Australians at War Film Archive

Edward Asquith (Eddy) - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/206

Tape 1

00:30 **So we're going to start at the very beginning, Edward. And ask when and where were you born?**

I was born in Tumbarumba, NSW, which is a city north of Wagga, out in the Blue Mountains out near the mountain near Batlow on 7 August 1921 along with my twin brother.

01:00 **And were you the first children of the family?**

Yes, I'm the first eldest, the first born. Yes

Were there other children after you?

Yes, I've got three brothers and a sister

So there were the twins and then?

Two other brothers I should say, three boys altogether. Four boys and a girl.

01:31 **And what were your parent's names?**

My Dad was named Edward, Ted, and my mother's name was Evelyn, Evelyn May Asquith.

And what were their occupations?

Dad was a farmer, he was a dairy farmer and later on a share farm, sheep station.

So did your mother work on the farm?

No, Mum didn't actually work on the farm,

02:00 though sometimes at shearing time she did help in the shed, the shearing shed, with morning tea and afternoon tea sort of thing

So, mum ran the house?

Mum ran the house, yes

So as you were growing up were you involved in working on the farm?

I was. Firstly, when I first became involved in the farm, we had a dairy farm at Tarcutta

02:30 in NSW. We would milk 104 cows, had to clean them up and milk them by breakfast time almost. You know. Fed the pigs

How did you milk them?

by machine. We had that many cows we had machine milkers. Had to start them, put the machines on them and then strip them and then run the milk through the separator, get the cream.

03:00 **And then what would you do with the milk?**

Well, the milk ...We had pigs. They used to get the skim milk. The pigs used to get the skim milk, go into the cream cans. They were picked up by the dairy people. The dairy people picked up the milk and cream.

And was that a reasonable living for your family?

Well, I suppose in those days back in the thirties it was. I would say it was yes,

03:30 being a very active sort of a family we were. We made a decent living through that.

And what were your chores around the farm?

Well, when time come to do the ploughing, I used to drive a plough. I had horses and plough, four horses, sometimes a scarifier then ran over it with

04:00 the rakes. Did the sowing, the sowing the crop, a general farm hand, like a general farm hand did work on the farm. There was always something to do.

What sorts of crops would you be sowing?

Oats and wheat, oats and wheat, yes

And how would you harvest those crops?

You had a head, a machine called a header to strip them and bag up the wheat

04:30 and take it to the silos. That's the main harvesting, just stripping the wheat. And sometimes the oats were cut and stooped for feed for the cattle in the dry time.

So there was no harvesting by hand?

No, no, it was all machinery, yes.

And when you said they later had a share farm. Could you explain what that is?

Well, yes the man that owned the

05:00 farm he couldn't run it, so he took Dad in as a share farmer. Dad, the family, we done all the work and got half the proceeds of all the sales because he couldn't run it himself, so it's called share farming, on a share basis.

So your dad did all the work but got half the proceeds?

Half the proceeds of the crops, the sales and things, yes.

That sounds quite hard?

05:30 Yes, I suppose it was. It was just after the depression back in the early thirties. It was quite uh, yes it was a hard life, a very hard life.

Did you have a favourite chore around the farm?

Yes, riding the horses. Especially when we had to bring the cows in on the Tarcutta

06:00 creek especially when it was in flood . We used to go down to the cows on the other side. That's, we used to swim them across and out into the paddocks. To bring the cows in to milk them we had to cross the creek, so I had my own horse. I used to hop on the horse and swim across the creek. Done some silly things, sliding off the horse I used to grab his tail. I was pretty young and silly kid those days.

06:30 **Sounds very dangerous**

I suppose it was in hindsight, a dangerous occupation.

I bet your mum wasn't impressed?

No – my Mum was a worrier, a real worrier about us kids. She was a great mother.

In what sorts of ways?

Well, very loving and caring and always made sure, cause we used to go to Sunday school every Sunday and she would dress us up –

07:01 like us what could I say, I'd say we were the best dressed kids in the street

Well, it was quite dangerous farm work. I'd say it still is?

Yes, it was dangerous but we never had any accidents that I can recollect.

07:30 **What about in the summer months – encounters with snakes and spiders?**

Oh yes, snakes, spiders and goannas. Oh yes, we encountered all those sort of things, especially snakes, there were snakes around. When we weren't farming we would be chasing rabbits, rabbiting.

With a gun?

Oh no, with dogs and, with dogs and we weren't allowed to have guns. I think Dad had a shot gun

08:00 but us kids were too young, we weren't allowed to have rifles.

What would you do with the rabbits when you caught them?

Well, we would skin them and peg the skins out and when we got enough skins, take them into Wagga and sell them to the skin buyer.

And what would you get for the skins?

Well, I can't recollect really what it was. It wasn't much but we got some pocket money out of it. I know we saved. It took a long time mind you, my brothers and I saved up enough money

08:30 from the rabbit skins to buy ourselves a bike each. It took a long time mind you.

Still that must have been good, having a bike?

Oh a bike. It was a Malvern Star. I think it was a Malvern Star bike yeah. And of course people used to live so far away from the school, when we were younger we used to ride our bikes to school.

09:00 From out where we were on the sheep station, a place called Spring Gully, to Rowan Public school about a five mile ride.

And did you enjoy school?

Yeah, I did, I enjoyed school.

Any particular subjects you liked?

Yeah, I liked history and geography and I was keen on English too, but I wasn't too keen about mathematics though, I found it harder.

09:30 **So it sounds as though you moved farms quite a bit?**

Yes. Well Dad was, Dad was always moving around you know. We had quite a lot of moves. We were at a place called Jingellic near Tumbarumba. I don't know if you've heard of Jingellic, Tumbarumba. Then we went to, bought another place at Mudgee,

10:00 was at Mudgee, 'cause Dad, he was a First World War veteran. He landed at Gallipoli when he was 18 and he was sort of restless, sort of a restless person, very had worker you know.

Well, I was going to ask, why these constant moves?

Well, I think Dad couldn't settle down after he came back from France (UNCLEAR) and he got shot through the arm and then he got gassed

10:30 as well and he was a bit restless.

And did he marry your mother after the war?

No he married, he came home from the war in 1919 and he married in 1919. Just when he came back cause I think they went to school together before he went away.

So how do you know about his experience in the war? Did he talk to you about it?

He did and we're…he did

11:00 but he didn't elaborate too much but he told us about "His experiences, about the Battle of Britain in particular". That's where he got wounded and he also said "They went on leave in London". How he used to go up to Scotland, because Dad being an Asquith, he had relatives in England.

Can you recall what he told you about the battle in France?

11:30 Well, I recall in fact he said that "It wasn't a picnic". It was hard. A lot of young fellows got killed in France. You see there was four returned soldiers in my family. Dad, and three sons in the last war. But he was very proud, military wise he was very proud.

12:00 **So sorry, you're saying your dad was proud of his service?**

Yes he was. He was. Anzac Day he would put his medals on and go down to the local, they called it the RSL [Returned and Services League] in those days with his medals.

What were your impressions of him with his friends, his World War I veteran friends?

Well to me he was a hero. A hero.

12:30 You admire your father, don't you? Well, you should.

So would you go to watch the Anzac march?

No, I can't, I don't think I did, they used to… No, I can't remember ever seeing an Anzac Day march in those days. I was really young, it was 1932, 33.

13:00 **And look, having been gassed and shot then having probably endured that terrible winter in France, were there any after effects on your father's health?**

Well, yes, yes it was. He wasn't 100% fit all the time you know. But hard work, I think he got over his unfitness, by hard work. He was a little goer and he, later on he

13:30 became a cabinet maker. He spent most of his life making furniture. Doing furniture work, wood turning and all that sort of stuff, which I now do.

So he did settle down eventually?

Yes, he did settle down eventually but in the early days as far as I am told "He was very restless".

Was that difficult for you as kids to be moving around?

No, it didn't seem to affect us.

14:00 We just went along you know.

You didn't mind starting new schools every couple of years?

No, well no, I only went to Rowan Public School, then we went to school in Mittagong. Dad moved down there. Dad bought a place at Mittagong. I went to school there and I only went to two schools.

14:30 **And how far did you go in school?**

I only got my QC. They called it those days QC, the Qualifying Certificate. That's sixth grade or a bit higher.

Look, earlier I asked what was your favourite chore on the farm. I wanted to ask as well what was your least favourite chore?

Feeding the pigs. We had – milk used to come out of the separator.

15:00 It would be pumped out into a 44 gallon drum on a slide thing pulled by a horse, and we would slide that down to the pig farm and all the pigs would be lined up with their snouts in the trough. But I didn't go much on the smell of them though.

It seems a scandal to me to feed good milk to pigs?

Yeah, but it was skim milk.

15:30 We had nowhere else to put it – gallons and gallons of it. We had a hundred cows, milking twice a day. You're going to have a lot of milk.

Would you keep some for home use?

Oh yes, we had some for home use. Mum used to put some aside and settle it, let the cream come to the top.

And look, were you aware of the depression as a young man?

Well, I was only a boy when the depression was on. Only ten years old, eleven year old.

16:00 I knew there was depression on but I wasn't aware of it. The hardship and all in those days. I was too young to appreciate those sort of things.

So how did you know it was on?

I can't answer that question, I don't know how. It was just general knowledge. There was a depression on. Funds were low in the family and

16:30 food was probably scarce. Dad didn't get a war pension in those days that I know of.

Do you recall men coming to the farm looking for work?

No, I can't, I can't remember anyone coming to the farm. You see Dad reckoned he had us three boys, four boys. He reckoned we'd do the work.

17:00 **I am also interested in your mother's activities on the farm. I mean for instance would she be doing the baking, the bread?**

Oh yes. Mum used to make her own bread. She used to make her own bread. She was a good cook. Shearing time comes she used to help cook for the shearers. That's when we had the

17:30 station. There was the two together.

Combined?

Combined station, yeah.

Would she make your clothes?

Not that I can recollect making clothes.

And what would she do if one of you were taken sick. What if you fell ill?

Well, she would just put us in bed I guess,

18:00 take care of us.

Was there a doctor nearby she could take you to?

Well, there was one in Tarcutta. We had to go to Tarcutta to get a doctor, see a doctor.

So the children all stayed fairly healthy, did they?

Yes, we all stayed fairly healthy, yes.

Well, that's a blessing. So you left school in?

18:30 1944, just 14, just going on 15.

And then what did you do after that?

Worked with Dad on the farm. That was a farm boy's life. You couldn't get him off the land. He wanted to be on the land. Just worked on the farm.

Now you mentioned that your father was a bit restless and you felt that his

19:00 **service years had perhaps contributed to him being a bit restless and finding it hard to settle. Were there other ways that you noticed he was affected? Like did he have trouble sleeping?**

No, I can't recall that at all, whether he slept or not. Sorry, I can't put a finger on any of that.

And do you think that it put a strain on your parents' relationship?

No, Mum and Dad

19:30 were very devoted to each other. Very devoted to each other.

Would he talk to her about his experience?

Well, I don't think – well he could have done. I don't know. Outside of my hearing he probably did. I don't know.

He did talk to you kids about it?

He spoke to us seeing relatives of his. Dad had relatives in England. And when he was over there,

20:00 he spoke to us about seeing some of the relatives and he brought some photos home. I've got some in there now, some of his cousins or something they were. Well, he was away for four years.

Yes, it's a long service.

It is a long service, yeah.

Well, Eddie, you were a twin. I'm also fascinated to hear about that. Can you tell us about what it's like being a twin?

Well, it has its high points and it has its low points.

20:30 Especially when you get called Bob more times than you get called Eddie. But my brother's name's Bob and sometimes Mum used to call me Bob instead of Eddie. Well, it is funny being a twin. You get so attached to each other like, you know, you're both the one person sort of thing.

21:00 Mum always used to dress us exactly the same and you would go to school and the teachers would call him Eddie and me Bob.

So would you use that, you know, the fact that you looked alike, to play tricks on people ever?

Well, when we were in the army, specifically. One day we were camped in the Wagga showgrounds and we both got put on gate duty, you know, sentry,

21:30 and I was in the bottom gate and Bob was in the top gate and somebody came along and I said "You can't get in here, you've got to go to the top gate", and he went up there and Bob was there and he seen him and he said "God, you must have moved fast. I just spoke to you down the bottom there". That really happened. Oh. Yeah. You get mistaken, especially when you're so

22:00 much alike. You see, we're the dead image of each other. There's a photo in there I could show you. Yeah. He now lives in Wangaratta.

So, Eddie, did you seek work off the farm ever?

Well, I was mad on radio. I'll tell you later about what happened to my radio career. I was mad on radio,

building crystal sets and whatever. Using ear phones and that

22:30 and putting these radio sets together and crystal sets and I wanted to be a radio technician or radio announcer or something like that. So that's off the farm, but I never got a chance to do it. Until I went in the army and joined the signals. Got into radio.

So you never worked in radio but it was a hobby for you?

No, no, Just a hobby.

How did you learn about how to make a crystal set?

23:00 Well, Dad bought home a book a radio text book. How to build radio sets? One valve sets, crystal sets. How to make the coils and crystals? Dad knew I was interested in it. I think he sort of bought home some books.

And was Bob, your twin, was he interested in radio?

23:30 No. Funny – no he wasn't.

So, was he working or were you both on the farm working?

No, we were all on the farm, after we left school, matter of fact we were all on the farm till the war broke out. We all got into the army then.

So, after you left school, that was '34. So Hitler was already in power in Germany by then, when did you start to hear about Hitler?

Well, can't say, can't remember exact dates and times. But it was in the news that Hitler was on the go… I remember in September 1939, when he invaded Sudetanland, I think, it was Poland. Britain declared war on him,

24:30 I think he seemed to come to the fore.

Can you recall where you were when the war broke out?

I was home in, we were living at a place called Oura [?], about ten mile out of Wagga. We were there when the war broke out.

Did you listen to the announcement on the radio?

Yes, I listen to Churchill making the announcement. I heard that, yes.

25:00 **And, what was your feeling about that at the time?**

Well, I thought "This is a chance to get away from the farm and go and join the army". When you're young and got no active life and other young people, of course you're sort of isolated you like to get away and do something different.

25:30 **And what were your parents' responses? Can you recall what your dad thought about it?**

No, well, Dad I think he said . . . Mum wouldn't, well we wanted to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], but Mum wouldn't let us. I think we were only 17, 18 and Dad never said anything.

26:00 **Yes, you would have only just turned 18?**

Eighteen, that's right, yeah.

So what did your mum have to say about it?

I wanted to join the navy first and Mum said "You're not joining the navy and you're not joining the army either, until you're 21".

So what did you and Bob think about that?

Well, we eventually went in and joined the 21st Light Horse Regiment, stationed

26:30 in Wagga. In the Riverina. Went into the camp on the first of December, this is a long time after the thirties. 1940, 41 just after the war broke out.

So were they not AIF?

That wasn't the AIF. They call it the militia. It wasn't the AIF. It wasn't . . . they didn't call it the Citizens Military Forces either. 21st Light Horse Regiment. The Riverina Horse they were

27:00 known as. We could ride horses, see, and thought "That would give us a bit of a break away from the farm".

And did it?

It certainly did. Well, we never got out of it until 1946.

So what was your mum's response then when you went off and joined?

Well, she said "You're old enough to know what you are doing so. A lot of the other young people are going." She didn't

27:30 want us to be shirkers or something like that.

And what about your dad?

Yeah, well Dad, he didn't seem to worry. He was proud of us I think. Dad was proud of us.

So you and Bob went off and joined up together?

Yeah. We went into the army the same day. The first of December 1941. In the Wagga Showgrounds. And we were there until we shifted down to a place called Berrima, Moss Vale,

28:00 there were three companies. A Company, B Company and C Company. But we were in the signals, Regimental Signals and we went down there. So in August 1942, I turned 21, we were both enlisted in the AIF then.

So look shortly after you joined the light horse

28:30 **regiment, Japan entered the war**

We joined on 1st December 1941 and Japan entered the war on 7th December 1941 and they got us out viaducts, garden viaducts, the railway, and going down to the hospital digging slit trenches that sort of thing. There wasn't a Japanese within a thousand miles of us

29:00 in those days.

Can you recall, was that a shock to you, I mean had you been aware that Japan was also on the march in Asia?

Yes, I was aware when Singapore fell in the early part of 1941, 42 [15 February 1942]. Well, I was in the army then.

29:30 No, we just learned by the local news. The only way we became aware of anything like that was hearing the news.

Can you recall what the feeling was when Singapore fell?

Yes, there was a chap on the . . . another thing Dad had was a milk run. This chap used to work for Dad on the milk run

30:00 and he went away and joined up and went over there and got captured by the Japanese, but he never come home. He was shot.

So he was 8th Divy [Division], was he?

8th Divy, yes. Because these things, you know these things are sixty years. Your going back a long way to recollect vividly things that happened nearly seventy years ago.

30:30 **No, whatever you do remember, that's what we're going to have to record. That's fine. I just thought that a lot of Australians were very shocked when Singapore fell.**

Yes, yes, they were. Well the Japanese, they were on the doorstep.

And look, when you joined the 21st Light Horse, was that full time?

Yes, full time, yes full time.

31:00 **So where were you camped?**

We were camped in the Wagga Showgrounds.

Can you describe your accommodation?

Yes, it was in the pig pens. We called them "The pig pens". That's where our bunks were. Of course, there were no pigs in those days. But we was camped in the pig pens. We used to do our parades out in the showgrounds, out in the grounds.

31:30 **And what was your initial training like?**

Well, seeing I was already interested in radio, I asked "Could I be put in the signals platoon?" But we had to, before we became a signaller we had to become a soldier. You know, face up to discipline, route marches and parade ground drills

32:00 and everything. They tried to knock you into shape. But when you go in there you're green. You know the army, when you first go in, I didn't know a 303 from a 406.

And how did you take to that discipline?

Yes, right. Yes, I think it done me good. I was too carefree before, but they sort of trained you and brings you in line with reality.

32:30 **Well, I'm not sure what you mean. Could you explain that a bit more?**

Well, instead of being loose free and do as you like sort of thing, when you get into the army you've got to do what the army tells you. You know, you're not a free agent. You're governed by discipline. And you have to have discipline. Having no discipline in the army is like having a cricket team without a captain, sort of thing.

33:04 **Did you find all of that preliminary training hard work compared to the work you had done on the farm**

More incisive, you know, instead of day by day sort of thing, in the army it was a routine. More routine. See on the farm one day you might do one job,

33:30 have a day off and don't do another job until a couple of days later, but in the army you're on the ball all the time, in the initial training, I found.

So did you find it physically difficult? Like, was it physically taxing?

Well not the…well, it was. The route marches and the backpack drill and all this sort of thing was demanding,

34:00 but, yes, it was a different life altogether. Being in the army and being out of it, sort of thing.

Did you ever curse, and wish you had never joined?

No, not really. Not really. I suppose we've got photos of when I was taken in the parade ground there. I was real proud of myself. I'm a big soldier, but only a little fellow. I said "People will think I'm a big bronzed Anzac, when I tell them I'm a soldier".

34:30 I know, I'm not a big bronzed Anzac, but I'm not a hero either so.

I'm sure there's a bit of a hero in everyone who serves?

Yeah. Well there is. You put your life on the line. When you volunteer to go overseas and serve in enemy territory, you do put your life on the line. And a lot of blokes didn't come back, or course.

No. It's a serious thing to do, wasn't it?

35:00 It was.

Do you think that you thought about that at the time?

Yes, I did think. I said, I know when I went to New Guinea, I said, 'Well, I'm not going to come out of this", you know. You can't help thinking that. But I'm prepared to do it.

Have you ever talked about that feeling with anyone? With Bob for instance or other soldiers?

35:30 Yes, well. You do talk about it. You know, it's pretty hard to say, to define what you say to them. Here today and gone tomorrow sort of thing.

So, while you're still in the militia then, you asked to be sent to the signals platoon?

36:00 Yes, in every company there's a signals platoon. Nearly all regiments have their own signals platoon. So I said "I wanted to be in the signals platoon" and they put me in there. Me brother Bob too, we both got in the signals platoon.

Why do you think he joined the signals?

Well I think, he was my twin brother, he wanted to be close to me I guess. So, we've had the training.

36:30 We had radio receivers, and telephones and heliographs. You know we used to wave flags. And I learnt the Morse code. But then when I joined the AIF, I was sent to the Arcadia School of Radio in Sydney and done, learnt the Morse code and learned to operate radios. I became a fully fledged signaller after that. That's how I got into the New Guinea Wireless Company.

37:00 **So you were in the light horse for one and a half years?**

Yes, well they disbanded. When we went to Queensland, moving up to Queensland, the light horse regiment was disbanded. We got Bren guns carriers and then we changed our name to the 21st Reconnaissance Battalion instead of the 21st Light Horse. We were galloping all over Queensland in these Bren gun carriers.

So look, I'm curious, in the light horse, did you ever ride horses?

Me? Yeah, another thing I wanted to do when I was young, I wanted to be a jockey. But Mum wouldn't let me be a jockey. No, we could ride horses since we were little kids.

No, but

38:00 But they took the horses off us. We had horses, but they took them off us. There was too many. There was 1,300 men in the battalion. And everyone had a horse. They couldn't have that many horses in the place. 1,200 horses. So the horses were dispensed with. They still retained the name though, the 21st Light Horse Regiment or the Riverina Horse.

Because in World War II there were no horses used in combat.

38:30 No, that's true. This is early in the war. The regiment was still the light horse regiment but they closed down and changed the name of the battalion to the reconnaissance battalion. The 21st Reconnaissance Battalion.

I mean, it seems very strange to me that in World War II you would be training with horses. So I am just curious – did that seem odd to you at the time?

39:00 It did, because it was actually a light horse regiment. It had been in existence for years and years and years and they just kept the name. It was the 21st Light Horse Regiment. And we had reunions. We used to go to Wagga every two years for regimental reunions years after the war ended. They still called themselves the 21st/5th Light Horse. Prior to that it was the 21st Reconnaissance Battalion

39:30 with Bren gun carriers.

Tape 2

00:30 **So, Eddy, did you not need your mum's permission to join the militia?**

No, Not to join the militia, because it's home service and Mum and Dad they thought "It wouldn't do us any harm to have some military training". We were young. They knew by joining the militia you weren't required to go overseas or go into combat or anything like that.

So your mum was comfortable with that?

01:00 Mum was comfortable with that, yes. But she didn't like us in 1942 when we wanted to join the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and got shipped off overseas. She wasn't real happy about that. (UNCLEAR) It was our decision, we was 21.

She had a bit say about that, did she?

Oh, yes. She wasn't happy about it, she said "You silly boys. You realise you might never come home, I might never see you again?"

01:30 **Was that hard for you?**

I suppose, yeah. In retrospect now it was hard you know. A bit chauvinistic in those days, and I'm going off. Should have had more feelings for Mum's feelings. But when everyone else is going. I don't want to be called "A coward". And get, what's it called a yellow ribbon?

02:00 **White Feather?**

Yes, White feather. Just a coward. All me mates, that I went to school with, they all joined up and were going, so we thought "If I don't go, I'll be called a coward" or something like that. That's the feeling I had.

Well, it's like that when everyone around you is dong something, you feel a bit pressured to be doing something too.

02:30 That's right.

But look when the 21st Light Horse became 21st Reconnaissance, they moved to Queensland, and then what were you doing?

We were doing that, learning the signals, we were doing that training up there. We had the Bren gun carriers. We had the machine guns up on top of the four wheel, like they had traction wheels. Mobile Bren guns they were called - Bren gun carriers. They were like a small tank. We had them and being in the signals I was called in one day and seconded. They said "You are going join a signals unit in New Guinea".

03:30 **Sorry, this was when you were in the AIF wasn't it?**

Sorry, well they disbanded the 21st Light Horseman and we was, I remember when I went away to Queensland, "I'll write you a letter and I'll put under the stamp where I am". It was a silly thing to do,

but I did. I just put QLD under the stamp and Mum knew we were in Queensland. Because everything in the military movements was top secret.

04:00 So I wrote under the stamp “I was in Queensland”. She got the message.

So, you got away with it?

Got away with it, yeah. I suppose if you got a spy you’ve got to open a lot of letters to find out. A lot of fellows were putting their destination under the stamps on their letters.

Were they?

Yeah

How would she get the stamp off?

04:30 Oh, I guess with the kettle.

So, Eddie, what were you up to then in Queensland with the 21st Reconnaissance?

I was in the signals. We were training, going out in bivouacs. They called them bivouacs, and having mock battles. A Company, B Company or the Reds, Greens would fight the

05:00 Blues and Yellows sort of thing, and you’d put a mark on the side of your Bren gun carrier what colour you were in and see if you could hide from them. Military operations, training operations.

And was that with live ammunition?

No, it wasn’t live ammunition.

And where were these exercises taking place?

We were at a place called Roma in Queensland and Beenleigh.

05:30 Beenleigh, Roma and another place we were at there. Beenleigh, up to Beaudesert. It’s out of

06:00 Queensland there. Oh, we done hundreds of miles in them Bren gun carriers. Travelling around in them, training.

So, while you were travelling around in these Bren guns, were you just camping out?

Yeah, were camping out, sleeping, taking tents and sleeping on the ground.

06:30 **Well, what did you make of all this, your first time effectively away from home?**

Well, I thought “It was great, it was great”. Running around the countryside in the Bren gun carriers and the townspeople looking at us and saying “Look at these heroes”. We were proud of ourselves. But we weren’t really heroes. We were babies.

Heroes in the making?

I suppose in the making.

What were your instructors like?

07:00 They were good, some were not real cluey, but some blokes were very intelligent you know, on a whole, you know the instructors were very good. Did their job.

Any mean ones?

Mean ones? Well, they would be if you played up or didn’t do the right thing, if you needed discipline.

07:30 They’d come down on you. If you give them any cheek, they’d put you on a charge sheet, or something like that.

And what would a punishment be if you were out of line?

Well, next time you were back in base you weren’t allowed to go out. You’d stay in the boob. You’d stay in detention.

So look, while you are travelling around in outback Queensland, were you having any contact with local people?

Oh, yeah. We did

08:00 talk to the local people or they’d have a wave to us. Say “Hello” to us. But we never got friendly with any of them, just friendly relationship, sort of thing.

And did you ever come across any of the aboriginal people in the outback there?

No, I can’t say I did.

08:30 **So, how long were you involved in these Bren gun exercises?**

Well, that' a hard question because I can't recollect the actual dates and times. It was that long ago. That was way back in the early '40s.

That's all right. What came after that then?

Came after that. When they disbanded that,

09:00 the Bren gun carriers, we were all split up into different units. Don't know what happened to machines but we all went into different units. And I was posted to New Guinea with the wireless company.

This was after you joined the AIF?

We come back on leave, that's right, they give us some leave and we come home to Wagga. I had a lot of leave due to me. We spent that.

Where was home at that point?

09:30 At Wagga, a place called Baleema Station. Where Dad was managing this sheep station just out of Wagga.

And did you have a girl at this point, did you have a girl back in Wagga?

No, I didn't. No, I was frightened of girls.

Were you? Why was that?

I don't know. I liked the look of them but I never got close to them. I never had a girlfriend in those days.

10:00 **Well, you wouldn't have had much opportunity to meet girls, would you?**

No, that's right. We used to go to dances and that sort of thing, but I never had a girlfriend.

So on this leave then, you decided to join the AIF?

Yes, we went back into camp in Bowral, Moss Vale, Bowral, Mittagong.

10:30 I turned 21 in August 1942, so I joined the AIF.

And what made you want to join the AIF?

I wanted to go overseas. I wanted to go. All the young people I knew were going and I said "I wanted to go too". Just a feeling I had that I wanted to go.

11:00 **And Bob joined up too?**

Yes, he joined up with me. My brother Max. He joined up. He was in another unit.

He wouldn't have been 21?

No, he wasn't 21. He joined up later.

So, when you joined were you able to nominate what kind of posting you wanted?

No, you couldn't nominate where you wanted to go.

11:30 That was dictated by the army. The army movements.

So, where did they place you and Bob?

They sent us back to Queensland, as I said before. We went up to Queensland. To a place called Mergan, Kingaroy. Stationed between Mergan and Kingaroy.

12:00 And we did training there in the signals. I was in the unit, I can't remember, but I wasn't in there very long. And I got my marching orders in 1943, I think. It's hard to recollect. It was so long ago these things happened.

That's all right.

And so much has happened in between.

Essentially not long after you joined

12:30 **you were selected for?**

Doing this signals. All the sigs [Signals] in our unit were, all the signals in our platoon were selected to go with the New Guinea Wireless Company, but in the meantime I got the mumps. Up in Brisbane and I was in hospital in Indooroopilly,

13:00 and they went off without me. I caught up with them later, though, when I got out of hospital.

So before you were sent abroad though, you were sent to Sydney for specialist training?

That's right I forgot to mention that. We were sent to Sydney for a two months course, a radio operator's course, learning the Morse code and how to operate a short wave radio.

13:30 **Now was this the whole of the New Guinea air warning?**

No, only the people out of the 21st Light Horse. Some other units, but before I went up there they were already in operation, the New Guinea Wireless Company. That's why we trained there, though, to learn the Morse code, which I haven't forgot, I can still do it.

14:00 **So, was Bob at the …?**

Yes, he done it too. Went to school.

Could you tell us the name of the school again?

The Marconi School of Radio. It was at Randwick in Sydney. We were camped in the Sydney Showgrounds.

Was it your first time to Sydney?

No, we had been to Sydney. We went to Sydney with Mum and Dad. But it was the first time I lived there.

As an adult?

As an adult.

14:30 **And two months?**

Two months. All day with earphones on. Learning de-da-da-da-da-dit, you know. I can still read Morse code.

Ah, tell us a bit?

Zelda [interviewer]. Da-da-de-ditdd-dit-da-da-dit dada. That spells Zelda. (In background – what about Rosemary [interviewer]?) Da-da-dit-da-da-da-dada-dada-dit- (etc) that's Rosemary.

15:00 **So they trained you really well? Or you've got a really good memory?**

We had to pass out at 20 words a minute. And 20 words a minute was broken up into groups of five characters, five figures or five letters. But after eight hours a day on the phone, well it's like another language. I can still read it and spell things out, of course.

15:30 **So after eight hours a days with headphones on did you have any time off, could you go out much, could you go out in Sydney?**

No, well we were confined to camp pretty much, because we were doing an intensive course, but not only learning Morse, but also how to build and repair radio sets, that sort of thing. Wireless instructions.

16:00 But you know the Marconi School of Radio. I don't know if it still exists or not, but that is what it was called.

So, tell us then how do you build a wireless?

Well, you get…for a crystal set you've got to have a cylinder and coils of wire around to make what you call a coil, and one end goes into a detector which is the crystal and the other end goes into the earphone through a variable capacitor, which

16:30 divides the stations up, you know, when the signal comes in. It divides the stations up.

And were you also able to build headphones?

No, I never had to build headphones.

And what about a wireless?

Radio? Wireless? Yes, I used to make a one valve radio. Just one valve, a receiver.

I mean, you had done quite a lot before the war?

17:00 Yes, I had done it at home.

So, at the Marconi School did you learn anything extra?

Oh, yes I did, more precise and more informative and more of it.

So, could you say, what were the key things, the most important things about operating radio?

Well, establishing communication, if you're

17:30 operating a radio you're working with somebody 500 miles away, 200 miles away or 20 miles away establishing a communication with that station, providing you know the frequency they are operating on, you can tune into their frequency, you can call them up or send a signal and they'll send you one back. Establishing communication with another station.

18:30 But with the army, especially where we were up in New Guinea, it was a different kettle of fish. We were operating under extreme conditions. Mosquitos, black swamp fever.

I was thinking it must have been very important to be able to repair?

Oh it is, yeah, to repair a radio. If you know a valve's gone or a capacitor's gone, you can send off and get a replacement you can solder it in.

But if you couldn't get your radio to work, how could you send off for a replacement?

That's pretty hard to answer that sort of question, because you couldn't send anything off.

Anyway, we'll ask you a bit more about your conditions when you got to New Guinea a bit later on, but I'd still like to ask you a bit more

19:00 **about Sydney, because I've just got this picture of this 21 year old boy from the country in the big city for two months? Now, did you get any time off?**

Well we did get leave, weekend leave. I had relatives in Sydney. Dad's sister lived in Sydney. I had cousins down there. I used to go out to their place. To Kensington.

19:30 We used to go out there the weekends with our cousins. Go down to the beach, go to Luna Park, something like that. We used to go out with them.

So did you enjoy that time?

I did. I enjoyed that.

Were there dances held for soldiers?

Well, a photo I've got in there, that was when the school broke up, that was in the Paddington Town Hall where we had a break up

20:00 I went to when I was there. That was a big ball we had after the Marconi School of Radio finished.

And how were you able to find a dancing partner for the night?

I seen a girl sitting over there and I said "I don't know whether she can dance or not but she's good looking. I'll go over and see her."

20:30 **And did she accept your invitation?**

Most of the time, most of the time they did.

Had you ever learnt to dance?

No, I didn't. Well we danced. When we was home in Wagga we used to have dances, you know, the old time dances, just the waltz and the foxtrot and square dances, and set dances. We learned to dance. In country towns, they have dances all the time.

21:00 **And how did you feel walking through the streets of Sydney in your uniform?**

Oh, I felt pretty proud of myself I guess.

What did your relatives think about it?

They were happy with us, as soldiers.

And the general public,

21:30 **they were warm to you. Were they supportive of you?**

Yes, they were. I'd say they were. I never had any distractions to me anyway. Say "What are you doing in the army? What are you going to do?" No, I found them very warm to us, the public.

So, were you aware of detractors, protestors?

No, I can't say I have, didn't see any detractors or protestors, no. I never seen any myself.

22:00 **So, Eddie, what's your opinion of the training you received at the Marconi School?**

Very good, very good. It was very solid, apart from learning Morse code and listening to Morse code.

And they used to

22:30 put static…you start off very slow with Morse code then you'd have two or three words a minute real slow – da-da-da-dit-da-da . Keep on building up, building up, until you got real fast. And I found that the further I went the better I got at it. And they used to have my earphones

23:00 on and they used to feed static into it, claps of thunder and wind blowing all that sort of thing and they'd push the Morse code through that and sometimes real weak, like a whistle, and you'd have to receive it and read it through atmospheric interference. It was all part of the training.

So they'd try to simulate conditions in the field?

Conditions in the field, that's right.

23:30 **I'm also curious because in the movies when we see them transmitting and receiving Morse code they're tapping on a little tap?**

Yes, there's a key, a Morse, I've got one out in the garage, a little Morse key.

So is that what you were trained in?

Yes, sending and receiving. We had to send as well as receive. Dit, you just pressed quick, and if you hold it down a bit longer, da-da-da-dit.

24:00 It's all rhythm. Very rhythmic Morse code. And some people, my brother, I could hear him hundreds of miles away from me but I knew when he was on the set, sending, I knew it was him. He'd got his own style. Everybody has his own style sending Morse code. Some roll it, some dance it. It's an unusual thing. People send it in a different fashion.

24:30 **Well, that's fascinating. I never thought there would be different styles of transmitting.**

Oh, yes there is. A different way of sending. Some are very staccato. Don't make their dashes long enough, or their dots are too quick. Sort of start off, did the hard bits da-da-dit-da-da-dit.

25:00 Then some bloke would get on it training – da-da-dit-da-da-dit -. They send differently, different sounds, the sounds are the same but the sound is different. Like music, I suppose. Like my son, he's a musician. How he can play the piano, I don't know. I could never play it.

So was Bob at the school with you?

25:30 Yes, he was at school with me.

And did you – Bob was obviously close to you. Were there any other people you became mates with?

Oh, yeah. One thing about the army, I'll say that, best mates I ever had was in the army. Best mates I've ever had, my army pals.

So those 21st Light Horseman who transferred and became

26:00 **the air warning, were they – did they all stay together then?**

Yeah, they all stayed together. But when we were in New Guinea we were posted all over the place. I suppose you'll ask about that later. The service in New Guinea, when we got there, was we got a little school just out of Port Moresby, but then we were posted out to 270 something stations all over the islands, all over New Guinea. That's why we were called "The Spotters".

26:30 **And was this a new thing in the military?**

Yes, as far as I know. It was the first time it ever happened. The spotting stations were set up. We were in enemy territory close to the enemy to report back their movements. But where I was out of Annenberg to broadcast weather reports for the air force.

27:00 Because New Guinea is very mountainous. Up the two valleys it's tropical, but every day there is fog over the mountains, low cloud.

Gosh, so you could have gone on to work for the Bureau of Meteorology?

When I come home, I did, I became an air radio operator at Essendon Aerodrome. When I came home I joined the

27:30 Department of Civil Aviation and I got a job in the control room at Essendon Airport as a radio operator, bringing the planes in and sending them out.

So, Eddie, I'm obviously not up to there yet but we will ask about your post-war life later on, so after the break up of the Marconi Radio School, where to next?

Then we went to New Guinea.

28:00 **So, from there you went direct to New Guinea?**

Up to the staging camp first. I was up at Townsville. They sent us to the staging camp at Townsville, and then we went to New Guinea. I went to Port Moresby.

Sorry, just back track a little? Did you know that you were going to be sent to New Guinea?

I didn't know till I realised that. They eventually told me that "I was going over".

28:30 **Did you know you were going to go overseas?**

I didn't actually know I was going but it eventually dawned on me that I would be going because of all this training I had at the Marconi School of Radio.

So after the school broke up were you given a final leave to go and see your family?

No, I can't remember, I don't think so. Might have done.

They didn't get to say "Goodbye"?

29:00 No, just went off.

And when you joined the AIF had you taken or been given anything special from home, from your parents?

No.

So what was in your pack?

In my pack? Just me clothes, socks, shirts, underpants,

29:30 singlets. Just the usual apparel, me kit bag. We weren't given any send off.

Had you taken anything personal from home, photos or lucky charms?

No. Not that I can remember.

30:00 **So did Dad have any words of wisdom for you?**

Yes, he did. He said one thing to me I sort of chewed over. He said "It's better to be a live coward then a dead hero". After I thought about it I thought "Well, I am not going to be a live coward, but I don't want to be a dead hero!"

Well, everyone would rather be a live hero, wouldn't they? But that's often not how it works. What about your mum? Did she have any words?

30:30 Yes, she just wished us well. She was reconciled we were going, so she knew when we joined the AIF that we would be posted off somewhere.

Did she cry?

I guess she did. But we never got a chance to say "Goodbye" to her. We never came home from Queensland the last staging camp we were in.

31:00 **Right. So your last staging camp was Townsville?**

Townsville. Went from there on a boat called the Taroona. Went to Milne Bay first.

Was it you first time on a ship?

No, that's another thing I forget, too. When I was in Townsville we did training on the [HMAS] Kanimbla, a beach landing. They used to take us out on these barges, and put us on this boat and they would come in close to shore, just out of the waves,

31:30 and we'd have to clamber over the side with our full pack and rifle and have to do a beach landing.

So clamber over the side and into landing barges?

Yes, the landing barges used to take us out, put us on the boat, no, we clambered over the side using ropes and drop off into the water, up to the waist.

32:00 Beach landing training. We done a couple of that for a while.

Sounds very difficult?

Yes.

And what happens if your rifle gets wet?

I suppose they become inactive, might damage it.

What other weapons were you issued?

Well, in New Guinea when I got to the spotting station my mate Stuey, we were each issued with a nine millimetre luger revolver. A luger, not a little revolver. It's a big weapon. We were issued with that, and grenades. 303 rifle and ammunition. Best mate in the army, the 303.

33:00 **And how did you feel about carrying a gun. Like when you were back in Australia and been given this rifle to carry around?**

Well, you come to see it as your best mate in the army. It sort of becomes a part of you. It become a part of you.

Did you have to take it everywhere?

Had to take it everywhere.

33:30 Except when you went on leave. You couldn't take it one leave, had to hand it into the Q [Quartermaster] store.

But like, when you went to shower?

No, never. In your bunker wherever you were.

And were you taught to use those 303s?

Oh, yeah. At the rifle range, the rifle range,

34:00 shooting moving targets and still targets, bayonet charges, fixed bayonets. They'd have a chaff bag or a bale of hay stuck up on a stake and you'd have to run in and stick the bayonet in the chaff, and say "Withdraw!", "Charge!", "Withdraw!" and then the bayonet would get stuck and they'd say, "Clear one!" and you'd have to clear the trigger,

34:30 fire a bullet, to clear the bayonet. Nearly everyone done that, I think, in the army.

And what did you make of that weapons training at the time?

Pretty keen on rifle shooting. Matter of fact, I've got my record in there. First class distinguished, if you want to see it on my AB83. First class distinguished rifle shot and I was worried then that they would make me a sniper. I didn't want to do that.

35:00 **Why didn't you want to do that?**

Well, I thought that being a sniper was a really dangerous occupation.

Well, it sounds like you did end up doing an even more dangerous job?

Well, I'll show you that later if you'd like to see it.

Eddie, was it just a bit of a game for you young men, or did you actually think "I might be firing at people"?

35:30 Well, as they told us in the army, "You are being trained to kill or be killed". One of the officers told us that. "You are trained to kill or be killed". Whoever gets the shot in first stays alive. If you happen to come across an enemy soldier, you have to kill or be killed yourself. That's part of the training.

36:00 **And was that something that you considered?**

Well, tell you the truth. I wasn't real keen about shooting anybody. No. But I suppose when you sign up to do these sort of things, you've got to go along with it.

Well, most of us are brought up not to kill.

That's right. Not to kill.

36:30 But being a soldier, you are trained to do that. You are trained to fight for your country, to uphold your military tradition and to kill the enemy.

So it was something that you did when you think about it, was it?

37:00 **Was that something hard for you?**

To fire on the enemy? Kill somebody?

No, well you're not in contact with the enemy at this point, but I'm just curious that these young men training to use rifles, whether you're thinking about the consequences of shooting these guns or whether it's just all can I hit the target?

37:30 Well, I suppose you're worried about coming into contact and shooting somebody. But I remember the officer saying in training "You kill or be killed and that you've got no option".

So it sounds as though it was quite scary at times?

Yes, it was very macabre. You were in the army, go and get into enemy territory.

38:00 You're there for one job. To rout out the enemy or get routed out yourself.

And what kind of instructions were you given about the enemy?

Well, we were not given too many instructions, only that they were a ruthless lot of people, especially the Japanese, they had a reputation.

38:30 Some of our blokes did get killed, but they were…but we weren't told much about them but "They were the enemy and if you see one, kill him. Kill more if you see a platoon of them. If you're in a position to take them on, take them on".

So were you told anything specifically about the Japanese?

39:00 No, we were told that after the fall of Singapore, "If you became a prisoner expect the worst, they would treat you very badly as a prisoner".

So were you given instructions on what to do if you were taken prisoner?

Yes, we were. But I just can't remember what they actually said to us. Go along with, well, you're not in a position to fight them or do anything,

39:30 to kick up a fuss about it because they had the upper hand on you. You had no comeback really if you're a prisoner. They've got you guarded with a rifle over your shoulder. They're just likely to shoot you, they're not your best mates, the enemy.

Well, that's an understatement, isn't it?

Right!

Tape 3

00:30 **Well, Eddie, I think you were ready to get on the ship to go to New Guinea. And I was wondering, at what point did you know you were going to New Guinea?**

Well, I was in Townsville at the time, and my transfer came through. My brother claimed me in New Guinea:

So your brother was up there in New Guinea?

Well, I got the mumps. When we all went from the light horse,

01:00 the signal platoon out of the light horse, the reconnaissance battalion as it was known, they all got drafted because they wanted these signal personnel to form this company in New Guinea. The Air Warning Wireless Company. So we all got drafted into that. But just before we went I got the mumps and I was put into hospital in Townsville.

And you were the only one to get the mumps?

I was the only one. Went to hospital in Townsville. I was there for two or three weeks.

01:30 And I come back and went out to a place called Mervin [?], an army base, until my transfer came through and then I was told "I was on my way to New Guinea", and I went to Townsville and got on a boat called the Kanimbla.

Can you tell me about the process of claiming you?

Well, I think what it means that a brother could claim a brother

02:00 from another unit. There was some talk about brothers or families weren't allowed to serve together. I think that was overcome in my case anyway, because we both went in the same unit, although when I went to Milne Bay first and my brother was stationed at Milne Bay at a spotting station and I was only there for a couple of days and I was sent around to Port Moresby.

02:30 **Well, before you get to Port Moresby, I'm sorry to interrupt you there, but I was wondering if you could tell us about the ship and the journey on the Kanimbla across to Milne Bay?**

No, it wasn't the Kanimbla. It was the Taroona. Have you ever heard of the Taroona?

Not until you mentioned it.

That was the ship, the Taroona. That's right. Well, we went across on the Taroona and I remember when we were in the staging camp at Townsville, we had a blackout. The Japanese bombers were coming down, but they never came of course, and then when I got to Milne Bay I had never seen so many lights

in my life. The whole place was lit up.

What was the ship like? What sort of conditions?

Well, they used to have a cattle ship, an Indonesian ship called the Taroona, and I remember we had a pet parrot.

On the ship?

On the ship.

Could it talk?

It used to make a lot of noise.

Did you teach it Morse code?

Morse code? No. We had a good trip across there, I got a bit seasick.

Did you? Did you have tablets to take or . . .?

04:00 No. Later on when I went overseas in private life I took tablets, but I didn't take tablets in those days, just had to wear it. I remember a naval officer saying to me "Go up to the middle of the ship. There's not so much movement up there from the ship rocking." I went up there, there was about two hundred other blokes up there. They we all sick.

Yes, I was wondering how many troops were on the ship?

04:30 A lot. Yes a lot. So we went to Milne Bay and we didn't disembark. We came back to Port Moresby and disembarked there.

Did you know why you didn't disembark there?

I don't know. They must have took some other officers or something up there, other goods. And then I got to Port Moresby and then I disembarked and then I went out to a place called Nine Mile.

05:00 There was two places there, big army bases. One was Nine Mile and one was Seven Mile. I went to Nine Mile.

I'm wondering what were your first impressions of Port Moresby?

It was bigger than I thought it was. It was quite a big place. I had never seen natives before in their grass skirts. I eyed them off.

So there were some women around there?

05:30 Oh, yes. Chaps in their thongs and short pants and what have you, and the natives with their grass skirts. Of course, they used to make them themselves, they would make their own.

Did you see them making them?

Yes, I have. Sitting under a palm tree. Later on I saw them knitting together the thongs to make the grass skirt.

06:00 **And when you said you went out to Nine Mile. How long did you stay in Port Moresby before you went out there?**

Well, I wasn't long there. But the unit headquarters was in Port Moresby, they shifted to Nadzab, over in the Markham Valley. And then Graham Mattock, he was interviewed by you people, by a woman named Stella and another chap, I was on the same ship as him. We went around to Lae and into Nadzab.

06:30 **And can you describe what the journey was like?**

Yes, it was a pretty rough sort of a trip around the coast. There was that many…a lot of islands off New Guinea. Frightened some of the ships was going to run up on an island, but they didn't. It was a fairly good trip.

Well, did you know where the enemy was at that stage?Well, we knew they were in the Markham Valley, the Ramu Valley, because we knew they got driven back over the Owen Stanleys ,

07:00 **down into the valleys. They were still occupying a good part of New Guinea, over the other side of the ranges. The enemy was still entrenched in New Guinea, till they got driven right up the coast.**

07:30 **And we followed them of course with the spotting stations.**

Did you know at that stage that that's what your job was?

No, I didn't know at the time that I got there. There was a signal unit and nothing else. There was no

infantry, or artillery, just the signals unit. We were told when we got there "That two or three men would be sent out to spotting stations to spy on the Japanese from the air,

08:00 as distinct from the coast watchers". They were another crowd. They were around the coast, but we were sent inland all over the island.

Well you said that you landed at Lae first. Is that right?

We landed at Lae first. Yes, that's right, and we were put on trucks and transported.

And what was Lae like?

Yes, it was a big seaport. Pretty in those days. A lot of Lae people, a big airport there. Planes used to come in over the sea and land at the airport base. It was just like… those New Guinea places are all the same, clearing surrounded by jungle.

And were the local people working?

They were working?

09:00 **For the Australians or Americans?**

They were Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. They was on this side. But later on when I got up north we had the Kanaka or the other natives who were more hostile because they had been with the Japanese for so long, and the Japanese had indoctrinated them and got them on their side as their allies. Down at Port Moresby

09:30 and Lae they were pretty good because they were working on the air field and the army put them to work and they were given a twist of tobacco.

So they weren't actually paid money?

No, not that I know of.

Ok, well how long did you stay in Lae?

I was only landed there, disembarking, and I was put on a truck and sent out to Nadzab.

10:00 **And how many of you went up to Nadzab, then, or do you say up or down to Nadzab?**

There was only our unit. My mate Graham, he was in the light section but he was on the same ship. I didn't know it at the time until I went back to New Guinea in 1995 that he was on that ship, the Gorgon [?], it was called the Gorgon, a Dutch vessel.

How extraordinary!

10:30 Yes, it is. He and I are good mates now, go out together and play golf together, and he was on the same vessel as I was, but a different unit.

Yes, it's amazing isn't it, how much you didn't know about what was going on?

That's true, we didn't, we didn't know what was going on really. There was a newspaper put out in New Guinea called Guinea Gold, which I've got a copy of in there.

I'd be interested to have a look at it.

11:00 **Yes, I'll get it out. Guinea Gold.**

Well, ok you were trucked into Nadzab. What happened then?

Well, we set up camp there. We had the headquarters of the unit there, we had a Q store, headquarters, and it was right on the edge of the airstrip where the Americans airplanes there. The Yanks were there – there were more Americans there then I think Australians at the time at Nadzab, at the airstrips.

11:30 They had bombers taking off day and night.

Well, did you hold any opinions about Americans before you met any? Or had you met any in Melbourne?

Well, we sort of. Between us, we thought they were terrible bloody skites, full of each other, sort of thing, showoffs.

12:00 But they were soldiers like us and they had a job to do and they done it too.

So you didn't ever experience any tension with the Americans?

No, no tension. There at Nadzab they were playing baseball. We played some local Americans baseball and we beat them.

12:30 **Well, that was good to hear. And were you – in Nadzab is this where you heard what you were going to do?**

Well, I can't remember the exact time. It was that long ago, in 1943. I wasn't there very long. I was there and got to know the place and mates. I remember one of our chaps went off his head, went troppo and shot the top off the cookhouse,

13:00 he opened up with a machine gun, just sprayed it all. I can verify that, my army mates would tell you that, too.

Well do you know what happened to him?

Yes, he got put in clink. They sent him back home. A lot of fellows did go troppo, they lost their minds, couldn't handle the conditions, unfortunately.

13:30 **Well, they were difficult conditions weren't they, and I was wondering how you were adapting to them?**

Yeah, well being a country fellow and out in the bush and all that sort of thing, in the jungle, it didn't worry me all that much. I sort of adapted to it all right.

When had you got all your jungle gear?

We got the tropical greens. We were issued those in Townsville.

14:00 **At what point did you find out what your job was going to be?**

I knew it was going to be at a radio station. I know that because we were in the signals and that was our job. We didn't have to be told "What we were going to do". We knew it would be on a radio set somewhere, communicating with other units, headquarters, or back to General Blamey's office or anywhere.

14:30 We had a communication job to do and we were trained as radio operators, we knew what our job would be. But at the time I didn't really know. There were only two of us set out at each station. You can see in that book there, that's the story of it.

I was wondering when you set off to this station. Could you tell us the story?

15:00 Tell the story. I was in bed in a grass hut. We had to have a mosquito net in New Guinea because the mosquitos would eat you alive, that's how I come to get malaria. And an officer come down and pulled me out of bed and said, "Come on Asquith. You're going. Pack your gear and go down to the airstrip." There was a little airstrip there, and I went down there.

15:30 It was about 4 o'clock in the morning, very early. And when I got there, there was an aeroplane. I sat behind the pilot when we took off. I had to go and get a parachute and a radio transceiver, which I sat on my knee on the plane. And we took off down this road. I didn't know where I was going at the time. I knew I was going out to a spotting station.

16:00 We flew right up the Markham Valley, of course, Nadzab is in the Markham Valley.

Well, can you describe what you were seeing as you were flying up there?

I knew I was going out to a spotting station, but I didn't know where. We landed at, I don't know the name of the place, but we landed to refuel. But where I was going was 500 miles away from Nadzab, right up in the top half of New Guinea.

16:30 Well, we took off, and as I say it was seen, an American pilot by the way, a very young fellow, he wasn't much older than I was, this young kid flying this plane. He was in front and I sat behind him. He told me "To put on the parachute" and he said "There's a handle there on the left side". He said, "If I tell you to jump out, grab hold of that handle and pull it and go for your life. Bail out and the parachute will open." So I sat there with my hand on that handle all the time, but it never eventuated, I never had to bail out.

17:00 And we went up past the Finisterre Ranges and up past a place called Shaggy Ridge, and went right past Shaggy Ridge.

What did Shaggy Ridge look like from the air?

Oh, real steep, real steep mountain. One of our blokes won the Distinguished Service Cross,

17:30 won a high decoration for his work on Shaggy Ridge. But then we landed on, I've forgot the name of the place, we landed to refuel, but up past Shaggy Ridge, that was in the Markham Valley, the Ramu Valley, and "Ramu" in the native language means "Death Valley", and we went up and come in. I had no idea where we were going,

18:00 and ANGAU [Australia and New Guinea Administrative Unit] had cut a little path down to the river for the plane to land. And he buzzed this place and we said "What are those black stumps going off into the woods?" And they weren't black stumps, they were natives. They looked just like black stumps running off into the scrub. And we landed there and unloaded the plane and he went back off home after refuelling,

18:30 I guess, no, he couldn't refuel there, that's right. He flew off back to Nadzab. And I was there and met this ANGAU chap, Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit. He was already there and we set up this radio base and another chap came up with me, a bloke called Stuart Mulcaster, Dave Whiten.

19:00 He was a sergeant and I was a corporal. I was a corporal then. My other mate, he was a corporal. We were out there for five months, but after about two months Dave got scrub typhus, so we had to evacuate him. Radio back, and Nadzab sent a plane out to get him. A terrible fever he had, and he had this scrub typhus. And when I came back to Nadzab coming home, I asked where Dave was and they sent him home to Sydney but he died.

19:30 You see, up there, the chaps that were there, we had these diseases, scrub typhus, black water fever, dengue fever, malaria. I escaped them all bar malaria. I got that eventually.

Tell me, was that your first trip in an aeroplane?

Yes, I think it was my first trip in an aeroplane.

20:00 **Something to be doubly scary or thrilling?**

Especially some of the terrain we flew over. It was a funny thing. When I went back with the pilgrims in 1995, we done the same thing in an aeroplane, it was a cabin plane though. I wasn't in the cockpit behind the pilot.

At least it must have given you a really good idea of the terrain in that part of the country?

20:30 Oh, it did. In the Ramu Valley, they had another thing called mockas. They would bite you around the ankles, you know, sand flies. Well, they'd nearly eat us, the mockas around the ankles. We would put our gaiters on, and keep them out of your ankles, out of our legs. Kunai grass, well real tall, up over my head in some places, kunai grass.

Well, you know when you were woken up early in the morning, and you were told you had to go, what did you take with you?

21:00 I just took me jungle greens, a pair of pants, a shirt and a singlet, and a hat, a broad-brimmed hat, an army hat. Years ago they issued them with tin helmets, but you couldn't wear a tin helmet up there, it would kill you. So you just took the gear you were issued with.

21:30 Although when I first arrived there I was told "To go the Q store and get my clothes", and I got more jungle greens, a second set and a shirt, socks. So I had two set of clothes.

Well, what about food?

22:00 Well, when we got there the biscuit bombers came out and dropped our food. The Royal Australian Air Force. They used to come out about every two or three weeks, they'd come out to our station. And the air force bloke would stand at the door and push our food out and it would come down in a parachute. And the board in the parachute, I made a draft board out of it. For Stuey and I'd play drafts. Just the nuts off the tree for men.

22:30 And when I brought it home I put my name on it and gave it to the Signals Museum at Watsonia. They dropped supplies out to us and usually dropped some rice for the natives and mostly we lived on prunes and rice, you know, talk about a diet.

I'm trying to get an idea of what this station was like, in the middle of the jungle?

Well, we were this side of the river and the Japs were on the other side.

23:00 But they sent out some PIB boys. Papuan Infantry Battalion to guard us. I used to smoke in those days, but you couldn't smoke at night. I used to get down under a ground sheet, not a ground sheet but a mosquito net or a blanket, and put it over me and have a cigarette.

23:30 And then they used to go out on patrol, the ANGAU blokes used to go on patrol, but we never crossed the river. But we did have a bit of excitement there one day. An American reconnaissance plane come out, flew over our base, and next minute we heard a terrible roar. Down goes the plane and crashed. It crashed on the other side of the river and Stuey and I raced down and got some native boys

24:00 and a little boat called a lackatoy, a row boat, and they took us over there. It's in that book there, what happened. When we got there we found a plane but no pilots. They were up in the trees, hanging by their straps, by their harness. So we had to get the natives to climb up the tree and cut them loose and get them down.

24:30 We put them back in the lackatoy and got them back to our base and radioed Nadzab for help. In a couple of days they sent another plane out to take them home. Two Americans were on a reconnaissance mission.

And what was their condition like?

They were very shook up. One bloke gave me his compass, which I brought home. My son's got it, a souvenir, an American compass with "US" on it, and the other bloke gave me his watch.

25:00 Gave Stuey a watch, too. But I wouldn't take the watch off him. I said "No, you keep that. But I'll have the compass."

Well, they weren't badly injured then?

No, they weren't badly injured. They were shook up though, they had a few bruises.

And you actually crossed the river then?

We crossed the river. They were out in enemy territory on the other side of the river. This place was a place called … . Later on when we got in operational base, transmitting messages,

25:30 we used to send radio messages about the conditions, the clouds over the mountains, and they'd tell the American 5th Air Force. An hour and a half after we sent the message, over would come the Jap bombers and bomb this place, a concentration camp called Angorum, down the Sepik River. There were a lot of Japs there. Later on, when we had our battery chargers dropped down to us,

26:00 for the radio sets, and the battery chargers were dropped down to us too, there were big caves in the river where the Japs had been and they had holes in the back of the river. So, we put our battery chargers down in there too, so they couldn't hear the battery chargers being charged up, no noise.

Well at this first spotting station – how do you spend your days? What were you actually doing?

26:30 We used to do our own patrols. Get around and get away from each other, because when your months and months with another bloke, look for a bit of something. Used to go down to the native gardens and get some pawpaws or something and bring them home.

Well, were there villages near you, were there?

Yes, villages. Annenberg is a fairly big village. It used to be a German mission station back in the early days.

27:00 **You'd never know we were there until you walked right on top of us, we were so well concealed.**

So this first spotting place, I hadn't realised this, was near Annenberg. It was Annenberg?

It was Annenberg. It wasn't Annenberg. It's in that book. The spotting station at Annenberg.

How regularly did you send back information?

We had CBs, we had transceivers, radios,

27:30 and they were very powerful. Twice a day or three times a day – we had schedules. So at 0600 in the morning or 1700 in the afternoon we set up communication with Nadzab and we had plug in crystals. But we never transmitted on the same frequency twice in the day. Because the Japs who were listening could pick us up. We'd change frequency. Every time we went on the radio

28:00 we'd change frequency. Put in a different crystal. We had a broadcast crystal. We used to listen to Japanese, Tokyo Rose, we used to listen to her talking on the broadcast channel.

Can you remember anything she talked about?

Yes, she'd say "Go home, Aussie. Your girls are living with the kangaroos." They'd also say "Go home Aussie, the Americans have got your girls back in Australia." Yes, that's true.

28:30 **I believe you.**

And they set up a broadcast station at Port Moresby, I guess it broadcast radio, music, that sort of stuff. Sometimes we could pick it up, sometimes we couldn't pick it up. It was too far away.

Well, so this was your routine every day?

Every day. We had binoculars.

29:00 We had a look around the mountain areas just in case there was any infiltration, the Japs were coming or Japanese planes would come in. Because they used to fly over, too, the Jap planes. Used to go over to Bougainville, I think. We'd report that back to Nadzab, to alert our air force that the bandits are coming your way.

29:30 **Well, what other signs would you be looking for? What other evidence of the presence of the Japanese, apart from spotting planes**

Well, they might have been lighting fires, smoke going up somewhere. It would be either them or the natives. But we had the PIB [Papuan Infantry Battalion]. But some of the natives, we did catch one with a Japanese uniform on,

30:00 walking near us one day. Nabbed him. But before we got there the Japanese had been there for months, years, you see, and they were indoctrinated. The Japanese had already indoctrinated the natives.

And these are the ones in Annenberg?

In Annenberg, we had to be very careful. Stuey and I used to go down for a walk, down to the river in the daytime, but I remember the ANGAU blokes

30:30 said "Don't let them get behind you, the natives." And another thing there, was the pygmies, little native pygmies. You'd never let them get behind you.

Well, you would go into the village then regularly?

Yes, we were always…I've got photos there of it.

And when you say you'd never let them get behind you . . ?

31:00 Yes, in case they had spears, and machetes, not machetes but stone axes they had made out of timber. They could kill you.

Well, how did you communicate with them? Could you communicate with each other?

It was very hard. Pidgin English. And ANGAU provided us with a cook boy, to do our washing in the river.

31:30 We called him "The Cookboy". He didn't do much cooking, but we called him the cook boy. His name was Begowi. I can still remember his name, Begowi. The planes used to drop our food out to us, rice, prunes, and tobacco, we called it "Boongtwist". Sticks of tobacco twisted like a candle, to give the natives to pacify them.

32:00 **Well, I was wondering whether you got the impression that the local people were hostile to you?**

Some were, well they wouldn't talk to you. Look at you in a funny way. I remember Begowi used to call me "LikLik Master". Little master.

32:30 **What was that?**

"Long time you talk along fella, LikLik Master? Long time balus i stop!" "Balus" is an aeroplane. Japanese aeroplane. I got pretty good at pidgin English when I was out there.

Well, what sort of meals did he cook for you?

Well, he only boiled rice up and that sort of thing, and did some pawpaws off the trees, coconut or something.

33:00 They had another thing called a taro, like a potato, out of the native garden to supplement our issue of stuff.

Did you trade the tobacco for the fruit, or what?

Well, we did. They give us something, we'd give them something.

33:30 Another thing happened when I was out there one day. I was out, had my rifle, out on patrol, not the two of us together, only one at a time. And I run into these natives and they were real hectic. "Oh, oh, LikLik master. Behind him you see along fellow." So I found out what it was. They had a pig.

34:00 It was a terrible thing. I didn't shoot any Japs, but I shot that pig.

Can you tell my why you shot the pig?

Well, I thought "They wanted me to shoot him". So I shot him and they went away. I think they ended up carving him up, the pig. That really happened.

So you didn't get any pork to eat?

No, I didn't get any pork to eat. Another thing, there were big Cassowaries out there too. Cassowary birds.

34:30 Beautiful birds in the jungle. All sorts of funny things in them jungles. But, if you got in the jungle it was hard to see from here to the door. The jungle's that thick once you got off the beaten track.

And did you ever have to get off the beaten track?

Well, you wouldn't because you would get tangled up in vines or nettles.

35:00 **When you say you went on patrols, how far would you be going?**

Well, you wouldn't go very far. You'd only go from here to the corner shop and just around the area. On

this side of the river, you didn't cross the river cause it would be too dangerous, the river, and the Japs could have spotted us. We were very quiet, and went very quietly on patrol and we had these PIB boys

35:30 and we'd take them with us. We'd have a couple in front and a couple in back of us. Just have a walk around and get out of base for a little bit. Only go for about an hour.

When you went on patrol what weapons did you take with you?

Always took a rifle. Another thing we done out there, Stuey and I, we shouldn't have done it, was we put a grenade in the river to kill the fish. We shouldn't have done it because we was throwing away weapons.

36:00 You'd pull the pin out and throw it in the river, and have a native alongside you when you did it, and up come the fish belly first. So we had plenty of fish to eat. That's how we caught fish. You couldn't catch them with a line, though.

Did you ever give any fish to the local population?

No, they might have stole a few.

36:30 After we got our fish they might have got some fish. The Markham River was a very fast-flowing river. After we'd throw the grenade, you'd see them come up belly first. Decent sized fish, too.

It would be a bit of a delicacy, wouldn't it?

Oh, it was. We didn't like to do it too often. Didn't want to run out of grenades.

But I was wondering. You were resupplied every three weeks with food. Were you resupplied with ammunition?

37:00 Well, we did. We'd have more ammunition flown out, and petrol. They used to drop the petrol in the river in drums. And the natives used to go in and get it for us and all the side was dinted in. And we had Briggs and Stratton battery chargers to charge our batteries up with.

Well, the Japanese must have known you were there?

Oh, they knew we were around. I suppose they thought "We had a

37:30 bigger concentration of troops there" then what was there. They might have been a bit worried about coming across. They had to come across the river to get us. It was a big river.

You said the natives would come down to help you with petrol and so on, well, these are the people you are still wary of?

No, the PIB – the native police they called them. They were sent out there by ANGAU.

38:00 **Yes, that's right. You said they were guarding you. How many were there?**

There wasn't many.

And where would they be camped?

They camped in a grass hut. I've got photos in that book there where they were.

Well, I was wondering about your camp too. You were in tents, were you?

Well, no, we had no tents. We were in those grass huts the natives built. I've got a photo of one in there. The radio was in there.

38:30 **They were already erected then before?**

They were already erected, the native huts.

I'm still trying to get a picture. Those huts were not part of the village huts, then?

They were spread around. They are part of the village. There was no shops there, nothing, just huts, thatched bungalows.

39:00 **No, I was just thinking if the villagers had really wanted to get rid of you they probably could have?**

Oh, they could have. Yes, they could have done.

Tape 4

00:30 **Eddie, could you just describe this hut you lived in for five months? The one hut for the two of**

you?

Yes, one hut for the two of us. We made little stretchers. We cut some saplings down. Cause they sleep on the ground, the natives, they don't have beds. And we made little stretchers. Put our ground sheets, we couldn't wear them because it was too hot.

01:00 And we had mosquito nets to put over the top of us. But the hut was a little thatched hut with a dirt floor, no furniture, just the bare necessities. A table. But we did have one occasion once when a big snake came in from outside. We had the radio on, playing music, and it must have brought him in.

01:30 Frightened the hell out of us. Like a python – it was a really big one. He come in. We kicked him out.

Well, you say you kicked him out. Can you just tell us exactly what you did?

We got hold of some sticks and sort of shovelled him out and put him down on the bank.

Was that the first snake?

The first and only one I had ever seen. It came into our hut.

02:00 We had the radio going. Another thing I want to mention too. Out in the Ramu River, the sandbanks, little sandbanks, and every day you could go out and see little crocodiles sunning themselves on the sandbanks.

Did you ever go swimming in the river?

No, no. Never went swimming in the river,

02:30 but we did take a couple of shots once at the crocodiles. Because they were called, I can't remember, but the natives reckoned they would come up at night time and take their little piccaninnies, their little babies, little kids. Pukpuks. The natives called them "Pukpuks". It was infested with crocodiles, the river. A big snake did come into our hut one day.

03:00 **Well, I was wondering when you went on your patrols, and you were doing this day after day for five months. Firstly, did you ever take a day off? Did you do your patrols every day?**

No, well not every day. We would go down to the river and sit around. Not sit around but we had to keep an eye out in case you were overrun.

03:30 There are some stories in there of blokes being overrun with the Japs.

Well, did you see any Japs?

No, we didn't see them. They were like us, they were well hidden. But we knew they were there though.

Well, at this stage how were you dealing with the climate?

Very hard. Took a while to get used to it, but it's very hot and humid,

04:00 the jungle, the humidity. Ever been to Cairns? Very similar to Cairns climate.

I lived in Singapore for a while.

Well, you'd know. And the rain. You could always set the clock by the rain, by the storms that would come down. Heavy storms. Tropical storms. Rain used to pour down. About 4 o'clock every afternoon down would come the rain. You would look out and no clouds. But half an hour later they would be there.

04:30 **And so was your little house waterproof?**

Yes, it was pretty waterproof. It's amazing, isn't it, how they made those huts so water never got in?

You said that part of your equipment was a mosquito net?

Oh yes. A mosquito net.

What other insets did you come across? What other insects attacked you?

05:00 There's the mockas. They would attack you around the ankles. Out in the kunai grass the mockas would attack you. They were like a sandfly only a lot bigger. And they'd give you scrub typhus. That's where Dave got his scrub typhus. Mosquitos, beetles. Never light a fire in the night time. As soon as it would get dark

05:30 and you would lay down, it would give your position away with the lights.

When you were on patrols, did you notice much, any birds? Any birdlife around?

Yes, there was a lot of birdlife around. A lot of birdlife in New Guinea. And another thing – I've seen them in Hawaii. A big parrot,

06:00 I can't think of the name now. A lot of birdlife and Cassowaries.

Yes, I was just wondering. You were in this one spot for five months. How well did you get to know the vegetation of the place?

Well, I tried to grow a garden.

Oh, could you tell us about that?

Yes, down the bank of the river. Plants I put down,

06:30 but some came up as weeds.

But what did you try to grow?

I tried to grow something that was growing indigenous to New Guinea. But it wasn't successful, not successful at all. But I'm back in there again.

07:00 **What else are you seeing in there then?**

Nothing. As I said before I didn't have a fishing line. We could have tried some fishing with a fishing line, but we didn't have one. The worst thing was we could get mail in but we couldn't get mail out. I did get a couple of letters from home. I don't know how they got my address but they did. Nadzab must have told them.

07:30 But you couldn't get mail out.

Do you remember the sort of news that you were getting from home?

No, I can't remember that. They used to drop that paper out, the Guinea Gold. I've got a copy of it here. That used to tell you how the war was going on.

You didn't know what was going on?

No, I had no idea what was going on.

08:00 And we were too far away from voice radio, we were too far away. We had to use Morse code nearly all of the time. We were 500 miles from anywhere, from Nadzab anyway.

And I was wondering.

08:30 **There's two of you. Had you known each another before you came out to this station?**

No, never met him before. Never seen him before. He was a nice bloke. He lives in Western Australia now. I been over to see him. Once with these reunions we have in Canberra. That's finished now. Stuart Mulcaster his name was. The other chap, I told you about, his name was Dave Whiten. He died back in Sydney. As far as I know Stuart's still alive.

09:00 **What I was thinking about is that there you are the two of you, working together, quite isolated, for five months in this tropical climate that can be really quite difficult to survive in. What I am getting around to is how did you get on with each other?**

09:30 Well, we got on pretty well. Tell a lot of jokes. He'd tell a joke and I'd tell a joke. We got on pretty well. We didn't have any arguments that I know of.

Were there ever any issues that you had to discuss and you had to make decisions about certain things?

Yes, we used to take it in turns to operate the radio,

10:00 I'd say "Stuey it's your turn tonight, you're on the air tonight with Nadzab." We had to do weather reports every day for the American Bomber Command, I knew that was the 5th Air Force we were working for. Nadzab, they would tell the Americans "What the weather was like up in Northern New Guinea. Was there clouds over the mountains, whether it was foggy, too dangerous for flying?" Hardly any wind. There was no wind problem.

10:30 But visibility was bad on top of the mountains. If your flight path was lower than the mountain then of course, you couldn't see for the cloud base over the mountains. It's a funny thing, New Guinea is a very hot, dry place that's mountainous, and the sides of the valleys, there's a lot of mountains nearly all day sometimes covered with cloud.

11:00 **Well, I was also wondering, what were your moods like?**

Moods?

Did you ever get depressed or bored?

Well, I got a terrible funny sense of humour. I never got depressed or bored. I did get worried. I was more worried not about myself, about my two brothers and I didn't know where they were. I knew where Bob was, but Max I didn't know where he was.

11:30 He was in the commandos. He was in Wewak when the Japs surrendered. But I was very worried about them. But I said “Well, I’m alive”, but I didn’t know if they were alive. Well, I knew about Bobby, but I didn’t know about Max. Then I also worried about our parents, not knowing where we were or what we were doing. I was worried about how they were feeling. That’s just one of those humanity things.

12:00 **How did you know where Bob was?**

Radio. It will tell you in that book how I knew. We had communication. One of our friends used to send messages back to Mum and Dad. Do you want to see it, do you?

I will later, yes.

Yes there, the stories in there, about how we related to each other on the radio.

12:30 And how they sent a message home to Mum and Dad about “How we were safe”. Some of our friends.

And you did that while you were out on the station?

Yes.

Well, what communication were you getting from others?

They set up a station at . . . a bloke called Spud Murphy. He won a few medals for his job. They went over to this little island and they couldn’t

13:00 get through to Nadzab, so they got in touch with us and we intercepted their message traffic and relayed it to Nadzab. They were too far away. But the chap named Bill Baker, he’s since died.

Well, just getting back to just the two of you being at this camp. Didn’t you ever get irritated over anything over the five months?

13:30 Oh, yes. We would get irritated, curse each other. “What the bloody hell are you doing, Stuey?” Something like that. I’d swear on the phone.

Can you think of any examples of what would be frustrating for you, or how you would annoy him?

Yes, you see the natives, they would go and sit down behind the bush anywhere in the jungle, but we had to dig a latrine,

14:00 dig a hole in the ground. And Stuey would go out and spend half a bloody hour on the hole. I said “Come on Stuey, it’s my turn there now.” Yes, so when that filled up we had to dig another one. Latrines.

So you took it in turns to do that job?

14:30 Yes, we would dig the holes. We had no buckets or cans, just the ground.

So I imagine you would have had to make sure you really were sharing the tasks equally?

Oh, we were. We helped each other. We knew we were stuck there together with each other and we had to make a sort of a pact not to get on each other’s nerves.

15:00 Make a pact “Well Stuey, you and I, we’re living in this hole of a place. We could be here for many months.” Which we were. “We’re not going to have any squabbles or get on each other. Because it’s not going to do either of us any good and we won’t survive. Go down hill.” So we sort of made that pact that we’d get on with each other. That’s when Dave got evacuated with scrub typhus.

Yes, at what point was he evacuated?

15:30 After about three months. After three months he was evacuated. Brought a little plane in to take him home. He was very sick. I thought “He was going to die on the station”. Because some blokes did.

Well, had he been in the hut with you as well?

Oh, yes. Three of us in the one place.

And what were the symptoms of scrub typhus?

Fever. Fever and terrible throats.

16:00 Like typhoid, as far as I know. I’m not qualified as a medical, but it was scrub typhus he had. And then there was another one called blackwater fever, and another one dengue. My brother Bob, he got dengue fever. I didn’t get malaria till I come home. And I had months down

16:30 at Lady Duggan Rest Home down at Portsea. Ever heard of that place? Lady Duggan Rest Home? I had BT malaria. That’s benign tertian. We had to take Atebrin tablets all the time, it’s in that bit of paper. Had to take a tablet every day, Atebrin tablet. But the mosquito that will give you the malaria, the Anopheles mosquito,

17:00 they stand up on their head like that when they bite you. They're not like an ordinary mosquito. They're called Anopheles. And there are bloody thousands of them too. Nearly eat you alive. So when I came home I had to take Atebrin. Down I went with malaria, terrible thing. One minute you're that hot you can hardly, like in a furnace.

17:30 Terrible fever. Yet after a few hours it all leaves you and you're that cold and you're shivering, freezing cold. You wouldn't believe it. The different ratios between the two, with malaria. I ended up getting a disability allowance for malaria. Tinea. I had tinea on my feet. That's another bad thing. Tinea. Malaria.

18:00 **And were there any other skin conditions that you developed?**

Oh, I didn't. There are other skin problems, tropical ulcers. I didn't. But I did see fellows with tropical ulcers. That's the thing that was up there too in New Guinea,

18:30 can't think of the name of it. Nearly all the natives had it. All their stomachs would blow up. Not berri berri. It's a well known thing.

19:00 You were in Singapore, they had it over there in Singapore too.

Well, it must have been quite an issue for people to get ill out in this remote area?

Well, that's right. No medical practitioners, you had to cure yourself. Find out what's wrong with yourself.

Did you have any first aid training?

19:30 No, didn't have any.

Well, can you tell me when your colleague came down with scrub typhus, what did you do about it? Did you have to radio back?

Yes, he was that silly, that sick. We radioed Nadzab that "He was sick". Dave Whiten. He was very ill.

20:00 He knew what it was. He said himself that "He had scrub typhus". They sent him back to Nadzab and they evacuated him home. But we heard later that he died. Tropical diseases. I can't think of that other disease though. The natives used to get all bloated up.

Was it yaws?

No, it wasn't yaws.

20:30 **And did you know why Dave was not replaced by anybody else?**

Well, that's the funny thing, because most of the stations are only two people. They sent me out there, I suppose Dave could have come home then. I don't know why we had three. But he was a sergeant,

21:00 we were corporals, although only acting corporals, when we came home. We got 10/6 a day pay as a corporal, but when we came home they took it off us. Back to an ordinary sig.

Well, did it make any difference that he was a sergeant and the two of you were corporals?

No, it didn't make any difference to us.

And can you remember when you heard that Dave had died?

21:30 When we come back to Australia and I got in touch with his brother Ken, which we got from his family in Sydney. Because his brother came to our reunion in Canberra. That's how I knew that he had died. His brother, we had a reunion every two years in Canberra, and Ken Whitely came and I asked him.

22:00 He got a surprise that I knew his bother, Dave. He told me that "He had died". That's how I found out that he had died. Young fellow too, 24, 25.

Were you ever frightened when you were out on this station?

Yes, I did have my moments of being scared. You know, I said, "Just as well we've got the river between us

22:30 or the Japs would run over the top of us." They didn't have boats or something. Because it was a very wide river where we were. We were on the bend that floats out in the Bismarck Sea. There's another river up further, the Sepik River, too. There's the Ramu River then there's the Markham River where we were at Nadzab. We were on the Ramu River and Angorum where this place where we used to send radio reports back to the American Air Force. They used to come and

23:00 bomb out of this place. There was a big Jap concentration there. That was just up north of us on the Sepik River.

When you said that you were in touch with Bob, were you in touch with any of the other spotters? Did you know what was going on?

Oh, yeah. We were coded up. We had code books with trent code. A thing called trent code, a thing like a slide rule.

23:30 Unless it was serious or rush, we had to send it in plain language. But everything was all coded up and decoded. But if a flight of Japanese bombers went over, just plain language. You would just say, “There’s a flock of bandits flying your way.”

24:00 **At what point did you hear of a spotter had been caught by a Jap, the enemy?**

Well, I didn’t. When I come back home, I read it in that book. But when Stuey and I came back to Nadzab they were all gone. The whole unit had gone except the quartermaster, so we came home with the rear party.

24:30 **Just asking a few more questions about your time there? I was wondering what you would actually do in the evenings?**

Well, as soon as the dark come we went to bed. We would cover ourselves up, keep the mosquitos off us, lay there and talk and tell dirty yarns, something like that. Because we couldn’t have lights.

25:00 Just lay down and put the mosquito nets over us. Use the stretchers we had made. We had a stretcher each. Cross pieces and runners up between them, like we made a bed off the ground.

25:30 Like in Queensland, and Singapore the same, insects and beetles, cockroaches. All these nasty insects.

You must have developed a very strong bond between the two of you in particular?

A bond. We were good mates. Because he’s been over to see me, and I went over to see him in Perth since we come home.

26:00 And he’s come over here a couple of times. Met him in Canberra. We come back to Balcombe. When we came home from New Guinea we were stationed in Balcombe. He married a girl in the AWAS [Australian Women’s Army Service], he met at Balcombe.

You must have been very aware of each other’s strengths and weaknesses, were you?

Yes, I suppose we were.

26:30 It’s like living with your family. Two dissimilar people but you sort of have that feeling, that bondship. But I found you can only get in the army, too.

When you said two dissimilar people, in what ways weren’t you alike?

Well, I suppose we had different upbringings, I guess.

In what respect?

27:00 Well, once they dropped beer out to us. Bottles of beer. I tied a string around mine and put it in the river to keep it cool, but Stuey he got on to it and drank the lot. He got drunk, lay down in the kunai grass. I had to revive him, not revive him, but sober him up. They dropped, sent a message with it, “Please de-cork the bottle straight away.”

27:30 But that’s a silly, they done a silly thing by sending beer out to us.

That wasn’t a regular occurrence then?

No, somebody up in Nadzab got that idea. Don’t know who it was.

And you didn’t ever drink beer?

No, I wasn’t a drinker, an alcoholic in those days. I like my whiskey now, though.

Well, that would have been unusual, wouldn’t it, for someone in the army not to drink beer?

28:00 Yes, I suppose it was. I did drink beer when I was home here. But up there, it was too hot, terribly hot.

Yes, another thing. How did you wash yourself or your clothes? Did you use the village water?

Used to wash it in the river. Just walk down the bank. The river came around there

28:30 like that and we were right in the corner. And we used to do our washing there. Hang it on a branch and it would be dry in half an hour. Underclothes and all.

And I have to ask about shaving? There seemed to be a real insistence in the army about shaving every day.

Yes, I didn’t shave every day but I shaved every two or three days.

29:00 We had soap and razors. I had to shave, we had toilet gear, because I reckoned I looked horrible with a

beard.

But over the time that you were there, did your relationship with the native population change at all?

Yes, I got very friendly, the natives got very friendly with us

29:30 towards the end. They couldn't do enough for us. "Lik lik master", they used to call me. Because we used to give them some tobacco which they dropped out for us. Used to give them rice and prunes. We had rice and prunes till we looked like them. Months and months living on rice and prunes.

30:00 **But you know you got your supply drops, did anyone ever come and visit you?**

No, we never got any visitors. Oh, there was a patrol officer came out once. But he just went through. Because Stuey and I we went walking once, we found a lake that wasn't even on the map. Over towards the Sepik River.

Well, that's interesting. What sort of maps did you have with you?

30:30 Well, we had an army location area map. That's all. Didn't have any government maps. We had a map, so you could take a map reference in case you got hunted out, so you could find your way home. Gives you the compass bearings.

31:00 **Do you think that the training that you had before you left to go to New Guinea, sufficiently prepared you for the job you had to perform there?**

As far as the physical side, I wasn't quite prepared. But as far as the radio side of it, the job we had to do, I was prepared for that. Because I was mad about radio and it sort of came second nature to me.

31:30 **Well, when you talk about the physical side of it, what else could you have done to be better prepared physically?**

Well, I suppose, I should have had more physical gymnastics. Didn't have it. Didn't have pushups, that sort of thing.

So did you feel that you were lacking in the physical strength?

32:00 Yes, I wasn't as big, as robust or strong as I thought "I should have been".

Well, what did you do that made you think this? What were the things you had to do that brought you to that conclusion that you should have been physically fitter?

Well, carrying kit bags, rifles and heavy gear around and wearing big, thick heavy boots. Although we had light clothing, the other stuff was heavy.

32:30 Kit bags, rifle. You see, the rifle weighs nine pound, kit bag can weigh forty pound. And everywhere you went, you had to take it with you. Even though, out in the spotting station you didn't, but

Well, did you have a first aid kit with you?

Yes, we had a first aid kit. Pills, tablets, anti malaria tablets.

33:00 First Aid kit with bandages, not sulphur, morphine for the wounds, and other medications, Aspirins.

Did you have to use much of it?

We didn't use much of it at all, if I remember correctly. Never got a headache.

33:30 I was a light sort of fellow. I think I sort of survived better than big heavy blokes. I sort of adjusted. I was already fit, light, sort of lived between the air waves.

Look when Dave became ill, what did you do initially? Did you have to care for him?

34:00 Yes, we looked after him. Radioed straight away for them "To send a plane to evacuate him". We had this little runway at the side of the river which the ANGAU people built and they weren't long. The next day they sent out a plane and we loaded him onto the plane. He was evacuated. It's in that book somewhere.

34:30 **And just another question? I was just wondering about your relationship with the ANGAU people. Did you mix with them very much?**

Yes, they were good. They were the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit. Yes, they were good.

Were they a mixture of New Guineans and Australian?

No, Australians. Nearly all Australians. Oh, they were Europeans. Could have been some Germans or Dutch amongst them. But they were very good lot of people, the ANGAU.

35:00 And they arranged to supply us with a cookboy to do our washing. Begowi his name was. His English

was pretty good, but his pidgin English was better.

Well, we were wondering if you could talk to us a little more in pidgin? But then you'll have to translate it for us.

"Well, bihaim time we stap along yupela you kai kai belong me."

35:30 That means "That when we stop talking you can kai kai, that means meal", food, have you heard of that, have you? "Bihaim time you kai kai belong me." That means "We both eat". I got pretty good at pidgin English.

And did all the Europeans up there learn pidgin English?

36:00 Oh yes. If you spend a long time with the natives you have to learn some type of pidgin English. Behind time we stop, we stop talking. Don't talk any more.

Well, with the ANGAU people, oh . . .

We asked a bloke about a piano once up there, play the piano,

36:30 and he said "Big fella bockus", that's "Box", "Big fella bockus teeth for long im, he fight him teeth and belly bring out." He played the piano, fight his teeth, that's his keyboard, and his belly would cry out. The piano player.

Well, it seems to me as if you had to draw on all your resources, particularly you mental resources.

37:00 Well, we had to do a job and we knew we had to be resolute. If we packed up or went down we were letting the unit down. If we were well enough to carry on, carry on but if not, can't survive. But you had a job to do and you knew you had to be resolute and do it because

37:30 if you don't you're letting the unit down because some blokes were in worse condition than we were in. But it's in you, that you've got to do a job that you're sent to do, in the army.

But do you have, did you have a strong religious faith?

Yes, I'm a Christian. I was confirmed in the Church of England by the Archbishop of Goulburn

38:00 in 1932, 34 or something. And I go in church parades, and I'm also a Monarchist. Another thing I am, a Monarchist.

Well, did you think your religious faith helped you?

Yes, I did say some prayers to myself from time to time. It helped, you've got to have some spiritual understanding.

38:30 **What about Stuey?**

Yes, he was much the same as me. He was a good fellow.

You know you also said then "That if you couldn't cope you could be evacuated".

That's right.

39:00 **Now, I wonder how people could decide that they could no longer cope? Did you know of anyone who had done that?**

Yes, but unless you become suicidal, become troppo, or something like that or couldn't cope, one of you would send a message back and say "My co-worker needs help, get him out of here."

39:30 Because we could both operate the radio. Morse code and plain language. So if it fell on one to do it all, to get the other fellow out, then you'd know what you've got to do.

And of course, you were in radio contact with other people, and this was a regular occurrence.

Yes, E16 was our call sign. Dit-da-da-da-da-dit-dit-da-dt. Dit-da-da-da-da-dit-dit-da-dt. You'd send that time and time again until

40:00 somebody answers you. And they'll send their call sign. Dit-da-da-da-da-dit. It means "I've got contact with you". Say what you want to say. Spell it out in morse code. If you were close you would say it on the microphone in plain language. "Send out a plane, me mate's fell down a hole and broke his leg." Excuse my mirth!

Tape 5

00:30 **I want to go over your time in Annenberg in a bit more detail. And firstly I wanted to ask, you**

said that the natives had been indoctrinated by the Japanese. What evidence did you encounter of that indoctrination?

Well, we did see the natives wearing Japanese clothing, coming into our village

01:00 where I was. And we got hold of him and made him strip off. But what I mean indoctrination, the Japanese were there a long time before we got there and they were nurturing them, I don't know if they were nurturing them or being cruel to them, or what they did, but we would say they were pro-Japanese as I put it.

So what led you to think that?

01:30 Well, they were very wary of us, the natives, when we first got there. They sort of looked at us with mistrust. We had that feeling. There was nothing said that indicated that they did, but we had that feeling that they were pro-Japanese. Because the Japanese had been there long before us.

Now ANGAU had obviously been there before you to build the landing strip?

Yes, they had.

02:00 **So, had anybody sought the agreement of those villagers to have you posted in the village?**

Not that that I know of, Zelda.

Because I was also wondering if you were the first white men they had ever come in contact with?

Well, we might have been. There were some pygmies up in that area, little people. And they probably had never seen white men before, or had very little to do with white men. They could have been.

02:30 **I am just imagining that it could have been quite strange for you, when you first arrived in that village, the three of you. Talk a little bit about your first few days?**

Well, it was an odd feeling. We said "How are we going to settle into this place?" We were surrounded by natives in grass skirts and hairdos and what have you. It was a new world to us. "How we're going to fit in with them,

03:00 or they've got to fit in with us?" You see, it was two different doctrines, human beings. We had our reservations, we all had our reservations, whether we'd get along all right with them. They kept their quarters and we kept ours. We didn't interfere with them in any way. They sent out the PIB, they call them "Local Police" up there but they're the Papuan Infantry Battalion. They sent some of them out to us, to guard us,

03:30 and we sent off to get some rifles for them, and they sent out the rifles, but they didn't have bolts with them. Well, that was the army, they made a mistake at the Q stores.

So how were you received by these villagers when you first arrived?

Well, they were all right. They were a bit reluctant till we started trading with them. A bit stand offish. They didn't know whether, I think they thought "We

04:00 were an imposition on their territory a bit", you know, we shouldn't be there. They became more acceptable as time went on. We gave them goods, gave them tobacco, mainly tobacco, because they smoke a thing up there called, I can't think of the name right now, but it makes them intoxicated. I should know the name of it.

04:30 **A plant?**

Yes. I think it comes out of - I can't think of the name of that.

Could you describe the plant?

Yes, they rub, they rub it together,

05:00 make a cigarette out of it and smoke it. Should know the name of it. Seen them all half stupid with it.

Not gunja?

Not gunja, no. Might be in that book. No, I can't think of the name of that, but they did smoke that stuff, made them intoxicated.

And what did you think about that?

05:30 We thought "It was silly of them smoking that stuff". It was a drug. But that was their culture and we didn't interfere with them in any way. We didn't go out there to try to alienate the natives or tell them how to live their lives. That wasn't our role to do that.

06:00 But they were there with us and we were there with them. We couldn't dictate to them or rouse on them or show any discipline towards them for what they should do. Because it had been going on for

hundreds of years. You can't change them.

So when you say they were a bit wary of you, how was that expressed?

Well, the way they would look at you. They would sort of look at you

06:30 in a furtive sort of way whether – somebody looks at you as if to say "I don't know whether I can trust you", something like that. Just the way they looked at you and you'd walk around them and they'd sort of back off a bit and walk away from you.

Were they perhaps a bit afraid of you?

I think they could be a bit afraid. I could say that, they were a bit afraid. We were coming in on their patch and telling them what to do.

07:00 They were a bit worried about that.

I mean you had lots of weapons with you as well.

That's right. We had rifles, pistols and grenades, what have you. And we had our jungle greens uniforms. Dressed up as soldiers. But the Japanese had already been there before us, before they retreated. That's why we said "We were a bit worried about them" because they were indoctrinated by the, I say indoctrinated, but they were probably brow-beat

07:30 by the Japanese, and they thought "They would get the same from us", but we didn't do that, didn't boss them around at all.

And, when you first arrived then, who showed you to your accommodation?

08:00 Well, we seen this little – well nobody showed us, we just seen this little hut there and we thought "That will do us". And we just took over this hut. The hut, I've got a photo of there and we moved in. No, that's right we had to see the Lulawai, called the Lulawai, he's the head of the village and we negotiated with him

08:35 about the hut there. And we said "We're here to fight your pandam." As far as I remember. You see this was 70 years ago, over 60 years ago.

Yes I was thinking it would have been important to establish contact?

Yes, the "Lulawai", we called him. That's the village chief.

09:00 **What language did you communicate with him in?**

Well, we gave our pidgin English.

Had you already studied it?

No, we didn't study it. Down at Nadzab we were talking in pidgin English between ourselves all the time.

So what did you say to this chief?

Well, we said,

09:30 I couldn't say the exact words, that long ago, I can't remember the exact words, but we did say, "Masta, can we have that place there. Belong you belong me now."

And what sort of a person was the Lulawai?

Well, they're all right. They're intelligent sort of people, because they select their own peers.

10:00 The natives have their own peers, like all civilisations. They were fairly amiable.

The Lulawai was elected, was he?

He would have been elected by his own people. I think it is the Lulawai.

And did he give you any advice on how to conduct yourselves in the village?

No, they couldn't tell us.

10:30 We would do our own thing. Let them do their own thing, and we'd do our own thing. Although we had to be, not to be seen as arrogant or obtrusive in their lives. We had to win them over to our side. Because early in the war the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels

11:00 helped our fellows on the Kokoda Trail when they were evacuating the wounded. Carried them down the mountain and all that sort of thing. So we had to make sure, get the natives conducive to our thinking and also with our behaviour that we didn't infringe on them and they didn't infringe on us. But as time went on, we got very friendly with some of the natives.

11:30 **In Nadzab, had you received any instructions about how to behave in the native villages?**

No, we never received any instructions.

So you went in knowing nothing about their culture?

Nothing about their culture, whatsoever.

I'm just thinking that must have been a very steep learning curve for you?

12:00 Oh, it was. It was, well we didn't have any instructions. We had militant education. What to do, what not to do. But instructions about what to do with the natives. Well, we were told not to attack them, beat them up, or anything like that, by the officers.

12:30 **I believe that New Guinean people have quite strong taboos.**

Yeah, I think they do to, but I don't know what they are, but taboos, what to do what not to do. They eat, I can't think of the stuff they eat.

13:00 Talk about their gardens, we got into their gardens. Sago Palm is another thing we had. They didn't grow any rice but they grew a thing like a potato, what we were talking about earlier. I can't think . . .

Taro.

Yes, taro. And sago palms.

You can eat the fruit of the sago palm.

Yes, it's like a sago.

13:30 **Did you eat it or cook it?**

Yes, we had some. Boiled it up.

And your cook boy, Begowi, was he a local?

Yes, he was a local. I'd say he was a local. But ANGAU might have brought him in. I'm not sure about that. But he was very friendly. Begowi. I'd like to go back and see him again.

What sort of person was he? What was he like?

Only a little fellow. He used to call me "Lik lik master,

14:00 little master. Me boy belong you. Me boy belong you. Bihaim time me tok along you masta, You lik lik master." I remember those words.

Did he live with you?

He lived in a hut in the village, yes.

14:30 **But not in your hut?**

No, he didn't live with us.

Did he eat with you?

No, he didn't eat with us either. He had his own place. I think he used to eat with the Lulawai.

And did he ever teach you anything about local language or customs?

No, he never, no he didn't. We had to learn our own way. The way they talk and everything.

15:00 **And what about you? Did you ever teach him English or . .?**

Yes, we'd teach him to say "Thank you". Thank you, and "Please". Those sort of simplified things. But he was quite good. He was quite a good fellow, that native.

Did you teach him how to handle your equipment, your radio?

No, no. He weren't allowed to come near that, no.

15:30 Otherwise you'd have all of the village kids in there playing with the knobs.

So the Lulawai obviously agreed to you staying in the village?

Oh, I think ANGAU, the Administrative Unit, the [Australian] New Guinea Administrative Unit. They're in charge of the natives all over the islands, in New Guinea. They've got voting power there.

16:00 **And when you first arrived, did everyone stare at you?**

Well, they did, they were a bit reluctant to accept us. They sort of stood off and gazed at us as though we were from out of Mars or somewhere. They didn't rush up and put their arms around us and say

"Welcome". They were sort of wary of us, I'd say, because not many

16:33 white men had been there in such a length of time. There had been the missionaries, the German missionaries had been there years ago, because there was a German mission station in Annenberg. The missionaries had been there before and sort of trained them into certain European things, but they had their own culture. And I think they were a bit wary of us, but they didn't run away.

17:00 **So what religion did they practise?**

I can't tell you. They've got their own religion. They'd get together and jump up and down and get into groups and dance around and around. But I don't know what religion it is called. I've got no idea.

Were you ever invited to those ceremonies?

Yes, we went to one once, Stuey and I, down on the bank of the river. Where they got around in circles

17:30 and danced and changed and painted themselves all up with paint. They were masters at doing that, putting crosses on their face and their cheeks and chests. 'Cause they were all bare. Painted their bodies with cocoa. And some other stuff. Some paint they would put on, it came out of the ground anyway. It was a sing sing. It's called "A sing sing".

18:00 **And how long did that last?**

Oh, it lasted for a couple of hours or more. Might last two or three hours. Sing sing. They danced around and get all their headgear out. Matter of fact I've got a tape here from when I went back to New Guinea, of them all having a sing sing.

Were you invited to participate?

18:30 No, I couldn't dance like them.

Well, how did they dance? Can you describe it?

Well, they sort of hop around, they hopped, and make all these funny noises.

Like what?

I can't say it. They made a funny noise, their own musical noises. But they do hop,

19:00 it's not a dance, they hop, they go round and round in circles. Very spectacular. I'll show you a photo later. A photo of them in their headgear, I've got in there.

Well, what did you think of that at the time?

It was very spectacular to look at. Very spectacular. And they smoked this stuff,

19:30 I can't think of the name of it. But it makes them high. They're all out of their minds with this drug. They're not vicious, they're happy. They're very happy-go-lucky people. They're not evil minded. They don't go around stabbing each other like that. But we were very friendly towards each other. It's hard to understand. Like the Aborigines, I suppose.

20:00 **Did they ever offer you some of this strange smoke to try?**

No, they didn't offer me any. I wouldn't have smoked it anyway. I can't think of the name of it. My memories going on me. I can't remember it.

It will probably come back in a while.

20:30 It was like opium. It makes them happy. It's not opium, but it has the same effect on them. I got it! It's betel nut!

It had just gone through my mind!

They chew it. Yes they chew it. And it makes them drunk, it intoxicates them. Yes, betel nut.

21:00 They get it off a tree. They get addicted to it. They can't knock it off. It's like opium and marijuana.

What were your impressions of the local men?

The natives? Big strapping fellows amongst them. Seemed to be very fit, but they age very quickly, the males. Not so much the women.

21:30 The males when they're in their twenties, they look like they're in their sixties. They age very quickly. I think it must be the climate. The women seem to hold up better, they don't look so old. They don't wear bras. Look a bit saggy some of them. If I can use that expression?

Well, my next question is what did you think about the local women?

22:00 Well, the young girls, some of them were very pretty, and very self-conscious, they would do themselves

up. They liked the men. But they aged. See, when they're thirty they're old women. I think it's the climate, or something, the breeding of them, they age quickly.

How would they do themselves up?

Well, they would paint themselves.

22:30 They've got this ochre, I think it is, paint you would get out of the ground, out of the river bank, wherever they got it from. They'd paint themselves up. Around the forehead, the chest around here. Like all women, they'd try and make themselves attractive. I think the girls are better looking than the fellows, though. I say that because I'm a male.

23:00 **That could be said of almost any culture.**

Yes, that's right. Women are more attractive.

And, living in isolation from your own people and your own women for so long, were you ever tempted to start a relationship with some of the women?

No, I tell you what. When they walked past you, the smell would nearly knock you over. They've got this terrible smell. Must be the oil and stuff

23:30 they put on them, apparently. They rub coconut all over them and make themselves attractive to their own people. But the Marys, we called them "Marys", but I said to Stuey, "There's a Mary just gone past, Stu, I just smelled her."

So that's a 'no', is it?

That's a no. We never got any relationships with the native women. That's a no no. Although I believe some of the

24:00 missionaries did in the early days. Got married in their own custom. The church missionaries. 'Cause they lived there all their lives.

And my next question is, what were your impressions of the children?

They were happy little kids. They would get in the river, jump up and down in the water, and scream and yell.

24:30 Like all children they were uninhibited, dance up and down and play like all children. Dive off tree branches into the river. The kids were quite all right. They were happy little individuals.

So, as the people grew to trust you and not be so wary of you, were you free to

25:00 **wander around the village and chat to people?**

Yes, we were, if we wanted to walk around and have a talk. They would have a look at us of course, but we didn't want to impinge ourselves on their land. Go into their huts. Because they had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, they had pigs, they had pens, built their own to have

25:30 their WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in, just a natural thing to walk around and have a look, but we never got in their way or done something we shouldn't do. Just kept a distant relationship, sort of thing.

So were you able to buy chickens and eggs and so on to eat?

No, we never bought anything with them. We traded.

26:00 We never took any of their eggs. The only thing we got out of them was their garden, pawpaws, and what was the other fruit they had? Taro, and sago and some of the other vegetables they ate there, they had in their gardens. We just traded mostly tobacco with them. And also

26:30 when our supplies were dropped, they'd come down by little parachutes, the parachutes were coloured, red and blue, all different beautiful colours, made out of silk I think it was, and we used to trade the parachutes, because we couldn't do anything with them, little parachutes. They took the, the native women used to cut them up and make skirts out of them. Parachutes

27:00 from the Royal Australian Air Force. They were happy to get these parachutes, I tell you. And they're very pretty. Haven't seen one since, since I come home. Not great bit parachutes, only like an umbrella size. Used to drop our supplies down, the Royal Australian Air Force. We'd go out and get them, they'd have a little plastic board on the bottom of it.

27:30 Three ply board and that's what I made my board for playing drafts, draft board, out of it. Parachutes. It was what I would call a nomadic existence out there. But I was there, that's it.

28:00 **So, were you ever invited into people's homes?**

No, they didn't have homes as we'd call them homes. They only had huts, grass huts, of kunai grass and palm trees and ferns. And they had, they did have benches inside. They built these high benches inside, and they'd sleep up off the ground on these benches. Just lay there, no blankets or anything,

28:30 almost nude. They had their own cemetery. They'd bury their dead, they don't bury them. They'd have this separate hut, and they put them up on these racks, the bodies up on the racks, and they would be there forever. We had a look in there, and they just had these skeletons on these racks. They don't bury them in the ground. Not where we were anyway.

Was that hut in the village? Or a little way out?

29:00 No, it was in the village.

What was it called?

Oh, I can't remember what it was called. But they had poles put up and nobody was allowed to go past these poles or something. They had their own laws.

While you were there, was there a wedding in the village?

Well, we never seen any weddings, No, there was no weddings,

29:30 never seen any weddings. There could have been, but I don't know whether they got married or not.

And look, when your friend got sick, when Dave got sick, I wonder whether the villagers offered any remedies for his illness?

No, I don't think we told them. Because they might give him something that was detrimental to him.

30:00 **So, did you never try any of the local medicines?**

No, I don't know, I'll think of that name in a minute, that stuff. It was a panacea they used to have, it was a panacea for all ills, the medicine they had. But just the one thing. I'll think of the name of it shortly.

Was that a traditional medicine or an introduced medicine?

30:30 No, it was a traditional medicine. Something that had been passed down through the ages I'd say.

And was it a plant that was boiled, or a plant that was eaten raw?

No, just a plant they ate raw. They ate it raw. God, I can't think of the name of that. It might be in that book somewhere.

31:00 **So the Papuan Infantry Battalion were not locals?**

No, the PIB came up from Port Moresby. You see, Papua is the bottom half of New Guinea. New Guinea is at the top half. Say PNG. Papua/New Guinea, two separate states like Victoria/New South Wales. Papua is down the bottom side, like the Owen Stanley Ranges, and New Guinea, we were in New Guinea,

31:30 the New Guinea side. So two, you might see PNG, you might see PNG, Papua/New Guinea. The bottom half is called Papua, the top half is called New Guinea.

So how were the PIB received by the locals?

Oh, I think they received them all right. Well, I think they had to because they were police.

32:00 They called them "Police Boys". We sent a message out to get rifles for the police boys. They are actually called Papuans, Papuan soldiers, but the term up there is police boys.

And these Papuan infantry troops that were sent for you, were they to protect you from the Japanese?

32:30 Yes, they were, that's right. They were sent out there for sentry duty and to keep an eye on us. They were actually soldiers, they were doing a soldier's job, but their main concern was as sentries. Sentries to look after our radio station, because they said "If you engage the Japanese

33:00 and you get killed and knocked off, we haven't got a radio station there". The main crux of the situation was, "Whatever we do, we've got to keep that radio station intact. If you lose that, the communication for that area is gone, and it would take awhile to set up a new station and get the personnel to do it." Because to cover the unit we were stretched to the limit with personnel, for all these stations they had.

33:30 These two man stations, they started with some three-man stations, but they had to pull the third man off to put him on another station.

So what are they wearing, the PIB troops?

They were wearing a sort of a uniform, they weren't wearing grass skirts or anything like that. They were wearing proper dark green clothing, long pants or short pants, a shirt.

34:00 Got some photos in there, I think.

And did they stay in the village as well?

Yeah, they stayed in the village as well, but in the outskirts. They used to set up a sentry post at night, in case the Japs came across the river. They were sort of guards.

Did the Japs ever come across the river?

No, never come across, thank God.

And had you and Stuey and Dave, had you worked out a contingency plan in case you were attacked?

34:30 Yes, we had to, well we were instructed by our officers, before we went out, well first thing we had to do was destroy the code book, then we had to destroy the radio equipment, in case it falls into their hands. Just smash it up and, of course, if the Japs got on and started to talk our language

35:00 on the radio, they wouldn't do it, of course, couldn't do it. And not to be taken by the enemy and we had this thing, a little thing about that long, like a slide rule, a little thing to make these code words up. If we looked like getting captured, we had to eat it, they told us "To eat it". It was a cardboard, sort of thing, and it was called a – I said it earlier,

35:30 it was a coding machine, like a slide rule. You get the alphabet, twenty six letters and you get twenty six numbers. But then you'd make a word up with the numbers corresponding with the letters in the alphabet. And that's how you would code up your messages. And you would send them in five letter groups back to the headquarters.

36:00 **In the event that you were attacked you were to eat your cipher?**

Cipher thing, chew it up and eat it. Don't leave it lying around on the ground or else the Japs would get hold of it.

Destroy your code book?

Yeah.

Destroy your radio equipment. But what were you going to do?

Well, we had to retreat down the valley and hope they would send down a rescue mission to get us.

36:33 **So did you plan a path of retreat?**

Yes, we had a situation where we said "If we've got to get out, this is where we go. We go back towards a place called", oh, it's in the book, a place called Tsili Tsili, I think. No, not Tsili Tsili. The radio station just down below us, there was another one down below us, that chap that was on that, he's died since he come home. Yes, that book, I'll have to show you that.

Who decided on that escape route?

37:00 Hmmm?

How did you decide about it?

Well, we worked it out ourselves, because we knew where the other radio station, we knew where that radio station was. If we had to get away we'd make for that radio station and once we got there we could relay to Nadzab where we were and that's what happened. Contingencies were put in place for that but it didn't happen, thank God.

37:30 **Indeed. And speaking of codes, you had a private code with your brother, I believe?**

I did.

Could you tell us about that?

Well, it was the way we sent out Morse code. I used to do a few extra, if I sent him a message, said "How are you, Bob?", instead of, when I'd say "Bob", da-dit-da-dit-da-da-da-dit-da-dit, I said, da-dit-da-dit-da-da-da-da-dit-da-dit-da-da-da.

38:00 He would know that was me sending him the message. He would know it was me. We would put a few extra dits on the end of our last letter in the code. We already wrote a letter.

Oh, you had arranged that before you were posted?

Yeah.

What use did you put that secret code to?

That indicated to him that I was all right. And I knew that he was all right.

38:30 He was posted down to Milne Bay or Mullins Harbour actually, a place called Mullins Harbour. But the

officers, they got onto that, he got onto it somehow. I didn't tell him but, don't know who told him.

So was that some comfort to you, being able to contact him?

It was, yeah, because being a twin, there's no two people closer together than twins.

39:00 When you're brought up together and go to Sunday School looking the same, and go to school looking the same.

Tape 6

00:30 **I was wondering how you powered the radio?**

Batteries. We had big 12 volt batteries in series, that means we made a 24 volt battery, and we had a Briggs & Stratton battery charger which they dropped out to us when we got the set out there and we had these down the bank of the river

01:00 in a cave. Where we could take the batteries down and charge them up with a battery charger. And they dropped petrol down to us too in drums. I think I might have said that earlier. And that's how we charged up our batteries

So petrol-powered batteries?

Petrol-powered battery chargers. Yes.

Fantastic.

And that was down in a cave in a bank. The Japanese had cut this cave out of the bank before they left there and we put our battery charger in there, Briggs & Stratton battery

01:30 charger, and we used to charge our batteries in series, two together.

Well, that was handy that the Japanese had already created that spot.

Yes, that was very handy. Briggs & Stratton used to make a lot of noise, but it was very quiet down in there.

Sorry, this battery charger, is it like a little generator?

Yes, it is. It's like a generator, it's like a lawn mower.

02:00 The engine on my lawn mower is a Briggs & Stratton too. It's just a little generator, it generates current. It's not for generating lights or anything like that, it's only for battery charging.

And then the radio would run off one 12 volt battery, would it?

Yes, run it for a long time.

Did you ever have problems with radios breaking down?

No, very seldom. We had an

02:30 AWA 3BZ [Australian Wireless Association] radio. There's a photo of it in that book in there.

Could you describe it to me?

Well, nowadays it's only one unit. But with the ones we had there was the radio itself and on top of it there was the loud speakers, two units. One was a transmitter,

03:00 one was the receiver, one on top of the other. One to send messages on and one to receive on, and it was called a "Transceiver". And they were both about the same size and the speakers were separate again.

So, how big was the whole ensemble?

Well, about half as big as that television set, I suppose, lengthwise. Can I get the book to show it to you?

03:30 **No, because we need to get you to describe it in words.**

It was a Briggs & Stratton 3BZ transceiver. It had a receiver on top and a transmitter on the bottom with plug in crystals. And it was about that case, that black case there, about as big as that.

04:00 A bit longer than that and a bit higher.

Two foot by one foot?

Yes, about and they sat on top of each other. It's called a transceiver, one for receiving and one for

sending. But nowadays it's all in the one unit.

Were there ever problems in transmitting or receiving?

No, never any problems. We didn't experience any problems anyway.

04:30 **And what about interference with your messages?**

Well, we think the Japs got on and tried to jam us. But we just changed frequencies. When that happens we just put another frequency changer, a thing with a little plug on it, change frequencies, another frequency, and up you send the code word of the station you were sending to, "That you were changing frequency" and they'd also

05:00 change the receiver. Crystal, plug in crystals they were called. But they set on 455 kilocycles. They just set on that, you can't vary it. It's a fixed crystal frequency, and they have the same, the receiving station has the same in their receiver. Matches our transmitter, fixed crystal.

05:30 Of course, we changed frequency every day. You couldn't transmit on the one frequency all the time in case you got intercepted.

And how many times a day would you be transmitting?

Oh, well sometimes three, in the morning and late in the afternoon, or at night, three times. But we had set times, we called them times scheds [Schedules]. They were allocated to us

06:00 when we went out and we knew when we sent out on that sched the station we were sending to was waiting to hear us.

Were there times when you couldn't make it at the scheduled time?

No, we always made sure that we were there at the scheduled time because it would cause concern down at Nadzab if they were waiting for your scheduled call and you didn't come through, they'd probably think some damage, or something's happened to you.

06:30 **And so, how would you tune into Tokyo Rose?**

Well, we had to plug in broadcast crystals. Instead of short wave crystals for the radio, we had these broadcast, AM and FM, crystals put in to tune into normal broadcasts. They're called AM and FM crystals. Normal broadcast.

07:00 **So earlier you said that you believed that the Japanese knew you were there?**

Well, we reckoned they knew, because once they tried to jam us. Well, somewhere in the area.

So did Tokyo Rose ever address you?

No, she didn't. She did send something, it's in the book there, it's well known. She called us the "Golden Voices of New Guinea".

07:30 Did you know that? Tokyo Rose, called us the "Golden Voices of New Guinea".

And what did she say to you?

She said "Go home Aussies, the Yanks have got your girls and they're sleeping with kangaroos". Or something like that.

Well, that's quite a nice title really, that, the "Golden Voices of New Guinea".

08:00 Yes, it's true that is. Everyone knows about Tokyo Rose, she called us the "Golden Voices of New Guinea".

Now you were quite isolated where you were?

Very. Very isolated, a long way from other people. Well, there was one station not far away from us,

08:30 just down the river a bit where we had to evacuate if we ever had to get out. Hundreds of miles. There was these transceivers, they were very powerful.

Did you ever visit this other station?

No, too far away.

What ways did you use to cope with the isolation?

09:00 Well, we used to, Stuey and I, well I made that draft board. We played drafts for hours and hours on it, and also I'd say, "Stuey, I'm going for a walk. When I come back you can go for a walk." Yes, just go away for a while, half an hour or something like that.

Earlier, you mentioned seeing a lot of cassowaries.

Yes, cassowaries. I thought they were emus when I first seen them, they're a big bird, Cassowaries,

09:30 pretty big bird. Matter of fact, I brought a feather home, I think. Don't know where it is now. A cassowary feather.

Were you ever tempted to catch and eat them?

No, not a cassowary. I reckoned they would probably taste like a turkey 'cause they looked like a turkey. Probably would have got into trouble. There was reindeers up there, some reindeers.

Did you ever catch them?

10:00 No, not allowed to touch them.

And how did you cope with your homesickness?

Well, it was hard for a while, but then I got used to it. Been away from home for so long, you know, you are sort of living in another existence, but you're always looking forward to go home. I know when I was in Nadzab, going back with the rear party, they said, "You'll be down at the strip in the morning. You'll be going home", and I couldn't get down there quick enough.

10:30 Got on the plane with me mates, of course it was a DC3 [Douglas], and it was that noisy and we were playing cards and saying, "Hearts, ten, hearts", and we were all talking to each other and we flew over the Owen Stanley Ranges and come to Townsville and I got out of the plane and like all good returnees, I got down and kissed the ground. Thankful to be home.

11:00 Then we got a train . . .

I just still want to ask some more about your time in Annenberg, if that's all right. So, you said you and Stuey would chat together of a night?

Yes

What would you talk about?

Well, we would talk about our school days, if we played marbles, if we had a girlfriend before we came into the army.

11:30 Just general topics. Fill the time in. Ask him "To tell me a decent yarn". I'd say, "Stuey, you tell me one and I'll tell you one", sort of thing.

Were there things that you didn't talk about?

I suppose I never talked about my own family to him. He didn't talk much about his family. No, we had general topics.

12:00 **Why do you think that was?**

Don't know, can't put my finger on that. Something psychological, I guess.

I imagine you must have missed your parents?

Oh, you do when you're away like that you do, but after awhile, you're living in another existence, another world, and you forget about them, sort of thing. Forget about them. Like now, if you go away from your family for months on end

12:30 you like to see them and know how they're getting on, but you can't do anything about it, can't do a thing about it.

I'm just imaging that it might have been quite painful to talk about your families. To let on how homesick you were.

Yes, I suppose you were. You could talk about it and get it close to you.

13:00 Make you feel like "What am I doing here? I wish I was home with Mum and Dad."

Well, did you have moments of asking yourself "What on earth am I doing here?"

Yes, I got myself here. I've got to stick it out now. It's my own fault, nobody else's. Because I volunteered for it. There it is.

13:30 You see, I've always been philosophical. You know, what happens in life - you have to be philosophical. You can't wish for has beens and what nots, if it can't happen. You have to go along with what cards are dealt to you.

Well, I think that's a very constructive attitude, however you nearly always do wish for something.

14:00 Yes.

And what were you wishing for when you were stuck up there in Annenberg?

Well, I was wishing we could all get home with the family and my two brothers and my sister. Three brothers, I've got three brothers and a sister. And we could all get around the Sunday table and have a big lunch altogether and have a chin wag.

14:30 Like the whole family gathering. One of the things I really looked forward to. And it did happen. Yes, I came home in 1945. I went into the army first in 1941 and was discharged on the 11th June 1946.

It was a long service, wasn't it?

15:00 Yes, over five and a half years, nearly six years.

Look before we get back to Australia, sorry, I'm still curious about your time in Annenberg

That's all right.

If we can keep going on that a bit more? What were your worst fears when you were in Annenberg?

My worst fears was "If we go to bed one night and we're overrun by the Japs, we would have no hope

15:30 of getting out". There were only two of use there, the rest were PIB boys, we know they weren't on our side of the river. We knew that. They were on the other side of the river. They would have to get across the river to attack us, or anywhere they went they could send a bomb. But that never happened. That was my worst fear, that we would get overrun.

16:00 We had no hope of getting out. Because as you read in that book I've got there, some stations did get overrun and blokes got killed.

And were you aware of that at the time?

What's that?

Did you know while you were there that other stations had been overrun?

No, I didn't know until I'd come back and we had that meeting and they put out a casualty list and we read that "Some blokes had been overrun

16:30 and killed". There's a good story in there about one of our stations being overrun by the Japs, but the Japs came off second best. They got knocked off and killed, the Japs.

Amazing.

We knew they were there, we were in Japanese territory. That's why we were put there, to report, on the weather reports and their movements. Well, we couldn't do much on their movements,

17:00 but we used to send a message for planes to come over, observation planes, especially at a place called Angoram, that's where there was a big Japanese concentration. And it was us that got the bombers out there to bomb them.

Could you see Japanese camps from where you were?

No, we couldn't. The jungle was that thick. New Guinea, you won't believe

17:30 how thick the jungle is. If you got a machete it would take you half a day to get to the back wall of the house. Only on tracks, if you get on a track, a native track, you could move some distance. But if you go walking about in enemy territory on a native track you're going to run into big trouble.

I mean you say that your worst fear was that the Japanese would overrun you, do you think you were more afraid of being killed, injured, or taken prisoner?

18:00 Well, that goes in hand with being overrun. I often thought at night time, "Will I get out of this, this place?" I had to do a job, and oh yes, you have your fears and you have your moments when you've got no fear at all. Like jump up and say, "Well come and get me if you're brave enough".

18:30 **So, was it day time or night time that was worse?**

Night time was worse. Yes, night time was worse. Even though you had a mosquito net over you, covered up with a mosquito net, you could hear them buzzing around your head all night. Mosquitos. That's a terrible place for mosquitos, New Guinea. Swamps. You see, up where we were there was a lot of swamps and millions and millions of mosquitos.

19:00 **So you were on the low lands then?**

Yes, on the river. Yes. The big mountains, mountains either side of both rivers. There's the Finisterre Ranges and then there's the other ranges. Shaggy Ridge. We were down a lot lower than Shaggy Ridge. But the valley and the rivers and either sides the mountains, mountains on top of mountains. I don't know if you've ever seen maps of New Guineas, the mountains.

19:30 **So, at least you didn't suffer from the cold.**

No way, suffered from the heat. No, it's not cold, wasn't a bit cold.

Did you have any respite from the heat?

No, very little. Got used to it, just got to perspire. Very hot.

Well, you couldn't swim could you?

Wasn't game, wasn't game. Dip our feet in

20:00 the water and splash ourselves. Couldn't swim because of the crocodiles, crocodiles like in the Northern Territory. There was some big crocodiles there. We used to see them out on the sandbanks in the river.

So how did you wash?

Well, Begowi used to bring buckets of water up. We had a wash dish. He used to bring buckets of water up for us to have a wash and we rigged up a shower out of a kerosene tin,

20:30 punched holes in it and had a rope on it and a bit of a branch of a tree, fill it up full of water, strip off and get under the water before the water run out. Pull the rope and get the can up over your head, get under it and the water would be all gone in a few seconds, less than a minute. That was your shower. Or sometimes

21:00 we would go down to the river and get the soap and have a go and bathe yourself a bit better. There was no home comforts.

And what did the local people think of your showering technique?

Well, I don't know anything, but they used to stare at us, you know.

Well, naked white men would have been quite rare in those parts?

21:30 Well, I think some of those natives had never had a shower in their life. They do smell.

So, were you more worried about the fact that you might be killed, or were you more afraid of being taken prisoner?

I wasn't worried about being taken prisoner, because I don't know where they could have taken us, prisoner. They'd kill you before they took you prisoner, the Japs. I don't think they took any prisoners in New Guinea. No, they'd kill you first.

22:00 I knew it was a very dangerous situation we were in but fortunately we never came face to face with them. But we were more or less told "Not to engage them because there were only two of us. If we could get out of it, not to engage them." They didn't want to lose the radio station. You see, our job too was radioing weather reports to the American 5th Air Force and they were bombing up the coast, up past Madang and those places

22:30 and Wewak and if we couldn't give them weather reports, they wouldn't like taking off in bad weather. They'd send a message early in the morning and say "What the cloud cover was on the ranges and clear days, flying". I know the message used to go to Nadzab and they used to relay it to the American 5th Air Force. You had to give weather reports every day.

23:00 Just for the air force, especially the Americans.

I'm going to ask if you can, to tell me, from your observation post, what can you see?

Well, we can see across the river, and you can see up the river, but out the sides you can't hardly see anything, 'cause the jungle, you're hemmed in by jungle but if you look down the river or right up the river.

23:30 We'd have to get out of the hut a bit, though from the hut you could hardly see anything. The other huts around, sort of fenced in by other thatched buildings. But if you got up and walked straight out of the area you would be in the jungle. But you could see down the river or up the river, but down the sides you couldn't see out. You couldn't see far. You could see a little way but you couldn't see far because it was such thick jungle.

24:00 **So you've got a really strategic position then, on that bend in the river.**

That's right, that's right. That's why they put us there, at Annenberg. Where the river turns around, it's on the map there, and goes down into the Bismarck Sea. It was a good position to be in because there was only one front fronting us there.

And can you tell us what the village looks like, as you walk through the village, what can you see?

24:30 Well, just like thatched huts. That little hut there, I'll show you a photo of. Some were a lot bigger, that's only a little one. Some were faced this way, some were faced that way, different ways. Native architects

must have realised they don't look all the same, different sizes. And pigs and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s running around in there, and natives and children playing.

25:00 **Was there anything like a square or a meeting place?**

No, nothing. Lulawai probably had his own place where they used to, the local hierarchy in the native world would meet or something, but no tables or meeting places we could see. We sort of kept to ourselves anyway. We were told "Not to infringe on the natives". We got a certain amount of instructions.

25:30 **Look, I also want to ask again about that big snake that came into you hut. Could you describe the snake for me?**

Yes, I think it was a python, because he came down one of the poles in front of the hut and he crawled in. There's pythons in Queensland. But I think we were playing music at the time, on the radio, that was in the day time he come in. Oh, he was a big snake.

26:00 So we got some sticks and pushed him out and made him slide away.

What colour?

Well, he was a sort of a rainbowy colour. He wasn't one colour, he was a speckledy sort of colour, if I remember rightly, brown and yellow and that.

And how big around?

Oh, that big around. He was about seven or eight feet long.

26:30 Oh, huge snake, absolutely huge, they are in New Guinea. A lot of them up there. Pythons, they're called. I think they're in Queensland too, pythons.

Why didn't you shoot him?

Well, I suppose we did, but we didn't want to make a noise and open gunfire in case we frightened the natives, I suppose.

Fair enough.

We could've shot him and the natives they would have ate him.

27:00 **Well, at least pythons don't bite.**

No, the natives said, "Nasty, heno kill you. No kill you." Won't kill you. Wrap themselves around you and give you a nasty shock. They're strong, their tails...

Ok. Now this spotter job that you were doing, the whole kind of New Guinea air.

27:32 The New Guinea Air Warning Wireless Company. NGAWW. We got associations in Victoria, and I'm the president of the Victorian Association and we just had a meeting yesterday, over at Watsonia RSL.

Now, it was a really pioneering . . .

It was. Something that had never been done before in the military. Two men spotting radio stations were set up

28:00 in a war zone to report back to headquarters the activities of the enemy.

Were you aware at the time that this was a big experiment?

When I went out I knew it was a one-off sort of a thing. I've got quite a good story in there.

So how did you feel about being part of this brand new military endeavour?

28:30 Well, I wasn't a hero, but I felt like one. I was very proud as a matter of fact, that I was part of this sort of a thing. The boys that were in it were pretty proud of it too, you know, that they were making a contribution to the war effort. Matter of fact, I've got a letter in there from John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States at the time.

Well, it was a unique . . .

Very unique, Very unique military operation.

29:00 It's like spies in the enemy territory. We were actually spies, and not only spies to the enemy, we were also (UNCLEAR) over land, sea and air. We kept the command in news of what's going on in the area.

29:30 **So when did you get your orders to return to Nadzab?**

We got a radio message, Stu and I, "That a plane would be coming out to pick us up" and they came out and it was a little Oster [?]. Have you ever seen one? A little Oster. I went out in a two cockpit thing, five months earlier but come back in this Oster. The pilot and Stuey and I

30:00 were sitting in there in a little cabin. I remember coming back into Nadzab late in the afternoon and then, as far as we could see aeroplanes on the ground, there were American aeroplanes on the ground. On the ground at Nadzab. Yes, that's the big air force base. And we landed and when we got there we found out that there was nobody there. All our unit had gone home. The master in the Q Store, he met us and we stayed there in the Q stores overnight and

30:30 a couple of days and then we were sent home.

So how much notice were you given to pack up and leave?

Not much, not much. They just said "There would be a plane out to pick you up". I just forget, it might have been a couple of days or a day. They came out, it was good to see too.

31:00 They came out and we had our stuff ready and just bundled it into the plane. Five hundred miles back to Nadzab. It's a big place New Guinea. Doesn't look too big on the map, but if you travel over it, it's a huge country, mountainous country.

Now, you already mentioned that you were very happy to leave.

Yes.

But did you have any regrets about leaving the village?

31:30 No. I didn't have any regrets, but sort of after going back there in 1995, it made me very nostalgic to think that I was up there you know, fifty years ago, as a young fellow. Now I'm back here again. What, would I like to be there now, at my age? I said "No thanks".

What about leaving Begowi?

He would have been sad when we left. Because he was treated like one of the family.

32:00 But ANGAU would have picked him up. Look after him.

Did you give him anything when you left?

What did we give him? No, I can't remember now, we might have done, I just can't remember. I know the two Americans we pulled out of the jungle, I said before.

32:30 I got his compass and his watch. I didn't take his watch. I took the compass, my son's got it now.

Did you have any other souvenirs of your time in Annenberg?

We brought home a spear of some sort, a little spear. I don't know, I gave them to Mum. I don't know what happened to the things I brought home. I did bring some carvings home,

33:00 but I don't know what happened to them. Crocodile, alligator, whatever you call them. Very good carvers, natives. They could carve crocodiles like anything.

And you had the cassowary feather?

The feather. Don't know what happened to that either.

Tell me what was in your heart as you were taking off from Annenberg?

To come home? Well, I was very happy, exulted. The pilot said "We are going over the Owen Stanley Ranges." Well, that's pretty high.

33:30 You have to get up to 30,000 feet to get over them. No, sorry, that was when I come home we had to fly over the Owen Stanleys, after we left Nadzab to come back to Townsville. But this little plane we just flew down the valley, that's right. I was quite relieved, that I got out of there alive. Well naturally, you don't know if you're going to come back or not.

So, on arriving at Nadzab . . ?

34:00 We were met by the quartermaster. They had a radio station there, too, at headquarters. He said, "The unit, they've all gone home." He said, "You're the rear party. So we went home with the rear party."

And what was that like? To get there and discover that everyone else had gone?

It was a bit of a shock. I said, "They're all gone!" Yes, it was a bit of a shock.

34:30 **Still, you weren't there long, were you?**

No, only there a day or two days. Got a DC3, went down and got in the old "Biscuit Bomber" as we called them. There's no air conditioning in them, and no sound proof. Your ears are busting all the time with the noise when you're flying over the Owen Stanleys.

You went from Nadzab to . . ?

35:00 Townsville.

So tell us how it was to arrive?

As I said before, I got down and kissed the ground! Yeah, got down and kissed the ground, shook hands with each other in different ways. Stuey and I come to Sydney then he got a plane to Western Australia because he lived in Perth and I lived in Wagga.

Right. So you got leave immediately, did you?

Yes, fifty-four days' leave I got, straight away.

35:30 And got some pay, because we didn't get paid in New Guinea. Got a fair bit of money and put it on this block of land I've got here. Because we couldn't spend money up there, there was nowhere to spend it. But I got fifty-four days' leave. I had some time at home and then I come down here. Couldn't get a job.

How was it saying "Goodbye" to Stuey?

It was pretty hard to say. But we have kept in constant contact with each other.

36:00 He's been over here a couple of times to see me and I've been over there to see him. And he's had a good job because he started a carpet business, a carpet warehouse selling carpet.

And you were probably really relieved to get away from each other?

Yes, that's right.

But on the other hand, I imagine it might have been odd to be without him?

Yes, he was like another brother,

36:30 you see, pals. Best mates I ever had was in the army. Good blokes, blokes you could trust them, and he was one of those. Sort of when we separated we were a bit broken hearted, sort of thing. We had been separated after spending so many days together.

Did you find yourself turning around to talk to him and he wasn't there?

37:00 Oh, not exactly. I think I dreamt about him in my sleep a couple of times.

You know, I imagine it must have been quite strange . . .?

Yes, it was, it was, being separated when we had been such good mates for a long time and putting our lives on the line in a very hazardous place. But we got out of it - that's the main thing.

And what was it like being among white people again?

37:30 Great. It was good, started to talk the proper language. We come back to Wagga and I got these fifty-four days' leave and I tried to get a job. Couldn't get a job.

But you hadn't been discharged?

No, I hadn't been discharged. I was looking for a job when I got discharged, but that was 1945. I was in the army till June 1946. I came down to Melbourne and was posted to Balcombe.

38:00 **Hang on, when you go on leave to Wagga, why are you looking for a job?**

I got a bit ahead of myself there.

Oh, that's right. I mean, fair enough if you did.

That's how I came to get a job down here.

Tell me about seeing your mum again?

It was great, and Dad. It was great, amazing.

Did they know you were coming home?

No, they didn't know. Didn't ring them up.

38:30 I just arrived. I don't think they knew, if I remember correctly.

What were their reactions when you come walking up the front?

Well, Mum broke down and cried, you know, very emotional. 'Cause Mum was a very emotional person.

What about you, did you break down and cry?

Well, I was emotional, too. You know how you feel,

39:00 being away from your parents for so long in a foreign country.

Was Bob also home at that stage?

He came home before me, he came home with the main party. And he was already down at Balcombe, when my leave was finished.

So did you get your family meal together like you hoped to have…?

No, that didn't happen until we were discharged.

39:30 **Because Max was still in New Guinea.**

Because Max was still up there, and my younger brother Neville, he was too young to go, and my sister she lives at Aurora.

Tape 7

00:30 **Well, Eddie, you were back in Wagga on leave, and you had 54 days. How did you spend those 54 days?**

Well, I suppose I had about a month at home, and then I thought "Well, I'll go back to the unit". We was posted to Balcombe,

01:00 down in Victoria, the whole unit was posted there, and when I got down there they was all down there. There I got a job as a radio operator at Grosvenor Signals Department.

Where's Grosvenor?

Out near St Kilda, off St Kilda Road.

Well, when you were all back to Balcombe there, you must have had a whole lot of stories to exchange with one another, did you?

01:30 Well, we did. Yes, we did. We had a lot of chinwagging to do and talking with each other. That was August 1945, I come home.

Now was this before the end of the war?

Just near the end of the war. The war ended on the 15th August, I just got home in time before the war ended.

Well, how did you celebrate the end of the war?

02:00 Well, we kicked our heels up a bit.

What did you do exactly?

Well, we went down to the local pub. We come into town and danced up and down the street with the village population in Melbourne. That's on the record too, the people dancing in the streets, trumpets blowing, throwing hats in the air. But then I was still in the army, I was still in the signals.

02:30 Still doing signals work at Grosvenor. For another twelve months I done that, till next June.

What was you reaction to going back to what I suppose was a fairly predictable, routine sort of signals job, was it?

Yes, it was a bit mundane.

03:00 We were going to, then I wanted to go back to the islands again, wanted to go back. It was a mundane job.

When all the unit was posted to Balcombe, so Bob must have been down there too, was he?

He was down there as well. We was all down there.

Well, had Bob been back on leave in Wagga with you?

Yes, he was. But he came home earlier than I did, he come home earlier, he come home before me.

03:30 No, we had a job there for a while at Grosvenor. And then I was sent down to Mornington, to General Blamey's property and we set up a radio station there to take the names of the prisoners of war released from the Japanese prison camps. We were sent down there for days and days receiving these names of blokes who were to come home from Singapore.

04:01 To let their parents know they were safe and were coming home. Some of our blokes went over to Singapore to set up the stations over there, so I had a job there for a while to do with that. Just taking the names of the prisoners of war released in Singapore to come home. The army let their parents, their

relatives know they were still alive. Yes, that was a job at the end of the war.

04:30 Down at General Blamey's property at Balcombe, no, Mornington.

Can you remember the name of the property?

No, I can't.

Was it this period that you discovered who among your unit had not survived?

It was a funny thing in our unit, there were a lot of fellows I never knew,

05:00 because we were all separated in different parts of the island. Only a few I knew. Since the war ended and we formed the association, I've got to know a lot of people I never knew in the army, we never seen each other. We talked to each other, but we never seen each other. So that was that job and then for a long time, so in June, my discharge points

05:30 came due, I had 136 discharge points. And before that happened I applied for the [British Commonwealth] Occupation Force in Japan when the war ended.. But then my discharge points came up and they said "Well, do you still want to go to Japan, or do you want to get out?" I said, "Ta, ta."

Well, what made you change your mind?

Well, I said "I've been away and my family wouldn't like me to go away again for three or four years over there in Japan with the Occupations Forces",

06:00 but I was keen to go. But when they said "Your discharge points are up", I had 136 discharge points, "Well, you can get out right now".

Well, do you know why you wanted to go over on the British Occupation Force?

I thought "It was another adventure". The war was over and there wouldn't be any danger. And I was still in the army and I thought "Well, that was part of being in the army and if they offered me a

06:30 post like that, well I'd go". But I didn't go. Then I was posted back to Sydney, the Sydney Showgrounds and got my discharge.

Ok, well people just . . . talk about getting there discharge. What procedure did you go through getting your discharge?

Well, the 11th June 1946, I was discharged at the Sydney showgrounds. We went through, we got our final pay,

07:00 we got our Discharge Certificate and then we joined the RSL [Returned and Services League]. There was another bloke on the end of the table, we joined the RSL, which I did.

Did you have to pay to join?

No, didn't have to pay to join in those days. But now you have to pay something, but seeing as I'm a life member, I don't have to pay any more, the RSL. That's it. And then we went home to Mum and Dad in Wagga, and Bob did too.

07:30 There was the two of us. What did we do?

When you were discharged, did anybody say, shake you hand and say "Thanks very much and good luck"?

Well, they did. The officer, I think it was a major, said "Good luck in civvy life and thanks for a job well done" or something like that. Some salutary comment.

08:00 **Well, can you remember what your feeling was when you were actually discharged?**

I thought to myself, "I've been discharged. I've been six years in the army for five and a half years, and I've never had to work for a living. I've been getting paid by the army. What am I going to do? I'll have to get a job."

You didn't think you'd been working for a living in the army?

No, well the army kept you of course, clothe you and feed you. You don't get much pay

08:30 but you exist in the army on their terms. I wanted to go out and get a job. So, when I got out, I couldn't get a job in Wagga, could have got a job at a packing shed or something, driving nails in cases, but I was better qualified for something else. So I came down to Melbourne, got into a boarding house down in St Kilda and then I see an ad in the paper for the Department of Civil Aviation.

09:00 I got a job at A J Field Radio electrical. Ever heard of them?

Yes, I have.

A J Field, invoices, doing invoices. I done that for about twelve months and then I seen this ad in the

Department of Civil Aviation for radio operators who had Morse code experience. I applied for that and got it.

09:30 I lived here, I lived over at Thelma's place then, boarding over there and got this job at Essendon Aerodrome on the air radio, Civil Aviation Department. And then they wanted to transfer me to Western Australia doing the same job. I said "No thanks". I went down to the defence barracks, I went down to the Department of Defence went and seen them

10:00 and I got a job with the Defence Signals Branch in Melbourne, down at Albert Park Barracks, and that was a job doing intercept work. The war was on in Indo China, not Indo China, where we was, before it was Vietnam.

Up in the Balan [?] emergency, was it, or Indonesia?

Yes. We were intercepting radio traffic and sending it to GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters] in London.

10:30 I was there for five years on that job.

Sounds as if it was interesting.

It was, until they brought in shift work, there was a lot of shift work, at night, 1946. 1949, I got married, and then, well Thelma was sick of me doing shift work after a while, so I left. I got out and got a job with Gollam and Co Limited, Importers and Exporters. Don't know whether you've ever heard of them?

11:00 I was there for 26 years, 30 years, 26 or 27 years with that firm. Ending up, I was paymaster. I had three or four jobs there, paymaster, customs officer and purchasing office. God, they give me some jobs.

It seems to me that you took a while to settle down after you left?

I can truthfully say I was very unsettled after the war.

11:30 After I got out of the army, been in there so long, it was sort of rigid contemporary sort of a life over there in New Guinea in the army, wherever I was. When I got out, I was very sort of lonely, don't know how you would describe it, unsettled.

Well, were there things that irritated you about civilian life?

12:00 **Why were you so unsettled?**

I think the reason was in the army I had a fixed position. I knew what I was doing and where I was going. But when I got out of the army I worked in three or four jobs and I just couldn't settle down into a long tenure. It is very had to describe.

12:30 **Well, had you left the army as a corporal? What had been your rank at the end of your service?**

When I come back from New Guinea I lost my corporal's rank.

Could you tell us why?

When I was posted out to New Guinea they said "You've been acting corporal, so you've got control over the natives." So I lost my rank, I reverted to a signalman.

Had you ever been told that before?

13:00 No, wasn't told…I got 10/6 a day and I went back to nine shillings as a Trade Group One radio operator or something.

And you just accepted that, did you?

Oh, I couldn't do much about it. So, you know, I lost my rank. If I had stayed on, because I reckon I had as much intelligence as anybody else, but it didn't do me any good.

13:30 **What was it about the last job you took? I mean, you stayed there for thirty years.**

It was very good. I had a solid foundation of what I was doing. I used to do all the purchasing and stuff and I had made paymaster and I learnt ledgers and paymaster on the computer, not the computer,

14:00 the Ledger machines. Used to draw the pays, the pay envelopes and put them in their bank accounts, their pays. Me and another sort of person.

So it was a fairly structured position?

Yes, it was. But I used to just finish one pay on the Thursday, until they brought in fortnightly pays, it used to be weekly. I'd just finish one pay

14:30 and I'd have to start on next week's pay. Then I had to work out who was there and who was sick and get out the HBAs [Health Benefits Association] and the hospital benefits and the sick leave and 17-1/2% leave loading when they went on holidays, all that sort of caper.

Well, we'll just pop back a few years again and find out, when you met Thelma? So could you tell us how you met her?

15:00 Yes, I met her. It was in the train. My brother Bob and his now wife, we were going down to Brighton. She lived in Brighton. Bobby said "Come down and have a week down in Phyllis's place." Her name was Phyllis. I said "All right." Because Phyllis and Thelma, they worked in the same place, they both worked in the city. So I met her on the train, that's how I got to know her.

And where were you going on train? Which direction?

To Brighton, down south.

15:30 **So you met her on the train? What happened after that then?**

I think I said to her "Can we meet somewhere and go out, go to dances?" And she said, "No worries."

And you were still in the army at this stage?

I was still in the army at that stage.. Yes, that was the time I had, between coming home from New Guinea and getting out of the army. So we used to go out to her place and meet her people, her parents. Sort of kicked on from there.

16:00 **That was 1940 . . .?**

That was 1947, that's right. '46, if I was still in the army. I got out in June '46. And I worked in Essendon aerodrome in Civil Aviation from 1947 to 50 something. We got married in 1949.

And so, where were you married?

We were married at the ... in Coburg,

16:30 at the Church of England church in Bell Street, Coburg. It's not there any more. It has been pulled down. In Coburg, yeah.

Then you have been married . . .?

We've been married 53, 54 years now. We had a fiftieth year wedding celebration up in the local hall. A lot of relatives turned up I didn't know I had.

17:00 **And you said that you joined the RSL on discharge?**

Yes, on discharge in Sydney, yes.

Well, when did you attend your first meeting?

Well, I wasn't in the committee of the RSL, I was just a member, but we would go down to the local RSL here in Pascoe Vale and when I come back here I was a member of the Pascoe Vale RSL.

17:30 We would go down there for functions, or lunches, but now Glenroy has got an RSL up here and we go up there if we want to go out for a meal or something. But we do have our meetings over in Watsonia now, RSL, where we've got a good standing over there. But that's how come I got into the RSL. And they asked me one day down at Pascoe Vale "How long I had been in it?" And I got out a receipt I had in Sydney in 1946 and showed them.

18:00 And they said "Oh, you're entitled to life membership. You've been in the RSL for fifty years." That's how I got that plaque up there. Signed by John Howard, too.

Tell me, did you march on Anzac Day?

Every day. Every Anzac I marched.

That's fantastic, isn't it?

Yes, it is. Every Anzac. Well, I'm the president of our Association.

Yes, I was going to ask you. Is it the New Guinea Air Warning Wireless Company Association?

18:30 New Guinea Air Warning Wireless Company Association.

Well, when was that formed?

That was formed, well, very early in the piece. I don't know exactly when it was formed exactly but . . . can I go and get a letterhead?

When was your association formed?

That was formed way back about 1960, in the sixties. A long while ago.

19:00 **Yes, but quite a while after the war?**

Yes, it was. Until we found out where all the blokes were, and sent them out letters and got them to

come to a meeting. We had our meeting yesterday. Yes, every three months we have a meeting. We're still going pretty strong. We've got another one in August.

Well, when did you find out about what had happened to all the other air spotters in New Guinea and elsewhere during the war?

19:30 **You know, I think it was mentioned that about ten had died in New Guinea. Is that right?**

Yes, I got that book. Till the Private War of the Spotters book was published we didn't know who died and who didn't die. Because we didn't know anybody. Didn't know ourselves because we were in all different parts of New Guinea, all over the place. Two hundred blokes in a thousand separate areas, never seen each other. Even when we come home, never seen each other.

20:00 **Well, what about at Balcombe. Who went back there?**

Well, some stayed in Sydney, some in Victoria. Queenslanders stayed in Queensland. Western Australians went to Western Australia. South Australians went to South Australia. Victorians came to Melbourne.

But you were from NSW. How come you ended up in Balcombe?

That's right. I was posted down because I was living . . .

Of course. Well, what happened to Bob?

Bobby, he had that dengue fever.

20:30 But then he had a heart problem, Angina. I don't know how he got that. But now he's got hearing loss and eye loss. He had a cataract operation that wasn't successful.

He had the same sort of problems that you did settling down after the war?

He got married before I did and went away to Wangaratta and got a job at Bruck Mills in Wangaratta.

21:00 And he stayed there till he retired. No, he settled down all right.

What sort of work was he doing with that company?

He was in the textile industry. The textile industry.

And you mentioned the work that you were doing when you were intercepting those defence signals. What sort of interceptions were they?

Well, it was, not Vietnam.

21:30 Before Vietnam came into being. We intercepted these messages, they were coded messages they were all coded up, that we intercepted them and copied them down and sent them to GCHQ in London, codes, and they broke the codes, we didn't break the codes.

So you didn't know what the messages . . .?

Know we just accepted them, messages. Called Defence Signals Branch, DSB. Yes, radio intercept.

22:00 **When did you come to live in this house?**

In this house? It was in 1953, if I remember correctly.

When you got out of the army, how were things in Melbourne economically?

22:30 **Did you still have rationing in place?**

No, I think we might have had petrol rationing. They had started to ease off on the rationing in those days. The war was over and the economic uplift in the company. There was plenty of work in Melbourne, I could have got half a dozen jobs in different places.

The people that you mixed with, were most of them returned servicemen?

23:00 Yes, nearly all returned people, except our next door neighbours, they weren't. Although Trevor next door, he passed away. He was in the merchant navy. We stuck with our comrades sort of thing. And associated ourselves with them, and familiarised ourselves with those. It takes a while to make new friends after a while.

Well, how often would you have seen your brother? Your twin brother?

23:30 Only when, after he went back to Wangaratta. Only once or twice a year, that's all. Drive up to Wangaratta. Didn't have a car those days, go by train. Didn't see him that often.

Well, when you got married, was he your best man?

Yes, he was. He was my best man. I've got the wedding photo in there.

24:00 **Who else was in your wedding party?**

My brother, Max, and my sister.

I was just wondering, because you and your twin brother, you had been together all this time, you had a similar sort of experience during the war and you were only seeing each other once or twice a year?

24:30 Well, we were too far apart, living too far apart.

And I was just wondering did you communicate by any other means? Did you write letters?

No, only telephoned. Got the telephone on, and ring him up pretty regularly.

Even in those days?

Got the phone on quick here. Don't know when I got it on, but I got it on quick.

I was interested to find out that you did build a house, so quickly?

Yes

And I was just wondering if you could tell us how you got that done?

25:00 Well, when I got the deferred pay I bought a block of land at Glen Waverley for £54. This block of land, big, it had a sixty foot frontage. And Thelma said "It was too far away from her people if I wanted to build a house out there".

So where were her people?

In Preston, just over the road here, not far away from here. So I sold it for £280. After I had it for a while and with that money I bought this block of land here for

25:30 £160, I think it was. And then a fellow at work advertised 5,000 bricks at a shilling each. So I raced up, it was on the notice board, and seen him and I bought them off him. 5,000 shillings or 500 dollars it was then, pounds. So I bought the bricks, and I bought the block of land with that. And I went to the War Service Homes,

26:00 and I put up the land and the bricks as collateral. And I had no problem getting a loan. Three thousand four hundred pounds, or something, and got plans drawn up, and got the house built. I've done a lot of improvement since, though.

Well, can you remember how long it took you to get the house built?

It took a while. It took about nine months, I think, because we couldn't get tiles and timber was hard to get hold of.

26:30 And I specified "I didn't want pine". I wanted all hard wood, which they did do.

It's a very solid house.

It is, yeah, solid brick home. I bought the bricks privately, most of them, off a chap at work. He had these 5,000 bricks and it fell through what he was doing with his girlfriend, or something. And he put this sale on the notice board.

27:00 I said "I had a bit of money at that time", so I went and got them off him.

Had you detected any particular changes in Australia post war that you hadn't been aware of before you went away or before you joined the services?

Yes, changes? Political or economically?

Well, both.

27:30 Yes. I suppose before I went away to the war, I wasn't that engrossed in political things like that or economic things. So I didn't really draw a line before what happened during the war and what happened after the war, if you know what I mean. So I wasn't aware of any significant changes the time when I come home.

28:00 **Another thing I was wondering about was your state of health. Did you suffer any ill effects from your time in New Guinea?**

Malaria and I got tinea. Tinea in the feet. And it affected my breathing a bit. Breathing that hot air all the time affected my lung capacity. But the tinea played up with my feet terrible.

28:30 It has all been cured now, I've had it cured, the tinea.

Well, did you contract the tinea when you were in New Guinea?

Yes, got it when I was in New Guinea. Sweaty feet. And I got the malaria. Didn't get the malaria till I got home.

Did you have to be hospitalised when you got malaria?

I did. I was sent to a hospital down at Portsea.

29:00 Lady Duggan Hospital, Rest home for servicemen. Down at Portsea. Down there for three weeks, I think. Kicking my feet up at the local pub and going out.

And so it never ever recurred. You only had that one attack when you got home?

Malaria? Well, it lasts for seven years. You do get other attacks. It goes out of your system after seven years. But you do get other attacks, lighter, every time you get an attack it's lighter.

29:30 A less degree. A couple of years ago I went to the Veterans' Affairs to see if I could get a partial disability allowance for the malaria and the tinea and I got that all right, no problem.

30:00 **Now, you got a life membership of the RSL?**

That's right, yeah.

Now you said you were a member, but did you serve on the Branch Committee?

No, I didn't serve. Although I was invited to serve but I didn't serve. They just gave it to me. I didn't ask for it, the Pascoe Vale RSL Club. When I joined up they asked "To see my", if I was already a member, and I said "I joined up in Sydney when I got discharged".

30:30 And I showed them my receipt and they said, "You've done 50 years, so you're entitled to a life membership." So I don't have to pay any subs any more. Well, I did join up and pay subs but I didn't know I was entitled to a life membership.

Basically then, you put your energies into your own association, then?

That's right.

Well, how long have you been president of that Association?

Oh, about ten years now.

31:00 Because we had, after a while they changed it, but I can't get out of it now. Nobody will put their hand up.

What does that association do? I mean, how do you keep it going?

Well, we arrange meetings. We have a president, on the letterhead there. A president, a secretary and a treasurer. I have to organise

31:30 meetings, lunches, I have to organise re-unions. We have a re-union at Corowa every year. I've got to organise, invite the people from NSW and Queensland when their people come down. Got to book accommodation. It's a fair size job to do that, organising things, then every Anzac Day I organise a luncheon at the RSL. Got to organise committee meetings. We've always got plenty to discuss.

32:00 **Well, what sort of issues are you discussing at your meetings?**

Well, yesterday we discussed, one of our members was the President of the Corowa RSL and he passed away. He always arranged the luncheons up there, in Corowa, so we've got to do that now and I've got to go up there to Corowa with the treasurer and our secretary to arrange

32:30 for Armistice Day in November. That's the sort of thing we do. Although we do benefits for sick members, if we can raise some funds for them, charity work for widows. We invite them to lunches too, but we pay for it, the association pays for it. We have a few widows now, war widows, the wives of our departed comrades. They can come to our luncheon and we pay for it.

33:00 **Well, how many members do you have in your association in Victoria?**

We have about 40, 30 or 40. I think it was 38 last luncheon we had.

Now, you talked about your visit back to New Guinea in 1995, as part of the Australia Remembers the . . . Now I was wondering, how you became involved in that?

33:30 **Was it through the RSL or through your own association?**

Apparently, every unit from the Australian Army had to send one nominee in. I was lucky. Our unit, unbeknown to me, nominated me to go, so the treasurer then, no the president, no he was the treasurer,

34:00 he put my name up. And I got a letter from the Department of Veterans' Affairs to say "I had been nominated to go back to New Guinea in the capacity, representing our unit in the 'Australia Remembers' celebrations".

What was your reaction to that?

34:30 **Had you known that you could have been nominated?**

I didn't know till they told me at the time I was nominated. I had no idea. And I said to one of our chaps, "Listen, you're entitled to this more than me. You can go", and he said "No way", he said, "I'm not going."

Had you ever considered going back to New Guinea yourself?

Well, I would have liked to take Thelma back there to show her places I had been, like up at Port Moresby and Madang and those places.

35:00 We were frightened of getting malaria. I'd still like to go back and show her where we were.

But could you just tell us, or start to tell us anyway, about the trip that you took? How many of you went?

There were a lot of people. We were on the ship called the Sholokhov,

35:30 a Russian cruise ship, beautiful it was. And we were flown to Sydney, me and all the other blokes from Victoria. We were flown to Sydney. Paul Keating came aboard. Paul Keating shook our hand and wished us well and we sailed off. Just out of Brisbane and we were all given a wreath to throw over into the water there and to honour the nurses who all got killed in that,

36:00 by Japanese off Brisbane, the hospital ship, the Centaur. So we had that there. Then we went to Milne Bay and then we came back to Moresby.

At Milne Bay was there a commemoration service up there?

Yes, there was a big church there. I can show you the things if you would like to see it. The photos I've got there.

Oh, I will later.

36:30 From Moresby we went around to Milne Bay and had a big service there. Then we went to Lae and we had another service there. But in the day time we went off to see all the cemeteries and battle grounds and that sort of thing. Up the Kokoda Trail and up to Nadzab.

You actually went over the Kokoda?

We went up there. The first half went up in a truck, we went up as far as we could go,

37:00 but when we went up to Lae, to a place called Popendetta, they took us right up the mountain, up to the Cenotaph on Kokoda. I've got photos in there of that. But then we'd go off the ship in the day time and visit the cemeteries, local areas and battlegrounds, and that sort of thing. At night time the local people would come aboard. And the night they didn't come aboard, we'd have a concert,

37:30 the Russian crew would do a song and dance.

And when the local people came aboard, you would . . . what would you be doing then?

We would just sit down and watch them, spoke to them at the tables, the different hospital nurses and doctors and local dignitaries, from the different provinces. They'd come and we'd sit around the table and exchange, talk to them.

38:00 **Can you remember any of the discussions that were held? What were the things they talked about?**

Oh, well, we just talked about things in general. The days when the Japs were there and how they've gone and you're happy that you've got their own country back. Because there were plantation officers, because they have tea plantations and coffee plantations in New Guinea too.

38:30 Ane we just explained the general summaries with people in New Guinea.

And, tell me, did you get back to Annenberg?

No, we couldn't get back to Annenberg. It was too far inland. I would have loved to get back but I couldn't do it. We got up to Wewak, Madang and Wewak. As far as we went up the coast. We went to Nadzab though.

Oh, I was wondering about that.

39:00 Yes, we went to Nadzab and some of us got in a light plane and flew up the Ramu Valley and up past a place called Tsili Tsili, where we were during the war.

Well, had it changed at all?

Some of the old air fields are still there. They're grown over a bit. But they showed us where some of the American bases were. And then we flew back down the coast to Lae, Nadzab, coming home.

Tape 8

00:30 **You were telling us about flying down the valley again, Nadzab and Lae?**

Yes, well we took off from Nadzab in this little plane. The chap that I was with on ship, not Stuart, Graham Mattock, my cabin mate on the cruise, my cabin mate on the cruise,

01:00 and he sat alongside of me. We went right up the Markham Valley, right up the Ramu Valley, but not as far as Annenberg. But Annenberg was a long way inland. Couldn't go in there, because there is probably no airstrip there now, all jungled over. Madang, we land in Madang and they've got a big hotel there now in Madang, because the luncheon was in the hotel at Madang. We went to a native garden, a place where they've got carvings.

01:30 They've got canoes and crocodiles, all these beautiful carving the natives do. I bought three crocodiles, about that long, carved crocodiles and I give them to the grandchildren when I come home. Didn't keep one for myself. And then we flew back to Lae and we got a truck back out to Nadzab then.

I was just wondering what your thoughts were

02:00 **after returning after almost 50 years?**

Well, to me it was very emotional, very nostalgic. You see I had been to this place before, I had been to Moresby before, been to Nadzab before, Lae before. Been up both the valleys before. I said it was amazing that after all these years I had come back to see it as a civilian. It was very emotional and very nostalgic. To have this happen to me. I couldn't believe it.

02:30 **What, that you were coming back again?**

Yes, that I was going back to New Guinea, that I was seeing those places I had seen 50 years ago.

Well, how did you see it? You were a young man when you were there, only 21 or 22? And you're coming back as an older man. How was it, you're saying you were seeing it through civilian eyes. Do you know how different?

03:00 The feeling was absolutely different because I was seeing it then as a solder. And now I was seeing it as a visitor, and looking at it as a visitor and I said, "I can't believe I was here before when I was young. I can't believe I've been here and seen this before in my life. But here it is, I'm looking at it again." I touched myself and said "God, I haven't died have I and woken up and found that I am in this land?

03:30 I couldn't have been here before." But I had been. It's pretty hard to describe.

It's almost like a dream, isn't it?

Yes, it's like a dream. You couldn't believe it had happened to me.

And did any memories come flooding back.

Yes. They came flooding back. I remember. They came flooding back. I remember seeing an Nadzab. We had a one way strip and they had these gliders, you know, a plane to pull them up.

04:00 Often I would see one, this plane took the glider up and let go, but the glider didn't get into the current and he crashed. Killed everyone on it. That was way back in 1942, 43, 44. I remembered seeing that again, because we used to go out and watch them at Nadzab. And watch these gliders being towed around

04:30 in the sky, and they would cut them loose, and they would glide around. One day, this one came undone and didn't land.

That was tragic wasn't it?

Yes, tragic. But going back there after all that time was very nostalgic. I just had to reminisce and say "I've been here before." I didn't believe it! Touch wood!

Well had your brother come too?

05:00 No, he didn't go on the trip. No. No. Only me.

And your mate's name was Graham?

Yes, he was my cabin mate on the ship. I met him in Sydney on the wharf before we took off. And I said "Graham, they told me I could pick my cabin mate. You'll do. Come on."

Well, how many other spotters were among the group?

Only one. I was the only one,

05:30 out of our unit. There was only one out of every Australian unit.

But how many spotters in total went?

On the pilgrim trip? Only me, I was the only one.

Oh, only you. So Graham hadn't been a spotter?

No, he was in the mine section. He wasn't a spotter.

Oh, so you were representing all the spotters?

I was representing all the spotters.

Well, you mentioned earlier that ten spotters had been killed in New Guinea.

06:00 Yes, that's right. It's in the history book.

Were their graves at any of the cemeteries that you visited?

I never seen any, no. I've got photos there, I've got a video too, of the trip. They give us a video when we came home, that the army took, the Veterans' Affairs took. But I've got a photo album of all the cemeteries.

What I was wondering,

06:30 **you went on this trip in 1995. Had you ever considered you might have liked to go back there before that?**

Yes, I wanted to go back. I'd like to go back to New Guinea. I'd like to take Thelma back.

Yes, but you had thought about it before?

Yes, go back as a civilian. Do my own thing, and not be regimented. Don't do as I do, do as you're told.

07:00 **At Kokoda, were you there when Keating kissed the ground?**

Well, I was up there, he was up there when I was there, but I didn't see him kiss the ground. But he could have done. But we got up there, I've got a photo, I'll show the video.

Oh, very interesting. What did you think of that act of his kissing the ground at Kokoda.

07:30 Well, I suppose to him being the Prime Minister at the time, I suppose he thought "It was symbolic, being an Australian". Australians were up in Kokoda. To him, or to my way of thinking, just a symbolic gesture, for the people who were up there in the war. If that's wrong, I don't know, but that's what I think. Just a symbolic gesture. By the Prime Minister.

08:00 **Well, I've just got some general questions to ask you about your war experience. And what I was thinking about was, when you volunteered to go into this unit, had you had any expectations of the sort of job you would be doing?**

Well, I knew I was going in. We weren't actually volunteered. The unit we were in, the

08:30 21st Reconnaissance Battalion I was in was disbanded, and, being in signals, I was drafted into that unit. A lot of other people were drafted into the spotters. Being a signaller. And that's the people they were looking for, radio operators, which I was, a fanatic. I didn't volunteer to go into it, in hindsight if they'd asked me, but of course I would have done. But when a unit breaks down and you're drafted to another unit, you've got

09:00 no say in it. Being a signaller I was drafted into it like a lot of other fellows were. Some of them came out of the infantry in the 39th Battalion, they were drafted into it. Spud Murphy, my mate in Sydney he was drafted into it. He got the Military Medal for bravery. Just had to accept it. Well, I thought "It was a good thing myself, being drafted into that unit".

09:30 **Oh you did. Because I was going ask you now that experience you got doing that job, compared with, I suppose I shouldn't say routine, but a more routine signalmen's job?**

Well, it wasn't a mundane sort of job you know. Things are happening all the time. Messages coming through and you're sending messages and report would come through saying "What's the weather like up there today?" or

10:00 "Can you give us a low down on the cloud base?" or "Is there any enemy aircraft in the area?" Those were the sort of questions you were asked and you had to reply back. So it was communications excitement, really. Because all armies must have communications.

And so what personal changes do you think that the war brought to you?

10:30 Well, I suppose, to me, well, I think, maturity. Because I was only a boy when I went in but I came out a man, well, I hope I was a man. I looked like one. But I thought "I was more manly", if you know what I

mean.

Well, do you think you, let me be clear about this, do you think being a soldier makes you feel more of a man, or having been a soldier?

Yes, it does.

11:00 To say you've donned the colours. Except those people who didn't like the army and run away sort of thing, there was types like that, wanted to escape.

You knew of such people, did you?

I think I know one person who went AWL [Absent Without Leave] and didn't come back.

Was he in your unit?

11:30 No, he was in the 21st Light Horse. I didn't volunteer for that, but I was glad I got in there. But as you say, as I got more mature, I don't know if it's called a sense of masculinity, or what, if you know what I mean.

Yes, that's fine. And when you saw those cemeteries in

12:00 **New Guinea how did you feel about seeing such stark evidence of the numbers of people who were killed?**

Well, I didn't. What I did learn is that the government never told the Australian people the true story of New Guinea, what happened, I don't think, because there are thousands of people buried up there. Some of them in their thirties, most of them in their mid twenties. Well, the public didn't know, I don't think the public knew, I don't know, I might be wrong.

12:30 But I think they didn't advertise the fact the war was so costly in human lives in New Guinea. Which it was. I think they must have hushed up a bit of the news. I was very surprised myself when we went back to those cemeteries and seen rows and rows and rows of graves. God, I didn't realise it was so bad. But I do know that

13:00 up in the Owen Stanleys they didn't bury the whole bodies. Only buried arms or legs or chests, and heads, or legs in the cemeteries. They couldn't get it out or something. I was told that when I was up there.

If they only had parts of bodies, I mean, they wouldn't have been able to identify them.

No, well, that's what I have been told. I might be wrong.

No, I think you would probably be right.

13:30 They didn't bury the whole bodies because they couldn't get them out, or find them all or something.

Look, are your memories of the war the most vivid memories that you have?

Well, Thelma's says "I talk a lot about it". They are very vivid memories, yeah. It is something you never forget. You cannot forget it. It is with you forever.

14:00 I just can't shake it off because it is something that has happened in your life. And you - it has been part of your life, and when you're so young you can't say "No, I wasn't there and didn't do this". Even if I didn't do much, but it is sort of, you're tainted with it, you can't shake it off.

Obviously then, you must have talked to Thelma about your war experience?

14:30 I have, yes. Because her father's a returned soldier, too. Her father's a returned soldier and there are four in my family, returned soldiers. They had a lot in common.

And of course, when you see Bob, would you talk about the war with him?

We don't talk about it much, to each other.

15:00 Don't want to become emotional with him, but he was there too.

Well, you know when you were younger, when you first come home, did you discuss your war experiences then?

Yes,

Well, what would be the sorts of things you would talk about?

Oh, talking about lonely nights.

Oh, you did, did you? You didn't just remember the funny things.

I did I suppose. There are some characters in the army, some real characters,

15:30 you know, telling jokes and what have you. You do exchange some thoughts with other people who were there.

Well, did you make any good mates apart from your close associations?

Yes

With those in New Guinea? Had you made other good mates before that in your unit, when you were still in Australia?

16:00 Yes, only the chaps that were in the Light Horse 21st Reconnaissance Battalion. Good mates. I've got photos of them too. Some of them came from NSW. But we were camped together in Wagga Showgrounds, back in 1941.

And are many of them still alive, now?

Yes, a few of them are gone though, yes.

And have you talked to your children about you war experience?

16:30 Yes, I have. I've mentioned a few things to them.

What sorts of things would you tell them about?

Well, I would just say "When I was overseas before you were born, I was in the army." I told that to my other young son and he was in the army for nine years. There's a photo of him on the mantelpiece, there.

Yes, do you know what unit he was in, or what corps he was in?

Yes, he was in ordinance.

I thought you might have said signals.

17:00 No, he wasn't in the sigs. Sigs are the intelligentsia of the army!

Well, I know. Well, what rank did he hold in the army?

He got sergeant. He was a sergeant. Did you see the photo in there?

Well, what had you tell him about your war experience? Do you think you were an inspiration to him?

17:30 Well, I did. I remember him saying "Dad, I want to join the army." I said, "Right, I'll take you up the barracks where you can enlist." We went up there and he'd already done it! Thelma will tell you that.

And what about your grandchildren? Are they interested in what you did in the war?

Well, a bit young.

18:00 No, the youngest one's 22. No, they're not interested. Not interested in joining the army. Lyndal's oldest boy, he's an actor. He was in "Neighbours". You know that show? He goes to Acting Academy. So he won't join the army.

Well, I've just got a few more special, you know, general questions here.

18:30 **When you joined up did you feel you were defending the Empire, or Australia?**

Well, I had heard so much about Hitler and people were joining up, well, like a lot of the chaps I thought "It would be a great adventure". A lot of other chaps thought "It would be a great adventure", not dreaming that anything's going to happen to you.

19:00 **What do you think was your most difficult experience during the war?**

Difficult? Yes, well, I think the most difficult was when I was posted to Annenberg, and one of the blokes got sick and was sent home.

19:30 That was the most difficult thing, because we were so isolated and lonely for our own people, there was only two of us there. It took a while to get adjusted to that. It was difficult, mentally difficult. Because when we were back at base camp, in Nadzab there, we were all mixing in together and going to this parade together and playing sport together,

20:00 but when you're isolated by yourself, only two of you, you can't get into sport or anything like that, you're sort of difficult sort of period to face. But you do come accustomed to it, I did become accustomed to it, and rode it out. To me, that was the difficult period.

I was thinking, you must have developed a mental toughness?

20:30 **Do you think that had an effect on the rest of your life?**

Yes, it made me mentally stronger, I thought “If I could go through that and not break down, well, I think I could go through any hurdles”. I was mentally tougher sort of thing. It is pretty hard to describe how mentally tough you are, but I think I am mentally tougher than I was.

21:00 **I think you mentioned that some people didn’t come through the experience, I mean some people went what was described as “Troppo”.**

Yes, that’s right. And I have seen them too.

You had seen them, had you?

Yes, I met one chappy. He won the Military Medal but he went off his head and he tried to shoot the roof of the cookhouse in Nadzab and they put him in Callan Park, a mental asylum in Sydney. I think he stayed there till he died. They called it “Tropical – troppo”.

21:30 **I have to ask you the other one. What do you think was the best experience in your army times?**

The best experience. Well, when I got off the plane in Townsville was very great, getting back in the country. But also coming down here to Balcombe and going to a dance every Saturday night,

22:00 and going out with the boys, and going dancing and meeting girls and all that sort of thing. That was a real, I thought “I was on a honeymoon sort of thing”. Yes, we’d go every Saturday night to the local dance down at Mornington. And down at Frankston. Dance and go home.

And another thing about army discipline,

22:30 **do you think that has an effect on the way you deal with people and jobs after the war?**

Yes, I think it does. Because army discipline, as I said before, you have to have discipline in the army. If you haven’t got discipline from officers, especially officers, show discipline in the army or

23:05 leadership. It’s like having a cricket team without a captain, so I think discipline is an absolute necessity in the army. And as long you have got good officers who can use the right sort of discipline without injuring the feelings of the men. You know, you can discipline a person and pat him on the back at the same time, but being an officer you just can’t override him and make him feel as though he’s just a grub.

23:30 Some officers were like that I think, but I never struck any. But I’ve heard it said “Some blokes, officers, were very bad disciplinarians”.

You had good officers, you are saying?

Yes, I was very fortunate, very good officers. Mostly lieutenants I had there was sig., signal officers.

24:00 **Well, who was your immediate superior in New Guinea?**

My immediate superior was Colonel John Marsh, we were all acting corporals then, but back in base our commanding officer, Colonel John Marsh. He was the – anybody above that I didn’t know much because we was in different places, see.

So back at base, you’re saying that was back at Nadzab?

Back at Nadzab. He was the commanding officer. He’s passed on now, poor fellow.

24:30 **But what sort of contact would you have had with him anyway? Were you constantly communicating with him?**

No, we never had any contact with him. I was only communicating with the signal office in Nadzab. In Moresby we had a signal office and at Nadzab we had a signal office. Different places had signal officers. Sergeants. But we never ever got to know them, because we never seen them.

25:00 **Well, that’s right, that’s why your experience is unique.**

That’s right.

For five months anyway.

We never seen an officer or other ranked person. Sergeants or warrant officers or lieutenants or majors. Never seen them.

Well, Eddie, are there any other, I’ve got a couple more questions to ask you – but I’d like to ask whether,

25:30 **is there anything that you would like to bring up at this point that we haven’t discussed about your war experience?**

I think I told you about on the ship where we all got seasick and

26:00 told “To go up to the middle of the ship” and everyone else is there. I think I’ve said everything I could possibly say with out telling lies, and I don’t want to be telling lies. I’m no hero. I’ve professed I’m not a hero. I don’t want to say things that can be misconstrued and I’m just an ordinary fellow who had that experience in the army.

26:30 I did say, one thing I did, I was an expert shot on the rifle range and got first class distinguish for target shooting, so.

Do you think you were fighting in a just war?

Yes, I think so, because the Japanese invaded Philippines, invaded New Guinea and Rabaul and they’re on their way down here,

27:00 and like everybody else, jacked up against them. I feel I was in a just war, because I didn’t want my family or relatives overrun for the rest of their lives under the domination of the Japanese.

Had you formed any views about the Japanese as fighters or soldiers?

Well, apparently they were good soldiers, but they were very cruel, what I have heard about them. People who have contact or come under them.

27:30 They were very cruel and the Geneva Convention didn’t mean a thing to them the way they treated prisoners and they had a rule of their own and they, in general, they weren’t a very good race. That’s my opinion, they weren’t a very good race, a very good human race, they were very barbaric from what I’ve heard about them, a prisoner of war.

28:00 **Well, what’s your attitude towards the Japanese now? Has that changed over time?**

It has changed a bit. They are a bit, they’ve changed, they’d have to, changed in their attitude towards people. Why they would want to come and invade Australia, but they have changed. I think they have changed, I could be wrong.

28:30 They could rise again and be barbaric. Murderers, what have you.

I have one last question. Do you think you and your unit received adequate acknowledgement for your contribution to the war?

Well, we did, when we come home and after the war was over I’ve got citations in there, and I’ve got one from the President of the United Sates of America.

29:00 **Yes, tell us what was in that citation?**

Yes, I’ve got it here. Can I show it to you?

Could you just tell us now, and I’ll have a look at it in a minute?

‘Congratulations for heroic deeds.’ What a fine job we done and that sort of thing. John F Kennedy signed it and sent it to our President at the time. Sent him, Neil Maclay, he was our president before me time, he passed away,

29:30 and he sent him a book that was called The Private Spotters book and he give us a few accolades, what he thought of us.

What was your reaction to getting this congratulation?

We all got a copy of it, those in the committee got copies of it. I thought “That was very generous of him”. Because he was saved by, not a spotter himself, but he was in a PT [Patrol Torpedo] boat.

30:00 I think he was a spotter, or an Australian Army personnel pulled him out of the water. He was very gracious. And we got citations from Major General C. H. Simpson, the Officer in Charge of the Australian signals. That’s in that book there.

30:30 And we got a lot of other things. One from the Returned Soldiers leaflet circular. Yes, we got a few commendations.

Well, what would be your final word to Australians about your contribution to World War II?

Well, my contribution was insignificant compared to other peoples.

31:00 But I had a job to do and our unit had a job to do and I think we done it to the best of our ability.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS