Australians at War Film Archive

John Coventry (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **So let's go back to, way, way back, oh not that far back really but...**

Well, I went to Croydon, the little township of Croydon around about 1921 I think it was, my people, parents took me there as a little boy. And I lived in Croydon

01:00 right up until the '30s, I went to school at Croydon. Did a paper round at Croydon, got up at quarter past four in the morning when I was only eleven and did a paper... met the goods train, sorted papers down at the paper shop and did a walk, paper round, came home, made sure the cows were right and then tried to run to school, and no wonder you don't do any good at school when you are a kid when you work like that. Soon

01:30 as school was over you had to run home quickly so that you get the cows in and do all that sort of thing again. And we just worked as kids, except that my relaxing time was that, as I got a little bit older I built billy carts, and we used to ride billy carts at, some of the estates were just being opened and there were a few concrete paths that we used to haul down the hills on the concrete paths. And then of course I, my Mum died

02:00 just before I was fourteen, and when I was fourteen an uncle sort of took over and brought me to the big city and I became an apprentice in a foundry. And just like all boys fourteen to sixteen you, I suppose you are a bit wayward, I don't know that I got into any trouble. But my pride and joy was to own a push bike, which I was able to purchase

02:30 a funny old one for, I think I bought it for about £1. Then a Mr Roberts in the Balaclava Junction, he built bicycles and he built me a bicycle for £10 something, and I thought I was Christmas with this, even had my name on the bar. And I rode from Caulfield to North Melbourne every day on my push bike because it saved a fare. In those days you got 15 shillings a week to

03:00 begin with and you paid 10 shillings for your board and you are left with 5 shillings. which is not very much, but the value was there for money. So I did my apprenticeship and at sixteen my uncle thought it would be a good idea if I joined the army. So in those days they had the militia and there were three main battalions in Victoria, or in Melbourne itself. There was the 5th Battalion, the Victorian Scottish

03:30 Regiment, the Melbourne University Rifles, and the Royal Melbourne Regiment was the 6th Battalion. And I now realise that most of the young people, or young men, around about from sixteen through to twenty, were in one of those units. It's a strange thing but they were big clubs really, while we had a uniform and all the rest of it, but it was the introduction to the young fellows

04:00 that they were big clubs. And I joined the Victorian Scottish Regiment because my uncle came from Aberdeen and I did enjoy the bagpipes, to hear them, when I was a kid, so at sixteen I joined the cadets. And I am very proud and I have a nice, lovely big photograph in 1934, '35 I am not sure which year it is, the first Trooping of the Colour was

04:30 conducted at the Albert Park cricket ground by the Victorian Scottish Regiment, the first time it has ever been done in Australia, in a kilt. And the full battalion performed that and that was a great honour. I became a sergeant in the cadets, and then when I became eighteen and joined the big soldiers I came back to a private, and worked a bit harder and became a sergeant again. And, of course, by that time '38, 1938 had come and

05:00 there was rumours of Europe etcetera. We were doing army training, or army camps, down in Shoreham, we went at weekends, we went to Sorrento, Portsea really, back of Sorrento, Portsea, Queenscliff, all those places we had stages, army places.

Okay.

And every Christmas we went to an army camp, so that was our Christmas holiday.

So that's...

05:30 **So can you tell me a bit more about Croydon, it was a farming community was it back then?**

Yes, it was a real, really a country town. And when I was very young it was serviced only by the steam trains used to go through to Healesville and Warburton, that was lovely for us, and they had a small train that used to come for passengers from Ringwood

06:00 through to Croydon, and that is the Croydon line. They didn't go onto Lilydale, the poor people who lived at Lilydale could only get the train that went to, through to Lilydale and branched off to Warburton. But I can well remember when I was a boy at school that the electric line came through and the electric trains. One day they opened the

06:30 blue, cut the blue ribbon and all that sort of thing, and we were all in one big open truck with a canvas top because it rained like billy-o. I can remember it raining as well as can be, all us kids were crammed into one of those open steel trucks where the, that they put the... or they just put the cargo in, and we watched the man cut the ribbon. But those are the, that was long before, oh, I could have only been seven or eight in those days.

07:00 But as a little boy during the end of the Depression, my Dad still had his job, he worked with the gas company and he used to collect the pennies out of the meters around the Hawthorn area. And he caught a train every morning at twelve minutes past eight, and he went down to Glenferrie and he did his round collecting pennies. How that man ever carried pennies in a leather bag

07:30 by emptying gas meters, I am blowed if I know. What a terrible job it must have been, from house to house. And of course the Depression was there and people put lead cut outs they made look like a penny to try and get the gas, because when you put a penny in the meter the gas would only run for so long and then the gas would stop, and they didn't have another penny to put in the meter, must have been really terrible. And

08:00 Hawthorn, in those days, was just a very poor suburb of little people, and then on the other side of the track was the big homes where, you know, people really had a lot of money, but it must have been very tough. And Dad used to come back on a train around about, I think he used to get into Croydon about half past five or twenty to six. So as a lad I would have to, we had

08:30 a little bit of a farm and grew our own vegetables, we had our own poultry, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s as we called them, and we milked cows, so as a boy from school I would have to bring the cows in and have them ready for milking. I was too young to milk, I wasn't strong enough in the hands to hand milk, and so I would get the cows ready and all that sort of thing. Feed all the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and just general jobs

09:00 you did after school. And as far as homework is concerned well, there wasn't any time for homework from school, because by the time you finished that and got your tea, you went to bed. And I can only remember going to bed as early as could be because there wasn't any telephone, there wasn't any TV or anything like that. We had a crystal set in our lounge room that on Sundays we could listen with headphones

09:30 to the Sunday School of the Air at, while we had our tea at Sunday night. But as I said to you before, I was either ten or eleven when I got a paper round at three shillings a week, which is thirty cents. And I used to have to meet with the boys, meet the quarter past four goods train that came through from Melbourne with the papers on it. And we pulled a little hand

10:00 trolley to the paper shop, sorted out our papers, put them into hessian bags with a strap around our neck. We had three bags, one for The Sun, one for The Age and one for The Argus. And I had, didn't have a bicycle round, I had a walk round and I walked around the streets of Croydon and up the hill. Houses were very far apart, I mean you found

10:30 the streets would be a house here, then what obviously was blocks of land, then there would be another house up the road, but you didn't put a paper in that one, but you did in this one and so forth. And you had to remember some got The Age, some got The Argus, etcetera. And it was a terrible thing if you put the wrong paper in the wrong box because when you get to the next place you found you done it and you had to walk back. And sometimes it was a long way, because once I had crossed the railway line

11:00 we got up onto the Wicklow Hill, the houses were very far apart, and if I had put the wrong paper in the one on that side of the line I had more than, oh, more than half a mile to walk back to pick up the paper to make the round correctly, get them in order. So, and things were pretty tough then. I had a little sister and I can remember in the winter we used to pick violets and put them

11:30 into bunches, and Saturday mornings I would go round to the rich people, as we called them, and deliver little bunches of violets for sixpence each. And my Mum used to scald the cream from the cow, there was no separator or anything like that in those days, she had big dishes and they stood on the stove in the kitchen, which, stove hardly ever went out. And I can remember these big, they were big to me,

12:00 sort of steel, yeah, they were steel dishes and the milk would be probably about oh, four or five inches deep, which is what, how many centimetres is that, I don't know, twelve, fifteen or twenty centimetres I think. And as you heat the milk slowly, it had to be done very slowly, all the cream would come to the

top, and with a special little sieve thing you took the cream off and it came off like a oh,

12:30 like a thick skin. And that used to go into drinking glasses and we used to sell the cream, different size glasses for different prices. Well that was, after the paper round on Saturday morning it was up around to the houses to sell the cream and sell for the weekend etcetera, but that was the most rich cream you could ever imagine. I mean, today you just wouldn't be ale to eat it, it was just too rich. And then of course there was the eggs to do, and there was the

13:00 twice a day delivery before school, you would do three houses with the milk, you had a milk can and a half a pint dish and you filled their billy up, and then at night time you went back. I can remember in the winter time with your gum boots on and splashing through the water across the creek, oh, I loved that splashing through the water, with your billy can of milk in one hand, and delivered to the people. But it was,

13:30 the old English tradition was, you know, pretty much operating then, it was, if you were on the poor side of the town you were a poor kid. Like delivering milk was probably a very looked down upon kid, some of the people were very nice to you but other people just treated you, you were just the kid that delivered the milk, sort of thing. And the other terrible thing about,

14:00 thinking about cows, you would get home from school and Mum would tell you the cows had broken out, they might be three or four miles away, and you would have to tear out and find out where they were then drive them home and get 'em home ready for... oh boy, all those things. So we kids were brought up to work, we worked and worked and worked, there was jobs all the time. And so I have to say now, as a funny old man, that schooling was a bit of a failure,

14:30 'cause we went to school. I reckon I was asleep half the time at school, they gave me up as a bad job. And I was probably... oh well, I don't think, I have to say, I don't think, oh well, I know I never passed an exam in the whole of my school life. But mind, I got through school and I learned a lot more after school. But Dad was lucky, he had a job and we supplemented, and my little 3 shillings a week supplemented

15:00 the money that was coming into the house. So, and he was a very good photographer my Dad, and I have still got lots of photographs of when I was a little boy and things that happened around Croydon. I joined the boy scouts as soon as I was able, because that was another wonderful thing to do in my generation to be a boy scout. And so, it just went on and on as I,

15:30 until I said to you that... and we used to catch rabbits and don't forget that the rabbits in the '30s Australia would have died if it hadn't been for the rabbits, that was the main diet, you would eat rabbit four or five times a week. And even the people in the cities they depended on the men who would go out and catch the rabbits, and I think you could get a pair of rabbits for 6 pence. And I think our Mums knew how to roast rabbits, boil

16:00 rabbits, cook em every way that you... but rabbit was wonderful. And of course we had the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, and even as a small boy I had the wonderful job of chopping the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s heads off. And as all my generation will tell you, we all used to do it, chop the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK 's head off and let him go and he would run around the paddock like mad, without a head, and it did them good because you got rid of the blood.

16:30 Then of course we had to sit there with a hessian bag across your knees and pluck the blooming thing. Oh, have you ever tried plucking WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s? Course they do it by machine now but we had to do this, pull the feathers and so forth. And the ducks were worse, and I still to this day won't eat duck, you can put it on the menu so long as you like but I wouldn't eat duck any more. But I go, have a bit of chicken, but every time you do it

17:00 you are reminded, your mind is a funny thing, it goes right back – boom. And course when you did the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, you dressed them and so forth, you would have to fulfil the orders. And who would do the deliveries...? And so, and everything was done by walking. We all walked for miles and miles, everything you did you walked to. And you would be sent down the main street of Croydon sometimes for the messages, but not very often.

17:30 And our wonderful vegetable garden, and it was completely surrounded with loganberries. And those loganberries, I can still quite remember, they would have been oh, nearly five centimetres long, as thick as your thumb and they were the most beautiful fruit. And of course Mum made jam and sold jam, and everything you did in the home was self-contained.

18:00 So then when, you know, back to the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s you did the eggs and then there would be the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK houses had to be cleaned out. Oh, I hate WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

So you must have known your community terribly well, you must have known everybody around the place?

Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, Croydon was a very small town then and everybody knew everybody. And we relied on things like the railway train came through and the engine

18:30 drivers would whistle and that was our clock, you know, we could understand those sort of things. And

we read the weather, see our home was in view of the Dandenongs, and Mum would always know when it was going to rain by the colour of the hills, all those sort of things we learned. And the whole, from the railway line up to our home, which was on the side of Wicklow Hill, and my, one of my play places was up at the quarry which is now the

19:00 convent up on top of the hill, and that was just bush. The original Wicklow home had been there, it must have been burned down because all that was left was the cellar and I, as a boy, we used to go down the steps of this, but the blackberries took over and grew there. Yeah, it was all open and the bird life was wonderful and I used to know a lot about birds when I was a little lad, where they built their nests and

19:30 I would never rob a bird nest of its eggs and so forth, but I would watch them and the babies would come.

Can you remember the native birds that were around at that time?

Oh, I couldn't name them but there was so many little finches in those days, obviously, because of all the hill country from the railway line right through up into the Wicklow Hills, just heavy bush and ferns and all those sort of things, and we used to know

20:00 the bush, walk up through the bush etcetera. But the other thing I forgot to mention that, about the railway train, the train would come through – and as we were talking about the Depression years – the drivers or the stokers would very accidentally drop off some of the coal, and we kids would be sent along the railway line with a bucket and we would pick up the coal. And of a night time we loved sitting by our fire watching the different coloured

20:30 flames come out of these chunks of coal that we had gathered in the winter. I can remember that and so forth, but, yeah. And yeah, there were trees to climb, that was one of the greatest things, you climbed trees as a boy, your sisters waited at the bottom of the tree and sometimes she could get up as well, and so forth. Girls and boys were all much the same.

Were there any Aboriginal camps around?

Yes, yes, I had forgotten to tell you that. Where

21:00 the Oxford Road bridge is on the way into Croydon, the railway line goes over the road, just on the Ringwood side of the cutting, right in the corner there, there were about three small huts, and the Aboriginal people used to live in those huts from time to time. And while we were forbidden, oh, I wouldn't dream

21:30 of what the threat would be if we went anywhere near the Aboriginals, but we used to go up and sort of peep and look at them and they would say hello to us, but we never ever got into real conversation with them. But there was a, quite a solid... because they used to come through from the Warburton hills, Warburton area, and I don't know where they went after that, but in the '20s and yes, all through the '20s there were Aboriginal people living

22:00 alongside the railway line in Croydon. And another mystery family that turned out to be the most wonderful people, were the Cheongs [Cheok Cheong settled in 1899]. They were a Chinese family, must have been very wealthy, the mother and father, and they lived right up on top of the hill out of the town, and Bud Cheong was a very close pal of mine, and a lovely Chinese boy. And he had a couple of sisters and one of the sisters later ran a hair

22:30 dressing salon in Croydon, and Bud Cheong was in the scouts with us. And it's a funny thing, I hadn't met Bud from the time I left him when I was about fourteen when I left Croydon, and the next time I saw him was on parade in Albert Park when we were discharged in 1945, he had been a soldier also. But the Cheong family were a very respected Chinese family.

23:00 **How did they get their wealth, do you think?**

Oh, I didn't know anything about the Chinese family at all. See here, you are going back when we had all that English left over thing, and I don't mean to be rude about it, but the class distinction was shocking. And the same thing went through in our early days in the army, the class distinction was there, and it didn't break down for quite a long time. But

23:30 that was very evident in the '20s and '30s in Australia, there was a big gap between the workers, the haves and have-nots.

Why were you forbidden to mix with the Aboriginal people?

On there again, class distinction, I would think, that is about all I can say. They were inferior to us, I suppose Mum thought she was something better and we must be better too.

24:00 And that is about it I think.

Did she ever say why she didn't want you to mix with them?

No, if she did I can't remember but I know, you know, it goes back, as I am saying, it goes back... there is not the reason why, you just do it. And I think that is the last, we are the last of the generation of people that don't question. I think that was the success of our war time

24:30 experiences. We didn’t question, we did what we were told. We questioned it quietly within ourselves but you still had to go and do it. So, I would think that is the discipline that was within us was very, very... looking back now was very, very evident. We were a disciplined race of people, and we were disciplined from the ’14–18 War right through our

25:00 youth, our schooling and everything, and exactly the same thing when the Second World War broke out, we were disciplined to go and join. We couldn't get in there quick enough. So, that is all I can say about that time. Of course, there were the number of houses, I mean, I have been back to Croydon a couple of times since, all the paddocks are all houses like they are

25:30 in every town. And the coming of the train, the coming of the electric train to Croydon was a big boost to the town. But as you just said, you knew everybody, everybody knew what kid was with where. And Mr Vale was the policeman, his boys, we were all pals at school, and all in the boy scouts and all that sort of thing and Mr Vale used to lock us in the police station for fun in the... And

26:00 there was one, Brown’s Hotel was on the corner and the wine saloon was on the other corner and oh boy, anybody that went into the wine saloon they were the end of the earth, wine was a forbidden thing, you didn’t drink wine in the ‘20s and ‘30s. And I am very much afraid that has stuck with me now, I still don’t drink wine.

Why didn’t you drink wine?

Oh, you were wicked if you drank wine, it was,

26:30 it was methylated spirits and boot polish in those days. It was the real days of the winos, they used to get a bottle of wine, and the poor things they were the deadbeats of the town that went to the wine places. Yeah, I think, although I know health-wise when I came back from the war I found I could not drink wine at all, and I still knock it back now when we go dinner somewhere. And I feel very much ashamed of the fact that

27:00 they want to fill my glass of wine but I don’t want it, it doesn’t taste nice to me.

But it’s not metho and boot polish any more.

I appreciate it isn’t and I appreciate that 99.999 people drink wine, but here is the fellow that doesn’t.

So two different types of people in, from the wine bar to the pub across the road.

Yeah, well even in those days the men who visited the pub often, you see, you are gong back to the days

27:30 when the wife and the children would be at the street waiting for the man to come out of the pub, so the poor wife could get some of his pay. That Depression period and so forth, there were a lot of men who actually drank heavy... or went to the pub to, you know, drown their sorrows, as the old saying is. And I think some of the women and kids suffered terribly and that left a stigma about

28:00 men who visited the hotel and men who went to the pub, because there was six o’clock closing and they would be tipped out at six o’clock and all that sort of thing. There was, you know, Australia was far from growing up in those days, there was just a stigma of behaviour of people. And of course everybody, everybody went to church on Sundays,

28:30 that was the place of communication. And when I was quite a small boy in the ‘20s it was horse and jinkers, the people would come to church, long before the motor car. And, you know, you went to Sunday school, oh boy you had to go to Sunday school, and from Sunday school to church. And the whole environment of the Christian

29:00 religion, you see everybody was Christ... ‘cause this country was very much a Christian country, you either went to the Catholic school or you went to the Church of England, or you went to the Presbyterian. And the Methodist people were considered to be wowsers, and the Baptists were bible bashers, all those sort of things, but the marked difference was there, but Sunday was part of it. And as I appreciate it, in bigger country towns and all over Australia, that was

29:30 where people gathered and that was the centre of communications. There was no telephones, there was no... the number of telephones was very scarce, and there is no such... the wireless was not the news that we have, we have got news all the time, we didn’t have that in those days. And the people gathered before church and after church and they talked about things and all that sort of thing, they got together.

Did you run errands

30:00 **or pass messages on when you would do your rounds delivering the paper or the walks, whatever, would neighbours ask you to run a message to somebody over...?**

Oh probably, yeah, yeah, that would have been happening. And I do not really remember anything particular in that but you often got little jobs to do for people, yeah. And you often got jobs as a boy to chop the wood for the two

30:30 little old ladies that lived together, you know, they had no-one to chop the wood, so you chopped the

wood. And the boy scout bit was, you were taught that you must help people and do those sort of things, you didn't get paid for that, you did that for nothing. And we used to go to the apple orchards and we wouldn't pinch the apples off the trees, we would pick them up off the ground, and that is the sort of discipline we had. And

31:00 those naughty boys that pinched the apples off the trees, well the farmer would catch them and they had shot guns with saltpetre in them, and if you got saltpetre in your bottom it would really hurt, just little bits of this... it was just like little lumps of salt, and sometimes a few boys got caught that way. But I must say, I am no puritan or anything like that, but I only ever took the apples off the ground. But you didn't have to, if you walked

31:30 up to Mr Dab's, Mr Dab's orchard, which was almost in the centre of the town, it was only just a mile out, and Mr Dab would give you a bag of apples any time you wanted them, so the whole thing was different. And I can remember walking from Croydon right over what is now the highway that runs through the back of Lilydale, the back of, from Ringwood to the back of Lilydale, from Croydon to walk over the top of the Wicklow Hills and everything else,

32:00 to work on the, to get to work in the orchards and pick peaches in the summer. I can remember doing that, and your pay was a bag of peaches to take home. Just imagine carrying a bag of peaches all the way from the Oxford Road highway or whatever they call the... what do they call the highway now that runs up to Warburton there? I forget, I don't know. But that was, oh, it would be two and a half, three miles.

32:30 You would walk home, after picking peaches all day, walk home with a bag of peaches! Oh, George. But money was very, very light on, to a lot of people. So...

So would that have been a job that your parents told you, you had to do, you had to go and pick peaches or would you have just...?

Oh, I think we would have found out that they would, yeah but, I think it has a lot to do with the bush telegraph, the peaches were ready, if you wanted

33:00 to go and pick for a day, you can get a job picking peaches, so go and give it a try.

Would you go with mates?

No, no, on my own. Nearly everything I did was on my own, I had two mates, the Walton boys were my close mates, but nearly everything we did, and everything I did was on my own. See, you go and get the cows by yourself, you go and do this by yourself, everything I had to do

33:30 was my own job and everything. And not only that, the Walton boys that were pals of mine, they lived every bit of five kilometres away which is three miles or so, you know, they were busy doing their jobs too.

What about your little sister?

Yeah, she tagged along. She tagged, she used to push me in the billy cart and jump on the back and go down the hill with me and so forth. Yeah she was,

34:00 she was a marvellous little runner, she won every bloomin' school race she ever went into. She is five years younger than I am, she lives here in Mornington, and yeah, she could run like a hare, she could beat me running, even when she was a little, five years younger. So yes, there was your closest pal, the closest pal I ever had in growing up as a boy and so forth, and my kid sister. She still remained my pal right up

34:30 until the war time, she was the nearest and dearest thing I ever had, she shared all our secrets and everything else together. And the treat on Saturday mornings, I can remember that, once the jobs were over we would light a little fire in the corner of the paddock and we would put a billy on that, and Mum would let us boil our own billy and we had to make our own drink and so forth, and those, we did everything on a fire and a billy. Like

35:00 your boy scouts you had to pass your cooking skills, you had to make porridge in a billy and an open fire, and you had to make sure because if you burned it you didn't pass your scouts cooking test. And then you would cut up meat and cook a stew, well you have never eaten anything so tough and hard in your life as stew boiled in a billy, but the billy was it. And there was always the kindling to cut for the fire, the

35:30 endless job the fire wood. See, the only fuel we had in those days was fire, the kitchen fire and the wood fire, the wood in the lounge room. So every morning there would have to be a box of kindling to get the fire going from the night before 'cause the embers would be still hot, but if you had the little bits of bark and the little bits of fine sticks and so forth, the fire would kindle up pretty quickly, and Mum and Dad could boil the kettle.

36:00 And it is like the song Denver, you know, [John Denver's Rocky Mountain High], you hear the kettle on the stove, the kettle was always singing on the stove, you could always hear that as a kid and so forth. But that was the way we lived, we lived that way.

So your mum must have had quite a lot of work to do, if your dad was away all day working in town?

Yeah, well he worked in Glenferrie and she just kept on going.

And you are running a farm as

36:30 **well.**

Oh you ran, yes, she ran the place. And we must have got, they must have got a bit of money because we built a laundry along the side of the house, and of course the washing was all done in what they called the copper, and they boiled the clothes and put them in the trough and rinsed them through. And of course the water supply we had was a tank, and our bath was Saturday evening. And we had a chute

37:00 from the copper through the wall down into the tin bath and there we, they used to pour the hot water from the copper into this square chute and the water would run down into the bath. And then of course we kids would have the first bath and then as it got cold they would say, “Look out!” And, “Stand away from the chute!” And down the hot water would come and warm it up again. As then as the bath got higher and higher and higher, Mum would have a try at it,

37:30 and the final thing Dad would get in and it would be nearly full by the time he did it. But it is funny to think that that was our method of cleaning our bodies, we cleaned our bodies on Saturday night with a Saturday night bath. And you gotta remember that when we first went to Croydon there we didn’t have electric light, I can remember the electric light globes coming and how wonderful it was that you had this light, and you turned a switch on and the light came on. And we had long

38:00 electric light globes with a little piece of, a little titty bit of glass on the bottom of them where they blew them. And when the globe actually went out and it wouldn’t light any more, you carefully cut off that little titty bit and so forth, and then fill the glass carefully through that little hole, you tipped it through the water slowly, slowly in it, till you are about three quarters to fill the glass

38:30 thing, the whole glass thing up with water. And then you got a piece of string and tied it on to the two little ends, the ‘t’ pieces and hung it upside down, and when it was going to rain the water would drip out, and that is how we used to check on the weather. But the weather was fine, no water could come out of that glass, but if it was going to rain the water would drip from that tiny wee hole that you cut. Yeah, cut the little titty bit off the end of the glass. But I remember the electricity coming,

39:00 and I remember very vividly the men digging the holes to put the electric light poles in, and they had to dig them a certain depth and they, because it was down quite low they made a step on the way down, they went down so far and made a step and then they dug down the rest of it. And I remember well, watching after school, watching a man do this, obviously – I think of him quite often – he would have been a ’14–18

39:30 soldier, probably the poor fellow would have gone to the war and he was just getting a job. And he told us then, “Don’t be like me, stay at school and learn because digging holes like this is no future.” Yeah. I often wonder that when all the holes and things I have dug in my day, but there it is.

So you had electricians come to your house to,

40:00 **to wire your house?**

Oh, I would suppose so, that detail, I would have been at school when he came, yeah, the electric wiring was done, but we didn’t have electricity when I first went to... And we used candles to go to bed at night time anyway, even with electricity we had, you know, the people didn’t really, in our gen [generation], our like, family didn’t really get used to the electricity. We still had candles and there was always

40:30 hurricane lamps, I mean, I delivered milk with a hurricane lamp in one hand and the can of milk in the other, across the paddocks. And early days of the army we only ever had kerosene hurricane lamps. And to clean the glass of the hurricane lamps was nothing better than newspaper, ‘cause they all go black around the top with the kerosene, you turn the wick up too high, yeah. And kerosene was the most used liquid that you

41:00 could ever imagine. We used kerosene our house, if you got a cut and so forth, kerosene fixed that up. I even remember some of the older fellows, ’14–18 War diggers, oh excuse me, they even used kerosene for a cough medicine. Very dangerous, you get kerosene across your lungs it’ll knock you around, but I can remember the old fellows putting kerosene in a... taking a little sip of that to...

41:30 cough medicine. Kerosene used for everything, you cleaned things with kerosene, you washed the rubbish, took the grease off the... cause we had a buggy when I was a kid, horse and buggy. So there you are, back in 1920s.

