registered solicitor. But when it's over I've got to go to bed for 3 or 4 hours because I snap everybody's head off. I would be a bastard. So to protect myself and my marriage I have to go live a certain lifestyle. And sometimes here when I've got a flat night I'll wake up and I have to do something. I've got books like this that I

37:00 read but I don't stay awake long. I've only got to pick up a newspaper and lie on my back and I'm asleep. I've trained myself at every opportunity to go off, to nod off.

**What are your feelings towards Japanese people today?**

To who?

**Japanese people.**

I just ignore them. I have no feelings whatsoever for them particularly the way their government treated their ex-servicemen. They lost the war and they came back - OK goodbye, hand your

37:30 uniform in. And there were a lot of them that for a long time lived under bridges and they were treated like dirt because they lost the war and lost face. I can deal with them and face them but I get a shudder when I walk away from them. And one time I bought a Mazda car because I got it at half price. A bloke went bankrupt in an agency and it was near enough to half price which is what they paid for the car. And he offered me the same deal that he'd paid for the car. I had to wait a while for him to get it but I didn't have it

38:00 long it just worried me. I went back to Holdens and stayed there. I can't stand it. I can't stand anything Jap they really get up my nose. But I've got to learn to live with it and not display it.

**So when do you think about the war that you had would you say that it was a positive in the long term and the effect that it had on the rest of your life thing or a negative thing?**

Yes it established me. In the early part of my history you would have seen where I was making money

38:30 hand over fist and with the help of my mother I always had this secret ambition that I could get enough money and go to university. It was my number one ambition and nothing else mattered - forever, it still is. But it didn't work out. And I was going real well until the war came along and destroyed it. I was going real well and as I told you I was making a hell of a lot of money much more than my family knew I was making but not more than the authorities knew I was making because they tracked me. And a lot of it I had to

39:00 keep in the house cash because I was making too much to put it through the banks and I knew the tax would get me one day and I had to have a nest egg. I would have gone to university and I would have probably thoroughly enjoyed it because somehow or other, probably through my mother's early teachings, I blame her, of reading jam tin labels and memorising them. That was memory training but at that time I didn't know what was going on I was just doing as I was told. I had the mind for it and there are certain things I can

39:30 do - I can read that book and just disregard it. It's just passing time away. I get into the files and there are quite a few of them here and I'll pick them up every now and again, particularly if they are pending, to make sure I've got my argument right. I live in that, for some reason I live in that and I can't help it. And I'm a different person when I'm doing a case to what I am when I've finished it or when I've got nothing to do. So I don't have anything to do and that's how I live.

40:00 And I recommend it to every veteran. My world appears to be that I'm trying to be an advocate and trying to win pensions. To me it represents me rehabilitating and a person that we're going to lose soon. And I've lost too many suiciding - the people that suicide are desperate. They are in a hole in many ways. I take them to court and put them through the divorce court, the family law court.

40:30 I finance them. I get the money back eventually. I finance them to get them out of jail providing that's not \$10,000 or \$20,000 but you know \$5,000 is all right. I get the money back eventually. I pay for some funerals above what they were getting from the Repat. I organise special deals for them and I get them

out of financial trouble. I'm there for the birth of a daughter. I've got a case on now - a mongrel I got him the TPI and he's dying of asbestosis.

41:00 He walks away and divorces his wife. I get him a TPI and he gets a lot of money and he buys a camper van and then sells his own home but buys another one with his wife in. Then he divorces his wife and picks up with a young German Sheila and now he's selling the house over his wife's head. And his wife and his daughter are both now divorced. He is kicking them out.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**