Australians at War Film Archive

James Morrison (Bruce) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 16th May 2003

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:30 **Bruce, good morning. It's lovely to be with you and what I'd like to do is to start right at the very beginning with where you were born?**

I was born in Heyfield, Gippsland, Victoria. At that stage I was born in a place called York Cottage, on the backwaters of Heyfield, down by the river in the middle of a flood. The water was pouring through under the house, which was up about 3 foot 6 inches, on stumps, or just around a metre if we're talking in metres.

01:00 My father had one acre of dry ground, that's all they had. He had a buggy, got out there in case he needed it. The horse was tethered there and he went up to get the doctor, and he said the water was flowing over the shafts in one place when he went up. He gets the doctor to bring him down and the doctor took one look and he says, "I'm getting out," and Dad grabbed him by the arm. He was a big strong powerful man. He says, "No, you're not."

01:30 So he brought him down and I was born and the doctor says "There could be complications," so he stayed there until the flood went down. The complications were he didn't want to get wet. Now, we were brought up in Glengarry. Mum and Dad had a selection back in the bush. Nine miles from Glengarry in Gippsland.

02:00 From photos the walls were of stringy bark. Dad said, "It had an iron roof, so they could catch the water for drinking." Roughly sawn timber floor and in the walls were hessian with paper on. I remember it after I got burnt. Later on I'll tell you about that. I remembered crawling around and looking up and seeing the pictures

02:30 and described some to my mother. It was burnt down when I was three years of age, so the mind is still there, it's a question of whether you can recall. At any rate, we moved into Glengarry. Just moved in when then 26 bushfires come. Dad was a saw miller. They lost the sawmill. Lost the house up the bush and they stopped the fire at the road where it was called then Maffra Road, it's now called Morrisons Road.

03:00 And I will never forget because of my mother's birthday and we had induced her to make a cake. She made the cake for us and the fire fighters ate it up. And I remember sitting at the window watching the fire fighters beating the flames out.

Tell me a bit about your father. Had he served in the First [World] War?

He was in the 13th Light Horse.

03:30 Dad was one of 15 and the principal supplier of funds for the family to exist. They were way back in the bush. Three of his brothers went overseas. One was home from Gallipoli and two died in Flanders. Dad was in the militia and he was discharged because he had cut his leg at the time. They discharged him.

04:00 And that saved him probably, because the Morrison's didn't have a good record of coming home. That's a family history and at any rate, he was a man stood six foot one, stood as straight as anything. You'll see photos of him later. I remember we were in Scotland and one chap who knew Dad was in the same

hut as me of 12 and he was telling the fellows about him and I walked into the hut

04:30 and this conversation just stopped. I said, “Come on what gives?” and they just—one of them said, “Well Joe was just telling them about your father.” And he said, “Dad was the best looking man he had ever seen.” He was very, you know imposing figure. He was a very honest man. I remember he made an agreement and shook hands on it and later on the fellow came back and said, “Well look, you’re going to lose on this Jim,

05:00 would you like to get out of it?” And Dad said, “No, I shook hands on it.” No legal binding but that was Dad. Mum was one of five, the youngest of five and she was a very good-living person and she wanted me to be a minister in the early days but I don’t think I was quite cut out for that. Food was short during the Depression.

05:30 Like so many in that era, nobody was buying timber from the sawmill much. Food was so short that I left school at 13 with a merit certificate, you could leave, otherwise you had to wait until you were 14.

Where did you go to school?

Glengarry State School and a fine little school. It was over 120 then when I—

06:00 Later on they had a couple more classrooms and there were about 50.

How did you get there?

Walked.

How far was it?

Oh, it wasn’t far. We could slip through the paddock from our place, so it wasn’t very far at all. The only trouble was of course, during wintertime when the frost was heavy on the ground, and no boots or socks, and no shoes or boots.

So you were barefoot?

Yes, barefoot and

06:30 not enough to keep warm and my memories of winters are very rugged. When I left home I went to work for Mum’s brother, an uncle in Heyfield on the same property where I was born. And the only thing there, he was a good-living bloke in many ways but he was a tyrant to work for. I worked seven days a week

07:00 from 6am to 8pm in wintertime, sometimes as early as 4.30am to 9.30pm in summer, harvesting season. Only two hours off every Sunday afternoon, two hours off only.

And how old were you?

Thirteen. And after several months I asked for one day off to go to the Glengarry sports, 18 miles away and I got a dressing down.

07:30 I didn’t know what hard work was. That day I had been cutting down blackberry bushes eight feet high with a slasher in between milking. One thing about all that, it probably saved my life later because I was a pretty tough person physically, not mentally but physically and when I got blown up and burnt later on —I’ll tell you about that, I believe

08:00 that that stood by me. I was talking to doctor—Weary Dunlop—Sir Edward Dunlop and we compared notes and he had much the same background. Hard work on a farm before he went away and you know how tough he was.

Indeed. When you were still at school, did you have to help out around the property before you went to school or after school at all?

08:30 I used to milk the cows at home. We had four or five cows for milk, cream, butter, after all, there was no money so I did that before and after school and that was the ongoing thing and then of course when the drought was on I used to go and saddle up a horse and four hours on horseback rounding up the stock and taking them. They were on an agisted paddock a mile away.

09:00 **And you had to do that after school did you, round up the cattle on a horse?**

Yes.

And how old were you when you were doing that?

I was eleven years of age then. At twelve I got a job milking cows for a fellow called Burt Brooks who had a property across the road from us. It was a mile to his house and I used to ride a bike up to there and milk his cows night and morning. Or help him milk them.

09:30 That was five shillings a week. For the first time in my life I was able to get reasonably good clothes because I had money to buy them. There was no money and there were no benefits at all in those days.

Your father worked in the sawmill, whose sawmill was it, who owned it?

His own. Initially, it was a firm of Henderson Morrison Bros. Dad, his brother and

10:00 Mr Henderson and his son, Ivan. There were four of them and that lasted until about 1936 when Dad said, “He couldn’t afford it any more.” There wasn’t enough money coming in to live. So I came back home and Dad and I used to go cutting piles, poles, splitting posts, squaring sleepers. I’ve used the broad axe squaring sleepers, and you know, at 15 you’re tough enough.

10:30 **Had his father worked in the sawmill too or how did your father come to buy the sawmill?**

I think it evolved really, it was a team start. When I was born I saw from the records he had a horse team carting wool from Licola to Heyfield and he found that when he got into the mill, the horses were no good in the rough bush.

11:00 They were too prone to get injured. So Dad developed a bullock team and so he drove bullocks and later on I drove them too. We started the sawmill when I was 16 and we built it up and the weekend beforehand and it was all done by hand, and then we progressed and I used to walk the bullocks

11:30 nine miles, work them all day with Dad, he’d drive them and I’d be hooking on the logs and all that. I was what they call a “Swampie.” Then I would walk the nine miles back with them at night. I went into the army at 16. I used to go in for something to do of the evening once a week as an unpaid cadet. But I was a good rifle shot

12:00 and as soon as I turned 16, I was in Glengarry rifle team and I got top score against the team called Taralgan where I used to go for parades, and the OC [Officer Commanding], Lieutenant Claude Lewis, later Major Lewis said to me, “You’ve just turned 18,” and signed me up as an 18 year old. So my age went up two years. I didn’t mind because I got a uniform, a rifle

12:30 and paid to attend parades, so that was something. Yes, well at any rate, immediately I became a private in the army, I was involved in a musketry course and this is why he wanted me to be a member. Because each group wanted to be a better group than the other.

13:00 **What did your parents say about you enlisting so young?**

No complaints, I don’t know whether they were really aware of everything fully. At any rate, we had a musketry course and I got the best rifle shot for the 52nd Italian and I was only 16 years of age and there were over 500 men. I’ve had that gift all my life and every unit I was in, I became the best rifle shot.

13:30 **Did you have any brothers and sisters?**

Yes, I was one of nine. There was one brother, eldest brother firstly, then a sister either side of me. But my oldest brother wasn’t very fit, so I copped a lot of things that he normally would have been doing. I also got his second-hand clothes, and then the rest are all boys. I had one brother who was

14:00 a Down Syndrome. But they have done varying degrees of success. A couple of them were quite brilliant at school, others were pretty ordinary. And that goes for most families, and some that are ordinary at school are very good with their hands. This is life and some people think you’ve got to be clever mentally, but if you are clever with your hands,

14:30 that’s more lasting in some ways. Now we should move on I suppose to—I enlisted in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. I was rejected first. In 39, 3rd September 1939 I went into the army camp for training for non-commissioned officers.

So that was the day war was declared.

15:00 Yes, the day war was declared.

Do you remember that day?

Yes, I was on the Glengarry railway station waiting for the train to take me to Sale for the course when an old chap came over and said, “War has been declared.” So we knew we were going to head for it.

Did your father or your uncle talk about their experiences in the First World War?

No, none because only one came home and he was living in Yinnar and never really had much to say.

15:30 **Was there anyone who had talked to you about their wartime experiences?**

Oh yes, there was a couple. One chap later on, he was a sergeant major in the 13th Light Horse in the Middle East and he used to come out with very funny stories about what happened. He and I were felling logs and you will see later on a photo of a big log that he and I fell. He would be working away and he

16:00 all of a sudden he would start to chuckle and he would tell you another story about the “Gypos,” as he called them.

But this was after you had enlisted so, before you enlisted you had never really discussed war or life in the army?

No, not really. Dad would tell me bits about the camps but that was all. When they were overseas.

And how did you find the army when you enlisted?

No worries.

16:30 I handled it. Even though I was younger than the others. I went on and I became company—I was a sergeant in the (unclear) in the militia. I used to train the 21-year-old call-ups. I would have them coming to me, some of them even crying because they couldn't handle army life, because I was the old bloke and I knew how to handle them. I was only 19 and 18 when I first became a sergeant.

17:00 You grow up very quickly and then one night I was offered a commission, given the papers to fill in and I was also offered to go overseas immediately to Britain for reinforcement for the Forestry companies and I thought about it, and thought, "Well, I'll never get to the UK

17:30 in a lifetime, no money you know all my life." So I took that, in other words, I threw in a commission. Immediately I signed on. I was in the queue at Royal Park, on the 25th April 1941 and beside me was Jack Saxton from Gippsland. He had been appointed as a lieutenant, no army training at all

18:00 and I was a sergeant going in and I came out a sapper. I wasn't very impressed with that. Then when I got to Caulfield Racecourse, where we all were stationed at the time, it was all out on parade and Jack came over to me and said, "Look, I've been instructed to give all these blokes some parade drill." And I said, "Righto, what you've got to do

18:30 is call for a marker, name me, you can stand beside me and I'll tell you every order to give." We went all around Caulfield like that and we got back and his OC said, "Saxton, you surprise me." Jack and I winked at one another and that was it and the next day, still a sapper, I've got 40 people and I'm giving them drill.

19:00 There were sergeants and corporals who got it from the Forest Commission—see they assumed control of everything—there were clerks, public servants and they knew how to work things, you know. The saw millers were the ones that did the work and any rate the following day I was called in and made an acting corporal for the trip over and I found myself with the group headquarters with reinforcements for the first and second company

19:30 plus several from the third company on the boat and I gave them drill all the way over to Britain. In fact I was in charge of the anti-aircraft guns, which were four Lewis machine-guns, which weren't very effective.

Which ship did you go on?

The Largs Bay, an Aberdeen and Commonwealth liner of about 600 people, 14,000 tons. There were a lot of civilians on it.

20:00 **Was it a good trip?**

No, it rolled like I don't know what. Crossing the Tasman Sea to New Zealand, one minute all you could see was water, the next minute all you could see was sky.

Were you seasick?

Yes, I was horribly seasick and I'll never forget talking to the captain. Because I was moving around. I had freedom and I was talking to the captain and he said, "That's the worst sea I've ever struck in 45 years." And we had to strike it.

20:30 At any rate we arrived at Wellington, New Zealand. We had a lovely welcome and then we headed across the Pacific and our escort, HMAS Australia left us two days out of New Zealand and we were unescorted. We had one six-inch gun, one four-inch gun and four Lewis machine-guns and that was our defence. And we went to Panama, Balibo, and we got shore leave. Of course, I was getting the job of rounding up all the drunks.

21:00 **Were there a lot to round up?**

Oh yes, we only had about sixty of our blokes but I found that I had to round up the air force and naval personnel that were there too. I didn't drink, so I always copped it. Then we went from there to Caracas Bay, Curacao in the Dutch West Indies. We left there heading for Bermuda, only a German suspected pocket battleship was sighted at dusk.

21:30 Here we are, a sitting target really. The old ship headed towards the USA [United States of America] and it hammered along and the captain asked me "To stay on the bridge," so I had a first-hand view of everything. Fortunately I didn't see any subs but in the early hours of the morning I said, "There's something out there captain" He said, "Yes, we've got four American destroyers around us."

22:00 Now this is June 1941, America didn't come into the war until after 7th December 1941. And they

escorted us all the way to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. We spent a week there and then we joined a convoy of 142 ships. We crossed over the Atlantic and I'll never forget mid-Atlantic, I was having a hot sea bath.

22:30 They dropped a depth charge right beside our ship. I got dressed for that, drying myself, I can assure you. It was very cold, we were up near Iceland. At any rate there was a lot of activity of course, there were sirens going, we had four destroyers and a group of corvettes plus one battle cruiser escorting the 142 ships and they were diving in all directions.

23:00 Any rate we headed on and I must admit feeling very relieved when the Catalina flying boat was overhead out of Scotland and we landed at Glasgow. I stepped off that ship exactly 100 years later than my grandfather had stepped on in 1841 to come to Australia, the same wharf. Amazing, isn't it? Yes, and he was exactly 100 years older than me.

23:30 It's amazing how things work out. At any rate we entrained to Sea Houses on the North East coast of England, north of Newcastle-on-Tyne, given seven days leave. I should mention the first night, after the meal we got there was so shocking. I went down the street, went into a café and ordered a meal. When nothing happened, I approached the waitress

24:00 and I said, "What's happened?" She said, "When you can be sensible I'll give you your order." I said, "What have you got?" She said, "Don't you know there's a war on?" I said, "No I wouldn't know that, I've only arrived here today." She said, "I'm sorry, fish and chips, but we've run out of fish." The meal was chips and at any rate. The next day we went on leave to London, five of us had been good mates on the boat.

24:30 Four in my cabin plus the fellow in the opposite cabin and the five of us went touring London and the rule was that you only got onto a bus if the top front seat was vacant. We kept to that rule, the second one was you got off at every fourteenth pub. After a while, chemist's shops, butcher's shops became pubs in their views of course.

25:00 At any rate we finished up pretty well full. We walked from Piccadilly to Marble Arch where we were booked into the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Hostel for overseas troops. 2/6 per night, bed and breakfast. Excellent accommodation. At any rate we were going towards there and Dave Berry, from Portland, a very fine bloke Dave

25:30 and quite a wealthy man eventually. He had quite a big business there. Dave was groaning out the song, The Bastards from the Bush. A policeman was following us saying, "Quiet, you're disturbing the peace." He was impolitely told what he could do and we continued on and he followed us all the way until we got to our digs. Dave then collapsed. We were only on the fourth floor, but there was no lift. I carried him up them. I tell you what, he was heavy.

26:00 And he was groaning out the song all the way up and next morning a girl came in and pulled the blackout curtain back and said, "Good morning boys, or is it? Who was singing last night?" And Dave pulled his head under the blankets and she said, "What was the name of the song?" and we told her and she had a good laugh. She had a good sense of humour. We went down and had our breakfast and went down

26:30 and at the reception, they said, "Now where would you like to go today?" Tickets wherever you wanted to go to, they had them.

What were conditions like in London at that time?

Very crook because the second night I was there, or was it the first night, I can't remember now, I got off the train at Marble Arch and I had difficulty finding places to put my feet over sleeping bodies on the platform. I got onto the escalator and went up the top and

27:00 there was a great queue of people with blankets and mattresses and pillows there and the porter said to me, "Just wait Aussie, the lifts will be stopping when the last train comes through," and when they did there was an orderly scramble to lay the mattresses and things on the escalators to sleep probably because their houses had been bombed out. Australia House, from Australia House, out in the Strand

27:30 was a great hole in the ground about 40 feet wide and about 30 feet deep where a big bomb had landed. It was in the centre of the road. Quite a few buildings of course, were completely wrecked. In fact, you'll see there, I was one of the ones representing Australia in the march at Buckingham Palace in '41. You'll see in the background there some rubble, what were buildings.

28:00 That's how it was. How the people stood up was remarkable and I pay really, very good tribute to them. They were very good.

Did the bombing continue while you were in London?

Yes, I'll never forget. Well, the first night we were told, "Get down into the shelter, there's a bomb raid on," but the fellows were all too drunk in any case, so we stayed there. No, it was regular, nearly every night.

28:30 That's how it was.

Tell me what it's like to be in a bombing raid like that?

Not very pleasant, but we fortunately never struck the bad part. The bad part was before I arrived. The Blitz in 1940. The originals who went away, some of them were caught in it but it was never that bad. Although I went to Newcastle-on-Tyne one night with a young lady from Hexham.

29:00 There was a dancehall there and we left to get the last bus home and we were on the outskirts of Newcastle when the bomb dropped and blew the glass in on one side of the bus. I thought, "Gee, we were lucky." Next night I went to Hexham to see an army mate in hospital and all the passageways were completely jammed up with stretchers everywhere. And I said, "What on earth happened Les?," and he said, "Oh there was a direct hit on a dancehall."

29:30 And he named it, in Newcastle last night, 300 were killed. That's where I had been only minutes before so you've got to be lucky and that's life. But I enjoyed my stay in Britain.

How long were you there?

Two and a half years. I spent several months in Hexham, Northumberland, then we moved to Thornhill in Scotland and initially I billeted with a family called Hillhouse.

30:00 John and Mary, no children. They were good friends with me until they died. It was really good to be in a good home. But then later, we moved out to the camp and there were 12 to a hut. I'll never forget one of the earlier things. On 14th February 1942, Valentines Day, "St Valentines Day" they called it then,

30:30 the local mail came in. There was 12 to a hut. I get six letters, nobody else gets any.

Where did all those letters come from?

I never did find out, they were Valentines cards. I used to go to the dancing classes, learning Scottish dancing, so I know it would be that group.

Did you wear a kilt when you went highland dancing?

No, no, no. I wear one now sometimes.

31:00 **Can you explain to me why you had been sent from Australia to the UK [United Kingdom]? What was the purpose of sending you blokes out there?**

The reason was that the British Government asked for Forestry companies from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Britain to cut timber. In the First World War, for every man that served in the Allied Forces, a ton of sawn timber was used.

31:30 We were cutting it and initially we were designated to—we were headed for France, only France fell. And they diverted to Colombo, Cape Town and up the UK and formed part of the defence of Britain. Then we moved when the threat abated, we moved up to the various places.

32:00 That's how it was. Initially I was in Hexham, Northumberland way out in the moors, bitterly cold.

So you were actually felling trees there?

Yes, I worked basically in the sawmills because I was in charge of the bush crew at home cutting trees and that and I wanted to learn every aspect of saw milling because I was going to come back to it.

32:30 Plans of mice and men they talk about. At any rate, one day for example, in Thornhill, we cut 62,500 super feet of timber on our mill. I was on number one rip bands taking off the heavy timber, it was 450 railway sleepers, plus a lot of other timber. 33,000 super feet of timber taken off that and all the rest were pushed

33:00 over to further benches, smaller benches.

And what's all this timber used for? Why is there such a big demand for timber during war?

Well, not only, see normally Britain imports timber. The other thing was, all along the railway lines were frequently bombed. They had piles of rails,

33:30 blue metal and sleepers all along so that when the bomb would drop on the main line say from Scotland to England, north eastern railway line, they would have the necessary there within a short distance and the trains would be running within hours. Didn't sort of destabilise everything. Mosquito bombers were built out of timber.

34:00 And with some of the timber we cut, the smaller stuff went into pit props for the mines and so there was a demand for it, there was no doubt about that.

Usually they had imported a lot of their timber, but now they were forced to cut down their forests.

Yes, we were cutting timber from the Duke of Argyll, Queensborough estate in Scotland for example and some of those trees would be several hundred years old.

34:30 Some of the oak trees, others were plantation trees which in Australia would be grown in 25 years, over there they would take double that time because of the colder climate. But we did cut a lot of that too.

And were all your blokes over there from saw milling backgrounds?

A good many were selected for that. You've got the group come from the Forest Commission.

35:00 The idea of course, was that they took over because they wanted somebody to see that we didn't destroy their forests. We, the saw millers, did the job. I mentioned Jack Saxton before he got the OBE [Order of the British Empire] for his designing of a portable saw mill. And when we got to the islands we was cutting timber within a few hours of landing.

Which islands were they?

New Guinea, New Britain. I was in the group that landed in

35:30 Jacquinot Bay in New Britain later on. At that stage of course, there was 17,000 of us and there was 80,000 Japs and we were on a perimeter and we were cutting timber and I must admit, one night, the natives come around to me and I was the saw doctor then as I sharpened the big saws. They asked, "Could I sharpen their machetes for them?"

36:00 which I did, with the light on. I wasn't very comfortable because even though there was a lot of bush, jungle between us, I was a bit you know, but nevertheless, I got away with it.

When you were in the UK—we will come back to New Guinea obviously later in a lot more detail—you were there for two and a half years you said.

36:30 **So you were kept moving around to various places?**

It was only in three places, the UK, firstly, two months in Hexham, I joined the other group there. Then we moved to Thornhill in Scotland for over two years. Then Haywards Heath in Sussex for about three or four months before we came home.

Tape 2

00:30 **Bruce, you were telling me you spent two and a half years in England. Tell me about the living conditions you encountered there?**

They were varied but foodwise it was very difficult. I found that was a really big anti, you know. I used to stay with a cousin of my mother's in Yorkshire. A 77-year-old spinster who tried to marry me off to the local vicar's daughter. She was about 6ft tall, but what worried me was she had a masculine voice, she frightened me.

01:00 At any rate, conditions varied. I remember speaking to a chap who had family and worked for the Duke of Berclune in Scotland and he could see nothing in front of him. He was living from day to day. He didn't have enough money to really properly to feed and clothe his family. And he worked for the Duke of Berclune,

01:30 in Thornhill itself. People lived in the houses and the footstep went into the footpath. She had to watch herself. You always kept 18 inches away from the wall, so you wouldn't step over one of them and of course those doorways were a place for blokes with certain young ladies. They were doing what comes naturally.

