Australians at War Film Archive

Frederick Powell (Fred) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **OK, we'll start off with this overview that we've talked about, and so I'll get you to take me through from where you were born, where you grew up and continuing on from there.**

Righto. Well to start with, my long term memory's all right, my short term memory's rubbish at times, but I was born in Paddington in Brisbane, and

01:00 we lived in a house in Herbert Street, Rosalie. There were seven of us, and my father and mother and my grandfather and two uncles, and my sister and myself, in a three bedroom house, and life was very rough, my father was out of work, my mother was a dressmaker, she

01:30 made dresses for ten shillings, my earliest recollections is that one of the uncles was a fruit carter, he used to have a horse and cart, and I can recall waking – my cot was in his bedroom, and I can recall waking up one morning with carrots all around my cot, and it still sticks in my memory now, and I would have been three I suppose, two or three at that stage.

02:00 But my father was a rum drinker, and my grandfather was a rum drinker, and my mother's life was bloody awful, and so was ours. The curse of the rum made life very difficult, we never had any money because my father always seemed to get drunk every Friday for some reason or other, my grandfather

02:30 got drunk every pension day, it was a Thursday for some reason or other. And I started earning money when I was about six, it was my job to put the – when my uncle came home was to put the feed bag on the horse and hose him down and comb him down at six, seven, my sister tells me that I was on the end of a cross-cut saw when I was eight, eight or nine, with my father.

03:00 And I used to have to chop the blocks up that were cut off, and the blocks had to be sitting three different timbers, that was in the blocks, the old house stumps that were cut up, there was stringy bark, iron bark and blood wood, blood wood was the easiest to cut, but I had to mix them to take them upstairs to the woodbox to the fire. The house

03:30 had an open verandah at the front and there was a toilet up the back, a dunny [toilet] up the back, and I used to collect the horse manure and take it round the streets of Paddington in a cart, I had regular customers, I used to get nine pence for a load, and you know, the hills of Paddington, they were pretty steep. And I used to cart them round, I was about 10, 11, 12,

04:00 and at other times I'd go on the bread cart, which was McDougalls Bakery was only up the end of the street, and I knew all the carters and my mate, his father was a carter, and he got me a job during school holidays of going out with the bread carters. And at 12, when I was 12 my uncle hanged himself under the house, and I found him.

04:30 And that was a pretty rough time in my life and at 14 I passed my scholarship at 13 and I started work at 13, and being in Paddington you get tangled up with a rough mob, so I started work and I got into the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], and I was a pretty good gymnast because of the work

05:00 I'd done, I was very strong for my size, the smallest and the youngest kid in school, and I went through life being bullied by everybody, but I got to being a good gymnast and they asked me to go to – when I was about 15, to go down to the orphanages in Brisbane, the Margaret Maher Home and the

05:30 halfway house for prisoners at Chelmer, and I realised that I thought my life was tough until I got into those orphanages and saw how those kids were. And my mother made me a green silk suit, which I was known as Freddo the Frog, because I'd be tumbling here, there, and falling there, and I used to slip these kids a packet of chewing gum. And anyhow

06:00 it got to the stage where the caretakers knew that I was giving them chewing gum, and they got up a chant, "We want Freddo, we want Freddo." so I carried on there with the YMCA and with doing that sort of thing, I played soccer and I loved swimming in the swimming pool at the YMCA, and I finished up being a very good swimmer, and then I

06:30 went into the army at 18, I was a corporal still at 18, I went to Moresby and I was there for two years, and I was in the dental section, I went in the army to be in the cavalry like my father was, but when they saw that I had a two and a

07:00 half year apprenticeship up as a dental technician they said, “Right, you’re in the dental section.” so that’s all there was to it. I only lasted a month in the training school and I was made a corporal, and then I – as I said I went to New Guinea and went to Murray Barracks first and the Japs bombed us out of there, and then we went to a place called Bootless Bay, and that’s when the 39th Battalion just

07:30 came back from the Owen Stanleys – Kokoda, and they attached us then to help clean them up and of course we were supposed to wear Red Cross armbands, and the boys in the 39th said, “Get rid of those armbands, you’ll be the first ones picked off.” because we were supposed to go as stretcher bearers to them, but they pulled us out, they wouldn’t let us go, and of course they had all the fuzzy wuzzies [indigenous Papua New Guineans] doing all

08:00 the stretcher bearing. And then went up to a place called Donadabu[?], which was about 40 miles inland from Moresby, it’s the start of the Owen Stanleys – the start of the Kokoda Track, and we turned off at Sogeri and went to a place called Donadabu which was a convalescent camp for those that came out of Milne Bay and those that came out of the Buna and Gona show.

08:30 And the Logi River [?] was there, and around one big bend, and we used to swim a mile and a half up against the current, a mile and a half back, and three of us, there was the Pop cousins, Freddy Shepherd and myself, I can still remember those names. And one time we were going out 400 metres from the bank, where we used to go in, there was a cane, there was a lawyer cane across the

09:00 creek, about 400 metres up a couple of crocs [crocodiles] came off the edge and went underneath me, and I was looking to the left, and they were looking to the right, they saw him and I didn’t, and they pushed my head under and it turned round as Freddy Shepherd pushed my head under, and I said, “What’s going on?” And then they came back to the pool and when I got back I abused them

09:30 and I joked at them and said, you know, “It’s not right.” and we went back along the bank and here’s the two parts in the bank where the crocs had been lying. That particular night there was a burst of Bren [gun] from the ford that we had to cross over, because the Japs had got just up to Itiki Plantation, which was only about a mile away from where we were at the time. So we thought, hello, the Japs have got through. But anyhow they hadn’t, and

10:00 we found out that the picket on the ford saw these crocs coming over so he put a burst of Bren into them, because their swimming hole was down below the fords. So I got malaria then, and I was unconscious for three days they tell me, and they didn’t know what sort of malaria I had. There used to be two malarias in those days, MT [malignant tertian] and

10:30 BT [benign tertian], and I just got my records this year for my 79th birthday, or 80th birthday, the wife wrote away for them. And it says NS, non-specific, they didn’t know what it was. So they transferred me straight to the 2/5th AGH [Australian General Hospital] as a corporal, and the CO [Commanding Officer] said, “Look son, we don’t know what you’ve got, but for God’s sake don’t ever give blood.” So I’ve never

11:00 given blood, all my life. And I used to get attacks for 30 years afterwards. And like the doctor Tommy Dunn, no Eddie Dunn said, “You know, that’s not malaria you’ve got.” And I said, “Well, I’ve had the bloody thing for 30 years, they ought to know what it is.” So that was in Moresby. I did a lot of faciomax

11:30 work there, making splints and things to fix broken jaws, shot about faces, artificial eyes and all that sort of stuff, they got me into that. And to finish that story about the crocodiles, Freddy Shepherd finished up coming to Hervey Bay as an alderman, and

12:00 I rang him up to find out if there was a Freddy Shepherd, and he came up and he repeated the story in front of the family, because I don’t think the family believed me, and he asked me to make him a set of teeth, so I made him a set of teeth, and he never ever paid me. But he went AWL [Absent Without Leave] after the crocs, and he went back to Melbourne, and he said he had a fleet of taxis in Melbourne during the rest of the war. That was ’42, ’43,

12:30 ’43, and he said he had a fleet of taxis, but I couldn’t believe anything what he said. But no-one – we had finished the Buna and Gona and Sanananda – they shifted us – after two years, they shifted us back to Australia, and we went on

13:00 14 days leave, we went to Bathurst, the coldest place in Australia, and I think out of the 400 staff, 200 of us went down with malaria and God knows what. And while I was in there I finished up going down with appendicitis, and that was on the 4th of August, 1944, because

13:30 my sister’s birthday is the 4th of August, that’s how I remember it. And the Japs broke out of Cowra on the 6th August, and Bathurst is not far from Cowra, so we had the hospital there, the field hospital at Cowra, and they brought the wounded guards in, and the wounded guards were more or less sitting opposite me, three were in the beds opposite me. After that we came

14:00 back to Ingleburn, and yes, Ingleburn, and we were going to get on a big Dutch boat at Woolloomooloo,

and we waited beside the boat for four hours, and the CO said to me, I was a sergeant then, staff sergeant, I was the youngest staff sergeant in the army they told me, they

14:30 didn't verify it, they just told me, and he said, "Can you hold it?" I said, "Well, I've been working a lot longer than most people." I started work at 13, I was 20 then. Anyhow [General] MacArthur changed his mind and turned us round. And all that four hours I was not allowed to leave my truck, because all the dental gear – they said, "If you leave your truck they'll

15:00 pinch every bloody thing on it." that's because hospital gear was very valuable then to those people on the dole and bludgers and all that sort of thing down there. So we went back to Ingleburn then, and we had to put barbed wire entanglements round the sheds that carried our hospital equipment. We were a 600-bed hospital, at one stage in Moresby we had 2,100 patients in a

15:30 600-bed hospital. I've got photos to show we had the first Jap prisoners of war there, and I repaired the glasses of one fellow who could speak English, he was a school teacher, and I said to him, "You look like you're beaten now; we're going to take Rabaul next." He says, "You'll never take Rabaul, there's 82,000 Japs in Rabaul."

16:00 So I went over to ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit] and I told them over there, what this fellow had said, so they came over and interviewed him. So I don't know, but MacArthur by-passed Rabaul. At the end of the war there was 83,000 Japs in Rabaul. So my little contribution to the war effort besides repairing damaged faces and God knows what. And then

16:30 while we were in Sydney waiting for the next ship we – I surfed every surfing beach from Cronulla, no, what's south of – Wollongong, from Wollongong to Palm Beach, because we had a unit bus, anybody that wanted to go to the beach

17:00 could go to the beach providing I went along, because I was the only recognised decent swimmer in the unit. And that's what I did for three months, surfed every beach. And they changed their mind and said, "Righto, you're off." so we got onto a Liberty ship called the John Hope, and we struck a bit of dirty weather going up, and a tank broke

17:30 loose down below and they called on sergeants to go down and chain the tank up again, and we did that and we all came back with stinking headaches from the fumes that were down there. Then we went to Morotai and we set up a hospital in Morotai in a coconut plantation.

18:00 And once you take the topsoil off the coconut plantation, it was pure while coral, and you had to wear sunglasses when you were driving there all the time. And we only had a finger of land, that's what it was like, that was Morotai, and the rest was all held by Japanese, and we had – American Negroes were guarding the perimeter there, and they said, "There's only a couple of thousand Japs out there, they wouldn't worry us here, you know?"

18:30 End of the war there was 30,000 Japs in Morotai, so they told us. But we got bombed and scraped a few times, one time some shrapnel, I don't know where it came from, came through a tent, we were all in tents of course, and it came through the roof of the tent and hit a fellow in the wrist, a piece of shrapnel, and he died. No-one knows

19:00 why, it's what they call a PUO, paroxysm of unknown origin. Fancy remembering that after 60 years. But when the war ended, we were still there, and of course you came home on a point system, that a married man with children got home first, and a single man without children came home last,

19:30 so it wasn't until July '46 that I came home. I had been doing a lot of work on artificial eyes, making them out of acrylics as we called it, or plastic as you'd call it, and that was just before – well it must have been in September '45 I think it was, or '44, might have been '44.

20:00 We wrote a thesis on how to make artificial eyes, there was a Melbourne technician, Reg Roberts, and a Sydney technician called Theo Firth, and myself, we wrote up this thesis on how to make artificial eyes, and Major Kingsley, he was the eye surgeon of the 2/5th, and they sent it to The Lancet in London and

20:30 published it. And we got enquiries from all over the world as to how to make artificial eyes out of plastic. And after the war Theo Firth had a big business in Sydney making artificial eyes, I don't know what Reg Roberts did, he was working for a dentist called Hall Best in Melbourne, but I taught a few lads up at the dental hospital, they worked at the dental hospital, how to do

21:00 them, and one of them was a fellow called Garry Blonde [?], he went to Western Australia and he was doing a lot of work on artificial eyes over there. But I fought for the registration of dental technicians after the war for 40 years, and every other state in Australia was registered for – dental technicians were registered to deal directly with the public, except Queensland. And I and a

21:30 fellow called John Taylor from Noosa, and myself, we went to every health minister that was in parliament, whether they were Labor, Liberal or Country Party – National Party, and we couldn't beat the money that was going in from the dental profession. There was a dentist here, was here in Maryborough, he was chairman of the ADA Public Relations Fund,

22:00 and practically all that money went into the politicians' pockets, and when the Liberal Party got kicked

out and the National Party came in, dentists switched allegiance to the National Party, and Liberal – the president of the Liberal Party, John Moore, got up in parliament and referred to the dentists as the white shoe trendies, because they

22:30 took their money and gave it to the what's-a-name. At one stage early in the piece, I think it was around about '47, '48, '49, they said, "Raise 5000 pound and we'll give it to the – we'd get registration." So we raised the 5000 pound, there was two fellows who were members of state parliament at the time, a Fred Bromley and a Jack – there's the name gone now on me –

23:00 they were dental technicians, and Yvonne Darling's father, she was a member of parliament for a long time, it was her father, Jack somebody. Anyhow they said, "You raise 5000 pounds, you'll get registration." But one fellow went to the ADA – went to the dentist and said, "Give us 10,000 pound and we'll stop it." So the Labor Party got 15,000 pound for nothing,

23:30 way back then when that was a lot of money. So I went to see Joh Bjelke Petersen [Queensland politician] about another matter a long time afterwards, and he said, "You do something for me and I'll do something for you." I said, "No, I tried that once before and it didn't work." I said, "No, I won't be in it." But that was when the war was over I had to come back and finish my apprenticeship, and as you can well

24:00 imagine, I was 22, I think, anyhow the Apprenticeship Bureau, the ADA would not allow me – they'd only allow me six months off my time

24:30 of my apprenticeship because I'd been in the army as a dental technician, only six months and I'd been in the army for four years, doing nothing but dentistry, and I've still got the receipt book in there, I can show you, I got four pound seven and sixpence a week I think, or something like that, for my work. But having done the

25:00 acrylic work early, whereas a lot of people were still doing vulcanite work, and being into artificial eyes, and being into faciomax work, I was far more experienced than any other qualified technician in Brisbane at the time. But I was still getting paid. So anyhow I finished up leaving that and I came to Maryborough. I got married in '51,

25:30 and I was working for a big lab [laboratory] in Brisbane and a fellow – I was doing work for a Maryborough dentist, and he said, "Why don't you come up to Maryborough and I'll give you a job here and get all the other dentists to give you work?" he said, "You're so far ahead of anybody else, it's not funny." So I came up here and of course my wife's brother was a constable here at the time, so we settled

26:00 here in Maryborough and we weren't here six months and the dentist sold the practice, so anyhow I then went out working on my own, working for quite a few other dentists. And I got a lot of work, but the demand on your time, every dentist thought his work had higher priority than anybody else's. So anyway I started fighting for the registration of dental technicians dealing

26:30 directly with the public, and I made more money in the last five years than I did in the previous 30 years. And we had five children, and we haven't had a moment's trouble with any of them, the government said when the registration – when the dentists

27:00 got medical benefits – I made a lot of money but the tax man says, "Oh, I'll have all that." so they left me with $4000 I think it was, to live on for the year. I had three children at high schools or universities or whatever you like to call it, Roslyn was at teachers' training college, Denise was

27:30 down at high school, down at Hervey Bay, Ian was at Gatton College, Mark was at university, and we're supposed to pay all those fees and live on … Damian, he wanted to be a policeman but he wasn't big enough, because his Uncle Brian, who was here as a constable finished up being

28:00 superintendent, and his grandfather, my wife's father, was a superintendent, so the wife has the honour of being the mother, the sister, the daughter of policemen, so when I retired I said, "Do you want the business?" He said, "No Dad, I'll go in the police force" and by that time he had built into a big boy, with a lovely physique. And he's now in charge

28:30 of the arson squad in Brisbane, he had been in charge of the fraud squad, he had been a detective sergeant down at Wynham, and he's done very well.

Excellent. Well we might at this point go right back to the beginning, and I'll get you to tell me about your dad's involvement in World War I.

My Dad was

29:00 in the Fifth Light Horse, he went through Gaza and all those places, the last charge at Beersheba, he was in that, so he said, and he knew all those places, he used to talk about them,

29:30 very critical of the English officers, the English generals, very critical, very bitter. And his father was an Englishman, he came from Lancashire I think. My grandmother, served under Florence Nightingale [World War I nurse] and now my daughter's got her book on obstetrics, it's been in the family ever since

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30:00 my grandmother committed suicide, my uncle committed suicide, and I found him under the house, I told you that, didn't I? And my father said that he was doling rum out to the troops in the desert and it got into his system and he's never been able to get it out, that was his exact words. And his three brothers

30:30 all joined up, two of them were in the Light Horse with him, but one of them, the youngest, went into France, was badly wounded in France, shrapnel on the brain, and he came home with shrapnel on the brain, and they could never remove it in those days, and he spent most of his life in Goodna,

31:00 and I took – he married and he had a son, and that son only died in January, and he was always worried that he was – his father was mental, you know? And I had a letter, I think I've still got it somewhere, of this fellow writing a letter from England and it got back to

31:30 Australia, telling how he was wounded, and I showed this letter to this cousin of mine, that his father wasn't mental, it was just the damage from the war.

How would he behave?

Badly. But my father, he behaved badly too, he didn't have any bloody shrapnel in the brain. And he used to threaten Mum I said, "If you ever touch

32:00 Mum" I said, "I'll bloody well kill you, no question about it." And I would have been 16 at the time. I remember, he used to take his web belt off at us kids, you know, the big wide samround round belt? We'd get belted with that, my sister and myself. My sister wouldn't get hit often, but I did, because if I didn't bring the firewood up, or you know, simple things.

What kind of a man was he when he wasn't drinking?

When he was sober?

32:30 He was all right, he was – but he – the only time I've ever done anything with him was plucking WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chickens] of a Sunday morning, or at Christmas time, things like that. He never taught me anything, a bit of plumbing, he was a plumber by trade, his father was a plumber, and his brother was a plumber, but they were never apprenticed to their father, and after the war you couldn't get a job

33:00 unless you had indentures as they called them. But he did a bit of plumbing around the house, but not much. But I could never get close to my father, never, ever.

How do you think his war time had affected him?

Oh yeah, I should say it would have, because his mother had died when he was only about 13 or 14, and she committed suicide, as I said, his father was a drunk

33:30 as well, and it happened a lot in those days, bloody rum, and he told me that he put the roof on the Eumundi pub when I was driving him back from here one stage, and I went down to Beaudesert at another stage to see a friend down there and he said he put the roof on the

34:00 railway, his father had the contract to do the plumbing on the railway line to Beenleigh, all the buildings there, and he had to ride bareback a horse from Beenleigh to Brisbane, because they'd forgotten something like bloody plumbers do, tools and things. You didn't know whether to believe him, but that's what he claimed he did. He said he was a breaststroke champion in Queensland, and he did all his swimming in

34:30 the drydock in Stanley Street, and I have been a good swimmer, and my eldest son Mark, his wife refers to him as a fish, he won the – at 48 years of age he won the swimming leg for his age group, they won the gold medal at the Noosa Triathlon, they won the gold medal at the Mooloolaba Triathlon,

35:00 and he's going down to Byron Bay next week in May for the Byron Bay Triathlon in swimming. And all of my boys are good swimmers, and they've all got diving certificates, all lovers of the water. But our skin's not designed for the water. But no, my father, I couldn't get close to him. And he said he didn't want to see 80, and he died at 79, and I went to see

35:30 him there at Greenslopes and he said, "Well son, I won't be here tomorrow." I said, "Righto Pop." So …

What would he tell you about the war?

What would he tell us about it? He'd tell us about going in behind Gaza, I remember one story, and they could have taken Gaza, they'd

36:00 surrounded Gaza, but the English general thought it was a trap, and they had to pull back. And when they pulled back they lost 100,000 men all told, I think something like that anyhow, that's what he told me. But he had a horse, Stoney was his horse, and it hurt him most to have to shoot the horse at the end of the war. All the troops had to shoot their horses, because they couldn't leave them

36:30 there for the Arabs, because the Arabs would kill and eat them, so they had to shoot them, and that's what hurt him most. But he never had any friends, my father, never had any friends at all. During the war, the Second World War, he had two friends he used to drink with at the Railway Hotel in Brisbane, Teddy Dunlop and someone else, they were with him in the Light Horse. But that's

37:00 all he ever had. He never marched, never marched, a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League] for 50 years, he's on the Honour Board of Rosalee, so am I, on the Honour Board of Rosalee, and he was just – I don't know, a lonely person. But I don't know whether the fact that after he and Mum got married, they were in a house at Kelvin Grove, and

37:30 he got out of work and had to leave the house and go back with her father. And my mother looked after my father and two uncles and grandfather, in the house. And whether he felt it wasn't his house and you know, he wasn't the boss sort of thing, those early days were rough, very rough.

