# Australians at War Film Archive

## Rex Ruwoldt - Transcript of interview

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## Tape 1

00:42 **Okay, perhaps we'll start with your early years, where you were born and where you grew up.**

I was born at Murtoa in Victoria in 1923, the day after Anzac Day. I don't know if that has any significance or not but then I grew up

01:00 there, went to primary school. The school system wasn't as good then as it is now. We had primary schools varied from about 14 or 15 pupils up to about 40 and there were no bus services or anything like that into the high schools in the towns, so that a lot of people grew up on farms, and I was one of them, didn't get to high school.

01:30 I did my secondary by correspondence, secondary education, but shortly after, when I finished that, I worked on the farm for a time. I don't remember how long it was, but when I was 17 I joined the army and had to put my age up a bit. But the recruiting officer was our local family doctor and he said, well,

02:00 that was easily fixed. He brought me into the world in the first place so he knew exactly when I was born.

**Where were you born exactly, at home or in a hospital?**

No, in a hospital. It's now an old people's home these days so I can say I was born in an old folks' home. But

02:30 I joined the army in December 1940, and early in 1942 got called up to go into camp and that was my first surprise. I thought it was joining the 1st Armoured Car Regiment but in that short time in between they'd changed the headquarters of the 1st Armoured Car Regiment to Horsham, from Horsham to Hamilton, and Horsham became the

03:00 headquarters of the 19th Machine Gun Regiment, Light Horse Machine Gun Regiment it was in those days. We didn't have any horses, didn't have much of anything else either but we did about, our first three months was in the camp in Hamilton on the showgrounds.

**Rex I'd really like to cover more of your childhood before we get to the army**

03:30 **if that's okay with you. You were one of 10 kids, is that right?**

That's right yes. I was the fourth I think. I had two older brothers and an older sister. The sister is still living at the age of about 84 and going well. The two brothers were both smokers and that killed them 20 years ago, the two older brothers, but still the

04:00 three younger brothers still survive.

**So what about your parents, what kind of farm did they run?**

It was a wheat farm and in those days all the wheat farmers were broke. It was in the years following the Depression. In the Depression, see the wheat couldn't be sold so nobody got any money. We never went short of

04:30 food or clothing cause with our food, it was all grown on the farm. We were better off than, you know people living in the cities for instance but we survived.

**So the children would work on the farm helping your dad?**

Yeah everybody helped on the farm. We had cows to milk. You know there's all sorts of jobs to be done on a farm. We kept about

05:00 a dozen or so cows and in our school days the thing was we got up in the morning, we milked the cows, put the milk through the separator which separated the cream from it cause the cream was the only part that could be sold. There was no sale for the milk in those days except for dairy farms near the big

city so the

05:30 skim milk then went to feed mostly the pigs. We kept pigs as well and they used all the waste food so, farming these days is a lot different. It's all mechanised and it's very specialised but in those days everybody did a bit of everything, for instance, the fowls, poultry.

06:00 There were always eggs to gather, chickens to feed, cows and horses to feed etcetera.

**How many acres was the farm?**

That's a good question but I think about 500 or near abouts. I don't really remember, but the farming property is still in the family.

06:30 My grandfather started there initially in 1887. He moved from South Australia and he bought a farm at Kewell for which he paid about four pounds an acre I think, these days worth about a thousand dollars an acre, but then he was a good farmer and he bought more land. He had five brothers. He was able to start them all off

07:00 and the property there now is run by two of my nephews so, you know it's still a family property.

**So how would you run a wheat farm back then, like how did you plant seed and**

07:30 **cultivate the crop and harvest crop?**

Well we had a tractor and there were horse teams. There was a mixture of the two. You know horses in a situation like that provide a tremendous amount of work because you've always got to store the feed to keep them going all the year round, but with the tractor

08:00 mostly the boys learnt to drive that tractor at a very young age. I know that when, in my school holidays when I was 12 years old, I went to drive my neighbour's tractor cause he had nobody to do it and that's about my, probably the start of my working career. I think I got about four pounds for that for about three weeks work but, you know for a lad of my age that was quite something.

08:30 **Were the fields ploughed with the tractor, a tractor drawn plough or horse drawn?**

Yes where we were, Grandfather had two horse teams. At times I helped there but mostly I was on the farm where the tractor was situated so I preferred that to the horses actually.

09:00 **What about harvest, how would that be done?**

Harvest was the same, you yoked up whatever source of power you had, whether the horses or the tractor, to the harvester and you dragged that around, around the field and emptied the wheat out of the bin and then carted it off to the silos. Actually my Dad was, I think the first man

09:30 in the district that used a motor truck to cart wheat. The people that owned the, used to deliver the fuel for the tractor, had a truck they weren't using so Dad hired that and he carted the wheat off, which is about eight mile. You had to take it to the railhead but

10:00 at that time, most of the farmers were still towing it to the railhead in bags with horses and wagons, a very laborious exercise and at the railheads it had to be stacked up and they had elevators to lift the bags up. A bag of wheat weighed about 180 pounds and what'd that be, about 80 kilos or something like that,

10:30 and there were fellows there that would pick up a bag and stand over their shoulders and climb up on the stack with them and dump them and come down for another one. They'd do that all day, enormous physical effort but I didn't have to do any of that. I didn't really have the build for it.

**What about the cutting of it in the field, how was that done?**

The cutting?

**Yeah, of the wheat?**

Well the

11:00 header has the name because that's what it does. It has a comb and a knife and it cuts the head off the crop, thrashes the grain out of it and blows the chafe out, out the back and puts the wheat in the box. From thereon when you stopped, that'd be bagged and then the bags had to be sewn and loaded onto the truck or wagon or whatever, and carted into the railhead

11:30 so there was no immediate money from that, you know you had to wait till the wheat board made a payment which might be three or four months later, so financing the farm in those days was extremely difficult and then with the Depression days, nobody wanted to lend a farmer money cause they had properties in

12:00 the early '20s, land boomed and the prices boomed and land that had been bought for four or five or six pounds an acre went up to about 25 or 26 pounds an acre. Those that sold out in those days of course

retired with enough to live on for the rest of their lives. But those who stayed, for instance if you paid 26 dollars an acre for

12:30 the land, then the Depression came and that land had a market value of about five pounds an acre. They were broke. They couldn't borrow any money. In a lot of cases the banks foreclosed on the mortgages so people lost their farms. It was a very desperate situation financially but it wasn't just the farmers of course. The whole country was broke in the early 1930s.

13:00 **There was a scheme, I'm trying to think of the name of it, a farmer's debt scheme.**

Yes that, I can't think of the name of it, but there were amendments made to the Commonwealth laws to change the situation legally

13:30 with farmers. For instance then you could, say you bought a farm that you might have paid say 20 thousand pounds for it, and you had a repayment agreement that you paid off say two thousand pounds a year or whatever, and you could have been at the stage where you had paid 19 thousand pounds off 20 thousand

14:00 and you couldn't pay any more, and if you defaulted on that last payment the mortgagee could take the whole property back and you got no compensation whatsoever. You know it was a disgraceful situation. The government changed that, which is a good thing, and then if the mortgagee took it over and sold it, well the original loan that then had to be repaid is presented in the proceeds.

14:30 But it stopped a lot of, you know, very nasty situations, but of course like most Commonwealth legislation it was about four or five years too late for a lot of them. But I know that on the farm we didn't have any money or anything, but we had food and people used to walk around the country looking for a job. They'd ask,

15:00 "Any work?" Very rarely was. But then, "Could you spare a sandwich?" So my mother made a lot of sandwiches over those years but.

**Well with 10 kids to look after, what about, you grew your own food?**

Yes.

**But what about other things, I mean clothing**

15:30 **and shoes and school books and things?**

Well they all had to be bought, but in most of my primary school years I went to school barefooted, along with a lot of others. You know, you simply couldn't afford to buy new shoes. But still one of my neighbours who was quite a wealthy man, he had a property of

16:00 about five thousand acres and as far as I know it was debt free, but he was at our place one day and he said, "Better to be a Ruwoldt than the King of England." So you can, you know, you can be happy in those sort of situations.

**Your mum, did she make clothes?**

Yes she was

16:30 good at all that sort of thing, fantastic cook. She had a great reputation as a cook and people would say, you know, "How did you make that, what did you put in it, how much of that?" "Oh just some…" but it always tended to turn out marvellously.

17:00 In a large family I think you, the older ones help take care of the younger ones usually, but I don't think there's much more I can say about that.

**Well did you have that role, like you were the fourth in the family, so you had six under you, is that right, younger ones?**

Yeah but spread over

17:30 a number of years so that when I joined the army, my youngest brother was only seven so, you know there are big age gaps in there and my younger sister was younger than he was too so that as, you know from that time on, I wasn't really there to do much for them.

**What's the origins of the Ruwoldt family, where did they come from?**

They

18:00 migrated from Prussia it was in those days. There was no country, Germany wasn't a country in 1848 when they migrated, but they came from a province, Mecklenburg, in Prussia by sailing ship of course and arrived in Adelaide on the 30th of October I understand, in 1848.

18:30 There were, my great, great grandfather it would have been, had two brothers with him and his wife and two small sons. I think the youngest was 10 years old. The two brothers took one look at Adelaide, and they called in at Perth on the way through and they said,

19:00 “Don’t like this Adelaide.” They went back to Perth and that’s why there are quite a few Ruwoldts in Western Australia too these days, but the 10-year-old son was my great, great grandfather. He and his brother were listed as being in the early pioneers of Mount Gambier in South Australia

19:30 and he was, I think it was in 1886, he was the mayor of East Mount Gambier. Mount Gambier was divided in two. There’s East and West Mount Gambier. He was the mayor of East Mount Gambier. It was in 1887 and my grandfather moved to Victoria and it was only a couple of years after that when my great, great grandfather died

20:00 and then my grandfather took all the younger members of his family across to Victoria with him and they were brought up there. That’s why there’s, you know these days, there’s quite a lot of Ruwoldts around the Wimmera district in Victoria.

**What brought them here, do you know their reason for migrating?**

Yes they were very

20:30 religious people and there was a lot of religious persecution in, pretty well right through Europe in those days, and in Germany they declared that the Lutheran church was going to be the state church, and of course the Lutherans, one of the basic foundations of the Lutheran religion was that the church and the state must be completely separate. That’s what Martin Luther said in the first place, so the church members wouldn’t go along with that and

21:00 there was quite severe persecution for anybody who didn’t go along with it, and so they migrated. The first of them left about 10 years before that and moved to Adelaide so Adelaide wasn’t a strange place for them. There was a Scot,

21:30 George Fife Angas who owned quite a lot of shipping and he moved out to Adelaide and he told the government there, “What we need is free settlers, tradesmen. We don’t want shiploads of convicts.” So Adelaide didn’t have any convicts, and George Fife Angas put up his own money, about five thousand pounds in those days, which these days

22:00 would be worth about three or four million dollars I suppose, to bring shiploads of German migrants out and this means that, you know they got sponsored passengers. When they got to Adelaide the deal was that they live on the properties that were allocated to them. He leased an enormous amount of

22:30 ground from the government and he divided it up into farming holdings, and the arrangement was they live there free for the first 10 years and after that they could start paying him rent. But the whole thing was virtually, he was a very generous man and Angaston, the wine area of South Australia in the Adelaide Hills there, is actually named after George

23:00 Fife Angas. But then see it was over the following years more and more of the Germans came and while George Fife Angas’ properties were filled up, others came out and they moved to Adelaide and after a few years then in Adelaide, then I think it was about, no it was about 10 or 11 years,

23:30 my family moved from there down to Mount Gambier and then sort of moved on from there. I think the Ruwoldt family is still farming that property at Mount Gambier, out at Yahl I think is the name of the district, Y A H L.

**So were there other Ruwoldts, like an**

24:00 **extended family, in the region where you grew up?**

Well we were all descendants of the one family there. See with Grandfather’s five brothers, see and my grandfather’s family there were nine altogether and only one girl and most of those

24:30 brothers finished up settling in the Wimmera area and their descendants are still there. They had farming properties. Some of them have, with no male heirs or whatever, the family’s died out and the properties are sold, but the core part of our family property is still there.

**Did your father fight in the First World War?**

25:00 No he didn’t. There were none of our near family fought the First War. My Uncle Jack, he was grandfather’s youngest brother, fought in the Boer War and there were quite a few fought in the World War II of course.

25:30 One of the cousins or one of Dad’s cousins actually, Les, that I worked with for some time, he joined the army, went to New Guinea and I think if you look up his record on the internet you’ll find that he joined the army and it was only about eight months later he was killed on the Kokoda Trail. But there’s another thing I should say,

26:00 on the prisoner of war memorial in Ballarat, the new one that’s been opened, there’s an RG Ruwoldt, the same as mine but it’s not me. He was somebody I’d never heard of. He was one of the Western Australian Ruwoldts. But, you know, the family generally, there were quite a number of them did serve in World War II.

26:30 I had one brother was with me all the way through, like went to Darwin together and he was one that died of smoking about 20 years ago.

**Can we talk a little bit about the kind of schooling that you got, your education? So a little country school….**

Yes

27:00 initially I started when I was six years old. I know we were three miles from the Kewell school and they wouldn't take any pupil under the age of six, but the day I was six I wanted to go to school and that day the pony was sick and we used to go on a horse and gig and I had to walk. I said that was okay; I'd walk. So I must have been keen.

27:30 After a few years we changed to a Kewell East School which I think was probably a good thing, you know from my point of view, because they had an exceptionally good teacher there and he put me through, I think I was in third grade when I went there. He put me through fourth and fifth in one year then six and

28:00 seventh in the next year. So I'd actually finished my primary education when I was 12 years old according to the laws in those days. See these days you do the first six years in a primary school, then you go to a secondary school for year seven, year eight, etcetera. But then because they couldn't go to a, they had no means of getting, most of them had no means of getting

28:30 to a high school, so the system catered for the eighth grades at the primary, the first two that you would have done in school high, so I'd finished those first eight grades when I was 12 but the law said no child was allowed to leave school until they were 14 years of age, but Peter said, "Well the thing to do then is to do it on correspondence." So I

29:00 enrolled with the correspondence school that was run by the Victorian Education Department at the time, but that I found fairly difficult, particularly the things like advanced mathematics. You'd send you papers in and it took, if you had a problem, it took six weeks to get an answer. If you're doing quadratic equations or something like that, it made it very difficult so when I'd finished three years of that

29:30 and then worked on the farm for a year or so and then joined the army.

**You did correspondence full time did you, from home?**

Yes. I used to go to the primary school cause the study facilities there were better than in a home, but that was great. But anyway I kept on going to the primary school and then did my days work there.

30:00 **And what about…you had two older brothers and an older sister, is that right?**

Yes.

**What were they doing, were they studying?**

No, they just went to work on the farm and, you know problem was there wasn't a lot of farm work to be done in those days, you know, not for the number of people we had but.

30:30 **So you must have been quite determined to get a reasonable education would you say?**

I think I must have. It was a long time ago now. I did receive one offer that they would take me as a, what they determined, a poor student, at the Lutheran

31:00 College in Adelaide, Concordia College, but only if I'd join the ministry and that wasn't my cup of tea I'm afraid, so I declined that and set out to battle it out on my own from there on.

**Were your parents religious?**

Yes they were, very.

**What religion?**

Lutherans, and that's more so than I am I'm afraid.

31:30 But one thing I'd always remember. It wasn't a religious act I don't think but there were a lot of rabbits about and from the time we were old enough, you know to use a .22 rifle, we used to shoot rabbits and skin them and there was resale for the skins, and when I'd accumulated a few pounds

32:00 I went to see a fellow, Bill Smith, in Warracknabeal who had a bicycle shop and he had these beautiful new bicycles there. "How much are they?" "Five pounds." And I said, "I'm sorry I've only got four pounds." "Well," he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do." He said, "You take the bike and give me the four pounds. You give me another pound when you've got it." That was my first credit transaction so

32:30 you know, I went out and I had a bike, I could get around a lot more so I shot more rabbits and he got his pound all right, can't remember how long it took.

**So what sort of country was it that you lived in?**

Very flat and heavy black clay that when it rained it would stick to your boots,

33:00 but it was good wheat country. But all of that country of course, it has an average rainfall of about 16 inches a year but then you can get a drought that might last three or four years and, you know, it's very difficult to grow anything in those circumstances so everybody lived on the breadline again, till you got a good crop.

**Were the rabbits a**

33:30 **pest?**

Yes there were thousands of them and they had to keep the numbers down because if you got a new crop, you know they could chew it off. So it was always a continual effort to keep the rabbit population down, dig them out of their burrows or fumigate them or whatever, generally exterminate them. I don't know what the greenies would think of that these days

34:00 but there were just billions of the things which, you know you don't see those numbers now. But if you drive through that country now too, you see on the sides of the roads there are casuarina trees, bull oaks they're called, that are only about 10 or 15 feet high and you see other small ones coming up, you know, seedlings out of the ground.

34:30 When the rabbits were there, none of that happened. As soon as the seedlings came through the rabbits nipped them off and apparently the saliva of the rabbit poisons the plant so there was no regeneration of that kind when the rabbits were there. They really were destroying the country.

**So there was serious erosion problems.**

Well only from, the Wimmera

35:00 country is too flat to be eroded anywhere and there's never enough water, but the erosion took place of course in all the hilly country around the, sort of south of the state and in the other states. The rabbits were really bad up in the dry inland areas of South Australia and New South Wales, Queensland. There were billions of rabbits about in those days.

35:30 **When you went out on a rabbit shoot, how many rabbits would you shoot?**

If you got half a dozen, you know that would be considered a good gain cause, you know in our area they were kept fairly well thinned out. I mean there were always enough rabbits, hares and foxes.

36:00 The hares you don't see. You see very few hares about these days and the reason for that is that when the myxomatosis was introduced it killed off the rabbit population and then the foxes took to killing the hares instead of the rabbits. So

36:30 bringing in the myxomatosis it decimated the rabbit population and also the hares and most of the foxes of course are still a nuisance. A lot of hungry foxes are not a good thing on your fowl guards and things like that, but they've been gradually kept under control.

**Did you shoot foxes as well?**

If we could, yes, much harder to catch.

37:00 But my brother Alan had a motorbike that we used to ride through the stubble paddocks and, you know after the crops had been harvested. I'd sit on the pillion with a rifle. He'd ride the motorbike until we'd spot one, good practise. You know, when we joined the army most of the fellers that joined from the city hardly knew one end of a gun from the other, but the country boys

37:30 could all shoot.

**Yeah, I've heard that said.**

Yeah.

**So the rabbits that you shot would be eaten, is that right?**

Some, but there were always too many for that. They were, you know fed to the dogs or buried or whatever,

38:00 the carcasses.

**What would your mum do with the rabbits, how would she cook them?**

Well roasted or stewed or whatever, you know whatever you do with meat, you can do with a rabbit.

**Did you get sick of it?**

We didn't have a lot of it. We mostly had lamb or beef, chicken

38:30 not much chicken. If you had chickens to sell those days, they were a good price, much more so than

they are now. The Americans, the Yanks, you know, we got fed bully beef ad infinitum and you can tolerate it but you do get very sick of it. And walk past a Yanks'

39:00 camp one night at meal time and they complained to us, "Goddamn chicken again." We hadn't seen a chicken in the army, never saw a chicken in our army diet, but theirs, they had, apparently grew their chickens to a particular size that they just fitted in, a whole chicken be pushed into a can,

39:30 you know a can about probably two and a half, three inches in diameter, fifty, sixty, seventy millimetres in diameter. A whole chicken just shoved straight into it.

**And the bones?**

Everything, yeah bone, no feathers and they weren't stuffed.

**But cooked?**

Yes, cooked and sealed in the can.

40:00 I don't know what they tasted like. I never got to taste it but there you are.

# Tape 2

00:03 "…Back through here last night and he just pulled out his .45 and he shot the heel right off of my boot." Another night they were complaining about their commanding officer. These two had worked out a particular way of, method of attacking the Japanese bombers that they wanted to

00:30 you know, they wanted to use, and the CO [Commanding Officer] wouldn't have a word of it and the one feller said, "That guy sure is a cork in the arse of progress." Now I only heard that once but I never ever forget it.

**Well maybe we'll come back to those. I'm sure there's lots of stories you've got about the Yanks up there.**

01:00 Well a few.

**Yeah, so lets sort of wind back again to your teenage years and I'm curious what you studied by correspondence, what subjects or things you were interested in as a young boy.**

Well there were eight subjects, three of them were maths. They were designated different than they are now. We had arithmetic which is plain straight maths,

01:30 then we had algebra and geometry and then there was French, history, English, drawing, and the eighth one I don't, oh commercial principles and practise, which I found of some use later on when I went into business.

**So you had a teacher there at the school, East Kewell was it?**

Kewell East.

**Yeah**

02:00 **that school, who inspired you, who was that teacher?**

Joe Roach his name was. He's no longer with us. He died at the age of about 40. I don't know what, you know I never heard much of him except that he moved to Ballarat after he left the Kewell East School, but the teacher who took over from him after that, Molly Parsons her name was,

02:30 she's still alive and living in Minyip, in her mid 90s and as bright as a button they tell me.

**So Molly taught you as well?**

Yes, well, no on the correspondence they didn't have a responsibility to teach at all. They just supervised but if there was some problems, you know

03:00 they were able to help. But in others, for instance in the mathematics, I don't know whether it was something perhaps that she hadn't done or what, I don't know. I was pretty much on my own with the maths and when it got into advanced algebra, I did have problems but with the geometry I found that a great help in later life. For instance after

03:30 I left the army, I was about 40 years of age, I learnt to fly and geometry's a great thing to know in navigation, to know where you're going.

**Was there like a cadets or a militia in the area?**

Yes,

04:00 the 1st Armoured Car Regiment had a, what do you call it, a troop I suppose it would have been in Murtoa and in each of the towns around Horsham, and my two older brothers had joined that before the war started actually. And the procedure there was that you went to,

04:30 one night a week, you went to parade hall wherever that was. I don't know where they used to meet in Murtoa, but there they had, you know laid down training subjects that were done and once a year they used to hold a two or three week camp somewhere in Victoria, and my two older brothers participated in that but I wasn't old enough at the

05:00 time but they were. The fellows from that group were the ones that finished up in the same platoon that I was in, in the 19th Machine Gunners. They were in 11 Battalion, all those Murtoa fellers were there, which is, you know a good thing in a way yet it's probably a bit rough on

05:30 officers, you know because if an officer did something nasty to one of the men from his own town, you know the word would get back and so there had to be a little bit of caution involved there. I know one fellow, I don't know what he did but he was a very big fellow, Jiker Philmore his name was, bonzer bloke, but he

06:00 must have done something to upset Harry Watson one day, who was the lieutenant. Harry was about a foot shorter than Jiker, but anyway Harry was tearing strips off Jiker and when he ran out of breath, Jiker said, "Did I do something to upset you, Mr Watson?" And that was the sort of the end of that one, but no disciplinary action was taken

06:30 I know. But Jiker unfortunately is no longer with us. He's another fellow, a big, brawny fellow but he died of cancer when he was, must have been in his very early 40's.

**Your brothers were both involved in this militia unit, what did you say it was?**

It was a 1st Armoured Car Regiment, yes and then when

07:00 the mobilisation came and we were all going into permanent service, then my oldest brother just couldn't go any further. He had to stay and help work the farm but Alan and I went into it and, you know, as full-time soldiers from thereon.

**Did you join the armoured car regiment?**

I thought I did but then the, see I joined in December and the camp…

07:30 **Sorry, what year?**

1940 and the army in the meantime was reorganising things and they switched the 1st Armoured Car Regiment to Hamilton, and Horsham was made the 19th Machine Gun Regiment, so I thought I'd joined the 1st Armoured Car Regiment but when I went into camp I found it was the 19th Light Horse Machine Gun Regiment.

**How confusing.**

08:00 **So pre you joining up, what involvement had you had, were you a cadet then like your brothers?**

No those sort of training nights were all suspended in, well some time in 1940 I think.

08:30 And we went into a more permanent army mode from there on.

**So how aware of the impending war were you, I guess when you were studying, when you were doing correspondence? How old, that was from 12 years old to 15?**

Yes, we

09:00 you know it wasn't good news when was it, the 9th of September, '39 when war was declared on Germany and I think everybody was concerned about it, but, you know a lot of fellows joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] for service overseas, I think the 6th and 7th

09:30 Divvy [Division] fellows joined up and I s'pose in one way a lot of them joined because they were unemployed and gave them an opportunity to do something with their, and they got paid and their clothes and food were provided so after the basic training, they off they went overseas, mostly to the Middle East and Africa.

10:00 **Where were you when you heard the announcement?**

I was on the farm, on my grandfather's farm and I remember we had the radio on one night when we'd just had our tea and the announcement came and, you know, I think it was pretty much a shock to any country, and we weren't any different.

10:30 We sort of knew there weren't very good times coming ahead.

**Do you remember your parents talking about it, were they concerned?**

It wasn't ever discussed much. One thing that did worry them that in the First World War, because of their German extraction, people of my grandfather's era, you know there was a lot of racial prejudice, you know and no matter, they

11:00 talk about a multicultural society but it doesn't really work, does it? There's always racial prejudice and it was fairly strong then against anyone born in Germany, and that I think probably worried them but it didn't really, it's one of those things you worried about but nothing happened. Like the families were well known in the district and

11:30 in a district like that, everybody knows everybody else so it wasn't really a problem even though it was something that you worried about.

**Did your parents or your father in particular, take an interest in Germany, in the affairs of Germany?**

Well Hitler was getting a lot of publicity and I think anybody who read the papers or listened to the news on

12:00 the radio, you know had to take an interest but probably not as strong an interest perhaps as somebody living in England would have done cause it was a vital concern to them, wasn't it? And a lot, you know they started the Empire Air Training Scheme,

12:30 the [E]ATS [Empire Air Training Scheme] and they took air crew mainly. They called applications for members of air crew. They were given just the basic training in Australia and then those that were suitable were sent off onto Canada for the next stage of their training there, and from thereon they went to England and served

13:00 with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] units but one of our local fellows, Len Peach, went with that and he was, they were flying missions over Germany and one night he was reported missing, believed killed and that's the last I heard of him. I think at this stage that, you know they'd have to certify him dead I think,

13:30 though it takes a long time but

**So was politics discussed very much in your house, like Australian, local politics?**

My Dad could talk for hours about politics and what was wrong with the government and all that sort of thing. It's funny, you know he could talk for hours on things like that but come to talking on the telephone, he

14:00 was, you know it just wasn't his thing. I know when, just before we left for Darwin we got a, I won't say it's leave because it wasn't leave officially. The usual thing or the accepted thing was that when any soldiers were sent on, being sent to a

14:30 war area, they were given a fortnight's final leave. That was a standard requirement but when it came to us, the army headquarters said, "No final leave," and yet we were going to be stuck in Colac near here for another couple of weeks before they were ready to move. But our CO, Don Clarke, was a Horsham man, he was a

15:00 you know he was a very well liked fellow. I know in our company he was generally referred to as 'old dog's body' but fondly referred, you know. He said, "That wasn't right, no leave." But he said, "I can't send you on leave but," he said, "there's no reason why we shouldn't go on manoeuvres." So everybody was instructed to pack up. This is

15:30 on Christmas Eve 1941, get your gear together and everybody went out on trucks and everybody was delivered to the railway station at their nearest town and they were going to be picked up there again two days later. So it would have been the morning of Christmas Eve, about four o'clock in the morning

16:00 when we got to the Horsham railway station and I rang the farm and Pop answered the phone, "Yep?" I said, "Alan and I are at the Murtoa railway station, can you pick us up?" "Yep," and crash went the receiver, great long conversation.

**No surprise?**

No,

16:30 he turned up there about half an hour later and we had Christmas at home.

**What did he drive?**

He had a 1936 Ford car, Ford V8, kept it going a long time. I think it did about two hundred thousand miles on the first engine and he put a reconditioned engine in it and did something the same on it.

17:00 Eventually it gave up the ghost but he drove that for many years.

**A tough engine, yeah.**

He was a first class mechanic too and he always kept it in good nick.

**So you had Christmas there at home then, you and Alan?**

Yes and Boxing Day headed back to camp again.

17:30 **Had a lot of men from the area joined up?**

Yes it got to the stage where there were so many people in the armed forces. The figure reached about one in seven of the population in the armed forces and in, it was very difficult to get anybody to work the farms, like with

18:00 the equipment. They had farming equipment then, a lot of operations involved two people and you had to get somebody to help and it was very difficult to get anybody so that's why my oldest brother stayed to work on the farm and Alan and I went off.

**Was he upset about that?**

I don't think so. I think he

18:30 accepted it, you know that's the way it's going to be. I don't think he was all that wrapped in the discipline in the army anyway. I don't think any of us were.

**Did he marry?**

No he didn't. My two older brothers both died bachelors but Alan had a

19:00 long spell of ill health. He was, we were on manoeuvres in Darwin one day with a temperature about 50 in the shade, Celsius that is, and he's carrying a Bren gun which weighs about 21 pounds I think, then you've got all your ammunition and your other gear. Anyway he blacked out and they carted him off but he seemed to recover in a couple of days and put him back

19:30 in the lines again. And over the years, after he got out, he was in the army before the war started and for about a year after it ended, and he kept having problems with these blackouts and the repat [repatriation department] would put him in hospital for a few days and he'd be carted off to hospital

20:00 when he blacked out. So in a few days or a week or whatsoever he'd be all right and he'd go back to work again. This went on for years until a couple of years before he died, they suddenly discovered, "You've got angina." He'd been having heart problems all the time and eventually he decided to go back to Darwin and have a look at it again and he went on

20:30 his own and died on his own in a motel room up there of a heart attack.

**So he went back to Darwin, to revisit Darwin?**

Yeah, another thing too, he'd paid his fare, but because he died and they had to cart him back, Ansett charged an extra two thousand pounds.

**So that was a big shock to the family?**

21:00 Yes but these things happen in all sorts of families, don't they, better and worse.

**What was the age difference between you two?**

Two years. I was born in April. He was born in May, two years prior.

**And he was already in the armoured car**

21:30 **regiment?**

Yes.

**As a cadet.**

Yes he was a despatch rider and they used to pay him a fee. I don't remember how much it was. It was a matter of shillings a week for the hire of his motorbike when they'd go to camp. No, they could run a whole army camp those days on amounts. It's recorded in our history. They'd run a whole camp for

22:00 sums like 467 pounds or something like that, but of course they had to get approval for these things from the government.

**So what sort of despatches would he have been given?**

Well there were no radios, like nobody had two way radios and mobile telephones had never been even dreamt of, so

22:30 if there was a message to go from one unit to the other or from your squadron to headquarters,

somebody had to take the message and he was always the despatch rider, get on his bike and go, message always had to be written of course because if they, stopped them getting garbled along the way.

**He was doing this while you were still on the farm and studying?**

Yes.

23:00 It was a part time sort of thing for most of the fellows because, you know the camps and that were arranged so that they didn't interfere with the seasonal farm work. Like there was never a camp for instance in the time the crop was sown in the winter or spring and there was never one in the harvest time. It was only from about February on, when the harvest was completed, that they'd organise the camp.

**Autumn?**

Mm.

23:30 **What did you do, what would happen to the fields in autumn, would they be ploughed over again?**

Yes, usually, ploughed and prepared and the country there was run on two year rotation, means that you crop with the soil one year and it was left out to fallow the second year. That's all gone by the board these days cause these days

24:00 they've got some marvellous fertilisers and they, instead of leaving it to fallow, they sow in the stubble from the old wheat crops down with peas or beans or whatever and, you know the land is in continual use. Where it wasn't in the '30s, or the '40s and '50s even; you only got a crop off each piece of land every second year.

**What do**

24:30 **you think about that, do you think it's over use of the land?**

No I think it's a good thing now because they get, the world population has increased so much that there's got to be a lot of food produced to feed them, and with the improved methods now… For instance, you know I mentioned earlier that a bag of wheat weighed about 180 pounds. A good crop

25:00 was about 12 bags to an acre or that's about a tonne of wheat to the acre, and an outstanding one you might get 14 or 16 perhaps tonne to the quarter of the acre. These days a good crop is about 30 bags to the acre, marvellous advances, and then being able to utilise the land for other things

25:30 in between wheat crops of course it makes the whole farming proposition much more wider, more versatile.

**The truth about that, what else is the land used for in between, say for example with your two year rotation what would the land have been lying in fallow or would you…?**

No, it would lie in fallow and then you'd have to

26:00 if you had rain then you'd have to work it over again, like you might have to work it over three or four times while it was fallow otherwise the wind would just drift it away and all that fine topsoil, you know, the stuff that costs the money, gets blown away. But no, it made the whole operation fairly expensive.

**So you'd be concerned about big winds and storms and things too?**

Yes, always prayed for rain but then had to get out and work the fallow every time it rained.

26:30 **Why, when it rained, why did you have to do that?**

Well after it rains, the ridging from the cultivation just flattens out and the fine soil all comes to the top and the wind comes up and blows it away, so as soon as it's dry enough after the rain, you had to get over and work it over again and also kill any young weed seedlings that come up.

27:00 **Would the rabbits get into those fields when they were fallow?**

Yes, there wasn't much on the fields for a rabbit. There was nothing on the fields for anything much.

**Just burrowing?**

No, no problem there usually. If they did try to, they're fairly quickly dealt with.

27:30 **Something else I was going to ask you…when you had the crop, you know about to harvest, because the weather can be very temperamental, did you ever have any years where there was a big storm that ruined crop or problems like that?**

Yes there was a big hailstorm went through one year when the crop was ready to harvest.

28:00 The hailstones were as big as a man's fist, actually killed horses left in the open, and crops that were

going to be nine or 10 bags to the acre one day, the next day went about 10 acres to the bag; was only a stalk left standing here and there. But I know in our case my grandfather went over it anyway because he had to get enough

28:30 seed to grow his next year's crop, but they were pretty devastating, those. But ordinary thunderstorms too, if you get wind with them, it gets very wet and you get a whirly wind and it lays the crop down flat on the ground and, you know you have difficulty getting it up off the ground and harvesting that.

**How did you do that, did you do that by hand?**

No but when

29:00 you're looking at hundreds of acres, you know. See with, I think there were, with the property we were on and the grandfather's as well, I think we were working a thousand acres or so, something like that, and any of the work has got to be done by machine and you just had to have a

29:30 harvesting machine or a header that would pick up and there were all sorts of mechanical gadgets made to pick it up. But usually too, if you get rain on a wheat crop when it's ready to harvest, if it stays damp for long enough, if you don't get any wind after the rain for instance, the grain will shoot in the head and then

30:00 it's useless as far as flour's concerned. It's only stock feed from thereon so there can be enormous losses from storms, rain in the harvest period.

**And that would affect all the farmers in the region?**

Yes, some more so than others, for instance storms are patchy. They might take out a strip a mile or two wide and devastate everybody in that, from west to east and

30:30 others a couple of miles away will be virtually untouched.

**Could you predict that sort of thing?**

No way, no, weather forecasting was even worse than it is today, a non-profit organisation, weather forecasting.

**Well that must have been very tense around harvest time.**

31:00 Yes it used to take weeks to get a harvest off in those days and you couldn't go out for instance at dawn and start because the dew at night would make the straw too tough, absorb enough moisture from the dew, so that it wouldn't thrash so you had to wait till the sun came out, even in the summertime, usually

31:30 till about nine, nine-thirty in the morning before it was dry enough, before you could start. You could tell. You go and pick a head and rub the head in your hands and if the grain separated, fine, it's dry enough and you start up the machine then.

**And how long would it take to do the whole crop?**

Three or four weeks, with good weather.

32:00 The farming machinery then, of course Australia produced great innovations and inventions in harvesting machinery. And HB McKays in Melbourne and a fellow, Taylor, produced headers which, you know did a marvellous job and were eventually copied around the world

32:30 all the good parts of them. These days, there's none manufactured in Australia at all. They're all either imported, you know mostly from Germany or United States. The cost of the machinery now for instance to buy a harvester these days, you're looking at about a five hundred thousand dollar investment and,

33:00 you know that's 10 times what a farmer's worth in those days, so you just had to get one you thought would do the job and keep patching it up, year after year. Most farmers got to be pretty good mechanics, you know for that reason. They just had to do it. They had to learn how to fix them.

**And improvise these different gadgets you mentioned?**

Yes, you see if,

33:30 round this time of the year, you see big bales of hay out in the fields. Well they haven't carted them in yet. People store them out in the fields now but there's still places in Europe, you know where they cut a crop by hand with a sickle and hand bind the sheaves and they stack them up, tithe them to dry them out and etcetera. But a

34:00 fellow in South Australia invented a gadget he called a binder, or that's the name that it got later. It cut a strip of crop about five or six feet wide, rolled it into place and it tied it into sheaves with wire. It had a unique

34:30 knotting mechanism which is built something like human fingers, but the way they used to mechanically go and tie the knot. But my grandfather told me that when this came out, all the old-timers said, "Now that will never work. One strand of wire won't hold a bale of hay." But the previous method to that was

that you picked a big handful of the longest strands of the hay, divide it in two and if you twisted it in your hands

35:00 in a particular way, you could knot it and wrap it around an armful of hay and knot it on the other side, and you had a hand knotted sheaf of hay. But, you know he had about 30 or 40 strands of straw to do that, you see. They reckoned one strand of wire would never do it but later they changed to tying with twine. Wire's fairly nasty stuff getting mixed up in machinery and livestock's innards,

35:30 so they changed to twine and then eventually changed to bales, like there were smaller bales about three feet long and about 15 inches wide, about 18 inches deep. These baling machines though only came out post war, World War II and now there's, what you see now is usually a contractor whose got a machine worth hundreds of thousands of

36:00 dollars and he goes around and he'll bale up an entire field in, you know a matter of a couple of hours, collect his cheque and go on his way to the next one.

**So that the round bales were a new innovation, weren't they, a few years ago?**

Yes and now they round them to save storing them in sheds. They wrap plastic around them to keep the rain off and they store them out in the open.

36:30 There's big rectangular bales too that, about eight feet long. For stacking in a shed, they are better than the round ones because they stack them up like big bricks, with a forklift truck, but all sorts of innovations.

**Many snakes up there?**

Yes, brown ones mostly.

37:00 Around these parts here they're, particularly if you go down the stony rises to the west of Geelong, tiger snakes are the common ones but the big brown ones used to grow about five or six feet long up there, always had to be watched out for.

**What would you do with a snake if you came across it?**

Always killed them.

**How did you do that?**

37:30 Well whatever you had at hand, but a shovel was good or a length of fencing wire or whatever. Actually my Dad had a trick that I never tried. He used to grab it by the tail and he'd crack it like a whip and the snap on the head you see would break the neck and kill them. But he tried it once on a tiger snake, and a tiger snake is a very active sort of a creature,

38:00 anyways he reached out to grab the tail and the tiger snake reared up, went over his shoulder. He never tried that again, gave it up.

**So tell me again when you joined up, when you decided to join up, that was 1940?**

Yes.

**What month was that?**

December, 1940.

38:30 **So tell me how it all came about, how old were you?**

I was 17, 17 and a half I s'pose I'd have been then, born in April and I discussed it with my brother Alan and told him to take me in to see the, you know our local GP [General Practitioner]. There was only one in Murtoa and he was also the recruiting officer and he fixed it all up on Sunday morning,

39:00 no problem. I think he saw this sort of training as being a good thing for young fellers who had nothing else to do. And a lot of, there were a few other under age ones too around Murtoa who joined up. But when I went to see him after I got out of the army once, I forget what it was for, but I went to pay him and

39:30 he said, "Don't worry about it." He said, "I never charge ex servicemen." There's not many like that left.

**So he signed your papers, he recruited you?**

Yeah.

**And then what happened? You moved up to Horsham?**

No, then you just go home and wait and eventually you get a letter in the mail to report to camp and mine was to report to camp at Hamilton on such and such

40:00 a date and they, with that, they usually supply some sort of a warrant to travel with. I don't think I

needed one because I went with Alan on the motorbike, but anybody that had to travel by rail, you get a rail warrant and it was all organised.

40:30 **What sort of bike did he have?**

At that stage he had a German one, a DKW, Das Kleine Wunder, twin cylinder, five horse power something it was, I think.

# Tape 3

00:30 **Can you to give us a bit more insight into that period when war broke out, and how that impacted on the family and the community and the building up to your decision to join up?**

It's an area where… you know I don't remember a lot of detail. There's a lot of things crowd into your person's brain over the years and that, I don't remember a lot of detail about it.

01:00 I know the whole country was still recovering from the recession years. There was a lot of unemployment about and I think it wasn't, you know the recession had receded to a large extent, and I don't know what the unemployment figures were like, but I imagine

01:30 they would have been, you know three or four times as bad as what they are now. Cause when you look at the present situation, it's almost full employment isn't it? Most people who are good at their job, want a job and they can get one but it was extremely difficult in those days.

**Do you remember, what to you was like the main**

02:00 **motivating factor to sign up?**

I suppose every young fellow has got some sort of spirit of adventure, go and do something different and I knew about it because the fact that my two brothers were already joined up, I knew what it was about and, you know decided, well I might as well be in it.

02:30 I must say, I didn't ask my parents. When I came home and told them they said, "Oh well."

**Do you remember their reaction when you came back and told them?**

Just nothing. "Oh yes," must have thought it wouldn't do me any harm. But I know our local, the minister in our congregation he spoke to my father about it. He said, "I do not approve of Rex joining the army.

03:00 There's some very rough types in the army." There are a lot of rough types out of the army too aren't there, but he changed his attitude over the years and, well eventually I was discharged and home again and I was his long lost friend.

**It sounds like your parents maybe half, with your brothers involved already, half expected that you…?**

Yes, I think so. And

03:30 the thing is in a large family like ours too, you've got to get out and do something for yourself, and I think they probably looked on it as, you know I was doing something for myself.

**Can you tell us a bit more about, you said how the GP was the recruiting officer, a bit of a conflict of interest maybe, but what**

04:00 **exactly was the process there, what did the medical involve and do you remember what was said to you?**

Yes, well there's a full medical examination to make sure you're, you know got no infirmities, but I was passed as A1. There were a lot of scathing remarks made about those medical examinations of course. As long as you could walk and that, seemed to be the main requirement. And

04:30 one fellow told the story how the MO [Medical Officer] was examining his ears and he was looking in one ear and the orderly was standing on the other side, and he thought he'd be funny. He said, "Can you see him?" "Nope." He said "You'll do." There was something in there.

**So how long was it before… I mean you were passed there and then by the…?**

05:00 Yes, once you passed in the medical then your papers were sent off to the army, I don't know where exactly. I was too young to understand that sort of thing at the time.

**So you were just 17?**

17 I was yeah.

**So the doctor had to put your age up, did he, to?**

Yes he said, “We’d better shove that up a bit.” So he did that and

05:30 so we’re away and then you wait until the papers to go in for processing and then you wait then until you get a letter from the army telling you where to report.

**And that was to report to Horsham?**

No. I had to report to Hamilton some time in February. I don’t remember exactly. It was something about six weeks or so from the time I joined up till I went into camp.

06:00 First job I got there, all the baking dishes from the cookhouse, hadn’t been washed up since the last time they were used, and it’s probably a year ago, got a job washing those. I thought bugger this for a joke. It wasn’t what I’d joined up for I didn’t think. But then we went on, initially all our training was first of all was on rifle drill, parade drill

06:30 and then onto machine guns, Vickers machine guns mostly at the time, and there’s a lot of training goes into making a good gunner. In the Vickers or the Browning machine gun is very similar, as are the German ones but they have a lock that’s about, it’s called a lock. It’s a part

07:00 about as big as a largish cigarette packet, and on the face of that is a slide which picks the new shell out of the belt that’s fed in, drags it back out of the belt, the same time it drags a spent cartridge out of the chamber and the lock drops down, pushes the new round into the chamber and automatically fires. And it does that

07:30 600 times a minute, 10 times a second. But the thing is, if you have a broken firing pin, on a Vickers machine gun there were four stoppages they were called, four things which would cause it to stop. On the right side of the housing of the gun was a crank handle which used to fly back every time it fired, and the stoppage was defined as number 1, number 2, number 3 or number 4 stoppage.

08:00 Number 4 stoppage the handle had gone right forward but the gun didn’t fire. That means your firing pin was broken so we had to train and practise taking that lock out, stripping it, something, a number of parts in the 20’s, had to strip it, put in a new firing pin and put the whole thing back. And you had to practise until you could do that in 30 seconds, blindfolded.

08:30 Now that takes a lot of practise but you get there in the end. The trick is to put, when you put the pieces down, you put them down somewhere clean and you put them down in a line in the order that you took them out, and then when you’re putting them back, you just take them in the reverse order. But it’s, I s’pose good training, and the discipline I think did a lot of us young fellers an enormous amount of good.

09:00 I was sorry when national training fell out. I think there’s a lot of fellows around our streets now that’d be different guys if they had a bit of training and discipline in their youth.

**How much of an eye opener was that for you? Had you father, for example, been a bit of a disciplinarian?**

Well not really. I suppose he was strict enough. Somebody had to maintain some sort of order but I don’t think we were, we weren’t really an unruly family

09:30 which is probably a good thing but the army discipline was something different altogether, where, I know our company, Major Freddie Jones, his main discipline is training people to do the right thing and to work together for the good of the,

10:00 for the whole unit and you’ve got to learn things, work together with all the others on the team. For instance, in the gun team there were six people and they’ve all got to work as a team and everyone has got to learn to do the other person’s job, but with a machine gunner the fellow sitting up behind the gun, he’s, the others are all lying down. The fellow sitting up behind the gun, where

10:30 in front of him there’s a blinking bit of light or there’s a cloud of haze or blinking bit of light in the middle, somebody has a shot for that and you lose the number one gunner. Then there’s the procedure you fall out one, so number one is moved out of the way, number two moves into number one and each of the other team moves up one. And so all this has to be practised over and over again, till it can be done without even thinking about it. And the same thing applies to other

11:00 guns like anti aircraft guns and that sort of thing. With these self loading rifles they use these days, it’s a different story because each person has virtually got a machine gun of his own and the amount of teamwork involved is not as great.

**So it sounds like you sort of adapted to that fairly well. What about the other blokes there, how was everyone managing to**

11:30 **fit into that sort of army life?**

Yes, one thing I remember noticing at the time is that with it, there were fellows who, you know as a school student would have barely passed anything, but they could train them up and they could do their

job, and they could do it as good as anybody else because it was all done by rote and, you know I think it's a good thing.

12:00 I mean that sort of training for anybody. It doesn't matter what you do, even if you're working with your computer at home, you've got to follow the correct procedures don't you, and that sort of discipline in your mind is a good thing. It's absolutely essential I think if you're going to get anywhere.

**Had you joined up, with that intake where there fellers that you were friendly with or knew from your community?**

Yes, two

12:30 cousins who lived locally and, you know numbers of them who were acquaintances. We didn't have the standard of the roads and motor vehicles and that sort of thing then that we had now. I mean now if you want to go to a town 20 miles away, no problem, you get in the car and you go and you're there in a few minutes, but it was more of a big operation in those days.

13:00 And petrol was extremely expensive so living, we lived 14 miles out of town and we didn't have a lot to do with the people who lived in the town, except, you know when you went for supplies, but you knew the grocer and the hardware man and that sort of thing, but as far as mixing with the younger people, apart from your own church people. We used to see those more often where there were, you know social occasions organised

13:30 etcetera.

**So other than that sort of training on the hardware on the guns and rifles and so on, what else were you trained on or trained for?**

Well that went on for three months, and following that I went to a different school which was motor maintenance. And this is all on transport,

14:00 you know, doing all sorts of mechanical repairs etcetera. But that was a month, took a month and came second in that one. After that there was a Bren gun carrier school, armoured vehicles and that sort of thing. That was also a month and I

14:30 came out of that as a, you know with a licence to drive all army vehicles, including armoured. There were seven grades at that time and actually I had a licence to drive a tank, and I've never been in one but you see the specification just said armoured vehicles. And anyway I was given a license and recommended an

15:00 instructor but then of course when I went back to our unit, didn't have any Bren gun carriers and didn't actually get any until we'd been in Darwin for about six or eight weeks.

**So where had those courses taken place?**

The armoured one was Hamilton also. That was I think mainly because the 1st Armoured Regiment was based there and they were their instructors

15:30 and probably their equipment that we were using for the training purposes. Quite a remarkable thing those Bren gun carriers, in their own way. You know as a tank they're virtually useless but they served the purpose. And Australia actually, you know industry was geared up and they manufactured over eight thousand of those things. Each one weighs about four tons and it's got armour plate sides and hull

16:00 and the two positions in the driver's seat, on the high position you can just see over the gunnels in the front so you drive visually whereas if you're in a firing position, you drop the seat down and there's a slot in front of the driver and a piece of bullet proof glass about two inches thick in front of it and you peer through that. But the thing about it is while those things are moving, you could never hit anything with

16:30 a machine gun. It wanders around, up and down, you know with the movement of the carrier and you just couldn't aim on a target, so to be effective, it's got to stop and then shoot.

**Is it possible for you to give us a bit more detail on the Bren gun carrier? I mean obviously you sort of became quite involved with them, just the sort of the design of them and how they were operated?**

Yes they have

17:00 tracks and the main bogey is one that's got two wheels on either side and a shaft that runs through from side to side. Now that shaft is, there's movement. The whole hull of the carriage can move sideways on that shaft so when you steer and you turn the steering wheel for the first half a turn or so

17:30 it slides the hull of the carrier across those bogeys and that will give you a steering of about four degrees, so keeping in a straight line on a road or anything, that's all you need. But when you come to turn at a sharp angle you've got to do something more drastic. Now they've got, hydraulic brakes were very rare in those days and

18:00 they had drum brakes. They called them bleeding shoe brakes because in a motor vehicle you put the brakes so that the actual brake pad trails behind the pin that it hinges on. And the carriers, they made it the other way around so that as soon as you touch it, they grabbed, which is essential to do a turn. So it had a heavy truck differential in the drive at the back, heavy truck

18:30 gearbox and the ones we had had a hundred horse power Ford Mercury V8 engine in them, and to do a 90 degree turn you had to first of all change down out of top gear, depending on the amount you needed to turn, but mostly down into third gear and keep a fair amount of pace like about 15 to 20 miles an hour. And you clapped

19:00 the brake on the side that you wanted to turn to until it grabbed and around you went. Actually the fellow who was teaching us had a more artistic approach to those corners. He used to build the carrier up to about 40 miles an hour, which is the absolute maximum you can get out of them, and the motor and that would be absolutely screaming and when he came to the corner he changed it down into

19:30 third gear, and if you wanted to turn right, he'd clap on the left brake and do a donut and then head off in the right direction. It wasn't an approved procedure but it was quite artistic. But, you know there were no traffic problems with Bren gun carriers cause the thing weighed about four tons and if people saw it approaching down the road, they disappeared in the bush either side and left you to it. I think you could go through the West Gate

20:00 Bridge in a traffic jam and you'd have no trouble.

**And was your knowledge of the actual, of the Bren gun itself just as intimate?**

Well they were called Bren gun carriers because they were designed in England and England was manufacturing Bren guns. We didn't have any. We had Vickers guns and in there were two positions, one out the front for the Vickers gun and one was a

20:30 taller one for aircraft, out the top. We had to, for the light gun we had Hotchkiss ones that were I think a Belgian design originally from leftovers from World War I so we had to learn those just an intimately as we did the Vickers. The

21:00 they wouldn't, they weren't so good for sustained fire as a Vickers. A Vickers was water cooled and Hotchkiss had no cooling so after it had, you know been fired for four or five minutes you had to change the barrel and put a cold barrel on which meant you had to have gloves on cause they were very hot. They were both

21:30 .303. That was their standard ammunition. All the ammunition was left over from World War I too.

**Did it strike you as…I mean you were just training, but I mean later on we know that even when you were on the lines that equipment, well there wasn't much of it.**

That's right.

**Was there a sense even when you were training that things weren't quite…?**

We didn't have

22:00 any idea at that stage. I mean we just did our training to get as good as we could with the equipment that we had, but then when we got into Darwin we found out that we were in concrete pillboxes at the time of the first raid. We couldn't elevate the guns more than about 20 degrees above the horizon which is absolutely useless for aircraft so they were useless, quite.

22:30 **Right well I guess we'll get to Darwin.**

Then later I was going to say they replaced the Vickers eventually with Bren guns when they got them, so.

**So what about just conditions when you sort of joined the army, like your living quarters, food, that sort of thing, how much of a shock was that to the system?**

Yeah it was quite a shock, yes. For instance

23:00 I left a comfortable bed at home, and the mattress was a palliasse on the floor which is, a palliasse is about six feet long made out of hessian bag and a few handfuls of straw in it, and that was it. That was your mattress, and you had blankets of course. Every morning you had to roll up your palliasse in an approved pattern, fold your blankets neatly and put them on top and be ready for a kit

23:30 inspection. But that sort of discipline I think is good for young fellers too because they're inclined to just throw their clothes on the floor, aren't they, when they're home, but you know, you have to get out of those habits. All your gear was kept in your kitbag. Actually everything, when you went to bed at night, everything you had in the army was there

24:00 at your bedside. You had, you know a rifle, whatever you had, your ammunition, your kitbag, all the stuff in it. It was all there. If you had to move out, well you just grabbed everything and went.

**What was your uniform like in those days?**

Heavy woollen ones and they, you know they were warm

24:30 which is a good thing in the southern climates, too hot for the Territory of course. Anybody that went north had to change their uniforms. They went for the khakis and greens up there. But there were two different standards, the tropical standard and the other standard. I don't know what they called it but the normal standard you had the woollen uniform and

25:00 long john's, like wear your winter gear, and when you went north that was handed back and you got tropical stuff.

**So if you can recall, from that training period, if you can recall some of the sort of, the incidents that might have happened, some of the lighter side of the training, if possible?**

25:30 Well I don't remember a lot. I do remember before we went north, we had to get vaccinations for all sorts of things. It was about five or six things, all lumped into two needles, and one morning we were lined up on the parade ground and said, "We will now proceed to the

26:00 medical office for the vaccinations." One fellow fainted on the spot but we went up there and one big fellow, about six foot two or six foot three I s'pose he would have been, big hail, hardy, strong bloke, the MO put the first needle in him and he passed out. He told the orderlies, "Hold him up, he won't feel the next one." And they carried him out and he recovered after a while and

26:30 no ill effects. Of course a lot of them got very nasty affects from the smallpox vaccination but it didn't, mine didn't take, so I was all right. I'd been done as a baby but I don't remember many really humorous things, but there were things that happened. You know we had,

27:00 with equipment, we didn't have enough rifles to do squad drilling with so they used broomsticks or whatever, and every night there was a guard mounted on the gate and the guard had to give anybody who approached the traditional challenge, "Halt, who goes there, friend or foe?" And the orderly officer

27:30 was going in one day, thought he'd be funny. He said, "Foe." The other fellow said, "Advance one more pace and I'll riddle you with bloody white ants." So we eventually got rifles but not until a couple of days before we left for Darwin and they were brand new ones, straight out of the Lithgow small arms factory

28:00 in New South Wales. They were good ones too. They made a good job of them.

**And how do you train with broom handles?**

Well you go through the same, exactly the same motions, like slope arms etcetera, but you do it with a broom handle instead of a rifle. There was one sergeant major I know, teaching about fixed bayonets where you have your bayonet and the scabbard on the left side, and

28:30 when you're standing at ease you have the rifle butt resting on the ground and your left hand holding it just below the muzzle, sloping out away from you. But when the fixed bayonet order comes, you pull out your bayonet and fix it but to do this all simultaneously, you see it takes a lot of practice. And the sergeant major saying, "Now when I says fix, you don't fix, see but when I says bayonets you whips them out and whops them on."

29:00 So that's what we did, after a lot of practice. If it's not, you know if you don't practise together in that sort of thing and develop some sort of a rhythm to it, the whole operation becomes something of a shambles.

**So how much training was there all up, you've mentioned, I mean there was obviously initial training and then the armoured vehicle,**

29:30 **that was what three months I think you said?**

That was a month and then we went back to, there was another three month camp at Bendigo, Epson racecourse, I don't know, think it's still there these days and I'm a bit hazy about the next bit. But

30:00 we went, you see to set the, after the Bendigo camp they decreed that there'd be no more part time soldiering. Everybody had to make up their mind, you're either in it or out, so it was full time and from there we went on somewhere down the coast I think around Torquay, not far from here, and then

30:30 prior to going to Darwin they took us back to Colac and we did all our preparation for departure there in Colac. Like there was issue of the tropical gear and rifle, all of which were covered in grease and they all had to be thoroughly cleaned.

**So at what stage did you learn that you would be heading north?**

31:00 Officially we didn't really, we weren't told anything officially at any time but we knew when we left Terowie in South Australia on the Ghan going to Alice Springs, it had to be north but I suppose our senior officers knew we were going but none of us were told. See they weren't allowed to discuss it.

**But amongst the fellows what was the talk, I mean what?**

31:30 All heard rumours yes. All reckoned it'd have to be north and of course when they issued the tropical gear, there was no doubt about it so then it was either north or New Guinea but anyway it turned out to be Darwin.

**What was happening in Bendigo, you said Bendigo and Torquay or down the coast before the call came, what sort of training for?**

Well Bendigo was

32:00 still basic training like we did in Hamilton in the first place. There were quite a few more recruits joined us for the Bendigo camp. For instance there used to be a 26th Light Horse at, based on Warracknabeal but they were far below full strength and they were merged into the 19th. I don't remember whether they were there at the time we went to Bendigo

32:30 but I know they were definitely with us when we went to Darwin, and they also needed another company, D Company, with A, B and C and headquarter companies. They needed another company to bring the 19th up to full strength and they took an entire company from a South Australian unit, 27th Light Horse I think it was, so our D Company were all South Australian.

**So when you say the 19th, that's the?**

33:00 Machine Gun Regiment.

**So at what stage did you know you'd be assigned to the 19th?**

Well I was in there when it went to camp the first time. It had already been changed from the 19th. I don't know when the fellers from the 26th Light Horse or the 27th from South Australia, I don't know when they got their notice, but by the time we were at Colac, you know everything was all

33:30 decided and organised, as well as it was ever going to be.

**Just going back a step or two, had it ever crossed your mind to sign up to try the air force, the navy, was it always army that was preferenced?**

It wasn't really my preference but to join the navy or the AIF or the air force, I needed my parents' permission

34:00 and I don't think my mother was ever very happy about rearing children to be shot overseas. And there was a lot of that attitude amongst our fellows, you know they were quite prepared to do anything at all to defend Australia, but to go and die in the battlefields of Europe or the deserts in Africa or something, you know it wasn't our argument was it, over there.

34:30 **Was there much, when we were talking to Jack yesterday he was saying how, or maybe it was someone last week, how they felt, even the late '30s and 1940 that the Japanese were a threat. I mean was there any sort of talk of that?**

Yes, they were because the Germans were urging the Japanese to get into it and take Australia cause we were supplying a large part of England's foodstuffs.

35:00 And the Germans, two German ships laid about 200 mines on the south coast here. I s'pose you've heard about those and they kept on urging the Japanese to join, and the Japs were just quietly preparing. And in the finish the Japanese foreign secretary said they'd, made the announcement – they'd be ready for war in six weeks – which is

35:30 not long before Pearl Harbour and they had their plans already made and they just sailed in. And I think as far as the attack on Darwin is concerned, it'd be all well planned, you know before that time. They had three different plans put by army generals, or in one case an admiral that they should attack Australia by, one said to make a feint attack on Darwin then make a landing in Perth,

36:00 the second was to make a major attack on Darwin then move straight through to Adelaide, and the third one said, "Be better to make a landing on the east coast and isolate Sydney." But when it came to implement those plans they didn't have enough men on hand. But they, in Burma it took longer for them to get control of Burma than they expected and by that time the Americans

36:30 were giving them curry out in the Pacific, so they just didn't have the men to go ahead and do Darwin, which I s'pose was a good thing for us, for me particularly.

**So even before you went up to Darwin I mean were you receiving sort of were there briefings on the Japanese or just sort of like propaganda machine happening?**

Only through the newspapers

37:00 and nothing at all as far as the army was concerned. We had no descriptions whatsoever of the enemy, what to expect, you know they tell you what to do and you line up your guns, and that I think, was one of the tragedies of the whole situation. The army thinking was still along the lines of the way our war was fought in Napoleon's day.

37:30 You stand up face to face and slog it out and if you don't stand up, you're a coward. Of course these days if you stand up, you're shot, you're a dead'un, and the standing face to face, the Germans really put an end to that when they overran France. They didn't go up for all these heavy defences of the Maginot line. They went up through Belgium, had a free run, just circumvented

38:00 the main defences you see. And even our army here took a long time to realise that the whole method of pursuing the war had changed completely. And in Darwin principally they built big fortifications over the harbour, just so anybody who attacked Darwin had to come in through the harbour entrance, in front of those big guns, and if it had happened

38:30 they had hundreds of miles of unprotected beaches on either side of Darwin where they could have landed their 30 or 40 thousand troops, as they usually did for a landing, and just moved in and cut off Darwin from the back, would have been all over.

**Like the same as Singapore I guess?**

Yeah exactly, yes the same thing over there. The Japanese just came down through the back, behind the guns. They can't shoot backwards.

39:00 **You mentioned how you, because of your age and your parents unwillingness to sign those papers, how you couldn't join the air force or AIF. Was there much of, and we've heard stories about that sort of thing, you know chockos [chocolate soldiers], AIF, and how there was a bit of roughing up there, did you experience any of that?**

There was always a certain amount about it but it didn't really worry any of us I don't think because we

39:30 took the view that we'd joined the Citizen Military Forces as they were called, as against the AIF. And the Citizen Military Forces were enlisted to protect Australia. Australia, at that time of course, included New Guinea cause that was one of our mandated territories, so anybody who volunteered for the CMF [Citizens' Military Force], volunteered to serve in Australia or New Guinea. And most of us, I know I thought, "Well,

40:00 that's about as far as I want to go and to protect Australia but I'm not doing much good, you know dying on a battlefield in Europe or Africa or somewhere." And most of us thought the same I think, by all means defend Australia but you go over there defending somebody else, don't you, so I don't think that really affected me cause I never did get into the

40:30 AIF or the air force. I really wanted to join the air force and then I passed, spent all one morning doing all the written examinations and passed and then the MO tested my eyes and my eyes weren't good enough for air force, and that meant of course the same thing applied to the navy, not that I ever wanted to join the navy, but you couldn't get into the navy either. And after a time

41:00 in Darwin I was downgraded and the MO branded me unfit, but I still stayed there for another 12 months or so I suppose.

# Tape 4

00:36 **So can you tell us about when the 19th had heard news that you were moving, you didn't know where at that point, I mean you assumed but yeah what that sort of, the procedure was there in terms of your equipment and kit and basic movement?**

Well there was truckloads of equipment started to arrive.

01:00 We had some machine guns but we had to get enough new guns to make up full equipment. Everybody was issued with a rifle. One of those numbers stuck in my mind. Mine was number 77082 but then you kept that rifle, you know for your full service or if you were changed into another unit and it wasn't required, you know it'd be changed. But

01:30 the .303 rifle was approved for army service in 1903. In the Second World War the English upgraded theirs slightly and then used the upgraded version but Australia stuck to the old one. So right through World War II we had the old .303 which is a very reliable rifle and very accurate sort of thing, but

02:00 the Americans for instance had 30–30s they called them. They were self loading rifles, .30 calibre instead of .303 like ours, so you couldn't interchange the ammunition or anything like that. But the whole approach to war…and another thing where the government wasted millions… We needed fighter aircraft see, so who organised it I don't know, but they set out to build Wirraways.

02:30 They built seven or eight hundred Wirraways which in war were absolutely useless. As training machines, one pilot said, "Look as a training machines," he said, "they're the best in the world." He said, "They've got every vice that's ever built in an aircraft. If you can fly one of them, you could fly anything." But after they tried them in New Guinea and then they were told, "Don't take them up against Zeros; it's just suicide."

03:00 So at the time of the first raid on Darwin our fighter aircraft were five Wirraways, four of which were unserviceable, big deal but you see they wasted millions of pounds when they should have been building something like Spitfires or Kittyhawks, something that could compete with what the Japanese had. They knew the Japanese were going to do it because the Japanese kept saying so.

03:30 **So when did you get marching orders, when were you, this is end of '40, towards the end of '41?**

Yes it would have been. The orders would have come through just before Christmas in 1941 and then it was a matter of, you know getting all the equipment on site and everything, because the unit has to carry all its equipment with it. So

04:00 then the, you know the truckloads of ammunition, not ammunition, we had very little of that, no problem carrying that but, you know the rifles, the guns etcetera. They were all issued and all the tropical gear was issued and the unit left on two separate trains. The first half went on the 4th of January in '42 and their train went around through Adelaide to Terowie,

04:30 and the one I was on left on the 5th of January '42, and we all got to Terowie on the, sorry we all got to Terowie on the 5th of January, and then embarked straight away onto the Ghan and arrived in Winnellie in Darwin on the 15th of January so it was about 10 days

05:00 it took us.

**Right so this is just weeks after Pearl Harbour?**

Yes Pearl Harbour was the 7th of December wasn't it?

**So what sort of impact did that event have on the ways things were shaping?**

I think it was a big shock to everybody concerned but there again, you know Americans told the world about it but our government decided they didn't want the people to panic so they kept anything published down, you know strict censorship,

05:30 and they kept anything published down to whatever they thought the people ought to be told. Which is a pretty disgraceful sort of a situation I think, because the public didn't really know, like the average citizen in Australia, didn't know what sort of problems they were getting into. But too late to fix it now, as long as they don't make the same mistake again.

06:00 I think they're more far-sighted now, particularly in the equipment line.

**And Pearl Harbour, I mean in terms of the, you know the urgency of what was happening and the possibility of the Americans coming to aid, you know being able to assist Australia, did that sort of have any bearing on morale?**

It was sort of never discussed. We didn't know enough about

06:30 it. We only knew what was published in the newspapers which wasn't a lot. You know there was a lot about how terrible it was to lodge an attack like that without warning and all that sort of thing. Well they had their ambassadors still negotiating in Washington and talking peace

07:00 and the same time they're lining up to attack Pearl Harbour. But it was a very effective strike as far as the Japanese were concerned but I think they misjudged the effect it had on the Americans. They thought it would cower them but it did the exact opposite. It united the whole country in their determination to clean up the Japanese, and I think it's largely that American determination that helped Australia because

07:30 our government was really floundered, didn't know what to do and MacArthur came and put some backbone into them, told them how to get up and fight, and everything sort of gradually got under way from there on.

**Getting back to the Ghan trip to Darwin, what can you remember of that, just travelling through that amazing country there?**

Well

08:00 for a start the showgrounds at Terowie were bare red dirt and very dusty and dirty, and we were only there for a few hours and then as we headed north. Quorn was a memorable place because the Country Women's Association there put on a meal for every soldier that went through on the train, right through World War II. And when you realise that there

08:30 were over a hundred thousand troops went through, some of them went through two and three times. I went through there three times and each time it was the same, still got a meal. They did a fantastic job. I don't know who, the army must have supplied them with food, I don't know. But from Quorn we went north, you know the country gets more and more desolate and some of the meal stops were just a

09:00 bore tank somewhere with a couple of coppers set up full of stew or whatever, where we were given a

meal and then onto the next place. Marree was one of those places I know we stopped. At one stage there there'd been heavy rains and the track was washed out but the railways were prepared for that. They shunted two trucks with railway sleepers in front of the train we were on

09:30 and then they come out to where the track was washed out. They, all hands on deck and they stacked the line up with sleepers and went on the way but it all took a lot of time of course, I think five or six hours in one place. When we got up to the Macdonnell Ranges it all started, the country looks a bit more hospitable. But in

10:00 Alice Springs I don't remember whether it was the, see I was there three times and I can remember camping overnight in tents pitched in the bed of the Todd River, but it wouldn't have been that first trip because it'd had heavy rain and there would have been water going down the Todd. But I think we were moved straight onto army trucks and went on, up north

10:30 and there, there were washouts on the road there too where at one stage we were delayed for about six hours till the water went down, so it was shallow enough to get through with the trucks. But sort of different country than where I grew up and then of course you get onto Birdum which is the, Larrimah with the railhead from the Northern Territory

11:00 railway which runs about three hundred miles. And there, the road wasn't made between there and Darwin, was only just two wheel tracks through the bush in a lot of the places. All loaded onto railway down and into cattle trucks and took an overnight trip to Darwin as far as Winnellie.

**How long was the truck trip from Alice to Larrimah?**

I think it was

11:30 spread over four days. There were a number of, like there might be four or five convoys going on the same day, so that the first one would have to head out at say four o'clock in the morning, the next one five o'clock and six o'clock so on. And then they'd pass along the way and the ones coming south. I mean they were coming back empty most of the time, but very hot country.

12:00 I came through Barrow Creek. I was heading south on Christmas Eve in 1943 and Barrow Creek it was 129 in the shade, the Fahrenheit gauge which I think is about 53 degrees. The driver of the truck had a thermometer in the cabin that went up to a hundred

12:30 and thirty five when we were travelling. But I know in the two years since I'd been there the first time, they put up Sydney Williams huts which, you know steel framed huts, corrugated iron covered with concrete floors and you could sleep in, you know they put up the sleeping quarters for anybody in transit. But the concrete was so hot you couldn't lie on it so I,

13:00 you know sat up till about midnight and then slept out on the sand outside. You always had a groundsheet and a blanket with you so you spread the groundsheet over the ground first, then folded the blanket double lengthways and lay in the blanket, sort of not really the best motel accommodation I s'pose. You wouldn't sell it much these days.

**What about, did you see much of Alice Springs itself?**

13:30 Not in those days, very little, just passed straight through but it's pretty much a bush town, you know. What we did see and what I read of it later, cause Darwin in those days I think had a normal civilian population of about twelve hundred people. It was only a small town but in the late '30s they'd had a lot of itinerate workers there, up to five thousand at one stage I think,

14:00 putting in all these big guns up in to defend the harbour and all that sort of thing. And those concrete pillboxes around the coast, that also turned out to be completely useless, but I s'pose it provided employment for a lot of people in the '30s. But when the war was impending, particularly after Pearl Harbour, all civilians had to be evacuated and there were only about two thousand of them left at the time Darwin was attacked.

14:30 And these, you hear stories about the panic, everybody ran down the road etcetera. The civilians did. They were told that, you know, "Get out. There's nothing to be done in Darwin." There's nothing for them to do so they, you know made their way the best way they could. One fellow said he was in such a hurry, he said, that he was halfway to Adelaide River before he realised the chain on his bicycle was broken.

15:00 **That frantic?**

Yes well it was, you know it was a pretty desperate sort of a situation. The thing is I think that, you know there were stories of the Japanese landings in Singapore and the other places with the Japanese atrocities, you know those stories spread around. You know it just wasn't a good place to hand around.

15:30 **Well can you tell us what you came across when you actually arrived, you said you got the cattle train to Winnellie is that right?**

Yes.

**And what was the next step?**

Well anybody arriving we found, was put into Winnellie camp for about a fortnight, and I think the main reason there was they had these enormous toilets. There were about 14 holders with pits 14 feet deep. And the reason they dug them that deep is that flies don't go down that deep,

16:00 so it was a sanitary measure. But everybody got dysentery from drinking the different bore waters at every stop along the way up so there was hardly a vacant seat in those toilets. But after about a fortnight this sort of thing abated and then we were sent out to other places, and from there then after a fortnight we were sent out to take up those beach defences in those concrete pillboxes. And from Darwin

16:30 north around Lee Point and across Leanyer Swamp, and beyond Leanyer Swamp, so a distance of probably 15 miles, 20 miles perhaps, you know. And with our B Company and C Company about 250 men to guard the lot, expecting a minimum Japanese force of 20 thousand.

17:00 The Japanese didn't make a landing with forces less than 20,000, so.

**You laugh now but what was the thought at the time, what did you guys, what were you saying at the time?**

Well we also knew that the way the Japanese made a landing is their heavy cruiser stood off the beach five miles out and they pounded the landing position if there was any resistance then, with their big guns.

17:30 In the meantime the troops come up in their landing barges underneath the fire of the big guns and we were told that, "Your job is to delay them until reinforcements can be brought up." It would have been a short delay because you only had five minutes ammunition. I think our C Company had 30,000 rounds so if you divide that amongst a dozen machine guns at 600 rounds a minute, it's about four and a half minute's firing, you know, and

18:00 five minutes is not much of a delay for a landing force I don't think. So we did have some concerns about the situation, sort of hoped it wouldn't happen here.

**But how likely did it seem at that point?**

It seemed extremely likely. See before Darwin was raided, Singapore had just fallen and we had details of how

18:30 Singapore was taken and these reports were coming in, you know on army and defence force radio, and we heard about those. They used to be relayed to us. From our unit headquarters there were field telephone lines, strung out for miles and miles all along the way and that's how you kept

19:00 in touch with your own headquarters. For instance, we were about probably five or six miles from our own headquarters where we were on the beach, and what they used to do at headquarters is they'd round up all the news that come in and then they'd give each post a call and read out the news bulletins. Course only one person could listen to the telephone and then you had to relay it all to the rest

19:30 of them so it possibly got a bit garbled along the way, but it did keep us in touch with what was happening.

**So were you situated at these pillboxes or were you having to sort of dig your own?**

No initially we were in those pillboxes on the beach. The one I was in was, I was with 11 Troop. We had a pillbox near,

20:00 we had two pillboxes between Lee Point and Leanyer Creek. They've changed the name of Leanyer Creek these days. I've forgotten what the new name is, but this is on a line of the beach probably about a kilometre long stretching from Lee Point to the creek, and we had two pillboxes in that and what, about 40 men I suppose to guard

20:30 that kilometre of beach, big deal.

**With five minutes worth of ammo?**

Five minutes ammunition yeah.

**How was that situation explained to you or justified that, you know, obviously you all knew that was a bit ridiculous, I mean how did they get away with it?**

Well if anybody asked any of the officers, they'd say, "Well don't worry. Your reinforcements will be here when they're needed."

21:00 Course we didn't believe it. Nobody believed it, even the officers didn't believe it. But while we were out in those pillboxes on one occasion we had a, one occasion it caused us, a couple of occasions it caused us, gave us a good laugh. There were the artillery, you know fires over the heads of things, the forward troops

21:30 or the machine guns, that sort of thing, so the guns are always positioned behind and in the forward line they have an observation post. It's officially known as an artillery observation post. Now for Morse code that's a big name to transmit so it's abbreviated to AOP [Artillery Observation Post], RT Opip [Radio Telephone Observation Post]. So the 2/14th apparently decided they were going to

22:00 have a trial shoot at a target out in the beach out in front of us. The tide used to go out in that area about a mile. See the tides are about 25 feet basically, and there'd be a mile of sand out in front. They apparently organised targets out in the front and they were going to have a trial shoot. Anyway they'd decided that our pillboxes, we had no protection at all from the back. We had barbed wire across the front and the pillboxes of course were camouflaged with big

22:30 camouflage on them so they couldn't be seen from the air or whatever. And they decided it'd be better to put barbed wire behind the post too and a gate, so this was done in fairly short order. And guard was told, "Now there's going to be a new password every day and you don't let anybody in unless he knows the password." So one of the first fellers to come along was the artillery officer

23:00 and the guard said, "Hold on, you can't come in here." The guard, he said, "I've got to come in there." He said, "What's the password then?" He said, "I don't know any password." He said but I'm RT Opip, I've got to come in." "Look mate," he said, "I don't give a bugger what your name is. If you don't know the password, you can't come in." It's a great way to run a war so eventually, anyway he had to call the sergeant

23:30 and he called the lieutenant and they let him in. But there was another thing connected with this in the same sort of thing where when the 2/14th were trained here in Victoria they trained on new 25 pounder field guns. When they got to Darwin they were, they left all their guns behind in Victoria. When they got to Darwin they're given old 18 pounders, left over from the First World War

24:00 that the previous unit had there and some of these weren't in good condition. One had a tag on 'To be used for drill practise only'. And another one they didn't know was, you know you have a wheel that you turn to adjust the range or the traverse sideways, they didn't know that the wheel was slipping on the

24:30 shaft. Anyway the artillery officers decided, and the brigadier I believe, decided they would have this trial shoot so they all went up to the observation post up front and round the back they gave the feller the range. They set it up on the gun, not knowing that the wheel was slipping you see. They fired the first shell and it landed just short of the observation post,

25:00 and then they had to convince the top brass they didn't do it on purpose. But it caused a lot of embarrassment apparently, but we got a good laugh.

**So they were basically firing over your heads?**

Yeah they should have been, yes.

**So the observation post is actually still back of where you were?**

No the observation post was right in our lines, right on the beachfront but the way we were scattered around mostly. You see the fellers

25:30 in any sort of an action situation, the fellers were all in the close vicinity of the gun posts and not spread out around the beach so we weren't really in any danger, but those artillery officers got a big sort of a thrill for their money I bet.

**So the 2/14th was there for the similar purpose, that is the defence of Darwin?**

Yes.

26:00 **Right and they were there for the duration, for the, while the 19th was there, same sort of period?**

Well I don't remember the exact time the 19th were there. We were there for two years, without any leave by the way, and the 2/14th I don't know when they left, whether they moved, when they moved.

26:30 See everybody was sort of kept incommunicado. They didn't even tell you what the other companies in your own unit were doing. Tell them nothing like mushrooms, you know keep them in the dark and feed them the appropriate sort of feed, horse shit they say.

**And you're supposed to just trust their decision making.**

Yeah.

**The fact that they might have, the reinforcements would come...**

Yeah, you've got to put a great deal of faith

27:00 in your officers but of course they weren't getting the support from army headquarters and that was the problem. You couldn't complain about our officers. They did the best they could under the

circumstances, but if they don't get the backup from brigade and the division.... There's a lot of rehashing of the situation went on after that first raid and, you know they gradually reorganised it

27:30 and so they took us back off those beach defences and reckoned we'd be a lot better around the RAAF on ground defences in case there's a paratroops attack on the airfield, which is absolutely right of course.

**Well before we get there, can you sort of describe to us the first emplacement, the pillbox there, sort of lay of the land and how many of you would have been working at the gun there and just basically how things operated?**

28:00 Well each pillbox had two Vickers gun in it and each Vickers gun has a crew of six so there would have been 12 fellers in the actual box, and there were two of those, which made 24 for our platoon and we had a total of about 40 men I think altogether, in a fully staffed platoon. So the others, outside of those there are, there's a lieutenant.

28:30 It can be a captain on some, in some companies, several sergeants, NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers], etcetera that don't actually take any part in the gun crews so these all add up overall, to about 40 over the two pillboxes that we had with the four guns.

**And in terms of, you were talking about communication or lack thereof**

29:00 **with headquarters, you were there 24 hours were you, would you be sleeping...?**

Yes we rigged tent flies. We had to cut a patch in the scrub. That area at the time was all rainforest and if you cut a tree down and we had to cut down a number of trees, to log sections off the track, we cut through the bush to get access.

29:30 Because if you cut a tree down you had to cut the creepers off the top before it would fall over. It's all overgrown there and mosquitoes, there were millions of mosquitoes, the ideal breeding ground for them in there; and spiders as big as a man's hand, big red and black ones, frightening sort of things, particularly if you walked into one in the semi darkness. Scorpions, they get to about six inches I s'pose,

30:00 long there, with a great, you know... One of those walks across in the lamp light at night, makes you very wary about sleeping on the ground; and centipedes they get to an enormous size there. They were nasty because scorpions for instance wouldn't climb up into, if you had your bed suspended, cause a scorpion wouldn't climb up, but centipedes were doing it all the time.

30:30 But my brother Alan, we had guard duty, you had two hours on and four hours off. This went on as a continual thing so if you happened to get the, you know the ten till twelve at night and you had to be up for the four to six in the morning, you didn't get a lot of sleep. But Alan had got up for guard duty one night and put on his steel helmet and it had one of those dirty centipedes

31:00 in it. He had a very sore head for a few days.

**What sort of, I'm assuming you'd be getting supplies brought in on a regular basis, what sort of contact was there with?**

Well we had, our own units would go to the supply depots and pick up what supplies there were, but at that stage there was very little food. We all lost a lot of weight

31:30 but, you know mostly around in shorts and, you know socks and boots sort of thing, you could count the ribs on any of them. And if a fellow didn't lose any weight you wondered where he was nicking the food. But it was all an education I suppose.

**What was, that early period when**

32:00 **you just got there, what was the morale like?**

That was pretty good. I mean everybody took the attitude, you know that we were there to do a job and we were going to do it and no problem in that regard. The air force fellers had problems, you know, there was stories about desertion, mass desertion

32:30 and it's all garbage. Anybody deserted, you know in those days were court martialled and the penalty was 'shot'. But if you looked up the army records, there are no records, or the air force records, there's no records of anybody being charged with desertion, and they would have been if it actually happened. But when the first raid came, the aerodrome of course was a prime target and they were told to get off the

33:00 aerodrome into the bush to the south which they did, and then after this is translated as being deserted. But one of the fellows from 2 Squadron, Richard Overhugh from Western Australia, is still with us, he wasn't there on the first day of the raid but he was on, he came in from Port Moresby the next morning and he said operation of the aerodrome was absolutely as normal. They'd filled in all the holes and

33:30 everything was operating again, didn't have much to operate with. Any of the Lockheed Hudson's like Dick was flying, they were on the ground in the hangars and all got wiped out. But, you know there's been a lot of garbage. There was also stories about looting, you know, and they branded everybody who

served in Darwin as a

34:00 looter or a deserter or something, you know which is really not a fair crack at all because the looting was done mainly by members of the military police who had been there on service for some months, you see and they took… There's scoundrels in all services, and there's about a dozen or so of them that really gave everybody a bad name. But

34:30 see there were about 12 and a half thousand of other service personnel who weren't even in Darwin at the time and they couldn't have looted everything. They weren't there, because in a red alert everybody has to stick to his own position, his own gun position, whatever, so the red alert wasn't ever really taken off after the first raid. But, you know

35:00 that's another dirty trick the government pulled on us at the time. They held this Royal Commission into what happened at Darwin and they laid all the blame directly on the people who served there. In fact they didn't have ammunition, that sort of thing. They had to have somebody to blame apart from politicians, and they got their politicians out of it and blamed the service personnel, you know, which is a dirty trick.

35:30 **So I was thinking mate just a couple of more questions, and obviously that first raid is a very important event, we need to get that told in as much detail as possible, maybe on the next tape. Just a couple of more questions about the set up there before the raid started. You mentioned, I mean Darwin at that point, was a very small town really, did you ever get into, while you were manning the pillboxes, was**

36:00 **leave ever given that you could get away or were you there seven days?**

I only got in once before and the one thing I remember about that is, at night time and the place was blacked out, and there was a place serving hamburgers which consisted of one slice of bread, a slather of tomato sauce and a rissole

36:30 perched on top, and this is all handed out through a little lighted door in the front of the café. Anyway I paid my money. I took my hamburger and I stepped back and the rissole fell off into the dirt so I finished up with a slice of bread and tomato sauce.

**Was that still better than the food you were getting at camp?**

It was, yes although we were getting some bread and tomato sauce back in camp.

37:00 But apart from that, you know I don't remember much about it because, well I just wasn't there. Shortly after the first raid I did go in with a party for some reason or other and I took a photograph of the harbour, as close as I could get to the damage to the wharf, which on a Box Brownie was, you know, wasn't really a good shot

37:30 but it was a record.

**Have you still got that photo?**

I've still got it yeah. Yes I was one of the few fellows, I think in our company there were only two of us had cameras - myself and a fellow called Reg Mitchell, and we took quite a few up until somebody decided, "This is a breach of security," so we were told we had to…

38:00 It would have been some time towards the end of April, anybody who had a camera had to send it home, if not it'd be confiscated, and one feller in another unit, a sergeant hid his in his kitbag and was found and next day he was a private.

**What rank were you at that point?**

38:30 Private or driver but actually I was a Bren gun driver. I didn't have a Bren gun carrier so I was a private. And at the time we were on the coast there I was designated as scout, and in a machine gun unit the scout has to have some mathematical ability. But it's a

39:00 means of, well if you haven't got a proper range finder, finding the range of a target, the scout has to find the targets, get an estimate of the range, and to do that the only equipment needed are a compass and a piece of paper and a pencil and a protractor so you took a bearing on the

39:30 target from your first position and you marked it on your drawing. You moved a hundred yards or 200 yards either right or left across the base of the triangle and you took another bearing and you marked that out to scale on your drawing and then measured off the scale, and then direct line to the target and you had an approximate range of the target. The next procedure then was

40:00 the gunner fired, he set the sights to what you said the range was and he fired a short burst of, I think six, eight, ten rounds and watched where they hit then you might have to go up one degree or right two degrees, whatever, to correct it and that was then passed to all the guns.

**And were you ever able to sort of, was there live firing practise while you were on the coast there?**

40:30 No, not a round. The artillery were the only ones that tried it. We just wouldn't want to waste any of what we had, there wasn't enough.

**Can you tell us about some of the guys that were in where you were working in that box, was your brother actually working along beside you?**

Yes he was a despatch rider so

41:00 he was moving around. He had an English, the issued bikes were the English Nortons and flat out I think they, full speed, they could do about 40 miles an hour, but he would then take, you know messages from unit to headquarters or wherever headquarters sent him. But we had a, one of the other despatch riders a fellow Ernie McMullen

41:30 who, when he got excited he spoke very quickly like a rattle of gunfire and he, one night on, if you're looking at the beach, straight north of course, it's 360 degrees on the compass. And one night there was a strange light and in these conditions we were told to immediately get on the phone and telephone headquarters. So there was this light

42:00 coming in from 360 degrees, so then he grabbed the telephone...

# Tape 5

00:43 **Actually you were telling us a story if you remember, last time?**

Yes about Ernie McMullen who was a despatch rider, in brief a Don R [Despatch Rider]. See in Morse code you,

01:00 names are kept to a minimum and the despatch rider would just be DR. It was called Don R, which is vital to the story. Ernie McMullen was a Don R and on guard duty, at about two o'clock one morning on the beach, course out to the north is all sea and on a compass bearing, 360 is due north, and a Qantas flying boat, one of those four engine Sunderlands

01:30 was coming in and he didn't know the radio frequencies apparently, or they wouldn't answer him cause they're suspicious of Japs coming in, so he turned on his landing lights miles and miles out so the ack-ack [anti aircraft] wouldn't open up on him. And Ernie, on guard on the beach, saw this light coming in so the instructions were immediately call headquarters and report it.

02:00 And on the other end of the line at headquarters was major, the adjutant, forgotten his name for the moment, I'll get back to it anyway. You woke him up at two o'clock in the morning, he's usually pretty curt and cranky. Anyway Ernie said, "Sir there's a strange light at three six zero." "Did you go and investigate it?" "No sir, it's at three six zero." "Well why the bloody hell didn't you

02:30 go and investigate it?" And he said, "Sir, I'm a bloody Don R, not a Donald bloody Duck." And from thereon I think the major was wide awake, but by that time of course, the flying boat had approached. It was almost in Darwin. Nothing like being alert is it?

**So how long was it, how long had you been in Darwin up at Lee Point,**

03:00 **before that first raid?**

It would have been about a month thereabouts, three and a half to four weeks. The raid came on the 19th of February, and yeah so it'd be probably about three weeks. And then we were worried about, you know we didn't have any fire planes and

03:30 no air force, and we kept being told, "They'll be here when we need them." And then this day we saw these big flights of planes coming in so we said, "Jesus look at our air force." And I said, "Don't be bloody stupid, they're Japs." With better eyesight he could see the red circles on them and then, you know, hell really broke loose then. They started,

04:00 in the first attack there were 188 aircraft the Japs had and they just blasted anything that moved. And we were on the perimeter of course, we could see them and hear them even though it was 10 miles away, but you know, there was nothing we could do about it.

**What direction were they coming from?**

They varied it. They came in, in big

04:30 flights and then some squadrons apparently broke away and approached their targets. They had it all planned out. They approached their targets from different directions. And, you know if you had Sydney or Melbourne aircraft, if they get half a dozen in a circuit at the one time they get terribly excited. Those Japs had 188 in the area there. There were no collisions or anything like that, you know it was all perfectly well coordinated. You had to

05:00 admire their organisation in that regard.

**And how low were they flying?**

Some of them went so low you could see the pilot smiling, you know right down. And they, for strafing, they have to get down to a low level to be effective and otherwise

05:30 if they, you know diving at the ground, all the fire just goes into a small area of the ground so they usually get down above treetop height and let fly, which is almost what happened at Lee Point. We had two gun posts and my position was at

06:00 the one nearest to Leanyer Creek and the other one gun post was probably half a kilometre towards Lee Point and when the red alert was given, everybody had to get back to their set position. I was at the wrong one so I had to leg it back through the scrub to get back to the correct gun position, and I was about half way there and running along the track through the scrub… And then

06:30 there's a Major Pell, one of the American pilots who was trapped there that day. You know they had ten Kittyhawks they were to take to Java I think, and they were halfway across the Timor Sea that morning, halfway to Java and they got a message it had fallen and they were to come back to Darwin. So they were just coming in and landing when the Japs arrived, out of fuel of course they were.

07:00 So anyway, Major Pell had landed and he took off again to the north and he swung out over, he passed over Lee Point and was swinging around to the right and a Japanese Zero dived on him and opened up, and that was my first real shock in the firing line because he was right in line with me when he fired, and if you get about six machine guns

07:30 whistling through the leaves above your head, and I flattened down. I reckoned I was about as thick as a sheet of cardboard, but…

**Were you in the bushland?**

Yes, we had a track cut through the bush to get access from one post to the other and I was, you know running along that track at the time.

08:00 You know you hear on the movies they talk about bullets whistling passed. You don't hear a whistle at all from a bullet but you hear a crack if it goes through a leaf or a twig, or anything like that. It's just a spat sort of noise but when you get a lot of them, you know it makes quite a noise.

**So the Zero was kind of above Major Pell's**

08:30 **plane, Kittyhawk?**

Yes, he was further to the north and above it and he dived on it and Major Pell was badly hit and he was making, he swung around to the right so he could land, make a false landing, and he actually put it down in the area of our A Company lines. And when he was on the ground, the Jap followed him in and machined him on the ground to make sure they got him.

09:00 But some of our A Company fellers were there to remove the remains, a pretty gruesome business.

**So was anyone else in the company, you know, were there other injuries or other damage along there?**

Not to us, although our headquarters company was right in Darwin

09:30 at that time, and they had those Hotchkiss guns mounted near the oil tanks in Darwin and one of the fellows, Max Grant, was crowded with a parcel, killed that day. He got a lot of shots in from his position there and his mates reckoned he got it.

10:00 But about half a dozen other gunners also had a shot at it and it was, you know a group action. But on that day too the first Military Medal awarded in Australia for service in Australia, was awarded to Darkie Hudson, an Aboriginal who was a member of a unit in there.

10:30 He had an old Lewis machine gun, left over from the First War and he couldn't, he didn't have an anti-aircraft mounting. You know the Lewis gun has only got two short legs in the front about six inches long, so you fired lying flat on the ground. So he dragged it out and he got a 44-gallon oil drum and he stuck it up on that and had a go and didn't sit back in a trench or anything like that. He really got out and had a go for which he was given a Military Medal.

11:00 He's still living in Sydney.

**Yeah? I hadn't heard of him.**

No he doesn't get a lot of publicity. I don't think he wants it really but.

**So you had to throw yourself on the ground and take cover.**

Yeah.

**And then what did you do?**

Well the thing got passed us fairly quickly and I had to get up then and sprint on back to where I was going in the first place,

11:30 but…

**You were on your own?**

Yes, I was there cause the other fellows were all back at their posts. I was just in the wrong one at the wrong time. But the other fellow, the headquarters fellows were the only ones, I think, of ours that got a shot at the Japs that day because we

12:00 couldn't, you know, in those concrete pillboxes, we just couldn't raise the guns high enough, and most of the action anyway, below flying action, was over Darwin in the harbour. They were dive bombing and strafing there and then. You know that went on for about 40 minutes. They all departed and everything was quiet again for a while and then about half an hour

12:30 later the second wave came – 54 heavy bombers – and they blasted the airport again.

**So you were still there on the beach at Lee Point?**

Yeah and it wasn't, I think for probably a couple of weeks after that and they decided that it was, you know those positions

13:00 were useless so they moved us into defence positions around the RAAF aerodrome, just thinking if the Japs were coming they'd put paratroopers in there, and we had to be ready for them so, which was, you know took us right in on the target area. And the raids, after the first raid the raids came, you know every

13:30 two or three days. I think there were about six in ten days if I remember rightly. And it wasn't a dull existence, like it culminated in, as far as we were concerned anyway, our C Company position was close to where the Americans had their Kittyhawks parked. The American

14:00 49 fighter group sent Kittyhawk fighters. They were the first we had after the first raid and they arrived there on the 17th of March, and then we were in positions around to, you know stop any damage in that area with paratroops, whatever. And on the 25th of March, oh there was a classic raid on,

14:30 it was Easter Sunday anyway. The Japs loved to raid on a Christian festival day, one of our special days. They'd put on a real turn and they came over with seven bombers and fighter cover on Easter Sunday, but the Americans were there and our heavy ack-ack, the big three point seven guns had probably one of the best fluke shots ever recorded in the history of World War II. The

15:00 bombers used to come in about 20 to 22,000 feet, varying, which is, you know about five miles up, four miles anyway. And on this day they were coming in and the ack-ack guns of course had range finders and the fellow with the range finder would call the range to the man who set the cap on the end of the shell which determines what height the shell will explode at.

15:30 And this one feller's job is to just slip a little gadget on the end of the shell and turn it to the required thing so the fellow on the range finder called out, "22,000 feet!" And the fellow setting the gadget, and I know he set it at 20,200 and they fired the first burst, four shells and put it right in the middle of those seven Jap bombers. Three of them were on fire with the first burst, and then the Kittyhawks were

16:00 coming in and then once the fighters start, they turn off the ack-acks cause you don't want to, you know kill your own planes so the, I think the call sign was "Tallyho." It means that the gunners stop and the Americans finished them off. The last bomber was heading out to sea and smoking

16:30 and the other six had gone and of the fighters, I don't remember how many Zero fighters they had with them for cover, but there were only three left and I think it must have been a matter of pride for them, "Don't go home without the bombers." So they came down in a strafing run on the RAAF aerodrome, one after the other and the Americans had point five Browning guns, machine guns, pretty

17:00 powerful things. They opened up on those and they fixed those three Zeros. But there were three Kittyhawk pilots and in the excitement of the moment they were told, "Don't ever fly over your own aerodrome in an air raid," but they did. They followed these Japs down so those gunners got three Zeros and three Kittyhawks. One of the Kittyhawk pilots died. The other

17:30 two survived, but bad news.

**How much could you see from your position at Lee Point, those first couple of raids?**

Well if you imagine you're sort of out on open ground about 10 miles away from Tullamarine, you see the aeroplanes taking off and landing, all that sort of thing. That's the sort of thing we could see from there. Exactly the same if you

18:00 look across the bay here when there's planes landing at Avalon. We can see them. It's about the same

distance, so you can sort of see them but, you know, not in close up detail.

**What could you hear?**

Well, in the distance actually the ground shook, you know when the [MV] Neptuna exploded, the ship that was tied up to the wharf. It had

18:30 a freight load of 200 tons of depth charges on it, and it caught fire and they went off and that's what blew about 70 feet out of the wharf, and that was one hell of a bang. Those sort of sounds would, you know drift across. But the worst one I think, in my book anyway, was

19:00 on Anzac Day in 1942. We'd just dug that hole to put the Bren gun carrier down in and camouflage it over the top with branches and that sort of thing, so it couldn't be seen from the air, and 24 Jap bombers came in and they split up in three groups of eight and they pattern bombed the area, and I don't know, possibly they were

19:30 using anti personnel bombers, the majority, so they were probably trying to wipe out those Kittyhawks in the dispersal raid but they missed them. And where we were, there were about 120 of us in an area, I s'pose about as big as a football ground and the surrounds, and on that area they dropped 84 bombs. That was a hell of a noise I can tell you.

20:00 **So where were you when the raid was going on?**

I was in a trench next to the Bren gun carrier and the nearest bomb hit six yards from where we were in the trench, and another one ten yards the other side of it. And the pain in your ears and the blast and that sort of thing, it's got to be experienced…

**Did you say six yards away?**

Yeah.

**How big were the bombs?**

The bombs were

20:30 50 kilogram, daisy-cutters. They have a, these anti-personnel bombs, they put a rod on the nose something like, you know the single rod of your tripod so that the rod hits and the bomb explodes above ground level, you see, and all the shrapnel then gets loaded. It's got two shells. It's got the core of where the explosion was in, in the centre, and then between that and

21:00 the outer shell, it's filled with shrapnel and that shrapnel blasts out in all directions. And the shrapnel is all sorts of stuff, very interesting some of us picked up, cause it came from Australia. There were nuts and bolts - the S for Singer, you know, Singer sewing machines. They always had an S on the head of the bolt. There were Ajax for McPherson's manufactured bolts in Australia,

21:30 the Ajax brand, and MH, Massey Harris, you know, the machinery manufacturer at Sunshine there. And, you know there was one, no you wouldn't remember, but just before, when Bob Menzies was still prime minister, just before the war

22:00 he approved export of scrap iron to Japan and the unions opposed it very strongly and they called him Pig Iron Bob. Anyway we got it back. I think one of the luckiest fellows is one of the fellows, Tom Harris, had one hit

22:30 only three feet from his trench and he and the two others in the trench got half buried, and unconscious of course. He was in a coma for about three days but he recovered, and he's still going, but he told the story that when he woke up in the hospital, his eardrums had gone of course so he's in the world of silence, and he started, his vision

23:00 started coming back, could see these white figures floating around, the nurses. "God," he said, "they must be angels. I really bought it this time." But he recovered and he wears hearing aids now, but he's, you know he's all right. The other two fellers who were in the trench with him at the time have passed on since. I don't know whether there was anything, you know, had that experience. But when you, you know there's some training

23:30 too on even how you get into a slit trench, in that you're told to squat down on your haunches. You don't sit flat down on your bottom because if your legs get buried you can't get up but if you squat on your haunches you can push yourself up. You don't put your back against the side of the trench because the tremor can dislocate your spine, and the third thing is that you put two fingers between your teeth.

24:00 When the blast comes it equals the pressure inside and outside and in most cases it will save your eardrums. It certainly saved mine and the other fellers. It was only Tom Harris and the two fellers with him that had any damage to their eardrum. And it was pretty remarkable, almost miraculous to think that all those bombs dropped between our trenches.

**Yeah that's extraordinary. Did you get any shrapnel**

24:30 **coming into the trench?**

No, see it blasts sideways, and you know the story about pull your head in? We did. You've got to do, and you keep your steel helmet on too because steel helmets aren't bullet proof by any means. But when there's anti aircraft fire going on those shells they send up, they break up into shrapnel and have to come to earth

25:00 and you hear it falling. And actually, I never heard of anybody actually got hit by it but it's a good thing to keep your helmet on just the same.

**And what damage did it do once it... so the bomb drops on the rod and the rod plunges into the earth, is that right, and then it explodes?**

No, with the daisy cutters, the anti personnel bombs, the rod on the nose is

25:30 about four feet long and it fires as soon as the tip of the rod touches the ground, so in that time those daisy cutters actually explode above ground level and blast sideways. Now there's one that didn't go off, left a neat round hole about eight inches in diameter, 14 feet deep, and the

26:00 bomb disposal squad was supposed to dig it out with wood shovels but they're still there.

**So it went straight down?**

Yeah.

**Right.**

And must have been softish ground. It hit a rock about halfway down or something, deviated a few degrees but the hole was fourteen feet, they measured.

**And only eight inches...**

Eight inches in diameter, yeah, just a neat round hole it left. I'd reckon there's probably a few like that around Darwin. I mean who's

26:30 going to dig them out by hand. But I know that night after the raid there was, everybody was sort of stunned, you know and we were standing around to get our meal at tea time, not a word being spoken and one fellow said,

27:00 "I could see we're going to cop it," he said, "and I thought I ought to pray." He said, "I couldn't remember anything. All I could remember," he said, "is what Dad used to say at mealtime." He said, "For what we are about to receive Lord, make us truly thankful."

27:30 **So that day of the first raid, and you were over at the other post there, what were you doing there? You said you delivered a message.**

No, I don't remember, no that's one of those details I just don't remember what I was doing there.

**And so when you got back to your post, what did you do then?**

Well we just

28:00 had to stay there and wait to see if anybody came our way so we could shoot them, but they didn't.

**With the Vickers?**

Yeah there was nothing on the beach in front of us, even the fellow that shot Major Pell, he was too high up, you couldn't, you know couldn't get enough angle.

**How low would the Zero have to come for you to be able to have a chance of hitting**

28:30 **it?**

Well the procedure was you watch and they come in range probably about five hundred yards, I s'pose would be about the optimum. And depending on the angle they're coming at, you allow a lead on the front, they reckon a quick estimate is hold your hand out in front and spread your fingers. That's about 15 degrees,

29:00 and that's about right. You start shooting that far ahead of it.

**So what you were expecting to happen happened, but still took you by surprise.**

What the raid? Well it was. The size of it and that was, you know really surprising. Now considering that they'd, Singapore had only fallen a few days before, about four days before I think, you'd have thought the Japs

29:30 would have had plenty else to do. But, you know they must have had tremendous forces. They had a total armed forces of 9.1 million Japan did. We had about 936,000 so we were outnumbered about nine to one if we were left on the road, so we can thank the Americans for keeping us out of it there.

**And with the second raid, the bombers,**

30:00 **did that surprise you?**

No, I don't think anything would have surprised us much after that, you know you get to a stage where you just watch and wait and take it as it comes. We did have one incident though. When we first moved into the aerodrome,

30:30 we were all allocated positions and everybody set to digging their slit trenches, and I mentioned to you earlier about Jiker Philmore, the big, brawny bloke. He dug his trench and the major said, "We've got to disperse them wider apart." He said, "You and you and you, you take your trench over to such and such a place." And Jiker was cranky. He said, "I am not going to dig another slit trench as long as I

31:00 bloody well live." So the major shrugged and left him to it. And the next day we're lined up for lunch. It was fairly cloudy and bombs started to drop about half a mile away from us, on the airport, never got a sign that anything was coming. Anyway, everybody was off then to action stations again and eventually an hour or so later when it all calmed down, we came back for lunch, Jiker was

31:30 missing. Someone said, "What happened to Jiker?" And one of his mates said, "Oh he's all right. He's just finishing his new slit trench." So his resolution to not dig another one didn't last all that long.

**So what happened the day after the first raid, what did you do?**

Well, we just had to stay where we were because they were expecting an invasion you see, so we just had to stay, wait.

32:00 **Had you received any news about what had happened in the town?**

Yes, one bit. I know I was on the telephone, would have been perhaps two days after the event, and the one item I remembered was that 'Army intelligence estimates the number killed to be about 11 hundred'. Now down

32:30 south the air minister released to the news, to the media, "An attack on Darwin, 15 killed and 24 injured." And an American said, "Well they lost 91 in the USS Peary that went down on the harbour." So it looked like the Australian government was lying in their teeth. So they amended it eventually to 242, but the unofficial estimate

33:00 like the army intelligence estimate was never published. And the mayor of Darwin, Jack Burton, he stayed on there right through the war too, he kept records for, you know damage payment to private people. He kept records of all that sort of thing so he stayed there, but he estimated the number killed to be about 900. So nobody will ever know how many it was,

33:30 but there were truckloads of bodies carted off to Mendel Beach and buried in the sand there. One fellow said he counted 300 bodies in the one grave, and there was another one further along. He said he didn't even look in that.

**These were civilians or….?**

Yeah, unidentified. And afterwards, anyone who enquired, "My brother Jack, he was there. What happened

34:00 to him?" "Oh he was killed in an accident." Certainly some accident but they didn't ever, you know publish the news that these people were actually killed in the raid. The civilians, you see the army personnel all had their trenches and that sort of thing, but the civilians had nothing and anything the Japs saw move, they machine gunned them.

**So why**

34:30 **were civilians allowed to be so unprepared for it? There were, did you say 12 thousand troops in Darwin?**

No, there were about 12 and a half thousand service personnel but there was still about 2,000 civilians there at the time, and I suppose a lot of those would have been the normal civilian population, you know plus some of the itinerant workers that still hadn't been evacuated. But one lady,

35:00 Violet's her first name. I know she lives in Western Australia. She was a schoolgirl and she was evacuated and her father stayed behind and he was killed in the raid, and she was sent somewhere in Western Australia. And she told some of her friends at school and they wanted to know, you know, "Where's your father gone?" or something. "My father was killed in an raid up there." She was hauled into the teacher's office and said, "You mustn't make up

35:30 stories and tell lies like that," so.

**So you don't think the secrecy was justified as…**

No way.

**Military intelligence?**

No. They should have done what, you know what the Americans did about Pearl Harbour. Tell the world about it and what an atrocity it was. And the thing about

36:00 Darwin too is, you know Pearl Harbour, everybody knows about Pearl Harbour, but on Darwin there were more than twice as many bombs dropped on Darwin as there were on Pearl Harbour – never got a mention, they just hushed it all up. Bad news I think, that sort of government. They said they didn't want the Australian public to panic. But if they'd have known what was going on they, you know

36:30 I think they would have, you know done what they could have about it.

**Now you said it wasn't until the middle of March before any semblance of an air force arrived, the Americans arrived with the Kittyhawks.**

17th of March, yes.

**So it took about a month.**

Yeah.

**What other reinforcements were there during that month?**

Nothing, nothing at all.

37:00 See they had that Brisbane Line policy, and they reckoned in the event of an attack they would abandon all north of that Brisbane line, which meant from Brisbane to Adelaide, and just defend the rest of Australia. So after the attack they expected the Japs to overrun Darwin at any time and it'd be a waste of money sending up supplies up there and just losing them, so they didn't send any. So nothing

37:30 until the Japanese arrived and General MacArthur had some stern words to say to the Australian politicians and put a bit of backbone into them. I think we'd have to credit MacArthur with that, tell them, you know, "Get up there and fight." And then things started to improve but there's still another

38:00 couple of, three months I s'pose before the food rations and that started to improve.

**So what about supplies during that time, ammunition?**

Nothing, no just had to make do with what we had, which wasn't much.

**The five minutes' worth.**

Five minutes, yeah.

38:30 **And food, what were you eating?**

Well, we had bully beef, dried biscuits. We used to call them dog biscuits and there was canned stew. These days they sell it in the supermarket as meat and veg. It was M and V we called it and that was, you know the

39:00 first two or three times you could eat it, but after that it was really nauseating. And I think there was a lot of it thrown out that was never eaten. And there were no fruit or fresh veggies or anything like that, so it wasn't long before we started to get tropical ulcers, no vitamin C you see. And I know I had eight on my legs. Some of them had big nasty ones, you know, if you got a scratch or anything it'd go ulcerous and just wouldn't heal.

39:30 But that went on, well for a couple of years, there were no fresh veggies in Darwin, you know. If they'd just given us, you know some vitamin supplements or something like that.

**So there were no gardens, no vegetable gardens?**

No, they started, in 1943 they started building

40:00 a garden down at Adelaide River but it was right at the end of '43 before anything started to grow. And then it wasn't nearly enough to, you know provide, if you've got 60,000 troops there, it takes an awful lot of veggies doesn't it. But I did get a taste of the first watermelon grown on that farm.

**How'd you**

40:30 **manage that?**

Well, it was just a matter of being in the right place I think. I was in a tent at Adelaide River and a fellow came along and then he walked right around the tent twice before he came in. He wanted to see who was there, came in and he had this watermelon. He said, "It's the first one out there and," he said, "I've been watching it for weeks." And it was beautiful.

41:00 I mean normally it would have gone to the officers' mess but that one didn't.

**A little coup.**

# Tape 6

00:36 If you've read anything of Robert Raynor's, you know Robert Raynor's written a couple of books. His father was a member of the Darwin Infantry Battalion. That's why I think Robert got such a great interest in it.

**I haven't read his books I don't think. So you were saying before there was some confusion between you and the Darwin Infantry Battalion?**

It was nothing that affected us there at

01:00 the time but in army records afterwards when somebody was hunting for the information on the 19th, they'd go to the battalion instead of the regiment and so on. And even later when our 19th Machine Gun Regiment was changed, fellers all joined the AIF so it then became a battalion so it was the 19th Infantry Battalion, then the 19th Machine Gun Battalion.

01:30 And they were both the 19th and I think there was some confusion at times on the 19th. Robert Raynor found some of that when he was doing his researches.

**You did talk before about the posts, the different gun posts that were set up around Darwin Harbour, didn't you?**

Yeah.

**That it was fairly well fortified?**

Yes, they had big nine inch and six

02:00 inch guns mounted around the harbour. It took them a long time and many tons of concrete to get them all in place and they never fired a shot in anger, and after the war they were cut up for scrap and taken to Japan and melted down.

**So they weren't fired during the raid.**

No, they never got fired at all in anger,

02:30 none of that heavy artillery.

**Where were the gunners?**

They were in their gun posts, but see the Japs didn't come into the harbour. But the guns, we only had our own ships in the harbour but there were about 45 ships in the harbour at the time of the first raid and they made a marvellous target for the Japanese, even the hospital ship

03:00 the [HMAS] Manunda got hit, but I think there were a dozen or so people killed on the Manunda on the hospital ship. But the Peary of course, that was really bad. They sank the American destroyer, USS Peary, caught fire and sank. It's still in the harbour and they won't have any salvage or anything on that.

03:30 They did recover one of the guns a couple of years ago and they mounted it up on the harbour in Darwin, facing out over the harbour as a memorial, but 91 killed on the Peary at the time.

04:00 **So you continued to watch at the post at Lee Point for three weeks.**

Yeah, expecting an invasion any time. About three o'clock one morning we got a message, "There's enemy ships standing seven miles off." So we thought this was it, but actually on Lee Point there was nobody

04:30 at Lee Point to actually watch. It was a big area there, about a kilometre, with not a soul on it so somebody had to go and keep watch out there so that fell to Les Sudoltz and myself, and Les was a sergeant and he maintained, he said, "Sergeants shouldn't have to do guard duty." So he never would, so he'd never done this sort of thing before, and we walked down through this

05:00 narrow roadway we'd cut through to Lee Point. On the way there was a shallow creek crossing and for those sort of operations of course you wear sneakers and you move very, very quietly, is what we were doing. And I was on the sort of the left hand wheel track and he was on the right and I got within

05:30 about three feet of a kangaroo, didn't see it of course. It's pitch dark, no starlight even with the overhanging branches and the kangaroo jumped out into the water, splash, one hell of a fright and I says, "Jesus don't shoot, it's a bloody kangaroo." And I thought well Jesus must have heard him, he didn't shoot, but I nearly did. But we went on further and Lee Point,

06:00 and we sat out there on the dunes and we just watched and waited. Nothing happened but coming over the eastern horizon was the morning star and Les says, "It's a light." I said, "It's the morning star." "No bloody fear," he said, "it's moving." But, you know if you stare at a light like that it appears to move and anyway we just watched and waited

06:30 and stayed there, nothing happened. But I saw Les at a reunion only a couple of weeks ago, bit longer, 21st of February, yeah and Les says, “Gees do you remember that morning star?” Yeah. But, you know that was the sort of thing.

07:00 You live with your nerves.

**And what about the ships?**

When daylight came they were gone, nothing there. We don’t know who they were or what they were doing there.

**But you think there was a ship there?**

There was definitely a ship there, a ship reported, even nearest position seven miles out but it was gone in the morning, thank God.

07:30 We didn’t want him.

**Kangaroos, you didn’t shoot kangaroos and eat them?**

No, we should have. Worried too about fishing because we were all fellows from the south and some of the fish up there are poisonous and we didn’t know which was which, so there’s a risk there. But eventually

08:00 some of them in B Company anyway, they put a netting, V shaped netting out over the beach so when the tide come and covered it and trapped a few fish in it, but I never saw any of those. I mean B Company stuck with those.

**Well that would have been a treat after M and V?**

Yeah. They did,

08:30 round about New Year’s Day in 1943 it would have been, they sent out a party fishing. They organised it. They rounded up all the camouflage that they could find and some Aboriginals to help, and they ran a net through one of the lagoons and they got enough fish there, barramundi, you know to feed the whole regiment.

09:00 One meal anyway, but there wasn’t enough of it.

**So tell me about when you were given your instructions to move to the aerodrome?**

All that would have happened would have been, sergeant would have said, “Hey you blokes, we’re moving today.” And that’s all there would have been to it. I mean

09:30 there was no, these days, you know people say, “You must have public consultation,” never heard of in those days. I don’t think it was even in the dictionary in those days.

**What was entailed in moving, you packed up the whole camp and…?**

Yeah well we didn’t have a lot to pack up because every man had his own gear and kit and he just, everybody took his own stuff and into the back of the trucks and away you went.

10:00 We used to have, at times, in other camps, they’d put on an emergency move. It was, on one occasion they gave a general alarm some time early in the early hours of the morning and everybody out. You take your own gear, strip your tent, everything into the trucks and gone. And they

10:30 gave a prize, something of a booby prize, the ones that were the quickest. And my brother Alan was in that lot so they were out in the trucks in four minutes, everything. And of course, when they came back then all tents had to be erected and all that sort of thing. Alan’s lot didn’t have to bother. They never pulled theirs down. They left their tent and the gear behind. They reckoned, “This is a false alarm,

11:00 it has to be.” So, but I mean they knew and the officers didn’t apparently. That was all right but those sort of things, like you had to be ready to move out any time and it doesn’t take long.

**You didn’t have the Bren guns or carriers did you,**

11:30 **you didn’t have the Bren gun carriers up there?**

We got them, when we went to the aerodrome we got the carriers and I was a Bren gun carrier driver, with a carrier then, which was a big turn up. But then only had it a few weeks and it got bombed and there was never a replacement see, so I was back in the PBI then, the Poor Bloody Infantry, walking.

12:00 But after a time when a truck became available, I became a driver again, truck driver. But the army’s very particular about who drives their trucks, you know, your driver has a truck allocated to him. He’s responsible for that truck and all the maintenance for it and that sort of thing, and nobody else is allowed to drive it and you don’t have a co-driver or anything like that. It’s your truck. You drive it and you’re responsible for it.

12:30 **So did you drive up through Darwin town?**

Not at that stage, saw very little of the Darwin town. It was, there were no normal functions going on, you know and there's nothing to see. There were no picture shows or anything like that, all that was closed down. All the civilians

13:00 were gone, you know, bar a few, like Jack Burton the mayor and it was just another military establishment.

**But after these raids, it would have been a bit of a mess?**

Yes, and it stayed that way for a long time too. Most of it stayed that way till the end of the war before it was cleaned up. The only cleaning up done was what was absolutely essential.

13:30 **So was that the first time you saw it, when you moved down to the aerodrome?**

I don't remember. We didn't actually go into the town. We moved to the aerodrome cause the town's another four miles down the road and we just had to move in and start digging our trenches.

14:00 That's why, you know Australian soldiers are called diggers, cause they do a lot of it.

**How did the aerodrome look when you got down there?**

Well the buildings were a shambles but the essential functions, see they stopped keeping aircraft in hangars. They kept them in hangars, all grouped together so one bomb would do the lot.

14:30 They were dispersed into bays out around the perimeter of the aerodrome and the, you know the whole thing functioned. Like any of the others, there were no buildings close to the airstrips and the airstrips had all revetment bays, like tracks leading off where they could take the aircraft off and then park them underneath the camouflage nets on the sides

15:00 so they couldn't be seen from the air, altogether a fairly big operation. I think the Darwin forces built up to about 60,000 on our side and most of those would have been in the area north of Katherine.

15:30 On the Japanese side they had 80,000. Course we didn't know that at the time but they did.

**On that map you showed us, was that a Sunderland base over in the east there?**

There were Sunderlands there in the very early days but later the flying boats were the Catalinas, you know, the twin engine ones.

16:00 They were used for submarine searching and mine laying and all sorts of things.

**So they weren't involved in defending Darwin?**

Well, to the extent that they went out looking for submarines and that sort of thing, on patrol cause they could stay aloft all day those things. A very long range, I think something like 10 or 12 hours,

16:30 and they can cover, you know a lot of distance, if they travelled slowly, one of the fellows who was in them said that it was the only aircraft he'd ever known that suffered from bird strike from her back, being so slow. But they used to cruise around about a hundred miles an hour, you see which means they've got the longest endurance for the amount of fuel they had. But Australia had a lot of Catalinas. Initially the ones there

17:00 were American but Australia bought a lot of them and they were used right through the islands. They could get into places you couldn't take a ship, like enemy harbours, and mine them. And a friend of mine was, don't know whether you call him a bomb aimer in those, in the Catalinas. He would lie in the front of the hull and he had a peephole out

17:30 there to watch the spot and he'd call to the pilot, you know, "Right a bit, right a bit, hold it here, left a bit." And one occasion they had a fellow there who used to drive horses before he went in and they overshot the mark and he called out, "Hey woo back a bit." It took them three quarters of an hour to fly right around and get back in the same position. They just didn't drop it at the right time.

**So when you got down to the drome, what planes**

18:00 **were there? The Kittyhawks hadn't turned up by this stage had they?**

No, we were there at least a couple of weeks before the Kittyhawks arrived.

**Do you remember what was there, if anything?**

At the aerodrome? Virtually nothing, see what aeroplanes were there were wiped out in the first raid and burnt

18:30 in the hangars, and I think after the first raid we had one Wirraway. But the aerodrome was used though for ferrying people and eventually we had Lockheed Hudson squadrons,

19:00 and 2 Squadron in particular from Ambon. They were where Jack McMahon was. Well 2 Squadron had

to move out of Ambon but they lost I think, about 80 per cent of their aircraft and crew, and the remainder moved back to Darwin.

**Yeah they were evacuated. We were talking about that yesterday.**

Yeah, but they couldn't all get out

19:30 cause they couldn't fit them all in the planes cause the Lockheed Hudson normally only, you know, they were converted passenger planes that took about 20, 24 passengers, something like that. But one pilot said that you hear people talk about they were on the last plane

20:00 out of Ambon. He said, "Well," he said, "if all those who claimed they were on the last plane out of Ambon had been on the last plane out of Ambon," he said, "I would have needed a 747." But they were probably on one of the planes out of Ambon, but not that one. But the Lockheed squadrons,

20:30 their losses were equivalent to 100 per cent every six months, you know. They kept getting replacements of course, but that's what they added up to.

**Lost in combat primarily?**

Yes, going, they kept on going on bombing raids across to Timor and Java and those places, and of course there they met stiff opposition from the Japanese

21:00 Zero's and that sort of thing. And they did a good job but the thing was, that was another problem with our government in defence buying people, and buying Lockheed Hudsons when the Japanese Mitsubishis had twice the range and carried twice the bomb load. The Lockheed had

21:30 very limited, I think two 500 pound bombs was the absolute maximum. If they had a long way to go, well they'd cut it down to two 250 pound bombs so as they could carry more fuel. But they did a fantastic job.

**So who**

22:00 **else at that point was based at the aerodrome to defend it?**

Well the 2/14th Artillery or 2nd Field Unit they called them, the artillery unit, they were there. There were others around the other side of the aerodrome that we never got to see, you know. You had to stay in your particular position and you couldn't just wander around and talking

22:30 to everybody, everywhere so, you know you get sort of stuck in a small cell and you just don't know.

**How did the Bren gun carriers arrive, how did they get them there?**

I think they came up overland on trucks, you know on the Ghan, then onto the trucks, the same way as we did,

23:00 then onto the railway again. They may have shipped some of them, I don't know. But see they could quite easily piggyback them on the back of trucks, particularly on rail trucks but they'd be pretty cumbersome to drive over a long distance like that,

23:30 you know they weren't really economical on fuel. But I think they were all trucked up there.

**So how many did you have?**

24:00 I think our C Company must have had about 12, so in the whole unit there would have probably been between 40 and 50.

**Were they all dug in around the aerodrome?**

I s'pose the others did them too. I only had to dig mine, that was enough, but the other companies were fortunate. They never got, you know, a direct hit like we did.

24:30 **So which side, can you describe which side of the aerodrome you were on, what you were near?**

Yes, you see in the plan of the aerodrome there are two runways that cross, like an X and on the south west corner in the V between the two runways, that's where we were at the time.

25:00 It's now the general aviation area I think for the airport up there. It's all built over now, things change.

**But there was some bushland there?**

Yes, there were trees and grass. The grass that grows there grows to about seven or eight which made it fairly difficult and somewhat of a fire hazard when

25:30 it all dries out in the dry. But, you know they kept the trees there because they were camouflage to a large extent.

**So why do you think you were hit so heavily, what would have been the motive?**

They were probably trying to wipe out the Kittyhawks I think, but they missed. I s'pose they

26:00 were only a quarter of a mile off line, from four miles up, you know, didn't allow for the wind or something like that. The Japanese were very economical too. They usually flew in a V formation and the only plane with a bomb aimer was the one at the head of the V. When he said, "Drop them," they all dropped them.

26:30 But in our case they timed it, you know instantaneously from three directions, and they all hit the spot.

**So with that particular raid, when you got bombed very close to the trench, on both sides of the trench…**

Yeah.

27:00 **When did you hear the bombers coming in, and were there Zero's that came in first, strafing?**

No, the Zero's usually kept up high so they could attack any defending planes that came in, so we didn't usually see those at close quarters because the American Kittyhawks would engage them before they got really close.

27:30 But then, you see the Kittyhawks keep the Zeros away from the bombers while the bombers made their run and they had it all pretty well worked out I think.

**But did you man the carrier, did you fire?**

We had nothing to fire at. No we were in the slit trenches, like we couldn't fire at anything at that height, not at 20,000 feet.

28:00 It's, you know, too far for the sort of guns we had. I think against an aeroplane our .303s were only effective up to about 500 yards or so and these were up 20,000 feet.

**So what sort of raids were you most useful for, most effective for?**

28:30 To be quite honest, a unit like ours wasn't effective in any of the raids very much, only in case they dropped paratroops, that sort of thing, you see. But the ack-ack guns, the big three point sevens, they were the ones mainly concerned. On lower attacks we had the Bofors 40 millimetre guns but they were a different unit again. They were

29:00 called the light ack-ack but they were only, you know effective up to about four or five thousand feet. So our .303 stuff was, you know useless for that sort of thing so, you know we had to be there. There wasn't much we could do about it.

29:30 But in that same raid there were two Americans passing in a jeep. They weren't as lucky as we were. They were both ground level and killed of course, but I don't think our authorities counted Americans.

**Possibly not.**

No, the official

30:00 report on that raid said, "No injuries and very little damage."

**So there would have been a lot of damage to the runways.**

Well they make, the daisy cutters don't do much harm on the runway cause they explode above ground and explode sideways, but high explosive ones do. They dig a big hole and then immediately the planes are gone, they start filling them in again.

30:30 So it's, you know a constant job cause they can't, you know land or take off, anything till the holes are filled, but that sort of damage is usually temporary. On that particular day there were no holes in the runway at all. They all dropped away from the runway.

**So if you were there in the**

31:00 **event of there being paratroopers dropped in, what were you expecting? How did you expect that that would happen?**

Well, it was a pattern of their attacks in other places and then, you know we were just trained to do what is ever necessary to counter that sort of an attack, which in our case was, "To

31:30 wait with your rifles and bayonets fixed and take no prisoners," were the instructions. There couldn't be twice as many paratroops as what you've got defenders, and if somebody has to guard a prisoner, you know it's not good so the instruction was to take no prisoners, try and get them on the way down.

32:00 But we moved away from that area probably, I don't know how many months we were there, a few months, and they moved us down to 30 Mile which is the, when they talk of the 30 Mile, that means 30 miles down the road from Darwin, on the north-south road. That's up at Berry Springs turnoff.

32:30 That was right in the centre of three airstrips, Hughes and Strauss and Livingstone. Hughes Field is one where our Hudson bomber squadrons were located. And then, you know we were there though for the same reason as we were at the RAAF. and later they moved on, moving into the 51 Mile camp but it was always adjacent to one of the aerodromes. See as time went on they built

33:00 airstrips all the way down the line. There were about a dozen between Darwin and Adelaide River, and later on they brought the Kittyhawks in. That was in, about in the second half, about the middle of 1943, no sorry not Kittyhawks, I meant Spitfires.

33:30 You know I've heard people say, "The English didn't do anything to help us at all." But they sent us over 600 Spitfires from about the middle of 1943 on and, you know they were good against the Jap Zeros. They were a match for the Zeros. The previous one, the Kittyhawks the Americans and later our RAAF were using, were

34:00 a bit heavy and a little bit slow for the Zeros and the Spitfires, you know much faster and more manoeuvrable, and they did a good job.

**So apart from Major Pell's tangle, you know the tangle between the Kittyhawk and the Zero, were there others that you witnessed, where the Kittyhawks**

34:30 **tackled the Zeros?**

Mostly it'd happen, you know out of range, like out of sight of the aerodrome. You'd hear the zooming of the engines and that sort of thing, but very hard to see. And the only other one, one other nasty thing, it wasn't the only one but saw one day that the Kittyhawks had one of our Lockheed Hudsons up

35:00 and they were practising attack manoeuvres on it and they both got to a height above it from behind and one attacked from the right and the other from the left and they collided and two Kittyhawks and pilots, you know lost in seconds, bad news but something wasn't properly coordinated.

35:30 But, you know there were, with the aircraft there were all sorts of accidents and that sort of thing that just, well they were listed in the reports but not publicised. Recently they found the site where an American Liberator crashed with the crew

36:00 and, you know they've gone for years but a lot of that, you know you only hear second hand, better to talk to somebody from the air force units, you know about what the air force did, the RAAF.

36:30 **Was there a lot of activity there though, while you were positioned there?**

Most of the time we were waiting, like on guard type duty and most of the activity was carried on by the air force, American and Australian. The Americans brought in, started bringing in Liberators which had a long range and after

37:00 a time, our Australian crews got on Liberators too which, you know vastly greater than they are, better than those Lockheed Hudsons. The Hudsons were good aeroplanes and all that sort of thing but they just weren't up to meeting what the competition could hand out.

**So how else did you fill in time?**

We did all sorts of things. They

37:30 got a report which turned out to be wrong and in records they had from the Japanese advance down in Malaya, one unit was identified at one place on one day and 24 hours later they had advanced 40 miles. Now they said, "If the Japs can do it, you've got to be able to do it." So they started training us for that and on route march.

38:00 We started off, you know on short bursts, I think 15 miles the first time, carrying 40 pounds of equipment tin the heat and then it built up to 30 miles a day and one stage our unit, they did a voluntary thing to see how long it'd take them to do a hundred miles and they did it in three and a half days. I didn't do it.

38:30 I'd been branded unfit by that time.

**How come?**

Well see when I worked on the farm I had an accident with a horse. I was galloping along. The horse was doing the galloping and I was on top. Suddenly the horse stumbled and fell and we changed positions and the horse was on top of me on the ground, broke my right leg, which finished up an inch shorter than the other one.

39:00 And on carrying 40 pound packs, you know for 30 miles a day, just didn't work so the MO branded me unfit for that sort of thing.

**Did you wear special boots?**

Never heard of in those days, no but I have done ever since. But it wasn't until I got to, you know

39:30 private doctors after the war that I was able to do anything about that, but that's the way the cookie crumbles isn't it?

**So along with the reinforcements of the air force, what other reinforcements arrived in Darwin while you were there?**

There was all sorts of things. A lot of the units came through and then went on their way to the

40:00 islands particularly when they started to drive the Japs back. They would, like a short time in Darwin then onto the islands and that sort of activity, though we never knew what was going on. Nobody ever told us. They said, "No, careless talk costs lives. Don't tell anybody anything." Never told us anything either.

**How would it have been helpful to you to know what was going on?**

40:30 Well I think we'd have felt happier about the whole situation if we'd have known what was going on, but I like to know what's going on but nobody would tell you anything. They didn't know I suppose. Everybody, even the officers, were on a need-to-know situation. So for instance, they might decide to move your camp,

41:00 put you into one that is half built so you could finish that. In the meantime there'd be another unit coming up the track that needed a camp ready to move into, so they'd go in, never heard who they were or what they did.

**Where was your brother during this time?**

He was in the same unit, in the 19th Machine Gunners. I was eventually drafted out of the 19th Machine Gunners, because of the unfit ankle,

41:30 cause, see anybody's not supposed to be in a front line unit unless he's A1 fit. But I was still there for some months and then I got drafted out to a work unit at Adelaide River which went around doing all sorts of construction jobs, and I s'pose like skilled engineering does these days. They go in everywhere they're needed and build anything you like and after some weeks of that I....

# Tape 7

00:35 Lieutenant came around with another fellow from rear headquarters and, "I'm the lieutenant and," he said, "the army audit section needs a driver. Will you," you know, "would you like the job?" So I thought, "Well that's better than digging drains or whatever." So I went and I spent the last six months in the Darwin area was with the army audit detachment at rear headquarters. The thing I

01:00 liked about it was we didn't have to stay at rear headquarters. The audit section used to move all over the place, even as far as Mount Isa. They'd go to a particular place and make sure the stores aren't being knocked off etcetera, or if they were it wasn't at an unacceptable level, which it was sometimes. But the lieutenant, Arthur Kitching,

01:30 Kitch he was known to all us as, would decide which unit he would audit, not say a word about it, just tell me, "Take me to such and such." And he'd walk in the door and ask to speak to the CO and he said, "I'm here to do an audit," you see. And the CO's face would go quite white and then in the back, had a one ton

02:00 Ford ute in the back of which usually had four or five auditors and they'd set to work and go through all the books to see what stores they should have, and then do a physical stock-take to see what they didn't have. And depending on the value, I think up to 50 pounds, the CO could write it off. If it was over 50 and under a hundred

02:30 it had to go to the brigadier and he wrote it off. And over a hundred it had to go to the general. And what happened to it from there on I don't know. But there were one or two substantial ones that, I think, would have involved some disciplinary action, but I don't know whatever happened about them.

**It's up to you whether you want to name names, but what were the sort of things that were going missing**

03:00 **and what was not being accounted for?**

Well in one case, Mount Isa we went there. We spent some weeks in Mount Isa. One of the places we audited there was a BID, a Bulk Issuing Depot. Now their job was to take in all the petrol and oil supplies that came on the trains from Queensland and then load them

03:30 onto transports to go through to the Territory. It was all in 44 gallon drums and the little problem they had was they were 250,000 gallons of petrol short. "Oh," they said, "leaky drums." But, you know I don't think anybody really believed that. Then there was another one in Mount Isa that was rather serious too. There was another store there

04:00 that was the, I forget the name of the unit but their job was to take all the foodstuffs, those sort of commodities, off the train and load them onto the trucks. And they had a big depot storage there and it was quite a job doing the audit of it cause we had to go through all the books first of all and then go and

04:30 count all the stuff and the books appeared to be immaculate, and we went through shed by shed and everything was exactly right. Till we came to the last shed, was one of those Sydney Williams huts, and stacked to the roof, and not a document to show for it. So what had been happening was that to conserve transport,

05:00 say for instance, the Darwin authorities ordered 600 cases of bully beef or whatever, and a rail truck only took 500, they would send the 500, fill the rail truck and when the chap in charge there, who went by the impressive title of the assistant deputy

05:30 director of supply and transport, it was his job to put in a deficiency report for a hundred cases. On the other hand, if he only ordered 400 and he got 500, he had to put in an oversupply for a hundred cases, but he never missed out on a deficiency report and he never put in an oversupply. And the rest of the stuff was being sold around Mount Isa with all civilians in the mines there. And

06:00 the last I heard of that… Kitch wanted, on a Saturday morning before he left he had to go and see this assistant deputy director of supply and transport and I was out in the car park. Kitch walked up to talk with this feller and they're out in the open, probably a hundred yards away, and this fellow said,

06:30 "I'm not going to do that." He said, "I'm a major," he said, "you're a bloody lieutenant." He said, "I'm not going to take orders from you." And Kitch says, "I'll tell you what you're going to do and you are going to do it." And I think there would have been, you know, the army used to take some strong disciplinary action against fellers like that. And I think that feller might have ended up a private. It's quite on the cards but, you know it was a deliberate fraud for personal gain.

07:00 **So what was your involvement, you were driving, but when you get there?**

I was the driver but then, well I had the option. I could sit around and wait all day till they're finished, which is pretty boring I can tell you. So I used to go ahead and help with the checking and this is sometimes checking off the dockets, which wasn't a difficult job and then afterwards counting the stores, you know that was fairly easy but

07:30 an interesting part. When we arrived in Mount Isa, one of the fellers said, "Kitch where are we going to stay in Mount Isa?" He said, "We'll stay at the ordnance depot." "God," they said, "you're not going to audit in the ordnance depot?" you know thousands of lines. Kitch said, "No, we won't need to audit." He said, "By the time we've been there a few weeks, they'll be so bloody honest," he said, "that they won't need to be audited."

08:00 That's the way it worked out too but that fellow was, the CO there was one fellow that really turned white when Kitch turned up, and if there was anything at all we'd ask for in their power, you know it would have been delivered on the doorstep immediately. Kitch made one stipulation when we went to these places, "That we were staying here, but we will not take part in any parades or anything like that. We'll

08:30 be here for breakfast and tea at night and that's it." So one morning, this gave me an extra hour and a half or so in the kip in a morning, I was still in bed this morning and the tent flies were whipped open. Their regimental sergeant major, "And what the bloody hell are you doing here?" I said, "I just woke up actually." He said, "What's your name?" So I told him and I said, "I'm with

09:00 the audit unit." "Oh, oh," he said, "I'm very sorry," he said, and he closed the tent flaps. He'd had his instructions hadn't he. But that's the only time a sergeant major ever apologised to me.

**And you were still just a private at this point?**

YeAh but others, they were two of the major ones in other units. There's one

09:30 place, I've forgotten the unit we used to deal with, hospital supplies and they're supposed to have X number of sheets in stock and when we landed there of course we had to go through the books first to see what they should have, and during that time the sheet stocks improved remarkably. The fellers were all whipping them off their beds and putting them back. I s'pose after we left, they took them again, I don't know.

10:00 They were probably the only fellers living in the Territory sleeping in sheets.

**Had you, before you joined the audit unit, seen much of that going on, a little bit of pilfering here and there?**

There's always some of it but not to any extent. I know I was very cranky one day when a couple of fellers got a bottle of

10:30 whiskey or something sent to them in the mail or something, and they pinched some biscuits my mother had sent me, to have with the whiskey and I thought, you know, that's about the lowest thing you can do is to steal from your mates. But there was very little of that sort of thing. It was a point of honour. You

never stole from your mates.

**Yeah cause we've heard stories from a few chaps who might have been out looting stuff from the wharves, and the odd case of beer.**

Yeah.

11:00 It happened. I know there's one of the transport units at Alice Springs had to go to the wharves and there was a whole convoy, and one of the trucks was a whole truckload of beer. And to stop pilfering when they were loading the trucks they, every man had a military policeman alongside of him,

11:30 and then when the trucks were loaded and out on the road, the military police led off with a motorcycle escort and they followed up the back. But down the road, apparently the fellers had it all worked out, they gradually increased the spacing between the trucks and when it came to a bend in the road, a truckload of beer disappeared into the bushes and they all closed up again and went to Adelaide River. But then

12:00 at Adelaide River, apparently unloaded the truck out in the bush somewhere and just went back to the unit and reported in, back and that's all the other fellers had to do after they'd taken the stuff to the quartermaster store, and that sort of thing. The other blokes had to go, just out and unload, okay and report back so they didn't know who drove the truck with the beer or anything afterwards. It was all fairly well executed.

12:30 But in the time that I was in Adelaide River in that work unit, some of the fellers had been digging drains out in the bush somewhere and they came back laughing and giggling and that sort of thing, definitely under the 'affluence of incohol'. So when they, "Where did they get it?" Well it turned out

13:00 when they're looking out the side of this pipeline they found the plant or what was left of it. There wasn't much of it left by then but they reduced it somewhat and there wasn't much digging went on that day.

**Were you much of a drinker at that stage?**

Not much. We used to get an issue of, well for the first

13:30 probably five or six months there was no grog at all available. Grog was available in Darwin before the raid but after that, nothing. But then eventually we started to get an issue of two bottles per man per week. I think it was a Thursday night, used to get an issue of two bottles which you had to buy of course. I think it was about a shilling a bottle or something like that but, you know, I did what I could in those days,

14:00 and just something to relieve the boredom anyway. But talking about pilfering, at one stage, it must have been for my 20th birthday, my Dad packed up a bottle of brandy and a bottle of whiskey, I mean to send a crate of beer just wasn't the option. And he packed them and

14:30 sewed them into a hessian bag, padded and all, marked 'Fragile', and everything was in tact. The stitching hadn't been altered or anything like that but when I opened it up, there wasn't a drop left in the brandy bottle and I only, it was years later before I found out how that was done with a hypodermic syringe, just pushed it in through the canvas bag and

15:00 through the cork and nobody looks for a needle hole in the cork.

**Must have been a bit disappointing?**

Yes it was. I still had the bottle of whiskey, which lasted a long time but…

**Were you a smoker?**

Yes unfortunately, sort of a peer pressure thing, you know everybody smoked, and then when we got up there

15:30 with all the millions of mosquitoes and that about there, the smoke tended to keep them away and I s'pose it broke the monotony of the thing. So just seemed to smoke more and more and that went on for some years after I was discharged but I gave it up in about 1960 I suppose, but not before I'd done some damage to the heart. But I think if I hadn't have given it up then, I'd have been like my two older brothers.

16:00 But I had one heart attack shortly after that and the, it was only in recent years that I applied to the [Department of] Veterans' Affairs for any disability allowance. I'd had a bypass back in '95 and that sort of thing and I thought, "Well if I go and I do nothing about this, my wife's not going to be a war widow." They're very tough on that.

16:30 So I applied and they knocked the heart part back originally until I got evidence from the hospital up in Parkes that I'd been in there for three days, I've forgotten the exact date, back in the 1960s with heart attack so that clinched it. See you're meant to have the trouble within a certain number of years after you gave up smoking.

17:00 That's the way the regulations go. They've got it all worked out. If you didn't get it within 10 years of when you gave up smoking and the thing is I did have it within 10 years and that was okay, they passed it but

**So how much would you have been smoking during, at Darwin?**

I think in Darwin probably be equivalent to about a pack a day but that got worse as I,

17:30 you know after I left the army and I was getting up to about two packs a day at one stage, sitting in an office and smoking all day and how the staff put up with it I don't know. But eventually I decided that, you know it was enough. I had sinus trouble and that sort of thing and the more I smoked the worse that seemed to get so I thought a man's a fool, better give it up. So I did, so I'm still here.

**You're talking about, you know**

18:00 **smoking and grog helped to break the monotony, what other means were there of doing that?**

Very little. There were later, the Americans first of all introduced 16 millimetre movie shows and we were invited to come any time to any of these shows. The same film would show for about a week usually but didn't get, I think I only ever got to one of the American ones. But then when

18:30 they started up a big open air theatre in Adelaide River which was 35 millimetre and long rows of logs to sit on and used to take, the units all took truckloads of fellows on night time to go and see the pictures. At the beginning they always played 'God Save the Queen',

19:00 the American anthem, 'Stars and Stripes', then everybody, the lights would go down, the film would come on and everybody would yell, "What about Joe?" Cause Russia was well into it by then but perhaps it was a good thing to leave Joe out of it anyway, the way things turned out eventually. We had one incident with one of Joe's supporters.

19:30 We had, the army had a unit they called the army education unit and they used to go around giving lectures and when we were in that site on the RAAF aerodrome this fellow would come around and he gave us a long lecture on how marvellous it would be when we got this new order, socialism. "That was the way to go, there's no doubt about it." And he was also something of a pacifist.

20:00 Anyway he was still there when the siren went for the air raid. He said, "Where do you go, where will I go?" And I said, "Well there's room in our trench, you better come in there." He'd come in an early '30s Tourer, don't know whether it was a Dodge or, it wasn't a Buick. Anyway, you know the type of canvas top, no side guards on or anything like that, cause he had parked in our lines and

20:30 you imagine what the shrapnel did to that. All the canvas hood was in tatters. The radiator had about four or five holes through it. The oil was running out of the sump on the ground. There were holes in all around the thing and he walked around it. "The rotten bastards," he said, "look what they did to my car, the rotten bastards, look what they did to my car." Just round and round. I think he may not have been as pacifist from that day on.

21:00 **And his lectures on socialism were condoned by the army?**

Apparently. I only ever heard two of them. I didn't believe a word of it myself but there were a few of these bods around. You know the Labour Government in the war years were very socialist minded and

21:30 it wasn't until Chifley tried to nationalise the banks that the country got up in arms and threw him out. But, you know apart from a few hangers on like Jim Cairns in later years, I think they've lost all that socialist touch these days. They've still got a left-wing Labor Party though, haven't they, Labor groups in the Labor Party.

**So you've**

22:00 **spoken briefly about the Americans, I mean how much contact were you having with them and what were relations like?**

Well we always got on quite well with them but we didn't have a lot to do with them. They, you know they were in their own camp with their own organisation and we just did, they were always friendly.

22:30 I know they'd swap you a carton of cigarettes for a bottle of beer. Apparently they must have liked our beer better than the American stuff because the American stuff was inclined to be low alcohol and a bit watery I think. One American I know had just arrived and, "Ask him which way he'd come through Melbourne or did he come through Sydney or whatever?" "No he came through Melbourne," he said.

23:00 "That beer," he said, "with a tiger on the label," you know the Richmond Tiger it used to be? It's no longer made these days is it? He reckoned that tiger really had a bite in it.

**So you didn't have much else to do with them?**

No there was a big dustup in Brisbane between the Australians and the Americans and

23:30 I got there just a week or two after it. but the thing, how I got there was interesting too, you know I'd

always wanted to get into the air force and then I couldn't because of sight but a Major McLachlan at the rear headquarters, got a message one day to report to Major McLachlan and I wondered what I'd done. I'd never heard of Major McLachlan. He turned out to be a kindly

24:00 sort of a gentleman. He said, "I've been looking up your record. Is it a fact you haven't had any leave at all for 22 months?" I said, "That's correct sir." He said, "I just wanted to let you know that I'm trying to do something about it." He said, "I've lodged applications to transport several times. They say there's no transport available," you know, when they had trucks going back empty. They just didn't want people to get out of the Territory. So anyway, a week or so went by

24:30 and there was apparently a party in the officers' mess at rear headquarters and one of the fellers there was a colonel from the American air force so the major asked and he said, "These Dakota's you bring your supplies up in, what do you take back?" "Nothing at all," he said, "they go back empty." And he said, "Would you take something for me?" "No trouble at all." He said, "What have you got?" He said, "I've got nine fellers that are long overdue for leave." He said, "Would you give them a lift?"

25:00 He said have them out at Batchelor aerodrome at four-thirty in the morning. So I got word that night, "Pack your stuff and get ready to go." And I'll tell you what, I didn't hesitate. They flew, went in the Dakota, landed at Cloncurry, just one stop in Brisbane and then got, he had rail passes made out to take us from Brisbane down through Melbourne and back home and I was actually entitled to eight weeks leave,

25:30 but he said he didn't have the power to grant more than six weeks. So he said, "What I'll do, I'll do all your documentation for six weeks and when you get home I'll send you a telegram extending it for two weeks." But unfortunately though, he didn't send it and the MPs [Military Police] at Camp Pell in Melbourne, they were out looking for me but they never found me fortunately. And when I get back I reported in, they

26:00 corrected it all and, you know it was definitely organised leave, etcetera, but they had it entered in my record that, you know I'd reported absent without leave and then rescinded it afterwards. But I thought at least they could have wiped it out of their record, couldn't they? But nobody wipes anything out in those records.

**Some of that might come in, I mean you assumed that telegram was going to come so you stayed the full…?**

Yeah well I got it there only a week or so after I got home

26:30 so there was no problem with that. And the thing about it was the six weeks too I was given only started from the time I left Camp Pell to go home, so all the time travelling down the east coast and that was, you know not counted as leave.

**That would have been the first time you'd seen the east coast really, you'd gone up through Adelaide.**

Yes.

**So did you get to, were you in Brisbane for very long, Brisbane or Sydney?**

I don't remember exactly.

27:00 I know there was some delay getting from Brisbane, might have been a week or more before I got a train pass on from there but then there were two or three days in Sydney and then onto Melbourne. I remember one feller in Sydney who knew every train route and train station in New South Wales, and anybody there in transit had to line up on parade in the morning

27:30 and, "Anybody for Wollongong, Port Kembla?" And he'd name every place down the line, "Please step out," and he'd go on the next one, you know and he'd name every station. He must have had a remarkable memory. I s'pose he'd been doing it every day for so long he knew them all by heart. But anybody then who didn't,

28:00 there wasn't transport for then, would get a leave pass for the day until midnight and next morning you turned up on parade again. And so, no it was an interesting trip down the coast there, you know country I'd never seen before. But we were saying about getting on with the Yanks, when I was in Brisbane I, you know had been very short on good tucker for a long time so I ordered a steak and eggs which,

28:30 steak and eggs and chips and, you know all the usual stuff, salads etcetera. Now two Americans, the next table who ordered the same and when the waitress brought my bill it was four shillings and sixpence and they gave the Americans the bill and he called it back. He said, "Now this chap, you charged him four shillings and sixpence. We had steak and eggs the same as him

29:00 and you've charged us two pounds, four shillings and sixpence." She said, "You had milkshakes didn't you?" "Oh that's right, so we did," he said. See they just didn't know the value of our money was the problem I suppose, and they surely got advantage taken.

**Two pounds for a milkshake.**

Yeah then there was a big dustup in the streets where

29:30 apparently a pretty big mob of Australians went through and dusted up every Yank they found in the streets. And these two fellers, when we left the café, they had a club in town, “Come down have a look at the club,” clubman came to the door and they wouldn’t let any Australian soldiers in. I didn’t know at that stage but nobody told us anything. I didn’t know anything about there’d been this big dustup they called the Battle for Brisbane,

30:00 but apparently it was quite a stoush.

**What was it like coming back home, I mean you’d been gone best part of what two years - 21 months?**

Yeah well getting near the, it was I think getting on for evening when we got near the Murtoa station

30:30 and there were, the rest in the carriage were rookies that had been in, come from the local area but they’d been apparently in camp in Melbourne or somewhere else and they had a real, they were really bitter against the authorities that, “It’s absolutely disgraceful,” you know, “they only let us come home on leave once a month,” said, you know, “we could quite easily come home every weekend.”

31:00 So this argument went on for some time and I was craning to get a look out to see how close we were to Murtoa, one of the fellers said, “You’re scared you’ll miss it?” I said, “Well I just might, I haven’t seen it in nearly two years.” And, you know there was absolute silence. Nobody said another word.

**And did your family put on a little homecoming for you or was it low key?**

Very low key

31:30 just a matter of course and, you know the usual things, small parties with friends and etcetera, but nothing extravagant.

**What about Alan, did he manage to get leave as well?**

Not at that stage. The rest of them only got

32:00 leave I think it would have been around about New Year in 1944, they, I know when I was on the way back from that leave I saw some of them in Adelaide on the way through. They were coming down and I was going back but then after that the 19th Machine Gun Battalion got broken up.

32:30 They’d lost so many fellows medically unfit that, you know they were far below full strength so they were broken up and sent as reinforcements to other units and I think most of them finished up in different places in the islands, you know Borneo, Java, Timor or wherever, New Guinea, New Britain, all over the place.

33:00 Actually one of our sergeants, Mervyn Schott, he went to New Guinea and he stood up from a foxhole at the wrong time and a Jap hit him in the chest with a machine gun, six bullets. Five went straight through and one lodged in his lung but they got him out and they got him down to Sydney and took the one out of his lung and he survived until he was about 70. It was only about a year before he died

33:30 decided to make him a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensioner], pretty tough but there was no way he could go back to his farming pursuit because his, he apparently lost, you know he was right handed and he lost a lot of the muscle control over the right hand side of his back so, you know his left arm was terribly weak. But I thought they’re mighty tough on the TPI thing,

34:00 cause he’s a bloke that wouldn’t have asked them for it, see and they certainly didn’t offer.

**When you did come back on leave, did you feel that you’d changed in any way, I mean you’d seen some gruesome stuff, you’d seen, you know the raids and you’d been working hard for a couple of years, army life, how had things changed for you?**

Well

34:30 I don’t know or remember a lot about the difference. It’s all so long ago. It’s just a matter of adjusting to wherever you were and what you had to do. But it was early in 1944 some time that I’d only been back in Darwin a short time and they decided to

35:00 discharge me so I was in the army for three years and out again before I was 21. But at that time too, there was very little farm labour about and anybody that came from a farm, you know they were happy to shove them back because, you know it was damaging the country in the food production.

35:30 **So was that due to the medical side of things?**

Yeah, I could have persevered and, you know gone for a sedentary job, something but it didn’t appeal to me I’m afraid at the time or I might have had to go back in Darwin and stay there and there’s nothing I would have hated more in the world than that.

**So do you think you were being missed back on the farm,**

36:00 **what I mean is, were you needed back on the land?**

Well initially I went to help one of my uncles who had a dairy farm. Later I went contractor with a rotary hoe. I bought a rotary hoe from a, it would have been at the end of

36:30 the war, even after the end of the war, I forget when but I decided to go into business. One thing I did do at home was, I did, started in pig sheds with pig breeding and that sort of thing all on the farm at home. I bought a rotary hoe from a fellow who was a TPI from the air force, Howard's from Melbourne,

37:00 and I went around contracting, digging up gardens and all sorts of small patches like that, fire breaks for the railways, you name it and eventually after that I accumulated a few dollars, or pounds in those days and bought a poultry farm which wasn't real good. The farm was all right but there's a tremendous amount of heavy lifting in,

37:30 I had a lot of back troubles and the doctor said, "You'll have to either put in a full mechanical handling or find another occupation." So I decided to go to, there was a job going with an engineering firm in Horsham so I went there and I started off there as a salesman and then, like I told you earlier, decided I'd apply for that job in the hospital and got it.

38:00 And when I resigned the boss said, "How about you be our cost accountant?" So I stayed in the engineering then and eventually when four of us went to Parkes in the business there we got to employing over 80 people making farm machinery and that sort of thing. A lot of problems of course, that's not an easy life but then eventually I, after 20 years it was time to make

38:30 a break so I left the other fellers and told them that things have got to change because to carry on the way we're going, you know, we didn't lose money but we're going to. And no, they didn't believe that, wouldn't agree to any change and they were three against one so I resigned and went away. I took a job for a couple of years managing an engineering place in Tamworth, which was an education,

39:00 where they had three directors and two of the other staff who were all intent on robbing the company of anything they could get their hands on, whatever means they could. So after a couple of sort of keeping the peace there I thought that's no way to live, so I went to Albury and started a business of my own there and did that with just myself and

39:30 Pat in the office. We were the sole proprietors of the whole business and we did all sorts of engineering, built a lot of transportable telephone exchanges, that sort of thing for Telecom, Victoria, mostly New South Wales, a lot of transportable units for the railway, did a lot of parts for Robin Hood range hoods. They had a factory in Albury just down the street from us and we used to do thousands

40:00 of flues for them and other little parts. But the time came there after about 10 years or so I suppose, and I was getting into my early 60s and my heart was giving me problems and it came time to call it, you know call a halt. So I was particularly crook at one stage and Pat said,

40:30 you know, "I think it's time we went." So we, to cut a long story short, we sold it up and retired. That's back in 1985 and stayed in Albury for about four years altogether because selling the factory was another thing that, so rented it out and eventually sold the factory and then put the house on the market and

41:00 we moved down here, lived in Port Arlington for a few months and then bought this place and a very happy move it was for us.

# Tape 8

00:37 **Rex while we're talking about that...earlier on you showed us one of those photos of Darwin harbour and the damage that had been done to the pier, the wharf there.**

Yes.

**How far in did you get and what sort of physical damage did you see?**

There was a tremendous amount of damage to housing and, you know the main buildings

01:00 in the town. The damage at the aerodrome, you know was really extensive. They decimated that. There was no sheeting left on the roof or the walls or anything, those big buildings. I've got photographs of those, not in that album. There one's taken by other people but we didn't, you know actually go into Darwin

01:30 very much at all because, you know there was nothing there for us to do. At times the fellers with trucks would go in to pick up supplies from Vesty's meatworks there became an ordnance depot where they kept a lot of supplies but I wasn't one of those that used to go on those trips so saw very little of it.

**What sort of casualties were there with**

02:00 **the 19th Machine Gun Regiment during the raid?**

The only ones we had were actually, on that day on the raid, on the RAAF aerodrome. There were three of the fellers in that one trench where they got the very close hit, were injured and carted off but they were the only three hospitalised from our unit. The rest of us were

02:30 like stunned mullets. I don't think you can imagine the shock of a thing like that, you know the quick successive blasts, not just one but in the stick that went across us and there were five. I can still remember, you know the five bombs, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom and the pain in the ears and that sort of thing from that sort of blast is really fierce and

03:00 I think everybody was really shaken in a state of shock after that, but it wears off after a few days and you get ready for the next one again.

**Does there come a time when, I can't really imagine it, I mean there's a complacency or you just adjust, you just acclimatise to that state?**

Yeah and you learn to watch carefully as they come in. If they're coming straight overhead, from you, it's bad news.

03:30 If they're slightly off to one side it means that they're up four miles and they could drop, you know quarter or half a mile to one side. That's all right. There's another fallacy too about bombers make a sound as they fall. It's similar to if you held a piece of paper in front of a strong fan it'd give, you know a rustling sort of a noise. That's the noise

04:00 the bombers made but the thing about it is that the one you heard you didn't have to worry about. They were travelling faster than the speed of sound and they had already hit the ground by the time you heard the sound, you see, so they were all right. It's the ones you didn't hear that did the damage but if they were slightly, you know you've got to experiment with it and if they were slightly off to one side you could sort of judge how far away they'd hit or what they were aiming for. But

04:30 night raids were a bit more disconcerting I think. They used to black everything out, right down the line. At one stage we were at the 30 Mile between, we were directly between the ends of the Livingstone fighter strip and the Strauss strip and off

05:00 to one side in the forming a triangle was the Hughes bomber strip, and we were in the middle and the bombers came over one night at midnight and everything was blacked out and of course they couldn't see the target. They're always on a bright moonlight night and the moon in the tropics, see is really bright but they couldn't see these black airstrips and we just sat out and waited for

05:30 a full hour it was, about one o'clock and then some 5th Columnists got a truck or car or something, drove, turned the headlights on at one end of the Livingstone strip, drove down the length of the strip and turned them off and disappeared and nobody ever knew who he was or anything and the planes just swung straight around and dropped them. But fortunately they misjudged the distance slightly and they dropped

06:00 between the end of the Livingstone strip and our camp and did no damage in the bush. But I'd like to catch that bugger that drove the car down there.

**They never found them?**

No, another incidence at Hughes field one day, the Lockheed Hudsons were always loaded absolutely to the hilt with the maximum amount of fuel they could carry with their bombload, and on the hot, black bitumen in the heat of the sun,

06:30 they needed every inch of the strip to get off the ground. And on this one occasion one of these bombers was taking off one day and he got up to a speed probably 80 or 90 miles an hour and a truck drifted in from the side. There was nobody in it, it was in low gear, just drove across the front of the bomber and crash.

**So these, they were actual agents do you think or they were just…?**

Oh yes,

07:00 no doubt about it and another time on the shore batteries, the guard challenged a fellow one night who took off like a rabbit in the dark, wasn't caught but then he checked in the side, you know the Japanese wore particular sandals. They're similar to thongs in a way but had full uppers but

07:30 they had a split between the big toe and the rest of the toes so left quite a distinctive footprint and those footprints were there. And the same thing happened at Truscott airfield over in Western Australia to the west of us, and on that occasion at Truscott the feller found the footprint and immediately gave the alarm in the morning,

08:00 kept the footprint covered with a can because it was raining, to preserve it and they found out the bombs for the early morning raid had all been defused so, and our fellers didn't do that. There's another record, it comes from Japanese sources, that when they were setting up

08:30 to build the Truscott airfield the Japanese sent a boat by lugger, a pearling lugger and they set in and they landed near there and inspected all the site. Their site inspection's probably better than ours but see the Japanese were well prepared. In the 1930s, you know they wondered during the war how the Japs got to know our area so well.

09:00 In the 1930s the Commonwealth Government called tenders for a topographical survey of northern Australia. Who won the tender? The Japanese did. They do all the mapping for it so they knew exactly what they were about and the only thing they could put down a new airstrip, they could mark that on, but they did that all right.

**We actually interviewed someone who was on Rabaul after the war**

09:30 **and they found maps that the Japanese had of Port Phillip Bay and this part of the world.**

Yes, the Japs also had a special submarine that they could take a collapsible aircraft into and there were reports that one of those flew around Port Phillip Bay at one stage. There was nothing ever confirmed of course and the authorities denied it, absolute rubbish and all that sort of thing. But there was

10:00 another sighting, Joe Redding at Port Arlington will tell you about. He was on the Fort Queenscliff defending, you see. Somebody sighted a submarine in Port Phillip Bay and we didn't have any there. Anyway they reported it and the authorities said, "No, you must have been dreaming." But the Japs are really with it in that regard

10:30 like they got submarines, well they got them into Sydney Harbour. They got them into Darwin Harbour on several occasions too, like if they, you had to open the boom gates to let a ship in, follow close behind them and the sonar wouldn't pick them up. There was one occasion there where two Japanese submarines were sunk in Darwin Harbour so they weren't

11:00 that far away. One night our cookhouse got raided and a lot of food taken and I know one of our sergeants was going to blame our own fellows for it. "Why would our fellers want to steal bully beef and biscuits?" The guard was doubled up after that, but another occasion

11:30 they found fellows out in the bush setting up landing lights in the trees, so they turned them one night and set up a false flare path. I believe there were four fellers shot there and no records taken.

**Sorry the false flare path for…?**

You know, they could light up at night in the trees so the bombers would return and land in the trees but

12:00 they didn't get far with that one. They got caught in the act but the strange thing is you don't find any record, you know in the Australian records of these sort of things, you know. They just happened and they did what had to be done and that was it.

**Was the possibility of there being these 5th Columnists in your midst, was that something that was discussed and people had heard rumours and suspicions?**

Yeah a lot of suspicions and I think some of them too, you had civilians

12:30 working up there in the Civil Construction Corps. Now that was an ideal place for one of those fellers to get a job because they're in the area with full authority, they can go where they like, do whatever they wanted but when the, at Dripstone at Darwin near us, the first radar station was set up and this could pick up aircraft 20 minutes flight out nearly, 200 miles from

13:00 Darwin. The first two raids after that were set up. Before the bombers arrived the cable was cut, the phone line back to the air station, so somebody had to be in radio contact with those bombers to know where they were and know when to cut the line so there'd be no time to repair it. But of course no-one was ever caught doing that.

13:30 We had secret operation units they called them, whose job was to listen out on the radio for Japanese radio transmissions and then, you know try and locate them or transcribe them, had experts who could transcribe them but there was very little ever published

14:00 about their work either. Some of them they had, used to fly them around with receiving gear in an aircraft, to ground stations and…

**And do you know what sort of signals they'd be intercepting?**

I think they'd, you know intercept anything they could and then decipher them and unscramble them later but,

14:30 you know the English did a lot of that in the raids on England, finding what they were up to.

**How long was it before, obviously the first raid was a surprise?**

Yeah.

**How long before there was that warning system in place?**

It would have been around about the middle of March, about a month or so later. The American Kittyhawks were there to, like

15:00 for a warning they had to get warning to get time to get off the ground, cause by the time they come into visual sight, you know there's not enough time to climb up to altitude so, the Kittyhawks weren't fast climbers either but with 20 minutes, they just had enough time to get up there and intercept the Zeros so eventually they put other stations on

15:30 Bathurst Island, Melville Island and around the areas. They manufactured more plants, some of the early ones of course weren't all that reliable. One of my friends was in the navy and he got to be a radar operator, and the antennas of course are up on top and his room was

16:00 down below the decks and when, at the time of the Coral Sea, he got a call from the captain, "Sparks, what have you got down there?" "All clear, sir." "Sparks, you better come up here and have a look. The sky's full of them." In other words the radar had gone on the blink and he wasn't seeing anything he should have.

**Just going over some of the things you've**

16:30 **mentioned in passing. You talked about being at the 30 Mile camp?**

Yes.

**What, at which stage was that, what sort of work were you doing at places like that?**

Mainly we went on about weekly route marches. Initially they'd take us to some place 15 or 20 miles out in the bush and we'd walk home, and this sort of thing. Then, you know it took a day or so to recover or something like that but

17:00 we got fairly good. I think I got up to about 30 miles before I had any real problems but this, with that sort of strain it takes a very fit man to be able to stand, you know in those sort of temperatures and on the type of diet we're getting. And I believe about 40 per cent of the unit dropped out unfit

17:30 over, you know a six month period or something. And a big joke it was too about the, they said, "If the Japs could do it, we had to learn to do it." What they didn't know was that in Malaysia the Japs had bicycles, 40 miles is no sweat, different thing when you had to walk it. They thought we had to be able to walk 40 against the Japs doing 40 on a bicycle.

18:00 **And what about the, again you've spoken a bit about the work unit, Adelaide River?**

Yes.

**What was the sort of day to day routine there?**

Well in the morning everybody would line up on parade, and the sergeant major I s'pose you'd call him, would have a list of jobs to be done and he'd call out, "Now anybody here with any experience at such and such?" I remember one morning he called out, "Have we any plumbers here?"

18:30 Not a one. "Have we got anybody who has ever laid a pipe in his life?" There was only one, that was me so I was in charge of the pipe laying and a job like that see could go on for three or four days, whatever, until the next one come along and the next time it'd be something else, wherever they needed a bit of muscle and sweat. So that was the sort of thing

19:00 they did, was sort of a general works party, you know they might be building, carpenters might be building cookhouses or whatever. The Civil Construction Corps did most of the road works or each of the different state road authorities, like in New South Wales the department of main roads and

19:30 in I think Queensland, the main roads council is one of them and the Victorian country roads board. They all had teams up there doing roadwork so that by early '43 I suppose they had, no would have been earlier, would have been late 1942, they got the road finished through to Katherine, north-south road. They didn't have to rely entirely on the rail

20:00 and then they went on sealing it. For instance, by the end of I think by about 1944 most of that north-south road was sealed. I never saw a drop of tar or anything while I was there. I don't know if you know Peter Forester, historian in Darwin. He lives there these days, but he did some research on

20:30 the early history of Darwin and he said, "In 1930 Darwin had three miles of sealed roads or streets." He said, "You could have counted the miles of sealed roads on the fingers of one hand and you'd have had two left over." But, you know that changed over the years. There was a tremendous amount of work done on those, in the road and the

21:00 airport construction work.

**How far south did the Japanese planes get during the raids? Was it mainly just Darwin and the base there?**

No, down about as far as Katherine was within their range and they particularly liked to attack the

Liberator strip at,

21:30 I'm too bloody old, it escapes me at the moment but there was one just north of Katherine where they had the American based Liberators. And those Liberators could go as far as Borneo and they flew out at one stage at five minute intervals. And the reason the Japs wanted Borneo of course was the oil supplies and the refineries in Balikpapan. Anyway the Yanks went out

22:00 there in the Liberators on one occasion, and flying at five minute intervals, the first one got a dead centre bomb and started a big flame and the rest all just honed in on it and they really flattened the refineries in Balikpapan. But one of the crew from America sent me a letter to say that his log book record shows that day they were airborne for 14 hours.

22:30 It's a long time.

**Yeah, and the Japanese were in sort of tit for tat coming back, getting down?**

Yeah they didn't have anything quite up to the Liberator standard. Their Mitsubishis would, carried about twice as much as our Lockheed Hudsons and they had twice the range but they didn't have that sort of range and they… I could look it up but

23:00 the thing was that from the airfields they had in the islands of the north, they could reach about as far as Katherine so that was why in later years, when they talk about repatriation, they set the line at 14 degrees 30 minutes south of the equator, which is the line that runs virtually through Katherine, and anything north of that in the Northern Territory is declared the war area, while the bombings were on.

23:30 And it created some anomalies cause if you're in the Northern Territory, of course you had to be there, there's a lot of discrimination though. They reckon service in Australia, you know it's not the same getting killed in Australia as it is overseas so you had to be in Darwin three months in the active period to qualify. Whereas overseas you only had to just pass through an area and you qualified for whatever it

24:00 was, but if you went up the east coast of Australia, you qualified for the Pacific Star. You did if you crossed to Tasmania from Melbourne and Darwin you had to be there three months, and there are a lot of fellers who didn't have the full three months there. For instance they might have had two months, two and half months, before the cut off period which was the

24:30 12th of November, 1943 and they might have been there for a year after that but they still didn't qualify for a Gold Card for repat benefits. That's one of the things we're trying to get corrected with this Clark report thing and actually the Clark committee agreed entirely when they proposed that that date,

25:00 which was previously the 19th of February, when Darwin was attacked, that be moved back to the day that Pearl Harbour was attacked and the other date was to go forward to the last recorded instance where the Japanese had aircraft in the area which could attack and that was the, I think about the 15th of September 1944 when

25:30 Spitfires from Darwin put on billy tanks and they went up in the Celebes Islands and wiped out the last of them up there. That became the last operation the Japs could reach us but the government knocked it back anyway, out of hand. You know there's a lot of, when the Spitfires came out here, there was a lot of English pilots and ground crew came out with them,

26:00 didn't qualify. They're fighting for Australia but no, don't qualify which is pretty discriminatory isn't it? See these are fellers that decided to stay here or they went back and got their discharge and moved out here afterwards but they still don't qualify for repatriation benefits, Gold Cards, that sort of thing.

**That's kind of convenient**

26:30 **for the powers that be now that there was a hush hush, you know everything was so hush hush back then, that they could use that.**

Actually Clark who was in charge of the Clark report he said, "Actually it's illegal to discriminate like that, against people just because they served in Australia and not overseas." But anyway the government's knocked it back out of hand so I don't know whether they've actually passed the amendments of the bill yet.

27:00 **How have you been involved in…?**

Well I'm a sort of a chief organiser, CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the Darwin Defender's Union, the founder of it actually and we, when the Clark committee was setting out to do all their investigations, they wanted submissions from all the different units and

27:30 they rang me and asked would we like to have a private interview with the committee when they came to Melbourne? So we did that. I went along with Major General Frank Poke from Melbourne who was one of us and we had about 20 minutes each to, we each put our own case forward and after that there were about another 40 minutes or so of questions that they asked.

28:00 And Clark said, when he shook hands with me, he said, "I certainly learnt a lot today that I never knew before." But anyway he accepted our recommendations then but it was no good if the government

doesn't put them into the Act. Actually they've really sold that Clark report out cheap, you know they're talking about putting in 200 million over four years whereas

28:30 the Clark committee costed their recommendations at about 600 million over four years so the rest of them are still going to be short changed for the rest of their lives which is bad news in my book. Somebody wrote in one of the papers, I don't know if it was yesterday or today, said, "Obviously John Howard has never looked down a gun barrel."

29:00 I think that goes for most politicians.

**Can you tell us a bit about the Darwin Defenders, how that was formed?**

Yes, initially had to register an association which I did and then Pat and I were the first two members of it actually. You have to have members to start with,

29:30 then I circularised all the members of the 19th Machine Gun reunion thing and collected another 70-odd members there and the other units had lists of their members and currently we've got something over 900 and that's after about probably 200 have died since we started. There's, you know a steady loss in that regard but we're getting a steady interest from

30:00 other people, family of members. They said, you know, "Dad was there, never told us anything about it," you know. "What did he do?" Anyway we joined them up as members and they're supporting us quite well. It's a gradual thing of course but you get two or three new members every week, then offset this week, there's been two passed on so, but the gradual thing seems to be

30:30 to increase.

**What sort of drove you to create the Darwin Defenders?**

It was the injustice of the whole thing, the way anybody who served in Australia, and particularly in Darwin, was downgraded for benefits or anything like that. Now it didn't effect me because I was there for the full three months and I got a Gold Card and all that sort of thing but there were so many that didn't, so.

31:00 And the fact that they'd prevented the history of the thing from ever being published, you know and that's real bad news I think in any country and that sort of censorship. Now stamping all the documents 'Not to be released until 1995', which is 50 years. And in the interim then I think it was in the time of the Whitlam Government, they were more interested in the history of Russia,

31:30 countries like that so they dropped Australian history right out of the Australian school curriculum so that people now 50 and younger, most of them had no inkling at all what went on in Australia with, you know in those days so we set out to publicise it. Well I started and I've got a lot of help from members around and the newsletters I do, I'll give you a few samples down there.

32:00 They're accounts sent in by members of their own experience there at the time and I warn people that these people tell the story as they remember it. Now if you remember something different, you know good luck to you, but you can't say that what this feller says is wrong because, you know that's the way he remembers it so, you know there's a general disclaimer in that regard. But

32:30 I've had, some hundreds of those stories have been published in that newsletter quarterly for, it's the fifth year we're in, yeah started July 1999.

**Are there other ways of publicising, of getting those stories out there, of sort of addressing, you know basically that lack of knowledge and understanding?**

It's fairly difficult because

33:00 papers for instance are not interested in stories they don't know anything about but we are getting good support now. One thing we initiated is having an annual ceremony for the, you know commemoration ceremony at different places. Now there's one held at the shrine every year, one in Adelaide at the cenotaph in Adelaide, in Sydney and in smaller country places, for instance Horsham, Bendigo, Shepparton.

33:30 They all hold an annual ceremony and other places too. There's smaller units we hardly hear anything about, RSL [Returned and Services League] groups where they, you know with a number of members, they run a small private one and that is helping. Those ceremonies get some publication in the local area and particularly when you get a speaker like our patron Sir Zelman Cowen and

34:00 the Victorian president of the RSL is a good supporter of ours these days and, you know we're getting the story spread around. But it's a long battle but I s'pose we can only do what we can.

**So how far off the mark is, you know the general public's**

34:30 **understanding and knowledge do you think, of what did happen?**

Well, I've got a letter there, had a number like it. One woman is a school teacher in New South Wales and she studied history and other places of course when she was there and she got to be a high school

history teacher

35:00 and suddenly she found out Darwin was bombed, “How did that happen?” Carol Cleary her name is. Anyway she wrote a letter to explain how the education department was so remiss in that here she was educated to be a teacher and she wasn’t ever told a thing about it, and there were hundreds

35:30 like that. I’ve had a history master, one of the Geelong colleges. A lady rang me one day and said, “What’s this about Darwin being bombed? I never knew Darwin was bombed.” Another woman from Melbourne rang me one day. She was going to write a book about the bombing in Darwin but she thought well, it was only bombed once. I sent her a list of suggested reading, books of publication, that sort of thing

36:00 suggested she study it up a bit first, talk to a few people. I haven’t heard from her since.

**Have you been back to Darwin?**

Yes, several times. Pat and I went back for a visit, it’d be 16 years ago I suppose. We were still living at Albury. We took a holiday, took a tour around Australia and called in at Darwin for

36:30 about four days and then being involved with the Darwin Defenders, of course got involved with the Centenary of Federation in Darwin and I was actually one of the speakers there on that day. It’s the only time I got to earbash politicians. Johnny Howard was there, Peter Reith and Kim Beazley. Course I was only allowed four minutes and the stipulation was, “Whatever you

37:00 do, you must not mention Japanese.”

**Did you pull it off?**

I had to submit my script beforehand, have it vetted first and it was well received and all that sort of thing and got a lot of publicity over it, but just wasn’t allowed to mention Japanese.

**The censorship continues.**

Yep, I mean the top pollies, they don’t want to do

37:30 anything to upset our Japanese trade, do they, so mustn’t upset the Japanese.

**Did you actually get to meet any of the pollies that day?**

Yes I did. John Howard very briefly. Peter Reith, struck him at breakfast the next morning. He congratulated me on my speech and actually I made two. The second one

38:00 was I was told that there was a dinner at which all the pollies were there and everybody they could fit into the place, but had to present Dennis Bourke, the chief minister, with a Darwin Defenders flag. I must show you one of those when we go downstairs and, “You must not make a long winded speech.”

38:30 When it came to the point, when I stood up and everybody was asked to sit down, “I’ve been told not to make a long-winded speech and I didn’t intend to. I mean why should I do that when we’ve got all these experts, the politicians from Canberra, here?” Which brought a big laugh so the next morning, that’s all I said before I presented the flag, and next morning Peter Reith said, “I congratulate you on your speech, both of them,” he said. So

39:00 then we went back, that was in 2001 and 2002 I organised over a thousand bods around Australia to go back for the 60th anniversary, tremendous amount of correspondence, that sort of thing was involved. But a lot of them, course there was about a thousand I knew about organised, but a lot who were contacted

39:30 decided they’d go and do their own thing and John Anictomatis, the governor there, said, he asked Qantas, “How many people did you bring up here for it?” “Two thousand, four hundred,” so there were, you know more than as many again that came under their own steam without getting involved in the official part of it.

**That’s a huge number 60 years on.**

Yes, the tourist trade got a big boost that week.

40:00 They still run a very strong annual ceremony in Darwin. There are two. There is one, the Americans hold it about eight o’clock in the morning they hold a ceremony where they put this gun they recovered in the memorial. They hold a ceremony there at eight o’clock in the morning and then the other, the main ceremony nearby at the cenotaph in Darwin starts off about nine, I think nine. Anyway they

40:30 were ready to blow the sirens at 9:58 [am], you know when the raid started but they get, you know good attendances up there every year for that. There’s not many of our members go though because they’re all getting a bit long and travelling’s more difficult and so many of them of course are Veteran Affairs pensioners and can’t afford the air fares and the accommodation.

**Now I think we’ve only got a minute or so left on tape,**

41:00 **so your final chance to say whatever needs to be said really before we're done. Now the pressure's on, I think you've said it all really but if there's anything else you'd like to…?**

I don't think there's anything more I could say but if anybody wants to support Darwin Defenders, by all means get in touch with me. We welcome all the help we can get.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**