

Australians at War Film Archive

Alfred Diggerson (Alf or Darky) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:39 **Okay, Alfred thank you for giving us the opportunity to interview you and what I wanted to ask from you today is specifically if you'd be able to provide me a brief outline of your life in terms of what your pre-war wartime and post-war in sections like that?**

Mhm.

Your life in those sections

Mhm.

And if you would be

01:00 **able to sort of like describe from the start as in where you were born, where you grew up, which school you attended and so forth and I'll try to guide you to help you through it.**

And I've got about fifteen minutes to fill in.

Oh well.

Thereabouts.

Fifteen minutes to half an hour.

No, I can do that I, that's the reason they dobbed me in I suppose. I can talk. Well to the best of my knowledge and according to my mother and my birth certificate I was born

01:30 in Albert Park and at six years of age we moved to Coburg, my Dad being an invalid at that particular stage we opened a music shop in Coburg. Later transferred it to a music shop in Sydney Road. My schooling started at the little school over the road at the infants school in Bell Street then we moved to the 484 Coburg State School to the, finished the fourth grade. I then, due to the,

02:00 partly to the Depression as I find out later I went to Ferntree Gully School and did my fifth and sixth schooling up there. Had to pass an entrance exam in those days to get into Coburg High which I achieved, I don't know how, but I did, and then came back to Coburg High where I stayed mostly with my grandmother. My grandmother at that stage and that helped me go through the school when I was at Coburg High. I got up at four o'clock with my grandmother, and did a paper round from Bell Street right up Sydney Road to the tram

02:30 [(UNCLEAR)] round come back and I can detail that later, come back and then go to bed and my grandmother wake me up and I'd go to high school at half past eight. Anyhow to cut I lived in Victoria Street [(UNCLEAR)], the old fire station was almost alongside us and the house we bought, they bought at that stage was the old stable yards big house brick house and the stable yards were behind.

And where was this again?

In Victoria Street just right next to the station. Our house is not there now. It's all car park for Safeway or whatever it was and went to school there and came

03:00 home and then I would do, sell papers on the corner of Bell Street and Sydney Road and finished my education. The war naturally had started and my older cousins and people around me had all gone and I and a lot of others were just anxious to go. I was fortunate enough that I didn't finish my matric [Matriculation] or anything, I had a job given to me at Lowe Hemmingway and Sons in Brunswick, the tobacco people. I was lucky to get the job. It was the only job I had till the, I went into a family business.

What sort of a job was it?

03:30 Eh?

What sort of a job did you say it was?

A traveller. Traveller at Lowe Hemmingway and Sons. And then done my apprenticeship there, if you want to call that. I was told I was put with the hardest boss in the world and they said, "If you make it there you make it anywhere." I did apparently. I was responsible for sending the cigarettes and sweets and cakes to the troops that were overseas, so I had a knowledge of what was going on. I made sure then when I went I got mine. I put my name on the list. That was the days of then

04:00 schooling finished, going to there. I then went away with the war in 1942, June '42 brief grace till they found out that I had a driving licence. The reason that I had my driving licence there was a car in the family since 1930 cause Dad had a, he manipulated, he could only use a hand brake and a power steering thing like that and at work at Hemmingways they'd lost all their drivers and two of us had got licensed at seventeen to drive cause they'd had no one to drive. That enabled

04:30 us to join up because we had driving licences, didn't we? So when I did go I got shot straight to Bendigo and not even an eighteen year old boy became an instructor teaching other people how to drive. There was cars and trucks and Bren gun carriers. That led me on to doing a motor mechanics course, which they took us down to Richmond Tech, Caulfield Tech then to South Australia where we finished our motor mechanic course. Then we were posted back, we at one stage, we thought we were going to the Middle East. These young kids but we didn't. We finished up going to

05:00 Puckapunyal where I became an instructor again because I could drive and that and that was with tanks and everything like that. Eventually posted back and did our jungle training at Canungra Jungle Training School.

That's in Queensland, isn't it?

In Queensland, yes I can tell you the highlights of that but never mind. Went from there we were then drafted to our unit which was getting ready at Southport under Brigadier Macarthur-Onslow the famous bloke to sail away and eventually we did sail on the Duntroon.

05:30 We went to, landed at New Guinea at Madang just out of Madang at Alex Harbour [Alexishafen] at a coconut plantation that was between Madang and and Alex Harbour where the naval base was. Set up shop there, if you want to put it that way. Later on C Squadron went to Aitape and Wewak. Remaining behind there was A Squadron, B Squadron and headquarters, which I was involved with, and then B Squadron went to Bougainville then later on A Squadron and our

06:00 headquarter squadron we went over to Bougainville also. I became part of advanced headquarters moving down in Bougain[ville] from Torokina and moving down the Buin track. One thing led to another and all those skirmishes blah blah. Eventually the end of the war came. I, being single, and not having enough points to come home, cause you had to be married to get double points and that was when you left the service, I got shot, our unit was a small party went to Rabaul for the war trials

06:30 and we were on top a war trials at Tunnel Hill where the Japanese had all surrendered in their thousands. How they didn't run over us I don't know but the Emperor had said, "Give in, that was it," you know and from then on we eventually, we got home or when I did get home this the war finished in '45 and let's face it, I'm looking at '47. I got home and my uncle who was in charge of the RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] at Broadmeadows, he was a colonel at that stage,

07:00 claimed me. You could do that in those days but they wouldn't let me go for Royal Park and I had to go to Murchison. When I got to Murchison the colonel there wanted to know what my, what I had that my uncle wanted me. He said, "Well what do you do?" I said, "I'll be near home, won't I?" and the he said, "Well, I'll give you anything your uncle'll give you." He said, "You look after the transport section here," which was looking after the POWs [Prisoners of War] and the AAC and he said, "You drive me down to Melbourne every Friday afternoon and bring me back Tuesday morning." So I every weekend I

07:30 was fortunate enough to come to Melbourne and have my leave which is a lot bigger, better privileges than others got. I then re-married, South Australian girl.

What year did you get married?

'46.

So almost immediately after you were demobbed?

After I was still in uniform. I was still in uniform.

Oh, you were okay.

Still in uniform. There are probably photos somewhere but I wouldn't have that. Back and then my firm would drive me silly, the fact that, "When are you

08:00 coming back? How long can you keep the job?" and cause I was a bit anxious the fact that well how long they'd keep me job because under the Veteran Entitlements Act as you realised later they had to take you back and cutting a long story short I was, uncle brought me down to Sturt Street and I was offered my captaincy and I knocked it back cause my, I thought I'd be better off staying with my firm go back to my firm, which I did and I'm not sorry I knocked it back because had I taken that I would have gone to Korea.

08:30 I could be dead now, so life was good to me that way.

Mm.

Getting back to my firm I went back there, I was welcomed with open arms because there was a lot of new staff taken on and I was a young fellow, had worked there pre-war, so I had some clues to what was going on and I was lucky enough that to implement some certain decisions for that firm in many ways I can enlighten on later. I then

09:00 became relieving traveller when all the travellers went on holidays to, cause I was the only one that knew the whole area as I did in those days. I then became the, they wanted liaison between inside and outside staff and I became appointed by the travellers to represent them inside, which I did. I had the privilege helping set up their two-way radio sections for to contact all their trucks and vehicles and that was an application that had been made pre-war for two-way wirelasses that the police didn't have then and to our Hemmingways, two advanced

09:30 gentlemen had been to America and seen these and they wanted that and they couldn't get them. They could only get one-way to start with. So eventually I was then elected social secretary of the firm. I became office manager and then down the track the firm was taking, getting to be taken over by the big firm HWDI Wills WH and DWI Wills and Picketts was another firm and I decided it was an opportunity to go into the family business, which is up here in Kent Road, the supermarket

10:00 up here with my mother and father and my brother. I chose that. I was lucky. I was the only one that ever left that firm with a reference to go and be re-employed at any stage, I so desired and I got my full superannuation from them.

Okay.

Ah I used to do a lot of work for them, then I'd been doing in those days, you were doing a yearly monthly balance sheet for the office and everything and I, they'd come in and say, "Well you'd better get this done," and I'd say, "What, what's on earth this?" and they'd say, "Oh this has got to be done for Rotary." And that was Rotary in those days and been formed by

10:30 Coburg and Rot Coburg and Brunswick Rotary was formed from Essendon, Melbourne to Essendon, Essendon to Coburg and Brunswick was a combination then Coburg eventually became [(UNCLEAR)] and they exist today as Brunswick that do themselves and Coburg's the father of the Pascoe Vale one, once I was charter secretary of.

Mm.

But I used to have to do all this work for Rotary and I said, "Wait on." They said, "Oh you've gotta get this done. There's a place down there known as the Dandenong [(UNCLEAR)] kindergarten." I think it should have been called after me. I did all the bloody work excuse the expression but it was good and I enjoyed it and then later having got in the business I found myself

11:00 being asked to join Rotary.

Okay.

That's thirty five years ago.

Right.

And having gone on from that I was then treasurer of the RSL [Returned and Services League] and then later become CEO [Chief Executive Officer]. I become a life member of the RSL twenty five years ago, ah.

So you seem to have a very esteemed sort of

Ah

Contribution to the community here.

Oh I've had the highest award Rotary can give me. I'm a Paul Harris Fellow and I enjoy what I do and am still doing cause I think there's a lot of people today, we must keep our grey matter going.

Yeah.

And not become stagnant.

Mm. Good,

11:30 **good.**

Is that a brief outline of

That's you're, briefer than I am, I'd say. No that's wonderful, thank you. How can I say, let's now I'd like to sort of go back now and what you've already sort of outlined in your introduction and okay, so you grew up in Coburg?

Yes.

Right. That's very interesting

Bell Street, Waterfield Street, Coburg ah, Victoria Street. All that little hub right around the Safeway store now.

I see okay.

12:00 And then they, the homes are not there now, they're gone.

Yeah it's also an area very familiar to me as well.

Yes.

So now I'd like to get okay to your initial, what, where did you say you were born again?

Albert Park, South Melbourne.

No, what year were you born sorry?

'24.

'24 okay. Now your background, your family's background, where did your as far as ethnic background is concerned, was your father Anglo Saxon?

Yes.

Your mother Anglo Saxon?

Yes.

Right.

And it goes

12:30 right back. Grandfather, my great grandfather was the captain of a ship that come here and goes right back, yeah.

Okay, so you said to me that your father was an invalid. He wasn't

Yes.

Capable of serving in the First World War?

No, he wanted, he couldn't, no.

He couldn't.

No.

Okay.

Cause he had to walk with the aid of two sticks.

I see. Did

But the same bloke could walk from the Ferntree Gully Station up the hill. It'd take him an hour and a half to get there and it took us a quarter of an hour

Mm.

And he'd always get, arrive, I realised later as you get older and you

13:00 realise that it took him that long and took us and go going back he'd walk he'd start off an hour early and get down there was just the fortitude that some of our older people had and particularly our First [World] War veterans. The fortitude they had is just unreal but I used to wonder why my father sat down to chop wood. It took me a long while to realise he couldn't stand up.

Mm.

He had to sit down with a tomahawk and took, it takes you awhile to realise these things, yeah.

What about your mother?

My mother, very interesting.

13:30 A magnificent woman. Born very deaf and in middle age life we found the fact that she could be operated to restore her hearing in one ear and then the other and then told she would eventually lose it. She did eventually in the, in her eighties she lost her hearing and then she lost her sight and my mother knew, could always say, "Son, I know you can hear me, understand me, listen to me," and then to answer her I would write on her hand. You know "I Y-O-U" and communicate that way.

14:00 **Okay.**

Magnificent woman that she was able to look at my father. My father also operated his own business cause no one'd insure him and the story was while he could get run over crossing the road. He used to say, "I can't cross the road until I'm sure I can get across." He had his own music shop. He had his own dance band, playing the piano. There's a pianola there too, you'll see. My other brother's got the piano. He had his own string band and during the war he was,

14:30 he and ah Jack Anderson from Bell Hosiery here in by the next Nightingale Hosiery and Lincoln Mills ran what they call the concert party, which operated from Melbourne Town Hall, Heidelberg. I actually sang there too but don't ask me to sing now. That was the type of thing my mother, she was a magnificent woman to be able to do what she did for my father and you don't realise that until you get older that you realise.

15:00 **How many brothers and sisters did you have?**

One brother. Younger.

Younger. How much younger?

Ten years nine years, nearly ten.

Oh I see.

Yeah.

Oh okay.

So I was when I went away at seventeen or eighteen, call it what you like, he went, would have been only nine. Hadn't even hit Coburg High. When he did they said, "Not another Diggerson coming there." So cause we were both shocking at French and why they started to teach us French in

15:30 those days I'll never understand but no that's right, so when I did come home, so I never got home till I was twenty three and in that period of time cause I couldn't get out and I got home in after 1946 to be married

Mm.

But never got out of it till 1947.

Now what's your religious background? You're Protestant?

Protestant.

Protestant, I see.

Presbyterian, if you want to be technical. Uniting Church as they call it but that means nothing to me because you learnt in the army that you would have a church service and it doesn't matter whether you're

16:00 Catholic, Anglican, what else you had it whether it be a priest or a minister give it, you all had that little quiet church service together. It never interfered with us and it's never interfered with any sense.

Mm. Okay, that's interesting. I'll, I'd like probably to come back to that.

That's all right.

Yeah, that's a very interesting point. Now you went to Coburg Primary School, I understand?

Yes. Yes. 484.

Yes and can you tell us about that? What was it like at the time?

Well you always got the cuts,

16:30 didn't you if you did something wrong. Down to the headmaster's office and get one yeah but oh playing cherry bobs in the, up against the wall. Well in those days you didn't have the things they got to play with today and cherry bobs and those type of things were the games we played

Mm.

But I was there for the, up to the, went away for grade five and six to Ferntree Gully.

Mhm.

But no, they happy recollections but ah, but as I said I

17:00 now cross to Ferntree Gully, well with forty in the school.

Mhm.

It was quite a different, I used to have to walk down the hill over the railway line up the hill and down there to go to school. Now everyone drives to school and that's why they've got too many cars on the road and that's why the kids can't be looked after. We looked after ourselves, it wasn't, didn't worry if

there was a snake on the path, you jumped around it and things like that. You soon learnt you know. When I went to a church up there I was sent to an Anglican, a high Anglican church cause there was no

17:30 Protestant or no Presbyterian church anywhere near. That's when I, oh when that's when I learnt Catholicism, is it yeah at

So your memory's probably still fairly good in that area

Oh.

About your youth is it?

Yes, yes.

So maybe it's around that period where you may have come, what's your experience with coming across World War I veterans? Did you know of any, did your brother, did your father have

Oh yes.

Brothers or

I had oh, I had yes, yes oh my uncle was in the first, my uncle was in,

18:00 my Dad's brother was in the First World War. Navy.

Navy.

Yeah at and he went in young and at the end of the war too. That's strange that and then he was the one that put me on my way, when I come home cause I'm a Freemason and proud of it and I've been, I've got a certificate somewhere, oh fifty years service or something and proud of it because once again a lot of people get the wrong idea of those things. Too much bias in a lot

18:30 of things in today I think, some of us leave, learn, leaving us a little bit. Be a bit more tolerant of other faiths and other ideas and things like that, I don't know but no he was there but that was where I got it. I remember living in Waterfield Street Coburg, which is still there now, which is where Coles is at the present time in Coles, that's where we had the house. It was the back of the shop in Sydney Road and shop in Sydney Road's next door to a chemist shop.

Mm.

19:00 And it was Haddon's Chemist and one of those girls is married to a friend, a mate a mine lives just down here, Ray Jenner, and she used to go away to Ferntree Gully with us and for holidays in the car and she's still in Probus as I am now

I see.

At, next to us there was living a family named Bell and I didn't realise at the time till I come home and I went to a reunion of the 2/4th Armoured Regiment and they had a

19:30 the [(UNCLEAR)] history goes back to the 2/4th Armoured Regiment and I'm diversifying now that I'm transgressing and going backwards. The 2/4th Armoured Regiment and its history, it's probably the longest serving unit in the Australian Army because it goes back pre-war, the Boer War, 4th Light Horse. The 4th Light Horse were the only Light Horse to serve in the Middle East, Gallipoli and France. They were the only one that went everywhere. They became the 2/4th Armoured Regiment. Today, it is still carried on and is known as the 2nd as the 4/19th Prince of Wales

20:00 Light Horse[(UNCLEAR)] at Watsonia, so the affiliation right through but this reunion old Mr Bell's there and I looked at him cause he had me frightened when I was a kid. He had one girl I used to chase and about five brothers that used to kill me if I looked at her but and he said, "What are doing here young Darcy?" Darcy was the nickname. I don't know why and

He used to call you Darcy?

Yeah, I don't know what it is. I got this nickname, I don't know.

In primary school was this?

No, no. I don't know what they called me in primary school. I really wouldn't know.

20:30 **Oh you're saying this is after the war?**

Yeah, yeah.

Sorry, yes.

Yeah and of course he was from the 4th Light Horse and he would, they used, we used to bring representatives that were still alive along to our reunion cause it was a, the continuation of the Gideons and their battle honours are altogether right through at Watsonia.

Oh I see.

That's all the battle honours carried through forward.

Were there any men, so he was in the 4th Light Horse that served in France and Gallipoli and all that?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, he was the next door neighbour actually.

Right. So he lived in Coburg as well?

Yeah next door to me in Waterfield

21:00 Street, yeah.

So he, what was the atmosphere like in Coburg, I suppose amongst, well say

During the war?

In your school, no Second World War but before that, what was the sort of feeling towards the World War I vets who served from Coburg?

We would not, in my, we were not taught much of it. I don't know why. There was so much English. So much United Kingdom

21:30 if you want to put it that way, that our own got sort of left behind and it's only in these later years they've started to teach a little bit about First War and even the Second World War now, it's I don't know why we've got that. It was never, not related too much. Coburg RSL were there, they used to meet in the Coburg Town Hall before they now in Sydney Road of course but they used to meet at the Coburg Town Hall at those stage in a little room just on the right of the entrance.

Now there was a roll of honour created for

Yes. Yeah.

Coburg Primary School.

Yeah.

Was that around

22:00 **when you were there in the '30s?**

Yeah.

What, did it have any meaning? What did they do on Remembrance Day?

Well we used to have a service but of course it was called Armistice Day then, not Commemoration Day. It was Armistice Day. That was the old empire cause that's [(UNCLEAR)], they've changed it since of course but then we weren't taught much of our history as we, I felt now that we should have been and I think our young ones today should be taught more of the history of our land in particular.

So when you met people from the Light Horse like in the instance of Mr Bell and he used to bring all

22:30 **veterans from the Light Horse**

Yeah, yeah.

How did you view soldiers from the Light Horse when you were younger before the war or after the war?

Didn't really know much about 'em.

What about after the war?

After the war we had a great appreciation of what they musta went through cause they went through far harder times than we did. Far harder.

Did you have a lot of respect for them?

Oh yes. Great respect because I realised as you get older you look back and realise that it was, there was oh Lawrence, a son of my friend, has just

23:00 come back from Gallipoli. He went, his father, a returned man, died since. He and his wife just come back from Gallipoli and what got him was the fact that talking to him yesterday at the hospital is the fact that kids twelve and fourteen year old, their graves are there from the First World War. Australians. Twelve and fourteen year old. There wasn't too many of them in the Second World War cause they had greater control over our age, didn't they? But these boys would come from the bush and they'd be brought up and they look after themselves and they took everybody.

23:30 Twelve and fourteen year old at Gallipoli, there are headstones to 'em from the First World War and he's come back Lawrence, has come back with a greater appreciation, he says, "You don't realise till you go

there, you hear about it but it's not till you see and you twelve year old, fourteen year old, eighteen year old, twenty year old," then he said, "Alongside you see forty year old, forty two year old." The difference in the generation, they were fighting the one cause. Staggering isn't it?

The respect you had for the people who served in the First World War, was it more

24:00 **like an appreciation in a sense, like you looked at them like fathers almost?**

Oh without a doubt yes, they were the father, that was that, what was I gonna say? Our own horizons were set on them to a greater respect. They were the upper echelon that we would look and refer to and adhere to too, yeah.

So what did Anzac mean to you before the war?

Oh

Say the

24:30 **late '30s.**

Just the fact that the men had gone to Gallipoli and fought. Men had gone to France and fought and there'd been a lot of gas and Simpson and his donkey and things like that ah got to yeah. That was all.

Was there a spirit? Was there something?

Oh there was a spirit there. There was definitely Australian spirit there and even today I've spoken to as you say to your school there and the other ones and that I still felt that if something happened today

25:00 our younger generation would rise to the occasion. I, there are a lot of them, criticise 'em. I don't. I think they would come out of the woodwork really cause I refer to them all as, "The silent majority," cause everything happens today, whether your polls are taken of, on a view of something, whether the churches take a view on something, the Logies as recently as last night and they get the Logies. Who voted? Did you? You did?

For the Logies?

For the Logies yeah. No I, did you? Did I? No. So it's only a

25:30 a pressure group that provides a point and then you become the winner of a Logie. Is that really what had been done if the thing, if you get a true representation when there's an election or a referendum. That's about the only time. The churches I blame the same way. They get up and say something. Have they ever discussed it with you or I as parishioners?

Mm.

No, that's their point of view, not the view of the parishioners. Sometimes they might be right, other times they might be wrong. I feel for our present Governor-General. You can throw the mud

26:00 but it, what happens? It's all proved in the finish, most times it's nothing but the mud's been thrown and sticks in the first place, doesn't it? I feel really sorry for him. Oh yes he might have been problem earlier with, he's overlooked something, I don't know but his latest one were forty years later to be accused of something and I heard another bishop get up and say that he was at Toorak. How could he be up there at the same time?

Mm.

But never mind but it was that we had a definite respect for them. We used to watch the march in those local marches from Coburg and things like

26:30 that.

Can you tell me what the marches were like in Coburg at the time? When you used to see the Anzac Day marches?

Not as

What was the atmosphere?

Yeah, not pop yeah revered and very quiet. All almost solemn right? Whereas today I think there's more pomp and pageantry to it and I think there's greater respect for it well due to that.

What do you mean solemn?

Well reverent you know, like almost churchy. You'd go quiet. There was none of this

27:00 cheer and clapping hands that I can remember, no.

So you're saying there was almost something very

Revered.

Sad about it all?

Yes, yes, whereas today the likes of the particularly even our POWs and I've been associated with a few and there's one mate still alive, I could tell you a story about him too, and I took him down to your school at St Josephs and you I don't know if you were there when it happened but that's another thing I could talk about too but when he was they all asked for questions, they were all sitting over the floor and I've never forgotten that. I had navy, army, air force.

- 27:30 I covered the army and he was a POW and he was asked what was his most horrific experience he's seen? He said, "Seeing my mates beheaded in front of me." Another young bloke got up and said, "What was your most frightening experience?" and he'd been told, "I was next day. The next day it was me." There's a difference between horrific and frightening.

So how many veterans would have marched on Anzac Day when you remembered? Like what was the estimate there?

Oh I couldn't tell you the numbers in town.

- 28:00 I wouldn't know.

A few hundred would you roughly estimate?

Oh yeah, oh it'd be more than that in the main march, oh Anzac House'd give you those figures. They've got all the reference back to there but the marches today straight after the war they were very big but my own unit like where we would have had thirty or forty marching here, we're lucky to get ten or twelve. They've all passed away or they can't march. Time's going.

So what was, what made you enlist? I mean

- 28:30 **of course there was the war, there was conscription and all that but before that were you involved in any militia unit?**

No, ah no my uncle I, if I admired my uncle. He was a member of the 5th Scottish pre-war and I used to watch him come in his kilts and thing and I sort of had an ambition at that stage I wouldn't mind joining the Scottish regiment. Yeah I had a little knowledge that way and of course he become involved. My cousins become involved. Jack got killed and

They went in the Second World War you're saying?

Yeah, yeah.

I see.

- 29:00 Cousins and they were all older than me and I thought it was just a fact that I thought it was the thing you should do and go and we all went together.

So what

When

Sorry to sorry

Go on.

I wanted to ask you what Empire meant to you?

Empire meant Britain. It was, that was it. Empire was basically Britain.

Not Australia?

Not, not

Not to you?

Not, yeah Empire was Empire was that, was the mother country. We hadn't really then

- 29:30 acknowledged the fact that we'd come of age through Gallipoli. Like Gallipoli happened but it wasn't straight the next year that the Gallipoli really come to light, is it? It's down the track that Gallipoli's come to light and realise the suffering that people these people went through and as Lawrence was saying, to see how they got out of there, ah from Gallipoli and the ingenuity they went through to get out, it's just unreal. He said, "You had to see it. It's all right, nice to see it now," and he said

- 30:00 "And the regard the Turks have got for Australians is just unreal."

Which school did you go to after Coburg Primary School?

Coburg High.

Coburg High?

Yeah. If all the school was, the quadrangle says, "If all the school was just like me, what kind of school would this school be?" It's still there I believe if they haven't wrecked it yet.

So Coburg was like a working class area at the time?

Yes.

Yes, okay. Now

The gaol was the pivotal point, it wasn't Pentridge.

Pentridge, of course.

Yes and the trams stopped at

30:30 stopped at, oh as a kid I believe it stopped at Moreland Road and a horse-drawn tram went up Sydney Road and then the tram eventually finished at Bell Street. Not where it finishes now so

Were there many cars at the time?

No. No.

Very few.

Oh well Dad had a car. 1930 Chev and there wasn't many cars around I'll tell you, no. Not like it is today, no. No way knowing. Yeah. A car was a luxury to those that could have one.

So can you explain to me what Coburg High was like at the time when you were there?

31:00 Ah very proud. Very proud.

Working class boys?

Yes, yes. There was I think if you'd been money, oh how can I put this? I've got to be careful haven't I? If you'd been monified you might have gone to University High or Melbourne High mightn't you but there was only Coburg, Melbourne University, Geelong, Dandenong. There wasn't many high schools around [(UNCLEAR)] and my greatest loss was the fact that I was

31:30 picked to play in the football side to go and go and play Geelong and Dandenong in a, I got the measles. It broke my heart. I thought, "I'll never ever have a game of football again," but that I did get a game of football again, yes but no very proud. Very, we were very proud of our school. We were segregated.

What do you mean segregated?

The girls went one side, the boys the other.

Oh okay. So it was co-ed?

Oh yes, no yeah but co girls one side and boys the other. Girls toilet, boys toilet. A fence down the centre and I got

32:00 into trouble cause I gave a girl a box of chocolates. I saved me money up from tips for selling papers and I gave this girl, it's hilarious this that this girl happened to be Betty Wilson, that's my other half now, and her maiden name was Wilson, Betty Wilson. That's strange isn't it, but it wasn't the same girl and I got into trouble giving her a box of chocolates over the fence trying to find out if I could walk her home, but it was segregated. The state school wasn't but the high school was.

Okay but of course, classes, in class it was different?

In class it was mixed yeah.

Mixed, okay.

Yeah.

32:30 **So how would you interact with girls at that when you were, I presume you were, what year did you actually leave school? High school?**

1941.

How old were you at the time? Sorry when I said year, I meant like year level. Like was it year eight, year nine?

No, no year, oh matric, is it? Yeah, yeah.

Okay.

There was sorry leaving honours. In those days you did your merit at state school then you did

33:00 your intermediate, leaving, honours and then matric but it's all changed now, so I left at the leaving honour stage then.

I see.

Cause I had a chance to get a job and my family couldn't support me to go, that's why I went. I had a

chance to go to a job.

So your family, this would have been during the Depression years as well, wouldn't it?

Basically, yeah.

Yeah. So were they finding it very difficult, your family?

Yeah, oh yes cause I my grandmother'd wake me up in the morning to do the paper round, I've never forgotten it now. It'd be a bit of bread and dripping and condensed milk and coffee

33:30 in a tin. Spoonful a that and away I'd go. I'd come back and go to bed and she'd wake me up to go to high school and there'd be another piece of bread and dripping and condensed milk and coffee in the thing and a, that's why I don't like my coffee now, but I still like tea and a beer but

What about the traditions of Coburg High? You said it was a very proud school.

Very proud, yeah.

Now I'd assume that there would have been a lot of Catholic boys there as well?

Yes because some, they didn't go to that high class. The St Paul's for example didn't go to

34:00 that grade, not if my memory's right, but I lived in Waterfield Street and I was the only Protestant in a Catholic street and

So Coburg was a predominantly Catholic area, was it?

No, I wouldn't say predominantly, it's just one of those things. [(UNCLEAR)] it had a fair size Catholic yeah.

Even mixture of both you're saying.

Yep, yeah.

Okay. Well how was Anzac portrayed in Coburg High?

Only with a service on Anzac Day or prior to Anzac Day yeah. Little bit of a talk'd be given to you about Gallipoli and blah blah blah

34:30 but nothing to what the education you get today on World War I or World War II.

Did the Catholic boys there have any sort of resistance or

No, no.

Opposite view?

No, no. No, when you talk about Catholics like I said I was the only Protestant in a Catholic street and two or my best mates are Joey Bell who's just died and Vin Kagan who are both returned soldiers.

So, it didn't matter to you

No.

[(UNCLEAR)] differences at all?

No, no not then. Not then and it didn't during the war.

Mm.

Still doesn't.

35:00 That's the beauty about Probus. Non-sectarian. Non-profit making, everything. Non-political, everything.

Do you think now, speaking now that the Catholic Protestant sort of division which was there very strongly in the First World War, do you think in the richer schools that would have been the case?

I think so, that's why you had your Scots College and you had your Xavier. Don't you worry about that.

What was your view of Melbourne Grammar and University High? What did you think of at the time

35:30 **that is?**

Ah well, another mate of mine went to University High and he was no better off than I was in education but just that I think it was a fact of, "Oh I must get to University High." "My boy must go to Xavier," or, "My girl [(UNCLEAR)]." I felt the education system that way, that day in those days was very, very good no matter where you were and as I say the religion-wise it didn't really worry us. We rode bikes as kids in bike races and they were

36:00 both, they were of all religions. We went, rode, went to dances and you would never really see a fight in those days between Catholic and Protestant or something, no.

No divisions?

No, I didn't strike it now. You might have some, mighta had someone yelling out to you know, "You're a rotten Catholic," or, "You're a dirty bloody Protestant," or something but no, not really, no cause Joey and I remained friends as kids right throughout the years and so did Vin, and still have.

So how did you view the middle class upper class sort of schools? Did you see them as being snobs?

36:30 To a sense, yes.

Why?

Eh?

Why is that?

Well, they didn't want to mix and the families, the parents oh you'd look back now and it'd be the parents didn't want them to mix. They were the ones that were creating the snobs cause when you joined the army you were down to one level unless you were lucky enough to have been through in the cadets or something and come out with a lieutenant or a captain you know, whether something like that you know.

So was there a cadetting tradition

37:00 **at Coburg High?**

No.

None?

No, no, but there was at Melbourne High.

Of course.

Yeah.

Did they have any pictures of boys from Coburg High who served in the First World War? Was Coburg High around in the First World War mind you? Was it around then or did it come after?

Come after.

Was it?

I'm pretty sure it come after.

Okay.

Check that with Pat anyway.

What memorabilia did they [(UNCLEAR)] put up in the school?

Wasn't much.

Anything military?

No.

Nothing at all?

Not much at all. No.

So there was no

37:30 **strong military indoctrination?**

Not really, no.

That's very interesting.

Mm.

Cause Melbourne Grammar was quite the opposite. Very strong military traditions.

Yeah cause they had the cadets.

Why didn't you have cadets? Why didn't your school have cadets?

I don't know. That's something I couldn't answer.

And how big was Coburg High then at the time? Like student wise. How many students?

Oh there'd have to be several hundred there.

Several hundred.

Yeah, just wasn't a hundred. There was more

38:00 than that.

And you had to wear a uniform as well did you or was it just

Yes, yeah we were all in uniform. Not as it is today, anyone wear's anything, though some of the places have still got the uniforms. The girl's school up here's still under what's her name? She's, they've still got their uniforms and I think it was a good thing really.

Okay now I want to move on towards the Depression. Now tell me how that, I'm obviously it was a, you know very bitter experience for many Australians who were especially in the working class.

Yeah.

38:30 **How did it affect your family?**

You don't realise you're in a Depression till you got older and realised what it was because you just took what was given to you. You took the bread and the dripping. You took the, you ate at a bare table, wooden table without any tablecloth and the butter come in tins if you're lucky to get butter. The jam come in big tins. There was no glamorised sort of crockery or anything around you. You realised later what it was and I can remember my grandfather and grandmother

39:00 coming up to Ferntree Gully when I was going to school there bringing a lot of goodies with them. It wasn't till I got older I realised what it was cause that was that, he was a wharfie and he used to get a few goodies.

Your grandfather was a wharfie, was he?

Yeah, yeah.

Did he get paid well? Wharfies at the time?

Reasonably well yeah,

Okay.

Reasonably well, yeah.

Now I understand your dad had a shop at the time, didn't he?

Yes, he had to go in his own business because, cause no one'd employ him, so he

A music shop?

Music shop, yep.

Did he make reasonable money?

Well he kept living a, kept a living out of it because he taught at the same time. Taught the piano and taught string instruments as well

39:30 as having his own band.

And when you say make a living, were you saying that you were still struggling?

Well there was no real luxuries.

No luxuries at all?

No and

And it was just you and your brother, that's all.

Yeah as I say, well he was a baby when I was doing the paper round.

Was it expensive to go to Coburg High at the time? What was the charge for school fees?

I don't think there was any charge. I thought our high schools were completely free then.

Oh okay.

I'm pretty sure. I don't

No I think you're right.

I wouldn't have paid anything. No.

No, you are right on that, that's right, yes.

Yeah.

State schools were

40:00 **always.**

Yeah.

Was there a big difference between private and state schools in the terms of mentality of people? Like yourself, you said you saw Melbourne Grammar and University High as being snobbish.

No, I don't really, it could be but I don't really think so. I think the fact if you'd had a, in those days a high school education you were thought, everyone sort of thought you had an education you know what I mean and not been deprived.

Okay, we're gonna have to stop there because of the tape running out

Tape 2

00:31 **Well, right um now you were talking before just about your schooling experience at Coburg High, okay. Now I wanted to know ah what took place in your mind when the war started. Okay you heard about war beginning with Germany and Menzies' famous speech**

Mhm. Mm.

Where were you at the time?

01:00 1939. Coburg High.

Coburg High.

Yeah.

How old were you then?

I'm guessing now, fifteen. Yeah, fourteen, fifteen.

Fifteen, right. What went through your mind at the time? Can you tell us?

Yes, a sense of, a sense of fear. Just what was gonna happen and then you realise that what was going on. You got the news and the fact that the they were enlisting and away they were going and the mother country England

01:30 called for support and Australians were going and then what came the blackouts as they call it and brownouts, where all the windows were papered up with, all the windows were painted up with paper, so the lights wouldn't get out and we were here, as you realise now, we, it wasn't gonna affect us then, it took a long while to get [(UNCLEAR)] to come down here you know. A certain amount of fear and trepidation. When we did, when I did join up a lot of us, I wouldn't be the only one with families battling,

02:00 and we went into what six bob a day, was it sort of thing, we were giving Mum I think it was six and six. I think Mum got three and six a day sent to her and I got three bob. Kept in my army account. You sort of still supported your family even though you weren't there and then you weren't, they weren't feeding you and you were still looking after your family. That was a sense there but that's back at school there, yeah little, yeah just trying to understand.

So you weren't really sure what was going on?

No,

02:30 no not really sure.

How did your parents react to it?

Worried cause they thought all those days had gone. That the Great War had finished everything, there was going to be no more wars but to their amazement there's gonna be another war. The war to end all war, ah my Mum and Dad didn't have any objection to me going.

They didn't?

No.

Were they supportive?

Yes, very supportive and Dad knew through the RSL it was very supportive.

03:00 They had what they call the Dad's association. They worked hard for all the boys that were away and all the troops and did lots of things, yeah. They were very supportive but we

What about your uncle?

Oh he'd gone.

He'd, dead?

Oh he's dead now, yeah.

No, I mean what at the time he was alive, wasn't he?

Oh yes, yes.

So he was he enlisted?

He was one of the first he, yeah he went from the 5th Scottish. Away he went the [(UNCLEAR)] as I say he finished up a colonel, finished up a brigadier.

Oh I see.

Yeah.

Brigadier.

Yeah, but

03:30 then as I say then I remember cousin Jack went and he got killed, ah Mick went

How old was your cousin, I'm sorry?

He would, oh I would, he woulda been twenty when he was killed. Mick woulda been twenty one when he was killed. They were older than me.

Where did they die?

Mick died in Syria, ah where did Jack die? Middle East somewhere, mm. As I said you come home and you realise your cousins had been killed,

04:00 [(UNCLEAR)] think well you know, "What was it? We'll go we'll fix these bludgers up. We're gonna stem the tide, we'll all go you know." There was no hesitation.

Were you close to your cousin?

Yes. Yeah.

You grew up with him.

I looked up to them, yes.

Yep.

I looked up to him actually.

So how was the, that was pretty early in the war, wasn't it? I mean

Yeah that's '39. I was still at school.

Yeah.

They're gone. They're gone.

They're gone to the Middle East, they would have gone with the 2/23rd and

All those battalions, yeah.

9th

04:30 **division.**

No, 6th division. They woulda, Mick went away with the 6th division and that's the first division that went away

The 9th came a bit later. Sorry my apologies.

Yeah, the 9th became the Rats of Tobruk, yeah. The 8th division went to Malaya. That's the one where most of the POWs came in.

So when this news came back of their death and the defeat of France

Mm.

How did your parents react to all this?

I can remember Mum and Dad couldn't understand that the Maginot line or whatever it was put up and it was supposed to be and it wasn't worth a crumplet. They went over

05:00 the top and around it. It [(UNCLEAR)] it didn't mean a thing. What looked to be a lovely secure barrier wasn't worth a piece of toast and the French still today, there's a, French in a lot of respects are still not trusted. That's right up to today and you gotta

By who?

By the United Nations, by people in the services. There were a lot of good French. There was a lot of but you just you just talk and you know they're a bit, always a bit wary of some of the French. Dunno

05:30 why.

Now you said your cousin Mick

Mm.

He died in Syria?

Yeah.

Right, now that was fighting against the Vichy French?

Yep.

So what did you think about the Vichy French? Is one of your

Well, what could you think then? At that stage as I say I'm only fifteen, aren't I? You just got some good opinions I suppose when you're young that age but no we're, I suppose our interest then was basically in our sport and once we did our schooling, did our paperwork and that and if we could kick a paper

06:00 football in Victoria Street by the station there or play cricket with a wooden bat and a ball we were in business and we were lucky enough to save up and get a bike and bike ride. That was our outlet and it was a pleasure even though there was a war going on. I'd say at fifteen we had no ambition, did, I don't think any of us woulda really thought of joining up. You had to get a little bit more mature I suppose.

So you joined up in 1942.

Mm.

How many of your friends went with you from Coburg High?

06:30 Ah about three that I can remember.

Were you all close mates?

Reasonably, yes and still oh one in particular Doug's still alive now, Doug and I finished up playing cricket and football at Coburg High and we finished up playing cricket with the RSL together and local competition and we had a lot in common, you know. Doug is now an organist for the Lodge. Does a lot of work like that way you know. Ah he's also,

07:00 oh he was secretary too through one of the First War units where his father was in and I got, even got a mate now that Neville, he's the secretary for the 2/27, I think it is battalion and he does all the secretarial work for them from the Second World War, yeah.

So 1942 comes along, what was the atmosphere in Coburg during the war? Early stages of the war?

07:30 Atmosphere? Well they would have all someone in along the line would have, woulda had someone away that they would be concerned about and places were all blacked out sort of business. Ah, they think they're gonna, mighta got bombed or thing, we were a long way away. They were all concerned, they all worked hard ah for a cause, ah as far as the troops concerned in their own little way. The RSLs in particular with the fathers and mothers

08:00 and that. The auxiliaries were formed and Betty that's in hospital now, she's been secretary of this RSL auxiliary down there for thirty years. Still working for it for selling poppies and selling tokens. They were doing all these things but they worked for their, for the services in some respect and they comfort, it was called the comfort.

Times must have been hard in Coburg.

Oh they

Rationing.

They weren't, oh and the rationing came in the war, yeah and that and I came home after the war, the war

- 08:30 rationing was still going on in '47. I think I'm right, '46, '47 had coupons and things like that for butter and that cause I was lucky then in the position I was in the firm I was with because cigarettes were rationed, tobacco was rationed but there was always some over, so I was able to manipulate that, I could always get tea and coffee and sugar and butter, providing they had cigarettes. Beer was always, was rationed too and if we had a function at the Brunswick Club, the Club's still there today, Brunswick Club. Now they want, they
- 09:00 might want a function, they say, "I want cigarettes," so I'd make sure cigarettes would get there but then I'd come back with six dozen beers for the boys, wouldn't I? Talk about a wheeler and dealer. The, ah my boss used to bowl in those days with the bowling Brunswick bowling club, now wherever he went everyone punished him oh, "Leo where's the cigarettes?" So, when I took over I got the fixture for his, where he was going and every Friday before, wherever he played I sent cigarettes over [(UNCLEAR)] thing and they'd, no one ever picked on Leo. He, it took him awhile to wake up. He
- 09:30 said, "I've just woke up to you young fellow, what you were doing," and so now they always used to say, "Oh I love you, see you Leo," and there'd be cigarettes on the bar.

This is when, after the war?

After the war, '47.

Okay.

Yeah.

So okay you went and joined up. Now specifically you said you went with a few of your friends. What were

till we separated, we, I got because I had a licence, they went that way infantry and I went mechanical.

Okay.

Yeah.

So you would have had a, even though you were

- 10:00 **still very young, you must have understood the significance of the Japanese taking Singapore?**

Yes.

At least as a young person would.

Yes, yes. Yeah. Yes. It wasn't funny. That really hit home what it was going on.

What happened around this area when that took place?

Oh people got scared. Oh they got, they started to worry because it was gettin' close to their own doorstep and people didn't realise how close it was till you've since heard some of the submarines were in Sydney Harbour, mini subs in

- 10:30 Sydney Harbour. There's a lot of things hadn't been told. I only found out oh some couple of years ago, we never got the truth back here of the full notice of the bombings that Darwin had. Yeah [(UNCLEAR)] they were bombed yes but not, no one never in the papers to the extent they got bombed. It's unreal what they did, what happened up there. Nobody, it never all come down. Yeah they got bombed, yeah but

Sixty two bombing raids, I heard.

Yeah bombed more than some of the major bombing places in Germany and everything like that, which is unreal. I

- 11:00 had the privilege some years ago of a coach tour out at, ah not out of Grafton, out of Newcastle, Port Macquarie, came down to Lake Cathie and we were waiting to go on a boat and take them on cruise and a boat luncheon cruise and standing on the wharf and I had an RSL jumper on and standing there and two of the blokes were sitting on the wharf there fishing away and they said, "Ay, soldier are you?" I said, "Yeah." "Bit young." I said, "Oh yeah I'm a returned soldier, yeah." "Young."

- 11:30 "Yeah all right," and they started talking and they realised even into their area it had never been publicised, they seen submarines come up, they must have come out to get water or come out fresh water, I don't know what they said, what could we do? We're little rifle we didn't [(UNCLEAR)] they just hid, it's on the coast on the south coast there. Never been publicised things and you learn little things down the track. Mines in Bass Strait.

Japanese mines?

Yeah. Mines in Bass

- 12:00 Strait. I don't know [(UNCLEAR)] where they were and because you came, if anyone came from Tasmania by boat across here to, this is broadly, from Tasmania over here in the services basically become a returned soldier because he sailed overseas into dangerous water. Yet if you'd gone by train

from here to Perth that's like Western Australia, a lot of the armoured people went, they never become returned soldiers and they never even got away but they're not, they didn't truly become returned soldiers cause they never went

12:30 overseas.

So everyone knew when Singapore had surrendered. The garrison there

Yeah.

And the 8th division was in big trouble.

Ooh yes.

You knew straight away?

Yep, yep and I just, I'd lost a mate, oh I call him my mate, he was on the on the Krait. You heard of the Krait? The little boat that went over and did all the damage in the mines, he was one of those yeah. Little whipper snipper of a thing, knee high to a grasshopper but they were I suppose that's why they went, cause they weren't big fellas in the

13:00 little boat, they went in, they weren't all six footers that. The little unit I was, oh it wasn't a unit I was in, the little company I was in, the thirty of us, I was the biggest and that photo would show you. That'd show you some of the smaller ones, oh there were others my height but they used to call us Collingwood six footers. I'm about five foot nine now and me leg's gone, they're bowed out and everything. This one's gone that but no, I think there was people started to realise that coming home to your doorstep

13:30 and they made sacrifices the people. They had to go without things.

So literally within four days you had Darwin bombed after Singapore fell?

Yeah.

So that must have been absolute panic here?

Oh yeah.

What was happening in Coburg? What was the panic like in Coburg?

I don't think it was actually panic, it just, people being very careful. I don't think people then wasted money right [(UNCLEAR)] thing. There wasn't any big spending in shops and things like that. They were hangin' on to any money they might have. Bare

14:00 essentials is what they wanted, nothing more.

What about your parents? How did they feel?

Ah strings were tight. Mum was always worried.

Well did she say anything to you about it?

Oh yes, she didn't want anyone to die but when my other cousins were gone and that she was quite faced to the fact that I was going.

What did your mum do? You said in the First World War, how did that war impact on her?

Oh how would it impact my mother

14:30 in the First World War? I wouldn't know. See that's 1914-1918, isn't it? I'm not born till ten years later.

I suppose the death toll was huge.

Huge, yeah.

So that must have affected her. She must have known so many people who would have died.

Oh well, I've just done a case for a lady, um Sandy and she's a returned nurse, oh I think I'm right, I think it's twelve in the family, ten went to war and only two returned from Tocumwal in New South

15:00 Wales or Victoria, call it what you like.

That was quite common actually.

Yeah, where would our population be today if all these people hadn't met, ah young people hadn't got killed in that First World War and the Second World War the same? There's another big family but

So where did you do your training once you had decided to join up?

Well having a driving licence as I said I got shot to Bendigo to help teach others to drive. That was an education for me.

15:30 I don't know how they found out you had a bit of sporting ability. Apparently, I did have. I showed you

the other thing there cause we only got there the first day and I was told with two others to report on the, onto the football ground in half an hour and then I never forgot 'em, that Laurie Nash the famous footballer from South Melbourne? I was interested in [(UNCLEAR)] and test cricketer and Bromley a test cricketer and the other bloke was Ball that played for top football with Melbourne. They were the three sergeants, so I had the privilege

- 16:00 of playing football against alongside Laurie Nash and all he'd tell ya is, "You stay out there in the boundary line young fella and don't get near me," but they were very hard sergeants. I could tell you some funny stories there. I won't though, particularly on sex.

Well go for it.

You wouldn't want to hear it.

Why not? For the record.

Well they talk, they teach sex today, don't they?

Yeah of course.

I've never got a lesson that we were given up there. We were on the parade ground and we were dressed and all wanted to go into Bendigo filling our order if you want to put it that way

- 16:30 and we're told, "Now all you young fellas just [(UNCLEAR)] listen to what," I've never forgotten this, "listen to what I'm gonna say," this is God's truth, "just listen to what I'm gonna say. Go down to the first aid place, first aid tent and get," we call, those days they were called your French letters, not condoms. "Go down get a French letter, think about it, go back and get another one. Think about it, go back and get another one and if you think about it, go back and get another one and if you think you're gonna be safe, go home and masturbate and you won't be in trouble." I'm
- 17:00 serious. I had a mate, that mate, oh not a mate a comrade up there right, he got into trouble and he went to Puckapunyal with disease and got came back and got back and went straight back to the same spot and got it again and away again. There was a message, they were hard and straight [(UNCLEAR)] this my granddaughter went out and she went out and she'll tell you I gave, I go, had the privilege of giving her away cause her father and mother were divorced and I've raised them so she had to give her away and she'll tell you I told her straight out, "Now you keep
- 17:30 your pants on, keep your legs together," she went to Sydney. "If you've got a problem ring me and I'll get you home. Don't sell yourself," and I think today you've gotta be a brute, brutal and point straight to the point not muckin' round and they don't realise the problems they [(UNCLEAR)]. There was problems in those days let alone HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] and all these things today. Oh there's another interesting thing. Having come back from a Rotary conference in Shepparton in March this year and realise in twenty five, thirty, forty years South Africa will be predominantly white
- 18:00 cause there's much HIV and AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] over there that all the women a got it and the men that associate a got it, their kids a got it, they'll wipe themselves out and it's gonna apply to China too and these are brute [(UNCLEAR)] statistics, you can check the [(UNCLEAR)] address and facts and figures. One doesn't realise just what problems we got. You got this SARS [severe acute respiratory syndrome] thing now.

So your sergeants

They were my three sergeants I told

How old were they at the time?

Oh well they were test cricketers I, they woulda been nearly thirty.

Nearly thirty?

Yeah I'd reckon.

- 18:30 **So they were straight, they were straightforward about sex?**

Oh no muckin' round no muckin' round. "You're not getting [(UNCLEAR)] getting into town and getting' in trouble." I've never forgotten that.

How did

I took a back step, I tell ya. I took a back step.

So what was the attitude to sex when you were young? At that time I mean you know just

Ah.

After the time you joined the army?

Not like today. Far different. You had greater respect

- 19:00 for a girl and society was a little bit hard on anyone, that was the, any of the other way. You couldn't

afford to get a bad name.

Even as a guy?

Yeah cause then there's girl's [(UNCLEAR)] name, then you had even that those days you had people that could brag about a thing and that's why I said I, this thing with the Governor-General, they'd say this and say that but they were tellin' lies. It wasn't a free society like it is in the later, last twenty years or so.

So among

19:30 **your mates would you talk about sex openly?**

Yeah, yeah.

At that age?

At that age, yeah. Mm.

Just openly.

Yeah but

Anything and everything.

Yeah but we were safe, we'd all be waiting till we got married.

Okay, but you still talked about anything.

Yeah still talked about it, yeah.

Only amongst your mates, though.

Yeah oh yeah. Wasn't open discussion, no.

Okay, so what was the training like?

Oh training was all right. It Bendigo was quite good.

20:00 We'd, I'd when I first learnt Morse code, we had to Morse code and to be able to send to and to receive. You could always send better than you could receive. I was talking to someone the other day and they were talking about Morse code, oh it was down [(UNCLEAR)] I had a group down at the Cerberus, the HMAS, the naval base and they said, "They were doing eighteen words a minute." I said, "Sending or receiving?" They said, "Oh sending." I said, "Oh I could do better than that." She said, "You could?" I said, "Yeah," but that was the only thing you could do in those days and today they've, you got everything else. You got

20:30 fax machines and computers and things and a message can go overseas in what, five seconds almost can't it, but we did that. It was training and we were mainly trucks and Bren gun carriers and that's, we were part of there and we thought at one stage, we thought we were going to the Middle East as reinforcements for the 2/8th armoured division and we got as far as Watsonia on the train overnight and the next day we were back on the train back cause that's when the Japanese and all this had happened you know and they were bringing the troops back from the Middle East.

21:00 **So what's that, can you explain to me what a Bren gun carrier is like?**

Bren gun carrier is an open thing, a track vehicle open carrier that you could fire weapons from. Not completely divorced from a tank.

Oh, so largely armoured

Yeah, you could and carry troops in it.

How many troops could a Bren gun carrier fit?

Oh ten if you were pushin' 'em.

So it's like an armoured personnel carrier now?

Yeah but it wasn't armoured, it wasn't covered in, it was just an open Bren gun carrier.

Okay just armour on the sides

Yeah, yeah all completely open at the top, yeah.

And when you say track, did it have

Tracks.

Front wheels though?

No, tracks. Tracks.

All fully tracked.

21:30 Fully tracked, yeah.

No wheels at all?

No, just you braked and used your brakes and you go around, turn around and go things and from there we went to and we had to do our, did that then we got shot back down here as I told you to do a motor mechanic's course which was Richmond Tech then Caulfield Tech and then to Enfield in South Australia to finish our course off. Now that's the other thing I've never forgotten, going to Enfield, get out there on the parade ground and as soon you get there they said, "Yeah righto." We were called troopers, we were. And, "Diggerson,

22:00 stay behind the parade please," and the bloke there said, "You played football, didn't you?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Right," and Curly Holden coached St Kilda and Northcote, older than me [(UNCLEAR)] he'd be forty. I'm out on the football track and I had the privilege of playing football on the Adelaide Oval. Not with the league but with the army and the navy, air force, fire brigade and police and that and yeah, so then they knew your history somewhere along the line of your sporting progress and I can't make that out because even

22:30 to this day I can't relate to the fact of what I did there. Where they'd said it looks, you read it didn't you? I showed you the fact that, did you read it? Where it said that due to the intimidating tactics of Darky Diggerson the underdogs beat the favourites. At one stage it was gonna be, had up for manslaughter and in future he's to be called Basher. Now I've got no recollection of that at all except it's printed. I knew I was a keen sportsman, so I musta got carried away

23:00 somewhere along the line, I don't know, and there's other references to it there but no, but no, so we did that Adelaide back to Puckapunyal and [(UNCLEAR)] went training again in tanks then, not Bren gun carriers, in tanks.

What sort of tanks were these?

General Grants, mainly General Grants then and some little Wombats we call them.

Wombats?

Yeah, little Wombats they were called. Yeah and fully trained

[(UNCLEAR)] General Grant tanks you're talking about.

Bigger, General Grants was the bigger one and the Wombat was the smaller one.

Was that an Australian made tank?

Oh,

23:30 no don't know, I think they all come from overseas at that stage. They all, most of the Matildas were made here, that we took away to the islands with us were Matildas.

So what sort of a tank was a wombat?

Just a small one.

What was the exact tank?

Just a small, little tank.

Right, was that the actual name of the tank?

Yeah, called the Wombat yeah.

Called a Wombat?

Yeah.

Right. You're sure that's not Australian made?

No. No. I don't know but all I, it coulda been I don't know. I'm not sure. I've got a history of them somewhere but all our tanks that we went away with, the Matildas, yes they were all made like [(UNCLEAR)] were all made Castlemaine's up in

24:00 Seymour now.

What squad were you posted in? Squadron?

Squadron? Headquarters.

Headquarters squadron?

Mm.

Now, how many, how big was the 2/4th Armoured Regiment? How was it structured?

How it was structured? Nearly fifteen hundred men.

Fifteen hundred men. How many squadrons?

There were A, B, C, headquarters. Ah, we had a workshop, our own workshop, our own sigs and our own light aid detachment.

I

Light aid detachment.

Light aid, that's like medics and so forth?

No, no, no.

24:30 It was more assistance. A mobile workshop you want to put it that way.

Light aid.

Yeah.

Did you have any infantry support?

No, no we supported the infantry.

Okay.

Mm.

So there were no specialised troops within the armoured regiment that worked alongside the infantry?

No, no.

Okay.

No, no we were all tankies.

Okay.

We were either gunners, drivers, loaders, or sigs whatever it may be.

So you were a trooper? That's your

Trooper was the [(UNCLEAR)] yeah.

The term for [(UNCLEAR)] regiment?

Yeah the trooper was a trooper with

25:00 same as a private.

Yep.

Yeah.

But your, what was your specific role in that?

Mine?

Yeah.

In the finish I was just a driver.

What, when you first started and throughout the war?

Yeah.

Did you ever go into operating guns?

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Firing guns?

I fired a few angry shots, but I don't know if I killed any, I wouldn't know. Ah going down the, well see, we were advanced headquarters at that stage and like in New Guinea when we first, all we were doing was patrols.

25:30 That's when C squadron went to Wewak.

All right but before we just, before we go that far

Mm.

Your first operation or deployment was in New Guinea?

Mm.

Right, and that was in '44?

Yeah.

You'd suggested.

Yeah, yeah we did

And that, that's almost two years of training before you actually

Yeah.

Before you left Australian shores?

Yeah. That's what they said in, that's what that book says, that having come out of Canungra and that we weren't trained in anything else but armoured and we had none, no other idea.

When you were

26:00 **trained**

Mm.

So Canungra was your major training, you never went to Darwin?

No.

Never went to Darwin.

No.

So Canungra's as far north as you went?

Yeah. That's, Canungra was the jungle training school.

That's right. How did, how was the training done with armour in the jungle?

No that was to [(UNCLEAR)] that was to train us back as, if you want to as, give us an infantry idea of how to handle ourselves. There was no tanks at Canungra, no it was only particularly a jungle training school.

Okay. Did they ever actually train you about using armour in the jungle at all?

No, no not at, not at [(UNCLEAR)]

26:30 **Not at Canungra?**

Not at Canungra, no.

Did they train you at all in armour training anywhere else in Australia?

What, with the infantry?

Well no in jungle warfare?

No, no we were basically basic

Nothing.

Basically there would a been more Middle East you were looking at when you were at Puckapunyal before the Japs come into the war, yeah.

Okay so you're saying to me that the 2/4th actually never had training in jungle warfare with armour, that is?

Not really till we got there.

Okay. What were you told?

We had plenty of training in tanks and things in Queensland.

Right, but none in the jungle?

Not in jungle. You couldn't say it was jungle, no.

27:00 **What was it then? Where did you**

Oh just open

Open ground?

Open ground, farming ground.

Okay.

Not in jungle warfare, no.

So what were you told before you go up?

Prepare for?

Yeah, what were you told to expect in the jungle when you used tanks?

Oh what, told what to expect.

In terms of the terrain you were in ah

The unknown.

What sort of resistance?

The unknown. The unknown. Knowing the fact that we were, they were slow moving vehicles. Very slow. Matildas were very slow. They weren't fast moving.

27:30 That's why they were in the jungle. Ah heavily armed, ah how can I put it, mainly done as back up to the infantry, ah which was emphasised both when the C squadron went to Aitape and down the Buin road in, particular in Bougainville. Whereas if it hadn't been for the three tanks from B Squadron that went in the

28:00 2/25th battalion would have been wiped out. That's where we seen the, I come in on the remnants of that.

Mm.

I didn't actually fire in, actually that is where they [(UNCLEAR)] the mass graves with a hundred and Japanese in one

Okay.

And it, it's all in that book there if you want to read it.

Yeah well I don't want to, I don't want to like skip too much.

Well, we weren't taught, we learnt as we went as to what we could do in the jungles with the Matilda tank and you couldn't get into a bog and that you you'd sink and so that's why they call these Buin tracks

28:30 and corduroy tracks where they lay logs down to make sure the tanks could get across them where it looked like dangerous ground or soft ground or things like that.

But where was your first deployment actual place in New Guinea?

Madang.

Madang.

And the, all we did from there was patrols up into the hills.

Okay.

Couldn't take the tanks too far up in the hills.

So the use of armour was actually very limited in New Guinea?

Very in that particular spot, yeah.

In Madang?

In Madang, yeah.

Tell us about

They used the tanks, were used up further up

29:00 around the coast at Aitape.

Aitape.

Yeah.

So tell us about your patrols. Can you walk us through sort of you're in the jungle?

Yeah.

Or what sort of

Yeah.

Roles you played and

Well you

Combat action you were involved in.

Well you forward scouts. Forward scouts. You'd always had a forward scout and you're walking back. You're always prepared to dive to the side. You had had your Owen guns round your neck, which were a marvellous gun.

You had an Owen gun?

Yes. Owen gun, grenades round your belt and sometimes there was, so I can remember at one stage I was carrying a .303

29:30 at the same time as an Owen gun and on many occasion I was carrying a bloody Bren gun cause that was the biggest and you'll see some in that photo there, I that, but be prepared to duck, dive you were taught that much from Canungra. At the sight anything, you hit the ground, hit it to the left and right or wherever you go to get cover straight away. Ah you were taught different things. We was also taught that Japanese snipers for example could be up a tree. Ah if you wanted to be patient enough and they had to relieve themselves they would

30:00 but if it had been an Australian up the tree he wouldn't. He woulda kept there no matter what. He wouldn't a given away the spot the, where he was cause then if you got anything like that you just fired into the tree and sometimes someone'd come down, dead of course, but you learnt to duck and get yourself to cover. We stayed in one place and out of Madang and the hut and they, what they call the soldier's hut. Sleep on the bamboo raised sort of a thing and it wasn't till we were leaving the next morning they said, "The Japanese had been sleeping there the [(UNCLEAR)] the night before." That's how far behind

30:30 we were of 'em you know but I got ambushed once, but we got outta that.

In Madang?

No, no in Bougainville. Even though we were armoured personnel we still had to do patrols.

All right, so you worked with the infantry

No, we were, there was no infantry then. We were it.

So you were infantry essentially.

Yeah basically.

[(UNCLEAR)] infantry role?

We took an infantry role when we were there pat doing those patrols, yeah.

Oh, so that was your own area that you were looking after

Yeah, yep.

31:00 **Can you tell us about your first combat action where you actually fought against the enemy?**

Ah well that'd be when I actually fought against the enemy.

Was that Madang?

No, no. We never really struck any there.

You said you were ambushed in Madang.

No, no not in Madang. We were ambushed in, down the Buin track in Bougainville.

Okay before we get to that

Yes.

Just, I want to sort of explore Madang a bit more.

Never actually had a big, any sort of big action in New Guinea. Us at Madang, no.

Nothing?

We did our

31:30 patrols, never fired a shot, well we fired a couple of shots but we didn't know what we were lookin' at. We just, something might have moved and we mighta fired but never any result or anything

What was the visibility like in Madang?

Oh at Madang? Once you're up in the bush? From here to there

So when you say you fired a few shots

Well you strike something or lead patrol might have just said, "Here settle down," and you dive, you mighta seen or heard something the patrol forward patrol and that and you'd wait to see if there was any movement and if you were

32:00 worried you'd let go just in case there was something there but there was a lot of cattle roaming around in those places in those days cause they'd farmed of course and many a time we got a cattle and brought it back to the and cooked it and things yeah but never actually got into actual battle in, us in Madang.

So did your unit actually come after it was sort of pacified?

It had all been cleared, yeah.

Been cleared?

Yeah, particularly by the Yanks. See we were doing a back up [(UNCLEAR)] then cause they were finding out what they were gonna do with the tanks,

32:30 that's what they were trying to work on. Just to find out where they go, what they could do.

Did you actually work alongside American soldiers at the time in Madang?

No, no. No. I went out to the Yankee sea board SeaBees [US Naval Construction Force] base off on another island. I went out there, had a pleasure trip one day to social, it was a social thing cause I had a, I could handle a billiard cue and I played, we played them pool on their own tables. Yeah, that was a social

33:00 what's it, PR thing if you want to put it that way, yeah.

Did you win?

Yes I did. Yes [(UNCLEAR)] I can handle a cue. My Dad grew up with [(UNCLEAR)].

I see.

We had our own table at Ferntree Gully that I learnt to play on. Yes I can handle a queue. Not such right now though.

What was your impression of ah U.S. soldiers?

Loved to brag.

They loved to brag?

Mm.

About what?

Anything. It was always the biggest, it was always the best,

33:30 ah always the biggest, always the best and cause when they went in fighting they just about blew the place out of the ground before the troops went in. Australians went out [(UNCLEAR)] and when Australians went in they went in without the back up that a lot of the American had. Big difference.

Did you resent them?

No, no, no. Oh how could you resent them? Without them we, where would we have been? Let's be honest about it.

But I mean on the smaller sort of points did you despise what some of the

No. Oh yes.

The traits?

Yeah.

34:00 Yes I can remember being in Brisbane, ah we were all camped at, we'd come up for the day or something, I don't from Southport cause we were on the Gold Coast and we come up and we went to skating [(UNCLEAR)] and there was the Yanks there and everything and a blue started and they reckon I knocked a few out but I couldn't, I didn't cause I couldn't skate but I tried to get Little Titch his photo's in that [(UNCLEAR)] up there, tried to get Little Titch, he was in trouble and I tried to get into him. Well I couldn't skate and they reckoned I knocked about eight or ten over tryinga to get to him just for the fact that I couldn't skate

34:30 but yeah we resented them cause they were, they had the money and some of the girls chased them cause they had the money but

Is that what you worried about as well? Did you have any girlfriends when you left?

No, no.

None.

No.

No plans to get engaged or anything like that?

No, no, no. I was writing to someone in the finish but that, not really, not but oh no I can tell some funny stories. There was a famous place in Brisbane called Ann Street, that's where the brothel was, wasn't it? So you used to queue up

35:00 there and sell your spot to the Americans. They pay money to get up the front of the queue, yeah I could go further but I won't but no, there was a little bit of resentment cause they seemed to have the money, they had the silk stockings and things like that that the average digger didn't take, have and secondly our blokes of their age weren't here, they were all over, they were away cause their R&R [Rest and Recreation]

35:30 and that all came back to Australia, didn't they for their pleasure, whereas our blokes didn't get that. They come back from the Middle East and they had a week or so and they were back in New Guinea.

I heard the 9th division, when they came back from the Middle East

Mm.

They got into a few

Yes.

Very large brawls with the Americans.

They did too, yes.

Can you tell me about any stories, not just about the 9th but any other

I didn't actually, I can tell you one about Georgie Holder lived in Coburg, in Pascoe Vale here. Georgie Holder, a mate a mine

36:00 older than I. He'd come back from the Middle East and we had spent some time together and then he said, "Now you keep a look after my family." He said, "I won't be coming home." I've never forgotten this. I said, "Don't be silly, George." He said, "I'm telling you. I will not be coming back. I'm back from the Middle East." He said, "I won't be back from New Guinea." He got killed in New Guinea. He had that premonition, that's true and I kept an eye on that family for years. He had that premonition. He, we were lucky.

36:30 We went away very well equipped. In amenities as well as fire power cause when you're taking tanks away we had our own canteen at Southport where these boys over the previous years had been in the armoured had raised their own money, so we all had our own refrigerator for every unit. We had our own Briggs and Stratton motor for light and for lighting, we had our own boats,

37:00 when you're packin' tanks you can pack these things away, so we could set up camp and the Briggs and Strattons were going and [(UNCLEAR)] lines down and we'd have power in all the tents.

You were just saying before, we sort of like digressed a little about the American experience

Oh yeah, yeah.

About the brawls. Can you tell me any more about that?

Oh, I seen a couple of them. I wasn't involved actually in them

Never?

No. I was never in the position to be involved with them really.

Did you ever feel like getting involved?

Yes, it was just

Can you tell us about that?

No, no, just it was a

37:30 swagger and I suppose the ones I'd be looking at would be at least five, six years older than me. At least. They were men.

So a lot of them were

Men.

Grown men?

Yeah, well the unit I went into and it's, no we've got some still alive in our unit that are over ninety. They've got twelve and fourteen years on me. So when I went in at eighteen these blokes are thirty and forty. So quickly as a young fella you got an education. You grew up very, very quick. You were amongst men and they sort of looked after

38:00 you and you learned a lot. I reckon in the first twelve months I became a man from a boy, just in army life and I think that's what a lot of our youth lack today, just a little bit of discipline, not only the discipline so much, the guidance the other ones can give you. Being a, we've never lost our comradeship. We're as thick as today, those that are left that we were fifty years ago, cause our lives depended on each other. If one went to sleep the other couldn't go to sleep.

So did the older American soldiers treat you well?

38:30 Never upset me really personally, no. I never had much to do with them cause we were away. We were right camped at Bendigo or Puckapunyal, they'd be having their high time in Melbourne

Okay.

And Sydney and these places you know. It was only in Brisbane I ran into the first lot a them. That's when a blue started. Don't know what it started over but provos [Provosts - Military Police] come from everywhere. Am American provos and Australian provos and it was broken up in no time at all. That's the only time I seen [(UNCLEAR)] and that was on the skating rink. A real blue. Apparently there were a lot of others. I heard about 'em but I didn't actually see them though

39:00 but as I said they had the money and the silk stockings and the cigarettes, didn't they? Camels if I remember right, Camel cigarettes and silk stockings and things like that but they were better off than we were.

So tell me about mateship in the specific sort of circumstances like Madang for instance. How did mateship matter? Camaraderie?

Camaraderie, yes you relied on it. Your life depended, even then your life depended on your mate.

And you knew that? I mean

Yes.

When I say you knew that in the sense that

39:30 **you knew you could depend on your mates.**

Depend on your mate, yeah ever alert.

No

Ever alert. One go to sleep, there'd be one awake.

Did you feel that if you ever got into a situation where you were almost certain to be killed, did you feel at the time that your mates would do everything possible to help you?

Yes.

To save you?

Yes, yes. We were doing our jungle training school at Canungra and Ken's dead now, he died last year, and getting onto our night exercise and

40:00 you hang onto the scabbard of the bayonet. You're not allowed to talk and I'm the lead, as I said the biggest, the captain's up front and I'm there and all of a sudden it's gone and no one's allowed to talk and we heard a voice saying, I heard a voice, "Darky, Darky," and the captain come back, "You're not allowed to bloody talk," and I said, "He's gone," and the voice is saying, "Darky, Darky." We had to he slipped down the bloody cliff right and we all joined hands and got him up and the final part of the story is down the Buin track

40:30 when we hit the side of the road that was shelled by Japanese and the infantry went and shelled it, we were going there, and getting shelled and we hit the side of the road and that he went that way and I went that way and after the shelling had finished I could hear a voice yellin' "Darky, Darky." He'd gone down a shell hole about ten feet deep and the mud and the slime he can't get out and I had to get him out

Again?

Again, yeah.

Okay. We'll have to unfortunately stop it there. I'll definitely pick you up

Tape 3

00:33 **Now Alfred we were talking just before about your experience of Madang.**

Mm.

How long did you stay there for?

I suppose we were there nearly six months.

Six months?

Round about. Have to check the dates out of that book if you wanted that exact, yeah.

Did you ever encounter any Japanese in Madang at all?

Well when I say encounter, no. I can remember being

01:00 at a picture show, we drove in ah to see pictures in Madang. We were actually down at Militat [possibly Milhanak] which is in between Alex Harbour, the naval depot, and Madang and we drove into a picture show illegally, ah [(UNCLEAR)] in charge of transport and we went in there and we found the colonel was in there as well, the boss was in there, so we went, better leave early and get back before he did. So back we go and drive like mad [(UNCLEAR)] tracks

01:30 and that and as we were coming out Japanese were in the back watching the pictures. Took off when they seen us. They were back in the watch watching the pictures.

They were POWs?

No! They'd come out to watch the pictures and snuck back into the jungle.

Japanese soldiers?

Yes!

Sorry, how did you know they were there?

Hey?

How did you know they were there again?

Spotted 'em drive driving past and realised who they were and away they went.

How many Japanese?

Oh there would have been five or six we reckon.

So this was an open

02:00 **air**

Open air, yeah.

Okay so like

They were right at the back watching the pictures.

Like a drive in sort of thing?

Yeah, yeah and we come back [(UNCLEAR)] corduroy track back into camp and realised then, "Well this is gonna be trouble. He's gonna find out which jeep's been taken," so we started 'em all up all together and when we heard them coming we'd turn 'em all off and when he come and felt the engines they were all hot. So he didn't know which one had been out. Oh you had to be cunnin', didn't you? Yeah never mind, but no, then we didn't actually see them apart from that. I told you in that

02:30 camp we found out they were there the night before sleeping in the same hut as we were, we were sort of chasin' 'em if you want to get that way and they were retreating

This is in Madang yeah?

Mm, up in the mountains, yeah.

So how many Japanese were you aware of that were around that area? I mean were you

Oh there was thousands. We wouldn't know, wouldn't know

Outside Madang?

Yeah wouldn't know, thousands of 'em, wouldn't know for sure. Never did know.

They never attacked you?

No, no.

Why do you think that was the case?

I think we were too well armed and too well secure but I don't know, I unless you

03:00 asked them I wouldn't know but I think they thought well, "They're not attacking us, we won't attack them," do you know what I mean? Cause it was strategic and I think just too well enforced. They could have been broken remnants away, we wouldn't know where they were cause a lot of their communications went down the drain at times.

So what sort of activities were you involved in at Madang in the period of six months you were there?

Patrolling and training, and a lot of pleasure as you seen. The in and that inlet we there we had little canoes and we could

03:30 pass our time go by. There was always someone on guard you know

So lots of patrolling?

Yeah a lot of patrolling in between doing that. We rigged up a trapeze over the water, we'd swing from one to another like ah circus artists cause if you missed one you only went down in the water, didn't ya and that water up there you can almost stand in. That much salt content. If you relaxed and stood like that the water would just go completely relaxed, that's all it would do.

04:00 You wouldn't drown if you didn't panic.

These are the rivers you're talking about?

They were the sea.

Oh in the sea?

In the inlets, yeah.

Oh right.

Oh the water inland those rivers and of course you get rain and it just come up like this and go down again. Cold, bitterly cold. One of the patrols we were out in, one of the things we were all having a swim in the pool. It was lovely. You realised you could slide down this oh twice as high as this, it'd be like a little waterfall but it was and the bottom of it was like glass, pure glass, it was that smooth. The water over the years running down it

04:30 and we used to slide that down into the pool but you had to stand each side of the pool'd, be oh twice as big as this room you were standing each side to pull you out cause it was that bloody you cramped straight away, the water.

And this is in a hot tropical climate?

Yes, yes. Yep.

Musta rained there a lot.

Ooh, yes up in the mountains there, jungle raining all the time.

What's it like patrolling in the jungle? Can you tell us about that?

Very tentative. You're always wary. Always try and tread in someone else's footsteps

05:00 or follow a path actually when they went on cause they didn't go up, they didn't get blown up, you didn't get blown up, did you? Not that we struck that many of that but that was the way you were taught to be careful. Don't go off into unhid untrodden areas, go where there's been trodden before if you could, you know, but you were always one side or the other side of tracks. You were never out in a line like this, you were always like that, you know and then staggered. Used to in those patrols and we were only armoured doing patrols.

So you were scared of, is that, was that tactic ah?

Yeah you were just prepared

Enforced because of mines

05:30 No, no, but you never knew, you never what could be in front of you were taught to do that and they were [(UNCLEAR)] mines, yeah. You just didn't walk blindly through anywhere. At times you couldn't care less cause you were hidden for cover somewhere and you just went, didn't ya but we didn't strike that many mines but it was just you were always careful. It was always better to walk where there was someone had walked before, if possible.

So you musta got a lot of experience at Madang?

Oh yes, we were, look not only I, I'd say that the best trained forces in the army were in the armoured because they all, they'd done

06:00 had been training and never got away. All those ones that went to Western Australia like brilliantly trained troops, some had never even seen action cause they were worried, they were coming in from the west and at one stage, yeah, that's why they was all rushed over to Western Australia and they were men and they were well trained.

In your unit did you ever come across Aborigines?

I think we had one, I'm tryna think.

06:30 No, no. No, not in our unit. There coulda been a couple coulda been part, but not full blooded. Not like ah Saunders, he was an Aboriginal that was made a captain. Another friend of mine, oh not a friend, an acquaintance of mine from Northcote RSL, "He was seven-eighths Aboriginal," he said. He said at a conference

07:00 some years ago, RSL conference, with what four hundred and something delegates there he was a mover of we call them remits but it's a motion, and he was the mover of this motion and naturally being the mover of the motion he was entitled to close the motion before, after it had been debated and I never forgot it and he got up and he said, "Well you all know," he said, "that I have more white in me than Mansell has black in him, can we collect Mintie wrappers and send him back to Libya?" That's true.

07:30 I wouldn't say it unless it was. "I have more white in me than Mansell has black in him. Can we collect Mintie wrappers and send him back to Libya?" and that sums up a lot of our demonstrations of our Aboriginal people are being misled by a lot of people at times.

Do you think that, did you think much about the white Australia policy? Did you think that was fair at the time?

I don't think I even gave it a thought. I can't say I did.

08:00 I can't say I did, no.

Do you think Aboriginal diggers didn't get a fair go often?

Oh no, I think they all got a pretty fair go from what I can understand, being associated with the RSL and being a delegate to the conferences over so many years where Aboriginal, some of our Aboriginal shoulders ah soldiers talked and debated things. I'd say they got a pretty good go. They were all respected by their mates. They weren't called Kooris or anything like that, they were mates, no matter what colour they was. Ah let's face it we had

08:30 not only the Australian army the air force and we had Chinese, Jews.

How were Chinese, Australian Chinese seen?

Well one of the vice presidents of the RSL and he, he's ah, he was a, he still is a Sydney councillor. He was in the air force.

Were there any Australian Chinese who were in your unit?

Not in mine, no.

Were there any other nationalities you can remember?

Yes, we had some Italians.

Italians.

Another mate of mine that's ah, he got a knighthood from

09:00 the Italian government for his works Sam Ganda, ah Samuel Gandolfo, lived in Chedden Street. I got him to be a guest speaker at Chi Lariste some years ago years ago, I'm talking about years ago now and they said, "Oh bloody Italian talking to us." He was an interpreter with the Australian forces. That's how important he was, but he's father had come out here straight after the First World War. He was born here,

09:30 so I mean there was quite a lot of those, a lot of Germans, particularly in South Australia from the York Peninsula up that way. We had a, one of my friends there, who's dead now, was Hilderman, as German as you could get, but they were all Australians.

And they fought in the Australian armed forces?

What yeah, what their history was nothing. They were Australians, yeah.

Did you have any in your unit?

Hilderbrand, Roy Hilderman was German.

Yeah.

Of German descent.

What did he know about his German descent?

Quite a lot. My mate,

10:00 my oh sorry my mate, my mate he was best man at my wedding, Captain Keith Russick, South Australian, Member of Parliament, he was of German descent. He knew all his history right back for the Russicks, right back. He was as Australian as you could make them.

Could they speak German often?

He could speak a little bit, yeah.

So

From his grand[father], from his father he'd learnt a little bit, you know.

Some of these could have been used as

10:30 **translators in the**

Well they were. That, that's what Sam was used for. I called Sam the Godfather. Sam was used as an interpreter for the Italians. How else could we interpret?

Mm.

Even today we got people that can talk Greek, Italian, Arabic, and I ah looking at the troops that marched at Anzac Day in our present serving troops marching up to the shrine there, when you stood back and watched them coming through later and we'll see have a look at the faces. Yours, Chinese, Vietnamese,

11:00 all wearing an Australian uniform, and that made me proud. That was Australia to me, to see all these different type of nationalities all wearing an Australian uniform, in both in the army the navy and the air force. See all this you could pick them but they're all down the track. My little mate that's in that picture, he was a Jew and his name was called Isaacs. He changed his name from by deed poll to Keith Langley and dropped the Isaacs

11:30 for prejudice.

How were Jews seen in the Australian armed forces?

No problems. He was

Were there any prejudices

No.

Against them in

No. He was worried.

Why was he worried?

I don't know. It, it's just the reason he felt the persecution of the Jews I suppose at some stage, I don't know what Keith really thought but he said, "No, I've changed my name by deed poll, I am now Keith Langley. I'm not Keith Langley Isaacs."

12:00 So if anyone seen him from then on, "What's your name?" "Keith Langley." Wouldn't even connect him to being a Jew. That was just his thing.

Did he grow up in Coburg as well?

No, no. No he grew up in down St Kilda, which is more as you say, oh I shouldn't tell you that joke, should I? About the Jew. Do you want to hear that?

Well you're welcome to.

There was a Jewish lass come down from the bush just recently. Her mother and father told her where she had to go down to St Kilda to find accommodation with her relations. "Get there so you won't get into trouble."

12:30 Well it started to rain and she got lost, couldn't find it. Night fall come, she thought, "Oh gee what am I gonna do?" So she slept on the door step of the Jewish synagogue and guess what? She woke up in the morning with a heavy Jew on top of her. Never mind, that's just the way it goes. They're not my jokes, I get told these.

Where were these told? During the army

No, no. These are told by women!

13:00 **I see.**

And the person that told me's a Jew. Becky Levi, she told me. She always

So it's all in good humour?

Yeah I always pick on her as a Jew and always do, her husband Mark was a terrific supporter of mine when I was CEO [Chief Executive Officer] down at the RSL. Never had to ask Mark to do anything, he would always be there on the doorstep wanting to do something but terrific, no so I could get away, I look it's the manner in which you say things,

Mm.

That you can get away with things.

Of course. Of course.

And that's why they pick on me a lot. I've got to take it, cause I give a lot you know.

I recall you

13:30 **were mentioning something of a café, since we're on the topic of sort of ethnicity so to speak, there was a café by the name was it, "Little Nigger Boy," was that what it was called? In Bendigo or somewhere.**

Oh yes, yeah the Favaloros. Now they weren't, I don't know what the Favaloros they were known as the seven brothers and they, our pleasure was to get out on a night's afternoon's leave and go in there and have steak and eggs and chips. That was what you wanted and cause every time one of them

14:00 died they had a public holiday in Bendigo. The cafes all closed down and that was called the Favaloro Cafes and we called 'em the seven little nigger boys, and that was that story as one little nigger boy died and they'd, everyone'd be looking for a day off again through these, through their trade and everything. Yeah, Favaloros. Right in the main street of Bendigo, had these cafes. Steak, egg and chips, that was the diet you wanted. Particularly after a couple of beers. Ah lovely. I enjoy, I always lined up. You asked for antidotes. You bring

14:30 back my mind of the good things and funny things you want. I was lined up in a parade for rape.

For?

Six of us standing up all about the same size all with dark complexion, dark hair like us, like me, and she paraded up and down in front of us and she stopped in front of me, imagine how I felt. She went down, come back and stood in front of me, come back and they found out a bloke had pinched her beret and uniform put and raped this lass, and that's why

15:00 they were looking for a fella my size and there were six of us lined up and we all had, we were worried I tell ya. All innocent, but worried. This I tell you, the Governor-General they say all this about him, but how true is it? We don't know, do we?

So do they did they catch the person?

Yeah, yeah.

Was it among your boys?

No, it wasn't from us at all. He pinched the uniform and pinched her cap, not a beret it was a brown beret there, not a black beret. Yeah, they got him. I've never forgotten that, it's not a pleasant, very pleasant stand up there coppers up and down, stop in front a ya,

15:30 ah yeah. Not funny.

Before I proceed to the next question

Mm.

As when you were in your soldiering years throughout the war, would you describe your, how would you best describe yourself as personality wise as a soldier?

Outgoing, lover of sport, pretty fit fitness fanatic to an extent, yeah. Reasonably

16:00 knowledged, yeah. That's about all I could say I suppose, yeah.

What about your association with women?

Women? What's the association? The last time when we went away in 1944 that was part of '44, '45 and '46 was, that's three years you're looking part thereof, we weren't home and in Rabaul in particular we all had our own house boys looked after us, did, made

16:30 our beds, put the mosquito tents down, did our washing, always brought us fruit in every morning and things like that.

They were Japanese, weren't they?

No, no these were the natives.

Right.

Natives, yeah. Japanese did have our jobs to do but they weren't our house boys cause the niggers, sorry I should ah Rabaulans didn't like them. Christ, that was without a doubt. Now Gunnamar was my house boy. I've never forgotten his name and his sister used to come in with him sometimes and I,

17:00 oh that's another story, ah she looked every time I seen her she was gettin' whiter. Every time I looked I reckoned she was getting whiter. I was getting really keen in the finish. I couldn't touch her and I realised later why. I was taken out and it was one of the privileges I had, I was taken out to a Christmas sing song. Sit sat on a wooden little mat while they all sang their Christmas carols, rang me round me and I was the only white person there. That was through my house boy and I realised later the reason I was taken, I was trusted

17:30 and they talk they really do talk, but they were terrific to us and in that way you know. Oh Japanese had a lot of work loads to do and things on gangs, work gangs and things like that cause there was thousands of 'em in Rabaul that [(UNCLEAR)] become prisoners of war, and there wasn't that many of us lookin' after 'em but that's where I saw the biggest snake I've ever seen in my life. I seen a snake and they wouldn't let me shoot it and the niggers. "Heme noma one

18:00 bad fella master, heme noma one bad fella. You no touch, you no touch." He was disappearing in the bush. I had a, driving at that stage a water truck and the great big wheels on the water truck, his track was just as big as my tyre tracks going into the bush and like that and I've only seen the last, I'd say eight, ten feet of him. The rest was in the bush. "Oh heme noma one bad fella. You no shoot master, you no shoot." I wouldn'ta known what to shoot at, he's in the bush, you can't see the front of it. That's the worst thing, the biggest snake I've ever seen. He was that big I had time to

18:30 go down the bottom of Tunnel Hill, toot my horn, go up and grab a truck up and I seen the last of him disappear in the bush. Very slow moving.

Like a python, is it?

He was a, yeah python probably, python yeah.

What contact did you come into with wildlife in Madang and outside Madang?

Madang was mainly wild cattle. Cattle had been there and farmed and got loose and we used to go to hunting. Went out with a Papuan, retired Papuan infantry

19:00 boy, oh he wasn't a boy, he was a man. He had a one arm and a stub. One arm he'd lost part of it and he could fire a .303. I couldn't do it like him. We'd go out with a jeep and trailer a few of us armed, wouldn't go as far as the patrols but we'd know where we were going, and he'd get one and we'd come back with a bullock and all that. Oh mate you wanna know a funny story I'll tell you a true story, I won't tell you any lies. I'll tell ya. I had to go from the camp at Militat down to

19:30 Alex Harbour and the naval depot, it was pretty safe. There'd been odd Japanese around but I'm out on me own. I took a bloke down and a parcel. I come back on me own. As I come back across the corduroy track you know there was culverts like scooped out drains on each side of the road to take the water, so you could get through and I seen a pig and he went in and he's snortin' and I thought, "Pork." Pulled the jeep. Now I can't fire a rifle, I can't fire a Bren gun, I can't do anything. So got this shovel off the jeep and I hit him on the bloody head and the harder I hit him

20:00 the more he snorted. I didn't know what to do and along come some of the natives, "Master master we fix, we fix, we fix. Master we fix." You know how they fixed it? They sat on the edge of the bank just like that, one rolled him over with his other feet and the other one stood on his head and the other pumped his stomach and drowned him and there I am tryna to belt the hell out of him with a shovel. That is true, we

So you're saying the shovel had no effect on

No effect. The harder I hit him the more he snorted

When you say he snorted he was actually moving around

No in the drain. He couldn't get out.

Oh okay.

He got into

20:30 the drain, so he had to keep going or he couldn't get up the sides and they just rolled him over, head and the other one pumped him and drowned him in the slush in the water and you learn things, don't you? So, "Listen master," they knew how to handle things and do things so, "Heme noma," but that was

the snake but, "No master we fix, we fix." We were only talking the other day about the pidgin English. I've lost a lot of it, like the piano [(UNCLEAR)]. You get all these things

- 21:00 but you managed to converse with them in the finish when we were up there and we'd seen the best of 'em at the best time cause let's face it, what they went through at the Owen Stanleys we didn't have anything like that. We had no problems like that at all those poor buggers. Going through the Owen Stanleys.

You must have heard about the stories, the tricks the Japanese soldiers used to use to try and deceive the Australians?

Oh everything.

Can you tell us more about them?

Oh.

What did you hear?

I've told you one what they did. With where they fell down and they woke up to with the fact when they were snipers in the trees and they had to

- 21:30 relieve themselves, they relieved themselves, and that's when they gave themselves away cause you'd go [(UNCLEAR)] and they'd fall down dead. Australians if they did the same thing, went up the tree and even if they had to do heavy poos or anything, would do it in their pants or do it in there. Not let anything show to give themselves away where their position was but they, devices, oh decoys got up and they were pretty clever in their own way, don't worry, but you woke up to them in the finish. Not that I had to

- 22:00 worry about 'em so much, but some of the others [(UNCLEAR)] in the Owen Stanleys, they woke up to them completely. Woke up once they only got caught once the Australians, they learnt quick, and word went down the line you, "Be prepared for this," you know. Even come out with your hands in the air.

What do you mean?

Surrender?

The Japanese soldiers would do that?

Yeah. I never seen it, but I believe it, yeah, yeah, yeah so they'd lower their guns like they'd grab 'em and next minute up they'd pop out of the bush and [(UNCLEAR)]. Just as a

- 22:30 decoy. You know I, different ones have told me different things.

So with all these stories you would have heard coming to Madang, what was your impression of the Japanese?

Well we didn't have much contact with them as I told you. We hated 'em. Oh we hated 'em.

You hated them?

Oh yes and how much I, not only I, how was, I as a Rotarian in 1950, what was it? Come back to a world conference of Rotary and I'm booked into Kings Cross and the only floor there's Australian and the rest are Japanese. They're bowing and scraping and I as a returned soldier

- 23:00 and Smithy alongside me returned soldier, it was very hard, I tell ya. Very hard, but realise today that a lot of it wasn't their fault and the younger ones it had nothing to do with them cause in later years I had a, my sister she was a [(UNCLEAR)] student and she was with the [(UNCLEAR)] party to farewell the Japanese exchange that were out here with Rotary, Rotaractors and what lovely young people they were, girls and boys and they're what eighteen, twenty sort of

- 23:30 business. Terrific people. They had, they were kids, they knew nothing about the war, only what they woulda learnt since. They're ideas are completely different. Their ideas and you realise Japan's Americanised to that much it's not funny. Right you McDonalds and everything, all those type of things you know and you got to know them and they were terrific, so you couldn't blame them for what their predecessors have done. How can you blame some of ours for what some of our predecessors might have done to their, to our Aborigines but that's not your fault or my fault,

- 24:00 that's why I'll have no part of the ah apology. What did I do wrong? What did you do wrong? How far do you go and once you open a can of worms, lord knows where you'd finish.

If you met a Japanese soldier who served in the war in New Guinea

That's happened, that has happened since, not [(UNCLEAR)]

You

It happened, just happened yeah, just recently there was an article in Mufti, you know what Mufti is? That's the Victorian journal of the RSL and only couple of issues ago one came out and we met the, a couple from the unit he'd been fighting as a goodwill gesture but they were led to believe we were bad.

The Emperor said, "You've got to go here and do this," and as we were told, "You're gotta stop 'em," and that's where congratulations to our boys in New Guinea in the Owen Stanleys to stop them in the first place.

So they met with Australian RSL?

Yes, yeah.

Veterans?

And now, our new president the of the RSL he's done an exchange visit to Japan

25:00 with the same thing.

So what's the emotion running there?

Oh for forget, "You forgive but don't forget." I think that's a lovely saying. You can forgive something, but that doesn't mean to say you forget it, do you? You follow what I mean there?

Mm.

Forgive, you can forgive 'em yes, but don't forget and I think that applies a lot, you know in lots of things today. Footballers, get thumped on the field. They'll forgive but they haven't forgotten, they'll catch you some time, won't they? Is

25:30 that right? Forgive and not forget, yeah.

I suppose with your particular experience of the time is a very different experience that I haven't been through, so it's I suppose

It was hard, it was hard.

It's difficult to

No one, no one'd ever buy a Japanese car for a long, long while, would they? You no way knowing you wouldn't buy a Japanese product and I think some of us today got over that, but I think some of us today are starting to buy, we won't, we try to buy every Dick Smith product now and I was in the little Tattslotto shop down here the other

26:00 day and that came up and I said, "Oh I just been into Bi-Lo and I wanted to get Dick Smith's imitation of Tim Tams. Couldn't find 'em. Every variety of Tim Tams you could get but not Dick Witts, ah Dick Smiths," and I said to Tom and there was a woman there and I said, "I couldn't find 'em." She said, "That's right," she said, "they're hidden, they're hiding everything of Dick Smith's right down the bottom around the back somewhere," and they both said the same thing, "They'll endeavour to buy Dick Smith's products wherever they can." Cause I, I'm crook on, I'm crook at Arnotts. I'm funny, aren't I? I'm crook at Arnotts.

26:30 Like Arnotts, I always liked Arnotts. There was Arnotts, Guests, Brockoff, Swallow, Sunshine right? Arnotts took over Brockoffs, then Brock Arnotts Brockoffs took over Guests and they become the ABC biscuit company, then they took over Swallows, then they took over Sunshine. Then bloody Campbells, the Americans took 'em over.

So do you still buy Japanese now?

Not if I can get out of it, but I wouldn't know half the time unless you take your glasses and read the fine print.

Yeah.

But not that much is bought made in Japan,

27:00 only a lot of electrical stuff is, yeah.

What about China?

Oh I hate it. Chinese everywhere you go, where was it the other day? These medals I'm talking about, that was centenary medals they was givin' out, someone tells me they're made in China. I don't understand that, we see you get political then, you know and I'm not a politician, I don't wish to be but the greatest mistake a, I and a lot of others I see, was when the Labor government under Whitlam took away this deregulation,

27:30 and what happened? One of my mates at Glowave, made their own shirts and did everything, all of a sudden their jobs were gone because they were importin' the stuff from China. Bells Knitwear, all me mates that work there lost their jobs cause all the imported knitwear coming in. They all went [(UNCLEAR)] it didn't help us. Even today I would be prepared to pay a higher price for something if it was made in Australia and kept Australians at work. I just don't understand.

If we go back a bit

Mm, go sorry.

No,

28:00 **no that's fine. It's a very interesting point you've raised here and I actually want to broaden that but I want to broaden it in the context of the Second World War.**

Mm, yep.

Did you feel that on not so much did you feel but did you think that the Japanese were, of course they're from northern Asia, north east Asia,

Mm.

Did you feel the Chinese and the Japanese were essentially similar? Did you feel that that there was a common threat, not just from the Japanese

Yes, yes and put it back to the yellow [(UNCLEAR)]. Yes.

So before the war you

28:30 **felt there was a**

There was a, I reckon that would be a feeling, yes.

Yeah?

Yeah, hence the White Australian policy apparently.

So in knowing that, in retrospect do you feel that it was the correct policy to have at the time?

I think at the time yes. It's all right to go back in retrospect but at the time you had to judge their thinking at the time and we can't take things back now. No way that can go on at all. It's thinking

29:00 applies the same thing as today as to where you go or how you go. One, I'm worried that we've had too many Asian imports. I know there's good, there's bad in Australia. Good and bad in Australian. I had occasion some couple of months ago to listen to a woman who's involved with parole and she was talking to us and she was talking about the drug situation and the dealers and suppliers and carriers

29:30 and I said, "Well all right." I knew the answer before I asked the question and I shouldn't a been, it was loaded, I said, "What percentage of this is Australian and what percentage is Asian?" "Oh," she said, "I don't want to answer it." I said, "Well I know the answer. What about telling, do you want me to tell the people or not?" She said, "Ninety seven per cent." Ninety seven per cent at that time were Asian, Vietnamese were the problem with drugs in Victoria and Footscray and Springvale and that's a big problem and I think we go

30:00 about it the wrong way. Ah I reckon that the supplier, he's the bloke that should go straight away. If they didn't have suppliers, what are they gonna do? That also leads to the thought as to whether they should legalise it and if it was cheap, who'd want it?

Mm.

I don't know.

Okay. All right now this is, I'm getting a broad overview sort of like your impressions at the time. I suppose what I'd like to focus on now is that from Madang

Yes.

Did you encounter any Japanese POWs

30:30 **at that period?**

Not in Japan. Not in Madang.

No in Madang, sorry.

No.

Oh, okay so from Madang you stayed there for six months, then you moved to Alex Harbour?

No, no, we moved over to Bougainville. Alex Harbour was Alex Harbour was the naval base the other side of Madang.

Okay.

We moved over to Bougainville to Torokina.

Bougainville?

Yeah.

And that was in '45. What month '45 were you there?

Oh that'd be yeah, early '45.

Early '45.

Yeah, yeah.

Can you walk us through what happened in

31:00 Well, we went across in Yankee barges, landing craft, and they tried to land us at Buin and the Japs started firing on us and they realised they were in the wrong spot and we had to come back and land at Torokina, at the base at Torokina.

So you're saying that you had to do an amphibious assault

Yes.

Assault there?

Yeah.

What's the place there?

We didn't do an assault, we had to land there. There was already Australian troops there but they tried to land us at Buin, which was Japanese held. We shoulda been landing back up the coast at

31:30 Torokina, which was controlled by us. Yanks had been there and we were taking over and we went in there as an armoured regiment and we took over the Yankee camp because we were the only armoured there, the rest of, they couldn't give it to the different infantry ones because there would have been a fight over who had the good barracks. We took over. Mess huts all fly wired, cinemas with coloured parachutes hanging from the ceiling. This is how well the Yanks did things and unreal and we landed there and A Squadron went up north and B

32:00 Squadron went down the Buin road across the rivers and it's all in that book if you want to take it and have a loan of it for awhile, as long as I get it back. Do you want a loan of it?

At the moment, I'll have to consider

Not now, yeah

Yeah, sure.

At, yes down there we weren't there long and we started to move immediately, B Squadron we had to move down and it's slow progress with tanks moving down, not like going down the Hume Highway and doing a hundred ks an hour. We moved them down and that's where the battle I told you at Slaters Knoll started and

That was the major battle of that campaign?

Yep,

32:30 yeah that really, it was the big one. That's when basically um

Which company was involved, sorry which squadron?

B B B

B Squadron?

Yeah.

But you weren't attached to them, were you?

Yeah, we were following them.

You were following behind?

Yeah advanced headquarters, we were the advanced headquarters.

Before you go on

Mm.

How actually big was the squadron in terms of ah vehicles and what types of vehicles it had?

Three tanks in each ah nine tanks in each squadron.

Nine tanks?

Three in a troop.

Okay

See.

And what about

33:00 **you know like light armour?**

Well, now no that was the tanks there were following, that was just and jeeps. Jeeps and trailers with supplies.

What about Bren gun carriers and so forth?

No, we didn't have Bren, any Bren gun carriers in that B operation at all, no.

You didn't bring any at all?

No.

Okay. Okay. Could you tell us more about that actual action at Slaters Knoll?

Well the 25th battalion was surrounded by Japanese and the word got out and Arnotts biscuit again,

33:30 he was the major Arnott biscuiter, he basically took the three tanks in quicker than he should have by orders. It was supposed to be a surprise but he went in and he actually saved 'em from extinction, hence those mass graves, cause when he got in there they dug the tanks in bah bah bah around a circle in a circle, if you can imagine. Dug trenches underneath 'em for the troops to stand up in. The wires were put round, all the rattles were tins with stones were put on the wires all around the

34:00 perimeter, so if at night they started to raid the tins stones went in the tins, rattled them so immediately they rattled the Brownings, the machine guns and the tanks and the, they just raked the whole area. Never stopped and they just kept piling themselves on each other. As you said there's a photo there, what a hundred and twenty five in one, I think it's eighty something in another. Mass buried we did. After it was all over, right, cause they just kept comin' and comin'. They realised they weren't gonna take it. Now that 25th battalion

34:30 never forgot us. Even today you can go in the march and if they see any of us with our black berets they'll come up and say, "G'day mate, how you goin'?" They were gone. That was the real turning point in that campaign down the Buin track but then the tanks become a focal point after that to protect the infantry. We lost a couple of tanks and then we lost a couple of bulldozers, D8 tractors, and how the boys did it I don't know, but they put a, the blade off a bulldozer track tractor on the front of a tank so when

35:00 they were going down the track, narrow track, they'd have the blade up in front of them cause a couple of tanks got hit with a hundred and fifty pounders from the Japanese but with this in front of them it gave them a hell of a, it shook the hell out of ya when it, I wasn't in a tank when it got hit of course and gave them the protection, but that's how adapted these blokes were.

It could stop a hundred and fifty pounder shell?

It made a hell of a mess, but it protected 'em.

Okay, so they survived essentially.

Instead yeah instead of a direct hit on the tank.

Right.

But you can read that in that book, long as you get it back to me.

35:30 I don't want to lose that.

So tell me about your, where did you actually see combat?

In down there, that's the real combat, yes.

At Slaters Knoll?

Yeah, just we were back from it, we were advanced headquarters cause we, there were Japanese everywhere, so we had to wire ourselves in. We were, there was only about in advanced headquarters, only about fifteen of us with the officers and ourselves and our tanks and our jeeps so we'd have to wire ourselves in.

When you say wire yourselves in, what do you mean?

Oh well, put wire around you trying to put the tins on to try and stop

36:00 them to make a noise so that if anyone come it'd rattle the thing you'd know there was someone comin' and but you used to use fire, do you know what a fire fly is?

No.

It's like an insect.

Oh you mean an insect?

Yeah.

Yes of course.

Yeah, yeah and you use those type of anything but no we we'd dig ourselves a little trench, we'd have our vehicles there and all wired all around and as we moved down right behind the advancing of the troops, as I said it was advanced headquarters cause we were really, really controlling the operation, not me but they

36:30 were the officers, were really controlling the operation.

So

That's where we got [(UNCLEAR)] ambushes, when you're then from there and you want to come back to base right, that's when you'd have to come through in convoy cause the Japanese were ambushing us. Got into one didn't take much for we didn't, we'd hardly fired a shot and we got out of that, they sort of took off. Another occasion we were coming down and I had the, we had the 2IC [Second in Command] with us, Black Jack, Major Mackay, and he forgot something, so we doubled back

37:00 and they got hit to ribbons they did, slaughtered. We come down the next line after and we found 'em.

So your unit got slaughtered?

That no, that convoy, little convoy of about oh eight ten jeeps, they really got slaughtered.

Australian troops, was it?

Yeah, yeah and a few died, yeah, but when I, they copped it and oh they fought back but by the time we got there the skirmish or that skirmish was over but it could have been, we could have been in, I woulda been in the front one but I wasn't but that stage we were carrying a,

37:30 an Owen gun, a rifle and grenades around us.

A rifle as well?

Yep. Carried a .303

Why did you have so much armament?

Oh well, just that we never lost 'em. I had a, at one stage I had a revolver with me on my thigh, too. .45. We never let anything go. Anything, we would have shot anything but oh no but no, they were the worst. They weren't [(UNCLEAR)] ferrying stuff across the rivers cause one, the rain, it rained the Imperia and the all those rivers they'd been down here, drive a tank across, and the next minute they're way up here cause

38:00 just comes down out of the mountains and gushes, you know and you'd have to ferry the food across from one side to the other to feed the troops you know and you control it.

Did you ever have your tanks being sort of moved with a torrent of water like

No, no, no.

Downstream. Did that ever happen?

No, they never shifted them. They were twenty eight tonne. Matilda's twenty eight tonne, which is not heavy to a Leopard today. A Leopard's about fifty six tonne and goes three times as fast and spins on a threepenny bit. They took me for a ride on it some years ago and it's just unreal to drive

38:30 one of them. I didn't drive 'em, drive one of them to what we were driving but modern day armour of course but no, that was all.

What sort of weapons did the Japanese use against your tanks? You said a hundred and fifty pound

Oh they had some mortars, mortars and they had, yeah those hundred and fifty pounders.

Did they have any special anti-tank guns?

Oh yes, but I didn't actually see any of them. They were mainly running into twenty five pounders and a hundred and fifty pounders on an odd occasion

39:00 and that but as we moved, they moved down the tracks and everything. We were nearly, when I say "We" the B company and ourselves advanced head, we were nearly down to Buin when peace was declared and that was another occasion the Emperor said, "Give in," that was it. They could have run over us with ease. They thought, "There was a lot more of us there than what it was."

On Bougainville?

Yeah. They thought there was a lot more of us and same

39:30 at Rabaul. They thought the Australian troops were greater in number than what they were, far greater in number. That's why they were a bit hesitant apparently but if you look into the facts and figures there was thousands of them. You march in here, your mates down there on that side, another one over there and in between you've got all these columns of Japanese. They could have jumped on you, could, you might have got a couple before they got you if they wanted to but Emperor Hiro [Hirohito] said, "You give, you give it in," and he did and I can understand now, they

40:00 obeyed him in those days, but no that was it, we you know it was, a night time was your biggest worry, at night when you couldn't hear and the tins' rattle and you'd let go, you wouldn't know what and what unless you got up in the morning and found someone dead round near the wire you wouldn't know where, you could have wounded some, you wouldn't know they'd retreated into the bush.

Did you ever actually come across that?

I found a couple, we come across a couple that were dead, yeah.

What, after you'd fired your gun?

Not me, but well you wouldn't know who hit what, would ya? When you blaze away you're not sure in the bush, what you've hit you know. We'd come

40:30 across the odd one, two.

Tape 4

00:34 **Regarding that action at B company's involvement in that track in Bougainville, what was that the area where you said the 25th infantry battalion was actually surrounded at one stage?**

Mm. Jungle.

Right, it was all jungle?

Mm.

So it was just basically a narrow road

Track, yeah.

Or a track if you like

Yeah.

And vehicles and troops going along that road.

Very few vehicles.

01:00 **Very few.**

Only be jeeps and trailers and tanks and of course you had to watch the tanks if they got into too much of the swamps and that they can get bogged too, even when you tracks on you can go down in the mush.

Did you actually see that happen?

Oh yes there was several times tanks got stuck and that and someone else go out and rescue them.

Tell us about that more. What would happen if a tank got stuck? How would you deal with that?

Well from that time on you always had infantry support cause they [(UNCLEAR)] the tanks to walk behind the tank you follow what I

01:30 mean, they were protected, weren't they? Whereas if they sniped at 'em and fired at 'em they had to hit the tank first before they'd hit any of the troops following behind you know and no you'd have to get firing they'd give cover fire cover right, if there was anything firing at them and that and you bring up another vehicle and hook it on, winch it and winch it out. That's all you could do. Bit like one day we were talking at headquarters there things had quietened down a little bit and we decided we'd give the vehicles a wash cause you get covered in mud and you clear your transmission and everything

02:00 and there were a little bend in the river and we all drove down "chung chung chung" about six of us drove down and parking on like a sand bar and I [(UNCLEAR)] little Joey Lyons come down from Brisbane, a little mate o' mine, he's dead now too and he come down and away he went in there but there was no sand bar. Just disappeared. So we had to winch his out too. These are the things that can happen, the funny things you remember you know but you had your winches on [(UNCLEAR)] you see it on the four wheel drives today. You got hooks on the back and the front.

02:30 Makes a difference. You can winch out with a nice wire tow rope, it's not rope you know.

Was it always raining? If it's thick jungle presumably raining quite frequently.

Not all the time, it was tropical, but when it did rain it rained and you could see the river you could hear it coming and you could water, might even, wouldn't be much deeper than that in spots. You know that little up to the window sill for awhile running out and a wide stream you know but when it rained you'd a raging torrent and you could hear it coming

03:00 and later with us, top swimmer Maxi Bell and he was the only one I know that could swim against it and crossed the river without losing ground. The rest of us'd swim against it but we're going backwards. We're getting across to the other side, so you'd start here and finish up down there even though you were swimming 'right? But he could make headway. He was a powerful swinger but just a torrent, you could hear the water coming when it rained up north cause you always, you, your ablutions were always down stream

03:30 and never upstream, cause you want, you wanted clear water.

So how did the water actually affect your equipment and your

Ah the Owen guns were magnificent. We were all on Atebrin tablets for malaria

Atebrin was it?

Yeah.

Yep.

In Madang we got attack of dengue fever and there was only I, I'm not sure now, off the top of me head there was only about six of us never got it and I was one of them, and what we'd do we were ferrying them into back into Madang to a base hospital. You'd take a truck load in, you'd bring a truck load back,

04:00 you'd get another truck load in, another truck load back. They were always getting a couple a day fever. It wasn't malaria. It was what they called dengue fever.

What happens when you get dengue fever? Did you ever have it?

Oh no, I never. I was one of the, I think it was six of us never got it and I was one of them. Ah you perspire and sweat and you're in a fever and you little bit of the shakes. Runnin' a high temperature of course you know but not malaria. Now I never got malaria. We came back and we were all tablets, special tablets under doctors when we come back to take 'em. I had a couplea minor

04:30 attacks but never had to go to hospital but I later, couple, say the last say ten years and that I don't think I've really had it. You sometimes you get [(UNCLEAR)] bit sweaty and clammy and that, but not now, so it's gone outta your system you know but that's a dangerous thing malaria, you know. It's from the mosquito.

So how would you live in an environment where there's constant moisture like a jungle? I mean your

You just get used to it. You

So you're

05:00 **almost constantly wet?**

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah and those Owen Stanleys, they were constantly wet all the time. You look at 'em.

Didn't cause corrosion?

No, no you looked after it

In the longer term?

You looked after your vehicles. They were well greased and oiled and as I said water proofed and everything. You did everything to protect 'em you know. That's what I say, you'd even go into the river to wash 'em to get the mud of 'em, so you could grease 'em you know if you had to do all your own maintenance in those days and grease those days, things are pre-greased today on all your modern cars and everything.

05:30 Haven't got grease nipples and everything to pump grease into and keep things going through shackles and things like that you know. No, but you got used to it. You were in the same clothes, oh you weren't carrying, where you gonna carry a suitcase? You're too busy carrying your rifle.

What about your boots?

You wore 'em.

But I mean they must be constantly soaked with water.

Yeah that's right.

So would they break after?

No, those old boots were good.

They lasted?

Oh unreal.

How long would they last for generally in those conditions?

Long while. A long while.

06:00 I can't remember gettin' a new pair a boots.

Did you get any skin problems? From insects? What sort of insects would you encounter?

Ah mosquito was the biggest worry. Ah no we basically, oh yes we did strip off and dive into rivers but basically all the times we usually had our sleeves down ah to keep you know not to expose your skin too much [(UNCLEAR)], that was the thing you were taught- try and not to expose yourself. Oh you used to go for a swim and strip off but

06:30 while you were goin' for a swim and stripping off there wasn't likely to be any mosquitoes. The mosquitoes were basically, seemed to be at night more than anything as far as I was concerned. Seemed to get you when you couldn't see 'em or hear 'em you know but no some of them got skin rashes. What do you call eczema and different things? Some had some funny cures. Even in Madang where there, where I know one of the boys he reckoned he got himself a cure for baldness. His hair was gettin' a bit thin so he got it all close

07:00 cropped and he concocted a juice of pineapple, ah coconut juice and essence of lemon out of the kitchen fermented and he said, "This'll fix me," and he's never grown his hair from that day to this. It never grew back at all. These were the [(UNCLEAR)] odd cures they had to do but we did our own brewing [(UNCLEAR)], a coconut cut in half juice in it and pinched the essence of lemon out of the kitchen and put it in and come up with something, oh you go cross eyed when you licked it but

07:30 ah the natives of course they ate the, what they call that betel gum, betel thing that put that, made them high of course but you could see all their red mouths you know but no there wasn't that many insects and things like that but you were too busy lookin' after yourself.

What did you hate about the jungle the most?

I don't think you had time to hate anything. You were there.

Well what made life difficult in the jungle? Miserable in a way?

Lack of amenities.

08:00 As I said to you where did we go to the toilet?

Where would you go to the toilet?

Well you had a shovel. You dug a hole and went somewhere when you were game, right? You know I said at times I know you had special latrines dug five or six or eight places, eight bangers at a time we'd call 'em all sit on the [(UNCLEAR)] and of course if someone backfired it meant the rest'd rise up of the seat of course but that that was they were not normally there. Later on there came a time when behind the lines they'd bring [(UNCLEAR)] showers up, hot

08:30 water to get some of them a decent hot shower but basically you were in the same clothes all the time. You didn't change your uniforms. You weren't back at base. You looked after your rifle and your Owen gun and yourself and how, you didn't polish your boots every day. As I said I can't remember shaving and I can't remember, don't know whether I spoke about this. Each other can we actually say on such a such a day and at such and such a spot we went to the toilet?

09:00 **You just improvised wherever you went?**

Yeah. Back at base at Torokina at Madang, yes there were toilet blocks and we would a gone there.

But these are field of course

Yeah

Field operations.

Field operations completely different.

So were you, oh were there any sanitary units that actually

No, not with the troops.

Came with the troops?

No. No. Not really, no.

What sort of directions were you given regarding sanitary conditions?

To be hygienic?

Yeah on the field of course.

Yeah, oh we were taught

09:30 to use a shovel and buried it wherever we could wherever possible. Ah many a time we had no toilet paper, you used grass or you, you're not having handed up a bottle, packet a Kleenex and a silver toilet roll. Let's face it, before we even went into the army what were most of us using? It was the Herald and Sporting Globe all cut in squares and [(UNCLEAR)] put a bit a string through and hung it in the toilet and that's what you used for toilet paper.

What about

10:00 **obviously latrines would be dug far away from**

Oh yes.

You know for obvious reasons.

Yeah.

Was there ever any sense of insecurity when you'd actually go to the latrines that a Japanese would attack or a sniper or

Not where they were, no. They were never put down for you to be open slather and someone shot at, no. If you were, if any of us went out to go to the toilet it was always someone watchin'. I mean let's face it, you're sitting down and whatever you might be doing, you

10:30 can't be, I can remember, I can vaguely remember squatting with a Bren gun on me, the Owen gun on me across me lap but there'd be others watching while you went. You just didn't wander off on your own, no. Oh no way knowing but

Have you heard of any stories where that had actually taken place?

Oh well in Madang we had, we got onto jungle juice one bloke and of course guards on duty he went out and he got an old Japanese bike apparently

11:00 and he during the night up he comes. "Halt." "Halt." "Halt or I'll shoot." Bang, dead. One of our own. He got onto the jungle juice and a Japanese bike riding in and he was one of our own got killed. Got high on this jungle juice as we called it but what was the sentries on duty to do? Let 'em come in, you wouldn't know who they were. So they're the funny side of stories. The people will react in different ways.

11:30 None of us are meant to be heroes and that you wouldn't know. I had an occasion where a chap went up in flames and there were a lot of people around and this was in Madang and for some unaccountable reason I was the first one to smother him and don't ask me how I got there, I don't know. I had, I have been involved with a couple of suicides. I don't mean, oh I shouldn't be talking about that, should I? What I'm trying to say is you don't know how you're gonna react in any given circumstances.

12:00 I was out with a mate of mine out here at a barbecue years and years ago and a bloke threw petrol on a barbecue and it went, blew right between my legs and burnt my suit and got a young boy behind me and raced him to the Children's Hospital and they said, "Who reacted and smothered him?" and it was me but I got no recollection of doing that. You don't say, "I'm gonna do that." You, it whatever happens, you could freeze or you do something. You don't know. You got no time to think.

You were saying

You act. You act.

Okay. You were saying before about suicides

12:30 Mm I've been involved with a few, yeah.

Yeah. I mean I understand that this has taken place in almost all armies

Yeah.

In during wartime.

Yeah.

And the Australian army's no exception to that.

I've had 'em happen since in civilian life.

Right but what about actually in the field?

I didn't see any in the field. Only the one I said that got drunk and come in and he got shot because of, they weren't gonna let him in, they didn't know who he was and but I didn't see anything like that, no.

Were suicides something that were

13:00 **not spoken about**

No.

But you knew took place?

Well you're getting back you're getting back to ah homosexuals, aren't you? If you want to. Ah I was involved with the Caulfield race course when a chap went off the top of the Caulfield race course cause they found out he was homosexual and unfortunately when he hit the ground he was dead, wasn't he? And that's the way they were after him. That was the action, that was the reaction they took to homosexuals.

13:30 I had occasion some thirty years ago. Coburg Rotary sent me to a course at the Alexander Clinic in Fitzroy. Alexander Clinic under Marie Coleman to do a three months course in social work and one of the things we come up with and do our papers and I can go back and have them corrected next day was on suicides and ah she read mine and she read and another chap from Sunshine Harvest, who I got to know, an accountant, cause his wife had done

14:00 the course and she said, "I don't understand." She said, "Your things are completely different to our theory." I said, "But have you ever been personally involved?" She said, "No," and there was two instructors, two women instructors and a man there. Three of them all told and they said, "No." I said, "Well how can you talk on this thing and make a suggestion to what action you'd take or what and if you've never been involved?" I said, "Have you ever cut anyone down? Have you ever rescued someone that's gassed themselves? Have you ever done that?" They said, "No." I said, "Well I have, so your theories

14:30 are that far out it's not funny," and this chap from Sunshine Harvest, he said, "Oh," he said, "Alf's right. It's your theories you're printin' on paper to tell people don't mean a thing." I'm afraid as academics, I'm sorry now, I'm gonna upset you, upset I'm afraid academics are my weak point today in present society and I've just been involved, I'm a director of the life member here and a director of Edith Bedwell Retirement Village down here. Now we as directors I've turned over seventy two, so I've got to be accredited

15:00 and who's doing one of my accreditation? A lass twenty five, twenty six. She's going all right, "I said now what qualifications you've got?" and she told me. I said, "I got all those. Ever worked in the industry?" She said, "No." I said, "You're telling me and these people how to run it and you've never worked in the industry." Isn't that applying to life in general today in a lot of the things where the, our public service is not only in that field in the age care in the age care in particular, they're shifting the goal posts all the time and you try and operate something

15:30 non-profit, not for profit and its academics are tellin' you what to do.

I don't disagree with you because it's the truth.

I'm sorry.

No, you just shouldn't have brought it up at all because my view of academics is not that far off.

I shouldn't a said it, should I? But no that's true. I think unless you've worked in a field of something you shouldn't talk about it. Come and find out and do something for it. I believe today is too, is nurses' day, is it?

I'm not sure actually.

Yeah I believe so. I was over at the hospital and they say it was nurses' day, yeah which

16:00 they're, can't get enough of them at the present time but what marvellous people they were in the war and the Salvation Army.

Did you actually, I mean speaking of nurses and ah did you actually have any contact with

Yes.

With AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and...?

AWAS yeah, that photo you saw there was Mick and I when we were going to an ack-ack, ah went to see some lasses at the ack-ack station in Brisbane, search lights and that and that's when that photo was taken of Mick and yes ah

16:30 got chased out.

Got chased out? Why is that?

We shouldn't have been in there. We were young imps we got called. Yes they were with AWAS yes, they had to do good job.

What was your impression of women in the army?

I think there's a place for them. I don't think it should be in the front line but a lot of places and I think the same as our police force. I think they should take over a lot of the roles that are desk wise and let the men that are more physically, technically more physically stronger go out but as nurses

17:00 yes, I my first impression was a eighteen year old boy at in Bendigo and I came out in a rash and a couple of others and they said, "Oh, straight into Bendigo Base Hospital." In we went and they reckoned we'd been eating crayfish and we said, "Where in the hell would we get the money to buy crayfish in Bendigo in wartime?" The next day it had disappeared but that next morning I'll never forget, all these young blokes in this ward and they're all feeling very well, aren't they and just a sheet over them,

17:30 you can imagine what I'm talking about without being rude and this dear old matron come along and she got about three beds from me and she just looked and she said, "Oh yeah feelin' well, are you?" and she went 'whack', it and that was my impression of a matron and that woman got Cath, who's our CEO director of nursing down here at Edith Bedwell, at the moment she reminds me of matron for sure. She's a lovely woman. Heart a gold but the discipline, disciplinarian and she reminds me of that same

18:00 old matron. Boy oh boy I got a good learning curve very early. Don't get ambitious and don't show it if you do but they were marvellous as were our Salvos. You never [(UNCLEAR)] strike a Salvo out in the middle of nowhere on this own. Never ever got killed, very few of them. Come round somewhere and where you'd least expect there'd be a Salvo standing there with a biscuit and a cup a coffee or a cup a tea. No fear. Least expect them so I've got great respect for the Salvos.

Mm.

18:30 Ah in that respect. I can tell you another story. I won't, but

Tell me if you have any stories about, you were talking about homosexuality with war. Now

That was our reply.

I'm sorry.

That was our reply. When I did this interview the, this bloke about twenty six, twenty seven, little goatee beard sitting there [(UNCLEAR)] and he said, "What's your views on homosexuality?" and I give him a straight answer. I said, "Well having been a returned soldier and seen the action

19:00 [(UNCLEAR)] should be done. I said nature's nature.

Did you hear of any stories of practising homosexuality with soldiers? I mean

No. No.

With

Basically, if there was any they would they'd have been caught up and got rid of.

They got discharged from the army?

Ooh the, more than discharged.

Did you hear of any stories where that took place?

No, no just a fact, no you just hear it, the fact it was done. See Bruce Ruxton retired as our state president. He was very outspoken against homosexuals.

19:30 **Did a lot of soldiers in the army also view it as something natural?**

No.

Under those circumstances?

Unnatural. Unnatural.

Unnatural.

Yeah, wouldn't have a bar of it. Homosexuals - they were out. Almost as bad as a thief.

Did you, just on the topic of this, I mean we're also delving into a deeper topic here of

Yes.

Mateship.

Mm.

Now what is deemed homosexuality? Where's the boundary between mateship between men, which is very strong

Yes.

And I mean

20:00 **let's**

Homosexuality is definitely sexual.

Right.

Mateship is not sexual

Okay.

And I'll give you an example of that. We had to at, out at Canungra we slept in a paddock, a paddock infested, ah infested with ticks and it was that ruddy cold the three of us slept together and we alternated one-two-three and then we'd change over, the outside'd come in and the other outside'd come in, so we kept each other warm but we weren't homosexuals. We were just surviving and keepin' ourself warm. Now that's what I mean, that's mateship

20:30 not homosexuality.

All right, when you say you slept together you're saying

Three of us

Really close to each other?

[(UNCLEAR)] Huggin' each other

Right.

And not ashamed of it. We kept warm

Mm.

But we weren't, we weren't homosexuals.

Okay.

It was survival.

Yep. Yep.

No, no that was just, I've got very strong views on it but never mind. Perhaps the church disagrees with me I don't know.

Would that be like for instance would you be,

21:00 **would it be enough where you were so close to your friends of course, I mean none of this surprises me, this is about mateship between men of course and in, would that sort of companionship, very, very strong brotherly type bonds, would it be okay to actually grab someone who is a very close friend of yours and in whatever instance kiss him on the cheek just as a gesture of love?**

Ah

Would those,

21:30 **if you know what I'm trying to say**

Yeah.

It's not a homosexual act is what I'm tryna define here.

Well you've got your, some of your nationalities now are like your Italians kiss you on each cheek. French do the same thing, don't they?

Could Aussies do that? At the time?

I don't know. I've never seen it.

Right.

I've never kissed a mate yet.

So there were no public displays of affection?

No. A hug and still today you get a hug. Not a shake hands. Even today you [(UNCLEAR)] mates will get a hug

22:00 but that's all it is. That's a real sign of a real friendship but oh how often does someone have a bad fever and [(UNCLEAR)] sweat ah number of times people have slept with them just to try and help them get

the keep 'em warm and try and get the sweat it out of them. Things like that you know. That's not homosexuality.

Of course yeah.

Homosexuality is definitely sexual.

Okay.

That's me. Sorry.

No, no, no, that's absolutely a per, you know a fine answer. I don't see anything wrong with that.

22:30 **So mateship**

Lasts for life.

This is a different kind of mateship, isn't it?

It's stronger than, you can pick your friends but you can't pick your relations. See your mates, they'll be your friends you've picked, your relations are given to you. You mightn't like 'em.

This is a different kind of mateship

23:00 **you're talking about. You're talking about a mateship through absolute struggle and**

Yeah, yeah.

Hardship

Yeah.

Life and death

Yeah.

Bit different to the sort of schoolboy type mateship

Yeah, completely different.

Mm.

It's a survival mateship. That's what it arose from, survival. You were depending on each other to survive.

Do you think if you didn't go through war that you, it was just peace time like you know

I think I'd have probably, have a different perspective of life than what it is now.

23:30 That's why I'm a, I and a lot of others are great believers that we should all have a national service cause I think

Do you, what I suppose I'm tryna get at is that do you feel mateship would be different, your impression of mateship would be different if you didn't

Probably.

Go to the actual field?

Probably, cause you didn't have to depend on anyone, did you?

So you're put into a very unique situation, here you're saying that you have to depend on people for your life

That's right.

And live with them day and night

Yep

24:00 and find out. Big difference. All right you can get to Probus, Rotary, Lodge where you'll find they're all kissing cousins. Like the men'll kiss everyone else's wife, men'll shake hands. Probus, Rotary, Lodge all the same. That's a greeting of friendship and mateship but not the same time of mateship we're talking about. That's a greeting. Have a brotherhood type of thing that you would belong to a similar organisation,

24:30 interested in the same things, but that's not depending on life.

Now what would happen if for instance, I mean we're all human beings and

Oh we've all

And we we're

We've all joked, you were, we've all joked and I dare say I've joked and kiss someone on the cheek too, muckin' around but cause you know what a Liverpool kiss is don't you, a Balmain kiss, don't you?

No I don't I'm afraid.

Gee. Just about kill you if I wanted to. Liverpool, Liverpool which is England, a Balmain kiss is simply you come towards me

25:00 and I just hit you with my forehead right on the bridge a your nose and you're gone and I've done it and I had one only a couple a years ago at the pub up in Echuca and they warned him. They said, "If you don't shut up Alf'll give you a Balmain kiss or a Liverpool kiss." He said, "Alf wouldn't do that to me" and he went on and on and walked round the bar I grabbed him and went 'bang' and he went lookin' at me and I only hit him in the forehead. If I'd a hit him in the nose I would a broken it cause when you were the aggressor and you hit with your forehead

25:30 you don't hurt yourself. In other words and [(UNCLEAR)] you see 'em choppin' wood and everything it's no good tryna to hit that wood like that. You gotta be decisive and you gotta be, go right through it and the same with a Liverpool or a Balmain kiss. Yeah but oh yeah I dare say in joking we've kissed each other on the cheek or somethin' you know, muckin' around or things like that.

What about showing emotion in the field? In the army? I mean

Yes. No, no, no

Crying?

No shame in crying.

No shame?

Nope.

Did men cry frequently?

Yes, I've seen

26:00 men cry. I've seen 'em cry in different circumstances. I've seen drunks cry.

But what about

In war, I've seen 'em cry after something happened. It's a good way to get rid of your emotion. Get it out of your system and then you could have someone on your shoulder huggin' 'em while they're sobbing.

That happened very frequently?

Oh not very frequently but it did happen yeah. We had two brothers die, ah two West brothers got killed and a couple of their good mates were very upset about that.

26:30 Very upset but we had a bloke disappear from us at Bendigo. He's never been seen from that day to this.

Mm.

In the [(UNCLEAR)] River. We couldn't find him. We don't know where he went, whether he got out and disappeared and ran away or what he did.

Could you describe to me your, that instance about you were saying those two brothers who got killed. You say you had some

West.

Friends that were very upset

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Very.

What do you, I mean this may sound like a very self-evident question

When they got the news. When they got the news.

Okay. They were in the field at the time?

27:00 Yeah, yeah. They were up in, they were up north in Bougainville and we were down south and you get [(UNCLEAR)] I was gonna say something else there about that, um oh yeah you can, I can remember being in Madang when some of the boys had gone home on leave in a plane and they went down in the ocean. Now we gave 'em money, we gave 'em cigarettes to take home to all our relations and they went down in the ocean. They were in, out in the water for twenty four hours in sixteen to eighteen foot swells

27:30 you know. Right? And they were rescued. The point was I was with the signal officer, Mitch a mate of mine, he's since died, taking the code coming through when they were Clarrie Rake and George

Attenborough and all the names a gone down, they'd been rescued but when we got news they'd gone down, a couple of the boys were very upset. They were in tears for them, not so much the money or the cigarettes they had with them or the things they were taking home but just the fact that was their mates and they thought, "They'd gone not even in action. Gone going home to have a holiday."

28:00 **Can I ask you, mateship with women? How now**

Would be the same thing

Same thing?

Girls would be the same way.

So say for instance

And that didn't meant to be that, it didn't mean to say that if they had mateship, didn't mean to say they'd been lesbians.

No, no, no, no. No what [(UNCLEAR)] I mean forget homosexuality and lesbianism and all that

Yep, mm. Yep.

That's really irrelevant at in this point.

Mm. Yeah.

What I'm tryna sort, I suppose I'm focusing at is that with this experience was,

28:30 **cause there's frequently a difference in the type of relationship men have with men**

Mm.

And men have with women

Mm.

And vice versa

Mm.

But what I'm tryna emphasise is there the mateship you had described to me on your experiences in the front line and with your friends, the troops and then when you went home after the war and you got married, how did that impact on your, well in the term mateship, how did it impact on your relationship with your wife, with women in that sense? Was

29:00 **it's obviously, it's a different kind of mateship?**

Mm.

But what parallels could you draw on that make it similar? Or was it similar? Was it different entirely?

Mm. Different entirely

What do you mean by that?

The, I think a lot of us come home and a lot of us coulda and I'm say talking in general now, coulda raced into marriage unprepared and I mean that, unprepared. I'd even put myself almost into the same category.

29:30 Unprepared.

Mentally unprepared?

Yeah. Not physically unprepared. Mentally unprepared and you're back in a completely different situation. You're not regimented, ah you have to give and take to a different sex whose outlook on life are completely different to men in most cases and I can understand that why and how and [(UNCLEAR)] I got a sister the same way, ah

30:00 the, ah just completely different.

Did you find that the men were more laid back?

Oh yes.

Yeah? You did?

Yeah.

And what was the difference in the sense of

Things have changed today.

Mm but I mean in [(UNCLEAR)] at the time when you did get married

Yeah, yeah.

You know first few years, whatever.

Yeah.

What was the difference in terms of mateship? Can you describe that to me?

Well it wasn't there. Your wife then was well I hear people say she's, "Oh, my soul mate," or things like that. I wouldn't say that at the particular time.

30:30 You were then, your mates had gone. You were married. You were married to a woman or a girl whatever it may be. She would have her girlfriends. Most of your mates weren't with you, meaning they'd not [(UNCLEAR)] come from Coburg, that they coulda been interstate or South Australia, Western Australia anywhere. They're gone but the, normally the person that woulda been married had her own girlfriends around her so

Did you feel that you could relate to your wife as a result of the

Very hard. Very hard.

Very hard?

Yeah, very hard

31:00 at times, yeah. Completely different outlook on life ah and I suppose I did too and I and a couple of my mates are the same way. You know very hard early. Might sound easy, but it was very hard. From a disciplined life to a undisciplined life um

Where did the views defer? I mean the major views that is on regard to life I suppose in general, whatever. You know you said your mates were

31:30 **laid back**

Mm.

But you didn't find that that your wife was in a certain sense

No, I think our girls in those days had pretty strict ideas.

What do you mean by pretty strict ideas?

On marriage.

Yeah like?

Straight down the line.

I'm not sure what you mean.

They would, they wouldn't want you to look at another girl.

I'm not sure if that's changed.

Ah I mean that and it could apply the other way. Ah that's when you need tolerance

32:00 and I've been lucky in later stage of life there's been tolerance because when you get interests that diversify you and you haven't got the same interests. You've got some of the same interests but different interests. You're not in each other's pocket. You got a far different look on life. You're looking from two different angles, not from the same thing all the time you go down that track and you might say, "She go left," and you said, "Go right," but when you're on that track over there and that track over there well you can come to a centre track, can't you?

32:30 You're more tolerant when relationships today and young ones, I'm not knocking them working. I know some would like to be home and that but I think while they got a, even if they're home they gotta have an interest in life completely different from divorced from their partners. That, there got something else to talk about. Not just the same thing that you would be talking about. You could come home from work and all you're talking's work. What's the housewife done? The dishes, the washing the kids but if she's got another interest in life then she'll [(UNCLEAR)], "I was down

33:00 at the kindergarten," or, "I was down the day centre or doing this." You got something else different to talk about. Your lives are far more compatible. That's just me.

Did you find that you could communicate with your wife in time? You could tell her the more gruesome aspects of your experiences?

No.

Never?

Never.

Never. Why?

I don't know. I'm saying more now than I would have ever said. Ah didn't mind, you can remember the good things and the things that no you didn't want to burden anything like that

33:30 ah

So if you were gonna say who your soul mates were

Mm.

Who are they? Who were they?

Who were they? They, most of them are gone.

They were the soldiers?

Mm.

Soul mates.

Mm.

What does soul mate mean to you?

A full brother.

A full brother?

Almost twin.

So you feel like blood brothers?

Yep.

That close?

Yep.

You could tell 'em anything?

Yep. Even today we can talk

34:00 to each other.

Do you love them?

Yep. Yeah no problem.

Unconditional love?

Unconditional yeah. If they were in trouble, I'd be the first there to help them.

And when you mean that you say that you would lay your life down for them

Yep.

Absolutely.

Yep and today things have changed. We come home and if you were crook and I can put it this way, if I was in the gutter or there was someone in the gutter I'd go there to help them right? Today if someone was lying in the gutter, how many people go to help? They're frightened

34:30 of litigation. They're frightened of getting into a blue but years ago if someone was lying in the gutter you'd pick them up and tell you what you could do for them. Today you're not [(UNCLEAR)] most people are not game to touch 'em. Well if someone's injured bleeding out there, right? I'm qualified. Certificates if you want to look at it. Right? I do not carry my gloves with me and I don't carry my mask with me. Technically I'm not to touch that person unless I put me gloves on and put a mask on. To stop litigation and would that stop me really?

35:00 Would that stop me really if I thought I could save someone? Would I worry about going, getting my gloves, getting my mask? To a lot of us it wouldn't but technically you shouldn't.

I want to sort of like tread back a little. On the notion of love

Mm.

Right, you said you love your mates

Mm. Love is not necessarily a sexual thing.

No, no. Of course. I'm not again, I'm not referring to sexuality here. I'm actually making a very strong

35:30 **partition here**

Mm.

You know

Mm.

But I mean I fully understand to some extent what you're referring to but of course I can't relate to your specific experience, it's impossible, but when you say that you love your friends and they're your soul mates I mean it's a very beautiful

Yeah.

Beautiful expression there I must say very, it's very heart warming when you talk about it in reference to your wife for instance

Mm, oh not

How do you love

36:00 **her?**

No, no not only my wife. I'm talking about in general cause I do a bit of counselling.

I see

And I've had one just recently and it's a problem. Now he and she I say would love each other without a shadow of doubt but you got one problem. She'll go and put everything on hire purchase. Then he'll find out half way through that he's paid, she's paid fifty dollars off something and worth seventy five and they get a summons. Right? Does he go and pay the twenty five and keep it or does he lose the fifty dollars? So to keep peace he pays the

36:30 twenty five and gets the thing but goes on. Now they love each other but he neither can get through the fact he shouldn't be doing this. Now if it was my mate he wouldn't be going spendin' my money. He'd be thinkin' twice about it.

Yeah okay. Okay. So you're saying that there's a very different concept of love between you and your wife

Yeah.

For instance in your

Yeah.

In your experience

Yeah.

And you and your mates?

Yeah. He wouldn't be going spending my money. Oh this is one I've just done recently and [(UNCLEAR)] they both love each other for sure but she's just got a weakness.

37:00 Now I fortunately haven't had any trouble with poker machines but there could be some that way. Both men and women.

Is it

They could love each other but one's wastin' the money on a poker machine.

Mm but did your wife or at the time I mean and I am speaking at the time, right so I'm tryna capture your thoughts then and there. Did you find that your love was I mean obviously you must have, well I can't speak for you of course but I suppose it's in your right to inform me if I'm

37:30 **incorrect your experience with love with your wife was different altogether to that of your mates, of course that's what you're suggesting**

Yes, yeah, yeah.

Right. Which was deeper? And if so, if they were different, on what levels was it deeper?

I

And again I'm speaking at the time. Walk us through that.

The, if during the wartime and your mate was in trouble that

- 38:00 you would forget everything and go and do something. If in your, later in life, if your, how can I put it um partner [(UNCLEAR)] she wanted to take a certain course, how would you stop her? He or her but you could stop your mate.
- How?**
- Physically, but you can't lay a hand on anyone today and you got
- 38:30 one just recently on television last night if you seen it with the Russians and the immigration. Did you see that?
- No I didn't.**
- [(UNCLEAR)] these blokes are being taken by the Russian brides and there's a weakness in their system. They can come in here, marry right, and immediately turf the, he out of their, his home right, his home and claim asylum and get it. It was on the television last night. It is disgusting and you're talking about it. Now in his case there, all right he's, there's been a bride through the
- 39:00 computer whatever it is through you know they come out but deep affection, deep love. As one said, "Did, got everything I bought a car for her." Did this, did that and everything. She come home and the police come and say, "Out." She's done a harassment claim against him.
- And what about in your experience?**
- I haven't had that, no.
- No.**
- No, I haven't had that, no. I didn't have that. Never have had that but I mean I'm tryna to point out the fact that they could go off and as with this one I'm just tellin' ya
- 39:30 about and go and have a [(UNCLEAR)] thank God it's not poker machines. I don't know where you'd go then. If they're wasting all their money on poker machines. It could be the man.
- Can I ask you one last question?**
- Mm.
- And I suppose because I won't get a chance to ask these again. This is a personal question. When you think of love for your mates**
- Yeah.
- You know**
- Yeah.
- And I'm thinking right then and there this is the jungle around us here you know you, you've made this fantastic friendship, strong friendships, when you look**
- 40:00 **back now do you feel that this type of love can almost make you cry? Is it that so strong? Is it so bonding?**
- I don't say cry now but I could have. I don't say I would now, ah no I think we gone past the crying days except I can get tears brought to my eyes now when I see certain things, yes. I'm not ashamed of it.
- Mm, so at the time it did?**
- Mm get a dry throat. Mm even there today you can get that when you see
- 40:30 certain things in life yeah. So the one that just, the lass that left I gave her away cause her mother and father were divorced and she didn't want anything to do with her father and I said, "What about your brother?" She said, "No," she said, "You've raised me. You give me away," and I was very proud of that and that brought us very close together. As a granddaughter brought us very closer together. Closer together than a normal granddaughter would be together. Do you follow what I mean?
- Mm.**
- I'm sorry. What have I done now?
- You've done nothing wrong. In fact the unfortunate thing is that the tape's run out so**
- That's all right.

00:32 **How are you going today Alfred?**

Good morning.

Good.

Very well thank you.

Lovely to see you.

Every day's a bonus when you get to my age.

Excellent.

In fact any age to today, you wake up you're going well.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Yeah. Alfred, I'd like to go to New Guinea

Mm.

While and I'd like to talk a little bit about

Mm.

Your time in New Guinea

Mm.

Um and ask you some sort of general questions about what the day-to-day life was like there. I want to ask you,

01:00 **how did you and your mates adapt to the tropical conditions?**

Not too bad cause we'd been, the unit had been in Queensland for x number of, couple of years. We'd been acclimatised on the Gold Coast for six months before beforehand and having trained at Canungra and sort of a jungle surrounding and sort of humid conditions, it led us in pretty good stead

Mhm.

01:30 And having landed as we did in Milne Bay which is between Madang and Alex Harbour and it was a coconut plantation. So and exercise became the main theme as soon as we arrived to get after a trip and we sailed on the Duntroon.

Mm.

And after landing on a boat all that time you wanted to get off and then you had to do some work and that and set up camp and everything. There'd been an advance guard had gone and started the things but then

02:00 it all had to be finished off because it was, we were a big unit

Yeah.

With so much equipment and thing like that and to be settled down sigs and many stories about sigs too.

Okay.

Then I can remember getting there, when we first got there we all had to do two different things and I was assisting, headquarters was putting up a, our telephone as we call it and sigs and I'm climbing a coconut tree, not like the natives do but we had

02:30 tied all the spike inside your shoe on the inside of each one, you spike and went up. I got up and got it all done and suddenly realised I was covered in ants. Well I come down quicker than you ever thought and I headed straight for the water, cause we were on the water at, in a inland inlet you know. Straight in the water and get rid of the ants so

Mm.

You can make a quick exit from certain spots if you've got to, I can tell you

Mm.

But um

And how did you deal with the dampness and the humidity?

We were all right. We were lucky. See we all had stretchers.

03:00 **Oh right?**

Yes, we weren't sleepin' on the ground. Not then. You're talking about in New Guinea and Madang, when we first got there?

I'm talking about the Owen Stanley ranges?

Yeah, well I never got into the Owen Stanleys. We were after the Owen Stanleys.

Oh okay.

Now those poor blokes, well they just lived and slept in what then we did in the finish, live and sleep in what we wore but they did it for weeks on end.

Mm.

Just lying on the ground and everything. We went, when we arrived to that first base point at Madang we had our own stretchers.

Oh.

03:30 Which kept us up off the ground.

Were they heavy to carry?

No just a little canvas stretcher with you know the little wooden legs and canvas and no, we didn't have to carry 'em. God we were an armoured regiment. See when you're packing tanks you can pack anything. We were lucky and I mean I told you we were the lucky ones as far as that was concerned.

Well you had a base. Yeah.

Base there, yeah.

Mhm. Did you have tents?

Yes.

Yeah.

Had our tents yeah, six to a tent and

Mhm. Oh okay.

In the book I gave you you'll see a

04:00 photo of that that place at Militat where we had our base camp.

Mm. What sort of noises did you hear in the jungle?

There? Nothing except really falling coconuts. Don't stand under the tree you'd get hit by a coconut. That it, it's real but when we, when they did fall that's when you grabbed 'em and cut 'em in half and you could eat them and eat the juice from them but no, there was no noises apart from normal bushland noises. You wouldn't a known you weren't

04:30 home somewhere, not home down here but you wouldn't know you weren't in Queensland in the forest jungle not the jungle, the forests of Queensland or somewhere like that.

You didn't see any monkeys or anything like that?

No, no, no, no there was no monkeys there. No. I don't think in the whole time we were away did I ever see a monkey.

Mm.

Plenty of mainly wild cattle, pigs and beef are the main things. There was some bird life and things like that you know but no, no strange noises really

05:00 cause Madang at that stage, we were in between Madang was that famous port with Burns Philp and there was, that's they had to give you an idea, had its own cricket oval at Madang, which we played cricket on it. Went in and played cricket so it was a, how can I put it, a reasonably civilised little part to land along the coast and do our patrols from yeah but nothing, no noise out of the ordinary at all, no.

What did you do when you weren't

05:30 **on duty?**

Leisure, yeah well once again in that book you will see there we rigged up trapezes out over the water and we swam a lot. We had our own little boats and [(UNCLEAR)] that we went out and did. Went out as far as we could go chasing shells, the kiri shells, things like that. We'd come back and fill 'em with something and make a necklace of them and send them home and things like that. We did occupy ourselves

Mm.

And then once we got established there was,

06:00 so no baseball, softball was done, which is the American diversion and kick a football, play cricket, ah it was the main, major things we did.

Cards?

Oh cards, yes. If you didn't play cards you were out of it and you played crib and you play five hundred and you play euchre, solo and all those type of things, which a lot of the young ones can't play today, cards. They've lost the knack.

Mm.

Cause there's too much, should I say television. Too much entertainment

06:30 provided for them. They don't have to provide their own. So we could drop a hat, play a game a cards and you stopped anywhere someone'd produce a pack a cards you could play euchre or something, which is a quick game, just have a couple of minutes if you had to pack up and go you know and anywhere but natter, put your feet up. The main thing we were always taught, no matter where we were, put your feet up, always above your head if you could. They were the main things but we were pretty fit most of us.

Yeah. What were you wearing mostly?

Jungle

07:00 greens.

Mm.

Jungle greens.

Long pants or short?

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

We did have shorts but you were better off in the jungle to have long, the mosquitoes.

Yeah, mm.

It's all right in [(UNCLEAR)] along the coast in Queensland we were relaxing, we were in shorts and things like that but not up there. Always in boots and jungle greens, long ones.

Was it hot wearing things like that?

Muggy but you got used to it cause you would only have a shirt on, you wouldn't have a jumper.

Yeah.

You'd only

07:30 have a shirt and trousers.

And I believe that the jungle was very dark in some places.

Oh yes, yeah, yeah. Very dark you tried to get into it, yes. It was the under growth lovely green foliage and of course it didn't have the population and didn't have the road main roads and things that, that we have down here.

Mm.

You know just your little tracks where the natives are walking from their own villages or wherever it might be and that's where the, all the different

08:00 dialects would come in, even with pidgin English

Yeah.

From village to village. Let's face it we're talking back in the 40, late 40, middle '40s aren't we? That's sixty years ago. Things have changed up in those place we went from Rotary and I didn't go on the last one but a lot of our boys in the Rotary club here we've done trips back to New Guinea, Samoa and places like that. Doing a fortnight's work and things like that and the whole place has changed completely.

Mm.

Civilisation to an extent has come to a lot of the places.

08:30 **Mm.**

With it come a lot of problems too.

Tell me, as far as the locals go what was your relationship with the locals?

Very good. Very good. You treated them with respect and they treated you with respect. It was always, "Yes master, no master," that was their pidgin English and some of the equipment they had would assist you. Like with the cross cut saw was ah the, "Pulla me go and pusha me go, pulla me come and a pusha me

09:00 go, pulla me come and a pusha me go," and the piano and things you learnt to talk a bit of English. Some of them had a little smack of English. Even no matter where we went you'd find an odd one or two could speak a little bit of English where the missionaries had been through for a period of time, or the traders had been through but they always, we never had any antag[onism] in our experience and my whole, my own experience and the unit's experience we never faced any hostile natives. Always

09:30 of great assistance. I think I mentioned yesterday we went on a, out on one of the patrols and we realised that they the night before the Japanese had slept on the same bamboo floor as we'd slept on. They'd let, they were a day in front of us but they welcomed us. They were glad to see the others go but pleased to see us cause you'd always give 'em a few cigarettes and a few things.

Yeah.

Cans of bully beef and stuff like that. We had plenty of it at the time.

What did they say about the Japanese?

10:00 No, we never found any hostile ones. We found them mostly supportive as they were right through the Owen Stanleys, they, our troops were, would a been lost without 'em. In most cases they found them supportive. On odd occasions they, apparently they found some antagonistic but different but not, we didn't ever find that now cause let's face it the Owen Stanleys was what, you're lookin' at eighteen months before us.

And what was their opinion of the Japanese do you know?

In the whole

10:30 didn't like. There'd been some atrocities done against them ah

Mm.

Thought I heard movement. Yeah in the whole they didn't like them. Odd occasion I, we never found any that liked 'em but how could you tell?

Yeah.

It was very difficult in those days but we never had any problems with them at all. They were always of assistance to us.

Mm. Okay and what, just generally your living conditions

Our living

11:00 conditions then were very, very good. We had our own cookhouses back at base and there. So we were fed fairly well.

Mm.

Fairly well.

What did you have for breakfast say?

Oh you know that's a good question. Ah usually porridge or something like that. That was a mixture he cooked up, cause we mixture of stew of some description. All depend what the cooks put together, but we weren't too bad off really

11:30 **Yeah.**

To what some of them would have suffered. Different when you got further like further away, like not there at base but different when we went to Bougainville in a bit of action, yeah it's a completely do you're looking after yourself then. Yeah.

Mm.

You know you can't turn around to the cook and say, "I want eggs and bacon for breakfast." It's not on. You're back to your biscuits and your bit of tin of bully beef or whatever it might be. Water, long as you could get water you were happy.

Did you have tea?

If you had a chance to boil it but if you boil,

12:00 all right there at base but back at [(UNCLEAR)] how could light a fire? Give your position away, you couldn't. Like the enemy would spot the fire and the smoke, wouldn't they? Know there was life, so you would see you were surviving on water and natural things like that. Oh it wasn't too bad. When you look back. It didn't do me and I'm sure it didn't do a lot of others any harm either.

When you're in your tents inside, what was the floor? Was it just

Just earth.

Just earth?

Mm, even though we had stretchers.

And then you'd put your

12:30 **stretchers on just**

Yeah.

Just straight on there.

Yeah, yeah.

So there was no sort of little floor and

Oh no, no, not like you would have back here.

Yeah.

Like back in base and back in Australia, yeah they woulda had like a flooring board base,

Mm.

Things like that or in the huts at Puckapunyal and things like no, nothing like that, no. Straight onto the floor that were, that was all

Mm.

And your tent's around you and the tents had the flap over the top to keep, help take the water off and you always had drains around to try and drain the water away from your own tent, you follow what I mean?

Yep.

So

13:00 it didn't come inside.

Did you have mosquito nets?

Yes.

Yeah.

Most

Cause that's when the mossies come out at night.

Most important, as I mentioned yesterday we had so many of them go down with dengue fever in at Militat in between Madang and Alex Harbour but I was one of six I think it was that never got it.

Mm.

But it was only, you're only a couple of days in the boat back into Madang and the base hospital and back again. It was like a regular transport of ambulances runnin' 'em in and bringin' some back. Just get the fever over and back it goes, you know.

13:30 **And what**

Had to take, we had to take our tablets every day, Atebrin tablets to prevent malaria.

In the tents at night

Mm.

How did you light the tent?

Back at the base then?

Yeah.

Oh we had our own little Brigs and Stratton motors that relayed a little like electricity lamp into each

tent. Not all of them but it went to quite a lot of them, yeah.

Mm. Okay.

But you could, that didn't work when you were further down on in action. There was no

No.

You no, that was just the base

Did you have candles or

14:00 **anything?**

No, I don't remember a candle.

Mm.

I really don't.

Mm.

Could have been, I wouldn't know. I don't remember ever having a candle.

And at base did you have a mess tent?

Yes.

Somewhere where you ate?

Yes ate, yeah

Mm.

Base had nice mess, oh in most cases there at Madang when we were there that was all outdoors. Kitchen there and you just ate on the ground. No seats or anything like that or anything [(UNCLEAR)] that you'd back in Australia or anything like that, no. That was reasonably comfortable yeah

14:30 and that's you're talking about in New Guinea at Madang where we were, yeah.

Mm. Okay. Moving along to yeah sickness, if someone got dengue fever,

Yeah.

What were the symptoms?

High temperature. Sweating. Ah oh slight [(UNCLEAR)] oh hard to say. Mainly a fever, which was sweating and feeling uncomfortable, yeah.

15:00 **Did you ever get it?**

No, I said I was one of the six that didn't.

One in six.

One of six.

One of six.

Out of fifteen hundred over a period of time. Back and forth like a yo yo, they were in trucks taking 'em in just to check 'em and next day you bring 'em they'd take another lot and bring another lot back.

And if someone got it quite badly, how long would they have to stay in hospital?

Oh, dengue base at Madang I think, the longest that I knew of in there would have been no more than a week.

Yeah so it wasn't like

15:30 **malaria?**

No, nothing like malaria. No.

Yeah, okay.

Not as death threatening as malaria.

Did any of the guys you know have malaria?

Oh had a couple, couple yeah. They were sent home of course as it happened but most of us didn't. We took our tablets. We, pre-embarkation we were on tablets before we all went to build up an immunity, which the others didn't have earlier a couple of years before and they didn't have any of this that we got later you know with prevention medicine, yeah.

16:00 **Yeah cause I know there was earlier in the war, there was shocking cases of malaria**

Yeah.

Wasn't there?

Yeah well there wasn't the prevention taken then that we were fortunate enough to be given when we went away in '44.

Mm, mm. Did you have a medical staff at the base?

Yes, yes, yes. We had our own RAP, Regimental Aid Post.

Mhm.

My, our orderly there, a mate of mine,

16:30 became a doctor and finished up he a doctor at Heidelberg at Veteran Affairs. He only died last year. Funny man, but he was an RAP, he was a corporal then and that and he went on to study and be a doctor when we come home and finished up at Heidelberg Repat. Yes, good attention, the best you could give a bandage or something and sometimes an aspro

Mm.

And I never, I think I can remember, might have been sometimes on the odd occasion

17:00 I don't very often think I went there but I, it reminded me of my days of football you know when I come home and the fact I got kicked in the head and there were only eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth man in those days and they were both crook and off the ground and I couldn't come off, so they gave me two aspros, a drink of water and stuffed me nose with cotton, both sides of me nose with cotton wool and said, "Stay on the field." It's a little bit different today with the blood rule. You come off, don't you? But no we were lucky in, back in those

17:30 positions yeah, and even right throughout there was always a Regional Aid Post and even a lot of them had a little bit of training in first aid which you apply. It's different today cause where we would apply a tourniquet you don't do those things today and things like, I just been re-certified my, I gotta do my refresher course every twelve months. As I said yesterday I carry my gloves and carry my mask but I don't generally,

18:00 I don't advertise it now. I don't want to get involved.

So what were the usual kind of wounds in you know just like every day kind of things?

Well when we were

That they were treating?

When we were there we, it'd be basically your own misadventure.

Mm, sort of scratches

Yep.

And cuts and

Yep.

Cause I guess anything, that if any skin was perforated

You had to be careful, yes.

Because infection was very easy to get, yeah.

Yeah particularly with some of the bushes, you wouldn't know whether they were poisonous or not.

18:30 **Mm.**

But that was

So you had plenty of antiseptic and all that sort of

Oh we were pretty lucky yes, and as I said once again we all had long sleeves, long pants so you were pretty covered in that way you know.

So by that time had the army realised that you know the correct sort of clothing needed to be produced

Yes.

For those conditions?

Yes, yes.

So did they give you lightweight cotton pants and

Yeah they were pretty lightweight but strong, yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So they'd adapted

19:00 But we weren't in

The uniform?

Yeah we weren't in our khaki heavy drill. No, we were in light jungle

Yeah.

I presume it would be cotton, yes, but

And they adapted that from earlier in the war?

Yeah.

Mm.

Learnt all these things, yes.

What in the early days they sent them up in

I don't know what the original ones that went I don't know. I've got an idea feeling they went in khaki, I don't know. You'd have to research that to find out, you know

Mm.

But they'd learnt a lot and as I said basic as you said long sleeves, long heavy boots,

19:30 long trousers.

Hats?

I wear berets.

Mm. You didn't have anything to keep the sun off?

No, oh you could pull the beret down. I got the beret because if you got into a tank you couldn't have a hat on. To drive or operate or even be a gunner or a loader or a driver in a tank you couldn't wear a slouch hat.

Yeah.

But so it was always a beret.

Okay.

And even driving in the vehicles you,

20:00 it'd be awkward in a hat. You'd be better

Mm.

Some of the Army Service Corps they had caps, but we were all berets.

With the hospital, did you ever have to visit the hospital?

Oh yeah, yeah I was just driving them in and out. Oh they were just on stretchers in tents.

As a patient though did you ever

No, not in

No.

Not in the islands, no. My only occasion was in Bendigo, here.

So

I related that earlier yesterday.

So you had to drive patients there and back?

Yeah.

Yeah.

20:30 **What was the hospital like?**

Just big tents. Nurses and back at base here.

Mm.

Very attentive.

And was that

There were doctors there of course.

At your base or was it near

No that was a base back, that was not our base no, the base was back in Madang then, that's where you had to go to.

Oh okay. Was it a long drive?

Oh just tryna to think now. No, ten minutes, quarter of an hour.

Mm.

21:00 A rough little trail corduroy track of sticks and mud and stuff, especially with little jeeps. They were big jeeps either Yankee tin wheelers or jeeps or four wheel drive of course, which got you out of a lot of problems.

And did you fraternise with the nurses at all or

We weren't allowed to, love. It was all right for the officers to go to them in their mess and then sing Roll me over in the clover and do it again. That's another story, isn't it?

You can elaborate

21:30 **on that one if you like.**

No I can't, oh that says enough, doesn't it? You listen to that song, yes.

So the officers had more opportunity

They had the privilege of

Mm.

Yes but not the men, no.

Really?

No

Mm.

Well there would never be enough, would there?

Mm.

So there was no chance

So, you didn't chat or no

No I don't, no I don't think, while no I don't, I ever seen I had a chance to chat to a nurse, I don't think so, no.

Mm.

No apart from driving in and

22:00 nurses they'd receive and [(UNCLEAR)] you you're busy going back to get some more but

Mm.

No, you put up with it, you got used to it.

Mm. Must have been nice to see some women though, I suppose.

Nice to see a face, yes like look you can laugh and joke about ladies and girls wearing trousers and things like that happened in a hospital yesterday last night when I went to Kirsty and grandson, Shannon and his fiancée came in, and she was in trousers too

22:30 and one of the nurses came in and walked through and said, "Oh it's nice to see four gentlemen," and there wasn't, there was three gentlemen and a lady and I said, "Your eyes are not too good for a nurse," and she stopped. "Oh," she said, "I'm sorry." See you can't judge from external experience external looks, you must look cause there's something about a woman's face that's different to a man's, to my

humble opinion, yeah.

And what's that?

Softness.

Mm.

There seems just a little bit of softness in most cases. I suppose you can get different but I think most

23:00 I always, I look at it that way. There's just a little bit more touch, a softness in a woman's face to a man.

And in a war, in the war situation, how did it feel just to look at a woman?

You can mind, your mind can run havoc, couldn't it? Imagination as I've heard some of them say and I don't think I ever got to that stage, but I heard some of them say, "I just physically undressed her," and I used to say, "How could you physically undress someone?" What they were saying they'd mentally undressed them

23:30 but no, you adapted to it.

Well how did you cope with you know lack of contact with the female gender?

Well we, us, most of us were young. We didn't have girlfriends, we didn't have wives. Some of them did. They were the ones mighta found it difficult but we were your younger vintage and what experience had we had at seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years of age? Where was our youth?

Mm.

Someone asked

24:00 the other day and I, where was mine from seventeen to twenty three? I didn't have a youth. Not, they're got like, they're got today. They don't know how lucky they are but we accepted and enjoyed it and wouldn't change it for the fact or we, I suppose under the circumstances we'd all do the same thing again.

Mm. Mm.

But you got used to it. It just wasn't there. As you said you had your own leisure. You, if you were lucky enough to get a radio there, could be a little thing that could pick up

24:30 something, you were in business but basically it was mostly Morse code that was coming in

Yeah.

Over the wires you know [(UNCLEAR)], "How are you today?"

Did you ever have entertainers come and entertain you?

Ah apart from where we were in New Guinea, driving in to the pictures that was all we had. Entertainers coming to us? Don't think we got into that

25:00 situation, no we, there were odd occasions where bases had some troop entertainment but we were never in that position, no.

Okay.

There was the major bases you know but we were never in that position, not in New Guinea, no.

So did you, didn't have your own concerts?

Ah New Guinea? Concerts? No, no can't remember doing anything like that. Plenty of sporting activities it was, basically was the

25:30 theme but as you said before activities, sporting activities, and if you had the chance you'd play cards or something like that, you know. Two up of course. The great Australian game.

I believe there was a drink that you guys indulged in.

Yes, yes.

Jungle juice?

Jungle juice, yes. You use the coconut fermented in it. Pinch the lemon essence from the kitchen which is called [(UNCLEAR)] and away you'd go. Ah I took

26:00 one sip. That was enough for me, I couldn't handle it.

Why? Too strong?

Ooh revolting. I got a sweet tooth. No revolting, but some of them did it and got into a lot of problems

over it, too.

Yeah?

With their own health, yeah. You can overdo these things. I think they all thought they could make themselves into winemakers and being in a coconut plantation we were blessed with the fact the coconuts were there. You could start, whip the top off and start fermenting it, ah

So what was it, what did it,

26:30 **what was it made of?**

Basically the coconut, the juice of the coconut milk of the coconut right? And they'd add other things to it, they'd get from the kitchen an essence like we call lemon essence and things like that and anything they could get out of the kitchen to add to it to make it high octane, cause all your essences are got alcohol bases in them. Lemon

Sugar?

If you could get it.

Mm.

They'd ferment 'em away there.

What did it taste like?

Shocking. Couldn't describe it. It wasn't my cup a tea, sorry.

27:00 I'll have a cup a tea, cup a coffee with a beer or wine at any stage but that wasn't my idea, no.

And was it highly intoxicating?

Ooh yes, yes. Highly, highly a big alcoholic content the longer they let it brew, yeah.

And ah did many of the men get quite drunk?

Not that many [(UNCLEAR)] a few did, as I related yesterday. One of them got out at night and pinched a Japanese bike and tried to ride back into

27:30 camp singing and so you know [(UNCLEAR)] and he was dead because they had to shoot him because they didn't know who he was and you can't see in the dark, he's not carrying lights and you can't put a light on 'em. If you put a light on shine, not that we had 'em, but if you shined a light on 'em they'd see where the light was coming from and you shoot where the light is so

Mm.

He didn't stop and 'bang.' In the morning they found out he was one of ours. Been on the jungle juice.

Mm.

So that that stopped a few of them, too cause they realised that

28:00 it could happen to me.

That's not the way to go, yeah.

Not the way to go

Yeah.

Mm.

Another thing I'm really interested and you touched on it yesterday and I wanted to sort of explore it a little bit more was you talked about how some of the men didn't cope very well and some of them went troppo, did you know many men who went troppo?

Yeah we had a couple. They just couldn't handle the situation

Mm.

Ah the but they

28:30 were sent home, they were sent home. The evidence was there and they'd be taken to the RAP and then all of a sudden they'd be on their way home somewhere back to base to a hospital and from then they'd be taken on from there. Same as a couple of 'em had like a mate a mine he, the idea he was gonna make he said, "I told you he was gonna make his hair grow." Didn't work. Gave him a great rash. So

How was he gonna do that?

Oh he was, he got this fermentation of the

29:00 coconut juice and things out of the kitchen. He was gonna fix his hair up, cause he was losing his hair at nineteen years of age but that's common in for some people and ah no but it didn't grow and it gave him a great rash and he finished coming home invalid, not invalid he walked home, but he coming out in a rash and they couldn't cure him.

Really?

Yeah.

Mm.

Like an eczema type a thing, things [(UNCLEAR)].

And he was losing hair because of the stress?

No, just the fact he thought it was the way he was gonna save it.

Oh.

Get

29:30 these funny ideas you know. As don't some people get mud packs and make themselves look beautiful and things like this? Take a lot a mud for me.

With the two guys that were sent home, how did their, how did they, how were they? I mean how did they present themselves as far as losing the plot?

Ah

What did they do?

Agitated. Agitated, couldn't relax, couldn't sleep.

Mm.

That's all I could

30:00 the ones I had anything to do with. Highly agitated. Almost to a sense of almost bad dreams that was getting to them, yeah.

Nightmares?

Yeah. Mm.

Mm.

You have nightmares and someone starts screamin' and you gotta hold 'em down, you know till you sort of get 'em out of it and things like that. All right we can all have nightmares and things like that but you're over it the next day it's gone, finished. It only takes seconds doesn't it and dream or whatever it might be but

30:30 in their cases it was just they couldn't handle the situation.

Did they cry?

Oh not really. I've seen men cry but not necessarily from that, no.

Mm.

They were more highly agitated

Didn't make sense?

Didn't make, didn't rave in other words almost a raving, just not comprehending what was going on at all you know

Mm.

But fortunately there was very few of them in amongst ours. Very few.

Mm.

Very few.

So how did

31:00 **they end up going home? Did**

Oh they

The commanding officer just say, "Look

The RAP'd refer 'em then, they'd be taken to base hospital and they'd attend to it from there.

Yeah.

Once the

And the doctors would say

Doctors, yeah. It would be out of our hands and it'd be out of the RAP's regimental aid post and the orderly, it'd be out of their hands and back to base back somewhere to a base hospital and they would handle the situation and then you'd never see 'em again.

How did it affect morale when that happened?

Didn't worry us. The general feeling was, "Oh gee, he just couldn't take it."

Mm.

31:30 Yeah you might be a bit sympathetic but, "Oh, he just can't handle the situation you know."

Mm.

But no, no.

Was there any men who sort of reacted negatively to people who'd lost it?

No no, just they were gone. They were outta your what's the word? Outta your hair cause once they'd been sort of diagnosed into the hospital you no longer seen them. They were gone.

Thank you.

32:00 **With the men who were sent home because they couldn't cope**

Mm.

Do you know what happened to them eventually or

Never really got any notification of them, see you sort of lost track of them.

Mm.

Because once they come home they were gone and quite often they'd, I don't know if any of them ever attended any reunions or anything. Whether they felt a guilt about it I don't know but they sort of lost contact with their mates.

Mm.

Or didn't have long enough

32:30 to assimilate with 'em, I don't know but no, we never heard anything about any of 'em.

Do you think in those days too there was a bit of shame associated with mental illness?

Yes I would have been without any doubt. Not just in the services, it would have been in general and hence your hospitals, Larundel and all these places out here. Yeah, I think there would be, yes.

Mm and so part of the soldiers' mentality

33:00 **would have been generally, "You shouldn't show any weaknesses."**

That's right.

Yeah.

That's right.

So if you're feeling like you're not coping and you want to have a good cry

Yeah.

It's probably best not to do it.

Yeah, yeah, yeah

At least in front of people.

In front of people, yeah

Mm.

That's right. You'd withhold it.

What do you think about that now?

Don't we all now still withhold it at times? Haven't you been to a funeral? I have and in fact I've almost come to tears but I held it back.

33:30 Some can't and I, there's no disgrace in letting them cry but I know a lot of others, including myself, who'll hold it back and get a very dry mouth and you're nearly there but no it, I think a lot of us do hold it back at times.

Mm.

I think in the main women are inclined to be a bit more sensitive to a lot of things than men, but there are men that are still just as sensitive and will break down

34:00 and cry and there's no disgrace in that as far as I'm concerned and I think you've got to get rid of your emotions.

Mm.

If you can't hold it you gotta get rid of it. Having got rid of it you, you're better off I think.

How do you think the soldiers got rid of their stress if they couldn't cry, how else, what were your ways of coping with the stress?

Ah, abuse each other. No, I don't mean that that. We would always

34:30 find some occasion of getting into a debate about something. Whether it be football, cricket, politics wasn't so much in the army or you know in the services at all. I think that most of us were too young to even let's face it some of us hadn't even voted, had we? When we went. So how could we be interested in politics but we'd get into a debate of some description over something whether as I said, whether it be sport or

And physical activity

Yes, oh our physical activities as far

35:00 as we were concerned

Was really important

Was monstrous, yeah.

Mm.

We were fit.

Did you ever have boxing matches?

Yes, yes. We had that when we went away on the Duntroon, boxing and wrestling yeah, but yes and we had one of not really a mate of mine but a friend of mine, Bobby Brown from Tasmania, he was a light heavyweight champion of Australia. He fought in, where did we see him fight?

35:30 In Madang, yes he fought in Madang, yeah.

Mm.

They would arrange boxing matches and things like that between units. There was always a lot of inter-unit rivalry you know, whether it would be football or cricket or rugby or that you played for your unit and you played it hard.

Thank you. Was there ever any

36:00 **blues between you all?**

Oh yes, yes. Yes but it, once it was over that was it, the best of friends, yes. Your frustrations if you want to put it that way were [(UNCLEAR)] and you were always encouraged to get rid of it and

Mm.

And afterwards you're the best of friends but the difference being that if it was you and I are fighting right and suddenly if someone from say it was outside, be it Americans, we forgot, we fought them,

36:30 you were the best of friends, then it was over and done. Just personality clashes at times.

Yeah.

I think we all had 'em. I think I had a couple a hidings a couple of times and that cause there's always someone round the corner better than you. I don't care, well that applies in life. Whether it be any type of sport, ah billiards, pool, blah blah blah, chess anything, there's always someone round the corner that's better than you. Never think you're the best. If you think you're the best you're gonna become undone very, very quickly

37:00 down the track.

Was there one bloke or two blokes in particular who you just did not like and you couldn't get

over not liking him?

Ah not really in our little situation, no. I couldn't say I disliked any of 'em.

Mm.

No. I probably would have had a chance

37:30 to be together enough to get over those type of things, I don't know.

So there was good sense of harmony

Oh definitely a sense of harmony, yeah.

That's good.

You mighta said the sergeant major was a funny name

Tape 6

00:33 **Another question I was very interested in asking you Alfred was what, how did you deal with the possibility of being wounded or even for that matter killed?**

I don't think we even thought of it. Even though it was a reality I don't think we even thought of it.

Mm.

And even today don't you think the same applies? The fact that we all go out today and we

01:00 don't know whether we're gonna come home tonight for sure. You're gonna cross the road or something. Look at Bali. When all those people went there they never expected to be killed did they? I think we knew we were in danger on many occasions but alert, prepared ah reflexes ready and hopefully that you were gonna get out of what the situation you mighta got into but I don't think we ever thought and sat back and trembled, "Oh we might be dying tomorrow." No, it never entered our heads.

Mm.

You went

01:30 on with life.

What wound did you fear the most?

Well having not really thought about death we didn't think about being wounded really. I don't think it entered our heads. I've spoken to [(UNCLEAR)] the boys since and that no it, if it happened to you it happened. Ah if there was any thought about it at all I can only remember one discussion at one stage and they said, "Well if it's gonna happen, I hope I go straight away and don't suffer."

02:00 **Mm.**

And that was about the attitude, that there wouldn't be a burden to anyone else yeah but it really didn't enter our heads too much. Not with us yeah. I didn't get time to think about what type a wound you were getting. You were more intent about staying

Keeping alive

Staying alive, yeah.

When you were in a dangerous situation, I'm sure you were in many

Mhm.

How did you react? How did you, what was going through your head?

Preservation.

02:30 Keep your head down. Don't do anything stupid. Be alert. Look for where something might be coming from, a movement from somewhere and don't move yourself to give your own position away. They were the main thing and at the same stage you knew you were amongst your mates who were doing the same thing and covering you and if you had to do something it would be the fact that, well you do something we, I got you covered.

Mm.

Which you even see in films

03:00 today in police and that, they all do and say, "We, we've got your covered," you know as a back up, yeah.

No, not really, not really a thought.

Do you think your senses become heightened when you're in a dangerous situation?

Oh yes, very, very alert. Very alert. Very alert. I think your eyes and your hearing become really, you, they're an instinct of course but I think they're heightened by the fact that you're in the situation you're in and you're sort of

03:30 ever alert your reflexes, looking for any movement and I'm sure that applied to all those troops, particularly in the front, real front lines and things. Their eyes and ears would be working for them and ready to act react. Your reflexes are the thing that's gonna get you out of your situation if you get into a situation.

Do you get adrenaline pumping?

I'm sure some did. I didn't, I didn't say, I really got adrenaline pumping. I,

04:00 a sense a tenseness you could get inside you, you know as your waiting to see what's gonna happen and what's going on and what movement there might be but not really adrenaline pumping in that which you'd get like you're having a game of football with a side or a cricket [(UNCLEAR)] your adrenaline's pumping and, "I must go on and do this." There were odd occasions. The one in the, that book there, our padre got ambushed and Jimmy Wilson lost a leg over it but the padre, he stood in the middle of that

04:30 little jungle clearing and he calls, called those Nips for everything you could think of and nothing hit him. Now I'm sure had it been you or I, we would a been riddled but nothing hit him so the good Lord even though he abused these, "Sons of heavens," he called 'em, he never got hit.

What did he call them?

"Sons of heaven." More than that.

Mm.

More than that.

Yeah.

He, the camera would become very obscene. He was a padre but never mind, that was

05:00 that but Jimmy lost a leg in that ambush, yeah.

Was he a mate?

Friend yeah. Not [(UNCLEAR)] no he wasn't in my little group, he was in the other little

Mm.

group cause we, even in the squadron you had your, in your own squadrons you had your own little groups, battalions.

How did he lose a leg?

In the ambush. He got hit in the leg.

He had to have it amputated?

Yeah, yeah eventually it was amputated, yeah.

Mm.

Got back and eventually lost it. He didn't lose it on the spot no, not like that climber

05:30 that cut his own leg hand arm off or anything no. He went back to hospital and he eventually lost the leg. It must a been shattered in a sense

Mm.

But I didn't see, I knew he got wounded but I didn't actually see him in hospital or anything [(UNCLEAR)]. We just got news back, "Oh Jimmy's lost his leg."

And he went home obviously.

Oh went home from there, yes.

Mm. Do you recall the first time you saw someone dead?

06:00 Can I recall the first time I seen someone dead in the services? Deep thought thinking, don't know how. First time I seen someone dead in the services. Yes, yes I can, yes. You just take it as part of life. You can't do anything to help so you let, leave it to the others

06:30 to take the body away and do something. I think today those type a things might have helped me in

particular in my life that I've had people die in my arms. Not what the question you asked that, but I've had people die in my arms ah on several occasions now. I don't want any more but and you're powerless to do anything even when you're first aid you, you're gone and it's just a matter of life

07:00 that times come. I sort of look at it that way when the good Lord wants us I think he's gonna take us but even if you're stupid. I remember reading a book some years ago from India in the war in India and a captain or something he was, he wanted to take his own life and put the revolver to his head and he didn't have the strength to pull the trigger but the gun was fully loaded and fireable but it was something holding him back. He wanted to do it but he couldn't do it you know. What that, what that sense was I wouldn't know

07:30 but getting used to the fact you got, it happened. Once you couldn't help or you had to go on with the job you were doing and it didn't strike too many of them fortunately, we didn't no. Seen plenty of Japanese dead. You've seen the photo of that here.

What was the sort of circumstance you saw one of your own dead?

One was shot yeah. Sniper's bullet and but

You were with him?

Oh a group of us yeah. There was about twelve of us, yeah.

08:00 **Where was he shot?**

In the head.

Mm.

Mm but there's nothing you can do. It's gone. You can't well, you can't administer any aid. You can't help. You can't do anything. If it was someone that you could have you would. We all had our own little packs where you can pull a bandage out and bandage something up or something or in those days we could, you could even tear anything up and do anything ah bit a tourniquet and a bit of wire. Those days, you can't do today. See your bandage today

08:30 for tourniquets you don't put wires on and things like that and

Mm.

And things have changed completely you know but that was the way you were taught but as I say, once the dead is dead. You can't do a thing about it. Leave it to other people in those, different if what can you do down here? Someone's dead in the street. You only got to wait for the police to come to whatever it is. You can't do anything, can you?

Was he taken away?

Yes take

And given a burial or

Yeah, taken away

Mm

But just imagine Gallipoli with

09:00 all those as I was saying yesterday. Remember that kid?

Mm.

Twelve or Laurie was saying twelve or fourteen, you know sixteen year of age kid. Pathetic.

Mm. Looking back now at war and the fact that there's so much death in war, do you ever sort of contemplate that and the absolute waste?

09:30 It is a waste ah but what do you do with oppression? Right through the years of history, isn't it? Through the bible and everything. Go back all the wars has there been, there's had to be a war to stop a war or a fight to stop a fight, otherwise you just become vanquished everywhere, don't you? It is a waste of lives. Waste of a lot of people's lives and innocent people's lives that are not even involved in the war. It's happening today in Iraq and then you can't do a thing about it. Ah no it is a waste of lives.

10:00 How are they ever gonna solve it, I don't know? It hasn't been able to be solved through history.

Mm.

How can we solve the problem in Israel and Palestine? It's a difficult situation.

Do you think humankind will always be engaged in wars?

It appears to me to be that way. Down the track there's gonna be something. Someone gets ambitious cause

Why do you think?

I don't know. At one stage in our defence forces here, I'm a great believer of

10:30 national service and one stage here I think a lot of us had a saying that, "We couldn't even defend Alice Springs against the Salvation Army." That's how weak our defence forces were. It's a lot better now than what it was and they've had to be. They've had to update. You gotta be prepared to protect yourself in your own humble way and that's where we so much need the support of America. Ah because on our own looking to the far north, if something happened there

11:00 they're teeming and what some of us couldn't understand in the RSL, we trained the Indonesian soldiers back in warfare. Did we find out the fact that we could be fighting them? Just worried a few of us from the RSL with our conferences and things you know but I

What do you mean about Alice Springs and the Salvation Army?

That's how, that's how weak our defence forces were. We didn't think we could defend Alice Springs against the Salvation Army.

Oh okay. Mm.

11:30 So they've had to update it and do things. Yes it costs money. We've all gotta pay for it down the line somewhere but I think oh we've gotta be prepared humbly some way, whether you would win overall against a mighty power or [(UNCLEAR)]. There's some mighty powers north of us.

Mm. Do you see, which powers north of us do you see as being a threat?

Indonesia and China without a shadow of a doubt and the more we can interact with them the better. I think

12:00 going a long way towards that is the fact our universities now are taking in a lot of these and a lot of people go crook about it but a lot of people are taking in these students and get a way, a idea of our way of life and they're just having some effect in China. I do know that cause my daughter, she's involved in that from the Victorian University. She sends the English students, English teachers to China and Vietnam teaching English, doing their courses

12:30 and things like that and there are others coming in here and they get a way of our life as Japan has in particular and some other places have now. It, we don't say it's perfect but it's a little bit more freedom than we've got in a lot of these other places, isn't it?

Mm. Mm okay. Another general question I'd like to ask you, what did you think of the other Australian services during the war?

Highly. We

13:00 joked about each other. We joked about each other you know. Like the navy for example. You could say yeah, "Ah you took us in and dropped us and then nicked off and left us," ah there's just common remarks, but no they all did their job and did it remarkably well and particularly our merchant seamen that was on some of these ships were, just as I had a mate just died just recently, he was a merchant seaman gunner on a ship and what he was torpedoed three times and saved three times, yeah. Now

13:30 they've been through some things some of these people. Some same as our POWs and things they went through. All I'd say the majority of our unit, the whole lot none of suffered anything like some of these people did and never went through the tribulation that they went through.

Mm. Mm. Did you ever encounter acts of heroism during the war?

Acts of heroism? In actual battle?

14:00 No I can't say I actually did. I, some of our boys got mentioned in despatches and others got a couple of others. Scotty won a medal but I didn't actually see it. I wasn't far away but I didn't actually see it. I think if you read the book you'd in that part of the book that I gave, there was in the back, there's a mention of those that did get their awards for different things but I

14:30 didn't, I was there but not actually on the spot and seen the actual thing that happened.

Mm.

Ah no, I didn't actually personally see anything that was anything that I could have seen anyone get any decoration for.

Mm.

Might have seen some stupid things but you know but

When you were engaged in battle

Mm.

Do you recall seeing the outcome of shots fired by yourself like

No.

15:00 I would never actually seen, I can't actually see someone that I actually shot. I seen I'd fired a lot ah and perhaps seen and odd occasions found dead the next day in light but who hit 'em or what was what and those you might hit coulda got away into the jungle too, a Japanese, you wouldn't know. No, not like those photos you see there where we did those the boys did those mass graves but we were just behind them. They were up there.

15:30 When I say just behind, just behind them but we weren't actually involved in that fire, they were. My mate was. Keith Barrett, he was [(UNCLEAR)] one of the drivers of that tank that was one of them

Mm.

And that's where he's written up in the local Northcote paper as, "Killer Barrett with his rabbit chute," and they had the photo of him, those mass graves and that was as I say saved that 25th battalion particularly and the fact that they were surrounded and gone if it hadn't a been for the tanks and the firepower of the tanks to save them you know. From then on they become a great,

16:00 it was more as a real turning point of the tanks supporting the infantry and how well the infantry loved the tanks and loved us.

Mm.

They just had little bit of extra backing or cover and comfort as the word they used. They used the word comfort, they knew the tank was there ah and that you know. They could get behind it and shelter from it, shelter under it.

Did you talk much with the infantry guys?

Oh yes, you struck a lot of them. I

16:30 remember, I on one particular occasion it was on the [(UNCLEAR)] the river in flooded and we had to get the food across and we being the advanced headquarters, we were the only ones with trucks to get across to get it up to the troops and you had contact with them. I was organising the crossing and on the other side was this mate I played football here in Coburg, Patchy Wilkerson, and he, "Darky what are you doin' here?" I said, "Patchy," see we all got nicknames haven't we? "Patchy,"

17:00 yeah, so we organised things and that was he was getting the food up to his infantry troops there. He was organising that. I'm on one side and he's on the other sort of thing and these rivers forded with the big ah ten wheeler trucks you know, you extend the exhaust pipe up so that the water couldn't get to it and grease all the engine and everything with grease and everything so the water couldn't get into the spark plugs and things like that you know. Water proof 'em. They didn't float, but they drove. Someone said oh [(UNCLEAR)] said just the other day, "No, the tanks never floated they

17:30 rode on the bottom of the river." Yeah.

Okay.

Yes and they were interesting to talk to yes but they had a different life completely to us.

Mm.

Oh we were up the front, we didn't have stretchers up the front or anything. No we just sleep sleeping in a hole. We would dig a, oh trench, oh series of trenches and wire around it, same as the infantry would do, and we would sleep standing up and that's when you see some funny things. A little mate a mine, we had a ammunition box as big as that full of

18:00 Owen gun cartridges and I just sort of stirred one and there's Joey. I said, "Where are you goin'?" and he's sleep walking draggin' that along. Gettin' out. He got a lot of ribbing over that. Went and slapped his bloody face and wake him up.

He's sleep walking?

Yeah he's sleep walking and draggin' the tin of ammunition behind him. Ah

Great.

He got a lot of ribbing over that you know

18:30 but

What beliefs, oh actually no that's not what I was gonna ask, did you have a lucky charm or a superstition at all or were you superstitious?

No, no. I'm a Gemini, I'm a twin and they were gonna get the other one, they weren't gonna get me, were they? No not really. No, no. I, some of them wore charms, yes. I didn't, no. I didn't have a girlfriend that'd give me a lucky charm or [(UNCLEAR)].

Mm.

19:00 All my mother gave me was a kiss and said, "Look after yourself son." Ah

Did you get things sent to you from home?

Not that much, no. I got most of the things that were sent to me come from my firm with cigarettes, tobacco, lollies, cakes, which I had organised when I was there and 'course when I, when someone took over after I left and I made sure my name was there and I got more than my share and I was a very popular person.

Did you trade these things?

Mm.

19:30 Yeah I didn't trade so much as favours. We [(UNCLEAR)] and eventually later on when we used to get our allocation later of two bottles of beer after the war, two bottles of beer and I didn't drink that much. They got me drunk for me twenty first. They made a mess a me on a beach. Got, I haven't got a photo, someone's got a photo of it, me I had my twenty first in Bougainville and

And you got drunk?

They got me drunk, yes. I don't know what they did to me but pretty safe at the time yeah.

20:00 There was only a little, small group of us had a little party. The rest were on guard and things. Yeah. I don't remember much about it but I know

What did you drink? What did they get you drunk on?

Oh I dunno what they gave me. I wouldn't know because it wouldn't a taken much in those

Jungle juice?

Yeah it wouldn't a taken much to get me drunk in those days, no but it was like our fishing. We used to wait for the tide to go out and all the little pools inland there not inland but pools

20:30 that go out and there'd be a pool of water you know and the fish would be caught in it so we'd throw a couple of grenades in and stun the fish and you catch your fish that way.

Great.

Yeah that was

And you cook it?

Yep.

Yeah.

I can, oh cookin' it yeah. I can remember at early training at Bendigo, we were that hungry, we caught a rabbit and we put it into the creek and dug for water and found some brackish water right down the bottom of the creek and rinsed it, put it on two sticks standin' up, forked sticks and a fire [(UNCLEAR)] the fire under and never got a chance to get

21:00 cooked. They [(UNCLEAR)] it, they ate it rare.

Oh

They were that ruddy hungry.

Humour must have important to get

Yes.

Keep your morale up.

Yes you had to have a sense of humour.

Yeah.

You had to be prepared to give it and you had to be prepared to take it and it's applied to my life since. They always pick on me a lot now but I give a lot too, but you've got to be prepared to take it in good humour. Oh yes. What's the word? Don't be thin skinned be thick skinned.

Do you recall any particularly humorous

21:30 **episodes while you were in the services?**

Oh humorous ones? Not sporting wise, other wise. Ah there's that many of them. Remarks passed and people's remarks at a time that probably wouldn't mean much now but at the time they were humorous. I'm trying to think of something in particular,

22:00 which is not easy. Um

We can come back to that if you like.

Yeah.

Yeah. Mm. Um okay, did you receive letters from home?

Yes we did get letters occasionally and we did write letters and all our letters were censored of course. So you had officers that would read your letter and cut out what they didn't think should have been in it and

22:30 it could have been information. It was amazing, censorship, yeah.

Was it nice to receive letters?

Oh yes yeah. Even a card, yeah was nice.

Mm.

We did get 'em on occasions, yeah. It wasn't a regular every day occurrence, no. No.

Who did you get letters from?

Me Mum.

Mhm. Any girls?

No I didn't have a girlfriend at that stage, no. Was too young to get involved. I did, yes I'm sorry I tell a lie. At the

23:00 finish, yes ah I was writing to one lass and on Valentines not Valentines Day, I got a Valentines letter telling me I was writing to the wrong girl. I never ever found out who it was from but I had an idea. There was a group of them and I wasn't sure. I just never worked it all out in the finish at all, but yeah. The fact that I had a couple from that person,

23:30 I, perhaps today you'd find their handwriting I wouldn't know. They were never signed. Ah, "Your unknown love," ah and then I thought, "Well it couldn't be [(UNCLEAR)] a mistaken identity. They wouldn't want me." I used to a matter of fact, you talk about an inferiority complex I think at one stage I mighta had it cause wherever I went and we're not talking about in New Guinea or anywhere now. We're talking about doing our training. I was in Adelaide,

24:00 can I diversify?

Yeah.

Yeah? I had the happy knack of always getting invitations. I don't know why I got them. Don't know why it was always given to me. Could you bring and I remember one occasion take six of us to a to a birthday party in Edwardstown just Torrens ville between Torrens ville, just down the Henley Beach Road and ah to be there at a certain time? I said, "Well I'll send 'em down," but I at that stage I was playing football on the Adelaide Oval, I said, "I'll come later."

24:30 'Course what I didn't know they'd all gone to the pub, didn't they? They all got full and as they get out of the tram they're causing no real big problem got outta the tram, they're climbin' trees and cowboys and indians and shooting everywhere and going past with band guns you know 'bang bang bang' and when I got there they said, "What type of people do you think you're bringin' to this place?" Now out of all that came the fact they all got girlfriends but not me and it happened on many occasion. I used to think, "What's wrong with me?"

Mm.

And I got interested in one. I found out she was engaged

25:00 to a chap that was away and ah her mother warned me and I [(UNCLEAR)] I was a gentleman and I did take her out and looked after her and as I would a sister and I was thanked for that and eventually I got a letter from her, he'd arrived home from the from the Middle East and I was away then and he and it was to thank Alf for the way he'd looked after his girl and I appreciated that very much but they all seemed to get girls but not me and I used to say, "What's wrong with me? There's something wrong with me." Probably still is today, I don't know.

25:30 **But you did finally get a girl, didn't you?**

Yes, yes. Probably married too young.

Well I'll talk ask you about that a bit later. Okay I'd like to ask you now Alfred about your time now, did you go, when did you go to Rabaul?

After the war.

That was after, okay.

For the for the war trials, yeah.

Well I'll ask you, before then where were you

26:00 **when war was declared over? When**

When war was declared over we were down the Buin Road heading towards Buin and not all the Japanese knew war was over cause there were still ambushes going on and fighting going on cause word hadn't got to them. We'd been told the war was over but a lot of the Japanese hadn't been told it was over.

And how did you react?

Well, stayed alert as we were and just fire and kill till such time as they surrendered

26:30 but let's face it, it took a, the lines of communication for them was probably harder to get to than us.

So even though the war was declared over you were still in danger?

Yes, yes and there was action after the war was declared, after peace was declared.

Did you experience action?

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

After the war was over, yeah. Yeah fired a few shots. Had a few fired at us.

Do you want to tell us in a bit more detail about?

They were mainly skirmishes like not a, not a

27:00 head on confrontation or anything like that. They were mainly skirmishes with patrols being out and didn't even know the war had been was over. That peace had been declared. Things like that.

Mm.

From the Japanese. We knew it was over but they didn't so you couldn't go and say, "Hey," wave a white flag [(UNCLEAR)] you'd be surrendin' then but I mean you couldn't say, "Hey the war's over." How can you talk Japanese? So it was a matter of fire and they'd take off.

Was there any sort of celebration?

27:30 Yes we celebrated. We were glad it's over. We thought, "Oh at last we're gonna go home eventually." Then the reality hit us. "Who was going home?" Cause those that were married had double points against any of us that were single. You got a point for every month of your service and two points if you were married, so those of us that were single we had no hope of going home. We were asked to volunteer. We, I volunteered to go to Japan for the British Commonwealth occupation forces and I wasn't allowed

28:00 to. I was knocked back. They said, "No you're going to Rabaul to the war trials." So we went over to Rabaul. Went over on, when did we go over? [HMAS] Canberra, I think and climbed down the ropes with full packs and things down the ropes and the boat to be taken ashore you know.

Did you go with any mates?

Yes, yes we were, had a few of us were still together and they're still alive now ah Gordon, Ken,

28:30 Jim, myself we're still there. You right?

It's okay.

Yeah, we're still mates now.

Yeah?

Yeah but then in Rabaul. We were lucky in Rabaul too even though it was [(UNCLEAR)] that. Just as well we didn't go there with tanks. They were prepared for us. They dug big moats and they were that covered with dense growth you wouldn't see 'em and the tank would just go down head first into 'em and the firepower from Tunnel Hill as they call it was directly aimed to that position. They would have blown us to pieces.

29:00 **So there were still Japanese**

Oh yes.

In Rabaul?

Ohhh there was thousands of 'em that surrendered. Thousands of them.

Mm. Mm.

They thought

So by the time you got there um, had they surrendered?

Mm

Yeah.

We were, we become marshals sort a business.

Mm.

And no it, but we had, but we were, conditions there were marvellous because the Japanese were doing all the work and then we had our own house boys. As I said we built our own tennis

29:30 court and softball court and cricket pitch and

Luxury.

Yeah we were in luxury yes, the

Mm.

Your bed was made every morning for you and your fruit was brought in every morning for you and

Describe us if you could tell us ah, what was the place that you were living in like? What was

Once again a tent with just a stretcher. Yeah [(UNCLEAR)] tent but we did have light power and to them then from the Briggs and Stratton motors. Little

30:00 **So power?**

Yeah just electric light and we had our little mess halls.

Yeah.

And recreation huts we'd built and things or the Japanese helped build and things like that you know.

So it was more comfortable than what you'd been used to?

Oh yes

Mm.

But otherwise they would a had a mutiny on their hands I think but

Was the climate the same or

Yeah still the same, oh the only thing the fact that what we didn't strike in New Guinea and what we didn't strike in Bougainville, we struck in Rabaul, earthquakes.

Mm.

30:30 You're on the stretcher and you're rockin'. 'Course since then they've really had a big one since when, since some years ago didn't they, had a real big one but the stretcher's goin' like this and you're on it. Yeah. Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee.

What did you think it was when you first felt it?

We'd been warned, "Ah the ground'll shake." It shook all right

Yeah.

And you sort of wait, "Where's the big hole gonna come, I'm gonna fall down?" you know but no, there was definitely an experience to have those earthquakes, yes.

Um could

31:00 **you just describe me a typical day in Rabaul?**

A typical day at Rabaul, yes. Ah first ones up would be the water truck and I drove that on many occasions and go down and pick up the fresh water and bring it back to the camp up over Tunnel Hill. Then breakfast, then you'd have your duties, whether you were going out on a guard duty somewhere or whatever it might be or you were just attending

31:30 ah guard duty on the trails or you were playing sport. Purely leisure, ah basically yeah [(UNCLEAR)] duties. There was no real hardship. Went out on some patrols and things in jeeps and things like that but no real hardship and I would say no real danger. You were prepared for it, but it never really eventuated even though there was thousands of Japanese there.

Mm.

They'd all surrendered and

And with the war

32:00 **trials**

Mm.

Where were they actually held?

They were held in Madang itself. [actually was Rabaul]

Mm.

Cause a lot of Chinese in Madang. They'd been atrocities committed against them as well as the natives and our own major was in charge of, he was the adjudicator at the war trials himself, yeah.

Was it in like a big building or

Yeah.

Yeah.

Like in a hut, yeah.

And your job, did you get to actually witness the trials?

Oh I seen some of them, yes

32:30 through interpreters. I wasn't an interpreter, through interpreters and things like that. I just had a feeling that I think the court was, they were guilty before they got there I think because the evidence was that overwhelming. Like this one that's on now. He's admitted to everything and the evidence was overwhelming and the Chinese or the natives'd say, "He's the one that caused it." Ah there was no doubting it that but yes it was an interesting situation there, they were tried. They were only on a minor scale

33:00 to what some of them that would a been in Germany for the war trials after the war.

How many Japanese were convicted of crimes?

Oh quite a few in Rabaul. Quite a few. Mainly

Numbers? Any idea?

Mainly officers, no I couldn't give you know what, the official history'd have to give you that. Mainly officers, cause they were the ones that directed the things to be done as it applies to all occasions. The officers give direction the troops would carry it out, you know.

Mm.

But,

33:30 but the, a lot of Chinese there, I, as I said and the local natives. They'd been abused in lots a situations, yeah.

Had they?

Mm.

Mm. In what ways?

Physically and sexually.

Mm.

You know possessions taken from them, particularly Chinese and the little businesses they might a had and things like that, yeah.

Mm.

Ah some accused of killing people

34:00 "He's the officer that ordered it." You know things like that even though the person was dead and gone, buried in their own situation. It was just word upon word but I just had the feeling they were gone before they even got to the court because I thought the evidence was overwhelming. They, otherwise how would they got there unless it was overwhelming evidence to point out you or I, the fact you're the one. So overwhelming for natives and

34:30 Chinese. "He's the one." They would know, yeah.

How were they sentenced?

Ah trying to think what the sentences were. They were basically [(UNCLEAR)] gaol and I'm tryna think

whether a couple were executed. I'm tryna to think now. I'm not quite sure and my memory's not that good on that.

Were any executed?

I'm trying to think.

Mm.

I've got an idea there might a been a couple

35:00 shot. I'm not sure. I didn't shoot 'em, no. I wasn't in any firing squad, no. We had our own horse races at Rabaul at Rabaul too. Each unit was given a horse to train and find their own jockey and very interesting. So we did amuse ourselves in the period of time after the war. That was in 1946 of course, ah yes but

Yeah I was gonna ask you about that actually.

Yeah. Oh yes that was

They were wild horses I believe.

Yes they were

35:30 wild horses. They were [(UNCLEAR)] some strange lookin' nags too but see there was horses throughout the thing and never struck any horses in Bougainville or Madang but they were in Rabaul. I don't know how. Must a been the lifestyle they lived or something I don't know. From the plantation.

Were they the big horses or

A reasonable size horse, yeah. They weren't ponies. Ah some

Were they rideable?

Yeah they all rode 'em yeah. You had to find your own jockey, your own trainer and they weren't

36:00 the world's best judges on how to back a horse either [(UNCLEAR)] cause one of ours won and another one they reckoned was a certainty ran dead last and we all lost our money but

Yeah.

Picked a spot and they arranged a little race course and everything. Ah yeah plenty of leisure in between patrolling and things that you had to do you know but life went on.

Was there a, what was the food like there?

Pretty good. Yes we had our own mess hall and we were gettin'

36:30 reasonable meals. By that time see you had the biscuit bombers [(UNCLEAR)] flying your food in and you were getting a lot of fresh meat and particularly at the end of the war all the front line troops were getting fresh meat and veggies and everything cause it was all flying in transported to them you know.

Must a been lovely to have good food.

Oh yeah beautiful yeah.

Mm.

Instead of bully beef and biscuits and things. No it was good fresh good food. Couldn't complain. Not like I can remember back in [(UNCLEAR)] Bandiana went up there,

37:00 took an officer up there and drove him up there and everything and went to the mess to have a meal and the only way I kept the meat while I got anything else is put me fork in it cause it was gonna run away. Well we, but forgetting that, we were [(UNCLEAR)] oh we were taught to eat witchetty grubs at Canungra in jungle training, we were taught to eat witchetty grubs. They're like an almond. Chop their head off and squeeze their [(UNCLEAR)] it's like an almond.

Aaw.

It's a delicacy.

37:30 That's you, that's true.

And did you, so was there a big sort of um eating area for you?

We had our own mess, our own little mess halls, yeah.

And there were army cooks and all that sort of stuff.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

No one called the cook a funny name, no.

Did you get on well with the cooks?

Yes, yes they were pretty good but

You had to really.

Oh you had to, you could, couldn't

Yeah.

You'd always have an officer come round when you were [(UNCLEAR)] come round and, "How's the meals?" and things like that you know if you had a complaint but basically they did a good job with what they had.

38:00 There were no good complaining. I didn't think because I thought I had the feeling, "If you complained they might make it worse the next day."

Did you go back for seconds?

Ah yes, yes occasionally yeah [(UNCLEAR)] that. We were never starved in Rabaul, no way known. We had plenty to eat and of course you, we were getting our own fresh fruit brought in every day from, by the natives.

Had you lost weight before you got to Rabaul?

Ah

What was your health like when you arrived there?

Oh mine was good. Mine was good.

Yeah.

Health good. Weight wise I think, I woulda lost

38:30 a little bit a weight. Not much but it was pretty fit. Still fit

Mm.

And of course the only reason you got home from there was the fact is they sent reinforcements to get [(UNCLEAR)] people that'd come and take your place to get home you know but we come home on the Canberra, and that was nice to come home. Nice meals prepared for us and playing bingo and those things on complete like a luxury liner it was, well it felt like that to us after what we'd been used to you know but

39:00 **Okay. What else was I gonna ask? I'll just have a look at my notes for a minute.**

Oh sure, yeah.

I believe there was a tennis court at Rabaul?

Yes we built a tennis court, a softball court, a cricket pitch, everything. We and we had, this is where I won a pool competition and I didn't know they had so much money on me. I got asked to play and I went up to this place to play and won

39:30 me couple of preliminary games and things and blah blah blah and eventually I won the final and I didn't realise that they had up to five hundred pound bet on me. Just as well I didn't know. I had enough problems with other competitors

Five hundred?

Pound in those days. The unit had put together to back me. I didn't

That's a lot.

I didn't yeah

Mm.

I can remember being in a football match at Bougainville,

40:00 and losing the game. I missed a goal at the finish that could a won the game. They had money on and they put me in a four gallon drum of water. Head first down. I thought, "I was gonna drown." With your arms bent and I'm in thee drum and eventually they pulled me out and they tipped me, they tipped the drum over and they said, "That'll teach you to kick straight in future."

40:30 Ah so that, that's true that it reminded me so many years later that I went down to Queenscliff and a

caravan park with friends and went down after I shut the RSL club to see I locked up and everything and went down. People said, "Don't make a noise. There's beds there in the annex for you," and it was on a slight slope and it was cold. I got into a sleeping bag, didn't I? Zipped it all up I was right, jumped on the banana lounge and tipped myself up and I finished up in the corner. Head on the ground on a slight angle like that and I couldn't

41:00 get out and I was screamin' and screamin', "Get me out of here," and woke the whole caravan park up but I thought that was the day they put me in the four gallon drum had come back, come back to haunt me again.

We might finish there, yeah.

Tape 7

00:31 **One thing I forgot to ask you before Alf was what did you think of the use of the atomic bomb?**

Magnificent. Stopped something, I know it was cruel, do what you like but I think it achieved an end. I really did, not that I'm an atomic lover but lord knows what would have gone on. That was the crunch, wasn't it? That was the crunch and I think we all felt relieved. We felt

01:00 sympathetic for those innocent people but it brought a message home in, "How far do you want to go? You'll all be wiped out."

Did you know anyone who witnessed the bomb?

No.

No.

No.

Okay. Part of your work at Rabaul I believe was guarding POWs?

Yeah just yeah I had a work, working things and things like that all but that was a breeze cause they weren't gonna do anything, they weren't game to.

Mm.

You know they could have overrun us if they wanted to.

01:30 There was plenty of them, yeah no worries. They were all subdued. The Emperor had said, "Surrender," and that was it.

Where did they stay?

They were in billets, yeah. They were not in the town itself near we were, they were further out on the island in camps sort of business, yeah. They'd erected the camps themselves and everything. We didn't do that.

And how were they treated?

Very well.

02:00 **Mm.**

Much better than our POWs were treated, yeah. Well as you heard there's never been a complaint made, has there?

Mm. Um I've heard from other veterans that in some cases some of the Australians mistreated Japanese prisoners of war. Did you know anything about?

No, never seen it, never heard of it.

Mm.

Difference between mistreatment and being stern.

02:30 I don't mean bashing though.

No bashing or

Not, I never seen any, no.

No.

No, the officers were, the officers in charge of them were told, "Behave yourself or else." Threat yes, but not an actual bashing, no.

Did you talk to any of them?

You couldn't. Lucky you get a smile from some of them or a nod. Cause they didn't understand, most of them didn't understand English and we didn't understand Japanese.

03:00 **What were your feelings towards them?**

Hatred. Couldn't help it any other way.

Mm.

Certainly definite no love lost, no.

I believe you had a friend who was a POW

Mm.

Australian.

Mm, mm.

You've talked about that all or would you like to talk about that?

No, well you see I had more than one of them that that were POWs

03:30 and on Ambon and places like that that went through hell but as I said the other day and just when I had him down at the girls when I had him down the St Josephs and when he was asked that question as, "What was your most horrific moment?" and he said, "Seeing my mates beheaded in front of me," and then asked again, "What was your most frightening moment?" The difference between horrific and frightening was being told I was to be due next day, but he wasn't.

Mm.

04:00 But he, Joey, Joey's passed away now. Clarry's still alive. Clarry was sixteen when he went in, um Joey's dead now. Joey was a POW, ah survived ah, we had about down at the RSL down here we had um local ones, whether they were all locals pre-war I don't know but they were locals here as far as we're concerned in the RSL, there was about eight of them were POWs. Some German, some Japanese.

04:30 The German ones were treated a bit better than the than the Japanese ones.

Mm.

But they didn't really

Stop you there for a sec.

Did your POW friend talk much about his experiences?

No, they didn't want to really. They'd suffered and that was enough. They'd sort of put it out of their mind and I think as I understand most of them wouldn't even tell their families what they've been through.

Mm.

It's like

05:00 two of the boys, two of my mates who have lost their legs and the joke was the fact they could always show the young ones how much pain they could take and they'd say, "Go on there y'are. There's a fork. Jab it into me leg and I'll, you, I can take pain," and they'd jab it in cause they were the wooden ones then, not the carbon steel ones that they have today and then and ah then they'd unscrew the leg and put it on the bar. They had a sense of humour but didn't relate the how and why and things that happened, no.

Okay.

It was only when they were asked

05:30 questions. I haven't shaved, that's why.

Um, do you have any other recollections of the war crimes that you observed?

No, not really, no. No we didn't see too many crimes ourself personally, no, only what the POWs went through and things like that. Atrocities and things and

Sorry what I meant was the trials, the

06:00 **war crime trials?**

Oh no not them no, cause we weren't there every day, it was only just, we were allocated there when we had to be, you know.

Sure.

At sometimes you were outside and you weren't even inside.

Mm, okay. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me Alfred about your time in Rabaul?

No, all I can say is we were well looked after. We were well fed, well housed, amenities were good. All of us wanted to know when we were coming home

06:30 and you know we were just told, "Well you've just got to wait to get replacements," from younger ones that had just come into the services and I know I came home with a couple of others and my, relieved of my job at transport because he'd only joined up in, he'd joined up a couple of days before the war finished. So did his training and there was others like that came then. Now technically, they technically wouldn't become returned soldiers but

07:00 they would have got the medal that I've got cause they were serving after the war, yeah. Yeah.

Okay.

Otherwise very pleasant ah

How did you spend your time off there?

As I

Sports, yeah you've sort of covered that. Yeah.

Sports

Yeah.

Games, cards.

Horse racing?

Cards. We always had an interest in something you know

Mm.

And we were on the go. I mean one of our most essential things was getting the water and we used to have the water cart,

07:30 used to have to go up what called Tunnel Hill and down the other side to get the fresh water into the wagons and put, you'd put the chlorine tablets in then you'd put the ah I can't think of the name of the other one tablet in to take the chlorine taste away and come down and fill the tanks up with back at the regiment, oh not the regiment, where the little, our command was where they could have their showers and the cooks'd have water for cooking and things like that. That was a constant thing and used to have to be done early

08:00 and late, rather than during the day when there was more traffic on the little road, you know.

Mm.

Up and down.

Mm.

Oh we had a chance to explore at time and that in the tunnels, that's why it was called Tunnel Hill and that's where the Japanese had so much stuff stored in all these caves and tunnels and things waiting for us to and particularly waiting for us - tanks to arrive. They knew we were coming ah

Were there still Japanese on the island who hadn't been caught?

08:30 Oh or when we got there?

Mm.

They'd all surrendered.

Oh okay.

Then but they'd all come in by the time we got

So they'd all heard.

They'd all heard by that time. Different to when we were in Bougainville where they, a lot of them didn't even know the war had finished till later down the track, that's why we had to be so prepared and there were number of times there was ambushes and things and snipers around because they didn't know it had finished. We knew it had finished, but not them. Not till a fair while after.

In Rabaul who was your superior and tell me a little bit about him?

09:00 He was a major. Um he was our major, he was our superior. Under him was a, my mate Jimmy, Captain

Jimmy Ireland and a couple of lieutenants and sergeants and down the, yeah to us yeah, but we were small, only a small group really and really close knit group.

Mm.

Cause we'd been together all of us for awhile in any case and we seemed to be the same ones that got shifted to Rabaul that were mates. It was a strange set up. We all seemed

09:30 in the one sort of, in the one category you know but

Did you have respect for your superior?

Yes, yes.

So he was a fair bloke, the major?

Oh yes, look I never struck any that weren't. I can relate a thing that happened in Southport before we went away when one of our boys got on the medicine or liquor, made a mess of himself and he got his rifle and he was bashing a tree

10:00 [(UNCLEAR)] arrested and taken up and the next day had to go up before the CO [Commanding Officer] to be charged for disorderly conduct and battering his rifle around and blah blah blah and I've never forgotten the major said to him he said, "Oh well, how do you appeal?" He said, "Guilty sir." He said, "And what was your reason?" He said, "Well I could see all these little green people all around that tree," he said, "and I belted hell out of them." And the major said, "Did you get 'em all?" He said, "I got 'em all sir." So he said, "Yes, case dismissed." Now what would have happened if he said

10:30 he didn't get 'em. I wouldn't know, yeah and that was the funny side and humorous side of compassion if you want to put it that way cause he hadn't been in trouble before or anything, never got into trouble after. It was just the grog got 'im

Yeah.

And away he went.

So did you hear of any stories of unfair superiors behaving unfairly?

No, not to us.

11:00 Not to us. Our, when we went away our colonel had come back from the Middle East, he was a military cross winner. Mills was a military cross winner, so you couldn't knock his capabilities back. No, I think we had good leadership and respected leadership. My immediate that particular time when I was concerned was a major and I think he was called Black Jack and he was a hard man but he was fair.

In Rabaul?

No, in

Rabaul?

11:30 In Bougainville in

In Bougainville, yeah.

Yeah, very fair.

Why was he hard?

Stern. Wouldn't take any nonsense but everyone respected him and that. He was and that was his job. When he's 2I, a bloke like that's 2IC ,he's gotta be that way.

Mm.

The top can be a little bit more humane if you want to put that way but underneath him he, he's gotta control law and order if you want to put it that way. He's almost the sheriff.

Did he bawl people out and that sort of

12:00 **thing?**

Ah in a quiet way. In a quiet way, yeah but everyone was sort of very wary of him cause he was very stern you know and that. Someone that never even cracked a smile too much you know what I mean, yeah very stern and I think that was his approach to the things you know but I found him all right.

Did you ever see him when he wasn't stern? Like when he put his guard down?

No that's the, no he never seen him like that. That's what I mean, no.

So when you went and had a few beers or whatever you

12:30 Well he'd go to the, they all had their own messes in those stages.

Ah okay.

Not when you're up the front a course, you had nothing cause you were all in the one place. Ah he was advanced headquarters with us see and Jim. He was the major and Jim was the captain and as I say there was only about fifteen of us at the most, that was all. We were up in advanced headquarters, right behind the troops and no, he was always very stern, alert ah

Professional.

Professional, not so, not jocular like we, we'd crack jokes and he'd

13:00 [(UNCLEAR)] yeah but

Did you, did he ever crack a smile?

I don't think so. I don't very often seen him smile. When I, well that's not right. Perhaps a slight smile when as I said when the cable come through for request to me to go back and play baseball against the Americans in the victory celebrations and that's when he said to me he said, "How do you think you're gonna get back there?" I said, "I haven't got a clue, sir." "You can drive, can't you?" he said. I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Well you'd better drive me back there," and I drove him all around the beach back to

13:30 Torokina to play in this victory celebrations with the baseball and that's the one thing I'm disappointed in. There's no record, I can't find.

Tell us about that baseball match.

It was a victory celebration, the Americans playing the Australians yeah.

Whereabouts?

In Torokina, in Bougainville, yeah.

And who won?

Oh they won. They were just a bit too good for us, but we put up a good show.

And where did you play it? On the beach?

No, no on a, it was a square, a diamond they call a diamond. A diamond had been made, yeah, and that's,

14:00 that joke that my sister-in-law got on, got me the other day and I didn't tell you. She said the chap that left home, left his home base and he did a left hand turn and did another left hand turn, he did another left hand turn and then he ran into two masked men. Where was he? He was on the baseball field. See he left his home base, ran to first base, second base, third base and ran back and ran into the catcher with the mask and the umpire with a mask.

14:30 I don't know where they get these stories from but that's what [(UNCLEAR)] did, yeah.

Okay.

Very enjoyable though, yeah.

Yes, yeah. Yeah.

See but I suppose it was the forces way of trying to relieve the tension and celebrate and

Yeah.

Create things, yeah.

So there, obviously you guys got on quite well with the Americans?

Didn't have too much to do with 'em, love. We, when we went to Bougainville we

15:00 were the only unit that went into the Yankee camp and that camp cause we being an only armoured regiment there, the rest were all infantry, artillery and [(UNCLEAR)] things like more than one, we took over their headquarters, their camp and which was fully fly wired, mess halls fully fly wired, ah theatres with beautiful coloured parachutes down and seating, pictures showing all the time and that's when I went to they said, "Come on Darcy, get the jeep

15:30 and we'll go for a swim," and I went for a swim, didn't I? Jumped in about six or eight of us in a jeep, which was illegal technically, away we went down the beach. Seen the beach seen women, just went in. There was AWAS and we went in cause we thought we didn't realise we shouldn't be there. That was women only dam swimming, so we got into strife

Women only?

It was an area reserved for the ladies

Swimming hole?

The girls, the AWAS the nurses to swim in.

Yeah.

We shouldn't a been we shouldn't a been there.

Oh.

Little rap over the knuckles, but never mind. Little things. They were harmless

Did the girls,

16:00 **were the girls happy to see you do you think?**

Yeah well we didn't fraternise with them no

Yeah.

But they got a shock to see us. They didn't expect to see a jeep load of young blokes ridin' down, no. Ah never mind.

Did they have clothes on?

Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Okay. Towards the end of the war

Yeah.

What did you know about the political context of the war as a whole?

Very little. Our news coming through from back home paper wise or news wise was very limited,

16:30 yeah.

Mm.

We only got told what would be printed in our own little journal things like that [(UNCLEAR)] Advocate and little news that they could put together for us, what was going on.

So you didn't really know what position the Japanese were in and

Not too much, no.

Mm. Okay.

See there wasn't little pocket wirelesses around in those days like there is today.

Or television?

There was no television

No, of course.

Not till 1956 and there was no fax machines and there was no

17:00 mobile phones or anything like that you know

Mm.

The phone was the wind up crank.

Did you hear about the end of the European war? Did you know that had happened?

Yes we got told, yes.

Yeah.

Yes. VE [Victory in Europe] Day wasn't it?

VE Day.

Yeah.

Yeah. Do you remember how you reacted to that news?

No we didn't react to it very much at all because we were in a situation we were lookin' after ourselves. We almost said, "Well bugger the bloody Europe what are we doin' here? What's goin' on here you know? Let's get on with this and fix what

17:30 we've gotta do." Yeah.

Mm. Mm.

And as I say I think it's probably some of the attitudes of some of us young ones could have been, "Well we're gonna fix this situation," but we're only little fish in a big pond yeah.

Did you often get sort of pep talks from your commanders?

Oh yes. Yeah that was to keep morale up, yeah.

Mm.

And that's why there was so much sport and activities done to keep your morale up and take your mind off thinking of anything else you know.

Yeah. Competitions

18:00 **and stuff.**

Yeah.

Yeah. What did you know of the life of your family back home?

Very little. Only the letters you would get. As you said no television or anything like that in those days. Just when you got an occasional letter, what was goin' on and Mum would always just say, "Yes everything's all right. We're goin' all right." That was all we ever got you know.

Did you ever see news reels?

No.

Not at the flicks?

Oh if [(UNCLEAR)] if they had a

18:30 picture show they might have showed some of them but we didn't see too many of the picture shows.

Didn't you?

No, no.

So you didn't get news from the home front?

Not that much, no.

No.

Some of the bigger base areas would have got more than we did.

Okay. So when did you finally return to Australia?

1946.

What month, do you remember?

19:00 You know I don't. I don't really know.

Early or mid?

Oh mid.

Mid?

'46, yeah.

And tell me how you felt when you were told you were going to be sent back.

Oh delighted. We couldn't get home quick enough. Um the, yeah climbed up the rigging onto the Canberra and that's where we were entertained and dined with good meals and playing bingo

19:30 and all those type of things. We were on our way home, we were delighted.

Where did you catch the Canberra?

At Rabaul yeah and then

What sort of boat's the Canberra?

It was a cruise ship.

Ship I should say.

In those days.

Boat. It's a bit bigger than a boat

Cruise ship in those days, yeah.

Mm.

And fair

How many

Fair size.

Big yeah.

Yeah and we landed at Sydney.

Can I ask you a bit about the voyage? That journey?

Home?

On the Canberra, yeah?

Yeah.

What

We seemed to

20:00 get home quicker than what we got to New Guinea in the Duntroon. The Duntroon was a bigger vessel too.

On the Canberra where did you sleep?

In bunks yeah.

Was it comfortable?

Oh yeah much different to when we went up on the Duntroon, we were down in

The hold?

Hold yeah

Mm.

But I didn't get sick. It was one of the funny things. I always spent a lot of time, I felt it better to be up on deck. Lay on the deck rather than be down below and I didn't get sick. Strange.

20:30 **What was the food like?**

Ah interesting. I think the food, the way we got fed, oh I'm caught up the way we got fed in, when we went from Madang to Bougainville we went off in Yankee LSD landing craft and that where the tanks went in underneath and the big thing went down and you loaded everything up and then came up and then you ran but to get fed you did a continual circuit

21:00 round the boat. So you went right around down to the stern and that was where the kitchen was and you get fed with your pannikins and out you'd come down the other side. It was almost a continual line to have breakfast and by the time you had time you got your breakfast

You'd have your lunch.

It was time to get in the queue and go back and get in the queue for lunch.

So there was many people on board?

Oh yeah quite a few yeah, really crowded, mm.

Yeah.

Really crowded.

All soldiers?

Yeah. Yeah that's one

Any POWs?

No. No never struck any.

Mm.

And that's when the Yanks

21:30 tried to land us at the wrong spot and they started, the Nips started shelling us.

Really?

Yeah from Buin then we had to come back to Torokina and of course we, you know what we said to the

Yankees, "You couldn't find your way out of a paper bag." Never mind ah.

So the Yanks were ah they were in charge of your

Yes that's it, was their landing craft, yeah.

Mm. Were you still with your mates?

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah?

We were all together.

From the original group

22:00 **that you were with**

Mm.

Did you all survive?

Yes, none of my personal mates got killed. Not personal ones, no. If you want to put it that way. Close, real close mates got killed, no.

Your clique.

Clique yeah.

Yep. On board, so you slept in bunks, how many men to a room?

Oh what on the Canberra comin' home?

Mm.

Oh gee I can't think now. I think about four

22:30 if I remember rightly, yeah. Something else I've forgotten. Don't stake me life on that, I don't remember [(UNCLEAR)] we woulda slept anywhere to get home for sure but

And what did you do on, what did you do to pass the time?

Cards, bingo. That was all you could do. Or sunbake on the deck. There was nothing else to do.

Bit boring?

No, we were that glad to be gettin' home cause the war had been over a few months by then

23:00 you know from '45 to when we were coming home. Our only thoughts were you know, "How quick are we gonna get out?" Some got a shock when we didn't, like me cause we didn't get out.

Must have been a bit of an anticlimax.

Yes, um to come back and then get to Royal Park down here as it was then to be demobbed and say, "Well, no you're not."

Well what I meant was um when the war was declared over it must have been an anti-climax that you

23:30 After we

Had to stay on you know?

Ah a little bit because as I said in Bougainville they didn't know some of them. For a while you couldn't cut a line down and say, "That's over, let's relax." No way known. It went on for a month or two

Mm.

Before things were really quietened down and even when we were in Rabaul you were still prepared just in case there coulda been an uprising or something, you wouldn't know. You were taught to be prepared.

So how long did it take to get to Sydney?

I don't know.

Or Brisbane

24:00 **I think you landed, didn't you?**

No, we were left from Brisbane, come back to Sydney.

Landed in Sydney, yeah.

I don't honestly know, do you know that? Be

A few weeks?

Oh no, no. It wasn't that long, not from the islands.

Couple of weeks.

No, it'd be less than that I think. I think we were only on board a week or so

Oh yeah.

From the islands down from yeah. It's not like doing a cruise ship which they're a fortnight or something.

Mm.

No it wasn't that bad.

Did you have a, was there a welcoming committee in Sydney?

No, not from when we come back no.

24:30 I didn't march any victory celebrations at all. No, we were still away when they were on.

Mm.

My first march would have been the first Anzac Day that I was home. That'd be '47, '48 yeah.

And what was it like seeing mainland Australia for the first time?

Beautiful. There's no place like home and there you sort of realise in a, how lucky we were coming back. What of people that didn't

25:00 come back? Those things went through your mind then. Yeah here are we for the grace of God but where are the rest?

Mm.

That's what I said you look at the book and you'll see that even those, we had casualties and our little mob if you want to call that or probably as mentioned before we probably killed as many as anyone, due to those several actions where there was mass graves and things you know.

So it must have been quite an emotional time?

25:30 Yes, yes. Get home and see Mum in particular, yeah.

So you got on a train in

Yes

Sydney.

Sydney home yeah, Sydney to Melbourne.

And Sydney to Melbourne

Yeah.

And did your family

I've gotta wait, I gotta try to think now. We woulda changed at Albury, cause there was different, it was on a different track. Woulda changed at Albury in those days.

Oh okay.

Great big long station at Albury, yeah.

Do you recall much about that journey?

No, no it [(UNCLEAR)]

Probably slept.

26:00 Well, yeah we did.

Yeah.

Slept a lot. We spoke about this only a couple of weeks ago. The things that we can't remember or we, we've forgotten and we don't want to remember. A lot of the bad things even now some of us can't remember but we remember all the funny things and the humorous things but some of the rest you put out of your mind you know.

Mm.

And some of those that went through worse than I did would they put it out of their minds? It's amazing.

26:30 They put it behind and remember the good things and the funny things. If you talk to a couple of POWs and you realise they've always got the funny side of things that happen. Unless you drag it out of them.

So did your family meet you at the station?

No. They didn't know what time I was arriving, where it was.

Um.

No, they didn't know what time we were coming. Yes they, no they didn't know what time we were arriving, so it was actually, was when I arrived home, I walked in the front door. It was the first surprise that Mum got. She knew I was on, thought I was on the way home but didn't know

27:00 when and how.

What time did you walk through the front door?

Ah about lunch time.

And what was the look on her face?

Amazement and a hug and a kiss cause you've only got one Mum, or we should have any rate but and then said, "Oh you're home for good?" "No, no I've gotta go. I gotta go," and that was when [(UNCLEAR)] come in and said, "Hasn't Uncle Charles claimed you?" "Yes but I'm not goin' there."

So you had to go again?

Yeah I then got posted up to

27:30 Murchison to a transport section there and that's when they, ah I fronted before the colonel up there and he said, "What's Colonel Fortune want from you? What have you got that you can't give me?" sort of business and so he'd, that's when he made me the offer of, I said, "Well I want to be near home," and um he made me the offer of driving him down there on Friday down to his flat in St Kilda and pickin' him up Monday and takin' him home so I was only

28:00 ever in camp Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday nights. Organising things, arranging transport and then I'd arrange things over the weekend and away I'd go again.

Where's Murchison?

The other side of Nagambie. Seymour, Nagambie, Murchison. Murchison is where you used to turn off to, it was East Murchison, you turn off left to go to Murchison, right takes you on the road to Shepparton. Now the freeway goes from the other side of Nagambie, freeway takes you right round and takes

28:30 that [(UNCLEAR)] goes right across, saves about half, quarter of an hour, half an hour. It's amazing the difference it's made.

Okay.

But that was where the base was the ASC [Army Service Corps], where we, all the food and transport was arranged from the PO, there was still POWs there, Italian ones at

Really?

Up at Murchison and those areas still in compounds. They hadn't been released and sent home or anything or released

Still? Gee.

At that stage yeah.

Mm.

And they all had to be fed, supplies'd come up by train and produce had to be delivered out to them in trucks and everything like that, yeah.

Were they

29:00 **Italians?**

They were Italian POWs mainly up there, yeah.

Any other nationalities?

Not that I know. I can't remember. I mainly remember basically Italians.

And how long did they stay there till?

They'd been in a lot of them [(UNCLEAR)] big, bigger part of the war.

When did they get released?

Oh some time after I left I don't [(UNCLEAR)] but about that time, yeah. They were held there till they were repatriated or sent home or released back here into society.

Okay.

That wanted to stay yeah but their

29:30 conditions, there were no problems there, they had good conditions.

Did you consider leaving the army at that point or why did you stay?

Oh weren't allowed to get out. There was no option, I had to stay.

Why?

Hm?

How come?

Well the points, the points system you know, you

Oh the points.

You got, the word was demobbed. You got demobbed on a points system and then it was only on

30:00 continual, it came to the stage then eventually they had to let you go but at that stage I suppose I was quite, I wasn't worried, I was quite happy in what I was doing. I was enjoying what I was doing, I was enjoying a reasonable stage, state ah side of life. Ah some little pleasures ah yes. We, couple of times there we, I remember we went across to Bendigo once and we became escorts for debutantes and things like that. No love lost or anything like that but just

30:30 they were a break in what you were doing, you know and then I

Did you have any girlfriends at this stage?

Yeah I at that stage I started to co corresponded with one and I finished up going to South Australia to get married and that was an experience, yeah.

Where did you meet her?

In South Australia when I was doing my mechanics course, yeah.

What was her name?

Thelma.

And she's your wife now?

No, she's deceased. I'm a

31:00 widower. I've got a partner of thirty years, who also is a widow.

Okay.

Yeah we got a very enlarged family between us now. Very enlarged family,

Oh okay.

Which I've helped raise or we've raised yeah.

Mm.

But that's the one that's in hospital now, yeah.

What's her name?

Betty.

Betty?

Mm.

Okay.

I wouldn't have achieved what I've done without her.

Mm.

The things that have happened to me in post life

31:30 would not have been possible with, wouldn't have been possible without her.

So you've had a good innings together?

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

Excellent. Seen a lot of things, done a lot of things together.

Mm. Mm. Is she your best mate now?

Yes. Yes.

Yeah.

She's got her own interests the same as I have. We combined with a lot. We're both outings officer, the two of us for the Probus club with a

32:00 hundred and twenty people. She's secretary of the auxiliary. She runs her own dancing class. She's still in her seventies and she runs a dancing class.

Wow.

Oh she was a, she was in the Southern Command concert party for the troops. She goes back a long way, yeah and

Performer?

Oh yeah, yeah

Mm.

Dancer, yeah. She still can dance, oh I don't know about right at the moment but she, she's got her own dancing school down the RSL which is

32:30 non-profit and exercise, yoga, line dancing, jazz ballet. You name it she dances ah Mexican, does everything. She had her own concert little party called the 'the Little Three Red Roses.' They've only in the last year stopped entertaining cause they're all gettin' a bit older.

Mm. So during the war she entertained the troops?

Yeah, she was in the Australian Command concert party.

Whereabouts did she go?

They were prepared to come to New Guinea when war was declared

33:00 but they didn't, mostly the troops at Puckapunyal and Heidelberg and places like that, yeah.

Mm, great.

They were always escorted. Very strict in those days, they were escorted.

I believe um so with your uncle who was the colonel that you were driving after the war?

No, he wasn't my uncle, that the colonel wasn't, my uncle was a colonel. He was the one that wanted me to go to Broadmeadows.

Oh right.

He became a brigadier.

Yeah.

He was from the 5th Scottish.

33:30 He's the one that had had my captaincy lined up for me and I knocked it back because I wanted to go back to work.

Okay and the drive to St Kilda for a meeting I believe, was there some meeting?

No, that was when I'd come down Thursday, Friday morning. I'd bring him down to St Kilda, Sturt Street

Yeah.

Put him in his flat, park the car at Sturt Street, come home by tram, go back and pick him up Monday lunch time after Monday after lunch and take him back to the camp.

So you'd have a nice long weekend?

Yes, I was a, only in camp Monday, Tuesday,

34:00 Wednesday, Thursday nights and I was home for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. I did well [(UNCLEAR)] I can't knock that, no. I was well looked after.

Great. How long were you um in the army for? When did you actually leave the army?

Early '47.

Mm and what did you do after that?

Went straight back to the job I had before the war because there was a right of employment and which I, some of us didn't really understand but I used to get letters from

34:30 the firm, "When are you coming back? We need you. How long can we keep the job open?" Well they had to under the, even today that applies right at this very moment to servicemen, their right of their jobs back. Right at this moment but which some of, didn't realise they wanted to get back, so I did get back and back into the situation I went. At that stage we had, rationing was on of course with cigarettes, tobacco, same as butter, tea, sugar. All those things were still rationed with coupons and things and

35:00 I had a great, in for getting things that others couldn't get, so I myself and my family and friends were looked after very, very well.

What was Melbourne like post war? Just generally, you know.

Oh quiet city. Ah

Oh cut.

Thank you. Did you,

35:30 **once you'd finished the war and the war was over and you were back in civilian life**

Mm.

Did you think about it much?

No, the only time you ever thought about it was Anzac Day and reunion when you went and met your mates again. Some of those mates you did see in between closely a couple of 'em but no, you didn't think much about it. It had gone and passed, it was a episode a your life. You concentrated on your job and

Did you dream about it?

No,

36:00 I didn't have any bad dreams really, no.

Mm.

Not really. I had a odd one but no nothing in particular like some I believe had had bad dreams but I didn't. I have a habit of sleeping on my side instead of my back, I think you dream most when you sleep on your back I think but um no I went back to the job and they only had six trucks at the time and they had three people on a truck. Three men on a truck that was the ration with cigarettes, cause we were carrying a lot of money and valuable stuff in those days and

36:30 we couldn't handle the situation and they wondered how they would do it hiring staff and things and I said, "Well the job the three do, men are doing on the truck two could do," so I said, "You've got eighteen people here. You could then have nine trucks. You could use eight and use one as a spare for your holiday periods," and the boss said, "You're right." He said, "Anyone prepared to give off a try on this?" and three others put their hands up, they would give it a go, so we went out, two of us went out on two trucks

37:00 and we did the job quicker and more efficient than those with three.

Mhm.

And motivation, call it what you like, we got away at the same time, we were home earlier, we were more efficient, made less mistakes and it was much easier [(UNCLEAR)] with that. I, then down the track, you want to know what I did, did ya? Oh righto there was no liaison between inside and outside staff, so I was brought in to vote, the men they voted, the fact that I had

37:30 the most knowledge having been there pre-war, I was voted to come in and I became the liaison between outside and inside staff and I become office manager.

Now what sort of business was this?

Tobacco. Cigarettes and tobacco.

And this is the same place you were?

Yeah

Yeah.

And then that's when we set up the two way radio. That was on, I was under cameras like this and hadn't done, it was sent to America what we did.

Mm.

Cause we used to unload the trucks at one end and the conveyor belt, take it through, put it back at one end and come out the other end and go back onto the truck. Very highly,

38:00 those days my years in front of themselves, my two bosses, the Hemmingways, they were businessmen with visions.

Mm. Can I get just get back to the war again?

Yeah.

After the war, did you see your mates? Did you stay in touch with your mates?

Yes, yes yeah.

Yeah.

Basically Anzac Day and reunions. You would never miss your reunion and Anzac Day you'd line up again and as we still do today, we still have our reunions and we still have, we meet out the Richmond at the pub there for lunch after the Anzac Day march and everything with some of the families come and join

38:30 with us. Numbers are getting smaller as they've all passed away. I had a Rotary conference in Shepparton at March and I went out and see one of my mates, Merv, who's just had an operation on his spine and his wife's just had five bypasses excuse me and he was that delighted to see me walk in the door, "Darky, where did you come from?" and this is the pleasure you give others by seeing someone in the same categories and he's got a little motorised

39:00 cart and headlights on it, blinkers, hazard lights and he said, "I," he said, "I, they gonna have get me up for speeding," he said, "I go down the footpath too quick on it," you know but he, "What," he said, "What's the good a money?" Not that he's that much but he come off a farm. He said, "May as well spend what I got. The family don't want it," but

And what do you do with your mates now when you catch up with them?

Reminisce a little bit. There's always some you remember some funny stories. Like to see each other's family.

Yeah.

We

39:30 really do like to see each other's family and that and see what's coming on that and you get in touch with them all but what's left, you know.

Okay. Might just

Tape 8

00:35 **Did you feel that you suffered post traumatic stress disorder at all?**

No. Most emphatically no.

Did you know anyone who did?

No. Not in out of my group, no.

Mm.

We were, we went on with our lives very, very well.

Okay.

01:00 As I, that's another debate on post I don't know. There's lots a theories on this and I'm not a medical person to know it to be, it reminds me of something of RSI [Repetitive Strain Injury] when they stay this stress business. I personally discussed this in a couple of forums on stress and some of us have got the theory that stress is simply you can't handle the situation or you're, oh not, can't

01:30 handle the situation and I'm trying to think of the word for it, or you're, oh there's a word, I can't think of it, meaning it's your own doing.

Responsible or

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah you can't take the risk

Sabotaging themselves.

Yeah sabotaging themselves. Cause if you can't handle the situation you shouldn't be in that situation

Mm.

Cause others

02:00 could be in that same situation and they haven't got stress. We're all different. Our metabolism are different. What one person can take another can't.

Mm.

And I mean a couple of from Rotary, a couple of debates about this have been very interesting and it's all right to say, "You've got stress and all this type of thing." It was never known RSI and they say, "Oh, you're using the mouse all the time and the computer and they're using their arm," and how did our Morse code operators get on during the war for five or six solid years of

02:30 doing this all the time and they never had any of that? And I just wonder we just won

You think it's a modern day phenomenon?

Yes. A lot of it, yeah. If they

How would you explain I mean, I believe that some, well many veterans

Mm.

Especially it seems to be Vietnam veterans

Mm.

It's more talked about with regarding Vietnam veterans

Yeah.

That many after they'd been

03:00 **in combat situations they've returned home, they were very much affected, they'd have nightmares, night sweats**

Mm.

They'd relive terrible moments. Wouldn't you see say that that was you know?

Yeah apparently.

A legitimate form of stress?

Apparently but I can give you the other side to it from the similar Vietnam vets, they can't understand it and

03:30 that's only just recently, I've been in that conversation and there was also, was a big article I heard it on the radio when a Vet said, "Some of them were are faking the situation." Now I'm not being cruel to anyone

Mm.

But there are people in the same units that haven't got that problem, so we're all different we know

Mm.

And it does affect people different but in the Second World War and even our POWs haven't had that same problem. It's a strange phenomenon.

Mm but you accept that

04:00 **it does exist for some**

Oh it must have existed

Yeah.

I don't doubt that it doesn't exist but it's not something I'd say is general.

No, no.

Because there are others are not.

So it really is dependent on the individual, isn't it?

And yeah and in a situation I went, where I was just recently within the last two months in a remark was passed that they felt there was a lot of Viet

Sorry, just pull your jumper down.

A lot of Vietnam veterans were rorting the system.

Really?

Now I don't know, I don't know

04:30 that was a statement made by a Vietnam Vet.

Rorting?

Rorting the system. Now I don't know. I can't comment on it but I can comment on the fact that remark was made.

Who made that remark?

A Vietnam Vet who works for Vietnam Vets.

Okay.

And helping with their problems.

So how were they rorting the system?

Telling lies. I've got a mate and he's just up here in the back road and up here and, "Mick," he said, "I'm gonna beat 'em. I'm gonna get a TPI." He did too but he hasn't been worth a crumpet since and he was fit as a fiddle

05:00 when he started tellin' lies.

What's a TPI?

Total[ly] and Permanently Incapacitated [Pension].

And that means he gets money?

Yes he gets a bigger allowance, yeah.

Mm.

You can't TPI. It's very hard to get now, any of us can't get it cause we're turned over at age, our age the best you can get is an EDA, Extreme Disability Allowance.

Mm.

There's an intermediate and then you go up in ten, twenty, thirty, forty up to a hundred per cent disability pensions,

05:30 they get and hence I said the other day I got a letter from Veteran Affairs and wanting to know why I had a gold card and didn't get disability pension. Well, what am I gonna apply for? I've got my, I hope I've got my faculties and I'm still capable of driving. I'm still capable of doing work.

So as a returned serviceman

Mm.

Have you received any benefits

No.

From the government?

No.

Mm.

Cause I'm not on the pension. I get my gold card,

06:00 which I'm thankful for. My gold card gives me my medical, eye, ear, throat everything, physiotherapy everything, doesn't cost me nothing.

Great.

That's the only benefit I get but

Transport?

Hm?

Public transport?

No, no. You've got to be a TPI to get that. I just get the o what do they call it? Over 60s.

So how does it make you feel that these Vietnam

06:30 **veterans are allegedly rorting the system?**

Well I can't complain cause I know there's been different ones in my, in Second World War have tried to rort the system. Told lies and cause it's getting harder to tell lies now cause around who could support your application are all dead, aren't they?

Mm.

I had one just recently and I couldn't get a war widows pension for her because there was nothing, I got freedom of information on his papers and there's nothing to say he was injured

07:00 or done anything severely for his medical records and when his questions when he come out of the army, "Are you perfectly fit?" "Yes?" "You don't look like claiming anything from the government?" "No." "What have you got?" He didn't smoke and didn't drink. Now the only way we could have got, helped her was the fact I'd have to get some of his fellow members of his unit, if I could, to tell lies. Say, "Yes he was an excessive drinker, excessive smoker," then they mighta listened to him but you can't tell lies and get away with it. You get caught up with the finish.

So the only way a war widow can get a pension

07:30 **is if**

To become a war widow

Mm.

Your husband must have died he or she, widow or widower

In action?

No, must have died of the war-related disabilities.

Oh okay.

Not of old age and not of anything they've had since. Must have died of their war related disabilities. Now once you get to over seventy let's face it, where does age come into it? Would you have had some of these disabilities if you hadn'ta been in the war? They're gotta be war-related and gee that's hard to

08:00 prove. Some of them do prove it and different forms and things, particularly emphysema, breathing problems and things like that you know.

Mhm.

But to a lot of us, no we, there's nothing we can claim on cause we've had our freedom of information. They've looked at it and there's nothing on the file to say, "Yes he was wounded in this and he had, he was in hospital and had this and he," no, there's nothing.

What are your views on de the Department of Veterans' Affairs?

I, my views on Department of Veterans' Affairs was what I've had to do with them

08:30 and I've probably had a lot more to do with them than a lot of people but there are others have more to do with them than I have. I can only compliment 'em on everything that's been given that I've asked for and had any correspondence with or phone calls with been nothing but good.

Mm. Very supportive.

Very supportive and helpful and I can only talk high of them and that includes what we're talking about. Different nationalities to myself but they've still been supportive and helpful, I can nothing but compliment them on

Can I ask you,

09:00 **actually I'll ask you just a couple more things and then I'll ask you something else. Sorry**

That's all right, love.

Um would you say that you enjoyed the war at all? Were there parts of the war that you could actually say that you enjoyed?

Oh you'd have to. There was experiences which you enjoyed, yes. You there's no debating that. No

matter how bad it was there woulda been experiences that you would have enjoyed, for sure.

Such as?

Well for a start experience, how many of us would have sailed on

09:30 boats if it hadn'ta been for the war? How many would have been given the training we did? In my case, motor mechanics course, Morse code, things like this. I would never have done that had I not gone to war.

Mateship?

Mateship yeah, probably wouldn'ta got as much as I've had got now, no. But oh no definitely it was an experience, you would have had to enjoy and remember, yeah.

Mm. Are your war memories your

10:00 **strongest memories?**

Ah yes. Basically yes, they seem to have put indelible sort of [(UNCLEAR)] and the good things. Not the bad things, the good things. The humorous things. You've obliterated a lot of other things. Ah even now that we as I mentioned yesterday, that even we were talking three of us the other day at a [(UNCLEAR)] committee meeting and things we, "Oh yeah that did happen," but we'd forgotten all about 'em but I can remember the funny

10:30 this or that or the other you know. I can remember a mate my mine went to an arm wrestling and he was the biggest fellow I'd ever seen in our unit. He was about six foot four and about sixteen stone and two of us couldn't hold him down and that was all in fun and yeah no way knowing like a great big bear and I believe he was the smallest of his family. From Western Australia yeah, mm, but you remember the funny things yeah but not the real

11:00 serious things, no.

Mm and that's a good thing.

Mm, mm.

Mm. So you don't regret being a part of it?

No. No regrets whatsoever.

Is it something you'd do again?

I think so. Turn the clock back but we can't go back in retrospect. I think it aided me in my later life right up to the present time. Taught me to be a leader. Even though I wasn't an actual

11:30 leader right then I was at the finish but not high but I become that way. Finished up being a CEO and

You had, what were the positive impacts of war on your personality?

One simple thing - discipline and teamwork. No matter who you are you need a team with you to

12:00 achieve anything. I don't even care if you're less, if you're a lowly employee you've got to rely on someone to do something for you down the track. So and it I think it taught us that. Or most of us it did anyway and it's just stood me in good stead down my life.

Did it give you confidence?

Oh yes without a shadow of a doubt, yes.

Mm.

Perhaps I'm over-confident at times. I get back to the fact that you came out of it. I can come back and my sporting career

12:30 and I was, came back, coached the local cricket club and those days you had afternoon tea and everything and the ladies did all the work. Little bit different, changes a bit today. Any rate I had after this afternoon tea, I had this second Saturday that I had to say a few words a thanks and it was my first occasion to really say anything speaking in front of a reasonable sort of a public or address and I got up and did the right thing and everything. At the finish I couldn't work out why they all went hysterical

13:00 and it wasn't till I realised I said when I asked them to put their hands together in appreciation, I didn't say appreciation, I said sympathy. All put their hands together in sympathy. That taught me also, so when people say, "Put your hands together in appreciation." No one says, "Clap," do they? "Put your hands together in appreciation." You do. Didn't say, "Clap," but I said, "Sympathy," and didn't realise what I'd said till after I got told. I didn't realise yeah but see you get a bit of confidence

13:30 going to getting up and talk on the drop of a hat you know and once you joined Rotary and these places and the Lodge and things like that you've got to be able to talk

Mm.

With confidence, yes.

How did your war experiences affect your faith in religion?

Would have increased it, not that I attend church on a regular basis now but that doesn't mean to say I haven't lost my faith.

Were you already religious when you went into the war?

14:00 Had a background in it. I think most of us did in those days, different to today. I think most of the kids in our area were always taken to church or Sunday school or done something but not so much today.

So you say it increased it?

I think so, yes.

Mm.

Mm, not that I become what's the word? A Bible basher or anything like that but just increased your thoughts in faith.

Mm.

I'm not

14:30 backward in saying I still say a prayer. I'm not ashamed of that. I think it's [(UNCLEAR)] and that's why I appreciate some of these other faiths that have got meditation, they think. That's all a prayer is really and you're thinking about it, aren't you?

Did you pray while you were over there?

Oh yes, yes. Oh, I think most of us did have a little prayer at times. We enjoyed our little services together and no matter what religion or denomination we were, we'd sit down in our little group of, out the back somewhere. There might only be ten or twelve of us but they'd be somewhere

15:00 a padre or a priest or someone would attend and just say a few words and it was nice to have that little meditation, yeah.

Did you have a copy of the bible with you?

No. Packed very light.

Mm.

Not like a motel or a hotel where you had to have a bible in every room, no, not like that at all no.

And just getting towards the end of the interview now,

15:30 **have you been back to any of the places you fought in?**

No, not fought in, no. I've been back to a lot of places I trained in and just recently just come back from Puckapunyal, where they had the second, sixty second anniversary of armour in Australia and I was invited back to that. Very enjoyable, but not the places to, where I fought. I haven't personally, no. I haven't set foot back in Madang. I missed out on the Rotary one that went to Madang to, I missed

16:00 out on that. There was too many applications and I missed out it and probably my age might have put me off a bit because of the younger ones, more fitter than oh not fitter than I was but I missed out on that one and it's like some of those that have gone back to Gallipoli. A friend of mine came back last year and they didn't want to take him, he was eighty five, and they said, "You can't go," and he said, "Why?" They said, "You're too old." He said, "I'm fitter than some of the people you're gonna take on that touring party," and he proved it. Younger ones cracked up and he

16:30 didn't. They complimented him later. So age should not be a barrier to your mental capabilities or your physical cap capabilities. That's discrimination. You strike a lot of that today in lots a things. I don't know why.

Mm.

You can't judge someone by the cover, can you?

It's lack of understanding.

Lack of understanding, yes.

Mm and I think a lot of well maybe I shouldn't say this. I'm giving my opinion

Yeah, yeah.

But that's okay. I think a lot of young people fear age too

17:00 **perhaps.**

Well I think they often say life begins at forty. Yes, mine would a really started at forty I reckon. Probably started before then. I'd had the privilege of doing so many cities of Australia with the organisation I was involved with and enabled me to take part of my holidays and do those things in groups and I used to organise the groups and take them with the RSL I was talking about

17:30 and the bowls [(UNCLEAR)], national carnivals and all the capital cities of Australia and we'd, Bet and I did a couple of tours of all those, made a lot of friends, met a lot of acquaintances that I hadn't seen for years you know cause all and particularly our unit came from all states basically predominantly from New South Wales but basically from South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia, Tassie.

And you were social secretary for your association?

No, on the committee.

On the committee.

Yeah there's only three of us, yeah.

Yeah

Yeah.

And now that's

18:00 **your unit's association?**

Yeah, we all, we organise everything, yes.

Okay.

For our Anzac Day and organise everything for our re reunion, yeah.

Okay.

Yeah.

Do you have any medals?

You got the medals there.

Yeah?

They're there. You've seen them. They're the only ones I got.

What were they for?

Oh well where we served, the areas we served in and there's that fifth one is the one that because of those that served after the war, after the cessation of hostilities. Those that went on and served that's what

18:30 that fifth medal is for. You'll see some of them have got seven or eight, particularly in the Middle East and those places there. They've got let's face it, as I mentioned before I was still at school when the war started.

Mm.

But

Do they mean a lot to you those medals?

Yes and [(UNCLEAR)] pass them on to my family, yes. Yes I, yes why not? At least we did offer and we did achieve and our objectives were there without a doubt today that the country we've got was our

19:00 freedom

Mm.

And you can express yourself today, even though some of them express themselves too much sometimes. Never mind, they do express themselves but it led me on the right course in Rotary. I've had the highest award they can give you, I'm a Paul Harris Fellow. I've been twenty years, I've been a life member of the RSL as you know I was given the volunteer of the year of the Sydney [(UNCLEAR)]. I was given the Anzac Day award the following year. I don't want any more gongs. I enjoy what I do. I still today drive senior cits [citizens] around

19:30 and help people and do things and I think I just finished auditing the bowling club books. I can do the [(UNCLEAR)] auditor.

Mm.

I can do a lot of things like that and enjoy doing it and I think today too many people let their grey matter go. I see too much of it. They retire and say, "Oh I'm gonna sit back and do this." They sit back and die and I look at, I see there was a woman I had at Rotary, we had at Rotary some last year what jumped out of a parachute and

20:00 [(UNCLEAR)] going somewhere. Jumped out of a parachute and done all these things and she's in her nineties you know so

Great.

If you, yeah I can't think of her name. She was in the television, on the papers and everything.

Fantastic.

But I think you must keep going and use what the, every day that we've got, to help someone else if we can down the track. You only get out of life what you put into it.

Mm.

And I'm sure I've got a lot out of life but I realise now I musta put a bit in ah

Just

20:30 **finally, for the record,**

Mm.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about your wartime experiences?

You, perhaps a closing comment. The sense of comradeship, discipline, trust in your mates is lacking in today. The sooner we get national service in to teach some of our younger ones what comradeship is,

21:00 what discipline is and what you rely on your mates for, the better and one of the pleasing things I seen in the last couple of months was the fact that there, I had a bus load down to Cerberus to HMAS Cerberus down at the naval base and to see those naval ratings come out, there's I forget how many thousand down there training of all nationalities, that pleased me to see them and to see the Anzac Day march and the troops that march in the air force, the navy and the army and to see the nationalities

21:30 as I call them. Perhaps I'm using that wrong word wrong but they're Australians and see those faces in all those uniforms, whether they're army, navy or air made me feel very proud that we're on the right track and I think there's more of it should be done with particularly national service. Let's face it the other countries do it, why don't we? And I think it would get rid of some of our unemployment and teach our youth on the right track because in days of the Depression and they call it the dole, we had the Great Ocean Road built for us, we had the Boulevard round the Yarra built for us

22:00 They all worked for it. Today our youth that are on the dole are doing nothing for this country. Sorry, end of my comments.

Thank you.

I thank you for the patience you've spent with me. I don't know how you got so much out of me.

Oh thank you very much Alfred, you were wonderful. Thank you.

Pleasure.

INTERVIEW ENDS