Australians at War Film Archive

Jack McMahon (Macca) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 15th March 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1618

Tape 1

00:38 **Tape's on Jack so, like we were saying, it would be great just to get a picture of life as a kid in the 20s, where were you born for starters?**

Melbourne. Prahran actually, in 1920, 26th September, which brings us up to school in Melbourne,

01:00 Roman Catholics, the family. Highbury Grove of East Prahran was our place of living in those days which was a working class suburb but until we went to Ballarat, which was when I was aged 11, it never occurred to us as kids that people owned their own homes because everybody rented near where we lived in Melbourne. When we got to Ballarat we found

01:30 out that people did own homes and things of that nature. Ballarat came into perspective in 1932. So that was the formation I would say, I was finishing school, in those days was, for leaving school was the Merit Certificate and I was fortunate to obtain the Merit Certificate which allowed me to leave school. And

02:00 jobs were hard to get, which they were, took me eight months to get the first job which was with a General Motors dealer in Ballarat. I was in motors up until the outbreak of war, which of course was September 1939, but …

So Jack, is it possible to get more of a picture of what life was like in Prahran in the 20s?

Life in Prahran, yes it is

02:30 in a sense that if we were able to balance it against what I would consider life today, there is no comparison because as kids I didn't know anybody in my bracket of age group that got into trouble, and we played footy in the street, we played cricket in the street. We didn't have playgrounds, we didn't have this, we didn't have that, we were very, very – and yet we didn't look for things because we weren't used to it. Was that way,

03:00 living with stuff. There was myself, two sisters, younger. I was the elder of three kids. Dad was a veteran of WW1. He was equivalent of what TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] is today, they were called TP&D in those days, totally and permanently disabled, which changed later on, of course, to what we know today. He was given the opportunity of –

03:30 have you ever heard of Wynn's Wines? Yeah, well Mr Wynn was the fella who he knew and there was a vacancy of a business in Ballarat, and they were looking for a manager and he was offered the job and that's how we went to Ballarat. Are we skipping along too fast there?

That's fine, I would still like to a little bit more about your father for example you said he …?

About my father, yeah, he was one of five and he was an

04:00 original – on the landing of Gallipoli, a signaller, he was wounded in the arms, but he was in the initial landing of Gallipoli, which went against me later on as far as he was concerned, being the only son and kids doing what they were supposed to do in those days, and refused to sign my papers to give me permission to – WW2, but other than that, as far as

04:30 living of the times – for argument's sake, I have often said, there was no such thing as pet food, put it that way. We all had dogs but there were no registration, no collars and your dog knew where he lived.

You had some pets back then?

Oh yeah, we all had dogs and cats, that was part and parcel of the set up, which it was. The dog ate anything, no

05:00 such thing as pet food as such as we know it today, well there were no supermarkets. The grocer up the street, broken biscuits on the counter, and bottles, plenty of bags and that sort of thing. Kites, 6 pence.

Kids go to the pictures of a Saturday afternoon with sixpence a head but then again, the best man in our street was a foreman of the SEC [State Electricity Commission] in those days, he was getting £4.10 a week, that was

05:30 very healthy money – if that's the line of information you're after.

Yeah, yeah, that's exactly what I want to get a picture of what it was like and how different to today.

That's right. I never knew how my mother did it, but she did, we never ever went hungry, the three of us. There was no such thing as a favourite food, you ate what was put down in front of you and it was just natural, you just grew up doing that, with the result

06:00 that it still applies today, eat anything that's put down in front of me.

Do you remember the sorts of meals that you had served to you?

Yes. Irish stew was very prominent, very prominent, must have been easy to make. And a leg of lamb – or a roast on the weekends. My mother would – you might find this hard to believe, at age 10, as I said, that was the last year in Melbourne – she'd shoot me off to the Prahran Market with

06:30 3/- or 2/6 in my hand, and she'd say, "Don't lose it son," and I'd come home with a leg of lamb because in those days there was no refrigeration and so the butchers would quit their stock at midday on Saturday, whatever was left, so that was the time to go and buy it. So she must have trusted me because I didn't lose the money or buy anything else, I wouldn't have been game to do that anyway. Oh, no, it could be said that by today's standards, and in my opinion,

07:00 you don't try and tell young people those sorts of things, they probably wouldn't know what you are talking about, probably would doubt you.

What about just a bit more about your father, because he was at the first landing of Gallipoli, how much did that stay with him after – did you remember as a kid, did he have a lot of mates from those days?

He never, ever was an RSL [Returned and Services League] man, he used to wear his

07:30 Return from Active Service Badge from those times. He didn't participate in Anzac Day marches. And I suppose it was fair to say that his health was ordinary to say the least and, as I said earlier, he was disabled and he wasn't over healthy, he passed away at the age of 53. He didn't talk much about his

08:00 experiences except that he was sure that his son wasn't going to participate in the possibility of the likes of what he had seen himself. But I had a mind of my own and as far as I was concerned I probably was a stubborn kid. And in those days the equivalent of a peacetime army was called the militia. I joined the Militia 8th Battalion City of Ballarat Regiment, at the age of 17,

08:30 so I was ready for it, ready to be part of it when war broke in 1939 but father said, "No, you are not going son." Am I getting away from what you wanted to know?

That's fine. Had you, I mean, this is all very, very valuable. Had you done the cadets or anything like that?

Pardon?

Were there cadets?

Yes, there were cadets, but the thing was, it wasn't easy to get into because everybody was in the same boat because they used to

09:00 pay us a small fee, I forget exactly what the fee was, a matter of shillings every six months, it might have been 7/6 or something like that. Everybody wanted to be a part of it and it wasn't easy to get into the battalion itself, as distinct from the cadets. I was at the awkward age from the army point of view, I was 17 in 1938 because my birthday was in September, so I missed the cadet qualification period to get in, but I was still able to get into

09:30 the senior battalion itself and become a member of A Company which I was in when war broke out and we were immediately shunted into camp for a month, guarding bridges and that sort of baloney, but in all it was viewed as being important. And then we were in 1940, for three months from April to July, but during that three months

10:00 and learning, and you do learn, I was 19 and had become a sergeant with the battalion. The vacancies were – and I don't know whether you are familiar with the set up with the army in those days, but the backbone of the army from the training point of view was the AIC, the Australian Instructional Corps, they were permanent soldiers.

10:30 The regular rank was warrant officer 2nd Class. When war broke out, those fellows were snapped up by the battalions of the 6th, 7th or any of the divisions to become regimental sergeant majors, which left the gate open for young fellas if they were keen enough like me. So I put it to them at home that I could get in. And in those days, which of course changed as the war went on with the advent of Japan's

activities,

11:00 but in those days you could become a member of the army with a V number. And the V number allowed you to serve anywhere in Australia but not overseas, you had to have an X number, VX. So I was allowed, and I did through from there to July 1940, when the three months' camp finished, to March 1941, when I approached the brigadier at the camp at Darley, out of Bacchus Marsh,

11:30 I approached him, had myself paraded before him and appealed to him with a couple of others to be allowed to gain an X number without having to go to our parents, and he granted it. So that put me into line to become a member of the 2nd 21st Battalion which was the one I went away with, and the reasoning behind that, what made me so keen to get the interview with the brigadier, was we were in Melbourne on weekend leave,

12:00 they were recruiting in Flinders Street Station, looking for men because they were due to go abroad, as we thought. Immediately when we were granted permission, and that meant being discharged from the army as a V number and re-enlisted with an X number. So we got in and up to Bungulla out of Albury, and the battalion was ready to move and we were certain

12:30 we were, and 8th Division I might say, 2nd 23rd, and 2nd 22nd were both members of the 23rd Brigade, and we were off to Singapore, as we thought, on the train over to Adelaide except we come unstuck there because at Wayville Showgrounds, where we were camped, we were notified that we were heading north on to the ship to go to Singapore, which took us to Darwin. So am I going too fast there?

Um, in some ways, yes.

13:00 **I would like to get a bit more detail – I mean, we have covered a fair bit of time there Jack, so just to get a little more detail, um, even going so far as to go back to Ballarat, moving from Melbourne to Ballarat, we'll definitely pick up on that shortly, but just to get a sense of how that affected you as well, I mean how life changed at that point for you?**

Well it didn't to any large extent. One of the most interesting things, I said money, I said early in the piece that money was terribly tight

13:30 in those days and we, as a family, went with the removal truck instead of going by bus or train or whatever, we could have done, but we were part of the load of furniture. And, Christian Brothers was where I had come from, St Mary's in East St Kilda to Christian Brothers in Victoria Street in Ballarat. And things were tough at school, the strap was

14:00 prominent, you only had to sneeze and you looked like copping one or two. But it didn't hurt us. Religion was important to both sides of the fence, that's the way I will put it there. The Catholics didn't have much regard for the Protestants and the Protestants didn't have much regard for the Catholics. And I played in the local football team, which I have got a photo down there of, 1933, and we were undefeated, and part of the deal was, I know it sounds silly,

14:30 but it was viewed in such a serious manner that it could have been classed as a mortal sin to lose to a Protestant team so we didn't lose a match for the year, believe it or believe it not. But in the main, it wasn't a warfare deal amongst the kids, the – more to do with the elders, and some of the earlier girls that I met in the course of natural boys' interests, if they found out you were a Catholic, you weren't welcome, and that happened on several occasions.

15:00 **Do you remember name calling and taunts, that sort of thing?**

Oh yes, 'Catholic dogs jump like frogs', that sort of business. Yeah. But it didn't influence your life to any great degree. But when I was, my birthday being the 26th of the 9th, and grand final time, it has been on grand final day

15:30 at times, and I am just on my 60th birthday, and I don't know whether you have ever, 16th birthday. Ballarat was famous for its South Street Competitions, where the – covers a wide range of areas, girls with their dancing and stuff and choirs, mixed choirs, and so forth. Anyway, I met this lass whom I thought was from one of the South Australian teams

16:00 over with the girls and she wasn't, she was a local, and that was the girl I married but at that stage she was 10 days short of her 14th birthday. So that's where we met, at South Street, and ultimately I became engaged to her on 13th March, which is a couple of days ago, today's the 15th, and we moved from Bungulla, as we thought to go to Singapore but it didn't happen, on the 17th,

16:30 St Patrick's Day. Yeah, just keep prompting me if there's other stuff you want.

That's alright. Yeah, um, you've sort of talked about your mum's cooking and you just ate whatever was given?

That's just natural, you didn't query anything, there was no point.

What was your mother like as a person, or what were both your parents like?

Well, my father was one who only worked intermittently, and when he went and took this

17:00 position in Ballarat he was the manager of a wine saloon in the main road, and that only lasted for a couple of years and then he was sent back to Melbourne to Caulfield Repat [Repatriation] Hospital of those times, and so he gave it away and he didn't work again, he was in receipt of a war pension, naturally. In those days the pension was paid at the Post Office so every fortnight my mother had to trudge off to the Post Office to get her share of the pension.

17:30 But I would say that in my experience I couldn't have had a better mother, she was a marvellous manager and good with us kids, brought us up well. Everything in that line was no complaints department at all, she passed away at the age of 77 back in 1974. My Dad was 53, as I said earlier, in 1947 he died, so he just lasted to just after the

18:00 war. That's about it.

How many kids were there?

Three: I am the eldest. Two girls younger, and all of us have passed the 80 mark, we were steps and stairs. My sister in Ballarat, I was talking to her yesterday on the phone, she's 81. So just one, two, three and bang that was the end of it, they found out what was causing it and altered the story. Yeah.

So how did

18:30 **all the kids, how did you and your sisters get along?**

Fine. Yeah, good as gold. Yes, I can – yes, we were a good team, myself and the two girls. At one stage of the game, my father was a bit annoyed with the eldest sister at the time, she might have been 16 or 17, and for some unknown reason she was to go to a ball and he said she wasn't going and locked her in her

19:00 bedroom. She put on a bit of a turn. Any rate, I went round to the side of the house and tapped on her window and she opened the window and I helped her out and I said, "On your way," and away she went and he didn't know anything about it. Things like the camaraderie was good between us, and it still is. And the other one, she lives in Melbourne and health is fair, which is – my health is far better than the two girls'. Yeah, and she only had one daughter,

19:30 that's the nearest sister, Noreen is her name, she lives in England, and she was out here a couple of years ago and down here to see me, renewed old times, and bits and pieces, Pamela. She's on the wall there somewhere, there she is above the lady's head, she's on the wall. I am a crank with photos as you can see, I have got them everywhere. I have even got, I have got another den out the back, used to be a garage at one stage, it's full of photos.

20:00 And then Val, she had – that's the youngest of the three of us – she had, she married a sailor, Charlie Philips, good fella, good mate of mine, anyway he became her husband and we got along fine, nothing to do with relationships at all, just good mates. He unfortunately died at the age of 42 with cancer so she

20:30 never remarried. They had two sons who are both car dealers. I was a car dealer, that was my life after the war when I came to Geelong, I got into motor cars, and a partner of a car yard, but I have been retired 23 years.

Back in those early days, what sorts of chores would the kids have to do? Would you help your mother at all?

Oh, anything, anything. Whatever was asked of you. In other words,

21:00 fire wood, of course was a prominent one, wood stoves were prominent, you know you had to have kindling, messages were automatic, where we lived there was a dairy in our street, so, "Go and get the milk Jack," and you just did it without compunction whatever. Oh no. Things at home were, to say in all fairness,

21:30 were quite harmonious. We had the family of five, could expect to be. Yeah, but it seemed to be of those times, and the street was quite a nice street, it was a one way street, Highbury Grove in East Prahran, and there was one car in the street and that was, it wasn't a car, it was a utility and that belonged to the fellow who was the foreman at the SEC. Nobody

22:00 else had a car, you were lucky to have a bike, that's true. At one stage there was a misdemeanour up the street, something had gone wrong and a police patrol car turned up at the residence and all we kids went up there, it was a real big novelty to have a look at this Daimler, this police Daimler, we never seen one before. All that sort of stuff, different world, different.

So what were your main forms of

22:30 **entertainment as kids back then?**

As I said earlier in the piece, if once a month, it might have been in the days of getting to the pictures of a Saturday afternoon, it was sixpence a head. So many occasions of the times when we were able to go, Mum would give me 2/- which was sixpence each, take the two girls and sixpence to spend, and we did well.

23:00 Oh yes. But often when I am talking to my sisters, I go to Ballarat every five weeks to see the one up

there, talk about the days when we were kids and all the, there was never any troubles or things of that nature. I have, remember when I was at St Mary's in East St Kilda, one of the boys' mums

23:30 passed away, one of the kids' mothers, and everyone was in deep shock to think that somebody had lost his mother. Oh no, quite good really when it's all said and done. And then I had an aunt who worked for the Tramways Board as it was then, and you expected to pay, if you could, going to the Catholic school, and the accepted amount of money was 1/- a week, she paid that

24:00 for me. She didn't have any aspirations, she was a career lady with the Tramways Board and she didn't have any romances to worry about and she used to give me the 1/- a week, she paid the Reverend Brother. Now they have trouble getting Reverend Brothers. College here in Geelong, they haven't got any brothers, they are all private teachers,

24:30 St Joseph's.

What memories do you have of those school years, at Christian Brothers there?

Oh good, yeah. Well they were always, always very sport minded, always. You always played, you were expected to play. Not everybody was a star of course but all the kids were encouraged to play, cricket in the season, running events and they managed, like at the time in Ballarat, like in Ballarat, I was only at

25:00 school there in – I went there in 1932, as I said earlier, and 1933 was when I got my merit. Then I didn't get a job, I couldn't get a job, so I went back to school just to go to school you know, in 1934, and the Reverend, one of the priests from the presbytery next door he bought a new car, Father Green, and in the course of his conversation with the General Motors dealer of the day,

25:30 when he went to get his car it wasn't ready, he said, "You need a boy here to do the –," he said, "Yeah, we need one," and he said, "Well I know where there is one." It was me and I got the job. It was 1936 when I finished with them and I took a job with a Chrysler dealership. But cars were my life, I owned my first car at 17 which was a 1926, I have got a photo of it, Essex tourer which I bought for £15,

26:00 had it for about eight or nine months and sold it for £16.

Did you do some work on it or what?

Yeah, all those things did happen you know.

So you were a pretty good salesman then?

Mmm?

You were destined to be a salesman?

Well I was keen in the sense of being keen, it's a little bit of kinship to do certain things, in other words I was interested in used cars, not new cars as

26:30 such. The same way in the army, I was – I wanted to be and was successful in being a senior NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] which takes you to the Sergeants' Mess, I never wanted to be an officer, never. I don't know whether I could have been or whether I couldn't have been, I wasn't a candidate. My associates after the war, in 1948 when they opened enlistment again, I enlisted in the peacetime and did five years

27:00 and one of my mates was a sergeant, and he was a good, efficient bloke, and I was a sergeant, but he went on to become a major general because he was dedicated and it was his life, but I wasn't and my life was to be one of the fellas. I remember one time in the New Guinea days, and this officer used to say to me, and he said it on several occasions, he said, "What's the mood of the men, Sergeant?" I would say, "Excellent, sir." And he said to me one day, "The last time I asked you, you said,

27:30 'Excellent, sir,'" and I said, "Yes sir, well," I said, "if there's anything wrong I will let you know." But that was it, happy to be one of the fellas. Things had to be done properly, which they did.

You got that – you were about 15 or 16 when you got that job at Ford? Sorry, was it Ford?

No, no. Ballarat, the first job?

What was the first job?

First job was General Motors dealership at Ballarat. Well I was one month shy of turning 14,

28:00 I was still 13 technically and then I became 14. The wage was 10/- a week. Believe this or believe it not, of the 10/- a week, 8/- a week went to my mother for board, 1/- went on insurance and 1/- was in my pocket, but I used to capitalise on that by washing people's cars, certain people, customers, and get 1/- from them

28:30 for doing it, so I could generally build myself up to 5/- or 6/- a week or whatever the case may be. And then after being there for 12 months, my mother she was one who was very fair, she was a good mother, but she said to me, "Jack, have they mentioned anything to do with a rise? You have been there 12 months, you know," and I said, "No, Mum," and she said, "Well you had better see Mr Craig, if you don't

ask him,"

29:00 she said, "I will go and ask him myself." So I did ask Mr Craig, and my nick-name at work was Mickey, and I said, 'Excuse me Mr Craig, Mum said this and Mum said that.' And he said, "As a matter of fact, Mickey, I don't know whether we need you." Just like that. Which of course he was having a go at me, and I got a rise from 10/- a week to – a mammoth rise, to 17/6. When I left

29:30 I was offered this job with a Chrysler dealership and there was another 5/-, another 2/6 a week. When I enlisted, joined the army, the highest wage I ever earned was £2.10. I was in the big money then. Then when – am I allowed to skip along, on the private line?

Skip along yeah. Go for it.

When the war ended

30:00 we had accrued, my wife's name was Mina, there she is up top. Later came on down here to become a Life Governor of Geelong Hospital. We had a son and at the time I was out of the army and I wanted to go to Queensland, to Toowoomba. I spent time up there but she didn't want to go that far, we had relatives and

30:30 so forth, and we had both been down here before the war, and we come down here for a couple of weeks. We come down here for a couple of weeks and, as it turned out, walking along Mooroobool Street one day, and saw a gentleman coming towards me who had been the sales manager of the Chrysler people that I was with in Ballarat. So we shook and he said, "What are you doing with yourself?" and, "I have just arrived here." Anyway, he said,

31:00 "Do you want to get back in the motor business?" and I said, "Well that's a goal if I can, I haven't even had a chance to get sorted out yet." He introduced me to what was called Burnside McClure, General Motors dealers here of the time, defunct nowadays, sold out and so forth, so I got a job there with them. We rented and it was in 1945 at the end of the war, rented a place, lucky to get it, in Grey Street in

31:30 East Geelong and then we built this in 1950. And so I have been here ever since, 53 years. And in those days, Queenscliff Road out the front was a single highway and trams ran from the corner to the city, and telephones were hard to get and there's the first one I ever got. There in 1952, and I have just got a little ticket on it to that effect.

32:00 The idea of trying to get that, my wife was pregnant with our last child, a girl as it turned out, and we had hoped to get the phone on before she was due for the birth at Christmas, as it turned out, Cheryl is her name, my daughter, was December the 2nd 1951 and we didn't get the phone in time, it came in February 1952. So it has been there every since.

32:30 **Can you tell us a bit about when you started work at General Motors, what sort of work did you do?**

Well I was in overalls in the first instance there. Well actually there was a bit of sympathy and a lot of effort trying to get the ex-servicemen into the work force with people and they said they could get me into the workshop. So I was in overalls for argument's sake. And

33:00 from 1945 to 1953, and in 1953 there was another firm we were dealing with, Thompson's, Thompson Motors. They were used car dealers, and there were two brothers, with a, they had another fella working for them, Ben Leicester, and Perce Thompson, the first of the two seniors, he was talking to me one day and he said,

33:30 "Have you ever thought about getting out of overalls?" "Well not really, what's the –?" He said, "We are going to put on another man and if you would like to think about it we'll take you on," so I accepted and joined them in 1953. So that took me into a suit. I loved it, I really did, I sold 108 cars in the first five months and, again, selling cars in those days was like buying a loaf of bread today. You

34:00 had to get the cars, that was the thing, you didn't have trouble getting the buyers. So eventually I became a partner in the business and I lasted in business with them for 20 years and then I retired and I took a year off, I had done enough. I never, ever wanted to be a millionaire, put it that way, but I was interested in having enough money that if I wanted to do something I could go and do it without any embarrassment.

34:30 I didn't want to accrue money for the sake of looking at what had been accrued. And we were never short, fortunately, and my daughter, who had gone to England at the age of 19, all my kids did the overseas stuff, when I say all my kids, there were only three, of course, they all did that, she eventually met a fellow in England who was a South African and she became engaged to him and the year was,

35:00 I suppose you could call it a successful marriage, a successful time of existence in Geelong always, and so did she, and Cheryl she told us she become engaged to – that she was going to become engaged to this fellow, anyhow the wedding date came along, and so I took my wife to South Africa for the wedding

35:30 and from there we went, made a trip of it and went to England and the continent, Singapore, which she hated because, "It was too hot," she said – and things like that. So we always had enough comfortably without striving to just make money our goal, neither of us wanted to do that. And to be perfectly

honest, don't get me wrong when I say this, I just gave my

36:00 daughter a cheque for $10,000 last week for she and her two brothers to share to have a drink for Easter. So I might as well get rid of it, I don't need a lot of money.

If only all parents were the same, I say.

Pardon?

If only all parents were the same.

Oh well it wasn't that we were good, but I suppose in the true sense it came from perhaps my earlier days, perhaps thinking,

36:30 "I can do it," so why not? When it's all said and done I would rather do that and see the benefit of it than be gone from this world and not know anything about it.

Can I just take you back to your very first job in Ballarat ...?

Craig Brothers in Ballarat.

Craig Brothers in Ballarat. What did they have you doing there and why were you known as Mickey?

Got no idea. They were –

37:00 they had an agency for, they used to do tyre retreading and things like that, they had an agency for it and they had fellows in that section of the building and they also had a motor painting section and I used to double between, I suppose you could say as a kid, which I was, handy kid, just wherever I was wanted. One of the fellas in the tyre service one day called out they wanted me to go round to the Goodyear

37:30 place and pick up a tyre, they used to do that, on your bike and put it over your neck and bring it home. And he called out, "Mickey!" and I didn't respond of course, and he roared out, "Mickey!" and one of the other blokes called out, "His name is not Mickey," but it stuck. My name is Jack, and it wasn't all that long ago in Geelong, I was down at the physio, down the road here, I was sent down there for some neck treatment, I had a problem with my

38:00 neck. And the physio fellow was from, not Fiji, one of the other islands, I have forgotten now, anyhow nice bloke and his name was Jack, he introduced himself and we shook hands, and he said to me quite gingerly he said to me, "Is your name Jack or John?" I said, "No, if it was John I would have said so." I said, "There's a story to it." My Mum popped me along to the Roman Catholic priest to be

38:30 baptised, and the Catholic Church, and the reverend gentleman said, "Oh Mrs McMahon, I am sorry, you can't call him Jack, Jack's not even a name in the Bible," and Mum said, "Well don't concern yourself, Father, if you can't do it I'll take him to someone else who will." So of course he did and so forth and he, it's Jack. But many times over the years people have said to me, "Is it Jack or is it John?" And then my second name is Lawrence with a

39:00 'w' and that was caused through her. My mother was one of eight, and one of her sisters was engaged to a jockey, in Melbourne, and his name was Lawrence Fisher, and his was spelt with a 'w' and his nick-name was Law, he was killed in a race fall, so Mum named me after him. There is a double explanation, every now and again over the years, "It's not John, it's Jack, and it's Lawrence with a 'w'."

39:30 By the time you have said all that you could be halfway to Adelaide.

And then you went on to the Chrysler Dealership?

Yes, Yes. George Oats Motors.

Were you doing the same thing there?

Yes, but I graduated there, they were looking for someone to bring on their motor painting section and panel beating, and I took a course at the Ballarat School of Mines, they did all sorts of trade deals and so forth, in

40:00 panel beating and dent knocking, and became after – and I also used to do, which I loved doing, go to Melbourne of a weekend, get an extra if required, to bring up a new car to the dealership, and I would take my girl with me and so forth. I was with them until I enlisted and that was what brought that to a head and by the time the war was over, they were Sydney

40:30 people that had the business, they had gone back to Sydney. They had withdrawn so that job had gone anyway, so it meant a field had to be opened up. That was how we had an open mind about where we would go because if I had gone back to Ballarat I would have had to look at a job all over again, may or may not have been successful, probably would have been successful, but no, a change was what was required and we never looked back.

41:00 To touch on it doesn't cause me any embarrassment at all, my wife developed emphysema, she was a

cigarette smoker. It killed her, simple as that, but we were married for 54.5 years, which looked like being permanent.

Tape 2

00:31 **So, when did you actually get your driver's licence, how old were you?**

Oh yeah, I was, that's a good question, it really is, because I used to drive when I was with the General Motors dealer, Craig Brothers. There were no used car yards in those days. People traded in cars and eventually the dealer sold them, we used to park them in Armstrong South in Ballarat and around the corner where we parked the

01:00 cars. You couldn't do that today because there are cars taken up everywhere, but in those days you could. I didn't have a licence, so I would be 15 when I learnt to drive, and when I got over to the Chrysler dealership, the boss said to me, he said, "You haven't got a licence." "No, Mr Oats." He said, and this is the way it went, "Well I have got to go over to the MRB with some certain registration papers and so and so, give me your details and I will get your licence while I am there."

01:30 So I never sat for a licence and it cost 5/- which he took out of my next pay. So that was alright, so I had the licence. Anyway, when I went away during the war, you could keep your licence for three years, if you didn't renew it after three years you had to sit again. And when I came to Geelong in 1945, my licence had run out and I had to get it again. So I had to go and sit a

02:00 test, which I did. It cost 10/- gone up 5/-. So I got – in the first instance in 1938 – oh yeah, and that was another thing too, I don't know whether I am talking about the licence, whether I am jumping the gun here but when I was with the 2nd 21st Battalion and I was in Machine Gun Carriers 4 Platoon HQ [headquarters] Company,

02:30 Light AFVs, Armoured Fighting Vehicles, but I wasn't happy because there were only a certain number of machines and a lot more eligible drivers. You didn't have your own, put it that way, and I wanted to get a transfer if I could from 4 to 6 Platoon, which took me to motor transport and I was able to secure that before, just before Pearl Harbour. Then later on, perhaps, in the course of discussion, I might be able to explain

03:00 how doing that move saved my life.

O.K. we'll make sure we will pick up on that. Can you tell us just a little bit, you mentioned how you met Mina in Ballarat, how often would you get to see each other while you were working?

While I was working? Daily, daily. Oh yes, she became a hairdresser for a firm, they were Adelaide,

03:30 home based. They had branches in Ballarat and main cities in between like Geelong, Bendigo, Horsham and things like that. She became manageress here at Geelong, which she did. She was also in Horsham, but a lot of her time was in Ballarat. Oh, no, while I knew, a certain amount of ego I

04:00 suppose, she was the lady for me if I could convince her. Oh no, we know all the time, for sure. Yeah. And fortunately I was accepted by her family, they didn't have any quarrels with the Catholics or anything of that nature, and they were a great family. Still applies true today,

04:30 there are two sisters of hers still in Ballarat, both of whom have lost their partners. Both lost their husbands, one in 1991 and the other one about seven years ago. We are still as close to them as we ever were. I see them when I go up to Ballarat every so often. Their parents are long gone, which they are. Not, it was just one of those things, I

05:00 suppose you could truthfully say we just clicked.

How would you spend your time together back in those early days?

You don't want me to tell any secrets do you?

That's up to you.

Well we used to go to the Regent Theatre every Saturday night, whatever the show was, and we would be sitting in the, not the lounge, the dress circle. And

05:30 that used to cost me 2/2 a seat, and the lady that we used to do the bookings, she got used to me, she got that used to me she used to keep them aside, she knew I would be in you know. And Mina was a prominent dancer and singer, which she was apart from her smoking business, which eventually caused her death, but she was a good pop singer,

06:00 she was of her day, and an excellent dancer, excellent. She was a better dancer than ever I was. Oh no we got by on that, which we did.

Where would she have sung?

South Street Competitions or, for argument's sake, on many occasions, you were being married and someone would say, "Get Mina to sing at the reception." She sang at a lot of weddings. Even here, when I

06:30 mentioned joining the motor firm, he had his 50th birthday, sure enough they got Mina to sing and she sang, 'Little Things Mean a Lot' was the name of the song she sang, and the encore was terrific and she had to sing it again. She was good.

When you say pop music, popular music, what was that?

Oh well, no comparison with what today is. It was all Astaire and Sinatra and on the

07:00 male side and Kitty Callan on the female side. Matter of fact I have got most of the stuff of the times down in the back room there and hundreds of records I have got. The old 78s, I have got heaps of those. I have got the first song she ever bought, 'Little Things Mean a Lot'. It's a pretty song. Oh no, she was with it at the

07:30 time, of the times. But no crash bands like they are today. Different world.

You would go to the local dances?

Oh yeah, and ice skating, ice skating was very much on the agenda. There was an ice skating rink in Ballarat in Grenville Street and we used to patronise that. That ice skating deal was generally about six couples, that sort of thing.

08:00 Yep. Plenty of entertainment, any amount. Bush walking in the right season. Oh yeah, yes.

You mentioned how you actually joined the militia in the 8th Battalion that was 1937?

1938.

Why did you decide to join up?

Well it was the thing.

08:30 It was an access to the rifle range, which was with real bullets, not make believe stuff, once a month. Camps, which were good. The 8th Battalion consists of HQ in Ballarat and they had a platoon in Daylesford, which was 30 miles away, and they had a company in Ararat and a company in Stawell and then when you went on to Mildura

09:00 it was the 7th Battalion, but Ballarat had all those and then when the annual camps came along you got in together, you know, down at Mt Martha or down that way, and you made a lot of friends. But it was there some way or other that my mother's brother, Albert, Bert for short, he was a Boer War soldier, which he used to talk of a lot to us as kids, he survived, he got back. And then of course

09:30 there was my father and his brother was a – he was another Bert, he was a veteran of France, and if I could say it was in my blood that's about the size of it. I was addicted to the army and in the – of the time when he refused to sign my paper to give me an X number, I wasn't unduly put out, because I was still in the army.

10:00 At the time of the fall of France which was June 1940, the Melbourne Town Hall was taking men, or men were being forced upon them at the enlistment depots there, at the rate of a man a minute. It's alright to say that but where are they going to put them unless there were fellas like us to teach them how to march and stand to attention and salute their officers, and small arms. So I become which I did, and developed

10:30 into a senior small arms instructor for the eighth month that I was in the 4th infantry training Battalion it was, and teaching Lewis machine guns, which was a very efficient machine gun of the times, it was before the Bren. And, we used to call it bull ring tactics, we moved around in a big circle, do one lot here and something over there and bayonet instruction

11:00 over there. And no, it was of great interest. Then on the other hand if we got leave from the three months' camp that we did before I did the infantry battalion training, relations would come down and visit the camp you know. My future wife, she was down at the camp several times with her girlfriend, who also had another

11:30 fellow, who was a mate of mine, she was going along with at the time. Life was very, very flexible and no complaints.

Can you tell us a bit more about your involvement pre war with the 8th, you said there was the annual one month camp. What would you get up to, what was the bulk of the training there?

The bulk of the training was basic.

12:00 In a sense of if there were developments, for argument's sake, which eventually the time of the month camp, new weaponry, like the Owen gun for argument's sake, Evan Owen, he invented that. The

Thompson, the TSN Thompson machine gun, which wasn't of great value to us as an Australian Army because it used 45 calibre ammunition, which is only effective if you are up close.

12:30 The lower the calibre the greater the chance you have got of effectively hitting someone because the 45 has to be, spray a bit, you know, unless you are up close. So all the chambers were changed, as they did, and different techniques were invented of fire training. There was plenty to work on, any amount of stuff.

Even in 1937,

13:00 **'38, did you feel that this was heading towards ...?**

Well yes, this is right, I am glad you mentioned that because over the course of the years, the interviews that I have done, some people have found it hard to comprehend. Now the eight months in Darwin in March 1941, and we left there in December, five days after Pearl Harbour, to sail north, the whole of that time was not training to combat an enemy, it

13:30 was training to combat Japan, and we knew it. How we knew it was from Japan's history as a warlike nation, went right back to the turn of the century with Russia, then China, the rape of Nam King, all those put before our eyes in the sense of knowing who you were going to meet. Now we knew, damn well common sense tells you that if you are sent to Darwin you are not going to be meeting the Germans territorial wise,

14:00 so there it is in a nutshell. So it was always going to be. But what it wasn't going to be, as we thought, was that Australia found itself in such a dire situation with the speed of the Japanese movements south through Malaysia, or Malaya as it was then, and in the times of 19 – in the First World War, that's the way I should have put it, there were four of everything. In WW2 there were

14:30 three of everything, like you marched in threes, you marched in fours in WW1. And there were all those changes whereby there were three brigades, three battalions to a brigade and three brigades to a division. So in our set up the Brigade HQ was Darwin. The brigadier that's in charge – that's another thing too, in WW1 it was brig-general that was dropped and brigadiers only in WW1. And so Brigade HQ, Brigadier

15:00 Lind was the chief and the 2nd 22nd, which was part of our brigade, sister battalion, was in Rabaul, New Britain. The 2nd 21st was us in Darwin and the 2nd 40th, which was originally Tasmanian, more than half, was over there in Timor. So in round figures, when we put the troops into Ambon we had 1131 was the technical figure, or just call it 1100, so

15:30 we had 1100 Australians in Ambon and we had 1100 Australians in Rabaul, we hit the 20,000 and it was inevitable what was going to happen, we just were not on an even basis. I never forget, I am jumping the gun, but I have to jump the gun at this stage, because everything we ever did was in default against the enemy on that side, and then back here I did a commando training course at Foster in Gippsland, and one

16:00 of our officers that escaped from the camp in Ambon, got back to Australia and he got half a dozen of us into his confidence, and the idea was to do a commando training course and become part of special independent group, the idea of getting back to Ambon. As I said initially when I met you, that they said no Japs would come further south than Ambon, well we walked straight into them. But had it been that the

16:30 Japanese, we had two ships, one was a navy ship with supplies on, to feed the islanders because they were not self supporting, and the other was our 40 and we were loaded with weapons and ammunition to the hilt, you know. Anyway, we were to land at Saumlaki Bay, and four or five in the morning, and the navy ship was away on our left, we were to go in first, they would come

17:00 in and unload their supplies. We had two of my mates on the bough of our ship with the Vickers machine gun, which is a water cooled weaponry, that was another thing that was part of our training in the early days, and these two mates of mine, number one and two on the gun and I was number three, which was the general purpose man to bring up extra ammunition or whatever the case may be. I had a set of field glasses. I had these field glasses looking in to five of them would be coming, 3-500 yards

17:30 off the wharf and there was patrolling up and down and I was uncertain, I said to Teddy Henson, he's left this life and so has the other one, anyway, I said, "Ted, have a look through here and see what you think. Have a look." He said, "What's the trouble Macca?" I said, "I am not sure, have a look and see what you think." He said, "I tell you what they are, bloody Japs." And they were. But the mistake that was made by the Japs was that they opened fire on us and the navy boat.

18:00 If they had let us land, they would have got the lot of us and no one would have ever known what happened to us. And Mina said to me after I got out of it, I rang her from Alice Springs when we got back to say to her that we were OK, she said, "When are you going to bloody well learn?" Because in the commando deal there is no such thing as compulsion, you volunteer, and that's all there is to it. You don't have to join the commando force. She

18:30 said, "When are you going to bloody well learn?" She did say bloody, too. Anyway, that was alright, but

we ran into adversity right up to then, and then I was based in Melbourne at a new camp they were just building, and some naughty boys from Adelaide, South Australia had deserted and all that sort of business. Several of us were given jobs of carting them back to where they came from, under escort and that sort of thing,

19:00 on the Adelaide train. Did that for about two months, while they were waiting there to tell us what they had in mind. And then an opportunity came up, they were forming a new setup of 1st Australian Water Transport, to go to Clifton Gardens in Sydney and start training there and then go on. The opportunity sounded good so I got a release of Z [Force, Services Reconnaissance Department] and joined that and got up to Milne Bay where the Japanese had suffered their first defeat. I was not there for the battle, I was there three months after, but it was an

19:30 education, and you knew straight away that you were going to win the war. The Yanks [Americans] were everywhere, Kitty Hawks, and P40s, which was a twin jet plane, not a jet plane, sorry, a prop [propeller] plane, twin body, there were no jets in those days, but the strength of the navy, the ships was just – which we didn't see, we didn't have anything like that, the Japs ran the show, the Zeros [fighters] would

20:00 come down and have a go at you, all that sort of business. But up there it was different altogether and of course, I have still got a Jap sword down there, in the back room, which I brought home from Milne Bay, but after the 1st July coming up it will be illegal, I will have to surrender it, not allowed to keep those things any more, the naughty boys that have been playing up

20:30 lately. So it was very good. I did 15 months in Milne Bay and Samurai, but I had six months, after six months I had a break down here, it was June 1943, in Ballarat and so forth, with Mina my wife and that was the number two son was the outcome of that leave. He was

21:00 born the next year, in July. But they were hectic days, but 1942 was a tremendous year, it was all activity, the lot, everything. When you reflect upon it I don't know how we got out of it, I really don't. When we were off Saumlaki after the Japs had opened up on us there and we got out of it, we got out of the range of – they killed the captain

21:30 of the navy boat, got him and a couple of his sailor men were badly damaged, but he was killed. We buried him at sea, I wasn't in that, our party, our commander, they buried him at sea. So we got around the other side of the island and took stock of the situation and were able to radio back to Darwin as to what had happened and let them know that the Japanese certainly, because Saumlaki was 300 miles north of Darwin

22:00 where Ambon was 650, so they had come down that far and Australia didn't know or officially didn't know. So they said, "Get out of there, and we'll find –," so Commander Bill Jenkins, who was as tough a soldier you would ever meet, he said, "How are we supposed to do that?" and they said, "The same way you got up there." So we were ready to come back – now if the Japanese had sent down one Zero it would have sunk us

22:30 but they didn't do it so that was just luck personified. And the general commanding in the Northern Territory was a fellow who later became Lt Governor of Victoria, he came down to the wharf when we were leaving and shook our hands with each one of us and congratulated us – he used some highly efficient skilled words any rate, the only sense of it was our determination to do the best we

23:00 could for our country, and he said, "If you are fortunate enough to get back, I will see that you immediately get leave to back where you came from." So I had leave back to Melbourne much sooner than he anticipated through not being able to go on with the job there.

So even though you didn't get to Ambon, it still – you managed to get some very important intelligence?

Oh yes, oh yes. No, we didn't get to Ambon. But then we learnt the true story which hadn't been told, was this

23:30 Bill Jenkins, who was a fearsome soldier, he was the officer – I have shown in the battalion later when I became a major, and he died at 83 and I was at his funeral of course – anyway, what he had done, he put up to the powers that be for want of a better quote, at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne to scheme to get back to Ambon but what we needed, or what he said we needed, was an American submarine, any other submarine

24:00 was out of the question because there weren't any, so it had to be an American one, and the Americans wouldn't have a bar of it, they said, "No, it's foolhardy, it's stupid and you can't get away with it." And Ambon itself, the key to Ambon was the magnificent harbour which was 10 miles long and enormously deep and with this beautiful big airfield which was where I was, and that was the attraction of course, and the Japs used it as a springboard for the first bombing of Darwin. We watched the planes take off.

24:30 They didn't all come from Ambon, some of them came from the aircraft carriers, but a lot of them came from Ambon, and we carried on, we watched. We knew where they were going, they couldn't be going anywhere else, had to be Darwin. So there you are.

There's some pretty amazing stories there, we are going to get more on that period …

Well I don't know what I have said so far is interesting or not.

Oh incredibly interesting.

It's true,

25:00 you know. Different people have said – one of the questions, one of my grandsons, he's in Sydney, he's in TV stuff, he is one of the staff of 'Totally Wild', an afternoon show comes out of Brisbane, Craig McMahon, he said to me here a few years back, he said, "Grandpa, can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure you can son," he said, "What was the worst thing while you were

25:30 trying to get back to Australia?" "That's very easily answered Craig, no toilet paper." The other thing was, when we did certain things, they asked, "Why did you do it?" I said, "Well I was 21." And really you had no fear at 21, I was never, ever at any stage afraid of the Japanese. Providing we met one, but if you were going to meet three or four or five, that was a different matter altogether. So they were the things you had to try and guard against.

26:00 But pretty well all of the fellows that I was close to in the battalion did lose their lives because we all went on to other units. And we had one bloke, he was an officer in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], Frank, he was in ground staff and he was an officer and he, big powerful man he was, he escaped from the prison camp on the Tan Tui side, but he went off at Borneo and they got him at the landing of Balikpapan at Borneo,

26:30 things like that you know. So really and truly fellas like myself were very fortunate to get through with a clean skin, that's the way it is, either your time is up or it isn't, but you don't do foolhardy things. There's other things I can tell you too as time went on. Probably you are not ready for that yet, or as the case may be, but to do with the escape from Ambon which was incredible, when you look back on it, the

27:00 circumstances.

Can we sort of build up to that because we still don't have a total picture of your joining the 2nd 21st Darwin, you were in Darwin for …?

Well Darwin is really a history of repetition in the sense that we were at – we built – the train pulled up put it that way, cattle trucks. And somebody said, cracking a joke, "Oh the bloody engine's broken down," and with that the whistle blew and with that down the line come the

27:30 officer and said, "Right, everybody out." "What's wrong? Is the train broken down?" they said, "No, this is going to be the site of your camp." This was four in the morning, pitch black and it was scrub, so we had to clear the scrub and build the camp which became known as Winelli, under canvas it was, seven miles out of Darwin, and we trained, which we did and, as I said, it was always the Japanese as far as our part of

28:00 it was concerned anyway. And I suppose it was fair to say we all loved a beer, rations was two bottles a day. We had one fellow in our tent, it was six to a tent, who didn't drink at all. He was very young, I was 20 by this stage, I had my 21st birthday in Darwin, in the September of 1941. Alan Letcher didn't drink so I had him on

28:30 side, the allocation of his, he gave me four bottles of which I farmed one off to my mate next door, Alec Hawkins. So we did quite well. That beer come up from Perth, all the beer come up from Perth by ship, but of course stocks had run out, Darwin had run out beer and the next thing the ship's in and of course everybody had been cheering and clapping and God knows what. And the other big deal was watching the big plane come in

29:00 which flew low over the camp which meant you were going to get mail, plenty of mail, any amount of mail, everybody wrote letters, which they did. And the food, no complaints, very standard, plenty of potatoes any amount of potatoes. Reveille at six and we had an excellent band, which we did, an excellent band.

29:30 And the band, jumping the gun and going on a bit, jumping the gun is an old army term of course, the band went in its entirety to Hanan when they decided to shift some people from the Ambon prison camp, and they didn't know they were shipping the band in its entirety, because they didn't know we made up the band, the band played, but they didn't know whether you were a member of the band or I was, couple of Australian soldiers, and the band kept their mouth shut and they got to Hanan in their entirety. They were no sooner gone when the Japs

30:00 wanted the band to play, we didn't have a band, they had gone. Anyway that's another story. There's not a lot to say about Darwin, because it was stereotype stuff, it went on and on and on and then eventually it was pretty well known that something was going to happen with the Japs and the Yanks, but everybody was more or less saying, "When? When?" And eventually it happened on the 7th of the

30:30 12th, which was the 8th as far as we were – and we were on the ship on the 13th, five days later, which were cattle trucks, Dutch.

Pearl Harbour?

No, no for us in Darwin, to go north to the Dutch East Indies. Pearl Harbour had happened, that was what veered us off, that's what got us going, the army the same move. Over the course of the years, just a couple of weeks ago, I read a story about Ambon, the Indonesian island of Ambon,

31:00 well that's so, it wasn't then, it was part of the Dutch East Indies. But they've forgotten that and the story should be written in appropriation of the times. We went to Ambon, to the Dutch East Indies, not to Indonesia, and in the town of Ambon, down the back there I showed you the photo, there's a photo taken of four of us on New Year's Day, in 1942, and we were in town having a day out, we got across on the ferry, and there was a photographer,

31:30 and it was me said, "Let's get our photo taken and a couple of the fellas were a bit wishy-washy about it. Mine came out in the last mail out of Ambon, that's how that happened. And I said to the Indian proprietor, "What's the story?" because there was so much about Ambon and some said Ambowena, and he explained, the island technically was Ambona and the town was Ambona, but loosely everybody called it Ambon. But it

32:00 was quite good which it was, it was a sizeable town, I have got music from Ambon there, beautiful stuff, lovely voices, often play it, often do. But um, am I too far advanced to say that I picked up language quickly and so forth? That's to do with the escape route, you know. (Counted here 1-10) [satu, dua, tiga, empat, lima, enam, tujuh, delapan, sembilan, sepuluh]. So if you said

32:30 'dua puluh satu' that's 21, that's the age I was when I went to Ambon, dua puluh satu - 21. Food was 'machan', well I learned all the things I had to exist. But I couldn't translate those music I have got, the Ambonese singing. But there were 57 different dialects of Malayan language in Ambon, the town itself. Incredible, beautiful place, absolutely

33:00 beautiful.

So what was the purpose for the battalion going to Ambon …?

Well technically in the sense of, oh yes, technically it would be an appropriate word, but it was to reinforce the Dutch Forces of which there were about 5,000, and the Ambonese troops, which was included in that 5,000, but it's not a nice thing to say, but what happened,

33:30 the air force were there, the RAAF, and they were all of course based at the airfield, and I had – I was in Ambon town itself in Tan Tui camp which the Dutch had built for us, beautiful camp compared to what we were used to. Proper constructed huts with added tops and that sort of business, it was very good. But after a week they transferred me across

34:00 to Laha to the airfield to be the driver for the officer in charge so I got to see quite a bit of the place because he wanted to go here there and everywhere and I had to drive him. I have jumped the gun with the story there in the sense that I have, how I come to get to the 6th Platoon, across there, but however, that's another story, but however, that's what I – my escape too was being transport driver

34:30 because you are in the heat of the battle. Am I too far ahead of you now?

We might as well talk about Ambon, but if you could guide us through leaving Darwin and what you came across when you got there and your situation …?

Yeah alright. We left Darwin, once it was decided with Pearl Harbor activity having happened that we had to go in the same way that Rabaul was on notice, just in the same way the 2nd 40th was on notice.

35:00 And so we went, sailed at 5 o'clock in the evening, and spent three nights on the boat and we got into Ambon, into the harbour, the wharf, at about midday the next day and we had three ships for our Darwin people, all Dutch cattle trucks, steamers, The Bok, the Valentine and the third one, I was on Ambrose,

35:30 something or other. Anyway, we were first off, and the reason why we were first off was because we're transport men who had to go out to Tan Tui which was five miles out from the wharf to get the trucks to bring them in to take the battalion out to the camp. So of course we made sure we did a good job of that because we probably could have done it in two hours but could have taken about four hours because we had a look around the place and the rest of it. Anyway we got established there and the very first

36:00 night I was assigned one of the sergeants in charge of the transport, was a reasonable friend of mine, Jack O'Brien, who lost a leg over there, at this stage he hadn't of course because we hadn't been in combat, but he said to me, "Do you want to drive tonight, to provide the town picket?" which meant you send in a ute with a dozen, sorry, half a dozen men on board, and if anybody's naughty they put them in the

36:30 back, like a dog cart. Anyhow, we did that the first night and it was air raid warnings but no activity, but just to put you in touch with what was going to happen. And being in and out of Tan Tui, he said to me, "I am going to post you across the bay with five platoons to protect the air field." That would be about 150 men, 30 to a

37:00 platoon, all of C Company and then attach troops, like dentistry and canteen blokes and all that sort of business. So I went over there when we were first bombed, which was the 7th of the 1st, 7th January, 3

o’clock in the morning, and the first sensation we had, we had these nice huts, big windows but no glass, just a big opening, and the tracer bullets

37:30 flying past, all the beautiful colours and these Jap machine guns. They dropped quite a few bombs, and the experts came across, and I say experts, I say bit tongue in cheek, came across to measure the size of the craters, which would tell them what the size of the bomb was, that was the theory you know, which was estimated on average to be about 250 pounders, they couldn’t carry them much heavier than that anyway, and the type of planes being used.

38:00 So of course we drifted on and the bombings increased, no more trips across the bay to Ambon, to town, and very little in a sense of contact. So we had approximately 300 Australians on the airfield, and I was kept very busy. I had two trucks under my command, one was a ute, drove the boss around

38:30 in, and the other was a 1300 tonne truck with tray top covered in and then of course eventually we had a week, it was really unbelievable how it did all unfold, saturation bombing for a week, softening up. No allied aircraft at all, we originally did have two aeroplanes but they were shot down in the first sortie,

39:00 Brewster Buffalos, both the Yanks were killed. Anyway, and then of course the news was through that the Japs were landing and the news also came through that Australia had decided to evacuate the air force lock stock and barrel and bring them back to Darwin. So we had quite a few mates in the Australian, you established yourself pretty quickly to mateship. A plane would come in, for argument’s sake it had been on

39:30 a mission, and we’d be down there with the crew. Anyway it culminated that this plane came in and the fella said, “My God, if you had seen what we had just seen, you would start to swim for Australia.” They estimated the best they could that there were 23 ships heading our way. But that didn’t mean that there were 23 ships going to land at Ambon, 16 troop transports and seven cruisers and

40:00 destroyers accompanying them, so, so many of them would be allotted to Ambon and so many to Timor, they would drop off the Ambon invasion which was estimated varied between 15 and 20,000. So the boss of the show, the captain named Doug Perry, and I had driven for two commanding officers before him, or ‘officers commanding’ the correct term is, there is only one commanding officer and that’s the battalion man.

40:30 And, the Japs had attacked on the evening of the 29th, on the 30th, that’s ground forces. But before they did, when they were unloading, one of our officers and I was going on a mission somewhere, to pick up something with my truck, and I had to go, he was addressing this group of people and I had to stop, I couldn’t get through while he was talking to a platoon, and the strength of his talk

41:00 was which I heard most of, he wanted to reassure the men, our men, not to be frightened or afraid of going into battle against the Japanese, because they would be just as frightened as we were if we were. So I don’t suppose anybody was actually looking forward to it, and he finished his little speech and give a pep talk and he said, “Has anybody got anything to say?” and a little fella up the back put his hand up, “Sir,” and he said,

41:30 “Sir, can I say something?” He said go ahead Private –,” whatever his name was, “I am not frightened at all sir, I am bloody petrified.” He did. That broke things up a bit, there was a bit of a joke all round. And the battle did decide and it was a very, very, very hard fought battle. All the air force was of course evacuated. Including

42:00 a bloke whom I knew from Horsham, who knew Mina and her family …

Tape 3

00:31 **If we do go back to the time before?**

No, I will just do it the best can, that’s all I can do.

Yeah, so you were at Mt Martha and Balcombe?

Well Mt Martha was a tent camp, that was the 8th Battalion, at Ballarat, and that was a one month camp, initial introduction there was in November 1939. So the war commenced in

01:00 September, and we were alerted that we would be called up in the sense of leave from our jobs, but we didn’t know where until later on anyway, it got to November and we were notified to go into Mt Martha for one month, at the end of the month they would assess the situation. In the month’s training that we did there, was all to do with

01:30 Battalion tactics which to be truthful was as was used in WW1, which was quite feasible at the time, because we hadn’t had WW2 at that stage. Basic stuff and a lot of physical stuff with bayonet fighting exercises, which might sound stupid to a lot of people, which it is not when you are involved. Otherwise, if you are not on the job

02:00 you might get hurt you know so they make sure things are as instructed. Machine gun range firing took up quite a bit of time, which it did. Street marches took up a bit of time to show the flag, for want of a better term, and we were pretty proud of ourselves, which you were, and pretty proud of the Battalion, the 8th, which I was.

02:30 Our AIC [Australian Instructional Corps] instructors were pretty professional, they were professional, that's elementary, but they were very professional and made sure that we didn't treat the thing as a holiday joke. It was a military manoeuvre as far as they were concerned and had to be done to the very letter, like you daren't call, if you are on parade, call the sergeant major by his Christian name otherwise you would be

03:00 ostracized, 'Sar Major, sir,' plenty of 'sirs'. That's when we were initiated to the idea of what would happen when we would be called up later for a three months' camp after this one month's camp, and that would be the introduction of what was the first permanent call up of the 21 year olds, right,

03:30 who were called up under the title of what was then used, of universal trainees and that was their title. Now I was never called up because I was a member of the militia before the war, and as such I was already registered, so I was never – many times in years gone by, "Where were you when you were called up Jack?" Well I wasn't, if I hadn't been in the militia I would have been called up. But it wasn't so. Nobody who was in the militia was called up because they were

04:00 registered people so then when they were called up in April 1940, we carried on from that one month's camp into what would become a full-time, full-scale training camp with no beg pardons and I might add it was only my opinion that they made it as hard as they could for the universal trainees just to show them that what we were doing had been voluntary, and what they were doing was compulsory,

04:30 there was a mark there and sometimes I felt sorry for fellas. Now they were drafted – I at that stage held two stripes as a corporal within the April 1940 camp and that corporal was put in charge of 40 men, 20 each side to a hut, corporal in charge. Now as the years went on, a lot of different things did happen in the army, but in those days there were no such things,

05:00 unless you were an officer, as sheets, or pillow cases, nothing like that, there was palliasses, which were straw mattresses on the floor and four blankets of which you could use them as you wished. You might want one on the palliasse and one rolled up for a bunk for your head and the other two over your body, put it that way, but that was up to you what you did with the four blankets. And then in the morning,

05:30 6 o'clock Reveille, and 6.30 you had to have that corporal, it was his job to make sure that hut was ready for inspection and at 6.30 the inspection party would come through, which was the officer of the day and the orderly sergeant of the day, and after that was so successfully done, and it had to be successful otherwise there could have been trouble, and then you did a day's training.

06:00 **So you became a corporal …?**

I became a corporal in April 1940.

And you were at Balcombe by that point?

No, no, no, Mt Martha.

Oh, still at Mt Martha.

Yeah, because that's where the trainees went to, Mt Martha. The call up trainees, were not called up into Balcombe, they were called up into Mt Martha. I can only speak for the Ballarat contingent of course, because that's who I was with, but I would say it would have been applicable across the state. Anyway,

06:30 no, no, at the end of the three months, that entitlement of the universal trainees was finished, they had done their basic training and if necessary Australia saw fit, and the situation was if we could be called up for permanent duty. But other than that, they qualified to become part-time soldiers after their three months. And I would say it was well and truly reached,

07:00 its objective, because I don't know of anybody who I would say failed to make the grade, once everybody realised it was fair dinkum, not everybody was against it but some were, the call-up people I am talking about, but most of them realised it got through. Not that anybody was a dunderhead, I don't mean that, but it got through, there was a war on, something had to be done, so they accepted the fact they had to be called up. After that three months

07:30 was concerned, that was when – we progressed from April, May, June when France fell. Right. Then they were looking for people to bolster the permanent army and that's where I came in because of not being allowed by my father to take a VX number. Do you know what VX stands for? Victoria Expeditionary, that's what the X is for. So you can be Victorian without being part of the expeditionary forces,

08:00 just for the V number. But as the war progressed, and I am jumping forward here, but I have got to do it this way, when Australia looked like going under, V men were went anywhere without an X number, things were that desperate but not so back in the earlier days. Anyway, so I was accepted, amongst

others, into the 4th Infantry Battalion training and then wore the uniform of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], whereby the militia men

08:30 didn't wear an AIF type uniform, the uniform in the militia days was a straight tunic with a nice green collar on it, and gold fittings, quite attractive, the girls thought so anyway. Oh yeah. With the advent of war all the brass, I said gold, the brass from the uniform disappeared and everything became gold copper, put it that way. So I did a course in,

09:00 NCO senior training course, and became a sergeant in the 4th Infantry Training Battalion, at 19. And it was nothing to have a, fellows that you were instructing who were men in their, they were volunteers, they were in their 30s, married, a couple of kids, things of that nature, could be apt to look down on you as being only a pup, but discipline always prevailed, always.

09:30 And I might say that anybody who had half a brain, even though he was a three striper, and you had the benefit of the Sergeants' Mess, and he wasn't stupid in the sense that he realised that he had to conform as best he could to the feelings of everybody concerned so it was quite successful. And as I said earlier chap, after eight months of that, I was able to secure the X number, which took me out of the 4th Battalion, out of training,

10:00 relinquishing rank, and had to be, you had to relinquish rank because you were starting again, so I was quite happy to do that, and so were the two fellows who went with me, three of us.

What – why did you make that decision, why did you decide to do that?

Well because of the fact that there wasn't enough adventure. If we were going to be in the army, we wanted to be wherever the army saw fit to send us, wherever, from the point of view of being

10:30 young and adventurous and to see what was offering around the world. Whereby if it was to be, say in my case, I am speaking for myself, I didn't want to do however long the war lasted, just locally training fellows as they came up to be trained. So willingly, and adding to the fact that at the age I was not engaged to be married, I had a girlfriend sure, but

11:00 I did not have any financial responsibilities or bits and pieces to attend to, so let's get out and see what there is to offer, and that's the idea behind it all, which perhaps we got more than bargained for.

How did you come to be in the 2nd 21st?

Well through the idea of being in Melbourne on weekend leave, that is in there a bit earlier, but still I don't mind answering the

11:30 question, and there was a set up at Flinders Street Station, and at the end of it, at the Yarra End, there was a recruiting booth. And there was an officer and his staff looking for recruits because they were due to move, and we cottoned on to this and spoke with the officer in charge. And he said, "Well look, if you can get your –" Darley was the place out of Bacchus Marsh I mentioned to you earlier, "If you can get the

12:00 brigadier's consent to let you go, we'll take you." So of course, as I said earlier, I approached the brigadier, asked to be paraded before him, you can't just walk in, 'Excuse me, sir,' you have got to arrange to be paraded, he's got to agree to see you, and that takes a couple of days, as a general rule anyway he did, and I put the case to him what to do, went back to my father's background, being a Gallipoli veteran,

12:30 also he woke up to that, he wasn't silly, "I won't let you go son," well that was the idea, "If you can, if you think if you have had that much experience under your belt now, you needn't talk to your Dad. If I grant you permission you can enlist with the 2nd 22nd as we are about to move." What the battalion had done, all battalions did this, if they had what they considered to be undesirables they didn't want to take with them,

13:00 they tipped them out into a pool, they went to other units, but that particular unit didn't want them. So people like myself, this is not ego, this is just the way it was, filled those gaps. With a background and coming from 4th IT and had worn three stripes for more than eight months, we couldn't be slouches, the three of us all resigned our rank and the other two lost their lives ultimately, and of course here I am.

13:30 That answers that, I hope, to your satisfaction. So away we went, we went to um, on the 17th March which was St Patrick's day, to Bungulla, and they were packing up hook line and sinker, as we thought, to Singapore because that's where the 8th Division was, as it turned out we took the trip by train and

14:00 got to Adelaide to Wayville Showgrounds and they said, "You are not going on a ship, you are going on a train up north." We soon realised we more or less tricked ourselves because we thought we were going to get over and see the tropics. And they decided we were going north, which was because of Australia's personnel not having enough troops to go around. They were going to stretch between Rabaul and New Britain,

14:30 Darwin and Timor. So it was just the luck of the draw and we had to make the best of it. Once we got to Darwin and got straightened out and built the camp and so forth, some interesting things, and we did

have a lot of picture nights and entertainment.

What about the trip up to Darwin?

Yeah, the trip up to Darwin was by train initially to a place called Torowrie and I sent photos home to my mother and

15:00 to my girl to whom I had become engaged to be married at that stage. I just described Torowrie as being the bottom of the earth, I said, “Desolate, nothing place.” We had a big camp there, the army had a big camp there, so we were in that for a few days and then were on to the train which was the Ghan, the old Ghan in those days, and that took us to Alice

15:30 Springs. From Alice Springs we were in army trucks and flooded country, in many, many cases all out up to our waist in water and pushing the trucks through, 30 and 40 men pushing one truck, things like that you know, for a period of one mile, two miles, three miles in cases. And then we finished with the army trucks in the Northern

16:00 Territory, and then the, oh, cattle trucks, railway into Darwin.

So how far out of Darwin was the Winelli?

Winelli camp we built, seven miles. Today, when I went back there two years ago, I wouldn’t have known I have never been to Darwin. Of the time we went there in 1941, the population

16:30 was around about 4 or 5,000, today it’s 70,000 and a city, lovely, and the highway as it was, and we were on the highway at Winelli, doesn’t exist any more. Say, for argument’s sake, this is the Queenscliff Road out here, technically it’s the Bellarine Highway, then across the next one is the Port Arlington Highway. So just say that Port Arlington was the one we were on and then when I was back here a couple of years ago, the highway was

17:00 different and Winelli camp didn’t exist any more. It was still going when we came back to Darwin the second time to go over to venture with Z force, but that was in July 1942.

Were there a number of camps along …?

Heaps, heaps, in the finish, of the time that, say, when we came back with Z, with Z Force after having the failed expedition,

17:30 the population troop-wise all around between say Alice Springs up to Darwin was round about 200,000 around about, all told, yep, enormous, camps all over the place and you could see the strength of them. The Japanese, is not commonly conceded through the media, did make landings on the Northern Territory, but they made them further down,

18:00 south of Darwin. Later on there were expeditions that found evidence of Japanese camps and things they had left behind, and things of that nature and air force bases were established, further south of Darwin was useless as a base because each time they came over they bombed it, being right on Darwin – actually I say we were seven mile out at Winelli, on the left hand side

18:30 heading to Darwin, and the big air force base, and it was big and properly constructed, was about two miles out of Darwin on the right hand side. The Japs came over with a bombing raid initially, and they lost a lot of planes there, Australians and Americans, lost a lot of planes, a lot. But, um, if that answers that part of the question up to there, good and well.

So what – I mean you have already talked a little bit about Winelli, what were you doing there,

19:00 **what was your main role?**

Well we had to be somewhere, I am not being facetious, but we had to be somewhere as a base to get our training. Now we used to get out training, and we could get out for three days, things of that nature, there are places up there, foreign to Australia, the average Australian would know it, this white deserts, there’s a place called Cemetery Plains, which is like white fine sand as far as the eye can see,

19:30 and we did training there, which we did, and we suffered with our mechanical vehicles. The Bren carrier, incidentally the Bren carriers were called Bren Carriers, but we didn’t have any Brens, never. They were carriers, AFVs, Armoured Fighting Vehicles, designed to take the Bren guns but we didn’t have the Bren guns so we had to convert them to water cooled guns, which we did convert anyway, but we got sand

20:00 in the tracks, we got sand in the engine, we got sand, they were all forward engines, and all these AFVs were built by the South Australian Railways out of Adelaide that we had anyway, but we had a lot of trouble on maintenance, spent a lot of time on maintenance. I have got photos in my album of that sort of work, I don’t think I have shown you either, I’ll show you later on this afternoon, headlines of the day of the ‘Herald-Sun’ and so forth

20:30 highlighting the Japanese horror. It is estimated, not because I had anything to do with Ambon at all, but it is estimated that the Ambon, out of all the figures, that includes everything to do with the 8th Division, Ambon was the worst in the sense of the POW [Prisoner of War] camps, horrific.

The training – you were training in a desert environment in Darwin?

Yeah, not knowing at that

21:00 stage where we would be when finally we did meet an enemy. It could have been on Australian soil, it could have been, had the invasion taken place, and it could have been that sort of country. Right, so we had to be prepared for any event. And we also trained, and this is interesting, I think anyway, we trained in jungle conditions in swimming holes and swimming pools and never a word was said of a crocodile,

21:30 no-one said, 'This area is renowned for crocodiles.' We never lost anybody to a croc but we could have. Maybe the crocs were frightened.

You weren't warned of that?

No, no. no. Never. And there was nothing to say that, well for argument's sake, the platoon commander, Ian Jaffrey was his name, and he would say at the parade

22:00 in the morning, 'Now like next Wednesday, we are leaving for such and such an area,' could be a jungle area for three days. 'You might want a change of underwear,' or whatever the case may be. But they never made it public, they wouldn't pin those things up on the notice board. I must tell you this, when we went away in the first instance, the pay was 5/- a day, so that was it, and we went up in March 1941.

22:30 In May 1941 there were two momentous announcements on the notice board at the top of the company line, one was that our pay had been increased to 6/- a day and HMS Hood, one of Britain's famous battleships, had been sunk by the Germans, two major items on the notice board and nobody gave two hoots, which was very unfair of course, but nobody gave two hoots about the battleship going down. We were all just rapt about getting a shilling a

23:00 day increase, 7/6 to 42/- a week. When I finished as a sergeant, I was getting 10/6 a day plus 2/6 deferred pay, you got that in a lump sum from the date that you enlisted you know. Daily pay rate was 10/6 a day and a corporal got 9/6 but the corporal didn't have the privileges of the Sergeants' Mess.

23:30 The Sergeant's, of course, was a very sacred deal of course. Even an officer couldn't go into the Sergeants' Mess unless he had permission, it was not the done thing, and the same way as an NCO couldn't go into the Sergeants' – Officers' Mess. So they were two distinct – and you had your own bar and beer and chef and whole bang box and dice. It was something to get to, attain. To become a sergeant, that was all I ever wanted.

So how did you take being

24:00 **de-ranked to a private?**

Oh no trouble, no trouble because the others were the same, there was the three of us. This air force fellow, he had resigned his commission in the air force and he enlisted the same day we did, and he was on his own, a wonderful bloke. He cottoned on to us, so the four of us travelled from Bungulla right through, we stuck together, the four of us, to Darwin. And any time we could

24:30 get a beer we would go to the pub. I drank, never smoked, didn't have a cigarette and he didn't and every glass of beer we had he had a glass of sarsaparilla. Frank Redhead was his name, he was killed in Borneo. Tried to rescue – he was an officer then, he retained officer rank and he was killed trying to rescue one of his men.

So what was Darwin like during that time,

25:00 **can you describe it?**

Oh great, in the sense of being seven miles out when you got your leaves and that sort of thing, and go to town and patronise the pubs or whatever the case may be, and I am talking of only getting 5/- a day, beer was only sixpence a glass anyway, everything was in proportion I dare say so you weren't hardly done by. And we got to know certain people, and one night I was in Darwin,

25:30 and with another bloke, there was only two of us, and we were standing at this corner in the town, and there was a girl that came across the road, a girl, that's all I can say at that stage, and as it turned out and a taxi came around the corner and hit her. Knocked her flying but fortunately she wasn't killed or broken bones. As it turned out she was 15 and of Chinese descent and we took her

26:00 home with the taxi driver and the girl was able to tell us where she lived. So this fella and I and the taxi driver, we all took her home. And the parents, of Chinese/Australian extraction, there was a lot of that, a lot, and they made us welcome, any time we were in town have Sunday night's tea, and that sort of thing, just through that accident. Then picture theatre, one picture theatre in the city, open roof

26:30 but it did have an open section, whites only. Downstairs and in the front, that was the situation and that was accepted, the blacks on their own down there and the whites upstairs, what was called the luxury seating. So we had plenty of that. And I suppose – they had brawls, there was the Don Hotel which everybody called the blood house,

27:00 that's a famous name, when you went in there, you couldn't hear anything for the noise, drunks and half drunks and gawd knows what. You had to go, you had to have a look to say you had been there.

Who was brawling?

Mmmm?

Who was brawling?

Oh different factions, somebody who belonged to such and such a unit and somebody else belonged to another unit, and they were inferior or we were inferior and it would be on. I have got photos of – the Victoria Hotel in Darwin, wrecked by troops.

27:30 Fortunately it was not our fellows because we was not on leave. It was a group that was on leave and we did not have any leave, so we were not involved, couldn't even be accused.

The military police must have been pretty busy?

Oh MPs [Military Police] yep, yep, that was quite a strong force of military police, and also Darwin had before we got there, had its battalion, which was called the DIB, Darwin Infantry Battalion,

28:00 that was permanent soldiers they had there. And they were looked down upon by our fellows, in the broad sense. And we were looked down on by them because we were interlopers. They were looked down on by them because we were interlopers and all that sort of business.

So much for Aussie mateship?

No, the Aussie mateship was there if you wanted it, it depended on whether you wanted it and if you didn't want it you just said so. That's right. But this pub in Darwin, the Don,

28:30 the blood house, the money went over the counter to the barman serving you, and he – there was, in the back of the bar was an island, on top of the island sat this fellow with the cash register and all the money went up there and all the change came back from there.

So he was sort of out of range of the brawling?

Oh yeah, that's right, or having the money pinched. And when I went back 60 years later, they wrote – the Darwin Council they,

29:00 this is jumping the gun forward 60 years …

That's fine.

My Battalion Association of course, which still exists in Melbourne, the 2nd 21st Gulf Force Association, not many members left nowadays, we've got about 50 out of 1100 odd. The Darwin Council notified that this was going to be a big deal, invite us back to Darwin. So – and also through the paper the 'Darwin Defender' they were on it too, so I said I would

29:30 go. Sure. Two or three others, and a mate of mine who just passed away just before Christmas, he badly wanted to go but he wasn't well enough. His wife said no, she was a good judge. Anyway I went, we got a discount on everything, I stayed at the Carlton Hotel, which is one of the VIP [Very Important Person] hotels on the waterfront and that was $140 per night and they gave it to us for $80 a night, I spent 10 days there.

30:00 10 days in Darwin, nine nights at $80 a night, beautiful hotel. We were, treated us as though we were all VC [Victoria Cross] winners. We had badges issued by the Darwin Council which identified you everywhere you went. They just fell over themselves to make you welcome. I went into the RSL [Returned and Services League] in Darwin, asked for directions, they made me an honorary member straight away, immediately.

30:30 Because their connection until recent times with Ambon was very big socially, over say 50 or 60 years they used to have yacht races between Ambon and Darwin and so forth and then things blew up with the Muslim factions and God knows what and they desecrated the Australian cemetery, which they did, and so all that finished. They had some good associations with Ambon in

31:00 socialising, and people that lived in Ambon would come to Darwin for shopping purposes, like in those times the Americans had a rep, their, say, a wife and kids, they'd come down to Darwin for their – of course that all finished when the naughty boys took over most of Indonesia for that matter. But getting back to ourselves, we were just treated, it was embarrassing it really was, to say we were embarrassed the way we were treated,

31:30 everywhere we went people just couldn't do enough, people bent over backwards. And as I said before, I would never have known the place, it's just different to what it was then.

So when you were up there, there was a very big military presence up there?

Oh yes, on the anniversary of the first actual bombing, and I have two schools of thought about

32:00 this, one was, it was two minutes to 10 on the actual deal of the first bombing in 1942, and at two minutes to 10 since, right around the harbour they blow the air raid siren at two minutes to 10. And my thought was, 'They must frighten the very growth out of little kids,' because the noise is horrendous of the what's-a-name, and all the anti-aircraft guns, blanks firing,

32:30 for 10 minutes in all. That's how they mark the anniversary. How many – I estimated – we went down the Adelaide River which is 70 ks down the line to the war cemetery to have a look at it, which is magnificently kept, beautiful. If you can say that about a cemetery you know, which it was, beautiful. There were probably 2,000 troops there ex-troops,

33:00 like nurses, people associated with the war. A lot of the veterans that went back did take their wives with them. But in our 2nd 22nd Gulf Force we had seven took advantage of the trip. One bloke forgot to take his medals and that was an essential part of the equipment,

33:30 of course you didn't walk around the streets wearing your medals, but any functions that they had, you were expected to wear your medals and he forgot to take his, so we used to tell people that he arrived when all the action was over and he got very annoyed with us. Then coming home we flew down, we flew up non-stop to Darwin, 3.5

34:00 hours, then coming home we flew down to Adelaide and then across to Melbourne, and then took the bus down to Geelong which of course is provided in your air ticket, they provide a bus. That was something I wouldn't have wanted to miss, it was unbelievable to think of 60 years and the hospitality and the way the visit was valued by the people of Darwin. It sounds like I am

34:30 stretching it a bit but I am not, that's the way it was. Since then, each year, I still get a letter from the Council, we want to come back to make ourselves known at the Council and get these – they can't do what they did for the 60th anniversary, but they will give us a little tag to wear for Anzac Day or something of that nature. I toyed with the idea, and I thought I would never be able to get on it, but I toyed with the idea of getting on the

35:00 new Ghan. It's just been opened in February, and go for Anzac Day, but they are booked out and well and truly for months to the general public. So if I am still around the year after, if I am still mobile and here, which is doubtful, I would like to do it, get back on – I love trains, absolutely, my wife and I did the Overlander to Perth some years

35:30 ago, it was just me, it was terrific. People used to bet if you had seen a bird going across the Nullarbor and things of that nature. Anyway, that's getting off the subject.

Let's go back to Darwin in 1941, that's when you were there isn't it?

Yep. Perhaps I could give an

36:00 insight into – they had to vary the training in Darwin and the idea was, in the wet season, which is a wet season and the humidity is bad and caused a lot of trouble. So they would do our training, if there was training on the books, between the hours of, say, five in the morning and finish at midday and then you could sleep

36:30 all afternoon or whatever the case may be, and if you did that, it was also an area which catered for – we didn't know before we started building the camp – big snakes, rock pythons, which are very big fearsome looking things, about as long as the width of this room, some of them, 16 ft, and they are non-poisonous, they are very nasty to look at, and also to make themselves comfortable in your bed.

37:00 Nothing to come home at night from the pictures, you might be a mile away from where you slept, go home and pull the blankets back and here he would be, all curled up in your bed.

So how do you move a rock python out of your bed?

Well, we used to have two men, one at the head and one at the tail, and pick up the blanket and walk towards each other, and walk say 20 or 30 yards away to another rival tent line, and empty it out.

37:30 I can tell you a story about pythons in New Guinea, Milne Bay, and we were camped in a, well this particular camp was in a pine plantation, so the plantation had to be cleared to spread things out to build the camp. Coconuts had to be got down, we got the coconuts down and put them in a big pile, I am not exaggerating, half the size of this room and about 7 or 8 ft tall. After about a couple of months the chiefs decided the pile had to

38:00 be moved. We never saw it, but when you moved it, it was full of pythons, get in the middle of the coconuts. You never saw one do it but they get in there, never, but there would be nothing like 15 or 20 pythons.

So when would they travel – they travel by night?

Yeah, they travel by night. We had this bloke, I have got his photo, Morrie Stanley, he died as a POW, and Morrie was an

38:30 odd bod in the sense, not because he's an animal lover, nature, but he was, he was a fellow that wasn't

interested in pubs, girls or booze or anything of that nature but he had a pet rock python, he had it while we were there, he built a corral for it just at the bottom of the tent line. He used to go down and feed it every day. Feed it with bull frogs. You'd see the python sitting in one corner and the bull frog sitting in the opposite corner looking at each other, you'd go back the next

39:00 morning and you'd have a fat python and no bull frog.

What did he call it, do you remember?

Mmmm?

Did he have a name for it?

I don't know, I honestly don't. I have got his photo with it draped around his neck. Morrie Stanley, he used to live in Geelong.

They weren't dangerous at all?

No, no, no. The only thing was as was said, I never saw any evidence of it to anybody that did, but if they were, say for argument's sake if you were inebriated

39:30 and lying on the ground asleep, they could wrap themselves around you and strangle you. That was told to us but never saw any evidence of it. But plenty of pythons, plenty of huge tortoises, big enough for a man to ride on. Down by the sea, I have got photos of that too, not with me on it, but a mate of mine. Big fellas, well from here to the chair, with their heads out, walking, scaled back, all those things. And tree snakes, yellow in colour, about three or four ft long. You wouldn't see them in the

40:00 tree until they decided to dangle themselves and come and have a look at what was going on. We discovered all these things while we were camp building.

Tape 4

00:31 I said February was a horrendous month for us. Oh, leaving Darwin, as I said, that was Pearl Harbour time. We had to go up and left on 13th December and got up there 3.5 days later. Then January was the first bombing but February was the month, on the

01:00 2nd because that's the night, technically I should have prefaced this story by telling you how I came to be where I was, but anyhow it doesn't matter. On the night of the 2nd of February, Japanese activity right through the night was huge with their mortar bombing, and to be under mortar bombing fire is a wicked thing, it really is. Anyhow that had

01:30 been going on all day between the two sides. I must put it this way, the captain in charge of where I was sighted me by accident amongst all the consternation that was going on, with our mortars operating against their mortars and vice versa, smoke and stuff in the air and God knows what, and it was only because I was his driver, and he saw me and he

02:00 knew me and he called out to me to, "Come here," and I came over, and he said, "What's that group of fellas doing over there?" and he had his hands like this to get his voice through. I said, "They are sick and wounded sir." "Have you got your bloody truck?" or words to that effect. I told him where it was, under trees. "Get it and get them out of here". So I did that, and it took a while to do it,

02:30 this was about 10 or 11 in the morning, to get them to the ADS [Advanced Dressing Station], they were sick and wounded and a couple were deceased. Anyway I got them loaded and we were on the way when I saw this figure over on the left hand side underneath these bushes, and he was down on his hands and knees, and I recognised him straight away, it was the fellow who ultimately escaped, Harry Devers, from Victoria, Rutherglen. He and I had been in the same

03:00 platoon in Darwin days but I had transferred into 6 Platoon, but I knew him. So I screamed out to him to get aboard, otherwise he would have been massacred with the rest of them, but anyway I got him aboard, and he was a very sick fella with malaria apart from anything else. So we took over and it took us all day, we ran out of road, we had to dump the truck, we had to wreck

03:30 the truck rifle buts through the radiator, so the Japanese couldn't use it, and then walk the rest of the way, and we finally got to the ADS about 6 o'clock at night, with a group of exhausted personnel. I didn't think Harry would make it but he got there. The officer in charge was a New South Wales man by the name of Boyd White, a gentleman. He saw us and so forth, and his personnel, he had eight on his

04:00 staff, and we handed over what we had to do. We settled down as best we could and the battle was still going on and then all of a sudden through a bit of sleep here and there, we realised there was no noise. And the Japs had broken through, and we were in the ADS, and they had broken through which was some few miles down on the airfield side. So this is why I am leading about February being a momentous month,

04:30 because that was the 3rd February that we fell to the Japs. So Captain White, and we all knew the score that we were done like, you know, and he said, “What are you going to do?” I said to the words that best can be recalled, “We’d better get back and make sure that it is so.” So he agreed with that, so Harry came back with me, so we went back,

05:00 naturally not bravado, careful, and I scaled a tree which gave me a look down on the airfield, and the airfield was covered in Japanese, covered. So we hot-footed it back and reported what we had seen. And the instructions was – I said to Harry, “I”, he couldn’t, he wasn’t well enough, but he could whistle though, and I said, “If you see any Japs coming through, just give, and I will stay where I am and you scoot,”

05:30 because even though I was 21 and he was 22, we both very quickly adapted old heads, old shoulders with heads, I should have put it that way. We weren’t doing anything foolish. Anyway I got back to the ADS and I reported to Captain White and he said, “Oh yes, I thought so.” So he said, “What are you going to do?” and I said, “Well it’s like this, as far as I am concerned, skipper,” I called him, “you blokes,” and this is what we believed,

06:00 that the Japanese would never be as bestial as what they turned out to be, that they would all become, over 200 of our men taken prisoner on the airfield, right? So Harry and I then, we are different, in a different category, “All you blokes are protected by the Red Cross.” There’s eight men and himself, being in hospital you know, and we weren’t, we would be treated by the Japanese as combat troops

06:30 and therefore weren’t entitled to any – and we knew that, we would just become prisoners of war. And I said, “There’s no bloody way known that I am going to become a prisoner, so I’ll give it a go to get out of here.” He said, “What, you’ll attempt to escape?” I said, “That’s it.” “Are you sure that’s what you want to do?” “Yes sir, yep,” and he said, “Well stay there and I’ll be back.” So away he went and, with that, one of his men and he said, “Are you talking about escape?” and I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well if you

07:00 can do it and we all write our names down, they were all Sydney boys, our parents and addresses, if you are lucky enough to get through to Australia, will you contact them?” and we said, “Yes,” we would, and we did, I have still got the letters, but if I took them out of the album now I think they would fall to pieces. Anyway, Captain White came back and he had a haversack with him,

07:30 one of our army haversacks, and he had a parcel, and he said, “Jack, here, take this, my Dad brought it back from World War I,” and it was a German Mauser pistol with a dozen rounds of ammunition, the belt, the whole box and dice. He said, “Take it, it might be handy to you on the way through if you make it or whatever the case may be.” I strapped it on and six packets of cigarettes for Harry, because he was a smoker, Craven A, small packets, field dressings and so

08:00 forth and little bits and pieces to do with perhaps things we could use on the way, and we left. Prior to this, the air force had left a dozen people behind when they evacuated, to clean up secret paperwork and that sort of business, and they did their job and as it turned out by the decree of fate, they got off the island too early in their escape, a Jap patrol boat coming around the corner copped them

08:30 and massacred the lot there and then, and tipped their bodies into the sea, a dozen of them. So we woke up then that we were up against a fierce opposition, not knowing what was going on back where we left until after the war, when they massacred every person. Yeah.

09:00 And Harry and I, and it’s true, we never had one word of dissension, not one word, and it took us 58 days to get home.

Just going back to when you made this decision at the ADS, it was you and Harry and who else, nobody else?

Just Harry, nobody else was eligible to escape. In other words, Captain White

09:30 told his men they could have a go of escaping if they wanted to, and they said, “No,” because they were Red Cross people, and they stuck with him and they were all massacred too, including – yeah.

So this journey was from Laha, is that the name?

Yeah, the technical name is Cota Laha. So we

10:00 got going from Laha, and up through the hills, the nearest hills to us were about 3,000 ft high and which we scaled them. We ran across a crowd who had escaped earlier and they had been decimated by the Japanese and their officer, Ian McBridge, he was a lieutenant, he had been wounded, a bullet had ricocheted across his chest, it wasn’t a nasty deal, it was a nasty sight I should have said.

10:30 Anyway who had improved his condition, God knows how but he did from what he was when I first picked him, and he redressed his wounds with some of these dressings that had been given us, and we sent them on their way but we made a rule between ourselves with nobody else knowing about it, we made a rule that we would stick together and we wouldn’t join any big group, if we met ‘em. We were far better off just being the two of us if we got to a serious situation, which there was

11:00 any amount of in the sense of that the villages that we passed through, we didn’t know if they were going to be, welcome us or Japanese agents, or what. Sometimes they would say, looking for food, I

never used this pistol in the wrong sense, I never shot anyone with it, but it was withdrawn if they didn't want to give us food, Harry would go forward and say, "Machan, machan," which is

11:30 'food', word for food, and they'd give us something, pieces of corn cob or bits of pineapple or anything like that, we would eat anything, leaves, if we didn't like it we would spit it out. Anyway, then I would put the pistol back and away we'd go. Sometimes we would be, when got to a village, we would always go inland in case the Japs came through and if you were down on the waterfront you would have nowhere to go, so would have a chance to get back and we worked all these things out.

12:00 And also they'd come and say, "Australi, Australi," they'd shake you by the shoulder, you'd be absolutely had it, you'd been walking all day, you never had your boots off. No clothes, no change, no nothing, no change of clothes I should have said, and your clothes would be getting worse and worse. Torn by bushes and things and god knows what. "Australi, Australi – Japan, Japan patrollie, he come." Well you didn't know whether they were fair dinkum or not

12:30 Because they just wanted to get rid of you out of their way, or they could have been telling the truth, you had no option, you had to get up and go. Sometimes you didn't have the energy to get up and go but you did.

They were vulnerable having you there?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. And if the Japs were, found out they harboured us they'd be in trouble and things of that nature. Finally we got to a place

13:00 called Asilulu, and we were down at this village, and the Rajah, these villages they have two, couple of hundred people, and they have a head man and he's called a Rajah and his lady, and this Rajah had five very attractive daughters, five of them, lovely looking girls, they were big girls all well fed. I suppose it's unfair to say that any female looked attractive to us through the

13:30 conditions, but they were, and they were very helpful and they fed us and so forth. And when we left the, I omitted to say this, when we left the ADS, they had a whip around of the staff members, and they gave us money, Dutch money, and it was six guilders to one Australian pound, so, and I had it, I was in charge only because of the fact that somebody had to be. Harry wasn't in a fit state initially, so it was left to me. We

14:00 had 300 gilders, and so Harry and I had a talk and we reckoned that our luck would sure run out, we had been in a position whereby we had Japanese patrols as close as hearing them chatter in the jungle and if you had sneezed you'd be gone, for sure, or coughed. Anyhow I said to Harry, "We've got to get off this bloody island." Neither of us could sail a boat, ever. So we put it to the Rajah's head man,

14:30 the boy, they all spoke a smattering of English so you could get a message through. So we bought this boat for 70 gilders and we sailed it, took off for Seram which is six or seven miles across the bay. Now if a Jap patrol boat came around, we're gone. We had our faces covered in mud and sarongs on over the top of our heads and made out we had fishing lines hanging over the side

15:00 but no Jap boats came, so there was another big slice of luck. We made it to Seram.

How was Harry's health?

Oh no, he came good, he came good, he wasn't well but he came good, he was coherent, he was slow, but he didn't get any worse. As time went on it was marvellous what he could do, excellent. Anyway we got along the coast.

I just want to ask another question. When you were on Ambon, you were

15:30 **travelling north from Laha up the island, any idea how long that took you, how many days you spent on that part of the journey?**

Well the island went under on the 3rd February and we got off Ambon on 22nd, 19 days after, so it took us 19 days to get from the ADS where the doctor was, to the little village where we finally

16:00 got off on the coast, so 19 days. So at the end of 19 days we hadn't had a meal, put it that way, only scraps of this and scraps of that, and things you never think of, no ability to clean your teeth, no shave, no razor, no comb. Lost my bloody army hat, blew away, couldn't find it again in the jungle, but I have got the old hat I wore back, it's still down there. But we got across. Now Ambon,

16:30 itself, the island itself, is 30 miles long and the bay is 10 miles long by about five, but the big island to the north of it that we went to is 200 miles long. But we walked and sailed back with little boats we used 26 different boats, pinched them from various villages. The thing with the boats – some people ask, "Why did you have so many boats, why didn't you stick with this boat or that boat?" Well it's elementary, we used, we were in a life-threatening

17:00 situation, and the Japanese are not stupid. And the islanders are great lovers of colour, they loved colour, and so they had their little boats and skiffs and so forth painted reds, blues, green and all that sort of business. So we'd pinch a boat, a red one, and we'd only use it for about an hour, put it that way, and we'd dump it, because if the islanders were favourable to the Japs they'd say there was two Australians in a red boat,

17:30 all they have got to look for is a red boat, so we'd dump the red boat and take a blue one and so forth until we got right down to the end of Seram where there's a little island called Geser.

So you are hopping along the coast line?

Hopping along the coast and then sometimes we'd say, or we'd run out of places for boats, the next village might be 15 miles apart. 15 miles you would have to walk, and we did it with walking and pinching these

18:00 little boats. And we got down to Geser and we met some other Australians who had come off the other side of the Island, the Ambon side and we had a pow wow with them and swapped notes and bits and pieces, but under no circumstances and they knew it too, best we didn't stick together, break up, better chance of getting through so we island hopped all the way down through the Kei

18:30 Islands, down to the Aru Islands, the Kei Islands the capital there is a little place called Tual. We hopped down to the Aru Islands and the capital there is a little place called Dobo, I have got a photo of a little girl and she was Indonesian, 15 year old. She badly wanted us to bring her to Australia, badly, badly, badly. We just couldn't entertain

19:00 the idea of it, you know.

How did you be able to come to take a photo of her?

We didn't, she gave me the photograph, it was already taken. Oh no, we didn't take the photo, she gave it to me. When she realised that we weren't going to take her with us, she gave it to us as a memento. I have got it down there, you haven't seen the album. So anyway we got on down to Dobo and we got into a situation whereby we had no option, we had to go south from Dobo direct to Darwin

19:30 and take the risk of the enemy planes which were active all the time, or head east across the Arafura Sea which would take us to Dutch New Guinea, and so we chose that and we pinched a lug up there, a 40 footer. And we got tangled up, for want of a better word, with a Dutch minister and his wife and a little baby girl, who was about two. He pleaded with me, and when I say me, I have to say me

20:00 every now and again because I had been a senior NCO in the army, and most of the blokes were just, I am not decrying anybody, but just ordinary blokes and perhaps not anxious to make a decision in case it was the wrong one, and somebody put him on to me and, 'Could he come with us?' Well I couldn't say no. So we took him and his wife and little girl. So we sailed the Arafura Sea and it took us 14 days. We had two boys with us, two native boys,

20:30 who sailed the boat, we couldn't have sailed it and they knew all about it. And if it was calm they would whistle for the wind, whistle and whistle for the wind to come. And when the wind did come it was a raging gale, we had no – we had fish about 2.5 feet long jumping into the boat, which they cooked and so forth, you know and things like that. The difficult thing to overcome was, I said to the fellas, I said, "It is unfortunate we have got this minister," and there was a covered in section at the back of the lug, a 40 footer,

21:00 a big boat.

I don't want to interrupt too much, however, Jack, um, there are other, I have more questions about the journey. It was an extraordinary journey and so I would like to go back over some stuff. For example, it was you and Harry most of the way, was there a point at which you picked up some other

21:30 **men and were travelling with them?**

No. We met other men, but we wouldn't travel with them, like meeting you now and say, "How have you been?" told us your experiences and getting where you got you know, shook hands and away we'd go. But no way known we'd travel with them, just the two of us, just the two of us. Until we got on this boat, and by the time we got on this lugger, the 40 footer, we had 30 odd people on board, some Dutch soldiers and so forth,

22:00 and the minister and his wife and daughter, and at night time I heard people forward to give the lady private, which I arranged with her husband, and she would attend to whatever she had to attend to. People's functions still go on, which they do. So we did the best we could with that. We got to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea which is, another story starts there. We dumped that boat and took possession of a 300 ton diesel and we sailed that

22:30 with a couple of fellas who knew about diesel engineering, from Dutch New Guinea, which is a little way along the coast, across and straight down the Gulf of Carpentaria and landed at the base of Gulf of Carpentaria at a place called Currumbin, and it had taken us 58 days. That's it in a nutshell. We waited at Currumbin for a day and a flying boat came in from the Middle-East with a brigadier on board, and it was coming back to Australia, he was a medical man, he heard the

23:00 story and so forth and he told us all to get in his plane and he flew us all down to Brisbane and in Brisbane we got treated the way it was in Darwin, we got that much of a fuss of us. But I arrived in

Brisbane in a Dutch uniform because by the time I got to Merauke, the clothes I had were absolutely shot to pieces, Dutch Army shorts and Dutch shirts and so forth, and Harry Devers, there is a shopping centre there of a type, but it had cigarettes and he's a smoker, so he was dyin' for a cigarette.

23:30 He came to me and he said, it's exactly, it did happen, he said, "Have one of these, it will do you the world of good." I had never had a cigarette in my life. I had one and that started 20 years of smoking, I finished in 1961. But he started me, yeah, it's true.

Was there a lot of Japanese air activity during that island hopping?

Oh yeah, and all those islands, the whole of that area of what we

24:00 did was occupied by the Japanese. Like, in other words, it was like they were following us. If we had have got to a certain spot and said, "Look we'll go back," we would have gone straight back into the Japanese, who were about two weeks behind us all the way. Yeah. That's right.

Initially when you went to Ambon, what information did you have about the strength of the Japanese?

None, just that they were a warlike nation which had been proven over the course of the century, definitely a warlike

24:30 nation and their fighting with the Chinese was absolutely vicious. But as it turns out, after the war, I will put this in now, Mina's first cousin

25:00 was an officer in the Australian Army, and by coincidence he was posted to Ambon as part of the deal to, because when the Japanese murdered all these personnel on Laha, the lot, everyone, they dug huge holes and just tipped them in, fill all the holes in, and he was in charge then, the Japanese were made to dig them out, so forth. Some of them

25:30 were beheaded, a lot of them, and a lot of them were used for bayonet practice and that was deducted when the shell cases, when the cases of the skeletons came out, the degree of smashed ribs and so forth and he was able to tell us all about that. I don't know whether you have had the opportunity of seeing the video

26:00 that was put out, which I have got, down there, with the Japs, what they did, it's all true, basically true, unbelievable. The only thing they did, in the finish when it was all over they were taken to justice, the main Japanese offender was shot. It shows him in this video of committing hara-kiri, where they disembowel themselves, but he didn't do that, he was shot.

26:30 Yeah.

So it would seem that there just was not enough fighting power on the part of the Australians?

Enough?

Fighting power?

Not enough personnel. When I say it wasn't enough fighting power in the sense of we had no artillery, that's fighting power with personnel. There was no air cover protection, it was withdrawn.

27:00 They knew we were going to be outclassed anyway, and the RAAF couldn't afford to lose any more so they brought them back to Darwin in their wisdom. We had no navy, no ships, no nothing and, as I said earlier in the interview, I didn't see any reality of us winning the war until I got to New Guinea and then saw what we had banked up with the idea of the Americans. We mostly definitely would have gone under,

27:30 whether we like to admit that or not is up to any individual, but as far as I am concerned we were saved lock stock and barrel by the Coral Sea Battle and what went on from there. True. But oh no, it was just a matter of not enough, it's just like trying to eat your breakfast without any tools or cutlery.

On this long 58 day journey, I am just trying to get a picture of what contact or how much you saw

28:00 **or were aware of the Japanese force?**

All the time.

Can you describe that for me and in what way?

Well, you knew that you were in their territory because they had taken the place, and you knew that with the idea there was no sense whatever trying to combat them because they would recharge. So the best thing that you could do was to ignore that fact if it was at all possible to do it, and making an endeavour to get back to your own country, and that was the

28:30 motive, to have another go at them, have a crack, with support. It's easily explained.

But day to day, on the ground, in the air, maybe at sea, what evidence were you seeing of the

Japanese?

The air deal was all the time. The troops were in the area, you knew, you didn't have to see them, you knew – well what else would they

29:00 be? – except that you were in foreign territory.

So were you coming across, stumbling across Japanese camps at all?

No, no, for the simple reason we were in advance of them, only just many times, but we didn't come through any areas which they had previously taken otherwise there would be no point in us attempting to escape, we wouldn't be able to do

29:30 it, simple as that. Then there is a final part of the story, getting back to Harry Devers, when we got back to Australia he didn't go abroad again, he was hospitalised as a guinea pig, which a lot of them were, with the diseases, foreign, picked up in tropical areas. I was lucky, hadn't contracted. But he was in Heidelberg. He'd had a romance before the war which

30:00 had come unstuck before the war so he used to tell me I was lucky because I was engaged to Mina. I would say, "Well yeah, but I mightn't be when I get back, I will have to see won't I?" He met a lady, a nurse, and he married her and they are still married today.

Were you working with a map?

No, purely and simply everything was done out the head, and this is what we were queried on. We had an inquiry in

30:30 Melbourne, as to our escape, and I told the story similar to what I have told you here today, probably being abbreviated more direct and so forth. As they said, all they did, the officer in charge of the five panel inquiry just stood up and said, "Sergeant, I shake you hand," which he did, "congratulations on your escape." That's all there was to it. But others, and I have got no comment to make on this, that had

31:00 escaped from Singapore, right, apparently, that's all I can say because I wasn't there, but the story is that they escaped, not authorised or before the balloon went up, there were illustrations and some of those people have been ostracised ever since.

So your decision to escape, it became authorised because you consulted with

31:30 **Captain Boyd White?**

Well if you looked at it from the inquiry board's point of view, and they didn't want to believe captain agreed that I should escape, put it that way, but they couldn't ignore the fact that we were the only non-combat, only combat troops, all the rest as far as the laws of warfare were concerned, they were all Red Cross personnel,

32:00 protected by the Geneva Convention, which we weren't. So we either had to try and escape or surrender, no other option. So the board took that as being quite genuine because we delivered our parcel of sick and wounded into the care of the ADS and there it was, they had no option, and I venture to say that if it had been an officer that had escaped from that area,

32:30 and I stress officer, he might have commended the likes of Harry and I to the board on our escape and we might have got a DCM, Distinguished Conduct Medal, out it, but there was no-one to do anything anyway and we didn't know until the end of the war what had happened to the people from Laha because there was no way of knowing. And the people on Ambon didn't know either, they

33:00 used to try and – Wally Hicks who was just down here before Christmas when this mate of mine died, and as he said, and he was a very astute man, and he still is but he's 80s same as me, but he was a former State Bank manager, which he was, he was no fool, and he was working in the officers' quarters as one of the servants and he overheard a lot of things, bits and pieces of stuff, and he said to me, he said

33:30 he tried at one stage with an officer he was very friendly with to find out what had happened to the people over the way at Laha and this officer said to him, "Walter," his name was Walter, they called him Walter, "Walter, if you don't want to finish up like them you'll stop talking." So Walter woke up straight away that they had been done away with because he had said 'if you don't want to finish up like them'. So,

34:00 but they just massacred, they did it over a period of a fortnight, they took so many men each day. So if you can imagine the horrific situation whereby they would take a group of men, we'll say six men, with a guard of 20, right, to an area where they had already knocked off six, so they are seeing bodies laying there, decapitated, people laying there and it's their turn next, so it's very hard to accept.

34:30 Terrible business it really was. But we never ever believed that. If anybody had ever said to me they would do that before it ever happened I would have said, "No, you have got to be joking, nobody would do that." But they got out of it by saying they had never been a signatory to the Geneva Convention, that was their story.

This other group of people that you me, the patrol that you met on Ambon, you bumped into,

35:00 **who were they?**

He was a, this was at Piru, which was the first little town we met on Seram, Mr and Mrs, they didn't have any children, Sitonela was their name. He was of Dutch extraction and he also had Malay blood in him and she was Malay and she was absolutely film star looks, she was absolutely beautiful. And I used to say to him, "What are you going to do," because when the Japs came through they would use her for any

35:30 purpose. And he said he could send her, he had friends in the hills, that's what he said, and he would send her. And I said, "Well you want to do it pretty quick, mate, they could be here tomorrow." But whatever happened to them I don't know, but they were district overseers for the district, like magistrates.

Was he going to stay there?

Oh, yeah, that was his duty, that's what they did, and the same at Amahai, the officer there was senior to the one at Piru,

36:00 Piru was subservient, and he had a wife and three children there and he said, "We have got no option, we have just got to stay here and rely on their mercy of when they come through what they do with us." Well we never heard what they did with us. But, the Japs did put fair at Amahai, a big depot, see everywhere we have been we were just a jump ahead of them.

So you said you weren't using a map …

No we didn't have any maps, we

36:30 didn't use any maps. All we knew was that we went up and we had a fair idea what the stars mean, where the sun rises and that sort of thing, we knew where it was. Well, coming back we had to get those things to our left, to our back, that's all simple as that, that's all we did and it worked.

So you just kept heading north?

No, where we were we kept heading east or south

37:00 or from where we were, east would take us on a level plain and south would bring us towards Darwin because we had gone north towards Darwin.

Oh, when you were out at sea. I was just thinking, in that jungle, the mountainous jungle terrain on Ambon?

Well see, no, the place wasn't as though as I said, it was 30 miles long by six or seven wide and it was pretty easy. When we got there it was a big, big island,

37:30 Seram, we knew that was north of Ambon, so if we were going to turn right we knew we were travelling east. If we got to the end of that and turned right again, we were travelling south. That's how it worked.

You said you encountered another group on Ambon, is that right?

Yeah, yeah they escaped to the other side of Ambon. They took this other lug over when we got to Dobo, right. We took this other lug with

38:00 these other people we picked up and mixed up with, and they took that with their group and they went on to Thursday Island and got down from Thursday Island after us, they were after us. We were the only people that came off Laha, Harry and I that got through. Others got off, got off Laha, but didn't make it, they got tripped up along the way. And I will tell you something else, in conclusion,

38:30 anyway, when we were escaping from the ADS in the early days and the weather was glorious, beautiful days, beautiful mornings, there was a fellow from the mortar platoon, Laurie Benvy, and I knew Laurie quite well, and he had a mate with him, I

39:00 can't think of the bloke's name, anyhow it doesn't matter, and he'd been wounded, Laurie, through the arms, superficial but nasty, anything is nasty if you have been wounded. Anyway we were about five days out from the start I suppose, and this morning and Laurie called out to me going along this track and he said, "Jack, can I see you for a minute?" he was a corporal and I was a nothing. He said,

39:30 so I went back, he was about 50 yards down the track. He said, "I am not going on, I am too crook, the wounds are sore and this and that, so if you don't mind." I said, "Mate it's up to you, Harry and I will carry on." They weren't with us, they were behind, but when we stopped they would catch up to us, that sort of thing. So that was alright, so we left them and didn't think any more about it. Then the war finished and Russell and I, this fella that died just before Christmas,

40:00 we went to the first reunion in 1946 and sure enough one of the first blokes I saw was Laurie and he didn't know me because he'd been 3.5 years incarcerated and, plus the fact that he'd been sent from Ambon up to Hanan, up the China coast where they sent – he did after, he got his wits together. I said, "The last time I saw you was on the bloody track, you know, when you said you couldn't go on." Well

that was the end of that. 40 years later, and it's a true story,

40:30 1982, and at that stage we were having annual reunions at the Toorak RSL, which is called the Heroes' Club, and the group of us there, including Laurie who had become Secretary of the Association, he had been for about 30 years. So we are at the bar and everybody's in good spirits, and after about an hour or so Laurie said, "Jack, could I see you for a minute?" I said, "Geez, that takes me back

41:00 to the days on the track when you said, 'Can I see you?'" He laughed, "Come over here in the corner," and he said, "Listen mate," he said, "I have got something to tell you, it has taken me 40 years to do this. Do you remember the day – ?" "Of course I do." "Well, I said to this other bloke, I forget his name, he said, 'We're not going on, that bloody McMahon the bastard is mad,' he said, 'what hope he thinks he's got of getting back to Australia is absolutely zero.'"

41:30 And he said, "That's the truth." So I said, "You don't owe me anything old son, we made it." Absolutely ridiculous, and he said what you've been saying, we didn't have any maps, compasses or any wisdom or bits and pieces, and I have got a book down there on another group of people, I didn't know them, who were engineers on Ambon, did their

42:00 time, and I have got this book some years. I didn't know any of them, but they were prisoners …

Tape 5

01:00 **Just talking about the escape back to Australia, you did mention in passing how you had to be careful not to sneeze because you would draw attention. What was the proximity to some of these Japanese patrols and so on?**

Well for a start, on occasions we were in areas where

01:30 the grass – I don't know whether you are familiar with kunai grass in Australia, well the grass is very similar except it would have been – I am only 5'7.5", the grass would have been 8 or 9ft high. Thick, you would have to work your way through it, and the Japanese as far as we were concerned, we can only talk from our own experiences, were a very chatty lot of people and if they had a patrol

02:00 whereby we would expect them to be in a compact formation, they would have fellows leading and fellows to the right and they would be talking out loud to each other, which gave them away as far as we would be concerned in certain areas, whereas they could have been in much closer proximity but they probably in cases such as I am just talking about, in many cases as far away as what your station wagon is which meant that we either

02:30 laid down in the grass and trusted to luck, or moved on. Or on the other occasions which I can tell you about was – I was very fortunate throughout my time with the army, I was never, ever troubled by looking for water, a lot of people are, but we were issued of course with water bottles and most times other people used mine, I was just one of those fortunate people that didn't need water. On one occasion Harry

03:00 was looking for a drink and his water bottle – and he didn't have one. Mine was dry and he didn't have one so therefore he had access to mine. We came across a little stream which is not on ground level, we would have been probably 100 ft up on the side of this cliff. I wasn't wise, but Harry went to go down and get this water bottle filled, you know, and it was pretty thick along both sides of the stream, the

03:30 jungle came right down to the stream, both sides. And I said, "Don't got down there mate, don't go down there yet." He said, "What's the problem?" so I said, "Well we'll see." It was quite rocky country, stones about the size of a cricket ball or a tennis ball, so I said, "Toss one or two from where we are standing, that way and that way, and just see if there is any reaction," and sure enough three or five of them come out of the bushes on the other side. So had we

04:00 gone down there and he was innocently filling the water bottle with water, we would have been trapped, for want of a better word. Just luck, just pure and simple luck. On other occasions, yes, we had to take it on its face value. As I said earlier, where on times they woke us through the night in villages, different villages, whether they were telling the truth or just having us – or wanting to get rid of us,

04:30 but on a lot of occasions they maintained that oh no, "Japan man, he come," or, "Japan man, he here." Things like that, so you just had – we saw Japs, sure, we saw Japs but we just made certain they didn't see us.

And as far as you know, you were never spotted?

As far as we know, no, we were reported to them as to our whereabouts we don't know either

05:00 because we weren't picked up, put it that way anyhow. Certainly I didn't mention earlier when I was talking in relation to skipping along the coast, for want of a better word to Seram, we were stoned by sling shots from the natives in certain areas where there were Mohammedans and Christian villages

and they didn't mix, which they didn't intermix or that sort of thing, and if they didn't want us to be landing in there

05:30 area they would let us know with stones. But of course, as we often discussed afterwards, had they been agents for the Japs, with the name of the game, you would have thought they would have let us land and said, "Well righto, now you are in custody." But no, no, we were stoned, I guess the best way to explain that, we would be 40 or 50 yards off shore and they would be onshore, and they would use sling shots or stones.

06:00 Nasty business, but we didn't get hit, they were close but we didn't get hit, but we were prevented from landing in certain areas. But as I said earlier Seram was 200 miles long, certain areas anti and certain areas quite reciprocal to our needs. Best I can say about that.

You mentioned you had the pistol?

The Mauser.

You never had

06:30 **to use that in anger?**

Well the name of the game was, there is a very easy school of thought there, as Captain White said when he gave it to me, and told us of his Dad as I earlier said. Naturally he wouldn't be there with us of course, but you use your own discretion. He said, for argument's sake, if there was a situation that was nasty, whereby a villager, for argument's sake, didn't want

07:00 to come to the party with food or things of that nature and we were silly enough, or I was silly enough, to fire a shot in anger or whatever the case might be, the old army expression, 'join the crabs', straight away giving away your position, there could have been a Jap patrol within three or four hundred yards. 'Trouble in the camp here, let's get to it.' So the name of the game was not to use the pistol under any

07:30 circumstances unless you were forced to do it, absolutely unless you are forced to do it. By the way, the pistol finished up on the bottom of the sea off Milne Bay, it was – my mother was terrified of me bringing – when I did arrive home with it – this thing in the house terrified her. And I got rid of it to a mate of mine who I sold another boat, that's in water transport days, and his boat was sunk and the pistol went down with it.

08:00 That was the end of the pistol.

But you didn't fire it that whole time, still came in handy just …?

That's right, and also it was intimidating in many cases to the various areas that perhaps weren't going to be congenial to us when they saw you standing there with the thing strapped on your hip. Quite often I did undo the holster, which was a press button holster and out come the pistol, but I just undid it

08:30 as an act of getting them to play ball with us, that's all, but that was only a few occasions, not as a general rule. The pistol was part of our equipment to be seen, but I never fired it, not under any circumstances. The only thing that did cross my mind, that if we were lucky enough, and when I say this I mean it quite sincerely, if we were caught in a situation and Harry was dispensed with by the enemy, I

09:00 often considered taking my own life because I was not going to be subservient to the Japanese, no way, no way. So therefore it didn't get used.

You talked a little bit about surviving with whatever you could get to eat …

Which was very, very, you couldn't rely on the fact that you were going to travel in an area where there was a continuity of

09:30 food, that was impossible, but there were parts on Laha where they grew pineapple and this was before the landing, and we became familiar with those areas because I was fortunate enough to be driving around with this commander and I knew where these were, but as we got on with our escape, we got further and further away from those fields. We were down low

10:00 and we were able to get a fair run, a reasonable run of corn cob and I can assure you, I don't want to eat corn cob three times a day, seven days a week. But we moved out of those areas and if we saw – what's the best way to explain it? – a leaf that looked alright we'd give it a go and if it tasted alright we'd eat it, and if it didn't we'd spit it out. But many times,

10:30 it's not an exaggeration, we'd go two or three days without food at all.

By the end of that – how many days was it?

58 days, yep, 2nd April we arrived back, on Australian soil I should say.

What sort of condition were you in, physically, when you arrived back?

Good. When I enlisted I was 10 stone 7 lb of those times,

11:00 and interspersed with that and so forth, I was never conscious of losing weight, and when I was discharged, five years and two months later, I was 10 stone 7 lb, exactly the same. But in the interim, getting back from Ambon and probably having a fair dinkum dash at food, I did get to 12 stone, I did. That's what I am today.

11:30 No, the food angle was something that you just knew that you had to put up with and conserve as best you could, and sometimes, there were nuts, I don't know what they were, but the natives at them and if they ate them it was good enough for us to eat them. Things like that nature. That's about all I can say.

How about sleep, how much

12:00 **rest were you able to get?**

Well, as I said before, Harry improved, he did improve and that was a miracle to me that he did improve, he definitely did, he wasn't anything like 100% when we got back, but he did improve against what he was when we started. We tried to take advantage of that by one sleeping and the other staying awake. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't, and sometimes you just took pot luck. But you could back it in, more likely than not, that

12:30 if you were in a village that was prepared to accept you and so forth, they would wake you in the course of danger, and if there was no danger they would realise, because they were not stupid, because they realised that you were tired and worn out and they'd let you sleep. Things of that nature, but we did pretty well for sleep by and large, and most of it was through being a bit exhausted.

13:00 **You just mentioned – we went back to Laha and the landings there, did you – what experience did you have – what did you see of the actual landings of the Japs and so forth?**

No, it didn't work that way. Across the bay, for argument's sake, there was a jetty, right, which we used but that was in the Bay of Ambon, the Japs didn't do that, and for argument's sake we'll just say that this room is the bay and the landing

13:30 was here from the jetty, they came from the bush, they landed around about 15 to 20 miles down the coast and immediately went inland and came down on land. They brought, initially, bikes with them, which they were famous for in Malaya, and, but they soon woke up they couldn't use them, so we did see a couple of illustrations of Jap bikes

14:00 that had been dumped in a group of six or seven. But no, they came to us from inland, they didn't come to us from the water side at all. And also they came down, once they came from inter land to the left of, classing this as the stressing dressing station area, they then crossed over inland

14:30 and they virtually followed the coastline which was the harbour side, down to the main point of attack, which was between the two villages just outside the aerodrome area, and which one was Christian and the other one was not. And the one that was Christian was a very, very nice village with little stores and things of that nature. But once the action started the natives just went bush, disappeared. And also with the idea of evacuating

15:00 the Australian Air Force, which we didn't blame them for because they didn't want to, we would have lost them to the fighter plane attack. That just reminded me of a ghost town that we went through – at all stages, any time the army went through, the air force accommodation was much superior, much, and they were in what I would call to comparison, ours was OK but theirs was luxurious. And it's just as though they had gone on manoeuvres, they had gone back to Australia, but everything was

15:30 left, photos of girlfriends and wives, equipment and clothing kit bags, just like a ghost town, but a few of us, we never, ever touched anything, on occasions the natives, the air force were evacuated probably eight or nine days before things got really dirty, and a couple of the natives were

16:00 quite good, young ones, asked us, "Australi, Australi," alright if they went through? – there's no good saying no. And also we had the stores were let go. We had plenty, stacks and stacks and stacks of Ballarat bottled beer, that was just given to the troops to do what they like with. I might mention something interesting, I thought it was, was three or four of us when the landing, when we were watching there, entered on the Ambon side from the

16:30 wharf, but not outside, the jetty side, as I said, from the wharf over there. And we were down, four or five of us or half a dozen of us with three or four bottles of beer, watching this big cruiser, and it was a majestic sight to see, this great thing with – and I suppose it was just like looking out at Corio Bay, and unbeknownst to us or up behind us, back

17:00 towards the airfield, there were two big hills and one was called RAAF Operations Hill, and the other one was Dutch Operations Hill. So anyway, in their wisdom the cruiser decided to let fire, let go, and she did, and I have got no idea how high above us the shell went over our heads, but it just lifted us off the ground and the bottles of beer we didn't see again, just with the draught of the shell careering up the back into the

17:30 hill. I would not have believed it, the shell might have been 200 ft above our heads, it might have been anything, I would not have believed that could happen. And when we gathered our wits and stood up, none of us had a bottle of beer, all were flattened. So that was lesson number one, don't muck around

with a Jap cruiser. Sounds silly doesn't it? But it's true, it did happen.

Can you tell us about the times

18:00 **after that? We've heard the amazing stories about the escape, but from that – watching the cruiser come in and then …?**

Oh well, those of us that were interested enough to do certain things, our own quarters, we knew it was on, you knew it was on of course, so we destroyed a lot of our own stuff, which we did, burnt it, set fire to it, personal gear and that sort of thing. We realised we couldn't cart stuff with us if we were

18:30 lucky enough to get out of the mess. We did a lot of burning of our own stuff and talked about the possibility if there was an escape on, and sometimes in later wisdom you realised that the army does make mistakes which of course we – the commander, Colonel Roach, who complained bitterly on our behalf, which we didn't know about until after the war,

19:00 he said that without a doubt if the Japanese got to Ambon they would take the place in five minutes because we were under-prepared. And he was recalled to Australia as a defeatist attitude and they replaced him with a staff officer who was in his 50s, 52 or 53, very old man by standards of those times, and he didn't know anybody. He didn't know any of the troops or the officers,

19:30 it was just a matter of chaotic situation as far – it didn't affect us on the side we were because we were on Laha, but for a main operation to try and deal with the Dutch and the co-operation, and they were hard people to deal with, very, very set in their ways and their thoughts. I suppose that's fair enough because it was their land, or part of it. You could almost say in many illustrations, many illustrations, they were non-co-operative

20:00 and virtually as far as team work the deal, if you could call it that, didn't work.

Did you have many dealings with the Dutch?

No, I didn't, my officers did and, as I said, I was a driver to three of them in turn, the first on was evacuated back to Australia and the second was a major, and that was when the Japs first reconnoitred our area and he decided to go forward and see if he could negotiate with them,

20:30 which meant we knew or he knew that we had no hope of holding them. Anyway they didn't return him and I became the driver to the 3rd man who was Captain Doug Perry.

He went to attempt to negotiate …?

Yeah, he took four men with him and a white flag to talk to the Japanese, he left and we didn't see how far he had to go, he went on the line that he knew that they would be approaching on, or

21:00 reckoned he thought they did, and we never saw him again. But after the war and after things were written and in the course of – and there is a book on Ambon, which I have got here, and the Japs refused to negotiate with him, and just took him and the four blokes prisoner, and of course they were executed and that was that. So Captain Perry took charge, it was illustrations, it's not, and I wouldn't,

21:30 perhaps I could leave it out of it, but I wouldn't want things that were seen technically you could say could have been reported to the detriment of certain people, you didn't do it. It might be unfair, oh well, to families if certain fellas didn't shape up as perhaps as was expected, and I include officer ranks.

22:00 **I don't expect you to name people, but what sort of things do you mean?**

Oh, lack of leadership, just lack of leadership, lack of initiative. One particular bloke was quite keen on surrendering before the surrender had even been thought of. He had a nice stick with a white towel on it, which was part of him being dispossessed. We didn't let him go on with it.

22:30 I was involved in that, which I was. But never would we name people, never, ever. No good anybody ever trying to find out, of course, we just wouldn't do it. They all had families back here. But not surprising, because some people are gifted with being able to take a bit of mental punishment and others aren't. So it's understood really.

What would have happened, you said you dispossessed him of the white flag,

23:00 **what sort of happened …?**

I was not involved further, the flag was taken and destroyed and he was talked – spoken to by others which I wasn't involved in at all. They probably told him he was the Australian link and he has been a naughty boy. But I had no part in that. We had to find, this particular

23:30 officer who was in charge, the last man, Perry, he was real fair dinkum, he tried to rally the situation when there was no hope of doing it, but he did his best especially with the mortars – I don't know whether you have ever been familiar with anything like that, but when a mortar – which is a cylinder and the shell is thrust into it and it explodes by contact with the bottom and fired in the direction, and the cylinder canon did

24:00 become red hot with the constant terrible – another one of our trucks, which could have been used in the evacuation of when we did evacuate, was put out of action because one of their mortars went straight through the radiator of this other truck of ours and put it, of course, out of action. And the driver stayed with his truck and of course consequently he was

24:30 annihilated too. And then if I can go on to getting back here, word travels quickly and so forth, and I don't know who did the organising, but there were arrangements made to meet people such as wives and mothers and half the time, you had no

25:00 idea – they'd say, "Do you know Bill Smith?" for argument's sake, you didn't know who he was, in another company, you are talking about 1000 men anyway. But then on other occasions, such as I was in Geelong on leave, naturally before I got out of the army, and I was on the tram in Geelong and there was this lass that got on and the 2nd 22nd colour patch was a royal blue over a diamond and ours was black over red,

25:30 and of course the colour on top designates the battalion and the red designates the brigade. And I explained earlier, the diamond designates the battalion. And this lass was there and the tram was crowded and we got into town, anyway I was intrigued because I couldn't identify where she was whether it was the 2nd 22nd or 21st. Any rate, I got off the tram and I went over to where she was and I said, "Excuse me," and she turned around and it was black. It was ours, I said,

26:00 because I had my army uniform and the colour patch was ours and I said, "You got someone?" she said, "Yes, my husband." I said, "What company was he in?" and she said, "Headquarter Company in –," she named him and I knew him well, well and truly. So I was able to tell her where he was taken prisoner which she didn't know because the Australian Army didn't notify none of, my parents weren't notified. Six, seven or eight weeks went by and they hadn't heard anything,

26:30 the army didn't say. They might be prisoners of war, they might be this or might be that, didn't say anything. No contact at all. And the only thing that was prominent of the times, even when we did get back finally to Melbourne, and this Court of Inquiry, "Don't say anything, don't tell anybody anything, if they ask questions, just say you don't know or keep it to yourself." Australia in the sense of being Australia was petrified of the situation the way it was.

27:00 And that's true, "Don't say anything. Don't tell them. Shouldn't take much notice about that when you got home amongst your own, of course. But if you are in a pub or whatever the case may be, don't talk about it."

I hope you don't mind me just staying at Ambon for a little while because while we have got you here it's great to get as much of that story as we can for the Archives.

27:30 **You mentioned how when you went up to the dressing station, that time before you made that decision and you had talked it over with the people there, um, you were ferrying the wounded were you?**

Oh yeah, you were ferrying the wounded is correct, plus two deceased, on stretcher cases they were but they were deceased before we picked them up. So we delivered them through and the

28:00 injured, wounded and a few mental cases that cracked up under the battering. That was our job, that was done, but that took all day, from 11 in the morning or so, when we got moving, and then we ran out of road, like I said, after a few miles, and then that was like I said, put the truck out of action. And marshalled the troops, for want of a better quote, and took it in turns to carry the stretchers of the dead. One particular

28:30 fellow, I don't know whether I could blame him or not, but he was anxious to leave the dead on the side of the road. I said to him, I didn't know him, I said, "Well if it was your brother, would you want to leave him there?" He said, "That's different, he's not me brother," and I said, "Yeah, but he's somebody's brother." We did, we delivered them through, we got through, as I said, about six in the

29:00 evening, from 11 in the morning, so it took all day, pretty well all day. But where we – the track was in a general area – I had never been to this ADS prior but I knew the general area of where it was, so it was just a matter of concentrating on – we eventually tumbled on it because none of the others had been there either, so we did our best, which they did. I have

29:30 often thought, when it was all said and done, the officer in charge, Captain White, who was a thorough, a real nice guy, to see his own troops, to see his own staff would have been horrifying for him, well and truly apart from the staff themselves. But as I said, that's that album there, I'll just show you if you don't mind.

30:00 There was eight of them, there they are, I wouldn't take them out of there for a million quid, that's half of them, because the other half are obliterated underneath.

So they have left their names of their next of kin?

Yeah, that's right, if we got through. We made contact with everybody, did the job.

30:30 They have been in there for years and years and donkeys years because I started the album just after

the war. But its fact.

Yeah, that's incredible. And you got to each and every one of them.

Yeah, yeah. There's also

31:00 another one there, but I'll leave that one there until the tape runs out. Where a lady rang, sorry, wrote home, just the situation a mother finds herself in, see if I had any news of her son. And I have never heard of him, but I replied to her, which I did. You did all those things. That's it there, you can read it later, that's the actual letter she wrote.

31:30 **So can you tell us during the thick of it, how did the order come that it was time to evacuate, I mean it must have been absolute chaos?**

From the point of view of

32:00 Laha, well I explained that earlier, in the sense of, the cessation of hostilities stopped 3 o'clock in the morning and went back to the aerodrome and I saw the airfield covered with Jap troops and then reported back to the ADS. So we were out of action, finished. So then you make your plans for the future. That's it in a nutshell. So there was no-one, for argument's sake, to get on the phone and say, "Listen, is it alright if we decide to evacuate,"

32:30 it was all in here if you did or if you didn't. As it turned out, if we decided to stay and join the others and become POWs, I wouldn't be talking to you now, because everybody was massacred, the whole lot, no-one escaped, and they don't know how many, the best they can come up with to fix up for you was 231 but others said it was as high as 300. So that

33:00 includes the idea of not knowing how many that were actually killed in action, right, as against in the team that were massacred, it's just that people were missing, gone.

When you were ferrying the dead and wounded to the ADS, that was from the mortars and the …?

That was from the battle area at Laha Airfield. And it was – if I can – it's pretty difficult in the sense that it's alright me having been

33:30 there, but to try and explain it to somebody else, we'll say the airfield, we were forward of the airfield in a sense of trying to protect the airfield, and the Japs crashed through us. That's about the size of it, by sheer power. Like, for argument's sake, if you had an attack coming to you from that direction and you tried to deal with it, then you were faced with attack coming from that direction. So

34:00 in other words you were in a hopeless situation. So, as I have made it quite clear ever since the war that I wouldn't have been able to escape if I hadn't been a transport driver at that stage of my career. It was only because the officer roared out to me, "Where's your truck, have you got your truck?" I said earlier in the transcript, he wanted to know what this group of people were doing up underneath these

34:30 trees. I said, "Wounded sir." He said, "Well get them out of here," and a few epithets thrown in. And so we got the truck and loaded and that was the start of the journey. But unless I was a transport driver I wouldn't have had that opportunity. And things were very rigid in relation to transport in those days, if you didn't – if you were a transport man and you were allotted a truck, nobody else was allowed to touch it, taboo.

35:00 But I had access to a ute utility truck, that was to cart the commander of the day, or whatever he was, around, wherever he wanted to go, inspecting positions and that sort of thing. The 30 (UNCLEAR) truck in case we were blocked, carting provisions or whatever the case may be – when we got there in the first instance, I might retrace my steps there and say that when we went out to the camp in the first instance. The day of landing at Tan Tui on the Ambon side, we were out there longer than we needed to have been, but we were looking into a food – there was heaps and heaps

35:30 of Golden Circle stuff – are you familiar with the name? – fruit salads and all sorts of things, we lived like lords. But that did finish, as far as I am concerned, when we got shifted across the other side of the island, but the stocks were there. The Japs would have got – the main, bulk of it.

Was there a point on that, on the route back to Australia,

36:00 **the island hopping to Seram and all of that, at what point did you feel you were safe, that you were …?**

Always in command, always, never, ever, that's the truth I can't do any better than that, it never entered my head that, "We've had enough of this and bugger it, we'll sit down and see what happens." We just had to go on. As far as I was concerned, and I am genuine when I say it, it was the fact that

36:30 in a stupid sense, I was quite anxious to have another crack at them which did come about, and even when I was in Milne Bay and I had been down-graded physically through my left leg, which was injured, and I was eventually sent home from Milne Bay, and it was eventually operated on in Queensland because they don't do those sorts of things in the tropics, not unless you are an actually wounded case, but other than that they

37:00 dodge it all if they can. But other than that, no, it was just fanatical. Even my mother, as mothers do, I suppose it's expected they do, I can hear her now after I come back from Ambon, "You don't want to go away again, son." Things like that. But as I said, Harry didn't go away, he was never physically able, by the army's standards, of going away, but I was away twice out of Australia

37:30 after Ambon. Ambon, sounds silly to say, it was a small part of my experience as such, you know. In Milne Bay I was eventually sent to the 2nd 3rd Australian Convalescent Depot, in army terms as 'protective infantry attached' and behind the convalescent depot were big hills and it was rumoured strongly that

38:00 the Japs would still be there because they were driven back into the sea, but some of them got away. So on several occasions I was leading a scout group, be away two or three days in the hills, but we never found a Jap, they weren't there, but the Australian Army thought they might have been. But that sort of business, plenty of activity after Ambon, well and truly. Even with the water

38:30 transport, we did our training at Clifton Gardens – are you familiar with Sydney? – well Clifton Gardens is next door to Taronga Park Zoo, and there's a big pub, or the place is still there, and we were camped down in front of it, so we had access to the pub and instructions in Morse code and all that sort of stuff and signalman work. Small ships, 1st Australian Water Transport, and the idea of that was to run up the New Guinea coast

39:00 with supplies where various sections of activities were, whether it was the Yanks or whether it was us or what. I might tell you a story. We were in Townsville on the way up, and some Yanks were in this pub in Townsville and their ship was at the wharf, we went up by ship from Townsville and a train to Townsville and this was going up the first time, these Yanks were coming down and, don't get me wrong, I am not trying to copy the Yanks, but this was in the pub

39:30 and this Yank said, "Where you boys goin'?" and we said, "We're headin' north." "I hope you are not goin' to Milnie Bay boy," this fella said, he said, "It's the devil's own country up there." This is exactly where we were heading for. You laugh now, but this Yank, somebody had a go at him, you'll be – no way. He wasn't goin' back to Milnie Bay. It wasn't Milne Bay as far as he was concerned, it was Milnie Bay. But in the main

40:00 the Americans we were associated with, and there were a lot, were very, very good, very good, well-disciplined and good people. Oh yeah, they were alright.

What was it actually like to step foot on Australian soil again?

Oh yeah, well that was written in two or three places that we were so

40:30 happy that we kissed Australian soil, well that never happened, did not happen, but whoever wrote it thought it sounded alright. We were so happy to be on Australian soil. But one of the boys said that Currumbin, a little fishing village and we said straight away, we said, "Where is the pub?" and the nearest township is,inland, is Normanton, but we didn't get there because, as I said, while it was going on, only there a couple of days and this big flying boat come in,

41:00 Sunderland type, with this brigadier on board, bringing him back. He was the only occupant and he put us all on board and flew us down to Bowen in North Queensland. And people made an enormous fuss of us, which wasn't justified, we were only escapees trying to get back to Australia when it was all said and done.

When did you ...

Tape 6

00:31 **Just one or two little questions, we are talking about the myth of kissing the soil when you came back, basically the reality was that you were looking for a pub?**

Well it was a graphic thing, to go back to the start, we got to, there's a story here if you want to hear it, Tamorkie, in Dutch New Guinea, and it's a little township,

01:00 and they had this motorised, 300 ton diesel, and its name, it had a name, The Harman, and it belonged to the Dutch at Merauke and they used to do their cruising up and down wherever, in the Dutch East Indies or somewhere, but I can assure you that we were in, and it applies to myself, in such a desperate mood to make it to

01:30 Australia and we had got so far, and it was 400 miles across the Arafura Sea after we left Dobo, you know. And to get to Merauke was an achievement. And quite a few of us, knowing full well you had to go on together otherwise we wouldn't make it, in the sense of trying to make it in two like Harry and I were. You had to put your heads together then, so we decided we would capture the Harman and I am

02:00 not joking and we were in no mood to be fooled around with. And this particular fellow, which I couldn't blame him for because he was on the Dutch side of things, but anyway we took the Harman, I just abbreviated it to that.

Tell us what actually transpired there?

No I can't, because it's heavy going, and it was not fit for the tape.

02:30 **We have heard some …?**

Yeah I know, but we captured the Harman, that's all. And we took off with the Harman and she had a heavy lift to port, which she did, and we navigated it down the full length of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and when we got to the bottom of, as it turned out it was Currumbin, we didn't know where we were going, we just kept going, and we had no further interest in the Harman, it couldn't do any more for us. So whether the Dutch got it back or not, we didn't care, she had done her job for

03:00 us. So we got ashore and, as I said, the boys wanted to know where the nearest pub was and no soil kissing. And fishermen, it was a fishing village, and they were able to help us out with a beer and talk and some food and so forth, and before you could really – and we were only there for a day and a half when this flying boat come in. And we had a half a day's negotiation when the brigadier, issued instructions that he would take us on

03:30 down, other than that we would have had to work our way overland or wait for a train on down to Bowen, that was it.

The Dutch physically tried to prevent you from taking …?

Well the Dutch said, "You are not taking our ship," and we said, "We are, sorry we are." Best way I can put it. We were in no mood for discussions. It was going to take us or we'd take it and we did.

04:00 We made sure we had plenty of fuel, being diesel operated. But a lot of these things went on, like when this captain who later commanded us with this Z Special [Force], he later escaped from the prison camp on Ambon with two or three of his mates. They did some horrific things in the sense of commandeering, it was either you did or you didn't survive and it wasn't worth the trouble of getting out of the places, you had to be tough. And

04:30 tough I mean, if there were fisticuffs involved, bad luck, you just had to make sure the numbers were on your side and, as I said, it was a big help being 21 and 10 stone 7, very helpful. Not me only, I don't mean that at all, there was half a dozen of us, just banded together when the time was necessary.

So who were the half dozen on the Harman?

05:00 Oh no, names I would have truly forgotten, but for argument's sake there was Harry Devers and a fellow named Ted Hanson, he's now deceased, Roy Bunnywarren, nick-named Bunny because his name was Warren. Ted Hanson, Bunnywarren, myself, Bluey Drain, Harold Drain, that's four

05:30 of the six, the others escape me after this, but whether you knew each other prior, it didn't matter, you were an Australian and you all had the same object, you just fitted in together for the occasion.

So how quickly, as you island hopped, did you sort of pick up seafaring navigational skills?

Oh yeah, not difficult because you always had someone to tell you something.

06:00 For argument's sake, when we got to the bottom of Seram, it was OK, that was just a piece of land and we followed it, and when we got to the bottom of it there was a littler lot sticking out, there's a photo of it in there somewhere, and this little island of Geser and that was a base for the Dutch, and they were very helpful, and they were able to tell us, "Now if you do this, and do that, you will finish up down at Toeal Isle in the Kei Islands,"

06:30 they would point your nose in the general direction, and all you had to do was use a compass, which we did, was to keep the compass on the course they set and told us to do. They were very helpful like that, so we carried it out to the letter, and when we got there for argument's sake, in the Kei Island, Toeal Isle, a little town, we then said, "What's the move from here?" and they said, "Well you go from here to

07:00 Dobo in the Aru Islands." "Oh do you? How do you do that?" "Well this is the way to do that." And we did it, we did what we were told. And when we got there they were able to tell us, "Well you have got no option now, you either go direct south, which will take you to Darwin, or you go left, which will take you to New Guinea." So of course the aircraft activity was heavy on the Darwin/Ambon route, so we decided we would go left and with a better of chance from not being hit from the air. And then we had to consider too

07:30 whether the Japs – I had instructions to ignore the likes of, do the job in hand, in other words bomb Darwin and don't worry about what you see on the way, but that we didn't know that that would be the instructions or not, so instead of taking a chance you went left. When we went left far enough, we eventually hit New Guinea. Now if you ask me, 'What point did we hit New Guinea?' I couldn't tell you, but it was land, so after having hit New Guinea, we then followed the coast around to Merauke. At Merauke

08:00 they were able to tell you, “Well you are so and so and so miles from Australia,” things like that, if you kept asking questions, it was all a matter of making sure of your survival or the health to do that.

Was it a unanimous decision to head for New Guinea instead of head for Townsville?

Oh yeah, we took a vote on that, yeah we did, we said, ‘Who wants to do that and who wants to do this?’ One fellow, I can’t think who it was, he got up and said that

08:30 he thought common sense should prevail and there was far less chance of enemy activity if we went left, the track route from Ambon to Darwin. So that was the answer in the sense of doing it that way. But by doing it that way, the experts back here were able to decipher things and work things out and tell us that what we had done was cover 1500 miles approximately as against 650 to get from

09:00 Ambon to Darwin.

You mentioned that, I think it was Dobo Island to New Guinea, the Dutch minister and his wife and little girl, how did everyone fair on the journey, was there just as much urgency for them to get out as there was for you guys?

Oh yes, oh yes, he was a minister of religion, and he had his lady and he had his little girl and we had room on the boat,

09:30 it wasn’t any to my recollection animosity putting them in the, taking them on the boat of that nature, we had room and the space was there and a few of us had enough gumption for want of a better word, and had a cabin set up in the rear, and we could stick them in there, Mum and the little girl, and Dad was quite co-operative and he spoke excellent English, which he did. And

10:00 his wife didn’t but he did, and he was the liaison between his own family and us. We were quite happy, the weather was pretty conducive, so yeah, no it wasn’t the sort of thing that was forced upon us or anything of that nature, and when we finally got to Currumbin, that was the end of their association with us,

10:30 they weren’t on this plane with us, it was the military people that’s all, but they were very happy they were in Australia. And not only that, he had – he was a minister of religion, I don’t know what denomination he was but he wasn’t an RC [Roman Catholic], but he had access through people up there. And no doubt, I have often wondered, not late of course, but in years following, whether they stayed in Australia or whether they didn’t.

11:00 But the difficulty was with hygiene and things like that and, be diplomatic, with the lady and the little child, the little child was only two, she didn’t even know where she was, which was fair enough. The woman was brave, which she was, she was in a situation totally foreign to her, oh no.

So you were sort of used to all those deprivations and you had to be on your best behaviour?

11:30 And the fellas were all very good, very helpful, which they were, oh yeah, all took their turns at watches and things of that nature. But, as I say, of a night time, as we would say to the reverend gentleman, anything that had to be done had to be some awkward moments and stuff that had, he would just have to work it out the best way he could, under the cover of darkness.

12:00 It worked, marvellous what will happen if you are in enough trouble to get out of a spot of bother – there’s an old saying ‘common sense prevails’ and common sense does come to the fore, it does, did in our case, anyhow.

How long were you in Merauke for?

Oh, Merauke for four days. Yeah, four days, just enough to get organised to get

12:30 washed, get a hair cut, there was those facilities there, get cleaned up, like I said I finished up shedding my tattered uniform stuff and Dutch Army shorts and got a Dutch Army shirt. A few of the people when we got to Brisbane must have thought I was a Dutchman. Oh no, we were treated royally when we got back but we didn’t get down and kiss the soil, that didn’t happen,

13:00 but whoever wrote this said it did. I suppose it might have sold a few newspaper copies.

I much prefer the idea of looking for the nearest pub, that’s much more Australian?

Yes.

So once you had said you were flown on the sea-plane, the Sunderland, to Bowen, and from Bowen?

Oh Bowen, we stayed overnight, which was – it was then of course –

13:30 a nice tropical town, and the next morning straight on down to Brisbane, down the coastline, and of course we said goodbye to the brigadier, that was it. And we met up there in Brisbane with fellows from our sister Battalion, the 2nd 22nd, who had done similar things to what we had done, worked their way back.

Had most of them come a similar route?

No, totally different, in other words we came from here and they come from there.

14:00 In other words we were that far out to the east of the Australian coast, the Queensland coast. I don't know whether I am answering these to your satisfaction but it's the best I can do.

So once you were in Brisbane what did you manage to get …?

Oh in Brisbane it was a matter of army headquarters in Brisbane and full kit, brand new uniforms,

14:30 pay and things like that, leave, we had four days' leave in Brisbane before going on down to Sydney, and just acclimatising or getting resettled.

What about contact with your family …?

Yeah, well that was done immediately we got to – when we got to army headquarters in Brisbane that was done

15:00 and Harry and I were taken to the Sergeants' Mess and the only reason we could – they were very good to us because we had both been NCOs in the pre-war set up so they looked after us extremely well. And we didn't use any phone contact, it was telegrams.

Do you remember receiving a telegram from your folks and from Mina?

15:30 No, not until we got down to Melbourne. No, it was just we had arrived safely in Australia, brief, was what I can think of the wording, 'Arrived Australia', and that's another thing, they didn't want you to say where you were, security wise. So just 'Arrived Australia' covered the whole situation. And then later on after the failed expedition with Z, I rang her from

16:00 Alice Springs and I said, I wasn't allowed to say I was in Alice Springs, just arrived in Australia. That's it.

There must have been some worrying and stressful times for your family?

Oh yeah, well, getting back to this Horsham fellow that was in the air force, he contacted, he got his leave from, eventually from Darwin and from Melbourne he contacted

16:30 Mina, who became my wife, and she contacted my Mum. And he said he was going through to Horsham the next day and of course you have to go through Ballarat, and so they met him at the station and he gave them the run down to where Jack was and all the rest of it and he didn't give them much, he didn't say anything wrong, he was just factual he didn't think there was a great chance, they accepted that and just waited. But the army, nothing from the army,

17:00 not a thing, nothing. There was a lot of that went on. And then the other things that happened, and you could almost say it was a flood of it, with relatives, word goes around very fast, say Jack McMahon from Ballarat had escaped and got home, and we didn't have a telephone, not many people did in those days, but we had telegrams, people calling. The lady come down from

17:30 Beaufort, which is 25 miles north of Ballarat or a bit more, 30-odd miles, I must have known her son, she said, because he had been in the 2nd 21st from the start. The only trouble was there were 800 other men too, and I didn't know him, you just had to be honest. Then we met this group in Melbourne, some fellows we knew of and some we didn't, some were able to say which company they were in and where that company was stationed on

18:00 Ambon, for argument's sake, but we couldn't give any clues to the whereabouts or the well being I should say of the people because you just didn't know. No good saying things when you don't know, it would be awful.

You told us how back at the dressing station those men had given their details of their families and we saw that in your album. How long was it before you were able to get to those

18:30 **people?**

We didn't see them at all, we sent telegrams. And then, as I said, hardly anybody had a phone. And I said in my – sectionised it, Harry did a few and I did a few, things like that. And if we were or happened to be in Sydney at a particular time, then the address was convenient, but we only wanted to

19:00 keep faith with these fellas and let them know, which of course we didn't know that they would have been massacred, but let them know where they were the last time we saw them. And to let them know – actually when I said we had no phones, there was people over the road from us who did have a phone. And on several occasions, unbeknownst to me, my mother, who was friendly with the lady concerned, and

19:30 they rang there and the lady would come across and get Mina and we'd just tell them what we knew, but we never ever built up hopes. Of course we didn't know. It was as big a shock to me as to anybody when we found out about the big massacres, we never ever considered that that would happen, no.

Well Jack, you have got us as far

20:00 **back as to Brisbane, you said you were given some leave there and you were re-kitted, what happened next?**

Well I might say we had quite a few beers. I love my beer, which I did, I never smoked, well I was smoking by then because Harry got me on to smoking in Merauke. I thought that was something I had been missing out on, I took to it straight away.

20:30 To jump the gun there and go on and get back to what you were saying, I went through 20 years and I had a minor coronary when I was 40, and my doctor whom I was quite friendly with, he has long departed, but I smoked Craven A, 2/6 a pack they were, anyway, he said to me amongst other things, he said I had a minor coronary, he said and I was in 2.5 large a day, couple of large a day, because I was

21:00 travelling and all that sort of business you know. And he said, and he used to call me son, and he said, "Now listen son, you'll have to break it down," and I said, "What?" He said, "Well you will have to break it down, there's no good carrying on like this." I said, "How far have I got to cut it down?" He said, "No more, maximum six a day." I said, "That's fair dinkum," I said, "I'll give it away." And he said, and he did, this is true, while he was saying this he reached into his pocket and he didn't even know he was doin' it, he reached into his pocket and took out his packet of Craven

21:30 As which he smoked and offered me one and I said, "I just said I am finished," and I never touched a cigarette from then. There and then, straight away, did it cold. And people used to say after about six weeks, "Are you back on them yet Jack?" So that was that. No, getting back to what we did, the time went very quickly, of course we were quite anxious to get back to

22:00 home base. And I just fitted in with arrangements, nobody put any pressure on us for duties or anything of that nature, the army was very good except you weren't allowed to say anything, they were absolutely adamant on that, they would have had a fit it you went to the toilet and spoke to somebody. Then of course it was down to Melbourne and back to Ballarat and I saw Ballarat for the

22:30 first time, you might find that very hard to believe, but I was walking – and it is a pretty city it really is, but beforehand I was just a citizen of Ballarat and accepted everything as such, in this I saw the beauty of the buildings and the streets and it is that sort of town, which it is. I was amazed that I saw things for the very first time. Then of course, from

23:00 there on things were very hectic because of the fact that I was determined to serve again and, as I say, this other officer got in touch from Melbourne, and I got back to Melbourne, and we were on the move and I went, I suppose in all, three or four weeks after getting back to Ballarat, I was in the commando school.

And that was based …?

In Gippsland, down at South Gippsland at – I forget the little town's name, but

23:30 they had a big intake of Americans there, which they did, and the attitude at the commando school – they had a little river, I suppose it's a stream anyway, going through the middle of the camp and the attitude of the instructors was, 'If you can't swim, do what Christ, walk across the bloody water, we don't care how you get there, but get there.' So if you couldn't swim and there was somebody that could, you got on their shoulders or whatever the case may be. We'd go into town and the Yanks would get dressed in

24:00 Australian uniforms, and the Australians would get dressed in the Yank uniforms, oh we did some terrible things. After a month of that solid, a month at the commando school, and then they had imported senior commandoes from England to be the instructive part of the course and we had our warrant officer first class by the name of John Ellis. He was alright, he was OK, he conformed to the Australian way of life

24:30 quite well. And we went back to Darwin the same way we had gone in the first place, to Adelaide, to Wayville, up the centre.

Sorry, the commando school?

No, no we were out of the commando school, we had graduated and become members of the Z Force which constituted 40 personnel, one senior warrant officer and one commander, who was a captain by that stage,

25:00 Bill Jenkins, who later became a major.

Had Z Force been in operation prior to that?

Z Force was formed in 1942. Mmmm. But I went to a very intriguing situation with Z, I went to a luncheon after Anzac march one year, and they had a table of 12 people, made a table of 12 people. There was a special Z table just of their personnel, and other than, say

25:30 for argument's sake, two you might have known and you didn't know the rest at all because it was so

secretive, the operational work, was, you know, they put a couple of men in here and they drop them off and attempt to do their job and liaise with them coming back and that sort of thing. One was a fella, a bloke from Ballarat, Jack Ruddrick was his name, he was a great footballer too and a wrestler. Anyway, they got him, the Japs, they got him

26:00 and they killed him. You expected that, you didn't expect any mercy, because the idea of Z was to get behind the enemy line and gain his strength if you could. If you couldn't, at least you could come back and say, 'No, they are too strong,' which gave the information back to the appropriate authorities, or you could say, 'No, they put on a big front here and if we put in X amount we should be able to take the situation.' But quite good.

26:30 **Just coming back a step, how did you come to do the commando training, was that something you were pushing for?**

No, only because of the fact of Bill Jenkins' idea to get back to Ambon, and the only way you could do it was to form a commando course. The military authorities wouldn't give him any co-operation at all. And he talked to people like myself and others, and we agreed to do the commando school to become eligible to do this so-called,

27:00 try and break the camp in Ambon, but it wasn't to be. But as it turned out, I dare say probably none of us would have survived because they were nice and strong. They had a pretty good force there, the Japs. It was a main base, a main base, or they made it a main base for their operations south to Timor and that sort of thing.

What was that initial training

27:30 **down in Gippsland like for you?**

What was the …?

What did the training involve in Gippsland?

Oh well, obstacle climbing, we'd never done it before, mainly super-physical to face any situation. And one of the things we learnt very, very quickly was, if we were unlucky enough to get into combat with an enemy, never to try to beat him physically, say

28:00 on a fist to fist basis, you learnt the tricks, for want of a better word, of dropping to your feet in front of him and smashing into his ankles and immobilise him and then you would be up and he'd be down. This is theory of course. But they are the things you worked on, like that. I suppose that in the main it could be said that it was pretty good stuff.

It sounds like –

28:30 **talking about the Aussies and the Yanks swapping uniforms, so you all got along pretty well?**

Oh yes, oh yes. Well actually speaking, the Yanks that were there, there was quite a bunch of them that had Irish backgrounds and they were real characters, they really were, they were funny men. Oh no, we got along fine, no trouble. The only thing where we didn't get along fine was in Brisbane. If you got away from

29:00 the islands and come back to Brisbane, there was always the willingness to be a, as they called it, a big blue, in a café or things of that nature. Somebody would say something under the duress of alcohol, and she'd be on. You saw some of that. Oh yeah.

Would it end in a handshake or …?

No, it would end in the café being a wreck and one time I was back in the camp and realised I didn't have a wrist watch,

29:30 things of that nature. You took the good with the bad and if you were defeated you were defeated. The idea was not to be if you could help it.

You got a few good punches in did you?

Oh here and there. Oh, did you go through the album?

Yeah I did.

Did you read the poem I wrote in the finish, on the last page?

No.

At the end of the war.

OK, I can see it.

Can you?

Perhaps you can read that.

30:00 I wrote it.

Would you like to read it?

That would be good, then we get a record for …

I used to write a bit of that sort of stuff in those days. This was actually at the end of the war, and it – I was out of course, out of the army, I came out between the fall of Germany and Japan.

\n[Verse follows]\n "To know the war is over,\n rejoice as well we may,\n but before we celebrate too much,\n let's stop and think and pray\n

30:30 for all the boys and girls we lost in this long and bitter fray.\n Spare a thought for loved ones\n of those gone forever more\n and those tough and hard fought battles\n that ingloriously called war."\n

That's how I felt at the time. Yeah,

31:00 I wrote that. I wrote quite a few really.

When did you start writing?

Oh, there was a famous Melbourne footballer, and he was in the air force, named Bluey Truscott, and he, anyway, he was recalled to Australia to help out, put it that way, and he was killed

31:30 over Darwin, and so I – it was one of the first I wrote, 'A Tribute to Truscott', and that got published by the Melbourne Football Club because he was a Melbourne Football Club player, and they thought it was alright so they put it out to the members, believe it or not. But they're all poems of the times that I wrote.

Did you

32:00 **ever keep a diary, I know you are not supposed to?**

No. No I didn't, everything was in my head, well to say that everything was in my head, those things I thought were important were in my head. It was true, diaries were taboo and I always felt rightly so because under duress if the enemy discovered the diary and they wanted to interrogate you they had their own methods of

32:30 interrogation and I dare say if the interrogation is applied hard enough they would crack. So no, diaries were out. No.

Can you tell us just a little more about coming back to Victoria, Ballarat, and then the training, what sort of homecoming, I imagine that must have been terrific coming back to Ballarat?

Ballarat – very, very quiet. Extremely so, which was the way that

33:00 the serviceman, in my illustration anyway, wanted. Didn't want fuss, couldn't be bothered. Nothing worse than having to be interrogated and because everything was on, 'Did you know him, did you know him?' people who were missing, 'Did you know him? When did you last see him?' that's if you knew him. But no, extremely quiet, very much so, and of course not there long enough to be involved. And I didn't want to be there long enough to be involved in anything deep.

33:30 It was just a matter of getting on with the journey. That was 1942 and I didn't come out until 1945.

What about with you and Mina, had you been making plans already or …?

Well, yeah, I had thoughts of marriage, I was engaged to her before I went to Darwin, and I know she would have agreed to

34:00 marriage and then I would have left her and possibly left her a widow, possibly, because that was the nature of the game in those days. But then on the other hand she would have received a war pension allowance, being my wife. So while I didn't go into great discussions on that with her, I was quite conscious and I decided without asking her opinion, and when it came to a finale, to just leave things where they were.

34:30 And I married her on the 15th of the 1st '43, in Melbourne, and I had seven days' leave. In those days she was Presbyterian, her family background, but they wouldn't, the families wouldn't, didn't, weren't religious and didn't live up to anything, they were decent people but they weren't religious. Of course in the army deal, and it's stamped,

35:00 you wear two tickets, one, 'dead meat tickets', one, if you happen to lose your life, they bury you with that and the other is kept on army records. One is green and the other orange colour. On those tickets it's marked that you are an RC in my case, you know, so of course that was important from the army's point of view. I had seven days' leave in which case we were to be married, but the deal was, from the Catholic point of view, the person,

35:30 in my case being the male, the female had to do a course of instruction in the Catholic religion and she

was happy to do that. But as the reverend gentleman said to me at the church in Hawthorn, he said, “There’s not enough time, it’s going to take the best part of seven days to instruct her in the Catholic religion,” and I only had seven days and I had already spent two of them. So I said, “Don’t worry about it father, I’ll go along to the Wesley Church,

36:00 I have already been there and I can get married tomorrow.” So very quickly they came to the party and we got married in the Catholic church. That’s true, absolutely true. Just firmness, I said, “I haven’t got the time,” and neither had she. So the 15th 1st, January, 1943. Then our first child was born on 25th March 1944, he’s 60 next week.

36:30 She has been gone five years, yeah. I said to my daughter a while back, I have said it to a lot of people though, she was sitting over there, Cheryl, I said, “You are the only –,” we were talking in general terms of course, we had been talking for ages, I said, “You are the only planned member of this family, you realise that don’t you?” She said, “Oh Dad, what, what?” I said, “Your brothers are wartime leaves.

37:00 You bobbed along –.” When I came out of the army, Mina was pregnant with Stu, the second boy, in July, and I came out in ’45. So we had to face the fact that I was a soldier and we had to consolidate and what we were going to do and where we were going to live, and get a few dollars together, or pounds, put it that way, so she had to go on hold.

37:30 So there are six years between her and the second boy. But she was quite surprised to learn that she was planned.

You don’t get much leave, I guess you have to make the most of it.

Well that goes without saying, that’s right.

Do you want to tell us a little about the preparations for the Z Special Forces?

No, there’s not a lot to tell really, there’s not.

38:00 There’s not, because it all happened so quickly. It was a matter of ‘will you or won’t you’, ‘are you or are you not’, as in the case of the commander who was trying, as I said earlier, to enlist the aid of the Americans, but they were too smart, which they were, they weren’t going to risk the lives of the submarine, so they declined to be a part of it. So it explains itself in this way, and I’ll put it to you like this. I arrived back in Australia on the

38:30 2nd April, so then it was getting re-established in the ways of the army, bit of leave, a bit of this and a bit of that, and we were back in action in July in Z Force, so that’s May, June, July, so that’s how quick it was, and having done the commando course in the meantime, so there was very little that can truthfully be said – if we had six months’ preparation, that’s different, there’d

39:00 be a story there. But as I stressed earlier, the only way it could be done was if Jenkins could enlist enough people to form under the banner of Z and he did, but that was the only way it could be done. So in the sense of sitting down and thinking about it and making big plans, we made plans I might say, plans of

39:30 battle attack and that sort of thing, on the way up to Darwin, what we’d do if we could. But really and truly, honestly, it’s not as if I wouldn’t tell the story, but there’s very little to be said on that score. ‘Will you or won’t you’. But he went on, Jenkins, I left, left them, because I was sick and tired of carting these naughty boys back to Adelaide,

40:00 fellas who had jumped leave and that sort of business. And of course the opportunity popped up for me to become a member of Water Transport, through other members of the battalion the word got out, and I thought it sounded good and I was quite keen to get a crack at New Guinea, see what things were like up there. So I resigned from Z.

Tape 7

00:31 Well Z, the ultimate plan, which I must say was Ambon, which was the destination, and to try and do the camp, but to get the conditions right and the co operation of the Australian Army and other people, plus the navy, which was very important because we couldn’t do it, and we had to,

01:00 when I say ‘we’, I am speaking on behalf of the commander, Bill Jenkins, when I say this because he can’t speak for himself because he’s no longer with us, but we had to tell fibs in the sense that one of our prime objectives was to feed, if we could, and that’s how we got the co-operation of the navy, of the little islanders, and there are dozens and dozens of little islanders which are not self supporting, so the navy would take food

01:30 and we would stop at these little islands and feed the natives, right, with the idea that once having done that we would be, well, more than half way to Ambon, and the navy would have finished their duties in relation to food and stuff and God knows what, and they’d be able to back us with the intended break into Ambon. Is that what you are after? Well now we had 40 people, 40

02:00 men. Our Commander was 41, so there was him and 40 people is what I should have said. We would have had six groups of five, which is 30 people, and a group of five with him as the headquarters, that's 35 people, and five people as spare parts, to be used, this is the theoretical side of things.

02:30 And when we got up to close proximity, there's a lot of fairytale sort of stuff in this story, but it's true, was that we would hope through the navy's co-operation, and they had a 40 ft or 50 ft thing, a drop off point around the island, and we would have dates whereby different units would attack different points and cause confusion amongst the Japs around the

03:00 camp, right. But we never got to it because we never got past Saumlaki because the Japs were there and we had the information that they were not there, they were not south of Ambon. So, in other words, the Australian military authorities didn't have it right, which they didn't. So once we walked in, head first, into the opening attack of the Japs at Saumlaki, the whole plan blew to pieces, right. And when, as I said, we

03:30 extricated ourselves, is probably the only word I can use, from the mess of being fired upon and I don't know why it was the Japanese, they must have had their own theory but they bombarded us with mortar shells and bombs, with the idea of hitting us of course, but they all landed around us in the water, but that meant that we didn't get the shrapnel you would get on land flying because it was all wrapped up in the water. They attacked the navy boat with machine guns and, as I said

04:00 earlier, killed the captain and wounded others, which meant withdrawal to regroup and rethink and we put a party on the land, further down the coast, of which I was not a member of that party that went on – that was – well you did what you were told and I was designated to stay on the ship with a role there and the others went apart and they did reconnoitre and I am pretty sure the time given for

04:30 reconnoitring the party was five hours, I think five hours to work their way back and things worked out alright. In the meantime Jenkins had been in touch with Darwin and Darwin just flatly said, 'Forget it.' That's whether we went on to Ambon with the trial or not because our – well secrecy for want, was blown, because the Japs knew we were in the area. And they would have set themselves of course,

05:00 to get us, especially putting Ambon on alert. So the army here in Darwin said, "Get out of there and get back here," and of course Jenkins said, "How do we do that?" and they said, "The same way you got up. Just set your course for home." So that finished the venture, but by that same token, from the time we left her to get up there to Darwin, that's after finishing the training

05:30 down here in Victoria and getting up there and going on to the various points to where the Japs discovered us, and getting back to Darwin and being re-routed, the whole lot about two months, and then that was over. So then you are looking for fresh fields. So, I could have stayed in Z, but they would have had to find a role which suited us if they were going to do, for argument's sake, exploratory work in Timor,

06:00 as an illustration. I could have been drafted to do that or anything like that, but going back up that way where we knew where the Japs were, there was no point in – unless we were going to execute a massive assault. It wasn't under consideration in those days, no massive assaults were, we didn't have the power to do it. So, I took the opportunity and some didn't and paid for it with their

06:30 lives. One I mentioned before, Jack Ruddrick, and one, two, three, four, five of us did take the opportunity to go to Water Transport, which meant a new field. Being young, still 21, a new field is always attractive. We went to Sydney to Clifton Gardens to do the initial work to go to New Guinea.

Can I just ask you, I don't

07:00 **understand what the purpose was of taking supplies to these little islands?**

Because they were not self-supporting. They depended – see the Dutch used to run regular bus services, if you like, through the islands with ships, and ships would off-load food, and that's the way they existed. And if they grew anything, or whatever the case may be, they did training, but in the general sense they were not self- supporting, and not only that,

07:30 there's more islands than you'll ever dream of, little islands bobbing up out of nowhere with 300 or 400 people on it, and virtually starving once the war started and the situation stopped, whereby the supplies were cut out.

So you had no idea, even though you were visiting these islands you had no idea that the Japanese were on the other island, I can't remember the name of it …?

That's what I

08:00 said, we were assured by Victoria Barracks – see we, this man who was the commander was a successful soldier in the sense he was a thinker and he didn't sell the idea to the Yanks and they were right, they didn't want to risk one of their submarines and there was a danger of doing so. And also, I have never had any proof but I believe that the Americans believed that the Japs were possibly south of

08:30 Ambon whereby that hadn't sunk through to our people. So our people were adamant that our people

had nothing to fear until we got to Ambon. It wasn't true. It was not true. It's just as though you went away for lunch today and the place was shut, things like that and you couldn't get any lunch. So we just had to put up with things that went wrong, that's what it boiled down to.

09:00 **Jenkins sounds like quite an unusual man, he escaped from Ambon didn't he?**

From the prison camp, with four others. And he was very, very tough, I have got him on tape in the other room there as a matter of fact, from the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], he was interviewed by the ABC, and I have got him on tape talking about it. And he stood for no nonsense at all, if anybody, I am not exaggerating, if he had got to a place where

09:30 they needed assistance such as fuel for a boat or whatever the case may be and they got no co-operation, he would be very much inclined to say, 'Well right –,' and the person was no longer on this earth, he was that tough because he got no co-operation. Of course men were first and foremost, but he was a tough, hard-headed, professional soldier. He was in the service to win a war and that's what he expected to do,

10:00 that's how he got out of the prison camp. And not only that, when he got out of the prison camp, he told the story so many times, he didn't even confide in his fellow officers what he was going to do in case the word got out to the Japs that the escape attempt was on because they had to break the barbed wire around the camp, see this camp at Tan Tui was our original camp which of course became a prison camp so it had all the wire entanglements, barbed wire and that sort of thing. But he only put in a certain amount of time and he said, "I am off and I am going to attempt to get back to

10:30 Australia," and took this personnel with him with the idea of carrying on with the attempt to win the war. I got along fine with him, which I did. Matter of fact he used to come here, football, he followed Geelong, which he did, Polly Farmer of the times, was one of our famous players, he had a daughter, they had a daughter, lovely lady his wife, and the daughter was unfortunately a little bit down in up top here, but she liked her sport. He

11:00 was very good with her and she liked her Dad. He used to bring her down to the games and sometimes he would come here and sometimes to this mate of mine who passed away before Christmas. But we were all pretty good friends, which we were. But we all understood each other and when he was tough to the extent that when he decided to look for co-operation to form then, he just said, "Now you know what you are in for, if you don't want to be in it just say so." We had so much respect for the fellow and his

11:30 ability to lead, we didn't have any hesitation. But when things went wrong, he was over the side of our ship and swam to the navy boat whose captain had been killed and men wounded just to size up the situation to help out, and stayed on board the navy boat while they buried the man at sea, and then came back to our boat and, as I said, we finished up back in Darwin. But what I am getting at,

12:00 a lesser person, lesser ability might not have understood it as he did, and when he was told by headquarters at Darwin to get back, you know, give it away, not to go on with it, as a soldier he did what he was told. But I know for a fact he would love to have gone and taken a chance, which of course would have been suicide, but he would've. He would've had a

12:30 go.

What exactly was the plan once you arrived at Ambon?

Didn't I – don't get me wrong when I say this, when I said about the five groups, the groups of five people, well you attack the camp from different areas and confuse the Japanese as to where the attack was coming from in the main and how many Australian troops were involved. Have them guessing instead of one frontal assault. If anything went wrong and they were able to combat us,

13:00 there were only 40 of us and they would know about it. And, for argument's sake, the album on the floor, you attack this point and that corner and that one over there all at the same time, we hoped they would tend to be confused.

Did you mean that going up Ambon Bay up to Tan Tui ...?

No, you didn't go up Ambon Bay, you made sure you didn't do that, because you would have been exposing yourself to the enemy without a doubt. So the idea was –

13:30 Ambon Bay, Ambon that side, Laha that side, we would go in like the Japanese did when they originally landed, they didn't go up Ambon Bay, they came from outside and unloaded off their ships and got on to land, so that was what we would have done if we had been able to get into the area.

What sort of weapons were you using?

Yes, if I said everything under the sun it would be an

14:00 accurate deal. We had, I had three different types of pistols I had TSM, a Thompson sub-machine gun, which I said earlier is a unit of close proximity range as close to what we are right now. If it was twice that far they used 45 calibre ammunition, which wasn't reliable over a distance. We had Owen

14:30 guns, we had Sten guns, we had hand grenades, in the sense of what you could carry in the way of small arms, we had it. We had it and were given it. They made sure we had everything that was required. The only thing we didn't have and it was talked about, and supposed to allegedly get them, were bullet proof vests. They hadn't come through in time when it was time for us to leave.

15:00 Wherever they were coming from I don't know. They hadn't come through so we didn't have those, but we had stacks and stacks of small arms ammunition. We didn't have heavy machine guns because they would have been burdensome. So we had what we called mobile stuff.

Did you have signals?

No, we had a couple of signallers,

15:30 two signallers, we didn't have intermediate signals between the groups of five because we worked on time schedules. In other words, if this group of five left here at such and such a time, supposed to be at a certain spot in two days' time, that was what we hoped to do, the average group of five to take two to two point five days, because you had to eat and that sort of business, they did (all arrive UNCLEAR) say for argument's sake, on 20th March, we are talking about the

16:00 15th today, things like that, but not signals whereby you sent signals, no. But …

So how were you, in your planning, going to co-ordinate the arrival of all five groups?

Well that was a great discussion, and we knew from the fellas who had already escaped from the prison camp, such as Jenkins and the other four, the main road ran

16:30 through the prison camp out of Ambon, the Dutch had built this on either side of the road. While they had all the barbed wire around it and stuff, there were certain times of the day when they would allow a number of the natives, local population, through on the road to get into Ambon city to do certain provisions buying or whatever the case may be, and of course they'd shut these big gates. So we had the advantage of knowing what these times were.

17:00 The theoretical side was to be able to attack one or both of these gates and also we had heavy barbed wire cutting equipment with us which would allow us, we had the knowledge through the escapees of how many strands of wire there were, we had a lot of knowledge that we couldn't have had if nobody had escaped from the camp following me. So that was a big consideration.

17:30 **When did you consult with the escapees?**

Well we arrived back on the 2nd April on our escape, and Jenkins and his crew that had escaped arrived three weeks after us, and we met in Melbourne at this big military camp outside of, gawd I can't think of the name of it, and the plan was hatched then.

18:00 **And of course Jenkins and his crew had been there so he knew the line of …?**

They were able to tell us. I had never seen Tan Tui since we arrived in Ambon, and it was our camp and I had never seen it as a prison camp and had no idea what the Japs had done to make it a prison camp.

What was the plan for moving the prisoners?

This is something I have said over the years to different people, and don't get me

18:30 wrong when I put it this way, but I just said, "Have you ever seen a female spider give birth?" and the average person said, "No." Well I have, and she's got a sac and this sac gives way and they just go like that, and there could be 100 of them, and that was the idea, to get the message through if we could break the camp, that they scattered and confused the enemy because we were under the impression,

19:00 in many cases the bulk of the invading force that won the battle for the island would have moved on to other areas and they had what we would call a garrison force, so we left it that we had an even chance. We knew that we would lose people, and we knew we would lose people from the camp to do that, and have them incarcerated, as it turned out, for the best part of four years and to lose a lot of people in that time. In the last few months of the – they lost, died in camp, in excess of

19:30 three hundred. In the last two months, they were dying like flies. Malnutrition and God knows what. So it was a gamble and it was a gamble that could be of benefit plus knowledge of the Japanese and their knowledge and bits and pieces, but we were thwarted by the wrong information just as to how far south the Japs had come.

Once they had scattered, would it have been up to each man to find his way

20:00 **to where?**

Yeah, that's right. The name of the game, we would presume we still had this navy ship, and that was the, sea- wise would be so far off the island, I suppose it's fair to say heaps and heaps and heaps of small craft at Ambon, heaps, and if they knew where – this is theory of course – where this navy ship was, they'd make their way in that direction. North

20:30 west of Ambon was another island called Namlea, well the navy ship was to be up towards Namlea but it might have been a day or two's sailing away from Ambon for the people who were able to get into boats, we did have people that come off Ambon, not on our side but on the Ambon side, after the Japs had taken the island, who pinched boats and got off

21:00 and eventually did get back to Australia, but that's nothing to do with us, that's the other side of the island. But there were heaps of craft, heaps, any amount.

It was such a small force, wasn't it, to do so much, you had 300 men?

What? I said 300 lives were lost in the last couple of months.

So there was more than 300?

In the camp?

Yeah.

Oh 800. 300 died in the last couple of months, approximately.

So a small

21:30 **force?**

Well it was a small force in the first place, there was 1131 of us all told.

I mean the Z Force, you had 40?

Forty men, it was all thought out to the best of our ability, with better brains than mine, that if we took in more we would be top heavy with the secrecy department, so it was either that or nothing. As it turned out we lost, only by

22:00 the Japs being further south than we thought. And a lot of that went on, a lot. See, getting away from Ambon for the moment, on the Timor side, those poor devils, most of them were prisoners, were shipped to Singapore, became prisoners and worked on the Burma railway. But those that got off on this side, on the Australian side, they had got off and probably could have hopefully,

22:30 were trapped by Japanese destroyers patrolling the area. They didn't get away with it. But in theory it was a good plan from the Australian point of view. Not knowing what the Japs were going to do, the whole thing was an enormous gamble. It was either that or you sat on your tail and did nothing, which wasn't acceptable.

And that's what would have happened …?

Of course, yep.

If Jenkins hadn't

23:00 **been so determined?**

No doubt, yes, he, I have tried to explain him, but one chap recently said that he thought he was stupid, that was one of the words used, idiotic, another one of the words used. I spoke to this fellow and I said,

23:30 "When did you ever serve under him?" and he said, "I didn't." I said, "Then you don't know what you are talking about, you didn't serve under him." He come from another company altogether, he only knew that there was a Captain, or Lieutenant Jenkins as he was. You wouldn't know what you are talking about you had to be associated with the man. No, he wasn't a fool, just that things didn't work out and you take that chance.

24:00 Yeah. So he's gone, went about five or six years ago I suppose. I have got letters from him, still, which I have. He wrote me a letter one time, I was in my middle 60s, couldn't believe it, he was still thinking of me as a 20- odd year old, forgetting that I was advancing in age also.

24:30 Time marches on.

Probably covered that pretty well.

To the best of my ability. It's no good me trying to conjure up a story that isn't there, it's either I tell you the truth or I don't tell you anything at all. A lot of it is just reflecting, getting back, a lot of wasn't allowed to be presentation because time wasn't on our

25:00 side, not on our side at all. It was either you do this or do that or you don't do anything at all. We were very conscious of the fact that the Ambon Airfield at Laha became a big base of theirs and also became a target for the Americans and their own fellows, not from the necessarily what was the RAAF base at

25:30 Darwin, but they had airfields further down the Northern Territory and they used to strike back you know. But on many occasions, when I say many, they bombed Tan Tui, not knowing whether there were Australians in it or not, or if there were, how many, because the Japanese refused point blank to allow red crosses to be painted on the roof to signal that it was and it was in their own interests to have done

26:00 it because in the bombings they lost people too.

They knew POWs were there?

Well they knew POWs were there but on the other hand, don't forget they had moved 300 odd out of Tan Tui up to Hainan, off the China coast, and the authorities didn't know whether they had moved, like they had moved in Timor, whether they had moved them to Singapore. We didn't know – when I say we, we as Australians didn't know whether

26:30 there was an original amount left in Tan Tui or a lesser amount or small amount and there was nothing to say, markings, whether there was any prisoners or what but one raid when they our fellows bombed the place and killed quite a number. There were a lot of Dutch wives and children there too who suffered. And it was just an

27:00 unknown situation in the general sense and of course the enemy were in complete control of the area so they had to be bombed. Stepping stone along the way to victory, the best way to explain that.

We should talk about the Water Transport?

Oh yeah, the Water Transport was just something different, and they hadn't

27:30 been and the one I belonged to was the first. And as things went on they formed a second and a third and a fourth. And I have got a Christmas card out there on the wall I sent to me mother in 1942 from the Water Transport, it's on the wall out there. And the idea was, that was formed through the difficulty of supplying the allied forces with food, because it was

28:00 MacArthur's idea, in liaison with others, that New Guinea being so heavily jungled and hilled that along the coast where would be, where the main battles were fought, and so they had to be supplied. But that was the role of the Water Transport, to take supplies up the coast to places like the Buna, Gona, Sananda people with

28:30 food and stocks, whether it was ammunition, whether it was something to eat or whatever was required. And our base was Milne Bay. We didn't travel by small ships until we got to Milne Bay and then the main set up of that was two men to a boat, small boats, 20 footers, 30 footers,

29:00 small, very small and not deep out to sea, within a reasonable distance of the coastline. Quite a few of them were sunk. But oh no, it was just something different, but the strategy was to feed the allied forces, if and where required, when necessary. That was the idea, that was the birth of it.

So you were based in

29:30 **Darwin?**

Mmmm?

You set off from Darwin?

What, for Water Transport? No, no, pardon me for saying this, I am not being rude, Darwin is there and Queensland is there, now that's the west coast of Australia, that's the east coast of Australia, and it's up off the east coast to New Guinea so it's miles and miles away from Darwin.

So where were you based?

Mmm?

Where –

30:00 **you must have operated from a base?**

Yeah, Milne Bay.

Oh Milne Bay.

Yeah, Milne Bay which had been a big, big battle which the allied forces had won, pushed the Japanese back into the sea, but we had to get over the side of a big ship which had been bombed at the wharf, and clamber over the side of this, oh, forget the name of it. No, it wasn't the Neptune, that was off the harbour at Darwin. Anyway we had to

30:30 clamber over the side, our ship that took us from Townsville to Milne Bay couldn't get to the wharf, had to anchor off-shore and put a small craft in.

So we just get it straight for the archives, the supplies would come in from where?

Well the same way that we went up there, and not by aircraft, by ship, 6,000 tonner,

31:00 the average size I would say. There were ships that did that sort of work.

They were coming from Townsville?

Townsville or Cairns, could even have been from Sydney, depending on what was being transported. But there was stuff all the time going up there, which there was, because it was a full scale, full scale war effort. Not a minor effort, I must say, like at Ambon was, with

31:30 all its deprivations, this was a real big war in New Guinea, really was. But oh no, and the sky was continually, wouldn't matter what the time of day, there were planes everywhere, allied planes. And the Japs would come down on, from their northern bases of New Guinea, as many as 100 planes, bombers in a convoy anyway, not 100 bombers but

32:00 50 fighter planes as escort, and it was a fearsome sight, and they'd come down and bomb Moresby which was away to our right and they would come round and bomb Milne Bay and then they would go on up, back to home base. But we were always warned, because we knew of the bombing going on at Moresby, that we knew what to expect coming across to Milne Bay, but their main deal wasn't so

32:30 much attacks on troops on land but to destroy the wharf at all times so the ships with supplies couldn't get in. That was the strategy of the times.

So the ship would arrive with the supplies, and you were operating this two-man boat, what, were you going out to the ships or were they coming right in …?

No. It depended on the circumstances, it depended. Depended on the weather, whether it was calm, whether it was rough,

33:00 the size of the ship or the size of interim ships that took a certain amount of stuff off and brought it in to the small ships. There's an old saying, horses for courses, and that's how it works, the way they did things. But, oh no, it was quite successful. But, as I said, I finished up leaving the Water Transport, I don't know how long I was with

33:30 them, probably about a year, but I was downgraded to a – my left leg was injured and I was downgraded, the army had you classified and in other words from A1, A2, B1, B2 and I had a B1 grading which meant they would still retain me, and they said, I didn't say, they said I was unfit for service on unstable ground. So I became

34:00 a member of what they called infantry protecting the 2nd 3rd Convalescent Depot there, where they used to send patients from hospital to, and we would have to protect the Convalescent Depot against the possibility of enemy attack which didn't happen while I was there. And eventually I had further trouble with my leg, so they decided to send me down to Brisbane to operate on it, which they

34:30 did. That didn't work so they sent me down to Heidelberg to operate on the other side, which they did.

How did you – sorry what sort of injury did you have?

Oh, loss of knee effectiveness, cartilage trouble and things like that and they wanted to operate, wouldn't allow you to do things, just would

35:00 disintegrate.

When did that show up, was it a war injury?

In New Guinea, in Milne Bay, and I finished up down at Heidelberg, and that was in May 1945, and there was a – I don't know whether it would be of any interest to you but there was a former world heavyweight boxing champion from America by the name of Jack

35:30 Dempsey, back in the 1920s, late 20s, and he was in the American services, and he came through Heidelberg to speak to the troops and shake hands and to wish them well, and he was an officer in the entertainment section. He had a party of Australians with him showing him where to

36:00 go, it's a big place Heidelberg Hospital, and one was a colonel. Anyway, he went through and, any rate, he met me and we shook hands, had a few words. I often said afterwards that this is the famous hand that shook the hand of Jack Dempsey, former heavyweight champion of the world. People were impressed about that of course. The day after my wife, who was pregnant with our second son but she was at the stage, he was born in

36:30 July, and this was May, so it was evident she was pregnant, and this colonel had been with the entourage that had been with Dempsey, came around and had a few words with the fellows, and Mina, she went of course, and he said to me the next day, he said, "That was your wife?" and I said, "I hope so, I hope it's not somebody else I have got pregnant," having a crack and he laughed. He said, "How long have you been with us,

37:00 Sergeant," and I told him, and where I had been and so forth. "So do you feel you have done enough?" And I said, "Well to be honest with you sir," I said, "it's not like that, but I wouldn't mind getting out," because of the fact that she only had a couple of months and we already had a son who was 16 months old, so there was 16 months virtually between the two of them. So he said, "I think we can let you go." So through that I got a discharge, I was out the next day.

37:30 I wasn't sorry when I was out, I was in a way, but not in the true sense. And then of course when the

war was over, I sat up every night, we were living in, not this house in Grey Street, East Geelong, and they were putting over the names on the ABC of prisoners, they had to take them off to Morotai and they sent messages home every night. I listened every night and sure enough

38:00 one – oh my wife would go to bed naturally, quarter past two in the morning I was still listening to the radio – and sure enough, members of my battalion came across who had escaped, been repatriated, which meant a lot. But oh no, and then we ….

How did that work, the names were broadcast on the radio?

They were interviewed. What they did when the Australians were released, the

38:30 survivors from Ambon, Australian destroyers went in and so the Japs got the message from Tokyo that the war was over so of course they had the Australians on the wharf ready to be received, and the naughty boys, the Japanese, our MPs soon found out who they were and they were escorted with our blokes to Moratai which is further up the line which became a big base for prisoners of war,

39:00 which sorted them out then for interviews by radio for messages to home. And it was quite a while before, as it turned out, members of the 2nd 21st Battalion, which I suppose it was about a fortnight I was listening when over they came, the names of survivors. Not all of them wanted to do it but most of them did. And there was a certain faction of fellows, and

39:30 this is quite believable when you think about it after being incarcerated for 3.5 years and, say, was a married man, didn't know whether she was still there to welcome him home or whether she had gone elsewhere or she was still living or what. And a lot of them were – and when I say a lot, a number of them were reluctant to send messages until they got home and found out for themselves what the situation was.

40:00 And in most cases things were alright, and in certain cases they were not. And getting back to the line of that, when I was initially in Darwin when I had my 21st birthday, there were plenty of fellows who were in their early 30s with a kid or two, quite a lot. So if they were about today, they would be in their 90s, where a fellow like me is in his 80s.

40:30 And of course as the years went on we had our reunions every year and you'd see a certain bloke and you'd say, "He's aged," but they say, "But he's 45." Time marches on. But still, in all, something we experienced, that's about all you can say.

Tape 8

00:38 We have in a sense that it was those episodes were straight forward transactions, put it that way, anyway. Whereby you knew what you were going to do tomorrow and got ready for the next day, hopefully in an uneventful sense whereby you didn't lose a ship

01:00 which we did but not very often, but they were very small ships.

Can I just put it to you this way, that from what I know that what the company said is that nobody from that unit has been interviewed before. So you would be the sort of person that would be able to give the sort of detail of the operations of that unit and it would be very useful for the Archives?

I understand what you are saying, but really, really and truly there isn't

01:30 a story there, only in a sense that the authorities of the day saw wisdom of the fact that, 'Oh yes, we'll form a small ship's company.' And somebody else says, 'To what purpose?' 'Well we'll supply the fellas up the coast or going up the coast,' of that nature, so that was how the idea was formed. And then they just had to make sure they had the personnel that were prepared to do it and knew the risks, and

02:00 like, the stage, the illustration of myself, and others from my unit, the 2nd 21st, who did join it. We'd had enough risks from the previous escapades to not be very concerned about the Water Transport, and working in shore to the point of view, and I must stress this, the stuff that we had on board had to be got off board, so the sooner you did that operation, the sooner things got achieved and you got

02:30 back to base and said, "What's next?" Right.

O.K. This is the sort of thing I am talking about, so that's good to hear. So, let's get a picture of …?

Another thing, I was a sergeant and carried that rank up there with me. As I , that was what I always wanted to be, a sergeant, so I

03:00 was, I got it back. I had to initially lose it to enlist but I got it back eventually and that was what I always wanted to be, but there was other people that had ambitions and those that wanted to go into the Water Transport and be part time on land and part time on ship, like to fill in if someone was crook,

sick, and that role suited me fine. So that meant I stayed a sergeant. But the fellow who was prepared to sign on, on

03:30 ship duties only, had a standard rank which the Australian Army gave them, which was warrant officer first class. So, people who, one was a fellow named Don Johnson who has long since gone from this earth. Don was a transport man in the 2nd 21st, where I was. He was a good mechanic, which he was, and he knew engines, and he took to this Water Transport like a duck to water, so he came

04:00 from a driver, which is a private rank, to warrant officer first class. So the reward was there for him straight away. I never chased that, so I was very happy to be – somebody had to be on base and take stock of what provisions came in, for argument's sake. And then, as I said, make themselves available, as I said, to go aboard ship, but did not have directly in charge of their own boat, in other words a spare part, and that was effective.

04:30 **OK. But you were responsible for supplies and the inventory of the supplies, were you responsible for ordering supplies?**

No, no, no. That would come from down the line. People would say, "When you get back, for God's sake, don't tell us you want 25 pairs of boots." We wouldn't know if they wanted 25 pairs of boots or not unless the order came up the line to base. And then,

05:00 it was done by senior executives, like the officer department looked after that.

So would there be a quartermaster?

Yeah, correct, you are on the right track. Comes under quartermaster supplies, which it does, that's quite true. And his sergeant, if he's got one, is called a staff sergeant, and he wore a crown above his three stripes, where the sergeant wore his three stripes.

So then

05:30 **you were ferrying these supplies up the coast?**

Yep, to where they had to go.

Can you describe what sort of places are we talking about?

We are talking about normal beaches, that had to be that way, and the people that you were supplying had to have an idea when to expect you because if it was, for argument's sake, you were at point A and it took two days to get back to point B

06:00 and get loaded and perhaps your boat had to be looked at or motor serviced or something like that. So it's Monday, so its Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, so it's probably the following Monday before you got back to point A which was where the initial order came from. And then of course you had to contend with the possibility of evasiveness of your little ship, if a Japanese wanted to have a go at you.

06:30 Mostly not, but then again it might be a bloke, Japs I am talking about, who might have been frustrated and said, "There's a boat I will have a go at that." He might have had a few rounds, things like that that you had to contend with.

So these might be Japanese who are on land or on ships, boats?

Not necessarily, not necessarily, I am talking about air activity there. We didn't – or not to my knowledge – have any

07:00 contact with any enemy sea craft, no we didn't. They would have been binged off, for want of a better term, by our own surface stuff. No we didn't have any worries that way. Air, the possibility was there and it did happen on occasions, but mainly, no. Mainly the idea was and what the Water Transport people had to contend with was the elements. Depth of water, depth of

07:30 sea, tides, when you could get in close, when you couldn't if you got in too close. Something important to deliver and the tide went out you were stuck with that until the tide came back in, but it was worth it because you delivered the goods anyway, things of that nature. But it was something that a lot of thought was put into, well and truly.

A lot of thought as in working out tides and in …?

Ah yes, a successful venture or not,

08:00 it just wasn't a loose skinned thing, very serious business, and you wore an anchor on your identification above your colour patch, you wore a – it's on the board out there, I will show you when you are leaving. Colour, blue and red anchor, so if you put your head in anywhere on land, and your uniform, would know, like knowing what battalion you are with, but you are a member of the Water Transport.

08:30 **Would you be met at the boat by troops?**

Invariably, or on the other hand you might know that you had to go a couple of miles to – how can I best explain this? – situations bobbed up by common sense and whether that the people you were going to see were inland or whether they had

09:00 access to the coastline or whether they had a detachment that could work the coastline, get the stuff from you and take it back up the coastline to where the provisions had to go. And as I said, really and truly, in my opinion the simplest way was straight out common sense to suit the occasion.

So this was Brunei you said?

No, Buna.

09:30 All those areas, not specifically but generalising. Buna, Gona, Sananda, I said.

So more remote places?

Oh yeah, yeah. Severe battles with the enemy in those areas of course, and prolonged jungle warfare. But don't forget too that we were well aware of it, that the enemy had

10:00 big problems with supplies themselves. Getting, they had to be fed, let's face it, from their stand point. And that was another thing too, that worked in cohesion of illustrations like the Water Transport, with the air force supplying their supply dumps and cutting their air supply as much as possible, which of course was, the method behind that was to try and starve the people.

10:30 All that sort of stuff, a real fair dinkum battle of tactics. But in those days anything was worth a try, anything, and it paid off, this fellow lives three doors up from me, here, he and his wife. He's in my age group, retired people from the land and they have only been there for about three or four years. He came down to make himself known, didn't know whether – he just came down to make himself known. As it turned out I invited him in

11:00 and he saw the ship's bell outside there. He said, "You are an ex-navy man." I said, "No I am not, no." "What's the bell doing there, do you mind me asking?" I said, "I used to be in the 1st Australian Water Transport." He said, "Good God, I was in the 3rd." So then we swapped stories, where his crew operated from in relation to what I could tell him about ours. Small world though, isn't it?

11:30 **You said before that some ships were sunk, do you mean the ...?**

What?

Ships were sunk, do you mean the little boats?

Yeah, the little boats. Yeah, but I didn't know anybody that lost their life, we lost a boat. Because we were close enough, or most times anyway, close enough in shore to be able to, unless of course you were hit properly, in which case you could have been

12:00 immobilised yourself, but in the main I didn't know anybody that lost their life under those circumstances, no. No I didn't. But it was very interesting days.

What sort of supplies were you taking?

Tinned food stuffs mainly, yep, mainly. Pretty well everything was tinned in those times, which of course you didn't complain about, you either ate it or ate nothing,

12:30 simple as that, but that was in the main tinned stuff. And of course it wasn't varied, there wasn't a great choice of, well we'll, I'll say I didn't ever see any tinned soup, put it that way, but tinned meat, vegetables and stuff. Yep. We were very lucky in the sense, as I said much earlier in the interview,

13:00 when I was talking with my mate over there, and when we were brought up as kids, in the Depression. Mum put the food on the table and we ate it. So I had no trouble with army food, I ate it, things like that. Fellows would go crook, somebody was an ex-Wesley College boy or something, used to his mummy being good to him so forth, and say, "You so and so," choice words being thrown back and forth, and say, "bloody well eat it, don't look at it,

13:30 it'll get cold."

You must have been really welcomed when you would take these supplies up?

Ah, not necessarily so, just part and parcel of the job. You had done the job.

I guess I am thinking at the moment about the camaraderie?

I think you are thinking as a lady, who's kind-hearted and generous and so forth and would be very, very likely to say thank you,

14:00 when sometimes they take the stuff from you and say, "For Christ's sake, get the hell out of here."

I have been known to say that.

I think I am a reasonable judge, after all this time.

What I am getting at, you are in this ship full of all these tins of food, maybe supplies have run low in the camp, you are arriving there and the fellas are there,

14:30 **what really happens?**

What you are trying to do is get to come up with something that will fill this tape.

That's actually not true. I am actually genuinely interested.

I am genuinely interested too. There's not much else to tell, other than what I have said, because it's simplicity in itself. In a sense that nine times out of 10, that when you had two fellows on these small ships, in theory one was capable mechanically

15:00 to look after the motor and the other had an idea of sail. And teamed up, they were compatible in themselves, you know, got along well, and that's what they looked for in trying to pair up people, and things of that nature. And to answer the deal there in my case, as I explained, the role that I had was a combined deal of having been an infantry man which was used to

15:30 ground work, things that might arise from ground problems and so forth, and having worked in the motor business in Ballarat, so I had a reasonable ground work and knowledge, if I was on a boat, so I was able to fill in a dual role if and when required, as I said before, if someone was sick or injured as the case may be, but I did not have my own boat. But these fellows who, I just explained,

16:00 were experts in their field, they would just say amongst themselves, 'Do you want to be skipper, or do you want to be skipper?' I'd say, 'We don't give a so and so,' and so they'd both be skippers or none would be skippers, just work in cohesion. That's that in theory was the way it operated. What's next?

Well um, I, you know the medical team from 1st Field Ambulance from Ambon, and the

16:30 **next of kin, the names and addresses of people, do you feel like telling us about visiting – you said you caught up with these people, do you want to tell us about that?**

There was no such thing as me personally interviewing any one of those people face to face. It wasn't practicable in the first place, if they were Sydney people and I was Victorian, so if I am back here from overseas, I am in Victoria, put it that way,

17:00 unless I was in transit going up or down the coast, for argument's sake. But the object of the lesson was we did – I did what said I'd do, if I got back, would make contact with each and every one of them to the best of my ability and tell them where their men were, and that's what I did and that was the end of the story. I didn't say, 'I'll ring you,'

17:30 just creating this out of a myth. 'I am going to New Guinea, I'll be back in a couple of months, I'll give you a ring.' Nothing like that happened at all. The reasoning behind that, you just did what you had to do. Time was too precious, unbelievable, the pressures of 1942 were beyond belief, they were. Because I suppose the serviceman saw it differently as from Joe Blow in the street, but it looked very much

18:00 like, many times, that we would go under and, as I say, without the Americans we would've gone under for sure and certain. No doubt you heard the famous stories like the Brisbane Lion and what to do and what to do in an emergency, well they had it all in theory, what they would have to do to try and combat the enemy, and the other thing too, which was very foremost in our minds, in all our minds, the fellas I dealt with, was if the Japs were successful,

18:30 and this was told to us by people that are supposed to know, like in lectures and things, they would, just say the girl I was engaged to, that's just an illustration, they would take her to Japan and they would send fellas down here, say and I had two sisters to assimilate with them and create another semi-race of people, like the Dutch did with the Javanese, things of that nature. And we were all made very

19:00 conscious of those possibilities had they got their foot into Australia. And a lot of people ….

How were you made aware of that?

Through lectures, through lectures who people, and we had them experts who were familiar with the history of the Japs through China, and back to the Russian days and what they had done, and just went hand in glove

19:30 that that was what we could expect in Australia if they got their foot in the door. So the object of the lesson was to make sure they didn't get their foot in the door. They were the objects of the lesson which wasn't going very well in 1942. See we had 20,000 prisoners of war in Singapore, 20,000, not all taken to Singapore, they took 15,000 there but the rest were shoved in and

20:00 Singapore was used as a base to farm them out on things like the Burma Railway and things like that stuff. I mentioned earlier, and this is something I could have said, the transport man that was my boss, for want of a better word, when I got into transport in 6 Platoon, and he was a Sergeant Jack O'Brien, and he got an infected leg, he's a big man, the left leg it was. There was no,

20:30 we had a young doctor who, after the war, everything got to him and he committed suicide. Anyway he was the doctor, no medicines, and he took those fellows – ulcers got up his leg right up to the groin

area, and he took his leg off with a hack saw and no anaesthetic.

21:00 Can't believe it can you, but he did. He took up, he – after the war, after he served his time as a prisoner of war, he took up practice in Mildura as a GP [General Practitioner], and after about six or seven years, the thoughts of all those things that he experienced got to him and he committed suicide, away he went. He was only

21:30 25, he had only graduated out of medical school when he came to us as the doctor for the battalion, and there we are, that's life, that's the way it is, can't – don't know what to expect. But Jack O'Brien survived, he died at the age of 70, but he survived and he used to – and there was nothing there to attach a stump to, so he was on crutches for the rest of his days, but he went to reunions with us and he lived in Kew.

22:00 He took us home on several occasions, when we were having reunions there and so forth, we all kept in touch, and eventually it all caught up with him and he passed away at the age of 70.

That first reunion you had in 1946, tell me about that, what was it like?

It was held in a depot in South Melbourne, it was the only one that was ever held there,

22:30 and we were living in Gray Street, and this mate of mine, Russ, I keep referring back to him, he's the one that died just before Christmas, and he was – it was his lady I saw on the tram, it was his wife, and I was able to say he was in the same platoon and she was delighted because I was able to tell her where he was. Anyway, my next door – I didn't have a car at that stage, the first car I ever had, I was 17,

23:00 but the first car I had in my married state wasn't until 1948. So this was '46. But the fella next door had an old Chev, it was alright in those days, but it was 1928, and this was 1946, the reunion was coming up and he said, "I'll tell you what I will do, I will lend you my car to go to the reunion," which he did, loaned us his car, so Russ and I went together to the first one, and that was a

23:30 matter of hand shakes and saying, 'Hello, hello, hello,' around in a circle because they had been in prison camp for 3.5 years, and I had escaped. And Russell had been out of Ambon at that stage, 1945, '46 it was, so he was renewing with his old prisoner of war mates. So it was a big get together. And at the function there were about, all told,

24:00 that's men and officers, was around about 200. And today, if we meet on Anzac Day, I won't march, I am finished now, but I'll go up, but we'd be lucky if we get 15 left out of the prison camp. But in all over Australia, I have got a list in my secretaire

24:30 there, last call was from here to West Australia, we had a few, it was 52, that's about four years ago that call was. So there's not many.

But at that first one, did you discover people who were alive that you didn't know whether they had made it through or not?

Oh yeah, but by the same token there were people there who were surprised to see me, "How the bloody hell did you get here," knowing I wasn't in the prison camp. So I went

25:00 through that side of the story. Oh yeah, you are quite right, that happened, which it did, a lot of back slapping, a lot of baloney, quite a few beers, plenty. I am not proud of this by any stretch of the imagination, we used to take it in turns to take each car up, and this year it was mine, one year it was his and the next it would be mine. You are not Melbourne people so I don't think you

25:30 would be familiar with St Kilda Junction.

We are Melbourne people.

You are Melbourne people. Well St Kilda Junction, well I came through it one night from the Prahran Town Hall which is in High Street, Chapel Street in Prahran, the wrong way around the roundabout, drove right through it against all the theatre traffic. I was getting across to Albert Park Lake, heading down to the coast to Geelong.

26:00 Anyway, we got through and there were horns blowing at us left right and centre and I am saying to Russ, "What's wrong with these silly buggers, you know, we are only trying to get round the roundabout," and then it sunk in we are going the wrong way. That's true but I wasn't proud of it.

But that was after a good night at the reunion?

Oh a big night, yeah. We had 15 consecutive reunions at Prahran Town Hall because the unit originally, in the militia days before the war, was from Windsor and

26:30 Prahran, and they had a lot of young officers who were ex-public school boys from the area. I did that. St Kilda roundabouts are different to what they are today, a different set up altogether. But it was still a roundabout then but now it's a big one. But I did against the foreplay of theatre traffic trying to make their way home. I had a Morris Oxford in those days.

27:00 Over the course of the years, being in the motor business, my wife always had her own car, which she

did, and she drove well, which she did, until the days when of course she did become ill, and the last three years of her life she was totally incapacitated, totally. But it was inevitable because there is no cure for emphysema, no cure at all, it's a

27:30 lung disease and that's it.

Can I just ask you something else I thought about? Jenkins, Commander Jenkins and the Z Force, did he continue with the Z Force do you think?

Yes he did, as a matter of fact he did and he went to a raid or he was in a raid. There had been a raid done that he wasn't in, when they got over there, and they attached limpet mines

28:00 which stick on the sides of the enemy ships in the harbour in Singapore and sunk them, quite a few. And they tried to pull it off again but they couldn't get as far as Singapore. Anyhow, the Japs caught up with them along the Java coastline, which is many, many islands, and they got out of that the same way they got out of the earlier one, as I said, with Saumlaki. But he said to me then, 'I think I might have reached the end of the road as far as

28:30 luck was concerned,' and then he became an instructor with Z in Western Australia. As an instructor he was a chief instructor instructing blokes to become instructors, in guerrilla warfare as it was called in those days. They didn't talk about jungle warfare, they talked about guerrilla warfare. He was a

29:00 chief instructor there and in civilian life he was a builder.

How do you feel about the POWs on Ambon basically being left until …?

Just the luck of the draw, that's all, it was either – from a hard-headed point of view, the prisoners felt, a lot of them, that there would be a rescue attempt because we were

29:30 650 miles out from Darwin, on a straight up line, but from the allies' point of view the Australians didn't have a say, because we weren't strong enough. But the Americans wouldn't entertain it, 'You don't do that,' and this was McArthur's strategy, you leap-frog and cut off the supply bases to the Japanese, which meant if you got – landed a big force two thirds

30:00 the way to Japan and cut off their supplies, they are going to starve, and they were successful. It wasn't worth the gamble – and the Americans were applying – and I could see it, and so could they after the war, but at the time they were thinking it could happen at any time, especially as the air raids increased, which they did, the allied air raids increased which they took it as a sign that there could be a counter-invasion, which was never

30:30 considered, just the idea of attacking to stop them from progressing any further with their attacks down the Australian coastline and things of that nature because they had all the strategy, the Japs, which they did, if they could've done it, if they could. From their point of view it was conceded they made a huge mistake when they bombed Ambon, bombed Darwin the first day, they should have gone in within a month and got a foothold into Australia,

31:00 which would have allowed them to bring the people in but they didn't do it because they obviously didn't realise what strength we had to bring – they knew we'd – and from their point of view their enemies and we'd reinforce that area so they didn't to what extent so they were a bit lethargic even then, but they could have done it, and then they would have got down to Alice Springs without any trouble at all. But it didn't happen.

31:30 But, oh no, the attitude was pretty good and then of course as the years went on and reunions were held every Anzac Eve, those things just weren't talked about, just more or less, 'Do you remember Billy so and so. He's gone now,' or, 'he's in a pub in Darwin,' or, 'he's this or he's that'. There was no animosity of any sort really, not towards anybody.

32:00 I think they were just so grateful, those that survived. When it's all said and done, the ones that were sent up the China Coast, they were supposed to be going, as they were told in Darwin, up there to build a holiday resort for the Japs and when they got there, there was nothing but a barren island, and they had to make roads and airstrips and things like that,

32:30 forced labour. So they lost men, but they didn't lose as many as Ambon, they lost just under 100. But, oh no.

So you are a member of the Darwin Defenders, what other associates are you …?

I am a member of the Commando Association which comes out every three months, newsletter, I got it a couple of days ago. I read it from cover to

33:00 cover, a lot of names I have never heard of, we all do that, but I belong to that. I didn't join the Commandos association for 20 years or so after the war, I didn't see any need to, and I was a member here of the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] for five years and I retired in 1953 and became president of the Sergeants' Mess,

33:30 and I am a life member of the Sergeants' Mess which I am, and what else? I, on ex-military side there's

the ex-Commando Association, the 2nd 21st Gulf Force Association and what did I say the other one was? There's three of them anyway. Z Special, they have still got a

34:00 function which they have as distinct from the Commando Association, that's only a token thing. You pay, oh Darwin Defenders, $20 a year there. The reason why you belong even if you – that was held the anniversary of the bombing of Darwin in February, just last February, a big deal in Geelong it was, big church service and, but they do good work in a sense of the Darwin Defenders, the idea

34:30 they don't want it ever to die out, how close Australia was to going under, so they want to keep it alive with schools right across Australia, various schools so the kids are taught what the role was in relation to Darwin and the defenders of Darwin. What they, sufferers, the suffering that went on. I would say that in many, many or most

35:00 instances, you walk down the street and stop 25 people they couldn't tell you how many raids there were on Darwin, they wouldn't have a clue, no idea, there were 64 all told. So I belong actively to those organisations, only because of the – I don't pay any fees with Gulf Force Association because fellas like myself once you are past

35:30 80, they call you a very old senior citizen and they won't take your money.

Fair enough too.

Very old, sometimes that's what I feel when I get out of bed in the morning.

What banner do you march under on Anzac Day?

Oh that's a very good question. We march under, or the marches I did, our own banner with relatives and friends, Anzac people, Rushton

36:00 and his gang, frowned on that but we just ignored that. We took the people with us under our own banner, and last year we got a special letter to say that ourselves through the Committee and the 2nd 22nd who were at Rabaul, the numbers had gone down to such an extent that we should combine and create a banner and march under it in joint, and it failed miserably. They were unhappy and we were unhappy

36:30 so it's going to revert back this year to our own banner.

Why not?

No, no, they lost their identity they said, they said it first and we agreed. I didn't have any say in that of course because I am not a member of the committee, but that was what I was told, the two committees in their wisdom, but the 2nd 22nd brought it up first and said, "No, we have lost our identity." So they said, "What do we do with the old flag?" and our mob

37:00 said, "You can stick it up your jumper," or words to that effect so I don't think it was that polite. That's the truth.

Because you had no contact, you had nothing to do with each other during the war?

Not really. They had their own fit-out, which they did, but direct contact between the two associations, no not really. No need to really

37:30 when it's all said and done. Sometimes things would crop up when you meet somebody and say he had a brother in the 2nd 22nd. 'Oh did he?' that was the attitude, and the end of it. They suffered heavily, which they did, and they suffered to the extent that the Japanese, the bulk of the people that were captured from their mob was about the same number in general terms as ours, in all with other people who were not members of the services, they decided to ship them all to

38:00 Japan, so there were over 1,000 on board and the Japs sank them on the way because there was no identification on the ship. Ex-POWs or whatever the case may be, it was a Yank, sorry, the Yanks sank the Jap ship because the Japs didn't put any identification on it. So I suppose you have read about this new memorial in Ballarat, I went up and had a look at that, it's well worth seeing, it's finished as far as the memorial is concerned, but the garden has all got to be done and make it

38:30 nice and congenial, but they have got a special section there for the sinking of the ship that was sunk – it was the biggest loss, of a single allied ship, of life of WW2, but the Yanks can't be blamed, they just sank a Japanese ship, that's all they did. So there you are.

We've just two or three minutes left on the tape so any final word?

No, very nice to meet you

39:00 both.

Anything you would like to say about that amazing journey you took, that escape?

Not really, I am very open minded about it, it's a long time ago, the only thing I can say is you never forget, never. I wouldn't give a Jap a drink of water.

39:30 I wouldn’t. A fella said to me a while back said, “Jack I can’t read you, you drive a Japanese car, a Mitsubishi,” and I said, “Yes, they are made in Australia, employing Australians in a big factory in South Australia.” So I said, “As far as I am concerned that’s a different side of the story.” There are people that have been to Japan and there are Japanese people that have been here to people who would accept them, but I am not one of them, not after what happened to my

40:00 crowd. There were just so many things that were animal-like committed by the Japanese and there was no justification for it at all. Just sheer pig-headedness and wanting to show who was boss. And not only that, I can only refer to Laha of course but that’s where the big massacre took place, I would say that being in transport and moving around and being driver to the boss of the show,

40:30 I probably knew 90% of the people, if not intimately, had dealings with them in one way or another, and they were a fine bunch of fellas. Young in the bulk, the four of us in the photo down there, the eldest bloke was 26 and he’s in the album there. So you just can’t forget, too deep.