

Australians at War Film Archive

Sydney James (Syd) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 2nd April 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1747>

Tape 1

- 00:38 I was born at Mole Creek. Went to school there – left school when I was fourteen and went to work on a farm. And then joined the scouts, went to South Australia with the scouts in '36 and in 1938 I went with the scouts to Sydney Jamboree. And from there I went to New Zealand where I spent approximately two years, came back
- 01:00 after the war had started, went and joined up in the air force and went to Laverton and did my rookies, to stores depot in the store as stores clerk, went from there to on embarkation leave and it was after Darwin had been bombed that I went there. I arrived there on the 14th March 1942. Was there for,
- 01:30 worked on the aerodrome for ten months. Being one of fourteen chaps that volunteered to help repair the drome and from there I went to Number 5 Replenishing Centre and I was there for two days and sent back to Strauss airfield within thirty some odd ks [kilometres] of Darwin to do repairs and general work for two months.
- 02:00 Spent the two months there and it was after Christmas in '43 that I returned to Katherine to Number 5 Replenishment Centre where we mostly our job was to unload trucks of petrol. Usually about six hundred drums would come in a day and we'd take that with three army trucks, 7th Divvy [Division] army drivers, and ten of us would unload six hundred drums take it to the dump
- 02:30 put it in six dumps of one hundred drums per dump and then pick up another six hundred from stock – because they wanted to keep stock circulating. You didn't use new stock straight away, you checked up on the old stock, checked for water and put it back on the railway and let it go them go to Fenton or wherever they required it.

Syd, that's great detail but just for the introduction we need to get a little bit more of an overview, if you know what I mean?

- 03:00 Will I start again?

No, just give us brief overview of Darwin.

After being in the Northern Territory for about eighteen months, I returned to Melbourne, came home on leave, did a course on welding and became an aircraft welder, went to Lake Boga and was there when the war ended. I came back home and being of a nature,

- 03:30 it was my nature to want to travel and so from then on for the next ten or twelve years, I travelled around Australia and New Guinea. And eventually went back home decided that being that I was about forty I thought I'd get married – so that's what happened. Started an engineering place at Mole Creek and because of ill health I gave it away after ten years and came to Launceston
- 04:00 where my two girls needed further education and it was there that they finished their schooling. And from there I worked for Board Mills for ten years and then I retired. We did another tour of Australia with a mate for about four months, came home and to... Oh, what have I done since?
- 04:30 Helped some of my friends in sawmills with repairs to all sorts of forest machinery and enjoyed retired life. Growing older.

Excellent, that's a great...

I'm eight-five, this month.

You are still young.

I was born on Easter Sunday, the 20th of April

- 05:00 and it's been 1924 and 1930 was the second – the only two twice since then until last year and Easter Sunday was on 20th of April and it was seventy-four, seventy-odd years from when I was born, and it

was in the eighty-four years that I've have been alive that my birthday has been on the 20th April, fourth time was last year.

05:30 **Excellent**

Easter Sunday and Anzac Day was both in the same week.

Now what I am going to do is ask you some questions about life before the war, before the Second [World] War, what I'll ask you is can you tell us a little bit about your parents, father and mother, their background?

My mother was one

06:00 of thirteen children, and she had two brothers and a sister older and she had six younger - two brothers and four sisters. No, how many does that make? Doesn't make thirteen, does it? Anyway she was the fourth of a big family. And Grandfather Lee was a farmer and

06:30 he was the original owner of Tiers, which is a very popular place for walkers and people that tour around Tassie [Tasmania]. Lees Paddocks or The Paddocks as it was always known. Been quite a lot of controversy over it over the years with conservationists and or whatever. Dad was born in Hobart. He was

07:00 seven years older than Mother. Mother was twenty when she was married and Dad was twenty-seven. He worked in mines, his father was an engineer, mining engineering and Dad worked in mines until he got married and he went into work for timber companies, Gunnerson from South Australia and another crowd at Burnie and one in Launceston. They had

07:30 lots of timber stacked and racked in Mole Creek, he was in charge of all that. In later life he and my daughter were in a business, a general country store, hardware and whatever. He has been dead since 1969 and he was eighty-four and Mother ninety three-and she has been dead, she died on one of my sisters' birthdays, 11th of November, I have forgotten what year it was.

08:00 Oh, what else do you want to know?

Did your father take part in the First World War?

No, my Father, I've got the badge he had, he was unfit for medical, for war service. I've got his, the badge that he was given to show that he was unfit. I don't, I never ever knew what he was. I think that perhaps it might have been that he played football once and look he was playing on a windy day and the top of a goal post broke off and fell on his head

08:30 and whether that had something to do with it or not I don't know.

He had to wear a badge, you said?

Yeah, I never thought about finding that, yes a badge, unfit for war service, a little badge that you showed, you, saving them sending you a white feather. And don't you know about the white feather? If people were, could be quite nasty, without even knowing your circumstances

09:00 they would send you a white feather if you didn't go to the war to say to show that you were a coward or whatever, what they thought. So eventually Dad joined up but he was unfit, and he has a medal, I have it somewhere. Oh, he worked in the shop and helped there

09:30 right up till within three or four years of when he died. He had a couple of, he had a bad stroke once and wasn't able to do anything for a long time and after that he gradually, well his general health deteriorated. He used to sit about and he couldn't do very much apart from, oh he could wash himself, oh I mean shower himself and things like that, a lot of people at that age can't.

10:00 And who else do you want to know about?

Your mum?

Mum? Oh Mum, she used to, well, they lived on the farm until they were, oh, I don't know how old Mother was, but she used to help milk cows when she went to school. She'd get up and they had to help milk thirty cows. She would take the cream two miles to

10:30 the railway station in a horse and cart, go back home and have her breakfast and then walk two miles back to school. And then go home at night and help milk and when in whenever the swedes or potatoes were ready for market, and they had them bagged up she and her sister used to help her two brothers load the wagon, because the boys weren't strong enough to handle the bags of

11:00 potatoes off the ground onto the wagon, and Mum and her eldest sister used to help em. And then they'd take them to the railway and help em load them in trucks. Things weren't so good. Depression days, well Depression was when I was a... It was nothing for the girls to do as much work on the farm as the boys. And then when she was much older, she was twenty she got married and then

11:30 Dad and she they bought a small property of thirty acres, built a house on it. Four rooms were lathed

and plastered and the other two rooms were, was a kitchen and a bathroom and a storeroom were lined with hardwood timber. They lived there for many years. They had an orchard and when in the Depression Dad had a job of three days a week

12:00 at six shillings a day and he and another chap worked on a, there was big farming property that had been all the timber had been fallen on it, but they had to go over and kill all the sprouts that grew on the stumps and whatever. And only two of them with an axe each and they had three days' work and eighteen shillings a week, and then two other fellows would do the rest of the week cause they worked all day Saturdays those days.

12:30 And then we grew up on the farm and like I said we did, well, I was in New Zealand when they shifted from there and they bought... A lady who'd had a shop retired, and Dad bought it and he and my sister ran the shop until my sister got married. She got married while I was in New Zealand. And then my

13:00 brother was in it for a while and then he went to the war and when he came back he went into the shop and spent the next thirty years there, and he retired and sold the business. But in the meantime Dad had died, Mother had died, no, Mother was still alive, she was in the Eliza Purton home in Ulverstone.

Did you ah, during the Depression, did you come across people who were finding it extremely tough. People on sustenance?

13:30 Well, the government spent a lot of or spent some money in cleaning up all along the railway line from Deloraine to Mole Creek, and every so often they'd shift camp. And they came into Mole Creek and there was camps near our place of people on the dole or whatever

14:00 camped close to us cause they came for some apples, for some apples from the orchard, and they were having a tough time and they were people who had lived in Launceston. But the government employed them cleaning up, fencing and all sorts of work on the railway line from Deloraine to Mole Creek. I can remember there used to be an old tramp used to come and live along of our fence

14:30 outside our property quite close to the house, and he used to camp there in the summer, came round here several years, three or four years he'd be there every summer for about a month, and then off, he'd go somewhere else. But apart from that... Oh, I've went to school with hand-me-downs, clothes from cousins and whatever. Patched pants and shirts and it was nothing to be poor.

15:00 I remember one Sunday, years ago, I was going to Sunday school. I went to Sunday school for six years and never missed a Sunday. But I can't say that it did me any good. But anyway, this Sunday I was going to school, Sunday school, we always had a penny for the collection and I lost it. It was close to an old lady's place. I was running along and dropped me penny and was

15:30 looking at this old lady. Old Mrs Blair came out and wanted to know what I was doing. I said I'd lost me penny and she went back inside and got me another penny and so I went off to church, but on Monday going to school I found the other one and I spent it on lollies, but I don't think I ever told Mum or Dad.

16:00 Oh, no, it is no disgrace to be poor. We used to have, we'd buy if Dad could afford a leg of mutton, and a leg of mutton is about twice the size of a leg of lamb. And we'd have that Sunday, we'd have it cooked, roast potatoes and whatever. Cause we all had a big garden and always had plenty of vegetables. And we always had two cows, one for the summer and she milked, we milked her in the summer,

16:30 and one we milked in the winter and we had butter and cream. But to buy luxuries, anything, say tomatoes or anything like that, we never ever had those. Biscuits we never bought because Mum was a good cook and the... And I will tell you about something about, something that's... All I do nowadays is forget. Oh, about being

17:00 poor. We had and then Monday we'd have in our sandwiches, we'd probably have cold meat and if we had cold meat for tea on Monday night, Tuesday night would be stew from made from the leftovers, what was left on the bone from the meat with vegetables. Lots of times all we had to eat for our meal of a night would be potatoes and butter and milk and

17:30 perhaps boil onions, and if we had sweets if would be blancmange made with laurel berry leaf, Mother used to put in laurel berry leaf in the blancmange to give it flavour. A lot of people today have never heard of it. I was talking the other day about some having this blancmange with laurel berry leaf. But if it was cold we'd have it with raspberry jam and if it was hot we'd have it with cream.

18:00 And that's what we'd have for sweets. Potatoes and milk and blancmange, many a feed. I mean, it's a, it makes a lot of difference if your belly is full. But when you get hungry and there is nothing to eat I should image that it wouldn't be too good. But we never did that, we always had something, potatoes or onions.

18:30 Where now?

What about swaggies, swagmen?

Where'd we lived?

Yeah, around your area? Did you get a lot of swagmen?

Only the one that I told you about. I never, no, I never saw very many. If we did, occasionally we'd see somebody come around, he'd be, he'd make clothes pegs out of willow sticks off willow trees, but very, very rarely. At one time there was an old Indian hawker,

- 19:00 he used to come around but he was quite well-to-do because he sold all sorts of silks and lots and lots of different things. He had a four-wheeled wagon with a horse, sort of a canopy on it to keep him dry and wet. He came once or twice a year, he used to travel around Tasmania.

An Indian?

We never saw, you were told, hear the stories of swagmen

- 19:30 on the mainland, well you didn't have them here because of the weather for one thing, and in winter time it was terribly cold and wet and yet on the mainland when winter came they'd travel north to where the warmth was and less rain, well I should imagine. The swagmen in Tassie, very rarely. What now?

20:00 Can you tell us about the schools you went to?

Oh yes, I... Miss Hill was the first school mistress I had at Mole Creek. She was one, grade one and two or class one and two as they called them then. And the first day that I went into the big room as we called it. I got six cuts of the best for carving me name, me initials in the desk with the pen. Like lots of other people had already done but so I added to it, but I got caught.

- 20:30 Mr Dowsal was a school teacher, he taught me from grade three to seven. There was about sixty-odd children in his room and he had used to teach all classes from grade three to seven. He taught school at Mole Creek for twenty-five years as headmaster. Played football, I played tennis; I played badminton and cricket, not

- 21:00 that I was much good at any. I was a medium fast bowler. I could, well I batted, usually be open batsman. And football, no just mediocre. Tennis wasn't too bad. It was while I was in New Zealand once I was playing tennis with a lass, we were playing mixed doubles, and it was in... Oh well we played A grade we were winning our doubles

- 21:30 and somebody said oh something about the time, "Oh," she said, "What time is it?" And it was five o'clock, "Oh God," she said, "I got to go, I got to go and feed me..." She had a stud, pigs, she had to go and feed her pigs, so she left me there and I had to forfeit, we had to forfeit, because she had to go and feed her pigs, she preferred that to playing finishing our game of tennis. That was at Ngaere. I worked on a dairy farm there

- 22:00 near Stratford, New Plymouth, in 19... That would have been 1939, the year the war broke out because it was after that I was involved in an accident and was in hospital there for six weeks. And when I got over that I toured around New Zealand and while I was waiting for two court cases involved in the accident then I came back home.

22:30 Why did you go to New Zealand?

Oh, just because I liked travel, just cause I thought I'd like to go and see it. That's what I have done all me life, I have travelled, even though I was married. It was cause the war made me so restless. I travelled the next thirteen years. I think I'd be home and then go away and come back and go away, and

- 23:00 and when a train whistles my feet itch. I like to travel. In June this year I'm going to Darwin, by train on the new train, yes, it going to be a good trip. I'm looking forward to that. I will be able to say that I've, I'm going back over where'd I travelled by train before from Birdum to Darwin,

- 23:30 and I guess there will be a lot of people that have never done that. They pulled the train up, the line up in '67 I think it was, or somewhere about that time, because it was clapped out. It did a marvellous job during the war, its trips that it went up and down the line with the old engines and very little maintenance.

Now about your schooling, can you tell us about the subjects they taught you?

- 24:00 Writing, reading, arithmetic, the three Rs. They used to, I never learnt, we never, we didn't do algebra. Algebra, that was something we never, it was never taught there, you had to go to higher school. We were too poor for me to be sent to high school, you'd have to go from Mole Creek to Launceston and you'd have to board, and it was just well beyond our means.

24:30 What about history?

Oh yes, we did history, we used to learn about India and Ceylon and Great Britain. No, Great Britain is a place I have never wanted to... Canada was always a place I wanted to go and when I had hoped to go from New Zealand to Canada, and that was when the war started. And I had met

- 25:00 met a carpenter on the boat going over, and I went over on the Niagara, and I met a carpenter and he was going to work around Auckland and New Zealand for a while and then he was going to Canada. So I sort of kept in touch with him for a while but then things altered. I don't know if he ever went, but I never did. But, ah, at school, well

- 25:30 it was, we had very little sport and I think we used to have we had a couple of cricket bats that the... There was two cricket clubs at Mole Creek. Mr Dowsal, the schoolmaster, was captain of one and he got us a couple of old bats that they had finished, were unsuitable to play cricket with for the teams, so that was the only ones we had.
- 26:00 We'd more often than not we had a composition ball that bounced and hit you in the top of the head before it would hit your bat cause they used to bounce. It was more rubber than anything else and cause you know what a rubber does, it stays up there. That's the only type of thing we used have, never had or very few leather balls, proper cricket balls, but it was...
- 26:30 Football we, it used to cost me sixpence to join the football club and that would go toward buying a football for the year. But we never played matches against any teams, like not football teams, not school teams. We used to play it as ourselves during lunch hour or after school or before school. School days were
- 27:00 poor. Saturdays and Sundays, well Saturdays we probably, I had a particular mate that went to war, before I was. He came to see me the day I got home from New Zealand and he was on his ways overseas, and he and I had been friends all our lives and until I went... Well he still stayed, lived around the district when I was in New Zealand

- 27:30 and he was still there when I came, and he went to war and he was a prisoner of war for nearly four years and after the war he came back and I used to see a lot of him, we used to still go hiking about.

How did the First World War affect the area you lived in?

There was twenty-one, twenty-one soldiers went from Mole Creek to the war and one third of them were killed and two were, came back

- 28:00 wounded. So that was nine of the twenty-one that were wounded. Oh no, there would be more than that cause Uncle Oliver was wounded, that was Mum's eldest brother, he went to the war. He was in Gallipoli and he was taken prisoner in Syria, I think, and he joined the air force over there and was an observer and got caught in Syria, a prisoner, or Turkey,
- 28:30 Syria I think. But no there was nine, ten, at least half of them were either wounded or killed of the twenty-one that went from Mole Creek.

How did it affect the community?

Well...

After the war?

I wouldn't remember

- 29:00 because I wasn't born, well I was only born the year after. War ended in 1918 and I was born in the 1919.

Well in the 1930s, you could probably remember then?

That was the Depression, yeah it affected most everybody, very few, there was very few people... The farmers were the best off because they grew their own meat and had their own potatoes, and cause Dad we had thirty acres too and that made a difference because Dad was a good gardener and

- 29:30 he grew a lot of vegetables for us to eat, and he'd have time to do that because he only worked three days of the week. It was though, for quite some time during the depression that I can remember. But no.

There must have been an aura of sadness throughout the community?

I wonder. What do you think? Don't you have some idea of what it would be like?

- 30:00 I mean even, I guess I wouldn't have sort of realised just how bad it was, not being particularly involved. You see Dad was medically unfit for the war and he didn't go, and Mum had a brother that came back and went, and I didn't, I wasn't sort of, no-one close. Mum talked about one or two, the two Clark brothers, Will and Peter, both killed,
- 30:30 but they were, they were. Peter was a very popular chap at Mole Creek and he Mum talked about him like as if he was a brother, and I guess everybody would miss him because he was popular and he was in everything. And he wasn't, I don't think he was married, no he wasn't married. But it would be the same as today, I have got
- 31:00 friends who was killed in the war, or didn't come back. I can't imagine me ever forgetting. But apart from being at Mole Creek I wasn't, I wasn't close to anyone's that died, were killed, I don't know. You'd often see them
- 31:30 Anzac Day and they'd still be upset. Old Mrs Harrison, I can remember her coming and she always be, she wouldn't be very happy. There were two different families, the Harrisons, and they both lost sons. But they didn't live near, didn't live in the sort of in the area that I lived. It covered a fairly wide space

and, I mean, apart from just our families and

32:00 our neighbours and you didn't... There was the New Year's Day sports and the Sunday school anniversary and very little else in the district that was anything, that was any that I remember. Februaries we used to go, train used to come in we'd go to the Bluff at Devonport for a day's picnic. You'd leave about eight o'clock, you'd be up at six and get ready and walk to the railway station

32:30 and it would be two mile away, and get home at eight and walk back home. You had enough of it, which was enough to want to go the next year. But that was in February. And then there'd be the Sunday school picnic was in January, and the anniversary and prizes at the Sunday school, that would be in December that they'd have that and the Christmas tree.

33:00 And there was only three main things in your life those days. All in the one end and beginning of the year. Well Christmas is the end and January and February the beginning of the next year, and the rest of the year was whatever you did. School until I was fourteen, and then I was on the farm and that was ploughing and pulling turnips and

33:30 taking cattle to the mountains. Killing snakes, not allowed to do that now you know. One year there was a big fire that went into Grandfather's paddocks at property, at the Paddocks, and we were there sowing grass seed and cleaning up for six weeks and we killed a hundred and fifty snakes. Slept on one one night.

34:00 **What do you mean slept on one?**

We went into the paddocks, two of my uncles and a mate of mine and we went in to pick up and collect a lot of rabbit traps, they used to catch possum in those days. And we had to bring them back to Mole Creek and oh check on the cattle and whatever, and we went in and the first night, it was summer time

34:30 and Jack and I slept in Grandfather's hut, and Uncle Louis and Uncle Oxley slept in Uncle Louis's hut, that was some distance up the plain. And on the bed instead of blankets we used to have waggers, never heard of one have you? Well they get flour bags, used to buy flour in hundred and fifty pound bags, and they'd cut the stitching down the side and you got quite a long,

35:00 it would be about six foot or a bit longer and they'd sew two or three of those together. They'd be about so wide, sew them together and you have quite a wide bag rug. Well then one side would be covered with a material, sewn on by hand. And they used to use those on the bed because they were warmer, they were heavy and warm, cheaper than blankets, and

35:30 normally when you left the hut you'd hang them over a wire when you left the hut. This time when we went back the there was the two waggers on the bed were still there. And we went to bed, left the bottom one and pulled the other one over the top of us. The next morning when I got up and was walking out went to go out the door and my mate Jack said,

36:00 "Keep going, there is a snake behind you." Cause there is nothing to stop snakes coming into the mountain huts. And so just as I did my uncle opened the door to come in and I nearly knocked him over getting out, but he had an axe and he killed it. When we left, when we lifted the... If we'd have used both the waggers we would have lifted it up and found him. But

36:30 underneath him was where he had been sleeping, where he had shed his skin, you know snakes shed their skin, well he had shed his skin there and cause when we had got and laid on him that night, he moved out, must have been on the floor or wherever. And we didn't realise until I got up next day that he was there. If he had stopped then we'd have never known, he could of easily bitten either of us.

What sort of snake was it?

A tiger - oh yes about four foot or three foot.

37:00 Funny thing about a snake you can't tame him, he doesn't seem to want to be tamed. If you upset him he gets quite nasty. Ever seen one flatten his head out and come at you like that? I'd suppose you would've. What sort do you have, cobras, or...?

Yeah, cobras, not a nice thing to see.

You got nasty snakes in Ceylon, yeah, the Indian rope trick.

37:30 **Yeah, I have had bad experiences with snakes, I'm afraid. Boa constrictors.**

Yes, nasty.

So can you tell us about the wildlife in your area? What sort of things?

Well, there would be Tasmanian devils, well kangaroos and wallabies.

38:00 Paddy millers and whatever. I have had seen a tiger.

Ah a Tasmanian tiger?

I've seen them in the zoo in Hobart. But I've saw one. Many years ago, there were two brothers and a cousin, Walters. Walters is owned on the way to Grandfather's property at the Paddocks. We pass Walters' Marsh, you went up the

- 38:30 Mersey River past where Lake Rowallan is today, covers all Walters' Marsh. But they had a lot of property there, well all the marsh on the flat. And up in the hill, towards the Walls of Jerusalem, where you go to the Walls of Jerusalem, they owned a lot of the hill country, but that didn't flood. But they had a hut and a hut and a skin shed, out on the plain.
- 39:00 Well this particular winter, Vin Walters was the owner, his brother Harry and his brother-in-law George Howl, were there snaring. And they had one long line. When you run line of snares you go in a straight line, if possible. Go right on down to the edge of a river or side of a track or along the edge of plain so they are easier to find,
- 39:30 and the clearer the going the better. So they had a long line and a short line of snares. So the next day when they looked at the snares, Harry and George, cousins, and brother-in-law to Vin. They took the long line and Vin took the short one. Well, being as there'd been a devil,
- 40:00 a Tasmanian devil, followed the line of snares and had killed a lot of the game and frightened the rest away, but in the end of the line they had caught him in a snare and he was still alive so they wheelbarrowed him. A devil's tail is a part of his backbone and he can't, you get him by the tail, he can't turn round, because it is like your backbone won't turn,
- 40:30 so they'd wheelbarrowed it. They lifted his back legs off the ground and made him walk on the front ones. They wheelbarrowed him back and put him in the skin shed, locked him in. Then, no tiger. All the snares had game in them, and they used to skin the game as they went. You never carry forty or fifty kangaroos, you'd probably carry, you'd have a job to carry the skins.
- 41:00 So he was late getting back and it was nearly dark. And he was going to put the skins in the skin shed, and George said to him, "Oh don't put them in there, there is a tiger, we have got a tiger." So he went to the hut and got one of those kerosene lamps and put it on, lit it and put it on the window sill outside the hut, got a stick, opened the door and went in, so he was going to have a look at the tiger. In the mean, when he got in there, George, his cousin, was a bit of devil
- 41:30 and he'd do anything, locked the door on the outside and took the light away. And of course Vin's in there with the tiger. And George used to tell the tale about when he did that they didn't know which was running up around the wall, George or the tiger, or Vin or the tiger. Well they made a cage out of rails off the fence.

I'll have to stop you there because we have run out tape.

Tape 2

- 00:33 We made a, made a box or a cage to bring it out in the bullock tray, thirty or forty miles it had to come with the bullocks, and bring this tiger out. The chap that I said was a prisoner of war, we, he come and told me about his grandfather had got this tiger and we went and had a look at him in this box. And that was the only one, only one I had seen from the wild, I had seen several in the zoo, different times I've been to Hobart.
- 01:00 And then the cousin, that locked the old chap in the shed, took it home and he was going to tame it but it died. They reckon it was stress probably or something like that, being on its own too. So he skun it and he had the skin in the loft above the stable. And I was talking to, it would be a couple of years ago
- 01:30 and I was talking to the grandson of the old chap that had the tiger and he said, "I was cleaning out the loft the other day" and he says, "And I come across this skin and I thought it might have been a tiger cat or something and I threw it out and burnt it." And his neighbour came and said, "What did you do with the skin of the tiger that your grandfather had in the loft." he said, "I didn't know he had one." He said, "But there was a cats skin or something I threw out and burnt it."
- 02:00 And it turned out to be the tiger skin, and he whipped the cats in because he burnt it, quite valuable, that was within the last year or so that he told me.

The chap that was a POW did he talk about his experiences?

No, never, no, only once he ever told me, I asked him. I used to go and see him

- 02:30 quite regularly weekend after work Saturday, I'd go up to Liena, he had a house, he bought a property there and I'd go and visit him and his mother would cook something for him and I'd call and pick it up and my Mum would cook me something and I'd take up and spend the weekend. Spend the first hour washing up, because he used to get a new plate every time he had something to eat and stacked it in a heap, he must guessed that

03:00 I'd be up and wash up for him. But oh no, we had some wonderful times, he and I. Travelling and walking about, camping out, hunting and shooting. I was talking to a young chap and he was calling me mate and it was in the café, "Ah mate, mate this and mate this." and I said "Listen, I said, you are not me mate, you're a cobbler, I'll call you cobbler but not mate."

03:30 **You said that you talk to him once about?**

Yes, he only told, he told me once about being a prisoner, never again. We used to go finishing of a night, take a light and a net, and get something for super or whatever and we'd go home and clean the fish and eat them and go to bed. But never before two or three o'clock, because he used to have a nightmare. I saw him in a nightmare only once, yeah; never want to see it again.

04:00 **Was he yelling out or something?**

Yes, I won't say any more, it upsets me.

What did he say on that one occasion about being a POW it was a tough life or?

Was it tough for him? Worse than tough. He had scars on his back where they'd hit him with the butt of a riffle.

04:30 Yes, I don't know if they'll ever alter that they were animals than, they couldn't treat there prisoners of war like human beings. Gerald, Gerald something, another chap I know he was a school master

05:00 he told me this story, he was on the Burma railway and the railway bridge had bows that carried the rails and not much else and if you wanted to cross you had to walk with one foot each side of the rail. And he was crossing it one day and the train was coming and there was another, quite a large chap,

05:30 frightened and he didn't like heights and didn't like walking over this, so Gerald helped him. Fortunately every so far there was piece that you could get off the rails and let the train go past or a little platform that allowed you to do that in case anything happened. Well they got to that and they let the train go past and then he helped him right across the other side and of course when they got there they went up and went and

06:00 patted this big fellow for helping the little fellow get across the railway and of course it was the little fellow helping the big fellow. He said the big chap got the praise, for something he didn't do, but he said he never let on.

Besides the nightmare of the chap that was the POW did he seem normal or he seemed physically and emotionally scarred?

Oh yes, very much so.

06:30 He used to, he like living on his own, he used to camp out, he go, he used to do bush, falling, falling in the bush for saw mill and whatever. He go and camp on his own, didn't worry if anyone didn't come and see him, didn't matter. He and I had had something about, just well mates.

07:00 Yes, he had been dead, I went and saw his grave the other day, he has been dead nearly twenty three years since he died. It was strange that none of his family, only great grand children and great grand children only left, the sister and the two brothers

07:30 both gone and their families. Not much else I can tell you about my early life, oh I suppose there is lots of things that I can tell you but not offhand sort of.

What was the influence of empire when you were growing up?

08:00 I had no time for the Queen, whatsoever, never ever have done. Strange that - if any somebody asked me, I can remember my mother saying "Shush, don't say that." When I'd be going crook about the Queen. And she said to me, "You'll be in trouble, you'll be in trouble." No, I have never, England is a place that I have never wanted to go. And I never sort of - they are just another family as far as I am just concerned. I mean, it's all right, I mean it is a good thing,

08:30 but I don't, people, if that what's English people wanted - so be it. But I couldn't see, what got up my nose was that she was so rich and she'd come to Australia and we have to pay her way. That didn't seem right to me and never has done, but anyway, she's quite a lady and so was the Queen Mother very popular and a nice old lady and nothing against her, it was just a,

09:00 just a - that that they were Queen and they were this that and the other and we were her subjects and paid their way, but not me, that was just my idea. Other people have got their ideas, so be it, and I have nothing against that, it like religion, there people, I got me doubts about there being a God,

09:30 and Mother used to say to me, about God and whatever and she was quite she believed in it, well that was, I never had anything against that but when she died I said, "Well, I hope she not disappointed, if she gets something to heaven and there is no God, and not of what she thinks, she is going to be disappointed." And I said, "Well I'll wait and see and when I get there and there is none I won't be disappointed and if there is I will be agreeably surprised."

10:00 **What religion were you being raised in by your parents?**

We were Methodists. Yes, I mean I still go to Church, to well for different occasions, I go and if there is a service on, something special that I think, I'd go along, as far as I have no religion other than that, or whatever, it's something that I don't discuss or talk about much.

10:30 I just go my way and believe what I like – what I think is right and I don't try and put it down somebody else's throat and I don't expect other people to do that to me. You see so much today and it makes you wonder if there is a God. So much hardship and poverty and droughts and the way people live. That what I used to say to Mother, "Well if you think,

11:00 he is so good and caring and whatever and you read in the bible about him and these things go on and all he had to do is make it rain and they have got something to eat rather than, it would be much more pleasant to think of somebody with something to eat than to starve." I know what it is like to be hungry. But I mean eventually I have had a feed but to go from day to day to day and not have anything to eat.

11:30 Beyond my comprehension.

Do you think you are bordering on the atheist?

Well, maybe, if you put it that way, I'm just doubtful that there is a God, that's all, I'll just wait and see until I get there.

At about what age where you forming these views, as a youngest?

I can all, well we'd be

12:00 taught about at school, we'd be taught about the empire and whatever. I, when I found out that they were wealthy and they had everything that they needed and lots more than most and lots more than a lot of people who had nothing; I couldn't see that that was right. Was never one of my ideas. When I found out that the Queen was coming

12:30 and that she was so well to do. I read in the newspaper, we always got the newspaper, read and I could read it and I did a lot of reading, I read that she was wealthy and read how much it cost the Australian government to pay for the Queen when she got. Nothing got up my nose worse than that. I guess I had read about people being poor in

13:00 Australia we were there was many people poor. It was after the depression that they came.

So what were you thinking when at school, when they were having all these sing songs and Empire Day and all this is happening?

Well at school days I don't, it wasn't until when I got older that I, that the Queen came and I realised that that was going on. Oh well Empire day was, we

13:30 had probably somebody who supplies us with lollies, well that was ok by me. And we would have a day off school or we never, very rarely we had sports on empire day, and if you didn't go to school, well so be it. We would go walk about – well cause Ray lived quite close, there was his Grandfather lived over there and he lived across there and another neighbour just lived up there

14:00 and we lived here – and it was – no problem to go to his place, across a couple of paddocks.

What did you think of the King before the Queen?

Pardon?

The King while you were growing up?

Well, it would be no different to the Queen I don't suppose. Not that I ever gave it much thought or worried, it was when I got older and I could read and

14:30 realised that – what they represented and what people thought of them, it didn't – I wasn't impressed. The Queen Mother very popular, very nice old lady and so is the Queen, I mean it is the person, there is nothing wrong with the person, it just what they represent.

15:00 The Empire well its – fell to pieces now hasn't it. No, if the English people want it that is their business. I still think that we should be on our own, a republic and whatever. Run our own show and don't have to run to somebody to tell us we, that is ok to do this and or the other. Time we grew up.

15:30 **When you were growing up in Tasmania, do you feel – how do you feel connected to the mainland and Australia?**

There is a lot said about the young people going to the mainland today. No, we went to the mainland and came back, we went over – oh the money is good, we'd get a job, we'd go over and get homesick and come back home. Stay home for a while. But it was always somewhere where you go could go.

16:00 You know, there is a lot of places that I haven't seen in Tassie, and a lot of places I've seen on the mainland. But I don't know it is just an attraction. But, oh, it's just me, lots of people couldn't care less

about going to the mainland, but just me I love travelling. Lois has never been, wasn't one that was keen on trains. I always wanted to go

16:30 to Perth and go across Australia to Sydney by train. And I wanted to take Lois and the two girls, I've got two girls and they couldn't think of anything worse. So a friend of mine was going to India and I said, and he said to me one day "What about coming across, coming with me to cross the Nullarbor", he said "I don't like driving over on my own" I said "Well, when do you want to go?"

17:00 Well, I retired on my birthday in April and he said "I want to go in May" and I said "Oh, will see what we can do." So that worked out - oh, Lois was quite happy she didn't want to go across and go across by train and neither did the two girls. Well I said, "This is the chance." So I got and so we went, we went all over the place, Victoria and South Australia and West Australia and up to Perth, got to Perth and there was some people

17:30 that we knew there and so we, I stayed with a cousin and he stayed with a friend. In his van, we, he had a campervan, to camp in and he stayed in his campervan. And we were having dinner there one night with these friends and some other friends of theirs had just come back from India. Cause my mate wanted to go India and they talked him out of it. They said "Oh for goodness sake, don't go where you want to go,

18:00 this time, things are most unsettled," he said, "You would probably never get back." So they talked him out of. So he said "What will we do?", he said, "We will go up the coast of Western Australia." I said, "Suits me and cause I've been and you haven't." So we went up to Broom and Derby and Kununurra and where we didn't go, we did 18,000 k's in four months and came back to Alice Springs and I left him there and came home.

In the 1930's though how easy was it, to travel from Tasmania to the mainland?

18:30 **I wouldn't know, it was right in, it was when I got, you see I was about sixteen, seventeen when we went to Adelaide and we went by boat, you see not by train and it cost us very little. Well I working for - those days I got twelve and six a day, and so I was able to save enough to go to Adelaide and I**

19:00 **was with the Scouts and we camped but it, it still cost us. And we came back and then we went to Sydney and I saved up and I sent fifty pounds in the bank. Cause you see you couldn't, I had to transfer if from Launceston to Auckland and send me specialist signature and all over and when I got there I could draw it out. But I had other money and I didn't need to touch that for quite some time until I came home I don't think I think.**

19:30 **I met a Scout Master in Sydney, who offered me a job when I got there and so I got off the boat and went straight to work. I took my gear to the YMCA and got some lunch and chuffed off to work. And I worked for there for a long time and got involved in the accident and then I left to go to travel around and to go to Canada and to see about going to Canada and of course I got in the accident. That was in that May**

20:00 **and I was in hospital till June and cause then the court cases and they were held over for two or three months and then the war started.**

How old were you when you joined the Scouts?

Oh, well that is a good question, oh about twelve, I suppose, ten or twelve as we had a scout team at Mole Creek and there were a couple of different people who were scout masters.

20:30 **What was the appeal of the Scouts to you?**

It was camping, getting about, hiking, we went round the mountains, we just used to walk all over the place, camped out oh it suited me. I haven't been a loner, but I have been sort of restless. Then well I was telling you that I went to Western Australia, when I came back, cause, as we travelled round with Max, I didn't go across by train at all

21:00 So then, I don't know when the first time was, I got Lois into travelling by train, now she loves it because it rocks her to sleep she tells me. But ah, no, we have been to the West, we've been to Alice Springs twice, once we have flown to Darwin and from Alice and then we have been to Cairns and Brisbane to Cairns and twice to Western Australia and

21:30 once, another time we went by coach. Went by coach to Perth and then caught the train and went across to Sydney. And the only trip, really long trip we haven't done now is Brisbane to Longreach. I have been to Longreach but not by train.

When you were young did you want to travel instantly?

Well, I was always going somewhere with my mate as I suppose

22:00 it was the same as travelling. There was no chance of me going anywhere else, one because of my age and another thing because I couldn't have afforded it. We were content.

Did you ever desire to leave Tasmania?

Oh, I wouldn't know about then, but I did after, cause once I went to the Scouts I was, oh that was all right. And cause I had, I

22:30 had done a lot of classing and things like that in the timber line and tallies and classing and whatever and it was no trouble to get a job. And then I, when I was, after the war I was a welder, you see I had a first class welding ticket. Cause I had been, no problem to get a job and good jobs and when I came back I started an engineering place of me own, but I haven't had that for

23:00 ten years or so because of me health I got - when I was up in Darwin, I got tipped out of a truck and hurt me hip and took the skin off me from the top of me boot to my knee straight up there. It hurt that much I couldn't cry.

Jesus

Went over - we were building - putting up a new camp - it was when I went to Katherine from Darwin - I had been in Darwin for about twelve months, and we went to Katherine,

23:30 we had to build a new camp. The latrine trench had rocks in it and they couldn't remove them they had no detonators, one night after work, the sergeant and one of the drivers, the tip truck driver - we went thirty miles to a public works camp to get some detonators

Is this in Darwin?

and when we got there, they gave us a box of detonators. And the

24:00 cause Sergeant said "I'm not getting in the front with us with that box of detonators." So I had to sit on a gelignite case in the back in the tip truck. And of course, going through, this camp was right in off the main road in the bush quite a way and the driver could see a short cut and so he was going through the bush in the short cut like mad and he didn't see the low stump did he - I was sitting right about this set of wheels and cause he hit this stump

24:30 and broke the spring hammer, that was holding the spring - turfed me straight over and I dragged this on the edge of the steel tray that shin and into the rocks over the side and hurt me back and me hip took me shin skin out. I was in six or seven weeks in hospital for that. And course the detonators went all over the floor of the truck and what did he do, up with the hoist and tipped them out and we ended up at camp with no detonators -

25:00 still was in the same predicament.

What was, when you were in the Scouts, what was the camaraderie like between your friends there and the activities that you undertook?

Oh, we had a good time, but mostly it was we'd going on a hiking, make up a bush camp, make a my my and sleep in it and we never had tents, we were to poor for a tent, we didn't know even know what one looked like I don't think.

25:30 Slept in, it was, we used to go in summertime when the conditions be good. And if we went someplace there might be a shed or something like that on an old property and there'd be shed to camp in or sleep in. We got on well. There is, who is alive now, Lloyd Cook, he lives in Hobart, he's one, Matt Cameron - dead, Noel Flanders is dead,

26:00 Freddie Furmington is dead, Austin Richards is dead, Matt Cameron is dead. And Lloyd and I are the only ones. Who else, oh no Ray Denny is still alive; Ray Denny was a prisoner of war.

And then before the war you went to New Zealand? Is that right?

Yes, I was only seventeen.

And what were you doing over there?

26:30 This chap that I met the Scout Master gave me a job in the timber, in a box Company. KDV Box Company, they made butter boxes out of pine that is grown in the South Island. They used to ship it up on boat and unload it at Onehunga into railway trucks and bring it into the racking yard and I helped to tally do the tallying and the classing and things like that. Old Mr Burnside was the boss there.

27:00 And then after, it was dried they'd used to send it to the factory and they made butter boxes out it. That was at Morningside and this was Onehunga. Onehunga is one of the, one of the harbours on each side of the North Island and there is only a short distance between Auckland and Onehunga. Well it is a suburb of Auckland it is only six or seven miles across from one harbour to the other, or it might be a bit more. When I worked there

27:30 when I boarded with the people there - Mrs Lyons - had an Alsatian dog that I used to walk and one day I took it out and it started to rain and we were rushing back and somebodies cat, run out and the dog barked and it frightened the cat and it ran up the drain where the person's drive in - know the gutter in the rain and of course we had a hell's own job trying to get it out and of course it nearly drowned with the water and blocked the drain and

28:00 we poked it with a stick and cause it wouldn't come out because the dog had frightened it so.

What did you think of New Zealand while you were there?

Met some nice people, lots of friends and I used to bought a push bike and rode around on that, rode to work about six or seven miles every morning. When to down on a dairy farm at Ngaere and met a lot of lads there.

28:30 I corresponded until last recent year or two, the old chap is like me, got old and couldn't be bothered writing back to me, so I give him away. He's still alive because his cousin, still writes to me, well once a year she writes. No, when I travelled in the South Island - I just took a - the Government used to sell you a voucher -

29:00 a book of vouchers - it cost a penny per - a penny point something a mile in those days and I bought I think it was a 1000 miles - a 1000 pennies or a bit over. And if you went 600 mile and they took so many, took one of a leaf and wrote in how many you had left, it must have been two or three thousand, anyway, I travelled all over the South Island on that.

29:30 And went to Christchurch where I had some relatives, they were friends of my Grandmothers, friend of a - no my Grandmother had a friend at Mole Creek who's sister lived - and it turned out that she had married one of Grandmas cousins and she didn't know it. And in later years when we had the history, family tree business - we found out and I had been staying with them not knowing they were cousins only that they were friends of me Grandmothers.

30:00 They have all passed on now. And I went and stayed with them. And they took me the young chap, Bill, Bill Walker - he went to the war after - I think he got killed at the war - he and I travelled around, there was a war just started and I was in and we travelled and he took me around all over the place. And we went up in the snow in the hills around Christchurch and got bogged. My life has been interesting.

30:30 **In New Zealand is that where you had the car accident?**

Yes, Mercer.

Can you take us that accident and what happened?

I had, oh, Douglas Macquarie, was a friend that I worked with at box company and he had a little Austin 7 car and so we decided see some friends of his at Hamilton I think it was. We were going down this day to Hamilton and we were going along

31:00 and he was telling me about how he had been to a fortune teller and she had told him that he liked to travel and he would have a car and whatever and he was going to have an accident, but he would get out of it all right, be all right. And he said, she said that he was going to have an accident at such and such a time and then he said, "No, we are not, we are having it now." And then bang.

31:30 We had come into Mercer and we were going through the main street and there was a car parked and just as he said, "I am going to have an accident." "No, we are not, we are having it now." A fellow came around from front of us, from behind this other car and smacked straight into us, fair and square. He and another fellow was racing and they were fined for racing, when they found out they were racing. And I went through the windscreen - that's that scar there,

32:00 that's a skin graft and cut there and across there - and I landed out on the road on me back and spat me teeth out because they were broken, and put me foot up to kick em away and I thought, "Oh, I had better not do that." And blood running over me and a bit of a mess. And me mate hurt his arm, cut his arm, but he wasn't hurt at all. A lady in a café bandaged me up

32:30 and I had cotton wool and a hell of a mess. And I... No doctors there so a chap in a log truck or something took me fifteen miles to the nearest doctor, and when we got there there was none of the three doctors home, so I had to sit in the waiting room and wait until one fellow came home. And he stitched me up and gave me some injections

33:00 and bandaged me up and put me on the express to hospital in Auckland. I arrived there some time that night. And I was in hospital and I had to get somebody who knew me to give permission for them to operate on me, and one of the scouts that I knew, I got them to ring him up and his Dad came in and he gave permission. Old Mr Batkins, Ron Batkins's father, he was a scout

33:30 and he gave them permission to operate. And they skin grafted me, took the skin off there, two patches and filled that up and I had to wait until the graft took and whatever.

How long were you in hospital for?

Six weeks. But most of it, I mean after getting over the shock and whatever, it took me a fortnight or so before I felt like doing much.

34:00 And then waiting for the skin graft to take. Like watching your tape. When does your tape run out? Five minutes.

Was ah, when did you start to hear what was happening in Europe and Hitler moving through

Europe and so on?

Well, I didn't take, I don't remember sort of much about that, I didn't take much a lot of,

34:30 well, I suppose we did talked about. I was more keen about going to Canada. Bigger the war in Europe, I wasn't going to worry about that. But then of course things turned out like they did in the First World War when England poked their nose into it and so we had to, and fair enough, and I mean so did Australia joined with England. You couldn't travel very far then. I had to come back on the Monterey. You see America wasn't in the war.

35:00 I got some mean news from the Monterey and the passenger list and the daily newspaper from that trip, when I come home, some where up in the garage.

So when Hitler was moving through, you thought it was just far away and?

Well, it didn't worry me, we knew about him and he was getting out of hand a bit. But now you are stretching me memory a bit, you must remember I mean how many years ago it was, sixty-odd.

35:30 And as you get older, you some of those things sort of, you know the things, well although... It is strange, the things of the past stay with you seem to well it does with me, but I have people I have talked to that couldn't remember. Well, our engineer officer that was in Darwin with us, Alan Bouch, I went to see him when he was ninety in Adelaide, I went to see him two or three times,

36:00 as he was such a nice fellow and a nice officer. I went to see him the last time, he was in a home in Adelaide, for returned soldiers, and talked about things that we did in Darwin. I went to see him in the morning and when at lunchtime he went to his lunch, and I went and got some lunch and came back and he didn't remember that I had been there that morning.

36:30 And yet I wanted to know, one of the things, I wanted to know... It says in that... Have you read that thing about my...? You're just reading it. I wanted to know who the padre was in Darwin and immediately he said... Whatever his name was...

But he couldn't remember the morning?

No, and we talked about the padre and things we did. And he said, "You know the letter you wrote me?" And that was three or four years before. He said,

37:00 "You know, it brought back memories of things that I had forgotten." There was chap over there, he is still alive, Jack Nelson, and he and Alan Bouch, well Alan's idea was to get all those that were still alive to write to him and tell him things about Darwin. When we went to Darwin for the first three months, being a detachment.

37:30 **We will get to this in a minute. We are sort of jumping ahead a bit.**

Well, something about Alan, in sort of comes in because of what I can remember. I am talking about remembering things, well he remembered the padre straight away.

What do you remember of the day that war was declared?

Well, were would I be?

38:00 I think I was helping a fellow on a dairy! And he went to war; he joined up nearly straight away. And he was a share milker on the dairy and he left his wife and kids to look after the cows and milk with the help of the owner, and he chuffed off.

Where were you at this point, New Zealand or Tasmania?

No, New Zealand, Ngaere, that was where I worked on the farm. Jim Watson, his name was,

38:30 Eddie was his son and Flossy, well they called her Flossy, I don't know what other name she had... was the daughter and his wife. They were share milkers and I got I think it was four pounds and twelve and six and me keep. When I worked for the timber company, I got five pound or five pound and one or two shillings, which was good wages then.

39:00 **When war was declared did you automatically think, "Oh, we are in now"?**

Oh, well you had to, didn't we. Australia was in. I got a telegraph to told me not to join up but to come home but I didn't intend to, well as soon as I could I came back home, cause I couldn't, they wouldn't give me permission to leave the country because I was involved in this court action from the accident

39:30 with the court. I said, "I am going back to Australia." They said that I couldn't. I had to apply for an application to leave the country, even though I was an Australian I was involved in the court action. I had to stop, it was, until both the court actions was over. Well it suited me because I got one hundred and fifty pounds for compensation.

What was the court action for?

40:00 The blokes, they were doing the wrong thing you see, they were racing and they run into me... two minutes... and they were up for racing you see, and they were up before the court for breaking the law, for racing through the town and as there was only a certain amount of speed limit... about fifty or sixty mile per hour and they were doing greater than that and came out behind a car.

So you were like a witness for the prosecution?

Well, I was one of the

40:30 those involved because I was injured.

How long did they all the court cases take?

Well there was two of them, I don't why it was postponed and it took a couple of days. But the next one was over in and the conversation was taken and the fellows fined or whatever and I was glad to get out of it so I could come home.

Tape 3

00:32 **We have got lots to ask you, so can you tell us what you were doing about your day when war started?**

Now that is testing... No I can't... I'd been on the dairy I guess, oh well yes, well the chap, he, the share farmer and when he left I left.

01:00 And then I came... The court cases were over and so I organised to come home on the Monterey, came back to Auckland and stayed with some friends and then came home.

Can you tell us why chose to join the Royal Australian Air Force?

Oh, glamour boy... No well I had a cousin in it and he was a pilot

01:30 and I had written to him and asked him about it and he had said that it was a good life and whatever. I was in the Light Horse before the war and I was seventeen and I joined the Light Horse troop... the Chudleigh Troop. And I was still in it when I came back from New Zealand, see I hadn't been discharged or hadn't resigned or anything and I still remained one of the troop. But all the chaps who were in the troop had gone to the war,

02:00 when I got back, yeah they joined up straight away. And I came back and I had to go to camp and then I went to camp and then I got a discharge from there to the air force. I just thought that I would like to be in the air force, but I couldn't get in. I was interested in, whatever they called it,

02:30 saving pilots and things like that... from in boats... But I wanted to join that and but then seeing that I couldn't swim very well and I had nothing to do with boats... so they just... I had a go as a general hand to start with and then worked me way up from that.

How did your parents react

03:00 **to you signing up?**

They never ever said anything about it. They sent me a telegram in New Zealand and told me not to join up over there and to come home, but ah I was twenty-one then, I had just turned twenty-one so I could please meself, but I came home and went and joined up and had me twenty-third birthday in Darwin. No, Mum and Dad, they never said anything. Mum had a brother who went to the war

03:30 and friends that went to the war, and Dad wasn't able to go because he was medically unfit and I suppose he thought well, he was quite prepared to go in his day for the First World War and he just wished me well, told me to keep straight. I can remember the day I left, Dad was a man of few words, very quiet sort of fellow, he just wished me all the best and to keep straight.