Tape 2

00:32 Oh yes, I forgot to mention that one of my hated jobs was turning the handle of a grinder. Now in the grinder you made chips of wheat for the chickens, chickens can't eat full grains of wheat or barley or anything like that, and we used to buy the wheat, of course, in big

01:00 oh, hundred pound bags. And you used to tip the whole wheat into the top of the chute and then you turned the handle and the wheat was ground, and according to the little knobs you turn, the finer the grain was chopped up, and you would cut it up for chickens and then some of it was, it was broken wheat and so forth. But to extend to that, and I think that one of the reasons that I

01:30 got right through the prison camp life later on was because we used to, I used to have to grind that down to almost flour, and that was our porridge. And wheat in those days was not graded to the extent that it is, and we used to get, sometimes we would get a bag of wheat that was poor quality and there were a lot of husks, and the husks would not grind. And I can remember as well as can

02:00 be, and the porridge in the morning it had the whole ring around the top of the porridge dish full of these husks, 'cause you couldn't... oh they used to be terrible, and that was when we used to get poor quality wheat. But as a lad to keep turning this grinding handle was almost a double handed job to get the wheat all ground up, and that was, those are the sort of things that Mum would not have bought, John Bull oats and those sort of things, we had our

02:30 own wheat and we ground it up and we had wheat porridge for breakfast. There's no such thing, I don't know if there were cereals in those days, I wouldn't even remember, but everything was produced close to the farm. And of course, there were wonderful gardens, they were wonderful garden people, not only just did they grow their vegetables, they grew them, I can remember my Mum grew the most wonderful... Fence that we had, I don't know whether Dad put it up and

03:00 built it himself, he was a terribly hard working man, and she grew these sweet peas, and I still love growing sweet peas. And of course he came from the Coventry family that settled in Australia, came to Australia I think in the late 1830s or something, and the two brothers came and one brother settled up in the Diamond Valley, and he settled in the Brighton area,

03:30 and he married a Dudley, and there is a Dudley Street named in Brighton. And the two brothers, the one in the Diamond Valley, they were the, one of the boys, two of the boys became the famous Collingwood footballers in the '20s and early '30s, and both of the men had nine sons and two daughters. So the number of cousins and so forth that,

04:00 in my day before the war, I didn't ever know any of them. But occasionally I meet a Coventry that says, "I think we might be cousins," and so forth. But it is strange that two brothers had nine sons and two daughters wasn't it? But that is how, my Dad was one of the nine sons.

04:30 Yeah, so that is about the Coventry family.

So how did your father end up in Croydon, how did the family end up in Croydon?

Probably economy. When I was a little, very small baby boy I lived in Balaclava Junction, just off Balaclava Junction in Caulfield, that's where they go, and my Mum had come from

05:00 families in Malvern. And see, in the 1880s, 1888 and thereabouts, 1889, the big Depression hit Australia, oh yeah, Australia basically, and a lot of people went broke. And my Mum had come from a family that had been pretty upper class, her father was a wonderful tilemaker, and the tiles that he made are still visible

05:30 in some of the old homes in Melbourne, and in particular the wonderful railway station in Maryborough. Is it Maryborough? The wonderful big station, the blue tiles that are on the floor. He was a tilemaker in England and came to Australia and he invented the first and only blue tile that was ever made in those days. And they had, would you believe, just behind the Malvern town hall, they had a

06:00 tile works there so it must have been all bush then. But in 1889, or something, the Depression came and he lost the lot, so my Mum got set back terribly, she had a couple of sisters and a brother and they just spread about a bit. But my Mum and Dad married, and I came along and they lived in a little house behind the shopping centre that is now Balaclava Junction. And

06:30 in the '20s for some reason or other they bought land in Croydon and they would have got a State Savings Bank, or something, loan to build a little weather-board house on the side of the hill and a paddock, and that is about what it is. And of course all the paddocks all around we didn't own them but you could run your cows on them and nobody cared, there wasn't any fences and so forth. And I remember that when the grass got short, and so

07:00 forth, we would take the cows further down and have them on a long chain. We had the cows on a chain, they drive this big peg into the ground and the cow would eat in a complete circle all day. But to my horror every now and then the link would break in the chain and the cow would take off. And you try, as a boy, bringing a cow home and it is going the other way and you grab the chain that is drag... going through the grass pretty quickly, you pick it up and you get pulled over because the cow

07:30 is stronger than you are.

How would you get those cows home if they broke out?

Oh, I suppose it is an art that you learn as a kid, you learn how to herd them around etcetera, and you get, run like mad and get in front of them and turn them. I think that is about the only way, yeah.

Would your sister help you with that?

Oh yes, sometimes in the good weather, in the winter time it was a terrible job. But

08:00 often you would get the cow, once she slowed down you could grab the chain, and many, many times in patience, you would stand on the chain to try and stop... of course the cow, the chain would move underneath you and tip you over and of course you would have to get up. And I suppose, like every little boy, the tears would be running down, you would be crying like mad because the cow has run away. Never mind, made you tough little beggars.

Did you ever lose any cows?

08:30 Oh no, no, no, you got 'em, you get 'em all home and so forth.

Did you have a big herd?

No, oh, we only had four or five, yeah, but that was enough for our little property. I am not a twenty, thirty cow boy at all, but we had a few. And we could always, never understand, see all this reproductive business was kept a complete secret from us, nobody ever knew anything about what we now call sex. And the

09:00 cow would disappear for a few weeks and so forth and I never understand... "Why did they take the cow away? Why wasn't she there?" Course they took it away to a man who had a bull, come back and we would have a... And we also, another thing I didn't tell you about, we had Shetland ponies, and Shetland ponies we had on agistment, it is called today. And they belonged to the McClellan family who had the big store in Prahran, a very, very wealthy people.

09:30 And they had a home in Dandenong Road and it is still there, 'Langdale'. And that was a mag... and I used to get a holiday at Langdale, and this was this wonderful home. And you sat at the table and the maid came around and served you what you wanted, you went to the sideboard and chose what food you wanted from the sideboard, and she would serve it out there then bring it and put it there. And oh, it was really upper, upper English stuff, you know.

10:00 They had a maid and, who looked after the whole of the house and the serving of the meals and she also, Grace... Margaret was the one that was the maid, and Grace was the lady in the kitchen. And it was a real treat for me to be allowed in the kitchen, but it was a real English home, the McClellan family. And those McClellans

10:30 knew, he knew my Mum quite well, and that is how the Shetland ponies came up to Croydon. They very generously gave me a Shetland pony called Little Witch, and Little Witch had a foal called Little Wonder. And one September I travelled down to Langdale and stayed there a night or two and went out to the Royal

11:00 Show, and I took Little Witch around the parade at the Royal Show. Now that must have been, I must have been only about ten when that happened, and I slept out at the Royal Show. That was a wonderful thing to be with the horses, I was a pretty good horse boy in those days. And we had horses that, course we had plenty of paddocks and they were fenced off and they used to bring the horses up by train, and they brought five

11:30 Shetland ponies came one Saturday on the goods train to Croydon, and Dad and I went down to pick them up. And Dad had three and I had two, and the steam train had to go across the railway line towards the cool store so as he could, I don't know whether he turned around or backed back and shunting, and as he went across the railway line of course he had to toot the whistle, and he blew the

12:00 whistle like mad and the ponies took off. Oh my goodness. Dad is trying to hang onto his three and I am trying to hang onto my two, Shetland ponies, gee whiz. I remember we, I can't remember the result but all I remember we were in terrible trouble with these in the... Engine drivers thought it was wonderful. But that's what, they used to send them up to us for a period and they used to be in the paddocks, open range, and then

12:30 they would, a certain time they would go back again. Of course, I had all the ponies to ride bare-back saddle and everything else, great time, so I was a pretty good horse kid. Because you could ride them anywhere, I mean, the roads weren't made in Croydon in those days.

You said the electric train came to Croydon, what, in the '30s?

No, be '28 perhaps,

13:00 around about that time.

Why did that make such a big difference to the community?

Well, it was a modern way of, I suppose it was advancement, it brought people to town and they could

get to the city quickly. You see, the trains, as I can remember, was the train came through from Lily... Healesville or Warburton early in the morning, and I think that was the eight o'clock

13:30 train or something, and the next train was twelve past eight, but the eight o'clock train would come down traditionally. And it, I travelled on it quite the time, it had the big boxes in the centre full of hot water to warm your feet in the winter, and things like that, it was a real country train. But I think, and it went straight through to Melbourne express at certain stations, whereas the quart past one, that came when I was,

14:00 yes, that would have come '20, '30, that would have been 1930, so it must have been through about '28. And that train would be electrified and it would stop at all the stations, and that was better for the people, both getting on and that, pick up. So that helped the whole district from Camberwell right through to Lilydale. Yeah, that would have been how,

14:30 I am just, thinking back now, I would not have registered in those days but it must have been a boost to Croydon to get electric train, because they would have had three or four trains a day, whereas before that the goods trains... See the morning train would come through, the next train would be the night train that came through and waited up at Healesville to come down in the morning, I would suspect. We didn't have midday trains I don't think, the goods trains would go through but there wouldn't be passenger

15:00 trains. It would be interesting to know how many people lived in Croydon in the '20s wouldn't it?

Yeah, and whether the population increased because of the train, the electric train coming.

Oh, it would be slow, it would be slow. See the population of Australia hasn't increased since the, really since our war, you know, you have got to think back. See we got a terrible setback during the war time in the '40s,

15:30 the population, see every, nearly every man joined the army and it must have made a big difference to the population that will... See that, you know, as everybody does, the immigration things came in the '50s didn't it? They brought migrants to Australia by the thousands and that was what boosted our population, up until then we were very slow to get people to Australia. So, you know,

16:00 and all over Australia country towns, their churches were just little small wooden churches, I suppose they were lucky if they got fifty people in them. So...

I am interested in, if you can recall anything, just finding out a bit more about the relationship between the Aboriginal community and the white community back then.

No, I don't know anything about it. No, I...

You don't remember any incidents?

No, well I, the only thing that you read and that, that is not me, I didn't know.

16:30 But all I did know is that the Aboriginals had that camp that I mentioned.

Did they come to town?

Don't think so, don't think so, not that I know of. I don't remember seeing them about at all, they probably walked, you know, in the same direction or opposite direction to us, but we wouldn't know, I wouldn't have known, no. It is an entirely different story, those days,

17:00 to what it is, you know, over the last, well the last fifty years. You go back over fifty years, the Aboriginals were non existent, it was just something that was, you know, people didn't take any notice of them or ill-treated.

Yeah, it is interesting though that there were little settlements around Melbourne.

Yeah, well here on this Mornington Peninsula they were there. Yeah, there is quite a lot of evidence here that

17:30 they were here amongst the early settlers and so forth. And if you read the early history of this peninsula, they were about, there is no doubt about that, but the white man hasn't been terribly marvellous with mixing. Still that, see, I am saying it all the time, I haven't got a hate for England but English history is pretty crummy. I mean, we are still paying

18:00 for it and so forth this, you know, to this day, the misbehaviour of the English nation. I mean friends, you got people they sent out to Hobart and Norfolk Island, well you visit those places, they are just bloomin' horror. They talk about Changi where we blokes were and so forth, I think some of us chappies that tried to think while we were prisoners, realised this has happened to our generation before, it doesn't matter what the Jap does, the British

18:30 have been so cruel to their own people, let alone how cruel the Japs were to us. So I often used to think back then, 'We are only being treated the same way as the Poms treated the poor old convicts,' and they weren't convicts any more than we were. But it seemed the persecution that the Japanese did to us, and they didn't want us to live, and I really think that that's what the

19:00 Poms did to their poor so-called convicts. ‘Cause you go to Norfolk Island, and it is just horribly, an horror at Norfolk Island, to say nothing about Port Arthur, and even along the New South Wales coast and wherever settlements were, so the Poms have got a lot to think about as people. Don’t give me this stolen generation rubbish, because that is nothing to what the

19:30 English have done. The crusades that came through Europe, nothing was worse and wicked than the Crusades, but still that is not our history, but we have got the back lash of it. That is why I say, it wasn’t until well and truly after the war the migrants... look at the way we treated the migrants who came here, they called them bloody new Australians, you know, that was a terrible slur until we got used to the Greek people

20:00 that have come here, been marvellous. Fellas that built the Snowy Mountain scheme, they didn’t get a go when they came to this... we Australians were just absolute snobs. We just thought we were just so superior, that is what knocked us fellows back when we went away to the war, we thought we were just so wonderful, but we weren’t, we were just ordinary people. Yeah. You are getting stories out of me I didn’t even know I knew.

20:30 **Yes, well we are getting to it. I know you said that you sort of slept through most of your education, but can you give us an idea of what the school was like, was it a small country school?**

Oh yes, yes, yes. Well, you followed the routine of the school. Monday morning did assembly and you saluted the flag, and the same as you said the oath to the boy

21:00 scouts, you be on your honour to serve the Queen and... or King or whatever was at the reign at the time, and we were so utterly British, the British flag was up there instead of the Australian flag. And I had a flag pole in our own yard and I used to run a British flag up on that flagpole. And the whole thing was, you know, part of the British Empire, that was the key thing, and anything that

21:30 came from England was really good, and all this. And the wealthy people, they all wanted to take the ship back to the old country and all that sort of thing, everybody bowed to the old country as if it was something marvellous. And that, see that is left over from the Boer War, you read stories about the Boer War, how the British were so wonderful. The British were terrible in the Boer War... treated our colonials.

22:00 I did a trip to England oh, ‘70s, and somebody called me a colonial then, which is nearly a red rag to a bull, “Don’t call me a colonial mate!” But there you are, but that is it. And as you say, “What was it like at school?” Well the school teachers were English, we, I had a, I think her name

22:30 was Miss Longley. All I remember that she had great big teeth and I hated her, blinking Pom thing she was. She, yeah, but there you are, but I didn’t learn much at school I am afraid, terrible thing, I have had to learn it since, after school. I am self taught and then, you know, I went to night school when I came sixteen or something, I tried to go to school again. But

23:00 reading, writing and arithmetic that is about all, that is about all we ever remembered. Sport was very, very light on, we had very little equipment to play sport with at the state school. And some of the boys were fortunate in the late... in the early ‘30s, they went on to colleges and things like that, the schools were picking up but yeah,

23:30 basic training at the state schools was pretty basic.

And your mum died when you were fourteen?

Yeah. So that changed...

That must have been a blow.

well that changed life completely I began to live on my own then, from then on. Dad, we came down, Dad came down to the suburbs to be closer to his work etcetera and so forth, and he did the natural thing

24:00 to do two years or something after, he married another lady, which didn’t suit me at all. By that time I had started to be quite independent, I was living in boarding houses and things like that. My Mum’s sister and her husband, the man I worked for in his foundry, they looked after me when I first left home sort of business, on me push bike with me little bundle, they looked after me for quite a

24:30 few years. And then once I got into the army military thing I was earning enough money then to go into a boarding house, and I just did boarding houses till I found a better one. So...

What sort of work were you doing at the foundry?

Oh well, they were smelters, we used to smelt, melt down all different metals in furnaces. And

25:00 it was heavy work and fortunately for me it made me quite a strong young fellow, I could lift enormous weights and things like that in those days and that made me quite strong. Because our foundries, our furnaces were pretty hot and in the summer time, it was pretty hot underneath a tin roof with the

furnaces going. They were very early oil-fired, and there was a forced fan and

25:30 the oil and the forced fan, the fan would give, supply so much air, which is oxygen of course, and once you got the flame alight by turning buttons and pulling levers and so forth, you could adjust the amount of air and the amount of fuel that went through, and of course that all exploded into terrific heats and we melted all sorts of things down. And I poured, well

26:00 actually in the book it says I recorded myself in the army as a ladle man, because it was very... I couldn't admit that I worked in a foundry, I couldn't have joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], they wouldn't have accepted me, they would have said you are in a protected industry, you stop hope and, to keep doing what you are doing. So I called myself a ladle man and they didn't know what a ladle man was, whether I ladled out soup or ladled out porridge or anything else. And actually I was a,

26:30 we had these big oh, containers about that round, you know, eight or nine, ten inches across, and four or five inches deep, and a big handle on them, and you held these and you dipped it into the molten metal and pulled it out. You had, we used to use old felt hats, a piece of felt hat on your hand here and on your hand there and you held this great long bar, and you took this metal and you slowly

27:00 poured it into a mould, and then you went back and got another lot, so you had to be very strong in the arms and so forth, yeah. One of the premium products we made was sticks of solder. Solder was used to join guttering, metal together and so forth, and we used to make a lot of solder at one time. Well that required handling the molten metal in the ladle, and sheets of metal

27:30 about that wide, oh so long, you know – I'm sorry, you can't tell – eighteen inches long or something like that, and it was all cut in V's, the solder was made in the V in a round top, and you ran this particular fluids, the hot fluid, down the V and you had to make sure you didn't spill it. Go into the next V, the next V, and you learned to do it and just put enough down and it would fill it up

28:00 every time. That was quite a skill, of course it required strong arms, and as for starting as a boy of fourteen, by the time I was sixteen or something I was really strong in the arms, which stood me in good stead all the years later. So shovelling and things like that has always been so easy for me. But...

So you joined the militia?

28:30 Yeah, at sixteen.

Whereabouts?

Greatest thing I ever did. Sturt Street, South Melbourne. Sturt Street, South Melbourne wasn't the busy thing that it is now, it was a drill hall down there and that became, that was the headquarters the Victorian Scottish Regiment. And I had kilt number three, I was such a long slab of skinny kid, I had kilt number three, I can remember that. We thought we were

29:00 just ants pants in our kilt, I tell ya.

What was kilt number three, what was the significance?

Well everything is numbered in the army, and I was had, I was an odd size probably, I was only a skinny kid and it fitted me, that is the one that they threw at me and said, "That's yours." So I remember you were supposed to wear your kilt at a certain length, it was supposed to go to your knees or something like that, and of course my first

29:30 kilt did fit correctly, but by the time I got to about, oh I might have been seventeen or before I was eighteen, a chap by the name of Stace Howden, he was a captain, he came along and he said, "Coventry, go and get rid of that kilt." It is what he would have called today a mini skirt, I had grown out of it, it was up here somewhere, my legs had grown and I was wearing a kilt that was too short, so I had to go and get... so that was the end of kilt number three.

30:00 I had to get another kilt. We had to wear our socks, you put your hand on your knee and your finger was supposed to touch the tops of your socks. And the typical Scottish, the Scots, the socks didn't have any feet in them, you only had the top bit, that went down to your ankle, from your ankle up to there, that was your sock, you had to have your own socks on underneath, or none. Yeah.

30:30 And ask us what we wore under our kilt, that is what you are going to ask aren't you?

All right, what did you?

Well we didn't wear anything under our kilt except when we went highland dancing, and I was modest enough that I had a green pair of woollen, we had woollen bathers in those days, oh my goodness, and I used to wear my bathers under my kilt when we went dancing. 'Cause Friday night down the South Melbourne drill hall was

31:00 highland dancing, and that was the best gymnasium that you could go to. For 6 pence, which is 5 cents, you would go to the highland dancing and they played bagpipes and you danced to all the Scottish reels and things you learned to do. And at supper time half way through it you would get a cup of coffee and two biscuits for your 5 cents. And the girls came from all over, you know, parts of Melbourne, the other side and everything else, we met lots

31:30 of girls. I never ever had anyone in particular, but we used to go dancing on Friday nights for 6 pence, that was part of the unit. But everything I did from the time I was sixteen revolved about, all my social activities and everything was through the regiment, everything. I think I had my 18th birthday on the train between Spencer Street and Adelaide, we went over,

32:00 a bunch of us were trained for months beforehand and we put on a display of well, pitching tents and several other military things that we did for a big show, Adelaide Centenary. And I remember we left on Boxing Day, and my birthday is Boxing Day, and we left Spencer Street, Boxing Day and I was in that crowd that went across to Adelaide. That was, the whole of our life and my pals and everything else,

32:30 they came from the other suburbs. I still talk, every second Sunday, Curly Forsythe rings me from Queensland and he was a prisoner of war with me and we were in the Scottish together. And he happened, we just didn't know, we just got thrown together as far as... we hadn't met each other for a long time and he finished up in the artillery, and I was in the Sparrow Force and so was he, and he is one of the boys that is still alive. I don't

33:00 think there many old Victorian Scottish blokes of my generation left, but Curly Forsythe is, and he and I, have a bit of a chat with him on Sunday mornings quite often.

Do you know the origins of the Scottish, Victorian Scottish Regiment?

Well they belonged to the Gordon Highlanders, it is a section of the Gordon Highlanders and, you know, they were affiliated with the... I have still got my Glengarry, my Glen, the red and white squares,

33:30 but nothing else of the unit, I haven't got a kilt and so forth. I foolishly, foolishly handed it in when I joined the AIF, I should not have done that; I should have kept it. Yeah. Later on the Scotch College they became, wore the Gordon tartan. We wore the Gordon tartan kilt. So that was wonderful training for me, and of course by the time the war came

34:00 I was well and truly trained.

So tell me about the kind of training you got with the regiment.

Well it was just straight out military manoeuvres and learned how to, well, just straight out machine guns and things of that type. See it was really all the equipment left over from the '14–18 War and when we first

34:30 got into, well us POWs [Prisoner of War], we only had '14–18 War equipment when we landed on Timor, we didn't have any modern stuff, this was our fault. See the fault of Australia was that when we got into the war in '39 we had the men who volunteered but they didn't have any equipment. And I, you know, as an old soldier you knew this, and we were so far behind, our '14–18 War

35:00 rifles, was it any wonder the Jap walked over us? Because they had, see there was only 1,169 or something men, Australians on Timor, and the Jap came with 21,000, and they were equipped. They had all jungle uniforms they had everything, they were ready for it, we weren't. We had khaki shorts, and soon as we went through the terrible lantana and the scrubs that we had to chase

35:30 the Jap for those three or four days, we chased them or they chased us or something, all our legs got cut with the bloomin' scrub. But the Japs had long trousers green, our uniform was khaki and boiled in Persil [soap], buckets of water that was nearly white, you could see our Australian soldiers a mile away but you couldn't see the Jap. You couldn't see the Jap if he was ten feet from you because he was in green, green hat, green shirt, green everything, and he blended with the thing. That is how far out we

36:00 were. So is it any wonder we got a hiding in the beginning? And our machine guns were obsolete, and they had modern machine guns. So, you know, it is just sad that when we were moved to Katherine that was a, well a farce, they had to move Australian soldiers somewhere, and we were moved from Albury by train and so forth, and we finished up in Katherine.

36:30 We were about the second convoy that went through the Northern Territory and the road wasn't made then and our trucks all got bogged and we had to push them through the water, it was a terrible trip to, for the, to put the fellas through. And we slept at the side of the road at night time on the way through to Katherine. And, you know, the train, when we got on at Birdum we got onto this funny cattle train, was all full of cattle manure inside

37:00 so we had to try and get rid of that so that we could be in the train, and then we got to a little bit of a hill, the poor engine was so weak we had to get out and push. So, you know, it was just so sad that... talk about Australian being, not being ready now, but that is only history, we weren't ready. We went to Katherine and they ran out of food and they sent the boys out in the bush with a few bullets to see if they

37:30 could shoot a kangaroo to bring back for something for the fellas to eat, but no, we were just, were not ready. We got the men, because actually it was the best thing that happened for quite a lot of men, particularly the men from Tasmania who were country boys. And Tassie was a very poor country, and when they got into the army they all grew, they all put on weight, because for the first time in their

38:00 lives they got fed properly, they had clothing, they had good boots, they had everything else. They got fed three times a day, and the tucker they used to... was terrible but it was pretty good tucker and some of the cooks were something shocking, but never mind. But all the boys... and they got paid for doing it, and Tassie boys in particular, when I mixed with them, were just hard working farm boys who all came along, and it was the best thing they could ever do

38:30 was join up, they got paid, they got fed and they got clothing. Now that is a pretty hard thing to say today when we have got so much money, got everything at our feet, we can buy anything. They say there is so many poor people but really and truly that is our own fault, that is because people won't think what they are doing. In those days, poor people, we didn't know we were so poor. But the difference in

39:00 terms of the Australian youth when he got into the army, or got into the air force... see lots of blokes joined the air force, they had nothing for them, they didn't have aeroplanes, didn't have anything in the beginning. So we were so unprepared for war that we got the men but we did not have the equipment. And that was one of the reasons why we failed; I think it was a military disgrace that they sent men on Timor, Ambon and Borneo –

39:30 the Sparrows, the Larks and the Gulls, those three forces. Probably, now looking back, should have never left Australia, never left Australia, because we were so ill equipped. We just didn't know what the Jap had, we just didn't know anything about it. And what the boys had done in the New Guinea campaign is just a bunch of heroes later on,

40:00 and probably they should never have gone to New Guinea. Mr MacArthur sent them there for his own political gain and that is another sad thing. Nobody ever wins in a war, it is just terrible. So, that is what happens to us, we were in it and we did it.

Tape 3

00:30 **Just looking at those photocopies from the newspaper there, can you tell us a bit about the sort of rituals, the pageantry that was involved with the Scottish regiment?**

Well, Trooping of the Colour means that you take your regimental colours and you parade them. It is an old English custom in the army, the Queen takes part in the Trooping of the Colours every year when she mounts the horse and does all that

01:00 sort of thing, and she has done that. But it is an old, old tradition of showing the flags of the different battles that the old Scottish regiments went into and everything else, and the 5th Battalion was very active in the '14–18 War, and we did have flags etcetera. And when the units are disbanded or, well, that is really the only word you can say,

01:30 they take the units' flags, which are very, very sacred, they hang them up in the church, the Victorian Scottish flags, our ensign in Scots church in Collins Street, so that's the end of everything. And usually they are very, very decorated flags with the battles that they have been and the honours they have done in beautiful tapestry type work and so forth,

02:00 hand done, and attached to a flag with their own particular colour. Now in Trooping of the Colour the battalion men form up in their companies, and the precision marching is the main thing because they go round and everybody goes around exactly the same, and so forth, and you have got to practice that thing and you are very proud to take part in this particular thing. And so it is a salute to the

02:30 previous activities of the particular battalion and it is not done, I don't think it is ever done any more in Australia, I mean, that goes back to '34, '35 and I don't know that it has been done since.

Yeah, it really is a piece of history there. What was it like to... whereabouts were they conducted there?

