Australians at War Film Archive

Norman Joseph (Jo) - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1954

Tape 1

00:40 **Now that we are recording, could you just give us a brief introduction?**

I was actually born in March 1926 in North Fitzroy, Melbourne. Then we left and we went up to Sydney, when I was only two years of age. So I lived in Sydney, when I say “lived” I say it in inverted commas because the war years came in between and I was away a lot,

01:00 ’till 1954. During that time, of course, when I was growing up in Sydney, I had to leave school when I was thirteen. And my family weren’t well-off, they lived at Alexandria in Sydney, and I started selling newspapers on pub corners and so on, and got very good at jumping on and off trams.

01:30 Then came, I was fifteen and I was very, very keen to get into the war. Everybody said I was too young. I can still remember sitting up on a bench at the top end of Martin Place in Sydney in the lovely sunshine and down at the bottom of Martin Place.... I’d better not go into the story now.

Probably avoid detail at this stage, raw facts.

Because that was interesting, all right, raw facts.

02:00 In September 1941, I joined the army and started my war service then. We did our rookie [initial] training up at North Head Barracks, then up to Darwin, because the Japanese were coming down - and my enlistment was actually before the Japanese came into the war - and shot us up to Darwin. I spent a year there, during that time there sat underneath the 62-point marines that they

02:30 had there. Then we turned down south and I was stationed at Newcastle for a while, this was an anti-aircraft searchlight unit, this was my unit. And then I still was very keen to get away where the action was, and my Father, who was actually a World War 1 veteran, he was wounded at Gallipoli actually, and he also served in the Second World War, he’d been to the Middle East with the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces],

03:00 and now he was in New Guinea, and I got him to claim me. You could do that in those days, just to get the grading background for my colour patch, which meant I was in the Expedition Force. In New Guinea I was there for about seven or eight months and I went down with dysentery and malaria, both at the same time, I was ill, and some - I call him an idiot - put me in the casualty list back in Australia as

03:30 “wounded in action”. This bears on earlier details. But my Mum saw this. I was in New Guinea for eight months with my Dad, I was put on the casualty list back in Australia when I went into hospital at Port Moresby as “wounded in action”: it was the first time my Mum really got the idea I was somewhere I could be shot at. She

04:00 went down to Victoria Barracks, and said, “He’s too young, bring him out of there.” So I was still within a month of turning eighteen at that stage, I’d been in the army nearly three years, and they don’t discharge you but they send you back to base, to Brisbane first and then back to Sydney, into a young soldiers’ holding battalion. We were camped in French’s Forest. We spent nearly a year there until you were nineteen, before you were sent away again. That was a

04:30 pretty boring sort of a year, except possibly a highlight was they used us to go down and mount up the escaped Japanese from Cowra, when they broke out at Cowra. Then also they used us to load up the ships when the wharfies [waterside workers] would go on strike. And when we turned nineteen we went through Canungra, the jungle training at Canungra, and we were allocated to our battalions.

05:00 I joined the 2nd 9th Battalion and from, they were up on the Tablelands at the time and we went off to Morotai, to form the invasion fleet there for the invasion of Borneo, or the southern part of Borneo, because the 9th Division had already gone in at Tarakan and Labuan. So we did the landing at Balikpapan on the 1st of July in 1945, and luckily there was, leaving out details again, but there was

05:30 very little opposition at the actual landing. Of course the Japs opened up the oil tanks up on the

Parramatta Ridge and set them alight, but we went around through Klandasan, the European residential area. After Balikpapan was taken we were sent across the bay to Penadjim, and we fought our way up, while remaining in contact with the Japanese, all the way up the Riko River until the 15th of August.

06:00 And of course, everyone knows what happened on the 15th of August, when the war stopped suddenly. And that was back to Penadjim after that, we were held on Borneo because of everybody wanting to go home. We were there for six months until March 1946, sitting at Balikpapan. I came back, was discharged from the army. Now, having left school at thirteen,

06:30 I didn't have much schooling so I didn't have much future, so I knew I had to get some sort of education. And ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper I'd always wanted to go to sea, so I tried to go to sea, but ships were being laid up all over the world after the war was finished and there were no vacancies, even as a steward or something like that. Then I heard about the, that there was a bit of a shortage of marine radio officers,

07:00 and a friend of mine was telling me about it. But the schools were all closed, unless you were a returned serviceman, so I got a job with the Repatriation Department, which is now the Department of Veterans' Affairs. We organised it there that if I could get an accepted war disability I could get a place on the course to get qualified as a radio operator.

07:30 And so we used to arrange our doctors' books so that if they wanted to play golf on a Wednesday or something we arranged it so that they had that time off, so they were amenable to getting me accepted as a war disability. I shouldn't be saying this, I don't know whether we should print this, but they got me less than ten per cent, which means you've got no money but you get treatment. And I did have war disabilities, as it proved later.

08:00 I'm quite, not too serious, but serious enough to get a much higher increase in pension. That came years and years later. I got the course, I qualified [with] Postmaster General Certificate of Competency. And then I wanted to go to sea, but somehow or other I got tied up with a young lady and wanted to stay ashore for a bit. So my first job was with the Department of Civil Aviation, at Rose Bay flying base. There we had to go out whenever the

08:30 flying fellows were coming in from Norfolk Island or something like that, we'd have to go out and clear the runway or get the pleasure boats out of the way so the planes could come in and land, and then talk them down to a landing. So I was there for a while, and from there I went up to, still Civil Aviation, back to Darwin, there for a while and then down to Alice Springs for twelve months, at the airfield there. And then the sea got to me

09:00 again. To qualify to operate on a big ship you had to do six months on a ship under five hundred tons. The only ships available were the trawlers going out of Sydney, and you'd do ten days out, two at sea, and that was an experience where I suffered seasickness like you wouldn't believe. For ten days I'd walk around with a bucket over the arm and two days getting over it,

09:30 and then it's back to Sydney. That was my experience. I saw out that six months and it really made me ill, so I decided to come ashore into radio. I did my training with AWA [Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia)] in Sydney, Marconi School of Wireless, and they controlled technicians for various radio stations. Mine was 2SM in Sydney so I became a technician there, and the highlight of that was when I formed the outside broadcast team with Reg

10:00 Grundy. Reg and I became, did all the football and the wrestling at Rushcutters Bay Stadium. And it was good working with Reg but I wish I'd stayed with him, I'd be a billionaire now. I didn't manage that. And then the sea got to me and I decided I wanted to go overseas. So at first, before that, I went back to sea on the Australian coast, mainly on the Australian Government ships

10:30 like the River Burnett, and we sailed around Melbourne, Tasmania, Newcastle, did all that, up to Cairns and so on. Then I came ashore again because I'd met another young lady and I wanted to be with her. So I worked for 4CN Cairns for another year, and that one was putting together a programme with Peter Dawson, the Australian singer. That

11:00 was a real fun thing. Then the sea bug got me again, so I was listening at the transmitter, I heard this ad that said "Off-season travel to England", so within two weeks I'd resigned, gone down to Sydney and off I went on the P&O ship the Arcadia to England. In England, the first thing we had to do, of course, was

11:30 do the Continent [mainland Europe]. So another chap and myself, a dentist actually from Melbourne, Ken Whitman, we bought a London taxi for eighty pounds to tour the Continent. It was a rattletrap old thing, in fact we tried to go up one pass backwards because we couldn't get over it frontwards. We did about four months on the Continent, and then I got another job, as a waiter in a fast food restaurant in

12:00 Piccadilly Circus. And then back to sea. Now, the thing with the sea over there was that it could get, there were plenty of ships, and you'd go down to the Radio Officers' Union at West Ham and you could almost pick your ships. I'd heard, "Don't sail on British ships because they are that tight they pay radio officers fifty pounds a month." The Greeks were paying up to a hundred and twenty, but the conditions of course aboard the ships weren't that bright.

12:30 Anyway, that's what I wanted to do, and I picked a, I heard this ship was going to South America. So

they flew me to Piraeus in Greece, there is a story attached to that, but we went up to Russia, to Odessa, and this is in the Stalinist era, and at Odessa we were loading pig iron for Buenos Aires.

13:00 The frightening experience there was the first night ashore we were picked up by the police. We'd been to the hostel there that they had, the seamen's club, and the beer was cheap and that was what we were looking for. There wasn't much, very little else to do in Odessa, it was a really drab, dreary town. They picked us up and sat us in a big marble vestibule of this big building, this was

13:30 with machine guns on either side, and every time we tried to speak we'd get this very, very firm "Niet!" We sat there for three and a half hours. Now I was scared then, because I'd just finished reading this book by Paul Gallico, Trial by Terror, where the Russians put a bucket over a person's head and beat it with an iron bar for hours. We didn't know what was going on.

14:00 Anyway, after three and a half hours, they called a taxi and put us in, so off we went. And it was lovely travelling down through the Black Sea and through the Dardanelles and lovely sunshine and up to the Med [Mediterranean] as we went out to the Atlantic. Now, this ship that I'd joined had just completed its five-year Lloyds survey - actually it should have had it in England, that was its last port of call - but there were thousands of Lloyds surveyors in England

14:30 and the captain took it down to Piraeus because his brother was there, he was a Lloyds surveyor. I don't know how many repairs were done to the ship. In fact, when we got out to the Atlantic and into really stormy weather I had to hang five buckets over radio gear and my bed to catch the water coming through the deck. A long, long story on this voyage, it was a real horror voyage, but anyway, instead of about two weeks or so it took us over five weeks to get to Buenos Aires. We broke down three times in the Atlantic,

15:00 running repairs twice, and then we had to call in at the St Vincent port, Cape Verde Islands, and went there for nearly two weeks to get a spare part. And we had a sick seaman on board and I was given the, because the only medical book aboard was a first aid book in English and no-one else spoke English, so I became the doctor. That's another story. We ended up getting into Buenos Aires past Montevideo, and you could see the

15:30 masts of the [German ship, Admiral] Graf Spee that was scuttled outside of Montevideo, into Buenos Aires, and you got the Argentine fleet that actually started the revolution that kicked Peron out were lined up outside the harbour. We had to go through them, they let us through and told us where we had to tie up, while their planes were still bombing Buenos Aires. So we had to wait about seven, eight days, before the war finished there, before we could start discharging our cargo. With the bombing

16:00 of the harbour, the harbour gear for discharging ships had been blasted all down, so we had to use the ship's gear, the derricks, to discharge our cargo. So we were taking out the first load of pig iron, and even though we'd done the five-year Lloyds survey, we were using our own ropes and things, we had wire ropes, and two of the ropes snapped, and the load swung and narrowly missed the winch

16:30 operators and hit the main mast. And being the lady that she was, the ship was the Arab TS, the mast very gracefully fell to the deck. Now we've got no main mast. So anyway we discharged the cargo, and the captain wouldn't have the main mast repaired in Buenos Aires, (a) because the war and the revolution had destroyed so much, and (b) because he wouldn't go to the expense. So

17:00 we tied the main mast to the deck, we had to put the derrick in the number one hatch and hang my antennas from that to get back to Europe. I very quickly signed off that ship. What I used to do in those days was pick a ship for two or three months, get a wad of money, sign off, go back to London and blow the lot, then go to West Ham and get another ship. So I was

17:30 doing that for quite a few years. And during that time there were other things, we got hit by a Frenchman in the English Channel in thick fog, Captain Karkakas, and he nearly did it again right out in the middle of the Atlantic. So we just missed an American weather ship that was anchored out there, marked on all the charts, but Captain Karkakas found them. I raced up onto the bridge, there was nobody on the bridge, we were on automatic pilot, and

18:00 I had to charge around to find the captain, and we missed that weather ship by about roughly two hundred yards, which is close at sea, in a wide open sea, the Atlantic, with the sort of weather you signed on for, you know, the flat calm; and the Americans looked out, you could see them running up and down the deck, shouting. And as soon as I opened up the radio they were calling me, because they got our name as we went past and they looked up the call sign,

18:30 and for two days after that they kept calling and I wouldn't answer them, I knew what was coming. At the end of that trip we got into Newport, Chesapeake Bay, and we were fined, I think, twenty thousand dollars for negligence at sea. I'll tell you something about that Greek sea captain.

Before you proceed, Norman - actually, this is very, very good detail - just for the introduction we're probably a

19:00 **bit too lengthy. So if you can very, very briefly skim over.**

I met my wife in London, and she was from South Africa, so I went back to South Africa. Now, I had to change career then because all radio jobs were controlled by the government in South Africa and you

had to have bilingual Africans, of course. So I got qualified then,

19:30 after a lot of research and a lot of study, as a transport engineer, took membership in the Society of Automotive Engineers, all that sort of thing. And so I spent most of the time there and I ended up with a job with Bosch. South Africa was very good to me, I ran the Air Brake Division for Bosch South Africa. But then of

20:00 course came the end of Apartheid, and I don't say I agree with Apartheid, but it did affect us. And our daughter, the one.... In the meantime I'd had two daughters. One has now a PhD in Economics and she was doing all the academic work at Oxford University, and she's living in England now, and she's gone on to something else. The other daughter's in Sydney and it's a long story with her,

20:30 she nearly died when she was a kid. She's now a practising accountant, she has her own consulting firm, they are doing very well. So that is them. But they left. Sally, the one in Sydney, had necklaces ripped off, chains ripped off her in the middle of Johannesburg about four or five times, and she's decided that if she had a daughter this is no good, so she

21:00 migrated to Sydney, because when they were born I registered them in at our Australian Consulate in Cape Town, didn't have any trouble getting Australian passports. So that's fixed them up. Then about six years ago it was time for us to come over and that's when also the Department of Veterans' Affairs was absolutely wonderful for us, because getting money out of South Africa is very difficult and it is right to this day, and without their help I think we would have

21:30 had a rough time.

That's great. OK, so now we are moving back towards the pre-war era. Can you please tell us a bit about your parents, their background?

My Mum and Dad were both Victorians, their history starts, where I'm concerned, in Williamstown.

22:00 Then they moved to North Fitzroy, where I was born. I had two brothers, an older and a younger, the older one died last year and the younger one died a couple of months ago; I'm the last of the Josephs. And my Dad, his profession was a labourer,

22:30 and we certainly weren't wealthy, we weren't very well off. He moved to, they moved to Sydney when I was two years old, in 1928, to get work. Then he was a veteran of the First World War; actually he was wounded on Gallipoli. The story on that one is that nearly forty years later

23:00 he had a carbuncle on the back of his neck that came up. When they opened it up they found just a tiny bit of the shrapnel from the shell-burst that wounded him in Gallipoli, they established that, apparently. And of course when 1939 came he figured he was still young enough and he enlisted in AIF and went to the Middle East in the Army Service Corps. So he spent the whole of the war in the army.

23:30 And back to, when he came back from the Middle East they went up to New Guinea, as I said. And my Mum was just a housewife, and nothing spectacular there, she looked after us kids. Apparently she didn't do too badly because my elder brother eventually finished up as the Chief Electronics Engineer with the Post Master General's Department in Sydney.

24:00 In fact during the war he tried to enlist, he tried to enlist seven times and he was pulled out each time and put into a protected industry. And he actually worked with the CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] on bouncing the first radar beams off the moon, that was in the experimental stages, so he didn't do too badly. And young Noel, he was the younger brother, he moved around quite a bit but he raised a good family and he was

24:30 more prolific than we were. I had two children, my elder brother only had two and Noel had five, so he did his bit. Then came, as I said, one of my first jobs was selling newspapers, on the corner of the Balalaika Hotel in Alexandria in Sydney. Then I went from primary school to secondary school and only had a year there because we

25:00 had to leave school and go to work. I worked in various very low labouring-type jobs, but then came the time when I really wanted to get into the Navy, I really wanted to go into the services, because the war was on. I mentioned that I was up the top of - can I go into detail now?

Yes.

I'd been thinking about it for a long time,

25:30 how I was going to do this, and I asked questions, and what lies I had to tell! So I'm sitting on the top of Martin Place plucking up the courage to go and enlist in the Navy - I always wanted to go to sea so it wasn't because I was frightened of the war or anything, it was because I knew the lies I was going to tell - and I marched up into the, they had three recruiting booths in the place, the army, the Navy and the air force.

26:00 I marched up into the Navy-recruiting booth and there was this huge petty officer, who had the biggest black beard I'd ever seen. He was a big fellow; I was only sort of looking over the counter, he towered

above it and he said, “Yes, son, what do you want?” I said, “I want to join the Navy.” He looked at me, he leaned across the counter, he stuck his face in front of mine, and he said, “See this?”, and he pointed to

26:30 his beard. I said, “Yes.” He said, “Pull it,” and I thought, “Hold on,” and he said, “Pull it.” I said, “No, I can’t pull your beard.” Then in this loud Naval petty officer voice he said, “PULL IT!” so I actually grabbed it and pulled it. I had a handful of beard, he looked at me and said, “When you can grow one of these, son, come back.” I was cross, I was angry, I was devastated, I was vowing all sorts of revenge.

27:00 I didn’t know what type of revenge, but I was going to get it, so out of the Navy hut and into the army hut. And they wanted to know if I was there to enlist and where was my birth certificate, and out it comes, my first big lie, “Actually it’s locked up in the football club, out of season and I can’t get it.” He said, “OK, you’ll have to get an affidavit from your parents stating that you are eighteen.”

27:30 I said, “OK, no problem.” That’s the next big lie, because I knew I didn’t have to worry about my Dad, he was in the Middle East. So I went home, and that was on the Friday, and I started nagging my Mother. I nagged her solidly for three and a half days, I had her up at three o’clock in the morning, nagging her, nagging her, until she finally caved in and signed. I went down to enlist out at the Showground, outfitted for war. I wanted to go to sea because

28:00 I always felt it would be much better to be transported to war than to have to walk there, but here I am, decked out, I’m going to walk there. I went to North Head Barracks for rookie [recruit] training.

I’m going to stop you there. It’s a good point to stop because I still want to explore the pre-war background before we move on to war. Your Dad’s service, did he ever talk about his war experiences to you?

Just a little, he spoke about Gallipoli and the

28:30 landing there and the eight months, he wasn’t there the full eight months when he was wounded; after about five months he copped a shell burst. He didn’t go into any details of all the people that were killed and shot in the battles they fought at Lone Pine and The Neck and all that sort of thing, he didn’t go into detail,

29:00 but he mentioned it now and again because he stayed in the Reserve, and one of the highlights of my life was polishing his brass buttons and things to go on his monthly parades so he looked [good] in his blue uniform, remember, with the big red stripe down the side. Actually in the First World War he was a farrier sergeant with the Light Horse and, of course, they’d left their horses in Egypt when they went to Gallipoli, and

29:30 then he was a farrier sergeant, he still kept the Light Horse going; but in the Second World War he went into the Army Service Corps.

What sort of things did he tell you, specifically, about his war experiences?

Mainly he told me about his mates, the times they had together in Palestine, his first trip to the Wailing Wall and that sort of thing. That was mainly

30:00 about it. The actual rough stuff he didn’t tell me a great deal about it. They got ashore, I think dawn had broken in Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] Cove and they were ashore, but they were kept on the shore in line for several days before they could push far enough inland to make an effect and to get more people ashore to hold that position.

30:30 So he thought at the beginning whether they could hang onto there or not, and that’s all he used to say about it. Then he came back to, when he was wounded, to hospital in Cairo and then that’s about the only thing I can remember him doing. But I know he stayed in the army after the war, not in the permanent army, in the Reserve.

31:00 **Did you look up to his war service, was it something you were quite proud of?**

I respected him for it, but I knew it was mainly because I had the same feelings when the Second World War came around, I wanted to get in there, I wanted the uniform, I felt that, and I know it was a similar sort of feeling he had.

31:30 All this fighting for “King and country” and all that, it was in the background but it wasn’t an issue; it was just get with your mates and wear a uniform and be seen to be doing your bit, and all the things that go with it, of course. In those days, during the wartime, if you had a uniform on you had a much better chance with the girls. That was important.

32:00 **So there was also social pressure involved?**

Social pressure, yes, that’s a good way of putting it. Except with me I really do think it was more the spirit of adventure than anything else. Something different happening every day.

Do you think your Father thought the same way?

I would say so, yes.

32:30 But he was also learning a trade while he was in the army. It was to do with horses, of course, and that fell away in the years between the World Wars, so he was back to being a labourer when we moved to Sydney.

Were you ever present at Anzac Day, was that something important?

Before the war?

Before the war.

33:00 Yes, I used to go down with him to Martin Place and march along George Street with him, felt pretty good about it. And of course Anzac Day parades I go right down Swanson Street along to the shrine. I wear not only my medals but I wear his, too.

What medals did he receive?

He's got nine and I've got seven, campaign ribbons.

33:30 We haven't got a Victoria Cross or medal or anything. The only additional ones: he's got one additional one that's an Efficiency Medal, which I don't see on many people, that's been approved by Veteran Affairs but it's produced by the battalion; one for front-line service, with the crossed rifles - he shared that, actually, with combat soldiers -

34:00 that's the one I like more than any of the others.

Now, apart from your Father, did you have any other relatives that were involved in the First World War?

No, his brothers weren't. My Mother had two brothers and neither of those were involved in the war, I think they were too young.

34:30 **Before the war started, the Depression I understand was quite a harsh period?**

It was.

How did it affect you and your family?

It gave me a life-long loving of soup, because we used to have to go to the soup kitchens during the Depression,

35:00 mainly the Salvation Army were so good then. In fact, my christening for some reason was done in the Salvation Army in Sydney. But yes, the soup kitchens became a part of our lives, we had our lunch there so we could have our big meal in the evenings. So yes, the Depression did affect us because it was hard to find work. And Dad was a labourer and

35:30 he worked at the Australian Glass Manufacturers in Sydney, and I used to take his lunch over to him sometimes. I used to be a bit scared of all the heat and hot glass rolling out, things like that, and the noise of the place, but certainly it was an experience taking his lunch to him. And of course the selling newspapers, I enjoyed that

36:00 because I used to get my grubby little fingers from below the counters onto the counter lunches, pigs' trotters in those days, and the little pies and sausage rolls, so we kept our bellies full that way. It was a hard time during the Depression. Of course that time, 1930 to about 1932, I was only about six years old.

What about rabbits,

36:30 **were they an important part of….?**

They were very important. We had a chap next door, I still remember his name, Andy Furlong, he used to take us out on the weekends rabbiting. I enjoyed it, I suppose I started getting a taste of adventure then, finding a field with the rabbit warrens and sleeping in farmers' hay sheds and things like that. And we'd go rabbiting with ferrets and many a time we had to dig

37:00 because they used to get themselves trapped in the burrows or they'd get into a dead end with a rabbit but the rabbit would be in front of them, the only way they could get out would be to eat through the rabbit. We used to get the shovels out and do that. Yeah, they were good days, and they were good sorts of food because we were selling those rabbits for one and sixpence a pair, that's ninepence each, and he used to sell the skins separately.

37:30 They gave us another little source of monetary income, food income. Yes, the Depression days were pretty bad in Sydney in those days.

What fascinates me was what you actually ate during the Depression, bread and dripping was a common thing, something that would be illegal today!

Put a bit of salt on it, bread and dripping I remember

38:00 very well. But that's - and different dripping, the shop dripping wasn't anywhere near as good. I loved the roast beef, when you had roast beef. What else back in those days? You brought those things to mind. Nothing, but rabbit was a big thing on the menu. Every weekend we'd try and get out there and get some, and that gave us meat for a while.

38:30 And of course the old battered saveloy, don't see those; frankfurts or something now. This was the big red sausage, it was cut in half and dipped in batter, used to love those. And great big fat doughnuts with cream in them, this was while I was selling newspapers. I was only earning

39:00 about thirty shillings a week, I wasn't doing too badly.

You are making me very hungry. What about school?

School, I went to

39:30 primary school and all the boys were not too bad at school. My elder brother, Ron, was dux [top pupil] when he did primary school. Noel, when we were selling newspapers and that, was actually arrested as an uncontrollable child because what they found was he was

40:00 never fetching up [arriving] at school. They eventually nailed him. He felt that he wasn't learning anything at the school and he spent all his time, he'd go off to school in the morning, but he'd end up at the public library, reading. In fact he was brighter than any of us. But he didn't get the opportunities that we had.

Tape 2

00:30 **And when we left, we were talking about your schooling; do you want to continue on with that for a bit?**

The usual schooling, I thing you went when you were six years of age or something to primary school, and it was the Alexandria Primary School, it was very much a concrete jungle type of school in a poor suburb. The six years there, we were all pretty bright at school.

01:00 As I mentioned, my elder brother was dux of the primary school, he went on to much better things, of course. We were six years at primary school so you were about twelve years when you went to high school. There was another form before Matric [Matriculation], you had four more years, first and second year, and then third and forth year, the higher two-year period. After the first year of high school,

01:30 the only thing I accomplished there was I turned out to be the best backstroke swimmer in the whole team, I was the only one who won a prize obviously in the big pool. That was my highlight. I don't know, I was always bright enough; I was always for the adventure side of things. So after one year at first year of secondary school,

02:00 that was at Gardeners Road Technical College in Sydney at Mascot, I had to go to work because the kids were bigger and bigger and needing more and so one of us had to go to work, and Ron was doing well at school and the younger son was to young to do any work. So I was the one, I went and got jobs, worked in a clothing dye factory.

02:30 Those were days or years best forgotten. Well, it was only for a short time because, as I mentioned, I was in the army. So that sort of saw me through my school days. Brief.

When you left school at such a young age, was that the norm of the day or abnormal?

No, it was normal in our area because, as I said, people who had plenty of money continued.

03:00 Mostly people did continue with their schooling, somehow. But there were poorer areas where somebody had to supplement the family income, when you only had your Dad doing it, or, on occasions where there was no Father, then the whole family left school and went to work. If they could find jobs, in those days.

Was that the major reason why

03:30 **people were leaving school, or....?**

I would say so, leaving school before completing their education, yes. And none of us of course could afford to go to university. In fact Ron, who became, as I mentioned, Chief Electronics Engineer at PMG [Postmaster General's Department], he did his university at night-time, got his degrees that way.

04:00 **Well, just talk about the Depression, and what you were telling us off-camera about pawning the rings and....**

We were growing up, we were demanding more food and that for our activities and so on, but my Dad used to get paid fortnightly and by the end of the first week, or even eight, nine days,

04:30 all his pay would be gone, his fortnightly pay, and I just remember having to take my Mother's wedding ring with a note to the pawnbroker and get enough money to tide us over until the next pay came, and then she'd go redeem that. It would happen every two weeks for a long, long time while the Depression was on.

How old were you when you were doing this?

05:00 It was in the 1930's, 1926, so I was about five, six years of age, seven years of age. It was never, it didn't get that much better, but when I left school we were still living hand to mouth.

At that young age, did you fully comprehend the situation?

No, because you don't see outside your own little world

05:30 and you don't really comprehend the whole picture of the Depression, how it affected the country. It was hard getting and holding jobs.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but when you are a child of that age you would think, "This is what life's like," wouldn't you, because you would know no other life?

We had our school and, as I said, I used to love going up to the

06:00 Salvation Army for the lunchtime big bowl of soup and big chunk of bread they used to give us. I really enjoyed that, was enough for me. You really don't comprehend at that age what it was like. You know a bit more about it in hindsight, that's all.

We've often heard that people growing up in the Depression, most of them had a happy childhood, was that the same case

06:30 **for you?**

Yes, because you didn't expect too much so you didn't get too much. If you were expecting and not getting then you'd have an unhappy life, but I didn't expect much, and it was adequate. We never had holidays. The school holidays would come around and you'd spent it at home, we couldn't afford to go anywhere. Once a year, if we could manage it,

07:00 we'd go down to Wattamolla, just south of the other side of Botany Bay. That was the big expedition, we'd go down there for a week when we could afford it, not every year. It was something to look forward to.

What did you enjoy most about it?

Well, it was just the freedom and swimming and all the other kids that were down there, got to know a different lot of kids than at your home in Alexandria.

07:30 Our main activities with our friends was to play with a tennis ball and any bit of wood we could get, play hockey out in the back lane, that was big rivalry and everything like that. As I said, when I went to work after I left school at thirteen, my ambition then was to get a bike. So

08:00 the first job I got was as a delivery boy for a grocer shop. The old style grocer shop was the counter and people took deliveries and you'd go out on a bike and do it. So I finally managed to save enough to get myself a bike, but I thought I was smart, do all this riding sitting up on the seat without holding the handlebars, I had no idea of road rules or anything. And of course what happened, I came out of one street within

08:30 two weeks of my brand new bike and a truck couldn't stop. I flew off the bike, and the bike went under the front wheels. I was bleeding a bit but that didn't worry me, it was my bike. And I pulled the bike out from under the wheel and cried my eyes out. And there was no such thing as insurance in those days, it took me.... I never ever got another bike, because by the time I could have saved up for one I was in the army.

09:00 **You were more worried about the bike than about yourself?**

Much more worried about the bike. This was my prized possession; I mean, it was like the Crown Jewels to me.

A shame they didn't have any insurance back then. When you were about ten, eleven years of age, what did you want to do when you grew up?

09:30 That's a good question. I didn't have any real ambitions, except I thought I wanted to go to sea. I wanted to travel. And I got that in spades after the war, I've had my share of travel. Sometimes I think it's the only thing, and so much so that at thirteen, I don't know whether it's still going today, at thirteen years of age you could apply for and sit for an examination and you were admitted

10:00 to Flinders Naval Base, and I sat for that examination. I went down to where the museum is at Hyde Park, in a building there, and sat with about fifty other thirteen year-olds to write this examination. I

know I did well, but I found out later that out of hundreds sitting for it only fifteen were taken that year,

10:30 and the pass rate to get into that fifteen was ninety-eight per cent. And I knew that I was probably in the ’90’s. Well, that was a big disappointment. That was how keen I was to get to sea. I wanted to go into the Navy to be a cadet midshipman, that would have been the tops, but it didn’t happen.

What was it about the sea that you loved?

I don’t know. Adventure, freedom.

11:00 Away from parental control I suppose had a bit to do with it, not realising that officer control could have been even stricter than parental control. I just wanted to sail away and see other places. And I liked the fact that the next day and the next wasn’t mapped out for you. I liked things just to happen

11:30 and handle it as it came. It was a sense of adventure for me.

Did you love ships as well?

I do admit I love ships. To go to sea you had to have a ship.

Would you draw them, would you….?

Oh no, just sail on them.

When you were young you didn’t draw them, fascinated by them, it was more the sea that you loved?

12:00 Yes. Travel, I suppose, call it travel, and the only way to get to travel from Australia was to go by sea. I mean aeroplanes weren’t that hot, they had flying boats and things like that, but it wasn’t like it is today. So the main affordable way to get to travel was to go by sea. And when I did get to sea, I was mainly on freight haulers,

12:30 trawlers. I preferred general cargo, I never sailed on tankers because they didn’t stay in port long enough. They’d go into port and they’d be full of whatever, twenty, fifty, hundred thousand tons of fuel in a matter of sort of hours the way they poured it in, so I liked general cargo which took quite a while to discharge. The passenger ships, I did one passenger cruiser, just trying to remember the name of the ship,

13:00 up through the Barrier Reef, and I felt I’d been into the social whirl there. But being a radio officer you got a couple of stripes on your arm and thought you were made with the girls. It didn’t work out like that, although sometimes they did funny things there. Being the ship’s radio officer, on this particular ship, you were supposed to be a bit of an electrician, so I had a call from one cabin to say that the light doesn’t work.

13:30 I’d get down there and there’d be a girl in there; she said, “My light doesn’t work.” I’d look and you’d find that she’d taken the bulb out just as an excuse to get you into the cabin. You felt good about it but you had to be careful because if there was any misdemeanour aboard you were gone, especially if you were an officer aboard the ship.

What did you family think of your dream? Did they know that you loved the sea?

They knew that I liked the sea, but they thought it was boyhood fancies.

14:00 They knew I had to go to work.

When you were growing up, was the Empire important to you?

Not really, no. Australia was everything to me. I’d always be an Australian. I spent nearly forty years in South Africa; I was always going to be an Australian and always did remain an Australian. I didn’t relinquish my passport.

14:30 Especially when, I remember a farewell party in Cairns when I left the 4CN Cairns radio station to come down to go overseas, they were all saying, “You’ll forget Australia,” and things like that. But I never would.

What did you think of the Empire?

I didn’t really think a lot about it, because you were more concerned for yourself in those days than the overall picture

15:00 and we didn’t get that much news - I’m talking now about in the late 1940’s, just after the war and so on. And certainly as we were growing up in the ’30’s you didn’t, I mean that was foreign to your thinking, you didn’t think like that. But the Empire, I was glad to be able to do a bit. Mainly through propaganda I got a little bit brainwashed, I suppose, with all the stuff

15:30 that’s put out by the radio, it was only radio in those days, not television, and all the newspapers, about doing your bit for your country. I suppose that did get to you a bit in your subconscious, but you didn’t give it a lot of attention.

What about your parents, were they influenced by the Empire and what were their feelings?

Their feelings were just to live from day to day.

16:00 Life itself was a big enough struggle without worrying about what the Empire was doing. I have to be honest about that, that didn't come into it.

What about religion, was that a big factor in your growing up?

No, not at all. We were going to Sunday School because everybody else went to Sunday School. But as for regular attendance at church, no, I didn't have any strong religious feelings except, what's the saying, "there are no

16:30 atheists in foxholes", then you got a bit of religion on occasions. You might say a little prayer, hoping you didn't get shot. I think I've got more interest in, not religion as such, not talking about the Catholics and the Protestants and Buddhas, or the Muslims or

17:00 that, everyone can have all their own faith like that, but you do get, call it faith if you like, as you get older. I suppose as you're approaching the end of your life you certainly do, and I do say prayers every night now. And sometimes I feel a bit guilty because I think God up there must have said, "Look, you should have been doing this years ago." That sort of thing.

17:30 **As you mature it becomes more important.**

More important, yes. Funnily enough, you feel as though in many instances your prayers are being answered. Life seems to get a little bit easier with having a faith.

In those times, was church more a sense of community rather than the religious aspects?

18:00 Church I think in those days, if I ever thought about it, was a social activity rather than a religious activity. Except for the keen ones.

Because they would organise a lot of events for locals to get together, wouldn't they?

Yes, and they also had these holiday places you could go to. And

18:30 usually they didn't ram religion at you, but they provided the sort of facilities where you were in that sort of atmosphere where if you were ready to receive anything like that then it was much easier to take it in.

Now, as we are in the 1930's, you are still young in the middle of them: what did you know about Europe and what was happening in the war?

In 1939 it had

19:00 started, of course.

But the lead-up to it and what was happening with [Adolph] Hitler [German Chancellor] throughout their....?

Never came into my calculation, that's only when the war started and the battles started to, even the "Phoney War" [militarily quiet period between Britain's declaration of war in September 1939 to April 1940] didn't really come into it. I suppose the 1940's were the times you started thinking, "What's going on over there?" And of course by 1941 I was ready to join.

Was that just because of your young age you didn't know about the....?

19:30 I suppose so, yes. And of course all of that was happening so many thousands and thousands of miles away. And the newspapers covered the battles and that, but they didn't cover them like when they got closer to Australia.

Just before we move on, as well you started work: can you tell us a bit of the working conditions you were under as a young kid then?

It was labouring work. The only two jobs I

20:00 can remember, first of all was the grocery delivery - oh no, I enjoyed that, it was before I got my own bike; at least I could get on a bike and pedal, even though sometimes the boxes of groceries were a bit hard to manage on the front of the basket on the front of the bike. And I delivered house-to-house, people ordered their groceries and I'd deliver; and I got to work behind the counter a little. I always liked working with people.

20:30 That was fine until I busted my bike under the truck. Then I knew I had to get more, if I was going to get another one I had to get a job that paid a bit more. And there was this cloth-dyeing factory and I worked in the steam rooms and that sort of thing. That was pretty hard work. Again, being young and fit

21:00 I was always comfortable with it, I didn't find it drudgery or anything. So I was there until I enlisted.

How would the employers treat young kids like you?

In the grocery shop it was a family business, it was reasonable, a bit, if you did anything wrong you probably got a cuff over the head for being stupid or something like that. In the factory

21:30 they just were walking around keeping an eye on you, you knew that they were watching, or you felt that they were watching all the time that you put in a good day's work. But they weren't cruel or anything like that, they just wanted the job done, that was their business. But you were always glad when the five o'clock whistle blew.

Were there unions at that stage?

No, not in those sorts of jobs I had. The unions were still very strong on the waterfront,

22:00 and they continued strong on the waterfront right through the war, and I have a few grievances about them, on the way they behaved. The only one I was glad they went on strike on was, it was to do with the very first beer ship for New Guinea, after New Guinea was secured after the war,

22:30 and I was in this young soldiers battalion in French's Forest, they were using us to load ships when there was any problems. That one ship I was quite happy I didn't work on because New Guinea was a "dry" [without liquor] island until all the hostilities had ceased and then, when it was made a "wet" island, we loaded the first ship for New Guinea in Sydney Harbour. And we were working six on and twelve

23:00 off, six hours on, twelve hours off. We'd go in teams into these holds and the crates would come down loaded with these cases of beer, and the first thing we would do would be build a wall about one and a half meters away from the ship's side and leave an opening to get behind it, set up a little counter, and quite honestly we got sloshed for most of the six hours on.

23:30 Twelve hours off, go back, fall into our bunch in French's Forest. I can't remember ever eating food. I suppose we did have food. Because back then, you know, we were young and all eighteen year-olds and that, all this free beer, I think that was about the only time we were happy that wharfies didn't want to load that ship.

Before you joined up, what was your social life like,

24:00 **and your friends?**

As kids and that, we had our back lane hockey, but swimming was one of my big joys, around the beaches and Bondi, well, our nearest - we moved, not really Bondi - but we'd go to, our favourite beach at that time was Coogee. But I'd do a lot of swimming over at North Sydney Olympic Pool

24:30 because I liked the still water rather than the sea, to do swimming that was, I'd go over and do some training and swim laps. I think swimming was one of the big things.

So do you remember the day war was declared?

Third of September 1939, 3rd September 1939. Not really, because at that time I was thirteen.

25:00 Not particularly, no, it didn't make a big impression.

Did you see your world start to change after the war was declared?

Not for the first year or so, no. It was only when I went into the army, a big change.

You didn't notice the people in the community changing

25:30 **their ways?**

No. I was envious of the increase of people in uniform. Even then I wanted to get a uniform, I was more interested in doing that. The sort of life they had, they all looked like they were sort of heroes, I wanted a bit of that, I suppose, yes. So that's the only change that I can say happened.

26:00 **That's the change that most impacted on you, I guess.**

Well, as I say, as soon as I got into the services life changed, total changes. And being away from home for the first time, I was never away from home before, and the army and the camps and so on, always coming home and everyone welcoming you, they were good times.

26:30 **What is it about the uniform that….?**

Mainly the girls. I was very keen on girls, I still am, I suppose. Yes, I felt that they'd look up to me as a sort of hero or something and they'd be easier to get along with.

Did you see that occurring with other guys in the street in uniform?

27:00 Oh yes, you know yourself, during war time, when you are that age, more than half your world is taken up with thoughts of girls. I've got no other way of saying that. I mean in Sydney they used to have what we used to call Battleship Corner, the corner opposite the Sydney Town Hall, George St and Park St. It was called Battleship Corner because that was

27:30 the place girls would go to, and fellows in uniform would go to to pick up girls.

So war has broken out, you have started to see the guys in uniform and you start to think….?

"That's the place for me." And again, as I said, I wanted to join up and I wanted to join the Navy. You don't want me to repeat that story; you've already got that story, haven't you?

28:00 And going into the army at that stage, finishing off in the army, I felt on top of the world. And then of course we were, rookie [recruit] training we did at North Heads Barracks, and then I was supposed to do this anti-aircraft searchlight unit for more training on the shores of Botany Bay. And we were at Botany Bay, and that's just before the Japs [Japanese] came.

28:30 And then when the Japs were coming down, we were shot up to Darwin.

I'll just stop you there and ask you a couple of questions on the joining up and so on, because originally you were rejected by the Navy, they found out about your age in the Navy and then you went to the army and….?

They didn't find out about my age, they just knew I was too young. I had fuzz on my chin, instead of a beard.

So when you went to the army, how easy was it to

29:00 **convince them?**

At the time, it was not long after Dunkirk, as I said, and they were recruiting as much as they could. They were a bit lax in any sort of restriction on people wanting to join up, and so long as you had the right papers and, as I say, I had to get that legal document, the affidavit signed by my parents, they would accept you. I suppose lots and lots of other chaps got in

29:30 at that age by the same way. They were wanting men and people in the army. They were already starting to send their troops off to Malaya and off to the Far East. Already had the 6th Division over there.

When you were there, and they were accepting you, did you sense that they knew that you were under-age?

The army couldn't care less. The Navy certainly did, but

30:00 the army couldn't really care much at all, as long as you looked tall enough, as long as you looked…. How can you tell the difference between a fifteen and an eighteen year-old? Not really. At eighteen you went into what was originally the militia - this was the point I thought chancing my arm and saying nineteen would be really chancing it, but at eighteen you joined the militia

30:30 and you couldn't be sent out of Australia and you had to serve your time in Australia. That's why I kept trying to get, and eventually got into the AIF by getting my Father to claim me into New Guinea.

When you originally got your Mother to sign the document, after much harassment, how did she feel, do you know?

It didn't dawn on her, she thought I looked good in

31:00 uniform, it didn't dawn on her that there was any danger around. Even when we went up to Darwin and the bombing started up there she didn't. See, they kept it fairly low-key in the newspapers down south, especially on that first raid on Darwin. That was a shocking, bad, misinformation that the Government put out down south. I think they finished up with

31:30 twenty-seven killed or something like that, and actually there were well over two thousand casualties in that first raid on Darwin. They thought that people down, they don't give people credit, they thought they might panic if they knew it was such a devastating raid. Just as an aside, that raid on Darwin was actually a heavier raid than on Pearl Harbour, there were more planes involved in that than the planes that bombed

32:00 Pearl Harbour. But that's jumping ahead.

So it sounds a bit like your Mother just thought you were joining the Scouts or something?

Yes, that would be exactly right, a good way of putting it. So that would be an excellent way of putting it. Her son was joining the Scouts and going into camp, enjoying yourself with mates.

32:30 **So you joined up, you were accepted, what was the direct next step?**

To Sydney Showgrounds, you were issued with all your clobber, all your gear, your uniforms and everything, kit bags and stuff like that. You were put into trucks and taken up to North Head Barracks, and at North Head Barracks it was pretty luxurious.

33:00 But there was the bull ring, the parade ground, where you do your training and I must say, it was about

a week or so afterwards, all of us started collapsing sick on the parade ground with our vaccinations, big sores came up on the arm. But before that, when we first got up there, they were having manoeuvres, we didn't even get into a bed that night, they stuck us straight out in the slit trenches out on North Head. We were there for about five nights.

33:30 At that time I thought what the heck had I landed myself in. But my Dad had said, when my Mum had told Dad in a letter that I'd joined the army, he wrote back and said, "Just let him be, he won't last three months." Well, that of course got my back up and I thought, "I'll show him," and I was in nearly five years, so he was dead wrong there.

Let's just go back to the Showgrounds,

34:00 **can you describe that scene of all the guys coming in and so on?**

I remember it was, we were sort of put into different pens there to sort ourselves out, then we had to come out and join a que past this long counter, they looked at you, and the fellow behind the counter wouldn't ask you what size you were wearing, he'd look at you, and I don't know how good they were but he would pull from different sizes and throw them at you.

34:30 You'd have to bundle them up, stuff them in your kit bag, and back to these pens where they used to have the cattle. And there was only straw there. We were there actually for a couple of days, so the first thing we had to do, they gave you a palliasse, you know what a palliasse is? A palliasse is a bag type of thing about the size of a mattress filled up with straw, that's what you slept on.

35:00 So we had our palliasses there and sorting our gear out for the first couple of days, and then up to North Head.

Did you feel like cattle at all, being pushed around?

Not really, we were excited we were in the army. We were putting on our uniforms, some of them were a bit baggy, some of them were a bit tight, but all in all they didn't do a bad job.

When you were there and you were fifteen

35:30 **did any of the other guys look at you twice, the guys you are enrolling with, or any of the people handing out the uniforms, look at you twice?**

Not really. We were all wrapped up in our own little worlds and getting to know each other as mates and things. The only time I ever had trouble, even to this day it bugs me, was this sergeant I had up in Darwin, who made, I was on duty, we were on the switchboard

36:00 and he came, and we had our bunk there, he made sexual advances. If ever I saw him again I would, I was actually scared of sergeants or anyone with rank, I was only a fifteen year-old, new soldier. He made these sexual advances and advanced advances; I really didn't know what to do.

36:30 But I got away from him, but I still remember that guy.

You were able to fend him off somehow?

Yes. But it took a while, he was pretty persistent, it must have been about fifteen minutes or so that he, only I wasn't into that sort of thing.

How old were you at this stage?

Fifteen. I hadn't turned sixteen, I didn't turn sixteen until the next year in March.

37:00 March 1927 I turned sixteen - what am I talking about? Anyway, it was the next year, 1942.

Did he know your age or....?

He must have known. I was certainly, for the first few years I was always the youngest and he must have sensed that. But I'd rather not dwell on that.

37:30 **A quick one: was it one occasion or multiple occasions?**

No, he didn't come back a second time. I don't remember what I said to him, but enough to.... I could have been charged with abusing an NCO [non commissioned officer], but.

You didn't need mates or someone to help you out?

No, this was in the middle of the night. We were kept twenty-four hours. You know those old switchboards with those old plug-in things,

38:00 and that was my two-hour duty, like doing sentry duty. He came in and tried it on and I wasn't having any of that.

You told him where to go?

Eventually. I didn't know how to handle it at first and I wasn't sort of actually forcing him away because I just didn't know how to handle it, until he got too specific and then

38:30 I said, “No.” And that was about fifteen minutes, if I remember rightly, but it was about that.

It must be even more difficult at such a young age.

And an officer, who you are supposed to look up to in the army, a superior rank, and he had the rank of a full sergeant, so a sergeant, to me he was not quite God, but he wasn’t far down the ranks.

39:00 A commissioned officer never came anywhere near me. In fact commissioned officers never really talked to you, they talked to you through the NCOs.

You’d probably through an incident like that lose your boyhood innocence pretty quickly.

Yes, I knew what he was coming at, I just didn’t know how to handle a sergeant, that was the thing. It wasn’t the sexual part about it,

39:30 I wasn’t into that and he knew I wasn’t going to have any of it, but I didn’t know how to handle someone you are supposed to stand to attention and “yes sir, no sir” type thing.

Did you become a bit more cynical of the world when that happened, from that age?

No, not, because the big thing you learn early in the army, like that, you’ve got all your mates around you and basically you get a couple

40:00 of bullies and things like that that take advantage of your youth and so on, but usually, when I give my talks to schools, there are two things to survive in a fighting unit, there are two things you have to have: firstly, hatred of the enemy, which we did, we hated the Germans; and secondly your mates, you knew that they would be there for you

40:30 if anything went wrong, and you make good mates. I’ve still got a couple of very good ones here in Melbourne.

When you were initially at the Showgrounds and you were surrounded by all these guys who would eventually become your mates, how did you fit in with them as fifteen compared to, well, they should have been eighteen, how did you fit in with them?

I was quite, mainly not voicing your opinions too much. No, it was all very amicable, it was

41:00 give and take all along the line there because you sorted yourself quite early with the people you felt compatible with. I’m using words now I wouldn’t use in those days, but that’s what it is, you found the people you got along well with, that you were compatible with, and you were drawn together, you formed your little cliques, if you like to call them that. The same in all the units.

Tape 3

00:32 **North Head Barracks?**

North Head Barracks I think we covered from going up there on the first night and ending up in the trenches in the barracks and the manoeuvre that they were doing. We did our six weeks there and we were assigned to our units, and I was assigned to this anti-aircraft searchlight unit for training on the shores of Botany Bay, which wasn’t very hard to take.

01:00 Then when they found the Japs were, before the Japs came into the war in September, October 1941, and we were finishing our training, when the bombing of Pearl Harbour took place and the Japs started moving down to Malaya and to the Philippines and so on, East Timor, we were shot up to Darwin

01:30 and we went into camp there, we set up our anti-aircraft searchlight unit just in one side of the airfield and, as it turned out, that particular location wasn’t very well thought out, because it latter became known as Bomb Alley. The normal route the Japanese would come in on would hit the airfield and then the overshoots

02:00 were catching, and there was quite a few overshoots from the airfield. Of course they destroyed the airfield, all the planes on the airfield. That was an interesting story there, during that first raid, the Hudson bombers were destroyed and the Wirraways that were being sent up were being shot down. When the raid, first.... There were two raids on that morning, one at ten o’clock, one at twelve,

02:30 and when the first one was finished this airman found this little kelpie pup wandering around with a broken leg, it had been hit with something, probably from flying timber or something. He took it to the MO, medical officer, to be treated and the medical officer said, “I can’t do anything here, he’s got no papers, he’s not part of the army or the services.” So this fellow went away and he drew up some papers and gave the pup the name of Gunner and now he’s

03:00 a fully-fledged member of the armed forces, so he’s taken him along and the doctor fixed him, put his

leg in a splint. But the peculiar thing about this dog was that in future air raids, long before anyone knew they were coming, before they got early warning, this dog Gunner would go a bit berserk, run around in circles and head for the nearest air raid shelter. And he had this sort of sixth sense and they noticed this, that he never failed to do this,

03:30 so they made him the official air raid warning, gave the craftsman that was looking after him a portable air raid siren, and every time Gunner would take off he would turn the signal alarm and the fighters were given the chance to get off before the Japs would arrive. That was a remarkable story, and it went on for the whole year that they bombed Darwin. So we were in Bomb Alley and

04:00 so I had twelve months there. There's nothing really to report except after the first raid on Darwin we expected the Japanese to land so we had our trucks and utes and that filled with gear, and we were supposed to, when they landed, we had enough ammunition apparently at that stage for two minutes' rapid fire and we were finished. And we were supposed to get into the trucks and head down to Adelaide River and form the front line there,

04:30 and after that, when that fell, down to Katherine, and down and so on. But of course they never landed. So Darwin was really a boring time until they started bombing at night and we had to go into action. We used to really, I actually enjoyed it, but I was a spotter and sitting out in one of the chairs away from the lights to spot when the lights were passed over a plane, and you had the headphones

05:00 and the communication to the chap on the wheel to pick up that bomber so that the anti-aircraft guns could have a go at it. So that was really Darwin, for us. In March the next year....

So you were there for a year?

Yes, for a year. Till 1941.

When you first arrived what was the scene of Darwin?

Darwin, we arrived just after the first raid.

05:30 It was devastated and there wasn't a lot of organisation trying to get everybody into the right places when they were allocating the different locations where you were going to set up a camp. Yes, it was pretty well devastated. We didn't get in to see the actual town, we were put straight into this camp, but the town was flattened and most of the ships in the harbour were sunk.

06:00 The USS Pirie, that was the one that was sunk, and the [USS] Houston. Of course, you know the history of that without me telling you that. The force that was going to land in Timor, they were on their way back and they caught it, too. So the first raid on Darwin has been very well-documented. As for personal feelings during those bombing raids, I've said many times after

06:30 I think I would much rather go on a fighting patrol, or a recce [reconnaissance] patrol into enemy territory than a bombing raid: they used to scare the hell out of me, especially when you knew planes were approaching and they had eight bombs in their stick and one would start coming down and they'd come closer, and you'd get one going "whoomph" and you'd be counting them

07:00 and saying, "Please keep the last one, drop the last one before you get here," that sort of thing. Yeah, I was scared of bombs.

You were there for the second raid on Darwin. What, how big was the second raid compared to the rest that followed?

Nowhere near as big. In the first one it was something like a hundred and fifty-five bombers and so many fighter bombers and that sort of thing. There was actually a few more aircraft than the number that hit Pearl Harbour,

07:30 it was a bigger raid, and I understand it was the biggest raid in the war up to that point, in comparison with the size of the target, the town and the airfield. So what was your question?

In comparison to the other air raids that followed, what was the second air raid like?

Smaller than the first, and it was about twenty-seven

08:00 bombers that seemed to have been there, their formation was twenty-seven bombers supported by Zero fighters. That went on for about three months, and then they started to get so many losses because the Kittyhawks had arrived up there and they were taking them out of the air. And then they switched to night bombing and then it was nearly all

08:30 night bombing. And then they brought us into action.

You must have seen some spectacular dogfights?

Not many, because it usually occurred out of our sight, they'd either get the bombers before they came in or they would chase them out, so we didn't actually see them overhead. So, as I said, before Gunner got going, when they realised that he

09:00 could give early warning, the fighters weren't getting a chance to get off the ground. This is all from his end because we weren't on the airfield, we only heard these stories afterwards.

So you knew about this dog, you'd seen this dog?

No, I hadn't, but we knew about him.

So you heard about this story: has there been any mention of this in the official histories as such? It's a fairly unusual thing to

09:30 **hear.**

I don't know, maybe, I don't know. I've never seen anything, but we heard.

But you heard other veterans talking about the dog?

Yes, because we have got an association here they call Darwin Defenders and people who've served in Darwin during the bombing, and I go to their, every year we have a thing, the 19th of February

10:00 on the anniversary of the first raid, we have a thing at the shrine. And then we have a lunch at the NCOs' mess in Victoria Barracks in St Kilda.

Did you have any near misses?

Yeah, we've had a few. When I say we were in Bomb Alley we had a few. I think the nearest a bomb ever dropped to me was possibly two hundred meters away

10:30 and it hit a tree, but they were around us most of the time in that night bombing when they were hitting the airfields again.

What's the difference, I mean in the sense of your experience, what's the difference between day and night bombing? Is there a greater sense of vulnerability during the night?

At night we felt they were a bit more indiscriminate

11:00 with their targeting. During the day you could see them up there and you could hear the bombs dropping on the airfield, but they seemed to be more accurate in the daytime than at night so your vulnerability was more vulnerable at night because of the indiscriminate targeting, especially when we caught them in the searchlights.

11:30 And the ack-ack was hitting all around them. Saw a couple of them hit and you see them come down, it was very interesting, and we'd cheer and say, "All right, we did our little bit there, we spotted them, we lit them up," and that sort of thing. Yeah, it was more vulnerable at night I felt. Consequently, as I said right at the beginning,

12:00 I had this fear of bombing because it could go anywhere and, strictly speaking, you had nothing to shoot back with. If you were out on a patrol or something like that, at least you've got your own arms. If you get shot at you shoot back.

How frequent were bomber raids?

They had sixty-two in the air, so you couldn't say one a week, or every week, or anything like that,

12:30 it was interspaced, but there were sixty-two documented raids on Darwin. And when we left, we left in March '43, the Spitfires had come up there then, and actually in the stories we heard, again you can only talk about rumours, but we were on the train coming down to Mataranka,

13:00 I think we were passing through Adelaide River when we got the story there was a bombing raid and the Spits [Spitfire aircraft] had gone out after them, and only the bombers came in and they were knocking the bombers down to the point of no return, this is the story we heard, and they started to turn to come back, and that's where the Zeroes [Japanese aircraft] were waiting for them. And that first time the Spits went out I believe they lost a lot of

13:30 aircraft because they had no petrol or fuel left to stay out there. And the Zeroes were a very manoeuvrable aircraft and they got amongst the Spits and knocked a lot of them out. I don't know the exact number.

What was your reaction to this, your personal reaction to this,

14:00 **to your first war experiences, I mean?**

Excited. When you were in actual combat conditions adrenalin used to pump out and you'd get excited and you hoped you could nail one of them with the light or you could spot them first. Sort of competition.

14:30 When you'd see them lit up in the searchlight, that was a good feeling. The thing was to hang onto them; well, you could, there were no jets in those days, it was fairly slow-moving way up there, you could follow them with the lights.

What sort of anti-aircraft guns?

We didn't, they were away from us, I used to know but I can't remember now.

15:00 But there was the normal ack-ack gun.

What would be the procedure normally when a searchlight spotted a plane? You'd obviously try and keep track on it, what would be the next sort of measures that would be taken?

Once we had them, if they couldn't be, if the anti-aircraft didn't take off, you could shoot at them almost straight away,

15:30 you had direct telephone contact with them, and told them where they were. We'd got them with the spotlight and give them a direction towards where to fire. We were in contact with the guns, but they were some way away from us.

I understand Darwin was almost one hundred per cent military wasn't it, there were no civilians there?

Oh, there were lots of civilians there the first raid, in fact, most of the

16:00 casualties were civilians. The biggest lot, of course, was the Post Office, where they got a direct hit in the Post Office slit trench. As I was saying earlier, the newspapers down south kept it low-key. This is where the politicians, again, didn't have faith in the Australians to be told the truth, and they finished up with about twenty-seven people killed and actually there was over two thousand

16:30 civilians in that first raid. It flattened the airfield, just about all the aircraft, the bombers and that that were on the field, they were all knocked out of the air. So Darwin was pretty well devastated. And all the ships that were sunk in the harbour, because there were two raids on that morning,

17:00 one at ten and one at twelve, a few minutes to ten, a few minutes to twelve.

Were the civilians evacuated?

Yes.

So by the time you arrived, were there still civilians being evacuated?

Yes, still being evacuated. Some of them had to be sort of pushed out.

What do you mean, "pushed out"?

They wanted to stay, and we told them we couldn't guarantee their safety or anything like that.

17:30 So yes, there were still civilians there.

Was Darwin considered a rough town?

I never got into Darwin at that time because after the first couple of raids there wasn't any use going in, there wasn't much in there as far as we knew. We stayed mainly in our camp, that's why Darwin was such a boring place to be in for nearly a year.

18:00 Especially immediately after the first raid, there were so many ships sunk in the harbour, we didn't have much in the way of supplies. We were all smokers in those days and we used to smoke the bark off trees or dried tealeaves, anything that would burn, wrapped them up in newspapers, because we didn't get any supplies up there for quite a while afterwards.

Maybe I could ask you for some advice: how did you smoke the bark off trees?

Rub it and roll it and put it in paper.

18:30 A few puffs would be enough, you couldn't smoke much.

You must have been pretty desperate for a cigarette.

At that time I was, I didn't give up until about 1974. That's thirty years, isn't it?

19:00 But I started smoking when I was about twelve, thirteen. I used to get through up to about forty a day.

Now tea leaves, you said you used.

We used to dry it, put it out in the sun, see if they would smoke, but none of them really were a success. As I say,

19:30 it was a boring time in Darwin, except when the action was on. But it was really boring.

Did you encounter any Aborigines?

No. Never saw them then, and even when I was going up in Sydney I never saw them. I knew that there were some out at La Perouse and for tourists and things like that, but I never saw them. I did after the

war when I

went up to Alice Springs, saw quite a lot there. Albert Namatjira used to come in in his utility on the weekends.

What about American soldiers, or Navy, for that matter?

Well, what about them? You know yourself, even through Brisbane, more than a million

American troops passed through.

I'm not talking about that, just Darwin specifically.

Darwin. Not there, never. But then we didn't move very far from our camp, and I think the only Americans that came up there were the Kittyhawk pilots in the air force. I suppose there were other support units, but we never saw any Americans.

Were you expecting Australia to be invaded?

Yes, after the softening-up of the bombing,

and the way the bombing kept up for a month or so we did expect to be invaded by the Japs. They actually loaded our trucks and utes [utilities]

with all our stuff and the idea was to form a front line down at Adelaide River and, if that was taken, to form a front line down at Katherine and so on. But of course it never happened.

Were you confident then that you could fight the Japanese?

No, because we didn't have the materials. The only really defensive weapon we had was Bangalore torpedoes,

which are not very good for taking out barbed wire and things like that. On our rifles for ammunition, we had very little ammunition, we thought that there was enough ammunition amongst all the troops for two minutes' rapid fire and then it was finished. And so, no, we couldn't have stopped them, not on the beaches,

especially seeing them later on in other parts of the Pacific Islands, when we were well-equipped and could handle it, how much firepower they had. Because, make no mistake, the Japanese were at that time the best jungle fighters in the world. They were the best soldiers; they'd been fighting since China, back in the '30's or something like that. So he was a very, very tough opponent.

What were your impressions of the Japanese?

What we thought about them was that, we had to think about them, or we did, that they were animals and they had to be exterminated. We didn't really think of them as human beings. I mentioned the two things that you had to have to survive,

in my opinion, to survive in action was: hatred of the enemy, you had to think of him as an animal, meant to be put out; and the other thing was your mates, you knew you had your mates with you, you knew that they were there for you and again, if ever you were in an attack or you were on patrol, you didn't hesitate or you didn't stay behind at all because you always wondered what your mate would think of you,

because if he was there you had to be there for him. So that old Christian mateship was very, very, very important.

Now, can you walk us through what actually happened after Darwin?

After Darwin we came back south and were put into camp on the coast out from Newcastle,

a place called Hexham. That's where are found the biggest mosquitoes in the world out there, they were so big you could actually feel them land on you, they landed like a 747 [Boeing "Jumbo Jet" aircraft]. But we were in Hexham for a while. Now, I was still into the AIF, I still wanted to go where the action was.

So my Dad had come back from the Middle East, the rest of the troops were coming back and he was up in New Guinea and I asked him, got him to claim me, he could put in a claim, and so that's how I got into the AIF. I went up to New Guinea with him, I was with him for nearly eight months up there.

That's when I went down with this dysentery and malaria. I've told you the story about that.

Before we go into malaria and dysentery, what did you do for eight months there?

I was on an army service unit and we just serviced vehicles, and actually there was a mobile laundry unit attached to it, we used to help out there.

Whereabouts were you stationed in New Guinea?

Outside Port Moresby, out towards where the

26:00 Kokoda Track started. There was a lot of illness there, and casualties with tropical diseases, the same as the battalion that I later joined. I wasn't with them at that time, but they were one of the elite: can I talk about them for a moment?

What's this, your battalion? Yes, absolutely.

2/9th Battalion.

That's who you were working for in PNG [Papua New Guinea]?

26:30 No, I wasn't with them then. I joined them later. I was with the service unit there. But I was just talking about the tropical diseases, I just wanted to mention that the battalion I later joined, we fought at Milne Bay, they actually won their VC there, [Captain] John French, and they fought at

27:00 Cape Endaiadere and Buna, Gona and Sanananda and those places, and at Buna it was a long campaign, they lost ninety six per cent casualties there. But it was mostly, a lot were killed and wounded, but most of it was through these tropical diseases I'm talking about. Back on the other side of Port Moresby, where I was, we lost a couple of chaps from typhoid, died of typhoid. And it was mainly malaria, dysentery

27:30 and that sort of thing that brought our casualties down. I got the two of them at the one time, so I was put into a hospital at Port Moresby. Someone had put me on the casualty list back in Australia as "wounded in action". And I imagine my Mother, "Somebody's doing him damage," and she went down to Victoria Barracks

28:00 and said, "He's too young, he must be brought back." So that was New Guinea, that was 1943 going over into 1944. Came back and I was in this young soldiers' battalion at French's Forest. I was there for a year, they had to hold you for a year.

28:30 Actually, while I was there, we actually broke the Australian ship loading record, we loaded a ten thousand ton ship in about three and a half days. We'd been promised leave as soon as we got it finished. We worked like sons of guns, we worked overtime, unpaid of course, to load this ship in about three and a half days, not bad. Anyway, that was back in Australia. Where do I go from there?

29:00 **I wanted to ask you firstly about when you first got sick, what other diseases that were rampant?**

Bit of beri-beri, there was scrub typhus, various kinds of malaria, there was BT [benign tertian], MT [malign tertian] and cerebral. BT was the mildest; luckily for me that's the one I got,

29:30 that's benign tertian. MT was the malignant and then there was of course cerebral, cerebral was the one that was more or less fatal. Then there were these other things, scrub typhus....

You had typhoid in PNG?

We had typhoid, we had two of our chaps die from typhoid.

30:00 Because the sanitary conditions weren't terrific, you know. The camps they serve in today....

Was cholera a problem?

No, we never knew of any cholera, no. Dengue, and that's about all I can think of at the moment.

Scrub typhus

30:30 **was a particularity nasty one.**

Never ever saw anyone with it but there was a lot of it going on in this 2/9th Battalion in Mount Buna area - well, not just the 9th Battalion, it was most of the units there.

You said you were stationed at Dobodura as well?

No, Port Moresby side of Dobodura. Dobodura is starting to go up into the mountains.

31:00 We were just on the plains below that.

Was there much talk about action at Kokoda at that stage?

Yes, there was by that time. Do you know the story of the 39th Battalion? They fought them to a standstill all the way along the track. I think they were starting to move forward when I was up there. People, fellows were back from the Middle East,

31:30 they'd been starting to move in there in numbers. And that's when the Japs, well of course, the first defeat the Japs ever suffered was at Milne Bay, and that's one of the things that I'm pretty proud of: that's my battalion, [it] was the 18th Brigade, 9th 10th and 12th Battalions that stopped them. I get pretty proud of my battalion because

32:00 another point about them, and I get it in retrospect, is that even at Gallipoli the first two Australians

ashore at Gallipoli were the 1st 9th Battalion. And so they have a reputation in the Second World War as an élite brigade. You know the history pretty well, I should imagine, whenever there was,

32:30 even in Tobruk, the 9th Battalion was used when there was a rough job to be done - of that time, that they were in the Salient for longer than any of the other units - so I get a bit verbose when I talk about it.

Rightfully so.

I was fortunate to be able to join them for the

33:00 last campaign.

Was your Father also in the Army Service Corps?

Yes, in the Second World War, yes.

In PNG?

In PNG.

So you met him up there when you first....?

He trained me, he got me into the unit, that's how I got into the AIF.

Was he in the same unit as you?

Yes, for about eight months, and then I got sick.

That's rather unusual, isn't it?

I don't know.

33:30 In that unit we were the only Father and son. But I suppose it was a bit unusual. But I think it was army policy, especially in fighting units, not to have two members of the same family in the same unit in case they were both lost at the same time.

What was it like serving with your Father?

34:00 I kept out of his way because he was a staff sergeant and I was still a buck private, I kept out of his way most of the time. We were friendly, but nothing in particular, nothing spectacular.

Was he looking out for you?

He didn't need to, because by that time I'd been in the army nearly three years, I considered

34:30 myself independent, and no. And he of course had his meals and that in the sergeants' mess and the ORs, other ranks....

Well one thing I'm curious about is was he disapproving of you being there in the first place, being under-age?

Yes, but he changed his tune after I stayed in, been in that long. I think he was quite proud of the fact that

35:00 when we came back after the war we both joined Coogee RSL [Returned and Services League]. He was pretty proud of the fact. He took me along, introduced me to all his friends.

At this stage you had been there for eight months: you got sick, you came back, now the Millin Dado?

1942.

35:30 **'42? Was this, I'm just getting a little bit mixed up, you came back after that to PNG again, after you went to Australia when you got sick?**

No. After coming back from Darwin we were at Newcastle, Hexham, and it was from there I went to New Guinea, and

36:00 there I got sick and I was sent back to Australia into the young soldiers' battalion in French's Forest, to be held there until I was nineteen and couldn't be sent away.

Where is it, in Brisbane?

No, the GRO [General Routine Order], I still remember the words of it, stated that "If a soldier is eighteen or within two months of attaining the age of eighteen he will not be discharged but he will be returned to the base of the area in which he is serving." The base of the area we were serving, which was New Guinea,

36:30 or PNG as you like to call it, was Brisbane, so I was returned to Brisbane, but then I was allocated down to Sydney into this young soldiers' battalion because what else could they do with me? I had to stay in

the army until I could be sent away again. And so I was there just on a year.

How many people were there?

Oh, there were all the young soldiers coming through, the eighteen year-olds being trained, and they were put

37:00 into these holding battalions until they turned nineteen. So I would say there were four hundred, five hundred at French's Forest - actually the "18th Battalion" it was called, something like that. And that's where we were held until we could go, and then we were sent for further jungle training to Canungra and allocated to our battalions

37:30 from there.

Was your Dad confident about your ability to make it?

Yes. He was a bit apprehensive when he knew I'd gone into infantry because he knew what was involved in actual combat, so yeah, I think he was a bit apprehensive about that. But by that time New Guinea was secured and he'd come back to Australia, and he didn't go away again.

38:00 **Did he convey this to your Mother in any form?**

I don't know about that now, he probably spoke to her about it, I don't know.

When you were away did you write letters to your Mother?

Yes, I wrote home and said what was happening. For the whole of the time we left Australia and went up to Morotai,

38:30 from Morotai and did the invasion of Borneo and then fought in the campaigns there right through to the atomic bomb - it was a matter of about, I would say, nearly two months; the Balikpapan Campaign was only five weeks or six weeks - the rest of the time I wrote on board the ship, and I did write a letter on board the

39:00 troop ship before we did the landing, and then didn't get a change to write again until we came out when the war finished. But we were in fairly continuous contact through letters. And I was always in a safe condition, so that didn't worry her. And of course the letter I wrote aboard the

39:30 troop ship before we went down over into the landing ship certainly didn't give her any reason to worry. I didn't want to give her any reason to worry.

What was the attitude of the young soldiers in the training camp you were at?

Oh, they were all very keen to get on with the job, they were anxious to go up into the Islands because, remember, they would all

40:00 of them go into fighting units. I did keep in contact with some of them, and a couple of our best mates were at the landing of Tarakan and.... But you don't want to hear of his story; you only want to hear about what I've got to say, don't you?

Oh well, I mean you could tell.

40:30 One of them, Randy McGreggman, he lives here in Melbourne, was in the, he went to the 9th Division and this unit that landed at Tarakan in North Borneo, and he was in the platoon that captured the Japanese commanding general, who spoke absolutely beautiful English, he was educated at Oxford [University]. And they were talking to him

41:00 and he said to them that if he'd known it was the Australians landing there on the beaches at Tarakan he'd have taken them out on the beaches because the opposing force to one brigade of Australian forces was forty thousand Japanese on Tarakan. He could have. He thought it was the Americans and it was a sort of accepted thing, and most people knew, that the Americans went in with sheer weight of numbers. And they knew

41:30 wherever the Australians would send a battalion the Americans would send a brigade. If they would send a brigade, they would send a division. He thought, the Japanese thought, that they were coming into the port, not Australians. That was an indication of our feelings of American troops. We never considered them as the best, they let us down too many times.

Tape 4

00:34 **Can you give us a, firstly, were you happy to leave Darwin?**

Oh yes, as I said it was very boring, I had no qualms about leaving, especially about getting away from the sand flies. The sand flies were really terrible, we had mosquitoes too, of course, but the sand flies

were tiny and they would get thorough your mosquito nets and

01:00 they were devastating, I didn't like them. Yes, I was happy to get away from Darwin.

When you were in Darwin, did you feel that your life was under threat?

No, not at that time. At the very beginning, as they were arriving up there, yes, we thought there was a possibility of the Japanese coming, but after they didn't and we just went day after day after day, we didn't feel we were under threat at all.

You said you thought the Japanese

01:30 **were coming. Was Darwin ready for the Japanese if they came?**

No. They were totally unmanned, and they would have been outfought and outshot by the Japanese. No, Darwin was not ready. Darwin was open slather if they had come.

Can you give us a bit more detail about that and why it was open slather?

Not really because, as I've already said, we were in the other side of the airfield and we didn't see much,

02:00 didn't know the overall picture. We were not given much information at all so I really can't comment on that, but we did expect them to come.

Did you know at that time that if they came you would be overrun?

Oh yes, we had our vehicles packed ready to move down,

02:30 and the plan that we understood was that two more front lines would be formed further down, in the Northern Territory at Adelaide River and Katherine,

Was that difficult for a soldier to take, that….?

No, it's just a matter of form. If it was going to happen, this was the next thing that was going to happen. So you took it as it came.

03:00 **Soldiers aren't really fond of moving back, though, are they?**

Moving back?

Giving up ground.

No, we were moving into another sphere, into hand-to-hand combat, on-the-ground fighting. Of course you learned once you had taken a place you give it up at some times, you've got no choice, because a counter-attack could push you back and the fire could become a bit more intense, and

03:30 it was only a tactical move to move back. But in the campaigns that I was in I don't ever remember us giving up ground. There is another boast of our battalion, that we never lost a prisoner from our battalion.

04:00 **How did the others around you feel that if the Japanese came you'd be moving back, the other soldiers that you were with?**

I don't know what was in their minds, but I should imagine they'd feel the same way as I did, that we don't want to go back. But it's a tactical move and you form again so that you live to fight another day. That's the sort of motto that would apply there.

04:30 **How long were you in Darwin before you realised that the attack wasn't coming?**

I would say two or three weeks, we'd be sure. We weren't on tenterhooks, it wasn't long after the first couple of raids and they hadn't come that we started to feel that they wouldn't be coming.

What was the basis of this feeling?

05:00 Well, that they hadn't come. If they were coming the first raids were so devastating that the whole area was softened up to the extent where it would be easy, and that's when an army would normally come. But they didn't come, and so very strongly we got the impression that they weren't going to come.

So they missed a prime opportunity?

They missed a prime opportunity.

Even though

05:30 **was this feeling something that was passed on from commanders and so on, higher-ups to you, or was it just the general feeling?**

I think it would come down from the higher-ups, but we'd get it from our NCOs and we'd presume

they'd got it from the same sort of feeling, if you like to call it that, or even by word of mouth or even by command that they weren't coming.

06:00 **So when this feeling comes that they are not coming at all, how does the battle footing drop then [that] you are on? You would have had at least some preparations to move back and so on. Once you know they are not coming how do those preparations, do they wind them down or....?**

They just fall away, you just unload your trucks and everything

06:30 and stay where you are.

And wait for the next order?

Wait for the next movement order. Yes.

So finally you got the movement orders for you to go down to Sydney, was that as part of your group or as an individual?

No, that was the whole unit went down. We were relieved by another unit.

And then once you were there, you were still under CMF [Citizen Military Forces] and you have a strong desire to be in the AIF?

07:00 Always, yes.

And what was that desire for you to be in the AIF, where did it come from?

I wanted to be where the action was. I'll say it again, I suppose it was the spirit of adventure, because army life can be extremely boring. I think it's a known fact that

07:30 in a fighting unit or battalion or something like that, the vast majority of the time is inaction, a comparatively short time is in action, actually doing the job you were there for. And that all depends on the commanders, of course, where they want the next move to take place.

08:00 You have to get ready, and in between times you'd do training, training, training. It's not a bad thing. I mean during the jungle training at Canungra, that was a really tough course over six weeks and we were doing all sorts of things, especially jungle training, and we'd be put into little swamps and slit trenches and tanks would run over the top of us and all that sort of thing.

08:30 And we'd have fixed line firing by Bren guns, as we were lying on the ground, directly over our heads, so we had to keep our heads down. So it was training, training, training, could be boring but it was also ingraining in the ordinary soldier, giving him every chance possible to stay alive. And training is so important that way.

Did you have jungle training before you first went to New Guinea?

09:00 No.

When you subsequently....?

The next time I went to the Islands, to Morotai in Borneo.

So you are in Sydney, you want to be in the AIF, and you think the best way to get into the AIF is to....?

I was still only eighteen, you can't be sent away until you are nineteen, and you can't be sent away if you aren't a member of the AIF.

09:30 And so I was still busting a neck to get up there. I had this way of doing it by being claimed by my Father, who was already up there.

What was that process for you? Did you write to him, how did you get in contact with him?

Oh yeah, I asked him to make the claim through army headquarters and it was approved and I went up. We went up in a convoy. I remember

10:00 that ship, the troop ship was actually a Liberty ship, you know, those ships they turned out every three days from the shipyards in America, the James W Grimes, and I believe it was sunk back in the Pacific. But we were going up to Port Moresby and there was a submarine scare, so they pulled us into Townsville. We anchored out of Magnetic Island.

10:30 We were there for, it must have been about ten or twelve days. Then the all-clear was given, they took us ashore, gave us a route march around Townsville, back up (UNCLEAR) and then up to Port Moresby. That was a terrible time, cooped up on this Liberty ship, the beds were just a piece of three-ply, about a six by three piece of three-ply on the deck in the holds.

11:00 And it was stinking hot, very uncomfortable.

Was there a smell because of the heat and....?

A couple of them went off, mentally went off their rockers, and they had to be taken ashore and put into psychiatric hospital. But most of the time we played cards, played cribbage or something on deck. Just waited out the time.

11:30 **How did they go off their rockers, these people?**

I didn't actually see them, but they had to be restrained. They wanted to jump overboard, they, I don't know the details of it. But I do know that two of them had to be taken ashore. The heat and the closeness and the inactivity got to them.

12:00 **Do you know, by any chance, if they had seen any action before?**

No, I don't think they had, I don't know if they had.

You didn't know them personally, you just heard about it.

I heard about them.

When you are going up there and there is a submarine scare, what goes through your mind while you are on the ship and that threat's about?

I certainly didn't want to be in the position where

12:30 the scare could become a reality, that would really worry me. I didn't object to the stoppage to make sure everything was clear, because these Japanese submarines were operating quite freely off the coast in 1943, they were sinking a lot of ships lower down, and it's all documented, and the troop ship would be a prime target.

13:00 **How widely-known was it that the Japanese were operating that way?**

It was, now we knew they were there, because the ships were going down, they were ships off the Australian coast. It was widely-known.

In army circles?

Yes.

But in general population?

I think it was kept very quiet.

The general population didn't know,

13:30 **wasn't told much, were they?**

No, it's amazing how much they were not told. In fact it's surprising that they ever kept it quiet, I don't think they ever told the full story of the Midget subs [submarines] in Sydney Harbour. We were up in Darwin when that happened. I think it worried us more than it worried the people, I don't think they were told pretty much about it. They couldn't keep it off completely because of the

14:00 explosions. So no, I don't think the Australian public were very well-informed about the various situations that were occurring around its coasts, and I never said anything, I don't think I talked much.

Do you think they could have handled it if they were told?

Yes, I think so. I don't think there is anything wrong with

14:30 the Australian mind, as far as adversity, like I think they could have handled it. I think it would have made them angry and, whatever work they were doing, made them work harder. But our government at the time thought otherwise.

You probably would have got more people in the army if they knew exactly how under threat we were.

15:00 You know, I don't think Australia could have put many more people into the army than was in there, because in comparison with the size of our population at that time, at least a million, maybe more, people were involved in war service. I don't think they could have done better than they did.

15:30 **When you were actually on the ship and there was a, you were told that there was a submarine in the area, how was that handled?**

We didn't know immediately, we just knew we pulled into Townsville Harbour there and they docked, as I said off Magnetic Island, and then the rumours started going around. It was never ever officially confirmed, but it was a very strong rumour and

16:00 that sort of intelligence quite often is right on the button. And the story was that Japanese subs were outside the reef, and we would stay until the all-clear was given. Of course by that time we were only a couple of days from Port Moresby, which was our port.

Was there a necessity to be quiet

16:30 **with the submarine, did you have to be quiet or anything like that?**

Be quiet? No, because we never really got anywhere within range of it. The Japs' subs were outside the reef, probably waiting at the openings for us to come out. No, we were not told, warned to be quiet, because we were never told officially that they were out there.

17:00 **So finally you reach Port Moresby after a pretty, how would you describe the journey, in a sentence?**

Very uncomfortable, as I said our beds were just three-ply between us and the deck, and the arrival in Port Moresby, it was just great to get off the ship. We were on it much longer than we should have been on it on a direct trip.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but that was your first

17:30 **trip on the sea, was it? So how did that affect you and your love of the sea?**

Yes. It didn't affect it at all, it was an uncomfortable trip but I certainly enjoyed being on board ship. They could have made it more comfortable for us and they could have fed us a bit better but, as far as the sea is concerned, no, it didn't affect my love of the sea at all.

18:00 **Was it a bit of your dreams becoming reality at all?**

No, I knew that this was something very temporary, just between Brisbane and Port Moresby.

So you wanted more of it?

Oh yes. Even today I still love the sea, I'd rather travel by sea than air any time.

So finally you reach Port Moresby and you are probably, for one of the few times in your life, happy to get off a ship?

18:30 Quite happy to get off, yes. They put us into trucks to take us to our camp. We went along the coast and up the ridge and into the inland. I remember crossing the ridge as you came off the coast road, there was this great big banner up there and it said, "Through these portals pass the best damned mosquito bait in the world." And as you went through them

19:00 you looked back and on the other side was, "I told you so." I always remember that, that bit of humour.

Did you happen to know who put that sign up?

The Americans, I think it was the Americans, because the 5th Air Force was operating out of Port Moresby.

Once you got off the boat,

19:30 **tell us, as you are going through the hills and terrain and so on, what terrain did you see, how would you describe it and what impact did it have on you about what you were going to be in for the next....?**

No, it was just a trip through the countryside. It was very green, being in the tropics, and all along

20:00 both sides of the road was visible evidence that the war was on. And there were airfields and there were planes taking off and there were tanks moving around. So everywhere you looked there was certainly totally on a war-centred footing, right through.

You must feel like you are finally at the war.

Yes. I

20:30 would say I strongly had that feeling, yes. Evidence all around. Having come from Australia where you never saw much of it, yes it was. I think they were pretty well-prepared by this stage, in Port Moresby. Port Moresby was the prime objective for the Japanese to launch the invasion of Australia. It was to be Leong [?] Bay

21:00 and Port Moresby, they were stopped at Leong Bay, that's when they moved up and came over the Kokoda.

Was it a sense of exhilaration that you were there?

I felt good, yes, I felt that here was where I should be.

No trepidation at all, or....?

No,

21:30 I suppose it's the old saying, at that time, at that age of nineteen or something, you feel like you are going to live forever anyway, so.... And the other feeling in the infantry units I used to think, "I'm pretty O.K., it's going to be the other fellow," that sort of thing. That's the sort of feeling that I think you had to have. When you are in action and the adrenalin is pumping a bit

22:00 you don't feel that you are going to get killed. That would be a horrible way to feel, knowing that you are there and to have to go forward.

When you were at Port Moresby initially, how was it secured?

We didn't see that picture, we just moved along the road and the action

22:30 taking place there was outside our sphere, only an ordinary private soldier, you know.

So where did you end up, straight from Port Moresby you ended up....?

About nineteen miles inland to where the camp was, where my Father's unit was, getting up into the foothills of the sand dunes.

And when you meet up with him, what was that

23:00 **first meeting like?**

He was glad to see me and I was glad to see him. We chatted about home, I'd come from home. Yes, it was a pretty good feeling. There was no way of celebrating, of course, because Port Moresby was a combat zone, so there was no liquor, no official liquor, but of course you had all the home brew going round about the place.

23:30 I wasn't a drinker in those days.

How long was it since you'd last seen your Father?

He was gone by the time I got back from Darwin, so I would say it was about eighteen months or more, two years, possibly about two years.

That's a long time.

Yes.

24:00 **How old was he when he joined up for World War II?**

That's asking a good question: '39, '40, he was about forty-two, forty-three, it would be something like that. I think he was born in

24:30 1898, so that would be forty-two, forty-three.

Do you know why he wanted to be in World War II?

Just that he'd served in the First War, he was in the Army Reserve right through the peacetime, so it was a natural thing to go on and

25:00 serve again in the Second World War. He just thought it was a progression of what he was doing.

So in a way he was a career soldier?

In a way, except that being in the Reserve it was only monthly camps and a week's camp a year, or something like that. They weren't really, he certainly wasn't in the permanent force.

25:30 **Did it appear to be a passion of his?**

He must have liked it because he wouldn't have stayed in otherwise. I mean the fact that he's got the Efficiency Medal after twenty years' service or something like that....

And he had no ill effects from World War I?

No, only that little bit of carbuncle I mentioned, where a bit of shell fragment came out of.

26:00 He didn't have anything really, physically no ill effects, or mentally, for that matter. He seemed to take things quite easily.

At this point, you meet up with him again; do you remember if you yet understood what war was about and the horrors of war that could happen, or what was your state of mind at that point?

26:30 No, the horrors of war hadn't really imprinted on me at all. It took up to that point. I think I was more concerned about that during the bombing of Darwin, but in New Guinea I really hadn't been facing up to anything like that. That came a bit later when

27:00 I actually went into a fighting unit, an infantry unit.

So, in a way, your Father probably realised that you still had a lot to learn?

I should imagine so, yes.

In that case, where he's in command of you, is he your Father or a commander?

I think he

27:30 was more army than family, doing the job. When not on duty and not doing any army work at all it was a different matter, we chatted. But we didn't become too familiar with each other because he couldn't do that with me, he was in charge of other men too in the unit and he mustn't show his son

28:00 whatsoever any favouritism. And there never was, pretty tight about that.

How did you feel about that?

Quite all right, in fact I felt more freedom, he wasn't breathing down my neck at all. So we lead virtually two different lives, he was an NCO and we were ORs and never the twain shall meet, sort of thing, except not quite like that.

28:30 You didn't socialise with them.

Were you a bit scared that that would happen, that you would get up there and he would be overbearing?

No, I was just happy to get into the area of operations, it was what I'd been wanting to do. And he was the means of getting me there.

How did the other soldiers treat you, with this family connection?

29:00 The way it was, that we didn't have overt family social connections, I was just one of the boys, I was with them, they were mates. No, there was nothing different.

They knew, though, that….?

Yes, they knew.

And they must have, because you were separated, they realised that there was no favouritism, so it was a lot easier on you?

Of course, absolutely.

29:30 **I've just had a thought, [if they] now and then come up, say, "I'm having a bad run with your Dad," can you say something, or anything like that?**

No. I should imagine a couple of them did, I'm sure my reaction would be to say, "Look, I can't do anything about it, you go and sort it out." It would have to be like that.

So when you were at this camp and you are there, did you start doing

30:00 **patrol work and so on?**

No, this wasn't a fighting unit, this was a service unit. You never did any combat stuff.

What were your duties, then?

As I said earlier, we were just a general service unit, of vehicles, and then we had this mobile laundry unit, they used to look after the machines, they used to do all the laundry for the

30:30 general hospitals and that sort of thing, all the sheets and towels, and they were big machines there, too. Imagine doing the laundry for a whole hospital, a couple of hospitals. So no, we were kept pretty busy.

Busier than Darwin?

Oh yes, we worked every day, we weren't just sitting around waiting for something to happen.

31:00 We were busy here, but then after that of course the next part of my army life was going to be totally different.

Just on your service division, were you still hankering to get further into the action?

Yes. I'd achieved that one thing which was first of all get into the AIF, which I did, now I really would

31:30 like to have done something, but I knew I had to wait until the opportunity came. That came when I was sent back to Australia.

So for you it was like stepping stones, one after another?

Yes. It might sound silly wanting to get into a fighting unit, but I wanted to. I wanted to experience that.

For the sense of adventure or....?

Yes.

32:00 **Was there more to it than that?**

It's a sort of, when you saw the newspapers and saw your forces were advancing and taking this objective and that objective and you were so far away from it all, that's where the action was,

32:30 and that's, yeah, you'd like to be amongst it. I did, anyway.

Being a bit younger than the others and so on, was there an influence, all young boys like to play cops and robbers and Indians and cowboys and so on, is there a sense of that and

33:00 **getting a chance to do it for real, was there?**

No, nothing like that because, by that time, having been in the army for a long time, I was much more mature than that, that sort of kids' stuff. I wanted to feel the adrenalin running and that sort of thing and maybe experience a little bit of danger.

33:30 At that stage, you knew you were going to see it through, but nothing was going to happen to you, you were convinced of it, otherwise you wouldn't have been so keen to go. But I wanted to be amongst that sort of thing.

So you felt invincible, it sounds like?

Well, yes. Not invincible, that's a really strong word; you felt like you were going to get through it. You had to feel like that, otherwise....

34:00 **Did you feel that if something would happen, it would happen to the other guy?**

That's the general thing, yes. And you knew if you were going to get hit, if it was going to happen, some other person would catch it.

At this service division, did you find it fulfilling?

Nope. Still, as I mentioned earlier, a bit of a stepping-stone to [other things].

You didn't enjoy the work at all?

34:30 I didn't enjoy it, I didn't not enjoy it. Doing each day's work as it came. Certainly wasn't the sort of job you could get into enthusiastically.

So after this camp you moved to where?

That's when they took me back to Australia and to the young soldiers' battalion in French's Forest.

After your Mother found out and you got sick and

35:00 **so on, who told, who sent the letter that you were wounded in action?**

I don't know. I don't know where it came from, but it was listed in the casualty lists back in Australia.

Do you think it was your Father?

No, he wouldn't have done that. Just someone got it wrong.

35:30 All the lists were sent back every day, I suppose, from the hospitals and that; they just happened to put me in the wrong list.

And so when she saw it you are no longer in the Boy Scouts?

Yes, that's right, it must have dawned on her that it's not a Boy Scout operation.

How difficult was the illness for you?

36:00 I was in a coma for I think they said ten days. Dysentery and malaria both at the same time, I was pretty sick. I don't think it was really life-threatening, but they gave you, treated you with drugs and plasma quin [quinacrine] was the one big one they used to pour into us. And of course the malaria stayed with me for years afterwards. It finally disappeared.

36:30 Luckily, as I said, it was BT malaria and it wasn't life-threatening at all. But it makes you horribly sick. You shake and you get hot and cold, huge headaches, and then to have dysentery at the same time, that was pretty hard to take. But, being young and resilient, it wasn't a problem.

37:00 **Where were they treating you in Port Moresby?**

At the 2/1st, it was either the 2/1st or 2/5th 88th Australian General Hospital. I can't remember which one.

What do you remember about the conditions at that hospital?

They were good. They were mainly under tents, they had full nursing staff and doctors.

37:30 No problems with it.

Clean?

Clean, oh yes. Don't forget they had been fighting – well, not fighting, but serving - for the last four years in the Middle East and so on, so they were very highly-experienced.

So when you get the orders to go back home, were you sick at this stage?

No, recovering.

38:00 The day the sister came and told me to pack up, I thought I was going back to the unit and she told me I was going home. , I was actually playing Chinese chequers, I was the Chinese chequer champion of the ward, playing, and she said, "Pack up, you are going home." Then it all came out.

When you returned, did it all come out

38:30 **that….?**

That sister said I'd been recalled to Australia as I was too young to be in the army.

Did you know at that time the full story, that your Mother had….?

No.

And how did you react to that news?

Happy. I'd had eight months up there and that was fine, I knew I'd just,

39:00 time to move on. I didn't know at that time what unit I'd be going to, but I knew that it was time to move on.

Because, even thought you were dobbed in for your age, you would have been under-age by only a few months by now.

One month.

One month?

Yes. I was only a month from turning eighteen.

But in order to be in the AIF, you have to be nineteen,

39:30 **so you are a year and a month from being where you want?**

Yes, still.

But still, you survived three years.

Two and a half, yes, getting on that way, from '41 to '44.

So I'm a bit surprised it wasn't more disappointing to you,

40:00 **considering your dreams and aspirations of getting into AIF.**

But there is no combat there in the service unit. So time to move on and see what else is coming up.

You didn't think it de-railed your plans at all?

No. I didn't have any real plans, I just had desires, no formal plans, just desires. But I wasn't getting the results that I was after, so time to move along.

Tape 5

00:31 **OK, so you are, how did you get involved with Cowra, if you would like to walk us through?**

We were in a holding, they were using us for all sorts of duties while we were waiting to turn nineteen. And when the Japs [Japanese prisoners of war] broke out of Cowra, they killed a few of our people doing it, we, as a battalion, were sent down to Cowra. They piled us into these trucks with big cages on them, drove around in them: it was quite embarrassing, it was right through the middle of Sydney,

01:00 we all looked like prisoners on the back of this truck. We were holding our rifles up against the side of this cage so people could see we weren't prisoners. Anyway, we got to Cowra, and most of them had

been rounded up and we rounded up the dregs and put them back into the camp. Another reason for the Cowra outbreak was because they were told the officers and the men were going to be separated. They didn't want this and they rioted and they broke out of Cowra.

01:30 When we got them back into the camps they were told they had got to be moved so they would go together. What they did was they put the officers in a lot of trucks but they interspersed those trucks with the other ranks. So they were all together in the same convoy, but as they drove out of Cowra - there is a fork in the road there, one way goes to Yass and the other goes to Hay - as they came up from the camp, we came up in the convoy.

02:00 We were all around them with our guns and machine guns and one was standing in the passenger seat in the manhole through the roof with our guns in case they gave trouble. We reached the y section and the convoy with all the officers took off down the Yass road and all the ORs in the other truck took off, one going one way and one like that, and took the two convoys. Well, the noise and the racket

02:30 the Japs kicked up, but they couldn't do a thing about it. But that's how we got them down into their separate prison camps, because they had to be separated because the officers were inciting the troops to rioting and to causing trouble.

When you first arrived, you had to go on foot patrol

03:00 **to look for Japanese, I take it?**

No, they were mostly rounded up when we got there, but we had to keep them confined into the prison camp because there were so many broken fences. If ever, have you been to Orange before? Have you seen that display they've got there? That's very well done. Well, you know what it's all about, then.

Was this the first time you saw Japanese?

Yes.

03:30 Actually saw them, yes.

Outside the planes, I mean.

Actually saw them, yes.

What did the Japanese soldiers look like? Were they fitting the sort of image you had of them?

Fairly well. They were mainly on the smaller side, the ones in the normal Japanese army. The ones that landed, say, at Bantam Bay were Korean marines and they were big fellows, they were six foot.

04:00 They were the élite forces of the Japanese Army so they had the big ones from Korea and so on. But the ordinary Japanese soldier was a bit on the small side and he did, a lot of them, lots and lots of them wore glasses. Lots of them had a buck teeth look about them. That's the ones we saw. In fact, I saw more Japs at Cowra than I saw in Borneo. But that was because they were so good.

04:30 Our big problem in the Borneo Islands, including New Guinea, was snipers. You rarely saw the fellows that shot you.

Which we'll talk about later, of course, you made a very interesting point there. So basically, when you came to Cowra, I just want to validate this, you came to Cowra, they'd all been rounded up by this stage, you were just in a garrison guard role?

That's right. And to make sure the escorting out went off without [trouble and] separate them going out along the road to Yass and to Hay.

Did you accompany them

05:00 **to Yass and to Hay?**

Only as far as the crossroads, and saw them on their way there.

So you said that they were still protesting.

Yes, there were still protesting, they didn't want to be separated.

When you say "protesting", what exactly were they [doing]?

Screaming, because the Japanese are a noisy person. I'll tell you another story, I'll mention that too. But they were noisy, they knew how to make a big noise. Screaming and yelling.

05:30 In Japanese, of course.

Were any actually physically trying to disobey?

The officers incited them.

Even at that stage?

Even at that stage, yes.

What was the view of the younger soldiers who were with you?

With me?

06:00 **You were one of the few who had some experience; how did they react to the Japanese when they first saw them in Cowra?**

They followed the lead there of the bit more experienced people, and their own officers. They knew what they had to do, they were trained, they had been in the army for the best part of a year already and most of it in training, and so they knew what they had to do. They weren't fazed by it at all, they were ready to shoot them if they

06:30 became dangerous. We all had live ammunition.

But I understand that there were a lot of soldiers that particularly hated the Japanese?

Yes, well, that was one of the things that you had to have if you wanted to survive, especially in a fighting unit. You had to look on them with total hatred.

07:00 You had to look on them as an animal that had to be exterminated, that's what it amounts to. That's the way we had to be.

That's the way you did look at it?

Yes. Because they never took prisoners, and we didn't take prisoners. Well, we took two, the battle before me, my battalion took two, this was up in the Ramu Valley, going towards Shaggy Ridge, and they sent them back with the fuzzies [native inhabitants] to

07:30 headquarters, but they didn't get very far. The fuzzies came back and said, "This is all nonsense." Of course they told them they tried to escape so they took them out. So we didn't take prisoners. In fact the story around it was that you don't take prisoners, not with the Japanese.

With Cowra, was there anything else you didn't tell us about?

No.

08:00 Nothing, really, we were there and then we went back.

How long were you there for?

Only a matter of two or three days.

Did your formation there at that holding camp, soldiers' holding camp, did that have an actual designation, a name?

Battalion, 18th,

08:30 maybe 18th Training Battalion, I think that would be it. But it was the 18th Battalion.

What happened after Cowra, you were sent to French's Forest, is it?

French's Forest, that was our base camp, and they used us when there was a strike or hold-ups on the wharves. We used to go in and load the ships.

09:00 And then just before we broke up and moved off to our units and to Canungra, they had the whole battalion had to change camp from French's Forest to Singleton. Singleton became the big major, it is today I think, training camp. We had to march to Singleton. It was the longest route march ever done in Australia, I think it was about one hundred and eighty miles.

09:30 We did it in twenty-odd days or something.

Before you went to Canungra I understand you were involved in a wharfies' strike, where you had to unload ships?

That's when we were at French's Forest. They used us to run, when the wharfies went on strike and the ships had to go, they called us, the army, in and we loaded ships.

What type of cargo did this involve?

Mainly it was either

10:00 general cargo, supplies or ammunition, and one spectacular ship, it was the first beer ship for New Guinea when new Guinea was declared a "wet" island, after the island had been secured. And we broke the Australian longest loading ship record: took us about two and a half weeks to load ten thousand tons, when we should have done it in about four or five days.

Beer, you said?

10:30 We were working six hours on and twelve off. We'd go down in teams and half the team would be in the hold taking crates of beer off, and the other half, first thing we did when we got in was to build a wall about a metre and a half away from the sides of the ship, with a gap, we'd get behind it, and a little counter; and so while half were unloading, the other half were

11:00 enjoying themselves, drinking beer. Then we'd swap that around. Apparently we got pretty sozzled every time on ship. They'd take us back on the truck to French's Forest, and [we'd] fall into bed. In two and a half weeks, even to this day I don't know if I ever had anything to eat. But that was it, six hours on and twelve off. We drank so much beer. We still had enough to go to New Guinea.

11:30 **What was the attitude towards the wharfies?**

The wharfies were an enigma, as far as I'm concerned. The stories that went around and why they were on strike.... I can give you two instances of ships that they struck on and I don't how true it is, but in my mind it would be true. The first was a mid-week race meeting the wharfies wanted to go to, so they found a reason to strike.

12:00 The other one was when there was something else on, the reason they gave for the strike was that they were loading twenty-four cases of bully beef to a crate then putting them into the hold and discharging, and they said it was too many, they wanted to load twenty-two, so that was another strike. Out come the army again, we had to load that ship.

Basically they were hated?

Hate's a strong word, but there was a bit of contempt for them.

12:30 This was wartime. The same thing happened on another ship we didn't work on, but they were loading ammunition to go out to the soldiers in wartime and they went on strike. They were very strong, wouldn't say communists, but they were very strong. The wharfies were strong in those days.

13:00 They, we never had much respect for them at all.

What happened after that, after French's Forest?

We continued training, then we turned nineteen in batches and all of us had to go through Canungra.

Tell us the story of Canungra, what happened to you in the training?

13:30 In Canungra we were there for six weeks and it was really tough training, but it was very good training because there was jungle training most of us had never experienced before. And have you ever been up to Canungra? It's on the border of New South Wales and Queensland.

Yes, I would have been past it.

The rainforest. Then we'd go out on manoeuvres, we'd sleep out in the forests and try to sling hammocks and that, water-filled, and that sort of thing.

14:00 We were taught how to keep our head down because they'd do what they called "fixed line firing", with Bren guns firing about eighteen inches above our heads, and we crawled along with live ammunition. We'd have night-time manoeuvres where we'd be attacked, they'd form attacking teams and defensive teams and so on. They had us down at a place called Wasp Creek, where it was swampy land but they could dig slit trenches, and they ran tanks

14:30 right over the top of us to get us used to tanks. That was a bit scary when you'd see these tracks because you'd wonder if the slit trench would hold their weight. That's in the area of what is now the Gold Coast, they were there at that time. The training we did for six weeks, and when we came out of Canungra we were really, really fit and ready to go, and

15:00 then we were assigned to our various battalions. That was when I joined the 2/9th Battalion.

Did you volunteer specifically to join that battalion?

No, we were just allocated the battalions. Never volunteered. But they were out on the Tablelands, and the whole 7th Division preparing for the invasion of Borneo. From there we sailed up to Morotai.

15:30 Morotai, as you would know, the method of warfare there and island-hopping, was to take an island that could be strategic, only take enough of it for what you needed, put troops around that perimeter to keep any Japs out, and they'd use that as a base and island-hop. Morotai was like that. So we boarded the troop ships in

16:00 Morotai. They took us around to the Halmaheras and did mock landing there as a practice, practice landing, back on board the ships and we sailed around up the coast of Balikpapan in Borneo and arrived there in the night-time, of course.

Before you proceed with Balikpapan, which I'd like to address a little bit separately, Canungra training, what sort of advice were they giving you? I'm sure they must have been experienced

16:30 **people who had all fought.**

They were giving us the benefit of their experience up in the jungle for various infantry people, from infantry units who had fought up through Mandalay through Java, Africa and all the way up. And we were taught, the way the warfare was being done there was you were paired, if you were reinforcement especially, you were paired with a veteran and you worked as two men.

17:00 And you had tents, the tents were two-man tents which acted as a rain cape, then you clipped them together and make a two-man tent. When you dug in for the night, if you were moving in action, you dug into a two-man slit trench, so that's where you got your mateship, you were with your cobber and you got to rely totally upon him, and him upon you. That's what they were teaching us at Canungra.

17:30 And the other thing was, if you know Canungra you'd know that Mount Tamborine is right there, and we used to have to scale that at night, in the dark with full pack and fighting equipment. That was part of the training. So Canungra was very, very good. It saved a lot of lives, I'm sure. I understand it also took a number, because people were killed on that training

18:00 course. I don't know if it ever came out officially, but that actually did happen.

Did you see someone that….?

No, not in my batch. That's the only time I've ever been caught with my pants down. I had an urgent call to the latrine on a night manoeuvre, and while I was on there we came under attack, a defensive unit, and I got captured in the latrine with my

18:30 pants around my ankles. Anyway, that's not for publication, I suppose.

How long did you have training in Canungra for?

Six weeks.

Can you tell us physically what sort of things would these experienced veterans be saying, what sort of advice would they be giving?

They would tell us about the Japs, and that's where I first heard they were very noisy and also

19:00 where we first heard that if you shot a Jap he squealed like a pig. And they just about invariably squealed like pigs. They told us how you had to keep a watch for snipers; you see, snipers haven't been given the attention I think they deserve because so many of our chaps were killed and they never ever saw who killed them, because you couldn't spot them.

19:30 Some of the Jap snipers had big records of ten or twenty kills to their credit because they hadn't been spotted. And especially in the Buna area that was rife, and the Cape Endaiadere. So this is what the vets [veterans] gave us, the benefit of their experience. And the type of warfare that we were fighting then was there was a movement warfare, you were what was called, you were in contact with the enemy all the time,

20:00 you kept pushing and pushing on him. And you would be divided into company action and one platoon would be up making the fielding moving, the other one here in support and another one in reserve. Then the next day, you'd dig in at night, and the reserve one would move up to the front, the support would move up to support and the front support one would go in

20:30 the front and the front one would drop back in reserve. And that's the way you keep moving right through Borneo, in my experience in Borneo, so the Japs never quite knew where we were. And then of course on top of that we had roving patrols, we had roving patrols and recce patrols. You want more of that? You haven't got to that yet?

21:00 **I'll bring you back. Hearing this advice was invaluable. What did they say about specific tactics, though, Japanese weapons tactics?**

We learned about the Japanese heavy machine gun, the "woodpecker", they had light machine guns too and they had these long, long, almost sniper rifles: long barrels, longer than ours. We had

21:30 examples of their weapons shown to us, just in case we ever lost one of our own and found one of theirs, we'd know how to operate it. As far as tactics was concerned, that was purely sort of follow-my-leader, you had him with you showing you the way. It was really no instruction you could get about it except how to toughen yourself up, make use of the jungle and make use of the rainforests to your advantage.

22:00 We did patrols, how a patrol was formed with a first man, second man and so on, a getaway man at the back, and then your Bren gun was in the middle. So all that sort of thing was told to us, what to do if we got ambushed and so on.

Did they tell you how the Japanese tend to ambush?

Yes, they had different methods.

22:30 In the high grass, you know the grass grows so high?

Kunai grass?

Kunai grass, yes, so high; or else, like the one ambush I remember, we were.... I'm jumping ahead again, but.

It's doesn't matter, but you can give us the example.

We came on this little row of huts up in Borneo, the people were still there, we were talking to them. We

23:00 had what they called NICA people with us, we had NICA people and we had Dyaks with us, they were natives. The NICA people were the Netherlands Industries Civil Administration who knew the area and knew the lingo and could translate for us. And the Dyaks, we were lucky we had them on

23:30 our side, because the one we knew hated the Japs, and he actually collected trophies. His trophies were ears, and he had them strung on a belt around his waist so that [showed when] he'd killed any Japanese. But at this particular little row of huts, there was a little village, our NICA chap was questioning where the Japs were and they all were mumbling and they were pretty scared,

24:00 and the reason they were scared, was because the Japs were there and had told them if they betrayed them they'd be killed, and they were around the back of the huts, inflating fire down between the huts. Our patrol, two of our chaps went down, so with the training we had we all scattered and

24:30 the getaway man, the one at the back, was supposed to get back to camp and get help and bring them up. And I happened to be the getaway man on this occasion, I managed to find my way back to camp and we brought out the rescue and met up with the rest of the chaps that had scattered everywhere. And we took an Opip officer with us, you know, observation post artillery officer, to bring in artillery fire.

25:00 And we came back overlooking this village and the Opip officer brought in ranging fire and then our two chaps were there in the middle of the road and it was obvious - it was possible, I should say - the Japs were using them as a bait for another ambush. So when the artillery came over and blowed [them] down, one was dead and the other was

25:30 wounded, so, that's the sort of thing these chaps were telling us about how to scatter and get back and bring reinforcements and all that sort of thing. That's what we were training in at Canungra.

So the Canungra training was crucial?

Yes, it was good. Saved a lot of lives.

You never had this before you went, when you went to New Guinea?

No.

No training whatsoever?

No, not in

26:00 Service Corps. This was real, dinky-die training.

Once you had done infantry training and met other experienced soldiers, did you on your own basis ask them questions out of your own curiosity?

No, because they covered just about everything. There was nothing else. Not having the experience you didn't know how to phrase your questions, you didn't really have any questions you could ask. They

26:30 had covered everything, probably everything you could ask.

I will come back to more general questions later. OK, so you got to Morotai, tell us more about Balikpapan from there, the invasion.

Right, at Morotai of course we went aboard the LCI first, the Landing Craft Infantry, we got taken out aboard the troop ships,

27:00 we were on the Kanimbla, then, when the whole troop convoy was ready, there were quite a lot of ships, we went of to the Halmaheras, trial landing, practice landing, and then sailed for Balikpapan on the evening of the,

27:30 is it 31st of June, the 1st of July? It was the evening, 31st of June, is it?

I'm not exactly sure. End of the Oboe [Tarakan landings] operation.

Anyway, when we woke up in the morning, there was one of the most awesome sights I've ever seen in my life. You looked out and - I found out later, I didn't sit there and count them - but there were over three hundred ships in that

28:00 convoy, the sea was literally covered in them, everywhere you looked you could see ships. And then the air force had been bombing the land. See, for that operation I believe there were two landing points planned and one of them, they were going to do one, but there were options: one was further up

28:30 the coast and then you fight your way down; and the other was to go straight in at Balikpapan on the beaches and [it] had the residential area there, Klandasan, and Parramatta Ridge was up there on the top with the oil tankers and the oil farms, there were tank farms, and that's where the beaches [were that] we were going in on, Red Beach and Yellow Beach, if I remember rightly. But before that,

29:00 the troop ships had to anchor quite a long way out from the shore at sea, it was quite rough, and then we had to go over the side into the LCI. But the sea was so rough that the LCI would be twenty feet or more down below one moment and then it would be up here the next minute, and you were going over the side with packs and gear, ammunition and rifle and

29:30 so it was pretty difficult boarding those LCIs. And then we left the side of the ship, and were forming up, and we were the second wave to go ashore and they, just about everyone, there was a stinky smell because just about everyone was seasick and they were really, really seasick. In fact, I think just about all of us didn't give account at all on

30:00 how many Japs might be ashore, we were just glad to get ashore. Luckily at Balikpapan the landing was quite light, there wasn't much fighting at all. But later on we had to go into the caves and things like that. We got ashore and we made our first day objective there and we waited there, and then we just kept going. We went round to Klandasan,

30:30 they went over, one of the other battalions, 2/10th I think, went over the top into Balikpapan and took the town and secured it. We did meet quite a bit of opposition then, but it really stiffened when we went up further up the coast. OK, are we all right up to there? Are we going to move on?

That's a good overview. Do you think that,

31:00 **or can you tell us if the training operation you had at Morotai, or the mock landing, was that sufficient for the real thing?**

Well, it had to be, that's all the time that was available. But it was helpful, it must have been helpful because everyone got to understand their particular jobs better and we go to know all the Navy operating the landing crafts,

31:30 knew how we had to form up to take the waves in. And so yes, it was very, very helpful, I would imagine. We didn't have to make the rough sea up and down on the landing ropes over the side of the ship, we didn't have to do that, because nothing can prepare you for what we did eventually get there off the beaches of Balikpapan.

32:00 **In the training operation, did you find any particular things difficult that also resonated in the operation itself, the day of the landing?**

No, it was all pretty straightforward. You had to get over the side of the ship and get into the LCI and get in to shore and wherever you saw the enemy, shoot him.

Were these barges?

32:30 No, these were called LCIs, Landing Craft Infantry; they were like barges, not the big ones, with the front ramp, the low-down ramp, they'd drop the ramp and we were lucky - some of the ramps were dropped in fairly deep water, but we were dropped onto the beach.

This was in training?

No, this was in actual combat.

The actual combat?

Yes.

So was that something that concerned you at the training?

When they landed us on the beach?

Yes.

33:00 No, we just trusted the Navy for that.

The day of the actual landing, can you describe the actual, what you saw that day you got up and went up the ship….?

Well, beside all those ships, of course, and then they were still bombing the beaches from the aircraft carriers and the warships were still shelling, and there was a lot of noise and a lot of smoke. But we were never in any actual

33:30 danger, except seasickness. They were dropping explosives onto the beach, almost right up to the point where we went ashore. The first wave got ashore and we followed after them and just moved up the beach. A few shots were fired, but they were too far away from where we were. But then we started meeting opposition from caves, because they

34:00 had a long, long time to prepare their defences on there, and the flamethrower did an excellent job, I believe. I didn't see any of that, we were moving down through the vegetation.

So there was no, when you actually got off on the beach, there was no resistance as such, Japanese?

Not in our particular part. There were some shots fired further along.

34:30 They might have got a bit of opposition, but actually where we landed there was very little.

Have you seen Saving Private Ryan [feature film]? How accurate was that to what the Omaha operation was like?

Yes, oh there can't be any comparison there, you mean the actual landing?

Well, in sense of combat, and obviously you didn't have an Omaha Beach episode [part of the D-Day landing, the allied invasion of Europe in 1944] at Balikpapan, but just curious, in the sense of the contrasts there?

Look, a beach is a beach, I suppose.

35:00 The Americans always put in a lot more manpower than we did. Our job was just to get ashore and make sure that the tank landing craft and that could get in there. That's what we did, we made our first day objective, we got there, we were supposed to get there about three o'clock and we got there about twelve, so we just stopped there, and you don't move on because

35:30 you could me moving into an area where there was shelling or bombing, so we stopped, and the landing at Balikpapan was fairly simple.

You said you moved through a residential area, how big is Balikpapan town?

No, not - how can I give you an idea? It was an oil town here where the oil pipelines came right down

36:00 from the tank farms and so on. How can you compare it to....? I think Dandenong's a bit big for it. It wasn't a massive town, but I couldn't give you any real idea of how big it was. But most of the Dutch people lived in this residential area.

36:30 There were nice homes, some very nice homes, but very badly damaged with the bombing and shelling. And we were looking to see if we had to do any street fighting or that, but we didn't. They had all moved out.

So when you went to the neighbourhood there was no [combat]?

No, very little. There was a bit, but not much.

What can you tell us about these incidents, when your platoon or section or whatever had to fight?

37:00 Oh, we didn't get into any sort of fire fight there. I suppose, you must remember that Balikpapan was the first time in the history of World War II that the Division had worked together as a division, they'd always been separated, so we had plenty of troops, we had

37:30 all the confidence in the world that we could take this place easily. So actual shooting, I didn't see any, I didn't see any Japs until we came to – well, until we crossed the bay to Penadjim, into operations against them all along the Riko River [when] we started to have our fire fights.

Is that where the caves were?

They were further up the beach, they were in the side of the cliffs.

38:00 That what they call Parramatta Ridge, along there. And that's where they had storage, they'd store stuff.

So this was your first combat experience, really?

Yes.

Tell us about the first fire fight you got into in Balikpapan.

Right, as I said we had two-man tents, two-man trenches. You circled with your mate. The first time

38:30 I was, we were moving up thorough the Riko River and our main objective was the Riko village, which was a big Japanese base, they were in contact with the enemy. We had dug in for the night and we did what we call "fifty per cent pickets", you stand up and kept watch half the night then the other fellow does the other half. And

39:00 it was stinking hot and I was conscious of where we were, and nothing happened during the first night, of course, when you are standing up like that, and you knew the business, you can see enemy all over the place. They are not there but you can see them, or you listen to them. Your head's going all the time,

it certainly keeps you awake. But then it was his turn to take over, and when you dig your trench

39:30 for the night you pile your hand-grenades in one corner, ready for use. And then the Japs came in with an attack. They came up this gully, we could hear them - I told you they were very, very noisy - and the firing started and I jumped up and got my rifle, and the veteran with me

40:00 said, “They are down there, throw grenades.” So I picked one up and threw it, picked up another one and threw it, picked up another one and threw it, until I’d thrown them all, and it wasn’t until it was all over that I realised that I hadn’t pulled the pin out of any of them in the excitement, not one single pin. Not that I could have done any, the only damage I could have done was hit them on the head with a grenade. The adrenalin was going, I was all excited and

40:30 I picked up my rifle and started shooting then. We stopped them, at that time.

Tape 6

01:03 **So this was at night?**

Yes, a night attack.

And your friend reacted by saying….?

He was bloody upset, he called me all sorts of “stupid bastard” and “fucking idiot” and said, “You not only wasted the bloody grenades, you didn’t hit anything.” No, it was quite an experience and we laughed about it afterwards, of course.

01:30 At the time it was just adrenalin flowing and excitement and, as I said earlier, when a Jap got hit invariably he squealed and we could hear them, so we must have been getting amongst them. And then they took off.

So the attack wasn’t successful?

No, they didn’t get to us. They didn’t get very close to us at all. But

02:00 I mean it wasn’t anything like hand-to-hand, it was fewer of them shooting back and our fire was a bit more superior to theirs.

Was this during the night?

That was a night attack.

In the jungle?

Yes, well, it was in a gully, we were in a grassy knoll, so we had the advantage of being up higher and shooting down on them.

02:30 **Can you tell us what it’s like to fight in the night?**

To me it was exciting. I don’t think, I never heard any shots go past but I knew they were firing at us. I could hear the crack of their weapons.

03:00 And yes, I wasn’t worried, no, I knew we were on top of it. Look, when you are actually - and I can only talk from my experiences - when you are actually fighting against them, when you are actually shooting against them, it’s more excitement; might be a bit of fear there but not a great deal. It’s only afterwards that I, anyway, felt

03:30 and shook a bit, only because it could have been close, that sort of thing. You didn’t ask your mates how they reacted or anything like that; you just assumed they were doing it as if they had been doing it all their lives, the ones who had been to the Middle East especially, in my battalion, because

04:00 they had a real hard time of it fighting down in the Middle East, with fighting the first action down at a place called Jerabub and then spending about eight months in Tobruk and then fighting in Syria and so, when you saw them being as calm as they are, they certainly had that effect on you.

What division were you in, by the way?

7th Division.

Tell us about the experienced veterans, what sort of impact did they have? Were there many of them in that particular battalion?

04:30 Still had quite a few, a lot of them served in the Middle East. I think it was General Eichenberg, the American general, that said that the 18th Brigade, as far as he was concerned, was the élite of all troops that he’s ever come in contact with. And certainly our battalion had an excellent reputation for

getting a job done.

05:00 And they had a bad time of it up throughout New Guinea to Buna and on Shaggy Ridge. As I said, they lost ninety-six per cent casualties at one time.

Was that your battalion?

Yes, that was my battalion.

05:30 **What happened after that first fire fight that you had, where was the next encounter?**

We did a lot of patrolling and moving forward to where we were next time, and every now and again we'd come across them, we'd chase them and fire on them, and then they'd disappear into the grass and we'd move forward again. We were always very cautious. And then when we got in our position

06:00 we'd call in an air strike and they'd pummel them and [we'd] move into them again, and that's how we kept going, kept moving, so he never knew where we were or how close we were. Well, he knew how close we were, because he felt us on his tail. But then we saw the results of our actions, just go along and there would be dead Japs lying on the ground, that sort of thing.

06:30 **Because you were moving forward, you would have had to be aware that the Japanese were trying to ambush you, I presume?**

If we gave them the time to set up an ambush, it happened, but I was only involved in that one. But other units did run into ambushes, but by that time we were well aware of what was going on, the forward scout

07:00 had a pretty good idea. We had one fellow right up the front, the forward scout, then the bulk of the patrol, and they had a pretty good idea of where the Jap was. And at the first sign of any action we'd go off the track and then we'd try and outflank them all or take them head-on.

07:30 **Were there any large encounters you were involved in?**

No, not at that time. Most of the resistance on Balikpapan came up on the north coast, north of Balikpapan, with the other battalions. After Balikpapan we were sent across the bay to this, I mentioned Penadjim, and back out to the beaches and

08:00 boarded the, they have another name for them, they are like ducks, they are amphibious vehicles, and the whole lot of us piled into these, I don't know how many numbers, any way, a long string of us, and very slow, about six kilometres an hour, across the bay and took Penadjim, because there was known to be two dual-purpose Japanese guns up on the cliff there. And we took along a couple of tanks with us, but when we got to the bottom of Penadjim there, they were off the

08:30 landing craft straight into the sand and mired down there, and still to this day they didn't go into action at all. But as we went up onto Penadjim, up onto the cliff there, these dual-purpose guns, they can be used high on a trajectory for anti-aircraft and lowered, they were actually lowered, and when we looked down the barrel they were almost at the place that we

09:00 were coming across. Why they didn't open fire we don't know. And some of their food was still warm on the table, they'd taken off when they saw us come ashore. So that's where we came back to after they dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We came back and we sat up on Penadjim for a while. We weren't very happy about that, because

09:30 we'd come back and the news that the war was over had been acknowledged. Celebrations were going on over in the Bay, at the town of Balikpapan, they were firing off all their guns and big guns and stuff like that in celebration, and that time we were supposed to get two bottles of beer per man per week, that

10:00 was our ration, you never got it while you were in action, of course, but it was supposed to have been saved for us. So comes these celebration, and the story goes around, "The beer ration is coming." It came across all right, and we were very upset because they gave us one bottle of beer that night and one the next morning, that was it. Who got the rest of our beer accumulated from the time we'd left Australia, we still don't know, but

10:30 it was very upsetting. In fact, the army did a few upsetting things to us after that.

Such as?

Such as one of the big upsets was, instead of going back to Australia as a battalion, they broke us up over Balikpapan, they sent us to different units because you had your different points systems, you know all about that, and they were sending them as their points came up.

11:00 I think we would have all preferred to wait a little while and go as a battalion. Of course the married men had big points and they all went first. In fact we didn't, personally I'd been in quite a long time, we didn't actually go home till March the next year, six months later. We sat at Balikpapan. That was the one big disappointment, that they sent us to other units, we went to an ordering sub.

11:30 The next big disappointment was that before that they were going to send us, briefing us to take over all the islands between the Kai Islands near New Guinea to Bali, all those all islands, to release POWs [prisoners of war] and people like that. Then that fell through. The next thing, they said, "You people, troops,

12:00 are going to Malaya to release our 8th Division POWs in Malaya," so we were excited about this, we were going to help our POWs. They stopped that and they sent a paratroop battalion from Australia, never been out of Australia as a battalion, most of them had seen action in other units but as a battalion they'd never been out of Australia. They were given the job of going to Malaya and releasing all our POWs.

12:30 So yes, they didn't do very nice things for us. The only one thing, sorry, at that time, I'm sorry, that actually in the excitement they called for volunteers from the infantry battalions to joint the VCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] to go to Japan, so I thought, "All right, I'll be in that."

13:00 The only thing, I started thinking that I hadn't been home for so long and I suppose I was feeling homesickness and that, so I withdrew. Since then I wish I'd gone to Japan, that would have been nice, as an occupying force. So that's about it, as far as the wartime experience is concerned.

You said that there was fighting in the cave outside of

13:30 **Balikpapan?**

Not from our side. You mean with the flamethrowers? They were holed up in there, they were well-defended, they had to fight to get them out or kill them.

Did you actually witness that from a distance?

No. We were moving down around the other way.

Did you witness any other battles?

As such, no; most of the action I saw was hot pursuit.

14:00 No standing battles as such except at the very landing, and that wasn't really a battle because the opposition was so weak.

Can you tell us what the artillery bombardment of Balikpapan was like?

The beaches? Well I can only say how noisy and how continuous it was, because it was not just the bombers coming over, it was the fighter-bombers

14:30 and the rocket fire, I think they were Typhoons or something like that. And it was brilliant watching them because you could actually see rockets leave the wings of the plane, they'd wobble a bit and as they hit the ridge they'd "pfffeeewww" as they came in. And then of course the warships were shelling and moving the barrage up and down the beaches, and as our fellow were starting to come in so they gave it a

15:00 heck of a pounding. And they had been bombing Balikpapan beaches for weeks before. So I suppose the Japs knew we were coming. It was an awesome sight. It's one you don't forget. There were shells falling into the sea amongst the landing craft from

15:30 the land-based Japanese guns but it was pretty weak, it wasn't as much as you would expect, and we put it down to the very thorough heavy bombardment that was done. Because I think that operation was one of the best-planned operations the Australians had done. It was the first time ever we'd gone in as a division; even the 9th Division had one brigade at Tarakan while the other

16:00 two were on Brunei, so it was quite a big operation. But, as I said earlier, it was totally unnecessary.

So what were you told about this objective, what were the objectives of this operation? I know you are a soldier, you are not going to get all the strategic stuff, but what was the general understanding amongst soldiers, for the operation?

Oh, we thought it was necessary at the time, otherwise why put us in there. Of course, we didn't know then what was going on up at higher levels.

16:30 And it was interesting because while we were still in Balikpapan we moved back over the Balikpapan side and we were called for parade and we were to be addressed by Lord Mountbatten, the Commander in Chief of South-East Asia then. He came across to address us and give out some medals and he was telling us what had been planned, because that

17:00 recce operation that we were doing, when we reached the village, that was to be the stopping perimeter, [not] to go any further, to put the perimeter in there; it would be a base for the next operation. And he was telling us, it was October, then we were going to go into Malaya. We were going to go to practically the same place that the

17:30 Japanese came in and down the peninsula, and that was to be our next operation. We were obviously going to stay at Balikpapan and train to get ready for that one. So it was interesting in that respect. All

the plans had been done for it.

18:00 And so that never came off. But I don't know the, I'm still rankled at the idea that those later battles, men that died in those later battles, were a bit unnecessary.

Did you lose any mates in the Balikpapan operation?

A couple were killed, but we didn't lose many men there, no.

18:30 **Did your sense of adventure change when people died?**

Not really, I can't say it changed at all. I mean [that was] evidenced after the war: I still kept on travelling. But no, to me, I think the whole thing was still an adventure. I was young enough to.... Because after,

19:00 you must remember, after nearly five years, I still wasn't twenty-one. I was still young and callow and certainly inexperienced, so far as ordinary life was concerned.

Didn't make you think twice about what you were doing,

19:30 **what you were involved with?**

No. I think I was immature at that time, it was all still, I don't know, a big adventure and what can I say? I can't say actually a lot of it I was enjoying; I was certainly

20:00 experiencing. The big thing that I think I liked about it was that the next day wasn't planned, you sort of had to tackle it as it came.

Did the death of those two friends, were they close friends of yours?

We were more or less acquaintances because I hadn't been in the unit, it was not as though I'd spent years in that unit; I only joined them for the Balikpapan show and that time with them with

20:30 training. And no, my best friends were possibly from my time in the holding battalion, because we had a lot more time together without outside interference. I still know them. Last November I went up to Brisbane for my very first

21:00 battalion reunion since Balikpapan. That was what, fifty-seven years? And it was a bit sad because I had one good friend that's still going, and there were only three of my old platoon left, and one in particular was there - Bill Matt, he was a good friend of mine and I could say he was a mate - and two others, and that was all that was left of our platoon.

21:30 So much so that it's reached the stage where I might be the only one to, we'll have one more reunion and then call it a day, because at the last reunion there were ninety people there and five of them were ex-battalion members. So it's a little bit sad that it's happening, but it catches up with us.

22:00 **How did you react when you first killed a Japanese soldier?**

Interested. I can only assume that he was my kill because I think several of us shot at the same time, so I can't really claim he was totally mine.

22:30 But he'd come charging out of the high grass, actually, and he had a grenade in his hand and where the heck he was going to throw it? About four of five of us saw him and opened up. One of us had an Owen gun, so how many shots he got away I don't know, but with the old .303 rifle you had to use the

23:00 retraction and so.... Interesting, saw him go down. 'Cause we weren't really thinking of them as human beings, even when we passed them along the road, they were lying around. You were just interested, that was it. I don't know how other people said they felt, but

23:30 that's all I can say about it.

I understand that some of the common traits were, if you walked past a Japanese body, to put a bayonet in it?

That's right, that was in the early days, especially in New Guinea. So many of our casualties were brought about by being shot in the back by a "dead" Jap who they had gone past, so it wasn't doing any harm either put a bullet in him or

24:00 a bayonet, if you'd got your bayonet on, just to make sure.

Was that what you learned in the early days?

This is one of the things that the veterans that came with us were telling us, that was in the early days. But we had them on the move so much during that campaign that they weren't really giving us the chance to do that.

But if you did come across a dead body that sort of code would be followed, generally

speaking?

I think that was so. I

24:30 never ever did it, because I didn't see that many, quite a few, but not that many. I was quite sure that they were dead. But it was a common practice, as I did say earlier, there were so much more of them in campaigns like Buna and Finschhafen and so on.

Now, just a more intricate question, can you tell us about the .303 rifle?

25:00 **was it difficult to operate in a jungle environment like....?**

Yes, it was a biggish gun and sometimes the restriction from the undergrowth made it a bit difficult to get it up and aligned. And it was also the old bolt action, so it was slow, and you only had ten rounds in your magazine, so the automatic weapons they have got nowadays

25:30 are much better, they have got telescopic sights on, most of them, by the look of it. But in the jungle there was a lot of close action, apart from the snipers, when you met them in force on the ground; it was possible to see them and they weren't that far away, twenty-five, fifty yards

26:00 away. But they were very adept at sort of disappearing in the undergrowth pretty quickly. But the old .303 rifle was, you know how old it was, it hadn't changed from the First World War, and I think it weighed nine pounds so it was a heavy gun to carry around.

26:30 When you had to get clips, the clips were in clips of five, you had to push them in and then you had to re-load, so if you were up against automatic weapons it could mean the death of you. No, it's not, looking at what they have got nowadays, the .303 was not a good weapon.

Certainly not for jungle?

Not for jungle. Different out in the desert, I should imagine, when

27:00 you have got an open field of fire, but in the jungle you very rarely had an open field of fire.

What about flamethrowers, were they used by your platoon in any way?

No, we never used them, I never saw them used until Balikpapan, where they used them on caves; but I didn't actually see them do it, I knew that they were doing it and they were very effective

27:30 to get the Jap out of confined spaces.

Tell us about the Bren gun, how effective were they?

They were accurate, they had good rate of fire and they were fairly light and easy to fire, for a machine gun. They were very accurate and, as I said, stable, especially if they had the front tripod on them.

28:00 The Bren gun was a good gun. We had a Bren gun; each of the platoons carried a Bren gunner and are made to carry the ammunition. They were good, that was a good infantry weapon.

What about Japanese weapons?

His heavy machine gun was very effective, I think, the Woodpecker,

28:30 he had a light machine gun. In fact, when our John French won his VC at Milne Bay, he attacked three of those machine gun nests and knocked out all three of them. I'm still amazed, reading accounts of everything, I've seen our battalion accounts of it, how he got through all that because all of them were firing at him with machine guns, and he took out two of them with hand grenades and a Tommy gun.

29:00 The Japanese, as I said before there, as jungle fighters they were the best in the world at that stage. They were, when you say "fearless", it was their culture, to die in battle was not a disgrace to them, that was for the Emperor and the ancestors. So they were, from what I hear from the old veterans and that, they were a much harder

29:30 enemy than the German.

Woodpeckers are generally considered the most feared weapon of the Japanese armament.

It was one of the most.

What were the others?

The Japanese had a, again I didn't see these in action, but my friend, chaps told me, especially at the Shaggy Ridge area, the Japanese mountain gun was a very effective

30:00 weapon. They were pretty good with their motors, too. The mortar was the, we had mortar crews with us, a mortar section, and they were very good. And the, what we used to call the "nine-mile-snipers", the twenty-five-pounders, what the Australians did with the twenty-five--pounders in New Guinea was little short of miraculous. They hauled those guns up and down the ranges

30:30 and they took them with them, and that crowd that took that flight into Nadzab in the Markham Valley and they jumped with their guns and none of them were trained paratroopers, and they jumped with their twenty-five-pounders and they were just fabulous. And they were accurate. And you had your own Opip officer with you, bring you up there and call up the ranges,

31:00 he'd get ranging shots, you usually tried to get one on each side before coming in on the target. They were good. How they dragged them through that mud and slush and mountains is beyond understanding, incredible.

Did you face a Japanese mortar?

No, never. So I suppose my period in action

31:30 wasn't extended, although I know what it's like, I've experience it. But I've often thought, "Was I really scared?" I can honestly say I wasn't until after it was all over. Then I'd get a bit of a thought that it could have been dangerous.

Did you have any near misses yourself,

32:00 **close encounters?**

Against me? I heard a couple whistle past. I think the worst time that I heard them, and this wasn't in war, not in our war, this was when I tell you about the revolution in - I'll come back to it, I suppose - in Buenos Aires, we'll save that for that.

What sort of

32:30 **problems did you have with Japanese booby-traps?**

None, I never came across any.

Punji stakes?

Or land mines.

Nothing?

No. As I said, in our action in Balikpapan we hit them hard, we hit them solid from the beginning and we kept them on the move. We never really gave them a chance to regroup. They'd turn and fight

33:00 and go again, and turn and fight.

Where there any, you said there were no POWs there?

No.

If the Japanese soldiers did surrender, what would happen?

Good question. I suppose by orders they should have been delivered back to base, but the occasion never, as I said, my battalion took

33:30 two prisoners up the Ramu Valley way, but they were too busy moving on to fighting action, but they turned them over to the fuzzies to take back to, the New Guinea native, to take back to the base. I suppose the base must have been half a day away and they were back within an hour and a half, two hours. They had tried to escape, so they had killed them.

34:00 That was all.

Had your platoon encountered any?

No, we never took any prisoners. In fact, the story was there were unofficial orders out to not take any prisoners because we'd heard the stories about what the Japs had done to our people when they had caught them in Zamin[?] at that, beheaded and so on, and we believed it, we believed they were capable of that.

So were there actual instances

34:30 **where Japanese soldiers were killed who had attempted surrender?**

None of them ever attempted to surrender. As I said, to die in battle was an honour for them. This is their culture. Our fellows have seen them walk into the beaches at Buna and, rather than be captured, they

35:00 blew themselves up with their own hand-grenade. They've seen it, they've told me that.

Fighting in the jungle, what were the problems you encountered, just with the jungle itself?

Oh, the jungle itself? Sometimes it got pretty dense and you had to cut your way through. We had some

35:30 machetes with us. But it was the, not so much jungle, the kunai grass, because you could pass an enemy within yards and you wouldn't see him because the grass was so high, and there were paths all the way through it. That has happened before, I've just remembered one occasion when

36:00 we were coming back to company headquarters from a patrol, and we were coming back on this ridge, there was another ridge coming down this way and we saw a Japanese patrol over there. So it was a big gallop from then to get to this point here, to prepare a firing position, because they were too far apart this way to get any accuracy, and they were moving too fast.

36:30 So we got down there, but we got there first and the Japs had seen that we got there first, so they turned and went back, so we went on to camp then. But that was the sort of thing that happened and now and again, as I said before, they were noisy and we've heard them in the kunai grass in a patrol passing maybe thirty, forty yards away, chattering away like mad. We could see they had quite a strong force and we wouldn't attack them then

37:00 if there was too many of them. It was just grass, it wouldn't stop any, we had no cover. So that's happened, too.

That actual incident where the two ridges had converged, you could both see each other?

Yes, we could see each other.

But you couldn't shoot?

No, we came together because we'd come out that way, and if they

37:30 had got there first we would have been in a bit of trouble because there was no other way to get down and get back to our company section where they were.

Did they ever, do you think, say anything to you in battle?

I have heard the stories where they have spoken, like at Milne Bay, they spoke in English to our fellows when they were fighting each other, but I've never heard them. I've just heard them yelling Japanese.

38:00 I don't know what they were saying, if it was war cries or what it was. They were noisy, as I told you on that night attack, in that gully, they just chatted and chattered like monkeys. And yet they were very good at infiltration in force like they did through Malaya, they'd quietly come around. But that's in force, and that was controlled.

What was the state of the Japanese forces?

38:30 **Did they look weak and....?**

Not the ones in Borneo; in New Guinea, yes, they were doing a lot of cannibalistic stuff there, I believe. These were stories I'd get from chaps when I joined the battalion. They'd had their whole supply of rations had been cut - we had air superiority,

39:00 they weren't sinking any boats from above. They were trying to be supplied from Rabaul and their ships were being sunk by the air force and they were pretty weak, but they still had the ability to fight. Again, they'd much rather die in battle.

39:30 **What about the natives in Borneo, were they helpful?**

Yes, the Dyaks were very helpful, they often gave warning where the Japanese were and the Japs didn't like them, as I said, the Japs didn't like them at all.

40:00 As for being helpful, they were good on information; they would pass the information to NICA, who would pass information to us. So we had a pretty good idea where their strongholds were, where they were going to make any sort of a stand or where they were patrolling, so we could formulate our own plans accordingly. The Dyaks were good to us. They were supposed to be head-hunters, too,

40:30 but I haven't heard anything.

Lucky, aren't you?

They were on our side.

You could be headless and having this interview right now.

Tape 7

00:30 **And where did you go to after Balikpapan?**

We had to stay in Balikpapan until the war finished in August and we were there until March the next year, simply because there seemed to be not enough ships to take the troops home. You went home on a

points system. Of course, married people got extra points, they were the first to go.

01:00 Anyway, I got home about March, April 1946 and went through the usual procedures settling back down in camp first, and then discharged from the army in June 1946.

How did you feel having to wait your turn to come home?

It was quite boring because there was nothing much to do after.

01:30 There wasn't any facilities for it. No, it was just you just had to wait and see it through. They broke our battalion up while we were away, while we were up in Borneo, that didn't sit too well with us, sent us to different units to see out our time. We went to an ordinance dump and we spent the time there counting everything in the ordinance dump.

02:00 Japan had turned it over to the Dutch Army, because the Dutch had come in when the Indonesians started to get on a war-like footing. That was troublesome, but they didn't really trouble us, they started to fight the Dutch. That was the beginning and the ending of the Dutch, of course, in Borneo. We finally got back to Brisbane

02:30 and then of course moved on to Sydney and waited for discharge there. Finally discharged in June.

Can you remember what it was actually like to hear that the war was over?

Yes, because, we'd been in action from the time we landed on the beaches. That was a six-week campaign, just over five weeks, less than a week before they dropped the bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

03:00 But we were pulled out for our first rest and we were back in camp at Penadjim when they announced the surrender, and that's when they had all the celebrations over the other side of the bay and they left us sitting up on the top of this cliff being very envious. Then it was just, more or less, uneventful after that. We were glad it was all over, we didn't have to go back

03:30 up the Riko river, but yeah, it was all over.

So you didn't have a good celebration about it?

Nope, not at all. Not the sort of thing you would picture. When you see it later on, of course, you saw all the newsreels of Times Square and Piccadilly Circus and everyone screaming their heads off. Nope, there was none of that for us. But we were actually glad it was all over.

04:00 **When it was all over was it an anti-climax or....?**

Yes, I would say it was an anti-climax, for us anyway. We'd been certainly looking forward to it for a long time. I have said where we were really disappointed about it was when they said we would have certain duties,

04:30 the very first thing they said we were going down to Macassar, which is a big town in the area, to take over Macassar from the Japanese, take their surrender, and that was called off. And then there was another one where they were going to go to all the islands between the Kai Islands in Bali and that was called off, and then we were going to go into Malaya to release our POWs and that was called off. And all these were horrible disappointments.

05:00 All those disappointments pile up on each other. At one stage there in one cave we found a whole store of boxes storing Japanese invasion money in Japanese guilders, and we were lighting our cigarettes with thousand guilder notes, playing two-up and big bets

05:30 and wishing it was good money. And as it turned out, the crowd that did go down to Macassar, when they got there they found the army legitimate money down there was Japanese invasion money and they could have bought anything, but they left all that behind. It was all good down there, so that was a missed opportunity. Another story from one of our chaps, as far as

06:00 bringing weapons and that was concerned - some of us, quite a few of us had swords and things, Japanese samurai swords and that sort of thing - but this one fellow, he was a bit nuts because he wanted to take home a Japanese Woodpecker, he stripped it down and pushed as much of it into his kit bag as he could, threw everything else out and that's all he came home with, this Woodpecker. We get outside of Brisbane on the ship

06:30 and the Customs and all that took one look at this and they took it from him and they dropped it over the side. So he landed with nothing. So that was the sort of thing we did.

The money, can you describe what it looked like?

It looked like legitimate notes, with a thousand guilders or a hundred guilders, guilders being the Dutch money, of course. It was reasonable paper,

07:00 it wasn't just funny money like in Monopoly. It was a genuine attempt at looking like genuine money. But it was worthless, of course.

What did it have on it?

That I can't remember, it was just, I can't remember that one. It had quite an intricate design, but the details, no, I can't remember that.

Was there also money that was designed

07:30 **to be for Australia?**

No, there was nothing up there for us to spend it on.

But I mean invasion money for Australia, in the hope that Japan reached Australia, did that….?

No, we never saw anything like that, no. I don't believe there was anything like that. The only invasion money I ever saw was for, because they had been there several years. I should imagine they

08:00 also had it for the Philippines and other places they went into, made out in Asian money.

So there was the, the soldiers started to think ahead of the memorabilia option?

Oh yes. I brought a sword and a battle flag home. But I actually gave the flag to a school in Cobar in New South Wales. When I left and went overseas in '54

08:30 I left the sword at home, I've got no idea where it's gone. I asked my brothers but they couldn't remember where it went. It was just one thing that disappeared.

How did you get he sword in the first place?

When the war finished and the Japs were coming in, swords were being taken off the officers and we were offered some of the swords as they came in, I got one that way.

09:00 I never took one off a Japanese officer, they just had so many there that they were handing them out to the infantry units and I got one.

When people are collecting this stuff is it more as a souvenir for them to keep or to sell in the future?

Souvenir, those who were up there, as souvenirs, reminders. I suppose a lot of them have been sold, but I think they were mostly for souvenirs.

09:30 **Because you couldn't, how could you bring back that much anyway, if you collected a lot of stuff? Could you bring back a lot or….?**

It depends on how much you could carry. There wasn't lethal firearms or things like that, the odd pistol and so on. But if you wanted to bring back, as I said, a Woodpecker or

10:00 a machine gun or even a Japanese rifle I don't think you would have been allowed.

When the war was over and all these things are called off that you are supposed to go to, had the adventure, were you disappointed about it, did you want the adventure to continue?

Yes, we were extremely disappointed about it. I was disappointed that I could have gone to Japan

10:30 but by that time I was a bit down in the dumps and I wanted to go home, called it off, I've always regretted it, to be the occupying force.

With BCOF?

With BCOF, yes. I was on it, I was chosen to go, but I wanted to go home and they agreed because there were plenty of others who wanted to go.

11:00 That was it, I came home and had to find a job.

Was one reason you didn't go to Japan that there was no fighting there?

I mean, you have been dong this for so many years, and then you have the opportunity to be, call it as a conqueror, I rather fancied that, yes.

11:30 I don't know whether I would have taken advantage of it or not, but then I felt I'd been away long enough.

There were no battles in Japan either.

No, there were no battles. And funny enough, the Australian contingent that did go went to Hiroshima. They went there. This mate of mine that was with the,

12:00 I mentioned the platoon that captured the Japanese general at Tarakan, Andy McWeedman and Dick Twentyman, they both went to Japan. And Dick Twentyman, his uncle is the fellow Twentyman is on TV

quite a bit, that's his uncle. Well, Dick was one of my

12:30 mates in the army.

So you decided to come back home and you had to wait for a ship, and you passed the time. What was it like coming home on that ship ride?

Just a happy atmosphere, we were all coming home, we'd all been away quite a while and everyone was very happy to return to Australia.

Was it better than the ship ride going there,

13:00 **your first?**

Yes. Well, at least we had bunks on this ship. I can't even remember what ship we went home on, but we did have bunks, I remember that, where we didn't really have, we slept wherever we could on the ships going up. We were on the troop ship the Kanimbla to do the landing at Balikpapan. Their mode of transport left a lot to be desired usually,

13:30 especially that one when we first went up to New Guinea, the James W Grimes.

So again you must have loved being on a ship again.

That's where I wanted to be and it didn't, in fact it reinforced my desire to get to sea. But when I got back in I found that all the ships were being laid up and I couldn't get a job.

14:00 Again a big disappointment, until I heard about the radio officers' course.

How did it reinforce your desire, that trip back?

Just when you stand up on a ship and look out over the ocean there is no-one in front of you and there is just sea, clear, clear sea, and it's an exhilarating feeling; it is for me, anyway. When I did get to sea and I was sailing later

14:30 on ships going across the Atlantic and things like that, I used to spend my time off, I got to the bow of the ship and just sit up there. More often that not there would be a big pod of dolphins running around the ship. That to me was virtually heaven. And everybody else was way back there behind you and you were right up the point

15:00 of the ship. I really enjoyed that.

Feel like it's just you and….?

Especially when it's good weather.

Through your experiences, how would your compare first your dreams and desires to fight, and then the training to fight, and then the reality of action?

15:30 How do I compare them?

The first one, we'll take one at a time. From the desire to the training sessions, how did….?

You felt alive; you were achieving things that you were thinking about and wanting. Don't know how strong the desire was at that time to do that sort of thing, but it was there and it was the achievement of getting there and

16:00 it was very pleasant, yes.

What about the discipline factor, did you realise how much discipline there was?

That never, I knew that, I welcomed it actually because at that stage of my life I wanted to be told what to do. I didn't have too many thoughts of my own, I didn't have too many ambitions to be a leader or anything like that.

16:30 I was quite happy to go along being told what to do. I was probably doing as well as I could. No, I had no ambitions to lead or go in opposition, so discipline didn't worry me at all. They told me exactly what I had to do, how I had to do it and when I had to do it. If someone said, "Well, good job, well done," that was a bonus.

Why was that,

17:00 **why did you want that discipline, why did you need it?**

Because I couldn't think for myself, I suppose that's one way of putting it. I didn't want to have to think for myself, I'd rather let someone else do the thinking and I'd just sail through life. And maybe it's not a good way of looking at it, it's certainly not good training for later on in the real world, but it was where you were protected

17:30 and that's it.

Is it possible that you needed direction because you simply didn't know where to go?

No, I had desires.

Or how to achieve those desires?

Just the easy way of doing things in those days. In fact,

18:00 when you think about it, it's not something to be proud of because you weren't formulating your own ideas and putting them into practice. Lots of people get the satisfaction out of that. I was just happy in those days: keep remembering I was just a kid really, and just quite happy to be told what to do.

18:30 And it's not a good thing to do, as far as taking you through into later life, real life. After that, many years after that I had to learn to stand on my own two feet. In those days it was easier to just go with it.

You've obviously achieved that.

Obviously yes, I think so, yes.

What about, from your

19:00 **desire again to be in the army to the actual mental and physical challenges of the training, how big a jump was it from one to the other, from your desire to those mental and physical challenges of training?**

All tied in together because it was there, you were pointed in the direction of doing it, the physical and mental discipline; training was the vehicle that took

19:30 you there. It was just easy to jump on the vehicle and go with it. And if a sergeant came up and said, "You will do this," then you said, "Yes sergeant," and you'd go and do it. I didn't have to work out what I had to do and how to do it, it was all there for me. So it was the easy way out. And that's not really a good thing.

Just on the physical side, was it physically harder than you thought it would be, more tiring and so on?

No.

20:00 At that time they never gave me anything I couldn't manage physically, young and virile, if you like, and strong and no illnesses and still growing. I had all the attributes to accomplish what was given to me to do.

20:30 **And mentally you could handle the jump?**

There wasn't any mental exercise involved because the sergeants and the officers had to do all the mental exercise, but they just had to communicate it to me in such a way that I understood what they wanted. I never really was doing things that I wanted, because there really wasn't anything I wanted at the time except to go through life the easy way. And I repeat, it's not

21:00 a good thing for [you], I don't advise anybody to follow that path.

And then? Let's talk about the jump from training to the reality of combat.

That became instinctive. The first couple of times in action you listen to what your mate tells you or

21:30 what you were told, but then it becomes really instinctive, you can respond to any sort of situation, and your training does that for you. If you absorb your training well enough, and a situation arises that requires some of that training put into action, then it comes like that and it's good.

When you are under fire, I've heard that there is really no-one shouting

22:00 **orders and telling you what to do: as you say, it becomes instinctive for you. That sort of goes a little bit against what you were saying where you needed leadership and so on; in that combat situation you had to take care of yourself a bit.**

Yeah, but you had been given all that leadership earlier, then you retain that and the training brings it out to the fore, as far as how you react to a certain situation, and, as I

22:30 said, it becomes instinctive. And of course events arise within that situation that are not quite so familiar and then you are grateful to have your orders given to you, what to do, and of course that's what they are there for. If a sudden thing that is out of the ordinary happens, you leave it to your leader to tell you what to do.

23:00 **Did you have any desire to move up in the ranks?**

Nope, I joined as a private and I finished as a private. I had no real ambition, sad to say, but no.

Again that's because you just wanted to be told what to do, or...?

Yes, that's right.

When you stay at that rank, do you form closer bonds with the guys at that rank around you,

23:30 **rather than rising above them, sort of thing?**

Yeah, you stay with your mates. When I went to the young soldiers' battalion, the uniqueness there, there was only about three of us in that whole four hundred been away from Australia, been in a combat zone,

24:00 and as evidence of it you had little blue stripes on your sleeve from.... Well, I had two of those, and going into a battalion of raw recruits they sort of looked up to you. So you did feel a little bit superior and, "I'm a little bit special. I've seen it, been there, done that," sort of thing. And it was a good feeling, too.

24:30 It was the ego being pandered to.

You really, at your age, would have become a man at that time, wouldn't you?

I was discharged before I was twenty-one and I'd been led everywhere so, as I said, that wasn't really a good thing. But now you've got to come out into the real world and you've got to learn lessons, and hopefully that's what I've done.

25:00 **But the things you would have seen and gone through, did they enhance your character?**

I don't know about enhancing character, it was irrelevant to the type of life you were going to live and it was totally, almost a different culture from the war culture to the peace culture. But it didn't really bear a lot of relevancy as far as your future life was concerned.

25:30 But as to knowing that you are not immortal and that you are vulnerable and can be hurt and everything, yes, you do have that in the back of your mind.

How did you change through those years, from fifteen to nearly twenty-one?

Maturity, I can't use maturity as a reason,

26:00 but I think it did give me a bit of an insight into human nature, and also it gave me an insight into what mates, other people, have performed and in a way why they do it,

26:30 because you have seen how other people have performed in close quarters. It's not as if you have been in a tightly-knit family; you've been out there with other chaps, your mates and so on, people from different spheres of life and different attitudes and so on. I suppose you, even subconsciously you pick a lot of that up, and that stands you in good stead when you are talking to people, and often it stands you in good stead when

27:00 seeing the genuineness in people. Because in a number of places in the world you have to be more genuine than when you are sitting in a bit of a foxhole, shooting at the enemy.

At the time, at the end of the war, did you feel in yourself that you had changed as a human being, or not?

Yes, from the time I was fifteen, yes, certainly; that's virtually what I've been saying.

27:30 You do change, there is no doubt whatsoever about that.

You obviously know that now but, at that time, when you were in 1945, did you know? Or was it something you learnt later?

I had a faint feeling that something had happened, you know, but I couldn't put a finger on it and say a definite, specific

28:00 knowledge that that has happened. But you know that something's moved, if that makes sense.

It does. So finally, when you return home, take us through the greetings back with the family and so on.

Certainly my Mum was my big welcome and my brothers, they were all happy to see me back, I

28:30 suppose, and wanting to make sure that I could assimilate back into civil life again and that sort of thing. One of the big things was my 21st birthday and that was the first big party I've ever had done for me. A huge cake and they even put some Rising Sun [Japanese flag] badges around it and a 2/9th Battalion colour patch in front of it and

29:00 that sort of thing. All their friends, I didn't have many then because I'd been away, but all their friends came and they all seemed to know me, and obviously had been told about me. That was also pandering to the ego a lot, in fact it was starting to give me a little bit of a problem as far as ego was concerned. You are sort of being welcomed as a hero or you've done your bit and all that sort of

29:30 thing, people are saying all these nice things. You still feel just an ordinary person inside, but the way they put it, you should have been up there as a statue outside of Federation Square or something. That's actually how it happened, hard to come back to earth from that.

How do you come back to earth?

Just realise inside yourself that you

30:00 are not on a pedestal, you still have all the foibles you had before, you still have all the, some good habits, some good habits. So no, you know that it's not quite right, but that's the way they feel about you. It gives them pleasure, OK, let them go ahead. But it does go out a bit. Egos are not good. I know that now. I didn't then, but I do now.

30:30 **What was it like seeing your Father again?**

Dad, the first thing he wanted me to do was join the Randwick/Coogee RSL. Every Sunday morning we'd go there and they'd have entertainment and drink a lot of beer. He wanted to show off his soldier son, I suppose.

31:00 It was good.

How was his war, did he come back injured or anything or....?

Just fine.

He had a clean run?

Yes. He was in a non-combatant unit, of course. He had a clear run, he didn't even get any of the tropical diseases. He was very lucky.

And when you'd sit down and have a beer with him at the RSL, would you talk about what you went through with him or....?

31:30 No. He knew what it was about, I knew what it was about, so there really wasn't common ground there for discussion. No, we had more things to talk about: what we were going to do and what sort of work I wanted to do and all that sort of thing.

Would you have liked to talk to him about what you went through?

He knew all that had happened in the war, immediately after coming back,

32:00 but we said what we had to say regarding the war and so on and there was really nothing new to talk about.

What about your Mother? Did you tell her, what did you tell her about what happened the last few years?

What did I tell Mum? I told her a few of the rough times, but mostly the good times

32:30 with my mates and so on like that, I told her stories about the invasion money and all that sort of thing. She was quite happy with that, and didn't probe too much. I think that's about it.

Did she still think it was the Boy Scouts?

33:00 I don't think she thought any more about that, no.

Do you think she fully understood what war was about with your....?

No, she didn't have that sort of a mind. She was just happy to have the family all together again, get on with living.

It must have been difficult for her having a husband and son away.

33:30 I suppose it was, but we made our allotments out of our pay home so she didn't have to worry about money. And my two brothers were there and they were supportive of her, she didn't have a hard time of it. She was glad to have the family back together again, that's about it.

34:00 **Did she talk of her war experiences to you and what she went through?**

She just carried on life as if, she wasn't a very deep thinker or anything, just accepted life as it came. She handled it very well, she raised her children and looked after her husband and that was typical of an Australian house wife then. Not deep thinking or

34:30 wondering what might have been.

Was there a lot of communication in your family, and discussions?

No, not that much, no. We didn't, we just lived day-to-day in the family and then got outside interests

that didn't interest other members of the family. No, we didn't have close co-operation or anything like that. We were quite a

35:00 happy family, but nothing close like that.

What about your brothers and their welcome?

They were leading their own lives then. Young Noel, of course, he did, he was four years younger than me. I suppose he was the closest, he sort of thought I was

35:30 somebody special and he even followed me to South Africa.

So how long did it take from coming home, being greeted as a hero, till reality sets in and you're back in mundane day-to-day life?

I don't know what sort of question that is because

36:00 you say "treated as a hero", it didn't affect me like that. I didn't feel I was a hero so I didn't have to transfer into any other sort of mundane life, as you call it. I didn't feel like a hero.

But the way that people are treating you, you had a celebration?

It swelled my ego a bit, but it still didn't convince me

36:30 that I was a hero.

When did you start to look for a job and get back into working life?

I took a long time off, I took about six months, nothing to do, just swimming, going to the beach, that sort of thing, movies and whatever. Took about six months, and

37:00 that was 1946, '47, and I suppose as far as getting a job was concerned I was searching to go to sea and I couldn't get to sea. I heard about this personal rehabilitation course in radio and I knew that I had to go to the Repatriation Department, it was called, or

37:30 Repatriation Commission it was in those days, in York Street, Sydney, so I went and applied for a job there and they gave me a job as a clerk and I worked my way in there. And from there, about a year or so later, I got my two-year course in radio and that began the next phase of my life.

38:00 **When you came back, you were discharged, were you? When you came back to your family were you discharged at that time or....?**

No, not yet, I came back in March and this took place in June, so I was three months at home, still in uniform.

So you were still being paid?

army wages.

You could afford to have that time off as well?

Yes.

38:30 **Was that the first thing you tried out for that you got, or did you try for other jobs and were knocked back?**

No, first thing was once I heard about this, then the door opened to the Repat and so on. I was with the Repat about a year, a year and a half before I'd established myself and got my accepted disability so that I could get into his

39:00 course.

And what was the disability that you [had]?

What is commonly, not "bomb happy", it was normally known as "combat fatigue". Nerves. And, quite honestly, there wasn't anything really wrong with me, but that's why I had to be in the Department

39:30 and work with the doctors and that to get into this course. And, as I said, they had the assessment at less than ten per cent, which meant there was no money involved, they didn't have to pay anything on that. Over ten per cent they gave you I think it was ten shillings a fortnight, then gradually went up. But I've got a lot more accepted disability since then,

40:00 melanomas and skin things like that, and it's a long medical name I'm trying to think of, there's enough accepted war disabilities to give me a ninety per cent pension, Disability Pension.

With the combat fatigue,

40:30 **what were your symptoms at the time, what were you experiencing?**

That's what I just said, there really wasn't anything, but that was the one I could get them to accept.

So you didn't have shakes or....?

No, no.

Nightmares or anything like that, it was just a way to get through into [the course]?

Yes, if you like, you can,

41:00 I was going to call it something else but I won't.

You sure you don't want to say it?

No.

Do you know others that came back that weren't coping that well?

No, this thing that we hear about nowadays, post-traumatic stress disorder, we never had anything like that, I suppose they did have a name for

41:30 combat fatigue, but we never really had anything like that. All these sorts of things we get nowadays, I didn't know. We old soldiers think, I don't know, things are a little bit sissy, actually. That was probably to them the real thing.

Did you know of other guys having just simple nightmares or anything like that?

No.

42:00 End of tape

Tape 8

00:32 **You didn't know anyone who was having simple nightmares yourself?**

No. But I didn't have close contact with too many of them after for long at all, because my battalion was a Brisbane battalion and I wasn't living in Brisbane. I was living in Sydney up to 1954, which was when I went overseas, and that was it for forty years.

01:00 **Even if a soldier was having nightmares, do you think he would tell his mates?**

I can't answer that. Maybe, maybe not, it depends. Everybody is different.

Would it be sort of looked down on if someone couldn't handle their experience?

01:30 Again, it depends who the person is. I wouldn't look down on anyone if they couldn't handle it. I possibly myself might feel a little bit superior because I think I could. But I wouldn't look down on them, no.

So for you, getting back in the community after the war, was it an easy or a hard process for you?

02:00 No, I was still in the take-it-as-it-comes type of mode. Still wasn't finding things hard, but I was still, as I was saying, trying to get back to sea, and the only way I could do that was Repat of course paid for two years'

02:30 tuition to get my qualifications, for which I'm very grateful. I moved on from there.

With these Repatriation courses, were they, do you know why they were set up and what for?

Yes, for the ex-servicemen, people like myself who had no formal education, I suppose, people who had no qualifications for any sort of work,

03:00 were it an apprenticeship or whatever. It was part of the Repatriation Department to do the right thing by the ex-servicemen, up till today they are still endeavouring to do the right thing for the ex-servicemen. So they have just been terrific, as far as I'm concerned, and in this particular case getting me the school job. They were doing it for, all sorts of

03:30 courses were open. My particular case was a radio course. They had no provision for enlarging anything further, on a normal basis, a normal application, but for a therapeutic person then they made special cases for them, and that's how I got it.

Do you know how long

04:00 **after the war they kept running these rehabilitation courses?**

I've got no idea. It must have been a long time. It's like after the First World War, soldiers came back, they made soldier settlers, they gave land and everything like that to rehabilitate the soldier, and it was part of the program.

When you came back as a soldier, and back into the community, were you always treated

04:30 **with respect and how were you received by the community itself, other than your family, just walking around and talking to people?**

Never had any problems, none whatsoever. No big fors and no big against.

It wasn't a big plus for you?

No, it was just an even balance, which was good.

Is that because there were so many returned servicemen, or

05:00 **why do you think that was?**

I don't know, I don't know what the question is getting at.

The question is getting at did people like you, who had just returned from the war, [get] "Come in, have a drink, how are you going, here's a job for you," or they didn't care or....?

No, neither of those. Take the middle course on that and that's how most people treated

05:30 it, I think. And most servicemen were excellently-treated. Some of them might have been playing on it, using it to get better treatment or something like that. And maybe they were, I don't know. But the normal, ordinary, regular person, they didn't need to do that. Neither one nor the other, no for or against, they treated them as another

06:00 human being. So I have got no real feeling about that at all.

Do you think that, because there were so many servicemen, really other people just took it for granted that "He was in the war"?

I never thought about this like that.

So once you finished your course,

06:30 **what did you do from there?**

The first job, to get experience and qualifications.... One of my activities over that period depended on what girlfriend I had at the time. This one happened to be living in Sydney so I joined Civil Aviation and went to Rose Bay Flying Boats

07:00 Base. The job there as a radio operator was to go out when the flying boats were coming in from Lord Howe or those places, they'd come in from Sydney Harbour where they landed, and it had to be cleared of small craft. We used to go out in a small launch and from the launch I used to by radio, bring the aircrafts in

07:30 and tell them their runways - and it sounds funny, "runways" on water, but that was actually what it was - and when to land. It was air traffic control really.

Near the sea, though?

What was that?

You were near the water?

We were on the water.

So you were getting closer to your goal?

No, that had nothing to do with it.

Nothing to do with it?

Nothing to do with ships.

08:00 That was bringing the airplanes in. Still with Civil Aviation, I transferred up to Darwin, at Darwin Headquarters, several months there, and we were working mainly.... The immigration policy was in full flight then, bringing immigrants to Australia, and a lot of the, there was an airline called the Flying Tigers,

08:30 they were old Flying Fortresses that were converted; must have been horrible planes for people to fly in as passengers. But they were bringing in planeload after planeload into Australia through Darwin so we worked there most of the time, and point-to-point was the weather report between us and Singapore and us and Bali.

You were in Darwin again?

I was in Darwin again.

Can you just take a moment and tell us how it had changed from when you were last there?

The town was getting back to normal, that was in

09:00 must have been ’48, ’49. Still a lot of damage there but getting back to normal. And there were more civilians up there now, it wasn’t a military town. Things were getting on pretty normal.

Were you happy to see it again?

It was interesting. I don’t know if happiness is the right word, but it was interesting. And the old

09:30 place where I stayed, I went out to where we were camped in Bomb Alley and so on. But then I went down to Alice Springs, again with Civil Aviation, I spent nearly a year down there, working air traffic control and air radio.

Did you enjoy the moving about?

I’ve always enjoyed travel, and that was the proof I still had a bit of wanderlust in me. Then

10:00 it was back to Sydney and then in order to work big ships I would have to be qualified first on six months on ships under five hundred tons. The only ships that size were trawlers, fishing trawlers out of Sydney Harbour. So I did my six months like that, I did it in winter, and that’s where I experienced my seasickness again

10:30 and this time it cured me. So six months of that I qualified and that and I thought, “Now I’ve got another girlfriend in Sydney so I want to go ashore.” So then I....

Just quickly, how did it cure you of your seasickness?

How can I say that? Do you know that seasickness is caused by the disturbance of the fluid in your ears, I must believe that if

11:00 you have a bad bout of seasickness, you eliminate it from happening again. Whatever happened, I’ve been in seas that were much rougher than those, trawlers and so on, on the tail end of cyclones across the North Atlantic, across the Bay of Biscay, and I’ve never been sick since. But the smell of the fish and the roughness of the sea, it

11:30 cleared. But anyway....

Did you get used to it after a while, your body adapts or....?

It must be the answer. This never happened again.

Did you find it a bit funny that you loved the sea, you wanted to get to the sea and you suffered from seasickness?

No, not really, because a captain we had on a ship, he’d been on trawlers for thirty years and right up till that time

12:00 every time he went out past the [Sydney] Heads he was seasick, from the whole time we were out, and after thirty years he was still doing it. So what’s the answer?

He does what he loves and puts up with it.

Right. So then I went on to got my qualification. I went onto big ships, mainly freighters around the

12:30 Australian coast. The river ships were owned by the Australian Government, and we took general cargo down to places like Stanley in Tasmania and Melbourne. And then on other ships, bulk loaders carrying from Wailer to Newcastle. I even did one trip on a passenger liner up the Barrier Reef. Moving from ship to ship I was getting experience.

13:00 Then, as I say, I got another girlfriend in Sydney, so ashore I come. All this time, while you were at sea or wherever you were, as a radio operator you were employed by AWA, not by the shipping companies. They hire out from the AWA Marconi School of Wireless where I did my training. The same thing happens while you are overseas: you don’t get employed by the shipping companies but by the radio companies that own the gear that’s on board the ships.

13:30 Anyway, I went ashore and AWA put me into a broadcast station at 2SM in Sydney. In a short time I formed this outside broadcast station with Reg Grundy. Reg and I used to do the Rushcutters Bay Stadium, the Sydney Cricket Ground for the football and so on, the boxing,

14:00 and for years I was his technician. Often I’d put the station on the air for him. It was good times with Reg.

Was there any money in it back then?

No, he was only an announcer, he wasn't the guru he is today. No he's just a dapper little fellow with a little moustache. I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of Reg Grundy, but he was like that.

14:30 When he went across to South Africa to do the Carruthers-Toweel fight, when Jimmy Carruthers won the world title. Anyway, I didn't go with him on that one.

Did you think he'd become as successful as he became, at that time?

No, he liked the good life a bit much, I never thought he'd.... See, I was gone by then.

15:00 TV [television] made him. Anyway, then I transferred to, a mate who I did the course with asked me to go up to Cairns, he got his hands on a broadcast station up there for almost a year at Cairns, and the highlight of this one was this program that I did with Peter Dawson, have you heard of Peter Dawson? At one time he'd made more records than any other singers in the world,

15:30 including Bing Crosby. He's a great Australian singer. Have you heard of Dame Nellie Melba? Well, he was in the same class as Dame Nellie. We sat down in the studio, not at the studio, out at the station, working out a program for him, and he was going through all the old 78's and LPs picking out the songs he wanted to include in the programme. He was going through all the old singers, and he was telling me stories all the way through

16:00 about these fellows, and I thought to myself, "What if these fellows hear what you are saying? They could sue the pants off [you]," because he told all these stories, some were libellous, some were funny, some were - never malicious, they were great. I wish I'd kept that tape. We were taping it all on a wire recorder, that's what we had in those days. You know, when you break the wire, the wire goes everywhere? We did that.

16:30 And it was while I was out at the transmitter, you know, you hear the transmitter going all the time while it was going, you don't listen to what it's doing, you just know it's right and it is going. When it stopped, that's when you came alive. One particular ad came through to me: "off-season half-fare travel to Europe": return in eighteen months and you got this cheap fare.

17:00 One day I was just sitting there, it hit me, I thought, "Bugger it, that's for me," so I just left the transmitter, went down to the travel agent, booked my passage and so I resigned. Back in Sydney I boarded the Arcadia and I was off to Europe. You are supposed to come back within eighteen months, otherwise you had to pay full fare. Well, I ended up paying full fare and not going back for nearly forty years. That's when I went to sea with the Greeks.

17:30 Now there's an experience.

Tell us about the Greeks.

It was good there, because at West Ham, where the Radio Officers' Union was, there was this worldwide shortage of radio operators and you could practically pick whatever ship you wanted, where you wanted to go. Well, I heard, I'd decided that, there was one going to Buenos Aires, to South America, but I had to fly to

18:00 Greece to Piraeus to pick it up. So I said, "That's the one I want." So the arrangements were made for ITWA2[?] and it was my first experience of, my first ship, my first foreign-going ship and I had no idea what a Greek ship was like. They told me, "Don't worry, you get to Athens, there will be somebody to meet you.

18:30 If you have any trouble, there's a number to 'phone." So I fly to Athens, there is no one to meet me so I 'phone this number, no-one answers the 'phone. So now I am stuck in nearly midnight in Athens and I know I've got to get to the ship in Piraeus, so I take a taxi to Athens and at that time the rate of exchange was eighty drachmas to the pound. So I gave him, I think the fare was only

19:00 about two hundred drachmas or something, I gave him five pounds, that's all I had, and there was no change forthcoming. I thought, "Is this what the Greeks are like? What am I letting myself in for?" I got to Piraeus and I'm walking around, trying to locate the dock. I walked miles and miles of dock to find it. So I get another taxi, and we start cruising around. At three o'clock in the morning I found it.

19:30 So I go aboard and they gave me a cabin. What I find out about this is ship is that it was there getting its five-year Lloyds survey, for insurance. Then I find out later that its last cargo had docked at Avonmouth in England near Bristol and discharged its cargo there, and there were thousands of Lloyds surveyors in England. But not this captain, he takes it back to Piraeus to do the survey there

20:00 because his brother is a Lloyds surveyor there, so you can imagine what repairs weren't done to the ship. So anyway, we eventually sailed, we are going up to Russia to Odessa. We have a cargo of pig iron, this is the Stalin era and this is 1955,

20:30 Stalin is very much, image is there. As we sailed into Odessa Harbour there is this great battleship blocking the entrance to the harbour and we have to stop. A whole launch of soldiers and customs comes aboard, they go right through the whole ship, even loudspeakers or portable radios or anything electronic they put a seal on it, radio gear, so that there was no

21:00 music or broadcasts can go anywhere near them. And around these docks they had these loudspeakers blaring out with, I found out afterwards, it was propaganda interspaced with music, loud voices. Now, when you go ashore, your first night ashore, you have to go through three lots of Tommy gun-armed guards, they body search you and, if you've got an English speaking paper of any kind, back on board the ship,

21:30 not ashore. Then you were constricted in what you could do in those days. You could either go to the parks - they are pleasant, they are nice parks - the opera or the seamen's club. But of course we went to the seamen's club, where the beer was cheap and the hostesses were very nice. One of them there I was doing great guns with, she was short, a small thing, lovely, beautiful, with hair you could sit on, you know, and I still remember her name was Meyer

22:00 Mickalovna, and so I think, "I'm onto something good here." They closed at half past ten, so I start to go out the front door, "Niet, not," we were sent out one door, all the hostesses were sent out the other, under guards. So now we are standing outside talking, "Now what the hell are we going to do?" We had been at sea for a while. And all of a sudden

22:30 up screeches an army van, out jump some soldiers and they herd us into this van to this huge building, it was a huge marble building, marble seats, cold as anything. They sit us there, there were five of us, with a machine gun-armed guard on each side. Every time we'd try to speak to each other they'd say, "Niet," meaning "No." About three and a half hours later

23:00 we were allowed to go. They called a taxi and sent us back to the ship. We found out later the reason why they arrested us was because we were foreigners and we'd broken the eleven o'clock curfew, but nobody had told us there was a curfew, and they picked us up at five past eleven. So I've never had an ambition to go back to Odessa. We loaded our ship and off we sailed. Am I boring you?

No, keep going, that's great.

23:30 It was beautiful weather, right down the Black Sea out into the Dardanelles and I'm looking out and all that sort of thing, past Istanbul, I'm in the Mediterranean, still lovely weather, past Gibraltar and out into the Atlantic. And the rough weather came, and the rain came, and then is when I found out how good this five-year Lloyds survey was: I had to hang five buckets over the radio gear and over my bunk

24:00 to stop the rain coming through. The conditions were shocking, we broke down three times in the Atlantic on the way to Buenos Aires. Twice we stopped for repairs, the third time we had to call in to Cape Town and they had to fly a part to us to fit into the engine, and immediately off we go again. Suddenly one of the seamen was very, very ill. And the only medical books they had aboard this

24:30 ship was a small little first aid, in English, and I'm the only one who can read English. So the captain hands me the book and says, "Fix him." So I go down and find out this fellow's in a lot of pain in his groin area. So I don't know what to do, so I get back up, this is all going to be in Morse code, we didn't have radio then. I get out and send out a three-X call,

25:00 the highest call after an SOS [emergency signal], to the operator on the Island Princess, one of the mail ships from England to South America, and ask for their doctor. So I'm explaining to this doctor in Morse code that this fellow is very ill and the pain is around the groin area. So the doctor said, "Go have a look at him and see if there is any distension of any kind there." So I go down and, sure enough, there is a big lump in his groin. So I look at this

25:30 and I touch it and he screams. So I get back on to the doc and the doc says, "Well, you've got a problem here, go down and se how many testicles he's got." So I go down and he's only got one in the bag, so backwards and forwards. The doctor said, "You've got this problem, you've got one of his testicles has slipped up into his groin. What you have to do is put your hands behind it and ease it back into

26:00 its bag." So OK, down I go and I get my hands behind it and as I touch it he screams so I tried to ignore him and I press harder, and he screams harder. And it won't move, and I'm pressing hard, and he's screaming his head off and sitting up and I pushed him down and pressing and pushing him back and pressing. I ended up getting another seaman to sit on him while I tried to get, and nothing would move. Back to the doctor, so the doctor said, "There is a problem,

26:30 it looks as though the testicle has gone up into his groin and twisted up and you can't get the twist undone, he's got to go into hospital because it could cause some sort of strangulation, tell your captain. Where's your nearest port?" And I said, "We are pretty close to Rio, Rio de Janeiro," so I told the captain he's got to take this man into Rio to get him into a hospital. The captain he says, "Not on your life, my port

27:00 Buenos Aires, give him something to kill the pain." So there was nothing else I could do. Well, we got him into sailing up the River Plata, near La Plata, and past the mast of the craft Graf Spay, the pocket battleship that was outside of Montevideo - it was low tide, so it was above the water - and up comes the Argentine fleet, blocking the entrance

27:30 into Buenos Aires Harbour. So we sailed through that, we get to the Cumberboard, it's a pilot vehicle, and the harbour's full of ships and there is no room for us so we have to double up beside a British ship. It was the Lossiebank, one of the tank line ships. While we were sailing up there the navy who started the revolution was bombing Buenos Aires.

28:00 Key buildings, apparently. And this is the revolution when Peron was, this is 1955. We waited there nearly two weeks. Now, we'd been at sea all this time. We could see the cantinas and the pubs still going full bore, even though parts of the town were being bombed. So we said, "This is no good." So we went

28:30 ashore in the dark, we weren't supposed to, we get into, and we were drinking cerveza [beer] like mad. We got sloshed out of our minds. Now we are going to make our way back to the ship, and we were going back over the railway lines and someone says, "Look at those beautiful fireflies." Now this is a question you asked some time this morning. They were bullets, and I could hear this "psheww."

29:00 These were the fireflies; somebody was firing upon us with a machine gun. I tell you, I was down on the deck, then we were up and over crawling on our stomachs, all the way back to the ship. So anyw ay we didn't dare go ashore after that. Then the revolution's stopped, now we've got to get rid of our cargo. And because of the bombing all the port gear

29:30 had all been either blown up or damaged. We had to use the ship's gear, the derricks and so on. The very first cargo, net full of pig iron out of the hold and the wire housing snapped. So it was only hanging on by one and it's swinging and it just misses the winch men and it hits the main mast. The main mast on a ship is much wider than

30:00 that door. You think it would withstand a hit like that, but Lloyds survey, remember, the main mast had been painted over so often over rust that the whole of the main mast just went, "shewwwww," down to the deck. Now, we got all that mess cleaned up and got this cargo out eventually, and we'd got to get back to Europe. Now, we've got to have a radio, so we take the derrick of number one hatch

30:30 and we get it fixed up, because you wouldn't have it repaired in Buenos Aires.

That testicle guy, so what's happened to him?

Oh, we got him in there in time and got him to hospital. Sorry, I should have told you that. They got a special ambulance down with a

31:00 jeep to see him safely aboard. So we put this derrick up and I got up there and I fixed up the antennas, and this is how we go back to Europe. There is another story in there; I won't bore you with it now. When we finally discharged our cargo, we got in with a visiting American roller skating show; they call them the Million Dollar Show, very, very good.

31:30 And the thing there they called a 'dance of De la zaguess'. It was waters, to a tune played on the piano, these waters went up and down under coloured lights. And we had great ideas with these American girls, they were lovely. And they were there as distressed American subjects because of the revolution so one of them was desperate to get out, and I said, "I'll take you back," and I was going to smuggle her back in my cabin. But we had to go down to Bahía Blanca and get a load

32:00 of wheat, then I came back to Buenos Aires by train, but by then the US Embassy had looked after the girls and was going to take them home. That's beside the point. So this ship, the Ariteyas, I swore, "Get me back to Europe," because you sign on, but it was under the condition you only signed off at a continent, or a continent port. We were going back to Antwerp.

32:30 So we get back to Antwerp, I was off that ship so fast. The poor old, she was such a lady, I've written an article called, 'the Lady was a Tramp' tramp steamer. So that was me with the Ariteyas [?]. Back in London what I used to do in those days was spend a few days at sea, get money, hit London, blow the lot. Go to West Ham Radio Officers' Union, get another job, that was my life at that time.

33:00 So it was only a year later I hear that the poor old Ariteyas, after she'd been to Antwerp and discharged, went up to Kiel in Germany picking up a load and was coming down past Cape Finisterre on the Spanish cape and, like the lady she was - this is still within the five-year Lloyds survey - slowly and gently opened her plates and went to the bottom. And I still don't know to this day

33:30 whether she wasn't assisted because, after all, why waste a good insurance survey? I think the Greeks wanted the insurance for it. Then to quickly finish off, not the next one, but the ship after, I stood by a new ship at Newcastle-on-Tyne, another Greek - I stayed with Greeks because they paid; the Brits didn't - and stood by this ship

34:00 and they took her out on trials. Now we are going, on its first voyage still, to America, and we are coming down through the English Channel, thick fog. Now, this captain, he knows all about radar. I'm supposed to look after it. Won't let me near the radar, he's watching it. Full speed ahead come past Dover, and out from Calais comes a French freighter, straight into the side of this new ship. Now we've got a gaping hole in the starboard bow that's almost the size of

34:30 this whole room. Brand new ship. And so now the captain won't take it back to Newcastle. He wants it to go to Vlissingen in Holland because he gets a kickback from the shipyard there. These Greeks, they're marvellous. The Frenchmen, this morning the sun was clear and there were helicopters and televisions and everything in the English Channel. This was Captain Karkakas.

35:00 I've almost finished. It took us another five weeks to get repaired and getting on our maiden voyage.

What happened with the radar, he had it on the thirty-mile range instead of the three-mile range of the radar, so that all the ships were lost in the clutter of the coastline, he didn't see this thing coming at him. So off we go, and we are halfway across the Atlantic, and anchored out there are

35:30 these weather ships, they are marked on every chart, they send weather reports. This was an American one. I came on duty, got onto the radio and we were heading straight for this weather ship, and there is nobody on the bridge, the captain's got it on automatic pilot. So I went screaming round, I found him in the chart room, I struck him like that. I said to the captain, "We are going to be in trouble."

36:00 So he goes out and has a look, he knocks off George, the automatic, and swings. Well, we missed that boat by two hundred yards, but that's close at sea. The Americans were running up and down, shouting their hair out on my radio, all I'm getting is my call sign, my call sign. I'm not going near it. And I could see the headlines: "Captain Karkakas strikes again!" So we were finally getting through.... And, incidentally, every time we went to America with the Greeks,

36:30 they were either very good seamen or very bad. And with this Karkakas, not once did he strike our landfall in the right place. Two hundred miles off that way, a hundred miles this way, turn around and go in. He got fined twenty thousand or thirty thousand dollars, something like that, for negligence at sea.

A couple of questions before we wrap up. One, how would you compare your army life to your life on the ships?

37:00 It was much more exciting on the ship, I think, much more continuous sailing with the Greeks. There was the Rearlander, the Ariteyas and the John Acre Lucinder[sp?]. Yes, they were experiences, all of them.

It sounds like your army training sometimes came back when required again?

Especially the revolution, I never got excited. We didn't get involved in that. But while we were in Buenos Aires,

37:30 Keith Byron, he was a photographer with the Daily News in Sydney, no, the Daily Telegraph, and I met him in London, and he said he was on his way down to South America. This was before the revolution, and he'd just got the job as staff photographer for United Press, and I said, casually, "I'll see you down there some time." As it turned out, after the revolution was stopped, I went and found Keith, we were treated like royalty by

38:00 Keith, and I shook the hands of the President of Argentina, Pedro Aramburu. He was only president for a week, because (UNCLEAR) took over next. So there it is anyway, I've been talking too much.

Comparing your army life to your ship life, the ship life was much more important to you, wasn't it?

38:30 I enjoyed it more. But I enjoyed, in retrospect, what the serving in the army is doing for me now with the support that I've had from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, it's been so important to us. Because Emily lived in South Africa, what money we have, my pensions from Bosch, I worked for Bosch over there, everything is locked up there.

39:00 The only way we can draw money is using our credit cards, and so we wouldn't have been able to have all this without Veterans' Affairs assistance, without any shadow of a doubt. Especially medically speaking and the "gold card" have been absolutely wonderful. So I'm trying to give a bit back to them now, I go round all the schools and give talks, Anzac Day and all

39:30 that, so on. And working with John Murray at the Division of Veterans' Affairs in Melbourne. We get competitions going in schools, that sort of thing.

Well, you've sort of already done it yourself, but at this point in time we have about ninety seconds left, and we give the floor to you to say whatever you want to whoever is watching this tape, or your last message to end the day up.

40:00 I've just, as you've said, I've just virtually said it because really and honestly and truly Veterans' Affairs has been, I have no complaints whatsoever, and I say that in all sincerity. Really we wouldn't have any sort of lifestyle at all without what they.... Mind you, I never made a claim on them for nearly forty years, but that's beside the point. When I did, they

40:30 came good.

Well, thanks for the day.

INTERVIEW ENDS