

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Reginald Davidson (Reg) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 22nd April 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1709>

### Tape 1

00:30 **Okay Reg we're going to begin the interview. Can you tell us about your childhood?**

Well I was born in Murgon the

01:30 16th of December 1915. My mother had been one of the pioneers in the Murgon district. Her family had migrated from Crows Nest. Her mum was dead and her dad reared three daughters and one son. And they were the first in that part

02:00 of the Murgon district. My Dad had come up from Sydney via Kyogle and Mum had been away with her sister in Mundubbera and came home on the steam train and I think the next day they married. So many months later,

02:30 eight or nine or ten months later I was born in Dudley Hospital in Douglas Street, Murgon. There is a story going that the doctor said, because my mother was a very small-framed person with an eighteen-inch waist, "Well I think we're going to have trouble with this kid.

03:00 Now do we save the wife or do we save the kid?" So, my Dad rightly said, "Save my wife." Anyway I survived that. And shortly after, by sulky [a horsedrawn cart] and a horse named Boysie, they went out to a farm and that was twelve miles out of Murgon on the Tablelands in the Crownthorpe area

03:30 because Dad had selected six hundred and forty acres of pine forest, which he was clearing in order to grow corn and eventually to start dairying. And in this job he was assisted by Aborigines he employed from the neighbouring Aboriginal mission called Barambah, which is now called Cherbourg.

04:00 And so they camped there and Dad used to kill a bullock every so many days. And in those days there was no refrigeration, so when you killed a beast you had fresh meat for two or three days and you hung it up and hoped the blowflies didn't get at it, and then you put it in a cask with coarse salt so you had salt meat until you run out.

04:30 And on one of these occasions, Dad used to shoot the bullock with a .22 rifle and the bullet hit the bullock in the forehead in the wrong place and it ricocheted and it went into his bowel area. And somebody got a

05:00 German wagon and put some hay in the bottom of it, and they drove him from there, with his knees bent up, to Murgon. When he got to Murgon I don't know whether the doctor was drunk or whether he wasn't available, so they went another twelve miles to Wondai. And Wondai maybe the doctor was drunk and so they took Dad back in this German wagon to Murgon

05:30 and a local chemist named Evans said, "Well I will have a go at Billy Davidson." And so he extracted the bullet and I think I have still got it amongst some of our treasures. That occurred before Dad married. Anyway now a family of three and Mum was a country girl, born in Allora. Her

06:00 grandparents, I mentioned about them.

**What sort of woman was your mum?**

Well she was a small woman as I said - she had an eighteen-inch waist when she married. She always remained small in body, put on weight with age and that, got cancer and had her two breasts removed and died of

06:30 cancer. But she was the mother of five children and four of them are still alive. I am the eldest. And then there is Daphne in Brisbane, at Kenmore, and then there is Noel in Murgon, and then I have got something from

07:00 him because he was in the Second World War. And then there is Betty, number four, and her husband was in Canada training in the air force under this Empire [Air] Training Scheme and he used to write to

his new wife every day and she used to write to him every day and neither of them got letters from each other for months. And so he said to the skipper, "What am I

07:30 going to do? I want to go back to Australia and find out where Betty is and how she is getting on." And so the skipper said, "Well all you have to do is fail your next exam, Harry." Which he did. And so they said, "We'll send you back to Australia." But Betty was working in Sydney, so that was all right. And then number five was Lorna, who died of pneumonia, measles and

08:00 pneumonia, when she was just gone one year of age. So that's what my mother had, five kids.

**And what sort of person was she?**

She was a very devout Christian and a practising Christian. And a very gentle woman but very intelligent. That's why I am so intelligent because she was a very good influence – as I say she was

08:30 a gentle person. She coped with her husband being away trying to get work. The Depression. She was very independent. So much so that she took boarders into our house and my elder, my next sister gave her a hand instead of going off to high school.

09:00 So Mum coped and she loved gardening, that's probably why I like gardening. And yes she used to play the organ, as I said to somebody the other day she was with the people that went out to Barambah, the Aboriginal missions, and she played the organ that you pump with your feet. This was in the days before electricity, and she

09:30 was a pretty important person in the church and she was in the red cross, somewhere I have got a certificate that indicated she was a good girl all those years, aeroplane spotting during the war, fundraising, and then she was CWA [Country Women's Association] when it was started. And also

10:00 because Dad was the first secretary of the Murgon Show Society, when they started this business Mum was in charge of the culinary and cooking and all of those sections, and then later on she became a judge, the same as Flo Bjelke-Petersen was the judge of those things.

10:30 Well then my sister Daphne, she married a fellow who was interested in poultry and he used to breed poultry and he used to breed champion WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chickens] and he knew a lot about WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and he used to be a judge in Perth and New South Wales and the Brisbane Exhibition. Anyway Daphne used to

11:00 assist Mum when she was a school kid and then later on she assisted the secretary of the Murgon Show Society.

**What do you remember about growing up in Murgon? What sort of things did you do?**

Have I got to tell you everything? I would say that in those days there weren't the restrictions about climbing trees and camping out

11:30 overnight, but we used to have to work quite hard. And I would say I went to school lots of time barefooted. And I probably had two pairs of clothes, Sunday clothes and the school ones that Mum used to wash when I got home from school and then they would be dry enough the next morning if they were put in front of

12:00 the JR wood stove. Probably my first memories of Murgon would be my fourth birthday. We had little glass jars and Chinese lanterns made of paper strung around the place. That was in 1919. I don't think Dad was home from the war at that time. And I can

12:30 remember Dad coming into Murgon after he was discharged. The train leaves Brisbane last night, gets into Murgon this morning, so there is this bloke with a couple of kitbags, walked down from the railway station to our house, well I remember that quite well.

**What did you think about**

13:00 **him when he came back?**

Well he was a bossy boots wasn't he? No, he was used to people doing as he told them or asked them. And he had lost his own mother when he was a little kid, he was the eldest of four and he had tried to support his mother who was very different to my mother.

13:30 They went on a farm north of Sydney somewhere and then he had a couple of jobs and eventually went up to Kyogle cutting scrub and in those days blocks of land were thrown open for selection. Put your name down in the ballot and if you were lucky you got one. And he got this six hundred and forty acres of red

14:00 soil country covered in pine trees. And he had to clear that first and then the bullock wagons would come in and they would cut the logs up; no chainsaws, just a good old cross-cut saws, and then they would cart the timber twelve miles into the nearest sawmill.

14:30 Dad was a very intelligent fellow, some people said, "Well Billy Davidson was before his time." Because

he was always an initiator, he was secretary of this, formed this, fought for this and he was instrumental in as I mentioned starting the show society.

- 15:00 And I think he was on the committee that got the first ambulance and ambulance bearer into Murgon. And he was in the farmers union or whatever they were called in those days. He supported somebody; he was campaign manager for a couple of fellows to get into parliament. And in the
- 15:30 late '20s early '30s he read all about the Douglas Financial Systems, in Alberta I think it was, Canada. And how it seemed to be a good economic system for the government, and so he was an advocate for that and he lectured about it around the district.
- 16:00 And there was a young teacher who resigned and wanted to be a member of Parliament and he was on the, interested in this Douglas Financial System and so Dad was his financial manager. During the Depression he had various jobs. He went out to Charleville working for
- 16:30 roads [governmental roads department]. I can remember the early '30s he undertook to fell so many thousand acres of scrub and he had a camp out there and we would go out and take the tucker to him. And he knew all about the system of felling of scrub where you chop the trees on one side only and then you went back
- 17:00 behind these and you felled a big fellow, big tree, you let it fall and hit the first lot of trees. And that snapped them off and they hit the next lot of trees. I think that was called a drive, and I think I have still got a photo of months afterwards when everything had dried out, they set fire to these thousands of acres of scrub.
- 17:30 Also, when I was looking at some papers only the other day, he had a Model T Ford with a dicky-seat and running boards and he toured the west and he was selling shares in a venture to build
- 18:00 wool scours and wool treatment plant in Charters Towers. And they built this, big Rusden Hornsby engine and so on. It was functioning and the Depression came and people went out of work and investors didn't have money to invest and so the shareholders of this Charters Towers Woollen
- 18:30 Mills then decided that they would use the equipment and plant to generate electricity for the part of Charters Towers. Years later when the government took over Charters Towers Electricity Authority, as they did all of the little ones, then the shareholders decided to go into third finance
- 19:00 and so they, he had shares in that and my wife and I bought shares in it. Then the managing directors moved everything down to Sydney and everything was high class with lots of expenses and reduced profits and it went into liquidation.

19:30 **Reg can you tell us what your father's involvement in World War I was?**

Yes he was a driver in the engineers and they...

**Hang on a second. We will have to wait for that plane to pass over.**

- 20:00 He was a driver in the engineers, he was in the reinforcements. Trained in Brisbane at Enoggera and then in Sydney at Moore Park, I think. And then overseas by boat to Egypt and the camp I think was Malaska, somewhere in Egypt. And then over to
- 20:30 Palestine and Jerusalem. And further north, I think he went as far north as Damascus. Besides being in the engineers he was also a driver and I have an idea he might have driven transport with horses. And he got malaria and the story
- 21:00 is when you get malaria, I know this is true you get a raging fever and he was in a hospital tent of course just ordinary tent. And he was supposed to stay in bed and they caught him clearing out, because he knew where there was a water trough for horses, but they grabbed him before he got into this. And while he was there he spent a lot of time seeing
- 21:30 places, doing things. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge, Murgon. His father had been a very leading Mason in Sydney and was involved in a lot of important amalgamations in the Masonic Lodge. And so he made a point of visiting
- 22:00 other Masonic Lodges when he had leave. And he went to holy places and he sent back two black plaques - one of the baby in the manger and another one of Jesus; I have got them here. Also an inkwell - they used to have ink in a well in those days and you put a
- 22:30 pen into it. Well he had one made out of stone. And some natural pearls and moonstone. I would say that he spent any of his spare time and money in sending things home to his mother. I have got one of the letters there. Something that he sent out for me. And so that
- 23:00 was his involvement.

**So when he left for the war, you were just a baby?**

Oh well a couple of years old, I don't remember. Mum had Daphne by that time so she had two children

on the farm, but Dad had bought a house in Murgon so Mum moved into Murgon instead of being on the farm, and put a share farmer on there.

23:30 And the story is that she had relations on the Darling Downs at Allora so she was visiting them with the intention of going by steam train via Wallangarra to Sydney to see him off, but one of us kids got sick and had diarrhoea or something so she never got down to see him off. He had quite a few photos I might have a chance to find,

24:00 if you're interested, at lunch time.

**Sure. How long was he away for?**

I would have to look it up. Anyway...

**Was he away in the war for a few years?**

As a matter of fact this friend, this is a relation of mine who is on the internet rang me just the other day and said, "I found your Dad's war record."

24:30 Well I have got some of Dad's war record from when he enlisted and what boat he went on, what boat he came back on, why he was discharged. I might be able to look that up at lunchtime.

**So your first memory of your father would be the day that he came back from the war?**

Of him, well yes, I said...

**And when you saw him that day, what was that like?**

25:00 Well I had seen photos of him. I always thought he was a contortionist because the photos that we had of him, he had his greatcoat, rolled it up long and you put it over your shoulder and then you tied it down on the side, and then he would have his arms behind his back. So he looked as though he had an arm that went over this way. But I had seen the photos of him.

25:30 Mum had photos and he used to send photos home. No, well I knew that this was Dad and he was at the war fighting the Germans and the Turks.

**And did he ever talk to you about his experiences in the war?**

Not to me directly, but if we go out, for instance, to visit some of his mates,

26:00 then they would start reminiscing over the kitchen table. And we kids in those days had to be seen and not heard, but we had our ears open.

**So what sort of things do you remember hearing him say?**

Talking about biplanes, Johnny Turk was a real gentleman, he was the enemy but a real gentleman. There was none of this

26:30 sneaky business like the Iraqis or the Vietnamese. Also talking about where he went and about the engineering problems ancient people had in building these monuments out of the gigantic stone so heavy,

27:00 and square pieces of sandstone or granite. And I only recently just found out that they quarried them around and rolled them to the site and then they got to work and squared the faces and so on. I think he went to the King Solomon

27:30 Mines and got a piece of rock that is very significant to the Masonic Lodge. It is an absolute perfect cube and he must have got that in some luggage or something that he sent home. And Mum gave it to the local Masonic Lodge.

**When you hear your father and his mates reminiscing about the war,**

28:00 **were they talking in a positive way about their memories?**

Oh yes. I don't think they were glorifying the war in any way whatsoever. They talked about their mates blown to pieces and so on. They talked about the kids in Palestine, like the kids today, starving and hungry.

28:30 The Australians had condensed milk and they were told that if you pick up any of these Bedouin kids and so on, water this milk down and give them only a spoonful at a time otherwise you will kill them. They talked about a lot of experiences.

29:00 Also about looking after horses and watering horses and feeding horses. Problems with the transports.

**Did they ever get upset when they were talking about their experiences?**

Not in my company. Usually we were with Mum and the woman of the family we were visiting and later on my younger brother

- 29:30 Noel. I knew fellows who were boozers [alcoholic] and the blamed the war for it. And I knew other fellows who were epileptic, whether it was because of war injuries or not I don't know. And I had a mate who was a machine gunner in the First World War in France
- 30:00 and he got a burst in the leg so that he had an artificial leg from around about the knee down. He wasn't negative in, you know, this was something to be done and it was done and over with. Let's get on with what we have got to do.

### **So how did the Depression**

#### **30:30 affect your family life?**

Well it had a big effect. I don't know whether, I was only a kid at the time, but my mother and father, he couldn't get work and that's why he undertook all sorts of jobs to bring in a few bob. As a matter of fact I showed Frances something last night, something that he wrote from Wyndham,

- 31:00 in the early 1920s when he was out there, as I said earlier, selling shares in this wool mill. He also was a managing director of an English consortium that bought land in Gladstone, Barney Point, where the

- 31:30 big smelter is now and bought a piece of land and he had plans for a house that he would have shifted us up to. And then that was cruelled by the Depression when the English investors said, "Well it is a Depression; we won't be getting a return on our money. It is risky."

- 32:00 Anyway the effect on me, I can remember Mum cutting up a skirt, a serge blue-black skirt, in order to make a suit for me to go to Sunday School. We were as poor as church mice and that's why Mum took in boarders. And I can remember going up

- 32:30 and we would buy a shin of beef and she would cut the meat off it and I would help her mince it and she would make rissoles with a nice spice in it and she would use the bones to make soup. And she made her own bread and we grew our own vegetables, and of course I used to be one of

- 33:00 the ones with the job to carry kerosene tins on a stick across my shoulders, because there were no hoses in those days and the tin would have a spout on them and go along and water the garden. We had all sorts of vegetables because Mum knew what she was doing. We planted grapevines along the side of the house and had beautiful grapes, Isabellas and Ionas and so on.

- 33:30 And she bought fruit trees and she knew which ones to buy, and then we looked after those so we had Brisbane lemons, I think they would have been, and bush lemons, and mulberries, peaches. I think we even had apples. See Murgon it was a cold climate in the winter time,

- 34:00 you get frost there. And so, to feed her family, Mum did all of those sorts of things so that she didn't have to spend money. And then she used to also make lollies. What do you call them? Sweets. All sorts of kinds and then she would sell them over the Christmas holidays I would help her in this little

- 34:30 rented room and sell the coconut ice and the toffees and the fudges and so on. And so that was another way that Mum acquired money. But she was very careful not to spend it. We never went to the pictures in those days, for example. The pictures in those days was a shilling, when they put tax on it

- 35:00 was one shilling and one pence or something, so we never went. But we went to Sunday School, she went to church. She contributed to whatever was necessary at the church. She had very little social life at that time. She was washing and ironing for the boarders and cooking and all of the rest of it. So it was a really tough time for her. As far as I was concerned, I mentioned I went to school

- 35:30 barefooted, other kids had shoes. And other kids had money to spend but not us kids. And we lived not far from the two schools that I attended. One was across from the corner of the farm when we were out at Crownthorpe

- 36:00 and it was across the gully through the railway yard to the Murgon School. But anyway I...

#### **Can you tell us about school life?**

Well, let's see. The first day I went to school at Crownthorpe and they had a barbed wire fence and I showed Frances a little photo of the school and she said, "It looks like a butter box."

- 36:30 Which it was. Anyway I had nice white clothes on, ironed and all of the rest of it, and I was getting through the barbed wire fence and I tore my clothes, my shirt or something. I must have said, "Oh dear." And one of the bigger boys said, "You don't say that. You say, 'The bloody thing!'" And I can remember we had, it was a one-teacher

- 37:00 school with about twelve kids in the school, and one of them was a lady teacher who used to live locally, and she used to ride a horse to school, but this particular day she didn't come so I said, "Let's go and play hide and seek in Barton's corn," and we did. And of course it is red soil and I was getting red soil in my sandshoes so I took them off and I put them beside a cornstalk. They're still there.

- 37:30 Never found them. But they probably cost one (UNCLEAR) or something. I can remember Dad spelling

this big long word and getting me to pronounce it and go to tell the teacher that, "An am-bu-lance man would be coming out with an am-bu-lance to see the people." So I must have got that

38:00 message right.