The Albert Park cricket ground, you know, off the St Kilda Road now, yeah, so they use that. And the amazing thing about it, we

03:00 formed up as a battalion in Sturt Street, South Melbourne and of course marched to that before we got to the ground and then we did all that marching around the ground together and so forth, fully dressed, we were all inspected beforehand and we all carried the marvellous 303 rifle, which today is a heavy bloomin' piece of equipment but we carried it all. And it was a great honour, really, for a young fellow like me on St Andrews Day, Scotland's

03:30 marvellous day, and the bagpipes. We had, wait a minute, we had fourteen pipers and sixteen drummers or something in the Victorian Scottish, and that was the most amazing Scottish band that was ever, they won every Scottish competition that was ever held in Australia as far as bagpipe music was concerned. Yeah, so...

So what else did your involvement with the Scottish

04:00 **Regiment entail, I mean, what sorts of training... obviously the marching and...?**

Oh yeah.

What else was there?

Well, we used to meet, I think it was Monday nights now, our training night we had, and we would be at the drill hall, I don't know whether we would be there seven or seven-thirty, we would be there till nine-thirty, and we did such things as forming up like that and knowing how to, inside the drill hall. And then getting, I can

04:30 remember getting, well we used to go every Saturday for a long time to get ready for Adelaide and that was the back outside yard and we learned to do things in a precision marching, so as you could go round in a full circle, and each man moved exactly, you kept in line, all that sort of, that was... And everybody did the army, the rifle movements to absolute precision, one, two, three, bang, you know, everything happened.

05:00 Just to bring your rifle up to, put it on your shoulder was a very practised thing to do. And everybody polished everything and all our buttons were all shiny and all that sort of thing, it was a real show off type of thing, theatrical in a way, but the comradeship was the beginning of everything. I mean, in those days when we finished drill on Monday night four or five of us would march, you know, walk, but it would be actual march right up through to,

05:30 right up to Swanston Street, where McDonalds and those shops are now there used to be milk bars, and we wild, young fellows used to go in for a malted milk, that was our drink. That is why probably I am a wowser, and almost a box of beer takes me months to go through, a slab of beer at various times. But that was our drink was malted milks, and we used to chat up the girls behind the... never got anywhere with them, I always remember that none of the

06:00 fellows scored, did any good with any of the girls and so forth. But we would look forward, see at Christmas time, our holidays, we couldn't afford holidays, but the army would take us down to Queenscliff or Portsea or Sorrento, no, Portsea, Queenscliff and those places, I even went down to Shoreham down here. And the whole thing was getting there, setting the thing up, time to sleep the

06:30 night, and all the blokes skylarking and then packing up and go home the next day, you know, that sort of thing. It was just a, as I said to you earlier, a big club, and it was wonderful to be in. Saturdays my, most Saturdays I spent on, when there wasn't anything special on, you get a pass on the railways and you go to Williamstown and you would walk from Williamstown station to the rifle range, and you would spend the afternoon at the rifle

07:00 range, going bang, bang, bang at targets and so forth, see how straight you could shoot and then you would go back home again, and that was your Saturday afternoon. Other people played football and all that sort of thing, I used to go to the rifle club. Really, you know, as I say, it was a sort of club with, gave us activities, and I said before, most of my social life

07:30 was around the regiment and what we did. They, I can remember twice I was selected to go to the lord mayor's ball in the Melbourne town hall which was a big thing, and we fellows were sort of ushers and... several social things like that. Something marvellous came to the Princess theatre once, I think it was the Princess theatre, and they

08:00 needed some background soldiers and so forth and oh, I don't know how many of us were selected to go there, and we joined the theatre company of a night time and lined up at a certain time and then...

Actually on stage?

Yeah, oh yeah, we were on stage, the background or something. No, all those sort of things were, there was something happening all the time in civvies [civilian] street, which was really great for us because

08:30 entertainment and so forth. And then, other than going to the pictures on Saturday night for 2 shillings or something, 20 cents, that was about, that was it you see, and gradually of course you got older and you got interested in girls which... so it progressed. And as I say, the Friday night dances were there and I suppose we took a girl with us at... I don't remember much about girls before the war.

09:00 So yeah, so.

You were talking about that, you know, the precision marching, which obviously you don't see any more...

No.

so it was really quite special. How were you trained to do that, what does that involve?

Well, that is what I say, our training on Monday nights we did and oh, I suppose it was just practise and practise. I mean, exactly the same thing happened in the AIF later, that was my success

09:30 because I'd had all this training, and when the army started to move into Balcombe army camp down here. I was commissioned to go down here and be a... I went with my own regiment then I was told, I

stayed there an extra three months just to pick up the fellows who were civvies and didn't know how to stand in line or do this and do that, and you taught them the movements. And as I said to you before, the generation

10:00 of those days would do as you were told, that is the difference, kids today obviously just do what they like and that is part of, you know why, because part of the education, and you are part of that, where the teachers told you to be independent. Now there is a big difference between being independent and being disciplined, and when you start

10:30 telling people to be independent, you have also got to teach them to take the responsibility with it. And that is a philosophy that should be in Australia, that is why our morals are going down the drain and everything, every person thinks they got a right to this but we haven't, we have a right to our fellow man, and that is what us old fellows get a little bit up tight about because it is just a rabble. And

11:00 you can't help it because young teachers and young people have been, that is the way it has changed. But it is the world wide thing, that is why we are in trouble now. And I personally, if you are asking me questions about it, this is not history, this is going today, I don't think we will ever have an army again. The army days are finished, it will be small, not altogether be small army, but we are at war right now.

11:30 This is a sad thing about the world, we are at war and it is back to, as I said to the lassie here, it is like the crusades, they are just going rampant, and they went rampant all that time. And now this particular religious thing, that terrible thing of Israel and that part, that has been going on for thousands of years and you will never stop it.

Well on that subject, how,

12:00 **going back to the 30s and your time with the regiment how conscious were you of the trouble that was brewing in the world at that stage, in the late '30s?**

Not much at all, not much at all. See, you didn't have news bulletins like you... the first of the news bulletins came out when the war started and people gathered round the radio, and the radios came in with valve, they got out of the crystal set, they got into valves. Just consider now, the radios that the boys

12:30 carried in the '14–18 War, everything was connected with wires and all our signal boys in our early training, they all had to have the wire, they wound it up and unwound it, all that sort of thing, anybody cut the wires, well they were off the air. And the field telephones were absolutely... hope they would work, sort of thing. And now you people got mobile phones and you are cooked up and a picture comes in the mobile phone, the advancement is enormous.

13:00 But during our period, it was carry heavy equipment, batteries had to be carried, all that sort of thing, and we just didn't get news. As far as news was concerned in POW [camps], the, "BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] London calling." That was the greatest thing that you could ever hear, "BBC calling." In prison camp clever boys made radios in the inside wooden shoes, as you will see in the museums and

13:30 so forth, the radio in a wooden clog and, the Dutch word for a wooden shoe, how they hid those etcetera. And half water bottles, cut water bottles in half, put a radio in it and they got the BBC news, but that was only in rare camps. As things got tougher and so forth and the Japs woke up and they used to put a stick down the mouth of the water bottle to find if it was a full

14:00 bottle or not. But the boys got away with so much, like I got away with a, I showed you my diary, well you weren't allowed to have pencil and paper. I got a diary, I got a watch. The watch they didn't mind because they didn't have watches themselves. The first things the Japs, when we had to surrender, the first thing they did is go along and take all the watches off the fellows, 'cause a wristlet watch was quite rare. I had a wristlet

14:30 watch that I remember I purchased as I joined up, and I don't think out of the, well, how many men I had, twenty, thirty men in my platoon, I don't think there was more than two watches, or something, in that. So you people live in a completely and utterly new generation, see you got this mobile phone, the wonderful thing. No such thing. And so the "BBC calling,"

15:00 must have started about '39 to '40, and that was the world news.

Do you remember hearing the announcement the declaration of war in '39?

Oh yeah. Yeah I, we all listened for it, we knew it was coming and I think it came on a Sunday night. And on the Monday morning we had received, obviously, orders beforehand, and on the Monday morning we,

15:30 I as a soldier went down to the drill hall in uniform and everything else, ready to move, and they took us to Portsea that day. And on the night, on the Monday night I was guarding the guns down at the fort of Portsea and didn't know what for, I mean, no bullets in our rifles, nothing and so forth, just standing guard. I remember the night was quite cold and we were put in gun emplacements, and didn't even know why we were there.

16:00 But we were supposed to do something, we didn't know what we were supposed to do but they took, we stayed at Fort Franklin, there was, now the children's camp. But that was the night after the war was declared, I went down there and I forget, I think I did a month down there then I went back to work. I got leave because I could get leave from the factory I worked at, it didn't matter, and I think I did a month down there and came back and you were supposed to

16:30 be, well that was September and I don't think I was called up again till after Christmas. And then the Victorian Scottish came down and stayed in the army camp there for three months, everybody who was in the militia was to do three months. Well I was in the camp from then as an instructor right through until July and I said, "I have had this." And I was a lucky boy that I had a

17:00 motor bike in those days, I had it hidden in the scrub down there, and in July 1940 I got on my motor bike and ride up to town and said, "Blow this, I am finished, I am joining the AIF. I am not going to train any more fellows to go to the AIF, I am going in it myself." So I went up and I said to you, foolishly I went back to the Victorian Scottish depot and gave my kilt in and my armour in. I shouldn't have done that, I should have kept it all.

17:30 **When you say down here, where was that?**

The army camp, the Mount Martha... not the Balcombe army camp, this is before Balcombe was formed. We were down very close to where the Mount Martha village is now but on the other side of the road, the property was a Buxton property and they had army camps all the way along there, yeah.

So what rank were you at

18:00 **that stage?**

Sergeant, I was a sergeant right through the war, yeah. My commission went through but the plane didn't get back to Australia so I remained a sergeant. I am very happy about it now, I would have loved to have got my commission, I was very disappointed at the time as a younger man, but as the sergeant I stayed with my men all the way through prison camp, the sergeant was just a soldier bloke as far as the Japs were concerned. As

18:30 far as the Japanese were concerned the sergeant had as much control as an Australian major did, very powerful man. Most prison camps were had just the sergeant in charge, and he was the cruellest most barbaric sort of creature you could ever know. A fellow called [Captain Kenichi] Sonei was in charge of Bicycle Camp in Java, and he was a fair cow, but

19:00 that was their army. I mean, I have witnessed him take off his, what we used to call the 'Sam Browne belt,' his belt with a buckle on it, and he would lay into his own soldiers like mad, so no wonder they belted us, that was part of their brainwash. See you have got to always remember that the Japanese started our war in the '20s and they started one hundred years of advancement of the Japanese nation,

19:30 and it isn't till 2020 that the first hundred years finish. They started in 1920 to train their soldiers, went into Manchuria and did barbaric things, they bombed Pearl Harbor in 1940, and they got us fellows and they treated heck out of us, and since the war... you people want to think how much the Japanese own, because we will never beat them because they are sadistic. They are still

20:00 playing with the white man to this day and we don't realise it, we are too complacent, we are too genuine. But underneath all that, this is what the Japanese go on with, they are the superior race, they really believe that, and ultimately they will do anything. See they own Hawaii, they own a lot of the western part of America, they own what they want in Australia, and people say, "Oh they will never get it." Oh won't they?

20:30 What have they have done with the car industry?

Well Bill we will get to those experiences in just a little while. Be great to hear a bit more about Mount Martha and that, you were there a good deal of time?

Six months.

Yeah, so what, you were instructing fellows who were going to, who were signing for AIF were you?

AIF, yeah.

What were you actually training them?

Oh, you see the, all the battalions that had been formed before the war, in turn came down to Mount Martha army camp. I

21:00 was one of the first that went there with the Victorian Scottish, and we laid out the tents and the tents ran back towards from, oh, it's not Dominion Road, dear... God I've forgotten now, but anyway the road that runs up behind the shops up towards Balcombe camp, all that land was cleared and we laid tents, row after row of tents. Now the Victorian Scottish came down and they were in the tents for three months,

21:30 they went back and the country units came in, the boys came down from Echuca and all those

wonderful country lads, they all came and they did their three months in Balcombe camp. And so they did this sort of thing and out of those units that came down, the boys were so thrilled about being together etcetera, they joined the AIF and they joined the air force, and it was a wonderful way of recruiting. Now the training that they gave us down here

22:00 was basically marching, they marched them round the streets and everything else. And the big stunt was that they moved from Mount Martha along the water front, right down to Boneo Road, and took them down Boneo Road to the long march and so forth, and it was, used to march so many miles per day, and that was supposed to be getting them fit in training and everything else. So that was, they formed a hospital in

22:30 underneath there, there was a big army hospital, and everything was sort of getting ready. When we first went down there, there were horse drawn vehicles, there were horse lines, they were all left over from the ’14–18 War. And the models of those horses and those actual wagons are in Bernie Dingle’s museum in Nar Nar Goon, he has got those wagons and so forth. And

23:00 a terrible thing happened in those days, if you went on sick parade, you weren’t feeling well so you went to the doctor and he put you on light duties. One of the terrible light duties of those days was running behind the wagon that the horses pulled, and you had to wind the handle of the thing when the man put his hand up, he was sitting on the horse he would put his hand up and you would have to... mean he was going to stop and you would have to wind the brakes to stop the...

23:30 And you weren’t feeling very well, you might have got the flu or something and you got to run behind this bloomin’... you weren’t allowed to sit in the cart, you had to run behind it and put the brakes on. Oh, I could never understand that. So the ’14–18 War soldiers must have had a terrible time in France with horse drawn vehicles, and the poor man who had to be the brake man behind. Shocking. But that is what they mainly did, was what you normally call drill. And drill means

24:00 standing in line, turning left, turning right and then marching off and doing so many marches, so many this way and then about-turns and learning how to move your feet in the right direction, and then do rifle drill, all that sort of thing, that was the simple training, sort of thing they did. And then there were the old machine guns and you learned to take a machine gun to pieces and put it together in such

24:30 and such a time and so forth and all that sort of thing. And practise, they would take a number of men and sit them up on top of a hill, they were guarding that hill, and then another lot of troops would come through the bushes and scrub to see if they could... you know, same as they do today, I mean they are doing that up in the different army camps, but you have so much electronics today that we just didn’t have.

Were there enough

25:00 **rifles and guns for everyone to train on?**

In the beginning there were but as, I am only heard stories, but as the war progressed, I think by 1942 or might have been, yeah by ’42, I think they were running out of rifles for training then, I think that that was a bit of a shemozzle. See when I first joined the AIF I

25:30 went along, as I say, I left the army camp here and went to join, in civilian clothes, join the AIF and went out to Royal Park as a civilian and lined up with all the others and swore on The Bible, everybody had to swear on The Bible there, that you would be loyal to your King and your country and all that sort of thing. And then they moved you through, I don’t used the word marched then, I just said they moved the people because they hadn’t learned to march, through what they call

26:00 the Q store. The Q store is the quartermaster’s store, the quartermaster is the man that has all the clothing, the rifles, the boots, the socks, the hats and everything else. Well you move through the Q store and as you went to each station they gave you another piece of clothing, so you can imagine by the time you got out the other end of the door, not only are you in civvie clothes but you have got all these things from an army great coat to a bloomin’ uniform that wouldn’t fit you anyway,

26:30 trousers, jackets, shirts and everything else. Most amazing thing about the army in those days they didn’t issue you with any underwear, even underwear was a bit of a scarce thing in those sort of things. So by the time you got to the other end of this particular tent or hut or whatever it was, you were loaded up with everything, a new hat that didn’t fit you or, you know, “That size will do you,” plonked it all on. Boots, if you didn’t know the size of your boots well you got nines or eights or

27:00 sevens or something. And so that you moved around and you went to what was to be your hut. So I am happily giggling about this because I have been through it, I had issued it or I had done this over the years and I knew what was happening, but a lot of the fellows didn’t. I go round the corner, and directed where I am, and I hear a voice saying, “Coventry,” and I turned round and I said, “Yes sir.” And there was Major Pond and he was a Victorian Scottish chap,

27:30 and he said, “As soon as you are free I want to see you.” So as soon as I put me gear into bed that they were supplied me with and everything else – he told me where he was – I went to Pond and I said, he said, “G’day Bill,” or whatever that was, he knew me as well as could be. And he said, “Well you are coming with me,” he said, “You are a sergeant.” I was a sergeant the first day I joined the AIF. So with that,

28:00 we moved off a couple of days later and went up to Tallarook, which is just near Seymour, and we formed an army camp where the train stopped and they said, “Righto, everybody out.” And of course they jumped down off the train down onto the railway line, all these boys, very few had had any army training, didn't know anything about it. And we moved up the road a bit from where the train was and went to a,

28:30 a farm gate with ‘Rokeby’ written on it, and up the back of the farm gate there was a shearing shed and that became the army headquarters. And we formed an army camp there and taught… the boys didn’t know how to put up tents but I knew how to put up a tent, so I was busily telling fellows how to put up tents and all those sort of things. And it was July and it was mighty cold, God it gets frosty up there,

29:00 and there were showers to do and there was only cold water, oh boy, things were really tough. And so the 2nd, I think it was the beginning of the 2/21st that finally went to Ambon. But Major Pond, and a couple of other fellows from the Victorian Scottish, we got the move to go to Tasmania to train the Tasmanians. Now

29:30 I don’t want to be rude or anything else but the Tasmanians were a lot of country boys, and the army didn’t think. Now whether that was right or not that they were getting on terribly well, because even their colonel was so well known to them that a lot of them called him uncle, and that gives you an idea of what the Tassie battalion was like. So we were sent to Tasmania to re-train or help

30:00 train the 2/40th Battalion. We were not very welcome because we were mainlanders, and in those days the division between the mainland and Tasmania was pretty thick. And then we moved to Bonegilla and trained in Bonegilla mainly marching. Marching seemed to be the training thing, line fellows up and say, “Righto, right turn, left turn, quick march,” and all that sort of thing. And that

30:30 was their training and they were out of Albury and they couldn’t get into Albury very easily. It is the same thing, I am going back to Mount Martha, we come into Mornington we would have to walk in and if we got leave of a night time, because nothing to do after half past four or whatever the time was. It was all right walking in to Mornington but walking home was an awful long way I tell you, you had to be home in bed by ten o’clock and so forth. So, but Bonegilla was too far away for the fellows

31:00 to go anywhere. Then they ordered...

Did you say you had been to Tasmania before Bonegilla, or the Tasmanians all came to the mainland?

Tasmanians came to the mainland. And then the train came and took us to South Australia…Adelaide, and from Adelaide they, well we had to wait a couple of days at Adelaide to get a train. The train took us up to the little town called Terrowie, and Terrowie

31:30 was the junction of the train that came through and joined a different gauge line or something, it went through to Alice Springs, and we stayed in Terrowie for a few days. And I will never ever forget Terrowie, it was fine red dust, and as I say, most of the, well, most of us fellows were lacking in underwear – we had shorts on by then –

32:00 and the fine dust got to us and the boys broke out with a tinea rash and so forth that was really very serious. The flies were so horrific, and all they could do in Terrowie was make a sort of watery stew for food, and I am not exaggerating when I tell you, you could not take a spoonful of this stew and get it to your mouth

32:30 before the flies would descend on the spoon. It was unbelievable, the flies. And we marched around Terrowie, out into the bloomin’ deserty things and that is where the boys started to sweat, and the lower part of the body they started to get all these rashes, which weren’t good. And then after two or three days we were loaded on a train.

How would they treat that sort of thing? Was there any treatment available?

Didn’t seem to be, I don’t remember

33:00 treatment for that and so forth. And then we were... I will tell you a funny story. We had a, oh, I forget his name, Bill something, I think he was a Bill, he was the leader of the… music sergeant, the leader of the band, and he was a terrible man to drink… and he was one of the boozers. And this morning, half the battalion was to go on the train,

33:30 because they couldn’t put us all on the train – we were staying in the sports ground, that is where we were camped in the sports ground – and you went out the sports ground into the main street, but you turned sharp left and that took you to the railway station. So the train is at the railway station, the men that are to move out have all got their orders, all their pack, and all their private gear and so forth, are ready to move, are all lined up, and the army band, the battalion band is all

34:00 lined up in front of them. And the order is to, “Quick march.” And Bill is the band leader, he is the drum major bloke out in front with his baton and everything else, he leads them out the gate, he goes straight on down the main street and the army turn to left, because he had been on the slops the night before and he goes down... We will never forget him, he went straight down the main street and the band

turned round and went to the train. We all thought that was wonderful. But then the next day, train was ready for us I think,

34:30 and I went on that next train, and we all met up again in Alice Springs, and we formed up in Alice Springs. And somehow or other the Chevy 'lend lease' trucks had started to form up. Now where the army got those from I am just amazed that they got them. Anyway, there were so many trucks for our battalion and so many men got in to each, the back of each truck, and if you can imagine what it was like to carry

35:00 in a three ton truck with half a dozen or ten fellows in the back of that truck and drive them to Darwin on an unmade road, how tough it was for those boys to sit in the truck. My diary tells you all about the trip going to Darwin, where we stopped and where we didn't, and when we got up to those places where the, you know, as I say, no made roads, those places where the water was still, I think, Daly Waters, and things like

35:30 that, the trucks all got bogged and we had to try and fill sandbags. We pushed them through, then there was sand drifts and the trucks got bogged in the sand. And that trip right through from Alice Springs on to Birdum, Birdum was the junction of the railway line, we got to Birdum and we slept in the bush most nights and so forth. And the mosquitoes, I'll never, oh, you can imagine, as soon as

36:00 night time came you were just infested with mosquitoes, and just lay out on the ground, I mean, there was no beds or anything like that, put your ground sheet down and lay down and sleep, and that was Birdum. And from Birdum we got onto cattle trucks that were full of cow shoosh [manure] and rubbish and all that sort of thing, that was a terrible trip. By this time we are getting pretty dirty, we haven't washed or anything else, and the food was pretty scarce, you know, rations were very scarce then,

36:30 and I think we got the first tins of bully beef, one tin to three men or something like that, the ration was terrible going through. We caught the train, as I said to you before, that funny goods train thing, some open car... flat tops, you know, and out in the sun, gee it was a tough trip. And we got to a few rises on the old railway line and the train couldn't make it, it ran backwards

37:00 and then had... and by the third time we got out and pushed the damn thing over the hill, that is how, you know, the power in the engine just wasn't there. We finally got to Katherine and we pulled up, on the left of Katherine railway line was grass about four, five foot high and that is where we made our army camp. We flattened all the grass down because when you walk over it, it just fell over, stalks and so forth, lined up and

37:30 made, put the tents in line etcetera. And that was our first Northern Territory type army camp, alongside the Katherine River. And I will always remember the padre, he was Crocodile Bill was the Roman Catholic padre, and he was the only padre I really met that had a philosophy of understanding men. And the Church of England padre was a dead loss, absolutely

38:00 a religious padre, whereas Crocodile Bill wasn't. And he was called Crocodile Bill because he used to scream out of a night time when the boys were getting so upset and, you know, tinea was getting bad with the men, the men all had tinea in their feet, in the crutch and things like that, that was bad and there was no treatment for it. Had condis crystal baths when you finished training during the day, everybody had to walk through the condis crystal bath,

38:30 and he used to scream out, "Crocodile in the river! Crocodile!" And of course the whole battalion would rush down to the banks of the river, no bloomin' crocodile there. But one day there was a crocodile there, floating upside down, he had died, and he was in the... so they called the Roman Catholic padre, Crocodile Bill. Then the next thing was to move again.

So at this point did you know where the battalion was headed?

Not a faintest idea, didn't know one camp... we didn't know we were going to stop at

39:00 Katherine. There was a big stir at Katherine one night, the boys raided the only hotel, a new lot of beer came in or something, and oh, that was a bad night, there was fellows got on the grog and, you know, all drinking beer they had been away from home and stuff, and that was a very nasty night. And the other thing is that, disturbing at Katherine, we

39:30 were out of rations, we were waiting for the boat to come in to Darwin, for Darwin to bring the railway line down to Katherine and so forth, and the food didn't turn up, and they sent the boys out shooting kangaroos. Well they went out in line out into the scrub at the back of Katherine, they would see a few kangaroos, fire a rifle and that was the end of it because all the kangaroos disappeared. There was one terrible incident happened that they said, "At

40:00 last, the food has arrived!" And the two box cars arrived at Katherine, pulled up, and it was just on dark so they said, "Righto, everybody out, everybody go down to the railway line, unload these trucks that has got boxes and boxes of food." Everything came, in those days, in tins, so many tins to a wooden box. So each man got a box, carried it back and stacked it in the given place where they had it in front of all the kitchens, three or four kitchens along the row,

40:30 and they were all field kitchens of course, not very marvellous. And in the night time when the dark

came it got cooler of an evening, 'Pop, bang, boom, bang,' you could hear this going on, you know, and the tins were exploding. I got up in the morning and the day light came, these wonderful stacks of lovely clean, pine boxes were all bright red. The two trucks

41:00 were full of beetroot, only beetroot. Trucks, boxes and boxes of beetroot. So you can imagine how much I have loved beetroot since the war – I eat beetroot now, but when I first came home – beetroot for breakfast, for lunch, there was nothing. That is how, you know, inefficient the Australian Army was in those days. Then we moved, from Katherine we moved up through

41:30 to a place called Noonamah which is twenty-eight miles south of Darwin. Here again we formed another army camp in the bush – which later was taken over by the Americans – and we formed our different platoons and companies in different sections in this bush. And that was the assembly of...further on at Winnellie other battalions were formed and

42:00 so forth and a lot of...

Tape 4

00:31 Course at Katherine the speculation of where we were going, we are the AIF and we want to go overseas and we are ready, you know, the war is going on in, over in the Middle East sort of thing. And the troops, the 6th Division had gone, we are the 8th Division, not knowing quite that we were the 8th Division, and the blokes were most, oh, unrest

01:00 was terrific. Once upon a... the ones a couple of days there, the soldiers went on strike and told the officers straight out that we were going on strike, we weren't going to do any-bloomin'-thing until you told us something, and then, all of a sudden, came a clothing issue and we said, "Ah, this is it." Well you wouldn't believe it, we are in the tropics, it is hot, they gave us long woollen underpants and long wool singlets, issued to the top.

01:30 Well you can imagine, it caused the greatest fun. The boys stripped off, put all this underwear on and ran around like a lot of Aboriginals. There were a few – you talk about Aboriginals before – there were quite a lot of Aboriginals in the Katherine area, when we arrived they disappeared to the scrub. So yeah, that was one of the incidents at Katherine, it was amazing how the boys tried to lift their spirits but they were getting very, very

02:00 low and unhappy, the troops were very unhappy in Katherine.

So they actually went on strike?

Yeah, they went on strike.

And how was that, sort of, resolved?

Well, it has never ever been recorded, we should have all been de-ranked and everything, but they couldn't do anything with us. And there is no good fining us the money, you know, they put them on defaulters on the parade, you know, and the colonel would have to bloomin' well sit court and... but that was ridiculous... the whole lot of them just,

02:30 "Stick it," you know, "you can do what you like, we are not going to b [bloody]-well do it until you tell us something. There is no food, there is silly looking beetroot, you issue us with woollen underwear, what is happening?" So they quietly, they had a talk to us, the officers came out, I remember Campbell, he was a lovely bloke, a very clever fellow. He came down and said, "Well listen fellas, we understand it is pretty bad but we are waiting for orders to come through." It wasn't very long after that, I think,

03:00 it is a bit hard to remember, but I think we got moved to this Noonamah place, which was a very comfortable place for the tropics, in the bush, and the trees were beautiful it was all really nice, it was much cooler, because you don't have air conditioning or anything like this, those things. We formed up in Noonamah and that turned into an army camp and they then started to work us as a work party.

03:30 Concrete machines arrived, steel huts, equipment arrived, and we had to put up steel huts, and we had to go out in the bush and gather beer bottles, but there is stacks and stacks of bottles out in the bush, brought 'em back in the trucks, smashed them all to pieces as we put them in the huts, and then we poured concrete over the top of them and they became the foundations of the huts. We worked on the concrete mixer two shifts a day.

04:00 We started at dawn and worked through till about midday, the one shift, and the next shift would take over after, I suppose, late afternoon and worked through till dark. And building toilets... see the big thing in the army, you have got to remember, that in training – you ask me what you do in training – you have got to train fellows that if you have a group of people together one of the most important things you have

04:30 to do in the beginning is form the toilets, if you don't you have got disease through your camp, and to

form toilets was a very important thing. And at Katherine where the toilets were all... we were alongside the river, all toilets in the army in those days was just a trench, and you have to watch that everybody behaves themselves in that direction. And then when the tinea got so bad, made sure

05:00 that every soldier walks through the tinea bath and so forth. And that was a problem into the tropics because the boys came from Tasmania and, well, we came from Victoria too, we are not used to the heat of that place, and of course had the mosquitoes and all those sort of things. And you have got, what have you got, eight men to a tent and, you know, there is... tried to make concert parties and

05:30 tried to make things of a night time, but once it gets dark in the army there is nothing to do in those sort of places, and the men just got very discontented.

Tell us a little bit more about the Tasmanian men and how, what your relationship was like from the early days at Bonegilla up till...?

Yeah, well from the early days of Bonegilla, I came back, I came to the unit, and I was issued, I was sent to this

06:00 particular platoon, and of course they didn't want to know, "Who is this bloke? We only want our own fellows." And Tasmanians, in those days, were reluctant to accept people from the mainland, that was a statement, "You come from the mainland, what do you know?" sort of business. Tasmanians are Tasmanians and they are brothers and all that sort of thing. And I found it most disturbing

06:30 that when I call them on parade in the morning, went straight after, you know, a certain time they have to get up and give them so long to get up and then they have to form up and call the roll, and I found that to call the roll, they didn't want to answer me to say that they were there. And it was just a straight out disturbance of personalities, and a few were quite friendly in the

07:00 beginning, I had to learn their funny little ways of handling things, the way they used to talk was differently. They called a cigarette a 'full' and they used to ask you, "You got the makings on you mate?" And everything was 'mate,' as far as Tassies were concerned. And they talked about how 'fur' is it, instead of how far is it. They called, I found out later, that they

07:30 called cordial 'cordigal,' and they had real strange words and so forth. But I was a mainlander and they weren't gonna have me, they had to break me in, you know, that sort of thing. But it wasn't really until we got to Terrowie, and there was a great problem in Terrowie marching out into the desert and things like that, and I was behind

08:00 the troops, as I should be, and some particular incident happened and so forth, and I took, really charge of it and so forth. And a chappie by the name of Bill Rainbow, he was a corporal, and Bill said in no uncertain terms, "You will do us." Well they accepted me at Terrowie, but before Terrowie I was just an outsider. And of course by the time Terrowie came and then Katherine and then

08:30 Noonamah and so forth, that there was no distinction between the Victorian sergeant and the Tasmanian boys, and I got my platoon up that we won several competitions and so forth, I got them very well. And I can remember, you had to be pretty tough but you had to understand your men, you had to do a thing that people today don't like to, so you

09:00 had to, sort of, really the extent that we use the expression, you had to love your men, you had to know them. And a thing that I have talked about, and it is hard for you younger people to understand, I did more than just about ten years, nine, nine and a half, ten years in the army, and all the way through prison camps and everything else, and I never struck any of this sex business that goes on

09:30 today. We had boys that were inclined to be a bit lah-de-dah, poofy, but nobody played up with anybody else, and that is what makes it hard for me to understand all these gay people that go on today. It didn't exist, it was there, but they behaved themselves. And this, nobody talked more about girls than we did during the army, even when you are starving, the necessity to reproduce

10:00 is the strongest thing within human beings, and so the language was of that type, but it was kept decent all the way through. And if you can go through three and a half years prison camp, starved for food, starved for the love of a woman or a girl or anything like that, that shows what a decent, disciplined – that I talked to you before – human beings were disciplined then, and unfortunately that

10:30 discipline is gone, and with it has gone the moral standard of people.

Bill what was, can you tell us about that situation in Terrowie, in South Australia, that sort of was the turning point for...?

Well, I don't really remember what it was, but it was something to do with the conditions that we were in, the food, the flies and everything else, and I must have said, done something that impressed my, this Bill Rainbow. Bill Rainbow was probably the, one of the

11:00 toughest men that I have ever experienced in life. He was really tough, he was a tin miner from up the west coast of Tasmania, he dug trenches. I went to his home once and his method, even with the wife, if you wanted to go to the toilet at Bill's place you took a shovel. Now that was right up until the bloomin' '60s I worked with Bill, but

11:30 a straight shooting tough man. He had a fight with his best mate, Vic Atkins, in Noonamah – he and Vic just hated each other – and we used to have a rest after the concrete mixing, and it was time to get up again and I gave them a yell and, or something, no, I don't think I did. And Rainbow sang out something to Atkins, and Atkins answered him and they said, "Are you good enough?" So they walked across

12:00 this little bit of parade ground we had between our circle of tents and they started to lay into each other, I stopped them after a little while, but they had a go at each other. And Atkins was as tough as Bill in many ways, he broke his thumb on Rainbow's face and Rainbow never batted an eyelid, these two tough Tasmanians they were real funny fellows. I took Atkins to the sick... no he, yeah,

12:30 I think he did, I saw Vic with a great big swollen hand, I said, "Vic what is the matter with your hand?" "Oh," he said, "I just hurt it." And I found out, you know, I took him... Atkins was a real dumb Tasmanian, I used to have to take him on sick parade in the morning, every time in the morning after roll call and breakfast you called sick parade, and you line the blokes up who are going up to the doctor to be sick. And we had a Doctor Brown,

13:00 when I say, a nice young fellow just out of university. But poor old Doc Brown used to sta-st-sta-st-stutter terribly, oh, he had a terrible stutter, and Atkins would line up every morning to go on sick parade. And Doctor Brown said to me once, "S-s-sergeant t-take this m-m-man out of my sight, he b-b-bloody well – excuse me – drives me nuts, and I'm sick and tired... and I d-don't want any..." And he stuttered

13:30 like that, and he started to swear. And Atkins is standing alongside me, he said, "Excuse me Sir, you are an officer Sir, you are not allowed to swear at me Sir." And you can imagine what the Doc said. Atkins is standing there, "You are not allowed to swear Sir." So anyway, that passed off. Another day we are on sick parade and Atkins is there, so Doc Brown he thinks, 'I will fix this bloke.' so he writes across his sick parade report, 'This man is pregnant.' So

14:00 he tells Vic he is pregnant, so oh, Vic is a very sick bloke, from then on he is a very sick bloke, he is pregnant. We are in prison camp taken by the Japs several months later and Vic is laying on his bunk and dear old young Doctor Brown, he was a very young man, about twenty-two or something like that, he walks into the tents, to the huts and so forth, looking after the men to see if they are all right because they are pretty sick. And he comes across Atkins, and Atkins is laying on his bunk.

14:30 And he stops, he looks at Atkins he says, "Atkins, I am very pleased to see you," but he's st-stuttering, you know like this, he said, "That problem you had w-w-way back in Noonamah, I can see by looking at you, you haven't got it any more, so you are a good man." Vic believed him, he didn't have a clue what pregnant was. So, you know, you have got to meet them haven't you? Yeah, that was a, that is a real, true story that not many know about,

15:00 Atkins and his bloomin'... But he was a menace this bloomin' Atkins, he was the funniest fellow, he unfortunately died when he came home, yeah.

You talked about some of the turns of phrase the Tasmanians had there, sort of slang.

Yeah.

Was it a matter of you having to adopt that or...?

Oh yes, oh yes, I had to talk like them, yeah. 'Cause you see, I have just been to Tasmania and I have met some of them blokes that used

15:30 to, that are real Tasmanians, and that language that they use is hardly heard today. There is a chap by the name of Gee down there, he had an accident and he has got two steel legs, but he is a very clever bloke and he has built this enormous shed that he is very proud of. And he is telling me this only just yesterday, Saturday as a matter of fact, "Bill you have got to come and have a look at this shed

16:00 I've finished, she has got doors that are forty foot high, and I have had her all done inside, all levelled off. I have got a bloke with a laser and he did that for me, and I bitumised the shed. And in the shed I have got 'lectricity now, I got lights and I got a fridge, so when you come over next time you better come and have a look at her and we will have a beer together out of the fridge." Now there is the way the Tasmanians, the real way back

16:30 fellas, that is the way a lot of them talked all the time. And I can still remember, "...and she is a goer boys, she is a goer," and if you can catch up with them as 'fur' as you like, you can become a Tasmanian. Now that is the way, it is lost now, but that is the way the biggest percentage of the fellows talked, pardon me I am not having a shot at them. But, you see, little Jackie Moles was the champion spud digger of the north

17:00 west coast and that was really something, he could dig more potatoes in a day, bag them and everything, than anybody else, and Jackie Moles was the truest, wonderful little fellow you would ever get, but a bushy. And some of those boys in Tasmania, they ate possum, they lived on possum, they know how to fish, they go fishing and snaring, that is the only country in Australia that the boys know how to go

17:30 snaring. We don't know how, what snaring is in Australia, but all those boys could snare things. And

they could, when we got to Noonamah and we had to clear the scrub and build sheds and build places for some sort of comfort or recreation, they would fall, they would put little sticks in the ground, not much bigger than oh, than your finger, and they would line these sticks along like that and they would chop a tree down and they would lay them straight on those little sticks.

18:00 They were bush men as clever as can be, and the sad thing about it is that the army used those fellows as labourers when we were at Noonamah, we worked on all sorts of construction jobs. We even bent, actually bent straight, railway line straights, we had a clamp and the handles and we used to bend them so that they could bring the train down from Darwin on a Y, what they

18:30 call a Y, they take the train into the Y and then it would back the other way and they would be able to turn the train around. And that is what, and we laid that railway line in all that heat and everything else, and we would move these clamps, they were like that, they clamp the bend, the railway line. The Darwin north-south road wasn't made, we marched from Noonamah twenty miles south, and you weren't allowed to use your water bottle

19:00 until you were told, and those boys were pretty tough. March twenty miles down the highway towards Adelaide River, sleep the night in the bush and go back through the scrub the next day. Now that is forty miles in two days, that is before we were prisoners. But once we got onto the island of Timor that is when things happened, the mosquitoes got em, dysentery got em, and we were sick men

19:30 before the Jap landed, I would say that sixty per cent of the men were quite ill, quite ill.

Okay, so we are back on Bill. Yeah, you sort of got us up to Noonamah, which is where the organisation seemed to be, sort of, fall into place a bit more, is that right?

Yeah, the battalion seemed to form a lot then. The Tasmanian colonel was still in charge and the message came through that the men,

20:00 or the whole battalion, with the exception of a skeleton mob that were to be left behind, were to come down to Tasmania and give the boys leave because they had been away just too long according to army regulations in those days, and there was no chance of them getting leave. The leave that we used to get was one afternoon a month or something like that, and we went up in small

20:30 quantities and went up to Darwin itself, and we would have, well the gentle drinkers would have a beer in the Darwin pub and then I and my pals went down and had a swim, and I don't remember what meal we had or something like that, we came back, because there was very little in the town. And then towards the evening, it must have been at night time, they had the Darwin picture theatre and we

21:00 all used to sit in deck chairs, that was an open air theatre, no roof or anything like that, and you lay back in deck chairs and we would see a film and then we would get the trucks together and take the boys back to camp. So this was a particular, well, desire of mine, I had a chappie by the name of Neil Snooks, a corporal, I had Armstrong, the driver, and I used to make

21:30 sure that all my platoon, my fellows, everyone came back, I didn't want anybody left behind. And if they'd had too much to drink, they were a bit stupid, we would throw them in, bodily into the back of the utility, slam the door and drive them back home, which must have been a tortuous drive because the road from Darwin down to Noonamah and that, was just absolute bull powder, powder,

22:00 dust was unbelievable, it must, how deep this powder must have been I don't know, but the trucks used to slide through this, you know, the panel van, ah, the utilities with the canvas over the back, and the choking dust. So we would drive the vehicle back to Noonamah and take it to the central spot round about our own tents, open up the back and leave them. So they would be piled one on top of the other,

22:30 and how uncomfortable, but we just used to throw them in if they were full. And they got out according to themselves and found their bunks, and have 'em again on parade the next morning and start yelling at them, and that wasn't very nice for them but that is it. But Neil Snooks and I, and Armstrong... Armstrong has just passed away, poor Neil Snooks died very early because he finished up in Japan. And he was there like Alan Chick,

23:00 he was there when they dropped the atom bomb and that gave him leukaemia when he came home. But Chickie has been very lucky, he hasn't got leukaemia out of it, but most of the boys I understand who were there with the atom bomb, it all affected their blood and they died early. So Noonamah was a place of comradeship etcetera. Occasionally when the boat came in we all got issued with a bottle of beer, which was quite

23:30 good, but unfortunately when you opened the top you had to be quick because it was always warm and it foamed out of the bottle. But we had a good camp, we had a dental tent and the dental chappie, a Captain Winter, and his dental mechanic, Charlie Snelling, was a real character, he was a staff sergeant, so being a specialist he had a molar tooth wired to

24:00 his sergeant's stripes to prove that he was a real chappie. Unfortunately he drowned on the [JN] Daichi Maru. And yeah, so Noonamah, a good tent, a good camp, sergeant's mess quarters the men were fed well, good kitchens etcetera. The greatest Australian Army enemy was a bread slicer, that was a terrible

wicked blade

24:30 thing that boys put on duty, to cut the bread, usually sliced the flesh off their thumb, and it was a shocking implement that bread slicer. ‘Cause you push the bread in and push the thing and if you weren’t concentrating for every minute, a lot of us got hurt there, but the sickness in Noonamah was quite, it wasn’t too bad. And I was in the concert party and we had a big concert we went as, representing

25:00 our battalion, up to Winnellie one night, and a big concert was there and we had our dance band and I was the MC [Master of Ceremonies] that particular night, I don't know how I got MC... done it ever since. And half way through the concert the camp commander, a full colonel, came up and said to me, “Sergeant, call the troops to order will you.” So over the microphone I called the troops to order and he came out with a command such

25:30 like, “Now everybody listen intently. From this moment you are to return to your tents, pack up all your gear and be ready to move by such and such a time.” So that was the beginning, the band that I was with and the party, we packed up and got ourselves back to Noonamah. By the time we had done that the camp was just about finished, it was all over, men had all... and we were just left to try and catch up. My gear was

26:00 still in the corner, which I was able to, in the corner of the tent, no, we were in tin huts by then, we had built Sydney William huts. And we all got out on the road early hours of the morning, two o’clock in the morning, and blow me down we are still, two o’clock in the afternoon we were still sitting on the side of the road waiting to move immediately, which was most distressing. And then we finally got into Darwin to get on board the ship and only to get there

26:30 and it was a very slow manoeuvre, only to find out that the wharfies refused to load our ships. It was a terrible disturbance there on the wharf, we are going away to war, we thought we were the right thing, and they wouldn’t load the ships.

What was the background to that?

Well, I don’t really know, how do you know what those type of people do? Why would they go on strike and refuse to load the ships? I don’t know, but it

27:00 has always concerned me greatly. And that chappie I mentioned to you before, Bill Rainbow, he said, “Give me my machine gun and I will make the Bs [bastards] go back to work,” and he would have too. But it caused a lot of disturbance, and then we were able to, we wanted to load our own ships and they said, “If you do...” load the things ourselves, and they said straight out, “If you do that, we will call every wharf out in Australia,” and all that. Oh, it was a nasty situation; the colonel was put in a terrible

27:30 position. Oh, I forgot to mention just before that, the Colonel Yule, when I said the troops were going back to Melbourne, or to Tasmania, for leave, of course the Japs came into the war, that was cancelled. And also they took the command away from Colonel Yule who had been in charge and they gave Colonel Bill Leggatt – who actually came from this town of Mornington – and they put him in charge and that caused... “Here

28:00 is another mainlander coming in charge of us.” But he was a very clever man, and after the war he did a lot for this country, he was a politician and everything else after that, but he took over. But a few, I think Yule and the adjutant and a couple of other fellows had already been given civvie [civilian] clothes, and they had been sent away to Timor to look the place over a bit before the troops were to be

28:30 moved. But then Yule got sent away and we got the new commander which I thought was, you know, I was quite happy about that. I was amongst the party that was to be left behind; I wasn’t coming home on leave. I, if you ask me I was probably a loner and I had nothing to come back to. I had a sister who I was naturally with but I didn’t think I wanted to come back and start

29:00 all over again. I was away, as far as I was concerned I was away until the war was over, but it didn’t eventuate, I didn’t, I was going to be the only sergeant left back in the camp. Then of course, the next thing, we were on the move and we landed onto the [SS] Zealandia and taken across to Timor, a very uneventful trip, all we could see is lovely smooth flat water with flying fish, that is all that happened.

29:30 The [HMAS] Westralia, a converted passenger ship had a little bit of a gun on the front of it or something and a little, few sailors, they escorted us across but we were, and so the air force flew over and they alerted that there was a submarine in the area, so why the Jap sub didn’t do anything about us, I don’t know. So then we landed at

30:00 Oesapa-besar, which means ‘big bay’ in English, and we landed on the beach and that was a shemozzle, because they just said, with all your gear, you go over the side of the ship, climb down the rope ladder, which is a big net thing, into little barge boats, and when we did that the fellow in charge of the barge boats just went to a certain distance and he said, “This is as far as I go, everybody out.”

30:30 Well some fellows jumped into three feet of water, some got into ten foot of water and all mayhem, you know, thank goodness there was nobody on the shore shooting at us, ‘cause we were very limited with our ammunition. I seem to recall we had five bullets each, that is about all, how we were going to do a landing party with five landing, I don’t know. And then we just sort of camped on the beach and for the

next few days, I was a pretty fit

31:00 boy and a good swimmer, we spent the next time, I don't... time doesn't mean anything to me any more, we spent, of course no bathers, we did it all in the nuddy [naked], we swam out trying to recover the machine guns and the bits that were dropped in the water. And we dived for these things and brought them up and we, I think we got all, the bolt that fits in the Lewis gun is a terribly important thing, and the boys dived for this. And I dived and dived and I was bringing up... because

31:30 a bloke got into about ten foot of water and his pack is on his back, he is not going to hang onto his rifle and machine gun is he? So that was it. Then they moved us up to, oh...

Why wouldn't they take you any further, why were you...?

Oh anything. This is what I said to you before, we were given an order, we did it, no question, did you? The sailor that was in charge of the barge boat said, "This is as far as I go, get out." And the water was beautiful and clean and

32:00 clear, the sand lovely, the water was warm of course off Timor, so that wasn't hard except the depth, nobody knew how deep the water was, you have got a pack on your back, your haversack on your side and your rifle in your hand, that was it. So then they moved us to an established camp not far from the aerodrome in Kupang, and it had been built by the natives so they must have been getting read for us for a few months before

32:30 hand, and there were hundreds of little Timorese girls all on work parties building huts and clearing the ground and everything else, but then of course no sooner we got there then the rains came. And there was only one road from Kupang up to Dili in those days, and when the rains came the mud came. And the trucks got bogged and we got mud on our boots, everything, and it was pretty

33:00 nasty, and the next thing they split the battalion up and sent companies this way and that way. It is well documented in The Doomed Battalion where they sent all the different companies to, and I was stationed at the aerodrome and I took up my place at the aerodrome with my men, and we were there right up until the Jap air raid came. The American Kitty Hawks used to come in of a late

33:30 afternoon, and they were landing there and sleep overnight and fly onto Darwin the next day because they were trying to get the Darwin aerodromes going and so forth, further down the bitumen road – or it wasn't bitumen then – down the track where they made the other aerodromes. And one day, as the Americans had been doing, these aeroplanes appeared and they circled the aerodrome and we, like a lot of silly billies, stood out

34:00 and waved madly to them. We soon found out that they weren't Kitty Hawks, the ground started to kick up around about us, and bullets were flying everywhere. And I can well remember that I put my tin hat on because we were being air raided – it might not have been that time but the next time – and I hated my tin hat from the day it was issued, fiddling little small thing sits on your head, with a little narrow brim.

34:30 And I can remember saying to myself, "Why don't they make em bigger?" I was trying to crawl inside me tin hat. But that's, sometimes when you get scared, don't ever say you don't get scared, you get scared, when the ground is kicking up alongside of you and swish, swish, swish, swish, boom, boom, boom, boom, you get scared. Oh, and that fellow Rainbow that I talk about, during that time we were at the aerodrome and

35:00 in between the showers of rain, we tried to build weapon pits, we also built underground rooms, type thing, and that we could get in out of the rain, but the more it rained the more they filled up with water... oh, never mind. And the day the aeroplanes came and shot up, well everybody was panicked, but the next time they came over Bill Rainbow ran to his weapon pit and with his machine gun he just stood there, out in

35:30 the open – out in the open – with his machine gun firing until he got one, and one went into the jungle down below us. So Rainbow stood there going, dooga-dooga, dooga-dooga, dooga-dooga, he was a brave bloke –Rainbow was not going to be beaten. But it was also, at that time, just before the Jap raids came, that the 79th Light Ack-Ack [Anti Aircraft Battery] from England arrived with the eight-shot Bofors guns,

36:00 and one of their guns and platoon was attached to my particular section. And a chappie in that – and they were ordered that if their gun ever got put out of action, they were to join us – and a chappie by the name of Harry Brenchley was sent to me, with a message from his sergeant major something. And we are sitting in our dugout out of the weather and everything else,

36:30 and we, a tin of fruit cake had come to somebody from Darwin in the mail or something, and we were enjoying our fruit cake, because the rations were terrible. The mud was so shocking and everything they couldn't get the food to the outlying units, our blokes were in a terrible state, we weren't getting fed. Our breakfast would be lucky if it arrived by lunch time and then after, the midday meal might not come at all, and it would be after dark before the night meal came, you know, and we

37:00 were really short on rations. But we are in this dugout thing and this English soldier came and stood outside the dugout, and one of the blokes came to me and said, "There is a Pommy bloke out there Bill,

wants to see you, he wants the sergeant." I said, "Well tell him to come in!" And he said, yelled out, "Come on in!" And he said, "Oh no, can't do that, talking to sergeant, you know." And he couldn't, he was so shy because he was British Army, had to stand to

37:30 attention if he talked to a sergeant. So finally we persuaded him out of the rain, came in and we shared the cake with him. Well he became a friend of mine for the rest of my life, and unfortunately he died in the late '80s or something, in England. I went over to England twice just to visit Harry. But when their gun blew up and we were in the action, and things were not very nice, next... one thing I am doing something with me blokes, next thing Harry Brenchley is alongside me, so he went

38:00 through the action with me after their gun blew up. But they were the bravest little Pommy soldiers you would ever imagine, they had their gun out in the middle of the road out in the open, and if an aeroplane flew over they would have a shot at it, their Bofors guns, they really were good at it. And then of course, as I said to you before, most of our fellows were pretty sick with malaria and dysentery before the action ever started.

38:30 **That sounds like you, you were saying how, when you got off the barges there, you only had five bullets per man or something like that?**

I think so, yeah. I think we got an issue just as the action starts, the air raids, and we were supposed to go through I am sure we got an issue of more ammunition, but we weren't stocked up with ammo, nowhere near. And of course the wireless messages that poor old Colonel Bill Leggatt was sending back to Australia requesting assistance this way, they just ignored him completely, as the book

39:00 says. And even to the last message that he said that they were being raided by a big force of Japanese and they said, "So long... too bad, so long you are on your own." And that was it, cut the radio off forever, that was never broadcast again. So that was very sad, and I believe in what I have read since that Ambon was the same, they just forgot 'em.

It's like the book says, it was doomed from the beginning.

Well, we were doomed from the beginning,

39:30 right from the beginning. The book called The Doomed Battalion, it is very well... a chappie from Tasmania wrote it, but he has got a lot of detail there.

Before those raids happened, I mean, was there any indication that action was imminent?

No, no, not really. Soon after the air raids came like that, the planes came over between Kupang and Dili up at Balibo; they talk about now in this

40:00 occupation of Timor, up in there, that five hundred paratroops arrived. Well, you see the Japs knew enough, they were in amongst the people, we didn't recognise them or anything so intelligence didn't know, but they had been on the island for quite some time and they knew where we were. See, we had one battalion down, one company of men and a few platoons on the aerodrome and the next ones were miles away, see we had them deployed

40:30 all over the place. And they were trying to look at the coast to see if they could see anything coming on the coast, but we were scattered just so much that we weren't even a fighting force. But when the troops landed by parachute, we very quickly, we marched all night, we marched all night to get to the place near where they had landed, the next day, and took action with them. They were well and truly

41:00 dug in, they had their troops, with rope, up in trees and so forth so they could see us coming, and we got nearly all those fellows, you could find them up in the trees shooting at you so we shot them, and they just hung up in the trees, some of them fell out. They had machine gun places just where it was right to get as we moved through the jungle, and they were well in. But we cleaned up

41:30 the five hundred paratroopers, there weren't many left by the time we finished. Because when we got to some of the villages and got there, we found that some of our much loved soldiers... there was a chappie who was a trumpeter and he used to play the tunes that we loved to hear in those generations, you know. And he was wired to a battery and he had bits of flesh cut out of him everywhere,

42:00 and we knew the Japs were torturing and...

Tape 5

00:13 I think it is the time that I should say now that obviously my words that I am using, we were not equipped for jungle fighting, because that is when I mentioned to you the Japanese arrived in their paratroops.

00:30 They even had rubber boots with a split in them, their big toe, fitted with a split between your big toe and your other four toes, so they could climb trees and do things that we could... they were well and truly equipped in many ways compared to us. We had our army boots and our gaiters and things like

that, it was most unappropriate for the jungle. And our shorts, as I said to you, we only knew how to

01:00 wash our clothes with Persil in a four gallon drum, a bucket, and boil them for a while. And that is what I have learned since, that that caused most of the tinea, because the soap powder was left in the trousers. Now you wear khaki trousers that have been boiled in Persil that has been too much, been put in the water, the soap was left in the trousers and then, Lord help you, groin and those particular spots, it just got infected

01:30 with, well what they call tinea or dermatitis or something like that, and the poor fellows were absolutely red raw down below, there was some shocking cases of burned with soap. And our clothes were light coloured, whereas the Jap was in dark green, dark green cap and everything. But it was terrible to come across little pockets where Australian boys had been captured and there was,

02:00 obviously they tortured them before they killed them.

Do you mind if we go back a little way? I would like to actually see if there is any more that you have to tell us about the three months before the Japanese, the first Japanese raid. That is correct is it, that you were there for three months?

No, we were there, we left Darwin, I think, in December and the Japs raided in 15th February see, so we weren't there long and that was just a matter of establishing ourselves

02:30 in camps and finding spots. I mean, I had my platoon to look after the whole of the aerodrome. Well we couldn't do it, we couldn't get to sleep, we had, didn't have enough men to sleep, and we had one armoured car. And the planes would arrive in the afternoon, the Kitty Hawks flying back to Darwin... and we were supposed to put a guard under the wing of each plane. Well, that in itself was a terrifying thing because at the edge of the aerodrome they put these

03:00 planes out, I don't know, fifty or sixty, hundred metres apart and you have got one man standing under the wing of that one, and one man stand... there is no help for him, he is on his own, he is on the edge of the jungle. I mean, naturally the man was itchy, you know, he didn't know if anybody was come in the jungle and attack him, he is standing in the dark, he has got a rifle with a couple of bullets in it I suppose, it was a terrible, you know, mental experience that the

03:30 boys were there. And I was one of the few people who could drive, see, as I said to you before, not many people could drive a motor vehicle, and I could drive the motor vehicle so I drove the armoured vehicle around the aerodrome nearly all night. Well, how did you sleep next day, because there was things to do. And as I said to you, not trying to cry poor or anything like that, our men were pretty near exhausted before the Jap landed. We could not have continued,

04:00 I mean, I said malaria was getting at the boys, we didn't have 'squito [mosquito] nets, we were getting bitten by 'squitoes like malaria borne 'squitoes and a lot of the fellows pretty sick before. And then the night we got the move we all came together and we had all these miles to march all night long. And the different units were... the petrol dumps, they were blowing up whatever was left behind,

04:30 they tried to blow the bridges as we moved towards Balibo and those other villages where the paratroops were, to get ready for action the next day or whenever it started. And there is only one road in those days, well the lassie spoke to me only this weekend and said, "There is still only one road, but it is a wide bitumen road, was not just a gravel track." Timor was terribly poor in the '40s, very poor. And of course the natives,

05:00 they just disappeared, they went to the hills, or somewhere, they just got out of it.

So how long after that first air raid did the paratroopers land?

Only a matter of days I think. I think, I couldn't tell you now, time. Time, you know, it has passed you. But yeah, and then of course there was our air force there, and our

05:30 air force was landing on the Timor drome, on the Kupang drome, and they were... oh, what did you call those big planes? Anyhow, I can't think of their name. Lockheed Hudsons, that's all, Lockheed Hudsons. And air crew was up the back in the jungle, they had some huts up there, and they were getting ready to get back to Australia. They used to fly out over the Timor Sea

06:00 and tell us, and they, I think they saw the convoy a fair way north before it came, but they didn't know where it was going to stop, which island, I don't think. And just before we went into action there was a big Lockheed, we called it big in those days, all loaded up with absolutely everything, and the remainder of the air crew and so forth on board, got to the end of the drome

06:30 at Kupang, and just did a hard left-hand turn and the wing crashed and it just burst into flame. And I, with the armoured car, rushed up to see but we couldn't save any of the boys, we could see through the windows or through the openings, they just got burned to death, it was the most horrifying experience that was. We were silly enough to get close to the plane which we should not have done, we could have been blown up too, but you

07:00 do these things, you are young. Just gonna try and save them but the fire was fierce.

So after that initial raid your instructions then were to mobilise, is that right, to head up this

road?

Oh yeah well, yeah we'd be, whatever the movement was we were told to, we had to move. We didn't know where to, that was the trouble, we didn't get any orders at all other than to,

07:30 "Everybody leave their particular post and head up the road." And we were walking and by this, you know, late at night and so forth, my men were absolutely exhausted, we could hardly continue walking. And I went up to the officer in charge of that section and said, "Hey, these men can't go any further than this, they are exhausted." "They are not allowed to stop, you gotta keep going, keep going, keep going." And that is what we did until

08:00 the next morning I think it was, some time. Yeah, it was soon after that we got stuck into the fighting part, chasing each other or after, trying to clear the Japs out of the jungle. But in all we didn't know much about it, we didn't know what we were really doing, we really didn't. We passed, I remember we passed little native

08:30 villages, and the part that haunts me to this day, the Japs were on the other side of the native village, we were down on the lower slope and we could hear the machine gun bullets going over our heads, and the next minute a hand grenade, Japanese hand grenade landed. We were laying on the ground with our bayonets on the end of our rifles, and Rainbow was a little bit in

09:00 front of me, and the grenade landed at the end of his bayonet and a piece of shrapnel went into his hand and so forth. With that Rainbow, typical him, pulled the pin out of his grenade and threw it back, and there were three Japs behind the machine gun just up there, and they got the three of them all in one bang, and we found them after we advanced up the hill, but he put that machine gun out of action. But that was, excuse me, that was the site of a

09:30 village, and to continue on we set fire to the village huts not knowing that the Japs had trapped the poor little natives inside, and to this day it still haunts me that we burned those little village huts, and we don't know how many little natives were inside. We could, you could hear them crying as we advanced through. The war is a terrible thing. They must have been, knowing what the Japs

10:00 will do, I reckon they got, they were girls inside, the women. I reckon the Japs had got the women inside for their own pleasure and they locked them in while they, once the fighting started. And to clear the area so that we could get through, I think we set fire to that village, and to me that has worried me ever since, but what can you do? War is war, a shocking thing. And to shoot people

10:30 and shoot another person, see him fall over the sights of your rifle, is not a very nice thing. But the Japs were up trees, and I am standing with George Bell, who was a corporal with me, and all of a sudden there is blood on his shoulder. I said, "You better move George," the fellow, bloke above you was... his blood was coming down on top of us. Nasty ooey-gooey things, you know, but that is war. We fought on for those four or five days under those

11:00 terrible conditions, no sleep, no... The men were just absolutely past exhaustion.

How close was this combat? You said you were moving up a road and through an area then?

Through the jungle we moved, oh they were only just in front of us oh, less than twenty yards, ten yards sometimes. 'Cause they were green and we were right on top of them before you could see them, but they could see us because of our light coloured khaki clothing

11:30 you know.

And what about casualties, say, from your company?

Yeah well, oh yeah, we lost a few boys there, a lot of them got hit and so forth, but that is it, I don't know the count, I can't remember the count and so forth.

But were you able to do anything for them or...?

Not much no, no you can't. You do what you can and stop with a mate, I didn't stop with anybody in particular, but I know. There was a fellow who used to live here in Mornington, his name was

12:00 Albie Hutchins, he was carrying a Lewis gun, which is your left hand here your right hand is in near the trigger, and the Jap machine gun bullets, put seven or eight bullets between that knuckle joint and his... He was a little stocky fellow with lovely big arms, not skinny like me but he had plenty of arm, the eight bullets went right through the outside flesh of his arm. Well, we couldn't even stop to bloomin' bandage it up but he got, he came

12:30 through the war with it. Once the days were over and we got into prison camp he was able to get... but oh gee, that poor little fellow suffered because it all went septic. And see, everything that we had, every cut that you had on your leg, because of the disease and everything that was in the jungle, that lantana scrub leaves a poison that turns septic, and we had terrible ulcers on our legs and things like that within a few days

13:00 of the actual fighting finishing. When we did get through the village and get rid of the paratroopers it

was then, unbeknownst to us, that the thousands arrived by ship, well they unloaded somewhere the northern side, or the eastern side of Kupang; they landed somewhere there and came up the main road. And as we saw

13:30 all these Japs coming up the main road, they were firing too, and then early daylight the next morning the white flag came up the road, waving a white flag, and we thought they were giving in, so our colonel went down, a party went down and talked to them down there and realised that they were telling us to give in. And must tell you a story here. There is a fellow we used to,

14:00 his name was Marsh, we called him Swampy Marsh. Swampy was the most useless, lazy, silliest, bloomin' get away with anything fellow you ever had with you, old Swampy was an artful dodger, wouldn't do a damn thing. But there was a fellow got shot in the middle of the road just before the bridge, and he is laying on the road and the Japs are coming up the road shooting and everything else, and Swampy Marsh

14:30 broke... come out of the jungle, ran out on the road, picked this fellow up and brought him in. What can you say about a fellow? What a thing to do, you know? The bullets are flying everywhere, Swampy just come out of the jungle, knew the bloke was hit in the middle of the road, picked him up and brought him back, yeah, saved his life. So there is a hero, the blokes are made like it, nobody ever hears about it, it is just part of... done, while the war was on, he never got any recognition or anything, it was

15:00 just a thing for a mate. So I knew Swampy quite well after the war, he lived down in Rosebud, a nice fellow, he became an inspector, fruit, orchard inspector he was. He used to inspect the orchardists out here when they grew apples.

So did you have like an advance patrol that detected this convoy, Japanese advancing, the landing party that were...?

No, we had assembled at dawn, I don't know what sleep

15:30 we'd had or anything else. I remember that some of us... I was laying down under the wheel, I woke up and my head was underneath the truck and I said, "Thank goodness he didn't move!" Because I had fallen asleep at the truck, and there was bods laying everywhere near the side of the road where we were exhausted overnight, we must have slept for an hour or two. And we could look down the road, the firing was coming up and the bullets were coming up and everything else. And this

16:00 party, or they had been the day before, and we saw this party coming up the road waving a white flag and we were told to stand by and so forth, nobody fire anything, the order came through quickly and that was when our colonel went down to talk to the Japanese officer, and the Japanese officer gave us one hour to decide what we were going to do. And of course they came along to us and told us because there was Japs in the jungle behind us, all

16:30 around, very thick jungle, we could hear them but you couldn't see them, they were within fifty metres of us all the way around, and we knew we were absolutely buggered so we said, "Yes," we would have to surrender, the battalion did. But they had half an hour to get away, and some of the boys that were a long way from that, close near where the Jap was coming, I was, they took off and got up into the hills of Dili

17:00 and caused a, quite a long time – months and years I think – caused a, great problems to the Japanese. Because they were hiding in the jungle and they were supplied with ships from Darwin at night time and all that sort of thing, so that a lot of fellows, not a lot but quite a few, kept on fighting up in the hill country, but malaria and disease beat them. They lost a few lives but they used

17:30 to patrol and they used to raid the Japanese.

So did they make that decision as individuals or...?

Yeah, oh yes, basically yeah, yeah. We weren't going to be captured, we took off, some of them took off. Yeah.

That must have been a pretty extraordinary meeting?

Well you see, as I said to you before, this generation doesn't understand the brotherly love. Blokes wouldn't leave each other, you know, they had made a decision, "We will do this, we

18:00 do it together." so they went off into the hill country towards Dili and caused a lot of trouble. The Japanese sent patrol after patrol to get them, but they lived in the native villages and all the rest of it, and they always had scouts looking out for them and they knew when the Jap was coming. They would just disappear into the jungle, the Jap couldn't find them, and then at the right moment they would raid the Japanese party and wipe out a whole lot of them. And the Australian Government,

18:30 through the navy, supplied them with 20 cent pieces, and they gave the natives 20 cent pieces because they were silvery you see...valuable. But those natives up in the hills helped our boys wonderfully, and they paid dearly for it too because the Japs got into them, but they never ever captured the men who got away in the hills in Dili. And the Australian Navy used to come in quite regularly and they finally took them all off,

19:00 what was left, and brought them back to Australia.

So can I just take you back to that meeting, who was leading you, who...?

Bill Leggatt, Colonel...

Leggatt, okay.

Leggatt. Yeah, in the middle of the book, the pictures, you see the pictures?

Yeah, yes I did. So when Leggatt came back after meeting...

The Japs.

the Japs, the commanding officer, so...?

Well, they passed the word through the officers etcetera, that... that was it. “What do you want to do fellas? Got an hour to surrender.” So the next

19:30 thing was the order to put your rifles down on the road, in the middle of the road and just wait to see what would happen. And the wonderful thing that happened was the Japanese convoys were the other side of the bridge, that had been blown up, but they just went round the side of the bridge and straight over there. But the one hour, before the hour was up the

20:00 Japanese aeroplanes came across and they started to drop their bombs, and the Japanese had the habit of supporting their men, or counting their men in trucks, and they all stood up about ten a row, and they all stood up and held each other in these open tray trucks. And fortunately for us the Japs dropped the bombs thinking it was us, and was them, and blew their troops to buggary, and we watched bodies go up in the air

20:30 and trucks and everything, we thought it was marvellous. But then they continued on with their bombing and we saw the bombs, I saw the bombs, silver bombs coming out of the aeroplane, you know, out of the bomb bays and I ran into the side of the swamp, which was about that deep with muddy water, and before the bombs hit the ground I dived on the eastern side of a palm tree. And when I woke

21:00 up with no breath and everything else, and mud all over me and the palm tree was gone, so I missed death by about that much, the bomb went under the palm tree blew it up, blew me up out of the ground, then back down in again. You know, fate steps in, you know, whatever you are meant... so that’s it.

So at that moment of surrender, how did you feel about that, do you remember what your reaction was?

I just did what I was told.

21:30 And then the Japs came along to us and took our watches off us, those of us who had a watch, the first thing they did is just rip your watch off and...

Did you destroy your weapons at all?

Oh, we didn’t have time. I had an American Colt that I had scrounged and pinched off someone. I forget what I did, I think, I stole a rifle that was up against a wall, all the time it was just sitting at the aerodrome office or something. So when the Yanks came

22:00 through on the aeroplanes he was trying his best to get a rifle, so I went down and got, pinched this rifle and gave it to him and he gave me an American Colt, a revolver, and I had that and I remember I buried that in the ground to make sure the Jap didn’t get that. But our own rifles I think were just left loosely on the side of the road, yeah. And then, by that

22:30 late afternoon, it took all day to do that, late afternoon, the Japs formed us up and marched us back towards this Oesapa-besar place, and we got realisation of war because as we came to little spots there were heaps of native bodies and Jap bodies on a funeral pyre burning, and the smell was something terrible. And they marched us all upon this and it started to rain

23:00 and boy when it rains, you know, tropical rain. And they put us all together, all those sitting together in a little rise of ground and as the rain came down we just sat there all night, and it rained and rained and we just sat in the rain, no food or anything else, just waiting to see what happened by the morning. By the time the morning came the whole thing was surrounded with water, we are on this little hill, and then they moved us on the next

23:30 morning. And we marched again to the place called Oesapa-besar where they formed a prison camp because we had made wire emplacements in case the Japs had landed; our boys had put a barbed wire circle around this particular bay so they put us in behind our own barbed wire. And there was a pond, sort of thing, because it had been a village nearby and this was their water supply,

24:00 which was actually filtered sea water which was fresh, but of course that fresh water was just a breeding ground for mosquitoes. And of course as they put us there without any tents, without any huts, without any food, we lay down too exhausted to sleep and the mosquitoes had a wonderful time, so everybody was pretty near sick with malaria. Then you would go over for a drink so you would

24:30 drink out of this pond, and people had done their washing or washed their bottoms on one side and we are drinking on the other side. And then the funny thing came that somebody told the Japs that we had no food, what he was going to do about food, and the Jap informed that person that there was plenty of food there at the entrance to the place, the food was there, and they found three bags of rice.

25:00 Well, being Australians we don't know anything about rice in the 30s. The only thing my mother used to make, a rice pudding sometimes, with eggs and bread or something, and custard sort of thing, boiled rice in this, that way, we didn't know how to cook, Australia didn't know how to cook rice in the 30s and 40s, not like we do today. So they asked all the fellows to supply their dixies, which is our

25:30 eating dixie, and we dug a long trench, several long trenches, gathered up burnable material and made long fires and put the rice... I mean, they knew that you boiled rice. So you put a dixie of rice, and you put some water in it and put it in the fires and, of course, as the rice, as the water boiled the rice came over the top of the dixies and put the fire out and then it didn't cook and everything. Oh, so

26:00 we found out... but slowly as time went by we learned how to cook rice didn't we? But that was the only ration, they put three bags of rice at the gate, what would have been the gate.

You had your kits with you, your bags?

No. No, they kept everything. And it was several days later that they used some of our boys who could drive trucks from the transport, to go and get our trucks so that they could take them into Kupang to the Japanese head-

26:30 quarters, because they didn't have enough drivers either, and they were then able to get the ones that had the kits on, see there was trucks with all our kits on, there was trucks with different things as we went into action. And a lot of us got our own packs back, a little canvas pack and that gave us a little bit of... And that's why I was able, I got my pack back, and that is why I was able to get some of that equipment I got, that was just sheer luck,

27:00 but some fellas didn't get a thing. But I did get my own haversack back because my name written on it, so that helped. And then our boys got together and realised that things were pretty serious and they started to build the huts, and I should show you the book called Oesapa-besar, it shows the drawings of the huts and the things that we made on Timor, and we gradually built huts.

27:30 And of course, the biggest thing was the latrines, there was no such things as latrines, and we couldn't wander around the camp at night time, the Japs got very niggly about that. I was pretty sick, I had bad ulcers on my leg and I had bad malaria and everything, and I... dysentery too, I think, and I was put in a hospital tent. And an air raid came one night and I got out of my bed to go for a wee,

28:00 and I was limping like mad because I am dragging a leg or two, and the next minute there was grunt and there is a bayonet, boom, right in front of me, and the Jap pulled me up because I was walking around the camp at night time, but he was as frightened as I was.

So how many men were in the camp by that stage. Had the other companies been...?

Everybody, the whole, they got the whole battalion except the men that had gone, nicked off to

28:30 Dili and things like that. There would be nearly oh, eight, nine hundred fellows in this camp, and we made, later we made bamboo huts and things like that, trying to make it comfortable. The biggest, one of the most wonderful things they did, they, we dug deep trenches in between the huts and covered them over with timbers so you didn't fall in them, and just left what we used to call – rudely to you – a 'pissa-phone.' They made funnels

29:00 and at night time they put the funnel down the hole so that you could get out of your bed, you could have a wee at night without wandering around the camp, because the Japs were too, you know, vicious and so forth. But then we...

Oh, so they were providing you with tools to do this building work?

Oh no, we got our... see when the boys went and got the trucks... in the beginning they let us go back to the stores, and after we had been there

29:30 a little while, many days, they let a work party go back and we got to our food stores and brought tins of meat and vegetables back into the camp, so we started to eat for a little while then. And then the other thing was that there was work to be done down at the wharf at Kupang, and we used to do working parties – so that was before I got sick – we would do working parties down on the wharf unloading Jap

30:00 ships, or whatever the thing was. And we were stacking food stuffs or anything in little houses along the wharf at Kupang and that helped greatly because Australians are great hydraulics, they would lift anything, so we pinched and stole everything that was movable, brought it back to camp at night time and was able to feed the sick and all that sort of... That is the, how we lived through scrounging, and that went on

30:30 for quite a while. And I know they had some tins of the most amazing things, tins of mandarins. And while I was working on this party, because the Japs were pretty hungry themselves then, the first Japs

weren't too bad because they were seasoned troops, it was later on we got all these village-type... well, all you got to call them are peasants turned into soldiers, they were the cruel ones, and the

31:00 Koreans, the Koreans were terribly cruel. But in the beginning there was a bit of reasonable, 'we were all soldiers,' sort of thing, and you could wangle a bit with – excuse me – with the Japs. And we were unloading these ships and carrying heavy boxes and things up to these little houses and stacking them in, and we found out that there was some food in some of these boxes. So we took our turn, drop off to single file, dive

31:30 into one of these things, get into the boxes, open up the food and have a bit of a feed and then come back, and then it is your turn and it is your turn, you know. Well, I'd had my turn and I am back on the work party and Bill Rainbow, that man I talked to you about, he went into the thing, he is in there having a whale... a tin – excuse me, because I had a tin opener, I was lucky, I scrounged a tin opener, so we passed the tin opener around. Bill opened up the tin and he is eating away whatever was in the tin, and a Jap came in.

32:00 And the Jap lined him up and spoke roughly to him in Japanese and Bill just said, "Oh go and get a woolly dog," you know. And with that the Jap hit him, and Bill just opened up his eyes and said, "What the so-and-so..." you can imagine his language, "do you think you are doing?" So, 'whoo,' course in one blow Bill knocked the Jap clean off his feet and he knocked him out. Oh, he realised what he had done and he said, "Oh, things are pretty tough." So he came out, shut the door and everything else, and said, "Don't go in there," he said, "I just

32:30 flattened a Jap!" Well within a few hours we were all lined up and this poor little face with his face all swollen up like... going along trying to pick out who hit him, but he never ever found Rainbow. You don't hit Bill Rainbow I tell you, 'whomp'. Bollocky... we called him Bollocky Bill, Bollocky Bill from the bush. Then there was another time, we were all pinching stuff and everything else, and the Japanese captain came on and lined us, we all had

33:00 to line up on the side of the street. And he called out, Captain Campbell I think it was, I think it was Campbell, yeah I'm sure it was Campbell, and he lined him up and he told Campbell that the Australian men, "...very bad soldiers, steal everything, terrible. Japanese soldiers very honourable, do not do that, Japanese. Australian soldiers..." "Ah no," said Campbell, "no, no, no. Australian soldiers just as honourable as Japanese

33:30 soldiers, never do anything wrong, all fine men," and everything else, and the Jap is getting cross with him. All of a sudden the Jap hit Campbell across the face, knocked his cap off and three tubes of toothpaste fell out. Well, all hell broke loose, he screamed and roared, and roared for a bit. Then machine guns were up on top and we thought, "Gee, this is going to be nasty." And they had the machine guns on top of the edge

34:00 of the buildings, so they got a big army tent fly, big canvas thing, put it down on the ground and said, "Everybody go round it." And you should have seen what was in that tent fly by the time it was finished; everybody had to empty out their pockets. And Freddie Snook will tell you the same story, he was there, he had stuff in his pocket he didn't give up because… clipped over the years a couple of times for not giving it all up and so forth, having a very nasty time. But we will never forget this officer saying how wonderful we were...

34:30 Boom, cap fell off and out the... oh dear, oh dear. But then the work parties finished and we went back to the camp and the, you know, we just tried to establish the camp as well as we can.

Were you punished, was anyone punished for that for thieving?

All the time, that slapping, see that is when the slappings began. See you were supposed to stand to attention while the Jap hit you. Well, I was fairly tall, I was still tall but I, for

35:00 those days, and if they couldn't reach you, they would stand you down in a ditch or in the gutter, they often used to stand me down and... Lofty is taller than I am and he will tell you, they stand you down in a recess so they could reach you, but you were just supposed to stand there and take it. But when they got really nasty I have seen them bash a man to death like that, just keep on hitting and hitting, when he is on the ground, and belting him and so forth.

With fist or hand or...?

Or anything. Or, well you

35:30 would be on parade or anything like that, they would hit you between the legs with the butt of a rifle, they would hit you over the head with a rifle, anything, their rifle was longer than ours, oh they would hit you with anything. But, as I said to you, that Sonei bloke that was Captain Sonei in Java, he hit his own troops, belted the daylights out of them, but it was just a vicious business that well, we were white men, they were Japanese, the superior race.

36:00 There is no logic in the Jap, you can't work out what he is doing and what he is thinking, they would give you a hiding for something you wouldn't know what you have done. They would just pick on, you pick on me for, just because I was taller than he was or something and find an excuse to give you a hiding, but we all got very bad ringing ears and all that sort of thing, bloody faces and so forth. I got taken on the wharf in Singapore in

36:30 late July, before the war ended, and I walked away, I had done my share of digging, we were digging holes, square holes, metre square holes or something, half a metre deep on the wharf. And I walked away and I walked about oh, ten or twelve yards away, because at the side of the piece of timbers that were stacked there I could see a little bit of green,

37:00 grassy stuff growing. We were very bad with scurvy, and if you could get a piece of green grass and bear to put it in your mouth, the sting was something terrible, but it relieved the scurvy for a while. So I went over to pick this little bunch, just like a little bunch of violets I talked about as a kid, and the Nip from over there saw me move away from the party, he must have thought I was going to break through from the camp away from the fellas. And of course I got me little bunch of

37:30 greens that I was going to share with the blokes around me, coming back to the work party, and he came down and got me, and he gave me a belting with his fists and all that sort of thing for a while, and I was very, very groggy. And when he finished he went back to his post and I sat down in the hole with my feet in the hole on the edge while our, wasn't... see there was, would be two men or three men, one shovel.

38:00 So you could only work alternating about each turn, and it wasn't my turn to work anyway, so I sat down to get rid of this groggy feeling I think, and he went over there and saw me sitting down, so he came back with a pick handle, he got stuck into me with a pick handle. Now if the war hadn't finished I would have been gone, because your system was so bad that if you got a hiding like that you didn't live through it, but I was lucky the war finished

38:30 a couple of months later and I got away with it. But my story is not sad, you want to hear some of the boys, get up the Burma Railway and things like that.

Yeah, we have spoken to people up there.

Yeah.

Can we just go back to the early days of the camp though, and you said that initially it was Japanese soldiers who were guarding you.

Yeah.

What happened, what was the process there, how soon

39:00 **did they leave and the Koreans come to camp?**

Well, that is just a transition that we didn't realise, I think it was really into Java before I realised that these weren't Japs, they were Koreans. See they took us from Timor on the Daichi Maru which is one great ship, and it was the biggest junk ship that you ever got on and they put

39:30 us thousand fellas down the hold and there they kept us. And there was a toilet up on top which, you made an excuse if you could climb up the ladder out of the hold, you could go to the toilet to get a bit of fresh air. And there was a troopship that the Japs had brought their own troops to the different islands or there was a troopship for them, and all the hold was built with decking about every metre,

40:00 metre and a half, four feet or so, and they were just shelves in the centre of the thing. And the men had to go inside these, and it was a rat infested horrible ship, and we were all almost naked by this... we had to be naked to try and put up with the heat, and it all brought us out in prickly heat, we all got, all our bodies went red raw with the heat and so forth. We were locked down that hold for; I think we were locked down about eight

40:30 days to go from Timor up to Surabaya, and we were all locked in there. And unfortunately dysentery was bad, the stench was unbelievable, and a few boys died and they put a rope around them and hauled them up top and just dropped them over the side if you died. That hell ship was something really terrible. And they took us up to Surabaya, and then from Surabaya we travelled by train with all the windows

41:00 shut and everything else and a guard at each end of the carriage etcetera. We travelled right across Java to Batavia, which is now Jog Jakarta, and we were marched from Batavia station down through to Tanjong Priok which is beside the wharf at Jog Jakarta, or Batavia. And we were too weak to march, the men were just so weak, they just stumbled and the

41:30 Jap pushed us along with open bayonets and so forth and we sort of helped each other and all that. And they got into this Tanjong Priok camp and the fellows that were in the camp, they were the Welsh Artillery and British troops, there was thousands of men in this camp, and they were shocked when they saw the condition of the men. And they tried to give us some soup in

42:00 four gallon drums...

Tape 6

00:33 Well you think you are getting it right, is it coming out all right?

Yeah it's really good, it's really good. You know, but we will keep trying to get as much detail as we can from you, so bear with us. I would like to find out more about that five months on Timor in the camp, like I was saying before, and you have just shown us some pictures of how the camp actually

01:00 **was built, so you must have got working parties together. How did that happen, did you initiate the building of huts or facilities at all?**

Oh well we just, I think we got to the stage that we want this done, "Righto you fellas, go ahead and do this, you know, you do this, you do that, you do something else," and the boys would just do it. I mean, there was no argue, "Why should I? I am going to sit in the corner," you just didn't do that in those

01:30 days. And they looked after the sick. As I said to you, I spent quite some time, I can't remember how long, in one of the hospital bays because I had injured my leg during the action, or some time, and I also got a foot badly crushed on the wharf in Singapore and I probably... ah, the wharf at Kupang, and I probably had great difficulty in walking. And my ulcer grew to such a stage that

02:00 the whole of my leg was open and the bone was exposed, and you could see the sinew going up and down as you waggled your foot and your toes, so I had a pretty mighty big cut, open cut sore on my leg, and it was weeping badly with pus which was there. So they said, "Well we..." they didn't know what to do with ulcers, they had no ointments or anything like that. They had,

02:30 oh, they had outfits for sexual diseases, they had a kit for that but they, that... see antibiotics hadn't been invented or anything like that in those days, penicillin was still unknown. And they used some of this ointment that was used for sexually transmitted diseases and that was good but they soon ran out of that because there wasn't much of that. And the doctors were

03:00 stumped for antiseptics or anything, so they had nothing to do. And an old Dutch custom of those days when things were terribly serious, they scraped the wound, scraped all the pus away from the wound. When I say it was pus, it would be at least two centimetres of pus running down your leg continually, so it was giving you poison through the whole of your system.

03:30 And the way they did it, they would take a dessertspoon which they tried to sharpen on one side, and you cut away all the pus, right to the flesh, if you could, and scraped all the poison out and hope that it would recover itself, and that operation had to be done without any anaesthetic or anything else. You just held onto your legs, the blokes held the other part of your leg and a couple of fellows your shoulder and

04:00 the doctor did his best. The poor fellows that were doctors were absolutely disgusted but... you know. There was other things; if men had appendicitis and so the operation was done without any anaesthetic at all so they just did the operation and hoped he would live. But then later on the ulcers were so bad, some of the men who became famous surgeons later

04:30 chopped legs off, but unfortunately most, I think just very, very few, one or two came back from the prison camp after a leg operation, the shock killed them, and of course they were in such low condition. And I remember discussing with the doctor, Stevens his name was, and he said, "Well the only thing we can do is amputate your leg at your knee." And I said, "You leave it alone!" I would not be in it. And

05:00 so I hobbled to the sea whenever I could, this Oesapa-besar was right on the beach, and I went down and I used to stand in the water hoping that the salt water would help. I widdled down my leg, had the maggots put into your leg to eat away all the horrible, pussey stuff, the maggots crawl around and eat the pus, sometimes they bite you. So, you know, and I was home here in Australia

05:30 oh, at least maybe ten or twelve years before the scar healed up, before the skin grew over. So they were pretty nasty things. And dear old Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, he had terrible legs before he died, because of his ulcers. But that is... most of us had terrible ulcers.

So what kind of diet did you have in the camp?

06:00 **Rice. Rice. Rice. In the early days I'm talking about, I showed you the pictures of meat and vegetable tins, well of course they didn't last very long, we only got the meat and the vegetable tins because it was uninteresting to the Japanese, they are not interested in European food. So when they were able to get out of the camp at Oesapa-besar on Timor,**

06:30 **they were able to get at our ration stores and bring stuff back to the camp. But it was running low before they moved us up to Java, and then from that terrible boat trip on the way, we were just a bit north off of Timor Island, yeah, Timor Island up from the Dili end. And our own aeroplanes came over and bombed us, and fortunately they missed us,**

07:00 **but they lifted the ship out of the water and all the rust that was inside all came down on top of us and everything else. But...**

This is when you were on the Daichi Maru...?

The Daichi Maru, yeah. We were just off Dili and one of our own planes came over and dropped some bombs, but fortunately, as I say, fortunately they missed us. But it caused us, through the bow of the ship, and lifted the ship right up out of the water, so we were nearly gone. But we got to Java,

07:30 and then from Java, and a different, the boss, the Tanjong Priok camp which I said is down by the wharf, that is where we met up with lots and lots of different country men. Terrible British rule camp, the British officers just thought they were so wonderful, so we Australians did what convicts used to do, just went, “Bleah to you fellas,” and

08:00 told them to go and jump in the river and wouldn’t salute them. And they complained to us and complained to our officers and all these funny things, but we didn't take any notice of them, we were real rebels in those days. There is a real story that not many people know. The 49th or 39th Light Ack Ack came from Wales, or 37th , 37th I think it was, Light Ack Ack

08:30 from Wales, and these boys would be out of the… for no reason at all they would start singing, and this is pretty... and they sang so beautifully, the whole hut, they were a real established hut. ‘Cause this Tanjong Priok place had been the place where all the people who worked on the wharf, they all, the Javanese or the Dutch had all the wharf people here, and they

09:00 lived with their wives and things in this little sort of village type thing, rows and rows of huts for the employees down the wharf for the workers. And that is why they, the British put the barbed wire around it and barbed themselves in, and so this was a British run camp. And this, one of this light ack ack from Wales, their major or their colonel, I think he was a major, he had his batman make a little garden, he grew a marrow,

09:30 and he was loving his marrow or something, and somebody pinched his marrow. Now I have never found out who did, but I bet it was an Australian, we stole his marrow, somebody stole his marrow. So he put the whole of his unit on what we call defaulters. Now they had to put their uniform on, clean their boots with banana skins or anything else, had to have their boots shining, and after we had been working all day

10:00 on the wharf doing things, whatever we did on the wharves and things, lifting sugars and moving drums and all that sort of thing, we would come back pretty tired to camp, not much food. This colonel bloke, or major, would get his mob out and line them all up with their lovely shiny uniform on and everything else and march the… and get the sergeant major to march them up and down their little square. Well, after about the third

10:30 night we thought this was a bit too much, so several of us – mostly half the bloomin’ unit, our unit, we hadn’t been moved away then, we broke down the barbed wire that was between their square and our square. We went through the barbed wire and started to stand and walk in between the little troops who were supposed to be doing left turn, right turn, march this way and march that way, we just stood in amongst them and

11:00 made jeering noises and so forth. With that the major – ‘course they couldn’t march, they just, it just broke the party up – with that the major came out with his swagger cane, cap, British major ‘Woh-Woh’ came up. “Woh, I say, what’s going on he-yar?” you know, “You rebels get back into your own camp.” And a chappie that was a very big man, a cane cutter from Queensland, I can’t remember his name, I wish I could,

11:30 I never have been able to. Of course, he was a ‘Tiny’ because he was a big man. Tiny went up to this major, and he was much taller than the major, but Tiny stood about that far away from him, and said to him, “What the x-l-m-n-o-p-q is wrong with you, you stupid Pommy bastards?” “Oh… you don’t say that to a major in the British Army!” And he said, “I am ‘Q-X-

12:00 so-and-so,” his number, “I am in the AIF, what the f…. are you gonna do about it?” They never marched again. But that was the best turn that I have ever seen a British soldier bloomin’ brought down to his ranks, he had never been spoken to by a colonial like Tiny. But that is a real, true army story; Tiny really dressed that bloomin’ major down and made him

12:30 feel about as big as a three-penny piece. We thought that was wonderful. So when the young officers from the Royal Hussars and so forth used to parade of a night time after their, they had their officers’ mess inside the prison camp, you know, this is pretty early, first six months, they had their officers’ mess and they still had their batmen and all the rest of it. And in the end, because there were streets in this particular place where they must have brought the vehicles

13:00 to take the people down to wharves to work and so forth, there was gutters and everything else. And they used to parade four or five wide, and with their swagger canes and everything go out for their evening stroll, and we used to torment them, we wouldn’t stand up and salute them. They got very, very upset about that because the more it went on the worse we fellas got and so forth, but… so.

13:30 **Yeah, I can imagine. Was their much insubordination amongst your company?**

No, no. No, we only kicked up about the British officers, there were none about the British soldiers, we stuck with them. They were, the rank and file we were quite happy with, even sergeant majors we were quite happy with, but once an English officer turned up, ‘argh,’ finished with him, because that is the

aristocratic way that Britain was.

14:00 And we, I feel, for the first time in my life I have ever felt that the British were still trying to treat us as if we had been convicts, and the Japs called us convicts too, they used to call us convicts. And I often used to say, and I still say we are convicts, there is the mark where my watch goes, and that is where the chains were, you know. But the Japs loved to tell us that we were all descendants from convicts, they could speak enough English to tell

14:30 us that, or make us understand. But the British officers, particularly early in the piece, when we got into Java they treated us just as if we were a common herd, and we just gave them beggary. I will tell you a naughty story. The officers did that parade every night and in that camp, which is Java's thing, they have trenches about ten centimetres wide and anything up to

15:00 half a metre deep, and in those trenches water runs all the time. This was any established army camp that you got into that was run by the Dutch, the same thing with the Bicycle camp, and they are the latrine trenches and all sewerage, all human excreta, you drop it into the channel and it just disappears. Well in this particular Tanjong Priok,

15:30 these little drains run on either side of the road and through the thing, they are very well done, but it is open sewerage. So we are sitting at the... so we got all this teed up, and these young officers are marching up and down and so forth, and one boy is ready to say, "Whatcha sittin' here for Charlie?" "We're just watching the turds go by." It's

16:00 those sort of things we gave those Pommy soldiers, those officers a terrible time. You must have funny stories mustn't you? Not all serious.

Oh yeah, yeah definitely.

And I got left behind, see the battalion moved on from that particular camp, because I got an extremely reoccurring malaria thing, and I was, well I was, must have been unconscious because I didn't know they moved. A couple, a day or so after, I... "Where is all our mates?"

16:30 "They are all gone." And I got left behind with a small number of our unit. And I was later moved up to Bicycle Camp and then out to a place called Makasura, different camps. I moved around about in Java, I didn't go on to Singapore very early and that is how I missed the Burma railway, I didn't do the railway, I did other camps.

What was Bicycle Camp?

Bicycle Camp

17:00 had been the camp of the bicycle unit of the Dutch Army, they were a mounted, whole battalion mounted on pushbikes and they travelled throughout the country of Java well, watching for disturbances and natives' misbehaviour and so forth. A lot of them were native boys and they... Javanese fellows. But they were mounted on pushbikes and it

17:30 was well established, beautiful camp, lovely huts and all that sort of thing, all lined up, all tiled floors and everybody slept on the floor, of course, there were no beds, and lovely verandas out the sides. And we got put into four or five huts or something like that later on, the Aussies, and I was with Jeff Tyson, that is where he did a lot of his drawings, he slept next to me, Jeff Tyson. And that is when I worked in the kitchen,

18:00 there were kitchen north and south, east and west, they had four kitchens at the edge of the camp, and the camp was supplied with gas from Batavia gas works. And the early part of that time I was in there, the gas still came through and the rice was cooked in a glorified pressure cooker, and it was a very big thing, you know, two, nearly two metres across and over a metre deep, and you put

18:30 it into an aluminium cage, the rice, and you lowered it down with a winder and a pulley, and put it down into the hot water and shut the lid down and sealed it down like a pressure cooker. And then the rice boiled so long and so forth, the meter told you when it was sort of boiled enough, and you opened up the lid and with the windy crane and chain you lifted it up and let all the water drain out of it. Then you shovelled with an ordinary shovel, the rice,

19:00 into a wooden table – as the picture shows you – one man shovelled it onto the table, the other man with the garden rake, raked it out onto a table, and that took all the steam out, and it was ready then to put into the boxes to send out to the men. And I cooked for... well there was one time the camp was overloaded and my kitchen was cooking for over a thousand men, and I was getting very little sleep. 'Cause it had been

19:30 a Dutch kitchen, and the Dutch sergeant was in charge of the kitchen with a big crew, but the Japs got upset with the Dutch and they moved them out, and I got sent down to the kitchen. I think I had been pretty sick and put on light duties or something and went down to the kitchen, and I became in charge of the kitchen, and I had a crew of five or six fellows. But that was a tricky thing because I used to have to go down to the kitchen at

20:00 you know, half past two or three o'clock in the morning, and two fellows... I had to go down the pathway

which was near the patrolling Jap on the outside of the fence, and they shot two fellows on that pathway, so I was a little bit uneasy going to work at two o'clock in the morning to get the, ready for... Some men went out on, you had to have breakfast, and then you had to have the wooden boxes full of rice for them to take out on work parties,

20:30 so there was a lot of rice cooked before seven o'clock in the morning, or daylight, or whatever it was. But I became, I think I became very well then, I think that might, that period that I was working in the kitchen, I think that might have stood me in stead for later on when the camps got very tough. And later I was moved up to a place called Makasura, and not many people alive

21:00 today that know about Makasura. That was a big camp out in the forest area and it was all atap, what we call atap huts, glorified bamboo huts, and we slept on bamboo bedding about a metre off the ground, and they are all slats and you slept on the slats. There is an absolute replica of that, those beds in the

21:30 Canberra War Memorial, war memorial in Canberra. If you ever go there you will see these, exactly, we had one metre wide to sleep, each man had a metre to himself, and that was a big camp like that. And there were air force, army, navy and everything, everybody was put in. The boys off the [HMAS] Perth, they came in there, fellas from all sorts of units, and that was a big work party. We used to line up in the morning before dawn

22:00 and they even were able, for a short period there, to make a little loaf of bread, a little, black, doughy thing they made out of some sort of tapioca, I think they made it out of, and that was our morning sustenance. We would form up before dawn and we would march oh, I think it was about three miles, we marched out to, oh, I am

22:30 thinking, I am trying to remember the name of the place, but anyway we marched out to this place. And there was a river that went round it, there was a protective point of land, and there was supposed to be nine acres of ground there, and we got there and it was jungle. And with the Australian Army shovels, that the Japs had been able to scrounge, we cleared that away and dug it up and turned it into a big vegetable garden, we had irrigation, irrigation channels running through it and everything,

23:00 they turned it into a big garden. And when the boys used to take malaria attacks and so forth, we grew cucumbers on long sticks, and underneath the cucumbers we used to put the fellows that were sick, and they would lay underneath there all day until they got over the malaria, and the Jap couldn't see them either. But I later became the water sergeant and I was, walked up and down the water channels with a shovel on my

23:30 shoulder and I let the water out to all the different places. And there came a new little guard, a Korean guard, and he is up on his Korean tower that they built so they could look over, and he saw this long slab of a skinny Australian walking up and down with a shovel on his shoulder doing nothing, so he comes down out of his tower and lines me up and he is going to give me the biggest hiding he had ever gave anybody. And he stands me down in the

24:00 trench so as he could reach to me, and he started to hoe into me, and so forth, I didn't know what for but I realised later it's because I was walking up and down the water channel. I wasn't working was I? I wasn't digging. I would just let water out and then I would see how the water was going. And he into me and so forth, and the next minute, I'm facing... coming from behind me a bicycle, 'ptcheeoo,' goes right past me

24:30 and a figure flying through the air, lands full bore onto this Jap, and it was a Japanese sergeant that was in charge of taking us out to the farm. And he and I, if you can say it in a way, had something in common, he was a sergeant, I was a sergeant, and he always walked at the back of the crowd when we went back to camp at night time, back of... a sergeant's place is at the back of the unit, he always walks, marches in the rear.

25:00 So I was the sergeant, I walked in the rear and the Jap sergeant rode his bicycle alongside me, and we did converse a little bit and so forth and he helped me get a lot of boys out of a bit of trouble. But this squirt of a Korean was belting me, and somebody told him, and he came around on his pushbike and so forth, and he let his bike go – I knew it was his bike when I saw the thing – and he flew through the air, and he into this Jap, by gee. And he took out his

25:30 pack of cigarettes and handed me the packet and told me to go and sit under the big pine tree. So I nearly got a hiding then. I have never known any other Japanese to have any tendency to converse with us or be anything, he was a proper Japanese soldier, he would be a professional, he had been in the army a long time, he would be in his mid twenties and so forth. And

26:00 I lost him after that, I saw him once in Singapore, but he was an absolute soldier, perfectly dressed all the time, all the rest of it, yeah. He took us down, I volunteered for a party to go to Marta de la Rosa – now that is an interesting thing – that had been a convent out from Batavia and the Dutch scientists, or clever fellows, had put on Dutch uniforms as the

26:30 Japs came through and hidden themselves in this convent. But in the convent there was also a lot of sick men, and a fella by the name of Alan Tredennick from Brisbane, he and I stepped out and volunteered to go to de la Rosa, so we moved from Bicycle Camp and marched down whatever the mileage was to Marta de la Rosa. And what

27:00 had been the chapel, concrete floor and so forth, turned into a hospital, and there were fellas from all countries and so forth, laying on the floor on the thing, most of them dying. And there was one Indian chappie, a Sikh Indian, oh boy he was sick, he was dying, and excreta was just running out of him all the time, he lost control of bowel movement and everything else. And we worked at night time in the hospital, in the day

27:30 time out in the garden. One of our jobs was to empty the septic tanks, with buckets, pour it into another big bucket and on two wheels push this septic tank round and tip it onto the garden and grow vegetables. And the only bonus from that is when you finished with all the 'shoosh' all over you, because you didn't wear many clothes you see, you were allowed to go and have an extra wash, you know, so we would get an extra bath out of that, but that was another thing.

28:00 And while this man was dying, so ill, a Dutch scientist who was upstairs, they all hid themselves upstairs – I saw a very few of them – and this fellow took a sample of this poor man's discharge, and he cultured it, and turned it into a clear white liquid and called it fudge. And through an

28:30 interpreter he asked for volunteers that he could inject this into us, and he believed that if he gave it to us you wouldn't seriously suffer with dysentery. And I said, "Well this is worth it." So Tred, Alan Tredennick, and I were inseparable at that time, we lined up and got it and I never seriously, I got one decent bout of dysentery after that, so he was a pretty clever scientist.

29:00 And that other man that was in there was the third or fourth best piano player in Europe. And there was a piano in there, and I can remember it rained like mad this day and we didn't have to go out to work and this fellow came down and played the piano, I thought that was marvellous. He played some of the classiest music that you ever... and boy could he play a piano. So the talent that was in prison camps was unbelievable. That happened at Marta de la Rosa,

29:30 which had been a convent, and I was down there for a few months I suppose. And we had a Japanese sergeant called Lofty, and he was about a six footer, and he didn't treat us too bad, he could speak a lot more English, he had been brought up in a mission somewhere in Korea, and we could handle him. And that wonderful sergeant that I talk about, he was stationed in there, and the Australian doctor

30:00 that was down there was Pointerman – he is still alive in South Australia – Doctor Pointerman. He did a couple of operations on me, oh I had things removed, and in that place that was quite safe, but no anaesthetic to cut you or anything like that, but I don't know, we seemed to be able to take it. Couldn't do it now. And from Marta de la Rosa went back to Bicycle, ah, back to Makasura. Makasura we moved on again. The Japs kept moving us,

30:30 all the time till finally I got moved through to Singapore.

Why do you think they were moving you?

They are not logical. They want something done, get an order from up above, and they want men, 'All men do this, all men do something else,' you know. And the way they would line two hundred men up or any number of men, they would go along and they couldn't count. We would line up in fives, we would line up in ten, and they couldn't count thirty men, they

31:00 were just peasants, and so we had to count ourselves. That Sonei bloke, one night in Bicycle Camp, every man in the hospital or anything, no matter how sick you were, dying or anything else, had to get out on parade, and the whole camp had to be counted. Well I reckon it was dawn before... the sun had come up before they got the count. And we had counted ourselves and gave them the numbers and everything else,

31:30 they still couldn't get the count. And Sonei, at the end of that, as the dawn came – it was still not dawn now obviously – he got on the table at which he was famous at doing, he stood on the table and he wanted a 'light-oo,' a light-oo above his head. And the electricians had to come and hang the globe above his head and he wanted every man in the camp to walk past him, like that, so as he could look. And if you hair was too long he gave you a kick in the head,

32:00 as you went past, because if your hair was longer than that, you could get a hiding, you had to have your head shaved all the time, that is what the knife is there for.

Yeah, where did you get the knife from? Did you make it?

Oh that is a, yeah, that is a broken piece of kitchen knife, you know, an ordinary cutlery knife, it is only the end of that and I fashioned it up and a little bit of aluminium, made a handle on it, and I could shave two heads with that before sharpening again. But yeah, so that happened and then,

32:30 here is something that you have never heard of. The next morning, of that night that he kept everybody up all night trying to count us, for some reason or other I was picked, the 'oosh,' they would line you up in big numbers and they would just along and he would go, "Oosh," and that meant you get that way and you go, stay that way, so I was in the 'oosh' party. And I was sent back to my bunk to get my gear,

33:00 which was the little bit that I had, and we were loaded into a truck and we went up to Sukabumi, which is in the country, where the wealthy Javanese, ah, wealthy Dutch I beg your pardon, wealthy Dutch went

up before the war in the heat of the summer and had their holiday homes up there, and their big lovely hotels and swimming pools and everything. We were taken to one

33:30 of those, this small bunch of fellows, we were taken there, when we got there, there was a crew like you are, a crew from America. American Japanese, with a camera, and a crew and everything else, and we were stripped off and told to jump in the swimming pool and play ball and golf course, play golf and everything else. And this bloke a real Yank, Yank Japanese, he took all these photographs and everything else for propaganda reasons. Now

34:00 there is a TV personality who actually showed that once years ago, it is in the archives somewhere, of us fellows playing in that particular... They took us up to Sukabumi and put a nice meal in front of us and then took it away before we could eat it, they did, and then they took us back to camp again. I can't remember, I don't know, I think I might have been wrong,

34:30 I don't think we were allowed to go back to our bunk to get our gear, I think it was that, and I was terribly worried because my diary was hidden in all those special little things I had. But we did come back a day or two later or something like that, after we done all this making out we were playing golf and having lovely fun in the swimming pool. It was the most luxurious place, you know, like you go here for a holiday, but that is what was, a beautiful swimming pool, beautiful accommodation and all the rest of it. But it was

35:00 all bunkum, to make out that we were having a nice time.

You mentioned your diary, how did you manage to keep a diary going through those years?

Well people often ask me that, and I wonder myself sometimes. But some of the searching parties, the only place that you could put that was between your legs, hold it there, and hope they didn't ask you to move or didn't give you a hit because if you had of moved, you would have lost it. But I did keep it

35:30 in the roof places that I could reach, because the sloping of the roof allowed you to be able to touch the roof in spots and I was able to hide it. I used to hide it in all sorts of places, not always on my personal thing, and luckily I got back to the hiding place every time. And there was a time that we were emptied out of a hut and obviously we were on the move to move to some other place,

36:00 and I lined up with all the boys and everything else, and we got all our gear out of the place is empty, and I remembered my diary. So being a foolish young man in those days, I waited till the Jap wasn't looking and snuck back in the hut and got my diary, and got away with it. But they said, "You are mad, if they catch up with you they will lop your lolly off, you had no right to go back in

36:30 to that hut." But I did it, and I have still got my diary.

So did they search the huts very frequently?

Oh yes, you would never know when a 'searchie' was coming, yeah. As a matter of a fact towards the end as the boys weren't at all well and so forth, we used to take it in turns to stay awake for a short period each night and then wake the next bloke up, because they would come screaming into your hut and, yelling and screaming, they would have a bayonet,

37:00 bare bayonets or something, somebody could get hurt, yeah. We got searched every night you came in from a work party it, was 'searchie-searchie,' you always had to stand outside the guard house and somebody would search, and you always had to line up and always count in Japanese. So some fellows couldn't pick up the counting

37:30 in Japanese, so the ones that could count Japanese stood in the front row and when the soldiers formed ranks, four or five deep or something like that, the back row would fill up first and then the next row. Because the blokes in the front row usually got the clip under the ear or a rifle or something like that if you couldn't count 'ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku' quickly, they would give you a hit, and hit you with a rifle and yeah, that sort of thing.

38:00 **So how would they search, what would they do?**

Well...

Would they search you bodily?

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Because most of us, see towards the end we didn't have clothes, I mean, I had a lap, lap-lap as the pictures shows you of Changi and places like that, we didn't have clothes to go out to work with and so forth. But then we used to always carry our eating utensil with us,

38:30 and there is a method of, you know, hiding things and getting things back to camp. See in the early days in Changi they even brought a grand piano into Changi, the Australians are hydraulics, they will lift anything. So we were always on the scrounge to get something to bring it back in, it was a challenge all the time, pinch anything. Bring food back for yourself,

39:00 or your mate, somebody back in the camp who couldn't come out to work and you tried to get him something, yeah. The comfort that we did for each other was, well, it would be surprising. It is hard for people to understand that if you have got a fellow with his head on your lap and you know he is dying,

that is something that has got to come within you to do it and comfort him,

39:30 and tell him that if you live you will be in touch with his mum or someone like that. That is a sort of deep, deep, deep friendship. I have just been to Tasmania, as mother told you, and I went, we were hurrying back to the airport, we called back to see my dear friend Lloyd Spender, and I cried like a baby just to see Lloyd again. I might not see him again but we did

40:00 so much together in the camp, it is all these years, we are both in our mid 80s now, to go and see that boy again was wonderful for me, so there is something deep that experiences made us be so close together. And you are asking me to remember things that are a bit bitter right now, but to think that you could cradle another fella,

40:30 for one reason to give him comfort before he died. And that is something I hope never happens again, but it does, I see a little bit of it in these bombings on the pictures now, men pick up other men and run with them and all that sort of thing. But that is what the Aussie soldier did in our show, and I think they did it in the ’14–18 War too, and probably did it in Korea.

41:00 So... End of tape.

Tape 7

00:30 I think we left off when we were doing Bicycle Camp and then Makasura Camp...

Yeah we talked...

and I think we are almost ready to be shifted from there to Singapore.

Okay. I’m just curious, you have told us some really amazing stories, you have talked about the, at Makasura, or Bicycle Camp, I think there was the real nasty Jap...

Sonei.

Sonei. Then you have also talked about that

01:00 **sergeant who was a bit more of a...?**

Yeah, well he was, yeah, he was reasonable, and an absolute soldier.

Do you remember his name?

No, I never ever knew his name, no I didn’t know his name. I saw him once in Makasura, in one of the camps oh, Marta de la Rosa, he was in charge there and he had so many guards of course. And he used to have a guard to

01:30 heat an ex-petrol drum, which in those days was forty-four gallons, and they used to have to warm the water and after work every day he got into his bath, and he had a sort of lovely warm bath and so forth. And these two Japs displeased him considerably, and he obviously made them get this water hotter and hotter and hotter, and he stood them to

02:00 attention and tipped the hot water over them, yeah. So yeah, and it was at that Marta de la Rosa hospital, in the garden, we were working and the new Jap came, and a rather well built Jap, and he did absolutely everything to try and make me wrestle with him. He picked on me and the boys would say, “Cov, don't go near the so-and-so.. keep away from him.” He called me for everything because

02:30 I wouldn’t play wrestling with him. How brainless a thing it would be, and I wasn’t... you know, we were well into prison camp days, we were into ‘43 or ‘44 by then, we were well... and he was most anxious that I sumo wrestle him I suppose or something, I don’t know what he wanted to do. But that Marta de la Rosa was a, as I say, used to be a convent, and the work party that went down there we got treated very well

03:00 there, we didn’t get any hidings or anything else, we just had to over-work in the hospital at night time, looking after the sick and dying, and in the day time work on the vegetable gardens. But this is all that promoted dysentery, I mean, you have the horrible septic tanks that are absolutely terrible, all the terrible dysentery bugs from the hospitals going to the septics and then you emptied them out

03:30 and pour them out in the garden and grow tomatoes. Goodness gracious me.

Can you tell us about the hospital, what sort of activity was going on there and how much care and attention were, you know, the sick being given?

Very little attention, very little attention. See, I wasn’t there during the daytime, at night time after work we would go and try and do some sort of comfort at night time. But when a

04:00 chappie or human being gets dysentery to that state, it can’t be stopped, it is just a matter of time. And

of course it was then that I told you that that Dutch scientist made his mixture, you wouldn't know whether you did the right thing or not, but I think I did the right thing that time. 'Cause I got, back later in Singapore I got a

04:30 pretty nasty dose of dysentery there, and another Dutch doctor said, "Well the only thing you can do is take Epsom salts." I said, "Good heavens, I am losing it all now!" He said, "You take Epsom salts," he said, "And get rid of it properly." Which he had some Epsom salts – I don't know where he got it from – but I took some Epsom salts and it stopped me, and probably the injection I had.

05:00 Yeah.

So how were you communicating, or how were the Japs communicating with you guys, was it, did they have enough English or were you picking up Japanese?

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. See when you are in a position like that, I suppose there is only about ten words you need. My language bit with the Japanese was a lot of Javanese language, and Malayan,

05:30 a mixture of Malayan and Japanese together. The hard language to understand is the Dutch and just for brain, you know, keep the brain going I did my best to learn as much Dutch as I could, and some of that has remained with me. Some of the Malayan has, the basic things... food, can't, can, don't, do,

06:00 morning, good night, and that sort of thing, that has remained with me, but the rest of it... But nearly all the Japanese near enough to about four or five words has left me completely, it is just as if I couldn't tolerate it, you know, it has just left me. So, but the other thing that is interesting – and this should be recorded – that the Japanese language that was spoken in the '40s, or during the war, is a different language to the Japanese

06:30 speak now. And one little incident I left out, was that when we were in Tanjong Priok on, near Java, was a Japanese officer of some rank stood up on the table... This Japanese officer stood on the table, which I said to you

07:00 before was their habit, and in Jap... we had to, everybody in the camp had to line out and stand around this big parade ground, which obviously was a big square. And he spoke to us, gave us a talk in Japanese and we stood on one foot and then the other and said, "So-and-so, what the hell is he talking about?" And then he told us in English – now mark these words – he said then, in good English, that the

07:30 Japanese may not win this war but it doesn't matter because they were so part of the one hundred years of the advancement of the Japanese nation, it is one hundred years of the great sphere of the Japanese advancement. Now you think about it, 1940 they began, I told you before, began in 1920 with their invasions,

08:00 bombed Pearl Harbor twenty years later, went into our war properly, etcetera and since the war became a nation that did exactly what they wanted. Okay they have been set back financially and so forth by the world markets and so forth but, they have got to go to 2020 before they have got their first hundred years, and they have done more than what we have in the hundred years. And that, to me,

08:30 is still a worry, because I said to you before, they are so different in so many ways, their logic is wrong but they are so fanatical. Even dear old Weary Dunlop, in his books, says that they are just so fanatical and they haven't any logic, they just go ahead and do it. And they don't care if it takes a hundred years, they don't care how many people die, what life means is nothing, they just go ahead

09:00 advancing the Japanese nation.

Can you think of any more examples of that sort of logic or non logic that you saw? I mean the sort of fanaticism that you were talking about?

No, well it makes me realise about it, knowing the stupid way in which they went about things. If they had said and told us, even in broken English that we understood, that we want to

09:30 take the side out of that hill, or they want to build a railway from so-and-so thing as they did, they did this in Java, in sorry, Surabaya. The treatment in Surabaya was beyond dreaming, what they did to the people there. If they had said, "We want to do job (a) to (b), we want you to work with us and you are working with us," and so forth, it would have been done.

10:00 Our boys could have built the Burma railway and built it properly, but they had to kill half the bloomin' population to do it, so their cynical madness is obviously there. And you speak to anybody in business here in this country that has been associated with Japanese, they will tell you stories that just about curl your hair, what they will do to obtain, to con

10:30 people in to do things in business, they are ruthless, and they are just made that way. And I don't wish to hate anyone, I don't hate the Japanese, I can't stand them what they do, but if you hate you get sick inside. I won't hate anybody, but I don't trust them.

You talked about the, that officer who wanted to wrestle, whether it is sumo wrestling or whatever.

That's right.

Your mates were saying don't do it?

Oh, I wouldn't do it

11:00 in meself.

And why, yeah why, what would have happened had you?

Oh, I wouldn't be here to tell the story. If you beat him for one particular second, I mean, there is another three or four guards around him just waiting to bait you on. You see, one of their main things, you were not permitted to smoke, unless you had a little dish or tin with you with water in it, so that the idea being

11:30 that anything happened you could put your cigarette out, and you never drop a cigarette butt, that might cause a fire. So you are on a work party, and you are out working, and the Jap comes to you and says reasonable things to you in his language, in Malayan, and hands you a cigarette, "Smoko, smoko," you know. And you say, "No thank you, ulu lu, lu, lu." Righto? So with that you take the cigarette

12:00 and you put it behind your ear because you know you are not allowed to light it, and he goes crook at you for putting it there, "No, no, no." Gets his famous thing out, they love cigarette lighters, "Lightoo, lightoo, lightoo, lightoo." You light it and see what he does to you. Now that is the sort of thing that they would deliberately do all the time, that is just an example of what they do with a cigarette. Other things, they would try and get you to do it, if you didn't do it

12:30 they would belt you, if you did do it they would belt you. So that is, you know, the fanatic way that they went about it, and every POW will tell you the same thing. You couldn't trust them to do anything or trust them at any time, you would think there would be going to be a bit of relief but they were trapping you to do things, but the cigarette was the most famous one. But there were other things

13:00 that you, the rules and regulations that say, 'You can't do this,' but they would trap you into it, yeah. So, and they were always very upset if you couldn't count in Japanese on a parade, you had to know how to say the Japanese language, yeah. And another thing, you had to form outside the gate

13:30 after a work party and do the searchie-searchie, then, "All men do…" they were mad on, "All men do this and all men do something else." Then you would turn to march into camp and everybody had to 'kiotski,' which is salute with a stiff leg march, like some other soldiers do during the war, and that is how you march through the gateway. But yeah, I didn't tell you about,

14:00 I don't think we got to the wharf in Singapore. Working on the wharf in Singapore was very, very tough at times, and the British bombed the wharf in Singapore while we were not far away, while I was on that work party, and they kept us separate from any other prison camp workers that came down to work, but they bombed it. And we stayed at the wharf for, I think, now

14:30 I remember, I think it was about four nights altogether, and twice a day we got a ball of rice about, smaller than a tennis ball, and a sour plum in the centre of it, and that was a full ration for the day, you got one in the morning and one at night. And we had to clean up the burning of the incendiary bombs and everything else that fell and burning. And during one midday break

15:00 we had, no that wasn't during... yeah, it must have been just after the raid because we had carried our rice from the camp we were in, we had carried our rice in our wooden boxes, that had originally been boxes for horse feed, and when the British were there we used to think they were horse lines and we were camped in that particular area. And these wooden boxes,

15:30 the kitchen would put so much rice in them and you dip it out, so much one container, each man got his container at lunch time. Well we got this day, and after lunch or while it was quiet I wandered off, and that was, in itself was foolish but I did, to where the refrigerators had been. And along the wharf in Singapore then there was big areas of refrigerators,

16:00 like a building that contained a lot of chambers, and the roof was, holes in the roof where the bombs had fallen through. And I walked into this and I went into one chamber, oh I walked into a Jap in the dark and he ran and I stood, I don't know why I didn't run, he nicked off, he got such a fright when he saw me, or he felt me. And I went round in an open doorway there, and there in the corner was stacks and stacks

16:30 of frozen fish, now it was still frozen because it had been really frozen. So I went back to the fellas and said, "Look, we have got to do something about this, there is all that fish in there!" So three or four of us got the boxes that the rice had been in and we filled them with fish, took them back to the work party and said, "Righto, now we have got them, how the heck are we going to get them back to camp?" Because the boxes had little wooden

17:00 lids on them, but that could hide that and so forth. So anyway we gave it a try. We marched back to camp, each taking our turn to carry this, pass these three or four boxes backwards and forwards. So when we got back to camp we thought, 'Well the only thing to do the 'searchie-searchie' is on, so we put the boxes down and so forth, so we better tell the Jap what is in it.' So fortunately for us they are mad on fish, so when we told them there was the fish and so forth we got

17:30 away with it, and they took their selection of fish, and the kitchen made a fish soup out of the rest, but they got the best of it. But that was a good story, we got the fish out of the refrigerator. But there again, I am no hero – excuse me – but, you know, you do foolish things. I should never have gone near the chamber and everything else but we did, we got away with it.

Well did you have radio in any of those

18:00 **camps in Java then in Singapore as well?**

The answer is yes. It was kept secret even between each other, because if a fellow knew who had the radio and the Jap picked you on for some reason and started to torture, but you might unintentionally say who has got it, that was it. But they, in Java Bicycle camp they had

18:30 good British calling, you know, "This is the BBC," they definitely had. They had them in water bottles, several fellas, but you didn't know who had them, and I know they carried them through in Changi.

So you were getting, I mean, news, be it second hand, but you were sort of still finding out what was going on outside?

Yeah well, in a way we did. But you see the war was over for

19:00 oh, I think about three days before we found out about it, and some of the boys were a lot longer than three days before they found out. So we were really told that the war was over by some Germans who had two submarines in Singapore Harbour, that had been damaged while at sea, and they had been able to limp into Singapore and they were trying to repair,

19:30 probably trying to get one work to get back to Germany, but they didn't get back, but the Japs didn't worry them at all. And they used to pass by in trucks, they had trucks to themselves, and they used to sort of call out things in a way, but they told us that the war was over and we didn't really know. And we only really found out the war was over because one morning

20:00 we woke up and the guard gates were open and there was no Japs. Within a couple of days we were taken back to Changi, and from Changi they formed the units and sent messages home to Australia, lists of the prisoners of war. The paper tells that one that I have got there, it got my name in it to let the family know that I was still alive. So

20:30 that was the only reason we knew the war was over, they just disappeared out of the camp that night. And the next big wonderful thing that happened, being on the wharf in Singapore at the end of the war, the ship, British ships came in to the harbour. And one morning, early, a jeep – something we had never seen – drove into the camp with a fellow driving it and a lady sitting alongside him

21:00 and it was Lord Louis Mountbatten and Mrs, and Lady Mountbatten. And those two came ashore without any escorts or anything else, and drove their jeep around Singapore looking for, what was his name, oh gee, that terrible fellow that was in charge of Singapore. Yeah well he, took all his clothes off him and locked him up in a cell until the time, the signing of the... oh he was, Mountbatten was really mad.

21:30 Mrs, Lady Mountbatten, the tears ran down her face when she, when all the boys gathered and stood around her. She signed a hundred dollar bill for me, of Singapore money thing, and during my talks and everything somebody has pinched it – you can't count people can you? I have lost me hundred dollar bill with Lady Mountbatten on it. But he must, you know, he was a remarkable man that fellow, because he was supreme commander,

22:00 why did he get off a ship mind you, you know, of a naval vessel. He and his wife, get into a jeep and drive into Singapore. Oh well, pretty brave thing to do I thought at the time.

How, during this whole time, I mean, how much of your – you were sergeant of a platoon – how much of that group had stayed together?

None. The Jap was marvellous at splitting

22:30 us all up. Yeah, I don't think any of my boys went through with me all the time, you just got new group, new group, a new group. There may have been some, yeah. No, I don't think... Noel Close, who lives in Launceston now, he was in one of my crowd for a long time, but I don't know

23:00 where I picked him up and, you know, it was just... See you would have Dutch men in your bloomin' squad. As I said to you, the Japs would line a lot of people up and they would do their famous 'oosh' and whatever went to the left, went to the right... the left ones they might, they might have finished up in Japan, you wouldn't know where they were going to finish up. So, you know, it is just the way it all ran until it was, until it

23:30 came to an end and, you know, you just hope that you... And the sad, sad thing about it, a couple of boys died on the ship on the way home, gone through all that and then to, you know, plug comes undone on the way home. But the getting over it was a difficult period; it took us years to get over it. Our families, our families welcomed us

24:00 home and gave us the Australian wonderful roast dinner and meals... that nearly killed us, 'cause the Australian... there was no advice, advice should have been given, 'Feed the boys on rice and gradually let them eat.' We got taken from the wharf onto one of the British ships and they sacrificed their ration to feed us, because we looked so sick and so ill, and they fed us sausages and mash.

24:30 And the boys lay on the ground and screamed with pain, because what it did to your tummy so, you know, the tummies had shrunk to such an extent. See a twelve stone bloke was down to six stone.

What about yourself, what sort of weight and condition...?

Yeah, I was just a little over six stone when I came back to Australia. And you saw how big I was in the picture, powerful, strong

25:00 and as good a physique that you would get a young fellow at that age, just withered away. Oh well, life is like that, I mean, you can't be too sad about it everybody has their problems. I think the kids of today have got far more problems with drugs and booze than we ever had, the drug bit is the most shocking thing with people knocking themselves about. I think we had the

25:30 desire to keep ourselves a bit better than that, you know, it was... a fellow might have a few too many beers and be a bit stupid one night but he wouldn't do it again for quite some time. But mentally it knocked some fellas, they never ever got over it, I think I am very, very fortunate that mentally I was strong enough to realise... And the point is that I am talking to you now,

26:00 if you had asked me to talk to you like this 1946 and '47, I would not have said a word. We just couldn't say anything. We just couldn't get over the shock of it when we came home. And, you know, to think that we tried to pick up the threads and tried to establish ourselves back, very few of us remained in the jobs that we'd had, because we just couldn't do it. I went

26:30 back to the foundry for a little while but I couldn't do that. I came down here to Mornington to recover etcetera, got married and tried to start life, I began to start life, so that is how it is.

And the not talking about it, was that because people were not interested or was it simply because it was too much to...?

Too much, yeah, yeah. I am quite sure,

27:00 and I think other boys have said, that people would not believe you, it's not being believed. And the stigma that we were prisoners of war, "How came that you became a prisoner? Why didn't you continue on with your war?" and everything else, you know. "You should never have become prisoners of war." They didn't realise that all the odds were stacked against you, everything was stacked against you, so that is how it is.

27:30 But we wouldn't talk about... I didn't even wear a badge for years and years, yet it came in 1984 I turned around completely and built the POW wall here in Mornington, of which I am extremely proud of, because it was the first and only prisoner of war wall and garden built in Australia, that is here in Mornington. And the response that we have got to some of

28:00 the pictures that I have shown you today, hundreds came to our POW Day, which is the Sunday nearest the 11th , hundreds came, year after year after year. Now the numbers are down so low, last year we carried on with it and a few POWs came, but the relatives came, and they are wishing like mad and trying to tell me to run it again still.

28:30 But the last prisoner of war, ah, for the Sparrow Force was held in February this year and twenty-two POWs came. There were six hundred and something returned to Tasmania, and now there is only twenty-two.

You said how coming back in '46 that, straight after the war, you couldn't really talk and it was just a matter of trying to get on

29:00 **with life, but then in the '80s it changed and... what was the cause of that perception? There was more awareness and an attempt to reflect I guess, and to commemorate, what brought that on do you think?**

I don't know that it was, I don't think there is any difference, it is just a mad bug that I got. I,

29:30 I think the point is that Dorothy and I went over to Tasmania, again at a reunion. In the park in Ulverston an ex-navy boy had done a naval walk, and he worked for the council and the council gave him his head, and he made pavements and he wrote in the pavements, very clearly, the name of every Australian ship and what it did, and made a whole walk-way,

30:00 and then they made a naval sort of memorial area, not so much a garden, a memorial area to the Australian navy. And members of the Australian navy, the Perth and those other ships, the [HMAS] Quickmatch and so forth, they have over the years gone back to Launceston just to feel that it was a real navy thing. And we saw that. And then there was a little bit of a garden, with a

30:30 couple of wooden of poles, and it said, 'The Prisoners of War Memorial...' just, 'To Prisoners of War'

written on that. And coming home Dorothy said to me, “Why don’t you do something about that in Mornington?” And I thought, ‘Well perhaps it would be a good idea,’ so I approached the council, who were the council then before they got this big thing going, each little town had

31:00 its own council. And Ken MacArthur was the engineer and he said, “Bill I think you have got something, I think I will see if I can do something about it, I will get you...” And he got in touch with me and he said, “Look I can get a $4000 grant from the council to provide work, $4000 worth of work, we won’t give you money,” so that is good. And then he told me about

31:30 the granite that was hidden in the bushes and so forth, and with a wink and a nod, or something, he said, “Well I think we had better use that.” So a very, very skilled mason by the name of Rex Hepner, I got onto Rex, and Rex and his mates built the POW memorial wall and garden. We needed a lot

32:00 more money, so with a lot of letter writing and stirring that you do with those sorts of things, Sir Edward Weary Dunlop got behind the program, the POW Association a bit. We got, we raised, we opened the wall on the 11th November, I think, ‘84, we had it dedicated by a couple of ex-army padres,

32:30 and we had a box for donations that day, and I think we raised $2,500 that very day. And then we went on and I think I raised with funds, $9000 with no government assistance or anything. Then the different units started to say, “We would like a seat.” So seats were $600, all made, as you will see they are beautiful seats,

33:00 so a lot of units and a lot of things got money for that. Women’s organisations, the Country Women’s [Association], the fire brigade, the Rotary Club, all they came and... “We want a seat in your park,” it is not my park. So then it went on from that and we have, I think we spent somewhere in the vicinity, I have raised somewhere in the vicinity $19… to $23,000 for those things. People kept donating, people come up

33:30 to me in the street and say, “Here is $5, here is $10,” you know, no receipt, nothing, “Just put it to the wall, Bill.” Well, you know, you couldn’t do anything else but be honest and put it into the fund. I had a fund in the bank and course pulled it out later, because they only charge you things and so forth. So that is what we did. And then a Mr Ken Matthews, an ex naval lieutenant commander, he sort of came to... ‘cause I used to have to write all the letters

34:00 in long hand and all this sort of thing, get people to sponsor us etcetera. And that is how we raised the money. But then Ken Matthews came on the point and he is an ex lieutenant commander with much more skill at office work than I had, and so Ken and I formed the Mornington... oh, I can’t even think what called ourselves, and

34:30 so we formed this little organisation and set to, to move the monument. And then of course we moved on from there and got the other things going. But the horse troughs are just a personal thing I did. The occupational force of Japan came to light with some money and they have got a big block at the side for them, but otherwise everybody is occupational of some sort of thing, some war that we have done. So we have got

35:00 POWs, the honour roll, the ’14–18 War, the Vietnam, Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Iraq, everything, I have got plaques for everything, and then I got the Boer War as well.

And that is horse troughs is it?

The horse troughs are the last thing we actually built, but we have added to the Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam War and put all the plaques on there, so we have got a plaque for everything. But the only assistance we got

35:30 from the Federal government was $25,000. And we have now found out that the central cenotaph is in a bit of trouble and I am trying now to get $4000 from the Federal government so we can drill into the centre of the cenotaph, put a camera in, take a photo and find... because it was moved in 1971/72 from on the highway and

36:00 put on that spot and we don’t think there was any foundations put to it, and it is sitting there and there is a lot of dampness coming up and a lot of obvious problems, so we hope to fix that.

I am just hoping that I can take you back to sort of Singapore, we didn’t really get a picture of that movement from Java. I am not sure what the last camp was that you were in, in Java before you moved to Singapore, do you recall?

36:30 I think it must have been the place they called Kampong Makassar. Kampong Makassar is the Malayan way of saying it. But I moved in a very – here again is an odd thing – I have got very odd stories different to the main bulk. I must have moved with about, might have been forty to fifty men were moved on to a tiny little

37:00 oh, coastal trading boat, glorified fishing boat. It was overloaded with all sorts of things, and about three Jap guards and a Jap to drive it, open boat, and we travelled from Batavia up through Surabaya along the coast, tootled around… even passed Lombok and passed Bali, hiding in the mangrove swamps at times,

37:30 and night time moving up through the water. The water line was about four inches from coming into the boat, so it wouldn't have done any good if we had struck a storm, and we just took so many days – I can't even remember, it was so torturous – 'cause we sat in this open boat in the mangroves, sometimes, in the day with the mosquitoes and everything else and the heat

38:00 and... I didn't even write in my diary, because I wouldn't have been able to, because I would have been seen. But we just suffered terribly and we were taken quietly, and everything else, into Singapore Harbour ultimately. And from there we were moved to, on gee, I can't remember where it was, but it was very near the kempetai which is the torture place, which was along there, where

38:30 they used to torture the poor people and, you know, sometimes you could hear them screaming from... this camp was right close to it and so forth, and they used to work on the wharf in Singapore. Then later I was taken from there across the causeway to Johor Bahru to up along the beach, somewhere through there we worked, I don't know what we bloomin' did. And then we were brought back to Singapore and brought, and camped

39:00 on the beach near Pasir Panjang, which is Long Sandy, and that is not far from the Tiger Balm Gardens, but since then it has all been reclaimed and is not there. But all the camp that we had was laying on the sandy beach at night time, and in the day time we went up over the top of the hill and built tunnels into the small hills at Mount Faber.

39:30 And we used to have what they call a hammer and tack, which is a long piece of steel and the steel hammer, and you keep, you hit it once and it turns the piece of iron, and then he hits it again, it turns it a bit more, and that bores holes into the stone. And into the... once you get the holes in deep enough you put in dynamite and you blow to make tunnels, and that is what we were doing, and there is a funny story there.

40:00 The chappie by the name of Sam Lowe from Tasmania, we made the tunnels. A lot of times we used to sit at, the Jap... it was so hot the Jap guard used to go down and sit underneath the trees and leave us to keep on tunnelling, and we used to just sit there and bang the two bits of steel together. But this time we had made some holes, oh four or five, maybe more holes, and we got the dynamite from the Jap

40:30 to bloomin' well... 'boom-boom.' And he stacked the five holes with dynamite, wired them all together and told us to get down the valley. Well down underneath their favourite tree was our two guards, and they were laying back with their rifles up against a tree, on their backs doing the 'esmai,' which means sleep or rest, and Sammy let these five bombs off. Well, gee whiz. I reckon the Jap went two feet off the ground before he

41:00 started running, they took to the scrub, we thought it was marvellous. Out the side of the hill came all this rubbish and bloomin', you know, from an explosion. And of course the Japs came back, didn't they, and they lined us all up and they were going to give us the biggest hiding they have ever... and somehow or other, in a broken language, I was able to explain to the Japs that this man here was number one dynamite man in all

41:30 Australia, and they believed me. Oh, gee whiz, that was close. But, you know, even though we were so ill and so sick you had to have a bit of humour. But I will still remember these Japs that were laying sound asleep or, I don't know whether they were sound asleep, and 'boom' this bloomin' thing went, and the rubbish... and they took off. By Jove they went, left their rifles at the tree. But I thought when they came back I thought, 'Think,'

42:00 because only a day before, or a few days before – I mustn't say a day before – some time before they...

Tape 8

00:33 **Yeah, so you were telling us a couple of days before the 'boom-boom'...?**

Yeah, they belted a Jap to death, you know, and they killed him.

Who did?

A Jap got a dislike to one fellow, I never ever found what he did or the party that he was with. He was with a party of about ten or twelve fellas, and the Jap disliked what one of them did, picked him out and he just belted him and belted him and belted him, and

01:00 the fellow was dead before... you couldn't stop a Jap. Several times I remember we tried to stop a Jap from hitting a man, enough is enough, you know that sort of feeling? But no, no.

But even hitting their own, you mean?

Oh no, hitting us, we couldn't care less, you could belt the daylights out of a Jap until he's not there, we wouldn't mind, but we tried to tell them to ease up, you know, "You have hit him enough." But they killed this man,

01:30 and this was at Mount Faber which is now a marvellous tourist thing with a cable car that goes across, all that sort of thing. But history is history and what happens, happens, yeah.

You told us the story about the dynamite, I guess it sounds like there were those rare occasions where you could, there was humour, you could have a laugh...

Oh yeah.

at the expense of, you know, these people who were being so brutal. Were there other examples of that sort of thing where you might have got

02:00 **your own back just a little?**

Yeah, I suppose there was but I don't really recall at this stage anything of that, though I remember that very vividly. I think we were playing jokes on the Japs all the time, I mean, most of the jokes came back our way, they didn't know. You know, the Japs, we taught them to swear in Australian and say things and they thought they were talking

02:30 properly, but they were saying terrible things and so forth.

Yeah, for example?

Oh well, we taught them to say bullshit and they thought that was very good, you know, simple things like that, you know. That went on for a very, very... I can remember in one camp one night, one funny little fellow we taught him, he came running through the camp and we are all trying to go to... and he is singing out, "Bloody red light! Bloody red light! Bloody red light!" And we

03:00 used to say, because when we saw the nips coming, the bloke who would see, the first... "Red light." And he is running through the bloomin' middle of the hut singing out, "Bloody red light! Bloody red light! Bloody red light!" Yeah, all those sort of things. I should tell you the story of Tommo Thompson. We were still way back in Timor, still we are, and we are getting a few cold nights,

03:30 and some of the boys with malaria were shivering, no blankets or anything like that. And this day, the Japs were great at sort of no clothes on, just a g-string type thing, and they would lay down where they, 'cause they seemed to have plenty of weight on them, a lot of them – rice makes them fairly round. And they were laying in the sun or they had been sleeping it up before in this hut, it was just outside our gate,

04:00 it was supposed to be their guardroom. And they had taken the blankets, which were Australian blankets, and they had hung them across the barbed wire fence to dry and warm in the sun, or something like that. And this fellow Thompson, he said, "I think I want a blanket." And I said, "Oh yeah, we all want a blanket." He said, "I am going to get a blanket." "What do you mean?" He said, "Well look, see that blanket there that has got

04:30 the grey strip down the middle of it, different to all..." There was an odd army blanket that had been made out of different coloured wools, and there was occasional, a light coloured grey with a dark grey strip down the middle, or a dark blanket with a light coloured strip, and the strip was about half a metre wide. And Tommo said, "I am going to get that blanket." And I said, "You are mad." So with that, he takes off, and we are all watching him. And he

05:00 goes up to the guard on the gate and puts his hands clear to his side, bows to the guard and says, "Oosh," the guard just takes no notice. And he walks around, goes around to where all these blankets are on the line, goes to the first one, shakes it all puts it back on again, goes along, shakes it all, and all these Japs are laying in the sun and nobody is watching him, nobody, must have thought he was being a servant or something, he is shaking all these blankets. And he comes to this grey one

05:30 and gives it a shake, folds it up very carefully, puts it on there, goes along. And he goes back to the blanket, puts it under his arm and quietly walks around to the gate and bows to the – with the blanket under his arm still – bows to the Jap on the gate, comes back inside again. And then we said to him, "Now you got the blinkin' thing home, you idiot, what are you going to do with it?" He said, "I am going to put it on me bed." I said, "You put it on your bed, they will bloomin' do an inspection, they will see it

06:00 surely." He said, "They won't even know it is there." Sure enough they didn't know. Now the guts that it took that man to do that is indescribable, because if they had caught him, his guts would have still been hanging on the barbed wire fence, I'm telling you. But things like that could be done in the very early part of Timor, but you couldn't do anything two years later. Two years later they were onto everything, every excuse

06:30 that they could they would turn it into something vicious, you know, hanging fellows up by their thumbs for hours on end. And why the human body will take so much punishment is beyond my comprehension, the human body takes a hell of a lot of punishment. Fellows left in the sun for hours and hours, fellows with... between your elbows across your back with a pole

07:00 and your arms stretched back like... and you try and, for two minutes, it hurts more than anything. Fellows with poles at the back of their knees and told to kneel on the pole, well let alone what your knees do to what the rest of your body... it is those sort of things. And then I have seen them line up Dutch girls – the Dutch were very prominent in Java – and there was a camp further along with a lot of

women folk

07:30 with their daughters, and they used to wave to the boys inside, and this was at this hospital at Marta de la Rosa. They lined up four or five little girls one time and stripped em, and they went along with their cigarettes burning them. Just deliberately callous, nasty fellows.

You said how they would try to bait you into some act of violence so that, you know, their

08:00 **retribution would be even greater, I guess.**

That's right, yeah.

Did you see men who fell for it, got to a point where they just couldn't resist and that was it, they had to...?

Well I, well it is a case of, if he came up to you and offered you a cigarette you knew darn well you were going to get a few whackings, you couldn't get out of it. Because if he offered you the cigarette and you said, "No, don't smoke," he would belt you. If you took the cigarette, he would belt you. If you didn't light it, he would belt you. So you knew darn

08:30 well that sort of childish behaviour, that is all it... their brain power was not much better than children was it, when you come to think of it. I mean that is just sadistic things. It is no worse than the idiot Muslim that we got today, he doesn't know why he is doing it, he makes out that it is Allah that is telling him to do it, or his God, but that's... his God is inside his head,

09:00 that's where God is, nowhere else, there is no God outside, it's a God inside your head. Well the Shinto shrine of the Japanese, you didn't see much of it but they must have been told to do this and do that within their own heads, you can't think anything else, it is all just like that.

What part did religion play amongst, within the camps, if at all?

09:30 A respect for a padre, that is about all. I also carried a small Bible with me because I had been brought up as a good Sunday school boy, and went to church and so forth. But the realisation of what Christianity really is, came to us chappies very, very early. And as for that Bible

10:00 story that says, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do,' there has been a great statement that is in The Bible, we knew darn well they knew what the hell they were doing. So that, those sort of quotations from The Bible that you were taught as a child and so forth, we knew they were a prefabricated things that somebody else had suggested a philosophy that wasn't true. And it has shaken my foundation...

10:30 to this day I am getting more upset about it, I suppose, and then turn off and say, "Well, I can't do much about it," to see which way the Christian church has turned in the last ten to fifteen years in this country, does not surprise me at all. Because well, probably shouldn't talk about it in these sort of things, but the lies that have been told and the lies through England – again, England is to blame for this – the Church of England,

11:00 and the other churches that have gone on about all these Jesus stories which are prefabricated, made up, most of the stories that they quote from were written sixty to a hundred years after Christ died. And you can't tell me, you are trying to get stories out of me that are sixty years old, and we now have the equipment to probably get a bit of the truth.

11:30 But when you have got, all those years ago, people who can't spell, can't write, can't do anything, how can you get a true story sixty years afterwards? So you do the same thing that those writers would have done, you copy each other, you hear phrases, etcetera. And that's what's to me is collapsing the whole religious thing. There is only one peaceful religion, and that is Buddha.

12:00 Buddha lives its religion because Buddha is an expression of what life is, and what peace can be in their mind.

So what would keep you going through those years, I mean, through immense hardship?

Bloody determination. As I told you about little Jackie Moles when they broke the shovel, and the Jap hated you to break a shovel handle, so they lined

12:30 us all up and the man who broke the shovel didn't own up to the broken handle so they lined us all up opposite each other and told us to start slapping each other. And Jackie Moles had the fellow opposite him that broke the shovel and he belted the daylights out of him. But the same little Jackie Moles, and I too, had been defiant enough, and the Jap give you a clock over the face, "You hit me again you yellow bastard, hit me again," and you would keep saying

13:00 things, and that would keep you standing on your feet. "You are not going to beat me you so-and-so. Hit me again you yellow bastard," and we would say things like that to ourselves. But you would say things, like, as I said The Bible quotations, '...forgive them for what they know, what they do, for they do not know what they do.' Well they bloody well knew what they were doing all right. So it is just sheer determination, "You are not going to beat me mate." And while you kept

13:30 well and didn't get any of the terrible diseases, typhoid or anything like that, it just sheer determination that you weren't going to beat me. Some fellas have got it, some fellows haven't, and I think that is the only reason why I am telling you stories today because you were determined that they weren't going to beat you. And you have got some funny determination thing, now that I am an older man and I think back a little bit, I probably

14:00 had that determination all the way through. But as long as you rule your determination with gentleness you can fit in society, and that is what I have tried to do. I am no hero, I'm no anything else, but you just try to do it gently. So, you made it or you don't make it.

At what stage did you sort of realise that, you have talked about the Korean guards and how, you know, that guard Sonei,

14:30 **who was beating his own men quite viciously, at what stage did you realise the hierarchy of what was going on and the way, the part that the Koreans played in that?**

Oh, I think we soon, no, I couldn't give you any time on that, but I think we soon learned, see the Korean wore a different uniform, he's different colour and a different badge on his cap, and you would know which was a Korean and that. And slowly as the war progressed

15:00 there were less and less Japs about, there were the Korean, they recruited the Korean guards to look after us, and of course the Koreans were hated by the Japanese – and I think they still are – and of course the Koreans had that terrible treatment from the Japanese, and so they just passed the treatment on to us.

Did Red Cross food parcels, anything

15:30 **of that sort, ever get through?**

No, no, no. The Japs made sure of that, they found a lot of it after the war and things like that. I think, I might be, I think once in Java, in the Bicycle… no, in Makasura, no you ask me, I think I saw for the first time ground coffee, instant coffee. That came in some sort…

16:00 I think it might have been in tins, and it was the boys off the [USS] Houston that told us that what it was, it was coffee, and that had been out of ratted Red Cross parcels.

Just talking a bit more about Singapore and getting there, you mentioned how you sort of…?

On a little, small boat that sneaked along the coastlines.

Yeah, why was it such a circuitous route to get

16:30 **to Singapore?**

You tell me why. I haven't got the faintest idea, neither does anybody else. I don't know why they took such a small party, I don't know why they took us on a little boat. Perhaps all the big boats were being used elsewhere or something.

Was there much sort of allied air activity at that point?

No, none at all. See there wasn't actually, actually there was very little air activity over Singapore at all. I mean, all aircraft and all the war things

17:00 were looking after the other war parts, you know, so. And you got to remember that date '44, wasn't it, the New Guinea campaign was in full… and the Solomons, all that sort of business, that is where all the strafing was going on. Singapore was out of it, we were very lucky to be in Singapore. And of course we were still in Singapore when the word had been issued from Japan to kill all POWs, as you

17:30 probably interviewed other people, you know that that order came through. If it hadn't been for the atom bomb, we would have been wiped out. But the funny thing about it was, or one of the things about it is that when they did surrender they thought we would turn on them, the same as they turned on us. But as far as POWs were concerned most of us just couldn't be bothered, we were just so relieved to get out and get a bit of

18:00 food, get some tucker.

You mentioned off camera about Singapore and the Chinese.

And how helpful they were, yeah.

Can you tell us about that?

Well, the Chinese, as you know, can't be beaten. I mean, even the wealthy Chinaman and so forth, dresses exactly the same as the poor Chinaman does. And we found that when we were working on

18:30 the railway lines and down in terrible places in Singapore, there would be an odd one or two Chinese about and so forth. And every now and then one would walk past you and so forth, and as he walked past you would just watch him and so forth, and after he had gone a few yards you would see there was

something laying on the ground that he had dropped. And you wouldn't follow him and pick it up, you would wait until everything was right and the moment was right before you attempted to pick

19:00 it up. So, so, you know, they were trying very hard, as I said to you before – I think it was off camera – that the Japanese money that I showed you that I have got carefully saved up there of the Singapore... it was the Chinese that printed it faster than the Japs, so that undermined their currency in that country.

19:30 So, yeah.

Because they were getting treated just as harshly, weren't they, the locals, a lot of them?

Oh, in some ways they were. I have been back to Singapore a couple of times since and I have picked up a driver, on one occasion we picked up a driver and said, "I want you come to back every day," etcetera. And talking to him, and he told me that he was a driver for the British, on trucks and things like that, and when the British just got

20:00 ousted out he was a driver for the Japanese, and then when they got kicked out he went back to driving for the British again, so the mentality of the Chinaman is so different. And I think you will find that their philosophy that says, 'There is only one thing that cleans up a muddy river, and that is time.' So if you can last the time, just let it happen and let it pass by.

20:30 Now, and that has been the history of the world, really, and it is just a matter of time before all this Muslim, Jewish, Palestine... I mean, they have quietened down the IRA [Irish Republican Army] quite a lot, so it is just a matter of time. But the trouble they caused during that time, hurts a lot of people. And we are going to be hurt right now,

21:00 I think we are going to be hurt, this country is going to be hurt, in a way that we would never dream of, and that is sad to me. Because we wasted, we wasted all our years as prisoners of war going to that war, all for nothing. You can say it was for trade, it was for this, it was for everything else, Australia would have been much better off, and so would all the other countries

21:30 that weren't involved in that time. The damage it did to Europe and all that sort of thing, that war over there was a different war. But I am very much afraid my analysis of it that that's not going to be this time, it is going to be the same war all over the world, it is the same war, it is right in amongst us, whereas the last time you put on a uniform and you went to it,

22:00 or you put on a uniform you were part of it. But this time it is the population, just in your ordinary jeans and clothes and so forth, they are the ones who are going to suffer. That is only my philosophy; it might not be right but never mind.

And I guess you are kind of saying that, I mean, war is futile, but the fact that that was World War II, we had to respond, and that was part of what you were involved in.

That is right, I don't doubt that for one moment.

22:30 But the deliberate, deliberate mistakes – well I can't call deliberate really a mistake – but the instructions. Fancy sending the best cream of this country, that didn't have a population very high, to Gallipoli and sending them to the wrong place. Fancy sending three units of soldiers to Timor,

23:00 Ambon and Borneo for nothing. Anybody that knew anything about military movement would know that a little over a thousand men on any island in the tropics could not do any good at all. That didn't save our country, we didn't do our job, we couldn't do our job. It should have been much more positive than that, sending...

23:30 I mean, the thing that annoys me is that we were sent to those places by instructions from England, and England doesn't know anything except, the English person doesn't know anything else but English tradition of villages, little streets and all those sort of things. Put a Pommy out in the middle of Australia and you'll... he is lost, and we saw that with the

24:00 English artillery. Those Pommy boys had never seen a tree as big as a tall palm or a jungle thing like that, they were lost, they didn't know which way to go, they haven't got the ability to adapt. So it was under Churchill's guidance that he told the Australian Government to send boys to help Java, to help the Dutch... should never have done it. And the first time Australia stood up to itself

24:30 is they have gone to Timor under their own orders, we didn't ask another country could we, we went into Timor. And we should have gone into Timor when those journalists were killed all those years ago. And Tom Uren [politician] was second in command to [Australian Prime Minister Gough] Whitlam, or way up with a bunch of top men, Tom Uren was a prisoner of war with us on Timor and he should have

25:00 seen that Australia went in to clean that up, and we would have done a lot better than... it wouldn't have turned out the mess that it is now. And Indonesia hates us. Isn't it Indonesia that has got more soldiers than we have got population? Yeah.

So when Sparrow Force was sent, when you knew you were going to Timor and you knew it was just battalion strength versus, you know, whatever was out there, was there already a feeling that this was, there was a sacrifice?

25:30 No, no, we didn't have any idea. It was a holiday, it was wonderful, we were enjoying ourselves, we were so blasé, we were so naïve and everything, it is hard to believe but we were. We were just doing what we were told, we were right, we are the famous Australian Army. Yeah, all that brainwash, you know, absolute typical brainwash. Go over to the islands and so forth; we didn't know what island we were going

26:00 to but it was all going to be hula-hula girls and all that sort of funny lot. They don't tell you that you are going over to a malaria infested, dysentery bloomin' hole. We were no more, we white people in those days were not accustomed to that sort of life or living at all, the food is all wrong, everything. So no, it was just,

26:30 we, as I said to you, very beginning in the first tape, we did what we were told. We believed that our leaders were right, we believed that England was the greatest nation in the world, it would never do anything wrong. When you get older you start hearing about... you don't know much about history. You today, probably only just touch a little bit of history, you haven't thought about the history like I have, when it's our things.

27:00 The history of The Bible, the history of nations and so forth comes to you when you are an old person and you start to think it out, as a young person every day is all right. What can happen? I mean, now we know a bit because we get news ploughed at us every hour of the day and all that. Well we didn't get news like that, none of us. So, no, it is just that sheer

27:30 Australian ignorance. Australian ignorance, that went on when the migrants came and we called them New Australians or Dagos and everything else. We shouldn't have done that; they were people the same as we are. But that is life. And we have learned a lot and yet we haven't learned. We have learned a lot, but we haven't. Human beings are very funny, crazy mixed up things.

28:00 So that is about it. And then you get to the point where the war is over and you all form up... I will tell you a funny thing about the war over. We are all back in Changi to get organised into different groups, who lives in Victoria, who lives in Tassie, who lives in New South Wales, getting them all together, putting units together, putting names in newspapers, sending it back to Australia. And we are in Changi,

28:30 and the Australian Army has taken over their section, the Pommy Army has taken over their section etcetera. And they put up a big army truck, a closed in vehicle, and on the top of it they have got loudspeakers, as we call them in those... big speakers, and that's in case of, for entertainment and so forth. And the first music that was played over the loud speakers was "Don't Fence Me In."

29:00 Bing Crosby singing "Don't Fence Me In." I have always thought that bloke had the most wonderful sense of humour. And I have spoken to a couple of fellows and very few noticed it, there is only people who were a little bit interested in music or had a little... that have said it. And another bloke said, "See you remember that," he said, "I remember that, the first music that came over the loud speakers was, Don't Fence Me In." So then we all formed up at different,

29:30 you know, times and we were taken to the wharf in Singapore, which was a fair way away from Changi, we were taken on trucks to the wharf. And then of course it was hours and hours of standing on the wharf with the ship there, waiting till you got your name called and name written down five hundred and fifty-five times and everything else, and then finally up the gangplank, with what little gear you had, and on board the ship we came. And they brought us back to

30:00 Darwin first and some of the, for some reason or other I was loaded off at Darwin. And a terribly embarrassing thing, they took all us fellas out of prison camp and brought us onto the barracks for the day, or the night, or something like that – I don't know why they did – the ship, the whole bunch of us, and brought us into an army camp where there were a whole lot of girls, army girls

30:30 and put on a dance. Well, gee whiz, to see a girl was a bloomin' fright let alone trying to make her dance at a party. That was torture to me. I was asleep on a bunk somewhere and they said, "Come on, up you get, you are on the move," course we were used to that. And it was cold so far as I was concerned, because I didn't have any clothes, and I grabbed a

31:00 blanket off the bed, thank goodness, and a little bit of possessions that I had. I think I had a bag with a whole lot of cigarettes in it, 'cause I got the cigarettes from the British navy fellows that give us packets of cigarettes. And I got on, I went where I was told to go and they put me on a bomber plane, a Liberator or something, and to fly us down to Adelaide. And I don't think I have ever been as cold in my life, sitting on the bare aluminium

31:30 of an aeroplane, and the bomb bays, and the cracks in the bomb bays, and you could look down and watch the land go underneath it, and I saw the brumby horses and everything else. And the pilot went as low as he possibly could because he knew it was freezing cold back in that bloomin' aeroplane – thank God, as I say, I had a blanket – and we were nearly all day flying down to Adelaide. Flew down to Adelaide and then I think the same plane...

32:00 And we had a rest in Adelaide and somebody gave us some sandwiches, and I was a bit doubtful about the sandwiches but I had the sandwiches, and they flew us to Melbourne. I got to Melbourne in the dark, was picked up with a utility, a driver and an officer, I had to sit in the back of the utility, and they took me to the last address that I had, which was an aunt's place in Kooyong Road, Caulfield.

32:30 They said, “Righto, this is as far as you go, report to Heidelberg Hospital tomorrow.” I got out and went up and rang the front door bell, they didn’t even know I was in Australia. So I rummaged through the clothes I had before the war, for the next day, but didn’t go to Heidelberg, I did the day after or something. Got out to Heidelberg and tried to tell who I was, and the matron

33:00 said, “I can’t do anything with you, you have got no papers, you have no pay book, I don’t even know if you are telling me you really are a soldier, we can’t deal with you.” And I went back to that bloomin’ Heidelberg Hospital for three days, and I got the same story every day, all they did was gave me lunch. And it is a beggar of a place to get to Heidelberg after the war. Oh gosh, you had to get a train into the city and change trains and get out and walk all that way from

33:30 Heidelberg station up to the Repat [Repatriation] Hospital, and when you got there, they didn’t know what to do with you. I can’t really remember what happened after that. I think something happened, I had to report to Albert Park, yeah I went to Albert Park and was in civvie clothes and they wanted to know what I was doing in civvie clothes, so they issued me with a uniform. And while I was issued, that’s right, I was there

34:00 one day and the smarty pants fellow came up to me and I had, yeah, I don’t know whether I had my rank up or what it was, but I palled up with half a dozen POWs, we were all in the same position, nobody knew what to do with us. And the bloke said to me, “Righto you fellas, come with me.” So I went with him. And he said, “Now see that stack of tent floor boards,” he said, “we want those to be moved

34:30 across there to there and put there.” I said, “You are joking.” And he said, “No.” “These fellows are not going to move anything.” And he said, “I’m not... are you disobeying an order?” I said, “If you think I am.” “I will go and get the officer.” I said, “I don’t care who you bloomin’ well get.” So with that he went and got the officer. And I said, “These men, and myself, are five days out of prison camp, Japanese prison camp and you want us to move those floor boards that are there, and

35:00 I have refused.” Well, did that bloomin’ upstart of a young sergeant get into trouble. I was very pleased, here’s this... I am almost grey haired by then aren’t I, I have been in the army so long. I told him to go and jump in the river. So gradually we went through the discharge process, which is a joke, you know, because medically they didn’t know if there was anything wrong with us or what to do about it, they just discharged us as

35:30 medically fit. We weren’t fit. Full of malaria, full of everything else, and sent us home to go to bed and shiver and shake, because malaria used to come back on us so much. And then after we had been home a while we went to doctors and went to Repat because we were called up, and they said, “Oh,” the doc, smarty pants, “oh, you can’t get malaria, you have been six months out of the territory, you won’t get malaria.” No,

36:00 we got malaria for a long time afterwards. As I said, the ulcer on my leg didn’t heal for probably ten years, the skin didn’t form over it.

How did you manage to take care of the leg during those, during your time in Singapore and Java?

Oh, I didn’t, it just weeped and bled and all the rest of it. It is nearly all gone now, but that is all that is left,

36:30 but it ought to after sixty years shouldn’t it? But it was right down here, and when you would do that, you could see the sinew pull your toe, and you know how the body works. But I have got nothing left now, see the scar is gone, but it is still tender to touch.

Yeah. So sounds like they just had no idea what to do with it when you come back.

Yeah. No, no. No, I just kept that bandaged up for years. I still had it bandaged...

37:00 I was working in Moorabbin in the ‘70s and I had it bandaged up then, I can remember having a bandage on then. But that is it, we are all right, I am now only eighty-five and I’m doing all right, smiling and laughing sometimes, whinging sometimes. As your little girl said, “You enjoy a wine?” It takes me months to drink a

37:30 slab of beer, months. Old wowser.

When you got back, what was the, what did you want to see, what was it you wanted to do when you got back to Melbourne, what was the first place that you went to?

Oh, I can remember going to Princes Bridge and standing there crying like a baby, it was just too much. I got to the city of Melbourne for some reason, I don’t know when and so forth, but I got

38:00 across Princes Bridge, and those little alcoves on Princes Bridge, I got into one of those and I was a mess, and then I got on a tram. I got very sick in Swanston Street once, I was terribly ill, and my vision all went and I got migraine and I got everything else, and I got a tram and the connie [tram conductor] thought I was drunk and wanted to put me off the tram.

38:30 But I was able, I got on a tram, ‘cause I went out to home in Caulfield then to get home. But gradually

we went on, and I got married and, you know, slowly you battle back. It was terrible, I couldn't work when I first came home, I tried so hard but you couldn't do a full week's work, you just fitted in where you could and so forth.

What sort of work did you do first up?

Well I went back to the foundry for a while,

39:00 but unpleasant things came up amongst family, amongst that, so I was better out of it. And I came back, came on down here to Mornington, because I married a Mornington girl that I had known before the war. And couldn't find... oh, I worked down the timber yard here for a while, in the shop. And one Saturday afternoon I

39:30 got terrible pains in my head and so forth, I lost my eyesight. And a couple of men that knew me well took me to Heidelberg Repat and I was operated on for the eyes, and I was bandaged up for several weeks, looked like losing my sight. But a Jim McBrien-White was the specialist and he worked on it and injected into the eyes and so forth and I can still see very well, I have had a few eye troubles. And

40:00 I came back and I couldn't get over, the fellow in the hardware store hadn't given me any money while I was away and all the rest of it, and I thought, 'This is no good.' And then there was a company called J.R. Watkins, they had a business whereby you bought products from them, was quite the same as a franchise, and you travelled from home to home showing this merchandise, door to door. And I thought, 'Well I will have

40:30 a go at this,' and I stayed as the 'Watkins Man' I was called, with my little panel van, I had three or four panel vans as I progressed, I did that for nearly fourteen years. And I travelled the Peninsula, called on every farm, every home and everything else, and they bought all sorts of wonderful things, all the spices, essences, vanilla, raspberry, strawberry, pineapple for cooking, because ladies cooked in those days.

41:00 They bought vanilla from me to make ice cream, they bought cinnamon and pepper and ginger and mustard. And we were the first company in this country to produce shampoo, and we taught the ladies to use shampoo because they all used velvet soap before that. And we sold fly spray and floor polishes and everything else. They had over three hundred lines that you carried in your little panel van, you called door to door and the people

41:30 were happy to meet you, providing you behaved yourself. For fourteen years I had a wonderful round, and when I wasn't well I pulled my truck up underneath a tree and have a bit of a lay off and take a couple of pills and, or come home and worked when I could. And I called on the people regularly, every... I called on them, when did I call on them? Six times a year or seven times a year, eight sixes are forty...

42:00 yeah about eight times...

INTERVIEW ENDS