04:00 I never go into any undue trouble that I can remember, never in jail. I don't think I killed anybody unnecessarily. But I reckon some of the bombs that I helped load onto the bombers or carted to the bombers killed a few, hopefully.

Were there any recruitment posters that motivated you?

No, there was nothing about much at home, well it was in the paper

04:30 I guess, it would be in Launceston recruitment depots, they come around... I guess they'd do have a recruiting drive... I don't remember. It's like I said, I have left it a bit late to try and remember things that happened so long ago. I know Austin Richards, my mate, my cousin, he was in the air force he was trained and

05:00 he was a bomber pilot and he crash landed in England and he burnt to death in the plane in England.

Oh well, they gave him a revolver and they couldn't get him out, and the rest of the crew had got out and they crash landed and the plane he was jammed in the cockpit by the legs and they couldn't get to him, and the plane was on fire and so they got out themselves and they gave him a revolver and I think he shot himself.

You found this out after the war?

05:30 Yes, fortunately, we never knew about it until after the war and after his Mum and Dad were both dead. It would be a shocking thing to know.

Can you tell us about your cousins? How did you grow up with them locally?

Well Austin, Austin and I were the same age, ten days' difference. We were born in the same house together.

06:00 They had a farm and I used to go out with them and stay the weekend and things like that and go fishing. At that time Ray Miles, me first mate, he had gone, he had shifted from the district so we never saw much of one another until after the war, after he came home from being a prisoner of war. So Austin and I, so same age... Austin and I were good mates, played cricket together and whatever,

06:30 tennis. So I used to go out to their farm weekends, we used to go hiking, climbed up Mount Roland two or three times and all over the place and places. I reckon we went in place that there had been anyone would have gone before the blacks. Out of the way places and...

Like where?

Well out the back of the Dog Head a they call it

07:00 and follow the Mersey River round and places.

Down to the western end?

From Mole Creek to Liena and out of back of the Dog's Head and up to Mersey, up to the Liena way. It was pretty rough country there. If you ever go boating down the Mersey and go from Liena to come down into the Union bridge in Mole Creek, be very careful because it goes under a

07:30 rock formation and if the water is up you're in trouble because you would probably get jammed there and drown, or get your head taken off as you scrape across the rocks above you it goes through a sort of short of a tunnel. Limestone country... It's below Liena... I have been through it but I have been told so.

Did you see any sort of recruitment posters at all?

No, not that I can recall... I suppose I did do in the cities and wherever... not that I took a lot of notice of em.

Why did you propose to join in 1940?

Well I thought it was about time that I did something... I suppose I had been a lot of places before it. And it was a chance of seeing the world or whatever. But the trouble was...

08:30 A lot of chaps complained and they were like me... I was hoping to go to New Guinea or whatever and we got sent to Darwin, and a lot of chaps were ended up in Alice Springs driving transport and they joined up to fight, and it didn't make any difference and you were keen enough to join and go wherever they sent you, and where they sent you was where you stopped

09:00 and there was nothing you could do about it, and you mightn't. Well they never saw any fighting and all they saw was loads and loads of goods and whatever from Alice Springs to Larrimah or Birdum backwards and forwards for two or three years on end. They was nearly a riot there once, wasn't there? They went on strike, they nearly court-martialled hundreds of them.

09:30 Have you read The Long Road North? Get it, it is a good book... hard to get... but if you could read it go to the library and get it. It's all about the drivers and what they did and how they... you see... well I was expecting... and well a lot of fellows I know went to Larrimah and places like that I wouldn't have liked to have done that. But I couldn't help that, they just sent me to Lake Boga, "You're a welder. You go there, we need a welder."

So you didn't want to join up and become a pilot or anything like that?

Well, one thing I never had me own teeth, and I understand, I was told that if you had your teeth out they won't take you as a pilot but I don't know if that is true or not. But I never had the education to be a good enough... but I would have had to be fairly well educated or had had to go to school. You see me cousin, his girlfriend in Queensland.

10:30 taught him, she was a school teacher and helped him to pass the exam to be a pilot. You see my education was not very great and though and even though... I don't consider myself a failure... I have done fairly well for myself.

What position did you hope to apply for when you joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air

Force]?

- 11:00 I wanted to be on the sea plane, sea rescue, but I couldn't get in that. And then I wanted to be a transport driver but they had too many of them. I was keen to go and do something and get away from the place, so I said I would be a general hand and do whatever we have to, and went to Darwin with a pick and shovel, never worked so hard in all me life.
- 11:30 We had an old bulldozer first up and it broke down and there was ten of us, and for five days we picked and shovelled over one hundred and thirty-odd loads of gravel in the five days... four yard loads to fill up bomb holes.

Hang on, we are getting ahead of ourselves here

Well your asking me and I'm telling you.

- 12:00 **We are going just a bit too far! Tell us about the process of enlistment and how they selected you for specific jobs?**

They didn't select me, they said, "Right we'll take you as a general hand." And that's it I went to Laverton and did six weeks' rookies, rifle practice and marching and whatever, and then they shunted me into Port Melbourne, stores depot, Number 1 Stores Depot. It was quite funny,

- 12:30 well, it wasn't funny. I had been, when I came back from New Zealand after the accident, I wasn't sure how I was going to be with me head injuries, so I went to Queenstown for six months and I worked on the railway, on the Abt Railway, the one they have just done up. I worked on that and I worked as a cleaner and then I got out firing and then I got
- 13:00 two trips firing over the Apt to Strahan with ore before it came Christmas and I decided, "I am fit enough to join up," so I left the railway and I told them I was leaving. And it is a wonder they let me go because at that time it was coming more prevalent and people in necessary employment or jobs, they refused to go to allow them to go the join in the services.
- 13:30 But I got away at Christmas time and joined the air force. I just decided I was fit enough although... Anyway, I joined up and went with what they wanted me to do. At Port Melbourne, when they found, they had
- 14:00 a boiler for hot water for showering and general laundry work and whatever and the fellow who was looking after it and couldn't fire it properly, and the officers were complaining about it and everybody was complaining about cold water for the showers and whatever. And they asked if anyone had ever had anything to do with boilers and I said, "Oh yes, I was on the railway." Oh, into to
- 14:30 looking after the boiler, wasn't I? I, the first day I was there I had to clean the firebox and put water on the coke and the fellow didn't know anything about it, because if you put water on coke it makes it, it gives it, soak it a bit and it generates a lot more heat. So I stoked the boiler and I had steam blowing off, I had to turn on taps.
- 15:00 I hadn't been used a vertical boiler it was about higher than this roof I suppose and about four foot diameter up like that, firebox and pipes going everywhere and water in and out. And I got up to whatever pressure and above it and so that was when I had to turn on the taps and I had steam coming out of it. So when next morning when everybody was expecting to have cold water or cool warm showers, they had steam
- 15:30 coming out of them and they burnt them and hot water. And of course when I left, there was a ruckus they didn't want me leaving because who were they going to have to get them hot water? It was mainly the officers, of course, they liked their hot water and whatever. Anyway, I left there and went to embarkation depot at the showgrounds in Melbourne and that was were the soup episode turned up
- 16:00 **Tell us about the soup episode.**
- I told you this morning. Do I have to tell it again? Well I went to, I was only there for three or four days before we left for Darwin. Do you want me to go on from there to Darwin?
- Actually, no, I might just ask you some more questions about Laverton.**
- I don't remember much about Laverton, other than the parade ground and the rookies. One of the chaps that I knew that joined up, he came from Chudleigh
- 16:30 and he had two of the biggest eye teeth of any man I have ever seen, because he couldn't shut his mouth right, they showed up right there like tusks nearly, they were enormous teeth. Well they pulled them out and he nearly bled to death in hospital. A fellow that I knew well from Chudleigh, and he was still in hospital when I left because I went to see him the day I left to go to Port Melbourne
- 17:00 and I took him some oranges - I'd forgotten about this till later after the war - and anyway, after the war he was home and before I took off again, I was carting some timber from Mole Creek to Launceston had I was driving a truck and it broke down at the Needles where he lived one morning early, and I knew where he lived and

- 17:30 knew he was a mechanic because he went to England, and after he came out of hospital at Laverton he went to England. He was a very good mechanic and went on aircraft, he was a fitter, he... Anyway, I woke him up – this was after the war – I woke him up, it was five o'clock in the morning and I was going through with an early load of timber and he came and fixed me truck, and I went to pay him
- 18:00 and he said, "No." He said, "I owe you one." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "I owe you one." And I said, "How come?" He said, "Remember the day when I was in hospital and you come to see me and you were the only one of the buggers that did of all the fellows who I knew, and you brought me some oranges." I had forgotten about them. He said, "We are square now." And he is dead now too, but anyway.
- 18:30 That was that. And from there when I went to stores depot and I just told you about that and the episode with the boiler. And in the first place I was in receipts in the store and they had me doing clerical work and counting badges and caps and coats and shirts, and everything had to be signed for subject to check.
- 19:00 If there was anything short you were covered... If there was half dozen badges short when you counted it and you made note of it and checked up and where you signed the receipt it was subject, they'd have to, they would accepted that and if it was any short they would replace them or supply them. Well I was there for I don't know how long, must have been several months, three or four months.
- 19:30 **Sounds like a plum job.**
- I always liked a lot of them more, but well, you didn't join up to count badges. Although the boiler was interesting enough to steam clean em when they got up in the morning, with a bit of hot water.
- Was that a tough job doing boiler work?**
- No, no it was easy. They had, I didn't even have to clean taps.
- 20:00 They had fellows who used to go around and look after and wash the seats in the latrines, keep the place and that. All I had to do was look after the boiler. You see I had to get up early and they allowed me time off, and then I would go into the store and then start again in the evening and make sure there was hot water cause the supply, they had a big storage of hot water for the boiler
- 20:30 and you could stoke it up and tamp it down to leave it to burn away overnight and the water would be hot when you got up the next day. And then you would have to clean the whole box out and light the fire again and keep the water going. You didn't have to supply the kitchen, when you were like that when they used a lot of hot water. I guess they had a hot water services.
- 21:00 But you had to boil up this one.
- What sort of basic training did you receive when you were in Laverton?**
- Basic training, oh nothing different to what we had already done in the Light Horse. You see we had rifle practice and machine gun, anti-tank rifle, and we didn't have that in the air force,
- 21:30 not like I had done in the Light Horse. We used to have field days, and rifle range shooting and all things like that. That was before the war and cause they carried on with that until the Light Horse transferred over to the Bren gun carriers and whatever.
- And being in the Light Horse before the war, obviously you had to have your own horse?**
- No, I used to borrow one.
- Oh, you borrowed one?**
- Yes, I never had me own horse. There was plenty of horses around. You used to get 7 shillings a day
- 22:00 for a horse. And then your horse was fed and all and they had a vet. No, there was no problem, whoever owned the horse you would give them half of whatever you got for it or five shilling out of the seven shilling. It didn't cost you anything to have it and you got three or five shillings a day while we were on parole, when we were on bivouac and things like that we got paid.
- 22:30 Matter of fact, they still owe me, I didn't collect the last of it; it should be worth something now I think. The Captain James, same name as me, Dickie James, he was the chap I used to call him, told me I should go and apply for it but I never had time; I never got around to it.
- 23:00 **Did you find it was relatively easy to make friends in the air force?**
- Well, I never had any trouble to make friends. Look at you fellows, you will be friends for life.
- Different circumstances than the air force.**
- No, not really, it was in a hut with eight or ten other fellows, and you all had to dug in and sweep the place out and keep it tidy and clean and make your beds, and
- 23:30 there would be some fellow who didn't even have to make your bed. But my mother was, she taught me

how to roll my socks, wash up and cook and make me bed and all things like that. Nothing, didn't seem to be a problem and make me bed and be gone and other fellows would still be at the blanket.

Was the training harder than the Light Horse?

No it was a different thing altogether. I mean the Light Horse was voluntary... I mean

24:00 the army was you had to, it was compulsory what you had to do. I mean you did it in the Light Horse and you learnt to obey orders, take orders and whatever comes to you, you are used to it. I went into the air force, do this do that and I never had any problems with the discipline. I mean my old man used to take his belt off and he

24:30 tell me if I didn't do anything that he told me not to do and I did it he took the belt off didn't he. Same as when you went to school, I got six cuts of the best and I used to have a shanghai and I was a good shot with a shanghai and a rifle. And if I went shooting birds and he told me not to and I came home and he said, "Where you been? Shooting birds again?" "Oh. I didn't shoot any this time."

25:00 "I told you not... take this." Shanghai, discipline, I was used to it.

Do you think it did you any harm?

I bet you didn't get a bit when you were a boy.

Me? Oh I got a bit.

Oh, it didn't do you any harm, did it? No. Me either. Yes, what is next?

25:30 **Discipline, can you tell us, what happened during Christmas time 1940? Were you entitled to leave?**

No, I was home three times in the 5 years. There was times when we never got leave.

26:00 Yes, just because there was leave the place didn't shut up. There was always places that wanted uniforms, wanted badges and wanted hats and shirts, boots and socks and whatever and there had to be somebody there, and I don't remember if I got home for Christmas or not. Oh, I was home three times in the five years so that wasn't bad.

26:30 **Can you walk us through how you got to Darwin?**

Tell you how I got to Darwin. Well to start off, well I can tell you quite a story?

Well, I want to hear it.

Right from the soup, well I did go home for embarkation leave I think for a week or three days or something like, because they had made up their minds

27:00 that they needed somebody in Darwin, and they needed a mobile work squad and they picked out fifty fellows and the others were sent to, after I went home for me two days leave, I went to embarkation depot at the showgrounds and I was put into the officers' mess and I don't remember peeling

27:30 potatoes. I can't think of much else that I would do because I don't remember washing up either, but it doesn't matter. What I did, anyhow, I was there and this is the day before I left, and I was only there 4 days, and the day before I left for Darwin, I was waiting to get some soup for me lunch

28:00 and the normally of a day, the orderly officer and a sergeant came through to inspect and to see what was on for lunch and whatever, and this day I was there waiting for soup and it was soup that I liked because it was white, and I think it was celery and I love celery soup. So the orderly officers didn't come but the sergeant came

28:30 in his place and look at the meat and he smelled the vegetables and he sniffed them, and he got to the soup and he picked up the spoon and he put his head right close and he looked and stirred it and then he perked [vomited] straight into it. He was half, he was well and truly drunk, he had too much to drink. And so then to the right of where the soup

29:00 was was the side into the officers' mess. It was opened and somebody said, "Two soups, please," and so they stirred the soup up and they dished it up to the officers. And that is as true as I sit here, and I never ate soup I don't think for twenty years. And the first soup I had was some of mother's, and she made beautiful tomato soup and that was the first type of soup that I had for years

29:30 and she could never understand why I couldn't eat soup

And I can't eat soup now myself after hearing that!

So we left Darwin, there was... We left the showgrounds and there were six trucks and a ute. There was two to each truck, two to the ute. The transport officer, or the convoy officer,

30:00 was Little John, John, Little John, I think his name was Ron or John, anyhow, his initials would be in... No, he is not in that. We left Melbourne on the 26th February at early morning to go to Terowie in South

Australia. There was a truck driver and an offsider and I was one offsider.

- 30:30 And we pulled up for lunch, I don't whether if be it Ballarat or where, but anyhow, it was prearranged and we pulled up in front of this café, and all the trucks had canopies on cause they had goods for Darwin and all sorts of stuff. Anyhow we pulled up for lunch, we all went in for lunch, there was the officer ute and trucks,
- 31:00 two or three trucks in front of me. Well the truck that I was in, well the truck that I was in, when it pulled out from after we finished our lunch, it pulled both the verandah posts and under the verandah in front of the café and it still hung to the café, the wall of the café, but it fell down and blocked the café completely off. And so we had to get out then and fortunately neither of the posts broke
- 31:30 and so we lifted it up and propped it up, and while we were doing this the officer came back and he was, he was real shitty, he was most upset, and he wanted to know why was we were being held up? And then he had to waste time and I think he would have had to make a requisite to the people to get the to get the repairs done. Fortunately it hadn't pulled away from the shop, and the two posts were there. Well I wouldn't know if it was safe,
- 32:00 but we got out of it, so we never ever heard what happened. And we got to Nhill the first night and spent the night there, and the next night we were at Terowie we were there for two or three days waiting for some of the chaps. That made, six, twelve there are. Well there was another thirty-eight to come. They said it was the 5th
- 32:30 March but I don't think it was that late because we waited three days in Terowie for the rest to catch, the ones that came by train from Melbourne and the ones that were recruited from Adelaide. So they came on at Terowie and we got onto the train with our trucks and left for Alice Springs. And then we went from there up through Peterborough and out through and up to Alice. We arrived there
- 33:00 I think in three days later. Because on our way up and we were going up a long slope, one of the couplings on the half of the train broke and the back half of the train started running backwards. And it was an hour or more before the train had realised what had happened and the engine came back later and picked us up. One of the chaps woke up to fact that we was going the wrong way, and so we applied the brakes on the truck
- 33:30 and stopped us, and we were there stopped when the train engine came back and picked us up and kept on. We got to Alice and we were there overnight and early the next morning we left with an army convoy for Birdum or Larrimah and on the way up the truck in front of us was an army truck with, I don't know if it had all of its load was ex shells, it had ex shells on it and it caught a light and we didn't notice is until it was well alight
- 34:00 because of the dust it created, because of the dust it created. It was shocking, the dust it created, and we had to back up while the shells went off.

The shells?

Yeah, ex shells set the truck on fire, they set em off. When the shell went up it flopped about anywhere but the shell went up it just went shumm... straight up in the air out of the way. When the cartridge part of it went up, it went just went shumm... didn't go like a shell would.

- 34:30 And when that was over we pushed it off the road and kept on going. We arrived at Larrimah, got back on there and from there we got on to train and cattle trucks and off to Darwin. Arrived at Darwin on Saturday night and it was pouring with rain and it was as dark, as dark.
- 35:00 And those of us that was in trucks we stopped with our trucks and those that were in cattle trucks, they were given a meal and they were taken off because they were wet through; it was raining. And one of the trucks had a tarpaulin on in and somebody was trying to get the water off it and tipped it all over the fellows that were in the truck. You know, a tarpaulin has a lot of water in and they was pushing it up and I think it tore,
- 35:30 and I think it showered them and they were wet and they, well they got wet going from the train to the mess and they were given a meal and we went without it because it was dry and warmer in trucks where we were. And from then one, things started. First day we were there, the Alan Bouch, I talked about him, and he and the engineering officer,
- 36:00 the other officer that was in charge of it, was Merchantson, a fine officer, Merchantson, he was over Bouch, he said that he was the impressing officer and he was supposed to have been, he did more looting than he did anything else. We were told later that he was dishonourably discharged for that.

When you first arrived in Darwin,

- 36:30 **you would have seen the evidence of bombing, severe bombing?**

Yes, we did when it got daylight, when we got there it was pitch dark and at ten o'clock at night.

No Japanese planes at that time?

No, oh wait till I tell you. Anyway, wait till I tell you. Anyway, we, Alan Bouch and another chap and I were walking about the drome to look at it and it was a hell of a mess and there was hardly any of the huts, well

- 37:00 we slept in them, most of the roof was there and it was able to keep the rain off but. We had no mosquito nets, we just slept under a blanket on the floor. I think we might have had palliasses with straw in. But most of us got dengue with in the first fortnight. Alan Bouch said to a sergeant on the drome, he said, "Where is your commanding officer?"
- 37:30 He said, "Oh he got I his Tiger Moth and flew to Alice Springs." When I went back for the 1992 to the anniversary there was an elderly chap there where we were registering and he got talking to me. And he said to me, "What happened when you first got to Darwin?"
- 38:00 And I told him this. He said, "That's funny, you're the third person that has told me that today." And he said, "That commanding officer told us when we asked him where he had been," he said, "oh that he was in Darwin trying to help em straighten things out." Enough said about him. Anyway it was on the Sunday. Well on the Monday
- 38:30 one of our trucks had been sent, been taken to a little house close to the main gate on the other side of Baggett Road. Baggett Road I think ran parallel with the air force safety fence, which had been there but had been blown down in the bombing. One of the trucks had been taken down to this house because it held
- 39:00 all the kitchen ware and all the stuff for the kitchen a cookhouse required for our squadron our unit. And Andy Hale and I was sent down to unload it and put it in this house because it was the only building that was sufficiently suitable or hadn't been bombed to put any great amount of stuff. On our way across to there
- 39:30 we came close to the perimeter where there was a hut that had been badly damaged, but there was two sergeant pilots were still sleeping in it and we got talking to them and they said, if we... We were talking and telling them what we were going to do and we were only newcomers and they said, "If you hear planes or guns today it will be the coastal guns
- 40:00 cause Monday is the day they practice." They had two 6 pair of 6-inch guns and I think two 9-inch I think they were.

Tape 4

- 00:31 And we were talking and the sergeant pilots had told us that they were there too. They had no planes to fly and they were just waiting to see what happened. And they told us that the coastal artillery Monday was the day they did their practice and firing and if we heard guns going off we would know it was the artillery. And they had hoped that the Americans
- 01:00 would arrive soon and we heard planes that it would be Americans. We had about one third of the stuff out on the ground because we had to check it all and see what we were doing, and then we heard the guns. And I said to Andy, "There are the guns." And then we heard the planes, I said, "Those two blokes are on the ball, they know what is going on." Then we heard swish swish swish I said, "That is bombs, Andy, lay down." And fortunate for us there was a big gum tree.
- 01:30 Andy lay with his head up to and I was a back a bit on his left from him, or about a couple of foot apart, and all hell broke loose. The bombs dropped all around us. The whole house was mutilated and the windows were blown in, and a funny thing, it never touched the truck, only an odd hole in the canopy. And, the nearest one to us that I can recall remember now, if it had been a
- 02:00 daisy cutter, cause there was a gap between the tree, and the house and me, so then Andy, because he was right near the tree. And there was a limb of the tree of about three or four inches through chopped off over us and fell between us, and if it had fell sideways across us it would of killed us both. And when it was eventually over, well it was only a few minutes, a minute perhaps.
- 02:30 You could never, no I could never describe what it was like, the bangs and the whistles and the, I don't know, I just had me face in the dirt. When we got up, we were like a, well we couldn't have thought straight because the first thing we did was get a pick and shovel off the truck and we was going to dig a trench, and I was trying to dig it and it was like digging up the middle of the road, it was that hard and rock and cause in was drive in to this house. And here we were trying to dig this trench
- 03:00 and we were only there for perhaps half hour and it was gone. God only knows why we tried to do that. And then we sort of settled down and we realised that we had to do, what we had to do. And we finished that and went into the house and there was books all over the floor. All the cutlery was blown down and smashed and out in the middle of the floor there was a gold ring and a little white, white dove moulded into it.
- 03:30 And I picked it up and I have had it ever since. And so I picked it up and put it in my pocket and I have

carried it and brought it home. That's, there is a little bit of one wing. I don't whether it was done in the raid or done before but there was an awful mess inside the house. We never went into the other rooms, as we were glad to get out of it. And on the truck also was our convoy officer's gear, his two or three suitcases,

- 04:00 and he was to go south the next day, that was Tuesday, but he got killed in that raid. And the two sergeant pilots we were talking to both got killed and they were only perhaps forty or fifty yards a bit more away, and if we had stayed talking a bit longer and I reckon we would have been in their trench and I guess... Well my guess was that it was a daisy cutter that killed them because it landed just outside
- 04:30 the side of the trench, and it was sort of partly blown up and the other side of the trench wasn't hurt. And they was in that. But they told us... we didn't see them... but they told us that they were killed. Pilot Officer Little John had half of his head cut off and he was killed too. He was running out of the officers' mess. And there was another officer with him who jumped into the grease pit and Little John didn't have his steel helmet on either,
- 05:00 but I doubt it would have saved him. But it was, they said that, I have read various reports of different books. Some say there was three killed some say five and some say and the one that was the most consistent was the five. But I think that it was probably more. There was an American and two of our chaps and the officer and two Australians.
- 05:30 But whether they were the two Australian pilots I never found out, not that I wished to see them anyway. But after that we went back, because we had a lot of work to do on the drome. We used to have to, oh our officer asked anyone would volunteer to look after the drome and Corporal Sleep he was, he said he would and there was
- 06:00 twelve of us and eight of us were Tasmanians. The Dig about you, he lived at Hagley and he and I are only ones who were in Corporal Sleeps' gang that is left. I made enquires and I went to the Vet Affairs [Department of Veterans' Affairs] officers and the chap there looked up on his computer and Paddy Phillips is dead, he died in Ulverstone about ten years ago, and I had been looking all over the place, down the other side of the island. And Andy Hay died,
- 06:30 and he and I joined up together went to rookies together and went to stores together and went to Darwin together and after we came back we parted... he went to New Guinea and I went to Tocumwal.

On that raid, was that the first time that you had been under fire yourself?

