Australians at War Film Archive

James Haynes (Jimmy) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Jim, can you just give us a summary of your life to date?**

I was born on the 24th of April, in 1923, which was exactly eight years after Anzac Day.

01:00 My father came to Australia from England in 1912. My mother came from a family that came to South Australia in 1848. I was born in a place called Clarence Park in South Australia. It was a suburb mainly of returned soldiers.

01:30 I went to school at Brighton for a while. There was a reason for that. My father was in hospital a lot, from problems encountered in the war. My grandmother lived there. I went to school at Blackforest Primary, and I did only high school. I started work in 1940 with Guinea Airways. I remained with them until 1941, October, when I went into the army.

02:02 After the war I recommenced in the airline business with the old Australia National Airways. They had taken over the Guinea Airways operation. I then went through the post-war period of the building of the airlines, that became a very big thing in Australia, as you know.

02:31 I was a traffic officer, as they call them these days. You did everything in the airline at that time. Then I became personnel officer in South Australia, Western Australian, and all that, and that was extremely interesting, interviewing people. At the same time I started to study at the South Australian School of Mines. I was studying management. And the School of Mines was similar

03:00 to what the Institute of Technology is today. As a matter of fact, the School of Mines is the South Australian Institute of Technology. In 1953, I married Kathleen – I probably jumped a bit there. In 1955, we had our first son Andrew.

03:31 In ‘57, our second son Richard. And then in 1960, along came Elizabeth. And all this time I was doing different jobs in the airline. Then in 1965, they wanted a manager for Darwin. So I up and took my wife and three kids from the comforts of suburban existence, to what would be called primitive existence in Darwin.

04:02 But it was a wonderful five years, everyone enjoyed it. The kids didn’t have television. That was one of the greatest times of our lives. we were then posted down to Brisbane, I became assistant Queensland manager, then I was Brisbane manager of Ansett. Then after the take-over by TNT [Trans National Truck],

04:30 like all things, my job as Brisbane manager had became redundant and I became personnel manager for Queensland, which I ended up doing. It was a very interesting period.

Can you tell me a little bit about the town that you grew up in?

Yes, Clarence Park was only four miles from Adelaide, it was on the railway line. It was a suburban town

05:02 When my father and mother moved there, the cow paddocks were still there. As a matter of fact, I used to go around the dairy and get the milk and bring it home. There was a big milk factory, and if you wanted cream or anything you used to go up there. But that was the sort of places they were, but like all places around here they became suburbanised, if that’s the right word. The people

05:30 had built, and slowly the whole area – I would doubt today if you could find a vacant block in that whole area. The town itself had a great spirit. Most of the chaps were ex-servicemen. From the First War, of course. A tremendous lot were from Gallipoli. They formed RSLs [Returned and Services Leagues], and unit clubs, and they had a great

06:00 espirit de corps, for people that had any problems. I remember my father was in hospital as a result of what happened in the war. He was in hospital and what happened, half the blokes would come around, they’d chop the wood, they’d dig the garden, they’d do all these sorts of things. And I know he used to

do it for

06:30 other people when he was well enough. You could leave your doors open. There was no worry of any theft or anything like that. But generally speaking, it was a good place to grow up. We never had much money. No-one did, because you had the Depression years come along in the ‘30s. The job that my father had ceased to exist, but fortunately, he had a pension from the First War. It wasn’t very much, but it was more than what a lot of people had at that time.

07:02 My brother was born in 1930. There’s quite a gap between the two of us. Me in ‘23 – He was a long way behind. He’s now in his ‘70s, and we became quite close. In

07:30 schooling, I told you I went to school at Brighton. Now that was an interesting school. It was Church of England school. It was run by two ladies, Misses Flemings. And there’s been a book written about them. I even got my name in the book, I don’t know what for. Getting on into – later on, I went to Blackforest, which was near where I lived. Then I went to Unley High School,

08:01 which was the school about four miles away – We used to push our bikes there every day. It was a very good high school. A lot of prominent people came out of there. Talking of the war again, Dave Shannon, who was one of the pilots in the Dambusters [RAF bomber unit] – He featured in the film The Dambusters. It’s a very good film, they made it just after the war.

08:34 After I finished schooling there, at Unley High School, the school used to get one vacancy a year to go to the airlines, Guinea Airways, and I was the lucky one to get that, at the end of ‘39, the beginning of ‘40.

The first school you talked about? What did it look like and who were your mates at school?

Yeah, it was a very interesting school. It was in one

09:01 big hall, and these two ladies, they were old ladies to us, they probably weren’t at that time – It was situated at the entrance to a cemetery. We would see the funeral processions go by and wonder who that was. It was a different school. We used to start off the mornings singing a hymn. We were given a lot of freedom in our education.

09:31 I could speak French when I was about eight. I wish I had kept on with it. That was the sort of thing that they did. I think that’s one of the reasons that my parents thought I was getting some sort of education. That’s why I went back to Blackforest School in my final year, because you had to get what they called

10:00 a QC, Qualifying Certificate, to go onto high school. But that’s what it was like.

You said there was a specific reason why you went to Clarence –

Clarence Park? Well, we lived at Clarence Park. I went to the school at Brighton because my grandmother. Dad was crook [sick] a lot, from the First War, and my mother used to go down there. If she was out,

10:30 or was going to be out, I always went to my grandmother’s place, down at Brighton.

Did you enjoy being with your grandmother?.

Quite good. In those days, she lived right on the seafront. You walked out the front of her house and onto the beach, and that was wonderful, for young people. I could swim when I was five. It was great. We also had big sandhills. Interesting. One of the chaps who went to that school was Jim Hardy, Sir James.

11:02 He had quite a famous winery. And there were a lot of other people. Sir Douglas Mawson [Antarctic explorer], his daughter went there. It was a different school to the normal run of schools.

Can you tell us a bit about your father, and his experiences in the war? Did he talk to you much about it?

I wish I had talked to him a lot more about it.

11:32 He came to Australia in 1912, as I said earlier. And he joined up at 1914, at the outbreak of war. He went overseas in 1914, with the 10th Battalion. As you know, they all went to Egypt and they trained in Egypt. He very much enjoyed being in Egypt. He enjoyed the training. He’s told me that. And

12:00 how much it helped when they got to Gallipoli. They went on boats, a few weeks earlier, I believe. He was in the 10th Battalion. There were three battalions that did the landings. There was a 9th from Queensland, a 10th from South Australia, and an 11th from Perth. They were the three initial battalions who hit the beach. My father did not land on the initial lot.

12:30 He came in afterwards. He always said that. He was very, very lucky. When he was on Gallipoli, the only wound he ever got was on the hand, he said. But he got tuberculosis, and he was evacuated to a place called Lemnos. By that stage they had the big evacuation, from Gallipoli. And he went over to England, to Salisbury,

13:01 because the battalion was going to England, before it went to France. And he could not rejoin his battalion. He was sent back to Australia in 1917, I think it was. He went to a tuberculosis place, Bedford Park in South Australia. And he went into remission. He went through. But he got ill, all through my young life, up till the time I was about

13:30 ten or eleven. He then became president of the Tubercular Soldiers Aid Society, and they built a big hostel, up on the Flinders Ranges, at a place called Angorichina. And his whole life was on that. He got medals, I can show you, for that particular type of work.

Did he describe much about his experience at Gallipoli?

Well, not a lot, no.

14:02 The trenches that they were in. The firing of the guns by mirrors. They used to look in the mirror, and pull a string on the gun. He explained the snipers were a big problem. They had an area, evidently, where they had to walk down to the beaches, quite exposed. And he mentioned how accurate the snipers were.

14:30 He never looked upon the Turks as being terrible people. And I think that was the same with a lot of those men. They didn't bear great animosities.

Well, they spent a lot of time together –

Very close together. Now that was another thing, too, their trenches were very close. They weren't like they were in France, I believe. They were quite close to each other.

What sort of impressions of the war did he give you?

15:01 He didn't like it. I don't suppose anyone did, then. There was a lot of people killed, and probably killed unnecessarily, and that's the same in any war. He didn't really talk that much. And probably at our age we didn't listen as much as we should have.

15:30 My kids are the same. The younger ones now, like the grandchildren, are asking, "What did you do in the war, grand-dad?" Lemnos, the island he was evacuated to, was one of the Greek Islands. That was very good, he said, there were hundreds – Did you know there were more people evacuated for illness and disease from Gallipoli than there were who were actually physically wounded?

16:00 I suppose that's the same in any type of war. It was the same in New Guinea, wasn't it? All the disease –

How did it affect you growing up? Having a father who was so ill, so often?

Lots of visits to the hospital with Mum. The hospital was only a mile and a half from our place, and we used to walk there. People used to walk a lot more in those days.

16:30 You see, every family had someone from the war, in those days. We didn't think we were exceptional. Dad would say there was a lot of people worse off than he was. And I think that's always the same. So no-one went around saying "I did this" and "I did that" because other people had experienced far worse things.

What sort of person was your Mum? How did she deal with it?

17:00 Mum seemed to deal with it all right. She was different. Mum was an artistic type, an artist. She seemed to bear with it all right. Dad looked after Mum very well, too. He was very good like that. She didn't have a handful. There was only the two of us.

17:33 Because my brother, he was a baby, and I was going to school. So that made it a bit easier for her. She'd come from a farming family. She was the youngest of nine, so I've got dozens of cousins. Dozens of them.

18:00 We're a very close family, which is great. When Dad was ill, they would all keep an eye on Mum. That's the way things happened.

Would you visit cousins?

We're going to Adelaide this week to do that.

18:33 **But as a child, would you go and visit the various aunts?**

Mum's sister, lived just down the road from us. Unfortunately, she died when my cousin was three. She was only young. We'd go visiting my grandmother, and they'd come to our place. But a lot of them lived on the west coast of South Australia, which was four hundred miles.

19:00 They were farming over there. Some of them were farming in a place called Mirandra, which is in the west of New South Wales, the Riverina.

Did they have family members going to war? In the First World War?

Yes. Mum's brother was in the actual landing on Gallipoli. Maurie, he was on the landing. He was

wounded, and he came back to South Australia, and he came good,

19:30 then he went back and served in France. Her brother Frank was killed in France. Her cousins, two of them, were killed in the Royal Flying Corps in France. So they were heavily involved in the First World War.

What did you think of war as a child?

Oh, a great adventure.

20:02 We used to play at wars and all that sort of thing. When you look back it was a bit silly, wasn't it? But no, that's what we did. I know we used to fight with a gang that was over the other side of the suburb, and they used to fight with us. But no, I think we were rather protected from the horrors

20:30 of war. We weren't exposed – Well, there wasn't the pictures and the coverage that there is today. There wasn't the films, like they have on the TV and that, showing what happened in the trenches.

21:00 It was all some great glory. Your father fought. My mother's sister, her husband, he lost his leg in the First World war. You saw those things, but you didn't know how he lost his leg. And those were the sort of things that happened.

What other things would do in town for fun -

21:30 **As kids growing up?**

Well, swimming was our big one. We built our own canoes and boats. We even had surfboards, for the little amount of surf you get in South Australia, and the only time you get it is in rough seas. Fishing, we used to do a lot of fishing.

22:00 We used to have fun with an old Buick car. That is an interesting episode. We grew grapes in our backyard. Every year they used to take down to Hamilton's Vineyards, kerosene tins of grapes. They used to get two shillings for a kerosene tin of grapes. They were along the running boards, both sides and across the back of the old Buick.

22:30 And they used to go down to Hamilton's there, and sell them. I mean, two shillings. And they got thirty shillings for the lot. That was a lot of money. That was a lot more than people were earning. And the three of them used to split the money. But we'd always go down with them. They'd always give us a drink of raspberry. We thought that was

23:00 wonderful. I don't know whether you've ever tasted the horrible stuff. Raspberry and cold water. And they'd give the men wine. And they'd give every grower a flagon of port, a flagon of sherry, a flagon of red and a flagon of white. I always remember, we had flagons of wine, because people didn't drink much wine. And I had some of this after the war, years later.

23:30 They were the sort of things we did. It was more basic. We used to build little trolleys. Four wheels on it. There was a hill behind us. We used to get up the hill and away we'd go.

Tell us about the Buick?

It was a great old car. They were very big, very heavy, it used to seat us, and we used to take other kids with us, and we used to go

24:00 down to my grandmother's a lot in it. My grandmother's place down there at Brighton, in the early stages it didn't have any road. She was on a sandhill, right by the beach. I remember getting bogged several times in the old girl. But that was a good car. We had to sell it in the end. I think I told you, my father lost his job in the '30s.

Can you tell us a bit more

24:30 **about what he did?**

Yes, he worked for G Wood Son & Co. In England, he became an apprentice grocer. They used to do that in those days. And he got through. And he came to Australia and he got a job with G Wood Son & Co, and they were a very big company at Port Adelaide. And they used to distribute like the wholesale groceries do today, around to all the shops. It was different in those days. There was no big supermarkets,

25:00 and there were many, many small corner shops. It was his job to see that all the stuff was distributed, take the orders, dispatch them, distribute them around. He got put off in about '32, I think it was. That was when he had to sell his car, he couldn't afford to keep running it. As I said, we

25:30 had the pension, which was helpful. In about '34, my grandmother died, and left the family a whole lot of property. Mum took that house I'm talking about, on the front

26:00 at Brighton, she paid six hundred dollars for it out of the estate. Six hundred pounds. You wouldn't even get half a room for that, these days. That's how we went in the '30s. You couldn't afford things. So she immediately got tenants, and she used to let it, I think, for about a pound a week to people.

26:30 **So she was a little bit business-minded?**

Yeah. It was all rather funny. Can I talk politics? Mum was a great liberal conservative and Dad was a great Labor bloke. He and my uncle used to go to the Botanic Gardens, in Adelaide. They had like a speaker's corner there.

27:00 And they'd go there, and I was dragged there, too. I had an early introduction to politics. But it was interesting, and it gave me an interest in politics. Either way.

Did they have debates at home?

Oh, not very many.

Describe that experience in the Botanical Gardens?

27:30 **They had these great big trees, and I think they're still there. And there was a big stump, where they'd cut off a tree, and the speakers used to get on these stumps. Not only from the Labor Party, but from all parties. It was a bit like the Speakers' Corner in London.**

Do you remember the political issues at that time?

Yes, there were quite a lot. Unfortunately Australia

28:00 was going through a tremendous Depression, and a lot of people were anti-capitalist, and all of that sort of thing. There was extreme socialists there, communists were there in a big way. Of course, they were very strong. They used to

28:30 allow a time. I think they were there from one to four, Sunday afternoon. I think that was the allowed time. And I think they had to book their times. But they used to get big crowds, because they didn't have any other form of entertainment. We used to go in on the trains because it wasn't that far from the railway station. Probably half a mile. Half a mile was nothing.

29:00 I think that's why the people of that generation were pretty fit, because they used to walk so much. But I can't recollect off hand any famous people, but there were quite a few federal members of Parliament used to come and talk there. And they were quite interesting.

29:30 Just as an aside, after the war, Dad was tied up with the Labor Party, then I went and saw people like [Kim] Beazley's father, and all those. This was just before the elections in 1938. The whole cabinet were there and I got introduced. I wasn't into a non-political family. But fortunately, I was able to see both sides,

30:00 which was good.

What was Adelaide like? The city itself?

Adelaide city was a very beautiful place, and I think it still is. Of course, it's got that territory bordered by trees, and the lovely buildings. And the buildings were of an era that was known for lovely buildings.

30:31 King William Street runs right through the centre of Adelaide. Victoria Square. It has changed of course over the years. We were back there a few years ago and we got lost. No, Adelaide was very good. But like a lot of people, we didn't go into the city. Going into the city was a big adventure. You'd sometimes go into the

31:00 pictures [cinema] in town. Most times we used to go the local theatre, on a Saturday afternoon, you'd pay six pence and they had a penny sweeps ticket, where you used to be able to go and buy a lolly for a penny. They were the sort of things that you used to do.

What was the earliest film you remember seeing?

Oh yeah, I can remember. It was called Hell's Angels. It was about the flyers in

31:30 the First War. The pilots. Flyers being killed off right, left and centre. It had quite an effect.

What sort of effect?

Well, the effect of realising just what had happened. We used to see films like Robin Hood, those adventures. They used to have a serial on, that was the real big time. And on your

32:00 birthday, you used to get a free ticket and a free sweet. It was a good gimmick. It got the kids there, right, left and centre. You probably knew half the kids that were there. You'd very seldom see an adult. But kids could go – there was not the problem you have got today of children going off. You used to walk about a mile –

32:33 **What was your Dad like? What sort of person was he?**

Short-tempered at times. He was very good for the family. He was a sick man, though, for a long time. But he served in the Second War, he was a B Class, he served down in Adelaide, in the records office.

He was a big man, about six foot.

33:03 He was tied up with an awful lot of organisations. I think I told you he was president of the Tubercular Aid Society, and he was president of the local RSL [Returned and Services League]. He was very involved in the community affairs.

Describe his involvement in the local RSL?

Well, being president of it, he was responsible for the operation of

33:30 the RSL. He presided over the meetings that they had. The meetings in those days were mainly concerned with welfare. They had a welfare man who did nothing else because a lot of men never had pensions, they were out of work, they might run into a problem and the RSL had a welfare fund. Which they

34:00 themselves, not having much money themselves, they all subscribed to it. And that money was not – given out easy. They would go into each case and have a look at it. And the RSL, generally, looked after the families. Of course, Legacy association for war widows and families] looked after the families of the dead. Legacy used to

34:30 liaise a lot with the RSL, too. I know a couple of the RSL members were Legatees.

Did you ever go to any of their meetings?

I did, of course, after the war. I was a member myself. They looked after the kids. We had a RSL cricket type team, and

35:00 that was for the Sunderland soldiers. I don't what they did with the daughters. I can always remember they had fancy dress parties for the kids. Used to dress up as Indians, put feathers in the hat. Things like that. So you can see we weren't an isolated family.

35:30 Mum didn't take part in a lot of those, she was more interested in painting. Women didn't, in those days.

How did your Mum and Dad meet?

I do know a lot about that. Mum and her sister used to go to a dance at the end of the Glenelg Jetty. Dad and Uncle Ern decided to go to this dance,

36:00 and it went on from on there. Dad married Mum and uncle married Mum's sister. They were married after the war. It was only when he came back. They were married in 1922, and they had their honeymoon at Port Elliot. Which is still a favourite place in South Australia, where people go for honeymoons and things like that.

36:30 It's a lovely area. Mum's sister, as I said, died, when her son was three. He ended up serving in the navy for twelve years. That's how they met. They had these big dances, and they were quite the meeting place in those days. I suppose they do it in another form here, now.

37:00 **Did you ever see your Dad in uniform? Can you describe his uniform?**

I only saw in the Second War uniform. It was the normal Australian type uniform. Same as what I had. They were pretty standard. Slouch hat, the brown uniform.

Did he march in the parades before the Second World War?

Yes.

37:31 When he was sick he was not able to. They used to have a bus that they went in. The Anzac Day parade was a big thing. They used to have a church service on the nearest Sunday. On Anzac Day everyone marched, with all their medals.

38:01 I did it after the war, for a while, with him, before we moved away. No, it was very strong – And it still is, down there, but unfortunately it's getting less and less. That's what happens.

Can you describe going to visit him in hospital, and how that affected you?

Yeah, well, in the '30s when I used to go and visit him in the hospital,

38:30 we had to take precautions, because they were all tuberculosis patients. We visited him, and he used to take us out in the gardens, and we used to play in the garden, and Mum and he used to talk. It was a thing we didn't think was out of the ordinary. Other people were doing it.

39:00 After the war, of course, they built the hospital out at Dawes Road, which is near the cemetery. That's where he was. He actually died in a sanatorium in the Adelaide Hills.

Did it worry you that he had to be in hospital like that, as a boy?

No.

39:30 It was not something different. Other people were the same in that particular area. Maybe if we had lived in the area where all the other farmers were – but no. The RSL themselves used to have what they called a visitation group, and they used to visit every member that was in hospital

40:00 every couple of weeks. It used to be rostered. So you can see what I mean. It wasn't taken as being different. In the end, I suppose I was getting older, I tried to get out of it. But I shouldn't have. I realise now that he probably wanted to see us, too.

Tape 2

00:32 **Can you tell us about your first job, when you left school?**

When I left school? I was an office boy. It was quite interesting. I had to be in uniform. I had a tailor made uniform with a little forage cap. I used to greet the passengers in those days, when they came into our office.

01:00 I used to go and get the mail from the post office. And I used to have to stay behind at night while the manager's secretary finished the mail, then I had to run down to the railway station and put it in the late fee bag. And I used to use my bike, which I got paid an extra sixpence a week for. And I used to go around and pay all the accounts. People didn't use the mail much.

01:30 They reckoned it was cheaper to have an office boy. They had an office in Currey Street, Adelaide, and the executives there were mainly from the First War. But Guinea Airways was formed in New Guinea, but the head office was there, in Adelaide. So I had a good basic knowledge, by the time I was seventeen, I suppose, of

02:00 what the airline business was all about. On a Saturday, we used to travel on the aircraft over to Kangaroo Island, Port Lincoln, and do the paperwork. We used to land at Penneshaw, Kingscote, and we'd do the paper work. Which to a young bloke was pretty interesting. A trip on the plane.

02:30 Two of us used to do this. And we got to meet a lot of people, passengers. I reckon I got to know half the population of Kangaroo Island, in those days. It wasn't that big. We had original Lockheed 10s, original Lockheed Electra. And we had also Dragon aircraft.

03:02 We used to have to collect the airmail and deliver the airmail. We used to do all the duties that an agent or someone at the airport does.

How did you get the position from school?

From school? They used to do one a year.

03:33 I never really worked that out. Probably all the good ones got the good jobs, but this turned out to be my whole career, for the rest of my life, in various forms.

What did you love about it, at that point?

At that point, what I liked about it was the different job I had to say a bloke in a bank, or doing all those sort of things. Some were working in stores, like

04:02 Myers, places like that. Whereas I was working for an airline and go on trips on Saturday afternoon. I got in a local hockey team, and went on playing with them. That went on after the war. I played A grade hockey. I played it in the army against the Indians. So that all started then,

04:30 that stopped my Saturday afternoon trips. By October, '41, a lot of my friends were going in the Services. The family didn't want me to go, naturally. I said, "Right, I will go into the services." In those days it was before Japan came into the war, they had a six months' service. I thought if I could get into signals, I would train enough to get into the air force, doing radio operating

05:00 and all that type of thing. I went along to the recruiting, and it was mainly taking nineteen year olds. But Dad was working then or recruiting. And rather than me trying to get into the navy or the air force, he said, "Right, Vic, you can come in this next lot." So I ended up in signals, in the army.

Can you tell me, going back a bit more, where you were the day that war broke out and what you were hearing about it.?

05:30 I was home, it was a Sunday afternoon. I'm pretty sure it was a Sunday. I had been playing football. I came home and the announcement was made by [Prime Minister, Robert] Menzies. Terrible feeling, I had a terrible feeling of apprehension. I don't know why. Why I should have felt like that? And I always

06:00 remember Dad saying "Don't worry. It will be over before your time." That's what I did. We had a radio. That might sound silly, but not everyone had radios. Right up until 1939. It depended on how prosperous you were. We didn't know anyone who was really

06:33 big notes, I suppose. There were very rich families in South Australia, but very few.

What were you apprehensive about? What did you imagine – ?

It's like I said before, I didn't really know. It was just one of those feelings. I'm not psychic or anything like that, I hope I'm not. I have two feet in the ground. But no,

07:00 I think you would find that – It was just something that said to me "You're going to be involved in this." Sure enough, we were.

What were your mates at the time saying about it?

Very similar. It will all be over. As a matter of fact, some of the chaps who joined up in 1940 said, "We're going to hop in now, because we want to get in before the war ends." It went on another five years.

07:30 But that was the general sort of feeling. A lot of the blokes went in at seventeen. I know one really good friend of mine, he's still alive, he joined the navy and he ended up in the Mediterranean and the North Sea and everything –

How did it affect the town at that time? Did you see lots of young men going away?

08:00 Yeah. It was more, after the Australians went to the Middle East, and the casualty lists used to come out in the local paper, that's when it started to affect the people, generally – I don't think they knew. I think the older people from the First War had, but I don't think the generation that had come along had the same effect –

08:30 **Were the older generation saying anything to you young blokes about joining?**

Most of them were trying to discourage us, from joining. But they became very proud when we joined. I don't think anyone really wanted their sons to join. Because they realised what had happened in the First War.

09:02 They thought that what would happen in the Second War would be similar. Fortunately, there was nowhere near the great casualties in the Second War. It was an entirely different type of war to what they had in the First War.

Can you describe what was happening when the casualty lists came in?

People, naturally, were very upset. Mrs So and So down the street had

09:30 lost her son. She probably knew about it before the casualty lists came out. People would call on her and see what they could do to help. If the family needed any assistance –

10:10 with the grief and all that, and the casualty lists, it didn't really hit Australia, they were quite small, until the landing in Greece and Crete. Then they started to get bigger, the casualty lists.

10:30 They got bigger again in '42, I think '42 was the year. The navy, and of course, the air force suffered more than anyone else. I think you would find, looking at the records, the number who were killed flying in England. I knew blokes from school who were killed. I knew their families –

What would happen? Would you all get together

11:00 **and have a ceremony for them?**

Not really. Most of them were killed, while I was away myself, overseas, or up north. I know one chap in particular, I grew up, I played tennis with him, and his family had a real castle

11:30 they lived in, on the South Road. We used to play there every weekend. I was coming back from Darwin, I met his cousin on the way back. He said, "John was killed a month ago." I didn't know. That's the sort of thing. You usually got to hear of it long after –

12:01 **What was the first experience that really hit home that the war was serious to you?**

John – John was the one that really hit home. There were others I knew, but he was closest to us. Our family were very lucky. We never lost

12:30 one member of our family in the Second War. Whereas we lost a whole lot in the First War. I had one cousin that was on the [cruiser] HMAS Canberra when it was sunk, in the Solomon Islands. He was again sunk on a ship, the [destroyer]HMAS Voyager – I knew all about that, when he went down. Another was in the 2/5th Artillery

13:00 in the Middle East, Syria and that. They all saw some sort of action, somewhere.

He survived two sinkings?

He survived two sinkings. Almost a third. He was a lucky man. He only died two years ago. But that's the sort of family, we were a very lucky family.

13:32 **How did the war affect your work at Guinea Air?**

Well, Guinea Airways, it affected it in a big way. We were flying to Darwin. We were carrying stuff for the services, and the people. We had a list of priorities, who got on the aircraft. It did later on, it affected them in a big way, because Guinea Airways took over repairing of aircraft and

14:00 everything else like that. They became a big repair business, because they had the people with the know how to do, because there weren't a lot of people in Australia, then. You will find that people did apply for apprenticeships. Back before the war, you would have been very lucky to get one. After the war had started

14:30 and they were wanting more people, they wanted as many apprenticeships as possible. And a lot of the engineers after the war, came out of this training they got, during the war. That's quite a story on its own, what happened to Ansett, Guinea Airways. I was with Guinea Airways at that stage, and with Ansett later on.

15:00 Ansett stopped flying, altogether, as an air service, and concentrated entirely on flying aircraft for the services. ANA [Australian National Airlines] kept going of course, and they did a similar job. In the period I was there with Guinea Airways, yeah, it was being affected. Darwin hadn't been bombed at that stage, but there was still a lot of traffic going up there.

15:31 **What were you doing about the Germans?**

Well, the Germans, in 1940, '41, made the big advances across Europe. And France, and how terrible that was. Our people had first come into the Germans in the desert. And then

16:00 when they went to Greece, the 6th Division in Greece, they were fighting the Germans, and the Germans overpowered us entirely, because they had far greater strength. I've known a lot of German people, and they are no different to us, really.

16:32 **At the time were you afraid of the Germans – the concept of the enemy?**

No, that's a funny thing. I don't think we were. We were imbued with the spirit of 'we're so good' which was good. But we had one of our chaps, before I joined, and he was taken prisoner in the desert. He said the Germans were all right.

17:04 The Italians were the worst. The Italians treated them very badly. He said the Germans treated them reasonably well. He said towards the end of the war, the Germans themselves were on the short rations, and they were on the same. But no, the

17:30 Japanese of course, was a different kettle of fish.

Did they come on the scene before you enlisted?

No. I joined up on October the 22nd, 1941, for six months, in the militia, which was going on at that time, to train troops in Australia. Along came Pearl Harbour,

18:00 Pearl Harbour was bombed. People said to us, "You're finished, mate. You're full time." Because I wanted to go into the air force. They said, "No, you're not. You're full time." So we became full time signals, but we were still training. When we were in Adelaide, they put barbed wire along the beaches, and we put up signal stations everywhere. I remember going to one place in the Adelaide Hills, a beautiful home, where we

18:30 set up a signal centre. And we provided communications, and then by January the 6th Division and the 7th Division came back from the Middle East. We provided communications and all that for the various areas – They had thousands of troops there. And of course then we were doing all this work, we were doing training all around Adelaide, trying to perfect our skills.

19:04 And what happened then, in about March they said, "Right, you mob. Get ready, you're going north." We didn't know exactly where. Some of our people had already been sent to New Guinea, and I was fortunately not with them, because they got involved on the Kokoda Trail and all that. We went to Darwin.

19:44 **Can you tell us again about the day that you enlisted, and what your father was saying to you about you going into it. He wasn't too happy?**

Once I got into it he was quite happy, and helpful to me. He said, "Just

20:00 take it easy. Don't try and ride the authority, go with it." Which was very sensible advice, because in these recruiting areas you've got blokes who are trying to look after a whole mob of young recruits. He thought that, well, he went through it, I may as well go through it. I didn't have any great problems with it. There was a lot of people I knew, too, going in at the same time.

20:35 There was forty of us that went in at that time, we finished up in the war in the same area, which was rather unusual. I will tell you about that later on. We had a camp, which was right near the sea –

We've had someone else talk about how their father suggested they join the militia,

21:00 **because they wouldn't have to go overseas. Do you think your father had the same intention?**

He probably did. I'd never thought of that. But when you think about it, yes, you're probably right. You see, if Japan hadn't have come into the war, I would have been out of the army in March or April, back in my job, back to work.

21:30 I'd probably be at school, trying to get into the air force or something like that, but at least I would have still been here. I hadn't thought of it, he's probably right.

Explain how when you joined up your life was changed, and what the camp was like?

The camp was right near the beach and right near the railway station at Largs Bay. It was a

22:00 small area, but it was built for training for signalmen. Our life had to change, because we were not doing the same work I was doing at work. We would have to go on route marches every day. Fortunately, I've always done a lot of working. We had a big training room learning Morse code, morning, noon and night, Morse code. But it stood us in good stead, because

22:31 later on, we had to use it all the time, it became like a second language. We learnt to handle weapons, which was different from your normal job. You had to learn to get used to army food, you couldn't be fussy. We did. You weren't allowed to wear your civilian clothes in those days –

23:00 But generally speaking, I loved it. A few people didn't –

Describe a day of life in that camp, from start to finish?

Yeah, we'd rally at about six a.m. You slept on the floor, on palliases, which are filled with straw. So you had to roll those up, and roll your blankets up and

23:31 them very neat, have everything ready for inspection. Then you would go to breakfast. Then you would have a parade, and at that parade they would allocate your duties for the day. You might be going to the rifle range for practise. You might be going into get instruction on how to work the radios, different radio sets.

24:00 You might have to spend two or three hours on the Morse code instruction. And then they might possibly do an exercise at night. They used to do that a lot, night exercises. One of the things that we had to learn to do was to operate the compass. They would

24:30 give you a bearing on where you've got to go, and they would see who ended up the closet. Little competitions like that. But that was just the first three or four months. And after that you were actually doing the physical, actual work, not practise work. We went around the foothills of Adelaide to establish signal areas where we could control

25:00 the operations. You see, a divisional signals unit, which I was in all the time, is made up of a headquarters company, which is A Section, which operate radios. B Section was laying the cable. C Section, which is a brigade section, and D Section, which I was in, sets up signal centres, operates a line, connects up the switchboards and all that type of thing.

25:30 **So what would you look for in a signal area?**

Well, it had to be located near a headquarters. We were the PMG [Postmaster General], or the Telstra [telecommunications company] for the army. We provided the communications for the whole of the division.

26:01 The division consists of the headquarters of all the actual ancillary troops, three brigades, and three battalions in each brigade. And all of those areas have to be communicated with. That's where we came in. They even taught us old things like signalling with flags, in the early stages. And

26:30 signalling with lights, Aldis lights they used to call them. The air force used them a lot.

What sort of method would you use to signal with flags?

You'd start A, B, C. You've seen them of ships –

And when did you have to use it?

Well, that often amazed me because we never, ever used it.

27:01 They were a hangover, I think, from the First World War. The same as the Aldis lights. We never used those. But they were the sort of things they trained you on in those days. They were entirely unnecessary.

What did you find difficult about the training?

Nothing really – I found initially Morse code very difficult.

27:30 Then all of a sudden it kind of fell into place. I just kept at it and at it and at it. Some people did very, very well. I had a friend of mine who could listen and take of Morse and sit down and type it. He was good. He was a newspaper reporter.

How would you take the Morse code?

Sitting down. A chap would

28:00 be transmitting at a certain speed. You would take it down, and at the end you would read out what you should have. And you would judge yourself. And you had to try and be honest with yourself, because he wouldn't take you on to a higher plateau until you got, more or less, completely okay with – say, ten words a minute. Once you were okay with

28:30 ten words a minute, he would go up to twelve words a minute. I think most of us reached about thirty before we left.

Can you still remember it? Can you go through the alphabet?

Yes.

29:00 (goes through Morse alphabet)

29:38 **That's a while ago, why do you think you can still recite that?**

I had so much bunged [forced] into me. I had a friend of mine who was in the army, he runs a radio station down in Adelaide, one of those private ones. When I go down there, we sit up at night and talk to people in Morse code all over the world.

30:03 The only thing now, I can send, I can send perfectly. I can receive it, but I can't get from there to there. There's a mental block there, somewhere. But the Morse code is interesting. You can play tunes on it.

30:40 **What was your concept of signaller before you joined?**

I thought chaps talking on a radio receiver, which they did, but ninety percent of the work was done by Morse. That was my concept of it.

31:03 I've always been a bit interested in radio, but I didn't end up in the radio section. I ended up in the line section. They had a thing called a Fuller phone, which had a continuous buzz, and it was supposed to be uninterrupted, and you sent code along with it.

31:33 We worked with the post office people who survived the raid on Darwin, things like that.

How difficult was it to make friends in the first training times?

Quite easy.

Do you remember some of the people you were with?

Yeah, there was a couple there. Gordon Fox and

32:00 Angus Brock, I know they were two. And this Brian Trott, he's 82 – There's a few like that that I still see. Jim Boco [?], he was a prominent Adelaide solicitor.

How did you get close to the guys?

You were plopped in the same tent with them. Gordon Fox and

32:30 Angus Brock and I drove a truck from Adelaide to Darwin. Before the road was built. That was quite an adventure. You get to know people. Strangely enough, I haven't seen either of them since the war. It happens that way. We belonged to a "9 Div 6 Association". We have a reunion. They've been having one ever since the war.

33:00 They won't be having them anymore because there's nowhere there to run it. I'll go down to Adelaide next week, and I will be able to contact quite a few of the fellows I used to meet.

What would you do with your time off?

We'd go home. We had started to go to parties at that stage of the game.

33:30 Young eighteen, nineteen year olds. Chasing women, I suppose – That's the sort of thing – We were fortunate that we were located in a training area not that far from our homes. Which was good. Poor old Mum got the washing. But no, and it was handy

34:00 to the city of Adelaide, too. Overall it was close to the beach. We had everything that we wanted there.

How had Adelaide changed with the war?

Adelaide didn't change a lot. It did change in the respect of – they opened up Adelaide, because they

had troops moving

34:30 through South Australia a lot. They had what they called the ‘Cheer Up’ huts. These were manned by local ladies who used to provide meals and find entertainment and all that type of thing, for people passing through. Adelaide,

35:00 They were mainly handling troops coming through, and there were thousands of them.

So the city filled with servicemen?

Oh yes, a lot. The city was filled with servicemen. The pubs never had it so good.

35:38 We had to take trucks to Darwin. An American ship came in with trucks that were destined for the Philippines, but by this time, the Philippines were lost to the Americans and we got these big Chev trucks.

36:02 And we had to pick one up, ready it to go to Darwin. It was an American ship, and it was the first time I’d run into American services. They were tremendous people and they took us to lunch. I think I remember the ice-cream more than anything. They had copious quantities of ice cream. And they gave each one of us

36:30 eight cartons of cigarettes. Lucky Strikes. I had never smoked in my life. So that was my downfall. I nearly died with the first cigarette. My head spun, everything like that. But unfortunately I got the taste for them. They were very good, and we had that truck, that was the one that took us to Darwin.

37:00 **We’ve heard that there were big brawls between the Aussies and the Americans. You didn’t see that?**

There were some here in Brisbane, the big ones. Oh, I think the Americans, they had a lot of money, and the Australians didn’t have much money, and the girls naturally went out with the Americans. That caused problems. Moved in on our territory, yeah. That always has been causing trouble, historically, for years.

37:33 I got on very well with the Americans. I had a lot to do with them, during the war, in one way or another. All the ships we went on overseas were American ships, and gee, they looked after us. They were tremendous. Their soldiers were a bit gung ho [excessively aggressive] at times. But otherwise they were very good.

38:02 **What about girls at that time? Did you guys have girlfriends?**

We had girlfriends. We were doing the same thing they are doing today, but not the freedom that the people have got today. But no, we all had girlfriends –

38:31 **Were you given lectures about VD and stuff like that?**

Yeah. That was very early on the piece. We were given lectures by prominent doctors or specialists, on the dangers of VD. They showed you pictures of poor blokes with it who nearly died, and they showed you how to take precautions and all that sort of thing. That was very much in evidence.

39:00 **It was really quite an epidemic in the First World War –**

I think that’s why they did it so much. It wasn’t so much in the Second War I don’t think. The Americans, they all took precautions, I think. They were drummed into them. Of course, there were always cases of VD. And there always will be.

Was it shocking to you as a young man?

Oh yeah. Oh God, yeah. It frightened the hell out of me.

39:33 And it did for a lot of my friends, too. It was a good thing, in a way, I suppose. It made people aware of it. I don’t know whether it would be any good today, or not. It was a different world then, to what it is today. It was done very well,

40:02 and it was done very dramatically, and it really hit you. I suppose most of the people you have spoken to might have said the same. They didn’t have videos in those days, but they had film of actual people, and all parts of them were shown, and what it had done to them.

40:32 There wasn’t a bloke that came out of there without a white face. There was one bloke that got sick, I can always remember that.

Tape 3

00:31 **Can you tell me how your early experiences in the army compared with your expectations?**

My early experiences in the army, I thought they would be a bit different to what they were. I expected, from what my father said, there would be more discipline. I realised later on, of course,

01:00 that the CO [commanding officer] that we had at that particular time was quite a disciplinarian, but he brought people into it slowly. In other words, you didn't go in after the first or second day into a boot camp like they have in America. Sergeants yelling at you. He eased us into a situation. Which I think was rather modern in its concept, when you look back now. You hear

01:30 of people going into army and getting terribly upset and becoming psycho cases and things like that. But no, I think we were eased into a situation, and that was it. Remember, as signals we had a lot of independence. We had to have. We had to do a lot of acting on our own accord, and I think this might have been the idea of what he had,

02:01 leaving us to our own devices, to a certain extent. We still had discipline, but not like you were marched so and so at a certain rate. We didn't have that.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that acting independently?

Well, we operated a switchboard, just like a normal switchboard in a business, but the lines were going out to brigades and

02:30 battalions and artillery and engineers, and all that. If there was a problem or something, you had to try and work out what that problem was, or why they weren't doing it. You might even ask them to tell you, so you can explain to someone else, rather than try and connect them because it wouldn't work. That was only one. There was dozens of little instances. But you had to use

03:00 your own devices.

What sort of problems would you have?

When you're in the field, you have problems such as broken lines, faulty lines. You have radio frequency problems. You have all those problems. If you get into a great deal of difficulty, of course, there was always someone

03:30 to call on, but the idea was that as much as you could fix up yourself, you would. You had various subsections, we operated shift work. And each one of those subsections was more or less independent. There was usually a sergeant in charge and a corporal. When you went on duty, "You do that!" If you didn't want to do that, or didn't feel like it for some reason, someone else would do it.

04:01 You could swap around. There was not the "You do this" or "You do that". You more or less used your own nous.

Driving the truck from Adelaide to Darwin, can you tell us about that journey?

Oh, that was quite an adventure in our lives. As I said, we picked up our trucks down at the port. We didn't hold onto them, then, they loaded the trucks.

04:33 We were loaded right up, there was a big cover on the back of the trucks. They were bull nosed trucks, and we had the engine – it was right beside you. This was not the best in the tropics. Anyway, we got the truck back and they were all loaded up. And that was going to be our home, more or less, that truck, for the next few weeks.

05:01 We had one bloke who was a professional driver in his business, Gordon Fox. We were offsiders of him. We drove from Adelaide to a place called Walloway. One of the coldest spots in Australia. We drove there and then we put the trucks on the flat tops. It's a

05:30 railway truck with a flat top. Gordon drove the trucks onto there. We anchored it down with ropes onto the flat top, and away we went. We got to Quorn that night, and that was quite an experience. The ladies, you can imagine in 1942, troop trains were moving up and trucks and tanks and you name it. Every train

06:00 that went through, these ladies turned on a meal. On this train, we weren't large in numbers, there were about three to a truck, but there was about sixty of us all told. In we went and they turned on this most magnificent meal at about eleven o'clock at night, and we thought that was wonderful.

Can you tell us about that meal?

I can tell you about it. We hadn't been badly fed, but we had been on Army – But

06:30 they must have killed a beast or something, because they had steak and onions, done beautifully and potatoes and all the vegetables. Quorn's not a very big place, but those ladies have been mentioned in many books. They were wonderful.

How was that, surviving on army rations?

We had only left Adelaide the day before, but we had had army rations there, but it was so

07:00 different to have something that was different. And they had the old special, the apple pie and cream. There must have been gallons of cream, because it was quite a big farming area. And the way they had all these tables set up in this big shed. That was very, very good.

How long had it been since you had had a home-cooked meal like that?

Oh, only a week. I lived in Adelaide.

07:30 I think when we were going away, Mum cooked a meal and all that and my brother was there.

Tell me why you left for Darwin?

Why we left for Darwin? Because Darwin, by that stage, was threatened. They had had the big raid on Darwin. There weren't a large number of troops in Darwin, not enough to defend it. The 6th Division had come back from the Middle East and they were a

08:00 really experienced division. They had been in the Middle East, they had been in Greece, Crete. These were experienced soldiers – And the 19th Brigade, of the 6th Division, had already gone ahead of us to Darwin. But there were people, the 3rd Brigade from South Australia – They were moving troops up there to form a division, originally called the Northern Territory Force.

08:32 We were going to provide the communications for it. But amongst us, not on that train, who also went up were 6th Division Signals. And they were really experienced. We ended up working with them, and they taught us so much. They were very experienced soldiers, having been through the Middle East, and actually on active service. That was the main reason,

09:00 to get troops into Darwin, in case there was an invasion. As it turned out, fortunately, there was not. But that was the whole idea of that. But the Japanese came down through New Guinea. They couldn't have maintained two fronts anyway.

What are your recollections of hearing about the first big raid on Darwin?

We were quite shocked, particularly with the post office.

09:32 I heard about that raid very early, not long after it happened. A chap named Maurie Roberts and myself were sent into the Adelaide Post Office, to learn all about teletypes, how to operate them. And while we were there, the message came through that the post office had suffered very badly, the family got killed, whole families got killed, and people got killed.

You were there when that message came through?

10:01 No, just after it.

Can you describe the mood?

Oh, it was bad, because they were all friends. They were very upset. You find that people in a thing like the post office are very close. Or they were at that stage of the game. Of course, later on we did work with these people.

10:34 We ended up with these people, working at Adelaide River, with the post office set up. We got to Darwin, and a lot of things happened between there. What they'd done, they'd set up, when the post office got bombed, they set up a telegraph station at Adelaide River.

11:01 And the people who were operating that south, along the line, were the survivors of the post office. We were working with them. They would get messages south, but we'd transmit it to all the units, further up in the territory. They were wonderful operators. They took all these messages.

11:31 And they also provided a service there for some of the station owners that were still there. They would come in and send their messages.

The survivors of that raid, what was your impression of them?

They were ordinary fellows, who had been through a lot of trauma. I know when we had air-raid warnings, they used to be the first in the trenches.

12:00 These trenches we had in case of raids.

Going back to that journey from Adelaide to Darwin –

We got to Quorn. From there on we were on these trains. It took us about four or five days to go from Quorn to Alice Springs. We got to Alice Springs and it was very cold, freezing.

12:32 We unloaded the trucks and we assembled in a convoy. Bear in mind, at that stage in '42, the highway was not built. It was just a dusty track. And it was really being used, so we were told when we left that we were going to be covered in dirt the whole way, and they weren't far wrong.

13:02 We travelled quite slowly, it was a big convoy, and they had staging camps along the way, where we

would stop each night. And you would all try and get in the showers, and the water running from the showers was like mud. Just straight out mud. You would wash your hair and mud would run out of your hair.

13:38 But one of the things that used to happen, people would get over the speed and they wouldn't see the truck in front and they would run into it. Not a lot of people were hurt, but the trucks were damaged, as a result of the thick dust. And there were people

14:00 doing that trip all the time, a transport company from Alice Springs to Larrimah. It took us three days to get from Alice Springs to Larrimah, and we'd stop at these staging camps. These staging camps were real dens of iniquity. They ran two-up [coin gambling game] in a big way,

14:30 they had ins and outs, all the gambling games, trying to get us poor blokes to put our money in. You slept in a tent. But we reckoned we were better off sleeping in our truck. We had that set up. But they were different –

In what way?

These camps? They were different from anything I'd ever experienced. But they

15:00 fed you well, very basic food. And the showers were the great thing.

What was your opinion of what was happening there?

What those camps were designed for was to ensure that the troops moving from Alice to Larrimah were looked after. There was somewhere to finish up the day. Some of them, they had film projectors.

15:30 That was repeated until we got to. And at Larrimah, of course, was the railhead for trains coming from Darwin. We stayed there about three days, waiting for a train. We put on trucks on the flat top again, and we took them up to Adelaide River.

16:01 Then we moved by road to Coomalie Creek, which was where our main camp was. We kept our trucks there. We used them, later on, to go out – If there was any exercise on, or any threats, we used to go right out towards Western Australia, providing a signal unit out there.

16:34 **Can you describe the camp at Coomalie Creek?**

Coomalie Creek itself was a creek. It was quite a pretty spot. It was a running stream, and plenty of pools to swim in, and it was used for that. The camp itself was pretty primitive, in the early days. The food was primitive. We had rice and bully beef, then

17:01 bully beef and rice. We lived under tent flys. We set up our signals base in a tent. Of course, later on we built a signals office, that was more or less bomb proofed. We hoped. We built of timber, with clay in between, then more timber. And we

17:30 had a metal roof put on it. The reason for that – and we did experience bombing raids later on, we thought the whole centre of communications would be intact, and it was. Our signals had been in touch with Timor. Now the story there of course – there were a lot of troops.

18:01 When the war came down to that part, they were left on Timor, to fight on their own. Which they did, assisted by the Portuguese and the Timorese people. And they couldn't establish communications. So a few of their chaps got together and build a radio set. And it was called 'Winnie the War Winner' [derived from a term for the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill]. And they transmitted a signal to Darwin. The people in Darwin at the day didn't believe it.

18:31 Because they thought it might be the Japanese playing around. So they asked the operator his name, and they asked him what suburb he came from and what his wife's name was. The people on Timor were the 2/40th Battalion, and an independent company.

19:00 As the war swept over that area, they were left unable to evacuate, at that time. And they carried on the war against the Japanese. They caused a lot of damage. They were assisted by the Timorese people, and the Portuguese, who were the virtual owners of that part of Timor. That has been brought up recently

19:30 with all the Timor problems, how much the Timorese helped us, and we were able to help them. The communication, they built this radio set, they had signalmen there who built this radio set out of bits and pieces. And they got batteries, they pinched them from the Japanese, and they communicated with Darwin, at the time. And they got onto frequency, and they told them

20:00 they were so and so, so and so. And of course the people in Darwin weren't going to get caught by this ruse of the Japanese. So they asked the bloke concerned, I think he was a lieutenant, they asked him what suburb he came from, he lived in Melbourne, then they asked his wife's name and a few other personal questions. When they went back to Melbourne, they checked on this and they found he was fair dinkum, so they established communication

20:30 with this set. This radio set, by the way, is in the War Museum. It's wonderful thing that someone had enough forethought to keep it. Of course when communication was established, they sent over radio

sets, real good ones to them. And we established communication. And of course, we were situated at the end of the Beaufighter strip –

21:00 These Beaufighters were coming in – They were a wonderful aircraft, they were very silent. They used to sneak up over the hills and strafe and bomb the Japanese. And they were able to help our people on there. But we had communication with them, right through, until the time came when they had to be evacuated. Quite a few got evacuated in different ways. I know one in particular –

21:30 The Voyager. I mentioned a cousin of mine, he was on the Voyager, and they went in and the Japanese got onto the ship and bombed it and sunk them. There was a Dutch ship also that came and rescued them, and took a lot of people off. That's how they got a lot of the soldiers off, from the 2/40th and the independent company.

Do you have any recollection of any specific communication with those people in Timor?

22:01 It was mainly how many of them they were, who they were, what was the situation, how much ammunition they had, because our people were dropping stuff, what food they required. That was the general idea –

So how important was setting up this communication?

This was one of the most important things in the war. It was only a small part of the war, but it was a very important thing.

22:35 The chaps who did a lot of the operating, got to know a lot of the people who were operating on the other end. This is very important. You can tell who is operating a Morse code. I knew someone on the other end of the line by the way he operated. It was the same as the way he talked. They kept the same two fellows –

23:02 One of them became quite a top businessman in Australia. They were the ones who did all the [transmitting] – in case the Japanese put another operator on there and sent false things. But these two blokes knew who was operating.

So how could you identify those operators?

By the way they operated. It's the same as how you talk.

23:30 The operators, they have different touches. Their da-das might be a longer than my da-das [Morse signals].

Tell me a little bit more about that radio they set up on Timor?

Winnie the War Winner?

24:01 They scavenged all over the place and got the bits and pieces – But you've got to have power to transmit. They got these big car batteries and used them to get through to Darwin.

How long had they been left there without communication?

They thought they'd lost them. I think it was over a month. Four to five weeks anyway.

When you say they'd thought they'd lost them –

They thought they had been taken by the Japanese.

24:32 It came a big surprise to a lot of people that they were still there.

Do you remember how the army responded?

Very quickly. One of the 6th Division chaps who was with us, he was sent over there to help operating, and all that sort of thing. And there were other people that they put in there to, to help them.

25:00 Of course they couldn't stay there forever, because the Japanese kept pouring more troops in and they had to get out.

Did you personally communicate with those officers?

No, I didn't. I saw the messages. We handled the messages. That's what I said earlier, the chaps who were operators knew who were sending them. I wouldn't have had a clue.

25:30 **And do you remember any of the messages as being particularly significant?**

Difficult to answer that one, because they were all very significant. They kept traffic to a minimum, because don't forget the Japanese had the ability to trace transmissions. Transmissions weren't going on all the time, they would only go on at odd times and all that sort of thing. They had direction finders and

26:00 they would find out what they were up to.

So going back to when you arrived in Coomalie Creek, what was your impression of the set up?

It was pretty rough, pretty crude. It didn't stay that way. It improved. We were only there a short while, and they moved the telegraph people from Darwin down to Adelaide River.

26:31 We went down to provide the army communications forward of that. They, as I say, they were a good mob of chaps who did an awful lot of work, in pretty rugged conditions. We had a big tin shed. It was a Sydney William Hut. A typical army hut, but it was very effective. It was right on the banks of the Adelaide River.

27:03 We used to swim in the Adelaide River and we never thought of crocodiles in those days. We had a cook who used to look after us. An interesting thing about the Adelaide River, when we arrived at Adelaide River on the way up, before we went to Coomalie Creek, there was an ammunition dump and it was dry and someone set fire to the grass.

27:30 And that set fire to the ammunition dump. There was the biggest explosion and sparks flying everywhere that you've ever seen. It was quite an event.

What was the reaction of the troops?

They thought it was fireworks night [Guy Fawkes Night, 5th November]. Fortunately there were no troops nearby. They had their ammunition dump away from the troops. But the army, I suppose, were quite concerned, because an awful lot of ammunition went up, at that stage.

28:01 Ammunition was very scarce in those days. I think all we had for our rifles was five rounds, at that stage in Darwin. I wasn't in the Infantry anyway, but hey were the ones that had to have ammunition and grenades, the artillery had to have their shells and all that.

What sort of ammunition went up?

All sorts. General explosives,

28:32 twenty five pounder [artillery] ammunition, .303s [rifle bullets] by the hundreds, they were banging off for about two days afterwards. But it was quite a fire.

How did it happen?

Somebody lit the grass, or the grass caught fire, and they didn't realise at that stage the volatility of grass in the dry season. Away it went. The aborigines of course burn the grass every year,

29:00 it does two things. It helps the grass to grow again in the future, and to drive the animals out, all the lizards and those things that they eat.

How close to you was that explosion?

I reckon we were a good mile away. Everyone was standing around watching it. There was nothing you could do about it.

What were you doing when it happened?

I think we were

29:33 just working on our trucks, trying to clean them up.

Can you describe what happened?

You see, we had just come off the train and we were going into the camp up at Coomalie Creek and we just wanted to get the stuff in order. So it was rather interesting. I think I told you earlier, in our trucks, we were loaded up with stuff and it

30:00 was all tins of condensed milk, we thought. And underneath all this was boxes of hand grenades, and nobody told us. We didn't find this out for about six months afterwards. Because we drove our trucks into what they called a supply depot, and they unloaded all the stuff.

So there you were, working on your trucks, what happened?

Nothing, we just worked and watched it.

But your reaction, it must have been huge –

30:33 We thought that's the biggest bonfire we had seen for many a day. We knew what it was of course, an ammunition dump going off. It was quite a thing. I never saw anything like it, the explosives, except during the landing in Borneo. It went down

31:00 very quickly. After it went down, the ammunition would be going off all the time, like bang, bang, if it got heated or anything like that. Nobody went near it.

Nobody was interested?

Not to my knowledge.

Getting back to Coomalie Creek, when you were there, did you go into Darwin?

Yes.

Can you tell us about that?

Well, it's quite interesting.

31:36 We went into Darwin, and there was a raid on the day we went in. There were three of us. There was Alex Donaldson, who became an interstate footballer, Australian rules of course, and Bill Peake who died last year, and we went in and we got to about Winnellie, and this raid came on. They buried

32:04 the people that got killed from the post office, out there at Winnellie, and there were a number of empty graves, so we got down into one of those, in case they came anywhere near us. They didn't, fortunately. One of their bombs actually landed in Darwin itself. At that stage, we hadn't experienced

32:30 a raid that was like that. We experienced a lot later on, at Coomalie Creek. But what happened is that we went into Darwin that day. We were a courier service, we were carrying correspondence – We were like the post office, in many ways. There was stuff that you couldn't transmit, there would be lists and ration lists –

33:02 And there were still people at Larrakeyah, and there was still a battalion in Darwin.

So what were your impression of Darwin?

Well, it was absolutely deserted. There were a few maintenance people there, electrical, water, and all that. The buildings had been badly knocked around, and the air force base was

33:30 badly knocked around. In the harbour of course, there were a lot of ships that had been sunk.

Can you really draw a picture for me of what you saw?

Well, we went in and we went down the main street of Darwin, and we went down and around and the thing was, the deserted look. Empty shops. I went to our old airline office, and on the ground there

34:00 were old teletype transmissions that we had sent up, before I joined the army, back in October, and they were there. They had just walked out and left her. That was the same everywhere. You had stores, with nothing in them. Darwin itself, unfortunately, a lot of troops did take stuff out

34:30 of houses up there. In all the camps you went to there were cane chairs and things like that. But they got onto these people and they got it back into Darwin, later on of course.

Did you see any of that looting?

No, it had been done before we got there. As a matter of fact, they were in the process of bringing the stuff back. It was something they got onto pretty quickly and

35:01 did something about. They just thought, "Everyone's gone. No-one wants anything." The Hotel Darwin was not touched, and the people on the esplanade – because we lived in Darwin later on as well. The houses on the esplanade were not touched. The post office, where it was, it was completely gone. They knew where to go.

35:31 They knew what place to bomb. The airport was completely decimated. And the harbour was full of sunken ships. There was one ship there, the [USS] Perry, went off in an explosion and sunk everyone on board. They call Darwin Australia's 'Peal Harbour'.

36:00 Douglas Lockwood wrote a book about that.

How did it affect you to see that devastation?

I think we were shocked. Although, we had been told, that Darwin was badly knocked around. That was one of the things people down south didn't know. The censorship was very much in evidence.

How did the reality compare with what you expected?

The reality

36:31 was a bit like I expected, after I had been told how everything had been – We couldn't get over a town that has lost life. It seemed as though it wasn't living. There were odd army people around, and there were odd people around, but the shops were empty, the pubs were empty, everything empty. It's like if

37:00 went into Jindalee and everything was empty, and a few things knocked around. The Bank of New South Wales, shrapnel had gone off right by it. You know those shrapnel marks were still there forty years later. The post office was not there. Well, part of it was.

37:30 As I said, the people [casualties] in the post office were shifted out to the Adelaide River war cemetery,

afterwards.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that raid? Why were you at the grave site?

We were stopping to have a look. We saw these crosses, and we thought we'd just have a look at it, out of interest. We heard the sirens go, and we knew there was a raid.

38:00 We just happened to be there.

Can you tell me exactly what happened?

Well, the aircraft came over. They dropped a couple of bombs near the airport, then they went off. Why they went off was they were pursued by fighters. At that stage, it was going to change. Originally the only fighters there were American Kittyhawkes, which were unable to reach the height that the

38:30 Japanese Zeros were flying at. So it gave them a bit of advantage. So they were quite effective with low flying aircraft. However, this changed when the Spitfires arrived. The Spitfire pilots had been in the Middle East, Bluey Truscott, [Clive 'Killer'] Caldwell, and all those famous pilots. They had been in England and the Middle East. When they arrived,

39:00 they got stuck in and the Japanese must have wondered what struck them. There were a couple of interesting things that happened there. In England, and also in the Middle East, they were used to not going very far. So what happened, they chased the Japanese out, and then they had to come back, but they never had enough petrol. And all these fighter planes were landing out in the scrub west of Darwin,

39:31 a hundred Ks [kilometres]. We went out with our trucks, we went out with a group there, we were looking for them. Fortunately all of the blokes, they crash-landed but they were all alive. But that gives you some idea –

How often did that happen?

It only happened a couple of times and they had to redesign their tactics.

40:05 Not chase them so far, try and get up. But they had a warning system that they were coming, so they got up high and were able to come down on them.

Tape 4

00:37 **That raid when you were in the cemetery, can you tell me exactly what you did and what happened? What you saw and heard?**

We heard the sirens go off, a bit later on you could hear the aircraft. They had a different noise, the Japanese aircraft. Their motors weren't synchronised and you could always tell a Japanese aircraft coming in, rather than ours.

01:00 And they dropped bombs a long way from us, fortunately. But you never knew where they were going to drop, so we were in one of the holes that they had dug for some other grave, you see. And when the 'all clear' went, we got out of it, and we continued on our way. We were looking for damage, of course, from that raid, but they told us they had bombed further out and it hadn't done much damage. Of course, they had been chased away

01:30 by the Kittyhawkes, it was before the Spitfires came in.

Can you describe the experience of having to dive into a grave to escape bombs? What was that like for you?

Well, we had that a couple of times, a few times there. At Coomalie Creek of course. You just

02:00 scramble in, you got in. Fortunately it wasn't too deep. The first raid I think I struck was at night-time. We had been on duty, came off at about eleven o'clock and there were raids at about two in the morning. We didn't wake up until the first bomb hit the ground. We were at the end of the airstrip and they were trying to get that. We had gutters that we dug around our tents,

02:30 for the water to run off, we all got into those gutters. We did have trenches, but we weren't going to go them. That's what normally happened. We were fortunate that each time we were able to get warnings. You see, one of our jobs was as signals, we'd get the warning and have to pass it our to all the brigades and battalions and

03:00 all the other units, that there was an air-raid yellow, they were coming in. An air-raid red was when they were pretty close, and we used to pass that on. Our people stayed in their place, because they built that signal office with the clay and the logs to protect us.

So you usually had more warning than the other troops, in that sense?

We got the first warning,

03:30 and we had to pass it on as quickly as possible. We had daylight raids, which were quite interesting. They relieved the monotony to a certain extent. We saw dogfights. We saw a Zero follow the Beaufighters back from Timor. They were at the end of the strip and the Zero dived, it was right over our camp.

04:01 The Zero let fly and missed him and the old Beaufighter just put his foot down and shot away. They were very quick.

How much could you see of those dogfights? How close were they?

Up there, quite close. You could see them going on. You could see the red circle on the Japanese aircraft, and you could see the Beaufighter.

04:30 The Beaufighter, of course, did the wise thing, he shot through, because he had the speed, but he didn't have the manoeuvrability of the Zero.

What was that like for a young man in the army to be watching that kind of thing?

Quite exciting. We weren't fearful. Did you feel fear? No. It was rather exciting. You realised

05:00 a bit of what the people of Britain had gone through.

Did the seriousness of it occur to you?

I don't think it did. You see there were very few people, after the first two or three raids, that got hurt or killed. There was a tremendous lot killed in the first raid, over three hundred Australian people.

05:33 But there weren't a lot killed after that.

Seeing the devastation in Darwin that day, how did that affect your opinion of the war?

Well, there was a war and you realised that it had come to Australia, which a lot of people never thought it would. And you wished the people down south could have seen that devastation because

06:02 there was a lot of complacency. But I think Darwin raids destroyed that complacency that existed at that time. But the Japanese bombing was reasonably accurate.

In what way did it affect your view of the Japanese?

They were just other pilots in aircraft.

06:32 I didn't dislike them, until towards the end of the war when we did our landing and found out what they had done, terrible things, in Borneo. Until you're actually face to face, or involved closely with the enemy, you

07:00 don't really think of him as a person, do you? We didn't. That Darwin was interesting. Digressing a bit, I've got pictures of us building roads. We had to build roads, the wet season was coming on, '42, we were in a low lying area, so all of us, when we were off duty, had to work at

07:30 road-building. You can imagine what it was like, we'd never done anything like road-building. We had to get trucks. As a matter of fact, our old truck we brought to Darwin was used for road-building. We had to get rocks, from this big heap of rocks, and these rocks were big – I can imagine what the old convicts felt like. We got these rocks, and was putting them as road base. And we had to do this all day. We just had shorts, and we got burnt to billy-o.

08:07 We did this for quite a while. We built the road, then we got gravel, there was a big gravel pit nearby, and we used to shovel the gravel into the truck and then put it down and build the road. Actually, it was a good thing that we did. If you got off the road in the wet season, you got bogged.

As signals, how did you like being put to work on the roads?

08:30 We didn't. But every unit had to do their own wet weather preparations. Everyone had to do it, do their turn.

Going back to Coomalie Creek, you said the daylight raids helped relieve the monotony. Can you tell me a bit more about the daylight raids?

09:00 The daylight raids were mainly with the Zeros, following in the Beaufighters, who were returning to their strip at Coomalie Creek. So we're at the end of the strip, that's why we got the good view of it. The Beaufighter must have seen them coming in the rear-vision mirror, and put his foot on it. They had rear vision mirrors, you know.

09:30 And we ended up seeing the raids, and all that. I remember one raid there, they had an anti-aircraft gun just up the road, Bofors anti-aircraft, and you could see the Japanese aircraft in the Bofors' fire – little clouds of smoke as the shells burst. So that was quite good.

10:00 As I said it was interesting. Of course, we saw more aircraft shot down in Borneo. Don't forget that Darwin was our first introduction to a bit of action. It was very interesting. We had reports of Japanese landing out west. We used to send out troops.

10:30 We used to provide the communications for it. But there was none, really. They were all false reports. You read now about a few Japanese landing in Australia, but I doubt it.

So how did you relieve the monotony in other ways?

We had a good sports program. I got tied up with hockey in Adelaide. There was an interstate hockey player, Rocky Martin, with us.

11:00 We built a hockey field and we used to play other teams. After we'd been there a while they had pictures. They used to show quite good films. The Americans got good films, too, which they let us have. We used to put on concerts. We had some very good entertainers.

11:30 We had concert parties come up, you know really top class ones. Americans, they were. The Americans had quite a long, strong base down at a place called Kenton. It got terrifically bombed at one stage. But they had top shows from the States. But we had amongst our own Australians some tremendous singers, actors, musicians.

12:00 They were quite good.

What about relationships amongst the men?

They were a tremendous lot of men, who helped us and put us on the right track. We thought we knew everything.

Can you tell me how they did that?

I can always remember one thing, a simple thing,

12:30 such a simple thing. I was operating on a key, and he said, "Don't do it like that. It's so much easier if you let your wrist just do it." And he was right. They said, "Look, get as much rest as you can." We were working long hours. And blokes were going out playing football or something. They said, "Get as much rest as you can.

13:01 Because you don't know how long this hard period is going to go on." And he was quite right. Because you got that tired in the end you hardly knew what you were doing. So their idea was right, you come off shift, you have something to eat and you rest. You know, it's a simple thing, isn't it? They were quite good. Their proficiency in actually doing things was so much better

13:30 than ours was. Of course they'd had three years, from 1940 –

Can you tell me about some of the stories they told you, about their experiences?

Oh, yes. You see, they were in Greece and they were being chased by the Germans. The Australian army was retreating. They were trying to provide communication

14:00 in a big retreat, which they said was very, very difficult. They got down to the south of Greece and they got onto ships. They said, "Whacko, we're going back to Africa." No, but they went to Crete. They went onto Crete, they were signals, but they said that, "Everyone of us had to get on the guns when the Germans flew over and dropped the parachutists." That was the biggest German

14:30 parachutist operation of the war to that date. And every bloke was there trying to shoot these blokes coming down on them. Quite a few of the blokes were captured. Most of them survived the war. The others escaped – One bloke escaped into the mountains, and he was there for about two months. The British had some commandos or people on there, and he got in touch with them, and they got

15:00 him off one night on a submarine. They're the sort of stories that they told us about. They were in action in Africa before this, at Bardia and all that. The 9th Division was in Tobruk.

What did they say about their experiences in Africa?

Well, initially the Australians were very superior. The Germans weren't there then. The Italians – they captured thousands of

15:31 Italians. You've heard of Bardia, and those they captured at Tobruk – They got as far as Benghazi.

How did they speak about their experiences?

They were matter of fact. They were experiences. They were very busy, flat-out.

16:00 Coming from Australia, they reckoned North Africa was like some parts of Australia, and they were able to handle it. And fortunately, the signals didn't lose a lot of men.

What was your impression of those men?

They were a different type of bloke, because they were a product of

16:30 the Depression. And yet, some of those men had very good jobs. They were in business after the war, some of them, for quite a while. They were very intelligent. To us they seemed very worldly.

How did you and your other fellow signalmen, how did you respond to their stories?

We liked to listen to them, because

17:00 they were very interesting. But they joined in with us, and they did the same things as we did. They weren't a people apart. It wasn't them and us, we were all together.

Why were you so keen to listen to their stories?

It was something different.

17:31 We had not experienced what they had experienced. So we liked to listen to them. You never know, we might have had to use it sometime. The more you learned from people like that, or that's what we thought, the better off you are yourself.

Did you here stories of bravery and heroism?

No, you very seldom ever did.

18:00 I knew of bravery, but I didn't hear stories of it. I don't think the fine average Australian bloke – Except in the Infantry, as far as I'm concerned, they're the top. They're the top.

When you say you know of bravery, at that time you knew of bravery?

In what they'd done in the Middle East? Yeah.

18:30 The way they got away from the Germans in Greece. One lot was – then they got into a convoy of German trucks, and they just drove along with them. When they got to a corner, they shot through. That took a lot of – It was a bad night, it was wet weather, and the Germans didn't wake up.

19:01 But boy oh boy, that took something.

Were these people you met and were with in Coomalie Creek?

Yeah, yeah.

So tell me about those people and that story that they told you?

About the trucks? That's all they said. They were all retreating, something went wrong with their truck and the Germans came along.

19:31 So they just got in with the German convoy until a side road which they obviously knew about came along and they shot off down there, in that truck. The chap's name was Jackson.

How did these stories affect you?

They didn't. We just thought, "Gee, that's an interesting situation."

20:03 You didn't get affected, you were interested. It became part of your knowledge. It can be done. There was no such thing as 'no can do'. That's the important thing to remember. You could do anything that you wanted.

20:30 **You went from Coomalie Creek down to Adelaide River?**

Yes, that was just for a short period. We stayed there for about two months. We were down there because it was a transition period from the post office further up, and what they called lines of communication signals came in and took over, and we went back to what we called our divisional function. That's where we got mixed up with Timor and all that.

21:00 Our day to day life was – You see, we were there from about May/June '42, to September '43. And in September, '43, we went back to Adelaide. But we went back on a highway that was bitumenised. It was entirely different to going up. It was beautiful,

21:30 no dust. And we went back in a transport company's truck. What happened, they decided to relieve us with, what they called, a crowd from, 1st division in Sydney. These blokes had spent most of the war in Sydney. What a great life, and we were going down to relieve them in Sydney. We thought, "We can finish up the war like that." But it wasn't to be.

22:00 We went down to Adelaide then for twenty eight days leave. Which was very good.

How did you spend your leave?

Well, I think drinking too much beer, partying, and all that. The silly part about it was you ended up spending most of your time with your mates out of your unit. You had various girls and blokes that you

had known, but most of them had gone out in the Services, or

22:30 gone their own way. Your families, you didn't want to be worrying them too much. Mum would say "You have to see Auntie So and So," the relatives, which I did, and they were nice. Or I had to give a talk to the local ARP. The air raid precaution people.

23:01 **What did you talk about?**

I just talked about the raids on Darwin, and that they didn't have to worry too much. I think I rather upset them. They were looking forward to it. But no, that was what we did. Then of course, when we came back we were sent up to Sydney. We took over what was the operation of the 1st Division.

23:30 They had sent that crowd up to relieve us, and the 6th Div blokes were still with us. And we ended up at a place called Strathfield, which is quite near Sydney, in a big camp there. And we had to set up a signals centre there. It was already set up in a lovely old home, but then they had to move it to Burwood, which was a bit away. We did a lot of signals work there.

24:01 They would post you down Sydney. This was '43, and the worst was over. We enjoyed the stay in Sydney but then we went to Canberra. The idea of going to Canberra was to put on an exhibition of how we operated our trucks, the sig officers,

24:30 for the students of Duntroon, the Military College in Canberra. We had to go down there, we had our trucks, and we had them all set up as signal offices. We actually did a makeshift operation on the edges of Mount Ainslie, the big mountain there.

25:01 I had my 21st birthday in Canberra.

Tell us about that.

As a matter of fact, I hadn't said much, and I said, "Gee whiz, I turn 21 tomorrow." And so they turned on a party for me in the ORs' [other ranks] mess in Canberra. But the terrible thing about it was that it was that cold.

25:30 And we were sleeping in tents on the edge of Mount Ainslie. I've never been so cold. I think we drank enough beer. We must have been silly at that age.

Can you describe the trucks to me, set up as signals offices?

Yeah, they were Chevs, bull-nosed, the engine was sort of inside next to you, two seats in the front.

26:00 Then in the back, we had connections, but we also had big fuses, boxes of fuses, because if the lightning strikes it blows the fuses. Or you get a power running through your lines that shouldn't be there, it blows the fuses. We had a switchboard set up in there. We had the Morse keys on a desk, on the edge of it.

26:33 We had places to put the messages. You see at all these places that we were, we used to have what we called 'runners'. This was people to run the message out to whatever function the message was for. There was a place for them to be. A replica of

27:00 these trucks, was kept in Canberra for quite a while. I don't know what happened in the long run.

Can you give me a bit more of an idea of what the equipment looked like?

Well, the switchboards in the early part of the game were only small. Ten lines, U.C.'s, and they were about that long, that wide, and they had ten lines. But after a while, it got that big, particularly in Darwin –

27:31 You've seen these big old switchboards? Well, we had switchboards like that. But our people had laid the cable for it. And the cable was brought into the big fuse box, then connected with the switch box. You answered by putting in the back .Years, later I had a situation, when

28:00 I was here in Brisbane and I was Brisbane manager, and they had a problem with the switchboard. I went down and said, "Are you using the rear plugs correctly?" And I found the problem. And they wondered how the hell does this bloke know about working our switchboard. And it turned out I was right. They had so many problems with them.

Going back to Coomalie Creek and Adelaide River, precisely what was your job?

28:31 What was my job? Well, in Adelaide River it was mainly sending messages and receiving messages, from Adelaide River to Darwin. The other one was operating the switchboard. I had another one there –

29:08 We had a courier service that we used – .We were a long way from any other Army unit. And we used to take it in turns of driving the vehicle over to the big hospital there, the big 119AGH [Australian General Hospital] was there, and there was a lot of traffic from there.

29:31 We would go over there and drop off any signals and pick up any from them.

What sort of messages were you sending and receiving up there?

It was mainly the strength, so many nurses, so many soldiers, so many people in hospital, what the problems were. That was just the hospital. You'd have your supply areas wanting to make certain they needed

30:01 more tins of bully beef, or more tins of goldfish. That was horrible stuff. We performed the function of getting that communication to wherever it was necessary for them to get. You see, the communication going south was done by these ex-post office blokes. Now an interesting thing also,

30:32 the [destroyer] Voyager. I told you my cousin was on board? And I got the list of names coming through, and I saw his name. I said, "Thank goodness, he didn't go down with his ship." And that came through while I was receiving messages from up north, and it was sent south, to let the relatives know they were coming home on survivor's leave. I got into trouble

31:01 there, and I shouldn't have done it. I thought, "Oh gosh, I will send him a note." "Glad to see you're okay. See you at Adelaide River on the way through." And about three days later, I had the provos [military police] there and everyone. "How did you know about this ship? And what about

31:30 telling them you're at Adelaide River?" I upset the security. Still I got out of it. They were worse than the Gestapo, I reckon.

In what way were you punished?

I wasn't punished at all. I got a talking to by the colonel of our unit, who more or less said, "You silly young bugger." He was a nice bloke. While I was in Darwin, the air force

32:00 recruiting came up. And I wanted to get into air force aircrew. I went to the recruiting and I got in. I was starting to do the pre-courses and everything. I was going down to Victor Harbour in South Australia. There was two of us, Coleman and myself. And the CO said to us "Look fellows, you're not going to go in the air force. We're short of operators." And they were short of operators.

32:34 "You're not going," he said. "I'm not going to lose you." He said, "I know you're going to curse me now, but you're going to love me at the end of the war." And he was right. There were some blokes went and they all got killed. So he was right. He was a Queenslander.

Did you know any of those blokes who got killed?

Yeah. There were two or three – I didn't know them that well, but I knew them.

33:00 I think one survived, a chap name Williams, he survived. Because he was flying up in Morotai when we were there.

How did you react about not being able to get into the air force?

Oh, very sore. But I could see the wisdom, and I could see the reason of it, as much as I could in those days. I mean if you're CO, colonel of the unit, and you're short of operators, what do you do?

33:34 So you've spent a year or so training people, then off they go. Not on.

What was your opinion of the job you were doing in the war?

I was a very essential one. Very essential. You could see. A lot of jobs you couldn't see a result, but you could see a result all the time.

34:02 How if affected people. How you are able to get messages through, and all that sort of thing. Towards the end of our stay up in the Territory, we got a phone line through and people could talk. That in itself was quite an achievement.

34:30 We put cables out with a phone, and we had people ringing their homes. There was only about twenty a night, but at least they could do it. Little things like that.

When you say you could see the results on the people, what do you mean?

Putting in the air-raid business, dat-dat-dat, you know you were getting things organised,

35:01 people were there, they were available, they did that. You get a movement order, to move a complete unit from the Territory to somewhere else, you could see that being done. Our involvement was

35:30 mainly sending the messages. It was to follow up, too. There was a lot of messages involved, particularly in the movement of a big unit. You'd most times do the whole lot. And you could see the signals being sent.

To what extent did you feel at the time that it was important?

I did afterwards. I felt it was important

36:01 afterwards, yeah. Later on up in Borneo, when we actually were in action, you'd send a message, a

message would go out, something would happen, you would get the result, and know the result –

What about when you saw the messages of those people going to and from Timor?

36:31 You realised that you were helping them. Like the blokes who received those messages, out there, and you were handing them to the correct departments in the Northern Territory Force. It was quite good. The only thing you would do is you would wonder what they were going to do to answer them. You never knew that always.

37:00 You did in some cases –

In what way were you thinking about those troops in Timor and other parts of the South Pacific?

I think we were concerned. You must be, and you hope that everything will work out. But we were very positive in those days, I don't know why. We knew it was working.

You said a lot of blokes joined the war early, because they would get out

37:30 **early, the war would be over quickly. As things progressed, how did you respond to the war continuing in that way?**

As the war progressed – Now, we were fortunate. We were serving in the Territory, at an active time. There was something going on all the time. It got boring towards the end. And we were

38:01 actually looking forward to being in action somewhere. But there were some blokes who got put into side areas where they stayed for the whole war. We were very fortunate.

Why were you so keen to get into action?

We thought we were real qualified soldiers, good signalmen. We could handle anything. And we did. We handled all the problems. We were

38:30 trained enough and fit enough to be able to do that.

What was it that attracted you to it, though? Why didn't you want to stay at home where it was safe?

Well, the big thing is I would have been about the only male of my age, home. All the people I knew, except those who were sick or crippled or something, were in one part of the war. Everyone of the chaps I went to school with, except two, who were

39:01 physically unable to go. Those people who lived near me, they all went. They were all guys. We were in that type of suburb.

To what extent did you feel you were defending the nation or the Empire?

People have asked that question before, and I feel that we were doing the same as a lot of other people, because they were doing it.

39:30 I know that's an ambiguous answer. Every country, everybody was doing their bit. And you wanted to do your bit, too. You wanted to show you were as good as them.

Did you have a sense of the Empire, of Australia being part of that?

We were conscious of it, but I was more concerned with Australia.

40:02 And I think at that stage we had a bit of a leaning towards America. We didn't have anything to do with the British. I didn't have anything to do with the British until the end of the war. And that was mainly with the Ghurkha battalion. But the Americans were around the place all the time.

40:31 There was talk in those days of Australia becoming part of America, .Just as well it never happened.

Tape 5

00:32 **So what happened after Canberra?**

We went down to Canberra. We were only there about a week, putting on these demonstrations for the students there. It was quite interesting. I had never been to Canberra before. It was a lovely place with nice people. The whole unit of ours then, it got broken up. We went back to Sydney and they said, "Right, you're going

01:00 to be sent up as reinforcements for the three main divisions." There was the 6th, 7th and 9th, who would have all been on the [Atherton] Tablelands at that stage. They said, "Right, go back to Sydney, then you got back to Adelaide again on leave." We went on leave within about six months. They were

the only two leaves we had. So we went back to Adelaide on leave, and then we set off from Adelaide, right up to a place called

01:30 Charters Towers, or a place called Selhiem. A big reinforcement camp that they put all the troops through to be put into the various divisions and units. There was a big crowd, but we went to Selhiem, on the edge of the River Burdekin.

02:03 It was a camp and a half. It was a like a real boot camp. They didn't have anything else to do but march us, every day, for about twenty miles. At least we got extremely fit. But the food was terrible. They didn't feed us much. One of the interesting experiences up there, I was picket [guard] on the brothel in

02:31 Charters Towers. The Australians weren't allowed in but the Americans were. I can always remember the old madam supplying us with supper at night, then catching the train.

Describe the brothel

It was a house, with the girls in it, and the madam was controlling the whole thing. It's a funny thing, the Probis club I'm in, one of the chaps in it,

03:00 he came from Charters and he knew the madam. She must have made a lot of money in those days.

Why weren't the Australians allowed in?

You asked me earlier about that. There probably could be fights with the Americans, so keep them away.

How did the Australians satisfy themselves?

03:30 I don't know. We kept pretty active. The activity in the Australian army was tremendous. I think they were aware of needs and environment?

Why were you in charge of that? Why would you have to picket that?

Every unit used to – There were people from everywhere, they used to say "You, you and you will go in there tonight."

04:00 Evidently it was quite a good thing, because you used to get off next day. They didn't have any regular train service from Charters Towers, but we used to catch a freight train, in a truck, one of those freight vans, and when it got near the Selhiem camp, they'd slow down and we'd jump off. And it was the same going in there. But that was just one of the things I remember about Selhiem. But we ended –

04:32 being posted to 9 Div. We had a chap, Lee Haynes, he died a couple of years ago. Lee was a terrific administrator, typist and everything. He'd get himself a job in the orderly room. He got a job in the area where they did the posting of all troops. So what Lee did, he said to us, and a few others,

05:00 "Where do you want to go?" And we all said, "9 Div." He said, "I'll tell you what, I'll work it so there's a whole crowd of us who go in together." There were forty of us transferred to 9th Division.

What was the feeling about 9th Div?

Oh, we thought they were the greatest. The others were very, very good, but 9 Div had been in the Middle East, they had been in Tobruk, they'd been in El Alamein, they'd been to New Guinea –

05:33 You go with them, you are going to go to some glamorous place. So Lee got us in there. He got himself in there. And before we went overseas, poor old Lee didn't pass the medical and he didn't end up with us.

06:00 But just as well, he was crook. We travelled from Selhiem to 9 Div. We were met and they were tremendous to us. We got there about midnight, they had tents and everything ready for us. The next day they told us what section we were going into, where we were going. All of us ended up in Don Section.

06:30 The same crowd. They were at a place called Ravenshoe, which is on the Tablelands. We soon settled in. We still had a lot to learn. We ended up, a few of us, being sent to a special school,

07:00 a more advanced school than signals, and that was very interesting.

To learn what?

To learn more about radio. There were different types of radio coming in. Different types of equipment. More modern equipment. I'm talking late 1944 now. And by that stage, the war had been on for four years, and there was new equipment coming out, and they would bring us up to date. They didn't

07:30 worry about our ability to do shorthand or anything – Morse code. They were very good. But 9 Div were very good, they still had route marches –

We heard a story of [Australian General] Blamey addressing 9th Div. Were you there for that?

No, I know of it – Was that the 9 Div or the 7 Div?

The 9th.

08:00 The 9th? I thought it was the 7th Div after they went over.

It was definitely in the north.

Blamey addressed the 9th, in 1944, just before we got there. But I know he addressed the 7th and carried on a bit about the way they'd done on the Kokoda Trail. You see,

08:30 9th Div wasn't there. 9th Div didn't come back from the Middle East until 1943.

In Canberra, you said that you felt the war was winding down, were you disappointed to get that posting to Canberra?

No, we were rather interested, because Canberra was so different from anywhere else, and what we were doing was rather good for our egos, to be able

09:00 to show somebody else how good we were.

Can you describe Canberra at that point?

Yeah, I can. I got to know Canberra quite well, because my daughter was there. Canberra at that stage was a lot of open spaces. We were camped on the edge of Mount Ainslie and you could see right through to Civic Centre. So it was a pretty open area.

09:30 Duntroon[Military College] was pretty well as it is today. Canberra was not a service orientated city. They had the air force there in a big way. They had quite a large number of air force personnel out there, but there was no army to talk of. It seemed to me,

10:01 personnel relations-wise, it was quite a cold place. But there again, it was cold physically, too. But that was because these people hadn't had any army experience. I remember the local RSL were very good. They asked us down there and we had a good night, down there.

What about the political scene at that time?

They had the Labor Party in at that stage, [Prime Minister] John Curtin.

10:37 The political scene was pretty stable at that part of the game. They didn't have as much political awareness, as there is today. See, John Curtin was there.

11:01 Unfortunately, John Curtin was a bit overawed by [American General Douglas] MacArthur. That's what was said, I don't know. I think he gave Blamey too much latitude. Maybe I'm wrong.

What did your Dad think of Curtin?

He thought he was a good bloke, because he was a Labor man. Later on I used to say to him,

11:36 "I'm going to vote for that Liberal [Party] bloke." "Oh, you don't know what you're doing." He thought John Curtin was pretty good. Of course, John Curtin died at the end of the war, as you know. He was a sick man, he was an alcoholic,

12:01 but he overcame it. He did quite a good for Australia. See the fact that he got the divisions back from the Middle East to Australia, that was quite an achievement. And I think that probably saved Australia. Because the Americans weren't able to help us much in the early days, up in New Guinea. Canberra was not an army town in those days.

12:34 **So when you got to the camp in the centre – .It was Longreach, wasn't it, you went to?**

No, I went to a place called Selhiem, it's just out of Charters Towers, on the Burdekin River.

Can you describe that camp for us?

It was a typical army camp, located on the river because it was a good supply of water.

13:00 It was a transient camp, people never stayed there that long. It handled a large number of people. They had a permanent staff there, and I think they were more or less people that were unfit, they couldn't send anywhere else.

13:30 But they had a large number of people to handle. We always reckoned they were flogging the supplies off, because we could never get enough to eat. Because they were sending us out on route marches each day. They did quite a good job there, sorting. All the units all over Australia were being broken up, and they were reinforcing the divisions, because 9 Div, where we were going to

14:00 do the landings, at Morotai, and the 6th Division were going out to Aitape, in northern New Guinea, and the 7th Division were going to Balikpapan.

So what was the strategy at that time?

That was the strategy, to get the troops into the fighting areas. There has always been a lot written about whether the last campaigns were really necessary or not. Some people say no, it's hard to say.

14:30 I think our campaign was necessary in Borneo when the oil fields were so great. The Japanese were getting so much benefit from it. The oil fields have since become some of the biggest in the world. But I'm getting ahead –

If you were to do a walk through of that camp, can you describe some of the things you would see?

I think you would see

15:00 tents, we slept on the ground, we had our ground sheets. We didn't have any stretchers or anything like that. I think we had palliases, if I remember rightly. It was June or July, so it was pretty dry, there was no problem. The river was very close, which was very handy. Good for swimming. Plenty of freshwater.

15:30 The surrounds were very open. Very barren. It was like a little town. They had the medical officer, they had a dentist, they had a big canteen. If you walked through, that's what you would see.

16:00 You could go and have a beer at night, two or three beers. They had this connection with Charters Towers, that was their main area of supply.

Would you get into Charters Towers?

I only went in a few times, one time was on the picket. Yeah, I went into Charters Towers

16:30 a couple of times. It was quite an interesting town. The pubs had those bat wing doors, you know like in the Wild West? That really got us in. It seemed like a Wild West town, with the bat wing doors. And the people, they had thousands of troops through there, and they were very nice. You'd think after a while they'd get bloody sick of so many troops, but the people were quite good, very helpful.

What did it mean to be on the picket?

The picket?

17:01 If you take a picket on the brothels, you stop anyone coming in that shouldn't come in. It's a French word. But you hear about on picket duty, you're on guard duty.

Did you enjoy that work?

Not really.

Can you describe the madam for us? What was she like?

17:31 She was quite a pleasant woman. She was a big woman, in her 40s, 50s. Long dress, dark hair, that's about all.

Did she have a gregarious character?

Yes.

Did you see of know of where the girls came from?

No, I didn't. No idea.

Didn't get to talk to them?

No.

18:00 **And what was the relationship like between the Americans and the Australians?**

Quite good. I never struck any bad relations at all with the Americans. Which was good. I know they had their problems down here in Brisbane, and in some other parts of Melbourne. Don't know about Sydney. We were in Sydney, as I told you, quite a while and we ran into quite a lot

18:30 of Americans there. At that stage they were having their R & R [rest and recuperation], in Sydney, from the islands. They weren't causing any problems. No fights. They had plenty of money, which I suppose means a lot. You see, in Sydney they had –

19:00 before we got there, the Japanese submarines, they had come into Sydney Harbour and caused a bit of strife. They sunk that Kuttabul, I think that was, and there was a lot of navy people were on it. We used to go to Manly. We had a family that was very good. They had families who said, "If these people would like to come and spend a weekend, do so."

19:31 People named Zimmerman. He owned a big hardware store in Manly. We used to go across to Manly in the ferry, and the ferry had to go through big gates, to stop the submarines coming in. It was quite interesting. Manly was quite good in those days. This chap there, Zimmerman, was a surf fanatic, and he taught us surfing and all that.

20:05 It was quite a town, then, I quite enjoyed going there. We used to go there every time we got leave. It was nice, being in a place like that. The only problem was we were out at Strathfield, train into Sydney, then walk down to the Quay, then across to the ferry –

What was the atmosphere in Sydney like at the time?

20:30 Very active. They were very aware of the war, they were very aware of what was going on. The people were very good, considering they had so many soldiers through there. So many –

Did people want to know of your experiences in Darwin at that time?

Not really. I don't think people knew a lot about it, so therefore they didn't ask about it.

21:00 We didn't tell them. But that was one of the things that people – You don't go and say, "I was in Darwin and so and so." Do you? Not unless somebody asks you.

So going back to your connection with 9th Division, what was your first impression of those guys?

Very good, because of the way they looked after us, and the way they greeted us and absorbed us –

21:30 That was very good.

What sort of things did they do to make that easier?

Well, a lot of blokes – You go to a new camp, a new area, they don't give you much help. You find out for yourself. But they used to really look after us. As a matter of fact, I remained friends with one of the blokes, over the years, Lofty Reeves. He's about 84, 85 now. Whenever he used to come to Brisbane,

22:00 he used to give us a ring, and things like that. That was the sort of fellows they are. A lot of them were South Australians, too, which was good for us. We were South Australians. That made a difference. We never struck many Queenslanders. Mainly our unit was New South Wales and South Australian, a few Victorians. But no, these chaps were very, very good.

22:33 And it was good because, by the time we went overseas we were all sort of one unit. A funny thing happened up there on the Tablelands. We were sent out to form a new section, an engineers section, this is away from Don Section, and a lot of the 9th Div blokes came and a few of us new blokes, and we were in this engineers camp, and this cow –

23:00 remember it is all cattle country up there. As this cow wandered through the camp. And these two big blokes came out with this axe. And they hit the cow, fair between the eyes, hung it up in the trees, skinned it, cleaned it, and had this big fire going. They shoved the skin on the fire. In the camp they had this big place where all the rubbish was put. And there were two chaps who were butchers,

23:30 they butchered the whole lot. Remember we hadn't had fresh meat for about a week. So they got this animal, cleaned it, and everything, and we had beautiful steak. The next day, along comes the police and the landowner. "Where's my cow?" "What cow?" They had put all the bones and things

24:00 in this big hole, with the rubbish. They burnt the hide. Under the tree there was no blood or anything. We opened our eyes, these big engineer blokes and the way they used to get fresh meat. Evidently it had been a regular practise, that's why the police came. One of the chaps was a chap named Sands, whose brother I think was a champion boxer at that stage.

24:32 So that's one of our Tablelands stories.

What had you heard about 9th Div and what they did, before you got there?

We'd heard all about Tobruk, a wonderful thing. The way the 9th Division defended that against the best of the German army.

25:01 I don't think enough has been done about it, or said about it. Although I did see they had a big 'Back To Tobruk' memorial a few months ago. But you see they were there for about six months, and they had the best of the German army thrown against them, and they held them off. I've got pictures of our signals. They had their signals office down there

25:30 in a big cellar-type place. They had a perimeter, that they put the cable out to, and that was all controlled in the signals office there. They were at El Alamein. The 9th Division were the main ones.

26:02 Actually Montgomery reckoned they broke the German defences. They had quite a background.

What would the signallers have been doing specifically to help that effort?

They would have been putting out cable. They were at the headquarters. [General] Moreshead was the commander of 9th Division.

26:30 He had the signals to go out to all the different units. "You move, you come back, you move – " Of course, a lot of the messages that we had were in code. We didn't know – We had a cipher section

attached to us, and they deciphered a lot of messages. Quite often we would see them when they came out of there. Not when they were going in.

27:00 **What did they look like when you first saw those blokes?**

The 9th Div blokes? The same as us, no different. They were a bit older, because don't forget we were an eighteen, nineteen year old intake, in about early '42, late '41. Whereas they had gone overseas, in '40, '41, they might have been about twenty, twenty one. But most of them were about three to four years older than us.

27:30 The chaps I know now are in their middle eighties. So that's what the difference is.

Can you describe Lofty?

He was a real character. He was six foot, cap, and a big old pipe in his mouth. A real Australian drawl, you couldn't miss him.

28:00 He has a memory of stories that are out of this world. But he went right through with us. When we went to 9 Div in 1944, a lot of the 9 Div blokes were going out, they had been graded B Class, they had been in New Guinea – and we were taking their place.

28:30 The whole of the operation from then on was a lot younger people. Lofty was quite a character, he still is. How he hasn't got emphysema or lung cancer, I don't know. His dirty old pipe.

What sort of stories did he tell you?

He'd tell stories about him on the land. He was on the land, he had property and all this down the south east.

29:00 And how he used to chase his cows and his sheep, and he knew them all by name. He'd say ,"Bloody Gertie," and that was one of his cows. Lofty is quite a character.

What sort of things were you doing in the Tablelands before you went overseas?

Well, training.

29:30 We used to march up to the Tully Falls, quite often, that's the highest falls in Australia. We'd go up there, stay overnight and march back the following day. It was about fifteen each way, about thirty, and that was our marching quota. The old 9th Div blokes didn't like it. They were getting a bit tired. And we used to do it because we had been through it – we enjoyed it. We had some wonderful

30:00 cricket and football matches, there in the Tablelands. We had the facilities there to do it. Good football ovals, good cricket pitches. The Tablelands was good. They had a real football program. Some of the top footballers, Australian Rules,

30:30 were in the Territory. 7th Div would play 9th Div. And it was really big. They'd get a few thousand there. The same with boxing. We had a champion boxer, a chap named Joey Sharp, he was a lightweight. And they'd have the real ring and all the bits made up. They had big crowds there. But that's what we did on there, it was a great training area.

31:00 One thing we never had so much of in our life. Each unit used to get a ration of milk. We used to get those big milk cans. A lot of blokes were drinking milk who had never drunk it before. The Tablelands was good, it was a great training place.

31:30 We left there in about April, I think, 1945. We drove down to Innisfail and then to Townsville, were we had to wait to board a ship.

Did you have any idea of what you were going to?

We didn't have a clue until we were on our landing barges. We were on an LST [landing ship, tank]

32:01 on the way to Borneo. We never had a clue. You see, 9 Div did an amphibious landing in New Guinea. They had been trained to do an amphibious landing, so this is how they came to be doing this one in Labuan. We did a landing earlier.

32:30 One brigade of ours did a landing at Tarakan, this was before Borneo. But most of these people, the older ones, had experienced an amphibious landing. But going down to Townsville to where we disembarked off the trucks, waiting for the ship

33:00 was quite a trip. We were at the staging camp there, and there was two Spitfires, and I will never forget this. They were training and they came towards each other and they hit each other head on, and they stopped straight, both pilots were killed. They landed a little way away from us.

You saw that happen?

We saw it happen. We knew

33:30 they wouldn't live. Bang! They weren't marked at all, very much.

What were the blokes saying around you?

"They're going to hit each other. Gosh!" I don't know whether they were mucking around or someone made a mistake. Terrible thing. We found out we were going on a ship called the General Bucker.

34:00 It held five thousand troops. And one of the things that I'd learned from the 9th Div blokes, you're going onto a big troop ship get a job in the kitchen. Otherwise you will only get two meals a day. You started lining up for breakfast at six o'clock,

34:30 and they finished serving at about ten or eleven in the morning. The same at night. So we got the potato peeling detail. They had these great machines and you used to put in bags of potatoes, and the machines used to whir around and do it and clean them, all of that. Can you imagine doing potatoes for a meal for five thousand people?

What had you heard about where you were going?

35:00 **What sort of things did they tell you?**

We knew we were going to Morotai when we left Townsville. Morotai was a big base. The Americans had taken Morotai a short while before. It was going to be the kick off place for Tarakan, Labuan, Brunei and Balikpapan. The Americans were still based there

35:30 for their aircraft. And there were a lot of Australians. There was a base there for them.

But on the way from the Tablelands into Townsville, where did you think that you were heading?

We knew we were going to Townsville. And then when we got to Townsville, we knew we were going to Morotai.

Had you heard anything about Morotai?

Yeah, they gave us an explanation.

36:00 Morotai was an American base, it was a big base. The trip up was interesting. And according to the American crew, we were chased by night by a Japanese submarine. You can imagine the tragedy of that. But the Americans had built these ships to be very fast, for this very reason.

36:31 That might have been hearsay stuff about the Japanese, I don't know.

So before you got onto the vessel, how long were you in Townsville and what did you do there?

We were there for nearly a week. We went into Townsville a few times. That was very much an army town, completely so. And we just went more or less to have a look at it. I had been through

37:01 Townsville, but not for long. When we went up to the tablelands, we went from Townsville up to Cairns. And Cairns, we were there for a couple of days. That was another area that was quite 'armified'. I suppose all those towns were during the war.

37:31 **What did it mean, an army town?**

Well, the services predominate, probably more services there than there are civilians. There are probably more camps there, nearby, than what there are in a normal town. Like Gladstone, or something.

38:02 And they've got the facilities in there to handle the army.

What sort of facilities do you mean?

The pubs for example had extensions on them, and they used to have bars. A great queue used to go up to the bar. Talking of drinks, when we were up on the tablelands, they used to get a beer delivery. I think it was once or twice a week.

38:30 And we used to have, what they called Lady Blameys. Have you heard of them? They're a beer bottle, and you get a hot piece of wire, red hot, and you tighten it around it, and that breaks off and that becomes your glass. They called it Lady Blameys, I don't know why.

39:04 I think it was Cairns or somewhere that they actually served you a Lady Blamey, or you took your Lady Blamey along. It's amazing, beer must have been quite a part of life. Not that there was very much of it.

Did you have pretty good access to it?

No, that was probably just as well.

How important was alcohol as a sort of relief?

39:36 I don't think as much emphasis. It was nice to have. You had a few alcoholics in every unit, every group.

They used to drink methylated spirits and that sort of stuff. I don't think the Australians were heavy drinkers.

40:04 Most times in Darwin we only had two bottles a week, perhaps. And through the army, except probably towards the end of the war you were getting more beer.

But you can understand why some of the guys from 9 Div would have wanted to have a release like that?

There was one chap in particular,

40:33 he was on duty with me the night of the surrender, but he had a particularly rough time in the Middle East. He came home to Australia, and he died an alcoholic. He was a hell of a nice guy, too.

Tape 6

00:36 **Can you tell us about the conditions on that General Buckner on the way to Morotai?**

Very crowded. I told you how we put up for duties, and the spuds [potatoes] – well, we got three meals a day, People were sleeping in the holds, four deep. They were really packed in.

01:00 But they were air-conditioned, of course. And that was something.

Can you describe the ship for me?

Well, it was a normal troop ship. An American built ship designed for carrying troops. It had been used in the UK, taking troops over there from America to England for the Normandy landing. It was –

01:31 a ship that had holds for the people, but it had decks, plenty of deck space for people to get up and walk around. We weren't all jammed down with the holds covered in. There was plenty of room to walk around the sides. It was crowded. It was a very fast ship. We left Townsville then we went to Lae,

02:00 they refuelled and put more water on, because you can imagine that in a ship of five thousand people, the amount of water being consumed. People showers, the showers were salt water.

How did five thousand men behave on that ship?

Alright. They knew they wouldn't be on there long. They were put on at Townsville very quickly. Actually, we went on the day before.

02:32 Then the others were loaded in a day and off they went. Went up to Lae, then across to Biak, then down across to Morotai.

How did you spend your time on board?

We spent our time peeling spuds. We also did other work, like clearing up. I had never been a kitchen hand before and I wouldn't want to be one full-time.

03:02 It gave us something to do. I know what you're getting at, there's lots of people, what do they do on a ship like that? Well, they line up for meals, it takes about an hour or so to get through. Then they lie down and do nothing, then they go for a walk up on the deck, then they have a look at what is going on. Of course, there were still restrictions at night-time. No lights, no cigarettes, or anything like that, on deck, because of security, submarines and that.

03:34 I told you earlier they reckoned a submarine chased them, but that might have been just hearsay. But people, when you get to Lae, not that they let any of us off, but it gave us the chance to look at Lae and the same at Biak. We went into Biak. And we saw the hills up there, where the Japanese had their strongholds.

What could you see there?

04:01 You could see the hills and mountains of Biak. The Japanese had tunnelled, like they'd done everywhere in the South Pacific. That was the trip. As I said, we were fully occupied. And it was good.

In what way was army routine maintained on board?

We had the situation on board the ship when [American President] Roosevelt died. And that was very

04:30 sad to the Americans because he was very popular. They held several services, because they couldn't get a large congregation in anywhere. They held one more or less over the loudspeaker system. The Australians expressed their sympathy. But that is something that did happen on that trip –

05:00 **What were your feelings when Roosevelt died?**

It was a shock, but he had been ill for a while. But he was a great man for the British, liaising with the

British. He was not an isolationist. A lot of Americans were at that stage of the game, but he was not.

What sort of impact did it have on the troops if any?

05:31 On the Australian troops, A head of state, he didn't mean much to them. What he'd done? Not a lot realised. There was a lot of illiteracy in the Australian army. See, a lot of people probably hadn't read

06:00 on Roosevelt, what he was all about, what he had done, that sort of thing.

So who was actually on board that ship? Who were those five thousand men?

Mainly 9th Division, and attached troops, of course. You see, there was twenty thousand men in a division, so that was a part of – probably about a brigade strength on there.

06:31 **How would you describe the mood of the men on board?**

One of anticipation to what's going to happen, where are we going, what's the score? The old blokes of 9 Div were quite philosophical about it. It was just another campaign for them.

How did they express their attitude?

07:00 They expressed it very well. They said, "We can do nothing about it. That's where we're going. It's all been worked out for us and that's it."

What about people like yourself who hadn't been in action?

Not excited – that's the wrong word. Apprehensive, not frightened.

07:30 **Did you express that to one another?**

Not to any great extent, no. You didn't mention those very much. I think people were aware that you were that way. Human relations as we know it today, was not the same then.

08:01 You see, there was no such thing as counselling, all this counselling business. None them was ever counselled. It might have been good for them if they were. But they didn't have the same outlook as a lot of people – that has been developed, probably for commercial reasons.

08:30 **What did you talk about amongst yourselves?**

We talked about life in general, there were some quite good philosophers. We had a couple of good poets amongst us. We talked about our home areas, where we came from, all that. There was one bloke doing the potato peeling with us,

09:02 at this stage he had been a butcher, and he was only young. You learnt a lot about what people did and how they did it. Russell Bill Peak, he was another bloke with us. His father was managing director of a big spare parts company, and he was part of the business, too. You learned a lot.

09:30 I was in the airlines business, and I told them about that and where I thought it would go in the future. People wanted to learn. I think they were thinking at that stage, I think, towards the future. What to do.

To what extent did you discuss the operation you were embarking on?

We didn't discuss it, because we didn't know what it was. There was no purpose.

10:00 We didn't know. It was discussed afterwards, naturally. We were put in the picture, of what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. But the general belief was that we were going to Morotai.

So you had no idea at all?

We knew it was one of those islands. We had a fair idea it might be Borneo, but Borneo is an awfully big place. We didn't know exactly where it would be?

10:30 **What was it like to be a young man leaving Australia in those circumstances for the first time?**

I think you thought you had achieved something, you were at last going to be part of the big action, because don't forget, I reckon people that I went to school with, many of them went overseas, and the majority of them hadn't, but now I was part of the big school.

11:00 **You talked about poetry being recited, do you remember any of that?**

No, unfortunately. There was one chap Bill Boyd, I only got to know him at the end of the war. He got quite a lot of his published. He was very good.

What about music, was that important?

Music was important.

11:32 We didn't have a large number of instruments. The old mouth organs used to get a bashing, but there wasn't a lot of musical instruments. We had a wonderful pianist, when they could get hold of a piano.

We had some good singers. Things like that.

What sort of songs were sung?

12:01 There was one there, Gordon Little, he'd sung in operas, and he was very good. Another one was a Gilbert & Sullivan fanatic. He could sing a lot of them, with all the actions –

How important do you think it was to have that sort of entertainment?

12:30 I think it was pretty important.

Why?

I think it took people out of their normal mundane existence. Because you can get into a set frame of mind, can't you? When you've got someone who can grab you and take you out of that – That's what it did.

So what was the daily routine for you on board that ship?

13:01 The daily routine for us was to get up about five o'clock in the morning, get down there and get everything ready for the potato peeling, the bags of potatoes. We were given breakfast before anyone else, and we were given a very good breakfast. By that time they're all starting to queue up, we're starting to put potatoes in – It was very monotonous, I can tell you. Potatoes into these machines.

13:32 **And for the rest of the day?**

That was similar. Potatoes, eat, then in the afternoon we might get a few hours up on deck, and have a look at what was going on.

How did you like being on board a ship?

It was different. I had been on board a ship before, but not a ship in the services. I joined one of the landing boats later on –

14:02 **What was your impression of the first place you saw outside of Australia?**

New Guinea, I suppose. Lae. My impression of Lae was it was very hilly, jungly, sort of place. A big port, lots of boats, lots of activity. And Biak was very

14:30 similar. It was an American base. It hadn't been taken very long from the Japanese. There were a lot of aircraft everywhere, there. It was a staging place on the way to the Philippines.

What did you know of what was happening in the war by this time?

Overseas? The army published papers of what was going on in Europe, and how the Russians were going, and how Britons were going. You see it was

15:04 on Morotai, we were when the war In Europe came to a conclusion. Morotai was like a thing you see on the films. A great big area being

15:30 cleared of all jungle. Almost a small city there. Aeroplanes taking off, boats running everywhere, trucks and everything. We were disembarked and we were taken out past a line, the Japs on one side and the Americans on the other. They took us out past this line because the Japs weren't offering much

16:00 resistance. That was the Americans. They had their Negro battalions there, defending this line. And they said, "Where you guys going?" I think we were out past the Sabarto River [?], on the beach again, which was good. And 9 Div set up its headquarters there, and we were nearby, and that's where they did the planning first. They had done most of the planning, but the final planning for the landing on Tarakan

16:31 and then the landings in Labuan and Brunei.

What were your thoughts when you saw that scene in Morotai?

I thought, "Gee, we're really in a war zone now. This is where the action is." And it was, too. There was Americans, there was Dutch, there was Australians. It was quite exciting. We knew we had got somewhere.

17:01 **How did it compare with what you expected?**

I suppose it was similar to what we expected, but far greater in size. The whole set up. Because don't forget it was the base – 9 Div, when we left 7th Div came in and did the other landings. So about fifty thousand Australian troops went through there, and a lot of troops were based in Morotai, too.

17:30 So fifty to sixty thousand troops were there.

How complicated was the operation of moving all those troops and equipment to Morotai?

Thinking back, you didn't think about that, but the planning and the staff were pretty good. We arrived,

they had trucks for us and trucks for everyone else –

18:01 No, we all marched in and from there we were taken out. We went out to where we were going to be, we were put on barges, LSTs. We were there for about a month.

At what point were you actually told what you would be doing, and where you would be going?

18:30 When we got on the landing ships.

But prior to that you had no idea?

We thought it would be Borneo, but we didn't know where. See a lot of people thought we might be doing a bit of a landing in Malaysia to release the prisoners of war. But it was not to be. It was to be Borneo. Mainly because Borneo, there were the big oil wells there, where we were went.

19:03 And also at Tarakan, and also at Balikpapan. They were all oil. Oil is always mixed up with war, isn't it?

What did you know about Borneo?

Very little, very little indeed, until we got on. And then we didn't know that much. You see, when we got

19:30 to Morotai, we were actually operating as a headquarters because the 26 Brigade was going to do the landing in Tarakan. They were put in ships ready for the landing. They went across to Tarakan, which is on the east coast of Borneo, they did the landing, and the battle there went on for quite a while. One of the saddest things happened there – Tom Derrick, a VC [Victoria Cross] DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], and he was a wonderful man,

20:01 he was killed. That really hit our people a lot more than a lot of others. He was one of these blokes you thought was immortal, invincible I suppose. In about three weeks, they had the whole place sewn up.

What did you hear about his death?

We were at headquarters – As a matter of fact, the notification came through

20:31 that Tom Derrick had been killed, and it was the general. That's how it came through on the signals, on the radio.

Did you receive that signal?

Not personally, no. But it came in while I was on duty.

So you were there?

Yeah. We didn't know at the time. It was in code. But we found out that the message that we had received had been the one, announcing

21:00 the death of Tom. He was a lieutenant at that time. He won the VC in Africa. He won the DCM in New Guinea.

How much did you know about him?

A lot more since he's gone, really, but he came from South Australia, he lived up on the Murray. He was a member of the 2/48th Battalion. The 2/48th Battalion of 9 Div was the

21:30 highest decorated battalion in the Australian army. And he was the highest decorated bloke in the battalion. He was quite a man.

So what did you and your fellow army officers actually know about him, at that time?

We knew about Tom Derrick. We knew who he was and what he was, yeah. We knew he was a great soldier, and he

22:00 was a member of the 2/48th Battalion.

So when that message came through, what was the reaction?

One of sadness, that such a great man has gone, but they realised the inevitable, it does happen. They realised they're not just out there playing ring-a-ring-a-rosy. They are fair dinkum. I don't know if you would say he took risks,

22:31 but he was a bit of a daredevil character.

Do you remember what people said to one another when the message came through?

They said how sad it was and how unfortunate. He didn't have to go, he could have stayed back in Australia as an instructor. But he wanted to go back to his own battalion. There are streets and places named after him in South Australia.

23:00 **Can you tell me a little bit more about setting up on Morotai?**

We didn't set up a lot. We put our tents up. I had never seen a place with so many snakes. These horrible things, they were everywhere. Before you got in your bunk at night, you shook everything out. You'd find a snake in there – I didn't like it. We were killing them and putting in the trench, and the whole bottom of the trench was covered.

23:32 **What kind of snakes were they?**

Horrible greeny, browny ones. Ones I hadn't seen before, but they reckoned they were all poisonous. It was just where we were located. On the beach, which was from about here to that road, from where we were camped. We had to go

24:00 over in the daytime, come back at night, over to where the signal office was, at the headquarters. It would be a matter of about four hundred yards. We used to walk it when we started, we had torches and lights, because every time there would be snakes. And I didn't like them. In the end we had a jeep that used to take us over and bring us back.

Can you describe the camp

24:30 **and the tents?**

The tents were normal, army style tents. Six man. We had the administration and the cookhouse and all that thing, all located along the beach, which was very handy. We had a bloke bringing in fish. He had hand grenades and threw them in the water and we used to get fish that way.

Was that one of the members of your unit?

25:01 Yeah, one of the members of our unit, Jimmy Evans.

Was that a typical way to catch fish?

In those days, yes. Morotai was a place you could see over the other side, the Halmaheras, the island group. The Japanese were over there. But it was terrifically volcanic. We had a big volcano

25:31 that was smoking all the time, and the ground would wobble all the time. A bit like New Zealand. It was quite a place, but an awful lot of Australians went through there. Before we left Morotai, I went to a very impressive church. It was a Church of England. He later became quite high up in the Church of England.

26:00 I can't remember his name. But they held a service on the beach, for all the people going into action. All the denominations went along, and he held the service, it was the most impressive service. Located on the beach, the moon was out, everyone was very impressed. They used to do it before every major landing.

26:32 The memory of that has always remained with me. The next day we left to go on the landing ships.

In what way did that landing impress you?

I think the sincerity of us, the reasons for it. Because some of the people there might not have got through the whole business. As it was, we were all very fortunate. Our losses were minimal.

27:00 It was very impressive. He had a few others assisting him, and they said the right things at the right time. But we saw him later on, on Borneo, when we were there and we told him we liked it. I ran into him in Sydney, years afterwards.

How would you describe the general atmosphere on Morotai?

27:33 It was just a transit place, more or less. People were getting ready to go. They knew they weren't staying there. You see, the 26 Brigade had landed at Tarakan. Tom had been killed. Tarakan had been taken. So they had a fair idea it was going to be somewhere else in Borneo.

When the Tarakan operation was happening, what was your role on Morotai?

28:02 Our role on Morotai, was to maintain communications between Morotai and Tarakan. But of course, our command of the division was not necessary then. The command was handed back to the commander in Tarakan, and the communication was given over to what they called corps signals.

28:32 It was passed over to another group. Because we were ready to embark then, on the boat.

What did you hear about what was happening in Tarakan?

We heard how the battle was going by what they called sit reps, situation reports. What had been taken and what had been lost and what had been gained.

What sort of reports do you remember receiving?

29:01 Mainly Sit Reps, mainly coached in language that was – Post So and So has been taken. Or they have changed their strategy reference somewhere else. More or less a progress of the battle.

What was the reaction to the progress of the battle on Tarakan? From where you were in Morotai? Do you remember any sort of

29:30 **reaction from the army about the resistance they were meeting there?**

No, they knew they would meet some resistance, but not that I knew. And see, the average people outside the signals didn't know. They did know generally by this army paper that used to come out. They knew in a general sense how it was going.

Did you personally, as a member of the signals,

30:00 **were you able to ascertain how that battle was progressing?**

Oh, we had a pretty fair idea, yeah.

And what was your reaction that?

I thought it augured pretty well for whatever we got to do. They had been in, taken that area, and that was it.

So there wasn't much concern about too much resistance?

They knew

30:30 there would be resistance. There had to be resistance of course. They weren't going to let our people come in – Our people were well trained. A lot of experience behind them. They soon overcame this.

There's been a lot of debate, as you said earlier, about those three Borneo campaigns. Was there any concern expressed at the time amongst the troops?

31:00 No, it was only after that people said, "Why did we need to do that?" Because I don't think the troops were aware of the overall strategies or policies.

What sort of preparations did you make on Morotai for the landings?

We got all our equipment workable, working, make certain our rifles went.

31:34 We were issued with very good clothing. Jungle clothing. Which we didn't really need. But we had boots that had spikes. And we had new green trousers and new green shirts. What we had to do was try and lessen our gear,

32:00 because you have to carry it everywhere. Instead of having a big towel, you used to cut your towel in half. Things like that. Instead of having two pairs of socks, you had one pair. But I took two and I'm glad I did. But that's the sort of thing, you tried to cut down on the stuff you had to carry. See, when we went to Borneo, we were issued with stretchers.

32:30 We had two man tents, one bloke had to carry that. As well as his own gear. They're only light, though. Of course you had to take those off the landing ship and through the water, onto the land.

What about briefings by the CO, do you remember any of those?

Well actually,

33:00 our CO didn't brief us at the time. Number One Company, I think, he briefed us. But the main briefing was done by the Don Section, one of the officers there, gave us the briefing on how we were going to land and what we were going to do. And that took part on the landing ship going to Borneo.

33:34 **What sort of things did he say in that briefing?**

He told us where we were going to land, at what stage we'd be going in. What our objective was, where we were going to set up. And to be careful of mines. The Japs at that stage were mining everything, they had mines.

34:01 And they said, "Look, you've got to be careful of mines. You'll see Japanese buildings and that with a lot of equipment. Don't touch it. Because if you do, it will blow your heads off." That was the briefing that we got.

What were your thoughts when you heard all that?

Well, we've just got to be careful.

34:31 We went ashore, and right where we went ashore there was this great big long hut, full of radio gear. And the engineer had put 'Beware Of Mines' around it. We found out later on there were no mines there at all, the engineers wanted to keep this stuff.

You've talked about a sense of apprehension

35:00 **while you were on the boat. What about in Morotai itself, just before we left?**

No, it was something we were looking forward to, a new adventure. That's the way it was to us. On the boat we played cards. We played a lot of cards. I played more cards then than I have ever since, I think. Played cards. As a matter of fact, I've still got some of the money I won in those card games. Dutchmen were paid in

35:30 guilders when we were on Morotai, because it was a Dutch place. We got on the LST, landing ship tank. We had the 2/14th Pioneer Battalion on it, plus ourselves, plus a small aircraft used for spotting purposes, plus about half a dozen jeeps.

36:04 And we slept on the deck of the boat.

And how long did that take?

From Morotai? Well, we sat in the harbour for about six days, before we left. And we couldn't swim. Someone suggested letting the front of the LST down, which they could do, but they said if you dived in that water, the sharks were there. So we weren't game.

36:31 **Why were you sitting in the harbour all that time?**

They've got to get all the ships together. They've got to gather them together from all over the place. Then they set sail in the convoy. The convoy was enormous. We had several cruisers, ships, ships like the Hobart. They were big ships.

So how did you spend your time

37:00 **during those six days?**

Well, someone had the brilliant idea, and it was a good idea, to do some exercises. Because if we had sat, doing nothing, we would have been nice and flabby and lazy. Because we were a week after that going off towards Labuan. They had card games. And even going along watching the

37:30 other vessels coming along in the convoy. That was interesting. There were ships either side of you, and ships behind you and ships in front of you. They had it all worked out, who was going where and when. We went up the east coast of Borneo, almost up to the Philippines, then we came down on the west coast. And Labuan was situated a

38:00 few hundred miles south. But we arrived there about two or three in the morning, the whole convoy, into the big bay. Then about four o'clock, five o'clock, all of the ships started to fire at the shore. That was a sight on its own, to see. They had rocket ships that they had used on the landings on

38:30 Normandy, and they absolutely cleared the shores. They cleared a whole area of people, of enemy at any rate. There was some Australian people who went ashore overnight. They went ashore with the prime object of ensuring that the inhabitants were in safe positions, when we started to fire. They were pretty game

39:00 you know, because the Japanese were there. But they went on and they got all the inhabitants to go to a spot, and gather, and they were quite safe. And they knew we weren't going to shell them.

How big was the convoy?

It was as far as I could see. I don't know, that's an interesting question, I don't know.

39:30 There would have been about twenty thousand people. You see, there were big ships, carrying troops, troop ships. But those troops went into barges, when they got near. So what happened around about six in the morning, the troops went down into the landing barges and went towards the shore.

40:00 And they didn't meet any opposition, whatsoever. The Japs had gone inland, away from the shore. As they often did, and set up in tunnels and at the hills at the back. We were the second LST to go in, and we were going to set up the headquarters at the old government house,

40:30 that was there. It used to be British. And we landed on a bitumen road. We walked out, the water was up to about here, then we walked onto a beach, then we walked onto a bitumen road. Then we turned left, I always remember that. That's where we saw the shed full of equipment. And then we kept going along there and then we had to turn right

41:00 into a road. There was a lot of equipment. And then the Japs started to throw what they called mortars at us. We were very fortunate. A mortar came over and landed on that side of a big Caterpillar tractor, we were on this side. It would have cleaned us up. But what happened at that stage, we got the message and we can't get through. The infantry couldn't get through to government house at that time. So then we had to walk all the way back, carrying all our gear,

41:30 all the way back to where the old hospital was. Where we set up for overnight.

Tape 7

00:33 **You said they told you where you were going and what you were doing and what the objective was. Can you expand on that?**

The objective was we were going to government house. You see, we were going where the headquarters was going, to provide the signals function. They were going to government house, initially. But they couldn't get a clear go at it,

01:00 or if they had gone there they would have been under direct fire, and you couldn't have that. So they changed it. They had an alternative, which was right near the old hospital. So they set up there, and we followed suit nearby. There was a casualty clearing station, there was us and

01:30 the headquarters and the cemetery over the road. That, by the way, is a big war cemetery now. I saw the first person buried there. One of our people. Fortunately, there were very, very few casualties. On that first day, we went back to there, and we only had

02:01 a small water bottle, and the humidity was worse than this. It was hot, our tongues were hanging out. And we found at the hospital a tank, that was full of water. But they had warned us that they had poisoned the water. So somebody found a little dog. So they poured out this water into this tin, and this poor dog went lap, lap, lap, lap.

02:30 And we all watched him. Then when he kept going for a while we said, "That's fair enough." I often wonder what happened to that little dog, because he hung around the camp. He was there for a long while, until we moved out there. He probably belonged to one of the Malay people. We were there and we operated from there. There was fighting going on, on

03:00 the island, of course. We were making tremendous progress. The 2/ 43rd Battalion and the 2/28th Battalion, and a Calvary regiment were all making the enemy into a small pocket. They had trouble. They couldn't dislodge him from it. We captured the airfield, which was very important –

Can you describe that event, how that took place?

03:31 It started from the time we landed. One battalion went that way, another battalion went that way, another one that way. And their idea was to get the enemy and push him right up into a pocket. And to get him off the airfield because we wanted to get use of the airfield. So they did this, and they got him into a pocket, but it was a pocket they had designed for themselves. And

04:00 that's where all the Japanese troops went. It was full of tunnels going right down deep. Because for nearly a week, or four to five days, the Hobart, which is a very big ship with very big guns, kept shooting into this pocket, trying to dislodge the Japs, which they couldn't do. Eventually,

04:30 the Japs decided that they would have a breakout. So they had a breakout, and they all got killed. They came down all right, right down towards our camp, guns were going off everywhere. I think it was the only time I fired a gun in the whole business. But they were all killed, except a batch of them who got to the edge of the island and they had a boat, and they got to the mainland.

05:02 But that breakout was quite an event for a lot of people. My next door neighbour in Adelaide, he was with the engineers and he got badly wounded there, in that operation.

Can you describe that breakout from the very start, where were you and how did it take place?

We were down by the beach.

05:30 As I told you, all these Japs went into this pocket, it was called 'the pocket' and they decided they were probably short of water and food. I've got a copy of the audio interpretation of the order that was given. They said, "We'll break out and kill as many people as we can." So they came out, and they came down towards the beach area, where a lot of people were allocated. An American boat and shore regiment was there,

06:00 and that was one of their first objectives. Poor old Americans, again. They came in and they came down towards our place, with all the people shooting at one another, they were shooting more of their own people than Japs. But they shot all the Japs. There was a great heap of them there, bulldoze and shovel them in. That was the last big action on Labuan itself. They had

06:30 small pockets of men there. The general hospital had come and that was located up near the airport. Talking about grenades in the water, there were some of us in the water and some silly blighter threw a grenade in the water. I don't think he saw us, I know who it was, one of our blokes, don't tell everyone this.

07:03 I went deaf. They took me to casual clearing station and next thing I know I'm in hospital, in the AGH. I was there for about a week. I came good. I started to get deaf, not too bad, about 1985. The DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] sent me to a doctor and he said, "You burst your ear drums, all that long time ago." But he said, "Being young

07:32 they healed up and you didn't notice." But by the time I went back to the unit, they had cleared up all the odd Japanese around the place. And the landings had started then, onto the mainland. They went to Weston, and there was a railway line that ran up to Jesselton. Well, Jesselton is now Kota Kinabalu, a lot

of people go up there for holidays. Lovely country.

08:01 We used to do the courier run. We used to get to Labuan, we used to leave there early in the morning, with all the dispatches and everything and we would end up over at Weston. I don't know what it's called now, because it's all part of Malay. And we'd hand over to another chap, similar to us, who took them up on a train, to the units.

08:30 Going up towards Jesselton. On the 20th of June, one of the chaps of the 2/43rd, a chap named [Leslie] Starcevich, won the Victoria Cross. That one was won in Borneo. It was for the bravery of what he did, in the

09:00 fighting against the Japs, he saved a lot of people. They were in a bit of a spot, and he got them out of there. It was quite a thing, there. The Japanese were getting, at this stage compressed out and they were fighting very well. We had the majority of people. Of course, the other landings went on at the same time, as

09:30 we landed on Labuan, down into Brunei, which is now an independent country. But the Japanese had fired all the oil fields. There was a chap that came out from America, who was well known, to put out the oil fires. He used to set explosions and blow them out.

10:00 There was a lot of things that we did, right through June and July. We were carrying on our normal operations, signals and all that.

Can you describe how they did amphibious landings and how you

10:30 **saw them organise that many people and get them onto the island?**

You must remember that the Americans had been making amphibious landings throughout the Pacific. They were pretty good. We did have American amphibious people there on the boats. You see our LST was an American. So they were organised in such a way

11:00 that the Infantry battalions, who do the front line fighting, are first in. And they'd go in on barges, the front goes down, and off they go. Then they bring in the troops that are going to support them. signals, engineers, you name it. They all come in behind. The Infantry are the front line. Never let that be forgotten,

11:30 they're the main ones. But it's essential, in this type of operation. It's no good the infantry coming in after the signals or the other troops. An interesting thing, during that landing, just after we got ashore, we saw this whole big group of people. It was General MacArthur and his entourage, and General Moreshead, he was an Australian commander.

12:00 They'd come over from Morotai, to see.

Did they say anything to the men there?

They could have done, but it was only in the distance I saw them. I don't think he spoke to the men. He wasn't like that amongst the people. It was all for show, cameras going and that sort of thing.

12:32 We had pictures taken of us doing the landing itself, by war photographers.

How did you actually get to the shore, and how were you told to conduct yourselves?

Well, what happened when we got to the shore, we could see that there we were not going to have to do any fighting.

13:00 We let the infantry do that. We hit the shore, and the front goes down. When the infantry went in, they judge it on tides, they went in on the full tide. Because we were on a heavier boat so we stopped further out. We would have to go through the water, they told us that. The big surprise was, of course, coming off onto a bitumen road. That hadn't happened. Our blokes had always been straight into jungles and things like that.

13:33 That was the landing as far as we were concerned.

And when you get in there, would the CO then tell you where to set up?

Well, no, the CO was not with us. Don't forget, he had units down at Brunei and some over at Tarakan. He was there somewhere, with us, but we had an officer with us. We were told. "You get off the boat, you go down there, and you go up there – "

14:02 They got a message to us, "No, go up there, Joe. Go back to the hospital area." Where we went back to.

Is that where you set up your operation? Can you describe the hospital area?

Yes, well the hospital area was like you would see in a country town here. A house and a building and a few out buildings, water tanks –

14:37 We were camped a little way away from it. We ended up in two man tents. We tried to work the two man

tents so that the same people in the tent were on the same shift. Funny enough, the bloke I was in the tent with that night, Lloyd Brown, I haven't seen him for over

15:00 fifty years. His brother in law played bowls down here and he came to tea. I said to his brother "I slept with that bloke." He said, "God, I didn't know he was a boy like that!" Yes, setting up a signal office is like the night of the breakthrough, there. We were all there and the guns were all firing and we were all lying

15:30 flat on our stomachs. We had all our equipment with us, we thought, "Somebody's going to smash that!" They didn't.

Who was lying on the ground?

We all were. The trouble was our people were shooting and their people were shooting, no-one knew who was shooting.

Do you remember what was going through your head at that time?

Yeah, get as flat as I can onto the ground.

16:02 Which we did. You had your rifle sticking out, shooting your gun. One of our blokes shot a bloke not far away, which worried us a bit.

What's worrying about that?

Well, that they got so close to it. There has been quite a bit written about that 'pocket'. It was only a small thing, but it caused so much

16:30 disruption. But once that was taken, Labuan was clear, then they got going on the main land of Borneo, as it was then Jesselton.

When you did the landing, you said that there was a lot of fire ?

Yeah, yeah.

Were there bodies? What was the destruction of the beach like?

There was a few bits of bodies around.

17:02 My vision of the thing is that there were a lot of big bomb craters, and a few bodies in those. There wasn't a lot.

How did you deal with that first real first hand combat?

I think all right. We expected it, and it happened. You probably think I'm very hard,

17:30 but I'm not. You see, some people get very emotional, and they hurt themselves tremendously when they get too emotional. Because it doesn't help anyone. We were very fortunate, we didn't have anyone like that. They were telling me on Tarakan, two of our blokes got a bit emotional and it was a problem.

18:00 They wouldn't go any further. They were frightened, yet they were types of blokes who were big, brawny men. Still that happens in any group in any where. You never want to be too critical of those people, either. And that's something I found out, the people who are understanding of people who weren't able to take it.

18:30 **In what way do you mean understanding?**

Well, years ago, people would have really pulled them in, and called them cowards. Which they used to do in the British Army –

There was a whole lack of moral fibre issue –

But you have to try and understand why people are like that. I never saw any instances of anyone what they called LMF [lack of moral fibre].

19:06 So I can't say what anyone did or said, but there wasn't so much aggro.[aggression] You'll find that people nowadays, I don't know if people nowadays are any more understanding. You'd have more knowledge of that. But that was Labuan –

19:30 **When those Japanese came out of the 'pocket', do you think it was in some ways a suicide mission?**

Oh, yes it was, definitely. In their order of battle they said that. We got copies, translations of it. It was a suicide mission. The Japanese were very good at that.

And you said it was the first time that you used a gun, when did that

20:00 **order come through and how did you react to that?**

We didn't get the order, we just knew that they were coming. They yelled. They yelled their heads off as they were coming down the road. But they had a whole lot of infantry blokes, they had machine guns. I think they had the old Owen guns, I think they're the ones that did the damage. Australian made machine guns, small –

20:32 **So when did you pick up your gun? As a signalman that was unusual, wasn't it?**

We had a gun all the time. I had a gun issued to me before I went to Darwin. I had the same gun right through. You used to clean it and look after it. Of course, the Army gave away the old .303 [rifle] years and years and years ago.

21:00 They're an antique piece now. The guns have got a lot more killing power now than they ever had then. That's why the wars now are over so quick.

What made you move into that position? And where were you firing? How did you know?

Well, we were on

21:30 a corner, the signal office, and they were coming up the road. And somebody else fired, so we said we'd fire, too. We did. By that time they'd stopped, they were all finished. It was a bit of an anti-climax. I don't think they hit anyone. If they hit anyone it was probably a local cow or dog or something.

22:00 **When did you see the first burial of an Aussie? What happened there?**

I told you we were located next to a casualty clearing station. That's where I went, first, when I got the ear problem. They used to bring all the casualties there. And this bloke was killed, and they buried him over the road in this war cemetery. There's something like two and a half thousand people down there.

22:31 These are people who were prisoners of war. You see, after that finished, Labuan, there were things going on on the mainland. I told you how we used to go across. There was one of the most terrible things in the war happened, at that stage. In a place called Sandakan, there were two thousand troops. Most of them Australians.

23:00 And the Japanese knew we had landed and were coming, so they started to march them, with very little food, no water, from Sandakan to a place called Ranau. Off that two thousand that left, only six got there. The Japanese killed the lot. Those six escaped.

23:30 We got the messages about that, not long before the end of the war. It was a terrible business, though.

Where you were when you got the messages about that?

At the signals, 9 Div. You see, our troops over there got in contact with them. The Malays had helped them to a certain extent.

And what was the reaction of the 9 Div blokes?

"Just kill the bloody lot," you know.

24:05 The Japanese were just as hard on themselves as they were on other people. That's one of the things the whole hatred of Japan became about, because of those type of things. See, a lot of Indian prisoners of war that we released had

24:30 scars on them and damage, and they had cut their legs along there so they couldn't walk, too much. Things like that. They weren't the nicest of people. Over on the mainland, we went over there. I told you about this train line. They had an engine but it was too far damaged to use, so they used a jeep, and put train wheels on it.

25:00 And that towed the trucks and things. It became quite operative. It was quite a big help, moving troops and parcels and freight and everything up the line. That was quite a thing, that train.

When did that happen?

As they came across from Labuan, over to the mainland, that's the sort of thing that happened. The train itself, I think it went all the way up to Jesselton.

25:33 Because we didn't get to Jesselton until after the war ended. But we got a fair way up there. They had trucks, a fair size, and they were being pulled by the jeep. We used to go across from Labuan, in the morning about seven o'clock and get over to Weston about ten o'clock,

26:00 deliver the mail, and come back about four o'clock in the afternoon. I can remember one trip back, we had two Japanese officers, prisoners of war, and they were keeping a very close tag on them because they reckoned they had a lot of knowledge. They told us they were taking them back to get a Japanese interpreter to talk to them.

26:31 The Japanese didn't have as much security as our people, they used to talk about what they were going to do, what they'd done. The end of the war, I better not get too far ahead of myself, that a tremendously interesting time.

Did much else happen on the way up to that?

No. There was a number of Infantry

27:00 fights, and things, but as far as we were concerned, everything was becoming pretty routine. We were a fair way away from it then. We were mainly concerned with keeping communications going, and doing these courier trips and things like that.

Was there a particular spot that was difficult?

No, we didn't. We did expect some.

27:32 But no, we didn't.

So when you look back, are you quite proud of the way you managed to keep going like that?

We are. As a matter of fact, the CO of our unit, a chap named Ted Lambert, he had a lot of old maps, and he found there was an old underground cable running from Labuan across to the mainland.

28:01 And he was able to resurrect this cable and use it. Which was great for putting communications over there.

Where would that have been from?

From Labuan, to the town of Victoria it was.

So who would have laid that?

A British cable company had laid it, long before the war I believe.

28:30 By this time in the war we had very good radios, communication was a lot easier. Even down to the front line, for the first time we had handheld radios, like little ones like that. They were handy. And all these things were coming on, because the Americans had used them in Europe and that. We were getting a lot of stuff from there.

29:00 But no, as far as the last part of the war, it was interesting because we were going so many places, doing so many things, and towards the end of the war we shifted from the hospital across to the other side of Labuan Island to a place called Timbali. The Japs had built an airstrip there. The whole headquarters moved, we moved – and it was the most beautiful beach.

29:30 There used to be surf. It was on the China Sea. That was great.

Describe that area?

I can describe it. It was a developed area. The Malays had their rice paddies right up to where we were. Our signal office now became a hut instead of just a tent fly. They had other huts

30:00 in the area, to operate the headquarters from. And it was generally a well set up place. We had plenty of vehicles. We used to drive – There again, we used to drive from our camp to the signal office. We had all the photographers in the world then, coming from Australia.

30:30 I got my photo taken in the sig office there, at that stage of the game. A lot of people were coming up then to say they had been up in the war zone. Everything was gone. Generally speaking it was good. But being near the beach – It was a beautiful beach. It was miles long and on the sea. Quite often, I saw Malay and Chinese – They tell us the

31:00 Chinese we saw were Chinese pirates. They were very much in evidence. And they still are, in that area.

Did you communicate much with the locals?

Towards the end of the war, yes, we did. You see, they'd been a British colony – And most of them spoke English. But we learnt Malay, and we could speak it reasonably well. I haven't used it for fifty years.

Do you remember anything?

Oh – bicara malay? 'Do you speak Malay?' and things like that.

31:36 I wish I'd sort of kept it going, because you forget them very much. We did this right up to the end of the war – When the war ended of course, our communications, we were really flat out, because we had to let all our units know what to do and how to do it, and we tried to follow

32:00 the correct procedures of what to do. The Japanese flew into our head office, headquarters, with some of their top officers, and they arranged messages to be given out to their unit. There was the cease fire and they had to hand their weapons over to our people. I've got copies of the messages, sent by the Japanese themselves, signed by the Japanese.

32:30 It went off pretty well. Major General Wootten, he was the top boy. He was old Duntroon. Great, big

man. And he had commanded the 9th Division since New Guinea, and he had been in the Middle East. He handled that very well.

In what way, describe his handling of it?

Well, I think the way he

33:00 organised getting the Japanese in, getting messages out to everyone. There were Japanese groups that didn't, because they didn't have communications. So what they used to do was send a Japanese officer out with our people, to tell them, "Righto, fellows. Your Emperor said you've got to stop this mucking around." And that was it.

Did people get killed in those exchanges?

Not really. Not really.

33:30 It was amazing the lightness in the casualties. There were people killed, but there were no where near expectations. The landing at Labuan, there was a few wounded, of course, quite a few wounded. But killed? No. And even going on, there were a few killed and a few wounded.

Exactly where were you when the war ended and

34:00 **how did you first find out?**

We were on Labuan. I wasn't on duty when the message came through. We came on about, two o'clock in the afternoon, and they said that the Japanese were arranging a peace conference, up there in Japan.

34:32 We were on Labuan still, in that new sig office I told you about.

How did you react?

Oh, it was very good. No more worries, not that we had great worries. We could sit down and take it easy. Little did we know – Because we had so much work coming up. Because, you see, Kuching, which was down in the south, was full of Australian prisoners of war. We were

35:00 arranged to go there and pick them up. We sent down on a plane a bloke with a radio, so we had communications down there. And generally speaking we had communications out to places we'd never had, after the Japs. So we were able to communicate with everyone. Communications, you can see, were very important. That's what we were there for.

What sort of messages were coming through about what would happen next?

35:30 **You said that there was a flurry of messages? What sort of stuff.**

The messages were mainly to do with, as I said the Japanese were there, about telling the commanders out in the field, what Japanese were there, what strength they were and where they were. And arranging for them to come in, arrange for them to be picked up. They had big prisoners of war camps.

Did you have direct contact with the prisoner of war camps there?

36:02 I saw them. Of course, they had big war crime trials there in Labuan, after the war ended. I was able to get along and see them. I saw the surrender, amongst about a thousand others, which was quite a thing.

36:32 The Japanese had a lot of equipment still, they had aircraft that we never knew about, because they were flying in from their headquarters, in the centre of Borneo, to us. And flying back again, backwards and forwards. They had a lot more equipment than we realised.

37:01 The natives were very happy at the result, of what went on.

What sort of things were they saying to you?

They didn't like Japan man. They wanted the Australians to come and look after them. The British were alright, they weren't over enamoured with the British. They wanted the Australians to come and take over. Our people, Australians

37:30 are very generous and give gifts and things and all that. After the war ended, about November, in all this surrender business, we couldn't see us getting back to Australia for a couple of months. What happened? The army said, "What are we going to do all these troops?" So they called for people

38:00 with any educational qualification to be interviewed, and they were going to start what they called a Formation College. A friend of mine, Harry Richards and myself, Harry is an accountant, so he's teaching accountancy. I could do shorthand and typing, so I was teaching that. But we had three schools. Three schoolies. We had literacy in a big way.

38:30 They opened a school in the huts that we no longer used. By this time the prisoners of war had moved on, and we used the huts of the school. We were seconded from our unit. I was only a corporal at that stage and I was made a sergeant. And we then started lessons, and it was amazing the results that we had.

39:02 And I did this teaching right up until the time I left Borneo, which was early February.

What were you surprised at?

The advances that were made by people who had not done these subjects before. I had people typing at a reasonable speed. I had them learning shorthand. Shorthand was still

39:30 used in a big way, in those days. And we were getting people to become literate. A lot of them could hardly sign their own name. And we had these three teachers, teaching in this place. We ran two schools. We had some people on the first school wanted to come on the second school. They were that enthused.

40:00 It was quite a business.

So what were the classes made up of?

About ten people. They were in huts. We had all the huts in the world, because they had built them for the prisoner of war release. We lived in that area ourselves, we had a hut. And at that stage we had our own servants. We had Malay people, we used to pay them a few shillings.

40:32 And they were tremendous people, and they used to do our washing, and all that sort of thing. Keep the place clean. We often wondered how they went after the war. They'd be old men now. That's what we did. And it was a very practical thing. And we got support from the high command.

41:00 There was a book written about this. They wrote how we got together and done all this. So we just kept going until '46.

Tape 8

00:33 **Landing at Labuan, was there an aerial bombardment going on at the same time? Can you tell us what was happening?**

They were Australian aircraft. I don't know the type, but I should. Anyway, they were Australian aircraft, and the bombing was very, very heavy. The whole of the landing area was targeted. So you can see why there were so many great

01:00 craters. But not one of the bombs hit the road, so their aim was pretty good. If the Japanese had any sense they would have got on the road and stood there, but they missed them. See, by this time, there had been landings going on all over the Pacific, and they were probably aware of our tactics, too. That is why they went inland to the 'pocket'.

Where were you when

01:30 **that bombardment was happening? What could you see?**

We could see all the bombardment. It was like a big picture show. We were on the LST, watching the aircraft come. There was very little anti-aircraft fire, there was some. There was one Japanese aircraft that came over, but they soon shot that down. Like in Lae, I believe, there were a lot of Japanese aircraft trying to bomb them,

02:00 and they were successful. But no, there were no aircraft shooting at our aircraft. So they had an open run. And of course the big guns from the Hobart and the other big ships there were making a mess, also. And the rocket ships going in – absolutely

02:30 plastering the shore, and everything inland.

So can you describe what you'd hear?

You could hear a continuous roar. A continuous roar, of the bombs and all that. It was very loud, and we were out in the bay. That's what we could hear. You could hear it –

03:02 You could hear the noise of the aircraft. You were close enough to it, but far enough away to be able to observe it.

Had anything you experienced prior to that during the war, did anything prepare you for that?

No, not really. I saw fires caused by bombing in Darwin, but not that – The only way I had seen

03:30 things like that was on newsreels of what they did in Europe. When they did the landings in Normandy and those areas, and the other places in the Pacific.

I can't imagine what it must have been like for a young man to be on a ship for the first time in action, seeing something like that. What was going through your head?

"It will be right when we go ashore." Because they had done this.

04:00 The more they did of this, the less problems we would have. And they told us, there would be a terrific bombardment. The more bombardment there is, the better it would be for us. And it was.

How well did you sleep the night before that?

Pretty good, pretty good. That was another thing that happened, the Americans again. On the day

04:30 of the landing, the Americans had prepared quite a meal for us. It wasn't hamburgers, but it was in sandwiches, and here again ice-cream. And it was beaut. And it was a good thing because we didn't have anything to eat all the rest of the day. We were issued American rations, but we were that beggared at

05:00 the end of the day, that we couldn't eat. There was a rather humorous thing that happened there. The Americans had been on landings before, and this was the thing, we were scared off that we would be shot at as soon as we opened the door of the LST. And when we got near the beach, there was bang, clang, bang, "Oh God,

05:30 they're shooting at us. We've got no hope." There's this American down there with a hammer, hitting the hull. He laughed like hell. He said, "Frightened you guys, didn't we? Ha, ha, ha."

And had he frightened you?

Not really. We were apprehensive, is that the word? I don't think people get frightened to the extent, we probably lacked imagination –

06:06 **To what extent did you think about the possibility of being killed or wounded?**

We probably thought that we were immortal. No, we didn't think about it to any great extent. I think you will find in all armies, all wars, the average soldier reckons he won't be the one. If you asked the chaps in Iraq,

06:33 they would say the same thing. "It won't happen to me."

Do you think that is a coping mechanism?

Yes it is. You see, some people are inclined to over analyse and imagine,

07:01 and it's no good. It doesn't help you. Or help anyone else. It's like I can always remember, back in the Northern Territory. We were at Daly Waters, on the way up there, in these early days, and along comes this American jeep. "Hey guys, they're going to raid Daly Waters." And we're all these trucks and they're going to beat up the convoy

07:30 and everything like that. Because we had had no experience at all, so we shoved on our tin hats. [helmets] And we get out of our trucks and we got on the side of the road, but nothing happened. But that's the sort of thing that makes you a bit jumpy; – what's going to happen? But after a while, you realise that you've got to be unlucky for anything to happen to you like that. One of the things that you worry about is if on the convoy,

08:00 if a submarine gets in there and starts torpedoing. And then you think, "Well, we're not the biggest vessel. They won't be going for us." So you look on the bright side.

What other coping mechanisms did you and the other blokes have?

That we were well trained. And

08:30 we think we had the ability to handle most situations. I might have been wrong, that might have been just our egos.

What about humour, was that important?

Oh yeah, if you didn't have a sense of humour – That's like I was telling you about the American and his banging on the hull with his hammer. That was rather good in many ways, if there had been any tension it certainly broke it, at that stage.

09:02 Which I thought was rather good.

How important was humour overall?

Very important. If you didn't have a sense of humour you would be lost. People you least expect to have a sense of humour had a great sense of humour.

09:31 And some blokes have a macabre sense of humour, too, with – "You will be the first knocked off, Jonesy. You been rooking [cheating] people all your life. They'll catch up with you. Even the Japanese." I remember old Jonesy had a shop in Adelaide, and they always reckoned he used to rook the client. A few of the blokes knew him. Actually, he was a nice bloke.

10:02 **In what sense did the Australian sense of humour differ from the Americans?**

Not a great deal, really. The Americans have a different sense of humour to us. The Americans are a bit racist people, aren't they? At that stage, we were all

10:30 Anglo Saxon people, where the Americans had very different types of blood and outlooks on life.

In what ways did you see any evidence of that difference while you were there?

I realised it was there, but I can't give you any examples. Maybe it's just one of the things –

11:00 in talking to the Americans, you realised that they are slightly different. Yet, they'd laugh at the same things we laughed at.

So did you laugh when you realised this bloke had been banging on the hull?

Oh hell yeah. Everyone laughed. And that's why I said it was a great release of tension. Tension is there and you don't realise it at times, isn't it? I remember talking about this a few years ago

11:30 with Bill Peake. He died shortly afterwards. I said, "Were you tense?" He said, "Not obviously, but I must have been." I think that's what I was, too. We were all a bit tense. You know you're going into an unknown situation. But you didn't want to show it, did you? With humour,

12:00 much of that, you can cover a whole lot of tension.

What about religion and other belief systems, how important were they?

Probably more so then than they are today. I mentioned the wonderful service before we embarked to go to Labuan. That was attended by all religions.

12:30 Well, two of the blokes I was with were Catholics, there were Protestants – there weren't many other odd religions like today.

What about yourself?

I was Protestant. They used to have army parade church service, I used to go to them. It probably wasn't as good attended as my friends the Catholics.

13:00 They were very good.

At moments, such as that landing, did God or religion or anything play a part?

I think it does. That's why they have the religious service.

For you personally, was it – ?

Yeah, I think you put your life in God's hands. I'm not an over-religious zealot, but –

13:31 you're in God's hands. The Americans and the British, you might have noticed if you saw films of their landings, they had a religious service on their boats, before they went ashore. We had ours before we went onto the boats.

Did you pray?

I might have, yes. I think we all –

14:02 Yeah, I probably did. I would say, yes. It probably was successful, because I'm here, being interviewed.

14:30 **When you did make that landing, that initial signals office that was set up in that tent, can you tell me about setting that up?**

Yeah, we had the equipment. We didn't carry the switchboards and that with us. They were in a jeep, and they took all our equipment. We had our cable people putting out their cable, connecting it up to the switchboard. Putting our

15:00 lines in for what we called Fuller phones, that's what we used to operate to send the Morse code on. And generally setting up tables and desks to put them on. We had a radio set in there, too.

So how did the set up there compare with something like say you had in Darwin?

Basically very similar. Of course, in the islands we didn't have trucks.

15:30 In Darwin we had trucks to have everything carted around. There we only had the jeeps. You couldn't put big trucks on the LSTs. The trucks were too big, so we had to set up under a tent fly. Towards the end of the war, when we moved over to Timbuli [?], the engineers set it all up for us.

16:02 All our fuse boxes and that, we set up.

Can you describe the sorts of messages you sent and received when you were in Labuan?

They were mainly the operations of the various units. He might tell unit so and so what's their

situation?, want a situation report?, where they are?, where they're going? Any casualties? what assistance

16:30 do they need?, and all of those things.

So you would have been very aware of what has happening on the front line?

Yeah, yeah.

And how did you personally react to that?

It was good to be informed. Because a lot of people were not. We were just in a situation that was.

17:00 Two nights before they [the enemy]broke out, we had this courier service again, and we had to go around to all the units in Labuan. We had a jeep and we used to have a Bren gun on the back. They wanted somebody to do it. Somebody said, "Would you like to go?"

17:30 Yes, I went. And that went right around our front line area, that was interesting. We didn't get shot at or anything.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Well, they had two blokes in the jeep, and I was in the back. They had this gun on the stand. And we went around these various units, delivering documents and picking documents up. I always remember we went to the 2/12th Field Regiment, and

18:00 they'd dug their guns in at that stage, as a protected measure. And there was a friend of mine that I went to school with, there, and he was the signals there. A chap named Fletcher. We went around quite a few of them. We didn't see the enemy. We didn't hear the enemy. This was at the extremity of our advance. He was probably down in the 'pocket'.

How dangerous was it to be moving around

18:30 **the island at that time?**

We didn't think it was, but afterwards we thought, "Gee, that was a silly thing to do." Another chap, he and I went for a walk. We wanted to have a look at what was over the other side of the area where we were. And we walked up there and we walked right around, and we didn't realise we had gone close to where this 'pocket' was.

19:00 And when we found out where it was, we nearly died. But still, they're the sort of things you do.

What did you do when you weren't actually busy working, while you were on that island?

Sleeping. That's what I said earlier. One of the things the blokes said was

19:31 "When you're in an action or something, get as much sleep as you can get. You never know when you might not get the next lot." We used to go swimming, quite a lot. We used to go fishing, with grenades.

Did you personally do that?

I was with them. I didn't personally throw the grenade. I saw it done.

How effective was that as a means of fishing.

Very good.

20:02 When we were over at Timbuli, there was a school of fish came in, they went out in a little old boat that they had, they threw the grenade and they got that much fish. They cleaned a lot of it, and they said, "We'll clean the other lot in the morning." But it had all gone bad overnight. The lot that we cleaned were very good. They fed a lot of people.

20:32 It's been done in Australia for years. They used to throw gelignite in streams.

What about entertainment on the island?

Well, entertainment came towards the end of the war. I can remember Gracie Fields [English entertainer] came, and she had a concert party. They were very, very good. Gracie Fields was a great

21:00 comedienne. You've probably heard of her. She was very well received. Then there was a couple of other concert parties. And then they brought in a film unit, and they were showing good films. Getting back to Morotai, they reckoned – we had films out there one night, and they reckoned there were about four Japs watching the film. And they said

21:33 it was not unusual.

Were you aware of that at all?

No, they told us. Whether it was a story or not. Another story they tell, it was on Morotai, they got in the

cookhouse – and this used to happen, the Japs were starving, and they used to come down and raid the cookhouse. So what happens is these Australians caught this Jap,

22:02 and they kept him and made him work, and do all the greasy dishes in the cookhouse. The next night there was another Jap down there, they had two of them. They said, “We don’t want anymore.” And I believe they stayed there until the provos [military police] came along and took them to a camp. It was just one of those things. Like one of these things you see on the television.

Can you tell me a little more about your stay in hospital?

22:32 Yeah, they were trying to get the hearing back. They thought for a start I had what they called external otitis, that is caused by disease in the water. It turned out it wasn’t that. They were putting stuff in treatment. The hospital was excellent. Seeing as it had just been put up a few days beforehand. That sleep in a bed was tremendous.

23:01 **Can you describe what you saw in terms of the casualties?**

Yeah, there were casualties in there. Mainly blokes who were light wounds, not heavy wounds. Bullets in the arms, or a bit of shrapnel in the leg. They were able to move around. I was not with the heavy casualties.

Did you speak with those men in the front line? What sort of stories did they tell you?

They said –

23:30 they didn’t expect, like I said, to get hit and they got hit. I noticed one of the things – If somebody snapped a tree, somebody outside, they immediately became very alert. And they reckoned – they were all getting like that, because the Japanese were coming. No, they accepted the fact that they

24:00 had been wounded. They said, “You beaut. I’m going to get a trip home.” They had a good outlook. They were good infantrymen.

What were your thoughts about those men in the front lines?

I thought they were really brave blokes. And they were specialists in their own right. You think today of the SAS, the wonderful job they did

24:30 in Iraq. And our infantrymen were very much alike – Probably not as skilled or as highly trained.

Did you have any thoughts that you would have liked to have been up there?

No.

Why?

I was keen on signals and that was it.

25:00 **You saw the people that were wounded. What did you see of the more than a hundred and forty Australian men who were killed?**

There wasn’t a hundred and forty Australian men killed. There were – It all depends. You take out

25:31 Balikpapan, Tarakan, Labuan, there would have been.

What did you see of the men who were killed in the front line?

I didn’t see any of them, because they were taken to the morgue and buried, in the war cemetery.

You weren’t involved in any of the burials?

No. We saw, but we weren’t involved.

26:00 They held services and they were buried in a similar manner. The body was covered in a flag.

Can you describe those services?

Not to any great extent. The padre, or priest, or whoever it was at that particular time, what religion, said the usual words and the body was then lowered into the grave.

26:30 That’s where they still are. There are two thousand of them up there now. All these fellows who were killed by the Japanese on this march from Sandakan to Ranau.

Of that march, you said earlier that you received some of the signals?

From our people who had found these people, yeah.

27:00 **Do you remember what sort of reaction there was when you got those messages?**

Well, we got the message and we passed it on, but we didn’t realise the enormity of it. The enormity of

it didn't hit people until about three or four weeks afterwards. We were lucky that we did have people escape, because the Japanese thought they had killed all the evidence.

27:34 The war crimes that they had in Labuan afterwards, they fronted the Japanese with these survivors. And the old Japanese who handled the whole thing, he was most surprised. He got hung in the end.

You said you went to those war crimes trials?

No, I went to the official surrender

28:04 of the Japanese Forces. It was quite a ceremony. They picked out the biggest blokes in the Australian army. We had two blokes in our group, of about six foot five, and they did that, and these poor little Japanese officers, they looked like midgets beside them. Wootten took the swords from the Japanese,

28:32 and they signed the documents, and basically there wasn't a lot more to it.

How would you describe the mood of the troops?

At last we've done it. We've got the little so and so's where we want them. There were Japanese prisoners everywhere. Particularly when I went to Rabaul.

29:00 there were many thousands of them there.

Can you describe the demeanour of the Japanese prisoners?

Yes it was one of acceptance, unhappy. But as the time went on, they became more adjusted and they were smiling. I'd never thought I'd say. Because they got all taken back to Japan in the end.

29:35 It was the only thing they could do. They couldn't shoot them. They got the war criminals, that was the main thing. The average little Japanese soldier, he was alright.

After that surrender, did the mood on the island change dramatically?

I wouldn't say so. The mood was 'When are we going home?'

30:03 What are we going to do? That's why we started educating people. Take their minds off what was going to happen. Because there was no shipping to take them home. Troops were moving all over the place, all over the Pacific, and the ships were moving back to America, back to Australia.

How can you describe that decision

30:32 **to start that educational institution?**

It had been done in the First World War. And it proved quite satisfactory. Because the same situation existed, we had thousands of troops in France, but there was no shipping to take them back to Australia. And it worked quite well. They were called the same thing, formation colleges.

How did you enjoy working there?

31:00 It was great. It was such a change after doing that sort of work. I enjoyed it very much.

What did you enjoy about it?

Being able to do something different, being able to teach people. I could have gone teaching. I saw a greater future in the airline industry and it turned out I was right. No, it was quite enjoyable.

31:31 I've asked other people the same thing and they agree.

While you were teaching, did you develop other pastimes on Labuan?

Yeah, I tried to learn a bit more of the Malay language. While we had Malay people there, they were speaking English and I hadn't had much chance to practise it.

32:01 **What was your impression of the different people you came across there?**

It was a pretty good cross section of the Australian public. I had one bloke who turned out to be one of the top union blokes. Another one who turned out to be quite a big businessman. They were different. I know one bloke

32:30 had a refrigeration repair business. You know, people like that.

What did the soldiers say about wanting to go home?

Oh, I think they all wanted to go home, but they couldn't. So it was "What I can do to occupy my time?" I found that was

33:00 the greatest thing of the whole education process, it's giving me something to do and I'm helping them learn something. Which turned out the way it was.

How would you describe that experience in terms of your other experiences in the war?

Different, but enjoyable.

33:30 **What communication did you have on Labuan with your family back home?**

Weekly letters. They used to write back. Of course, by that time censorship was easing, and I was able to write pretty freely about what was on, what happened. They kept me up to date with what was happening back here in Australia. When Mum died I found a whole lot of my letters.

34:05 You realise, how immature you were. Not that I'm mature now –

How important was it to receive letters from home?

Very important. Very important. I found it very important, and everyone else did, too. Because that's where you come from, that's where you're going to be going back to, you want to know what's going to happen.

34:31 I can't think of anyone who didn't want letters. I used to feel sorry for people who never got letters. There was a group who if you knew of people who weren't getting letters, you'd contact them and they used to write letters to people. So that's how important letters were.

Can you tell us about being told you were finally going home?

35:04 Yeah. The first thing I said was, "How am I going to be going? By plane or by boat?" They said, "We don't know yet. Some are going by plane, some are going by boat." So at the last moment there, I was in this transit camp, and they said, "There's a boat leaving in one hour. There's room for you on board."

35:30 So there we are. We ended up on the Georgetown Best.

How would you describe that day?

Exciting, and there again, different. Little did I realise it was going to take three or four weeks. And Harry, had already sent a telegram to his wife to be, be ready for the wedding. We go right up to the Philippines,

36:00 across to Rabaul – At Rabaul there was a mutiny. We had a points system, for getting out of the army. I had a hundred and thirty points. Anyone under a hundred thirty had to get off at Rabaul, and all the blokes at Rabaul who had more than a hundred and thirty, came on to take their place.

36:30 They refused to get off. The general there had to come aboard the boat. This held us up for two more days. We went ashore at Rabaul and had to stay there, they were left on the boat, up one end without any water. They eventually gave in. It was the first intimation that I had and the first time I had seen the potential for Communists. They were having meetings down in the hold

37:00 and telling these people to jack up and go on strike. We knew who they were. A couple of them became quite big trade union people. They didn't like Australia, and wanted us to go Russia. You've probably heard of the Communist influence. I saw it at its worst. Anyway –

What did you know about what was happening when you talk about mutiny?

Well, I was a sergeant at that stage.

37:32 And we had to station ourselves on the entrances to the deck, so they didn't move off it. And I knew what was happening. And we went down to the hold, Harry and I at one stage, and we actually heard the meeting they were having. We got out of it very quickly. So we knew –

38:01 some of these Communists had to get off the boat, too. They were looking after their own ends. There were quite a few blokes out of the signals, new blokes, who had to go off at Rabaul –

What was your opinion of that decision to cause that fuss? That strike, if you like?

I thought it was very poor. Terrible as a matter of fact. If they'd used their nuts [heads] –

38:30 They were only looking after their own ends, which I found out after. They ended up putting a lot of people out – You see, people are gullible, and they were taken in by them. But there were people there, who had a lot more service, a lot more points, than what other people did. And anyway, they were going home in about two months time and they were taking their place on Rabaul. The Australian army could have been a lot more heavy with them. The Americans wanted us to

39:00 turn the machine guns on them, which would have caused a major crisis. – But our people said, "No, just take it easy." There was a bit of a write-up on this in the February, Courier Mail [Brisbane newspaper] in 1946, if you want to go and look it up.

You say the Americans wanted to turn the machine guns – ?

To frighten them. They didn't want to shoot them. But fire them over their heads. Threaten them.

39:30 Of course the Americans had no say – We had the say. So we kept at them, and we won. The general told them to get off the boat, and they did.

What was your personal involvement in that?

Oh, mainly to just see that these people went off the boat, which we did. We got them off. But all the time,

40:02 time was ticking by, and Harry was getting married. As I said, halfway across the Coral Sea, the ship full of a couple of thousand troops ran out of water. Real good organisation. You can imagine a ship without water. They forgot to put water in it. So we had to go into Milne Bay. We were there two days while they put water and fuel into it. More time going.

40:30 We eventually got down to Brisbane on the Tuesday, before Harry's wedding on the Saturday. So we said, "We'll be right now. We'll get you Harry on the train the next day." We went to get him there, and the bloke in charge of the train said, "No more. He hasn't got any right to be on this train." So that's Tuesday. Along comes Wednesday,

41:00 we'll be able to do it. But we get the same thing. By this time there was general panic. Then on Thursday, we put on an act. I was sergeant. I walked up to the thing and said, "Harry Richard's papers have got mislaid. He should have gone down yesterday." So he said, "Put him in here."

41:30 So he got to Sydney on the Friday, and he got married on the Saturday. It was very close. I stayed in Brisbane a couple of days, then went down to Adelaide.

Tape 9

00:34 **So what happened for you when you got back to Australia?**

I was in Brisbane, until after Harry went. Then I was put on a troop train to go to Sydney, Melbourne then to Adelaide. I had charge of a carriage of troops. In the other carriage was a chap named Frank Walters. Frank was an actor

01:00 on radio. He was on all those radio plays. He was a great actor, and he appeared in a number of plays. Anyway, over night we would stay at a staging camp, and would get on the piano and he hadn't done it for years. And it was great. We ended up in Adelaide, and it was the old story, they said, "You go on leave, and when you come back from leave we will probably discharge you."

01:30 I went on leave, and there was quite a few things that I did. As a matter of fact one of my uncles wanted me to come and stay with him on his property. All that sort of thing, I saw the family. There were no ex-girlfriends at the time. So I came back to the Showgrounds where the LTD [leave and transit depot] was. They said, "Do you want to get out straight away? Are you in a hurry?" I said, "No. Well, I'm single,"

02:00 I was only about twenty-two, twenty-three. I said no. They said, "Will you have a mantu?" [skin test for tuberculosis] I knew what a mantu was, because my father had tuberculosis. A mantu is what they give you if they're positive you've got an immunity. I knew I was immune. They gave me a mantu and I was immune. So I shot out to the Australian General Hospital out at Northfield. And this hospital

02:31 was full of blokes who had contracted tuberculosis. They hadn't found a cure at that stage of the game. They have now, of course. There was a lot of Italian prisoners of war there, too. I got the job as education sergeant. They read on my papers how we had done this school, it was nothing with signals. There was a lieutenant and myself, and we did the whole lot there.

03:01 And I stayed there at the hospital until July '46, when I was discharged. It was a terrible disease and a lot of people died from it. They were affecting cures when we were there. I met a lot of very nice professional people. Different to what I had been mixing with –

In what way different?

03:30 They were medical people and things like that. There were nurses and there were sisters and doctors. There were a number of pharmacists there. I shared a tent with a pharmacist. He had his own business after the war. Anyone connected with the hospital. You see, I had been mixing with the blokes who were doing the same

04:00 as I was in signals, it was a little different with the education area, but the hospital was different – But I eventually ended up being discharged in July, 1946.

Were you sad to be discharged?

No, no, it had reached the stage. I had four years and nine months service. I was rather pleased. But I realised it took me a long while to –

04:30 get adjusted.

In what way?

I did miss the comradeship of the army. You're on your own. Which was probably a good thing. A cousin of mine who lived over in a place called Mirandra [?], he was having a lot of problems and couldn't get labour or anything on his property, and the rabbit plague was on. So I spent a month with him, trying to kill rabbits –

05:00 just before myxomatosis. And they used to put them in all the great big nets. Put gas down the burrows. Eventually they got myxomatosis, that got rid of them properly. Then about August or September, I went and rejoined the airline. Guinea Airways had then been taken over by ANA. The airlines then were at that stage in their big formative years.

05:33 TAA [Trans Australia Airlines], the government airline, had come onto the scene. Guinea Airways was still operating to Darwin, but the Labor government at that stage said, "Right, you will no longer go." They just told us we would no longer go, Guinea Airways. Because we still operated Guinea Airways, even though we were ANA. The airline was growing, and then of course TAA came on the scene.

06:00 And the competition was on then. We were getting bigger aircraft, and the whole industry was growing. And I think we were growing with it, which was good. I reached the stage where I was in charge of the terminal. The terminal then was in the city. Most people checked in in the city. We used to run buses out to Parafield.

06:33 I was getting more and more involved in different facets of the airline business. All through the late '40s – of course, I had difficulty settling down. We used to go out partying an awful lot in those days. You were unsettled and all that.

Who would you go partying with?

There were blokes and girls. There was a group of us –

07:01 As a matter of fact, I spoke to one who lives in the west, his wife just passed away. I spoke to him on Saturday. You'd go along with a few beers and food, and that sort of thing. There were a lot of people in the same boat as I was. They were very unsettled. We'd go various peoples' places –

07:30 **Most of the people that we have talked to us have said there is that unsettled period. Why do you think that was?**

Trying to readjust back to normal civil life. It's vastly different. You see, you had a life, you had someone to cook your meals for you, you had had someone to provide your clothing for you, everything. You were back on your own. You get to the stage where you're in your mid twenties, and you're still living with your parents,

08:00 and younger brother – I used to knock off at two o'clock in the afternoon – We used to work shift work, of course. I used to knock off at two o'clock and we'd go to the pub and have a few beers and that, and at night you would go out on the town. I never saved a penny. That was the sort of existence that I led –

08:30 But I suppose, as you say, and I knew a lot of blokes who were in the same boat. Some of the married blokes might have had something to hang onto. But there again, there were a lot of people who had disrupted marriages, even at that stage in the game. I was lucky I wasn't married. But I think that happens after every war –

09:00 Readjustment time.

What were you trying to do with that partying phase?

I don't know, you're trying to prove something. I can't work it out. After I had been discharged about eighteen months, I got a ring from a chap in the army who I knew, and he wanted me to come back into

09:30 the army again. A lot of blokes did that, but no. He ended up going to Korea. He ended up a major. He did quite well. So I went that way. I met Kath. She was a manager's secretary in the airline, about '51, '52,

10:00 and I went out with her for quite a while, and we decided to get married I suppose.

What attracted you to her?

She was smart, she was good looking. Very understanding of my ways. Her family were very, very nice.

10:35 They sort of accepted me, which I think is very important, don't you? That was the situation. We got married in September, '53.

When did you feel that you started to settle in, yourself?

Around about '51. '52.

11:00 I started to settle down and realised that life was not all beer and skittles.[a game] Before we got

married, I think it was, we brought a block of land. Probably paid three hundred pounds for a beautiful block of land, on a corner.

11:30 We got married in September, ‘53. We had a honeymoon at Mildura. All the way from Adelaide .that’s what you did in those days. Then we flew to Sydney. We spent a week in Sydney. We came back and – I only had two weeks off, in those days.

12:00 You see, Kath was working, too, in the airlines still. We had a holiday coming up in about June or July, in 1954. So we had a little Morris Minor, and we hopped in that and we went to Bordertown, right through Victoria, and ended up in Canberra.

12:30 We had part of our second honeymoon in Canberra. And we came back right along the coast, you know Bateman’s Bay, right down there, ended up in Melbourne for a few days, then went across Western Victoria and back to Adelaide. That was good. That was great. My mother had a house at Brighton, which had a room and a big veranda.

13:00 We put a stove in it. We didn’t have any water, so we used to bring in buckets every morning to do the washing. We had access to the toilets and shower. But from then on we started to build a house. A War Service [loans program for returned servicemen] home, which was good. Around about ‘55, two years, Andrew came along. He’s our eldest son. Richard came in ‘57 –

13:32 **How did becoming a Dad change you?**

A lot more responsibility. No more frivolous life. I was studying, also. A diploma in business administration. And that was taking up a bit of time. I wanted to get out of the normal life – So that’s what I did, and the house was –

14:02 We went into it just before Andrew was born in ‘55. Lovely home. Richard was there, and Elizabeth. The family was growing, the industry was changing. In ‘57, Richard was born, Ansett took over Australian National Airways, and I was sort of taken over with it.

14:32 It was a big improvement. ANA was running down. It had gone bad, it had gone flat. So it ended up – more or less, folding up. But Ansett bought it out for about two million dollars. And I found the Ansett way of doing things was excellent. And I really enjoyed being there.

15:01 In 1960, I had been studying, as I told you, and they wanted a new personnel manager in Adelaide. I put in thinking I wouldn’t get the job and I got it. I remained there until ‘65, when they wanted a manager in Darwin. Of course I had been in Darwin, I wondered what the hell do I want to go back to Darwin for? And somebody said, “Look, take it. It’s a first rank.” So the family, I give

15:30 Kath and the kids full marks. Going from an existence with the family all around them, they had a nice home in Adelaide. Sent up to Darwin, then which was fortunately a reasonable home. They had to upgrade, and the kids – Fortunately the education system in Darwin at that stage was the same as Adelaide. The other good thing about it was we could come backwards and forwards. Kath came back to Adelaide about four times in the first years. We had some weddings in the family.

16:11 **How had Darwin changed when you went back?**

Darwin was starting to redevelop. It hadn’t changed a lot in a way, but it was alive. It was an alive place. It really was. Being the manager of the airline up there you got mixed up in all the social functions and balls.

16:30 We used to go to a ball almost every Friday night, in the dry season. It was very good. During a stay in Darwin, Kath got a job at the school, at prep school. All in all, in the end, we didn’t want really leave Darwin. The kids were growing up, though. I could see at that stage – they were all going to go to university.

17:00 Richard was starting at high school, Elizabeth was still at primary school. So they wanted an assistant Queensland manager, here, and they said, “That job’s yours, if you want it.” Then that job was changed to Brisbane manager, and I became Brisbane manager of Ansett.

17:30 And the kids here – Andrew went to university, he’s a doctor down at Berkeley Vale. He’s got his own practise. Richard is a high school teacher up at Wartalla Beach [?]. Elizabeth is doing research for the Queensland University of Technology. She’s been a teacher. Elizabeth has been living in Geneva

18:00 for quite a few years. She lived in Zimbabwe before that, and they separated, and she’s now doing this research work. She was doing teaching, but she’d rather do research.

When you went on to become manager of Ansett, how do you think your war experiences, if they did at all, affected your working career?

I don’t think they affected,

18:31 they helped them I think. Understood people, very much so. You see, Darwin, I started off there with about seven or eight staff, and when I left there in 1970, I had something like thirty staff. It had grown that much, you see.

19:00 I was able to handle all right, no worries. Because down here, I had over two hundred. No I didn't have any worries.

Did you talk much to your father about your war experiences?

I did. I spoke to him about them. He said they were very similar to what his were. We didn't have the terrible Gallipoli, and he told me I was very lucky. He was still

19:30 reasonably active when I came home.

Was he happy to see you? How was the reunion?

He was happy. They were happy. They knew I was coming home. So it wasn't a shock to them, walking in. They were quite good, and they got used to me, after a while.

20:00 As I said earlier, I think it was a bit tough on them having me at home working shiftwork. It upset their routine. They never complained.

How do you think the war experience changed you?

It made me grow up. I became more mature.

And what would you say the highlight of the experience was?

The whole war?

20:31 That would be very difficult to say. There were a number of highlights, as I said. Darwin, the Northern Territory, the bombings. The landing at Borneo, that was a big highlight – because not a lot of people experienced an actual landing, did they? People went to New Guinea, they walked up to the front line, wherever they were and went from there. There was the big convoy of

21:00 amphibious vessels. The education part after the end of the war. That was interesting. And finding out all about tuberculosis, after the war, at the infectious diseases hospital. And seeing what it did to people, and all that. And you realise so much,

21:31 how fortunate we are today, not having diseases like that.

What were the hard times during that period for you?

The war? I think the hard times were in Darwin, in the early days. It was still very basic living. The food was pretty mundane. You lived in tent flys

22:03 and all that. You had a job to do and – At one stage it got very busy. We were working twelve hours on, twelve hours off. Which wasn't easy. There were tough times –

How did you deal with being without women at that point?

22:30 You know I never saw a woman for twelve months. I don't know whether our libido was broken, or whatever it was. It came good afterwards, of course, but it was everyone else was in the same boat. There was one thing, we were talking about this at the reunion,

23:00 there were no homosexuals. Not that we knew of.

We've wondered that, too –

We've wondered about that. And somebody said, "I suspect so and so." I know in 9 Div there was a couple. Homosexuality was not, as I saw it, in evidence.

23:30 Yeah. You listen to people in these talks and their answer generally would be similar to mine, I would say. The one bloke that I've talked about, he was a very clever man, but was definitely – and he advertised the fact that he was a homosexual.

And how was he treated?

In 9 Div, he was treated well. He was a very good soldier. He had been in the Middle East

24:00 and he had been right through from the very beginning. He was a teacher. But he ended up very sadly, he got on the drugs. He died from an overdose. They found him in a gutter in the street in Sydney. Terrible, isn't it? He was a good bloke. I got on well with him. We all got on well with him. We realised what he was.

24:30 **So he didn't cop a ribbing for it?**

No, I think people were more understanding, I think at that stage. It's only in certain parts of Australia you get this business, I find, of homosexual thing – you got it in the infantry with a pretty basic intelligence person. Not very educated. I might be wrong.

25:01 **So how would you view your war experience as a whole?**

A wonderful experience. This sounds terrible, but I wouldn't have missed it. Maybe I was a very lucky person. Everything seemed to work out for me. I got terribly frustrated at times, I got bored at times. But taken overall,

25:31 the people I met, and I've been associated with since the war, has been tremendous.

How do you think Australia on the whole conducted itself in World War 11?

I think very well. Very well. We'd just come out of a Depression. And I think

26:00 in the early days, the people were – a lot of them in the 6th Division, the first to go overseas, they were unemployed people, they weren't unintelligent people. Don't get me wrong. But I spoke to some of those people and they think that yeah, being in the army was the best thing that ever happened to them, because it gave them a stability of life and when they came out afterwards they were able to continue that stability.

26:30 **Do you think that it's important that we remember the wars?**

Yes, I think it's very important. You've only got to go to a war cemetery, see all the blokes, and imagine they were your age. I think it's important that they're not forgotten. I know that sounds like a hackneyed phrase, but it's not. They must never be forgotten. Because they came from families, just like us, ordinary families,

27:00 with fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters. Kath's brother was killed flying an aircraft in West Australia. Kath's sister, who is 82, is going over there to see his grave. That's the sort of thing that –

What is significant about that?

27:30 She still thinks of him and still remembers him, and she wants to just see his grave before she dies. She's a fit 82 – And unfortunately, no-one from the family has been there. We were going, but we got held up, we couldn't go. Here again there is a chap who's got to look after in Perth who's an old

28:00 RSL friend of mine. When she gets to Geraldton, we've got a bloke in the RSL there who is going to look after her. So these things flow on, even though it's many years afterwards.

How important has it been for you to stay in contact with those blokes?

Very important. Many of them lead different lives to what we lead.

28:33 Harry Richards, I mention Harry a lot. Harry is a millionaire, quite a few times over, but he's not different to me, to what we were fifty or sixty years ago. I'll ring him and it will be the same.

29:03 We can go to his place next week and we can just take over where we left off. And that's the sort of thing – They've been very good friends.

It was sixty years ago, what was significant about that four or five year period?

Well, we served together in the army. Harry didn't do the landing on Labuan.

29:30 The week we got onto the barges, Harry got pneumonia. He was very upset. He came into Borneo about a week. But he'd done the amphibious landings in Lae, in New Guinea. But no, I think it's the fact that you served together, and you experienced hardships together. There were hardships.

30:00 It wasn't all beer and skittles. I've probably made it seem a bit like that, though. There were times when you were thinking, "What the hell am I doing here?" But it all worked out.

When you won the war, did you think we won the peace?

30:30 It's difficult to say. We in Australia benefited by the war. Whether we won the peace or not, it's a universal thing, isn't it? See, don't forget there has been conflicts ever since then. And there always will be conflicts. I don't care.

31:01 You see these people, what they used to call 'peaceniks'. There will be no such thing ever as peace. You've got the worst possible type now with terrorism. I think basically they're just cowards. You often wonder how they'd be if they were fronted by someone –

31:30 **Did you ever dream about the war ?**

A couple of times in the first couple of years. That was all.

What sort of dreams did you have?

I dreamt about the landing. I didn't think it affected me – But I didn't dream about it in a nasty way. They weren't bad dreams. But no, I quite often

32:01 even now, I find myself back in an army camp or group with some people. But that's just getting older, and your memory is regressing, I think.

Do you talk to your children about your experiences in the war?

My daughter is very interested. My sons are not – strangely enough. My grandkids are. That's why I'm in

32:30 the process of writing my memoirs. I've got to the end of the war. You've gone further than what they have. My grandkids are interested more than what my kids were. You see, when we came out of the Army in about '46, most of our friends who had been in the army, you just didn't go around talking about it, because they all had experiences, some had terrible experiences, some had good experiences.

33:00 Mrs Jones down the road, her son had been killed, so you didn't sort of talk about your good things, when this poor lady was still grieving over her son. So in that period we never really did talk about what we did. That's what

33:30 people say "Did you talk about these things?" But you didn't. Because everyone else was in the same boat.

What do you want your grandchildren to think about your war experiences?

I don't really know. Just realise that Grandpa was not an old bloke always. He was young and fit and able,

34:02 and what we did. You see, I've never sat down as much as what I have today, and you'll probably get this answer from everyone. They never really sat down and talked liked I'm talking to you. I've never talked so much.

Is there anything else you want to put on record about your war experience? Maybe something you haven't told someone else, that you feel like you want to tell us?

34:35 A couple of things that happened since the war. In 1968, I was selected to attend the Duke of Edinburgh conference. And I spent a month with the Duke of Edinburgh, in this group. We went to a university in Sydney and Melbourne and we had a special project in

35:00 Tasmania, and he spoke, and we did meet him at a lot of the functions. That's one thing. There were several blokes out of the army who were on that.

Why was that organised?

It was organised every four years in the British Commonwealth. This year it was in Australia. Previously it had been in Canada in '64, in England in '60 –

What did you do?

35:31 What you did, you got into groups studying. In our group there was about three Australians, one English, one Singaporean, and we went and investigated the effects of the closing down of the coal mines in north east Tasmania.

36:00 And the effects it had on the new jobs that the coal miners were given in re-forestation. And they hated it. Because once you're a miner, you're a miner all your life. And we had to study their whole outlook and attitude. And groups went all over Australia, studying this. And the findings of this group were used by the government in quite a number of instances.

36:30 **So it was a positive experience?**

Oh yes. I was one month away, that was when I was living in Darwin. In 1974, I was put on the industrial mobilisation group. That was a group that studied

37:01 our defence possibilities, in case of war. For example, we went to Mount Isa to have a look at the mines there. We went down to Wollongong and we went down the mines there. We were under the charge of a navy captain, but that was a tremendous experience. We had to end up writing a paper.

37:31 I was in charge of a group, we wrote a paper. It's been used. But the idea of it was what is there in Australia if a war came. Because that was in '74, it's a different situation now. They were holding these industrial mobilisations every four or five years.

38:00 **A final comment on your war experience. Something you would want to say to Australians as part of the Archive?**

I would like to say to Australia that it is very essential that you have a trained army. I'm in favour of National Service training. It would help a lot of our youth problems today. You see, it's made out to be terrible thing, the army.

38:30 It's not, really. It's a very good living. There are a lot of people who are in the army, too few will stay. I would say national service training, or you volunteer for the army. You will get benefit out of it, today,

particularly. There are so many trades – And I would say that to anyone in the future. I can’t see it ever changing.

Great. Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS