Australians at War Film Archive

Maxwell Piggott (Max) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 4th May 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1958

Tape 1

00:31 **Whereabouts were you born, Max?**

I was born in South Melbourne in a suburb of Melbourne, of course.

And what was your Father's occupation?

Well, my Father was a policeman in the Victoria Police Force. But that wasn't his lifetime, he was actually a farming contractor, back in those days of course, which was draught horse days and his time

01:00 and he came from Bendigo. Which was an old goldmining town of course in central Victoria, he went away in 1915, 1916, of course, not to Gallipoli, but to France, where he was in an infantry battalion largely recruited in the Bendigo, Ballarat area. And his brother went with him, the brother was killed there, in France and my

01:30 Father, John James, he came back a bit bewildered, I imagine. He had a child born, he didn't enlist until his first child was born and pregnancy was over and that sort of thing. And then he and his brother went away and losing his brother, they were joint contractors together, probably interfered with his life quite a bit and so he gave the countryside away

02:00 and just simply looked for work. And he'd been a sergeant in an infantry battalion which of course is a good training ground to be a policeman. And he was a policeman for you know, roughly twenty years and retired as soon as he could.

Did he discuss his experiences with you when you were a child?

No, he's very quiet, he's very reserved man. And

02:30 I think the war was something he wanted to get out of his mind and forget about. So it's very hard to ask him a question, you know he just didn't want to talk about it. So, unlike his son.

So, you were the child that you mentioned, that was born?

I was the child. Well you know, my Father would have come home with a gleam in his eye and I was the result of it. I was born in 1920

03:00 and if you go back nine months there would have been roughly the time my Father got back from France probably. And my Mother was a Bendigo girl, and they must have known each other, you know, perhaps down in the turn of the century and my elder brother who's still living, he was in hospitalised, eighty nine years of age,

03:30 and he is ill at the moment, but of course, he was the child that was born before the war and I was born immediately after it more or less.

What are your earliest childhood memories?

Well, we lived in South Melbourne, that's where the first station my Father was and I was actually born above a shop in the main street of South Melbourne, Clarendon Street and down the bottom of Clarendon Street was the South Melbourne Football Club

04:00 grounds, which is now the home of the only soccer club in Melbourne. And from that bedroom window, although I wouldn't have seen it as a child, I would have seen the flag of the South Melbourne Football Club from that very window because several years ago I wandered back into that building and it was under the wreckers, so I wandered up into it and had a look and realised that I could have as a child, peered out the window at the South Melbourne

04:30 Cricket Ground. Which was the famous cricket ground of course, it had four test captain's games, played for South Melbourne and I was fortunate after the war to play a couple of seasons of [Australian

rules] football with South Melbourne. Now, the Sydney Swans of course.

Did you play both football and cricket when you were growing up?

Yes, I played all those games as kids, but of course, we moved to Albert Park which is the home of the Grand Prix, you know the race

05:00 car race, and the beach was only a couple of minutes walk from the house we lived in there and so I became a typical 1920s, '30s beach boy, I suppose.

What did that entail?

The beach boy? Well there was a lifesaving club there and I was junior member of that for years, I loved swimming and I used to fish off the piers there

05:30 because the next suburb to us was Port Melbourne which all the ocean liners came in so that was a great education for a child, to live in that area. I always think it was probably the best part of Melbourne to live in as a child because we had the large Albert Park area there, and we had the beach. And so we had the best of both worlds in a way, a kid growing up and being so close to a port, you

06:00 it was a wonderful educational medium because my earliest hobby that I took up was match brand collection. And I'd wander onto all the vessels coming into port, the sailors and the crews never concerned me in any way, some of them would invite me in the cabin, and talk because they had kids back home in England or Scotland and they just liked to have a young kid to natter to and I

06:30 saved these matchbox covers. And there were literally hundreds of them from all over the world. And that's always the reason I think why I always topped the class at geography.

Do you still have that collection?

No, no, unfortunately my Mother, during the years I was away, I was away for six years in the army during the war and she thought, "Well Max has grown up past all that sort of thing", and he had of course I suppose but

07:00 I asked for it and she'd given it all away.

It'd be a curious collection to look at today.

Well, it'd be interesting to look at, it'd also be very valuable, because matchbox covers are a collector's item.

What was home life like when you were growing up?

Well, I had an elder brother, five years older than me. And I suppose, I always got in his way

07:30 if he wanted to go somewhere, I demanded, I had to go too. Which meant that he said, "For God's sake, get out of my road, and buzz off Piggy", sort of thing. So that was a little bit too big a gap, you know for a brother. And I had a younger brother and a younger sister. But they were separated from me by up

08:00 to eight years so in the sense of home life, my relationship with my brothers and sisters wasn't great, I bought my own first bicycle and I'd roam around the countryside on that bike, I'd sort of ridden as far as Albury that sort of thing, up the Sydney highway 'cause I had a uncle up there who was one of the first men wounded

08:30 at Gallipoli and he was in the 14th Battalion which was a famous infantry battalion of that war. And I loved to ride that bike up to him, which I did but they were my big trips, but frequently I'd ride out to places like Essendon Aerodrome, which was the main airport, watch the aeroplanes. Bicycle was a great thing in that respect.

How old were you when you bought the bicycle?

I was twelve I think

09:00 you know I had pocket money, I used to walk dogs for neighbours, those sorts of things, take them down the beach, let them have a swim and bring them home and be paid a couple of pennies I suppose. Can't remember the amount but it wasn't very much.

That's entrepreneurial of you.

I sold newspapers on Saturday nights for Melbourne, had a newspaper, we've still got it, called "The Sporting Globe". And I'd go to the newsagents and I'd sell papers which enabled me to

09:30 save some money of my own. And because my Father by that time reasonably senior police in that areas was what was known as a plain clothes constable, which were really the cheap way of having a detective, he was never in uniform in my experience, he was always a plain clothes man. And he and another man of the same rank were the two more or less

10:00 you could call them detectives they were under the port front, the waterfront of Port Melbourne, not the

Yarra waterfront but Port Melbourne overseas liners and large cargo ships, that sort of thing that couldn't go up the Yarra River.

What was it like growing up under the guidance of a Father who was in the police force?

Well, you had to worry that you weren't doing the you know, you were doing the right thing by him. So, it wasn't as though I

10:30 was inclined to get into trouble, in that respect. But being a city kid and growing up amongst other city kids of course, you got into various forms of mischief and just hoped that it didn't get back to your parents.

What kind of mischief did you get up to?

Well, what were they?

11:00 They're all so sort of minor things, it doesn't come to mind really, well I mean on one occasion I stole a lot of plants out of somebody's garden because I thought I would make a garden for my Mother who was away having my younger sister at that time, the younger sister was roughly ten years younger than me, so I pulled plants out of somebody else's garden and planted

11:30 them in our garden to welcome my Mother home, you know, but there was no spectacular items of mischief that I can relate.

So your Father didn't have too much concern about his reputation?

Well there was one aspect of it which was interesting I suppose, that he was stationed in the Port Melbourne Police Station for much of that period right during

12:00 the Depression years which was a pretty awful period, the school I started in was in South Melbourne as a five year old and then we moved but because I had friends in that school, I didn't go to the Albert Park school, I walked all the way to South Melbourne to go back to that school. And my elder brother finished up as a teacher there. That's the brother George, who's now ill.

12:30 On his last legs, I think. But my Father, who'd been stationed in the South Melbourne precinct to start with, was transferred to Port Melbourne and the port area was part of his responsibility and there are occasions then where he never came home of a night, you know, he actually slept in the police station because the situation was pretty bad and one of the

13:00 policemen had his house bombed and in fact it was the other plain clothes man, it was my Father's friend, had the front room of his house blown out. We had the front windows of our house boarded up with six by one wall planks because of the fear of a bomb being thrown in there. And that would have lasted perhaps, seemed to be twelve months. And

13:30 I was the messenger kid. My elder brother was paralysed, he got caught in one of those, infantile, what they called infantile paralysis in those days, and the left hand side of his body was withered by it, didn't effect him in other ways but I was the messenger boy that would be sent out the back gate to scurry around and get something because of not going out the

14:00 front door which wasn't ever used and if there was a knock on the front door, I was the one sent up to it because they thought, well nobody's going to worry a little kid but, well I was ten years age, seven years of age I suppose, if it was someone. But so for a couple of years there was that fear in the house that my Father might be attacked and sort of things.

What criminal elements was he

14:30 **dealing with to have led to that ordeal?**

Well, I suppose they were all criminal, any crime that occurred was in the Port Melbourne precinct would have been concerned with but so much of the period was affected by poverty during the Depression years which were largely sort of 1930 to about 1935, when there was a very high degree of unemployment, there were food lines in the street,

15:00 there were soup kitchens in the street near the school that I went to, the primary school and with other kids, I'd join them sometimes and you'd get a cup of hot soup in the middle of winter, but you were standing amongst elderly men who were unemployed, they were always men. And that was a feature of Australian life that seems to be largely neglected in the literature, unless you search it out

15:30 how bad things really were. But of course they were worse overseas. Worse in places like central England and that. 'Cause at least the sun shone here and despite Melbourne's reputation as being four seasons in one, it's nowhere near as bad as that and twice in the last five years they've been declared the most liveable city in the world. As you may have seen in the newspapers. So it was good

16:00 place to live, I look back on it as fairly good days for a young kid growing up, interesting.

Sounds like you had your share of drama though with the fear of leaving the front door and boarding up the windows.

Yes, well there was an occasion when a boxing trainer, a man who had the lightweight and we had two Australian boxing champions and my

16:30 Father didn't charge his son on an offence, he should have charged him but he let him off and this got back through the system somehow or other and there was a fear in this particular family which was the Duigan family that the boy would be charged, but my Father had protected him and just realised it was something that didn't warrant a charge being made, but

17:00 there were people that believed it should have been. And my Father got into a little bit of trouble over that but the boxing trainer, just as an anecdotal piece, came to thank him for not placing this charge on his son. And my Father was away when he arrived and I answered the door and here was this old pugilist who, himself, back in 1914 to

17:30 1920s was the lightweight champion of Australia. Professional boxer who now had a training school so here he was trying to pass a message on the thanks through me, you know who by this stage was about fourteen or fifteen years of age. And he said, "Well, how'd you like to be taught to fight?" Of course I was a bigger than average kid, and fairly

18:00 athletic, he said, "How'd you like to fight?" And I said, "Oh, not much", and he said, "Would you like to be taught?" And I said, "Yeah", and he said, "I'll teach you, free. You tell your Dad that I'm going to teach you how to box, free". So I did it for twelve months, I went to his gymnasium and sparred with professional boxers who protected me of course, I was only a kid but it was you know a nice gesture by him and it was interesting it

18:30 enables me to, if I wanted to write about it, anything like that I could. So yes, Jimmy Duigan and on the West Melbourne Stadium where all the major fights were there'd be old Duigan in the corner with one of his boys fighting four or six rounders, or whatever it would be. It was all good education.

Sounds like you were educated with the ways of the world, quite young?

I think that would be

19:00 true really. You know, I mean, I know other people of my own age and I think they missed a lot of that because perhaps their family's a bit over protective. That's something that never happened in the household I suppose, my Mother and Father would have assumed that I was behaving myself which I was really. But there was never any question, we were never told, not to do this or not to do that, you know.

19:30 I respected them, you know, respected my parents very much. They were both very good people. And they both lived very correct lives, neither of them drank alcohol, my Father was because of what he'd seen, in his life, I suppose, as a policeman, was very much against it. And particularly during the Depression years because some men just drank themselves to death, really because

20:00 a sort of feeling of hopelessness in their lives I think.

What kind of relationship did you have with your Mother?

I had a very affectionate one I think. Not over affectionate, you know she was a very good woman, she came from a well known family I don't know you know, the north east Victoria at all, but

20:30 there's a town there called, Beechworth, it's an old mining town, it's famous because of the large body of Chinese that settled in that area and there was some Chinese riots and things like that. And Beechworth is one of Victoria's major historical towns today where they've preserved the town as it was a hundred years ago, more or less. You know the people are told not to paint their houses this colour and

21:00 there's an old prison there, it was Ned Kelly country of course. And she came from there, her family came from there, they were pioneers, at Beechworth, and she had relatives more than my Father did, throughout that area, including the uncle who was the dairy farmer from Gallipoli, the man I said was one of Gallipoli's earliest casualties.

21:30 He married a sister of my Mother, so there was a stronger family relationship through my Mother than there was through my Father.

Did you help your Mother out around the house at all?

Well, I was the message boy, I certainly the message boy for many years.

What about chores in and around the house?

No, I wouldn't say that

22:00 I did a great deal of that. You could suggest chores and I'd say, whether I did them or not, but I had to make my own bed, that sort of thing. And I suppose I had an early interest in gardening I wished the house had been big enough, you know to garden because I did like that. And that came from my bike riding and wandering out into the bush, I suppose.

22:30 But, no I wouldn't say I did a great number of chores in the household.

What kind of meals did your Mother and Father put on the table during the Depression?

The traditional mutton. And sometimes fish, I mean, I caught fish, sometimes my Father'd bring home a fish because people would give it to him you know. I think he was a popular policeman. Because he really wasn't a policeman at heart, he was

23:00 as I say, he was brought up as a rural lad and he simply took police work as a job to do because he had a family on the way, he had one child already and he didn't own a farm, he wasn't a farmer, he simply worked for farmers bringing in harvests and things like that. But I don't know that I can say any more about that.

23:30 **What about your school life?**

Well, I left school early, that was again a Depression thing, my brother five years older to me, he won a scholarship to Melbourne Boys High School, which was probably the best school in Victoria and probably still is. It was a government school, high school of course, but then it was like Modern School in Perth or Sydney High, which has produced prime ministers and various

24:00 other people. The headmaster at Melbourne High at the time was Bill Woodfill a captain of the Australian Cricket Team in the Bradman era. And I deliberately failed to go to it because I didn't want to. I sat for a scholarship at thirteen, it was a council scholarship, which paid certain amount of books and various things for

24:30 this student but because I wandered the streets a lot and saw what was happening in society, which is strange but it's true that I looked and thought, "Jeez, I don't want to be like that, if I've got to be like that I'm going to go". And that was all my ambition perhaps from twelve years onwards that I was going to travel. In fact a young friend of mine, who died during the war, he and I thought of getting

25:00 on a ship and smuggling away out to Britain but we never, ever did it because we couldn't find any source where someone'd say we knew someone in England and they might put you up for a while. But we were scared to do it. But there was, as I say, the unemployment was so high, there were so many men out of work and they had these soup kitchens in the street near the school

25:30 and when I looked at the work that people were doing I wasn't interested, you know, all I wanted to do was get away somewhere. And when I turned eighteen, I immediately applied to join the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] or the Australian Army, I never strangely never considered the navy which was surprising seeing that one of my hobbies was wandering on the ships. And I did, I joined,

26:00 they did very little recruitment of the permanent forces in Australia during the '30s, they were depressed too, like the police forces were depressed. Governments just didn't have cash, so there were two hundred, something like two hundred and sixty people applied for eighteen vacancies in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne in 1938. That's the number we were told, there

26:30 were two hundred and sixty men, young men, mainly you know probably eighteen to twenty five, or thirty years of age, just for jobs. And that was even in '38. Well, eighteen of us were chosen to, as recruits for the Australian permanent army, I applied all, immediately I turned eighteen years of age, at the time I was working in Lever Brothers who were the,

27:00 possibly still are, the world's biggest soap manufacturers, they own all the popular brands. I was working in there and I was under a man who promised me, if I stayed there I'd eventually be the boss of that department and it horrified me to think that I might be the boss of this job. But I had to do some work, of course and earn some money.

What kind of work were you doing in the factory?

I was operating a machine that made cartons

27:30 and I was carrying weights around there were thirty women in the department, 'round about thirty women, and a woman foreman in charge of them and a male foreman in charge of the whole department which was a prospect that I might have got if I stayed there. But no, I was a general odds body as well as I'd go onto different machines and operate

28:00 them except there were, we had soap making machines, shaping the soap in the department, but they never gave me that because it was a dangerous job where you're likely to lose your fingers and things. So as I say, immediately I turned eighteen I got the application form which I can't remember what it looked like or anything but I applied for both the air force and the army. And the army

28:30 one came first and I went up with these great line of men over about three or four days they recruited and eighteen were recruited and I was one of them. And if I think back, why they chose me, well I was six feet, I was athletic, I could swim, I played football, I played cricket, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and the army liked to have people that were around six feet in it. For ceremonial purposes,

29:00 we were the sort of grenadier guards of Australia of course. And I got in with seventeen others and we went to a place called Queenscliff in Victoria which was an artillery fort like there is, one on Rottnest

and for many years and a Larakia in Darwin and also at North and South Head in Sydney, they had these

29:30 large artillery pieces that could sink shipping that tried to get in or out of the harbour during wartime, that sort of thing. So I was turned into an artilleryman at eighteen years of age.

What did your Mother and Father think about you joining the army?

I don't think I ever knew. I think it was my decision, I suppose, and

30:00 they said, "Well, that's what he wants to do, that's okay". But it was my way of thinking I could travel, you know, if I joined the services. Well, I was in the army for about six weeks and the application for the air force which I really did want to be in turned up to be recruited into the RAAF, was too late.

I would have thought that joining the navy would have given you a better opportunity to travel in those years.

Well, you would have thought so, wouldn't you?

30:30 I don't know why I didn't choose the navy, it's something that's puzzled me too. But it may be that there was I'm trying to think of whether there was somebody there that suggested if you did this, so and so could happen. You know, for instance, my Father's, now whether he's a grandfather, or my grandfather or great grandfather but he

31:00 was in the Indian Army and he didn't go back to Britain when his time came up he did his period of army service in India, in Indian Army and he came to Australia. And that's how my Father's people arrived here. It may be that there were stories that, may be that my Father was in the first AIF [Australian Imperial Forces], yes, it's a good question why I didn't go for

31:30 the navy. I don't know why.

Had you heard a lot of tales of adventures overseas in the army?

No, no, I did not. I mean, there were films, of course, kids went to the movies and you read books, one of the good things about you know when you say to people, you leave school at thirteen, but my most intimate friends in

32:00 Melbourne are two professors at Melbourne University, they didn't worry, I could handle them and speak with them just as well as I could speak to anybody you know, they're both dead now but one of them Professor Tribe, held positions with the World Bank and UNESCO [United Nations Educational, and Scientific Cultural Organization] and FAO [Food and Agricultural Organization] throughout Africa and things. You know I've got books of his here that he gave me

32:30 the good thing about it was growing up as I had that I used to go to South Melbourne Library, borrow books there. I read a lot, that was one of the evening things in the house and it was a good thing because of my elder brother who was training to be a teacher, that he was at Melbourne High and I of course didn't go there but with his exams and various things,

33:00 he'd throw things on my lap and say, "Ask me a question, ask me about this". And things like that, my education didn't stop and my street education I think was good in that respect, being living in a port area. So you got a sort of worldliness, I suppose as a kid that you mightn't have got if you were living in another suburb away from that sort of activity. But wandering into vessels and sitting

33:30 in cabins with merchant sailors and talking to them and things like that you know, as I said, earlier, they liked talking to kids, you know, and men do, and it's unfortunate today in the sort of society we've got that, "Don't you speak to that man in the street". You know.

What kind of experiences did you have talking to merchant seamen on board their vessels?

34:00 Well, they'd talk about their families in England, I've got to think hard on this one, it's a fair while back now, its seventy years ago, or more.

Just thought there might be a tale or two that you could share with us?

I can't readily bring one to mind, you know perhaps if you've given me warning a week ago, that these were the questions you were going to ask, I could have supplied them but I can't really, they

34:30 may have told me anecdotes of calling in at port, but then again, they were talking to a child, they weren't talking to, 'cause that sort of life that I led between sort of six and seven years of age, 'til fourteen years of age, started to weaken after fourteen years of age because I was employed in a job and I had to ride my bicycle to work in all sorts of weather of course, winter and summer.

35:00 From the house to this factory I suppose.

I'm just wondering how you would have managed to get aboard one of those vessels, without any difficulties.

No trouble. No trouble at all and I took my eldest son, who now is in business in Echuca up in the

Murray River in Victoria. I took him down the ports for interest's sake and he was sort of a bit nervous about going on the ship, I said, "No worries.

35:30 Just walk in with me". And I walked on the ship, we walked around the ship, poked our nose, I'll tell you one anecdote occurred 'cause it's amusing. There were two of us used to go to these ships and we're both collectors of match brands and I went down in the back cabin and there was a

36:00 sailor lying on his bed with his back to me, and there right in front of me was a match brand I didn't have. And I used to carry a couple of Bryant and May matchboxes and I'd say, "We'll swap over, you give me your matchbox and you can take my matchbox and fill your matches in it, you know". Do a fair swap and I'd get a foreign matchbox. And it was so tempting, so tempting so I leant over and I picked the matchbox up and

36:30 as I picked it up, it could have only had a few matches in it, it rattled. And he whirled around and he grabbed me and he went, "Whack", across the face. Big man too, it hurt. And you know, I'm no doubt, tears came to my eyes and everything and he pushed me out and I think from memory he just went back and slept again, probably been on the street and alcohol up Little Long which was a prostitute area

37:00 of Melbourne, a lot of the sailors that do that sort of thing. Well, we're walking off and down in the cabin area of these transport ships, cargo ships, there's a transverse passage way between cabins and grinding rooms and things, some of them would carry twelve passengers, up to ten or twelve passengers and

37:30 bay liners and things like that. And we wandered across this corridor and as we wandered across in the door and there's the open, the dining room. So we went in there and we took a bite out of all the scones, on the dining room and quietly left, we could hear voices in the next room. We bit, put them back, put the napkins over the top of the roll again and fled. That

38:00 was our punishment for giving me a clout across the face. It still amuses me to think of it. Seeing some other kids, you could imagine it in a movie, some kid doing it.

Sounds like a classic movie scene.

Yeah.

What did you know about the business that the sailors sought at Little Lonsdale Street?

Little Lonsdale Street,

38:30 it was up near Parliament House, higher part of Melbourne up towards the east end of the city itself and one of the small streets Melbourne if you know it, is a whole city of parallel major streets, intersected by parallel minor streets between them. So you'd have Collins Street, Little Collins Street, Flinders Street, Little Flinders Street. Well you had Lonsdale Street, which was up Lonsdale Street had

39:00 police headquarters in them and Little Lonsdale Street which ran up to the east of the metropolitan area central city area, well they were single, double storeyed buildings, I think but the madams used to sit out on the front, in a chair and look for custom. And of course, being

39:30 a young teenager, you were curious about this, it was well known that the police used to arrest one now and then and that was all very stupid, but and the stories in some of the literary you'd read of a well known politician being caught in there once or twice you know. 'Cause Parliament House was just hundred yards from where the women operate. But it was only

40:00 a story to kids. Everybody knew what Little Lon was.

How did the madams view you when you came to investigate?

The only time, I sort of investigated, walked up there out of curiosity and that was all there was to it, you know, it wasn't any interest to me. I mean, I'd fallen in love with a girl when I was twelve

40:30 years of age at primary school, I think, but the sexual side of it, was no interest, it was just a mucky area. Sordid area in a way I suppose, you know. If you thought about it, you were sort of sorry for them in having to do it, you know.

Imagine it would have been out of bounds for you to investigate?

You wouldn't want to be seen there. I mean, a lot of policemen knew who I was of course and not that that entered my mind, no, I just wasn't interested. I think I might have wandered through it once or twice because I was in the city for some reason, just out of curiosity. Because it was always in the newspapers over some sort of trouble, you know. And of course, authors like Frank Hardy and people

41:00 like that would write about it, you know. But no, didn't interest me really at all. Had other things more interesting.

Tape 2

00:31 **When you joined the army, Max, had the war broken out at this stage?**

No, this was I think it was September, 1938, I joined the army. I turned eighteen in June, ’38.

Were you following what was going on in Europe?

Oh yes. Yes. I was a good reader of the newspapers, used to certainly read the news, that type of thing, yes I was very

01:00 familiar with it, I think.

Did you talk about what was going on with your mates?

I’m sure I would have, I can’t confirm that I did. I mean, I knew Hitler and who Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin were, of course. And you’d have the sailors down the port, even earlier complaining about the prime minister of England’s doing this, or “Your prime minister’s a twit”, or, you know those sorts of conversations, are going on all the time.

Did you think that a world war was actually going

01:30 **to erupt?**

I thought it was a certainty. And so did other people, too by the time I joined the army it was inevitable.

So what happened after you got your papers of acceptance, is that right? What happened directly after that?

Well, I was transported, I forget how, down to Queenscliff, which was a fort town, and historically

02:00 Queenscliff Fort, fired the first shot in World War II, because a German cargo ship, on the night that war was declared was trying to get out of Port Phillip Bay. And the fort fired a six inch shell across its bows and stopped it and that German cargo ship was became a part of the Australian commercial mercantile fleet I think during the war.

02:30 **Get out and stay out.**

That was in 1914. Yeah. And the fort people have always claimed they fired the first shot in World War II.

They don’t like Germans?

World War I, I should say, World War I.

So can you describe to me what sort of set up was at Queenscliff for your training?

Well, we would be training on the same sort of guns that they actually had here in Albany,

03:00 and at the various permanent artillery forts, which defended every port in Australia. And even Darwin had them and they were six inch artillery pieces and we were trained on those but I’d been down there for perhaps less than twelve months but certainly

03:30 two or three months before war was declared, yes, it would have been probably about June, of 1939, that they formed an anti-aircraft cadre and there were no anti-aircraft units in Australia. And they formed one cadre in Sydney and one in Melbourne to learn how to use and fire anti-aircraft guns and they were a three inch, two thousand weight so

04:00 they were fairly mobile, transportable guns. And they were pulled by a tractor called the Hathi, which is the Indian word for elephant and I was one chosen to become one of the people that trained on anti-aircraft and not coastal artillery work.

So how did you get chosen for this job?

I’ve no idea how I was chosen but of course our officers

04:30 were all staff corps officers, permanent army staff corps officers from the staff college in Canberra. And one of them who was in charge and his name was Lieutenant Ruston, he formed the cadre and I was one of them chosen to be trained in anti-aircraft work. Well when war broke out the guns that we had which were to my, well I knew

05:00 later on that they weren’t quite as good a gun as they should have been.

Are they ex World War I guns?

No. No, they were a gun I think designed and built probably in the 1930s, for anti-aircraft work but they weren’t powerful enough to fire to elevations. You know, there’s a great deal of gravity resistance and firing at high flying aircraft, so

05:30 so the cartridge that fires them has got to be pretty powerful to get the height and the speed and also the timing to fire ahead of a bomber so that the bomber flies into the flak and it's all got to be nicely timed through an instrument called the predictor, which I suppose you could almost say was the original computer.

How does this predictor work?

Well, I think it worked

06:00 internally by a whole series of cams and settings that you put on the predictor, I was instructor in the predictor eventually, because when the war broke out that cadre, we'd never fired a shot with an anti-aircraft shot at that time, I don't know that there was probably much ammunition for them in Australia, was just simply a new piece of equipment, as far as Australian services

06:30 were concerned and they sent a unit up to Yarraville in Melbourne to mount guns to protect the ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries] works where, because ICI are the biggest producers of explosives in the British Empire at that time, British Commonwealth.

07:00 Well, we mounted guns over the ICI factory and while I was there they transferred me to Sydney because they were trying to hurriedly train an anti-aircraft unit from militiamen in Sydney and because I'd gone through a course of work with these anti-aircraft guns I was transferred to Sydney.

Just before you get to Sydney,

07:30 **when you're doing the training in Queenscliff, you're there for quite some time, aren't you?**

I was there from September or October, 1938, 'til probably fourteen months.