Yes, the second day you had been there.

What was going through your mind when it was all coming down?

- 07:00 I have no idea, no idea, there was so much noise and I have, where they had been firing a couple of machine guns together, but nothing ever, there was no noise of that bomb. I guess it was the fact that it was a five hundred pounder or probably bigger that was closest to us and the blast would have went up, and that was why it chopped the piece of the tree above us and never came close. Although,
- 07:30 next to my left foot there was six pine dippers, little dippers for the cookhouse, and the only one that was any good was the one nearest my boot, but whether it was somewhere else, when the blast of the bomb which ever piece hit that knocked it towards me, I'll never know. I didn't realise till later, I wasn't worrying about what was next to me boot when I lay down. I could hear this bomb, these bombs coming. And they went from there.
- 08:00 That was the only damage that was killed or went near the officers' mess. We were right, just went past us. We were here, fortunately, and the bombs went sort of that way.

Did you see any officers get killed or did you just hear about it later?

No, they just told us about it. I didn't want to see dead bodies. There was one chap that they told us in another raid

- 08:30 that he one of the chaps, there were three of them in a trench and he was in the middle and he looked up and they said God knows why to see what was going on and a piece of shrapnel a piece chopped the top of his head clean off and just laid it on the side of the trench. Hardly a hair out of place. I knew him and I can see his face if I shut me eyes now. And his parted hair, he had lots of hair, and parted beautifully and they said that there was hardly a hair out of place, it just went quick and it was there.
- 09:00 And they called it the three Bs: the bombs, the blood and the brains. I'd have hated to have been in the trench with them because
- 09:30 it, they would never have got over it. We often used to say, to this day, that we didn't need any counselling but I guess that was a bit of an understatement really. But to see and put up with something like that that, you wouldn't forget. There was another time a young chap and he was under twenty-one and he got out of the trench
- 10:00 and he ran across... across some of the... it was sort of a lot of the parade ground that was all sealed.

But he ran from a trench that wasn't on the parade ground and got out and ran and the daisy cutter hit behind him and blew him to bits, and I didn't see him but we had to go around after with a shovel and a pick and picked up pieces of him because human flesh stinks to high hell.

- 10:30 And we had to clean it up, bits of skin and little bits of flesh. After that they sent all the chaps that were twenty-one and younger, they took them away from, off the RAAF, and took em further back where there wasn't likely to be so many raids of course.
- 11:00 From then on we had to get to work and there were no dozers [bulldozers]. And there was the only thing we had on the drome was a roller to roll the dirt down as we tipped it into the holes that the bombs would go off. Fortunately, then was only one time when there was an amount of bombs there would be one or two and your could fill them in a reasonable amount of time with the trucks it wasn't so bad, but when we only
- 11:30 had the one truck and picks and shovels and no dozer, it took a bit more time and a bit more hard work. When a bomb went off, the dirt that was displaced, you would wonder where it went to and we would have to go around the bomb hole and shovel it all back off the drome so they could land, and we had to fill the hole up and we had to have it rolled and oiled and whatever. And that took, as I say, time.
- 12:00 When the dozer broke down, there was ten of us, five with picks and five with shovels, and a tip truck. I think it was five days, I think it was nearly one hundred and forty-five yard loads we loaded that time into bombs holes. Or into, we used to, we'd put
- 12:30 we made protection bays for fighters. They were made of timber and poles out of the bush and they were shaped like a triangle shape and about two foot wide at the top and two foot six or three foot at the bottom and you had to and that went both sides and across the back and you had to pull a fighter back into it.
- 13:00 It was big enough to put a fighter into it to protect on three sides from bomb blasts. And that all had to be filled with dirt.

Before you got to Darwin, were they telling you there were air raids?

Oh, yes, we knew before we left Darwin, oh before we left Melbourne, we just knew that there was a raid and no damage and that sort of thing. It was a real eye opener when we got there. It was a mess, there was boats all over the harbour.

- 13:30 Oh, yes, Zealandia used to go from Sydney to Hobart, and she was laying on her side off the wharf and yes, it was unbelievable the things that'd done. And we used to when, if there was no bomb holes and there was no, well there was always protection bays to fill up. But we had to go and get more materials from the bombed out buildings, pull down old sheds
- 14:00 and scrounge all the tin and timber that we could. The sawn timber. And rather than bush poles, it was easier to make a protection bay because it was square and level and easy to nail tin to. And we. One time we dug up and an underground petrol tank and took all the pipes off and
- 14:30 used the pipes. We made a, we had to oil the runway and they used to tip it out and we made a spray unit with a four-gallon tank, the pipes and the spray business on the back with a tap. We used to go up and down go into the navy depot and get oil out of the big tanks there. In the night-time; we did all of this in the night-time.
- 15:00 Anyway, I was with the driver, I forget who it was now. And it was a four-inch pipe that came from the bottom of the big tank and he and I passed it up to the driver and he put it in and hold it there. Well I turned it on and he let it go and oil and four inches of water went all over him and in his eyes and nearly drowned him. So
- 15:30 I to help him clean himself what he could. And he filled the tank and I drove it back and on the way back we were going on the bitumen, and unfortunately, and I suppose it was all right in the end, we came across an army road block. And of course it was going down a hill down a bank and a heavy load of oil, and this old shift truck and the brakes, well
- 16:00 I had better ones on me pushbike. And I couldn't pull her up and she just rolled in and I made a dent in one of the army vehicles and the bloke there said, "Oh, it won't matter, she'll be right." But they reported it and the officer came to me, in charge, Bouchey, come to me the next day and said, "You driving the oil truck last night?" He said, "You have no business to be." I said, "Well." I think it was Digger Boucher. I said, "He got covered in oil and he had it in his eyes and all and he couldn't drive." I said, "So I had to,
- 16:30 so I drove home." And he said, "That's okay, but you are not allowed to go on the bitumen any more, you gotta go down around the trap and around the gardens or wherever it was onto the end of Baggett Road." It is a bit difficult to describe, you used to come down the highway, but instead of coming down the highway we had to go right away around, and Baggett Road went this way and the air force was in here and Baggett Road runs there, and it is now a big overpass
- 17:00 now, and come in on the bottom end of the drome of the strip. And that was when I learnt to smoke, oh

when I took up smoking. Cause the smell around the waterfront and that, we'd light a cigarette each and fill the cab with smoke and drive through to stop the stench.

So that's why you started smoking?

Yes, that's when I started smoking, yes I did off and on for about forty-odd years ago and then I gave it away, stopped.

17:30 But, no, we used to oil the runway and dark nights wasn't so bad, just with the blackout lights you could just see a bit ahead of you and up and down and you could see where the oil had run as it, cause it was quite a long airstrip and it took a lot of oil and a lot of runs up and down. We'd only do a section at time, instead of going way up and back we'd only do a little strip, you'd only have perhaps

18:00 half the drome done at night, so if you had half this way, end on instead of up the middle, you did it in sections. Because they used to come over in the moonlight. I have read the newspaper at night in the moonlight, it was that bright, beautiful. No, where, the, of course... where, if there had been a bomb, and

18:30 cause there had been a bomb hole on the edge of the runway and of course if they ran off they wouldn't want to run into a hole.

How often were the raids occurring?

We were there from March to October and on the RAAF in Winnellie where we camped eventually there was twenty-odd raids. But there was sixty-seven all up on Darwin and the RAAF

19:00 and Broome and all that.

Were those raids fully reported to...

All reported.

fully reported to Sydney and Melbourne?

Oh, we would hear via Japanese radio that there had been a raid on Darwin. Oh and they had raided Darwin. What was the fellow's... Tokyo Rose they called him, and you would hear him,

19:30 he'd play 'There is no place like home' on the radio. Yes, we used to get that on. We had an old wireless that we got from one of the... oh I think... two of the boys in the camp bought it from an army chap, but I reckon he had pilfered out of a home. In the end we had known about Merchantson, was our commanding officer, and he was

20:00 well known for pilfering and cause he used to come into camp and show the boys stuff he had purloined. And he had a Mercury car and she was souped up and no-one could catch him to see what he had in the car. Anyway, the reports were that at the end of the war, that he was dishonourably discharged for looting and he got,

20:30 there must have been a load of stuff in a boat and it was confiscated and he was blamed. Anyway, we were known as Ali Baba and his forty thieves. And that was well known. But it was Merchantson, some people used to say that it was Alan Bouch, he was the one who had the forty thieves, but it was Merchantson and his forty thieves, that was us, but there was only twelve

21:00 in our unit... but we only got what we needed. But we didn't go around pinching whatever else we could find. He did get... he turned up at camp one day with a piano in a case never opened and it was taken out of the case and we had it in one of the huts, and the only person who could play it was padre. And he used to only come every once a month or two

21:30 but he was quite a character. I can't think of his name. Did you read your notebook? What Colleen Bower said, it's in there... what his name was... doesn't matter. He used to write letters for the boys... there some, quite a few boys who couldn't write or read and he'd write letters for them home and make sure they did. And he had a competition once when I was in Darwin

22:00 cause I won it and I can still remember. One... Spell fuchsia. What did Abraham Lincoln have a beard or a moustache? He had a goatee. And I spelt fuchsia, write a telegram and use the same letter. And mine was

22:30 'Susan Sweet, 7 Steep Street, Sydney, send shorts, singlets, socks, saves shivers, Syd'. And then I won that one that night. And then some months after he was at Strauss, he had the same thing going and I won it again, and the prize was a quarter of an ounce of pipe tobacco.

23:00 And I smoked a pipe then.

Going back to the raids and so on and Tokyo Rose, you were hearing... We will just spend a little bit of time on the raids and all that now. You said you were hearing from the Tokyo rose that the raids were occurring?

They'd say, "We raided Darwin last night," or whatever.

Was, this was what was happening in Darwin being told to the other capital cities

23:30 **or was it being kept from them?**

Yes, I guess because we would get news from the Australia stations and they'd say there was a raid last night. Now one night we understood that there was seventeen soldiers killed in a camp some distance from the RAAF but in line with the main strip, and they overrun that and they loved to put bombs in to the bush and hit these... the seventeen chaps killed... soldiers in this camp. Well we know about that

24:00 and then the next thing we knew there was a raid on Darwin last night and there was no damage no casualties. And what used to get up our nose was those seventeen soldiers would be seventeen different families being notified that their sons were killed, or didn't they notify them at the time? That's what we used to wonder. You see, well they couldn't very well say... Well they said that there was no bombs,

24:30 no damage and no casualties, yet there was these 17 poor buggers dead. They must have either kept it to themselves for a while or their parents knew and they'd know different.

Did you understand why that was happening?

Well, not really, we used to wonder, but I guess it was to stop panic. See even when we knew in when we knew in Darwin, when we knew in Melbourne, before we went to Darwin, we had no idea that it was an awful mess like it was.

25:00 It was mind boggling to see all these ships in the harbour and all the places blown down.

When you were in Melbourne, what were you expecting?

Well, no idea!

Just not as badly?

Oh no, I mean we never knew what a bomb was... I mean I suppose we had seen photos, or had we? Was there TV [television] around then? I don't think so. I mean

25:30 we could have probably seen it on TV, we would have had some idea but I mean it may depend they would never have done that. Not under the circumstances. There was a big enough panic as there was. Sometimes you wonder, with all the people who came from up there, some left after the raid, they must have been sworn to secrecy or sworn to be shot if they divulge anything, because they must have known. But when we went back to Darwin

26:00 in '92, there was lots of people there, "Oh we never knew this happened and we never knew that happened." There was a lot of civilians. We were told that... I don't know whether it was right or not, there was an awful mob there and we were told that they invited... Any of the women that liked to come back were invited back and they had to help em find accommodation and whatever that left Darwin like that prior or

26:30 after the raids, and they didn't expect many but eight hundred turned up. Well that is what I have been told. I don't know if that is right or not. And there was a shortage of accommodation and I was in a pub way out round the waterfront run by some Chinese, very nice people, they gave me a really good time, looked after me well. But they, but people...

27:00 You wonder why people didn't wake up to the fact there was damage done and so many soldiers were killed and whatever, and the people that came knew what happened. No, we had another time that I have got in that too, we were, cause we had, we had a blue heeler dog that came to our unit and stuck with us for a long time.

27:30 And we got a copy of Pix. Do you remember Pix magazine? You wouldn't. It was a magazine. It was sort of, it was not like Women's Weekly, it was quite a large one and all, news and photos and all that. I had my photo in it once on the St Kilda beach and the granddaughter of Bunton, the flour magnate, and

28:00 we's it that... Oh we had been out in the canoe and I carried her in from the canoe onto the sand. Well my photo was it that. Well in that as well came out the photo of this dog and the little girl that owned him and she was wondering if anybody knew it anything about it or if he was still at about home and it was us and we could tell the dog from the photo; it was him all right. You know if there was a raid and you'd look around, "Where's Blue,"

28:30 and he would know before even the siren went. Yes, lots of times he disappeared, but he disappeared altogether in the end and whether he got killed... Well he wouldn't have got killed in a raid, it would have been bad luck if he did because he would be gone before we ever knew, We'd be working and somebody would say, "Where's Blue?" and you might see him sneaking off and they'd say, "Oh, we had better had watch out," and the whistle and the sirens would go and there would be a raid.

Can you

29:00 **describe for us a bit more about Tokyo Rose and...?**

Oh, no, other than that. When it a certain time of the night or whatever the day and it just be Tokyo

Rose and they would have a bit of a carry on and some garbage about how we were being belted and beaten and things weren't too good. Why I mean there was a lot true in what they said, but a lot of people didn't know anything different, but ah but what got up our nose

29:30 was that it played 'Home Sweet Home'. But no, it was only just that this is Tokyo Rose signing off or whatever she said, we always knew that it was Tokyo Rose, because you could tell by the voice. We never always go it, cause we weren't always in camp at the right time and we had lots of time we had work to do and come and get a meal and go.

30:00 **What effect did Tokyo Rose have on morale if any?**

Not really... They used to laugh about her... The poor bastard, you know. It was a bloke, wasn't it? Yes, didn't know any better or whatever... abuse it. Every time, you could bet somebody would say, "Oh that so-and-so is on again. And what does he have to say today?"

30:30 **In some funny way, was he a bit of entertainment for you, what Tokyo Rose would say?**

Oh yes, well it would be something different. But the piano, I was going to tell you about the piano. The piano was in a case and they undid it, the padre, and the last raid that they had on Winnellie know that they strafed it and they blew it, that piano, to bits and we were the only ones who ever used. And some poor beggar had bought a new piano and... But we never ever knew whether it came out of music shop or not but it was still in the case,

31:00 but I think perhaps that we knew that it came out of a home. Cause people, people left things there according to reports, well all their furniture, they just walked out and left them. I read somewhere not long ago that one chap went back after the war and he had a house and block and all that was left was the block of land, they took the house completely, maybe, it might have been blown down and they picked it up and carted it away. But if it had blown down we would have got our share of it...

31:30 it would be the iron off the roof and studs that were long enough or anything that was square enough to make a bomb bay out of it.

Can you take us through the process of air raid? As you said, the dog runs off and the air-raid siren goes off, can you take us through that a bit?

Well, if the air raid went off, it would depend on where we were if we were on part of the drome, we would make for the nearest set of trenches we knew about or as far away as we could get.

32:00 And if it was... we could hear the planes coming we didn't bother getting in the truck, but if the siren went and there was no sound of raids, or if we had noticed the dog had gone, we'd never dare go without the siren went, because if it wasn't right... somebody would see us rushing off in the truck. There would be, "Oh, what is going on here?" Oh, not a panic, but people wouldn't have known what to do, to go to their trenches or not.

32:30 We always got as far away as we could, over in the bush, but we were caught. And there was the time I said about the two chaps always said there was a bomb... There was only one bomb that hit in the bomb hold. It never hit in the same place, but they got in a big hole it was off the road and I know where it was and off the edge of the runway and it was a five hundred pounder and blew a big hole... You could get this house in it, nearly. And

33:00 they got right on the lip of it and was laying there you know, cause if another one went off in it and it went down fair in the middle of it and cause the blast blew them out. Shuffled em up over the edge. Yes I can... There was lots of fellows we knew by sight or we knew by their name or nicknames. I've forgotten who they were but they were two of our unit... There was one hundred and fifty of us

33:30 in the unit... Number 1 Mobile Works. Well, that particular day we got caught. We didn't get off the drome at all and we was just in trenches close by. Fortunately for us they went up the edge of the drome in the bush. Well some of the lads got in a trench across the other side of the drome and they got in this

34:00 but whoever dug the trench put a fair sized log, about oh eighteen inches high each side and because the bomb went off close and shifted the logs plus dirt on top of them, and they were doing some scratching and hollering by the time we got over there to get out and we had to shift the logs and help em out. And they gave them a bit of a scare, I suppose naturally enough. Well that raid all the bombs, it was twenty-seven bomb raid I think

34:30 because you could see em up there... if they... If they were there and they let the bombs... You were there you were in trouble probably because the bombs come like that and they let the bombs go back, but if they were back there and let their bombs go you were safe. And they came this day and they came in from the sort of south and they must have went right around, and they came in and faced out to sea and they let the bombs go and we could see em like needles coming down,

35:00 oh lots of them. Hundreds of them perhaps. There was twenty-seven bombers and if they had all sorts of shapes and sizes and they could have had ten bombs each and that is two hundred and seventy bombs and all coming. You could hear their motors, they revved their motors and there was a click, click, click as they released the bombs and even that high up you could... Ohhhhhh, the rev of a motor... And they used to say, "Oh they are revving their motors and they let... Their bombs are coming." And you could see them coming like needles, shiny.

- 35:30 Anyway they missed the drome. But there was... We got these two blokes out, oh, two or three, and down the edge of the drome and there was one two kangaroos, one with half his head torn off and the other one with a broken tail and a dingo running around and circles. In the write up I did... there was two wounded kangaroos and
- 36:00 a bomb happy dingo.
- How much protection did these trenches give you?**
- None if a bomb landed on top of you! It was just a hole straight down in the ground perhaps six or eight feet long might be a Z shape or might be just a L shape. The day I arrived on the Sunday I said and we went around and the chap told us
- 36:30 that the commanding officer had gone to Alice Springs in the Tiger Moth. I met a chap from Tasmania and he was showing me around and he came back, and he worked for Genders and I can't think of his name, but he was there in the first raid and he was in a trench with the four transport drivers, and
- 37:00 he said that somebody said they thought that they would be using gas, so he had a bike and he rode back to his hut and got his respirator, and when he came out and he was going to go back on his bike the bombs were dropping, and so he ran and jumped into a straight trench with another chap and all the transport drivers were killed, a direct hit. And he was about twenty or thirty yards away, perhaps a bit more,
- 37:30 and he got in this straight trench, and he said, "You see that hole?" It was just outside the end of the trench. A bomb went down there and never went off. So he wasn't meant to be killed that day. He survived but he came... A lot of those who were in that first raid were sent south within a month or two because they had a bad role. And he would be dead a year or two now. I never ever got to see him about it
- 38:00 but it was he who showed me and told me, and I never ever remember that bomb being dug up. It is probably still there. When I go back to Darwin in June I'll see if I can get permission to go on the station and if I can find where the old mess hut was, if it is still there or where it was, I could take em and they have no doubt... Got some
- 38:30 where those four transport drivers were killed, they would show where the exact spot is, and then I could go from there to where this bomb is. I don't know if they have got any means of checking to see if the bomb is still down there. But there was a bomb, a five hundred pound bomb that went down the middle of the strip and it had to be dug up and I don't know how long it took, I wasn't in that crew, that crowd that had to dig it up.
- 39:00 It went down nearly ten foot and then skewed off like that and was thirty feet from where it went in to where it stopped. There was no backhoes, just pick and shovel, and they dug that out it would have taken them a couple of days, I reckon, because they had to dig down so far and dig down so far and throw the dirt out up and throw the dirt out onto about three levels.
- How safe was that to do?**
- Well, how safe? I'm glad I wasn't in it. I mean they survived, but
- 39:30 well, how could they tell when they were near? Well they had to use a stick. They'd push a stick and feel it. If it wasn't there they kept on going. Once they had dug down to where it had turned off. You see they still had to dig down so far to throw that dirt up to throw it out... You couldn't throw it out ten feet.
- Were you surprised that they didn't actually, or did they build bunkers under the ground instead of just trenches?**
- 40:00 Well I wouldn't know, but they had bunkers... But they had a lot of stuff around the hills in Darwin, around the city Darwin. They had bunkers and they stored a lot of stuff in eventually. You can go and see them now. The doors are knocked of them... A hole back in the hills.
- But you didn't see bunkers for people?**
- No, not for us, not on the drome. Some of the time we would just lie on the ground.
- 40:30 Well, if we thought we were safe we never bothered to go out into the bush, and sit down and wait for it to be over, trust your luck that they didn't land on us.

Tape 5

- 00:35 I wasn't there for the first one. There was two raids that that day, one on the township and then they came back and raided the air force and made an awful mess there. The hangars and everything blown to bits. And after the second raid there was a strafing raid.

- 01:00 And then I was there for the next raid, that was the 16th March. A day I haven't forgotten. Something else I was going to tell you about. Better tell you about the... A Chinaman got killed... This was when Ali Baba and his
- 01:30 forty thieves... The Chinaman lived on the civil drome and he got killed. And he had a lot of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, fowls, and Squadron Leader Merchantson got to know about it and so he had a fowl pen built at Winnellie and we went and captured these WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s one night in torchlight - moonlight. And we ended up with a heap of fowls, and occasionally we got eggs
- 02:00 but the offices' mess got most of them, I'm afraid. But then we went to... It was in about May, there no was no raids, it was strange. We went to Bathurst Island, about 20 of us. All Corporal Sleep's gang went. And there was much to do on the drome because when we were away there wasn't a raid.
- 02:30 It must been sort of May and June. I'm not sure, I could look it up in that book, it gives you the bombing raids there. May and June I think it was that we went. We were away six weeks we went to Bathurst Island on a little old mission boat. Twenty of us went out to the mission and ten got off there and they had to dig holes in the aerodrome, fall trees and make it unserviceable
- 03:00 for the... so the Japs couldn't use it. And the other ten of us went right up around and to the north and far point Bathurst Island. There was a lookout post and three chaps there. And they had a two-way set and they sent messages every hour on the hour to Darwin to say if they had heard anything,
- 03:30 that they were all right, and if they had heard anything about, planes mostly. And we built an emergency trip for somebody to fly them in supplies because we went there, ten of us, with tinned meat and biscuits. We had half of bag of potatoes and the three chaps there helped us eat them and they didn't last long with thirteen of us. And we had picks and shovels and we had to make a landing
- 04:00 strip, and I think it was three hundred yards long or something and about twenty yards wide or whatever. And it was little bunches of tussocks that had to be grubbed off, holes filled and stones shifted and water that we used. They were cunning, these three fellows that were there, permanently or whatever for how long. They had the blacks catching them crabs,
- 04:30 but never gave us any. They never told us where they got the fresh water from. But we enquired about it, but they said, "You can't use it because the gins swim in it." Cause there was black gins there. And what else? Oh we had to dig holes in the sand back from high tide and what water seeped... we had to use that for cooking... we washed in the sea
- 05:00 and drinking. So I, Merchantson went over with us and he said, knew that I, well probably I'd told him that I was able to cook. And I had well no more nous than some of the others, I just used it a bit better, perhaps. Anyway, I was cook and I had strict instructions under no circumstances allow any of them to drink the water until I had boiled it and it was made into tea,
- 05:30 that's what they had to drink, always tea, plenty of tea and sugar, no milk, and I have to boil up buckets of water and make tea and a smoko and dinner time I had to have that for them and I had to have... There was three to a tin of bully beef and some biscuits after the potatoes went, and so we eventually
- 06:00 had scurvy. Fingernails peeled off and our toenails and if I remember correctly in the six weeks we away there wasn't a raid.

And you were talking about the rations on Bathurst Island?

Yes, we only had half bag of potatoes to last us. And I would have to open the tins of meat when they came back for dinner time and have the tea made for them and cause it was the best way to drink this... It was

- 06:30 real dark coloured water from sea water that had soaked through the sand. It was not very pleasant. And then we got all our toenails and fingernails started to peel off. I didn't know till I was in Hobart and they sent for me to have a check up and I was down there and I was talking to the sister in charge and I said, "Could you get my records? I would like to have a look to see what it was they said about when we were on Bathurst Island and our toenails and fingernails were coming off." And she said, "Don't
- 07:00 you know what that was?" And I said, "Oh I wouldn't have a clue, and I never was told." She said, "That is the first sign of scurvy." And we got back and we went to the doctor and he put us onto three bottles a week of Passiona cordial, fruit mix, and we drank with water and we had to drink three bottles a week. It cost us seven and six a week for cordial but eventually we, that came right. After that we started to get some better meals and cause we were on
- 07:30 rice and tinned meat, tinned fish, tinned fish and tinned rice and that was all. We had rice for sweets just the same as we had for vegetables being full of rice and we were hungry. Everybody was the same they were short of food. And not only us there was a few civilians and it was on Macca... You know, Macca on the radio on Sunday morning,
- 08:00 'Australia All Over'? Haven't you heard of 'Australia All Over' with McNamara talks? Well one morning, he is on every Sunday morning from five till ten, five o'clock in the morning until ten midday. And a women from up there was telling them about how they were, short food we were and they were on rice

and how the troops were on rice. I was pleased about that and because the same thing I used to tell the chaps the people here

08:30 how we tied beer bottles together. There was a Catalina used to go out on reconnaissance and he would be away for twenty-three hours, and we would see him off and we would be waiting the next morning to see him come back. And we used to tie beer bottles together with wire.

When you were that hungry and your nails are falling off?

Yes, that was only because of the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Did you feel sick or

09:00 **weak, or what did you feel?**

I wouldn't remember. Hungry. Weak or sick, I wouldn't remember. No, just hungry. But there was nothing else to eat. Even the bread had weevils in it. That was the only fresh meat we got was the weevils cooked in bread. Never picked them out because you wouldn't had much bread left much because it was full of weevils; there was brown dots all over it. And the butter you dipped out of a tin, it had melted

09:30 and as long of you got the top of it, it just looked like oil. If you got the bottom it looked like... If you have seen milk that has gone sour and all the water comes off the top and the what was all slurry, the bottom of the tin was slurry. That's, and what it was and we had pineapple jam, God, we had tins and tins and tins of pineapple jam, that's all we

10:00 got.

Were you surprised by what you were eating and they didn't organise something better?

Well we just realised what the trouble was that every now and again, they'd say, "Oh, there was a boat sunk last night or whatever." You'd get news that a boat be sunk.

Lets just change tack a bit, and can you tell us what missions were being flown on the aerodromes

10:30 **and so on and, what planes you saw and what was going on there?**

Oh, we would see planes come in and go out. We see em have to wash the tail gunner out of a... He had been shot up in the back of a Hudson. You would have to wash him out, what was left of him and whatever, or drag the bits out and wash her out, but not often but enough times. No, one time the Yanks [Americans] were coming and I think it was the Battle of the Coral Sea and they were running short of bombs

11:00 and they sent our old truck out to get a load of bombs out to the bomb dump out across, somewhere near where Sattler is now, Sattler wasn't there when I was there, they built later. And that was a fighter strip near Darwin and Strauss or Livingston. We went out and put on these bombs, armour piecing and anti submarine and so come back, "Right, here's some bombs, Yank. Where do you want them?"

11:30 He said, "Put them over here, guy." I don't know who was driving, I don't think it was Bert Stoneham, it might have been Bert Stoneham, and he backed up the truck and up went the hoist and out shot the bombs. And 'shoom', away went the Yanks. I never seen fellows move so fast, cause the force... Well they won't detonated so they didn't go off, but they didn't... They weren't running any risks. I reckon the armour piecing bombs dug into the other because they were sharp on the end.

12:00 They used to bring them... went out and got em each load. They tipped em off, they didn't want to handle them. It was bad enough picking them up and putting them on the truck. Up with the hoist and off they go, they'd shoot off well off a steel tray.

What other aircraft did you see coming through?

Oh, Spitfires and Kittyhawks. Kittyhawks most. Spitfires came later but the Kittyhawks were there and they used our bombs bays and that.

12:30 No, they'd be fighters coming and going. And when things got more mechanised later on towards the October. We went and built a road there was no road down to Point Charles. Point Charles was a radar station and we had to go right out and around the bay and out to Point Charles and clean the road out so they could get round with supplies rather than taking them across by the sea.

13:00 And so we put that road in, it was one of the last jobs that we were there... We had to fall trees and pull em off and we had axes and crosscut saws. A winch on the old six by six and a block and tackle and plenty of rope and pull em off.

Do you know when all these planes are coming and going what there mission is? How much did you know?

13:30 We weren't allowed to ask questions. We knew damn well what they were going off for because there would be a raid on, and towards the end, the radar, they'd pick the planes up about fifty mile out, gave

the fighters a chance to get up. But a lot of planes took off from Strauss and Fenton and they didn't bother about being on the... It gave them more time to get higher up when it come to bomb Darwin,

- 14:00 the strip, the aerodrome. That's 40 miles or less away from Darwin. The fighter planes got word probably before we did, and the siren would got off after, probably went... They were on the way up. It gave them a chance. The Kitty Hawks weren't any... they weren't the same good at manoeuvring as a Zero. Get up above him and dive onto the him and they were terrific, and you could hear them
- 14:30 screeching in a dive. Now the officer Livingston, that is what Livingston was named after, him, the chap that crashed. The day he crashed, a plane came across chasing a Zero below the 10,000 feet. Now Beaufighters, they are not allowed to come down because of the Beaufighter so they were both shot down.
- 15:00 A Beaufighter doesn't... The predictor doesn't say, "Oh that is a Yank so don't shoot him." And so they came down below... The Yank was, I think he was a Yank... They came down and were chasing the Zero and cause they both got shot down. Now where we were told, we were down there later, we were told he crashed in, was straight into the ground... he said... the story goes... It could be right
- 15:30 and I might be wrong, but we were there and we were told that Livingston came down chasing this Jap [Japanese] and they both got shot down. In the report it says that he was wounded, I guess that he was. Yea was hit by a Beaufighter shell and he crashed into a tree. One report that I heard or read... But they showed us Livingston crashed into there. It was just a big mess, a big mess
- 16:00 but you couldn't tell... Well you could tell that there was bits of plane and whatever, he went straight here. You had no show of finding anything of him. I read where his parents wrote and asked where his grave was and was he buried, and course they wouldn't say well he was just a heap of junk a mangled mess in a hole. I should image that they said that he
- 16:30 was buried in such and such as place, probably got a headstone above, where it was, I don't know. That would be the sensible thing.

When you were on the ground did you see dogfights and whatever?

Oh yes we used to lay on our backs so you could see them better. When there was... In one report that I read it said about being planes and a dogfight. One place we watched them and the ack-ack hit,

- 17:00 the first three planes were hit and set alight. I think they got about six out of the seven, I'm not sure about that. But we were watching and we saw the shells burst and the planes. Because three chaps came down on one parachute, and some of our fellows had to bury them and they buried them in shallow graves because the digging wasn't too good, and the dingoes dug em up, didn't they, and they had to go back bury them again. I think the next time they covered them over with rocks. I've forgotten now.
- 17:30 They were going crook because they had to go back because the dingoes had eaten them.

In some way was it entertaining to see the dogfights?

Well, what do you image seeing planes diving. I mean they are hard to keep track off, don't worry, unless they came down a bit lower because they would go up to twenty-five, thirty thousand feet. You can see planes in a formation but when they are light coloured and it is against a blue sky it is difficult.

- 18:00 The Kitty Hawks were black and you could see them a bit better, and the Spitfires... That is another story. When the Spitfires came they were all eager to have a go at the Zero, but the Zero was... wasn't about fast... about the same speed I think but they were a bit more manoeuvrable so there was this dogfight on. The Spitfires, they lost fifteen the first day, didn't they. And
- 18:30 then at the time we were there, yes, over enthusiastic and chasing the Zeros, couldn't catch them to shoot them and they realised that they had gone too far to get back with the petrol they had, so a lot of them crashed on Bathurst Island, or on Melville Island or in the swamps, never got to, in the sea. But later on it said that a lot of them had malfunctions, and engine problems and various things that they didn't admit, or I don't know what they
- 19:00 admit, and whether they had malfunctions and whatever. But we were told the first day that fifteen didn't get back because they went too far.

What can you tell us about the, what different nationalities was there flying the planes up there?

We didn't get to know the pilots, we had other things to do. And

- 19:30 I got to know one or two chaps in the gun pits there, Americans once or twice. Well we would knock off... When were on the oiling the runway or whatever working at night we would pull into one of the gun pits. They were right on the end of the chuck wagon line and when they were on the last end of the chuck engine line we called to see because they save us whatever chuck was left over - tucker. That for a while was the best we ever got.

But you would have seen English pilots, did you, just walking about or...?

20:00 No.

Were there Australians?

No, they didn't camp where we... We were in Winnellie and they would be in the quarters at the RAAF.

But they were there?

I guess so. They didn't... the Americans... I have met one or two of the Americans pilots - very nice fellows, easy to talk to, but they never had time. People think it was a picnic, I have never worked so hard in me life.

20:30 So much to do, especially on the drome, that's... Never volunteer to do anything. Just say... Wait till the officers say, "Right you, you and you do this." But never put your hand up. That's what we did. We thought that this is going to be good. Well I'm still here and fortunately none of our crowd got killed, not of the aerodrome crew. All came back. But they are all nearly dead now. Yes.

21:00 Some of the... Two of the cooks that I know are dead. They lived at St Helens. Pop Cole and another chap went to Melbourne, Charlie Pointing you know what his name was. I said Pally Phillipson and Stan Matthews and Laurie Crag and Con Allan and Andy Haag and Pat McClymont, all the ones that I knew. I haven't found out if Colonel Sleep

21:30 is still alive or Jimmy Devour. A chap named Cook. And we had a chap named Clark and he hated the sun and if you stood there and held your shovel up and there was a bit of shade he would sit it in. And we used to laugh about it and I called him Shady, nicknamed him Shady. Years after, some years after I took my mother to Melbourne to see a specialist

22:00 and we were walking up Swanson Street one Sunday morning. There was a fellow about ten or fifteen yards away. He said, "You bastard!" He said, "They still call me Shady." And Mum said, "What's that? Who's he? What's he doing about?" And so I had to explain to her to that was a bloke that I worked with and I nicknamed him Shady. And Andy Hay worked in Melbourne after the war

22:30 and he was me mate. And he used to drink in a pub at Elizabeth Street on the left going up a bit and Andy used to drink at... Alan Clark, this was Shady, worked there and he got talking to Andy about him and Andy said who he was. He said, "That bugger James, is he still alive?" He said, "They still call him Shady."

23:00 **The pilots you saw just walking about, you didn't interact with them, but could you tell from there demeanour how hard they were having it and if they looked tired?**

We never saw pilots walking about. Only time I saw pilots and they were resting was at Strauss Field, I said that I went to Strauss Field. If you did twelve months in Darwin they sent you back south but I had been there, well, ten months. But a lot of the chaps went south.

23:30 When I came south at about eighteen months' time from when I went to, when I came back, chaps that I went with in the first place are going back because they went to Morotai. I don't know why Andy and I and a three or four others were sent to the replenishment centre. Whether they were short of fellows who would do a bit of work I don't know. But anyway, Andy and I were sent there and immediately the next day we were sent back to Strauss because the repairs and things had to be done there. Oh those poor buggers, silly buggers,

24:00 they have done this sort of work before, they will know what to do. So back we came and we were there for another two months. We seen... While we were there... There was only two raids on Strauss happened to be there while we were there. Yes. The first night the siren went - "God, what's going on here?" So we gets out and sitting in the trench and up into the air went three flares.

24:30 Phew! "What is going on?" And then we heard the planes going and then down came the bombs as we slid into the trench, and they went off down just over right through the... A couple of bombs went off quite near us, just into a bit of clearing, sprayed a bit of shrapnel up around us and round about. Next day we had to do some more clearing up of bombs and whatever. They found where the chap that fired the Very light,

25:00 the flares, given the Japs' position with the bomb. Well they followed his tracks to the railway line and whoever did it walked along the top of the rail. And they didn't know how far, where to pick him up so they never found out where he came from or where he went. But the next night they come again, and because we... What got up our nose about that too is we used to work eight hours a day and then have to do four hours a night on guard. And

25:30 each of us would have two planes to guard because there was some reports that Japs had landed and all sort of different stories. Whether any of that was true we didn't know, but we had to do guard duty on the planes after working all day. And the next night that they came and I was out on the other side of strip amongst the planes with no slit trench.

26:00 And so the bomber came down and there was a fair size tree and I was easing around the tree and the bombs were falling across that way, and I was easing around the tree in case a bit of shrapnel came my

way. But I never heard anything. It was the only two raids that they had. Must have known that I was there, that we were there.

So there was rumours and talk of people and Japanese spies?

Oh I understood or was told that there was a Japanese chap who had been there for

- 26:30 many, many years and he was a reporter, and he had a job and he was very well trusted and they never ever thought of him, and after one of the raids he disappeared and was never seen. And they suspected that he went back to Japan, picked up by a submarine or something. A lot of information they didn't get. Oh yes, there was reports that there was some Japs who had landed further down the coast. They had found a campsite
- 27:00 or whatever. This would filter through. And some of our chaps were down there in that secret place was... What did they call it? There was a strip down the west coast, it was never bombed - Truscott, after Bluey. But Bluey flew into the sea and he was down low and he
- 27:30 misjudged the size of the waves, or whether his altimeter was working or not they never knew, and that was the end of him. And it was... I'll tell you a story. When we came home, Andy and I, we came down to Adelaide in shorts and shirts in the middle of winter. So the army took pity on us and loaned us an overcoat each, an army overcoat, and told us to hand it in to somewhere when we had finished with it,
- 28:00 which we did in an army depot. We got into Melbourne and went into Myers downstairs café and had a meal and there was a lady there, oh I don't know how old she was, perhaps sixty, and she served us and got us something to eat and a cup of tea or whatever. And she got talking to us and said, "How come you got air force hats and army overcoats and shorts?" "Oh we just came back from Darwin."
- 28:30 And she said, "Where were you?" and whatever. And I said, "We were at Strauss, our last aerodrome." Because there wasn't one... Oh there was an aerodrome at Batchelor, Katherine, but we weren't on it, like we were back in the bush, picking up petrol from the station, railway. And, "Yes, we were with
- 29:00 Bluey Truscott but he had an accident and he is going to be missed by his mates." And she said, "Yes, not only his mates," she said, "I'm his mother." And you know, and I never liked him. Only for the reason, I didn't think he had any principal because he was commanding a number of pilots and he used to sit out and wait for an alert, and censor our letters and laugh about what we put in em and different ones.
- 29:30 But this one not having to good a go with his wife and that sort of thing, and we reported it to the padre and he put a stop to it. That was the only reason that I didn't like him. He wasn't... He was reckless too. He would come in and kangaroo hop on his landing in. And he would rush up and get into a plane that wasn't warmed up or anything, just trust your luck. He was lucky and he was a wonderful shot, he shot quite a few down.
- 30:00 In England too he fought as a pilot, he was a good. Once when he was in the air, landing and taking off. But I'm not a pilot so I can't comment too much.

But you said that he was looking at your letters and so on?

Censored, yes, all our letters had to be censored and anything that wasn't, that they didn't think was safe to be sent down they cut out.

Do you think that was one of the major reasons

30:30 why it was kept so, well, quiet later on? How much bombing was happening?

Oh, you wouldn't dare put that in, but later on, one of the letters that the archives in Canberra had of mine that I wrote to my mother, it is on [Australian] Comforts Fund paper - it is the original, it has coloured writing on the top on that. Comforts Fund and Red Cross or whatever. And I said in it,

- 31:00 I said, "There was a raid here last night," but I didn't say where. But in my address... My address is Darwin, section, something something, and I said, "There was a raid here last night," and they told me that was what they wanted too. Because it verified by the date and everything was as was and it had the fact that I had mentioned a raid.

So it was censored completely?

No, it wasn't censored at all at that time.

- 31:30 It was towards the end when it became known that there was more raids and you would hear in the news that there had been another raid in Darwin, and I say, "Well there was a raid last night," and I wouldn't say where or what time or anything, just that there was another raid last night. And that went through and that was in it and that is what they have got in Canberra.

You said also that he was reading the letters and laughing about what was going on. How did you find that out?

We heard them, they used to sit out waiting for a thing

32:00 and they would be laying down and they had all sorts of seats and couches and whatever in the sun outside the operations hut. And we would be working close by and it would be, "Oh, listen to this."

Oh, that is incredible, isn't it?

Oh, it wasn't right. What you put into that to your mother or your daughter or your wife or whatever is confidential, but they didn't worry, didn't see it like that.

32:30 **Was there a great respect between...?**

Well, we never bothered speaking to them, they wouldn't speak to us. We were only the RAAF, I mean, well, I don't know if they thought that. We were the necessary evil and they were the above us by a long way, but without us they wouldn't have fared too well. It is like the Number One Book, always first. The aerodrome construction crews

33:00 were there always before the pilots of the fighters and whatever they had to be there. You were... There's survey crew who survey out your patch and made the runway, and then along comes the fighters. Yes, we were always first.

How hard was all the work that you were doing filling these holes, eight hours and four hours watch?

You get a pick and shovel and work for eight hours, ten hours a day, and be shovelling dirt all day

33:30 or then you shovel one load and then you have a go on a the pick. You would be picking up enough dirt for the next fellow who took over from you. And then the next time you would be doing the shovelling. And if you were left handed shoveller, you worked on one side and if you were right you worked on the other. Lorraine Russell is the name of the lady I was trying to tell you about. There is a story about... She was only a second rater.

34:00 **With the censorship, do you know whether this occurred within the public and what was happening?**

Yes, everybody, everyone's letters were censored and stamped 'Censored such and such' and if anything got through we were, I guess the censor would be in trouble. But we were always very careful. Our letter would be censored and shown

34:30 if it was cut out, and then they would seal it up and post it. We weren't allowed to have it after and we were told, "Your letter was censored." Or sometimes, depending on the censor I guess, Mum would say, "You had a fair bit cut of your letter this week," when you wrote back.

When you were working all those hours, how much sleep did you get?

Ask a silly question,

35:00 you'll get a silly answer - as much as possible. By the time you had a meal and a shower, had a meal, you would get into bed, fortunately. But for the first month, six weeks, we never had mosquito nets, we were covered in mosquito and sandfly bites, got dengue fever and had a week off. But once you had the net you were dead tired and would go to sleep, or perhaps you would be too tired and couldn't sleep.

35:30 But if there was a raid on the sergeant would walk down the line of huts and he'd say, "Come on boys, it's on." He would be talking quietly and you would hardly hear him, and he would be up and getting dressed and you wouldn't be fully awake. It would be in your mind all the time. I will give you an instance of that. We had a chap, Harry Webber, a little fellow,

36:00 with a big mo [moustache], and had been a gardener in his time and apparently a good gardener, and he worked for some lady of some repute in Sydney. And he used to talk in his sleep, and he used to talk about, "Yes, Madam, if we put the rose here, we prune that rose bush and do this and do that and put the pansies over here and don't you think that hedge wants trimming." In his sleep, he would be with the lady who he did the gardening for.

36:30 And one night he said, "It's on boys, come on, high level bombing," and we were all out before we realised it was he and not the sergeant. And you would get up, when the sergeant came and pull a pair of strides on and get outside the door and have your nervous piddle. That was the first thing you did when you got outside, and off you would go and find out which was your slit trench. We had ours way down in,

37:00 down the gully from the back of the huts, and there we had a trench there, we used to go at night. A few nights we nearly got hit two or three times. Like I said the piano got strafed in the last raid in Darwin.

So when you were going to sleep, I think I heard you correctly, you were like half asleep, you were waiting for something to happen. Is that right?

Yes, it would be. Well you would be asleep and the sergeant,

37:30 you would just have to hear the sergeant's voice. You were expecting it, you would be expecting it, especially moonlight nights - you could see the drome.

That must be draining in itself, being constantly on alert?

Well, yes, but I think you got used to it. We used to be tired from work, not lack of sleep. We would sleep fairly oh soundly I guess, but oh it wouldn't take much. You can be in bed asleep

38:00 and somebody speaks and you are not used, you are awake because it was something different, but with us we were expecting sort of, especially at moonlit nights. At the time they liked coming over. And they wouldn't always bomb Darwin, they'd go somewhere else you see. There was Fenton and other places. If you read Darwin's Air War it will tell you. You fellows want to check up on these books that are available and read all about - you will learn more then, I can tell you.

38:30 **No, you can tell us much more than the books, trust me. You were actually there and you know what you saw. Most of those books, yeah.**

But, what's-a-name, another chap, perhaps will tell you the same thing. Say Andy Hay will tell you the same thing but there will be something - he won't tell you word for word what I have told you, but will tell you in another way.

But that is what we want. We want what individuals saw and heard

39:00 **and what they thought.**

You won't get two individuals, unless they talk between one another, there will be nobody who will tell you things that I tell you...

That's right.

because they never saw those two sergeant pilots and talked to them and know that they was killed a quarter of an hour after you talked to them.

How do you cope with things like that when it happens and...?

Well, I think sometimes, well I don't think of it too much because it upsets me.

39:30 We had to... There was nothing, there was no counselling, there was nobody to do anything. The old padre was never there and old Woody, well I wouldn't, I suppose I wouldn't have like to have said something because I am upset because so-and-so got killed. They were a couple of real nice guys, the two sergeants, and we talked there for...

40:00 Oh you are running out of tape. Oh, I won't have enough tape so I can finish me story.

Oh, ignore him. All right, we will stop now.

Tape 6

00:31 I have told you how we were there with the other bag of potatoes and biscuits and tinned meat and we were there for six weeks and our fingernails and our toenails started to come off, peel off from the quick up because we had the first signs of scurvy, and when we came back we had to go to the doctors and get... He gave us instructions to drink three bottles of Passiona cordial in a week.

01:00 We had to buy it from the canteen. But before that we were there and we built this emergency strip. We had to shift tussocks and stones and fill up holes and be big enough for a small plane to land and take supplies to the lookout. Wooden hut. And two other chaps. And in what's-his-name's book, Darwin's Air War... Who is that by?

01:30 Bob Alford. He told a story, put a story in there that said that the lookout was at Point Fourcroy and I wrote and told him got through his publisher and told him that wasn't correct, that we were at Point Brace

02:00 and he wanted to know how we knew that. And I said well, that the Japanese after they had bombed Darwin had sank a couple of ships and they sunk the Don Isidro or something similar name to that and it is in the mouth of the channel that come out of the channel, the waterway between Bathurst and Melville Island on the bob end right close to Point Brace. And the lookout used to... was drinking beer that came off that,

02:30 and I suggested we go and get some more. But I said about him having... that we were drinking water that was soaking back from the sea and they didn't tell us were they got it, but I reckon they were putting us off from that waterhole that he said that the gins were swimming in. And I don't reckon they were at all, I reckon that's where they got their water cause they never got it. We had to dig holes in the sand and let the sea water soak in to make it reasonably fit, well it wasn't reasonably fit but it was the only stuff we had to drink.

03:00 Anyway, they got crabs, the blacks caught them crabs because there was one chap, Captain, a big tall

Aborigine that worked and helped us, but that was the only one, and we paid him in tobacco leaf. But these other three chaps, they got the beer off it. Bob Alford in a letter that he wrote to me, Allford, whatever his name is,

- 03:30 wrote and told me the chap who was a corporal, Woodnut or whatever his name was, had crockery off the boat as well. So that is how I know that it was the place where it was at Point Brace and not Point Fourcroy. But we were there and we finished the job and they came back and picked us up. But they picked the other ten chaps that were,
- 04:00 that we had dropped of at the Catholic mission down at the bottom end of Bathurst. And they picked up a hundred, two hundred pound bomb; hundred, two hundred and fifty pound bomb. Three tons of ammunition and three quarters of a ton of gelignite. And they had that on when they come and picked us up. And on our way down, it was late in the afternoon, fortunately, and on our way back we were coming, sailing down the coast
- 04:30 and three Lockhart bombers flew overhead and radioed Darwin to say that we were followed by a submarine. And I don't know whether they knew it was Japanese or what. But anyhow, we got the message. He was army lieutenant and two ordinary soldiers, the crew of this boat. He got two of us. He said, "Have any of you chaps have had anything to do with machine guns?" And another chap
- 05:00 and I said, "Yes, we were in the army." And I'd been in the Light Horse and so he got these two machine guns and mounted one forward and one aft. Got heaps of ammunition, belts of it, and threw a lot of boxes of overboard. And we were practising firing these machine guns. But he only told the two of us first up what was going on. Later on when the moon came up
- 05:30 and it was beautiful and light he pulled in at Gordon Bay, right up hard against a big cliff and stayed there until the moon went down and the tide come back in. We were there, we had, I think he had two pair of night glasses and we were scanning the sea, and what else? By this time he had told the other fellows what was going on.
- 06:00 So, we pulled in there and waited and some of the chaps was getting some meat from the cook or whoever it was to go fishing, and they had little bits of meat and was fishing away and pull her up and the bait's gone - swearing and carrying on. I let em go on for a bit and I said, "You know, you might catch a fish when the tide comes back in." Cause we were sitting on sand. The tide went out about twenty-seven feet.
- 06:30 I said, "When the tide comes in we will catch some fish. The crabs are eating your bait." They were disgusted and went off to bed, I think. Anyway, moon went down and the tide come in and we set off for Darwin. That was very early in the morning perhaps, four, three or five o'clock. And we got to Darwin that evening. It's eighty mile. And we had to set and unload all this gear, three ton of ammo [ammunition],
- 07:00 gelignite and the bombs. They are pretty heavy to handle, two hundred and fifty pound bombs, and you had a long, we had a pipe with a hook on it cause you hooked into... The place where they hooked them into the plane and you just lifted them up on the wharf. And some other boys took em away from there. I said to the chap Ivan, "Let's tip one or two of them overboard." So we tipped one of them into the sea and watched it go down. And there was an officer watching and God, didn't he go crook. Anyway,
- 07:30 that was the only one we tipped overboard. And they got it later on when the tide went out. And then when we had finished that we went back to camp. The next day we had the one and only day off... working days... Merchantson had got ten gallons of beer sent up from Brisbane and we had... and there was twenty of us and two of the didn't drink. So we had a little more than half a gallon each. The
- 08:00 next day, got a nice cold beer. That was the only time. We were told normally if we wanted a day off for rest and recreation they took that off as our leave when we came back south, so we never bothered. But there is quite a story about a chap that was on Bathurst Island. I will tell you when you turn it off.
- 08:30 **What's wrong with it?**
- Now?
- Sorry, yes, I mean the story about Bathurst Island.**
- It was about one of the chaps involved with a black girl.
- Yes, well you don't have to mention any names!**
- Well, we were told that he was dishonourably discharged because he had two of the native women pregnant. And it was in standing orders that at no time were you allowed to have anything to do with the Aborigine folk.
- 09:00 But you see they were in the camp all the time. But another thing I was going to tell you about, they told us that the Aborigine... caught them penny goods... well the captain did... he was the main Aborigine there... big tall fellow... he called them penny goods, skinned them and gave them to cook, fresh meat it was. Well
- 09:30 eventually I got to understand Captain's way of speaking. He spoke very quickly. And he... penny good...

no... not penny good... I worked it out it was bandicoot. You see bandicoot bandicoot bandicoot and he said it so. And I found out eventually what it was and so I said in the piece that I wrote up, "I suppose that a lousy bandicoot, skinned,

- 10:00 the lice and fleas or whatever it had on it wouldn't effect it when it was cooked. It would be better than no fresh meat. Tut that was what they ate, these bandicoots that the Aborigines caught them. That was on Bathurst. But I used to wonder when Captain sat down to have a spell. He had always had a crab claw, he had quite a long crab claw and he poked his tobacco in it and lit it and smoked it away and it just sucked it straight. I had a pipe and I just put a bit of tobacco
- 10:30 in and smoke it when you could get tobacco, smoked it like a normal pipe. But I could never tell where he left, you know he always seemed to have it. And one day he was running and could hear this... The tin he had his tobacco and crab claw was in underneath him in his loincloth. That was where he kept his tobacco and his crab claw and matches. But no, but the reports
- 11:00 in David Wilson's book, Always First, it tells where, tells at the time that it wasn't a great deal after that that they had to go back to Bathurst Island and undo the work they did of wrecking the drome and make it serviceable. Once they knew that the Japs weren't going to land and they had a bit of control. Now, where do we go from there?

Well, can you tell us what Bathurst Island actually looked like, as in terrain? How big was the island?

- 11:30 Well, we didn't travel anywhere, we were all the time trying to get it straightened out so they could come and get us. Where we were was fairly flat, right on the coast, right, and the canal went down between. And this boat is half sunk, half out of the water. We had a Japanese sink her, the Don Isidro. I was really sorry I never got on board it. The other chap reckons there was too many snakes. But Don...
- 12:00 But Bob Alford said it would be crocodiles, wouldn't be snake, no, sharks. The crocodiles would have been worse then the sharks would have been. I don't know whether, they never had a boat, I don't know how they got on. Maybe they swum out I suppose. They had some sort of a means of going across. But they didn't want us to get on it, they wanted all the grog themselves I suppose - which was fair enough. We were only for six weeks and they were there for
- 12:30 months. All though I believe that the came down to Point Fourcroy.

So Bathurst Island didn't have Aborigines there?

Yes, they had a mission on the bottom end. And these... There was must have been... Sort part of it... A tribe or whatever - there was two or three Aborigine women and two or three Aborigine men. Only Captain was the only one who helped us, as far as I can remember. Cause we had plenty of tobacco leaf and he got

- 13:00 paid pretty well, and he was quite happy with tobacco leaf. Cause we bought some back home. I never ever smoked it, even though I never had tobacco, I didn't fancy it.

How many servicemen were on Bathurst Island? Was it just your crowd?

Ten of our crowd and ten of someone else's. There was twenty of us. You see I said in the first place, I was told, and I said about before, there was twenty of us that went out there and ten stayed in the bottom end

- 13:30 to wreck the drome and put trees on it, drag trees and whatever, and we went north to build the strip, the other strip.

Were there any coast watchers?

No, other than these three chaps. There was a temporary corporal, I think he became a corporal. Later I was told because of his association with the Aborigine girls he was discharged, but that was hearsay.

- 14:00 The same as was said about our commanding officer was discharged because of looting.

Whereabouts was he looting?

In Darwin.

What was he looting?

Well, whatever he could get from houses, I guess. He had a batman that showed us some very nice glassware and other stuff that he had in possession. But that was long ago and I think, well

- 14:30 he has passed on now and it could take some proving now. A long time ago. But it was a well-known fact that there was an awful amount of looting done. I read somewhere not long ago where one chap went back after the war to have a look at his house and to see what was gone and all that was left
- 15:00 the block of ground. The house was gone completely, never ever found it. But how would you find a house if someone pinched it and pulled it to bits and pieces... probably used it for firewood.

How long did you actually stay on Bathurst Island?

Six weeks... it was in between May and June... I'm not sure of the dates but it was while, we were away six weeks and those six weeks there wasn't a raid on Darwin.

- 15:30 But one of them, a report that I read was that there was fighter planes there and they shot down some bombers, but the particular day that I am thinking of and when it said that they shot down these bombers, the ack-ack didn't fire while there was fighter plane there. And this particular day there was... it said that there was fighter planes but I know that the ack-ack shot
- 16:00 down some planes. And that was the time that I said the three came down in one parachute and as it came down a plane came past it and set it alight and they all came down in the one heap. And some of our chaps had to bury them and didn't do to good a job and the dingoes dug em up. And they had to go back and bury what was left, rebury. What other questions do you have?

In your relationship with the Aborigines on the island?

- 16:30 Weren't allowed to have any association with the Aborigines in any shape or form and any place whatsoever. Only thing that we had, we had Captain there to help us and we were to recruit what help we could get and pay em in tobacco leaf. But other than that, none. We didn't even speak to the lady, the girls that were there even though they were in and out. We were more or less we were in the same camp. We had nothing to do with them, we cooked our own meals and
- 17:00 got our own, everything our own. No, it was punishable by, oh I don't know what, discharged or what for associating with... Weren't allowed to go near native camps. If you were in the vicinity you weren't allowed to go near a camp.

What did they think about the war, the Aborigines?

Don't think it worried them much, I wouldn't know.

- 17:30 I mean I didn't have much to do with them to find out. Most of the Aborigines were in the on the Mission end on the bottom of Bathurst Island. Oh there was some on Melville Island, I think there was one of the Japanese pilots that plane had crashed and he survived, he gave himself up to a heap of native women. If you read some of these books you will read all about this.

- 18:00 **I would love to, believe me. There's too many things to read.**

Go to the library. I'll give you a list of books to get.

So where did you hear this story?

Pardon?

He gave himself up to native women, you said?

Yes, it is in a book.

Whereabouts was this, roughly?

Melville Island. One of these Japanese, one of these planes that got shot down and he landed and was wounded and he even handed over his pistol fully loaded to the young chap that came

- 18:30 along at the same time. Whether he gave himself up to the lady, to the girls... And a chap come along and I think he took him over to Bathurst Island probably. But took the pistol off him, oh he handed him his pistol. That could be in... that's in... I don't think it is in Shadows Edge,
- 19:00 it could be in Darwin's Air War. I don't know.

It doesn't matter, that's okay. Now once you had finished building the strip, how actually big was this strip? What are we talking about?

Only, something to supply supplies to the look out you see. Oh it was, I don't know, what did I tell you? What's your name there? Two or three hundred yards long

- 19:30 and whatever width it needed to be for a small plane, forty or fifty feet or something. Oh it wasn't, it was only in one direction and you'd either come in from the sea or the land depending on which way the wind blew, I guess, which way he landed. But there was only one direction we could build. It was a long narrow plane and we had, that was all we had room to build. And we had to put something for them cause it wasn't convenient to be taking stuff up on a boat all the time, it was too risky. Well
- 20:00 there was a sub [submarine] when we came home. We were lucky, if the sub had have shelled us or put a torpedo into us we would have been in orbit with three quarters of a ton of geli [gelignite]. It would be... it would just sink. It wouldn't do much harm to the bullets or the bombs, but if the gelignite had have gone off we would have been floating around still. If you had have had three quarters of a ton of geli she'd have made a hole in the water for a while.
- 20:30 Rattled, if you had have been on top of the sub it would have rattled their ears, I'll bet.

When you were stationed there did you really expect the Japanese to land in Australia, on Australian soil? An invasion?

Well I wouldn't...

At that time?

Well, I didn't know the particulars. I knew that they were bombing but I didn't realise that... We weren't told that there was an armada out from

21:00 Timor or whatever. We didn't know who or what or where. We just thought that they were probably land based planes. We had no idea that was what was going on. Even I guess they knew from the first raid. You see they came from a carrier base, but I think they knew that the carrier was there but they had nothing to bomb them with. Nothing that would do any damage to... Because they shot up all the planes on Darwin and all the planes that were out on Broome Island. No,

21:30 it was a shemozzle. You read it, it is an article that I am reading in one of the books about... Curtin took over and they reckon that the politicians, they were running around like a lot of hens without heads. They were in such a panic they didn't know what to do next. Things couldn't have been or weren't in too good a shape as far as leadership went.

But were you fearful

22:00 **that an invasion would take place?**

Never, thought about it, never enter me head as far as I can remember. With all the soldiers about we thought well they had to put up some sort of a scrap. Although we were all on the parade ground one day and an officer in charge, Swan, this commander or whatever his rank was, told us that

22:30 should the Japanese come, they thought they might... I think they really thought they were going to. And he said should they come, don't try and stop em but to make our way to Adelaide River where the front line of the army was and good luck. And one of the chaps said, "And what do we try and stop em with, a set of sticks?" Because we had one rifle to three fellows and ten rounds of ammunition, that's with us. And some of the army I understand had no bullets.

23:00 And some had rifles and no bullets, and some had bullets and no rifles. But that is how grim things were. But not... we never knew... we were there... we were on the drome... We had to fill in bomb holes and bomb protection bays and do what ever necessary and let somebody else worry about the rest. We had enough trouble doing the work we had and

23:30 living on the tucker we were getting at the time - two or three months of boiled rice and tinned fish and tinned meat, and tinned meat and tinned fish again for a change. Once we had a quarter of a peach one Sunday with our rice that we had for sweets. The rice, we would get a spoonful of rice with our one third of a tin of bully

24:00 beef. One spoonful of rice for sweets, and perhaps if you wanted to do something with it you could put pineapple jam cause that was all we ever got for a long time. Pineapple jam. And this Sunday we had a quarter of a peach and that was only the once. That must have been Christmas because it was quite a

24:30 luxury. You know, a little bit of peach like that, cut it in half and you had two bites. Well there was... what happened after. Came back and then the bombs started again and we had work again. And we went down to Point... I said something about a

25:00 lighthouse, didn't I, where we built a road around to the lighthouse earlier on?

I see.

Where the radar stuff was.

Can you tell us about the difference in bombing raids. Since you had come to Darwin, what sort of pattern did they take and how heavy were these raids?

Sometimes there'd be seven planes, once or twice there was three planes

25:30 and two or three times there was twenty-seven planes. Get that book over there and have a look.

Oh, I just want to hear it from your point of view!

You could tell by the sound that there was more than three. Lots of times it was night-time and they would just come in and drop their bombs and went. Like I said earlier, they missed the drome, overshot the drome and dropped them in the bush. And I said that it was a wonder people don't know because there was seventeen

26:00 soldiers killed, we were told, when they overshot the runway. And there was a camp thirty or forty miles from the end of the runway and the bombs dropped on them and killed seventeen, and yet next day we hear that the bombing raid on Darwin, no damage and no casualties and we were told that there was seventeen. Somebody must have known or found out or knew about it. The mothers and fathers of seventeen fellows that were scattered around,

- 26:30 if there were seventeen fellows killed from the Deloraine, well in the unit that went from Deloraine, well half of the population would know if Tom, Dick and Harry were all killed. So how come did they withhold information that these boys were killed? Because it suited them? And if not, how come people didn't know more about it? Good question.
- 27:00 But no, in regards to the different raids the more planes there was the heavier the raid. If there was only three planes and they got turned back, there was no raid. Several times eventually when they had plenty of fighters and they... There was Strauss and Livingston and probably Hughes, and they all had a good chance of getting up high before the Japs got there and they got stuck into them, they didn't worry about letting their bombs go on Darwin, they took em back home again.
- 27:30 There was several times that they were turned back. According to reports we knew there would probably be an alert and then you would wait and wait, and you'd hear planes and you'd hear some firing and shooting and nothing eventuated and that was nothing, no, a raid of no consequences. And then when there was twenty-seven bombers and fifty fighters and there was a hell of a commotion. There'd be
- 28:00 a lot of bombs dropped somewhere. That was the time I said that was the biggest raid that we were in and they all went down the side of the drome and the kangaroos got damaged and whatever. That was quite a big raid but fortunately they didn't hit the drome, but if they had there wouldn't have been a drome left. We got see them come down, like needles flying in the sunshine. You take twenty-seven planes and if they all had ten bombs each,
- 28:30 that was two hundred and seventy bombs up the strip. It would cover more than the strip, it would have made an awful mess. Well there was an awful mess when there was thirteen bombs hit it. That took a some filling, that was two or three days before it. And I was telling him about the bomb that went in, five hundred pound that went in, it had to be dug up before they allowed any bombers to land on it for fear of it went off. And that went down ten feet and speared along another twenty and they had to dig that out by pick and shovel - there was no backhoes
- 29:00 or anything like that. It was a long time before we got any decent sized machinery. It wasn't until the Yanks came and they built another cross strip. But eventually... I wasn't there for that. It shows you now in the photo in that book, a cross runway, something similar to the one they built at Batchelor. But no.
- 29:30 **Did the bombing raids predominately take place at night or in the day?**
- Not always, they liked moonlit nights because it was safe as far as ack-ack went and so they'd have searchlights. We had a searchlights gun position and search behind Winnellie came... And we'd be in our trenches and the searchlight was up and they'd pick up a plane and you could see the shells going up the beam of light. And the guns
- 30:00 chuff, chuff, chuff, one after the another, chuff. Like if you go shooting a ringtail [possum] or anything with a .22 and you got a light, you can see the bullet go up the beam. Try it some time. No, at night-time, they preferred the, they liked the night-time. That was why, when we was oiling the runways with the old truck and spray oil on it at night-time we would stand on the running board
- 30:30 as you drove it up and down. I used to drive it up and down the drome. Me mate who drove it into town and back, he would have a sleep and while he went into town I'd probably have a sleep. It was always night-time and we worked all night, and backwards and forwards to the oil tank in Darwin and up and down the strip. We'd put a fair amount of oil on because it was a gravel strip and it didn't take much for the oil to soak away and dust. But we wanted to prevent that.
- 31:00 It was mostly the Lockhart bombers that went off. When things got better and they had the Yanks there with the Kitty Hawks they would use it. When the Spitfires got there... There was a story of the Fitter E, that was the engine fitter, and the fitter A, that's the aircraft [fitter]. Were both working on this Spitfire and the Fitter E
- 31:30 had finished his work and had the motor running and the pilot came along, "How is she? Right?" and the fellow said, "Yes," and didn't think about Fitter A was sitting straddled, leg facing the rudder doing something to the rudder or whatever and that part of it, and the pilot got in thinking everything was right and took off with him sitting there. This is what we were told. And he did a lap of the plane
- 32:00 and he found out that this fellow was sitting there come in and landed okay, fellow got off. Somebody... And they rushed up to see if he was all right, not knowing that he was down. Somebody bet him twenty-five pound that he would not do it again, but he wanted to for twenty-five quid but the pilot wouldn't be in it and neither would the authorities. Apparently, there was quite a kerfuffle, somebody sitting on a fighter plane while he did a lap of the drome.
- 32:30 **On his wing?**
- Sitting on the tail end of it. But he was facing the rudder bar sitting there and he was hanging on like grim death, his legs either side of the fuselage. I reckon he was sticking on like he was on a horse. Have those spurs dug in. I don't know where it is true or not, but we were told it was true.
- 33:00 I suppose there would be some strange stories told during the war. I suppose somebody would know.

What are the other strange stories you have heard?

Ay?

What are the other strange stories you have heard?

Only the CO [Commanding Officer] being discharged for looting and the chap having problems with the Aborigine women. I suppose if it was true he would be well and truly grown up by now,

33:30 sixty or seventy year old – sixty years anyway. What's next, boss?

What about the Aborigines on mainland Australia?

Never had anything to do with them. The only place when... I think it was when Commander Creswell shot down the Japanese plane at night. That was strange. That plane had nine crew in it, which was most unusual. I don't think they ever found out why.

34:00 And he shot him down in the moonlight and they crashed on Koolpinyah, not that far away from the Darwin cause I went out with our engineering officer and found the plane and we organised to bring it back into camp. We had the fuselage in at Winnellie. But coming back they tore one wing off and it was still on it when we went and had a look at it.

34:30 But the Japs they all died, the nine of them. But that was on Koolpinyah or one of the stations. And there was an Aboriginal woman in the homestead and the owner was there with other one or two blacks. This lady made us a cup of tea, this Aborigine lady, and that is the only time I ever saw or had anything to do with them. As I said before, we weren't, it was strict instructions not to have anything to do with them,

35:00 which was fair enough. I was there eleven months before I saw a white women.

Was it tough for the chaps to handle the absence of women? How did they handle it?

No it didn't worry me. I never had much to do with them beyond me war years. I used to go to dances. I liked dancing and thinks like that.

35:30 I never used to take girls to pictures or anything. I didn't like pictures much anyway. I would go to a dance and if I was anywhere where there was a dance I would go to a dance, and I wanted a dance with half a dozen girls or a dozen or one if she was a good dancer. No women didn't worry me. He who travels alone travels

36:00 furthest and fastest. And they say to you, oh yes, you know, a rolling stone gathers no moss, but the answer to that is a yes, but a standing post gets pissed on.

There is some degree of truth in that, isn't there?

Oh well, that was just the comeback. They say no second prize.

36:30 **Well speaking of standing posts, what about WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force]? What women were there in the Northern Territory? Were the WAAAFs there?**

No.

Nurses?

Could have been. I think there was some nurses in the hospital. That booklet that I got showed some photos of the hospital. But it is no longer there. But I wasn't in hospital. When I got tipped out of the truck I was in

37:00 our own... Three nights I was in our medical tent and when... This had to be dressed twice a day. The wound was so wide, the wound was so wide, straight up me shin to the top of me knee to the top of me boot. It was all open and it had to be filled with sulphur melamine powder every day to stop an ulcer. And that had to happen till it healed up; it took six weeks. But that was at

37:30 Katherine, there was a hospital and the first person that I went to... I had to go every week or so to see a doctor or a senior nurse to see what they thought about how it was healing up. And they gave instructions on what had to be done, cause we only had a medical orderly. And a...

So that was the first time you saw a white women when you went to hospital?

Yes, when I went to Katherine, yes that was the first women I had seen in eleven months.

And she was a nurse?

38:00 Yes, only women there were nurses. Only personnel that was there wouldn't have been nurses. I never saw. I was in hospital twice with ptomaine poisoning from eating rotten fish and twice while I was in the territory and I was in a hospital but there was only men, men orderlies. But I was in hospital and an orderly sergeant

38:30 came around, the sergeant came around and he wanted a sample of water but he never... He thought he

had told me but he hadn't, and so he went crook at me for not leaving him a sample. There was a bottle there to leave him a sample of water but I hadn't been told. So he went away and he said, "When I come back in five minutes I want a sample of water." But I had show of getting him any. But I had barley water,

39:00 I think it was barley water that they were getting me to drink, so I tipped some of that in the bottle and when he came he said, "Have you got it?" and I said, "Yes, it's right there, sarge [sergeant]." So he took it away. And he came back next morning with the doctor and I said, "How was me water sample, sarge, is she right?" He said, "No problems." "Well," I said, "Doctor you had better teach the sergeant about the difference between urine and barley water, cause when he came to me and got crook at me about not giving him a sample of water

39:30 I put some barley water in it and that's what he is talking about." I really chopped his feet from under him. I wasn't very popular but I didn't give a bugger - he was supposed to be looking after me.

What was the relationship like with officers generally?

Our CO we saw perhaps once a week, and our engineering officer perhaps every day probably, and these were the only ones we had anything to do with.

40:00 We were a unit, a mobile works units. We were there to repair the drome and do whatever else that needed doing on the drome and about it. No other officers had any say as to what we did or how we did it, we relied on... We had to do what our engineer officer told us and that was PO [Pilot Officer] Bouch and he was a thorough gentlemen.

Tape 7

00:32 They wouldn't be able to read your writing I suppose.

When you were in Darwin can you tell us about how inserts where made on airstrips?

Inserts?

The protection bays for aircraft?

Well, I guess first up

01:00 if there was none there, there was nothing to... There wasn't any graders or anything to do it with, although the Public Works Department might have had a grader. Although I never ever saw one on there, and anyway we would have done it with shovels. If there wasn't a track. You see around through and about the RAAF at Darwin there were roads through the bush and whatever. We were working on the drome

01:30 filling up inserts and that we had an officer that wasn't very popular and he used to go around a back track that was already there, and I surmise that perhaps they were made with a grader when they first did it. I don't know when the strip was built. And there was a lot of bush around, even right up to the edge of the,

02:00 of, not right close but a bit back from the strip. And I reckon probably that they were made then, because they seemed to be there, and we were able to put one up here because there was a track into it, and we put three or four inserts into, on the one track. But this officer used to go around and come in a back way and we would see him sneaking up on us to see if we were working. He was a Pommy [English] and we never liked

02:30 him. He wore long socks and long shorts, the bottom of his shorts were below the top of his socks. You couldn't see any legs, but not that we wanted to. Well we saw him twice or three times, sneaking up on us. We'd be, we might be having a spell and he would come up and criticise us for not doing anything.

03:00 So, he comes one day, and we said, "You want to be careful, sir." "Why is that?" "Because they tell us that there is spies about and they have been around. Probably have to keep our eyes open for fearing we can see them in the bush coming through." I said, "If you get shot, don't blame any of the fellows that shoot you." I said, "You could be taken for a spy." And that stopped him coming in the back way.

03:30 We had quite a good excuse. They said that there was spies about and we was to watch out for them and what better place would they be around an aerodrome, and he was doing just that, being a back road. So, he was told if got shot don't blame anybody. It wouldn't have mattered if he had got shot and killed, well he wouldn't have worried about. But it stopped him coming through. The fuselage that they brought back

04:00 with the Japanese bomber was put in the... in part of the surround... a clear patch around near the Winnellie camp. And we had a DWO [Divisional Warrant Officer] came near, he had a lot of ideas, so he put two of our fellows on... No, they didn't belong to our crew, but two that was working just as

- 04:30 hard in another places, he put two of them on guard and course they went on guard on this... What, for goodness sake, why would they want to guard an old shot-down fuselage. And he found them asleep and next morning he had them on the parade ground, full pack, rifle, running around the parade ground. And our engineering officer comes out and sees this. Did he start and shout and jump up and down.
- 05:00 And pull the blokes up, "Who gave you this? Who told you to do this? What is this in aid of? Why?" They said, "Oh we had to guard that bloody fuselage, sir, and we went to sleep." "Oh, who told you that?" "The DWO." Oh, did he roast him. And he was only there, he was new to the place and he was there a fortnight I think and he got shifted. Bouchy told him that his men did enough
- 05:30 work during the day with out him putting them onto a useless fuselage and for no good purpose and whatever. Really tore him to pieces. Another funny story was about that one that used to sneak up on us and whatever he was. When he came there he called a CO's parade. Well we had been three for three or four months and there hadn't been any CO's
- 06:00 parade. You got up in the morning and had your breakfast and when straight off to what you had to do. If you had been given instructions of the corporal... But we knew what had to be done and we took off and did it. And we would leave about half past seven and go out to the drome. This CO's parade, yes, he got us all there on parade, put it up on the notice board you had to have a hat,
- 06:30 shirt, socks, shorts, hat, shirt, shorts, socks pulled up to the knees, clean boots. God, we had nothing to clean boots, only a bit of spit and rub em with a bit of rag or a dirty handkerchief. And gaiters. We had a chap named Portwine and he was the funniest character that I had struck for many a day, and he was doubled jointed, he could put his legs around the back of his neck and all that sort of thing.
- 07:00 Well he was on parade, he was loose sort of jointed, and when he took a step he picked it up, and he'd tear it, being about two foot six, or three foot, probably he nearly maybe four foot, he was fairly tall, he lunged a long. He was there with the top of his socks down the top of his gaiters. And so PO Bouch took the parade because he was
- 07:30 our own officer. I didn't know what happened to him. But Bouchy was in charge of the parade and he was there and wasn't fitted too good because we had never had a parade, a CO's parade before nor after, not while I was there. Anyway, he said, we were lined up, there was two lines of us, "That man with his socks down to his gaiters, take two steps forward and pull up his socks."
- 08:00 So Port took one step out like that and put his foot down and then the other one and he was about six foot out from the front of us and leaned over, pulled his sock up, and pulled his sock up. And all he had was the tops of two socks cut off sitting on top of his gaiters so he had the top of his sock pulled up to below his knees, a bare leg and his gaiters, and cause everybody laughed, including Bouchy, the officer. Well he laughed and laughed until
- 08:30 tears run down his face. And when he could speak he said, "Parade dismissed. I don't want to see another one of yours, another one of these parades." But oh, everybody laughed and I'll never forget it. Bouchy, he laughed and laughed, I have never seen anyone laugh so much, and these tears rolling down his face and this bloke is standing there up straight you know, a bare leg and a top of a sock and a gaiter.
- 09:00 A sort of break in the monotony, I suppose you would call it, because it was monotony I suppose you call it, in a way - get up and go to work and shovel gravel and pick gravel. I was sick of the sight of gravel. I can get a shovel full of gravel and you can put a bucket over there and I can put nearly all in it. I can shovel, I have tried it recently, to see how well I... I haven't forgotten the knack.
- 09:30 **Were you sick of gravel altogether?**
- Oh, yes, don't worry, I reckon we shovelled thousands of yards of gravel, well we had to. If you even had a small bomb, it blows a bit of a hole. A daisy cutter, they told us that they had a piece of pipe and I never saw one that hadn't gone off. Well I never saw one go off. And by the time that piece of pipe and by the time that piece of pipe went into the ground it went off you see, and it was level to the top of the ground.
- 10:00 You get a five hundred pound bomb and he blows a big hole and the dirt goes that way, it was more or less for demolition in buildings or whatever or amongst planes and that. The blast goes up and you can tell by the size of the hole it is like that and it goes up. But what happens to the dirt? You never get near enough dirt to fill a hole once even though it was small bomb. Sort of it blows the dirt and the dirt must disintegrate or
- 10:30 whatever, but there is never enough dirt to fill her up. You got put a lot of dirt to fill a hole.

What about the Americans?

Americans?

Can you tell us about the Americans in Darwin?

Only ever saw one American when he came in from a dogfight. He'd been flying around and he flew into a hawk and it made a great big dint into the wing. And he came in and landed.

11:00 **A bird?**

Huh?

He flew into a bird?

Yes, a hawk, right the way up. He come into a dive and he hit this hawk. He said he thought at the time it nearly tore the wing off, the noise it made. And that was the only, well only pilot I remember talking to because he went into the insert were we working. Whatever, and I said, "What on earth happened to that that made a dint in it?" He said, "I hit a hawk." He didn't know if he had been hit by bullets or what.

11:30 I suppose he did know, as I tell you before, the only ones I had to do with were the ones on the gun pit and they were right on the end of the drome, and when the chuck wagon came to them , they took it in turns of being last and the sergeant there used to save us what food was left over. And that was the first decent food we got and well that was

12:00 four or five months after we got there. And our own food supplies, I don't what I did with the letter I put into there. Have you got that Darwin Air and piece that Colleen Bowers there and the letter that I wrote to me mother? That was the best feed we had for many a day. And we had a bottle of beer that night and we had, I think we had peas and carrots and something with cold mutton or tomato, I think.

12:30 And those vegetables started to come from Adelaide River or down there where they had a army had a market garden near the river. A garden, not a market garden, but a garden to supply troops. We got a few of those and that and that was when the food improved a bit. But before that anything that the was left from the Yanks, cause they used to get tinned pork and turkey and, oh, remarkable stuff they got. But we used to get,

13:00 mainly they used to eat the tucker themselves. We would get iced coffee and drinks or something like that but not so much food. You couldn't blame them for that. I wouldn't want to put up with the food we had. They used to comment about what food we had and what food they had. Frank Beal was one of the Number 1 Works

13:30 and he was with a squadron and they were building radar buildings for installing radars in several places, and he said that another thing they did was shifted the building and huts and things from the civil drome down to Hughes Field. Hughes Field was between Strauss and Livingston, both Strauss and Livingston was named after pilots that had been killed.

14:00 And Hughes Field was there and I think they were there with Beaufighters, it might have been Lightnings, some other plane anyway. And they took their planes, and they took the huts down there to improve the conditions for the Yanks. And they said once they were there and the Yanks were there and they stayed and had tea. Remarkable, compared to what we had. Tinned fruits and all sorts of stuff

14:30 they gave for their meal that night before they came back to Darwin. But you want too much of that because you would be getting discontent. It was bad enough, thinking that some fellow's getting good stuff and we were on what we were. Weevily bread and whatever, pineapple jam.

While you were up in Darwin, what would you do for entertainment and recreation?

15:00 Work, we had none. No, occasionally we had picture shows. Three picture shows I think I saw in the ten months that I was there.

What sort of pictures are we talking about?

Oh, I couldn't tell you what they were. They were always some that hadn't been, hadn't been that the general public hadn't seen them before we had. I couldn't tell you what they were. I'm not a good one at remembering

15:30 names of pictures because I was never interested in pictures much. Unless it was a documentary or the news, that is all I watch on TV. Oh I do watch 'The Bill' or whatever. Normally it is news, 'A Current Affair', 'Today Tonight'. No, we used to have to go quite a distance to

16:00 the picture theatre. It was shown at the navy depot I think it was. I don't know where it was. I've forgotten what they call it. It was a mile or two, we used to go on the truck and watch it. That was at the navy place, navy had an inland base.

16:30 Apart from that I never... Some of the other units used to play football. Frank Beal played football. But not in the north. I played when I went to Lake Boga. Just before I was discharged I was at Boga, I played football with a team there. Not, like I said, if we had a day off for sport or rest and recreation, they were going to take it off

17:00 our leave when we came out. We didn't want that to happen. Sunday was when we did washing and darning socks, if you felt fit enough to darn your socks. We had one chap with us, they dragged him to the shower once or twice and made him shower. And he was there for three months or more and never had shower and he wasn't, if he got in the mess

17:30 you'd be the last person you sat against near. When he left to come home they tipped all his gear on the

middle of the parade ground and burnt it all and gave him a fresh lot. It was that dirty and stinking.

Why wouldn't he shower?

It was just in his nature. Didn't believe in being washed. He thought only dirty people washed, I think he'd forget about it. Nothing like him.

18:00 **How often did people shower there?**

When you had a chance, every day if you got a chance. When we were on the wharf at night, we would go out after tea at night and work until two or three o'clock in the morning, probably later, depending on how well you worked. And unloading coal, there would be a swing of coal come up onto the wharf and it had to go into trucks. And they would try and load that from the sling. It depended where the tide was. The tide was going out

18:30 and the boats were way out there and the truck was up here, and the gear they had on the boats wasn't high enough and they dumped it on the wharf. Same with cement and bags, we had to load, pick it off the sling and put it on the back of a truck. And when you got home to go to bed at four o'clock in the morning and you were covered in sweat and cement dust and it is starting to set, it is not very pleasant trying to shower and get it off. You had your mate scrubbing you down with a scrubbing brush.

19:00 Try that some time.

Ah, no thanks. You must have had a great time up there!

Well, that is the truth.

Oh, look I believe you.

Yes, we put it in that book. Yes, that is honest. And we had to go home at night or an

19:30 early morning and go under the shower. But the water that went to the camp, came from Menton, Menton Dam was it, about forty miles on threw a pipe on top of it and I went to have shower and the water was too hot, can you believe that? Too hot to get under. At that hour of the morning it was wouldn't be too bad, nice and warm, but to get the sweat and cement off you

20:00 it was really starting to stick.

How long were you actually in the precincts of Darwin? How long were you stationed there for? Darwin?

In the RAAF or Winnellie?

What about Strauss Field?

I was only there for two months.

Tell us about Strauss Field.

Well, it was just a piece of... The main road was a part of the strip and the piece on the western side was clear of bush and that, and there was inserts there

20:30 and a guard post on each end of the strip. It would be a mile or more long and the railway line went down past one side on the western side. The road was on one part of the strip, and was cleared and sealed and be just wide enough for fighter planes, so it wasn't too conspicuous from the sky. And the only time when they

21:00 bombed that was when the chaps fired the pistol and the flares up, the three of them went up and lit up the sky and a couple of minutes after the planes come in and bombed it and the next night they already knew when to come I guess, so they come the next night but there wasn't a great deal of damage done. First night they bombed most of the camping area.

21:30 I don't know whether, I don't recall anybody being killed that night but there was some bombs next day in the clean up, a couple of bombs that hadn't gone off. That is why you can never understand how come... that bombs falling and would come and land belly up on the ground, unless they were nearly to the ground and hit another one. Because if they hit another one high up, they would eventually straight up and still come because

22:00 they were nose heavy. If they hadn't have banked up two or three thousand feet up, they would eventually fall nose down, but to have them land on the ground and not go off, they wouldn't go off because they hadn't nose down, you had to hit them on the nose. But they were only small bombs, I would say they were only seventy pound. They had various sized bombs, apparently, and the ones that I told you about, the chap who was in the trench and didn't go off,

22:30 that was only a smallish bomb, cause the five hundred pound bomb had made a fair hole in the ground and didn't go off. The others, you had no idea of what sort of hole they give them. They blew a fair hole in the ground you could put a house or more in them. They had one, there is a photo there, but it is not a very good one in that book of Colleen's, of her Dad and his brother in a bomb hole. And I think he said that was about

23:00 ten foot deep and twenty, thirty foot across. So that would be a fair size because Winnellie was a rocky hard type of ground.

It must have been terrifying to be under these attacks?

Well at the time that we were bombed... Were you here when I told the story?

Yes.

That was well, I can't image... explain, oh the noise was horrendous, the different noises,

23:30 the banging and the screeching and whatever. I suppose we were close. Whatever, that was when I told, no you weren't here, when I said...

Yes, go on.

one unit had been bombed and the other one was still there. And we went into the one that was still there and there was a gramophone and the record that was left on it and had been playing when they left was when they sounded the last all clear

24:00 on the gramophone, that was in Darwin. When we went back to Darwin a couple of years ago, Lois was very disappointed cause I had been telling her over the years what a frontier town that Darwin was like, and all the vacant spots and a lot of open ground and whatever, but now there is nothing but big buildings. Even Winnellie there is great big factories and buildings. It was open bush and

24:30 the railway line, it is gone now it is back in a different place. But those sort of things that were there then and would never be any more. And she said, "Well, nothing like you have told me." But I am taking her back again to have another look.

Can you describe to us what Strauss Field was like? How far from, say, Darwin was it?

Somewhere about thirty eight ks I think, thirty-eight miles, I am not sure.

25:00 They were about, Strauss and Livingston weren't far apart, I think all up it was about forty miles from Darwin to the furthest out, that would Livingston, Strauss was the closest I think.

How far was Katherine from Darwin?

Three hundred miles, I think, I'm not sure. I mean this is easy for you fellows, to look up get a map and measure it off.

Yes, I might have to do that a bit later.

25:30 **Why were the dromes, aerodromes actually built parallel to the road?**

Well, I told you. They were so they camouflaged, the road was already there, they were not going to run this way and make a strip this way and make a strip running across the road and the railway line and make it be obvious and something was going on here, because there was the road and there was a strip going across it. They just ran parallel. It wasn't much

26:00 more wider than the road. It was all sealed, I think. But you see it just looked like a continuation of the road. And the each end of the strip there was a guard post and that would be camouflaged and so that it didn't look so conspicuous, hard to see when you're high up, and you see there was road and a bit of stretch of - it could have been anything.

26:30 Yes, no it was for the sake of it being conspicuous that they went with the road, because they were north and south oh approximately, they'd just make it a bit wider and use it as a strip. Everything was camouflaged, even the inserts would be not much more wider than the plane and in amongst the trees and there would be have a camouflaged net over it. That was something else we had to do, put nets over it and

27:00 put all the stripping through it to camouflage it. It wasn't already done, it was just a big net and we had to get up and put all this. You got hessian strips, yards long, and you had to weave it all through it. And that was another thing, a chap and I was on a scaffolding, oh, about eight or ten feet up, and they were still filling, still filling their sides and when the chap came in he swung around he knocked the scaffolding down one side and we came down.

27:30 That was went I hurt me hip and my ankle. I still have trouble with me ankle. And the doctor told me I was a malingerer, to get back to work, and I had an ankle swollen up like this. We had a doctor, our officer called him the vet; in the end he didn't, wouldn't take us to there. He would take us to the navy doctor, he didn't like the air force one.

28:00 **What sort of planes would be used at Strauss?**

Oh Kitties, Kitty Hawks.

American pilots?

Yes, I think that the Yanks were at Hughes Field. I don't know, there would have been, I think that they wouldn't have been Kitty Hawks too. I don't know what was on Livingston, I was never on it other than to go from... I went from Strauss down to Katherine and back one day

28:30 to pick up some gear because they shifted it up to Katherine, up to Strauss from Katherine just for a week or so. And because we went up with our any change of clothes or anything and cause we had to go back, we did six hundred mile in the day, or it was more than a day. When we got back the old ute was wrecked, we blew four tyres on the way down and back. We called into army camps and got fresh tyres.

29:00 There was three drivers and one fellow went to sleep coming back and ran off the road and hit an ant hill. We eventually got back and the next day and the sergeant of the transport, he said, "You had a good fast trip, you fellows, you rested that vehicle, you rested that vehicle... unserviceable."

You also stayed at Katherine for four months?

29:30 Thereabouts or probably a bit longer. First off we slept underneath this old school and then we built a new camp out in the bush. That was were we went and got the detonators and I got tipped out of the truck and have the scar on me leg. I was in hospital, in our hospital tent at the camp for three nights, another six weeks in my own tent under the

30:00 supervision of the medical orderly, and once a week we used to go to the army hospital to see how me leg was progressing and what other treatment it had to have and whatever. And that was six weeks.

Can you describe what Katherine looked liked?

No, I know it had a school and a pub. The school was on stilts and we slept upstairs, but downstairs,

30:30 no, some of us slept downstairs and that was where the shower was under the school. And then as the unit got bigger we had build a bigger camp, we had to go into tents then. It was pretty rough sort of a... it was not cleaned out. The only thing they had there, the showers were on a Public Works camp, I think, and the showers were on a concrete slab.

31:00 And we were showering there one night in the lantern light. And this crab was coming up and I let him come up close and I thought, "It's not a crab," but I couldn't work out... It was a scorpion about five inches long, big one. We had him in a honey jar about so high and that square and he just fitted in it. We had two of them, the one I caught and one somebody else caught. The big ones like that they said weren't as bad as small ones.

31:30 You had too of a night, you always looked through your bedding before you got in it. Course we weren't particularly fussy about making our beds like you were as would be in a normal camp when you fold your blanket and make your bed straight and rather respectable looking, but it didn't stop centipedes or scorpions and things crawling in or snakes.

32:00 We had, one of the chaps... We had boxes with a shelf in, probably a bananas case for a cupboard, and he had his writing material one of these and he went one night and drove his hand in and there was a big snake curled up in there. He didn't go out through the door of the cab, the tent, he went clean through the side of it. But it was a brown snake, poisonous. But anyway, they got it and shot it and killed it.

32:30 I got into bed one night and got bit on the arm with a little centipede, scorpion, a little red bastard. He was only little but by crikeys it stung. I don't think, the doctor didn't give injections, but he told me that they were worse than the big ones, the medical orderlies. But at the same time we had a chap, he went up with us, Mickey Lowe, and I think perhaps they had sent him back early in the piece because he didn't stand it at all,

33:00 he hated it really. Well, he got into bed one night and there was a centipede and it bit him on the penis. You have never heard a man scream and perform like it. Well they sent him south the next day - went clean off his head. You never looked. I was sitting in the Red Cross or what's-its-name, we had a tent, writing letters and it was perfectly quiet, a peaceful evening.

33:30 And I was just working away and I could hear this scratching noise and this big centipede come up and over the table and you could hear him walking, I reckon he was about that long and about that wide.

Really! That big, and that thick?

Yes, a centipede about that wide with his hundred and ten legs or about, I forget. I lost count. And he come up the side of the table and you could hear his scratching noise.

34:00 And the doctor said that the bigger they are the less poisonous they are. But I didn't try it, no, I let him go, he wasn't doing me any harm, he didn't bother to bite me. I just went on writing and he went down the other side of the table and off.

He didn't stop for a chat?

No, he wasn't interested in what I was writing about. But I told Mum, I said, "A centipede just walked past me."

34:30 Like I was, Mickey Lowe, he should have went through his bed and he would have seen the centipede. But it was one like that that bit him.

A big one bit his penis?

Yes, on his penis. I think it took four or five fellows to hold him down to give him injections. Yes, but the next day they had to send him south.

And you were in the tent while this happened?

No, I wasn't in the tent but I wasn't far away. Wondering what all the hell was screaming going on about.

35:00 But we found out. There was a mob of fellows holding him, and the doctor came giving him injections, or the medical orderly.

And you said you got bitten by a scorpion? How big was the scorpion again?

Only a little red fellow, a dark colour. Yes, the doctor said the smaller they other the worse their sting. And he stung for a day or more I reckon.

Where was this when you were sleeping?

When I went to get into bed, I wanted to get into bed and the bugger was in there with me, wasn't he. Yes.

35:30 **So what precautions would you take to get rid of insects and things like that?**

Just go through your bedding before you got it in. You had a good strong Tilley lamp or something and you could see and so make sure that you did. It was your fault, my fault in a way, I didn't go through me bed. I was just tired I suppose, and, "Oh, bugger it. I won't worry about it tonight." I tell you what, I wasn't asleep before long. But no,

36:00 poor old Mick, I often wonder what happened to him, whether he'd ever come right. Like the two chaps who was in the tent with that fellow who had the top of his head chopped off. I often wondered but I never wondered at the time, but how they must have felt. I reckon they, it would still affect them today. Yes, I get a bit upset at times when I think of the poor little bugger that the daisy cutter blew to bits, and we had to go down with a shovel and pick up his pieces.

36:30 With a pick and a shovel. So, those sort of things you don't forget.

Do you talk about these sort of things with your mates?

Never.

Not now, but at the time with your mates?

37:00 No. Bad enough having to think about it, without having to talk about it. But then again, think about the poor buggers who are the soldiers what they went through in New Guinea, they had it a lot worse way than we did. But that is just an odd occasion, it was only a couple of times that terrible things happened but I can't forget about, but.

What did you think about the Japanese at the time?

The worse bastards

37:30 ever born. The things that they were doing and the things we heard about. Well I suppose any time you have war with somebody the opposition is the worse fellow that you could know because he is trying to kill you. They didn't care about the women and kids that they bombed when Darwin was first hit. Yes, we talked about that. I got to know a chap who worked in the post office and he was very, very lucky, he said, because a girl came along

38:00 and there was no room in the trench so he got out and let her in and he got down over the cliff, and everybody in the trench was killed and he wasn't. That was postal, the people who worked in the post office. I used to correspond with him when I first came home and he was at Twopenny Bay in South Australia, and then

38:30 I started touring around and I forgot about him. Much to me sorrow, cause he was nice guy.

Was anyone accused of lack of moral fibre, LMF?

Me?

No, was anyone?

Not, as far as I ever knew. Nobody who backed their cart or the fellows who I worked with or had anything to do with.

That was a serious accusation at that time that basically meant cowardliness, didn't it?

- 39:00 Yes, but that was on the home front not on in the wartime, or the frontline or in Darwin or anything like that. I was anyone who stayed at home and never went to the war no matter what. My father was enlisted and he was declared medically unfit, for why I don't know. Do you remember when I said it was the pole that hit him in the head, whether it affected his head? Not that he ever would... He was good with figures and things like that. But he...
- 39:30 I've got the badge somewhere that says that he was medically unfit for war service or whatever. But no, they sent a lot of people who probably were fit. I knew one or two that I considered that were cowards. But it wasn't for me to say. This one fellow who blew his fingers off and they reckon that he did it so he didn't have to go out to the war. But I couldn't prove that and I wouldn't like to say it
- 40:00 because to me he was a decent sort of guy. And an accident happened and I guess it was purely an accident. Just because there are those sort of people who say that sort of thing. That is what they talk about and that is what they say, which is quite incorrect. Most unjust to the person they say it about.
- Did you have a dislike for the Americans?**
- Never knew any. No, I didn't have any have dislike or anything.
- 40:30 Only I met one or two in Melbourne and places like that that are bit of windbags [talk a lot]. But the only chaps that I told you were the chaps on the gun pit and I got on well with them
- You must have heard about the Battle of Brisbane and all those fights going on?**
- Yes, I had a chap who I went to school with. He clocked [punched] a Yank in Brisbane. I think the Yank called him a chocko [chocolate soldier] or something and he wouldn't back his
- 41:00 cart for half a dozen Yanks. And balled off and dropped him [knocked him down]. Because he was well built fellow and he was strong and muscularly. I could image he would have nearly lifted him off the ground. I wouldn't have wanted him to hit me. His brother told us that he said he balled off and bang, he would give you a bloody chocko. And I can only speak of the one or two that I met have been really decent fellows. Met the pilot who I said hit the bird and had a bit of a yarn and had to go and see if his plane was okay or whatever,
- 41:30 but he had used up all his ammunition and I suppose there was no point to flying around and waiting for somebody to shoot you down if you couldn't shoot back.

Tape 8

- 00:31 **What do you recall of VE Day [Victory in Europe] in Europe?**
- Oh, I don't recall VE Day in Europe. But I do know VE Day in the islands. We were in Boga and the next thing we knew, we knew that it was inevitable. But the ambulance turned up full of nurses and hanging off it, and sitting on it and screaming and carrying on
- 01:00 and came down around the camp and back up to Swan Hill. Quite a commotion, what's going on with this, cause we knew most of em. They used to go to the dances. Lake Boga had one of the nicest dance floor I have ever danced on. It was Tasmanian myrtle and it was sprung. It means it had a big of give, you could dance all night and you would never be tired. Oh it was a lovely floor. I went back several times to Boga
- 01:30 for a reunion. Bogaphobian. I have a badge somewhere, a Bogaphobian. Every second year the same as we do with the aerodrome. ACS [Airfield Construction Squadron]. And we had it at Lake Boga. When I got back there it was burnt down. It was sad to see, it was a beautiful old hall. We used to go and
- 02:00 if we got a bit tired of dancing, we would go and play euchre with the old ladies, and trump their aces; oh we had some blues with the old ladies. No, it was quite an experience at Lake Boga. I had been to Sydney to the technical college at Ultimo and I had been interested in welding before I had went into the war, the front. I had the opportunity to
- 02:30 go and learn on aircraft welding and did well at it at Sydney, even if I do say so myself. And I held an AID [Aeronautical Inspection Department] ticket for all the time I was welding. But once you were away from the job and you can't do a test every three months you just lose your ticket for Aeronautical Inspection Department ticket. I have got somewhere, got some of me results for some of me welds. We did a test every three months and I never failed in any. I was thinking last night, it is funny I suppose
- 03:00 this has sort of brought it out and things that I did at Lake Boga. An officer had a Hillman car, I think it was, and he got a new set of pistons, which was most unusual for wartime. He had brand new set of pistons and he did his work on his car because he was fairly handy. But he never thought or forgot to split the skirt, if you know what I mean. On a piston, it is like a cup or thing,
- 03:30 right on the bottom, at the bottom of a slit that goes up right, so far to the bottom, it has got a piece that you cut with a hacksaw. Well he hadn't done that. You see, it allows for expansion and cause he

never split the skirt as I said, and it expanded and broke. Well it ruined them and he couldn't use them, kicked up a clatter and made a fuss and so he took em out, but he couldn't use them. So somebody suggested that he weld them.

04:00 They brought em into the workshop and nobody would have a go at them but me. So I welded them up and the machine shop machined them all down and it was fixed and he was able to use em. Well, I loved welding, particularly aluminium and stainless and all that sort of... Those days you could weld die casts, well you didn't weld it, you paddled, but you could make a good strong job. But die casts today like everything in a car, small bits and pieces.

04:30 You used to get a kit for a water pump, or you would get a kit for a water pump but you used that and now you go in and say I bought a pump from such and such a car, the whole works you buy, where you used to just by the parts. As I say, water pumps and all sorts of pieces. No, it was interesting and I enjoyed it but you were talking about

05:00 when the war ended.

No, in Europe, when the war ended in Europe?

No, I don't remember.

You don't remember, you only remember the VP Day, Victory in the Pacific?

I guess we did know about it cause it was fairly prolonged, the landing in Normandy, and a lot of things weren't going too good for quite a while. It could have gone either way. But

05:30 no, it was just news, I guess, and we were more interested in winning our own backyards and keeping it clean and whatever.

It was anti-climaxing, the victory in Europe, wasn't it, the victory in Europe because you were still fighting?

Oh well that is it, yes. Well I went from Lake Boga to Laverton to make bomb racks for Spitfires up in the islands. We had twenty-three hundred to make and there was ten welders recruited from various parts

06:00 of stations around and we all went up to Laverton and worked twelve-hour shifts to do them. They must have been in a hurry for them but they weren't very big bombs they carried, sixty pounds or something. But anyway, they were bombs and could do a bit of damage and they brought, they were bringing in... This was when my luck was, all stayed with me during the war. They brought in from various places drop tanks. They were shaped like that,

06:30 so they cut out wind resistance in the front of the planes and underneath they had drop tanks so they could go farther. And when they run out of petrol in the belly tank, they would drop them and then let them go, they would have all their own petrol to carry on with. Well they used to get damaged, well why they brought them to Laverton, I don't where they brought it from. Well this one had a hole, the copper smith had cut a hole in it and the measured it up and made a patch to put in.

07:00 Well they had to come in and they had to be steamed out for twenty-four hours because of hundred and twenty octane petrols, you can see it vaporising away. If you have got some tin you could nearly see it going down, because it is evaporating. Well it is quite powerful and this one hadn't been steamed out, and course when the... even with the steaming out for twenty-four hours you have got to, as a precaution you put CO2 gas going through it

07:30 while you're welding. Well they had the gas in it but it hadn't been steamed out, and when the welder put it on it blew up and it went through the ceiling, went through the hangar roof, and it blew all the windows out of the hangar and nearly killed the two welders. You see I stayed back and when the WO [Warrant Officer] came in to see that it was okay and that they were going to do it before he left. I said to him,

08:00 "Oh, I am going to weld that." He said, "Oh no. Forget it," he said. "I let somebody else have that." He said, "Oh, I'll give it to you next time." But there wasn't any next time and I wouldn't have welded it anyway. And so that is what happened. Both of the chaps had, I think they had silver plates in their heads. The hand piece of the welder was thirty yards out through a window and it went through the roof. This was another thing, these

08:30 stories that you are told, well you think it's impossible but did it happen. But they said that the officer that signed the chit to say that it was steamed out, he didn't make sure. If it'd been me, I would have been sniffing it. He got five years for not signing the chit and not making sure.

Five years what?

Gaol.

Military gaol or...?

Yes, I guess. But so

- 09:00 but that is hearsay. Lot of things could be true. I mean I wouldn't blame them if he did get five years for doing something like that, cause those fellows will never be the same, both with metal plates in your heads but and quite long after. But while I was at Boga I will tell you another instance. One of the sheetmetal workers knew some people that owned an orange orchard and they had a little daughter and she had a little dog,
- 09:30 and it was running around the orchard one day when they were mowing the orchard, ran out in front of the orchard and so did she - chopped both her feet off. Well the coppersmith knew the family and he got a carpenter to carve a little pair of feet with a long section of leg on it that fitted her shoes, only little shoes, and he thought up a way of fixing it, so he got me to do the welding.
- 10:00 And he got a piece of tubing, so long, that fitted onto this little leg and on the top of it, it was concave, with two little holes down in it, little bits of tubes down in it. And then he got a piece that fitted onto her leg and that was concave with two little holes, two little tubes and I can never, I have tried lots of times to remember how we hinged them. Anyway, hinged them and put two little strong springs in each, that fitted in them
- 10:30 both and that acted as an ankle. And I remembered about it when I was at a only of the reunions at Boga and I asked one of the chaps from Swan Hill if he'd heard anything about it and he remembered about it. And he said, "Her mother is married again and she was Mrs So-and-so and I'll get you her phone number." Well he found out the phone number and I rang her up. Well she said, "Oh yes." And I told her who I was and I said, "Oh, well I did the
- 11:00 welding on that. I don't take any credit for thinking it up." I said, "The coppersmith was very clever and he thought it up and I helped him." And she was thrilled about this, and I said, "I suppose you still have a pair of little shoes?" And she said, "That is the one thing I have always regretted, she said, "We never kept any of them." I went back to Swan Hill later on and found out that she, as she got older they made them bigger and until such time that she was able to get some others, but they were shocking things. I often wondered why
- 11:30 didn't keep em up, which you wouldn't have been, it would have been difficult I guess. But anyway... And I said to her mother, "Where is she?" and she said, "Oh, she is at Lardner," out of Melbourne somewhere, and what is that name of the town, near the railway, quite close, about 80 ks out of Melbourne?

I'm not sure, I have heard of Lardner though.

Well, she was at this other place and she had a small farm

- 12:00 and I rang her up and told her who I was and she was, whoa, screaming and carrying on. So I said, "I can come tomorrow to see you." She said, "Look tomorrow I can't help you because we are selling our farm tomorrow and we are going to buy a place at Lardner." So I said, "Right, next time I come back I will come and see you." And so I did, and I have been down to see her two or three times and we ring her up and talk to her at Christmas and she sends me a card. And she has grown up and got two kids and
- 12:30 her husband has retired now. He had a service station for a long time just out of Melbourne and he used to travel home weekends and help her on the farm. But she still has got no feet and still walks about. And runs a stud Hereford farm, who shows in Melbourne and Sydney and has done and gets about on a four-wheel motorbike.

Does she have prosthetic feet now?

No, it costs \$4000 a leg, so they told her.

You should make her some new ones.

- 13:00 No, not now. As I said, it would be interesting to do something about. But anyways she still keeps in contact, nice people, I've met her husband and met her kids and I think the girl is married now and the boy is getting married, or was to get married some time early this year. Yes, she keeps in touch. I ring her up but I can afford it and perhaps better than she can.
- 13:30 And I have a yarn to her every Christmas. I only ring several people at Christmas, rather than send a card it's nicer to have a yarn. So it is one of things, the interesting things that happened during the war.

During the war you mentioned a couple of accidents there with the guys. Were accidents common like that?

No, that was the only one that happened. I will tell you another thing that happened at Boga. When... This has never been made public

- 14:00 either before. When the war ended and because we never had anything to do around Boga. And the store was on one side of the hangar and we were in the back end of the hangar in the workshop and welding shop. Between us and store was an eight foot fence and it was opened out onto the drome area, out onto the lake area. Well we got a condom and blew it up about as far it would go and about this big, put it out into the middle.

- 14:30 Nobody about and nobody was doing anything, just sitting about and so we had a look round and somebody keeping an eye. And put the condom out and got a bit of toilet paper and let it burn. And then bang, we was working away and then bang, it blew out all the windows out of the store and there was ambulances and fire attendants, people came from everywhere and there wasn't a thing to be seen. Nobody knew what happened,
- 15:00 only the coppersmith. WO, he reckons that perhaps it was some of those bloody welders, he said, "I bet they knew what went on." I guess he knew what went on, but he couldn't prove it. I'll tell you a story of what happened in New Zealand, I was working on this dairy farm, share milking and I was working for him and I used to go to the dances and whatever. And there was a ball on this night and
- 15:30 unbeknownst to the single chaps, the girls, the married women had arranged with the single girls not to dance with any of the single fellows until they had danced with all of the married ones. And course that got up our noses a bit and we were a bit huffed for a start, and in the end that meant we had to dance with all the married women and then we got on dancing with the single ones. And when two o'clock... And because we all had dairies and whatever, came and go home and get ready to milk a couple of us kept knitting,
- 16:00 one or two of the boys, and there was seven babies so we switched em all over. Took this there, put him there and that one. And everybody come in and grabbed their kids and rushed off. And when they should have been milking they were back at the hall sorting out their babies. There was a hell of stink but they never ever did it again. Oh that is the sort of fellow I be, playing jokes and easily led. My life has been interesting.
- 16:30 **Did they sort the kids out properly, do you know?**
- Yes, well they had to. Yes, they had to. Yes, they sorted em out. They knew who had boys and who had girls when they got home.
- When you were in Darwin, what was the thoughts going around about MacArthur and Blamey?**
- Never heard of them! Ohh Blamey! We were there and Blamey came and there was a parade once,
- 17:00 The Salute, they saluted the motorbike parade that come for him and didn't salute Blamey. I didn't like him, he was no bloody good, that is what they said about Blamey. Ran a brothel, he had his own brothel that he ran in Egypt and which he was supposed to... Oh, I have heard some shocking things about him, I won't say, but anyway. The brothel was well known about because they all talked about it. But this was there at this,
- 17:30 The Salute, and the soldiers saluted the motorbike that went along in front but didn't salute him.
- So no-one saluted at all?**
- Oh, well I wouldn't know. I suppose the officers might have done.
- What was the antagonism towards him?**
- Oh just that he was, what he was, I didn't like him. He wasn't a strategist, I don't know how he got the job. Whether he talked,
- 18:00 or it was in his family. Like a lot of other fellows, people who got along with the upper crust and walked into jobs and became officers and never earn it. Admittedly there was a lots of them that did, there was lots of them who were very clever, who had been officers right from the start, clever and brainy and down to earth fellows. There was always that
- 18:30 element, that, well, I don't what you call them, better not said possibly.
- Ah, you can say it.**
- You find that in all walks of life, look at the fellow in Western Australia, all the money that he did people for and what he did and. Homes a Court was a, I knew people that who knew Homes a Court,
- 19:00 they reckon he was a thorough gentlemen.
- Was there repercussions, because no-one saluted Blamey or...?**
- Well, it was nothing to do with me. I was air force and that was the army. No I didn't, I never heard, but I wouldn't doubt it, but what could you do about it.
- Why was he there?**
- Wouldn't have a clue. Well I expect he was inspecting the troops. You see there was thousands of army about, even though at the start
- 19:30 they weren't, they had rifle with no ammunition and ammunition with no rifles so we were told. And I know that I had a rifle for three of us because I had been in the Light Horse. And I was giving them bayonet practice in Darwin after we worked, finished work, when we first when there. Because I had army practice, bayonet practice in the Light Horse and there was six of us with two rifles. And then when the instructor came and he was giving us bayonet practice

20:00 and he's got the bayonet and was showing up with and drove it into me mate's arm here. And he is still alive and he has still got, you know, go out to Hagley and ask for Dick about you and he has still got the scar where the instructor drove the bayonet into him.

What happened to, did the instructor get any punishment for it?

Oh, I don't know, they did it up, I don't know whether he had any stitches in it, not that he would have done. The first thing the instructor did was drop the rifle and put his thumb over to stop if from bleeding. I reckon that

20:30 he probably poked his thumb in the wound he had. Dick has still got the scar. I haven't talked to him lately but, he got the bayonet scar, do you, yes, he still got it.

So if, hypothetically, if the Japanese landed what was the defences there?

Well, there was nothing. The coastal guns were nine inch and six inch, wouldn't even reach a destroyer. Well a destroyer could have stopped off

21:00 and blown hell out of the place, let alone the battleships, nothing to stop em coming out and standing out, but what would be the point they wouldn't have blown the place to bits. They could have just steamed up with boatloads and had a bit of machine gun fire and a rifle, I suppose. Well the coastal guns could have done damage there but they could have been blown off, out of the water, and the same goes before they came in cause they knew where they were. They were bound to know that, they were all in one heap basically.

21:30 How effective were the Japanese in bombing the airfields and stopping missions taking off?

Well, they had nothing for a long time to stop em. They could just come and do what they pleased. They had ack-ack was a fairly accurate but they knew the range of the ack-ack and that's what they kept above it. You see until they got bigger guns and they perhaps they did some damage. But you have no... It was unbelievable

22:00 how things were there. As we were told, you couldn't say there was any difference because there was one of our officers said if the Japs come, he said, we think they might, they were expecting them, why would he say don't try and stop em and one fellow in the ranks said, "What will we stop em with, sticks?" Because half of them had no rifles. There was one hundred and fifty of us and that meant there was fifty rifles to

22:30 one hundred and fifty and five hundred bullets, thereabouts, some of us had shot em off. Going up I had got some bullets, I don't know where from, but later, going up we were sitting about having a meal and high on top of this gum tree was a cockatoo, squawk, squawk, squawk. I said, "I'll make you squawk, you bastard," and they all laughed like you did. They said, "You've got Buckleys [no hope] of shooting that," and I took aim and shot

23:00 and he landed down at the bottom of the tree. I didn't say anything and neither did they. There was a dead cockatoo and I'd stopped his squawking. But I was the second best shot in the Light Horse and Cyril could always beat me. If I got hundred points he'd get a hundred and five. He was a good shot though. And then in the air force, Corporal Sleep, we used to practise and that, he could beat me at shooting and hitting things, and he was like Cyril, just a bit better.

23:30 He taught me a thing or two about shooting, shooting from the hip with a .303 and hitting a fruit tin about twenty-five or thirty yards. When we had the bullets we could hit it, quite a couple of times, eight out of ten. Holding your rifle and what you do when you, you don't shoot. When you first aim it, you drop it about six inches; it gives you more accuracy.

24:00 When the Japanese bombed the airstrip, how long would it take before the airstrip became operational again?

Depends how many holes were in it and how well we worked with that pick and shovel. For the first weeks, few weeks. Then we got an old, old D9 with a cable blade and it was not much, well it was fast and easier than us because we had a Chinaman to load from, that's, they dig a trench through the bank and board it over, and in the middle of the board is a

24:30 hole and trucks drive, and underneath he just pushes the dirt and it falls in it, that's what they call a Chinaman. And course that made it quicker. But I mean with a cable blade you had no ripper on the back to stir up the dirt, you got to work hard. And other times, we had an old truck you were shovelling dirt and that had to be tipped into the hole and rolled, when they got enough in it had to be rolled, and rolled and rolled and run the truck over it with

25:00 gravel on it and whatever else with an old roller. And that would be oiled. It depends how big the hole was.

Are you talking hours, though?

Oh year, of course it was hours. When they put the thirteen holes into the runway we worked, they did it tonight, we started tonight and then through till tomorrow and then the next night then tomorrow and

then the next night, and that was not only our ten or dozen, there was other crews as well.

25:30 What with the old dozers and shovels and picks, and they wanted to bomb us on and off and they couldn't do it. That was three days or about, or more. It was tonight it would be ten hours, tomorrow would be another twelve hours, twenty-two, the next night, thirty or forty or fifty hours.

And in that time, what did they do to the planes, redirect them?

26:00 Well, they couldn't take off so you sort of can't direct them because they had to stop where they are, and if... Cause the bombers used to come and land and refuel to Darwin, they'd come from Fenton, or not... Oh, I don't know if they came from, Fenton, Fenton, I was never on Fenton or Tindal, Tindal was later, Fenton was a strip and the Yanks were there. And

26:30 no, with all those holes, or even with one or two holes, or with a bomb, the bomb that never went off, they wouldn't let them land or take off. They reckon that the bumping of the planes could let it off. They didn't know how far it had gone down if it went off and blew as big as hole about thirty or forty foot deep and ten foot across, you'd have one hell of a mess on your runway. They can't jump it, they can't jump when they land in a hole. They would just go to the side and take off. We loaded the bombs, they took a lot

27:00 to get off, cause they... It would depend on how far they went and whatever.

How did they protect the planes from bombers coming over while they couldn't take off?

They got no show of protecting them unless they have got fighters up. You see if the fighters can't take off when the planes... If there was bombers there they'd let the fighters... If they knew they were coming, the fighters go first and then if they got fighter protection

27:30 and they come in they have fighter protection, well your fighters are up a ditch to start with. You see the Japanese for the first raid or two never had fighter cover. They did during the big raids, they had fighters and strafing. But then one or two raids they came without any fighters and they got touched up and they realised that we had fighters. See it was a bit late for them. If you get Darwin's Air War it tells you there all about it,

28:00 different to me. I could talk for a week but I would have to read it up and tell you. But I wouldn't have never known all that information without reading it because it was all on the strip and there wasn't always holes for us to do. And there was always plenty of other work to do. It was all the more work to do when they did hit the strip. And more more urgent work

28:30 making the... We worked to an eight or nine hour day and we were filling up the inserts and things like that and building them. But if there was holes to be filled up we worked until they were filled. Be it ten hours or be it a week. You still had to have crews in to take over from you or work if there was no-one else. We used to just have a meal and go back to work for about two nights. Two nights and a day.

29:00 That one, the only one time it ever happened, fortunately, I said the time they came over and the kangaroos were hurt and the dingo. Well if all those had hit all... There would be no drome because there was three or four hundred. Because they all went down the along the edge of the strip in the bush. I saw a photo of that section of bush from the air once after the wet and it showed up all these holes, these bomb holes with water in them, showed up as if

29:30 you could bend down and take em. Well it was a photo taken... There was hundreds of them.

At the end of the war, you mentioned earlier that there were the nurses running around to celebrate, what big celebrations were there?

That was only from the nurses. Well I don't... It was an anticlimax. You're sort of used to camp life and all this and

30:00 then it like as if... When we came back towards the end of the war it was more like civilian life. We had a job and we went to dances and things like that, and then it's all over. I mean, I can't explain it. It just sort of... That's it and we are back to civilian life. I can't explain it. Not a let down,

30:30 well maybe it was. It was just all of a sudden you were back in civvy [civilian] life, no more camp, and there is no more fellows around with you snoring and all sorts of things. You were in a tent, in a hut with eight or ten others and half of them snore and you were trying to snore louder. But, no, it was quite strange for a while and I couldn't...

31:00 When I came home from Darwin I couldn't eat Mum's cooked food. And she was worried about it. She was all the more worried when I cut a fruit cake and spread butter on it. That's... we... Occasionally we would get fruit cake in Darwin when things got better and we spread butter on it. Don't know why, it was just something... I guess it was something that we lacked,

31:30 that we were getting enough of and that seemed to take the place of it. She was horrified when I came home. She was a beautiful cook and she had this, she used to make this sultana cake. It used to have this big dish and I cut a slice and I used to cut a slice... And she said, "Why don't you want a big plate?" "So, I don't have to give anybody any." And spread butter on it. I suppose half a pound of butter on it, is

a pound perhaps or

- 32:00 a pound to the cake it would have been that rich. I'd spread butter on it. I couldn't eat it. I wouldn't, I never ate her soup and she couldn't understand that and cause I told you about that bloke. Whenever I had soup for years and years. When I told her she was horrified and the first soup I had that she made, was tomato. She made beautiful tomato soup. But she was really worried because I couldn't eat.
- 32:30 My stomach wasn't used it. That was when I came home from Darwin on leave. I was home for a month or more. I'd just eat a little bit. It was too well fed like that, with just rice and rice and rice and stuff like that for so long. Even though when things got better there was still a lot of rice, I couldn't eat rice. Mum made a nice rice pudding, we used to put nutmeg on it and have it with cream.
- 33:00 It was beautiful, but no more.

Did you prefer the air force life to civilian life?

Not really. But like I said it became more like civilian life, we had a job and there was some interesting jobs that I did at Boga. Welding up things, the diesel motor, the edge of a diesel motor, Jackie Drewman and I had to do these things. It was like doing the job for that little girl, interesting things, things that

- 33:30 I have remembered.

After the war ended did you continue in the air force?

No, I was discharged. I was manpowered to a sawmill to tally and grade their timber and whatever for six months. Then I left there and went back to travelling around Australia, went back to welding and then just before I got married I worked for my cousin. I stayed put for ten years with him. He had

- 34:00 all the welding gear, and a garage and a workshop, a lathe and all sorts of things. I'd... I was more or less satisfied with travelling. And then I met Lois at my cousin's wedding and courted her for five years and it was whether I'd be getting married or whether I wouldn't. Then I still if I wanted to go, I used to go somewhere and leave her,
- 34:30 Lois. I did a bit of that, I am afraid. It was because it was so natural. I had been doing it... I had been a bachelor for nearly forty years or whatever. Anyway, we have been married forty-six years come 27th of this month, 26th of this month, day after Anzac Day.

How did she feel about all the

- 35:00 **shenanigans?**

Well, what shenanigans? Just that I used to go and stay the night, weekend perhaps, Saturday night with me mates and I mean the prisoner of war. I mean in a way, not for a long time, Lois couldn't see or understand mateship even though her Dad had been a First World War, he had been in it.

- 35:30 But she still couldn't see. He told her once, he said, there are like me, one or two episodes I like to forget but I can't. People ask you what was the worse thing, but that is the worse thing they can ask you. Because it brings it back. And her Dad said there was things that he wanted to forget, but couldn't. And they wanted to know about them and he said, "Why should I tell you about them, because you'll never it forget either." But not in the same way
- 36:00 as he couldn't. With me, me mate wasn't well and he wanted company or it's hard to explain unless you have had a mate, done so much with, been with so much. He would do for you what you did for him and he'd have risked his life if he had been with you in the war. That sort of thing. People don't understand.
- 36:30 I mean I don't know if you do, but I doubt it.

Was that the biggest thing or the most important thing you gained from the war, the mateship?

I guess so. I can go and sit down with Digger or Charlie, fellows who went to Darwin with me, and just talk about different things, about the war or cricket because Ricky Ponting is his grandson. Course I ribbed him about that. Cause I reckon when Ricky doesn't do any good and he hits catches. I said, "Why doesn't he get a... go play tiddly catches with the kids or something."

- 37:00 And Digger's wife died just recently and I have been ringing him up occasionally to see how he is going. But he gets meals on wheels; he is as old as me. Living on his own now, he has got... He is well to do and got a big property and I have been trying to talk him into selling. And he said, "Well what would I do?" I said, "Well, that's just it." I have worked hard like that, but I go bush with me mates and I go up to the shack or up and watch him while he
- 37:30 cuts wood. I've got something to do. I don't help him now, but I have done over the years. And I have got something to do. Well Digger would have to find something, the same. Get somebody that is younger and goes and does this because he is still using a wood heater and course I go and help him and see he doesn't cut his legs with a chainsaw or whatever, there is somebody there. It is not a good idea to go cut wood with a chainsaw on your own. I knew of a chap once who used to

- 38:00 go to his bush block on a Monday morning and go home Saturday night. And this week he was going to split posts. Well he felled the tree and blocked it off and was trying to split one open and he was trying to push it and he put his foot there and the wedges slipped out. And that was where they found him and that was Monday morning, and he died – had been there all the week. He couldn't get his axe out to cut his leg off or anything and so that's where he died. With somebody with him it doesn't happen, does it?
- 38:30 That could happen the same with Clyde, he could cut his leg with the chainsaw and bleed to death. He is just a chap, and a fellow introduced me and let me go deer hunting in later years out Cressy in the little Den. Well Clyde is his brother and he has died and I sort of come up with Clyde, he fills the place. Both me good mates are dead.

39:00 As they say, only the good die young. So there is hope for you two yet!

We might be good and die young!

I was going to tell you about – I told the girl on the what's-the-name – about the yard of the nun that went to the doctor.

We have got a few couple of minutes left.

You want this on that?

Whatever you want.

Yeah, well put it on. Anyway she went to the doctor and he inspected her and whatever

- 39:30 and she tore out of the surgery, past the receptionist and never said a word. And when the doctor come out, the receptionist said, "What on earth did you say to the nun? She never spoke. She nearly run over the top of me." "Oh, I gave her an inspection and told her she was pregnant." And the receptionist said, "Of course she wasn't, what on earth did you tell her that for?" "Oh, she is not pregnant but it stopped the hiccups."

40:00 Have you ever tried stopping the hiccups?

Needed a good scare. Oh, all right we have two minutes left and this is basically your time to say anything you want to address anyone who is viewing this tape, whatever you want to say left.

Nothing, only... Thanks. It has been a very interesting interview. Something I never expected to

- 40:30 ever happen. Perhaps I had thought of writing another book and putting some of these things in it. But I will probably will still do, it will give me some time in the winter. I has been nice to meet you two characters. I don't know how you'll behave when you get away, whether they will sack you for letting me tell so much rubbish, or what will happen. But take care of yourselves; it has been nice to know you.

No worries, thanks very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS