

Australians at War Film Archive

Augustine Breen (Gus) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:30 **Gus Happy Birthday firstly and thanks very much, to begin with can you share with me an**
- 01:00 **overview of your life from where you were born to where you are now in about fifteen minutes?**
- Right I was born in Willoughby and my early childhood was spent there. I went to school at the local convent school which is still there, St Thomas'. And from there I went to my secondary school I went to Waverly College. I won a scholarship actually from St Thomas's Willoughby to go to Waverly.
- 01:30 I am one of six children, three boys and three girls and I am the eldest boys. I spent six years at Waverly College, 1942 to 1947 and from there I went to the Royal Military College Duntroon. I applied in 1947 having been taken on a tour
- 02:00 of Canberra by the school and shown the college. I liked it and I guess a military career was in my blood because my father was a British army officer and his father was in the British army. I was selected for Duntroon and I entered there in March 1948.
- 02:30 I spent four years there as a cadet and graduated in December 1951. I graduated into infantry which was my first choice of the arm in which I wished to serve. And fortunately, I say that because I guess you go to a military college to go to war, I graduated right in the middle of the Korean War.
- 03:00 In November 1952, I went to Korea. After my graduation however my first posting was to 13 National Service Training Battalion at Ingleburn here on the outskirts of Sydney. From there I moved just across the road also at Ingleburn to 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment which was the training battalion for Korea and then I was posted to Korea as a
- 03:30 re-inforcement infantry platoon commander. I flew there with QANTAS [airline] flew to Japan actually. Had five days in Japan getting ready, and had breakfast in Japan one Saturday morning and lunch on the front line. It was welcome to the war. I joined 4 platoon B company of the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment on
- 04:00 Hill 355 which is very well known in Korean history as Little Gibraltar. The chap I took over from had been killed about twelve days beforehand but I took over a great platoon. So my wartime military career began. I served with 1 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] until they
- 04:30 came home in early march 1953. Ten days after I joined them, B company which I was a member performed 'Operation Fauna' which was a company raid behind enemy Chinese lines and I had the privilege of leading, well at least I had the lead platoon. And so I was initiated pretty
- 05:00 quickly into what war was all about. When 1 RAR came home they were relieved by the 2nd Battalion which came up from Australia, and those of us who were re-inforcements and who hadn't done twelve months mandatory tour were transferred over to 2 RAR. I was only there a matter of weeks when my posting to the American Air Force
- 05:30 came through and that was as an aerial observer with 6147 Aerial Tactical Control Group which was based east of where we were stationed at a town called Chun Chong. The base was K 147 and I and two other Australians, one from 2 RAR and one from 3 RAR went there as observers. We were the only people during the Korean War
- 06:00 to get that posting. I flew in the back seat of an unarmed Harvard Aircraft which was the basic American Air Force training plane. It was armed with white phosphorous smoke rockets for marking targets. And the job was to patrol the Chinese front line positions back to an area of twelve miles behind their lines,
- 06:30 seek out targets of opportunity or find the pre-brief targets which we were given before we took off and

direct the fighter bombers which were either ground based, or off the aircraft carriers off the coast onto these positions for their dive bombing runs. It was a great

- 07:00 posting. I could read a map, I was trained, so I didn't have any difficulty with it. I was also trained in radio communications, because the basis of it was the plane was flown by an American pilot and he had an army observer with him in the back seat to do all of the map reading and radio communication work and so forth. I flew seventy-six missions in three months.
- 07:30 I joined them on Easter Sunday the 5th of April 1953 and I left them on the 5th of July 1953 went back to 2 RAR just before they were going onto the Hook which was the famous battle at the end of the war and so before I got my feet back onto the ground again I was on the front line. I didn't have any break. I took the company advance party onto 'the Hook'. I was in A company of 2
- 08:00 RAR, again as a platoon commander. And I spent my last three weeks of the war there and my last three nights in the Battle of the Hook. I was on the front line obviously the night the war ended. I came off the line a couple of days later, and we went into a reserve position behind the Imjin River and I was
- 08:30 there for a couple of months and I was posted, when my time was up, to Japan. I went as an instructor to the re-inforcement holding unit in Huon in Japan and I was only there for a couple of months and I was posted to Headquarters AustAmry Component as G3, which is the Operations Officer in the headquarters, it is a small headquarters only about seven officers in it. That was a
- 09:00 great life, I lived in luxury and I stayed there until early September 1954 when I was posted back to Australia. I came to Australia had some leave, was posted to 16 National Service Battalion in Woodside in the Adelaide Hills and I served there until July 1955 when I was posted to Queensland as
- 09:30 Adjutant of the Queensland University Regiment. And I served there until January 1958 when I left the army .I was actually posted to go to Malaya with 3 RAR as the mortar officer but I decided that I could do better, I thought in my own mind I could do better in civilian life than I could in the army, so I took the plunge.
- 10:00 And so apart from some service in the CMF [Citizens Military Forces] after I left I really basically left the army in January 1958.

Where did you go to from there business wise?

I went to Waltons which was then Waltons Sears, the departmental store. And I was a captain in the army on the Friday and one the Monday morning I was pushing a

- 10:30 barrow around Walton's main store in the valley in Brisbane. Picking up all of the parcels that were left at the collection point pushing them into the good lift, down to the bowels of the store and I unloaded them sorted them out into delivery runs and loaded the trucks. I did that for about six weeks and I was promoted sideways. Instead of
- 11:00 loading the trucks I unloaded them. I went into the goods receiving section. And so I was taking the goods out of trucks, sorting them out and ticketing them and putting them into the barrow and carting them back up to the departments. And I did that for another six weeks and then I was posted straight away as relieving store manager, and I was store manger for a month at a time
- 11:30 in Rockhampton., Bundaberg, Ipswich and Stones Corner which is a Brisbane suburb. And then I became the Operations Manager of the State Warehouse. So I was then the floor man reporting to the warehouse manager I was responsible for the floor operation of their state warehouse. Then I was posted down to Sydney with them and I became a
- 12:00 furniture salesman in the Parramatta store and then a carpet salesman of all things in the Hurstville store. I was a bit I was taken back a bit by all that, I didn't like it terribly much and I didn't know what I really wanted to do, I floundered around .And then I went to work for British Paints
- 12:30 as a sales rep, a friend of mine who I knew in the CMF got me in there. I joined them as a sales rep, I had never really sold much in my life, but I represented British Paints in the St George, Illawarra territory here in Sydney. But in my time with every territory they had here in the metropolitan area and
- 13:00 some near country, down to Wollongong and up to the mountains and that sort of thing. I became sales supervisor for them and then I became metropolitan sales manager for them. It was in the mid 1960s the magic word was marketing and every man was wanted to be a marketing man, so I thought, and I had applied for a job
- 13:30 when I was at British Paints with a tobacco company which came to Australia from England. It was Gallagher International, you probably don't even remember them, but their cigarettes were Edinburgh and they were going to work wonders in this country, take on the giants, WD & HO Wills and Phillip Morris and they were looking for a New South Wales Sales Manager, and I thought I will have a go at that. I didn't smoke which wasn't an advantage,
- 14:00 so I applied for it through a management consultant, I didn't get the job but they offered me the New South Wales Sales supervisor job which I decided that I wouldn't take. A) I didn't smoke and B) it

would have been a move sideways because I was already a sales supervisor. But I met a very fine fellow,

14:30 and the manager himself. From a military background, training planning that I had been trained to do in the army, really it falls into the place with marketing. He said, "If you ever see job advertised with Nestle, or Unilever they are two of my big clients, ring me." Well time went on, nothing happened and I

15:00 had in the meantime become sales manager for British Paints and then I saw this job for a product manager for Nestles. I rang him and he got me the job. And so my marketing career started. I was the product manager for their beverage division which was 'Milo', 'Quix', which is still on the market. Malted Milk, I guess it is still around and a product called Liquid Ice-cream mix.

15:30 And so I had to learn to be a marketing man. Well I floundered around in that for a while, but it was a great training ground at Nestles. I then became the product manger for Maggi their soups and sauces and all of that. and I did both of those one for one year and one for the second. But I was a very ambitious fellow and an opportunity came up to go

16:00 with a company called Corn Products which is now Uncle Toby's here in an Australia. They were an American company Corn Products, and I joined them and did two product launches with them. One was pourable salad dressings and the other was spray on starch. And I stayed with them for also nearly two years. in the interim I went to university at night to study marketing and I got a diploma at the University of New South Wales in marketing and

16:30 then I got a diploma in advanced marketing which is the statistical, mathematical side of marketing, all good stuff but you never use it. I became very friendly with the advertising people, which is George Patterson. And one day one of the account directors in there said to me, "Would you like the opportunity

17:00 to meet John Mars?" of 'Mars bars' fame, he was the son of the founder of the Mars Bars empire. He said, "They are looking for a marketing manager for Uncle Bens." Which as you probably know 'Pal'dog food, 'Kitty cat' 'Whiskers', 'Lassie' and all of the other things. He said, "They have just come to Australia, they are establishing in Wodonga Victoria and

17:30 they are looking for a marketing man and I reckon you can do it." And I said, "I sure want to meet him." and so I had lunch with John Mars and his general manager and they offered me the job on the spot. So I was married living over in Ryde with three small kids and come home and my wife said, "We're moving lets go." So we moved to Albury and

18:00 I worked in Wadonga, I worked for them for over three years. I was their first marketing manager and I launched a lot of those products and I had a very successful time. But circumstances as they often do changed and so I decided to come back to Sydney and through the personnel director of Uncle Bens who had

18:30 resigned and come back to Sydney also, he was working for one of the major personnel consultancy firms he said that he had a job that I could do, marketing director on the board of Ingham's the chicken people. So I went to work for Jack and Bob Ingham, and I worked for them

19:00 for two and a half years, maybe longer and regrettably had a falling out with Bob Ingham. You never win those and I found myself out in the street, in my early 40s, had to get a job at the level I was looking so I tried and tried my friends came to the party, I got a

19:30 great consultancy job with White Wings as it was then the food company, that kept me going. And then I took basically the first job that came around of any importance and that was the general manager of Fowlers Sanitary Ware. Well it was a far cry from chickens to toilets. But I did it. and I did it for three years.

20:00 I wasn't terribly happy there I always thought it was a bit of a stigma flogging toilet pans, and so again through a fellow I met, I did a lot of networking, I was offered an opportunity in a company that nobody has ever probably heard of, Mirrotone Paints. It was a privately owned company in the Industrial Paint field. I knew a bit about paint because I had worked for British Paint's for four and

20:30 a half years, and it was for a marketing manager and I said, "Well sometimes you have to go backwards to go forward." And I took the step back from general manager to marketing manager and I got back my old hat and wore my marketing managers hat there, then I became marketing director and then I became general manager. I worked with them for over thirteen years and

21:00 I worked the last seven years as managing director. It was a good company, it is still a good company. They are the leading paint company in Australia and New Zealand in furniture finishes, so you have probably got them in your own home. They also have metal coatings and they are

21:30 in optical glass fibre coatings, all of the underground cables, all of the submarine cables that go from here to America, well half way they're coated with Mirrortone paints. They have got all of the scratch off lottery business, there is five coats of paint on a scratch off lottery ticket and it is all Mirrortone .It was a good company, the fellow who owned it was a bit of a .

22:00 desk thumping, file cabinet, kicking, shouting, kicking sort of guy and that suited me fine because at least you knew where you stood. And I am not a bloke that pushes around to easily and so I stood up to

him in the first three weeks and we got on famously. He decided that the furniture industry in Australia was dwindling

22:30 because of the imports that were coming in from South East Asia and he adopted a very aggressive stance, if we can't beat them we have got to join them. and so he sent me up to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Jakarta and Indonesia on the one trip to try and establish distributorships so that we could ship our products into South East Asia to the furniture manufacturers.

23:00 Well I had I started off I can remember forty-three letters, got all of the contacts, went through the phone books and went to the trade commissioners and I got forty-three contacts in Singapore and Malaysia, I wrote to them made appointments by letter and arrived in Singapore bright eyed and bushy tailed and nobody had ever heard of me, they

23:30 are Chinese they don't read letters. So I thought I had better get on Shanks Pony [walk] and get out there. So eventually I established a distributor ship in Singapore and I established one in Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia and Bangkok, one in Hong Kong, missed out in the Philippines and by the time I had got to Jakarta I had had enough anyhow and you can't

24:00 do business up there believe me. I have had about four goes and I have never been able to get it off the ground. So there we were with distributorships, we started to ship our product, I was in charge of it. At that stage I was marketing director and used to go up there about four times a year. In our first year we made a profit so we decided we would manufacture. So we set up a joint venture with the Singapore

24:30 Distributor, Chinese group. And we established a factory in Jahoor Barun which is just over the causeway from Singapore. That enabled us to get our product into Singapore duty free and as we were manufacturing in Malaysia there was no duty I established that and within three years made three million dollars profit.

That sounds terrific.

25:00 Great job and then in my latter years there I established a joint venture manufacturing with a Thai paint company. The Hong Kong paint business folded, there was not a lot of industry, cottage industry in Hong Kong but I became a director of all of the companies up there, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the holding company

25:30 I became a director of the New Zealand company which is based in, the factory is in Wellington in Lower Hut and the office is in Auckland, I built a new head office over there and they have distribution in Christchurch. And so for a privately owned company and it is still privately owned by the family, although I had shares in it. he offered me shares and I took them up

26:00 and made a few bob out of that. That was the end then when I retired from there, I was sixty-one, that was the end of my full time working life, but I was only retired for three weeks and I went back to work. A consultant that I knew called me and said, "I heard you were looking for work?" To which my response was, "Listen I have just retired I am going to play golf." And he said, "No you're not I have got a great job." And so for nine months I went back to

26:30 work and I was a consultant for the government and I was actually marketing manager for corrective services industries, I had to market and sell all of the merchandise manufactured in the prison system.

Just briefly again you are married with kids?

I was married in 1960.

27:00 And my working life started in 1958. I was married in Brisbane actually, my wife's a Queenslander. But we lived in Sydney or Albury all of our lives. We honeymooned coming back to Sydney and bought a house we had already bought it before we were married over in Ryde and it was still being built the new place and then we moved to Albury. We bought this land for this home before we went to Albury and when we came back

27:30 we decided we would build and so we built this house.

We might just stop there for a sec I just need to blow my nose. Yeah what you have said is spot on, so now we want to come back to the beginning and chat about your childhood and growing up, so what are your first memories of early childhood?

Going to primary school, I was taught by the old Irish nuns at Willoughby.

28:00 And growing up in a family, I mean my parents well I wouldn't say they were poor but they were certainly not wealthy and I grew up in the Depressions years, there was six children, my father had a pretty ordinary job at the Sydney Morning Herald [newspaper] and I am sure it was a struggle

28:30 for them to bring us up. Although, each of us, the six kids all won scholarships for secondary education so we all went to good schools. I used to travel from Willoughby to Waverly every day in the days when you would hop on the bus at Willoughby go into York Street walk up Martin Place catch the Bronte Beach tram, it used to take me an

29:00 hour to get to school. My childhood was a very happy childhood. I am still great mates with my brothers I don't see a lot of them although they live in Sydney, we get together about four times a year, but we rarely ring up. They will ring me today because it is my birthday, they always remember that and I remember theirs.

29:30 The family all got on well together and still do. My elder sister has passed on, but there are five of us still alive and we are still very friendly. I don't think we have ever had a cross word in all of our lives in the family, we have got time for that.

So you're one of six children the house you lived in was it a big house, small house?

Standard Willoughby size, full brick home.

30:00 Two bedrooms but at the back was a large verandah which those houses tended to have, glassed in and the three boys slept out on the back verandah and the three girls slept in the second bedroom. One bathroom, the standard house that you find around this area. Haven't moved far, it is only about three miles away.

30:30 So what did you get up to as boys?

All that area in east Willoughby which is now Castle Crag, Middle Cove and Castle Cove was all bushland and we roamed the bush. We used to go down there in our very early days and play cowboys and Indians. Kids don't play cowboys and Indians today but we all had

31:00 scout knives and we had little tomahawks and we would build huts and then we had our little gangs, which rivalled the gang next door and so forth. If we wanted to get vicious, we had catapults which was the fork of a stick and cut up car tube and a little bit of leather.

31:30 We used to pinch from the throwout tip around by the tannery which is over at Smith Street in Chatswood. But all of that was bush down there we would go down to the rocks on Sugar Loaf Bay and cut all of the oysters off the rocks and sit down and eat fresh oysters. All of that sort of thing.

32:00 Living in the bush, we would take down some tea and our billy can and have a cup of tea, get up to a bit of mischief every now and then.

What sort of things mischief wise would you get up to?

I can't remember now, I really can't. Sometimes there would be a meeting of the gangs

32:30 and we would fight it out with our catapults, but we were all good friends. When I got a bit older I used to go to the Younger Set which was the CYO, Catholic Youth Organization which they used to hold in the little hall up there at the school. We used to go dancing there, that was in my early teens on a Friday night. One of the parents would play the piano.

33:00 Were you forced to go to the dances or was it something you wanted to do?

No everybody went because we played football with the CYO the boys did at least and the girls played basketball. And it was a competition held amongst all of the CYO organizations of the Catholic parishes of Sydney and Willoughby had some great

33:30 footballers who went on you know to greater things. I played football as a young fellow, bot there and at Duntroon. Rugby that is Rugby Union.

These dances, what would you wear to them?

Just a long pair of trousers and a shirt that's all. You would sit down one side of the little hall and the girls would all sit down the other side. We knew them all and there

34:00 were some friendships. Some of the guys married the girls. I didn't, I moved on you see, I was only seventeen when I went to Duntroon. The CYO in those days used to go on until they were about nineteen or so.

Did you have lessons in respect to dances?

Oh they used to teach us, the lady that played the piano used to teach us all of the old style, teach you the waltz

34:30 and the barn dance and the slow 'fox trot', old fox trot and the quick fox trot and the 'Pride of Erin' I learnt all of those old style dancing.

Did girls feature much in your growing up days?

Not until the end of my secondary school. I knew a lot and I lived next door to a couple of very nice girls who are still around.

35:00 But we were just friends, we used to go to the dances, we would go on picnics with them but we were just friendly, not like it is today.

You're obviously from a Catholic family, any friction between Catholic and Protestant s in those days?

I never found any no. we played with anyone. All of the local kids all used to play

35:30 down in the bush.

Now you were named after your Dad what can you tell me about him?

My Dad was born in Singapore which is a bit strange. He was born in the British Army Barracks Hospital on the 2nd of April 1886. His father was a colour sergeant,

36:00 three stripes and a crown in the East Kent Regiment the Buffs and he was stationed in Singapore. My fathers mother, my grandmother was born in Hong Kong and she was a member of quite a well known as they called them in those days British Colonial family, we would call them a public service family. In fact there is a street in

36:30 Kowloon across the Harbour in Hong Kong named after my grandmothers family, Austin Street. My father was born there, from there he travelled with his father but finished up back in England and then in Ireland. My mother was Irish. She came from a little village

37:00 called Anacurra which is in county Witlow, just south of Dublin. And by coincidence my father finished up in Anacurra when he went back there and so they met. My father ran away from home when he was fourteen and joined the British Navy as a boy I forget what they called them.

37:30 But we used to have a photo at home of Dad in his uniform and his bare feet, he was on the wind jammers, you know the old sailing ships? Until his parents found out where he was and reclaimed him. But I guess he must have been a restless soul because in 1908 he joined the British army. He spent some years before the First World War in Burma and then along

38:00 the Mediterranean. I know he was in Aden and somewhere else there. And then when World War One started he was shipped straight to France. He was an 'Old Contemptible' which was the first British troops into France [August 1914]. It was nicknamed the Old Contemptibles by the Kaiser, head of Germany,

38:30 as Britain's 'contemptible little army' and they were the infantry people who held the Germans at Mons just south of Brussels. And my Dad was one of them, he was wounded I think four times in the First World War. He very quickly went through the ranks, the war started in August 1914 and by the end of 1914

39:00 he was a lieutenant. I have got a photo of him in there, I have got a photo of my grandfather which I managed to track down. Both in uniform. My Dad survived the war. In 1918, the end of 1918 into 1919 he was posted to Germany in the occupation force

39:30 and from Germany I think they sent two or three battalions to Archangel in the top end of Russia for the White Russian revolution and my father was posted there, not many can say that. And then he left the British Army in 1922 and came to Australia in 1924.

40:00 **I will just hold you there because we have got to change.**

40:04 **End of tape**

Tape 2

00:30 **We have been talking about your Dad, did he ever talk to you about his service?**

Just a little bit, in those days they never talked very much about their service but he was very proud of the fact that he was an old contemptible. And he served there at Mons

01:00 and he served on the Somme in 1916 and he served at Ypres I do know and I am sure he would have been up on the northern part of France in the 1917 Paschendale Battle and those because he served non stop on the front line for the four years of the war.

01:30 **Being a religious man did he ever talk about the Angels of Mons?**

No he didn't, no.

Was he affected by the war?

No he was very much the British army officer, he was ram rod straight ,he was about five foot eight tall

02:00 but you could tell he had been in the army, he looked the part and quiet fellow. Didn't talk too much about himself or his life. Very proud of me, I think it was a very happy moment for him when I came

home from Canberra and told him I wanted to go to Duntroon although he never mentioned it.

02:30 **How did his sort of army military background affect the way that he related to the family?**

Dad was very quiet, he hardly ever raised his voice. Occasionally he would shout at you but not very often. He was very proud of his family

03:00 and we were all moderately successful. He well, he was certainly a good father, he provided as well as he was able to. But not the sort of man who would push himself and I think that was to his detriment. He had a lot more ability.

03:30 When World War II started he joined up again. And that was 1939 so he would have been fifty-three then and he did a refresher course at Randwick race-course to get his rank back and he did and he went back into the Australian army as a captain. He didn't

04:00 go overseas, he was too old. But he was in training units, he trained the 2/1st, 2/3rd and 2/9th Pioneer Battalions all of which served right through the war. He was out here at Wallgrove, at Largs and Greta, just north of Newcastle and at Dubbo with them but they pushed him out because he was too old, they didn't want them that old.

04:30 But he enjoyed that, I can remember him sitting at the dining room table at home studying all of the military pamphlets and what have you, he used to study by writing and he was a prolific writer of things, I guess it runs in the family we all do a bit of writing.

What did he think of the Second World War given his experiences in the First?

05:00 Once its in your blood you know, he would have served overseas without nay problem at all. He would have liked that I am sure.

Did you know your grandfather growing up?

No my grandfather never came to Australia, he died in Ireland in 1932.

05:30 **Why did your Dad come to Australia?**

This was the country of the future. My father came to Australia in 1923 or 19 24 could have been 1923 but in that time and my mother came in 1924 and they were married here in St Benedict's Catholic Church there on Broadway and they

06:00 owned a little mixed business there on Cleveland Street.

Did they know each other before?

Oh yes they knew each other in this little village of Anacurra in Ireland. But they linked up here. My father actually was a very generous man, he made a reasonable amount of money while he was serving in the First

06:30 World War which he had no opportunity to spend and he was quite thrifty and he ultimately brought out, he was one of eight and he brought most, paid for their fares to come to Australia. And all but about two of them came to Australia to live, I knew them all. Uncle this and Aunt that.

You mentioned your Mum was

07:00 **an Irish lady, what can you tell me about her?**

Oh Mum was a real Irish lady, she had all of the old Irish expressions, she was always joking. She had all of the little songs she used to sing, and ditties. And she could do all of this Irish dancing. Occasionally she would dance around doing the Irish jig and so forth.

07:30 She had a couple of step-brothers who came out here also and she was very friendly with them and she had her own brother who served in the Australian army, lost his leg on Gallipoli actually. And we knew him, he used to come around and visit, there was always people around she was a very popular person.

08:00 She was such a bright happy soul, slightly different from my Dad actually he was a much quieter person.

Do you remember any of the songs or ditties?

Oh what's his name? Peter Dawson, we used to have the old wind up gramophone and she would have all of those old Irish songs, 'When Irish Eyes are Smiling' and so forth.

08:30 She could sing all of them. the big treat at home was Sunday lunch. Sunday lunch was the big baked dinner, and the whole family would sit up. And she was a magnificent cook, oh boy could she cook. And that was the treat of the week, just like chicken was for Christmas. Never had chicken, nobody had chicken in

09:00 those days and my Mum used to cook this chicken. I think it was an old boiler hen that she would have

to beat to death but she could do one as good as.

And I mean being Catholic fish on Friday?

Oh God yes. My mother used to go to mass every day of her life. She would get up and go to half past six in the Catholic church at the end of the street, about a three hundred metre walk,

09:30 and she would go to mass come home and get breakfast for all of us at seven o'clock and we would all be on the twenty-five to eight bus and we all went to schools away from Willoughby. She was quiet a woman.

Just in respect to

10:00 **faith was your Dad as strong in his belief?**

No, but he used to go to mass every Sunday. Not every day.

And as kids you were encouraged to go to Sunday school?

Yes, oh my God you weren't allowed not to go. The Catholic Church holy days of obligation and all of this sort of stuff, no meat on Friday, I didn't

10:30 eat meat on Friday into my thirties when it was still obligatory, now it is not. I wouldn't dare do that. My wife and I go to church every Sunday without fail, it is just ingrained in you.

Waverly what was the scholarship there?

I wanted to go to Waverly and a couple of the fellows that were in front of me at St Thomas's Willoughby had won scholarships

11:00 to Waverly and they told me it was a great school and I wanted to go there. 1941 was the year that I was due to leave St Thomas' Primary and that was the year that Waverly College stopped giving scholarships, and I was very disappointed at that.

11:30 But I was taught by an old Irish nun, Sister Augustine would you believe? She liaised with the headmaster of Waverly at the time, Brother Carroll who was another Irishman, and the nun was Irish so you could imagine them together and would he make an exception and give a scholarship if I was up to standard?

12:00 He said he would consider it, to have the lad and the lads mother come out to meet him? So Mum and I went out to Waverly College and of course Mum is as Irish as Paddys Pigs, Carroll is as Irish as they come, so the relationship was there, he was going to offer a scholarship. So I had to go out one Saturday morning

12:30 and do an English and Mathematics examination by myself in the brothers residence at Waverly. And I got passed to the required standard and he gave me a scholarship. I have got a soft spot for Waverly Scholarship my brother, Brother Carroll had gone and another old Irishman

13:00 O'Connor was his name, quite famous in Catholic Education Brother O'Connor he came there and he was talking to Mum one day and he said, "Do you have nay more boys at home like this?" And she said, "Yes I have got two, one goes to Marist Brothers at Mosman and my other boy is due to go to a school." And he said, "Why don't you send him here?" and she said, "Oh I can't afford to send two boys."

13:30 And he said, "He can come for nothing." So my brother went to Waverly College for nothing which was incredibly generous so we are pretty staunch supporters of Waverly College I can tell you. Both of us went there.

Well tell us about the school when you were there?

I was there in 1942 in the middle of the war and it was, I don't know whether you know Waverly College

14:00 but it sits up on the hill there overlooking Bondi, it used to be one of the highest points in Sydney, I am not sure that it still isn't. And the Japanese submarines in 1942 stood off the coast there just off Bondi and Bronte and shelled Bellevue Hill, we had the midget subs in Sydney Harbour, and we used to practice air raid drill.

14:30 The bell would ring and the school unsolicited it would ring and we would all have to evacuate the school, down the stairs up into the basement of the boarding school which was a solid brick building. God knows what would have happened if a shell had ever hit it because the whole school was in there. We were very much on alert. When I first went there we used to wear straw boaters [hats], our navy blue suits, blue and gold ties.

15:00 I played football for them. Fortunately I got in the A teams right from the go and I played in the first fifteen for two years, won an honour cap which was quite a thing at Waverly. My last two years I was coached by one of the greatest footballers the country had ever seen, Dave Brown who captained the Australian Rugby League team in

15:30 1936 he was an old boy of Waverly. He coached us. I played for combined associated schools. I played for the first combined associated schools team there ever was in 1947 and I played for Duntroon for the four years I was there. I got in the first fifteen as soon as I got there and I captained them in 1950, I captained actually a lesser

16:00 version, the under twenty team in Duntroon against the combined GPS [Greater Public Schools] schools which used to be the annual game. So I had a very happy time at Waverly.

Do you remember the time the Japanese sub came?

Yeah vividly, I can remember

16:30 when, because I had just come home from the scouts, I was a boy scout third chapter I was in. I just got home and the sirens went. During the war years in Sydney there were regular testings of the sirens but you knew when it was going to be tested.

17:00 And it was done every weekend without fail one o'clock the all clear would go. And the siren went, it was about half past ten at night, that's when the subs came in. And it was shortly after, from memory about a week later when they got the three subs, they never found one of them, raised the other two, one is in the harbour somewhere and then they

17:30 suspected that the mother ship of the three subs was the one that shelled, but the shells landed up the back of Bondi on the Bellevue Hill but only about three went off. They fired about twenty, they were all duds. They weren't primed properly. Only about three went off and superficial damage and no casualties, but I can remember that vividly.

But when the sirens went off did you think it was a false alarm or?

18:00 No we didn't because we used to have blackout curtains, every house had black out curtains which were home made I can remember my Dad and I making them with a hammer and a nail and they fitted up into the windows, not for every room but if we were in our house

18:30 at night you put the blackout curtains up, Sydney was basically blacked out in those very dangerous years 1942 particularly.

What was the feeling after this particular raid, was this a sign of things to come?

No. I went to school the next day and a lot of the fellows of course Waverly being in the eastern suburbs some of these shells landed close to their

19:00 homes, but it didn't worry anybody they still came to school.

So Sydney wasn't, gosh next it will be an invasion?

No the place was full of Americans, they were everywhere here. And no we didn't. it was a little different for my wife she lived in North Queensland and of course there were unidentified aircraft

19:30 going over there all day.

Do you remember the Japanese plane at all flying over?

Yeah one came over Sydney it was unidentified, again at night and the sirens went. As soon as the sirens went you basically turned off your lights and if you wanted to have a light you went into a room with your blackout curtain.

20:00 **Could you share with me what Sydney was like during these war years, you mentioned the Americans?**

Well it was a very different Sydney to the one it is today. The highest building in Sydney was the AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] Tower 47 York Street. Trams ran up, both ways, up and down in George Street. They ran up Pitt Street from the Quay, they

20:30 ran down Castlereagh Street to the Quay and in Elizabeth Street they ran both ways., the Elizabeth Street trams were Eastern Suburbs trams basically. Trams ran up King Street and their terminus down there was Erskine Street.

21:00 They ran out along, up through King s Cross down through Rushcutters Bay, Edgecliff, down to Rose Bay. Went right out to Watson's Bay actually. Trains were the same, they were running. The buses were double decker.

And how had Sydney changed when the war came along?

21:30 There were always warships in the harbour, that's what the Japanese subs were after. There was a very big heavy cruiser, the USS Chicago was moored just on the heads side, the eastern side of Port Denison she was moored out there and it is said that that's what they were after. Because when they fired their torpedo it missed it and hit Garden Island.

22:00 The Queen Mary, a great ship, was moored in the same place as was the Queen Elizabeth. The ship, big

one, the Mauritania and the Aquitania at what is now the overseas terminal at Circular Quay and they were the troop ships [converted liners] that took the troops to the Middle East they

22:30 went almost unescorted because they were a hell of a lot faster than the submarines. Everybody was in uniform, army, navy, air force. The girls were in their nurses uniforms or the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service], or the women's army service, the women's navy girls, everybody was in uniform.

23:00 It was pretty much life as normal. The city itself had many more departmental stores. You had David Jones was the big one. Farmers was the store there on the corner of George and Market, opposite Gowings that was Farmers. There was McDowells which was down George

23:30 Street between there and what was then the GPO [General Post Office]. The GPO was the centrepiece, which is now the Westin Hotel. Cenotaph of course was there, there was no Eastern Suburbs Railway in Martin Place. It was called Martin Place in those days not plaza and it was a street with cars running up and down it. Not like it is today, the top end of town, the buildings are

24:00 higher but Macquarie Street is almost the same as it was. None of those high buildings were down around the Quay, there was, you know the old customs house that is still there? All that style of building. There weren't anywhere near as many people around of course.

Given it was a time of war did your father at any stage talk to you about the war or prepare you for events that may happen in the future?

24:30 No, not really I don't think anybody thought we were ever going to lose. I don't think anybody realised how close it was and even I never realised how close it was, and I am a military person, until I read afterwards that the Battle of the Coral Sea was only thirty miles

25:00 off the Queensland Coast. And that's where the Japanese were stopped, that was the invasion force. The battles like Guadalcanal and those I have been there and they were absolutely huge, we didn't know about them.

Moving forward can you tell me now about this excursion to Canberra?

25:30 Yes if you were at Waverly College and you were a prefect or a member of the first fifteen rugby team each year in those days the college used to take you on a tour, in the school bus. We had a bus with Waverly College written all over it, driven by one of the brothers and one of the parents of the boarders, they used to go to a different town every year, that particular year it was Canberra and

26:00 we stayed in a hotel out in Queanbeyan which was owned by one of the parents, and you would tour all of the usual tourists spots in Canberra and play a game of Rugby Union against one of the local teams. And of course Waverly College had one or two cadets who were at Duntroon and they acted as guides to show us

26:30 around the college and so we had a birds eye view of the college. And I saw it and I guess as I said earlier it must have been in my genes I loved what I saw and I thought this will do me. It didn't cost my parents anything it was put on by the college as a reward for being in the first fifteen or being a prefect, I happened to be both, I was a prefect and in the football team.

27:00 **I mean it would have been a fair trip out there to Canberra?**

Oh yeah a couple of hundred miles in the bus, we were all decked out in our uniforms of course.

And what was Canberra like at that time?

I can tell you because I went there the next year. Very different from today, the

27:30 airport was still there in the same place, Duntroon was there, but there was none of those buildings there around the corner, the Defence Department Building and so on. We used to do infantry minor tactics and training in that area, it was just paddocks. There was nothing between Duntroon and St John church there, do you know it in Reid? The northern suburbs?

28:00 That was just open paddocks either side of the road, the road ran right into there almost until you got into Manuka. There was three shopping centres, Civic, Manuka and Kingston and they were very small. The entertainment was the movie theatre. Nobody had a car, in 1948 I used to borrow my uncles, my uncle was actually a

28:30 sergeant on the staff of Duntroon and he had a bike and I used to borrow his bike to go on leave. And that was the entertainment, they would make arrangements where you could meet some of the local girls and they would invite you home for Sunday lunch you would go and get a decent meal and that was the entertainment or you went to the movies.

So after this excursion what was it about it that made you decide you wanted to go there?

29:00 I can't remember to be honest, I guess that it is a very nice place. Have you ever been there? You should go there a magnificent place, white stucco buildings and the parade ground in the centre of them. It wasn't anywhere near as large,

29:30 it sits beneath Mount Pleasant which had an old derelict observatory there on the top of it. It's a most impressive place. Of course the cadets I think the cadets in our day were a bit smarter than they are today ,you weren't allowed to walk all over the place, you had to march everywhere and

30:00 seeing that sort of thing. I didn't mind that, I liked it, I am still a very disciplined sort of person.

What did your father say to you when you informed him?

Absolutely delighted he couldn't believe it that one of his sons wanted to follow what he did. And of course Mum and Dad, they didn't come down there, couldn't afford to come , but they didn't come down until my graduation

30:30 and of course they came to that. that's the big day where you have the graduation parade and then you have the garden party on the lawns of Duntroon House. Duntroon is actually the name of a property in Scotland which was owned by the Campbell family and the Campbell family used to own that area which is now, that

31:00 suburb which is now Duntroon. And there is a magnificent old home that is part of the college and that's where the Commandant, well he is not there now they have moved him out of there, but the home is still there it is still the officers mess of the military college and hence the name Duntroon.

So while you were at Waverly College were there cadets there?

31:30 Yeah I was in the cadets I wasn't a great cadet I can't say I liked them very much, I was a private in the cadets. I had no interest in it, I didn't like it. amazing isn't it? I was most unmilitary I used to shoot through and get up to all sorts of.

So what sort of training did they used to do in cadets and why didn't you like it?

I know we used to learn to drill and semaphore flags do you know the old semaphore? Whoops I spilt the water. What were we talking about? Cadets, I hated the cadets. I had no interest.

32:30 It used to be on, I think of a Friday afternoon and we would all line up and march down Carrington Road in Waverly, down to Queens Park which was the college sporting area and we would do this semaphore drill and learn about weapons and what have you. But they were all old and out of date. And if I did semaphore drill once I did it almost every second

33:00 Friday with these damn flags. And I went to camp with them and so forth. I had a basic knowledge, I could drill when I went to Duntroon. But I had no interest in it and yet as soon as I went to Duntroon I really got stuck into it. I really enjoyed it.

Cadet camps while you were at school what did you do on those?

Oh camouflage and the usual infantry minor tactics.

33:30 Fire and movement, the usual sort of stuff. Digging holes in the ground and climb into them.

And you just didn't think this was much fun?

Didn't at all. I used to vanish regularly over the hill even though I was a prefect and was meant to be the epitome of

34:00 what was right in the place, I was still a bit of a rebel, I told you it came from my mother.

You frequently went AWL [Absent Without Leave]?

Well not frequently but occasionally.

You mentioned you weren't like your Dad because you used to get up to a bit of mischief, at school and at cadets what mischief did you used to get into?

34:30 It was so long ago I can't remember. I have never been one to toe the party line, lets put it that way. If I have got something to say I say it. this isn't exactly mischief but it is a little bit of an insight into Gus. It hasn't done me much good in my business life but at least people know where they stand,

35:00 what you see is what you get. And I have always lived that way, I am seventy-four today; I am not going to change and I think it is a good way to be. I am always up front, I don't tell lies, I can't stand people who tell lies. I would rather somebody say to me, "I have made a mistake." As I used to say to my people when I was running

35:30 Mirrortone, "Listen a kick in the backside only lasts two seconds take your kick and lets get on with it." and people like that, not a lot of it around today unfortunately is there.

So to get into Duntroon what was required?

Academically you had to have English Maths and Physics and any other two subjects in the leaving which is now the HSC [Higher School Certificate]. And you had to pass a medical, dental,

- 36:00 psychology and psychiatry, about three different psychology tests written and verbal and finally you had to go before the selection board which was headed by the commandant of the college. And there were sixty-six in my class at Duntroon out of somewhere in the vicinity of thirteen or fourteen hundred applicants.
- 36:30 **Any other fellows from Waverly?**
- Two other from Waverly College, there was three of us we all went through school and we all graduated.
- And who were they?**
- David Millar and Peter McKenzie, Dave lives up here in Gordon and Peter McKenzie now lived in Brisbane. We all went to Korea as platoon commanders, infantry.
- Had they progressed any further in cadets than you?**
- Yeah McKenzie and David Millar were cadet lieutenants so they had reached the top in
- 37:00 cadets, but I didn't.
- Was anything said in the interview with respect to your lack of promotion?**
- Yep. But you have to have an answer, I can't remember what I answered but obviously it didn't worry them. I think I would be the only cadet that had ever turned up to a selection board, no rank.
- You mentioned your uncle was there did he have any sort of bearing on your?**
- 37:30 None what so ever. No he was just in the army and just happened to be, he was one of the sergeants out of the artillery unit. He had no influence at all. His main influence as far as I was concerned was that his wife was a wonderful cook and I used to go and have Sunday lunch on a regular basis.
- 38:00 Up to the married quarters.
- So preparing to go to Duntroon do you remember what you took with you?**
- You didn't take a lot because you weren't allowed to wear civilian clothes on leave, they only came in on my last year there.
- 38:30 But I had my sporting gear, football boots and all of that sort of stuff. I had some civilian clothes, mostly shirts and shorts, but as soon as you got there you were issued with a full kit out of army gear. Everybody had their own room .you were allocated to a cadet who was a year in
- 39:00 front of you who was referred to as your lord and master. He was given the responsibility of keeping you on the right track in your first year because when you went up there you were in fourth class and you worked up through the classes, fourth, this second and you graduated in first class. Fourth class are the nobodies and you had
- 39:30 mild bastardisation. I never thought it was too bad but I was a
- Such as?**
- Knock around bloke. Oh used to you were, when you went to your meals you sat on these long tables and a senior cadet was at the head of the table and then a couple of senior fellows on either side of him. and then it depended on your class.
- 40:00 You went down the pecking order so if you were in fourth class you were down the bottom of the table and you were constantly bombarded with military college. Recite the inscription on the grave? How many memorial stones are in the college?
- 40:30 How many names on them? How many captains amongst them? all of this sort of stuff. And if you didn't know the answer you were what they called made 'X pluff' and X pluff meant that you couldn't participate in playing for any of the spare food that came around. And when you were a cadet at Duntroon I tell you, you would eat the pattern off the plate because you're going all day and half the night.
- 41:00 And you're damned hungry and on every table, every meal there was spare meal, spare bread and so you play the game. Have you ever seen the game? Stone scissors paper, junk and poor its called and so you play the game and if you're X pluff you're not allowed to play the game, so you have got no chance of winning the spare meal. And if you win the spare meal you're made X pluff anyway
- 41:30 because fourth class shouldn't win. And you had to do all sorts of menial tasks. You were always last in the shower when the hot water was just about tepid you know? and you were kept in the bathroom until five minutes before a parade sopping wet and you had to be in your dress uniform and on parade in five minutes.
- 42:00 End of tape

Tape 3

00:30 **What were your first impressions of the military college when you arrived there as a cadet?**

Well I was very homesick. I had never left home apart from going to scout camps and I can remember being

01:00 allocated to my room which was in Quart block up the back upstairs looking out my window and thinking what am I doing here? I was very homesick. My lord and master was a very nice fellow a guy called Ansell Goodall, old St Pats [Patrick] College golden boy and

01:30 as he turned out a very fine footballer and we played in the centres at Duntroon for three years together, he was a year in front of me. He has passed on sadly since. But we were great friends and he sort of mothered me through my first year. But it is a great experience, you meet sixty-six other fellows

02:00 from all walks of life. It is an absolute myth that it is elitist. There were legacy kids, one that I know of in our class, they come from very wealthy families and they come from very poor families. And the purpose of that fourth class training I was referring

02:30 to with Michael [interviewer], it is designed as a leveller to bring people to knock the spots off you. Its if it turns nasty I believe its wrong. But in the form in which bastardisation was dished out to me, if you couldn't handle it you would never

03:00 lead an infantry platoon in war. And none of my class, it never affected any of us. The principle is you band together as a class and you get your own back in little ways.

On the rugby field?

On the rugby field exactly right. Because we used to play inter-company football, and in inter-company football, a company has all of the classes in it.

03:30 And if there was one of those nasty bastards that you didn't like, he didn't get up too quickly.

You were explaining when the tape ran out a couple of the other ways that fourth class training went on, can you just compete telling us about that?

Well talking about leaks, being held in the shower and then you had to be out dressed in your dress uniform for

04:00 your evening meal. There were various ways you could beat that, one was, you didn't have your uniform on, you had black bedroom slippers, you would be dripping wet you had no time to dry yourself, some of the fellows had little bibs which was a white

04:30 shirt and a tie already attached, slip into that and put their jacket and trousers and bedroom slippers on, pull the hat on and hope like hell they weren't inspected. You could make it in two minutes in that. Again I could get dressed in five minutes without a lot of problem at all, in dress uniform, that's the way you were trained. If you were late on parade of course you got

05:00 an extra drill which meant that you were out on defaulters parade at six fifteen the next morning.

You said that you were homesick in your first few weeks at Duntroon how did you handle the reality of the whole military style of the organization and the discipline?

05:30 I think I was very lucky in that very shortly after I went in there football trials came along and the coach of the football team knew that I had played for combined associated schools. And I don't think that did me any harm being selected, and it was in the days at Duntroon when Rugby Union was a religion.

06:00 It was two drop kicks short of going to heaven if you made the first fifteen and not many fourth class made it. In fact in my first year there were only three of us. And that made it a pretty easy transition for me. I became known very quickly, we all used to leak around with our names in a name tag on our hat so our senior cadet would know who you were, but of course they

06:30 always addressed you by the last name. I was Breen there was no such thing as Gus, nobody called you by your first name, in fact it was a bit odd being in the first fifteen playing with fellows and not knowing whether to address them by their Christian name or call them Staff Sergeant so and so. And it I was Breen until forty days before

07:00 graduation. And that's when you have survived your first year, at forty days. But my transition was pretty easy and I wasn't really picked on for the bastardisation as much as some people.

Were there others who didn't handle it quite so well?

They mightn't have internally but they never really showed it.

07:30 If you showed it of course that was basically the finish of you, you would be really picked on. But most

of us handled it and we made our own, you make your own niche.

You had been pretty scrappy at staff cadets, what did you get into trouble for formally at Duntroon?

I only ever had one major

08:00 disciplinary blemish, in fact in all of the time I was there apart from the blemish I only received three extra drills. I was a very disciplined person, still am. Even though I didn't like school cadets once I went there I knuckled down. This was it and I was going to graduate come hell or high water.

08:30 It was in my first year and it was the Spring Ball which was early September. We all had girlfriends and we had taken them to the Spring Ball and we took them home and you had extended leave until one in the morning no get back to the college and one of the fellows was friendly with a lass from the Irish Legation

09:00 and she put on an after ball party. So some of the fellows got home at four o'clock, five o'clock and one of the boys got home at six o'clock and reveille was seven o'clock on a Sunday morning, six fifteen normally. Unfortunately one of the fellows

09:30 had taken out the granddaughter of Sir Robert Garran, I can't remember exactly what he was but he was a very senior public servant. And he had some occasion to look into her room at three or so in the morning and his granddaughter wasn't there so he rang up one of the colonels at Duntroon.

10:00 And of course the bubble burst. He named the fellow that took out his granddaughter and when we all went down for Sunday morning assembly prior to mess, we didn't parade for Sunday morning there is this poor guy his name was Smith, there is poor old Smithy looking crestfallen standing out on the veranda of the assembly

10:30 building and he was gone. And the senior cadet said, "I understand that there were a number of fourth class cadets and other who were at a party would they step forward?' So we all stepped forward. And Smithy got twenty-one days confined to barracks multiplied by six, which is a hundred and twenty

11:00 six days without leave and the rest of us finished up getting fourteen days confined to barracks, eight-four days without leave. We lost three marks off our totals by fourteen, forty-two marks off our totals also and that was it. but I was in a group there must have been fourteen or fifteen of us.

How did that even affect

11:30 **you in your first year?**

Didn't at all. We just took it in our stride, we had to get up for defaulters parade every morning at quarter past six for half an hours drill with a pack on our back, you know, it is all part of life.

Can you tell us about drill and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]?

The RSM was a great man. I was lucky

12:00 when I was there the RSM was Fango Watson and Fango had a voice like an overworked rasp but he was a magnificent psychologist, he could get you eating out of his hand. "I'll eat you, I'll eat you boots and all." And he used to go on, he was brilliant and the cadets loved him, we idolised Fango.

12:30 Ours was the first calls to invite him to our graduation functions, we had a cocktail party for our families and we invited him along and he was the life of the party, he was a great fellow. He was there as the RSM from just after the war for quite a long time. I was very lucky to be there while he was there, and the standard of the drill has never been higher.

13:00 Even today, they are very good today but gee I reckon we were just as good under Fango.

What made him such a good RSM?

His way with you. He could see that the cadets weren't drilling very well, and he would be bullocking and giving you heaps and then he would realise that it wasn't working, and he knew how to back off and get you going. "Come on."

13:30 And he was very funny, he was a born humorist you know some of his famous expressions were, "The next man that fiddles will be fiddling with the angels." all of this sort of stuff, and of course in those days that had a great reaction with young fellows, we were only seventeen year olds. And so he knocked us into shape. I can always remember

14:00 going down to football practice one day with one of the other fellows Colin Carn and we're slopping along past the administrative building, the lecture building middle of winter, cold as a frog, our great coats on and ordinary shoes and our football boots draped around our necks and our hands in our great coat pockets. And he is over in his office

14:30 about a hundred metres away. Didn't even open the window and next minute you heard this voice, "Staff cadets Breen and Carn if I was your football coach I would have you moved, now get going one two

three four left, right." It was an offence to walk to football practice, you had to double all of the way down to the bottom oval there you know the

15:00 one on the other side of the road, that was number one oval I think it still is and you had to double back. When football training was over you had to run back up the hill across what is now the golf course, used to be the horse paddock. He was marvellous.

Were you friends with Colin Carn?

Yes great friend of mine Col Carn.

Was he in your year?

Yeah my year. Interviewed him? Great bloke.

15:30 **Any stories about him in Duntroon?**

Colin and I were in the first fifteen for the four years. when I captained them in 1950 against the GPS he vice captained them. he was in the forwards I was in the backs. He went to Scots College, I played football against him at school., he is a good fellow, he has just had a couple of strokes unfortunately.

Apart from Fango Watson who else was a bit of a mentor for you?

Well General Daily, Sir Thomas

16:00 Daily who passed away earlier this year, he was a lieutenant colonel he was director of military arts and Sir Thomas was an outstanding man part from being a very fine soldier. My calls used to be very proud of the fact that we were Toms boys, because when we went to Korea and thirty-two, there were fifty-four graduates in my class we lost twelve along the way,

16:30 and thirty-two of them graduated into infantry .and we went to Korea as the infantry platoon commanders and Sir Thomas was the brigade commander and he used to come up to the front line and he knew your name. He used to say, "Morning Gus." He called you by Christian name and he would come up the front trenches and have a look, he took a personal interest in us

17:00 and nurtured us as young officers .even afterwards when I left the army I was in Brisbane and he was the General Officer Commanding, Northern Command. And when he knew I was going, because I used to see him regularly in the officers mess up there, I lived in the officers mess at Victoria Barracks in Brisbane, and he

17:30 said, "Come and have a cup of tea with me. " which was very nice, and on the morning I left we sat in the mess and he wished me well and afterwards I used him for a referee when I was going for a pretty senior job. He was a lovely man, went to his funeral, he had a big influence on the lives of all of the cadets in my class. The other thing we were very fortunate to have was that some of the

18:00 instructors we had as cadets we later served under in Korea. So they knew us all intimately. Second in command I RAR was Derek Sharp, he is still alive, talking to him the other day, he was our small arms training, he was the SAT [Systems Approach to Training] instructor down there. Bill Morrow was our instructor in infantry, well he was a brigade major under Tom Daily

18:30 in 28 Brigade in Korea. It was like one big family.

Could you tell us a bit more about the military side of your training?

Yes well in the first year it is basically drill and PT [physical training]. Small arms training which was learning the weapons and then infantry minor tactics which is camouflage and

19:00 concealment and all of that sort of stuff. Pretty basic, some map reading I think from memory in our first year. Then you progress to other things. In second year you do signals training, more map reading, more tactics, you do military history, military law,

19:30 war administration, peace administration that sort of thing. Third year again it is more advanced in those particular subjects. And your last year is your specialist year. You also have training in every arm of the, like engineering,

20:00 artillery, armour, signals, you trained in each facet. At the end of your third year I think or in your last year, it doesn't matter, you are then asked to put in your preference for your arms and service. I forgot incidentally you're taught to drive, you're taught to drive

20:30 trucks and jeeps and ride a motorbike. Drive Bren gun carriers in those days, the old Bren carrier. Your'e then asked to put in your preference for arm or service and mine were infantry, armour, artillery, in that order and I was selected in infantry. Initially in my class sixteen out of the fifty-four

21:00 graduates were selected for infantry. I was one of them I mentioned Colin Carn he was another one. Chap who you are going to see on Mondays, David Bernhard he is another, we put in for infantry and got it. David Millar my classmate at Duntroon, we got it. Half way through 1951 the casualty rates of officers in Korea was creeping up and they seconded another sixteen out of there who were doing

specialist training in other arms and services like

21:30 artillery, armour, transport and they pushed them into infantry so that thirty-two out of fifty-four of our class graduated into infantry the highest ever those fellows that were seconded from their arms had the option to go back if they wanted to, they could stay in infantry or they could go back after two years, some went back.

The Korean War

22:00 **broke out pretty much in the middle of your time at Duntroon, how did the war there and the kind of conflict it was, influence the kind of training you were receiving at the military college?**

I don't think it influenced the training but we certainly knew that if it lasted we would be going. And that had an immediate effect

22:30 on the cadets because we all wanted to go without exception, we wanted to go. In fact when I graduated in 1951 in December and we went in January 1952 to our units it was a real race to see who could get to Korea the quickest. Not that we had any influence on it but we were all terribly disappointed when other people were going of our peers, I didn't get away

23:00 until November, some of them got away in about July I think was the first. So there were fellows going in that space and some were wounded and out of Korea before I got there, Col Carn was one of them.

Was there any emphasis on the patrolling and the kind of small sections?

No unfortunately and I think that was probably a weakness.

23:30 You see patrolling and raiding and ambushing in our time in Korea was all done at night, no doubt we will get onto that. It was all done at night and I think perhaps in hindsight, but then hindsight gives you twenty twenty vision, there could have been greater emphasis put on night patrolling.

24:00 However it wasn't really until well into our last year that the war stabilised and it became a static war. So I guess it probably was felt that there wasn't any need, the war was quite fluid before hand and that was the type of training we were doing. I don't think it affected

24:30 the situation very much we had had a lot of experience training on patrolling and that sort of thing by day and there isn't a lot of difference between that and night except perhaps a tighter formation.

We will come back to that and talk about Korea,

25:00 **but just a few more questions on Duntroon what was the social aspect of your life there like?**

Well initially they put on a tennis party. Now I couldn't hit a, my wife is a top tennis player, played with all of the greats when she was a young kid, played with Laver and Emerson and all of that lot. I couldn't hit a ball over a tennis net if I had two racquets

25:30 but they put on a tennis party and that was an opportunity to meet the young belles. The Canberra family and the girls were great. I mean the place wasn't as, I mean the world wasn't as promiscuous as it was today and the girls loved to go out with the Duntroon cadets, we weren't hard to pick I

26:00 mean we all had short hair and we had to wear our uniform on leave, until well into our last year we weren't allowed civilian clothes. And when we were allowed civilian clothes they brought a tailor into the college and so most of the cadets bought the same clothes. Well at least they were cut the same, you could always meet yourself coming around the corner. I never bought

26:30 them because I had civilian clothes at home and you were allowed to wear your own subject to inspection by the company commander. And so you had to trot your sports jacket and your trousers and shirt and tie out for his approval.

I will just straighten your microphone. What was your reputation like in the town of Canberra as cadets?

27:00 Oh the local people liked Duntroon cadets. I don't know whether they do today but they did in those days. See the college was very small, in 1948 when I went in there there were only a hundred and thirty-two cadets and sixty-six of them exactly half were fourth class.

27:30 The class in front of us only had thirty odd in it and there were only three years when I went there, you graduated the 1948 class only did three years and then in 1949 there was no graduation and in 1950 there was a graduation and in that time was the change over from three to four years.

28:00 Of course during the war years they were down to eighteen months. You asked me, what did I? We were very well received into the families in Canberra and I think there was probably I don't know how disciplined the cadets are today, they certainly all drive cars which gives them a lot more freedom, well

28:30 we didn't have that freedom., we rode bicycles or walked into town, we used to walk into Manuka or

Civic.

No lake in those days?

No, you used to come roaring down across what is now Lake Burley-Griffin, the Duntroon end of it there was a little causeway about this wide you remember that? The water used to flow over it about this much and you would come roaring down in your blues uniform on your bicycle

29:00 going like the blazes and hit this thing and hope like hell you didn't come off. And walk across there and it was Edlingtons Paddock. All on either side as you go out to, from the big war memorial there, well that was all open paddock and you used to walk up through Edlingtons farm to get back to the road.

Apart from playing Rugby against them what sort of opportunity

29:30 **did you have to mix with the locals?**

Only through the girls, that's it. I mean if you were fortunate enough to have a local girlfriend otherwise you just went to the movies. If you didn't go out on leave every Saturday and Sunday night in the old camp theatre which is

30:00 over there used to be an old prefabricated army hut over near where ADFA [Australian defence Force Academy] is today they used to have a movie on. Used to cost us sixpence to go to the movies and we would go over there, walk over and back. That was the entertainment in the college. Or you would just laze about on a Sunday some fellow would study, as you got

30:30 closer to the exams of course you would study hard at it. Always playing sport on a Saturday afternoon.

You mentioned the outbreak of the Korean War changed your ambitions if nothing else, you said it didn't change your training, did people come back from the war and explain what was going on, did they instruct in what was happening?

No there was nobody who had served in Korea on the staff while I was there.

31:00 **What were you learning about the war at that time?**

Mostly reading it wasn't referred to very frequently because the people instructing had no knowledge of it. No first hand knowledge, they only had what we were getting out of the newspapers. But the 1948 graduating class which was the senior class in our first year there were the platoon commanders in

31:30 Korea when the war started. And so we knew all of them and I mean there was one fellow in particular who was a cadet in 1948 who was killed in November 1950 well we all knew him, he had been there.

From the papers and the general information available how much was the war being reported?

32:00 It was reported almost daily and we knew the nature of it. it was, how fluid it was. We knew about the early days the push up to the Yalu River, we knew about Kapyong in 1951.

32:30 We were very much part of that and we knew a lot of the officers who were there.

Moving on can you tell us about your graduation and the events surrounding that?

That was great. The graduation parade the salute was taken by Sir William Mackell who was the Governor General. And the

33:00 parade was held, it is always held on the second Tuesday of December. And the parade was on early afternoon. It was a beautiful day my parents went down, my girlfriend came down from Sydney. There was the parade and then we

33:30 all moved up to the gymnasium which was an old weatherboard building at the back of the cadets mess there and I am not sure that it is still there, I think it is gone and the graduation diplomas, your commission was handed out to the applause of all there

34:00 and then we moved down to the gardens of Duntroon House for the garden party. And in the evening of course there was the ball and the ball was held again in the gymnasium. At midnight the graduating class take the floor with their mothers and or girlfriends and there is the

34:30 pinning on of your pips. Most cadets have their girlfriend do one side and their mother do the other. You know it is very nice. I have still got photos of my mother and my girlfriend pinning mine on and the next day of course you go on leave.

At that time being a very young man what did it mean to you being a commissioned officer in the Royal Australian Army?

35:00 I was absolutely delighted to have graduated and excited about it. I was a little bit disappointed that I went to a National Service battalion as opposed to going to the, call it the regular troops. But in hindsight it didn't make any difference. My first commanding officer was Colonel Ferguson who had

35:30 commanded 3RAR in Korea and he was the commanding officer at Kapyong on Anzac Day 1951. He was

- a very fine soldier and there were three out of my class who went to 13 National Service and Colonel Ferguson went about knocking the rough spots off us and doing his utmost
- 36:00 to mould us into the type of fellow who would have no difficulty commanding regular troops. And I thought he succeeded. I thought the world of him, he has had his critics over the years but I thought he was a fine soldier .and then we moved from his battalion across the road and there it was on in earnest, because out of 4 RAR we
- 36:30 went from there to Korea, that was the holding unit for Korea.
- What did Ferguson do for you I mean what were the rough spots he needed to knock off?**
- Just the way you addressed the national servicemen you know. For example, when you were at Duntroon instructors called you Breen
- 37:00 or Mister. And well they did in my day I don't think they do now. So you get into the habit of calling people Mister, well that was one thing, he cut that out straight away. He was just very good in seeing you approached your training, the manner in which you put your lessons over and so forth
- 37:30 and he made sure that you did plenty of instructing yourself and didn't leave it to the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers].
- What insights was he able to give you about the realities of war?**
- Well he never talked much about the Korean War, he was interested in you as a person, he didn't specifically say, "You have got to do this or that." not that at all.
- 38:00 I think I was a better soldier for having served under him.
- Can you tell us a little bit more about the national servicemen?**
- Yeah well national service in those days was three months full time training. That was the second intake ever that we had. In Sydney there were three national service battalions, 12 and 19 were out at Holsworthy and
- 38:30 134 was out at Ingleburn. I found the national servicemen very good fellows. in the platoon I had they came from two districts, one was the coal fields around Newcastle, Curry, Cessnock, those towns. The second lot came from the St George area along the Rockdale, Kogarah and across on the
- 39:00 Sutherland to Cronulla peninsula there. They were very good fellows and they adapted very quickly to it and I think rather enjoyed it. they were pretty smart soldiers you know the young fellows who hadn't had any training.
- Were they any problem for you?**
- No, I never had any problems.
- 39:30 I liked it. the only thing is, and it depends on your own personality as to how you approach it., some fellows are a bull at a gate, others sit back and have a look at it and probably every bodies biggest failure is that they are bright eyed
- 40:00 bushy tailed and wanting to become a general overnight and very much the Duntroon cadet which partially works but not in total. You have got to be yourself, know when to joke, when not to joke. You can be
- 40:30 one of the fellows without being one of the fellows, be close to them but not of them.
- We will come back to that in a second.**
- 40:40 **End of tape**

Tape 4

- 00:30 **What does it breed the Duntroon system, what sort of man comes out at the other end of that system?**
- A very disciplined person and I think above all it teaches you to think on your own feet. To be self reliant and to become a decision maker
- 01:00 and be able to make on the spot decisions. I found I could do that not only in my military career but once I got into civilian life I never had any difficulty making decisions. The only principle, say
- 01:30 something even if it is only goodbye.

After the 13 National Service Battalion you moved over to 4 RAR?

4 RAR.

What was going on there?

That's was the second stage of training in preparation for Korea, most of the troops there were K force, some regular but mostly K force.

02:00 K troops was a system that the army introduced, K being for Korea, where the army offered you three years in the service and then it was reduced quickly to two years and it attracted fellows that were spoiling for fight because what they did was, they did nine months training before they got to Korea, so they did their initial training, most of it in Puckapunyal in Victoria

02:30 or Kapooka down near Wagga. They came to 4 RAR or they went to a different area in Puckapunyal where they did what was called their 'DP3', [their level three training. Now when that was from memory again could have been six months I think, then

03:00 from Ingleburn we moved them out to Glenfield which is only down the road, and that's essentially where they did a lot of their field work, where they went out, lived out in the bush. That was DP 2 training, from there they came back were held for a very short time in Ingleburn within the

03:30 confines of that camp and from there they were shipped as reinforcements to Korea.

When you say they were spoiling for a fight, can you give us a bit more detail?

Well people who join the army for two years, nine months training, they went to Korea for twelve months so that was twenty-one months., they came back and were entitled to leave, went on leave came back and that was it they were discharged. So basically what they signed

04:00 up for was to go to war, they didn't sign up to dig gardens or any other from of military training, they joined up to go to war. And as such in the main, there was some rascals amongst them but on the whole very good soldiers. Fellows I guess having difficulties in civvie street, weren't doing much with their lives, others were,

04:30 but very good. And when you got them to Korea my platoon was a mixture of K force and regulars, the regulars were in for six years, no difference in the person. You would have to look at his regimental number to know whether he was a K force, all of the K force were four hundred thousand numbers see?

And was that always the case, how did the regulars and K force mix at first?

05:00 Well this started straight after the start of the Korean War, K force, there was no difference they were integrated straight into it and no one knew if you were K force or otherwise.

So what sort of training were you doing with 4 RAR?

4 RAR we were doing mostly field work, weapon training, grenade, small arms including

05:30 grenade work. We were doing a lot of patrolling work, that sort of stuff. Our training was much more closely aligned to what was happening in Korea. Defensive positions, play acting the enemy, you dug into defence positions and that sort of stuff, it was good training.

Can you give us a bit more detail about what you mean what was going on in Korea at that time?

06:00 Well you asked me before were we trained at night, now out at Glenfield particularly when they were doing DP3 training in the camp or in the bushland around the camp because Ingleburn and that area, there was nothing there it was open paddocks. Most of that

06:30 training was patrol work because they knew that that's what we were going into in Korea. It was living in defensive positions it was the normal drills that go on when you're in defence, what you do. Standing to in the morning and evenings. On outposts, sentry work

07:00 in the forward trenches, this sort of stuff. Weapons and drills and so forth. All of the defensive routine that goes on when you're in a defensive position.

What role were you being trained for at that point?

Platoon commander, I was a platoon commander at Ingleburn and that was what I was, I knew that was my job, I was going to Korea as a platoon commander.

07:30 **How long was that period of training in 4 RAR?**

I was there from June 1952 to November 1952.

In hindsight was that enough, what do you think about that now?

It was too long, I was busting to get to Korea.

08:00 Apart from doing it in a practical way with regular troops, I mean I had done a lot of that training at Duntroon it was second nature to me really, I mean I was there to impart what knowledge I had to the troops, but I was keen to get out of there and to get going.

It might seem like an obvious question to someone who had done all of that training, but why were you so keen to get to Korea?

08:30 You don't go to a military college for four years to push a pen, you go to military college for four years to go to war. I could not understand people who want to go to a military college without an opportunity to go and test their skills. I mean why would you go? Nobody thought about a free education or anything in my day I mean it was

09:00 you went there to be soldier and what's a soldier? A guy who goes and fights.

At any time before you were preparing to go or maybe on leave just before you left did the dangers of what you were doing come into it? Did you talk to people about it?

No I never worried about I never thought about danger the whole time I was in the war. Never worried me.

09:30 I have been in a few hairy spots but you have just got to get out of them.

What happened then in November did you get leave?

Yes I think from memory I got about a weeks leave and then I was with another guy, we were the draft conducting officers and we took a

10:00 group of the troops who were waiting to go, we went on a QANTAS charter flight and flew to Japan. And we flew from through, via Guam, we went Port Moresby, Manus Island and Guam and into Ewokuni which was the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base south of Hiro or Kure in Japan and then we went by launch up the Inland Sea in Japan

10:30 to Hiro which was the reinforcement holding unit. Two days to get there in those days. Well we overnighed in Guam.

In that week before you left what last minute preparations and goodbyes were there?

Well I went home. I used to go home on weekends, not all weekends if I was duty officer or we might have been out bivouacing in the scrub,

11:00 but I went home. I was single and my parents were living in Willoughby the family home and I went home on leave.

What was their reaction?

Oh my mother was very upset about me going to a war because she had seen it all before. My Dad didn't worry he was a pretty sort of a placid sort of a guy.

What did your mother do?

Oh I can remember going

11:30 for a walk around the block with Mum she was pretty teary, I told her I was going to be all right, I didn't have any worries. I knew I was going to come back.

You had a girlfriend still at this time?

I had a girlfriend in Sydney. But like a lot of those romances it went awry when I went overseas. You can't expect somebody to hang around and wait for you for eighteen months,

12:00 two years, I mean we weren't engaged.

Was there something you did before you left, you chatted to her about it?

No not really I can't remember ever, I mean she knew I was going to the war, I certainly had no intention of getting engaged. Some of the guys were married before they went, the guy you're interviewing on Monday was married before he went. Collin Carn was married before he went. Not for me,

12:30 I didn't get married until well after I came home.

That must have made it easier in a lot of ways to be so gung ho if you like?

I guess so. I suppose it did, I don't know whether married blokes think about it any less than I did, if you're numbers

13:00 up it is up isn't it?

Tell us about arriving in Japan, what were your first impressions of that?

The smell because RHU [Regimental Head Quarters Unit] is right at the back of a wood paper mill and by God isn't it right on the nose. But of course we arrived in the middle of the night and you don't see a lot of it. We disembarked

- 13:30 off this army launch and there were trucks to take us about three or four miles from the port of Kure to Hiro, it is just up over the hill and we when we arrived there of course we were met by the duty officer and shown to our quarters, I
- 14:00 shared a bedroom in a Japanese style house. We met the CO [Commanding Officer] of course and he is ex-Korea and I was only there about five days and that was mostly spent for me on being issued with all of my Korean gear. Getting rid of the gear I had brought up from Australia, it was held there in storage
- 14:30 in Japan for you. And then being very well briefed by fellows who had served in Korea on what was going on over there. But you were trying to absorb all of this and put it into perspective and visualise it, but of course as with anything you visualise it totally incorrectly. He is talking about a hill
- 15:00 and you visualise and when you get there it is quite different.

November is getting quite cold in Japan, what was the gear you were issued with there?

Well the Korean gear was in winter you wore a string singlet, you know with squares, string. And the reason for that is that it keeps the air circulating

- 15:30 on your body and keep the perspiration from settling because if it settles it will freeze. And then on top of that you wore a thick woollen singlet and you wore a woollen shirt and then you wore a sweater, very similar well a bit like yours but a big heavy sweater with
- 16:00 elbow things on it you know. and then on top of that you wore a windproof jacket. And if you were going to line up for any period of time on top of that you wore a parka so you looked a bit like the man from Mars. And wind proof trousers, three layers of material those wind proof things, very good, British equipment,
- 16:30 clothing. On your feet you have got quite thick white socks and very good rubber soled and heeled boots, soles were about that thick on them. but inside of them was these nylon inners. And that again was to stop the sweat from building up. But the sweat got into them and each night in Korea you had to take them off, beat the sweat out of them and dry them off otherwise the sweat would freeze
- 17:00 and you would constantly have wet feet. Hats part of the discipline, defensive discipline of Korea, but you didn't have to tell the diggers to do that, they're not silly they did that every night. On your hands you wore mittens and you wore mittens and you wore a pair of gloves with the trigger finger out. That was a one piece to
- 17:30 keep your fingers together and the trigger finger was like that sticking out the front of them. On your head, we used to wear little cloth peak caps in 1 RAR, 3 RAR wore a slouch hats, but I preferred the little cloth cap, the slouch hat is very cumbersome and when you went out on patrols you would wear a steel helmet.
- 18:00 We had balaclavas. I seldom wore a balaclava, during the day in Korea you could even though it was the middle of winter, there was snow on the ground you could walk around with all of the jackets and everything off, just the shirt and sweater, and that's all I used to walk around the front line with. With my battle bonnet on of course.

18:30 What personal weaponry were you issued with?

I had an Owen [sub machine gun] gun I carried it all of the time.

Anything else?

No. on patrols you took six grenades, five high explosives and one white phosphorous.

Was there any other personal gear or equipment you had on you?

Oh as an officer I had a .38 [calibre] pistol

- 19:00 which I used to wear around during the day and when I went on patrols I used to take it out of the holster and put it in my hip pocket.

That was a badge of rank as much as anything else?

Oh yes. But handy on patrol, you never knew when you might get into a really tight spot.

Before we get over to Korea, in Japan was there any other training given to you there?

I never had any, no,

- 19:30 I went as I said earlier on the Saturday morning I left, well the Friday night we again went by launch

back down to Iwakuni and I spent the Friday night at the air force base in Iwakuni and the next morning I went over on a DC3 [transport plane] the old Dakota's to Korea. We landed at Kimpo

20:00 which was the air base, it is still there, the base for Seoul, the South Korean capital and we were met by a jeep there, another officer and myself, he went to 3 RAR which was out on reserve and I went to 1 RAR which was on the front line. And I was driven to battalion headquarters which was back behind the lines and I met the CO and adjutant and so forth

20:30 and I was allocated to 4 platoon B company and the jeep took me straight up to the line. I met the company commander it was a fellow called Mann, Joe Mann a great fellow, old Smokey Joe. I had met him before in Australia so he sort of half knew me and I went to 4 Platoon .and about two hours after I arrived there we were shelled.

21:00 **We will get to that, just on training in Japan, did any of your people go to the battle school that was in Japan?**

When I came out of Korea I was posted to RHQ [Regimental Headquarters] as an instructor and when the troops came out of Australia they went to RHQ and they did a refresher on a lot of and

21:30 weaponry work mostly and then they went from RHQ up to Haramura which is the battle school about thirty miles up in the hills at the back of Hiro. I personally never went to Haramura and I didn't do any instructing there. I have been to Haramura but it was only to have a drink at the mess.

22:00 **Can you describe your emotions on waiting to go and arriving in Korea?**

I don't think I was too emotional about it, I was taking it as it came. I was very pleased to get there but I wasn't emotional about it. of course you wonder what it is like but it doesn't take you long to learn

22:30 and for me there was no breaking in period, I was straight on the front line and it was on

Well what did you find when you arrived can you describe where you ended up?

Yeah 355 is a massive hill, I have got some photos of it. it is called '355' because it is three hundred and fifty-five metres high. It sits out in the middle of the

23:00 Korean hills. If I could tell you, the Korean countryside is very hilly you no doubt know. Of course between those hills run valleys, lots of long ridge lines running down off higher hills. Both back and front. The front line of Korea basically ran north east,

23:30 south west and sort of ran. Most people think it ran straight across Korea it didn't, it ran that way. There are, where we were 355 was by far the highest hill. For example the Chinese position just across the valley from us when you were on the front end of 355 on the forward slope would be

24:00 about a hundred and fifty metres away and it was 227, so it was considerably lower. Our position on the left flank of us was 210 and 159 so they were considerably lower than 355. 355 had three companies on the hill itself and one on the little hill behind it.

24:30 One of the front on the left hand end, one right on the top and one down the right side, I went to the one on the right side.

How did you get up there?

Jeep. There were dirt roads and you came along right along the back of it. Some of the roads. Just one small section in that area was a

25:00 camouflage road with a net over the top and that was because the Chinese could see you, because their front line turned a little bit and they could see you coming down there. They would mortar that area occasionally but we just went by jeep and walked up the hill.

And can you describe the positions you were holding there?

Yeah they had been built a long time ago,

25:30 they were front line trenches with weapon pits. Long communication trenches, all zig zagging. And then on the backside of the hill were living trenches, and they had been dug into the side of the hill, sandbagged on the top and on the sides. In my bunker there were just two bunks and they were made out of

26:00 steel posts. Same steel posts as we have here on properties, dug into the side of the wall and strung with signal wire and on that you put your sleeping bag, one up and one down. I slept on the

26:30 one up top and my platoon sergeant slept on the one down bottom.

Where were the rest of your platoon?

Oh they were in their bunks scattered all around the back of the hill. And in each company there was three platoons and that was the same. Normally there was two platoons forward, mine was one of the

forward ones and there was one of the forward ones and there was another platoon on the knoll at the back of me,

27:00 in B company in the first position I ever went into. And then down the bottom of the hill and around the corner in a little re-entrant was the company cookhouse because you would come off the line a section at a time ,well not exactly a section at a time, a couple of men out of each section in relays to get your meals and

27:30 bring it back up. That was once a day, the rest of the time you were on field rations.

What was directly in front of you on that line?

A valley. I have a photo of it but I can't find it. It would tell you exactly what it was like, a valley not that wide about a hundred metres wide,

28:00 maybe a hundred and twenty metres and then you were onto the Chinese positions, but to get to the valley you could just walk off the top of our hill and go down the hill because it was mined all across the front .And that mine field ran in depth it could have been four hundred metres,

28:30 and mixed up amongst the mine field and back closer to our front line trenches were concertina wire. To get down into the valley you had to go down through the gap and there were three gaps along the front of 355 and we went down the right had gap which would have

29:00 been, from where it started nearly seven or eight hundred metres to the valley floor. You would get down into the valley floor and if you went straight ahead of you, you would have these ridge lines running, we ran this way and the ridge lines and the Chinese ran that way, which they occupied, they weren't dug in on them but they were theirs and they were actually just

29:30 behind those ridges. And at night all of the patrolling took place in the valley in front of us and on these ridges.

So what could you see of the Chinese position?

Nothing. You they were all dug in on the reverse slope of the hill, of their particular hills. They were masters at camouflage.

30:00 At the end of the war when firing ceased on the next morning I was down on the hook and in front of us was this Amishon Valley with a river running down the middle and they were on the hills on the other side of the river. They pulled the camouflage nets off the hill right opposite us and we had never seen so many weapons slits

30:30 that had been dug into the side of the hill in your life, it was pock marked with them and we had no idea that they were there.

Just to flesh out this description, going back from your own position into your own lines, what was behind your kitchen and?

Not much behind us, in terms of troops?

Artillery?

Oh well the artillery positions are back there.

31:00 But it wasn't as if there was another infantry battalion sitting behind us no. They were, when we, there were four battalions in 28th British Commonwealth Brigade two Australian when I first went there 1st Battalion and 3 Battalion. And the British battalions were the Durham Light Infantry from Northern England and the Royal Fusiliers a City of London Regiment . Now

31:30 normally what happened there was one British and one Australian battalion on the line at one time. The other two would be back in reserve but it wasn't as if when you were back in reserve you were in a defensive position, they were back a mile or so down the road which was not that far removed from being at Ingleburn camp except you were

32:00 living in pup tents. It was out of range, really out of range of the Chinese artillery.

Where were your company and battalion headquarters?

They were, the company headquarters was right in the middle of the company on the front line, but the battalion headquarters would have been back about four or five hundred metres. Not far down the road.

What was the company headquarters then can you describe that?

32:30 Well it was there was the company commander he just lived in a bunker like everyone lese. And the company second in command who was a captain, and a signaller who doubled as his batman. It wasn't as if the batman was there to clean his shoes, but he looked after the company commanders weapons and he doubled as the signaller. Sometimes you had an artillery

33:00 FOO, forward observation officer, living with the company. We didn't in B company. Also in the middle of our position were two tanks which were dug in to the reverse the back slope of 355 and they used to reverse them down the slope so that you couldn't see them from the front and every

33:30 now and then they would trundle them up to the front and they were such that the only thing sitting up over the hill was the turret and they would pump away a few twenty pounder shells at the Chinese from time to time and then trundle back down the hills again if the Chinese retaliated. They were British, they were 1st Royal Tank Regiment when we were there.

34:00 **Who was it that showed you around when you first arrived?**

My platoon sergeant a fellow called John McNalty a little Englishman, dapper little guy, won a Military Medal with me. He is long gone, he died about five years ago. Great soldier .he showed me around, introduced me to the section commanders,

34:30 there were three and the diggers. I am still friendly with all of them. We had the fiftieth anniversary of the cessation of hostilities in the Korean War and the first national reunion ever of the Korean War vets last year in Brisbane and six of my platoon were there.

It is always a little difficult to arrive in an established unit as a re-inforcement what is it like when you're in charge?

35:00 Well I guess everybody is wondering who the hell is this bloke? I never knew the fellow I took over from who was killed but I did appreciate that he was killed on a patrol action with the fellows that I was going to take over, they carried him in. His name was John Seaton.

35:30 he was from Tasmania and he was obviously a very good soldier because I took over a very good platoon. I had some top diggers in my platoon. Really good guys and I had one famous one, Keith Payne a Victoria Cross winner was a private, a digger in my platoon in Korea and went on to win the VC [Victoria Cross] in Vietnam. I had a great team of fellows.

36:00 **What is the first thing you did to get to know your men?**

I went around to each bunker and sat in there with them. There was normally about four fellows living in each bunker. And I went into each bunker and sat down and talked to them and told them who I was and you know, I guess

36:30 I can't remember what I said to them about how I was and a bit about my background. And then It was a case of, I am sure from their point of view, well lets see how this fellow goes. If he makes it great, and if he doesn't, and I had the opportunity ten days later to lead them on what we will talk about, operation Fauna, and that was the makings of me I never looked back after that ,that was quite a raid.

37:00 **You mentioned right after arriving in your position you got shelled can you tell us about that?**

Yeah about two hours afterwards, I wondered what the hel it was, they were off target a bit, only about a hundred metres away, less than that. The thing I can remember vividly about it was that I was in the open talking to a couple of diggers,

37:30 and not that you made a great habit of walking around in the open even on the reverse side of the hill because you could be shelled at any time. But it wasn't taboo, I mean fellows walked around, you had to do thing like that. And as soon as we were shelled of course you could hear the whistle and these two diggers, phew they were gone. And I can remember

38:00 and I soon realised where they were going. You can see how green you were, I can remember thinking now why the hell would they go into that bunker in case it was hit. Somehow or other there was something in my mind going around that you were safer on the outside but you sure weren't, so you learnt very quickly. Amateurish stuff when you look back on it.

Was your reaction under fire different to how you expected?

I didn't know how I was going to react, I was very calm.

38:30 Never worried me, I never thought about it, I was never frightened, sometimes you get a bit emotional when its all over. I am not saying you cry but you get a bit emotional within yourself but for me it was routine, when I was flying

39:00 and I saw a lot of action in that three months, I would come home from a mission which was a bit hairy, you could see the flak going past you two feet away, never worried me. That's all part of the job.

Why was it difficult what were the difficulties of getting into the platoon when you first arrived?

39:30 I think the quickest thing you have got to do is learn the people. I relied heavily on, I didn't try and come into the platoon and take it over .the first night I was there was a Saturday night, the company had been scheduled for a counter-attack drill. And we had a job, a role in the counter attack and I didn't buy into that because I only arrived at lunch time. I just tagged along with the platoon sergeant

- 40:00 and he ran it. And I did my best to meet the fellows and learn something about them quickly. When I went out on my first patrol I let the platoon sergeant pick the fellows that were going to go with me. and so I relied
- 40:30 on him in those very early few days and then it was over to me.
- I will just stop you there because we are going to run out of tape.**
- 40:42 **End of tape**

Tape 5

- 00:30 **Can you tell us a bit about your platoon notebook and what was in that?**
- Did I have a platoon notebook, I certainly had a notebook but I can't remember what was in it to be honest.
- 01:00 I am with you, I know what you. I had all of the details of my platoon.
- How is that kept is it a notebook, what do you?**
- I had a notebook it is a proper service field notebook, thick green cover and I went to each of the fellows and as I when I talked to them and introduced myself to them and met them I wrote down all of their personal details,
- 01:30 name, address, phone number, next of kin details and their religion. And so I had all of that of my fellows, God knows what happened to it, I don't. I think that's very important.
- Why is it important?**
- Well if you lose
- 02:00 a fellow, be he killed, wounded or missing its very nice to write to the next of kin. When we get onto operation Fauna, I had three fellows wounded and one missing, they never found him. So it is very nice. It is an interesting story about him.
- Just a couple more things before we get to that, can you just explain to someone watching this archive exactly what the job of a platoon commander in Korea was?**
- 02:30 Yes in Korea at my time which was during the static stages of the war, the last eighteen months of the war we occupied a defensive position much like World War One except the ground was a lot hillier than France.
- 03:00 The aim of the United Nations force of which we were part of, was to hold our line. And the aim of the Chinese I guess was to hold their line and to get out and kill the enemy, or alternatively find out what they were
- 03:30 doing per the medium of attempting to capture a prisoner. That I guess was the role of either side. A platoon commander is part of an infantry company, he doesn't operate independently, although of course when he is patrolling I guess he is on his own, although he is constantly in touch by radio or can be as the need requires
- 04:00 back in touch with the company commander who monitors any patrol of his people who are outside and of course other company patrols. The aim, the role of the platoon commander on patrol is to probe to try and find where the enemy are and to either attack them if it is a fighting patrol, in which case a fire fight
- 04:30 ensues. Might have a secondary role of attempting to take a prisoner. Now those sorts of clashes can happen when the patrol is moving or alternatively they can happen when you're in an ambush position, that is you're lying in wait waiting for the unsuspecting enemy to walk right into your lap.
- 05:00 And the platoon commander leads those, he gives the orders and directions, he leads by example. When he is back in his own front line position, he has a routine, he has got to. Stand to with the whole platoon first light in the morning and
- 05:30 normally about half an hour before first light through first light and then a half an hour afterwards. Then you stand down and you leave the standard number of sentries in the forward trenches to observe all day and then you change them over on a regular basis. They normally operate in pairs. There is nothing worse than to put one guy up there by himself.
- 06:00 You had your defensive routine testing weapons, normally tested them in the morning but a different time every morning because if the Chinese heard you firing weapons they would know you were testing

and pump a few mortar shells in so you did that well down on the reverse slope of the hill. You changed the spot every morning and you changed the time.

- 06:30 He is there to look after the welfare of his troops, their hygiene, make sure he has a shave. My blokes used to shave every morning and they had very little water. I used to try and give them a shower. I had one of those, which one of the diggers had scrounged, one of those canvas bags with a shower rose on it and it doesn't take the diggers long, they like a shower. They strung that up on a
- 07:00 tree right down the bottom of the hill and they got half a forty-four gallon drum cut this way and they used to boil the water up in that. And we would rotate the fellows, not all in one day to go down the bottom of the hill and have a shower, otherwise you get crabs. To put it mildly, Korea is not the cleanest place in the world,
- 07:30 bloody hills were covered in rats which you weren't encouraged to shoot because they used to drop what they call hemorrhagic fever. And that's pretty nasty, none of my fellows got it fortunately. You have got to look after the diggers feet so I used to go around and make sure they were powdering their feet, we got the foot powder. And generally look after
- 08:00 their clothing, if their clothing gets old and tatty and torn on barbed wire and so on, nothing worse and fellows morale drops. Fortunately we had a very good Q [Quartermaster] store in B company, CQMS, company quarter master sergeant was a fellow named Sammy Beam who just died recently, he was the greatest scrounger God ever put a sock on
- 08:30 and he was able to keep us pretty well supplied with extra gear, if ever there was an extra ration around he would find it and he would get it. And so really you're looking after the welfare of your people, that's what he does.
- 09:00 And he leads them, you have got to be there to be seen, not only to be the leader but to be seen to be the leader. You don't have to be walking around back slapping them. They don't expect you to walk around slapping them on the back telling them what a good bloke they are and trying to be one of them. They don't want that. They want you to be seen as a leader, a fellow that you can have a joke with and be friendly with but they always
- 09:30 know who the boss is.

What was the chain of command?

Going upwards? Well you have three section commanders and a section is about eleven men, and they are corporals, two stripers and they report to the platoon commander, and the platoon commander is a lieutenant, there is a platoon sergeant there who is second in command, he is a three striper

- 10:00 of course, he is second in command of the platoon. On the platoon headquarters there is normally three people; there is normally the platoon commander the platoon sergeant and the sig [signaller] and the sig doubles as the platoon commanders batman [servant]. That platoon commander reports to the company commander who is a major normally.
- 10:30 Three platoons in a company, and then company commanders report to the battalion commander, there are four rifle companies, a support company and an administrative company in every battalion. And that's how it works and the battalion commander reports to the brigade commander.

On the hill 355 how is that communication kept up?

- 11:00 Radio, when you went out on patrol it wasn't used a lot during the day, it was always kept on. But if I wanted to talk to the company commander I would get on the phone, there would be field telephones with wire strung across from the company commanders to each of the platoons. So if I wanted to talk to the bloke next door I would ring him up on the phone.

11:30 When you were out on patrol what was the radio equipment like?

Eighty-eight sets, they were a little haversack sets with an aerial up the side. And in the platoon headquarters you had that eighty-eight set and you had a bigger set which was a thirty-one set. You could carry it on your back but it was

- 12:00 reasonably big and reasonably heavy. You would know it if you carried it for a long time.

How reliable were those radios?

Very reliable even in the hills I don't think I can ever remember being out of radio contact. See if you got into a hotspot on a patrol and you wanted to call down artillery you would need to be in communication with the company commander and he would call down the artillery for you

- 12:30 which was pre-arranged you know. you would just get on the blower and advise the company commander what was happening and advise fire, might be bulldog was the code. And he would say, "Bulldog wilco." And wilco, wilco means message received understood and will be complied with.

- 13:00 That's the army definition of it and before you could blink down would come the artillery.

Lets talk about patrols, you did a couple of patrols before Operation Fauna, can you talk about how they were organised?

The first patrol I ever went on was an escort patrol which was a bit rare, they didn't do too many of them. The engineers

13:30 were going out to repair the wire on the minefield which had been hit by artillery fire. And it was down, very dangerous to have minefield wire that wasn't in place, but you just don't send people out to do that because there is a fair amount of banging in with pickets, and even though you don't try

14:00 and muffle it with sandbags, when you're trying to drive a steel picket into frozen ground you're making a bit of noise. So you need to have an escort patrol who spreads out tactically while you're doing the work. So that was the first patrol I was on, the other one I can't remember but it was out in the valley somewhere or other.

How does your platoon move when it is out on patrol?

14:30 In formation. I used several formations, if it was a sweep up the valley I used to spread them out. A lot of people used a box formation, two scouts out the front, I didn't like that. I reckon that's,

15:00 I have thought about it many times since and I still don't like it because I think you have got your people too close together. The principal of patrolling is first of all whatever formation you adopt you have got to be able to see the man on your left and right, if you can't see the man on your left or right you can't support him

15:30 Its no good trying to support the noise or the flash of fire, I used to use double arrow head, one like that and the same behind it and two scouts up front and me just behind the front of the arrow head. There have been occasions on which I have personally lead patrols, not approved of in

16:00 normal military circles, but I felt pretty safe leading. It wasn't a case of you know don't ask somebody to do the job you wouldn't do yourself, that's a load of crap. I mean you do what's best. But I lead them if it was going to be a fairly dicey spot, when I say I myself and my signaller

16:30 beside me. People say well you get knocked out and your patrol has had it. And I guess you could say that but I will tell you something I never got them lost. No, most of the time I didn't but I did on a few occasions. Particularly if I was going into a reasonably difficult area where there might be some difficulty

17:00 finding the ambush site even though you had a look by day and read your map properly. Sometimes they're a bit harder to find at night. I liked the double arrow head because I think that if you were hit you have got the flexibility of the second arrow head to move to your right or left to support you.

17:30 If I was going over a sweep right up the valley and we did a few of those I liked to spread out a bit more and I used four diamonds, one diamond there one there and one at the back, so four diamonds forming a diamond.

18:00 And they weren't exactly four people in each diamond because a fighting patrol was normally an officer, an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] and twelve men, fourteen, so you only had fourteen men and I rarely went anywhere without a couple of scouts out the front. Two out the front so you were then down to yourself

18:30 and eleven men. I always had two men right at the back as getaway men. In case you were ever really jumped you could get two fellows out, pretty simple stuff.

How do you communicate within the formations with these other men?

I had a series of

19:00 clicks, I don't know what other fellows did. Sometimes I would go phht, because you can't talk at night. Now if it was a very dark night you can't spread your guys out very far because you can't see them. See, if we're talking about four diamonds, if that diamond can't see that diamond or that diamond he can't support them.

19:30 So you have got to be in fairly close together, so it is not that difficult. No matter how dark it is they can hear you or see you and they know when you're moving. It depends on circumstances whether you move the whole patrol at once. Mostly I did. Sometimes you move on, you put him down and then move the

20:00 second group up to them and go on like that. Leap frog it. it depends on the circumstances.

How did your clicking technique work, can you remember any?

No I can't but I used to click, I can't remember what one click was or two. See that's not unusual, that could be, say you were a Chinese ambush

20:30 there and they hadn't got onto you, they weren't certain that you were there, that doesn't sound like a

human does it, it could be anything, could be a cricket, could be anything.

What other rules were there about moving in this patrol? If you stopped or if you?

Well when you stop in a patrol everyone turns outwards because you have got to have all around defence,

21:00 I mean if you were doing a sweep you just don't keep pressing up the valley you move for a certain distance and then you prop everybody out, have your Bren guns, I used to carry two Brens on a patrol and they were always on the flanks.

Were they the main weapons?

Yep.

You mentioned five grenades each?

21:30 Every soldier had five grenades and a white phosphorous. Most of the fellows carried Owen guns but some of the unlucky ones when we didn't have enough Owen gun had to carry rifles and in Korea it was the old .303 bolt action job. You had to be careful in winter if you were on particularly

22:00 on ambush patrols that your weapon didn't freeze, in which case you would have to tuck it right up under your arm and make sure that the working parts were in the warmth between your arm and your body, otherwise it would freeze. In fact if a rifle freezes you will never open the bolt and you haven't got a weapon. And also

22:30 the very reliable Owen gun, I have been on patrols where I have had occasion to fire it, on automatic and the first time you press the trigger it fires one shot. And you think gee, what's wrong with this? But once the one shot goes through the barrel she warms it up and she is away.

Were there any other particular

23:00 **bits of clothing or equipment you carried out on these patrols?**

Some people carried bayonets, I didn't, too cumbersome and they rattle., noisy things. See our bayonets were about that long. Owen gun bayonets are shorter but I never had one.

Camouflage or disguising?

No most of the time I was on the front line

23:30 there wasn't any need to wear the white smocks, but they were available. It was a total overall thing like a big overall one piece thing with a hood on it because the colour of our uniform was green, but it would have to be snowing for you to wear that otherwise you would stand out like proverbial. But I

24:00 I never wore them in all of the time I was there.

Did you wear badges of rank?

Not on patrol, in fact I never wore my, around the line I can't remember but everyone knew who I was anyway, but never on patrol and never any personal effects although some diggers occasionally would break the

24:30 rules and have pictures of girlfriends and all of that sort of stuff but I never had any of that.

Food?

No we weren't out long enough. See you cannot stay out that long in winter, you cannot lie out in the snow, the absolute maximum is four hours and that is about two hours too long. After you have been lying in snow that long I can tell

25:00 you, you totter until your circulation gets going again. It is very difficult to lie in snow and be totally quiet for more than two hours, and also to keep your body functions going.

So tell us about Operation Fauna that happened ten days after you arrived, what were the objectives?

25:30 It was to capture a prisoner. Before I got to Korea and went onto Little Gibraltar 355, the hill was occupied by the 1st battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment. That was in October 1952. They did a silly thing, they

26:00 I suggest, I don't know I suggest that their patrolling wasn't anywhere near as vigorous as the Australians and as such the Chinese who were very active and very good tunnellers, right on dusk one evening

26:30 jumped the forward company right on meal time. And the Canadians hadn't done what I said to you they do, you send two men per section down to the kitchen get your meal come back, when they're back in position and you always carry your weapon and you go for your meal with your hat on, your 'battle bonnet', and Canadians were a bit lax on that one on this particular occasion .they were very fine

- 27:00 soldiers as they showed earlier in the war. They got jumped, at least the forward platoon did almost en masse picking up their meal and the Chinese got stuck right into them and they lost nearly the forward platoon, I have got nearly the whole history of it here. The Chinese were able to get onto 355 and at least
- 27:30 two third of the way up the hill on the western side. They were counter attacked off it but the place was chaotic, bunkers had been blown in, Chinese throwing their potato mashers into the bunkers. It was mayhem. They pulled the Canadians off that hill and put
- 28:00 1 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment on. And B company onto the forward left hand or western end of the hill which is the area that had been overrun. There was still an odd Chinese body there and an odd Canadian body there. The trench work, bunkers and everything had been really knocked
- 28:30 around an B company had the task of rebuilding it and at the same time aggressively patrolling which they did magnificently. As I said the fellow I took over from John Seaton was killed off the front of that left hand end in a patrol clash. It was pretty nerve racking stuff and
- 29:00 B company was then pulled out of that front position and given a rest. B company was very fortunate that the company commander Major Mann, Joe Mann was a very capable officer, a hunk of a man, about sixteen stone, six foot two and a great bloke, everybody loved him. He and his company was pulled out into reserve,
- 29:30 remember I said three companies up and one back. He went into the reserve company position and then he went up onto the right hand. Now the CO reasoned that because B company had taken a bit of a lacing on the front and had all of the tough jobs they should get the job of giving a bit back. I can't quite work out the logic in it.
- 30:00 So B company was chosen, I think Joe Mann leading it had something to do with it also. B company was given the job of raiding this Chinese heavy mortar position which was about a thousand metres from the valley floor behind their lines, and it was going to have
- 30:30 two companies actually do the assault and it had one company as a firm base on the valley floor to prevent the Chinese re-enforcing off other ridge lines, and it had a section of assault pioneers who with the satchel charges, which is dynamite inside a haversack to blow
- 31:00 up Chinese bunkers and or to stun any occupants so that we could rush in like John Wayne and grab some stunned Chinese. So any rate, that was the basis of it, primarily to catch a prisoner. You want to know any more about it?

Take us through it from the beginning what happened?

Right I was summoned by

- 31:30 company commander Major Mann, myself and the two other platoon commanders, one of them was a sergeant at that stage because the platoon commander in that platoon, you're going to interview him I think Jack Skipper, had been wounded. We were summoned to battalion headquarters and when we got down there all of the hierarchy
- 32:00 were there, it was one morning and they had a mud model on the ground which had been done by the I section, the intelligence section, of the area we were going to cover. And we were briefed very thoroughly, we were also to take a FOO forward observation officer, who was a bloke called John Salmon, a captain, Duntroon graduate
- 32:30 1946 graduate who was attached to the New Zealand artillery but he was FOO up on the top 355. We were briefed and that afternoon nobody was told, none of the diggers were told, only the people there were told, it was taboo to talk about it.
- 33:00 We were then taken out and did a rehearsal which was pretty terrible and Brigadier Daily, Sir Thomas Daily was there and he made us do it again. Some reports say we did a night rehearsal, I am damned if I can ever remember doing a night rehearsal, I can't remember it. I don't think we did.
- 33:30 Then it was the night of the next day that we were going and so the morning of the night of the raid which was the night of the 10th / 11th of December 1952 exactly twelve months to the day that I graduated from Duntroon I was told I could brief the
- 34:00 troops. So I briefed the company commanders, took them into the forward trenches, showed them where we were going and actually went down the minefield gap, through the outpost, we had a fixed outpost at the bottom of the hill. Past that, right up the valley floor past three of the Chinese ridge lines and up between the third and fourth ridge line and we had to go up this narrow valley for
- 34:30 nearly a thousand metres, find the right re-entrant to go up onto the Chinese ridge line because we went down across up onto the Chinese ridge there and assaulted back towards our lines. My platoon was the lead. And

35:00 away we went. We left exactly at midnight and they said that it was going to take us an hour and a half I think to get there, in fact it took us four hours. Much to the consternation of the CO who was getting pretty testy and agitated about it, how long it was taking. But they totally underestimated how quickly you can move

35:30 ninety men in the middle of the night across the valley floor in snow that deep, frozen creek, frozen pools, every time you hit them you would crash through them. We got out onto the valley floor and there was a movement to our right, and one of the corporals in the platoon behind me

36:00 6 Platoon, platoons in B company were 4, 5, and 6. 4 and 6 were actually on the assault, 5 was the firm base platoon on the valley floor which had gone out before us. And this guy challenged, there was movement again and he challenged and there was no answer and he opened up with an Owen gun and he just slightly wounded a guy, well it turned out to be a member of the 5 Platoon that was out on the standing patrol.

36:30 But of course everything was sprung, well at least we thought it was, we thought at that stage they will call this off, but they didn't. And so we kept going. Turned up between the Chinese ridge lines and this quite narrow valley which wouldn't have been more than forty metres from that ridge to that ridge. And we were in the middle of it with Chinese there and there.

37:00 Any rate we got between them, I am still out in front and we were making a bit of noise because when you get dry snow it crunches and in Korea there is grass that grows about that high, but it isn't like our grass it is stalky and you break that damn stuff in winter because it is frozen and it makes a hell of a noise.

37:30 We managed, I got the right re-entrant, middle of the night black as the inside of a cat and we got onto the Chinese feature and we knew we were in the right spot because you could smell the Chinese food. That's the first thing that struck me, we're here, like Dickson Street and we got onto the feature exactly where we were supposed to. And running down the middle of this ridge line

38:00 was a great big communication trench which the Chinese had dug it was about nine feet deep and we jumped over that I put one section one side of it, one section the other side of it, one section at the rear and my, with the platoon sergeant at the rear and the signaller and I between the front two sections. And 6 Platoon had to go and

38:30 attack a feature behind us which when they got there there were no Chinese on it. So they left a section of their platoon there to make sure that the Chinese didn't come back and down the hill and reinforce and then tagged the other two sections of 6 Platoon on the end of the assault. In the middle of this conglomeration of bodies on the Chinese ridge line was the Company

39:00 Commander Joe Mann and his little headquarters, John Salmon the FOO and then about ten assault pioneers with these satchel charges. Always we started to advance slowly towards the Chinese position which we could see about forty metres in front of us and we went

39:30 about ten metres slowly, nothing happened, we edged forward further, twenty-two blokes in a long line like this out across and me in the middle and we got about twenty-five metres off them and all hell broke loose. They fired everything. There was about fifteen of them I would say dug in

40:00 firing machine guns and automatic weapons, burp guns. And then they started throwing grenades, the Chinese are very good at throwing grenades. It is part of their defensive technique and they have two types of grenades, they have what is called a potato masher which is alike a tin can with a handle on it, handle about that long and they throw them like that.

40:30 They pull a pin at the end of a handle and it trails a white tape and you can see them coming. You can see the white tape, well they are throwing these things as fast as they can. And then the other thing they have is like a little avocado about that size, it is a stun grenade which if it hits you it will knock you for six, knock you right out. If it hits you in a vital part it will kill you but normally

41:00 it is there to stun, makes a hell of a noise. Anyway they were throwing these and we returned fire 4 platoon. and I had the Brens on the flank firing across in front of us they're there and as we got within about ten metres of them they dived down into their trenches which were little

41:30 adjuncts to this big communication trench I was talking about. And they obviously got back into the communication trench. On the way while we were moving up the right hand section had the job of dropping two men into this nine foot deep communication trench. Now that takes a lot of guts. Two blokes went in, one of the blokes was Keith Payne the VC winner. He was dropped into the trench and the other guy

42:00 had to move as fast as they could through the trench and what they found was

42:05 End of tape

Tape 6

00:30 **Just before we go on into the battle coming way back to the rehearsal you mentioned that it wasn't done right or correct and you had to do it again what went wrong?**

01:00 Well in Korea there weren't many opportunities to do that sort of platoon attack and I don't think the fellows had ever done one, maybe in Australia, but they hadn't been trained in it and so the formations and that sort of thing just weren't good enough and the timings weren't good enough.

01:30 Particularly as we were doing it in the daytime. There was a bit of straggling as I remember. What happens is with a rehearsal you try and pick a piece of ground which best resembles the piece of ground you are going to attack so that it is almost a matter of taking it from there and put it into the real thing. It needed polishing up,

02:00 the second time was okay. As I say some people say we rehearsed at night but I definitely do not remember ever rehearsing at night.

Where did you do this rehearsal?

Back behind lines. The I section, intelligence section went out and found a piece of ground that had the same sort of approach march onto it and

02:30 it wasn't the same as the attack but it wasn't far off it, similar sort of country.

In the rehearsal did you have an enemy?

No.

So the purpose of it was for what?

Practice formations, practice communications, that sort of thing.

03:00 Spacing between men, maintaining your line. When you go into attack you can't have one section in front of the other, you have got to maintain your line. The two men we dropped into the communication trench they had to practice the same thing. Although there were trenches there they had to simulate it. That's how it went.

So what did you take away from the rehearsal attack?

Well I don't remember but it is essential if you are going to put a lot of men onto a set piece. Even though we moved onto the Chinese position it still was basically a set piece attack and you have got to do it properly and if you rehearse it you iron out the bugs which is exactly what we did.

So what were the emotions for yourself and the men before you set out?

I was pretty calm I was looking forward to it. I don't know about the diggers, remember this was 10th / 11th of December and they had been in Korea since early March and they had seen a bit of action,

04:30 355 wasn't the only position they had been on, they had been in a couple of others. My platoon sergeant had been in a daylight raid of a company size which was conducted by A company, he was in A company originally before he was transferred to B. What I did find was that when I spoke to

05:00 the diggers before they went out and briefed them individually, they listened. And I had only been there a very short time. And there was no mucking around, no if, buts or maybes, they knew it was serious and they listened to what I had to tell them. I can remember that vividly because one

05:30 bloke started to talk a bit and his mate shut him up. "Shut up and listen." And they soldiers are pretty serious people when it comes to the crunch.

you mentioned this other

Well he started to talk and he hardly opened his mouth before they, everybody was listening to what I had to say. Not

06:00 the whole platoon at once, I went be groups, you can't have the whole platoon gathered together in the open, too dangerous and so I went to each section and briefed them. I didn't have any doubts that these fellows would do the job, they did and they were very good.

But obviously they understood how dangerous this could be?

Oh yes they knew where they were going, they knew they were going I took them up into the forward trenches and showed them where they were going and they knew damned well it was dangerous, a thousand yards behind Chinese lines with nothing between you and your and your own position but Chinese

07:00 you have got to hit the thing right on the nose and make sure you're in the right spot otherwise it would

have been a debacle and we would have lost nearly the whole company. It was a very dicey exercise no doubt about that.

So what did the fellows do before they set off, did they write letters home?

Yeah they wrote letters home, some are very quiet. You always get the guy who is

07:30 the bullshit and bravado merchant, there is always one or two of them dancing around the platoon, but that is only emotion hiding what's underneath. And before we went out on that night of course the padres come up. The Catholic priest came up and the OPD they call him, 'other Protestant denominational',

08:00 to see anybody that wanted to go, it is surprising who goes, suddenly fellows find religion.

What about weapons checks and that sort of thing?

Well that's all done in the afternoon.

What do fellows do, do they clean guns and?

Clean their weapons and the weapons were tested in the morning, but they

08:30 cleaned the weapons and check their equipment and they particularly check grenades because as you know there is a pin in a grenade and you pull the pin out and the striker flies and then the mechanism down the centre fires onto the cap and once it hits the cap it burns the little fuse which is a seven second or a four second

09:00 fuse and you make sure that the pin in the grenade is splayed so that if it catches on a twig or on a barbed wire fence when you are going through the mine field gap, so that it won't pull the pin out. If it pulls the pin out you will lose half of the platoon. So all of those things have to be checked, normally that's done

09:30 by the section commander, he goes right around his men, as does the platoon sergeant he supervises it. I am hanging around in the background spot checking each of their checks. Feed the troops and we started to assemble about eleven o'clock at night . We

10:00 were relieved off our position ,when we pull the whole of the company off 355 a reserve company came up to take our place and then a company from 3 RAR which was right back in reserve came up and went into our reserve company position and so there was no gaps in the line.

What time did you set off?

10:30 Midnight exactly.

Okay so just travelling forward a bit you mentioned the shooting incident when the guy fired, when that happened what did you see?

I heard the challenge because you had a password, the password could be apple pie.

11:00 It is always two words, if you challenge somebody you say, "Halt, apple." And the guy is supposed to reply, "Pie." If he says, "Pie." It is all clear. If he doesn't say anything it is not so good, it could be Chinese, it could be him dumbstruck, he could have forgotten what his counter to the apple was anything

11:30 could have happened. If you have forgotten the password the only thing to do is swear in Australian and they know damn well who you are and won't kill you.

So you heard the challenge, do you continue on, what happened?

No they stopped, we were going forward, stop, forward, stop. Leap frogging.

12:00 Going in just making sure, well the scouts in front were making sure it was clear to make the next move forward, but basically there weren't too many stops because we had to keep moving to try and meet the timetable, it was no good hitting that Chinese hill with dawn coming up, we had to hit it at dark and as I said

12:30 to you, I think it was something like an hour and a half to get there and it took us four hours, but that in the end had no bearing with what went on.

Okay you stopped the challenge was made?

Okay the guy who challenged when he didn't get a response he fired which is the thing to do,

13:00 he did the right thing but unfortunately he mildly wounded one of our own blokes. And that was one of the fellows who was in the standing patrol, 5 Platoon, not much damage to him.

So you're in charge what did you do next?

- No I wasn't in charge I was leading the leading platoon. Major Joe Mann he was, it was his
- 13:30 command. He reported that back, although the CO of the battalion was sitting in an observation post right up on the top of 355, not that he could see what was going on but he would have heard it, he would have heard the Owen gun go and then he got the message and Joe Mann at that stage I think thought that it might be called off
- 14:00 but it wasn't., the CO said, "No press on." And we did. And that was the only incident apart from fellows on odd occasions just losing their footing, particularly in the icy pools of water, they were everywhere.
- So what other noises were around?**
- None.
- No other gunfire in the distance?**
- I had forgotten that. On our right flank
- 14:30 there was a hell of a fight going on, immediately across to the right a little valley was the 1st ROK division, Republic of Korea Division. South Koreans of course, and they were holding their part of the line. Where I was was right on the right hand end of the Commonwealth Division, the next people were the ROKs and the
- 15:00 Chinese attacked them that night and really there was a real brawl going on there with artillery whistling over and it was about three or four hundred yards to our right and that helped to blanket our movement. It enabled us to get going, to get out of the valley and up into
- 15:30 the Chinese valley before it stopped, it went on into about two or three o'clock in the morning, but we had got through the noisy part of our trip at that stage, when we were going across the valley floor and crossing the frozen creek and that sort of thing. So there was something of a diversion going on on the right hand flank. That was pretty noisy, there
- 16:00 were star shells up and flares but, and that was a God send for us. It was predicted because the Chinese had been probing the ROKs for a few nights and the Co and his intelligence fellows reckoned that might be the night for the attack on the ROKs and it was.
- So just to understand**
- 16:30 **Chinese tactics they probe and area before they make an all out assault?**
- Oh yeah but what it also is, it deflected all of their artillery away from the Commonwealth Divisions, their artillery that night was firing on the ROKs, certainly it could have switched from there onto the Commonwealth Division but it didn't because there was no need to, it was supporting their own infantry going in against the ROKs.
- 17:00 **Excellent. So it had taken you four hours?**
- To get right onto the objective.
- When is sunrise?**
- About six thirty, we hit at about four o'clock, pitch black. Couldn't see anything, just make out the dim outline of the Chinese trenches when we got on it.
- 17:30 **You mentioned that you smelt them first?**
- Yeah you can smell the Chinese food. It is very pungent and it hangs. You walk around Dickson Street at night, you probably never noticed it, you breathe in when you go around the corner into Dickson Street, go like that, you smell nothing else but Chinese food because it hangs in the air. As does our cooking, unbeknownst to us.
- 18:00 **Were there any orders that you needed to issue upon approaching?**
- No. When I was I had the eighty-eight set on my back, I was my own signaller that night although I had my signaller batman with me I did my own communications. I spoke with Joe Mann, whispered to him on the thing. I never spoke to him until we
- 18:30 were nearing the re-entrant. We were going up this valley and we had to turn right, do you know what a re-entrant is? Like a little water course without water where it runs off a ridge line down into the valley. Narrow, no wider than this room and when I picked the right way and I picked it and as I was turning right to go out of the valley up there I communicated with him I said, "We have reached the re-entrant we are turning right. "
- 19:00 and all he said was, "Roger." We went up the re-entrant and as I said before we spread out. The communication trench was down the middle of the Chinese ridge line, one section either side of that, one astride it at the back with platoon sergeant with them and company headquarter, pioneers then

- 19:30 started to go to, we knew from aerial photographs etcetera exactly what we were looking for. And 6 platoon when they found there was no Chinamen in their objective which they had to assault, they put one section down to stop them from reinforcing from their main line which was on a ridge line back down towards us and
- 20:00 it subsequently proved absolutely a bonanza because the Chinese came rushing down the hill. I will come to that. So when the firing started, and we were about thirty or thirty-five metres off our objective, as soon as it started the Chinese started to reinforce from their main position which was about three hundred metres further on and they came rushing down the ridge line
- 20:30 and as they did the two Bren gunners in the section from 6 Platoon that we put down to stop that opened fire. And they fired straight up the ridge, cleaned up heaps of them. And when the Chinese realised that they couldn't get down the ridge they went underground, into the tunnels all their ridges were tunnelled,
- 21:00 into the tunnels ran along and came back up through tunnels on the position that we were attacking. I will come to that. So the forward platoon, mine, swept through the objective, the Chinese by that time had gone. We got a few of them, the rest of the dived down into the large communication trench, remember I started to tell you about the
- 21:30 big holes that were in the side of the wall. When I dropped the two fellows into the trench to clear the trench and check there is no Chinese lurking there. They came on these big holes about that big, just above the floor of the trench that's when they used their grenades. And these were about every
- 22:00 six metres along .and they were tunnels that were going down underground. They threw grenades into them and I can always remember Keith Payne telling me when you throw grenades in you could hardly hear them going off, that's how far down they were going into the bowels of the earth. My platoon swept through the objective. The blokes in the trenches were
- 22:30 throwing grenades in. The pioneers had jumped into the trenches and were throwing satchel charges into the Chinese bunkers. The satchel charges were too strong we thought they would be enough to stun anybody where as they absolutely disintegrated the bunkers, blew them to bits, so anybody who was in there wasn't going to be of value to us. The Chinese stopped running down the ridge line
- 23:00 to try and reinforce and gone underground and we had reached the objective my two leading sections and reorganised about thirty metres beyond which is a standard attacking drill. My platoon got through with three wounded and one missing. The routine once you start to reorganise
- 23:30 is you call for personnel reports, "Reports?" of course there is no whispering once the firing starts, I mean I am yelling trying to keep the fellows moving, there is a bit of a tendency to stop and fire, we kept them moving, that's the secret, don't lose your momentum, I called for reports.
- 24:00 1 Section was right, 2 Section was three wounded and one missing and I said, "Who's missing?" and the guy came back, "Private Roots" was his name R O O T S. And the section commander said, "I want to go back for him." and I said, "No absolutely not." I mean pitch black, there is a battle going on behind us and
- 24:30 the Chinese had reinforced the ridge line up through the tunnels, all of a sudden tunnels were opening where we had just come from, I probably walked on one. And out of the tunnels were pouring Chinese into the middle of our attacking force. Joe Mann got blown off his feet. John Salmon the FOO, forward observation officer
- 25:00 got hit with a potato masher, still got shrapnel in him. He was wounded twenty-two times. But with company headquarters and 6 platoon they managed to drive them back down into the tunnels where they could do no damage. Then the Chinese started to mortar the position when they realised they couldn't knock us around with people coming up through the tunnels they mortared
- 25:30 the position. John Salmon the forward observation officer although he was wounded he called down our artillery which had been zeroed in on set Chinese targets which were possible areas from which the Chinese could reinforce and that artillery came pouring down but once the Chinese started mortaring us there was no point in hanging
- 26:00 around. we weren't going to get a prisoner, the Chinese never left their wounded, they always got them off the hill, and we didn't get one. And Joe Mann gave the order to withdraw so we had a pretty orderly withdrawal. I had to get my platoon off, my platoon sergeant was at the bottom of the ridge line and he was checking them
- 26:30 through by the time, I was the last off the hill of my platoon and there they were in front of us streaming home. And coming home, although it was orderly it was every man for himself, there wasn't any formation coming home. Dozens of diggers streaming across the valley. All knew where to go. Actually I said there was one man missing,
- 27:00 actually there were two. One guy was wounded and he got disorientated and came back down the wrong valley. But we got him the next night when a patrol was going out on their routine patrolling that night. He was sitting on the edge of our minefield, he had made his way, he managed to get himself

down there but he just had a bullet

- 27:30 here. And during the course of lying up during the course of the next day because he couldn't move around the valley it had frozen so he was all right. And we brought him home. So we had one missing and three wounded out of my platoon. There was another guy missing they never found out of the Assault Pioneers, and John Salmon and a radio bloke from company
- 28:00 headquarters, I think it was six wounded and two missing total tally. It is in that book anyhow. And we came home and where it took us four hours to get up there when I came off the hill I linked up with some of my diggers who were helping one of the wounded there was a fellow in my
- 28:30 platoon Bob Auhl, A U H L. And he had been badly hit around the knee on his right leg and we I stayed with him whilst I was coming home and helped him and then we got him on a stretcher and carried him to the base of hill 355 and then we had to get him up
- 29:00 the mine field gap. The Chinese chased us with the mortars but they miscalculated. They thought we came from, and this was predicted by our CO, Colonel Austin, they predicted that we would come from the forward left hand company on 355 when in fact we came from the forward right hand company of 355. So they mortared
- 29:30 that and then they switched to the centre of 355 and mortared that then they switched finally to our side where we were coming home, but by that time most of the fellows had gone up the minefield gap. Except a few of us at the end and we were bringing this guy Bob Auhl in on a stretcher which was quite a job I can tell you. We had to bring him up the minefield on our hands and knees and
- 30:00 strapped on the stretcher with rifle slings. He was mostly unconscious, coming in and out of consciousness. We managed. We would crawl about five metres, he wasn't that big but it is damned heavy when you're crawling on your hands and knees and you have got a guy like this and you can only lift the stretcher about that far off the ground .We got him home,
- 30:30 I have seen him occasionally. Seen him three or four times.

Just going back the fact that you were four hours instead of an hour and a half, that time constraint what pressure did that place on you?

The CO was extremely worried about it but it had absolutely no bearing on the end result.

But what pressure did it place on you?

None.

- 31:00 My Company Commander never once said to me, "You have got to hurry it up." I think he was pressured a bit from the CO, I suspect he was that we had to keep moving. We were going as fast we could possibly go and Joe Mann being on the valley floor knew damned well we were going as fast as we could go because we would have made a hell of a noise if we had have started crunching through the stalky grass.
- 31:30 So we had to move very slowly.

Who initiated firing was it the Australians or the Chinese?

The Chinese.

So they spotted you?

Yes.

Did they spot you or someone else?

Well my two forward sections were lined out, we were right in front with me in the middle and they

- 32:00 spotted us. We didn't know whether they were in the trench line that we could see and the bunker complex that we could see in front of us. You could just make out the dim outline of it, but we soon realised that they were there and they opened fire first. When they opened fire again the Chinese from right up the back three hundred metres up the ridge they started to come running down shouting,
- 32:30 "Chou, chou!" Which means beware, they were giving the signal.

Were you yourself firing?

Yes.

Did you hit anyone?

God knows. I tell you what if I didn't hit anyone Michael I gave them a fright, they knew we were there. My platoon fired brilliantly, at night you fire high

- 33:00 by everybody fires high at night but my fellows were under very strict instructions to fire low and when

I was going into the assault, after we had been fired upon I am yelling, "Go fore! Fire low." And one of the Bren gunners who was on the left flank he was firing right across the front of us and

33:30 you could, as we got closer you could see the line, he was firing right along the top of the Chinese trench, now he must have hit a few. And we were all firing purposely low because once we opened fire the grenades that I was telling you about were coming by the dozen

34:00 almost stopped immediately, although not totally because they were still throwing grenades. I mean I can remember going into the attack and saying to the fellows, "Watch the grenades." Because you could see them with trailing white tape, and they were landing there, very close to you. But I never worried we just kept moving, you lose people like that, I mean if we had have stopped we would have lost people.

34:30 **Your particular action was it a success?**

Well lets put it this way, how do you judge success? Did we get a prisoner ? No. I think we were never going to get a prisoner. But I say it was a success because it must have absolutely astounded

35:00 the Chinese four o'clock in the morning and here was two rifle platoons of the enemy a thousand metres behind their lines giving them buggery and hit in and out without them knowing., they must have been absolutely astounded that that could have happened. Also

35:30 it was the makings of me, it was my baptism of fire as a very young platoon commander and it was a great exercise in cooperation because dotted all around the valley floor and going into that feature were standing patrols, ambush patrols of both 1 RARs other companies and 3 RAR who were out there that night. And also

36:00 a lot of the 3 RAR fellows came down and were allocated as stretcher bearers and they were a great help. But you needed them. to bring that one guy up that mine field gap there were about sixteen fellows on that stretcher, not all at once but you take a turn and the next guy takes a turn.

There were a couple of decorations I think your sergeant was decorated?

36:30 The company commander Joe Mann won a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and my platoon sergeant won a Military Medal whilst his citation was written around that raid he basically won it, my personal opinion was that he did his job on that raid, he wasn't extraordinary.

37:00 But he had put in a lot of good work before that on other clashes that they had had and he was on the daylight raid with A company, so what he had was a very good history of good soldiering.

What bravery did you actually witness?

37:30 I couldn't say any to be perfectly honest, not individual bravery. It wasn't the sort of operation where you had individual bravery, it was really a tame effort. I mean there was nobody running across open ground sort of stuff knocking out Chinese bunkers, you couldn't do it, you don't do that in the middle of the night. It has got to be a team effort.

38:00 **In the reverse which you may have answered the issue of cowardice?**

No there was none. Everybody did their job there was nobody shrinking away from it. In those exercises you have got to do your job, you have got to know where you are, where the man on your right and left is and if you can keep him in your sight all

38:30 of the time then you are what the military calls mutually supporting. That's what it is all about.

How was the platoon affected by this engagement?

Very sad about losing Reg Roots he was a very popular member of the platoon. He was an original 1 RAR he sailed from Sydney with them, he was from Sydney, Leichhardt

39:00 and he was a very popular member of the platoon. They were very upset with him not coming back, but there was no way you could let anybody go back on a Chinese infested hill, with a fight going on, wandering around looking for wounded or dead blokes, sadly you have got to leave them. You lose too many people trying to be heroic and so that's where

39:30 the officer has to make a decision, I had to make that decision and if I hadn't have made the decision Joe Mann would have and I know what he would have said, "No way!"

I mean the decision is understandable but obviously to be asked that?

It is not easy to make those decisions.

Were fellows disappointed that you didn't agree to such a request?

40:00 Nobody has ever said anything to me about him being left behind, never. And Anzac days when all of the heroes come out and no. that's was the right decision.

We will stop there.

40:20 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:30 **Can you tell us what your responsibilities were then in regards to Roots and his death?**

Yes of course I had to report to the company commander that I had two

01:00 men missing and I told him who they were. A patrol from another company picked up Jim Young the next night because he had got back of his own volition right to the wire at the front of our minefield. So they got him but Roots never reappeared, neither did the other fellow who was a pioneer, his

01:30 name was Griffiths. And both are listed as killed in action no known grave. I wrote to Roots parents who lived in Leichhardt and of course you have to go through the business of gathering all of his personal effects and that has to be sent home. That was done, I didn't personally

02:00 do that, the platoon sergeant does all of those things. I wrote to his parents and when I came home from Japan in 1954 I went to see them. So I did meet them and very nice people. His father was a tram driver on the old trams and he had three sisters and I can remember vividly going there and that was the end of it as far as I was concerned

02:30 until a year ago. The phone rang here one day and a chap his name was Bourne, B O U R N E, Don Bourne rang me and he said, "Mr Breen?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "I wonder if you can give me some information about a soldier who was missing in Korea,, I believe you know about it." And I said, "Are you referring to Reg Roots?"

03:00 And he said, "Yes he was my uncle." And so I said, "Yes I can tell you about it, how did you find me?" And he said, he is the licensee of a hotel in Campsie and his son runs the internet shop or something next door and he said, "We decided we

03:30 would just put Reg Roots up on the search, maybe its there. And he put Reg Roots up on the search and there came that story that you have just been through.

Just explain for the archive what story that referred to?

That referred to Operation Fauna.

04:00 When this guy put Reg Roots up, Reg Roots' name is mentioned in that article I wrote and that it is Operation Fauna which is an extract straight out of the book 'Korea Remembered', and it has got a little bit of a foreword on it with a bit of a biography of me. And

04:30 he put up the white pages of the phone directory and he came up with me so he rang me. And to cut a long story short I was able to tell him first hand all about it. And he was able to put me in touch with Reg Roots sisters and I subsequently met his sisters at the fiftieth anniversary reunion of the Korean War vets as were six other guys who were

05:00 in my platoon and on that raid. The sisters were able to get it first hand exactly what happened to their brother which I thought was great and they were so grateful to be able to do that.

At that time, or in 1954 when you went to see his parents how emotional was that?

Well we didn't talk very much about

05:30 in fact we didn't talk about it at all his loss. They knew why I was there and there was ample opportunity to raise the question but I didn't bring it up and they didn't. I think they were just happy that I went there though, to visit them. It was a recognition of the fact

06:00 that I knew what they were going through still. Actually I knew that he worked, knew that his father worked, I don't know how I found that he worked on the tram ways and a chap that lived two or three door up from us at Willoughby was one of the senior executives of the tramways and he knew Reg Roots father

06:30 and through him I asked him would he ask Mr Roots senior would he like me to come over and he was delighted so over I went.

You mentioned before that that operation sort of blooded you as a commander how did it change things for you around the platoon for the next couple of weeks?

I think fellows knew that I was capable of doing the job. That was my baptism of fire

07:00 and I came through it., I think I performed reasonably well, in fact I know I did I am not being

egotistical. Even today people express quite some amazement that I actually got that company onto the Chinese feature right on the nose. John Salmon whom I haven't seen,

07:30 he was the forward observation officer who was wounded, I met him last year at the annual reunion. I haven't seen him since that night and he said to me, "How you ever found that re-entrant I will never know. you must have paid attention in the map reading lessons at Duntroon." I said, "Well I could always read a map and still read a map." We hit it right on the nose because to miss it would have been absolutely

08:00 diabolical. Too short would have been a wasted exercise and if we had gone too far we would have landed in the middle of thousands of Chinese troops.

What mistakes were made on that night?

Not that it had any bearing, the length of time it took, the approach march.,

08:30 What had happened was that reconnaissance patrols from other companies had been sent out right up the re-entrant, between the Chinese ridges, up the valley but they were three man patrols, now you can move three men faster than you can move ninety. They went up and back in no time.

09:00 It is a vast difference moving your own people. Getting down the mine field gap is a hell of a job. Because you slip, the slope is like that you slip, you slide, fellows fall over. They fall over and take out two or three guys in front of them and unless you are hanging on pretty tightly to the barbed wire which is between you and the minefield

09:30 you are going to finish up flat on your face or back sliding down the hill. That's always a problem and therefore you have to move necessarily a lot slower than if you have three people. Not many, there weren't many other mistakes, I think getting wounded in one never knows how difficult that is particularly when you have got to come back up the minefield gap with fellows who are emotionally drained.

10:00 But that was to some degree taken care of because 3 RAR had been allocated that role and they had come down the minefield gap to take over any stretchers that were being brought in.

You mentioned before that four hours is as long as you ever want to be out on a patrol?

In winter, in summer you can stay out all night.

This was in winter, what were the effects of the cold when you came back?

10:30 One of the, I didn't notice the cold on the raid because you're too busy and I guess too churned up within yourself, but I noticed it when it came back that it was very cold. The temperature would have been below zero although it wasn't snowing.

11:00 You can move through snow and stay out longer than four hours I would suggest, but not through a snow storm, I don't think you can stay out, you certainly can't lie in the snow longer than two hours and be effective.

11:30 After that operation you obviously got reinforcements?

Yes the wounded fellows went off for treatment and they all came back eventually but there were one or two reinforcements came up from Australia yes. Through the set-up which I told you, through RHU

12:00 and into Korea that way.

Were there other incident on hill 355 before 1 RAR was transferred off?

There were certainly patrol clashes out the front, not in my platoon. Again didn't again clash with the Chinese, I had one very close call where we would have been surrounded. Had I not got them out but I got them out.

12:30 Can you just tell us briefly what happened there?

Oh we it was just straight across from where I was and we came down the mine field gap and instead of swinging left as I indicated and moving along we had to go straight over onto this hill which is called Flag Hill, Chinese position, just over the other side of the valley., the stalky grass was about this high and we were making a bit of noise. I knew we were making noise and it wads very difficult to get there undetected, standard fighting patrol, fourteen men I was leading it.

13:00 Again the whole roll of at that time of the Korean War was to get a prisoner, there was an obsession in higher command to get a prisoner. Personally I don't think that the means justified the end because in twelve months that 1 RAR was in Korea they caught one bloke,

13:30 one Chinaman and that was much earlier than I am talking about. I took my patrol across up the ridge line up the slope onto the Chinese ridge went down about a hundred metres and went into an ambush position. And I sent three men as a reconnaissance patrol further up the ridge line to probe carefully and see what was there,

- 14:00 see if there was any Chinese movement and see if we could using those three men draw the Chinese back down into our position, very effective. Worked like a charm except I had fourteen men and they had a hundred and fourteen. And they came all right, followed the three men back but there was one force coming down the ridge line, there was one coming around our left flank and there
- 14:30 was one coming around our right flank and ultimately would have got behind us and cut off our exit and then taken us out because we would have been isolated from the top of the hill. So when I ascertained what was happening and I had my fellows spread out in an ambush position and I was getting the word, they are coming around our left flank,
- 15:00 well you never listen to people who say that because there are lots of noises out there, whistling wind and so forth, grass that's wavering. So I went over and listened and it was sure not whistling wind. And then I got the call coming the other way so I went back over the, half crawling over the other side and they were coming down that side
- 15:30 so then I knew what they were up to because I knew they were following the three men that had gone forward back down the ridge. So I got the patrol up and put three men down the slope back into the valley floor first and told them to wait there and they were the people to give us the firm base that we could move through.
- 16:00 And they would have given us early warning had the Chinese got in behind us and the extricated the patrol. Got them down again into the valley floor. What do you do then? Call artillery. We called artillery onto the Chinese positions, you never know if you got anyone or not but you sure beat them up.

How close did they come?

- 16:30 Well I would think about forty metres either side, not far. You have got to move, they would have been outside grenade range. Absolutely vital when you are fighting any South East Asian troops, keep them outside grenade range which is about thirty metres. That's about as far as you can throw a hand grenade.
- 17:00 If you let them inside grenade range you are in trouble because their principle is, if they are going to attack you fine, but before they attack you they pepper you with grenades. And they come forward, throw and then they throw again and then that group pulls back and another group comes up and throws and throws and throws until they
- 17:30 weaken you and then they take you out. So you have got to keep them out of grenade range. It was a philosophy that I always used. Well not always used, that I had intended to use and never did. If you ever got into a fire fight with them like that that's when you bring your white phosphorous grenades into action.
- 18:00 Because they cause mayhem have you ever seen one of them go off? Well it is like Luna Park, they blow little bits of phosphorous that stick but not only that they are great illuminators, and if you have got well trained troops and you're under fire and you yell, "Phosphorous!" and it goes the fellows are all ready as soon as it explodes to open fire, because they can see.
- 18:30 Not only is it a great morale booster but also an illuminator.

You said a moment ago that higher command seemed to have an obsession with getting prisoners?

Absolutely. Talk to any guy who served as a platoon commander and you no doubt have and they will tell you that the means did not justify the end.

How much of that opinion were you at the time and what did you do about it?

- 19:00 I don't think anybody who went out on those patrols ever believed they were going to get anyone, my opinion. Nobody ever said so, I am talking about the people who were actually doing the jobs. The principle was, they used to have what was called snatch patrols, have you heard of these?
- 19:30 Where you put down a firm base, three fellows forward, one stage they had garrottes that they were supposed to throw around the Chinese neck and well, if I am a Chinaman are you going to let someone throw a garrotte around my neck and throttle me? I don't think so.

Did this affect the morale the fact that you were being sent on these unwinnable missions?

No. But

20:00 Why not surely?

The thing that affected morale was that if you really suffered heavily on them. I never had that misfortune. A classmate of mine had it in 3 RAR lost about fourteen men and himself, never been found because he was sent on one of those. The 25th

- 20:30 of January 1953 raid which you will no doubt pick up along your travels. They were sent on what I would regard as an absolutely impossible mission.

What was the high commands reaction when these missions were continually not successful?

I think the pressure was coming down from the very top echelon

21:00 and that would have been coming down from corps headquarters, we were all part of I Corps, the American corps. And I am sure they were after prisoners, over in other parts of the Korean front particularly where I used to fly they were much closer to the Chinese, there were ridge lines there where

21:30 the United Nations Americans or ROK were sitting on one end of the ridge and forty metres away there was Chinese sitting on the other end. it used to change hands almost every night and you have got more chances of getting a prisoner in those circumstances because you hit quickly and might pick up a wounded bloke. But not the sort of valley in-between we were talking.

We had better move on to talking about the flying so I will just ask you a couple of questions about the end of 1 RAR.

22:00 **how did it come that you were pulled out, what happened to you at that point?**

Well we were pulled out into reserve after 1 RAR had been on the front line for two months. We came out the day before New Years Eve 1953 and we were out in reserve for three or four weeks and then the whole division was pulled out and we became the core I Corps reserve.

22:30 And we went back to a place called Camp Casey and that's where when 1 RARs time was up and in fact when 2 RAR came up they relieved 1 RAR actually in Camp Casey which was about ten miles behind the lines.

What did you do in reserve?

23:00 Just trained.

What was the set-up there?

Tents for us and you had officers and sergeants and the other ranks mess. The whole thing was set up like a peace time camp.

Were there comforts available in the reserve line that weren't available in the front line?

23:30 In the front of course we were living in bunkers and they weren't heated back down there whilst it was just as cold, we were in tents but there were two heaters per tent. There were from memory twelve men to a tent. And they could go and have a beer at night. On the front line we got one bottle of beer per man per day. And you had to drink it.

24:00 and we got in winter a shot of rum.

How was the rum distributed?

Well the platoon sergeant used to do that. Used to come up with glass demijohns and fellows would come around with their mug and he would dense it with a cap that he had there to measure it out. Everybody was happy with that. Patrols going out during the day, on a regular

24:30 basis they used to send out lie-out patrols which used to go out before first light, done up like the abominable snowman with their white smocks on and they would go right across onto the Chinese front line positions and actually lie within ten metres of the enemy troops listening to them jabbering away all day and not being able to move. And when I used to send my fellows out they used to

25:00 have about three quarters of a water bottle of rum each. OP [over proof] rum, rot your boots. And it was the, I have had fellows say to me that it was the only thing that kept them alive, have a nip every now and then and put some warmth back into your body. It was one of the most harrowing exercises, out there by six o'clock

25:30 in the morning and not be able to move until nearly six o'clock at night which defies what I have just said to you about not being able to lie in the snow. These fellows used to have sand bags full with straw over all of that gear, tied on their feet and really rugged up, about this wide and they managed it.

26:00 **Was there ever any problems with alcohol or rum?**

No because the troops weren't allowed to horde their beer. It was the section commanders job to make sure that each fellow, it used to come up in wooden crates, Asai Beer from Japan. Wooden crates and straw and one was given to every

26:30 man and anybody who didn't drink didn't take one. He wasn't able to take one and give it to someone else. So each man drank his bottle of beer and that was the section commanders responsibility to make sure he did. You couldn't have them hoarding it and having a party.

In reserve was there more beer available there?

Not in active reserve, by that when we were pulled off the line to go back about three miles no.

27:00 When we went back to Camp Casey when we knew we were going to be there for some time there was more allowed there but people weren't allowed to get drunk. It wasn't that much, no such thing as beer on tap.

It must have been difficult for you after just getting used to these men and moulding them and then being deserted by them in a sense?

27:30 Oh it was sad to some degree I have got a great fondness for those fellows and I hope they have for me. I think some of them have for me. Because over fifty years I still have fellows ring me here, for a chat. So I must have done something right.

And what was it like to be in the reverse situation to be left behind?

28:00 I didn't think too much of that, I never really had a platoon initially in 2 RAR because I had been posted to the Americans and I was posted one day and gone the next so my first job I was only there a couple of weeks before

28:30 I moved to the Americans, I and the other fellow who went out of 2 RAR with me were given a role of training KATCOMS [Korean Augmentation Troops], do you know what KATCOMS are? They are Koreans who wore our uniform Koreans attached to the Commonwealth Division.

29:00 And there were six I think in every platoon. But we had to teach them how to use our weapons and go right back to basic training and then once they got that basic training then the platoons took them over and taught them minor tactics and all of that sort of thing but we mostly concentrated on weapons training.

29:30 And I did that for a few weeks before I was shipped out to K47 at Chun Chong.

Well tell us about your posting to the US Air Force and what your reaction was?

Absolutely delighted when I got it. Actually one of the fellows who you're going to interview, Jack Skipper,

30:00 Mosman, have you interviewed Jack? He commanded 6 platoon B company and he was wounded up there, got a Military Cross Jack did and he was after he got over his wounds came back as a liaison officer and he was on 28 Brigade Headquarters and he contacted me and said, "There is a job going with the American Air Force."

30:30 He said, "Every man and his dog is going to want it are you interested?" and I said, "Bloody oath I am interested." He told me what it was all about it. And he said, "I will put your name in with Bill Morrow." And Bill Morrow was the Brigade Major, my instructor at infantry in Duntroon, I was still lobbying then. And as it happened I knew Bill Morrow very well and still know him very well

31:00 and he pushed it through and I got it.

Sounds like how you got your scholarship at Waverly and your job at Nestle and?

Got to do a bit of networking, it is called networking today isn't it?

What was the job why did you want it so much?

Well it was different, adventurous. I was an observer and if you can picture one of those T6 Harvard's aircraft, armed with smoke

31:30 rockets flown by an American pilot, and fitted with two very heavy radios, with an army observer. Mostly American but there were a few interlopers from England and Canada and three at the same time from Australia.

32:00 One New Zealander at one stage, so a few Commonwealth fellows got a go at it. Our job was to go to pre-briefings and get all of the information and transfer it to the map so that we could guide the pilot. The pilots job was to fly and it was our job to do all of the direction once we got over the front, or seek out targets of opportunity

32:30 which hadn't been pre-briefed. You might find a mortar position, trucks on a road, the odd tanks, a build up of personnel. As I did that morning that I read out to you, sunning themselves. And then call the fighter bombers in who were on standby, pilots used to literally sit in the cockpit waiting for a call, bombed up

33:00 ready to go. Two one thousand pound bombs most of them carried and they were jets or propeller driven aircraft and they were raring to go. They would fly in over the area and contact the mother ship which was a DC3 radio mother ship which flew right across the front day and night. And that mother ship

33:30 would direct them to the appropriate mosquito as they called us and we had our call sign and you would get a call from the fighter bombers saying this is so and so inbound and you would talk them into the

general area, get them circling and then talk them into the target area by describing the hills and so forth using known check points and so you would control them on

- 34:00 their air strikes. The sort of information that you gave them was the description of the target a map reference, the direction of the attack dive bombing run, the nearest friendly force the friendly identification panel. Because right across the front in every position you have these huge material panels
- 34:30 and they are different colours for different days and you put them in different shapes, one day it might be a T, next day a V, next day a U. And they are there as target identification firefly troops. You get the, you then the distance to the nearest
- 35:00 emergency L Strip, light strip, distance to the nearest friendly and then away you go. And then you get each fighter bomber, there are normally four in one flight, which you get them to identify the target so each man identifies, so there is no doubt they are all going in on the same target, they don't all go in together, one at a time. And then
- 35:30 you talk them in on their dive bombing runs and you correct the next mans aiming mark from the preceding mans bomb burst. When it is all over you the mosquito goes back and do a post strike reconnaissance to do an assessment of damage. While you're doing all of this the old Chinese are too inactive, they're popping away at you with small arms,
- 36:00 twenty millimetre cannon shell, thirty millimetre cannon shell. The other thing you do to further identify the target; it is marked by smoke. So that is fired by the artillery, you contact the ground controller who contacts the artillery and they fire smoke. And if they fire yellow smoke and it hits the target fine. You use that as identification.
- 36:30 What you had to be careful of however was when you fired yellow smoke so did the Chinese and so you had yellow smoke on every hill so when that happened you would have to go down in the mosquito and do a rocket one, hence white phosphorous smoke rockets. And you would go in low mark the target and get out fast because
- 37:00 the Chinese philosophy was don't try to hit the aircraft throw up a wall of fire that he has got to fly through. So that's what I did seventy-six times.

Well we will come to one of those times, but first why was it necessary for them to get an army observer to do this job?

Because they can map read.

What are the differences in reading a map on the ground and in an aircraft though?

- 37:30 It is easier to read a map from the air and identify the ground because you have got it in play you're looking down on it and there it is. On the ground you certainly don't have anything like the vision.

Was there anything else you had to learn about navigation or any other airborne?

No when we weren't controlling air strikes

- 38:00 we were cruising around either identifying targets of opportunity or identifying future targets. Because you might out more that one flight of fighters in per mission, or I was learning to fly from the back seat which was good fun. I learnt to fly, well I learnt to right turn, left turn, climb, dive.

- 38:30 And so forth. Pretty hard going stuff you know.

Tell us who you joined up with, can you explain what the American Air Force unit was?

Yes it was quite a large base call K 47, and the town was called Chun Chong and if you look at a map of Korea and you look right in the middle of the 38th parallel you will see Chun Chong because it is

- 39:00 three miles south of the 38th parallel right in the centre. It was the first own overrun by the North Koreans when they invaded on the 25th of June because it was just over the 38th parallel. It was the centre then and it is today, the centre of Christianity in an otherwise Buddhist

- 39:30 country. It is the centre of Christianity. It was a typical Korean town, straw huts, mud huts, mud shops tiny little shops. Open markets that sort of thing, they had a big hill up one end of it which was at the edge of the runway and the Americans in their inevitable style christened unnecessary because there was no need for it to be there. The strip was

- 40:00 five thousand feet long. It was sealed. And at either end it had that TSP [tooled steel process] that very heavy steel metal track which sat down where the aircraft actually hit when they were coming in on their landing. It just had the one runway.

- 40:30 But it had of course all of the taxi ways and one end all of the aircraft were moored, I have got photos of it there in sandbag revetments which are little cubicle thing up one end. We flew with parachutes, our own personal weapons were a .45 pistol and of course you had a headset which you

41:00 connected into the radios.

We will stop because we're out of tape.

41:04 **End of tape**

Tape 8

00:30 **When you arrived how were you received by the?**

Brilliantly, we arrived and we were wearing our slouch hats. We got there mid afternoon and we got issued with all of our flying gear and the rest of it, not a

01:00 lot of notice was taken of us because the fellows were out flying. It was a big base, I can't remember how many people on the base, there would have been a thousand people there. And of course like all of those American bases they are very nicely equipped thankyou. Although we were living in tents in marquees, six to a marquee with floor boards and heating and all of the rest of it.

01:30 Sand bagged up the sides. They pointed us in the direction of the officers club as they called it for dinner. So this other bloke Bruce Boys and myself in our jungle greens and slouch hats marched over to the officers club and walked in the front door and hung our hats on the hat rack that was there and there was a

02:00 team of them, pilots mostly drinking at the bar. And one bloke looked up and he said, "God damn it! Aussies! I will give you fifty dollars for that hat?" We said, "Hang on we have only got one." "God damn it I want one of those hats, those bush hats." We were made welcome,

02:30 really welcome and before we could blink we were rolling dice for drinks. We didn't have any money because they used American Armed Forces money and we were using British Armed Forces money and I can remember saying to them, "We can't roll for drinks, if we lose there is going to be a drought."

03:00 Well they thought that was hilarious, "You wont lose buddy." And so began a lot of friendships and we had one chap and his wife here for dinner a few weeks ago for dinner, spent a day with them and took them up to Brooklyn and onto Terrigal for lunch., had a phone call from one this morning that I still exchange emails with that sends me a card for my birthday every

03:30 year. And we have had others here, a guy I crashed with has actually stayed in this house.

Forgive me, what does the phrase roll for drinks?

Yeah roll the dice for drinks.

You mean your shout?

You lose your shout.

And did you ever lose?

Oh I used to roll for dice every night you had to that was

04:00 part of the furniture, yeah I lost but by that time I had American armed forces money.

Do you remember your first flight?

Yep, my first flight was with an American called Frank Spieldanner. Frank was a hundred mission man when they completed a hundred missions they came home. He had done about ninety-three missions and to make it easier for them to get to a hundred because

04:30 you don't want to get shot down on your ninety-ninth so as you get close they used to give them one of these orientation flights, and mine was with Frank Spieldanner. I did fly a couple of missions with him after that and then he was shipped home. He is still alive, he lives in Massachusetts. Very good pilot, and he took me up over the front and showed me all of the major

05:00 landmarks. His call sign was Shoe Black Sugar, that was when you would call in, call in the mother ship which was known as Half Step. You would say, "Mosquito Half Step, this is Mosquito Shoe Black Sugar." And I can still remember it.

So what preparations did you have to do before, talk me through an operation from when you went out?

05:30 When we went out early in the morning all pilots and observers reported to the briefing room and there you were briefed on the previous nights operations, exactly what had happened across the whole of the front. Because there were five United States Corps

- 06:00 across the front and a mosquito was in that corps sector from dawn until dark so there were five mosquitoes up at the one time. There were 2 squadrons, 6148 and 6149 I flew I 6148, A Flight. And no, B Flight, I was in 6148 B Flight and I flew 9 United
- 06:30 States Corps area which was the Choron Valley and that's the big valley that runs down the centre of central Korea. It was the invasion route which Genghis Khan used to capture Seoul yonks ago. It was a huge valley bordered on either side by huge mountains higher than over on the British Commonwealth Sector
- 07:00 and it had such hotspots as 'Kung Wa', 'the Iron Triangle', 'Sniper Ridge', 'Jane Russell', where those positions which were manned at my time there by the United States 3rd Division that were really hotspots and used to change hands regularly and we put in some really hot strikes in that area. Further
- 07:30 east there was another village called Kunsan and that was in 9 Corps sector and it was where the Chinese attempted the big break through right at the end of the war. The Commonwealth Division was not in that sector, I didn't fly with the British Commonwealth Sector.
- 08:00 Three of us flew, Bruce Boys, the fellow from 2 RAR he flew I Corps area in which the British Commonwealth Division was located and Hatfield, Keith Hatfield who they are going to interview in Melbourne, he was in 9 Corps area with me.

Before going out?

So you would go to the briefing and you would be briefed on the previous nights operations, what had happened, what the status across the front was. You would be given

- 08:30 any intelligence of what it was anticipated that the Chinese were up to. Might be saying there is a build up in such and such a sector there will be a major attack there you would have all of that intelligence. You would be given a prearranged target if there was one. In that case
- 09:00 you map spotted it in the briefing and you knew immediately where to go when you went to the front, you knew before you went what time you were going off because all of the flights I think nine in any one day, nine or ten you knew exactly what the time of your mission was. Sometimes I flew
- 09:30 two missions in one day, one day I flew three but you can't fly three I was knackered at the end of the day. Then you would go then at your appropriate time, go to the parachute room. You had your own parachute, nobody touched it. And you donned the parachute got in the truck and it drove you out to the aircraft where your crew chief would be
- 10:00 checking the aircraft off. You would then climb aboard and taxi down and there would be five mosquitoes waiting there to take off and away we would go. Now to get from Chun Chong, K 47 to the front you flew slightly north west and it took about twenty minutes to fly to the front. You would get over the front and you
- 10:30 would check in with the ground controller. On the ground was what they called a TACP which is a 'tactical air control party', it is manned by some American army personnel but also there was an air force officer who was a pilot from Chun Chong, they used to fly a hundred missions plus two and a half to
- 11:00 three months on the front line working in the TACP. That was to give the air force slant to an army operation and you would check in to the TACP, they had air force signals guys up there and let them know you were in the area. As you came into the area the mosquito that had been flying the previous mission
- 11:30 would check out and go home. Up above as I said flying right across the front dawn until dusk was the mother ship and that was monitoring all radio communications going on between the five mosquitoes and the fighter bombers and relaying appropriate message back to JOC, JOC which was the
- 12:00 'Joint Operations Centre' back in Seoul so that they knew what was happening over the front line instantly. Then we would go out and if we had a pre-briefed target the TACP would know we had that we would go out, I would map spot the target work out the best way to bring the fighters in on their dive bombing run
- 12:30 and identify of course by, if it was a mortar position try and identify where the mortars were, could mean a big build up. Just trying to find where the caves were or the bunker set-up. Then shortly thereafter the fighters would check in and you would get such things as, whatever your call sign was, one of mine was
- 13:00 Exile and the fighters would check in and they would say, "Exile special 6 this is Acme 11- 1 I am inbound with Four Chicks and Angels 15." What all that means in American is
- 13:30 that there are four fighter bombers coming in in our direction and they are at fifteen thousand feet. So you would contact them and say, "This is Exile 6 what is your present position?" They would normally check in there was a big reservoir, the Wachon Reservoir just south of the front and they would check in as they got close to that, it was a good land mark for them and they would be told, "Just fly to the Wachon Reservoir," it was easy for them to identify on the map.

14:00 And then we would get them from there up over the front and bring them down from fifteen thousand to about eight thousand feet and they would circle and then we would from the land marks, we talked them in on the target, general area and we would talk them in on that general area without giving anything specific. Then we would call for the artillery marking, smoke if it was off target or if there were too many Chinese similar smokes around or if the wind got it and it

14:30 dissipated the mosquito would go in and do a rocket run and they could normally see you. We would tell them where we were and they would pick you up. And so we're rolling in rocket run and down they would go watching you and of course you would go in like this dodging the flak not flying around on the straight and level, all of the time we are going like this, diving and zapping. While I am talking the pilot is doing all of these manoeuvres.

15:00 Do the rocket run which is, you would come off the target at about a thousand feet which is very high and you would be very accurate with the rockets and they would see them and each man had to identify the target so they were all looking at the one spot and then you were ready to roll. And from all that information which I detailed before and in they would come. Number one man would come in and you would have to watch for his bombs dropping and when they hit, when he

15:30 pulled off the target he had to pull over Chinese country before you could break him back over friendly lines to see that ensured that he didn't have a hung bomb, because if it hung and he flipped around and came over and they are going, they are in jets, when he came back over friendly if the bomb unhung it can cause chaos., so you would watch that.

Did that ever happen?

16:00 I never saw it happen. It was pretty hairy those fighter bomber pilots used to go in pretty low and I have seen a few go in. Never pull out, they were on their dive bombing runs and just kept going and those nice two one thousand pound bombs on it when she hit.

16:30 And then when then you call the second man in, third man in, fourth man in, correcting each mans aim from the previous mans bomb burst and then as I said before you go back and do post strike reconnaissance. And report back to the fighter bombers what damage they had done. Destroyed or damaged.

If one of those does go in do you call it immediately off or?

17:00 No they didn't call them off when I was there they just kept going, it must be terribly unnerving for the next bloke coming in. I have seen them go down and also do an emergency landing one time an American pilot in a F 86 Sabre jet came down in the Choron Valley and we flew what they call Rescap, rescue

17:30 on him and brought a chopper in and got him off. He was out in no mans land and went back the next day and the aircraft had gone, they had blown it up with artillery fire. And most of it had gone, you know they don't leave them out there, too much valuable information in them.

They being the Americans?

18:00 The Americans. It was a great posting. The friendships were marvellous, it had its dangers but when you're as I said earlier in the day when you're bullet proof and twenty-two you don't worry about it.

The event where your plane was crashed what happened there?

Yeah well what happened there was rather interesting, we put in a couple of

18:30 strikes, it was over on the western side of the sector in an area called White Horse Mountain which was a pretty rough area of the Korean front and I don't know, neither I nor the pilot really knew whether we were hit. The motor started to act up

19:00 and the tachometer was going blurr, and the motor was coughing. So we, well the pilot it was his responsibility. He ascertained that he wasn't going to get back to base and we had been out a long time and we didn't have a lot of fuel, we had enough to get back home .the red lights were on which indicated that fuel was down low, but we still had enough to get home.

19:30 But he chose to do an emergency landing on an L strip which is a dirt strip and these were dotted around mostly artillery positions because they used to have their light aircraft like spotters, light 'Austers' [Ostillerly]. And we approached this strip and called the mother ship and told them what we were doing and they gave us the all clear to go ahead and we went down wind, turned across wind to

20:00 come in for our final approach onto the strip. And it was then that we spotted these Korean labourers, we actually spotted them when we were going down wind, about thirty of them down the far end of the strip. And they are working at about this pace chipping away, filling in potholes at the end of the strip. And the pilot, a guy called Danny Wheel

20:30 Danny was in touch with the radio jeep which was sitting on the edge of the runway, and this was an artillery guy in the jeep, and telling him to get these Korean labourers off the end of the strip. Well

nothing happened. By this time we have gone across wind we are about to come down wind on our final approach, there is thirty guys standing on the end of the strip wondering what the hell we were up to.

- 21:00 And we came in, normally we would have probably pulled up by the time we got to them, probably but coming in on the new strip we were a bit long on the approach and floated a bit and didn't hit the ground until we were about a third of the way down the strip, and that was no where near enough
- 21:30 room. And we're boring down this strip with thirty guys in front of us and well you didn't have any option but to go around, with a sick aircraft, so he said to me I have got to go around I have got no option." I could see them, I said, "You have got no option Danny you have got to try and get around." So he gave her the power and we lifted, the wheels were down of course and we climbed
- 22:00 over these thick radio communication cables and they were about twenty feet off the ground and we just got over them and he didn't have the wheels up at this stage and we got about another fifteen or twenty feet in the air and the motor died, stopped, nothing happened. And we
- 22:30 just went woof, came down like a stone. Hit the ground, well you have seen the photo, broke the port wing off it, snapped the fuselage right behind my seat, tore the wheels off it, we had about four smoke rockets left and they knocked them off it and of course they're white phosphorous and they're spewing around the place. Still about fourteen litres
- 23:00 of diesel, gasoline in the tank. Danny's harness snapped, he went forward onto the dashboard in the front seat, and if you look at that photo I got out of that aircraft wearing a parachute, I used to fly with the back canopy open that much and it blew all of the glass out of the back canopy and I got out of that aircraft without opening the canopy.
- 23:30 Shows you how fast I moved I tell you, when we stopped, he said, "Get out!" and I was out. And when I got on the ground he was staggering around with blood streaming out of his forehead where he had hit his head. And when he came here a few years back he still had the scar, I said, "You have still got it?" and he said, "Yep that's my memory of my time." So I grabbed him and we off. Across the paddy field
- 24:00 where we finished up and about that time there was about fifty Americans came running over the hill, they had seen what happened and an ambulance came for him and they put me in a jeep, and we spent the night in an American Artillery base there and they came up the next day and flew me home and Danny went off to hospital.

24:30 **What were the events that lead to engine trouble?**

Well we were either hit or we just had engine trouble. I suspect we might have got a glancing small arms round that went in somewhere or other, but they never found it, the plane stayed there for about a week and was ultimately towed away and destroyed.

25:00 **But you were observing before then?**

Oh we put in two air strikes before that so we were copping a bit of flak. So it is reasonable to assume that we probably took a small arms shot without doing a lot of damage, doing enough damage.

So how many sorties had you done at that point?

Fifty-two, it was my fifty-second mission on the 26th of May 1963.

25:30 **During that time did you come across enemy aircraft at all?**

Not at all, the only enemy aircraft around was bed check Charlie and bed check Charlie was supposed to be a bi-plane, two winger which the Americans reckoned used to come from South Korea and when we were at Chun Chong, twice it happened, bed check Charlie came over

- 26:00 and he dropped a mortar bomb, he was aiming for the base and he missed the base by about three hundred metres and it landed outside the police station in Chun Chong without doing any damage at all. But of course we were all herded out of our tents in the middle of the night. They had one T6 fitted with a thirty

- 26:30 calibre machine gun which used to fire through the prop and he was dispatched during this thing, ex-fighter pilot, but you couldn't see three feet in front of you let alone see bed check Charlie. That was a futile mission and you know what the Yanks are like, they have got an incredibly dry sense of humour and there we are standing in the sand bag revetments by the side of our tents looking up

- 27:00 into the air with them making their usual comments. It happened twice, second time he dropped a mortar bomb too and it landed miles away. They weren't very good but bed check Charlie was fairly well known around Korea, he used to appear from time to time.

Were there any other horrible situations you found yourself in?

- 27:30 My aircraft was hit by two twenty millimetre cannon shells on my eleventh mission right there, about two feet from my seat in the port wing. We were a bit lazy, we were back behind our lines and reckoned we were out of range and we weren't. I am sitting there minding my own business and waiting for fighter bombers to check in and next thing bang, bang what was that?

- 28:00 I looked down and I soon knew what it was, two holes in the wing. So that was the end of that mission, we had to come home. Can't fly with battle damage because you never know what structural damage was done. And on another occasion I had flown in an aircraft and when I went out there the next day I was allocated to the same aircraft and when I got out there it was a different pilot,
- 28:30 but I knew the crew chief that was responsible for the aircraft maintenance and he said to me, "Sir you had battle damage yesterday." And I said, "No we weren't hit." And he said, "You were." And I said, "Where?" and underneath of the wing where we had obviously gone in doing these falling leaf turns and split eights and all of these
- 29:00 that they call doing evasive action, a fifty calibre bullet had hit the wing and put the whole shape of the bullet about as long as your hand was a scrape in the wing and I had not realised that we had been hit. He found it of course. It hadn't done any damage and the aircraft was still safe to fly, as it
- 29:30 was because I went off in it. So I suppose it is true to say I had one crash landing and hit twice in my seventy-six missions.

Was there a difference in ability of the pilots?

Oh yeah vast differences. A lot of them were as they call themselves jet jockeys, they had trained on jets as fighter pilots but when they were posted to Korea there was no vacancies

- 30:00 in the jet squadrons because at that time they weren't losing very many. The air to air combat that went on in the early stages of the war, well it went on right through the war, but it lessened and lessened as the war went on and so the Americans weren't losing aircraft and so there was no vacancies and so they pushed them into flying the T6 the aircraft
- 30:30 on which most of them had learnt to fly. Some of them weren't too happy about that. They were a pretty gung ho lot and they used to fly that T6 like a F84 Thunderjet.

But the difference in abilities?

Well some of them weren't used to it. One guy I flew with was an ex-B29 pilot, bomber pilot and he was used to pushing one of them around

- 31:00 the sky and here he flying a single engine aircraft. So he wasn't as good as he should be but they all came up to speed, generally they were top, great pilots. You had to be to survive. They were in behind Chinese lines and a hell of a lot of them flew their hundred missions.

31:30 Were there ever pilots that you didn't want to or were afraid to fly with?

No. I never had any hassle with any of them. I didn't have much option, once it went up on the board you could have objected if you wanted to but I never did. Lost a few over there, one of my very good friends, he was an American observer and he was shot down. I had breakfast with him actually and

- 32:00 he didn't turn up to lunch, a few went down.

How did that affect morale?

Oh nobody liked it, nobody liked it when they weren't there. It is pretty sudden, talking to a guy he goes off and flies a mission and doesn't come back. I think there were about

- 32:30 forty-two mosquitoes shot down during the war, quite a number.

Just in regards to the Americans the relationship between the blacks and whites did you notice?

I never noticed anything. Actually there were a couple of black American observers flying. There weren't any black pilots while I was there, but there was a couple of black observers and they came out of the infantry

- 33:00 battalions. Nobody worried about it, they were officers and they went into the officers club just like anybody else.

So there was no form of segregation?

No, never had that problem at all. There were Koreans there also, ROK [Republic of Korea] Air Force but they looked after their own fighter bombers.

Were there times when you were able to go and have R and R [rest and recreation] amongst the Korean population?

- 33:30 When we crashed I was offered the opportunity to go to Japan, what happens, it is a bit like a car when an aircraft has battle damage, particularly on the wing, and they replace the wing or patch the wing, mostly patch them, it is then out of balance and it is

- 34:00 difficult to trim them. so they were sent over to Japan to the west coast of the island of Honshu to a place called Meho which was a Japanese fighter base in World War II, all of the hangers were underground, quite unique place. And I was given the opportunity to fly over there, have a couple of days R and R
- 34:30 before I went back flying. When we got there the weather set in, rained like hell, and so instead of two days I got four. So I had four days R and R over in Meho and it happens to be in the hot springs district in western Japan, a place called Kaiti, ever been there? We checked into a luxury hotel which cost you a bowl of rice and two fish heads and

35:00 you could stay there all night so we stayed there and then flew back.

Touching on your time in Japan what did you do during that time off?

Actually there was a beach there and we went swimming., wandered around.

35:30 it was very pleasant. I served in Japan afterwards I used to do lots of things for sport I played cricket. I was in the Australian services cricket team in Korea, this is getting away from Chun Chong, we used to play tests against England after the war was over, and this was very serious stuff.

36:00 Australia versus England Ashes Test and when I came out to Japan it was summer, and I played cricket for the headquarters team there.

One of the areas the archive is interested in is the social setting during war, what of brothels and things like that in Korea?

Not a lot I never went to too many of them I have got to be honest with you, I am

36:30 not a limp wristed character. When you get troops who come out of a war zone, haven't seen a woman for months, I mean the first place they head is the brothels, lets be perfectly frank about it. Both in

37:00 Korea and in Japan, although it was basically frowned on in Korea, it was a bit more liberal in Japan. They were either free standing places or attached to the bars. Australian servicemen like a drink, so many of them spent a lot of time in bars. And there

37:30 was a lot of leave, a lot of freedom in serving in Japan. I mean it was a nine to five job. If you were in a training capacity unless you were up at the battle school at Haramura you didn't train much at night and so they fellows used to go down into town on leave. And where there is bars, there is bar girls and where there is bar girls there are diggers,

38:00 and there are back rooms and plenty of brothels. Because Japan was a very poor place in those days, it was still recovering from the war. Same on leave, where else do diggers go?

Coming back to the Americans and observation, you talked of targets that had been identified and targets of opportunity can you just explain a target of opportunity?

38:30 Yes, lets use the example of those troops in the open. I was flying with a fellow someone I flew a lot with, he is dead now, Jim Sullivan. And we were cruising around looking for possible targets early one morning.

39:00 And we came around the side of this hill and about five miles back behind the Chinese lines and there they were and I reckon there would have been about three thousand Chinese in the open, in a valley, up basically sunning themselves having some breakfast.

39:30 Thought they were free from everything and out of the wide blue yonder appears a mosquito. Well they threw everything at us including their fried rice I think. They never expected to be caught and there were four aircraft on call on one of the carriers and we

40:00 got them off a carrier quick smart and they went in and attacked them and they must have taken out hundreds of them. They just went in on their, we controlled the strike and they were going everywhere. Into caves on the side of the hill but once you have got aircraft up there you can plant the bomb in the side of the cave and so forth., the other thing I didn't mention

40:30 after some of the strikes the flight leader whenever he was a bit of a gung ho guy would ask for permission to strafe. And if it was a reasonable geographical area and plenty of area to manoeuvre and not in-between hills and down gully's you would give them approval to strafe. And they would

41:00 come in two at a time one forward one back right on the deck. And that's quite spectacular when you see a jet going at four hundred and fifty knots, fifty calibre machine guns blazing the hell out of anything that blinked. And I have done that a few times with them.

Just a quick question before the tape ends, how long does it take from you spotting the Chinese to the point of the aircraft there?

41:30 It only took about ten minutes to get them over the target because the carrier was just right there off the coast. Not far away fifty miles, you see what, is the tape finished?

41:47 End of tape

Tape 9

00:30 When Margie stops click clacking up the hallway.

Right so after your time with the USAF [United States Air Force] you were transferred back to 2RAR right near the end of the war and you were involved in the Battle of the Hook, can you tell us about the lead up to that?

01:00 Well 2RAR the Commonwealth Division, I will start again the Australians were on the right hand or the eastern end of the Commonwealth Division and a decision was taken to switch them down to the left hand or western end and relieve British troops. In

01:30 November 1952, the Black Watch, the British regiment were overrun on the Hook, in 1953 the Duke of Wellington regiment were overrun on the Hook and were pretty knocked around. They were pulled out of the line 'the Dukes' were and the Kings Regiment which came from Liverpool

02:00 were put on the line as an interim step before the Australians were switched down to the area. They had never been on the Hook before. The Hook is an unusual piece of real estate because it is shaped like that, like a fish hook. And the on the

02:30 this side is the Samichon Valley and the Samichon River with Chinese hills on the other side of it looking from one flank. As you go around the top of the hook there the Chinese were about fifty metres away right in front, underground. As you came around to the barb of the hook the Chinese were all there in that north western sector

03:00 and right along side the Hook was the 7th Regiment of the 1st Marine Division US. So we were right up against the marines. The Hook was tunnelled by the United Nations troops, might have been the British. And those tunnels had been used when both the Black Watch and the Dukes were overrun, they withdrew into the tunnels

03:30 literally shut the doors and called down artillery on the Hook and blasted the 'be-jesus' out of it. Anyway to cut a long story short, the Australians were put in there on the 7th of July 1953. And I was back from the Americans two days and I was given command of 2 platoon A company.

04:00 And I took the A company advance party onto the Hook to orient us so we knew exactly where everybody went when the company came up a day later. It was a pretty dicey spot particularly in the centre where the Chinese were very close.

04:30 Even the approach road to the Hook for about half a mile was camouflaged. Because the Chinese could see from the flank and they would see a vehicle go in one end and time you and mortar the other end. so you would get in under the camouflage net at one end and the driver would put his foot down, as they say today, he would floor it. You would go down the road and out the other end as the mortar bombs were coming down behind you.

05:00 That company that was on the bend of the Hook was in pretty constant contact with the Chinese. In front of it was a ridge line that ran down and sat right on top of the Chinese positions, it was known as Green Finger and there were three or four clashes between the Australians

05:30 and the Chinese there and we lost a few men on Green Finger. It was occupied every night mostly by the Australians but on the odd occasion by Chinese who then withdrew into holes which were dug down, because it dropped off very steep, the Chinese dug in along the bottom of that. That sort of action went on most of the time.

06:00 The marines were being probed with little probing attacks all of the time we were there. The usual shelling and mortaring by day and not much activity by night. Until about the 20th of July when there was a fairly major build up in air traffic, radio communication by the Chinese.

06:30 That indicated something was on and on the night of the 23rd 24th they started a major assault to try and drive a wedge between 2 RAR the Australians and the marine division. That was around on the barbed side of the Hook.

07:00 That was manned by C company 2 RAR. In between the marines and the Australians was a bunker, it was manned by the Australians and it was called the contact bunker and every night a section, slightly less, seven or eight men were sent out into that bunker as a communication link between the marines

07:30 and the Australians. It played a vital role in the big battles. And on the night of the 23rd /24th of March the Chinese attacked en masse, they reckoned that about eight infantry battalions attacked. There was bugle blowing and drum beating and whistles blowing which was the Chinese rather primitive way of communicating when they were in attack.

- 08:00 The British Commonwealth and the American artillery went into action. The British Commonwealth artillery was the 16th New Zealand Field and the British Artillery Regiment, I can't think of the number now. And they were firing what they call VT, variable time fuse which is air burst and it
- 08:30 was bursting about thirty feet in the air above these Chinese troops who were literally shoulder to shoulder coming at us on the Charlie company side. And they were knocking them over, swathes of them were coming down dead or wounded, in fact they say in the two nights 24th /25th and the 25th/ 26th of July that the Chinese lost
- 09:00 three thousand men killed in the front of the Hook. The contact bunker was overrun. It was manned by a guy that I trained out at Ingleburn and he won an immediate Military Medal, he counterattacked it and won it back. With his seven or eight men. The next night
- 09:30 it was overrun again and the guy that was in it did the same thing again and won an immediate Military Medal. So the two MMs [Military Medals] were won in the contact bunker in two nights. Overhead on both nights there was an American flare ship, the old C47 ['Hercules' transport] dropping these big canister flares which took forever and a day to come down and lit the place up like Coney Island. The dust, my God it was like a desert dust storm with
- 10:00 the artillery that was exploding. It lasted from about seven o'clock at night through to about eleven o'clock both nights. In between the Chinese in the day time put the white flag up and sought permission to come out and collect their dead, which they did all day. They had stretcher parties out picking up the dead.
- 10:30 They lost them by the hundreds out there God knows how many wounded they had. The futile part about it was that there were quite strong rumours that the war was going to finish. And then on the day of the 25th which was the day before the second mass attack we
- 11:00 the officers were told officially that the war was going to finish at ten o'clock on the night of the 27th. Now the Chinese must have known that but they threw everything they had into it, again a second night. It was quite a battle I can tell you but mostly an artillery battle against masses and masses of
- 11:30 infantry. The noise was something you have never experienced in your life. There was our machine guns firing across the front, there was this air burst artillery, there was the flare ship, during the day there were air strikes going in on the Chinese build up points. And that was the Battle of the Hook and the futile part about it was that at ten o'clock the next night it was all over.
- 12:00 **Where were you during all of this time?**
- I was in my platoon position but I was on this side of the Hook, not on the top but just around the corner.
- And what did you and your troops spend the battle doing?**
- Pulling our heads in because we were mostly subject to mortar and artillery fire but not the close contact with the Chinese.
- 12:30 We got a hell of a lot of mortar and artillery fire in on our position. Fortunately the fellows were pretty good and I only lost one man and he was one of the KATCOMS, he was hit in one eye and subsequently lost his eye. But Australians didn't suffer very many casualties at all in the battle which was quite remarkable.
- What did your men do that was good, what was the drill?**
- 13:00 Well the drill was to stand to in the trenches because had I been the Chinese commander I would have attacked from where they did but I would have also attacked from our side and come in up across the valley, which after the war we saw how many troops they had in the hills and the valley right opposite us which was about three hundred metres away.
- 13:30 I would have attacked across that valley en masse and from where they did so that they would have hit us from two sides at once because I believe the artillery we had would have been stretched to its limits to hold them. And we certainly didn't have the infantry troops had they ever got close to the 2 RAR position they would have overrun it in no time because we didn't have enough men there, and that's what happened to the Black Watch and the Dukes they let them into the trenches, in our case
- 14:00 we held them off with the best artillery barrages you have ever seen in your life.
- When an air force pilot gets close to his last mission it is always a bit frightening was the same true when you knew the war was over essentially?**
- No I didn't worry too much about it, we were pretty pleased it was over. I was, particularly,
- When you knew it was going to end were you a little more nervous?**
- No I don't

14:30 recall being any more nervous than I was. But the fellows when I told them and we were given the okay to tell the troops everybody was very pleased, nobody takes chances on the last night but when you're in a battle like that which wasn't the last night, it was the second last night you never know you might cop a shell right on top of you because they were whizzing around. 3 RAR

15:00 was, I drew the Hook like this, at the bottom of this side over there 3 RAR was here, two companies of them but they were just on the fringes of it.

What happened when the announcement was made?

At ten o'clock when the announcement was made it was very quiet, and then we woke up the next morning

15:30 and of course instead of not walking, during the war we only walked around in the trenches, then we were able to walk around on the top. Then the Chinese came out of their positions and came up onto our positions some of them did. Across the valley as I said to you from which I believe they should have attacked, there was literally thousands of them and they were in long greeny, grey uniforms and

16:00 a long line walking back up over the hill going home. They had pulled all of the nets off the weapons pits which we had no idea were there, the whole time we were on the Hook, I don't think we ever shelled it. It was a fairly quiet area. Just further along around the corner from where we were. But the Chinese certainly had a lot men

16:30 across that valley.

What did your own troops do?

When it was over they went over, there is a well know photograph of Australians shaking hands with the Chinese that has been floating around for yonks. That was received very well, in fact it was frowned upon and in the end they banned it. No publicity shots thankyou very much.

17:00 One experience I had that morning I was over at the next platoon to me, 1 platoon A company he was in the same Duntroon class, mate of mine was commanding that and I heard this voice and it was a woman's voice and she was a Chinese woman, an interpreter, she had come across she was an officer and there was an officer there.

17:30 The rest of them were daggy looking Chinese diggers. And she had come across to our position but I didn't talk to any of them, I didn't fraternise with any of them, it was a bit of a novelty for the diggers but none of my fellows walked over there it was pretty free to walk around. Then we had the job of dismantling what we could of our

18:00 positions in two days, that didn't mean blowing them up and then we were pulled back off the line. But they had a period of a week or something or other to destroy the positions, the engineers were up there blowing them all up. I wasn't privy to that though I knew it was going on. And then we went back into a position

18:30 south of the Imjin River and went into almost a training camp again.

What was the atmosphere like then?

Well all day most of the day was spent digging, and we were given this hill to defend, inverted commas and we had to dig a total battalion position.

19:00 It was as rocky as country as you have ever seen, that much top soil and then you hit rock, and we were blowing it and blasting it plastic explosives and the usual explosives you attach to those things and I was doing a lot of that, blowing work but that's pretty boring stuff. And the troops you couldn't say they enjoyed it,

19:30 nobody liked digging particularly when it is incredibly hard ground. On the recreational side there was sporting things on it was autumn there, cricket matches and all of that sort of thing on, canteens open for everybody but otherwise it was like a normal training camp.

How did you feel personally about the end of the war? It was over great, but the

20:00 **lines hadn't moved a great deal, it was a political thing more than a military thing?**

It didn't move at all while I was there, for me it was the experience that I had wanted. At that stage I had no ideas about leaving the service, hadn't even crossed my mind. I had had a good time I was twenty-three and a

20:30 couple of months when the war finished. I hadn't had any leave at that stage and I took, you were entitled to five days leave and twenty-one days leave at various stages five days after four months, twenty-one days after eight months

21:00 and you took them in Japan. I hadn't had any of that leave so I took twenty-one days leave and went to Japan. By the time I got over there and got back I was away about a month. And then I really only

served there, I came out that would have been August, I came

21:30 out in October so I didn't have a lot of time with that platoon, I had just under three weeks on the line with them. and then when I came back I was with them for a month or so and then I was able to take my five days leave and I didn't want to go back to Japan so I contact Chun Chong K47 and I went down there and

22:00 had a couple of flights in a T6 again. So I had five days down with the Americans which was pleasant and they treated me royally.

Can you tell us about your work in Japan and your posting there?

Yes it was at RHU and I was an instructor and I was instructing on mostly weaponry

22:30 polishing up the skills that the fellows had learnt in Australia. We were still sending troops into Korea, in fact Australian troops were still in Korea until 1956 and this was the end of 1953. Battalions were heading over, when 2 Battalion came home in March 1954, 1 Battalion came up and relieved them and so it

23:00 went on. 3 Battalion was there all of the time and because people came and went to 3 battalion all of the time they always needed troops as reinforcements in Japan so I was training those reinforcements in Japan. I wasn't there at RHU very long before

23:30 around Christmas 53 and I was posted to AustArmy component Australian headquarters which wasn't far away around the corner about a mile away in Hiro, RHU was on one of Hiro and it was on the other. It was a small headquarters commanded by a brigadier and there was about seven officers on it. So I was posted there as a staff officer, I was G3 Operations

24:00 and I was there until the August early September and then I came home. It was a good life we were well, living in a Japanese house with tatami matting on the floor and the whole bit. It was originally a school and then it became

24:30 34th Brigade Headquarters, which was the Australian Occupation Force Headquarters. The officers mess had been built by the Australians, it was a nice, I have got a photo of it in there, building. It had a nice dining room and what have you in there and we lived quite a nice life. Played a lot of sport particularly cricket.

25:00 Played bingo every Thursday night down at the officers club in Hiro, I had a good time in Japan.

I will stop you there for just a second. I just want to pick up one question when you were first in the line, Christmas Day what happened there with the Chinese?

Prior to Christmas the Chinese were

25:30 great propagandists and they left Christmas presents and Christmas cards and free parcels if you were captured on the barbed wire. And they periodically they would pull this PA [public address] system up onto the hills and give you a broadcast

26:00 and they broadcast the fact that on Christmas Day they would not fire one shot, they recognised that it was a Holy Day in the Christian church and not one shot would be fired and they kept their word. There was not one shot fired across the whole of the front and so it was deathly quiet. We didn't celebrate Christmas on

26:30 the line. It was kept over for us until New Years Day. We came off the line a couple of days before New Year and that's when the turkey was brought out and all of the trimmings and so forth. But I have got one of the Christmas cards or a copy of it, a safe conduct pass which they left there. So nothing happened on Christmas

27:00 Day. I was given the job by Joe Mann my Company Commander of mapping all of the barbed wire entanglements. And I wandered around the top of 355 where the Company Headquarters was in full view of the Chinese which you would never do, a sniper would have picked you off in no time in the normal course of events, but nobody worried me I was scrambling around up there for a couple of hours mapping the wire

27:30 and so forth. So it was deathly quiet.

So obviously you were mapping and at the same time you grabbed a few of these cards?

Well they were brought in by we knew where they were, you could see them by day and they were brought in by the fellow who went out on patrol, they thought they might have been booby trapped but they weren't. There were little trinkets and things in the boxes, but the Christmas cards were the prized things. People,

28:00 what do they call it? They had a name for themselves.

Why would they do this?

They had this sheet which gave it to the Americans they said, "Here you are fighting in this land away from home, Christmas coming and you're not home with your family, you're fighting with the money barons of Wall Street." And all

28:30 of this sort of language, propaganda.

So it was a propaganda offer?

Absolutely.

Were there any Holy Days of the Chinese that you respected?

Not that we knew of, we certainly didn't respect any. I am sure they got them.

Did it at all change the attitude of the men towards the Chinese?

No I think they were glad to have the day off

29:00 because you had to be on the alert. When we realised there was nothing on. Over on the Chinese hill or below their ridge line they lit a huge fire right across their valley and you could see the top of the flames and the smoke going up which normally we would have let fly at and they lit this huge fire about

29:30 two o'clock in the afternoon and the word went back to Brigadier Daily that the Chinese had lit this fire what should we do? Should we retaliate should we fire? And his reply was let it burn. And we let it burn, didn't suck us in at all. And the thing burnt and went out and that night we still sent out our

30:00 patrols but there was no Chinese out there. Next day everything was back to normal. It was a shooting war.

After the war was over and you returned home did you find it difficult returning home?

Yes I found it quite difficult to settle back in Australia. You're immediate urge is that you want to do something different and

30:30 all sorts of crazy ideas go through your head. A lot of the fellows wanted to become Hong Kong policemen would you believe? Yeah it was a British posting back in those days. None of them ever did but it was a very popular subject of discussion.

What was the allure there?

I think the lifestyle and we all had a bit of Asian in us after

31:00 being away for a couple of years, but nothing ever eventuated and finally you settle down and forgot about it once you got on leave and got back to caucasian living.

So how did the war affect you after you came home?

I don't think it did, I have never had any problems, 'post traumatic stress' [Syndrome] or anything like that.

But did you find it difficult to get back in to?

No not

31:30 once I got home and got stuck back into the normal routine of life. I was on leave for about six weeks before I went to Adelaide. I picked up my old acquaintances, the old girlfriends, not that too many of them were interested in me because I had been away too long.

How did the war change or affect you?

32:00 I don't think it did. People talk about the horrors of war, I never found it very horrifying. I don't know why I have had no troubles in relation to it. I was fortunate enough to get through it unscathed, I had some great experiences, I met some great people

32:30 in fact I am generally regarded as having had a great war, people often say to me, "Gee you had a good war." If you can have a great war, but I did. I mean how many Australians commanded infantry platoons in two different battalions and go fly with the American Air Force, get a posting in Japan afterwards, also while I was in headquarters in Japan I got my temporary captaincy, I had only been out of Duntroon two years so I wore the

33:00 rank and got paid for it, I didn't have any complaints.

You mentioned while you were at Duntroon and all of the guys were looking forward to getting there given that this is for an archive what would you like to say to future generations now that you have been through a war?

Well if you make a conscious decision to go to a

33:30 military college, be it ADFA or the Royal Military College Duntroon, anywhere in the services I think

that you should go there and be prepared to go to a war. I don't think those institutions are mediums for a cheap education, I think you should be very serious about it and the serious end of it is that you are prepared to serve on active service as I was.

34:00 **And what about the fact of war itself what would you like to say?**

Well I think it is a testing ground for you as a person. Some people react differently, some not as well as others, others brilliantly. And some I guess

34:30 perform extraordinarily well and are well decorated for it, but I am sure they never had that in the back of their mind when they went there. Some people act spontaneously, other people tend to be far more cautious and probably as a result of being cautious don't come through as well. You have got to take some risks if you are going to succeed. It isn't a matter of sitting back all of the time you have got to be aggressive, once you take the

35:00 aggression out of war you will be beaten, you have got to be out there giving them hell.

Was the Korean War worth fighting for?

I thought it was, it was the first time the United Nations stood up as a force and there were a lot of nations fought there in various capacities. They weren't all infantry, the Indians for example had the 16th Indian Field Ambulance one of the great

35:30 organizations .the Norwegians had a MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] there, the Americans of course you have seen the MASH on TV, You had the Ethiopians, you had the Turks, the Greeks and so forth. There were a lot of people fought there, there was a Dutch hospital ship off the coast. It was a genuine United Nations force and as such

36:00 well it was almost the birthplace of the United Nations, in fact it is the only time that the United Nations have really fought as an entity.

Why do you think it is important for you and fellows like yourself to share your stories and experiences?

36:30 Well my father never talked much about war to me and I am sure as you talk to other people you will find they know very little of their fathers' experiences in war and I think it is very important that the next generations know what you did. That book With the Australians in Korea I bought three copies of that and I have given one each to my sons and that one belongs to my

37:00 daughter who happens to be in England at the moment and she will get that so she knows something about me. I have given them all a copy of my American Awards, a copy of my citations, something I never saw of my fathers. Now I have got to write to Northern Ireland to get them. And I think that

37:30 it is important that the next generation after you and further on know exactly what you did.

Your citation.... can you talk us through what that was for?

I have got it in there. I won the Distinguished Flying Cross, American on the 23rd of June 1953 over a hill

38:00 called White Horse Mountain which I mention briefly before, it was on the western side of the 9 Corps sector and I controlled, it was an extraordinary strike, it was on the reverse side of this hill which was absolutely pock holes with bunkers and mortar positions and communication trenches and we put three flights of fighter bombers in on it at very low altitude, about two thousand feet and

38:30 it took about two hours and as they say on the classics, "We were getting the shit shot out of us." The fighter bombers kept telling us that we were under heavy fire, they didn't have to tell us, you could see the golf balls. You know when you're getting about that round and red going up past the canopy.

39:00 It was just generally a pretty good strike and I got the credit for it. Maybe they should have given it to the pilot, but it was very successful and we did a lot of damage to that big Chinese build up. They thought that it could have been the start of another build up to attack the 7th United States Division which was just over west of it, but we did a lot of damage.

39:30 **Excellent, finally is there anything you would like to add to your interview?**

No except that I have enjoyed it. I have talked a lot I hope you have enjoyed it. I am just a small cog in a big wheel and you will hear some more stories probably more interesting or as interesting as I have had to tell.

40:00 But they are just two or three episodes that I went through as a young guy in my early twenties, fifty years ago.

Well Chris and myself and the Archive would like to thank you for sharing your time.

Thanks Michael.

Happy Birthday.

40:17 **End of tape**