Yeah, that's quite a while so I want to get more information from you about exactly what you were doing there. How much of an emphasis was there on fitness at this point?

Oh, very much so. Yes,

08:00 there were physical culture exercises done and you're encouraged to play sport which was one of the reasons I think I was selected out of a large number of men and the other factor because I was eighteen years of age, they like to recruit young people because we're more malleable and older people who are possibly don't like discipline so much. You can

08:30 bully us kids sort of thing. Queenscliff was a very pleasant coastal village and still is. Although I haven't been there for many years, but very pleasant place to live. Fishing village.

So what sort of exercises would you do as part of the fitness regime at Queenscliff?

Oh it'd be just the ordinary physical culture, you could do a bit of boxing, if you wanted to, you know, set up, as long as it didn't get too

09:00 serious. Wrestle around, you know, we used to wrestle each other in our quarters, that type of things, lump over the top of beds and beds collapse and someone'd come storming in, the corporal or bombardiers they were called in the artillery. A senior bombardier come storming through our room and what all the noise was about that sort of thing, so we were all young, physically active people.

Were you doing many route marches?

No.

09:30 No it's a poor infantry that does the route marching. We did, we marched, see, those units, those artillery units, were ceremonial units for the Australian Army. If there was guards of honour for the Governor General, opening parliament or something, the bunnies that were chosen to go and do it so we were trained very strictly as say, the guards units in England

10:00 London would be on ceremonial duties in, we could shoulder arms all perfectly like chorus girls, dancing that sort of thing.

How would they teach you how to do that sort of a ceremonial stuff?

Well, it was simply demonstrated by perhaps a sergeant who was very efficient at shouldering arms and briskly coming to attention and all those types of things that you do in ceremonial work,

10:30 presenting arms, they're done by example and then you'd have to try and follow that example then the ultimate test was that fifty young men could all clash their rifles down on the ground at a absolutely the one mini second. So you were proud of your ability to do that, of course and when you shoulder arms, when you do it first, when you're a bit nervous, you're likely to shoulder arms and

11:00 your rifle goes flying through the air over your shoulder or something, because you've got to leave it and snap your hands onto it. So there was that about it.

So you're saying this takes a bit of practise?

I don't think we liked it actually because there were so many things you could make a mess of and I can remember one instance where one of the eighteen that was recruited with me, was rather a nervous sort of chap, you know the sergeant, actually

11:30 was the captain of the Victorian interstate football team, during the early '30s, his name was, Gordian, and he was a famous Victorian footballer of the 1930s. And he was a pretty tough character, physically, he was very thick set and very strong man and he certainly was a man that had a bit of a bullying in him, which was traditional for drill sergeants. Anyway we

12:00 were parading and we were doing these marching exercises very briskly on the parade ground and he gave an order and we all turned right and this poor nervous bloke turned left and marched up and here we all and the sergeant stopped us and said, "Look at him." And this poor other coot's still marching off in the wrong direction, not knowing what to do with himself. He looked like something out of a goon film.

12:30 **What sort of a uniform would you wear for this ceremonial work?**

Well we wore the same uniform as the Royal Marines in England did and why it was a Royal Marine uniform I don't know, but they may have been the left offs from the Royal Marines or something.

What did it actually look like?

Well, it was a blue uniform with the brass buttons down the front, epilates, gold epilates on the shoulder, and you wore a white pith, a large white pith helmet the same as the

13:00 marines did and it had a red collar. It looked, and red stripes up the leg. And that was the official ceremonial uniform, but the ordinary work dress uniform were just khakis, khaki shirt and khaki trousers.

So what sort of ceremonies would you actually attend?

Well see I wasn't there that long,

13:30 and then the war stopped all that sort of, you could say, nonsense. They still do those ceremonials, you're probably aware, for Federal Parliament and things like that and you know, President of the United States come to Australia, they'll have a guard of honour in which he'll walk past and the poor man's got to do, and with our chins sticking out and very rigid. People have been known to faint, in fact

14:00 the guard commander fainted on the steps of Parliament House in Melbourne this was the First World War, a man who was a regimental sergeant major and his legs went on him. Because you're just kept standing there, rigid, you know. And suddenly your legs go on you and your knees collapsed and you want to collapse properly if you collapse, you don't want to sort of suddenly get up again, you want to make out your, you make out everything's gone blank.

14:30 **If you're going to go, just go really quickly.**

Go properly. Because we had bayonets on too, which could be quite dangerous 'cause you'd fall over with your bayonet on and a bayonet is that long. So, yes, so I did two ceremonials in Melbourne, in front of Parliament House and that was the only opportunity I had to do them. But we would train in the streets of Queenscliff, march down the streets with the guard and do things

15:00 and course we were in a way, much liked by the Queenscliff people because we were a big part of the society there and our provisions all came from locally, so we were very much a part of local Queenscliff society.

So what did the actual barracks look like out there in Queenscliff?

Well they were largely a red type of brick,

15:30 a wall of nine or ten feet high, encompassed the whole fort area which there were large heavy timber doors, you had to enter to get into to get into the fort area and that was the same at North Head in Sydney and wherever those forts were they were not open to the public except they'd open them perhaps one day a year, or a couple of days a year and families

16:00 would come down to visit their sons and that sort of thing. It was a very small institution because the Australian Army was almost non-existent in the '30s. And we were very slow in building it up.

What sort of area did you have to sleep in as far as barracks were concerned?

Well, we had a sports field inside the barracks, we played football on it, I was a member

16:30 of their football team from the start and our coach was this ex-Victoria player of course, Sergeant Gordian. And we'd play the Point Cook, RAAF people. We'd go up to Point Cook and play football there and Point Cook team, air force team would play us, the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade which was almost full of Victorian League footballers because it

17:00 was a job they could get and they had an amazing team. I'd say they could have played the Victorian interstate side and probably beaten them. Except that half the interstate side would have been firemen in the first place. But they came down, they sent a team, the fire team and they played on our ground, we beat them. I remember kicking four goals for centre half forward on league footballer and suddenly woken up that I was classy

17:30 footballer. Was only something to kick in the park was before that. But I did realise at eighteen years of age that I probably good enough footballer to be picked up by one of the Victorian League teams and I was eventually after the war, I played two seasons with South Melbourne, now the Sydney Swans of course. But of course I was old then and you know, I was twenty six, twenty seven and I wanted to do other things anyway and

18:00 I was quite happy when I had my one game and then never got another game I wasn't going to worry, I just proved a point that I knew, but I had six years in the army and hardly ever played football and but, it satisfied my ego, you know.

What were the facilities like inside the barracks at Queenscliff?

Well they were typical,

18:30 well eighteen of us in our sort of recruit group, eighteen of us all lived in one room. We'd short sheet blokes sometimes in their beds, you know where they'd go to get in bed and all the bed had been messed up sort of thing. That was one of the things that did just for a lark, I suppose.

What sort of beds were you sleeping on?

Well, they had

19:00 a wire mattress and then sort of a traditional mattress on it, an grey blankets and sheets.

Relative comfort.

Oh yes, it wasn't rough life, I mean it was all internal. In the sense that a lot of our work was done internally in the fort itself. You're always getting lectures on artillery work which required a reasonable degree of mathematics

19:30 **Why does it require this degree of mathematics?**

Well, it was just, put it this way, it'll stretch on a bit, because I was trained in artillery, I was trained there in artillery and I was trained there in anti-aircraft artillery and shortly after I went to Sydney they opened an officer's school, to train officers for anti-aircraft artillery and they sent me to it,

20:00 which meant that when I graduated I became a potential officer, the establishment were there to turn me into a lieutenant, I was an acting sergeant at the time.

You're talking about Sydney now, aren't you?

I've left Sydney, because you asked me about why they require mathematics. Well, I suppose it's

20:30 like teaching a doctor, a lot of biology that he'll never, ever use but he might use, might require. Now, once during the war when I became an infantryman, 2/6th Infantry Battalion, the officer, platoon commander, didn't really know, take the risk of dropping some mortar bombs very, very close to us. From our mortars because the Japanese were only

21:00 thirty or forty yards from us. And I said, "I'll drop them, I'll put them there, you just let me take control of those mortars, I'll put them there". Because of my artillery work, I knew how much one degree, subtended at the end of a distance, how I knew that mentally and work it out, that if I could drop a bomb there I'll move the next mortar about fifteen yards and then I'll bring that and that came from my artillery

21:30 training. Now, you might have said, "That's alright for a kid that leaves at thirteen years of age". But I had a slide rule when I was about sixteen years of age, of course, that's an interesting sort of thing. So I bought one, but don't ask me why I bought one. I hardly ever used it but remember a slide rule?

Vaguely.

So that leapt forward. I did anyway, I got myself to Sydney.

22:00 **With some of the other lectures that you were having at Queenscliff, what would they teach you?**

Well, I mean, we still had to use rifles of course, even artillerymen are given rifles to be able to use. So you had to be a reasonably good marksman in that sort of sense. That was a coastal artillery unit which is a fixed unit, in other words no mobility there, so you didn't have to be

22:30 trained in say, driving, you never had to be trained for a car license or a truck license as you would if you were in field artillery, a lot of people had to be able to drive implements from one part, instruments and things. I suppose there were educational lectures, you know on would have been lectures on world

affairs and things like

23:00 that with the war approaching. As I say, all these were pretty well all the officers would have gone through school to leaving certificate, matriculation stages, some of them would have had university degrees, and gone through to Staff College in Canberra. So, they had to maintain your interest and probably you would be getting lectures

23:30 on health and you know, just general subjects that filled the curriculum, almost unnecessarily now, you know. But there was no opportunity to sort of loaf or anything like that. There was also guard's duties, you know, you did overnight guard's duty on the gate as they

24:00 would at Buckingham Palace or anything like that.

Were you fed reasonably well?

Very well, you know your conventional way, no French cuisine there. Just another side, both the heads of Port Phillip Bay, which is very narrow and it's a very dangerous current of water that flows in, Bass Strait's a very rugged strip of water as you possibly know, it has

24:30 more wrecked ships in Bass Strait than any other part of the Australian coast, from the early history of Australia trying to squeeze between Tasmania and Victoria, and Wilson's Promontory. And that's where I did further army training, was down at Wilson's Promontory, because that's where they trained the commandos. But one of the heads

25:00 was Queenscliff, and over on the other head was Point Nepean, well that had guns too. These were the large six inch artillery guns which fire several miles out to sea. And probably for until the six months until the period that I was trained as an anti-aircraft artilleryman I was stationed at Point Nepean. Now, that was great for a young man. Because

25:30 we were more or less left to ourselves, over there, the commanding officer of the fort wasn't there and we had a lieutenant there who was easy to get on with and we also right along the bottom of the cliffs there, which is quite elevated, sharp cliffs, was great lobster area, for catching lobsters and so we dined pretty well there. And it's a great place to fish.

26:00 **Would you get across there by ship?**

Yeah, yeah. The fort at Queenscliff, was also an engineer's fort. Royal Australian Engineers and they were responsible of course for building forts and maintaining forts that wasn't our job. But I won't go onto those, that's another area and nothing to do with me. But they wore a slightly different uniform than we did.

26:30 But at Point Nepean that was a narrow long strip of land, and for about four miles which was a quarantine area, because at the four miles away from us and nearer the border was the quarantine station serving the port of Melbourne. And that was an historical area of course and it had been just closed as a quarantine station, before we got there. So

27:00 we had all this long strip of four miles of country just to ourselves about thirty of us, I suppose.

What would you do there?

Well, I mean, I think we fished. I mean, it was sometimes you'd be transported back to Queenscliff, some particular reason, you know it might be series of lectures on something which I don't remember now. But

27:30 Point Nepean was a good life, but there was one unfortunate incident in there is that we lived in a barrack living there, as we did back at Queenscliff, and the sergeant was there had a separate quarters. And the officer had a separate quarters, he had a room to himself somewhere. Which is a hierarchical system of course in the services and

28:00 I had my coats and that hanging up in the typical steel locker, you know you have in football teams and various things like that. And when I went to it one day, a five pound note which was in it had been stolen. And I reported it and that sergeant broke down and admitted he'd taken it. He was a

28:30 family man with two or three kids and he admitted and of course he was de-ranked which made me unpopular with people. So I've heard, you know, so I did hear later on. And that's maybe one of the things that encouraged me to go to Sydney. But the fact that if I'd reported him stolen did have its offshoot, you know, in the sense that I'd caused the de-ranking of an

29:00 old sergeant. 'Course he went before a formal court martial I suppose, he broke down anyway, and admitted he'd taken it and he'd taken it because of family reasons and things. I don't know why he took it.

So you thought you were doing the right thing?

Well, naturally you know, five pounds is quite a considerable sum to me, I can't remember what our salary, wages were. 'Cause

29:30 they were pretty small though.

So what happened after the Point Nepean incident?

Well, I'm just trying to think, that was before the ack-ack [anti aircraft fire] cadre was formed. The anti-aircraft. So I would have gone back to Queenscliff and trained in anti-aircraft work.

So, how did you find out that it was being formed?

30:00 Well simply a message passed across, to Point Nepean the officer who was forming this cadre was selecting the people for the cadre, I imagine, he may have been given a free hand or not, I don't know but I was one of the ones chosen.

Was that an exciting thing for you?

Well, it was interesting, you know it was going to give me another interest in life.

30:30 Yes, I quite enjoyed the thought of it I think.

So who was in charge?

Well, it was a Lieutenant Rushton. I've got an idea Lieutenant Rushton was an old Geelong Grammarian and Geelong Grammar has been regarded as the Eton of Australia for many years and you know Rupert Murdoch's a Geelong Grammarian. Malcolm Fraser [Prime Minister of Australia] was, you know there are some famous Australians

31:00 came from that college. And of course we played cricket against it. Probably because of Lieutenant Rushton. But we played, we went up to Geelong Grammar and played a couple of games of cricket in the summer, that first summer. They beat us.

So what was Rushton like?

I'd say he'd be terrific as a womaniser, he was very good looking man, very spic and span

31:30 and I can't say I liked Rushton but it may be because you didn't sort of like any officers back when you were being pushed around.

Would he push people around?

No, he wouldn't, no, he would have done his job properly as a trained officer but you know more back then this sort of caste system which probably irritated a boy from Port Melbourne

32:00 a bit. Like, I became an officer myself, in the commandos and even in New Guinea, I had a commanding officer who eventually took over the company who did isolate himself, even in the jungle, you know, and I just couldn't understand it, just wasn't in my make up to believe that junior officers are any different than senior sergeants or corporals and

32:30 if they're any good, they'll lead you by example, you don't have to be aloof from them. That aloofness, it was just part of the upbringing I think.

Was it after you had mounted the guns on top of that, like a munitions factory?

The ICI. International Chemicals.

ICI. Was it after that that you went to Sydney?

Yes, yes, we mounted the guns up there and I had a photograph here somewhere, I was setting the predictor up which was the instrument that does all the calculations where you want the shell to arrive and explode.

Do you have to manually punch them into the predictor?

Yeah, you put a certain amount of information and a range finder is giving you very height and the distance of the plane from you. And

33:30 calculations regarding speed go in because you're looking into a telescope through the predictor and get that onto the aeroplane and in the movements and information you feed into it, it provides the information which transferred to the gun. And that was interesting, a new interest for me. And as I say, they sent me to an officer's school at South Head in Sydney where there

34:00 were a lot of people coming in and be trained as officers.

Do you know why you were selected to be an officer? Did you have to go through any sort of test?

Well, I was selected to go to the school, which was for officers and I suppose because I was a sensible young man who probably had potential.

34:30 **Just wondering if you had to sit any sort of?**

Well, remember I was a permanent soldier so I had a lot of knowledge about the game than a lot of the people coming in. And there was a militia unit formed in Sydney which was an anti-aircraft unit a regiment and 'cause it was quite untrained, you know, wasn't very well developed and the same thing was

35:00 happening in Melbourne, the rest of Australia didn't matter. But I suppose that's not quite correct but why I was selected, I can't tell you, you'd have to ask who did the selection but I suppose I was relatively experienced and therefore I was receptive to the work that would be given you there.

35:30 And I can't remember how many were there, probably fifty.

Were there some other fellows from Queenscliff, also selected?

No.

So you were the only one?

I was the only Victorian that was over there and I was amongst a huge number of rugby players, in fact one of the other men there was the captain of the Australian Wallabies who was the rugby union test team and after

36:00 the war, Bill became the manager of the Australian Wallabies on their overseas trips and that. So he was a student there, but he knew nothing about artillery work, he went there when the 2/1st Anti-aircraft Regiment, which was an AIF regiment, and I say completely new to the game.

Had war broken out by the time that you were doing the officer's training in Sydney?

War broke out before I helped mount the guns in ICI in Yarraville.

36:30 War broke out in the first week of September, 1939, and I wouldn't have got to Sydney probably until around Christmas time or something like that.

So what was the first thing that they started training you as part of the Sydney officer's school?

Well, the regiment formed with the, I'll explain this to put it in a time scale again.

37:00 While I was at an artillery camp, no guns there but it was part of the Australian permanent army camp, called, Georges Heights, which looked straight out across out to the Sydney Heads, right across Port Jackson and to the opening of Sydney Heads, from St Georges Heights. And it was a beaut position, you know a lovely part of the

37:30 harbour there and that had barracks there. And I went there to help mount guns there, anti-aircraft guns in Sydney and when the first troop ships came, we moved guns down to the port area because the Mauritania, one of the big white star liners from the Atlantic trade, was one of the first troop ships to come and they were

38:00 transporting the 16th Brigade which was the first AIF brigade formed, that was formed there and the 17th Brigade, the next brigade was formed in Melbourne.

When you were at St Georges Heights, is this part of the officer's training?

No, no, we were training militia.

When is this?

This was around Christmas, January, 1939.

So,

38:30 **this is after you've come from Queenscliff.**

I've come from Queenscliff to Yarraville Melbourne, to mount guns over the factory that produced explosives and then they transfer me to Sydney.

So is it then that you start doing this work at St Georges?

Yes.

So you're not really doing any training at the moment as part of the officer's school?

No, no, from there, St Georges Heights, they formed probably

39:00 around about February, March, probably March 1940, the war had been going for six months in Europe and it was very quiet, nothing much was happening in Europe even. And those first few months they were just staring at each other and you know, I suppose there were some ships sunk in the Atlantic but not much fighting on France yet.

39:30 **So with your posting to St Georges, are you training as an officer then?**

No.

So, this is still part of your posting from Queenscliff?

Still a member of the permanent army, but they had formed the AIF for overseas service in October and they formed the 6th Division, the first division of it. They had five divisions in World War I, in the Second World War they

40:00 had 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Divisions.

So what are you doing at St Georges?

I'm training militia in anti-aircraft work because they'd formed a militia unit for anti-aircraft work. But as I say they'd formed the AIF. Now, several of us applied to go to the AIF straight away, back in October '39, they wouldn't let us go. Because what the answer always was, "Look you've got to train people.

40:30 Haven't even got anybody trained for this damn war. You've got to train". You see? So we were training people of a militia unit, not the AIF overseas soldiers, we were only training for the defence of Australia.

So you would have been pretty young to be a trainer?

I was nineteen years of age. Yeah.

So were you training people?

I was training people up to forty years of age.

41:00 **So how did you cope with that? Being so young?**

Well, I knew my job, wasn't any trouble. Wasn't any trouble and I was proud of my job. I was a healthy young man and I could cope with that, I mean, I didn't have to extend myself, really to train them, I was just telling them what I knew, which was basic how to fire those damn guns.

What were the barracks like at St Georges?

Good they were comfortable, much the same, but the main barracks were

41:30 over on North Head Sydney, which was biggest probably barracks in Australia. And they had guns there too.

So how many men were you training on a regular basis?

I really can't remember, but they were coming in all the time, you know, forming these units and there were officers coming in and the CO [commanding officer] was a Sydney barrister, I think he was a barrister he was certainly a lawyer, by the name of Gibson, he was a militia, he formed the militia unit as a lieutenant.

Tape 3

00:31 **Can you describe the militia training that you were involved in?**

Well, you know, it's pretty simple, basic sort of training, I mean, the person that fires a gun doesn't have to be a Rhodes Scholar or anything. You've got to be careful of course, you can lose your fingers in loading shells into artillery pieces, by simply getting the door that

01:00 closes on an artillery cartridge, which is the explosion which sends a steel shell flying through the air, the doors are very heavy and they're very beautifully machined and if your fingers are just too slow, you're likely to lose the end of your fingers, you know. So they were always one of the things, never use an open palm, you had to instruct them, and always use your clenched fist because your fingers

01:30 are more likely to get caught than your clenched fist is. So, there were things like that but it was a lot of repetitive work, in other words doing the exercises in loading and firing and loading and firing, not necessarily firing but going through all the actions, and then there were the ordinary soldier's duties around the camp that you had to instruct people who'd never been in a camp in a military situation before.

02:00 There was a lot of unused time, you didn't map out a whole day's schedule and expect to be absolutely cramming stuff into a man eight hours a day. It just wasn't on, you couldn't do it. So, the sort of training you got as an infantryman, you'd be out on route marches and doing tactical exercises into trenches or into holes or

02:30 digging holes and doing a lot of walking and hiding and ducking and those types of things that doesn't

occur in an artillery unit. And the other thing is that artillery instruments are very expensive instruments and you can't afford, you can fire a 303 rifle, or a Tommy gun or a Bren gun or an Owen gun or whatever it may be, a Kalashnikov that nowadays,

03:00 and it's not very costly to fire a few shots off, but if you're firing artillery shots off, there's a lot of dollars going up in the air and if it's a rocket there's a hell of a lot of dollars going up in the air so you couldn't get as much of that sort of training as you'd like. And as you would have liked to have had and you know everybody wanted to be more and more efficient in the use of their artillery pieces but most

03:30 people would have been trained in action. They would have had that sort of developed the real expertise that was required, in action, not in training.

Did you find it rewarding being their instructor?

No, I don't think I ever thought of that in those terms, I just did the job and it was another job, you know, it wasn't exciting or anything

04:00 you were interested, like for instance the anti-aircraft work, we'd fire at a thing called a drogue, which was towed by an aircraft like a large sock, flying several hundred yards more or less behind the plane and we'd

04:30 fire shells at that. Explosive shells at that, or smoke shells at that. And that'd be out over sea, so we did some exercises like that at a place called, Narrabeen, which is a bathing town, a swimming holiday town more or less an outer suburb of Sydney along the coast towards Newcastle and we fired shells out at these drogues. That was the only shells I ever fired in Sydney and

05:00 that was only done once. But we'd do exercises out in the bush, where you take the guns out onto the road and we'd disappear and adopt a fighting arrangement of the guns as though we were defending some sort of centre or other.

What kind of defensive positions would you set up?

Well, they weren't defensive,

05:30 they were attack positions, you know to attack aircraft, bombing or fighter aircraft attacking, when I say, fighter aircraft, the guns we were using in training there were for more high flying aircraft and not low flying aircraft. Low flying aircraft are more or less attack with heavy machine guns, until the Bofor gun arrived from Europe. But the Bofor guns were used in light aircraft, regiments, which were formed

06:00 later than the heavy aircraft, anti-aircraft regiments.

How long were you instructing the militia for, Max?

Until they formed the AIF. Well, they had formed the AIF in October, General Blamey formed the 6th Division which is the original division and the original division is the 18th Brigade and they were training at a area called, Ingleburn, which is about thirty miles out of Sydney.

06:30 And some of us wanted to join that as artillerymen. We would have had to been field artillery, and that would have been the 2/1st Field Artillery Regiment if we could have got into it but they wouldn't let us because they said we had to be instructors. And that was an irritant. I mean, you know, young men have got some stupid ideas about war, they always want to get to it. Then when they got to it they

07:00 don't want to be there. Mostly. But that didn't happen, as far as I'm concerned. This militia unit which was being formed, trained by us and had been partly trained you know, and scratched together, sort of thing, it's always hard to accumulate the men into a unit. Some of them don't want to be there and they want to go elsewhere because they've got a cousin somewhere

07:30 else in another unit. And I became a recruiting sergeant, I was acting sergeant which meant that I had to do the job as sergeant, but I only got the pay of a bombardier. While you're acting. And I had three stripes on my arm but no crown with the three stripes, you see. But so when the 2/1st Ack-ack Regiment was formed, they had

08:00 to go down the recruiting depots and see who was coming in and I was with the captain of the battery which was four batteries to a regiment, I was with the battery commander, whose name was Jock Pagan who eventually became the federal president of the Liberal Party and knighted for his work and pretty high commissioner in London for New South Wales Government. Jock Pagan. He took me down to Sydney and

08:30 he'd say, "See that joker over there? Go and talk him into joining the 2/1st Ack-ack Regiment". 'Cause you'd look at him and you'd say, "He's an educated man, looked good sensible sort of man". We finished up with the best educated regiment in Australia, I'm sure and there're rugby players galore, we had international rugby players in the unit and the unit in the game on the Sydney Cricket Ground later on, two months later, played the internationals game the regiment thrashed the

09:00 nationals, because the regiment was full of national rugby players anyway. But that was a funny job to get. So that's what I did, I went up to people on the street and you know, they were in civvies, nicely

dressed, the nicely dressed ones were looking as though they might have got their leaving certificate or something, they got into our regiment. And then it was all formed up

09:30 at Ingleburn and that's when I was sent to this officer's school at South Head, Sydney with a number of the other fellas from the same regiment. And I graduated from that and I went back to Ingleburn like everybody else and then they held the second school and they sent me back as an instructor. Instead of promoting me to lieutenant they were bringing these odd blokes in with leaving certificates, things from well known Sydney Grammar schools and various

10:00 things and they were getting commissions and I had to train them. That was very annoying for a young man who couldn't understand and quite a few of the regular army sergeants like I was, had been permanent soldier, were overlooked. They just kept us as sergeants as instructors. The second school I went to I was actually training the colonel, that was the

10:30 commander of the 2/2nd Regiment formed in Melbourne. And amongst the students, was my future brother in law, my wife's elder brother. I didn't know him then of course, and I walked into her flat where she was staying in Melbourne after the war, twelve months after the war or so, and this bloke walked in and he said, "I know you", and I said, "I've seen your face before". He turned out to be one of the students I was instructing

11:00 at South Head Sydney back in 1940.

Can you tell me about the Officers' Training School?

Well, there were two levels there, I think in a way, as I remember it.

Can we start with your experience as a student?

Well, the lectures covered a fair

11:30 range of material. They were mainly given by staff corps officers, but there were one or two people brought in from Sydney University to give us lectures on world affairs and general knowledge, you know of the world that you were going to be fighting in. I imagine they talked about Germany and the history of the European First World War and things like that but there were lectures on the science of artillery work.

12:00 I really can't remember too much about it, you know.

How long was the course for?

I think it was about six weeks. I'm only guessing, could have been four weeks, I'm not sure. They were pretty good standard, well educated lot of blokes. And very fit and one of them was a Blaxland,

12:30 I remember was a bit of a, well he became a scientist but the Blaxlands were a famous historical family in New South Wales, they were one of the original explorers over the Blue Mountains and that and you read history books of the early history of Australia you run into this Geoffrey Blaxland, you know as one of the early pioneering families of the original

13:00 Port Jackson settlement. So they were good crowd to be amongst but there were what I call, well a friend of mine once, who had three university degrees, Bill Beattie, I said to him, "What did you learn at Oxford, when you got your Oxford degree?" And he said, "I learned how to do something to women and

13:30 and I learned how to drink". And I said, "Gee", and he said, "Honestly, I learned bugger all at Oxford." He said, "We just womanised and drank and went to parties in London and I had a bloody good time". He had a university degree from New Zealand and one from Sydney University. His Oxford one.

Sounds like he might have been having a little modest.

Well, he might have been, of course, he yes, he probably was, but

14:00 I only mentioned that because half of that school of officers were like that. They fooled around, mucked about you know, because they were coming from well known leading Sydney families and that sort of thing, and then there was the more serious young blokes that had come in and wanted to get on and develop knowledge and efficiency and that sort of thing, so there was two groups amongst them which were

14:30 followed on into the army a bit, too really. And that's about all I can say on that.

What was your impression of that division, or those factions?

Well, it's one that I was aware of, you know, and I've been, as I grew older I became more aware of, but it's disappeared largely in Australia to a great extent but I think in the '30s and '40s

15:00 when I was in the Commandos, my original CO was an Oxford graduate and he was in the Foreign Affairs Department and colonial administration in the Solomon Islands on behalf of the British Government and then the second in command after my CO was killed there, he was the manager of 3AW in Melbourne

15:30 radio station and he became a head sherrang of the Macquarie network in Sydney. He came from a different level of life and you were aware of it, you know. Because I say I was basically a working class kid. And you were conscious of those things then whereas you perhaps wouldn't be now. And I was one of the fortunate ones that

16:00 grew out of it and out and matured out of that sort of attitude. So I suppose teaching at officers school where there were people from what I'd say was the caste system. You woke up, you became aware you were just as good as them, some ways you were better than them and you could knock them off in

16:30 various other ways and that was a good educational experience which was common to the service life. Because everybody is pretty well at the same level and once action starts and once you're in a threatening situation everything levels out very quickly.

Doesn't matter where you come from?

Right, doesn't matter on iota. And fortunately

17:00 the Australia Army that was a relatively minor thing compared to what British soldiers of that time would have told you, the caste system was still very strong there and that disappeared during the war, in World War II, I think we moved that very strongly. In Britain too.

When did you get to the field officer's school?

Well, what happened,

17:30 the 2/1st Ack-ack Regiment was split up for a while and 1 Battery went to Darwin, came under command of a Major Mander-Jones, whose wife was the head of the Mitchell Library in Sydney at that time. Mander-Jones was a weirdo, very strange character. You know, he was like a mad professor. He really was and I entered the orderly room one day and he swore at me

18:00 "Go back and open that door, shut that door, Piggott and come in this room properly!" He said. Here was I, a senior sergeant, walking in and out of the orderly room constantly. And he'd been in there, you know, stupid mad professor and because I didn't knock on the door and ask permission to enter, he tore strips of me. Nobody could believe it.

18:30 **He must have been puzzled with something that he was studying.**

But anyway he took a battery to Darwin to protect something in Darwin, another battery went to Newcastle, to protect BHP's [Broken Hill Proprietary] factory, God knows what we were protecting it against. You know, I mean the war's in Europe and hasn't really warmed up terribly much. And the other batter of this regiment remained in Sydney.

So you weren't particularly motivated to

19:00 **build defences?**

I was giving, like, you see, we had this group of permanent army men who were all sergeants now, and warrant officers, in other words battery sergeant majors and things. And we were becoming restless because part of the reason we were restless is we knew the job from A to Z and we were having young men coming in

19:30 as officers on this, what I believe was a really an unfortunate caste sort of system you know, that this was good officer material. Must get him, you know, good officer material. And here we were, as the sergeants we were doing most of the work and we were pretty restless and on one occasion you've asked me how I got to the field artillery, well

20:00 this is partly the cause of me going to the field artillery. We had the officer's mess where the officers had their dinner and had their drinks and that sort of thing and they could stay up, have lights on there till ten o'clock. The sergeants could have lights on till nine o'clock in their mess, we were separated, all sergeants in a sergeant's mess, everybody else were just ordinary soldiers and they ate in

20:30 large mess halls. Well, the sergeant that looked after our mess, was a Macarthur- Onslow, do you know the family name Macarthur- Onslow? Well the Macarthurs started the Australian Merino industry and Jim Macarthur- Onslow was the oldest sergeant of the lot and he had been in this militia unit and he'd looked after our mess which meant that

21:00 he had the key to where the beer was. Well this particular night, here's six or seven of us, browned off, we were getting browned off and this is getting into late 1940, Dunkirk had occurred in England the war was really on, the AIF, 1st AIF Brigade, 6th Division had gone to the Middle East, they hadn't fought yet, because this was before December, 1940.

21:30 So there's no Australians in action except perhaps some air force blokes in Europe and as I say, here we are, browned off. We've been in the army long enough and still stuck in Australia, we're in anti-aircraft where we're defending Sydney. When the troop ships came into Sydney Harbour we had to mount anti-aircraft guns, Queen Mary came in, biggest liner in the world at that time.

22:00 Took another brigade of soldiers away. And we saw them sail out of Sydney heads, you know, I think I

cried that day because I was so frustrated because I'd tried to get into the AIF and couldn't, they wouldn't let me. But I was in the AIF now, I was an artilleryman, anti-aircraft artilleryman. That was alright, I had all the necessary badges on and probably looked good in the street, walking down with a couple of patches on your shoulders and things. But we were irritated and we drank so

22:30 here's these seven or eight sulking sergeants and we had a few beers and Jim Macarthur, "Oh have another one". So we had another one. Ten o'clock at night we're still in there with the lights on, drinking beer and probably all under the weather a bit. When the orderly officer came along, here's a young man of about twenty years of age, my age, sort of thing, nice young bloke, can't remember his name. "Christ's sake, put your lights out fellas, go on get out!

23:00 Back to your huts". Sort of thing. "Oh come on, have a drink, Bill". You know we knew him by his first name he was lieutenant orderly officer, responsible, discipline you see. So we fed him a beer, and we put the lights out, off he went, happy that we were going to hut. So as soon as he'd gone, Jim Macarthur poured another beer, jug of beer and so we sat there. He came, that orderly officer must have come back about three times, but this time it's

23:30 half past eleven at night. The camp's silent, was twenty thousand soldiers in that camp, you know, infantry units, and artillery units and pioneer battalions and god knows what else. And here we are, these sergeants soaking up our grievances with beer. And of course, I was the youngest, amongst them. Probably one of the most senior, but I was still one of the youngest and I wasn't a great drinker anyway.

24:00 So he finally came back and he said, "You'll get me into real trouble", he said, this orderly officer, so we decided we'd go. Well we're wandering back and one of the sergeants, his name was Fredericks, started to abuse the bloody world you know, the government and everybody and we're trying to shut him up and he's quite drunk. We got into the ablution blocks which had the toilets, lavatories and the showers

24:30 cold showers. We got into that and we started to fight and wrestle and pushing each other under the showers and here we are, fully clothed in our ordinary shirts, khaki shirts and slacks and the water's pouring down, we're all soaking wet and we're all grabbing each other and fooling around and like you wouldn't believe it would you. Seeing half a dozen of the most senior sergeants in the whole of the AIF when who strides in but the commanding

25:00 officer in his dressing gown. Now, he said something that stuck in my mind all my life because it was said to me as a primary school student when I was called before the headmaster. And the headmaster then said, "Oh Max, not you". I must have been one of the good little students. He was aghast that I had been misbehaving too. And

25:30 this is what the CO said, you wouldn't believe it the same words. He looked at the six or seven of us and thought, "You're a lot of scoundrels, you but Piggott?" "Not you Piggott!" He said, "Not you too, Piggott!" And I've stuck it in my mind all my life really that, "Not you too Piggott". I'm wondering if it's going to happen when I arrive up there. He's going to think, "Not you,I should have sent you down there!" Anyway

26:00 I called up before the adjutant shortly after that and he said, "You could have an opportunity to be trained in field artillery, do you want to take it?" I said, "Sure". You know, "Quicker I get out of this regiment the better". All I wanted to do is go overseas and fire guns at the Germans or Italians or something. Like stupid young men do. And so I was sent to a field artillery officer's course

26:30 still a sergeant, here I am you know, so experienced in sort of artillery work by now, and that sort of thing, so I went to the field artillery. Which requires much more skill than anti-aircraft does. And of course, you're in much greater risk as a field artillery because the enemy's field artillery fires back at you too. And I know what happened to a couple of my friends that were in it

27:00 so I trained at a camp called, Holsworthy, which is just outside Sydney.

So Max, had they given you this opportunity because they could tell that you were getting frustrated?

Oh well, I mean the incident under the showers and the CO they probably knew it anyway. You know, probably Jock Pagan, our battery commander, as I explained earlier, his brother was an actor, who acted in Australian films too. One of the young

27:30 brothers. Pagan, can't think of his name, he acted in America I know. He probably would have known anyway, would have got to us. But anyway that was an opportunity to get out and two or three others took it too. And we trained there at Holsworthy, and nothing happened, still didn't get promotion and we were sent to Cowra where there was the reinforcements for all the Australian

28:00 artillery units which were the 6th Division, 7th Division, and 8th Division and the 8th Division had been sent to Malaya. By this time. So up there I was training and I also was training in anti-tank guns too, because there were same sort of artillery principles, in anti-tank gun warfare. So I was training at Cowra and here I was a reinforcement

28:30 potential reinforcement officer still waiting for a commission that should have been given to me back in May, 1940 and this is now, roughly eighteen months later and I'm still stuck in Australia, still frustrated

and amongst a group of blokes who I bought a photograph of them in, they're a

29:00 whole stack of sergeants in this photograph which I put somewhere or other. Or perhaps it's over here. In an envelope, I put some photographs that might have been interesting to the archival people and they can take that photograph away if they wanted, this group of sergeant. They're all very senior sergeants too and all of them except two, were waiting to be commissioned as lieutenants, including me.

29:30 And I was then a reinforcement officer, well a potential officer if somebody got killed or sick or went inefficient and got kicked out back to Australia, I'd take his place and probably be promoted to lieutenant. And that was in Malaya, so the likelihood I was going to go to Malaya. And anyway

30:00 this is roughly a couple of months before Japan came into the war, in December 1941, I'm up at Cowra and Cowra became famous as you know where the big Jap prisoner of war camp. And I was still frustrated, anyway, I'm frustrated again, I'm getting stewed up again. They were my

30:30 my artillery friends from Melbourne were fighting in Tobruk, Tobruk original desert campaign. And they're in Tobruk, I applied from this anti-aircraft and actually had myself before the CO to be transferred back to Victoria so I could be with my friends who were now the foundations sergeants and that of the 2/12th Field Regiment, which was the main artillery unit in Tobruk in the original Rats of Tobruk. They were my

31:00 mates and I wanted to get back to them. You know, fellas that I joined the army with in the first place. "Piggott, you'll do what the army expects". You know. That was all you were told constantly, "You'll do what your army expects you to do, not what you want to do".

So you're stuck in Cowra?

That's the sort of lecture you got and that's what he said, and anyway I got to this field artillery unit and

31:30 they used to give you weekend leave, occasionally, once a month you would get a leave pass that you could leave the camp, say at Cowra and get a rail ticket, free, a free rail ticket to return to your family, which meant that I went back to Melbourne, and I had to be back in camp by late Sunday and that was traditional, if you were Sydney it was easy but for me, to Melbourne or from West Australian of

32:00 course it was quite a momentous occasion to try and get back to your family. They wouldn't have flown you back, there wasn't any way of flying you back so you had to have a long journey. But I don't know what happened there, with the West Aussies, but I went back to Melbourne and I remained there. And I stayed at my over leave for a fortnight, because I said, "I'm going to go back there and not be

32:30 arrested for absent without leave. And I'll lose all my three stripes and they'll send me overseas to a field artillery unit somewhere". Alright. So I turned up at camp and camp sergeant major who slept in our hut, said, "Gee Max, you got a doctor's certificate?" Sort of thing, and I said, "I haven't got a bloody doctor's certificate, I've been AWL [absent without leave]", and he just laughed, "Oh bullshit!" You know,

33:00 and I said, "No, that's fair dinkum, you've got to arrest me", and he said, "Have I?" And I said, "Yeah, you've got to arrest me, I've been AWL". And he sort of believed me after a while. All the others were bit shocked, but then I was crazy, I came from Melbourne, you see. But anyway, I was paraded before the CO and he was the First World War colonel, a British soldier who

33:30 was a camp commandant and he was a very fine man, very admirable man, distinguished looking man, he would have made a lovely governor general something like that. But he was a very fine man of mid fifties or something, served in the World War, had highly decorated ribbons on his chest. And he dismissed the sergeant major. 'Cause I went in between two men armed with bayonets,

34:00 and he dismissed them. Said, "I'll talk to Sergeant Piggott privately". And he then he called me by my first name. He said, "What's wrong Max?" And that was a surprise and I said, "I'm just browned off, sir, I'm still instructing people, I've never fired a shot in anger, I don't know how I'm going to behave if someone shoots a gun at me. I've lost all confidence in that respect, I'm

34:30 just trying to explain that I'm browned off and fed up". That I tried to join the AIF even before it was formed and all sorts of things, soldiering's my life and here I am teaching people how to do these things and I should have been in action, people should be coming back from Middle East and teaching, not me. And he said, "Well, there'll be no charge against you and you keep your stripes". He said, "I'll

35:00 have you paraded before the brigadier in charge of training camps who's visiting the camp in a couple of weeks time, and you can put your case to him and I'm pretty sure they'll draft you to a unit somewhere. I'll recommend that you be drafted". And I'll go on the next convoy overseas. So that was pretty good, I thought that was wonderful of him to do that, you know which he didn't have to. So things went on

35:30 for about a couple of weeks. And I was called up to the office, and here were two captains, and I was interviewed because they were forming a commando unit and I said, "Yeah, I'd love to join you". So, that's what happened and I went down to Wilson's Promontory and I was recruiting for the 5th, what they were called, independent companies then and

36:00 we did our training down at Wilson's Promontory. There were four of them already formed. Unbeknownst to me, they were hush-hush units and the first had gone to New Ireland which is a major island off the east coast of New Britain, you know where New Britain is I suppose. The big island on the north east of New Guinea, Rabaul's the capital city of New Britain,

36:30 first company went there. They were almost all lost because an American submarine sunk a ship going to Japan which had them on as prisoners of war. Second company went to Timor, third company went to New Caledonia, a French possession to be there ready to shoot Vichy Frenchmen who were opposed to the Free French. New Caledonia, the French island was split between the pro Vichy [French war-time government that worked with the Germans in occupied France]

37:00 German people and the pro Free French [those fighting outside France]. So the third company went there. Fourth company were deposited into Arnhem Land in case the Japanese landed there and we went to New Guinea. We were the first AIF troops to go to New Guinea. There were only two militia battalions in Port Moresby and they were all average age about eighteen and a half I think. One unit was from Sydney, recruited in Sydney and

37:30 the other unit, the 39th Battalion, were mainly came from where my Father came from, round Bendigo, Ballarat area. And I was split up again. What happened, we were training down there on Wilson's Promontory when and I was still a sergeant, we had to lose rank, that's what these captains said, "Gotta lose rank and we'll decide whether you'll be a sergeant or not".

38:00 Anyway as soon as I got there they made me sergeant and they found out that nobody in the whole unit didn't know how to handle an office work, the routine paperwork for rations and establishment things all the various things that flow through and up, unit office, so they made me temporary company sergeant major so I could run the office, which was amusing until they got a trained company

38:30 sergeant major recruit. And so all the new recruits coming in went through me to start with, you know people coming down there by rail and that and that was always interesting because one of the questions of CO Neem, his name was, used to say, "Now, pretty good chance you'll be killed, does that worry you?" It was a silly bloody question to ask, but that was his style. And

39:00 we were into the Japanese are well into the war by now of course and must have been around February 1942, that the CO said, "You know pretty well, you know Melbourne pretty well wouldn't you?" And I said, "Yep, I do". And he said, "Well, I'm sending you to Melbourne, get all our equipment together". So I was deposited, I had a

39:30 room in a drill hall in the northern suburb of Melbourne and my job was to go out to the Broadmeadows ordinance depot with requisitioned seats which I got from special operations in army headquarters in Victoria Barracks, I'd go there every morning, report in, I'd been given some requisition orders, get in a truck and I'd take the truck out to Broadmeadows and I'd pick up whatever equipment this independent company was going to go to New Guinea with. And that was my job for until

40:00 they went and I had several truckloads of equipment down to Spencer Street railway station when all the train bringing all the members, these independent companies, only about two hundred and seventy five personnel in them so they weren't, they were just small, infantry type units. And I had all the gear in this hall, I often thought about this one.

40:30 Because I had something like two hundred Smith and Wesson revolvers in that hall, would you believe me, here I am all by myself, sleeping in that hall with all this equipment, guns, rifles, not so many rifles, Tommy guns, now the Tommy gun we were issued with was the American Tommy gun which was the famous gangsters of Al Capone bootleg era used to shoot up each other. Big round cartridge of quite

41:00 a heavy thing with a 45 mil slug in it, which if it hit you it was terrible. And so I've often thought, jeez if the Melbourne underworld knew what was in that drill hall, what a mine of guns and stuff. But anyway I took them all down to Spencer Street Station, expecting to go with the unit to New Guinea we were, this was going up to Cairns, you see by train up to Cairns and

41:30 boarding a troop ship to Port Moresby, and the CO, I said something to him and he said, "Oh you're not coming with us, Max, yet". And I said, "Why's that?" And he said, "We're not up to strength, we've got another forty, we're under strength, we haven't recruited our numbers yet. So four of you officers", I wasn't an officer, "Four of you have got to remain at the Prom and train up those forty blokes before you get back to us". Well, you can imagine my disappointment.

Tape 4

00:31 **What was the training like at Wilson's Promontory?**

Well that was pretty rigorous, you know, they were very keen to have very physically fit people and I mean, Wilson's Promontory is rather like the Sterling Ranges here, you know, but it's right on the coast, of course, the mountains go up to about two and a half, three thousand feet direct out of the sea and

01:00 it’s isolated, you can’t get down, well you couldn’t get down to it, it’s a very narrow neck to start with and widens out a bit and our early morning exercise was to run and climb up about an eighteen hundred foot peak outside our camp, you know, and it used to be contests who could time, I remember a famous international rugby player had the record

01:30 time up this eighteen hundred foot mountain. Doesn’t sound terrifically high compared to Mount Everest or anything but it was something you had to do before breakfast, you know. So it was very much physical work, there was also densely forested gullies there which you could liken to jungle, ‘cause there were all the undergrowth and lower structure was still there with stalks

02:00 and shrubs so you could have mock battles and ambushes and those things and the training, a lot developed on that sort of work, that you know we knew, we erected bridges and blew them up. Erected bridges out of logs and that type of thing, we knew how to cut bridge buttresses with plastic AG [explosives] things like that.

02:30 **Were you learning how to set explosives off?**

Yeah, we were all trained in explosives and unfortunately the 4th Company was still there when we were training, the 4th Company that went to Arnhem Land, they eventually went to Timor and relieved the 2nd Company in Timor. A couple of them blew themselves up one night because the various plastic cords are different colours.

03:00 And if someone strips them to put them into detonator sort of thing, in the dark, you can make a mistake and someone made a mistake one night and blew two of, blew themselves up, two of them. So that was an abject lesson in being very careful in the handling of explosives and the things that were connected with explosives.

Were accidents common?

No, no. I don’t think there were any accidents in ours

03:30 except there were a couple of incidences of tomfoolery that went on with parts of sticks of gelignite, in fact when the unit was going away and I was explaining earlier on that the unit took a train from down in Gippsland, Foster Wilson Promontory to Melbourne, Spencer Street Railway Station, which is the main interstate terminal station, one of the blokes had a detonator and a half stick of gelignite and as they went through Flinders Street

04:00 railway station, he threw it out of the train and the newspapers reported, because of the terrible panic, ‘cause everyone was sensible, very sensitive to the fact that the Japanese were approaching Australia, and here’s this explosion occurring. It was these pranks, someone had kept some detonators and of course the CO was furious, that’s why he was in a very bad temper when I had to deal with him. With all my trucks and equipment

04:30 and things.

What other things did they teach you at Wilson’s Promontory?

Unarmed combat, you know, unarmed combat, we were all issued with Swedish knives which were ghastly looking knife we did unarmed combat, stabbing people in the kidneys and all this stuff. But main work was directed at ambushing and blowing things up you know. Making

05:00 grenades yourself, out of what you had.

How do you make a grenade?

Oh well, you’ve got sticks of gelignite, you’ve got gelignite, you’ve got detonators, you’ve got some way of exploding them. You could be in a situation where you didn’t have the official types of grenade, so you had to make a grenade out of a tin of jam or a tin of bully beef or something like that. Or you

05:30 booby trap tins of bully beef, so that the enemy would pick them up and when they pick them up they’re blown up, those sorts of things. ‘Cause I missed quite a bit of that because I was in Melbourne doing this ordinance job. So while they were training down in the peninsula, a lot of my training was when I went back when the unit had gone up to Cairns by train, four of us, lieutenants

06:00 by now, I was the junior one of them. I was the senior soldier, you know, my army number was earlier than anybody else in the whole of that unit, which is not a thing to boast about it’s just simply a fact of life, we were training these roughly forty blokes and one of the interesting things that happened is some American officers who’d arrived in Australia came down to see what

06:30 our training methods were and watch what we were doing. So we turned on a couple of dummy raids for them. In which I was going to blow a hut, which we’d built, which was a Japanese guardhouse, and they were up on the hill, watching this, above us, looking down on us and they thought we still had men in the hut. But of course, we slid the

07:00 men out, quietly out the back of the hut when it blew up and one of the American colonels up there was sick. “It’s happened!” He thought it was an accident. He was waiting for us to get out of the hut. He hadn’t noticed that he’d gone. But Lloyd, who was one of the lieutenants said, he was quite ill. On the

belief that, he gasped and thought there'd been a terrible accident been, which there hadn't been.

07:30 **How difficult was it for you to actually miss out on the training at Wilson's Promontory?**

Well, I'd done quite a bit before I'd gone up. And I knew what the training was and I had to report to the CO almost every night on what equipment I had, and so I knew what was going on down there and

08:00 about a week before the job finished and the unit departed to get to New Guinea, they sent a sergeant up to help me which was all the stuff had to be packed into sort of small groups, so that if we lost some we didn't lose everything, you know, in other words, as I say, we had roughly, I don't know how many Smith and Wesson revolvers we had, they were 38s we had a hell of a lot anyway

08:30 and 'cause I didn't want to have all the Smith and Wessons in one case, I had one of those wire strainers, you know for packing case. Locking packing cases, this wire strainer business. Which you used in packing sheds. But things like grenades, other things that were vital that if one of them happened to be lost

09:00 or left they still had a large number of revolvers available, that's whatever it was, signalling equipment, signalling gear. So, I enjoyed that job, I remember at special operations where I had to go in army headquarters to get the requisitions of a morning to go to the ordinance depot. And the colonel there who was, I've forgotten his name now, but he

09:30 was the head of special operations, he was a First World War man. He was a bit aghast at our commander, Neen from Prom had sent up a sergeant, a young looking sergeant that didn't look any more than about eighteen years of age, to him I suppose. But he couldn't do anything about it anyway. And I eventually did the job properly but I can remember him saying, "Why'd they send you, why didn't he?" He would have thought the

10:00 lieutenant would have, or at least a captain or a lieutenant, doing such a responsible job but the Neen knew I was an experienced, relatively experienced soldier and that I knew my way around Melbourne and wasn't going to get lost or anything, and I suppose because I did some office work with him he realised that I was mature enough to handle that job without any trouble, which was nice.

So was it a case of you having

10:30 **to catch up with your unit, after you've done this job?**

To New Guinea? Yes, well we remained down on the Prom for about another month or roughly a month, I'm not really sure, the period and then the thirty or forty blokes that

11:00 in the establishment of the unit, we were arranged in the same different to an ordinary infantry unit you know, they're called independent companies and the establishment the arrangement at which the unit is broken up into units, is a different. We were more broken up into troops, like a cavalry unit is.

11:30 And in other words we were very senior in the establishment, a cavalry is the senior establishment within the army. If you had a parade of all the army units, the leaders would be the cavalry units, 'cause it goes back to the British cavalry of the Middle Ages, where the soldiers are on horseback. No such thing as artillery then, of course. But you know, it was flattering that Neen, my CO

12:00 who was a major, chose me, which was nice to know, that people had confidence in me. So we rejoined them in Moresby. Now, the Coral Sea Battle, do you know that, the Coral Sea Battle?

Before you get onto that, how did you actually rejoin?

Oh right, yep. Well, we took a train to Cairns and then we flew this small element

12:30 the main unit went to Port Moresby by ship from Cairns and we took a train to Cairns, very slow of course.

Just you and your CO?

No, they're all in Port Moresby, by this time.

So who are you travelling with?

I'm travelling with those other three lieutenants and as I say, we had to have thirty or forty men trained to give the unit its

13:00 full number of men personnel in the unit. Which I'm not sure of the numbers, was somewhere round about two hundred and seventy five men. Whereas infantry battalions got one thousand, so four times as big. So the unit, the main unit, the two hundred and fifty men sort of thing, had gone all the way by train to Cairns, and then by troop ship to Port Moresby

13:30 and they were there, the Japanese were bombing Port Moresby before I got there with my rear tail, the tail of the unit. And we did the same train journey but the flew us in to Port Moresby, we landed on there and we were bombed within about thirty minutes by the Japanese 'cause the Japanese dominate the air there.

What sort of plane did you fly over on?

Douglas

14:00 Douglases taken away from the airways company. Australian National Airways, I think they were called back then?

Was that the first time you were on an aeroplane?

No, no, I'd flown between Sydney and Melbourne on leave, from Georges Islands, I'd gone home for Christmas in aeroplanes and I'd flown in an aeroplane, as a twelve year old I'd gone out, there was an aerodrome outside

14:30 on the edge of Melbourne, almost in the centre of Melbourne, actually it was just on the edge of the city and they used to take flights from there and you could, I forget, probably about a pound you could go up and fly over the city for a pound note. And it was flown by a First World, well one of them was a First World fighter pilot and his name, I think his name was Stanton.

You've got a pretty good memory there, Max.

15:00 'Cause I was only twelve or thirteen years of age, I knew I wouldn't be allowed to go up with him but he had a two seater, in which two passengers that and a front seat and he sat in the back seat like quite separate, you couldn't get from one to the other. They were two different seating cabins, and your head was out in the open air of course. It was as biplane and I went to a man

15:30 where you booked your flight to go up and I said, "Will you be my Dad? Will you tell him that you're my Dad?" And he agreed. So I got up in the aeroplane.

Going back to arriving in Port Moresby, what was actually going on there as your aircraft was landing?

Well, I can remember quite clearly, we landed there in these Douglases.

16:00 We must have been flown over in about two Douglases I think as I say, the tail of the unit. And we were still on the drome after our planes had landed when a Mitchell bomber, pretty sure it was Mitchell bomber, USA [United States of America] bomber, came in and it had been over Rabaul and they pulled out a couple of dead men out of it. Their rear gunner had been killed so they were doing these Mitchell Bomber raids which was a medium sized bomber,

16:30 named after a famous World War I, aviator in the US [United States] Air Force, Mitchell. And that was my first intimation of war, you know, that here were a couple of dead men, the plane had been badly shot up. And that night we were bombed again by the Japanese and we were bombed again the next day.

What was the drill for air raids?

Just run to the slit trench because

17:00 we weren't living on the aerodrome we were defending Port Moresby by that stage, that was our role at that time. There were two militia units there, 51st from Sydney and the 38th from Victoria, 39th from Victoria.

What happened immediately to you after you got off the aircraft and saw these dead guys and the plane shot up?

We were picked up by a truck and taken to where our unit was.

And how far away

17:30 **from the airport was that?**

I'm only guessing, four or five miles, or something, I really can't remember.

Not a long way?

Yeah, I was only there a short time because within the next three or four days, I think we were flown to Wau, so we had to fly over the Owen Stanley Range, you know which is a pretty big mountain range and down into the Valley of Wau. And Wau

18:00 was the headquarters of the Bulolo Mining Company. Bulolo was the next town down the valley, split by a very narrow gorge and valley which was a bit hair- raising driving in that at night too. You know, just as wide for the truck and you were looking down several hundred feet to drop down into a stream.

Did you know that you were going to get transferred to Wau when you first arrived?

No, that was all very secret,

18:30 as far as the ordinary soldiers. CO would have known. I mean, what had happened, by this time the main Japanese force in the south west Pacific were in Rabaul.

Did you know all this at the time?

Yeah, yep.

So you were getting informed about the state of..?

We were informed, once we got to Moresby, we were informed the whole, the overall situation report given to us, the Japanese had already landed in Lae and Salamaua on the north coast of

19:00 New Guinea. Their main force was in Rabaul which was feeding troops, navy and air force, their bomber squadrons were in Rabaul and they were bombing the Solomons where the Americans were starting, going to attack at the Island of Guadalcanal. And they had a Zero [Japanese aircraft] squadron which would knock off any Allied plane at that stage, the Zero's far

19:30 better fighter than we had in the Pacific at that stage.

How many would come over in an air raid?

Well, a dozen bombers, I suppose, a dozen bombers, various numbers.

How much warning would you get? When you were talking to me before, about just arriving and you got bombed, pretty much straight after.?

Well, there was very little warning but I mean, the Owen Stanley Range

20:00 protected both Japanese and Port Moresby in a sense. They had to get up over the Owen Stanleys which rise up to about twelve thousand feet in that area, but the bombers actually came from Rabaul, there were no bombers, well the odd one. There was no bombers stationed in New Guinea they were all in Rabaul which was a very big, it was the biggest Japanese base in the whole of the south-west Pacific. And

20:30 they fed troops to New Guinea and they fed troops eventually into the Solomons where they were establishing depots there. The warning was very little but it became better once we got over into Wau, because there were civilians in Wau who'd formed a sort of militia unit, semi- trained and they were called the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles. It was similar as in Africa

21:00 in the First World War period there were sort of South African volunteer rifles, they were civilians trained enough to be able to use a gun, rifle and that sort of thing, elementary. Well when we got there, I'll explain very quickly, a lot of those blokes became officers in Australian and New Guinea administration unit, called ANGAU [Australia and New Guinea Administrative Unit] and ANGAU was the civilian unit which was familiar with New Guinea

21:30 could speak the language to the natives, knew New Guinea in parts, like the back of their hands, explored parts, you know established parts and some of them came from Lae, which was now a major Japanese fighter base and an army base too. We never knew how many soldiers were there really. But the thing we ran into was we were split into two units, the 2/5th Independent Company and we

22:00 were renamed with these civilian ANGAU blokes, renamed Kanga Force, that was our code name, Kanga Force, Designation Kanga Force. And two thirds of our unit the main number were kept up in the Wau area, and to go over the mountains and establish camps and bases in the mountains behind the Japanese base at Salamaua. Now

22:30 you will recall perhaps in the history of New Guinea, war, the main battle of the New Guinea campaign was at Buna, Sanananda. The end of the Kokoda Track. And that was the most vicious fighting in the New Guinea campaign. Salamaua, between Wau and Salamaua the mountains really were terrific, very steep and so our command, the Kanga Force commander was a Major Fleay, a West Australian.

23:00 F-l-e-a-y. Now, I'll say something about him later. But Kanga Force were to operate to harass the Japanese in their two bases, to cause a presence there. Make the Japanese think, don't let just them sit there relaxed as though nothing's happening. So there was obviously an intention to attack the Japanese base at Salamaua

23:30 in some way with the main group of our blokes and our group was to go down to the Markham Valley which was as big wide major river, that flows into the sea right at Lae and Lae had an aerodrome in which there was always twenty or more Japanese Zeros sitting on it. Untouched, you know, unworried. 'Cause you wouldn't want to go there, they'd rise up like hornets and they'd shoot you down.

24:00 But those Japanese Zeros, we used to protect the bombers. Now the Zero is a low range fighter, can't fly great distances of course, a bombers could, and the bombers would fly in from above, to bomb Port Moresby. And the Zeros would then take up and escort them to Moresby and shoot down any Allied planes that came up to hit the bombers. And they always won because they were probably the

24:30 best fighter plane in the world at that time, they were so manoeuvrable. 'Cause they were so light. But if you hit them that was the end of the Zero because it was so lightly built that it could turn on its end, you know. So it's a great fighter for dog-fighting. Well, I'll tell this hair raising story because it did make my hair raise. All the unit had to be flown by these two or three

25:00 Douglases, DC-3s lumbering over the mountain range, to Wau. And the Wau drome strip was like that. It rises up very steeply. Which is great for landing on, but terrible for taking off, to get to speed up and get over of course, there's a big coffee plantation right at the end of it. It's not a very long airstrip and it runs up a mountain, a mountain's about six thousand feet at the end of the back of the drome.

25:30 And there's the township of Wau. Headquarters of this mining company, Bulolo dredging etcetera, alluvial mining in the river. Well established houses, you know, very attractive little town. Well, my flight, with my group of blokes in the plane, was flown by an American pilot, co-pilot and we were armed, you know had Bren gun and Tommy guns and rifles

26:00 and everything. So would have been twenty of us on the plane. No door on the plane so you could get out quickly, or fall out. And we were the last flight to get there. And we're lumbering over the range, still twenty minutes flight or something, fifteen minutes flight from Wau, when the pilot turned excitedly to me, knowing I was in charge of these twenty blokes and said, "You got plenty of ammunition in those guns you got there?"

26:30 And I said, "Yes", he said, "Boy, you might be using them shortly", and I said, "Why's that?" And he says, "There's a bloody dog fight going on to our west". I could hear on the radio, this exciting talk going on, you know. The Air Cobras escorting us had disappeared they were in a dogfight with Zeros so many miles to our west. And of course, I know I said it, I thought it then, well this is going to be a bloody short war

27:00 for me. Those Zeros come our way, we're finished. Well, they did come our way but we were down on the aerodrome, the two planes that had flown us in there. Of course they'd been flying all day, carting blokes into Wau from Moresby. And those last two planes, which were camouflaged just flown around a spur and out of sight of us on the drome when the Zeros arrived over the aerodrome. If they had arrived a minute earlier

27:30 even they couldn't have missed seeing these two Douglases. And they would have been sitting ducks. What they did, they zoomed around, circled around, about four or five of these zeros and one of them peeled off and fired a machine gun down at us, 'round the drome, 'course we fled out of the plane as quick as we could get it. The idea was throw things out of the plane and allow the planes to turn around and get away, that's what they were doing. Not on the drome where petrol drums

28:00 everywhere and they had to be moved to stop a plane landing on the drome with armed, Japanese soldiers in sort of thing. And they had to be replaced again as soon as the plane had left. So that's what we were doing when these Zeros arrived and we fled off the drome as quick as we could get off. And there was still baggage lying on the drome, your kit and kit bag and things.

28:30 **Were you in a trench? Fighting?**

No, there were no trenches, well, I suppose there were. There was a trench, because the padre who served there actually dived into one of them. But it was a latrine trench, he dived into, so the story went. The native used it.

So where were you actually sheltering while this was happening?

Just on the side of the drome. The Japanese weren't serious, they flew off to Lae.

Did you fire at them?

No.

29:00 No, too far up, no point anyway.

But they couldn't have been that far up if they were strafing you.

No, it was only one peeled off, and he just showing off I think, or perhaps just easing his cartridges or something.

So none of you were injured?

Wasn't, no, no it wasn't serious.

What happened next?

Well, as I say from then we were broken up into these two

29:30 sort of base units,

You've had to land back where you took off from am I right? You couldn't get there?

How do you mean?

You were on your way somewhere and you couldn't get there because of the dogfight. Is that right?

Oh, no, no, we landed on the Wau strip.

Oh you did.

Oh yes, we landed and as I say the planes that brought us there, were just flying low over the timber

30:00 mountains and out of sight of us when the Zeros came from the dogfight they'd been in. And they'd been in fighting with Air Cobras, it was more a plane that was good for strafing ground troops than a dog fighting plane and it was just no good against a Zero and it was replaced by a fighter called the Kittyhawk and the Kittyhawk was what Australian fighter pilots used in the desert campaign in the Middle East

30:30 at that time. It was the best American fighter plane available, it still wasn't a good enough fighter plane to take a Japanese on in a dogfight because it just wasn't manoeuvrable enough.

After the Zeros left, what happened next to you?

Well, it must have been late in the day, we mounted, quite a few of us got on a couple of the trucks and we were driven down to Bulolo. Through

31:00 a mountain pass, sort of thing, which is a secondary city but there's a airstrip on it too, because airstrips were important to New Guinea, it was the only way you could get around, there's no roads, there were no roadways from here to there in New Guinea. And if they were, there were just jungle tracks, you know, and which a truck might get along or sometimes, and if it rained too much it wouldn't get along, sort of thing.

31:30 'Cause it rains very heavily there. But we were taken down and at Bulolo the unit broke up a bit. Two thirds of the unit were left at Wau to go over largely to go over and harass the Japanese at Salamaua on the coast and that was real Kokoda Trail of its own to get there. The camp up there was

32:00 over six thousand feet high. That was just the first camp that you stayed in and there were points where you're walking on a track and you're nearly eight thousand feet above sea level and you had to be pretty fit.

Which way did you go?

Well, I went down, I'm going north now from Wau to the mining town of Bulolo, which was smaller than Wau but still with a few decent sorts of reasonable sorts of timber houses on it,

32:30 it had an airstrip and it had a Junker cargo plane on it, which had been shot up by the Japanese. Now, the mining companies used to use a Junker, aluminium fuselage plane, to fly in mining equipment and all the dredges in those rivers were flown in bits and pieces in those Junkers, stripped right down to nuts and bolts and then rebuilt again in

33:00 the river, 'cause they mined in the rivers, you see for the gold dust. Well we got down there and of course we knew we were into the war now, because here's this Junker [German] plane which had been destroyed and for a few days I used it for training blokes. Because it was going to be one of our roles to try and get into Wau and blow up aeroplanes.

33:30 **How did you go about training these blokes?**

Well, it was mostly night training, I mean you can't sneak in, in the daytime.

Is that what you were trying to teach?

Training exercises, rolling, wriggling along the ground with plastic explosives you know, or something made up that looked like you were going to blow the plane up and I used this Junker plane to do it. To sort of wriggle there and we'd have a couple of blokes guarding the Junker plane and he'd simply say, "Jeez , I shot you mate,

34:00 I shot you, you're had it". We didn't get there quiet enough. Or whatever, that sort of thing. But I'm still there when Major Neen our commanding officer, remember now, I've got Major Neen who is the commander of the independent company, not yet called "commandos", they changed independent company name to commando squadrons, we were independent companies,

34:30 and we've got back in Wau, the overall commander, Major Fleay. Who'd been a West Australian infantryman in the Middle East. And he'd been given this job to be our commander and to be the commander of these few civilian New Guinea Volunteer Rifle blokes who were good. And they were mainly good up in that Salamaua region. More than

35:00 down with us at Lae but they become administration men later, not soldiers. And they served in New Guinea administration, as specialists dealing with the local native population.

Can I just ask, I'm not sure why it is that you're in charge of training these blokes. Wouldn't they have had training before they came along to Wau?

Oh you can never have too much training.

35:30 You're developing sort of expertise all the time and you're finding out who's good at it and who isn't good at it, if you're going to do a job, you're going to select, Smith, Jones and Brown, you're not going

to have Bluey Harris because he's a bit of a bloody dope, you know he'll do something silly, he'll go and pull the trigger just at the moment when you're sneaking in. So you're doing, you're trying to fine

36:00 up the quality of the thing all the time. On one occasion, one of those New Guinea men who was the manager of the mining company in Bolola and he would have had to be an infantryman if required but he wasn't required to do our job. But there were natives there who'd come from different parts and they were working as a sort of slave, low paid labour in the mining companies, doing the rough work, you know. Not

36:30 operating the plant. But doing sort of servile types of tasks and they were just dressed as ordinary natives, they weren't clothed in our type of clothing but when I was down on the aerodrome one day, here was a native there and he's got a bow and arrow in his hand, the whole shaft of arrows and so I was learning a bit of pidgin English all the time and I said, 'cause we were trying to

37:00 teach blokes Pidgin English including myself as pupil. What these New Guinea blokes were teaching out to speak to the natives because we could easily get lost out in the bush. And you'd have to ask, you know, "Where's the such and such or how can you get to such and such the name of a village". Villages all over the place, up on the mountains and I said to this native, "You know?"

37:30 He said, "Alright". So, we rigged up a, might have been an old shirt, hung on a peg about forty yards away, you wouldn't believe it on the first shot, went right through him, hit him perfectly. I tried another dozen shots and missed the thing by that much, but the first shot was rather good. Got the target beautifully never held a bow and arrow in my hand in my life. But that native was thrilled, he laughed, he

38:00 couldn't stop him laughing, he was bending over laughing. "This officer man, he good, ooh he good fella, he good".

Did you get on well with the locals?

I thought I did. But when we were down near Lae, I don't know how far forward I could jump with you here, but when we were down near Lae of course, the Japanese did patrols out from Lae and that and the natives knew that we were

38:30 just jungle boys and the Japanese were in charge here, not us. There were only sixty or seventy of us down there anyway and our first attack on Lae which I wasn't involved in, our commander, Major Neen, led it and it was done at 1 am in the morning on the outpost protecting the western edge of the airport where there would have been

39:00 fifty or sixty Japanese soldiers. And that was done at 1 am in the morning and Neen was the first casualty. Don't know, as I say, I wasn't there, I was supporting them and I was back further back in a support role and none of the blokes in the actual raid knew what happened except there was an explosion whether

39:30 he was hit by a grenade or what he was hit by he was killed instantly in the body was never recovered. So we lost our CO in the first action. The same night at Salamaua, one hundred of the unit went down into the Salamaua at one o'clock in the morning, shot the place up and claimed over one hundred Japanese dead, captured a Japanese fighter aeroplane who was carrying all valuable documents. And those documents apparently were quite valuable

40:00 back to army headquarters in Moresby. That was a very successful raid, Parer the war correspondent and war photographer, the most famous war photographer of World War II, I don't know if you ever heard of Parer, well he made, if you go onto the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] or that and you'll see films of the Kokoda campaign on films.

40:30 **Was he around where you were?**

Yeah. No, he did the Salamaua campaign one. I did meet him before he went there. But he went with the troops up into the Salamaua and took film there. And they appear as a Kokoda campaign film, nothing to do with our crowd, we don't get any credit for what we've done. This is before Kokoda, this is two months or so before Kokoda campaign started.

41:00 And of course it set up a bit of a hornet's nest, with the Japanese, made them worry and they landed troops at Buna, which was the start of, or the end of the Kokoda campaign to invade Port Moresby. And whether we'd stirred them up enough to cause them to do that, we don't know. But they landed several thousand troops down at Buna and started their attack

41:30 on Milne Bay and Port Moresby.

Just rewinding back to when you first arrived at Wau, when you were training people with the aircraft, how long were you doing that?

Well, it's very hard to be precise about that.

Was it just a short period of time?

We must have got into Wau about April, 1942.

Tape 5

00:31 **Where were you posted once you're in Wau?**

Well, I was posted to Bulolo to start, which is the next mining centre, down the Bulolo River, further north and that's where I was doing this training with this Junker aircraft which had been shot up by the Japanese. They shot that up before they landed in New Guinea, they attacked Bulolo believing it

01:00 might be, aeroplanes there or something and would have been only this one single Junker aircraft, I think. But they did shoot it up and destroyed it as an aeroplane. And then after that they landed at Lae and Salamaua, having removed any opposition that might have been there. But they would have known that Bulolo and Wau was the sort of

01:30 headquarters of these part time soldiers which were the New Guinea volunteer rifles, who were all members of the mining companies and very good blokes too, you know, we got on very well and they combined to become with us, members of the Kanga Force but they gradually slipped out, you know they many of them were older men, past military service years, but not all of them. And

02:00 I can't recall just when they sort of seemed to fade out but they were withdrawn and a lot of them had semi- executive positions back in Moresby and New Guinea administration, handling the native question more or less, quite an extent. But becoming a wonderful mine of information for the commanders of the force as to where you could go and where you couldn't go and

02:30 things like that. No, they were good blokes. They had a good supply of pawpaws too which you thought, most of us blokes wouldn't have eaten a pawpaw in our life. 'Cause, it wasn't common in fruit shops back in the 1930s, you know it might have been specialty shop that had a pawpaw in it, which you could say very few people knew what a pawpaw was.

03:00 **Tropical fruit.**

We knew all about pineapples of course.

What became your role in the area?

My role, personal role? Well I suppose we were broken up into platoon size groups and my role was to command

03:30 one of those groups. They would vary in numbers and they're rather indefinite sort of numbers particularly in that unit, because over time that unit lost a lot of men, a lot of illness was the biggest problem there and illness was the biggest problem for those of us that went from Bulolo down into the Markham and I wasn't in the group which attacked the, what was called the Heath Plantation defence

04:00 area of the Japanese, protecting the aerodrome, the Zero base. But I was in the support group and 'cause the Japanese chased us out of that part of the lower Markham area for several miles back up the Markham River, westward, so that we weren't in a position to attack them again, easily. And as I

04:30 explained earlier, we lost our commanding officer, in that Heath Plantation raid. Very quickly it was decided that it was too risky leaving the bulk of the unit that was down in the Markham Valley, and I'm explaining the Markham Valley was a very big river, very fast flowing one and it flooded in some circumstances. Quite wide, and so during the night we moved all

05:00 the supplies and all the soldiers equipment and everything over onto the south bank of the Markham, to have left them on the north bank would have just been suicide really. So the Japanese were patrolling up the Markham to make sure that there wasn't another repeat of that type of raid. And surprise one was started about 1 am in the morning. Was a very difficult

05:30 assignment, getting everything back across this relatively wide, fast flowing river. And there were a couple of mules which were helping carry things. They were lost in the river, where they finished, God only knows, it was also a river that had crocodiles in, was an estuary type freshwater crocodile. You could sometimes hear them, and I was camped in a village called, Mari, with

06:00 most of the blokes and we'd established a hidden camp a bit further west up the river, not very far, but it was called "Bob's" after a man Bob Kirkland, who was one of the New Guinea volunteer blokes who helped choose the site. And that became our base for the rest of the war in New Guinea. Well, rest of that part of the war in New Guinea. Bob's Camp.

Why was that site chosen?

Well,

06:30 it was well hidden in a thick forested country so it couldn't be really observed from the air, the trees were quite tall and it had what we call a "pisser", which were just a thin, light creek, running up

towards the camp and the directions were to walk in the water, don't walk on the land down to the main track to disclose footprints or anything. And that's what we did. We used to wash in the Wampit River which

07:00 was the river nearest to us, quite a substantial stream.

Can you describe Bob's Camp?

Yeah, well Bob's Camp was I think about four huts. About four huts with a bit of a cookhouse, and all cooking was done at night so the smoke and that wasn't visible. And

07:30 built rush roof, all rush ceiling, you know, on just timber cut there, largely cut by a native there. There was a Wampit village reasonably close to us, which was on the other side of the Wampit River, there, opposite side to Bob's and that raised some problems because that was also where the track went back to Wau. But we had to cross the river, there was no track on our side of the river that would

08:00 take us upstream it was all forested and steep rugged country and we had to get back across the Wampit River if we had sick men that had to be returned to Wau or anything like that. We did eventually build a bridge there, by driving poles into the ground, high poles into ground and getting some old mining cable down and rope and various things and it was like a suspension bridge.

08:30 And that had a floor in it, no good for vehicles or anything but it did make us more mobile in the sense that we could cross the river without having to get into, it was quite dangerous to get into it, when it was flowing fast. Because you're generally carrying a rifle and a pack on your back and if you went over well, there were a couple of cases of blokes being rescued but I don't know of any being drowned.

09:00 Sickness was a great problem down there, which wasn't anywhere near a problem with the people up in Wau, in the back of this Salamaua, this Japanese base because they were at such an elevation that the malarial mosquito doesn't exist above a certain height of sea level but Markham was notorious we always joked about the mosquitos being as big as Zeros and

09:30 they caused a lot of trouble to us.

What kind of sickness was there apart from malaria?

Oh, forms of beriberi, I'd say, malnutrition because our tucker supply down there, a couple of times it was lost. It was very risky business, if it hadn't been carried in, there were at least two occasions I'm certain of, which a reasonably fast flying plane

10:00 flew our provisions in. And they dropped them but they didn't drop them to us, they dropped them in swamps and into the bush, we didn't know where the food had gone. And some of the natives might have and they would have got hold of it perhaps. But so there was certainly a degree of malnutrition down there. You only had to look at the people to see it and another factor which was important is the protection against malaria, at that time

10:30 was quinine and it wasn't really effective. You know, I suppose it might have affected, I can't speak medically, we did have a doctor there, Bill Stout, an Englishman from Hong Kong, who was a great bloke, very fine man, very much admired, but the health there was poor and well, I don't want to jump the gun by saying what happened

11:00 later on, so that was around about June 1942, which was getting on for about the time the Kokoda campaign the Japanese came over the mountains to attack Moresby, started up. We didn't know much about that of course. And we were cut off by air really, we were, Wau was totally responsible air transport was

11:30 totally responsible for supplying Wau, with food and ammunition, medical supplies or whatever it was, and there was always a great problem there that you couldn't get into Wau, because New Guinea's a wonderful place for cloud, and frequently planes would leave Moresby and never get to Wau, they'd just turn back. Couldn't see the place. And that happened later on, when we had, what was called the Battle for Wau, when we were flying in infantry troops, and

12:00 some would get in and some wouldn't. Simply because the airport was Wau airstrip was invisible.

What operations were you doing from Bob's Camp?

Well, from Bob's Camp we patrolled constantly and one of the reasons we patrolled was extremely important in the whole of the New Guinea campaign and it's one that's received practically no recognition whatsoever, I've never seen a reference to it. It was a

12:30 most decisive point in the whole of the New Guinea campaign. Now, with the New Guinea volunteers, a couple of the New Guinea volunteer rifle blokes and one of our fellas, and a couple of others, the officer with Stringfellow, who later became a brigadier, he stopped in the army after the war. And he was a lieutenant the same level as myself, in 1942. They manned an observation post on the south side right

13:00 opposite to a Japanese Zero base on the south side of the Markham River, on a ten thousand foot mountain, they were up about three thousand feet and had to walk and climb quite a lot just to get water to live on, the water, and they had one of our radios and the radio sometimes worked to Wau and

Wau transmitted messages to Moresby, that the Zeros are taking off. They had a ship that arrived in Lae,

13:30 the troops that unloaded at Lae, they could report if the visibility was good with their, with glasses on, activity in Lae quite clearly. Soldiers moving around, people moving around, aeroplanes taking off, aeroplanes getting maintenance done on them. It's all being reported if you could get the messages through. And that lasted right throughout the New Guinea war, until the Japanese were driven out of Lae

14:00 by the 7th and 9th Divisions. In the Lae, Finschhafen campaign. And Stringfellow never got any award for it, it was a very risky job. Why the Japanese never went up and cleaned us out, I was on my way out to take over from Stringfellow when I got my first taste of malaria and I almost had to be carried back to a camp we had off the edge of one of the local's villages.

14:30 Because of this malaria, I just collapsed, straight off, hit the ground, you know, I was vomiting and of course I might have got to the Opip [Observation Post] and I would have been a casualty up there if I got up there. And a real problem to them because I was taking some food up to them too, with another chap, a corporal, which I remember, a great friend, he was a Dutchman, Sam Loolos [Sp?]. And

15:00 as I say that Opip reporting all the air movements, every time Moresby was bombed, those Zeros would take off to protect the bombers, against, you know Kittyhawks or Air Cobras and later on they were Lightnings, which eventually became the dominant fighter plane in the New Guinea campaign, the American Lightning, it was very powerfully built, very strongly armoured

15:30 and it started to knock Zeros out of the air for a greater distance, it wasn't a dog fighter, wasn't anywhere near as manoeuvrable but manoeuvrable as the Zero but it had stronger weapons, could probably fire from a greater distance and I did see Lightnings shoot Zeros down later in the war but I don't mind putting on record at Opip which

16:00 I would have loved to been able to bump into a Japanese that lived in Lae later in life and say, "Do you know we've been watching you the whole bloody time you were there?" Well, after about two or three months of that, because of the inadequacy of our radios, which were purely infantry troop type radios, they weren't sometimes getting the messages through, the RAAF sent

16:30 two aerial technicians over and they manned the observation base for the rest of that part of the war. Which was roughly another fifteen months I think until the 7 and 9 Div [Division] attacked Lae and drove the Japanese out of that part of New Guinea back up further out west they pushed them up back to their main base

17:00 on the mainland Japanese base became the village of Wewak, which had a good airstrip on it.

How long did it take you to recover from the malaria?

Well, it as I say, we only had quinine, we didn't have a pill called Atebrin which came in, later on and became more effective and it wasn't that effective as I'll explain but I think I would have been ill for about a fortnight, before you

17:30 were sort of weak enough to get up and walk. And I was living in a hut about two thirds the size of this with about eight other soldiers, was two thirds the size of this room, and they were feeding me, you know, I just lying on ground sheet and sort of bunk you'd make out of a few poles and a couple of bags, you know. Couple of bags that carried wheat or oats or supplies or something

18:00 but we also had the fear that we'd lost one man with what is known as Blackwater Fever and Blackwater Fever is an offshoot, I guess you'd call it an offshoot, of malaria, which destroys the kidneys. And you urinate black which is so thick with blood I think that once you've got Blackwater Fever there was no cure for it then. But we had lost one bloke with Blackwater Fever and that was always a fear among you

18:30 "Gee, I've got malaria, you know so how far is it going to progress?" Anyway from then on after getting fit again, that was on a camp halfway between Bob's and on the south bank of the river between Bob's and the observation post. And I was responsible for that area. We were always concerned about Japanese movement and reporting where the Japanese were moving. And we did patrols

19:00 across the river again, I did several patrols, in fact I did more of that sort, than anybody else did I think. And my last action down there was to go down, set booby traps outside this Japanese defensive area and cause an explosion that drew a large patrol up the road and we had a whole string of instantaneous fuses and detonators and connected to hand grenades

19:30 hidden in the grass beside the track and the observation post reported had a Japanese ambulance going up the road and several wounded bodies were being carried back so, was quite an effective booby trap. That was my last patrol that I did down there because I went down with malaria again, and shortly after that my commanding officer who was then in command of the whole

20:00 unit but he was in command of the unit parts that were up in the Wau, Salamaua mountain area, where they had a substantial camp halfway between the Jap base of Salamaua and Wau, but as I say, the

mountains were like this. And Captain Taylor, I was the only lieutenant left down in the Markham Valley because

20:30 there were the other two that had been with me both became ill. And both went back to Australia. And Taylor took sympathy on me and said, “I’m sending you and you pick eight blokes that you reckon are the badly need a rest and some good food”. ‘Cause we knew they were eating quite well at Wau, ‘cause planes were coming into Wau, you know whenever they could and the rations

21:00 were better there and they’d also had a few head of cattle there but they’d caught again from the New Guinea free history that they had some steers there that they would eat for meat and that sort of thing. And he said, “Well, Max, you pick the blokes you think ought to go up there because they’ve done more work and they’re tired and fed up and that sort of thing and have a

21:30 break up there for ten days, fill yourself up with as much food as you can eat and get back”. He wouldn’t have had another officer see, got me. There was a sig [signals] officer, but he wasn’t a combatant, he’s purely looking after sig equipment. And I hadn’t been up there more than a couple of days, and I must confess, I wasn’t full of energy.

22:00 Captain Winning who was our officer in command up in the Wau area and who had led to some, his successful attack on the Japs in Salamaua several months earlier, and I’m not going to tell their story, I mean they’ve got their own story in that part of the world. They had a pretty rough time, but he said, “You’ve

22:30 got to be in the raid we’ve got to do on the Japs at Mubo”. Mubo was a Japanese company around about one hundred estimated hundred troops which were Mubo, this was how it’s spelled, a village in the valley which the Japanese had established as an outpost.

23:00 They’d driven Captain Winning and his troops out of Mubo, earlier separated part of them and a couple of the parties thought the Japanese were proceeding onwards because of the pretty large patrol the Japanese sent, were going to go into attack Wau, they knew it was no use walking back to Wau, they’d deviated, they got lost in the bush, six weeks later, I think it was, they arrived back in Moresby. So it was a real shemozzle.

23:30 And he said, “You’ve got to be in this attack”. And I appealed on the basis that the blokes I’d brought up from the Markham were really not fit to go climbing up several feet into mountains and down and up again and down again and up again, and then fight a war. But he said, “No avail”. Fleay, that’s the Kanga Force commander who I said earlier was a West Australian, who’d been in the Middle East before that

24:00 and was now a lieutenant colonel and whose guts we hated, and who we told war correspondents we hated his guts too and the war correspondents published it in the newspaper, he’d never seen a Japanese the whole time he was there, never came down to the Markham once to visit us, stuck himself in Wau the whole time, made himself into a hero with war correspondents, was written up in papers as though he led an attack on Salamaua and

24:30 he hadn’t and so he said, “Fleay says, no, he wants every man to involved in this attack and you’ve got to go”. And I said, “John Taylor back in Markham will do his block”, he was our commander. And he said, “No go, I’ll talk to Fleay”. So he sent us up the mountains with the other blokes who were already up there, and had been living there for six months or more,

25:00 knew the country and were used to being up in the mountains. Well we hadn’t climbed a mountain since we left the morning, the mess the Wilson’s Promontory I think ‘cause living in the Markham Valley’s just flat, hot tropical country. So, that’s what we did, we went up and I got myself into trouble here, because when Winning started to explain on maps and various things how he

25:30 was attacking and how the force was going to be split up down the two ridges and attack this silly lieutenant from the Markham disagreed with it. I said, “I don’t think that’s the way to go”. And he more or less told me to pull my bloody head in and I hadn’t seen Winning since we left the Promontory and I hadn’t seen a lot of those blokes, they were all strangers to me. Only the troops down in the Markham that I could

26:00 recognise by this time, because as I say, I’d done the unit store thing being separated from the troops which were mine, then we were separated getting to New Guinea and separated again in Wau and Bulolo and so here I am amongst a lot of strangers and I disagreed the way the attack was going to be done. And when the attack was done, and I’m sorry to say this, but what I’d suggested was the right thing to have done

26:30 as it turned out. The point is, I was always thinking as a soldier. You know I’d trained as a soldier right from the start as a kid, eighteen year old and these sort of technical things interest me as exercises, I disagreed with some of the things that were going on down in the Markham, and I didn’t say so down there because I got on quite well with Captain Taylor, I would have got on much better if Major Neen had lived,

27:00 from that first attack, our CO, ‘cause he was very friendly to me and good. But Winning was regarded as a heroic figure because of his successful led attack on Salamaua which he was. And he deserved it and I

probably didn't deserve to be offering a suggestion counter to his

27:30 design, which he'd probably put a lot of work into. But I disagreed how the attack was to open. And the attack was to open with a Vickers gun mounted up at the top of what I'll call a cun, that's a Welsh word, an arc in which two ridges ran round, in like a big horseshoe shape, one group was going down there because the Japanese had an anti-aircraft heavy machine gun down there to shoot at Beaufighters and that

28:00 had, had a go at them. And that was to be destroyed and another lieutenant down there and by this time the 2/7th Independent Company had arrived from Australia and they were coming in for their first attack. They were under a Major McCaddie. They were all strangers, but they went down the spur on the right hand side which

28:30 was going to be the main attack and as I say, we estimated a roughly company of Japanese were occupying that which would be about the same number as we were, vaguely and this struck me as being an infantry attack, not an independent company type attack. And an independent company type attack or a commando attack is, hit and run. Hit, do as much damage as you can and get out.

29:00 But an infantry attack is, get in, do as much damage as you can and stay there. Occupy it. You're going in there to occupy land which is what all armies try to do. Well, as I say, this is where I got into trouble. The 2/7th Independent Company blokes under a lieutenant went down ahead of my small group of walking wounded, I'll call them,

29:30 and the Vickers gun opened up, we weren't even down there in position, the 7th Independent Company blokes were down there and they got shot up. The Japanese shot them up and John Kerr who was one of my friends from the Wilson's Promontory, said to me, "Well put your men across there", he was senior to me, and 'cause he'd lived up in that part of the campaign all the time, unlike me

30:00 he said, "Line your blokes across the ridge there and go in, Max". And I said, "Bugger going in, that's bloody stupid". And he said, I mean this is the Japanese dug in. And I'm thinking, now as a bloody infantryman not as a bloody independent company bloke and he said, "Well go down and find out what happened to this 2/7th Independent Company Platoon", who are further down the ridge. I went down there and they got two dead, three wounded, and

30:30 they had more than that ultimately and I said to the commander there, I said, "I just refuse to take my blokes in up there". I only had eight of them. And he's got thirty six nearly forty down there sort of thing. And I went back to Kerrand I said, "That's bloody stupid. I tell you what, they should have". You know and I criticised Winning to his face and some of the troops heard it,

31:00 I was that angry and annoyed and I was upset because I was physically incapable of doing the job anyway. So he said, "Oh well, just go and sit down, relax, Max". The attack never went on, just folded up there. And that's about how good it was. But we had about forty, fifty blokes across

31:30 on the mountain side across the river that ran through there, the Bitoi River, it's called. And they were firing also into the Japanese positions and next morning they were firing on Japanese troop reinforcements which were coming up from Salamaua. Well I went down into the bush and I tried to win the war by myself, wasn't successful. And when I went back up the hill all the blokes had disappeared

32:00 and I was there by myself in the bush and my attitude was that bloody annoyed with everybody and myself it sounds, I don't mind just going on print or anything other because that's exactly what happened but I mean, I'm probably in the wrong. It's probably me in the wrong,

32:30 but what happened is that Vickers gun which Winning had set up in the head of this cun like structure, arc, opened up when all our attacking forces weren't ready for them. So the Japanese were just sitting waiting for us. And it'd take four or five men to occupy one Japanese whose got himself in trench with a submachine gun or something and in that type of country, 'cause

33:00 you can't rush them. You can't rush in thick bush, heavily forested bush with a lot of undergrowth in it, you don't know where you're going for a start. So anyway I walked overland up through bush, I met some blokes, they were carrying a couple of wounded from the officer leading the attack on the

33:30 anti-aircraft gun. He'd been killed and the troops that he was commanding on that side, they were walking slowly back to get back to the Skindewai area, which was our major camp halfway between Wau and Salamaua and Mubo. High up, a friend of mine flew into that campsite after 'round about

34:00 late 1960s. He flew in with a helicopter pilot who was a distant relative operating a helicopter service in Lae. And he flew him up there and it was six thousand four hundred feet above sea level. And that was just one camp that you lived in. And it got cold at night, you know that sort of thing. So, we were all heading back there and I was

34:30 eventually, I'm just trying to think of times, we were anticipating the Japanese aren't going to sit doing nothing about this, you know, they'd really been disturbed now. And that's what happened because it wasn't very long and I can't remember but I was on one of the ridges with a few blokes with another lieutenant and we were the first troops to see the Japanese,

35:00 four thousand of them tramping through to attack Wau and clear us all out of there. And that started what was known as the Battle of Wau. And I was on a ridge, with another lieutenant we did a reconnaissance and we found a Japanese staging post on the track where there was a hundred, two hundred Japs cooking meals and that before they were progressed further, they were on a track we knew nothing about, was unbelievable.

35:30 It was a very old track, which had overgrown quite a bit, and it led to a mine called the Black Cat Mine which was outside Wau. The Japanese knew about it, it was a way of getting into Wau without coming through where we were all guarding and that's the reason they made a very quick advance there but unknown to the Japanese, General Blamey had decided to reinforce Wau, he was our commander in chief, you know the

36:00 whole of the Allied forces, American troops and everything there, and the American General Macarthur who was the overall air force and everything commander, but Blamey decided to reinforce Wau and he was flying the 2/6th Infantry Battalion in, which was where I finished up in the second, last half of the war, as a corporal in the 2/6th Infantry Battalion. Anyway,

36:30 I was sitting with the sergeant and I'd positioned some troops around the edge of this spur and we knew the Japs were heading into Wau and I'm sitting there and with a Tommy gun over my lap. This is one of these 45s, heavy submachine gun, when out of the track, twenty feet, twenty yards or so in front of me, appeared a Japanese with a steel helmet on and searching, nervously so I shot him.

37:00 And the sergeant with me said, "What're you going to do?" And I said, "Oh pick up the blokes, move them back". And this is one of these fictional Errol Flynn [famous actor] stories, I had the submachine gun and I walked about 'round to the side to see if I could see the Jap. There's always the forward scout and then back behind him is someone covering the forward scout and then

37:30 back behind him for a few yards, will be the main body of the platoon or the attacking force. Remember everything in New Guinea is done by files, you don't spread out like that, it was always single file, couldn't do it any other way. I couldn't see anybody, the Japs behind him fired a few rifle shots or something in the area where they thought I had fired from. And then I went over the cliff

38:00 and I must have fallen thirty or forty feet, and I was stunned and I said, "I'm getting out of this fucking war". So I walked back to Skinty Why and all my company blokes had disappeared, there was none of them anywhere but these fellas in another company

38:30 and I said, "I've had this bloody war, and you can stick your commission up your bum", and all these sorts of things and something or other. And the Battle for Wau was raging by that time and was dog fights up above us and was all very exciting. And I watched a couple of Japanese planes being shot down, I remember. And eventually the 2/6th Company with the old commandos

39:00 that were small groups around the place pushed the Japanese out. A couple of artillery pieces were flown in which were very effective. And the Japanese gave the game away and retreated. But lots of casualties of course and my unit was reassembling as a unit, which we'd never been since we got to New Guinea. From

39:30 the time we left Port Moresby we were separated and broken up into bits and pieces all over the place. So we're never together. And I was at a camp up above Wau, a couple of thousand feet above Wau, a place called Edie Creek rejoining when I was ordered to report to the brigadier who was from 17th Infantry Brigade. And this was his first command in action as a

40:00 brigade commander in the 17th because he'd been a 7 Div man in the Syrian campaign, mainly fighting the Vichy French people there. And Brigadier Martin and I was ordered before him and he gave me a lashing, tongue lashing, and said, "Can you use a typewriter?" And I said, "Yes", he said, "Well go and write a report

40:30 and say what you want to say about this". So I wrote the report and at the end of it I said, "I am deeply ashamed of my actions and I know it was the wrong action what I took and I want to retire my commission. I want to be returned to the ranks". A few days later my CO had arrived up from the Markham Valley, John Taylor, and he said,

41:00 "I think Martin's going to court martial you". 'Cause he'd been called before Martin, because he was now the officer most experienced about the Lae and Markham area, he said he thought he's going to court martial me, which didn't eventuate and the 2/5th Company the old originals, New Guinea lot, were gradually getting together

41:30 and were going to be returned they reckoned we'd done twelve months in New Guinea and it was time to rest us which was a good thing. Because we were largely disease ridden anyway, you know, I mean the amount of sickness in the unit was astronomical and I got out to Moresby, immediately went down to malaria, spent hospital in the general AGH [Australian General Hospital] army hospital.

Tape 6

00:31 **What was the hospital like that you were in?**

Oh, they're very good, you know, I mean, all soldiers love nurses. And they do a great job and they're all very friendly you know and you don't want to be over sympathised or molly coddled, but when they had their moments where they weren't under pressure themselves with work

01:00 they were always very nice to talk to, all soldiers in that sort of situation it's a great break to be able to talk to a woman.

Well, it would have been a while since you'd chatted to a woman.

Yes, the only women I would have talked to would have been native women when I was doing patrols around the Markham and because the natives largely, closely got to Lae,

01:30 were really pro-Japanese to a certain extent.

How could you tell?

Well, they were sullen. They didn't want you to come into our village, into their villages and a lot of the natives, they'd spread themselves out of their villages and were living in what you could say a secondary type villages away from the main village. And if you went through there and sometimes I'd go through there and I had enough pidgin to

02:00 ask them, "You lookalong, Japan man yesterday in that first light?" Sort of thing whether a Jap was here yesterday. You realised they didn't want you there, because there was always a possibility that the Japs would know that you had been there and they'd come along and they'd say, "You talk to those Australians, I'll stick this bloody bayonet in you", you know, that sort of thing.

02:30 I imagine there was a tribe very close to Lae, native tribe called, Butibum. And they were definitely pro-Japanese and we know that, you know we were warning fellas on patrol, "Just be very careful, they're .." After I mentioned I did a booby trap raid on Japan towards the end of my service in the Markham and the Japanese

03:00 sent a plane up and bombed the village where they thought I was with my blokes, you know. That was Wampit village they came up and dropped three or four bombs and fired a few machine guns down at it, they killed one of the native women in there. They didn't kill us, there were only half a dozen of us there. But someone, one of the blokes said, he was sure, it was a native in that plane that

03:30 flew low over us. You know we could see the hair, sort of thing, perhaps, I wouldn't have known whether he's telling the truth or not but I could have believed that that was a Butebum native who said, "I know where those Australian soldiers are". But he obviously didn't know about Bob's because our Bob's hidden camp was not very far from that village. And he could have caused devastation if he dropped half a dozen bombs there.

04:00 **Was there any evidence of cruelty from the Japanese to the local people?**

I can't recall any. There was cruelty to us. Well I'll say this is outside my area slightly but Flight Lieutenant Newton, won a VC [Victoria Cross] in the war for the RAAF and his plane crashed outside Salamaua in the sea and because they

04:30 lopped his head off. And I think there were two New Guinea volunteer blokes in Lae were captured by the Japs and they were executed. I don't know, of any sort of torture, I think they'd just do those ceremonial decapitation.

Pretty straight forward really.

Oh well, you knew that was going to happen.

05:00 They weren't taking any prisoners there. And I don't think they took any prisoners on the Kokoda Track either but they did take prisoners in New Britain and New Ireland and I did explain earlier that the 1st Company were heavily lost because they were largely taken prisoners. A few of them managed to escape from New Ireland to New Britain and they managed to get with native help, back to New Guinea, they became part of our unit. They were 2/1st blokes,

05:30 Independent Company.

Just going back to your time in the hospital, how were they treating malaria in those days?

Well they were treating it with Atebrin. And Atebrin was a new tablet, I think it was American discovery. But I'm not positive about what research provided the Atebrin material, but it was much

06:00 more effective. People knew you were taking it because your skin colour was affected; you got an orangey tinge in your cheeks because the dye in Atebrin was orangey. And you were on a course of Atebrin indefinitely then.

So you managed to recover after two weeks, is that right?

Well you recovered to the extent that you were still tired but you're getting better all the time and

depends upon how bad a

06:30 dose you got. I mean, it can be fatal if it gets to your kidneys and that sort of thing. I'll just explain and partly explains my action I think. I accepted that I was a medical case when I was told to go and join the force to Mubo, and my own commander must have thought that by sending me and these half a dozen poor blokes up the Wau to get some decent tucker in us,

07:00 well I just recently before that had a dose of malaria and eventually did the Mubo campaign part of it and Wau campaign and then in disgrace was flown out to Moresby where I got a dose of malaria almost straight away. That would have been a Markham Valley infection, nothing to do with Moresby. It was in my blood. And it was being depressed and then circumstances it came out again. After being

07:30 in the what did they call it again? Camp up in the mountains, recovery camp sort of, I just forget the term they used. But a place called Rona, I got better up there and then I was ordered to face the commander in chief of the whole force who was Lieutenant General McKay, Ivan McKay. And I thought, "Oh you've got this

08:00 message, you've got to go and face him". Well, I did.

Is this after you've come out of hospital with the malaria?

After I'd come out of hospital, after I'd had a week or so up in the mountains getting, you know recovering from the attack. So I faced the top man in the whole, you know Americans and everything were under.

And what did you say?

I was paraded before him, and he was this distinguished soldier who led the first desert campaign

08:30 you know in Bardia and Tobruk and that he was the 6th Divisional commander.

What did you say to him?

Well, I think I said, "I'm sorry about this, sir", well, you know, it was the obvious, "What have you got to say for yourself?" And I said, "I'm sorry about this, sir, I just lost control I suppose". I made no excuses and I said, "If you have the report that I made I want to

09:00 have my commission taken away 'cause I don't think if similar circumstances arrived again, I could do any different. I just simply was out of control, couldn't help it", more or less. "I was incapable of doing the job properly and it overwhelmed me, I just wasn't physically right for it". And just to prove this in a sort of extent, and I'm not making excuses, because I was in the wrong obviously,

09:30 I got back to Australia, after seeing General McKay.

What did he actually say back to you after you told him all that?

He said nothing. And I just left. Went back to where my company were slowly gathering, you know, went back to where the officers were in a particular camp in the edge of Moresby, down near the port and we were all more or less waiting for a ship to

10:00 troop ship coming up from Cairns or somewhere to cart us all back as a unit, back to Australia. We didn't have the numbers by then because of the amount of illnesses and things.

Do you think that the malaria had anything to do with you just letting go and being out of control?

I'm sure it did, in the sense that it caused in me, a total

10:30 frustration that I couldn't do the things I wanted to do. That I was constantly being exhausted, you know, just getting up there to do that Mubo attack, and I could see it in the faces of some of the blokes that were with me but they hadn't had the malaria I'd had and I had two doses, both which were pretty bad ones, some blokes didn't seem to get it as bad as I did. Perhaps my blood was too pure, but anyway,

11:00 I'm just trying to illustrate a point there, I'd had the dose down in Markham Valley just before I did the Mubo, Wau campaign fight and out to Moresby I get, flown out because I'm in disgrace, immediately get to Port Moresby I collapse into malaria, and you can't hide it. Well, what's the organ, organ under your chest there?

Liver? Kidneys?

No, no, no,

11:30 **Stomach.**

No, it's an organ that filters blood, what the hell's the name of it. Anyway that's the one immediately the doctor feels there, "Oh malaria", just swells. And it's an organ that contains a lot of blood, it's got a filtering role I think of bacteria and things and that.

Is it a spleen?

Spleen, thankyou the spleen.

12:00 Well done.

It was Julian [interviewer] actually.

Why I've forgotten that I don't know. But anyway that was the first sign, you know doctor always goes for your spleen, and he finds it swollen. Okay I have an attack in Moresby, I go back to Australia, I get home to my family, "Bang!" Over I go and I'm out next moment, within ambulance arrives I've carted to the Heidelberg Military Hospital outside Melbourne.

12:30 **What for?**

Malaria.

Again?

Yeah, malaria again. The private doctor came and my Mother probably got on the phone or something and phoned up the doctor, said "My son's just back from New Guinea and he's ill". Doctor came, straight to my spleen, "Oh god", into hospital, then they do a blood test of course, but its automatic, was the spleen, swollen spleen.

How were you on the ship back to Australia?

Alright.

That's strange isn't it, that you were alright on the ship?

13:00 Oh well you were alright but you're not jumping out of your skin.

Was it reasonable conditions on board the ship?

Good, yes. Well it was good to what we'd been having. You know there was proper food and there was nice white plates instead of eating off your hands and those sorts of things.

So you were treated pretty well on the ship?

Oh yeah, they were very good, they were very good.

Was it exciting to come back home?

I think it was probably just, you know, I was in a difficult position.

13:30 Here I was, I was still a lieutenant, they didn't take my rank off me and perhaps they weren't going to. I didn't know what was going to happen. I assumed that something would happen, even a court martial could still happen. I don't know what General McKay who said nothing, you know just looked at me. His assistant, the adjutant in charge of his office and he was just in a tent too. In Moresby, no he wasn't, no

14:00 it was in a big hut.

Am I right to assume that the entire time that you were over there you didn't actually get any leave?

There was no leave, no. No, no, definitely no leave.

'Cause it's pretty big pressure to be over there for twelve months with the Japs constantly on your back, without a break.

Well, that would be fair enough, you know and I assume if I hadn't got malaria,

14:30 and that wasn't down in the Markham Valley 'cause the blokes up in the Wau area were relatively healthy compared to the Markham blokes. And sometimes there'd been a change over perhaps a few blokes from the Wau, Skinty Why area would be sent down to build up the numbers again. We were down there but we were always less numbers than we started with, well under, as I said, two of the lieutenant that went down with me were only there for a

15:00 month and they were sent back to Australia, ill.

Did the constant sickness amongst you blokes actually decrease your morale?

Oh of course it did. I mean, I don't think you thought of morale. I think you simply knew there was a job to be done and you had to do it the best way you could. And I doubt whether I even thought of the word, morale, didn't enter my head.

15:30 I wasn't critical of things down there in the sense that I thought things perhaps could have been done differently because I regarded myself as a professional soldier. Whereas most of the blokes were just voluntary AIF blokes, I was still imagining in my lifetime to be spent until I was sixty years of age as a military officer. And that was alright,

16:00 you know, I was quite happy to do that. And but I'll just enlarge on this extent that I had malaria down there, got to Moresby, malaria again, got home, didn't have any leave, 'cause I spent it all in hospital, was sent back through the transit camps I got to Sydney, Sydney transit camp said, "You've got to report to your unit up in Canungra", which is now the jungle warfare training centre for Australian troops.

16:30 And that was relatively mountainous, hilly country south of Brisbane which was good for training in for New Guinea.

So you're relatively healthy by this time that you got to Canungra?

Oh yeah, I was reasonable. And I reported to my unit. Who's in charge of the unit now? Captain Winning, who I'd criticised for the way he organised and planned this Mubo thing and I knew he didn't love me. And

17:00 he was a relative stranger to me, because he was always up in the Wau area, and I was always down in the Markham area until that Wau shindig, and Mubo attack and that. And he said, "Oh you're back with us". And I said, "Looks like it doesn't it?" And you know they may not have been the exact words but he said, "Well I won't employ you as a combat role again".

17:30 And I said something rude to him. And I think I said, "Well, I couldn't wish for anything more", or words to that effect and I said, "Anyway, it won't matter, I'll be losing the commission. A message will arrive one of these days, they'll wake up where I am and they'll say, 'We want him, we're going to strip him of his pips on his shoulder". Well, next day what happened?

I don't know, you tell me.

18:00 I went into hospital with malaria and I was in hospital next to a couple of the lieutenants in the unit I knew, Mick Sheehan who was in Canberra for most of his professional life, as a public servant, and a very nice bloke and we chatted, both of us sick in bed. And I remember

18:30 Mick saying, "Jesus you've got a raw deal, Maxy". And you know I could have cried over all the sympathy I was getting. And word came down shortly I had to report to army headquarters in Sydney.

So you're in Canungra?

From Canungra back to Sydney where I'd just come up from.

Hang on, when you got the malaria, where are you?

I'm in the hospital at Canungra, army hospital. Yes,

19:00 I don't think it was an Australian general hospital in the sense that you know, it had the whole rigmarole that a big army hospital has, you know, operating theatres and God knows what else, it was a simple, like a bush nursing hole they'd taken over for the fact that they'd started this jungle warfare training camp. And of course some of the instructors in the jungle warfare training

19:30 scheme were largely blokes from independent companies. George Wharf who became the senior jungle warfare trainer for the Vietnam War, was there. And he'd been a company commander in 2/6th Battalion who'd been in Wau.

So you were on your way to Sydney after spending your entire time in Canungra in hospital?

Yeah. Yep. I did nothing else in Canungra but in hospital there. So back to Sydney I went, and in the

20:00 Sydney Showgrounds was a transit depot and I was living in one of the cattle pavilions with other blokes when I was given a job with an office as a transit officer. In other words, troops moving through the camp, a lot of them would come to my office and I would supply documents, rail passes and various things so they can get back to their units or go home and things like that and I worked for that, perhaps for a month and then I was called up to

20:30 Victoria Barracks which was Eastern Command Headquarters.

Were you decommissioned at all at any stage?

Not at this stage, it's just going to happen now. As I say they told me to report to Victoria Barracks.

Is the desk job that you did with the transit, is that like a demotion do you think?

No, it was just a job, "What are we going to do with this bloke?" You know, "Lieutenant Piggott, what's he here for?" "Oh God, I don't know", nobody knew.

How many blokes were hanging around the

21:00 **showground then?**

Oh hundreds, hundreds passing through every day.

So it's a transit camp?

It was a big transit camp for all troops moving from southern Australia north to Australia and up to New Guinea or even overseas. You know for if they were still reinforcing, but they weren't 'cause all the troops were coming home from overseas except the 9 Div at that time. And 9 Div had the battle in El Alamein to finish.

So how did you

21:30 **organise these blokes with this bit of an office job that you've got in the showground?**

Well, documents would come to the office, like Private So and So or Corporal So and So you know of such and such a unit and such a such and the messages were coming in all the time. From wherever, I can't recall where they came from, but that's what I was, I was transit officer.

And what were the actual duties that you had to perform as part of this job?

I was just doing the sort of clerical type job and

22:00 checking up who they were and making them prove who they were and when I identified them I could, by the documents I had, I could say that they were being moved so and so where and I had to provide them with the very rail documents to get there. Pretty simple job, didn't require any brains but when I went to Victoria Barracks I thought, "Hallo, this is on", you know, "It's

22:30 on now". So that was the headquarters of Eastern Command. And I reported in the office there and I found this particular office and he said, "You've had it boy", you know more or less words, "You've got to hand in your commission today". So I took my cap off and tossed it to him and said, "See if it hits your head". It did and he said, "Yeah, I don't mind keeping that". So he did, and that was a peaked cap,

23:00 you know that officers wear. I was only in my jungle greens I think, green shirt and trousers, I didn't have my tunic or anything, I wouldn't have known, well my tunic was in a kit bag somewhere I hadn't seen for two years or something. And in fact, I did see it after the war. Wasn't in a very good condition to wear, stuck in a warehouse somewhere up in Brisbane for three years. But

23:30 so here I was and in this office with several other officers around and people no doubt saying, "Oh the poor bugger, he's had it". So I left it and I said, "Where's the recruit depot around here?" And he said, "What're you doing?" And I said, "Well, where do you join the army?" And he said, "Oh, so and so", and I said, "Oh well, I'm going there". So I went around and I re-enlisted and the AIF. And

24:00 by this time they were doing aptitude tests and the aptitude test was to decide which part of the army they'd shove you in. In other words if you were reasonably intelligent you might get the artillery, if you were a dumb cluck you'd be sent to the infantry, more or less. And so I did this aptitude test and I'd say a young university graduate,

24:30 was only Sydney University there anyway. No other universities in Sydney in that time I think, and he was a smart young man. I sat down, like we are now and he started asking me lots of questions. And he was writing down answers and evaluating me, where sort of thing. And then I was sent to, from there, given a number and told to go round get a uniform, of course I only had

25:00 me jungle greens on. He knew I'd been in the army at one time, I made some cock and bull story probably to keep him satisfied and I was pulling his leg quite a lot actually from memory.

Maybe you were just relieving your stress.

Yes, yes, I'd got my sense of humour back.

Is that how you dealt with the decommissioning process, did you just do it with a sense of humour?

Well, I thought it was

25:30 inevitable. And I couldn't understand why it hadn't been taken away from me earlier. I mean, it's a disgraceful thing and the only thing you know, a hundred years before that, I would have been shot.

Really?

No question. They shot people in the First World War for what I'd done. They might perhaps they mightn't have done it as an offer but I didn't cause anybody else any harm, my actions didn't cause the death of anybody or cause the loss of a

26:00 mile of trenches or anything. So I was a good thing to get out of the way. You know, I was a problem I think at the time and I couldn't explain that I was a problem. But, so oh yes, I could have easily been shot back in the early days of Lord Kitchener and the battle for Khartoum [First World War] and all those sorts of glorious historical

26:30 events. But the Australian Army treated me fairly well I think and I valued the fact that I still had lots of friends who thought I was getting rough deal. I've said to people, if I'd been a fighter pilot with a Spitfire over London, my squadron leader would have looked at me and said, "Jeez, Max, I think you better bloody leave that plane for a few weeks and go and sit down somewhere and go and

27:00 find yourself a girlfriend in London or something or do something like that", you know. But of course in an infantry unit, stuck in the jungle that doesn't sort of happen.

The stress doesn't go away?

Well, I'd sent blokes away. Blokes that were in my, I'll call them platoon, I defended them when I could see, even when I was a corporal in an infantry battalion for the last part of the war,

27:30 I had a couple of blokes that dodged going out on a patrol. Deliberately, they were frightened, and I had to go to them and quieten them down and it was always a difficult role to do. And I finally had to report them to the company commander and say, "Would you mind speaking to so and so". Twice, we've gone out before light in the very early part of the morning, before you want to get out of your lines

28:00 and sneak up on the Japanese position while it's still relatively dark. And I thought I'd had me patrol collected ready to go out, we go out there, we find this bloke isn't there. You know, that sort of thing.

Was there much of that going on?

Not that I know of. It happened with me with two men, two very young men, very young men, boys really, you know.

28:30 When I say boys, they were eighteen year olders, probably but they were still boys, mentally. Still young and probably not very bright boys. See, it's always the feeling that the infantry are, I mean it's infantry that goes in and has a huge casualty losses and who occupies the country and are the frontline troops.

29:00 And they're expendable. So that's in it, but let me continue on with malaria, because as I explained I got Markham Valley I go to Moresby I get it, I go home on leave and I don't get any leave because I finish up in Heidelberg Hospital. I eventually get up to Canungra, the jungle warfare training course, where I might be instructor in warfare perhaps,

29:30 but I'm back with my unit and my unit commander then tells me he doesn't want me and if I'm going to be with him he's not going to use me in a combatant role, which was a bit of an insult but not from his point of view. So down I go with malaria again. There's four sicknesses of malaria. From the jungle warfare training school I'm back to Sydney Showgrounds, I lose my commission, I'm sent as a private then to the

30:00 Hunter River Valley where there was a camp called Greta, Greta Army Camp. And guess what there is, there's some artillerymen still there, stuck there, were still there when I joined the commandos and when I joined the commandos they didn't. And they're still in camp back in Australia, bored stiff, all still sergeants and I've got a photograph here, in that packet and I look at that photograph and I think,

30:30 "You bastards didn't come with me". But that was wrong to think that. One of them went to Malaya and he died in the Burma Railway and he was my best friend in that photograph then, Peter Bennett, from Sydney.

So they would have been happy to see you?

I don't think they were, they were embarrassed. Because here's the bloke that went off and has seen action in New Guinea and we didn't. We stuck back there,

31:00 we didn't make an attempt to go deliberately as he did. I'd gone AWL, I'd done everything to be de-ranked from the sergeant, and I'd had twelve months in New Guinea, and they thought I was a bit of a bloody problem coming back and I was a private, you see. I was a private, which made it worse, it was embarrassing and I actually met the colonel that had introduced me

31:30 remember that I'd gone AWL and the colonel dismissed the guard that marched me in and called me, "Max", by the first name, which was most unusual. And he was still there too, as commander of the artillery training camp for reinforcements to go and join units which needed reinforcing their numbers.

32:00 And it was a disappointment for me to see him because I think back early on, he said, "Jeez that Max Piggott's a keen soldier". Etcetera, etcetera and here, poor old Max Piggott turns up in more or less in disgrace, you know, lost his commission. Mucked it up. Must have been blunderer. And I was really sad for him. Because he'd probably rated me as a pretty darn, dashing soldier or something

32:30 like that.

Did you ever discuss it with him?

No, I didn't. I think I said something, "Well, I used to know a young bloke, was a pretty enthusiastic soldier sir, I think probably too enthusiastic". But I could see he was disappointed. And he didn't want to know me any more. Anyway, they then

33:00 from Greta camp which is in the Hunter River Valley, you know where vine grapes vineyards all around it, you know some of the famous New South Wales vines are all around that Greta Camp area.

What were you doing in this camp, were you doing some training?

Well, it was an artillery camp that they'd sent me to. I didn't say anything, they just sent me off.

33:30 Probably did this aptitude testing, sort of thing, I may have let slip that I'd once been in an artillery unit or something. They sent to me an artillery reinforcement depot as an ordinary soldier. And

'Cause you would have already known how to do all that stuff anyway, wouldn't you?

Oh yes, it wasn't anything they could teach me there.

Did you still have to go through the process?

They didn't know that, I mean the army's just a big awkward organisation that pushes

34:00 people in all directions, you know and I was one that was pushed in that direction. But I was standing outside wondering what to do with myself, at one stage, between some huts and the camp sergeant major came along and he gave me an order. "What're you doing, can't you find something to do with yourself?" You know, so I then said, I got paraded somehow into something and

34:30 I said, "Can't I be sent onwards?" You know. "I know all this rigmarole and I don't want to go on with, send me on somewhere and where's the infantry training that I could go to?" And they said, "Up at Tenterfield", right up on the border of New South Wales and the town of Warwick, right on the Queensland border. So I was sent there, and that's an infantry training reinforcement crowd.

So why did you want to do that instead of stay with the artillery?

35:00 I don't know, I just wanted to get away from the artillery anyway, I think. I thought, no I really did think, I've got to put on a bit of a show here. I've got to become a hero.

Did you actually want to redeem yourself so to speak?

I think I wanted to demonstrate a redeeming, I didn't want to redeem myself because I never felt guilty of anything. I felt

35:30 some other people were guilty of letting me get into the condition I was.

Well you certainly had some bad luck with the malaria?

Well the malaria had definitely affected me, no question. Well, I'll just add to that one, because I'm up at Tenterfield and I was given an escort duty. To guard with another bloke, with bayonets, a couple of prisoners, army prisoners that were being taken

36:00 by the Tenterfield camp to Warwick where there might have been a gaol or something, I don't know.

Is Tenterfield in New South Wales?

Yes, it's just inside the border and the biggest town north of it is the town of Warwick, Queensland. Which is farming country and cattle country and it's very pleasant country and good place for training infantrymen but more training infantrymen more desert open

36:30 type warfare. Was forests there but there's lots of open fields and it wasn't jungle warfare training area but it was elementary infantry training there were blokes that had come straight from cities and drafted into infantry were in Tenterfield. And so we did some training exercises out in the countryside, you know attacked the knoll or something or other we had boxing contests and various

37:00 things that the army did like any other camp.

Did anybody ask you whether you'd already been in the war before?

Yeah, they knew it. Because the aptitude test records were somewhere or other and I saw the aptitude test, it followed me, it followed me into the army. And I saw the aptitude test and I'm not going to say what it said into it, because it's so flattering

37:30 that nobody believes it.

What did it say?

Superior intelligence, it said. "This man has superior intelligence". That's what the university bloke said, and I thought what a waste of good superior intelligence sending me to an infantry, but I joke about this honestly, I mean, I didn't mention it because I'm quite happy to hide it, but I suppose lots of people have superior

38:00 intelligence. But anyway, it amused me.

It amuses me.

It amuses me, I tell you. But it didn't do me any good because one of the staff sergeants there said one day and I could see this, he said, "You any good with your glovers?" And I said, "No, never used the glovers". Because they had these boxing contests, and he said,

38:30 "How about having a go?" And I realised I didn't like this bloke, this staff sergeant, 'cause somehow or

other I knew he'd found out I'd once been an officer. Somehow it follows you. You couldn't help it. And so he wanted me to get in a ring with a bloke that was already had two or three fights in these whatsernames, well I didn't say the fact that I'd been in a boxing gymnasium which also had sparred with two Australian champions

39:00 of their weight. So I wasn't a mug. But I wasn't very aggressive, you know, I'd sparred with people but I didn't like sparring because the moment your hand, you landed a hard blow, that was the end of it, it turned into a fight and the other person's going to try and knock you to show that he was better than you sort of thing and he more or less threw the gloves at me said, "Go on, hop in with Jonno over there".

39:30 Well, Jonno was alright but I kept hitting him in the face with my left, all the time it was embarrassing I could have knocked him unconscious with my right, with these gloves on. I mean I was taller than him, I had a bit more reach on him, he was more nuggetty bloke, not, he's probably my weight but it was done deliberately, that sergeant wanted to see me get my nose blooded I'm sure. Bloody officer, you know probably the story, might have

40:00 filtered around that he'd been kicked out 'cause he was a coward or something or other. I don't know. I don't know.

So how did you eventually extract yourself out of the boxing ring?

I got out of it alright, we sparred for three rounds or something and the bloke was friendly enough, he didn't want to have a bash and I didn't want to have a bash, and I avoided it from then on, I didn't want to hide it, because

40:30 I think it's always dangerous because it's an ego thing doing that.

So what else happened? 'Cause you're still at Tenterfield, aren't you?

I'm still at Tenterfield and I was given this job to guard a couple of prisoners, army prisoners and take them up to Warwick, it may have been there was going to be a civil defence, those soldiers may have committed a crime in Warwick or something I can't remember. But I had to escort them up there for some reason or other and I started to feel sick in the

41:00 train. I got to Warwick, and I went around because after I'd dumped the prisoners, I went to the local doctor and my local doctor did this and he said, "Oh you've got malaria, old boy". So I finished in Warwick Hospital.

Hospital again.

Yeah, so I was rotten with the wog.

So how long were you in hospital this time?

Oh I don't remember, but maybe a couple of weeks or something. Something like that. But as I say they had Atebrin now and it was cleaning you up much better. And this will amuse you, because I never had malaria again, there was still two years of war to go, two years roughly and they sent me to Canungra, to the jungle warfare training, and of course I ran into some of my old buddies.

Tape 7

00:31 But I don't know anybody that, unless they were prisoners of war in Borneo or somewhere, none of the soldiers I know had it as much malaria as I did, like that sequence, and the amusing thing is, on our honeymoon, guess what happened? I went down with malaria and that was in 1948, three years after the war had ended. You wouldn't read about it, would you? And I

01:00 remember Elizabeth saying, "Oh gawd, how often's this going to happen?"

She had reason to be concerned by the sounds of it. So what was it like, becoming a private again?

Oh, I felt free. I really did feel free. I could feel in a sense that I didn't really much responsibility for myself or for other soldiers, I'd do the right thing by other soldiers but

01:30 I had no responsibility, or could be the cause of their getting into trouble in that sort of sense. But, we talking now? Yes, well we were at Canungra, remember at the jungle warfare training and I did say that they were forming the parachute regiment, and I knew that Captain Shepherd from our company was a senior

02:00 officer of it and so I made inquiries whether I could enlist in the parachute regiment which is completely untrained and was just new to the Australian Army and I saw somebody that was connected with it, and recruiting for it and he said, "You're too big". At six feet, I was a little over six feet then and I was probably eighty kilograms

02:30 I suppose. They were recruiting mainly light people and stocky people, he said, for the role of paratrooping, that is, “We’re avoiding anybody that’s got over a certain weight as much as possible”, you know. I don’t know quite whether that was the truth or not but nothing happened for it, but I’ll explain, I don’t mind it being in the war history, but

03:00 you see, I knew some of the officers that were in Canungra because they were my old buddies and one of them is still a buddy of mine, he’s a farmer in southern Victoria now and when I go east, they have a house in Melbourne and that is open house, for Liz and I to go to if we want to stay in Melbourne for a week, we just take their house over, which they only use themselves, for their own members of family. Nobody lives in it for most of the time. Good house too. And

03:30 I mention, well I won’t mention his name because you know, it goes into the records, but he said, “Oh look Max, shove these on your shoulder”. And he gave me the clips and he said, “Come into the officers’ mess for a drink”. So I, Lieutenant Piggott, was in the officers’ mess amongst all ranks of officers, you know, Private Piggott with Floyd’s pips on the shoulder.

What was

04:00 **the training like at Canungra?**

Oh well it was a lot of the stuff that we’d been doing, done at the Wilson’s Promontory and I think it got harder and better all the time, there’s more and more people became more and more professional at it but it was, you know hard log slugging marches, crossing streams, loaded up, crossing rope bridges, perhaps making the rope bridges,

04:30 all those sorts of things. The weapon training was all the stuff I’d already done anyway but there was nothing new there as far as I was concerned but well, I can’t say any more than that, but I knew I was going to be drafted, to an infantry battalion somewhere, and when the draft came on, and we were

05:00 heading for the Atherton Tablelands, behind Cairns, where all the infantry divisions regrouped after returning to Australia, and the 6th Division was up there, that was the old original, Sir Ivan McKay, the commander of New Guinea force, took to the Middle East way back in January 1940. I asked, “Could I be

05:30 sent to the 2/6th Battalion?” Now that was a Melbourne recruited battalion, or Victorian, you know, and they were the unit that had done most of the fighting at Wau when they turned the Japanese out of attacking Wau, and I thought, well that’s a good show to get into, I’ll see if I can get into it, and I managed to fluke it. And a truck, I went with a truckload

06:00 from this transit sort of depot up in the Atherton Tablelands, to the 2/6th Battalion lines, jumped out of the truck and we all lined up to be inspected by the second in command of the battalion. Major Jones. And Major Jones walked along and said “Yeah, I’m Private Smith, sir”, and, “Private Brown, sir”, sort of thing. Got up to me and he looked at me and he said, “Hey, you been with this battalion before?” And

06:30 I said, “No, I run into you up at Skinty Why though”, and he thought, “Oh what’s the name?” He said, “Oh yeah, I remember you. Hey, you, oh yes”. And he sort of stopped, didn’t like saying it, you know, he was suddenly recalling who I was. Because I’d been involved with him on a patrol up in the mountains when the Japanese were all marching into Wau sort of thing, and

07:00 that was a little bit interesting sort of incident I thought. There’s all around the officers’ mess the 2/6th Battalion, “We’ve got a bloke from that independent company here, he’s a private”. Well it certainly got around because within a night or two, it was all a tented camp and in the tent that I was I think there was eight of us.

07:30 Four of them were playing cards on the tent for a penny, pennies in the ring sort of thing. Playing poker, when a bloke strode in. He said, “Oh you wouldn’t believe it. We’ve got a bloody bloke that got sacked as an officer, we’ve got as a bloody rookie come into the camp today”. I recall it quite well, ‘cause I was reading an old tattered “Readers Digest”, that happened to be lying around somewhere and I

08:00 was lying on the bed and I thought, “Oh Jesus, this won’t be long before this is all over the place. And they’ll identify, someone will identify pretty quickly”. So it was only a matter of sort of waiting until I knew that everybody knew that I’d been an officer who had been sacked, you know. Didn’t matter, they had a footy team, so I got into that and played and

08:30 I did all the sort of things and acted just like an ordinary private and we trained up there with all sort of infantry type training, it had a wonderful CO, by name of Fred Woods, Colonel Woods, and I’ll tell a nice little incident that shows what some infantry battalions are like. Some, may not all like it perhaps, but Colonel Woods who is a very fine soldier as well as very experienced one from the

09:00 desert and Greece, the 2/6th Battalion got thrashed in Greece, with a battalion probably about eight hundred of the battalion went to Greece, which was a terrible mistake of the British Prime Minister’s and was terribly wasteful of soldiers, and some of them managed to fled across to Crete and then they had the same old trouble there. But nearly four hundred of the 2/6th Battalion were captured

09:30 prisoners of war in Greece. So the battalion that came back to Australia, got to be completely rebuilt.

And the battalion that came up to Wau, half of it would have been blokes that had never been in action. Because the Greece campaign was the last campaign of the 2/6th Battalion in Europe, in the desert warfare, though they'd been in the original desert warfare. So it wasn't

10:00 as though I was amongst blokes who were the most experienced AIF infantry fighters in the whole Australian Army, a lot of them weren't but they were even newer than I was in that sense, you know they were complete rookies. So that was alright that made it much easier for me, but of course, most of the NCOs, sergeants and everything were fellas that had been in action two or three times against the Italians and the Germans. And they were quite experienced but

10:30 they were good blokes. And Colonel Woods, in the Battle for Wau, had been hit by a bullet in the head and opened up the top of his skull, so here was this colonel who was a pretty good fighting infantryman. Well, he was walking near our lines one day when a private who was a biggish, jocular sort of a decent bloke about thirty years of age, and I'm what? Twenty four I suppose,

11:00 twenty three, twenty four. And I was in hearing distance, the colonel walked past and Theo, his name was Theo French, he was killed up in New Guinea towards the end of the war, poor old Theo. But Theo was one of those happy go lucky blokes that everybody liked, you know, cheerful bloke, and the CO walked past and Theo said, "Morning, Fred!" And Fred said, "Morning Theo", walked on. And I said to someone, after that,

11:30 "Jesus, Theo French, saying 'Hello, Fred', to the CO?" And they said, "Yeah they both played in the St Kilda footy team together". I thought that was lovely. Well, I'll expand on that, you want to ask me questions about the Wewak camp, Wewak, which was the last campaign on the New Guinea mainland.

12:00 Well, I'll just give you this anecdotal piece because this did disappoint me that I don't mind. After the war, I was in the street, one of the main streets right in the centre of Melbourne, came up to a tram stop and I'm standing there to cross the road and I looked sideways, "Oh there's my old CO, Fred Woods". He finished a brigadier, he was sent to Borneo and took over one of the 7 Div brigades there as the brigadier

12:30 so we lost him for the last couple of months of the war. But there he was and I said, "Good morning, sir, Corporal Piggott, C Company". And he said, "Oh yes, you got your decoration?" And I said, "What decorations?" He said, "Oh you were recommended, you didn't get your medal?" And I said, "Never heard anything about it". And

13:00 don't know anything about it. And he said, "Oh it could still turn up". Never has though. I think I got to Brigadier Moten, do you remember Brigadier Moten? He was still the brigade commander and my recommendation for an award would have gone through Brigadier Moten and he would have traced this and he said, "That's that bloke, that lieutenant fellow". That's what I guess happened. But again, I must stress, I'm not complaining, it doesn't worry me,

13:30 I know who I am. And it would have been nice and I would have liked it for my Father's sake who was an infantryman in the First World War, got as far as sergeant rank, and I would have liked him to have known that his son was decorated for bravery but it never happened, so I don't mind, honestly.

When did you return and

14:00 **go to Wewak?**

Well, we trained on the Atherton Tablelands, the 6th Division and the 9th Division had finished their war at that stage, they ultimately went to Borneo, Balikpapan and Borneo and Tarakan, did the Borneo campaigns, after that, but they were training also in Queensland and being, you know, fresh recruits coming in some men

14:30 no longer physically fit, being retired and all those sorts of things. So all these units are being renewed all the time. Fresh blood going in, officers who had done well, perhaps promoted and gone to other units as senior men with other units, whereas if they'd stayed, they wouldn't have got any promotion because the positions were all fixed. So it was all that sort of thing was going on all the time. So all the Australian fighting army was at that time, in 1944

15:00 up in northern Queensland. You know you say, perhaps one hundred thousand men or something like that. Well, we'd lost the 8th Division in Malaya, they'd all gone and the rumours going round the camp was we were being amalgamated with an American corps to do the initial landing in the Philippines. Now,

15:30 I knew I was going back to fighting, somewhere and that pleased me because I thought, "Well jeez, we're getting nearer Japan", and you feel a bit easier because you're going to be killed, at least you're ending the war, you're getting nearer Japan, and I'd said to blokes, Blamey, who was our commander in chief, and who became a field marshal at the

16:00 end, after the war, the only man that's ever been a field marshal in the Australian Army, the top rank. And he was second in command in the Middle East, under a British general and he was famous First World War general, because he was chief staff officer of General Monash's staff. So he was a disliked man in many ways but he was obviously a brilliant soldier. Possibly the best soldier in

16:30 the big sense, the big broad sense. And he knew far more than General Macarthur did. General Macarthur was a raw recruit compared to Blamey's experiences. You know, Blamey was Gallipoli, France, in which a pretty terrible war. And then the Middle East and all that and then Macarthur came into the war after all that. So, we knew our top man was a more experienced soldier than their top man, who was a terrible publicist,

17:00 sort of Hollywood style. Good soldier, no doubt about it and did a wonderful job in Japan after the war as the sort of administrator but what am I getting at now?

We're in Wewak.

Going to Wewak, yes. So we were sent to Aitape where the Americans are gathered, now, the 9th and 7th Division have driven the Japanese

17:30 further west along the New Guinea coast. Through a very difficult thing and the intelligence estimates, which I've read, the Japanese had retreated and there was sixteen thousand Japanese soldiers had retreated to Wewak and were congregating in Wewak a force. That's about a division, a healthy division, fresh and full establishment

18:00 about 'round the sixteen thousand mark.

Where did you land?

A place called Aitape, which was a native village. It was wrecked, Aitape was wrecked and hundreds of lives lost when there was a tornado and a huge tidal wave, hit Aitape. It was in the news several years ago, and it just swamped the village and drowned

18:30 you know, literally hundreds of people around there. But the Americans had gone along the coast. Our two divisions had cleaned the Japanese, forced the Japanese out of Finschhafen which meant that the sea route between New Britain and New Guinea was now open. So we could sail ships through there. And the Japanese on Rabaul were locked in. We had air supremacy

19:00 and growing sea supremacy, the Americans had defeated much of the Japanese Navy at Midway so it was obvious the Japanese are going to lose the war but it's going to be a long haul because the Japanese soldier is at least as brave as any soldier ever created, very hardy. And they were prepared to die. You know they were that type, philosophically, a lot of Japanese were peasant type of

19:30 people, small little farmers whose sons had been recruited and they were tough. Physically tough, too. And we rendezvoused at Aitape with a couple of American divisions, there out in the sea you could see battle ships and aircraft carriers, sometimes they were there, sometimes they weren't. And the American Navy was of course, controlled

20:00 starting to take control of the sea lanes to Japan and Borneo and Malaya and that. And we were reasonably optimistic on the base that we were going to be with the Americans to do the first landing back in the Philippines, under General Macarthur. But politics intervened the Australian commander wasn't happy with the thought that Macarthur would split Australian units

20:30 up, shove a brigade with American division and another brigade with American division, on the basis that the Australians are the most experienced fighters in the region so you'll stiffen the American divisions while shoving a brigade of Australians among them. That was the feeling. And of course, a lot of the Americans had never been in action at all. And the first American division in action in New Guinea, were pretty appalling, you know, they did a really bad, bad show.

21:00 They weren't properly trained for the job and there were a lot of American senior officers sacked and sent back to America because of the conduct of their troops. I think they were seeing too many Hollywood films, some of them actually, from what stories one heard from blokes that were among them. But that doesn't denigrate the American soldiers, who were obviously as good as any soldiers in the world and

21:30 so is their generals. But we didn't go with them. We were left at Aitape and told to clean out Wewak, so that's what the role we were given until the war ended. We had to sort of, keep crushing the Japanese back and tighter and tighter around Wewak and the war ended on that time because of the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, that's what we were doing when the war ended.

22:00 **Can you describe how you were tightening on the Japanese in the area?**

Well, the tightening was harder than we thought it might have been for two reasons. One, our instructions were, "Do not risk lives if you can avoid it". You know, do your job, but don't do anything rash in the sense that you're taking unnecessary risks. We don't want unnecessary casualties. We're doing an elimination job,

22:30 which we'll do quite efficiently if we just take it along steadily and we've trapped the Japanese they can't be supplied, they're food sources will be from gardens they're making and all sorts of things but there wasn't sixteen thousand there, there were thirty five thousand. And that made it more difficult. And as I say, they were pretty brave blokes and they'd seen a lot of action, the division facing us was a Japanese 51st Division,

23:00 I think who'd also been in China and had fought their way down through the islands sort of thing. So, it wasn't a picnic, by any means.

Were there many casualties?

Oh of course there were casualties, yeah, yeah. And the good thing, from my point of view is, that established my position in the battalion, because all the officers knew that I was an ex-officer

23:30 and they probably thought, "We'll test this bloke a bit, this'll test him". 'Cause the first fighting patrol that went out to confront the Japanese from Aitape as far as our battalion was concerned was given to me. And I took about six or eight man patrol out. We had to walk from Aitape, a long walk to get up to

24:00 a position to take over a position that the 6th Independent Commando Company occupied. Ahead, out in front of the Americans. The Americans had withdrawn you see, the Americans were just standing there as policemen, they weren't fighting a war there, they were ready to attack the Philippines. And we were given this secondary role which we did very well, I think but we didn't like it.

24:30 We wanted something more achievable, something, not achievable but something that would be a real achievement in other words, keeping the Japs out of the Philippines and making another step towards Japan. So we were doing a secondary role which was unfortunate in the sense that any secondary role and you go and get yourself killed or your leg blown off or something is a bit disappointing, because I can afford a leg if I'm winning the war. But I don't want to lose a leg if I'm

25:00 just doing a secondary, almost police type job. But no, we had gun fights and all those sorts of things but we had no artillery assisting us, occasionally some two or three Beaufort bombers would come over and bomb the knoll over there that we wanted bombed, but it was just a rifle and submachine gun job, and consequently had casualties.

25:30 You're no better off than the Japanese were. We were devalued in the sense that we never could use the equipment we should have been able to use and we didn't have a light mountain gun in the Australian Army. A light, mobile, mountain gun which you could use artillery. Just didn't happen. So we had to fight a distinctly infantry contact type job, you know, get up close to them and

26:00 pop them with rifles and submachine guns, that type of thing. And when we first went forward, I was in the advance party, which had amongst them there was, there were certainly a couple of officers and a couple of sergeants and there was myself, who by now, I was a lance corporal, purely because the commander had to have a lance corporal and he couldn't get someone

26:30 to agree to want to be a lance corporal and he came and begged me, would I take a stripe, so I could be, he could get his establishment correct, he'd had the right numbers of corporals and lance corporals so I thought, alright, I'll take a strip. I take one stripe. And then they give me this first fighting patrol, which was purely to establish whether the Japanese in that position, you know we believed they were but two days before that

27:00 when we were going to that position, to establish and take over from the 6th Commando Company, who'd been there before us, of course. And they were stuck, they couldn't move, they'd had a couple of aerial drops for food and ammunition and they'd lost them to the Japanese. Stuff dropped out in front of the Japanese, not in front of them. So they weren't happy either and they were very happy when we arrived, said, we were going to release them. The Japanese had actually dug in behind them. And it was a pretty strong little

27:30 force because we didn't know that. I'm with this advance party of about twelve soldiers and we're walking along this track quite freely when a machine gun opened up on us and then the two first front blokes were shot. We didn't even know the Japanese were there. And we had to get out through there to get to this independent company, commando lines to take over that position.

28:00 Because we were going to attack from then onwards, our job was to keep attacking the Japanese, pushing them back until we got them in the close perimeter, and decimate their numbers that sort of thing. And we tried a second time and the same thing happened, none of us were shot, the bloke that was firing at us must have been a bit nervous or something and we couldn't get out so we had to make a long circuitous route by going down into valleys and walking

28:30 around and we got around to the 6th Company and we were fired on again by the Japs. They'd held the independent company blokes there for two or three weeks and they hadn't moved. And I can only assume they knew they were being relieved and they didn't want to lose casualties. After we were there for two days, my CO, company commander, came to me and said, "You've got to take a patrol across

29:00 and find out whether Japs are established on that hill in front of us". And I did, and we killed two Japanese there, established that yes, they were there, I didn't have any casualties, I went back a week later, they gave me a second stripe. That's how what I was when the war ended, I was a corporal. Well, it's no, Napoleon was a corporal and so was Hitler at one stage. Hitler was a corporal in the

29:30 First World War, Great War, so you know.

