Australians at War Film Archive

Bruce Wilsher - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Thank you very much for being involved in the archive project. The first thing I want you to do if you can is just give a very brief five or ten minute summary of your life?**

All right. I'll try and get it in five or ten minutes. I was born on the 13th of December, 1928 in Vesty Street Rockdale in New South Wales of course.

01:00 We had a very large family and it seemed every time Mum had another baby we moved again. They were all rented houses. I'm sure they were paying rent. We finally moved to Conomarra Street in Bexley when I was about five and that's where I grew up. My thing was that as I grew up there was the Depression

01:30 on and there was very little money. It was pretty tough times. In those days the grown up men, to collect their dole, if they were brothers they couldn't collect it in the same spot. So they moved my brothers everywhere all around the state. I missed them of course. When the war started I had been to

02:00 school first and when I was about 12 or 13 the boys were all away at war. Mum was short of money so I got a job on the dairy cart. I used to wake up at 2 a.m. and get going. In those days we lived at Bexley as I said and I used to ride a horse. I would ride the horse to the dairy in the morning, at Hurstville. And then

02:30 one of the dairy farmers, they were two brothers, would take me to their home and give me breakfast and I would have a little lie down. Then I could ride my horse to school. There were lots of us that rode horses to the school. Anyway, as I grew older, and got more of a larrikin I suppose, we used to have pigeons in the yard and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and

03:00 all sorts of things. By the time I went to my school – my infants' school was at Kogarah and my high school was at Kogarah. So I got past my primary and went to Hurstville High School. I stayed there

03:30 for the usual thing but I got very fidgety and one of my brothers was killed in the war. Anyway, I got fidgety and I was at home. And when I was about 14 or 15 I joined – the Americans had what they called war shipping and they had American small boats. The American

04:00 war shipping was to do with the chartered, privately owned, ships to use in the war. When the war ended they were to go back to America. So when it came to the end of the German war they started moving them and I couldn't get one out of Sydney. So me and my mate went on the train across to Perth, to Fremantle. There was a ship there

04:30 that was going back and we joined that. They didn't want us as crew any more but the sailors on board said, "Well come over for the trip anyway." So we were virtually stowaways I suppose. We went to America and I turned 16 in America. My friend got involved with a girl and her father didn't like the idea and he dobbed him in to the immigration and of course he dobbed

05:00 me in. We ended up at Ellis Island where we were for something like eight months. At the time the United Nations started up and an Australian, Dr Evatt, was made the first president. I wrote to home to my Dad because I knew he knew Dr Evatt's secretary who lived near us, Mr Dalziel.

05:30 He got us released sort of and escorted to San Francisco and we were put on the SS Monterey and brought home to Australia. That was my first adventure, I suppose. Then I wanted to go into the army. The boys were coming home and it was 1947. I joined the infantry and I stayed in it for no more than 12 months. I met a

06:00 girl and I got married but it didn't work out. Anyway, when the Korean War started I wasn't getting on with my wife so I recruited into the first Korean force. We were taken out to Ingleburn army camp and were trained and got ready.

06:30 I had an accident. I was what you call a Bren gun carrier, which carried the Vickers guns around. I had an accident and was put in hospital and my other mates all went. I was in hospital for about six weeks and I got out and I went after them and met up with them. They had gone to Korea and I had to do a couple of weeks in Japan and then I went over and met them in Korea.

07:00 It was cold and it was a very different place. We were there and we were moved through – it wasn't in my time but in my time we advanced and retreated through Seoul. I think they did it twice more during the war. The North Koreans were coming in at first. They got us but then we got back but then the Chinese came in and pushed us right back again.

07:30 **I might talk in detail about your war time experience there, but if you could just tell me how long you were serving in Korea for and briefly what you did when you came home?**

When I was in Korea I got frostbite at the end of the winter. I was there for only 240 days or something like that, two hundred and something days. I got frost bite and it was pretty terrible. We had been in the

08:00 same position. Australians went over in just Australian uniform like ordinary boots, leather boots, and it was 28 below zero. Before that when it came to Christmas in 1950. And it was at

08:30 New Year's Day in 1951, which was probably the biggest action day I had in the war. And the army typically makes mistakes and all the vehicles over there were frozen. We had to keep the motors running 24 hours a day even though we had anti freeze in our radiators. We used to keep them running because it was that cold.

Could I just interrupt you there because we will go back and

09:00 **talk about that in quite a lot of detail your experiences there. What I would like you to do now is just say very briefly what you did after the war because we're going to go back and talk about that in detail?**

I got frostbite and I was sent back to Japan. There's a story in that but anyway. I went back to Japan and I was in hospital for six or eight weeks. Then I was talked in to going onto

09:30 staff there. I was supposed to go home and get a medical discharge but they talked me into staying. I remained in Japan for two and a half years I think all together. I came home and I was in the army for about another year or so and then I got discharged. That would be about my war experience I suppose. There is a lot of

10:00 detail in it that I'll tell you later. Then of course I had this wife and we had two little girls and unfortunately she proved herself and she left me with the two girls. I had built a house at Fairfield, it was the quickest place I could get a house built with a war service loan. I had the house built and

10:30 she never ever came there. She just dropped the kids off and ran. I brought the girls up for a couple of years. Then she got a court order for custody of the children and took them off me. So in that time I had met another girl who became my second wife. I had five

11:00 children with her, Evelyn. While I was in Japan one of the things that the army did right was they talked all the troops into learning something about the Japanese people, their trades and their industries. As I grew up near the Cooks River and when I was a kid we used to get prawns all the time, I selected prawn farming. That was

11:30 later on to be the rest of my life. When I got back to Fairfield I started enquiring into prawn breeding and mass methods. And I went to the fisheries in Sydney and there was a Dr Racik there.

12:00 He was a Dutchman, he was born Dutch anyway, and he worked in Java which was Dutch Indonesia. He said, "Yes, you can do this. I think you can do this." So we dug out some ponds. I had relations fortunately that had some oyster leases in Georges River. You could do it in those days but you couldn't do it now. We cut down the

12:30 mangrove trees and dug a big dam. I had permission to go to Swansea, which is normally a closed lake, where I caught my large prawns. I brought them back there and released them into the ponds and they actually bred – surprise, surprise – they shouldn't have but they did. That started that off. While I was there I had to get money. I started taking the oysters off the

13:00 mangrove trees and opening them and bottling them and I started selling them around the pubs in a basket. While I was doing that one of the hotels was in Beverly Hills and it was owned by a Mr Harry Shaw. He was interested in what I was doing and he said, "I'm going to sell the pub and I'm going to Japan to have a look."

13:30 When he came back he told me, he said, "We can't carry the prawns, they are too specific. They are grown for restaurants and delivered to restaurants and what they call tempura houses and it's too much for us to take at this stage." "But," he said, "They grow oysters different to you." So we formed a partnership and put five hundred pounds in each I think.

14:00 I flew to Japan and it was my first trip back and I was very impressed. It wasn't to do with the method of

growing, it was the oyster.

So oyster farming was what you ended up doing?

Yes, oyster farming, that's right.

I might just have to take you back to your childhood now and talk to you about that if we could. Growing up, can you just tell me a little bit about your mother's and father's background?

14:30 Yes. Mum, as she was white, was born in a tent at Cobar. Her father was what they called a scratch miner. He was looking for tin and other metals like that and particularly copper if they could get it. Cobar of course had a lot of copper and Cobar is actually Aboriginal for copper. It's their word for copper but it comes out Cobar. She was born

15:00 there and she ended up as a secretary to a Canon Hammond. He was a church man. My father met her and they got married and lived in the city for a long time. Then they had a heap of kids. They first had a

15:30 son and then they had a daughter but the daughter – had kidney trouble. She would have survived today but not then. I never met her, she died. Then they wanted another daughter so they had another son and another son and another son and another son and I finally was the last boy. The next one was a girl. They made it.

16:00 It was a happy family. We were very religious but it was very happy, our family. As I was saying I mostly can remember growing up in Conamarra Street. We had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and vegetable gardens and we were well fed and looked after. I just grew up and my brothers went

16:30 away and my eldest brother came back. He got with the PMG [Post Master General's Department]. My brother Frank had a wireless shop at Arncliffe so he was exempt. My brother Jack, the next one, he was a welder by trade. He got into the army but they kicked him out and made him work on minesweepers and mine layers, but he was a welder and an engineer. Then there was my

17:00 brother, Fred. He went in and was wounded. He was machine gunned very badly in New Guinea and was shipped home a couple of years before the war ended or a year before the war ended. My brother George was a pilot and his plane came down and he was killed. My brother Harry was in the air force. He was the next brother to me.

17:30 Harry is now well and lives out near Bowral in Mittagong. Then after me came my sister, Joy. I always say to my brother, "They always wanted a girl." I don't know. Where do I go from there?

What did your

18:00 **father do for a living?**

Dad always worked for the PMG all his life. After he got married he went to PMG and he was a superintendent at the parcels office at Central. He was a pretty good man. He didn't have any designs for a business or anything like that. He just had his family and his church and he was happy with that. We all sang in the church

18:30 choir in St John's at Rockdale, the whole lot of us. We grew up fairly well. I went through the other bit before.

What impact did the Depression have on your family?

Very bad. It was very bad. The parting of the brothers was bad but they all had fun. They went to the bush and we had relatives in the

19:00 bush and they got jobs around the farms doing things and breaking in horses and lots of things young men like to do. We all came through it all right but it was only because Mum was a good cook and Pop had a job. As I say, it was the splitting up which made it very hard.

19:30 **Could you just explain what that rule was that meant that the brothers couldn't stay together?**

The government at the time was frightened of what had happened in other countries of mob rule. You know, mobs getting out of hand and getting together and causing trouble during the Depression. It never happened. It's not in Australia's nature. I think as far as they were concerned that was the

20:00 main reason.

Could you explain that law again and what that meant?

It meant that brothers could not collect their dole each two weeks in the same location. We lived at Bexley and Rockdale was the nearest office where they could collect their dole there. One could collect it there and one had to collect it about twenty miles away. I'm not sure how many miles but it was a long mileage

20:30 away. It meant that they all scattered all over the place. One went south and one went north and a

couple went west. It was a bad ruling that. Of course the war came on and everything immediately changed and them all being young and healthy they wanted to get into the forces. And Fred got in just before the

21:00 war. He joined when he was about 17 in about 1936 or 1937. It was about that era when there was trouble in Europe brewing and he joined the Light Horse. We were all horse men really, in one way or another. Fred went by ship, a team of them, and they were

21:30 dropped off at different places. He stayed a lot of time in New Caledonia. Their job was to round up any, not Japanese as much then but Vichy French, who were causing trouble in Europe against our side anyway. There was Germans and then there were a lot of Germans and Italians in the islands. They caught a lot of them with morse

22:00 code buttons and things. Then they started on the Japanese when Pearl Harbor started. They rounded up a lot of them and they'd bring them back to Sydney and eventually they went to Cowra. Of course the brothers again were away for a while. Some had come back.

22:30 **What are your memories of being a boy during the Second World War? What do you remember about the impact it had on your everyday life?**

It wasn't an impact really because there was food rationing here but it wasn't harsh. We had our gardens with WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s up the back and once a month Mum would say, "Lop the head off that one and we'll have that for lunch." It was

23:00 a larrikin sort of an area. With all the big brothers and the fathers away the kids were running a bit wild. They still do I suppose. You were pretty much a burden on your mother and, you know, I can remember a bit of hardship but it wasn't too bad for us or for me personally. What I did was

23:30 Mum was doing it tough and, as I said, the old baker's cart, I'd worked on it for a bit, and then the dairy farmer said to me, "Come and join us." And that's how that started and that got me work and I've been a pretty hard worker all my life. The effect as I said was there was a lot of truancy in the schools

24:00 because of that I'd say. That's probably the main effect. There was a lot of sadness when my brother was killed of course. The other one was in bad trouble. He was wounded badly and we lost touch with him for a while, Fred. At home we had my brother Alan. Alan was a very small man. He was the first son

24:30 born. I don't think that he made the grade in health to get in. He later on died with multiplesclerosis in his life so there was probably something there. He didn't get in the army and we had him at home. He took on a wireless operator's job at AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] but then he joined the post office with my father. We had him there and he was

25:00 there all the time so we had a bit of a change for Mum and Pop.

With so many brothers away at the war?

That was bad. And of course they were all writing home telling us their troubles. The war, I think we got out of it all

25:30 right I suppose but it was pretty tough for others. The kids were telling me it was pretty tough. A lot of them had their fathers away. My father was lucky I suppose because he was protected, but his age by then may have got him out anyway. He didn't go. I was pretty fortunate in that way.

26:00 **What did you learn about what was happening overseas through the letters home that you received?**

They were badly censored of course but we learned a lot. I'll say this about my Dad, we had big maps on the wall and he'd mark where we were and what was happening in Europe mostly at first, and then in Japan when we were being pushed back, the Allies. Then of

26:30 course they bombed Darwin and everybody was worried. We had relatives up in Brisbane and they were worried about them. I think the lowest place was Townsville that got bombed. That was as far as the Japs got. They were all home matters. You'd have relatives around and they were concerned. Of course I can remember very

27:00 well when the submarines came into Sydney Harbour. We were living up high in Bexley and we could see the gun flashes from Middle Head trying to get at the mother ship that had dropped the subs [submarines] off. There were huge things going on in Sydney Harbour of course. As a young bloke it was exciting you know but not so good.

27:30 I had pigeons. I used to raise pigeons and enjoy myself that way. I had my horse to ride and in those days I used to ride from Bexley to the sandhills at Cronulla. You could get to places and do things. You'd have horses and carts delivering all your milk and bread and anything else that had to be delivered. It wasn't

28:00 a raging world like it is today with cars everywhere and that sort of thing.

You mentioned that you worked on the milk cart?

I did. What I did was, Mum was after money and it was pretty tough. I was offered the job by the milkman. He was our milkman. He had this dairy up in Forest Road,

28:30 Hurstville. And he said, “Do you want to work for me or a morning?” And I said yes I would. So, as I said, Mum would get me up at about two and at half past two I’d get on my horse and ride to the dairy. It was a big dairy. There are all shops there now but it was a big dairy. He had his own bull and cows and milk there. The milk carts used to have two twenty-five

29:00 gallon tanks either side of the cart. And they had measures. The idea was when you got loaded up and you got started on the run the milkman would be driving the horse. And he might say, “Take over and drive around the block and do this and do that.” And the poor people would put a billy out the front and you had a quart measure and a pint measure. And you had

29:30 about one gallon of milk. And you’d go along and the ladies who were regulars would take a pint every day. Others would leave a note, “Two pints today and a jar of cream,” or whatever it was. That was the milk run. It was pretty good and it kept you fit. It was bringing in a couple of pounds a week. That’s about all but it was and it was good

30:00 good money. I think Dad was only earning five pounds a week so it was a good help. I learned a lot up there with the horses and how to handle them better and feed them well. I would drive to the dairy and kick the cow out and put my horse in and feed him. I was lucky that way. That went on for a couple of years.

30:30 Then I had grown up a bit and I was a bit of a larrikin and I wanted to do something. And that’s when me and a couple of mates – one stayed with me and we joined the war shipping. Shall we go onto that now?

Could you explain what the war shipping system was then?

The system was that the Americans

31:00 chartered out privately owned ships to use in the navies in Europe and in the Pacific. When the war was over they were to go back. War shipping had to get them back as it went on. They recruited a lot of Australians and we were to help them crew the ship to take it back to America. We waited in Sydney. We were getting about

31:30 four pounds a week I think. We waited in Sydney but we couldn’t get a ship. We were getting restless and they said that we’d probably get one if we went to Fremantle. So we got on the train and we went to Fremantle. The German war had ended. When we were going through Adelaide the Japanese folded up and that made everything a lot easier going. When we got to Fremantle

32:00 this other bloke with me was born there and he had relatives there and we had a bit of fun and that. We were 15 or 16. We found a ship and were talking to some American sailors to find out what we could. They said, “There’s a ship, the USS Clyde.” We’d say, “Clyde,” but they called it, “Clyde.”

32:30 It was to go back to the state of New York. So we said, “We’d like to go on it.” We went to the war shipping but they said, “We don’t need you now. The war is over and we’ve got plenty of sailors.” The young sailors that we met said, “Come on anyway and enjoy yourselves. We’ll look after you,” So they gave us a uniform and we went aboard. We sailed on the Clyde

33:00 up through Australia. And the crew, the skipper, took them and showed them Pitcairn Island and told them the history and printed it in their paper. When they printed their paper, the crew that was aboard doing certain duties, they’d give the number of the crew and they’d say on the bottom, “And two stowaways, Australians.” They knew we were there.

33:30 We were looked after very well. They had a big mock battle. It would be the last one that they’d have between themselves. That was good. Then we came through the Panama Canal and we got to the American end, which was Panama City, and a couple of the crew took us ashore there and showed us around. I think my

34:00 mate had turned 16 and I was about to turn 16. Anyway, we went ashore and enjoyed ourselves and when we got through there and into the sea, which might have been the Caribbean, into that sea there, we got to Norfolk, Virginia. And it’s a big bay. It’s a huge area. And the part we went to is called Newport News. The sailors said, “We reckon this is where you should get off because

34:30 they’ll be hell playing when we get to… There’ll be too much noise and movement.” We virtually jumped ship there and we hitchhiked. We wanted to go to New York of course and we hitchhiked to New York and that was a very exciting time. We ended up and as I said my mate got himself involved with a woman and his father didn’t

35:00 like it so he dobbed him in. The Immigration Department came and took him to Ellis Island and he told them where I was. There used to be this Anzac Club in New York in 56th Street. I spent a lot of time there and got a bit of a job. That’s where they found me and they took me out. I’m sure the

35:30 two fellows would have let me go if I'd have wanted to go but I didn't – I wanted to come home. So we were put in Ellis Island, which was just Immigration like we've got here, I suppose. It wasn't very good and I wasn't very happy. We stayed there for just about eight months. The United Nations was formed and lucky for us Dr Evatt was made the first president.

36:00 His secretary, Mr Dalziel, my father knew. He lived in our suburb. I wrote to him and asked him would he see him. So he went and saw him and Dalziel had us more or less released.

What other kinds of people were at Ellis Island at this time?

Real bad eggs. I remember the worst one was a criminal called Lucky Luciano.

36:30 He was one of the biggest crooks in America and they'd sent him back to Italy. They had a lot of battles because he was pretty rich and had lawyers and was fighting them. Eventually they got rid of him. There were German fellows that they picked up and from Guatemala and things like that and countries like that. They had brought them in and there were some

37:00 important people. We were in what they called Room 222 and you didn't necessarily sleep in there, some did. But you spent your whole day in that one room and you didn't go anywhere else. It was very cold. We were in there during the winter. My mate and I being young, they put us into a

37:30 cabin sort of thing in a room on our own and that was pretty good. Then Dalziel came to our rescue and we came back by Pullman train across the States, which was very eye-opening. We had a bit of freedom they didn't worry us very much. The guard that was with us didn't worry. We got to Frisco [San Francisco] and

38:00 the ship there was the steamship Monterey. We were put aboard it and we went home via Hawaii and Auckland, New Zealand. It was carrying fiancées of American servicemen. No, it was carrying the males with fiancées in Australia and New Zealand. They were putting them off and putting the brides on or

38:30 whatever and that was mostly the trip. They had paying passengers just like cruisers. It was a very good trip. Shall I go on?

I might just ask you what the atmosphere was like in Australia. When you were crossing the Nullarbor across to Fremantle you mentioned the Pacific War ended. What is your memory of that day?

39:00 It was a very good memory because the train we were on had a company of just over 100 men from the 6th Division who were going back to Perth. That livened it up because they knew the war was over and they'd be right. The desert was lonely. There were no facilities out there then. There were a lot of Aboriginals running around.

39:30 They pulled up I think there it was at Cook. They pulled up at a couple of stations because they had to refuel and put water in the steam engine and feed us. It was just bully beef or something or just a stew. It was wonderful. The people were wonderful. There weren't many out there but we went into Kalgoorlie and they were good people, very happy people.

40:00 **Do you have a memory of how you heard that the war was over?**

Yes it was in Adelaide. The word got around pretty fast. We got into the parades and the joy. They were going up the main streets of Adelaide and everybody was whooping it up. We were in the merchant navy

40:30 and in American uniforms. I remember on the train they'd put so many of us and two Yanks, which wasn't true of course. Anyway, the people were happy and Adelaide was very happy. Everybody was because it was over and finished.

41:00 When we got to Perth and Fremantle it was still the same but in Perth they had a lot of American navy. Fremantle had the biggest submarine base in the world. There were a lot of submarines and a lot of Americans. It was a very happy place and we stayed there for a couple of weeks before the ship sailed.

41:30 **We might change the tape there I think.**

Tape 2

00:36 **Mr Wilsher, I just want to ask you some more questions about your childhood and your family and your upbringing, especially during World War II. What do you remember about blackouts and air raids, etc., during the war?**

Yes we had what we called brownouts I think, but they were blackouts. We had those and we had wardens. One of my brothers was a warden who they didn't accept in the army.

01:00 My brother Frank was a wireless operator anyway so they wanted him here. He was an air raid warden at Arncliffe. He used to get me to go down there with him and go around shouting out and looking for

cracks of light. Mostly it was just a joke – we didn't think they'd ever come here. Anyway, they did. Being a young kid it was more a

01:30 fun thing than a worry thing. I can remember it well and your headlights in the cars had to have a special screen put over them with just little cracks of light going down and that sort of thing. And at the dance halls there were big heavy curtains coming behind you and all that and the windows of course were all blacked out. It was pretty frightening if

02:00 you ran down the street or anything because there was no light. There was nothing. With Frank being an air raid warden it was a bit of fun for us. He was married and had his daughter down there near where he operated from at Arncliffe.

What sort of preparations did you make for

02:30 **air raids? What practising did you do?**

The boys dug an air-raid shelter in our backyard actually. Pop took it seriously. They built it and stocked that up a bit. We were more worried about a bomb hitting the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s than we were of it getting us. We had a lot of fun in that hole too after the thing was all over.

03:00 A lot of people built air raid shelters. We could have fitted about 20 into ours. It was a pretty big shelter.

What did it look like? Can you describe it to me?

It was a fairly long – it was about 12 feet and then you had to gradually dig down. We walked down the

03:30 steps and it was just wood for the steps. All we had in there was some battery lights. We didn't have any electricity in there. And there were benches and that was all. There was a bit of food and water and that. Luckily we never had to use it.

How seriously do you think at the time

04:00 **people took the threat of a Japanese invasion?**

I don't know that they took it – the elderly did but the kids just laughed at it. I don't think we really thought that they'd make it because they had too much to do up north, you know. But then they started to push through New Guinea and the Yanks lost a few battles up that way. And they

04:30 brought they boys back, the 6th Division, back from Europe and Egypt and those places, well if they got into New Guinea we thought we had a bit of a chance. It was real war. You didn't have television in those days and you just had to follow the papers or the radio and they weren't telling you a lot anyway.

05:00 **Can you remember when you were a boy during the war what you thought about the Japanese and what you thought about Japanese culture?**

You didn't. You really didn't. I don't think I did even when my brother died. I did when my brother was wounded badly and he was writing to Dad some pretty nasty things about them and

05:30 Mum was telling us and reading out the letters. I've never had any dislike for the Japanese. I spent a couple of years there, about two and a half years, and I've been back three or four times since. No, I didn't mind at all. I never thought about it. It's funny, but I think the European war was given more attention than our own war.

06:00 It seemed to go on longer and was worse with Hitler and his habits.

You said that your family was religious. Can you tell me about your family and their religious practices?

Yes, well Mum was of course being secretary to Canon Hammond who was pretty high up in the Church of England

06:30 and my father was always religious. I think he got more so as he got older. We used to have to go to Sunday School and when we became confirmed at the age of about 12 we went to church and had our first communion. We all sang in the choir. We all sang in the choir, the lot

07:00 of us, some better than others. We enjoyed it. It was good. The church used to organise paper chases and little things to keep kids occupied and picnics. It was pretty good.

What was your local priest like?

Not much good. I didn't like him. His son-in-

07:30 law was much better when he came. We had a Reverend Knox and all the people liked him, but he was a very religious man and he was very hard on kids. He had a daughter of his own who married a minister and became a canon, which is pretty high up in the church. He was a nice bloke. He was at the Seamen's Mission at first at Circular Quay.

08:00 He came out and he was a good teacher. He could convince you. Sunday School was interesting. All the

young blokes were – young I mean you weren't enlistable age, you were under 18 and all that – and they'd make it more relaxing.

Was there much talk about the war at church and at Sunday School?

No not really. There were

08:30 always prayers for them. That was one of the first prayers but not really, no.

Did the priest visit your house, your home?

Yes he did. Mum got on pretty good with him. Mum was in charge of some missionary society in our area and he had all the women knitting for the troops and all that sort of thing and sending Red Cross parcels. He would come up fairly

09:00 regularly, yes. I didn't seem to – as I grew older and I went away for a while I wanted to go to get a regular job and I asked him for a reference. He said, "You haven't been to church for 12 months so I won't give you one." That is how hard he was. He'd known me all my life.

09:30 He was a pretty hard man.

What sort of support did they offer your parents given that their sons were away at the war?

A lot. They were good particularly when my brother George was killed. George was training at Point Cook on the new bomber, a British bomber. It was a Beaufighter or something like that. He was flying solo at night and something went wrong and he

10:00 crashed it into a paddock out at Point Cook. There was one tree stump in it and of course he had to hit it and it broke his neck. They were very good. Mum and Dad went down there by train and they looked after him and they buried him at a war cemetery out of Melbourne. I've been there but I can't remember the name of the

10:30 place now. They were very good and very supportive.

What do you remember about receiving the news about your brother?

It was terrible because there was only me and my sister left at home and my oldest brother Alan was around. He looked after the camp. It was very lonely and very terrible. It was very sentimental and terrible.

11:00 He was a good bloke, George, and he was an educated man. He was Captain of Kogarah High School. He was a good athlete. They say, "The good die young," and that's it.

Because you were a boy when the war started, what

11:30 **sense did you have of the danger that your brothers were in?**

Everybody being Australian they would joke and laugh about everything but there were times when you used to worry. Mum used to worry. I can't say much more on that.

12:00 **What thoughts did you have at that time about joining the army?**

I'd have loved to but I was too young. I would have loved too. I joined the Air League. And they used to have an Air League of young kids that hopefully would join the air force. It was probably like the Boy Scouts in a way. We had our little band and I used to play the drums or something in it. And it educated

12:30 us a lot on planes and identifying them and being able to identify any planes that came over. We had books and sheets. Out of bamboo we built planes and out of cane or balsa I think it was. No, it was interesting. We were all right and we had a lot of fun. And of course I had my horse. I always had a

13:00 horse.

Where would you go when you were participating in the Air League?

Mostly it was done in schools. We were paraded in the yard and you had to beat the drum and do whatever you had to do or blow a whistle. It was mostly in school yards that we did it. We didn't actually do any – we did go away for a

13:30 camp once I think. We didn't actually move far out from our homes. That was the sort of deal. I think they used us mainly because they thought if foreign aircraft or anything came over we had to know the planes and all that sort of business.

Did you ever do any actual plane spotting?

I wouldn't know now. We didn't see any. There weren't many

14:00 planes then. I think in those days Smithy and them used to still land on the beaches. There was hardly an airport or anything and we didn't see planes. I think it might have been for my 11th birthday there

was a five-seater birthday that used to go to Bega down the South Coast. Mum had relatives on a farm down there, dairy farmers. And they shouted me a

14:30 trip and that was exciting of course being this young boy. I was down there with the cows and he had a few daughters who were big bullies but they were all right. I enjoyed that. I was probably, other than my brother George, the first one to fly in the family.

What was that first experience like going on a

15:00 **plane?**

It was frightening. It was only a single engine and noisy as hell I can remember that. It landed on a couple of paddocks that were not far out of towns. It was still war time and they had to be careful in doing what they were doing. I think we flew down to – I think we went via

15:30 Nowra and then down to Moruya. They picked us up at Moruya to take us to Bega. That was exciting for a boy.

How did you receive news about the war?

Only through papers and the radio and of course we were watching it

16:00 through – because we had a couple of brothers up in the [Pacific] Islands. Fred and Harry were the last two left up there I think. Harry was in the ground crew in the air force, a technician, and he was a Morotai most of the time. Fred of course was in New Guinea for most of us.

How

16:30 **frequently were they able to correspond with the family?**

We used to get a lot of letters. There was a lot of censoring, particularly in brother Fred's. I don't know what he was saying but they cut it out. Letters were pretty frequent and Mum would be anxious and waiting all the time. The postie used to come around in those days and blow his whistle and you'd run out

17:00 to get the mail. That is all we could do. It was just the radio. It's not like the radio today of course; it was very slow.

Can you remember some of the things that your brother said about the Japanese?

Yes. He wasn't very kind to them. He'd seen some good friends of

17:30 his mutilated and he got pretty savage. He wouldn't write anything that would upset Mum. They were pretty cranky on the Japs. The Japs were pretty cruel during the war to our fellows. That's war, isn't it? That's what it's all about.

18:00 I don't know that you could add much to that.

What sort of a school student were you?

Lousy. I wasn't much good. I wasn't very interested in it. I would like to go to carpentry and those sort of things but I didn't like to go to maths and things. I was a pretty lazy kid.

18:30 If my brother George had been there or still alive he was a pretty smart kid and he'd have helped me through. I don't think anybody was very much interested then. Some would go to the Leaving Certificate stage and a few to university, but they were rare. No-one could afford much then. Every mum was glad to see her kid out of school and earning some

19:00 money because they needed it.

Can you remember what the subjects were that interested you? Were there particular topics that interested you at school?

I'd say it would be nature and geography. I wasn't much good at maths. I was good later in life. I must have

19:30 learned a bit. I didn't sit for the Intermediate Certificate, which is like your first exam now. That was the benchmark. You'd do that certificate and then go on to do the Leaving Certificate and then you'd go to university if you passed. That was the deal, but not many kids did. As soon as they turned 17 they'd still be at

20:00 school but they try and join up in one of the forces. You could always get into the navy at 17 and I think with the other forces you'd probably get in all right.

So what did you think about what you wanted to do for a job?

I can't recall very much. I suppose I fiddled about too much. I was just

20:30 enjoying myself. I just rode my horse and raced my pigeons and did the things that kids liked to do. I didn't have anyone to annoy me or worry me or stop me. In fact I think my brother Alan encouraged me. The war did affect everybody. You knew it was going on because somebody in your street, one of them had got

21:00 killed, one of their kids or one of their cousins, which happened to us. We had big families and there were lots of different ones. As a kid it wasn't too bad.

Were there lots of Catholics in your neighbourhood?

Yes there was. There was a couple of good mates. In the next street was the

21:30 Kogarah Marist Brothers' School, in Washington Street. I had good mates there. We used to play football in their yard and cricket. The brothers there were very good. They would encourage us. They didn't care who we were. If we were Protestant it didn't matter and we didn't think about it. You used to hear things about the difference but I never saw anything that was of any

22:00 concern at all. Why did you ask that question?

I guess I am interested in the division between Catholics and Protestants at that time and what people experienced in terms of discrimination for being Catholic?

We just thought it was the other way around. There was a lot of cheek went on and

22:30 actually I'd say that things that we Protestants couldn't understand were things like Fridays when you only ate fish. But when Argentina was going broke the Pope gave them permission to eat meat. We thought, "Well how religious is that?" Those sort of things. It was nothing personal.

23:00 My best friends used to have pigeons also, the Kites, they were a Catholic family on the other side of our street, four or five doors down. I think there were Catholics on one side of us but I don't know. I don't think – adults might have between them but not here. It was a bit. It was there. There were jokes and all that sort of thing of course. But I

23:30 think they were having as much fun as we were.

Where did you keep your pigeons?

My brothers helped me build a big coop up the back. I had a big two-storey coop, pigeon coop, and I had a lot of pigeons. They were a lot of fun. When I say I raced them, I didn't race them professionally much. It was just with different groups of kids from the school mostly.

24:00 I belonged to a club up there. I belonged to Bexley. And my elder brother was in a club at Rockdale I think where he used to race his pigeons from. They built the coop and it was up to me to keep it clean and make sure they had feed and get out and rattle the can when we let them all out to fly. Of course there were a lot of stories even then about

24:30 pigeons in the war carrying messages and things like that to keep you interested.

Can you explain to me how the pigeon racing works?

Yes. You get a false ring. You put your pigeons in a basket and you go to the club and they give you some rings to put on the pigeon. That ring would

25:00 fit in – you had a box, a time box. At home you would put the ring on the pigeon. They would put them in crates and put them on trains or trucks and take them to where the race was to start. The pigeons were released and when they came into your coop you'd drop that ring that they'd given you into your clock. And when it went in it gave the time. Everyone did that and you'd go back to the club house and you'd give them the

25:30 clock and they'd read it and you'd won or you'd lost. It was good. It was a lot of good fun. We had all sorts of funny things happen. Fellows would find a way to dope them and make them go quicker even then with pigeons. I remember a fellow a bit later on in my life. He was a pigeon fancier.

26:00 He was a policeman actually. We were at the trots at Fairfield and he asked one of the trainers, "What do you feed them to make them go quick?" The trainer fortunately didn't admit if he ever did dope his horses. It was a pretty serious business but more for prestige than money. There wasn't much money in it at all.

26:30 Friends at the club might say, "We'll all put a shilling in and the winner takes all," or whatever.

How do you dope a pigeon?

I don't know and I wouldn't tell you if I did. I don't know if you could. You can slow them down of course. You can overfeed them or give them split peas instead of decent feed.

27:00 **So how popular was this pigeon pastime?**

Very popular. Nearly all the kids had pigeons. It was very popular. I never ate any but a lot of them

would eat them. A lot of people would eat them. I never took to that. Mum would never have that. All kids were keen. They would take them to school and let them

27:30 go to go home to give them a bit of distance flying. Amazing things, pigeons, aren't they, how they can fly for hundreds of miles? All sorts of fellows have got theories that they follow train lines but it's not of course because they fly over oceans and bushland. I don't know how. But it was interesting. And we'd swap. If you had a good cock or a good

28:00 hen your mates would come around and have a look and say, "Can I borrow your hen? I'll put my cock across that one and I'll get a good breed out of it." We used to do a lot of that and that kept us interested. It wasn't expensive. Peas and that for pigeons weren't very expensive.

Where did you get the pigeons from?

Originally? I think my brothers had

28:30 them. Where they got them from I don't know. They probably pinched them or something. I honestly don't know. I more or less followed my brothers. I found it good fun.

If we just leap forward to when you came back from the US, what happened when you came back to Australia?

We were met by an

29:00 Immigration Department fellow at Circular Quay or where the ships pull in there. It was about that area. He gave us a bit of a browbeating and made sure that we were all right. We had to have medical checks and all that. We just went home to our families.

29:30 Then, you know, I had a lot of mates and kids that I had grown up with who were all excited and wanted to know about it. It was a big world and it was an exciting trip that very few do. We were doing it illegally of course. We weren't supposed to be doing what we did. We had everybody on side so it didn't

30:00 matter.

What thoughts did you have about travelling more?

Well I probably didn't just then. I got fairly restless though after that when I went on to join the war shipping. That was the sort of thing that had led me into that sort of thinking.

30:30 It's not that I was a really good sailor or anything but planes weren't the thing to move by then, there were just ships. Of course when I went to America I learned a lot from that trip.

So when you ended up in Ellis Island you were working in the war shipping job?

Well no I wasn't really. You

31:00 see we had stowed away actually to be very frank. The navy boys said, "Come aboard and we'll look after you." So we went aboard but they knew we were on it. Everybody knew we were on the ship. No, I wasn't getting any money from anybody then. The Yanks were pretty good to us. They threw a few dollars in each when we went ashore

31:30 so we had money to get going. I had a job which was to do with cleaning fire engines in New York. A bloke from the Anzac Club had got me that. We were just cleaning the engines down and that sort of thing and getting a few bob.

What would you do for fun in New York?

There were girls there.

32:00 I went to a lot of shows. My whole family was musical. Alan was a good pianist and Pop used to play the saxophone or trombone more and Mum the violin. We always had music in the family. When I got into New York I went to all the shows. They had some great musicians. In those days they had the

32:30 Mills Brothers and the Whatsaname Brothers. They had good jazz bands. You can see all my jazz videos. I would spend my time going to those sorts of shows.

What sort of places would you see jazz?

Mostly in movie theatres. They'd have concerts on. We had jazz concerts here in Sydney but they had

33:00 them more so in America. If you know the history of jazz of course it's a racist sort of a thing. But I loved it. I thought it was magic. You'd see all the Negroes and the singers. There were some great artists and trumpeters.

You mentioned the racisms or issues or race associated with

33:30 **jazz. What were your impressions of American society?**

They were down – right through the Korean War they were down on the dark people. On that day, New Year's Day 1951, in Korea we had a bit of a break. It was the first break. The fellows had been there since September. I didn't get over there until late in October.

34:00 They gave us a 10-day break for Christmas and I think we had Christmas and the next week was New Years. We used to fight over there in brigades. Can I go that way first? Korea wasn't very wide – it was only a small country. We'd fight in a brigade and there were three battalions in a

34:30 brigade and three brigades in a regiment and three regiments in a division. On one side of us we had the Argyles and we might have a South Korean battalion on the other side of us. And we'd have to go forward or back in that line if we could keep it.

35:00 But the United Nations never taught us how to speak South Korean so we just didn't know what they were doing. We might have one interpreter among a thousand men. It was confusion all the time. On this particular morning as I said to you before we had to keep the engines running all the time. I was on duty doing my bit on our Bren gun carrier that our

35:30 gunners were carrying and our jeeps for the boss or whatever and the truck. And a jeep came in at about six o'clock in the morning. It was just dawn. It came racing in and it came up to where I was near enough and there was a Negro in it – two Negroes, maybe three. He yelled out for the officer in charge. So I woke him up and he said,

36:00 "What's the problem?" I said, "Apparently they've been cut off and they want us to help them out of trouble." So he ran out and talked to the blokes. We all had to get in it and get going. They were a bit north of us and the thing I'm getting at with the racism is they still weren't allowed to carry rifles, the black people.

36:30 They were a convoy of troops and they never had a rifle between them. They had to get across this bridge and it was pretty high up in Korea. We had to all get up and get ready and get in our vehicles and go. We came to this bridge. We could see the bridge where they had been cut off in their trucks, etcetera, and they had a couple of tanks and that.

37:00 We were told, typical army; they told us that the front was coming from the east. So we got all our machine guns and everything lined up to the east. Then they sent us down to have some lunch and when we went down the Chinese, and Koreans came from the north. Of course we had all our guns and everything up the hill. So that was a bit of a

37:30 mess. It was that day and it was probably the only day I shot a Korean. I know I shot him – or a Chinese, I don't know what he was. That was a pretty rough day. The Negroes were there but they were always driving or something. There were lots of them there but they weren't armed. There might have been some

38:00 sections that were armed but we never saw any armed. That's where that part of it went.

At the time, what did you understand to be the reasons why they weren't armed?

I think the whites were afraid of them. If you go through the jazz records it shows you that. Jazz was strictly Negro music and they were singing about and telling

38:30 about how they'd been downtrodden. The Micks today, I think they carry weapons today but they didn't then. I think that was 1951, '52 and '53 and '54.

Did that seem peculiar to the Australian troops?

Of course! It was mad! It was absolute stupidity, we thought, that they couldn't trust their own fellow soldiers.

39:00 That's how it was in those days I suppose. I think the Yanks have probably got over most of it now.

Where did you live when you were in New York?

A couple of different locations. They were probably second-class hotels. I wasn't getting much money.

39:30 It wasn't all that long before I was caught up with. He gave me up and then the most that I can remember is that I got in New York a fair bit. But mostly I can remember this Ellis Island. Unfortunately you remember the worst.

40:00 **So when you got back to Australia can you explain what you did for work then?**

I think Alan got me a job. Alan was home of course and he was working in the spinning mills near Botany. It was shift work and he got me a job that wasn't paying much. It was pretty near slave labour I thought but I worked

40:30 there for a while until my other brother Harry came home and got out of the air force and he got a job at Gilbarco as a technician. He got me a job there assembling petrol pumps and that sort of thing. All the time I was trying to get to my prawns and what I could do there. Luckily that came about. I told you that, didn't I?

41:00 **We might just stop there.**

Tape 3

00:40 **Mr Wilsher, you were talking about the work that you did when you came back from the States, can you tell me what other jobs you did?**

Mostly I worked in the spinning mill with my brother Alan and then I went with my other brother Harry who guided me into this Gilbarco company making fuel tanks. I was just fitting the wires in and all that sort of stuff.

01:00 From then I got married as I said and it wasn't working out too good. I went and got a job at Ford Motor Company and I worked there for a couple of years and it was quite good. In those days they used to bring in the cars and trucks from England, Ford Trucks, the Thames and the Pilot cars and the Prefect motor cars

01:30 and Anglias and a few others. Anyway, we had to pick them up off the ship, that was my job, and it was a good job. I was only a young bloke but I'd take the car and about six drivers or whatever we could fit in. We had a little bus that took about six or seven drivers.

02:00 We'd go down there and they'd all drive one. The keys were in the cars. They were taken out of the ship and put on the wharf, the wharfies used to do that. Then we had to take fuel and put a gallon on fuel in each one to get us back out to Homebush and these fellows would drive them back. That was strange. In a lot of the cars the wharfies from England must have put stuff in for the wharfies in

02:30 Sydney. And they'd miss some of their stuff. We'd grab some of it and take it back to the company and they'd do what they wanted to do with.

What kind of stuff was it?

It was a lot of material like silks, woven, that sort of stuff mostly. There were no drugs. They'd never head of them in those days I don't think. That's all we found but it was a lot of good material, very good material.

03:00 So they'd take the cars back and then I'd probably take my vehicle home and then go back there in the morning and get another load. We might have to do two or three loads in one day to get all the cars out. I enjoyed that. That was pretty good. By then we'd got up to about 1949 and the Korean War had started and I was

03:30 battling on with my first missus and I wasn't very happy and having been in the army for that little short time before I was eligible to join. I joined on the second day. My number was 2/400079. There were 40 a day going in so I went in on the second day.

The time that you'd been in the army before, was that with the Air

04:00 **League?**

No, I didn't go into that.

Do you want to talk about that?

When I first go back off the ship, the Monterey, we were queried and asked and whatnot and they told us then that we could join the interim army. As things weren't good at home I joined the interim army for two years. All my discharges and that are there, by the

04:30 way. I joined the interim army and trained and that was the only reason I could get into this Korean Special Force. You had to be an ex serviceman because they didn't have time to train you for six months. They wanted us there in weeks so they took anyone who had been in the army and anyone who was still in the army could volunteer. They took us out to Ingleburn and pulled all our

05:00 teeth out and everything else. They filled us with needles and poisons.

What was the role of the interim army? What were you doing?

I think it was just to catch the blokes that they couldn't conscript. It was just a follow on from the army and they had all the gear and the war was over and nobody knew what was going to happen whether it would break out again or what might happen. So they formed this interim army.

05:30 I think it was a three-year show. I was in it for a couple of years. I got out of it. But that was the interim army.

What did you do in the interim army?

Mostly drove every sort of vehicle. I had a licence for a jeep and an ambulance and a fire truck and a

semi trailer and tractor vehicles.

06:00 I finally got posted to Victoria Barracks and I was just driving round the show ponies, all the officers, to wherever they might wish to go. We were camped in Avoca and most of the trucks were in Avoca Road, Randwick, so it wasn't far from Victoria Barracks. I sort of went

06:30 and got out of that and I went and worked for a while with my father-in-law at the time. He was an engineer with the Eta Peanut Butter Factory in Marrickville, which used to make peanut butter. He was a boiler maker and was looking after that and I worked with him for a while in that job. I wasn't very happy and the

07:00 Korean War came up and, as I say, having been in the interim army I was eligible. I went in on the second day to get away. I found out when I was in Japan and pay sergeant that so did every other bloke. Most of them were runaways, a lot of them were. So we went straight into training and back to Ingleburn. As I had been driving

07:30 tractor vehicles I joined the machine gunners. A Vickers machine gun had a crew of four. It carries the gun and all its ammunition and traverses everywhere in this caterpillar tractor – a Bren gun carrier. Unfortunately for me we were doing training and we were nearly

08:00 through with the training and ready to go. Just because of laziness – I won't say it was my part, but it was laziness – in these caterpillar tractors the trouble is with them that the pins break, the pins that holds the tracks together. They've got to be checked. They might get split and they might last for miles and they might last a minute. You've got to take them out – it's a long hard job – take them out and

08:30 replace them. This day we had come from Ingleburn army camp and we were going through Moorebank army camp next to it. We had checked them and somebody had missed a cracked pin and it broke. The carrier went straight into a big ditch. I got thrown back to where there should have been seats and wing nuts on them and there were none. There was just the upright box. And one of them went into the cheek of my bum

09:00 and I ended up at Concord Hospital. And I was in there for several weeks. And in that time my mates went. I came home and they moved me pretty quickly, which was good. I was soon over there and I did catch up to them. We had to do two weeks acclimatising, I suppose you'd call it, in Japan before we went over to Korea. I did that and then they whizzed

09:30 me straight over and I caught up with my mob.

I might just ask you – you mentioned that you had worked unloading the cars on the wharves. What was the climate like, politically, on the wharves at that time?

I don't think there were any politics really. I don't think it was that. The

10:00 communists were there. Of course a lot of the wharfies were communists and they used to get you to read their Tribune. That was the paper they sold for a shilling and would give you for nothing. There were a lot of communists but they never worried me. That was to come later, the communist bit. Otherwise there was nothing much.

What did you

10:30 **know about communism at that time?**

Only what my Catholic mates had told me. They were down on it of course and they were probably pretty right because of what they did to the Jews in Russia and all that sort of thing. They'd all be Catholic or Orthodox but I think that's what made them more against communism than anything. We all eventually were of

11:00 course and probably still are. It doesn't work. It's obvious it doesn't work. No, I didn't worry about politics on the wharves.

When you joined up for Korea, what did you know about what the war was about?

Very little. My brothers had told me because they'd been in the real

11:30 war, "It's only a toy game. It's only MacArthur, General MacArthur playing." He wanted – he'd took the Philippines and they made him the general in charge of it and nearly ruined it. He wanted the Yanks to try to go right through to China, "Let's do China while we're here," you know, that sort of caper. They'd give us a really good hiding then. America took him back.

12:00 I'd heard a little bit about it but it hadn't been going long sort of thing. I think Australia was only going to send a few over anyway and ex soldiers weren't particularly interested in it.

Was there much talk at home in the press or among people about what Korea was about?

No,

12:30 not really. I don't think they told us much what Vietnam was about really except that it was communists

again. It was the Yanks that were fearful of them and maybe they were right. I don't know. It was definitely a Yankee war. It was the United Nations, but it was the Americans that were pushing it, I'm sure of it. As my brothers said, "It was

13:00 a pitiful war." I think Australia lost – we might have had a total of about seven or eight thousand altogether in there and we lost 300 and something which is a pretty high percentage if you put it against other wars and numbers of men and all that. They died just as hard as any soldier anywhere. I think some of them were rapt up and

13:30 fair dinkum and had that anti communist thing about them and would have fought a little bit harder. It was definitely a Yankee war.

Once you went to Ingleburn, can you just explain what kind of training you did there?

Before I went to Korea? Well this machine gun, I didn't know anything about these Vickers machine

14:00 guns. They taught us and it was a four-man crew. One would be firing and Number 2 would be feeding long boxes of ammunition through into it. Number 3 would be looking after the water because it had water-cooled big barrels. They were water cooled and he'd have to look after the water. When he would run down a bit, Number 4 would have to run and get more water or more

14:30 ammunition and bring it up. That was the sort of layout. It was a very good gun. It was a very good gun. We learned to fire it and learned how far it could fire accurately and it was a long way, miles. It was a great gun. That is what I learned there. I did more driving work but

15:00 we were all trained at it. The four on the gun all had to be able to drive in case one of them got hit or anything but Number 1 was generally the driver. Then you'd swap around just to give you a feel of everything. We had to learn again on different vehicles and of course we were taught a lot about what we were going to meet, like the

15:30 cold conditions and the snow, which we'd never driven on. They didn't take us to Kosciusko and we didn't have any snow to train on, but we used to do big bivouacs out to Singleton and we'd go a long way. We would load our vehicles onto trains at Liverpool and they'd take them all the way up through to Singleton and the troops would join

16:00 them and train there. They'd be very good training conditions.

You mentioned earlier that you joined up partly because your marriage was in trouble and you mentioned that other men were also runaways. What were some of the reasons that you discovered for people joining up for Korea?

After I'd come back from Korea I ended

16:30 up a pay sergeant for a couple of years. I had to look at all their pay books and soldiers would be paid every fortnight. They had in there who they were sending money to. They might send some to the bank or some to their mothers or some to their wives, but their wives had to get a proportion. You'd

17:00 hear, "Bloody bitch," you know. They'd all tell – when you read their records and that a lot of them were for the same reason. They had an opportunity. They had come home from the big war and got married quick and it didn't work out and they thought, you know, "The life in the army is pretty good and I'll get away from her," and away they'd go. That was a lot of soldiers

17:30 and officers I think.

You mentioned too that your brothers spoke to you about what to expect. What did you learn from them before you left for Korea, what did they say to you about war?

I'd say they spoke about it a bit but not along those

18:00 lines. I was going to a different war in different conditions and they were in different parts of the war and they were all different in the way you had to fight it and what you did and particularly I think who you were fighting. It didn't take long for the Australian blokes to get to hate the Japs because of some of the tricks they came up with. I don't think the Australian blokes in Korea ever hated the North Koreans. The

18:30 Chinese, they feared them because when they'd attack, if you said they weren't feared, you were a liar. They would come in the middle of the night. We all got into formation along the hills and with snow and ice you'd have to dig in and sleep in the hole you dug.

19:00 We'd put tripwires down. The wires was probably 100 yards away in front of our line. We had this wire across and a hand grenade so that they were going to trip on them and the hand grenade will go off and we know they are there and we all get up. There were a couple of guards walking along the front line all the time watching for the snow to be knocked off bushes and that sort of thing. You would know that there was a movement down there. They got over the

19:30 tripwire and the next thing we'd know they'd come at you with whistles and ra-ra things and horns and all the noise in the world. They would run up ringing bells and they'd frighten the hell out of you. They'd

be on top of you before you knew it. They were wrestling and stabbing and it was a hell of a mess. They were different again. I don't think it happened in any other war

20:00 that I know of. They did frighten you. They had that knack. When we got pushed back the first time out of Seoul we were up in the hills. What they'd do is the first blokes that would go in generally were the signals. In those days there were no walkie-talkies. There were walkie-talkies, but they weren't much good. They had to run wires up

20:30 trees and things and make little posts where you could hook up with the phone sort of thing. Then the next fellows in that would come in, in the daylight, were the range finders. And we being with the Vickers gun for us they'd punch into a bit of wood about two inches square with a luminous arrow in

21:00 it and an indication of the distance of where they were watching the troops in the daylight. So we could come in and the CO [Commanding Officer], the officer in charge, would work out the ranges and things. And we'd fix our guns at that range because all the instruments in the Vickers were illuminated towards you. You could fix the range and the

21:30 distances where you wanted to fire. And you could bet in the morning when you pulled the trigger it would hit where you wanted it to hit. It was very accurate. We were in this position and that was daylight. We were firing on them and we thought we'd beaten them but they snuck up around us somehow and got up in among us. Of course we they were shooting blokes in jeeps so we had to retreat. And that was just out of the top of Seoul.

22:00 That was a bugger of a day. Their tactics were their tactics I suppose. We always thought that we were pretty fair but maybe we weren't. We used to have a fellow who was a Chinese. I think it was a Chinese or North Korean. Big Check Charlie we used to call him.

22:30 He'd fly over and check us out and we knew he was spotting us out but no-one would ever shoot him down or shoot at him. We used to call him Big Check Charlie. He'd come over about five o'clock every evening and check your lines and where you were. We only had rifles so we probably couldn't shoot him or reach him anyway. He could see us. We would wave to him.

23:00 Then of course he would pass on all the details of where we were. So in the dark the Chinese would just come up easily. I suppose they were Chinese and North Koreans probably.

Can I just ask you about leaving for Korea and when you

23:30 **first arrived in Japan. Can you just explain that trip over and where you landed?**

I went to Mascot from the airport and then we got aboard – it wasn't a jet aircraft, it was a four cylinder big plane. We were

24:00 flown to Darwin first and refuelled and then we went to Manila. We went to Manila first I think then Hong Kong and then Japan. And we landed at Iwakuni, which was the Australian air force base. All our planes were there. And we'd come by water. We'd get on

24:30 ferries or launches and come back from Iwakuni to Kiri, which was the Australian's headquarters. When the war ended, America and Australia – the Poms were occupying Germany and doing all their bit up there – the occupation was taken on mostly by the Australians and the Americans and there were a few Kiwis around the

25:00 place. There were no Canadians or any of them. The Yanks and us decided that the Yanks would take over the northern part of Japan and we'd take the lower part of Japan. There were many more up north of course. So we came from about 40 miles south I think of Tokyo right down to the end of Kyushu and then

25:30 the bottom island. Anyway it was the bottom island and we looked after that section. So we were pretty organised and our air force was right. They ended up with jets in Korea but they started off with all propeller-driven planes. Anyway, we'd land there and then we'd get into launches

26:00 and go back to Kiri and then to Hiro, which was by bus or truck or whatever. It was about four or five miles out. That was our starting point. That is where we would go up into the hills and start acclimatising. You learned the Japanese culture because you were going to get similar in Korea.

26:30 That is how we got there.

You are saying you were taught about Japanese culture, what was it that you saw and learned?

It was mostly what not to do. That was the army's way. Don't mingle with the women and don't do this and that and don't eat their food because they use their excreta on it to fertilise it. And don't sort of

27:00 mix with it if you could help it at all. But then of course we had hundreds of Japanese women working in the units. An officer had one of his own. A platoon of 28 men would have two. The sergeant would sleep one end and the corporal at the other end and they'd come in and do all the housework and everything. They had women around all the time anyway.

27:30 When we went to the training camp it was very thorough. It was an old Japanese army camp of course with training also by the look of it. We went to the hooplas up there and I was later to be a pay sergeant up there as well as down at the hospital. We were mostly taught that. They had areas that were out of bounds which

28:00 were all over the place. You weren't supposed to go to beer halls and brothels and all, that but if you wanted to look for anybody that's where you'd go. With the culture at that stage before you went to Korea you didn't have a chance because the blokes were just there and training and off. When we came back to Korea we were taught again. But I had some fortunate breaks and

28:30 stayed there, as I say, for two and a half years.

I might ask you about that experience in Japan a bit later. I just want to ask you what kind of preparation you had for the conditions in Korea while you were doing that preliminary training?

It was reasonably good. Unfortunately they didn't think about the clothing or the

29:00 bootwear or the essential things. Mum would send us over a beanie and scarf and gloves but they weren't on issue. The training was good but I don't think anybody knew what it was like anyway. The fellows that first went over and when I first went over of

29:30 course it was their autumn. They didn't probably say that they needed to do that but they should have. I blame a lot of the – Vet Affairs [Department of Veterans' Affairs] have accepted that I got my frostbite and my problems through equipment and a lot of others the same. That was a shame because a lot of blokes

30:00 died of frostbite and lost their hands and feet and dreadful things. We just took equipment and that's all. The Canadians that came over there and they were fine and the Yanks were right, but not us.

What clothing were you issued with?

Nothing other than what we had. We had ordinary khaki trousers and jackets. I forget the

30:30 material now. It was just ordinary material trousers like these I suppose and a jacket with some pockets in it and you could put your hands in there. We had a beret and we had plenty of socks, I suppose, but you could only put two pairs on in your boots otherwise you'd cripple yourself.

31:00 They taught us the soldiering pretty well and the terrain in places. The training camp was as good as they'd get in Korea because Korea was very rough. Korea was just hills. One hill to another hill, you know. Some were bigger than the others but there wasn't much open space

31:30 and there still isn't. It was much different to us of course.

How long were you in training in Japan before you went to Korea?

Only a couple of weeks. It was very quick. I learned more about it when I was paying them up there later. No, it was just a quick training. It was a bit of range

32:00 shooting and a lot of talks about the conditions and how they'd be and what to expect. The army are the army and they don't tell you all they should do in a way. I don't know why. You'd say truly in Japan that the Japanese girls knew more about where you were going next than the army ever told you.

32:30 Some officer had a girlfriend or was talking to the officers or read the paper or whatever. You could safely tell somebody that they were on their way in the next couple of days from the girls. We weren't told.

What were you told by the army about what to expect in terms of the enemy in Korea?

33:00 They expected things I suppose. When I went over the Chinese were hardly in it I don't think. They told us the history of why they were fighting and about communism and that the south didn't want it. They wanted to go Japan's way and the north wanted to go China's way. It would be like New South Wales fighting

33:30 Victoria, you know. It was a terrible thing. They told us things but they hadn't learned much. We'd only just arrived there and they hadn't learned a lot. They had learned then about the bells of a night and the ringing and the way they attacked and the size of their mortars, which they were very accurate with. They were bigger. Everything they had had to be bigger and noisier than ours. Their rifles and

34:00 machine guns seemed to be a different beat. They had different ammunition of course. But it was another sound. We'd call them burp guns. In Vietnam they mightn't have called them burp guns. They had another name anyway. They gave us a pretty good low down on what we could expect.

Can you tell me about the journey from Japan to

34:30 **Korea and your first impressions?**

It was very quick. It is only across the strait a bit. I went by aircraft. They were nearly all in those days the Lockheeds. There were no seats in them you just sat against the side of the cabin. They landed me at north of Taegu. They had

35:00 Kiri for a while and then they had Taegu, which was the next one down, and then Pusan was the lowest. That is where our air bases were. They landed me at Taegu and I went up by truck through Seoul. It was right up. We went a hell of a long way north. All we got was a bandana with 50 bullets in it, .303s, we had our own rifles

35:30 of course. And we had bully beef or something like that to eat and biscuits, the stuff they fed the army on during World War II. We were on the back of trucks. They took us on trucks right up north. We stopped a couple of times on the way up for a break and then

36:00 we went to headquarter company. The battalion, when I joined them, was up on a hill, my mob. They were in position up there and they'd been doing a bit of fighting. I joined them up in the line and we stayed there and it was pretty cold. We stayed there for a long time and then gradually

36:30 we got pushed back and we got pushed back to the outskirts of Seoul, the northern outskirts of Seoul. We fought our way but we couldn't hold them. What was happening – as a brigade of three battalions, one battalion would disappear. If it was the South Koreans, you didn't know. You couldn't speak to them and you didn't know what they were doing. One interpreter might

37:00 have picked that up and passed it down the line to the officers. You didn't have much chance. You knew that if you had a Pommy one on your other side you'd be right. There was no risk about that. Later on when the Canadians came in they weren't crash hot. They fought I think as a brigade themselves, their own battalions mostly.

What was the

37:30 **name of your brigade and your battalion?**

3 Battalion, 9th Brigade. We were a support company. A support company in a battalion – a battalion is almost 700 people and you've got the four rifle companies and a headquarter company and a support company. The support company are divided

38:00 between A, B, C & D Company. Able, Baker, Charlie & Don. Machine gunners would have to mark the position when they were moving forward and cover it when they were treating. They had all their assault pioneers, the fellows who'd have to dig tracks and all that sort of thing.

38:30 And they had the sigs [signals]. The signals had to do all the communication work. Who else would we have in the support group? We did everything that they needed. We had trucks and things to move them and that sort of thing. We would be allocated a different company in maybe each move. It might have been Able or

39:00 Don or whatever. We were just told that's where we'd go. And our lieutenants would take us there and hide us there or whatever.

When you were making the journey north in the truck, could you describe what sort of landscape it was that you were travelling through?

Well it was a lot of little trees and

39:30 foliage, but it wasn't like ours. There were a lot of rocks, a lot of black rocks. The terrain was hilly. It was always hilly. You'd get through and you'd get some straights now and then. It didn't appeal to me. It was like out of Cobar but a different colour, you know,

40:00 that sort of thing.

Did you see many civilians at this time?

No. A lot of civilians of course were coming from the north to go south but there were none going through the other way. We'd have to patrol them and let them come through and check them as they went.

40:30 Most of the young blokes were checking the girls. We were looking at their stock. They were carrying all their furniture maybe on a beast, on a steer or something like that. We had one stage when we came down and we had no rations at all. The officer in charge told us to kill one of the oxen and we could have it and eat it. That was an incident. I think they

41:00 machine gunned it to death but I don't know. They had arguments about how long you have to leave meat to eat it. I think they ended up arguing to get us to eat it in a couple of hours. It is supposed to be twenty-four at the minimum but being so flipping cold, that was a cold time that we were doing that. And we had no rations and we were fighting and looking after them we felt so we took one of their beasts of burden. They were interesting. You could

41:30 talk to some of them with a few words that you'd learned. We had books, little pocket books, giving you a rough idea of the language so you could say hello to people and wish them well. That was good. But

they carried everything with them. Sometimes in the cold we'd go into their huts, which were deserted.

