

Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Smyth (Bob) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 16th March 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1714>

**Some parts of this interview
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are
noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:34 **So Bob where about did you grow up?**

In Greylands, Claremont. I was actually born in Ottway Street, Swanbourne, and then taken home to

01:00 Thompson road for a couple of years. And then my mother died when I was two and I went to live with my aunt in Greylands for about five years, six years.

And what was it like living with your aunt?

She was very, very good to me. And she had her own four children, they

01:30 were older. And in those days around Greylands area it was all bush and I spent a lot of time in the bush as a kid, I'd go for long walks. We were near what was then known as Butler swamp. It is now known as Lake Claremont. I spent a lot of time down there walking through the reeds and

02:00 as little boys do, gathering birds' eggs and so on and tadpoles and leeches. I recall the occasion when with a friend we went to the swamp and you walked throughout for an hour or so you'd have these leeches attach themselves to your legs. So we put a number of these in a jam tin and we came back to the

02:30 Greylands school which was then had about twenty students. And my mate bumped me up onto one of the two tanks they had their rainwater tanks off the roof, which was used for drinking water. And I tipped my fourteen leeches into the tank. But my uncle happened to come along about his time,

03:00 anyhow he taught me not to do it again.

Leeches in the tank.

But oh for a kid it was quite a good life. My Dad used to work at the Claremont asylum.

What did he do there?

He was an attendant and if he was on say day shift he would

03:30 walk along Davies Road to where he boarded himself in the other end of Claremont, so. I recall one day at the age of about five I hung around the road asking the workers going home if they'd seen my daddy and they said, "Oh he is just up ahead." So I

04:00 trotted after him, as a four or five-year-old could do and by the time I got up to him, about half a mile I was so puffed I couldn't say a word so I just grabbed him by the trouser leg. But anyhow for the hugs that daddy gave me there it was worth the run. But it was one of those occasions where, that's how I used to see Dad, he would call

04:30 around to my aunt's place regularly too to see me. In the meantime my sister, she was a year older, she stayed at another aunt's place down at Fremantle and I'd see her occasionally. But about the age of six,

seven we were both put into an orphanage at the Methodist Children's Home in Victoria Park.

05:00 That wasn't at all good. It was a very miserable existence.

Can you describe what it was like living inside there?

We were both desperately unhappy. The, my mother and father as they were know looking after us they were very, very strict but nevertheless

05:30 they were not cruel by any means but just the fact of being away from people we knew. And we went to school at the Victoria Park school.

That must have just been a rude shock going to an orphanage at that age. It must have been awful for you.

06:00 Yes we were both most miserable most of the time. I can say that many occasions when you had solitude was sitting on the dunny [toilet] and that's when I would often shed a tear.

Yes.

Reflect what a horrible world it is.

How many kids were in this orphanage with you?

06:30 Possibly eighty in total.

So that's a lot of kids and pretty noisy too I should expect?

Yes but at the end of that. Dad used to by the way ride a bike out, he'd borrow a bike and ride out from Claremont to see us on a weekend. Each second weekend he

07:00 was allowed to take us both down to where he was boarding in Claremont and spend a couple of days with him there. Finally he took us out of the home and we boarded with him then in Chester Road, Claremont. It was only one block away from the Claremont baths. And that was a different life entirely. We both went to

07:30 Claremont Primary [School] at that time.

So what was school like?

A bit tough at first. They started off by downgrading me a grade, I had to repeat a grade.

What sort of sport did you like to play when you were at school?

I played soccer originally, believe it or not.

08:00 **That would have been pretty unusual for those times. Everybody was playing football and cricket.**

Yes, oh yes soccer, a bit of cricket.

Any sort of subjects that you enjoyed while you were at school?

None in particular. I do recall that my writing was never the best

08:30 but, now I'm going back to grade 8 in school here the time when I won a writing competition but there were only two in the competition and my mate Tom had chopped up two of his fingers with an axe and he couldn't write too well. But...

There was a ring in..

I could write better. But my staff in later years would sometimes

09:00 disbelieve the fact I ever won anything as far as writing is concerned. But after about two years my Dad married again.

How old were you at this time, when he remarried?

The second time I think I'd be about nine. We used to live out at Greylands

09:30 or first of all in Mount Claremont which in those days was the area surrounding Atalie Street, there are only about four streets up there. It was always known as 'Pommy Holler [Hollow]'.

Why is that?

Because originally there were about, of about a dozen families lived up there four of them came from England or they

10:00 spoke English anyhow and so it was known as Pommy Holler.

It sort of demonstrates the Australian sense of humour really doesn't it?

Oh yes in deed, yes. But it was about, I suppose two few miles from Claremont school and we used to always walk, did us no harm at all. In fact sometimes my sister and I would

10:30 decide we'll try to run all the way. It kept us in good condition anyhow, yes.

So when you got back, now you've got a stepmother, did you have any duties around the house that you had to take care of, as part of being in this new family?

We did and the most memorable I

11:00 remember is when we were ordered to go down and pull the clover out of the lawn. We spent hour after hour pulling out this damn clover. But again with the view to make sure you weren't going to be street-kids. My stepmother wouldn't allow us to leave the front gate without a very good reason, like going for a message

11:30 or something like that.

It sounds like she was a bit of a disciplinarian your stepmother?

Yes she was indeed.

It sounds like it would have been better than being in the orphanage?

Indeed, that is true many times over, yes.

What kind of things did you get up to on the weekends?

Well

12:00 because we were always confined to the block, not allowed to go anywhere without a good reason, I found that by saying I was going out to get some firewood I'd be able to take my cart out. I had a little pull-cart of course and I could disappear for two

12:30 hours getting a load of sticks and so on. But also I'd take my ging[?perhaps a spear] with me, that blows away any bird in sight.

So you'd basically be pointing your ging at a lot of birds in the bush?

13:00 Well I think in the course of a year I'd throw around more lead than you'd find during the whole of the Iraqi battle but if we ever hit a bird we'd then be very, very sorrowful and pick it up and do our best to bring it back to life again. But

13:30 we'd hit a bird once in months, months really.

So they are pretty inaccurate those gings, you've got to be, you know?

Inaccurate, yes.

Yeah.

But also invented in those days, a newer type of weapon for shooting things and I got hold of some of the flower stems you get in pampas grass.

14:00 **Oh yeah.**

And the stems were about say, in those days about a yard long, and light but also straight. And I did get hold of a piece of bamboo again about ten inches in length and a couple of nabs off from the end and instead of having a prong on the ging I'd attach it

14:30 to this tube. And by pulling the so called spear or arrow down through the tube, I'd fire that. And the trouble was although it used to go a fair distance it was too light and had to have some stability and that's where Dad's nail can came in handy. He didn't have a lot of them but he had about maybe a dozen

15:00 fairly long length screws and also a few six inch nails and I found by putting one of these on the length of the arrow it could travel a long way. So much to say I could shoot one from the front of our place in Davies Road at a later date and it would land almost in the swamp about one hundred and fifty yards away. So armed with this contraption

15:30 I went out to see what birds were around and in a, it might have been a tea tree in the next paddock, I saw a dove got underneath and aimed it at the dove and off it went I missed the dove but a wattler fell down from the far side of the tree, which shows that

16:00 it does kill birds.

Well done, so this was your own invention this contraption?

Yes.

Well it's very enterprising of you to work it out because I thought I haven't heard that one before.

But we used to go for long walks in the bush too. By this time we were living in Davies Road opposite what was then called Condren's dairy and we'd go out

16:30 through Mount Claremont, out the back of what is the asylum of course, the asylum grounds. And go through what in those days was Itterschagen's Airdrome, and Itterschagen was a German tractor parts distributor. And to distribute to country areas he had this

17:00 Glen monoplane and it was, the plane was flown by Harry Baker who was known in those days as Harry Cannonball Baker, finished up as one of the directors of Ansett. But we go out through that area, Perry Lakes and so on and sometimes walk as far as City Beach through the bush. We'd

17:30 see a number of rabbits, very rarely a kangaroo. But as the time we were say toddlers and so on I'd draw a map of the area and work out where we had been and things like that. They were pretty rough maps by the way. I must add too that whereas in later years the Aborigines are reported to occupy

18:00 the land, in all those years we didn't see one Aborigine. And I might add that if we had of we would have run screaming for a mile because we'd sometimes be told when we were bad a black fellow will get you. Yes but it was interesting.

18:30 **You mentioned that this fellow had an aeroplane. There wouldn't have been a lot of aeroplanes around at this time?**

No there weren't. In those days there was a service started from the east to Perth and they flew an aircraft called the Hercules and that always made great conversation

19:00 when it was heard flying around.

Sounds like you're a little bit fascinated by aeroplanes, and killing birds?

I think all kids were in those days, yes as they would be now, yes.

So at what point did you actually leave school Bob?

I went to Claremont School until 1993,

19:30 1933 when I did the junior examination, which I passed. And then I think I was fifteen at the time, I could have been fifteen and the school age to leave school was fourteen. And my cousin had done twelve months commercial course at Perth

20:00 Tech [Technical School] and I asked my parents if I could do the same commercial course which seemed to show that you'd get a better job at the end of it. So I went to Perth Tech which was then St George's Terrace.

What sort of things were you learning there as part of the commercial course?

We had shorthand,

20:30 typing, bookkeeping, commercial, mathematics of course, commercial procedures and those subjects mainly.

Did you enjoy doing it?

Yes

21:00 I might add that it was a class of twenty-two and we'd often be joined by another group. There was a mixed class and we'd be joined by another group of girls for the typing lessons and this one would possibly have about

21:30 we'll say thirty in the class. I was graded the best typist. Although I couldn't write very well I've often said since that I could type pretty well.

It's more useful in these days as well.

Yes but anyhow Dad wasn't on a great

22:00 pay naturally working for the government as looking after lunatics and so on so my stepmother gave the word I had to get out and get a job. I only had about two months to go before the exams came along but reluctantly I had to go out and look for a job.

How did you go about that?

Well I had the impression that

22:30 the best places were the pastoral companies like Elder Smith, Dalgettys Elders Mort. So I started off

applying for jobs there, then I tried the banks. But I'd march in and they'd ask you,

23:00 "What are your qualifications?" "What school did you go to?" I would have said, "I went to Claremont school and passed the junior." "Where do you live?" "Greylands." And, "What does your father do?" "He's an attendant at the Claremont

23:30 Asylum." "Yes well we haven't got a position here at present, I'll let you know." And I heard that so many times and I realised after a period that all the blokes, younger fellows who worked at Elders and Hale - Elders or Dalgettys they were from Hales School or Guildford Grammar and

24:00 the reason being their fathers likely were farmers and all their business went through the particular firm and so also various charges went through the account and I wouldn't have a hope being employed by them.

Tough realisation?

When I tried the banks I had a similar response when it came to the part with what did my father do.

24:30 They would have like to hear me say that he was manager of the local bank or local Mayor or something like that but that was my luck. So in Forest Place I went along to the Commonwealth Bank. And I was lead to what I was told was the manager's office, which was on the ground floor it was quite a large office. And behind this

25:00 very large desk sat this very important looking fellow and I stood at attention waiting for him to ask what I wanted to say and so on. He went through a letter he was reading, he took a long time to read it I thought. However he put that one down and picked up another one and went through a second letter and I had to wonder whether all managers

25:30 had to be like this. Having finished the second letter he leaned across his desk to the far end which I said before was far too big for him anyhow and in doing so the top of his swivel chair fell off and he crashed to the floor. And immediately I'd say half the staff from the ground came rushing up and crowded, nose pressed against the glass. It was panelling up to about say

26:00 five feet high glass above it and they were all convinced that I had clobbered this fellow and I was about to knock off the safe. Anyhow I wished I had have clobbered him but I'm afraid that the fellow sitting on the floor looking up at me laughing I didn't get the job.

Well it's hard not to laugh under those circumstances isn't it?

True. But finally, I applied for a job

26:30 advertised by Harris Scarf & Sandovers and they were a major wholesalers and retailers based in Hay Street, Perth and I got a job there as office boy.

What sort of things did you do as part of your job?

Well with two other office boys we would spend a lot of time licking stamps and going on messages. But an important job was to take the mail down to the post office and

27:00 this was the mail for their Kalgoorlie branch and it had to be down there before quarter to five. And so there was always a competition between the mail boys to see who could get down there quickest and return so. I do remember I grabbed a case of mail,

27:30 rip across to the lino [linoleum] department on the first floor, take two flights of stairs by leaping the second lot. And I do recall clearly one day when I knocked over two old ladies which was very regretful. Then across Hay Street through the very light traffic of course, down through malls

28:00 leaping again another two flights of stairs and rushing to the post office, deposit the mail, pick up the rest and then go back again the same exercise. Anyhow that was all a challenge but after about I'd say four or five months I was approached by the office manager. He called me in and said would I like to be cashier and I said,

28:30 "Yes sir." So they put me in the cashier's desk and I recall I had a rise this time too, before this happened but I'd been there about possibly five weeks and he came and said to me, "Do you like the job?" And I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Well we're giving you a rise." So he gave me a rise

29:00 and I went from eleven and tuppence up to fifteen and threepence. But I learned later that was the rise that I normally would have got because three weeks hence because they paid it under the clerks award which originally was ten and ten pence for the first six months and then during that period the rise in the award put me up to eleven and tuppence and then of course I jumped up to this majestic fifteen and threepence.

29:30 So I, the job was a challenge. I used to take all the cash for the departments brought up to me maybe twice a day anyhow I'd do the balance during the morning,

30:00 take it down the bank by a certain time. And often went down through what was then Airways Arcade

with what was then a heap of cash and I'd bank at the Union Bank. I'd also have a forty pound petty cash account. I recall I'd balanced all the cash one day, that was including the petty cash and found it five pounds short and

- 30:30 it worried me a lot naturally. I went through all the vouchers and checked again and again and did the banking on that day. I came back and had a very miserable afternoon and spent the whole afternoon trying to balance the cash, going over my figures. And I didn't sleep too well that night, I came back in the morning to start my job and I decided I would tell the chief accountant,
- 31:00 Cyril Hammond that I was five pounds short. I'd worked out anyhow what I would do, I thought now they'd naturally give me the sack and might even go to gaol and I thought I'd get on a goods train and go up to Bruce Rock where I had a cousin working on a farm and spend the rest of my life working on a farm. Anyhow
- 31:30 about eleven o'clock the girl that used to do the credit payments came to me and said, "Bob here's the cheque for Mr Heffernan's IOU [written acknowledgment of a debt - 'I owe you']. And I said, "What's IOU, Jean?" And she said to me, "Oh I forgot to tell you, Mr Hammond was making up payments
- 32:00 and I decided to incorporate the IOU with the list I had and I got it from your cash box." She actually had access, she had her own key to my cash, my cash department. But she'd forgotten to tell me she'd taken the I owe you, which I might add too, she had originally taken out and taken the five pounds to
- 32:30 present in the first place. So I didn't even know the IOU existed or the fact that she'd used it. Well I was so relieved I decided I didn't want to be a cashier and shortly afterwards I told the office manager, "Look," I said, "I'm doing accountancy bookkeeping at night school and I
- 33:00 would like to be in the ledgers department rather than to be cashier." And in due course they transferred me to ledgers. So I'd been aware also, I used to take around to the directors the sales results, weekly, monthly and also I had knowledge of
- 33:30 the pay. I knew that Cyril Hammond was earning seven pounds ten, seven and a half pounds. And Monty Cooley who was the company secretary he was earning £10 a week and I thought well if I get to be your age I'd like to earn more than that. Then I thought now I've already crossed
- 34:00 crossed where the big money is so the thought came back again to the banks, insurance companies. And Vacuum Oil Company just here advertised a job so I applied for it, had an interview and I was told I had the job but then I learned it was in advertising department. I said, "I don't want the job because I'm doing
- 34:30 accountancy and I want to be in the accounting rather than there so thanks very much." So I went back to my job at Harris Scarf. Anyhow Bill Docket who was interviewing - Bill Derbyshire who was interviewing me got in touch with me three weeks later to come around again and he offered me a job then in credit collections which I accepted. And
- 35:00 having accepted it and been very pleased about it he then said to me, "We have got a slight glitch Mr Smyth." He said, "We pay here under the award and you're being paid more than the award rate for your kind of service." He said, "You're being paid one pound one and four pence
- 35:30 and the award for your experience is fifteen and threepence." Now he said, "It's only for three weeks." Now it gave me a problem because I had left home. I'd had a disturbance with my stepmother and
- 36:00 rode off on my bike into the wilderness and I went up to a friend of mine who was boarding in a boarding house in Subiaco, Eddie Pearson. And I spoke to the landlady about whether I could stay with her and the trouble was the board was twenty two shillings per week. And I said to her, "Well look,
- 36:30 can you make it less because I'll mow the lawn for you, I'll chop the wood, I'll do the washing up for you, I'll sweep the floors and make the bed. I'll do anything at all if you can make it work for me." So she agreed to make it eighteen shillings a week. And having accepted that then I'm lining up with Derbyshire Vacuum and he's offering me this job where I had to go back to fifteen and
- 37:00 threepence. Anyhow I had a talk to Mrs Savage and I made out for the three weeks until I got to the one pound one and four pence.

Mrs Savage was not savage at all.

She was a wonderful lady, wonderful lady. Her husband was a well known figure in Perth in those days, George Savage. He was a floorwalker in Bowens in the City. And

- 37:30 he had a very commanding presence. He always wore a white shirt and bow tie. There was not many worn those days and everybody knew him. But over the years the poor old bugger got Alzheimers [disease] and she was looking after him as well as about, about half a dozen boarders in the house.

- 38:00 And so she was extremely good to me.

But eventually your pay went up with the Vacuum Oil?

Well I managed. I was being fed and I might add that in those days say as a seventeen, eighteen year old I eat like a horse. I used to ride my bike down along to North Cottesloe Surf Club

38:30 as the junior and I'd be in the water all day of course and sun and come back. And also later on I played rugby. I'd go for a run through the park so I'd have a wonderful appetite. I'd eat anything that the other boarders wouldn't eat but nevertheless I did mow the lawn and I chopped the wood and all those sort of things.

Well it sounds like through all that you actually developed a good relationship with Mrs Savage?

39:00 We did, yes she was a wonderful person.

So it was actually a blessing in disguise?

But in those days too, I kept up night school. I went to night school in Perth Tech four nights a week.

This is doing the accounting course?

On a Saturday night I'd take down

39:30 a billy can or large jug to the shop down the next corner, a little handy food place run by a fellow called Assewer. And frankly his personality was like that.

Great.

When I say personality there, he had extremely dour, he would grunt in conversation and nothing ever made him

40:00 happy. I'd pay him four pence and I'd get two pints of milk and I'd take those up to the bedroom where I had a small table and I'd put the milk down over here and I'd spend the evening doing my studies and drinking the milk. And that was my big Saturday night.

40:30 But anyhow it kept me to be a good boy.

Absolutely.

Yes I, in later years I was even able to join the Cottesloe Golf Club as a junior. I think it only cost about, oh

41:00 it was something like twenty five shillings for a year's membership. I used to caddie there when I was much younger.

Oh well that's a nice little job.

So I kept the, it kept me interested in the game. I left in later years and I joined Lake Curriner where I played for

41:30 48 years until fairly recently. But I enjoyed golf, I enjoyed rugby.

And soccer.

And swimming. Well soccer was only a very short period.

I'll just pause you there because we just need to change a tape.

Tape 2

00:30 **About the war in Europe?**

What was I?

Learning about the war in Europe?

When, what period though? When we we're in New Guinea for example?

No while you were still back in the company, before you'd joined the services.

Well

Were you reading the

01:00 **newspapers or discussing it with friends or family?**

Oh I read newspapers of course but the war opened up there on the 3rd of September I recall. And I went along to Yorkshire House in Georges terrace to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Recruiting Centre.

Why did you choose to join the air force?

To join the air force, I wanted to be a pilot.

01:30 **Any particular reason why?**

Well, it appealed to me frankly to be up there as a fighter pilot.

Fair enough.

In those days of course they didn't have the logistics to run many cadets. I think we had about twenty going at one time.

02:00 And there was nothing doing so I enquired again over a period until December and I went back say about mid December and the recruiting fellow said to me, "The best way to become a pilot is you get across to Laverton

02:30 in any mustering. Join the air force in any mustering and then you can re-muster to be a pilot." So I fell for that story and he enlisted me as a WT trainee, a Wireless Operator trainee. And I resigned my job at Vacuum and went across to Laverton. I was enlisted

03:00 on the 9th of January 1940.

How did you reach Laverton?

By train and...

Where there a lot of other young blokes, like yourself, going to Laverton?

Oh yes, there were quite a lot. Some fellows who, a couple I knew at that time and others naturally became friends. But we went to

03:30 Laverton, enlisted on the 9th and then we went down to Point Cook. And I was in number 18 Signal School, the course, signal school that was signal school.

Can you describe what was there, what kind of buildings or facilities they had?

There was a bell hanger at the end of the

04:00 long road down there from the called headquarters building. That was the left hand side. And then the other buildings were possibly eight or nine single story buildings, wooden from memory.

What kind of buildings did you sleep in?

They were

04:30 back again to the main area of Point Cook which would be about a mile from the signal school. And they were - what did they call them? - they were galvanised iron huts anyhow which was quite common construction in both the army and the air force in those days.

Are they Nissen huts or?

Nissen huts yes, they were Nissen huts. Yes

05:00 wooden, galvanised walling and roofs.

Were they very comfortable?

Very?

Comfortable.

Pretty austere frankly but you accept those sort of things with a war on. You just had a wire, wire frame bed with a mattress on it probably a

05:30 palliasse a mattress, I can't remember that now, straw and a couple of blankets and so on.

What was the food like?

It was okay, yes. You've got to remember we ate it anyhow. Always ate what was put in front on you, that was normal.

What was the daily routine?

March down

06:00 to the school and go into the classroom where you are then armed with the key of course and you spend the day doing Morse code.

Did you find Morse code very difficult?

Oh no more than the average person would but the trouble was I made a lot of enquiries about the blokes

- 06:30 who had been on courses previously and it appeared that well over half of them were posted to ground jobs. They might be posted to Pearce or anywhere the airforce had a base and they would simply be tapping out messages in an office. And it wasn't
- 07:00 my idea of flying. So having decided it not for me to fight the rest of the war like that I just started to put down either gaps or wrong letters and deliberately failed, failed tests and things like that. So I was taken
- 07:30 off course and when you are taken off course they ask you, "What do you want to re-muster to?" I mean my reply naturally was, "Pilot," but that was a laugh because again the reason stated previously and the story about re-mustering was a big laugh. But I decided that
- 08:00 it wasn't for me to fight the rest of the war like that. And I did, I became friendly with a fellow called Squadron Leader Red Green who was a pretty well known figure and he in a spare period, maybe half an hour or so would put me onto a lead trainer. Which I found most interesting and challenging and
- 08:30 possibly again it was from his point of view was to assess how, whether I was a natural on controls. But over a period in re-mustering, come back to that subject, they would ask you what you wanted to do, what you wanted to be. Now a good mustering for pay was as a clerk general and I'd done
- 09:00 a commercial course. In fact at that time too I had passed the Federal Institute of Accountants intermediate exam and had also passed half of the subjects for the final when war broke out. I could type naturally and so I'd have no difficulty in being a clerk general and be paid. I can't recall the figures now but being paid about possibly about seven
- 09:30 and six pence a day rather than five shillings a day. And the lowest rating of mustering was either as a guard or office orderly where no brain is required. So I didn't want to make myself indispensable to them or be of value to them, I wanted to get out or join
- 10:00 aircrew and so I nominated I'd be office orderly. So I re-mustered accordingly and was given a job in the office. And by this time the Empire Air [Training] Scheme had come into being and they were enlisting thousands of blokes all over the world into the Empire Air Scheme and I wanted to be part of that. But they were not taking
- 10:30 re-musterings. I was lead to believe that it would come about so I was just filling in time and then when they did change the policy to allow re-mustering I got a transfer to Melbourne to do the pre-enlistment course. And this was fairly easily accomplished because the officer in charge of airman's records was Reef Ross
- 11:00 who was a city accountant in Perth in later years but he also happened to be the person I caddied for at Cottesloe Golf Club for a number of years. And so he got me a transfer to Melbourne, I did the pre-enlistment course over a period of about possibly six weeks or two months.

What was the pre-enlistment course?

It was

- 11:30 it was to determine whether you were suitable to be, worth training as aircrew. And it was not difficult though, it was only junior standards. And...

What kind of things did they assess you on?

Principally maths, geometry was very big.

- 12:00 Maths and geometry, a bit of written work but I'd say mainly geometry and maths, those two. But I waited so long I was so determined that this was going to be the tops that for eleven tests, examinations, I averaged 98%.
- 12:30 So naturally I had to walk in. Then came the medical again and they failed me on eyesight.

That must have been a devastating blow?

My left eye wasn't strong enough. And I recall I appealed and they did try, the fellow in charge of it was a fellow who was still a civilian although a squadron leader and he ran his private

- 13:00 practice well in Collins Street Melbourne and his name was Travers, Squadron Leader Travers. And I went up one Saturday morning to his surgery in Collins Street where I was checked out by Travers and two others who were on this particular board and I recall during the examination they had a book which they'd
- 13:30 turn over, this was to check you for colour blindness and there was one page identified as seventy-two

and they weren't sure what it was. And remarkably the whole damn three were colour blind it appeared. They tried to look at the back of the book to verify the fact that my seventy-two was correct and it was. But I still had this difficulty in my

- 14:00 left eye. And they told me that if I was in England the RAF [Royal Air Force] would take me in and train me because over there their allowance was to wear a lens if necessary to correct that vision from, it might have been say six twelve or six nine down to six six anyhow along those lines but
- 14:30 I was failed on medical. And at this time I had been transferred to Air Board, the director of signals and I was a corporal, a corporal office orderly in signal section S1 doing the most absorbing interesting work.
- 15:00 This department dealt with HFDF [High Frequency Direction Finding] Stations throughout the air force coverage in the Australia area and the Pacific of course. And I'd make up graphs from information coming in from various DF [Direction Finding] stations and from this a very important function was to estimate, I recall the file was
- 15:30 the characteristics of the ionosphere and the function was to determine the maximum workable and useable frequencies of radio transmission which was very, very important for HFDF in terms of skip distances where they could estimate where particular aircraft were. And I found it most
- 16:00 interesting. From the information which come out of it we'd send signals to about twenty eight or thirty stations around Australia and one of them I do remember was to General Short, Officer Commanding US [United States] Air force Honolulu, Hawaii and because
- 16:30 shortly after this period the Jap [Japanese] attack on Pearl Harbour took place. But as interesting as I could see it I, I didn't want to stay in the airforce I still wanted to go overseas and to get into the action. And I, I knew they wouldn't let me go without a very
- 17:00 good reason and the armoured tank regiment came from Perth across to Victoria and the headquarters were in the Chevron Hotel, St Kilda Road. And I went down to see Colonial Pope their CO [Commanding Officer] and I told him I was confident in Morse code up to eighteen words per minute, which I was anyhow, and
- 17:30 I would be handy as part of tank crew if he could claim me but I wanted a letter from him to say he would claim me if I was available. So with his letter I came back again and I applied for this charge. I was familiar with the procedures of files moving through air force headquarters and
- 18:00 I traced it through over a period of about a week or ten days and finally I had the word it's been approved. I then went in, S1 is commanded by Wing Commander Berry and his right hand man is Flight Lieutenant Arthur Hall, I think at that time his was Flight Officer Hall. Anyhow I told Arthur Hall
- 18:30 that I was leaving him. He said, "What do you mean you're leaving me?" I said, "I've applied for this charge and it's been approved." He stood to his feet, his eyes blazing and picked up the paper I gave him and stormed up to have further words about it. Anyhow it was too late for him and I got out. It was in the week when I had sent, I'd taken signals up from
- 19:00 Arthur Hall to combined operations which was on about two floors above on air force headquarters and the signal was to air force headquarters, Pearce and the other signal was to air force headquarters Darwin and it requested them to have a listening watch at a particular time round about evening anyhow. On
- 19:30 a particular frequency and vaguely the call-sign 6EP seemed to come into memory but this was all over the stir when they couldn't get any response from HMAS Sydney and I wondered what the replies were going to be.
- 20:00 But this was the week that I left headquarters and went by train back to Perth to discharge. And on the way there were no big pence then because no real news had got out at the time but it did come out a few days later after I got to Perth.

How did that news affect the community here in Perth?

How did?

How did that news affect the local community?

- 20:30 Well I don't think people realised that the ship was actually missing. It was just they couldn't get in touch with it. That was about the limit at that time.

So it wasn't panic or distress?

I might add to that when I say to revert to this point I,

- 21:00 for a bloke who wanted to get away overseas and take a rifle and fire up a few shots, I couldn't be further removed from that then in my job at Air Board where I'd been transferred only to do the Pre-Enlistment Course to get into aircrew because at Air Board and signal S1 I was only five doors away

from Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett. Now

21:30 how close can you get to a base walloper [base bound] than a job like that? Anyhow in the meantime friends had gone overseas and been killed. One of them though was a fellow called Frank Kale who joined the RAF early. I used to work for Frank in the Vacuum Oil Company. Others needn't mention their names

22:00 but they were knocked off at Ruin Ridge under they were the 2/28th.

Did that news motivate you even further to want to go overseas?

Absolutely, absolutely. I was so dispirited over the two years I had in the air force not being able to get overseas that when leave came along I refused to go home to Perth until I'd done what I planned to

22:30 do. That was to get overseas and fight.

How would you spend leave if you wouldn't come home?

Well I'd go up to, you could get rail passes of course. I went to the Gold Coast on a couple of occasions. I'd go to Sydney, to Adelaide and there was no trouble in those days either in a uniform to hitch a ride and I'd

23:00 hitch between states, capitals and so on. I went to Canberra but the day I went to Canberra I was in, I was in a vehicle in Canberra. Oh I think that was the occasion when, or it might have been a subsequent

23:30 visit to Canberra but it was the Prime Minister Menzies walking along, having an early morning walk I do recall that.

You caught sight of him did you?

Actually the person driving the car said, "That's Menzies there."

Why did you choose not to come home to Perth for leave?

A sense of shame

24:00 **You felt very strongly about going overseas.**

Hmm. Hmm.

Was it a realistic notion of shame or?

Well it was to me.

What happened when you returned?

I said goodbye to all the people at Vacuum Oil I'd worked with and all my friends and bloody big hero going away and two years later I'm,

24:30 I'm working at Air Board Melbourne, with a pen.

So what happened when you came back to WA [Western Australia]?

I...

I suppose you stayed low.

Went to the recruiting centre in the showgrounds in Perth, yes the great showgrounds and enlisted in the

25:00 AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. They gave me a number 19098 and I was sent up to Northam. I did the usual rookies drill and all that sort of stuff and we...

How long were you at Northam?

I'd been there about possibly

25:30 a month when they put me onto the NCOs [NON Commissioned Officers] course and that was about another month or five weeks and I got a good pass for that. It wasn't very difficult I might add.

What did it involve?

Well mainly learning about the rifle and the Bren gun and marching, a lot of marching of course.

26:00 And then going on a bit of rifle shooting and I recall I topped the company in rifle shooting and they gave me a marksman qualification. I enjoyed that.

It must have been very satisfying?

More than I used to fire a ging.

26:30 **So obviously that right eye didn't affect your marksmanship?**

Oh no, no, good right eye. And then after about another probably four weeks I'd say when they sent me to a junior leader's course down at Narrogin and from that...

And what did that course entail?

Well that

27:00 was the more, a more senior situation. In other words to be qualified as a sergeant, a platoon sergeant.

So what kind of exercises did they put you through?

Well the usual stuff again. It was a lot of small arms stuff and learning about various parts of weapons and

27:30 controlling people particularly getting lessons on the workings of the arms and so on and how they worked.

How did they instruct you about leadership? You mentioned just now controlling people, I'm wondering what sort of leadership courses they were giving you?

Oh leadership well you'd be told to take over the squad and do a few exercises and so on, what

28:00 to do and how to do it and so on. I came back and they gave me a platoon where we went out first of all to Canning Dam and we were supposed to protect Canning Dam from a parachute attack. It was thought the Japanese might come down, land in Perth and that sort of thing. And then after having been up

28:30 there for about six weeks.

How did you spend those six weeks, were you in tents or?

We were in tents and doing our usual guard duties of course.

What kind of guard did you sent up?

Well you simply stand at a certain position that was one of the key positions of Canning Dam and spend your four hours there, well what you called it four hours, two hours

29:00 and then maybe attend a few lectures. I recall there were a few kangaroos up there too at Canning Dam and live ammunition was not too plentiful. And somehow I had, I had two

29:30 rounds and decided I was to go up with some other blokes and shoot a kangaroo up the far end of the dam, not supposed to of course. But we went up and got a boat from somewhere, at the other side of the weir and we must have rowed about two miles. And fanned out, I think there were four of us some blokes had five shots,

30:00 fired. I had two but anyhow suddenly you hear a bang, bang, bang somebody let off about four shots, another three shots over there. But I just felt that I wanted to make sure of my two shots. In due course one leapt up and I shot him with the first shot. So we took back, we got one kangaroo among four of us.

30:30 So we got him. We...

I don't suppose you took him back and prepared him for dinner?

We did, true. Anyhow from there we went, we were posted to Pearce.

Can I just interrupt there for a minute Bob, was that a mock exercise or was there real anticipation that the Japanese might parachute?

Well it was thought that the Japanese could land.

31:00 Yes in fact I've read since that there was a division of something, a division. There was about twelve or fifteen thousand fellows near Gin Gin...

That would the western division was it?

Preparing for the same possibility...

How real...

Believing that the Japs could be coming down to

31:30 land and that was an area which it was thought they would land at rather than Perth directly they would land, make a bridge head first and - I was surprised to hear I didn't know that even until fairly recently but there were as many as twelve thousand troops in that Gin Gin area.

How real did you feel that threat was at the time, while you were at Canning Dam?

32:00 No, didn't worry us actually. But that again not long after I had join and while I was at Waterloo the Jap bombing of Broome occurred and they called for a dozen men who

32:30 were marksmen to go up to Broome. And I applied for that one too but they didn't take me, they sent another twelve blokes up there.

I'm curious to ask because today it's hard to imagine that there was any plans of a Japanese invasion here in Perth but if you look at the period during World War II, the bombings in the northwest and then the activity down our West Australian coastline

33:00 **and then the actions that you're describing, for instance the Canning Dam exercise.**

When you realised this was just at the time of the Japanese push south at the beginning of 1942 and yes, Broome must have been bombed and also in January '42.

33:30 The Sydney had disappeared. The thinking was that the Japanese could come down this coast and land in Australia.

Fortunately you were prepared for it? So was it the action that you had been looking for?

Not necessarily, facilitation was over in the Middle East.

34:00 Yes.

So what happened once you completed the stint at the Canning Dam?

We went to Bullsbrook where we had a small fort or detachment there and I recall it was under Major Morrie Salem, he was a fairly well know Perth bloke at that time and there were about two platoons, say there were maybe

34:30 up to nineteen men altogether. We had an encampment area across the road from the airport, the air force buildings and I recall we had a roadblock leading into Bullsbrook. And our orderly room

35:00 was the most southern room of the Bullsbrook Hotel. Yes that was fairly interesting.

Why do you say that?

Well it was handy to have a drink.

So were there any shenanigans or strife?

No not that we were into the grog, no not really. But we had quite a lot of vehicles going through and checked them

35:30 out and that sort of thing. There was another roadblock the other side of Bullsbrook, about two miles up the track, north.

And Bullsbrook was significant because of why?

Sorry?

Bullsbrook was significant because of why?

Oh yes.

Because it was near Pearce or?

Well it was Pearce, Bullsbrook is Pearce actually. Yes

36:00 the boundary of Pearce is flush up against the hotel anyhow. Well it was in those days, yes. I recall an interesting thing happened here. We'd go to the pictures at the airforce at Pearce and

36:30 there'd be approximately about a thousand airman of those seven or eight hundred thousand of them and about seventy or eighty army blokes. And we were lined up to go to the pictures this evening and there were about possibly fifteen or twenty WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force]

37:00 based at Pearce. Anyhow while we were lined up this group of WAAAFs walked past and one of them who was a very attractive blonde walked up to me and said, "You're Bob Smyth aren't you?" And feeling most flattered that a girl should talk to me I

37:30 said, "Yes." And she said, "Do you remember me, you saved my life down at North Cottesloe." Anyhow when I belonged to the surf club I had pulled her in one afternoon from the reef. Anyhow I was able to accompany her to the pictures. That was quite an episode that time.

I bet you made an impression on the rest of the blokes?

It did.

38:00 Yes.

I don't suppose it lead to any romance?

Oh no, no, no.

Was it frustrating while you were at Pearce to be surrounded by that many airmen now that you were in the army?

Oh no not really, no. We were all doing our job.

So you had moved on and

38:30 **you'd made the right decision...?**

Well about that time, they then came out and that is posted up, what you call a routine order or something or rather. It called applications from infantry men to join a particular

39:00 body for training where the risks were greater than what you'd normally encounter in infantry activity. We all thought it was parachutists and a number of us applied and we were accepted. And about a matter of days or a week later we were moved across to

39:30 Forster, Victoria. Went across on a cattle truck and we went down to Derby which later turned out to be the guerrilla warfare school.

Were you informed that you were going to guerrilla warfare school before you got there or was it a surprise when you arrived?

We were told we were going there, yes. It was to

40:00 join an independent company and we learned more about the independent companies of course.

What did you know about guerrilla warfare before being given the opportunity to go to guerrilla warfare school, anything at all because that wouldn't have been a common warfare?

No it was not a name used in those days. It was not used it was only used in later years. But it was simply a base

40:30 for training independent companies. There were independent companies working in Europe at that time and England etc.

I imagine you must have found this quite appealing?

I did. Yes.

Was there a sense of growing excitement?

Well it was very, it was a new challenge if you call it. And it

41:00 was a great interest yes.

Was there any excitement amongst yourself and the other boys that had signed up?

Well we knew the training had to be tough and we welcomed that.

Before I ask you about the training we'll have to change tapes

41:30 Oh yes.

Tape 3

00:30 **So you're at Forster? Is that what it's called, Forster?**

Well actually they called it Derby the actual, it is Victoria's national parkland area. Its right down the tip of Wilson's Promontory and it forty miles from Forster, that's the nearest town. And it is a great

01:00 health place these days.

Oh really. So what sort of facilities did you have there at the time?

Well they had what they called the tidal river, which in deed was tidal and not a very wide one. At the camp would be only about barely twenty metres across, there was a bridge across. And

01:30 they also had the beach of course was quite close, we'd go for a swim occasionally. Although fairly mountainous, I recall Mount Otto, Mount Leonard and they might only be about up to 1800 feet, about that in height.

But still it's a pretty good climb.

A lot of,

02:00 a lot of scrub of course and some swampland and so on. And they had the usual bayonet course and that sort of thing.

What sort of, were you on campus there?

Campus yeah.

How about other facilities that you had open to you, was it fairly?

They had

02:30 a hut about half the size of a Nissen hut that was the sergeants' mess. Then a small cookhouse out the front. The food was could I say basic but very good.

Like what would you be eating?

03:00 **I'm just wondering if you were on rations almost there at all?**

Stew.

Knocked off a couple of kangaroos and made it up into a stew?

I recall they had the rice pudding with blowflies was always very good. Well you know the big fat sultanas, yeah.

There not raisins, they're blowflies?

Oh well you call them blowflies.

Oh right

03:30 **so it's not really blowflies.**

No they were good. Well I still enjoy here, I'll often say to Margaret, "Can we have blowfly pudding?" and then of course there's bread and butter pudding with lots of blowflies in it, the sultanas yeah it's one of my favourites. But over there in training you'd have a, for the meal you'd have say,

04:00 say twelve blokes on a table, six either side, and they'd put a big bowl on the end and you'd pass your plates up or somebody would spoon the stuff out in big scoops, etc. And you'd have lots of butter and jam. You'd take a big thick slab of bread out and you'd throw it onto the flames of where the cook was doing something or rather

04:30 and when it would start to burn you'd take it off and that was good, good toast, yes.

How did they go about weeding out blokes who couldn't take the sort of training?

Well in many cases the fellow just couldn't take it and he'd fall behind or he called in the same week we arrived over there

05:00 we were pulled out about say ten o'clock at night. Told to get in full gear, marching order with your pack, rifle and with other gear that you would carried anyhow, you had to fill your load up. Form up and off we'd march. We'd

05:30 march at a very, very fast pace, a very fast pace. And we'd do say three or four miles and some blokes might feel as though there's twenty to catch up but each bloke realised too that he had to do it. So after about six miles your feet might be

06:00 feel a bit sore but you still press on. And I recall right in front of me a big bloke named Bruce Godson, he was a mate of mine in the same tent. He was a big bloke he was also a bit overweight, Bruce, red hair, rather a giant of a bloke. But Bruce was finding it very difficult but I though also too that

06:30 God if Bruce can do it I can do it anyhow and so, the pace was like that some blokes weren't falling out. And after ten miles of this made pace without a stop you could pull over on the side of the road and we all thought well we possibly can stretch out here. But

07:00 we'd hardly been down for say fifteen minutes and it was on your feet again and we're marching back. And your feet are covered in blisters. You'd find when you pulled off after the first march out you had blisters but

07:30 we all had to go back. So you marched back blisters or no blisters. Your thinking is the same that you've got to do it. Other blokes are doing it therefore I can do it. Still this mad pace and naturally, possibly a third of the blokes are checking into the RAP this is now

08:00 in the morning, say 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock. And the blokes in the RAP are I think they are putting a needle

underneath the blisters to press them out and so on but yeah that was it that was one night. And a lot of activity could be like that. It was to test your

08:30 endurance, excellent for the brain and the body, yes.

How much of an emphasis was there on fitness?

It was on all the time to be fit, get fit, stay fit.

What sort of other things would you do as part of fitness training, apart from route marching?

I

09:00 recall after we'd had a good session in the sergeants mess we had to come back over that little bridge and it was, we arrived over there by the way in the middle of winter. This was a time when there was literally ice half an inch thick

09:30 around the edge of the river, not across the centre part of it, but it gives you an idea in the centre too it had to be, it had to be pretty cold. And there were about fifteen blokes being around on the bridge, having a great discussion, shouting and so on naturally having been filled up with the beer too earlier. And

10:00 it appeared that one of the blokes had bet ten dollars that he would swim across this ten yards or so of the river and he'd pulled out of it and I said, "Hell I'll swim the bloody river for ten bob." So I pulled off my clobber and

10:30 then they changed the rules that I had to stay in the water for half a minute. So I dived in and my god it was certainly cold and to take up the half minute I would have swam I reckon a good ten metres down stream, came back again I said, "How's the time?" "No not yet, not yet."

11:00 Having a go at me of course anyhow I got out and got the ten bob but it took me a long time to get the body warm afterwards, a long long time.

You can get hypothermia from doing something like that when you've been drinking.

Oh well we were young in those days and everything was a challenge.

Did you make some good mates while you were

11:30 **at this training?**

Oh yes.

Were some of them from Perth?

Yes, Bruce Godson was one in particular. Bruce Godson and a bloke called Lorry Cross. Yes I didn't see much of them afterwards because they went on,

12:00 they went on to the 8th Company, the 8th Independent Company and there were several of us went to the officers training school to do another course and that's how we were split up.

What were some of your trainers like in this camp? The people who trained you what did you think of them?

12:30 They were good, they had to be. Yes one of them was a Duntroon trained bloke. He was very good. They had some famous

13:00 fellows ahead of us but we missed them. No they were very efficient.

What was discipline like?

Naturally very strict yes.

What other sorts of things did you learn as part of this so called

13:30 **guerrilla training?**

Well we had things like map reading and how to use explosives.

What would you learn about explosives?

Which types of explosives were best to apply to

14:00 particular purposes.

Can you give me an example?

What it would do. Well plastic explosives applied to say a railway line or something like that. Other types for woodwork like a bridge.

So how proficient

14:30 **would you have to become on explosives?**

How?

How proficient would you have to become on explosives?

Well it was best to be one hundred per cent.

Sure. I'm just wondering you know all the different elements of the training course that you are doing, do you have to be one hundred per cent at absolutely everything?

It would help because you don't know in which circumstance you might strike when

15:00 you are in a hostile area. Yes we learnt how to set booby traps for example.

Can you give me an example of a booby trap?

Well I brought one home here actually.

15:30 No there was an item called the Murray switch which we used a lot in New Guinea and a Murray switch has got a fitting to take a cartridge and when a cord is pulled

16:00 it sets off a trigger which fired the cartridge. And the cartridge, it may even be attached to, the switch itself can be attached by a wire to a grenade.

16:30 And you shouldn't be near the switch if you've got a grenade attached to it. I do recall, I'm digressing here but there was a grenade holder, a cup, which could be clamped onto the

17:00 barrel of a rifle and by the grenade had a round based plate which fitted into the cup and by using what they called a ballistite cartridge in the business end of your rifle. You'd fire the ballistite and the charge

17:30 then would throw up against that plate and would hurl a grenade, I think it was a hundred yards but that was used during part of the war. Anyhow I brought home a Murray switch and crows were giving trouble in the loquat tree.

18:00 I also happened to have a blank cartridge and I put the Murray switch on some dexy and I strapped to the loquat tree and from there I put the lead cord up to the back door. And the crows were eating too many loquats so Margaret came in

18:30 in the morning and said, "There are half a dozen crows in the loquat tree." I thought now at quarter to six in the morning I better not set off a ballistite cartridge because not only will the neighbours hear but the police station is only a kilometre down the road. So I deferred pulling the cord until about ten o'clock from underneath there because I enjoy a couple of loquats myself.

19:00 And this crow landed about my head, only about five feet up, so immediately grabbed the cord and off went the switch with the cartridge and with the boom that went with it we didn't see crows here for a better part of a week. But it made a hell of a bang.

It's amazing you

19:30 **didn't destroy your own loquat tree in the process.**

Yes, yes.

That's very funny.

No well that's a cartridge opposed to a grenade. The grenades are quite, their switches are very good for use in New Guinea attached to a grenade, for booby traps.

Where there any accidents in training considering the fact that you were using explosives?

20:00 Oh not while I was there, no.

So you felt that the training was effective enough to actually...?

It was yes. I recall I must revert here back to Northam when the instructor was giving a lesson on throwing a grenade and how to throw it and one of the recruits said, "Sir what do we do if you drop the grenade?"

20:30 This is a fairly typical one, the instructor said, "Follow me around the first corner."

That was fair enough.

Follow me, yes.

Is there anything else you can tell me about the guerrilla warfare school that you did as part

of training that we haven't covered?

- 21:00 Oh a punishment sometimes would be if somebody stepped out of line, to run up Mount Bishop which was five hundred feet. So you'd have to scramble up there and down again. And sometimes I think Mount Leonard was about 1800 feet and
- 21:30 some of the patrols were required to go up there. But again there'd be exercises all around that area where you'd be out starting early morning with a full pack going through the bush up and down rocky mountainside and you might wonder well I
- 22:00 hope it ends soon, but you still push on. But again exercises of endurance where you mightn't have any water and you won't get any water either until the end of the day.

How do you cope with that?

Well you just do.

Isn't there a medical danger in doing that?

Maybe there could have been but

- 22:30 I think our fitness was beyond that, we could take it.

So how long were you actually in that training camp, was it about six months that you were there in Derby?

Oh I'd say only

- 23:00 I'd say about five months, say four months five months.

What happened next then?

Well I was sent to the officers training school at Bonegilla. And I went along with

- 23:30 Jerry Toohey, Gordon Williams, Russ Crooks, Ben Davies and Cec - I've forgotten his name. Yes that was again a series of
- 24:00 lectures, training, instruction, learning about small arms and so on.

Any idea how you made the selection for that?

Well it was after the course at Forster of course and you were simply

- 24:30 told you are being sent. The colonel in charge then was Colonel Bandy McDonald. He was a well known figure.

So you must have been pretty pleased to be put on the special list?

Put on?

Put on the special list so to speak for officer training?

Oh yeah. Well I'd had good passes on my previous courses I'd done

- 25:00 and naturally it had been a long time before I heard a shot fired so.

So with the officers training in, was it Bonegilla?

Bonegilla.

Bonegilla. Where is that, is that in Victoria?

That's in Victoria yes. North of Melbourne.

- 25:30 I'm trying to remember now whether Bonegilla's close to the border of the line through to Sydney.

How did they get you up there, was it on the train?

Train yeah.

And what did you

- 26:00 **see when you first arrived to this new camp? Was it any more sophisticated this camp from the one you'd just come from?**

It was yes. It was yeah.

In what way?

Well I wouldn't say we had sheets for our bed and so on but it was pretty well set up. The food was good.

26:30 Training interesting.

What was interesting about it?

Well I'm sorry if I'm not very clear about this one but...

That's all right I'm just thinking perhaps what you're going through at this time is

27:00 **perhaps more cerebral than physical. Is that a correct summation?**

It was rendered very important to be as it turned out later, one of the officers in charge called Major

27:30 Court, he was in charge of the first wing. And I didn't get along too well with Major Court although I passed the

28:00 school. But I had occasioned to meet Major Court on a subsequent date.

So did you find out what his problem with you was?

I'm skipping quite a lot here. After I'd been with the 2/2nd for

28:30 the better part of two years, eighteen months, two years I was sent back to do an officers training school, the same school again. This is not general known I don't normally talk about it but it is history and I struck Major Court again.

29:00 Major Court had a great dislike of the commando fellows who had been commissioned in the field and there were a number of the 2/2nd who were in that category and he invariably gave them quite a hard time.

29:30 And I think it was because Major Court himself had never, never had a shot fired in his life. He was a schoolteacher and he gave, he was best known for his lecture on the use of the bayonet. The bayonet and the bayonet charge and so on and

30:00 he was very, very good in his talk how to use the bayonet. A number of people would probably agree with me say that if he faced a Japanese bayonet he'd probably turn around and run. But Court having been a schoolteacher was also a very, very good actor. He was certainly a very good actor

30:30 in giving his lecture on the use of the bayonet which he'd studied. But put in front of him a commando who'd come back from action and he would give him the works, in other words give him a rough time. One of our blokes was named Kevin Curran. Kevin Curran is a very

31:00 very well known footballer. Played for Victoria, he used to be I think captain for Carlton and however a well known footballer post-war. And Kevin got his commission in East Timor in the field, you don't get a better commission then when you are given the commission in the field and he was

31:30 given such a bad time by Court. Now Kevin Curran told me this story in his kitchen in his hotel in Victoria after the war. He said in the streets of Melbourne at the start of the war he was approached by a young bloke of fourteen, fifteen

32:00 who said to him, "Oh Mr Curran you knew my father." And Kevin said, "Who was that son?" He said, "Major Court." Kevin said, "Oh. Where is he now?" "Oh he died sir, two years ago." And Kevin replied, "Well son he didn't die

32:30 too soon as far as I'm concerned," and turned around and left the kid. Now not too many people would tell the son of a deceased bloke a comment like that. But it does show again what Kevin Curran thought of Court. And I'm going on a bit here.

That's all right.

But

33:00 when I came to Seymour, which was the Oct [October] 2, Major Court's office was at the end of the orderly room but I thought it was the orderly room and I had a letter which had to be,

33:30 it had to be approved by the officer, it had to be censored sorry.

Right.

And I had in it seven pounds I'd required to post back to a friend I'd borrowed from and I wanted it censored so I could post it. And I went and explained this to this, well I thought it was the orderly room corporal, it was night-time, the light was on. Anyhow we had an altercation

34:00 as to how I could get this censored, why not and one thing he said, "You don't think an officer would take your money." And I said, "Yes I do, it wouldn't be the first time." And so he didn't have a great liking for me for a start. And then in a lecture one day in the field

- 34:30 a group of say ten were be lectured by the warrant officer on the use of the Owen gun and this is where we had to instruct ourselves on the Owen gun. And he said you pull back – I forget the name now the cocking piece, no the cocking piece is on the Bren. But if you pull back the cocking piece and
- 35:00 you hear a click and that is when the sear is engaging in the trigger and then your gun is loaded. And I said, “No sir, there were two clicks.” And he said, “There is one click,” and he is the warrant officer instructing
- 35:30 our course. And I protested but you know I said, “Sir, I’ll say very definitely there are two bloody clicks,” I didn’t say bloody I said, “Two clicks.” Now a voice echoed behind me and I didn’t know he was there and it was Major Court and I got rung out. Now
- 36:00 in New Guinea we had crossed the Ramu River into Japanese territory. We were a patrol of about twenty men. I was forward scout, second forward scout. Behind me was Tom, Captain Nesbitt our troop captain
- 36:30 who was accompanying the patrol and it was night time and suddenly a shot rung out and it just missed me and it was Tom’s Owen [gun] had gone off. And that had happened, he went to load his Owen, heard the click and let go and a shot went off. I
- 37:00 was returning from an action, we were carrying a wounded man and we’d come back to a rendezvous again a Japanese area and the other blokes were not there, they had gone. There was a shirt hanging over a branch over there which seemed to indicate they’d left in a hurry. I felt that
- 37:30 the Japanese had got there first and they were waiting for us. And as forward scout I decided time to load so very gently I’m looking around and pulled back the handle, I heard a click and I let go and off went a shot. Now a shot of course in the middle of Japanese area would naturally attract them, where we were and what we were doing and so on. And carrying a bloke on a stretcher not
- 38:00 good. As it happened it was not a set up, the Japanese were not there and we managed to get out bloke back safely. But nevertheless a shot went off and it was caused because rather than the trigger engaging in the sear and being brought back, it was the next round in the magazine
- 38:30 bring the cassette away and down comes the next round into the barrel, that click. And the next click is when the sear engages there, there are two clicks. And that is what I got bounded for but I should dare to suggest that the instructor was wrong. And anyhow
- 39:00 the following week I was taken off the course, I was failed, sent back to my unit.

You must have been absolutely ropeable?

Oh well. Any of our blokes would tell you that if you come back with any rank at all as far as commando’s are concerned

- 39:30 Court would have been on to you.

And do you think his main issues was the fact that he perhaps himself felt he was not good enough, that he would take it out on blokes such as you?

I’d have liked to have this confirmed but Colin Doig who was later our 2IC [Second in Command], Colin Doig told this was Captain

- 40:00 Colin Doig he said to me that Court committed suicide and it was over a boy business.

Oh dear.

That was since the war of course.

So essentially there was a lot going on in his world that didn’t really make him one of the most....well people of

- 40:30 **great integrity, through his army career and in his personal life, is what you are saying?**

A school teacher, famous actor.

According to a lot of men, he shouldn’t have been in that position am I right?

Hmm.

It’s interesting to hear stories like that because you obviously come to the conclusion that the training that you had at that point was completely ineffective because of the superiors that you had

- 41:00 **such as him.**

Well in fact I had passed the course, I forgot to mention one more point by the way which didn’t help me.

Actually what we might do, before you mention that point, is change the tape.

Tape 4

- 00:36 Because when I did my junior at Claremont Central School, Norman McLeod was my teacher and he was a very, very good teacher, most efficient. One thing he instilled in the whole class was do your work so well, make sure that you are know your subjects so well that you cannot be
- 01:00 failed. And he said, "Have confidence and tell people that you can't fail me. I know my subjects so well." Now at that second OTU [Officer Training Unit] which they called it an Officer Training Cadet Unit. I wrote to my parents
- 01:30 and knowing it had to be censored by Court I said that I had no problem about the course having passed it two or three years earlier. I said, "It was only junior standard" and it was really only junior standard and I said, "I have no problem about passing it." Now I should have
- 02:00 not said that, not as a message to Major Court because his heckles would raise, wouldn't they wouldn't they now? And add it on top of my heated discussion about the use of the Owen gun then he would have to have it in for me so anyhow I was failed.

What followed that?

- 02:30 I went back to my unit.

Were they at Canungra doing jungle training?

Sorry.

Were they at Canungra doing jungle training?

Oh no, no, I went back to my unit in New Britain.

Ok, so have we moved forward?

Yes, oh back to New Britain this is in 1945, yes.

I might just rewind you then Bob and ask you about the jungle training in Canungra?

Yes. Now the jungle,

- 03:00 we come back now to the first OTU from Bonegilla where I went back to Canungra for jungle training. Well jungle training, I was then I was a sergeant and I was appointed to H Company as acting officer commanding. When you passed an officer training school
- 03:30 six weeks later would come through document called Lay 22. The application for commission rank and then you'd sign that and then you'd be gazetted as lieutenant. And I came back to Canungra and was made acting officer commanding of H Company. H Company was a training company where
- 04:00 the army naturally was extremely busy training new recruits. The position up in New Guinea was getting close to being critical, certainly in certain areas and the 2/5th Independent Company had a lot of casualties around the Wau, Morobe area and they wanted reinforcements. So
- 04:30 the Canungra was not an independent company training camp it was the general reinforcements and we were taking these fellows to show them what a rifle looked like, how to fire it and how to handle it and so on. And take them out on marches through the jungle, get them accustomed to jungle activity, what to wear, how to act and so on and so on. And again I recall one exercise was to,
- 05:00 we had a rope slung between two trees, oh say eight metres apart and say about twelve feet high and they had to go up this tree over here and work their, climb across the rope to the other side. Exercises like that. Maybe
- 05:30 down by the limit of the river area to take them through there at a certain depth and so on. Anyhow again keep them out marching up and down the various tracks to pick up the stragglers and lead them to believe in themselves that they could in fact carry out the exercise and if their mates are up in front,
- 06:00 you must catch up and so and so and so, all that sort of stuff. Anyhow I could see that having been appointed OC [Officer in Command] of training company. And the other blokes who were with me, who had done the same OTU they had their companies as well and I approached the colonel in charge of the camp who was Colonel Bandy MacDonald who was also
- 06:30 my CO down at Forster who sent me to the OTU and I asked him, "Sir, when could I be posted to an overseas unit?" And he went very sour on me for even daring to ask and dismissed me. And he called a meeting down at the sergeants' mess where he gave us all a lecture about doing the

- 07:00 job the army decides you will do, in the circumstances you must do the job you are appointed to, your country depends on you and all this sort of crap. Anyhow so being all admonished you went back to your unit and carry on training these recruits. Now within, within about approximately ten days or a fortnight of this happening because of the critical situation
- 07:30 of the 2nd, of the 2/5th Independent Company it appeared on the noticeboard this routine order again calling applications for reinforcements for the 2/5th Independent Company from men, from NCOs, corporals and sergeants who had done the course at Forster.
- 08:00 In other words we were fairly well trained as commandos and who were prepared to drop rank back to private to go away as reinforcements. Now naturally most of them would go forward. I applied for it and so did Gordon Williams who was one of them who had done the OTU with me. And at
- 08:30 the interview by the adjutant and his RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] you were asked various questions about the army experience, what schools you'd done. I said I'd done the junior leaders course at Northam. I'd done the senior leaders course at, I done the juniors and the seniors at Narrogin where I was made sergeant and then I had done
- 09:00 the cadre at Forster. The cadre is for NCOs and officers of what is going to be the 2/8th Independent Company. But I had not mentioned having done also the OTU because records have to come through the system and it had not come through to the edit in my pay book. So the list came out
- 09:30 that afternoon and my name was on it but Gordon's was not. And I said to Gordon, "Did you mention the fact that you'd done the OTU?" And he said, "Yes." So I cautioned the other blokes not to make any noise about me being on it and the draft left that night. We went up to, we went up to town up to Townsville
- 10:00 and out to Charters Towers on another train. And we were in camp at Sellheim twelve miles short of Charters Towers and I can't recall the time we were there it could have been, it could have been five days or ten days. But then we were put on a train and then into Townsville and then onto a ship which was the HMAS Katoomba and we were on our
- 10:30 way. That's when after some more interesting happenings I joined the 2/2nd.

What were those happenings?

Could I, well I'll say this I'll jump a bit here. Jerry Toohey who was one of those who stayed behind got his rank, joined our unit as lieutenant

- 11:00 reinforcements and he told me the story about what happened after I'd gone. McDonald was down the sergeants' mess and said, "Where's Smyth?" And one of them said, "He went away with the 5th Company, drafted." He blew up and asked Dawson to recall me. The signal came back to say I'd left on the Katoomba the previous night. So I got away. So...

So McDonald was unhappy was he?

He was yeah. He'd lost, he'd lost his

- 11:30 instructor. He'd lost his OC of H Company. Yes anyhow...

How would he have gone about finding a replacement?

I wouldn't have a clue what he did then. I wasn't worried about it I was on my way, yes.

So you finally got overseas?

Yes and we went to Murray Barracks which is a staging camp about

- 12:00 three miles out of Port Moresby and we had a rather boring time there waiting to join the Unit.

While you were waiting can you describe the place?

Murray Barracks is about, I'll say about three miles out from Moresby. It was a collection of Nissen huts and that's about all too.

- 12:30 There might have been about fourteen of them I can't remember, fourteen maybe or there might have been twenty of them. But it was the major transit area.

Did you stage there alone or were there other groups there?

Oh no it was with my whole group, these other NCOs. There were about, I think we'd have about at least fifty or maybe seventy,

- 13:00 fifty blokes altogether, fifty, seventy. Anyhow...

It was quite boring there was it?

We had our allocation of huts. Twenty, forty, there was probably more about forty thinking about the size of the huts itself. I'd say about twenty in each hut.

13:30 But we then had to wait our posting and there was the occasional Jap raid over the area. And we used to attend the morning parade and the jeep rides to visit other units and so on to fill in the time and write letters etc.

14:00 **What was your reaction to the first Japanese raid?**

Well mainly get up and have a good look. You would hear a scream to get down into a slit trench. I recall one day when they had quite a big raid and they were bombing a petrol dump about oh it might have been half a mile

14:30 away, a mile, I'd say a mile away. And these drums are going off with a great explosion of flame and all this sort of thing. But we were ordered to get down, get our heads down inside the slit trenches anyhow. You could also see, I do recall among the Jap aircraft flying over and the

15:00 ack-ack flying at them I recall this Lightning, American Lightning fighter was flying through the flack and through the Japanese to have a go at them. I didn't see any shot down, he wasn't shot down either thank goodness but that was all very exciting to watch.

It's not the kind of thing you see in the sky above you everyday.

No true, no. But

15:30 oh we used to go and visit the various picture shows and so on around the area. And I recall one day a bloke named Dan Thomas, one of our blokes came back and he said he'd been up in a liberator Jap..,

16:00 an American Liberator skip-bombing ships in Wubak Harbour. And I thought the whole story was so unbelievable they wouldn't believe him. He was in the next hut and our blokes gradually drifted off and I went on writing letters and they were almost all of them were crowding around him

16:30 in the next hut. I learned this later. But then when some of the blokes came back and told me more about it I realised it had to be true. I asked Dan more about it. And he flew with a Liberator group A20s who were at the, Ward [Ward's Strip] Five Mile they called them,

17:00 not very far from our camp. Anyhow but I had my heart set on doing a trip on a flying fortress and they were up at Seven Mile [Seven Mile airstrip] so I got a jeep ride up there and had a chat to some of the blokes, crewmen and so on. I recall I had a Japanese flag I bought

17:30 from somebody or rather and I traded the flag with them and I asked about doing a mission with them and they said to, I had to check the operations officer. So I looked up the operations officer and I can't declare whether this one was, there was two of

18:00 them, that's there one was Captain Williams and the other one Captain De Wolf. But he said to me, "I can't approve it for you," but he said, "If you get the approval from operations officer at 5th Air Force Headquarters then I'll put you on a mission providing the skipper would take you." So

18:30 I then got several jeep rides around to 5th Air Force Headquarters and looked up this Major Scott and I said to him, "I'd like to do a mission on a B17," and I said, "I've done commando training and I'd be very useful to the crew on the ground if the plane was shot down and

19:00 required to make our way through the jungle." Anyhow that appeared to me to be a powerful argument but anyhow...

You had this proposal all figured out?

He said to me, "Yes." He said, "Sergeant that will be all right." He said, "That will be okay." I said, "Well can you tell Captain Williams?" He said, "That's all right." So I then got back again and I told Captain

19:30 Williams that Captain Scot had, Major Scot had approved it. He then said, "If a mission comes up where the captain will take you we'll let you know about it. Speak to the boys about a cot." So I went back to their particular group that I had been talking to and they gave me one of the stretchers they sleep on

20:00 and so tucked up into the stretcher that night. And I was wakened about one o'clock, half past one, went along to the briefing and then down in a jeep to the strip area and we took off. And I

20:30 was the, on the aircraft they have the tail gun, the belly gun, the dome gun, a couple up forward through the nose there might have only been one there and there were two waste guns, waste windows.

21:00 There was one bloke on looking after both guns if you like if I was not there. But he said, "You could use this one here." He said, "Have you fired a Brownie [Browning] before?" I said, "No." He showed me how to operate that, 50 calibres of course and he showed me again more details like the parachute

21:30 and emphasised a few points about making sure you always look into the sun. That's where the Zeros would come from. And I did not have a helmet with goggles but I did have the gas goggles which was part of the army equipment. They were clear plastic and

- 22:00 I did have the intercom on me so he told me we were off to, along New Britain etc. And we took off over the Owen Stanleys [Owen Stanley Ranges] which I've got an idea they were about twelve thousand feet something like that.
- 22:30 And then I'd also taken my own map with me, a map of the area. And we crossed the Owen Stanleys, we crossed over New Guinea, you call it the east coast and then past Umboi Island and we went along the south coast of New Britain.
- 23:00 And I'm tracking it on my own map as we went along. And we passed Gasmata and we got as far as Open Bay. There's Open Bay and Wide Bay. I think its Open Bay it's about 80k's short of Rabaul. And then we cut across the peninsula
- 23:30 came out at the other bay, Wide Bay. And from there we started going in a pattern search until we came as far as what they call the Talasea Peninsula from memory on the north coast of New Britain. And we hadn't gone far past there when the weather closed
- 24:00 down, it got very cloudy and we had to come down to a much lower height. Possibly, possibly about two hundred feet to keep below the weather at the same time be able to have vision across the ocean itself. The weather closed in so badly then that we simply raised height and
- 24:30 flew back towards New Guinea to Finschhafen. And at Finschhafen there was a supply ship in the lagoon and, whether lagoon or harbour there wasn't any other small supply ship down there. And the other crewman was shouting out to me that
- 25:00 we'll probably have go dropping our bombs on the supply ship. The conversation was going on all the time by the way over the intercom but I couldn't understand with their American accent and not being familiar with the sound and so on. I couldn't understand most of it but it was the effect we were going to have a go at this supply ship. And we apparently straightened up for the run and
- 25:30 this time, this was after about seven hours leaning out the waste window, turning my head around, looking into the sun this way, up and over here and back and then back into the sun again and so on. I wouldn't say I got a crick in the neck but it felt as though it should develop. And I'd have liked to see some action and I had determined
- 26:00 well I'm going to watch this bloody bomb drop on this ship. So I was leaning out over the fuselage to see if I can see it but the bulge was too much to see the ship but at the same time unmistakable, unmistakably over the intercom I hear the word "Shit." And I thought oh it must have been a bad shot. So I still couldn't see anything and we went up and turned around
- 26:30 and I could see a lot of foam and some smoke down below but then we came, we made about four runs like that and apparently dropping the bombs we have on board. Now we were then straightened up to go home, the other crewman told me to go back now
- 27:00 and he was saying that we cannot go up over the Owen Stanleys we are going to go up higher because we have to conserve fuel, short of fuel and therefore we are going to go down south and over the lower part of the mountain range. And anyhow I was convinced that me being an Aussie on his first trip that you'd have to pull my leg with something like that, so
- 27:30 I didn't believe a word of it. And we went back to [Port] Moresby, unloaded etc. I'm standing underneath the wing where this captain, his name was Captain Lewis from memory, he says to me, "Well how did you like the trip sergeant?" I said, "Oh it was great, thanks," whatever his name was. And then he said something about
- 28:00 lucky with the fuel and I said, "What do you mean we were lucky with the fuel?" And he said, "Hell didn't the fellows tell you. That first bomb we dropped was our four hundred and fifty gallon bomb bay reserve fuel tank." Now what had happened was when the bombardier, we carried on one side, instead of carrying four five hundred pound bombs here we carried
- 28:30 the bomb bay fuel tank hooked up on the same system. On the other side were the four five hundred pound bombs and he had pressed the wrong button and down went the bomb bay fuel tank instead of a five hundred pound bomb. Yeah. So it is remarkable isn't it?

What did they think of you as this Aussie who had come and thumbed a ride

29:00 **basically?**

Oh I don't know, maybe adventurous but I found it a wonderful experience and they were great fellows. The tail gunner we had with us was named Mickey Andrade, very little fellow and I think he was part Mexican by his appearance, quite animated in his conversation.

29:30 But Mickey Andrade held the record for the most number of planes he had shot down from a rear gun position. Now I cannot determine how many he'd shot down, he wouldn't tell me. Although he wouldn't tell me but he had this record of being the most, he'd shot down the most.

So you were in good company? You were in good company?

Oh yes too right with him, yeah.

Did you fly with that crew again?

Once

30:00 more. I recall one of the other blokes name was Jim Mercer. He came from a farming area. I've got an idea it might have been Jim Mercer of Missouri but they were a great team. I enjoyed their company and I'd like to feel they did mine too.

It's very interesting so far you've created a lot of opportunities for yourself which is not usually a liberty that you are granted

30:30 **in the forces. You are usually told what to do and where you are going?**

Yeah, well I missed this point until afterwards. I enjoyed the run and the following day I went up and the news was out that a Liberator had sighted this convoy coming out of Rabaul. Now

31:00 we were actually looking for that convoy. I didn't know at the time but we were looking for that convoy. That was the purpose of our trip which I did not know. But I was out on the 28th and it was the following day, the 1st of March that that convoy was sighted by a Liberator and the whole battle was on. And that was the commencement of the Bismarck Sea battle.

31:30 There were fourteen ships in the convoy. There were six destroyers and eight merchantmen carrying troops, Japanese troops. And the whole battle was on. I wanted to get out again to participate in something, a bit of action.

Had you returned to Murray Barracks?

I'd gone back yes. And I'd go back

32:00 I'd usually tell them back there that I'd been up to the pictures up at Seven Mile and I couldn't get a lift back and they gave me a stretcher for the night. And so I would then (UNCLEAR) if you like was my excuse.

So you didn't tell them about your exploits?

Well, no not then no. But I must say after a while the whole damn camp new where I was going.

32:30 **You were just missing that jeep too often were you?**

Yeah. But on that second day I went back to get out again and the blokes told me you that wouldn't be in an event to get away because he said even the sergeant cook wants to fly because they had shot down a Liberator and then the fighters had machine-gunned two of the crew who were coming down on

33:00 parachutes. And they were all so made about it, they all wanted to fly. So he said you would not be an event to get up even the sergeant cook wants to fly.

So there was no room for an Aussie by that stage?

No but that was the Bismarck Sea battle where they, I think the news reports are that they got all the transports, sunk all the

33:30 transports and possibly two of the destroyers. But it was quite a big battle up there, it made big news at that time.

And what was happening back at Murray Barracks?

Oh they carried on as usual. Yes so.

Receiving daily or regular reports about that battle?

In Guinea Gold which was a local forces newspaper they reported information, yes.

34:00 But it would come out later because a lot of that sort of stuff was kept quiet, they keep quite about it. They wouldn't like the enemy to know what stage they got to so it would be a long time afterwards.

And why were you staging at Murray Barracks? Why were you staging at Murray Barracks?

Well I was staging with the other reinforcements to join the 2/5th Independent Company who were over the range at the Wau

34:30 Morobe area and they, it was a dicey situation to get the DC 3s, they called them C54s in those days, to land because the whole country was covered with cloud cover and you couldn't get down through the cloud cover to land at Wau. So we remained there

35:00 for a long time. But I did then four more trips in B17s.

Can you tell me about those experiences?

Well I think the next trip was a midnight, was a night raid over Rabaul. And that was oh full of interest and excitement and that.

35:30 We weren't hit but...

What do you remember about that raid?

Well a lot of smoke up there from the ack-ack [anti-aircraft] fire and also you see another aircraft being picked up in the search light, that type of thing.

What about on the ground?

No night fighters there thank goodness.

36:00 But at one stage I thought I must jump now. Apparently one of the other aircraft suffered a hit but it didn't put it down at all but this was told to me by the crewman. I thought to myself, gees I shouldn't be here anyhow, maybe I shouldn't be here.

36:30 But then you get back again and the whole thinking changes, that was quite an experience. I did, did other armed recces [reconnaissance trip]. There were two armed, there were two bomb raids over Rabaul. In one of them the Guinea Gold [local newspaper] reported that it was the heaviest bombing raid over

37:00 Rabaul up to that time. And there were I say two more armed recces. One of them was to Gasmata we were asked a briefing to keep an eye open around Gasmata because an Australian crew of a PBY Catalina

37:30 had been, was missing in the area. He went on at length what a great job the Australian Catalinas did in rescuing their blokes when they were shot down at sea and so on. And anyhow we got to Gasmata and we cruised up and down at some length looking for signs of wreckage but couldn't see anything at all.

38:00 I noticed in our commando courier about five or six years back a story about the Catalina squadron flying out of Townsville or Cairns and how their wing commander had gone out on a mission and did failed to come back. It brought to mind

38:30 this particular, they said it failed to come back from the Gasmata area. And this would have been the one that we were asked to have a look for.

What sort of thoughts pass through your mind when you receive news like that?

When?

What kind of thoughts pass through your mind when you receive news like that?

Are you talking about after the war?

Just when you hear that a plane has been lost

39:00 **or a crew has been lost. What would you think?**

Oh yes well it had to happen of course. There's a close friend of mine that I shared a room with at Mrs Savages, Bert Dempsey who he joined the air force about two years later.

39:30 And he was apparently piloting a Beaufort, a Beaufort bomber. And I have an idea that the name of that was 8 Squadron but he went missing around the Trobriand Islands area, which was a similar area. A bit south of where we were flying. But when you hear those things of course and that's war.

How much

40:00 **longer did you stage at Murray Barracks?**

I came back from a trip.

It doesn't sound like you spent much time there at all.

It was my fifth trip. No I'd been there at least four months I reckon altogether. And I came back from my fifth trip anyhow and I was dismayed

40:30 to find all my mates had gone and the huts were empty except for Corporal Scott and myself. And Scottie had been out on some other mission and naturally with our draft having gone I had to go and report. So I went to the adjutant's office to report that

41:00 I'd been up to the pictures at Seven Mile and I couldn't get a lift back and stayed up there overnight and I came back and found that my draft had gone. It was quite a serious thing to happen of course.

So they left without notice had they?

Well they always, because of cloud cover and the opportunity and availability of aircraft for carrying troops

41:30 and so on they had to find the whether conditions right to be able to shift so many and so the news would come through, maybe sometime during the night or maybe it might have been the day before because they wouldn't necessarily tell the troops until the last minute because you always had to be available. And so they'd simply gone.

You must have got a shock then?

42:00 Well I was and I...

Tape 5

00:30 **So Bob before we broke for lunch you were just talking about the adjutant and he suspecting that you might have been with the American's during these bombing raids.**

Oh yes the adjutant asked the question, "Have you been flying with the Americans, sergeant?" And I said, "Oh no sir. I was up to visit the pictures and

01:00 I couldn't get a lift back and the boys gave me a stretcher which they have done before." But the fact remained that I had missed the draft and it was quite a responsibility on his part as being adjutant of the camp. So his reply was, "Well until you are posted to a unit you will be orderly sergeant of this camp, Murray Barracks twenty-four hours a day until

01:30 you are posted. And you Corporal Scott the same remarks apply." So we were really anchored down, lost our wings. And it was a concern to have missed the draft but it made it all the more boring to be tied down twenty-four hours a day. So after about the third night of being

02:00 in the orderly room I said to Scottie, "Scottie, it is sometime since we've used the skills we've learned in our training to live off the land and we still must have some exercise there." Now to live off the land when you were a commando in those days meant that if a high echelon wouldn't give you

02:30 want you want you would, with your own discretion of course, go out and take it.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

03:53 **Would you have got in trouble if people knew you were doing this?**

They didn't ever catch us.

04:00 **But your defence would have been a bit of a foraging exercise?**

I would have said that we are merely in training. Yeah.

Trying to keep up the skills required.

Yes. But it was something to keep us occupied and also it didn't do any harm anyhow in doing what we were doing.

How did members of your unit, like the ones who knew you were going off with the Americans, how did they

04:30 **view you doing what you did? I mean did they applaud you for going out there on all these missions or did they think that you were completely mad?**

Oh I think they had a rather balanced view of it all but if I was game enough to give it a go then what's wrong with that.

So

05:00 **silent support?**

Silent support, yeah. There was some naturally that said, "There is no way I'd be in it." But to me it was a great experience.

You wouldn't have given it up at all? So what happened next after you going on these foraging

exercises are you being transferred back to your unit or?

Finally

- 05:30 only within about another week or so and I heard word that the 2/2nd Independent Company had arrived in Port Moresby. They were in a camp near the Four Mile only a short distance away. I knew several of them. I knew Bill Hoddy with him I was a member of the Northcote Surf Club and also Tom Nesbitt who
- 06:00 was a journalist in Perth and he was a troop captain. So I went over there with several others and explained we were in limbo and Tom made a claim for us, fixed the papers up and so we were transferred right away to the 2/2nd. I might add to that at this time I still had on my sergeant stripes and I'm
- 06:30 sure it would have brought a lot of resentment to see this peanut coming in wearing the 2/2nd colour patch and also a sergeant, now who's he, who's this bum. Anyhow I took them off immediately. Naturally because I had to revert to private on reaching my unit that was the understanding what I left with the draft from Brisbane.

Did you get transported over there on truck

- 07:00 **or did you have to make your own way on foot to where your?**

I think we were taken over by a jeep or truck or something or rather. Yes we were taken over there. We were official transfer from Murray Barracks, out of the hair of the local adjutant.

Finally.

Yes.

Would have had a bit of celebration in the mess I'm sure. So what's..?

We were there for about

- 07:30 barely three or four days and then the word came through that we were going up north. And we were lifted by a flight of C54s and flown up to Bena Bena. Bena Bena is up in the Bismarck Ranges they were called at the time, near Mount Hagen, short of Mount Hagen and so we landed there.
- 08:00 Bena Bena had been possibly, it was a mission anyhow and the landing strip was on a raised promontory out from the main mountainside. So they had to be very careful in landing the aircraft because there was a limited amount to put the wheels down and land and then pull up otherwise you are going
- 08:30 up hill into the jungle. But we called in there and dropped off and about, it might have been the following day, another flight came through and as the planes were circling there were, I'd say three aircraft coming in with troops and a fourth one appeared to be quite
- 09:00 a different type, a different shape. And we commented on this and it transpired the fourth one was a Japanese plane, which had lost its directions and it appeared the Japanese plane had thought it was in line behind its own. Anyhow when the first or second plane landed
- 09:30 the other one coming in very smartly swooped off, it was being chased off by a Lightning. We heard a lot of firing a bit later over the hills behind us and anyhow that was it.

How high up are you in the mountains, is it a reasonable distance up?

It was about seven thousand feet, quite high because even so close to the equator we'd use a blanket at night-time.

- 10:00 **See that's extraordinary really isn't it, that it gets that cold?**

Well again at seven thousand feet too, you'd often come out and you'd look down across a valley and the clouds are below you.

What were some of the other climate problems that you would have as part of this time? I'm just thinking about you know insects, rain?

Well

- 10:30 where I was down in the flat country there'd be swarms of mosquitoes and naturally being malaria type 2, they were all over the country. Up in those high areas there weren't any of those mosquitoes to worry about.

Oh that's a relief.

It was a great consolation, yes. So at the same time it was very humid. We'd go out on a trek

- 11:00 somewhere and you'd sweat immediately, perspiration. And also there were plenty of leaches there too in the high areas. But at Bena Bena we were a long distance from the Japanese. The Japanese were over

the Ramu area, the other side of the Ramu and they were a good, oh that's about a good two days march away.

- 11:30 But once more that's where we had troops spread out in encampments along the Ramu. We had there a forty mile front to cover and again our unit had taken over from the 2/7th Independent Company who had been there for some time. They moved out to a different area and given a rest.

How many units were covering that forty

- 12:00 **mile area?**

How many?

How many units were actually covering that?

Over the forty miles one unit, that was our own unit of about say two hundred, two hundred and fifty, something like that.

That sounds like an awful lot of area to cover with such minimal amount of men?

Well it was except the Japanese were not out there in force, the Japanese were along the coast.

- 12:30 Now this is a very much inland area the Ramu, Ramu Valley and the Japs could be on a march operation possible, well Madang would have been at least I'd say eight days march away. So the Japs had taken in strength along that East

- 13:00 north coast of New Guinea but they hadn't penetrated very far inland although they were doing that and the reason we were shifted up to Bena Bena is that the tablelands at Bena Bena known as Mount Hagen Tablelands. It's a very fertile country and there were possibly, possibly two hundred thousand natives up there, living in their various villages

- 13:30 and there was plenty of food that they were growing. So being a rich area for food it also had areas which were flat areas of kunai which you could cut out only a strip. And the higher command thought that the Japanese and moving down through New Guinea towards Australia could have

- 14:00 moved from the coast and taken over a block in that area of Mount Hagen, Bena Bena and established troops there as well as an airforce. And from there of course they could more easily bomb Port Moresby and taken over the, well moved from there to take over other parts of New Guinea, ultimately all of it. So the thing here was for the Australian force

- 14:30 to occupy the area for a start, let the Japanese know that we were there first and they came in and they naturally to face obstacles. And so the whole positioning of our forces through that area was to give that message to the Japanese but at the same time you don't sit there and do nothing. You put out your own patrols to find out where the Japanese are and you

- 15:00 sting them here, sting them there and so on to let them know that this is our territory.

How would you know where they are on any given day?

Only by going out and patrolling. So you might send out two men, you might send out fourteen or twenty depending on what you expected to encounter, where they had to go.

When would you use fourteen

- 15:30 **men in differentiation to two men? What sort of situations would require a larger or a smaller number?**

Well we after about the first two weeks we moved from Bena Bena up to Goroka which was a larger centre and a larger mission. They had an airstrip there which could take light planes

- 16:00 and it became our own headquarters of the area and from there where we fingered out on various areas. We hadn't in the first two weeks taken over an area known as Guieba Faita which is the lower areas of the Ramu River.

- 16:30 Now that is where the 2/7th Company before us had men and they were being withdrawn. But word came through the Japanese had moved over and they had, they killed one bloke and another one, Bruce Roff from memory, he was

- 17:00 shot by, he was shot by one of the Japanese across the chest and having then fell the Japanese stood above him with his sword and he used the point of his sword to undo his trousers. And with this Bruce suddenly lunged

- 17:30 upwards and he hit the Japanese and he started off across the plateau, over the edge and he got away. He had two, he had about two days with very serious cuts on his body and he only had shorts on I think.

- 18:00 This is just how it's been relayed of course. And he got back to his main camp at Guieba and from there they got a message back that they wanted help and so I went out from Goroka with the party, the doctor

- and another bloke. There were five of us went out to meet up with Bruce Roff and
- 18:30 bring him in. Anyhow we got to him and he was carried back.
- How did you know where he was?**
- The report came back from his came. A native had come through that he was at so and so and he was taken back. But it took a long time to get him to a hospital. I think Bruce died only in the last twelve months over in Adelaide.
- 19:00 **It certainly sounds like an extraordinary tale of survival?**
- It was, it was indeed, yes.
- And how did you get him back to base?**
- He was carried back on a stretcher, yes. But you asked in the first place.
- Why you send out fourteen men or two men?**
- How the two man patrols come about. On our way out there I was with Tom Nesbitt out troop captain and I said to Tom,
- 19:30 "Could I be in the first patrol to cross the Ramu?" Anyhow I was sent to a detachment area called Emigari, which was roughly half way between Guieba and Bundi or Bundi Crai which was the smaller area. And anyhow a runner came across
- 20:00 to request me to come across and report to Tom at headquarters. And over there was Arthur Hurst and Arthur and I were to cross the Ramu and if possible get to as far as Usini, which was a Japanese camp and to
- 20:30 report what is there and what you can see and how many and so on.
- And what is the distance between that end destination that you'd like to get to where the Japanese camp is and Goroka.**
- Goroka. Well I must come back first and say this that in going out from Goroka to Bundi that was a seven day trek.
- 21:00 We went through the valley first from Goroka through Asaloki, a very pretty village. And then we started to climb over, higher up the mountain and we must have spent, it seemed like half a day climbing up over what is known as the Kwambaki Pass. And
- 21:30 from memory I think the Kwambaki Pass is about nine thousand eight hundred feet. Anyhow it was close to eleven thousand feet and at that height of course the rainforest was extremely wet and dank. And again by the time you get there too you are covered in sweat anyhow and we went down the other side of Kwambaki. That was the short
- 22:00 cut from Goroka up over the mountains to Bundi. There was another track you could go around but not quite so high but...
- With the height involved was there any chance of getting altitude sickness?**
- Oh not really.
- I'm just not an expert on altitude sickness.**
- We didn't know about that thing anyway.
- You know when you don't have enough oxygen and you move too quickly up.**
- I don't know about it.
- Did you feel that there**
- 22:30 **was a lack of oxygen?**
- Oh it's true you don't have the energy at that height in going up because you're wearing boots and you're going over a track. A track which is also because of the wetness is slippery and so you take your time but nevertheless you still must get there. And you have with you native carriers and they're carrying a lot of gear with them.
- 23:00 They are carrying possibly food as well too for the benefit of the blokes where they are going to join. So you simply plug on. It helps to have a stick with you to go up the hill and stop slipping too far and so on.
- Was that a problem slipping with the kind of boots that you had on?**
- Oh you got used to it. They were leather boots that's true
- 23:30 but you had to have footwear. And some boots they were, they tried rubber-soled boots at one time but

they were useless.

Why's that?

They don't slip. They slip much more than leather would. The Japanese had rubber boots and with theirs they had a separate area for the big toe to fit in.

Would that have helped negotiating some of that terrain do you think?

I don't know. I didn't ever find out.

You never tried on a pair to try them out.

24:00 You'd see tracks occasionally. The same as they'd see our tracks when they were, we were Australians, yes.

I'm just thinking what kind of supplies do you have with you when you go out on one of these sorts of missions? Is it just rations that you are carrying for yourself?

You take

24:30 one twelve ounce can of bully beef in that half triangular type shape and one packet of biscuits and that would last you for a day. So you'd make it span out but that was the average. That was the hard ration. We had many times,

25:00 well week after week just living on one can of bully beef and those hard biscuits per day per man.

Don't you get hungry doing that incredible physical?

Well of course you do, of course you do.

How do you mentally get over that?

Well you are hungry. I recall there was one particular patrol,

25:30 there were about twenty of us and we'd been, in fact we had been to Usini. The one that Hurst and I were going to in the first place and we didn't make it. But we'd got to Usini and by the time that we got there, I'm talking about the big twenty man patrol there was no food at all. We'd used all our own and we went two whole days and nights without food at all. But

26:00 that's something again you just have to get used to.

How about water supplies, what do you do for that?

Well water in the higher areas up in the mountains you have a drink under a stream anyhow, a waterfall. And there were really plenty of those in the mountain areas.

26:30 But down the flat country you'd have to use your discretion. We would carry water bottles of course and we'd be given tablets to put in to kill any germs etc. but often enough you were walking, you might be walking through water all day, water or mud in the flat country. So if you

27:00 see an area what looks as though its water you could drink then you might be into some of it with caution.

How do you deal with being wet all the time because I understand that there is a lot of rain going on?

Well you're wet with sweat for a start and you were your shirt because at night-time you are sleeping down there and it is certainly

27:30 very helpful to keep mosquitoes away or to protect you. But if you have been out all day or maybe a couple of days on the march and your clothes are still wet and sweaty then you have to cross through a creek somewhere. It might be this high or what, you simply have to get down the whole lot of it and get all wet and so on to wash it off, without taking your clothes off.

Was there any sort of skin reactions that you have to being wet all the time?

Yes. Tinea of the feet was bad but also on some occasions in the groin area. And you would get

28:30 what they called Doby's Itch. It would be all red inflamed and so on. I do recall I'd come back from the odd patrols and we'd get out from the RAP or the RAP man some Whitfield's ointment

29:00 and it was a type of dirty yellow Vaseline in appearance mixed up with sulphur and which used to be painful to put in on but you knew it was good to repair the problem. And I can recall getting hold of a lot of this and standing up and dropping my duds and quickly smothered over everything here and then I got a mate behind there with a towel. He was waving

29:30 the towel behind. Anyhow it was one method of dealing with it.

Because that would stop you in your tracks if you were in that sort of pain from you can't you know go on a ten-mile march somewhere can you?

Well when you are in an area with a couple of hundred Japs all around who knows so you keep going, you don't want to stay behind.

30:00 **Sure. And what were the medical facilities like when you were out there? Can you get access to medicine that you need?**

Only what you carry. You're talking about out on a patrol?

Yeah but also when you get back to your base.

Oh when you get back in your camp then it's what you might be carrying. You just try to keep yourself reasonably fit. I was in one

30:30 area when we first arrived at a place called Emigari and there were five of us in this detachment area and we were on one of the tracks which lead from the Ramu up towards our area, one of many of course. And the fact that we were there we'd been able to assure that headquarters or anybody from any other area that there weren't any Japs coming through. And

31:00 a further point is the natives were over the whole area and they always conveyed news if any Japan man was coming through. So the same as when we were on their territory and the natives on their side would be aware they'd pass the message on that there were soldiers belong Australia coming and so on.

31:30 **How important was it to be able to get along with the natives?**

It was very, very important for the reason that I state they, I could state in relation to East Timor particular, I did not serve in East Timor but the whole unit owed their lives, their existence to information passed on by the local natives, the East Timorese and the food they supplied them.

32:00 And in the mountain areas along side the Ramu we could supplement our own rations with native food. Particular the later potato called kow-kow, taro and also bananas. We'd trade with the natives, we'd be supplied a good quantity of shells

32:30 which are their currency. Shells what they called giri-giri. And you might give two giri-giris for oh well say about a kilo or so of taro or sweet potato or again in the earlier days too you might give, if you had it,

33:00 half a sheet of newspaper for a few bananas. They'd use it to roll their cigarettes. Again even if you were lucky enough to score a jam tin, if you had an empty jam tin for pretty near to a bunch of bananas because they were always short of that kind of thing, receptacles etc.

When you said you were issued with

33:30 **shells as currency, was it the army that would issue you with the shells?**

Yes they'd get it from the ANGAU [Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit] down south. They'd bring them in possibly from the islands down south, south of New Guinea and through to the ANGAU administration. But they were very much an item of currency and other items of currency might be tomahawk or

34:00 a...

Tomahawk as in like an axe?

The very tiny axe yes. Or possibly a machete in some cases they were most valuable. You wouldn't give those in for sixteen bunches of bananas. But again another valued item for the eye level would be a pearl shell. The type you see them in

34:30 photographs worn around the neck, half shell. Well a native carrier might work for three months carrying all day going over hundreds of, over a period hundreds of miles, after three months you get one of those shells. Or again it could be that you do three months to get the head of a tomahawk.

That's extraordinary.

Trade items. Oh going back in those days.

35:00 **But it is amazing isn't it that they'd put in so much work for something that we find quite useless?**

Well it is a very essential part of their life.

But I mean even with these half shells, that's just a decorative thing, that's not a functional thing. I mean I can see the value in a jam tin but you know for decorative because I didn't think that they were particular decorative people.

Well here a bloke might work

35:30 for three months to get his wife a diamond ring.

And what's wrong with that? I see your point. Can you think of any other sort of forms of trade I mean how about cigarettes? Was that going on, or alcohol trades?

They grew their own cigarettes and it was terrible stuff.

36:00 You'd try it and you'd cough, cough, cough so much you wouldn't want a second one, but some of the blokes did. Cigarettes and, oh yes they would chew betel nuts and betel nut very much gave them a high. I wouldn't say how much like the drugs of today, I don't do drugs today myself. But they'd chew betel nut

36:30 and you'd recognise them. This happened more amount the Bena Bena people rather than Chimbus and in the more habitable areas. Their teeth would wear down and go rotten after a period and their mouth would be covered with red with the betel nut. They would chew the beetle nut and then they would have

37:00 a little gourd carried under the shoulder that contained lime. I cannot recall now where the lime came from but they would spoon a bit of lime and eat that at the same time they were chewing the betel nuts. But that was not a strong one in our area, it was around Bena Bena but not up in the areas where the Chimbus hung out.

37:30 **Was it all like a stimulant? You know how in Peru people chew cocoa leaves to deal with altitude sickness, is the betel nut a similar thing to that do you think?**

I don't think so, no.

So it's more of a bad habit.

Yes because these would chew betel nut in other areas too. Down the flat country

38:00 and maybe out in any area of New Guinea.

Did you ever try it?

No.

I don't blame you. How difficult was it to communicate with the locals?

Initially it was by sign language but I realised over a periods that it would be a great help to converse more easily with them because you'd be out on a patrol

38:30 with a police boy [local native employ by armed forces] and the police boy would talk Timbe or say pidgin English. So I resolved to learn the pidgin English and I had a small book for a while which I used and I, I could converse sufficiently well. I knew how to talk to the police boys. And sometimes,

39:00 oh the mission lads some of those could talk a bit of pidgin but otherwise you got away with sign language and so on.

What would be a common thing that you would say in pidgin? I know I'm testing your memory.

Masky, that means forget it. Masky's forget it. Pidgin,

39:30 I recall there was quite a large cargo-line of Chimbu carriers and they had a police boy in charge of them and he came along this particular day and he was giving a how do you do to one of the carriers for doing the wrong thing. Now the police boy was a Solomon Islander and

40:00 the Solomon Islanders are as black as black in skin colour. So the police boy was saying, "You drop him. You no good. Ebelong you all around same German. Sick him belong

40:30 you black all the same saucepan. You black bastard you."

Black all the same saucepan.

Oh yes. The Solomon Islanders police boy himself, he couldn't have had a blacker skin.

It was just hilarious how the coagulation of the words come together. I mean it's incredibly humorous just because it's so incredibly obvious.

Yeah.

Did you

41:00 **have a sense of humour about all that stuff?**

Oh yes, yeah. True, you had to yes.

Well I know we're coming to the end of this tape and I know that we haven't talked about Ramu at all.

Tape 6

00:30 **Bob when you got to the Ramu Valley were you itching to get over the river?**

Oh I was keen to get over and see a bit of action of some kind because otherwise it can be a bit boring.

Can you describe the camp that you had in the Ramu Valley?

Well initially we were not

01:00 in the flat country at the Ramu. As I said at Emigari which was say about four hours march from Bundi, Bundi Crai we were still in mountainous country and still would have had about, oh probably a day and a half march down to

01:30 the Ramu itself. And so...

What was the location that you were camped at like?

It was on a mountainside. We had a stream running through it almost all the time, a small plateau. And we could look across to the other side which

02:00 would be maybe, maybe only a mile and a half across but once more we'd take five or six hours to get there.

Where there Japs across the other side?

Sorry?

Where there Japs on the slope on the other side?

Not in this particular area we were up from the Ramu itself still in the mountain area. And there was quite a

02:30 fast flowing stream down the foot of where we were. And the Japs were still two days - pardon me - the Japs were still say two days down the Ramu itself. It just depended on how close to the river the Japs were with their camp.

So did you have to worry about open fires or light in the evening where you were?

03:00 Not really because once more the natives would have advise if any Japanese were anywhere near the area. Fires were mainly in the enclosed area, say in the house cook for example. And we didn't have any fire for warmth. We were never as cold as that. The, and the natives' fires too were mostly inside their huts

03:30 and they'd be full of smoke most of the time, yes.

And what were you doing to occupy yourselves while you were there?

We might sometimes bring out a pack of cards, writing. Not much reading because you didn't have the reading material and what did come through you'd get through pretty quickly

04:00 anyhow. Bearing in mind that from where we were it still took the native carriers at least seven days to come out to us with any supplies.

And what was in your supplies?

What were they?

What was in your supplies, yeah?

Mainly food.

What kind of tucker were you being given then?

Well the old bully beef of course and biscuits

04:30 and tins of apple jelly jam. Never see fig jam out there they used to knock it off back at the base headquarters. The base always had the best stuff. They had the raspberry jam, fig jam and so on. It would never come to the forward areas. So ours was always the apple jelly jam.

That sounds like baby food.

Yes well it's

05:00 very cheap to produce. And we would never see a can of tinned fruit out there. Sometimes you might get some dried fruit. But they'd send out also sometimes some flour to make some damper. And it was expected

05:30 to that we would negotiate with the natives to buy food from them and we always had plenty of kow-kow.

What's kow-kow?

Kow-kow is the, it's a native sweet potato except it's not like ours here. I think it always tastes a lot better than our sweet potato.

The kow-kow tastes better?

In my opinion it did. They're a small tube or so about that

06:00 big. Also taro, taro was more of a white substance and what else was there? They might sometimes have some small tomatoes.

Were they wild jungle tomatoes?

The?

The tomatoes were they growing wild in the jungle?

06:30 They grow them in their garden yes. We'd always have bananas because bananas were a very source of food for us. We'd put the whole banana, the green banana on the fire and cook it like that. And once in a while we might even score half a pound of custard and that was quite a delicacy.

07:00 **I'll bet.**

Because I'd knock off then I'd show the cook boy, cookie how to make banana custard by slicing up a banana or two and mixing it with water and custard. I'm not sure we even had any powdered milk but anyhow it used to work.

Did you have tea or coffee?

Yeah we had tea, yes. Tea especially.

Would you have

07:30 **morning or afternoon smoko or something like that?**

Oh sometimes, the boys used to smoke whenever they felt like it anyhow.

Was there always a brew on the fire though?

Well the fire would mostly be alight most of the time. The cook boy would be looking after that, yes

08:00 so.

So when did you eventually get to cross the river?

I had a call to go across to headquarters where Tom Nesbitt was and we were asked, Arthur Hurst and myself, if we'd cross the Ramu at a particular point and go as far as Usini where it was believed there was a Jap camp and to

08:30 find out what we could. We had a police boy with us and we might have had two natives and we went down to the Ramu and we, my idea was to go across at night time

09:00 for a security point of view and we were set to do so except the police boy wouldn't go. He said, "No master Bob. Pukpuk is stopped." Of course pukpuk is their name for crocodile. And he wouldn't be in it. So I thought now there was no point us going without the police boy who was going to show us where to go and maybe converse with the natives

09:30 who might strike if we ran into any. So I decided to wait until the morning. And we built a raft and put our gear on it because Arthur and I could swim, that was one of the reasons we were chosen, and the native boy or two they, they wouldn't go unless they had some support.

10:00 So we built the raft and put our gear on it and entered the water about dawn and swam madly across pushing the raft. But the Ramu River is quite fast flowing. I'm talking about or at least five knots and I seen in one of the reports given that they reported being eight knots, it wasn't eight. But I'd say

10:30 five, five is quite fast. I mean after all it's a very fast walking speed, almost running. And we had one hundred yards of water to get across. So by the time you get in the water then you're being carried downstream quite rapidly. So that's how we went across.

What did you build the raft out of?

Bamboo cut down. There was plenty of bamboo there of course. You know the big jungle type.

11:00 Cut down one of those with machetes. Cut off lengths of it and they were bound together with kunda which is the cane that cane chairs are made out of naturally and put the gear on top.

What gear did you have with you?

We had an Owen gun each and we had a good stack of ammunition.

11:30 We had two grenades each and food to last about maybe five days. That would be about it.

How did you fare trying to cross the river?

12:00 Just one hand on the raft and the other hand and legs kicking madly. Get out the other side and shift all the mud off your boots etc. Pull the raft out of the water. Put it in a reasonably hidden spot and then

12:30 proceed to find a track of some kind away from where you were to go through the mere jungle growth.

So what did you find on the other side?

Well we would have penetrated no more than one hundred yards and we walked into a Japanese patrol.

13:00 We had almost a full days march to get as far as Usini. So we hadn't got very far. Anyhow the police boy was out on the right hand side here. Arthur was in front of me there and Arthur let fly a burst of his own and he turned around and took off. And

13:30 I hadn't seen anything at this stage so I moved forward and I could see these Japs, one fellow wearing a beard was still standing there and the other Japs were either lining on one side or moving to get there. So anyhow I opened up with my Owen and I gave several long bursts and

14:00 I thought it time for me to depart also. So I turned around and proceeded to follow Arthur but I couldn't see Arthur then and I only got about, I suppose 30 yards off the track, and I got caught up wait-a-while vines. You know what they are? Anyhow they're fairly common I understand too in north

14:30 Queensland but they're a vine that had got hooked thorns on them and they hook into your clothing. Anyhow it took me a while to disengage from that and then I took off again. I couldn't see Arthur. The police boy had gone the other way and as for the carrier bloke, the native I didn't see him either. But

15:00 anyhow I kept going through the jungle towards the river where we'd come from and finally hit the water, didn't wait because I knew that we were in a very, very awkward situation on their side of the river. It didn't matter what other strength I had there whether in fact there was a camp on the river itself.

15:30 So I kicked off and I realised with the weight of my gear there was no way I was going to float, at that same time as swim. So I dived my gear, had to drop the Owen and I swam like hell. I came to a branch sticking up in the water and

16:00 I paused against that and I realised that with the flow of the water I was being dragged down under it. So I let go pushed off it and kept on swimming the other side. Then having struck mud at the other side I turned around and I couldn't see Arthur at all initially. I thought he must have got out and gone on but there was no sign of him.

16:30 Anyhow I kept looking around and then I saw his head. I was looking in the wrong place. He was still right across the far side of the river. Simply sitting it appeared in the river. And I yelled out to drop all his cloths, take off all his cloths and to swim over I said the Japs

17:00 will be come down around the bank and he better be quick. So he did that. I'd say he was trying to get probably a breath. Anyhow he did that and I'm there further down to join him and we got out of the water. As I got out of the water I could see somebody's head here. I wondered

17:30 whether it was one of our blokes or who so I grabbed it by the hair and had a look but it was either a Jap or a native. Anyhow and then we moved over and

Was that a disembodied head?

Probably part of it, yeah. Maybe a croc had got to it, I don't know but anyhow it didn't matter.

18:00 We were joined then by three other blokes who had come down to see us off. And we had a bit of a chat and a bit of food and I went up to Faita which was about oh about

18:30 maybe to an hour and a half up the mountain side. That's one of our positions and that was our first position once you crossed the Ramu. And we stayed there that night and there were six of us there,

19:00 four were in the permanent camp and then Arthur and I moved on across to Koben, which was another probably three hours to Koben which was the section headquarters, 4 Section. We'd normally have about twenty men. Then we moved back to Tom

19:30 Nesbitt's headquarters told him what had happened and went back to Emigari but the Japs struck on the second night after we'd crossed over. They came across at dawn on the morning after we'd left for Faita camp and they killed three

20:00 blokes and Shadow, a fellow called, I always called him Shadow, he had got out the Japs didn't get him. And also there was a native boy who was their cook boy he'd climbed up above the fire somewhere and the Japs didn't get him either. But one of the blokes

20:30 they got was Bill Holly who was a fellow I knew in the surf club.

That must have come as disappointing and unfortunate news?

That was the exercise, didn't get very far, one hundred yards to Usini.

What other contact did you have with the Japs at Ramu?

Sorry?

What other contact did you have with the Japs at Ramu?

21:00 Had one, well following on from that particular one, four section were going over it's section strength and they went down to Ramu but word went back through a runner to Tom Nesbitt that they couldn't get across with all their men. They had to have a canoe of some kind

21:30 and with the fast flowing water in those circumstances they weren't going to make it. So Tom got a message across for me to come down with him. And we both then went down to this particular area being lead by the runner, a native fellow and we were then for about three hours, two

22:00 or three hours further up stream. And this is where what the native said was a crossing the Japanese had been using. So it was decided that somebody would go across the other side at night time and find out how many Japs were there and so on.

22:30 And me being the swimmer and Tom having had the challenge because the whole section couldn't get across, Tom was the other one. And the police boy and the couple of natives cut down more cane and made about three hundred or maybe four hundred yards of cane

23:00 knotted together, with a V on the end. I was in one V and Tom was on the other one. So we took off everything, not even a button except I still carried my stiletto, which was strapped to my leg.

23:30 So I said I'd go first and I took off with this thing. Sorry I wore a belt because the belt held the cane behind here. And I struck off and got carried down stream pretty quickly but I finally grabbed on the other side and I started to pull the cane because the cane was supposed to be affixed from where I

24:00 went in and then it could be used possibly to haul others across. But I pulled the cane and I kept on pulling, the whole damn lot came in. What had happened was that I went so far down stream that the paying out department had got short of cane. So I pulled it all in and

24:30 hid it up in the bushes off the edge of the river. I then had to go back and see if there was any Japs in this camp. This would be about one o'clock in the morning because we started off at midnight. And as I walked up the bank which was fairly clear for about possibly ten or fifteen

25:00 yards width. As I got near to where the camp is I could see these two logs on the edge of the river. Now I had to work out whether they were in fact logs or where they crocodiles and I knew

25:30 I couldn't go back without reporting something about the damn camp. I moved gingerly up towards them and then I also realised this that, very, very bad assumption. In all my life I'd seen crocodiles in the zoo, I'd seen them in the pictures and I'd never

26:00 ever seen a crocodile run, they always used to crawl along. And I thought now crocodiles move so slow that if it is a crocodile my plan was to turn around and run like hell upstream, sorry down stream with a big flying dive in the water and

26:30 swim across without having a thing to tow behind me and swim to the other side. Thinking there is no way they'd catch me. Very bad mistake wasn't it. Could have been I should say. Anyhow I got up closer and closer and there was no movement so I realised they were logs anyhow. So I moved past there and up to where the crossing was supposed to be

27:00 and I left the river bank there and had a look around. I couldn't see any buildings anywhere or anything resembling a track. I thought well I think it's time I went back. So I went back and hit the water once more and swam madly to the other side and I came out in the middle of the kunai patch and I had to struggle through the kunai,

27:30 no knife to cut or anything at all like that. I got back and joined the boys and I reported what I'd seen and what had happened and so on and a big problem I had was, I had collected quite a number of - what do you call them?

28:00 They are a very, very tiny insect which you get in the kunai and which I was told could lead to black water fever which is a very, very serious fever. And these things they are orange in colour if you can see them. And in a torch light

28:30 I had these damn things all over here. And when I say all over, I might have only had about three or four but they give you hell. Nip, nip, nip and I couldn't see myself sleeping that night. And I had to remove them with the very fine blade of a knife before I turned in.

Where they ticks or?

Yes I've forgotten the name of them now.

29:00 They were a type of tick, as I said they were so tiny. And you always got them in the kunai. But from there in the morning, oh another point too I had to establish there was no canoe on the other side either and there was nothing like that there. There was no Jap camp and so we had decided to

29:30 go downstream about another two hours march which we did and somebody knew where there was a canoe. Some native a police boy had picked up on the way and he got this canoe across anyhow and in due course ferried everyone across in the canoe. We set out for

30:00 Usini once more and we went around a back track to get there. The police boy knew where to go and as we got near to the camp creeping in, naturally very quietly and unobtrusively and the bloke in front of me walked into a,

30:30 what are they called, the bush wasp? You commonly find these things in the jungle anyhow, walked into a heap of these they are like our paper wasp here. But they do sting like hell so you had to slap these off without making any other noise. Anyhow this was done and then we resumed moving inwards and we had a forward scout who reported the place appeared to be empty.

31:00 So we moved in, the Japs had moved out and they had left in a hurry apparently and there was still quite a few boxes lying around, boxes of food. We had to be terribly careful in that circumstances to make sure that none of them were booby-trapped but nothing untoward happened there. And then we, all we wanted was some food. We hadn't had any food for

31:30 at least twenty-four hours and we went back toward Ramu. I recall we slept on the way.

Whereabouts did you sleep?

Well that's where, oh on the ground. That's where I woke up and, you could wake up and have a big leach inside your mouth. And he'd be in there for a while and he's fattened up about the size of your finger. You could feel this thing in your mouth anyhow

32:00 you take him out. Or sometimes they would crawl into your ear that could be quite serious too. Your mouth or your nose, the two moist spots were favourites for them while you were asleep, they simply gauge themselves with blood and they fatten up. But anyhow

They sound a bit too friendly for my liking.

That was the least of our worries. You take your boots off any time up there in the mountainous area, the higher levels and

32:30 you'd find, as tight as your boots would be done up with your laces and also your gaiters they would crawl under the flap of your boot into your foot and they'd go on feeding there. And you might take off your boot and find two or three fat leeches inside your boot. It was best not to pull them off because you would leave an infected sore

33:00 so you - pardon me - if somebody was smoking a cigarette you put it on him and they would back out very quickly. That was the best way of removing them. Anyhow we got back and we went back over the Ramu and that's where we had the first bite to eat for two days.

What was the meal?

I can't recall what

33:30 we ate then, it might have been a bit of raw kow-kow.

How do you manage those conditions with an empty stomach?

Oh well you've got no option. It's either put up with it or stay there because everybody prefers to go on.

Is it a battle though to deal with your hunger?

Hey?

Do you have to battle with your hunger?

Oh you don't think. Well you think of it I suppose but the most important

34:00 consideration is to get to where you are going whether it is to the objective or out of the area.

I suppose you are running on adrenaline?

Presumably. Yes, we're all young blokes and I suppose many care to think well we've done it before

34:30 and you're part of the team so you go on doing what you are supposed to do.

What happened once you were back safely on the other side of the Ramu?

And?

What happened once you were safely back on the other side of the Ramu?

What happened then?

Yeah.

We go back to our respective camps.

Did you continue patrolling the area?

Oh

35:00 yes. No you don't go out patrolling everyday of the week of course. It depends upon what the objective might be. Who's been somewhere and what reports are and so on. And there was another patrol I recall when the Japs had been pushed back

35:30 up the coast following the taking of our forces taking Lae and moving up to Markham Valley to the Ramu Valley. And here the exercise was to let the Japanese know we were coming through in force. And so we had almost a whole platoon, we had 60 odd men went out

36:00 and we went to a particular area where we walked into an ambush and we lost one of our blokes.

What happened in that contact?

Corporal Alex Stewart got knocked off and he walked into a Jap machinegun

36:30 on the side of the track and we had to go to ground. And then it was not thought there were many Japs there but we moved off both sides of the track, reconnoitred around and couldn't find any more, they had obviously pulled back. And we carried on our patrol.

37:00 We went to another area and this was about the following morning where one of our blokes had

37:30 dropped his tree to do what you often do at that hour of the morning and this Jap walked into him on the track. The Jap levelled a pistol and fired but he missed. Then one of our other blokes fired back and got the Jap and we realised we were going to draw many of their blokes again. So we went down hill and we came to a very, very steep,

38:00 a very steep ravine and I recall Kiwi Harrison and Ray Parry who is still here Ray, got halfway across when shots rang out from a height of about one hundred and fifty feet on the side of the ravine. Anyhow Ray turned around and used his Bren gun from the

38:30 hip but silenced the shooting. Whatever it was whether they got knocked or disappeared there was not any firing anyhow. And we were able to cross over then safely and we were able to withdraw from the area without any other great concern.

Sounds like it was a bit touch and go there?

Oh it could have been a very bad position we were in. Where the Japs had the initiative

39:00 up on this very steep area. They were on top and yet they only fired a few shots and they disappeared. There was another one where an area called 10 Section, under a lieut [lieutenant] named Phil Hopper. And

39:30 the objective was to go up to a place named Aminik and we crossed over the Ramu. I heard they were going out and had been out for a while and I got permission from our troop captain, Tom Nesbitt that I could go with them. As a volunteer I was taking the place of

40:00 their forward scout. And so Terry Paul and myself were forward scouts. We crossed the Ramu and went about three, four days and we came to this very steep mountainside

40:30 and started to move up there. We had been avoiding the main track and going up the very steep side which was also fairly heavily wooded and we hadn't moved for more than half an hour, an hour when we were accompanied by a screeching flock of white cockatoos. And

41:00 for the better part of, it could have been three or four hours while we were going up the mountainside, these cockatoos circled above us and naturally gave the whole area the whole game away that we were foreign to the area of course and moving up. So by the time we got to the top of the mountainside they, the Japs

- 41:30 would have known we were coming. And having arrived at a plateau which looked as though it could have been part of their camp, we pulled up for a talk and this was very close to, it was after sundown and the question was whether to go in then or wait until the morning. But it was decided to go in then and
- 42:00 we had an ANGAU...

Tape 7

- 00:37 Well we were at Aminik I take it.

Yes and you were wondering about whether you should go in now or later.

We'd decided to go in and so whereas Terry and myself had been forward scout up to this time this is where Phil Hopper the

- 01:00 section lieutenant moved through together with Peter England who was the warrant officer from ANGAU and they had moved forward. Anyhow we hadn't gone more than a few yards forward when the whole bloody earth opened up with machineguns and rifle-fire and grenades and so naturally everybody
- 01:30 hit the deck. Peter had been hit and so had Phil and Ron Duke and Boyd Coat pulled out Phil Hopper and he was badly injured through the head, very badly and he had died within minutes. In the
- 02:00 meantime Peter England was making a hell of a lot of noise out front and he was trying to crawl back to where we were and I had my head down, I'd moved up several times to see where the firing was coming from but I'm afraid you couldn't see anything. But it did draw a lot of fire as a result
- 02:30 and each time I'd be showered with a mass of twigs and leaves above me as the shots went above my head. So whoever was on that machinegun had the sight set too high. Anyhow I made signs for the police boy that he and I would move out
- 03:00 and I wanted him to take Peter's right arm on his side and I'd take his left arm on my side and we'd bring him back behind the tree. So he acquiesced with that one. So we both rushed out, grabbed Peter and we dragged him back in again without any shots being aimed at us
- 03:30 and put Peter down. The firing dropped down and it was getting darker. I checked with Ron Duke, he told me that Peter, Phil rather had had it. And we had to somehow carry
- 04:00 Peter and we decided that the rest of the force, all twenty odd they had disappeared. So it was decided to stay the night on this plateau. And the police boy had cut up
- 04:30 a couple of branches and made a stretcher out of belts and things like that and we had Peter on it. But it would have been hopeless taking him down that mountainside the way he was. So we, we could only move that barely 50 yards or so and spend the
- 05:00 rest of the night there. Trust that the Japs wouldn't be coming out, which they didn't and before dawn we did an attempt to go down the hillside and as it got litter we hurried our pace. We got down the hillside and we needed to avoid the tracks
- 05:30 so we were scrub bashing to cut it wide enough to bring the stretcher through and on about the, maybe halfway through the second day we came to the place where we had agreed to be a rendezvous to join up with the main body and that's when
- 06:00 we were very carefully creeping in and I could see an article of clothing hanging over a bush which would indicate they left in a hurry and that's when I proceeded to load the Owen gun, pull it back far enough to hear the click, let it go and off went a shot.
- 06:30 Of course that sort of thing you could hear it two miles away in that country. And it gave our whole position away and in my surprised the other blokes behind had dropped the stretcher straight away and had flattened out on the ground and ready for action. And immediately
- 07:00 I'm saying, "It was me." Anyhow we got ourselves together again and didn't spend anytime in this particular point. And after about another day, say on about the sixth day, we were then met up by another body of our troops who'd
- 07:30 come out to look for us and we went back, back over the Ramu and we were home. That's when we discovered also that Harry Cole was missing. And it was only almost twenty years later when I went up to New Guinea with my son Richard who was then fourteen, we went through that area.
- 08:00 I hired a car and missed this area going up but got it coming back out of Madang, a place called Oonah. And I asked for the 'counsella', who came out wearing a red-banded cap, and a young girl carrying a

baby,

- 08:30 she could talk. She could talk English to be understood anyhow. And I learned that Harry had gone over the edge of the cliff when the firing started and he'd been belted through the leg or somewhere and in the morning the Japs shot him from where they were up on top. But at the time
- 09:00 too I, the way of conversation to them I said to them, to the 'counsella', "One time soldier from Australia fight him soldier belong Japan." And he replied, "Me look him." I said, "What me look him?" "You look him." And
- 09:30 I said, "Well what name belong you?" "Aami." I said, "Aami, you one time police boy?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Me Master Bob." And it was quite a meeting, quite a meeting. Yes he remembered,
- 10:00 Aami, Aami the police boy. At this place called Oonah as the local chief in Lulawai they call him 'counsella' and we had a discussion about this when I learned about Harry Cole. And also the girl indicated another young bloke there would be aged about twenty and she
- 10:30 said name belong him so and so and she indicated that he was the son of one of the native guides we had with us who had lead us back to the village in the first place. And this native guide, his father had been shot through the leg and the following day he had
- 11:00 tried to get help from the Japanese but they wouldn't do a thing about it, he died. Whether he died or they shot him but he died anyhow. But that was about twenty years after the event.

That's extraordinary bit of synchronicity that happened to you there Bob.

I unloaded all the money I had on me, which was not a great deal and I

- 11:30 left it with Aami and maybe one or two other possessions I cannot remember. But it was dramatic wasn't it.

It was extremely dramatic.

Aami the police boy.

That's incredible. Well rewinding twenty years.

Sorry?

Rewinding to when you were crossing the Ramu, I'm just wondering that it would be quite difficult carrying a wounded man

- 12:00 **across, back across the river?**

Well to get over the river he might have been on a raft now I cannot remember how we got him back. There very likely was, at this time there was a quite big canoe available. And he would have been some how supported on the canoe to get him

- 12:30 back. He was shot through what they call the clavicle and he finished up, he wrote a letter to Terry afterwards and he finished up with a gammy arm from it.

Oh right it's up here is it?

Yeah the clavicle is the shoulder, the collarbone I think. But apparently he finished up with a

- 13:00 gammy arm.

But he was all right as far as?

Went to England, apparently he went back to England somebody was saying.

Where would somebody like him be evacuated to for more specialised treatment, would it be back at the base or evacuated somewhere else?

We were then at Faita, we had an airdrome there which we cut out of the kunai and we

- 13:30 also had an American radar plant there, a radar plant with about six or eight American soldiers manning the radar. And we'd have an occasional a small plane drop in there too.

So at most they'd have to wait for a couple of days?

- 14:00 He would have been cared for by our own doctor of course initially and then wouldn't want the outstanding treatment there with him but he might have been taken back. He'd been flown from there to, at that date I'd say probably back to Port Moresby. But that bloke Roff I told

- 14:30 you about, he was cut about with the Japanese, he was seven days before he got back to, back to Goroka after being carried on a stretcher.

So that's got to play with your mind knowing that if you get seriously injured, I mean first of

all you know your mates are going to carry you back, but second of all you are thinking well if you get a bad injury your chances aren't that

15:00 **good in getting immediate treatment. Does that play on your mind?**

It was part of the game.

What was the most worrying thing that could happen to you as far as injury was concerned in your mind?

Boredom.

Is that an injury, boredom?

There is one reason why, when I'd dropped

15:30 my sergeant stripes and became a private, Tom Nesbitt grabbed me as his right hand man on his headquarter staff. As a result anywhere Tom went out I'd go with him. And also where things did get too quiet and bored I would say to Tom I'd like to go out on this patrol and so on. And that's how I went out

16:00 on most patrols, by getting out to relieve boredom. It would be like a pilot I think who has got an aircraft and no action and not allowed to fly.

Is boredom a greater enemy than the Japanese.

16:30 Oh yeah.

You know you're not in a relaxed R & R [rest and recreation] situation. So if you are constantly on alert and you are bored out of your mind do you start to go a little bit loopy?

Oh no, no not at all, no. It is true some blokes went like it. Yes I do recall one of our poor blokes who,

17:00 the standard one where, anyhow he wanted to do something or rather. He could play musical instruments he could play the gramophone, that's right he could play the gramophone. But that was a joke over a period but he would carry on all this crazy out of this world talk. And he did go troppo

17:30 the poor bloke, troppo. And I'd say again some blokes were like it. They would be sent back.

Was there much instance of blokes going troppo?

Much?

Instance, was it common? So you would only see one or two cases in the entire time?

18:00 I only knew about four or five of the time I was up in New Guinea. Not in our own unit, I'm talking about blokes you see, you might meet them in a transit camp that type of thing. But it did happen a bit.

How were they viewed by men such as yourself?

Well you feel sorry for them of course. You always talked to them but

18:30 I don't think the boredom would make you go troppo, I didn't feel that way anyhow. I just liked to get out and do something different.

So what happened after you returned from that crossing over at Ramu? I'm not even actually sure where you are by this stage because we've

19:00 **moved around all over the place. You've crossed the Ramu River with your injured mate so you're back at that base camp. What happens next?**

From there we, we moved across the Ramu permanently because

19:30 our main force had moved up the Markham and pushing back the enemy over what is known as Shaggy Ridge past a prominent place called Dumpu and so we moved across to a camp named Isariba and we patrolled

20:00 out from there but not for any great activity because the Japs were already on the move, moving further back.

What's the distance between those camps, is it just a couple of days?

From,

20:30 oh it would have, two days. It would have been two days I guess. Yes it could have been two.

What sort of news are you getting through about your progress as far as pushing the Japs back is concerned

21:00 **or are you in the dark?**

Oh we'd get a general coverage from your own troop captain, what was happening. We were fairly well informed that way.

So things are looking up a bit more at this point?

Yes, oh yes,

21:30 very much.

Knowing that how did that affect your morale?

I suppose everybody felt better but yes. There was never ever any dampening of morale. It was true that there were some blokes who were

22:00 anxious to see the whole war over. That was normal too I suppose to get back. And that's a question of doing the job you are supposed to do.

Is that how you saw it, doing the job that you had to do rather than wanting the war to be over?

22:30 Yeah.

Did you manage to get any leave during that entire time or not?

We went back after New Guinea.

I'm just thinking you seem to have been out there for quite some time under a lot of stress, they must have relieved you at some point, surely?

Yes I went back for about

23:00 three weeks and we were taking Atebrin every day while we were up there and I'd been taking it for so long my skin had turned a very yellow colour. I went into hospital in Brisbane and

23:30 I recall I was going to go back on leave to Perth and I was told to stop taking Atebrin to let the malaria break out and I did that and I went into hospital, oh for about ten days maybe two weeks.

While you were on leave?

Yeah but they gave you extra time. And also I

24:00 picked up what they called acute otitis externa which is a tropical ear, this comes out of the streams in New Guinea of course. And I went into Hollywood Hospital here and I always recall this specialist Ernie Green

24:30 he would come in in the morning and I'd sit up in a chair and I'd grip the chair like this and he'd do his steel probe with cotton wool on the end of it into my ear and he'd clean out the ear. I'm gripping the seat but anyhow that was part of the treatment.

25:00 I think I would rather that than a leech in my mouth.

Oh worse things could have happened. I used to, well we all had malaria of course, we'd always get malaria at odd times. You know you'd break out, sometimes worse than others.

Did you ever have a break out while you were actually in New Guinea?

Not seriously

25:30 so because I always took the Atebrin. But sometimes you'd feel very much off colour and as I did after discharge sometimes feel off colour with it but I started playing rugby again and after training I would

26:00 do an extra four or five laps of the oval to try and work it off and by the time the year was out I'd got rid of it altogether.

The easy way and the hard way. Guess which way you tried it. Just going back to when you were in New Guinea how did you actually get back to Australia for that leave time?

Went back on a ship. Yes, came back

26:30 possibly on the HMAS Katoomba again, that was a regular run up there. And I recall coming back on one occasion and I got onto a, a got onto a troop train as far as

27:00 Brisbane, would have to be Brisbane and had two or three days there before the transit went on so I went out to Archerfield, their RAAF base at that time and I looked up the,

27:30 a fellow who had just come in or was doing something or rather with an A22, an A20 was it? Anyhow it was a Boston aircraft, a Boston attack bomber which belonged to 22 Squadron, that's right. And I was asking him movers and so on and the told me that

- 28:00 they were a flight of three who were going up to Port Moresby and I put it on him about taking me up with him rather than me have to get back by train. And he told me if I was out there by a certain time the following day yes he would organise it. So I went back to the barracks in Brisbane and I asked to see the transport officer and I said,
- 28:30 "I want to get back to my unit in New Guinea, they could do with some help and if you gave me my transit papers I've got a chance of going back by flight because I've got it teed up." Anyhow they gave me my papers and I went out again then and I got hold of this pilot once more and I had another bloke with me too
- 29:00 and I seem to think his name was Eddie Rowe, one of our blokes was Eddie Rowe in the unit. Anyhow Eddie's in the other aircraft and I was in this one. The Boston, for some reason I couldn't, I did not have a seat behind the pilot but there was
- 29:30 this space in the, might have been a luggage department or something or rather behind the pilot and you could see, you could see downwards but not over the top. Anyhow that's how I went back and we flew from Brisbane through Townsville
- 30:00 and Cairns and we had a stop over somewhere. I can't remember where this was but at one place and I seem to remember it was Townsville I went for a swim. It was quite hot weather and it was over the ocean side
- 30:30 and there was only about a dozen people on the beach including this small kelpie type dog. And the word there was that a shark had appeared there the previous day and it was in the area. Anyhow I had to have this swim and so I went out
- 31:00 in water say about chest deep and my mate on the beach yelled out to me and I saw this dog swimming out towards me. The dog swam right up to me and I went to pat it and it grabbed my wrist in its jaw and not to hurt me but firmly and the dog turned around to go back towards
- 31:30 shore. Well I went back with it and up the beach and it released its grip on my wrist and the dog sort of wagged its tail and that was it. But wasn't that strange?

So was there a shark out there?

Well, now how would the dog know and to think that way? It's a very,

- 32:00 it's a very strange occurrence.

That's just amazing behaviour from a dog. But then again I mean you know dogs can sniff prostate cancer, they can smell earthquakes and they are very sensitive kind of things but it obviously wanted to get you out of the water and you are a complete stranger, so what danger was there?

Anyhow back again and they, we flew up to the tip of Cape York Peninsula, a place called Higgins Field

- 32:30 and we spent the night up there. And in the morning back in the aircraft, flew across the straight to Port Moresby and I said farewell to the skipper, I can't think of his name now and back to Murray barracks and joined my unit.

What was it like actually seeing your unit again?

Oh it was good to see the blokes once more, yeah, yes.

So you really only had about three weeks leave?

- 33:00 It could have been five with the time that I was in hospital and so on.

Probably had so much of a fever for a couple of weeks that you wouldn't have known what day it was?

Yeah I can't remember what the actual leave would have been but anyhow.

Did you get relatively good treatment in hospital, was it back in Hollywood that you stayed?

In Hollywood yeah.

And what was the treatment like that you got in Hollywood?

Oh very good. Well you do, whether you

- 33:30 had malaria or acute externa otitis, yes. Oh they feed you well, yes.

The ear thing it just sounds bad doesn't it?

Yes.

So you were cleared up with the ear and the malaria.

Oh yes.

So what was next on the

34:00 **agenda with your unit?**

We moved up to, we were at Strathpine for a while in a camp at Strathpine, just out of Brisbane. And I recall as our numbers grew from the blokes getting back from leave we found out that it's possible to

34:30 have our own canteen. So I was placed in charge of the canteen to get it going. And I drew a, oh I'll say a ten gallon keg or something like that, ten or twenty gallons or whatever it was. And it was my idea that the blokes who were serving the beer didn't have to pay for drinks.

35:00 Then when I came to balance up the cash, the cash we'd taken there was a fair gap showing we'd drunk a lot more beer than we were supposed to so I had to put a clamp on that one. Start charging above after the first two or something like that.

So is that on your way back to New Guinea or is it?

Yes.

35:30 **Right. It's a good idea but it just doesn't work in practice really does it?**

I recall we went, one day we went to the, went to the races somewhere in Brisbane and somewhere we'd passed a roadside stall where they were selling day old chickens. And so I bought a day old chicken and I put it in my shirt

36:00 and I took it back to the camp too. And the only thing this damn thing would eat was eggs. So I had to catch some eggs, some yolk from the house cook and feed it on egg. I'd go along to see a mate of mine in

36:30 the hospital, at the camp, and I'd take the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK out of my shirt and put it on the ground. He ran around and he would think that I was his mother. But if a nurse walked past, he would be about six weeks old at this time, if a nurse went past he would run after the nurse. Then I'd go and he'd turn around and race madly back to me every time.

37:00 Yes.

You had a little pet chicken?

Oh yes. Anyhow I had him on camp and he'd sleep under the bed and so on. Anywhere I'd go I'd take the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK with me. Finally when I got posted I took him across to a nearby poultry farm and I got their promise

37:30 that they wouldn't put him in a pot or send him with one of their ordinary WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s but he would be with their special WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s anyhow that had their own pen. That's where I left him.

That's just a bazaar story.

Oh yes I'd take him anywhere. I'd just whistle and he'd turn around and fly back to me.

A man and his WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK ?

38:00 Yes.

It's a very sweet story. So what was next on the agenda for your unit once you got back to New Guinea?

We went from Strathpine to New Britain. We were landed at Jacquinot Bay first and then ...

So I'm

38:30 **assuming this is a pretty quick...**

Jacquinot Bay the south beach I think of the Island of New Britain. And we were later up to this other bay, I forget the name of it, it might be Wide Bay or Open Bay I get mixed up between the flights we were doing on the B17 between those two bays. But we used to patrol from there from that point across to the northern side of the island to ensure the Japanese did move

39:00 further out of Rabaul. And that's where we were near a river mouth, the lagoon and again to avoid boredom I got hold of a roll of aircraft matting which had been rolled up into a pillar and

39:30 this used to be used by the Japanese filled up with bricks to bridge a stream. Anyhow I wired up the end of this particular six-foot high roll and at the other end I wired, I fastened a cone out of wire out of packing cases at the house cook and I got hold of a pigeon somebody had knocked

40:00 off.

A pigeon?

A pigeon, yeah a wild pigeon. I used that for bait and I put it in the lagoon out the back of the house cook and pulled up the following day about four or five black bream, quite a good weight. The natives said they wouldn't eat black bream, I don't know why but anyhow we decided that we wouldn't eat them either. So I took this roll then down to the entrance

40:30 to the river mouth where the lagoon was and it was quite, was much deeper water and I rolled it down the bank into about eight or nine feet of water and as it rolled down, it rolled up itself on the wire I used. And anyhow we got first of all only a couple of bream but the second day I started to pull it up and it started to jump all over the place. And I said to my mate, "Look

41:00 I've got a bloody crocodile, I think you better come and give me hand." Because we had seen a crocodile on the far side of the lagoon and I pulled it up and here's a whopping big trevally in it. Now the trevally is about that long, well the thing was six foot long anyhow. Now the trevally had to squeeze its way in through the opening to get in and anyhow I took it back and

41:30 in true cod liver oil advertisement. I got hold of a pole first of all and we'd wired this thing onto the pole and marched back while all the blokes are lined up to have breakfast. Well I come marching in and the blokes had rubbished me about my fishing net and they all raced over. Anyhow we put the pole across another pole and put a Bren gun over here, a Bren gun loaded and

Tape 8

00:33 **So what was happening in the war while you were fishing?**

Well the Japs were bottled up in Rabaul and I think there were refutably about 30,000 of them there. And we were there as part of the

01:00 force to keep them bottled up. They weren't expected to give any great trouble but at that time the allied forces had got up beyond the Philippines of course and getting near the death knock of Japan which occurred in August.

01:30 **How did that news reach you?**

Well there were no papers where we were but a lot of it was word of mouth from the signals branch, letters and so on, that type of thing.

What was your reaction to hearing that Japan had surrendered?

02:00 Everybody was very, very happy of course. I recall standing next to a tent to hear a bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, Hiroshima and then of course the second bomb, Nagasaki. And then came through the news that Japan had capitulated.

What did you know about atomic bombs in those days?

02:30 Not a great deal except this enormous bomb had gone off and wiped out a whole city.

Was that difficult for you to imagine? Did it raise much discussion?

Well yes, it certainly was great news. The war over at last, we could all go home

03:00 except it would take a while to get us home because there was so many hundreds of thousands of troops spread all over the areas outside of Australian had to be taken home and there were just as many Japanese who had been prisoners. There wasn't, nobody knew how the Japanese would act

03:30 in particular areas or that they would do as they were told by the command or they'd choose still to fight on.

Is it true that there were pockets of Japanese still fighting?

They, if there were it was not for long.

04:00 **So what was your next move once the war had ended?**

We moved up to Rabaul and we were attached to the 13th Brigade who had also moved up there and our job was to simply show a presence in case anything

04:30 wrong did take place. And we were in a very delightful spot on the ocean front, right on the ocean front where we could go fishing, swimming and generally take life easy. We would get upwards of

05:00 forty or sixty Japanese prisoners of war to help around the camp.

Can you describe the camp that you had there?

We were living in the usual army eight man tents. We might have been half a dozen to a tent with fly. And it was

05:30 it had a nice level flat area removed of all rubbish and so on, bushes etc. There were trees around it and a gently sloping shoreline going out to the deep water. That's where I decided to build a fish trap.

How did you go?

I had to have some three star pickets

06:00 which I hammered into the reef but we had some Japanese prisoners to help and I remember when the Japanese series of caves behind our camp on the hillside where they had dug them out to store their ammunition and explosives.

06:30 And from up in this area in addition to the usual pipes there was one pipe that somebody had brought down which had a rounded end to it. And it was about the same diameter as the other pipes we were using and I recall I wanted this Jap prisoner of war to hold

07:00 the damn thing while I used the back of an axe to hammer it in. But he looked at me in a terrified manner and nodding his head and I thought this very strange a prisoner, especially a Japanese prisoner of course, disobeying orders. But I held the axe but he wasn't having a bar of it. And by sign language he indicated that what

07:30 I had was called a Bangalore torpedo. It was used, it was an explosive device used to put underneath a barbed wire fence or a wall to blow it up. And this damn thing was full of explosive and I wanted him to hold it while I hit an axe on top of it. So we got out of that one satisfactorily.

Thank heavens for sign language.

08:00 Yes. Anyhow the fish trap it worked fairly well. I, somebody had this fence going out to about four feet of water and then had a box at the end of it and they swam in here and couldn't get out sort of thing. We didn't get any 33 pound trevallies though with it. Also at this time I got hold of

08:30 some of the bamboo in the area and with some backing case board from the house cook. I'm not sure what I used for nails now but I built a framework to build a surf ski. Now this was before these very short skis became popular here. This was about ten feet long and

09:00 I had to have a cover over it of course and the cover naturally is canvas. Now this is where once again we had to live off the land. And down in the harbour waterfront there was a store of tarpaulins and tents which had been taken off the Japanese and so I went down there one night with two of our

09:30 blokes and we crept underneath the fence and so on into this particular building and dragged out a tarpaulin. And we got it back to the camp and I cut it out and wrapped it around this framework I'd built and got some paint from the same source and I painted it over. And then with

10:00 a long pole with a couple of boards at the end of it I had my surf ski. Then I got to go out then into nearby bays around the area and it was one more area of relaxation.

It sounds like discipline had really relaxed in the army by now?

Yes.

What was it like

10:30 **supervising the Japanese POWs [Prisoners of War]?**

Not a big problem. Some of the boys got a bit harsh. While we were there one of our blokes who had a brother POW the Japs had given him the treatment and killed him as a prisoner. Our

11:00 bloke wasn't at all happy with them over that one.

Did he want some revenge?

Well he wasn't happy.

What kind of behaviour did you witness towards the Japanese which was inappropriate?

I recall reading, oh in the back of Doig's book I got this one where

11:30 the Japanese commander in Rabaul had registered with the headquarters of 13th Div [Division], one hundred and thirty two instances of ill treatment of prisoners and one hundred and thirty one of these all were from those working for the 2/2nd Commando Association. But in describing them

12:00 though this prisoner had to go into a particular tent and then sweep it out and then he had to bend and pick something up, now then he was kicked in the behind. There was a lot of that. A good kick in the

behind but really not a great deal more worse than that.

So nothing particular severe?

No, not like the way the Japanese used to torture our

12:30 blokes, no.

How well informed were you about the way the Japanese had treated our blokes?

It had come out in, it would come out in the papers and sometimes, there might have been cuttings of newspapers that type of thing. But we were well aware one of our blokes got knocked off on a patrol to

13:00 Koolau. The patrol went out to bring back a Japanese prisoner. And they weren't able to get the prisoner but we lost two blokes. Well one of these was shot through the stomach. And we got word back again from natives who worked in that camp that the Japanese with his shot to the stomach simply sat on

13:30 him, sat on his stomach while they played cards.

Appalling isn't it?

Imagine how our blokes felt over that one.

How did you feel while guarding the Japanese POWs?

Well you resent

14:00 them as Japanese of course but the war is over.

So how did you supervise them while they were on work details?

Well I didn't, I didn't feel the urge to whack one of them over the chops for example. It didn't seem relevant.

Any harsh words?

They just did their job.

14:30 They wouldn't understand harsh works anyhow.

Did you form any close relationships with any of the POWs?

Absolutely no.

How long were you in Rabaul?

Possibly, possibly six months something like that. Five months, six months.

15:00 **So how would you say that time was mostly spent?**

Oh visiting other camps, going out fishing, going out on my raft, surf ski I should say. And

15:30 I recall about this time we wanted some lighting for our camp and the Bull, our CO [Commanding Officer] Jeff Laidlaw, we'd line up on parade and he said to us that he had applied from Division 4 certain amenities including some

16:00 hurricane lamps. And they weren't able to supply them and he gave the usual word to us, well fellows you've just got to live off the land again. So a few nights later I went up with two of the blokes to the 13th Brigade Headquarters and I'd had during the day time been

16:30 pointed out where the officers mess was. And anyhow I went in there about eleven o'clock at night, twelve o'clock and I removed two of their petrol lamps and brought those back. We did a fair bit of that to occupy our time. Again we might go down I recall when

17:00 we built another, another surf ski and I went down to the 13th Brigade area where they'd bring in troops just coming into Rabaul. And they'd be fitted out, put them into a standard army tent.

17:30 And I went in there one late afternoon, very late and removed the fly, the tent fly was quite a nice one, single sheet of cloth. It might have been fifteen or more, it had to be foot square and that was beautiful cutting up to make

18:00 a couple of surf skis or maybe cover the framework of a small boat. And I recalled somebody came along and wanted to know what we were doing and I said we need these down at so and so, need to go to some other part of the camp. I said, "Can you give us a

18:30 hand?" So having taken the fly off we then took down the whole tent. And we carted off the fly and the tent. The fellow who was asking about this I think was one of the orderly corporals. But I

19:00 like that one.

You took the lot.

Yes. Took back the lot.

It sounds like the Australians are pretty good at acquiring materials when they needed to?

Oh we were caught again yes. A ship would come in with rations. The truck would be loaded up going up the steep hill out of the Rabaul Harbour

19:30 and they would occasionally move up, load it up with big crates of eggs. And so while going up a hill we'd remove one of these crates that used to contain about oh twenty four dozen eggs or something, quite a very, very large number of eggs anyhow and we'd take this back to the camp. And that's where I'd show the boys, introduced them to

20:00 prairie oysters. Where you'd knock an egg up into a mug and you'd tip in about three or four tablespoons full of vinegar and you'd slosh it down. Prairie oysters, yes.

A bit of protein.

Well helped to fill the time in anyhow.

Were you thinking about home?

20:30 Oh yes you had to wait your turn and we returned home on the points system depending how many days you'd been overseas and that sort of stuff. I had a fairly good score so I was able to go back sometime, it

21:00 would have been March early April 1946. So I could come back and be a civilian.

Were you discussing your plans with your mates about what you had in mind of doing when you got home?

Well I had a job to go back to, back to the Vacuum Oil Company. And that's where I went back and...

21:30 **Before we get to employment and the Vacuum Oil Company, what happened when you arrived back on mainland Australia?**

Our own company were very disappointed that having been shifted up to Rabaul instead of moving forward with [General Douglas MacArthur's] troops right up to Japan. We were virtually guarding the Japanese left behind and of course that was

22:00 MacArthur's whole policy, the Americans had to be in the van of everything, didn't want to be burdened with other troops and so we were relegated to virtually a guard keeping role. That was as far as New Britain was concerned. And at the end of the war instead of going back to Australia,

22:30 that most of the Australian formations were treated with their march through the city. We were suddenly broken up and came back in twos, threes, fourteen, fifteen and so on. And for those that were left they were finally posted to other larger units and that's how the 2/2nd

23:00 Commando Association was, sorry company, squadron sorry was broken up at the end of the war.

So how were you returned to Australia?

Came back on one of the usual troop ships and then by the...

What was that voyage like?

Oh it was all right. It took about four days from memory, four or five days.

There would have been celebrations on

23:30 **board I would imagine.**

Not really.

Was there a beer ration? It doesn't sound like it.

I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I don't think so, not on the troop ship, no.

There must have been an amount of cheer

24:00 **though I would suspect. Having come home victorious, winning the war, looking forward to seeing family and friends perhaps?**

Oh that was great, that's true. Yes we came back and off loaded at Brisbane I think. Then by train back to Perth.

What was your health like after being up there?

The?

Your health,

24:30 **how was your health?**

House?

Health.

Oh health, oh that was okay. I'd had malaria of course but in general terms I was okay. Yes no worry at all. I started playing rugby right away and that kind of thing and swimming and so on.

How long did it take to get back to Perth?

From Brisbane?

25:00 **Did you have a disembarkation leave somewhere?**

No. No in my case I would have already been on the train, which went right through. We had to be changed up, had to

25:30 be changed at Adelaide of course for the difference in the rail gauge at that time.

Can you describe scenes aboard the train on your way home? Nothing comes to mind. Was it crowded or?

I recall, I recall coming back over the Nullarbor. We pulled up at one spot

26:00 where there were a lot of rabbits and I'd heard that if you chase one rabbit for long enough you'd be able to run it down. So I went out, there must have been a hundred rabbits there but I went out about say fifty yards from the train itself and I clamped my

26:30 eye on one rabbit and I started to chase it. I've got to be fair it was not a full grown rabbit about half size but I ran after it. And by this time a lot of people on the train had started to cheer. And the rabbit ran around back to the railway line, across the front of the train and around the other side

27:00 and I'm still hammering after it but by this time the rest of those on the train were also aware what was going on. And they're all shouting all sorts of words. Anyhow I finally dived on this thing and I got it. They gave an enormous cheer from the train. And having caught it what do you do with it? So I took it back to the carriage and put it down

27:30 on the floor of the carriage. And I recall I did get something from the food van and tried to feed the rabbit with this but we got quite friendly by the time we'd got back across, right across the Nullarbor back to Kalgoorlie and then down around about Chidlow I remember I thought now I can't take the damn thing home

28:00 so I took it out and let it go outside the train at Chidlow.

Surprised it didn't fret.

It might have wanted to leave me you reckon. Yes.

So what was the prevailing feeling when you got back to Western Australia?

Well it was good to get back naturally.

28:30 I'm trying to work out whether I went back to Mrs Savage again at that time.

Which platform did you get off the train?

Gee I wouldn't know.

Would it have been a city depot or?

Oh in the city

29:00 yes.

Were there people waiting to greet troops as they came home?

No I had to get back through, back through the showgrounds again which they called Greylands and I was still part of the army. I had to go through the various

29:30 procedures for discharge.

What were they?

Well that was a medical examination and I recall I had an aptitude test. I've still got a copy of it. That's where they reckon that I had an aptitude in the top five

30:00 per cent which would give me confidence to take up any university type subject if I chose to but in view

of my interest in sales they recommended that I pursue sales as a career, sales executive

30:30 as a career.

Before you recommence your employment when did you see your father and Mrs Savage?

Well I saw my own family of course, my father and stepmother. It was about the same day I came back it would have been, the same day. I had to get a leave pass from Greylands of course

31:00 and the question of visiting people.

What was it like to see your father again?

It was great, yes it was great indeed.

How did he greet you?

I was always very close to my father. He went through tough times. He was quite a battler and always battled for my sister and myself.

31:30 Never on anything more than a very, very low rate of pay. And so I always appreciated from him that he did his best for us.

Was he proud of you?

Oh yes that's true.

Where was he living when you returned from the war?

32:00 In Claremont, in Davies road, Claremont.

Which is where he had been living before you left wasn't it?

Yes where I, a house across the road from a dairy and so on.

Did you stay with him once you got back?

No.

When were you discharged?

April 1946.

32:30 I recall staying, I stayed for a while at His Majesty's Hotel in Perth. It was not a, it didn't cost a great deal for a room

33:00 and then this friend of mine Neaty Roberts had a flat in Mount Street, Perth. And he was transferred in his employment to Northern and told me I could take over his flat, which I did.

That's generous of him.

33:30 Yes I lived there for a number of years, up to the time that I was married in 1955.

So you were there for what, 9 years?

It could be about that.

What was it like walking down civvy [civilian] street after having been in the army?

It was great to see few faces you hadn't

34:00 seen in a number of years.

Where you out looking for people that you hadn't seen for those years?

Well I recall saying to my stepmother at the time, "I'd like you to nominate a certain day when I'll be here and the relatives can all come and visit me." Because when I come home on leave

34:30 I found that I was spending quite a few days going down to Fremantle to visit my stepmother's sister down there and then my stepmother's brother somewhere else and it was using up a very valuable part of my leave. Anyhow that's how it was.

So you thought it was time they came to you.

We had

35:00 a date that they'd come and see me at home yeah.

And was there a big gathering? Was there a nice gathering or?

Oh yes, they had maybe a dozen or so. That was enough.

Were you busy trying to catch up with people you hadn't seen since you left home, other mates who had gone away in different services or?

Yes, yes

35:30 there were some. Some hadn't come back but you'd bump into them.

Were there mates that you kept in touch with when you got back, who you'd been in the army with?

There were some I used to, some I wrote to throughout the war. One was a very close mate

36:00 Bill Reeford, when I worked in Vacuum Oil he was working in Shell Company. One time I was going to join the navy with him but I couldn't suit on account of night school activity, the night to go down to join the navel reserves pre-war but Bill went down he joined the navy. He finished up gunnery officer

36:30 on the Hobart and had quite a great naval career. He finished up also by the way as our best man when we were married.

Before we move on to how you met and when you were married had Perth changed much when you got home?

Not enormously so, no.

37:00 **Did friends or family, sorry?**

Not that I can recall.

Did friends or family think that you had changed much?

They reckoned I'd grown older.

Which you undoubtedly had.

Yes.

So how long was it before you went back to work?

I'd say about a week.

What was it like returning to your old job?

37:30 I went back and I was working in, I was working in what they call sales clerical. And where there were other blokes that had come back also.

38:00 And there are some fellows who came back and were working in the mail department as office boys but they all had jobs to come back to, those who were working previously.

So did you knock off and go to the pub together after work?

Oh yes.

What was your favourite watering hole?

That was, became a fairly common

38:30 occurrence to have a couple of drinks after work.

Do you remember your favourite watering hole?

That was the hotel across the road.

Very conveniently placed.

They called it the Dive.

Why was that?

Down the Dive. Well you'd dive down the stairs to get there. Yeah so they were quite a team,

39:00 the barmaids down there.

How long was it before you met Mary?

I married in 1955.

Where did you meet?

Oh I met Margaret among friends. Yes. Margaret's father was the managing secretary

- 39:30 of Kings Park and sometimes when we were out together I'd say, "I have to go, I've got to take Margaret up to Kings Park." Of course that was the comment that the young blokes would say when taking the girl up for a bit of canoodling up in Kings Park but Margaret lived there of course. So I'd say I'm taking her up to Kings Park. I might add
- 40:00 too that whatever habits when we were younger there was a divorced detective, private detective named Alf Sleep and he was notorious for bursting in on people in the wrong bed and that sort of thing. I then the Mirror newspaper would write it up. And anyhow
- 40:30 when, oh this is pre-war though.
- Oh well actually we need to change tapes there anyway but it sounds like...**
- I'll just say it quickly. We'd drive up in a car up to the parking area of Kings Park and you'd see about half a dozen cars parked along here and we'd open the door of the car and with a shout say, "There they are over there Mr
- 41:00 Sleep." You'd find somebody's car start up, put into gear and they'd charge off
- This Sleep character sounds like an interesting fellow.**

Tape 9

- 00:30 **So you mentioned that you met your wife, not canoodling in the Kings Park.**
- Oh no, no.
- So it must have been pretty strict back then too? It must have been pretty strict, you had to have the approval of the father?**
- Oh yes true. I was a good boy too.
- Well disciplined after your war service. So how long was it before you ended up getting married to Margaret?**
- 01:00 How long before?
- You ended up getting married to Margaret?**
- Well I came back in '46 and married in November '55.
- So you had a bit of time.**
- Nine years yes.
- 01:30 A friend of mine had quite a nice unit up in Kings Park overlooking Kings Park Road and the park itself and he was moving back to Melbourne so I took over his unit. We had a readymade
- 02:00 accommodation.
- That was handy.**
- Gee I forgot to mention something there. We were first offered a house in Bedford Avenue, Subiaco, only a few doors away from Mrs Savages because the owner was going away for about four or five months. We lived there first then up to Kings Park road.
- So you were still in contact with Mrs Savage?**
- Yeah.
- 02:30 Oh she was a great woman. We had a great relationship. I used to call her Ducky Daddles and then it came down to Duck for short. So she was always called Duck after that. So she was a great lady.
- That is a bit sweet. And so where were you working after you came back from the war because you said that you...?**
- Vacuum Oil Company.
- What sort of things**
- 03:00 **were you doing with that?**
- I was working in sales clerical taking the orders and that type of thing, paying the invoices, etc., etc. I think it was about that time they put up the large neon sign above the building. It was a four-storey building but that was one of the biggest in Perth at

- 03:30 that time. Shell were bigger, they were about six stories I think. But they had this big plumes sign put up and the workman had left behind some of their gear on the parapet overlooking St Georges Terrace which was an area sometimes the staff might have lunch. And I'd had lunch there with this friend Peter Kennedy
- 04:00 who'd also been away in the Middle East in this case and I picked up a bar of steel about a foot long and two and a half inches wide and maybe half an inch thick. And I tossed it to Peter to catch and he caught it and the thew it back to me and I threw it back again. Now when I threw it back the second time
- 04:30 he missed catching it. And it hit the deck and skidded over underneath the wrought iron rail and disappeared over into the terrace. Now this was about five minutes to two when the foot traffic was very heavy coming back after lunch. And we'd both raced to the rail
- 05:00 dreading what we might see, who was lying down below or it would have been a very healthy happy clang. Fortunately it was a happy clang. And with that we both raced inside, didn't say a word about it to anybody else and in the morning there was a prominent article in the West Australian newspaper about this dangerous bar of iron that had dropped down in very heavy traffic
- 05:30 and how it could have killed somebody and the story went on and on and on. It also happened to mention that it's known that employees of surrounding buildings were known to skylark. Which was untrue but it troubled me naturally and I spoke to Peter. I said, "Look I'm
- 06:00 going in to tell the accountant what has happened and I caused it." So we both went in to see the Accountant D. J. McLean. D. J. McLean was a very, very dour Scot and he very gruff and he was the big ogre and terror of the
- 06:30 staff. So I told him what had happened and he gave the expected dressing down and he said, "You might not be aware that the owners of this building who are our landlords
- 07:00 are Milers Timber and Trading and the manager of Millers Timber and Trading was the person who was about to mount the steps when that bar of iron missed his head by less than a foot." And thoroughly admonished over all this and offered our apologies over and over again
- 07:30 we turned to go out Peter went first and I came next and the door wasn't closing, I was trying to close it so I used both hands on the door to pull it. I'd not known that the previous day he'd put up these automatic door closers and I'm working against it and McLean shouted out, "Leave the bloody door alone."
- 08:00 Peter and I literally cringed and crept to our tables. I should have mentioned that happened before the war not afterwards.

Well it was an accident, there was nothing you could do about it really.

- 08:30 Anyhow it did teach a lesson to take more care.

Was it difficult to go back to your old job after being in New Guinea?

Not really because I always wanted to be a salesman and I had made this quite clear before I left to go away to the war and

- 09:00 it wasn't long before, with several others I was put on a sales course. And then I would have been in the office only about six months and I was posted in January out to Kulin which was a farming area about one hundred and ninety miles out
- 09:30 from Perth. But I might add one that it threatened to bring back the boring part again because you were so far from the beach, so far from all my friends, so far from all the happy times I was having living with friends around Perth.

- 10:00 **So what would you do in your day as part of your new selling job out there in Kulin?**

My job was to book orders for diesel and kerosene and oil so on, petrol. And I resolved that because I did not have the bright lights

- 10:30 to chase around Perth or go back to night school at that time I'd simply bury my head down and do work twenty four hours a day for the job. So I did that, day and night and also on weekends. On my weekends, it being summer, I'd drive the car out from Kulin to Wave Hyden Rock,
- 11:00 I'd pass through Kondinin. And I knew the farmers would work seven days a week anyhow so I'd call on the farmers the same as any ordinary weekday, talk business and either book or promote the products. Anyhow I recall going through Kondinin on some occasions I'd pass
- 11:30 Vic Flower who was the Shell salesman. And Vic was married with about three kids, three or four kids and they'd be in their car going out to the Kondinin Lakes, spend the day out at the lake and I'll be out in the opposite direction trying to knock off some of his clients. Anyhow I recall

12:00 when I left Coolumb at the end of twelve months Noel Cuthbertson who was our district manager asked me if I'd like to have a drink with him. You don't drink with the opposition normally of course but he knew I was leaving.

He was probably very happy.

We had our drink and the first word he said to me was, "Well Bob," he said, "You've certainly had a picnic here haven't you." And I had

12:30 because there were 33 salesman in the state and I'd topped the results for that whole state. Yes so it was, it was worthwhile. Then I was posted then to a very senior territory which was the northwest where...

You were even more isolated.

Again well, isolated but much more interesting. The territory extended from

13:00 Shark Bay up as far as Wyndham.

Oh now that's a nice area.

And by the time I left I would come down to Perth once in the twelve months. So I was virtually on my own but you could say my own manager of the territory. Very challenging...

Why?

But nevertheless most interesting and I'll come back more

13:30 and say this that when I was advised I was going out on the road I said to the general manager, J. C. Murray I would prefer not to go to the territory where my close friend Bill Reeford is as a Shell salesman. He obviously forgot that over twelve months because

14:00 when I went to the northwest. I drove up from Geraldton to Carnarvon, Bill came down to meet me and he was my opposition, he was my main opposition. Of all the territories in Western Australia he was posted to northwest and I was posted to northwest. And we both did though a very good job for our companies. Although we had a lot of fraternising, undeniable, we

14:30 still worked hard for our companies and it worked out very well. Yes.

So how did you end up in the carpet company if you were doing that sort of work for so long?

I'd spent twelve months up there and I wrote a report to say that I consider the money being spent to maintain a salesman up there was not justified. I gave my reasons for it and

15:00 they accepted my recommendation and gave me a territory at Kellerberrin which is only a small territory and I still retain looking after the northwest where I can go up the northwest after I've booked city and (UNCLEAR) requirement to the farming area then to the northwest then come back again to resume in Kellerberrin.

15:30 That took place in my second year. And then a friend ask me if I'd join him in supplying him in Singapore if I acted as his agent down here to buy goods to supply what he wanted up there. And I didn't like the idea but we did carry on

16:00 what he'd been doing in Singapore throughout the northwest. And I added a number of my own agencies and that grew into an operation where Bill took over Darwin after a period and so did John Hickman who became a subsequent partner, they both went to Darwin. Both did very well in Darwin.

16:30 And John became managing director of a local TV [television] station up there and various other areas fishing and so on. But I once had four salesmen covering the same area in the northwest but I wanted to develop the lower part of the state. Instead of booking an order in Hay Street for a

17:00 two dozen ties and a few shirts I wanted to book something where you are booking a thousand or two thousand dollars and I went into floor coverings. That's how the business grew. First as the agent and then we got enough money together to buy overseas on credit. And it grew to the point where I had warehouses in Perth,

17:30 Adelaide, a brief period in Melbourne and again operating differently in Darwin.

I think it's quite fascinating how you started small and you just graduated up into such...

And in one month rather than booking a dozen shirts and two dozen ties in Hay Street we packed into our West Perth warehouse, sorry not in the one warehouse. We

18:00 had thirteen forty foot containers come in in the month of January. Some went to Adelaide, Perth and so on.

You certainly had the right idea.

Yes. Thirteen forty-foot containers.

You mentioned to me earlier that you went back to New Guinea with your son when he was fourteen.

Yes my son, youngest son Richard.

So what was behind the idea of doing that with your son?

Nostalgia. Yes

18:30 I wanted to go back and look over some of those areas again. We, Margaret's sister and brother-in-law were in Port Moresby at that time. Campbell was secretary to Somare the Prime Minister at that time and significantly Somare is Prime Minister again now but they have both died since. But

19:00 we flew up there and flew across to Lae. Booked a hire car and drove up the Markham Valley then up the mountain side into the Bena Bena area. Then came back through Kainantu

19:30 and found a way up to the Ramu Valley and then the turn off to go up through Madang and hopefully passing Usini. But it was raining like hell. We had to cross over many flooded creeks and I'd

20:00 been followed by a utility type truck where the bloke in charge was the police, police commissioner or police, anyhow he ran all the police in the Madang area. A youngish fellow and he said I'd never get through to Usini but he'd be quite happy to see us through. He pulled us out of one creek then

20:30 and so I decided to do that. We went through to Madang, we had about four days in Madang during which I went out on a pleasure boat on Madang Harbour. Richard went down diving freestyle and he came up with such a streak, such a yell I thought he'd been bitten by a sea snake but he held in his hand a clip of fifty calibre bullets he'd found on the bottom.

21:00 Yes his souvenir. Anyhow we went back from there back through Oonah, I told you about it where, not Oonah.

Was it near...

What was the name of that place?

Boonah, Bundi?

I've forgotten the name now

21:30 Oonah, anyhow you know where I mean. Yes back to that landing where we caught up with Aami and...

Which is extraordinary.

A little girl and his son.

What did your son think about being shown this side of your life?

Sorry being?

What did your son think about

22:00 **being shown this side of your life and your past?**

Oh he wanted it, well the whole family have for some time wanted me to record it, record my history. And last year up at Kalbarri I started to pencil out part of it and bring back memories.

It's interesting a lot of veterans that we speak to they've really never told

22:30 **their family any of their story and their family has never asked them anything about their experience in the war. So from what I can see..**

Oh I haven't said much either about the detail of action and that type of stuff no.

But still it's a very open sort of a conversation in your family ...

Oh yes, yeah.

And they support you by you know going back to New Guinea. What did you get...?

I sometimes feel by the way that a lot of people who don't want to talk about the

23:00 war is because they've never been to the bloody war or if they have they've been back there in the base camp eating up all the good stuff that should be sent to the forward troops. There is a lot of that too. That's the reason why I think only some years ago they brought a special badge out for those who were in actual combat or faced the enemy.

23:30 I don't wear mine only for the reason that I think our own colour patch tells a story anyhow.

That's a nice way to put it, yeah.

Well it's true, yes.

What do you think you gained by going back to New Guinea all those years later?

It was something of an enjoyable

24:00 interesting experience to revisit those places, to find out what that particular area at Amanik looked like. Yes. I might add that we couldn't get up to that particular place at that time. The Aami and the other people said it was all grown over and it was

24:30 also I might add threatening weather again and those sort of things so we didn't go right up there.

You've already put yourself at risk in that area once before in your life, a second time was probably not such a good idea.

Oh no it wasn't that at all. It would have been the same at Usini. Usini after all was only a flat area with a few huts around and they probably would've been knocked over. And there were no good roads

25:00 unlike the other roads. Down to Usini was only a track again, a lot of mud and so on.

Anything about your involvement in the war that changed you as a person that you can identify with?

Keep your head down when necessary.

25:30 **Make a fish trap when you can.**

Yes.

I mean did it change you in a positive way?

It could only improve one I think. Any experience can only improve you. Yeah so, yeah I think that way.

Did the kind of...?

Turned out wiser.

26:00 **Did any of that wisdom perhaps that you experienced help you with being a salesman?**

Oh well you are simply growing older.

How important is mateship

26:30 **during your service?**

It is very, very important. You must have support of the people who surround you. You must have support. You must give them the same support in return.

Did you miss that sort of mateship when you came back to civilian life?

27:00 Well you meet other people, you meet more people and so on. You have your own friends. It's certainly great to be back with those mates again.

Are you involved in any organisations where you still meet up with some of those people?

Since the war?

Yeah.

Well we have our 2/2nd Commando Association

27:30 which has existed since the war. When we, before I left the squadron in Rabaul we had a meeting one afternoon among those who were there about the association existing which kept sending Red Cross out and things like that to us during the war. The idea being

28:00 to keep the association going post war and I suggested as part of this that we had lots of photographs taken during war. I had a box brownie with me part of the time and other blokes had there cameras, there was some official photographs taken by headquarters. And I suggested among that all the photographs that had been taken

28:30 if the blokes would let me have then I would send them down to Kodak in Brisbane, I'd made enquiries about this earlier, and Kodak would then take negatives off them and would reprint the same photos and these would be so much each. I said that I would set the scheme

29:00 up if the blokes would send in their photographs. So they did so and first of all I required to list all the photographs submitted and among very, very rough figures you'd say if there were two hundred photographs

29:30 submitted then they were to be divided among say eighty members who wanted copies. I got some large

sheets from the Q-Store [Quartermasters store] and I had two double sheets on each six foot table and I had, I had I think four tables in this particular hut

30:00 and then across the top would be the numbers of the photographs and down this way would be the numbers of the blokes who were ordering them. And then I had each photograph marked off with the name and address of the bloke who submitted it. Then having got them all photographs mounted up with their numbers on the wall then the job was to record them

30:30 on the listings. Sounds complicated doesn't it?

It sounds like a nightmare.

Well I can tell you, it was a nightmare. But anyhow as it turned out it was working out pretty well. I had all the records put out and then I had to do the totalling to order how many of each. And then it had to balance and so I'd total up this way and total up this way and over there should balance

31:00 and it wasn't bloody well balancing. So I did it over and over and over and over again and I didn't know until the scheme was almost finished that the reason why it finally balanced over here was because one of my two helpers thought that he would put it right so he was inserting things to make it balance.

Oh dear.

Anyhow

31:30 the first lot of photographs I received totalled nine thousand, nine thousand. Then I took a second run and the second run was seven thousand. I'd had to admit that, by the time I hadn't delivered all the second seven thousand I'd gone back to Australia and left and handed somebody else to run. But it was quite successful overall. Sixteen thousand photographs taken and distributed.

That's fantastic.

32:00 **Did that, the benefits the financial benefits go to the Red Cross did you say?**

No benefits, I just made it all operate according to cost.

Oh okay.

No profit at all.

Because you were also involved in the Timor trust?

Yes. I was asked in late 1991 if I'd be chairman of this trust to let the East

32:30 Timorese people know that they had not been forgotten by the 2/2nd Commando Squadron, it was 2nd Independent Company and it was proposed that the members would very gladly subscribe and it was proposed that they put in fifty dollars each year for five years or those who wanted to could pay the

33:00 full two hundred and fifty initially but those were the suggested figures. And I decided very early that I would not take money from outside the unit because it would get too complicated for the treasurer and I didn't want the treasurer having to worry about getting five pounds from Mrs Bloggs over in Wagga

33:30 and then two pounds from Bunbury and twenty dollars from Darwin, pounds rather in those days, no sorry dollars yes, dollars from there and so decided to keep it within the membership.

And what sort of things did you buy as part of the donations are concerned?

Well I started off by writing a letter to

34:00 each of about ten major independent schools. I felt they're the ones with the money for a start and I suggested that at the end of the school year if they could make available their books to be sent up to East Timor to help the kids up there. And

34:30 it started off with quite a wallop. This is where Keith Hayes came into it. Keith Hayes has been a fantastic support to the operation since it first started. He does practically all the leg work. And Christchurch where both my boys went to school they weighed in with many hundreds and hundreds

35:00 of books. Christchurch, Scots College, Methodist Ladies College, St Hilda's and so on and so on. Claremont Central School my own school down here, Claremont Primary they came into it. And had to have a place to keep the books

35:30 and I arranged through a place called something primaries. They're a wool, a wool brokers down on the other side of Fremantle. They had a very, very large storage shed and they agreed to store these things for us. And

36:00 we collected over about over thirteen and a half thousand school books. They had to be sorted through. Also I had to get permission. I thought it wise to get permission from the Indonesian Consulate here and they were naturally a very, very, very suspicious mob. They thought I might be slipping up a few missiles

in

- 36:30 the containers, a few grenades that sort of stuff. So I also had a fair bundle of clothing and footwear etc. Some food stuff and in making up the shipment I took a list down to the consul and I wrote a letter first
- 37:00 and I wanted them to accompany me down to the store in Fremantle which they did. The two blokes in the back, they looked as though they were straight from Al Capone's storey, but however they have to have their secret service men the same as we do. So down there I gave the manifest to Consuls assistant
- 37:30 and I indicated the various cartons are all numbered in accordance with the manifest. I said, "Now you pick out whatever you like, half a dozen of those off the manifest" and he indicated the ones. So I then had then opened up and he inspected the contents. It did about eight of nine of these altogether. Anyhow they approved them and I weight the stuff and went.
- 38:00 It had to be shipped through Singapore. There was no direct shipment from Australia to Dili. And in Singapore there was only one ship operating which was owned by the Indonesian conglomerates again and the General Madani and his team. So all the goods had to
- 38:30 be unloaded in Singapore, put into storage before they were then transshipped to the monopoly operation across to Dili. And we had to pay charges in Singapore of course and charges also for the shipment across there and altogether it was quite expensive and that's where we used a fair amount of our money. And stuff having arrived over there I consigned it through the Salesian Brothers.
- 39:00 Efrim, Brother Efrim was a fellow in charge of it and somewhere along the line it rained and the cartons weren't protected so certain of them were damaged by rain but the shipment went through and that's how we did ship things for a number of years.

It's just an extraordinary project. I mean you certainly haven't taken on easy things but yeah congratulations with doing all of that.

Yeah we

- 39:30 went up the stage where finally more recent years I, we've had volunteers go up there. One bloke he's agricultural volunteer he used to manage the university next to Fremantle Station over here in Shepherd Park. Les in total had over twenty, about twenty-two months up there but he reported that you could do with some mechanisation so
- 40:00 I phoned the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] and I arranged through them to advertise over the country hour for corn farming equipment, this being in Queensland and it resulted in Father Joseph coming down from East Timor. And we paid the fares for them to go across to Queensland to Kingaroy. They had about a week over there.
- 40:30 And we coordinated about three twenty foot containers of agricultural equipment and they also brought silos from Pioneer Smorgon and these went up to East Timor. It was caught up in the middle of the rampage which occurred as you know in 1999 and we lost one container but the rest went through
- 41:00 safely. And the machinery was used, a certain amount was not used but most of it was. I had the job of finding out who ratted the third container which went to Kupang, it's quite a long there but anyhow I sent faxes and telephone calls and so on and threatened the Indonesian people over there, they wouldn't get any business at all from Australia unless
- 41:30 they produce this container. Anyhow it came up, it had to be returned to Darwin first and then back again up there, anyway we got it.

Well you don't look like you've got any signs of slowing down there Bob but I'd just like to thank you so much for talking to us today on the archive, you've lived a very colourful life and thank you very much for sharing it with us today.

Thank you for your time Denise and Julian [interviewers].

That's all right.

I feel I've spoken a hell of a lot, I hope it's all general interest.

INTERVIEW ENDS