It's an accomplishment.

It is, yeah. And one of the company commanders of that battalion was David Hay, who became Sir David Hay and during the 1960s, early '70s he was administrator of New Guinea,

30:00 and he was also deputy secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, represented Australia at the United Nations, used to travel with the foreign minister all those sorts of things and he was one of our company commanders and he wrote that history of our battalion, 2/6th Battalion, it's there. He was a very fine man, very soldier and in one of those positions that I was occupied in was the platoon, I didn't command the platoon, I just

30:30 commanded about eight of them, nine blokes as corporal, the section. He's leapt frog us, went ahead and took the knoll ahead and promptly got himself shot into the stomach and he looked like a dying man when I saw him passing back through me, but he lost a kidney, through it and he's lived, and he's still alive. Very fine man. And I ran into him once, the only reunion I've ever been to with 2/6th Battalion, I

31:00 ran into him and we're chatting about this sort of thing and I did say, "I never thought you'd survive that war, you looked really crook when you went through, past us, being carried out". You know. And he said, "Well, I never expected to be alive myself. I felt that there". Lost a lot of blood and that. And I said, "You know that war, Wewak, Aitape war that was a corporal's war". If ever it be known as a war, let it be called a corporal's war. Because all the

31:30 patrols and the scores and scores of patrols, corporals were leading them. Taking out contact, find if the Japs there, you take four men, you take six men. And it was constantly like that, the whole time we were there. For about six months and if I wrote a book I'd describe it as the corporal's war, and he agreed. He said, "It's just the nature of that campaign".

32:00 You know, that you couldn't do a big force attack or anything because you had no big force opposition to attack. It would be twenty men, thirty men attacking thirty or forty Japanese on a hill, you know the Japanese were here, there everywhere.

What condition were the Japanese in that you were encountering?

They were deteriorating physically but they had a very cagey commander whose name was Hatazo Adachi, he committed suicide

32:30 cut his stomach open after the war, he was questioned and he was going to be charged with wartime offences because and this is quite true, he was allowing his troops to eat people. Wewak force of thirty five thousand only about sixteen thousand left, when the war ended. They'd died of disease, they died of malnutrition, they'd died of starvation. We'd shot them, all sorts of things like that.

33:00 And but what he did, is he made sure he had his top units, were reasonably well fed and well armed. And whenever you attacked a place, you knew you were up against first class soldiers, you know. Real infantrymen, not someone who was behind the scenes soldier, support soldier. And they attacked us. Not in big

33:30 waves, 'cause they couldn't. They had to reserve their ammunition, those sorts of things and keep alive these blokes, there was a real commando type officer, leading groups around us, they did sort of small raids on our

34:00 perimeters, we were constantly moving, we didn't stop in any one position for very long and so you just dug a bit of a rough hole, in which you could lie down in that wasn't a real trench, that you'd lie down at night and just before the war ended, I had a bomb land right on the perimeter of my hole, everything shot over the top of me. And in the morning when the light came that was about, that was in the middle of the night, that Jap threw a bomb which I'm

34:30 guessing was a jam tin bomb. It probably got explosive in it, which he could have made up out of artillery shell explosive or something. And this had happened before and a couple of blokes had been killed in other platoons and that by the Japs throwing these things into your lines. And this is what amazed me, in the morning, the officer in charge of the platoon, he said, "I thought you'd been killed".

35:00 And I said, "Why'd you think that?" And he said, "There was an explosion right in the hole, and I said, "Well you didn't come and investigate to see whether I was wounded or anything", and he said, "Well they just said you were dead". That was just shortly before the war finished.

Did you see any evidence of the cannibalism that you mentioned?

I'm afraid so.

35:30 This chap, I mustn't mention his name, he was a private, no, he wasn't, he was corporal, he was corporal by then. He did one of these small man patrols, you know six men, contact, find out if the Japanese, how they're armed, if possible, you know. If they fire a machine gun at you, you knew they were pretty well placed and well organised to defend their position sort of thing, once the machine gun opened up.

36:00 And he led this patrol out and he was killed. And some of these patrols were so small in numbers the next person who would be senior would most occasions just another private who might accept responsibility quickly and grab the role with being the leader of the patrol. His assessment was, I would

say, without knowing

36:30 it, that if he'd tried to recover, I won't mention his name, recover his body, he'll be shot too, which is what happened on a couple of occasions, and nearly happened to me. And so they came back and reported that whatsername, the corporal had been killed by this burst of a machine gun. Well, within twenty four hours, or thirty six hours or something

37:00 we attacked that knoll, and we found his body and it was all emaciated, stripped, stripped of meat, just parts of his skeleton. They'd eaten his brains, cut his head open and because some of the blokes were shocked I gathered his remains up, put them in one of the bags that we used for stores, you know bully beef coming up would come in a sugar bag type thing, and all his remains fitted into it, tied it up

37:30 and his remains would go back for burial and he'd be in a war cemetery just what remained of him. And okay that happened. And the next report I heard was, that the natives, we had some native carriers, you know the local tribes would do some carrying jobs for us, they might even carry out some wounded or

38:00 they'd be given the jobs of carrying some ammunition for us or something which would save our energy and also saved us leaving our other positions to go and cart things. So I was told that the natives carrying the bag back with other stuff that was being carried back, I wouldn't know what it was, they'd thrown that bag in the bush, thrown it away. And that they said they actually looked into the bag, "Whoooo!"

38:30 And threw the fellas remains away. Wasn't much of it there, as I say, it was just in one of those sugar bags. You know a bag about that big. And well that was proof that they were cannibalising, but we had other proof because the Japanese had brought lots of prisoners, Indian Army soldiers, Indians down into New Guinea

39:00 as slave labour. To do those sorts of menial roles which their soldiers weren't required to do. And they had quite a few of them in Wewak with them and two of them escaped to our battalion lines, I didn't see them, but this is the story that went around the battalion, they came in because they'd fled out and managed to flee the Japanese lines and get out and they'd walked, they'd footed, for days

39:30 more or less, and they arrived at our lines in bare feet, bedraggled looking, under nourished and everything, and they told the stories, they were being selected for meals, the Japanese were eating the prisoners of war.

Must have made a particularly gruesome discovery for you?

Well, it could have been if you hadn't been already dealing with

40:00 dead people. You get hardened to that, everybody did. It was more sickening years after the war to think of that poor bloke because he was a popular man and he was a very handsome physical specimen, very good looking young man, and he'd been married that year before the unit had gone away again, they'd had final leave, I didn't get it,

40:30 from Atherton Tablelands, I wasn't due for it but most of the battalion went on final leave before they were going overseas, always do and he'd been married on it, which didn't do any good. And it was a very sad incident but I can't recall that there were a great numbers of people upset really by it,

41:00 it was going to happen, sort of thing. But that was the only evidence that I had specifically, I mean, he'd been roughly barbecued, you know.

Tape 8

00:31 **Did his wife ever find out that that happened to him?**

I'm sure wouldn't have. Sure it wouldn't have. I mean she would have known, she would have very quickly received a telegram saying her husband had been killed in action, yeah. Very simple message, no adjectives used in it or anything, just a simple wartime, "Unfortunately we report that your husband

01:00 number, number, number, was killed in action on such and such a date, and where". You know, she would know, what he was doing and what unit he was in and he would have written to her, you know you could write home and all your letters went through a censoring you know, the officers in a unit all the letters, the ordinary soldier wrote had to go through the officers who would look at them and I remember

01:30 there was a famous incident as far as I was concerned, yes that's right, I did mention about the colonel in the camp at the Hunter River where he'd been the man that originally called me in when I went AWL and dismissed the guard and called me, "Max", and said, "What's wrong Max? What's the trouble?" Well, I saw him again later

02:00 in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales when I was a private of course and that would have shocked

him to know that this good, keen young soldier had been demoted.

I think you told me about this before.

I did tell you about it and I'm using it as an illustration of censorship because I wrote to one of the sergeants who I'd know quite well, who was still in that same camp and had never moved out of it, during all that part of the war, as a reinforcement because

02:30 his unit had been lost in Malaya. So he wasn't going to go there, it was all over, the Malayan campaign was over, but I wrote and I mentioned the incident of the colonel and I said, "Please give Colonel so and so, my regards". You know what they did, they cut his name and everything out of it. They weren't going to allow to go through uncensored the fact that I was sending a friendly message about a colonel that had let me off a charge.

03:00 Should have charged me with being AWL, but he didn't.

Did you get much mail when you were out there?

I got the occasional letters from home, once or twice my parents, things were a bit difficult to get during the war anyway so your parents, if they wanted to send you something, one of the privates in my section in the Wewak part of the campaign, his Father was a restaurant owner in Queensland and he used to get pretty nice

03:30 little packages of food sent and sometimes they'd get to him, sometimes they'd just disappeared, someone else just sort of undid the paper and said, "Yeah, look what's in here". Probably ate them with his friends but a couple of packages that my Mother sent me, and I did specifically say, "Send us some dates and raisins and peanuts, those sorts of things". Well, I opened them they were just ruined with the temperature and the humidity of the being stored somewhere in New Guinea,

04:00 before they got to me so I just looked at them and threw them out in the bush. But no, I got letters from, very occasionally, just other servicemen mainly. And my parents, my Father.

Was it a bit of a lifeline to have some mail?

Oh its good to have letters, I think letter writing has disappeared from society,

04:30 you get phone calls now.

Would you share your mail?

Sometimes you know, of course the first New Guinea campaign 1942 one, I was censoring letters of ordinary soldiers, privates.

What did you think about that job?

Well, I would have liked not to have done it, you know because some of the letters were pretty emotional and you couldn't help reading them. I didn't like reading them, you know interfering in the private life of some poor bloke who's in love with a girl down in Australia

05:00 somewhere, you know they were always lots of letters were written to their girlfriends, and they were making expressions of love and all this sort of thing, it was a bit embarrassing sort of reading them and you tried to skirt over it, but you had to be particular because if he said something that indicated where he was, and I hadn't censored him and yet, my signature was on the envelope indicating I had censored it, and there was a stamp went on, I could be in trouble.

05:30 For not having done the job properly.

How many of those would you have to do a day?

No, it wasn't on that at all. I mean I'm talking about a period down in the Markham Valley where I was doing this, which there was only fifty, sixty blokes writing letters and a lot of them wouldn't have written one letter. So no they're very few.

So, how long were you actually in Wewak?

06:00 We were in Wewak I think and I'm got to guess this, we were in Wewak I think from November '44, till the war ended and we weren't in Wewak, we were still out approaching Wewak.

So you were on patrol?

The Japanese still occupied, there's a big mountain at Wewak, when I say, big mountain, it'd be perhaps four thousand feet high, perhaps and the Japanese had armed positions and artillery guns,

06:30 which they were still firing up on that mountain.

Did they know the war was over when it was over?

Oh yes, yes they did, I think they still had probably still had a powerful radio which was in contact with some of their forces, I don't know how they knew, but of course, they had a very capable very tough commander in chief who had been the commander in chief in the mainland of New Guinea for the whole

07:00 of the New Guinea campaign.

What did they do when they found out the war was over?

Well I can't speak for them of course.

What did you see?

I can tell you that Adachi the commander in chief, General Adachi, he was a small wiry elderly man and there's a famous photograph of him handing his sword to General Robertson, surrendering it which was an act of surrender and

07:30 one which he would have hated to do because that was the most degrading thing a Japanese Army officer could do. Hand away his sword.

What were the Japanese doing around where you were, when they found out that the war was over?

Well they all became prisoners of war.

Did they surrender to you?

'Cause we had a division there, the 16th, 17th and 19th Divisions.

Did anybody surrender to you?

08:00 No, no because I was one of the first to leave. Because what they did is they gave a priority to people that had been in the army longest and I was what they called a "five-two man". Five, a minimum of five years, AIF service and two of it overseas and as a combatant. And they were selecting offering those blokes a first release and some of

08:30 that releasing went on before the war ended which was only fair. One of my blokes, Wally Cattern, he'd been right through the desert campaign, Greece.

So he got out before you?

He left, he applied and everybody understood. It would have been nice to keep him because he was pretty cool customer and you know, very experienced. And he'd seen it all and he wasn't going to be upset by anything that happened.

09:00 **When the war was over, were the Japanese still firing upon you, or did they just surrender?**

No, they surrendered very quickly, they did because their chief had ordered them to and they were Japanese, very good at obeying orders I'd say more so than we were. Like, I think we would have used our initiative to a certain extent whereas the Japanese I think were more tied to a very strict discipline. There's an island off the coast, Manam

09:30 I think, Manam Island, reasonably biggish island, not a huge island but a reasonable sized one and that was used as the prisoners of war camp, the Japanese were all moved over there and under the traditions of our armies, British, Australian Armies, we supplied them with food, our doctors went there and treated them, there were a lot of very sick, a lot of them had very scabby wounds over their legs and things and

10:00 they were very well treated and I'm sure, when they went back to Japan, they probably had an appreciation of the kindnesses that were given to them. What can I say about that? I did explain that Adachi did commit suicide as a prisoner of war, he was going to face the war criminal trial because of

10:30 his conduct with the Indian prisoners of war. He was going to be charged with, obviously with murder and not acting according to international, I mean it's a terrible thing to think there's international law regarding war, when you think of what goes on in war. I mean we're there to murder and slaughter and do those sorts of things and yet there's a code of behaviour.

What sort of a ship did you get onto, to get out of Wewak?

11:00 I think it was a coastal passenger steamer called the Duntroon. But I'm not sure about that.

What were the conditions like on board?

They were excellent. They were excellent, you were comfortable on it, I mean you were crammed, you were crammed on it I mean we – in the troop ship, the troops ships going to New Guinea say to Wewak, were American

11:30 liberty ships. And they were purely cargo ships. And you were crowded into the hold where it was absolutely like a hot dungeon, you know.

What did you do to get away from the heat?

Well you walked up onto the deck and had a breath of fresh air on the deck. And you'd sort of almost take it in turns. But you were just so languid down there, it was so humid in the hold of the ship and I

remember this distinctly, because of all the time I was in the Markham Valley,

12:00 at my first months in New Guinea, in 1942, the running parallel with the Markham River down into Lae it was this huge range of mountains on the north side of the river, there were reasonable flat area, the flat area, the first flat area where we used to cross the river, that was a village of Nadzab and Nadzab was on flattish ground and that became the main air force for the bombers, our Allied bombing. Because it was

12:30 the best piece of land suitable for a big airstrip.

Were you actually there, were you?

I took American colonel across the river and we woke up what he was there for, 'cause that's what he was looking for, he was looking for an aerodrome site that once we'd cleaned the Japanese out of Lae then we could advance, we could bring the air force out of Port Moresby and put it down in Nadzab and we'd be nearer the targets we were going to bomb. We could even bomb southern Philippines

13:00 saving one hundred and fifty miles of air travel, sort of thing.

But you didn't actually realise that at the time.

I didn't know what he was but I was told I had to get a native canoe, lakatoi type of thing, you know we had some funny incidents with those during the war down there too. Take him over with a couple of troops to protect him,

13:30 yes, he was an engineering colonel, he didn't say he was but we woke up because of the questions he asked, what he was doing. Took samples of soil, you know looked to ground, dug holes. And probably someone in New Guinea administration said, "There's a long strip of flat land there". And that's what he wanted to look at because he'd been told by his commander in chief that the next leapfrog will be we want an aerodrome and the Lae aerodrome which the Japanese using, ran out

14:00 over the sea, wasn't long enough for big bombers, because Japanese only had medium sized bombers, we had the flying fortresses and the liberators which required a pretty long run when they were heavily loaded with bombs.

So you were talking about these canoes before, where did you get the canoes from?

You'd get them from the native village. They're not a canoe in the sense that an American Indian had just a narrow canoe, they

14:30 were more or less a raft with a sail and on a double canoe base underneath that type of thing and I mean that's how we used to cross the Markham River of course it was very wide river. You could walk when the river wasn't flowing fast, you could get off the canoe and walk the last hundred yards. So in water up to your waist, you could get to the bank

15:00 and but the middle of the stream was fast flowing and deep. And I remember one occasion when I was going down, doing a reconnaissance for an incident that was going to occur in a few days, I was on there with my commander, Captain Taylor then. Who commanded the whole of our unit, but he was stationed down there because Fleay didn't want him up there. Fleay would have had our

15:30 commander as someone that could argue with him. And this Fleay who was ghastly hated, didn't want any senior officers who could contest things with him I think. And we were on the raft and the CO was going down with it and we had a couple of other blokes, think there might have been five of us and we were right down in the middle of the stream when a Zero came tearing up the river with its wings only

16:00 I would guess, thirty, forty feet above the water. Came straight at us. You could see it from a mile and a half way, and we straight over us and your immediate thought was, there must be Japanese on the bank somewhere and they've warned, you do this quick sort of thinking, we all leapt into the water and hid ourselves on the edge of the canoe, we were up to water in the neck and all our part of our body was just our head above water.

16:30 Anyway, the Zero flew right past us, roared up the river, opened his guns, did a beautiful loop, complete 180º loop and tore back down to Lae again. All he'd done is probably had maintenance done on his engine of his plane and he was just giving it a run, you know to warm it up. And used his guns just very briefly to burst into the river and tore off again. "Well, jeez", I thought, "This is the end", you know,

17:00 "We're going to be dealt with", with this mad Zero and I was up a tree and the same thing happened once from the south bank. We had an observation post where we could watch for any signs of Japanese activity down the river almost see down to Lae from there. And you could see quite a lot, very long stretch of river so, we could warn people that the Japanese have got a patrol out and they're crossing the river. Which was, we were always dead scared that they

17:30 were going because we just didn't have the numbers to oppose them. And we erected a small platform in this quite high tree which we used to climb up, and we could see a considerable distance both ways, which the river was wonderful, a boundary, no jungle in the middle of the river. And when this Zero did the same. Came tearing along and the tree shook with the plane, you know they were showing off. And an interesting factor was that,

18:00 I read a book out of the army library, written by a Japanese air commodore, and he was the officer in charge of the Lae fighter squadron and the book claimed in the dialogue of the beginning of the book, front piece, that he had shot down more Allied planes than any other Japanese pilot during World War II. And I'd love to correct him.

At least he didn't manage to get you, so when you were on the boat

18:30 **what's morale like after finding out that the war's over and you're on your way back home?**

I suppose there's a tremendous sense of relief.

Is there any celebrations going on?

Didn't happen as far as I was concerned. And I didn't celebrate, you know, my military career was over. You know I was never going to be a soldier again. And

19:00 I was like my Father. See, my Father never, I think he might have marched Anzac [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] Day once or twice and he was an infantry soldier in the war during the First World War. And uncles were. One or two of the people that called to the house were and the fact that he'd lost his brother, who he must have been very fond of, his brother was a year or two older than him, and war wasn't a thing in our house,

19:30 you know, and I suppose, it got to me too, that other than having three or four friends from those independent company days, I never quite established the same rapport because you know I was only a corporal in the 2/6th Battalion, and the blokes were very well spread,

20:00 and I did bump into after the war, two or three of the officers of the commando group I'd been with and I did see them and I would still see them, if I went on a trip to Melbourne now, I would see one of them who's a farmer in southern Victoria still.

Were there actually, when the war ended, was there celebrations to be had on your way home?

You mean events that I could have gone to?

20:30 **What was the atmosphere like on the ship?**

Well, I can't think of remembering any atmosphere on the ship, other than you're just on it. No, I can't say, I think everybody was just relaxed

21:00 and, thank god, it's over, you know and I think we were more worried, Jesus, how are we going to deal with city life? How are we going to handle it, you know I had nothing to go to. And I was still wondering what I was going to do with myself. I still had a sort of wanderlust that I'd wander around the world, that sort of thing, if it was possible but it wasn't immediately possible because there was no transport or any way of getting around the world

21:30 in those first perhaps, twelve months after the war.

So what did you do when you came back? What was the next job that you had?

When you're saying, celebrations, there was, it was very good in the train journey down from, whether it was Cairns or Townsville that the ship landed I can't remember, but we were put in trains, in trains in Queensland then, were pretty awful, terribly slow, you know. And they lumbered along and they stopped

22:00 all stations and a lot of the stations, the local women's group would have food on the stations and perhaps a few bottles of beer. And the troops'd unload and they'd get a glass of beer and there'd be cakes and the women would give you a hug and all that, that was good, you knew you were home. And they were always wonderful they were always Mum types and

22:30 that was good, I recall that was a pleasure. But when I got south, I just went home.

Were you de-mobbed?

Oh yes, yes. De-mobbed immediately, the Americans had built a camp, see Melbourne was the first destination when the American troops came in the Pacific war. Melbourne was safe, Melbourne was well down safe, so the Japanese submarines and things

23:00 of course, you know Sydney Harbour had a couple of submarine attacks and there was a hospital ship sunk north of Brisbane on the coast there, the Centaur, and my friend from the Queenscliff days, his fiancée was a nurse in there and she drowned. The Centaur, 'cause they lost pretty well everybody on the Centaur. And that was a hospital ship.

What job did you do when you came back?

23:30 I wasn't de-mobbed immediately, there was this camp, Camp Pell, which was near where the Carlton football ground is in the present Carlton football ground where the west coast were thrashed only a couple of weeks ago. By a team that lost by one hundred points on Saturday.

You were going to talk about the job that you had a Camp Pell.

Right, that's what I'm doing. I just wanted to explain that Camp Pell was an American camp which was no longer an American camp but they established

24:00 Pell was an American colonel or something in charge of that camp. It became a transit camp in Melbourne and it was right on the verge of the city buildings, you know. You could see all the city buildings quite clearly, the high buildings and that. It's a very pretty spot, big parkland and that. Well, I got there and that was where I was going to be de-mobbed, when I was called up to the office and why they picked me I'm not

24:30 really sure, perhaps there'd been someone gone through the camp an officer who knew me from the past and I didn't know that. Anyway, the camp adjutant said, "Would you be prepared to stay on and do a job and not try to get out?" And I said, "What's the job?" And he said, "Well, we've got all the prisoners of war from Germany, we're going to be loaded on us in the next two or three months, they're coming back in dribs and drabs and we want a

25:00 somebody like you, to help handle them because a lot of them going to be emotionally downgraded. They've been in prisoner of war and they've been half starved in Europe and prison of war camps and all that sort of stuff. And they'll be coming back wondering what their girlfriends have done, and what their wives have done and what their parents are doing and all sorts of things. So would you do a job for us?" And I wasn't the only one and there were probably

25:30 half a dozen got this job and where we had a little office, and anybody that was leaving the army came into me and I told them, "Well what'd you do before the war?" " I was a plumber". "You want to go back to plumbing?" "Yeah". "Okay, well here's the plumbers' union, there's the address, there's the telephone number, this is the present wage level, etcetera, etcetera". And all sorts of things like that. Answer

26:00 questions, so they were looking for blokes that were reasonably well informed about life outside the army. And so I did that job right up to December 19, until five months I did that job. Well I didn't do that job for five months, slightly less than that, near enough to say five months. I didn't get out to the army until five months after the war ended.

26:30 **What sort of physical condition were these fellows in when they got to speak with you?**

Well, I can't think of anything special to say about that, you know it was purely providing information, my job wasn't to be padre and sympathise or anything like that.

I just wonder what physical condition they

27:00 **were in that you could observe?**

Were they happy?

They varied, they varied to the character of the man. You know, I mean there were blokes in that battalion I was in that were prisoners of war in Greece and they escaped, they jumped out of trains going to Germany where they became labourers, in factories and things and some of them wrote stories and two of them who were in the same

27:30 company that I eventually became in they got into Yugoslavia and they were with the partisans fighting the Germans in Yugoslavia.

The ones that you were helping, were they really happy to get the help that you were offering and did they look like they were really pleased to be home?

I think they'd been well informed and instructed on the ship coming home, you know that they had a lot of the information already that I probably would have had.

28:00 Mine would have perhaps been more recent. And because I suppose, one of the reasons I was chosen was probably that somehow they knew that I knew Melbourne streets and everything pretty well, I knew where factories were, I knew where ICI, the Hoadleys, the chocolate factory, the tea factory, the bully beef factory, the canners and all those sorts of things, I knew where they were because I rode through all those streets on my bike as a kid, so I was a good selection in the fact

28:30 that I could inform them about Melbourne, about the sport that was in Melbourne, the clubs that were still going and some of the football clubs had closed up.

Did you enjoy the job?

Well, I enjoyed it from the fact that I still felt I was being useful and of course I had nothing to go to anyway. It was a job.

What were you thinking about doing after this job was over?

I wanted to

29:00 get some sort of a career, you know, I realised I'd have to go back to school. Go back to school, because I hadn't been in anything but an army school after thirteen years of age and I was reasonably good at

learning things, so I suppose, what I was feeding out to people the soldiers, the prisoner of wars, I was benefiting from that because I was learning what was available

29:30 and how you dealt with the people up at the trades hall. That was one of the things we were told about who to see at the trades hall, about difficulties and union matters and all that sort of stuff. So that was good, but because I used to stay, as a kid, ride my bike up to a farm and I loved the country there, in north eastern Victoria, it's mountain country with lovely valleys and that inside it and

30:00 lots of cattle. Snow in the winter, up in the mountains. And I used to think about that, you know I knew I couldn't say, ring my uncle up there, the fella that was wounded at Gallipoli I couldn't ring him up and say, "Can I work with you for a while and get some experience?" Because his son was there doing all that anyway. And the son would eventually take over the farm. My interests were towards being on the land

30:30 because the soldier who's been out in the open country like that and he knows how to handle it and handle himself in the open air, bad weather, good weather, that was all part of life, and I'd fed cattle and I knew what sheep had four legs and all that sort of stuff.

So you wanted to get out on a farm?

I wanted to get out on the farm and I woke up after a while. What was also occurring around

31:00 about the Christmas 1944, January '45, yeah, after the war, '46. Was more and more information about these courses that were available and the government was paying a small sustenance sort of payment so that you could have enough money to pay a rent so you could rent a room somewhere and perhaps have enough money to

31:30 buy a bit of tucker and perhaps even take yourself to the pictures once a week or something. But it was a very small, nominal amount and of course Australia's a relatively poor country, nothing like it is today. There were only seven million people in Australia when the war broke out.

So what did you decide to take up, did you decide to take up some sort of a course?

Yes, I did. One of the things that came out and I found out about there was a horticultural course and

32:00 with horticulture, you don't need the capital that you need to go in other forms of farming. You don't need large areas of land, for a start. And I thought, well that's something I could do, so I found out, I forget the sort of details there, at about the same time, the man that had

32:30 been second in command of the commando company who was sacked by Fleay, sent out of the valley by Fleay and his name was Pat Lang and he was a large Merino breeder in western Victoria but he was also a doctor of agricultural science and he had a job, in that period that I was doing that settlement sort of work in Melbourne, you know at the camp, with the returning POWs [prisoners of war]. He was given

33:00 a job and part of that job was, how can I explain it? People that wanted to go back to the islands, or perhaps were not allowed to go back to the islands, old residents who had capital invested, property important jobs in New Guinea, were allowed to go back, could return but they had to be sifted out and that was his job. His office was to assess

33:30 these people's cases, if they wanted to go back to those islands, you know there was a lot of islands, not just New Guinea. And I went to him, I recall this now that you've raised this question, going to him and saying, "I wouldn't mind getting back to New Guinea and working in the plantations up there". And he said, "You can't do it Max. It's closed, New Guinea is a closed centre for about three years". So that the original New Guinea people can get settled, they didn't want

34:00 other people flooding in there and grabbing all the positions. But he said, "No, you're no hope for three years". So when I learned that they were going to start this horticultural, Melbourne had the only horticultural college in Australia specifically training horticulturalists. And it was at a place called Burnley and there's still there, but now it's part of either Monash or Melbourne University. And now its courses are much deeper.

How long did the course go for in horticulture?

34:30 Three years I think, three year course, yeah, three years.

Did you enjoy learning about horticulture?

It was good and I met my wife there. 'Cause she was out of the army too and a student.

So how did you apply what you knew about the horticulture to what you were going to do next?

You mean having done the course?

What use has the course been?

Well, let's say I met my wife there, we fell in love. Mushy, all that rubbish.

35:00 And she was an educated girl and she'd got the sergeant's rank with this special operations headquarters in Melbourne's headquarters and we both were in the same position as in, "What are we going to do with this course when we've graduated?" And started to talk about it and

35:30 I became president of the student council and at one of our meetings at which the principal of the college sat in on, quietly, I severely criticised the course, I thought it was inadequate, I mean it was alright for sixteen year old students who were, who did have had operated a course for ex-service people, and still it was running

36:00 as a horticultural college for what would be largely young ladies I'd say. But there were men there and there were men that had been in horticulture before the war and gone back to it after the war, because if you went through it you had a good case for getting a loan, you know from a bank to say, "I've got a diploma in horticulture".

Is this what you're trying to aim for with having a farm and getting a loan?

But I'd

36:30 become critical because I didn't think the course was deep enough, I thought it was more for the secondary school students, it wasn't for men. And I felt there was too much time wasted in these minor things.

So what was the outcome?

Well, Lib and I had a discussion one time we'd halfway through the course and I said, "I'm not happy here, I'm not going to benefit from this, I'm not

37:00 learning anything worthwhile. I could have learned all this in two or three months in a good orchard or a plant nursery or something". And buy the necessary books, because we were issued with books you know. I could have learned it all out of books and then just get practical work and I was doing that, I was working weekends in a large plant nursery.

So is that what you did?

No I worked in the plant nursery in spare time, to earn some money, he paid me, I went to him and said, "I'll work for nothing".

37:30 Just to learn. I was still a student at the college at that time and this was on an outer suburb of Melbourne. And he was happy with that and after a couple of weeks he said, "I can't employ you and not pay you". He said, "I feel so bloody miserable, not paying you, I've got to pay you". So he put me on the staff, even though he couldn't afford it. So I did that for several months and I knew quite a lot about growing

38:00 plants, selecting plants, all that type of stuff. Potting plants, how to run a hot-house all those sorts of things.

So did you end up graduating from the course?

We resigned, we both resigned. My wife, went back to her family who were in the country and a man who'd been my platoon commander in the 2/6th Battalion at right up to the end of the war there, where I was

38:30 a corporal and he was my platoon commander, and I'm sure I could have taken the platoon over and run the platoon quite easily. And I wasn't too happy with him because he gave me some jobs there that because he knew I could do the job well he gave me the job and I was being a little bit overworked, and I was aware of it and when one of the other officers came to me and said he'd spoken to my platoon commander about the

39:00 undue amounts of jobs he was giving me to do. Take, you know, leading small patrols. But anyway, I'd run into him, after the war and he was alright and he invited me to his wedding, married his little blonde gal

So you and your wife, are you together? She's moved to the country?

No, we've split up, we've split up.

And you're doing what?

She'd gone back home to a farm that her Father had and not a big farm,

39:30 but a farm and you know not a great big Merino farm but and when I ran into this officer, he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I've just tossed in this horticultural course, but I'm going try and get more and more experience in the horticulture". He said, "How about coming up and taking the crop off at my place, help me with the crop?" Because he owned quite a substantial farm right on the Murray River, directly north of Melbourne

40:00 one hundred and fifty, forty miles north of Melbourne. And I thought, well that wouldn't do any harm, so I worked with him and took crop off, in the shearing and we had an arrangement which he gave me as a money earning thing, he said, "What do you think we grow some pumpkins and take them down the Melbourne markets?" So we growed eighteen acres of pumpkins, and I did all the work, I graded the fields and with

40:30 his tractor and did the irrigation and we got this load of pumpkins. And I took the first load of pumpkins down to Melbourne.

So it was a profitable thing, the pumpkin industry then?

Not for long. Not for long, this shouldn't go in, this has got nothing to do with my soldier experience. But his wife and her Mother used to come up there and one day I had a, what are they called? Not a bilious attack in the middle of the day I had eaten something that affected me, you know, I might have drunk water that shouldn't have drunk, 'cause this was right in the middle of a hot summer and gets pretty hot up there, you know one hundred degree summer days are not uncommon around the Murray River area. And I felt too ill to work, I had to knock off in the afternoon, you know that his Mother in law, strode into where I was and said, "You shouldn't be lying down on this bed, when Frank's away". If he'd been a man I would have clobbered him.

How long were you working on the farm then?

I worked throughout that summer.

What was next?

Well, I learnt a very good lesson for a horticulturalist, I took a load of pumpkins down to Melbourne market in bags, you know might have been forty, fifty bags of pumpkins.

Tape 9

00:31 **How did you move from horticulture into agriculture?**

Well, the army services always take a percentage of your wage out of your wage packet and you build up a bit of capital that way, it's not a large sum of money, it might be over fifty years if you did it,

01:00 but not in four or five years of wartime it isn't and because I had reserved pay as an officer, which was reasonable sort of money compared to what I got as a private. But I had this sum of money which was I couldn't tell you the amount but say, perhaps somewhere between one thousand, two thousand pounds, might have been nearer to two thousand pounds, my wife had a certain amount of that.

01:30 I had this ability to borrow and get loans because of my war service, if I could prove that I had a good case and that I had experience and 'course that working on that farm I'm talking about up in the Murray River, the Victorian Murray River, you know the border between New South Wales and Victoria, was good to have if I'm going to loan, I can say that I've taken a crop off, I've irrigated land, I've ploughed land, I've prepared

02:00 irrigation banks and all that sort of stuff. And also I'd done half the course of a horticultural course, so my intentions are good, that's what I'm aiming for. So I had a good case and I knew I could argue a case quite well. And so we had the ability, both of us had the ability to borrow, and down near where my wife's Father had retired,

02:30 that's him up there, now he died some years ago, he was captain in Second World War, artillery captain, he wasn't a combatant, he was more on the administration side. 'Cause he was too old, that there was a block of land down that area, that was only semi developed and they knew what the price was for it and we worked it out that we

03:00 could buy that, "We've got enough to buy that", there was only a small old shed on it. No house or anything. So we did. And I left my friend up on the Murray River, the farmer up there. He died about four years ago, in Queensland where he'd retired to. He retired a comparatively wealthy man.

03:30 What was I going to make there?

I asked you how you moved from horticulture?

Well that's what I did, we bought this land and we decided to marry, we weren't married then. And we managed to get hold of the land, and we decided we'd raise fat lambs, prime lambs, they're called nowadays, they used to be called fat lambs back then,

04:00 which wasn't a good term to use. But we decided to do because I'd been handling fat lambs on this farm, and helping with the shearing and that. And I'd read quite a lot about shearing and about wool handling and classing wool, that type of stuff and we lived for best part of two years with her parents, who lived several miles

04:30 away from this block. And we didn't have very much money of course and we borrowed and we borrowed money from the ANZ Bank and it's not easy living with your in laws, despite the fact that you like them, you know, it was awkward things, you know I want

05:00 to put my feet up on the chairs of a night or something like that and you sort of feel, better not put my feet up, Mother in law's watching. But I also I had played two years of league football and they gave me a bit more money, not very much, they only paid three pounds a game. You couldn't pay a Victorian footballer more than three pound a match. But on a couple of occasions when I played well, a bloke

05:30 who'd won bets, gave me five pounds, he said, you know part of his winnings, "Jeez that was good", he said, you know, give you a fiver. Was all very flattering, you know, kids running up to you after a game and chasing you for their signatures and things like that.

What position did you play?

I always played up in the forward line and I played several games with full forward.

Forward line players are always popular aren't they?

Yeah.

If they're kicking goals.

06:00 Well, I played a few games the first year, I got a dose of malaria during that period. I thought it was flu and I treated myself. But later on the doctor said, "You know it wasn't a flu case you had, you had malaria and you've still got it in your bloodstream and it'll pop out again one day". And it did of course, popped out on the honeymoon. And whether the excitement of being a husband and all that sex that goes with

06:30 honeymoons, caused it to rise in temperature. But don't put that on the tape. Don't want any young men reading that.

When did you decide to relocate to the south west?

To where?

To Western Australia?

Not for eighteen years. I

07:00 built my own house on the farm, I'd never built anything before, in my life, but I built my own house, I've got the photographs here, pretty good house it turned out. And I added a room every time we had a new baby, I added another room to it, so it finished up quite a substantial house. Didn't have electricity, 'cause the road that led to it didn't have electricity on it. But we got that on eventually. And it was all tank water in the house and sheds and I built a shearing shed. Sub

07:30 divided the paddock into paddocks, did all the work, developed a complete farm on the bits of profit and the bits of borrowing. And managed to get things cheaply, you know knew where a few of the lurks and that type of thing. And things were hard to get, very hard to get, you could only get a certain poundage of nails, three inch nails, and they'd say, "No, we can't give you any more because they're short". And galvanised iron which the roof of the house and sheds and all the galvanised, I got some

08:00 in fact, I bought a poultry farm to get the sheds and I built the shearing shed largely out of the sheds on a poultry farm. So you did those sort of things and we got a lot of galvanised iron relatively cheaply, so I built quite a good house, it's still there.

Sounds like you had a very well established property there.

Well, I did by the end. We farmed that for eighteen years, and I formed

08:30 a couple of things, I was the foundation president of what was called the Peninsula Fat Lamb Association, I won a Nuffield scholarship which took me to Europe and England for six months. When I say I won it, I sent forms and applied for it. And there were a lot of people applied for it pretty good, you know, six months holiday in Europe and everything, I was a young married man with two young children.

09:00 And I applied for it out of amusement in a way, "Oh I'll have a go at that for fun". I got the damn thing. And so overseas I went for just on seven months, my wife joined me for the last couple of months. And when I got back I formed what was called the Victorian Grasslands Society. When I say, I formed it, I put the idea to people in the agriculture department and the CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] man and we

09:30 were the steering committee, the three of us and we formed the Grasslands Society which still operates and currently is the largest scientific farmers group of its type in Australia. It holds a big annual conference which attracts four or five hundred people to it. And we get speakers from overseas, all that sort of stuff. And I was its founder, no I wasn't its foundation president because the CSIRO bloke was because he had an office and a clerk

10:00 and all the gear in Melbourne. And the phone expenses to do the office work and the fact that it was so useful, with me working on a farm and not having much income, he became the first foundation president, the first year and I was the second one after it had been formed. We formed it in September, three years after I got back from the

10:30 Nuffield thing, ’58. Still goes, still operating. And I was a member until two years ago and I decided I better retire I’ve had enough. Used to get their annual reports and it’s got branches all over Victoria into New South Wales, down into Tasmanian, Eastern Victoria Grassland Society. It’s called and on the area I formed we were both music

11:00 lovers, we both liked classical music and we don’t say that for snobbery reasons or others, I like Satchmo and I like you know good clarinettists and I established a friendship with the leading jazz clarinettist in Australia, during those years and he was the main clarinettist in the James Brothers Band, which toured Europe back in the 1940s at the end of the war they went to Europe and toured all through the army camps, it was the leading Australian

11:30 jazz group. And I like good jazz music, a lot of other stuff, I think’s awful. I think currently we’ve got the worst singers ever sang songs in the history of the human race but they’re promoted and they’re promoted disgracefully in my view, they’ve got no talent but they can make a noise. And the kids love them. That’s because the kids don’t know good music.

12:00 But I formed and was president for four or five years, the Mornington Peninsula Music Society. And the reason we formed it, to go and see a good concert or hear a good symphony concert or you know, a classical music concert of any sort, recitals and that we had to travel long distances we were exhausted by the time we got home again at one o'clock in the morning or

12:30 something. So we got a committee of people that liked a similar sort of music and we got the committee together and we organised it, we founded it and we started a series of four recitals a year, in the local consolidated school hall. And we succeeded enough that Musica Viva Society of Australia which is the world’s biggest

13:00 promoter of chamber music, quartets, quintets, and that level, Musica Viva agreed to give us concerts down there, so we had people like the Borodin leading quartet from Russia, the Borodin Moscow Quartet, string quartet, music of that level coming down into a consolidated school hall. And one of the groups we had, a trio

13:30 was the Suk Trio who I don’t know if you know of Orszak (Dvorak?), who composed the Orszak and his American symphony’s one of the most popular tunes in the symphony world, his grandson, his name was Suk, and he was the son of a composer, Suk, they came from Prague, Prague family and he said to me, after the concert

14:00 they gave, the trio, they played down in that hall, he said, “Acoustically this is the best hall we’ve played in, in Australia so far”. This is all pre Sydney Opera House, which hasn’t got particularly good acoustics anyway.

Why did you relocate to Western Australia when you had a very established life in Victoria?

Yeah, it was a very established life, and people would say, “Why?” But I wasn’t making any money, and we had four kids, all at school and

14:30 in about 1962, a man who’d been a staff corps officer and who’d gone to New Guinea at the end of the war, he didn’t see any active service he was a 9th bloke. He was the son of a Melbourne business man who’d bought him a farm, not far from us, he left the staff corps, left the army Bob applied for one of the

15:00 land releases out at Wellstead. You know, hundred kilometres east of Albany, which was being opened up in 1962. ‘Cause there were other land opened up nearer to Albany earlier than that, in the late ‘50s, Denmark was opened up earlier than that, but this was the particular year 1962 that the Wellstead areas opened up and Bob applied for one and got one. And because I knew him,

15:30 and we’d been gone to dinner and lunch at his house, that sort of thing, had a few drinks together occasionally, I knew that he was coming across to Western Australia, said, “How you getting over, what are you doing?” He said, “Oh I’ve been to the army disposal and got myself a five tonner, Bedford truck from army disposals and I’m going to shove much gear as I can get onto the back of it, and I’m driving over”, and I said, “I’ll come with you then as co-driver”.

16:00 So I did. And through my in-laws family there was a man that had also got a block earlier than that at what is known as Boxwood Hill. Boxwood Hill’s on the other side of Wellstead the other side of the Palomine River and the road from Boxwood Hill runs down to Bremer Bay, well he had a block there and he’d already developed it

16:30 three and a half thousand acre block. Bob had a three thousand acre block at I think it was three thousand acres at Wellstead. So I drove over and looked at it, and I thought, well, perhaps this is what I ought to do. Get a bigger block, go into the Merino sheep game and start growing wheat and barely. So I thought seriously about it and discussed it with Lib and surprisingly this is another little surprise, my

wife was actually

17:00 born at Merredin because her Father and the man here in this photograph, as a young eighteen year old after leaving school, came to Western Australia with his young brother when they were opening up the Merredin district in about 1906, 1908, that sort of period. And he came over here with his elder brother who was about twenty one or twenty two years of age, end of 1914, came

17:30 and they both went off to France, the elder brother was killed in France, he came back and he ran that farm on his own with a wife and two boys, two sons, young sons, little sons. One of them born in London during the war. His wife was a Red Cross worker.

Did you have any difficulties relocating to Western Australia?

Well, I had to sell my farm for a start to try and get enough money

18:00 and it was a bad time to sell farms. So I didn't get as much money as I wanted, but I sold the farm. And before that I'd bought a neighbouring forty acres which had a few acres of orchard on it, and because of my horticultural experience, I established an eighteen acres of orchard, on it. It had a house on it and that put us into debt, buying that. 'Cause it was a pretty good house. And this'll knock you, that forty acres in about

18:30 1980 was sold for 1.8 million. 1.8 million, I got thirty thousand dollars for it. You want to be patient in your investing. Anyway we decided to come. I applied for land at Cape Ridge, there was only one block available and it was the wrong time to apply for that one block at Cape Ridge I came over here, sat in

19:00 on a meeting up in Perth before a group of about four men that were the authority for releasing these titles to people. I should have known, I would never have got it because what happened is the president of the farming union got it and there was no competition was there. And there's always been this eastern stater, you know, still goes on a bit. But it goes on humorously these days,

19:30 even back then, "Oh bloody eastern stater's got it". You know but if you went from Albany to Esperance, most of those farms were opened up by eastern staters because hundreds of South Australians all through that area. Esperance, was largely South Australians, odd New South Welshman the odd Victorian, I bumped into him and done articles and you know they all tell you why I came over. And then the Americans got big slices of course. It was a mad period of a million acres release a year.

20:00 So I went back home, before I got home I went to a motel in Perth and I had a big feed of scallops. Woke up at one o'clock in the morning and I was in agony, my stomach and I had a packet of disprins or aspros with me and I filled myself up with those trying to get rid of this stomach pain. And I went to a chemist in Perth, next morning, said,

20:30 "I've got a bit of tummy ache, you got something?" And so he gave me milk of magnesia or something. I took that and all the way over in the plane going back to Melbourne, I think I ordered about four little bottles of soda water and the air hostess came to me and said, "Excuse me sir, you feeling well?" This is before I got to Adelaide and if I said I was sick they would've put me off the plane at Adelaide, it landed in Adelaide. So I said, "No, I just love soda water. I'm addicted to soda water".

21:00 Don't think she believed me but she didn't do anything. I got home, and during the night I couldn't sleep because the pain in the stomach and probably Lib or something I said, "I might have appendicitis or something, gee something's wrong with me". So we rang a doctor who we used to play tennis with, not my own doctor, who brought our four children into the world, I rang the doctor who lived on a farm, the second house on the farm, about two miles

21:30 from us, I rang him up and I explained what I had and he said, "Boy, you get straight into that hospital". And I went straight to hospital, he looked at me and said, he pummelled my stomach and he said, "Appendicitis". So he rang a surgeon and the surgeon came down and ripped the appendix out, that was a disappointing trip.

So your relocation was nearly interrupted by appendicitis. How has living in the community in Albany been

22:00 **since you relocated?**

Oh it's been good. I came intending to do nothing but farm, I wasn't going to join anything. But you know, you get into these habits and I did form a farmers group so that we could bring lecturers down here, you know when we knew there were important agriculturals in Perth, if we could get hold of them with a degree and they had formed, I become a member of a group which now I think is defunct,

22:30 it's so defunct I've just forgotten the name of it. But it was the national organisation of working in this field of farm research largely put together by farmers, and every year that the existing president would visit Western Australia and we'd get him down and we used to have lectures at the Department of Ag here, the Department of Ag agreed to let this group of about twenty farmers hold meetings in the Department

23:00 of an afternoon. Sometimes our Ag Department blokes would address us. As I say I was the president and I was also the bunny who organised these meetings, and after that the speaker would be our guest

at a restaurant in Perth. In Albany. And we had this little intimate restaurant run by a wife of a deceased doctor. And she was a very good cook, she put on plain meals but they were soups and

23:30 main courses and pudding and they were always beautifully cooked and beautifully done. At a very modest price and we'd take our speaker down there as our guest and we'd all fill ourselves up with wine or beer or whatever it was and we had a good evening information, and he'd have to talk again, but he'd adlib a talk the second time, we'd always have an after dinner speaker, and he was speaking about anecdotal

24:00 type things, agricultural and they were always very good, the head legal officer for a bank. Another occasion we had Australia's leading sheep dog breeder. We had professor or two, we had a couple of Americans come down. That lasted for several years until I

24:30 suppose it had run its race, you know, it was abandoned and that was the only function, organisational sort of thing I really joined.

Are you a member of the local RSL [Returned and Services League]?

Nup. I was a member of the RSL in Victoria for a couple of years and I was a member and I pay a sub to my unit at

25:00 those two units still exist, most of the blokes are dead now. And I am a member of those. I get a newsletter from both of them, I went to a reunion in Canberra and this was a nice thing and I've got a photograph of it there. I went to a reunion probably sometime probably in the late '80s, '90s about 1988 or '90 and that was the only reunion

25:30 of a commando group that I've ever been to, because I regard myself as really an ex member of the infantry battalion, more than the commandos. And I went to that and there was a tree planting ceremony beside the war memorial which was a tree planting, the memorial, war memorial agreed to the commandos, having the 5th Independent Company of the commandos,

26:00 having a memorial tree which they could gather around in small groups and that was their tree. And they asked me to plant it. And I could have wept over that, these blokes who knowed I'd been sacked from that unit were asking me to be the planter of the memorial tree. Right beside the war memorial wall just a matter of five yards from it. And then there was the chief of the war memorial there, watching, and they took a photograph of it and there's

26:30 old Piggott, bending over stamping the tree into the ground. You know. So that was good. And I felt very good about it and I thought the blokes were wonderful to have asked me to do it.

Do you attend Anzac Day ceremonies?

No. They had a big one in Albany, they'll have one every year because the local RSL and the town regard Albany as the Anzac port of Australia. You know because the

27:00 convoy, congregated here from New Zealand and the east coast, the transport ships and the war ships taking them to the Middle East in 1915 and they were the blokes that did the Gallipoli campaign and became the original ANZACs but they weren't ANZACs when they came here. The ANZAC term didn't occur until they got together at Gallipoli. And as you know in the Second World War the New Zealanders

27:30 fought separately to us altogether and they remained fighting in Italy, whereas all the Australian units returned to fight the Japanese.

Have you attended Anzac Day ceremonies in the past?

I did as a kid for a start, you know, I used to go and watch the Anzacs marching into the war memorial in Melbourne, the big parades that was always an experience, you know especially when a lot of them were

28:00 in chairs and a lot of them had one leg and a lot of them had crutches and god knows what. Of course the casualties in that war were horrific compared to the Second World War. Yes, that had an effect, I admired them and respected them. The headmaster of the primary school I went to, he'd been wounded in the First World War. Very nicely sent me a letter when I kicked seven goals in a game against Carlton,

28:30 one of the reasons he sent it to me is the sports master didn't like me. And he thought deliberately we were kicking balls in the park, with the sports master between the two ends, you know, kicking the ball and marking the ball, and I did a drop kick and it hit the sports master in the back of the head, and all the kids laughed. And he believed that I'd done it deliberately, which I hadn't, it was just an accident and

29:00 he didn't select me to play for the school for a couple of matches because of it as punishment. And he always looked at me in that sort of way that he thought I was a disgusting little boy, you know. Well the headmaster was a nice man, and my elder brother, the one that was partly paralysed, he went back to that school

29:30 years later as one of the teachers there.

Did you attend the Anzac ceremonies as a boy with your Father?

Never and rarely did my Father. He did once or twice that I know, it might have been some special occasion, because his unit was largely recruited round Bendigo, largely farmers and probably all his mates were up there in Bendigo not in Melbourne,

30:00 but once or twice he marched with the police group, 'cause the police had lots of returned soldiers in them and I know he marched with, as a returned soldier with the police returned soldiers, not with a battalion. Because most of his battalion blokes were up in the country, hundreds of miles away. That's what I think, I don't know, but we weren't a warlike family. We don't talk war, we don't talk war now, we don't talk war in the house,

30:30 I don't talk war and the kids, if they want a question answered, about something, all my kids know I lost my commission, I was quite open about it, you know, I said, "I was in the war, I got sacked". Sort of thing, in the middle of the war. But it's never worried me because if you read the two histories in there, Max Piggott did this and Max Piggott did that, it shows I was a good soldier and did things and

31:00 I just regret a little bit of why the award that was made to me or recommended for it didn't come through. And it wasn't on my account, I just would have liked it for my Father because he might never have understood the situation in which I lost my commission. Because I'm sure Dad, as a sergeant, who would never have got past being a sergeant, would have been proud that his young son was an officer. And I suppose

31:30 if I hadn't had that trouble, I would have finished up a senior officer. During my days in that second infantry battalion, I used to think, I wouldn't mind running this company which was a company of one hundred thirty, one hundred and forty men an infantry company. I did the same thing there that I'd done to the commandos, I

32:00 without voicing it, I was critical of a couple of decisions made by my senior and it was the first time we used flaming throwers, a flame thrower wasn't looked as a good weapon by most of us but they were given to us and we had to use them, and the bloke that brought them in was not a member of the unit and we did an attack on a fairly well held Japanese position

32:30 and both blokes using the flame throwers were shot by the Japanese.

I imagine they would have made quite obvious targets?

Wasn't a position to use them. Flame thrower ought to be used for ratting somebody out of a trench or out of a tunnel. Or something like that but to attack using flame thrower, it wasn't attached to a tank, you can fit flame throwers, big

33:00 flame throwers to tanks and that's a different thing. Small arms fire's not going to worry a tank. And it's only artillery piece that'll worry a tank. Or a rocket these days, providing the rocket's big enough. But I was sour for two or three days after that attack because it shouldn't have gone on like it did. And but I never voiced it, but because I had

33:30 commanded troops earlier, I sort of practised commanding troops unconsciously sometimes by looking at a ridge ahead, in which we knew Japanese were on, how I'd tackle that ridge, you know, where I'd go and where I'd put blokes and where I'd put a couple of Brens to covering fire and I used to do that as sort of mental exercises you know which wasn't my role to do at all

34:00 but it was just simply because I'd played that role two years earlier in the war in a way that it was sort of habitual.

How do you think your service change you as a person?

It's made me forgiving and casual about things. I think it makes you know which things in life are important.

34:30 **And what things are important to you in life?**

Friendships, love, affection, respect for people, you know there are people in politics that I respect, who get a terrible slamming in the media in very many ways. I'm very critical, I'm very critical of some journalists on their writings on politics and how they

35:00 degrade people, I think the present foreign minister, Downer is the best foreign minister we've had in donkey's years but he was regarded by cartoonists and some journalists as a bit of a clown. You know he was elected as leader of the Liberal Party at one stage, when it was done too young. It was done because they couldn't find someone to take on the job almost. After Fraser and

35:30 Downer was rubbished. He was rubbished by the press because he stumbled badly, he did stumble because the job was a bit too big for him at that time. But he's grown into the job now, and I wouldn't object to Downer becoming the Prime Minister, because I think he's built the job around him, you know he's created the job and he's created himself as a man of judgement and all that sort of thing.

36:00 But yes, I'm critical of the media and various things and I voiced that in couple of letters to the press at the time when some journalist who wrote something that I thought was a very poor piece of journalism and yet she's a senior journalist, so you know and being learning the sort of lurks of journalism in the sort of

36:30 lower level way in which I do it, I did go to the Melbourne Herald, I went to the Melbourne Herald after the war and we were still in uniform. I was a corporal and the war was over and here was a little gathering of blokes I knew and a couple of them were officers, one of them has died and the other one's still alive, we'd been celebrating,

37:00 you know at the pub and though I wasn't a great drinker I know that I got a bit tight on that day and we had been talking briefly, "What are you going to do?" You know, "What are you going to do with yourself now that it's all over". And because I'd bumped into a couple of war correspondents, I thought, "Gee I wouldn't mind having a crack at that, wonder how you go and get into, how do you become a journalist?" I had no idea. So I wandered into the Melbourne office, you know

37:30 the Murdoch press. Set up by Rupert Murdoch's Father was the most powerful news man in Australia at that time and he was the man that broke Gallipoli because he wrote articles in English London newspapers about the bad management and what a shocking thing the whole Gallipoli campaign was and that stirred the British up and more than any other writer he was the man that

38:00 ended the Gallipoli campaign I think. 'Cause the politicians in England were Churchill's choice, Gallipoli.

In the closing minutes of the interview, I'm just wondering if you'd like to make any further comments that you haven't made for us yet today, Max.

Oh I've enjoyed the interview. Enjoyed meeting you, you've handled the interview very well and professionally, I would think. You've been polite

38:30 and I'd say, the interview, you've done it well, in the sense of you've drawn things out of me, and made me speak incessantly endlessly.

INTERVIEW ENDS