Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Scott (Bob) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Do you just want to introduce yourself to us?**

My name's Scott. Bob Scott. I was born in Perth in 1915 and I joined the militia [Citizens' Military Force], as it then was around about 1936 when the government of the day had an advertising campaign

01:00 to build up the strength of the militia. I went along to the 5th Field Regiment headquarters at Kelvin Grove. I enrolled there. I was given the number of Q9303 and I became Gunner RW Scott in the 13th

01:30 Battery of the 5th Field Regiment. In those days we trained on the old 18 pounder, iron rimmed, wooden stoked field guns left over from the 1914, 1918 war and we had very little equipment. I think it was about 18 months before I got a full uniform. Which in those

02:00 days consisted of a jacket, riding breeches, leggings and boots and the guns were drawn by a team of six horses. They towed a gun 'limber' and the gun was hooked up to the gun limber itself. The gun crew rode on the gun limber and the drivers rode, three of them, on a horse of the six team horses.

02:30 The officers of the regiment were mainly middle aged fellows, who had served in the First World War and the recruits were like myself – mostly 18, 19 year olds who had come along to join the militia. We trained at Kelvin Grove every Monday night I think it was, about from seven till nine.

03:00 Once every month we had a weekend bivouac up at Kelvin Grove. On those weekends we went out on 'manoeuvres' as they call them, out to the outer suburbs. The outer suburbs those days were places like Ferny Grove and Mitchelton. We learnt the

03:30 rudiments of artillery. My immediate commanding officer, chap in charge of the 13th Field Regiment, he was a real enthusiast. He invited anyone who was interested in learning a bit more about the intricacies of artillery work to come along to his place at Ascot I think it was, and we used to go on there

04:00 once a fortnight for a couple of hours and he'd run us through the things like gun laying and surveying while his wife served very nice suppers – I remember that very well. That went on for quite a while. While I was – about 1939 when war broke out

04:30 things more or less continued on as they were. There was no great change. There was plenty of speculation going around, but nothing exciting happened. Then the militia got called up for fulltime duty. I remember at the time – I used to work for Shell [oil company] – and I was granted leave to go on this,

05:00 I think it was a weekend manoeuvre that we were on, or a week's manoeuvre maybe. The militia got called up and I never went back to Shell. I was fulltime at Grovely. I gradually got promoted. I learnt to be a gun layer for a start. The gun layer is the plum job on the gun. He's responsible for laying the gun out

05:30 on the line that the officer's give him. It's only when he's ready to go, that they give the order to fire. That brings me to mind of a rather interesting episode. The gun layer was virtually the man who gave the direction to the gun sergeant. He had power to say move the gun right or left and so forth. He had a

06:00 traverse wheel that moves the gun along the line but to lay they gun out on the line they wanted to have to look through the dial sight. The dial sight was a very restricted line of vision with a hairline in it. If for any reason a gun layer couldn't get a clear line of sight he had an order, stand clear of dial sight. Any artillery man hearing that knew

06:30 something was wrong and he would see whether he was the offending person and get out of the way of line sight. One evening at Kelvin Grove the Governor of Queensland came out to review the 5th Field Regiment's training and we were lined up going through our gun drill and I was number two on a gun at that time. Number one was a gun sergeant. There were three other members of the team taking up

07:00 their various positions going through their gun drill. The governor and all the high ranking officers of the 5th Field Regiment escorting him, were moving up and down the line and we got an order to change the direction of the gun and the gun layer looked through the dial sight and said that someone was blocking the view. Quite correctly he followed procedure and he shouted out, “Stand clear of dial sight.”

07:30 The offender was the Governor of Queensland. He was standing right in line of the sight, but none of the high ranking artillery officers thought fit to say to the governor, will you move out of the way sir? So the gun layer called out the second time, “Stand clear of dial sight” and nothing happened and he shouted out more shrilly the third time, “Stand clear of dial sight.” Still nothing happened. So in exasperation the gun layer, “Get

08:00 out of the bloody way,” and it had the desired effect. The governor moved. But poor old ‘number three’ on the gun got reprimanded afterwards for using and un-army term. My daughter is mad keen on family history, writes up the family tree and so forth. And for years she’s been drumming

08:30 me, “Write down what you did in the war.” I’ve heard the story that it takes ten men to keep one man on the fighting line. Well I was certainly one of the ten behind the line. I haven’t got a very exciting war story at all. The heroes in my book are the blokes that walked over the ‘Kokoda trail’ or were at the ‘Rats of Tobruk’. Anyhow I started off writing my memoirs just as I mentioned to you here. So I started to write, I rang a bell and I remembered more and

09:00 more things. I ended up writing 23 pages of typewritten on my experience on the artillery. I knocked off when I transferred over to the air force, but my daughter urged me to write about my air force experience. So I got another 26 pages. So it’s only recently that I’ve done this.

When you were looking through the dial sight, when you were laying the gun, what would

09:30 **you lay on to?**

Usually out on the field you’d lay on the furthest high position, clear, for instance, if you were happy enough to have a lighting tower or a windmill or a church or anything like that. But usually for accuracy’s sake you’d try to get it as far away as possible. And as conspicuous as possible. Because it had to be recognised. The GPO – that’s the Gun Position Officer would call out, “Aiming point,” and he would

10:00 nominate the church on the hill. Each of the other sergeants had to identify that point and know that was it and they in turn would pass it on to the gun layer. Then the GPO would work out from his director the angle of the guns from the gun position to a target that he would get. The GPO would give him the co-ordinates of a target and he would plan those on his map and he’ll work out the line. It might high from the line

10:30 of the dial. So the line from the dial sight to the aiming point was zero and the order would be, “Right, three degrees left, three degrees,” and carry on like that.

How often did you get to fire live ammunition?

That was the thing. Like uniforms, ammunition was very very scarce and I suppose it would be a good well into 1940 before we went away to a camp at Caloundra. They had a firing range at Caloundra.

11:00 Just north of ‘Dickie Beach’ and they fired up the coast towards Noosa – not that far up, but towards Maroochydore way. I think at a range of about 6000 yards. It’s in that particular area that they are still finding, if not live ammunition, spent ammunition.

11:30 **What was it initially that made you want to join the militia?**

I thought that the artillery – I was always keen on surveying and I knew that the artillery did a lot of survey or basically, it was based on survey. I think that was the reason why I went into artillery.

12:00 **When you first went in, what sort of basic training did they give you?**

We did the basic foot training and after that it was mainly gun drill although they split the men up into four sections. There were the drivers and they were mainly in those days, fellas from the bush who loved horses and they were right in their element. They had a team of two horses each to look after.

12:30 There was the signals. We didn’t have wireless in those days, but they had line telephones and semaphore and that sort of thing. Then there were the gunners with the fellas on the gun and that’s where we did the gun drill and we had finally the battery staff. These were considered the ‘bright boys’ of the thing. They did all the survey work and working out the line of land to the gun. But the gun rule was mainly what we did.

13:00 There were six men, as I say. The sergeant who was the number one of the gun and the other five – number two actually put the range on the gun. He turned the handle and worked the gun this way. Number three was the gun layer who moved it this way. Four the chap that loaded the ammunition and five and six were the fellows that got the ammunition out the of the gun limber. I think the limber carried about 60 rounds and passed it on to number four

13:30 who loaded the gun. Mainly we did this gun rule. To make it interesting, apart from the sergeants the other five rotated in turn. For instance, you'd be a number two at one part of the drill. You might be a number six on the next one.

So would you have done a lot of kneeling gun drill.

Yes. The number fours which had to do the kneeling, number three and five and six

14:00 to a certain degree. But number four position in action was virtually kneeling. I think he was on his left knee with a round in his hand and on the order, "Load" he'd get up, ram the 18 pounder which was a combined projectile – the shell itself was crimped onto the cartridge case and the primer was in the cartridge case. He'd load the

14:30 shell into the breach and number two would close the breach.

It must have been a lot of fun once you finally got to fire some live rounds.

Well, we had been told about what would happen when the guns fire, how they recoiled. There were two staff sergeants. I think these were permanent army men who came up

15:00 to supervise the first drill. We were up at Caloundra, as I say. We went out as a 'troop'. There were two troops in each battery. Three batteries to a regiment. That's not right. There were three troops to a battery. Each

15:30 troop would take it in turns laying 'four'. Four guns lined up and the first buzz of excitement when we saw live ammunition for the first time. 18 pounders – weighed I think about 18 pound. We loaded them. On the first shoot I was number three. I was the gun layer and I actually fired the gun. The order came "Fire" and I pulled the

16:00 firing mechanism and the shell went off. There was a mighty flash of fire and smoke. The gun jumped, recoiled and bounced down. I think I, and I don't know about the others, got the shock of our lives. We had no idea the noise was going to be so deafening and so forth. I think we all acted a bit as though we were dumbstruck. I remember

16:30 the staff sergeant racing up shouting out to get our heads down. But after the first one, it wasn't too bad.

Did they make you do manhandling the guns?

Yes. Nothing like manhandling a gun. The old 18 pounders with their iron wheels and their very heavy trailer were quite a job to handle. You had to lift the tail up – this is the gun sergeant's

17:00 job. Two other fellas were on either side of the trailer and two were on the wheel. So on the order, "Lift" you had – if the gun had been fired, first of all you had to 'run it forward' to get it out from where the recoil had taken it. Then you held it up while the horses came in with the limber-hook to hook into the limber. I think the order was, "Prepare the hook in" and that's when you went through this rigmarole.

17:30 **Was most of the training based on actually doing your firing drill or was it to do more with moving and deploying the guns?**

It all depends. When we were up at Caloundra we did quite a lot of what they call manoeuvres. We went all over the place. The idea was everyone then was able to participate. The regimental commander would tell the battery commander where he wanted the battery. The battery

18:00 commander would tell his troop commanders where he wanted his troops. That filtered down the line. The battery commander would tell the troop commanders where the guns were to go. And he would then give the map reference for a spot to the GPO. The GPO had to go round and find a suitable gun position. The idea was you wanted the guns staggered a bit. You didn't want them too close. They had to be staggered. But

18:30 they still had to be within voice range of the GPO with his megaphone. And you wanted a reasonable line of fire. It was no good if it was in a big hill or mountain range. Although the Howitzers could fire over those. They had working lift positions. But when you were on manoeuvres the observation post party would go ahead to find a suitable hill that overlooked their target area.

19:00 The gun position officers would try and find a suitable spot to deploy the guns. The signallers would run a telephone line from the gun position up to the opip [Observation Post]. The drivers would bring the guns in and then take the horses back to the horse lines at the back somewhere under cover. So everybody had a job. Then we'd go through the exercise of engaging imaginary targets when everybody

19:30 had a job to do, except the lucky drivers who stood back, looking after the horses. That was quite an interesting part and we did quite a lot of manoeuvres on that.

Did you fire just HE [High Explosive]or did you fire illumination as well?

No. The first shoot I was on we had HE and in later shoots we fired smoke and star shell.

20:00 The idea of the guns being fired was to fire on the target. The GPO would order what they called a ranging shot to be fired and he'd estimate the range would be 6000 on a certain line where it'll come through to the GPO, who would relate it to the guns. The gun layers will put that range and line on the guns.

20:30 The GPO would order usually a number one gun to fire a ranging shot. It would land. Now if he was in reasonably open territory and they had been reasonably accurate he would see that first round fall and he would order a correction to bring the gun back to where our target was. The idea was to bracket the guns both in line and in range. But if the first shot

21:00 landed outside behind a hill and there was no obvious smoke coming up he had to change his line and order another ranging shot. It wasn't till he got an observation of his first shot that he was able to order the next correction to the guns.

You were happy being on the guns?

Yes. The number three job was the fun job.

21:30 You had to go through a special layers course and I think the big attraction too – I think in those days you got sixpence a day extra if you were a gun layer. That was a bit of skill. I was quite happy there. But I gradually, while we were up in Caloundra I was promoted to 'bombardier' and I didn't last very long as a bombardier. I was bombardier for about three months and I was promoted to sergeant.

22:00 As sergeant, I came off the guns and I was on 'battery staff'. That's where I started to learn a bit about the survey and the trigonometry.

This is after the war started is it?

Yes. There was nothing doing for quite a while as far as field artillery was concerned. I think we were up in Caloundra about 41 and they started to raise

22:30 the RAF [Royal Air Force] by now. I think it was a bit of – I think the RAF fellas thought the militia fellas were shirking their duties and the problem with the enlisted crowd that I and quite a few others applied for a transfer to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], but they

23:00 said, "No. You can't. You've got to stay on, particularly as sergeants" because they had already brought in national service. They needed the trained ranks to train these 'Nashos' [National Service soldiers] as they were called, coming in in quite large numbers. We were held in the militia and all the equipment

23:30 was going to the AIF naturally because they needed it far more than we did. With the result that the militia was still training on these old 18 pounders. I got promoted to a sergeant major and I was off the guns altogether then. I just had charge of the discipline and training. While I was sergeant major I was nominated to go down to Holsworthy.

24:00 We had heard of Holsworthy from fellas who had gone there before and I swatted up that '18 pounder gun book'. I knew it backwards. I could strip the mechanism blindfolded, but I got down to Holsworthy and found they had just brought in the new, Australian made, 25 pounders which were a vast improvement. They fired 25 pounder shell compared to the 18 and they had rubber wheels. They could be towed by motor vehicles.

24:30 Gun trailers they call them. They were far easily managed. And all my good work of learning the 18 pounders went out the window and I had to start swatting up on the 25 pounders.

If we can back up a bit, can you remember hearing about the stirrings in Europe before war was declared? Can you remember hearing about Hitler and the stirrings in Europe before the war broke out.

I remember

25:00 hearing about Hitler. I remember when war broke out, I think Hitler had invaded Poland or somewhere against the convention that was going at the time. Yes, I remember those days. But out here, as far as I knew we were so remote from it, we didn't really appreciate the significance of it.

25:30 Gradually I think as he, more or less took over most of Europe, the significance began to become apparent.

Was a significant day – can you recall when war was declared, when Menzies informed the nation that we were at war?

Yes. I remember this well. I don't remember the actual date. But I remember that we were in a weekend bivouac I think, at the time. This came over. I remember all the fellas

26:00 saying, "What'd going to happen now? What are we going to do about this?" Yes.

What were the general feelings amongst the blokes in the batteries? Did they feel they were going to be used straight away?

I think the general feeling was, what's going to happen? Nobody knew. There was quite a bit of activity

going on as a result of this

26:30 war breaking out. The RAF being included and the army being built up. They formed a new field regiment out at Grovely where we were. The 17th. The interesting part about this one is that all the gunners were AIF volunteers and to staff the high ranks, sergeants and

27:00 lieutenants and higher were pulled out from various other artillery units and sent over to the 17th to train these fellows. So we had mainly most of the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] were militia men. And we had brand new AIF recruits who had done their basic training but who knew nothing about artillery work.

27:30 So we had to train all these fellows. This again, the Militia got the name of 'Chockos' [chocolate soldiers]. The AIF – I don't know why, about how general it was but there was a certain feeling amongst the AIF that the Chockos got it easy because the government couldn't send them outside Australia. Although they amended that later, when many of them went to New Guinea. But the idea was the militia was kept for Australian

28:00 Defence Forces. A few fellows like myself had tried for a transfer and we'd been knocked back on several occasions. Anyhow we went to the 17th and it worked out rather well. All the other ranks had Australia on their shoulder straps, but all the officers and NCOs had nothing on their shoulders so it was quite apparent. But no it fitted in very well. 17th was eventually transferred up to

28:30 Townsville. We went up on a troop train. Wonderful stories to tell you about troop trains, but my memory of them was that the train was very slow, very crowded. It didn't matter what time we pulled into a station where we were due to have a meal there was always a crowd of volunteers from the local people. Could be 11 o'clock at night sometimes we got in because of various delays and

29:00 that brought home to me how the Australian people were behind the war effort. All the way up the Queensland coast they used to turn out and wave to troop trains and every time they stopped the locals would come down. So troop train memories are quite happy ones.

When you first went into 13 Field Battery how did the experienced World War I AIF guys treat all the militia blokes?

29:30 Very well indeed. We had as the CO [Commanding Officer] of the 56th Battery a most decorated – not the most highly, but the most decorated officer in the first world war and I think he at that stage was about 56 years of age. All the senior blokes were comparatively senior. They probably were outside the range of, I think 45 was the limit in those days. But they had volunteered

30:00 and they were kept on. But we got on splendidly. I think they were keen to pass on their information. Because, again, we were all volunteers. We'd do it in our own time.

What do you remember of Holsworthy?

Holsworthy. I have very vivid memories. Holsworthy was the artillery officers' training

30:30 college. They ran officer training courses over a period I think of about 10 weeks on a recurring basis. Every artillery unit was invited to send down prospects. I went down with two others from the 56 and two others from

31:00 105 and five of us went down on a troop train. Holsworthy. It was – the opening remarks was we were down here to work and they made sure we did work. You were required to march everywhere. Even to the loos I remember. You marched to the 'mess' up.

31:30 You marched back. If you were found slouching around you were very quickly disciplined. The fellows down there knew there stuff and by the time I did the course, they had run several of them. So they were vastly experienced on it. In addition to the officers

32:00 the training crowd were staff sergeants. They were permanent army men. According to the fellows on the course they were there to make our life miserable. One or two would be allocated to various sections of the artillery. Every day they'd draw up a manning detail. The school provided the drivers and the signallers. Everybody else

32:30 from the battery commander down to the lowly gunner was drawn from the personnel on the course. They drew your name out of a hat every day. So you might be the high positioner battery commander one day and a lowly gunner the next. It was a lot of manoeuvres and these staff sergeants attached themselves to various groups.

33:00 They had a notebook and they roamed round and you'd just move position and suddenly one of them will come up to you and say, "What's the map spot of your present location?" And if you were lucky enough to tell him he put it down in your book. If you didn't know or you made a mess of it, he put it down in his book. Then they come along to you after five minutes, "What's the last gun order you received?" You had to tell him.

33:30 At night they all went in after the evening meal we went into this big hall and the CO of the school

would get up and go through what he observed and then – I forgot to tell you whenever they wrote anything down in the book the staff sergeant said, “Name? Rank?” I don’t know why they asked

34:00 rank because you had your rank on your shoulder. And “Number?” So that went down on the book. After the evening session each of the staff sergeants would get up in turn and shout, “Scott, R. W. QX3609 Gunner” and you would stand up. The staff sergeant would read off the misdemeanour. “I asked Sergeant Major Scott for his gun position and he was unable to give it me.”

34:30 The CO’d say, “What have you got to say for yourself?” and they used to rip into you on this sort of thing. These staff sergeants after three or four days of this got the nickname of the ‘gunners’ friend’. They were always on our backs. But Holsworthy was very good. There were two tragedies, as a matter of fact. We were out doing a panorama exercise on one occasion and we were travelling in the back of a van.

35:00 The staff sergeant and the driver – the driver came from the school – were in the front. And I think there were five of us were in the back of the van and you couldn’t see out of the van because they had a canvas canopy over the back. All you could see out was the back. We got a bit cagey by this time of the staff sergeant who asked you where you were. So I was sitting in the back with five of my mates and I had the map out and I was recording where we were going. We were just past

35:30 the so and so. And I remember saying to them, “We should pass a church in a minute” because on the map there was a crossroad and a symbol for a church on the map. I no sooner said, “We should be passing a church in a minute,” there was a mighty ‘bang’, we rolled over and we ended up in the churchyard on the side. We scrambled out. Unfortunately the staff sergeant in front

36:00 was badly injured. They took him to hospital and he later died. We’d been hit by a truck carrying gravel on the crossroad. So we eventually after about a half an hours delay, we got onto another van and went to where the rest of them were and the officer from the school who was in charge of the course, his greeting to us was, “Where have you been? You’re late.” But Holsworthy was quite happy.

36:30 They had a rather embarrassing or worrying situation. At the end of the course they called you in, in order of rank. The bloke who got the highest mark in the course was called in, so I think there were about forty of us on the course and ‘number one’ went in and ‘number two’ went in and when it got down to about ‘number five’ or six

37:00 or six, we suddenly realised that somebody was going to be number 40 because they would go in one way and they would go out a side door and you never saw them again. I think I ended up about 24 out of a course of 40. But gradually the numbers dwindled and the last bloke went in feeling a bit lonely standing out and being number 40 on your own. But I remember the CO was a lieutenant colonel. I was trying to make

37:30 a firm impression, so I stood stiffly to attention and took my eyes straight ahead and he said to me, “I’m going to recommend you for a commission. You see you don’t waste the taxpayers’ money and waste my time either.” So I assured him I wouldn’t do any of that and I passed out. I came back to the 5th.

38:00 About three weeks after that, a commission came through. I was then transferred and I took over a troop in the 17th.

So when you got to the 17th how did they take the fact that you as a CMF [Citizens’ Military Force] officer?

Bit ‘dicey’. One of the unpleasant jobs that the officer had to do

38:30 was to read the men’s mail. You had to censor anything that gave out the location or any of that sort of thing. Now all letters had to be censored and the fellows had the option of letting the mail go through to the officers to be censored in the normal way or to get the padre to do it. He censored the letters or you were able to use some sort of a special envelope

39:00 that you signed a declaration on the front that there was nothing in your enclosed letter other than personal details. These envelopes were scarce as hen’s teeth and the fellows couldn’t get enough of them with the result the padre used to get a fair few. But the majority of letters came through. And you’d read such things as “We went over to Magnetic Island today.” That immediately gave away the location. Or “We started firing our new

39:30 armour piercing shell.” That had to come out. The idea, you cut it out with a razor blade. Well some of the letters went very much mutilated and the fellows would get letters back from their girlfriends knowing that their letters had been mutilated or cut out in this way. It was by reading these letters that you realised how the fellows resented this censorship. And of course in

40:00 answer to your question your realised that they used to, Chocko officers we’ve got. But eventually after about the third application the officers were granted a transfer and I think that was the reason that we got it, because the men were all AIF and it was virtually an AIF regiment. I got a new QX [Service number] number and became an AIF unit.

Tape 2

00:32 **We'll start with – you said you had two stories.**

We went up to Townsville via the troop train. Took us quite a while to get up there because the line was tremendously busy. The Queensland Railways did a magnificent job. They had the old steam fired 'locos' and a very old fat and old rolling stock, but they moved thousands of troops up

01:00 and tons of equipment up on the single track up to Townsville. We got up to Townsville and spent the first night up on the Townsville Racecourse and then we went up on the road up to Cairns, about 30 miles out on the Bowley River. On the Bowley River there was a spot in those days known as the blue water. It was a beautiful wide lake I suppose in the river itself. We were camped there. It was a very pleasant spot. But Townsville

01:30 was only the bitumen road up – all the other roads were mainly gravel – and we went up there right in the middle of the wet season. We realised that taking guns and gun tractors off the bitumen was trouble. We spent the first few weeks getting experience digging out and pulling out bogged vehicles. Gradually we acquired that. But my memories of Townsville was that it had this, I think they called it 'spear grass'.

02:00 It would grow about that high and in season it had these black sharp seeds on it and interspersed with the spear grass were these big huge boulders. Some would come up above the spear grass. Others were in the spear grass and you couldn't see them. Pushing through this particularly on the hills outside where we were was quite adventurous. You'd stumble over the boulders and get tangled up in the spear grass.

02:30 But the spear grass, if you grabbed a handful of these seeds in your hand and wet, put moisture in it, you'd feel these seeds reacting. Most of the time we were walking through mud and slush and out boots and socks got wet and muddy and the spear grass would get down into your socks and they would eventually, if you didn't get them in time, penetrate your skin. They ended up in all sorts of odd places. I remember getting one

03:00 out of the back of my knee. Now how on earth it got there I don't know. But I learnt later this was one of the scourges of the cattle up there. The cattle – the spear heads of grass got into the cattle and spoilt the quality of the beef. Anyhow we were up in Townsville for quite a long while and we thought we knew all about gun drill and what have you, by that time. We never had any live ammunition. I was

03:30 issued with 6 rounds of ammunition for my [Colt] 45 I think it was – a revolver the officers were issued with. I thought to myself, "I never know how I'm going to use this. I only have the six shots." So one day I went out in the bush, put a jam tin up on a stone and fired my one and only shot at the jam tin, saying, "At least I'll know what it's like to fire it in case I ever have to." But I kept the other five rounds for the emergency which actually never came.

04:00 We manoeuvred round Townsville for quite a long while and we were getting slightly sick of the getting nowhere. One of the manoeuvres we did, we were all sent out in small sections. For instance, a trooper might be sent out for two or three days to manoeuvre and do exercises on its own.

04:30 This was very acceptable to the troops. You could go off on your own and for three or four days you might not see anybody although a battery commander or even a CO might suddenly pop up and want to know what you were doing. On one of these manoeuvres I took my troop up on the highway up towards Cairns.

05:00 We were practising manoeuvres for two or three days and about the third day I realised I'd be only about 30 miles in those days it was south of Ingham. Ingham is – was then and still is – the middle of the sugar growing country. The sugar farms were mainly run by Italians. A lot of the Italians

05:30 had been born in Australia and were naturalised Australians, but a lot of the men were Italians by nationality and hadn't got nationalised. Early in the war the federal government decided they were going to intern all Italians of military age. So anyone between 18 and

06:00 45 who wasn't a naturalised Australian, got interned. This meant that the farms were still being run by the women or elderly men and the kids. I knew Ingham was the middle of the sugar growing area up there. I also thought there might be an air of resentment

06:30 up there, if not actually hostility. I didn't want to end up with a court of inquiry to explain something that had gone wrong because I went into Ingham. Anyhow I decided to play safe. I sent my troop leader up to Ingham to enquire from their town clerk whether we could bivouac in their showgrounds for the night.

07:00 He came back in about half an hour and he said, "The shire clerk is very enthusiastic. He tells me they've never seen Australian troops up there before. We can use the showgrounds and they'd be glad to see us." So we packed up about three o'clock and we drove into Ingham. I don't know how they knew this because the troop commander wouldn't have been up there much before three o'clockish

07:30 and by the time we started we got in, about quarter to four. But we got in there and along the main and street and I think in those days there was only one street the townspeople had come out and they were lining the streets. What I think touched me was that all the schoolkids were lined up outside the school and cheering and waving. So we were very cheered up by that.

08:00 We went into the showground and it was lovely there. They had showers and they had toilets and lovely grass and we camped for the night there and I was a bit conscious that there might be an odd fanatic Italian around who might want to damage 'His Majesty's equipment'. So normally a guard list consists of six men and a bombardier. I played safe. I put eight men on and a sergeant.

08:30 We were organised the guard and one of the sentries that was on duty at the gate of the showground came along and said, "A lady at the gate wants to see you." So I went up and she introduced herself as the matron of the local hospital. She came to enquire if the nurses put a 'dance' on for us that night, would our fellas

09:00 be able to come. So I quickly reassured her that we would be able to and we'd be pleased to come. So she went off. I lined the fellows up and there was one counter attraction to the dances we now had and that was the local pub. I told them if they went to the pub, no good coming to the dance afterwards, unless they were quite presentable

09:30 and not too much 'under the weather' and I was going to have the sergeant major on the door so he could keep anybody out. But the rest of us would go to the dance. We bowled up to the dance and we found that the nurses had cleared what might have been their recreation room. I thought, "Gosh, there's only going to be a few nurses" but they must have used the bush telegraph because I think all the young ladies around the district had come in.

10:00 And there were about 20 girls there and about 40 fellows so we did very well. Then, rationing was enforced in those days, and butter and tea and sugar and quite a few other things were sadly rationed. But of course up in areas like Ingham which was a farming district they probably had their own cow

10:30 and they could get eggs and so forth. Anyhow about ten o'clock they stopped the dancing. The fellows had to take their boots off. They had to dance in their socks because they didn't have anything else and the nurses had an old gramophone. We had an excellent time and at about ten o'clock they unveiled the supper. Again, I don't know how

11:00 they did it. But they had sponges and they had scones. They had a 'scrumptual' supper and I think the fellows fell on it with delight. We had wonderful time. About 11 o'clock we called it a night and thanked them. We came back to the showgrounds and as I came round the gate of the showground, I noticed there's a civilian car down on the gun line and I thought, "Oh bum what the hell's going on here?" So I

11:30 panicked a bit and I shouted out, "Sergeant of the guard!" in my best officer voice and this bloke, the sergeant came running out to me. I said, "What the hell are these civilians doing there" because I laid down the law no civilians to be permitted. And he said, "These people came up. They had heard that there were fellows left behind on duty and they had brought up some supper. They were so kind and one of them said could he have a look at our guns and he was so nice I

12:00 thought you wouldn't mind provided I keep an eye on him." I should have done my block and charged him, but what could you do? I'd probably have done the same myself. We left Ingham the next day with very fond memories of that little country town.

What was the reaction of most of the blokes to that kind of hospitality?

We spoke of nothing else for the next four or five days. They did. we had very fond memories of that.

12:30 Just around the other time that we were gradually being issued with camouflage nets. Now, camouflage nets – I don't know whether there's any specific size or not but they were quite big. In the old days they were probably about 18 feet, maybe 18 feet square and about five, six metres. They were bordered with quite a stout cord and on this cord there was knotted in about

13:00 six centimetre meshes knots so that you had a whole net made up of these knots. But the rope they used for the mesh was rough size or impregnated with tar to preserve it. And it must have been a quite a difficult sort of job to do one of these things. But all round Australia volunteer groups were being informed to make these camouflage nets.

13:30 Usually when they come up to us they had a tag on them, "Distributed by Australian Red Cross" or "Distributed by Country Women's Association" and so forth. But one we got had a little tag on it that this net had been manufactured by a church group in an outback New South Wales town. I forget the name of the town now but I remember it was a very small place. Anyhow we put the net up, used it over one of our

14:00 gun positions and something prompted me to write a note to the secretary of this, saying that her gun-net was now in good use and he might be interested to know what we were using it for. About a fortnight later I got a letter from a lady who was the secretary of this group and she explained to me that her group was only a very small group, there was only a few in it and it took them quite a while to manufacture one of these nets. And that

14:30 they had sent out three and this was the only time they heard what happened to one. I remember saying that how delighted they were to know how it had ended up and how inspired the members were to hear that it had virtually been put into action. It touched me very much that story. But that was just another example of the Australian civilians being 'behind the

15:00 troops'. Didn't matter where we went, we got this very warm, very cordial welcome.

Moments like that and the hospitality at Ingham must have made you very proud of your uniform?

Not so much my uniform. I think it made me proud of the Australian civilians. I was deeply touched and I know most of my blokes were by that

15:30 effort that little town put on at such short notice. I suppose the fact that the kids hadn't seen any army at all might have been a bonus in our favour. Albeit they did an excellent job for us. Yes. It's one of my very happy memories.

When you were in Ingham did you see any – you mentioned you were concerned that there might be some resentment about the internment that was going on – did you see any of that?

No. Not at all.

16:00 I never mentioned, I never contact any actual civilians other than the ones at the dance and the ones that came out with the supper, but there was never – my fears were entirely unfounded. The civilians could not have been more cordial to us. I think by that time too they were

16:30 managing it. They realised the men had gone and they basically had to carry on.

I'm curious to know, that civilian sentiment you were talking about, do you think that was a pride in Australia or was it still very much were we thinking of ourselves as part of the mother country?

I think it was pride in Australia. I read somewhere that Australia

17:00 had more people in uniform – that's all uniforms – in proportion to their population than any other nation at war. I'm very proud of that fact. I think Australia did a mighty job in the war.

Can you tell me about some of the 'Nashos' that you were training?

Mm.

What was the sentiment amongst most of those that had been called up?

They were a mixed brew. The first batch I got, as a sergeant major

17:30 and 20 of them arrived from the recruiting depot. I think they'd been called up about a week and they'd got their uniform and they'd been told how to stand up and march around, but that's all they had. They came to me. 20. As I say there, were a mixed brew. Most of them accepted the fact that they had been called up. They might have been a bit resentful, but they accepted the fact.

18:00 Others and a few of them, were downright obstructionist. They weren't going to take any orders. And it was quite difficult. I remember one instant there, when we got to the second parade we had, I had them all lined up about 20 in the – basically there were three men in a troop and 20 in the 63 to make up our strength.

18:30 I shouted out something, "Right turn" or something and this bloke shouted out to me, "I'm not going to do anything you tell me. You can jump in the lake. I'm not going to take any orders from you. And what are you going to do about it?" He took me a bit by surprise because I wasn't over experienced with insubordination at that time and I thought, what am I going to do here? I thought I better try and bluff it. So I put on my best sergeant major voice and face and I stalked up to him and I

19:00 looked him in the eye and I said, "Gunner, if you don't obey the order of the superior office, and I'm your superior officer at the moment, you're in deep trouble. Have you ever heard of a court martial?" I don't think he had but somehow he got the idea that firing squad might be involved in a court martial. Anyhow he mumbled something under his breath and I said, "Get on with it." I shouted, "Right turn"

19:30 and the whole bunch went off. I think that even though they were resentful and didn't do things too willingly it was only a very minor number of them. After that I had no trouble with them at all. Everybody else was doing it. They were being called up, the rest of the blokes were volunteers. They all had the same meal. They all had the same sleeping quarters. They all did the same.

20:00 They weren't picked on in any way. I think that at that stage they did a mighty job. I remember Milne Bay, turned them back there – none of them got through. Fine moment for Nashos.

The Nashos that were coming through when you were training them, were they expecting to serve overseas or were they expecting?

No. They were in the militia. The militia was only a reserve for Australian defence. But later on when things got serious and the Japs [Japanese] started to come down, the militia could be used in Australian mandated

20:30 territories which was New Guinea in those days, so that actually, as you probably know the Japs were turned back for the first time on land at Milne Bay and a Nasho crowd were in the front line there.

That would have spurred on the Nashos that were still at home.

By this time, in my opinion, things were so serious that I think everybody realised that we were all in it

21:00 together and everybody had to pull their weight.

The young Nashos that were coming through when you were training them, how did they respond to that whole 'Choco soldier' routine.

That didn't develop for quite a while. I think it really developed when the AIF divisions came back from overseas and we had a lot of Australian troops milling around Brisbane

21:30 and they gradually moved up north, to the Atherton Tableland in their hundreds and thousands. There were militia units also in the same area. My first recollection of the Chockos system was round the Townsville area where it started. But I don't think it was ever a bitter resentment. Might have

22:00 a chuckle and say, "As if." Eventually the Nashos wore the badge with pride. Nothing to be ashamed of. They held their own. Look at the Kokoda track where they had Nashos there, completely untrained men, till the AIF came through.

To backtrack right back, what was it that originally made you join the militia?

22:30 First of all there was the government appeal I told you about and secondly I was a young bloke about 18 or 19 and I thought, 'bit of adventure'. I don't think it was any love of country or love of war. I think deep down, every male should be trained.

23:00 I still have that idea. I think a form of national service wouldn't hurt them at all these days. I don't think it's a duty to serve your country. I think you've got an obligation to.

When you were talking about Holsworthy before when you were in the truck that rolled, you mentioned there were two tragedies.

Yes. The second one.

23:30 We all had to have a 'motor bike army driving licence' because one of the jobs you might get on this roster system I told you about was a 'Don R', a dispatch rider. His job was to take verbal messages from the guns up to the 'O' pit in case the telephone line was broken. Very exciting job riding a big 'Harley' motor bike. Diverging a bit, I didn't have –

24:00 I had an army truck driving licence, but I didn't have an army motor bike riding licence and I was told I couldn't go to Holsworthy until I had my motor bike riding licence. So the LIC of transport of the regiment took me out to give me a crash course on riding motor bikes. And it was quite fun. I was young. Quite exciting to ride a motor bike. That's when we rode around the playground and the open paddocks and then we got a bit more serious.

24:30 One day out at Ferny Grove we said, "We're going down a creek bank." No trouble. He went down first and up the other side and it was a piece of cake so down I go and halfway down I realise it was far steeper than I thought it was. So I panicked. I put the brake on. The bike somersaulted and I somersaulted. Apart from one of my arms and the exhaust pipe, I got away unscathed. But I got my license. And getting back to your question. One of the fellows

25:00 was nominated to be a 'Don R' and we were out on manoeuvres around the town of Liverpool and I'm not sure of the details but the CO that night told us that Sergeant so and so had been acting as a dispatch rider on the exercise that day and had been killed. That's all we heard about it. So he was killed riding a motor bike. Probably like me and didn't have much experience on it.

When accidents like

25:30 **either of those two happen, what does go on?**

That's a court of enquiry you see. For the first one – I wasn't anything to do with the second one – but for the first one everyone that knew anything about the accident was required to be a witness at the court of enquiry at Victoria Barracks in Sydney. So one day everybody involved in the back of a truck and a few others besides

26:00 we were sent down to the court of enquiry and we were all brought in. I came in and he asked me what I could tell them. I said I couldn't tell them very much. I was map reading at the time. I said, "I said, very shortly we're going to pass a church. Next minute we ended up in it." I heard later on that all the other five blokes that were in the back of the truck with me, gave evidence exactly the same

26:30 and there are five dispositions in the record that, “Sergeant Major Scott said, “very shortly we’re going to go past a church.”

Good to know they were listening to you.

I told you about the ‘gunners’ friend’. We were on our toes. We could expect them to stop the truck any time and say, where are you, or something like that.

When someone is killed or injured in training like that though, what does it do to the morale of the other blokes?

We were deeply shaken

27:00 by the fact that the staff sergeant had been killed while we were on exercise. A lot of us didn’t know much about the second. He was on his own, on a motorbike and I gather he was going from one place to another. And none of us actually saw it. But the two of them coming along so shortly after another, shocked us a bit.

27:30 But those sort of things happen. Where was I? A training course at Canungra – an obstacle course – and of course the idea was ‘everything on realism’. You go through the normal crawling on a creek bank and under yard wire and wading through water and climb trees and what have you. They had these invariable staff

28:00 sergeants around and to give you an air of realism they’d get a small piece of dynamite and a detonator and a fuse and they’ll light this and they’ll toss it in and theoretically if the fuse was the right size and the dynamite was a small part, it would blow off with a burst and give an air of realism. When we were doing this course we had a school of officer cadets.

28:30 I don’t know where they came from. There was about a dozen of them just as observers. They were lined up along this creek bank. Blokes doing the course like myself were going along and the staff sergeant was throwing these pieces of dynamite with a fuse on into the ground and they were bursting up and one of them threw a piece of this gelignite with the fuse and it landed on one of these officer cadet’s shoulder.

29:00 Unfortunately it was a very short fuse. He didn’t have time to brush it off and the thing exploded in his face. He was a mess. They were only training exercises. Enough to give you a feeling of the real thing.

I wanted to go back and ask you about the train ride up to Townsville. What was the actual train like?

29:30 The Queensland Rail roped in every conceivable carriage they possibly could. We were moved from Gaythorne Railway – it’s still there. Took my grandkids to show them where Dad went off to the war. And about 11 o’clock one night, after the suburban trains had finished,

30:00 we all embarked in army vehicles and we got lined up on Gaythorne Railway Station and a train pulled in. There were a couple of the suburban trains with the seats going all the way across and there were a few of the ‘thin corridor’ type, with the cabins going in.

30:30 They piled I suppose, about 200 men into the train, maybe more. It was crowded. We all had our gear – the big kit bag. For the first stage of the trip I was in one of these suburban carriages. They were ‘crook’ inasmuch as they had no ‘loo’. You couldn’t get out of the compartment unless

31:00 you climbed over the thing. But the other ones had the corridor and they had seats. I think a top and bottom bunk. They had comparative comfort. The crowd I were in with – one bloke, believe it or not, climbed up into the metal carriage rack at the end of the carriage and he was comfortable. Two of us were on the floor and the others were on the seats. By the time you had six kitbags in there plus – no we didn’t have

31:30 rifles, we had some other equipment as well. It was quite a slow trip. We travelled all night like that. I forget where we stopped but when we got a way up the line, we stopped for breakfast. And invariably you’d stop at a siding while another train came down. You spent more time waiting in the sidings waiting for the other trains to come down because they only had the single track in most of the thing. But troop trains were quite an adventure. Fellows played cards, played –

32:00 a mate of mine played chess and we had one of these portable chess sets made out of leather I think it was with men out of leather pieces. Wrote letters the best you could. Sang. ‘Yarned’. And be glad to get to stretch your legs.

What kind of songs did you sing?

32:30 The songs of the First World War. Used to sing such things as ‘A Long Way to Tipperary’, ‘Pack Up Your Troubles’. At that stage of the game we hadn’t moved on to the Second World War songs. The First World War ended about 1919. This one started 20 years later. A generation to go. Not like now, there’s quite a few years apart.

33:00 The army was famous for its ‘grapevine’. The grapevine was where rumours started. And it’d start at one end of the train and change its message by the time it gets through. The only protection we had on

the troop train were Bren guns. All the light arms the Australian Army had at that time was the 303s [.303 calibre rifle] and we had the Australian version of the Tommy gun [Thompson submachine gun]

33:30 which is a hand-held machine gun and later on they invented the Sten gun for the jungle fighting and we had these automatic Brens. I think we had three Brens on the troop train. We mounted them on the tops of the carriages and some poor gunner had to strap himself to the roof of this thing in case Japanese fighters would come down. That's another example of the grapevine.

34:00 **Did you ever have to take a turn?**

The Bren gun I didn't. You required specialised training to be a Bren gunner. What on earth they were going to do, I don't know. They had no tripod. They use it as an 'anti aircraft' and just fire from the hip. Anyhow it done somebody's morale good to know we had Bren guns up there.

What did you do when you had to go to the loo when there was no loo on there?

Good question. The meal spots were very popular I tell you.

34:30 They were 'crook' those trains. They stopped at a siding and the sidings were very useful.

What was your favourite of all the songs that they used to sing?

My favourite. That's a good one. I think the old ones that

35:00 my Mum used to sing like, 'Pack Up Your Troubles', 'It's A Long Way To Tipperary', those old songs. I remember when I first heard the song, 'Don't Fence Me In'. You hear that? You hear it occasionally now. We were up in Townsville and a British aircraft carrier had come into port and the English sailors had come in and they had come down to our mess to have a meal.

35:30 And they sang this, 'Don't Fence Me In'. I think that's the name of it. I've heard it recently as my wife wants to tell me something. Speak up. Well the first time I heard it was these English

36:00 sailors singing it. I heard it up in Townsville. That's my story.

What can you tell me about Townsville at that time?

A garrison city aflood with American troops. The Americans were everywhere. They'd taken over Garbutt Airport which was the main airport. They had very heavy bombers there, they had fighters there. They built strips all around Townsville area.

36:30 They'd taken over the town itself. Townsville was blacked out or dimmed out. Air raid shelters were down the main streets. The Australian troops in town or out of town a bit – we very seldom got into Townsville – but the Americans had virtually taken it over.

What were your impressions of the Americans?

The Americans came over to Australia

37:00 because they were driven out of the Philippines. They came to Australia to use Australia as a base to build up their strength to attack the Japs. There was no other base available to the Americans and they came here for that purpose. They did a mighty job. We could not have won the war without their manpower and their fire power. But personally, I found them very arrogant.

37:30 And it annoyed me tremendously to hear a Yank [American] say they'd come over to save our country. I thought we were doing a pretty good job of it ourselves. But we needed them. I think that was pretty common about most Australians. The Yanks in the average Australian serviceman's opinion were arrogant. They had the advantage too that all the Australian troops were out of the

38:00 big city. There were very few Australian troops in Melbourne. Very few Australian troops comparatively in Sydney. But there were thousands of Americans. And the Americans had a – I think they called it a 'PX', the equivalent to the Australian canteen. They had a lot of things in the American canteen that the Australian canteen couldn't have. One in mind is the chocolates. You couldn't get us

38:30 chocolate very often in the Australian canteen. The Americans were flush with it. And the Americans for some reason or other could get nylon stockings. Well of course nylon stockings in the war years with a lot of the female population made the Yanks very popular. And the Australian troops had a saying about the Yanks. "They only trouble with the Yanks, they were overpaid"

39:00 because they got about five times the pay we did and also they were very glamorously fitted. The Australian uniforms looked, 'surplus' would be one word. But the Americans looked as if they'd been tailor made individually. So that was another minor factor that the Australian troops resented I suppose. And we had our saying, they were overpaid, over dressed and over here. My opinion of the Yanks.

Did you have much interaction with them?

Up

39:30 in Townsville I did. They had an artillery unit up in Townsville. They were mainly airfield defence. We had liaison with them and I was appointed liaison officer to go and see what we could do to help the Yanks win the war.

And what did that entail?

Just coordination of 'fields of fire' and recognition of planes so we didn't bring any more down with friendly

40:00 fire. We had Bofors guns and the Americans had Bofors guns so they gave us a bit of uniformity. But it was mainly coordination of what would happen in an air raid.

And how did you find them in those one on one interactions?

One on one, I thought they were very good. The blokes I got on with, they were just like us. Blokes they

40:30 got a home back, somewhere in America, over here fighting a war. They didn't have much to say about it and neither did we.

Tape 3

00:31 **Now you were just about to tell me what you did when you didn't have a natural aiming point?**

As far as I remember there were two alternatives. One was the 'director'. That was a instrument that was mounted on a tripod and it swung around on a base and you could read the angle from this scale on the director itself. They would use that

01:00 when they couldn't get an aiming point and they would lay the director out and use the director itself as the aiming point. But the more common one was the 'aiming posts'. These aiming posts were about a metre and a half high, black steel and they had two arms that came out on either side and clamped down. They were painted black and white alternatively.

01:30 I think it was numbered one to six on either side of the post. You had two of these and I think the theory was you put one down in a certain position and another one behind it say 30 or 40 yards away. The aim then, was for the dial sight to be aimed up so that you got two numbers, two ones or two twos or two threes, lined up. That was the correct thing and they were used when you were in close vicinity

02:00 of forest or thick scrub.

Did you ever have any accidents on the guns with people losing fingers in the breach?

No. Not if you're well trained. The number two had the responsibility of closing the breach. It was quite a heavy breach and you had to pull a lever down and slam the breach or help the breach.

02:30 If the gun was like that it was a bit hard. That was one of the training exercises too for the number four to load and get his hands out of the way in a hurry and the number two never to close the breach until it was clear. But no. I can see what would have happened. Maybe we were well trained. But we didn't lose any fingers.

And when you went from the 18 pounders

03:00 **to the 25 pounders was the ammunition still … ?**

No. And the only impounder was a single shell. The shell and the projectile climped together and they came that way. The 25 pounders, the projectile came itself and the cartridge case came separately and in that cartridge case the cordite came up in I think, it was three different bundles. And depending on the range that you wanted

03:30 or the elevation you want you would use charge one which would be one packet, or charge two or charge three. So included in the loading orders would be 'HE 106' which is the high explosive, charge two or charge three. And also you had to ram the cartridge case of the 25 pounder in. With the 18 pounder you didn't. It went in automatically.

And on the lowest charge could you actually see the projectile

04:00 **fire out of the weapon?**

No. I don't know what the velocity was, but the gun would recoil. There were be an almighty bang and there would be a flash, followed by smoke and that was it.

And does the smell of cordite still stick with you?

Not really. I was never in action. So I was never firing shells long.

04:30 Also, live ammunition was as scarce as hen's teeth. If you got 20 rounds to fire on a live shoot you were

doing very well.

How did the Australian army prepare the field regiments for fighting the war? Was there a particular style of training that you had to do with the artillery?

Yes. There was a gun drill book

05:00 and that covered every exercise on the gun. The deployment followed an established procedure. There is a saying in artillery that the time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted. What they meant by that, the 'OPR', the observation post officer, he was the bloke who actually observed the full shop.

05:30 He would reconnoitre around for a suitable spot to see that covered his line of fire. The gun position officer would also reconnoitre for a spot where he could get the guns in. Wasn't much good if you had to cover a flowing creek. And the troop leader would reconnoitre for a spot to put the gun trailer and tractors in. That had to be under cover if you could get it, within reasonable distance to come up in a hurry if you were required.

06:00 So there was a fair bit of reconnaissance. But the whole exercise I think, was handed down from the 1914, 1918 war procedure. I think we simply followed on what the procedure with the artillery was then. The actual observation of shot which was the vital thing – at Holsworthy we were taught the system of straddling – for instance if you fired a shot, first of all

06:30 you had to get it over to the line of your target. You did that by moving the guns right and left or traversing the guns. Then you watch the line where the fore shot was. If it was over you had a plus. Your next thing was to try and get a minus. So you straddled it. Then the over one might be 20,000 and the lower one might be 14,000. You then split that and fire the next one at 17,000 until you're able to

07:00 straddle the target with a comparatively short range. That was a standard procedure.

I can imagine that a lot of the artillery up till that point had been in open country in world war one and the middle east and such. How did it change with the Japanese?

That was it. When we were up in Townsville rumours started to come around on the grapevine that the artillery was no good for the jungle fighting. They woke up to this

07:30 when they tried to bring in field artillery to support our ground troops. You couldn't possibly pull a 18 pounder as it was then, over places like the Kokoda Trail. But the Japs, they were very crafty, they had a very light field gun which dismantled in four or five pieces and one bloke carried the muzzle on a bicycle and wheeled that through the jungle track. Another bloke had the breach and about four or five fellows could carry

08:00 a very light – it wasn't as heavy as the 25 pounder, but it was efficient enough for the short term. That led to the result that field regiments were reviewed and the 17th which I was in was disbanded because they had no use for them in general fighting.

How did the blokes take the disbanding of the regiment?

I think one remark of a fellow –

08:30 I heard that we were going to be disbanded and bear in mind we had been up in Townsville several months training and getting nowhere. We reckoned we knew all about firing guns and moving guns and whatever. I think everybody was fed up. We got very little leave while we were in Townsville and I think fellows were generally getting a bit 'browned off' and the word came round that we were going to be disbanded and rather than leave it to the grapevine,

09:00 as soon as I heard, I called a parade and told them that the 17th Field Regiment was going to be disbanded. I remember one bloke in the background saying, "Thank Christ for that." That might have summed up the feeling.

So Townsville was just training and waiting was it? How did that affect morale?

Morale dropped. We were out in the bush.

09:30 Virtually repeat – I think you can train an artillery man in three months of intensive training and he'll improve as he goes along. But we were there for about 18 months doing virtually nothing. Very little home leave. Little amenities. We weren't allowed into Townsville except on holy days and holidays.

10:00 **When they broke up the 17th Field Regiment how did they disperse the officers?**

All the other ranks went into a pool and they were split up as reinforcements to infantry or signalling. The officers were a problem because they all had a commission and in the army your seniority is based on your date of commission.

10:30 It didn't matter what experience you had. If you were commissioned before somebody else you became senior to them. So that raised a bit of a problem. I had quite a few regiments. The 17th I suppose, they had about 20 officers that they had to find jobs for. The senior blokes were more difficult to place than the lieutenants. Lieutenants can be put in most places. But most of the

11:00 fellows I know went to garrison artillery. Went to Sydney Heads or Melbourne's [Port] Phillip Bay and then the coastal guns. I got a transfer to the 2/2nd Field Regiment. That was a regiment that fought over in the Middle East and they'd come back. They were stationed up in the tablelands.

You must have come across a lot of blokes there that had experience. How did that go down?

11:30 They were. There were all battle hardened troops. I came in and I appreciate the CO's position. He'd been landed with me, a comparatively green, inexperienced officer, who had got a commission way back three or four years ago and his own officers had commission about a year or so ago and had actual fighting experience. So it raised a bit of a problem. He was quite

12:00 frank about it. He said that he took me on but he didn't feel fit to displace any of his troop commanders to give me a job, so he gave me a job as a troop leader which was the lowest of the officers' ranks there. But I realised that we weren't getting anywhere in the artillery. I thought even the 2/2nders were more likely to go in the jungle war, so I asked him what chances they would be, if I could transfer to the air force.

12:30 He virtually said, none in the world, you won't get a chance for that. But he said, "I'll see what I can do for you," and he sent me on a training course. The army are always doing courses. This one was at Canungra. That's where the fellow got his head blown off. I went off and finished that course at

13:00 Canungra and I remember the obstacle course at Canungra. They walked us through it first, to show us what it was. And then they took us on the actual thing. In the walk through I saw this – we had to clamber up a rope ladder, up a tree trunk and with no exaggeration it was about 30 feet high onto a platform. And hanging out about

13:30 a metre and a half away was a rope from a branch. The theory was, you climbed up the ladder, stepped off the platform, jumped out, grabbed the rope and slid down. I thought, "Oh I don't like the look of that. I much prefer crawling under galvanised iron on my tummy under the water. But we came to this and I noticed the bloke behind me. He got up there and he hesitated. I thought to myself, "If I hesitate, I'll never do it." So he jumped and I

14:00 scrambled up the ladder, raced across the thing, blindly grabbed the rope and I tell you I never felt more relieved than when I had my hand round that rope. And I came down. But it was a good, tough course. What I see on TV these days, it's chicken feed to what they do now.

All the blokes we've spoken to have said it was quite demanding, the Canungra training?

Tough. The idea was to

14:30 exert you. A few fellas fell by the wayside, they crack up.

Was there a feeling at the time when they were starting to realise that artillery mightn't be used in New Guinea that you'd all be made just infantry soldiers?

Not among the officers because as I say, the seniority affected them there. But the other fellows, some of those did go to infantry units. I lost touch with most of them

15:00 after we broke up and I went to the 2/2nd.

With the training and waiting that you were doing, you said the morale of the blokes was affected. In what ways did they try to 'gee' up the blokes to relieve the boredom?

We used to – I'll tell you my famous effort at Townsville. I was appointed among other things the entertainment officers. I don't know why the CO chose me for the entertainment officer. Anyhow I tried to

15:30 get things very organised and one thing I organised was a football match between the officers and the other ranks. This was a very popular feature with the other ranks. I think they looked upon it as a good chance to get square. When I tried to get the team – I think we played rugby league or rugby union. I know I didn't know the rules. I know that

16:00 I had to play because I couldn't get enough of the other blokes to take it on. Some blokes had played football and they got on. So we had a bit of a rough ground up there. It was pretty rough in Townsville. We had cleared a line of fire in front of the gun so we could fire it off and see what we were looking at. Very rough ground. We marked out a football pitch and away we went. I thought I had a moment of glory as a matter of fact because somebody passed me a pass and I dived for the line and got it

16:30 over the line and I thought, well I've scored and the blinking ref said, "No. Double move." I didn't know what a double movement was, but we didn't get the point. But that was that sort of thing. And we built – I think I've got a photograph there – of a hut. I had a chap, a left sergeant who was a architect in private life. I thought, he'll be the bloke to design this. All we wanted is a cut bush timber

17:00 to make a framework, a branch and a leaf roof and a few tables so you could sit down and write. Letter writing was about one of the only things they could do. They all had girlfriends or wives or mothers. Lot of letter writing going on and all they had was their own tent with a kerosene lamp in those days. I

thought if they had this recreation hut where they could come and sit at a bit of a table.

17:30 So I got this sergeant who was a architect and I gave him a team of about 8 men to do the job. They cut and so forth. And his progress was painfully slow. Everything was perfectly right. After he'd been on it about three weeks I think he had about four stumps up and I thought, we're never going to get anywhere with this. I had a real 'live wire' sergeant that 'Mr Get Up And Do It'. So I had the

18:00 tactful job of taking the architect fellow off and putting this other fellow on. I think I got round it by saying, "We'll get you to give us your technical advice and we'll get Sergeant so and so to do it." Anyway we changed sergeants and they had the hut up in about a fortnight and that's the one in that photograph there. It was very popular. We managed to buy one of those kerosene pump lamps and that gave us the best light we had in the area.

18:30 Shone out. We had a blackout there. We were out in the middle of the bush and it shone like a blinking lighthouse. But we didn't do much to – we put a few tarps around the side to blacken the light a bit. But it was still pretty light. But it did give them somewhere to write in comfort. Then the other thing I organised, I found out that the Salvation Army had a concert party. So I thought, this'll be fine. I

19:00 had visions of the Salvation Army girls with their cymbals and fellows hadn't seen ladies for quite a few months. So I got in touch with the Salvation Army. Yes, they would come out. And I wrote it up in the diary in routine orders, the Salvation Army crowd are coming out with the first concert party ever, make sure, I expect the troops to turn up and watch this. I think they, like me – or they were carried away with, my enthusiasm – they thought they were going to have a tambourine concert there. The Salvation Army crowd arrived

19:30 with six male members playing brass instruments. But they gave us a good concert. There were a heck of a few disappointed fellows. But that's the sort of thing – we kept them busy as best we could.

You spoke of the relationship between regular soldiers and Nashos or AIF and CMF blokes. What about the relationship between other corps of the army and artillery?

We got a bad name as the 'Drop-Shorts'. We were notorious

20:00 for when we had to fire at 3000 yards over our own troops we'd fire 3000 yards and they'd drop on our troops. I had a very embarrassing moment. I was on this course at Caloundra there was an army exercising process and ground troops were to cross, I think it was the Logan River and advance under cover or a barrage of artillery, and they were firing live shells. The artillery were

20:30 lined up and the gentleman in charge, Lieutenant Colonel, said, "The artillery will now bring down the barrage on the starting line which is 20 yards out in the Logan River" and the artillery barrage came down and landed right on the starting line. So that didn't improve the reputation – fortunately no-one was hurt, but it did happen in real life and the artillery men got the nickname of 'Drop Shorts'.

What sort of things would happen that would make

21:00 **a round drop short like that?**

Purely mainly human error. They had a chart showing you the full shot and if you fired say 100 rounds at the range of say 16000 yards a certain percentage would fall within 50 yards. As you got out, less and less. So you had always a fall of shot which

21:30 you didn't know. It depended on how closely the cordite was packed, how it burnt on the explosion as it all went up or just part of it went up. So you had this line of fearless shot which was always with you. Then you had the wind you had to take into account. The rain. Weather conditions had something to do with it. And then of course you had the actual estimation of distance. And we didn't have any range finders.

22:00 Nowadays they press a button and know it's 17000 from 125 yards. But no you didn't have anything like that at all. With all those you managed to get it. Other shootings I saw were excellent and they fell 100 yards. Advance. And they advanced up the frame. But a lot depended on the weather conditions, human error and experience too.

You've talked about Townsville being a real

22:30 **garrison city. What was Brisbane like before you left?**

Brisbane was a garrison city too. They had the big water pipes down Queen Street and Adelaide Street. I think they ran the full length and they were pumping water from the river and they had hydrants every so along for fire fighting. They had these concrete air raid shelters all over the place. Some of them –

23:00 there's one still in existence at Newmarket or it was with part of it converted into a bus shelter. I think it's still there. But the ones where Roma Street Gardens are now. All the parks had them. A lot of the main streets had them. Brisbane was completely dark and dimmed out. The petrol was rationed. As a result there were very few cars on the road. The trams and buses that were running all dimmed out.

23:30 I think in those days too, even if you drove a car, you had to have the headlights blacked out on top and

the soft focus, so you only got a parking light going down. And it was packed with troops.

Can you recall before that, Japan entering the war with the attack on Pearl Harbour?

Yep. I remember attacking Pearl Harbour. I can remember MacArthur arriving here in a

24:00 submarine and taking over the building in Queen Street mall there.

Did you ever see him?

No.

What sort of impact did Japan and the United States entering the war have on people?

I think it boosted our morale a fair bit. I think that every thinking Australian realised we were in trouble. Britain was in trouble because as you know, just after the Japs came in the British lost two aircraft carriers

24:30 in Malaya and that was a devastating blow. Gave the Japs virtually unrestricted air control. We had no facilities out here. We were starting to manufacture the infamous 25 power gun we manufactured out here. We manufactured the Sten gun which was very handy for fighting in the jungles. We manufactured the Thompson sub machine gun. But we didn't have

25:00 the resources. When the Yanks first came here they had nothing either and they had to build up and stuff piled in. The Yanks took over every building that was any use to them for their own purpose.

You mentioned that when you were finally sent to the 2/2nd they put you on

25:30 **a course and sent you away again.**

Yes. And lo and behold I was due to come back and the last day of the course I got a letter and it was from the army command telling me I was being discharged. So I didn't go back to the 2/2nd. I went out here to Moorooka I think it was. I got my discharge papers, got my back-pay, handed in my uniform and went home and told Mum I was out of the

26:00 army and I was going to join the air force. A week later I joined the air force.

Were you surprised at how easy that was to get out of the army?

I think they knew that I was going to apply for the air force. I never knew what influence my commanding officer had. But he knew that I wanted to get out. I think that he

26:30 must have said something. I think they were glad to get rid of me as much as I was surplus to their requirements. They didn't need junior artillery officers. I think that solved the problem for them and the air force took me. I started off as an AC1 [Aircraftsman].

That must have been almost a shock to go from one to the other.

It was a wonderful experience for me. It showed me the other side of the line because most of my

27:00 war years I was either an NCO or a commissioned officer. You miss guard duty unless you oversee the picket. You miss a lot of things like that. You have a few more responsibilities, but being the lowest ranker you didn't have to think. You just did as you were told. I suppose I was a bit critical of them having a bit of background I thought why don't the air force do it this way? But no problem there.

27:30 I fitted in reasonably well.

Why did you think you'd like to join the air force?

I wanted to be in the flying crew. I didn't think I'd be much of a pilot but I loved surveying, I loved map reading and I thought if I can get in as a navigator I'll be fine. I thought this is the shot. I'll be a navigator. So after I did my

28:00 rookie training. Everybody did that. They conducted another exam medical for the blokes that wanted to go to air crew. This was far tougher. To get in as long as you could move your arm you could get in, in those days. But the air crew was far tougher. The MO [Medical Officer] was a civilian doctor. He was doing something. I could see something was wrong. I said, "What, am I

28:30 in trouble?" "What did you do in civil life?" "Accountant." "Oh. What did you do in the army?" "I was in the artillery." "Were you on the guns?" "Yes." "I thought so. Your hearing's gone." Apparently – I found out later a lot of the blokes that served on the guns they had no ear muffs in those days and if you were close to the guns for a while your hearing went. They tossed me out of the aircrew and they gave me the option

29:00 of the ground staff. The air force work on a mustering system. They must have quite a large number of jobs. It's signallers, drivers, guard, cook, plus all the technical stuff. One of them on the list was

29:30 air sea rescue. I thought, that's the shot for me. I can imagine myself on these high speed boats going out on the middle of the ocean, pulling out some poor bloke who's in the dike. So I put down as my first

priority air sea rescue. They gave you three choices. I forget what the other two was. But I know my air sea rescue was my first priority. In the fullness of time they posted up the posting. To my surprise I found I had been listed as

30:00 technical trainee. So I went down to Melbourne to train as a technical trainee. The first night I got down to Melbourne I was about with five or six blokes who'd never been to Melbourne either. We got into a troop train at Spencer Street Station. A bus took us over to

30:30 the building – I think it's called the exhibition building in Melbourne. It's famous in history. I think they held the opening of the first commonwealth parliament there or something to do with the opening of the first parliament. It was a magnificent building with soaring arches with murals of nymphs holding flowers and playing lyres and harps and we got leave

31:00 the first night. None of us knew where we were. The five or six of us had come up the same day decided that we would go down to Melbourne. It's only five minutes walk to the centre of the city. But we didn't know where we were. We asked the guard on duty at the main gate of the 1STT [School of Technical Training] it was. He told us to go down and there'd be a red cross kiosk in one of the streets of Melbourne

31:30 and they acted as a centre of all the activity. All the civilian organisations were continually putting on entertainment for the troops like dances or concerts or whatever you like or taking you for a picnic. We decided, we looked up the list, and there was a dance on at the lower Melbourne town hall. We didn't

32:00 know where the Melbourne town hall was, but they told us it was up the road a bit. And as we walked along in Melbourne was dimmed out, all the shops were dimmed out and even the street lights were browned out and that's when we realised how many Americans were on the streets. There were Americans everywhere spilling out of any café that was open. We must have saw three or four hundred in the one street we walked down. That was one impression of Melbourne, how many Americans were there. And we got into the

32:30 lower town hall and the dance was on in full swing. What happened in those days, the various organisations used to issue invitations to the young ladies to come along to these dances to make up partners for the troops. They ran them pretty regularly. It was crowded. As was the fashion in those days all the girls lined up in seats along the side of the hall. The band – they had a band – was down at the stage.

33:00 All the fellas would stand at the entrance to the hall surveying the field, looking around to see what young lady they could go and ask for a dance. And as I surveyed the field I looked across and here was the girl. She was absolutely the one. So I said, I'm going to try my luck there. So I went over and I was thinking, what'll I do if she knocks me back? I was only a lowly LAC [Leading Aircraftsman]. I didn't have any rank to influence her. I went up and asked her for a dance and she demurely said, "Yes." We got along very well.

33:30 And after the war I came back and married her. And there she is over there. First night in Melbourne.

Can you tell us more about your impressions of Melbourne when you first got there? Did it surprise you that so many Americans were there?

My impression of Melbourne at that time was that

34:00 the Yanks had taken it over. Without exaggeration there were Americans everywhere. On the – now I only saw – we didn't get much leave. If we studied and passed the test at the end of the week – each segment of the course was a week – you got leave from Saturday lunchtime till Sunday night. So you got Saturday night off. We had to be back on Sunday night.

34:30 That was the only chance. I didn't see much of it in the daytime. But in the times I was there – I suppose the Americans got leave too at the same time, but they were everywhere. You'd get on a train, there'd be ten Americans to one Australian. Then all the Australian troops were in Townsville or New Guinea at that time. All the Americans were pouring in building up their base. My first impression of Melbourne was

35:00 it was a beautiful city. I still remember the lovely gardens, but it was all the windows were taped up for air raid precautions and as I say it seemed to be taken over by the Americans.

They weren't in blackout?

Brown out I think was the term. I think the domestic people were not allowed

35:30 to have outside lights. They had to either draw heavy curtains or put brown paper up in their windows. The street lights were definitely dimmed and as I say the motor cars were blacked out. You walked along in a semi dim. Enough to see where you were going. But it was an eerie system.

When you went into the city for the dances and the cafes they were still?

They had blackout. They had some sort of

36:00 screen. They weren't allowed to show their lights showing. They'd have their windows shut up or even

the door maybe shut. But they had some way of preventing direct light getting out. I don’ t think they’d be allowed to be operating at all otherwise.

At this stage what sort of news of the progress of the war are you getting?

Very little. Again most of it came through the grapevine. Melbourne still had the Melbourne paper but we had Buckley’s [no] chance of getting those

36:30 because we weren’t out during the daytime. We might get one over the weekend. We had very little opportunity of listening to new broadcasts mainly because they weren’t available to us. If I remember rightly there were a couple of radios in this exhibition building. But we had to after tea at night study from seven to nine every night. So the

37:00 opportunities really of hearing very much was a bit remote. We did hear the more exciting things of the Japs had come out of the Kokoda trail. We certainly heard of that. That was a grapevine thing that everybody heard about. Basically we didn’t know much about it. I didn’t. I think I was pretty typical.

How did it affect you when things like Darwin,

37:30 **Singapore falling, the raids on Sydney?**

I think the raid on Townsville woke us up. The raid on Townsville was a very minor affair. I think what happened, the Japs did not have an air base close enough to send out a heavy duty bomber. They

38:00 converted a couple of flying boats with long range tanks and they only had a couple of bombs each. I think we were not in Townsville, we were up at this place we called Bluewater about 20 miles out. But we heard them strangely enough. The local news was that one had burst out in a paddock from Townsville and had done no damage and the other one

38:30 had burst out from the causeway and the whole thing was hushed up. But I think it woke us up to the fact that the Yanks had fighters at Garbutt which was just – and they didn’t have enough information to have a scramble and fighters up to intercept them. The Japs came over. It so happened either by good luck or judgement the one bomber, first of all, fell on the paddock

39:00 but in that paddock was one of the American communication towers. So whether they knew or not. The other one fell pretty close to the bridge over the river at Townsville going south. That would have been a mighty successful target. It was only propaganda I think as much as anything. I think the bombs were only lightweight and they came in and got out as soon as they could.

How real did the threat of Japanese invasion of Australia feel to you?

Definitely was on.

39:30 Specially when we were up in the Atherton Tablelands where the 2/2nd were. Two overseas divisions had been called back by that time. They were all flooded up to the Atherton Tableland. They went from the Atherton Tableland up to New Guinea. The Japs were coming over the Kokoda Trail. They were coming round the eastern coast of New Guinea.

40:00 So things weren’t too good.

You must have ‘blitzed’ the rookies, did you, in the air force? Having had all that army experience?

No. Because I was being trained as a trainee technician and before that I had to get technical training. The technical training was all things like, one job we were given was three files and a piece of square steel and we had to file that steel down to a perfectly

40:30 little surface and try it out on a blue tashing tape. That idea was to give us basic technical skills. We learnt soldering that way. Then we, later on, did learn the theory of wireless. After I finished my technical training, I was posted to be a wireless maintenance mechanic.

Tape 4

00:33 **At the point that you had gone through the medical and missed out on being a navigator and then missed out on the mustering system of doing the air sea rescue, at any point during that did you regret leaving the army?**

No. I didn’t regret that. You must bear in mind that at the time practically

01:00 every young fella was in uniform or something and I was quite pleased that I was in the air force. I had no regrets. I thought I might be getting somewhere in the air force. But I had no regrets that I didn’t get – I was sorry that I didn’t get a navigator. I was dead keen on that. I would have liked it. I had the background.

01:30 I think I would have liked the course on navigation.

A lot of the army guys that we've spoken to, including you this morning, said that their uniforms that they got in the army tended to be often ill fitting and … ?

I think there was one size. I'm sure there was one size in overcoats. Yes. The uniforms – the only word you could use was that they were 'serviceable'.

I was wondering if that was any different when you got into the air force?

The air force

02:00 was a bit more glamorous. You wore a tie in the air force and a shirt. But I think the air force uniform was slightly better. By this time the supply had caught up. They were various sizes. No longer did you only have one size. I don't want to exaggerate. You would go to the Q [Quartermaster's] Store to draw something and they'd give you one and say,

02:30 "That's your size," and you tried it on and it was going over your shoulders and you'd go back, "No. That'll suit you." By the time I got in the air force they were a bit more sophisticated. They gave me a size 80 and a reasonable fit.

When you went to enlist in the air force and once you got in, how were you regarded by the other fellows that you had come from the army?

Nobody knew. I didn't tell them. I didn't see fit to tell them.

03:00 I did the best – I had to. I had no choice. Nobody knew that I had a background. I was just a new recruit. Although a pretty old one by that time because most of the others were – I was about 25 by that time and the new recruits were 18 or 19.

Did the younger fellows think anything of it that you were a bit older than them?

There were fellows who couldn't enlist earlier for various reasons. Some blokes were

03:30 enlisting when they were 25, 26 for the first time.

When you enlisted in the air force did they not ask you if you had any other service?

Yes. I filled in the enlistment form. You had to have that. So it was on my record. But the record's not carried around with you. Certainly doesn't go to the drill sergeant. He didn't know who he's got in his ranks.

How did you find the different training compared in the

04:00 **RAAF to the army?**

Basically the basic training – rifle drill, foot drill was basically the same. But after that the ground staff are more training in specialist jobs whereas the army is training more in, they are specialists but not to the degree of the air force. For instance, there might only be half a dozen

04:30 instrument makers in the particular wing of an air force. But in the army there might be a hundred machine gunners. So there was far more specialisation in the air force.

Did you find much of a difference in discipline between the two?

Not really. Same line of command and same –

05:00 drill sergeants in the army were the same as drill sergeants in the air force.

Amongst the average fellows in there did you notice were they different types of people that joined the army as opposed to joined the air force?

No. I've really got no idea. I wouldn't know. I think it was

05:30 there was a certain glamour in the air force if you could be a pilot. I think every bloke that joined the air force hoped he might be able to get into the pilot's job or a air crew's job. Apart from that I don't think there was much in it.

You were just about to tell us at the end of the last tape about the training you did as a wireless mechanic.

I did this training for

06:00 wireless mechanic on the equipment the air force were using at the time. The stationary equipment, the wireless sets in the aircraft at that time. We knew a fair bit about RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] equipment. At the end of the course I qualified. Then things happened. On the one day I was promoted to wireless mechanic.

06:30 The big thing about that promotion, I went from a grade six which was a pay of about ten shillings a day

to a – ‘musters’ they called them – ‘muster six’ to a ‘muster one’ which paid sixteen shillings a day so I got a big increase in pay. I also got a promotion from AC1 [aircraftsman] which was the lowest to LAC which was also very low and on the same day I got posted

07:00 to RAF command, at Morotai. Things happen on the one day I finished.

That’s a lot to happen all at once.

Certainly is.

Before you got that posting to Morotai, during all that time when you were in the army and then joined the air force, were you keen to get overseas?

Yes, I think everybody was. But in the armed forces you do as you’re told and if you’re

07:30 in a certain mass unit sent to so and so, you go. If you’re not in that unit you stay where you are. So it doesn’t matter about your own feelings about the matter, I think everyone would be reasonably keen to get overseas. I think that’s fair enough. But on the other hand you were – many units don’t get moved. You could quite easily get posted to defence at Port Phillip.

08:00 You stay there. Until someone decides time to move you.

We’ve been through a bit of your time in Melbourne. When were you at Sandgate?

Sandgate’s the rookie depot. I enrolled in Brisbane at the enlisting deport at Creek Street and hopped in a bus and taken down to Sandgate which was the RAF recruiting depot.

08:30 No. First rookie training depot where you went through your basic got your uniform and got pay book and all that sort of thing and they started you off on elementary drill.

And what were the conditions like out at Sandgate?

Sandgate were good. They had hot water. And tin roofed sheds and mess halls. Quite good. Because by the time I

09:00 got there they had been established a while.

How did you find the food in the air force in comparison to the army?

Basically the same. I think we were both on the same rations.

So what sort of things were you getting at Sandgate?

Sandgate was good. They had a system in the armed service that every man has entitle to a certain amount of ration per day. It works out

09:30 something like two slices of bread and a teaspoon full of sugar and a spoonful of jam. And when it gets up, 8 ounces of meat and three ounces of vegetables. And it’s the quartermaster’s job to supply that unit with the aggregate. They work out how many men are in the unit and they take out the basic rations for one man and that’s so the quartermaster’s got a supply to that unit on a daily basis. He probably doesn’t send it

10:00 every day but he might send a week’s supply in one go. Then it’s in the hands of the cooks. The army rations sink or swim on the skill of your cook. I had a shearer’s cook when we were up in Townsville and he turned bully beef into the most delicious fritters you could ever have. He was very popular. But other fellows either didn’t have the skill or didn’t have the

10:30 inclination to put the extra work in. It depended entirely on the cook. The rations were tinned stuff. I think most of the sweets were in the line of Australian tinned fruit. Plenty of custard. Plenty of macaroni

11:00 something or other. Bread and butter custard. I think that the army rations were excellent when they got through and when they weren’t mutilated too much by the cooks. I can tell you an interesting experience at the air force where I was down at the exhibition centre in Melbourne. They were running courses for quite a lot of disciplines.

11:30 They were running courses for instrument makers, wireless mechanics, signalling people and cooks. The cooks’ courses was a practical one. I think it only lasted a fortnight and they cooked for the rest of the troops. You could always tell when the standard of food took a plummet, that a new line of cooks had started their course.

12:00 They hadn’t got the technique of making stew properly. It improved.

So when you got your posting to Morotai what were your thoughts?

Now I’m on my way. Long since.

Any idea where Morotai was?

Had not the slightest clue. It was only when I came up here to Brisbane, and I don't know how I did it, but I dug up an atlas and I found out where Morotai

12:30 was from the atlas. That's the only clue. Had no idea.

So what transpired then between getting that posting and actually landing in Morotai?

I flew to Darwin. No, I flew to Townsville. The RAF ran a Catalina flying ferry

13:00 from Townsville to Port Moresby. I got onto this. Quite an experience flying in a Catalina with no seats and just the metal frame. It was cold and noisy. We sat on the floor and we landed at Port Moresby. A boat came out and took us to a staging camp. We were only in Port Moresby the one night. I never saw much of Port Moresby. The next morning some of us were marched down to

13:30 the wharf and we got onto the most rusty steamer I have ever seen. It turned out to be a Dutch boat. It was on the ferry run from Port Moresby up to the islands. Had Dutch officers. I think there were about three of them. The captain was certainly Dutch. The crew were natives – I should imagine they were Dutch East Indian as it was in those days.

14:00 They didn't speak any English and the Dutch captain didn't speak much English, so we didn't do much conversation. We had no idea ultimate where we were going. I did because of the – not everyone was going to Morotai. Some of the blokes didn't know where they were at all. Some of the army blokes on board they just had a movement order to go so and so.

14:30 We went on this very rusty very old Dutch, I think it was a freighter that did the ferry run in peace time. One hull was reserved for cargo and the other hull was reserved fro troops. To get down the hull, you went down a steel ladder at the side of the hull and at the bottom of the

15:00 ladder they had two tier bunks. You bunked down there. We went down there, put our gear on a bunk and by, I think mutual agreement we weren't going to sleep in this place, we came up and we slept on the deck all the time. There was rumours that there were Japanese subs around, again on the 'grapevine'. The boat was in the

15:30 blackout and off she went. After a couple of days we came to Medang. Medang had received a battering from the Yanks; when the American policy was to put down a heavy barrage before they landed their troops and save casualties. They had knocked the place round. From the boat you could see the remains of the plantation or the coconut grove.

16:00 It was devastating to see must have been thousands of trees and ninety percent of them had tops knocked off them and various huts were knocked around and so forth. So Medang was a sorry sight. But a few of the army got off there and we pushed on, we were on the Beach further up the coast, on New Guinea and it was a picture of a tropical paradise. I don't know what happened there. But the Yanks must have

16:30 landed unopposed. The plantation was still there. There was native huts around. Of course the Yanks had cleared for their planes and eventually we pushed on again and we arrived at Morotai.

I'll just backtrack for a second. When you left for Morotai did you get any pre-embarkation leave?

No. Finished the course and I was posted the next day.

17:00 **So did you have any time to communicate with your family or with Pat?**

Yes. Wrote and told her – did I write you a letter from Morotai or did I write you? I wrote a letter Morotai saying, I'm up here and I remember writing to my mate Jack Din who by this time was a training pilot over in Pearce in Western Australia. He ended up in the air force as a pilot. He got a training job. I previously had told him I was having a whale of a time [great time]

17:30 in Melbourne. I wrote him on Morotai and he asked me how I organised to get up there so quickly. But it was outside my control.

Did you take many personal affects over with you?

You had to have everything in your kit bag. I had my camera with me for those two photos that I had. But it was extremely difficult to get film. In the air force I didn't take it because I knew I wouldn't get any up in the islands. No. Personal effects was, no.

18:00 Couple of photos maybe and that was it.

Did you notice if many of the blokes around you had any kind of good luck charm that they took?

Yes. I did. There were an awful lot of what they call 'foreigners' being made – have you struck the term 'foreigners' yet? It's something that an armed

18:30 member, of the armed forces, makes in army time, out of army material. It's got to be out of hand. They

were making all sorts of things out of Perspex and aluminium and they clamped down on it and they forbid the making of 'foreigners'. But what was the very popular ones with the fellows with the skill – they'd get these coloured toothbrushes and if you were, say in the artillery for example, the colour patch was red and blue and they would

19:00 cut out a little strip of red toothbrush handle and blue toothbrush handle and then get a piece of aluminium and form it into a ring and sit these inserts into the ring and send it home to their loved one. There was a lot of that going on even though it was supposed to be forbidden. You pilfered what aluminium you could, anything you could get away with. But in answer to your question, there was quite a bit of fellows would knit

19:30 bits of leather – bootlaces – and they'd string shells or bits of this aluminium thing, rings or tokens on. Not very much. Not to the extent that everybody had it but they certainly – see one of the troubles up on the islands was if you didn't have something to do you very well went troppo [deranged]. Nothing to do. Very oppressive climate. Rain practically every day. It was hot.

20:00 Your clothes were clammy and get sticky and smelly and torn. Your boots were the worst. They'd go to pieces very quickly and unless you had a job to keep you going – I was lucky enough there was a spare bit of work to be done on the wireless maintenance. But if you just imagine fellows that are air force guards, they're just standing round waiting for something to happen. Most of the time it didn't. Although we had a

20:30 few alarms. That was the biggest thing to up there keep yourself occupied. And you didn't have the opportunity to write very much. The Red Shield [Appeal] – I'd like to plug the Red Shield here – they did a marvellous job, the Salvos [Salvation Army]. They were everywhere. Everywhere the troops went the Salvos were there. They had a kiosk or a tent up there and they used to supply you with writing paper so you could write home.

21:00 But mainly was a case of writing in pencil. You had no biros of course in those days and you didn't hardly get pen and ink. We had a few entertainments up there. The picture theatre. The concert groups used to come up. They were very popular. We got pictures reasonably regularly. They were an evening's entertainment.

21:30 **When you were on the ship with RAF guys and army guys, did you intermingle?**

We were all Australians. No problem at all. Bit of ribbing [to make fun of] going on. I remember climbing up the rope ladder – the army blokes had embarked before we did, so they had chosen their bunks and were leaning over the rails watching us mob come up. And the rope ladder – I don' t know if you ever climbed up a rope ladder, but it was the first time I had and there's a skill in it

22:00 and I didn't have it. I made heavy weather of getting up that. This was in the harbour, it was still. How they do it on the pitching boat on high sea I don't know. Course the army blokes gave me a rough time then. They had the cry, "You'll be sorry." That was the standard cry whenever you – used to be very common on the troop train. If you were coming down to Sydney or Melbourne on leave and a troop train was coming up and it stopped at a station, which it frequently did and they all got out to have a meal

22:30 together virtually, or at the same time. They'd cry, "You'll be sorry" to the blokes going north. I remember this army bloke telling me I'd be sorry – all the air force blokes – He'd be 'sorry', if I clambered up that rickety old rope ladder.

So what sort of ribbing went on between the blokes?

I think it was all good natured.

23:00 They were all fellows together. Most of them had been away from home a great while. They would talk about football but it was mainly football of a year or so ago. They had a 'gripe' about the food. That's where these goldfish came in. They'd gripe about the –

23:30 no, I won't say they'd gripe. They would comment about the food. "Not bloody goldfish again." All that sort of thing. It was all good hearted rivalry. I suppose the army blokes thought they were better than the air force blokes and the air force blokes thought we were. But we were all in it. We were the Australian Armed Forces. I think it was a case of mutual respect as much as anything.

You want to tell us about the goldfish?

The goldfish. We were up in Morotai

24:00 and the food was pretty good. You had the standard ration which was forecast by the army and you got that when it could get through to you. That was what you should get, but if you didn't get it they tried to supplement it with something. Then you had what they called 'hard tack'. Hard tack was a tin of bully beef and a packet of biscuits. The main characteristic

24:30 about the biscuits was that they were hard. If you tried to crack them with your teeth you were in danger of going to the dentist very quickly. The only thing you could do was soak them in tea or soak them in water before you could crack them. You could crack them if you made an effort. But the bully beef was excellent. High quality beef. That was what was known as hard tack. Then they had this

emergency ration. Emergency ration, every fellow had a tin. It was a small tin.

25:00 In it was a packet of dehydrated meat. The idea was you put this in a dixie or a billy can and you applied a quantity of water and heated it and the meat swelled. Well it was nutritious but that was about all. Then you had a packet of milk tablets. They were concentrated like milk powder in tablet form

25:30 which you could suck or dissolve in water if you want to. But the prize of the lot was this plug of fruit. It was dried fruit like dates and raisins and figs all compressed together. You could chew on that. But that was emergency. You only broke into that when you had nothing else. If you couldn't get through, you lived on hard tack. The hard tack travelled very well. The biscuits were as hard as rock. You could drop them at 20 feet and they wouldn't break.

26:00 And the hard tack was in tins, so the army was able and they were easy to pack and transport and they were able to get that through to you reasonably easy. And fruit and other tinned stuff came up easy. But you very seldom saw fresh meat or fresh vegetables. But we did get it occasionally. It got through. Particularly towards the end of the war. The supply ships started to get through and you got better variety. But we were living

26:30 reasonably well on hard tack and you get used to hard tack, it's not too bad. And all of sudden the diet changed and we got these fish in oil. I don't know what sort of fish they were. They might have been some sort of herring. And they came in these oval tins. About six of these fish to the tin. And they were oily. For the first meal they were quite a change. "This is not bad, is it?" But then we realised

27:00 that they were taking the place of hard tack. We were getting these herrings or fish regularly and it got to the stage where you got herrings for lunch and say a stew for night or you got say stew for lunch and you got herrings at night. Of course they rapidly got a name of goldfish. In the mess parade you didn't know what was coming on. You lined up with a group of

27:30 about 20 blokes all with your mess tins waiting to shuffle up the line and somebody up the line would get his serve and he'd pass it down, "It's bloody goldfish again" so we knew we were in for goldfish. And there was an awful lot of waste in them. They would serve you your rations. Might have been one or two fish. And fellas would just pick at them. You couldn't stand them. They really got to the stage they sickened you in that condition. In a colder climate they might have done well. Goldfish are not a happy memory. I for one

28:00 can't face tinned fish again and I know quite a few blokes the same way.

So when you all got aboard the Catalina, what was the mood like?

The mood? We were all young blokes going to war. They were a mixed brew. When we got to Townsville you report to a movement officer and he looks at your movement order

28:30 and sees where you're going. He says, "Right, I've got a Catalina leaving today. I've got all these blokes going on that route" so he'll load that flying boat or on a ship or anything depending what the movement order said. So none of us knew where we were going. No, no-one. I was posted to advanced RAF command as the term was. I had found out

29:00 none of our blokes that had qualified with me were going to advanced RAF command and none of the blokes on the course. So I knew nobody on the Catalina going forth. They were all going to various places.

Did you land in Port Moresby – was it day or night?

Daytime. About lunchtime.

And what did you think?

Talk about action. The place was humming. The harbour,

29:30 they had every imaginable ship in it. Naval ships, warships, troop ships, coastal frigate. Port Moresby was one of the main supply points for the islands and they had everything on the harbour. But as I say I was rustled from the harbour to the staging camp and back. But I didn't stay a night in Port Moresby.

30:00 I was on the Dutch boat the first night. My memory of Port Moresby is that I saw the first natives for the first time. Struck me as that. But mainly Australian troops. There were a few Yanks. But it was an Australian base.

What were your first impressions when you did see your first natives in Port Moresby?

Very interesting as a matter of fact. I got a far more vivid recollection of my first native in Morotai. We got off

30:30 the boat at Morotai and we went into the staging camp. They've all got these staging camps, where they sort out where you're going. It was almost on the water edge and it was just dusk. I think I'd had my evening meal and I was wandering about and I stood on the water shore water off bay at Morotai. The bay was full of quite a few warships and other craft and across

31:00 the bay in a motor boat – I think they call them Lakatoi. They're little shells with outriggers on either side. They paddle them obviously. And here across the harbour full of the paraphernalia of war was a native lady an din the front of a Lakatoi she had a two year old. Couldn't be any less. I thought to myself, I don't know where she's going. – I hope she makes it safely. My first sight

31:30 of a native in Morotai. She was going about her business and going somewhere or other. I did see other natives. I think Morotai had been cleared of Japs. They all bunked off into the jungle. They were still around. I remember the first briefing we got that they came down and raided, but they were mainly after food. They weren't after creating another war.

32:00 They were dangerous. The natives had all gone from the plantation. The plantation area has all been cleared otherwise it was all jungle. So the armed forces based their camps or their huts and tents around the coconut plantations. I never saw any natives. I was there for about a month or so. And then two of them came round and they had

32:30 hand carved mementos. One of them was that knife I've got. The other was a model of a Lakatoi. I had acquired a few American dollars which was the main source of currency up there. I wanted to buy this knife and the Lakatoi off this fellow and he wouldn't have anything. Didn't matter how much I offered him he wasn't interested. And he pointed. I realised he was after some

33:00 clothes. So I took a punt and I traded in an old air force shirt – one of my three, in return for the Lakatoi and the model knife that I've got now. I still use that model knife to open the mail. And I sent my Lakatoi down to my grandson who was army mad. I sent it down as a souvenir.

33:30 **In either of those landings in Port Moresby or Morotai, were you armed?**

Yep. We had a rifle and a bayonet.

What was the briefing before you got off the ship in Morotai?

We got a briefing when we landed at Morotai to tell us that the Japs had taken to the hills, they were still

34:00 numerous, they were still raiding, we had to be careful, and that we were to have our rifle and our ammunition ready at all times. I was in the RAF command unit which was a comparatively small unit. To provide some sort of

34:30 alarm system with these Japs that were coming down and raiding the cookhouses – although they did more than that. In one about a fortnight after that we got a report that some bloke got his throat cut in an attempt, not so far from us just across the air strip. A Jap had come down after food. They had slit trenches under – we were all living in tents, or most of them were in tents.

35:00 They had slit trenches adjacent to the tent. Certain personnel were allocated to this slit trench. They had parapets also that were built up and other personnel were allocated to this parapet. But the trouble was the slit trench was all mostly full of water. You'd bale it out and the rain'd came and slit trenches weren't too popular. Parapets were a far better defensive base. Or so we thought.

35:30 They had a rather high tech system. They had strung a piece of heavy duty wire on posts about that high all around the perimeter of our tent facilities and on these wire they had hung half a dozen empty tins like jam tins or fruit tins or bully beef tins. Punched holes in the bottom of the

36:00 tins so they wouldn't hold water and hung them on the wire all together. And the theory was if anybody stumbled, these rattle. You had the guard on duty. He did two hours on and four hours off. The theory was that if he heard these tins rattle he would sound a siren. When you sound a siren all the folks that weren't on shift, blokes asleep and that

36:30 grabbed their rifle and took posts around the thing and were ready to repel the invaders. Most of the rattles were due to false alarms. Fellas would forget they were there and go for a walk and rattle into one of these things and quite frequently they'd say, "Don't sound that bloody siren, it's only me." But it was reasonably effective. It gave us some sort of security. But after the raid on the fellow where he got virtually killed

37:00 we took to sleeping with our bayonets on our chest and many years later, after the war was over, I came on a friend of ours and he said he used to go to sleep with his revolver on his shoulder because it was a bit nerve wracking.

At the time that you were sent to Morotai did you have the feeling that the tide of the war had turned against the Japanese?

I think so. They were starting to get pushed back.

37:30 It wasn't till we heard about the atomic bombs falling that we realised things were really starting to go our way.

At that time that you were posted to Morotai what were your feelings or opinions towards the Japanese?

Well

38:00 by this time we had heard about the prisoners of war and I think I had little time for them. They did some terrible things to our fellas.

How were you hearing about that?

Being a wireless mechanic I had acquired a certain amount of skill.

38:30 There was another wireless mech [mechanic] at RAF command with me and we heard that somebody in a unit on the other side of the island had built himself a short-wave radio. This other wireless mech said to me, “We should be able to make a short wave radio.” We thought about it and we had a fair bit of the equipment and we could scrounge around or make the rest of it.

39:00 To pick up a signal you’ve got to have a circuit that resonates at that signal. To do that you have a coil and a tuning condenser and your turn the condenser round just like a tuning station till you’re on the wavelength of that station and then you can amplify it. I had a pair of earphones on. We had no tuning condenser. No way we could get one. And all of the RAF aircraft –

39:30 we had spare parts and parts that we had salvaged from crashed planes. We had a fair few of the spare parts but we didn’t have the necessary coil to get a tuned circuit. We knew that the

40:00 Radio Australia broadcast on a short-wave radio and from our training we knew that short wave was a certain ratio and we knew we could wind a coil to get this frequency we wanted, but the problem was that we could scrounge enough wire and we

40:30 - but we didn’t have a condenser which tunes the circuit to the frequency which enables you to pick up Radio Australia. All we knew that Radio Australia broadcast on a short wave up there anyway. We fiddled round and we eventually decided that we couldn’t get a condenser that would enable us to tune the circuit. We were about

41:00 at our wit’s end and this other bloke said, “Hey remember when we were a kid, if we used to make crystal sets and we used to tap into a circuit on the crystal set” and that gave us the clue. We got a wooden former, wound wire round and we turned every third or fourth piece of wire into a tapping point, tuned it into our aerial and

41:30 with a pair of earphones on and a battery we tapped into the airwaves. It did very well. But all we were getting was the RAF airline station with the nearby control tower.

Tape 5

00:31 **You were telling us what you could hear on your short-wave radio.**

All we could hear on the short-wave radio of course was the aircraft in the vicinity that were coming down and the control tower. So we fiddled around. We were getting nowhere. We rewound another coil and this time we had a smaller

01:00 diameter of a coil. We had to use jam tins for a coil, but of course the jam tin was unsuitable because it picked up the signal as well as the wire round it. You lost the signal. We eventually ended up with a piece of bamboo and we used that to wind our coil round. After a fair bit of experimenting we got a signal.

01:30 We could hear the signal, but very faintly. We were getting somewhere. But we didn’t know what it was. That night we had another go at it. We wound a coil on this piece of bamboo ad we what they call tab it – instead of winding it around every time you wound it around about three quarters and then make a loop so you can

02:00 clip onto the loop. We fiddled around and after much experimenting we heard a clear signal. We heard a voice. And it turned out not to be Radio Australia, but the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] with their overseas broadcast. We got it for about two minute and he finished off. So we hung tight. We didn’t know what happened. We tried again next night. Somehow or other the atmospheric

02:30 conditions were not suitable, but we knew we were on the track and I think on the third night we dug it out and we got most of the BBC’s short-wave overseas news. We were very thrilled with that. But we couldn’t leave it in the wireless maintenance mech’s hut, where everybody came in and out. Most of the officers didn’t know we were making it, but most of the other technicians did. So we took it down to our tent and hid it under

03:00 the packing case we had there. From there on – not every night because sometimes the atmospherics was crook – but most nights, we managed to get through to the BBC. We used to listen at night and came in and tell the blokes what was happening. We kept that quiet right up to the end of the war. We heard on that

03:30 the news not that they had dropped the atomic bomb on the first place – where'd they drop the first bomb, Hiroshima was it? We didn't get that. But they dropped the second bomb on Arasiba [Nagasaki] I think it was. We were able to spread the news around Morotai that the bomb had dropped. So that was an achievement we got.

04:00 We kept it on the quiet because it would have been confiscated. We were able to keep it quiet all the time we were in Morotai. We kept it under a kerosene can. You've probably never heard of a kerosene can. In the old days kerosene was packed in four gallon tins and two tins went to a case and that went up to the islands and was available in Australia. We had a kerosene case and we put our wireless under sight of the

04:30 kerosene case and we listened in, whenever we got the opportunity and passed the news on to the troops by means of our home made wireless set. So my training as a wireless mechanic didn't go astray. I managed to get communications.

Good bit of Aussie ingenuity.

Yes. I had a bit of help. The other bloke was a pilot's mechanic too. We played around with it. We thought it was quite an achievement.

05:00 **Let's go back and fill in some of the details. What are some of the day to day duties you had on Morotai?**

We had a 12 hour shift, on and off. You'd start six o'clock in the morning and work through six o'clock at night. The next shift would take over and do six to six. It was a 24 hour watch. Being the RAF command

05:30 they had fixed communications, transmitters and receivers on the ground, and contact with RAF command in Melbourne, the Yank command. And then they had a command to their air strips. We had two on Morotai. The Yanks had many more.

06:00 We had air to ground communication that they maintained contact with their squadron leaders or whoever's leading the flight upstairs.

As a wireless mechanic were you monitoring the communications that were coming in?

We did service all the equipment every day. That's the stuff that was on the ground. And then as the planes came in it'd all depend on what the circumstance were.

06:30 If they were there for a while we might do a long maintenance on them. If they were only there for a short trip we'd just give them a rough check over. But the main thing was that if they were in trouble we'd rip the set out and put another one in and take the one that was a bit dodgy back to a base and work on that. We always had a new one in, in a hurry, if it was badly damaged. A few planes come in badly shot up. Had to give them away.

07:00 We just salvaged what we could and keep the parts for spares.

The wireless sets that were in the aircraft, were they standard or were they different depending on the aircraft?

No. There were several types of them but basically they were standard. The bombers would have a different type than the fighters because they had probably longer range. But they all had their frequencies. Most of them were about seven frequencies

07:30 so if they couldn't get through on the one frequency they'll turn the switch to the next. Far as I know all the wireless were Australian made by AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia].

What about the aircraft? What type of aircraft were they?

We had Australian built Beauforts we were very proud of. And Australian manned, but American built Liberators.

08:00 Plus a whole variety of fighters. Even though it was RAF command we didn't have too many RAF squadrons in the area. The Yanks had the big bombers that did the long distance bombing and they had their own fighters and support. But we had a couple of squadrons there. They mainly were ferrying back to Australia.

08:30 **As a wireless technician, what relationship did you have with the actual air crew, the pilots and navigators?**

Very little. They operated them. It was our job to see that they worked. Whenever they landed, depending on how much time we had, do a maintenance on them, do a check on them and see how they worked and have a go at that. If the pilot said, "My RT's [Radio Transmitter]

09:00 a bit dicey," we'd get it out and put another one in. Most of the time they had a few minutes to refuel and get on their way.

I've heard stories of pilots coming back and making ground crew that worked on their plane go on a test flight with them.

I had a few test flights, but that was mainly to test the sets themselves, not to test that we had done a good job or not. Because

09:30 the procedure you followed after you did a few checks and the set looked to be working correctly, you had a set procedure that you call base – the aircraft tower – and see that it was working on all frequencies. No good working on one. Basically if the job was too big to do in the plane we'd rip it out and put another one in and send him on his way.

What was that like, flying

10:00 **in the test flights?**

It was very exciting. I remember the first one I saw camouflage underneath a camouflage net or underneath a palm tree you 'd be right. But I got up on one of these test flights and looked down and saw how clear things were on the ground. Even under a well camouflaged net you still see very clearly. That woke me up to the idea how ineffective camouflage really was.

10:30 **Did it quench your thirst again for wanting to fly?**

Some of the pilots, of course were only too happy to put the wind up you. They'd say, "Watch this" and take you for a dive and you wouldn't have a clue what was happening but you'd know it was very exciting. But we didn't get the opportunity much to 'get up' because discipline was pretty strict and they didn't take off and do a 'joy flight', just to go round the drome. And most of the sets

11:00 were tested on the ground. The theory was, that if they worked from the plane to the tower they should work from 'upstairs' to the tower.

The bombers that were going out on missions from there, do you know where they were flying?

Yes. They were flying – I don't know where they were flying to. The Japs were retreating at this time and they were mainly bombing the islands around the approaches to Japan.

11:30 Although several of the big American Liberators bombed Japan itself. But they actually didn't have anything to do with those. Our fellas had Liberators but they were manned by Australians and under Australian control.

In the interaction that you did have with the Yanks what did you think of the equipment that they had?

Wonderful. They were a very advanced

12:00 technical nation. There sets were miles ahead of ours. Ours worked quite efficiently. But the Yanks had 'bells and buckles and braces' and everything else on it.

What about the actual conditions between the American camp and the Australian camp?

The same thing applied up there. The Americans had far better tents. They had tents that had a

12:30 big centre pole and the side poles were about six foot high which meant they had I think it was eight men and they could all stand up and walk around. The Australians had these 'tepee' tents that were about six foot in the middle and that's the only place you could stand up if you wanted to move around. Otherwise you had to bend down or crouch. The Americans were far more serviced than us. They had all sorts of high quality

13:00 canvas compared with ours.

What about things like supplies that they had for rations?

They lived better than we did.

Heard some stories of ice cream and coca cola factories.

Yes. I'm pretty sure they called them PXs. I don't know what it stands for – PXs. The Americans had everything just like that had in,

13:30 I was telling you about the one in Melbourne. The ones up at Morotai – not that we were allowed in the American canteens. They were out of bounds to Australian troops. But we knew and heard that they had ice-cream and as you say, Coca-Cola. They couldn't do much without Coca-Cola. They were unheard of in our place. We got a bar of chocolate occasionally; we were doing well.

Were there ever any times that you knew of Aussie guys

14:00 **swapping or acquiring American things?**

Yes. There were. A big trade with the Americans was Australian beer. For 'some reason' or other, the Americans preferred Australian beer over there own. I think it was probably more stronger beer. We got a ration of two bottles of Australian beer once a week.

14:30 The Yanks would come round after ration day. I think it was Friday. And inquire if we had any surplus beer. Most of our Australian fellows were good drinkers themselves. But the Yanks would pay good money for a bottle of Australian beer. They'd give you 50 American dollars for a bottle of Australian beer. Money didn't mean much up there because there was nowhere to spend it. The Yanks got quite a good salary compared with what

15:00 our blokes did.

Do you ever recall what the Australian beer was?

Yes. It came from all round Australia. You never knew what you were going to get. For instance, I was a Queensland and our fellas preferred 'Four X'. But we got Perth beer, 'Swan' beer. We got the Melbourne beers. And of course the competition between the fellas from Sydney and those from Melbourne and they all preferred their own

15:30 beer. When New South Wales fellas got a ration of New South Wales beer, they were happy for a week. Same with the Victorians. Basically the beer came from wherever they could get it. No such thing as putting an order in for a 'couple of bottles of Four X'.

In the time that you were on Morotai was there any time for recreation or was it too tense a situation?

No. We

16:00 did have recreation and that was the Yanks put on pictures at night. But apart from that there was no spare time. There was no such leave and so forth and we weren't allowed to wander around the islands, but a couple of us did. No. There was no recreation there. No sports ground. The main clearing was the air strips that the Yanks put down.

16:30 **Can you just describe the actual Australian camp for us? If you were walking from one end to the other what would you see?**

Bear in mind it's a tropical island. Where they hadn't cleared it for coconut plantations and native villages it was jungle. In the early days there were only native tracks through the jungle. But when the Yanks came with all their 'earth moving', they soon changed that.

17:00 They put down air strips all over the place and they also put down tracks so they could get around far easier. After the Americans had finished their roadwork. Because of the thick undergrowth and the fact that the plantations had been cleared and they were the only comparative clearing on the island, all the units tried to camp in a

17:30 plantation if you could. So most of them were parked under 'whopping' big coconut palms. That had an element of risk too. In the days when they were manufacturing copra up there the nuts were harvested regularly and the natives apparently

18:00 cut them down before they got to the stage of being over ripe. That went by the by and the nuts were falling wherever they fell. A coconut with a husk round it is quite a heavy thing. They would fall continually. If they fell on the tent it was just a dull 'thump'. But if they fell on a mess hut which had a galvanised roof you wondered what hit you with a mighty bang.

18:30 We had a couple of near misses. One bloke got collarbones broken because a nut fell down and hit him there. While I was up there apparently they got a bit worried about it and they enlisted a team of natives. I don't know where they came from but they arrived one day with their machetes and a cord they put around the coconut tree. up they went and slashed them all down in no time. I think probably they were natives worked on the plantation in peace time.

19:00 They'd taken to the hills while the fighting was going on.

Was there much interaction with any of the natives up there?

No, as I said to you earlier, I only saw natives on three occasions. One was a lady paddling across the bay, the second one was the couple that bartered the air force shirts with me and the other ones were these fellas that came in and cut down nuts.

19:30 I think they were encouraged to keep out of the troop lines. I know the Americans fed them. They didn't have any chance of cultivating their own gardens and I know the Yanks used to feed them. I only heard that. I never actually seen it. They were on American rations strength. They got the same food. I don't know what they thought of it. Then of course they could live on the land as best they could.

20:00 Plenty of bananas and paw paws growing up there.

Did you ever see the POW come through at all?

Yes I did actually. The first POWs I saw, was on a troop train going south when I was going down to Holsworthy. We pulled into one of the stations over the border – Tenterfield or Glen Innes – word got

20:30 round that there was some Japs in the last carriage. Course, first meal stop about 500 troops go down to

look at these poor old fellas. About half a dozen of them – they looked frightened. The Japs had the idea of being captured as a national disgrace. You should put down your life for the emperor. But these blokes just looked like young

21:00 fellas in uniform, not knowing much what was happening to them and hoping for the best. I don't think any of our fellas spoke Japanese. I know a few of them tried to talk to them in pidgin English and things like that. Didn't get anywhere but I think they were – there was a prisoner of war camp at Cowra. But there weren't too many prisoners of war taken. The Japs didn't believe in being taken prisoners of war.

21:30 **You didn't see any in Morotai?**

I saw a couple in Morotai. On one of these night raids I was telling you about, a couple of the poor devils they were half starved and they looked a wreck. Our fellas caught them. They didn't shoot them. The Japs weren't armed and they didn't have any ammunition anyway. Even if they had a rifle.

22:00 Our fellas caught a couple. I don't know what happened to them. I suppose they were sent south somewhere.

What were the orders on those to do with the night raids?

On this night raid I was telling you about, when you manned the rampart you were ordered to fire at anything that moved outside your perimeter. It was pitch black. You couldn't have a blinking clue and even if something moved you wouldn't see it. But we had

22:30 a couple of false alarms when these jam tins rang the alarm and everybody grabbed a rifle and somebody's started shooting at shadows and everybody else'd join in. There was a bit of shots fired for a while. But I never saw any actually at night. Although there might have been false alarms or they might have been shot off. But it was common for them to come down from the hills and try and get food. Course if they got shot that was the emperor's –

23:00 'serving the emperor'. Didn't really worry them.

Did you fire your weapon in any of those night raids?

Yes. I fired my 303 at shadows. All you could do in a night raid like that was to put up a curtain of fire. If they were out there you'd say, "Righto let's hope we bring down enough fire to frighten them off." You didn't – I never saw anything to shoot at because you couldn't see anything. What lights we had were all dimmed.

23:30 The 'twit' senses and the ramparts are faced so you had some sort of perimeter. This was only a perimeter around one unit. The other I suppose had no different ideas at all. But the rampants and the slit trenches weren't uncommon.

Do you recall what sense you had when you first had to fire your weapon overseas?

24:00 Not really. Ammunition was very scarce in the Australian army. My training on firing a 303 was to be taken up to the Redbank firing range – a suburb of Brisbane where they had a firing range – and I was allowed three shots of my 303 and all the rest was theory. When I was commissioned

24:30 I didn't have my rifle. I mentioned before I had my revolver and I got six shots on that. So I had very little experience at all. But in Morotai the ammunition – we had the guns in the Australian fighters and the Australian bombers were 303 ammunition and there was plenty of the ammunition the armourers used to use when they re-armed the

25:00 aircraft as they landed. So we had plenty of ammunition then. I think we had about ten rounds to a clip. You could put a clip in the magazine of the 303 and fire ten shots without reloading and then you put another clip on. But no I had only fired half a dozen times at

25:30 shadows. Nothing spectacular. No glory to report.

But did being overseas, serving your country, firing live ammunition, did that somewhat satisfy that sense of adventure you'd been looking for or was it far too serious for that?

I think by the time I got to Morotai my sense of adventure was a bit dimmed.

26:00 We had heard of the 8th Division and the tough time they got. I think that sobered us down a bit. I think most of us by that time, decided the best thing we could do was to keep our head down and get back home. I think the spirit of adventure was in enlisting and getting trained and going off. Chaps who went overseas in Africa, they no doubt

26:30 have got a different version of it. But the fellas I was with, we got a bit bored with doing nothing.

Was there a story you had for us about being asked to fix a cipher?

Where did you get that from?

We have spies everywhere.

Yes. That's a good story. I was a humble

27:00 pilot's mechanic and I had been trained on fixed RAF wireless and the one in the aircraft and I knew a bit about them but anything else I didn't know. Hopeless on American stuff although you could say, oh it looks like a valve, I can see where that's defect and put another on in. But being at RAF command we had communications with all the important people around the world and

27:30 because the messages passing through were classified as all very hush hush they were all coded. We had this 'X' machine. This 'X' [Enigma Coding device] machine has quite a bit of history. I did a bit of research on it when I came back. Apparently the Germans started it off and they came up with a scheme of a series of drums with the letters of the alphabet around the perimeter of the drum and

28:00 wires leading from a keyboard. Say, for instance you pressed the letter, B, on your keyboard. The impulse would go to this first drum and to come in to a terminal of a letter might be, K, and it would pass from the letter, K, on one side of the drum to another terminal on the outside of the drum which might be, L. So you press, B, it comes to, K, it comes out, L, the next time

28:30 and so on through I think there were five of these drums on this X machine. Then it came out on a printer or on code in a jumble of letters. To make it even more complicated there was a five letter code and it was changed at a fixed time every day. I think it was six o'clock in the morning. I remember the duty officer coming in with his key and he'd open the safe on the command post and he'd

29:00 take out this code book and he'd run down, find the day, find what code it was, fix the code in the machine for the day – all at six o'clock in the morning. The other bloke who was with him would check it. They'd lock the code book away into the safe and this was done at any centre that had the particular machines all at the one time – allowing for different time zone – all at the one time at the one day. So the code was only in existence

29:30 for 24 hours. If the Japs picked it up and were able to work on it, it'd be in a different code the next day. The Germans perfected this and the Allies couldn't crack it for quite a long while. Then I think the story is that the British army over ran a German command post and got hold of a machine. It didn't help them very much because they only had the

30:00 machine. Then a British Naval vessel sunk a German submarine. But the German submarine instead of jettisoning its code books, as it should have done immediately, it came to the surface on being attacked, it came to the surface after being attacked and they abandoned ship, but in the panic maybe the captain was killed, I don't know. But the British warship put a landing party on the submarine and they rescued

30:30 the code book. So they had the machine and the code book and they were able to break the code. For quite a long while the British Intelligence were able to decipher the German codes in Europe. But the Yanks took it up and they improved it in some way and it was this was what the Yanks used. The particular day I was a shift mechanic –

31:00 all the technicians worked a 12 hour shift and they all gathered in a hut where we did our maintenance. We had one of these 'X' machines in the RAF command post. The phone rang in the workshop and the flight sergeant in charge answered the phone and he listened and he called out to the assembled fellows on duty, "Does any of you blokes know anything about the 'X' machine?"

31:30 All shook their head. Didn't know anything about it. I heard him say, "Nope. Nobody knows anything about it. Mm, mm. Okay." He turned around and he said, "You're a wireless mech, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." "Go up and see what you can do." "Hang on, I don' t know anything about 'X' machines." "Go and see what you can do" he said. So I go into the headquarters and they had five big tents where the RAF command personnel were

32:00 stationed. But they had one which they called the coding centre and this 'X' machine was in the coding centre. Usually top brass [senior command] didn't go in there. It was just a duty officer and a couple of signallers on duty. But this day all the top brass in the unit were crowded round the 'X' machine. I come into the tent with my little toolbox. I remember the duty officer turning round and saying to the CO of the RAF command,

32:30 "Here's the technician now, sir. He'll fix it." The CO said to me, "You better get this fixed in a hurry." I refrained to tell him that my chance of fixing this was 'my own and Buckley's'. I hadn't a clue what was wrong. So I looked at the machine and I asked the duty coder what happened. He said it just closed up on me, just went blank.

33:00 I went round the back and the machine was hard up against the side of the tent. To provide electricity for the various machines we had what I think they called KVAs. KiloVolt Amp Generators or something. They were diesel driven generators and they made a heck of a noise all the time and they vibrated badly.

33:30 This was about ten feet away, three or four metres away, and it provided power to most of the RAF command tents and machines. I got round behind the tent and the back of this machine and I got out the tools and I thought, "Well I'll have a look. I'll take the back plate off." I had a look. Of course, being a Yank machine they had special screws. I had a normal screwdriver, the Yanks of course have got

34:00 screws in their you can't get off with a special screwdriver. So I'm getting nowhere fast. Eventually busting a screwdriver and a couple of wrenches I got the back off. I optimistically looking into the back of this machine and there's wires everywhere and I hadn't a clue anything of this. I got the torch out and I get down on me back and I'm right underneath and I can't see anything and I look down and here on the floor of the 'X' machine

34:30 was a tiny brass nut. Being very bright I said, 'that should go somewhere'. So I got in again, I looked around, and lo and behold! there was a terminal hanging loose from a screw and it was quite obvious what had happened was with the vibration the nut had come off. "Here's the go. I'm going to get good at this." I put this thing back. I screw it back. I'm half underneath the machine

35:00 and I shout out to a fella, "Try that." I was a bit cocky. I thought I'd got it. A voice comes back, "Still not working." I'd exercised all I knew about 'X' machines. I better have to come out and acknowledge I haven't got very far with it. Then a penny fell. On most of these machines they have a safety switch. When you

35:30 take the back of a machine off, the safety switch opens and nothing can go through. I thought, "I wonder if this thing's got a safety switch." Right down the corner about this size, there's a safety switch. So I put the thing back and I screwed the nuts up and this time not quite as hopefully I said, "Try that" and a voice of triumph, "She's right mate" and as I go out the CO says, "Well done LAC." That was my moment in glory.

36:00 And I didn't know what I was doing.

What did you tell the other fellas?

Oh yes. They ribbed me I came back and of course all the blokes in the tent knew. Nobody actually knew what I had done. So when I got back all my mates, "How did you go?" "I fixed it. It was a short in the 'VH Gaff' circuit." That's just a bit of a technical term sounded a bit better. When the pressed me, "What did you do?" "I just screwed the nut

36:30 back. So they basically brought me back down and said, all I'd done is screwed back the nut. Anyhow I claimed I put the RAF command 'X' machine back on the air. I suppose we went back to the war after that. Able to get their messages through.

Speaking of getting message through, how was the mail delivery on Morotai?

Spasmodic. When the boat got through or a plane got through. You couldn't guarantee. They realised that mail

37:00 was very important and they did everything to get mail through. When we were up in Townsville it came through regularly as you'd expect. But up in Morotai it was spasmodic. There were an awful lot of fellas on Morotai even though they were scattered all round the place. They either had to fly it in or pick it up by boat. Flying it in they gave a pretty high priority. But supply of vital things took place and not all the mail came through and the boat took much longer

37:30 to get there. But probably about once a week, sometimes better. It all depends how it came through. Always a 'heyday' to see how many the girlfriends back home had written to you.

Being in the army when you were the one doing the censoring – how did you go in the air force when you would have been having your letters censored?

Strangely enough I posted my letters in the air force and I never knew what happened.

38:00 Whether they got censored or not. Whether the ones back home got censored I don't know. Did you ever get any letters from me censored? I knew the rote not to say – did you? Yeah. None of the people I wrote to ever come back and said half your letter's been torn apart. I knew what you were allowed to do and what you weren't allowed to do.

What did you think of the air force officers?

38:30 I thought the fighters, the pilots, the aircrew were excellent. Salt of the earth. Australian manhood at its best. They were wonderful. But the wingless wonders. They were a varied mob.

39:00 In answer to your question there were good blokes and bad blokes, just the same as in the army, I suppose. Ask some of the gunners what they thought of me, they'd say he was a pain in the neck, what have you. Some virtually looked after their staff or their team. Other fellows didn't give a darn. That was one of the big problems with the army and the air force. They all had, an officers' mess,

39:30 a sergeants' mess and an Ors' [Other Ranks] mess. That created an artificial distinction immediately. I appreciate that the fighter pilots, they deserved to get better tucker [food] and they got it and better service – they shouldn't be in queues. But it did create a bit of a 'them and us' atmosphere. But on the whole I think that both in the air force and the army, all ranks accepted that was the way it was and took it as such.

40:00 **A couple of the air force guys, that we have spoken to, have said that to them, it seemed to be a real class distinction in the air force. Did you find that more so than when you were in the**

army?

Rightly so, I think aircrew deserve any priorities they got. It was a sheer matter of necessity. You had to look after the aircrew. You had to feed them well. If the rations were short the aircrew blokes had to have the best because they were going up

40:30 and they'd come back and land and a few hours later they'd be back in the air again. I don't think anybody begrudged them that. The wingless wonders, they were a bit different. Bloke who's filling his time in the officer in charge of the quartermaster's store, he'd get inclined to throw his weight around but you took that. It was a fact of life.

Tape 6

00:32 **Having met Pat and then going overseas, how hard was that to leave?**

A bit hard, 'courting by correspondence'. We wrote for about six months I suppose. I was in Melbourne about three months, four months, I think. Most of those

01:00 weekends I managed to pass the Friday night exam, so I got the weekend off. A couple of times I was roped in for cookhouse duty or guard duty. That put it out. But the rest of the weekends I got out. I saw a fair bit of her over that time. We corresponded by mail and eventually I got discharged over in Western Australia and I came back and got married in Melbourne.

Can you tell us about – was there

01:30 **an army magazine called 'Salt'?**

There was indeed. I don't know where that was printed. It was an old fashioned 'Roneo machine', the old fashioned duplicator. It consisted of I think two sheets of foolscap folded in the middle and stapled. It was called 'Salt' and it was issued by the army publications.

02:00 It was purely for the troops. Gave them a bit of war news, bring them up to date and who was who and who was new and who was promoted a major general and that sort of thing. But it came out every fortnight I think. But we never got it every fortnight. Sometimes it came very late. But it was the army – I think it was called the Army Official Publication but where they got the name 'Salt'

02:30 from I don't know. It certainly was in existence.

Did you ever see many army blokes around the place?

No. I'm pretty sure there were no Australian army fellows on Morotai. I'm pretty certain there was none. Mainly air force there. Occasionally a few sailors, on a boat, pulled in. But no army blokes. I didn't see any Australian army blokes

03:00 in the islands at all, except for the few hours in Moresby. I saw plenty there. And a few on the ship coming up. I don't think that we were fighting on many of those islands around that place.

Besides the mail that you got, did you receive care packages?

Yeah. The Red Cross had a system and probably other ones, but the Red Cross are the ones that

03:30 I remember. Occasionally you would get a 'comfort box' and it came in a small shoe box and it was cakes of soap and toothpaste and things like that and usually a piece of fruitcake, a few sweets.

Well received?

Oh my word yes. Course the old story, there was never enough of them to go around. I think they had to

04:00 to be careful that they didn't have a distribution, until they had enough to go around. But I think I had two or three in the time that I was up in Morotai. Enough to remember them.

At that stage were you thinking about what you'd like to do after the war?

Yes and no. I remember the main topic of conversation

04:30 towards the end of the war was one, when we were going to get out of here – here being the islands – and secondly, I wonder if I'll get a job when I get back. Gradually as things firmed up and the war ended and fellas started to think about it, that was the one topic. What sort of job I'll get when I get back.

Because when you went fulltime with the army what sort of discussion did you have

05:00 **with your employer at the time?**

'Shell' – I'll give it a plug – were an excellent employee. They not only gave me 'leave of absence', but they made up my pay. When I started, I was only on five bob a day, so Shell made up a bit. When I got to be Lieutenant they didn't have to pay me. But when I got into the air force they paid it up again. So they

made up my pay right from the time I was there and they gave me a job back when I came back.

05:30 **Can you explain for people who have no idea what them 'making up your pay' actually means?**

In Shells case I had to tell them my rank and they knew that I got six bob a day when I started. Say Shell was paying me ten bob a day they paid the difference. When I got promoted, I think a lieutenant got 11 shillings a day, and I think Shell didn't have to pay me then because I wasn't getting much from them in those days. I think the pay at Shell was about five pound a week –

06:00 when I went back I think it was about five pound a week.

And they told you when you came back there'd be a job for you?

Yes. I never actually went back to Shell as I think it told you earlier. I was called up when we were out on a weekend bivouac. But I did manage to get in and see them, or I wrote to them, or telephoned them telling them, I won't be seeing them again. We knew

06:30 that was their policy. A lot of fellas left from Shell and they made up their pay in every instant and they all got a job when they came back.

So were you thinking at the time when you started to think about going back home and getting a job, did you think Shell was going to be?

Yes. Shell was very good to me and looked after us well. When I came back I simply came back. They gave us a debriefing session where they said if you can't stand sitting in an office for six hours

07:00 at a stretch, get out and walk. A few blokes had to do that. But they did. I got a job as soon as I came back and it helped considerably. I didn't have to worry.

What exactly had you done in Shell before you left for the war?

I joined Shell about 1936. Only there a couple of years before war broke out.

07:30 I had studied accountancy at night school and I qualified and I got this job at Shell on the strength of that accountancy. When I left, I was simply a lowly paid clerk in Shell. I hadn't been there long enough to warrant any promotion. I left as a clerk and I came back as a clerk.

08:00 **Did you learn any skills at Shell that carried over into your army or air force life?**

No. Not really I don't think. Shell – most big firms in those days – were highly disciplined. They had the finance manager or accountant and he was the number one front man. He said, 'jump', you jumped. So you never queried anything.

08:30 Shell were a very fair firm. I'm not criticising them in any way. They did have this strong discipline. You did as you were told. The Shell system had been worked out before and people with more experience than you knew what was best for you and you did that. The conditions were excellent. I had no complaints about the conditions. I find that a couple of years at Shell were giving me a good basis for what I struck in the army. But it was a different world altogether.

09:00 **Now that you'd learnt practically a new trade as a wireless mechanic, did you see any future in that?**

Not really. I wanted to be in motor torpedo boats. I got that purely because of the luck of the draw. They were short of wireless mechanics at the time and several blokes were chosen. I don't think too many got their selection unless you wanted to be a cook or a guard or something they might – any

09:30 unpopular mustering you might have got it. But none of the other ones.

Must have still been handy to have a new skill.

Yes. It came back – boys of my age always were handy. Their Dads taught them how to use a hammer and a saw. There was no waste. Everything was fully utilised. You had a packing case you turned it into something. I had that sort of background. When I went to the wireless mechanic

10:00 I learnt a whole lot of new skills quite apart from the theory. It stood me in good stead when I – even the wireless now I can still deal – not that I know enough about it now as things have changed completely. But I still know the theory of the thing and I think how things work.

So are you going to tell the story about … ?

Yes. I must tell you this story. We had

10:30 pictures every night of the week courtesy of the US Army. They had the projector and a screen and we had a ready made open theatre on the runway of the airstrip. We were camped very close to the air strip and every night the crowd that were in walking distance would walk and buses would bring troops from other

11:00 outlying parts of the island over to the airstrip to go to the pictures. Now you never knew what was on

because no program was announced. And they showed the same film night after night until a new one came along. If a new one came in three days and you didn't go you missed out on the new one. But they also had a very nifty idea. The priority of the airstrip was obviously for aircraft.

11:30 They had to have a system that the aircraft could be cleared if a craft was coming in. What you would do, you would come along about six, seven o'clock. Invariably it would be raining. You would have your groundsheet around you and a tin hat on to keep yourself comparatively dry. You'd take up your position sitting down on a box or anything you could get hold of on the airstrip.

12:00 If the airstrip was not going to be used or the air tower hadn't received any knowledge there were planes coming in or taking out, the Yanks would drive in two trucks. One had the screen mounted up on it and the other one had the projector. They'd run cables from the projector and the screen to one of these KVAs that generated the electricity and away we'd go. But

12:30 if a plane was expected in, you weren't allowed on the airway and you had to wait until you got the light. The drama really happened when the show started because if a plane was unexpected and was coming in the aircraft tower would fire a very light or a star shell that would come over, light u p the whole – everybody grabbed their gear and their seat and rushed off to the corner or the edge of the airstrip

13:00 and the two trucks would drive off and would clear the drome. For safety reasons the Yanks had a military police truck that would go up and have a searchlight mounted on the truck and it'd swoop over to see that nobody left a box or anything like that on the tarmac. Then the plane would land, taxi off into a landing bay and the tower would fire another signal.

13:30 We'd all come back and we'd start again. So it was quite an adventure. As I say, it invariably rained. So with the noise of the generators going continually and the rain pelting down sometimes you didn't hear much of the dialogue. But you could see the picture. Now the other thing – I told you how we had made this receiver to see if we could pick up and I told you we picked up the

14:00 BBC and we had heard of the atomic bomb being dropped not on the first place but the second place. Nagasaki, I think was the second place. We heard all about that. We gathered that things weren't going too well for the Japs. Anyhow we were at the pictures one night. They only had the one projector. They always used to have to stop and put a new spool in.

14:30 The screen would go up brilliant light and the fellas got up and stretched their legs and settle down again as it was reloaded. There was always a gap of about five minutes by the time they had it loaded up. This particular time they had it loaded and the second reel seemed to be taking an awful long time to come on. All of a sudden some bloke got onto the truck where

15:00 the screen was and shouted, "The war's over! The war's over!" It's hard to believe at the moment. We were sort of expecting it. But it was very hard to believe. Bit of bedlam on then and shouting and screaming and hats going up in the air. But the most dramatic moment, the Yanks or the American troops had Bofors guns mounted on the side of the airstrip to protect the strip.

15:30 The screen would be only about two, three metres above the ground. Quite a big screen. These American gunners lowered their Bofors down to perpendicular and fired a clip of five Bofors shells through the screen and tore it to tatters. They were flying on a flat trajectory. They went through the screen and it must have landed on some habitated part of the island

16:00 because there were lots of other units on the island. Anyway we never heard any more about it, but that's how the Yanks celebrated the end of the war. When things settled down the rumours started – when are we going home? After a while they came up with a scheme that you went home on a point basis. You got so many points on how long you had been in the services,

16:30 on how many dependents you had at home, if you were single or married. On this they worked out a scheme that you went home on a certain priority. But the trouble was that most of the fellas that would accumulate a large number of points that would go on the first wave, they were the blokes that had the experience, they'd been there for years. They still had to feed the troops, bring in the

17:00 supplies, administer and run the communications. That caused a bit of trouble for a start when key personnel started to get shifted home. We didn't – I suppose there were a good six or eight weeks before the first contingent went home. The rest of us are looking at the list every day to see how we were. Gradually the numbers dropped and the whole nature of the place changed.

17:30 Fellas that had a fulltime job like armourers and had been flat out all the time, had nothing to do. Signallers were kept busy but a lot of other fellas had nothing much to do. Aircraft security was kept up but a lot of them were twiddling their thumbs and wondering when we'll get home. Then the rumours started, what am I going to do when I get home? Am I going to get a job? Eventually my number came up and I got on a

18:00 RAF transport plane. We landed at Darwin. I thought, this is good. Sydney or Melbourne for sure. I didn't realise they were taking us off the island. When we come back to Australia we were going to be placed, in our case, air force permanent depots to wait our turn to be discharged. A different thing from coming back from the islands. I landed in Darwin.

18:30 Sydney or Melbourne – both would suit me, Brisbane wouldn't be too bad. Away we go and off the plane again and we were flying for about two or three hours and we landed in the outbacks of Australia. We all come out haven't a clue where we were. There were a few ground staff on the ground waiting to unload the plane. We shouted out, "Where are we mate?" The bloke said, "You're at Pearce." I remember saying, "Where the bloody hell's Pearce?" "Oh Pearce is in Western Australia."

19:00 We ended up at Pearce, a permanent air force base about 30 miles north of Perth. That's how we came home.

So it must have been almost ironic, because you were born in Perth, that you ended up back home.

It was purely the luck of the draw.

19:30 Fellas were stationed all over the place where they had these permanent bases. The permanent bases – 'goodo', they were brick buildings, you shared a room with another fellow, had hot showers, had the mess hall, the seats – and Pearce was one of the good ones. Other fellows got stationed at Alice Springs. Some of them got South Australia. All round the countryside. They were held there until they got discharged. I don't know how or

20:00 what sequence were allowed for discharged, but I was over at Pearce for about three months before my turn came. Then 'out of the blue' my name was up on the list and I got my back-pay, got special ration coupons and special clothing coupons because clothing was rationed and back-pay of about 130 quid or pounds and a rail pass back to Brisbane.

20:30 So I got on the train, got out at Melbourne, and got married.

We'll get back to that. I promise. What were your feelings at that movie when you were told the war was over?

I think by that time we were expecting it was going to happen. We didn't realise the significance of the atomic bomb. All we heard, a bomb practically wiped out Nagasaki and Hiroshima but we had no idea of the impact.

21:00 It was quite a surprise when it ended so quickly after it did. I don't think any of us were expecting it to go so quickly, but the news that we were getting filtered through told us that the Japs were being beaten and they'd retracted to – but they hadn't all gone back to Japan. They were either bypassed on some of the islands – the Americans left them there. Or they took

21:30 to the hills like they did in Morotai. It was a fairly – most of the fellas had been in comparatively short periods, but I had been away from home, for my some about six years. It's a long stretch. I think it was a case of relief. I don't think it

22:00 was so much joy and jubilation that we'd beaten them. I think it was just 'thank heavens it's over'. That's how I felt and I think a few of the others did too.

A few of the people that we spoke to said, that the weeks preceding that, they felt it was a bit of an anti climax.

Might have been.

Because it was so sudden.

Yes. I don't think

22:30 we realised what a factor the atomic bombs were going to be. We knew that the two cities had been wiped out. But they say, cities wiped out, but that doesn't mean much to you up in Morotai, wondering what you're going to have for lunch. Then, knowing from the reports that we did get through that the Japs were being forced back in the islands we knew the war was going our way. So it wasn't entirely unexpected. But

23:00 we didn't expect it so soon as it actually did.

And how was the feeling leaving Morotai and going back to the mainland?

I don' think it was any regrets there. We didn't get much notice. The system of the lists were posted up the afternoon to leave six o'clock the next morning. Listed to go up everyday. This only went up occasionally.

23:30 You read the list and see who's on it. If you were on it you packed your gear and you stood by and they took you to a transit centre. Then they did the bookwork at the transit centre. Some blokes came back by boat. Some blokes cruised back via [HMAS] Kanimbla and told me, 'a very fine trip'. They went through the Whitsundays in the mid winter. But I flew back. Nothing to recommend an army transport plane for flying. They take everything out so they can get as much as they can in.

24:00 And it's noisy and cold.

What sort of aircraft was that one?

I think it was a 'Dakota' we came back on. As I say we landed in Darwin and then we came on.

We've also heard stories that in the time that the blokes were waiting to get returned to Australia, blokes went 'troppo'.

Yeah. It was a common term up there. It got to the stage if you did anything strange, 'he's troppo'. But there were genuine cases

24:30 of it. Fellas went to pieces up there. It's hard to describe it when you were living in a tent. It's hot. It's raining all the time, you're sweating all the time, you're fed up with the food. it looks as though you're getting nowhere. If you had something to do it wasn't too bad. But towards the end of the war

25:00 and after it a lot of blokes had nothing to do and there was some strange things going on. Some of the blokes would pull a 'swifty' [tell a lie] and they'd do anything to get a quick return home. Most of them were genuine. The circumstances and the climate got them down.

What sort of things could blokes do to get a rapid return to Australia?

Feigning sickness, delusions, can't remember things

25:30 and I think the MO's were awake to most of them. But a bloke would have a genuine breakdown. You'd see them running 'amok' firing a Thompson machine gun in the air. Well you see that on TV now it's common over in the Middle East. But up in the islands where we were, no go. You didn't see that sort of thing. See a bloke running around. He either was genuine or he was almost a 'cot case'.

26:00 **You showed us some of your souvenirs. When did you manage to grab those?**

Most of those came from Morotai. The money came from Morotai. The maps came from Morotai and the – I got a ration book there – you've seen a ration book no doubt. Got my pay books. Of course I had those, but I dug them all out

26:30 when my daughter asked me to write my memoirs and I was able to get a few dates from the pay book and a couple of dates where I was there because you ask me when I was at Morotai and that was very vague idea, but we got a few definite dates to pin things on.

Can you tell us about the maps?

Those maps I showed you – those –

Just for the benefit of people who haven't seen them before.

Those maps were issued to the crew of aircraft.

27:00 If you were flying over a certain area you got one of those maps. If you were on a different route you got one. I don't know if they had maps for every area, but I know they had quite a lot of them covered. They were American production and American crews got them, first priority. But at RAF command we had a supply of them that was issued to our own squadrons that were going over a certain base and the idea was that if a plane came down in an island at least you have

27:30 a map to indicate possibly where it is. It's only a long shot, but it might be some use to them. First off a long shot, but if you came the right map when you came down the right island secondly you were able to identify a spot on the map. All the aircrew particularly the navigator had an elementary course 'on survey'. If there's one 'whopping' big peak on the island and no other there, and that's on the map well you got a chance to

28:00 locate it. Everybody knew the trick of finding north on your watch and I've had a couple of stories how fellas used them and managed to get to the coast. If you landed in the middle of a jungle and you didn't know which way to go you looked at the map and could locate yourself as being reasonably close to the east coast. You'll follow the sun of a morning and walk that way. I picked half of them up when the

28:30 RAF were packing up and everything was being jettisoned. The Americans had a good scheme of taking a place out. They'd dump everything. Their aircraft they'd just take it and dump it off the end of a jetty. Stuff like that was going to be burnt. But the Australians were a bit more frugal. I stunted those and brought those back. That's about it I think that's out there.

What did you say those maps were made of?

29:00 I think they're silk. I might be wrong. But they can be crushed. The idea is they can be crushed. What's the good of having a paper map over there? They could get wet and dried.

What did you think when you saw the waste the Americans were destroying at the end of the war?

I tell you. Some of those fighters – I don't know what they cost in those days, but they'd be hundreds of thousands of dollars. I have

29:30 seen the Yanks bulldoze four or five planes off the jetty into the water. They wouldn't strip them of anything. But what do you do with them? It would take them quite a long time and quite a lot of shipping to take that back. What they wanted to do was get their men back, so they dumped all the stuff. It was used military

30:00 equipment. What use is it in peace time? Have to sell it to foreign countries. The Yanks policy was then generally to dump stuff.

Did you see any use of 'jungle juice' up in Morotai?

Yes. We used to make 'Jungle Juice'? Yeah. Currants and sultanas if you could get them. Coconuts were the main source of supply. You got the coconut and got the juice out. They

30:30 gave you a base. If you could get hold of any sort of fruit at all – not that you've got much – but you occasionally would be able to get dried fruit like sultanas and currants and prunes and that sort of thing. If you brewed those up with anything else you could get hold of – a green paw paw or green bananas, put them in a boiler. But you had to have some sort of a still. The idea was you boil it up

31:00 and it had to come down into a tube. I've seen some very ingenious stills I tell you. They'd boil it up in anything at all and they'd make – did you know the stems of a paw paw tree are hollow? And it gave you a tube about that thick and they tapered off so you could slot one into the other and you had a tube. The other thing was that the coconuts, the top section of the coconut palm,

31:30 the pieces that are off each section are not hard. You could put a stick or something down them and break them. Down the bottom end where they are hard you couldn't. But they could make a tube out of that. And rubber tubing. Anything at all. All you needed was some sort of container down the other end and put the container in cold water and eventually you got a brew out and it was called Jungle Juice. My word it was horrible. But that was a cause

32:00 of blokes going troppo too. A few of them had drunk too much of it. I don't think it'd do your nervous system much good. It was pretty awful.

Backing up to when you were in the army up in the Atherton Tablelands, did you ever see Lady Blamey's?

No I didn't see Lady Blamey, but I saw Lady Blamey on the beach at Townsville I think it was.

32:30 Where did I see Lady Blamey? Lady Blamey I think was the head of the Red Cross. She used to get around visiting the troops in her uniform. I'm not too sure of the location now but I remember we were on a beach and this party's coming along the beach. You could see it was a very important party because there was a lot of

33:00 'top brass' escorting her. I think we were swimming at the time. We all didn't have any swimming togs on and we had to put towels around us because we could see there was a few ladies coming along. Lady Blamey stopped and spoke to us, asked us how we were going and a few comments like that. That was the only time I saw her.

A lot of the blokes have mentioned this – a drinking

33:30 **receptacle they made out of the 'tallies' called the Lady Blamey. Ever seen those?**

No. I haven't seen that. I haven't. But I wouldn't be surprised. They were ingenious the Australian troops. The things they made to make life more pleasant, I believe. They were very resourceful. I think this was the difference between the British troops. The British troops didn't seem to have the same resourcefulness.

34:00 The Australians'd hop in and do things and have something. The British, the ones I saw, a few up in Townsville, they seemed to have to be told what to do. They do it very well, when they're told what to do. I think our blokes are more – but that might be a 'one-eyed Australian' [biased].

So where eventually were you demobbed?

I was demobbed in Perth. My name went up on the

34:30 Pearce board one day. Grabbed me gear. Went down to the Pearce demobilisation centre and signed quite a few papers and got me back-pay, got the ration books, got a special food ration and I got a clothing because we didn't have any civilian clothing. And I got a special rations for civilian clothing. And a rail pass to Brisbane.

35:00 So we got married over there in my air force uniform.

Did you have any service mates that were at the wedding?

My wife's brother was the air force bloke. He was a permanent air force man. He had a very interesting history. Because he was a child of the 'Depression' years, jobs were very hard to get. He couldn't get

35:30 a job and he joined up in the permanent air force. I think by the time war broke out he was already a

staff sergeant and years of experience behind him. He served out the rest and after the war he continued on as a permanent bloke. We compared notes after the war and he reckoned he was up in Morotai either before me or after me. But it's strange enough, while I was up there in Morotai

36:00 there were very few Australian army blokes that I encountered, but I did encounter a lieutenant who'd been in the 17th with me and he had been seconded to the RAF command. He had been at Morotai for quite a while at RAF command. That's where one of them ended up – in intelligence.

In what ways did you war service affect the rest of your life?

Six years wasted.

36:30 Wasted. That's a bit of exaggeration. Six years taken up. I was 24 and I was like 30 when I came back. Those years you do things usually with your life. Hundreds of thousands in the same boat.. Some stayed longer than I did. It was a big thing. The fellas that I feel sorry for, there was a fellow at Shell, he was

37:00 recruited in the 8th Division and he came back as a prisoner of war. I remember him going away and I was horrified when I saw him. He did it tough. He never recovered. Shell were very good to him, looked after him, but it was sickening. Very sad. It wasn't – there are some sad memories.

37:30 But anyhow that's how it was and that's how we finished up.

Have you marched Anzac Days?

I didn't for a long while. I thought it was glorifying war and for quite a long while I didn't. Then I realised that I and fellas were growing old and we were getting less and less and the fellas from the Second World War were

38:00 becoming a diminishing number. I've marched for the last 10 or 15 years purely because I think it's now really a national day. We've got the chaps who were in the Vietnam who didn't get recognised. The Anzac Day parade is an opportunity for them to get back in life. My grandson, who is mad keen on the army, he came up one year and

38:30 marched with me and I think that was a happy memory for him and his sister who didn't like to be outdone, she wanted to march with me one year too. I'm in favour of the descendants of old blokes marching because sooner or later there's not going to be any of us left. I think it should be carried on.

What's your message to future Australians that might see this?

39:00 I think the message is to pray to God that your government keeps you out of future wars. If they could see the effects, quite apart from the tragedy of being killed, but to see the effects of war service on some fellas who come back and live a terrible life. I think we should do our very best to

39:30 keep out of wars. Yes, there's no glory in war.

Tape 7

00:33 **We've had a chat about coming home and about Anzac Day, did you join the RSL [Returned and Services League] at all when you got home?**

Yes. I joined the RSL because a workmate of mine who was in the air force – a flying officer – he said to me on day, "Why don't you join the RSL?" He was the president in that day of the

01:00 Gaythorn RSL. "Okay." So I joined the RSL 15 years ago now wasn't it? So, yes, I am a member of the RSL. The advantage, of course, is we go round to other clubs and get cheap meals, don't we? It's gets us into – there's a restriction on members going into clubs unless you're outside a certain area. But if you're a member of a

01:30 fellow club, we're right.

You mentioned to us earlier that when you got back, Shell sat you all down and said if you had any issues being in an office for a long time, that you could feel free to walk around – how did you go settling back into that kind of environment?

No great problem. Shell had quite a lot of fellas in the war and they were coming back gradually and they ran these courses every three weeks or a month when enough fellas had come

02:00 back. It was simple indeed, to bring us up to date with what was happening at the time and for them to say they appreciated we hadn't been sitting behind a desk for a while and if we found the circumstances a bit stifling, we could feel free to get up and go for a walk. I never found it too much. I was rather keen to find out what was going on in the place and I settled in without too much trouble. Because I had a new wife. I had to settle in very quickly in those days.

02:30 **A lot of blokes that we've spoken to haven't ever really discussed their war service or their war experience with anyone. Have you discussed it with your family?**

No. I haven't got a war record that you could say, 'that blokes a war hero'. I mean, blokes who fought on the Kokoda Trail, blokes like the 'Rats of Tobruk' – there's a friend of ours up the road

03:00 who went over the Kokoda Trail. He's the sort of fellow that I think has got more stories to tell. I'm just one of the 'nine' behind the fellas, that keep one bloke in the front line. No. We didn't talk about the war. We had two boys and they wanted to know a bit about the war but we didn't; never spoke of it at any great length.

A few of the fellas that we have spoken to have expressed an opinion that

03:30 **when they went to Morotai it was part of a mopping-up campaign for the Americans. Were you aware of that sentiment while you were there?**

Yes. That's quite true. By the time I got to Morotai the Yanks had knocked the hell out of it with their aerial and naval bombardment – as they did with a lot of islands where they actually landed. But on the other hand they left quite a few islands. Bypassed them. Left the Japs to starve on the island

04:00 and simply prevented supplies getting through. Yes. I got up there definitely in the latter part of the war years when it was more or less a mopping up arrangement.

What was the general sentiment amongst the fellows about that?

I think the blokes that had been in it five or six years, I think they were hoping things were going to happen

04:30 and the war would end. And it did. I think there was an air of inevitability. You accept the circumstances. You can't do much about it. You don't like the place, you can't put your hat on and leave it, you just got to put up with it. And it's no good grizzling about supplies. You know they're doing the best to get supplies through to you. You simply grin and bear it. I think that rubbed off on a lot of other fellows too.

05:00 You accepted things as the best at the circumstances at the moment. I think the troops I was with – I think the morale was very high. We didn't suffer horrendous casualties like some units did. Might be a different story there.

A lot has been written and passed on in oral tradition about Australian larrikinism. Did you see a

05:30 **lot of that?**

Larrikinism. No. That may be one way of describing it. I think the Australian young fellows in those war years they were all keen, vibrant, take on anything,

06:00 adaptable. Things were 'crook' and they didn't have anything they'd make it out of a kerosene tin and so forth. I think that the morale of all the units I was in, was high. In the artillery when the unit was being disbanded, admittedly, the morale fell then. But there was a good reason for that. Other ones,

06:30 all the other places I struck, I never really struck a fellow that grizzled about the war years. Quite a few of them had problems with family, things weren't going too good at home and they were concerned about it, but it wasn't that they were blaming the war for that particular thing. They simply had to accept that these things were happening. Others sailed through it quite well.

07:00 **Fifty something years on, what's your feelings towards the Japanese now?**

I don't forgive them for the atrocities they perpetrated on hundreds and thousands of

07:30 our fellows. They didn't observe the niceties or the principles of war. They killed a lot of our fellas in cold blood. I don't think the relation to the emperor gives them the right to do that. I know that they are a good, big trading partner of ours. They are

08:00 adding to our national prosperity with their trade. But I simply can't forget. And I am not personally involved. I knew, as I mentioned earlier a couple of fellows who were POWs. I knew a couple of fellas that were killed by the Japs in cold blood, but I wasn't personally involved. I just knew them. How I'd feel if they were members of my own family, it'd be a different matter. But I just didn't take to them.

08:30 **Coming home, do you remember the reunion with the family?**

No. Rather sad that. I was an only child. The only dependent I had was my old Mum and I used to write to her regularly. I think she was rather proud of her son being in uniform as was most

09:00 of the family. They all had men or women in uniform and they thought their boys and girls were doing their bit. There was an intense surge of patriotism. I think everybody was proud to be doing something for the war effort. Even the civilians back home making camouflage nets, they did their part. And the families that lost loves ones in the war, they made a great sacrifice.

09:30 But I feel in my own particular case – nothing to do with the army – I only had my Mum – I used to write to her regularly and of course she used to always say in it, she would always tell me how she was well enough. She wrote me a letter saying she was going to the hospital for some tests and I

10:00 read between the lines and I knew I could get compassionate leave from the course I was on, if I could get a doctor's certificate. So I wrote to the doctor and said, "What's wrong with my Mum? If you think there's anything serious would you give me a certificate and I might be able to get some compassionate leave." He came back and he said, "No. It's purely a routine check. Nothing too wrong there." Next thing I know I got a telegram from some friends of

10:30 ours saying Mum had died. That was about the saddest part of my career. I still hold it against that doctor. I don't think he give me the right advice there. He may have thought things were going to be perfect. Unfortunately I never saw my mother alive again. I had to come back and virtually

11:00 bury her and that was a melancholy sort of job to do. Only had the one relative in Brisbane at the time.

We haven't really had a chance today to discuss your life before the war. Let's go back and do that. Tell us all about – let's start with where you were born.

I was born in Perth. My Dad was an engineer on the trans-continental railways.

11:30 It is a proud fact in the family history that he helped to build the first engine that ran across the trans continental railway. But unfortunately when I was 8 a boiler on an engine was being swung and it hit him in the back of the spine and he was paralysed. There was no workers' compensation in that day. That left Mum with a son of six or seven

12:00 and we had a pretty tough time. She did. I didn't appreciate the significance at the time. Anyhow, after Dad died, Mum had some friends over here and we were living in Kalgoorlie at the time which was a pretty rough mining town in those days. We came over here and my Mum virtually brought me up from

12:30 when I was eight. She did that by doing housekeeping jobs, menial tasks, and things like that, until I was able to bring a few shilling home when I got my first job. I got the first job in a chemist shop. I got that through the fact that my Mum was housekeeping for a gentleman who was a widower and he was very sick and he used to buy a lot of

13:00 medicines from the chemist shop and we got to know the chemist shop. I think it was my Mum's idea. She said, "Would you like to become a chemist?" I got the job as a messenger boy. I started on ten shillings a week in those days. When we looked into the fact of the chances of being apprentices I could have got the chance. But in those days

13:30 you had to pay quite a large sum to be an apprentice. We had no way in the world of raising that sort of money. So that opportunity of being a chemist went out of the window. And I don't think I would have liked it, looking back on it now. I decided I had a flair for maths and I started to study book keeping at night school. After studying book keeping

14:00 I started to study accountancy. I got a job in a cash order firm. Cash orders are a thing of the past. But basically what it was, these firms issued people with an order to buy a certain amount at a firm. These people who bought that paid the cash or the firm off on a weekly basis. You got a five pound order, you paid five shillings a week as it was in those days. The

14:30 firm got a commission from the firm where the lady spent the order on and also charged that lady a commission. I got a job for a couple of years there. I didn't like it because one of the jobs was to go up and issue summonses to people who didn't pay up on time. One of the ways of doing that, they subpoenaed their pay. You had to go along to a paymaster

15:00 who was going to pay the debtor that afternoon and say, "I've got a court order here to garnish his wages for a certain amount." I found that a bit 'displeasant'. Anyhow, I got my accountancy degree and still working at the cash order place. The chap that was there wanted me to stay on and be the accountant but I wasn't happy with the job. I noticed a little advertisement in the local paper. Didn't say who it was from. Just said they wanted a clerk. So I

15:30 wrote and to my great surprise, I got a letter back on the Shell letterhead. I went in there and was interviewed by the 'high and mighty', I think he was called accountant in those days and my degree helped a bit. But I got the job and I started at Shell. That was about 1936 I suppose. I was there for a couple of years when the war broke out and I went back to Shell thereafter. Worked for Shell for

16:00 what, 35, 36 years.

Looking back, what's your very earliest memory?

I can remember my first day of school in Kalgoorlie. I can remember that because there was a singing lesson and everybody had to stand up on their chairs. The teacher was out the front conducting the

16:30 singing lesson. I can also remember an escapee, yes, I got into. That's right. Dad was paralysed. Mum was working as a cook in a restaurant and she was working in the afternoon. In those days the goods

were carried around by horse and ‘dray’. The dray was a flat top

17:00 wooden ‘dray’ with iron wheels and about four or six horses. Anyhow, another kid and I, about five I suppose, hopped on the back of this dray and went for a ride. He was taking the supplies out to the outer station, outer farms and he was away a long while. By the time we got back it was quite dark. My mother gave me a belting because I hadn’t told her where I was going and she was worried sick. After she’d given me the belting, I remember she gave me

17:30 a bar of ‘penny chocolate’. Cadbury’s chocolate in those days were made in penny bars. They were little small things like that. So I got the belting and then I got rewarded. I don’t know what I got the chocolate for. I think Mum was glad to get me back. That’s the earliest memories. I remember coming home in the boat over from Perth to Sydney. We got another boat up. And in Melbourne we got off the

18:00 boat at the Melbourne piers and there were trams running from Melbourne pier into the city. Mum and I were a group of other passengers on the boat – there was probably about a dozen passengers on the jetty waiting for the tram. The tram came in and for some reason or other everybody else except me got on the tram. The tram shot off. I was left standing there. My mother was deeply concerned I understand, being where I was. But somebody

18:30 cheered me up and told me to get on the next tram which came along in five minutes time and Mum must have had the foresight to get off at the next stop and wait and we had a reunion on the Melbourne pier. So I nearly got lost in the big city. Probably a foretaste of the things to come. I was an irresponsible child.

What do you recall of when your father was injured?

19:00 **You mentioned he was paralysed. Did he come home?**

Yes. He lived for about a year after that. He was paralysed. In those days they had no treatment whatsoever. He passed away as a result of that after a short in – he was quite incapacitated. I think he could get around on crutches. I don’t know too much about it. But he was almost bedridden.

Before the accident,

19:30 **what do you remember of your dad? How would you describe him?**

He was six foot two. He was a big fella. I remember my Mum saying how she fell for him because he was so handsome and so tall. He was an Englishman. A Londoner. But a rather interesting family story that I remember my Mum telling.

20:00 He was courting my Mum who was born in Glasgow and had come down to work in London. His Mum apparently liked the gin and tonic with more gin than tonic in those days and she had an unloving habit of pawning his clothes and then redeeming them. I understand that he was due to take my Mum out one day and came home to find his clothes were all down the pawn shop.

20:30 According to Mum he said, “That’s enough. We’re getting married.” The history’s very blurred there, but they came out to the gold fields and he worked for a while on the mines as an engineer and then worked on the railways. Why they got to Kalgoorlie I don’t know. Maybe he was offered a job on the mine.

Who was the disciplinarian – mum or dad?

Dad died

21:00 when I was eight. I don’t remember. Mum did a mighty job bringing me up on her own in adverse circumstances. She didn’t deserve to have such a lonely death as she did.

21:30 She did a good job of me. She got me through schooling. We managed and things ‘bucked up’. When I got a job we bought a house. We lived there till the war broke out.

What was your mum like?

Charming. She was a Scots lassie. Very short.

22:00 She had the ability to make friends with everybody. One of those personalities she talked to people that never saw them before in her life but she’d chat away about everything under the sun and she was quite a friendly personality. I remember that quite well.

When you moved

22:30 **here to Brisbane, how long did that journey take all together?**

We came up by train didn’t we?

No, as a child?

I think it would take about ten days to come round the [Great Australian] Bight from Perth. We pulled into Melbourne and we came up to Sydney. Then we had to change boats and then we came up to – I

think it was about two or three days from Sydney to Brisbane in those days.

23:00 I remember staying our first night in Brisbane was in a two storey wooden lodging house opposite St Johns Cathedral in Ann Street, Brisbane. It was there for quite a few years. They've pulled it down now. I remember another sad incident on that first year. It was just around about Christmas time and all the kids were writing

23:30 letters to Santa Claus telling them what they wanted. I still believed in Santa Claus when I was eight. I wrote telling him I wanted a model train. Mum read this letter and I think she must have been very sad. She had to explain to me that Father Christmas was really a make believe man. I ended up that year getting a set of wooden skittles for my Christmas present. That's another family memory.

24:00 **What sort of things did you get up to as a young lad, being an only child?**

We were poor. I think that Mum has instilled in me, we had to keep our heads down and behave ourselves and not do anything. I remember we were very poor. Just imagine, you wouldn't get much of a wage

24:30 as a housekeeper. What saved us I think she managed to get jobs where she got accommodation. Having a young child meant that she probably got less in wages because they had to keep me. Yes. I lived through the Depression. You've probably heard that the Depression was tough. A lot of people had it tougher than we did. But in my

25:00 early days and for my generation, not just me, things were tough. If you were in the lower classes you didn't have much spare money.

What did you do to amuse yourself though?

I remember playing cricket with the kids. I used to play marbles. In those days there was a community group

25:30 in practically every street. Most families had kids and they'd all come out and play together. They were dirt streets in those days. Playing marbles in the dirt street was common and you played with all the kids in the area. The girls used to play hopscotch on the streets. Boys used to play cricket on the street. That was about it. There was no organised sport for us.

26:00 **Was it a home made cricket bat?**

Now you're talking. It could well have been. But I think it was one of those occasions – somebody had a cricket bat and it depended on him bringing the bat, whether you played cricket or not and when he wanted to take the bat home it was the end of the game. So it wasn't wise to get him out too early. Otherwise he might take the bat home. But I don't remember too much about it. We didn't have stumps. We had a kerosene tin or something. Kerosene tins in those days

26:30 they came two tins to a case. If you got a kerosene tin or a kerosene case you had a treasure because you could turn them into an awful lot of things. Buckets, packing case for a suit, dressing tables and all sorts of things. Because there was so little that everything had to be made useful.

And where would a young kid come across a kerosene can?

Kerosene in those days was packed in

27:00 kerosene tins. Four gallon galvanised iron tins. Kerosene was one of the main lighting – kerosene lamps. Electricity was around and so forth. But still a lot of stoves and lights they used kerosene on. There was quite a use of kerosene. Of course you got these empty kerosene tins, you could cut it long ways and make two trays for doing the washing in or cut the top off and make a bucket

27:30 out of it. Knocking a kerosene tin from the shape it came in, into another shape and turning down the edges and using a hammer was a common sound in the suburbs. Everybody banging around a kerosene tin. "There's Charlie making his wife another bucket." Kerosene tins were a very useful item.

Did you have any

28:00 **childhood heroes? Any sporting heroes?**

Not really. I was in the age when Don Bradman was the sporting hero. He was the hero of Australian cricket. In those days

28:30 they used to play test match in England only and another lot out in Australia. Most kids of my generation had a crystal set. Ever heard of a crystal set? The crystal sets were very simple. They had the advantage you could make them yourself if you could get your hands on some wire. And all you needed was the actual crystal and the jig up. I used to have a crystal set, I made myself. I had a pair of earphones

29:00 and I lay in bed about two o'clock in the morning listening to the broadcasts that were coming through on the BBC while Australia was playing in England. Of course in those days it was all reconstructed. They would cable through the first ball was hit for four and this end the commentator would turn out

[Sir Donald] Bradman [cricketer] has now turned that ball to a square leg and it's cut to the boundary and put a commentary. They also used to tap

29:30 a piece of wood on a pencil to indicate there was a ball striking the bat. They were very inventive in those days. I remember that was one of my prize possessions, my crystal set.

Where was that first house that you and your mum bought in Brisbane?

30:00 It was in Manning Street, South Brisbane. Which was about four streets down from Victoria Bridge. I worked at the street opposite the South Brisbane station. So I was able to walk up Melbourne Street four or five

30:30 blocks and go to work.

What were your recollections of Brisbane at that time?

Brisbane was a country town. Most of the streets in the suburbs were unpaved. The city was mainly a one street – Queen Street. I remember the city hall being built and the city hall in those times towered over

31:00 every other building in the city where it was built. There were three or four big departmental stores all of which have gone now – taken over – Edwards & Lambs, Bayard's, Finney Isles and that's about the three I remember in Queen. And then down the valley

31:30 which was a real hub of a shopping centre they had McQuirters and TC Burns and Overalls all in that one area of Bundrick Street and Wickham Street – something like that. Brisbane has changed considerably.

What was that first house like?

Very small, very humble.

32:00 Wooden, tin roof, 'hot as billy-oh'. Up on stilts. Most of Brisbane houses were up on high stilts in those days. High step, back and front. Very basic. Wooden stove – you put wood in, fire.

What sort of furniture did you and your mum have?

I don't remember exactly.

32:30 I would say it would be very humble stuff. We must have got some furniture from somewhere but I don't remember.

What about school? Once you moved to Brisbane, where did you go to school?

Dutton Park State School. I started my first day at school at the Dutton Park State School. They asked me – or asked Mum – what grade I did and she gave them all the information. I started off

33:00 on the junior school which is on one side of the railway line. The other side is the state school for more senior schools. I must have been bright. Because I no longer was in the junior school for about half an hour when the teacher said, "Come with me." Up I go and she takes me along the street over the railway embankment down to the school next to it and enrolled me there. So apparently the Western Australian standard might have been a bit higher

33:30 than the one here. Anyway I went to Dutton Park State School for a couple of years.

Did you like school?

Yeah.

What sort of things did you get up to at school?

I must have been a model pupil. You weren't allowed to get up to anything, young lady, in those days. The teachers were in charge. You sat up and did what the teacher said. The teacher said, "Keep quiet" you kept quiet. "Sit up" you sat up. "Three bags full"

34:00 you filled the three bags, full. The teachers were in charge in those days. But on looking back I had teachers that did a good job. They taught me a fair bit. I learnt from them.

Are there any teachers that stand out from your memory?

Yes there are. After I had been

34:30 at Dutton Park for a while – my Mum got about five or six jobs over the period we're talking about – she got a job for a family that were going to open a restaurant in George Street and they wanted somebody to housekeep the home and cook the meals for them while they ran the restaurant. Mum and I had a room at this place.

35:00 That lasted a year and then either the restaurant didn't pay and they had to do something with it, or Mum lost her job. I don't remember what. We moved to a house in Pearce Street which is just round the

corner. Next to this house which was a very modest cottage I may assure you, was quite a substantial wooden house which was occupied by the manager of

35:30 Watson & Ferguson's. They were the wealthy family in the area. Their children went to the St John's Cathedral Day School which was a tiny church school next to the St John's Cathedral in Ann Street. My mother thought I might pick up a bit of 'genteel habits' and goings on if I went to this school. The advantage

36:00 was that the father of the kids next door, had a car which was rare in those days and he used to drive them to school and I was getting a free ride. We came back from school by tram. I went there for a couple of years. But it was mainly staffed by ladies and I think Mum thought I wasn't being disciplined enough and the only one

36:30 that had a strong discipline was the Catholic school. We weren't Catholic, but she took me up to Saint Laurence's College over in South Brisbane and I went there for about five or six years. In those days you passed a scholarship if you wanted to go on to secondary school. They had

37:00 Year Nine and Ten. I did junior there. But they didn't go on higher at St Laurence's. If you wanted to go on to another school you had to go on to one of the bigger colleges, but Mum couldn't afford the very modest fee to keep me at school and I had to go to work.

Did you enjoy St Laurence's?

I think if you asked any boy who went to a Catholic brothers' school

37:30 they will tell you that they belted the hell out of you. That is not an exaggeration. I think that they wanted the kids to 'get on' and they found it very hard to accept the fact that some kids might not have the necessary brain power. One bloke in particular he was very severe on anybody that made a 'blue' [mistake].

38:00 He bashed into them. Literally.

What sort of things would spark that kind of discipline?

Simple things. Giving a French idiom incorrect would bring on an outburst, or you hadn't done your homework correctly. They didn't need much excuse. But to be fair to them I and a lot of others got through

38:30 and got an education out of them.

In any of your schooling either at Dutton Park or at St Laurence's were they teaching you much about World War I?

No. All I heard from World War I was from a friend of my Mum's who had married a fellow who had been in that war. We used to go over to their places and he told me –

39:00 I was a goggle eyed boy of ten at that stage – stories of the First World War. That's where I learnt a bit about the First World War. Wasn't till later years, I started to read myself, that I learnt a bit more about it.

When your mum and dad – they came out here from Scotland and England?

Mm.

Did they speak much of the mother country?

Oh yes. Definitely. The mother country –'home'.

39:30 My Mum was always talking about home. Are you going home? And quite a few people did make trips back home. Scotland was the home country – no doubt about it. That persisted all my mother's life. Her home was always England or Scotland.

Did you feel that you inherited that?

In my youth we were part of the British Empire. We were proud to be part of the British Empire.

40:00 Britain ruled the waves and we were out here. Had nothing to fear. Britain was strong enough to take care of us. I think everybody in my generation grew up to look on Britain as the home country. Not in any overbearing ruling way but just a guiding hand.

We're almost at the end of that tape.

40:30 **Did you have any final thoughts or messages for the archive?**

I think it is a splendid job that while blokes like me are still alive, that you get the opportunity to put it down. As I said to you earlier, there are thousands of blokes that have got

41:00 far more interesting stories than I have got. I hope you get some of their stories. I've got a friend of

mine like I told you before that was on the Kokoda Trail. It’s blokes like him that you should be interviewing because his story is something worthwhile preserving.

INTERVIEW ENDS