Tape 4

00:32 **I just want to ask you some questions about your training in Japan. Can you describe for me in as much detail what you did day to day in that training before you went to Korea?**

Yes, well because I was chasing my mates they didn't have any Vickers guns up there for me to train on so I did just normal army training,

01:00 which is commando type of climbing over rocks and things that weren't in Korea anyway, and objects. I learned that it wasn't that sort of war at all. There was a lot of wrestling. I wasn't there and it happened before was where the Australians were

01:30 awarded, not the Purple Heart, they were awarded a citation, a Presidential Citation for their work in this orchard when they were still up north in Korea and their stand there. That was hand to hand close fighting. There were bits of it I suppose all the way down, but it was more a platoon against a platoon,

02:00 like a group of men in a mass, and we were all awaiting positions to see who could win the point there and which way you were going to go, north or south. There were all sorts of difficulties. As I said, communication was one of our worst problems. The training in Japan was

02:30 no more than we did probably at Ingleburn back home. It was just a refresher and going through a different terrain.

What were you told about how skilled the enemy were, how good they were as fighters?

Not a lot really. By then there were a lot coming back. A lot of blokes had been killed already

03:00 or wounded. They told us about their horn blowing and their bell ringing and their attacks in the early hours of the morning. The North Koreans didn't mean body wrestling with you and stabbing and punching and gouging. In general we were bigger than them, but they were strong men. They were very strong men.

03:30 They mentioned those sorts of things and what to be prepared for.

What sort of briefing and training did you have on how the cooperation of the various forces was going to work?

Not enough.

04:00 At training camp they didn't know enough. The Aussies hadn't been there that long. They were only going on what the Yanks had told them maybe and it wasn't great information and there was not a lot of it.

How did the cooperation work? How did it work and who did what?

04:30 The general worked all that out. It would be high stuff going on probably through Canberra and Washington, I don't know. The head man for the Yanks was MacArthur and we only had our General Robertson and he was back in Japan. He never went to Korea I don't think.

05:00 We had a few brigadiers running around I think but mostly it a battalion it was a lieutenant colonel, and that might have been the highest rank that you saw in the field. They must have been communicating with their interpreters or the South Koreans or whoever was next to us. We didn't learn a lot.

When you

05:30 **initially arrived in Korea, what was the base like?**

There wasn't a base really. There was a field position. We went up in a truck, the headquarter company, and they gave us a bit more gear and stuff.

What sort of gear did they give you?

At the time in the field they were already on American rations and they were called C6s. They were good rations.

06:00 They had everything in them, cigarettes as well as food, and they had powdered milk, I think, and coffee. They had the tins and it was virtually a six day ration so you had 18 tins in it or 12 tins and I think you had little packets of cereal, Kellogg's

06:30 Cornflakes or whatever. And you had your powdered milk. You had little tins full of alcohol that you had to light and put your tin on top to get it hot. There were lots of good meals. The Yanks had hamburgers in one tin and frankfurts in another and a stew sort of thing in another. It was good tucker.

Why were you on American rations?

07:00 I don't know. We didn't really have our own facilities, I don't think, in the battalion. They probably were cooked for headquarters or something. You had to have something you could carry on your back and they were the most ideal. When the Pommies arrived at the later stage when I was there – their battalions were there in the

07:30 field but they were on their own rations. Their rations were terrible things. They had potato powder that they had to put with water and heat it up for potato. They had to cook nearly everything and it was impossible because you couldn't light a fire in the field. I don't know where they got that idea from. But the poor old Pommies were underpaid and underfed I reckon. They are good fighters and good

08:00 men, very good men.

Can you explain why you couldn't light a fire in the field?

Because of position and smoke. You had to keep everything – you just had to shiver in winter. You couldn't because of smoke and visibility.

Exactly where was this field station when you first

08:30 **arrived?**

I can't think. They were fairly well up. At one stage they were up nearly at the 38th parallel. And we were probably down at about the 36th I suppose. We were way up above Kiri

09:00 because when we retreated the first time it took us a couple of days to get out and to get our next position. We were never under cover. You always had to dig your holes and sleep in them. That was always the drill.

You mentioned that you'd been issued with khakis, regular army khakis, were you still in those when you arrived in

09:30 **Korea?**

Yes. In my kitbag all I had was another field jacket and a pair of trousers. I don't think I had a second pair of boots or anything. Equipment was terrible. You were going to get into strife. You knew you were going to get into strife just with your clothes when the winter started. In the summer at the first of it and in autumn it was all right.

10:00 You could take your coats off and just have your khaki shirts and that on. When the winter came, the cold weather came, we'd had it and you couldn't do much about it.

Just for the sake of people that don't know much about the Korean climate, can you explain to me in as much detail as you

10:30 **can what the weather was like when you arrived and how that changed throughout the course of your tour?**

I think they probably have four seasons like we do. Their spring is very pretty and getting warm, much like ours. It gets hot, very hot, in their summer but it's very cold, like I said 28 below zero, and that was Fahrenheit not

11:00 Celsius. It is pretty cold. You had to have gloves or mittens on and you couldn't touch your rifle because you'd have to pour boiling water over your fingers to get them off because they'd freeze straight away. Summer was hot. You didn't see any mosquitoes or anything but I wasn't there really in the

11:30 summer. I was there in the autumn and their winter. It wasn't so good. I went back on my holiday in the spring and it was wonderful, beautiful.

So what season was it when you arrived?

It was the autumn.

So how did the equipment and the clothing you had suit that season when you arrived?

Probably all right.

12:00 Mum sent – and I think all mothers and women sent – things up. They knew we needed scarves and balaclavas and things like that. We didn't really have a blanket. A lot of us managed to carry around a greatcoat and that was your warmth. That was your bedding.

12:30 The winter was pretty bad. It was very bad.

You talked on the last tape about coming into contact with the civilians. What did the villagers look like? Given that the North Koreans had already pushed south and were being pushed back, what did the

13:00 **villagers look like? What sort of damage was there?**

They were trying to carry everything with them, everything. They had what they called an A-Frame. It was just shaped like an A with two cross part. It had a couple of handles. I've known them to carry a 44 gallon of fuel on the back of one of them and nearly jog with it.

13:30 They'd pack them with all their household goods. Like the Japanese, they don't really have much furniture at all. There is a hole in the ground in your kitchen and your dining room and you have a table. You put your feet down the hole and you eat off the table in summer. In winter you put chips of coal stuff in and you light it and it keeps you warm.

14:00 Then you've all got a mat like I suppose we'd say a bamboo sort of thing and you laid it down. You know the bamboo mats, tatami mats. Koreans were much the same style as that. They were very much I suppose like the Japanese.

What sort of damage was there to the towns and

14:30 **cities and villages from the North Korean invasion?**

This was the funny thing; they didn't damage it a lot. It was like I said New South Wales fighting Victoria, you are co-folk, you know. You've just had a disagreement and you don't destroy everything that they've got. I don't think that they – there was some bombing and that. They had no

15:00 aircraft. The Chinese had a few at the end, Sabre jets and that, but we never saw much of them. Big Check Charlie was about the only plane that we ever saw much of. I don't think they did much damage to the South Korean's homes in general. They did to some, but not in general.

That first field

15:30 **station that you arrived at, where was that in proximity to the enemy and the fighting?**

It was there. It was right there. It was not even hundreds of yards away, it was there. That was a very active spot. We were doing it pretty tough at that spot. We gradually got pushed back out of it and we kept going down and

16:00 down until we were in Seoul for a while and they pushed us out of that. We kept going down over a period of time.

I'm just trying to get as much detail so I can picture what it looked like. What was there at the field station when you arrived? You mentioned you were in a relief role, so what was there when you arrived?

16:30 They were working out of a big tent, there were a couple of tents there, and the back of the truck was mostly where they did half their work the officers and the RAP [Regimental Aid Post]. They had lean-tos or tents and, as I say, the back of trucks. You know, they weren't kidding themselves. They knew we were going to move one way or the other and that was the idea.

17:00 When I was there, except for New Year's Day in 1951, they didn't use many aircraft, not even the Yanks. There were a lot of Australian Meteors there and they were working somewhere, but it didn't seem to be around the battalion much.

How many men were stationed at that particular field, roughly?

At the base when I

17:30 first got there? There was headquarters company, which would be 100 men. I don't think there were any extras there so I'd say about 100 men.

You said that people were always prepared to be on the move. What sort of protection or defences were there then?

We had some

18:00 jeeps and trucks that were down at the headquarter company. And there were a few Bren gun carriers to pull us out. There were a fair number of jeeps. The New Zealanders were there. They had a field artillery. They were 4-inch guns I think and they were meant to fire over your head and get the enemy over the top of us. It

18:30 didn't always fire over the top but that was their aim. We used to call them drop shorts. Anyway, they were always there and they were putting in a fair bit of strafe work. It was very hard because of the hills and the trees and the terrain, which was really rugged it was terrible to get around. You couldn't move a vehicle up there

19:00 hardly in those positions we were in. There were very few where you could. There'd be four-wheel drive jeeps or something like that and you might get one close enough to help you. Support Company of course had mortar groups amongst us with 2-inch and 3-inch mortars. I don't think we ever had 4-inch like the Chinese did

19:30 or the North Koreans did. There were about 100 I'd say that were down the bottom and that would include drivers and all sorts of blokes.

What was the geography and the landscape around immediately around this field station?

Hills, immediately hills.

20:00 You seemed to be walking up hills and down hills all the time, you know. It was very bad terrain. When we retreated out of Seoul, the last time that I was there, anyway, we had to come back about 100 miles and we

20:30 came back to a place called Kimch'on. There was a port from shore called Inch'on. I might have got them mixed, I don't know. The driver certainly got them mixed and we had to go back to the other one. The port was taken by the Chinese who'd come down the coast and they'd taken Inch'on. And we were in Kimch'on, which is right in the centre.

21:00 The roads weren't too bad getting in there but then we had to go to the hills again to fight. It must have been pretty much winter by then. We came down in trucks. I was on the back of a truck. And everyone was just about frozen. We'd come about 40 or 50 miles

21:30 in these old rattling 3 tonne trucks. When we got there we got into a school yard. It was a big school yard. And already they were throwing every desk and piece of furniture and piling it up to set light to it to keep us warm. We were frozen. We had to nearly walk into the fire to live. Luckily they were smart enough to do that and it thawed us all out.

22:00 The next day or so we were back in the fray again. It was a different hill and a different spot and we were back. It was not far from Kimch'on and that's where I got my frost bite and where I was evacuated from. It was a few miles up. It was up from Taegu.

22:30 What we did was the officers told us all to get our boots off and our gear off and get rid of the lice or whatever we had on us. We hadn't bathed for weeks or months, weeks anyway in my case. I took my boots off and my feet just went 'boom' like a balloon. There was

23:00 no chance of getting them back on again and they were black and red and blistered. I'd had them on for, I don't know, a couple of months or something. I didn't ever take them off. They'd smell a bit, I suppose. Anyway, the officer ordered that they carry me down. A fellow called Jock Record, he put me on his back and carried me down the hill

23:30 to the first aid station, the RAP, the Regimental Aid Post. They took one look at them and they just wrapped them up and called a jeep. The Indians there – all the countries did different things. We were a rifle company. The Indians that were there were with all the support carrier trucks and

24:00 the ambulances. The ambulance consisted of a jeep with a stretcher either side. I ended up in one of them. Am I going too far? I ended up in one of them and I was taken to the railway where there was a hospital train in and a couple of carriages for patients. Unfortunately, like everything else that happens in the army, as we

24:30 moved south – we think they were North Koreans but the might have been South Koreans who were in favour of the North – they blew up the railway line. So we sat in that train for days. It was lucky there were a couple of good RAP fellows. I wasn't in grave pain or anything like that but there were a few fellows who were in a pretty bad way. We had some Yanks with us.

25:00 **What medical attention did you have while you were stuck in this train?**

Only RAP blokes. I don't think I saw a doctor. They were only just ordinary fellows, corporals and that and privates. They had a bit of equipment. As far as I was concerned I was all right. All I had to do was clean my feet and keep them wrapped up. There were some blokes with

25:30 bad wounds and how they managed I don't know. They got them through. The train eventually took us down as far as Taegu and from thereon we were all put on DC3s and flown back to Japan to Iwakuni. Then we were transported by ambulance, truck or water to Kiri hospital where I ended up later working.

26:00 That was a nasty experience. Whilst we were at the station they were bringing down some POWs [prisoners of war] from the Yankee train going north to south. They treated them like dirt. There were drums, 44 gallon drums, on the

26:30 station that had collected water on the rims and they were drinking it, these blokes. They had nothing to eat or drink and they were starving. Anyway, that was the Yanks' fault. They were taking them down further and they might have done something that I don't know about. We arrived at Taegu and as I say we were flown back to Japan.

27:00 **You mentioned that you believed it was a Yankee war earlier. Can I ask you to elaborate on that?**

It was their idea to go in. It was General MacArthur. He was a good American general I suppose, a very good American general.

27:30 He had been up through the Philippines. That was where he was based when the war started I think. He became Commander-in-Chief of the Yanks in the Pacific. He had this idea that, he was a fantastic anti-communist; he had a program in his mind that we'd go straight through North Korea into China and take them on. Nobody wanted that I don't think.

28:00 We certainly didn't. It was all their war, like most of the people and the food and the planes. It was a Yankee war with no risk. It was like Vietnam; we came in. I don't begrudge it.

28:30 I had a good time and I'm alive and well. It was a silly war when you think about it. Communists they did – you know what they've done in Europe and that and they're pretty nutty sort of blokes. It affected a lot of them.

Can I take you back to that first field station you were

29:00 **at. What knowledge did you have there of the enemy and what they were doing and where they were and how they were moving?**

Nothing officially really. The fellows just told you what was going on.

What did the fellows tell you?

"I'm glad you're going up there and not me," you know, and, "It's pretty hard going," and that sort of thing.

29:30 We stayed in that position for a fair while because the weather was warmer then when I first got there. We weren't worried about digging holes to sleep in. We just slept on the ground. I think the forces that landed in September didn't get under cover at all until

30:00 December at Christmas when we went to rest and got our first break. The other blokes did it the toughest. They got all the hard places to fight at. And they were the only ones, except on New Year's Day '51, when there was anything hand to hand. That day, for history's sake,

30:30 we only had one Aboriginal in as officers. I had two beside me all the time, brothers, but there was this officer who ended up being the first Aborigine. He had become an officer in World War II and he joined us up there and he was a company commander, he was a lieutenant.

31:00 And on that New Year's Day '51 we didn't know who was coming through and whether they were North Koreans or South Koreans. There were some fellows running a group or a platoon, maybe 28 or 30 blokes. And they were running with the South Korean flag. Apparently it looked like they were being fired on by North Koreans from behind them.

31:30 So John has let them through and they turned out to be North Koreans and they had the same uniforms as the South Koreans. And they were in among them, the company, I think it was Charlie Company. They were in among them wrestling them. So he got them to fix bayonets and

32:00 he won a Military Cross and he deserved it. That was the only other hand to hand. You'd wrestle with them. They'd come across our lines of a night and it wasn't like there was any time to fix any bayonets or anything like that like he went through. John Saunders was his name, Reg Saunders. He ended up a captain.

32:30 He is written up well in the books. He was a very quiet man and a bloody good soldier. Next.

How did you know that they

33:00 **were – you mentioned that they were dressed as South Koreans, how were you able to figure out then that they were indeed enemy?**

They weren't far from where we were. This was on the front line that we were facing when we thought we were going to face that line and we were facing north. They were coming down and there was a big railway line, a huge railway line and some sheds and some carriages. And that's where they were

33:30 all coming from. After they got through our officers must have called in the Yanks. And that was a really deplorable day. We lay there and watched them napalm the poor buggers. Once they started firing at their backs we knew they weren't South Koreans.

34:00 So we got into them and we did a good job. That didn't happen very often. That was the only occasion I knew them to do those sort of tactics.

How many were there?

It would have been 20 or 30 but I can't tell. We weren't far from it. Our unit saw some of the action but we

34:30 weren't there. We still had our guns down and we had them facing north to fire. After a while the whole thing fizzled out. The napalm wiped most of them out that were coming on. The others must have all gone back. They were all running over what were in summer time the paddy fields. There were just flats and banks and flats.

35:00 **Were they all killed with bayonets?**

I wouldn't know. I don't know. I hope so. I don't know. At the time they're too close and you can wrestle with them but they're

35:30 too close to fire upon. They are all on top of you. I don't think there were any more bayonet attacks in Korea. I don't know. I haven't heard of it. I've got films and there should be books of it. There are none that I can recall reading or seeing. The Pommies might have had – they had some tough –

36:00 they made a movie of one of the Hills, 310 I think it was. They had the Pommy Gloucestershires there, the regiment. They might have had bayonets.

How many men do you think you would have had to engage in combat with using bayonets?

Not me in Korea. Do you mean our army?

36:30 **No, I mean you.**

I've practised with it but I've never used it. Fortunately I've never got that close. I did on one night when they got into our lines just above Seoul. We let them win that battle. They were everywhere. They had knives. They were stabbing and wrestling but I think we were

37:00 shooting pretty strong our blokes and we kicked off. We retreated and they won that round I'm sure. Everybody would admit that. There were masses coming and we had a company and you do the wise thing. "We'll get you back tomorrow." I don't know, all the tactics of course were

37:30 way beyond me. I was still a lousy private in those days and just a machine gunner. You had to go through a lot of ranks before you got to the decision makers, but it wasn't a very nice war.

What do you mean?

Well a lot of people were killed for

38:00 nothing and there were a few nasty things done in the villages. You might have heard some of them. Mostly I'm only going on photos and that. I didn't get – I probably wouldn't have stopped it if I was under those circumstances. I don't know. But I was never part of any attack on a village or anything like that.

38:30 I've spoken to blokes that were but most blokes in the army don't want to tell warries to each other. So, no, I've never bayoneted. I've had plenty of practice.

Was there a few stories told about some of those attacks on

39:00 **villages?**

There were a lot of rumours and furphies. It's party of the army, you know. The day we killed that steer we shouldn't have done that but the captain said, "Shoot it." So somebody got his

39:30 rifle out and shot it. That is probably the worst thing. I never saw any violence either way. I didn't like the way the prisoners of war were treated coming down in the train. We had to wait there too for another day. We waited beside it on the other side of the platform. Then we got moved down south. We went first.

40:00 They were pretty nasty. When you read that story about the Gloucestershires that were taken prisoner of war, they were treated pretty badly. They are not a very sympathetic mob. I'd rather they were on my side than against them. I think they're a nice people, a very nice people.

40:30 I've had reunions since I've been home and the Korean businessmen put on nights for the blokes who served in Korea. They put on big nights and they are very enjoyable. They are wonderful. They are all right.

41:00 **It might be a good place to stop, I think.**

Tape 5

00:33 **I just wanted to ask you about your impressions of the other nationalities you were fighting alongside in Korea. What were the Canadians like, for example?**

It's not a flattering one to start with. They were Elvis Presleys as far as I was concerned. They were

01:00 show ponies. Every Australian soldier will agree. It wasn't jealousy. Well, I suppose a bit of it was but we wouldn't admit it. Their equipment and everything was as if they were just about to go on a television platform or something. We weren't jealous of their equipment, we were cranky with our government. We didn't want what they had but we wanted something good though.

01:30 I'm sure even the New Zealand government would have equipped – they did equip their gunners better than we were equipped. As soldiers we didn't see much of them. We heard a lot about them. I think, like their American cousins, I'm sorry to say it but this is how I found them – sorry for the expression but they were like the

02:00 Yanks with their brains kicked out. They didn't have a sensible approach to anything. Their officers were very aloof. They were different to the Pommies who were aloof anyway, but that was because of their regimental training and that was all right. We didn't see much of the Yanks at all; they were fighting in a different area than

02:30 us. They are all power, the Americans, with big tanks and big guns and big planes and big everything. They had the best food rations, which we enjoyed, and the best transport when we wanted to go somewhere or do anything. The Yanks, I don't think they're very good soldiers but they're wonderful people. The South Koreans were great

03:00 at fighting for their country. They were loyal. They were very loyal. You never heard them say they were going to kill – as I said, if we were fighting Victoria or Queensland we would probably be the same – you didn't want to do it but they had to do it because they were frightened of communism.

03:30 South Korea is only I think about 40 miles away at the nearest to Japan, so they are very close. But then the Japanese had occupied Korea for 40 years before the war, that war. They knew all about Japan and vice versa. They were good soldiers. They called them ROKs, Republic of Korea or something.

04:00 They were great soldiers and great people but they got very much on the American side. Their air force fellows were a bit garish like the Yanks. They'd come out all like Clint Eastwood or somebody. They were all dressed up and done up. They were great people, and I learned this later when I did a trip as a civilian.

04:30 They were really the only ones. I went through a field hospital where there were Swedish. The United Nations were United Nations and each one did a different job. As I said, the Indians did the transport and ambulance and the Swedes and the Norwegians did most of the hospitals and that sort of work.

05:00 We all had our different jobs. I had no trouble. I had only satisfaction with all of them. There was no conflict at all.

You mentioned that the Americans had the best food rations. Can you explain what was in their food rations?

Their field rations, I think they called them, and they'd come in a carton. It was a C6 it was called, I think. It was six days' rations. I don't know what they did on the

05:30 seventh day, but it was six days' rations. You had packs of cornflakes or whatever for breakfast and powdered milk which you mixed water with to make milk. They had sugar. They had coffee, plenty of coffee. They had packs of cigarettes. But the cans of food were varied and they were good. They had a

06:00 can full of hamburgers and they had a can full of frankfurt rolls and a can full of this stew and that and then they had sweets. They were in smaller cans and they were a bit rich, I think, for the average Aussie but they were good. It was good stuff. We were on them all the time in Korea and I think that all soldiers were. At one stage we got onto English rations and heaven forbid! They were called C51s or C5s or something.

06:30 Anyway, they were make your own. You had to mix your flour and your powdered potatoes. You had to mix them with powdered milk or something to make up a mashed potato. Most of the English that were in the army in Korea were Nashos [National Service Soldiers]. I can remember later on I

07:00 was a corporal and I was just promoted to sergeant. There was a very nice bloke, a lieutenant surgeon who was made captain, and he got the same wage as me. No, I think the blokes were all right. I don't think anybody would have really knocked the other blokes.

You mentioned earlier that there was

07:30 **a way of cooking in the rations. Can you explain what that was?**

In the C6 there was a little can of alcohol, pure alcohol. You would light a match and put your tin on top of it and that would heat it right up, whatever your dish was. And it worked wonderfully. The Canadians, unfortunately, started to drink it and they got blind. A lot of them got blinded, totally blind.

08:00 I didn't ever hear of an Aussie drinking it. I know a few that might have if they could have. They were good rations.

You talked earlier about the fear of being in Korea and the enemy attacking. I want to talk to you about that. Tell us what it was like on a daily basis, like what happened in the mornings and

08:30 **what you were doing at this time when you were on the move?**

Mostly to be honest it was frightening, particularly when the Chinese came in. They were very aggressive. They were very aggressive and very frightening in their methods of attack. They were very efficient soldiers. We knew there had been a lot of prisoners

09:00 taken and they were pretty bad in the prisons. Of course the Chinese blamed the North Koreans and vice versa. When they got into those prisoners up in North Korea and in China they were pretty aggressive and they were pretty tough. In the field they were frightening troops. They were excitable and very young, I thought, or they looked that to me. We always think the Chinese are younger than us, but they were young

09:30 and they were excitable boys and girls. I wouldn't say there was as many girls but there were a lot of girls among them and they'd do anything too. They must have hated us and I often wondered why. We didn't want communism but we didn't hate them. We just had to stop them. Most blokes I think, most blokes that were in Korea would tell you that that sort of thing.

10:00 We didn't discuss much between us. It was a strange war, like all wars are strange and silly and different. I suspect very much in Iraq that our blokes have the same trouble with the Arabs. You can't understand the lingo to start with, which is hard, but I think I'd rather fight against the Chinese than the Arabs.

10:30 What more can I say?

When you were moving and being pushed back to Seoul, could you explain to me what would happen on a daily

11:00 **basis and what the kind of flow of the battle was? Was it mostly attacks at night?**

Yes. They generally almost always attacked of a night. That was the Chinese. They knew that they were frightening us and it would be a brave bloke who said he wasn't frightened of them because of the noise they made when they attacked us and the

11:30 whistles they blew. In daylight you'd shoot them down because you'd see them. Of course of a night they'd sneak up on you and they'd get over our trip lines and get right into us and wrestle us and try and stab and hand fight. On average, even in size the average Aussie bloke would beat them but we weren't trained in wrestling and

12:00 that sort of warfare. We were soldiers with rifles. They were fighting in their style and they did pretty well. I know we both ended up where we started, so I suppose we must have been equal.

How were you protecting yourself at night in preparation for these attacks?

With prayer.

12:30 I remember writing home to my brother. I thought that we'd had it. I thought they were all over us and I asked him to look after that wife of mine or whatever. I don't know if Harry has still got the letter.

13:00 I thought that we were surrounded then and at that time there was little chance maybe. There were a few blokes getting killed and I was maybe just getting soft or chicken or whatever. I wrote Harry the letter and he never reminded me of it, thankfully. We were frightened at times and

13:30 they made their impression on us.

How were you positioned? Were you in trenches?

Only the ones that we dug. We had to dig our own. We had a little spade, a small spade, that we carried on our pack, but not a pick. The first four inches were always ice and it was hard in the winter. It was always

14:00 frozen stiff. And then you had to get into the earth and you had to dig yourself a hole and you had to lie in it. All you could do was put your balaclava and your scarf around your face and put your gloves and that on. Being in a small hole was better. You'd get warmer. Your own heat would keep you going. We ate well and we used to get a rum ration. I never drank rum. I don't know whether I should have but I could only have a little

14:30 mouthful. Some blokes would drink it. Each platoon, 28 men, would get a water bottle full. And they'd pass it to each other and drink it as long as it lasted. Some blokes would just treat it like water but it kept us warm. It definitely kept us warm. It wasn't half water or anything you'd buy in a pub or anything. It was pure, beautiful Queensland

15:00 cane rum.

Did you each have a trench?

Mostly we did. You might find a ridge behind – it depends on the terrain we were in. If you were down on the flat you might get into paddy fields because you always had some cover there because of the mounds. But up in the hills you'd have to find the best. You'd get behind the roots of a

15:30 tree or dig a trench and they were mostly individual trenches. Occasionally blokes would get together but you always felt you didn't have time. You probably had time to do it a bit better than we did but the ground was that hard. You were sort of buggered by the time you dug through the ice to the frozen earth.

16:00 That is how we had to spend it in the winter months. In the summer months it wasn't as bad. As I say, I wasn't there in the full summer I was there in the autumn. The ground even then was pretty hard but you could find places. You'd kind of bunk down somewhere and most

16:30 Aussies have got a bit of bushie in them I think.

During the day if you had stopped at night and these attacks were happening, how were you organised and what types of things were you looking out for during the day?

You were mostly busy getting yourself ready for the night. You were getting your ammunition up.

17:00 When you were getting into a position, the first blokes to go – when you're advancing or even retreating I suppose – the first blokes to go were the signallers. They would carry the wire because there were no walkie-talkies in those days. They'd run the wires over the trees and get us all hooked up for communication, which was the most essential part. Then came in the range finders and they would put

17:30 pegs in and mark the ranges. As far as we were concerned, the Vickers gunners, we had a tripod and there was a square in it. The range finders had a 2 x 2 with a point on it and they'd drive that in and put the cross in the direction that we expected to fire.

18:00 We'd put our tripod over it, even in the dark, because they had illumination on them, and you'd square it off with your tripod and then he'd leave the measures there to tell you what distances and that was the mark and it always worked. We'd get in positions before maybe the riflemen even because we were there –

18:30 if they were advancing we were there to fire over their heads. If they were retreating we were there to fire at those that would chase them and that sort of thing. That was about the most important thing I suppose.

Working on the guns, what equipment were you carrying with you personally?

19:00 We were always supposed to carry our rifles but a few wouldn't have room. Number 1 would carry the tripod and Number 2 probably the gun. Number 3 and 4 were ammunition and water because they were water-cooled. Number 1 was the shooter and pulled the triggers. Number 2 was to

19:30 feed the ammunition through to Number 1. Number 3 was to feed it to him from out of the boxes that the ammunition used to come in, rolls and rolls and rolls. And then Number 4 was to make sure there was enough water. They'd yell out, "More water," because the more you fired it overheated. I've seen them get that bad that we had to get up and

20:00 urinate in them to try and cool them down waiting for the water to arrive. They were a wonderful gun. That was about my effort. We'd try and be there first and would always inevitably be there last with cover fire. It was an interesting job to have because you knew you were doing a good

20:30 thing and you saw a lot of action but you weren't actually being fired at. It was mostly infantry that were going down and getting stuck into it. As I say in most situations the enemy were night firing anyway which we weren't involved in.

So you couldn't fire those guns at night? Would that be the

21:00 **case?**

We could fire them but they'd be too obvious and our position would be taken. The North Koreans and Chinese were very good on mortars. Mortars are a tremendous and frightening and nasty thing. They can be a 2-inch, 3-inch and 4-inch mortar. And they are fired through a barrel with a tripod on

21:30 it. They just drop them in and they'd discharge when they hit and it shoots them out of the thing over the position. We had a lot of good mortar men. They would know accurately where they wanted the mortars to land. And they'd measure the guns right and position them. They were frightening

22:00 too because you wouldn't know when they were coming. You'd hear some whistle. The bigger ones, the 3 and 4-inch ones you could hear them sometimes. We didn't have 4-inch ones. We had 3-inch ones but I don't think we had 4-inch. The infantry were mostly the mortar men.

How did you sleep when the attacks were happening at night?

You didn't. You could hear them. They made a lot of noise

22:30 and you could hear it and you'd think, "We'll get them in a minute. They're going to trip one of our lines," which were all set up, but they didn't. They got over them somehow most times. We'd be there just waiting and shaking, particularly in winter. There was snow in the bushes and you were waiting for someone to walk past one and shake it and then you'd fire. I'm sure the Chinese knew that. So they'd

23:00 throw something at the bush and make it shake and it would drop the snow and then you'd fire. And then they'd fire at you. They were very cunning and very good, the soldiers, as a soldier would admit.

What was the sound like at night before a battle if you were awake and waiting for this to happen?

Ghostly quiet. It was ghostly quiet. You were up a hill or the side of a

23:30 mountain and it was quiet up there. You could hear the snow falling, nearly. Of course that is making you all the more nervy. It was very worrying. It was no fun and games. You might have had your rum ration and that was about the only joy in the day for those who drank rum.

24:00 Most Aussies were always cracking a joke or telling a lie or ratting. It was all right.

You mentioned the tripwires that you would set up. Could you explain how that was done?

They had them, say, ten yards

24:30 apart and attach to a bush or something, a hand grenade, and they'd put a trip line on the tripper that would pull the pin out and that exploded the grenade. They would do the same ten yards away and for however long the front was they'd keep putting these grenades. We expected, and mostly did, I suppose, that say

25:00 half and half would get over them and somehow find them and see them and step over them. The other time it would trip them. It was more often that they got over them in my experience. They were placed out by part of support company. They were the assault pioneers, or one of them. They were a

25:30 special group and they were very, very good. You can't do much more than that. You're in the dark and it was snowing or whatever and you can't see anything. It was pitch black, really pitch black. I've often thought of my uncle in Gallipoli. We had something of comfort but they had nothing.

26:00 Anyway, that's about how that happened.

What kind of assistance was there? What kind of medical assistance was there for the wounded?

It was pretty good but a lot of it had to be done by yourselves. In rifle company most of the battalions, all the musicians in the battalion, we had our own band, were

26:30 stretcher bearers and RAP men. They could cover a wound. In those days I think the only good thing was that antibiotics and penicillin was the big go then. Mostly it was just yourselves.

27:00 There was no chance of a medical corps being right there with you. They were right behind you. They were close behind you. And when you were seriously wounded you would go back down to the tent and they'd look after you and send you back to a field hospital. As I say, we had our stretcher bearers but you didn't seem any RAP or anything like that

27:30 in the field. They were there.

These battles that were happening at night, how long would they go on for?

They were generally late, after midnight I'd say most times.

28:00 It would go on until an hour before dawn and win or lose. It was a matter of you having to advance and really getting the heavy stuff in or retreat. It was quite a personal thing. I felt that it was that they were all infantrymen fighting each other.

28:30 I honestly didn't worry about politics or who they were. I don't think most blokes do. You just get in there and do what you can.

The fighting that was going on, what kind of weapons and what kind of combat was it?

All of that was hand to hand nearly. You had to have a distance before you'd fire a rifle.

29:00 You had to be a distance away. You could be lucky and shoot a bloke straight away but normally you don't. You throw your rifle aside and you hadn't wrestle them and get your bayonet off your rifle or on your belt or wherever it was and you might use that. The Yanks had pistols which were pretty useless. But we just had to

29:30 fight them as we found them. In the islands even I remember my brother telling me the Japanese had

sneaked through and they'd had to wrestle them and fight them off. It was just man against man and muscle power. You were bright enough to keep on to

30:00 what was happening you were all right.

Did you take part in this hand to hand fighting?

Only once really and maybe another time close by. It was only the once in – I can't remember the hill. I think it was when the Gloucestershires were in trouble or about that time.

30:30 I can't remember this hill. Most of the battles in Korea, history wise, are written in hills – Hills 1 and 2 to 110 and 350 or whatever. That was how you could position and locate your people. There were no towns. You couldn't say you were in Parramatta or Granville – it was a hill. It was Hill 310 or 250 or whatever and that's how the

31:00 records were kept. I can't remember the hill. There were so many bloody hills that I can't remember the names of them. I remember 310 but I can't recall why. I can remember that hill.

What was the feeling among your unit when you were being pushed back to Seoul

31:30 **about the support that you were receiving from command?**

I don't know. The bloke in the field doesn't really – he just cops it. Between yourselves you'd say, "Who's giving up?" It wasn't necessarily giving up. The Chinese and the North Koreans were very cunning. They'd

32:00 hit one side very hard and if you lost one battalion out of your three you couldn't leave that gap open because he'd get behind you so you'd have to drop back. They'd hit one and sometimes it was our side. We weren't always in the middle. We were on the right or the left or the centre. Their intelligence would let them know which they thought was the weaker and that's the one they'd hit. And if

32:30 they gave way then the rest had to give way. You couldn't stay there on your own because they'd be behind you. They didn't use any tanks or any of that sort of equipment that I ever saw. They mostly relied on sheer numbers. There were so many of them of course as we know. They'd just pour them in and pour them in. Like

33:00 there's 300 million of them or something now. They didn't care. I don't know. I don't think it's like the Muslims are now who are just purely against the Americans and their style. I think it was to protect their communism. It didn't matter who it was. I really think that the Chinese and the

33:30 North Koreans they wanted to get South Korea communist. As we know in the west, that was a stupid thing because they're the ones today throughout the world – it finished in Russia, the home of communism – and the other countries that had taken it up have more or less folded. I was in Vietnam a couple of years ago on a holiday and

34:00 they don't bash it down your ear, but they're real communists. They don't like us at all.

Can I ask you about the use of napalm in Korea? What did you witness?

On the big day, my big war day, it was New Year's Day 1951. And the Yanks used a lot of napalm that day. I didn't. I hated it.

34:30 You could see it. A 44 gallon drum hit the ground and then like a live oil and it would run after the soldiers trying to get away. They'd catch alight because it spread everywhere. They would die as they run and I thought that was pretty rough stuff. I don't know that they used napalm in Vietnam. They probably did. I don't know. But it was terrible in

35:00 Korea, terrible. What do you do? If you are in an army and you're getting defeated you've got to pull out all the stops, haven't you? You don't want to get defeated. And if you've got dirty tricks like napalm and those sorts of things well they'll use them, like the Germans used gas. It's a rotten

35:30 solution. It's still going on but it's a rotten solution. It is all down to your leaders' believe in the thing. It's like we've got now with the Muslims and the terrorists. They believe in their beliefs and to me it is totally wrong what they believe in anyway. The Americans nearly got like that. They are not

36:00 like that at all. Americans are nice people. But they almost got themselves to that stage with anti communism like in Cuba. The people they killed in Cuba and that, it was pretty shocking. And in all those South American countries. But that proved nothing. They just made them more aggressive against America. And they grow drugs and that's the biggest way to kill Americans or Australians. That's their secret

36:30 weapon. I lost the track there, I'm sorry.

I just wanted to ask you as a witness to napalm what it actually looks like. When you see a plane fly over and drop its napalm, could you explain what it actually looks like and what happens?

It looks like a 25 gallon drum of oil and it splatters and spreads. And everybody it attaches itself

37:00 to catches alight. It is a burning oil sort of thing as far as I can see. I have seen them running alight and it would break your heart. But it was a weapon. Before that they used, and it was nearly as bad as napalm, they had flame throwers down trenches.

37:30 I'm on the Yanks' side but they did some cruel tricks, terribly cruel tricks. America has never, except for September 11 a few years ago, they have never been hit with anything. Not America – Hawaii, the Japs hit Hawaii, but

38:00 they've never had it and yet they are the hardest people. It's probably because they've got so much good technology. They just keep going and they find something bigger and better. I'm not joining forces with the communists but that's the Yanks, you know, they seem to be that way. It's got to be bigger and better. The officers were all

38:30 issued with 38s, an English weapon. The Yanks had a bigger one and they used a 45, which is better for throwing at a person than firing it. If they were 20 feet away you wouldn't – they were too big and heavy and the bullets and the lot of them. The Yanks would swap about four 45s for one 38 in Korea. That's the difference and their thought.

39:00 It's got to be bigger and it's got to be better and it will make a bigger hole in them, which of course it does.

You mentioned before that it was very much the Americans' war. Did you have much knowledge of the United Nations when you went over there?

No. I had a bit more than most because of Doctor Evatt getting me out of Ellis

39:30 Island. No, I was a kid. I still reckon at 18 I was a kid. I was a good reader and I still am. I read a lot about it. World War II was a shocker. But then I could see that Japan wouldn't have joined the United Nations before the

40:00 show was all over. They were fanatical and most of the wars are. They've got a purpose and they've got a religion or a political belief which they get heated up about. And they're generally a poorer nation and encouraged by whoever it is. They go and they push their people into this great belief that,

40:30 "They're doing the wrong thing. They've got to do it our way."

Was there much of an understanding that it was a United Nations action in Korea?

No. None of us ever did any parades or anything on behalf of the United Nations. As far as I was concerned we were just Aussies who were there. We were called up to volunteer and we were

41:00 volunteers and we just joined up. Of course the Korean battalions were firstly made up by the occupying Australians that were in Japan occupying Japan. There were a couple of battalions, the 45th and 6th I think, and they made up the basis of it and we all came over just to reinforce them. But we had to have some military experience because of the

41:30 time factor. Our air force was similar. They did a good job. They got their first jets, the Sabre jets, in Iwakuni in Japan and they flew a hell of a lot of sorties. Our navy, they had to go up a wet coast of Korea which was bitterly cold. You are nearly into the Antarctic.

Tape 6

00:36 **Mr Wilsher, you mentioned that New Year's Day was your big war day, can you explain to me what happened on that day?**

That day we'd been on rest since a couple of days before Christmas and I think I explained that though we

01:00 had anti freeze in the radiators we still had to keep the engines of all vehicles going 24 hours a day because it was so cold. So we were pulled back for the first rest for most of the blokes since they had got there in September. And we had the Argylls, their battalion, on our right as we advanced.

01:30 **Can you explain what they Argylls were?**

It was a Scottish battalion. They were Scottish troops and they were wonderful. It's a very famous battalion and a famous name, Argylls, but they were whisky lovers and New Year's was the day. We had a lot of them come over on New Year's Eve and we all woke up pretty seedy and it was very cold. I remember that.

02:00 I had to get up at about 2 or 3 o'clock for my watch of two hours and keep the engines running. You'd

go to one vehicle and the next. We had jeeps for the officers and Bren gunner carriers for our weapons and trucks for the troops. So in the morning at about dawn, just on dawn, a jeep came rushing

02:30 in. It happened to come up to where I was. I was moving about and they must have spotted me. They were a couple of Negroes. There were three, I think, in the jeep. They said, “We’ve been cut off. We are heading north and we’re cut off. They are about 20 miles away or whatever it was on a bridge and we need help.” They said, “Where’s the duty officer?” I knew where he was and I woke him up and

03:00 I told him what they said and he spoke to them and he said, “All right. We’ll put the whistle out and get everybody up and going. I think I said to you before that they weren’t armed. No Negroes were armed then. So we went and we advanced up there to where they were. It was a hell of a spot they were in. There were lots of trucks. It was a big

03:30 convoy. Anyway we did what we could there. Where they wanted to advance was the trouble, not what was happening to them where they were. They knew if they moved they were in real trouble.

I just want to stop you, Mr Wilsher, what do you mean by ‘a hell of a mess’?

It wasn’t messy on their part, but the situation they were in could have been very messy.

04:00 **What do you mean?**

Well they were surrounded and they couldn’t go ahead. There was no way they could get through without a big fight and they didn’t have rifles. So we went up and set up our line in the wrong place to start with and then on another line. This was New Year’s morning, 1951. We were told that they were going to come and hit us from the east and we put all our guns

04:30 up, Vickers guns, put our lines up there. The fire came from our north, six miles away. No, it was six miles to our east – two miles. We knew we were in strife. They weren’t going to miss much sort of thing. So we got down the bottom of the hill and we had to set up where we were going to put our Vickers guns

05:00 and we sat them along this road that was coming along this way. We set them up facing north. And there was a lot of firing. That was the day that I said the famous Aboriginal, Klees, was awarded the Military Cross. I think he was first one. I don’t think there are any others that have been awarded. Maybe in Vietnam they have.

05:30 That was a day of battles and they were sneaking through on us. They had a force of North Koreans dressed in South Korean uniforms and they… And Saunders just had his bayonet fixed and he did what he had to do. We were lying there and I remember I heard, which is wrong

06:00 I must admit, in the distance I heard a, “Cease fire.” And I had a fellow lined up with my rifle and I squeezed the trigger and down he went and I don’t know what happened to him. That was probably the only day that I know that I shot a bloke in the whole campaign. Of course the officer came along and kicked my boots and said, “Behave yourself,” or something like that.

06:30 Then the force came through, the North Koreans dressed as South Koreans, and Saunders attacked them with his bayonet and won himself the MC [Military Cross]. We ended up moving back anyway. We wiped them out. The Yanks had come in with their napalm bombing and there was none of them left as far as I could see. We had to move. There were breaks in the

07:00 lines from other angles and distances and we had to move back many miles, which we did.

I’ve got to ask this question because it is a project that’s about war. What thoughts or feelings do you have when you are responsible for the death of an enemy soldier?

07:30 You don’t get any kicks out of it but you feel satisfied. I think you must feel satisfied otherwise you wouldn’t have pulled the trigger. You could have thrown it over his head. But if you are aiming at a man you know you are going to kill him or wound him pretty bad with a .303 at only a few hundred yards. You are going to bust him up pretty bad no matter what you do if you hit him. You pull the

08:00 trigger and you’re guilty and that’s it. It’s something you’ve got to cop and think about. I suppose it is like a pilot bomber in a bomber who drops a bomb and kills a couple of thousand. They’ve got to feel crook about it but you’ve got to go out again tomorrow night. That’s war. It’s a very nasty business and it’s stupid, absolutely stupid.

08:30 They’re still carrying on the same now. They’ll never learn. Anyway, that wasn’t the question.

When you think back about the Korean War and you talk about it as a nasty experience, what particular aspects of the war do you find the most emotional, I guess?

That in itself I suppose. I lost a couple of

09:00 good mates. Our sergeant was stretcher bearing, which he shouldn’t have been, and they put a mortar on him. And they got him and the other bloke who was on the other end of the stretcher and the patient they were carrying. That was a nasty experience. You only see so much. The rest is hearsay and you

09:30 believe it or not believe it. It sort of grows with you. Most diggers don't talk about it to each other. They go home and have a beer and go back to the unit. They've got a beer ration and they have a beer, which you didn't have it in Korea of course, but you don't mope about it. You wonder what is going on. Some blokes want to go home and other blokes want to

10:00 stay and a lot more want to advance. You are just amongst average people. I'm sure if women were the warriors they'd think the same.

Were there many times when there were ceasefires?

Called in the field you mean? There were quite a few I suppose.

10:30 That day was one. We had the ceasefire and we had to pull back. They had gone. We had got rid of what was there. But as I said before there was a hole somewhere along the line apparently and we had to fall back to get into formation again. Had we not done that of course they'd get around behind you so you've got to keep together.

11:00 We retreated a fair way from there. I think we went right back. There were two cities. One was on the coast and one was

11:30 inland. One was Inch'on and one was Ich'on. I think the port one was Inch'on and the one we were supposed to go to in the centre of Korea was Ich'on. I was in the jeep with a couple of officers and another digger who was driving and I heard the officer say, "Driver, we go to the right here to go to

12:00 Inch'on. I'd heard, and every soldier had heard, that Inch'on had been captured by the Chinese. They'd come up in battleships. I said, "Excuse me, Sir, I think you should be going left to Inch'on," "Don't question me, soldier." So I shut up. Of course when we got to Inch'on I remember a Negro running out and he said, "Don't go, don't go, it's captured,

12:30 it's already captured." So he got aboard and we took him back to Inch'on. Those were the sort of silly things that went on. It could have been pretty bad. We got back there and settled ourselves down. Then we got to trying to get back into Seoul. I didn't make it but some did, I suppose.

13:00 That's what the war was like. It was up there and back again. It wasn't every day but every few months or something. My brothers would tell me about their wars but mine was nothing they used to say, "You were bloody Boy Scouts in that sort of show," which we were maybe because they copped it real bad. It was nothing for them to lose

13:30 three or four of their mates in a night. We lost a few but only on the rare occasions. It didn't hurt you as much.

What sort of a Christmas did you have in 1950?

We got all we could get. A lot of good things came from

14:00 home and the rations were doubled and beer flowed a bit. There was some good tucker to be had. Just to be stable and not have to cook your own. To have a cook and set up a kitchen it was good. It was a good Christmas. Jingle Bells and all that. It was pretty cold.

Was there a ceasefire over Christmas?

No.

14:30 I don't think they recognise Christmas. I don't know. There was no difference in the fighting. It's just that some blokes were relieved and some weren't. We were the lucky ones.

Can you tell me about the tanks and the various armies of the United Nations forces?

I didn't see any. I knew they were there but I didn't see any Chinese tanks.

15:00 We had – I think it was a Sherman I think the Yanks had. The Pommies came in and they brought in their Centurion. It was a huge tank. Once they left the road they sunk. They were too heavy and far too big for that sort of a war. There weren't a lot of tanks. There were a lot of armoured

15:30 cars and the lighter artillery. That was in 1950. It was nothing like 1990. There was none of that modern stuff we have now. Fuel was always a problem. When there's snow you don't know what's underneath it. You go across and you drop 20 feet. You don't know what you're going over.

16:00 I saw a few big tanks bogged down. And on New Year's Day 1951 there were a couple there. And I noticed with the Yanks there were some jeeps broken down on this road. And they just whistled up a tank to run over it and crush it into the snow. Not with the soldiers in it. They'd get out and down it would go and just

16:30 be crushed into the earth. They didn't care. They'd bring another one up. I didn't see a lot of tanks.

What were the American tanks like and how suited were they to the environment?

They were fairly good I think. You didn't see a lot of them. They kept to the fringes. They had good guns on them and they could fire long

17:00 distances. When we had the New Zealanders they had the big tanks covering them and their artillery of course covering them. Cover power is very important. You can't just all go down and lie down with your rifle. You've got to have somebody softening up the ones that you're trying to advance on. We had the Kiwis and other than a few drop shorts they did a good job.

17:30 **What experience did you have with the North Koreans' tunnel system?**

I didn't have a lot to do with that. I never got right up that far. I heard a lot about it but I didn't have any personal experience of it.

When did you start to realise that you were in trouble regarding your frostbitten

18:00 **feet? Can you explain to me when that**

18:30 **first started to occur?**

That first started when they first took my boots off. They just burned. And I looked at them and looked away. I thought they were gone. They were blackened as if they'd been burned. There were these bloody spots here and there and on the edges of the toes and I knew I couldn't get my boots back on.

19:00 Then they calmed down a bit of course, once I'd settled down, and got into the ambulance jeep. I got to a field hospital which Swedes were running and the nurses there were pretty good. They got it softened down and they just laughed. They said, "Blisters, just blisters, don't worry." I didn't know that it was frostbite

19:30 until I got back to Japan. I knew they were bloody sore and they didn't look good.

What were the facilities like in the field hospital?

Pretty good. They were run by the United Nations and there was no expense spared I'm sure of that. It was good gear, real good gear. There were plenty of nurses and volunteers and they were good

20:00 people. I think they looked after us well. The hospital training was as good as it could have been. There were no bitches at all through all of that.

Was the field hospital anything like M.A.S.H. [television program]?

It was exactly like M.A.S.H. I think M.A.S.H. was one of theirs. I never saw an American field hospital. I'm not going to doubt there were but most of them were

20:30 Swedes and Norwegian, Scandinavian. They seemed to be in all of them that I ever saw. It could well have been an American – it could quite easily have been but I never saw one.

What sort of treatment did they give you for your feet? What did they do exactly for them?

In Korea they didn't do a lot. They just bathed them mostly and used soothing creams and things like that.

21:00 They knew a lot of the black had to be cut off them and things like that. There were worse blokes than me. There were blokes that lost their feet and died. It was like burned toast. It was just black. You'd have to treat it like toast and knock it off and wait for the flesh to come through. If you are young and healthy, which I was, and you're

21:30 lucky, it does that. But your skin never really heals properly is what the doctors tell me today. That's why I've got that ulcer under my foot. Your skin would never grow again and as you get older it will get worse and worse, which it has. You just have to put up with it so that's what I'm doing.

So what

22:00 **treatment did you receive once you got to Japan?**

Mostly I was in bed and they pulled skin off and they got it down as far as they could and ran some sort of soothing ointments onto it. They kept them wrapped a lot of the time. They were very good. They were very efficient like all Aussies nurses and it was a wonderful place.

22:30 I was glad when I got on staff there because they were good people.

Can you explain to me that recuperation process and how long you were there and what happened?

Well to the best of my memory I was there about six weeks in hospital. As I said they just pulled a bit of skin away and did it up

23:00 and I already had a big bunion on my right foot. They were tempted to cut that out but they didn't because of the tenderness of the whole foot. After a while, six weeks, they sent me back to my infantry

unit five miles out and I'd come out about three or four days a week to get physiotherapy.

23:30 That started a different, new world. The physiotherapist, I was coming in three or four days a week, suggested that I stay because we were in charge of all that area, Australia. And this was a navy hospital and there was a navy camp

24:00 down behind us. The Aussie army turned that into a signals camp for our signals and put them all in there. It was a great spot. There were beds in there and the hospital staff used to live there. It was only a walk down to the park in front of the hospital and across the road and you were there. He suggested I leave my infantry unit and come and live in there and

24:30 sleep there and come and work with him of a day for a few hours a day. He'd give me my physiotherapy and we'd be right. Well it was good. It was a good life. I was wandering about and met a couple of Japanese girls and that and I was enjoying myself. He asked me one day, he said, "Look, you can write very well," even though I never even passed the Intermediate. I got to the

25:00 second year or something. He said, "You write well and you're intelligent enough. Do you want to be my clerk for a while and get all these records up to date?" He was in a mess so I stayed with him, Lieutenant Johns. I stayed with him for quite a while. I was all right by then. I could walk about. And I was waiting to be returned to Australia for a medical discharge. One day he said to me,

25:30 "Why don't you stay in Japan? You're not happy with your marriage and that." I said, "I don't know. I'm enjoying myself now, I know." He said, "I'll give you a job here in the hospital but you'll have to sign up in the army for six years." I said, "What?" He said, "Forget going home." I said, "To join the army I'd have to be fit, A Grade, Number 1." He said,

26:00 "This is a hospital. We can fix that with a stroke of a pen." So I wrote to my Dad. I was only 22. I wrote to my Dad and I said, "What do you think?" He wrote back pretty quick. And he said, "Things are not crash hot here. They're all right but if you are getting a promotion like that and an opportunity…" The lieutenant had told me I'd become a sergeant straight away when I enlisted and up to a lieutenant or a captain

26:30 and all this. It sounded good. So he said, "With the promotion coming you'd be a fool not to take it." So I signed up. They made me A1. Nobody looked and me and said, "He's A1 or A4," or whatever. So I became a permanent corporal and a temporary sergeant. That was they way they worked it. You moved up your

27:00 ranks like that. I went along with him pretty well. One day he sat down and he said, "What the CO wants you to do is – this is the tricky part – is to go to the pay school and learn to be a pay sergeant. That's your first step." He said, "Then you'll

27:30 be a pay sergeant for a while and we'll maybe make you a staff sergeant or a warrant officer and put you in charge of the canteen and after a year that you'll be flown over to Australia, to Duntroon, to officer training and you'll get a commission." It was too hard to resist. So I said, "All right." I went on and I did my training at the pay school and became a

28:00 pay sergeant. I was paying all the officers. I was paying al the people around the place. There were Canadians and British and New Zealanders and Australians and whatever they were I'd have to pay them and all different things. It was interesting and I enjoyed it. One day after about six months of that I suppose, or not even that,

28:30 the CO called me up. He said, "Bruce, you're doing a good job. Now I want you to go on to this canteen but before you do I'd like you to do me a favour." He said, "I'll look after you and you look after me." This is a 500 bed hospital with only two or three hundred in it and we've got floating rations, two or three hundred floating rations. We get rations for

29:00 Americans and Canadians or Australians or whatever race. The Americans were entitled to two cartons of cigarettes a week, I think it was. They just think, "We've got 200 Americans in here so they get 400 cartons when they go to the store. He said, "I'll pay you for them." He said, "Keep about 10 cartons for here in case the Aussie blokes want them in the canteen.

29:30 I'll pay you for the rest and you don't worry about it." After a while I worked out what they were on about. The physiotherapist was a treasurer and the auditor of the canteen and all the staff and all the stocks and all the food and all the things. It wasn't only the canteen that had 200 floating rations, it was the butcher and everybody in the unit, all the sections, the lot of them. They were the best kept nurses in the world I can tell you that. I thought, "They've conned me. They've got me into a situation and although they're paying for it I'm into the black market. I don't want to be in this." But I carried on. I enjoyed it. I was having a

30:00 ball. The CO said, "Put a couple of Japs in and take time off. Just go to the ration hall and come back and make sure everything's going all right and just enjoy yourself." Being young and there were plenty of young girls about I took his hints. There was a lot of it that went on.

30:30 Our captain, Captain Brown, he was our company captain and he was in it. The one big fellow was our Red Cross corporal. The deal over there in Japan was that you could buy an American car which was

sent to Japan and you had to keep it for six months and then you could send it back to Australia. That was virtually what it was. So they kept the first

31:00 one or two and then they wanted to ship them home one a month, which they could. They were entitled to but they needed the yen. So this is where muggins Bruce comes in. I've got to get them the yen. The pay officer's deal was to check the pay books of the fellows coming home who weren't registered to go home to Australia but wanted to go

31:30 home. You would pay them in Australian pound notes and draw it out in yen, which was for the CO, for his car. As far as the canteen went all the American cigarettes he black marketed towards the cars. The Red Cross corporal was selling blankets and all the Red Cross stuff. He had rations also for 500 and only needed them for

32:00 two or three hundred. All that was going out of the back door and they were paying for it. As far as I was concerned for my end of the deal I had to get my balances on the thing, and I did. And they kept the goodies. It was good for the nurses and good for the staff because he just said, "Give them what they want. Don't tighten their rations." The deal in the occupation was that every

32:30 pay day you were allowed three pounds sterling of rations out of the canteen. They had coupons. They could go away and come back in another ten minutes' time with another coupon from another person and you'd give it to them again. To put it in man's talk, a quarter pound of chocolate would get you a naughty off any girl. A packet of

33:00 cocoa would get you all night with any girl because they had nothing in Japan and that's how they made their sweets and things. That was the thing. So they changed the ration over and over and they'd have plenty of cocoa and plenty of chocolates and the CO would have all the American cigarettes. Everything was paid for and nobody was pinching any money of anybody but of course it was a bit wrong.

33:30 When I finally got to the end of it and I thought, "This is crazy. Maybe they are going to catch me doing something. I'm in the middle of this lot." Then a Pommy from the 8th Caesars, which is their tank mob, he came up to me and he said, "I believe you've got a good foot into the

34:00 black market?" I said, "I wouldn't say that." He said, "I want to sell some scrap metal." He said, "I've got a heap of stuff there. It is not going to Korea. It's just going to sit there and rust." I said, "I'll tell him and I'll introduce you to him and we can talk." What he had for sale, despite all the odd things, was a full tank track off a Centurion tank. It was probably worth 30,000 pounds. I don't know. It was worth a lot of

34:30 money. And he sold it to this Jap. A Jap came and picked it up on a truck and they melted it down or whatever they did. The Centurion tank was no good in Korea – it just sank in the snow. It was too heavy. It wasn't right so I finally said, "This is…" I put in an application to come home so I never made lieutenant. That was that story.

The

35:00 **Commanding Officer who was receiving some of these black market goods, would he have somebody in the field to trade?**

Yes, one of his girlfriends. He had girls. Everybody had a girl. When I joined the regular army and was posted into the hospital unit me and a couple of mates from the sigs went out and we got caught in a beer hall by the provos [Provosts – Military Police]. We were out of bounds.

35:30 We were reported. The RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], whose name was Ben Flaxton, called me up and he said, "This is not good enough. We don't want our staff – the next thing you'll be in a brothel up there and you'll be in lots of trouble." So he said, "The law is…," which I knew then. The staff all had to have a girl, a clean

36:00 girl and do it properly. Do it nice and tidy. So he said, "I want you to go, and out of the staff…" I was paying about 200-odd Japanese girls. He said, "Do you fancy any of them?" I said, "I've never really looked." He said, "Find out. I'll give you a week." Anyway, I picked out this young girl who I ended up calling Mary San.

36:30 She was very plain but a nice girl, I thought. So he said, "All right. I'll get her parents in." So he got her parents in and I was introduced to them. I had quite a decent interpreter. I could speak a little bit of Japanese then but not much. I told them that they would be benefited because I had every weekend off and I had days off and they'd get all those rations and others.

37:00 Anything they needed, virtually, they would get. So they grabbed it. It ended up that I got Mary to pick us out this nice house. It had a water view and everything and it wasn't far from the hospital. And we set up camp there and it was wonderful. All the staff from the CO to a bum like me everybody had a girl and lived with a Japanese

37:30 girl. I say all, but mostly. Of course the nurses and that, well they belonged to the officers. The men couldn't go with them so you ended up with the Japanese, which was quite good. They were very good cooks, etc., etc. That was that little part of the story.

What were the

38:00 **brothels like in Japan?**

Why would you ask me that? They were very primitive. They were disgustingly primitive really. I'm not being crude. I'm telling you the facts. I was a big boy then when I was young and they didn't like it because I was too big for them. In their

38:30 brothels they had just an ordinary what Australians would call a bottle that had a cork in it. It would be full of vinegar and the blokes would fill it up with beer when it was rationed. They would have one of those with water in it and they'd have it tipped upside down with a plug on it with a lead coming down with a metal hook on it. They'd leave it up there and after they had their sex they would put that

39:00 inside to wash away the sperm and the dirt and the whatever. That was no bowl or antiseptic or anything. It was very primitive. But they were very – made a lot of money. There were a lot of lonely blokes and it was natural, I suppose. There were no condoms. The army used to issue them but I don't think

39:30 anybody much used them. What happened in the hospital was a good story. When the Pommies came in they had a venereologist, and I used to get on with the surgeons all right but their venereologist came in and he was a very smart boy. He was in the British forces but not a

40:00 recruit. He was called up in the forces. He told us early in the piece about things and how to avoid things. He had some tricks which I thought worked. They worked anyhow with me. He said, "I want to tell you this, boy." He said, "When you have sex and you've probably had a few beers

40:30 and that. Don't have a leak before you have your sex. Have your sex and as soon as you come out force your urine out in spurts." And he said, "The last bit of it wash over your old fella and all that and that will mainly keep you at bay." As far as all my mates reckoned it did work for them and he was a good bloke.

41:00 He used to lecture us every month or so. We had a, which I consider and I still believe it and I've spoken to doctors and they think it could be as far as I was concerned the first case of AIDS. What happened was where the hospital was we had a Kiri House. It was the township of Kiri, Kiri House, and there were shops and all that and they had a beer hall and that

41:30 sort of thing and a lot of blokes would go there. In it there was – I don't know whether it was a hermaphrodite or just a queer, but he used to dress up in kimonos and he'd look like a geisha girl, but it was a male. He was just like the prostitutes and he'd encourage them to go to bed with him. Of course he'd go in

42:00 your backside.

Tape 7

00:33 **Mr Wilsher you were telling us a story about what you thought was the first case of AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]?**

We all knew. Anybody who'd been on the staff and been around Kiri for any length of time knew that Micky San was a homosexual. He dressed like a girl and he took men on in his backside. In this case there was a one

01:00 pip lieutenant, an Australian bloke. He was married back home and he came back up as a reinforcement into Japan, not to Korea. He got this peculiar trouble in his penis. The venereologist told us. He got us all up and he said, "I've never seen this before. His whole body is

01:30 collapsing. We know nothing about it and we don't know if there's a cure or what it is." One of the blokes said, "Who did he have sex with?" And we all said, "Micky San." That was how he described him. "He was done up with a big hairdo like a geisha girl." "That's Micky San, that's a bloke." "Did he actually put his penis inside him?"

02:00 He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, it had to be in his backside so it was probably a shit germ or something." That's what it was. They never let him come home. They never could cure it. He got a posting in Japan and two years later as far as I know he was still there. They didn't know what it was. They thought it was related to animals or something. The

02:30 Japanese women were funny. The Japanese women with snakes and all that they'd put them up their nostril and pull them out of their mouth and those sort of stupid things. And they'd do filthy things with them too. We thought it might be some animals or something. The venereologist was scared. He said, "This is something bizarre." And that's why I thought it was AIDS and we all did afterwards, years and years later when we talked,

03:00 we thought that was probably what it was. Things went on. The lieutenant had to stay and life went on. The black market thrived. I was doing all right. I went from pay to canteen. I think we covered that, didn't we?

Was there much evidence of homosexuality?

03:30 Not really.

Did you hear stories?

No. It was amazing. I've had an argument with a dermatologist, no names and no games, who was very queer and known to be, he put it on me. I went to him for some treatment and he put it on me straight away, "Did you meet many queer fellows?" because

04:00 he's queer himself. I said, "No I didn't, not at all, until I got back for discharge." Before I got back to Marrickville, where I was posted for about a year, we struck a couple there. He said, "How were they treated?" I said, "Truthfully, as soon as they got out of hospital they were discharged. If we caught them we'd

04:30 bash hell out of them." It's funny how they say it is natural and it is the third sex. I don't believe that even though Micky San there was a homosexual. I think it is what they want to do. I think it's what people want to do. And I can't believe it because it wasn't there. When I was a kid and younger I was going to school and it wasn't there. It's not that I missed it. It just wasn't there. I've spoken to all the mates that I grew up with and

05:00 blokes, not only in the army but just ordinary blokes, and it was never ever – in the navy, where you'd expect there to be a lot of it, no. Why did I say that? I didn't. I still believe today that it has come on with the fashions. It's come on with the sympathy or ideas or easiness or whatever. I don't think you are born like that. I didn't really believe that.

05:30 **What was the soldiers' or the army's attitude towards men who were found to be gay?**

As I say there were none that I knew of in Japan that I knew of. We knew Micky San, he was Japanese, and he was. I honestly never struck any in my whole career and I was a knockabout bloke. I used to go to beer halls and drink. I never had any approaches in Japan or in the services.

06:00 I was young and I was pretty but I didn't get any approaches and I didn't when I got home. I spent a lot of time in the army and it wasn't until I came home, that would be in nearly '54, that I struck my first one. And I mean struck him. I struck him all right. That was the attitude then.

06:30 Most blokes, I've spoken to heaps of blokes in the army and my brothers, and none of them ever knew one. They had never seen them or heard of them. They might have been there and I'm not going to say they weren't there, but I cannot be convinced that you are born that way. I can't. But that's what they say. My daughter would argue with me. But in my experience anyway I think they just get themselves that way for sympathy or whatever they do and

07:00 favour mummy or whatever they do.

Can I ask you about your relationship with Mary San? Can you describe what her family was like and where you actually went to meet them?

They came to the camp originally. I had only been to their house once. It wasn't far. It was only a tram ride or something out of town. We'd see them occasionally. We'd invite them

07:30 to our place, what we called our place. I was a sergeant and had a bit of money at that time and we had a nice set up. I'd get the tram down. I'll get to the parents in a minute. I'd get the tram down to our place and the place was up about 200 steps up a hill overlooking a bay, probably Kiri Bay but I don't know.

08:00 Anyway, she'd see me when I got off the tram and she'd have my bath ready. You didn't have showers in Japan. You had showers in the bath houses but they didn't have showers in the homes. The baths were just a copper of boiling water with a wooden thing sitting on it so you wouldn't burn your bum on the copper and you'd sit in it. I'd get home and she'd just

08:30 strip me off and you'd have to soap yourself down and wash all the soap off you and then get in the bath and soak. While I was doing that she'd get my tea ready, whatever it was. It was very good. She was a good cook. I was bringing her Australian rations but she was cooking them in a Japanese fashion. It was very nice and we had a good life.

09:00 I can't say I missed going home to a cranky wife who I couldn't wait to divorce as quick as I could. Most, I would say nearly all – all staff from the CO to the bell ringer would all have a girl. I think it was a good idea. It kept them clean and it kept them out of problems, particularly if they were married. There were no diseases.

09:30 It was really controlled by the unit.

What were her parents like?

I thought they were nice people. They were very humble. They were always bowing and you could never see very much of their faces. You'd look at them and they'd bow. They were very humble people and I did what I could to

10:00 appease them and to be friendly and to give them what I could give them. We gave them plenty. My mate was with the quartermaster's office and we gave them plenty of blankets and things. We looked after them pretty well, as most blokes did. They looked after their girls very well. I never heard of any – one bashing. I heard of one bashing that happened but that was one out of the lot.

10:30 It turned out she was pregnant and this smart ass pushed her down some steps thinking he'd get rid of it. That was the only actual charge we ever had one against one.

Where did you go when you went to see her parents at their home? Whereabouts was it?

I can't remember the suburb but it wasn't far at all. It was only a few

11:00 miles out of Kiri. And like all that part of the world it was on the side of a hill. It was a nice tidy little home and we had some rice and some food but it was not very often. I never got close to them and nor them to me. They didn't speak any English and my Japanese was poor. The daughter would interpret a bit but it was a bit difficult.

11:30 So we just kept up just by looking after them.

Do you remember what their house looked like?

Yes, I've got some photos but they're different. They all live in sort of semi detached homes because they're so many of them and they live so close together.

12:00 They speak to each other over the veranda. They don't socialise like we do. Their socialising comes in the bath houses and things like that. They were amazing places too. They had bisexual and male and female, but they had bisexual. Nobody cared or looked or worried or whistled and you

12:30 felt like it sometimes. It was pretty good and pretty interesting. I never met them in a bath house. I went with my girl. We went to a couple of bath houses a couple of times.

So who was there when you were making the arrangement with Mary San? Who was translating?

We had a Japanese translator, one of our

13:00 staff, and the RSM and that's all. There was just the five or six of us. It was talked over very thoroughly. It was a procedure that the RSM had been through a few times. He spoke wisely and he was friendly. They had to approve unanimously and thoroughly, not for the gifts that they were going to get but

13:30 that they were satisfied that their daughter was going to be in good hands. They knew it wasn't going to last forever and she'd have to come back to the Japanese way. Some blokes married them and took them home but that wasn't my cup of tea. I was already married anyway. That was probably the procedure, yes.

Do you remember what questions you were asked by her parents?

14:00 No. They were just questions that you'd expect. I didn't have to admit I was married or anything like that. It was that you were a fair man and what would happen if Mary San has a baby and those sort of questions. I didn't answer that one.

14:30 Luckily I ever had to. She had a way. They had their ways, the Japanese. It was unbelievable. I've told doctors about it and I had one believe me but the others pooh poohed it. One doctors said, "Yes, it could happen."

15:00 They would go to the bath house and the bath houses all had polished wood benches that you would sit on. They claim that if a woman who had a period was to sit there and move away and you were to sit there on top of it it would bring your periods on. It worked with her. It's unbelievable, but it did. Whether it was in her mind and you can't imagine there was anything there or whether it was all

15:30 heat or whatever it was but that's what they do. A lot of them did. They just did that. I don't recommend it but it did work and the doctors that I've spoken to about it back here, a couple of them agree and others say, "Oh that's just luck or imagination."

Did she use anything for contraception?

No.

16:00 Not that I knew of. She could have been. She could have had something there that I didn't know about. She could have been telling me a fib. I don't know but she never fell pregnant and she had a few opportunities.

Was that something that you were concerned about?

Of course. I didn't want her to

16:30 fall pregnant. It wasn't a love thing. She was a nice girl and it was an affectionate thing. It was probably pretty necessary. It keeps you from going to beer halls out of bounds and all that stuff. It was a good idea.

17:00 **How did you communicate with her?**

We both managed. She worked in the hospital. She was just a waitress. We had a lot of staff. I knew that and I was paying them all. The Japanese didn't sign for their wages, they had what they called a chop. It was just a little thing with their signatory thing

17:30 underneath it.

You mentioned that the Japanese girl made you dinner in the Japanese style. Can you tell me what kind of food she cooked you?

There was plenty of rice. They cooked sukiyaki sort of a deal most of the time. We'd

18:00 have oysters cooked their way. I'd rather have them natural, you know, but they more or less boil them sort of thing and it takes the taste away to us. And there were prawns and a lot of seafood. We had a lot of seafood. I'd go to the markets with her and collect some stuff. Japan was still, then even, it was still pretty – things weren't good. They had very little

18:30 money. Hiroshima hadn't been built up again. When I left there was still a lot of things to go. It was unbelievable when I went back years later. It was unbelievable the change and how it's come up from the dust to the magnificence it is today. They are good workers and conscientious and work

19:00 24 hours a day with no unions or anything to worry about.

Did you go out with Mary San? Did you go sightseeing or go out?

We went to a lot of shrines, which I enjoyed going to. They had different shrines and they had different gods that you'd pray to. A different shrine was sort of a different god, sort of a thing. I don't really know what she believed

19:30 in but she believed that we all come back as spirits. It was mostly picnics and the historic spots.

What did she call you if you called her Mary San?

Bruce San.

What was her family like?

20:00 **Was it a big family?**

I think she had a sister but I never met her. I think she had a sister but she was very much a mummy and daddy's girl. She was very much so, which was good because they were nice people.

Were you able to talk to her much about what was going on in her country, in Japan? Was there any discussion about it?

Very little.

20:30 We were the conquerors and they were very humiliated about that, all of them everywhere. You'd try to dodge it. I know with the Australians we tried not to be occupiers. We tried to be friends. We did. We really tried hard. We'd go to picnics and her friends would come along. There were not many blokes though, it was always

21:00 girls. There were ladies but there were never any Japanese boys that came to mix with us. I don't know whether it was still a hatred thing but that was the case all the way down the line. You couldn't make – it was very hard to make a friend out of a Japanese male.

Why do you think that was?

Because I think they mostly still believed more or less that we attacked

21:30 them, like America started the thing. Of course America probably did in a way by cutting off their oil and all that and threatening many things. No, they just didn't – later on in my life I had a couple of good Japanese friends but at that time it was very hard. It was just after the war.

22:00 **How did you communicate with the Japanese girl and her friends? How much English did they have?**

They had about as much English as I had Japanese, and it wasn't much either way. You scratch around and you manage. It's a thing that comes to you. You speak nice words and we were romantic to a

22:30 fashion, but she knew it wasn't going to go any further. Some fellows were taking them back to Australia and all that. She knew that I wasn't going to take her back. I never gave her that indication at all. So we got on pretty good. She was happy with me. I was pretty kind to her and generous to her and I'd never do anything to harm her. It was all her way so we got on pretty

23:00 fine.

Was that a discussion that you had had with your parents straight away about her future?

Yes, it did come up. The sergeant major made sure that all of that came up. He said, "Bruce is a kind gentle bloke," and all that sort of thing. They wanted that assurance. They didn't want anything to happen to their daughter. They knew it was, forgetting the sexual matter, they

23:30 realised that she was going to learn more and do more than just serve plates out at a table, which she did. She learned a lot. They didn't know as much about Australia as we knew about Japan even, and we were a long way apart. It was a good

24:00 friendship. It was a good friendship with old Mary.

What did she look like? Could you give a description of what Mary looked like?

She wasn't as good a sort as you, but she was still pretty good. It was all right.

What did she wear? Was it a traditional kimono?

As often as not. At home she mostly had a kimono on but in the street they dressed in – a lot of them were still in

24:30 kimonos but they were becoming more western all the time and the clothes were becoming available to them. She came up pretty good. I never saw her in shorts or any of that caper and you wouldn't go swimming or any of that sort of thing somehow or other. We played rugby union against them and baseball and

25:00 sports like that with them. We played water polo but nobody would go swimming. The beaches were good. They had some nice sandy beaches down in the Sea of Japan down past Hiroshima. We went there a few times and that was good fun. There was always something going on in the army side of things too for me. There was always something to do extra.

25:30 It was a good, enjoyable part of my life.

What did you have to do for the army during this time?

Besides running the canteen – I was a pay officer and I went to the canteen. That was pretty busy but I used to have a lot of time off, as I said. I was free to do whatever I wanted mostly it was a pretty easy job. You had to keep stocks and you had to keep your

26:00 money right and the Yanks would come in with dollars. You had different currencies to change. I was busy enough. What happened was I was sending home – you couldn't – it wasn't much. I think I ended up with one of those army trunks, a big trunk full of money, Japanese money,

26:30 but you couldn't change it into anything. You'd give it to somebody and there was probably a million yen in it but you wouldn't know. All I could send home were things like – they had pretty strict rules. My Dad was, as I said before, the boss of the parcels office so I sent everything home to him. We might have got a couple of things through that would be hard for other people.

27:00 They were starting to manufacture things like binoculars and I sent heaps of them home, and little Japanese dolls and artefacts and anything that I could get hold of. I had all the money but it was just buying things that you could ship home. There were a lot of tricks and a lot of blokes used to send things home, bodgie things, but I didn't. I just kept to

27:30 the rules or whatever.

Why were you sending them home?

Mum would send me up skeins of wool and that which was very scarce in Japan. I'd give it to Mary and she'd give it to her friends so they could knit it up because they couldn't get anything like that in Japan. Silkworms were

28:00 coming back into the throw but with silk and wool there'd be a lot of difference in the cold winter. I would send Mum some money home and she'd buy the wool.

How was Mary San when you went home? What was said when you said goodbye?

It was naturally pretty sad but the Japanese are very humble. They are very

28:30 quiet. You know that you are hurting them and they are sad but they don't start bawling or anything like that. They just bow and weep. It's not that they're not emotional but they sort of keep it to themselves.

She was sad and I was a bit sad about it but that's the way it goes.

Did you keep in contact with her

29:00 **afterwards?**

No. I did a trip back to Japan – I did several trips – but I did one and I tried to look up where her parents were but it was all developed. It was gone. The little houses, it was like here with those little houses at Darlinghurst – they are gone. That was unfortunate. I didn't know what I would have done when I met them but I wanted to meet them and I wanted to help her if I could.

29:30 By then I suppose being Japanese she could probably help me. I don't know. I would have liked to see her, not romantically, but just to see how she was going.

Do you know what happened to her at all?

No, not at all. I left her too – I left it in a will. The deal was that whatever you owned when you go back to

30:00 Australia you wrote a will out – whether it would be money. I had a jeep and I had a boat and I had her and I had a house. I think we were paying rent for it. I don't remember but it wasn't much anyway. I spoke to her of course and introduced her to the bloke and she said she'd rather have him than nobody. It wasn't flattering for him but anyway but I left it to this

30:30 mate of mine. I never got in touch with him. He was Tasmanian or Victorian and I never saw him again. You had to move on. I had my own life at home. I hoped she'd be all right and I thought she would have and I moved on.

Your wife in Australia – did she know about Mary San? Did she know about this arrangement?

She would be accusing me and all

31:00 that. It never stopped. She always thought I was playing up and it was her, but that was it. It should have never happened that marriage, but the two girls are beautiful girls that came out of it. I've got beautiful kids. She comes here annoying me sometimes. She's been married three more times. She's trying to look for another me, I think,

31:30 but three more times! It didn't work out for her. She's finished now with the last one and she's living now with one of her daughters, I think. I don't try to buy into any of that.

Were many of the men in Japan who had the girls and were living with them, were many of them married as well? Was that the norm?

Yes it was the norm,

32:00 yes. It never came into conversation. It was just better than them going to brothels and things. It was better than them going out of bounds and getting into strife. I think it was a good rule. I think they did it in Germany for the British and everybody and it got followed on in Japan for the Australian occupation. Everyone was happy.

32:30 We had a lot of nurses, females, but they seemed to collect with the officers and it suited everybody fine. You had to – it's natural and you could talk all you like. Maybe the ministers and priests wouldn't worry about it but it was a natural thing.

What was the general arrangement

33:00 **between the Australian soldier and the family of the Japanese girl in terms of rations or payment?**

You were obliged to look after them, and you did. Where I was in the hospital it was no problem because as I said we had two or three hundred floating rations. You'd say to the butcher, "Give us half a lamb," and he'd give it to you. We had no worries about rations.

33:30 And as I was canteen sergeant it was very easy to deal with. They had plenty of chocolates and you know whatever they wanted to cook with. I was able to help them and my mates' girls' parents and I was happy to do it. I think it might have cost the tax payer a few bob but I don't think so.

34:00 Blokes paid for what they got and we had that much money we'd just give it away. There was plenty of money for us in Japan.

Was it in the form of cash as well as goods or was it mainly just goods?

It was mainly goods. I think we could buy better than they could. They were going through a pretty tough

34:30 time and there was nothing after Hiroshima. The whole country had gone and they weren't selling much silk overseas or doing anything like that. Their fishing was not even really good then. And nobody was eating many oysters, naturally. We were able to look after

35:00 them. And all the girls that were working in the hospital and all around whether they would be bed wardens or looking after beds or washing up or washing clothes or whatever they were doing in the canteens or in the kitchens they were getting paid all right. I used to pay about two hundred a fortnight I think it was. They would get paid every

35:30 fortnight the same as the troops would. It would be a different time of the day. We didn't have a huge staff in the hospital and most of the blokes that were in the beds didn't want any money. They were given everything Red Cross and all that. They didn't want much. So we'd pay the girls and there were a few men working there of course, Japanese men, quite a few. I had to look after all of

36:00 them and it wasn't easy. I'd have an interpreter there but you'd never know what he was interpreting half the time. You'd have to hazard a guess. You'd have to use your nous and work out what you reckoned they were doing and how many hours and where and what. It was very interesting.

You mentioned that they were paid two hundred a fortnight, two hundred what?

36:30 Yen.

What was the rebuilding like in Japan during this time? Did you see much of that?

No I didn't really. They were still clearing up more than building. Things were going on up north around Tokyo I believe. They were. I went up and had a look but down south around Hiroshima and that it was very slow to

37:00 build it up again. They had no tradesmen there. They were all wiped out mostly. And everyone was frightened to go there with the radiation and all that so they weren't getting people coming from any distance. I'd say labour was a big part of their problem. But when they got going and when I went back a few years later it was remarkable. They are remarkable workers and achievers.

37:30 Any Asian people, they just work 24 hours a day and they don't worry. They get it done. They don't pull in the unions and say, "They're trying to work us an extra couple of hours," and that rubbish. They just do it.

Did you visit Hiroshima?

Many times. I saw it actually first before I went over to Korea. That would be in '49.

38:00 They hadn't put up much at all. It was just a wreck on the ground most of it. It was a pretty rough place. It was a pretty poor place. You could have nothing but pity for them. You would see some of them that were burned and all that. I went to Vietnam a couple of years ago and, God…

38:30 They didn't get an atom bomb but the napalm and the smart bombs that were dropped. Jesus. Agent Orange, fair dinkum, you've got an arm growing out of your other arm. It's unbelievable to see what it has done. It is shocking thing, war.

39:00 **What evidence did you have of the injuries that were sustained at Hiroshima? What did you see?**

I saw a lot of damaged people. There were a lot of people with just like skin burns all over them like they'd been in a copper or something. A lot of people had it over their face and their arms. I don't know

39:30 whether most of them moved away or what happened but you wouldn't see them there and then every day but you'd see a lot of them. You could only have pity, that's all, for no matter what they did. I don't think my brother Fred would have pity, but I found that I had to have pity.

What was your

40:00 **perception of the way the civilian population were coping with the fact that they had an occupying force?**

They didn't show that they hated us or anything like that. Naturally they didn't like it. We were under pretty strict rules and most of the blokes were obeying it. You wouldn't do anything that would offend them. For me it

40:30 was more pity than anything. The Japs wouldn't have liked that if they knew it but there was no – Australians would – they'd duck out of their way a lot. They'd see you. We were all in uniform of course and they'd duck out of your way most of you. But the staff, we

41:00 went to a lot of picnics and things with the staff. They had it good. They knew that we were no monsters or anything. The Japs knew that they shouldn't have gone to war anyway and the way they did it was stupid. They had to get beaten taking America on like that.

41:30 **We're just going to change tapes.**

Tape 8

00:38 **You mentioned that it was considered better for men to have these live-in girls than visit brothels, but what were the official instructions from the army in regard to sexual antics in Japan, what did they tell you?**

It was like what happened to me. I wasn't in a brothel. I was in a beer hall, which you could call a brothel in a way. It was out of bounds the area, the whole

01:00 road, street and district. And the provos caught me but they didn't charge me. They just got me up in the jeep and took me back to my unit. I spoke to the RSM and he put me in the picture. He said, "You're only new here and I don't want you getting into trouble so you've got to get yourself a girlfriend. You're paying them all so you might have an idea of

01:30 one you like or whatever." So he gave me a couple of weeks to pick one out and I picked out Mary San. I was only young and she was young but the CO and every officer and the RSM himself all had a girl. That thought that was the best way to go in the army and it was probably unofficial but it was the army's, in my opinion,

02:00 correct approach to keep blokes from getting into trouble whether they were married at home or just single blokes it didn't matter. They had to keep it under control and they did. It was the same all right round world with Germany with the English and whoever occupied the countries. They were all treated in a similar fashion.

What were the penalties for being caught in a brothel or contracting venereal disease?

Well a corporal could lose his two stripes or a

02:30 lieutenant could lose a pip. They were pretty hard on it. They were very hard on it and that was a good rule too. As far as VD [venereal disease] went, the Canadians when they arrived there were about 350 of them or something on the ship. And they'd all come through this same camp in America.

03:00 Ninety per cent of them got VD. There were only about 12 girls working in the place and they all got caught. We had to put them all in hospital and we had to treat them all. The lesser ones would walk out but they'd have to get needles and needles and needles. Fort something it was – I think it might have been Fort Worth or something in California. They all went through the same camp and got the same

03:30 diseases. It was gonorrhea mostly, but it was treated pretty quickly over there. The cure seemed to be effective. It's lucky I never had to try it.

Did the army issue troops with condoms?

They didn't actually hand it to you. I don't think in those days –

04:00 later on they'd give it to you with your pay. They'd give you a couple of them back in Australia. They were there though. There were boxes of them in different offices or places where you could grab a handful if you wanted them. A lot of blokes didn't like them anyway. They thought they were smart to get around it in other ways but they could get them if they

04:30 wanted them.

Can you describe what these beer halls looked like?

They were more like a restaurant but there was just plenty of beer flowing all the time and a little bit of music on the old plastic discs. You know, 38s or whatever they were called.

05:00 They had lots of girls there. Most of them were nearly brothels. Like up the [Kings] Cross and that, there are girls there going all the time.

So who actually worked the bars in the beer halls? Who actually ran these places?

The Japanese. They were mostly blokes behind the bars and the

05:30 girls were there to serve you. You could have food or anything you wanted. They were pretty wild places at times. When the troops got a few beers in them and things weren't going the way they wanted them to go they'd get a bit wild.

So where did the sex take place then?

In the

06:00 building or the building next door – anywhere. It was very rife. They were on the streets and they were anywhere. I don't think they charged much money but to them it was good income and the only income they could get.

The different forces that were in Japan at the time, were they

06:30 **mixing in the beer halls?**

Not much. The Aussies and the Kiwis would get on all right but the Canadians and the Yanks didn't mix at all. They didn't come near us. We more or less kept to ourselves and any Kiwis that were in town they'd always come and join us. We weren't looking for them

07:00 anyway.

You mentioned that there was some hostility in the Pacific regarding the Japanese and how they'd treated the Australians during the war. What was the treatment like of the Japanese during that occupation time by those occupation forces?

07:30 Fred used to tell me about the trouble they'd had with the Japs who had captured some of our blokes, but none of that went on. Even with the blokes that had come straight from the islands and that there was no animosity. They just went on with it. I think everyone was pretty well behaved. I never heard of anything outrageous

08:00 from us to them.

Can you tell me about travelling around Japan and the places you went to and what you saw and what your impressions were of those towns and cities?

While I was there on staff we didn't travel a lot. The Australian Army, in its wisdom, there was a place – the town was called

08:30 Ito. It was about 50 or 60 kilometres out of Tokyo on the coast, on the west coast, on the inland sea there or the west coast anyway. We took over a big hotel, the Kuana Hotel. It had two 18-hole golf courses. They were huge.

09:00 The professional there was a fellow called Chick Chin. And he was good. He beat our best champ, Von Neider, in the Pacific Championship after the war. He was a good golfer. He was a pro and he would teach you. The deal was that it was only about a shilling a night or seven and nine pence a week or something and that was you food and everything else. And to

09:30 play eighteen holes of golf was sixpence, which is five cents. You were given your golf clubs and a caddy, a young girl, and a few balls and away you went. If you were lucky enough to get Chick Chin or one of his – his family, and his ancestors even, they ran the whole of that. All the

10:00 staff and that they were all his relatives. He was a good bloke. I played a bit of golf but I've wasn't mad about golf but I've always been mad about shooting. Up in the hills they used to have a lot of pheasants, big golden pheasants. I had a few feathers here once. I used to go out shooting these pheasants. They would take you out the first day with a dog or

10:30 maybe for two days if you were a bit slow. You'd have to talk to the dog in Japanese and tell him when to stop and when to hunt. He was a pointer. He would run and show you where the pheasants were hiding and then you'd tell him to go and flush them out. And you'd be ready with your gun and he'd run in and the birds would go up and with your shotgun you'd shoot them if you were any good. I used to get a few birds and I'd take

11:00 them back to the hotel and ask the bloke in the kitchen to pluck them and clean them and dress them. I'd always give one, if I could, I'd give one to be taken to Chick Chin and to his family. So I kept in real good with him and learned to play a little bit of golf. They were good times. Even there, there were things going on. If you paid

11:30 a shilling a day extra you could have breakfast in bed. But the girls would bring the breakfast in because the blokes would start playing games then and it spoiled everything a little bit. The fellows were wild. The Americans used to come over and play golf. They'd come over big time and they'd have their ships come over not far off shore and the helicopters would bring them into the Kuana.

12:00 We used to give them the okay to play 18 holes and fit them in, you know, with some admiral or some big nob and they thought that was a great joke. It was a good place to go and it wasn't far out of Tokyo. I enjoyed it. I went up there a few times.

Had this place been bombed during the war?

Not up that way, no.

12:30 No, I think the bombing in Japan was mostly the two atom bombs, Nagasaki and Hiroshima. On the other islands I think there was a bit of it going on. What is the name of that other island? It was more the outlying places. I don't think the Yanks wanted to really bomb them.

13:00 But when it came to them losing so many men in the islands and the atom bomb – they got Einstein or whoever he was from Germany and he showed them how to make the bomb and they decided they'd drop a couple and that's what they did. Three I think they dropped. It was pretty bad news for those poor blokes because who they didn't kill burned, and they may as well be dead.

13:30 **What did you know about atomic weapons prior to that?**

Nothing. It was only what everybody else heard on the radio. It was more afterwards of course that it started coming on. We thought it was going to be pretty bad but luckily the

14:00 Russians and the Yanks had a bit of a competition and never fired on each other, luckily. If one had ever had done what they did, I'd say that the other one would have got them. They tried to keep up with other and common sense ruled that we wouldn't have it.

Given that you had lived through World War II and you also had intimate knowledge of Japanese culture, while you were there what

14:20 **thoughts did you have about the necessity of those atomic bombs being dropped in Japan?**

I didn't think it was a very good idea but the Yanks were losing a lot of troops, a lot of men, it was 20,000 a day or something. It was some stupid figure. Whether it was the way they fought or what they did and they just had too many troops running around.

14:40 I think they probably did the right thing by their people. The Japanese, you couldn't flatter them. They were pretty low in their methods of warfare. Changi and all those places were pretty grubby. I can't say whether it was their education or what it was but they were all for the

15:00 emperor and all that. They didn't have a chance from the start even though they built huge ships, wonderful ships. They didn't have a chance. They were in with Germany but that didn't work. The Germans beat themselves really and once they collapsed well Japan had to collapse. It had to go

15:30 and they knew it. I don't say they are aggressive people in themselves but they are very proud and they didn't like it when the Yanks cut their oil off. That of course started the big one when they hit Hawaii. I don't know you could call it –

16:00 maybe a trade war. Not like the one we're going to have soon. I can't say much more.

Why do you think that given the losses they suffered during the Second World War and the bombing damage done to Japan and then that period of occupation,

16:30 **why do you think it is that they were able to rebound so successfully?**

The Japanese?

Yes.

They are that kind of people. They are hard-working people and they are pretty bright. Their education is pretty good. They don't have any foreigners in their country. There is no racism. Against the Koreans there was a fair bit. But they're

17:00 a pretty bright race, the Japs. They got together and they sacrificed. I don't think they had the unions in those days to hold them back and they developed quickly. They worked 24 hours a day building roads and railways lines and they were very interesting

17:30 people. They were very good that way.

While you were there, what sort of scrutiny was there from military police or other army officials in regard to this black market activity?

If they couldn't beat it, join it. That was probably the scheme. A lot of them were involved in it. They

18:00 needed some help, the Japanese, and they found that they could rake up the money and there was lots of stuff. Like in our hospital, we were overstocked more than we needed and the ships were coming in with the goods and everybody wanted to sell it. There was no big – the Japanese police were on to the black market but not with the

18:30 full enthusiasm. They knew that it would be good if a lot of the food got through, which it did.

What items were most sought after by the Japanese?

Mostly the basic foods. I don't think they were after anything that they couldn't make themselves.

19:00 It was mostly foodstuffs. They made their own cigarettes. I don't think they liked the American cigarettes that much. They had a terrible cigarette. I remember having a puff on a few of them. I would say it was mostly food and chocolates and goodies like that. There must have been a lot of meat and stuff being black marketed.

19:30 I know there was a bit of it but there must have been a lot of it, a huge amount, going. It was all the forces. I don't think any of them would be knocked back for anything they asked for from their countries, different countries. They were all stocked up and there was always somebody there that wanted to make a dollar or two. The black market thrived in every country, in every occupation part of the

20:00 world. It would still be going on today.

To what extent did the people involved in the black market feel like they needed to conceal it? What level of that was going on?

Not too high up the chain. There would be a few copper in a bit of it but mostly

20:30 it was the girls, and there were millions I suppose, that worked in army units and that sort of thing. They'd have boyfriends and they'd get white boyfriends and that was mostly when the black market was going and how they'd get all their things. Like I said before, the rations for a soldier were so good.

21:00 They were only supposed to get say three pounds or six dollars worth of things in their pay but they'd go and just flog it and somebody else wouldn't want it and they were interested. They'd get their ration card and they'd say, "What's going on?" The canteens had plenty of stock so that's how it went.

What were the reasons for you deciding to

21:30 **leave Japan?**

A lot of it was homesickness. I got sick of it.

I'll just ask you that question again. What were your reasons for making the

22:00 **decision to come home?**

It was homesickness a lot. I'd had a long time away, three and a half years I think. And there were two little girls I was looking forward to seeing. I wasn't expecting to end up bringing them up, but anyway. The black market was a bit red hot. I'm not talking about my conscience, I'm talking about my

22:30 feelings. I didn't ever feel guilty for doing anything. I felt I was getting the stuff and they needed it and nobody was getting robbed at our end, although it was illegal what we were doing. I thought I wanted to get home and that's all. My family was back at home, my brothers, and everybody was settling down. I wanted to get into my prawn breeding that I had

23:00 learned while I was there. So I had another world to start, which I did.

Can you elaborate on what you mean by, "The black market was getting red hot"?

Well it seemed to be moving into a bigger scale. No one seemed to be getting caught. I didn't ever hear of anyone getting into trouble. You don't want to be hiding from another one. They were all

23:30 in it. There was talk of some stuff, military stuff, that I didn't like being black marketed. That tank track and other military things, I think that was wrong. That was a bad step. That was just to make people richer. That wasn't to do with anybody needing some good food. I'm not a

24:00 goody or anything like that but I just got sick of it and I missed home. I was in full correspondence all the time with Mum and that. I got a couple of stupid letters from my cook and my wife and I thought I'd get home and sort that out. I had a talk to my commanding officer and he said, "Yes, I'll get you home if you want to go."

24:30 So I went.

During your time in Japan and after being evacuated from Korea, how did you follow the progress of the war in Korea?

There was wounded coming over all the time and different blokes that I knew coming through. I was interested. It was kind

25:00 of phasing all the time. They got another battalion that came over and our battalion was relieved and the 9th Battalion I think came in, or 2 Battalion, it doesn't matter. Most of the blokes that I knew were going home anyway so I thought it was time to go.

What sort of injuries were they arriving in the hospital with?

A lot of bad ones. There were a lot of blokes with legs and

25:30 arms and the normal things that get blown off or shot and wounded and can't heal. There were probably some diseases but it was mostly to do with the war itself, the fighting. I don't think anybody came home with any drastic things. I remember one

26:00 bloke came and they couldn't work out what was wrong. He was getting as thin as a pencil. He had a tapeworm inside him. I'll never forget that. The nurses told me, they said, "We're going to try and encourage that tapeworm to come out and we estimate it is 20 foot long." I said, "You're joking!" And they said it was about a quarter or an-inch or half an

26:30 inch wide. What a tapeworm does is get into a person, into the top of his bowels and gets in more towards his top stomach. And it just lies there and a lot of the food goes into him and the rest of it just goes down through your stomach and out. And the worm keeps growing. So what they did… I saw this

and it was great. I spoke to my daughter who is a nurse and she said, “Yes, that would be

27:00 right.” They starved him. They wouldn’t feed him at all. And this nurse came over and said, “We’re going to get that worm out tonight.” So they got this hot food which was fuming and steaming. And they put it so that it was blowing over him. And the worm came out of his mouth to get to that food, truly. They got hold of it and they pulled it out and it was twenty-

27:30 four foot long. They were right. They pulled it out in one piece. It was amazing! You’d think it was a magician’s trick but they did it. I’ve told doctors since and they’ve said, “That could be possible.” And it was possible because they did it. Prowse was his name, Private Prowse. He soon put weight on again.

So how did you travel home to

28:00 **Australia?**

By air. I went across by ferry from Kiri to Iwakuni, the airport, and I came home TAA [Trans Australian Airways] or one of those. It was TAA and ANA [Australian National Airways] then and it was on one of those. We came home via – we had a good trip home. We came via Manila I think and because we were nearly all soldiers

28:30 they took us over to New Guinea and Kokoda and showed us the mountains and the terrain and that was wonderful.

Can you describe what that was like?

It was exciting. To see where so many of our fellows were killed, you know, it was a moving thing. I don’t think anyone was talking. My brother had been up

29:00 there and lots of his mates and a lot got killed up there. It was good to see. You can imagine that you might get someone on a movie. They used to have movies turned theatres in those days and you might have got something on that but you didn’t get television of course and you were always curious to know how it was. You could see down the trail or the track or whatever you want to call it

29:30 and how it wound down and how long the big mountains were that they had to go up and down and up and down. We lost so many men there. We didn’t land at [Port] Moresby or anything, we just came straight through. It might have been Darwin we stopped at and fuelled.

So what were your first feelings about being back in Australia?

30:00 Wonderful, wonderful. Mum and Dad were there and a couple of the kids and my sister. I don’t think the old cook arrived. No, it was a good welcome home, it was good. I caught up with her the next day probably and it went from there.

So what happened then in terms of your army career?

I was still

30:30 in the army and I really had a fair way to go because I’d signed up for six years and probably only three or four had gone. So I had to supposedly work my time out. When I was still in the army at Marrickville and doing the pay sergeant’s job, the paymaster had an in to get this land at Fairfield and I’d get it built within six

31:00 weeks, he said. And he was right. I got my loan through and gave a fair few bottles of beer here and there to get everything running straight. I got through and she never came. As I said, she never lived there. She dropped the two girls off and left.

31:30 That ended up in divorce. She got the girls back because of the funny laws in those days. Maybe they’re not funny laws, maybe they are correct laws.

How much do you think your war service had to do with the breakdown of that marriage?

None, it was gone before. The army, the time over there, was just a relief. She was getting paid. She was getting

32:00 good money coming home to her and the kids were all right. Of course you miss your kids but I never really missed her. I never ever loved her, I’m sure of that. But that’s another story.

So when and how were you eventually discharged from the army?

Well, when I got the girls and I had to raise them on my own the adjutant, which is the second in charge of the

32:30 company, the adjutant was looking after me pretty well for leave and all that. I had the house at Fairfield and he lived a couple of suburbs, at Granville I think, away. We used to travel home and I got to know him pretty well and I said, “This is getting too hard. I might have to try and get a discharge.” He said, “I’ll recommend it.” So I did.

33:00 I got a compassionate discharge because I was in such a situation. It wasn’t long after that I met

Evelyn, my second wife to be. She used to come and look after the kids real good. Anyway, the other one put in for a divorce and got the kids. And I had the

33:30 divorce and married my second wife, Evelyn.

Given the amount of time that you'd had away and also the quite extraordinary life that you'd led in Japan, what was it like assimilating into Australian civilian life?

It was pretty difficult. I was lucky I had a good girl with me.

34:00 The kids were gone, although it didn't take long before we got married and reproduced and we were happy families again. I got my prawns. I started prawns and then I got into oyster farming, which I stayed in for the rest of my life until I gave it all away about ten years ago.

So what difficulties did you experience becoming a civilian back in Australia?

It was awkward after all those years and just living in army camps mostly and that. I suppose Mary made it a bit easier because I wasn't bound. And I'd had pretty good officers because they were getting their benefit off me. I had a good life there and I didn't have any problems and when I came home I

34:30 assimilated all right, pretty quickly and easily. I got involved in my prawn thing and then I ended up in the oyster thing and I knew I needed a thousand pounds. I got a job at Goodyear Tyre Company. It was a three-shift day. It was day, afternoon,

35:00 night and there was always overtime every day. It was twelve hours a day, six days a week, which I did. At the end of twelve months I had my money and I said, "Give me my pay, my money, and I'm off." They wanted me to stay but I didn't. Then I went almost full-time oyster farming. I had my little van and vehicle and a boat to get out there with and it went on and on and on. They were good

35:30 days. They were good days.

Can I ask you to sum up the treatment that Korean war veterans received in Australia after the war?

We were probably a little bit brighter than the World War II blokes as far as getting benefits from Repatriation [Department]. But we were never ever as smart as the Vietnamese Veterans.

36:00 They said, "They got this in World War I and World War II and us blokes were shafted." They organised themselves and got members into parliament and lawyers onto their staff and doctors and really hit it. And they're all doing very well out of Repat [Repatriation Department]. We are still struggling on very hard and World War II would be phasing out now.

36:30 Like most things in life and particularly to deal with the government you've got to try to be smarter than them. The Vietnam blokes went about it the right way and I think they're all doing all right now.

How do you feel about the fact that the Korean War is considered the forgotten war?

Not very good but I understand it. I've got to understand it. Like Vietnam – there was nobody called up into the Korean War. We all volunteered.

37:00 There was nobody sent into a letter saying, "You've got to go into the army." Right after the end there was National Service that came in. There was a battalion, probably the 9th Battalion, that had a lot of National Servicemen in it and they had been called up, but other than those they were all volunteers. Most of them were getting away from their wives, I suppose.

37:30 **Can I ask you because you've mentioned that you've visited Vietnam, and because of your experiences in Japan and Korea, how do you feel now about the necessity of war generally?**

Well generally I think, and I think most blokes would think this, you've got to wait until you're attacked. But in all

38:00 sincerity we are being attacked now but in a different way. I don't think there will be a war like – I think Iraq hopefully will have been the last one. But I believe we've got a big fight with the Muslims on our hands, a very big fight, and it will go on probably forever.

38:30 That is going to be our main problem with terrorists. I agree with all of that. That is the main worry and how they are going to sort that lot out, I don't know. I think Bush is trying but I don't know whether he's going the right way about it or not. Somebody's got to be sincere about it and face it and not be talked

39:00 down and know what it's all about. It's a religious thing. Our church and your church doesn't want to fight it but it's got to be done. It's got to be done. I just hope that my grandkids and great grandkids – that we've managed to get the problem over to make it preferably agreeable

39:30 but I don't think we will.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

It's a wonderful day. I lost an uncle in Gallipoli and I lost a brother and many friends and I admire being

a soldier for five years or more or my life. I admire soldiers.

40:00 I think that most of them are genuine blokes. They are ordinary blokes but they believe in what they are doing. I would say that these fellows over there in Afghanistan, they'd maybe want to come home. But if they asked the blokes in Iraq I bet they'd say, "No, leave us here. Just leave us alone. Let's finish it." They would for sure. That's a soldier.

40:30 **On that note, thank you very much for talking to us today, Mr Wilsher.**

It's a pleasure.

INTERVIEW ENDS