Why do you

38:00 **think your mum stuck by him?**

Would not have a clue, I would not have a clue, I don't think she had anywhere to go, or do anything, you know? She used to be always threatening to commit suicide. I stopped her twice.

What would she do?

Well see my uncle hung himself under house, and my grandmother took

38:30 Lysol, killed her, poison, and because of Pop playing up all the time she hung a noose under the house, and I found it and I pulled it down, and she was going down to the river to jump in the river one time, and I went down after her on my bike, and brought her back. But the woman across the road, she went down, and

39:00 she got a taxi and because her husband was playing up with another woman, and she went to Toowong Reach of the river and jumped in off the ferry there into the water and drowned, killed herself. But anyhow mother died when she was – Anzac Day, when she was about 79. My sister's 82,

39:30 and still in the same house. The house was built in 1859, it's been in the family name all the time, and I could show you some photos of it, it doesn't relate to my war experience, but the building, the alterations that I've done to it, I can turn my hand to anything, I built all those beams

40:00 that's up on the roof there, and I built most of this house, all those boards and things, I put all them up. But I had another builder do most of the work. But I built a house on my own up at Boys Avenue, the first concrete slab home in Maryborough. And they said it wouldn't work, and I don't think there's a house built today that's not concrete slab. So

40:30 we paid $30,000 for this block of land here, and it'll be worth a million before long. So we've turned that, that's been a marvellous effort as far as Pat's concerned, and the kids and all that. That's the gist of it, anyhow. But there's a few things I could add in, you know?

Well we'll just pause there for a second, because we're at the end of this

Tape 2

00:36 **OK, on the last tape we were talking a bit about your father and his World War I service, is there any evidence of anything like shellshock or anything like that with your father?**

Oh yes, yes, I remember him fighting in bed and hitting Mum, you know, thinking he's having a go at the Turks, and that's even not when he was drinking, that's

01:00 when he was stone cold sober. And quite often Mum would get hit by an elbow or something like that, when he was fighting the Turks. And a lot of it would be to forget memories, for sure, what went on. But when he was with his two mates, because I used to have to go and pick him up from the pub quite often, I'd come home from football of a Saturday and

01:30 I'd go and pick him up, on the way home I'd pick him up from the pub and have a drink with the three of them, and they never ever spoke about the war, and yet that was the only friends he had, I'd never known him to have any friends at all. He was a very quiet person, and he could never remember anybody's name, he always called them love, women particularly, always called them love.

02:00 But I resolved that I would never be like him, and I thought that was the best way to live, was the opposite of the way he was living. So whether it was shellshock I don't know, but he was affected by it, there's no doubt about it.

What about his health?

Pardon?

What about his health?

He was

02:30 a very healthy sort of a fellow, he worked as a cable joiner from just before the war. He was out of work, on the dole more or less, as they call it, two days relief work, until just before the war he got a job as a plumber on the flying boat base

03:00 up in the Gulf of Carpentaria, they built a flying boat base there and he did the plumbing on that. That was for the Sunderland Flying Boats, they were going to come from England to Australia, instead of that they used them in the fighting around England. And when he came back from that he got a job with the PMG [Postmaster General's Department] as a cable joiner, and he used to work out of the Paddington depot,

03:30 and he would walk up Helena Street, he would be in his 50s then, I should imagine, yes, around 50s, and he would walk up that hill like it was a piece of cake, no trouble at all. And he always walked home from the trams, he could never drive a car. But health-wise, he seemed, well I

04:00 knew he had a hydraseal, do you know what that is? It's a swollen testicle, and it's about that size, and it finished up he had that removed, and he got that out in Brisbane General Hospital. At the same time he had a sebaceous cyst in the middle of his spine, he said he got the testicle from galloping horses,

04:30 and this hydraseal (sic) was from his trigger guard of his rifle, rubbing up and down his back, it was a lump about that big. And he said that the doctors couldn't operate on it because the roots were in his spine, and it was only a sebaceous cyst, it was just a sac. And when he was dying, just before we took him to hospital, the cyst burst in his back,

05:00 and oh, the smell, it was something shocking. But he did have prostate cancer, and I think that's what killed him, if my memory serves me right. But no, I'm the exact opposite to what he was.

And describe for us like what some of this rum drinking was like. How bad did it get?

05:30 How bad did the rum drinking get? Oh God. Well, he'd get violent at times, and I've never known my grandfather or my uncles to interfere. One uncle, I don't know whether I've told you, he died of TB [Tuberculosis] and he left a set of weights underneath the house that he used to

06:00 practice with, so needless to say I used to practice with them when he died, and he died when I was about 12 years of age, and I could throw up 115 pound when I was 15 years of age. But then times were tough, and my father sold them for rum money, the weights.

06:30 I had 10 pound in the Commonwealth Bank that I had earned from selling manure, selling newspapers, we used to sell at the butchers shop, selling bottles, I used to cart down to the bottle depot, and the bread run that I used to go on, and the money from my uncle for looking after the horse.

07:00 So I had 10 pound, which was a lot of money in those days, all in threepences and sixpences, that I'd been … And my mother took the lot to help put the sewerage on, so we put the sewerage on and I started again, building up, then I don't know what happened to all that money, it went, all went on rum, the whole lot of it. All my money that I sent home from four years in the islands,

07:30 all went. When I got home there wasn't a cent left. All went on bloody rum. And my sister got married just after the war or during the war or sometime, and I paid for the wedding. So that's how bad it was. Oh no, it was rough, very, very rough, all the

08:00 incidents, I don't like remembering them. Yeah.

Well how would your mum get by? How would the family get by for money then?

Well we used to go up to the bakery, McDougalls Bakery was only 100 yards up the road, Herbert Street, the end of Herbert Street, which is a dead-end street, there used to be McDougalls Bakery there, and I used to go up

08:30 there and get yesterday's bread, a penny a loaf, and when we came home from school all we ever had was bread and dripping, and we used to think that was pretty good, bread and dripping. We never ever had a holiday, never went to the pictures, I remember – I never went to the pictures until I think I was about 16 or something like that before I went to the pictures. Never

09:00 went anywhere, never did anything. I was ashamed to be with my father, but proud to be with my mother and sister.

Well tell us about her, what kind of woman was she?

Mother?

Yes.

It's a bit hard. She was only about five foot three, five foot

09:30 four, she would have weighed about 12 stone, I've got a photo in there that might describe it better. But a wonderful heart, put up with a hell of a lot, a good cook, brilliant cook, she could turn a beautiful meal out of nothing, and

10:00 she cared for us, yeah. Of course she was always on the sewing machine, they tell me I used to pick up pins off the floor when I was about two, with my tongue. She was always dressmaking,

10:30 always making 10 shillings here, or something there, that's what kept us going. No, she was a lovely lady.

And you mentioned you have a sister. How many siblings did you have?

Only one, Gwen, yes, one sister. She got a job when she left school at 14, Legacy got her a job as a

11:00 ladies hairdresser, and she stayed with that until she had her own salon, she managed salons for John Campbell in Brisbane for years, and one in the National Bank building, I know that, one in the valley, and then she had her own practice at Indooroopilly, just up from, what's the big shopping centre there, about

11:30 100 yards up the hill from there she had that there for, I don't know, about 10 years I suppose, as a hairdresser. But her husband – she married as I said, just after the war or during the war, and she had one son, but her husband wouldn't work, she was keeping him,

12:00 and she had the son. Anyhow he wanted to go to Sydney to live, and he had no prospects, didn't do anything, and she wouldn't go. And so she didn't divorce him until, I don't know, only about 10 years ago. But the son has been with her, he was living with a woman for a

12:30 while, but she kicked him out for some reason or other, but he's living with her, and he makes a few dollars here and there making knives, he's a member of a gun club and he's not game to leave the house. Someone's got to be in the house all the time, because of the guns and knives he's got in the place.

13:00 Bloody ridiculous situation, we were only talking about it last night, we've got my sister coming up on Friday with my daughter. My daughter's coming up for a school reunion, a 50th school reunion, coming here, so my daughter's bringing her up, and we'll get her back to Brisbane somehow. But the last time she was up he didn't eat for a week, she said. So I don't know

13:30 what happened. And he's a funny individual, he must be 59 or 60 now I suppose, 58, I don't know. But no, just the two of them in the house. He had a 125 Yamaha, he just left it lying on the ground under the house,

14:00 it's been there 15, 20 years.

Well getting back to that work you mentioned you did, when did you start doing some odd jobs? How old were you?

How old was I when I started doing odd jobs? Oh God, I was six, I think, six or seven. Because I know I used to have to get two boxes and be able to reach the horse's back,

14:30 one box I used to stand up on another big box, I used to climb up on that, and I used to use the bottom of an old tub as a hoop, and I used to have to comb the horses back down with that. And I used to have to put the – I used one box to put the feed bag on the horse, and then I'd have to hose him down and comb him in the summer time, and bag him down in the

15:00 winter time, and I don't know how I even reached up to him half the time. And then I used to grow vegetables, radishes and lettuce and beetroot, when I was, Christ I was only seven or eight then, because we had a spare allotment next door to us, we were on an 18 perch allotment and we had a spare allotment next door to us. The horse was in one half of the spare allotment, and this garden was

15:30 in the other half of this spare allotment. And my uncle used to sell whatever I grew, he used to sell it, but I never ever got the money for it. But I've had the love of gardening ever since, and I've got a vegetable garden out there now, got things growing. But it was one way of making money for somebody. But, when you see the hills of Paddington now,

16:00 to think that I used to – oh, another job I used to get to, but see the hills of Paddington, and I used to have this cart which was about that long, and that wide and about that deep, and I had straps on my shoulders, and I'd take this up, I know over at one place, I don't know whether you know where the Plaza Theatre is in Paddington, I used to go up to a house up there, I'd get ninepence for

16:30 the load, I would only have been 10 or 11 when I was doing that. But another job I used to have to do too was to go out to the Rainworth School, just past – on the allotment next to the Rainworth School I used to cut down black wattle, and cut it – that's the length of the cart, I used to have to cut them just short so they fitted in, fill the cart up, and I used longer pieces that went over

17:00 the back, over the whole cart, and I'd put a strap round the lot, and I'd work all Saturday doing that, and then I'd have to pull it up the hill to the Rainworth train terminus, which was there, and I remember pulling it up a little bit one day, and then stopping and pulling a little bit more, and stopping, and I didn't think I'd get it up the hill. And a tram conductor fellow came off the tram, and came and gave me a hand

17:30 and pulled it up the hill, and I'd go down the bitumen then, all the way down past Government House grounds, and down Beck Street, and then along Helena Street into Herbert Street. And I'd get sixpence for that. Now that was excellent firewood once it dried, for starting a fire. And

18:00 I don't how long I did it, how often I did it, but I know I used to do it quite regularly. But making money any way I could. And the bottle depot that we sell them to was – do you know Park Road, Milton at all? Well, there's a railway line comes into Park Road, goes underneath, and there's a street runs along beside the railway line, on the river side of the railway line,

18:30 and there used to be a bottle depot there, and we used to take this cartload of bottles round there, and I might get two shillings for the cartload, or something like that. Most of it was bloody rum bottles and beer bottles and things like that that I'd take down there. But it was a muscle-building exercise, I can tell you, and no wonder I did

19:00 so well at sports. I played soccer as a school boy for Queensland at the Exhibition Ground in Brisbane, played against New South Wales, and on the program they put my name down as Torvil, T-o-r-v-i-l, I think it was, instead of Powell. Everyone was asking, "Who's this Torvil?" But I used to go on a bread cart with Jimmy McDougall,

19:30 and he was the left back for Australia, he played left back, he was only a little fellow but oh Jesus, he taught me a lot, taught me how to climb, and taught me how to do a lot of things, so that's why I was all right at soccer. Then I played for the YMCA for years. But a lot of water's gone under the bridge [a lot of time has passed], trying to

20:00 remember it all now is a bit difficult.

You mentioned that cycling too.

Yes, well I got this bike for my 14th – no, for passing the scholarship, I passed my scholarship when I was 13 years of age, nearly 14, 1937, and my mother got me this bike for

20:30 passing my scholarship because father was working then. But that would have been – he'd have been up in Groote Eylandt then, up in the Gulf, so he'd be sending money home so that's why I got the bike. And it was an ordinary roadster bike and I put different handlebars on

21:00 it, and put different things on it, and I used to ride everywhere, went everywhere on bikes, ride to Sandgate, ride to Southport, ride everywhere on bikes. And we joined a club, it was from South Brisbane somewhere, a cycling club, and I joined them and I was cycling at Lang Park whenever they had a do on there, and

21:30 I remember some of the cyclists, the day I won the Queensland Championship as a junior, a fellow called Walsh was a New South Welshman, he won the seniors, and there was another sprinter there, Arthur King Koi, of China, a Chinese fellow, he was a good cyclist and – I forget their names now, the kids that used to ride,

22:00 but a lot of them got killed during the war. Out of my class that I went to school with, we had a school reunion a few years back, and, "Oh, he got killed, he was shot down over England." he was a fighter pilot, Terry Edwards, he was killed, Johnny Delahunt, Jimmy Martin, they all went. And when I went to the reunion there was only

22:30 about two fellows that I knew.

What was school like for you as a kid?

Rough. I was the smallest and the youngest in the class. I missed – my sister tells me that I missed a grade, there was first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, and seventh grade was the final year, and

23:00 my sister told me that I went from second grade to fourth grade, which I think was absolutely bloody stupid, because I was so small. When I started work I was only five foot – I was four foot eight, when I started work. And you'd get all the bullies would have a go at you all the time, they think they can push you around. But on the soccer field I had

23:30 three mates, the Olden brothers, Dougie, Ronnie and Alan, and if anyone touched me, they'd flatten him. No, they didn't like bullies. But no, it was tough. Of course you'd go home to do your homework, and there's bloody fights and all that sort of stuff, and arguments and going on, and it wasn't easy. I

24:00 wasn't a good scholar. Put it this way, I must have been early in the piece, to jump a grade, you know, and to go into the army, I was only there three weeks I think it was, and I was promoted to a corporal,

and then when I was 20 I was promoted to a staff sergeant, the youngest staff sergeant in the army. “Do you think you can handle it?”

24:30 I said, “Oh yeah.” I must have grown up early or some bloody thing, I don’t know.

I was going to ask you, with all this work, do you think you had much chance of being a child, like playing games or …?

No. It was mainly trying to make money, I think. I would

25:00 kick a tennis ball to school, I’d kick a tennis ball home, and I’d have to make sure that the wood box was full, and there was always something to do. But play, no, I never had – one mate across the road, Mucka Blonde, I used to go over to his place and play in his backyard because he had Guinea pigs.

25:30 We called him Mucka, because he was always mucking about with something, mucking about with birds or Guinea pigs or animals of some description. We were never allowed a dog, I was never allowed a dog or a cat or anything. No, I never played many games, but as far as I’m concerned the main ones were

26:00 cycling, swimming and soccer, and then after the war I got into basketball and I played basketball until I was 40. I started basketball off in Maryborough here, but we won the Queensland championships in ’46, ’47, ’48 and

26:30 ’49. I could have gone away with the Queensland team but I was still doing my apprenticeship, I couldn’t get away. But only when I was so small that I could leap, which was – there’s one fellow, Ken Pearson was a doctor here, he played for university and he was six foot four and nine stone six, and we used

27:00 to call him Sticks, and you either got an elbow in the eye or a knee in the testicles from him, he was the dirtiest player, and he finished up, they used to say, “Watch out for Sticks.” and when we came here, he was the doctor for us here, and he had a go at my wife, only she was too naive for him,

27:30 I think he’s gone through three wives, and now just recently he’s just gone to Tasmania with another one, he’s a womaniser, his father was a minister of religion and his first wife was a daughter of a minister of religion. But he – Kenny Pearson, ooh.

28:00 **And going back to some of the tough times in your childhood, you mentioned to Naomi about your uncle hanging himself? Why did he do that, do you know?**

Yeah. See the other uncle had died of TB, and when I used to go out in the bread cart with him, he used to have membranal catarrh as we know it now, and he’d spit out flecks of blood, and he thought that he had TB.

28:30 He wouldn’t go to a doctor, he hated bloody doctors, the same as my father wouldn’t go to doctors, and he thought he had TB. And we had the earth closet up the back of our block, and my mother got me out of bed early one morning, “Les is not in bed.” she says, “He might be up the toilet, go up and find him.” And my grandfather was in the house, but he was very slow

29:00 moving. And I went up the toilet and I said, “No, he’s not here.” you know, and I came back and here he was hanging under the house. And my grandfather came and cut him down. But I still can’t tolerate anybody touching my neck. The kids used to tickle me everywhere, and couldn’t make me laugh, couldn’t do anything, don’t touch my neck. You’d wonder, wouldn’t you? Yes, so 12 years of age.

29:30 **Well how did you cope with finding that sight?**

I couldn’t go near that spot under the house for 10 years after that. Bad vibes. Yeah.

And you mentioned it was in the family, do you think he got his ideas from like your grandmother

30:00 **suiciding?**

Well yes, I think he just thought that he wouldn’t like to go through what Les did with his TB and he didn’t want to – he was a lonely man too, he only had one friend that I know of, and he was with the Queensland Book Depot and he died of TB, and

30:30 he thought that there was nothing in life for him, he was in the road [way] in the house, because Gwen and I were growing up. He was more or less, you know, if I suggested we do something, “Oh, we can’t do that now, can’t do this, can’t do that.” you know? And he never played sport, he was the

31:00 secretary of a soccer club that operated near the Milton School, that was the school that I went to, the Milton School, and it had a funny name, I can’t remember it at the moment, but he was the secretary of that, but he

31:30 never played sport himself, I don’t know why, never had any friends, he used to go out of a Saturday night with this friend of his who worked with the Queensland Book Depot, but I don’t know where he went, wouldn’t know what he did of a Saturday.

32:00 In those days a lot of that was bloody normal, you know, compared to what there is today, medical science – the reason my grandmother committed suicide was because the doctor told her that she was responsible for the death of a mother. She was a midwife in Paddington, she

32:30 served under Florence Nightingale, she worked at Queens – not Queens, a big hospital, Guys Hospital in London, and even after the war, after the bombings there's still a bronze plaque to her, my daughter went over there and saw it, to her, Nurse Lansbury, but I don't know what it was for, what she had done,

33:00 but her name was up on a brass plaque, in Briars Hospital London. And this doctor was drunk and accused her of killing the mother of a baby. And plus my grandfather being always on the bloody rum. She married one fellow, Bruton, when she came out here, she came out here with a

33:30 well known family, the Landsbury's in Brisbane. One of them lived at Indooroopilly, a Landsbury, one was a Supreme Court Bailiff, I think a judge, another one had a big job in the government, but they thought she married beneath herself in marrying this Bruton, he had a truck,

34:00 a dray, horse and dray, and he was a carrier of some description. But he had his son with him, or their son with them, and coming down Barina Hill the horse bolted and threw him out, and killed them both. And then she married this Jimmy Davey, he was a lamp lighter, he used to light the lamps

34:30 in Helena Street, all the way from Milton School up to Government House, used to light the lamps, and then put them out in the morning. That was his job. That was before I was born, long before I was born.

35:00 All he could look forward to was his cigars and rum. He used to sit on the front porch of the house, I'll have to do a drawing of the house to illustrate it, it was just an open verandah. I lived on an open verandah from when I was six years of age until I was

35:30 22, I think, just an open verandah, no – just blinds, that's all it was, until I finally – I built the verandah in, and I did a lot of building on the house, I put all weatherboards on the house, instead of the old pine chamfers, I lined the house, the house wasn't even lined, it was unlined. And I built the extension

36:00 out the back for the toilet and put a carport with a concrete roof on it, out the back, and put new stumps, all new stumps under it, concrete stumps under the house, and put a concrete wall under the front of the house, this was all – I don't know when I got that time to do it, but I did it all.

36:30 But I had bought a house over the back of my mother's place, or over the back of the spare allotment, I wanted to build units through there and have the entrance into the back street, sort of thing, the two ways, but the council would not permit it, the council wanted – that was for residential only. Now they're all bloody units round there.

37:00 So paid I think 1000 pound for the house, and I sold it for 2000 pound.

Well speaking of some of the work, tell us about finishing school and your first job.

Well, I left school as soon as I'd done my scholarship, I didn't know whether I'd passed or not, and I got a job as a message boy, I've still got the reference in there. Press

37:30 Etchings, a process engravers, and they used to do the printing in those days, in newspapers and everything else, all your photographs were done on metal blocks and zinc blocks. And there was the etching people, the fellows who used to do all the etching, do all the work on them, and I used to deliver them to all the printing companies, whether they were printing books or printing newspapers. And that was on my bike, I

38:00 used to hop on my bike. Press Etching was on the first floor, and you went up a flight of stairs and I'd carry my bike up and down those stairs every time I went out, because I couldn't leave it outside, it'd be pinched. And I stuck with that for 12 months and then the acid fumes seemed to get to me and I said, "I'm getting out of this, I don't like it" because I did have

38:30 a lot of catarrh and I've still got it, membranal catarrh. And I saw a job advertised for a motor mechanic, no, for a motorcycle mechanic. Well that'd suit me, you know, I thought I could do that. So there's 51 boys lined up where you came off the Victoria Bridge, around the corner,

39:00 there's 51 boys lined up for that job, and I went in, and you had to walk down a corridor I suppose from that window there to this wall, and you had all motorbikes and things on this side, and there was just this passageway to go down, and there was a fellow standing at the door there, and you had to wait until he called you in. So he called me in and I went in and I see a

39:30 telephone book on the floor, and I picked it up and put it on a table or something, and then they asked me quite a few questions, and they said, "What do you know – what do you call that?" And I said, "Well I don't know what it is, I don't know what you'd call it, but that end is for measuring the outside of bolts, and that's for measuring the inside of nuts." And they asked me a lot of other questions. A fellow down the road had a water

40:00 cooler Scott motorbike, and I helped him repair that, sort of thing, and – where was I? I got the job, 51

boys, and I got the job. And they said to me, “Do you know, you’re the only person that picked up that phone book?” I said

40:30 “No, I didn’t know that.” Anyhow, I got the job. And they gave me a tea chest. Do you know what a tea chest is?

We’ll have to pick this up on the next tape, because we’re close to the end of the tape, so we’ll just continue on

Tape 3

00:36 So I took on this job with Markwell Brothers, they were motorcycle people, they were at South Brisbane, and this tea chest of nuts and bolts were put in front of me, and a set of drawers and things, and that was my job. There were three different threads of nuts and bolts, there’s

01:00 BSF, there’s SAE and there’s Ritworth. And I used to have to sort them out and the same with the bolts, put the bolts in one drawer and the nuts in another, and I was there for about three weeks, and that’s all I did, was sort these nuts and bolts out, and I thought, that’s enough, I’ve had enough. So I walked out on that job, I left the

01:30 key in the door and said, “I’m going.”

What did you say to them when you left?

Nothing, just walked out. I was absolutely disgusted to think they could do that to anybody. So I saw an ad in the paper for a message boy for a dental company, and this was in 1939. The company name was Bosch Bartell at the outbreak of war, and

02:00 I was a message boy, and of course having been a message boy before I knew Brisbane very well, been on bikes ever since I was 13. And the first job that they gave me was to take the brass plaque off the wall and put on the new one, Ron Brown, they changed their name from Bosch Bartell to Ron Brown, that’s why I know it was started at the start of the war.

02:30 **Do you remember hearing the news of the start of the war?**

No, I don’t, I don’t think I do. I remember the end of it though. So anyhow I was with them for about six months and we saw an ad in the paper for a dental technician, and having been round the labs and

03:00 seen what it was like, I thought that’d suit me, you know, an apprenticeship. That was a name that was thumped into my head by my father, because he never had an apprenticeship, he never had his – although he had the ability. So anyhow I had to get an apprenticeship somehow, so I was writing a letter out, applying for the job in the dental company, and the fellow said, “What are doing Fred?” I said, “I’m applying for this new job

03:30 as a dental technician.” “Oh.” he said, “Don’t do that, I’ll get you one.” So he got me a job with Lilystone and Sullivan down the valley in Brisbane. And that’s where I started, I did two and a half years there, then I went into the army.

Well what was your interest in the dental industry?

I liked to use the fingers, the skill of the fingers, and doing what was necessary.

04:00 It was rewarding work, you can do these things and you see something for it, it was not repetitive, every job is different. And it wasn’t just one thing, you know, there was plaster work, there was wax work, there was gold work, there was chrome work, and all this sort of stuff, all different facets. And I was good with my hands,

04:30 and two and a half years I was apprenticed, I never had a sick day, never had a day off.

What were your main duties as an apprentice?

Well, you were making moulds, and you were mixing up wax and plaster and God knows what, and learning the intricacies of the work, because in those days dentures were made out of vulcanite, and that is

05:00 rubber, and you had to treat that very gingerly, because it would catch fire pretty quickly if you overheated it. It was in a vulcaniser, it was cooked in a vulcaniser, and you had a pressure gauge that you had to watch all the time, because if it went over that, that’d be the end of it and you’d have to start the whole job again, because the vulcanite and the teeth are together. When they brought out a new product called Heckalus, it was a cellulose block,

05:30 and you had to have a heckaliser then, that was another one with a press incorporated in the heckaliser, and you put these dentures, these blocks between the two moulds and just squeezed it. But if it got too

hot it exploded, burnt the whole lot, and it was a failure. When the brought out acrylic in

06:00 1942, no '41, '41 they brought acrylic out, and the acrylic was made in India by DuPont, it's a product called Benzine they brought out, and I learned about acrylic work where all the dental hospitals and everybody else were still doing rubber work, you see? And Lilystone and

06:30 Sullivan were pretty inventive, you know, did the best of everything, and you had to do good work. And all the time I was there before the war, even during the war, I never had a day off, never took a day sick or anything like that. And then I went in the army and I was 18,

07:00 Mum didn't want me to go, Pop says, "He's got to go, that's all there is to it, if he doesn't he'll get called up sooner or later and go somewhere." So that's what happened.

Well, just tell me, in the apprenticeship what was the main method of instruction?

You were guided by a fully qualified technician who was there, he showed you what to do, showed you how to do it, and you

07:30 had to be pretty smart to do it. If you weren't any good at doing it, you got the chop [fired]. You went in on probation first, you had three months probation, if you were any good you get apprenticed. So that's what happened with me, I went in for three months and then I started my apprenticeship. It took me eight and a half years to do my apprenticeship. You'd think I was a slow learner, wouldn't you?

What's the dental technician's

08:00 **relationship with the dentist like?**

Some's good and some's bad, and some's very bad. We had a friend, Jack Jorgenson, his son decided to do dentistry at Queensland University, this would have been round about 1952 or somewhere round there. And his first

08:30 class, went in, all young fellows keen to do dentistry, and Professor Lumm his name was, the professor of dentistry, and he said, "The number one thing you've got to learn is that dental technicians have got to be kept under the heel."

09:00 And this young Jorgenson got up and he said, "Well you bloody clown, my father's a dental technician, and no so-and-so's going to keep him under the heel" you know? And Jacky Jorgenson, he had a big private practice in Brisbane then, he was a good technician.

Well how about when you were first starting doing the apprenticeship, what were you taught about a dental technician's relationship with the dentist?

09:30 You're just an employee, that's all, just an employee of the dentist, same as you're an employee of anybody else. It wasn't until the dental technicians started advocating recognition – you see I can make an artificial eye, I can make an artificial nose, I can make an artificial ear, I can make an artificial breast, but we're not allowed to touch the mouth.

10:00 **Why?**

Definitely against the rule, can't touch the mouth. And yet I can go into a dentist's surgery and say, "Well look, you're doing it wrong, this is the way you do it, do it in the mouth for the patient." But to do it myself, no. So my bosses were good, I used to go fishing with them, they had a house at Caloundra, I used to go up

10:30 there to Caloundra and fish with them, and they were real good. And when I came back after the war, one of them had died, the partnership had busted up and the mechanic went into partnership with his brother, there were three brothers, Nelson, Vic and Bill Lilystone. And Bill was the mechanic, and a brilliant mechanic at that. But he had a

11:00 lab under his home at Camp Hill, and his brothers never said anything about it. Nelson died and Vic and Bill went into partnership together, and I worked for them after the war, and when I came back I finished my apprenticeship, and when I finished my apprenticeship, I decided to go and do some chrome work, because they weren't doing any chrome work there, so I got

11:30 a job in a lab in Brisbane, and the fellow was a German, an arrogant bloody German, oh my God, hard man to work for. So I said, "No, I'm getting out of this." So then I got with another fellow and I was with him for 12 months, two years or something, and anyhow

12:00 I was doing work for a dentist, through him, in Maryborough, and this dentist said, "Well, come up to Maryborough, the quality of your work, you'll get a job anywhere." He said, "I can't get your quality anywhere else." So we went to Maryborough, and been here ever since.

And just run me through what the

12:30 **exact duties of a dental technician are.**

Well the dentist takes an impression of the mouth, and then you have to pour up the models, and from

there you start the process of doing wax models, from the plaster models or stone models, and then you put the teeth onto the wax to simulate

13:00 what the denture is going to be like, whether it's a full denture, a partial denture or whatever. You have to know the limitations of the mouth, how much the mouth can tolerate, how much it can't tolerate, and …

How do you work that out?

Experience and eye, you know there are certain rules. I could show you a couple of models if you like.

13:30 You go from experience, that's what the apprenticeship's all about, experience. The dentist gives you certain guidelines as to the length of the teeth, the shape of the teeth, but a lot of dentists I worked for only ever used two moulds of teeth, one large and one small, and yet you know, there's round about 30 different moulds of teeth. So it's just the way they worked.

14:00 But some dentists have absolutely no skill in their fingers whatsoever, and there's some good ones, but there's bloody hell a lot of bad ones. And some of them are very, very arrogant towards you, you're just a technician. I had one particular case where a

14:30 fellow had a newsagency, got sick, and his teeth went down the toilet. And he went to the dentist and said to him, "I've got a newsagency and I've got to have teeth straight away, as soon as I can get them." and he said, "I'll fix that up." So he took impressions, rang me up and he said, "Fred, drop everything else, I want these." I said, "I can't drop everything else." "This man's very important

15:00 in business in town, we've got to do this." "All right, I'll do something with them." So I worked all night, made the set of teeth by the next morning. Well the dentist, I don't know, charged him a hell of a lot of money in those days, and he told the patient that

15:30 I charged double what I normally charged, because it was done in such a hurry, which I didn't do. Anyhow this fellow came and had a go at me. "Why'd you do that?" I said, "What?" He said, "That set of teeth that you made." I said, "I didn't know whose it was, I'm not given any names, never ever given any names of the patients." He said, "Why did you charge me double?" I said, "I never charged you

16:00 double." I showed him my cards, every job's got a card, and how much I charge. And he never said anything to the dentist. And then there was another woman, we made a set of teeth for her exactly like her own teeth, in the same position, she was a woman who had a large tongue, she spoke a hell of

16:30 a lot, and well she talked, put it that way. And I made this set of teeth, or the dentist did, and she was quite happy, "Oh yes, lovely." and then she wanted a new set about five years later. So I knew who it was, so I made them according to the dentist's specifications. And I said, "She won't be happy with these Alf."

17:00 He said, "Why?" I said, "She's got a big tongue, that woman." "Oh, that's all right, she'll be right." Anyhow, a month after she got the teeth, I met her in the street. She said, "Fred, can you make me a set of teeth, like the ones you did last time? I've got no tongue room." I said, "Well look, it's illegal for me to do that." "Don't worry, I'll pay you cash,

17:30 nobody will know anything about it." So I made her a set of teeth, and she was as happy as anything. She says "I'm going up to the dentist's and getting my money back." And I said, "Well for God's sake don't tell him I made them." because I was still doing work for him. And anyhow, I was up on the first floor, and I looked out on the street, and here she is standing down on the

18:00 gutter there, waving her money, she'd been up to the dentist's and got her money back. So that's how …

During the apprenticeship, how much hands on work were you able to do before the war?

Hands on with the public?

Hands on in terms of how much was observation and how much was …?

Oh, you were doing work all the time, the moment you started you were pouring models and

18:30 doing things like that, and doing wax work. It's all skill.

The apprenticeship …

It's hands on right from the word go, you're learning, and what to do with your fingers and how to do it. What do I call it?

19:00 You've got the ability to perceive, that's what I call it. If you haven't got the ability to perceive, give it away. I can imagine – people tell what they want, and I can imagine it, exactly what they want. I've only to see a person do something once, and I can do it, that's

19:30 how I built these houses, that's how I've done everything, I've seen someone do it once, and I've done it, that's how I was with the job. I've never been sacked in my life, I've got references in there.

And what would you say your level of skill was by the time you joined the army?

I was,

20:00 well, an indication of it was that I was too good for the class I was in, because the instructor was from the dental hospital, he was in the army but he had been trained in the dental hospital, and I'd been – and he was still on rubber work where I was used to working with acrylic, you see, so I was advanced on him, and I had a big stink [fight] with him. As a matter of fact, he still lives down the bay,

20:30 Ernie Dick, I had a big stink with him then, I said, "No, that's not the way to do it." And of course, you know, fancy a private telling a staff sergeant what to do. So anyhow, I was appointed a corporal and out within a couple of weeks, that's all there was to it. And when I took over in a section, there was a sergeant, a corporal, a

21:00 dental attendant and a dentist, that was the dental section, four people in the dental section. And we had two tents, we went out and worked in the two tents, and when we got to New Guinea, the sergeant went crook, sick. Well I had to do everything for a few weeks, a couple of weeks, which I was capable of doing.

Just generally,

21:30 **your observations I guess during your apprenticeship and also during the war, what was the general state of peoples' teeth like?**

Shocking. Absolutely shocking. This is something of mine, when people say, "Oh fluoride, you shouldn't have fluoride in the place." well the reason we have teeth – respectable teeth today, is because of fluoride,

22:00 there's no question about it, as far as I'm concerned. And I have held the head of many a patient while the dentist has ripped out every tooth in his head, and then I've had to go and pick up the blood – pick up the gold out of the teeth and break the teeth up, and put the gold in a bottle for the dentist. And that was a job on a Saturday morning, was to hold the patient's head. And I used to – 14,

22:30 15, I used to have to keep my eye on the bottles, the oxygen bottle and the nitrous oxide bottle, that's the laughing gas, when they put the patients out with that, and if one got too high or too low, then I had to regulate it, at the same time hold the patient's head. And every Saturday morning I'd do that, one or two every Saturday morning, you had to do that. And when I went to Moresby, the dentist there

23:00 had me doing the same thing. And we never had any hiccups with renal failure or anything like that, that other dentists have had.

With what, sorry?

Renal failure, nitrous oxide can affect the bladder. So anyhow, you don't see that today, you know, you see we

23:30 inherited shocking teeth from the English, shocking teeth we inherited. And now, Australians seem to get more like the Americans, a better standard of dental health, and mainly through dental hygiene and the use of fluoride, fluoride tablets are excellent on kids.

24:00 But these people who advocate against fluoride – I would debate them anywhere, any time, any place, because I have seen over the last 60 years, I think that's enough experience, to say that I've got qualifications.

And during that time after

24:30 **war had been declared and before you joined the army, what sort of changes did you notice around Brisbane, as a result of the war?**

Well, the Yanks [Americans] had arrived, and everything was busy with the troops in town, busy, transport

25:00 was chaotic, of course I was on the bike all the time, but it didn't leave any lasting memories as far as I was concerned.

Do you remember when the Japanese came into the war?

Yes, that's when I joined up, when the Japanese came into the war.

How did you hear the news?

Over the radio,

25:30 over the radio or whatever. No, I built a – on the spare allotment next door I built a trench for my mother and sister, my father, I dug a trench on the side of a bit of a slope, roofed it with bits of railway line and iron,

26:00 and I was gone then, in the army. But I built my trench, I suppose it would have been eight feet by four feet.

Well what was the fear like in Brisbane?

Well you know, we thought the Japs were going to come down,

26:30 and bomb Darwin, they bombed Darwin, you know, I don't know where I was then. But no, the fear was that they were going to come down and we were going to have trouble with them. But I used to go out shooting a bit in the bush, and

27:00 even up – you mightn't believe it, but what's that convent up on the hill at Mt Cootha? Lord …?

All Hallows?

All Hallows. We used to shoot koala bears up there. And I used to go out to Inglewood, where my uncle lived out

27:30 there, and we'd go shooting rabbits and God knows what, and I was a pretty good shot. And I thought, well, it's Mum and Dad I've got to protect first. But you know, no matter how many millions the Japs have got, they're going to take a lot to capture this country. But it was Mum and Dad I thought of, and my sister, when I joined up. I expected to join the bloody cavalry,

28:00 and went in as a dental technician.

Well tell me about the procedure that you had to go through to join up.

You'd just go to a recruitment centre and say you're 18 years of age, they'd give you a form to sign with your parents' consent, and you'd do that and they'd say, "Right, report to somewhere." I don't know where I reported to, Monday morning or something like

28:30 that, I know I went straight into the training school at the exhibition grounds in Brisbane.

Did your dad give you any words of advice?

Nope, not a thing, not a thing. But I do remember one time, this is away from this all together, but I was in hospital in Bathurst,

29:00 getting my appendix out, and my mother woke Pop up, she said, "Something's wrong with Freddie." and he said, "There's nothing wrong with him, he's back in Australia, he can't be in any trouble." "Yes, there's something wrong with Freddie." "Go back to sleep." So anyhow, a couple of days later after I came out of hospital I rang her up and she said

29:30 "Are you all right?" I said, "Yes, I just had my appendix out." She said, "At 11 o'clock on 4th August?" That was the Queen's birthday. I said, "Yes." She said, "I knew something was wrong." So there's something in this ESP [Extrasensory Perception], I don't know.

30:00 **And just describe to me the set up at the exhibition ground.**

The exhibition grounds, underneath the Ernest Maine Stand I think it was, and there was another building just up past the Ernest Maine Stand, they turned that into a training centre for dental technicians, and all the toilets and everything were in the Ernest Maine Stand

30:30 and accommodation was all in there, everybody slept in – I don't know whether it was stretchers or what it was, or palliasses or something. We did all of our parade ground work out on the centre oval.

Well what was the set up with the dental unit like there?

It was I suppose they had three or four chairs there, where they had dentists working, and

31:00 setting up models and things for us to work on, you know? No, the one thing I remember about the dental school was having this barney [fight] with Ernie Dick, the staff sergeant, cheeky little

31:30 bugger he was.

Before you were sort of put with the dental unit, were you given any basic training, or just general army basic training?

No, see we were under the Red Cross, and you weren't supposed to have a gun, weren't supposed to do this, weren't supposed to do that. But they said, "There you are, now you're going to join that unit with

32:00 Major Smith, Captain Smith" but he was an older dentist, he would have been I suppose 50 – over 40 anyhow, and they said, "When are you going to – we'll supply a truck and take you and get the dental gear" they allot you certain gear for a field unit. We were the 81st Dental Unit

32:30 throughout Australia, so a fair lot of us. So we went down to Maclean's Bridge, south of Brisbane, and joined the Victorian 4th Division, 4th or 5th Division, I'm not sure, the militia division, we went down there – no first we went to Kapirra [?], we went out to Kapirra and got some equipment

33:00 made to take with us, particularly we had to have a collapsible machine, peddle machine, for polishing dentures and things like that. So we went out to Kapirra, and the carpenters out there made us a portable one. So we then got that set up, we then went to Maclean's Bridge and we used a hollowed-out ants' nest there

33:30 for our furnace, and that was the Victorian Division had come up because of the Brisbane Line, ever heard of the Brisbane Line? That was the Brisbane Line. And we were there for about three weeks or a month, and when we had any time off we'd walk into Brisbane. We

34:00 could do four miles an hour, marching. And we'd walk in and walk back to Maclean's Bridge. Only did it twice, I think, or three times. But anyhow they said, "Right, you're on the move, the division's on the move, we're going north." So 200 trucks came in, and all our gear was in one truck, and the dentist was in some – two trucks we had, the dentists in

34:30 one truck and the technicians and the orderly in another truck. We got as far as Nambour, and that was bitumen all the way to Nambour. If you can imagine 200 trucks going up the highway, in those days it wasn't much of a highway, and once you got to Nambour it was all dust and dirt roads at Nambour. And we had to wear gas masks, and we got as far

35:00 as Oakhurst, do you know where Oakhurst is? You come into Maryborough then you turn and go out to the left on the road to Biggenden, where the Woocoo Shire Council chambers are now. Across the road from there was tea tree scrub, and of course we're all covered in dust and everything, not a bloody drop of water in sight. And they said, "We're going to camp

35:30 here" and I said, "Whoa, just a minute, before you camp here, have a look under those logs." There were bloody scorpions everywhere. So they said, "This is no good, no water." it was shocking, badly organised, no thought, no nothing, just moved the whole division off. Anyhow the staff sergeant at the time, I was only a corporal, he knew the owner of the

36:00 hotel or motel or whatever it was across the road from the railway station there, the Bellevue Hotel, so he said, "We'll go in and have a shower there." So we walked in from Oakhurst, had a shower, went down to Kings Café, had two pies each, then we walked back. And then the next

36:30 morning, they said, "You're going to Maroochydore." So all right, we hopped in the – this would be about May, I think it was, in '42, and righto, we get down to Maroochydore, the unit we were with had just gone on board ship to New Guinea, so most of the unit's

37:00 gone, so what do we do? So we went into Nambour for the night, and by geez it was cold in there, cold in Nambour in May. So anyhow they decided to send us to Toowoomba, General Lavarack's headquarters, 1st Australian Army, so we were

37:30 there for a month, I think, and then they said, we were told "Pack up and get ready to go to Albion Park." So we packed up, got ready to go to Albion Park, and we were down there, we had to dye all our clothes, tie them in a knot, put them in a pot of boiling green stuff, and there would have been a fair amount of troops there, tents and things,

38:00 and we were there for about a week I think. I remember one incident there, a fellow had a gramophone and he was playing the same tune over and over again, and driving everybody mad, you know? Some big fella came in and he just put his boot into it, smashed it up. And the joker that owned it was a pretty big fella, and oh geez, there was a hell of a fight. That's the only thing I remember about it, but then

38:30 we went on the Manunda, the hospital ship, the Manunda had just come back from Milne Bay I think it was, where the Japs had put a shell through the Manunda, the hospital ship. But we went to Moresby then, no trouble at all, we weren't in convoy or anything at all. And it wasn't long after that that they sank the Centaur, the hospital ship.

When you were in Australia before you went to Moresby,

39:00 **and moving around, what was the main sort of work that was …?**

Making dentures, repairing dentures and things like that.

Was there any dental check for men to get into the army?

No, they'd take anybody. A lot of men you know, in those days, wore artificial dentures, they wore artificial teeth, uppers and lowers.

39:30 **What was the criteria for them to qualify for new dentures then?**

Well, no criteria, if you wanted a new set of teeth you got them. You know, you generally had a rapport with the troops around, you know "Freddy, these teeth of mine are crook." "Well, I'll have a word to the boss, see what we can do for you."

Well just pause there,

40:00 **because we're at the end of the tape, again.**

Tape 4

00:38 **I was just interested in how you were taking to army life at this early stage, just after you'd joined up?**

I took to army life like a duck to water, being in the YMCA and going to YMCA camps and things like that, I was used to associating

01:00 with people much older than myself, because I was pretty young, I might have been only 15, 16 when I first went into the – the YMCA had a big camp down at Currumbin, and we used to go down there and live in tents and huts and things like that. I took to army life like a duck to water, didn't worry me at all. Only when the Japs started bombing hell out of me, that's when

01:30 I took to water.

And what about the discipline in the army?

Well I never got a discharge certificate, I've got no red marks on my name at all, four years unblemished. Not that I didn't break it, I would have got caught, that's the thing.

You mentioned to Naomi that you were moving around up to

02:00 **Maryborough and Toowoomba and various places. Was it just denture work, or was there anything else that you were …?**

No, only denture work, that's all, as far as we were concerned. Yes, no inlays or anything like that, because the army didn't supply gold inlays or anything like that, it was just denture work, that's all.

And what about at the Australian Army Headquarters in Toowoomba? Was there …?

No, we were just a dental unit attached there,

02:30 waiting to find a place for us see, because they'd made arrangements for us to go the 7th Div [division], but the 7th Div had gone by the time we got there.

Were you excited at this prospect of working for 7th Division?

No, no feelings on it at all, I think you just do what you're told in the army, you don't worry about it.

Well tell us about receiving your orders about where you were to

03:00 **go. How did you feel about this?**

How did I feel about …?

The possibility of going overseas.

It didn't worry me at all, you know, excitement or something. But you felt as though you were doing something towards defending your homeland, you were just doing what you were told, sort of thing. But I know that in my own heart if necessary, I'd have dropped the dental work and got a gun pretty quick, if it came to it,

03:30 because I've always been able to handle myself.

Well were you receiving any kind of infantry-style training?

No, we were protected by the Red Cross, you see, that's what's supposed to be – protected by the Red Cross. When we joined the 39th Battalion, I spoke to a

04:00 company runner, he was a sergeant, and he'd just come out of Kokoda and he told me a few tricks about the Japs, well a few tricks about fighting them, that's all.

What were they?

He said that they would hit you in front and then they'd try and circle you, he said

04:30 "But if you could get back a certain distance pretty quickly they'd come in, in front of you again, instead of going behind you." He said, "You can pick them off that way, but once you move you've got to move fast." Yes, he taught me how to use a 303,

05:00 I had been using 22s ever since I was that bloody high, because we used to go shooting up around Mt Cootha and places like that. And out at Inglewood, my uncle had a place out there. But no, we weren't concerned, we knew that the Red Cross – the red armbands wouldn't protect us, so if you've got nothing to protect you, you've got to fight back.

05:30 But reading all about it, we were lucky, very luck in Moresby at the time that we weren't – there was only brigade more or less saved the whole show, plus the fact that that brigade had done so much damage in holding up the 49th Battalion and the

06:00 49th had done so much damage in holding up the Japs, that they never had to supply the position to supply the troops with food.

Well tell us, what kind of expectations did you have before you went, like did you know where you were going, and what to expect?

No, you had no idea where you were going, there were rumours, God there were always rumours in the army. Nobody told you anything and so you'd

06:30 just go where you were sent, that's all, and just hope that you're lucky. I was lucky, there was a lot that weren't lucky. If I'd have been born six months earlier I'd have been in Malaya, that's how it was. But I wasn't.

Well tell us about the journey there on the Manunda. Were there any events of note or …?

No, you were on look out duty, you were allocated a

07:00 certain area of the sea in front of you, from that point there to that point there, that's your vision, keep an eye on that. Practically all the front part of the ship was people standing watching, and you got shifted every two hours or something like that. So you'd see a few coconuts floating by, or sticks floating by and there'd be a bit of a panic, you know, all that sort of stuff. But we were on

07:30 lookout look out all the time, for subs [submarines]. And when you go into Moresby Harbour and see the Macdhui there, just a wreck where the Japs have bombed the guts out of it.

And what did you think when you saw this wreck?

The poor bastards who were in it, that's all, when it got hit, they were the 49th Battalion boys, boys from here, Maryborough and Queensland.

So

08:00 **tell us about your arrival. What was Port Moresby like at this time?**

It was bald hills, all we could see was brown kunai, kunai grass there, six to eight foot tall, and just looked like lawn, you know? And there'd been a bit of bomb damage in Moresby itself and around the waterfront, a bit of bomb damage. The

08:30 native huts on the water were still standing. It was a pretty eerie looking place, and once you got ashore, we went in to what they call a three mile, which was Murray Barracks, and that's where the Nips [Japanese] blew the bloody dental centre to pieces there, and then if you went to the right, you went

09:00 down to just behind Wards Drome, Wards Drome was – not Wards Drome, Jackson Drome was on the right and down behind that in another valley that's where the hospitals were, the 2/1st and the 2/5th, the hospitals were there, and then you went up the road further and then there was the second ninth hospital,

09:30 and if you go right down to the left that was where Wards Drome was, and then you went up to Rona Falls, up to the Kokoda Trail, Sogeri and those places. Errol Flynn [movie star] had a place at Itiki Plantation, he owned that, and …

Well tell us what happened to you once you arrived at the boat,

10:00 **where were you taken first, and what were you doing?**

We went straight to Murray Barracks to get sorted out, everybody – they didn't know what to do with us. And the Nips bombed us, and I was on one side of the tent, there were three mosquito nets, and they said I went over the top of the three mosquito nets into the slip trench on the other side. Now if someone told me that I wouldn't believe them, but they

10:30 said, "That was what you did Freddie." you know? Because the bomb was coming down, you know.

Well what happened in that raid?

Oh Jesus, well I don't know which one it was, but they hit a petrol dump, we went through I don't know, 30 or 40 raids, they hit a petrol dump and they wiped out about

11:00 30 planes in another. The Yanks had come in and parked them wingtip to wingtip, and the Australians were screaming blue bloody murder. "Get those planes out of the road, they'll get blown up." And sure enough, the Nips came over and wiped the lot out. And the dentist we had in Queensland before we went away,

11:30 was Captain Smith, and he was too old to go to New Guinea, so they sent another dentist with us,

Captain Fletcher, he'd just come out of university, and he was frightened, I've never seen a person so frightened in all my life. I thought, how the hell is this fellow going to be, you know? He'd only be about 24, 25. Anyhow, we got as far as Bootless Bay, that was on the 5th when we left Murray

12:00 Barracks we went down to Bootless Bay, that was the first one on the right, and the Nips had been pretty close and the boys from the 39th had given me a couple of seven second grenades to keep under your pillow, he said, "Keep them under your pillow." our pillow was our pack, you know? "Just keep them under your pack." he

12:30 said, "Because they're the best weapon you've got." And of course there was one night there, there was a wild pig in the bush not far from the tent, and I had the pin out and was ready to throw it, sort of thing, and someone said, "It's a wild pig." Anyhow, we went up, and Captain Fletcher was supposed to come down for work, and he didn't turn up. So I

13:00 went up, and he's sitting on his bloody bed in the officers' – you're not supposed to go in the officers' lines, you know, but I had to go in. So I went and saw the CO of the 39th, I said, "Captain Fletcher's not well sir." So they sent him back to Australia, called him Spunky Fletcher, he went back to Australia, he wouldn't have been in New Guinea I don't

13:30 think a week, I don't think, might have been more. But no, he was … But then we got a Major Sands, he was a major because he was from an infantry battalion, it was a machine gunner battalion, and he got a bullet through the forehead, they thought he was dead, but he wasn't, so they sent him back and they B-graded him, and

14:00 he was our CO, and he was good, he was a real soldier, of course he was a dentist before he went into the army. And he had a mate who was CO of the 30th Beaufighter Squadron, and we got a phone call from – we were up at Donadabu at the time, which was in Sogeri,

14:30 and he said, "Come on, we'll hop in the truck and we'll go down to Beaufighter headquarters, 30th Beaufighter Squadron. And it was the day before that I think that – they called them Whispering Death, the Beaufighters, and we were in a thatched hut, and they came down

15:00 straight over us, and went up and you got the hell of the noise and they fired their canons and their guns, and the bloody shell casings came down on top of us, they were just showing off to us, the 30th Beaufighters. Couldn't hear the buggers coming, there's all these mountains there and that. So anyhow, a couple of days later I dived under a water truck and – because that's the

15:30 only water you had, this water that came in on water trucks. And we went down to see Blackjack Walker of the 30th Beaufighter Squadron. And in the headquarters they had I think two or three big A-frames, like that, they were about nine foot high I suppose, or nine foot – you know, that shape, and it was all the photos of the Bismarck sea battle, that

16:00 Damien Parer [war correspondent and photographer] had taken over Torchy Aren's [?] shoulder. And the photos that you've never seen in the flesh, I can tell you that much. Every time Torchy pulled the trigger, he said, "That's for Nick." What was his name, Nicholson? I think that was for Nick. He was the one that the Japs had beheaded, he was parachuted into Salamaua I think it was and the Japs beheaded him,

16:30 and the Beaufighter boys said, "Right, into it." And they shot everything that was in the water, they shot thousands of bloody Japs in the water, and yet it was lovely to see.

Tell us about what you were doing when you initially arrived that first week or two, in Port Moresby.

17:00 You've got to set up your lab, you know, it's a matter of tables and cooking area and plaster area and all those sort of things, setting them up, there wasn't much to setting them up because you're only a field unit, you never ever had any electricity, everything was by foot pedal,

17:30 your polishing motors, the dentist stool, it was just a foot pedal, and very primitive. It wasn't until I got to the 2/5th AGH that I got electricity, and they had big generators going all the time, even get ice. See we had to have ice to keep our acrylics and stuff like that,

18:00 they wouldn't keep in the tropics. A friend of ours, well a sergeant who was running the hospital before I did, he went home with dermatitis, because the acrylic liquid got to him, and he just couldn't cop it any more.

Well tell us, how long were you in Port Moresby before you were moved to the

18:30 **convalescent camp?**

We were in Moresby only about two months, I think, about two months and then we went up the range. Just recently I see where a truck went over the range in the old switchback, you used to have to go up, and you'd do a sharp U-ey [U-turn], and come down this

19:00 way, and then you had to go back up that way, and you had to back back before you could take the

second turn up the mountain. That was up at Rona Falls, past Rona Falls, that's to get up to the top of the Owen Stanleys – not the top of the Owen Stanleys, that's for sure, but it's the top of range before it starts to flatten out a bit at Sogeri and Itiki and Donadabu.

19:30 **And what was the plan for you from here? Like what was the plan for your dental unit, where were you to go?**

Well, we went to a convalescent camp, where the troops had come out of – some of the wounded come from hospital, they go to a con camp for three weeks or a month, for their wounds to heal and things like that. And that gives us the time to work on them when they're there for two or three weeks, or a

20:00 month, all depends how sick they are. There was a lot of con camps there, there was a big con camp at Sogeri, but this bit one at Donadabu, we had one fellow came out of Milne Bay, he'd had enough and he put a 303 in his mouth while sitting in his bunker, and the brains were all scattered on the roof of the tent.

20:30 Yes, that happens. But that sort of thing didn't worry me, you know, blood and guts and death, never worried me. You could – for instance I went down to – where was I? In Moresby, I was in

21:00 Moresby at the time, and I went to Moresby the first time, I was a couple of months in Moresby, then went up to Sogeri to Donadabu, been up there maybe two months, and then I came back to the 2/5th AGH, and when I got to 2/5th AGH I was in a tent with what they called the dispensary, no, not the

21:30 dispensary, the mortuary technician. He said, "Freddie, come down, I want to have a look at a fellow that has got scrub typhus, beri beri, malaria and tetanus, four of them. And I want to see what killed him." Righto, so I went down. And we'd had a glass of home brew first, you know,

22:00 so this was after dinner at night. And he opened this fellow up right down the bloody middle, and that didn't worry me. And then he was sewing him up, with this stitch, he called it such and such a stitch, he was sewing this fellow up, and the doctor came in, this Major Kingsley came in and said, "I just wonder what effect it had on his eyes." So he got a pair of tweezers, picked the eye

22:30 up and cut it out like that. I just went outside and I threw up the home brew and everything else. That disturbed me, but all the blood and guts, no. Pat can tell you with the kids growing up, if any of the kids dirtied their nappies or anything like that, I always got the call up when anyone was sick and I had to clean it up, it didn't worry me.

Well when you mentioned this man suiciding, did you see this yourself?

No, I didn't see it, no.

23:00 **Well what kind of sights were you seeing, of men coming back from the [Kokoda] Track?**

Getting them out of ambulances, at the 2/5th, it was frightening. They were just skeletons a lot of them, you know, with malaria and Christ knows what. Yellow as anything, fellows with the shakes or their bloody arms missing and legs

23:30 missing, all this sort of thing. And as I said before, a 600-bed hospital in '43, we had 2100 patients. And we had them everywhere and anywhere, and the nurses and well I worked three days straight, 72 hours straight, without a wink of sleep. That's when I was doing faciomax work, I started in there doing

24:00 faciomax work when I came back from Sogeri, and we were making splints for half a face, and things like that. There was another particular surgeon that was absolutely brilliant, and he treated you like a human being. "What do you think corporal? Can we do this? Can we do that?

24:30 Can we put a pin in there, or can't we get a pin in that?" Well I'd have to make the pin, we had a tap and dye set there that I could put a thread on a very very fine wire, that was what they call a vitalium – not

25:00 vitalium, might have been vitalium wire, it's something that the mouth tolerates, the mouth won't tolerate anything like steel or anything like that, you've got to have a special metal that goes in the mouth, or silver. And you had that many that you had to – the secret was that you had to get the

25:30 relative positions of the bones – relative within 24 hours if you could, particularly of the face, because if you didn't the tissue would grow in between the bones, and all that sort of stuff. And I could show you, I've still got a book here of what I used to do.

We might go into detail on that later. Maybe we should pause there I think.

26:00 **Yes, I'm just interested in what kind of tasks you were doing in Port Moresby for those two months before you went to Donna?**

Before we went to Donadabu it was mainly denture work, broken dentures and new dentures, particularly for those boys in the 39th Battalion who'd just come out of

26:30 crossing of the Owen Stanleys, and they walked both ways, they walked over and they walked back. Originally I think it was only headquarters company went over, they went over without their steel hats,

they went over with just

27:00 rifles on their shoulders, that's all. And the rest of their gear was going around by ship. But I don't know what happened to the ship, I don't remember, but the work we did with those boys was just getting them dentally fit, I suppose you'd call it, that's all.

What kind of problems were coming up for some of the men?

Well they

27:30 had been on the Track and overland there – they got to Kokoda and they'd been fighting for their lives for the best part of two months I suppose, everything gets neglected, teeth get neglected, they hardly ever had time to clean them, never had time to do anything, and they get

28:00 dirty, teeth get dirty, dentures get dirty and all that sort of stuff. I remember they tore their towel in half, they only had half a towel, some of them even threw their toothbrushes away, of course weight was the thing that they had to carry. But all we were doing was repairing their teeth for

28:30 them and getting them dentally fit.

And so tell us about Donadabu, like tell us how you were set up there in the camp.

It was a convalescent camp in what was a big kunai ridge, on the banks of the Loloki River. And they cleared all the kunai with natives, natives

29:00 with knives and fire, there must have been, I suppose about 10, 20 acres of it there, and they built a road into it and a few roads around the place. It rained every day at three o'clock up there, and

29:30 we did have a drought for 10 days, and there were cracks in the ground which you could – they'd be two inches wide, it's the sort of country it was. And it was a bend in the Logi River, and from where the bend started, it went up into one great big U and this front here would only be about, I don't know, I

30:00 suppose, half a mile up, and a mile and a half up and a mile and a half back. But we were looking after those that came out of Milne Bay, I remember the 61st Battalion, well all those that fought at Milne Bay, they came up

30:30 there for a rest, I forget who the rest of them were. But I went down with malaria up there, and as I said, it was something – they didn't know what it was so they thought the best thing to do was to put me in the AGH, because the technician in the AGH, both technicians in the AGH had gone down with

31:00 dermatitis, they had to send them back to Western Australia where they came from originally, because they'd been to Egypt, through the Middle East with the Australian Divisions, I don't know which one they were attached to, I forget now, the Second Ninth

31:30 AGH, the 2/1st AGH, the 2/4th AGH, 2/5th AGH, they were all Middle East units. Of course I didn't join them until New Guinea.

Well tell us, in Donadabu, tell us about your equipment and your set up in your tent there.

Well we had a native hut there, the natives built a hut for us, Hessian walls,

32:00 and a thatched roof. And it would have been – in this hut it would have been three rooms I think, a waiting room, then a surgery, and our laboratory at this end. And

32:30 water came in with the water truck, and we would take our buckets and things out and fill up from the water truck, what we needed for the surgery and for the work room, and our equipment was still – no electricity, it was foot pedal drills and

33:00 foot pedal lathes, everything that we had. Materials were standard army materials. If we wanted any we could get them from – we sent to Moresby for them, we didn't want to run

33:30 out of anything, because quite often Moresby itself would run out of them, and you would then be stuck, you couldn't do anything without materials. You had to make sure you always had them, if you didn't, you got into trouble with your CO. But

34:00 while we were in Donadabu there was a big 200 plane, I think it was 200 Jap bombers and fighters came over, and they knew they were coming, and the lightnings were waiting for them, up above them. And they came down through these bombers, right above our heads, you could see them

34:30 coming, and some of the Jap planes jettisoned their bombs and one bomb landed in a village called Mary-Anne. I don't know how many planes were shot down, but I know there was a lot. They

35:00 came down, the lightnings seemed to come down through the Jap planes, and then they'd go down, then they'd do a u-turn and go straight up again to get above the Jap planes again. Because the zeroes weren't fast enough to catch lightnings. But the lightnings couldn't out-manoeuvre a zero, no way in the world, so that was their tactic, to

35:30 come down out of the sun, hit them hard and keep on going. And when the bomb went into Mary-Anne village, a team of us went over and helped patch them up, some of the wounded up. But before then we had been going over to the villages and doing a bit of work, on our days off, on a Sunday or something like that, and the natives would give us

36:00 some pineapples and bananas. I shot a wallaby up there, they called it magarney, and I told the native boys that I shot a magarney, "Oh, where boss, where is it?" They took it home and they had a real good feed out of it,

36:30 out of the magarney. But it wasn't much other than denture work up there at Donadabu.

Well what kind of work were you doing with the natives exactly?

Patching up sores and things like that, yaws was a big problem, which was a disease of the skin, and we'd get

37:00 stuff to treat them with, we'd take bandages and oh God, anything and everything, because we had the orderlies that worked in the surgery, in the hospital units around the place,

37:30 they just – well men who had medical skills who were up there at the time, they would go over and help them, the natives.

And what did you think of the natives yourself?

Oh, they were all right, they were all right, there's some good fellas among them, yes. We never had any trouble at all with the

38:00 natives. They were different all together to what they are today.

And how did you interact with them? Like how did you communicate and …?

No trouble at all. You learned Pidgin English. I still remember some words, like abi ace, abi ace means to lift up, dika harrier was very bad, nurmaa harrier was very good. You know, terms like that, and pom pom was

38:30 sex, things like that.

Did they talk about pom pom?

Oh yes, they talked about pom pom. But there was no trouble with them as far as they knew what you were talking about. Because the missionaries had been up there.

How bad was the scene after this bomb hit the village? How badly was it hit?

39:00 It was devastated, of course they were all built on stilts, all the villages there, and they were just completely blown over. The village consisted of I would say around about six or eight different thatched huts, and I suppose there'd have been five of them would have been skittled, if my memory serves me right. But Mary-Anne, I can still remember it,

39:30 the name of the village.

Were any of the locals killed?

I don't know, I don't remember now, but there were shrapnel wounds, I know, we repaired a few shrapnel wounds. And I think one of the fellows who went over there, he finished up going back after the war and going up there with the natives,

40:00 working with them for some reason or other, whatever it was.

Well we might just have to change the tape here, and then we'll continue on.

Tape 5

00:37 **I'll get you to tell me about when you were sent to, was it Bootless Bay?**

Bootless Bay, yes, that's just after we arrived in Moresby. Then when we came back from Donadabu we went down the 2/5th AGH, that's where that was, that was at Bootless Bay.

And why didn't they keep you at Donadabu?

I

01:00 had contracted malaria then, or they didn't know what it was, so they thought they'd better put me with the hospital unit, so I could get treatment straight away.

What were the differences in the set up between the two units?

Well at 2/5th AGH we had electricity to start, which was very, very important. They'd lost the two technicians that were at the 2/5th, and I was working on

01:30 my own as a staff sergeant and a corporal for a while. And they sent me another young fellow to work with me, so there was only two corporals there working. But we had a – I've got photos of it there, we had a shed, a concrete floor, separate rooms and you know, it was a complete change

02:00 to what I'd been used to, and we had furnace for casting splints and things like that. That's where I got into the faciomax work there.

Well tell me about how that started.

The faciomax work. It was just that a fellow came in with a shattered jaw, and they had no way of holding it in place, and the doctor said, "Can you make a splint?" I said

02:30 "Yes, I can make a splint, providing I can get the silver to do it, the coinage, we had to use two shilling pieces, minted prior to 1940 or something like that, because of the silver content. And we melted those down and cast these splints out of them.

03:00 They gave me a book to follow, I've still got the book, and it was just simple carrying on from the work I've always done. And I made these splints for them, I don't know how many I made, there would have been 10, 20 splints, different types, different things. Worked with one of the

03:30 most brilliant surgeons in the world, and when the war was over I said to him, "What are you going to do sir?" He said, "I'll go to Newcastle, that's where the most accidents happen where I'm required." Anyhow, I find out later that he went to the Mayo Clinic, lecturing in long bone fractures in the Mayo Clinic in America, that's how good he was. He could operate with a pair of scissors, on that finger

04:00 and that thumb, and he could flick the scissors up and he could flick the scissors up with the thumb and the finger, and operate with those three fingers on that hand. They called him God, because he was that good. If anybody said, "Where's God?" You'd say "Oh, he's up in ward eight." "Where's God?" You'd say "He's down in the x-ray room." But he would come and say to you "Corporal, can you do this" or

04:30 "Can you do that?" Not tell you, not demand, you know, ask you. So he was a lovely fellow, and some of the other doctors were absolute bloody pigs.

And with this splint that you made, I don't quite understand what you mean by splint. What exactly do you mean?

If I could get the book, I'd show you.

But then the camera can't see the book.

The camera can't see the book. Unless I could turn and

05:00 face the camera.

We probably can't get the information, so if you explain it to me …

If the jaw is broken in two, for instance down the midline here, one piece goes that way, one piece goes that way. So we take an impression of the upper jaw, and the lower jaw, and then we pour models, and then we cut the lower model in two so that it fits the upper teeth, so we've got the jaw back in its correct relationship

05:30 to the upper jaw. And then we make what we call an open ferrule splint that goes around the casting metal, and we put a couple of hooks on it and then we put wire on the top and we wire the upper teeth to the lower teeth with the jaw in its right position, the relative position to the upper jaw. But then we've got pieces missing, you've got this missing, and that missing,

06:00 and you've got bone grafts and God knows what to consider. What we had to do was to get the jaw in the correct relationship, or get the eye socket to maintain its shape, and send them back to Australia, because we could not do skin grafts and we could not do a lot of things, owing to the temperature up there, it was humidity and everything else. Skin grafts would slough off, couldn't hold

06:30 them in place, so you know, today with air conditioning and all that sort of stuff, there's no trouble at all, but in those days in field conditions you couldn't do it. So it was just maintenance of getting their jaws in the relative position.

And why does it have to be made out of silver?

It's the only metal that the body will tolerate. If you put screws in, they've got to be made out of

07:00 chrome cobalt, and the screwdriver must be made out of chrome cobalt. Any use of any steel or anything like that, will set up a reaction with the tissue, and the mouth won't tolerate it. All your dentures, the chrome cobalt for the dentures that are made now, it's the same material.

07:30 All your pieces – you hear of plates in skulls and things like that, that's all chrome cobalt.

Is that what dentures are made out of?

Yes, some types of dentures are made out of chrome cobalt.

And why couldn't you use that material for the jaw splint? Why did you need to melt down the silver?

We never had the equipment for handling chrome cobalt.

08:00 You've got to have high furnaces, if my memory serves me right, gold melts at 1066, silver melted at I think it was 900, the chrome cobalt goes at 2000, yes, you couldn't get the heat. See, what we used to – I had a room about nine by nine, nine feet by nine

08:30 feet, and I had a brick furnace in the middle of the room with a – like a big primus underneath it on an arm about that long, so that the fuel, the range fuel was nowhere near the heat. And it used to put the – I'd take two salt tablets before I went in to the furnace,

09:00 and after I finished casting the splint, I'd have to take another two when I came out, there were a tablet about that big, because I'd be wringing wet by the time I came out because the humidity and the furnace and the room, I had to have that heat to cast.

Were you casting the …?

09:30 The splints.

With the silver?

With the silver, yes.

And so if you couldn't use the chrome- -

Cobalt, yes …

- -Cobalt in New Guinea, what were you using for dentures?

Oh, that was all acrylic, all acrylic dentures then.

And why couldn't you use the acrylic for splints?

No, it's just not strong enough. See the design of a splint, it fits down just on the gum margin of the teeth, and they're only about an

10:00 eighth of an inch wide at the most, and quite often only a 16th of an inch wide, and only about two millimetres thick, that's all it is, so it's just a network that goes round the teeth, and it can't interfere with the bite, the jaws have got to be able to come together properly, without being interfered with by anything that goes across to hold the front to the back.

And when someone came in with a broken

10:30 **jaw, how pain-wise could you get in to make a mould?**

Well, they've just got to put up with it, there's no anaesthetic, no nothing. See sometimes you've got to take bone out of the hip bone here, where the mass of bone is, and put it in the jaw to rebuild the jaw, and

11:00 that goes in pieces, and you've got to hold those pieces in place, and all that sort of stuff.

How permanent is this splint that you make?

Only until the body heals itself, the body is a tremendous healer, it will heal itself. But normally a splint will be only used for about a month, two months,

11:30 all depends on the amount of damage, because you know, some of them lose their whole jaw and you've to replace it somehow. It's very interesting, very intriguing work. But you know, the doctor would come down "Staff, can you do this by tomorrow morning?" Or, "Corporal, can you come down to the dentist by tomorrow morning?" And you've got to work all night, to do it.

What sort of

12:00 **things caused the broken jaws that you saw?**

This is shell fragments, people in battle, battle injuries or sometimes they get hit in the face with an anti-canon shell, and all this sort of stuff. It's never given me any nightmares, doing it.

How do you make the mould? How do you …?

With wax.

12:30 You have your plaster mould, and then you have a wax pattern that's going to be the pattern of your splint, and you make that wax pattern and then you put sprues on it, what we call sprues, so that – and then you have a button, so that when you melt your gold

13:00 or your silver in the top, you put in on what you call a centrifuge, in other words it was a swinger, when you got your silver melted to a certain extent you swung it and sent the silver down into the splint. And you know, it's quite intricate work.

And the physical mould itself was made out of wax?

13:30 Yes. And then you burn the wax out in the furnace, remember I was telling you about the furnace? You burnt the wax out until you got your mould completely burnt out, and that material that that mould was in, was red hot, it had to be red hot. And then you melted your silver on top of it, and then swung it and poured it in, so the hot silver went straight down into the

14:00 mould. But today they've got machines, you just press a lever and the compression forces the gold down, or presses the silver down, whatever you're doing.

And how would you physically get the mould from their mouth?

You just take impressions, you have what we call an alginate on a tray, and you put it in the mouth and it would set, the same as they make ear plugs,

14:30 things like that, the same sort of thing. It would set, and then you'd pour a plaster mould, and then you'd pour what we call an investment mould, so your investment mould would be the same as your plaster mould, but your investment is what you would make your wax pattern on, and

15:00 then you would put the whole thing in more investment and just have your sprues going down into your mould. It's the same, they're making dentures the same way today, in chrome cobalt.

And who would be the one to put the splint into the …?

The dentist.

15:30 Quite often it would be the surgeons who were doing the work. The patient would have to be under anaesthetic, general anaesthetic, they'd have to bring the jaws together, the broken jaw together, put the splint on, put the bars on it and screw it together and see – with the lower jaw you'd have a

16:00 guide plate on the front of it that you pulled the two pieces together and then put a screw in it, put two screws in it to hold it in place, and then wire it to the upper teeth. There's that many different ways of doing it. It was a lot for a little boy to do in those days, it was. And I

16:30 think I was only 19, 20, yes, 19 when I was doing it.

And with it being wired together, how would the patient eat?

Fed with a tube until they – you know, fed with a tube, that's all they can do with them. They can't talk. They're generally wired together for a week.

17:00 **Would they be sent home?**

No, they're in hospital all the time. They'd be in intensive care, with their jaws wired together. But they used another appliance called a Clauston Walker,

17:30 three pin appliance, it's a skull cap that goes over the head, and then it's got a device that's like wire that fits and goes round the jaw, and onto that wire goes pins, pins that go into the bone and hold the jaw in place.

What about the skin?

Goes straight through the

18:00 skin, yes, they use that towards the end, more than they use the splints. It's all different – you've got to bend this wire into the shape of the skull, and around the jaw bone, and these pins that go in, they just drill holes in the bone and put these pins in, and they're adjustable and all that sort of stuff.

18:30 That's the old Clauston Walker appliance they call it. You've got to remember, I haven't done any of this for 60 years.

And tell me about this book that they gave you.

Well, it's only an instruction book on what they had done in Sydney

19:00 and in Melbourne. There are five faciomax units in Australia, one at Sydney in the Concord, one at Melbourne at Heidelberg, one in Western Australia at Hollywood, and I think one in Brisbane at Greenslopes, and myself. That's all there was, there was nothing in South Australia, you

19:30 know, I could be wrong, but that's what it was, if I remember. And I was the only field unit, but I wasn't

recognised as a faciomax unit, I was just recognised as a dental unit, that's all, I was doing faciomax work.

And what did this book teach you?

How to do it. Showed me how to do it, that's all. As I said before, I've only got to see how to do it and I can do it. That's been my

20:00 life in everything, like the building of this house, and the other houses, everything which I've done, just have to see how to do it, and I can do it.

What gave you the idea to melt down the coins for …?

Well that was all we had for splints. See I had done a bit of it in my apprenticeship days,

20:30 of making rings and things like that, so you're making a ring out of two bob bits melted down, and you make a ring. I never ever wore rings, I still don't wear rings. My wife's got a wedding ring that I made for her, and I made a couple of wedding rings since I've been here for people, just plain gold bands, and I learned it from

21:00 this – the trade, sort of thing, that's all, because you've got to be very innovative in that particular trade, you've got to understand how to do it, why you're doing it, and all that sort of stuff.

Well where did you have all these pennies from? All of the coins that you had to melt down?

Oh, we'd go round the hospital and find out who's got any

21:30 coins. See we had a staff of about 400 and everybody had a bit of money in their pocket, all they had was a few coins, that's all. But I think we did requisition the mint at one stage for coinage, but it had to be florins or two shilling pieces prior to I think

22:00 1936, '39, something like that, because of the silver content that was in them in those days. I don't know what's in them now, wouldn't have a clue.

And how did you melt them down?

We had a Bunsen burner, we had like a soldering iron, not a soldering

22:30 iron, a Bunsen burner that you used to heat a soldering iron, it was primitive. Today they use oxygen and – a mixture of oxygen and acetylene I think it is, I'm not sure, I forget now. And

23:00 you had very strong, great heat from that. And I just had – what's it's name, what would you call it in those days? It was a blow lamp, just a blow lamp that I'd adjusted. Thank goodness the silver was easier to melt than most other things, but I couldn't – I melted gold too,

23:30 making wedding rings. I've got a couple of cuttings there of the paper, where I've made wedding rings for nurses. And of course in those days they'd say "You know, I'm getting married tomorrow, can you make me that ring?" Well, a fellow came in to me with a Leggo's pickle bottle, I can still see the blue label on it, a Leggo's pickle bottle about that high, full of gold. And he said, "Can you make a wedding ring for me?" And

24:00 I said, "Yes, when do you want it?" He says "Tomorrow, I'm getting married tomorrow." "Oh yeah. What size?" And he had a piece of cardboard with a hole in it. He says "That's the size of her finger." I thought, that's bloody lovely, that is, you know? So

24:30 I said, "All right, what do I do with it when I've finished it?" And he says "Take it up to the matron, Sister Swine, nobody's allowed in the nurses' quarters, the nurses lines." So I worked all night and I made this ring, and I took it up to the nurses' quarters, the matron saw me, and I said, "This is the wedding ring for so-and-so."

25:00 "Oh, thank you." Never ever got thanks from the woman, never heard a bloody word from … And both of them, I made exactly the same thing, never even got thanks from either of them.

Where had he got the gold from?

Wau, the Battle of Wau, they were troops up there in the Battle of Wau, he got that gold from up there. There was quite a bit of it,

25:30 a lot of the troops went fossicking for gold up there. I can still see it today, that pickle bottle, that Leggo's pickle bottle, full of gold. I don't know how I got the bottle of gold back to them, I don't remember what happened to the bottle of gold, but I didn't get any of it, I know that.

And how did you, I don't know,

26:00 **make a cast or a mould for the ring?**

Well the same as you do with the splints and all that sort of thing, the same technique, you made a wax

mould first, and then you put the screws on it, and then you invested it, and then burnt it out, and it'd take with those furnaces we had in those days, it would take two to four hours to burn out, and to cast it. So you can well imagine it takes a while, first you've got

26:30 to – he gave me this piece of cardboard of the ring, and so I got a piece of wood that fitted the ring, fitted into that piece of cardboard. And then I made the wax pattern, to go around that piece of wood, and that was the same size as her finger. And that's when I cast it and that was the end result. But I didn't know

27:00 what the content of the gold was, whether it was hard or whether it was soft, you see, 22 carat, you've got to mix a bit of copper with it, and that hardens it. What we used to use were filings of a penny, you'd file some bits off a penny and melt that with your gold, because that ring you saw of Pat's is 30 years old – 51 years old – pardon

27:30 me, we've got a son that's – a daughter that's 53, so it's 51 years old, and hasn't worn at all. So I didn't know what the carat was, if it was nine, 18, 21, and that was three carats for gold in those days, I don't know what it is today, they're mixing that much rubbish with it. But

28:00 it was – of course the soft gold is usually 21 carat, it's easier to work, it's malleable, but once you get 18 it hardens it up.

And did you get thanks for any of the rings that you made?

No, no thanks.

What about this clipping that you mentioned from the Courier Mail?

I've still got it in there.

What was the story with that?

It was just a story of

28:30 this particular girl and an officer, was married with a wedding ring that was made by one of the local dental technicians. Didn't mention my name or anything.

And was that this man that had come to you with the pickle bottle?

Yes. Two of them, I don't know what the other one's name was, I can't remember. Joyce was someone, someone's name was Joyce, that's all I remember.

29:00 **And how many coins would you need to melt down to get enough silver to make a jaw mould?**

You would need at least four two shilling pieces, all depends on the size of the splint, and what was involved, you had to over-estimate it, because if you didn't have enough silver going

29:30 down those holes, you had a mis-splint and you've got to do the whole bloody lot again, you've got to start again from scratch. I was in Concord doing a course down there one time, and they had the ability to – if they missed part of a splint, they could join pieces together because they had old splints there that they could manage and adapt, and silver solder them.

30:00 **You mentioned about making the splints for the jaws, but also for eye sockets.**

If a person lost an eye, you had to make an appliance or a mould to keep the socket open.

What happens to the socket?

The socket will fall

30:30 in, and the eye will fall – you know, the whole of that thing falls in, unless you can keep all the tissue open and with pressure on it, and you'd use a Clauston Walker [?] appliance with one what's-it's-name, with this mould on the end of it, made out of, what was it, gutta-percha [a whitish rubber], I think it was gutta-percha they used in those days. Today they'd use a polyvinyl of some description.

31:00 It's got to be something that the eye socket can tolerate.

And what was this material that you used?

Gutta-percha, we used to use in those days, it was a sort of a soft rubber, and you can mould it into a shape and it would hold its shape in the socket, so that it kept all the tissues open. One time when we made artificial eyes they were

31:30 half inch thick, but today, if a person has to get an artificial eye, they're only about an eighth of an inch thick. They kept all the eye muscle there, and just this made the veneer to go over the top of it. That's the last I saw of them, I haven't seen any for 10 years, I suppose.

How big would the moulds that you made for the eyes be?

32:00 How big? They'd be the shape of a human eye, normally. If you can imagine what the size of it is, it's – you've got your pupil and your iris, your sclera, the body of any eye, you know, it's just about that size.

But what did you use as a gauge?

Well the doctors

32:30 would – we didn't make anything, it was all just like a piece of putty, and you just moulded it and put it into the eye. The doctors did all that, I didn't do that, not with the eyes, I didn't do them until it was up to me to make an artificial eye, and then the eye surgeon would take the mould and give it to us, and we'd work from there. So

33:00 that's how that was. And to make the artificial eye, for the pupil we made a little black stick, and you always took your impression in daylight, because you've got to match the pupil of the other eye, because at night time the pupil is much smaller, and then around that you had your iris, we made a disc that went round the pupil,

33:30 and that was your iris, and you painted that the same colour as the other as you're looking at it, and then the sclera, which is the white of the eye, we made that as the bulk of your eye, but we had trouble getting the blood lines or the capillaries through the eye, until I came up with the idea

34:00 of a red nylon binding twine that I used to use on my fishing rods, and I got my father to send up some twine, a reel of this – got it out of my own fishing gear, and I used to make my own rods out of bamboo poles, and bind them. And we

34:30 unravelled that and used that for making capillaries, the blood vessels in your eyes. We had a problem with the margin between the iris and the sclera, it was too distinct, we had to blend that in so that it matched the other eye. So we'd taper that off, instead of leaving an edge which was bout a millimetre, we tapered it off

35:00 until it was about a quarter of a millimetre, so you can imagine how big that was. And then the sclera would come in, it would blur the edge. And that's what we sent to London, and printed in The Lancet, and we were world-wide acclaimed for it, but not us technicians, the doctor. Our name wasn't mentioned.

35:30 **And what material were these artificial eyes made out of?**

Acrylic, plastic, same as what the dentures are made of today. But it was the first of the acrylics, and I got a tin – I had a black and white tin of paint chips, I got from ICI Chemical Industry in Melbourne,

36:00 and that was the start of the artificial eye business, using those paint chips.

And how would you fix the red nylon fishing …?

You just lay them over the white, but then you put a clear all over the lot, over the whole lot. So you had your pupil,

36:30 your iris, your sclera, and the clear over that, so you had four cookings of it, sort of thing, you know? But then of course a lot of people go out a lot at night, and you've got to make one with a smaller pupil, so you make two eyes for them.

How was the eye secured into the socket?

It just stays there, just

37:00 fits in. Yes, the tissue around it holds it in place.

And did you ever get to see one of your eyes when it was put in?

Oh yes, yes.

What did it look like?

Looked real good, some of them not so good, but some of them were real good.

Were the owners happy with them?

Oh yes, couldn't see with them, but still happy. That was the only thing about them, you couldn't see with them. But I daresay one of these days they

37:30 might be able to see with them too, with science, the way it's going.

What would the morale be like of people who'd lost an eye?

Pretty good, like the same of those who'd lost a limb, lost an arm, it's just you're lucky if you get through to be 80 without any of those problems. You've got to be lucky, there's no question about it, because I should have been dead many times,

38:00 I should have been drowned three times. I went into the surf at Keira Beach and came ashore at

Maralinga at one stage. I had a couple walking along the beach, and I got caught in an undertow there, and they were walking along the beach with a pair of binoculars watching me all the time. I swam with the rip and I came out at Malinga. I was off surfing off Southport and I

38:30 had a sandbank collapsed underneath me, and I was in deep trouble there, but I got out of it. Yes, a few places I've been lucky, very lucky. Bombs dropping not that far away. I should have been in places, I didn't get there, and those who were there were killed.

39:00 **How long would it take for you to make an eye?**

It takes about a week, off and on, because you've got to have the person sitting there when you paint the iris, and you can have two or three goes at painting the iris before you get it right, you know?

How do you get the right sort of muted colour for an eye?

It's

39:30 all in the painting, sometimes if they were on the home brew and they got up with bloodshot eyes, you've have to send them away "Come back when your eye's clear."

Well, we'll just pause there because we're at the end of the tape.

Tape 6

00:36 **OK, can you take me through, maybe each day was different, but what may be a typical day of work at the AGH was for you? Like, from what time did you start, and what happened …?**

Yes, you normally started at eight o'clock, but when you finished it was a different thing all together, sometimes we'd work through till

01:00 five o'clock next morning, it all depends what happened, what was required of you. But mainly it was eight o'clock until five o'clock, and quite often we'd have a glass of home brew after that, and sit down, but you couldn't have too much to drink because you could be called out, and you had to be on the – you couldn't leave the unit unless you were authorised by the CO,

01:30 that was the position. I've seen nurses work 72 hours straight, we had some horrible instances up there where we had a plane taking off from Jacksons Drome and it went – it didn't clear the hill at the end and the tail section dropped off this side of the hill, and the bombs and the petrol went over the hill and wiped out, I think it was

02:00 one company of the 30th Battalion, wiped them out. And we had wounds, we had burns, I forget what the figures were, either 50 or 100 or something burns, and we had the natives dig trenches, and we put half a tent in it, then they'd have to pick out all the shrapnel and bits of clothing, and of course when a piece of shrapnel goes in, it takes a bit of clothing with it, and then

02:30 if they've got any rings on their fingers you've got to cut them off, and all that sort of stuff. So you know, when you get a rush of casualties in, everybody works all hours, doctors, doctors work incredible hours themselves. There's no bitchiness, there's no complaining, there's no nothing, just did the job, that's all, and got the people as well as possible, get them onto the hospital ship, get them home, fly them home,

03:00 do whatever you could, because you're limited to what you can do. My work was mainly dentures and things like that, but I'd be called on occasionally to do this faciomax work, and that's what I did for – I just forget how long now I was doing it. We came home in '44, so it would have been,

03:30 what was it, July, yes we came home in July '44, we went up there in, I think it was June '42, no, July '42, about two years. But I was doing that for well over 18 months, I suppose, in the 2/5th.

And was there any time in particular where it was

04:00 **extremely chaotic for a period, where you were working hard, that you remember?**

Oh yes, when we had the 2100 patients you were working phenomenal hours then. If you were sick yourself, like I had bouts of malaria, and the doctor would say "Go to your tent and I'll look at you down

04:30 there, I'll keep an eye on you down there." By that time we had stretchers to sleep on, which we'd got from the Americans, whether we got them legally or illegally, I don't remember, but we had stretchers with your mosquito net over you, that's all you needed, something off the floor. And it was nothing for

05:00 the surgeon or some of them to come down to your tent, or send a runner down to get you, or something like that. But if you were sick they'd come down and see you and see how you were going. But it generally lasts, I suppose three or four days, your temperature would be up well over the 104, 105, 106, something like that, 106 you're supposed to be dead, but I've seen jokers still bloody well fighting with that temperature.

05:30 And – yes, no union rules, you just worked and that's all there was to it.

Describe the place for me, what did it look like, what did the AGH look like?

I could show you photos, but geez you can't see them on this. It had –

06:00 we had concrete floors in the huts, we had corrugated iron roofs, the walls were sometimes Hessian, sometimes framing of some description, I don't know, but there was one main street went up

06:30 and you had the entrance, you had facilities if my memory serves me right, the dental section, the x-ray section, then you had the – across there you had the Q-Store, then as you went up the hill you had the wards running off, with the big red crosses on the top of the roof. And I don't know

07:00 how many wards there were, I forget now. And up above that was the nurses quarters, and the officers quarters, the sergeants' lines were over to the left, and the ORs' [Other Ranks] lines were down below that. And they had a competition early in the piece for people to build their own accommodation,

07:30 and they made thatched huts, some of them even double-storey thatched huts, I've got photos there I can show you. But the thatched huts were the coolest, because the heat off that corrugated iron used to – she was hot. The x-ray technician had trouble with his materials, and of course we had trouble with our materials, so we had a

08:00 supply of ice there, we had ice works across the road from us, we had an icebox, army iceboxes, they were about that long and about that wide and that high, and we used to keep all our acrylics in it, and our home brew, kept our home brew in it as well. But we had a CO's inspection one day, and somebody had put too much sugar in

08:30 the bottles, and the CO was – we were part of a one building, the dental section, and the other end of it was the x-ray section, and the x-ray technician was a mate of mine, so we kept our home brew down in the dark room. And the CO was doing the inspection and one of the bottles burst, and he just carried on, he never said a thing, you know? He

09:00 knew what it was. But I had to go up to his tent, and this Major Marks was our boss there at one stage, and he was in the tent next door to the CO's, and underneath the centre pole

09:30 of the CO's tent was a board, about that long, and about that wide, and underneath it had two kegs of home brew, brewing all the time. There was no way in the world he could go crook [get angry] at us for having a bottle of home brew when he's got two bloody kegs going underneath. And when we lined up in Morotai, we got to Morotai, he said, "In the Moresby we had the reputation of being a hospital attached

10:00 to a brewery, I don't want to see it happen here." That was his exact words, and all of us were laughing, because he had the best home brew in the bloody place. Yeah, my Dad used to get XXXX – used to get hops from Castlemaine XXXX, that brewery was down at Rosalie at the time, or down at Milton at the time, it's still there, and he knew one of the workers there and he'd get me a packet of hops. And

10:30 of course we got the sugar from the cookhouse, whatever else was required we could get it from somewhere, but the hops was the main thing, malt, yes, we used to get malt, one of the sergeants was a – worked at the Red Cross, we used to call it the PBRC [Poor Bloody Red Cross], and he got malt from somewhere, I don't know where he got it from, I never asked him. Poor Bloody Red Cross. And he was a Jew, Michel Enzer [?],

11:00 and he was a nice fella, Mick. We used to make a fair amount of home brew.

What was it like?

Good, we never had anything else. It had a kick like a mule [it was strong beer], you wouldn't feel like eating anything, you know, it was that hot, and you'd go and have a glass of home brew, and you'd go up and you'd eat the cookhouse out. You see all you ever got there was

11:30 three meals, was M and V [meat and vegetables], that's like a stew, cold fish, which was tinned fish of some description, and baked beans. So you know, whatever you got, that was the three meals for the day, whether you got it for breakfast, dinner or tea. That's all we had for months. Then they introduced some spinach, I think it was spinach.

12:00 I've never eaten spinach since. I couldn't eat baked beans for a long time. And diced carrots, and of course I still can't eat carrots, you ask Pat. I got sick on home brew one time and that came up was diced carrots, and I haven't eaten diced carrots ever since. But we at one stage up at Donadabu, we were short of tucker [food] and all we got was bloody tinned carrots.

12:30 **Apart from the home brew kind of hobby, was there anything else you'd do for entertainment?**

If we could get into Moresby at any time of a Saturday – I went in for a swimming carnival representing the unit in the swimming carnival, and I lined up on the blocks, it was in Port Moresby Harbour, and of course there were all the troops, American troop ships were in,

13:00 and they kept all their sewerage until they got into port, not out in the open because of the submarines, yes, they wouldn't let their sewerage go out at sea. Anyhow, I lined up to dive across this part of the Moresby Harbour, and it'd be 100 metres I think across, it was, and 100 metres back, and I lined up and I looked beside me,

13:30 here's Allan Emery, he was Australian surf champion, and I'm standing there beside him, you know? Needless to say I haven't got much chance of winning this thing, you know? Anyhow as soon as you dived in, you'd come up and see a mouthful of excreta everywhere, you know, you didn't feel much like swimming. And then we'd have boxing fights, boxing in town, and a

14:00 friend of ours, Alan Holmes, he was a mate of one of my mates, and he was a good boxer, very good boxer, and he used to bet big, and this other mate of mine was an ambulance driver, operating out on the airport, and he called down, he said, "Freddie, let's have a bet on whoever Alan's fighting tonight, he's

14:30 taking a dive [losing on purpose]." And sure enough, he took a dive, I think, I won 10 pound or something like that, betting on the other fellow, you know? Because Alan Holmes had won about 10 fights in a row, or something like that, you know? But they cleaned up something shocking, you know? It's a gambling game. But I don't know whether this is relative, but I wouldn't bet on anything, racehorses or anything, because it's

15:00 all crooked. When I worked at Lilystone and Sullivan early in the piece, we had two kerosene cases with an old door on it, tongue and groove door, and about eight kerosene cases round the outside, and our workroom would have been 20 by 20, which is bigger than this room here, and you'd have all the jockeys,

15:30 trainers and owners all sitting around the place there, and they were deciding which horse was going to win which race. And there were three brothers, Tim Hennessy, Tom Hennessy and Arthur Hennessy, and they would – so Tim was the owner, Tom was a trainer and Arthur was the SP [Starting Price] bookie, and as far as they were concerned, Tim said if a horse was going, Tom said yes the horse was going, they looked at Arthur and he shook his head. He was the SP book

16:00 maker and he was betting against it, because he knew it wasn't going. Oh, they were so crooked, the whole lot of them. And you know, the swimming races and things like that, anyone who'd bet on them, they're mad, because they were foxes, half of them were foxes, they were good swimmers and they'd go dead.

Well in New Guinea were there any other black market things apart from the gambling?

There were people making things all the time, I would

16:30 make butter knives and I'd get a dollar or something, and making a lot of things out of aeroplane nuts off our crashed aeroplanes, rings out of them and put a piece of toothbrush handle in them. But a lot of gimmicks and things like that were going on. Had to be small because you had to transport it to

17:00 wherever you were going.

I'm interested to know, when you were talking to Naomi about some of your facial work, and you said you worked from a book, tell us, was some of the work you were doing a bit trial and error when you were …?

Oh yes, it was trial and error all right, but you had

17:30 that book that you've got there, it shows you what is required, and then you've got to do the same thing, what is required. You have your moulds, and you know your splint's got to fit your moulds, and that's all there is to it. There's a certain tolerance in it, which they use cement, to cement the splint to the teeth, and you know you're allowed a little bit of tolerance, it's better to be loose than be tight,

18:00 and all that sort of stuff. So yes, it's just commonsense, well to me it is.

Was it scary to do your first few kind of jobs, where you were …?

No, if it fitted the model, that's all right, it wasn't my fault if the impressions were crook. I can put it on the model and send the model up to the theatre, and that'd go through the autoclaves sort of thing to sterilize

18:30 it, and it had to fit, that's all there was to it.

And what were the nurses like at AGH?

They all had to be over 23, they were all too old for me, I was only 19, 20. But they were dedicated, they had to be to be in that country. They were all volunteers,

19:00 I've never heard anyone say a bad word against them. They worked for 72 hours straight without complaining. They used to have trouble with the American Negroes trying to get into the nurses' quarters, and they had the second machine gun battalion acting as guards on the nurses' quarters. We had one problem with them up at the second ninth,

19:30 where a nurse was raped up there, and they shot the American Negro for that. There was no trial, no nothing. They just shot him. But no, as far as the nurses were concerned, even when the bombs were dropping they still worked through, they used to have just as much guts as anybody else.

It's a bit of a gruesome story, but what happened with this nurse?

20:00 She was in a car with an officer, if my memory serves me right. And this Negro bashed the officer out, knocked him unconscious, raped the nurse, and bit the nipples off her breasts. And they shot him, straight out.

20:30 That's if my memory serves me right. That wasn't hearsay, that was fair dinkum [true].

Did this cause any ongoing problems or any tension, with this event?

No, but you know, you didn't trust the American Negroes for one minute.

21:00 I don't know whether I was right or wrong, but I just didn't trust them at all. The American soldiers that I struck were all right, never had much to do with them, until I got to Morotai, and a I had a fair bit to do with the American air force personnel that were there, because they never had any dental section with them. If they got any teeth problems they came

21:30 down to us, we fixed it up. And we got film, aerial film out of the big cameras, a roll of film, and we cut it to fit our sized cameras. I've got little photos there I've taken made out of this film, this aerial film, we used to cut them down in the x-ray department, take them to the

22:00 x-ray department and cut them down to fit our cameras. But no, I never – the ones that I struck were all right. We got a few Americans in the hospital at times, they were all right.

Well tell us – you told us earlier in brief about the Japanese POW [Prisoner of War]. Tell us the story, was this at the AGH?

Yes,

22:30 the first prisoners in early '43, I think it would be, these are three they'd picked up, I think this side of – nearly at Itiki Plantation, which was this side of the Owen Stanleys. There were as thin as – just skin and bones,

23:00 they had no weapons, no nothing, just shorts – long trousers, barefoot, and they thought they were dead. And they brought them to the 2/5th AGH because they didn't think they were dangerous and they fattened them up and one of them could speak English, and they weren't any

23:30 harm to anybody, you know, but we did have 24-hour guards on them, and they were looking after them. One of them could speak English. They fattened them up and I don't know how long they were there for, whether it was a month or two months, but then they disappeared, they took them to a prisoner of war camp somewhere, whether they went down to Bathurst or Orange, was it Orange?

24:00 Orange, Bathurst? Somewhere. Must have been Orange I think. Cowra, that's where it was. That's the only place where I knew a Jap prisoner of war camp was. This teacher broke his glasses and he came over and sat down

24:30 beside me, sort of thing, while I repaired his glasses. They were wire glasses, you know, the wire was broken across the centre. So I had to take the lenses out and I silver soldered them, and he was very grateful. And I had to call the guard to take him back to the unit, and we were talking and I was

25:00 told about we were going to take Rabaul, and he said, "You'll never take Rabaul, there's 82,000 troops there, in caves and all that sort of stuff, so you'll never take Rabaul." And what's-his-name by-passed Rabaul, MacArthur by-passed Rabaul, and at the end of the war there was 83,000 Japs there. They said there were only 2000 on Morotai and there was

25:30 30,000 there. By-passed it.

And what did you do with this information he told you?

I took it to the ANGAU, Australia New Guinea Group that was in charge of the defence of Moresby, the ANGAU headquarters, and I met a lieutenant up there and

26:00 he was – what did they call him, an officer, anyhow he was an officer and I said, "Now this Jap reckons there's 82,000 in Rabaul." "Oh, does he?" So he said, "Will you take me over?" I said, "Yes." So we went over in a truck, we went

26:30 up and we had to get special permission from the CO, and this fella asked him what sort of troops they were and whether they were engineers or whether they were this or that, and they were all busy building tunnels in Rabaul and he told this ANGAU officer that you'd never get them

27:00 out, he said, "The tunnels are two miles long, some of them." So MacArthur by-passed Rabaul. And people that have been to Rabaul since told me that the tunnels were two miles long.

And describe your impressions of this Japanese man. I mean, what did you think of him?

27:30 He didn't – he was just a normal, simple bloody school teacher, to my way of thinking, I wasn't frightened of him by any stretch of imagination. And as a soldier, he would have been tall for a Jap, too. But no, he was very meek and I think he was the leader of the three of them, he saved those

28:00 other two, because they would have died up in the jungle without him, I think. He was quite all right. I know I wasn't concerned about him at all, Jesus, he could have grabbed a knife off my bench and stuck it in my back, but that never entered my mind.

Well was it strange for you to be next to this enemy in your own room, talking?

Yes. Didn't worry, didn't think about

28:30 it. The nurses were up there looking after them all the time, if it was good enough for the nurses, it's good enough for me. If I was to show any fear or anything, I'd look bloody bad when the nurses aren't showing any fear. No, I wasn't worried.

Well tell me about the wind up at the AGH for this period, like in Port Moresby,

29:00 **the packing up and that. Why was that decision made?**

Well, the war was moving on, see the battle casualties weren't coming in, and in Moresby there was the 2/1st, the second ninth, and the 2/5th hospitals. The second ninth was there before us, the 2/1st was there after us. And needless to say when the battle casualties weren't coming in for the three AGHs,

29:30 that's 3000 wounded we needed accommodation for there, in those three hospitals, and they were 600-bed hospitals, and nine times out of 10 they had 1000 in them. So the ninth went first, and then we packed up all our hospital gear, it went in trucks and went down to the wharf, and we go onto – I forget what it was, what the name of the ship was we got on, and

30:00 we came back to Townsville, all our gear was offloaded in Townsville, and we went out to the Atherton Tablelands for some reason or other, and then we went on leave. We went on leave 14 days after two years in the islands, I had an attack of malaria as soon as I got home, and went down to –

30:30 I went to – I was notified that the unit had transferred to Bathurst, and so they sent all the hospital – the 600-bed hospital gear, to Bathurst for re-equipping. And while we were in Bathurst we had to go through all our gear to check that we had what the army said we

31:00 had, you know, because they've got a whole list of it. And it was from the hottest place in the world to the coldest place in the world. Frost on the ground, drying rooms for your clothes because you couldn't dry them, and I think half the hospital went sick, something like 300 went sick. And we couldn't do much in

31:30 Bathurst, nowhere to go, the army camp is outside of Bathurst, and Bathurst town never had much for us. I think I played a bit of soccer there, I got a bike from somewhere, and rode a bike around the place for a while. Went with a couple of fellows with ferrets, digging rabbits out, getting rabbits out of the hills. We had a good rabbit stew at one stage, I know that.

32:00 Then I got my appendix out on 4th August, and I don't know how long it was after that then we went down to Woolloomooloo to get on a ship. I told you about that, MacArthur changed his

32:30 mind, he was going into Wewak and he didn't want any Australian troops, it was going to be an American troop show. And they got into a hell of a bloody mess. Anyhow, I had to come back to Ingleburn then, and we had three months at Ingleburn with all our equipment in sheds, with guards, with wire netting,

33:00 with barbed wire, you name it, protecting all our sheets and blankets and pillow slips and all that stuff, for a 600-bed hospital, plus all the drugs and stuff like that, because they used to like to get hold of one particular thing was a green colour, I remember green, it was something – and oh, terrific alcohol content, they used to mix it with orange juice or something like that, and get on with it. It used to send

33:30 them blind [drunk], some of them. But we had to guard our stuff like hell. And then we went down, we went north to Morotai on the Liberty ship, the John Hope. I don't know whether I told you the story already? Where the tank broke loose on us and after it dropped us

34:00 off in Morotai, at a coconut plantation, and as we saw it we thought oh, wouldn't it be lovely to be camped in there, they'll most likely put us up in the bloody jungle somewhere like they usually do, you know? Anyhow they put us in this coconut plantation. And you couldn't dig a hole any deeper than a foot, two foot at the most, you struck coral, white coral, and you had

34:30 to have to have your sunglasses on. So therefore we had 44-gallon drums filled with soil on the corners of all the tents. We had poles running out with ropes on them, and all your sides of your tents were all tied to this poles, and then they were tied to coconut trees, the poles were tied to coconut trees. And that was the only way we could put

35:00 tents up. And the light poles, they had an explosive device, like a jam tin with something coming down from it, and they used to detonate these, and it would blow a hole suitable for an electric light pole, in the coral. And that's the only way they could put a – you couldn't dig a hole. And the coconuts themselves, the big trees 60 foot high, they'd

35:30 have a bulb on them about that size I suppose, that's all that was holding them into the coral, all the thousands of roots, all knotted into the coral underneath. And that's what held them up, they'd go through cyclones and still held up. But it was a good place to be, as I say, on the beach, a coral reef outside of it, and then you got out to the coral reef and then you went straight down for

36:00 about 20 fathoms. And we would swim at pool tide, and I took swimming classes there for quite a while, teaching the fellas to swim because they were all Victorians and they couldn't swim. And we had a case where two doctors went out from Morotai in a home made boat made out of two belly tanks,

36:30 discarded belly tanks the planes dropped off, a platform on it, with a jeep engine and a propeller, and they went out from Morotai, over the reef, went out, and they broke down. It was coming dark and these were two big-gun surgeons in the hospital, and someone said, "There's no boats around here that can go out and bring them back. We had one sailing skiff with half a tent,

37:00 and the skipper of that, he says "Freddie, you'd better come with me, because these fellas won't swim to us, we can't swim to them." So I went out with him and we got these two fellas, and we tried to steer the boat towards them, and the boat didn't want to go, and he said, "Freddie, take this rope over." so I went over with the rope, I swam over to them, towed the sailing boat into their boat

37:30 and then they jumped into the skiff and the four of us came home in the skiff. Never said thanks. And one of them was a big-gun surgeon, I think he was, Lou Swiss Davies [?] was his name, from Brisbane, I think. And I showed him the photo of the sailing boat, oh, 20 years afterwards,

38:00 when he did an operation on my nose, and he charged me $600 for it, to do the operation on my nose, and I said to my pal "I should have let the bugger die, and drown there." Yes, so we brought them home, and I've still got a photo of the boat that we went out and brought them home in. But after the end of the war there, they drove tanks out on this coral

38:30 reef and the jokers jumped off them, and of course they jumped off without bloody boots on, because you couldn't walk on the coral without boots. But I learned to roll off dumpers [waves] off the surf, cyclones and things would come in, and they'd roll onto the reef, coral reef, and I learned to ride off them and ride right into the shore, 150, 160 yards into the shore, when there was a full tide, come in and dump us there.

39:00 But there was only one or two of us could do it. But coconut plantations in the background, I never wanted to see another coconut plantation or another waving palm. I was there for that bloody long. No women for company, they were all too old for me, I was still only 21 then, I suppose, 22,

39:30 at the end of the war.

Right, well we'll pause there because we're close to the end of the tape.

Tape 7

00:38 **You were telling Keirnan about the coral and how it made it harder to dig. So how did the hospital get around this, trying to set up such a big hospital?**

Well they used explosives if they wanted to dig any holes. Everything was in tents, and the coral made a good floor

01:00 in the tents, and they'd scrape the soil off it, just leave this white coral, and the white on the roads was the same, there was no soil on the roads, it was just white coral. You had to wear sunglasses. It was amazing, you'd have to see the photos, the white coral – it went down the – all we had was a finger of land, and the road went

01:30 straight down the middle of it, and the second ninth AGH was on one side of the road, and the 2/5th was on this side of the road, and down further was the 1st Australian Army Headquarters, and down here was the two airstrips, were down here. And engineers were down there, quite a few Australians, and that was the hopping off place for Labuan, the attack on Labuan, and went over to Balikpapan, the big convoy from Balikpapan

02:00 was in there. After the war they brought the prisoners of war from Ambon in to Morotai, into the 2/5th, and I think the second ninth, but I know I carried quite a few of them off the corvette, the Australian Corvette, and they were only four and five stones, they were all bones, that's all they were. We had two die in the 2/5th, even

02:30 though they got out of Ambon.

What was it like seeing the state of these POWs?

It just made you realise how bloody lucky you were. I suppose you relate it back to yourself, and think Jesus, I'm one of the lucky ones. If I'd have been born six months earlier I'd have been over there with them. But you did have a hatred of the Japanese, absolute hatred, I mean

03:00 what they did – and yet when the war finished they were the meekest, mildest people you'd ever see in your life. I had one as a batman in Morotai after the war, and he used to polish my Jap sword that I had, I had a big cabinet with a big Jap sword, so I wasn't frightened of them. They absolutely – once they lost the war, that was the end of it, they weren't worth a drink of water. But I swore I'd never

03:30 ever buy anything Japanese, and I've got a Subaru truck, haven't I? And I've got Makita tools, and my wife was talking about a new sewing machine, and I said, "Don't buy a Jap one." "Oh, it's all right."

04:00 **And these prisoners of war, what was their health like, rather than just their bodies being …?**

Their health was all right, once they got them well they were real good, you know, after the end of the war. But during war, once they got well, they went straight into a prisoner of war camp. So

04:30 we'd get them fit enough to travel or fit enough to live in a prisoner of war camp.

What sort of work did you do on their teeth?

I never did any work on the Japs' teeth.

No, on the prisoners of war?

What sort of work?

The Australians who'd been in the camp, the prisoner of war camp?

Well, we just checked them out for everything. We had to keep them in Morotai for

05:00 three weeks, and we sent them home by hospital ship rather than fly them home, because the longer we kept them, the fatter they would have become, and they'd be more presentable when they got home, that was the reason for it, and it was pretty logical too because I'd hate to see these fellas turn up on their doorstep with their wives or their sweethearts looking like they did. They went through sheer hell. You feel, when you saw them,

05:30 you feel, when you saw them as though you could have killed every bloody Jap you came across, you know?

What were their teeth like?

Gold fillings in most of them, that I can remember. I never worried much about their teeth, I'd rather knock them out.

No, I mean the prisoners of war.

Australians? Oh, we didn't worry about them till they got home, because we were doing everything else on them. But if they had any toothache or anything

06:00 we – you couldn't take them out of the hospital bed and put them in a dental chair to work on them, they were skin and bone, you were frightened they'd break, honest to God you would.

What was their morale like?

To be out there, they had tears all the time, big strong – big men, they would have been six foot and six foot four, just bones, that's all they were.

06:30 Yeah, they'd cry at the drop of a hat [regularly]. They were strong men.

Just describe for me the general set up of the hospital at Morotai.

Morotai, as I said, we had this section of land on one side of the road, and it would be I suppose only about 200 yards deep, and it'd be

07:00 about the best part of half a mile long. And you had the nurses' quarters on the beach at the front there, you had a couple of wards behind them, and then you had the x-ray centre and the dentist centre, and we had a picture show down the end,

07:30 and then we had hospital wards, we had three or four rows like that of wards. And the other end on the beach had the officers' quarters, and the sergeants' quarters were back on the road here, back towards the road. So it was a layout program, and our sergeants' lines

08:00 were back on the road. We used to have permission to go through the officers' lines to get to the water, because when you had your time off, all you did was sit and read on the beach or swam when the tide

was in, or did a bit of fishing with grenades and things like that. We did have a

08:30 pilot's inflatable dinghy, and we got a load of four second grenades I think it was, to go fishing for the hospital, and there's two of us in this inflatable canoe, one was sitting

09:00 on the side, and I was sitting on the bottom. And we dropped a four second grenade, he was ready to go over the side and grab the fish and throw them in the boat, but I'm afraid my testicles were resting on the bottom of the boat and when that grenade went off, I nearly went – I went over the side. Oh God that hurt, I still laugh when I think about it. And I had to hang onto the side of that dinghy

09:30 for a while to get my breath back. But we brought out enough fish from those few grenades to feed the sergeants' quarters and the nurses' quarters and the officers' quarters. We only did it a couple of times. I don't know what happened, whether the boat sunk or disappeared or something, I don't know what it was. But we had two

10:00 areas of sand in the coral reef, and we'd start on the side, and if you had sandshoes that was all right, you could swim wherever you liked, but if you never had sandshoes, you had to swim from that area to that area. And a lot of these Victorians couldn't swim, and I had them, coaching and coaching them. And whether they reached that – they had to reach that side, put their feet down, and they all learned pretty quick,

10:30 they did.

What methods did you have to teach them to swim?

Oh, just the old techniques, that's all. Breathing with your arm up, some people breathe on their left, some breathe on their right, and all this sort of stuff, you know? But there were two big brothers, and they were the most uncoordinated couple I've ever struck in my life, and once they learned to swim, Jesus they could go.

11:00 Yes, little things like that come back to you, after 60 years. I don't know, I would have taught I suppose 30 or 40 of the hospital staff to swim.

Were there any things you had to watch out for in the water?

Spineys, what do they call them, spiney – they

11:30 were little – sort of a shellfish with all spines sticking up, black spines, and if you stood on them in bare feet, you'd have your feet full of bloody what's-a-names. And they were in the coral, they didn't get on the sandy beach. But that's all there was, there were no sharks, because once you start dropping grenades the sharks don't stay around, they get going. But

12:00 yes, there were a lot of complaints that the officers and the sergeants and the men got fish, but the patients didn't get fish, and I thought, I'm not feeding the bloody lot, you know, it's enough trouble as it is, going out here and getting these.

And just before the end of the

12:30 **war at Morotai, what was your workload like?**

Nothing much at all, very little at the end of the war. Just filling in time, that's all you were doing, filling in time. They took our lines off us, the 2/5th AGH at the end of the war, they closed us down, and gave all our tents to the force that was going to

13:00 Japan, and we moved out of our tent, six of us, and we had built underneath a bit sort of fig tree, and when you come to think of it, it was ruddy stupid because those fig trees could not – those big trees could not put roots down, no tap root, they couldn't go down through the coral. All the trees there were all shallow-rooted.

13:30 But these big trees, they were about 30 foot high, these big ones, I've got a photo of it somewhere. But we'd shifted out and we went over the second ninth AGH, those of us who had been left behind. The others went home and we learned that three of the fellows who were going to Japan were killed in our tent, the tree came down on top of them and killed them. Now

14:00 we'd been there for 18 months, I suppose, and it never came down, but this storm came up and it skittled them. That's luck, isn't it? I've been lucky.

You mentioned that you could watch movies at Morotai?

Yes, we used to get pictures there. I've got a photo there of Gracie Fields [entertainer] coming in to the concert party.

What did she do?

14:30 She was singing and her husband or boyfriend or whatever he was at the time, Monty Banks, he was a little fella, about that bloody wide, and he was supposed to be her husband, and they put on quite a show. We had quite a few Australian people came up and put on a show, and we'd get films, maybe

Saturday night or something like that, I don't know, I

15:00 can't remember now what it was. Some of the pictures were all right, some weren't. Of course you were sitting out in the weather, and if it rained you got wet. And we had one in Morotai, not in Morotai, at Donadabu, and there was a slope, and we were sitting up the slope with our rain slickers on and it was raining like hell, and we all went sliding down the bottom.

15:30 But in Morotai they tell me that the Yanks used to have a picture show down at the airstrip, and the Japs used to be up in the trees watching them, watching the pictures. I didn't see them, but that's what they reckon. We never saw anything.

What was your interaction with the Americans like?

Not much at all, not much, only a matter of need, that's all. With the film, that's all we had to do with

16:00 them. They were a fair way from us, well the strip of land that we had would have been maybe two or three mile long, and we were up this end and they were right down the other end. But there weren't many American troops there, there was just one black Negro airport defence group, that's all there

16:30 was, I think. And the air crew, the flyers flying over to Balikpapan, Labuan and all those places, bombers, you know?

And you mentioned that Morotai was where you made the fake eyes? Was there much of an emphasis on the facial

17:00 **reconstruction at Morotai?**

Yes, the reconstruction consisted – of course we had a good plane service back to Australia then, it consisted mainly of maintaining the facial shape, sustaining the facial shape, because we would get it back –

17:30 get the patients back to Australia as quick as possible, and of course there was a daily plane service to Australia, DC3s. A friend of mine was a pilot at that particular time, and he was on that particular run, and he used to bring up a bottle of scotch now and again for us. I can still taste it. Because we had our own ginger ale factory, or soft

18:00 drink factory. Not us, but the army did, they made soft drink. Because otherwise we'd be drinking home brew all the time. Towards the end of the war we did get one bottle per week, that's right. I think it was a bottle a week. And those that didn't drink, they'd get paid for their bottle. But there were three

18:30 types of beer we used to get, there was Cascade, there was Richmond Tiger and I forget what else we got. Oh, some from Adelaide, Adelaide beer. Never any XXXX, never any Queensland beer. I don't know why, but we never ever got any. And

19:00 you would swap three bottles of Brisbane Tiger for one bottle of Cascade, green label Cascade. The Richmond Tiger as far as we were concerned was a very rude name.

And working with the facial reconstruction, what were some of the worse sort of facial injuries that you saw?

Well

19:30 it's hard to say, I've seen the whole front of the face taken off, the nose, the lips, and all those taken off, just like that, half the teeth missing, all the teeth missing, all this sort of stuff. And jaw gone. It's only certain surgeons would

20:00 allow you to go in, the brilliant surgeons would allow you to go in, and say "This is what we're trying to do, this is what we want to do." And when you think, I was only a blood kid, I was only about 19 or 20. And they must have had supreme faith in me or something like that, I don't know.

And

20:30 **how do you create dentures for someone say if all of their teeth have been blown away? How do you …?**

Well you've got to build up a ridge in the mouth, the lower jaw first, or the upper jaw, you take bones out of their hips, pieces of bone out of the hip, and build up a ridge for dentures to sit on. So if they've lost, you know – they were dentureless, and

21:00 you can't do that up in the tropics because it takes too long, that's a long time job, they take the thickest part of your bone is in your hip here, and they take pieces out of that, small pieces and big pieces, hold them all together. Amazing how they join up, when you pull the skin over them, they all join up and you finish up with a good

21:30 lower ridge or something like that. It's very rewarding, to know that you've done that, as far as I was concerned, anyhow. To think, you know, you're just a dental technician, you're just looking after teeth and things, and when you get into that sort of work you think, well, I couldn't do it if I wasn't being a

dental technician.

22:00 **Is there some sort of generic mould, say if all my teeth were missing and you needed to replace them but had nothing to base them on, is there some sort of a generic mould that you use? Or how do you create from scratch the shape of someone's teeth?**

No, you've just got to use what's there, to give you a mould, and you

22:30 work from that mould. And every one is different, there's not two of them the same. When you hear old married couples say she can't eat until he's finished with her teeth, that's not on, there's no way in the world one set of teeth will suit another. Man or wife or dog or anything else, it won't do. It's

23:00 an interesting exercise, particularly if you get into the technical stuff, you've got to be up with it, you've got to know your melting points of your alloys and your different gold. I can still remember the melting point of gold, for instance, 1066, was that

23:30 the Battle of Hastings or something like that? But it all depends on the carats, and you can overheat it, and if you don't heat it enough it won't flow, you've got to have your model hot enough and just hope that it doesn't cool. And this fellow

24:00 that, this Theo Firth that had the big lab in Sydney doing eyes, he had an artificial eye himself, and he had a glass eye, he lost his eye by a football at Waverley College in Sydney, and had a glass eye and it blew up, and that's what started the artificial eye making. And as a technician he worked for Hall Best

24:30 in Melbourne, he was working in the army at the time, and they decided to get into it, and the technique they developed, and I helped in the end, turned out that – it's not the technique that we invented but the way we did it, is different to what they do it now, inasmuch that a lot of the

25:00 irises and the pupils are prefabricated, you can buy them off the shelf, buy one to match. We used to have to paint our own. See, just the difference to what it is now. But your sclera, the white of your eye has still got to be moulded to the shape of your eye, and you've still got to have – well as far as I know, they're still using the

25:30 nylon twine for capillaries. But other than that it's doing all right.

And at Morotai, how did you hear the news of the end of the war?

On the radio. We heard it – of course we had wirelesses and everything

26:00 else there, and we heard the news announcement, we knew it was coming, the big announcement. And I think they fired off every gun on Morotai itself, and shrapnel was coming down in all directions, every gun in the place went off, everybody got as full as a boot [drunk] that I can remember.

What was your reaction to hearing about how the war had

26:30 **ended?**

It was just bloody great, you know, I'll be home next week, sort of thing. Then they brought out the point system and six months later you're still there. So I went over to the second ninth AGH and I had my beer in the fridge for Christmas or

27:00 something, and there was a note on the fridge saying "This fridge must not be opened." That was the officer in charge, Fritz I think his name was, a German. So anyhow I went and I got my beer out of the fridge and the next day, did he blow up. This was after the war, you know?

27:30 And he said, "I left an order that the fridge was not to be opened." And I said, "My bloody beer was in the fridge, you weren't going to get that." I said, "You had no right to put that letter on, if you want to go to the CO I'll go with you now, come on." He backed down.

Why didn't he want you to open the fridge?

Because his beer was in there, he put it in there warm, and he wanted it kept cold for quite a while, whereas mine had been in there and it was cold, and I wanted it out. And

28:00 he was just one of those people, I didn't like him at all.

And how did your workload change once the war ended?

There was very little to do, there wasn't the number of people around, those people that were getting their dentures and everything done before the end of the war or out of the army for nothing, sort of thing, you know, because the materials we had weren't as good as what you'd get in

28:30 private life anyhow, and the quality of the teeth weren't as good as you could get in private life, all that sort of stuff. I told a lot of them "Wait till you get back on civvy [civilian] street because you'll get better quality teeth and better quality materials and all those sorts of things.

Was there a certain standard that the army had to provide in terms of dental care?

Oh yes, yes.

What was that?

Everybody had to be dentally fit, had teeth to chew with and no toothaches. How's that for instructions?

29:00 Yes. So the army thought that if you might have had only 10 teeth on the upper jaw, you know, and eight teeth on the lower, that's enough to chew with, you've got enough to eat with, they didn't worry about making partial dentures. But I remember at one stage a general, I can't remember if it was General Moreshead or who it was,

29:30 broke a gold clasp off his gold denture, gold lower denture, and I had to solder it back on, and of course once you apply heat to acrylic – I put an investment band over it and God knows what, I soldered this clasp on and it burnt a bit of the acrylic, and

30:00 oh Jesus did I get into strife [trouble] from my officer, I forget who it was, no, I forget who it was. He went crook. I said, "What else can I do? I had to solder the clasp on in a hurry for the general." I said, "I put a mask over the acrylic, the investment mask, so it should have been all right,

30:30 but it wasn't." Mooreshead didn't worry, he got his denture back.

And you mentioned the swimming and these sorts of things, what other sorts of things did you do to keep yourself occupied after the war?

I did a bit of fishing and did a bit of swimming and I went visiting mates in units and things like that.

31:00 **You mentioned you had a Japanese batman. How did this come about?**

Well, they had a big internment camp on Morotai and they just let these fellows out that they thought were all right, and every sergeant had a batman, and the officers had batmen, sergeants had batmen.

What was yours like?

He was a meek, mild little fella, you know,

31:30 and he did all my washing for me, cleaned the tent out and polished my Jap sword for me. And I had that Jap sword until I came out here, and I saw an ad in the paper from a fellow in Bundaberg, ringing

32:00 up wanting to buy Jap swords, and I think I put $400 on it. He was down in a flash and took it. Now they can get 2000 bucks [dollars] for them. He must have known a bit about them.

And would you talk at all with your Japanese batman?

Pardon?

Would you talk at all with your batman?

Just point and show him,

32:30 all this sort of stuff, you know. He never had a name, not that I can recall.

Were the Japanese ever treated sort of badly, given the fact that you'd been fighting with them?

Did we treat them badly?

Or did anyone every maybe show some aggression towards them?

Oh they would have at times, yes, I know one fellow walked up and shot a Jap,

33:00 "That's for Billy" or something, for his brother or something. What made me mad was that the Japs got a ship home to Japan before we did, and that's what made me mad. How in the hell, you know, they can get a bloody ship for the Japs, yet they couldn't get a ship for me and us young fellas. Not that there were many of us left, probably there

33:30 would have been only 20 of us left, I suppose. We finished up getting on a ship, I forget the name of it now, and we came home. But that boat I was telling you about, the John Hope, the Liberty ship that the Yanks had that we went to Morotai on, on its way home from Morotai,

34:00 the skipper ran it up onto an island, thinking it was a low cloud bank, and they opened the ship up on the side and drove the vehicles straight onto the island, off the side of the ship. It was there for quite a while outside of – I don't know whether it was Salamaua or somewhere there. But he was a panic merchant [quick to panic], the skipper, he was only a young skipper of the Liberty ship, and there were rumours of a sub in the area,

34:30 and oh God, he wouldn't deviate from the course he was taking when the seas were bloody humungous, you know? And someone said, "For God's sake, go with the bloody waves." and he just ploughed into them. We had a derrick break loose, he bloody went out there and came back and nearly cleaned about

six fellows' heads off, you know, everyone screamed "Duck"

35:00 because we were all sleeping on deck, it was wet as shags [very wet]. Yes, I expected him to run into trouble, that fellow. And we had to go down as I said to retie these tanks up that were loose down below, and we'd go down through the crews' quarters. Well I saw the

35:30 filthiest photo I ever saw in my life, the American Negro crew. I thought, oh my God, is this what life's like in this part of the world? I was absolutely amazed to think that people did that sort of thing, you know?

What was it a picture of?

Pardon?

What was it a picture of?

Oh, men and women in – I'd never seen anything like it in all my life. And of course as soon as we came up we all started talking about it, everybody wanted to go down and see what these photos

36:00 were.

Looking back were they particularly risqué or were they just …?

Oh yes, they were risqué, yes. They weren't little pictures neither, they were bloody big things, on the walls of the cabin. They weren't in his cabin, but they were outside the cabin, or somewhere where we had to go down past them, anyhow, to get down to the

36:30 hold. Yes, just little incidents like that you don't forget.

And what was it like when you had to pack up the hospital, or what was left over at Morotai?

Well I packed it all up and it went back with me to Sydney, but

37:00 I had to sign for it, that it was all true and correct. It was not my prerogative, it was the officer's prerogative to do it, he was supposed to sign for it. But he wasn't there, so I had to sign for it. I could have walked off with the bloody lot, but I was too honest, too honest, I could have taken all the teeth that were there, and a lot of equipment, I knew which box it was in and everything else,

37:30 but I signed that it was such and such – so many teeth were there, and so many boxes of wax were there and so much of this or that. It was amazing to me that I didn't pinch anything, I should have, everybody else did. And I was too keen to get down to Melbourne.

38:00 My mother and father were in Melbourne visiting a friend of ours who was with us in Moresby, he was the x-ray technician, I've forgotten what they call it, and they took him out of Moresby and sent him to Enoggera in Brisbane, and when we came home from Moresby, he saw my colour patch and he

38:30 got on the back of the tram and I got on the middle of it, and he saw me get off and he followed me home, and we were sitting down having tea and he came and knocked on the door. And his name was Bill Smith. And he's a nice fellow Bill, I said, "Come in." So anyhow Mum invited him to stay whenever he wanted to, and get away from the – he was at Yeronga, no, Enoggera army camp, in a hospital there, he was a bit of an expert on skin radiology,

39:00 and he finished up meeting a girl out there in the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] or something, and they got married from our place, in Herbert Street. And then they went back to Melbourne and he did dentistry. But anyhow I went down to Melbourne and his father was a dentist living at Seddon, and

39:30 I went down, Mum and Dad and Bill and his wife met me down there and anyhow he was only in the house a couple of days, might have been a couple of hours, and my father says "Come on son, we'll do a pub crawl that I did after the First World War." So we started at Chloe, Young and Jacksons, and we did every pub we could find, and he had a rum and a beer chaser on every one. And he abused every

40:00 barmaid or barman that he could, he said, "You wouldn't know what a bloody good house rum was if you fell over it." That's how he was.

We'll just pause there for a second.

Tape 8

00:36 **OK, I was just interested in that end of war story, you told us briefly before that a man died. What happened?**

Three men died in our tent that we'd been living in for 18 months, when they had a storm come up, and it blew a big gum tree down on

01:00 top of them and killed the three of them in the tent. It just makes you realise how lucky we were, that it didn't happen to us.

I was actually referring to the story of shooting the air in celebration.

Oh yes, he was just lying in bed, he was sick and they didn't know what was wrong with him, but anyhow a piece of shrapnel came through the roof

01:30 and hit him on the wrist, and it was bleeding, and he yelled out to the nurse and the nurse wondered what it was and she came in and there was blood everywhere. Anyhow she wrapped him up and half an hour later came back and he was dead. And they didn't know what the hell killed him, so they just put it down to PUO, paroxysm of unknown origin. I don't know whether he was sick or whether he was battled scarred or what he was, he just died. But we had

02:00 quite a few, they might have been slightly wounded, but lack of will to live. It was a well known complaint that people used to give up after living in that country and fighting like hell, and knowing they've got no bloody chance of getting through, so they just give up. Yes, I don't know what they called it, lack of will to live or something like that.

02:30 **Speaking of which, you were talking with Naomi about some of the worst facial injuries that you saw. How was the morale of some of the men who were suffering these?**

Well they couldn't talk much, most of them, they were incredibly tough, a lot of them were front line soldiers, and they were tough men, there's no doubt about it, it was terrific, they knew that we were doing our best

03:00 to ease the pain and do this and do that, and now, 60 years later, if we'd only had the anaesthetics and stuff that we've got now, it's absolutely incredible. Because up until the introduction of a product called Xylocaine in 1939, we only had nitrous oxide, and cocaine I think, as anaesthetics, and every time you used them everybody was sick afterwards, including the dentists. But

03:30 then when the Xylocaine came in – now I think there's something like 50 derivatives of it, different types of anaesthetics that they can use, so that you wouldn't have the vomiting, you wouldn't have the pain that you've got now. I just had four months in hospital, and I lived on Tramel [pain killer] for those four months, or three months, 200 milligrams

04:00 every eight hours, to ease the pain on the spinal chord, and I didn't think it was possible to live without injections. But that's what I did. That's the difference between 60 years and now. And now they can – as far as faciomax is concerned, they can take the skin off the whole face, replace it, patch it up, patch the bones up and reconstruct it, put the

04:30 skin back and sew it all up again, that's what they can do with it now, and plus everything else they can do in the surgery field, absolutely incredible. Knees and elbows and all that. It's wonderful, though what the future's going to be, I don't know.

And tell us, after the war and with people going back, you mentioned that things got less busy, is there a typical day after the war that

05:00 **you could outline for us?**

Well, you've got to report – morning parade you've got to report in by eight o'clock or something, and then you check up to see whether there's any work involved for the day, and if there's no work involved you'd go fishing or you'd go down the beach, just filling in bloody time. You'd read book after book after book, whatever you could get, you'd read toilet paper if you had it, that sort of stuff. It was most frustrating, you couldn't get

05:30 home and do some work.

Why was it taking so long?

Well they reckon they never had the ships to get us home, but as I said they had the ships to take the bloody Japs home, but they never had the ships to take us home.

And were there any unusual weather conditions, like cyclones or anything like that?

Oh yes. We were at Donadabu and we had a cyclone there, and

06:00 we had our tents in four 44-gallon drums, one on each corner and a pole across, because the ground was that soft that when it got wet the pegs would just pull out, so we used that. And inside your tent you had your mosquito nets tied to

06:30 the centre pole – the rope through the centre, your mosquito nets were tied to the back to there, and we had this cyclone hit us, and that tent just went up in the air, our mosquito nets with it, and we never saw it again. Some terrific winds we got up there, and I camped under the water truck that night

07:00 until we could get new – in the cabin of the water truck – until we could get new tents. And of course

you have to sign a big creed as to what happened to your tent, what happened to your mosquito net, whatever gear was missing, where was the tent when you last saw it? It was flying above the Loloki River at about two

07:30 thousand feet when last seen. Yes, I still remember that.

What about all the equipment when the cyclone hit? Like your dental equipment?

It took a bit of the roof off the bloody thatched huts and things like that, but they stood up pretty well.

Just actually while we're on that, tell us how this peddle machine works.

You know what the old sewing machine's like, you know, the old treadle on the sewing machine, that's what we

08:00 used for doing our lathe work, our polishing, for drilling anything, and the dentists had one exactly the same, not the same as the lab one, but another one that was just a wheel about that size, and just one single peddle and he used that to do all the drilling in the teeth and all that sort of stuff, before we got electricity.

How hard was it to do? Like was it ...?

You got used to it,

08:30 you got used to it, yes.

Was it tiring?

Yes, yes it was. The sergeant, he refused to do it, he let me do all the peddling. I was only a corporal then. When I got to Moresby I was still – when I got to 2/5th I was still a corporal, and when I was at the 2/5th we got the

09:00 electricity there.

And how long could you go on the peddle for?

A couple of hours. It takes you a good hour to polish a denture with a peddle machine. And if you've got an upper and a lower well it takes you a good two hours to do it.

Well you were mentioning you were a corporal, tell us about your promotion to sergeant.

Well I was in Ingleburn and

09:30 I was coming back from the pictures one night with some of my mates, half full [drunk]and chiacking, you know, and a voice came out of the darkness "That's no way for a staff sergeant to behave." and I looked around, and there's no bloody staff sergeant here, we didn't know who it was who made the statement, we were in the dark, walking home from the pictures, and we didn't know a bloody thing about it. And the next morning he said, "You've been promoted to staff

10:00 sergeant" and I said, "That's good." And I said, "Was that you that yelled out last night?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well that's one way of finding out." you know? So of course I went into the sergeants' mess then, and being only 20 you're on the outer, because most of the sergeants are 30 and 40 and older, and I never had any friends in the sergeants' mess, there was only one fellow there, was

10:30 Mischa Enzer [?], and Mischa and I got to be great mates. While we were in Sydney, his father was a Rabbi of Sydney, and he'd died, I think, yes, he died. So we went down to his mother's, where his home was, at No 1 Carrington Road, Randwick, I used to stay at his place. And he had a sister,

11:00 she married a Christian, and that broke up the whole bloody family sort of thing, you know? But anyhow the marriage didn't last long. But Mischa and I, we used to go down to the synagogue for dances and things like that. He was great roué as far as women were concerned, oh God, something shocking. And we knocked around together, and I remember he gave me a silk handkerchief, a white silk handkerchief,

11:30 his father was an importer of silks from Thailand, but the Rabbi of Sydney, I couldn't relate them both together sort of thing, and that's what it was. His brother, Simeon Enzer [?] was the leader of the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra, a great violinist or something. But I don't know – Mick went into a finance house after the war,

12:00 I believe, but Mick on his own was a nice fella. Put him with another Jew and he didn't want to know you. Funny, isn't it? Yes, I learned to sing My Yiddish Momma with Mischa when we got half full, we used to sing My Yiddish Momma.

How did it go?

Oh God,

12:30 I couldn't sing it now. No, I wouldn't remember a word of it now, I just remember the title, My Yiddish Momma. And I sang it at home to my mother one time, my mother went crook. "I'm no bloody Yiddish –

I'm no Jew."

Fred, I might just ask you to let go of the chord because it might make a sound.

Sorry.

No, that's all right.

Just wasn't thinking.

And how did you – well you

13:00 **mentioned briefly that there was a bit of difficulty there, but how did you fit in with the Jewish people?**

I fit in with anybody, I've got no religion, didn't worry me. Mischa looked after me sort of thing, taking me out round Sydney, showing me Sydney and doing all that sort of stuff. But no, we only had weekend leave, that's all we had, or you know, overnight somewhere. And I had a bed to stay in, in Sydney, that was always very

13:30 difficult if you weren't in – well to get back to Ingleburn you got the last train out and then you got a bus from there to Ingleburn if there was one round, otherwise you walked.

And what were the leaves like back in Australia, like this time at Ingleburn? What did you get up to?

Well, if it was warm enough I'd be down

14:00 the beach somewhere, one of them, I'd spend most of my day down there surfing, or swimming or doing something. There was only two or three of us that used to knock round together, and that's what we used to do. I did meet a girl down there, that's right, and I took her out a few times. We won the dancing championship at Parramatta Town Hall one night, the dancing championship,

14:30 whatever the hell that was, I don't know. But I used to like dancing. There weren't many places, I think I recall going to Luna Park one time, that's all. Liverpool, Liverpool Town Hall, that's where it was. Her father owned a shop in Liverpool, a grocery shop.

15:00 Barbara Fitzpatrick, that was her name. But when I went to Morotai she caught up with someone else and dumped me like a sack of potatoes. Yes, she finished up marrying a bank manager I think.

How did you find out this news, this bad news?

Oh, I don't know,

15:30 might be I wasn't getting any letters for a while, I don't know. But I wouldn't be the first that got dumped. One of my other mates, his girlfriend dumped him too, so we used to get on the shicker [alcohol] together, commiserate with each other. But you could only drink so much when you were in the sergeants' mess.

Well tell us about your feelings as you finally received

16:00 **the news that you were going to be discharged.**

Yes, well when I came home I knew I'd be discharged as soon as I could, you know? And I went to Melbourne for four days, then I came back and I reported in at Sydney, wherever it was there, and they didn't ask me questions why I was AWOL or anything like that, they said, "You report to Redbank in Brisbane."

16:30 So I reported to Redbank and they just gave me my discharge and that's all there was.

What was it like to return to civilian life?

Well I knew I was going back to finish my apprenticeship, I knew that. And the fellow that they had working there, the dentist sacked him straight away and I took over. So I started my apprenticeship. Then the firm was subsidised by something

17:00 like two pound a week or something for my wages, so they had all their technical work done, and the lab work done, at a quarter of the price of what they normally paid. So they did very well out of it. But it was bloody shocking as far as I was concerned, to earn the money I was getting from them.

Returning to an apprenticeship, with all this wartime experience did you feel like

17:30 **you already knew a lot of things?**

Oh yes, oh yes, I was a fully qualified technician theoretically, I had a school in Ingleburn at one stage, teaching 20 technicians how to do certain work. You know, you don't do that if you're only a bloody apprentice. And I had a dental school at Ingleburn, the big army camp then,

18:00 before I went to Morotai. And it was just after I was promoted to staff sergeant. My boss didn't

complain at all, but this was one of the reasons why the ADA made these rules, the Australian Dental Association made the rules, that even though you'd been a fully qualified and fully experienced staff sergeant and been working for

18:30 four years doing dentistry, they'd allow you six months off your time of six years. Should have been doing six years, instead of that I did eight years. No, I was disgusted with the ADA and I fought them for 40 years after that.

Was it hard to settle back into civilian life after being in the army?

No, not at all.

19:00 No, I had a mate of mine, we were in the YMCA together, before the war, he was shot down over Germany and he's the only one still alive out of his crew, because he was a six foot, blue-eyed blond, and he lived through hell over there and we got together again, and we used to go out dancing everywhere together, and we played basketball, we played basketball for Queensland,

19:30 I didn't get to go away with them, but we won the Queensland championship in '47, '48, '49, somewhere round about then. And I've got a photo there I can show you. I did a lot of swimming, and we went to dances and things until 1950 when I played soccer for the

20:00 YMCA as well as basketball. My mother used to say "Why don't you take your Dad to the YMCA?" Because at home they were always fighting, you know? I went home there to sleep, that's all. I gave Mum board when I started work on 10 and six a week, my first job. She got 10 bob and I got sixpence. And that's how it went. All the money I sent home

20:30 during the war, all gone.

Was it hard to return to your family situation given that your father was still drinking?

Yes, well I stood up to him, I quietened him down a fair bit, and he knew I was big enough to deal with him, plus the fact that he was getting older. But he was still drinking. But mother used to bring home a bottle of rum every Saturday

21:00 night, and he would have that bottle of rum finished by Monday morning, or Sunday night. But mother used to take half of it out and fill it with water, and he didn't know the difference. And she used to use the rum in cooking in cakes and things.

And so tell us, when you look back at your service time, what do you think had changed in you from

21:30 **the young man who'd joined up, to now?**

Well, I was more secure, I was more capable, I was more confident in my own ability, and I was prepared to take on anything and everything. I had faith in myself, and I was resolved that I would never finish up like my father and I would always do the right thing by my family, and that's what I've done. I

22:00 remember looking up at the hills in Paddington and saying "When I build a home, nobody's going to look down on top of me." and that's what's happened, that's why I'm out here. As I say, I hold my hat up to nobody, I've seen what grown men can do and how weak they are, and they're all front, and all that sort of stuff. Put to the test they're not worth a drink of water. When you're only a kid and you see this happen, you think well Jesus, you know,

22:30 they've fallen to pieces and I'm still standing up. That's the way I look at it, I'm very proud of what I've achieved as far as the family's concerned, and this was the driving force. I was saying that this was what I was going to do, and that's what I wanted to do, and to start off with nothing and finish with – well I've got a million dollar valuation, so I think I've

23:00 done all right.

Is that why you like to go to high places? You mentioned that you liked to buy a house on top of a hill, or …?

Yes, yes, I did. See I think I mentioned that I built our first house at Tennyson, they built the bloody power house beside us. I got out of there and I built on the highest block of land in Maryborough, and then they built the Hume pipe across the road, so then I came out here. But

23:30 I kowtow to nobody. I taught public speaking and debating for 20 years, I can handle myself with anybody verbally. And I've achieved, I've got awards there for 65 years of community service, one from Mr Howard [John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia]and one from Legacy and one from Woocoo Shire Council, and I know what I've achieved in the town here since I've been here,

24:00 and I know what I've achieved in my life. I've achieved much more than I expected to achieve. When your children can go into a shop in town and they're Freddie Powell's daughter "Oh, that's all right, you don't need to pay for it now." that's confidence.

And looking back over your service time, what do you think were the best of times?

24:30 Well I don't know whether there were any best of times, but I know I didn't grow up early, the best of times in the service, I suppose, when you're promoted from a private to a corporal in sudden quick time and you're promoted to a staff sergeant and you're told you're the youngest staff sergeant in the army it made you proud, and you just carried on normally, that's all.

25:00 I've got no ego, that's for bloody sure, because I've seen those egos get knocked to pieces very quick. But with five healthy happy children and they're making more money than I ever did, so what more could a man want?

Looking back at your service time, what was your worst memories of service?

Oh, when the bombs were falling, and if anybody says they're not scared, they're a bloody liar. But when the bombs stopped, you

25:30 rushed out and helped those who were injured, so that's all there is to it.

And do you feel part of the ANZAC [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] tradition?

No, no I don't, I wasn't a fighting soldier. If I was a fighting soldier I'd say yes, I would be. My father was a member of the RSL for 50 years, and I was a member of the RSL for 50 years. I'm not now, even to go into the local RSL here, I've got to sign my name in, because I wouldn't be a member of the club because I don't drink. I've got to

26:00 drive, I've got to drive out here, I've got to live by my car, at 80 years of age and still got your licence, I'm doing all right. I've want to retain it for a while. So no, I have a lot of respect for the work that they do, that fellow who was in Legacy with us, he was also a member of the RSL, he got me my pension, my service pension, he got my disability

26:30 pension for me, and I get now, it's my disability pension and my wife's pension and my pension, we get nearly $1000 a fortnight, which we can live on quite comfortably out here, growing our own fruit and vegetables and all that sort of stuff. One time we had our own meat, I had a cattle stud here for 20 years Droughtmaster Stud,

27:00 and we used to kill our own meat. It's what I set out to do, because my father had a soldier settlement block after the First World War, at a place called Bringalilly, that's where the big coalmine for the Millmerran Coal is now, but prickly pear [a weed] beat him, he went broke in the 1920s, my grandfather, his

27:30 father, had Minnivale Station, and he went broke in the 1902 drought. So I decided that I would get money first, and go into cattle, and see how I went, so that's what I did. And that was – when did I think of that idea, I don't know, but that was my idea anyhow. Because being stuck in rooms for 16 hours a day,

28:00 you get a bit fog-bound, and then you'd go to a service club of a night or you'd go adjudicating or you'd go as a guest speaker or you'd go somewhere, and then go back to work.

Do you have any side effects from the war? Any bad dreams or any …?

Oh yes, the bombs used to get to you at times, you'd wake up in a cold sweat,

28:30 you know, you'd be ducking and diving. I slept on the front verandah of a house that was bloody cold in winter, and I'd be sweating like a pig in the middle of winter, so that was nerves. But like everything else, you grow out of it. The same thing about my neck, I can't tolerate anybody touching my neck, I can myself, but I can't tolerate anybody else, even Pat knows now not to

29:00 touch my neck. Now why's that?

Well, what you told me earlier.

Yes, that's what it's like. But no, it doesn't get between me and my sleep sort of thing, not much. And I've been used to still living on six hours sleep a night, I'm still doing that.

And, we're drawing close to the end of the day, are there any final things you'd like to

29:30 **add to the record, final words?**

No, I'm just trying to think. It's great that this is going into records, because in generations when there is no wars, they're going to realise how valuable these things are, and I do believe in record keeping for things, because that's what I've done myself,

30:00 I've kept all my records that I've been able to get my hands on. My children are not interested in records, or what I've done or anything else. It's not that they don't love me or anything like that, I think they do, but when I couldn't get to my granddaughter's wedding, my daughter flew over from America as soon as the wedding was over to see me, so it's great.

30:30 She wanted me to go into a nursing home straight away, and I said, “No way.” But no, it’s great that you’re doing the job you’re doing. I really enjoy that sort of thing, I really think that that’s part of history, and if we’d have had more records from the First World War it would have been a bigger help to the Second World War, I reckon.

31:00 The men in the front line are the real heroes, we’re just back-up troops, that’s all, and as far as I’m concerned, going over the top like they did and getting killed straight away was just bloody ridiculous. It wasn’t necessary, it’s just that – it was part of

31:30 history, you had to do that. But Australians I believe are starting to wake up that those English ideas of walking into bloody rifle fire or machine guns like that, it’s just plain bloody stupid. And I think in future they’ll be all from long distance guns, if there’s any fighting at all, I don’t think there’ll be – you know, man on man sort of battle, it’s just not on. It’ll be more on the sporting field as far as

32:00 superiority is concerned when one nation wants to be boss. That’s my philosophy, anyhow, because wars achieve nothing. This one now, it’ll achieve nothing. Because the Arabs like to fight, and they like dying, you know, as far as I’m concerned – my father said to me, “Never ever trust an Arab, son, turn your back and he’ll pinch your wallet.” So that’s

32:30 one of the things I seem to remember and the world’s different, the Americans didn’t learn their lesson in Vietnam and this one’s going to be just as bloody tough.

All right, well we might finish up there, we’ve come to the end of the day, but thank you very much, you did a terrific job.

Right.

INTERVIEW ENDS