**Did you enjoy school?**

Some of it. of course I was the victim of bullying because I was one of those smart kids that always came top of the class and I was the teacher's pet.

**What were you particularly good at?**

Most things. See

38:30 when they had the state scholarship examination... do you know anything about that?

**No, tell us.**

They used to publish... This is when you're about fourteen; you do five examination papers, written ones, somewhere other than your own school. And when I sat for the scholarship exam I think I was thirteen and we had to go down to Kingaroy

39:00 because that was the nearest place, and there was a high school there, from Murgon. And anyway these five exams and then the papers had all been marked and then they gave the information to the Daily Mail or the Courier or the Telegraph. And they printed the names - there weren't many kids got scholarships - they printed the names and of course they highlighted the

39:30 first ten in Queensland. And of course it was a girl who was first and it might have been a boy who was second and I think I might have been the second boy in Queensland. And so the head teacher of the school said he was going to give me a gold medal, which he did. And I have still got it, if I can find it.

40:00 So that was at primary school. I can remember some good teachers, particularly the woman that... Because there was no accommodation, the head teacher said, "Well you can have the storeroom under my..."

40:20 End of tape

## Tape 2

00:30 **Now Reg can you tell us again that story about your grandmother and if you can, remember to speak to me when we're talking.**

Why shouldn't I?

**I know it's hard.**

I am trying to.

**What were you saying about your grandmother?**

I was saying that lots of kids these days know their grandparents and in some cases know their great grandparents,

01:00 but in my case my Dad's mother died long before and his father died when he was only a kid of ten, I think, in Sydney. So on that side of the family I have only known Dad.

**You said your grandmother was involved in the Crimean War?**

That's correct.

01:30 Well then on the other side of the family, my mother was born in Allora, my father at Warwick, and her mother had been a nurse in the Crimean War. She was one of the girls who went out with Florence Nightingale. And while she was there she nursed this soldier and later on they married and migrated to Talgi where

02:00 he was a gardener on the Talgi Station and that's where my mother was born and grew up there. But then they moved to Crows Nest and her dad never remarried, which a lot of fellows did in order to get a young woman, a

02:30 stepmother for their kids. And kids will tell you some horror stories about jealous mothers-in-law.

**So your grandmother had been with Florence Nightingale?**

Yes, well that's the story that I have found so that's the way it is.

03:00 **So as a boy growing up and hearing those stories, when you overheard those stories being told about World War I, what did you think about war?**

Well there was no TV [television], there was a few paintings, so it was left to our imagination. But Ernie, the lad I mentioned who had one leg

03:30 cut off by machine gun, see he used to talk about his experiences and I knew some returned servicemen in Murgon and some were drunks and some had epilepsy – war neurosis I think they call it now – and some were hopeless fellows, but they would have been hopeless even if they hadn't gone to war.

04:00 And then there were the other stories of about fellows who were married probably because they had to – they had the girl pregnant, and they cleared out and never came back. They came back to Australia but not to their wives. Now these things that I am telling you are true, not hearsay. But

04:30 my idea of war was that if necessary you fight to defend your own, and I think that's been my attitude all of the way. But I know that there are vested interests and financial interests and so on in behind a lot of wars. I read Zaroff, the armaments king, who just went from country to country helping them to build up their arms,

05:00 "Because the other country has got some, you need some." This was good business. I think war is unnecessary but as a Christian I believe... And as a kid I didn't know about Gandhi, but I knew about Christ and he was a very strong powerful man, but not of the way the Romans were.

05:30 And of course just recently Frances and I had a look at Mel Gibson's The Sacrifice of the Christ?

#### **The Passion?**

The Passion of the Christ, so that yes if you can be strong enough to resolve anger against

06:00 somebody, then it is in the best interests of everybody because with war everybody loses. Everybody. Even the ones who win, whatever that means. So that has been my attitude to war all of the way through.

#### **Even as a boy you thought that?**

I don't know that I got so philosophical, wait a sec.

06:30 You have got to be old before you become philosophical, old like you.

#### **But as a boy did you ever play war games or anything with your brothers?**

Oh yes, we used to go down the gully and dig trenches and throw stones at each other – fortunately I think most times we missed each other. We always had guns in the house –

07:00 shotguns. I can remember one night, I must have had a dream or something, I was marching into Mum's room with a shotgun, probably loaded because I think our family kept them loaded anyway, and I must have woken Mum up and here I am with a shotgun looking for someone in the house.

07:30 That was a nightmare, I would say.

#### **That wasn't real, you weren't sleepwalking, you just dreamt that?**

I must have dreamt it. But Mum just quietly got me back to bed and took the gun off me.

#### **Oh, so you did physically do that, lifted the gun and was sleepwalking?**

Oh yeah, I was looking for this bugger in the house

08:00 who was going to do harm to my mother and sisters and brothers. Anyway...

#### **How old would you have been then, do you think?**

Ten or eleven something like that. Because I went to the Crownthorpe State School as I mentioned and I spent quite a lot of years at the Murgon State School. And when we didn't have somebody to be share farmers

08:30 on the farm, then we moved out. And sometimes Dad was there and he used to have to go and get the cows and take them to the dip and so on. And when he wasn't there well I was the right-hand man. Mum ran the farm and I killed the poddy calves and caught kangaroos, which we cooked for food,

09:00 and took the cows down to the dip. A horse bolted with me once going up a hill. Never mind – I didn't fall off. And then back to Murgon, Murgon was an interesting school because it was an experimental school. They had what was called the Murgon Rural School and in the final year

09:30 of primary school we spent one day a week doing things other than academic stuff. For the boys we did sheetmetal work and woodwork and leatherwork and blacksmithing. And the girls did things that girls were expected to do, cooking and sewing and hygiene and looking after babies. That was Murgon Rural School.

10:00 **Can you describe the school for us?**

I have got a photo there.

**But can you tell us on camera what it was like?**

Well I have got some good memories of it, and I have got some very unpleasant memories of it. I mentioned bullying. Dad was away for quite some time and kids came to school and said they had read where he was in gaol.

10:30 So of course I told Mum about it, but he wasn't in gaol. That was one of them and there were fellows who would try to grab me and belt me up on the way home from school, but I could run fast in those days. And then of course you had the very positive teachers and just like

11:00 you have got some misfits who shouldn't be teachers. For instance one of the teachers accused me of taking sixpence from her drawer and one of the boys in the class said, "He wouldn't do that, he wouldn't take it." Which was pretty good of a fellow because in those days you were supposed to be quiet and do

11:30 what you're told or you were sent to the boss and he used the cane on you. Maximum six on your hand, not on your bum. But I wasn't particularly good at sport. I played football, I played cricket. We used to play football against the Aborigines from Cherbourg or Barambah and we used to reckon they

12:00 used to run themselves over with a grease of some kind because they were so slippery. They probably did too. My sister came and watched some of the matches and on one occasion I must have been winded and she was quite sure I was killed and she won't look at football, even on TV now.

12:30 Let's see, I had some very good tradesmen teaching us, because in those days the tradesmen who taught trade subjects were the local saddle men, local carpenter, local blacksmith, oh yes, and Bill Sander the tinsmith. They were very competent and I reckon that some of the things I learnt there I still know, I still remember.

13:00 That was a good system. I hear my grandkids... One, for example, is doing his high school. He is doing hospitality and mechanics at the local TAFE [Technical and Further Education] college, which is a very good idea. So that was that. And of course I started to

13:30 tell you there was nowhere for the older children and there was only about twelve of us and the boss said to Miss Cunningham, "Well you can have that room under my office." So we scrounged some lino from somewhere to put on the cement floor. This is fair dinkum. We didn't have desks so I invented a kind of desk made out of a kerosene can with a slope in it and put some legs on it and took it to

14:00 school. And she thought it was a good idea so the other fellows got their parents or somebody, so we made our own desks. Had a drain running through it, concrete drain. When it was raining had water running along in it - very inconvenient. But Miss Cunningham got on with the job of teaching us and inspiring us

14:30 and that's why I did so well. Although I was and I still am still a nervous type. We had to go to Kingaroy for the exam, but anyway.

**What was the rest of the building like, the school building?**

Well in those days they used to use a pan system for the toilets,

15:00 and so for ventilation they had plenty of space underneath and open space above. I don't think we had toilet paper - I think we had newspaper cut into squares or something. And anyway that was the toilets. The other building, well because it was a rural school they later on built a special room for home science. But originally

15:30 underneath the school, the play area under the school was turned into a home science section, carpentry section tinsmithing section and a leatherwork section, and the blacksmithing was in a shed out the back. And we had a play shed. But I was going to say now the ventilation of the classrooms, all around there was a

16:00 flap about nine inches wide right along the floor level and you hooked that up so you got a draught of air coming in there. The classrooms were divided by moveable screen.

16:30 You hear some helicopters going over?

**Plane.**

Well it is good to have them. My son had a Cessna, too, so I don't mind the sound. Talking about the school building, it was divided by moveable glass screens and there was two of these, so this big long building with very

17:00 high ceilings could be three classrooms. Some classrooms had two teachers shouting above each other in one classroom. Or when it was time to have practice for the fancy-dress ball or something they would push these glass screens out and put the desks against the walls and I think it was beeswax or



- 17:30 verasic [?] on the floor, so that you could slip over. So that's the building. The teachers had desks, presses, blackboards, usually on easels. And the kids sat at big long desks. Some would fit six kids and some would fit four kids.
- 18:00 And you had a long form that you sat on. And you had white china inkwells in holes in the desks and you had pens with nibs, and you could put flies in these inkwells, or you could with your pen take ink out of the inkwell and splash it on a girl's hair if they were sitting
- 18:30 in front of you. Yeah. You got to have something to keep it interesting. What else? Discipline was morning parade inspection of nails, this was hygiene and you bent your hand and showed your nails. And you got a tap and told to go upstairs or
- 19:00 they passed you. If they passed you that was good, but if you went up, and sometimes there would be twenty or thirty of you and the head teacher would come out with the cane and he would give you one on the wrist or two - you were supposed to learn how to keep you nails clean. And they had a chart, every classroom and it was called a good manners chart or something. It
- 19:30 was more than a metre long and it had all of these good sayings: 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' and 'Wash your hands after you have been to the toilet'. 'Lavatory' I think it was called in those days.

**What sort of things did you get up to apart from...?**

I am not going to tell you. No, don't you look at me with that tone.

- 20:00 I got six cuts from time to time for probably being insolent or answering back or having a bloody say because I didn't think something was wrong. I probably got the cane for having dirty fingernails because when we got up in the morning
- 20:30 I would go and find the house cows, who would wander all around Murgon and out on the roads towards Bode Mountain or Wondai, and then walk her home and milk her and race home and have breakfast and sometimes my hands weren't quite clean.

**So you had to do all of that before you went to school?**

Yes, and chop the wood for the fire.

- 21:00 And because we couldn't buy block wood I used to go out in the bush with what they call a billy cart and chop the wood off, dead stumps and so on, and put it up and drag it home, but it kept us going. I don't think I got the caned from swearing; I have given the cane to kids for swearing.

**You said that**

- 21:30 **your family was too poor to go to the movies or anything, what sort of things did you and your brothers and sisters do for fun?**

Well we were nearly all of the time working. When it was warmer we used to walk down - we didn't have any bikes - walk down to the Barambah creek, and there was this great big waterhole. There

- 22:00 was weed growing in it but we could dive in under the weed and avoid being caught in the weed, swim to the other side. My mother just thought we were going swimming, Flood-time we would be there and we got tangled up in a fence from one time because of the overflow from the waterhole. Another time we got too close where the water was running
- 22:30 very fast and we got swept downstream, but we never bothered to tell Mum about that. I played sport, but not like some of Frances's grandsons, you know, training three days a week and all of this business, a hundred dollars or something just to be in the team for under-thirteen or something.
- 23:00 We used to play in the gully and this had a steep bank and we used to cut trenches in this bank and then we used to throw rocks at each other, just kept your heads down. What else did we do? I haven't thought about those things.

**Did you have any actual toys?**

Oh yes.

- 23:30 We had, I had a very good horse. It was a driven by us then and I tacked a bit of leather on it as a bridle and I used to ride this thing everywhere, and you could get across the country so much faster if you tucked your leg over a hobby horse. True story, ma'am.
- 24:00 But there wasn't much time for play by the time you got up before sunrise and got the cow and brought her home and milked her and helped Mum with something. And got home from school and had some smoko, some nice cake with raisins or sultanas in it and homemade jam, homemade bread, homemade butter,
- 24:30 cream from the cow. By the time you did that and helped with the gardening and went and got the cow again and milked her, there was no time to sit around. We used to climb trees, we used to have some

favourite trees and we could swing on the branches, these were trees that the branches wouldn't snap off.

25:00 **What about school holidays? What did you do?**

Work. Christmas holidays, well Mum would make all of these sweets and I would go and help her sell them, Daphne would help her and go and sit in the shop and sell them to people who knew that Mrs Davidson made sweets for...

25:30 that would be Fran back.

**We might just pause there. Where were we up to? Can you describe your house to us?**

Which house?

**The one that you grew up in while you were in primary school?**

We lived in a big barn and there was living quarters in one corner of the big barn,

26:00 a kitchen, dining room and I think two bedrooms and a landing and outside a creek, flat rocks with vines growing over them, nice and cool because it was on the right side of the house. That's one, the first one where we were living when Dad came back from the war.

26:30 I think it is still there. It had bull-nosed iron for the veranda, and I would say it had, front veranda, hallway, two bedrooms a bedroom on one side and a dining room on the other side. At the back there would have been a kitchen, and

27:00 we must have had a bathroom. And we had a dunny [toilet] down the back, or 'thunderbox' as some kids call them now. That was well away from the house. And it was on reasonably high block, so Mum did the laundry downstairs. That was the first house. And then I was at the farm

27:30 house that I just mentioned. We came in from the farm once and that house had been sold and so we rented a place and it was on high blocks, two or three rooms, and I know I found some detonators on top of a ground plate and I was nearly going to play with them

28:00 and Mum must have seen me so I didn't smash them to see if they would go bang. And then we went back to the farm again. And then we got a share farm and came back into town and the only thing available was what we called 'Fosters Humpy', and it was about three foot off the ground and I would say that it had about three rooms,

28:30 that was all, no veranda. It is no longer in existence. Then back to the farm again and while we were at Fosters Humpy Dad was getting a house built for us in Douglas Street, more or less opposite where the Dudley Hospital used to be where I was born.

29:00 And I think he and Mum bought two allotments facing Douglas street, and one allotment facing Stephens Street at the back and that gave us room to plant pine trees along the boundary and a barn and a milking bale and barn for the storing of lucerne hay, and room

29:30 in the yard for a few trees, mulberries, lemon, peach trees, grapevines along the side of the house. Anyway, Dad was helping this carpenter, cabinetmaker, and he was the chap that used to teach us woodwork at school and he could

30:00 only work certain times, but anyway he made a good job of it and it was quite a big house. So we were staying in Fosters Humpy and then we went back to the farm. I can remember Dad had had a bachelor living in the place and he wasn't very good at hygiene

30:30 and when we got back out there to take over the care of the farm there was dust everywhere and fleas everywhere, and I can remember Dad getting around and swearing and all of the rest of it, with disinfectant, phenol I think it was, and he was splashing it all around because of these bloody fleas. So next day it was a case of clean the

31:00 place out and get rid of the dust and some of the fleas, and then we went out to live there. And while we were there Dad went away looking for work and I would have been about ten or eleven at the time. And we milked these cows, Dad had installed these milking machines, he was probably one of the first in Murgon to install milking machines

31:30 and so I think I used to start up the Leicester engine and Mum used to supervise. Anyway we were there for quite a few months before they got somebody else to come and take over the farm and we moved back into Murgon into this partly finished big house

32:00 called Malacca after this big camp in Egypt where Dad had been in camp during the First World War. And he had double gates made and on one of the gates he had this word 'Malacca' picked out in iron. And after they left that house he got somebody who was welding to cut this name out

32:30 of the gate and went to Daphne and now it is on our back patio. So that was that house. And from that

house I left to go eventually to high school and the teachers' college and then went out working as a teacher. Mum continued using this big house into one,

33:00 two little rooms on the corner of the veranda, so she rented those to single fellows. And then she had three bedrooms and the side veranda, and she rented them but she kept one for herself and we had a little veranda beside that.

33:30 And it was from there that I sat the scholarship that I mentioned. And eventually Mum and Dad bought a brick house opposite the high school; it is still there in Murgon. So they were renting this Malacca, and some stupid tenant, because it

34:00 was a wooden stove, used to empty the ashes out over the veranda rail and started a fire and the place was burnt down. So that was a traumatic thing for Mum and Dad in their elderly years. Anyway they had this other house so they stayed there and when they eventually died my sister and I rented

34:30 it, trying to sell it, and eventually we sold it to my younger brother and recently within the last two years they moved out of there and they like us have got part of a duplex.

**Can you tell us about the town of Murgon? What it was like, what it had there in Murgon?**

35:00 Well it has changed.

**What it was like back then?**

Yeah I may have photos but I never got them out. Where the main street is called Lamb Street, and in between the two sections of Lamb Street is a beautiful big park. One section, cross-street, another section, cross-street, another section,

35:30 and this had trees in it and this was a very important foresight way back in 1910 or something like that. And this was fenced all around, so that was the central part of Lamb Street. Wondai side there was a gully called Murgon Gully and later on they put a concrete bridge over it.

36:00 On the other side of town, because the town is on the top of a ridge, you go down two parts of Lamb Street again and then they join and then they go out to the Aboriginal settlement, which is about three or four miles out of Murgon that way. The railway line comes along the top of the ridge, and it

36:30 comes down a hill from Goomeri and there is the railways yards where they had the building for the firemen and the drivers to camp. And then it goes between the post office and the school of arts, crosses Lamb Street level crossing, and then you have got

37:00 the railway station and railway yard and a big square tank of water that was pumped from the Barambah Creek to supply water to the steam locos [locomotives]. And there was one good shed that belonged to the railway. Then there were two gigantic grain sheds and Dad was

37:30 involved in the development of them. As a matter of fact at one time he rented them and stored produce in them and then transshipped the produce to the Brisbane markets or whoever wanted it. Now in this railway yards beside the railway station there was a refreshment room, and when the train got there, there would be staff that could sell you grog

38:00 or a meal if you wanted. So that's the centre. While I was growing up in Murgon they developed a power station I think one or two Rusden Hornsby engines and they generated power for Murgon. That was about 1928 or '29 when I

38:30 was in scholarship class because we had essay competitions and I think I must have won the damn thing.

**So how did that change things, having power for Murgon? How much of a difference did that make?**

Oh, it made everybody so much lazier, didn't it? You could iron with electricity and you could

39:00 have an electric stove - we had a wooden stove. You could have electric light. And in those days people believed you could plug in an appliance, take the bulb out and plug it in. Anyway the... Oh yes, and then they introduced street lighting instead of the little

39:30 single stands of kerosene light of the top of a pole, and a chappy would come along with a ladder across his shoulder on a pushbike and put his ladder against the light and climb up with something with a wick on it like a candle and light this street light.

**What sort of shops were in the town?**

40:00 Well every town along the railway line would have a general store, wouldn't it? There was three stores in Murgon. There was Mrs Angel, Paddy Tiernan and then there was Cuning Allen Mills. So there were three general stores, and most of them gave credit

40:30 and then they went broke because people didn't pay. Then there were two pubs, the Royal Hotel and the

Australian, and they are still there, modernised, and they have got drive-through bottle shops and got a motel unit. One of them was burnt down before I left primary school.

- 41:00 About twenty minutes and this whole Royal Hotel burnt down because the store next door, somebody had grabbed a bottle of methylated spirits or benzine and the bottle fell out and caused a spark and twenty minutes and the whole thing is burnt down, well that's that. There was a
- 41:30 private hospital called the Graham Hospital and then there was another private hospital called the Dudley Hospital. There was a Catholic Church and a Church of England and a Presbyterian Church and a Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church.
- 41:58 End of tape

## Tape 3

- 00:30 You were supposed to say, three, two, one.

**Three, two, one, it's on. Can you tell us how you came to go to Brisbane Boys' Grammar?**

I didn't go to Brisbane Boys' Grammar, I went to Brisbane Boys' College, which is different. Anyway in those days if you passed a state scholarship and you got a pass in English and maths I

- 01:00 think, which they used to call arithmetic, then you got fifty pounds I think paid towards your secondary education paid by the state government. Well there was no secondary school in Murgon. There was a day high school at Kingaroy thirty miles away, there was another day high school at Gympie -
- 01:30 that was a hundred and fifty miles away. There were two boarding schools at Mervera [?] so the kids at Murgon never went away unless their parents could pay for them to go somewhere. Some went to Ipswich Grammar School, some went to Brisbane Grammar, some went to Clayfield, some went to Southport School and a fellow named Arthur Rugs that he started
- 02:00 about 1905, very highly qualified chap and his wife used to act as matron and they had a couple of houses. She was matron for some of the time and then later on they got a different matron and eventually they taught classes in bedrooms of these houses,
- 02:30 and then the Methodist Presbyterian Schools' Association, and decided to invest in education and took over Brisbane Boys, College at Clayfield from Arthur Rugs, and they converted that brick school into a girls' school. Anyway that was 1929
- 03:00 that I passed scholarship, so I went to Brisbane Boys' College in 1930. But there was the Depression, no money, Dad was out of work, so I got a job at fourteen bob [shillings] a week at the butter factory, and I was 'gopher' - go for this and that, go up the street and get the mail, serve on the counter and sell cheese.
- 03:30 And I think butter used to be about a bob a pound those days, something like that. And cut up the big round packs of cheese and this butter factory had been moved from Tiaro near Maryborough to near Murgon. And my Dad was involved in that move, and that would have
- 04:00 been some years before 1915, before he married. And cream was brought to the butter factory by train from as far away and somewhere near Gympie and from as far away as near Kingaroy and then cream wagons, a bit like the stage wagons of the old days with covered canvas tops,
- 04:30 would come in with these cream cans, eight gallon and six gallon, from outside Murgon, probably from fifteen, twenty miles out, every morning. And then they would go back every afternoon after they had collected people's meat and groceries and mail. Well we used to have a chap come around on horseback with the mail. Then he would go to the factory and
- 05:00 pick up the empty cans which were clean and on the way home he would drop off the empty cream cans, and if you had any groceries or things he probably put them in your cream cans and left them at your gate. So that's where I worked. And then Dad got a job, I mentioned earlier, the wool scourers in Charters Towers.
- 05:30 And he was working in Gladstone on the woollen mills that they were going to convert; scoured wool into wool tops which is then sent to a woollen mill for spinning. So he was able to afford to start me at Brisbane Boys' College, so it was about the middle of the year that I started.
- 06:00 And in those days the Department of Education was converting from a two-and-a-half-years' course to a two-year course and they were getting rid of high school exams which were separate from the scholarship exams - high school exams were meant to be easier than the scholarship - and it was held in the middle of the year. And the intake from the high school exam
- 06:30 meant you could go to high school and you did two and a half years. Well, when I decided to go on they

had got rid of the two and a half years, but they had pupils that had started the two-and-a-half-year course but I was to be part of the course that took two years. But then I didn't start until probably the middle of the year at the Brisbane

- 07:00 Boys' College in Clayfield near the tram terminus as a boarder. So Arthur Rug, at the interview said, "Here is the ten subjects to do for the equivalent of Year 10 nowadays." He said, "Let him try it." But in those days they didn't have teacher aides and
- 07:30 support staff to help a kid who is six months behind everybody else. And so after a while I had to give up Latin and something else, so I did eight subjects. And so at the end of 1930 that school closed and they had been building the Brisbane Boys' College in
- 08:00 Toowong, in Kensington Terrace, Mulga Road. Very few facilities, no floor covering, concrete floors and so on. And I can remember we used to, after school we would get with picks and shovels and we dug out the first tennis court. True story. Since then of course they had acquired land over the other side and land over
- 08:30 towards Missen Street. But I am still a member of the Old Boys' Association and Frances and I went to an Anzac Day ceremony a couple of years ago. That was the Brisbane Boys' College.

**Did you miss Murgon at that stage?**

No. Well I was homesick but different from some fellows who were supposed to be tough and got homesick and they would clear out.

- 09:00 Well I decided I would stick it in spite of anything that was wrong with the system.

**What did you like about living in the city compared with the country?**

We had never lived in the city.

**In Brisbane?**

Toowong was out in the bush. There were trees all around the place and there were trams that came within five or six blocks of the school.

- 09:30 And there was a train station and an interesting thing was to for publicity I suppose they decided that this Brisbane Boys' College would have straw boaters. Can you imagine boys with straw boaters in 1931? And I was the first little
- 10:00 bugger that was sent into Adelaide Street to take a parcel or something for the boss into the secretary of the schools association. And I put my felt hat on and I started off, but you know these school teachers they have got eyes in the back of their heads. "Davidson, come here. Where is your hat?" I said, "Here sir." "I don't mean
- 10:30 that. You go and get your proper hat." So I was the first little bugger to board a tram to go into Brisbane. Now of course they are everywhere a straw boater. The boys decided they were going to get rid of them and they used to fling them and they would break. And all the bushy-tailed principal did was, "I will book another one up to your parents."
- 11:00 Anyway I made lots of good friends there. Most of them have died of course. But I am still a member of the Old Boys' Association but not involved. Although I did go to the fiftieth anniversary, on my own. And these kids of course with bagpipes and kilts and so on.
- 11:30 And I didn't know anybody there and all of the teachers were dead when I went down to the Crest [Hotel], I think it was, where we had this reunion. Fiftieth I think it was. Anyway it could have been fifty years after we went to Toowong. And Sunday morning, one Sunday
- 12:00 we would be Methodist at the Toowong Methodist Church and the next Sunday we would be all Presbyterians and we would be sent off to the Presbyterian Church. But I joined a boys' church group I belonged to in Murgon called the Order of Knights. I used to get leave to go out for that. And then of course when I went to Clayfield I
- 12:30 started rowing in what they called 'tubs'. That's two people with oars and a cox [coxswain] at the back. And we used to row in Breakfast Creek, well we went over to Toowong we rented or hired part of the Toowong Rowing Clubs' boathouse, and they're still going strong. BBC [Brisbane Boys' College] has
- 13:00 got its own boatshed. In those days we had a couple of fours and a couple of tubs. Now of course having rowing on Wivenhoe Dam they have got these eights now. BBC went to England and competed against Cambridge and Oxford and belted the socks of them some years ago. Oh yeah. We have got a good
- 13:30 publicity department and I read the stuff that they send out. They have got their own printing press, their own photography department, and they train kids in these disciplines.

**When did you leave Brisbane Boys' College?**

As I mentioned earlier, this scholarship was for eighteen months so I had to leave just before they took

all of the official photos.

- 14:00 You know, once a year towards the end of the year somebody goes around and stands you up and you smile in your uniform, so I don't think there are any photos of me because for some reasons I had to go home and give Mum a hand. And so travelling by train I would go to Mary Brothers and Thompson's and get all of the ingredients for making lollies and take them home
- 14:30 in my suitcase for Mum to save freight, you see. And she would turn them into lollies and sell them over the Christmas holidays. And so I left in December 1931. Results came out and of the eight subjects I got five As and three Bs, which I thought was not
- 15:00 bad considering all of the problems I had. Well then it was a case of getting a job. Now at that time it was still the Depression, Queensland government had cut the salary of teachers by ten per cent across the whole lot and gave nobody automatic increases. And then they decided to
- 15:30 economise they would not employ any student teachers, but they had a system where they recruited a few graduates. Now all of the teachers are graduates. And then a few extra who had done senior and a few extra who had done junior. But they weren't going to employ anybody, any
- 16:00 new staff. But then about May they decided they would put on about seventy, I am not sure. There was three classes of us anyway, about twenty in each class, and we were called junior teacher scholarship holders. So this was about May,
- 16:30 we got a message to go to Brisbane to what is now the Casino, upstairs. And a great big desk with three grim looking guys behind it. And we are kids of sixteen, some of us in short pants, some of us not very tall. And we were grilled and so on.
- 17:00 I remember one fellow was a little short bloke and these buggers behind the table well said, "Do you think Mr Bowen would be a good teacher?" And I said, "Well it depends on how he can cope." And they said, "What about his size?" "Well that doesn't matter." That's with me because I had had a Scottish teacher one time and she was a little, short, dumpy Scottish woman whose
- 17:30 name was Cullerin, and she used to put three rulers together and we boys would be looking down on her and she would be whacking away at our legs with these three rulers. Anyway that was the interview and we were given, I suppose an apprenticeship, and we had to go and see Johnny Morris at the teachers' college.
- 18:00 Now this is a lovely building. It had been condemned because it was unstable because the foundations became unstable when the railway put a tunnel underneath it between Central [train station] and Roma Street [train station]. The tunnel is still there and there is a second tunnel. The building has got SGIO [SGIO Insurance] on top of it. But it had been a Trades Hall building
- 18:30 and they built a new Trade Hall building up the top end of Edward street, brand new building, so that's where they went, so this was surplus to their needs. Now they have got a modern place somewhere else, haven't they? So that was a case of now going and meeting Johnny Morris, who was the principal.
- 19:00 Real gentleman. Very well educated. Very quietly spoken and his offside was a deputy principal. And she was Jeanie, I think, Gilbert and she used to teach needlework to the girls, not to us fellows. And so we had this interview and one of the questions was, "Why do you want to be a teacher?"
- 19:30 and I must have had some of the right answers. He said, "You know if you don't like it here the Taxation Department are looking for recruits and you can transfer over there. But I can be sure that if you are very efficient at your job as a teacher, you might have people show gratitude. And like you. But I can assure you if you are very efficient in the Taxation
- 20:00 Department..." You know the rest. Anyway that was.

**Why did you want to be a teacher, Reg?**

I wanted to be a doctor but there was no money. You had to have private means to go to Sydney I think in those days, board and all of the expenses and so on. Couldn't afford it and this came up.

- 20:30 I don't know whether I had any other choice, I told you I worked at the butter factory. And you'll notice in the noted I made there I worked at the cash and carry, the first country cash and carry that was opened in Murgon, Brisbane Cash and Carry it was and they moved out to Murgon, the first country place they went to, and I worked there.
- 21:00 And the chap was a Pommy bloke, Paul Figma. So I worked there. Also when I couldn't get a job even there I applied for jobs working on dairy farms. And at that time Dad was cutting cord wood, do you know anything about cord wood? Well cord wood is logs probably about
- 21:30 six inches in diameter and an axe handle and a half long. I had to fell the tree, you chop it into that and then you stack these logs about that size into a square heap and then somebody came and took it all away to that butter factory that I started to mention to you, and that's used in the boilers

22:00 to generate steam to run the Hulmish Flash [?]. Well, I was cutting cord wood too but I was a skinny, undeveloped kid. That was one job.

**What was the first school that you started teaching at?**

Oh, you're moving on aren't you? Well

22:30 that links up with how much time I had at the teachers' college. They were short of teachers and in August in my second year at the teachers' college they were short a teacher in Murgon, so they said, "You're it," and I never finished. I never finished the two-year course that had been shortened to a year and a half. And I had started studying night classes

23:00 at the teachers' college building and of course I gave that away and so that was the end of my sitting these exams which would have given me eventually the equivalent of what is now Year 12. So in August I went to Murgon as an offsider, assistant teacher. I was given a lot

23:30 of wild kids and of course I didn't know how to handle them. Looking back I think, well now I picked on Daphne, this girl Daphne, I don't know why but whether she was a bold little lass or something, defiant little lass or just sticking up for herself. One of the classes I had

24:00 was to teach my younger sister and she was a little bugger and so were her mates. And for some reason she put her hand up, which you're supposed to do - I didn't have that system when I had school of my own - and she said, "Sir, can I go out?" And I could see by her smirk and they way she looked at her mates, she was thinking, "We'll see what we can do with him."

24:30 I said, "No, Betty, sit down and get on with your work," and so on. And she tried me two or three times and she said, "I will tell Mum when I go home." And she did and I walked up the back stairs and she was there at the top of the stairs, "Mum do you know what? He wouldn't let me go to the toilet." Mum knew what she was like.

25:00 Anyway I was going to say that was in the top class in 1929 and I came back about three and a half years later and some of the kids that I used to play games with and so on were confused because I was now 'sir'. And one aunty said to this fellow casual, "Well what do you call Reg?" "Well at school we call him 'sir' but

25:30 when we see him downtown we call him 'Reg'." Anyway I was assigned to coach the football team, and when nobody would do the girls for basketball so I coached that. And read all of the rules and asked my sister about it. then they had to have a

26:00 uniform so I designed a three-cornered thing with a monogram on the front of it that you tied at the back. So that's how you could sort them out from the girls from the other school. So I went with them of course usually we took the football team and we took the basketball team and in those days you just sat

26:30 with your legs dangling over the side of a track, just a tray on the back. And they weren't subject to Transport Department scrutiny and so on when we were going up a hill toward Goomeri and the engine wouldn't pull it and the driver said, "Hang on."

27:00 So we back into a bank at the side of the road and a lady teacher was sitting in the front seat with him, she rolled out, hurt her spine. And so rather than have the kids hang around, because we didn't know whether the truck could be fixed or not, I said, "Well let's start walking to Goomeri." Probably two or three

27:30 miles we walked to Goomeri. We played our football and our basketball. So that was something on the sporting side.

**Did your teams win?**

Oh no, they had a chap who was a really good five-eighth, 'Digger' somebody he was, five-eighths and captain. They probably ran rings around our kid.

28:00 Interesting thing playing for Goomeri was a chap who eventually married my sister. That was Murgon school.

**Did you like teaching?**

Oh yes.

**What did you like about it?**

The kids. Not necessarily the parents. Not necessarily the school inspectors that sneak

28:30 around with a black notebook and put numbers against your name. In those days you know they used to score you on I think four things, give you a mark out of ten as a head teacher. One would be teaching methods and discipline. One was about how hard you had been working,

29:00 all intangible. But these blokes thought they were God and they would sneak around and never let anybody know they were coming, and you would turn up at school and this bloke has climbed through

one of the windows looking at your books and things. Terrified the kids. Terrified the teachers. I know one fellow had a .22 and he shot himself through the foot because he wasn't expecting an inspector to show up.

- 29:30 So he shot himself through the foot and got a message to the inspector that he would be able to be at this little one-teacher school eight or ten miles out of Benalla. Oh yes. And some of the, there was nepotism then as there is now. One of the principals I was under had been a friend of the bloke who was Director General
- 30:00 of Education. And so Barney gave him a promotion that he probably wasn't fit to take on. He hadn't had the background. Anyway and then of course the inspector blew in and I don't know how many were on staff six or eight, including me. And he found a lot of things deficient,
- 30:30 should have been done and so on and he called a meeting after school, and of course I was the raw kid and so who did he ask first? Me. And I thought, "Well I will tell the truth. I am not going to let all of these other teachers be crucified." So I was asked these questions and I think he said,
- 31:00 "Do you want the principal or head teacher to stay, and one of the senior teachers?" And I said, "Yes of course." The inspector was ticking everybody off, haven't done this and haven't done this, and the senior teacher, the most experienced, had said to the inspector, "We would like to have a meeting with you after school." So that's how he came to be there. And I
- 31:30 am being questioned and I said what I thought to be the truth and I don't think the head teacher ever liked me after that. Anyway he remained there as principal. Anyway there is such a thing as people in high places looking after their own, they still do it. That's why ATSIC [Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission] is in trouble now.
- 32:00 I liked teaching because I liked the kids. And I got two schools that I eventually ran myself, as head teacher. And I had a good rapport with most, not all but most parents. So when you have cooperation with the parents and you have a school committee or
- 32:30 Parents & Friends Association that try and be as helpful as they can and stay in their place... I mean their job is fundraising and advising, not trying to interfere with the professional people. And so, of course later on I had a different type of parents and these are
- 33:00 parents who had been pushed around. Their kids were mentally retarded and they couldn't get any satisfactory answers, and then they were disappointed because they have got somebody honest enough to say that he will never be any brighter than this. So yes, I liked teaching. The first school on my own I had seven or eight classes
- 33:30 and I was the chap who used to have to, originally to empty the toilets and do the gardening and sweep the school out and go to committee meetings and teach all of the kids and a few of the older ones got scholarships. And tried to have a bit of private life and tried to study for university.
- 34:00 So yes I liked the kids.

**Where were you then, moving forward a little bit, where were you when the war broke out?**

Well I was still at, when I was nineteen we were opening a new school in the Biloela scrub - it was near the end of the railway line that was supposed to join up at

- 34:30 Monto. And so there was a teacher, head teacher and two assistants and scattered around Biloela were all of these one-teacher schools staffed by single men, single girls, some married couple who had to find their own accommodation.
- 35:00 The government got somebody to put up a school building in the corner of a paddock, part of which was donated by Charlie Skinner to the Department of Education, and half of this land was to be a horse paddock, which it was, and the other half had the school in it. But the carpenters they built the
- 35:30 school. They left stumps underneath it, they left galvanised iron and nails and everything all lying around and they cut the barbed wire fence at the front and that was the entrance. So they had this one and they had to get someone to go there. And they knew that the English pig farmers were not going to take up the Australian Government's offer of a settlement for the English pig farmers,
- 36:00 they weren't so silly to come out to Australia. And so they made it available to south Europeans, particularly if they were family groups. And so I just looked at my diary the other day, it was Easter. I left before Easter and travelled by train to The Mine and then up to Rockhampton and
- 36:30 was entertained by all of these chirpy ones where were going to the eisteddfod in Rockhampton. And I stayed in the Peoples Palace in Rockhampton, I had a corner room on the north-western corner. If you have ever been in Rockhampton in April, the north-western corner, no
- 37:00 air conditioning of course in 1935. And then the next day I caught a train. And in those days the steam train used to go so far and then it would be broken into two and they would have a little rack engine to help pull half of the train up the hill to Mount Murchison. That was a rack engine, it has all been closed



off now.

- 37:30 So whatever afternoon it was I left Rocky [Rockhampton] in the morning early and I got to Biloela that night dark. Only a hundred ks [kilometres]. Hundred mile. So I got there and there was a railway station and a couple of fellows standing there, "Are you
- 38:00 the new school teacher from Mount Murchison?" "Yes." "Well I am Harry Wilson." "And I am Ted Minnus," or somebody. And they said, "Well we haven't got any accommodation for you. Can you stay at the pub?" I never had any spare money to stay at the pub. Anyway I am used to being short of money, so I said, "Yeah." They said, "Can you ride a bike?" And I said, "Why?" And they said, "Well you
- 38:30 will have to ride a bike out to the school." And I said, "How far is it?" They said, "About six mile. And we can borrow Jackie Skinner's bike and you can ride out." "Oh, all right." So I got on the bike the next morning from the Biloela Hotel and off I went out and found this shambles.
- 39:00 They said, "All of the stuff is there." Yes somebody had brought it out and just dumped it on the floor with the shavings and everything else. So, "When can you start school?" I said, "I don't know." "Well can we have a meeting?" "All right." They said, "I will come and pick you up and you can come to our place
- 39:30 for dinner and then I will take you to the meeting and you can throw your bike on the back of the utility and bring you back to town. All right." So off I went, and I told you about the surroundings. And I had the key, went up and I don't know how I swept the bloody thing out,
- 40:00 they might have supplied a broom. Anyway I swept it out and then a couple of little boys turned up. "G'day." "G'day." "Me Pasquale. "Me Antonio." "Mr Davidson. Would you like to help?" "Si."
- 40:30 "You can pick up all of this string I have been unravelling." "String?" "What's string?" And I showed them some. "Oh, wire," they're saying anyway. His younger brother called in to see Frances and me only a few weeks ago. Anyway
- 41:00 Pat's dead, Tony died of cancer in Sydney, very wealthy man. Anyway these two boys they gave me a hand and I had a press and I started packing something there. And I think I had six or eight desks, four to a desk and one table, one press. One clock I put on the wall, put it near a fan light. There is a story there because
- 41:30 they could open the fan light and reach in to the clock and alter the time on it. Very handy sometimes when I was running late because I would be there on time according to the clock. Anyway so I went down to Wilson on the bike, bush roads
- 42:00 End of tape

## Tape 4

- 00:30 The monitor hasn't given us a signal yet.
- Well we're rolling.**
- Okay Ellen, hang on.
- Ready to go. School?**
- Well we were talking about school and this first day the 24th of April 1935. And so I had dinner with these Littletons and they took me up to the school.
- 01:00 No electricity, no lanterns or anything except what people brought, but they brought somebody's brigalow logs together and set fire to them around the stump and so we had smoke and light. And we sat around and some of the people, Salvatore Risposito translated to the Italians because he spoke reasonable English,
- 01:30 and the other people just listened in and didn't understand a word that was said - I am talking about the Albanians and Greeks. So we had a meeting. And they said, "Well what do you want to do?" and I said, "Start school as soon as possible. Tomorrow." "You will be ready tomorrow?" "Oh yeah."
- 02:00 So they turned up tomorrow, some walking, very few on bikes, no mothers were in limousines, one fellow on a dray with his Dad. And we started off. I think I had about twenty-odd kids the first day and eventually it built up
- 02:30 to forty-five. Now in those days in a one-teacher school you are supposed to teach every kid from a little five-year-old to a fourteen-year-old, and that's what I did. And some sat for scholarship and passed, in spite of being neglected. Because in a school like that the smart kids have got to
- 03:00 teach themselves and help the other kids, and you can't be doing five or six things at once. You prepare

them stuff on the blackboard and in the notebooks, and you say, "Well here is some cards to do. You correct them and you take the little ones out of the back veranda." Anyway, so that was

03:30 the first day.

**How did the different nationalities get on in town?**

Oh well like now. Some people hate each other, they, a lot of the Aborigines believe that they are victims and some of them are. And some of them are victims because they haven't decided to do anything about it

04:00 and they're on grog and so on. And Vietnamese, talking about the Vietnamese and the Lebanese these days, they take over our jobs. And the English and the Germans.

**Why were all of those... Why was it so mixed in Biloela?**

Oh well

04:30 my area, Mount Murchison area, weren't as mixed as parts of Biloela where there could have been twenty different nationalities. They came to pick cotton, to clear scrub, with the idea that if they cleared the scrub, they cut it down this year and when it was dry they burnt it. And they went with a walking stick through it and planted the seeds of cotton.

05:00 And then they walked in amongst the old logs and everything at the end of the season with a chaff bag on their side and picking balls of cotton putting it into old wool packs, stamping it down and sending it away to the ginerry. And the next year they might be able to plough some of this land. Perhaps the third or fourth year they

05:30 can plough the land with a disc plough rather than a mull board. And then you can plant Rhodes grass, you can plant sorghum and then you can get cows and start dairying. And then later on when you can afford machinery or hire machinery then you grow wheat. So that's why these people came there.

06:00 Many of them then had left their wives and children at home and would live on the smell of an oil rag and send money home to support mamma and the kids. And when they could afford it, not a lot of assisted passengers like there are these days, they would pay for mamma to come out with some friends and so on. That's why they went there.

06:30 Also it was seasonal work and if you were a hard worker picking cotton you could amass some funds to bring mamma out earlier. That's why they moved there. You didn't have to pay for the train because you would wait for somewhere where the train slowed down and just the rattler and hide in under the tarpaulin and if the driver of the

07:00 train was sympathetic to you and they mostly were they would slow down just outside of the town, outside of Biloela or Callide, but where the policeman couldn't pick you up and gaol you. The policeman didn't want to pick you up anyway because if he arrested you then his wife has got to feed you and he has got to find accommodation

07:30 for you, and in the early days Biloela there was no gaol house, but there was a house for the policeman to live in and so he had a number of bullock chains and he would handcuff these guys with bullock chains around logs, around stumps. And on one occasion there was some row

08:00 and the policeman went down the steps to meet these fellows and his wife came out on the top of the steps with a rifle in her hands to protect her husband, that's how serious it was. No, these people were trying to get away from Hitler, and the Albanians and Sicilians and a lot of the Italians and the Greeks were trying to get away from Mussolini,

08:30 Il Duce, and they did and they eventually became good citizens and then worked, communicated with the other men at work, learnt to speak English better than their wives. And then the wives were very grateful when their kids learnt to speak English and they could do arithmetic. A lot of these kids had done schooling before they came out

09:00 so they weren't hopeless kids, but as far as English was concerned they were better than I was because they tried to teach me Albanian and Italian.

**What did you like about being out there?**

It was a challenge, I suppose I thrive on challenges, even now. It was a challenge and also I started to tell you, they said, "We have got no accommodation for you."

09:30 Well then they said, "Sally Skinner has got a house on high blocks but he can put a tent up with a floor in it somewhere in the yard, and you can eat your meals at the house. Or if you can hang on at the pub for a few days," George Ezzard, an elderly hunchback with a mentally retarded wife,

10:00 very simple soul, but she was very much in love with her husband. Mentally retarded daughter who had three kids eventually to an unfaithful husband. Anyway, so they said, "You could do that, but can you drive a horse?" and I said, "Well yeah." And they said, "George Ezzard will give you accommodation and you can get your meals there and Mrs Ezzard

- 10:30 will do the washing and ironing for you and he will build you a little room on the veranda, which is he is doing now, but will you take his grandkids to school?" and I said, "All right." So every morning Queenie the horse and the sulky were out the front of the house and Cathy
- 11:00 and Georgie came in the sulky with me, and later on Johnny and Georgie wasn't toilet trained so we used to have problems from time to time, but a spare pair of pants will do it without any fuss. And George Ezzard was a well-respected gentleman, intelligent fellow, good for conversation.
- 11:30 He knew how to treat his wife. She couldn't read or write, but they would go shopping and Mum would say to Dad, "Dad, what do you think about this dress?" or, "What do you think about that?" And he would say, "No love, I don't think that suits you." He was very loyal to his wife, he was a real gentleman and I enjoyed being there.
- 12:00 And then of course they sold out, went to Yeppoon, and so I went to live with the people who had offered me the tent in the yard. But in the meantime they had built a house and they had one room that was spare and Grandma was staying there and they said, "Well Grandma can look after you and do your washing and meals and everything."
- 12:30 They were milking cows, the chap and his wife were involved in the cow yard. So I was there and that was quite close and very handy and then they sold out and I had to find somewhere else, and I went to stay with people who had a two-storey house and they gave me a room on the end of a side veranda.
- 13:00 And Mrs Druger supplied the food and everything. So when Bernice and I wanted to get married, Bernice was my first wife. We were trying to get a house and we tried to get the government to build a school residence - they did later on, but not for us. The locals had even offered a piece of land right next door to the school and I was
- 13:30 prepared to sign an agreement that we would rent this house. So Mrs Druger said to me - I used to play tennis with her family - she said, "Pa and I said you can have that back room." And so it was a tiny little room and that was all right, and so I used to go to school from there, about three or four miles. And so
- 14:00 when Bernice and I wanted to get married...

#### **How did you meet?**

Hey, I will tell you in a moment, and so Mrs Druger said, "Pa will put a room on the end of the veranda which will be your bedroom and you can keep the room where you have been, and Bernice can cook your meals and do your

- 14:30 washing. Seeing we go to the dairy early in the morning you'll be able to get breakfast at night-time, because it was a big long family table, "You can have that end near the radio and listen to "Dad and Dave'." And Mrs Druger and Mrs Druger and Derrie, and three of the girls would
- 15:00 have their meals at the other end of the table. So that's how we managed and then an Italian chap near the school came and said to me, "You look at this plan, I build a house, Anna and I stay in old house, we rent that to you. One quid a week." "Well let's have a look at it. Hey Joe, where is the bathroom?"
- 15:30 "Bathroom? You got clean (UNCLEAR 'jor') what you want bath for?" True story. And so he had this house built, high block, no anchor bolts so it was dangerous because it was the top of a ridge and faces like that it can move. "Right, we will take it." After I talked to Bernice and so as soon as we got there we got some hessian and
- 16:00 closed underneath the house and put some boards down and one of these round... Ever seen these showers? Just like a round bucket with a spray on the bottom, and you fill it with water and you pull a rope up and tie that off, and you pull on a level and some water comes out and you try to get yourself soaked, and you would usually run out of water.
- 16:30 So we were there and then wartime, Joe had been to town to see if there were any houses available for rental, there were none. So he said, "Mr Davidson, you have to give me more money." "How much Joe?" "Oh twenty-two and six." "I will have to think about it," says Reg. I went to town and found
- 17:00 there was one house not available for rental to him, but I knew Bill Calgary and he was in charge of the experimental station at Biloela and I kept the agreement, about seven or eight legal jargon and signed in so many places, Bernice and I, so we could have the house.
- 17:30 But if he sold we would have to get out. Well Bernice's family had moved from Longreach and had the general store in Biloela, and they had rented a big house and then they rented a smaller house and he said, "Well if anything goes wrong you can come over." But Bernice's dad was dying of cancer,
- 18:00 son and daughter were in the house as well. Anyway Bernice and I had came to that house and Bernice was pregnant before we left Mount Murchison and I think Joe knew that. Anyway, so Bernice had the first baby in Rockhampton
- 18:30 and we lived in that house there.

### **Do you remember the exact day that war broke out?**

Yes. Wait a minute I don't know about the war breaking out when they moved into Poland, but I remember one of the activities fundraising at school with a little box about the size of this room,

- 19:00 eighteen by eighteen with forms around and a press in this corner and somebody on an accordion which we bought because a lot of people could play accordion and they could beat out a tune. You could say, "Come on what's-a-name, give us a tune. What do you like to play?" "I can only play waltzes," or something. Anyway this is when the Japs [Japanese] moved in,
- 19:30 and we had a dance on, and I think it was on a Saturday night and by that time we could afford petrol light upstairs and people had their own laps downstairs to play euchre and then we had supper down there and I was MC [Master of Ceremonies].
- 20:00 I had been in touch with the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] some years before and they were running concerts in the town hall and the fundraising went to helping schools get radios, so we had this homemade radio. Car battery, six volt, three B
- 20:30 batteries, dry, one little C battery and this little box and speaker, and I put it in a piece of masonite on the back veranda so some kids could sit there and look up at this and get radio lessons in the year, right at the very beginning and so we knew,
- 21:00 we would listen to the ABC news and sometimes we would hear, "This is the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation]." And for some reason we had this on at the back and some were listening to it and somebody came in and said the Japs had attacked Pearl Harbour. So that was that.

### **Did you want to join the army yourself?**

Yeah, but I talked it over

- 21:30 with Bernice and by that time I had Peter and we knew the Japs were coming down through Malaya and I was in the VDC [Volunteer Defence Corps], and we had information from General Gordon Bennet about their tactics and so on and the farmers had come with a plough
- 22:00 and we dug trenches and I had shifted all of the identifying signs we had around the school, you know Mount Murchison and we used to have drill in case the Japs came.

### **What happened in drill?**

Oh no matter what time of the day because I believe in taking people by surprise, I would just blow this whistle

- 22:30 so many quick blasts and the kids were supposed to be phsst, like that, into the slit trenches. They would have been a bloody trap. Instead of being zigzagged, the farmer had said, "Well that will do there and there." It had a bit of a bend in it. Anyway that was the drill and they had to stay with their head down until I blew the all clear whistle. No big deal.
- 23:00 We used to do the same thing for snakes. We had sticks at the back steps, always have to be left there and there would be a snake and somebody would call out, "Snake!" and the girls would round up the little kids and shepherd them somewhere, probably and the big strong boys and the head teacher with these pieces of six foot wood,
- 23:30 slightly springy, we would surround the snake and hold him up for everybody to see and then put him on the ants nest. True story. So these kids are used to emergency and they were cooperative, and the big kids looked after the little kids and bossed them around. So that was that drill, snake drill
- 24:00 and bushfires, fire because we had lots of tall Rhodes grass, dry, right around the school and from time to time somebody would be burning off and a fire would get away and you would see flames as high as this building coming toward you. And you know what we would do, we had one or two one
- 24:30 thousand gallon water tanks, that's all the water we had. Well we had bags, corn bags, we would soak them in a little holes that we made to catch the overflow water from the one washing crop, put the bags in there and off we would go. And then some of the big boys and I would start a firebreak up here
- 25:00 and other blokes would follow up putting it out and we would get the fire moving towards the one that was going to be so dangerous.

### **Why did you join the VDC [Voluntary Defence Corps]?**

Why? Because I am a silly bugger. Oh no, my great grandfather was in the Crimean War as I told you. My Dad and his two

- 25:30 brothers were in the First World War. As a matter of fact one of the grandsons rings me up every few days and says I have been to the Mitchell library and I have found out this and that. So there is a tradition there at that generation. Bernice's brother tried to join the air force but was killed in a car

accident.

26:00 And my own brother was in the Light Horse in the Murgon district and they became the 5th Motor Division so he was involved. And I have always been community minded. See I was involved in the teachers club, that was teachers helping teachers,

26:30 and we would meet up after school. We would hire a truck and go up to Rockhampton and go and have a look how other teachers did the job. I was a member of the progress association, Biloela Progress Association, and we had challenges, and we got the shire central point shifted from

27:00 Wowan down to Biloela, which was the logical centre.

**But did you actually want to go away to war?**

No but whatever was necessary to protect, I had a wife and one child and I knew what I had read and what I heard from these migrants

27:30 and I knew what a bugger Hitler was, and I believed from what I knew from fellows that had joined up and went to Malaya that this was a threat to our way of life. But there were lots of people like that. My brother-in-law's mother in London,

28:00 when they were bombing London they came in and said, "Well shift, Mrs Emps." And she said, "I have been here all of my life and I am not shifting, not even for Hitler!" And all of the houses on the other side of the street were completely destroyed but her house remained and she never moved out, not even for Hitler. And Bernice, Bernice

28:30 was a very strong woman, like Frances is, that's probably why I married her. She wouldn't take any nonsense from anybody no matter who they were. So that's probably why. To defend, not philosophical or anything. To defend what was my way of life and family's way of life.

29:00 And VDC was a way we could do something about it. In England they had civil defence, in Australia we had Volunteer Defence Corps and so I joined as soon as it was available.

**What was the role of the VDC at that point?**

Well geographically we were in the 32nd Battalion Headquarters

29:30 Rockhampton and the 32nd Battalion was regular army and army reserve, whatever they were called, and we were under them. They were going around to different areas to see if they could get half a dozen fellows to make a Volunteer Defence Corps, use their

30:00 own weapons and keep their eye out for quislings. Do you know what I mean?

**What do you mean by 'quislings'?**

Well Quisling was a fellow in Norway who was working with the Germans so that when the Germans wanted to invade Norway he already had all of the groundwork ready,

30:30 but you didn't know about them, they were silent partners of the invaders, and if you recall there were people from various countries, and Von Lucknow, who was on the USS Hamden I think it was, he came out for a goodwill tour. I wasn't it was a spying mission

31:00 because my Dad in the Murgon district kept a check on him. And Australian Intelligence said, "Welcome and invite him and wherever he wants to go, show him everything." And so they had a list of all of the people who offered hospitality to Von Lucknow and there were people in the Biloela district who had. As a matter of fact I wasn't officially part of intelligence but

31:30 intelligence officer of Biloela used to say to me, "Reg will you check on so and so?" or, "What do you know about so and so?" and I would find out and pass it on. And so there were quite a few people in the Callide Valley who were interned. Because they were a threat to our security and so that's how I got involved.

32:00 **How did the war change the community in Biloela, because you had quite a lot of different nationalities?**

Well that's right. Some were glad to be out of the conflict because they knew what was happening to their relations elsewhere and they knew what Mussolini and his Brown Shirts had been doing and Hitler,

32:30 liar, that he made friends with people and just attacked them, and so a lot of these people, these kids I taught, they had had bitter experience.

**Were the Australian people suspicious of the migrants in town?**

Oh yes, of some. As a matter of fact I have a system where the kids elected a captain of their class instead of me

- 33:00 appointing them, and the older kids had an election and they appointed one of the senior kids as the captain, and somebody else as a vice captain. It could be two boys, two girls, a boy and a girl. Anyway Pasquale, or Pat – we started using Anglicised names – Pat was elected.
- 33:30 I don't know who was vice captain. And one of the parents came down and was going to report me because I had appointed a bloody Itye [Italian] as captain of the school. And I said, "Well I didn't, he was picked by the kids. He is a reliable lad. He is a very loyal lad." I took the kids in, because I had a mouth organ band there,
- 34:00 I took the kids into a concert in Biloela. And somebody who is now dead, so I won't mention her name, she should have known better. But anyway there is Reg Davidson with his League of Nations up on the stage playing mouth organs and afterwards they came down and were sitting in the hall, and this particular woman, mature age, said,
- 34:30 oh and we had a display of flags you see? So she said to Pat, "Which is your flag?" and of course Pat pointed to the Australian flag and she said to my wife later on, "I was never so put in my place." This lad was going to our school, they honoured the flag every day,
- 35:00 we talked about being Australian, I tried to help them in the Australian way of life. There were people like that. There were people who couldn't stand a bar of it. Bloody Itye and so on.

35:30 **Did you keep teaching while you were part of the VDC?**

Yes well let's see, I had a wife and two kids. I was trying to study to matriculate. I was in the VDC. I used to teach and I was also the gardener.

**What sort of things did you used to do with the VDC? Did you have to train?**

- 36:00 Well we pretended to be soldiers. If you have spoken to Kevin Bellows, he has been interviewed, he can tell you about how after Dunkirk the Australians sent all of their small arms and equipment over to England because they had lost everything in Dunkirk. So, let's see,
- 36:30 36th Battalion the captain came out and we called a meeting and he rounded up fellows who had been in the First World War, so Harry Payne, he was appointed captain. I don't know what he was in the First [World] War. Albert something, he was a sergeant major in the First World War so he knew a bit about drill.
- 37:00 Chap with the red moustache who was in the air force, English air force, he come on., and the rest of us were raw recruits and so we, they worked out, "All right, we will have a parade. This is how you slope arms. Right turn, left, you bloody fool, turn that way not this way.
- 37:30 And then march and keep in step." All of that sort of thing. Well of course we didn't have rifles. Well some of the fellows had .22s, had shotguns, but you had to check them all that they weren't loaded because there was a tragedy on South Burnett where a farmer with a .22 was getting through a fence... Do you know how to crawl through a barbed wire
- 38:00 fence with a rifle? Well you put it down and you get through the fence and you come back and pick it up. Well he shot his mate. So we said, "We'll use broom handles." True, broom handles. We could slope arms and stand at ease. And I had a relation who was a blacksmith
- 38:30 and I said, "Can you make me a trenching tool?" and he said, "Well what do you want?" And I told him what I wanted and he made this thing. Broad face like that for digging, the other hand a pick end face. And he hinged it and a piece of piping and I could tie it on here and it was very effective for digging a hole if you wanted to. What else?
- 39:00 No uniform, no hats no boots nothing and then eventually I think we got discarded boots because they looked as if they had been somebody else's, and a bit of mutton fat or something put on them and sent out to us. Then I think we got an issue of
- 39:30 hats and then we got pants and shirt. And then the 32nd Battalion had come out with a training cadre as they called them and they would be teaching you, come out in an army vehicle.

**What sort of things were they teaching you?**

Oh well the small arms drill. First of all the small arms drill, firing, target practice.

- 40:00 Later on when they could get them they brought out a Bofors [40mm anti-aircraft gun] so we could learn how to fire a Bofors without getting our shoulders broken, and they brought out mortars, small mortars we learnt how to use that and become fairly active. And we built ourselves a rifle range and what else? Of course the postmaster used to use
- 40:30 Morse code in those days. So I was one of the ones that had to go and learn Morse code and we were learning semaphore in case communications were shut. No radio of course and very few telephones, and we learnt the army alphabet and

- 41:00 first aid and then we started to learn manoeuvres and principles of ambush and where to set up your troops so they weren't see and they weren't going to be cornered by the army getting around you.
- 41:30 End of tape

## Tape 5

- 00:30 **I would like to actually go back just before the war in 1939, what was going on in the town then? Were people concerned about what was going on in Europe?**
- Oh yeah. Because the federal police or whoever they were they were rounding up suspected quislings, suspected possible
- 01:00 enemies of Australia. Some had been shooting their mouth off talking about Hitler and getting literature from Il Duce in English and people with, would go home to Germany and they spoke German quite a lot and they
- 01:30 congregated together in an enclave. The same as the Italians who loved Mussolini. "What a great man Mussolini is." So a lot of those were rounded up and there was some bitterness. "Why did they intern mister so and so, he is a pillar of society." Oh
- 02:00 yes that was going on, and there was dobbling people in by some people and some of the dobbling wasn't honourable and appropriate. But anyway many of them were drafted into CAC, Civil Alien Corps and they were made to work on roads and construction
- 02:30 sites under supervision. That's before the war.
- They were Italians and Germans?**
- Oh yes, and we were talking about things happening before the war. I wasn't involved very much. I wasn't involved at all. I had the school. I was trying to get a
- 03:00 wife, I was trying to do uni [university] studies and have a social life.
- So you were trying to get a wife, what were you doing to try to get a wife?**
- I am not giving you all of those secrets. Anyway you did ask me earlier, I used to be MC for dances in Biloela, that had been designed
- 03:30 and built by this Mr Ezzard that I mentioned and beautiful floor and good music, sax [saxophone], piano drums, clarinet, different from out at Mount Murchison where it was an ordinary accordion, a concertina, a guitar, and I used to play the mouth organ or the mandolin.
- 04:00 This was a beautiful hall, and when they opened the butter factory in Murgon well of course they had to have a celebration and of course they said, "Reg, will you be MC?" "What sort of program do you want? Who is the orchestra?" And so it was more or less fifty-fifty, modern things like quickstep and old-fashioned things like
- 04:30 not the Alberts, but gypsy taps and waltzes and mazurkas and volitas. And so I was the MC and I used to wear a suit in those days and a stiff white shirt. I used to take it to the dry cleaners and have it starched, and a black bow tie and rounded vest. And in my job as MC up on the stage the
- 05:00 orchestra was to look up what was interesting, and I saw this new girl come in, this blonde, with a woman who obviously was her older sister. So I, being a gentleman, and she didn't get a dance I went over and asked her would she like to dance. And of
- 05:30 course you know how girls try to find out about fellows? Yes. She said, "What do you do?" I said, "I am a cotton picker." She said, "That must be awkward for a big tall bloke like you to bend down and pick cotton." I said, "Yes it is." Later on she found out. That was the start. She was a teetotaller like me. Or was I at that time? Anyway
- 06:00 we used to go early to the dance and we would be there for the last dance. Like Frances and I we had the first and last and favourites and I didn't get sulky or go out and booze because she danced with some of the other fellows, she was a good dancer. So is Frances. So that's how I met, I met Frances at a dance too, I heard her tell you.
- 06:30 So that was the beginning of the war.
- Who were your favourite musicians?**
- Sylvester and the local band was a very good, competent musicians. You know I like Torger and I like Joseph Smeard and the 'Sweet Mystery of Life'. You have never heard of these songs? No?

- 07:00 Beautiful music. Probably saxophone music because Bernice's brother played the sax in a band and he was coming home from a dance in the back of a utility and the driver had bumped something and damaged the steering, and they were coming down one side of the Callide Creek and of course you have got to turn off fairly sharp
- 07:30 to go down this bank down the side of this very deep creek, and the steering was damaged, okay, car rolled over and he was crushed between a tree and the back of this utility. Hardly a mark on him. He could play the violin and he could play the sax.

- 08:00 As a matter of fact the sax has been in the family ever since because Bernard finished paying it off as a young fellow and he was trying to get in the air force actually at the time, so that was music.

**Reg, what sort of things did you play on the mouth organ?**

Anything at all. Mainly dance music so that I could teach the kids dancing.

- 08:30 But I was going to just finish. So Colin, who was killed, he played the sax and he played the violin and he was in a band with another instrument, and his sister Joan was a well-known dance pianist in Biloela for umpteen [many] years,
- 09:00 and Bernice was a very nice little pianist, but shy. And two of her sisters used to sing duets and one of them, Eileen, was a very competent pianist and had there been the opportunity those two eldest girls would have gone to Conservatorium [of Music] but there wasn't, so they just sang at local things.
- 09:30 So that was my interest in music. I started to learn the organ but then I gave it away and I bought another keyboard but I haven't had time to play it and I played the mouth organ and I played the Italian mandolin and then the round banjo mandolin. Other than that.

- 10:00 **Do you remember any of your favourite songs?**

Do you want to have a look at the book?

**No, I was just wondering if you would perform one for us?**

No I have retired. Yes. But I have all of the music that I copied out because on those instruments you only need the melody there, I still have the music there.

**Just going back to what you were talking about before about...**

What was I talking about?

- 10:30 **About the people dobbing each other in and that sort of thing?**

Only some did that.

**What sort of atmosphere did that create in the town?**

Well there was tension between people but I think I wrote somewhere there, in a summary of a speech that I gave some place that in spite of the tensions, it was fairly harmonious and that's true.

- 11:00 Because they carted away the ones that would have been trouble makers, quislings and so on. And then of course we got the Land Army girls to come in and pick cotton. And Fran knows a chap, Aborigine, who with other Aborigines from the Hopevale mission were
- 11:30 brought down to work on the farms. I thought they were brought down for their own protection. They could have been victims had the Japs came in on the coast up there. But he looked at it as being sort of, not a chain gang but they were under military supervision. They came down, these
- 12:00 Islanders and Torres Strait fellows. That's where I first tasted porcupine. When it was raining they would go out in the scrub and they knew where to find porcupine, they would bring one home and Mrs Drugell would cook them the way they said wrapped in bag and Clinton, one of the chaps said, "Would I like some?" and I said, "Yes." Quite nice. Just
- 12:30 recently I was hoping to taste dugong and turtle. I mean Aboriginal people, it is their right, now these days to eat traditional food. I don't know if they have to get permission. But for some reason or other, oh yes we couldn't get to the function but
- 13:00 Gracelynn, the girl there, she had some visitors and they ate the lot.

**What was the relationship like between the Aborigines and the white people?**

Oh there weren't many Aborigines there. I would say they had been moved on. They had been amalgamated in Woorabinda

- 13:30 Aboriginal Mission or if they were troublemakers they were sent up there to Palm Island. But I taught some, I taught the Daylight family, and some of the Daylight family were the Barambah Aboriginal settlement and others were from Perga down near Ipswich. They were mostly labourers



- 14:00 around the place they weren't all drunks or like that like people seemed to think. They had a very primitive kind of life, but then so did a lot of the people. I can remember Ellen Roberts being pregnant and delivering the baby herself in the tent on the bank of the Callide Creek.
- 14:30 And Mrs Druger, her neighbour, thought, "Ellen looks slim," and went over to see, and Ellen showed her the new baby that she had delivered herself the night before and cut the cord because her husband was away. And the same girl, something went wrong with her car taking her into the Biloela Hospital, her car stopped in the Wisepool
- 15:00 Creek and that's where the baby was born. And I had a mate he was a chemist, he had a utility before we had an ambulance, and he picked up pregnant women and delivered the babies in the back of the utility. But then later on, following on with the ambulance, through the
- 15:30 Progress Association we were able to get the ambulance service in Wondai to establish a sub-branch in Biloela. And so they bought a Buick car and took half of the front seat out and half of the back seat out and opened the side up and you could put a stretcher in there, and the
- 16:00 driver had the head of the patient there and somebody else sat in half of the back seat, and that was pretty good. So that was, as I was saying, things were tough for people, people went without food. I knew a kid who used to come to school without any lunch but he used to pick up prickly cucumbers on his way to school and he would come to
- 16:30 school with a bag full of these, they grew wild in the bush. Things were tough. You killed your own and you went in the bush and shot scrub turkeys with the lovely red heads, which you're not allowed to do now and I know Aborigine people who used to catch goannas. And we had
- 17:00 wattle trees in the schoolyard and one of the wattle trees collapsed and the kids got in and found the witchetty grubs in the wattle tree. They're quite nice. You don't eat the head, that's all.

**So when war broke out in 1939, what was the sort of mood or reaction in town?**

- 17:30 Well that it was inevitable. Can't trust this bugger Hitler, he had pulled the wool over Chamberlain's eyes. But of course we realised later that Chamberlain was just biding for time so that they could get England ready for the expected onslaught
- 18:00 because he knew he wouldn't keep his promises - he never did with anybody.

**But did many of the local boys sign up to go into the army?**

Oh yes.

**What happened in that regard?**

Well they just signed up, the recruiting officers came around or they went into Rocky, they drafted into camps for basic training and then they were sorted out into whatever they needed and very quickly they were overseas,

- 18:30 but hardly any equipment because at Dunkirk the British lost most of their equipment, small arms as well as the big stuff.

**And how did that affect the town with all of these people leaving?**

Well the labour force went down and most of the people who had gone

- 19:00 were desirable citizens. There was Bank Johnnies, some of the schoolteachers, the fellows from the experimental farm and farmers' sons. Yes and I think they formed a committee or something, a farewell committee or something to keep in touch. I think the women used to knit socks in those days, I am
- 19:30 not sure of that. I never... But the school the fellows locally, Jack and Andy and a few others had left. They wrote to them and as I said these fellows wrote back in some cases and when they came home on leave they called in to see the kids and that was good. This was at the start and then
- 20:00 of course they brought in rationing. So there was patrol rationing. I used to get my brother, when he joined up he gave me his 1926 Whippet for Bernice, and we brought it from Murgon up to Biloela. I didn't have any priority to get tyres so if one of the tyres had blown well that
- 20:30 would be it unless I could scrounge one. So there was petrol rationing, butter rationing, food rationing. I even had to get a permit to get tyres for my pushbike because I never had a car until I got the Whippet but of course never had enough petrol to run it. So what other effects on the town?
- 21:00 Oh you know, families were split up and I think in some cases where a marriage was unhappy he was glad to get away, and of course this had repercussions - while he was away, she was playing up with someone else and then if he was unfortunate enough to come out of a prisoner of war camp or come home, then he found his missus,
- 21:30 sometimes they had even been pregnant and had children. So that was traumatic.

**How were those women treated in the town?**

What these?

**The women who...?**

Oh same as any other woman who was pregnant. And Bernice's mother, she was the head of the CWA and I was an ex-officio member and we used to raise money, and they eventually

22:00 got a house and pregnant women from out of town could come and stay there for a few weeks before they went into hospital. And of course when we got an ambulance and I was a bearer driver, Prudie Wendhouse, the official one, he would leave the ambulance car beside our bedroom. And we didn't have a phone so the

22:30 President of the Ambulance Committee, big fellow, would send his wife up to knock, do what you did, knock on the back door near our bed and say, "Reg, you have got to go over to so and so and take Mrs so and so to hospital." Or, "Somebody had just poured a pot of tea over themselves." Something like that.

**When were you doing the ambulance driving?**

23:00 This is just in my spare time.

**During the war years?**

Yes well actually this little car that I had the front seat, the back of it could be folded down and then it could be the equivalent of a bed and a Russian fellow was working horses and the horse rolled on him and fractured his hips and they brought him into the Biloela hospital

23:30 and got him a shot of morphine. And Matron Allan, somehow she got a message to me, "Is your car able to be driven?" "Yes." "Well can you take this chap up to Mount Morgan?" which is eighty odd miles. "I will get you some petrol," I think. Anyway I went up to the hospital and they

24:00 lifted him up on a stretcher, they gave him a shot of morphine and off I went chugging along at twenty miles an hour, about that speed, to Mount Morgan. Got to the Mount Morgan hospital, the doctor knew what was happening and they came out and gave the bloke a shot of morphine or something and then they took

24:30 him on the stretcher inside and gave me back the stretcher and then I started off home. So now how did we get onto that?

**You were talking about the ambulance?**

That's right, and the pregnant women.

**What about the, when the young men left for the war were there any sort of farewells held in town?**

Oh yes that would be an excuse for a dance,

25:00 so there was quite a few of those. They didn't go en masse although compulsory conscription came in and then a bigger group would go at any one time. Eventually we had a doctor in Biloela whereas we didn't earlier. So Doctor Leeds, he did the physical for all of us, including me.

25:30 And I had a clean bill of health and so I was to go and the government said, "Hey, wait a minute! We need somebody to keep an eye on things in that area. We need teachers and so you can't go." My wife didn't mind, although she said she would have probably seen more of me if I had gone and come

26:00 home on leave because of involvement with the VDC. So...

**So did you want to go away overseas? Was that something you wanted?**

Well, I would do what I had to do, I mean that's my philosophy, and some things I would like to do and didn't do. I told you I wanted to be a doctor and couldn't be,

26:30 so okay.

**But when you first thought you were going to go away, what was your reaction?**

Well to get out the axe and the saw and go and cut down trees and cut wood and bring it home and stack it, and dug a silly-looking trench that the family would have been drowned in. But I made this zigzag trench with timber over the top of it and

27:00 soil over the top of it. It would have redback spiders and snakes and everything else in it. It would have been safer to stay on top. You see we had been following the movement of the Japs down into Malaya and the Zeros shot down a mate of mine who was in a Wirraway, of all things.

**Can you just stop**

27:30 **there for a sec, I think we might have to. Rolling.**

These stories of the advance of the Japs and yes, this friend of mine was in the air force in Wirraways, of all things, against Zeros over Rabaul. What chance did he have? Another chap that used to play tennis in our tennis club, he was in Malaya, the Japs captured him

28:00 and beheaded him. So these stories came home. And then of course with the fall of Singapore we were hearing all sorts of stories about the invincible Japanese and Gordon Bennett escaped, he was criticised for this but he escaped and got back to Australia and he was able to brief the defence forces on the strategies and we got

28:30 feedback on that. They were not invincible at all, but you have got to know how to beat them at their own game. And that of course lead to the strategy we had in mind before the Coral Sea. Some said Coral Sea that they were coming to Yeppoon or Gladstone, well either way it was going to affect us.

29:00 **Reg can you just stop there? I am going to, facing the Zeros in Rabaul again and that sort of thing because the sound was a bit?**

Well I ain't telling a lie.

**If you could just tell us again.**

From now?

**Yep.**

All right, Dick was training in Wirraways and they must have had a couple of Wirraways in Rabaul when the Japs came in with their

29:30 Zeros and landing craft, and he went up against them and they shot him down straight away. Then I mentioned this lad, Berendock, who used to be in our tennis club and he joined up and he was in Malaya somewhere and the Japs captured him and tied him up and beheaded him. These sorts of stories came back.

30:00 And then of course we had fellows coming back from the front. They would tell you what was going on, come to VDC and tell us we were doing things right or wrong, so the town was affected. And then of course I mentioned all of the restrictions and

30:30 rationing and ration books, can't have this or that. So the township was like most towns, yeah.

**How did it affect you personally when you heard all of these stories about your friends?**

Well I was bloody mad about it but what could I do? I couldn't do anything. As I mentioned, Gordon Bennett escaped and came back and

31:00 passed on the information he had.

**How did he escape?**

I don't know, but at the fall of Singapore he was in charge of a battalion or something and he got away and the newspapers said he should have stayed with his troops. He wasn't any use to Australia as a prisoner of war, was he? And the priest who married Bernice and me, he joined up and so

31:30 did his mate and Father Walsh. Doctor Walsh was captured and he was up in Changi I think, and a chap I went to school with, he was in Changi. And I heard later on that because he was a cluey radio operator - he managed to make something so they could listen to the BBC news

32:00 and the Japs thought they didn't know anything.

**Did he come back?**

No. But the two priests did. They were skinny fellows before they went and they were skinnier when they came back. When I came to Jervis Field, out here I met a fellow who had been a well-built chap and he was a prisoner

32:30 of war, came out, he was in the mental section of the Townsville Hospital and he was a broken man. Well that sort of treatment and no medical treatment. And the doctor who was a close personal friend of mine in Murgon, he was one of these that a lad could talk to, well we heard that he was in Borneo trying to do some work on injured people on

33:00 a fuel tank, some of these big fuel tanks, and the Yanks [Americans] came over and killed him. See so that's what war are like, so many mistakes.

**So was there a lot of sadness in the won when these stories were coming back?**

Oh yes but it affected some people but not everybody.

33:30 I would say lots of people it was just a bit of news or they never even heard about it. Now I used to hear

about it. Now the migrant families who were here, they got no word at all, did they? For years. So they wondered about Nonna and Poppa and brother and the rest of it.

34:00 The kids that I taught, some were from Sicily and Mussolini had taken over. Some were from Calabria, south Italy. Some were from Rome and some were from Udina in the north, some were from Albania. Well Mussolini had taken over Albania. One family was from

34:30 Crete, well the Germans overran Crete. One land was from Smyrna in Turkey. They were threatened by the Italians and Rommel's crowd. And then another family I had had escaped from

35:00 Russia from the Odessa area on the Black Sea and had migrated right across Siberia to Vladivostok, and eventually they got out here into the Mount Murchison district and I taught two of the girls.

**So how did all of these children from all of these countries, how did they deal with what was going on?**

35:30 Oh they just got on with being kids. And then that was our, my brief, to help them to become Australians, help them to speak English. Help them to write letters and resolve differences and be hospitable. I would accept invitations to different homes and when I had,

36:00 ptomaine poisoning when Bernice was away looking after her dad, it was one of the mothers who made chicken soup and sent a billy of chicken soup over for the headmaster via Phillip. No, people got on with their lives and the school kids,

36:30 you don't impose all of these things on them. They may have been aware of things at home, but see the families didn't get any word.

**What did you teach the children about what was happening in the war?**

Well, I taught them the ordinary subjects and Australian citizenship and tried to introduce to them the Australian democratic way

37:00 of life, and I suppose Christian principles and live and let live.

**Did you talk to them about what was happening in the war?**

Oh yes, a bit, but only as much as they needed to know. Bear in mind these are kids with limited, they were originally, limited English.

37:30 And there was no point trying to make people be worried about something that we can't do a damned thing about. I would say that my main brief was to help them grow up as Australian citizens. Which I think most of them did. I haven't heard of any of them being put in gaol. I heard of one fellow used to pinch other people's cattle.

38:00 But no, they were good citizens. I have been back to Mount Murchison a number of times. I have been back for special celebrations and also if I am in the Biloela district I got out to the school even now when I have got the car, and Fran has been with me when I have gone out and met the school.

38:30 And all of the amenities and money that is spent on them now compared with five bob for three months for petty cash. True, and now they have got all of this electronic equipment and band instruments. They have got two buildings, residence there which the

39:00 teacher doesn't use so somebody from the state government uses it. Some of the trees that Bernice and I planted are still there. Some of the rose bushes I planted are still there, how many years later? Sixty-odd years later. But roses last. Go on, it is your turn.

39:30 **You said when some of the people came back from the war they came to the VDC about what was happening, what did they tell you about what they had experienced?**

Well they were more interested in showing us how to use the equipment. About ambushes because the Japs were good at scissor movement or pincer movement and ambushes.

40:00 Well see Jim Oxley came back and he was a doctor and a surgeon and for some reason he was boarded out, well he was a valuable fellow in the Biloela district. As a matter of fact two young women that I used to teach, or one was involved in a head-on collision and in those days, car

40:30 windscreens were not made of this fracture glass, and so there were great big chunks of glass and Tamara's throat was cut. She would have bled to death, but Jim Oxley happened to be coming along and he always carried his kit with him and he did what was necessary and stitched her up or something and she lived. She might still be alive. I don't know.

41:00 **Reg, can I?**

41:03 **End of tape**

## Tape 6

00:30 **Can you tell us how you came to go to Enoggera and what you did there?**

Yes well eventually the VDC became organised and camps were organised for us for training, and since I was in the intelligence section, which involved map reading and tactics and intelligence

01:00 and communication, then I was sent down to Enoggera, which was an army camp. And so fellows from all over Queensland turned up there and a sergeant major tried to straighten us up, because we were a lot of hillbillies – well some of us were – and we talked and he said, “You fellows shut up.” And we kept talking, so the next

01:30 morning, “Hut so and so, line up here to go and get your beds.” We were taken to the Q store [Quartermaster Store] “Here are these chaff bags and there are some bales of hay. You buggers will learn to do what you’re told.” But it was, also hand grenades

02:00 were used in the First World War and they were being used then and so we had information and practice in trenches, throwing hand grenades and how to do it and the chap in charge said, “Well now if you drop the bloody thing, leave it there, I don’t want to bend down to fetch it and you do too and we both get hit.” But then we had

02:30 tactics and they showed how we could ambush people with just a few and where to hide. Don’t get above the sky line and also we saw equipment we hadn’t seen. I think that was the first time we saw a Bofors anti-tank gun, for example. So that was Enoggera. But then also see we also went to Yeppoon for night exercises.

**Before we go to Yeppoon in Enoggera did you have to do**

03:00 **marching?**

Oh very little of it. You know.

**What did you like about Enoggera?**

The tucker, it was good tucker, you had your own dixie and you could have as much as you wanted to. They worked us hard they didn’t muck around.

**Were they all volunteers there with you?**

The VDC fellows were, the officers

03:30 doing the training were regular army or part of the regular paid VDC who would go around, known as cadre something. C A D R E.

**How did the regular army treat the volunteer guys?**

Didn’t notice, I mean they’re in the army, we’re in the army. I

04:00 think at the beginning of course we were toy soldiers because we had nothing but broomsticks and we had no equipment and if you have spoke to this friend of mine Kevin Bell, he could give you a lot of details because he was regular army at that time. No I mean, we were both in uniform, it wasn’t like the Aussies versus the Yanks,

04:30 who got into trouble because they were trying to pinch our girls but our girls were quite willing to be pinched.

**And did you get into Brisbane at that time at all?**

Well Enoggera is part of Brisbane isn’t it? And also I think at about that time I was a delegate for the Queensland Teachers’ Union so I went down to a conference in

05:00 Elizabeth street. Whether I combined the two or not I don’t know. Generally you got a pass, a rail pass and that was it.

**Did the teachers’ union change much during the war?**

I don’t think so. Always the stirrers were fighting for better conditions for the kids, and for ourselves,

05:30 and I was part of that and I was in the teachers club in Biloela because we couldn’t get anywhere else to have a voice. I established a Clifton novice teachers’ aid group in Clifton, Jervis Field I established a Lower Berrigan teachers aid group and I also joined the

06:00 teachers’ union, and then when I worked for sub-normal children we weren’t part of the Department of Education, but I retained my membership and eventually with a certain amount of lobbying we got accepted, the teachers, in the Sub-Normal Children’s Association because accepted by the teachers’ union and recognised by

- 06:30 the Department of Education. Just talking about lobbying, I mentioned about the radios didn't I? Getting a radio and so on. Did I tell you about deputation to Frank Ford, the one-time Prime Minister of Australia for a few days? Well his electorate included Biloela so every so often he would come to Biloela for a public meeting and talk about,
- 07:00 like Keating and others have done, like Beattie will do this weekend, talk about their plans and so on. And this hall in Biloela is the meeting place. And Frank Ford is there and I saw him and his secretary with his notebook and I went over
- 07:30 I put it to him that it was grossly unfair that here we are trying to raise money to buy radio for the children to learn and these clowns want to charge a licence fee. Well I don't know how many others got on his back but it was cancelled not long after. So there is the power of one, and there is the power if you are

08:00 lucky when you do your lobbying.

**So you were quite vocal at that age?**

I have always been vocal. I have been taught by my mother to stand up, and by my father. You don't step back and let people walk over you, you get into trouble of course, so no. That was on deputation, we were talking about Enoggera.

**08:30 What happened when you went to Yeppoon?**

Well we went in army trucks, there weren't too many of them about and being a sergeant of course I sat in the front seat and all of the other fellows were in the back, and the road was rough and they got thrown about. And what's his name, Moger, the driver who was part of the regular

09:00 training cadre, he was the driver and of course he drove fast as anything and these blokes in the back were shaken up and they had a go at me about sitting in the front seat. Anyway the purpose of it was training at night and some daytime training, and so we were dog tired but they pumped this into us. And the mosquitoes ate us and the

09:30 sandflies were around and we travelled through swampy areas and scrubby areas. And we had demonstrations and when the demonstration was done it was your turn then which is the right way to do it. So I don't know if we went down one afternoon and trained that night and trained the next day and came home on the Sunday.

10:00 But the driver was just about exhausted, we pulled up at Mount Morgan at a creek and he went and washed his face and hands and he said, "Reg I have got to drive like this otherwise I will go to sleep." And this chemist friend of mine when we stopped in Biloela, "Bloody hell, what sort of a driver did we have?"

10:30 Anyway so that was Yeppoon. Another time we went to Mount Morgan and the purpose of the exercise was to protect the Mount Morgan mine, I think at that time it was still in production, so it is a different sort of strategic plan.

**So what was involved in protecting the mine?**

11:00 We were allocated certain kept parts of the mine that it was essential there was somebody there. I think all of the time it was nearly two people at each spot and what you had to look out for and make sure your mate didn't go to sleep or if you were on duty, that you didn't go to sleep and you didn't smoke on duty

11:30 because the lights could be seen, and you didn't wear watches with fluorescent faces, so you wore leather guards over the watches so nobody could see you.

**How real was the threat at that point?**

Well I have said this many times and I might be wrong,

12:00 but I don't know where the Jap fleet was making for. I believe that the logical place would have been Yeppoon beach landing craft, very little opposition and no hills and mountains in the way. Or else there and in Gladstone where you could bring the whole navy in. Then,

12:30 you didn't worry about Bundaberg and Maryborough and those places, you went inland a bit, in behind them and cut them off a pincer movement and they would have finished up somewhere between Toowoomba and Brisbane or keep going across the New England Tablelands and get at Sydney because Canberra wasn't very significant.

13:00 I mean most of the commonwealth buildings were in Melbourne. So as far as we were concerned they would come in, and the road from Gladstone to Biloela wasn't a very good road at all but at that time the Yanks brought in a lot of very heavy earthmoving equipment and bulldozers and so on. And you came to a

13:30 creek and you pushed a hole in the bank this side, push some of it in the water, push some of the bank

to the side and you go straight through, half an hour or so and you're gone. That's the way the Japs would have done it. So yes, we were taught to use gun cotton and those sort of things to put on the posts of the bridges and to blow them, the railway bridge.

14:00 Harry Payne was the captain and he had sealed orders, which he told me he had, he never disclosed to me what was in the sealed orders, there was no need. I mean you don't tell people things they don't need to know. So he never told me. But we never had to introduce a scorched earth policy against the Japs but we were prepared to.

14:30 But then once I had family and this little car that I talked to you about, I acquired petrol and I did up the engine and I had it all worked out that my wife and baby and whatever petrol I had scrounged and I would have cut for Monto, Gayndah and

15:00 down probably to Murgon or somewhere like that but that was never necessary.

**Were you really worried?**

Yeah I will tell you a funny one. Bernice had the baby in Rockhampton for a number of reasons, eventually we brought her home and the baby was nearby in a cot and there was all of the stories about the Japs coming in

15:30 and about aerial bombs. They make a distinctive noise and we are both asleep and the baby is quiet and suddenly there is this noise like a bomb going through the house, and Bernice is out of bed that fast and I am there within a second and it was one of these Holland blinds with spring-loaded things and it had

16:00 pulled down and the wind had loosened and up it went. The Nobby kids, my mother in Murgon too were spotters for aircraft and from Mount Murchison you could look towards Gladstone and all of these aircraft were going north, DC3s

16:30 and fighters, and they were making firstly for Rockhampton and eventually for Townsville and we would see these things. And because I used to take the kids down into the scrub not far from the school and we would sit on the log and we would eat our lunch and we would identify insects and trees that were there, and we

17:00 would eat our lunch. And it was better than sitting underneath the school. And we would watch aircraft going over because while they're in school you head on there, never mind what's outside, so we used to spot aircraft too. And there was the local aircraft that used to come up from Brisbane to Gayndah, Monto, I think Sangoul [?] at one time and then to Rocky.

17:30 I think it was a biplane, probably a six or eight seater, and it used to fly just over the fence, a bit over the fences so they used to say that he knew every pregnant woman on his plane, "Oh she is looking very nicely." And he used to fly over the school and do that with his wings and so on. As a matter of fact it was a good job that was

18:00 available because when my eldest son was about twelve months old during the war he was in the St Martins Hospital and he picked up an infection which they couldn't cure, and so Bernice's mother and the local doctor in Biloela said, "Well bring him home and we will see what we can do." So we arranged for somebody to offer to get her to the aircraft.

18:30 And the solicitor's wife was coming on the same aircraft, so the solicitor said to me, "I will go over to Monto. I can get petrol and I will pick up Bernice and young Peter in Monto." Which he did. Brought him home and he was dehydrated and he was

19:00 skin and bones, but Mum got to work on him with bread and condensed milk, that's right, and condensed milk was in short supply and it was rationed. But we met a grocer who said, "I know where I can get you some for the baby." And so he survived and he is the bloke in Melbourne.

19:30 **So that was your mother-in-law that nursed him?**

Yes and his own mother. So these are some of the ways in which the war at times affected people.

**You said that your mother-in-law established a place for pregnant women? Why did she do that?**

Well because there was a hospital in Biloela, sixty or eight miles

20:00 away there was one in Monto, a million miles north there was one in Mount Morgan that I mentioned and I don't think there was anything at Baralaba. We used to go over towards Baralaba, there was an ambulance there. But then we would arrange for the patient from the Baralaba area to be brought in their ambulance on a certain road, and we would go from Biloela

20:30 and we would meet somewhere along the road and transfer the patient over, or the pregnant woman. So favourite name for Grandma was 'Jari' for some reason. And so she was CWA and women were sitting around bickering and all of those sorts of things like some women do and so she said to Bernice and me, "I think I have got to get a project for these women."

21:00 So this was her idea and so fundraising got the house and these women, I don't know whether they had anybody looking after the place or if you just went in there and did your own cooking and so on.

**And were they women who were married or not married?**

Oh yeah. You know they were single girls getting pregnant too, that's always been the way.

21:30 **Was there much in the way of sex education?**

What's that?

**At that time was there much sex education?**

What's sex education? You find out by experimenting or getting pregnant or something.

22:00 I probably was the one that used to tell the kids, boys and girls together, "No touching, none of this behind the dunny," and that sort of thing. I did that off my own bat, see I am one of these, so that the kids could go swimming at Nobby. I said, "Well let's start school half an hour early," which would be nine o'clock and lunch hour would be an hour and a half, and the first half hour of the

22:30 hour and a half we would use in the swimming pool. It was a nuisance to my wife, but I gave them half an hour of swimming every suitable day. So we did that out at Mount Murchison and it was something to do, it might have been daylight savings, I haven't thought of this until you came here.

23:00 It had a big effect. See during the war there was none of this SES [State Emergency Service] with rescue boats and outboard motors, but Tom O'Brien went out with his raincoat on on horseback to rescue some of

23:30 his cattle and he couldn't swim, the mad Irishman, and he must have got knocked off his horse or something and he drowned. And all down the Callide Valley the water was rising because of the rains and I think the local policeman or the shire engineer came and said to some of VDC blokes

24:00 and one of the local carpenters, "Want you to make a boat." And we said, "What are we going to use for material?" He said well we can have the pine boards off his shop. So we got the pine boards off college's shop, and we worked all night and made this boat,

24:30 flat like a tub thing, and we got volunteers and off they went, went downstream because they couldn't go the other way. Made some oars, primitive looking things. But they rescued a lot of people and they took some from low lying areas to other places. But we put tar on the boat with the idea of trying to seal up the cracks in it and

25:00 somewhere along the way people got tar on them and said to a farmer, "What can we use to take this tar off?" And he said, "Well I have got kerosene here for the tractor." So they washed themselves in the pal kerosene and of course, hot sun, pal kerosene and just about burnt the hide of these blokes. But they came back and this Doctor Oxley

25:30 from Biloela hospital gave them sedatives and so on. Treated them for all of their burns. So this is one way the people worked together. Most people.

**Was there an absence of men in the community due to the war?**

Oh yes, but we got the Land Army girls

26:00 to replace some of them and the womenfolk ran the farm because the men were away. The kids did extra work.

**How did the women go running the farm?**

They were used to it, had an idea of Dad running it and probably had neighbours they could talk to about getting the tractor to

26:30 work and so on. As a matter of fact I used to go with Charlie Thompson, he was a contract ploughman. And I can think of one weekend I went, Charlie said, "Well come and give us a hand over at Salvatore's he has got this paddock to plough," with a John Deering tractor, no rubber tyres in those days,

27:00 great big metal things that bounced around and a three disc plough. And Charlie drove and at a certain time we came back up to the shed refilled with fuel and he said, "Here you are Reg, you get going." And so I kept going until daylight or something and Salvatore came down and said, "You bloke coffee?"

27:30 So we had a hot coffee but we did the ploughing for him. So there was a case of people helping other people. Fran, you can answer the phone.

**What was your role in intelligence?**

Very minor. Horace would say, "Reg, do you know so and so?" "Yes."

28:00 "Have you seen him about lately?" "Yes." "Where has he been?" "Oh, he called in at Harry Coe's and so and so." "What's the bugger doing?" "No idea." He would say if he has got his speedo [speedometer] on



when you're in town on Saturday just walk past and tell me what the speedo shows, things like that.

**Can you give us a specific example?**

28:30 No. I mean minor points I wasn't anything official. Well if you talking about intelligence with VDC, that's a different thing all together, which one are you talking about?

**I was actually talking about VDC.**

Right well that's one of the sections of the VDC, you have got command and communications for fellows with the

29:00 telephones and the Morse code and the semaphore and intelligence is dealing with teaching fellows to understand maps and map reading. All of the different signs that are put on official maps, army maps.

**Did you choose to do the intelligence?**

29:30 No I just got drafted into it but that's all right. Same as SES over here I was search and rescue and then Keith Ronal said, "Well you come into the operations room." And that's all intelligence and maps and allocating jobs and so on and

30:00 given to the communication to get in touch with the fellows in the field. Same sort of role, but with the VDC, any information that was to be shared with the fellows, it was my job to get it to them the appropriate way. And I had to do all of the other training as well and read any appropriate. I was telling you about Gordon Bennett, well

30:30 they put out, the army put out some brochures about what Gordon Bennett said about the Jap tactics, it was my place to read it up and share it with the fellows. Sit around and, "Did you know so and so?" "Did you know that?" Perhaps prepare a chart or something. That's all, no big deal.

**What was Captain Payne like?**

31:00 Well he was English and he had been in the in the First World War and that's why, and he was a level-headed sort of fellow who didn't get ruffled or excited, and the sergeant was another Pommy I think who had been in the First World War and he knew a bit about army manoeuvres and so on and so he was a sergeant major.

**So how important did you think that your area was at that time?**

We could have been crucial but we had limited equipment, we had almost nothing, even at the end of the war, and we had very few people.

32:00 And we were inexperienced or old and decrepit or nothing a bit more than teenage kids who couldn't get in the army so they came to us. So I would say under-resourced personnel and equipment. But I would say that we were silly enough that had the Japs came in we would have done what we could to stop them.

32:30 That's all. Or bark at their heels as they were going past. But we also believed that if the Japs had come into Yeppoon more so than Gladstone, they wouldn't have bothered coming through Biloela if they had landed at Gladstone, they would go straight down the coast. But if they had landed on the beaches at Yeppoon or

33:00 Emu Park then they would have come down the Callide Valley, in that case we would have done whatever we could to delay them that's all. Harass them. But we wouldn't have been very significant.

**What did you think of the Japs at that stage?**

33:30 That they were ignorant and primitive, vicious, cunning, not friendly people at all. Well of course I have met quite a few Japs since then and it is quite a different story. I even know there are some going around the world trying to spread goodwill.

34:00 There is somebody coming here shortly. Anyway you're not supposed to like your enemy are you? So that's that.

**What was your dad doing in the Second World War?**

My Dad, okay, he was too old to be involved, although his younger brother, he joined up for the

34:30 Second World War. I don't know about the other brother but they were all younger than he. See Dad was involved in the local government in South Murgon where Noel is now and I would be saying that as the Chairman of the Shire Council he would have been doing things to facilitate things because Murgon was a big staging camp.

35:00 And the present representative of Northern Territory, Grant Tambly was a baby in Murgon . When his mother was pregnant Tammo came and asked my mother could they have a room at our home and so whatever her name was she had a baby,

- 35:30 and this little Grant grew up while Dad was in charge as a camp commandant of a big group of soldiers in training scattered through the south of Murgon. Well see Dad would have been a PR [public relations] man and I would say he would have been a facilitator. If they want to do so and so,
- 36:00 how can we do it? And so on. And I would say he would bend over backwards to help them and of course his other son was in the army was in the army and in the Atherton Tablelands and in the army and then he was invalided out.

**This is your brother? He was invalided out?**

Oh yes, well he had a broken wrist for a long time and they never

- 36:30 worked it out and he used to complain about it. Anyway they sent him to Toowoomba, an orthopaedic bloke, and he got to work on it and he is hearty and still going strong. That was Dad's role. Mum was in the Red Cross and she was also a plane spotter because a lot of planes of course went through that area.
- 37:00 They were always looking for Jap planes but very few Jap planes, I think some came to Townsville. I never saw hide nor hair of Jap planes in Callide Valley when I was there. But of course the Battle of the Coral Sea made all of that difference.

**37:30 What did plane spotting involve?**

Well you had these cards with, and the VDC had them too, cards with a view of it from underneath and a view of it from the side. I think they were the two aspects and there would be a description, bomber, freight plane. The name is so and so

- 38:00 and special markings or special lights on the thing and that's all and what you had to do was report it to somebody and they did the rest. You were also spotted Australia planes going through. Avro Ansons and Wirraways and later on of course there was the big American

- 38:30 planes that came out.

**Did you see an Anson and one time yourself?**

Did I tell you?

**That's right we talked about that.**

No we didn't but I talked to one girl about it. On the telephone. Well Mount Murchison School is about six miles out of Biloela and I lived with my wife and son in Biloela. Bernice's dad had died of cancer and so we have moved from the

- 39:00 house we were in with Bernice's mother, brother and sister. All right, each morning on the pushbike off I would go out to Mount Murchison, just a Jackie Hower and shorts and I would have clothes to change into when I got to school and I am going across this flat part of the country in the valley of the Callide Creek
- 39:30 and the wash pool that I told you about and I could hear this spluttering plane. Seemed to be close so I pulled up and it is not very high above me and it is following the road going towards Mount Murchison and it did a U-turn. Now I am not sure whether it came back and did another U-turn
- 40:00 or whether it went towards the Callide Creek and did a U-turn and came back and just clipped just over a dividing fence in this wheat paddock, spluttering and all of the rest of it, and it came towards the other fence of this paddock and that was where there was brigalow and ballah scrub.
- 40:30 And I think they managed to turn the plane and it is coughing and all of the rest. So of course I went over and there was two young trainee pilots in it and they had come from Bundaberg and they had this engine trouble. So rather than have a crash they decided to settle it down there. So I got in touch with some of the
- 41:00 VDC fellow including this chemist friend of mine for somebody could guard this plane so that they could go to the post office, and the post master, he was in the VDC, he used to teach us Morse code. So they could see him and get a message through to their base in Bundaberg. And Bernice and her mother said "Where are the boys going to sleep tonight?
- 41:30 They can stay here." We didn't have any room so she made room for them and the locals put on a dance for these boys, they didn't have any dancing pumps but I did so one of them went off to the dance with my dancing pumps, I don't know about the other bloke. One was called Rod. Anyway they got in touch with Bundaberg and Bundaberg said they would send out a plane
- 42:00 End of tape

## Tape 7

00:30 **Well I will get you to finish that.**

Well then I went on to climbing Mount Murchison.

**I am sorry?**

We went on to climb Mount Murchison, didn't we Nicole [interviewer? Anyway so the Bundaberg mechanics and so flew over but the, before they came they said, "Well get that bloody fence moved out of the road." So Frank Leeman, the owner,

01:00 he got this fence pulled up and did some other clearing, I think they even took some tops of the trees one the approach where they would be landing and this experienced pilot with, I don't know what sort of plane it was came over and fiddled with the Avro Anson and off they went.

01:30 One of them piloted the plane off the ground and off they all went. One of my VDC mates always sticky-beaking in to do this and what's that for, and so he pulled the cord on one of the parachutes and of course it went off. But anyway.

**I bet those guys must have been happy to have a place to stay?**

02:00 Oh I think so they were young fellows, early twenties, and one was Rod. Anyway they went to the dance, that's the main thing, so a good time would have been had by all you see.

**Reg what was it like to be raising a young family in that period of uncertainty?**

02:30 Well it was risky but we wanted a family, we were prepared to protect and shelter them and feed them and go without this and that so that they could have a reasonable life Bernice and I were tough on our kids, wouldn't take any nonsense from them. Bernice was a strong woman, yes.

**Were you tough on the kids at school as well?**

03:00 They knew what the rules were, you obey the rules mostly yes.

**You received discipline when you were at school you mentioned that, what sort of discipline did you measure out?**

I didn't use the same, when I went to the school the local teacher said, "You have got all of these wild bushes and you will have to straighten

03:30 them up Reg, you want to get a cane, have you got a cane?" "No." So I wrote away for a cane and this was a piece of vine about this thick and about so long and it arrived and I opened it up in front of the kids and for some reason big fluke I straighten out and a blowfly or something came I and I went like that and I

04:00 hit the damn thing, and of course as if I am used to doing things like that. I used the cane if it was necessary. Years later, I said to different ones that I knew later, "What about school, did I ever treat you unfairly?" "Well you caned me for pissing on the floor

04:30 of the toilet and I didn't do it." I said, "Didn't you? Well don't tell me who did, but I apologise."

**Was it hard for you to do that, to cane the children?**

No, they deliberately did it so they got it. They were deliberately rude on some occasions, they would tell lies, yes.

05:00 But I used to not belt them because they had dirty fingernails.

**Where did you use the cane on what part of their body?**

Only one place and that's on the hand, put your hand out and if you pull your hand away you get an extra one. I think that was the rule but I also had a set of boxing gloves which I took with me and if there was any bitching between fellows

05:30 I would say, "All right what about it? Do you want to have a go at him?" And I would supervise and this would be the victim, oh yes he wanted a chance and so made a parade and those that wanted to watch formed a ring and those that didn't want to watch went upstairs or something. Two seconds for you fellows, each of you, take out the cane

06:00 and I would say, "We're not messing around ,you want to fight you fight, Three rounds of two minutes each." And that was it. It worked. It worked at Nobby, Jervis Field. No I never used it at Mount Murchison, I hadn't got around to that idea.

06:30 And it was very effective actually particular in relation to bullying because the bully, you get him in the ring and all of the other kids are standing around, who are they going to barrack for? Not the bully, and

he is beaten before they start. So that was the cane. I used to keep kids in occasionally, but if I kept them in I had to stay in.

07:00 **The rules about corporal punishment have changed now so what do you think about that? Where we were.**

We were talking about belting the poor little kids.

**Well what do you think about the fact that they don't belt them any more?**

It is silly.

07:30 Particularly little kids a smack on the bum not hard but done at the right time is very effective in curbing misbehaviour, and see I haven't told you but for eighteen years I was principal of a school for mentally retarded kids. Okay, it is very different, and in that case the state schools used to have it that the

08:00 teacher sent the kids to the head teacher or deputy and he meted out the punishment. I interviewed and I had a say in the selection of most of my teachers for endeavour and I would say to them, "You're responsible for your own discipline. I want to know what happens but you take action immediately. Solve the problem and then tell me about it. "

08:30 Because it indicates to the kids that the teacher hasn't got authority. You have got to come to the principal. So we didn't have any, we had all sorts of problems and we had all sorts of behaviours of kids which was quite interesting. But nothing serious.

**So just going back to wartime.**

09:00 **In Biloela, what's the thing about that period of time that sticks in your memory most, the strongest memory if you like?**

Have I got to tell you, I got married. Didn't I tell you? That was the best part of my life then and it stayed that way except for the odd occasion, that way for about fifty years and that's fair dinkum.

09:30 Well because there was a lot of opposition to us being married, same as there was a lot of opposition to Frances and I getting married. So I said, "Well bugger them, we will get married, it is our business, nobody else's."

**Why was there opposition to you getting married to Bernice?**

When were you born? Yes. Well have you ever heard

10:00 of bigotry? Protestants don't marry them Catholics because the Catholics are just trying to get your kids and they want you to turn and become Catholics, and statistics show that more and more Catholics... And so there was opposition. And in Frances' case as is

10:30 obvious, she is quite a bit younger than I am, and you don't marry an old bloke like him. He is just looking for someone to look after him.

**How much younger is she?**

You never told me when you were born, why should I?

**1964.**

Yes well she was born before that she is a 37-er.

11:00 **Okay.**

But that's all right.

**And there was opposition to that marriage as well?**

Oh yes, silly buggers. Getting married a second time and her marrying an old bloke and me marrying a younger woman, that could kill me or something.

**How old were you when you got married a second time?**

Take four from eighty-eight. That's all right, not a bad marriage just the same. That's was probably the most

11:30 important thing at the time. I was doing uni study and VDC and ambulance and Biloela Callide Valley Progress Association and on committee to try and get telephone services around Biloela and deputations to try and get high school around Biloela and

12:00 to get an agricultural college in conjunction with the experimental station which was already there and probably a few other things too.

**What did you do when you weren't working?**

I was just sleeping and relaxing.

**You had time for that?**

You can fit it in if you want to and that's why I relax here.

**So Reg do you remember when the war finally ended?**

12:30 Yeah.

**What happened in Biloela?**

As a matter of fact I don't know in Biloela because Bernice and I were in Mount Morgan, and the hooters went at the time and people drove around the street with the horn blowing and with kerosene tins tied on the back, and the bars were open and the fellows were singing 'Sweet Adeline.'

13:00 Later on in the day it got much slower: Sweet Ad-el-ine. And some of the pubs closed their doors because they were wooden buildings and they were frightened that somebody would set fire to them. I had my little son with me whilst Bernice was getting her hair done. She was going into hospital to have a second baby,

13:30 Pam. So that was, but the important thing was the boys started to come home and there was tragedy and there was joy. The women that played up they were scared of what would happen and the fellows who were in the prisoner of war camp came back skin and bone

14:00 and couldn't sleep, nightmares. So it was a very traumatic time when these chaps came back and girls too and they tried to settle down to ordinary life. I would say they were the main things I remember about that. This priest

14:30 friend of mine he came back skin and bone. It is a wonder that he lived, but he did. I think he might still be alive.

**Did he speak with you about what happened to him?**

Oh no, you don't worry about those things. Get on with your life, life is worth living. You don't look back over your shoulder, you look in front.

**15:00 What do you remember thinking about when you heard the war was over?**

I didn't think about anything, I don't know at that particular time except there will be all of these changed, adjustments to be made. Was it Ben Chifley?

15:30 Or John Curtin and Ben Chifley. There would be all of these adjustments to me made in the trade union, politically, financially, people to try and get their business' back together, great turmoil and there was and there are the go-getters who try to make a fast buck at the expense of somebody else.

16:00 And with some families it is lovely to have Dad home again or Mum home out of the Land Army. It is a different life in civvies. And then there was going to be the cancellation of rationing and I think one of the politicians

16:30 promised that there would be no more petrol rationing and he got a few votes at the next federal election.

**How long did it take for life to really change markedly?**

I would say four or five years. I think we got our first car, not the little one I told you that my brother lent me. We bought a Ford V8 Super Deluxe, but that was 1948 and there was still

17:00 rationing of cars then, you had to get a permit and all of the rest of it and there was jealousy, "Why does a school teacher need a car like that when we can't get a Mercedes?" or something. Anyway we got this permit and we got this car, so I would say four or five years.

**17:30 And how did your life progress after the war?**

I kept working. I mean I was at Mount Murchison and then I was promoted to Nobby. I took over from a chap who had a couple of degrees, but I had a very good record from the school inspector. Went down to Nobby

18:00 and there was the challenge of Nobby because in Mount Murchison they were people new to Australia. Nobby near Toowoomba was very old families, some had never been down to the coast and they were in their forties and I had a swimming pool built in 1922 that had been resurrected so I had to clean that and pump it full. Bernice

18:30 and I acquired another four children. Bernice fell off the veranda of the house and injured her spine, which she never recovered from, and we went places in this new car, which was a lovely car.

**So you had six children in the end?**

Yeah, well Bernice did. I just

19:00 helped her pay for them. I said Bernice, did not me.

**You helped a little bit, didn't you?**

Of course. In those days, different from now. Matrons of the maternity hospital, husbands, they had done the damage, "We don't want you in here." Your kids can't see your wife and the baby,

19:30 but other people visiting the hospital, they can look in and see the baby. Oh yeah, but I had a schoolmate of mine became the doctor in the area. Bernice's mother died of a stroke. Bernice's uncle came to give her a hand when Bernice's Dad died and he stayed on with us and he was good company for Bernice.

20:00 I kept studying. In those days you couldn't do it in blocks, you studied all of the year and at the end of the year there was one day which was exam day and if you failed then then you did the whole course again next year, true.

**What were you studying?**

Well in relation to my job

20:30 there was psychology and English. I took subjects that were relevant to my work. That was Nobby and then my eldest was due to go to secondary school and what were we going to do with him? Bernice

21:00 wanted to keep him home and so did I so we could keep some influence on him. But we would have to send him to Brisbane. I thought, "I will apply for a transfer, not a promotion," and I put number one I think against a hundred and ten schools and I got one. It worked out all right eventually. Anyway this was a three-teacher school,

21:30 and it was handy to high school, Catholic High School, Marist Brothers, and when we got there we found out it wasn't all it was cracked up to be, the bus service wasn't convenient. Pam got nephritis and couldn't ride a pushbike, and we found that this secondary school only went to junior not senior.

22:00 And so it was a disappointment. Anyway we survived that and then I got involved with sub-normal children.

**So how did that happen?**

Well a niece of mine is mentally retarded. Her mother and she and Dad came down to see us and said, "Well what do you think is wrong with Doreen?" And I said, "Well let's go and see

22:30 Doctor Jones, our local doctor." And he said, "Well she is not mongrel, she is not Down syndrome, but there is something wrong there, possibly brain damage," which it turned out to be. And so we looked after Doreen, Bernice looked after Doreen for twelve months because her mother was an asthmatic and her husband used to smoke and the silly bugger wouldn't take our

23:00 advice to cut out smoking. So we took Doreen for twelve months. So this was all of this extra work for Bernice and our kids felt as if they were being neglected because she had to spend so much time on Doreen. And we used to bring Doreen up here to Shell Bay for treatment and so on. Anyway, knowing this about me, Doctor Dawny, who had a mentally retarded daughter I think,

23:30 and Arthur Cummings who had a mentally retarded daughter who died, and a friend of mine who had a Down syndrome daughter, we got together and they had started this school in Townsville. And so they said, "Well Reg will give us a hand to do fundraising and we will build a school in Ayr."

24:00 And I said, "Well I think we won't get any support unless we're building the school in Ayr. Don't want to be an adjunct to Townsville, too much friction." So we started fundraising and I got on the education committee and the building committee and I used to run around getting plans and seeing the architect. And we acquired the land and we built the school

24:30 and I organised volunteer women to help and the sub-normal children Townsville advertised worldwide for a principal. Some of them asked me to put in for it and Bernice and I talked about it and I said, "We'll I will give it a go." And I did for eighteen years.

**How many schools had there been like that in Queensland or Australia?**

25:00 Oh well Queensland there was Brisbane, Townsville, and Toowoomba and Rockhampton, that's it. Well now of course the Department of Education had taken over that sort of education and a lot of little schools were built and they have been closed. The one here in Townsville, through neglect, they let the white ants eat it and

25:30 so they went to the waste before they bulldozed it and the kids go to the state system, the sub-normal children. Endeavour Foundation caters for adults, but not for little children.

**So the school that you organised that was one of the first schools?**

Well one of the first four. Townsville, I don't know about Toowoomba, Rocky,

26:00 Brisbane, four.

**And how much of a challenge was it?**

Well if you know anything about mentally retarded kids a lot of people do, do you?

**Not much.**

Well they're not mental in the sense of being mad

26:30 or anything like that but they have got limited abilities. They have got limited responses to their environments and like all kids they react to the environment in which they are growing up, and if you can help parents to be not so frustrated because little Johnny at seven can't do what the two-year-old other grandchild is doing, and to accept it,

27:00 so it is very important learning experience for the parents. The doctors in those days and doctors today too don't know very much about mental retardation at all. But now we have got actually courses for parents and doctors and some of the actual paediatricians are cluey

27:30 and others couldn't care less. It is just another patient. Put them on Ligactil and forget the tests. So it was a challenge. And this friend of mine when there was a competition for the name of the school, he said, "I am going to recommend 'Endeavour'." And I said, "Why, Chas?" And he said, "Well Cook came up the coast in a ship called Endeavour

28:00 and would have seen this area, and from your point of view your endeavouring to help these kids to lead a normal life." And so most of the staff we agreed that that's what we would try and give these kids, a normal sort of life, and I think we did. I see some of them even now who come and say, "Hello

28:30 Mr Davidson." It was a challenge, but progressively we got Professor Chanel and the Chanel Centre in Brisbane to put on special courses, and now the teacher

29:00 colleges they have special courses for teachers of the mentally deficient.

**How rewarding was that work for you?**

Well it was a challenging job and a worrying job and I suppose that I did a lot of prayers that I did the right things by these kids and their parents. I mean you have got to work through the parents. I just saw a photo last night of when I was looking for stuff for you, and this little girl was a Down syndrome kid and

29:30 and her mother came and said, "Well I don't know what to do with Kerry. Should I let her go into the residential? She is talking about wanting to go into the residential." And I said, "Well, why not, and see how it works?" She is apparently quite happy. But I have always had mentally retarded kids in all

30:00 of the schools. This little boy that I used to take in the sulky, he was mentally retarded and he didn't have toilet training and he couldn't speak properly and he never got worthwhile employment, but he existed. And at the next school there was a little girl and her mother

30:30 used to bring her up to Shell Bay here in Townsville, and there was her and her husband who worked with me to get the school in Ayr. The school is now closed opposite the hospital, but it is used for an adult training centre. That's all right. So yes, it was challenging and

31:00 worrying and I lost a lot of sleep over it. And my wife put up with me when I was so edgy about the thing. But we got there.

**Reg, so what sort of a teacher do you think you were?**

Wait a minute. The inspector of the school used to go with his black notebook and give me numbers. He never gave me ten out of ten, probably

31:30 I was never as pedantic as a lot of fellows, but I wasn't trying to teach the kids to pass exams. I was teaching the kids to think so that they could meet challenges along the way. So some people thought I was a unusual sort of

32:00 teacher - I challenged kids all of the time. "What do you think?" And I wouldn't help them. They would say, "Can you show me?" "Well how about you work it out?" and they go on and then they don't come back to me next time.

**And how was teaching children in the**

32:30 **Endeavour School different to teaching children before that?**

Well it was very different in some ways. But they're all children and they get hurt by the same things and they respond to smiles and kindness usually, not always. You expectation of someone with an IQ [intelligence quotient] of say thirty as

- 33:00 against someone with an IQ of a hundred and ten or twenty, yes your expectation has got to be different. They will be slower, they won't understand all of the words you use, depends on the level of course. They will understand some words and not others. Abstract concepts they might not
- 33:30 understand at all. But then you demonstrate and you show them, you have got to be very patient. Well they need that sort of treatment. It is challenging. And if these kids get on your nerves, get out, don't stay. That's why I was so glad in the early stages how I had the say selecting my staff.
- 34:00 I was interested in their reaction. I never employed any of them and their wives if they were married, until they went through the school and saw the kids. I was interested in their reaction to these kids. If it was positive, okay. If it wasn't, if they were on edge or you could see that they felt
- 34:30 uncomfortable, that they are not the ones for us.
- Reg, just going back to the war years and looking back now, how did those year affect your life in any lasting way, if at all?**
- If at all. It was just as far as I am concerned an experience along the way. It was one where I came out of it
- 35:00 unscathed instead of with physical defects or mental defects. I am no hero. I didn't get my name in the paper. I didn't get any medals, although I could apply for some. It was part of living. But then of course I didn't have the traumatic
- 35:30 experiences that my mates had. So I was one of the lucky ones.
- But it was a tough period in many ways, what did it teach you perhaps if anything?**
- Well I suppose it taught me to be patient.
- 36:00 And to look at both sides of problems and probably to not give in when the way forward looks so difficult. And probably I am less trusting of people because of all of the
- 36:30 lies that were told and are still being told about conflicts, and I am a believer in mediation. I was reading about the justice system and small claims tribunals and mediation and I think that's the way forward, because let's see,
- 37:00 Christ and Gandhi, Nelson Mandela perhaps, anyway Christ and Gandhi were great teachers and they practised what they preached. So they're probably the things I think about.
- How important do you think Anzac Day is?**
- 37:30 Oh I think it is very important. I have been involved mostly, whether as a kid in Murgon, as a teacher in Murgon taking the kids down there. As I showed you the Anzac Day in Biloela, not Mount Murchison, in Biloela, I was a
- 38:00 guest speaker at some of the Anzac Day ceremonies. Nobby, they built a memorial to the lads who had gone overseas and here I am a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League], only a social member. But I think it is...
- 38:30 An Anzac Day is a day when you can think about what these lads do. I know they do it for a job, but they also risk their lives and they live with fear. You just imagine being in Iraq at the present time, you never know if the car next to you is going to explode.
- 39:00 You're walking along with your mate and someone in a building picks one of you off. It must be a fearful experience. People shouldn't have to be exposed to it.
- Do you have a final comment to make for all Australians?**
- Well of course being a Christian I think that Christ's example of the way he treated people, he
- 39:30 tipped over the tables of the money lenders and so on in the temple, but he was a very strong fellow as far as his principles were concerned. He condemned the wrong; he praised the people who were doing the right thing. He was very gentle and yet he was strong, I think. And I believe that some of the
- 40:00 other religions, I have got a friend who is a Buddhist, and they are a gentle people. They don't believe in vindictive and an eye for an eye sort of, and I believe a lot of Islam are not vicious people. But you have got to get to know people. See Fran is on a committee,
- 40:30 Queensland-wide committee - she was supposed to go to a meeting today but they didn't let her know early enough - where they're trying to achieve reconciliation between Aborigines and the rest of the community. Because Fran is part Aborigine. Her father was part Aborigine and her mother was part Aborigine and she told me when I met her first,
- 41:00 she said, "Of course you know I am part Aborigine?" and I said, "So what?" So what? I mean she is a



good woman. So those are my final philosophy, that more can be achieved in this world by prayer and by good deeds than by

41:30 trying to show how strong and tough, you know, "They're not going to let anybody put anything over us." But anyway that's the way, and I have only had eighty-eight years' experience, you see, so I don't know anything.

**That's a good call Reg, that's lovely.**

41:54 **End of tape**