02:00 And I enjoyed that time very much because I used to go to the dancing four nights a week and it got us away from the thing. I learnt Scotch.

So after cutting timber all day, you used to go and do highland dancing in the evening? Tell me what sorts of things you had to eat then?

Food which was very, very ordinary. Army tucker. I never forget there were lamb sides brought in, Australian lamb sides.

02:30 One of the chaps claimed it had "1917" branded on it, in other words, they were right at the depth. So many ships got sunk. I went eight months without getting a letter from home. And when I did get one I got one from my sister roasting me for not writing. The mail had been sunk with the ships. The number of ships that were sunk was appalling.

03:00 **What part of Scotland were you in?**

This is south Scotland. Do you know Glasgow, Carlisle, the next major town after Carlisle is Dumfries? We were 14 miles north of that on the main Glasgow road.

And you were there for most of your time?

All of the time was in Scotland excepting when we did a commando course at Achnacarry Estate.

03:30 **Tell me about the commando course.**

Well, we were doing that in '43. The idea of course was training us for the landing at Normandy, the second front. You didn't go around a building, you had to go over it. You didn't look for a shallow spot to go through a river, you went straight through, tin hat and all even though the water was freezing.

04:00 So it was really tough. You know, using grappling hooks, going straight over buildings and it was tough but we handled it very well. You weren't allowed to walk anywhere, you had to run. The first thing they did, they lined us up and they said, "All those left-handed, step forward." And they did. "You carry a rifle at the high port, that's up here with your right hand. All the rest, carry it with your left hand."

04:30 If you were right handed, it was a stronger one than your left and vice versa and that was the reason. Everything was done at the double.

How long did that course last?

Oh, that was about two weeks I think or three weeks.

Did you know what you were being trained for at that time?

No, not then, we got later. When we got to the south of England we went to Aldershot and did an engineers course.

05:00 We were delousing bombs, building Bailey bridges and that, setting bombs, blowing up bridges and that and I'll never forget when we were to build a Bailey bridge over a stream, they said, "Well, until you can do it in two hours, you will keep doing it." We took one look. They said, "That part, four men carry that." Well two of us just picked it up and walked away with it. We had it done in fifty minutes.

05:30 And they said, "It had never been done like that before." We were used to handling heavy things. It makes all the difference.

It reminds me of our training at Orange.

We had a regimental sergeant major from the guards—anyway it doesn't matter and he gave us drill there and he was getting on the nerves of some of the blokes and he would give an order and they would tell him what to do.

06:00 In impolite language! We walked off the parade ground on him and that night we met him down the street and bought him a beer. He said, "If you had been British soldiers I would have had you shot for that!" See, we were a law unto ourselves.

Who was the commanding officer for your—?

Colonel Cyril R Cole OBE. He was a private in Flanders

06:30 in the First World War and as a matter of fact, they were talking of forming a forestry group then, and he put his name down but they never got around to it. He was a thorough gentleman. He had the touch because he had been a private for years. And he was very good. Our company OC lacked a lot. He hadn't grown up.

07:00 **How many men were there in your company?**

160 for each company. There were three companies of us plus a group headquarters. In round figures about 600. Of course, we got leave every three months, a seven days' leave pass with a ticket to wherever we asked. We were encouraged to go to various parts of Britain, so Mr Churchill, he would get up and say, "So you're worried about all the troops in the Middle East? I can assure you you've got so many thousands of Canadians.

07:30 You've got the New Zealanders, you've got the Rhodesians, the South Africans, the Ghurkhas and of course those magnificent Australians." And we would chorus, all six hundred of us.

Did you used to move around in groups of 160, so would your company be posted somewhere and you would all go together?

Yes. You would have an initial group go to set up the things

08:00 and then the rest would follow, that type of thing. You don't all go in one day.

So when you were working in Scotland, that was your longest period of time in one place, wasn't it? Were there 600 of you there or 160?

Yes, 160 of us there all the time excepting for the first two weeks to get them settled.

And were you billeted in private homes there?

Firstly, for the first several months.

08:30 About nine months I was in the home and I was one of the lucky ones because I wasn't in one of the halls and it was very good but when we moved out to the camp we were all together then. We built the camp while I was there, we built the sawmill while was I there. It was used by the British later on of course.

So you were working pretty long hours I should imagine?

09:00 Oh yes, we worked long hours and it was heavy work.

Tell me about a typical day's meals. What would you get for breakfast?

Porridge, which I never liked. I was very fortunate because John Hillhouse had some bees, on Alofa Hills – some beehives. And I always had a little jar of honey and I was able to put a spoonful of honey on the porridge because there was no sweetening. Sugar was not there.

09:30 Some put salt on theirs. I used honey. At lunchtime, well you had whatever the cook knocked up. The favourite meal was of course, was what we called "Camouflage pit pony." It was a loaf, you know a round loaf and they would cut it about a three quarter of an inch slice off it and

10:00 use breadcrumbs and hence the name "Camouflage pit pony" because we had seen the pit ponies going into the works, the meat works, where we got that meat from.

Do you think it was really horse meat?

Oh of course it was, there was no doubt about that. Some of it at least was, so there you are. Food was scarce, very scarce.

What about vegetables? Did you get vegies?

10:30 Not a great deal. Your potatoes were always there. Some pumpkins and things like that. Greenery was very scarce. Fruit, no we didn't see fruit. As a matter of fact we made a big stink at one stage because a lot of Australia Red Cross tinned fruit came in and for somehow or other, it didn't seem to get down to our mess. It all stayed at the top

11:00 for the officers, in the sergeants' mess and we kicked up. I'd been a sergeant and it was a sore point with me to get knocked back for the ranks. I applied for a transfer for the air force, was accepted in '42 and they wouldn't release me because my papers were stamped "Release for the forestry only." So they had me and the major said to me,

11:30 he said, "Oh I'm thinking of giving you a lance corporal." I was so offended and I told him what he could so with it. So I said, "The standard of your NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] are so low, that I don't want to put myself in their group." And every time we did a training, army training, I was called aside and asked "Why I wasn't promoted?" And then in 1941, that was the year we arrived there,

12:00 I was selected along with 19 others, 6 from our company, to march past in the first Allied Nations March World War II, past the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace. Inside the gates and everything, you know. And we, the Australians were given the honour of being with the duty guards of the palace in the Wellington Barracks by the palace. None of the other troops got that. Nor did our air force or army or navy.

12:30 And I was called in, paraded in, mind you and the fellows said, "What have you been up to?" Two guardsmen either side taking me in to the Colonel and when I got in there he says, "I am inviting you to join the Coldstream Guards." I said, "No thank you." He said, "I have never been knocked back before." I says, "Well I've signed on for the AIF for the duration." He says, "Mmm

13:00 well," he says, "After the war, come back and see me and you've got a post here." I said, "Thank you very much," and that was it. He probably wouldn't have wanted to see me because I was down to seven stone after getting blown up and burnt, which I'll tell you about later.

You mustn't have been too heavy when you were in Scotland because you weren't getting a lot to eat really, were you?

I was around 13 stone, 13 and a half stone, somewhere between 13, around 13 stone I suppose.

13:30 I may have been a bit below. Yes I would have been below that.

How did you keep going on that sort of diet?

We got extra diet over the British troops, they were skin and bone. And for example, when we got to Aldershot, the first thing, you know, you go into a mess hall and everybody sits down and you line up and you get the food in your tin plates

14:00 and the orderly officer comes in and the orderly sergeant calls out, "Any complaints?" All the Tommies [British soldier] would be complaining bitterly and we would be sitting there saying nothing and not feeling very happy about the food and at any rate, when he asked, any complaints, we all stood up. Every Australian stood up. And the English

14:30 officer didn't know, he had never had that before, now our officers with him had to tell him what he had to do. Ask the nature of the complaint. And we chorused together. "Wouldn't give it to a bloody dog!" We got extra rations. And the other thing too, when we went into that camp, the first thing was, "Your ablution day is Thursday. Any man not found having his shower on Thursday will be on a charge.

15:00 You shall change your clothes that day. All other days' showers are out of bounds." At any rate, we used to tie a towel around our waists and go straight into the officers' showers, it had no effect on us. I remember in Scotland, at a dance one night I would just stand there and the Tommies would rush over to the girls sitting there at the dance

15:30 and I would just raise my eyebrows at the girl I wanted to dance with and she would just nod and I'd amble over and pick her up and they'd say, "How come the Australians always got somebody to dance with and the others haven't?" She says, "You've never had to stand close to them," holding her nose. Well I saw it first-hand. It was a group of Tommies going to a dance. They had been in their heavy uniforms all day and one bloke he opened up his shirt

16:00 and his jacket and put Johnson Baby Powder under both arms, I'm ready. That was him. So you can just imagine what it was like in the blackouts, in the buildings in London and other places. The BO [body odour] was very, very bad. In fact I was taken home by a lass from Birmingham when I was there on leave.

16:30 I get there and I go into the bathroom, the toilet, and the bath's full of coal.

Didn't know what a bath was?

No. I didn't go back incidentally. And I never forget, I went to Manchester the first time. The whole centre of the town was black, absolutely gone. Bombed out of existence.

17:00 **And what was the morale of the people like at that time?**

Very good although a lot of them said privately, "Will we win this war, will we win this war?" They would be asking us all the time. That was the thing, so they were worried, very worried.

And what did you tell them?

We will.

And did you believe it?

You didn't have to, did you? You just say it. I felt we would stand out. I didn't think we would lose.

Why did you think that?

17:30 I suppose, over-confidence. I know when Russia come into the war I was elated. We all felt, well at least now Hitler's overstepped his mark and that proved to be so. I remember I had an appendicectomy in Scotland. It wouldn't heal and I went to the West Kilbride convalescent home

18:00 overlooking the Firth or the Clyde and all the ships were lined up for landing at North Africa. It was early '42 and that was the best holiday I had all the time I was there. So I was there for a month. The matron, I'll never forget, there were 17 of us went from the hospital with infected wounds and this matron barked out the orders like a company sergeant major.

18:30 And she said, "Dismissed and not you!" My reaction was, "I wonder what the old bag wants," to myself, you know, "Shut the door" and in a different voice, "Please have a seat, now what will I call you?" She says, "I'm an Australian and I've got a son in the Middle East your age and he looks like you. There are three rules here, one: let me know where you are going before you go and I will cover for you,

19:00 two: you will get first choice of every invitation that comes into these homes and there's many of them, and three: leave the girls alone, you've just had an appendicectomy, we don't want you back with a hernia." Those were her directions. Very good for a 20-year-old.

Just for being an Aussie?

Yeah. She was true to her word and whenever I was in that area, I had a free bed. Private room, free bed.

19:30 **Were there men in the hospital who were casualties?**

Not at that stage. There was a few, but it was mainly illnesses and accidents. There's an awful lot of accidents in the army you know.

Tell me about the accidents, how did they happen?

Well, on one British—three million troops involved in Scotland and a lot of the troops slept under their tanks and a lot were crushed because the ground gave way, it just sunk.

20:00 This is the sort of thing that happens. A typical thing too, I should mention about the Scots. Every night there was a fellow, J.B. Murray was his name. He would sit in the corner of the pub, the George Hotel, telling yarns and the theme was always how lousy the Scots were. He was a Scot and he never drank in

the thing, but he carried a flask of whisky.

20:30 And I said, one night I said, “Look, Mr Murray, why do you carry whisky?” He said, “When I go walking in the moors,” he said, “If I get a pain in the heart, I have a whisky and that clears it,” and that probably saved my life later on that knowledge.

Why is that?

Well, I was on the plane going from Brisbane to Darwin. I was chairman of a committee of enquiry involving millions

21:00 up in Darwin and half way along I got this pain, because I had left home at ten to six in the morning here, and I put my hand in my pocket and I didn’t have any Anginine tablets. I rung the gong and one of the conductresses come along and says, “What is it?” and I told her. “Have you got any tablets?” She said, “No, and we haven’t got a doctor on board. Somebody else might have it.” No, they can’t give it to me, bring me a whisky quickly.

21:30 She came back and about three girls around me and five minutes, ten minutes later I was free of pain.

I’ll have to remember that. Yes, and when I got to Darwin of course, I got the car that was waiting for me to drive me to a chemist shop and they gave me some without a doctor’s certificate.

How did you get on with the locals when you were in Scotland?

Very, very well.

22:00 I was treated wonderfully. With name like mine, it’s a Scottish name with a Scottish background, that would have helped. Of course, on the Sunday morning, the elders of the church would stand on a street corner by their square and they would tell stories about people and I’ll never forget one morning they pulled me up and they said, “You boys are playing football, on the ground on the Sabbath!”

22:30 I said, “Well, isn’t that better than standing on the street corner telling tales about Mary or Betty or Jean who are playing up?” They all come back to me individually and said, “You know that was the best lesson we ever heard.”

I’m not quite sure I understand you. The elders of the church, the local church, what village are we in now? We’re in Thornhill on a Sunday; they would stand on the street corner?

23:00 And they’d talk, you know.

What, about the people in the village?

Well, they would talk between themselves, but I knew what they did, because I had been pulled up and told, “Watch that man.” They’re very anti-Irish you know there, and because he’s an Irish Catholic. “Watch him, don’t trust him.” Some of them were my own army mates. Fellows who were amongst

23:30 my best mates. That’s how bigoted they were that way. But the reception we received really was wonderful from the people, it really was. A convoy of British troops pulled up in that town of Thornhill, the trucks were bumper to bumper right down the main street and next thing, ladies came out with tea and things,

24:00 whatever they could add to the troops in those buses, knowing in many cases, they would have no tea or sugar for the next month because that was all their rations. And yet that night, J.B.Murray was still telling stories about how lousy the Scots were. See it’s a misnomer. The distinction between English and Scotch

24:30 is that a Scot will tell a joke on himself, the Englishman will tell the joke on you. It was the distinction that we had. We also had another name, the Englishman and the Pongos. Pongos we gave to those whose actions in our eyes were not acceptable.

25:00 Englishman was a fellow you respected. That was the distinction there.

Tell me how you became involved with highland dancing in Scotland?

Well it wasn’t basically the highland dancing you see here at the various highland games, it was basically doing the Scottish dancing like the Dashing White Sergeant

25:30 Eightsome Reels and that sort of thing. What I found out, there would be snow outside, it would be freezing and you would be stripped down to your shirt dancing because with all the blackouts that were around, there was no air coming in and it was hot, sticky, and you’d find you would have a good old sweat up. Hence the need for a shower when you got back to camp.

And did you have a band that would play for you?

26:00 Yes, one of the local bands, yes. And there was a lot of people. I remember I used to often dance with a 70-year-old woman. She was a beautiful dancer. I found that out very early on. It wasn’t all young girls even though going to the dancing class beforehand, the fellow I was billeted with,

John Hillhouse said, next morning, he says, “Do you know how many girls picked you up last night?” I said, “I wouldn’t have a clue John.” He said, “I counted them, there were 19.” I was the first to get picked up and they would pick up others on the way. It just depended where you lived, you know. So that was the way it is. You don’t get into any trouble when there’s that number, I can assure you. Safety in numbers. Yes.

Tell me about a typical working day in the forestry company.

First thing you’re there and start at 8am and you are into it straight away. In my case, on the saw bench, there was fellows in the yard cutting the logs and things, they came in on semi-trailers. Those logs would be cut, rolled down to a breaking down bench. They would take one slab off it and then it would come to us. We were number one rip band and number two and number three.

We got all the big stuff, all the heavy work. You go flat out until about 10.15am. The whistle would go, the saws would stop. Over to the canteen in the camp, have a cup of tea and the first over there of course, got in straight away. I used to be the nominated runner for our group, our bench.

So, and I would order for the four of us. That’s four to a bench. Then 15 minutes the saws would start again and you were into it until lunchtime. About 45 minutes for lunch time and then right through until after five at night. The electric lights would be on of course, because in Scotland you know, it’s dark until about 10.30 in the morning.

And dark again at 3.00 in the afternoon and very little light in between. You still need the lights on. And I often thought, “Well, we’re a candidate to get bombed,” but we never did fortunately.

And there are four of you working on the bench, and what jobs does each of those men do on the bench?

Well, you have a benchman, who leads in the saw, you have somebody on the rollers, power rollers, he sets the gauge for whatever size the benchman wants. The tailing-out, two of us, I would be on the side always where the finished product was coming off. The other fellow would be on the other side. And we took off a certain amount. Anything that was smallish at all, we just

pushed on to the other benches. We handled all the heavy stuff. The yard, of course, the timber went on rollers into the yard and there would be a tally clerk tallying it, so you knew exactly what was being produced. It would go down a chute into the timber yard. We had a group of fellows down there, loading trucks, taking them to the railway line

to put on trains and all that sort of thing.

What sort of timber was it?

Various types, you had the Scotch Pine, of course, the Radiata Pine or Pinus Radiata, Oak, Ash, Elms, Silver Birch, Beech, Sycamore, you name it, we had it.

And the equipment that you had to use, was it good equipment?

For the times, yes. A double saw for breaking down, one saw here and another above,

so that covered all sides. The breaking down bench, not used in Australia was what they called a rack and pinion bench. It went either side of the saw, it went on rollers. And the only connection was at the back end. The two sides stayed put and they would just wedge it up and run a log through and over it

and that’s it and back for the next log. There was not wasted energy at all to produce. The average British sawmill was turning 2,000 super feet a week out.

What’s a super foot?

It’s a 12” by 12” by 1.” One twelfth of a cubic foot and they would turn out 2,000 a week and as I said,

we turned out one day, 62,500 super feet in a day.

How many men are working?

We had 37 in the mill including steam engine drivers, the fellows cutting the logs in the yards, rolling them in and all that. We built a little railway to bring some from across from the other side of the railway line down to us.

That was the main line to Glasgow.

So they were only doing 2,000 super feet and you did—?

A week, yeah, because there would be only four or five of them working. They were not organised.

Still, it’s a big difference in productivity, isn’t it?

Well, in Australia we always worked, that number of men should at least turn over a thousand a day.

They would put 2,000 a week and the other thing is, when we found

32:30 in the islands too, when we were comparing to the Americans, we produced far more than the Americans or Canadians could produce.

Why were we so much more productive than them?

Better organised, I think. When you do it for a living, you have got to produce it or the money's down. It's as simple as that. And the machinery there was quite good.

33:00 **Was some timber easier to work with than others?**

Oh yes. They're all different weights. Spruce for example used to buckle in on the saw and even a log three feet in diameter, you would be pushing it through and it would come back and we would be hanging on to keep it down. It was pretty dangerous you know. I remember one day, it went so far that my hand went across and I hit the side of the saw. That was training to know what to do. If I

33:30 hadn't done that, I could have lost a hand. Quite a few had lost fingers. And we had what they called amps—English troops which were very poor quality ones—ones that weren't considered good enough for the infantry or something. And they were to do jobs there. And I'll never forget one day one of them was singing and waving his arms

34:00 around and he was cutting up the rubbishy stuff on the circular bench, the saw. And I warned him, I said, "Look, for goodness sake, keep your hands away." Next thing, clunk, lost all his fingers across like that. Another time, one of them wore those English outfits and he hadn't done up the flaps around the base of the trousers and he got caught in a rack

34:30 that drove the saws and everything. Well, we stopped as quick as we could and I know on our bench we jammed the log in as fast as we could to try and hasten it. But he got away, he got out of it all right, but he would be a pretty sore man for a few days, I could assure you.

It could have been very nasty. Did anyone actually lose their lives in an accident in a sawmill?

Yes, oh yes.

35:00 I remember George Lilley of the 3rd company. Why I mention him, he had a magnificent singing voice. He was highly regarded by the Scots, they used to have him, I've got a poem there, I'll let you read later on that, about George. "Who Had the Splendid Voice," they called it. And he used to sing the song to the tune of Mountains of Morn. The sands roll down to the desert

35:30 and I had the words to that song.

What happened to him?

A log rolled on him unloading it off a semi-trailer. So that's the sort of thing that happened. Others died from illness. It was true, working in the mud. We was warned quite often by the local doctor that a lot of our fellows would never live long because of the exposure

36:00 to the mud and that.

The mud around the timber mill?

And the bush and all that. See, we had to cut the trees down at ground level and that meant you had to kneel in it. And there was clumsy pads you wore on your knees, that was all right up to a point but when it was really wet it didn't keep the water back. So—

So you just got very wet?

36:30 Yes, and I know after one of our exercises when we swam the Myth River, I think there were particles of ice in the water, it certainly felt like it, in full outfit, tin hats you know, rifles—we had 29 on the sick list the next day out of about 100 that took part in that exercise. So that's the sort of thing that cost a lot of lives, a lot of hours

37:00 in armies anywhere.

How was your own health during that time?

Mine was pretty good apart from the appendectomy. I had a sort of malignant type. It wasn't an acute one and I wasn't well at all until that was done. After that it was good. I was in superb physical condition. I'll never forget, I went into a hospital in Glasgow and the surgeon said, "Would you mind

37:30 coming into the room with all the young doctors?" There were men and women doctors, about 20 of them. He said, "I want you to strip to your waist and let them see your muscles." He said, "I've never seen muscles like that before." They're gone now I can assure you. When you go down to seven stone, that's it. Also when I was in Balakmile [?] emergency hospital I was giving cheek to one of the sisters, she (unclear) two grenadier guardsmen on to me.

38:00 They come, one either side of the bed and I grabbed them, one arm in each and just went like that. Held

them down and twisted one arm of the blokes around the other and held them up and said, "Anybody else?" You're very strong because of the work you do, that's where the muscles are built up. These people that build muscles and that, we had one fellow in our unit, he did the exercises to build up his muscles

38:30 he was an amateur—professional boxer in Melbourne but he wasn't very strong at all. He worked as batman for one of the officers. Different sort of work altogether.

He had no real strength.

Tape 3

00:30 **Now you were just going to tell me—?**

Yes, we had just arrived in Hexham. I think the second night I was there, I went to a dance in Hexham, the Old Abbey there, and I took a girl home, and I picked her and took her out and that. At any rate, her sister was there with a sergeant, an army sergeant there. I thought he was her husband, her sister's husband. At any rate, all of a sudden there was panic—"Oh, her husband's coming home." So I go along with this girl and her sister is meeting her husband, all crying all over him and everything.

01:00 "Oh, yes I never looked at another bloke while you were away." I'm thinking to myself, you know. At any rate, he had seven days' leave. When he's leaving, we're there to see him off. His wife was crying over him. She says, "I'll never look at another bloke," and this sort of thing. That it was all right and we go to another dance and this girl says "I want to go home," something. I said, "All right," I walked her in, it wasn't far away.

01:30 She opened the front door and there he was in bed with the bloke's wife. He, army sergeant, was back with her and the doors were open doing what comes naturally. So much for her cry. And I thought, "If that's her standard," well I never went out with that girl again. I thought, "That's it."

Now I want to ask you about tree felling and sports.

02:00 Sports, well we didn't have much excepting the—we had a sports meeting in Dumfries. That followed on, I should mention at the beginning of that, I had been in hospital, I got leave and I was down in London. I went downstairs at Australia House, the comfort section to get a jumper and the lady was wonderful to me. She went to

02:30 all trouble, calling me "Lovely one." And she said, "Now would you like to come home and stay with my husband and I?" I said, "I would love to." I said, "But I've got to go back to Scotland tonight." She said, "Well next time you're down, come and stay with us." I said, "All right" without thinking. "By the way, what's your name?" She said, "Mrs Bruce. Stanley Melbourne Bruce's wife." Lord Bruce of Melbourne later. He was then High Commissioner in London.

03:00 Well, we had the sports meeting in Dumfries, and because I couldn't compete because of my condition, I was the fellow looking after the media. Explaining the various wood chopping events etc. The official party came out, Lord Bruce, then Stanley Melbourne Bruce and our Colonel, Cyril Cole, our Major, Ben Alicken and General Short with the British Army and a few others.

03:30 And they went walking out and Mrs Bruce leaves the party and comes over and gives me a kiss and goes back. And the (unclear) what gives it to you? And I said, "Oh we're old friends!" So much for friends. I never did go and stay with them and I've always regretted it since.

I understand that Dr Evatt visited your company on one occasion?

Yes, yes, he came to see us down in Scotland once and down in the south of England. One particular time

04:00 in the south of England, we had been away then, the originals had been away three and a half years and I had been away nearly two and a half years and Dr Evatt came with the colonel and the major, and I think General Short was there, the British Army General. At any rate, one of our fellows, Ken Sparks, I'll name because I know his family wouldn't mind. Ken was a fellow with a real

04:30 larrikin streak in him. Ken had been relegated to driving tractors because too wild to drive the major's car and he had been working in the bush snigging in logs, covered in dust. He had cut the trouser legs off because it was a hot day. 80 in England's a hot day, cut the sleeves out of his shirt with an axe.

05:00 And he walks up and they're all standing there and he goes straight up to Dr Evatt, and he says, "When are you bludgers going to get up off your gingers and bring us home? We've been away three and a half years." Well, Dr Evatt had allowed twenty minutes to be there. An hour later they're still trying to get him away. Ken had such a vocabulary of jokes and what have you, he didn't want to leave. The same Ken Sparks and we're in Aldershot, in an army camp there.

05:30 It's an army town. We're in a double-storey building, about 25 feet away there's another double storey

building and the girls are there. They had a guard on duty, so don't worry. At any rate we were getting undressed and there were, because it's lights out at ten o'clock, no blinds or curtains on either side. You get an idea of what sorts of gestures went on. At any rate each morning when we marched up one street there was three girls used to come out on a balcony

06:00 and wave to us and I heard from one of the blokes that they were the girls on the switchboard, night duty. And one morning there's nobody there. Ken yells out, "Come on Blondie, show a leg!" And Blondie came out, threw her hair back over her head, lifted her nightie up to the waist, and waved a leg over the balcony sans pants! Those were the sort of things have happened, you know.

06:30 And, we had some funny things really. Another time when we were in Scotland, Ken again, had a 4-10 shotgun, I don't know where he got it from but he got it and he was shooting at pheasants while we were driving along the road going from the town out to the camp before we built the camp.

Did you ever get the chance to do any shooting while you were over there?

Yes, I did. I was selected to represent Australia

07:00 against a Scottish side. I got top score, a double possible.

What's a double possible?

2 50's, 10 shots for each, 5 are counted. A bull's eye was 5, 4, 3, 2, and so on. I got two 50s, that's a possible. I was also selected against a Bisley side for Australia and I got equal top score there

07:30 with 99 out of 100. And I was also asked, seconded, to the British Army by our major to test rifles. At about 10am a British gold braid came along, you know one of these top group and he's a captain with a rifle. He said, "I want you to test this." It's shot firing low right.

08:00 "Ah go on, you're only pulling it." You pull it down instead of squeezing the trigger. The army, British Army, of course, I didn't give a continental how I spoke to them and they are sort of bowing to their officers and he said to me, "You had better put some shot through." So I laid down a 25 yard range, a central bull's eye, right in the centre. I said, "Nothing wrong with that." The armourer said, "You had better fire another four shots

08:30 to show it's not a fluke," and I fired four more and all I did was slightly enlarged the hole. And they wound the target back and the armourer took the thing, and he said, "See, sir, his score the other day was no fluke." See, I had broken the field firing record and 70 odd thousand troops had been over beforehand from 1,000 yards down to 100 yards. You fire you run, you fire you run

09:00 because I used a little bit of this (taps head) one bloke was a very slow runner, so I made sure I was 2 yards, 3 yards in front of him. I wasn't puffing at all, and when you are puffing you are going up and down like that, and to shoot is very difficult. I had no worries that way at all. I think I cheated somewhat.

What made you such a dead shot, Bruce, what do you think it was?

Dad was and one of my uncles in Flanders was a sniper

09:30 in the First World War. Dad was an outstanding shot. I think it's in your makeup in part. Practice is part, but makeup in as much as you're able to control your heartbeat and your breathing. You've got to control your breathing. A lot of people can do that. Dad, like me, had a slow heart beat. I think that was an advantage.

10:00 And strange as it may seem, I was slightly short-sighted and the result is I saw the foresight very sharp, very clear. The target, a haze. But as long as you fire at the haze the same way all the time, you're right. The other way and if you're long-sighted, the foresight is blurry,

10:30 that can throw you ten or twelve feet out in 1,000 yards. So I think that was it. And I was in the Victorian Squad at one stage and I used to go down there. I remember Percy Pavey who was the best rifle shot in the Commonwealth saying to me, "Why didn't you put your name down for the Olympics?" I said, "Perc, I couldn't afford the special rifles." We were living—

11:00 I built a new house at Moorabbin—Dorothy and her little girl, a baby, and I didn't have the money. He said, "Well I would have given it if I had of known that." Because I knew I was a better shot than the people representing Australia. But that's life.

How much were you being paid while you were in the UK?

I was on a higher rate, of course. I was, saw doctor for group one which you get basically get a corporal's money.

11:30 Whereas the basic sapper was six shillings a day. I was on nine shillings a day.

What does a saw doctor do?

Sharpens the saws, etc. The circular saws of six feet in diameter and all that sort of thing, you grind them out, grind the teeth out and you file it and it's got to be able to cut.

12:00 **Where did you learn to be able to do that?**

I used to watch Dad in the mill at home. This is why I went into the mill, to work in the mill when we were away there. To gain experience in every facet and I got it that way. So that was the idea of all that.

There was a CSM [Company Sergeant Major] Sam Hibbs, was that in England or Scotland? Tell me about him, because I understand he was a—?

12:30 Well, he was called the "Brown bomber" or the "Black bastard," it just depended who spoke. He was a bad man, he really was. And he didn't look like a good soldier. I found some of the things he said and that was not right.

13:00 For example, every now and again you would be put on guard duty and in our case, we would fall up and they would select the stick for the best presented person and the first time I went up I didn't get it. It was the only time I didn't get it because I was always so smart at drill. It was because of the webbing, was put the wrong way according to him.

13:30 It wasn't right according to the Australian Army and so on, you know. He would be out at night time, you know, fellows would come back late, they'd come back in the morning. He would be walking back with them, speaking with them, being nice to them and that. They would get into camp and the next thing you'd know they would be up on a charge for being AWL [Absent Without Leave]. Yes, I struck him once in Dumfries.

14:00 I was down there and I stayed on the Sunday to get the early morning train back to, no leave pass, to get the train back to Thornhill. At any rate, I opened the door to my room and the door opposite opened and here is the—an older blonde who was in our canteen in the camp at grips

14:30 and she was saying "Good-bye" to him. I walked off quickly and I could hear him trying to catch up, so I walked as fast as I could without running. I could hear him running after me, when he caught up he said, "Look Bruce, you're not going to tell anybody about this, are you?" I said, "That depends." I said, "You have been on to me ever since I come here," as though he was a company sergeant major. So he upset me right from the beginning.

15:00 I said, "No more fatigue duties, number one. If you report me now, everybody in the camp will know including the sergeant major." And so, you know he said, "Righto, righto, righto." So I never did any more fatigue duties after that until I got back to Australia and I copped it immediately we landed in Brisbane.

Now when did you finally leave the UK?

15:30 October 1943 and we came home—we were put in a train first with all the blinds down and went one way and came back another way and ended up boarding the Mauritania at Liverpool. It had been apparently leaked that we was to get on a ship at Glasgow. And when we were in the middle of the Atlantic

16:00 Lord Haw Haw pronounced that, "Those misguided Australians were now at the bottom of the Atlantic." The ship that had been leaked that we was to be on was sunk. That's a pack of submarines. We were unescorted because it could outpace a submarine. It went like this all the time (zigzagging) the ships kept changing direction. If any torpedoes are fired at a distance,

16:30 they move quick and often enough to offset that and so we went via the Mauritania without any problems to Boston. We got off the ship there and went by train to Teenick [?] Armoury in New Jersey. At Teenick Armoury first thing, of course, we're lined and we had to strip off and be examined medically, all standing naked in a great big hall, right? That was the first thing, and I thought, Ahhh…

17:00 **Why did they do that?**

Oh, to make sure you didn't have VD [venereal disease], etc., etc. That's what it was all about, disease of various types, of course. There, I'll never forget after the UK, the food. First thing we had were great big trays, stainless trays of food with six compartments loaded up with food and it was far too sweet for us. None of us could handle it, it was too sweet, we hadn't had sugar for years.

17:30 The sweets for example would be a pound of ice cream with a great big ladle of Australian peaches. I was then 22 years of age and I could not manage any more than half of the meal. And I know we went to the canteen when we got over the side to California, one night, and the Americans were buying food.

18:00 Further icecream after a pound of icecream.

Did you go to New York?

Yes. We were taken everyday from Teenick Armoury in New Jersey across the Hudson River to New York. We did the tours and that was always with a guard of military police. Any rate, we had the march passed on 2nd October, 1943

18:30 and we marched from Battery Point up Broadway to the City Hall and it teemed rain. A ticker-tape welcome. I'll never forget at one stage a lump of paper had blown onto my face, covering one eye. Of

course you weren't officially allowed to shift that. But I did shift it, I must admit. We got in front of the City Hall and the then Mayor of New York, La Guardia,

19:00 they named the airport at New York after him. It was a stirring address, he was almost 'Churchillian' in the way he spoke and I'll never forget his final words: "Never have I seen finer, fitter, more handsome men that these Australians and New Zealanders. Now girls, make them real welcome." Any rate, that night we were taken to Madison Square Garden, "Ice Capade Show of '44," they called it.

19:30 This was '43, I've got the program there. At any rate, we, well it was a magnificent show and I got backstage.

How did you manage that?

Oh, I just slipped out to the toilet, and out back. I got picked up by the American MP's and bundled into a truck with the New Zealanders. I said to the fellows, "Well look

20:00 I'm not staying here, the first corner it slows down, we're over the tailboard and off." Full gallop up one street and down the next. We got away and we got outside the Len and Eddie nightclub and we were only, Australians, allowed $3.20 American, that's all we had. I had tons of money in my pay book but we weren't allowed to have it and the cover charge was $2.20

20:30 And the cheapest drink was 75 cents.

It wasn't going to be a big night, was it?

Any rate, Len came out, at least Eddie, came out himself—"Oh, boys from Down Under [Australia]. No cover charge for you boys," and we go inside and he said, "First drink on me." And we're having a drink there and I was having a beer then and at any rate, we're counting our money and I said, "I can't do this. It's too expensive."

21:00 And a voice in my ear says, "I've got the money honey, if you've got the time." I turned around and here's this blond with a peek-a-boo hairstyle, turned out to be Veronica Lake, the film actress. She took six of us nightclubbing around New York. I didn't see her pay for anything, we didn't have to pay for anything, everything was on the house and I don't know what happened, but I was sitting down talking to the leading lady at the Howdy nightclub,

21:30 Joanna Driscoll I think her name was, any rate, I looked around and all the other blokes are gone. I thought, "Well that's beaut – I've got out to New Jersey, Teenick Armoury and she drove me out." She said, "I finish in a few minutes." A straight eight Buick with the hood down. Just as well, because I was feeling a bit green. Of course in typical style, instead of dropping me discreetly at the gate and letting me walk in, she drove straight in,

22:00 pulled up between our CO [Commanding Officer] and the troops. And I got out of the car and the Sergeant Major Hibbs, yelled out, "Where do you think you're going?" I said, "Don't be bloody silly, I'm not going, I've been," and was promptly sick and that probably saved me. So that was it, six hours later we were on the train across, by Pullman sleeper, across America.

What was the trip like across?

22:30 Oh, wonderful really. We even had a Negro steward making up our beds for us. Sheets on beds were things we hadn't seen for many years excepting when we left camp. And when we got to California, well, firstly, we used to get out at various places and march while they filled up with the water—

Why did you do that? Get out and march?

23:00 Well, they filled up with water and all that – see it's several days on the train. We had to get exercise and this was a way of letting the locals see us and I think this was behind it. And any rate when we got to California, through the Sierra Nevada mountain range and that is absolutely beautiful. The Rockies is nothing to me, but the Sierra Nevada mountain range is really beautiful. And we got down to—and it pulled up in a vineyard.

23:30 In the middle of a vineyard and any rate, needless to say, we decided a few fresh grapes would be good. I remember going and getting a nice bunch of grapes and this American Negro, stood in the doorway of the train and said, "If it's good for youse boys, it's good enough for me," and jumped out and got some. I said, "Quick mate, grab some and get back in, you're not going to get away with it like we do!"

24:00 So he got back in and of course the fellows had conned him that he was going to join the Australian Army and he broke down and cried when he found he couldn't. When we arrived in San Francisco area, it was at Oakland, Oakland there, and we were stationed in a camp there but we got one day that we were taken into San Francisco.

24:30 I remember a fellow called Bill Arnott and myself, he was from Queensland, he was an older chap and we were walking around the Golden Gate Park amongst the Blue Gums with kangaroos hopping around and a girl in a white coat came out, and she said, "Oh, Professor Toss would like you to come and have a cup of tea with him." So we go in and I thought, "All right,"

25:00 and she was his assistant, he was an English professor. At any rate, we had a cup of tea there, and he says, of course, he says, “You recognise them,” pointed to the kangaroos, “But you’ve never seen any Blue Gum trees like these” and I said, “As a matter of fact, I’ve got a property of them at home.” That really upset him. Then he arranged for us to go to a party up “Snob Hill,” that’s what they call it in San Francisco

25:30 in their daily terms, Nob Hill, the “Snob Hill” it’s called and we got there to a beautiful home, it really was and the main room was a great dance hall. And we were met at the door by the hostess and I would say in her late forties, trying to look twenty. She said to my partner, “You’re my partner for the night”

26:00 and grabbed him. And she said, “Don’t you go away, I’ve got somebody special for you.” And the next thing she comes back with her daughter. At any rate, after three dances, there’s a dance going on, this girl proposed to me. I thought, “Good heavens, I’ve had proposals in England and Scotland but not after three dances.” I said, “What gives?” She says, “Well, American soldiers are marrying Australian girls. I’m trying to break into films. I’d have my photo all over

26:30 every page if I married an Australian.” I said, “No thanks, not without a honeymoon.” Well we only had a couple of hours in any case.

What was he doing with kangaroos? Where did the kangaroos come from?

They were just hopping around in the Golden Gate Park, on the San Francisco side of the Golden Gate Bridge. A lovely park there. Beautiful Blue Gums,

27:00 I’ll never forget that.

Were you very homesick at this stage? You had been away a long time.

No, I had reached the stage where I would have rather stayed in the UK rather than come home because of the difficulty, you know, when I left home, Mum broke down and all that sort of thing. My youngest brother was in her arms then.

27:30 So you could see it was a big family, a big difference in ages and I felt—and many others expressed the same thing, as we were coming across the Pacific in the ship from San Francisco, we came through Auckland and then to Australia, that we would have preferred to have gone straight to New Guinea and got it over with, rather than—we knew we were going there.

Were any of your brothers or sisters in the services by this stage?

28:00 No, they weren’t. My eldest brother was rejected and nobody else. There was only the one sister that was old enough and she was working in a restricted area in any case, you know. A couple of my cousins were and I met one of them in New Guinea, in Lae.

28:30 On our trip home, I should mention, travelling from San Francisco, there were a lot of Americans on board, of course the Australians ran the Crown and Anchor board and the two-up schools and made all the money and when we got to Auckland, the American colonel had demanded nobody be given shore leave and our colonel was the senior colonel, so he really had the say

29:00 but it was an American ship and he was in a spot. So the word was passed around that at ten to six, all officers and NCOs had to go below. And stay below. I marched them off in full marching order. A guard on the gangplank, two of them with baseball bats and the American colonel up on the bridge yelling out, “Use your baton on them,”

29:30 a couple of our blokes, grabbed the batons off them and said, “Don’t be silly or you will finish up in the water,” you know and one of them, Jim Waterhouse, from WA [Western Australia] yelled out, “You shut your mouth, or I’ll come up and use it on you.” Any rate, we marched them all off and of course, there was a fleet of cars to meet us. The New Zealanders, of course, had arranged parties for us and I was very fortunate, I got picked up by the regal car.

30:00 See, I had marched them off, and I got taken there, and I was with the Governor’s daughter. And of course, we had the tour of Auckland. Wonderful tour. At a minute to twelve, I marched them back on. Mind you they weren’t quite as steady. And next day we got charged, and of course the charge was three days confined to barracks. Nothing was ever entered against my book and I’m sure no other pay book had it recorded.

30:30 And of course, we would be three days on the ship. See you couldn’t go anywhere, could you? And when we got to Brisbane, the wharf labourers were on strike. “No ship shall be unloaded” and they tried to explain we had been away three and a half years but no, no ship. And I was there, and I said to a group of blokes, “We’re not going to stand for this are we?”

31:00 No! And I said, “Let’s get the jelly bellies” which we called them and we had to run down the back of the ship and down the gang plank otherwise we would have thrown them into the sea but we cleared the wharf. There were about six ships all standing idle with supplies for the troops in New Guinea, all held up because of the wharf labourer’s strike. Within half an hour every ship was being loaded or unloaded.

31:30 **How did you manage that?**

We cleared the wharf. We cleared them off. We would have thrown them into the sea if they had have resisted.

Why were they on strike?

Oh, goodness knows, some industrial action, you know.

How did you find the American soldiers?

Quite different to the Australian. Noisier, for example, I remember in California

32:00 in the canteen there one night, an American, and they rows of patches up, you know for medals, and he said, "Where's your medals?" and I said, "We don't hand them out for nothing." "Oh yes, see that bloke there," I said. "Yes, I see him there," he said. I says, "He's only got three, hasn't he? Did you see that first one? That was a military medal for action under enemy fire.

32:30 Bravery. Have you got one for that? What have you got yours for?" "Oh, one's for shooting, one's for drill, one's for—" You know what I mean, worthless. We didn't get any until after we got back to Australia, that's when we got them first.

Had these American soldiers seen any action at all?

No, they were only in a training camp and I know the first morning we were out doing physical training

33:00 at 6am and the sergeant giving the Americans physical training made the Americans stand and watch us. They were young men with obese—completely utterly unfit and he said, "Now I want to see you fellows like these boys." It's all that ice-cream I suppose, that's what did it to them?

Soft living. And that of course,

33:30 was why they failed in New Guinea in both campaigns, they weren't fit.

What happened when you got back to Brisbane?

Oh, I was given the task because I had led the charge of unloading all of our stuff while the rest had shore leave. Sergeant Major Hibbs was catching up with me. "Hibbolini" we nicknamed him. But then of course,

34:00 we got on a train from Brisbane and another fellow who was a permanent army man, he lost his rank as a quartermaster sergeant, for I don't know what, Jim Muldeary. He and I who had been unloading and organising all that and was put in a box car compartment and there was no cushion on the seat even. He slept on the rack over head,

34:30 I slept on the other and we came from there right down to Melbourne.

How long did that take on the train?

Oh, that took a couple of days I think.

A bit different conditions from the Pullman going across America.

The most efficient train were the British ones though. They were smaller engines, but gee they were efficient and we used to travel on them a lot. The American ones

35:00 also threw out a lot of coal dust where the British ones were cleaner engines. They must have had a better collection of dust. Crossing America for examples, going through the Sierra Nevada rocky range we had an engine at the front, an engine in the centre, and an engine at the rear. We were waving to fellows two bends below us – it was like this (spiralling).

35:30 It was a massive train of course, because the Australians and New Zealanders were all on it. So there would have been a large number on it. I don't know how many

So you came back to Melbourne?

Yes, I got leave, we got discharged at Royal Park. And I know that the first thing that happened to me was my name was called over, "Would you please report to the adjutant's office?" they said, "Oh what are you up to?"

36:00 I get there, and of course the adjutant was a fellow sergeant who got his commission papers the same day I did and he was then a captain, I'm a sapper and he offered me a post there and then, but I felt, well, I had a team lined up to work on the mill for me, top workers in my opinion.

So you had already recruited men to come and work for you?

Yes, after the war yes,

36:30 but that of course was all blown out when I got blown up and burnt.

When you were in Melbourne, had you already arranged for these men to come back to

Glengarry with you?

Yes, we got passes to do that but I had to wait 24 hours before there was a train even. And I know that one of our fellows who had been sent home medically unfit sometime before was at Royal Park. He wanted somebody to go home

37:00 and have dinner with him and his wife. At any rate, he was going around, and I wasn't a particular mate of his but I knew him quite well and he was a good bloke and I says, "Well, I can't do anything today, I'll go home with him for a yak," you know. We get there, he takes me into his house. It was between, right next to – about four or five doors from the beach. A lovely home, a mansion.

37:30 Well, Jack's got money. I'm taken in there, taken into the lounge room and he walked out and I walked over to the mantelpiece and there was the girl – a big picture of a girl Jack was knocking around with in Scotland. And the other end, a photo of an American soldier. And I'm looking at this girl and the voice behind me, a woman's voice behind me said,

38:00 "Yes, while he's been having her, I've been having him!" So that was it – that's just life.

And you had already recruited men to come and work in your sawmill down in Glengarry? And did you recruit them from your company?

Yes, of course, they were the fellows I worked with. You know who the workers are and who the shirkers are, that's the way.

Tape 4

00:30 **Bruce, you were just telling me about an occasion before you left England when all the Australian troops were addressed by General Short. Tell me what happened?**

Well, he addressed us and said, "The King and Prime Minister Churchill were both coming today but they have a meeting with Mr Roosevelt, President Roosevelt, so they couldn't make it and I'm apologising on their behalf and I'm telling you that you have been selected to spearhead the British landing on the second front." We had done commando training, we had done a special engineer's course and we were highly fit.

01:00 A few older blokes would have probably been left behind. At any rate, Prime Minister Curtin had heard about it and rang Holland, the Prime Minister of New Zealand and the two of them rang Churchill and told them "We had to be brought home immediately." So that's what led to us coming home to Australia. So maybe Ken Spark's comments to Dr Evatt also helped.

01:30 **Indeed. So you knew you were actually coming home to go to New Guinea?**

Yes.

Let's come back now to Melbourne, in Royal Park. After that did you get down to Glengarry to see your family?

Yes, I had to wait 24 hours to get a train and we went up to Glengarry and there was about thirty people waiting at the station, that little town to welcome me home.

02:00 Including one cousin who spoke to me and I didn't recognise him. In two and half years since I hadn't seen him, he'd grown up so much. That Saturday night following it, they put on a dance at Glengarry in my honour. They did that for everybody from Glengarry that came back or when you went away, and my cousin Ruth Smith who had a magnificent singing voice did the singing with the dancing

02:30 and my mother went with me. My father never went to anything like that, he was very much reluctant to go to anything like that. Mum went with me and a girl I used to dance with that beforehand, Lorraine Broomfield and I danced with her and supper with her and Mum and that was it. I didn't take her or anything. Her Dad took her home.

03:00 I was home for a week, for a week, what was left of the week. Only another five or six days. Of course, Dad took me up the bush to do some free work for him. That's Dad. And I had no means of transport, the only transport I had was the trucks, timber trucks. I borrowed my brother's bush bike to go to one place and that was about it. Walking up the street, you know, I met locals all the time.

03:30 You see, I was well known and then when we left there, back to Royal Park and up to Wagga and Kapooka training camp at Wagga. There I was out in the bullring doing training, and I'll never forget, I was laying down having a rest, eyes closed and everything and there was a corporal

04:00 giving us detail, drill and that and occasionally he'd say something and I'd say, "No, that's wrong, it's such and such." At any rate, all of a sudden I hear a voice yell out, "Corporal what's that man doing laying down asleep!" And I sat up and it was the captain in charge of the training. He started to ask me questions and I not only answered them I added a bit to every one.

04:30 And the corporal said, “See sir, he knows the lot.” I was offered a sergeant’s position to stay in Wagga. Foolishly, some will say, I went away with nothing. While I was there Dad got ill and I got leave to go home, unpaid. And firstly I paraded to Hibbs to our major, Ben Aleck and he rejected it.

05:00 I said, “I wanted to be paraded to the colonel.” That was your right, you know, you could always go higher. “No,” I said, “Oh yes, under AMRO [Australian Military Regulations and Orders] regulations I am entitled to that.” I paraded to the colonel and he immediately said, “Yes.” They held me back two days because there was a musketry course. I got top score in that of course.

05:30 And then I came down with Harry Hopkins who used to be the adjutant of the 37th Battalion, where I was beforehand and he and I travelled on the train together until General Blamey got on and he left me to go running around Blamey. So I got home, spent a month home, worked like a nigger and went back,

06:00 and on the train going back, a group of young blokes who had just joined the army were going on. I walked into the thing, and I said, “Gentlemen, is that seat vacant?” Oh, calling them gentlemen with a pronounced English accent then and I stripped of my coat and I said, “Who’s first?” I chucked them up and one of the fellows pointed to the chevrons, the blue chevrons

06:30 showing the three of them for overseas, you know. If you had overseas service, you got chevrons. They were quite good after that. No problems. I got back to the camp and Jim Waterhouse and Norman Hope, both Western Australians, particular mates of mine, who were in the first hut in Thornhill and Scotsvale Hall in Scotland and in the north of England,

07:00 and I volunteered to be lifeguards at the sands on the riverbank for the swimming club and we got off early every night. It was beaut and we used to go there and I picked out a couple of kids, saved them from drowning, yes.

What was that, the Murrumbidgee?

Yes, at Wagga. At any rate, we,

07:30 I’ll never forget the one girl who embarrassed me quite a bit because every time I went there she kept on looking at me, such is life.

What sort of training were you receiving at Kapooka?

Oh, just boring training which is basic drills. At any rate from then on, after I came back, Harry Hopkins who was adjutant for the forestry group, had me up as runner for the colonel.

08:00 So I used to sit outside the colonel’s office while the others were out in the bull ring at 100 degrees.

Sounds good. How was your father by the way, at this stage?

All right, he was pretty right, thank you.

What had been wrong with him?

Oh, he had arthritis and he had a bad back, you know, part of his life you know. But I think he was putting a bit of it on to get me home.

08:30 I found out afterwards, years later that he tried to get me out of the army then and he could have done it if I had have been in any other unit but the forestry company.

Because you would have been in a reserved occupation?

Yes, special. Because he had men working there for him who were obviously only working there only to keep out of the draft. And that was them.

How long were you at Kapooka?

09:00 Oh, several months. It was in early about March, I think 1944 I moved up to Rooty Hill out of Sydney and was there in a transit camp. We were expecting to go every day. We would line up every morning. Roll call would be taken and dismissed for the day. So we would go into Sydney. I used to go to Manly Beach

09:30 quite regularly and places like that. At one stage, I had an invitation from a family there to go up and stay with them at Tuggerah Lakes. How I arranged for Jim to answer to roll call every time, we had a new company sergeant major by then, Hibbs had been made the regimental sergeant major and when I got back, the instructions were, “Send a telegram

10:00 to the post office at Tuggerah Lakes if there was a movement to go north and I would come home.” At any rate, when I did get back the new company sergeant major fell in beside me and said, “Did you enjoy yourself?” I said, “My oath. See the difference?” And so he covered for me in other words. He was quite a nice bloke too and he was very crooked on the treatment I had received.

10:30 He was really. So I suppose I deserved some of it having most definitely refused the lance corporal. So of course, I could have left at Wagga, I could have left at Royal Park with a rank. I would have got

sergeant at either place. Much better pay of course

11:00 and better conditions. But when you've been away and you've had the good side, I always felt, I always felt and the others did too, "Well, that the others must envy us." We being there and I've got to give a talk soon to ex-commandos and they've been fighting behind enemy lines. How will they feel when they hear my story about England? You had that feeling at the back of your mind, you know.

11:30 That's why I didn't want to run away then.

So really you were looking forward to going to New Guinea?

Well, I felt it was my duty to stay with the unit, and that's the way I felt. I'm very strong on duty. You'll hear that in my post-war life. Like I've been involved with our unit association since '48 until now, and heavily involved, with war widows and that sort of thing.

12:00 I've always felt I had responsibility. I've had to deal with responsibility all my life. Because I worked for nothing until I went overseas, what I did at the sawmill was for nothing. It was to keep the family and if I hadn't have done that the sawmill would never have gotten off its feet.

When you left Rooty Hill, you finally got the call to go back to Rooty Hill, where did you go after that?

12:30 We got on the train. We went up by train to Cairns, and got on the boat there which took us via Milne Bay to Lae. We were in what was a coconut plantation in Lae, gee it was hot. You felt it after the snow of Scotland.

How long were you in Cairns before you went to—?

Only train, straight onto the ship.

13:00 **Which ship was that you went on?**

I've got it written down there, would you like to know?

I would, but that's all right, we will go back to that later, that trip. Tell me about when you first saw New Guinea, what were your first thoughts?

Well you could see the steam rising out of the jungle everywhere. I'll never forget the first time we went out. It used to rain everyday in Lae, and we were going along and the kunai grass was about eight feet high either side of you and the rain had come down and then the sun would come out and the steam was coming up

13:30 and I remember my head going like that (spiralling). It was hard for a start but I was only there for a short time and I was in the detachment that went to Labu Lagoon in the mangrove swamps. Now, in Labu we had no facilities. We were in a tent on a strip of sand, which eventually, the sea did come over it.

14:00 And we used to get on a little boat, or barge we had moored. We worked from the barge, I've got photos of it, there in the mangroves and you're up to your armpits in the slimy mud. To get them out, the logs out, after we had cut them, you cut foot holes in the roots that come down. You're up about eight feet, you had to cut it by axe only, you had to cut the thing down and the wood was very, very hard.

14:30 **What sort of timber was this?**

This is mangrove and it's very, very hard. And the reason for it, they wanted it for a wharf at Lae. They had cut the easier to get stuff and the wharf was collapsing before the wharf had been finished because the Terra Nerada [?] grubs were eating it away and this was resistant to it and so hence the need for it. And very heavy timber.

15:00 Getting it out, we had the winch on the barge, and went up through a high lead and down a log. Well I went up and put the high lead on, with spurs, up the tree and of course having to lift up a hundred weight of block and tackle, I got too close to the tree and the spurs slipped, the bark broke away.

15:30 It was so hard, the spurs wouldn't go into the wood, and here I was crushed against the thing. You know it took 45 minutes before I could properly breathe. It took a long time. Nobody had anything to come and get me. I had to get out of it myself.

How did you get out of it?

Through sheer willpower I suppose. At any rate, I got it and I eventually got the lead up and I didn't feel very well for several days after it. And I know

16:00 that in the water, you know, up to your armpits in slimy mud, going under now and again, it wasn't very pleasant and one day we come back to the bay to have lunch. I hadn't washed my face or anything. The mud was just dripping off then and there was an English one pipper, a sub lieutenant from Oxford. He had been sent out by the British Army

16:30 to learn all about jungle warfare. Well, the powers that be in Lae decided that we had the dirtiest job of

all, so they sent him out and he came out. And he said, “What a peculiar perfume in the air.” A bloke called Ted Catlin, a very good bloke, Ted, but he called a spade a spade. He said, “Perfume! That’s a so and so stink. Ya bloody poofter [homosexual].”

17:00 He said, “Put that man on a charge.” And of course, our officer is with him and I said, “Leave it to me, Rex.” So I walked up to him and I said, “You came out to learn all about jungle warfare, didn’t you?” Well I think you had better come out with me now, and you’ll get first-hand experience. In fact, if you persist with that charge, you’ll come out whether you want to or not and everybody took a couple of paces towards him. “Forget that charge,” he said.

17:30 And that was the first lesson in jungle warfare. It was funny moments, it really was.

So how were you cutting the timber? Were you, were just using axes?

Lateral and saws when you got the tree down to cut the head off, but axes to fall them. It wasn’t practical to use anything else because the wood was so hard and it restricted the way you put up a platform around them.

18:00 You’d be weeks getting an odd tree down.

Because the mangrove is growing right in the swamp, isn’t it?

Yes, the roots come down like that.

So how do you get in close enough?

Well you chip little chips out as foot holes and you go up those roots, and bigger chips where you’re going to stand. Oh, it’s tiring, very difficult work.

And this is in a muddy and very hot and humid environment?

18:30 Yes, you are stripped to the waist. Before you go in, of course, you start in the morning, you take your shirt off and you get the mosquito repellent and you put it on and you put it on each other’s backs and if you get a bloke you don’t like, you pour a little extra. You’ve probably heard of the weed in Gippsland called smart arse? This stuff has the same effect.

19:00 But once you’ve been under the mud, you’re right. There’s teems of mosquitos and crocodiles in there, you are amongst the crocodiles.

Did you ever see any crocodiles?

Oh yes, but never got really close enough. The noise of our machinery seemed to frighten them away. You know, the winch operating and that sort of thing. When you’re out doing it, you didn’t have a rifle with you, you had an axe and I reckon you’d have a 50/50 show with an axe with a crocodile.

19:30 Of course, we had rifles on the barge and every day, there was a native used to come down the (unclear) with this little boy and this little boy had a great swollen stomach, obviously malaria. And we had tinned milk, so we used to give a couple of tins of tinned milk and drink our tea without it for the boy. Well that was all right on the first day

20:00 and on the next day the fellow came along, the native, with a great hand of bananas. And that happened every day, so we had fresh bananas and of course coconuts. I used to go up, two handkerchiefs knotted together and I would go up the coconut trees around the entrance of the lagoon and knock down a green coconut and punch a hole through them. The green coconut ones—the juice, and it’s beautiful juice.

20:30 That was the nearest we got to alcohol until one of the blokes made up a tin of jungle juice.

How did he do that?

Well, he made up a gallon, a four gallon tin, yes, he had swiped or conned or manipulated straight alcohol from the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], mixed it with a lot of raisins and currants, coconut juice etcetera,

21:00 and he put it there and he kept it there for a few days and he would say, “Righto. She’s ready for drinking now.” One evening we got it and we poured it into our in-out tin pannikins. I took one sip and I could feel the hair standing up the back of my neck. And we had one bloke from another unit and he got stuck into it and the next thing we know, he went mad. He would be on all fours on the ground and then he would leap about five feet into the air and down.

21:30 And he headed for the ocean and we had to go in after him and bring him out. We had to knock him out to bring him in. He was really round the bend. Years later, in the repat [repatriation], I saw him there as a patient, seeing a psychiatrist.

Still getting over the jungle juice?

I wonder whether he had that trouble before or whether it was the jungle juice. I know, immediately the bloke who made the jungle juice poured it into the ocean. He said, “None of you blokes have heard a thing about this.”

22:00 **Did you see any blokes who did have trouble coping while you were up there? Who went a bit strange?**

Well, there was one bloke, he used to be a bit strange, but he was strange. He was an alcoholic. For example, when we were in Lae, we got one bottle of beer rationed once only and he had been there about seven or eight months. That was before I went back,

22:30 back to New Britain. He had I would say, a tin pannikin of beer, and he was drunk. He was alcoholic, it didn't matter. The other blokes would drink the whole bottle and have no effect, but not him. So, of course, he, I struck him in Heidelberg Repat Hospital in later years, when I had cancer.

23:00 He was in because he was bringing up blood. At any rate, he came in at midnight, I recognised the voice and I thought, "Oh, yes, that's Brucie Winfield!" He had two pair pyjamas on under his clothes and there was blood on them and that sort of thing. Next morning, the sister says, "Come on Mr Winfield, get out and have a shower."

23:30 He goes into the shower room and he comes back with his hair wet. And the sister come back, "You haven't changed your pyjamas." "No." I called the sister over and said, "Look, I know him from way back, I stopped him from getting into trouble in Royal Park before we went away even." I said, "You go and have a look at the shower. None of us has been in yet, I'll bet it's dry." And she come back and said, "You're right." So she sends him in there and stands

24:00 and watches him shower to make sure he did. Oh well, what did he do? He puts his old pyjamas on, so I go over to where the pyjamas are kept and get a nice pair for him and said, "Here Bruce, put them on." "No." I said, "Yes, put those on." So I stood over him.

Did he remember you?

Of course. Yes, I knew his father later on, I met his father, and his father was a World War I veteran.

24:30 His father's a well-dressed, well-mannered man who lived in South Caulfield in a beautiful home and everything and he said to me, "I don't know what I'm going to do with him." I said, "You won't be able to do anything." He would be benching, and he would have a piece of timber and he would be about to run it through the saw, he would do a jig before he would go through and come back. And that was the 3rd Company with a fellow called Jack Saxton, I've mentioned him and Ron Moon

25:00 was the sergeant under Jack. They were building this portable sawmill and he would wave his arms and say "There they go, Happy Jack and Tropical Moon!" We're in Lae one evening and it's quite a hot walk out to where our camp was, a mile or so, he says, "I'll get a ride" and he lays crossways on the road. An army come around and stopped about that much off hitting him. We got a ride

25:30 but gee, see what I mean! Nothing really worked properly. And he would say, when we got a cold night at Heidelberg, he'd say, "Oh, it's a two carton night tonight." He spent his nights sleeping in the alleys and that. Anzac Day he would always stagger out from Young and Jackson's pub with a bottle of wine in his pocket, join us and by the time we got to the centre of Princes Bridge, he would say, "I've had me march." And leave us.

26:00 **What was your camp like in Lae? What were the conditions in the camp?**

The tent was so high with steel mesh, you know, the steel mesh they use in factories, about four inches in diameter, and your stretcher's on that. And you each had your individual mosquito net and you would get into bed at night time, at the time the lights were going out.

26:30 The whole of the roof of the tent would be black with mosquitos and you would get in there and you would have some spray, so you would tuck it excepting the parts you get in. You get in there and you spray it out and then you hand it to the next bloke. That's how we did it, eight to a tent, you know. You had no space between you of course. And that was the conditions there and you would go down to the mess hall.

27:00 **What was the food like down there?**

It was a lot better than what we got in the UK. It was dehydrated potatoes, dehydrated cabbages and all that sort of thing and the meat was good. We had better food than in Scotland and the climate was easier to take. But the entertainment, nowhere near as good.

No highland dancing.

No, none at all. No roaming in the gloaming.

27:30 **How much timber did you used to cut out of the mangrove swamps?**

We didn't get that many out because it was so hard. I couldn't tell you how much we shifted out of there. I never did see the figures to be honest. And therefore I didn't write anything when Rob Yuel and I wrote the history of the forestry, we never recorded that. Because we didn't know.

When you had finished working in Lae, you were there for what, a few months? Were you?

28:00 Yes. A short period, then to Labu for a few months then back to Lae and while we were in the camp there I went up to the third company, working with their saw doctors, that was opposite the 2/7th Australian General Hospital, where they were and I spent a few days there before I went back to Lae and we went to the landing

28:30 at Jacquinot Bay in New Britain.

What did you do, did you say Labu? Before you went to Labu after Lae? And what were you doing up there? Labu?

Well, that's where we were cutting the piles out of the mangrove swamp. That's all swampland there.

So your next post really after Lae was—?

Back to Lae and then over to New Britain, the Jacquinot Bay landing.

29:00 **Tell me about the Jacquinot Bay landing?**

Well, that was quite an experience. You'd come out of the ship into a landing barge, steel side, a big steel thing that drops down in front of you. I must admit I felt very much happier about that steel thing up in front of us because of there was rifle, machine-gun and mortar fire going on and I thought, "Well at least there's that." Some of them were putting their heads

29:30 over to have a look and I said, "Well you're an idiot." So, I could kill any one of you from three hundred yards away from that and so that kept my head down at any rate. And we landed without any problems. The very first thing, of course, no camp, and I rigged up a ground sheet with brush and a stretcher underneath it which we put up in the dark and I'll never forget that because

30:00 I worked on the stretcher while we were on the ship going over and the major, Hibbs said to me, "What are you doing that for?" I said, "I'm doing what everybody should be instructed to do, getting it so it will go together and I know how to do it in the dark." And we got to the landing, and I put about 30 of the other blokes together for them. And the batman of the CO came along and said,

30:30 "Will you do the major's for him?" I said, "Look, I've got all these to do yet, you'd better do it." So the major didn't get it done by me and the very next day, or that night, the volunteers, I was out in the jungle, way up, and I got the midnight to 4am period. Right out in the pig trail, there were pigs rooting around and I thought, "Gee, well at least the Japs [Japanese] won't get through

31:00 without me hearing them." That was my feeling and a young bloke who had just been picked up, just out of school I think, said, "Don't worry mate, I'm right behind you, I've got my finger on the trigger." And I told him where to take his finger off the trigger because I didn't want to be shot from behind. The next day, we did the—with a 45 ton tractor and blazed a track into where we were

31:30 going to build the mill. And coming back, I know the major got on the tractor and he got caught with a form of green ants. Gee they bite. And any rate, I was cutting these vines and they were carrying a 45 ton tractor (unclear) and I had cut them down with an axe and down with a crash and we got the track through.

32:00 Gee, was I worn out! I was the only one who stayed back to the finish. All the rest had gone through, no orders or anything, no control and I was a bit annoyed about that and when they got it clear the tractor driver stopped and said to the major, "How about giving Bruce a lift?" So I got on the back of the tractor, a ride for the last bit. Next morning I was told "I could stay in bed for a while extra."

32:30 So that was during that morning that a stray bullet cut the sling of my rifle which was under the stretcher, touching the canvas. And I was lying on the canvas and it had cut it. I thought, "Gee I'm lucky that time."

The trip up from Lae to Jacquinot Bay, how long did that take? Do you recall?

It was only about

33:00 I would say about 24 hours. I can't remember now.

So you knew you were going up into an area where there was a lot of action?

Oh yes. We definitely knew that.

Had you heard any action when you were in Lae?

No, no, it was too far away then. And when we got to Jacquinot Bay of course, when we got into the area where we were building a mill, we were cutting timber within hours of landing there,

33:30 for the engineers to put up a wharf and bridges over streams to keep the supply up for the infantry. So we were engineers, but we were a different type you know.

Did you go in with the first landing?

No, there was—the original landing had been done by the infantry only with support of course from the

ships and all that sort of thing.

Did you see casualties from that landing?

34:00 I don't know whether they were from that or not. I saw some casualties when I got to the casualty clearing station. Apparently there were other field dressing stations like I was in, but I think there was only two of us there and of course, there was no attention overnight at all, but I know this, that a Japanese drum of fuel, of aviation fuel,

34:30 we presumed, washed up. They wouldn't use it in our vehicles, and I was running it out with another chap, I said, "You get away before I undo this bung just in case," and I undid the bung and out came this evil smelling stuff and I knew there was something wrong and I started to go for the cliff to get out, and too late. She went up and the flames were going two or three hundred feet high when I finally got out. And I had no skin from the waist up at all.

35:00 And very little below, and two thirds of my total skin area burnt off. The difficulty was that nobody knew anything about it. They put grease on it, which was the very worst thing to do and they lifted me into a jeep and they bodily lifted that jeep over logs, four feet in diameter

35:30 and got me to a landing and put me on a little boat and I was across Jacquinot Bay to the field dressing station and then of course, I was treated by a doctor there who I know got penicillin and every second word from him was a swear word. He would say, "This so and so stuff is so and so and so good, and so it had better be," and he washed my face with it

36:00 and that healed much quicker than the rest of the body. After about six days, at the casualty clearing station, by then the damage was done. About four inches of my spine had no flesh around it. They said, "Sorry old man, you'll never walk again." And after, I think about two or three weeks there, Dr Scott came to me and said, "We're going to take you over to New Guinea in the morning."

36:30 He said, "We didn't think you'd make it, but we think you're such a fighter we think you might." And so next morning, very early in the morning, I was put face down on a mattress on a stretcher, that's how I came to Australia that way. And they put me into a Catalina flying boat, flew me across to Salamaua across the Huon Gulf from Lae. Then put me on a little boat across to Lae, and ambulance to the hospital.

37:00 While they were unloading me at Salamaua, one of the stretcher-bearers had a bit of a limp you know, let go of a corner of the stretcher and it was caught by the bloke at the back who saw it was going to happen and at any rate, they got me off and I looked at him and I recognised him and I couldn't move or speak. And they said, "He knows you Jim, he knows you," but nobody

37:30 thought to look at the ticket that was stuck to the bandages with my name on it and, at any rate, he was Jim Cramer, my sister was married to his brother. He worked for me at our sawmill and he and I used to go to dances together. Then it was some years later, when I saw him. I had Dorothy with me then, he says, you know he says, "I heard in a letter from Jean—that was my sister—that you got burnt. I thought of

38:00 that poor devil, poor bastard," I think he said, in New Guinea. I said, "Jim, if you hadn't caught the end of that stretcher, he would have gone into the water." And he spun around and he said, "How did you know that?" I said, "I was the bloke on the stretcher."

Tape 5

00:30 I lived not from one day to another, I lived from one breath to another. I had to fight for every breath. I was on the dangerously ill list and very few came off that. That went on for quite a long time. I would say after I was burnt, 36 hours later, I felt as though I was still burning. On the other hand, just before I got out of the flames, I had the feeling, I just wanted to go to sleep. I was being burnt alive and if I had have been burnt alive, I wouldn't have any more pain at all, that would have been it. But I was holding my breath right through

01:00 and I climbed up this eight-foot cliff and got out on my own and when I was out, I was just like that, I couldn't move. The healing process, well basically it didn't start until they got me down to Lae.

Just before we do that, have you any idea what this substance may have been or how it came to be there?

No, no. Some thought, "It could have been a booby trap."

01:30 On the other hand it could have been fluid that had gone into the ocean, spread over the water and been ignited by something.

So it wasn't just the barrel that blew up, it was all the—?

Fluid that had spread out. There was a smell that made me want to get out. That was an unusual smell.

The person you had been with who you told to get back—

He got his face and hands burnt but not badly.

02:00 It would have been painful, mind you, but he didn't leave the island, he was out of the hospital only days after he was back to the unit. He was way back though when it happened and he was able to get out into the ocean, whereas I was caught. See it was very rough, all coral, you know and the water was only about ten inches deep, so you couldn't go under.

02:30 And he had gone back at least twenty-five feet from it, so he was well back so that saved him. When they got me to Lae, I was going back to where I was before by this little ship and I got picked up by an ambulance and taken to the hospital. With me was a fellow who had had both legs shot off here,

03:00 both legs, and a couple of very seriously ill fellows but this fellow who had his legs shot off, he was the mouthpiece for me. They stopped at Lae, of all things, with the sun beating down on us, and did he bawl them out. At any rate, they took them in and pronounced me "Dead" and put a screen around me. And as I said, I couldn't speak, couldn't move, hand, foot or anything.

03:30 I was absolutely paralysed. It was later on I heard them talking outside of the screen, "Come and have a cup of tea, Johnno, he won't run away." At least they got one thing right, I won't run away. At any rate, twenty minutes or so later, I heard them talking and a different voice said, "I had better prepare the body, you know what it's like in this climate." And I thought, "Gee, what on earth am I going to do!" I don't think my brain was ever more acute.

04:00 Any rate, they pulled the screen back and come in and she looked down at my face and I winked. That's all I could move, was just move the eyelashes, and the bandages. My face was all bandaged and she screamed, "He's alive!" And then all hell broke loose. Next thing I knew, there was nine around the bed, they lifted up the sheet with me on and I stunk to high heaven too and they carried me out under the tropical sun into another tent

04:30 and lowered me into a saltwater bath. The sister chased them out and there were two sisters working on me and they poured brandy down my throat – I think it was a bloke pouring brandy down my throat, to keep the heart beating while they were trying to get the bandages off. Of course, I'm absolutely stinking. If you've ever smelt anyone who has been burnt and left for days on end, you will know what I mean, but it was high. At any rate,

05:00 when they got the bandages off, the sister called them back and they come back and they lifted the sheet up with the water pouring out, well that didn't matter, because it was all under canvas and that kept the dust down and back to the bed and there was about five of them working around me for quite a long time to put the bandages back on. The process took four hours and that was a daily occurrence. But then I really started to make headway.

05:30 The saltwater did the wonderful thing and of course I had blood and plasma dripping into me all the time excepting when I was in the bath. By then I was down to seven stone and not in a very healthy situation. I wouldn't recommend it. And after a while they decided I should come home and they took me to Nadzab

06:00 where the airport was, the little hospital was there.

How many days had you been at Lae? Can you remember?

About three weeks, I've got it all down there. I've written the dates down there. I was about three weeks there I suppose. Sister Johnson, Johnno Johnson, used to sit behind my bed. I couldn't speak. She had to anticipate when I needed the bottle and do everything for me. I couldn't get on a bedpan

06:30 or anything like that, laying on your stomach. It was not very pleasant for a 23-year-old. Then she would come in at time off and write to my mother for me. She would say, "Would you like to say this to your mother?" And she would write the letter which was wonderful considering she was engaged to an army captain in the area. She could well have done away from the hospital. Just before I came home

07:00 she was moved, they sent her up to Werai, where the climate was high altitude. It was cool and Sister Patterson from Sydney looked after me. At any rate, to cut a long story short, they took me to Nadzab airport, to the hospital and there was an argument whether I was fit to travel on a plane. It was a Lockheed Hudson bomber converted to a hospital plane with four beds in it and the fellow

07:30 with both legs off, and another bloke with all his back in plaster, and the fourth one, who didn't finally leave had lost his right arm here, his right leg here, left leg below the knee and he had his left arm and of course he was right-handed and he was only 19 years of age. He was in such a state they decided he shouldn't be in the same plane as me.

08:00 I don't know what happened to him but they got a walking patient, with a—and that was good going over the Owen Stanleys after all this period of seeing nothing. Where I was laying on my stomach, I could look through the porthole and see the magnificent Owen Stanley mountain range. We went from there to Townsville. In Townsville, I got a couple of weeks there with a lovely sister looking after me from Hamilton and I didn't even know her name, never did.

08:30 Really wonderful treatment, but the important thing was my voice started to come back. And I started to get movement in the hands and after two weeks they put me on a Sunderland flying boat with passengers to Brisbane.

You're still lying just straight down?

Yes, still lying flat on a mattress on a stretcher.

09:00 Then an old digger come up, an old First World War man. He said, "Oh, the boy needs picking up." And he gave me a double scotch. And he poured it down my throat for me. Well, I never felt that landing in Brisbane at all. At seven stone weight, I was drunk. Dead drunk. And they told me next morning "That when they took me into the ward they thought they had a corpse." They found I was alive, but I was dead drunk, there was no doubt about it.

09:30 After a couple of weeks in Brisbane and my voice was improving every day, they put me on the hospital train for Sydney. Well I got the fellows in the train to tear up my card. They said, "Where are you going? There's no card here." I said, "I'm going to Melbourne, Heidelberg, so I come right through." I'll never forget, and I must have been pretty high too because there should have been treatment. It had been quite a long time.

10:00 I got to Albury and had to change trains, and I'm face down on the stretcher about that high off the tarmac, and there's a bus coming up, you know, and there was a couple of newspaper blokes took me photo, several photos and the MPs [Military Police] come up, tore the cameras off them and exposed all the film to the light. "You are warned that this man must never be photographed." Bad for the people, see.

10:30 If I'd been on crutches, with one arm in a sling or something like that or a bandage around the head, that's good, but somebody like me, no that's bad. So we come through to Heidelberg, to Spencer Street, and they put me in an ambulance and they've got a learner driver in the ambulance. By then the bandages are starting to stick because of the healing process.

Had you had them changed since you left Brisbane?

Not since I had left Brisbane.

11:00 Every move I made, it hurt like heck. And of course, she was jerky, she couldn't change gears. Oh gosh, was that agony! I got to Heidelberg, and got one of the fellows in the bay I was in to ring up my auntie in Melbourne, Caulfield. And he rang up and he come back and said, "They couldn't believe that you were here. They got a warrant to go to Bonegilla for you."

11:30 And he says, "I assure you he's here and he asked me to ring and he gave me the number." So I remembered the number and at any rate, Dad and Mum were there and they didn't come to see me next day because there was no visiting. They come the following day and the sister in charge went crook. She said, "This man can be visited any time." Oh, incidentally, my mother didn't even recognise me.

12:00 That's a sobering thought. And an army mate from the 37th Battalion, who was a sergeant under me when I was company sergeant major, he called me "An impostor" and a few months later I'm on a train going up to Glengarry with a local girl, Lorraine Broomfield who was in the army, she was on leave. He was in the compartment and they gave me cups of tea

12:30 and that to Warragul and looked after me and he was telling me about this impostor he had seen. I said, "But it was me." That'll show you how your appearance changes when you go down and I got home and went back. I think I had one night at home and back to Heidelberg. It was agony really. And that cost me 74 days leave because I might have had to leave

13:00 from hospital in the final analysis and the payment to me. And that taught me a lesson, that people that served must be assisted and that's why I've been so active in the RSL [Returned and Services League] ever since.

Can you explain this? I don't quite understand.

I never did understand why. They said, "I could have had leave from hospital, so all that accumulated leave was scrubbed. Oh there's some little clerk

13:30 in B Company. Do you know what B Company is? Be here when they go and be here when they come back." That's what we called them. At any rate, after some time there, one funny incident for example, the second in charge of the ward, she was wonderful to me, what she did for me and everything—looked after me and I thought, "Gosh, she's good." And I mentioned that to the blokes. I said, "She's a wonderful sister," and they started to laugh.

14:00 I said, "What are you laughing about?" They said, "She's taken a shine to you." I said, "Oh break it down" and at any rate, later on I said to them, "How old do you think I am?" And "48," one bloke said, and the other says "45." "46," the third bloke says and she walked in. And she said, "What are you trying to do, guess his age? What did you say?" And they told her, oh you're much too old. He's only about 36. I said, "Thank you very much, I'm 23." She goes out and brings my card back. 25.

14:30 Yes, I said, my age is up two years. Such is life. And then I did nine and a half months in Caulfield Repat after that.

Were you completely wrapped in bandages at this stage or was your face free?

Part of my face was free then. See, this ear that's been burnt off. The bandages were over it like that, I lost my hair basically, that all stopped growing.

15:00 From the shock probably. Two of my cousins used to come in, one was in the army and one was only a girl about 16 and the sister got them to massage my scalp with some oil, you know. And the hair started to grow and I had a great crop of curly hair again! I did have curly type of hair then, black.

You were obviously in a lot of pain. How did that manifest itself?

15:30 Well you just stick your teeth together and hang on. That's the only answer when you really get pain. When they put me into the saltwater bath in Lae, I just stuck my teeth together. Look, it hurt too much to even make a sound. That's how I found it. There was a military policeman came in, next bed to me and he had a foot square burnt on his back where you feel it the least of all. That's my experience. The worst is the rib area.

16:00 And he, when they put him in the salt bath, he bawled like a bull calf. Did he make a racket! And the group that carried him came back laughing. Sister Johnson who was sitting beside me looked down. She said, "Those so and so's," she said. "You disappointed them, you didn't make a sound." He was carried out two days later. Died, from the shock of the burning.

16:30 And when he was carried out, Sister Johnson said to me, "He didn't have it. You've got it." And nobody could explain, but every time they carried out a burns patient they would say, "He didn't have it." Of course, nobody can explain what 'It' is. It's something you're built with, something that's beyond your control.

Tape 6

00:30 **Bruce, I would like you to tell us a bit more about your recovery in Heidelberg, in hospital.**

Yes, well when I was admitted there, the treatment was good but the attention of the staff wasn't up to the standard

01:00 that I had received further north, because they were just magnificent, the girls up north. Particularly in Lae, Sisters Johnno Johnson and Patterson, those two were really wonderful to me. The same in Townsville, I can't remember the name, and in Brisbane. But they were very good.

01:30 And the second in charge of the ward I was in, what was then East One, they have altered the wards now. The second in charge of the ward she was always doing something for me and I made a comment, I said, "She's a magnificent teacher, the way she treats them," and they laughed, "You, you get everything." And I thought, "What's going on?"

02:00 And they said, "Don't you wake to yourself? She's taken a shine to you." I thought, "God, she's old enough to be my mother" and so a little while later, I said, "Fellows, how old do you think I am?" And the first fellow said, "48" and the next bloke said, "46" and the third one said, "He's younger than that, 42." And she walked in and wanted to know what they were trying to guess, and when they told her, "Oh," she said, "He's much younger that that. He's 36."

02:30 I said, "Thank you very much, I'm 23." So she turned around and went out and brought me card back. "25." I said, "Yes but me age is up two years," so it shows how you age when you're like that.

How much of your body was bandaged at this stage?

From lower hips, I've got a great hole in the lower spine, right up to my neck, down both arms.

03:00 In fact the fellows used to run around and say, "The reverse to Nelson. He had one arm, one eye, one arsehole. You've got two arms, two eyes, two arseholes." See, they can be very difficult can't they in life? It was good. I had pinch grafts put on the hole in the spine. The sister was doing that under direction of the doctor.

03:30 The doctor said, "You shouldn't be complaining about the pain," and all of a sudden he holds up the pain killing needles. He said, "Sister?" She hadn't used them at all and she was cutting the skin off without anything. And it was off my bottom and after it was finished it looked as though I had been hit with a charge of buckshot, there were little patches all over. They said, "They couldn't do anything about

04:00 the skin grafting" because I overproduced and that caused the keloid flesh, which was about three eighths of an inch high, vivid red over large sections of the body and down both arms and a bit on the face, and that was burnt off over a period of years. It's amazing even after the treatment finished when I met my wife first in late '46, she had noticed

04:30 how reddish it was as to today, you don't even see it. It shows how burns heal themselves in effect.

You had some skin grafts though, so they took skin from your buttocks to put—

In the hole in the space of the spine. See the hole was big enough to put a closed fist into and the spine was actually without any flesh around it, for about four inches.

05:00 That was why they told me "I would never walk again." Well, I proved them wrong.

How long did it take you to be able to stand and walk?

Well the first time I stood up was with aid, when they were bandaging me in Lae in New Guinea. But I was supported. I never walked until, well, when I was in Heidelberg when Dad and Mum come to see me.

05:30 I got one of the fellows to help me stand up by the bed and throw a dressing gown over me and do the sash up, but no arms in or anything, just to show that I was on my feet. And Mum walked past and brushed the sleeve of the dressing gown and never even recognised me. You suddenly realise how much you have changed.

06:00 And an army mate was there from the militia days, a sergeant who was my platoon sergeant under me when I was a platoon commander. He called me "An impostor" when I told him who I was. A few months later, he was telling me about this impostor he saw. That's how it goes. I was laying face down on the mattress, on the bed

06:30 on these grafts and very awkward and a lot of relatives turned up one day, there was eight around the bed and when you're trying to talk to them and you're laying face down, it makes it difficult. The advantage there was, they used to push the bed over onto the balcony, and because when you're on your stomach, you naturally look down and that was good. I was watching the people go by and it

07:00 was things that I noticed that you normally don't notice every day, the degree of alteration in the plant life and all that sort of thing. It felt so good to be able to see that.

How long were you in Heidelberg?

I was only a couple of months there in round figures then I was sent to Royal Park to be discharged. I arrived there in a new uniform,

07:30 because all my clothes had been ratted, stolen, and new boots, new hat and very unstable on the legs. I could just walk and that was about it. Immediately everybody, it didn't matter what their rank was, or who they were, was given a job and I along with a captain was given the job of sweeping the parade ground. I just walked off.

08:00 They yelled at me "To come back" and this captain in charge of the thing—"Let him go." I went straight to the RAP and the doctor there came from Toongabbie, the next town from Glengarry. And he wanted me to go straight back into hospital and refuse discharge. Foolishly I didn't do that. Because army pay was a lot better than the money I got when I was on repat.

08:30 At any rate, I was sent to my auntie's place. I think I stayed about two days, two nights so they were able to do all the paperwork. I went up home to Gippsland and really, it was an ordeal. The next day, I was staying with my people at Glengarry,

09:00 and I went into Traralgon to get some money out of the bank, the State Bank of Victoria, it was then. I was refused because they couldn't recognise the signature. The hands were all in bandages. At any rate I eventually got the manager and he took one look at me and he said, "Give him the money and then bring him to the front door," and I got my money

09:30 and I had on me a repat letter to say "I was getting 30 per cent pension, 15 shillings a week." The lowest board was 22 and 6 a week a week at that time and I couldn't feed myself. Any rate, he took me straight around to the local doctor who happened to be our family doctor, and I didn't think the old man had it in him, Dr McLean at Traralgon. He rang up the medical officer

10:00 in charge of Veterans' Affairs, and did he tell him off. "You've given 100 per cent to so and so for a knee condition and he's playing football for Traralgon Firsts, and this man," he says, "In a shocking state, and you are giving a pittance!" Any rate, next thing of course, I'm back to Heidelberg, at Caulfield at least. On arrival there I had a suit made up,

10:30 in Flinders Street, a beautiful suit and I spent all of my money to get all of my clothes plus the value of their suit and all that and put it into one suit only. A beautiful suit and I walked in there and a voice said, "Here comes a wounded hero to Caulfield Rest Home." And I had my right side of my face away from her, so she couldn't see.

11:00 The ear was all burnt up, you know at the time it was very pronounced. So I said nothing and the sister was taking me up to the ward, and I said to her, a young sister, and I said to her, "Look, I need treatment straight away" and she said, "Righto, I'll get it done," and nothing was done for two hours and by then the bandages were sticking and every time I breathed it was pulling and it was very painful

and

11:30 any rate, two hours went by and I went back up and I said to the acting sister in charge of the ward, “Look, I’ve got to get treatment straight away, I’m in agony.” And I went back and nothing happened. Twenty minutes later, I’m back up again and the sister in charge, Sister Edgecombe, had come back onto duty and I hadn’t seen here before and she copped the blast. I said, “I’m going to ring the premier’s office if I don’t get

12:00 immediate treatment.” And with that I went back to the bed and the young sister come skipping down the ward with a roll of bandages, like that—about two inches in diameter. To cut a long story short, she was saying, “Where’s this man that must have treatment immediately?” All the blokes were chuckling thinking it was a joke. See, when she got to me she said, “Where is it?” I said, “Well look, you’ll have to help me

12:30 take the jacket off,” and she gave a tug and realised I was in pain and when she took the bandages off, the blood had come through the bandages and through my shirt. She undid the shirt buttons, oh my God! And she run back with Sister Edgecombe and two other sisters and Sister Edgecombe immediately turned to one of the young sisters and said, “Go and get sister so and so,” who was the one in charge when I arrived.

13:00 They said, “Oh, she’s off duty.” She said, “I don’t care if she’s in Melbourne, you get her and bring her here.” She got her, she made her apologise to me but first got all the walking patients in the ward of fifty to stand there and to listen to her apologise. It was giving her the treatment. The next thing I knew, there was about three or four of the girls working on me in a saltwater bath to soak all the bandages off.

13:30 **Now you had a lot of saltwater baths in Lae too, what’s the specific purpose of this?**

It’s a great healing element. In fact, for the golden staph, it’s the only real healing element there is unless they have found something in the last few months which you never know in this field, of course, but I had golden staph later on. I’ll tell you about that.

14:00 And saltwater, that was it. No antibiotics are worth a darn against that.

To inhibit infection?

Yes, and of course, penicillin. Penicillin injections. I had millions of units. I also had blood and plasma dripping, going continuously in Lae all the time I was there, and a little bit in Townsville. So it gets a bit annoying, you know, these things dripping into you, but it’s life-giving

14:30 and there was no AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] about then. So you didn’t have that worry about getting foreign blood. No, at any rate, from Caulfield, it was great. I became very friendly with a lot—the skin specialist who came once a week, Dr Keith Cohoun, a wing commander, Keith Cohoun, and a very fine man, a very good friend of mine later.

15:00 He one day decided, well, it was a few months after I was admitted, said, “I think you ought be down at the beach, but you are not to go alone.” And he turned to Sister Edgecombe and said, “Sister, could you arrange for somebody to take him down?” She says “Righto.” I was taken down and there were six sisters turned up and—Elwood Beach.

15:30 A busy warm day, you know, a summer day and I’ll never forget, they formed a guard around me and I’m going down to the water and everybody on the beach seemed to be looking at me. And I couldn’t make out whether it was because I had these girls there or because of the horrible scars I had on the body. Any rate, they were very good but they played pranks on me of course. One time

16:00 I woke up and I was being conveyed on a sheet out onto the lawn with frost dumped on it. Of course, they had made sure they gave me a crummy pair of hospital pyjamas the night before, which didn’t hide any modesty and of course, everybody was a wake up to it and that was it. Another time, I could always

16:30 go out if I had a nursing sister with me, and I used to go for lots of walks to build up strength. One night I was at a dance at St Kilda, the Palais de Danse, with a sister looking after me, Sister Kath Jolley. The itch of the scars got to a terrific state,

17:00 all the imprisoned nerve ends in the scar tissue. And she immediately took me down to the beach, and I stripped to the waist and here she is with her scarf in the seawater slapping it on and the police come around, “What are you doing?” And she says, “I’m a nursing sister. You can see this man needs treatment, I’ve got to look after him.” And they said, “Well we’ll stand guard.” Another thing too, after about two or three weeks at Caulfield,

17:30 I decided there was no point going like a lot of them did, they become hospitalised. They have got to be told what to do all the time. So I used to go into RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology] four part days a week. I would always arrive late and the tutor was Mr Herbert Beshovase. His son, John, was the leader of an Antarctic expedition later. Herbert himself, was a secretary

18:00 of the Standard Oil Company before he did that, he come out of retirement to do it. There were about fifty in the class. A special clerk’s course they called it, having left school at thirteen, I needed a bit of extra tuition. After several days he would say, “Why are you late?” And I would say, “I’ve been getting

treatment." He said, "You should be in a hospital." I said, "But I am in the hospital." He couldn't quite get the thing. This went on several days running

18:30 and got too much for an old First World War man that was there, as well as the Second World War. He said, "Bruce, would you mind standing up and let Mr Beshovase see?" When I stood up, he undid my jacket meaning to show him the bandages. And he pulled the jacket back and the blood had come through and it looked a mess of course and the old bloke fainted. And he come too he said, "Quick get an ambulance." I looked at him and said, "Mr Beshovase, you're not that bad."

19:00 And everybody roared laughing. Well, I went there and another time of great interest was the day peace was declared. The class was dismissed. We're going down the street. Everybody was grabbing one another and cuddling and kissing, you name it, it was all on. A few of the blokes formed a guard around me because I couldn't be touched. Too much pain.

19:30 One bright young girl said, "What's wrong with him, is he a poofter?" That's just life. But any rate, when it came time and I was told I could be discharged, provided I could get treatment twice a day, Sister Edgecombe, along with the secretary of the hospital, a Mr Leo Pierce, a very fine man, had decided that they could employ me in the admission room at the hospital.

20:00 And they sent me into the personnel section in what was then Hammer Street, of the Repat and I was told by the personnel officer "I was a nothing because I didn't have the formal qualifications that were prescribed by the then Repat Commission."

20:30 To bring it round to a point, I said, in other words, "You don't accept the course I have just finished." "No, no we don't accept that," I said, "But you expect outside people, industry to accept it." "Yes." I said, "Good, the Truth will be glad to hear this," and walked outside and slammed the door. I got back, I was going to go straight round to the Truth office and I thought, "No, I had better not," because of the change of nursing staff. There will be nobody to spend

21:00 the hours putting the bandages on again. Because it would be the night girls on if I didn't. So I went straight back to the hospital and Sister Edgecombe was waiting and I said, "You should be off duty." She said, "Oh no, Mr Pierce wants to see you straight away." I go up there, I said firstly, "Oh he would have gone home" and she said, "He's waiting." And I go there and I come in and he's waiting with a grin on his face.

21:30 He said, "Bruce, have a seat." "Oh," he said, "By the way, you got the job you know." So that was my entry into the public service. And when I told him what happened and in fact I had slammed the door on him, he says, "It's time somebody put that twerp in his place!" You know, I finished in the service three times higher up than that twerp.

You talk about the fact that you needed treatment twice a day.

22:00 **What was that treatment? Just changing the bandages?**

They used to put lotions on it and all that. Even after I was married, I wore a gauze singlet—singlet, a gauze one because the condition of the skin was so tender, it really was bad and that's what they do for treatment for that.

22:30 If anybody bumped into you it was quite painful. And my hands were bad then. I know me arm, the right arm, at the body it was like a web, the skin had grown across like a web. It was a mess and no hospital in the initial stages was the problem. I cannot blame the people concerned. They did everything they could with what they had but

23:00 it's unlike today. When I think of the Bali thing, I think, "Well at least they were lucky. Good treatment within days," you know, some had to wait a while but at least they got good treatment. I got excellent treatment later and the staff were wonderful, but the facilities were not there. That was the difference. I had a lot of good times there.

23:30 When I started to work there in the admission room, I believe I was outstanding because the patients knew me and respected me. In fact one day a patient came in and said, "You wouldn't be standing behind that counter smiling if you had what I have." And he was going on and the Registrar of the Hospital come out and blew him up. He said, "If you had half of what Bruce's got you wouldn't be here because

24:00 you haven't got it." They were the sort of things that happened. This will give you an indication. Another time, two Christmases running, on the Christmas Day, I was on duty on my own, in the admission room and I'll never forget, we had a death in one of the wards. I had to organise the funeral directors to come and speak with the lady, the widow and all that. They brought me over a Christmas dinner, the nursing staff

24:30 that knew me and I never tasted it. It just sat there for hours because of a stream of ambulances coming in, people with malaria. There were a large number of fellows would break down with malaria. I would answer the phone for example, and a doctor would say "So and so's he's got all the symptoms of malaria, give them—yes, right. Has he got anybody to look after him?" and if the answer was "No," I'd send an ambulance immediately,

25:00 and if the answer was “Yes,” I would send it by taxi, a malarial pack to the doctor to administer. And that was it. I think of the times then, I was instructed every ambulance patient had to be in the ward within ten minutes. Well I’d been twelve, fourteen hours in Austin Hospital waiting to go in, left in a room,

25:30 a cold room without any heating, with just a hospital gown on, no blankets and even though I had been seen by three doctors who said, “They had a bed for me, and that I would be admitted. I couldn’t be admitted because the admitting officer wasn’t available. They had to wait until he was available.” Now to me that is absolute atrocious administration and I would like to get to them and tell them a few facts of life.

26:00 When I took them to the ward, the sister in charge of the ward was responsible for getting the off-duty and the on-duty doctors to immediately see the patient and see what was to be done. Much more efficient than the present system yet the present system, you’ve got staff running around in circles and they still want more money.

26:30 **When you got the job as admitting officer, whereabouts were you living then?**

I was boarding with a family in Hawthorn Road, Caulfield and I had a key to the back gate and that took me five minutes walk, three minutes to jog. Its advantages were tremendous and its disadvantages too because one Sunday morning I was dragged out of bed because one of the fellows that should have been on duty was not.

27:00 And I think I should not mention his name, but I think he ended up being charged with murder. He got life. When he did finally turn up I asked, “Where have you been?” And oh, he said, “I met a sheila [woman] on the bus coming from Toorak to the hospital and I whizzed her off to the beach.” He had a name for that.

27:30 One girl said, “No” obviously, and that’s why he got life for murder. But that was the disadvantage of being so close. The others were further away and they were out of it.

And was it about this time that you met Dorothy?

Yes, I met Dorothy then. I went to Caulfield Town Hall. The week before I met Dorothy, I was at the Town Hall there at a dance. And a group of young blokes were there

28:00 boasting about their army service and it was obvious they had never been out of Australia. So I stepped right back, almost out of the group, you know, there were men and women there and one malignant fellow says, “Oh what about you, were you in B Company? Be here when they go and be here when they come back and don’t even enlist,” and I just pointed to my return-from-active-service-badge, which I had on me and he says “Well, where have you been?” I said, “If you really want to know,”

28:30 I said, “New Zealand, Panama, West Indies, USA [United States of America], Canada, Britain.” “You so and so liar.” That was his response. So I told them where they could go and walked off and the following week I met Dorothy and she was a lovely nineteen year old. And she’s still a lovely person. And any rate, she said, “Where have you served?” And I said, “I wouldn’t tell you, you wouldn’t believe me.” And that went on

29:00 and we were engaged to be married and that was in February, the day she turned twenty, February 8th, 1947. It was some night shortly after that I was taking her home to her mother and father for dinner and the old chap said to me, “Isn’t it time you told us where you were?” He said, “I heard the other day from Bill Francis,

29:30 her father used to work for us, that you were in New York.” I said, “That’s right.” I said, “If you’ve got two hours I’ll go through it,” and by the time I had finished the run-through of my experience, he sat there with his mouth open but I was very—I didn’t want to speak about it, I just didn’t. And the other factor,

30:00 I always felt because we had the good times compared with the others in Britain, you know, and after all, a lot of fellows who joined up at the same time as I did finished up as POWs [Prisoners of War] in Malaya and the group I was in with the militia finished up on the Kokoda Track. I would have been in that if I had have stayed behind and accepted a commission. So I think I gained by going overseas as a reinforcement even though I lost rank.

30:30 Any rate, I never said much about anything after that, but I know we got married on Valentine’s Day ’48 and that was the first Saturday after she turned 21. She was very determined. She had to be 21 before she would get married. That was her terms.

31:00 **And what was your physical health like at that stage?**

Very poor. I had picked up. I would be eleven stone then, lifted up from the seven stone I was down to up to eleven. And I know I organised and had our house built at Moorabbin and we got in there and I would be out digging the garden and I would just go down, almost collapse onto the ground.

31:30 A couple of times, a couple of neighbours picked me up and carried me over to the porch and I sat down

there until I recovered and then I would go back and do a bit. But by doing that I gradually built up strength. My health was bad, I was going on to do accountancy and I found that I couldn't handle it

32:00 and working too for a while. So the doctor made me stop and it wasn't until some years later, after we had a daughter, that I started and I did my study through correspondence and did very well. I regularly got first, second or thirds in Victoria. In the final subject I got first and that was a great deal of satisfaction

32:30 for a man who had just left school at thirteen. To me at any rate, it indicated I had certain abilities at least. Then I worked, they moved me from the outpatients to the outpatients clinic in the repat as a permanent officer. I was only a temporary in the hospital admission room.

33:00 After several years there I realised it was nothing for me and so I transferred to taxation. And then did accounting. That was when I was really into the accountancy because I could see the advantages of doing it there and by doing it you had to get up to a certain standard to go above a certain standard of pay. And that was a turning point in the amount of money coming in.

33:30 Always an important factor. No, it was hard studying, five, six nights a week, three hours a night and working full time, leaving home at ten to eight and getting home at quarter past six at night and I would help Dorothy bathe the baby and put her to bed and all that. And then

34:00 there was, the two boys followed. So I didn't start studying until eight o'clock and I would set the alarm for eleven o'clock because once I started I would be concentrating so hard it wouldn't matter and I could go all night, but the next day I wouldn't have been able to work. It was quite a difficult period. Then in tax

34:30 of course I got involved. I was assessing and then investigation work and I was supervisor of investigations and appeals and advising officer and I could see that I had had enough of that, I thought, and I applied for and got the job of chief internal auditor for the Australian Department of Works as it was then known. And eventually I had a staff of 62 spread

35:00 from Butterworth in Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and all over Australia so I was almost a jet set man. In that of course I copped jobs like chairman of the Committee of Enquiry for parliament in certain things that went on in the Northern Territory and I got commended by parliament in one of my reports for the fullness and the accuracy of the report. I might add that the local director

35:30 of the Northern Territory did not agree with me and raised an objection and immediately the Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Accounts Committee, it incidentally, the committee, comprises of members from both houses and from all political persuasions, so you've got a very good cross purpose of people you are dealing with. At any rate, when the director of the Northern Territory opposed what I said

36:00 in a couple of things, immediately the chairman called on the representative from Treasury and then the representative from the Commonwealth Audit, and they both supported me a hundred per cent.

I bet there are some stories in your work in the taxation assessing too.

Oh, yes well you've got to be very, very careful on that. I know there were certain very strange things.

36:30 And one that may be of interest in those days, one fifth of the cost of a farm building would be an allowable deduction for income tax. See you write it out over five years and of course, one of our chaps doing an investigation with a certain farmer, he says now he says going through everything, he says, "Now where's this woolshed? It's cost a lot of money, where is it?"

37:00 And the fellow didn't say anything for a while, then he says, "You're sitting in it." It was his house. Oh yes, I know, I've been placed in the middle of the public square along with so and so Menzies and so and so and so and so and so a QC [Queen's Counsel] that tore a person to pieces in court and the judge found the person to be a cold callous woman whose word could never be accepted under any circumstances.

37:30 And I said, "Well at least I'm in good company," and that's (unclear) immediately said, "At least you've got a good sense of humour, have a coffee," and that broke it down and that's the sort of things that happen, you know you've got to accept that and another time as supervisor of investigations, I would put penalties on a person for tax evasion. It was my job, it was in my power to put on up to sixty thousand dollars in penalties. That's a lot of money, isn't it?

38:00 Any rate, I go into hospital to have an operation, and I'm in the bay with four people and two of them were talking and one chap says, he had been investigated. The other bloke says, "Were you guilty?" He says "Of course, I was. They will never get it,

38:30 I've got cancer, I will be dead—I won't have to pay it." And my ears pricked up immediately. Only the week before or so, two weeks before I had put a penalty on him, so I just listened to everything and here he is explaining and of course, the rotten hound's put a penalty on me. I was as guilty as hell. Another time, I'm in a country town in Victoria

39:00 and you know, you get to know all the bank managers because the whole crux of the job is what goes through the accounts in the banks, not what goes through the books. And three bank managers are

standing in the corner at lunchtime. I walked up and said, “G’day gentlemen.” One fellow said, “Who have you got now?” I said, “Well it’s like this, I’m not allowed to tell you,” and they all chorused, “Not allowed to tell you.”

39:30 But I said, “I’ll give you a little clue,” and they all leaned forward. And I said, “Now,” I said, “A man about six feet tall, he’s got a little moustache, he’s got a beautiful tweed English suit, very impressive character.” In other words, I was describing the fellow that was speaking to me and the others roared laughing. Any rate, it’s now three o’clock, I’m walking along the street and ‘pitter patter’ and a girl’s running after me, catches me and says, “Mr so and so wants you to come in and have afternoon tea with him.”

40:00 He says, “I deserved that, didn’t I?” These are the sort of things that are funny.

Tape 7

00:13 I’ll tell you about one chap. I called on him and he’s working in a place and I had certain information on him of course before calling on him, naturally. He said, “Oh, I’m at work now, could I see you tonight?” And I says, “Yes all right.

00:30 But where are your bank accounts?,” and he gave them to me with the details and away I went. I went around to his home that night, at 7.30 as he had requested and sat down with him and I said, “Well, you’ve been getting money from SP [starting price] bookmaking.” He says “Yes, it’s been bothering me. I didn’t know what to do.” It’s illegal in the police eyes and I said, “Well, you should have declared it for tax purposes.” At any rate he made

01:00 a full confession. His mother came in, he was a bachelor, with a beautiful supper for me and it was twelve thirty I think before I left there and in the course of events, I found that this chap had been through a solicitor giving money to a woman who had a family, and her husband had been killed—he knew the husband

01:30 but he didn’t want that woman to know that he was doing anything and he never went near them. But every fortnight money went into her account through a solicitor. You know, there are fine people and you see that all the time. And they would say, “But he’s a tax evader.” But he was a good man. And I think that’s important. During that time of course, I was involved in community affairs.

02:00 I was looking after a youth group, I was fifty at the time. I was an elder of the Presbyterian Church at Moorabbin and later at Mount Waverley and I found all those things were complete contrasts to my work and I think it helped keep my balance in life. Sometimes a case would get you down a bit especially

02:30 when you were dealing with educated rogues which I dealt with quite often. I shall not say any more about them.

It’s a long way from being a sawyer up at Glengarry.

That’s right. It’s a complete different life from driving bullocks in the early years.

Did you reflect on that very much?

Yes, I’ve always had the affinity to the bush and I know sometimes

03:00 when I’ve been under a lot of stress I’ve gone up there and sat down with my back to one of those magnificent Blue Gum trees on my own property and thought, “How little some people are.” Thinking of the people that had been nasty, you know, and you get that in life and that was good and I only sold it recently, about three years ago. After a severe heart attack I decided by selling it while I was alive, it would relieve Dorothy

03:30 of any problems then because I don’t believe she should have to do it.

You mentioned that while you were in Heidelberg, your parents had come to see you. Did you see a lot of them in those years because they were still living down in Glengarry?

No, they only come to see me once. As a matter of fact an auntie of mine used to deputise for them. She’d come from Chelsea to Heidelberg

04:00 all the time. Her name was Violet Johnson, a lovely person, Dad’s youngest sister. And she really was a lovely person and unfortunately died in her fifties. She was such a good person. A couple of me cousins used to come and my sister would give them oil, I think it was castor oil to rub into the scalp to make the hair grow again.

04:30 See that had all stopped and it came out a nice curly crop afterwards. The other times, groups from Glengarry came to see me and the Broomfields, Lorraine and Mr and Mrs Broomfield come to see me and I used to dance with Lorraine in Glengarry, you know. She was in the army in Melbourne.

05:00 Out at Caulfield, I told them not to bother because I was a walking patient. It was unfair to drag them out. My younger brother Frank used to come and see me occasionally and he would ride his bike over from North Fitzroy, he was doing an engineering course. He won a scholarship to the Victorian Railways.

Can I ask you how your relations with your parents were, especially with your father at this time?

05:30 Oh, very good. Oh, yes, I respected Dad very much. Dad had a saying, "I'm going to do this and that for you if you come back a cripple." To Dad a cripple is somebody who had a crutch, you know what I mean. He never realised the sort of pain I was in while he was speaking to me. I never told him. Well there was nine kids, Mum had a baby in her arms

06:00 when I sailed overseas. And there was no money much, and as I said, if I hadn't worked on the sawmill for nothing, before I went away, it probably would have never got off the ground. So, the younger members of the family got paid for what they did there but I got a property left. That was my share of the profits. So I gained something there that

06:30 I never really got any benefit until I sold it a couple of years ago. And that was it, in other words, rates and insurance in case some thief hurt themselves stealing something. There was no cattle to get away, only wallabies, wombats, a few deer—you know four legged ones.

Did you do much shooting on the property?

No. I used to take my rifles up

07:00 occasionally just to test them out and that sort of thing on to a stump, but that's all. I just didn't want to shoot animals. That was me. Even though I was captain coach of Prahran Rifle Club at championship grade and I did compete in the King's prizes quite a few times. I still didn't feel happy about shooting animals.

07:30 That was me.

Can you tell us a little bit more about your community work that you did?

Yes, well I was an elder as I said at Moorabbin Presbyterian Church. I was on the finance committee and that sort of thing. I used to visit, there was over fifty families every quarter. A lot of nights were spent. I remember one time I had been three weeks

08:00 without having a night at home. This was after I qualified and Dorothy was president of the ladies' group and of course she was out and I thought, "This is wrong." I was in the Lodge at the time. I thought, and they wanted me to go into the chair, and I says, "No thank you, I'm out." And I felt to have staff of all persuasions,

08:30 "It's better if I resigned," so as to be completely biased and to appear to be biased –unbiased at least and appear to be unbiased. That was my approach. I've always tried to be fair dinkum with everybody. In fact I copped it a few times because, well when the Vietnam boys came home, I had a staff of 16 qualified accountants on and they were going down to see the march and I called them together

09:00 and I said, "Now before you go down, we the people of Australia sent them whether we voted for the Prime Minister or not. They went on our behalf and they had real bullets fired at them and not dummies," and they went down and they got involved in fisticuffs with people who were throwing tomatoes and some of them came back a bit worse for wear and I sent them home. I was

09:30 soundly reprimanded by a fellow higher than me—a bloke who had never been in the army or anything, he was in the B Company, be there when they go and be there when they get back—for my approach, letting Joe go home because Joe was splattered with tomatoes. I said, "Well, I couldn't send him out the way he was" and I said, "I wasn't going to dock him." And that's it.

10:00 I think I did the right thing, and you've got to be right within yourself.

And can you tell us a little bit about your involvement with the Knights of St John, how you came to be involved?

Yes, well I was at a function and—the Beefsteak and Burgundy Club actually, and one of the things was that you used to get up and give a little talk

10:30 about what you've done and where you've been. I just mentioned briefly where I'd been and Bob Halliday who was Mayor of Oakley at one stage, he said to me, "You should be in this" and another couple of blokes said the same thing and I went on and saw an investiture and I presented with a request

11:00 for what do you call it, the word? Anyway, it's in the rundown of my affairs in what I've done you know

Your CV [curriculum vitae].

Yes, CV, that's right. Yes, I always forget something. It was then I was called before Sir Hubert Opperman, he was then the chairman and I walked in and he said, "Righto Bruce. Have a seat. You

wouldn't be here if you didn't have the runs on the board."

11:30 **That was the approach and I was voted in and I went on to become the Treasurer of the Victorian Priory, then Treasurer of the Grand Priory of Australia and I'm still a trustee of the charitable fund which I set up. Donations to that are tax deductible. All the money goes, every cent of it goes to the various things. St John's boys and girls homes,**

12:00 **Brotherhood of St Laurence. Oh yes, I've met the Governor General.**

Let's not confuse ourselves with that at the moment.

That was before this elevation to higher ranks, when he was head of the Brotherhood of St Lawrence. It was very rewarding but a lot of work. Quite a lot of work. Also in the RSL, I was very prominent there. In my unit association,

12:30 **I became secretary of that in 1948. I had about five years as secretary, and then five years, I think, or four years as president. I've done something in the [unclear] line ever since and I'm president now. And I look like dying in the job I think. Maybe I won't. Somebody else might take over but there's very few of us left. It gave me a great deal of satisfaction**

13:00 **to get a war widow's pension for quite a few war widows of my army mates, because they, being bushman, hadn't pushed their claims that they were entitled to. And of course when Premier Tilly died I worked with Legacy in getting them a pension. I made submissions, I produced photographs and all that to support what I'd said.**

13:30 **And that was a great deal of satisfaction. In the RSL I was very prominent in that because I felt that I got pretty raw treatment getting 15 shillings a week when I was discharged and I couldn't even feed myself. It was atrocious and so I've been pretty active ever since. I was chairman of the one AV [Australian Veterans] District Board for many years, because I was a delegate to the board from the taxation sub branch.**

14:00 **For about 18 years I was a delegate, chairman for five years. I was secretary treasurer and trustee of what do you call it? Now where did I get to?**

We were just talking about various services you did for different people.

14:30 **I'm just interested if you can make some comparisons, not necessarily about yourself but it's been said that the generations that followed your generation don't seem to get involved in community service in the way that people did immediately post-war. Is that something you've observed?**

I think that could be a fair comment, because I know

15:00 my wife has never worked since we got married, she had to resign when we got married because of them, ex-servicemen. Married women had to be kicked off the staff. She was in Ball and Welsher and she's been involved in charitable work all through and she was saying only recently "The difficulty now of getting anybody to do any of those jobs."

15:30 Because both husband and wife are working and they really, well it's a different ball game, isn't it? I don't know about that, I think myself, they could do more than they are doing and they would gain from it. I think it's more of a selfish society today. You may agree or disagree, but that's how I see it. I never seem

16:00 to have any spare time. I was always sort of tied up with something or other.

Is there something then that you can look at war as having some positive outcomes?

Oh yes, the fellowship that you have with both men and women who have served. It was wonderful. In my case, what a magnificent experience I've had that money couldn't buy. Those years in Britain. Places

16:30 I finished up. You just couldn't get there in peacetime, you wouldn't be invited. That's the sort of thing you know.

And yet the price that many people pay, it's a bit hard to weigh the things, isn't it?

Yes. It is difficult because every era is different. I look at my grandchildren and I think, "Gee it's tough for them in many ways." In a different way.

17:00 When I was brought up in the country, well basically there was nowhere to work except to you know, get out and do it. Contracting, cutting piles, poles, sleepers and all that sort of thing and then the sawmill and all that. That was a full time thing. There was none of this going to a nightclub for night-time. There was no nightclubs for a start. One bloke said, "There's only the barbed wire fence to camp under."

17:30 That was a comment that was said. I think of the times and what they do today, they don't bother getting married. They live together. That's all right, but to me it indicates, often, not always, often, there's no commitment. That's how I see it.

18:00 On the other hand, there's some wonderful people that do have and that's—the number of children being born today has dropped quite a lot. I know from my own experience that I think it would come back to the fact that they want to go out and be entertained and that.

18:30 An army mate for example, his two—he had a daughter and she's in a highly paid job and she's married and that and never had any family. He wanted a grandchild and he says, "I'll make up your salary for twelve months," and it was a very high salary, if you will have a baby, because I want another grandchild. She says, "Mind your own business." That was it. She never did have any.

19:00 He's dead now. That's what happens. You could perhaps add a lot to that. I haven't thought very much about it over the years.

You've talked about how the RSL – you were quite involved in the RSL. How soon did you get involved and what form did that take in the early years?

Well, early years of hospital visitation.

19:30 You go to the hospital and visit fellows in hospital and I used to go to Anzac hostel from Moorabbin every month. I become quite friendly with a lot of fellows there and they were all TPIs. Totally and Permanently Incapacitated. And all they wanted was a visit. Initially we used to take along a parcel of goodies from the taxation sub-branch of the RSL which was a very strong sub-branch.

20:00 They made it clear they didn't want anything, only a visit. The district board, of course representing people, because of course, you have complaints and all that sort of thing, they would come in and handle that. As chairman of that board I had to handle them. A lot of them were quite capable men but they had differing views.

20:30 Twenty-three sub-branches on the board, that's up to forty delegates. I was a state counsellor too for a couple of years. And Bruce Ruxton personally asked me to go onto the state executive, and at that time when I got the job, I was at the Department of Works. And the week before I had been given one hour's notice to leave for Port Moresby. In that time I had to go to from Hawthorn here to pick up my gear,

21:00 they had a car waiting for me. It happened to be Bill McMahon's personal driver and his LTD [Ford automobile] and take me straight out to the airport and they had to hold the plane for me to get on it, for ministerial business and I thought, "I can't be a state executive member when you've got to be on tap all the time." So I not only resigned from that, I resigned from the district board.

21:30 That sort of cut my service to the RSL down at that stage but it doesn't stop me and I've done it since of course, representing widows and that sort of thing.

What about the camaraderie of the RSL? Was that important to you?

Yes, yes, it was quite good. But you get different views, you know.

22:00 It's a bit like parliament sometimes. And you've heard parliament no doubt on Channel 2. I don't think I could go to parliament though.

I would like to ask you now Bruce, about when you volunteered for the first time and I understand you were

22:30 **rejected the first time you volunteered for the AIF? Why was that?**

Well there was manpower restrictions. We were in the restricted occupations, saw millers. In fact there was fellows worked with Dad right through the war, they were all restricted, but when they wanted reinforcements for the forestry company which should have been called the saw milling company,

23:00 it was absolutely misnamed, they wanted saw millers to do the job.

The forestry company sounded like you were all sort of like Robin Hood and his Merry Men.

Well, the Forest Commission people, they ran the show. They set it up and they were clerks in the public service and knew how to look after themselves. Whereas a saw miller was only interested in doing the job and I noticed that very much so.

23:30 And I look around at them and after the war, it's a strange thing but there was only one of those forest commission men who played a really active part in our unit association. It was the fellows that did the job. I'll give you an example: Malcolm Walker who had a big sawmill up in the Yarra Valley area, and he lives in Warburton.

24:00 A very fine man. Really, a very capable saw miller but only got a corporal rank near the end of the war. It makes you think, doesn't it? He knew what he was doing but fellows were walking around who didn't. And it was in Jacquinot Bay, we had a young officer come from somewhere or other, he had been a forestry man.

24:30 And he was interfering with the mill and I told him to go away for half an hour and not to come back and everything would be working. And it was. Completely. I could be put on a charge for telling an officer to get lost. It was just a nice way of doing it, to tell him to go for a walk. So that was always a

bone of contention with me. I felt they had too much say.

25:00 It wasn't until I was president of the association, our army unit association, the ex-forestry group association, the RAEAIF [Royal Australian Engineers Australian Imperial Force] and there were 120 members present. I was voted as president and my old OC got up and apologised to me for not promoting me. It made it worse in a sense. He knew, yes.

25:30 **Can I ask you about your experiences in America. You went across on the Largs Bay, is that right?**

Going overseas, yes, we went via Balibo. We got ashore at Balibo. Firstly at Wellington then at Balibo, Panama and I know at Balibo

26:00 I was put in charge of the picket to pick up the drunks. And that was a real experience because I had two American army men with me and they had revolvers, right? And a couple of times we walked into a place and they undid the flap and had their hands on them and some of the characters! I think there were three murders in Panama and Balibo that night and I thought, "Gee, what a place to live."

26:30 But that would be just a chance I suppose, to hit it like that.

What was the boat like because you had never been on a sea voyage or anything like that?

It was a boat that rolled terribly and it had no stability at all. It was about 14,000 tons with a maximum speed of 14 knots. And of course we were in convoy with a much slower Greek ship

27:00 that the third company were on, that was down to three knots at times. And the accommodation, well it was a passenger liner of the Aberdeen and Commonwealth line and we, the four of us were in a cabin and across the cabin from us was a single cabin and there was an English lady there, about the age of my mother I suppose.

27:30 And she'd say, "Righto boys, cup of tea time." And she would make us a cup of tea. And it was very pleasant that way. I was horribly seasick going over to New Zealand. It was all right when I got the stable weather. When we went out through Panama that was an experience because you're sailing through the jungle. You are risen up to go through and you go down again. Of course, the Pacific side is quite a few feet higher than the Atlantic side.

28:00 We went from there to Caracas Bay, Curacao. I know we got off ship there and got a cab to go into the town. A group of us got into a cab. We argued with the driver, we reckoned he was charging too much. We paid him what we thought and when we found out from the Americans later on, we had paid three times what we should have done. So we got done. We left there and were

28:30 heading towards Bermuda, no escort at all. We had no escort from two days out of New Zealand and we had one six-inch gun and one four-inch gun and four Lewis machine-guns and we met what appeared to be a pocket battleship. It was at dusk fortunately and I think I mentioned the next morning we had four American destroyers around us. So that was it.

29:00 The trip across the Atlantic was on a very large convoy.

Yes you spoke to us about that. Do you sometimes reflect—you said that one time when you told these chaps at St Kilda Town Hall you had been through all these places, they didn't believe you?

Caulfield Town Hall,

Have you talked to people about

29:30 **those experiences very much? I mean going to Curacao in 1941, it sounds so—?**

No, well that's life. I was more interested in the future than the past and I had a house built. It should have been finished for when we got married.

30:00 I had quite a lot of army pay, that's war gratuity and war deferred pay. The pay was two shillings a day if you were overseas and I think it was six pence a day for home service. Most of mine was overseas and the war gratuity was two and six a day for me and with the two combined at seven days a week it amounted to quite a few hundred pound. In that '47 era when I

30:30 bought the land with the house built, fourteen hundred pound would buy you a good, then, house, a very ordinary house, not like today's standard. I bought the land and had the house built, limited to twelve and a half squares in those days. Brick veneer or twelve squares of weatherboard. I built a brick veneer and it was about five months after we got married that we were able to move in.

31:00 And I know in those days of course, the street was not made. You couldn't get cement to put paving down and every Saturday morning I'd drive around the various hardware stores in the district and I'd think my day was made if I got a bag of cement! I would sit it on the handlebars of the pushbike. No car of course, no money. I put it all into the house.

31:30 Dorothy and I were very careful in what went out when we was engaged. I built the kitchen cupboards for the first house in the father-in-law's garage, under his supervision. He was a top carpenter. He was later a foreman carpenter of the building of St John's Church of England, Camberwell. That big church there— he was the man.

32:00 And his name's on the plaque today. So I got good advice and that saved a lot of money.

You said that when you met your mother and father-in-law, you told me, you said I'll tell you the story once, that will be it. Did you ever discuss things more with them or was that?

No, never really.

What about with Dorothy? Can I ask?

32:30 Yes, well from time to time. It was like listening to a tape yesterday, that being put on to try it out and I was with the family and I told them a lot of stories about what happened in service. What I didn't tell them, and I can tell you, and I suppose I could have done was in the '39 bushfires. I was nine miles up the bush and that's about four miles through

33:00 from the clear country, with a team of bullocks and it got that dark you couldn't see and I helped Dad load the logs onto a semi-trailer and he had gone down to Glengarry. I had to unyoke the bullocks and because I couldn't see and with the roar of the fire and everything behind me I crawled on the pack of one of them, a poler, and laid low so I wouldn't get swiped off by an overhanging branch

33:30 and they found their way out. I'll never forget (unclear) going overseas on flame and all this and we hit the flat country and I know a lot of fellows there and they cheered when I come out and it was twenty minutes later the fire broke through. That's when 71 were killed through that bush. It was a harrowing experience and I was scared and I admit it.

34:00 Anybody that's not scared in those circumstances is either a fool or he's a liar. Same when you're in the army, at times, you've got to be scared, if you think.

When you first met Dorothy, you said it was at a dance, you also said it was obviously very difficult for you because bodily contact could be very painful.

34:30 **Were you dancing?**

Yes. And I said, "Can I see you home?" and she says, "No, I'm here with a girlfriend and our rule is no girls left all alone." So I made a date with her for a week's time and that's when it started. I think I was very lucky and she's a lovely person and I think you've got to be lucky but I suppose

35:00 I had some experience in as much as I had been out with girls in the UK and I found that some of them were no good at all. You would just get that feeling about them. I suppose different to today, you didn't go home and share a bed or anything like that. That was out, there was no sleeping together—very much so.

35:30 And the old saying was that if you do, you could finish up ringing the bell. Do you know what that means? If you ring the bell it means that you've got a girl pregnant and you've got to marry her. They're wedding bells see. Early Australian.

Wasn't there a bit of that throughout the war? Surely.

Oh yes. There was a lot of it. As a matter of fact,

36:00 quite a few of our fellows who were married before they went away spent their nights not in the camp. They found a woman who was a widow or whose husband was away somewhere and kept themselves busy. I used to go to the dances openly you know, during the war of course, and I'll never forget walking through Piccadilly in London, through that area, and "Hello love" from a doorway.

36:30 "Oh, an Aussie! Free to you!" And we used to say anybody that's foolish enough is an idiot because quite a few finished up in the VD hospital and that's how you would finish up with them, that's for sure. We had a saying, 'If somebody got VD, you should have put your hat over it and run." And that was an army saying of course.

37:00 Another thing too, when we were in Aldershot I mentioned, we travelled around a bit there and opposite us was the girls' quarters. One day there was an army box delivered there. Quite a big carton and it's a stamp, typical army style. What it is is the first word and then what it's used for. And here it was. French letters [condoms]—troops for the use of.

37:30 And it was delivered to the ladies' quarters. You weren't allowed to go on leave unless you had an army issue and that was it, that was a requirement. You didn't get your pay. You signed on for pay and signed on that you collected your "French letters" as they called them then. Now it's condoms. So that was life. That's how they kept VD down in Britain.

And for the women too? You said it was delivered to the women.

38:00 Oh yes, there were women in the forces, oh no, they got treated the same as the men in the forces.

Tape 8

00:30 **Bruce, we were talking a little bit about what chaps got up to or didn't during the war and I think the other day you were mentioning that people would go up in doorways. Is that what people used to call a "Knee-trembler"?**

Yes that's right. Yes. As a matter of fact, one of our chaps is a bugler.

01:00 He's a weed of a man physically excepting in one proportion and the rest of us wouldn't go down to the shower when he was there because we would feel too ashamed. Any rate, he was with a lady in Hexham one night and the stone on the bridge gave way. She finished up down below and one of my army mates

01:30 saw her a couple of nights later and she's going crook about it and she says, "The rotten hound left me for dead." She had fallen down knocked out and he thought she was dead, so he cleared off.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

02:54 **When you were in Scotland, is that where you had your appendix cut out?**

Yes, in Balackmile Emergency Hospital

03:00 at Kilmarnock. That's where Johnny Walker Scotch Whisky comes from, Kilmarnock. That's where they had the distillery. And then I was moved to West Kilbride Convalescent Home. Did I go into that? I have a feeling I might have.

A little.

There I think I told you that there was an Australian mate and we got first choice. Well one night I got a, one day she said, "Look, who will you take with you?"

03:30 An invitation for two people, Brigadier General So and So, you know and I said Red, Red Costa, an American who said he was a film director and I said, "I was a kangaroo farmer." After the war, there was some films produced by him so, I was wrong. Any rate, she says, "Right, be here at five to six, so I can inspect you." Five to six we go down to her very tidy.

04:00 "Excellent, as I expected," she said. The next thing the Bentley pulls up. The driver gets out in uniform, holds the door open for us and we get in and we go up to his home. Lovely home, winding drive, gravel drive up to the mansion and I'll never forget it because we went straight into a room, I'm not sure what you would call it, and it had a window about 14 feet long by 6 feet high

04:30 overlooking the Firth of Clyde—Ailsa Craig Island out there and all that. And the armada was forming up then for the landing at North Africa. And any rate we went in to have a meal—soup, chickens grown on the estate, chicken soup which was very nice. We were waited on you know and it was very good. I thought, "This is good." Next the main course come out, pheasants shot off the estate.

05:00 Green peas, new potatoes, grown on the estate. Beans, French beans, grown on the estate. This is food that we never saw in the army of course and that was good. And then the next course came, plum pudding. He says, "I refuse to divulge the source." And when we had finished that he says, "Righto, we go to the smoking room." Up we go to the smoking room and he says, "Will you have a port gentlemen?"

05:30 And Red and I both nodded yes and he sent his footman down to get a bottle of port and he comes up and there's cobwebs on it. He was carefully handling it, very carefully opens so as not to disturb the sediment, poured it out and it was just magnificent. And we are smoking American Red Cross cigars at this stage of course, they were all out of Red's pocket

06:00 and I said, "What is the port?" And he named a Portuguese and I never had a pen on me to write down the name but it was 1888, I remember that because that was the year Dad was born. This was 1942 and I'm drinking an 1888 port. It was magnificent. That was my first lead in really wanting to be involved in wines which I am now. They were the sort of things you got,

06:30 you know. Really, they were wonderful. There was a patient there. An English commander was marrying an Indian princess and we were all invited and I'm called into the matron's office again. Being an Australian and from one Australian to another, "Will you look after sister so and so?" This sister could not speak, she stuttered so horribly. She said, "Try and anticipate what she will say and answer for her."

07:00 Which I was doing. When the wedding was over, they go out to sign the necessary documents and she gets out of the seat and walks up to the front. They start playing music and she sings Ave Maria magnificently and when I got back to the Convalescent Home I went straight into the matron and I said, “What gives about that?” “Oh didn’t you know? She has a one-hour program

07:30 every Friday on the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation].” There were only two radio stations in Britain, the BBC and the Home and Forces program. She was a class singer, much older than me but she was a lovely person all the same.

But she stuttered.

Yes, horribly.

But not when she sang.

No. She sang absolutely magnificently.

08:00 **Matron also, I think. Is that the one who told you not to get a hernia?**

Yes, that’s right. She said, “Three rules for you. 1: Let me know when you are going out, where you are going and I’ll cover for you. 2: You will get first choice of every invitation that comes to these homes and 3: Leave the girls alone, you’ve just had an appendicectomy. We don’t want you back with a hernia.” Good advice for a twenty year old!

Did you follow all that advice?

08:30 Yes, yes we went up and down the coast. We used to get up as far as Greenock and down as far as Larg – Larg’s (unclear) West Kilbride right up and down the coast and I must admit one time, I was upstairs, you get a better view from there. There was just the two of us and the bus was pretty well deserted and a group of British WRENS [WRNS – Women’s Royal Naval Service],

09:00 that’s navy girls, got in. And they was singing songs like She’ll be Coming Round the Mountain When She Comes, with all their extras which I wouldn’t like to repeat on the camera and when we got out at West Kilbride, you ought to have heard them scream, when they suddenly realised that what they were singing was overheard by us.

So the girls had some raunchy lyrics as well as all the boys.

Of course, of course.

09:30 Oh yes, they spoke a different language to the girls of that era. I’m not sure how they speak today, you see. I’m out of touch. My granddaughters are completely wonderful to me but they wouldn’t speak to me like they probably speak to the young men.

You said that at a lot of these dances you would get a lot of proposals from English and Scottish girls.

Oh yes, I’ve had several proposals.

10:00 **Explain these proposals.**

You would take a girl out occasionally and that and I found that well, a lot of our blokes got married. Some of the blokes around 45 years of age, two of them I knew, actually married girls who were 16 and the marriage seemed to last. The Scots had a way of saying, as one Scot said to Dorothy and I one time,

10:30 she had married one of my mates, she said, “Well when I decided to marry Ross, my father said, well, you’ve made your bed now lass, now lie on it.” In other words that’s it, and that was their attitude. There was no thought of temporary arrangements or anything like that. Excepting one bloke, one girl I used to occasionally dance with in Thornhill,

11:00 I used to go round and dance with them all of course, was getting married to a Norwegian army man and in Dumfries they went down and a few of the girls went down there. I wasn’t there but it was reported back to me was that when the minister said, “Do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife until death do you part?” he says “No, only for the duration.” She ran screaming out of the church.

11:30 That would be a sobering thought, wouldn’t it? And across the road from me in Thornhill in Scotland there was a family of three girls. The old chap used to, I would go over there and sit by the fireside and he would tell me all the yarns about the early Scottish clan fights and all that sort of thing. I went out with the two eldest and the eldest one

12:00 had taken me to what they call a country dance. The ladies select the partner and take them. You could not line up with a partner and get there. It would have to have been a lady that accepted to take you. Well I went with the eldest one who’s now married to my mate and the following night, I said to her, “Oh, I’m going out to Burnhead tomorrow night, about four miles away, are you interested Jean?”

12:30 And she says, “No I’ve got to do this and that, sorry, thank you all the same.” I said all right, so I go out

to Burnhead and I'm dancing with a girl and we're getting on quite well and I asked her the burning question, "Where do you live?" You know, you're all on foot, she could have lived four or five miles further on. And she said, "Thornhill." I said, "Can I see you home, Betty?" She says, yes, and we're going there and in the blackouts they were real dark nights, with no moon, no stars,

13:00 and it's almost impossible and stumbling along and I thought, "Gee this is near where I was last night, I'm sure that rings a bell," you know. All of a sudden, Betty say, "I've left my keys at home. Oh, bother, oh," she says, "But my sister will be up." Any rate, we get to the door, she knocked on the door and guess who opens it? The girl I was out with the night before. They were sisters and I didn't know it. Well that's all right, I went with Betty for a while

13:30 and she was seventeen and I was twenty and her father called me in one night and he said, "Well John's marrying Jean, the eldest. If another one of my daughters marries an Australian, we'll all come to Australia." That's putting the pressure on, isn't it seeing the youngest one was only thirteen. Well it was only a matter of a couple of months later and I'm in Dumfries one night, and the Sands at Dumfries,

14:00 it's known as the Sands on the Nith River, is the bus stop or terminus and they're queuing up to get on to the bus to go to Thornhill. It's fourteen miles if you didn't get on, I was counting the number in front. I suddenly saw—it's dark, no lights—a couple of Tommies interfering with a schoolgirl. And I go, "Well somebody's got to stop this" and I walked up and I thought, "They're all older people here"

14:30 and I went up and I suddenly realised that it was the two youngest of the three. Well I put two Tommy soldiers to sleep. I hit him so hard he was still out to it when the bus left. I was always afraid I could have killed the poor blighter. And I took her to the door when we got home to Thornhill, see I was only across the road from them and the moment the door opened, I buzzed off [left]. The next morning

15:00 Mrs Hillhouse, where I'm staying said, "Oh Mr Glendenning wants to see you. What on earth have you been doing?" I said, "I wouldn't have a clue." I gathered what it was and at any rate he rushes over to shake me hands and to thank me and says, "Why didn't you come in?" and I said that was Rima's business not mine. Her name was Rima and that's the Scots' way.

15:30 Well from then on, she would sit in the doorstep and watch us going up and down. And her eyes would follow me and the blokes got onto it. They gave me a rough time, you know how army fellows can be. But that was all right. Dorothy and I went over in '75 and Jean, the eldest of them was married to Johnny O'Sullivan in Perth. She told Dorothy and I, Rima won't know you. She's got multiple sclerosis. She won't even know you.

16:00 Well I go there, her husband takes me into the room and the moment she spotted me she said, "Oh Bruce," and sat upright. They said that was the first time she had sat up for weeks. You know, there you are, same person, different era. She had a family at that stage, but died shortly after unfortunately. But that's life. Neither of the elder girls ever knew what it was.

16:30 They knew that something went on, but they never knew what it was until after Rima died. And they were absolutely astounded when I told them. Firstly the eldest, Jean in WA and Betty had come over from Maidenhead in England and was at Jean's place at the time. So there you are. That's the Scots' way of keeping things.

Can I just clarify, when you said the Tommies were interfering with her,

17:00 **what do you actually mean?**

Well, I mean that. Trying to get at her in other words. And there was a queue. I got cheered by the group at the waiting, particularly the older people. And I often wonder whether I killed the first bloke. I hit him that far, I lifted him off the ground, I hit him that hard and I would say if

17:30 anything happened to him, not one of those persons would have dobbed me in. That's the way they are. They are close to the—very close that way. What you do and say, that's your business. I have a great admiration for the British people, both British and Scots. I suppose it comes out.

18:00 When we got to America and I found them harsh, shallow in some ways, loudmouthed by comparison, comparing the two and I didn't particularly like the American style. There again, others liked it better. It's a matter of personalities, I suppose.

Did you have a lot to do with Americans later in New Guinea?

Not a lot. I used to go along and I got to know a couple of them

18:30 and they run the canteen, the American canteen which was out of bounds to us and I used to get supplies of pens and pipe for a couple of blokes who smoked a pipe and tobacco, American tobacco for others. And I did a bit of a trade, I made about fifty quid over a couple of months, because I had the entrée, you know.

19:00 But no, we didn't have much to do with them. There was none with us. There was one occasion, I suppose I could mention it. At the 2/7th Australian General Hospital, that I was in later, but earlier on there was a guard there, Australian sentry on duty you know, to look after the nurses and sisters. There was a scream

19:30 came from the shower. And they dive in and there was a big American Negro soldier there and they shoot him, kill him there and then. The officer in charge of the hospital rang up the American authorities and he was treated very gravely. He said, “One of your men has been shot in the showers here,” and he explained and that and he said and the sentry went in with this big Negro soldier, and he said, “Oh that’s all right, put the body in the truck

20:00 bring it over, no need to say any more.” Because he was a Negro and that was it.

Who had he been shot by?

The Australian sentry who was on duty. The sentry had gone into the shower with the girl screaming and this American Negro was there. The rule was around Lae at that stage, you could not take one of those girls out, sister or nurse

20:30 unless you had a revolver on you. That was the rule. And the American Negroes were apparently a bit hot blooded.

But no one really cared if they—?

If he had been white it would have been a different question, yes. That was the inference, came out loud and clear.

21:00 Perhaps there’s a lot of grey areas, isn’t there, in life.

Just one other aspect of your work that I wonder if you could talk a little bit about. The different timbers that you worked with, you said that in England and Scotland

21:30 **there were different timbers you were working with. How were they different?**

Well, they were entirely different. Each species is different. The English Oak for example is extremely heavy. It’s very heavy. A ten by five, ten inches by five inches by eight-foot sleeper of English Oak, you’re really heaving when you lift that over. A spruce,

22:00 a spruce is so light, you give it a flick like that and it’s on the rollers. It’s very light. In between there’s the larch, which is a very good timber, but going through the saw, it sort of pinches back, it’s very difficult to cut that way. Of course, the Scotch Fir, Pinus Radiata, which is the common one you see planted here in Australia.

22:30 They’re all different varieties. Oak, Ash, Elm, Silver Birch, even cuts, well the Silver Birches are only small things and they were a waste of our time, but you took everything. And in some of those areas, I’ve been back where our mill was and it’s a new plantation now. Where the hut was and everything, there are Scotch Firs growing.

23:00 It was an interesting exercise to go back there. I could almost see the blokes walking around.

And how did those timbers compare to the Australian timbers you were used to?

Well the Australian hardwood, certain varieties, would be probably as heavy as the English Oak. But Red Ironbark for example, and Red Gum, they were heavy. Again, Mountain Ash is about a medium weight timber compared with them.

23:30 Stringy Bark, Messmate, they’re a medium weight, a little more than the Mountain Ash is closer to the Red Ironbark. It has a bark similar to Red Ironbark at the base, but silver limbs up top, hence it’s called “Silver top.”

24:00 These of course are names that are common names, not the botanical names. Blue Gum, for example, White Gum, Manna Gum, they all grow magnificently big trees and they were always my favourites in a sense.

And in England and Scotland, were you mainly just working in the mill or were you sawing as well, and chopping the trees down?

24:30 Basically I worked in the mill because I wanted to do every job there was in the mill. When I was at home I run the bush crew. I felt, “Well, I’ve got more to learn in the mill.” Secondly, it had one advantage. When it snowed, you had a roof over you. The track was dry where you walked up and down.

The saws that you were using, can you describe some of the saws?

The breaking down saw would be six feet in diameter.

25:00 And with big teeth of course and it runs a bit slower than the rip bench with a smaller saw above, so you’ve got two saws, like twin saws they call it. And they used a rack bench which would come through and take a slab off it and it would come over to the number one rip bench which I was on. And that was a 48-inch saw, which is quite a big saw, but that’s the one we operated on.

25:30 Then there were smaller saws on the lower benches.

And how were they driven?

By steam. Steam engine. One of our drivers of course, he had a steam ticket, in fact he's still alive today in his nineties. He was on top rating, the saw doctor's rating. I was on a saw doctor's later but at that stage, I was only on a sawyer's rating which meant of course, you were above the average wage by a fair bit,

26:00 in army standards. And as I said, the poor Tommy soldiers, they were very poorly paid compared with us and we were poorly paid compared to the Americans. And it goes like that.

The one thing which was pricking my curiosity, as you were speaking to Annie [interviewer] about all

26:30 **your experiences in marksmanship was that why weren't you ever taken out of this and made a sniper somewhere because presumably your marksmanship would have been a wonderful skill?**

Yes, well an uncle of mine died in Flanders because he was a sniper. No, well, as I said, I could only go into the AIF by going into the reinforcement to the forestry.

27:00 I was in the militia, excepting of course, when Japan come into the war, the 39th Battalion was volunteers from the 37th, 39th and 52nd Battalions. I was in the 52nd before the war and the 37th from the day war broke out or just before war broke out and those three battalions were called for volunteers to make the 39th

27:30 that went and basically stopped the Japs on the Kokoda Track.

And you would have known, presumably, a lot of those chaps.

Oh, yes. A lot of them were badly affected by it. Mainly disease like malaria and scrub typhus and that type of thing. They had it rugged, very rugged and because their uniforms were khaki, they were sitting targets. They dyed their uniforms with, I understand with plants to make them green

28:00 and when Thomas Blamey came along he said, "They were a raggedy group," and made them put good khaki ones on. Sitting targets again, but that's all hearsay. I think you should hear someone who was in the Kokoda Track for that.

If I can just ask you Bruce a little bit more about when you first got to know Dorothy and

28:30 **how you spoke to her about your injuries and your attitude to life?**

Well I was down at the beach in swimming togs. I put swimming togs on to let her see the scars and I lowered my togs at the back to let her see I had a hole in my spine

29:00 well before we settled, getting engaged to know what she was getting. I was very concerned about that. Financially, she had no idea whether I had any money. I married her for her money. She had twenty-eight shillings when I married her. See, so I was a gold digger, but I got a lovely person and that's all that matters.

29:30 **Do you feel a need to talk about that experience and your convalescence?**

Well, I wouldn't talk about it then but I have in recent times because I have felt there's a need that somebody should talk about it. I believe that the more understanding people have of what's happened, the better for the future.

30:00 **How so? Why is that important?**

So they know from the experiences that some others have done and I'm very much against them going to Iraq for example. But once they went there, I was very much against those who were still protesting. I thought, "Well, everyone who goes out to protest is likely to assist in causing the loss of lives

30:30 in the Australian, British and American forces in Iraq and support for Hussein."

Do you think your war experiences changed your attitudes?

Well it's changed my life completely that's for sure. Attitudes, yes, instead of working in the bush that I love,

31:00 to go and work in an office. It's a different environment altogether. In tax for example, when you're assessing, your head's down and you're flat to the board all day. You've got so many assessments to do and honest to goodness, you haven't got any time at all, depending on the degree of difficulty of them.

31:30 The businesses you know, only do a small number. I think it was 160 a day, you would turn over 160 files and it's only those you finish that count and a lot of them you've got to write a query on and that doesn't count at all only when you finish it and you find you've only got 20 seconds to handle each one. I'll feel more confident with my tax return.

32:00 Well, they don't do that any more. Now they just punch it into the machine and I don't know what happens. I of course, am not a great supporter of our present commissioner.

Can I just ask you about religion? You've talked a lot about being an elder of the Presbyterian Church. Was religion important to you during the war?

No, it wasn't.

32:30 I used to go occasionally to the Kirk in Thornhill but that was all.

When did religion become more important?

I suppose it evolved, you know what I mean. And Dorothy was very much involved in it. She was the girl that played the piano for all the activities,

33:00 you know, the youth activities and that sort of thing, so we sort of evolved to get involved in everything.

Do you think you're—I mean, you've had near-death experiences a number of times, how have they affected your understanding of life?

33:30 I don't know. That's a very hard question to answer, I find. For example, I'll never forget, when they told me I had three months, no a year, no you could have five months. It was in 1990, I took it without being perturbed like a lot do. I had just been told that and I walked down the ward in Heidelberg Repat Hospital and I saw one of my army mates and his wife crying their eyes out. And went over and I said, "What on earth's wrong with you?"

34:00 "I've got cancer." "Well so have I but I'm darned if I'm going to cry about it." And I got him laughing and sister came back to me since I had gone to sit by my bed. She said, "You did a wonderful thing." A little while later she come back and said, "They're at it again." There's no hope there. They know that from the person's attitude. And he died within a couple of weeks.

34:30 Not from cancer, it was like pointing a bone at an Aborigine. Mentally he had died when they told him, if you know what I mean. Another time I was there and I was taken back to them to have a look down, they put a tube down and have a look every so often. This time they put a rigid three quarter inch tube right down.

35:00 A general anaesthetic and I was discharged on a Saturday morning and a young doctor came to effect the discharge and he called my name and I was sitting dressed like this beside the bed. I stood up, he said, "I don't want you, I want the patient." I said, "I am the patient," and quoted my repat number. He looked at me and said, "If I hadn't read your file, I would never have believed you've got what you have.

35:30 It's remarkable. It's obvious you'll get well." Attitude again. Another time, I was walking down the corridor. I used to walk up and down the corridor for exercise and a young doctor there, I was talking to him. We were having a good old yarn and he said, "I don't know what you've got wrong with you but you're pretty fit, you're going to be right." I told him what I had and he said, "Good heavens

36:00 I would never have believed it. But you're going to be right." It's something to do with, who knows. Sisters used to say in Lae, he's got 'It'; he hasn't got 'It'. Who knows, I think it's in your makeup. I'm pretty case-hardened now. I'm told that by my wife at times but I do feel for people, but I can handle it.

36:30 I get quite upset when I see some young people, for example, when I was going to Peter McCallum every day I used to see young kids with no hair, cancer you know. And I'll never forget one day, there was a lady, a beautiful woman, with no hair, but she was absolutely beautiful looking. Her skin was like parchment, well I thought, "Oh my goodness."

37:00 We just smiled at one another and nodded, she was wheeled away and that. Goodness knows whether she made it or not. I would say she's got trouble. Dorothy's brother has cancer in both lungs, liver and bones and he's going down. He's got 'It' but the condition is so bad he's not going to get over it. And that's life, you're either lucky or you're not. Somebody's looking after me.

Tape 9

00:30 Yes, we were coming from Hexham one night, a bus out to Scottsdale Hall in Steele, which took the best part of forty-five minutes—we do about nine miles, and one bloke he's as full as a boot. And we get out of the bus, what's it about, and its about half to three quarters of a kilometres from the road down the winding drive to the Scottsdale Hall grounds.

01:00 Which was fifty acres of botanical gardens, a beautiful old mansion, you will see it in the photo there after and we were having difficulty in getting there. There were a few bushes along the road and we would say, "Oh the bomber's behind that bush Joe," and Joe would charge it like a bull. Look he got down to the next one and this is how we got him. He got to the guard house and there was a guard

01:30 on duty and he picked it up, the guard box, and threw it over the fence. He said, "If the bomber hits that

he'll have a rough ride." He gets inside and the Jerries [German soldiers] are coming over. They turn around over our camp to do the repeat bombing of Newcastle-on-Tyne. He goes inside and comes out with his rifle and a hurricane lamp. I'll shoot the B—, I'll tell you what, it didn't take us long to get that hurricane lamp out

02:00 and get the rifle off him. That was him, one of those uncontrollable blokes. In Thornhill it was about eighteen months later, before the major on a charge and he says, "Sapper [engineer], this is the 52nd time you've been on a charge in a year. That's one a week. What have you got to say for yourself?"

02:30 And Joe said, "Well, at least major, you can say I'm consistent." That was him. Last time I saw him, no when I was up the field dressing station at Jacquinot Bay, he come out the night before, the day before I was to be moved, and I was telling him I was moving and he opened up

03:00 my little satchel there, with my personal photos and that sort of thing and said, "There's no money here," and I just shook my head and he took ten shillings out of his pocket and put it in. I did send it back to him, the first letter when I was able to write. And the last time we saw him, he was speaking, in those days he spoke with a decided

03:30 firstly Geordie accent. Hexham, Northumberland, you know, had a distinctive accent, next thing he spoke beautiful Scot. By this time my wife and myself were travelling to Springvale seeing Dorothy's auntie and he's in the same carriage and he's got a real, real Irish brogue. So he had been to Ireland, he'd learnt the language.

04:00 He was a mimic, he had a beautiful singing voice. An idiot to himself really, he never brought his wife home. What happened to her, I don't know.

He just couldn't leave the juice alone. I was going to actually ask you about, going back to your treatment, something that you mentioned earlier, that you had golden staph.

04:30 It was after I got cancer in 1990, they did the operation and when I came out I had about eight tubes hanging out of me. From every opening in my body plus a lot of man-made ones. Absolutely every one and I got it in a great big hole in the side here and after a period of time, the one sister

05:00 used to do the dressing because the others would take one look at it and run. And she said to me, you know, "You've got to get home. You won't get better in hospital." So I came home and I read a bit in a magazine that sunshine was effective plus salt water. And it was wintertime and I used to pull these blinds back, I had a couch there

05:30 and the nursing, district nursing sisters would come in twice a day and they would come in and take the bandages off and I would lay with the sun coming down onto it, that was my idea, and Dorothy would make them a cup of tea or coffee and that would happen twice a day and the moment I started doing that, it healed up quite quickly.

You also mentioned, and I have to come back to this because I was absolutely intrigued by it

06:00 **the admissions officer at Caulfield Hospital, who didn't turn up for work, when you were dragged in, you said he was charged with murder?**

Later on yes, I had better not say any more because it could be traced to who he was.

Can you tell us sort of in a general way about the facts of that case?

Well, the facts were that the girl died at Albert Park, down on the beach there

06:30 and he was found guilty after three trials.

It took three trials?

Yes. He was dismissed from the hospital because the registrar of the hospital came in and found him on the registrar's examination table with a ward's maid. Another time, a nursing sister said to me, and she was one

07:00 that I had power of attorney for before she died and for her late husband, a doctor. She said to me, at the time, "Well John came in at midnight, no ten o'clock after lights out, to get the information he should have got at seven o'clock in the evening. So you can guess where John was. He certainly wasn't doing his job and he made certain suggestions to me." Now this is a sister with

07:30 grey hair and he was 25 and she says, "All right John, but just a minute I'll get you a coffee while I deal with the patients." She said, "I gave him a cup of coffee with a treble lot of bromide in it. No further worries," she said.

That's one way to deal with it.

We've got some questions that we ask everybody that we interview, just so we can get a sense

08:00 **of people's overall responses. I might run through a few of those with you now if that's all right. Bruce, one of the questions we ask people is if they associate the war with any**

particular songs, if there's any song that you recall?

Oh, well there's quite a few because laying in hospital in the UK listening to the Home and Forces program, The White Cliffs of Dover, and those sort of songs,

08:30 Vera Lynn singing, Bing Crosby singing, you know, White Christmas, they were very popular. The White Cliffs of Dover and The Lovely Weekend, which was banned in Australia according to Dorothy during the war here.

Why was that? Why was it banned?

The inference of course, of having spent a weekend together.

09:00 Doing what they do every day today.

Who used to sing that? I can't say I know that one, The Lovely Weekend.

Oh, that was Vera Lynn, yes she's got a magnificent voice, a lovely voice for that sort of song.

Oh well, we have to be protected from these things in Australia. I also wanted to ask you, you mentioned that you have

09:30 **a great deal of respect for the British and I wondered if at the time of the war, if you had a sense of Empire?**

Yes, see Mum used to talk about—well her mother would come and she was born in Yorkshire, the Dewsbury, Batley area—Batley, which is a town not far from Leeds.

10:00 And Mum's father was a Cotswold man and he was a magnificent singer. He learned to sing in Cardiff with the Welsh and he had a magnificent baritone voice and before the First World War, he a regular singer in Heyfield, at all the functions there. So Mum's mother would be talking about home.

10:30 Well, my mother and we always used to say "She was more Pommy [English] than the Poms." So there you are. Mum would have loved me to have married an English girl but would have hated me to have married a Scotch girl. Trouble is see I had a girlfriend in England and a girlfriend in Scotland.

But you married an Aussie girl anyway.

Yes, came home and married an Aussie, who I hadn't met, who was going to primary school when I sailed overseas.

11:00 **The memories that you have of the war now, are they your strongest memories?**

They are very strong, yes, they are very strong. I have a lot of strong memories too, of my own family, and the sawmill in the early days and that sort of thing. I have a lot of strong memories about our own personal life, Dorothy and mine. And our family and our kids

11:30 and our grandkids. It's all sort of, it evolves, doesn't it?

Do you ever dream of the war?

Not really, although I woke up one night thinking, "Gosh, I remember so and so, she was a lovely girl." I knew she wanted to marry me, but I didn't.

So your strongest memories of the war are about the girls that you knew during the war?

No, not necessarily. No.

12:00 What went on in the army hut, for example in Thornhill, in Scotland. There was four feet of snow outside and were in a Nissan hut and there were twelve of us there and one bloke from Western Australia, who was a two World War man, he says, I've got to liven things up. We had a fellow called Hooper who stuttered, from Victoria, and he was almost bald and a fellow called House from Western Australia who was almost bald

12:30 and they were arguing about who had the biggest tree, you see, bushmen. And Pat said, "I'm going to have some fun with them." Hoops, Hooper nicknamed "Hoops," walked into the room and he said, "Housie was just here Hooper" he said, "And he reckoned you're a bald-headed old so and so, and he's got twice as much hair as you." And Hooper said, "Dddddid hheee bby crikey.

13:00 III'll haave a bbbit of him." He walks out one end of the hut, you couldn't have orchestrated it better. And Housie walks in and he says the same thing to Housie who, when he got excited, had a high-pitched voice. And then Hooper walked back in. Well, we had to hold them apart from having a fight. They are the sorts of things you remember. Oh, there's a lot of them memories.

13:30 You don't think of them all at once, they keep coming back.

You've been back to Scotland obviously, quite a few times.

Twice, yes, in '75, '85, and I was going in '95, but I couldn't get travel insurance because of my—they

wouldn't even give me travel insurance to go to Hamilton Island, so I went without it.

What about New Guinea? Have you ever been back up?

Yes, my job took me there. I had staff there.

14:00 Our department had thousands there. We ran the government, we did the roads, the sewerage, the electricity, everything. We had a lot of day labourers, we had people measuring streams. I've been back quite a few times. I had to go back and do investigations of things that went on because, well I had six people there.

14:30 I couldn't ask my chaps there to investigate Joe Blow, one of the fellows in the office, because their wives knew one another and went to the same clubs together. You can just imagine how impossible it would be for them. If something blew up, I was the one who would have to answer to the Minister of the Crown. And I become quite good friends with Senator Reg Wright.

15:00 And the first time I met him was after I did an investigation of something that went on in Port Moresby. I was interviewed by him with the Director of Works, the Director General, Allan Ryer, and he's a QC of course, Senator Wright, and he cross-examined me

15:30 and he was after one bloke, I know who he was after. And he says, "Surely you wouldn't expect him to be involved in that." I said, "Of course I did, but there's not one tittle of evidence to tie him in." And I says, "I know and you know, without evidence, it's nothing." But he says, "You must have been aware?" I says, "Of course I was, the point is, even a child in the third in primary school would have been aware of that, Mr Wright." And immediately I did that,

16:00 he completely changed. And I was sent to Sydney to do an investigation of a senior man. I get to Sydney Airport and hear this voice yell out, "Hey Bruce, come over here." It was Senator Wright and I go over and he was with the bloke I was to investigate. Would you believe it? Only that fellow was never told before or since and Senator Wright said, "Get lost you urgers, I'm going to have a drink with my mate."

16:30 And the man takes me into the VIP [Very Important Person] lounge. Of course he didn't have to pay for the drinks we had there. I had to have a couple of drinks with him. And another time for example, when Labor, Whitlam got into power, we had a fellow called Senator Cavanagh as our new minister and he was being introduced to the staff. And Wright comes in and stands right beside me.

17:00 Cavanagh was saying things and Wright was answering things out the side of his mouth—"So long as you join the union!" Oh, and Cavanagh's glaring at me! I never did interview Cavanagh. No relationship there at all. But when Johnson took over after him, I remember sitting beside him by chance on the plane, going to Sydney from Melbourne and he said, "Where are you going?" And I told him who I was

17:30 and I said, "I'm going to Port Moresby." Oh he said, "On a Friday? Surely you could wait until Monday. What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm sorry, our Director General doesn't know yet and until I report to him, it would be improper for me to tell you." He said, "Thank you very much, that's good. I'm glad to hear that," and he started to expound ideas on something that he had in mind and I gave him my opinion on it. And there you are, that's the sort of thing you deal with.

18:00 **Now Bruce, we are coming towards the end of our time with you.**

Good

Good? You sound very relieved. What I would like to ask you, is there anything you would like to tell us now that you would like to go on the record?

Yes, I've mentioned that I'm a life member of the RSL, I've been involved in a quite a lot of things there and I'm a life member of the

18:30 Army Association, all four services, you know, and I'm a life member of the Caxton Beefsteak and Burgundy Club, a real fun club and I hope to go there tomorrow. We go to various restaurants and it's limited to thirty members. It's a worldwide organisation and each club has their own club and you've got to be voted in. You can be blackballed in other words, if nobody wants you.

19:00 But it's good fun and I enjoy a glass of wine, even if I can't eat the meal.

Well, I'm glad to hear it. Thanks very much for your time, we've really appreciated the opportunity to get your experiences on the record. Thanks very much Bruce, it's been great.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS