Australians at War Film Archive

Desmond Balkin (Des) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **OK, so we'll start with your life arc, sort of the short version.**

I was born on the 19th of August 1920 in a town called Maryborough in Queensland. I was born into a family

01:00 of mother and father and a grandmother who was living with them and my eldest sister who was about two years of age when I was born. I went to school in Maryborough. I started school, primary school in the convent school and after grade 3 or 4 I went to the Christian Brothers College at Maryborough and I stayed there until about

01:30 finishing year 8. Then I, the family moved to Brisbane because the children in the family, I had another sister but she was born, my father died at an early age and when I was about two, and my other sister, the younger one, she was born four months after he died. So that left my mother

02:00 with two children and one on the way more or less and so we stayed in Maryborough for some time but then moved to Brisbane later on when we were getting older, and the possibilities of getting a job were a lot better than they were in a little town like Maryborough. In Maryborough there were only certain places where you'd work. You either got into the railway, you got a job in the sawmill,

02:30 you joined the public service and it was just at the end of the recession and the Depression as they called it. Maryborough and most of Queensland I suppose at that time, and Australia, were involved in a Depression and when I was really young it was nothing to see people going to the soup kitchen in the Maryborough Town Hall to get soup and

03:00 something to eat. Things were so bad, but they had some employment where the council and government were putting people onto the streets laying water pipes and all that sort of thing just to give them possibly a day or two days work a week just to keep them going. Anyway, I went to Brisbane and went to St Lawrence's College there and completed my education. Went to year 10. In those days people didn't go to

03:30 university as much as they do today, and you'd go to year 10 and get a job in the public service or somewhere else and that was it. It was only if you wanted to go on to university or something like that you'd go on to year 12. I got a job. My first job was a company called Taylor Elliotts. They were pharmaceutical people and they made chemical lightings and I got a job there

04:00 because my mother and grandmother had moved into a house that we were building, and when the roof was going on the house in Brisbane when my father died. So that left her with a big problem, a new home in Brisbane and two young children and another one coming. So it was a very trying

04:30 time. But I went to St Lawrence's College anyway, completed my education and because of financial necessity I decided to take a job at Taylor Elliotts and the only job that was available at that time was washing bottles. At that time there were bottle people going around the streets of Brisbane collecting bottles, old used bottles and were taking them back to their storage area,

05:00 and then redistributing them to places like Taylor Elliotts who were manufacturing chemicals, and these bottles had to go through a big machine to be washed and I got the prime job of being in charge of that machine. It was more dealing with caustic soda and all those sort of things. It was a big tub and a revolving thing like you see on the back of a paddle steamer

05:30 and the bottles would revolve around, go through the caustic soda and come out clean. Then they would move into the other part of the factory where they would be completed and filled with chemicals and things that were needed by the pharmacist. So I stayed there for probably eight months or nine months and I decided to do a course in accountancy and I did that. It was

06:00 different now than in those days. You went to a technical college to do it and it wasn't as extreme and invasive as much as it is today. So anyway, I went there and then I started as I got on with my studies I

thought well, I'm going to improve myself here. I'm going to try and find a job working in an office. So I applied for a position in an office and I

06:30 got that position and I stayed there for about eight months. Then I found another job advertised in the paper and I thought it was closer to home and could be more interesting. So I applied for that, and when I made the application the idea was that you had to line up outside the office for an interview, and when I arrived there, there was line up of about 30 people from the front door

07:00 out along the street waiting to be interviewed for this particular job. Anyway, luckily I had the interview and I got the job and started working for Claude Neon Limited, the people that do the advertising signs. They were probably the biggest advertising company in Australia at that time, and I worked there for 46 and a half years except for the period of time that I was

07:30 at the war. So that's

OK, great. We'll go back and we'll start right at the beginning. What's your earliest memory?

Well, my earliest memory is going back or going to Maryborough, or living in Maryborough and my mother and grandmother, they,

08:00 and going to school and I remember we had a pet lamb that we acquired as a little lamb and we kept that as a pet and we even fed it a bottle of milk like you'd feed a baby, and it eventually grew into a real good pet. It was tame and did all the sort of things we wanted it to do.

What sort of things did you get it to do?

Well as I was a bit older I got

08:30 it to do, I built a cart, a little cart with shafts on it and I made some harness and I used to put the sheep in the cart and go up the street. It was very hard to get him to go up the street, but when you turned him around to come home he'd go like blue blazes. And we had a bird aviary and a few things like that.

What sort of house did you, so where did the pet lamb live?

The pet lamb lived in

09:00 our backyard at our home in Maryborough in 242 Alice Street, Maryborough. We had a nice Queenslander home on high blocks, much like you see in Brisbane here, and the lamb came to us. A friend of ours had a property out from Maryborough on the way to Hervey Bay. They had sheep and this lamb was born and somehow or other we

09:30 got the lamb and we raised it from probably a week old.

What was it's name?

Peter.

Why was it called Peter?

I don't know. It was just something that came into our mind. No particular reason. It was just something that we thought of.

Did it sleep outside?

Well we had a big bougainvillea down the corner of our yard and it had been trained as a cubby house. You know how you can trim them? And

10:00 it had an entrance and you had the background of the fence and the bougainvillea creeper was growing over the, to make a sort of a roof and Peter slept in there and we had to feed him lucerne and things like that when there wasn't enough grass for him to eat. We used to tether him sometimes. He'd have a collar on and we'd have a long rope and he would walk around. He would be tethered to this stake in the ground and

10:30 he really liked that, and he would eat the lawn, the grass of the lawn and give me some fertiliser for the garden. He was quite an interesting animal.

Did he ever come inside?

Well as I said, he used to come up the stairs sometimes if he felt like it, the front stairs and come around our verandah with clip clop clip clop, you know. You'd know he was coming and then he'd stand at the kitchen door and just inside the

11:00 kitchen door was a big tin of Arnott's biscuits always there, and if we saw him we'd give him a biscuit and tell him to go home.

And what happened to him in the end?

Well when we left Maryborough, we left Maryborough and came back to live in Brisbane because we couldn't bring him with us. The house that we were building in Brisbane when my father died, we came

back to that

11:30 and we sold the house in Maryborough, so Peter came back, Peter stayed in Maryborough and was given to a friend of ours and I just don't know what happened, whether he ended up on their plate or not. I hope he didn't.

Do you know who you were named after, Desmond?

No. I think it was just a name that my mother and father thought of.

And tell us about your parents, what do you remember of your Mum?

My

12:00 Mum was a marvellous woman and you can imagine when she was left without a husband and her husband had died. She had the problem, or not the problem, but the responsibility of raising two children and the third one eventually. So she managed to, she was a very clever woman, you know. She was

12:30 able to do things and she went into business with my uncle who had a casket agency, a newsagency and tobacconist shop in Maryborough, in Kent Street, Maryborough, and so she was there for some time before we shifted back to Brisbane to our original home, the home that was getting built when my father died.

How did your father die?

He was very unfortunate. He had a tooth extracted

13:00 and he went to the Mater Hospital to have it done in those days, and he died of blood poisoning because in those days you didn't have the antibiotics and things that you've got today, and he was only in there about three days and he got blood poisoning and he was dead within four days I think. All so sudden and unexpected, but you know, that wouldn't happen today because people have antibiotics

13:30 and they can get over that no problem. It's not a problem.

When you were growing up were there many other single parent families?

No, not many. Not like today. It was a different world in those days. The only single families would be cases where, there was no such thing, even in my early days, as divorce and that sort of thing. But mainly families where one of the parents had died from

14:00 natural reasons.

So without having a Dad there from a very young age, who taught you to do the men things?

Well I had some good mates that went to school with me and people who lived near me. We sort of used to go bird trapping down in the pocket in Maryborough. In those days you could go, in the in thing was you could go, you'd have a little bird trap and go down and

14:30 catch double bars and bullies and all those little creatures that were there. There was no such thing then as the Greenies or anything like that, and we used to go down catching these birds and we'd put them in our aviary at home and they were well looked after and quite good.

Excellent. What other things did you do when you were a kid to amuse yourself?

I did lots of things and got into trouble many times doing lots of things I shouldn't do, but

15:00 I was very keen on playing football at school and I was the leader of the gymnastics team and I won the senior cup in the school about 1935 I think for athletics. So I was very keen on sport.

And what about at home, what did the family do for entertainment?

Well, my mother was musical

15:30 and my sister was musical, played the violin. I was forced to learn to play the piano, which I didn't like, I didn't appreciate very much. Now I wish I'd paid more attention to it now, but we used to have on a Sunday morning, we'd have a musical morning and there'd be people come from various parts of Maryborough, you know, musicians of different types and play the piano, play the violins and sing and all this sort

16:00 of thing. So it was a recognised thing in our home that practically every Sunday morning there'd be a musical concert or something in our home.

And what about, you mentioned earlier that you were in Maryborough during the Depression?

Yes.

What do you remember of that?

I can just sort of remember the people that were working on

16:30 the road, laying the water pipes and putting bitumen on roads. They were nearly all dirt roads in those days. So they found jobs for people to do, and I can remember they were very bad times and a very bad situation for a lot of people.

What about for your family in terms of getting food and that sort of thing?

Well, we were alright

17:00 because in my, as I said, my mother opened this newsagency business with my uncle. That's my father's brother, and we were able to, she was able to earn enough money and that to keep the family going. So we didn't have any problems in that regard.

Did you ever go and work in the newsagency?

No. I didn't go because I was going to school and as soon

17:30 as I'd finished year 10, year 8, we left Maryborough and I came to Brisbane and finished my schooling there. So I was fully occupied in going to school more or less and doing the things boys do.

Tell us about the school you went to in Maryborough?

Well, I can remember my first school teacher in Grade 1 was a woman called Minnie Wilson and she was a marvellous

18:00 teacher but she taught us our tables, '1 and 1 are 2, 2 and 2 are 4, 4 and 4 – ' and so on and we had to repeat that like a parrot time after time. So we all knew out tables. So that I found was a big help to us during our later life, in my later life. You never forget your tables.

Can you describe the school for us?

Yes, it was a concrete building with,

18:30 it had, the main school was up on the first floor and underneath was a play area and quite a big, big grounds and quite a few students went there, people went there, and it was right beside the botanical gardens in Maryborough in Lennock Street. It was good, and then when I went to the Christian Brothers College it was on the other side of town and we had big football fields all around us and

19:00 it was much the same, a wooden structure, and we had a beautiful rose garden. The head brother there at the time, the headmaster, was a very keen gardener and he used to have a beautiful rose garden out the front, and it was known that he'd work until midnight at night time out in his rose garden planting roses or watering or doing something like that.

And what sort of things did you study at school?

Well, all the normal things,

19:30 maths, English, we did a bit of Latin and I wasn't good at it, bookkeeping and religious knowledge of course going to a Catholic school, and all the normal subjects. French, I did some French.

What about that, going to a Catholic school? Did you have to go to Mass?

Oh yes, yes, that was a part of,

20:00 on the first Friday of every month we'd be marched from the school down to the Catholic church in the town and we'd have a benediction or something there. There was always something, but it wasn't persuasive. It was the done thing. You didn't take any notice of it. Probably today people would complain about it, but in those days you accepted things like that. It was a different world.

Did

20:30 **the church play a big part in your family life?**

Oh yes. We sort of would go to mass every Sunday and I was an alter boy at one stage for a few years. So no, it did play a big, we did take seriously our religion.

Did you have to wear a uniform to school?

Yes, in the convent school when we first started. I think in year 1 we didn't have a uniform,

21:00 but in year 2 we did have to wear a uniform and then when I went to the Christian Brothers College we had a school uniform with a blazer and all the rest of it. As a matter of fact I've got a photo somewhere of me sitting in class with my blazer on and I think I was the only one in the class that day who had the blazer.

Can you remember what the uniform looked like?

Yes. It was a sort of a

21:30 blue uniform with a blue striped braid around it.

Did you have to wear the blazer year round?

No, not when we, only when we went out to special occasions and things like that. When we were all marched down to the church on the first Friday of every month we'd have to have our blazer on and look respectable and keep in line and march properly and do all those things.

22:00 There was more discipline in those days than there would be today and I think it was all for the good. I don't, I've got no qualms about discipline in the whole of my life, even in the army. You don't get anywhere unless you have some discipline.

What sort of things did they do to discipline you back at that school?

Oh well,

22:30 if you were very very bad we had a vaulting horse down in our gymnasium and it wouldn't be untold for you to be told to go down to the gymnasium and lie across the vaulting horse. I don't know if you know a vaulting horse.

Maybe for the benefit of anyone that doesn't know what one is can you just explain it?

Well, it's an article padded with leather and it's

23:00 quite long, about six feet, and it has four legs much like a, much like a carpenter's bench the carpenters use, and it was much like that and we used to jump over it and do somersaults in the air and land on the other side and do swallow dives and all that sort of thing. But anyway, getting back to the punishment side of

23:30 it, it was, anything that was particularly bad you'd go down there and you'd lie across the vaulting horse and the brother would have his black snake as he called it, it was a leather strap. It was about three layers of leather sewn together, and you'd get a few belts on the behind with that. But you know, it didn't do us any harm. A lot of people say it's cruel. Today you couldn't do it, you'd be

24:00 had up for hurting somebody.

What sort of things would have to have done to get that?

Oh well, run away from school or disappear out of the school yard and the prefect would find you down the road somewhere, or go to the shops or something when you shouldn't have. Mainly bad things.

What about less serious things?

Oh no. Less serious things would be treated

24:30 quite reasonably. It was only for very bad things.

What sort of things did you do that were the less serious things that you might get punished for?

I don't know that I had much of the discipline sort of thing. I don't know, not that I was that good or anything, but I think it just came my way, but sometimes if you hadn't done your exercises at night time. Every

25:00 night we had exercises at the Brothers' school and you'd be given work to do. Even over the weekends you'd have work to do too and if you came to school on Monday mornings and you didn't have it completed and you didn't have a good excuse, you'd put your hand out like that and get the cuts as we used to call it, you know. So we tried to avoid that as much as possible.

What about the brothers, were people like school kids, were they

25:30 **scared of them?**

No no no. We really liked them. Even though they were strict, but they were fair and they participated in sports, football with the boys and they were our friends and probably we were their friends too.

What did they wear?

They had a black uniform, something like a cleric would wear.

26:00 It was just a plain black, black and white uniform. Probably a white shirt and black coat and black trousers.

What about in Maryborough, did they used to have like a show, like a fair?

Yes. The annual show was held every year, during May I think it was. You'd have shows like Jimmy Sharman's boxing

26:30 tent would come there and that was a great attraction to us. There'd be the Mummies and all the other people that, much the same as in Brisbane when they had the Exhibition but not on that scale. One of the things I remember was when I was about 12 I think, my best mate, he was the quietest fellow you'd

ever seen or

27:00 spoke to in your life, very quiet fellow, and Jimmy Sharman's boxing tent was there. All these fellows used to stand outside and bang a drum and all that sort of thing, and they'd want anybody to come and contest or fight their fighters in the tent. The people would all go in to see this. This friend of mine, this school mate of mine, he was about 12, he put his hand up and I nearly fell over, you know.

27:30 What's he letting himself in for, you know. He gets up on the stage and there was a great big hurrah and this fellow's going to kill you and he's going to do this. You know how show people go on. He went into the tent. I went in and he knocked this fellow out to the surprise of my life, and he was a big boy but he was only about 12 years of age.

What did he win?

I think he won some money, probably about

28:00 £2 or £3 at that time, not very much.

Did you used to get pocket money?

Yes. I used to get a little bit of pocket money and I used to work a bit. I used to help to cut the lawn and we had a very nice garden in our home and I was attracted to the garden a bit, and so I used to earn not a great amount of money but a little bit of an amount of money and that bought a few lollies and things for me.

Do you remember

28:30 **what sort of lollies you used to get?**

I used to like acid drops. They're sort of a candy with an acid taste and I used to go to this corner shop on the way to school, not every day but occasionally when I had the money, and they would have these acid drops in a glass jar and the person in the shop, normally a lady, she would get a bit of paper and

29:00 make like a cone, like an ice cream cone and then she'd fill that up with acid drops and that would keep me going for most of the day.

You mentioned that you used to have to help in the garden at home, what other chores did you have to do?

I didn't have to do too much in the domestic line because I was too well looked after. My grandmother was a wonderful cook and she stayed at home and looked after the house affairs whilst my mother went to

29:30 work in, this is in Maryborough, went to work in the business. So no, they didn't even, we even had a maid for quite some years and she used to do most of the housework and everything. I wasn't very well domesticated you could say, but we seemed to get by.

What about your sisters, did they have to help around the house?

Well, no,

30:00 they didn't, no, they didn't. My eldest sister, she eventually, she wasn't well and when she got on in years a bit, and before we moved back to Brisbane my mother sent her down to Stewart Home College up on Montree Hill or Mount Cooper [?]. So she completed her schooling and everything there.

30:30 So no, we weren't domesticated very well.

Tell us about having maids, Des, did many people have maids?

In those days, yes. It was quite common for people to have a maid who more or less looked after, she looked after us quite a bit when we were younger and did some of the housework. My grandmother normally did the cooking because she was a wonderful cook and when we had these morning tea parties on Sunday

31:00 morning, the musical mornings, she would have all these different types of cakes and lamingtons and sponges. It was a real feast.

From those musical Sunday mornings do you remember any of the songs?

Yes, my mother used to be, what was her name? The Mikado, you know, the Gilbert

31:30 & Sullivan, and she used to sing all the songs from The Mikado and that sort of thing.

Do you remember having a favourite song?

No. My favourite song later was at the end of the war years when we had Vera Lynn and We'll Meet Again was my favourite song towards the end of the war.

And you were talking about your grandmother

32:00 **being a fabulous cook, what sort of things did she used to make for the family?**

What sort of?

What sort of food did she cook?

Well, roasts and pancakes quite sometime and cakes and sweets, all kinds of sweets and my grandmother was a wonderful woman. She came from Bundaberg before, in her early days

32:30 and she married my grandfather and they lived on, they started the first iron mongery store in Bundaberg. That's a country town just north of Maryborough, and my grandfather opened this big iron mongery store. It's still there today, called Wiper Brothers, and he also built

33:00 and then maintained the first foundry, the Bundaberg Foundry, where they made all the machinery and things like that, and they lived on a plantation just outside Bundaberg and it was in the days when the cane farmers, different to the cane farmers today, that cane farms had a lot of South Sea Islanders and they called them Kanakas,

33:30 and they used to work and live out on the fields sort of thing. My grandmother told me it was nothing at night time, she'd be, if my grandfather had gone out for the night, to look at the window and she'd see the big wide eyes looking through from outside the house into where she was. They were the days when the Kanakas were coming over, the people, the South Sea Islanders were being brought over to the mainland

34:00 in Australia to work on sugar cane farms.

Do you remember the Kanakas?

No no. That was long before I was born. My grandmother, she was the sort of person in Bundaberg if there were any babies being born, she would be the one they'd come and call to deliver the babies. They had to do all those things in those days and there were a lot of diseases that you never hear of now that were fatal

34:30 and the local doctor, he would be in a hook with a cab and a horse drawing it. He'd be so busy they often called on the other people that knew something about nursing and able to help and she was really well known in Bundaberg for her acts of charity that she did around the place, looking after sick children and doing things like that.

35:00 **Do you now how she learned the nursing?**

No. I don't know how she did it but she was pretty bright and she had an aptitude for being able to resolve problems, you know.

What sort of diseases were around then that we don't see now?

Meningitis. Still the old whooping cough and that sort of thing, and all the things that we have today. Not, certainly more than the things we have today, but

35:30 the things, common colds and flu and that were around. But they didn't have the medications and the items that we can have today to make you better. So it was a very serious thing.

You mentioned that when you were young your sister was unwell?

Yes.

What happened to her?

She was always getting sick, bilious and that sort of thing and so a friend of

36:00 ours said, "Well, you know, we think that it would be better if she went into a boarding situation," where she was very fussy with her food and that sort of thing, and so she went as a boarder to Stewart Home Convent where they could look after her and possibly some of her meals she wouldn't eat at home, she was told to eat when she was at the boarding school.

And when she went to boarding school, did she get to come home very often?

Oh yeah, all the school holidays

36:30 she came back to Maryborough and mid year, probably twice a year.

Did many girls go away to school?

No, not a great number, but there were some, a couple of others that came from Maryborough. The police magistrate's daughter in Maryborough went to Stewart Home with my sister. They were good friends. So there weren't that many but there was occasions when people did send

37:00 some of the children to school in Brisbane, and on top of that it promoted her, she played the violin. She learnt the violin in Maryborough, had a very good teacher and when she was able to go to boarding school she advanced quite considerably in violin and that sort of thing, and in art. She was advanced in

art as well, drawings and paintings.

What happened to your grandfather?

My grandfather,

37:30 he died in the, he was drowned in the Bernard River. He jumped in to, he jumped in to rescue somebody, a boy or a child that had fallen into the river, and somehow or other he got drowned. He didn't come out of it. I believe the boy was saved but he was drowned.

That was before you were born?

That's before, oh yes, before I was born, and that's why my grandmother came to live when my grandfather died.

38:00 She came to Maryborough to live with my mother.

What did your, you mentioned briefly before, but what did your Dad do?

My father was an accountant and he worked for a company by the name of Hosper Limited, an iron mongery place in Maryborough, and my mother worked at Hosper's too before she was married and that's where the two of them met, eventually got married. So

38:30 my mother worked in the office and he was the accountant.

We might just stop there. We sort of got off the track a little bit, I asked you before what sort of meals did your grandmother used to cook?

All delicious meals. They were roast pork, roast lamb, steak

39:00 and we even at time, not that we had to cook it, oh yes, she did have to cook it because we used to have a man come every Friday, nearly every Friday, with mud crabs and they were alive mud crabs and he'd come to our back steps and hand over the mud crab and my grandmother would cook it, and we always had crab or fish or something on Friday. But cakes, she was a marvellous

39:30 cake maker and it was very good food.

You were telling us just before what you remember during the Depression was that your family sort of, they were doing OK because they had the newsagency?

Had the business, yeah.

Was there a big difference do you remember, between yourself and a lot of the other people in town?

Oh yes. There were some very very poor people and there were some very very

40:00 rich people. Not that we were very very rich people but people who owned sawmills in Maryborough, the Fairleys and people like that, and Braddocks who owned the big foundry in Maryborough where they used to make locomotives and send them overseas and made most of the locomotives that were on the Queensland line come from

40:30 Maryborough, from their factory.

Was there an expectation for the more well-to-do people to help out the less well off?

No, I don't think so. I couldn't be 100 percent sure. Possibly some would, but you know, they seemed to be the very wealthy people, would be a step above. They'd have the big cars, they'd have, motorcars were just coming into vogue in

41:00 those days and they'd be driving around in their motorcars where the other people would be riding their pushbikes or walking, mostly walking. So they wealthy people, they had two homes. A lot of people in those early days had a family home down at Hervey Bay and they had all these beautiful homes lined along the foreshore

41:30 looking out to the ocean and over to Fraser Island and they were the wealthy people. They were much better off than the other people. I suppose a lot of them, they got their wealth through hard work and through doing things that were productive.

Tape 2

00:32 **You were just telling us cars were starting to come in then?**

Yes.

Did your family have a car?

No, we didn't. We didn't have a car. We had pushbikes. Everybody in our family rode a pushbike, even rode a pushbike to school and anywhere I wanted to go I always had my bike with me.

How far was it for you to get to school?

It would be about a quarter of an hour's

01:00 ride on a pushbike, not that far.

What did the family used to do? Did you ever used to get away on holidays?

Well, we used to go down a place called Urangan which forms part of Hervey Bay and we used to have a great time fishing and playing on the beach and all that sort of thing. It was a great break, my mother working so. My sisters

01:30 and myself would go down with my grandmother and because of the business that my mother had in Maryborough she couldn't come down all the time but she came down whenever she could, mainly Sundays or something like that to fill in with the family.

What about off camera a second ago you were telling us you used to go to a friend's property on school holidays?

Yes, that was at Calliope. Yes, they had a cattle

02:00 property. I had two relatives, they were two sisters who married two graziers in that area and they had separate properties. So I had a choice. I'd go to one and spend some time there and then go to the other one and go down to the milking sheds and see them milking the cows and go over to one of the other cattle stations there and we used to take cattle over to swap

02:30 them around or to sell them or to buy them and that sort of thing. With my relatives I'd ride a pony and go over there and it was great. I had another cousin about my age and he was a mad one on a horse. He'd put his head down and go like blue blazes, you know. So he sort of was with me most of the time and we got into riding horses and

03:00 looking at animals.

Did you ever have to help out milking the cows?

I beg your pardon?

Did you ever help out milking the cows?

I tried, yes. I tried, yes, and it was quite a thing to get the squeeze, squeeze it and if there was anybody next door, my cousin next door, it was nothing for him to get a skirt in the eye with the milk instead of in the bucket, you know. But in those days they didn't have, they could've had milking machines but it was all

03:30 by hand.

How long would it take to milk the cows?

Once you got them in the bail it would be about quarter of an hour, 20 minutes depending on the cow I suppose and if there were any problems or something like that.

And so what happens then, you milked it into a bucket?

Milked it into a bucket and then it was put into a big container that was a separator and

04:00 all the milk then, some of it, most of it would be separated and a lot of it would go to feed the pigs and also to make the cream, to get the cream. The cream would go into the Port Curtis dairy in Gladstone where it would be processed into butter.

And you were just mentioning about the cream and the butter, was their refrigeration then or how did this

No no. As a matter of fact

04:30 they used to make their own ginger beer on these properties, and I don't know if you've ever experienced home made ginger beer where they put a yeast in it and it becomes, pop the top off and can explode the bottles and that sort of thing. But they used to have a big well down from the house in one of the paddocks and they'd put the ginger beer bottles into

05:00 sugar bags as we called them in those days. Sugar bags, and then they'd drop down the well with a rope attached to them so that they would be kept cool. All the meat that came from the property would be put in safes that would hang up on the, out on the patio, out on the verandah or somewhere like that to keep the flies away and that sort of thing. But you had to eat

05:30 things quickly in those days. You couldn't, you had no refrigeration or anything like that.

What did your family used to do for special occasions like Christmas?

We used to have the usual Christmas tree and giving out of presents and we used to have a very happy time with relatives coming around. We had other relatives in Maryborough. So we

06:00 did the normal things with Father Christmas. Probably an uncle of mine would come from Brisbane and would bring their cricket bat or something and that would make my day.

Whose job was it to go and get the Christmas tree?

Well I used to get them quite a lot until one time I went, in those days you went out into the bush and you got your own Christmas tree and I was chopping one down one day and a

06:30 swarm of wasps came out of this tree, hooked onto me, gave me a big fright. I still went and got Christmas trees after that but I can always remember that. I just started to chop the thing down and the next thing I was covered with wasps.

Did you get bitten?

Oh yes, very bad.

And what did they do? How did you make the bites better?

Oh, couldn't do anything. Just let time heal it all.

07:00 Didn't have any chemicals in those days that you'd have today, antibiotics and things like that.

Can you remember a time that ever you were sick or had something happen to you, some of those sort of home remedies that your grandmother would use?

No, I didn't have any serious sicknesses other than the normal cold or flu or something like that, but no, I was rather healthy fortunately.

07:30 **Now what about when the family moved to Brisbane, what do you remember of the move?**

Well, I remember that it was a very difficult time because we moved into our house and that house had been rented to somebody all the time that we were living in Maryborough. We still had the house in Brisbane, we retained that, and fortunately it was rented all that time, and when we moved to Brisbane

08:00 we sold the home in Maryborough. I think it was sold. It was a beautiful home and I think we got £600 pounds for it when it was sold. So we moved to, from Maryborough to Brisbane and the money started to run out because we didn't have any income. I was still going to school and

08:30 my eldest sister was going to a business college learning accounting machines, and so I think at the end, I think my mother said she had two shillings in her purse when I got a job and my sister got a job both about the same time, you know. I can remember my mother used to go down to George Street and I can remember every Saturday morning

09:00 they had an auction of meat. You'd stand outside the window and the butcher would be in behind, the front window, he'd be the other side of it and he'd be holding up like they do probably in some of the leagues clubs now and that sort of thing, you know, "This tray of meat £1/10," or something like that, you know, and the people standing out on the footpath would put their hand up to sort of,

09:30 so my mother used to go down there to save money every Saturday morning and I used to go with her too quite often, and she would put her hand up if she thought there would be sausages and rump steak and things like that. But I've never seen that since.

What about, do you remember the actual move? How did they move everything from Maryborough to Brisbane?

Well, we sold all our furniture with the house in Maryborough

10:00 and we caught a train in Maryborough, my grandmother and the children. We came to a house in West End in Brisbane and, but it was completely bare because we didn't have any furniture at all. We gradually bought furniture with the money that we got from the sale of the house in Maryborough and

10:30 so over a matter of time, in those days you'd go into your home and you'd buy a table, a kitchen table, and that would be that. For the chairs you would have, we used to call them kerosene boxes or kerosene cases, just wooden cases that tins of kerosene would be taken out of and the boxes would be surplus, and they were the chairs in our kitchen.

11:00 Gradually and gradually we sort of got enough beds and went to the auctions and things like that where you could buy things at a reasonable price. So eventually built everything up, but towards the end we were just more or less running out of money and I think my mother had two 20 cent, not 20 cents, two shillings in her bag at the time I got a job and my sister got a job.

When you first came to Brisbane you went to St

11:30 **Lawrence, is that right?**

Yes.

Was that very different to going to the Christian Brothers school in Maryborough?

No, much the same, much the same only it was a bigger school and more pupils there. No, I thought it was much the same.

Were the people very different than country people?

No, they weren't. I didn't notice any difference because I made friends with a lot of them and

12:00 no, I had quite some good friends at school and same in Maryborough, same in Brisbane.

And what about leaving school, what happened then?

Well I left school after year 10 and went to work in this pharmaceutical company, Taylor Elliotts, and went through the bottle washing routine.

Tell us some more about that, about the bottle washing? Can you walk me through a normal day at work for you?

12:30 Oh yes, we had to even work Saturday mornings. So I'd catch a tram from, we were living at West End at that time, catch a tram that would go all the way from West End through Queen Street. It was a street then, not a mall, and it would take me into the valley, Fortitude Valley, and we'd go around Brunswick Street and then towards New Farm Park and Taylor Elliotts

13:00 was just around the corner in Brunswick Street and Wickham Street near The Truth newspaper building.

And so what happened when you got to work then?

When I got to work it was very strict, you had to toe the line and do a good job and I'd spend from probably 8 o'clock in the morning to 5 o'clock in the evening, afternoon, with a leather apron

13:30 on standing up against this big tub of caustic soda and the revolving dish going around, and when the bottles were done, well while the bottles were coming through the machine I had a brush. I'd hold the bottle in one hand and have the brush and make sure that all the sediment and everything that was in the bottle was taken out and cleaned before it found it's, we passed it

14:00 finally, you know. And the caustic soda was so strong it would burn your hands and this sort of thing, you know. But anyway I stuck it out.

Did you have gloves?

No, you couldn't have gloves, no.

Did the caustic soda have, was it a really strong smell?

Yes. It had a caustic smell, yeah.

So what would happen to your hands? How did that?

Well it probably wasn't strong enough to damage your hands but

14:30 you sort of got used to it. It's hard to remember now exactly, but you had to get the bottles out. They used to come on a tray. They'd be drained a bit. There was a tub sort of thing and this big wheel that would revolve around. It would catch the bottles and bring them up to you about waist height and then you'd take then out of the tray.

And then what would the bottles be used for?

15:00 Medicines, the same. Today probably a lot of plastic bottles are used, but there weren't such things that I can remember were plastic bottles. They were glass bottles and they were recyclable ones.

Did you get money for recycling the bottles?

Well the company that I was working for used to buy them from this bottleoh, as they used to call him. He used to go around the streets calling out, "Bottles!"

15:30 And also there were people going around with wooden props at that time. There were no Hills clothes hoists or anything like that. The clothes line was a stretch of wire between two posts and to stop it from sagging in the middle there'd be a prop which was a sapling from out of the bush, and people used to go in the bush and

16:00 they'd have a horse and cart and they'd go around the suburb of West End calling out, "Anybody saplings today," sort of thing, and if you wanted a sapling or wanted a clothes prop you'd go out and buy one of these forked clothes props and put it up against your line.

Do you remember how much money you got for your first job?

Very very, I don't remember the exact amount but it was just a matter of probably £3 or something like that

16:30 for a week.

And what did you do with the money? Did you give most of it to your mother?

Well most of it went to my mother because both my sister and myself, we had the responsibility of supporting the family.

Did you ever spend any of it on yourself on special treats?

Occasionally I would, but nothing very extravagant.

Like what sort of things would you buy for yourself?

Well I was always keen on football and I know that one time I bought a football and

17:00 shortly after I bought it I went to a picture show in Maryborough, a Saturday afternoon, and they had a lucky door number and the first prize was a football and who should win the football but me. I had the lucky number, and I'd only bought my own football about two weeks before that.

OK. So

17:30 **while you were at Taylor Elliotts you started going to tech college, is that right?**

Yes, and I was doing, I started off doing a correspondence course because the education wasn't like it is today, and having learned Robinson were a firm that taught accountancy and you did it with text books, you'd end up

18:00 with, you'd be given 12 text books and you'd have to send all your work into the office to be corrected and you'd be given marks and all that sort of thing, and as you went through the 12 text books you would be given another lot of text books and you'd advance like that. And that was actually how I got my third job. The second job I got because I knew a bit about accounting,

18:30 knew the fundamentals, and so I got a job as the office boy there. I was sort of going to get the mail. White Mercantile that I went to, the company, they used to send out a weekly gazette which was results of all the court cases of people defaulting on payments and court judgements and things like that and it was actually

19:00 to do with finance. So I had to go and was involved in taking these things to the printers to give them, tell them what they had to print and then when they printed them I'd have to pick them up and bring them back to my office and then I'd have to fold them all up and send them out for postage and all that sort of thing. And I was also looking after the receipting of all the

19:30 payments that came in. I had to look after the books and account for all the cash that came in and you didn't have an accounting machine or you didn't have an adding machine or anything in those days. It was all hand written with a bottle of Swan ink and a nib with a pen, with a nib on a handle, a wooden handle. So that was the, all the equipment you needed to be a junior clerk.

How long

20:00 **did you do your tech course for?**

I did that until about four years I think.

So while you were working you just did that at night?

Yeah, I did that at night time, and that's how I got my original, my next job, the one that I stayed there for 46 and a half years less the

20:30 time I was away at the war. And I got that because at that time, the head office, I worked for Claude Neon Limited which was the neon sign company and all the accounting and everything was done in Sydney office, head office. A bit different to today where they seem to want to send everything from the branches into head office, and the volume of work was too much in head office in Sydney and they decided

21:00 to send all the debtors ledgers, these were people that were hiring neon signs and in those days they didn't buy them, they rented them on a five year plan, and every month they had to make a payment of rental and it was my job to keep the ledgers in regard to that. I had about six, about, the ledgers went in alphabetical order from A to B, C to

21:30 G, H to LG, M to R and S to Z. So I had ledgers that were that thick and I was responsible for, the reason I got the job was because at that time I'd reached that stage in my studies where, they called it in those days self balancing ledgers, where all the work was sent to the branches and you had to look after all the accounting for

22:00 Queensland from Tweed Heads right up to Cairns, and I had to look after these ledgers and balance them, and at the end of the month I'd have to send a return to Sydney to tell them what the total debits were, the total credits were and you'd take the credits away from the total debits and what's left over is the balance. So I got the job because I was up to that part in my studies and

22:30 I was able to answer the questions when they said, "We're going to transfer all these ledgers from Sydney and your job's going to be looking after them and filling in the monthly reports and accounting for everything," and when I went to work there I sat on a stool and the desk was something like that up against the wall and I had a bottle of Swan ink with a steel nib

23:00 and a pen and everything was hand written, and then at the end of the month when you had to add everything up if you didn't balance to the penny they wouldn't accept anything. Today I think they would say, you know, if it's 10 cents out it's near enough. But in those days it was a bit ridiculous I suppose, but that was the way it was done.

So what would happen if you were out a penny? Did you have to go back?

Go back,

23:30 quite often if I, I'd go back at night time and work. Fortunately the office was in South Brisbane just near the Grey Street Bridge or the William Jolly Bridge just around the corner in Peel Street and I lived at West End. So I could walk home and have some tea and then come back and probably stay there until 10 or 11 o'clock at night time doing my work.

Did you like it?

Yeah, I liked it.

24:00 I liked it. Fortunately I was able to get the balances true and to head office in Sydney on time. So no, it was good. It was an interesting company too. They made all these neon signs and the neon signs you see to day aren't anything. You would've never, unless you went over to America or somewhere where you have curtains going up and down and flashing signs and,

24:30 but today you don't see that. In Queen Street before it was a mall we had big vertical signs hanging on the face of buildings and under awning signs and spectacular ones. One the edge of Victoria Bridge, that's the old Victoria Bridge, we had Paul's Ice Cream, had a big ice cream cone on the, right up on top of the bridge and the bear was

25:00 licking the ice cream. It was an animated thing, and they were eating the ice cream, licking the ice cream off the cone and people used to come in the trams. You'd see them come into town on the trams just to look at that and the children would be amazed. It was something unreal, unseen, and then on the other end of the bridge there was a pegasus, a flying bird,

25:30 and it was a, it was a sign for the petrol and it used to flap its wings just near where the casino is now at the end of the bridge. There was a big steel structure at that bridge, and it amazed people when we put that sign up. I wasn't involved in the building of the sign or anything like that. I was mainly in the office. But it really struck a point when that

26:00 sign went up and people were amazed, this pegasus flapping his wings like this. And I can always remember we had a manager at that time. His name was Jim Egan. He was a very nice fellow, but a real Irishman, you know, and there was another fellow down in our Melbourne office, he was an Irishman too, and the two of them were cards. So we put this pegasus sign up

26:30 and one day we got a telegram. A telegram boy arrived at the office. There was no faxes or anything like that, and he came on his pushbike and he had a telegram and it read, it was to Jim Egan, the manager, what price horse flying Victoria Bridge? Apparently the company in Melbourne, the branch of the company in Melbourne were wanting to do the same thing in Melbourne

27:00 over the Yarra River or something like that, and they were trying to find out what price the Brisbane Division was renting this particular sign for. So the telegram arrived with the telegram boy and the telegram read, what price horse flying Victoria Bridge? No, what price cow, no, what price was flying Victoria Bridge?

27:30 And Jim Egan, my manager, he sent back, same price cow jumping over moon. So that's the way people did business in those days.

What about any of the other signs around town that they did, do you remember any other stand out ones?

Oh yeah, the Regent Theatre, all the big theatres had signs. There was one down Edward Street there. I don't know if it's still there. The one in George Street.

28:00 There were big signs everywhere, spectacular signs.

And when you were working by now, what sort of things were you doing for entertainment when you weren't at work?

We had a lot of dances and those things and we played tennis and went to the movies. You know, we had social evenings and did the normal things that boys and girls do.

Do you remember what your

28:30 **favourite movie was that you saw?**

I think it was something to do with, I've forgotten the name of it, something to do with a river. Something on The River? No, I really can't remember.

Did you have a favourite movie star?

Oh yeah. Ginger Rogers comes to mind and a few people like that.

And what sort of music were you listening to?

Music?

29:00 **Yeah.**

I used to, well, as I said, I learnt to play the piano and it was mainly classical music. Today I couldn't play it because I don't practise. I wouldn't have practised, but I like classical, I like the music, I like The Mikado and the Gilbert & Sullivan operas and things like that.

Where did they used to have the dances, the socials that you went to?

In

29:30 Brisbane there was a school just in Peel Street, a convent school up there, and every Saturday or Friday, Saturday nights we'd have dances there in a big school room and people from all around that area would come. Other nights we used to have movies. We, a friend and myself,

30:00 we were able to get a 16 millimetre projector and we'd show movies to the people that lived around that area. We'd fill the hall. There'd be a small donation of something like that that went to some charity and we'd be up in the, there was a choir loft in the back of the school room. We'd be up there with the projector and Herb and myself would

30:30 be showing this film, projecting it onto a screen down in the main hall and we used to get, the Education Department used to have a library and this friend of mine worked for the Education Department and we were able to lease films from the Education Department and show them. I do remember one night we were showing

31:00 this, we had, they were big reels. They'd be that big, and we were showing, we were watching the movies, my mate Herb and myself, we were busy watching the movies and the next thing I look on the floor and there's a heap of tape, film that's come off the spool and it's all on the floor, but we got over that because you didn't have to sort of do anything straight away. We just let the thing go through the finish and then

31:30 we had to change the reel because there were quite a few spools that you had to take the old one off and put a new one in.

What about hearing current affairs and news? How did you get your news?

Well we had a short wave set. They were new, a short wave set, and we could listen into the test matches in England and they used to broadcast them but

32:00 it was all different. There used to be somebody in the broadcasting studio so that when somebody hit the ball they'd have a bit of wood or something like that. They'd go like that so you'd get the sound effect and think that you were really hearing the things going on. But you'd listen in to overseas and when I was a lad I

32:30 even made a crystal set myself, and I don't know if you know about crystal sets. It's a crystal and you wind the coil like this and you have a bit of crystal and you have a cats whisker as they called it, it's just a little piece of wire and you would connect that wire to the crystal and it would go through a circuit and you had a pair of earphones. You could listen to 4MB in Maryborough, the local radio station, and then

33:00 I advanced from there. I started building radio sets with tubes in them. I even built one of those when I was up Bougainville and I could get the news from Australia.

How do you build one of those?

Well, you just make it out of bits and pieces with bits of wire and whatever you can scrounge from the signalling people. I was lucky enough to get a

33:30 valve or two valves and I used to listen into broadcasts from Australia on the set I made up in Bougainville.

Do you remember first hearing when the war had started?

Yeah, the war started in 1939 and I was working at that time and was really

34:00 committed to my family and I was too young really to worry about that. But we were getting, I've actually got a newspaper, of The Courier Mail that the date the war was declared and I've got that, and so it was 1939 that the war, and so we weren't worried. It was out of the way. I was always keen to

34:30 go but I felt I had responsibilities at home and waited until later on until an opportunity presented itself.

How old were you when war broke out?

Well I was born in 1920, in 1939, so I was about 19.

Did many of your friends sign up to go?

Yes and no. There was quite a few went, quite a few didn't go because some people were in restricted jobs. You couldn't

35:00 even go if you wanted to go because they wanted you to remain at home for particular reasons. It might've been manufacturing equipment or ammunitions and something like that and you were needed here, and I think they had enough volunteers, people volunteering to go over to Europe and to England, and it wasn't really necessary, it didn't seem as urgent.

35:30 Then as the war went on and it looked very grim in some stages. Then when we seemed to get the upper hand it wasn't so severe.

Did you have relatives or friends of the family who had served in World War I?

Yes, I had an uncle who was in World War I and he was killed unfortunately.

Where was he?

36:00 I think it was Gallipoli there he was killed.

Do you think that sort of had any affect on you wanting to go or not wanting to go?

No. I didn't even consider that.

You were saying that you remember during the war when it got grim a few times, do you remember specific things before you decided to go?

Well,

36:30 yes. It was the Japanese, this is in the, I was only involved in the Japanese war. The Japanese had invaded, they'd gone through Hong Kong, China. My wife, Connie, came from Hong Kong and she remembers as a small child the Japanese coming into Hong Kong and mistreating people and doing all these silly things, and

37:00 then they moved into China. Then they moved down Malaya and they came to the Dutch East Indies. In those days it was the Dutch East Indies, not what it is today, and they headed for Australia and things were very serious and then when Darwin got bombed and

37:30 a few things like that, it made me think well, you know, they're getting too close and we've all got to pull our weight and do something. So that's when I decided to join the army, and I joined the army and I was sent to the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds where, no, I was sent to

38:00 Woolloongabba Cricket Ground where there was a staging camp for people who had just been recruited into the army, and we there received all our tetanus injections and all the other things that we had to go through, the issue of clothing and everything. And we used to do our PT, physical training, out on the cricket ground now where they play the test matches. It was quite an experience. When I

38:30 was going to St Lawrence's we were up behind the Mater Hospital there and our sports ground was Woolloongabba Cricket Ground and many a game of football from school I played on Woolloongabba Cricket Ground and so I was familiar with Woolloongabba when I joined the army and we were sent to Woolloongabba. Anyway, I stayed there for a while and I was sent to a place called

39:00 Boggabilla. That's just over the border from Goondiwindi in New South Wales. I arrived there and we'd all been issued with new equipment like clothing, blankets, haversacks, palliasses. They're the things you used to put a bit of straw in, like a big sugar bag, and put straw in and fill it up and that was your bed. So when we arrived at this particular place, it was a training camp,

39:30 we were told to just put our gear on the, drop your gear on the ground and we had these new blankets and everything and I looked at the ground and here was the dust that thick, you know, no grass at all, and anyway we did that, but I was then allocated to a specialist company where they trained the specialist and I was allocated, I don't know why, to the intelligence section

40:00 and that involved compass reading, marching on compass bearings, all kinds, making maps and all that sort of thing that they do. I did the course there and at that time things were getting so grim that they sent everybody they could that was even half

40:30 trained or quarter trained, they sent them to New Guinea because the Japanese had landed on the north coast, the north shores of New Guinea and were heading down towards Port Moresby and the big battle was just about to commence. So we were all sent to, the ship I was sent on, we didn't know where we were going but we were in

41:00 Brisbane and we got on a ship called the Anshun. It was an old Chinese tramp ship, a terrible ship. We were herded down into the pits of this ship and proceeded on our way to New Guinea.

Tape 3

00:31 **– was declared, how did you see Brisbane changing?**

Well, Brisbane, when it was declared Brisbane didn't change that much except for the troops that were going overseas and building munitions. We had to build munitions and there was a reorganisation of the workforce, but the bigger change came when

01:00 Japan came into the war and the Americans started arriving. I was still working at my accounting desk and looking through the window. Truck after truck after truck came over Grey Street Bridge or William Jolly Bridge, around the corner from Grey Street into Peel Street heading out towards Archerfield Aerodrome and these trucks

01:30 were carrying all the war supplies, mainly aeroplanes. They were bringing them in great big crates and taking them out to wherever they took them. I think it was Archerfield or somewhere out that way, and they were being put together. But the place was just overrun with Americans, Negroes, the darker people, and the white ones and at that time there was animosity, ill feeling between the black

02:00 and the whites, you know, and even the black people, they were kept on the other side of south Brisbane there on the other side of the river where the Palace Hotel and those places were, and all the white people were over in the city side. It was a crime for the dark people to cross the bridge and come over into the city. So that was, and during the war

02:30 there was a big fight that went on. I don't know if you heard about it, but there was a big fight outside the canteen in Adelaide Street between American soldiers and Australian soldiers and I think there were a couple of casualties or something, but it changed completely and another thing, all the girls were taken by the Americans. They were able to interest them

03:00 in their, being able to give them nylon stockings, and they were always well dressed. The American soldiers, the uniforms looked smart and everything, whereas we Australians, we had baggy pants and the uniform wasn't A1. But that made quite a difference to where we lived and how we were living.

How did that affect a young bloke like you by going out on a Saturday night when the town was full of Yanks?

03:30 Well we didn't like it because, you know, a lot of our girls were on the arm of an American or something and we didn't like that. Also when we were going up north on a troop train we might get to Rockhampton or something and we'd be going up to the frontline to New Guinea, and an American crowd would be coming back, Americans would be coming back on another

04:00 troop train coming towards Brisbane and the troop trains would pull up side by side and then there'd be a bit of going between the two, the Americans and the Australians, and the Americans coming back used to be always singing out through the windows, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry," and bickering like that, you know.

When you were at school did they have cadets at school?

No, not in my time, no.

04:30 **And had you ever thought of joining the CMF [Citizens Military Forces] or anything like that?**

No, not before the war, no, I didn't. I probably didn't have time doing what I had to do. It was very important that I get a job and earn some money, so that was my main aim in life at that time.

So can you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor being attacked?

05:00 Yes. Pearl Harbor was attacked right at, that was the reason for America coming into the war. Yes, it was devastating. I can remember the Japanese planes flying over, a swarm of them flying over Pearl Harbor and bombing all their navy boats and things that were around there and the oil tanks and all that sort of thing,

05:30 causing a lot of trouble.

What was the reaction of people, the fact that Japan had come into the war, but also that America had been brought into the war? How did that affect people's thinking?

Well we were glad to see them because we could realise that unless we had some help we had no hope in Australia. Once they started bombing Darwin and getting to Milne Bay and getting to Port Moresby, well they would've just taken over here and

06:00 I think at that time the government had devised a scheme where they wouldn't even worry about defending the north of Australia. I think they called it the Brisbane Line. They were going to let them land and come down to Brisbane and then sort of take them on from there, but that would've been a bit ridiculous.

Can you remember hearing about Darwin being bombed?

Yes. I was in

06:30 Boggabilla doing my training in the I Company, in I Section [intelligence] and we heard the first news that Darwin had been bombed and quite a few casualties, and then later on we heard that bombs had been dropped on Townsville and that was making us realise that things were getting very serious and I think everybody in Australia really took a look at it and decided we've got to do everything we can

07:00 and it was a blessing in the way that the Americans arrived when they did. The Americans arrived shortly after General MacArthur was tossed out of the Philippines and he came to Australia and came to Brisbane and he was in Lennon's Hotel in George Street just opposite where Triton's big furniture company was, and he lived there for years and years. No, we were very

07:30 glad to see the Americans even though there were some minuses, there were a lot of pluses.

So can you remember when it was that you finally decided, OK, I've got to join up?

That would've been in December of 1941. So I

08:00 decided that I wanted to really get into the air force. That was my main, wanted to do, but it was impossible at that time practically to get into the air force because they couldn't train any more people. They had all the people they wanted to train and it was such a slow process sending them to Canada and over to England to be trained. We did have certainly an amount of training in Australia but they were mainly on the spotter plains and tiny little things flying around.

08:30 **What was it that made you feel like you'd like to join the air force?**

Because all my life I've wanted to be a pilot and you can see when I went out to the Maryborough Aerodrome to see Kingsford-Smith arrive in his plane, I was interested in aeroplanes and I used to go out to, ride my bike out to the Maryborough Aerodrome and watch the planes come in, especially the Stinson plane, the one that crashed on,

09:00 up on the mountains behind Springbrook there and O'Reilly's Guest House, and I was always out there watching planes come and go. So I was keen to get into the air force.

Had you ever flown in a plane before?

I beg your pardon?

Had you ever been for a flight in a plane?

Not before that. That was the first plane that I went in and it was only a joy ride around the suburbs of Maryborough, over Maryborough.

Can you recall what

09:30 **you paid for that joy flight?**

No, I haven't got a clue now. I don't know.

What about the fact that he was, Smithy's plane was there? That must've attracted a fairly huge crowd to Maryborough?

Oh yes. A lot of people were out there looking at the aeroplane, and not only that one, other planes were there at the same time. They used to have air shows in Maryborough too and that was quite popular, where the planes would have races.

10:00 They'd take off and they'd race all around the circumference of Maryborough and do all this stunting and all that sort of thing. That was probably an annual event. So I was always there with my pushbike.

So can you tell me the process you went through when you first decided you wanted to join up, when you actually went to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] recruiting office?

This didn't happen until I was already in the army when

10:30 that happened. The air force recruiting team, it was a practise to go around to the different army centres like the battalions in training and that and ask people if they wanted to, would like to join the aircrew or air force, and they came to a place called Boggabilla where I was doing my training, and this would've been early in 1942 I think

11:00 and my two cousins and myself, we went and did an aptitude test. You had to do a written test, and we did that and the three of us were put on a waiting list, waiting a call up to go to Canada or England or somewhere. But when it eventuated it eventuated just at the most critical time of the Japanese war and anybody that was available, I think they'd have

11:30 taken you if you only had one leg, you would've been needed up there, because not only, we were losing people because in the early days in New Guinea it wasn't realised that the malaria problem was so severe. After we were there after only a short time people started being attacked and going down with malaria, even some of them dying it was so severe. But when we went up there

12:00 we went up, we weren't clothed to operate in that particular type of country. We had shorts and short sleeves and everything, and then they found eventually that that was no good, that everybody was going down with malaria and they had to change the clothing that we wore. We had to wear long trousers. We had to wear long sleeved shirts buttoned up at the wrist. We had to take

12:30 quinine, the chemistry that they used. An antibiotic I suppose it would be against malaria, and even to the extent that at night time before we had our evening meal we'd have a parade and the officer in charge of a particular section, whatever it was, he would stand there and the quinine would be, later it was Atebrin, the officer would go

13:00 along with the person handing out the tablets, or the quinine was a drink, making sure that you took and that you swallowed it because quinine was a terrible, I don't know if you've ever tried quinine but it's a very very bitter drink, and some of the lads in the early days I think they used to toss it out or not take it, but it was so necessary that we had to do that.

So in the very first instance when you joined up, was it with the army?

Yes.

So can you

13:30 **tell me about that, going to the recruiting office for that?**

Yes. I'd actually got a call up in the, they were calling people up at time and I'd got one earlier then when I went to apply they didn't want me, and then later on I got another call. So I was called to go to attend the

14:00 army centre at Annerley and I went out there and had my medical check up and a few other things that had to be done and then I was shunted off to Woolloongabba Cricket Ground to receive my injections and get some clothing and then start to be sorted out as to where we were going to go.

How did you break the news to your bosses at Claude

14:30 **Neon?**

Well, I knew, I knew about a fortnight before that I had to go and they were quite receptive to the idea because Claude Neon was in the doldrums at that stage because when the Japanese came into the war we had complete blackouts. You couldn't have neon signs because of the possibility of aircraft coming over to bomb Brisbane.

15:00 You couldn't have any open lights, you couldn't, outside on the streets. The windows in the houses had to be covered like your cover over there so no light would shine through at night time and our company went into, Claude Neon went into manufacturing steel helmets and putting the inserts into the straps and everything that fit into them. They had a big full time job keeping up

15:30 with manufacturing steel helmets and inserting the inserts and sending them off to the munitions.

Do you know whether the factory changing over to manufacture helmets, was that an initiative by the factory or from the government?

Well I think the supply source had been cut off because of the law that had been brought in that you weren't able to have any outside lighting at all

16:00 and the company was at a standstill as to what was going to happen. Everything had been taken away from it except for some interior lighting, you know, the fluorescent lighting that was coming in, and I think it was a partnership between the government and my company that they decided on the munitions aspect.

Were there many people from Claude Neon that were joining up and going away?

Yes, there were probably about half the staff

16:30 would've joined up. Once they started manufacturing the helmets and the tin hats as we used to call them, it was designated an important industry where people, they had to have these things done and they were exempted from joining the army or whatever.

Did you see the workforce within the factory itself, did that change from mostly male to females?

17:00 Yes, it did. There were quite a number of women came into the factory working, whereas before that the only women we had in the place would be secretaries and clerk typists and people like that.

And how was that, was that a bit of an upheaval at times?

Yes, it was a big change. It was a complete change and it made a big difference, but the company still continued right throughout the war from

17:30 1941 to 1945 when the war finished and they went back to the original thing. We had a lot of work to do reconstructing and reorganising all the signs that had to be built, and I went back to my original job. It was waiting for me. The day I got out of the army, I think I started work the next day.

Did they tell you before

18:00 **you went into the army?**

They told me before I went that you're welcome to come back whenever, and I only got home on leave on a couple of occasions and very short terms they were too, and I always used to go into the office and say gooday to the people that were there and worked with me. So I kept in touch but possibly only saw them about twice in five years.

And you must've been quite concerned, because at that stage

18:30 **you were the breadwinner for your family, joining the army?**

I was, and that's why I was a bit reluctant to join up earlier in the peace because our financial circumstances required income, some money to come into the house because you didn't have unemployment benefits and you didn't have pensions and things like that. There was an old age pension but you had to be 65 or whatever it was

19:00 for a woman, or it could be 60 for a woman to obtain a pension and they weren't given out very lightly. So the only income that was coming into our family was the money that we got from selling the house in Maryborough, living on that, which miraculously just lasted us until my sister and I were able to gain employment and bring in some income to support us.

So was joining the army going to be

19:30 **more of a financial boon to you than working at Claude Neon?**

No. When I joined the army I think it was six shillings a day, could've been seven, I'm not sure, but I did an allotment. I used to retain a shilling a day out of my $6 and the other $5 was sent home by the army pay office to my mother as an allotment.

20:00 So that made a difference to her because the income wasn't as great as when I was working. So it made a tremendous difference, and not only that, being on her own in war time with two children, my two sisters and my grandmother at the time, it was quite a big thing.

How much were you making at Claude Neon before you joined up?

That's

20:30 hard to remember but it would only be a matter of probably £5 a week or something for a, used to work then a 44 hour week, worked Saturday mornings and also a lot of overtime that I wasn't paid for. If I couldn't balance the books or something I'd go back to work at 6.00 o'clock and work there until about 10.00 or 11.00 o'clock at night and then come home.

21:00 Didn't get paid for that.

So when you went into the army was there anybody else that could sort of take over from being the man of the house?

No. I didn't have any brothers or anybody like that. My mother never remarried or anything like that and no, she was, she was left on her own with her two daughters, myself and my grandmother.

How old were your sisters at this stage?

My eldest sister was about, she was born

21:30 in 1918. She was two years older than I was, born in 1920.

So I guess she would've taken over that role?

So she took over. She got a job probably the same time as I got a job and she got a job working for the

army records office, so that kept her busy all the time during the war. So

22:00 her job was secure and I was the one who went overseas.

So can you tell us about everything you had to go through in basic training and being kitted up and stuff?

Well, we were handed our gear, our uniform, which in that time consisted mainly of a great coat and the suit, you know, a very rough suit it was,

22:30 and singlets, underpants, shirts, blankets, palliasse to sleep on and we were issued with all of that kit and told to hump it around until we settled down at Boggabilla eventually, and we all had our, as I said before, our injections and typhoid injection and injection and all this sort of thing.

I forgot to ask you Des, what did your Mum think of you joining up?

23:00 Oh she was very, you know, she was very distressed and very worried about it. As a matter of fact, she was a religious woman and I've still got inside there a prayer that she said every night for me when I was in the army and I reckon that it did work because there were many occasions when I should've been killed and I wasn't killed.

23:30 When I came home she gave me this and she said to me, "I said this for the five years you'd been away every night."

So that the last time you saw your Mum before you joined up must've been an emotional experience, was it?

Oh yes. I just, I think I got a leave pass from Woolloongabba the first or the second night that we were there. I caught the tram home from Woolloongabba to West End

24:00 and walked up home and then I had to go back to camp that same night, be in by 10.00 o'clock or something and then I was sent away to Boggabilla without even seeing them again. Sent to New Guinea without even seeing them again.

So you didn't have pre-embarkation leave?

No. It was so urgent at that time that the ships, the ones that were available were coming into Brisbane and they were filling

24:30 them up with the troops that were available and heading off for New Guinea. We joined this Anshun, the ship that I went overseas in, the Anshun, and we joined just near Breakfast Creek there, a wharf just up towards Newstead from there and we went along the reach of the river just where Hamilton and Ascot,

25:00 and I can still see all the people up in these big houses that are on the cliffs up there with bed sheets and they were waving like this to us, more or less saying goodbye. They knew we were going overseas or doing something.

Can we talk a bit about Boggabilla camp, because we haven't heard much about that camp?

Boggabilla is a small place. It would be about 15 K's outside Goondiwindi,

25:30 a very small place. It had a hotel that we were able to go and have a drink now and again, but other than that nothing, only the army camp was on the banks of the Macintosh River, the river that goes through Goondiwindi. And it was a terrible place for flies, in the sheep country area, and we were just covered with flies

26:00 and as a matter of fact when we were on marches and doing training, if we were doing a route march we'd probably be put on the road to Moree which is down in New South Wales and it was quite common for the fellow behind you, he'd have a branch of a swig of tree, you know, and he'd be brushing the flies off your back, and we had a lot of lamb to eat in that area, and it was quite common for the,

26:30 because of the number of flies and lack of facilities, refrigeration and that sort of thing, that quite often the meat would be fly blown. It would have maggots in it because of the flies, it was impossible to cover everything. And we used to go down to the river that was down at the bottom of the Boggabilla training area, we'd go down there for a wash

27:00 and all the toilets and urinals and things were just out in the open yard, a pipe stuck in the ground, very primitive.

How did you get there from Brisbane?

Went by train. Went by train from Brisbane. The train used to run up to Toowoomba and then we'd go through Stanthorpe and then out to Goondiwindi and then we were trucked by truck from

27:30 Goondiwindi to Boggabilla camp.

Can you explain to me what the camp looked like when you first got there?

It was just a mass of tents and a lot of people because it was a big training camp, but it was very primitive insofar as the training we got was mainly route marching and they were short of ammunition and they were short of rifles and short of all the things that we

28:00 should've been trained on. As a matter of fact I'd only had one lesson on a Bren gun before I was sent to New Guinea, so it was very sparse and didn't happen to often, the proper training. We did have sloping arms but I didn't see this, but I did believe one time they were taught their drill, arms drill with sloping arms and presenting arms and all this sort of thing

28:30 with broomsticks because we didn't have the equipment to do the right thing. Actually we were sent to, I was in the I Section and my time was mainly taken up with map reading, compass reading and all the drawing maps and looking at the topography of the ground and then doing your map and putting in traction

29:00 things like that. So that mainly took my time, but when I was sent off to New Guinea I knew hardly anything about, I had a .303 rifle that was given to me I think before I went on board the boat and I think one clip of ammunition. The .303, I think they're about, I can't remember now exactly but there could've been 10 rounds in this clip.

29:30 That's all I had, and when I landed at Milne Bay that's all I had, and I hadn't had much experience in fighting or what the drill was. I knew how to march, I knew how to carry my pack and that sort of thing, but I didn't no much about jungle fighting.

With your original clothing issue, what were you

30:00 **given? Were you given the old woollen?**

Yes, the old thick, very thick and rough coat and trousers and army boots, army boots and socks, singlets, underpants. Not much more. We had some, we were given a little container with a sewing kit

30:30 I suppose you'd call it, you know, it might have a couple of needles in it and a bit of cotton or something, but very primitive. No, we didn't have much in the way of, but the big thick uniform that we had to use, the uniforms we went into Goondiwindi on, on leave when we were in the training camp, we'd go in there. We'd all have to be dressed up in our uniforms and

31:00 it was a Godsend at times because they were so thick and out there it can get very cold around Goondiwindi and those areas, Warwick, and it was good to have the warmth and everything, but when we went to New Guinea we had to hand a lot of things in like that. We didn't take that with us.

When you first joined up did you know whether it was a militia unit or an AIF [Australian Imperial Force] unit?

No, I didn't

31:30 know but it was, it ended up to be a militia unit, but I think they could've taken everybody. I think it was a general training camp.

And did the militia guys know at that stage whether or not they could be sent overseas?

Yes because some of them had already been sent over there before. The attack on Milne Bay, the 61st Battalion, the one that I became a member of

32:00 had landed there before the Japanese and fortunately they were there with the 9th Division. Not the 9th Division, the 9th Battalion, 2/10th and 2/12th [battalions] when the Japanese landed on the 25th of August 1942. They possibly went there in July.

So were any of your instructors at Boggabilla returned servicemen?

Yes, they were returned service.

32:30 Probably mainly from the First World War, but none that I can remember that were actually returned from the Second World War at that time, but most of the sergeant majors, they were pretty strict people. They came out of the old brigade and some of them even trained over in England in that respect and

33:00 yeah, they were pretty severe.

How did you find the training?

It was a bit different to what I was used to doing, working in an office situation, but you gradually sort of got used to it and the life. The food was a bit of a problem early in the piece to sort of get used to.

Can you guesstimate for us roughly how many people would've been at Boggabilla camp?

33:30 There would've been probably over 1,000. There was A Company, B Company, C Company, D Company, probably about a battalion strength I'd say.

These are all Queensland blokes?

Yeah, mainly Queenslanders.

How long did you spend there?

I went there in December, in January 1942

34:00 and I stayed there until about July of 1942.

So when was it that you were told you were going to be part of the 61st?

I wasn't told until I got off the ship at Milne Bay and I was then allocated from there to the 61st Battalion who were then just finalising the attack on Milne

34:30 Bay and my first job was to go and bury a lot of dead that were in the area there and there patrolling, mopping up Japs that had been straggling behind and hadn't got on the barges when the Japanese pulled out.

Going back a bit, from Boggabilla where did you go from there?

From Boggabilla I was sent to

35:00 Ascot Racecourse where there was a transit camp, spent about a night there and the next morning we were trucked to Newstead Wharf and we got on the Anshun and headed straight for, we didn't know where we were going. You weren't told. As a matter of fact I don't think the captain of the ship knew where he was going. His first call was Townsville. The Anshun pulled into Townsville and we were immediately

35:30 greeted by an American patrol boat that came out. We anchored in the harbour, came out and brought us some fresh bread and that sort of thing, and I think the Americans came out with the general instructions as to what was to happen from there and the ship just headed to New Guinea. We landed at Gili Gili, the wharf there and

36:00 that was the first time we knew. When we landed at Gili Gili we'd been escorted up by the navy, not a cruiser but a destroyer, the Arunta, and it was our convoy all the way, and I can remember going to, between Townsville and New Guinea we were going zigzagging nearly all the way because Japanese submarines were in the area and

36:30 so it took us longer to get there than it normally would because of the extra distance. Anyway we arrived at Gili Gili at the wharf and they told us to disembark and we disembarked off. We didn't know where we were going or what we were going to do, and we disembarked and they led us up about 100 metres where the ship had berthed at Gili Gili Wharf and told us, "This is where you're going to stay

37:00 the night." It was in coconut plantation, big coconut trees. The coconut trees, the plantations hadn't been looked after because of the war years and there were dead coconuts, there were brown coconuts all over the ground and that sort of thing, and we were told, "Well, you're camping here for the night," and when we looked on the ground the water was that deep where we were to spend the night. So we

37:30 decided that there was some steel matting around. I don't know if you, the matting that the Americans brought in when the planes used to land on the airstrips because of the mud and everything. I think it was called Marsden Matting or something like that. We scrounged around and found some of this and we got coconuts that had fallen onto the ground and we put about six under this strip of matting and that was our bed for the night, and kept

38:00 us up off the water. And we got into Gili Gili in the wharf there at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and so we just settled down to sleep at night time on this matting that we'd put down and about 11 o'clock at night there was a hell of roar and row and there was a Japanese cruiser, had followed the Anshun

38:30 into Milne Bay Harbour and they sank the Anshun at the wharf. Unfortunately we'd got off a few hours before, and they sank the Anshun and the shells that didn't hit the Anshun or went through the Anshun were coming straight into the area where we were camped chopping down big coconut trees as thought they'd been cut with a big knife, and trees were falling, shells were falling and it

39:00 was just bedlam, but they kept that up for about half an hour or three quarters of an hour and that was my first indoctrination into active service about four hours after we'd landed at the wharf.

What did you think when you heard the first round go off?

Oh, we were horrified, didn't know what was going on, but then, the Japanese cruiser had a big searchlight on it, very powerful searchlight

39:30 and they came in pretty close to the shore and they were scanning the whole Milne Bay shoreline and people that were miles and miles away even told me later on that they had, the searchlights had gone onto them too, but the main objective was to sink the Anshun and to make sure that it was sunk. It sank at the wharf. To make sure it

40:00 was sunk they pumped in plenty of ammunition.

I've been told that fellows were told not to shoot at the Japanese cruiser?

Well, we didn't, we didn't know. There was no fire from the shore, but there was, I believe there was an American gunner on the Anshun and he had a reputation. He was quite commended. I think he fired at the cruiser

40:30 and he was killed. He was hit by a shell and blown to pieces. I wasn't there, I didn't see that. I was 100 metres behind him.

OK, we'll just stop there and wack a new tape in.

Tape 4

00:31 **You were telling us about the hospital ship that was in Milne Bay as well?**

Yes. The hospital ship had come in the same day that we arrived in the afternoon. The hospital ship had come in in the morning to evacuate some of the people that had been wounded in the battle and some people that had gone down with malaria, and it came in and it was

01:00 anchored in Milne Bay Harbour and when the Japanese cruiser came in, this was about 10 or 11 o'clock at night, the two of them passed one another. The Japanese cruiser came in and the hospital ship headed at the, said the best thing for them would be to head out to sea and fortunately the Japanese let them go past and they didn't fire on them. A bit different to the other hospital ship, the Centaur, that was

01:30 sunk out from Stradbroke Island, Moreton Island.

What was the trip on the Anshun up there, what was that like?

Well if you've seen the cattle that they sent over the Middle East just recently and they couldn't land them, that's how we were. We were packed like cattle down underneath the decks and being a Chinese ship with Chinese cooks and Chinese

02:00 people looking after the ship, it was just terrible. Today you wouldn't transport people like that. You wouldn't be allowed to, and we were packed in like sardines and it was a terrible ordeal. We didn't enjoy that trip to New Guinea at all.

How long was the trip?

Well from the time we left Brisbane it was probably about five days. We went from Brisbane to Townsville

02:30 and then as I said, the Americans came out with further instructions and brought some food or something, bread I think it was, and then we headed for Milne Bay. It would be about five days as near as I can calculate.

So what did blokes do on board to pass the time?

Nothing. Nothing much other than just lie around and a lot of them were seasick,

03:00 I can remember that, and for our meals we had to go up on the top deck and the cooks had long tables and in the early days the cooks would be behind the tables dishing out the stew or whatever it might be, and the troops would be lining up and coming on the other side of the table, and we weren't awake to this, but some of the

03:30 fellows that were behind the line ready to get their meal they'd get seasick and they'd race over to the side of the ship to let it go over the side and the wind would be blowing so hard it would all come back onto the line that was going to get the food from the cooks. So we soon learnt then that you didn't go that way. You sort of put the tables on the other side of the boat where the wind wasn't blowing. But it was

04:00 very primitive and as a matter of fact, the latrines on the ship, they put out over the propeller of the boat they built a platform of timber, and that's if you wanted to go to the latrine. You'd go over the back and over where the propeller of the boat was and the rudder and everything and you'd squat over

04:30 there and everything would fall down into the sea. And when the Americans came to Townsville they were all done up in the white suits and you know how American officers dress with the braid and all the brass and everything. This magnificent looking cutter ship, cutter sort of a boat, miraculous boat, it was beautifully polished timber and everything, they anchored their boat on the side of the Anshun and then they

05:00 went up the steps of the ladder that was put down to bring them up and they were in probably talking to

the captain with instructions and that sort of thing, and it took quite a, probably about three quarters of an hour before they were ready to depart and when they came their boat had swung around and got around the back of the Anshun right under the latrine and it was just plastered, you know, it was terrible. That's how primitive it was.

05:30 They got a big surprise when they came back to their boat.

Were you escorted at all between Brisbane and Townsville?

No, we didn't have. We only took on the Arunta from Townsville.

And were yourself or any of the blokes concerned about travelling in a ship up the coast of Australia?

No. We just took it in our stride. It was what we were told to do and what we had to do, so it was

06:00 no good getting into trouble or strife about it.

Did you have any idea where your destination was?

Didn't have any idea at all. I doubt whether the captain of the Anshun knew where he was going other than to Townsville, and then to receive further instructions there and then he knew where he was going.

So when you finally did arrive at Gili Gili did you have any idea even then where you were?

06:30 No, we didn't have any idea at all. We just got off the ship and we found that there were some canteen supplies and things like that aboard the ship and there were some other army people at the wharf to unload the things that had come. It was a very primitive wharf. And we eventually learnt when we went ashore we knew where we, Milne Bay.

07:00 **Did you want to have a drink, Des? So what did you initially think of new surroundings when you first got off the ship?**

It would be impossible to describe it. So primitive, we had no tents to live in. That's when we got off the boat. It was raining, Milne Bay was a very wet place. Every afternoon,

07:30 you could set your clock by the rain coming at 2.00 or 3.00 o'clock in the afternoon. Rain and rain and rain and the mud roads, the mud was that thick when you started to walk. The roads were so muddy that the roads were built like that with gutters down the side and gutters there and quite a steep part in the middle, and even the trucks, a lot of them would slip down into the side of the road into the drains.

08:00 So it was very very primitive, and a lot of thought, oh well, I suppose they didn't have the time or the equipment to do what they would need to do, but we just had to make the best of what things were there.

And how soon was it when you were allotted to the 61st?

I was about two days at this staging camp behind the Anshun and then we were marched to the area where we were to

08:30 join the 61st and I was indoctrinated into the A Company, 61st Battalion, 7th Platoon.

That first night at Gili Gili or when the Anshun was sunk, did you have an area of operations or were you just basically told you guys set up here?

No, you just put your gear down here and you stay here until you're told to go do something

09:00 else. That was, so we just bedded down for the night there amidst the falling coconut trees and coconuts and all the shells bursting in where we were or over our head.

What was the wash up of that? How did the fellows feel the next day when they realised what had happened?

They were so surprised. There was nothing you could do. It just happened and

09:30 they didn't seem to have nervous reactions or anything like that at that stage. It was just an indoctrination into warfare, but it was the calibre of the shells that the Japanese cruiser was firing that was bigger than the 25 pounders that we were used to, our army was used to, and they were tremendous shells and caused terrific damage wherever they landed or whatever they,

10:00 where they came.

So who was in charge of you at that stage? All the blokes that had gotten off and were told to bunk down, who was actually looking after you blokes?

Well I can't remember that we had anybody who was telling us what to do. The captain of the ship I think was Chinese and

10:30 the crew were Chinese and I can't recall anybody. We just followed the leader like Brown's cows and we

were told by somebody, I can't remember who, we could've had an NCO [non commissioned officer] or somebody with us but I just can't recall that.

And were you guys already taking quinine at this stage?

No, we hadn't, we didn't know anything about quinine before we landed in Milne Bay. Then when we get there,

11:00 when we got to the 61st Battalion the malaria control came into effect and probably the first thing we did was at tea time that night, first night, line up to get our dose of quinine under supervision.

So at that stage most of you blokes would've already had a nice …

We thought it didn't taste like XXXX [Queensland beer] that we'd been used to. It was quite different to XXXX.

11:30 **But you would've had two days of already being hammered by the mozzies, wouldn't you?**

Yeah, oh yeah. They were just thick and swarms of them, you know, and everywhere you went you'd get bitten by mosquitos.

So can you tell us about when you were marched into 61st?

Yes. We marched from Gili Gili Wharf into the A Company, 61st Battalion where I was allotted and that was

12:00 right at the edge of a number 3 bomber strip. The strip that really had a lot to do with the Battle of Milne Bay and the saving of Milne Bay because we were camped just at the spot where there was a track going across this big bomber strip and led into the jungle on the other side of the strip and I was landed there.

12:30 I went to A Company and was allotted to 7 Platoon and my NCO, Owen Bradley, was the one at the time. Captain Gowland was my commanding officer of A Company, Bobby Gowland, and we were just told to settle down, but immediately it was a very severe, we had a severe leader in the 61st Battalion at that time,

13:00 and about the second day we were there we were lined up and the commanding officer of the whole battalion came around and was doing inspection to make sure that the people were shaving and that your boots were tied up. He was so strict that routine would come out that today the laces on your shoes are to be laced like that. The next one would come out, your laces were to be just like that.

13:30 And he would come around at 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock in the morning and call for a parade and this was when there were even Japs still filtering around on the other side of the strip, he'd be coming around doing inspection and making sure that you shaved. A lot of us didn't have razor blades. But I don't know, it was reported that he said, I can't say if this is hearsay, it's only hearsay, but some of the fellows were

14:00 told, "Haven't you got a glass bottle? Break it and shave with that," but I don't know how true that is but I do know that he used to come around to check you to make sure that you'd shaved in the morning and that your shoelaces, and the reason for that I was told was that he wanted to make sure that the routine orders that were directed from battalion headquarters was conveyed down the line to all the troops so

14:30 that they knew. If they knew about had to do their shoes, they'd know about some other important routine order. So although it seemed severe, that seemed to be the purpose of it.

Up until like the training stage of your army career at that stage, how had you adapted to army life in general?

I enjoyed the, some good friends I made and it was different to my usual job.

15:00 But you know, it's a thing that gradually comes to you. There's nothing you can do about it. You've just got to, it's better to accept than to try and fight it. That was my attitude towards it, that we had a job to do, it had to be done so why not?

So how did you feel now that you're at number 3 strip and you're being made to?

Well,

15:30 just explaining number 3 strip, the, a lot of tangled wire, barbed wire was put in the middle of the strip from one end to the other and that was the thing that saved the, this is when I was behind the Anshun this was going on. The Japs attacked and they were going to come across the strip and if we hadn't had the barbed wire entanglement there they

16:00 would've overrun the 61st Battalion on the other side of the strip, but the Japs when they attacked, they attacked straight across the strip from out of the track that was there. They called it the Buin Road, it was leading towards Buin in Bougainville. No, I'm thinking of Bougainville, this is Milne Bay. They attacked across that and they were getting caught up in all this

wire netting and getting tangled there in the wire and they were being just shot at by machine guns, Bren guns and other things that we had. I wasn't actually involved in that. They were just crawling over one another. They'd get killed climbing over the barbed wire and other ones, they were so fanatical, they'd be trying to crawl over on the back of the people that had been killed to get over the top.

So what was it like when you first got to number 3 strip? What did it look like?

It was the sight of like anywhere, the sight of, there were a few tents around. A makeshift kitchen had been built there and that's about all that was there. We were given tents then to erect which we put up and it was very, very very primitive, but

we were only there. We didn't waste any time or the army didn't waste any time putting us to work. So we were then sent, the people that came to join the 61st on that day, we were put to work patrolling on the other side of the airstrip down the track and the first thing we came across was a lot of dead Japs lying around and in that climate with the rain and everything their bodies were

disintegrating and they had to be buried quickly because of the disease factor.

Was that the first time you'd seen a dead enemy soldier?

Yeah. You never expected to see that, but I think there was 139 of them that we buried. We had to dig a big, the Americans built the airstrip and they had some heavy machinery so they just dug a big grave

or a trench for us and we had to place the Japanese dead in the big trench and they were covered over by the bulldozer.

At that stage were they searching the bodies of these soldiers or anything like that?

Yes, there were a few of the fellows that were going around seeing if they had any watches or anything like that and trying to get information as to what their name might be or what

the number of their battalion would be, but that depended on the individual. There was no instruction to do that or anything, it was purely and simply to find the dead and bury them and also on the lookout for stragglers who had missed the evacuation boats taking them all away, and for quite some time there were quite a few of them who didn't go and we found them further down the track as we went and checked.

So souveniring would've been pretty easily done in Papua New Guinea?

Yeah, I think most of us ended up with a bit of Japanese money, you know, the paper money. There were some coins too, but you know, we came across it sometimes and there was no point in just leaving it where it was.

What sort of effect did it have on you seeing your first enemy dead?

It was a bit horrific because in that climate where the heat was so hot and humid, the bodies when they've been lying there for a day or so they expand and they blow up and they look terrible and being out in probably incessant rain for days on end and nights on end they

weren't a pretty picture to see and the smell was horrendous.

Had you seen any dead or wounded Australians at this point?

No, I hadn't seen any at that stage. I think some of them were killed in that bivouac area when the Japanese shelling, when the Japs were shelling the Anshun. I think there were a number of people killed, but we didn't get a chance to investigate that.

So what,

were you guys patrolling at that stage?

Yes. We were sent out to patrol straight away and we went down the tank, down the strip, across the airstrip and then we were led to the path which the Japanese came up when, and the first thing we saw, we saw the dead people first accumulated on the side of the strip, and as we walked a bit further down there were two tanks that the Japanese had landed on

the road and both of those were involved in the Battle for Milne Bay, but fortunately they got bogged in mud at the side of the road and the chap that eventually ended up to be my officer in Bougainville, Lieutenant Robinson, Bert Robinson, he is reported to, when the Japanese tanks came up

they had headlights and everything on them and shining the lights and the commander of one of these tanks, he opened the peep hole at the top of the tank turret and Robinson shot him through the head and killed him. I think that was when the tank came to a stop. It was bogged and the other tank got bogged too. But if those tanks had got onto the airstrip they could've broken

through the wire netting, the wire and got over to the other side of the strip and Milne Bay might've been a different story.

What strength was your patrol?

Normally a platoon would be about 14 people I suppose.

So, what level of experience would that platoon have had at that stage?

23:00 Practically none because a lot of them came from the camp that I came from at Boggabilla and the ones that had been in the rifle company were probably more experienced in regard to firing rifles and sending off hand grenades, but because of my studies in the special section of where I was placed,

23:30 the intelligence section, our training was mainly devoted to map reading and all the things associated with the intelligence section of a battalion.

So at that stage the forward scouts would've been experienced blokes, would they?

No. We were sent over to probably, most of us, there might've been one man that knew what was going on, but we were all new boys and we just had to learn the hard way.

24:00 **Did that worry you at all?**

You don't think about things like that when you're doing that. I didn't. You're just sort of, you're told to do it and you do it.

So how far did your patrol have to go?

We went quite some distance along the shore of, not on the shore but just in land off the shore, quite some distance

24:30 down to other points towards the mouth of Milne Bay.

And you said you did come across some stragglers?

Yeah, we did strike some stragglers and by that time we had a few more people on the patrol and they were disposed of, but there weren't that many. Most of them had got off during the night they decided to retreat and the ships came in to pick them up and take them off. I think

25:00 they went to Rabaul or somewhere.

Was that when you fired your first shot in anger?

No, actually I didn't get a chance to fire a shot at that stage but other people that were with me had sort of disposed of the ones we saw. There weren't that many but there were some stragglers. I didn't fire my first shot until

25:30 I ended up in Bougainville, like in action.

So how long did you spend at number 3 strip?

I was there until Christmas Day of 1942 and we arrived there just after, we arrived at Milne Bay just after the 25th of August 1942 and about December,

26:00 around Christmas time I got malaria like most of the other people did and I was very sick and I was taken to the hospital they'd rigged up in Milne Bay and I was given some treatment there and on Christmas Day 1945, no, 1942, I

26:30 was placed aboard the Taroona, T A R double O N A. That was the ship that used to go between Melbourne and Tasmania. It was a passenger liner but it was pretty primitive and not very big and I was brought back to Australia with malaria because I was so sick and ended up in Toowoomba in the hospital at Toowoomba which was taken over by the army, took

27:00 over the Downlands College in Toowoomba. It was a boy's school, boarding school, and the army acquired that, so I ended up taken off the Taroona when it embarked in Brisbane and taken to the hospital at Downlands in Toowoomba.

So before you caught malaria when you were based at number 3 strip, what was the day to day routine? Was there such a thing as a routine?

27:30 No. There was no military exercises going on other than the patrolling that you were told to do. We did have a couple of air raids. One time the, I think it's mentioned in that letter that's about me, where we were more or less wiped out by a number of Japanese aeroplanes. Bombers came over and just dropped bomb after bomb along the side of the airstrip where we were.

28:00 We were sent down to Gili Gili Wharf. Other ships were coming in with supplies because the Anshun had been sunk and very primitive. They had to come in and they were bringing in supplies, tinned cheese and canteen supplies and letters from home and that sort of thing. We were put to work on the wharf unloading the ships

28:30 and we spent a bit of time getting ourselves a supply of food. We'd walk from the wharves back to the 61st company that I was with and it wasn't unusual to have a hand grenade or something and you'd toss

it into the sea as you walked along and the next thing you'd have probably 30 or 40 great big fish that you'd take back to the cooks to get

29:00 them to cook it because all we had to eat at that time was bully beef and dog biscuits as we called them, and dog biscuits were a sort a wheatmeal biscuit but I don't know how they ever made them. I think they were made of cement and we used to soak them in water all night so that we could eat them the next morning. We'd eat them like a porridge, but you'd break your teeth if you tried to eat them if they hadn't been soaked.

29:30 **How were jetty unloading operations done with the Anshun sunk at the jetty?**

Well, there was an area where the boats could come in, but a lot of them anchored up beside the Anshun. The Anshun was at the wharf like that and as it was sunk it went over like that, so it wasn't much higher than the actual wharf. But anyway the other ships could come

30:00 in and anchor off the, tie up to the Anshun and then they had ways and means of getting the stuff unloaded onto the wharf.

And how did you go with being based at number 3 strip digging slit trenches and things like that?

That was very eye opener and very unusual, but when I first went to Boggabilla I, not having probably used

30:30 a shovel in my life, two of us were sent with a big, I don't know how many tons it was, it could be a five ton or six ton truck, the big army type, with two shovels. I think they were size 12 shovels. They'd be about that wide. We were sent out to a quarry to fill this big truck with gravel and it nearly killed me and it nearly killed the other fellow.

31:00 That was my first introduction to hard work, but we also then had to go along the roads where the drains were and dig trenches to facilitate the water flowing off the crown of the road down into the gutter. So it was very hard work and something that most of us were not used to.

So how was it like with the water and everything there? It must've been

Everything was

31:30 terrible. Everything, your clothes got mildew, your shoes, your boots got mildew. You couldn't dry things, it was continuous rain, rain, rain, mosquitos, bad food, possibility of getting air strikes so it was very grim.

I'm interested to know what it's like when you're in an air raid?

Well, you dive for the nearest fox hole, the nearest hole, trench

32:00 and that happened on a number of occasions there where we'd hear the planes going over and we'd immediately dive for even the trenches that we were digging on one occasion. We had an air raid when we were unloading the boat down at Gili Gili and we rushed to the side of the road and cowered down in the trenches that were there.

Was there any sort of warning given about air

32:30 **raids?**

Sometimes it depended where you were. It depended where you were. In some areas where they had the facilities to warn you, you were warned. They had a siren but in most cases you knew it had arrived when it was dropping the bomb.

Were there any anti-aircraft guns in placements anywhere at Milne Bay?

No, we had some Americans there and I believe they had some anti-aircraft guns, but

33:00 they were, they were not fighting men. They were engineers. They'd been building this, the Americans were responsible for building the number 3 bomber strip and when they built it they had to put all this steel matting that I was mentioning before down, because the planes, the Liberator bombers and things that were coming in from Mareeba in Queensland, they used to come from Mareeba and they'd be red

33:30 underneath from the red dust of Mareeba and when they'd land at Milne Bay they'd come in from the sea because the strip was built coming in from the bay and the planes would come in over the bay and land straight on the strip from the shore, and this matting had holes in it like that to allow mud to come through, and when the Liberators and the other fighting planes that came in, they'd be covered in black

34:00 mud. All the mud would be coming up through the holes in the matting.

Did you see any allied air support while you were there?

No, no. We only had really engineers there and the story goes that when the air raids used to come there was a report of one fellow, he was a sergeant in the American, in the American Engineers

34:30 and he'd been working on the airstrip and there was an air strike and this fellow was around in a pretty precarious position and he was reported to have said, "Lordy Lordy, lubricate my limbs," and he headed for the trench.

Can you remember any other funny instances while you were there at Milne Bay?

No, it was a pretty serious thing, but

35:00 it was very, the food was bad and there was nothing very funny about it other than what I just told you and people scampering for slit trenches and things like that.

Did you manage to sleep at night?

Oh yeah, yeah. We were so tired you'd sleep alright and we had,

35:30 the mosquitos were a problem. We didn't have any nets or anything at that time and it was impossible to not wake up during the night with some problem, whether it was rain, rain or mosquitos, cold. Even though it was such a hot climate at night it got cold with the rain. It was very unusual for us. We'd

36:00 never struck anything like it before.

Did you feel like you were well equipped?

No, we were anything but well equipped. The Australian Army was very badly supplied in those days. They didn't have the facilities. We had a certain amount but we didn't have any tanks or anything like that to support us. We didn't have much in the way of craft,

36:30 sea craft, you know like things to bring in and move along the shore. There were some of course but not much. No, we were very ill prepared really.

Did you have any personal interaction at all with these American Engineers?

Yeah, we used to be given a bottle of Coke now and again. Everywhere they went, the Americans, they

37:00 had a supply of Coca Cola and they had a supply of Camel cigarettes, so we used to get cigarettes and Coca Cola. We made friends with them and they were a different type to what we were.

Before you joined the army had you smoked?

Yeah. No, no, not until I joined the army. When I joined the army that was my temptation to smoke because when we went to the canteen we could

37:30 buy Craven A cigarettes. I think they were sixpence a packet or something like that for 20. No, I didn't smoke before I went into the army but when I got to New Guinea that's when I started. Everybody smoked.

What about drinking?

Well no, I didn't drink before I went into the army, other than just socially if we were having a party at home or something like that. We might have a bottle of XXXX, but no.

38:00 I did have a few drinks when we used to go on leave into Warwick when I was at Boggabilla. That was the thing. There were so many hotels in Boggabilla that the first thing when you got off the truck in the main street, we'd all head for one or two of the particular hotels and have a day out and then go and have a feed of fish and chips somewhere. So no, that was the first time I ever smoked or drank.

Can you remember the name of any

38:30 **of the pubs that were at Boggabilla?**

There was only the one pub there at Boggabilla. I've forgotten the name of it, but it was the only pub and it was, a lot of dark people lived in, Aboriginal people lived around that area. They used to frequent the pub too with some of our boys, some of us.

Were there any Aboriginals that were serving with you?

No, I didn't have any.

39:00 I had this lad that became my friend, this chap that I knew as a boy in Calliope, Les Ah Chay. He was part Chinese because his father was Chinese, his mother was Australian.

Did it surprise you that you hadn't done any real jungle training before going to New Guinea?

No, I think the point was that

39:30 we didn't have the chance to do it. Things happened so quickly and the Japanese advance towards Australia was so critical that anybody that had possibly two arms and two legs was needed at the front. And then when I got there after doing the bit of training that I did in the specialist company at Boggabilla, I ended up in the

40:00 7 Platoon in the infantry section with a 303 rifle and a couple of clips of bullets.

Did you feel like

I felt like I hadn't, you know, hadn't been set up to do that sort of thing, you know, but you soon learn. I soon learned.

This specialist training that you received, was that utilised?

No. To get into our battalion they have an intelligence section at

40:30 headquarter company. You have different headquarter companies. You've got mortar platoon, you've got mortars, you've got intelligence section, you've got machine gunners and they all come under the heading of specialist things in headquarter company. So if I had been posted to headquarter company and put into the intelligence section I'd have had an opportunity to

41:00 use what knowledge I had in regard to map reading and compass marching and bearing and all that sort of thing. But no, they didn't even consider that. "You come from Gili Gili Wharf, we'll take you to A Company, you're in 7 Platoon." There was no decision I had to make. It was all made by the army.

Righto, we'll stop there.

Tape 5

00:32 **Des, when you went into the 61st Battalion you went in as reinforcements?**

Yes.

What was that like going into part of an already established unit?

We were accepted pretty well by the old timers or the ones who had been there previously, and I didn't have any difficulty there and they didn't have any difficulty with me.

Do you know where they had served previously?

01:00 Well, they'd been mainly around Brisbane and Yandina, but that was their first time in active service.

So how long had they been there before reinforcements got there?

They landed there about June or July in 1942 and I arrived there just at the beginning of September in 1942.

Des, can I ask you what it was like, you know, you said you went out on

01:30 **patrol, can you just actually walk me through a patrol? What happens?**

Well you walk ahead along the jungle track or whatever. We didn't do that in the end. We learnt that walking along jungle tracks was a dangerous thing to do. We always walked off the track. It was harder but we walked off the side of the track in the bush, or jungle really, and that was the time you

02:00 were wishing you had six eyes because every tree was a possible ambush and you had to keep your eyes scanned around you because that was the way the Japanese fought. They were just an ambush and hide behind a tree and you were walking, you wouldn't even see them sometimes and the next thing you'd hear a machine gun go off and you'd dive for the ground if you didn't get shot.

So how many

02:30 **of you would be out together?**

Sometimes about 10 or 12. We normally went in sections and in each infantry company you normally have the head company, A Company, and then you have the company split up into platoons, 7 Platoon, 8 Platoon and 9 Platoon.

03:00 We were in my company, A Company, and then each platoon had three sections, 1, 2 and 3 and he had one officer for the whole platoon but we normally had a sergeant or a corporal in charge of each section, and when we went to Bougainville I was put in charge of number 1 section in 7 Platoon.

03:30 About 12 people I think I was in charge of.

So when you're actually out with your 10 or 12 other guys on a patrol who does what?

Well, you have forward scouts and you walk in line like this, one behind the other. Sometimes it's an extended line out that way, but it's everybody's responsibility, especially the forward scout, to see what he

04:00 can see in front of him and know that if there's danger ahead he can see pieces of paper on the ground or tins that the enemy have had their lunch with and signs of enemy, you know, and you just get the instinct of trying to see those things because if you don't see them you can run into a machine gun or something, as often happened with dire consequences.

04:30 **So how long would you be out on a patrol for?**

Sometimes we'd be out on patrol in Bougainville for three days, two days. Sometimes we'd be walking through swamps up to our waist in water. Leeches were a big problem. The leeches would suck your blood. They were all over you and you'd be trying to brush them off and if you had a cigarette you'd

05:00 put it down and put the heat near the leech's mouth and it would fall off or go away. So it varied, depended on what job you had to do but normally it was three or four days. Sometimes it was only one day but it depended on what you were doing and where you were.

05:30 **When you were at Milne Bay and were you going out on patrol, how did you actually get your orders every day?**

Well, there'd be a meeting every day between the platoon commanders and the officer in charge of the company, and the officer in charge of the company would get his orders from battalion headquarters and it could even be that battalion

06:00 headquarters had received instructions prior to that from brigade headquarters and they'd say righto, we want a patrol to be organised to go into such and such an area with a map reading and that, and so it would be down the line. It would be from the company commander down to his captains or lieutenants that were in charge of the different sections and then it would

06:30 pass down the line to NCOs, the corporals and sergeants and we would then take it from there with the other troops.

Do you ever remember a time when you saw people around you being given an order that they were reluctant to carry out?

Well, that happened in Bougainville because when we arrived there we took over

07:00 from the Americans so they could head for the Philippine Islands, and when we went there we noticed they were living in luxury. We got off the American liberty ship that brought us from Madang over to, it was Augusta Bay or Torokina and we went into, they were living in luxury there as I said. They had their ice cream factory, their Coca Cola factory, their

07:30 outdoor movie cinema and they were just lying around having a great time, and because we'd been hearing that there'd been great things in the paper back home here in Australia about the position that the Australian troops were to carry out. They classified it as a mopping up operation because it was purely and simply

08:00 the Japs were on Bougainville. They claimed that they weren't being fed but they were being fed because they had a lot of, they took over all the native gardens and had beautiful bananas and pineapples and all those things that were abundant and they were living quite well. But it was a situation where the Americans were here, the Japanese were

08:30 down here. They were just filling in time more or less and hoping that MacArthur and his troops would head for Japan and the war would turn around. But when we got there General Blamey and his offsiders decided that we couldn't have Australian soldiers sitting at the barracks doing nothing, so it was arranged

09:00 that we would clear out the island and we started patrolling straight away about three days after we got there and the order was to clean out the islands and obliterate all the Japanese that we came across, but MacArthur wasn't in favour of that. MacArthur, when he went to the Philippines, it's recorded and it's noted in various aspects that he wanted the Australian

09:30 troops to be just holding the bases that had been established and just sit there and keep the base open in case of supplies and airfields so that planes could land there because he considered it was no point in wasting lives and trying to kill Japanese, and when the time came that the war ended it wouldn't have made any difference. We lost a lot of men because

10:00 we were fulfilling the requirements of the main command under General Blamey and even in parliament back in Australia at that time there were big debates going on in the House of Representatives as to what the Australian troops were to do, whether to bring them back because the fighting had ceased in this part, but there were still Japanese hanging on in Bougainville and some parts of New Guinea and

10:30 also in Timor and Borneo, but it was thought that it wouldn't make any difference if we just held the bases that had been established when they were fought for in months prior, and stay there and just wait for the end of the war to come but it didn't happen that way. But some of the troops thought it was a waste of manpower. We lost a lot of our good

11:00 friends and going out every day putting your life at stake and we certainly did some, got rid of some

Japs and that sort of thing, but you've got to ask yourself now whether it was worth it. Anyway we had no say. We were only the army. We had to do what we were told. So after we took over from the Americans we started

11:30 immediately patrolling, and immediately we started doing that we started losing mates and people with us.

Just go back to Milne Bay for a moment. When you were at Milne Bay was there, after the main battle was over and you were out doing patrols, was there a high casualty rate for Australians?

No, not much. There were probably a couple killed. I can't remember the exact number but

12:00 we had to be careful with land mines and booby traps and things that were left behind.

What sort of booby traps were there?

Dynamite and bombs, hand grenades mainly, your trip wires. You'd trip over, there'd be something in the grass along the track and if you didn't notice it, it always had a grenade or something and you could be killed.

And what sort of thing were you looking for to be

12:30 **able to spot booby traps and land mines?**

We were looking for anything that looked a bit obvious. Firstly we were looking for people, for Japanese enemy, and then we were also looking behind every tree as we passed it to see if there was anything there. And the trees in the islands up there, they were tremendous big trees of soft wood and they had big fins that came out like that. The roots

13:00 were probably started to develop from probably four or five feet above the ground and the roots would come out like fins like that which was a great place where the Japanese used to hide behind there and they'd have a machine gun or something or a sniper and they'd pop you off as you came along if you didn't see them. So, it was a bit

13:30 of patrolling to be done, cleaning, mopping up I suppose you'd call it. Eventually it all died down and we went to then over to Port Moresby. We shifted over there mainly to recuperate because all of our people had gone down, we were going down with malaria and berri berri, lack of nourishment and that sort of thing. So we were sent to Donadabu

14:00 but instead of treating us as troops that had been living under sparse circumstances and difficulties, we went there and they immediately started training again up in Donadabu. We went there as a training, even though we'd just come out of the Milne Bay episode.

When you were at Milne Bay where the Japanese retreated, was there a feeling amongst the men that the tide had turned

14:30 **against the Japanese?**

Well, it was the first time the Japanese had ever been defeated. They'd come all the way from Japan through China, through Malaya, through Dutch East Indies and practically nearly to Port Moresby, and Milne Bay, it's reported Milne Bay and the Kokoda Trail were much about the same time. It was a bit of debate as to

15:00 who turned the Japs around, defeated them first before the Japs turned around and went back from Kokoda or whether the Japs departed from Milne Bay. I'm not sure, but I think it was, they seem to think that Milne Bay was the first time that the Japanese Army had been turned around for quite a number of years.

What did that do to morale?

We were delighted about that, but

15:30 we knew that there was more to come. We more or less expected that they'd be coming back again because sometimes they can go away and reinforce at Rabaul or somewhere like that, or Borneo, and come back with a vengeance with more troops and have another go at trying to land on Milne Bay, and the object was that they

16:00 were trying to do a pincer movement over the Owen Stanleys [mountain range] trying to get to Port Moresby and they were doing a circling movement coming around the east coast of New Guinea to Milne Bay where they could be here and Port Moresby in a pincer movement that would come down land on Cape York, all around Townsville or Cairns or somewhere like that. So that was the obvious thing that was going to happen, but

16:30 because we turned them around it was the first time they'd ever been defeated, that's when the war started to, the tides turned, that was the starting point.

Was there a celebration at all?

No, no celebration, we just took it in our stride and that's what happened and we had to soldier on from there but it didn't last very long before other things happened. We had this bit of a break at a place

17:00 called Dona Dobu, just outside Port Moresby. It's the entrance to the Owen Stanley Ranges or to the track leading over to the other side of New Guinea. So that's where we did a lot of training but we could do a bit of swimming and that sort of thing, a bit of recreation.

When you were at Milne Bay what news were you getting from the guys up in the Owen Stanleys?

Well we weren't getting much

17:30 at all, but there was a newspaper called Guinea Gold. It was printed I think in Moresby, and not too often but occasionally, they'd distribute Guinea Gold and we'd read some of the things that the army wanted to tell us.

Were you getting fresh food through?

No. The only fresh food we had at Milne Bay was in the days before the war

18:00 the natives and the people that owned the plantations up there had built a slaughterhouse where they had cattle that were called Zebus, Z-E-B-U, and we managed to operate this slaughterhouse and they killed the Zebu cattle that were roaming around in the scrub and the jungle, and we did get a little bit of fresh

18:30 meat but mostly it was bully beef, corned beef in a tin, cheese in a tin and dog biscuits which were these hard biscuits that were very hard to digest and very hard to chew. We had to soak them in water to make them softer. But no, the food was very light on and that's why a lot of the people I think ended up

19:00 with beri beri and got very sick.

You mentioned that you came down with malaria?

Yes.

Can you describe the symptoms of malaria for us?

Malaria, it's a, you get very sick, you run very high temperatures and you can't move around. You're lying down and can hardly move and you might have a temperature of well above normal

19:30 and that might last for three hours, and the next thing you get the cold shivers. You're shivering like this and it goes from one extreme to the other, but you are very sick. You haven't got interest in anybody or anything and sometimes I think you wish you could die it was so bad.

So what would happen when you got sick?

Well, we did have a hospital at, a makeshift hospitals and doctors, a casualty clearing station where if anybody was

20:00 shot or the casualties came in, they would go there, but it was only, it would be something like an ambulance where they'd check you out and if it was possible to retain you there you'd be retained, but if you had to be evacuated they'd evacuate you. The hospital ship would come in or you'd be dropped across to Port Moresby by aeroplane and then you'd be repatriated back to

20:30 Australia. You might even go to a big hospital in Moresby. But malaria, it's a recurring thing. It's not only you get over it, but then again it can come back on you in a matter of weeks and you go through the whole thing again.

With so many people getting sick was there a lot of, like you know, if you got sick you just struggled on until you absolutely couldn't keep going?

You struggled on as long as you could but then when it got to

21:00 the stage when nobody could carry on you had to sort of report to the regimental aid post which was back behind the frontlines and there we had our own battalion doctor and he was a person that if you went on sick parade and you said you were sick he was more likely to put you on light duties. He'd tell you to go and see the kitchen staff and

21:30 get on the wood heap. That's the sort of thing, it didn't happen all the time, but it was known to happen. They called him, he had a nick name, I just can't remember his nick name but he was, his nick name was something to do with one of the buck jumping people that were in Australia at the time, the rodeos and all those sort of things, and he was such a good man in that field, this chap,

22:00 that he'd never been tossed by a bullock or a horse in the rodeo and so they called this fellow his name, they called him, I've forgotten what the rodeo fellow's name was, Gilcrest or Gilchrist or something like that, and they called the doctor, we all referred to him as that because he'd never been tossed. Because people would go along and they might say, "I'm a bit sick today," and they might not be sick and they'd be put on light duties or something

22:30 but you had to be very, very sick to get passed the regimental doctor and be sent to a hospital.

How is that looked upon by the other guys in your platoon when you were sick?

Oh, it was so common that after a while nobody took any notice of it. If you were that sick you had to go on sick parade and go to the battalion

23:00 doctor, the medical officer, and then it was up to him to decide what he'd do, but that was happening all the time. That's why we ended up with so few people at the end. They were going to Australia and coming back again whenever they could after treatment in Toowoomba or up to the convalescent camp at Warwick or at another convalescent camp at Sellheim just outside Charters Towers.

23:30 **What was sick parade?**

Well, we'd have a normal parade in the morning and one of the questions would be on parade, "Sick parade fall out," and anyone who thought that they were sick or knew they were sick they would be taken to the side and then distributed through the doctor through the medical checks and that sort of thing and then processed depending on their case.

24:00 **Can you describe a morning parade for us?**

Yes. We'd all have to line up in our platoons and every platoon had an officer in charge and he would go along and inspect, and sometimes the commanding officer of the 61st Battalion would come along and he would do the inspection, not

24:30 the platoon commander. He would come along and he'd look to see that you had shaved, that your shoelaces were tied up the way the routine order had been issued and he'd come and do a personal inspection to make sure and see how things were going.

25:00 **What was the, with malaria, you were mentioning to us earlier that when you went there you were ill equipped in terms of you had the wrong clothes for that kind of environment. What had you been warned about about malaria or berri berri or any of the other**

From memory we hadn't been warned about anything. It was only after the Milne Bay, after they'd been there about a month before the effects of malaria

25:30 started to worry us. When the original people in July arrived in Milne Bay they were in shorts and trousers and short sleeved shirts and all this sort of thing, but because of the volume of the number of people that were put on sick parade and going to hospital

26:00 with malaria and coming back to Australia with malaria, strict controls were brought in with the long shirts and sleeves, and also taking the medication which you had to take every day to avoid getting malaria, but even though you took the medication which was Atebrin in the latter part, you still got malaria, but

26:30 it probably avoided malaria in most of the cases, but you still knew it was possible to get malaria even though you'd been taking your quinine or your tablets religiously.

When you left Milne Bay I think you said it was on Christmas Day?

Yes, on Christmas Day on the hospital ship.

Was there any kind of feeling of it being Christmas?

No, I was too sick actually.

27:00 I'd been in the hospital at Milne Bay, spent about two or three days where they diagnosed that I had malaria and I was, they decided then that I was so sick the Taroona, the hospital ship came in and I was sent back to Australia and landed in Brisbane and taken to

27:30 Darling Downs to the Downlands College and went in there to be treated, and then after that, after they'd sort of brought my temperature down and I was feeling a bit better I was sent to a convalescent camp at Warwick in the middle of the Warwick golf links where they had a few tents erected and it was in the middle of, it was probably in May and

28:00 Warwick is a very cold place and it was very cold living in a canvas tent in the middle of Warwick golf links. Some mornings, it was for fire drill in case the tent caught on fire, we always had to have a bucket of water at the entrance to the tent so that if there was a fire you'd have water on hand to put over the tent and try and put the fire out, but

28:30 some morning that bucket of water would be a bucket of ice it was so cold. And we had a pretty tough sergeant major and about 6 o'clock in the morning he'd be getting around, going around the tent, "Get out of bed before the sun burns a hole in your arse," he'd say. That was the sort of talk that he had. So it was very cold and that sort of thing.

Was the,

29:00 **the trip back on the hospital trip, how long did that take?**

It took about four or five days. I'm not quite sure, I didn't keep tab on it. But it was probably five days.

Can you describe the hospital ship for us?

Yeah, it was a bit better than the ordinary troop ships we came on. It was the Taroona actually. It was a makeshift hospital ship. It was the Taroona

29:30 that used to go between Melbourne and Hobart I think, or Devonport, and it had been a passenger liner in a sort of a way with cabins and bunks and everything, but I can remember I didn't appreciate the trip very much because after being down with malaria we had a pretty rough trip coming across from New Guinea to Brisbane, especially out in the Coral Sea,

30:00 and this Taroona ship had been recognised as being not very seaworthy. It did a lot of rolling and things like that and most of the troops coming back were violently sick and there was nothing much to do then, except you used to wait that you'd soon come to an island where you could get off and hopefully die.

30:30 So it was comfortable enough. We had probably the best food that we'd tasted for months and months on the ship. We got butter and we had bread. Nothing elaborate, we didn't get sweet and sour pork or anything like that. But we had good food and butter and bread and jam.

What were the sleeping arrangements?

We had cabins and probably

31:00 two men to a cabin. I think there'd be two bunks in it and we'd be allocated to a cabin and stay there. We were able to get up if we were well enough, get up and walk around the corridors of the boat and get up and get a bit of fresh air if we could, but it wasn't the Queen Mary or anything like that.

Who was nursing you on the hospital ship?

They had people

31:30 from, really the hospital people, nurses. There were serving nurses but there were more the next run down. I can't remember now, but they were civilian people. People who'd gone into the army but they went in as nurses or aids and there was a doctor aboard of course, but we were mainly on our own. We did have help if we wanted it from the

32:00 nursing people or the aids and the doctors when required.

They were female nurses?

Yes.

And what was that like to see women again?

Oh, it was a bit of delight, although we did see some nurses up in Milne Bay. There were nurses attached to the hospital there and a couple of people who were just aids, they were there. It was good to even be heading

32:30 back towards Australia, that was the main thing, you know.

What were the thoughts for the guys that you were leaving behind in New Guinea?

Yeah, we felt for them, but fortunately they weren't in a serious predicament as far as fighting was concerned because the Japanese had departed and the clean up had been finished and it was more or less, there wasn't any

33:00 danger unless it was another invasion or landing by the Japanese which was really on the cards. But other than that we felt they didn't have any worries except for being sick and catching malaria even to the extent of dying, but we just had to take that in our stride.

What sort of welcome home did you get when you came back on the hospital ship?

None at all actually. We

33:30 got off the hospital ship and I think from memory I went to the Exhibition, no, Ascot Racecourse again where there was an embarkation centre where they received people and there was a train waiting and we were put on the train and sent to Toowoomba, and our parents didn't know we were even coming. Nobody knew what was happening. All

34:00 we knew we were coming back to Australia and what was going to happen to us we didn't know.

And so when you were back in Warwick did you see your family then?

Yeah. My mother and two sisters came up there and they came to Toowoomba, not Warwick. I went to, the hospital was in Downlands College in Toowoomba and then after you moved on to there you moved to Warwick to a convalescent camp. So that was the first time I'd seen my

34:30 mother and family since I joined the army. So they came up and found my lying in a bed pretty sick in Toowoomba.

Do you remember what they said or what they thought when they saw you there?

No. I can't remember exactly but it was, you know, it was a case of great to see them but sooner or later I knew I had to move on and go somewhere else. They only came up for the day and went back the same day I think.

35:00 **So how long were you then at Warwick for?**

Probably about three months in the convalescent camp. Up there we were doing route marches and training and trying to get back into condition again.

Did you feel like you were being given a proper chance to get well?

No, not really. We were too stressed and been through to much to

35:30 do that, but we had route marches and at least I was able to practise some Bren gun firing and throwing hand grenades and physical training and that sort of thing, and we'd get a bit of leave once a week or something. You could go on leave into Warwick and have something in a café, some new kind of food. But

36:00 I was there for about three months and then we were sent back to battalion back in New Guinea. They were at Donadabu at the time because the people that had stayed behind in Milne Bay had been shifted over to Port Moresby and then shifted further up the Kokoda Trail to a place called Donadabu where it was supposed to have an easy time, but we didn't have an easy time.

36:30 Considering our health and everything it was pretty strenuous.

What sort of notice were you given that you were going to be leaving the convalescent camp?

Well, they don't give you much notice. They don't tell you. They might call you at lunch time, there might be a parade and if your name was called out they'd be telling you, "You're on draft this afternoon at 4.00 o'clock. Pack all your gear and get everything together and we'll be taking you

37:00 here or there or wherever you're going."

Who else was in the convalescent camp? Was it just others from the 61st Battalion?

No no, they were from the 2/9th Battalion, 2/10th, 2/12th. There were some people that had been badly wounded and they were still there but they hadn't been shipped back to Australia at that time, so it was a sort of a makeup of most people that were at Milne Bay.

Was there a lot of

37:30 **swapping of war stories though?**

No no, just a few good jokes told. You know, we army fellows are pretty good at telling one another yarns and that sort of thing. No, there wasn't sort of, we didn't like talking about war. I still don't like talking about it. I don't know why I'm doing this. No, we were just mates and if we were well enough we'd go out

38:00 and join the two-up. That's one of the main things, the two-up games that used to take place out behind the sheds sort of thing and we might spend an hour or so at the two-up ring and lose our money or win some money.

Why is that do you think, that no one liked talking about what their experiences had been?

I think you like to get away from it. You don't want to labour the problem too much and you get on with life and,

38:30 but there would be some that would talk about it.

Do you remember what other stories you were hearing about other people's experiences when you were there?

No, I can't remember any.

Do you remember any of the jokes?

Can't even remember those, but there were some.

So when you got back to, or how did you get back to New

39:00 **Guinea?**

On the ship we were taken to Townsville and we were taken from Townsville back to Port Moresby on a ship. I can't recall the name of it at the moment, and from there we were put onto, we went to Murray Barracks I think. Murray Barracks was the holding camp in Port

39:30 Moresby, and then we got into trucks that took us up Hellfire Pass. That's going up the mountains to Donadabu. That's more or less at the beginning of the Kokoda Trail and the road is so bad and so steep that we went up in trucks, in these big army trucks loaded with all kinds of things,

40:00 Fowler stoves, tents and there was one part, Horseshoe Bend they call it, to get around it the truck had to go that far and then it had to back, and it went forward again, back again and the tailboard of the truck with the Fowler stove and everything at the back would be hanging over a big drop near Rouna Falls. There's a big waterfall just near there and we were all on edge hoping that the driver had his foot on the brake when he was going backwards

40:30 because there were a number of trucks did disappear down the cliff. So we got up to Donadabu and that's when I got back to the 61st Battalion.

Do you remember what your feelings were?

Tape 6

00:33 **So what was it like to get back to the blokes in the 61st after being away?**

It was very good. I was glad to see mates that I'd known at Milne Bay and also make some new acquaintances. The battalion had been because of the sickness and people being repatriated there were quite a lot of new faces that had been brought in as reinforcements and

01:00 so it was a matter of making friends and getting to know people like that.

Did you have a core of mates, particular mates?

Oh yes. We had very, we had very good mates. You might've only had, we were friendly with everybody, even our platoon commander, but you did sort out and I found that when I was promoted to corporal or even lance corporal

01:30 that you seem to mix with your own. I was friendly with all the corporals in A Company and we knew one another, but we were just as friendly with the privates too. So yes, you'd have a very strict bond, especially when you were in action and if anything happens, well you just lay your life on the line and if there's somebody wounded and lying out in the open

02:00 it wouldn't be anything to race out and pull him in. It happened quite often.

So 61st Battalion, that was essentially it's an AIF unit?

Yeah, we were AIF. What we were doing, it was no difference, we even had some reinforcements who were AIF. There really wasn't any difference between the fighting abilities of the CMF and the AIF as far

02:30 as I could see because we fought beside them at Milne Bay. We had the 2/9th, the 2/10th, the 2/12th and their results were probably not as good as what the CMF people did.

Did they ask you blokes whether you wanted to change over to AIF?

You could've done that if you wanted to but not many did it. There was no purpose in doing it because the main thing that you didn't want to

03:00 do it because you'd be posted to another battalion. You'd be allocated to another area. You'd have to leave all your mates, go to somewhere you didn't know and people you didn't know. So we tended to stick together and want to be with one another. We'd been through the hailstorm and everything and we wanted to, we knew one another and we wanted to stay

03:30 together.

Was there any light hearted ribbing amongst the AIF blokes towards the militia blokes?

No. I never struck any although it's been reported in different books and newspapers and things, that I can honestly say I wouldn't know if I was talking to an AIF man or a CMF man. They both had the same job to do and they did it well.

04:00 **So when you were at Donadabu, and it's really in the foothills, isn't it, of the Kokoda Trail?**

It's the foothills of the Kokoda Trail, yes.

Were you getting reports back from blokes that had been on the track as to the conditions of it?

No. Well a couple of them came through and we did hear, but most of them had come back by the time we got there. Most of the fighting was over up in Kokoda, but there were people coming.

04:30 As a matter of fact, when I went there, there was an ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit] officer, a captain, and he went to school with me in Maryborough at the college, and we were great friends at school and I heard he was there and he invited me over to, he was living as a patrol officer for ANGAU and he was in charge of a native

05:00 commitment and he lived in a house there not far from Donadobu and he had servants and everything looking after him, and he invited me over for tea one night and we had this most beautiful pineapple and food that this native person, his cook, had put on the table and then he invited me after that to go out into the,

05:30 there was a rubber plantation around there and he used to go out shooting wild pigs. This was at night time. So he said, after we'd had tea he said, "Des, come out and we'll see if we can get a wild pig." I wasn't very conscious of how wild pigs reacted if chased, but anyway I found out that they were very dangerous animals and I ended up up a tree. There was one at the bottom of a tree

06:00 and I'd got up far enough off the ground to be out of his way. But my friend in ANGAU, he had a rifle and he disposed of the wild boar. That was a bit of break away from the general camp.

Was that one of the better feeds you'd had in a while?

It was, yeah, it was lovely, and I can still remember the beautiful yellow pineapple

06:30 off the plate and all the skin had been peeled off and had serrated, like the teeth of the saw all around the circumference of it and delicately produced and put on the table. A bit different to opening up a tin of bully beef.

How could you make your bully beef palatable?

I beg your pardon?

How could you make your bully beef palatable?

Well I think they said there were a thousand ways that you could do bully beef.

07:00 You could stew it, you could make fried fitters out of it. As a matter of fact one cook that we had was called Freddie and they always used to say, "Come and have some of Freddie's fried fritters," and he was an expert on making rissoles and things like that out of it, stewing it. I wasn't too keen on stew. Lots of times you'd just eat it straight out of the tin like you get corned beef in a tin here,

07:30 and it's quite nice if you only have it occasionally, but if you have it every day for months on end it gets a bit monotonous.

Did you find you'd sit around dreaming about what you were going to eat when you went back home?

Oh yes. We often longed for roast beef, roast pork, even sausages, you know. Yeah, that was something you though you would like when you got home.

What about the water situation?

08:00 Well the war situation was being more on the northern side of New Guinea. It was still being fought over there at Wewak and other places up the coast there and we, that's what happened to us eventually. After being at Donadabu for a while we were shipped across to Madang and the position

08:30 there was to patrol and we were camped in a place called Nobby Nob right up on top of a big hill behind the seashore, and we had to do active patrolling and that sort of thing. There were still a few Japanese floating around, but the Japanese had sort of moved further west along the coast more up to where it's controlled by Indonesia now. I think they called it Dutch New Guinea, and eventually taken over by

09:00 Indonesia. So we were there for quite some time doing patrolling, got in a bit of swimming down on the seashore and we were amazed with the beautiful tropical fish. You'd go swimming there and millions of these beautiful, all colours of fish swimming and we'd be diving on the coral reef and that sort of thing.

Was there ever any concern about crocodiles

09:30 **or sharks?**

No. Well actually when we were at Donadabu we were camped near a, I suppose you'd call it a creek but it might've been a river even. It was probably as wide as this garage, and at night time you could hear the crocodiles down there making a sort of a barking noise and we used to go down into that creek every afternoon when we had the chance

10:00 to have a swim and bathe in the creek. Nobody to my knowledge ever got taken by a crocodile but at night time you could hear them and there was really nothing to stop them from wandering up from the creek bank up to where out tents were and having a good feed. They were there but they didn't worry us.

What was the security situation at night as far as pickets and that sort of thing?

At night we always had to have a piquet

10:30 on and one hour and sometimes it could be two hours on and then you'd be relieved and it would go right through from when it started to get dark to early morning in the daylight, just before daylight broke and then the piquet would be withdrawn but there was always somebody on guard.

And you were telling us earlier, when

11:00 **was it that you actually fired your first shot in anger?**

My first shot in anger was in Bougainville actually. That was on probably the first patrol I did and that's after Madang. We went from Madang over to Bougainville and then about three days after arriving at Torokina and settling ourself in taking over the American quarters

11:30 we were ordered to commence patrolling and the objective was to go from Torokina right down to the end, the southern end of Bougainville heading towards a place called Buin where the Japanese headquarters, they were all centred. It was a great big, there was miles and miles of jungle country with a very thin track practically all the way through and

12:00 you couldn't use a motor vehicle or a jeep or anything like that until they decided to put corduroy, the engineers that came along after us as we advanced, they would come behind us and they would chop down saplings like that and the width of what the road was going to be, and they'd place them one beside the other like that, and the jeeps were able to go along there and they were

12:30 keeping behind us bringing supplies and whatever they could and keeping the front supplied with food and ammunition and things.

Did conditions improve markedly from Donadabu to Madang like as far as supplies were?

No, much the same, much the same. We had a lot of fruit at Madang. I can still see the Meris as we called them,

13:00 they're the women, they walk in line like one behind the other and have got probably a bag over their shoulder like this. The bags would be full of paw paws or pineapples, bananas and all this fruit and we were well fed because we loved the fruit and especially the bananas and paw paws, and our cooks, everyday,

13:30 I can still see the meris [indigenous women] coming up the track leading to the cookhouse of A Company and they'd hand over all these bags of fruit to the cooks in the cookhouse and they'd be prepared and we'd have for either lunch or tea at night time.

Did they get anything in return for that?

No, I don't think so. Not that I'm aware of. ANGAU might've had, ANGAU was the section, not connected to the 61st but they were

14:00 their own part of the army in New Guinea and they more or less supervised and controlled the natives that were willing to participate and they were a great help, the fuzzy wuzzies as we called them.

What was that relationship like between you blokes and the fuzzy wuzzies?

Very good, very good. We'd give them a cigarette and they'd climb up a coconut tree and bring us down a coconut or

14:30 they used to make these little lakatois. They're like canoes, one joined to the other with a little section going between one canoe and another. They used to make them beautifully. They'd only be about that big and quite often we'd give them a cigarette and they'd swap a lakatoi made out of the timber they'd carved. No, we got on very well and we

15:00 treated them well too. We appreciated what they were doing. As a matter of fact, in certain instances in Bougainville we couldn't have done without them. They were marvellous people to track through the bush and they were marvellous people to know if there was any danger ahead.

How was communication done between both of you?

Between?

Between you and the fuzzy wuzzies?

A lot of them could speak English, in broken English and Pidgin English as we called it,

15:30 and we learnt a bit of their language and they seemed to catch onto a bit of our language but if they had an ANGAU officer, the ANGAU officer would be versed in their language as well as the English.

Was there any sort of fraternisation between Australian soldiers and meris?

Not to my knowledge. I never saw it. They were in a bad state, a lot

16:00 of the indigenous people. They had some terrible diseases, skin rashes, skin just falling off them. A lot of the Meris I noticed might have had one foot or one leg that would be like that. There was some particular disease they got. I think it was mosquito-borne. Elephantitis I think they called it, and they were a very unhealthy people because

16:30 they'd been living in trying conditions and when the Japanese were prevalent the Japanese took over all their market gardens and food supplies, so they were really restricted in the food they could eat and where they could find it.

At the time when you were fighting there, are you sort of thinking you were fighting on Australian territory or are you fighting to stop the Japanese from getting

17:00 **to Australia?**

Well not so much there as when we were in Milne Bay. When we were in Milne Bay, we were until the Japanese were turned around, but when we were at Madang we knew that the Japanese were getting further closer to Japan than they were to Australia and you know, it was good to know that that was happening but we didn't feel that the, it was

17:30 so important. Not that we didn't do our job as well, but it was important to be concerned about the invasion of Australia because they were heading back to Japan and we were pushing behind.

What had you been told before you first encountered any Japanese soldiers, what had you been led to believe about the Japanese solider?

We weren't told much at all.

18:00 We made some mistakes and we learnt mainly by our mistakes. When we started patrolling in Bougainville where it was quite active as far as the enemy was concerned. Every day you'd go out you'd be sure to strike some. We were walking on the track, the main track and of course the Japanese would have a machine gun

18:30 just at the first bend down there lined up on a straight section of the track and as you walked along there they'd attack you with their machine gun and quite a number would be killed. So probably after the first week of patrolling we learnt that you don't walk on tracks. You go to the side of the track into the undergrowth and the scrub, and even though it was much harder to

19:00 break your way through with thorny vines and things like that, it was better to do that and you weren't as obvious as if you were walking down the middle of a track. But in the early days we lost quite a few men and I was on one patrol, about the second patrol I went on, and we lost our platoon commander, our Lieutenant Robinson,

19:30 and he was shot in the middle of the track and my best mate, Stewie Herrigan, he was mortally wounded and lying in the middle of the track, and Stewie went out whilst they were still firing at this officer, got him and dragged him back into the undergrowth so he was out of the way, but he died within 10 minutes I'd say. So that was a lesson we learned. So

20:00 as far as my section and our battalion was concerned, we didn't. We had to do it the hard way. We had to patrol off the track in the bush.

Were there medics in the patrols?

I beg your pardon?

Medics?

No. You might sometimes have a fellow from the regimental aid post there with you with a bandaid in a box or something like that, but

20:30 no, there was quite often there was nobody. But we did learn first aid and we sort of learned how to put tourniquets on if somebody had a leg shot off. We'd know to tear off our shirt and find the pressure point and stop the blood from oozing out, you know. But we did have first aid instruction in our training.

Did the soldiers have issues of dressings?

Yeah, we all had, we all carried a

21:00 dressing and some antiseptic. I've forgotten what was in it, but we also had food in, chocolate in bars, chocolate. They call them rations, you know, in case you got cut off and you had to sort of live without anything to eat for days. I've forgotten the name, something rations. So we did have bandages, possibly, not much. If you had your leg shot off you wouldn't have enough bandages

21:30 aboard to stop the flow of blood, you know, but we could possibly put a pressure point on and stop the blood from flowing from that point on.

So just going back to what you knew of the Japanese. Did you actually have any respect for

them or was it hatred, or what was the feeling towards them?

We had, yes, we didn't like them. We were disgusted with them because of some of the things they did. They didn't

22:00 take prisoners. If you got caught, if you didn't get shot and wounded or killed being retrieved, you were likely to be taken out and be decapitated with a sword like I've got there. At Milne Bay there were quite, about three fellows I think in our battalion that were captured by the Japanese and they were tied up with their hands behind their back around coconut trees

22:30 and they were just gutted, bayoneted by the Japanese and killed and when we saw some of them, you know, we found them later on, they were still tied to the trees and had been dead for quite some days. But they were very cruel people and they didn't believe in taking prisoners. That was one of the big fears we all had was if you happen to get cut off or

23:00 stranded out on your own that you didn't have much chance. You'd have an awful death.

What did seeing sights like that do to the men, the morale of the men?

It just horrified you. It made you more determined to go out and get them. We were sad with what had happened in the case of Bert Robinson. He was an excellent officer and

23:30 there was a certain amount of sadness about that and we were stunned really because that was the first casualty that I'd seen and it happened so quickly and before you could say Jack Robinson he'd gone, and then it was a matter of, this friend of mine Corporal Herrigan, he won the Military Medal for that particular episode, going out and retrieving the body

24:00 and bringing him back.

Obviously he was a

We had no, I'll probably explain later on in the Warapu business that I was a bit concerned about, probably it's better to wait until we get to Warapu and I can tell you about that if you don't want to hear it now.

I was going to say obviously he led by example, the fact that he was

Yeah. He wasn't actually

24:30 the forward scout or the second scout, but they picked him out. He was a very tall man. He'd probably be six feet four or something like that and he looked distinguished. He looked as though he could be the head man in the unit that was there, and so it might've been that they just had a good shot at him and decided that he was the head man and if you kill the queen bee, everything sort of

25:00 disintegrates. It wasn't the case though, but we got him back. We carried him back to where he could be looked after.

What was the grieving process for something like that, something as momentous as that happening?

It affected different people in different ways. Some people tended to be shocked and they'd react in that fashion.

25:30 Others probably would take it in their stride. It was, there wouldn't be any common formula there. It was mainly the attitude of the person who was at there. It used to grieve me terribly to see somebody killed or somebody wounded, but you can't go on living your life like that.

26:00 You've got to keep going. You get over it but then, when the war ended and I often think even now, today what a terrible waste of lives. If we'd only been doing what the Americans had been doing when they were there, everybody that was killed, quite a number of them were killed and they'd still be alive possibly. They could be dead by now, but at the end of the war they'd have been there.

Did you become fatalistic?

26:30 No, no. I never became fatalistic. I took it day by day and did what I had to do. I was promoted to corporal during that campaign and as a matter of fact I did a lot of forward scouting. It was against the law or against the rules of the army, if you were an NCO you weren't supposed to

27:00 go up front and be a forward scout, but I probably did more forward scouting in my section than most of the other fellows because my feeling was that if the fellow that was telling them what to do is not game to go up front and be forward scout, well what can you expect them to do? So I did that quite often and I'd have my, broaden my share of forward scout and the forward scout

27:30 is the most dangerous position in the patrol when you're the first one they see when you come around, especially going through the gardens. The Japanese took over all the native gardens that were on Bougainville and that was a source of food for them. They were living off the Japanese gardens, the potatoes and beans

28:00 and all the bananas and paw paws and these things because the Japanese were herded down towards the Buin area and they couldn't get supplies. No aeroplanes could fly in to supply them with ammunition and food, and aeroplanes couldn't come and drop them food. They did occasionally but it was restricted and

28:30 so they took over all these natives gardens, and that was one of the dangers. One day I was leading scout and I got through. We were one behind the other, one one one, and I just entered the native garden and I was probably about 10 metres out in front of the perimeter of the garden, out in an open clearing, and

29:00 all of a sudden bullets were whizzing past my head, and there was a machine gun over on the other side of the garden and they saw me walk into this opening and they opened up on me. I could feel the breeze of the bullets going passed my head and I immediately went to the ground, and when I went to the ground they still kept shooting at me but probably they couldn't see exactly where I was. But the bullets from

29:30 the machine gun were hitting the ground about that far from their face and I was nearly blinded because you can imagine the bullets hitting mud and soft dirt and it was pushing it up onto my face. So they fired on me for about five minutes continuously until another section went around in a movement around that way and the section went around there and started firing

30:00 at the Japs and got rid of them. But I definitely thought I was going to die that day because I was right out in the open and directly in front of a Japanese machine gun.

You'd mentioned earlier when you were talking about the prayer that you Mum said for you, you reckoned

Yes, yes.

Did you still have faith? Did your faith serve you while you were there?

Yeah, of course, of course, yeah. Well I

30:30 still feel that I was protected, that I might be not thinking along the right lines but as far as I'm concerned I think there's such a thing as providence and what's meant to happen will happen and if it's not meant to happen it won't happen, and I think that followed me all through my life because when I got out of the army I was involved in the biggest train smash

31:00 that Queensland has ever had, the train smash at Camp Mountain and one of my army mates and his wife were sitting beside me on the last carriage, on the last seat of the first carriage and they were both killed. They were on the side of me and the train went down Camp Mountain and got out of control. The brakes failed or the driver was going to fast and when we got to the curve in the line just outside Brisbane

31:30 here at Camp Mountain the engine ran off the line and it ploughed into the dirt into a paddock, and the weight of the train, all the carriages, I was in the first carriage, the last seat in the first carriage and all the other carriages telescoped over the top of where I was sitting and my good army mate, Reg Burns, was sitting here and his wife was here and the second carriage came over and just swiped them

32:00 away like that and it took them two days to find them. They were under the debris of the train. My sister was with me, my mother was with me. My sister was sitting with her boyfriend, her fiance at the time, and he was wiped away, just swept away by the other carriages, and if anybody should've been killed, the second carriage of the train went past my shoulder about that close and all I got was a big

32:30 splinter because the wooden, they were the old type wooden carriages. This was in 1946 or '47 just after I got out of the war, the army, and there were quite a number of people killed and quite a number wounded. My sister, my younger sister, she lost her right leg and she was aged 21. The floor of the carriage,

33:00 it was a wooden floor and the floor just disintegrated like that and when I saw what had happened I looked down and there was blood spurting everywhere because the floor, just like a pair of scissors, her leg was down here and the floor just came like that and chopped her ankle off, chopped her foot off, and there was one good thing about the army that I learnt first aid that

33:30 I was able to extract her. I got her out of the carriage onto the side of the railway line and I managed to tear my shirt off and put a tourniquet on her leg and stop the bleeding because when I laid her out on the ground the blood was just pumping like that, you know, because the leg had been severely, or had been cut off. But through my army training I was able to arrange a

34:00 tourniquet with my shirt and I stopped the bleeding and the ambulance didn't arrive. It was out in a country area, and when the ambulance arrived, in about 25 minutes before they could get an ambulance through to wear the crash had occurred, she would've bled to death. Anyway, she's still alive today and 80 years of age. So that's one good thing the army did for me, and that's beside the point.

34:30 **Well not really. Did you pray every day?**

I did at times, yes.

Did you ever lose faith at the things that you were seeing?

No, no. I never lost faith, no, never. I think there's, you know, what's to be will be and some people are protected and some aren't.

Can you recall any of the army chaplains?

35:00 No. We had army chaplains but they were normally from the brigade and we used to have a church service whenever we could, but not too often because not on the frontline. Only when we were back at base there'd be a Sunday service with people who came from the 61st Battalion, the boys from Toowoomba, the 15th Battalion from

35:30 Brisbane and the 25th Battalion from Toowoomba. We were all together in the 7th Brigade and so if it was a church parade, well only the ones that wanted to go to church and the ones that were interested enough would go to this church service and after that we'd come back to our individual companies and platoons.

What about the Salvos, did you see any of those fellows

36:00 **up there?**

Yes. We had a marvellous – Neville Bedwell [?], I think his name was. He was a Salvation Army. No matter where you were, even up on the frontline, he'd turn up with a pot of coffee or tea or biscuits or something. He was a – Bedwell – his name was Neville Bedwell, and he was awarded a citation the same as I got. There

36:30 were three of us in our battalion got that and he was the captain and he was the Salvation Army officer.

Did any of the blokes go troppo?

Yes. There was one, one fellow went troppo at Madang. We're going back now to when we were at Madang. We

37:00 were camped in a coconut plantation. There were lines and lines of coconut trees. No matter which way you looked you'd see a straight line of trees. If you looked that way a straight line, and funny enough that after the war the company that I was working with, WR Carpenter, they took over my business or our business and I still continued on with them on

37:30 staff and they owned that plantation. So the people that owned the plantation I ended up working for at the end of the war. So we were camped in there and because of the lack of control over the plantations due to the war years, all the fronds, the palm fronds, a lot of them had been, you know how palm fronds go brown and fall off, and

38:00 so it was a bit messy. The plantation was there with all the trees and everything but it hadn't been maintained and we still had nights, guards going around at night time. We had sentry duty, and because of the climate and lack of decent timber to burn

38:30 and the rain and water and everything, it was the duty of the last one on guard duty at night time early in the morning about half past 4 to go over to a big drum of, a 44 gallon drum of high octane petrol and this was a big drum that high and down at the bottom it had a little tap you turn on, and it was dark at the time and this character, he went over

39:00 with a hurricane lamp and a tin in his hand and he put the jam tin in his hand to get enough fuel out of this 44 gallon drum of high octane fuel, and he had the hurricane lamp just beside the tap and the next thing there was a terrible explosion. The whole 44 gallon drum of petrol, fortunately he didn't get hurt, it's a miracle. He didn't get touched, but the flames

39:30 went up into the old coconut plantation into the first few trees and it spread from one tree to another tree. All the burning fronds were falling down on our tents burning tents, and so they classified him as B class and sent him back to Australia. So he didn't have to do that again. But it covered the whole A Company in the 61st Battalion in Madang.

40:00 All the people were probably asleep in the beds in their tents when it happened. The next thing we were all on fire and our tents were on fire and people running everywhere.

Unbelievable. What about jungle juice?

Yes, there was some. I didn't get into that but it was terrible stuff. They used to put Kiwi boot polish and all that sort of stuff into it, [tmkn? UNCLEAR] sugar

40:30 and they'd open up the coconut and sort of pour a bit of sugar in and some of the other things and it was even reported that they even put Kiwi boot polish in or something like that, and let it ferment and then they'd try and drink it, but I never had any desire to get into that.

Righto.

Tape 7

00:33 **Leaving Madang, were you aware of where you were going on to?**

Yes. We were knew that we were going to Bougainville, yes.

What was your, by the time you'd got to Bougainville you'd already been in Milne Bay, in Madang, in

In Donadabu.

Donadabu. What was your impression of the actual physical surroundings you were in?

01:00 In all those places or just one particular place?

No, all of them. Could you appreciate the physical beauty or was it the conditions were so trying?

Well there was beauty in all places, but also there were bad points with mud and the mosquitos and sickness and that sort of thing, but there were good and bad points in all places. But when you look at it, if you

01:30 weren't involved in a war and you were going there as a tourist you'd say they're beautiful places. Beautiful waterfalls, Rouna Falls around Moresby and the big volcano in Bougainville, Mount Bagana, that was all the time shooting up flame and smoke from the top of the volcano. Then that would die down and then you'd have,

02:00 the ash would start to come, it would be blowing out ash and we used to swim in the river that came down off the volcano because the water was nice and warm, but it all tasted and smelt like sulphur. But no, it was, it had beauty and it had some ugly things too. All the insects and things that used to plague us, the

02:30 mosquitos and the leeches and the hold-me-tight vines. You know, you'd be going through the jungle and the next thing you'd have a vine with big thorns on it grab you on the shoulder as you walked further forward it would sort of try and restrict your progress. But no, it was different to Australia but it had good and bad points.

When you got to Bougainville and you

03:00 **saw the Americans' camp at Torokina, what sort of thoughts were going through your mind?**

We thought we're in heaven. We're here now to drink Coca Cola and have ice cream and do all these things because the Americans, they didn't take anything with them. When they left they had beautiful trucks and probably 100 jeeps and all kinds of machinery and all they did was they drove this into the

03:30 jungle as far as they could go or hit the first tree and then they just got out and walked away and left it all there, and the reason for that was they had all new equipment when the boats arrived at Bougainville to tranship the Americans to do the landing back on the Philippines. They had all new equipment on board the boats and jeeps, everything was new so they had no need for the equipment,

04:00 the old equipment that they had on Bougainville and they just ran it into the bush and scrub as far as they could and got out and left it. So in the first few days we were in Bougainville it was quite common for a lot of us to have jeeps to run around in. They had proper roads made and everything in their perimeter and we were driving around in jeeps and thought this was great, you know. Then the order came out there'll be no more driving around in American

04:30 equipment and you'll be severely chastised if you broke the law. So we came back to earth and sort of settled into the camp that was there. It was quite comfortable. It had some wooden buildings and quite good, good roads. But our stay there was only a matter of days, and then righto, this is not the life for Australian soldiers. You've got to get up and we've got to clear

05:00 this island of Bougainville from where we are now right down to the south end of Buin where the main headquarters of the Japanese were being held.

What was your attitude towards the Americans knowing that they'd been luxuriating and now you guys were there to do the bloody work?

Yeah, well there was nothing you could do. We felt that they were lucky, but we couldn't begrudge them the fact that they had it so easy because that was the way

05:30 that General MacArthur had decided they would fight the war, they would hop from one place to another. And when we went there and we saw what they had and then we had to get back to square one

again, we just, we did it. We knew that that's the way it was going to be so we just had to do it.

There's been several reports that MacArthur wasn't so generous at reporting

06:00 **the contributions Australians had made in several of these clashes.**

That's very true from what I can see and understand about it all. He didn't even want to take any Australian troops with him when he started the run back towards Japan. He wanted us to do a mopping operation, not a mopping up, a bit of consolidation just to hold the things that had been captured and preserve them,

06:30 and he wanted the glory I think when it came to the end of the war and the way that things were going to be controlled after the war, to be able to say, well, the Americans did this and they did that. They did the bulk of the fighting and they were responsible for dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and so when the cut up time came he could put his hand out for more recognition than what

07:00 General Blamey or Mr Curtin could do as the Prime Minister of Australia at the time. But MacArthur wasn't very happy about Australian troops. I don't know why because the Australian troops were probably better than the Americans when it came to getting into the thick of battle and capturing a hill or a gun point or something.

07:30 I think from my experience anyway that the Australians were top notch soldiers and they did things much quicker than the Americans did.

That idea of MacArthur not sort of giving credit where credit was due, were you aware of any of that at the time or did you just find that sort of stuff out later?

No, we found that out later on when people were writing about the war and how it went, but in that book there, The Unnecessary

08:00 War, it's all explained in that how MacArthur wasn't keen on the Australian Army going into Bougainville and becoming actively involved in exterminating the Japanese or trying to get rid of the Japanese. He felt that we were there to just, it was only a holding brief, to just take over and do what the Americans were doing when they were there. He didn't want them to be

08:30 fighting. As a matter of fact I read where he even suggested that now that the war was heading in the right direction the Australian Government could think of retiring some of the army, bringing them back to Australia to do the necessary work that was required when the war was running down and finishing, getting people productive on the industry, doing the things, rebuilding Australia

09:00 from the way it had fallen by the wayside because of the requirements of the activities of war. That's all documented in that book, The Unnecessary War, and even the government had big arguments with General Blamey. There was disagreements between General Blamey and the government in regard, but Curtin seemed to be,

09:30 whilst he didn't want to do it, but he did agree with what General Blamey wanted and he took his advice, and it wasn't so much General Blamey, there were a couple of other people that were just below General Blamey, his advisers I think, and they had very strong ideas as to what should be done in regard to the Australian Army. They didn't want the Australian Army to stagnate and do nothing because that's probably a dangerous

10:00 situation probably to reduce the army and the size of the army and send a number of people back to Australia to join the workforce and reconstruct Australia. That probably would've been the better idea. All those people that were absolutely killed and wounded, they would still be alive today and they could be having their families and

10:30 populating Australia, you know, their offspring. But I can see a lot of sense in what MacArthur wanted to do. When the war ended there's no point in, the fact that we killed so many hundreds or thousands of Japanese and they killed so many Australians, what's the point of it? If we'd stayed at Torokina where the base had been established and just sort of

11:00 took care of any trouble that came our way, but no. It was even said that when the Americans were at Torokina they had this outdoor movie theatre where the seats of the theatre consisted of logs that were made like that and you'd sit on the log. You'd be on stumps about that high off the ground and they'd watch all the latest movies and everything, and it wasn't uncommon to find that a Japanese had

11:30 sneaked in from down the road a bit and was watching the movie unbeknown to the Americans. Even if I think the Americans knew that it was a Jap they wouldn't have worried about it. That's my feeling about it, and that's been documented.

Once you got the orders that you were to leave Torokina and go out –

Go out and do patrolling?

Yeah. What happened then?

Well that's when all the trouble started. We were

12:00 patrolling for about four months I think continuous. Nearly every day you'd be going out searching for Japanese to get rid of them, but you were also in great danger. Every minute of the time that you were out on patrol you were being stressed by the fact that somebody there, somebody there or you could hear somebody chopping in the distance. The Japanese

12:30 might be clearing a tree or chopping a tree down in the bush ahead of you not knowing that you were coming in their direction. It was a very big strain. It's the worst kind of war that you could possibly, I'd rather have a fight like they did in the olden days where the whole battalion moved across a field and they met the other German battalion of whatever on the other side and you had a good ding-dong battle. But the

13:00 suspense and the anxiety, it was just straining all the time because you had to be so intense, you had to be alert all the time looking behind every tree you passed, looking ahead, looking to the side and even looking behind sometimes, because towards the end of the war as the lines of communication, we were at Torokina but we had to go down

13:30 to find our way down to Buin, so when we got half way the Japanese tended to, they wouldn't be in front of us as we went down, not as often and not as much, but they would come in behind and the line of communication and we might be sending jeeps or something from headquarters back at base, bringing supplies down to the frontline, food and that sort of thing, and

14:00 it happened quite often that the jeeps were ambushed and the people driving the jeeps and any people that were in the jeeps would be killed immediately. They'd be machine-gunned. So you had to look to the front, you had to look to the right, the left and even towards the end you had to look behind.

How did that strain begin to show among the blokes?

Well, it depended on the person. Towards actually at the end of the war

14:30 I'd say that half of our battalion, I was not included in that, but half the battalion were sort of, they were ready to stand up and say, "Well we've had enough, we can't do any more." They'd been worn out and their nerves had been shattered and they were terribly, and the fact that we knew that we were told a lie, that there were only so many Japanese on Bougainville and

15:00 that they'd be easy. They were half starved and all this sort of thing. They were not true because the Japanese that we did strike were big strong, some of them were marines. I think they'd been in China, they were very big men, six footers, and very strong and very healthy because they'd been living on this good food, the native gardens and everything, and some of them might've been a bit sick or

15:30 something but we were terribly outnumbered. There was one case at Slater's Knoll where 10 of us went into, we had A Company headquarters were there. Japanese, 300 Japanese had dug in here and they were in trenches entrenched in the ground and 12 of, I was one of them, 12 of us were told to do an encircling movement, come back behind the Japanese and to,

16:00 so the Japanese were sandwiched in between company headquarters here and this patrol that went around the back, and they were dug in. And when the officer who was in charge of this patrol I was on, when he saw the number of, we couldn't get over that 12 men were sent in to try and dig 300 Japanese out of fixed positions in trenches, and so we decided we couldn't do,

16:30 he did mention we were going to do a bayonet charge, you know, a bayonet and try and dig them out of their trench, but that would've been futile and fortunately he didn't go ahead with that idea. So he said to me, "Des," he said, "I want you to go back to A Company headquarters and tell the commanding officer there that I want an artillery drop into the area between A Company

17:00 and where we were, and drop it in to where the Japanese have entrenched themselves." So I had to go back by myself and it took me about three quarters of an hour to walk back and as I walking back there were a number of Japs, the ones that weren't in trenches, some of them were still wandering around in the bush and I had to scramble and find my way back to company headquarters. It was very frightening because

17:30 I had in the back of my mind, well you could easy get caught here out on your own and these fellows are roaming around all over the place. You'd probably end up with the blade of a sword around your neck. Anyway, I eventually got back to the company headquarters and I passed on the message that they wanted to have an artillery drop where the Japanese were entrenched. So

18:00 from what I've heard the commanding officer of A Company, he put the matter to, back to further to higher up and it was decided not to do it because artillery drops are not very accurate a times. It depends on, some of the shells fall short, some go long and some go right in the right place, and I saw a number of Japanese wandering around and I was dodging them

18:30 through the bush until I got to headquarters and that was the most frightening part of my army experience.

Can you walk me through some of that? What actually happened, so you left your men?

So we had 12 men so I left and there was 11 men there and they just stayed put and they were watching

this 300, it's in the book there, 300 Japanese

19:00 were entrenched and I think it was intended that they were going to make and attack on our A Company headquarters during the night. The Japanese fought a lot at night time. They used to go crazy and be singing out and screaming out and everything and make a big raid, and we think that was going to happen on, it was Easter, it was the Easter period in 1945

19:30 and so the idea was we were to go around and try and do something with them, but we could never have done, 12 men or 11 men after I left, could never eradicate 300 Japanese who were in trenches. So I went back and got through all these stragglers, you know, people that were in the area, Japanese who were in the area. I did an encircling job and went around

20:00 through the outside edges and got back, and it was decided then that rather than bring down the mortar fire they requisitioned two Matilda tanks were able to find their way up towards where the A Company headquarters and the other people, the 12, the 11 that were left where I left, they eventually came back but they didn't make any effort to, they could see it was futile

20:30 to try and extract 300 Japanese. They came back to headquarter company and I caught up with them later on, but it was arranged that two Matilda tanks would come up the track, and so they came and they arrived about 6 o'clock in the night, just on dark, you know, and they arrived and when they arrived all of a sudden the signal wire, the wire

21:00 that, the signallers used to have a big drum of wire and they'd wind it out as they went along and it would go from A Company back to battalion headquarters and probably then back to brigade headquarters, but the signal wire, the phones went dead and that was the only communication we had. And my commanding officer said to me, "Des, I want you to take out a sig patrol," people that

21:30 worked in the signals, "And see what's happened to the line." But we knew the Japanese, one of the tricks would be they'd come in around the back of you and they'd cut the signal line and they'd not only cut it but they would probably take out 20 metres of the wire, throw it away, and when you went there to join it up you couldn't do it in a hurry because the wires had

22:00 10 metres of so that wasn't there, and you'd have to get the two pieces together or bring more wire with you and fiddle around, and while you were doing that they'd have a machine gun down the other part of the line and as you were working there or as you came across it they'd shoot you with a machine gun. So just about at dark I was told to take some, two fellows down with me and find the end of this signal wire and see why the phones weren't working, and

22:30 that's what happened. But fortunately the Matilda tanks when they were coming up the path, one of them apparently ran over the signal wire and the tracks on the Matilda tank had cut one of the wires and that was the reason why the phones didn't work. But I was fully expecting when I got down to where I found where the fault was that I'd be ambushed and there'd be people down there or enemy down there trying to pop us off.

23:00 **That day that you were sent back by yourself, what did you have with you for protection? Did you just have a 303?**

I had an Owen. I always carried an Owen machine gun, sub-machine gun and that's all I had. I probably had a few hand grenades thrown around my belt, but I was just in my ordinary army battle dress.

How did you actually make it around the straggling Japanese without them seeing you?

23:30 Well, this is a case of providence again. It's another reason I think my mother must've been saying prayers for me or something, but it was a miracle that I really, it was probably more than half an hour to take from where I left the other 11 to when I did this encircling movement around the Japanese that were wandering in the jungle there and, but they were not the ones

24:00 that, they were probably headquarter staff or something like that because all the other ones were entrenched and all the big long trenches had been dug and they were there ready to move, but the others, I don't know what they were doing but they were certainly wandering around and I saw quite a few of them, and fortunately they didn't see me and so I went around. There's that thing you read this morning by my officer that was commanding

24:30 that day. I think he puts it, he said, "It's the most traumatic thing that anyone could ever be expected to do." To find your way back, because it was very easy to get lost in the jungle. You think you're going north and you could be going south and if you get lost you've had it because you could walk into a trap or walk into a whole host of Japanese. So fortunately I went in the

25:00 right direction and I wasn't spotted and I got around to the back of the headquarter company to see the company commander, give him the message, and then he thought for a while and then he decided that he'd put it through to brigade headquarters, and they in their wisdom decided it would be better than to have an artillery barrage to bring up two Matilda tanks. Well the Matilda tanks arrived

25:30 that night and the next morning, I wasn't involved in this, but some of our other platoons went in beside and behind the Matilda tanks and the tanks just ran along the trenches the Japanese had dug with machine guns that pointed down off the tank. They just blasted. There were 300, over 300 were killed.

It's reported in the book. 300 Japs were killed in

26:00 that one operation that one morning and I don't think from I hear we didn't have a casualty, but I wasn't involved in that.

So leaving the other 11 men, the guys, did you have a feeling that it was the last time you were going to see them?

Yes. I thought, and even the commander, Peter Henderson, the lieutenant who was in charge, he even writes in the book that he didn't think he'd ever come out alive, and if we attempted

26:30 to attack them none of us would've come out of it, especially making a bayonet charge and you've got enemy troops, 300 of them around you, around 12 people, and with machine guns and hand grenades and all the other things. It was an impossibility and really a stupid thing to even try to do.

When you were walking back into enemy territory like that feeling like, you're

27:00 **almost walking into certain death,**

Yeah.

how do you say goodbye to the other 11 men?

Well, I didn't get a chance it happened so suddenly. We were surveying the position of the 300 Japanese who were entrenched at Slater's Knoll and when Peter Henderson, the officer commanding came over to me and it was just a matter, "Des, do you think you could hurry up and get back now and tell them to bring the artillery fire down onto this concentration of Japanese who are dug in?"

27:30 You didn't have time to think, your mind didn't think about those things. You were thinking about what you had to do, you had to get back and get the message through.

Do you remember what it was like when you got to see those 11 men again?

Oh, it was great, yeah, to see them all and not some of them missing. They could've all been missing, and even to find their way back was a risk because you could

28:00 easily get lost in the jungle if you didn't know which direction you had to go, and when you've got 11 men trying to skirt around a number of Japanese wandering around the same playing field. We were all lucky that all of us came back, 12 of us got back, and I got back by myself and the others came eventually when it was decided that they were to come back

28:30 and that we wouldn't attempt to attack them the way that it was proposed.

Coming across those 300 Japanese, was that the first that you were aware of their numbers?

That was the first concentration of, oh no, there was one time before, that Warapu episode. I think you saw the photograph. That was where we came across quite a lot. It was a Japanese headquarters at Warapu.

Tell us about that?

Well,

29:00 the ANGAU people who were in Bougainville, some of the natives had come across a Japanese headquarters at Warapu and they said there were quite a number of huts and a lot of Japanese involved there. So it was arranged with the ANGAU officer, an officer and 8 Platoon. I was in 7 Platoon,

29:30 but 7 Platoon was short, too short, so the sergeant and myself, we volunteered to go on that patrol to check out this Japanese headquarters and we arranged that the two native guides who were experts in finding their way through, we wouldn't walk on tracks and that sort of thing, so we more or less went in a straight line from where our company

30:00 was camped or entrenched towards where the Japanese headquarters. The natives could guide us straight through the jungle and we came out directly at the right spot, but we left our company headquarters about 8.00 o'clock in the morning and it took us from then, there was 8 Platoon of A Company and myself and Owen Bradley who was the sergeant as sort of reinforcements

30:30 to bring the numbers up to date. We set off at 8.00 o'clock in the morning and we walked all day through the jungle guided by these two native people and they brought us out about 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon. They brought us out where this Japanese headquarters was. There were about seven or eight big thatched huts like you saw in that photograph, and it was decided we'd pull up. We

31:00 knew that they were about 200 metres in front of us and there was a big high cliff probably about 15 metres high and it went down a cliff like that and the Japanese had built that hut which you saw, and other huts further down and they spread out amongst the area. But they led us to the hut that they thought would the hut of the headquarters of the Japanese headquarters, the main hut,

31:30 and so when we got there the majority, we left most of the patrol stayed 200 metres away from the top

of the cliff and being so late in the afternoon, it was about half past 4.00, we didn't have time to do anything there and so it was decided that some of us would go and do a reconnaissance and we crept our way through to the top of the cliff and we were looking down on

32:00 that hut and on the Japanese, and it was late in the afternoon and they were walking around. Some of them had hand basins out from their camp, their thatched huts and they were washing and some of them were cooking meals for tea and that, and so we had a good idea of the outlay of what to expect when we all came and spread out on, fan-wise, on the top of the cliff.

32:30 During the night it was a bit dicey because we all went back 200 metres after we'd done the survey and we warned you can't smoke and don't cough during the night or don't make any noise. We had to be as silent as could be, which we happened to be too. I don't think anybody sneezed because we were so close that the Japanese could know that there was somebody in the vicinity.

33:00 So it was arranged that at the crack of dawn the whole patrol would head towards the cliff and lie down on the top of the cliff overlooking the Japanese huts and that at break of dawn we would all open up with throwing hand grenades and machine guns. I had an Owen machine gun I think I'd fired about four lots

33:30 of magazines. So it was a hit and run thing. It was like a commando raid. It was a surprise attack. In the morning when we arrived there we could see the Japanese getting their breakfast ready and walking around shaving and they were just metres away, probably 10 or 15 metres away, but we had the cliff face to sort of protect us a bit and we were very lucky

34:00 that when we opened up it lasted for about five minutes with the hand grenades, the machine guns and the rifles. I had the two, one of the two native fellows who happened to be our guide, he was on the top of the cliff. I was here and he was beside me and he had a double barrelled shotgun. Some of the natives had things like that, you know, where we had military rifles and

34:30 machine guns. But we were lying on our stomachs that way just sort of facing into the direction of where the hut and where these people were moving around, and on the command to fire, which was the opening up of a Bren gun, everybody started firing and this native fellow, he fired a double-barrelled shotgun about that far from my right ear and it practically deafened me and I

35:00 still to this day feel the effects of that blast in my ear. But anyway, we opened up and did the damage, whatever we could do, and then we retraced our steps back to headquarters. Took us another day to more or less get back. We got back in the afternoon there to report it had been a success. We didn't know how many we killed or anything like that, but 7 Platoon

35:30 including myself and a few other people, we had to go back there in three days time, three or four days and have a look and see what the position was after four days. When we went back there the whole headquarter company and enemy camp had been deserted. The Japanese had flown. There were a number of graves. They estimate that, well as a matter of fact they excavated

36:00 some of the graves because they were looking for documents and things that could've been handy to the war effort and that was one of the worst things I'd ever done. We had to dig these people out of the graves that had been buried probably 10 metres away from the hut they lived in, and there were five in a grave and there was one on the bottom, one on top, one on top and one on top again, and there were 15 altogether

36:30 and we had to extricate these bodies and search the graves to see what was in them, any special documents that had to be procured and sent back to brigade headquarters, and even in four days it was a horrifying thing to dig a grave where people had been buried four days previous and I was just amazed that the bodies were

37:00 bloated. They had heads that big, you know, and with the climate conditions and everything, and the bodies disintegrate very quickly in tropical areas like that, and we had to retrieve these and excavate the graves. But they were mainly high ranking officers that we found in the graves. They all had leather belts and belts going across their

37:30 shoulder and red caps. They were buried in their uniform, you know, and so we found that fortunately what had happened as a result of that raid, we killed about 15 Japanese that we found in the graves but how many would be wounded and taken away you'd never know, but the amount of fire that went on when we attacked the place and the quantity of ammunition that was fired and the position, the tactical position

38:00 we were in to really strafe the whole area and the hut, we should imagine there'd be many many wounded that would probably die later on. So then we had to sort of further, that completed that part of the business and, but that was about three days, four days after the attack that we'd made on the previous four days. So we were very lucky

38:30 and we didn't lose one man. We carried out this operation, it was a very good success but it was just part of the job and we didn't get, there were no medals or anything given out for that and it was very difficult to get any respect or gratitude for things that people did during the war. You might've if you wanted to win a Victoria Cross.

39:00 You'd have to do it and I think you wouldn't be there to receive it, you'd be dead.

The morning that you were lying on the cliff looking down, do you remember what sort of thoughts you were having?

I had the feeling and I thought these, I had a bit of sympathy towards them actually. I felt that these people, just roaming around not a care in the world, shaving, having their breakfast or getting their breakfast and doing the things that we would even do

39:30 when we were in camp, but then for me to know that in a few minutes time all hell was going to break loose and these people are going to be dead. Even though I didn't like Japanese, but I had a certain, I had a few qualms about it and felt that, you know, it was terrible to be doing things like this but it was war.

When you were saying the night before you'd been lying

40:00 **there and you couldn't make a noise at all, but you were saying that it was arranged that at dawn you would strike,**

Yeah, that was the normal time to do surprise raids, just as there was enough daylight there to see what you were doing.

When you can't make any noise how do you arrange what's going to happen?

No, that was arranged. We could make, we could talk, whisper to, the instructions weren't sort of shouted out over a loud hailer or anything like that. But when we'd done,

40:30 I went up with the officer and we did the survey and found out what the ground was like, where we were going to sit and where we were going to attack from, and we knew exactly where we were going, well we went back 200 metres and the rest of the people were still there and we spoke to them and told them what we had seen, very quietly of course, but it was a surprising

41:00 thing that the Japanese didn't have any sentries on that part of the approach, but it wasn't the normal way their camp was formatted. It was probably the back of their camp with the big cliff behind and all tracks leading into there were around the front of the place, and probably they had guards guarding the entrance from the other areas

41:30 but they didn't have anybody up on the position we, and that was one of the brilliant things that the indigenous guides did, to bring us right to the right spot in a straight line.

Tape 8

00:36 But there were a number of other skirmishes we had as we were moving down. Quite often we'd strike, run into an ambush or we'd either kill the ones that were trying to kill us or we'd get out of the way or dodge them or do something, but that was going on continually. That's the thing in the war

01:00 that was so demanding and so nerve-racking was the day after day, day after day doing, putting your life in the hands of an enemy, that you couldn't see many times.

After the day that you were actually attacked on Warapu and then you went back to the rest of the 61st for three or four days, why was

Yeah. We went back to the,

01:30 when we attacked Warapu we went back that afternoon to the A Company, but then three or four days after that my platoon was sent, 7 Platoon was sent from A Company headquarters back to where the Japanese camp was that we attacked to do a survey and find out what had happened. Were they still there?

02:00 Could we find out how many were left, how many had been killed? Our brief was to survey the area and find any documents or anything left, but we didn't know what we were going to find when we went back there. It was just by chance that we went back there and the place had been deserted. 15 bodies had been buried

02:30 just a few metres away from where they were living and all the others had disappeared. We don't know where they disappeared to but they just vanished, and from there we had to go on patrolling further towards Buin.

What was the reason that it was a three or four day lag before you went back there?

Well I suppose it was time for things to settle down and to,

03:00 and to, it could've been very dangerous if we had gone back the next day or something like that, but it

was just the way that they worked it out, that we'd have a delay of three or four days and then go back to check out what damage the raid had made three or four days previous.

When you went back what struck you as obvious differences between the way that the Japanese set up a camp and the way that the Aussies did?

03:30 Well we normally had tents or we didn't have anything at all in lots of cases. In the army you were supplied with a ground sheet and quite often because of the constant rain the ground sheet happened to be your tent. You'd have some forks and sticks or branches and you'd make yourself like a bed cover and you'd put your ground

04:00 sheet over the top. Ground sheets were made to lie on or to wrap around yourselves if you were in rain or anything but we had to use the ground sheets as a tent cover, you know, we used the ground over our heads to keep the rain out and sort of stretched out and slept as well as we could on the ground or whatever.

When you went back what was the, obviously you were there to do a job but do you remember what you felt?

04:30 I felt mainly that we had done had been, we didn't know the extent until we went back the next, in three days time, but we knew that it had been successful. We hadn't lost any men and with the law of averages we must've done everything that we should've done because of the volume of firepower and the way it was carried out?

And what things did you find there?

05:00 Hmm?

What things did you find there?

Well some of those Japanese documents that you saw there. It was just one mess. They must've left in a hurry. Things were strewn, as you can see in that photograph, things were strewn all over the place, but there were lots of papers and things and I don't know, I can't verify this, but we had to hand in a lot of the equipment

05:30 or things that we found, quite a number of swords and we handed them in and they eventually ended up back at brigade headquarters or division headquarters, and it's reported that they did find amongst the material that we captured or found that there were some plans regarding the invasion of Australia there, what they intended to do,

06:00 that they intended to capture Port Moresby and capture Milne Bay. That was the idea, but they even had instructions about that in Bougainville. So apparently that was the plan for landing in Australia, had been worked out probably months and months and months before. Before we went to Bougainville.

When you got there and you saw the graves and knew

06:30 **that you'd had to dig them up, how was it decided who would do what?**

Well, we all did our bit and there were probably about four or five of us involved in that. There weren't that many people you could see in that photograph but that was the extent of the patrol, that there weren't that many of us there. But we

07:00 just got about doing it. They were newly dug graves so it wasn't very hard to excavate them and, but we all, we had trouble getting some of the bodies out because they were buried in six foot deep pits.

How did you get them out?

Well, we put a rope down and whatever we could do with the rope, hook on to some of the belts or something like that. We'd get on

07:30 the end of the rope and pull them up and I remember one particular big fellow that we were pulling out and because of the period he had been in the grave and the humidity and things deteriorated very rapidly, the bodies, but even the equipment, the belts, and we hooked onto one fellow and we were pulling him up with his, we call it a Sam Browne belt, but they had

08:00 something like Australian Army but we were pulling him up and the belt had perished and we got him nearly to the top and the belt broke and so he went back into the grave again. I hate talking about these things, but you know, it's what happened.

Once you actually got them out of the grave did you actually have to look through their uniform?

Yeah. We had to search,

08:30 see what was, they had a habit of burying things in the grave, the Japanese, not only buried the bodies but they buried any items of any consequence, swords, a lot of swords were buried in graves and we found quite a number, and documents and things. But you know, we were pretty respectful as far as we could be, but it was an instruction that we had to carry out and that we did

09:00 and it wasn't very pleasant. I still wake up at night time and it horrified me to think that we had to do things like that.

Were you worried when you got back there that there would be stragglers or booby traps?

Yeah, we fully expected that we'd run into trouble when we got back there, but when we got to the edge of the area we did a bit of a survey and found there was no movement,

09:30 didn't seem to be anybody and the place was in such disorder that we realised and we thought then, well they've got out of here in a hurry and left everything behind. So we just went in then and had a look in the huts and did everything, checked it out.

Did any of the blokes souvenir stuff for themselves?

No. Not that I'm aware of. Only possibly some of those

10:00 paper things, you know, but no, we didn't do that because, see after us probably other people would come along. We had people following us up all the time and we were in the frontline all the time and people coming behind would be able to instructed to do more scientific work and see what had to be checked out and

10:30 report on it. We had to report on the position, what we found and anything of any consequence that we could we had to acquire it and then hand it back to our company headquarters and then passed down the line to wherever it had to go. Could've even come back to Australia some of it.

When you were doing such constant patrols, was there any down time for you? Did you have any time to relax?

11:00 We might have a day's break every now and again. There were three platoons, 7, 8 and 9. Monday it might be 7's turn to do patrolling. The next day, Tuesday, it might be 8 Platoon and then the next day it would be 9 Platoon, but depending on the urgency. Sometimes two platoons. If we expected to strike a lot of trouble,

11:30 two platoons would go out together but it was mainly one. So we took it in turn, but for some reason or other 7 Platoon and A Company were the ones that they relied on most for getting the best results. That's what's been reported to me and as a consequence we probably did more than our fair share of patrolling and going in and being trouble-

12:00 shooters and correcting things that were going wrong.

Was there any practical joking or ways guys maintained their sense of humour?

No, it was pretty serious, especially when you're on patrol. No, I don't think so but a lot of people got fatigued. It was very fatiguing crossing rivers and climbing mountains

12:30 and going through swamps up to your waist with leeches hanging all over you. It was very trying and how half of us didn't go mad I don't know. It was just beyond human expectation that we did it, but we did eventually get relived and went back to towards Mount Bagana where the battalion had a bit of a rest. But then

13:00 after a short rest it was time to get back to work again and go down, we were getting down towards Buin. That was the objective. We were at the Mivo River, 'Mivo' or 'Meivo', when we were on one side of the river and the Japanese were on the other side of the river and we were ready to cross over to make the final attack

13:30 down over that area, down over the other side of the river heading towards Buin. But fortunately we'd only been down there two or three days and we could see the Japanese. They were on the other side of the river and they were washing and swimming and all that down on their side. We were on our side of the river there and it was just about the

14:00 the 11th or the 12th of August 1945 and we heard the news that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima and there was a possibility that the war was coming to an end, and when that happened nobody did anything. We just stood there and waited. But we were geared to cross over this Mivo River and attack the Japanese and we found out after the war ended that we would've

14:30 been terribly outnumbered. We would've all been killed. There's no way in the world that we could've crossed that river and we would've met their full opposition. There'd be hundreds and hundreds of them over there, and we would never have got out of it. It would've been the end of the 61st Battalion in Bougainville, but because of this a sort of peace had arrived, but they took a few days to really establish and to say that

15:00 peace had been established. So we just stayed put and everything, but we were miraculously saved by the fact that the atomic bomb was dropped on that particular day and then another bomb was dropped shortly after and then the end of the war was in hand, and then eventually peace was declared and the Japanese were told to

15:30 surrender and leaflets were dropped all over the area where they were telling them to come in and hold up these surrender papers and they would be treated properly. A lot of them did and then when that happened and they did come over, I was just amazed at the equipment they had. One fellow had a Singer sewing machine strapped across his back. I don't know why or where he got it from.

16:00 But they had bags of fruit and food and tin dishes and tubs and all these things. They carried them on their backs and walked out of the jungle heading towards the area where we were going to keep them until we could put them on barges and take them down to Fauro Island, which is a little island just south of Bougainville and I was involved

16:30 in that, taking them down in landing craft and putting them into the camp that had been built on Fauro Island. So I was in charge of a barge. There were about three. We were very short of equipment and landing barges were part of the equipment. We didn't have enough. We didn't have enough of anything. We didn't have enough artillery. We didn't have enough landing barges. We didn't have enough shipping coming in, and so

17:00 we had about three landing barges and there's photos here, I can't get up, over here. There's one, I took those photos when I was up on the bridge of the barge heading towards Fauro Island. There was only myself and another lance corporal and then there was a fellow driving the barge and we had a barge full of, they were crammed in like those sheep that were going to the Middle East

17:30 just recently. They were packed in, even hanging over the side of the barge, and all we had were three men, myself and the lance corporal and the fellow driving the barge who couldn't do much anyway, and we ferried them all the way down and then the door went down on the landing barge and they were put ashore and even though peace had been declared, but the

18:00 Japanese could have attacked us, just three men, taken over the barge and headed for the hills anywhere they wanted to go. Could've killed us and we wouldn't have had a chance. It was just the way that it happened. So we had a number of trips like that, taking them, putting them on an island down south of Bougainville so they could eventually be repatriated to Japan.

What was your feeling towards the Japanese that were coming in and surrendering?

18:30 I didn't have any like of them. They were smelly and dirty, but they were very, they were probably in better condition physically than we were.

Did that surprise you?

That did surprise me because we were, although all the way along the line if we ran into any and we killed them they all looked big strong men. I couldn't see any evidence of

19:00 malnutrition or any reason why people would be saying it would be a walkover. It was certainly no walker. Whilst it was an ongoing thing and very monotonous and very trying they were physically fit. The ones that we struck were physically fit and were just as able to take us on as we were able to take them on, but I think in the papers back

19:30 at home that we were doing, it was to be a mopping up operation. Well it was anything but a mopping up operation, and the Japanese were half starved and didn't have any physical ability and all this, but that was a lot of rubbish. It was only paper talk and some propaganda feeding to the people back in Australia to make them think it was going to be a walkover.

How did you actually physically get that news that the atomic bomb had been dropped?

20:00 It spread through the radio. They had a radio that they could listen to back at headquarters. Then it filtered up the line to where we were. The atomic bomb had been dropped and there was a possibility of peace talks and the war was going to be over. But it's an amazing thing in the army that the information gets through. Some, a lot of them would be rumours,

20:30 you know, somebody would start a rumour. The war had finished or something, six months before it did, and that would spread like wildfire right throughout the area and it would only be a rumour but we were sort of used to rumours being promoted, or we're going back to Australia or going to go on leave in a month's time. They were things that were spread around. I don't know for what reason, but that happened

21:00 quite often. But getting the news up to the frontline, even getting the letter from home up to the frontline was something that was done.

Did you get many letters from home?

Yeah, I used to get a letter quite often, but sometimes there'd be a delay in the mail and we used to get tins of, from the Red Cross, you know, cakes and I even had a

21:30 Red Cross parcel came once and it had a pair of socks in it, knitted socks, hand knitted socks and this had a letter in it. The girl who had knitted the socks, she lived on a sheep station down at Armidale and she had her name and address and everything and this. So I did drop her a line and told her that I received them and

22:00 thank her very much. So she wrote a letter back and we started writing to one another a little bit, but it ended at the end of the war. It didn't come to anything. I didn't want it to come to anything.

Had you had a girlfriend when you went to war?

Not very seriously because of my family situation. I was committed to the family and what I had to do, but I had quite a few girlfriends, but

22:30 nothing serious.

So when it was announced that Japan had surrendered, were you eager to get home straight away or did you know there'd be a lot more work to do?

Yes. We, I was eager, we were all eager to get home. We couldn't get there quick enough, but we had to wait until the Japanese had crossed the river and all the one who were still in the scrub had come out of the scrub and

23:00 were being gathered together in a bunch to be put into the holding place where they were then put on the barges. So we couldn't do anything until that part of it was up and then we came back to base and we got rid of all the prisoners and taken them down to Fauro Island and there was a big,

23:30 we all came together, the ones that were left of us, into a base and there was a big battalion parade called. It was a lot of people, probably 1,000 people and the parade was called and Brigadier Bridgeford, Major General Bridgeford, he appeared and I was on this parade and unbeknown to me or unbeknown to Nev

24:00 Bedwell or unbeknown to Corporal Smith, the three of us were given this citation. We were on this big parade with 1,000 people, told to come forward. We didn't know why, we hadn't been told anything, and here we were then presented with this certificate from Major General Bridgeford and that was a tremendous surprise just to be called out from the ranks and think it was just an ordinary general

24:30 parade and it was a presentation of three certificates for my battalion. So then after that, well most of our battalion went home but I was kept behind and I had jobs of cleaning up and finding, doing surveys around the battle area there where we were down the Mivo River and making sure that everything was tidied up and

25:00 I didn't get back to Australia until about the 15th of January 1946. The war ended on the 15th of August 1945 and I was kept in this holding position until the 15th of January, or the 14th or 15th of January next year.

When you were awarded the citation, was that for one particular event?

Well, I don't know.

25:30 I think it was for what I did. I was told that, they didn't tell us that we were getting it and they didn't tell us why we were getting it. It just said for loyal and meritorious during operations, but I heard on the grapevine that it was for the Slater Knoll episode of coming back by myself through the number of Japanese and getting back successfully to pass on the message to company headquarters.

26:00 **What did it mean to you to have that citation?**

I was proud, but you know, it was only a bit of cardboard as you can see. It was nothing elaborate like a Military Cross or Military Medal, and they classified it being like 'Mentioned in Despatches'. That is a recognised army

26:30 decoration, but I don't know why and I've never really been able to talk to anybody. There's probably no way I could find a record out of why it was presented, other than hearsay, and the other people, they're the same. They weren't expecting it. They didn't know. It was just out of the blue. In amongst 1,000 people and you name gets called out to come forward

27:00 and you don't know whether you're going to get the sack or get a promotion. So fortunately it was a matter of getting the certificate which was an honour. Then unfortunately the honour was left out of the book that was published in regard to the 61st Battalion because probably they didn't know, whoever wrote the book. I wasn't one to go around saying, "Look at this, I've got a

27:30 certificate from Major General Bridgeford." I just sent it home to my mother and family and I didn't say much about it. The people that were on parade they sort of, shortly after that parade they boarded the ships or the aircraft and went home to be demobilised.

On the day that you were awarded the citation, how did the other blokes react? Did they give you a ribbing?

No. They were very

28:00 enthusiastic about it, you know, because I had a pretty good rapport with my A Company in general and especially with any officers that were attached to A Company and the commanding officer of A Company, but particularly I was good friends and a bit popular I suppose, even though I say it myself,

but I had no animosity from any of the

28:30 people I was sort of in charge of and asking them to do things they had to do.

Des, the researchers in our office told us that you might have a couple of stories for us about some of the mates that you served with, one about Jimmy Bruce?

Yes. We were on one of our normal patrols and there was Alec Brown, a forward scout, and I was a few feet behind him and as we were walking through we saw

29:00 a head bob up with a machine gun in front of him and I had my sub-machine gun, my Owen sub-machine gun and Alec Brown the scout in front, we both fired. We saw this head at the same time and the fellow was just ready to pull the trigger on the machine gun and I don't know who hit this Jap, whether I hit him with my,

29:30 I sprayed out more shots with my Own sub-machine gun than Alec Brown did with his, he had a .303 rifle, Lee Enfield. So we don't know, but anyway we didn't have any trouble with that Jap any more. We walked over and saw that he'd been shot through the head, whether I shot him or whether Alec Brown shot him we don't know because we both fired at the same time. So we came to a halt then. Jimmy Bruce

30:00 was the, he was in charge of the number 2 section and Peter Henderson, who was the officer commanding the patrol, he said to Jim, "I want you to do a movement around and see if you can come in to where we'd killed this Japanese machine gunner," and as Jim did a circling movement around he ran into, he and his section, probably be

30:30 about 10 people, they ran into a mob of Japanese and there was firing from Jim's crowd and the Japanese and hand grenades were thrown and it was a real ding-dong battle and I was just up the front a little bit to the side where we'd stopped after we got rid of this machine gun. But in all the haste

31:00 and rigmarole that went on trying to extricate themselves or fight the Japanese that they'd run into, they eventually lost their bearings and became lost and we had a little fellow, Siddy Stacey, he got wounded and Jimmy Bruce and another one, another fellow, took it in turns. He wasn't killed but he was terribly injured,

31:30 and they couldn't find their way. They couldn't get back to us, only we were probably only a matter of yards away but because of the thickness of the jungle and they were so disoriented that we waited and waited there and all the time we were expecting because of the firing that had gone on and the fact that my sub-machine gun had been firing bursts, it would attract any Japs that were in the area to come to where the noise was

32:00 coming from. So we waited and waited. We waited there for about an hour for him to come back and he didn't turn up. So we didn't know where he was or what had happened, whether he'd gone back to camp. Anyway, they were trying to extricate themselves, find their way back to A Company headquarters carrying little, he was only a little fellow, he was a real character but nice fellow, carrying him on their shoulders and bringing

32:30 him back, but on the second day he died from his wounds. So they eventually brought him back to, carried him back to where, but we had to go ahead. We couldn't wait any longer because it was too dangerous because the Japanese knew where we were and it was only a matter of time before they'd come to where we were and we'd have had another fight on our hands. So we continued to advance our patrol and we

33:00 got back to the company headquarters and in about three days time Jimmy Bruce wandered in to our area, got his way back, but he'd been shot in the eye, shrapnel from one of the hand grenades had gone off and blinded him in the right eye and they came back and told us and we found out then what the

33:30 problem was, why they didn't come back to us, but they were hopelessly lost. You only had to turn around in that jungle. You knew that north, south, east and west would be where they should be, but after you've turned around a few times in amongst trees that all look the same you could think that was north but it was probably west. Hopelessly lost, and they were very lucky to extricate themselves out of that predicament. So we

34:00 just continued on, but poor old Jim. He died a few years ago and he had, his eye had to be removed and for the rest of his life he only had one eye and a glass eye where the other one had been damaged.

When someone was killed in action out on a patrol, what would happen to them?

Well, we'd always try and bring them

34:30 back if it was possible. Sometimes it wasn't possible, but if they were dead we might consider, well it's impossible to bring them back all this way to where the company headquarters would be, or the first point where it would be appropriate to raise the alarm or either get help for them if they were wounded. Mostly we got all our wounded back. We brought them back, carried

35:00 them back. Sometimes we had native people to help carry, but that was one of the main things, if

anybody was wounded or shot you would give them first priority and try and get them back, bring their body back, whatever.

With the bodies that you did manage to get back, were they buried there?

They were all buried in Bougainville

35:30 and then later on the war graves people went through all the areas where battles had been fought and they dug up all these bodies of people that had been buried on the islands and in New Guinea and they brought them to Bomana Cemetery just outside Port Moresby. The Bomana is a very big cemetery there and so if we, if I were to go to

36:00 Port Moresby today I'd probably find the graves of all these people that were with me and got killed and were buried in Bougainville or Milne Bay. They'd all have a cross in a beautiful lawn cemetery and their bodies would be in there.

The ones that you did bury, was there time for any kind of memorial for them?

No. We just, we tried to be reverent

36:30 and gave them sympathy but there wasn't much you could do. So even in some cases I think they were dead, they didn't even get buried because we weren't in a position to do it. We were being attacked from all sides and it was better for us to be pointing our rifle that way and being able to protect ourselves than to be digging a grave.

Was there any one

37:00 **death that was more heart breaking for you than any others?**

Well, little Siddy Stacey, when I heard he'd died. He was the clown, he always had a joke and he always had a smile on his face. He was a lovely little fellow. The first thing I did when I got back to Australia, got back to Brisbane, I went, he had a widowed

37:30 mother and I went out to see her and she had another son who was with her at the time, and Jimmy Bruce with his one eye and myself we went out to see her and tried to comfort her as much as we could and tell her as much as we knew without sort of the grim details and tried to make her feel comfortable that what had happened and

38:00 that she knew really what happened.

You were saying that sometimes you had, obviously throughout your time there the natives were of a great help to you. Was there ever a fear that they were working for the Japanese?

It was never evident to me although there were reports that the Japanese had them and there were dire consequences if the Japanese found that some of the natives that were under their control had ever helped Australian troops, or

38:30 doing anything that was adverse towards the result of the war as far as the Japanese were concerned. The Japanese were very cruel. They'd only have to look side-ways and they'd execute or do whatever, shoot a native and so there was no sympathy from the Japanese towards the people, but the ones that were probably too frightened to revolt or try and escape because they

39:00 knew if they tried to escape and were caught that would be the end of them. But the ones that I came across and helped us were very helpful and especially at Warapu. We could never have done Warapu without the help of the ANGAU warrant officer and his two native boys.

You mentioned the cruelty of the Japanese was well known

39:30 **and obviously by the time they surrendered you all had lost a lot of great mates. Was there any examples that you knew of of sort of revenge things happening to the surrendering Japanese?**

No, no, there was nothing that I was aware of or heard, but we were just glad to see them coming out of the bush and the jungle and putting them in their right places and

40:00 getting them behind barbed wire. We got satisfaction out of doing that. As it is now you can go to Surfers Paradise and you walk down Surfers Paradise and you see tons of Japanese tourists walking around, chaps and girls and women and sometimes I just think to myself, well I've got no animosity towards them. The war was the war and we're at peace now

40:30 and they're on holidays, I'm on holidays, but it just shows you how futile war is and you're deadly enemies. You're killing one another at one minute and then shortly in years time you're buddies again and everything's forgotten, but that's the history of war I think throughout the centuries.

We'll stop there.

Tape 9

00:32 **Des, can you read us the prayer that your Mum read for you everyday while you were away?**

Yes. This was a copy of the prayer that my mother told me when I returned that during the five years of my army service and particularly when I was in the battle areas that every night without fail she used to say this particular prayer

01:00 and this is the prayer that she used to say. “Dear God, answer this my humble prayer, keep my soldier son ever in thy care, watch over him day by day, be his guide in work and play, he is only a lad with a lad’s delight to be in the war and in the fight, oh God hear me

01:30 on this I trust, make him always brave and just, please God answer this my plea, guide my son safely home to me, let him return with smiling face, his same quick eager walking pace and we will kneel my son and I to return our thanks to thee on high, and as

02:00 the years of life assail our trust in thee will never fail.” So that was what she said, told me that she said religiously every night.

Can I get you to take your glasses off? So can you remember coming home and when was the first time you got to see Mum when you got home?

Well, what happened was that

02:30 I was brought back on the, I think it was the 14th or 15th I embarked, I got back to Sydney. That’s in January 1946. I came by ship. Most of the battalion had been home and they were demobbed, so we came from Bougainville and

03:00 we came by ship and we headed for Sydney and it was the morning and just about 7 o’clock in the morning. It was a brilliant day, the sun was shining brightly and the first thing I noticed was the Sydney Heads, coming through the Sydney Heads and then pulling up at the wharf and getting off the boat. It was a wonderful vision to see

03:30 Sydney Heads and Sydney Harbour and the big bridge behind it. Anyway, shortly after we arrived there was a troop train waiting and we embarked and got onto the train and we came back to Brisbane, and the line, the railway line. We went straight to Redbank area, to the camp there where we were discharged and we couldn’t get out of

04:00 that camp quick enough to get home and to see our family. Well even in a way I know that I myself, the first they would ask you, “Have you got any problems? Have you got any psychological problems, have you got any injuries, have you got anything wrong with you?” “No no no, nothing wrong,” because that was going to hold us up to save us getting out that front door quicker

04:30 than, as quickly as we wanted to. So a lot of things, [being anx? UNCLEAR] we had to hand our kit bags and all our things in, but that was one of the things I think now we all put on a brave, well most, some of them didn’t, but I know I did. I put on a brave face and said, “There’s nothing wrong with me, I’m 100 percent.” “Good boy,” and, “I’m going home now.”

Have you ever thought in retrospect that the army or the government did that on purpose?

05:00 I don’t know. They could’ve. It’s something I’d never know, but it was such an enticement to get out to be, have your army discharge after six years of army, and to get on that suburban train and head for home, you couldn’t get there quick enough. It was a very quick procedure and the quicker it was the better it

05:30 was for us. But a lot of people regret now that they did have problems, psychological and other problems, but they never realised that until, or they never mentioned it or said anything about it until some later time in their life.

Did they give you anything to send you on your way?

No, no. We had just probably

06:00 the clothes that we had on the boat, the shorts and shirt and shoes. You probably know the army shoes with the big thick leather soles and the tie up laces that came up here. They were very strange things to get used to when you first went into the army after being used to slippers and light walking shoes that you’d wear to work and that sort of thing, but

06:30 when you’ve got these hobnail boots with the big protectors on the soles and that, and so heavy. So we probably, I probably came home with a slouch hat, shirt and singlet, pair of pants, shorts and probably socks and my army boots.

Did they issue you with a suit or give you a chit for a suit?

No. No, the only thing we

07:00 got was a gratuity which I showed you, was about $143 which was paid as a recompense, was supposed to be the recompense that was due to you for the number of days you served on active service and also the number of days you served back in Australia. But an interesting thing about

07:30 when the war ended, I'm going back a bit now, that Gracie Fields, the English singer at the time, she was the favourite of the forces during the war. She was in England and she went to all the areas I think and her turn had come to go to Bougainville and the concert,

08:00 she was to put on a concert for the troops the very day that peace was declared and I wasn't able to attend that but I've heard later on that Gracie Fields came and tears were in her eyes saying it's the best thing that's ever, the most joyful thing she's ever had in her life was to be at Bougainville and have thousands of people looking at her on the stage and singing We'll Meet Again or something like that.

08:30 But I was still down on the Mivo River and miles and miles away from where Gracie Fields was performing back at Torokina.

Did you ever get to see any of the entertainment units that came over?

Oh yes, we saw some of them when we were back at base area, but there weren't that many. When we were in the convalescent camp up at Warwick

09:00 we had some concert parties came out there and in Moresby. I think when we were there for a little time. At Donadabu I think we had, could've had a couple of concert parties and they mainly, I can't remember any prominent names but there were some. I've just forgotten them, but a lot of the fellows dressed up as girls and female impersonators and that seemed to bring a bit of a roar from the

09:30 crowd. As a matter of fact I've got some photographs there of that particular incident.

Anyway, actually we've sort of got away from it. I was interested to find out about you getting home from Redbank that day.

Yes, I got home from Redbank and I hadn't told my mother or my family that I was on my way or anything like that. They didn't know, and really I didn't have much

10:00 advice as to when I was coming home. It's sort of just plucked out of the air that you're going home tomorrow or something and be on parade and you'll be transported to the boat or whatever and you'd head for Australia. So I didn't have any chance to, you had no, couldn't phone anybody or send telegrams. The only way would be by writing

10:30 and then they didn't like you sort of, every letter that you ever wrote in the army on an operational sight would be censored. You couldn't say anything that would be detrimental to the war. You couldn't tell your family even where you were. If you did it would be censored, like they do now in the government, a big black line would go through it all and it would be unreadable. So you sort of, so it was a

11:00 big surprise when I put my head through the front door and said, "Hello Mum, I'm pleased to see you," or something like that.

What was her reaction?

Oh, just hard to explain. She and my sisters, you know, they couldn't believe it. But anyway things settled down and I didn't waste any time. I went in to see Jim Egan, my boss of five or six years ago,

11:30 and said, "I'm back." He said, "When do you want to start, tomorrow?" I said, "Oh no, I'd like to have a few days, three days or so until the end of the week with my family and I'll come back on Monday," and I was welcome in there with open arms, and next Monday I was there on time and went back to my old job and stayed with the company, but I did move on. I was eventually promoted

12:00 the division accountant for Queensland and it was my responsibility then to be looking after all the accounting procedures that went on in the Queensland division. It was a lot of money involved and a lot of work involved and I had control of all the office staff and I had to send monthly reports to head office in Sydney to be put together for the overall view for the

12:30 way that the whole of Australia had performed during the month, and after that I got a call one day from head office in Sydney and the said, "Des, can you be in Hobart on Monday morning?" This was a Friday afternoon. "Can you be in Hobart on Monday morning?" I didn't know why

13:00 or anything. I said, "Well, it's a bit short notice but if I've got to go, I've got to go. I'll do it," and from that point I was promoted as the trouble-shooter for the company for Australia and my job was if there was a manager in the division going on long service leave or had to go overseas, go to American or wherever, I was sent down there to sit in his seat until he came back or

13:30 if there was an accountant leaving or going on holidays I'd be rung up from head office in Sydney. They actually wanted me to move from Brisbane down to Sydney and when I did an analysis of it and sort of thought what price I'd have to pay to shift, well the company was going to subsidise it, but to buy a home in Sydney would be much dearer than it was in Brisbane in those days. This is going back

14:00 probably 30 years, but it wasn't impossible. But I said, "I'll still do the job for you if I can still reside with my family in Brisbane in my own home." So they agreed to that. So it was quite often I might spend six months in Sydney at Mascot where they had the big office in Botany Road or I might be down in Melbourne at Ascot Vale

14:30 in [Mt] Alexander Road, or I might be in Adelaide, or I might be in Perth and I was shifted all around and that was the way I ended up with the company, and then when there were any moments when I wasn't needed to carry out those I would come back to my original job in the accounting side in Brisbane and I'd find out all the things that they put in the too hard basket and

15:00 sort of I had to straighten those out. It was an interesting job.

How do you see your army experience, war experience as affecting the rest of your work life?

No, it didn't really affect it except that I always believed in doing a good job and I had quite a staff under me, quite a few typists and accounting

15:30 machine operators and switchboard operators and people like that. I was sort of in charge of employing staff and directing them in what they had to do, but some of them said that I was a bit tough, but I expected things to be done properly and I expected them to be paid quite a reasonable amount for the work that they were doing and I felt that everything had to be done

16:00 accurately. It's not like today, if the ledgers weren't balanced, towards the end we were using accounting machines. I had two girls operating accounting machines and then I retired just about the time computers were being brought in to replace the accounting machines. But if the ledgers didn't balance or you didn't get a trial balance, it didn't come out, they would have to find

16:30 where the mistake had happened. They wouldn't go and say, "It's only $10 out, we're not going to worry about that." I think today there's a lot of that goes on where, but I was more inclined to be accurate and have the thing right and possibly some of them might've thought that I was a bit strict in sort of sticking up for that thing that I wanted to do, but I felt that I was fair, the same as I was with

17:00 the people I had under my control in the army.

So how do you look back on your war service?

Well, in a way I'm pleased I did it because you learn a lot. Your attitude towards life has changed. I think you're more sensible and you can appreciate things more

17:30 and things like the fact that I was able to save my sister's life when she had the train accident. I often think of that as a godsend. If I'd never joined the army or been taught Red Cross or that particular treatment I wouldn't have know what to do. I would've been like a duck running around with its head chopped off. So there were good points and bad points, but

18:00 I do feel that it does affect your nerves. You can be affected a bit by that and if you dwell on it too long it's something you don't want to do.

Did you have any trouble settling down after the war?

I didn't have trouble settling down but I'm still, even to this day it's nothing for me to wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning or dreaming during the night that I'm doing that

18:30 Slater Knoll trip around the 300 Japanese and trying to, I'm being chased by Japanese and I can't get my legs to move because I'm asleep and it just comes into your head sort of thing that you, yes, there's certainly an amount of traumatic stress and you can never overcome that.

What's your opinion of General Blamey?

19:00 I didn't like him, and I better not say too much. But no, I didn't ever see him up the frontline. It was reported that he did come but he was never up where I was, never in the frontline face to face with Japanese. He always had his bodyguards around him and sitting in the back of a jeep. But no, I think some of his decisions were stupid and

19:30 I think he was selfish to a degree that the latter part of the war, the unnecessary war section that we talk about. If it hadn't been for him and some of the officers that were with him and guiding him in what he did and if the government had been a bit stronger in saying to Blamey, "Well this is going to be a holding situation where in Bougainville

20:00 the troops that have gone to relive the Americans, they will carry out the same functions and just protect the perimeter and keep a foothold on Bougainville that we can fall back on any time we like, keep the airstrip going and anything we want to use Bougainville for will be there for us to use." But no, he didn't want to do that. But I think he wanted the, my personal feeling

20:30 is that he and some of the headquarter people back at Canberra or whatever were protecting their own jobs because it would be pretty hard for General Blamey to substantiate his position if all of the Australian Army at that particular time, 1945, were doing nothing active in the field,

21:00 especially when I believe it had been discussed and decided that a lot of the army would be, a lot of the armed forces would be demobilised because they couldn't be used productively. There was no purpose in mopping up like we had to do, but I can see Blamey's point. What would he be doing if he didn't have any army to control or to look after?

21:30 And his job's gone. So I think it was a matter of sort of protecting themselves.

When you look back on your service when was the proudest moment for you?

There were so many moments that could be classified as proud, you know, it's hard to sort of pinpoint any particular thing, but I was particularly proud when

22:00 I was given this citation from General Bridgeford. That was a proud moment, but in retrospect there are other people that did more things than I did and were in more danger than I was. So it's in life, you can always realise there's always somebody worse off than yourself.

22:30 The man that's got no shoes but then there's another fellow's got no legs. Well he's a bit worse off than the chap that's got no shoes. That's the attitude I adopted.

Just going back to some of the things from earlier on that I missed out on. Did you wear a slouch hat or a tin helmet in action?

No. We didn't wear, we didn't wear, we just wore a green khaki sort of a hat. In the early

23:00 days in Milne Bay we were issued with tin helmets. In some cases they did protect people but it was well known that if a bullet was, if you were shot at the right angle many tin hats had bullet holes in them and the people who had their heads in them were killed at the same time. So no, we tried to, we felt it didn't make that much difference whether you had a tin hat on or you certainly

23:30 didn't have a dress like the police have or protective armouring or anything like that, no.

But it wasn't a slouch hat that you wore later on, it was a different hat altogether?

It was just one of these green beret sort of things that we wore around our head to keep the sun off it. No, we never wore a slouch hat into action or anything. We would if we were on parade, but in most cases where I was operating from we didn't even have slouch hats

24:00 and we didn't have our main uniform. All those things were taken off us before we went into action back at base and put into kit stores and they were held in our kit bags and put in safe keeping until we were ready to be discharged or ready to move to a new area, come back to Australia on leave or something like that, but we only more or less carried our day to day gear with us because

24:30 we had heavy equipment. We had a flame thrower that we used to take on patrol with us and we had to carry quite a quantity of ignition stuff, petrol and that sort of thing that they put into the, we put into the flame throwers and that was like carrying a big tank on your back, and we had a lot of ammunition, carrying a Bren gun for a couple of days on end was very stressful and very difficult. So

25:00 as far as clothing was concerned we only used the minimum clothing and it was preferable to carry ammunition and a couple of extra basic pouches and a few more magazines of, Owen gun magazines, than to carry heavy clothes which couldn't be needed anyway.

How did your promotion come about?

It was just I

25:30 think that they saw when we started off our patrolling that I was fortunate enough to have good people with me and we were successful in what we were achieving and so I was then promoted out of the blue a lance corporal, and than shortly after that I got the promotion to actual confirmed corporal. But that was towards

26:00 the end of the war and I don't know where I'd have finished if the war had gone another year. I'd either be dead or promoted, I suppose.

Is that when you went from a .303 to an Owen gun, with promotion?

Yeah, well I had an Owen gun all the time I was in Bougainville and before that I had a .303. All my Bougainville work was done with an Owen gun. That was the gun that was invented by

26:30 an Australian. I think his name was Owen by the way, and it was a gun, we had a lot of trouble with other Bren guns and a Bren gun was a heavier gun and it was a machine gun, whereas the Owen was a sub-machine gun, it was a lighter gun and was smaller and lighter to carry. But up in the conditions, the rainy conditions and the muddy conditions,

27:00 we were finding quite often that some of the older guns wouldn't stand up to the conditions, the mud, the water, but the Owen gun was miraculous. It has been known to jam or something like that at a vital moment, but I never had, I had a couple of jams when I hoped that it wouldn't happen and, but

27:30 in the main I was very happy with my Owen sub-machine gun. It was very good and very accurate and it really fired the shots out the barrel.

Did you ever see any photographers or journalists in your travels?

Oh yes, there were war correspondents coming around and photographers. The fellow that came, Keen or whatever his name was, that took the photo of the Warapu hut when I was

28:00 there, he came, but I've forgotten the names of, well known names of war correspondents. Quite often they'd be around taking photos and making notes because they used to send information back to The Courier Mail and the Australian papers and I think the army possibly the paper companies

28:30 had something to do with putting the war correspondents into position so that the people back in Australia, or the world, could be informed as to what was happening many many miles away, especially when Australia at one stage was in such a dangerous situation and it was vital that the people in Australia knew that the Japs had arrived at Kokoda and the Japs have landed at Milne Bay

29:00 and it made them back in Australia realise that things were a bit serious.

Did you ever give any thought to staying in the army?

No, I couldn't get out of it quicker. I did appreciate my time in the army and was thankful that I got out of it alive, but I was anxious to get back to my normal routine and family life. So no, I appreciate

29:30 I've got no qualms now about being in the army or what I did, what I saw. I know it's not good to think about at times, but I feel that something would be missing in my life if I hadn't done it.

And what are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

Yes, I think Anzac Day is a wonderful thing to commemorate all the people that have particularly

30:00 died and my friends and people not only in the Second World War, but the First World War and any other war and Vietnam. I think it does have some bearing because you can tell by the number of people that line the sidewalks, you know, and the children with their flags and that sort of thing, and Anzac Day, the participation

30:30 by the general public is greater today, and you'll find that on the 25th of April this year when we have another Anzac Day the papers will probably report the crowds in 2004 greater than they were in 2003. So it did fade off for a while and shortly after the war, but people have got to realise now that what happened

31:00 and most of the people that were in, even in the Second World War are going by the wayside now, they're passing away, and I think they really appreciate, you can tell by the flag waving and cheering and everything that goes on.

Have you always marched?

No, not always. I felt at times it was a bit stressful, but

31:30 I could go in a jeep. They do provide jeeps for oldies like me that, it all depends how I'm feeling on the day. It's a sad day for me.

What about, did you join the RSL [Returned and Services League] when you got back to Australia?

That was the first thing I did. Possibly within the first week after my discharge I joined the RSL

32:00 and I've even got a certificate from them on the wall inside there. It's a certificate recognising my 50 years association with the RSL.

Have you spoken of your experiences to your wife and kids?

No. Not in great detail. As a matter of fact I don't even like talking about it today, but I feel for the

32:30 sake of the reason why this film's being done and for generations to come it would be of some value to have this in archives, particularly my family. I haven't told them, but possibly if they get to see what I've said today or part of what I said today, especially for my two little grandsons, it would be something that

33:00 they'll know about that I possibly couldn't tell them about.

How often do you think about the war?

Probably every day. It's something that you'll never get over and it can be stressful and especially the post traumatic stress and I still feel the pain in my ear where the fellow with his double barrelled shotgun

33:30 blasted me.

Have you been diagnosed with PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder]?

Yes, I have.

When did they finally give it a name for you?

Not so long ago actually because with PTS, you sort of bottle things up in yourself and you don't sort of mention it to your family. You suffer it and you do things like that.

34:00 It could be about 10 years ago. But that's a long time since 1945 and that's the only time, and I only did it because the doctor that I was attending, my doctor at the time, he sort of got me to spill it out to him and I'd been bottling it up and he immediately made me report it to Veterans' Affairs and after

34:30 quite a lot of forms to fill in and having to prove this and having to prove that I was shot at, you know, and that I got malaria. That couldn't have happened, your blood pressure couldn't have been raised because you must've had that before you got into the army. They're not easy people to deal with. I know that this is going to Veterans' Affairs, but they want all the I's

35:00 dotted. I can understand why to a degree because there would be people that weren't genuine and the thought of a disability pension or something like that could be something that they'd be looking for but even in genuine cases you have to fight and you go before a tribunal and you put your case to them, or the person that's representing will, "Oh no, that couldn't have happened, that doesn't happen,

35:30 things like that don't happen." They're very difficult people I find to deal with in matters of compensation. But when I was first, I had to go before a psychiatrist. Probably, I don't know if you've seen today, but you do get a bit sentimental about things, but they sent me to the army psychiatrist and

36:00 he did a report that was quite appropriate. Then that wasn't sufficient. They ended up with, they rate you with a percentage and I think I got a 40 percent instead of really I should've got 100 percent for what I went through. But things like that, you know.

Do you think in some ways that attitude has made your condition worse?

36:30 Well to me, my feeling is we're probably dealing with people that have never been to war, possibly public servants that have just got into the public service at one stage and been promoted or put aside to work in Veterans' Affairs. Unless you've really been to war, been fired at, machine gunned, been shelled by artillery,

37:00 been shelled by Japanese cruisers, you could never appreciate what was involved, and just for an ordinary individual who'd never had any army training or never been on the frontline, they can't expect to appreciate what's been done to you, what where and tear on your body and your brain and your nerves. So

37:30 I classify them as bureaucrats and as you find in government everywhere they're the ones that feed information to the ministers and to the head people and they do the assessing and they come up with an assessment of 20 percent, 30 percent and that's it. If you were being assessed by people that had been at my side they'd have said 110 percent or something like that.

38:00 That's life.

What's the one thing you would like to pass on to future generations of Australians like your grandkids and that?

I think the benefit is sometimes I worry about, that's one of my worries, what's going to happen to, when I go, the people that I leave behind, especially my grandchildren. I wouldn't be surprised if

38:30 they were involved in a war themselves with possibly a bigger and more dangerous war than I was in, and I think of the way we have neighbours in Indonesia, millions of people that are fanatical people and we've only got a fine little stretch of water between us, and with the, there'd be nothing

39:00 to, you'd only need some disagreement between some little thing like Timor and we could find ourselves involved in a war where possibly some day enemy troops will land on Australia's shores and when we read what's happened in Bosnia and all those places, once the invading army gets on the shores of your country and

39:30 via the force of numbers and the fact that Australia is such a big place and you can drive in Australia once you get out of the cities and you wouldn't see a farmhouse within miles and miles of each other and you come to sheep stations where you go through the front gate in the morning and 5 o'clock in the afternoon you go through the rear gate at the back, and Australia is a big temptation to

40:00 any of the people that live around us, especially Indonesia, China, Japan. It's all possible that we would never have thought that Japan would've taken on America and that Australia would've been involved in the war. So that's one of my worries, for my grandsons, I especially hope that that won't happen to them some day.

OK,

40:30 **that’s it.**