Australians at War Film Archive

John Jarrett - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Good morning John.**

Good morning.

Thank you for giving us your time today. I would like to start off by asking you a few questions, if you could just give me a brief summary of your service?

Well I joined the army, the regular army in 1972, drafted in National Service and went

01:00 to basic training and only spent twenty-four hours there because I just finished National Service so they sent me straight to a unit in Albury, or actually Wodonga. Ordnance Depot Wodonga. I was an ammunition examiner. I done one ammunition examiner course so I travelled pretty extensively throughout New South Wales in bomb disposal and maintenance. And then I was

01:30 transferred to Japan. And I went up to Japan as I thought an ammunition examiner and was sent to a laundry and dry cleaning unit. And from Japan I went to Korea with mobile bath and laundry unit, travelled back and forth two or three times to Japan and Korea and after three years came home. Was stationed at Albury again for a little while and then I was transferred down

02:00 to Puckapunyal as a National Service instructor. Did the last couple of terms in National Service and then they started up a new unit, a mobile unit for 3 Battalion in New South Wales up at Holsworthy and I was sent up there as one of the unit members of that. And

02:30 from there my six years were up and I came home and got discharged.

And that was in what year, that you…?

'58. I spent six years, regular army.

So when you signed on originally for six years?

Yes, when I joined up you could join for two, three or six years. And I thought I might as well go the whole hog.

And what did you do after your service,

03:00 **when you were discharged?**

Well actually I have had a multitude of jobs since I have got out of the army. Initially when I first got out of the army I went to work for Kirby's, a refrigeration mob, and they were selling refrigerators. And I was actually the storeman at… I don't know how I got the job but I did. But there was a big long queue when I went up for the job and I was the last one in the queue. I

03:30 walked into office and I said, "I'm wasting my time here." And he said, "I'll judge that." And I walked out with the job. But I didn't like it. I don't like inside jobs. Then I went to work at the ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries] down at Osborne. I spent eight years down there as a shift worker. And I decided to go into business for myself, so I came up and here and started my service station, had that for six years, and run out of well

04:00 energy as far as I was concerned for that. So I went and worked for other people then. And I became a sales rep [representative] for different firms, so it went on until I retired. And as I said, I worked for a lot of different firms as a sales rep.

And family, when did you get married?

In 1956. 16th February 1956.

04:30 **So that was while you were still in the…?**

In the army, yes. I had two years to go actually. Actually it was while I was a National Service instructor at Pucka [Puckapunyal], I got married.

And any children?

Yes, I have got a son and a daughter. Shock of my life, my son actually joined the army

05:00 and it was a big shock to me because he was a non conformist. And when he told me he was joining the army, I said to him, "You realise that when they ask you to jump, when they tell you to jump, you ask them how high?" And he said, "Oh I'll be right Dad, I'll be right." And surprise to me he lasted eleven years in the army. He was in 1 Battalion that went to Somalia. He has

05:30 had a bit of active service as well, so. And now he is a truck driver, an interstate truck driver from Sydney. And about me daughter, what can I say? She doesn't live very far from us here. Over in Woodcroft she lives, in Woodcroft, she has got two lovely daughters. And my son has got three lovely kids and the eldest one of those is twenty-one.

06:00 Four granddaughters and one grandson.

Fantastic, its sounds like a great family.

Oh well, we like to think so.

Okay, well that is a really good introduction to yourself. So what I would like to do now is go back to your own childhood. Where were you born?

Down at Semaphore. You don't know where that is – it is down at Port Adelaide way.

06:30 So I am a Port [Port Adelaide Football Club] fan you know. And I went to Le Fevre School till I was fourteen and then I left school when I was fourteen and I went away to sea. Went away on the ketches the first couple of trips.

I'll ask you about joining the merchant navy in a minute, but just to begin with can you just paint a picture of your early family life?

07:00 Well I was a wanderer when I was a kid. I was forever going walkabouts. I think I was part Aborigine. Finished up when I was about four or five year old, or four year old, before I even went to school, I used to go wandering down over the river, down the Port River. And it finished up that they had they walking harnesses and so they finished up I had one of these with a forty foot rope hanging on the clothesline so I couldn't get out of the backyard.

07:30 But I had a lot of fun because this was in the war years; the Second World War was going on. I think we enjoyed ourselves more than the kids do today, to be honest with you, because we had to make our own fun. They are too frightened to make their own fun. I won't go into that. But as I say, the families in the area

08:00 were more closer together than they are today, I think. I had a good family life, you know. I was a rebel, a real black sheep of the family I was. Any strife that was going on, I was in it.

And did you get any beltings?

No, I can't honestly say I got belted. I got chastised, I got punished, but I didn't get belted.

08:30 And my mate next door did. His Dad used to wear these big wide leather belts and he used to take that off. If all Ursie Johnson, Ursie Miller it was, if he got into trouble, he got belted with this thing. I pitied him, you know, he was no worse than me. But his Dad was a lot stricter than mine. Or my Dad was only a little short bloke and he couldn't run.

And what sort of

09:00 **work did your father do?**

He was, actually he worked for McCauley's Hotel. He only ever had one job in his life. He started there when he, it was his first job and he stayed with them till he died. He was a barman and a roustabout and he used to work funny hours, and he used to go in on Sunday mornings and drive the family to church cause the pubs weren't open on Sundays in those days. And I can

09:30 always remember him, because we used to have to walk past the hotel going to school so we would stop in for a lemonade on the way home. And we always went past when the brewery truck was loading the big kegs off. When I say brewery truck, it was a horsedrawn wagon. And these big eighteen-gallon wooden kegs, they were lowering down the slides. And one of them slipped off over the rope and my Dad jumped in between that and a

10:00 crate of whisky, a stack of whisky, so the whisky wouldn't get smashed – smashed all his ribs. But they saved the whisky. And I used to wander around the port a lot when there were all the ships. Every chance I got I was down there with the ships, because the port was very busy in those days. All the ketches and fishing boats and overseas ships and coasters. I

10:30 got a fascination for them.

And did you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, I have two brothers and a sister. One older brother and my sister is younger than me, and then my younger brother. I am the second eldest and I am still the rebel. I don't see my brothers and sister very often, unfortunately. They live the other side of town and it's a long way to go to there.

And how strict was your mother?

11:00 I wouldn't say she was a dominant woman. She was firm, but not overly. We could get around her, we had ways. But no she wasn't really strict, she was… I can't really

11:30 describe her because, as I say, I only had up to fourteen and then I left home and I went away for three and half years when I was fourteen so I didn't see much of my parents.

And when you got the long harness that you've mentioned put on you, was that irritating to you?

No, I used to get up in the morning and come in and say, "Here Mum, here is my harness." And she used to fit it on me and I'd go out in the yard

12:00 and hook it on because I had the whole length of the yard because we had one of those clotheslines with a big prop and I used to be able to run the whole length of the yard. Because it was forty foot long rope on it, you know, I had plenty of room. Didn't worry me. Course then when I started going to school, I didn't have to wear my harness any more. No, we had everything we wanted. We were fortunate in this respect that we grew up just at the

12:30 end of the Depression and my Dad had never been out of work, so we were fortunate in that respect.

So you had enough food and shoes, food and clothing?

Oh yes, we were always, plenty of food, and there was always clothes. Shoes were always good, not that we wore them very often. We used to go barefoot more often. No,

13:00 it's really hard to recollect what your parents were really like, you know. They made mistakes, we made mistakes, it all comes out in life.

And how did you respond to school?

Didn't like it, hated school, used to play the wag [truant]. Used to go swimming in the summer time down the pool.

13:30 We go out the back gate and go down the river and have a swim, come back at the afternoon recess in time to knock off and come home. But I got through school all right. But as I say, I wasn't overly thrilled. But in hindsight I wished I had stayed longer at school. But it's always easier to be wiser after the event, isn't it.

And in that sort of, in those

14:00 **wandering around the docks of Port Adelaide, what was it is like during those days?**

Very bustling, activity everywhere. It was good to watch the people. The characters down the wharves, the different things. Course those wharfies used to have horses that used to pull the trolleys, so as

14:30 soon as it came off the ships onto the trolley and the wharfie would lead the draughthorse along them and go up to where they would unload it and then unload it. But there were all sorts of characters in the port. There was one old wino [alcoholic] used to live a big cardboard box, and he had worked a way in how to get into the customs contraband

15:00 what's-a-name, where they used to store their products before they ship it out. And he had to bore a hole into this whisky thing and put a straw into it and suck it out. And we could never work it out until we found this straw going through the back fence, through the back wall into this box.

Very resourceful.

15:30 The wharfies could take anything that was busted open. And there was funny accidents, you know. Things were getting smashed and the wharfies would take their kick [share] out of it. But that's part of life again.

And how did you get around when you were wandering around?

Walked, walked everywhere. We couldn't afford pushbikes. We were to poor for that. And we used to walk everywhere and

16:00 run go for a run down the sand dunes, down along Semaphore and that. We were very active in those days. Oh Dad, he used to walk for miles. Do you know Uraidla out near the Adelaide Hills? He worked as I said, for McCauley's Hotel and they owned the Maiden Magpie when he first started with them.

And he used to knock off work at Saturday afternoon,

16:30 six o'clock closing, and he'd walk from there to Uraidla because that was where he lived. And then he would walk back on Monday morning to start work. He used to walk everywhere. We used to go on holidays up to Bridgewater and then we would walk from Bridgewater to Uraidla to see our grandparents. So we done a lot of walking.

17:00 **That is a lot of walking isn't it?**

Yes, especially when you were a little kid.

And the family house, that you lived in, in the port, what was that like?

Actually it is still standing to this day. It is a weatherboard type house. It was weatherboard and iron, iron sides. A real old place built up on stilts a little bit.

17:30 Actually the corner house was the old butcher shop and our house was the house for the butchers and the backyard out the back was the slaughterhouse. We had all these big Besser block walls at the back where there used to be this slaughterhouse. We had the usual things – the chickens and the goats and the dogs in the backyard. Sometimes a horse.

18:00 **Did you ride the horse?**

No my older brother was the horse man. I could ride but he was the one that was, he was the one that liked the horse, he was the country boy.

What sort of boy were you? You have described yourself as a rebel. Why do you think you were a rebel?

Just if there was any mischief to get into, I got it.

18:30 I had done it.

Such as?

Well as I said, when we were kids we went for a walk down the Port River and we seen a rowing boat and so we took it out for a row in the middle of the river and turned it upside down and brought it back and tied it up upside down. And we'd go down, before the Port was like it was, before it is now, they used to have a bridge that used to open spindle. And when it was going to open we used to go down through

19:00 the manhole and walk along the catwalk, and where the water pipe had an automatic value and when the bridge opened it shut off, and we used to hang onto this and go around with the bridge, and as the ketches come through we would drop down into the water and catch onto the bowsprit and go around to the bend of the river on the front of the ketch and let it go and catch the ferry going across the river. All sorts of silly things.

19:30 If our kids had done that today, I would have killed them.

I was just thinking that is quite dangerous.

It was, but we didn't think of it at that time. I couldn't swim at the time. Used to run across the wharf and jump into the river and call out to my brother and come and get me until one day he said, "No, you got out of here, you get back." So I learnt to swim. We didn't have any fear. They talk about all these kids jumping off

20:00 the jetties and they say, "Oh they are mad." But we used to do it when we were in Semaphore. You can't really blame the kids today. So you eventually learnt to swim. Had to – out in the middle of the Port River, you got nowhere to go.

Did you do any fishing?

Oh yeah, I love fishing. Every chance I get I go fishing, which is not often.

20:30 Not now.

But back when you were a boy?

When I was a kid, yeah. There used to be a shop in town called Semtunes. They used to sell all the fireworks and all the gear. And I went in there one day and they had this big long bamboo, I'll never forget, huge. And I said, "That would make a great rod." So I brought it home on the bus. Eighteen foot long it was. Carted it home on a double-decker bus.

21:00 How I got it on there, I don't remember. When I got it home, I thought, "Oh, it's too long." So I cut some off. So instead of taking it off the bottom, I took it off the tip. But I made me rod. I had this big long rod that I'd made.

And where were your favourite spots to go fishing?

Oh down the Semaphore jetty or down the Port River. We used to go crabbing a lot, down the Port. We used to get a lot of blue swimmers [crabs] in Semaphore

21:30 and the Port River. I don't know what it is like now.

And how did you catch the crabs?

With a net or we used to go in the Port River and go toe crabbing, go walk across barefoot and with a dab net and put around with the sand, and when the crab come up, scoop em up with a dab net. Cause the water was only so deep at low tide across the river in those days.

22:00 All sorts of things we used to get up to.

And what would you do with the crabs?

Take em home and boil them up and eat them. Sunday mornings we used to go periwinkling for Dad. That is a little shellfish that goes along and makes a tunnel in the sand, and you follow the tunnel along and you dig at the end of it and pick up the periwinkle. We used to bring them home and boil them up for Dad to have on Sundays. Made your own fun. As I,

22:30 we used to do all these fun things.

Well tell us why you decided to join the merchant navy?

It was an adventure. I wanted to get away, I wanted to travel. So I got myself a job on a ketch, what was I on, the Ticketra was the first ketch I

23:00 had out of Port Adelaide. We went across to Pine Point, which is straight across the sandbar at outer harbour and straight across the gulf.

Well you were very young. Fourteen is very young.

Oh yes.

So how did you manage to get a job on the ketch?

Just went and asked for it. No problem. Jobs were plentiful in those days because you didn't… And as I said, the war was just it was coming to an end

23:30 so there was lots of work around. I got this job on the ketch to get a bit of experience. And then signed on a steamer and done the sugar run up to Queensland, up to Townsville. Townsville, Adelaide, Townsville, Adelaide. And then got another ship and went over to Tasmania and Melbourne and Sydney and Brisbane.

24:00 Then I got onto a Danish ship and that's when I went overseas then.

And what did your mum and dad think of you joining the merchant navy?

Well, I got their permission before I left. I don't think she was very happy but she knew that I wasn't going to do any good at home. I come home and I had a job, I come home from one ship and Mum said, "How long are you going to be home for?" And I said,

24:30 "Oh, I don't know. Till I find something." I got myself a job in the port and I was going to work, and I seen a ship with the sailing flag up. And so I went and asked them if they had any vacancies, and they said yes. So I went home and packed my bags and left, and they didn't see me for two and half years. Left a note to say that I was gone. Never even got to the job that I was going to.

So, you did a few, you

25:00 **mentioned there was a sugar run that you did?**

Used to run from Townsville down to Adelaide, to the sugar works in Adelaide, and bring the sugar down for that. That was one of them. All different ships do different things, you know.

So, well what was the first ketch that you joined?

The Ticketra.

Can you tell us what it was like that first trip, what did you have to do on board?

25:30 Well there were only two of us in the crew – the skipper and me. And I can always remember it as if it happened yesterday. He walked down the wharf and he had a little bag in his hand and it was our stores for the trip. He had a stick of Metwurst, a dozen eggs and a loaf of bread. He was a German, this bloke. So we sailed across to Pine Point, we got there in the middle of the night,

26:00 and berthed along and when the tide went out the ketch sat on the bottom. And all the farmers come down the next morning with their horsedrawn trolleys and their bags of wheat and we loaded bags of wheat. And my job was to, as they come down the slide, was to stop them and ease them down into the hold so the skipper could lump them down and stack em in the hold until he got that far between the stack and the deck. And then it was my job to go down there and put them on my back and hump them

into

26:30 the corner, because I was the small bloke. And then when the tide come in the ship floated and we sailed back to Port Adelaide. Skipper said to me, “Give us a call when you see the lights of the other harbour and I’ll come up.” So he did. He went to sleep and I stood on the wheel. And I couldn’t wake him. I tied the wheel, went and shook him, but he still wouldn’t wake up. So I actually brought the ketch down the Port River,

27:00 through the harbour and down the Port River until he woke up.

All by yourself?

Yep. That was my first experience. And then when we unloaded it was at 4 o’clock in the morning when we berthed in the Port. And then at six o’clock we shifted ship alongside a steamer and the wharfies came aboard and unloaded our wheat into the steamer. And he said, “I’ll be back in a minute.” I said, “Where you going?” He said, “I’m just going to get the papers. We are going back again.”

27:30 I said, “You’re going on your own.” Not with me. I didn’t want to go anywhere with him.

You didn’t get on?

I thought it was too hard a work for a pound. That’s all I got paid, one pound. I thought, “No.”

It was backbreaking work.

Oh yeah, it was hard work. Plus I didn’t get hardly any sleep. And fourteen year old.

28:00 It was a bit of a shock to the system. So then I got a temporary job with Oldfields Bakery down the Port and I worked for them for a little while delivering bread until I got myself another ship and off I went.

So did you have a van to deliver bread?

Yes, a horsedrawn van.

28:30 Them were the days.

What was the bread run? Where was the bread run?

Down to Largs, Largs Bay and Semaphore all that area. When you get down round just past Largs, there wasn’t a great deal. There were all sandhills then so we didn’t go much past Largs. There was

29:00 as I say, interesting, but not for me.

So you were still hankering to get back on a ship?

Mmm.

So how did you find the next ship?

Well it’s a strange setup. When you join a ship, you have to be a union member, but to become a union member you have got to have a ship. It’s a catch. So you have got to stand there until they call for a, I was a deck boy.

29:30 So a deck boy is actually a first timer. It’s like an apprentice. So if there is no deck boys available that have got union cards then they will take you. So once you have got a union card, you can get a ship anywhere. So all you do is you stand in line and they call for a particular ship. They might want a deck boy,

30:00 a bucco and two ABs [Able Seamen] and four firemen. So everybody that wants a job, they stand in line and the skipper or the first mate or first engineer will come along and if they take your union book off you, you have got the job. That’s how it used to work. I don’t know how it does now.

And so what was after the Ticketra and after doing the bread run?

30:30 **What was your next ship?**

The Yulalu was the first steamer that I went out on, and that was up to Townsville on the sugar run. And then the Dandenong and the Dilgar. A river boat, the River Derwent. And then the Pulkau

31:00 was the Danish ship.

And the crews, the average size of the crews? For example, the Yulalu what size?

About thirty-four in the crew, that was deck and below, firemen and that. Each ship was different to the last, inasmuch as the

31:30 first, the Yulalu, was a old fo’c’sle, you lived up on the fo’c’sle. And the next ship was a forward cabin and midships, and then finish up on the Danish it was a single cabin. As I say, they varied. The Dandenong was only about three or four and half thousand ton, not very big. That was a

32:00 twin cabin, midships.

And so you started off as a deck boy?

Hmm.

How were you treated by other older crewman?

As all apprentices were trained, taught, you were like gofers [‘go fer’ this, ‘go fer’ that]. You were ordered about and when they asked you to do something you

32:30 done it you didn’t argue with them. If you did you got bumped. Because I did one time, I backchatted one bloke and he thumped me with everything in the cabin except the door. I never argued with him again. It was a hard life but a good life, because they look after one another because you are living on a ship so you have to get on. I have never ever seen

33:00 any real animosity on the ship. I think that was a good training for me when I went into the army. It was the basis for me, because I learnt how to live with me men. It was a good life.

What were those ships like; can you describe the conditions on board?

The Dilgar,

33:30 that was a tub. I was lying in my bunk and my bunk was below the mess deck. And I woke up and I was saturated and I couldn’t work out what it was. And all the water from the mess sink was dripping through the deck and was coming through the rivet holes. I could lie in my bunk and just twist the rivets out of the… So they black banned that in Melbourne. She stayed there for about

34:00 six weeks before they got a crew to take it on a single trip to Sydney via Tasmania for scrap. They sold it to the Chinese for scrap. It was a terrible ship, an old coal burner. There were some characters on it, though. We had one bloke, he was eighty-year-old and he was an old windjammer man, and he

34:30 he spent his eightieth birthday because he was a fireman on this and to celebrate his eightieth birthday he ran hand over hand from the foot plate at the boiler room to the boat deck right up the top. Hand over hand, just to celebrate his eightieth birthday. Only a little bloke, wiry as anything. Good fireman. He used to get a slice, a big long steel, about that long, he used to put it in the fire

35:00 and turn the fire over and he could do it one handed. I could have put it in and it would have melted.

And what were your duties?

Oh as a deck boy. You learn, you used to learn splicing, a lot of painting, chipping and painting.

35:30 Boatmanship, you’d get your boat ticket for the lifeboat. What else? Navigation, how to steer a ship, and as I say, you are an apprentice you actually do two years as a deck boy, and then two years as a bucco, that is the next one up. But I only done one year as a deck boy

36:00 and then I went straight onto a bucco because the one ship they couldn’t get a bucco so they upgraded me.

And can you just describe for people in the future who might be looking at this archive what the term bucco means?

Bucco is as I say the next one up from a deck boy. So you got your deck boy, which is a one to two apprentice type thing, and then the bucco is between the deck boy

36:30 and the AB your ordinary Able Seaman. And then you got your, in the crew, well it used to be, I don’t know what it is like now. There was the deck boy, bucco, AB, then bosun, and that was all the deck staff. And then you’ve got your ABs, you have only got one deck boy and one bucco and but you might have fifteen or twenty ABs and one

37:00 bosun The bosun is the boss; he is the one who takes the orders from the first mate. And each person on the ship has got a different job. Like coming into port, and what they call the mud pilot is the bloke who is on the wheel entering and leaving port. He is the most experienced.

37:30 **And did you, I guess, you spent four years in the merchant navy. I am wondering on all these ships did you look up to any of those men as kind of a father figure while…**

38:00 We were mates more than anything because they didn’t treat you as kids. You were treated as an adult and they expected you to act the same, you know. We were only kids. But it broadened my education, I can assure you.

Perhaps you can tell us about that. You went overseas with a Danish ship, was it?

Hmm.

So you had done a few runs around the Australia coast?

And then I spent about eighteen

38:30 months going to Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Portugal, Spain and then I came home.

And sorry what was the name of that Danish ship?

The Pulkau. That's what, when they came back to Sydney and that's where I got called up to do my National Service.

So where did the Pulkau originally leave from?

39:00 **Was it Sydney?**

No, actually I joined it here in Adelaide. And it had the sailing flag up and I went and asked for a job on it. And they said yes. And actually I went away on that as an assistant cook, believe it or not. I couldn't cook a thing for the life of me.

Okay, our tape is just coming to an end, and we will just change tapes and I will ask you…

Tape 2

00:32 **So, John, you were just about to tell me and I am curiosity as to how you managed to get a job on the Pulkau as an assistant cook?**

An assistant cook, yes. Well I was going to a job in Port Adelaide. And I seen the ship with a Blue Peter up, that's the sailing flag, and that means that it is going to leave port within twenty-four hours. So I thought, "Oh, that looks a nice ship. I will go down and see if there are any vacancies."

01:00 So and the only vacancies was assistant cook and he said, "Would you like that, John?" And I said, "I'll take it." So I got the job, went home and packed my bags and left a note to say that I had gone and see you later and sailed with it that night.

Could you cook anything?

No, but fortunately I was only assistant cook and I used to just have to do what I was told.

01:30 And as I say, I learnt.

And what did you learn?

To do what I was told. But what were your jobs as assistant cook? Well basically it was just to prepare whatever the cook wanted to make. I used to get in there and prepare everything for him. Because I wasn't the only one, we had two or three boys. Actually it was the first ship that I was on that had females in the crew.

02:00 And it was a Danish ship and we had a couple of stewardesses on the ship and there was actually one of the officers was female and it was quite a novelty for me. I had never served on a ship that had a female aboard as a crew member.

That would have been very different for that time?

It was it was very different and it was only a small ship

02:30 and I think it was only less the four thousand ton as far as space went. It wasn't a big ship, but it was a happy ship. It was. We were able to have a lot of fun.

So roughly the size of the crew?

Oh there was only about thirty at the maximum all told, if there was that.

03:00 It was a long time ago but I can always remember when we pulled into Sydney and where Darling Harbour is now, that bridge across, we were actually alongside that and that was a working bridge in those days with traffic going across. And there was a butter shortage in Sydney and I was up on the wing of the bridge, which was actually level with the footpath on there,

03:30 dressed up in all my whites, and this woman came along and said, "Have you got any butter?" And I looked at her and said, "Beg you pardon?" She said, "Have you got any butter?" And I said, "No speak English." I got a great thrill out of that.

So you passed yourself off as Danish?

Yes.

04:00 And then as I say, we went overseas for a while and I come back and then Sydney again. And there were two gentlemen that came aboard the ship and they said, "You're required to do your National Service and in fact you should have done it the last intake." And I said, "Well I couldn't very well, I wasn't here."

And they said, “No, but you have got to do it now.” And I said, “Well is there any chance of doing it in Adelaide in my home state?” And they said, “Yes.”

04:30 I said, “Good, the ship is going to Adelaide. Can I sail on that?” And they said, “Yeah, no worries.” I knew that we were going to Melbourne and then overseas again. And I got down to the Melbourne and they were waiting for me there. So I done my National Service in Victoria.

That’s interesting. Before I ask you about your National Service, can you just tell us a little bit about those ports of call that you made overseas, that trip around the world?

05:00 **That would have been your first time overseas?**

It was eye opening; it was all new, different cultures. I used to wander everywhere, go everywhere, and go all over the place. As soon as we hit port I was allowed off. I would go walking all over the place just to see what was going on.

05:30 As I said, it was a culture shock because they were all different to what I remembered as a kid. But it was interesting.

And where did you go?

As I said, we went to Denmark, we went to Sweden, and I went to Portugal and to Spain. Never ever wanted to go to England if the ship was going to go to England.

06:00 I had no inclination to go to England. Don’t know why, I just didn’t feel like going there. And I have been there since then but that is another story. I found customs interesting in different places that we went to. And I

06:30 learnt that before you done anything you learnt that you tried to get as much of their custom as much as possible or otherwise you’d get into trouble. Not physically into trouble, if you upset people unnecessarily. And I learnt at an early age that you didn’t do that if you could help it. I still do and I am still upsetting

07:00 people.

You mentioned earlier that your time in the merchant navy broadened your mind and your outlook. What did you mean by that?

Well at an early age you can appreciate your home life. Actually that was actually driven out of… My early home life was actually driven out of my mind because I expanded in the unknown, if you like to put it,

07:30 and I got my education through experience more than anything. And I think I was the better for it because it certainly changed me. I wasn’t such a rebel when I came home.

Is that the way that you think the merchant navy changed you?

I think it was

08:00 part of it, plus my army service was the background, you know. That fact as I said, when you are in close contact with men, you learn a lot more. You learn how to behave yourself, how to behave and how to treat other

08:30 people in the same predicament. So I think that was my initial testing, for want of a better word.

So you said that the National Service caught up with you first of all in Sydney. So how old were you then?

I was eighteen. Just turned eighteen,

09:00 so actually I should have been in the first intake. But they caught me for the second intake in Puckapunyal, put me aboard the train and sent me up to Pucka. Got off the train in the siding in the camp there and this RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] was calling all these names out and pointing them in different directions. Went through the whole list and I am standing there like the proverbial all on my own, and he walked up and said, “What’s your name?” And I said, “Jarrett, sir.”

09:30 And he said, “You’re not on the list.” And I said, “Good, I’ll go home.” And he said, “It is now.” So that’s how I got an introduction into the National Service. And I looked at it this way, “If I am here, I may as well make the best of it.” These people who went in there and grizzled and carried on, they only made it tough for themselves. It’s the same with anything. If you, just because you don’t like it you have got to make the

10:00 best of it.

So you didn’t have any opportunities to go home before you went straight to Pucka?

Hmm, straight to Pucka, and when I finished my National Service, or my three months’ basic training, I

said, “Oh good, I can go back to sea again.” And they said, “No you can’t.” Cause in those times you had to do two years in the CMF, the Citizens’ Military Force.

10:30 So I said, “If I have got to do it, I want to go home.” So I come back to South Australia and wandered around a bit and I thought, “Well if I can’t beat it, join them.” So I joined the regular army.

Well before we move on and talk about what it was like at Pucka, I’d just like to take a moment to ask you about

11:00 **whether any other of your family members had been involved in World War I or World War II?**

No, no not to my knowledge. But it was only recently that I found out that my uncle was in the First World War, I didn’t know that. He, cause he was a Scots man. He joined some regiment when he was fourteen

11:30 and went overseas and they found out and they sent him home, and they put him in a shipyard as an apprentice and he finished up as a boilermaker. But that was only in the last eighteen months ago, or twelve or eighteen months ago, that I found out that he was in the army. And his son rang me up and asked me if I knew anything about his Dad’s service. And I said, “No.” And he said,

12:00 “Well you’re the only one on the side of the family that has been in the army or the services and I thought he might have spoken to you.” And I said, “No, I didn’t even know.”

So how did you respond to when you got hauled into National Service?

Another adventure, different, didn’t, I wasn’t annoyed or anything, I wasn’t as I said, I was there.

12:30 Do what I am told, enjoy it. It was different, it was different to what I had been used to but I think as I said, the fact that I had done spent four and half years in the merchant navy it had given me a grounding for this and that’s why I accepted it so readily.

Would you have considered yourself at that time

13:00 **to be fairly patriotic or…?**

I thought I was, yeah. I think I have always been patriotic. Not boisterous about it, but proud to be an Australian. Still am.

Because National Service was effectively conscription.

Yes, but it was

13:30 conscription inasmuch as no National Serviceman could be sent overseas. And it was only a three months’ basic training and then you done two years in a CMF unit. So there was no fear of going overseas. Having said, that a few of the naval National Servicemen went overseas. A few of them went

14:00 to Korean waters but there wasn’t many. And they were the only ones, the Australian National Serviceman that ever went near Korea.

Well by the time that you got called in to National Service, the Korean War was on?

Oh yes, yes.

So had you been aware of that or were you aware of that at the time?

14:30 Vaguely, but to be honest with you it wasn’t classified as a war. It was a police action so it didn’t get the publicity, plus the fact that on reflection now, and I would say the reason was that it was too close to the end of the Second World War so it didn’t get a great deal of publicity. You got your write-ups in the paper, but it was on the newsreels, but it was

15:00 always weeks or even days, weeks and months before, you know, that you heard anything. So there wasn’t a great deal. That my first, real acquaintance was from a returned Korean veteran, it was actually an instructor at Pucka. And that was the first,

15:30 cause the only reason I knew he was a Korean veteran was that he had two medal ribbons up. As I said, there was nothing told to us about the Korean War, or the Korean police action.

So you had just spent four and half years at sea thinking of yourself as a sailor and now

16:00 **you’re at Pucka in the army?**

That’s life; a grunter. It was different, as I said. It took me awhile to get my shore legs back. If you live by the rules it’s no problem. You stretch them but you don’t break em

16:30 and then you don’t get into trouble.

And what do you mean when you say it took a while to get your shore legs back?

Well you are used to walking around in a cramped area on a ship. And all of sudden you have got these big wide open spaces. It's another culture shock and you have got all these blokes standing there yelling at you. I never had that before. And there

17:00 used to be people asking me to do things and not telling me. You know, in a different way, you know, on the ship, they say, "This is what we want, do so and so and so." And you just went and done it. And you got a bloke standing there going red faced yelling out you, how to slow pass, how to stand, how to march.

I imagine it would have been quite a shock?

Yes, but as I say it was interesting because it was different.

17:30 And I have got a very inquisitive mind and I like to know the ins and outs of it and then I will persevere until I get sick of it. But as I say, it was different and so I enjoyed it.

And were you put into an army uniform at Pucka?

Oh yes, regular army uniform. We had the battle dress and the

18:00 fatigues and carried weapons and done all the soldier bits. You went up and got issued with uniforms, they'd throw these things at you and you had to get them into the right perspective. And a pair of boots that were awful heavy and I weren't used to them because I was always wearing sandshoes all the time. Freezing cold and blowing,

18:30 raining, flies, you had all things over at Pucka.

Well many things have been said about Pucka, but wondering what were your instructors like?

Well I don't think they were any different from any of the others. They'd yelled and screamed and carried on, but they got the job done.

19:00 I don't, they weren't bullies. They, each one are an individual and you can't say that when one was worse then the other or anything like that. They just had a job to do and they did it to the best of their ability with what they had to work with.

19:30 Course they had some atrocious things with people to work with, but they knocked us into soldiers.

And where you all National Serviceman in your…?

Yes, everybody at Pucka. There were three battalions at Pucka. There were 19, 20 and 21 Battalions and right down the other end was the armed regiment. And up the top end of the ground was the

20:00 service corps. So you had two regular army units each end of the what's-a-name and three battalions of National Serviceman.

So the three battalions of National Serviceman, were there grumblings and mumblings amongst other men about having to be there?

But that was initially. Once

20:30 they get moulded into unit they changed their attitude. You still get your odd rebellion now and again but nothing to like what it was the first week. The first week was the hardest, but once they realised that they were stuck there and they had a job to do they just done it. They made it hard for themselves, they got it hard, but if you plodded

21:00 along and did the things that you were asked you never had any problems. Once again I have got to revert back to the fact that I was better off than a lot because this wasn't my first time away from home. A lot of these blokes it was their first time from home so they were a little bit teary eyed.

21:30 **And how did, what did they do to?**

I can't really remember to be honest with you now, it is a long time ago. 1952, yeah '52 early '52. It's a long time. But I think it was just we were in there and out sort of thing. The three months went very quickly, a

22:00 hectic three months but to me it went quick.

And was the physical regime of Pucka, was it difficult or punishing?

No, no, you are young you are reasonably fit and as I say if you wanted to make it tough you could. But if you knuckled down and tried your best,

22:30 they made it as easy as they could for you. But if they could see that you were rebellious then they would make it hard for you.

And did you do any route marches?

Yes, we used to do the ten milers. Everything that the basic training was required for service, that was

what you done. Everything that the regular army done,

23:00 we done. They made us build a, or didn't make us, they got us to build an obstacle course and they said, "What do you reckon? That's nice and tough?" And they said, "Okay, go in and try it," because we were the first ones to try it because half of us built it. Not being naïve and not thinking that we would have to use it we make it tough as we can, you know. So we found out the hard way, you never volunteer for

23:30 anything in the army unless you think it out. "So any bush carpenters here?" A couple of blokes put their hands up. "Good go in the kitchen peeling spuds." You know, silly things like that. I always learnt you never volunteer for anything.

Well after that initial three months training, were you still hankering to get back to sea?

Oh yes, I wanted to get back to sea.

24:00 Yeah, that was my job what I enjoyed. But when they told me no.

Did you apply?

I told them that I was going to. Cause you had to report to these CMF units and I said, "Well I am not going to be here much longer." And they said, "Why?" And I said, "I am going back to sea." And they said, "Like hell you are. Think again." You had to do your two years National Service. I said, "How the devil am I

24:30 supposed to get back to my job?" They said, "Well you have got two years to go back." And I said, "In two years' time I will forget what I learnt." No, so, then I met Shirley and she said, "If you go back to sea," she said, "I don't want to know you." So I said, "All right." So I joined the army and went away for three years anyhow.

So do you think

25:00 **that the navy would have had you back?**

Oh yeah, I feel sure that I could have got a ship again, no problem. But it wasn't too be, unfortunately.

So where did you go after your three months at Pucka?

Well actually I got a job in Victoria for a little while working for the railways. But as I say, that's when I

25:30 found out that I couldn't go back to sea again. So I said, "I might as well go home and finish my National Service in my home state." But I couldn't settle down here, had to find something different.

And where did you live when you came back to Adelaide?

I went back to my family home for a while and they wondered who the stranger was walking in the door.

26:00 **Was it smooth going back home or did you have a few problems?**

I didn't have any problems, no, no. It was just like as if I had been on a holiday somewhere or the family had been on a holiday, you know, it was just fitted back in because I was part of the family after all.

And which CMF unit did you join?

26:30 Actually they put me in a signals unit in Victoria. But I didn't, as I said, I didn't attend any of their sessions. I was too busy trying to get back to sea.

And when you came back to Adelaide?

I didn't do any. I wasn't here that long. I didn't report to any CMF unit here either.

27:00 **So all of your CMF was in Victoria?**

All of it, I think I went to two parades the whole time.

So you weren't a regular attendee?

No. No as I said, I was to busy trying to get myself back to sea. But I, and I didn't like radios anyhow, couldn't understand them; I couldn't see any sense in having these things around anyhow.

27:30 **Were there any penalties for not showing up?**

I believe so, but they never ever caught me because when they found out. Well as I say I come from Victoria to South Australia – they had to find me again. I don't know how they found me on the ship in the first place, but they did.

28:00 **Yes, it does seem rather intriguing how they tracked you down.**

Oh yes, they had ways, apparently. Because as I say, when I was on the ship, I never had any passport. How I got out the country I don't know, in the first place, but I did. How I landed in other ports, nobody ever asked me for a visa or anything else.

28:30 I just walked around as if I was at home. But as I say, when I come home I just decided that I wasn't cut out to be just sitting around home so I joined the army. And that's when we started to get a little bit more information about the Korean War. They were calling

29:00 for K Force members in those days to reinforce, cause this was in 1952 and in July 1952 was when I joined the army and you could join up in the K Force, which was two years. I forget what they called the three year term, and or six years regular army. So I took the six years

29:30 and enjoyed that too.

And where did you go to join up the regular army?

Up in town here in Adelaide, in Perry Street I think it was. They had the army on one floor, the navy on another floor and the air force on another floor. So you went which floor. So I went up to join the navy and the CPO [Chief Petty Officer] sitting behind the desk,

30:00 and he said to me, "Have you got your progress certificate from school?" And I said, "No, why?" And he said, "Oh, I can't make a sailor out of you." And I said to him, "How long you been in the navy?" And he said, "Twelve years." And I said, "Have you ever been on a ship?" And he said, "No." I said, "I have rung more salt water out of my socks than you have seen." And he ordered me out of his office. He was very upset and so I went downstairs and I said to the sergeant in the army

30:30 there, "I want to join the navy." He said, "You haven't been upstairs to the navy, have you?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I heard him."

Well how disappointing was it for you?

I was a bit dejected that this bloke had been twelve years in the navy and never been on a ship and he was telling me that he couldn't make a sailor out of me and I had spent four and half years at sea. So.

But he didn't know what he was talking about.

31:00 No, but he had to go by the book. You had to have your progress certificate from school. I never got it because I only went as far as grade six. So I left school at fourteen. But it hasn't stopped now, I keep going.

Didn't consider the air force, I guess?

Never even contemplated the blue orchids, never thought about joining the air force,

31:30 you, it didn't appeal to me. But I am not disappointed that I didn't get in the navy now. I don't think I would like to be on some of those ships. They are a little bit cramped, worse than what I'm used to.

So after you joined, you signed up with the regular army? What happened?

They sent me to

32:00 Wagga to do me basic training. And I got off the train about two o'clock in the morning and they took us and put us in quarters at the parish early in the morning and later on that morning they started putting us into different what's-a-name. And they were going through my records and they said, "You've just finished your National Service, haven't you?" And they said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Come do my basic training."

32:30 "Oh, you don't want to do that again, you've just done it recently." And they just signed the papers and I caught that train back to Albury that day. So I was only basically overnight at Wagga. And send me up to Bandiana outside of Wodonga and that's where I started my army career.

33:00 As a, they put me out in the ammunition depot out the other side of Albury and we were stripping 3.7s, anti-aircraft shells until we got familiar with those and then they took us off those and put us onto another job until we got familiar with that and then they took us off that job. Because if you get familiar with things you become complacent and things could happen, so. And they sent us from there

33:30 I went up to just outside Newcastle, Muswellbrook.

Just tell us a little bit more about Bandiana and the stripping down the shells that you have just mentioned?

It was out in the ammunition depot, out in the middle of nowhere and they have got all these big sheds full of ammunition, different types of ammunition. And they have

34:00 got one particular shed and it has got a series of like railway lines through it, through different sections, so that you have got 3.7s come in two to a case, and they slide them along these like railway lines into a through a hatch into the what's-a-name. And one chap might take the fuse out. And right, as soon as he takes the fuse out he pushed it through the slot to

34:30 the next one and the next one in there takes the grain out. And then through that and he takes the

primer out, so you actually are stripping the shells down, so it is useless. And then it is taken out and it's disposed of. So you'd be undoing the fuse, and this is what I am saying getting familiar with a job. And all these were sealed with a like a putty type stuff and the blokes used to roll it up in balls and

35:00 when you were pulling out the fuse you'd get whacked behind the ear with a lump of this putty. So when you start doing things like that, they took us off the job and put another crew on there. And so they sent us up to Muswellbrook then.

Well what sort of training did you have before you got put onto stripping a shell? I mean you can't just start?

Oh they take you in there and you stand with a bloke and watch what he is doing and they show you how to do it.

35:30 And that's how you get your training. And you do courses through the camp on doing exams, etc., and so basically you know what you are doing when you are finished. But initially you are just put into this room and watch the bloke that is doing it. And then he says, "Have a go." And so you do.

It's fairly

36:00 **dangerous work.**

Oh yeah, as soon as they see you are getting familiar with it they take you off it. And then as I say they put you on a different job. The disposing of something or stripping something down.

And was that a full day's shift that you would be doing that.

Oh yeah, yeah.

36:30 Go out in the morning, come back at lunch time, go back after lunch and come back in the afternoon. You spent most of your day out in the middle of nowhere cause all these ammunition depots are inaccessible to a lot of people. There is only one road in and one road out sort of thing.

So the shell would be, the 3.7s that you would be stripping,

37:00 **would be completely stripped down?**

Yeah, completely stripped down to the casing.

And then what would happen?

They just got disposed of. I have no idea how, because our job was just to strip em down. What happened then I don't know. Till we went up to Muswellbrook and then we found out what we were doing to dispose of other obsolete equipment, cordite,

37:30 etc. We had to dispose of a heap of cordite, so we just put it in a heap about that high and about that wide until we run out of it and then run some cord and set a match to it and it went psssss – finished. And then we got rid of some anti-tank stuff, it was like a pencil,

38:00 like a biro, but you could set it by turning the top to whatever time, whether it was one hour or two hours, and there was enough explosive to blow the turret off a tank. We had to get rid of a lot of these so we just stuck them in a 44-gallon drum and put a fire underneath and walked away, kaboom, came back there was this big hole in the ground. Another job was getting rid of twenty-five pounders

38:30 and we used to stack them in forty, forty to a heap and different intervals around and then put gun cotton on top with a fuse again, and measure out the fuse and then you light the fuse and then you walk along and light the next fuse, and then you know until you get them all done and then you walk around, you don't run anywhere, you walk, cause if you run you fall over and hurt yourself.

39:00 And then you walk around and sit down the other side of the hill and then the first one goes off and then you count each explosion until they are all gone off. And then you sit there for another two hours and then you go back with a big rake and you rake in all the big craters and find out if they have all gone off. Good fun.

Did you have any accidents?

No,

39:30 because as I said, once you start to become familiar they take you off the job. The truck used to pull up and the driver would get out and lower the tailgate and he would walk away. And it was our job to unload the truck and stack them. And when we first started, when the chap on the truck would pick one up and he would hand it to the bloke and then you would hand it, like a daisy chain, hand to one another.

40:00 Eventually you just start throwing it to one another and then when you get to that stage they take you off the job.

Well that is a good place for us to stop and change our tape.

Tape 3

00:31 **Talking about the ammunitions work that you were doing?**

Hmm.

I was just wondering what safety precautions you were given?

Hard to say, safety, we just took it as a job. It was very professional to start off with. But as I said, when you become

01:00 too familiar with it, you started to get a little bit lax with it and that's when they changed you. But it was as far as safety was concerned, we never ever it gave it any thought. It was just a job to do.

How did you respond to the discipline of the army?

I think, I think I coped

01:30 pretty well with it. As I said earlier, my years in contact with men give me a better education into the discipline because the ship's discipline is not as strict as the military, but it's, you have still got a certain amount

02:00 of restrictions on a ship. There are laws on a ship that you have to obey and the same thing applies in the services.

I was just thinking of your rebellious nature as a child.

No, I think I got that curbed. I think it was knocked out of me in the merchant navy. I wasn't as rebellious. I was an individual still and I still had a certain amount

02:30 of rebellion, but it wasn't as much as it was when I first went into the merchant navy.

And I am just curiosity why you chose six years with the army?

Why not? I don't know. It was just there and I took it, you know. I didn't want to do a two year stint and I didn't want a three years and so I thought, "Well I might as well go the whole hog,

03:00 go for six." Because at that stage I thought I might make it my career.

So how long were you in Bandiana?

I was only initially there for about two months and then they shifted us up to Muswellbrook up outside of Newcastle,

03:30 and I think it was up at Muswellbrook that I volunteered to go to Korea.

So how did your time at Bandiana wind down, or how did you know that you were moving up to Muswellbrook?

You were just told, "Pack your bags. You're going." They don't give you any warning, it's just you're here today gone tomorrow, you're on the train tomorrow.

04:00 **And Muswellbrook was that where the ordnance courses were?**

Ordnance depot and ammunition depot outside of Muswellbrook.

So what was the camp like at Muswellbrook?

Very sparse. It's out it in the middle of nowhere and you had to… Any entertainment you had to go into Muswellbrook. There was nothing. You'd catch the truck in, there was nothing, there was no bus

04:30 service or such, it was a few concert huts around the place and that was it.

And what was the entertainment in Muswellbrook?

Oh just the normal pub, theatre, dance hall, nothing, no nightclubs like it is now.

What was the population there?

I don't know, because

05:00 I wasn't there that long really. We were only there I think it was a couple of weeks doing this disposal job and then we shifted out.

And where did you shift to from there?

I come home on leave prior to my embarkation to Japan.

Well how did you know that you were going to bath and laundry? Where did that…?

I didn't know until I got up there. When I left Australia

05:30 to go to, when I left Sydney to go to Japan I was under the impression that I was going up as ammunition examiner doing exactly what I was doing in Australia. But when I got off the plane at Iwakuni, went and seen a film at Iwakuni at the airport base there, can always remember it, it was all about kangaroos bouncing down the main street of the town.

06:00 Can't think of the name of it, but shocking. But anyhow, freezing cold and they put us on the ferry in the Inland Sea for Kure.

Before we make our way to Kure, I just wanted to know how your mother and father responded to you volunteering for Korea?

They were used to me by now, not being home. I think they were concerned. I know my Mum was, cause she actually wrote a letter to my

06:30 CO [Commanding Officer] in Korea asking for me to be sent home. Which didn't happen, I am glad to say.

And what was their understanding of what was happening in Korea?

They didn't know. It was the same as everyone else. There wasn't a great deal of publicity about it. There was basically when 3 Battalion actually held up the whole Chinese army was the big news,

07:00 which was a big thing. Eight hundred men can stop an advance of a whole Chinese army. It is something to put in the papers.

What was the propaganda like about the red peril [communism]?

Do you mean as far as the public was concerned or…?

Yes, and yourself as well,

07:30 **because what did you know about Korea?**

Not a, basically nothing, there was no discussions whatsoever. Only basically what you read in the paper. There was nothing spoken about it in the camps that I can remember. And the only bloke that I ever seen that had come back from Korea was this National Service instructor when

08:00 I was a National Serviceman. But up until then, up until I actually got to Japan, that I started to learn things about it, about Korea. I knew where it was, basically, but not what it was and it was a real culture shock to land in Korea in the middle of winter,

08:30 freezing cold.

Just on the political side, how big was the threat of communism to Australia?

Communism was the big threat. It was more pronounced then than it is now. And this was the political theme, to stop the red hordes, you know, because if you didn't

09:00 stop them there they could eventually infiltrate our own country and this was the big threat at the time. Because when you got one hundred million people in Japan, Korea, I will get it right in a minute, China, it is a lot of people under the one banner, isn't it. They can make a big dent in your way of living. So this was the propaganda at the time

09:30 was to stop this flood.

And why did you volunteer for Korea?

New experience, young, silly, adventurous. Call it was you like. Why does anybody volunteer for these things? I think it's because its there. It's like this bloke that climbed Mount Everest,

10:00 why did he climb Mount Everest? Because it was there. Why do people go to war? There is a mixture of feeling, patriotism, adventure, mostly adventure. A lot the blokes that went to Korea initially, when I say initially, the K Force, they were

10:30 ex Second World War blokes a lot of them and they were readjusting after the Second World War and they saw an out of their predicament because it was getting tough in Australia back in those days, so they joined the army again.

And John on your pre-embarkation leave

11:00 **what was your farewell like?**

Oh it was, a little bit rough for Shirley cause I had only just met her. And my parents, they were a little

bit apprehensive. To me, as I said, it was just another adventure. The only thing that I was a bit crook at them was they give me injections

11:30 before I left and I had a sore arm. And I went to the dance down the Palais down at Semaphore and a bloke knocked me and I nearly died. I couldn't have killed him, because I had this swollen arm through the vaccination.

So you just me, how long had you been seeing Shirley at that stage?

Well just prior to joining the army. I'd only met her

12:00 in the May, I think, the May of '52 and I joined the army in July.

Where did you meet?

Down the Port town hall – dance.

So you had been seeing her for a few months then when you joined the army. How did you break the news to her?

I just said, "I'm joining the army." She said, "Oh fine." And she said, "As long as you are not

12:30 going away to sea." And I said, "That's all right." And then as I say I went away to Korea and Japan for three years and then did all my courting by correspondence.

So you say she was a bit apprehensive about you going to Korea?

Hmm.

Do you remember what she said to you before you left?

No, I can't remember, sorry.

13:00 **So you went to Japan as part of BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force], what did you know of BCOF?**

Nothing except that it was an occupation forces, that was all. But when I got up there it was near the end of the occupation so things were a little bit more settled. There wasn't, initially when the first BCOF started that was a little bit hairy for them.

13:30 But as I say, when I got up there, and I got up there till late '52, December '52, so it was a little bit different. They were just starting to get their independence back, the Japanese.

So what was, for you, before you left, what was the role of an occupation force or BCOF?

14:00 Glorified policemen they were, what I could see of them. Actually, having said that, you have to got to remember now that at this stage the Korean War is into its second year so there is a lot of, it is a staging depot for troops for Korea. So there is a lot of movement in and out.

14:30 So the role of the BCOF actually changed from BCOF occupation to virtually to staging camps.

So where did you, how did you get to Japan?

By plane, Qantas flight from Sydney. That was a strange flight. They commandeered or chartered this Qantas,

15:00 what do you call it, Super Constellation, four-engine plane, and apparently, unbeknownst to us, this was the second attempt to get up to Japan. And I look out the port and there was all this oil streaming out of the engine and they said, "Oh, that's all right. We fixed that." When the plane was in Sydney before we boarded they took all the food off and left the drinks on instead of the other way round.

15:30 So we had to stop at Port Moresby for breakfast, Manus Island for lunch and Guam for dinner and overnight stay, and then we left Guam the next morning and landed at Iwakuni.

When you say drink, what, that alcohol?

Yes, but we didn't get any of that. They locked it away. But they forget when we got to Manus Island there is an air force base there

16:00 and they had the bar open and so the blokes were filling up coconuts and were going back aboard the plane with coconuts that they thought was full of fluid. It was, but it wasn't coconut milk though. But then when we got to… As I say, we landed overnight, stayed overnight at Guam, that was a Yankee [American] navy base.

16:30 **So was this your first time in an aeroplane?**

First time for a long flight. I had been to Kangaroo Island from here on the plane but never, never anything like that before. That was a new experience.

How did you go with that?

Actually we frightened the hell out of the pilot. Because if you have ever been on a Constellation, as you walked in the door

17:00 it had an area as big as this, and you walked on and you walked through a doorway into the cabin. But when the plane took off and the seatbelt light went out, about a dozen and half blokes all got out of their seats and came back to this compartment and the plane shifted and frightened the hell out of the pilot. And he said, “If you are going to shift, let me know. But don’t do it in bulk like you did.” And so we all

17:30 come back to sit down and play cards. Because it was all troops on the flight up.

And where did you land in Japan?

Iwakuni.

And what was your first reaction?

Another culture shock. The first place that I visited was the toilets. And I had never seen anything like it before in my life.

18:00 A Japanese toilet, funny.

Describe it for me?

Well what we have here as hand baths, they were used for other things. And instead of having toilet that flushed like we had, they had a hole in the ground where they squatted over it, a dropper type thing. Completely different to what I was used to.

I just find it interesting that you had actually at quite a young age been travelling around the world

18:30 **and you landed in Japan and it was culture shock. What parts of Japan really stood out for you or really shocked you?**

When I went my first trip down to Hiroshima.

When was that? How long had you been in Japan?

Oh a couple of months.

In the initial stage when you first got there?

The initial stage because the first place that we seen was the actually the airport at Iwakuni,

19:00 we had never seen anything of basically of Japan itself until we got to Kure. And then there was all this, it was like a suburb, but it’s a city as big as Adelaide but with a lot more people living in it. And it is all hustle and bustle and all these funny little people running around everywhere.

So how long were you

19:30 **in Iwakuni before you went to Kure?**

Oh that was only overnight, stayed overnight and then you caught the ferry the next morning. But bearing in mind that when we left Australia we were in summer dress, when we got to Japan it was the middle of winter so it was a bit cold. But fortunately for me I had packed my greatcoat on top of my pack so I was able

20:00 to get my greatcoat. All the other blokes had put it in their other gear and that had gone on a different truck.

So what was the temperature?

I can’t remember exactly what it was, but it was the middle of winter and during the big snowing so it was cold.

Yes, I was going to ask you if it had been snowing.

Yes, it was in late December, yeah, it was it was pretty cold.

20:30 **And where were you based in Kure?**

We went to a place called Hiro, which is around the harbour, because you have Kure harbour and then there is an inland waterway and you come around to Hiro and that was where I got introduced to the laundry and dry cleaning unit.

And how did that come about?

Well as I said, we got off the ferry at Kure and put onto a truck

21:00 and driven straight into the gate and they said, “This is your unit.” And I said, “So what do I do here?”

And they said, “Oh, you will be told.” And this sergeant came up and he said, “Welcome to Japan.” He said, “And this is your accommodation and there is the mess hut and there is the canteen and you start work tomorrow morning at 0800 hours and we will show you what your duties are when you get there.” And I said,

21:30 “Where are we?” And he said, “Around the street there, in the laundry and dry cleaning unit.” I said, “But I am an ammunition examiner.” And this old hand was there and he said, “Shut up.” I said, “Why?” He said, “Just wait and see.” And about five minutes after I started work, I thought, “Well this is a cushy job. This will do me, no worries.” Because you didn’t do any work, all you did was oversee it.

22:00 All the Japanese did all the work; we had three hundred Japanese working for us. So all we done was made sure that… Well we were just overseers. We were the bosses.

So how many of you went over to the bath and laundry unit?

I was the only one that went up on that trip. But the whole unit consisted of twenty-four people and we used to work three shifts.

22:30 So our canteen was the only canteen in Japan that didn’t close. It was allowed to be open twenty-four hours a day because we had people coming in and off and everything. So we used to have a lot of visitors.

Before I talk more about the bath and laundry unit, what were your barracks like? What was your accommodation?

What, in Japan?

Yes, in Hiro.

We had a two-storey building, brick building,

23:00 and the provos [Provosts – Military Police] were on the ground floor and we had the second level. And it was a big long building and there were twelve bunks on each side of this partition down the centre. So there were twenty-four of them who lived up in this.

And did you live with everyone in the unit?

Hmm. All this as I say there was twenty-four of us. But we were working three shifts, so

23:30 you never had everybody there at the time during the week. In the weekends it was different.

So you got there and it was quite cold, so what was the heating like in the building?

Oh, it was central heating and it was very civilised in Japan with their heating. It is quite unique. It was quite warm. But we didn’t have an airconditioner or anything, but it was central heating, oil heaters. It was very warm, we were quite snug.

24:00 We had good clothes, good uniforms. I procured my self a Canadian army greatcoat, which was a little bit thicker lining that our greatcoats, so I was quite comfortable.

And where did you procure that from?

I worked in a laundry and dry cleaning unit, didn’t I?

So,

24:30 **what actually was the dry cleaning unit like? What can you explain how that was set out?**

Well it was, you had two sections and you had your laundry section where they used to do all the sheets, the shirts and the ironing and all that. And the dry cleaning unit was just a like a big tumble dryer washing machine and they used a white spirit

25:00 with and a machine for filtering the white spirit so it could be reused. And we had con dryers which were an endless built, I can show you photographs later on if you like of this con dryer. And I am posing, making out that I am working. Checking the clothes as they went through this con dryer.

Right, so how did they go through this con dryer?

They just keep on going round and round on this endless belt through this heated compartment.

25:30 **So how did you keep things separate?**

Each part had a laundry mark on it. You were given a number and when you first went to Japan that was your laundry number. I can always remember mine rokuju-roku, sixty-six.

Sorry, what is rokuju-roku?

That is sixty-six in Japanese. Rokuju-roku, so when you used to go up and get your things you just tell em your number, “Rokuju-roku.” But we never had our gear, we never handled our gear.

26:00 I'd go back to camp at night and get stripped to have a shower and just throw my clothes in the corner and the house girl would pick them up, bundle them up and take em back to our laundry and they were processed and they'd be brought back the next day and laid on your bunk and the house girl

26:30 would put them away for us. We employed house girls, house boys, cooks. We paid so much a week out of our wages for these. So we didn't have the army cooks. We used to have tables set out like restaurants, a menu. Oh, we had it made. And as I said, our canteen never closed and so all the money that we would

27:00 make, this would actually pay for… We used to have free weekends. We would hire an inland ferry and go inland on the Inland Sea for a weekend for free. So as I say it was a cushy job.

So, I am just thinking, where were the cooks established? So you obviously didn't use your mess?

Yeah, we used the

27:30 mess. We used to set up in the mess, my word.

So what happened to the army cooks?

They just supervised, they didn't do anything, didn't have to.

And what were the meals, what kind of food were they?

Anything you like. You just told them what you wanted. Breakfast, for instance, consisted of bacon and eggs,

28:00 or scrambled eggs, or sausages and eggs and tomatoes and fruit juice, toast, coffee, tea. And it was all set out and the waitress used to come along and she would take the order and then she would go up and bring it back to you. All the other camps they used to go up to their mess tents and get it slopped into them.

Yes, I am just thinking the choice, actually having a choice in the army is quite different.

And as I say another culture shock

28:30 because we never got it here in Australia, not like this anyway.

So how much did you take out of your pay for all of this?

What, to pay for it?

Hmm.

Basically it was paid through the canteen funds.

Oh okay, so profits from the canteen.

Yes, it paid for that. But they were employed by us. And the sergeants had their mess and their setup the same, but they had to pay mess fees out of their fees. And the same with the

29:00 officers, they had their mess bills. But no, we were quite… We had a life of luxury in Japan. Soon to be shattered.

Just going back to the dry cleaning unit. You had three hundred Japanese workers. What were their shifts?

We had three shifts. You'd work eight o'clock in the

29:30 morning, or I'd used to start at seven, seven till four, and then four till midnight and then midnight till seven.

And they were the same shifts that you had?

Yeah, so we had two or three of our people and so you might have a sergeant and two privates and

30:00 the mechanical boy, electrical mechanical engineers on their side and the same for on the dry cleaning side, you had one sergeant and two corporals working in the dry cleaning and laundry side of it. All you done was supervise, you didn't do any work. We were the best dressed blokes in town. We had the best looking uniforms, the cleanest uniforms, pressed,

30:30 the right amount of starch in the shirts.

And what if you had a problem with your uniform the way it was cleaned, who did you complain to?

No, we never had any complaints because the… All the Orientals I have found are very good with their laundry. They have some funny ways, like in the ironing they would pick up a bowl

31:00 and psssss. But what, really, I don't see the theory, really.

What other techniques did they use that were different to what you were used to?

Well they had these big flat irons but they were all electric and very heavy and that was only for the shirts, and our summer uniform was the same material for the trousers

31:30 as for the shirts and they had to be ironed, pressed. But the battle dress was done with like a steam dry, like a normal dry cleaning. They just put it on a steam and bring the lever down and put the steam through it.

So you said that you were given a laundry number when you got there, when you in the army, was that

32:00 **sewn into the uniform?**

No, just with a texta colour. No. But as I say, that was only the people who worked in the laundry. We got our own gear back every time. Nobody else could guarantee that because it was a unit number then. So we would get, say a battalion was having a change of dress, all their stuff would come in as a battalion. That would be that

32:30 battalion's number and that would come from the Q [Quartermaster's] store. So we would process it and send it back to the Q store and the Q store would reissue it. Whereas we had, so the shirts, all my shirts were mine, nobody else had them.

And the battle dress that was coming in, what kind of state was it in?

Oh it wasn't too bad, because in Japan

33:00 you didn't get em very dirty. You just took them back. Every second week you just send them in for getting cleaned that was all. If you had a parade coming up then they'd send them in to get them so they were nice and creased and looked nice.

And how did you overcome the language barrier?

Most of them were, we had interpreters with a

33:30 working with us. But you pick up a lot of, what is the word I am looking for, bastardised language. I mean, if you spoke to a Japanese today, the way we used to talk to them in the same way, they'd be appalled because it wasn't good Japanese. But we made ourselves understood.

What about the Japanese

34:00 **understanding of English? Did they speak any English?**

Oh yes. I can always remember our interpreter, her name was Asi Tao and she was actually a Hawaiian Islander and she spoke perfect English, you know. Lovely girl, but she was always trying to reform me though – she always wanted me to go to church. She'd say, "When are going to go to church?" I say, "When Bluey goes."

34:30 And she said, "Yes, but what about you?"

So when did you have your first leave when you got to Japan?

Basically your leave was every night – when you weren't on duty you could

35:00 you'd go out of camp. The actual leave itself when I had two weeks off, that was about, it was after July of '53, because when I went back to Japan after Korea that was when I actually got my first leave that I could physically leave camp.

35:30 No, I am telling lies. No, I had one when we went to Tokyo from Korea, that's right, on leave.

So when you were in Hiro? Where did you spend most of your leave of an evening?

Oh just around either in Kure or Hiro, just travelled back and forth. They had a tramcar that used to run from city or suburb to suburb.

36:00 Used to get on the tram and go into Kure or just wander around Hiro.

And how did the Japanese respond to the occupation forces?

I think they never gave us any trouble. I think their economy was growing through the fact that they were occupied because there was a lot of money that was

36:30 actually dispensed with in that time. Bearing in mind, we were paid equivalent to the English pound at the time so our Australia pound was worth seven hundred and fifty yen, the British BAF [BAFSV – British Armed Forces Special Vouchers], what we were paid, BAF money, it was worth one thousand and eight. So

37:00 we were paid a lot of money if you wanted to draw all your pay. And it got spent quite regularly.

What were the main commodities that were indulged in?

Oh, you'd just go to the beer hall and have a few beers and something to eat, and we used to have a dance there in the beer halls and have a dance, you know. But most of our time we spent in our canteen.

37:30 It was beneficial for us because we used to get more out of it.

What kind of things could you get from the canteen?

Anything you want. It was like a supermarket, and the only thing you couldn't get was spirits. You could have any beer that you wanted provided it was available. It was either Australian beer or Japanese. You'd get your cigarettes, you could get your toothpaste or all your other toiletries, but everything you wanted from the canteen.

38:00 **And how was the canteen set up?**

How was it set up?

Yeah, you said it was like a supermarket? I'm just…?

Basically it's the same as when you walk into a delicatessen now. You had your fridges and your… Nothing different.

Just touching on the Japanese

38:30 **reaction to the occupied forces. Was there any animosity or anything left over from World War II?**

Not that I know of. I had one particular Japanese working for me. During the war he was actually a navy pilot and he was the one who flew over Sydney and photographed it before the midget submarines come in. I had another one that worked there,

39:00 he was unfortunate to be in Hiroshima when they dropped the atomic bomb and he had a burn on his face there and he said to himself, "I'm getting out of here." And he went to Nagasaki and caught that one too. So he had seen both blasts and he was fortunate enough and he lived through it.

Well that is just… How did you feel working with, particularly

39:30 **working with the pilot who had done something as risky as that?**

Well he wasn't a great deal older than me. All right, he had a job to do and that was what he had done. As for the others, they were all about the same age as me so you can't really blame them for what their people done. So,

40:00 and never having had any bad experience of them, I couldn't hold anything against them so I just treated them the way that I wanted to be treated. Hard, isn't it? How can you justify any animosity towards anybody that it's not really their fault?

And on that we are going to do a tape change.

Tape 4

00:30 **I am just going to ask a few more questions about the laundry unit or the dry cleaning unit. Was this a Commonwealth, you were with the Commonwealth forces?**

British occupation forces, so it was the Britcom based laundry and drying cleaning unit.

So what other services or other countries did you clean for?

There was all the Commonwealth like England, India,

01:00 New Zealand, just to name a few, any Commonwealth country that was there. Oh Canadians, all their gear and the hospital, we used to do the hospital stuff too, all their sheets, etc.

And who had the best uniform?

What, best looking uniform?

Yeah.

Oh the Yanks, best looking uniform. Ours,

01:30 ours was all right. When they cleaned them up and went on parade they looked good.

Can you describe the actual laundry? Like the actual building, how big was it?

Huge. If you can imagine a big warehouse, actually it was a big timber frame warehouse, wooden building. And there was actually two side by side,

02:00 like two roofs coming in like that. And two big double doors on it. And you can imagine all these washing machines, or not washing machines as you know them here, but the big washing machines, and through the centre was all the ironing tables with roller what's-a-names for the sheets. There was three or four of those, plus ironing tables

02:30 with all these Japanese men and women doing all their ironing bit. And then on the other side I was saying was the dry cleaning plant with… We used to do as much as them but with less equipment because we only had half a dozen steam presses and only two washing machines to do all the uniforms. And a con dryer, so it comes out of the washing machine

03:00 into the con dryer and into the presses.

So how many uniforms would you get through in say one run?

Oh, I think it was something like a hundred uniforms used to get washed at one time. So there would be fifty in each machine. And so they'd take about twenty minutes to tumble dry. And when they were finished,

03:30 they used to put a wooden slat into the machine and then turn it over once and open the doors again and all the uniforms were sitting on this what's-a-name and they would leave them drain there for a little while and then pull them out, put them into a tumble dryer or spinner and spin all the excess fluid out of them and then the fluid would go through a distillery plant for cleaning

04:00 and then into a holding tank and then they would draw from that holding tank for the next wash.

That recycling, you know, is quite possibly a new idea at that time?

Well that was the only way I knew how to do. I didn't know how the dry cleaning was done here. Cause that was my first insight into a dry cleaning was there. But I believe the system is the same here. Except

04:30 they are a bit more gentle over there than here. I had an occasion to have a consultation with a dry cleaner after he pressed me greatcoat and squashed me buttons. I was not impressed.

How much care was taken?

They are very careful. They are very conscientious, Japanese, very conscientious worker.

05:00 They take pride in everything that they do.

And what were you duties, so what would be your daily duties or routine?

Just keep walking around to see that everything was running smoothly. Nothing drastic except when the unit photographer come round you make out that you were doing something.

Did you ever get bored?

No, not really,

05:30 no, no, because when I say we didn't do anything, it's not that you didn't want to do, you didn't have to, but if you wanted to you could do. I used to often get in and help, help do something because just wandering around all day does get a bit monotonous. But no, the nights were the worse because they drag on, like any shift work, you know.

06:00 We used to just sit around and play cards and every now and again get up and walk around to see how they were going. But we had, as I say; we had Japanese that were in charge of different sections, so we just got up to see how they were getting on, if they got any problems.

And you mentioned leave? How long were you in

06:30 **Hiro before you went over to Korea?**

I think it was end of February when I first went to, around February, this is in '53, when I first went to Korea.

So it was about three months, four months.

Hmm.

And was it in that time that you went Hiroshima?

No, in this first three months I went to Hiroshima, yes.

07:00 **Yes.**

That was only a day trip sort of thing.

What was it like? Describe for me what you saw.

A lot of devastation. A lot of bombed out, flattened buildings. Well, flat ground with rubble on it. And the roads had just been cleared, that's all. A lot of markings on the bridge from where people had stood

07:30 and blast had caught them and put their imprint on the concrete. Sounds strange, doesn't it? There was a kimono, a black and white kimono this woman was wearing and when the blast hit her – it had imprinted it onto the concrete. That was on the footbridge, or the bridge in Hiroshima. There was all these people there selling

08:00 radioactive particles. All the Japanese were trying to flog off these radioactive particles.

Why was that?

Just making money, making money from the devastation.

And what would be the use of having radioactive particles?

Well they reckoned that it was radioactive, because it wasn't that bad. Because by that time, this was in 1953, so it was '45

08:30 when they dropped the bomb there, so there wasn't a great deal. They were selling it off as radioactive for anyone who was silly enough to buy em.

Did you know anyone who was silly enough to buy em?

Oh yeah, I knew a lot of blokes who bought em. But you could have gone and picked up a piece of rock from the side of the road and do the same thing.

What was the appeal of having a radioactive substance?

Just to say that they had got it from Hiroshima, I suppose.

And do you remember when the bomb was dropped?

09:00 Yes, yes, I was still going to school. I think I was just about ready to leave school then, twelve or fourteen around that time.

And what did you think when the bomb was dropped?

Not a great deal. I didn't… I just knew that they had dropped this devastating implement and a big mushroom thing, that was all. It wasn't until I had actually seen what it had done that the

09:30 impact hit me of what human beings are capable of doing.

You said it was like a culture… Before you were saying before about a real culture shock, what was the real culture shock there in Hiroshima?

Oh it was a completely different way of life. You know, here, for instance, when you are at home in Australia you wanted to go for a shower or a bath you

10:00 went into your bathroom and had a shower. In Japan you don't because they don't have the normal… In the little villages they have the public bath house where you go and everyone goes, male or female, men, woman, kids, the whole thing just go into the showers. And we have a shower here and we soap ourselves down under the shower and then wash it off. In Japan they don't. They sit alongside the tub, wet themselves, wash

10:30 themselves, rinse it off and then get into the tub. So there is, there is all these different things.

Did you ever go to one of the bath houses?

Oh yeah. Oh, you have got to go for the experience. Strewth, it's great, sitting in the hot tub there and the whole family walk in, Japanese family, just strip off and get in and do their thing and nobody takes any notice.

And what other, just

11:00 **you know, we are still trying to think of prior to Korea? What other travel did you do or parts of Japan did you see?**

I went to a lot of places. I was a loner. I used to go on holidays. There were all these blokes, all they wanted to do most of them, was get their leave, go to the beer hall, get drunk. They come back from Tokyo and they say, "How was Tokyo?" "Oh great." "What did you do?" "Got drunk." "What did you see?" "Nothing."

11:30 So when I went anywhere I went on me own and I seen what I wanted to see and where I wanted to go. I went to a place called Biwa, which is outside of Kyoto, and I was on the station waiting for the train and this American sergeant came up and said, "Where you going?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Why, are you on leave?"

12:00 I said, “Yeah, I haven’t made up my mind where I going yet.” He said, “Well, come home with me.” He was married to a Japanese girl and so he put me up for a fortnight at his place and I spent a fortnight in and around Kyoto and Biwa.

How was that, an American living with, married to a Japanese woman? How did the forces, the US

12:30 **forces respond to that?**

It was just a thing that happened. There was a lot of inter marriages going on. A lot of Australians married Japanese. That was what they wanted.

And did you stay with anyone else? Any other, any other, outside of the camp, any other people?

No, no that was the only leave that I had on that basis.

13:00 I did stay in a little Japanese hotel in a out of the way place on my own. I was the only one, or the only, the first white man they had ever seen, I think. It was a strange thing. I was walking around and everyone just stood there and looked at me, you know.

What was the hotel like?

Oh it was basic; it was just like their homes. You’d walk in the door, you took your shoes off, you stepped up onto the tatami mat and they

13:30 slid the doors, through the bamboo and paper doors across. And a lot of bowing and scraping, and if you wanted to go to bed they just rolled out the futon out of the cupboard and rolled it out and that was your bed for the night, and when you finished in the morning they just rolled it back and put it back it the cupboard.

And where was the room that you slept, or was there a room or was it communal?

No, it was a room,

14:00 but all you had was these bamboo and paper sliding doors between each room. Another culture shock.

Did you expect a bed?

No, I had been there long enough to know that they didn’t have beds. And their tables, the tables were lower than that, because you sat on the floor. And it is very uncomfortable unless you are used to it, you know.

14:30 Because the way that they sit, because they actually sit on their calves and I can’t do that for too long, I used to be sitting around and then they would give you pillows to sit on. I have got too long a legs for that.

And what about the food?

Different. Yeah, tried everything. My favourite thing was when I was walking back to camp at night and

15:00 you’d go to a udon stall, they had a little cart, like a bowl of soup with noodles in it, yaki udon, or yaki soba. Have a feed of that and go home, go back to camp.

So when the cart came up, did you eat at the cart?

Yeah, just stand there and you just fill this bowl up and get stuck into it and you didn’t know what you were eating half the time. It could have been dog or anything.

15:30 **What about sushi?**

Oh yeah, I love sushi. Oh yes, I tried all that.

How did you first respond to the whole idea of raw fish and raw meat?

Well I look at it this way, if they have lived on all these years, there has to be something going for it. It is no good saying you don’t like it unless you try it. Took my wife a long time before

16:00 she tried it, but when she did, she loves it now.

What about saki?

Oh I love saki. On pay day, we used to get paid every fortnight, so cause you spend your money the first week sort of thing. And then when you get to the second week and you didn’t have any money you would go into the beer hall and we used to buy a big bottle of saki about that high, about that round, about five hundred yen it cost us. That would last you the

16:30 week. Three or four of youse. You’d go into the beer hall and they had your bottle of saki there and they would pour it out for you.

So you had your own saki?

Oh yeah. We already bought it, you pay for that this week. And that would last you the rest of the week. So you had beer one week and saki the next.

And was the saki warm?

Yes.

How was it warmed?

They put it in a pot over a flame.

17:00 But if you ever go to a Japanese restaurant in Australia and they serve you hot saki that burns your lips, send it back because it is not right. It has to be just lukewarm. But you can have cold saki, like you do wine here out of the fridge, which is very nice.

So what struck you about the landscape?

Very mountainous,

17:30 very, as I say, very steep. But all the level parts were all cultivated. Wherever it was it might be shelved and they if it was if there was a bit of dirt there, they cultivated it. They made use of every piece of land that they could get.

And then you were travelling around, how did you get about?

On the train.

18:00 Train and bus. Never afraid to go anywhere. Never ever occurred to me that there could have been any danger of me doing this, just didn't occur to me because the only, as I say, all the leaves that I had except two I went on me own.

18:30 I went with the two trips to Tokyo that I went with a group of mates.

Was that before Korea or after?

No, that was in Korea. On leave from Korea.

Did you travel in uniform?

Yes. Wasn't very often that I wore civvy clothes. Didn't have any, very many, only had one suit. And I looked like a gangster in that.

19:00 **So on your travels, I am just thinking of the places that you went where they had never seen a westerner before. How did they respond to a westerner in uniform?**

Oh, greeted me like a long lost friend. It was great, you know, because they are very hospitable. This is… You couldn't imagine that it

19:30 wasn't that long a go that we were fighting them, they were our enemy. They just welcomed me with open arms. Nothing was too much trouble.

So when did you find out about your posting to Korea?

Oh they just come up and said they wanted somebody to go to Korea. "Would you be interested?" I said, "Why not?" I said, "Yeah, I'll go." So the next day I went.

20:00 **So what did you know about what was happening over in Korea at that point?**

I knew that there was a lot of fighting going on, but at this stage it had settled down into a static… Before initially it was back and forward but now it was virtually on fixed lines. So it was… Virtually we reverted back to the

20:30 original warfare as we knew it in the First World War, trench warfare. You just sent out patrols into no-man's-land. But fighting virtually across no-man's-land.

So how did you get over to Korea?

By Dakota, a DC3. And the door was

21:00 held shut by a lump of fencing wire. Freezing cold, middle of winter. And we landed at K14 just outside of Seoul.

And what was Seoul like?

Bad. I thought Hiroshima was bad, this was worse because there was

21:30 people still living there. You know, there was while all this was still happening it was like an ants' nest. There was people living in whatever makeshift things that they could use. Like get kerosene tins and

cut them down and flatten them out and make sheets for the walls, this type of thing. It was

22:00 very hard to imagine how people could actually live like this. And why were they living like this? The kids running around who didn't have any parents, or didn't know where they were. Little kids coming up and propositioning you for their sister to get this, you know. Shine your shoes, do anything to get money.

22:30 Very, very heart breaking. And all these old people suffering. And it is bitterly cold, freezing cold, middle of winter.

I am just trying to think of the impact of the war, was there much damage?

When I got into Seoul the only building that I seen standing

23:00 of any resemblance of a building was the Capital building and that was a big building. And the South Gate and North Gate. That is the original gates on the city, in the medieval times when they had the wall around the city, that was the only two gates and they were still intact. Whether or not it was by design I don't know.

23:30 But the fact that these three things, they still stick in my mind that they were in one piece. The Capital building never had any glass in any of the windows. That was all broken with the street fighting. It had chips out of the brickwork and all that but basically it was still habitable. But nothing else around.

How many other men were you with from the unit?

How many?

24:00 **Men from the unit were you with?**

Well once again it was only a small unit, there was twenty-four us in Korea in Seoul and from that twenty-three, twenty-four were broken into two groups because one would do the trips into the country, while the other one stayed in

24:30 Seoul and then we'd swap over. So but we had different camps within Seoul. We weren't… The laundry itself was stationed in one place, but we used to have to communicate back until such time just after the ceasefire and we actually went into one, to where the laundry was, we actually pitched our tents in there.

So where were you based in Seoul?

25:00 Just outside of the city limits. I can't remember the name of the place. I actually tried to find it when we went back '95, but couldn't find it. I remember when we first got there and the first camp we had was actually, it was where a bank had used to, had been, the Seoul Bank, and it had been

25:30 completely obliterated. And all that was left was the big cabins in the side of the hill and we had set up a canteen and it's this cave. And when I got there the blokes used to sit there with a crowbar running it into a wall, and the crowbar was twelve foot long, a big thick one. And when I got there, it was that much of it sticking out this wall and they were still… And every time you went in there and sat down and had a beer, it was your turn to punch it in. Just trying to see how thick

26:00 the concrete was. And eventually they broke through, and they shined in the torch under there and all the printing presses for the mint were inside this. So they had done all this to make it hard for the Chinese when they come.

Was there any money around?

Oh didn't see any money. It would have been any good anyway because everybody, we used to use BAF and the Americans had their military currency.

26:30 **So what was your camp like? How was the camp set up?**

Oh it was just a series of tents in this flat area. But then that was a static camp and then we went on a mobile camp. It was, they were little hootchies, like two-man tents that we used to sleep in. They are very cold.

I have heard about the

27:00 **hootchies. I'll ask you more about that in a moment. I am just thinking about the static camp that you had in Seoul. Did you have a laundry unit there?**

Yes.

And how was that set up?

It was all on trailers. Everything was on trailers except for the ironing, ironing tables, and that was in a big long tent. How would you describe it? Like a big circus tent. Not quite

27:30 as high of course but about thirty or forty foot long and about twelve foot across, all different panels to

make it up. And all the ironing tables were set up in there and all the machinery was set up around it, so it was an easy flow. And we had clotheslines for hanging the sheets on for the hospital.

So how was the, where did the electricity come from?

Generators.

28:00 Generators for that, when we needed them, which was most of the time because you couldn't rely on the Korean power, plus, because I think it was different voltage anyhow from memory. Water was our hard part. In the winter time the pipes used to freeze up, so it was hard to get water. So we had, we used to dig the water pipe, just before winter time, dig it out.

28:30 And we had Koreans running along there with these big blow torches, up and down the water pipe to keep the water flowing.

How often would they do that?

All day.

So was there, you were talking about the shifts for the laundry back at Hiro. What were the shifts for the…? Was there, this mobile unit that you had, so to speak…?

Oh, in?

In Seoul.

29:00 In Seoul, that was a mobile unit, but at that time we were static, we were in the one place all the time. Only the bath unit used to go out to the different places.

And what was the shifts, was it the same?

Oh it was two shifts, only two shifts there. But because… And you had to finish before ten o'clock at night, because they had a curfew. The Americans had put a curfew on

29:30 Seoul at ten o'clock.

What was security like in Seoul?

Quite funny actually. Everybody walked around armed, you carried your weapons wherever you went, except, that was during the actual fighting. I can remember that we went to a movie theatre in Seoul,

30:00 to see a move, and as you walked into the foyer, or what we called the foyer, and it had a notice up, 'Please unload your weapons before entering the theatre'. And this American, he walked in and he had two 45s, one on each hip, two 38s in shoulder holsters plus a carving knife and it took him five minutes to unload them all before he went into the movie. He must have missed half the film.

30:30 But it was quite funny, actually. And then when the ceasefire come we weren't allowed to carry weapons in Seoul because of the ceasefire. We had to carry sidearms, which is our bayonet, that was all the defence we had in Seoul.

How did you feel about having come from Hiro which was relatively safe and as an occupation capacity to now being in Seoul where you had carry arms and there is a risk involved

31:00 **just walking down the street?**

I'll tell you a story of my first night in Seoul. I was put on guard duty, bearing in mind that it is the middle of winter, freezing cold, and to get into our camp you had to come up this alleyway between all these houses and then do a right-hand turn through the gate and then over a little bridge, because we had a twenty foot storm drain running across the front of the camp.

31:30 I am up the other end of the camp, middle of the night, snow, and it is crystal clear and I have got this big torch, big eight-battery torch and my rifle with the fixed bayonet. And I hear this aeroplane, so I put the torch on it and I'm watching it, and then another little plane come over and it dropped a bomb, an incendiary bomb into the camp next door, into the Yankee camp. And as soon as that hit the ground

32:00 I had somebody pulling on my leg. I was going over the gate out the front, I dropped me rifle, my torch and run and cleared this twenty-foot storm drain and I was getting out of there! Frightened hell out of me! I have never been so scared in all my life. And then anybody that tells you that they have never been scared, look them in the eyes and tell them they are telling pork pies [lies] because

32:30 if you are not scared, you're stupid. It is the most frightening thing in the world, because this only an incendiary bomb, but it was my first experience of somebody doing something in anger. I had heard a lot of explosions before, that didn't worry me, but it was somebody was having a go at me. I thought that they were having a go at me, but it was next door as I said. And that was Bed Check Charlie.

33:00 He used to come over every night at ten o'clock and that was how he got his name, Bed Check Charlie. It was a Chinese plane and nobody shot at him, weren't allow to.

Why not?

Well boost their morale if you shot at him, if everyone was having a go at Charlie. No, he was a joke. Everybody knew that he was coming but he used to come and it was a mail plane, a Dakota, that used to come from Japan every night and he used to fly in

33:30 underneath, the Dakota, so he would miss the radar. It was a joke. Everybody knew that he was coming. We used to make fun of it.

Did anyone warn you about this when you were on guard duty?

When?

Warn you?

No, same as over the road, across the other side of the road, there was a big American camp, it was an engineers' camp and it had this big tower with a twin 45 calibre [gun] mounted up there. And when Bed Check Charlie came

34:00 over you could hear them cranking it up, but they never ever fired them, because one they never ever had a firing pin, and one had something else wrong with it. They just used to crank them up for fun, just to make out that they were doing something.

So who was it that grabbed your leg, as you went flying?

It was the sergeant, the guard sergeant. He said, "Where you going?" I said, "I'm getting out of here, they are bloody serious." He said, "Where is your rifle?" I said, "Back up there." He said, "You'd better get up there and get it."

34:30 **This was also your first taste of war?**

Yes, that was my first experience, ever. It was my first night in Korea.

What were you thinking after that?

After that I found out that they had dropped it next door. I thought, "Well, they are not after me." It doesn't matter now, and I grew accustomed to it. And as I say, Bed Time Charlie used to come over every night, and he would pick on somebody and somebody's camp to

35:00 drop a bomb on it.

You signed up for six years of this?

Hmm?

You signed up for six years of this?

Yes.

What were you thinking at that stage?

Must be mad, I ought to be mad for being here, I volunteered for this, got to have rocks in your head. But as I say, then everything that

35:30 you do, it is an experience and you learn by your experiences. And as I said, it is the middle of winter, nobody told me what to expect or anything else, they just issued me with my gear and said, "This is your gear and this is what you do." So I get dressed during the day, I put me liners inside my boots and I walk around all day

36:00 and don't think anything of it, but that night I take me gear off and next morning I get up and I put my boots on and I have got the coldest feet you have ever seen. All morning I am walking around, like, "God I'm frozen." And a bloke said, "Did you take your liners out of your boots last night?" I said, "No, why?" "Well your feet sweat during the day and during the night they freeze up and that is why you have cold feet." So I learnt, didn't do it any more. Every night I take the liners out, dried them and put

36:30 clean dry liners in the next morning. Didn't have cold feet any more.

Well how else did you get around the cold, talking about Seoul, because it is a completely different situation when you went out into the field, I am sure?

Oh yes.

But in Seoul, how did you really combat the cold?

We had a petrol choofer, like a wood stove in the middle of the room.

37:00 You are laying in bed with the blankets like this and you are looking around and the first one to move to go out to the toilet, he'd switch the petrol on, and the next one as he went past he'd threw a match in it and lit it. And everyone would get out of bed then, when it was nice and warm. But the first one there, the one that was busting to go, he had the job of putting the petrol on.

37:30 **So how did you sleep, like what was your bed and things?**

As I say, once again, being fortunate in being in this unit, we didn't rough it so bad. We had tents but we had bunks, like folding bunks in our tents and we had sleeping bags and blankets, so we were quite comfortable because the tents had sides, solid sides that

38:00 high, and then it was canvas from there up. In the summer time you just rolled the canvas up and get air, because it gets very hot in the summer time. You got three climates in Korea; you got very cold, very hot and very wet. That fifteen-foot storm drain that I was telling you about earlier, I have seen that flood, overflow, in five minutes.

38:30 I could show you a photograph of me standing in water that deep in the middle of the street where we had just rescued a little boy being swept down the road in the water.

How many men were there in the tent with you, that you slept in?

I think it was ten, ten in each tent. There were two tents. Yes, there were ten, twenty of us.

And what did

39:00 **you wear to bed to keep warm?**

Actually I used to strip off, because I don't like a lot of, or never used to like a lot of clobber on. I used to just strip off and just get in and once I was in there I was as warm as toast. That was in Seoul, not in when we were out in the field, though.

And in Seoul how did you warm your bed before you…?

You didn't, you just go into it, soon warm it up.

39:30 My wife tells me I am hot blooded.

And what was the food like?

Ah, now, the food? One day a week we used to live on hard rations, which was a combination of egg pulp, dehydrated cabbage, bully beef,

40:00 anything that was nasty. What do you call it? The food, is it Fab [dehydrated] potatoes? We used to have a thing like that; it was horrible tasting stuff. But I was as I was the senior NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] in the unit, so it

40:30 was my job to go out and get the rations from the stores for the day. So instead of taking an hour and half to go and get rations it would take me anything up to four because on the way back I would go to all the American camps and swap cause you could get fresh vegetables there. Anything in a can the Yanks love. So a case of bully beef was worth two nice hams or half a dozen fresh chickens. And a side of beef or

41:00 something and fresh vegetables, it was great. I only had the dehydrated stuff one day and I refused to eat it any more. But other than that, it was quite good tucker, you know. We had some very inventive chefs, cooks. They call them chefs. Very inventive.

Well I might leave it there because we have come to the end of the tape, but we will ask about the inventive cooking.

Well I had better have a pit stop.

Hang on a moment.

I have forgotten that time.

Tape 5

00:33 We used to swap go around and swap all these rations, because as I said, the Yanks, anything in a can the Yanks like, they reckoned it was marvellous. So because everything they ever had was all in a can, their K rations were very good in a can. They had self-venting cans, pull the ring, pull the what's-a-name and light the candle, you know, and when it burnt down it was edible so. So we used to

01:00 swap a lot for those things to0.

So sorry can you just explain that again. What was in the can?

Well you might get a chilli, a chilli concarne in a can. So it was a ring-pull, so you pulled the top off and inside was a centrepiece with a candle, and then you lit the candle and when the candle burnt down it warmed up the interior, the meal, so you could eat it.

But how did the wax not melt?

No, it was in a sleeve, in a what's-a-name.

01:30 In that camp where I showed you that photography earlier, where the Yank was trying me hat on. We, I used to go over there quite a bit because it was Pommy national, this was during the ceasefire, Pommy National Serviceman used to… They'd didn't have much money. They were only getting five bob [shillings] a week. So I used to go over to the American camp and they'd put tins of stuff on

02:00 their heaters and when they come back from the movies or the show or whatever it was in the camp, we would have supper. And we came back one night and there was chilli concarne all over the what's-a-name – they had forgotten to pull the ring-pull and she'd exploded all over the ceiling, the walls, the curtain, everything.

Very messy.

Yes, very messy.

But it is very inventive. I haven't actually heard of the candle inside the tin before.

02:30 That is the only time that I had ever seen it. It was a new K rations that the Yanks had pulled out so. But the other rations that they had were quite good too.

And did it work?

Oh yeah, yeah. Most of their stuff was ring-pull, ours was the old can opener, can opener and spoon combined used to have to. But as I was telling you earlier that our cooks were very inventive with

03:00 the rations. We had one, as I said, bully beef was a main staple. One cook used to do a batter and slice the, into thin slices and dip it into batter and deep fry it and it was palatable.

And what other things?

Oh, that,

03:30 that was the one that mainly comes to mind, that one.

What did it taste like?

Overcooked ham, if you can imagine what that tastes like. But it was palatable but it would be better than what is was coming out of the tin. Because I reckon that stuff they give us in the tin, the bully beef, was First World War stuff, I am convinced of it, army surplus.

04:00 **I have heard others speak of the same.**

Yeah, not a good taste, but this was palatable. Because the biscuits weren't as bad as the Second World War blokes, they had modified them a bit, so that wasn't so bad.

So you didn't break your teeth?

No, but you still had to soak them a bit though.

And what did you soak your biscuits in?

In the coffee, so.

04:30 **And so you were senior NCO on stores duty and you would… Can you just take me through that round that you did, that you mentioned that you took a four hour…?**

Well usually you got the rations today for tomorrow right. So just set off and go down to

05:00 the supply, the central supply depot, and pick up your rations for so many troops for twenty-four hours. From there I had a set round of different camps that I would go to and who I was going to swap with and what. So a case of bully beef was worth so much. A bag of pulverised, or what do they call it,

05:30 dehydrated cabbage, that was worth so many green vegetables or fresh vegetables and so it went on. So you know who, which ones were the best ones to swap with so that was the ones that you went to. And that was always a weekly trip.

And what would you trade a case of bully beef for?

Oh sometimes you might want some ham, like say you'd get a couple of

06:00 legs of ham. Or it might be fresh chickens or some fresh beef or lamb. All these things, when I say fresh, it was frozen. It wasn't dehydrated, it hadn't been tampered with.

And better than then bully beef?

Oh yeah, anything was better than bully beef although it is, as I say it sustained you.

And how often would you get actually fresh veggies?

Oh we used to get them every other day. It was just one day a week that we had or supposedly had the dehydrated, hard rations they call them. But as I say, we soon learnt how to dispense with that and they still think to this day that we had them. They didn't know what we were doing.

And what sort of vehicle were you doing this round in?

Oh a little 4 x

4.

07:00 That's like a four-wheel drive a little bit bigger than about half a size again as a jeep. But not as big as a three ton truck. It's only a small vehicle.

And would you do the round on your own?

No, no you would take a Korean driver, Korean driver and myself. And off we'd go and I'd actually go down to the NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute] and pick up the beer ration as well.

07:30 So how much troops to how many cases you got. It was supposed to be one bottle per day per man perhaps.

And what did the perhaps mean?

Perhaps you got it and perhaps you didn't, if it was in.

What sort of beer were you getting?

Oh sometimes we got Australian beer, Melbourne Bitter, or mostly it was Japanese, either Kirin or Ashia.

08:00 I always remember it was two and a penny a bottle.

Was that a fair price?

Well it was a lot of money in those days, considering I was only on twenty-five bob a day. What's that, four dollars fifty in present terms. So we weren't paid big money. The highest paid troops over there were the Canadians and then the Yanks.

08:30 And the Yanks only used to get paid once a month so they used to go mad with their money and so they always seemed to have a lot of money at one time. We got paid once a fortnight, but I only drew out five pound a fortnight, I didn't need any money over there. I used to walk into the canteen on pay night and throw the five pound on the bar and say, "Have a drink on me, boys," and

09:00 walk out. As I say, Pommy National Serviceman, poor buggers, were only on five bob a week so they weren't making much money at all. Why I say the Pommy National Serviceman, after the ceasefire the Poms took over our unit, they manned the unit. It was an Australian unit manned by Pommy National Serviceman

09:30 and I was the Australian representative in the unit, that's why I was senior NCO. They had other officers, Pommy officers, but I virtually had a free hand. I could come and go as I pleased. Hence the Australian concert party, I scouted around and got that. I was a real scrounger, anything they wanted they used to always send me out to get it.

10:00 **Was there anything that you couldn't get?**

I never struck anything. You can always get something if you are persistent enough. We were building a new sergeants' mess and they needed some aluminium foil to go up the back of the wall behind the choofer, the stove, to stop the heat burning. It was not available in Korea, they thought. I got some.

10:30 **Where from?**

From the air force. We went to the air force, we went down with a truck and we used to do a lot of wheeling and dealing. And the sergeant said, "What do you want?" I said, "I'm on the scrounge." He said, "Where's your hat?" He said, "Get your hat." You weren't allowed in the camp without the hat on. But never came out with it, though. Fifteen hats I went through in the time that I was in

11:00 Korea.

So how much of the materials that you were looking for could you get with one hat?

Well let's put it this way, we wanted enough aluminium foil to go up one wall and that wide and I finished up with three ton of it.

For one hat?

You could get anything from the extra hat. They loved

11:30 the Australian slouch hat. They loved that hat.

I have heard this story but it is interesting. I didn't realise that you could buy quite as much.

Oh look, you could name your own price. I got a Yankee 45, a carbine, a standard carbine, a night-sighted carbine and a sniper carbine for a slouch hat.

12:00 **These are all guns?**

Oh yeah, they were guns. I had quite an arsenal in Korea that I accumulated. I used to go armed to the teeth wherever I went.

So where did you get these from?

From different Americans. I got a Canadian FM 9mm pistol from a Canadian doctor, only because he didn't want it. He said, "I'm a doctor.

12:30 I save people. I don't hurt them."

Well I am interested, why do you think that they are willing to swap the guns for a hat?

Just because they wanted an Australian hat. It's the only country in the world that wears it, you know.

But it does seem extraordinary because you are in a war zone?

Yeah, a lot of wheeling and dealing goes on in the war zone, more so than you could imagine.

13:00 Anything that you want, provided you know what you are doing, you can get it. That's is why they used to send me out to do their wheeling and dealing.

So you had the gift of the gab, as they say?

Well yes, you could say that. Knew which button to press, who wanted a hat bad enough.

And why were you interested in collecting some

13:30 **guns?**

At the time I just thought it was nice to have these things. And when I left Korea, I didn't want anything more to do with. The weapons that I had at home were private .22s and that, I got rid of. Didn't want them. Haven't touched a gun since, not interested in them.

And where did you stash them when you were in Korea?

I had them in my hootchie.

14:00 Oh it was quite legal, the only trouble was that I couldn't leave the country with them. I couldn't bring them out of the country with me. And they thought I was. They stopped me on the way to the airport when I was leaving and searched me gear, but I didn't have any on me. I had left them behind because I had had a warning that the MPs [Military Police] were out looking for them.

Who did you give them to?

Whoever was in the camp.

You gave them away in the end?

Yeah, no good to me.

And did you ever,

14:30 **I don't know, do target practice with them?**

Oh yeah. I used to go down the range quite regularly in Seoul and fire them off. I had the 45 chrome plated in Seoul.

To make it look good?

Oh yeah, made it look very shiny, nice. Not the sort of thing that you use out in the field but it was my showpiece though.

15:00 The war, what you got to remember, in Seoul a lot of this went on after the ceasefire. So there was a lot of people in Seoul who had nothing to do. You know, they were just virtually bystanders so we occupied their mind by doing things.

15:30 I sold a jeep, an ex jeep to a Korean. Wasn't mine, but I just sold it for fun. And we were standing there and it was a brand new jeep, different, not the Second World War type, a different sort. And we were standing there and they pulled up in front of the PX [Post Exchange – American canteen unit] and this thing got out and they used to leave the keys in them when they got out. And we were standing there looking at it and walking around and this Korean come up and he said,

16:00 "You want to sell?" And I said, "Yeah, how much will you give me for it?" And he pulled out his wad and

I took it and he drove off in it.

What did you say to the Yank when he came out?

I wasn't there when he came out.

So you pocketed the money?

Yeah. Same with the Koreans. The Americans changed their currency.

16:30 And at twelve o'clock today their currency was null and void. So everybody that had American dollars had to queue up and hand them in and get a chit for it for that amount and then go back the next day and get the new currency. They couldn't account for forty million dollars, because all the Korean houses of ill repute and all the

17:00 black marketeers, well they had them. There were blokes driving Cadillac over cliffs, Koreans, because they were committing suicide because they didn't have any money. They were bankrupt. So when I was leaving Korea I went up to all the houses of ill repute that I saw and told them that the British currency was changing, so I took it from them to change and they are still waiting for me to go back.

17:30 **I'm sorry. I'm sorry.**

True, true story. I thought it was good for the goose, good for the gander [good for one, good for all]. They got it for nothing, anyhow. I was doing them a favour. We used to do raids on these houses of ill repute because they were forever pinching our gear out of the laundry, so we would put raids on them and go and pinch it back. And I went in there one day and all this wall was all plastered with all this

18:00 money that had changed hands that they couldn't do anything with, so they used it for wallpaper.

Because it was useless?

It was nothing, it was useless. They couldn't spend it.

Hang on minute; I just want to go back to that story when you said that you would walk into the red light district houses…

Hmm

…and say, announce…

Yeah, cause look the Yanks had just changed their currency, so it was only natural that

18:30 the English would. So I told them that they English currency was changing the next day. And I was going home the next day.

But I am just curiosity why they would give you their money? I mean, you were saying…

Well how else were they going to change it? Nobody else would change it, and they had no other. You had to be a serving personnel to change your currency. I couldn't change the American dollars. If I had American dollars I couldn't change them, I would have to give them to an American

19:00 to change and the same thing applied with the Commonwealth forces. They never changed but they thought it was going to.

Did you get yourself a bit of a bad reputation?

I don't know. I wasn't there. I left the next day. Didn't worry me. I wasn't coming back. I never went back till '95. I don't think they remembered me then. Look, you done all sorts of things

19:30 to relieve your tension.

Well, and I was going to ask you about the black market, but this, I mean you have already been indicating that there was quite a high level of…?

When I first went up there, soap, you could get anything you like for a cake of soap. Soap was very scarce and then the next thing was materials, so you could get anything you like for a bolt of material.

20:00 And cosmetics, they went mad on cosmetics and all these things were one after the other. And most of this was after the ceasefire, though. If you could procure these things you could, you could sell them.

And where did you, I mean you said that you went through about fifteen hats. So where would you get all your hats from?

From the Q store.

20:30 If you lost a hat you just went back and got another one.

No dramas?

No, lost in action. I couldn't do it in Japan because you had to pay for it. But in Korea, yours in Korea.

And how much did you get for that Yankee jeep that you sold?

I can't remember now. It was some ridiculous price. I don't know why I even took, to be honest with you, I was only joking, but he took it so I took it.

21:00 **Well that's quite fascinating. So things did, as you have mentioned a few times, things really did change after the armistice.**

Hmm.

But perhaps we should spend a little bit of time before the armistice, talking about life was like and what the routine was

21:30 **before the armistice. Is that when you did your rounds with the mobile bath?**

Yes, we used to, you done a three-week cycle. For this week, half the unit would take the mobile bath unit away to a specific place and set up and all the chaps in reserve from the

22:00 front line would come in and strip off and have a shower and get a clean uniform when they walked out at the other end. And all, we would have stores in the trucks of all this equipment. We'd know exactly where we were going, what unit it was, and what uniforms to take. So we would service that and then load all the gear, all the dirty gear and then we'd come back to Seoul, where it would get processed and

22:30 three weeks later the other crew would go somewhere else and do that for them. So it might be the Australians one week and the Canadians, could be the New Zealanders, whoever was in reserve at the time. And it wasn't often they had, about every six weeks they got a bath. They started to smell a bit. It didn't worry them because they all smelt the same.

23:00 **So can you just tell us, how did you rig up the water system?**

You just dropped a big hose into the creek and suck it out. We had a pump, suck it up through the heaters. And then when they had a shower, we had mobile, portable showers set up in cubicles.

And how many showers did you have?

Oh there could be anything up to twelve showers in

23:30 one tent.

So was it tented?

It was a big tent. When I say cubicles, it was just a series of showers along the wooden floor and the floor was slatted and all the water used to run out and back into the creek.

So when you went out. I'll start at the beginning. So who would give you your briefing of where you were going to go?

Our officer,

24:00 unit officer. He would say, "Oh well, you have to go up to Tongduch'on," and give us map references and everything of where to go. So it was usually a sergeant and half a dozen blokes with the Korean crew and off we'd set sail in our vehicles.

So how many Koreans would go with you?

Oh two dozen, Because they used to do all the work. We didn't do

24:30 much. When I say didn't do much, they were the donkeys, they used to do all the donkey work. But we had to do our own guard duties and everything while we were up there.

So that is equivalent to a platoon, about thirty men?

Hmm.

And what sort of vehicles did you?

Bedford QLs, British Bedford QLs, three ton. You'd have one full

25:00 unit of change of clothing, etc., or whatever was required, socks, underwear, shirts, trousers, anything that is washable. And the other equipment trucks were our supply trucks for our own requirements for our food, etc., a kitchen, a country kitchen type thing,

25:30 and the compressor and the generator and pumps with heaters and the big tents. It would take you a day to set up. And then they would just come in the next morning and take all day to go through and you'd pack up and come back.

So it would be at least half a dozen trucks, if not more?

Oh yeah.

26:00 **So quite big conveys?**

Yeah. And very rough narrow roads that we'd have to drive along. Not wide enough for two vehicles to pass. So if another truck was coming, or vehicle was coming the other way, one would have to pull right over as far they could go without going off the road to let the other one pass. Very hairy.

Was it mountainous?

Yes,

26:30 very mountainous. And you are travelling along these valley roads, so you have got a drop off into a creek or river on one side and then got this steep incline on the other side. So you had to go very careful there or you'd rip the side of vehicle out on the side or you could drop over the edge.

And what time of the day would you set out?

Early hours of the morning, actually, so you got there in time for

27:00 setting up in daylight. Course you didn't travel too much at night over there because people could see your lights.

So you would be travelling half a day away?

Hmm. Well from Seoul to the 38th parallel is appropriately twenty mile, so

27:30 we would travel at least fifteen or eighteen miles to get there. We were just behind the lines, we would be. As I say, there all, the people are in reserves, so that is there rest area. But you are still within mortar range. They used to drop a couple in now and again.

So when you would arrive, what would be the routine?

28:00 Oh first of all you would set up your pump, get your pump situated and your generator and your tents, put your tents up and then work out where your river area is going to be and get everything ready in the field kitchen and set up for business. You are just waiting for your customers to arrive.

So who would…

28:30 **What sort of… While the unit was being set up, what would you be doing? Would you be overseeing?**

All depends. If I got the guard detail I might have to set a perimeter guard, and then it all depends as I say what duty I have drawn for the day. So if I am doing guard duty, then I have to set a perimeter guards. If I have got field duties, then I have got to set up the

29:00 equipment. We used to take it in turns.

And how would you establish the perimeter?

Well actually it is within your own compound. Wherever you set up, that is, you work out your perimeter around that. It wasn't hard because nine times out of ten you would just run a trip flare around the what's-a-name so nobody

29:30 could sneak in on us. Not that they ever did, we never ever used them.

And what was the trip flare?

Well if they tripped over the wire, it set out a flare to light up the area. But as I say, they were only a precaution. We never had anyone use them or trip them over. But that was just part of the deal that we done.

So you would get the

30:00 **shower cubicles in the tent sort of set up and the pumps fixed. Those showers, were they open, or did they have a roof on the tent or…?**

Yes, a proper tent. Everything was prefabricated so it was just a matter of just putting, same as you put your gear here, and everything had a place to go so that you set it all up

30:30 and you… The plumbing was the hardest, that took longest, was getting all your hot and your cold water to the showers. But as I say it was all prefabricated, you knew what went where. It was easy.

Did you have hot water?

Yes, we made hot water, that was what we used the generator for, to generate the electricity to run the pump to run the steam,

31:00 to make the steam to make the hot water. So one complements the other. They were not little things, they were big noisy things.

And what sort of thing, the shower, how would it work?

You just had two pipes coming into a ceiling rose, right. And they just pulled the chain so it opened the valve, like a toilet chain.

31:30 You used to pull it to open it and pull the other one to close it. Usually they were set so that water would come in at the right temperature.

Yes, I was just going to ask you, how did you regulate the temperature?

You couldn't mix it. Whatever came out that was what you got. We never made it too hot for them, though.

So it was first in best dressed for the supply of hot water?

No, no, it was continuous.

32:00 We never ran out of hot water. We wouldn't dare! You got eight hundred blokes hadn't had a shower for six weeks. No fear, they had enough fighting. They didn't want to fight us too.

And what sort of soap did you use?

We actually had a, we used to get it in boxes, it was like soap flakes. So we used to mix up in a solution

32:30 and they used to squirt it on them themselves, you know. So we'd just make that up. Actually it was same soap we used on the clothes. We'd use soap flakes for that too. Basically that was what we were using.

And what sort of bottles did you put it into?

Like a water bottle, similar to that, only metal bottles, and just shake it up. And it had a little hole in the top and

33:00 just shaking it all over you. And around your hair, we didn't have shampoos for the hair. They were just thankful to get it. I know I used to appreciate a shower.

33:30 **And so how often would you be able to get a shower yourself?**

Oh we could shower every day, if you could get the water. In Seoul in the winter time it was very hard to get water. But I used to go across to the Yankee camp across the road and use their facilities they always had plenty of water. I don't know how they done it, but if it was freezing cold, our pipes used to freeze up.

34:00 **So how long would you stay out with the mobile bath unit?**

Oh, possibly a week, go out for a week and then you came back and somebody else would go out. About every second or third week, we used to chuff off to somewhere. Mostly it was around Tongduch'on or Uijongbu area.

34:30 **And as you say, you are just behind front line.**

Hmm.

And every now and then you would?

Oh now and again Charlie would send us over a message to say that he knew where we were.

And would you build trenches?

Oh yeah working pits and everything else. It was a proper maintained campsite, you know. And as I said, we had our perimeter guards

35:00 and they were very toey [anxious]. They kept their eye on things.

And what sort of weaponry would you take out with you?

Oh, basically just our rifles and Bren guns. Bren guns were usually mounted up on the cabin of the truck. We had a round hole, a manhole in the passenger side of the truck cab roof. So we had the machine guns,

35:30 **Bren guns mounted up on that and set up there. That was for travelling, mostly, because somebody had to stand up there while you were travelling. So that why it got very cold in the winter time driving along.**

So was there any occasions that you had to use your weapons?

A couple of times we had to fire a couple of bursts to

36:00 persuade somebody because we thought they were getting a bit close. But we didn't actually see anything. But from the angle that the mortars come in we knew they was somebody that shouldn't have been there. They were actually between us and the front line. They were actually in our territory so. So we thought it might be just a

36:30 fighting patrol. So we just persuaded them as much as we can.

How many customers would you get in at once?

You might get a company in in one day, so that was about a hundred and men, a hundred and fifty men or something in one day. So you do a battalion over

37:00 the course of a week. So that's where things, as I say a company at a time.

That's quite a lot of customers?

Yeah, well you have got, as I say you have got eight hundred to one thousand men. So you have got to have all the sufficient quantities of change of equipment for them. So that's two pair of socks, two sets

37:30 of underwear, two shirts, two trousers for each person that comes through. That's what he is issued with and that is what he has to give you back, as he goes in he gives you his two sets of dirty of clothes.

That's a lot of uniforms and dirty clothes.

Hmm.

And also I was just curious to think about how you accommodated the incoming?

38:00 What do you mean how we accommodated?

Where would the incoming sleep for the night?

They didn't sleep the night. They went back to the unit same day. In and out in the same day. We might feed them, which was very often because usually they brought their K rations with them or C rations as they were in those days, no.

So you would set up close enough for them to be able to travel...

Oh yes.

...and then return?

38:30 Oh yeah, we'd only be a mile away from them at the most. We never ever went…

You were just telling us that you didn't accommodate the incoming?

No.

So they would come in and maybe get fed?

Possibly, sometimes we would, or sometimes they'd, most times they would bring their own C rations so that they… A C ration is a

39:00 twenty-four hour pack. So they have breakfast, dinner and tea in that one container. So you ate what you want when you want, how you want. And what we would supply them with was facilities for showering and a change of clean uniform.

So one hundred and fifty men would have to have a shower in one day?

Hmm.

That's a lot of showers?

Busy. They didn't have long.

39:30 **Did they queue?**

Oh yeah. Had to there were only twelve showers in this tent. So you only got twelve blokes at a time so you don't hog the shower because you got the bloke, "Come on, hurry up," you know.

Okay, well our tape has come to an end so we will just stop there and change it.

Hmm.

Tape 6

00:31 **Just still talking about the mobile unit?**

Hmm.

How long were the men actually in the shower for? Was it timed?

Oh yes, had to be timed. And as I said there was one hundred and fifty blokes waiting for a shower and only twelve showers so they got roused out pretty quick. Time enough to soap themselves up and rinse off, virtually. Enough to get rid of the grime and the

01:00 lice.

Well how was the lice treated?

Well actually that was treated by the RMO, [Regimental] Medical Officer. But we used to set up tinea baths, so that they step into it. As they come out of the shower they stepped into a tinea bath to compensate for that, and that was only Condy's crystals in water. They just had to

01:30 walk through that before they got out of the shower cubicle or shower area.

What other kinds of physical complaints were the men coming in with?

Oh a lot of frostbite. That was the main one. From natural causes it was mostly frostbite, especially in the winter. These poor grunters, I really take my hat off to them. They

02:00 endured some horrific conditions. And I was only thankful that I was in the position I was. Cause as far as they were concerned I had it easy. To me I had it tough, but compared to them, mine was a cakewalk and I'll be the first one to admit it.

02:30 **Did any of them tell you what was happening out there when they went through?**

No, I have got a mate today, he'll talk, him and I together, but as soon as anyone else comes around he clams, up he won't say a word. And there is no way in the world that he would sit in front of this camera and talk to you like I am, he just won't do it. He just lives everything

03:00 within himself.

I'm sure he saw some pretty horrendous stuff out there?

Yes, well as I say, his experiences were front line. He was actually in Kap'yong the battle of Kap'yong, so that was hard work.

Well just talking about the

03:30 **laundry service, this may sound like a really silly question, but I am kind of curious. You said that you take the men's clothes in and change them. What would you do about sizes? How would you know what size to give them?**

You would virtually look at them and say, "That will do you." And most of them, of the blokes, would swap amongst themselves to get the right size. But basically there is only about two or three sizes, if I can remember correctly

04:00 on trousers and shirts, didn't matter with underwear. But if you had a little bloke you wouldn't give him a big shirt sort of thing, you know, and if he did happen to get one, then he would swap with somebody or he could always bring it back, you know.

And what was the state of the clothes that they were handing in?

A little bit smelly. You can imagine after six weeks that they would

04:30 be. We just had a big bin and they just threw there stuff into there. And they were lifted on to the truck and stacked on the truck. And we'd have more gear coming back then, oh well it appeared more gear coming back because when we go out everything was stacked neatly but when you come back you might have two hundred big bags full of clothing.

05:00 And then it is all dumped on the door step of the static laundry and they sort it out and wash it.

So was any of the cleaning done out in the mobile unit?

No, it was all done at the static, static laundry.

You showed us a photo before of the sock drying?

Yes.

How did you acquire that?

Well I happened to be in the field

05:30 when the day after the 5th Cavalry, Custer's mob, 7th Cavalry, Custer's mob, that had bugged out [left] the night before. And when the Americans bug out they leave everything behind, and when they get to their new place, everything is supplied to them. And then a crew comes into their old position and takes everything away. Well I happened to see all this stuff standing around and so I went and had a look at it and seen this funny looking

06:00 heated compartment with all these little wire feet things in it. And I asked the bloke what it was, and he said, “It’s a sock drying machine.” So I promptly hooked in on and took it back to camp.

And did you use that out in the field?

No, we used it back in Seoul.

How important was it to have dry socks?

Very important. Because as I said, it gets

06:30 very cold, very hot and it gets very wet. So if you have got cold feet it wouldn’t do you any good, if you had wet feet it wouldn’t do you any good, and if you had sweaty feet it wouldn’t do you any good. So the more often that you could change your socks the better. And the beauty of the sock drying machine was that in the winter you could wash them with out them shrinking, because you stretch them over this wire thing and it stopped them from shrinking,

07:00 and dry them at a normal rate. Otherwise they put them through a tumble dry or something, you know what wool does. So.

So how many socks could you get through and put in?

You work it out.

How big was it? I am trying to get a picture of how many rows there was?

In the machine?

Yes, the machine?

Oh I’m sorry. It was like a caravan,

07:30 as big as an eighteen-foot caravan. So there would be one, two, three tiers high, three or four tiers high. And the full length and a width of the… As I was saying, they were on trays. You opened the side doors up and pulled the tray out and loaded them up and pushed the trays back and then started the hot water flowing through the pipes and start the fans going and dried them up.

08:00 **And when you got that back to camp, what did the other guys think of it?**

At this stage we had a Pommy National Serviceman. It was his first stint as a CO. He was only a lieutenant and he wanted to take it back. And I said, “Take it back where?” He said, “Where did you get from?” I said, “No, somebody would only pinch if you put it out there.” I said, “We’ll look after it

08:30 for somebody.” So he believed that. He was very naïve, I’m afraid, this bloke.

Sorry, just to go back being out in the unit and camped out there, how close did you get to the action?

Well as I say, mostly within a mile at any one time because we didn’t deliberately go out there

09:00 to… We are a self-contained unit, but we are not a fighting… We could virtually protect ourselves but you didn’t go out looking for trouble. So if any trouble come, it actually comes to you – you didn’t go out to it. And as I said, we always knew that we could have problems if need be.

09:30 So that is why we had the perimeter guards.

And were the guards a part of your unit?

Oh yes.

Did you ever have to go on perimeter guard?

Oh yeah, I done my stint as guard commander, oh yes.

What is a guard commander?

Well he is the one in charge. He sets up the actual perimeter and maintains the guard. That is his

10:00 sole job. He doesn’t do anything in the camp when you are guard commander, same as when you are… That is why we used to swap. Whoever was guard commander last trip was camp OC [Officer Commanding].

So how many of you would go out with the unit, the mobile unit?

As I say about a dozen servicemen and the rest were Koreans.

And where did the Koreans camp?

10:30 Within the compound. They had their own little tents as well.

Did you ever mix with them or socialise with them?

Not really, couldn't speak to them. I only had one or two that could speak English.

And how were they paid?

They got paid in British BAF and they could go into

11:00 a particular place and get it transferred into their own money. We couldn't handle their money but they could do both, you know. But they had certain points. All the people that were employed by the forces had set points where they could go and change their money back to their own currency. But again, a lot of them, the currency was negotiable within the civilian community. That's how

11:30 they got all this stuff pasted on the walls with the houses of ill repute.

So did you have any problems with the Koreans working for you?

No, not the Koreans working for us. But we did have problems with the civilian population outside the camp – this is in Seoul – because they were forever sneaking in at night and pinching equipment,

12:00 stores, etc., so we would have to retaliate the next day.

And what would that be?

Go and pinch it back. As I told you before, you had to come up this little laneway and there was rows, one row of shops with houses, with the flats above and houses behind with an alleyway between, and every one of those was a house of ill repute.

12:30 And our CO used to sit in his office with the tent rolled up with his binoculars looking along rows, and he'd pick out laundry marks on different clothes and then he'd call me up and ask me to man a patrol to go and get our gear back. You'd see some funny sights. Like there were blokes hiding in cupboards thinking it were the provos putting a raid on. And you'd open the cupboard up and there'd be a bloke curled up in the cupboard.

13:00 **What kind of things were they pinching from you?**

Sheets, sheets mainly from the hospital. They were getting short of sheets and we couldn't afford to lose any, so. And they would, we'd have them hanging on a line and next morning they'd be gone and you'd see them hanging on a line out of the window of one of the

13:30 houses. So that's what I say, hence the binoculars. And look to see, "That's one got one of our sheets." So half a dozen of us would go in there and get them back.

How would you get them back?

Just put a raid on the place. If you go into a house armed you don't get much resistance. Not that we were going to do anything because nine times of ten our rifles weren't loaded anyhow.

14:00 But just the fright of it with a fixed bayonet is enough to deter anybody.

All for a couple of sheets.

Sorry?

All for a couple of sheets.

Yeah, oh yeah. But you can't get them let away with it. If you let that go then it gets worse.

Well I am going to have to ask you now about these houses of ill repute that you keep mentioning.

Hmm.

How many were there near the camp?

Well I'd say

14:30 about twenty-four because there was two rows of houses in front of us. And as I say the only way that I can get through was this laneway leading down to the main street. Oh no, they were quite busy. Lots of coming and goings there. We used to lock the gates at night and stand behind our… We had

15:00 a weapon pit built on the opposite side of the creek facing straight down the laneway and we used to stand behind that because there was a lot of night fighting going on between the military police and the blokes stuck in the houses of ill repute. They'd have a firefight and we'd usually be in between, so we used to stand back behind there so we weren't in the line of fire.

Sorry, who's fighting? The MPs are?

The MPs, when they

15:30 go to raid the place the blokes would fire on them so that they could get away.

The brothel owners?

No, the troops.

Really?

Yeah. It was actually was more hairy on a busy night than for some of these blokes up the front line some time. We had a real firefight there one night.

16:00 Shots being fired back and forward.

Were these? What country were these forces from?

Mostly Americans. You're lost, aren't you?

Just a bit baffled at the retaliation.

Well if they get caught they get into trouble. They get in the stockade. If you go into the stockade in American,

16:30 the American stockade, it is not nice. No stockade is right, but the American ones are particularly bad. They don't want to go into those so they got to make their escape somehow, so they fire a couple of shots and get their head down and run. I don't think they fired to kill, they just fired to frighten and they don't care which way they shoot.

And how often would there be raids?

Oh quite regularly, oh yes.

17:00 We used to stand in the alleyway and just egg them on because they couldn't touch us because that was our only entrance to and from camp. And we used to stand there and watch them doing the raids, you know, just for fun.

So for the Australian serviceman was there ever picket duty or anything like that?

Particularly?

Picket duty to make sure the Australian men didn't go in?

No, in Seoul you mean?

Yeah?

No, see we had

17:30 the… When you say picket duty, we had the provos, the military police, which do a town pick up. They were the ones that enforced the laws within the communities. It's all like, what's a good example of it now, overseas now they are training these people to take over the country. And this is basically what

18:00 was happening in Seoul at the time. So you had the Australian military police, the American military police, each country had their own military police but all working together. So if I as an Australian done something wrong and an American picked me up, I would have to go with the American MPs. And same with the Yanks, if a Yank got picked up by an Australian. And they'd swap them over.

18:30 So deal with them in their own way. But I only ever got picked up by the provos once, and that was for… He reckons I was speeding. And that was an American provo. He reckons that I was speeding and passed a streetcar on the wrong side, cause they drive on the left the same as America in Korea and he reckons I passed, and anyhow

19:00 I got out of it.

What did you say?

Oh it cost me a case of soap to the Australian provos to get out it; they got me out of it. They got me out of it, but it wouldn't have stood up in court. I have still got the citation that they wrote me. I kept it for a souvenir because it is a lot of crap. You see one of the questions was, "Where do you live?" I said, "Australia." He said, "What part of Australia?" I said, "South Australia?" "What part of South Australia?"

19:30 I said, "Semaphore." And he said, "How do you spell that?" I said, "Sem with a four." So he wrote it down, Sem with a four.

What, the American provo wrote that down?

Yeah. When he produced his citation to my blokes, the citation, they just laughed it out. Because it was wrong, it couldn't be used.

20:00 They only said it so I'd see what he'd do. I used to tantalise them something shocking.

How was that?

Oh I'd just do things just to annoy them. Just for fun. We used to do all sorts of things.

What kind of things would you do?

On one particular section in Seoul there was a five roads used to cross and there was a police station on one of these things, one of these corners

20:30 and it had barred windows, and they had a machine gun poking out the window and it covered all five roads. Now anything that moved on the road after curfew got shot at. So we used to sneak up and get piano wire and tie it around the barrel and tie it to the bars so the machine gun couldn't be moved and then we would go over there and tantalise them so they'd be, after curfew.

21:00 Can pop up out of a trench and go boo who. Just for fun. You got to break the monotony.

Yes, I can understand that. Can I just ask some more questions about the brothels?

Hmm.

What were the warnings? I mean were Australian soldiers allowed to frequent…?

Nobody was allowed, they were off limits. That's why they used to raid them. No,

21:30 there was no… To my knowledge there were no brothels that were sanctioned by any forces. They were all off limits and you were advised against them insistently.

So what happened if a man got VD [Venereal Disease]?

You had a very painful experience, so I am led to believe.

22:00 **But how would it be treated? What would he do?**

You'd have to go to hospital and you would get all the injections, I believe penicillin, all this, and all sorts of nasty things happened to them. A couple of blokes who I had spoken to swore that they'd never have it again.

22:30 **How would the doctors or the army react to that?**

Actually it was a chargeable offence. You could… If they wanted to they could charge you and put you in the stockade.

They were very serious about it?

Oh yes, yes. But if these blokes are stupid enough to try it they have only nobody to blame but themselves.

23:00 You have got to find other alternatives for getting rid of your inhibitions, like tying machine guns barrels to bars.

What about alcohol? How was alcohol treated? I mean I hear that there were rum rations.

Rum rations, yes, we used to get a rum ration once a day in the winter time. Every day at midday you queued up for your rum ration, and for the bloke who didn't drink, he kept it and gave it to you after. Oh no, it was good

23:30 stuff – like treacle it was. You may not remember the square kerosene tins, those four gallons, that's what they came in and a screw top. And they used to pour it out like treacle into a bucket and you had so much and then you would fill it up with water and stir it up and it was smooth, warmed the cockles of your heart.

That's a bit dangerous giving that out in the middle of the day though?

No, no, not in

24:00 the winter time. It's only rum. It's like they get in the navy, a tot of rum. You'd didn't get a big mug full of it. Strewth!

So what about other alcohol that was available?

Beer. Unless you went into an American camp then you could get anything you wanted. In the sergeants' mess they had their whiskies, etc. But in the ORs' canteen you're only got beer. One bottle of beer per day

24:30 perhaps.

And how did you keep that? I have heard about it freezing up in winter.

In the winter you used to sleep with your bottle of beer in your sleeping bag to keep if from freezing. It is true. In the summer time we had a, I had the carpenter make a big chest up and we lined it with

sawdust, the cavities with

25:00 sawdust, and then we got ice from out of the Han River to cut during the winter time with a saw and stuck it in there and we had cold beer in the summer time.

How did you keep the ice cold throughout the summer?

Oh, the Koreans used to cut it in the winter time out of the river and store in big blockhouses for their summer. So we used to go and get ice off them in the summer. But you didn't suck ice like you do here, because it was full of worms.

25:30 **What was the local water like?**

Terrible. You couldn't drink it, couldn't drink it, it all had to be purified. Our canteens, we'd fill it up in the morning and put a couple of tablets in it and shake it up. You couldn't drink it until you done that.

And what about local food? Any of the local food did you eat?

Oh no, you never know where it was coming from. It could have been dog.

26:00 **So did you actually eat out in Seoul?**

Yeah I did once. We went to a Chinese restaurant. We didn't enjoy it though so we didn't pay. We went out through the window, through the toilet window at the time.

Just asking more about the alcohol, I mean was there a problem of excessive

26:30 **drinking?**

No, no, we never had any problem within our unit. I don't know, I can't speak for any other unit but having said that, I know the sergeants' mess used to get through a fair swag of booze over the period of a week. So but then other than

27:00 that it would only be individuals. It wouldn't be general. You'll always get the odd bloke that doesn't drink so he gives his beer ration to somebody that does, but all in all I would say that it was pretty moderate. They made a mess of themselves when they went on leave, really wrote themselves off.

27:30 Come back from leave and you say, "How did you enjoy your leave?" "Had a wow of a time." "What did you do?" "Got drunk." "What did you see?" "Nothing, don't remember, it was all oblivious."

So you were distributing the other rations, were you also distributing the beer ration?

Only just for the canteen. Only just bring it back and put it in the canteen, because it was actually sold over the counter. But as I say it was

28:00 two and a penny a bottle and you had one bottle per night.

Was that enough?

Oh well I wasn't a big drinker in those days anyhow so it didn't worry me. Not that I am a big drinker now but I didn't enjoy beer as much in those days as I do now.

What about at the Americans' mess?

You could get in there. They are called

28:30 clubs, they are. They have got the officers' club and they have got their warrant officers', ORs' club but that goes right up until the rank of warrant officer. The warrant officer goes in the officers' club. But they can have anything they want, their bars, it is just like walking into a hotel, everything imaginable is on the shelves. But the beer is terrible, it is only three and a half per cent

29:00 alcohol, there is no kick in it at all.

And what about the other stuff that was available?

That was top shelf, you know. You'd get the one hundred and ten proof vodka and all this. This is what I couldn't understand. They had these silly ideas that they didn't want their troops to get drunk on beer but you could drink the spirits.

And was the American club popular amongst the Aussies?

Oh yeah, very popular, oh yes.

Did locals frequent them?

29:30 Oh no, only military personnel, unless some of the Americans might have had lady friends that they invited in. But most of that was at the end of the officers or to

30:00 the consultant. We had an occasion in 1954 Anzac Day we gatecrashed the American Embassy.

Oh, you have opened a can of worms there. Do tell.

Oh, it was funny. We never had any money, we walked, and there were half a dozen of us, a couple of Kiwis and a few Australians

30:30 and we were out enjoying ourselves. And we saw this big brick wall with a big gate on it. So we walked in and there were all these people walking around in civilian clothes. And we said, "What's this?" They said, "It's the American Embassy." And I said, "Oh sorry." And started to walk. "Oh no, stop and have a drink," you know. "Oh, I have got no money." And within five minutes, because they used to use a chit system, you'd go up, or you'd get the steward to buy a two dollar book of chits and it was marked off

31:00 in ten cents, twenty cents, fifty cents, and dollar. And that how they paid for the drinks, right, out of the chits. So within ten minutes of being there we had everybody's book on one table in the middle of the room and we were shouting drinks off their books.

How did you manage to gather everyone's books?

We just told them that you had to put your book here, it was your shout. You know, "Everybody bring their books," and they did, put them on the table. And we sat around

31:30 the table and gossiping and carrying on, starting a football match and all that you know, taking the colonel's shoes off and throwing it around as a football.

So who was at the American Embassy that day?

Oh a lot of Americans. And that is where I met a civilian colonel attached

32:00 to the air force and he was a filmmaker and he was making a film in Korea at the time. But he didn't live in the embassy, he lived in a house belonging to the embassy called Cho Chong House, so went I went out, I went to Cho Chong House, not to the American Embassy. I used to ride around in this chauffeur driven Chevy [Chevrolet], sitting in the back seat smoking cigars, giving salutes going through

32:30 the gate, the whole bit. Great fun.

How often did you visit Cho Chong?

I used to be quite a regular visitor because, as I say, I was the only Australian in the unit. All the rest were National Servicemen so I come and went as I pleased.

And how did they respond to Australians?

Oh great, we were the flavour of the month.

And why do you think that was?

Just,

33:00 because I think we were novel to them. Unexpected to them. They never struck anything like us before.

In what way? What makes us so novel?

I think it is the fact of our ability to make a joke of ourselves and your mate and get away with it. Where they couldn't, they couldn't carry on the way we do

33:30 because it wasn't done, you know. Our bantering towards Australians and New Zealanders you know, that was never heard of. It was just a novelty. Plus the fact that we had our slouch hats on, loved that hat.

So you were the only Australian in the unit. What other nationalities were in the unit?

34:00 All English National Servicemen. Actually it was an 5th Armed Regiment, 5th Tanks were our guards and National Servicemen manned the rest of the equipment.

So where did you meet other Aussies?

Just around town, go for a walk around town, I met a few. There were other Australian units – there were electrical and mechanical engineers, there

34:30 was survey corps, a whole multitude of different units that surrounded it. You soon found out where you would go and meet up.

Did you make any Aussie mates over there?

Yes, but unfortunately I don't know any of them now because most of them are all interstate and I don't… All the ones, it's only recently that I found a chap here in Adelaide that was with me in Japan.

35:00 And it has taken me all these years to carry on, to catch up with him.

Did that ever get lonely, not having other Australians with you?

No, not really, because I knew that they weren't far away. Once again I think it was harping back to my merchant seaman's days,

35:30 when you are on your own for so long at different stages it was no novelty. And as I say at that time I enjoyed my own company anyhow. So because I liked to do my thing, not what the mob wanted to do.

Well you mentioned that earlier today,

36:00 **that you took leave in Tokyo…**

Hmm.

…when you were in Korea. Who did you go to Tokyo with?

This was when it was an Australia unit. There was half a dozen of us, went from Korea to Japan on leave. So we flew over in the Dakota to Iwakuni and we caught the Qantas flight up from Australia going up to Tokyo. We got aboard the plane, all these civilians on the plane, only these six servicemen

36:30 and the steward came along and we said, "Yes, we will have six beers." So he produced the beers, and we pulled out our money to pay and he said, "I can't accept that." And we said, "Why?" And he said, "No, that is not Australian currency." I said, "And where are we going to get Australian?" Here we are nursing these beers and have got nothing to pay with it. And so this chap in the front seat he turned around and he said, "I'll fix it up." He was an Australian businessman on his way up to Tokyo.

37:00 So when we got to Tokyo we took him out on the town for shouting us a drink on the plane.

And what was a night on the town in Tokyo?

A night on the town in Tokyo for us at the time was, we made a pact when we went that we were only going to have one beer a day for the time we were there because we were going to see Tokyo, and that's what we done. We had fourteen days in Tokyo and it only cost me thirteen pound.

37:30 Everywhere we went we went in the taxi. And the bloke who sat in the front of the taxi crossed his legs and lifted the machine off its spindle and let it down every now and again. Because at the time, whatever the meter read, that's was what you paid. And the taxi driver knew that it cost two thousand yen to go from Ebisu Camp into Tokyo and we used to do it for one hundred fifty.

38:00 Never did wake up that we were lifting it off its spindle.

And what did you see in Tokyo?

Oh we went to the Emperor's Palace. We had a look round the outside of that. I went to the Diet building; I went to the Ginza market. I went to a theatre in the Ginza, it was seven storeys high and a different theatre on each floor and

38:30 you just paid as you went in the door and that entitled you to, you could spend all day there or twenty-four hours just going from one theatre to the other for the same price that you paid to get in. I mean that's why we actually seen Tokyo. We went everywhere, done the whole tourist bit. And when we went back, we told them and they said, "You're mad." "No." We didn't think so.

39:00 **And what did you think of Tokyo?**

Very congested, very busy, quite interesting. I don't know what it is like now, I would like to go back and find out. But you could buy anything that you wanted in the Ginza and get first-class products for half the price, just by bartering.

39:30 I bought a pair of binoculars and he wanted seven thousand yen for them and finished up paying two hundred and fifty for them. Kept on walking around the Ginza and he'd say, "I'll give you a special price?" And I'd say, "Yeah, how much?" And he would bring the price down. "Takai." And walk off. And there was no difference from those binoculars that were in the shop, except that you could see the join on the fabric on the outer casings.

40:00 Nothing wrong with the binoculars. But if you didn't barter they didn't think much of you. One American came in and he wanted three pair of binoculars and he said, "How much?" And he said, "Two thousand." So he peeled off six thousand and gave it to him for three pair of binoculars. Mad, but that's the way they were. They didn't like bartering. We did.

We have come to the end of another tape. How you going there?

Tape 7

00:32 **So John, just picking up on what we were talking about off camera the fact that armistice took place in mid '53, in about July '53, how did the running of the bath unit change after armistice?**

Not a great deal of difference, there still, only that the fact that all the Australians were withdrawn from the unit

01:00 and it was manned by Pommy National Serviceman and I was the Australian, or I was delegated as the Australian representative within the unit. But they still maintained everything in a status quo inasmuch as all the laundry for the Commonwealth forces was done there in Seoul. And we still sent out our bath units but then the

01:30 National Serviceman took them out and I didn't have to go out on them then. So that was the only difference.

But you still stayed with the unit?

Oh yeah, I still stayed with the unit, yeah. Yes, but as I say I was representing them and when I was relieved I was relieved by another Australian who occupied the same position as me.

Okay, well I would actually like to backtrack to those mobile bath

02:00 **trips that you did.**

Hmm.

Just a couple more questions I had. So you mentioned that you would do a battalion over a period of a week but there would be about a hundred and fifty at any one time. I am just wondering, what did you do for shaving gear? Did you supply shaving gear?

Oh, if it was required. We supplied…

02:30 Everything that was available to a battalion goes through their Q store. Say if a chap in the infantry wants any toilet gear he goes to the Q stores and procures it from there. This is in the field. Within the peacetime, like if he was back in Japan, he would buy it through the canteen. So basically they supply

03:00 their own gear in that respect. But we did have it in case they didn't, but it wasn't often that it was required. As I say, the only things that we supported was a change of uniform, clean uniform and soap.

So it was the individual's responsibility to provide their own shaving gear?

Yes.

But you would have supplies?

If it was required,

03:30 like a matter of razor blades. But nothing else and not, it wasn't an issue at this stage.

And would you have any mirrors?

Yes little metal mirror, it was. It was in the kit. When you join the army you are given a toilet kit and it has got a razor,

04:00 a shaving brush, shaving soap and this little mirror with a hole in and you can hang it on a nail on the wall, but it is only metal. It is not the best thing in the world to shave in, you have to have a good memory, and it just shows you were to got not how to do it.

So I am just wondering whether the men would, when the men came in to have a shower in your unit would they take that opportunity to have a shave then?

04:30 No, they would shave either before or after. They couldn't tie up the showers for too long. We had hand basins, etc., for those people who wanted to.

Where did you set up the hand basins?

In the same tent. Basically you walked into the tent, stripped off, went and had a shower, walked through the

05:00 water trough for any tinea or anything then dried yourself on the other side, sort of thing, and then you got issued with your uniform, and if in between if you wanted to have a shave or a whatever.

The other thing I was wondering about was you might not have had anybody doing hair cuts in your

05:30 **unit but?**

The battalion usually has their own barbers. Each company usually has their own barbers in the field. Somebody always chops your hair for you. We had Korean barbers in Seoul.

So did you have anybody in the bath unit who was cutting hair?

No, as I say the Korean that we had in Seoul, he didn't speak any English

06:00 so you had to be very careful how you told him. I said I wanted it short and he went, berrrrrrom, took the lot off. So I had a real baldy.

And how much was your haircut?

Oh we didn't pay for it. No, he was being paid for being in the unit so he didn't get any extra. Strewth, you can't over feed them!

06:30 **And how would the troops spend their time milling around the day that they came in for a shower? I mean there is lot of showers to get through, so you have some spare time?**

Oh they'd find their ways. They'd get a two-up game going or a game of cards or sit around writing letters. Because we acted as postman sometimes, when we were leaving we'd take their mail out and post it for them.

07:00 But no, they'd find things to do. A lot of them were cleaning equipment, etc. An infantry battalion or an infantry soldier is never without something to do. It is instilled into him that he does something, he rests when he can, he sleeps when he can but when he has a free moment,

07:30 then he checks his equipment. And that's what they do. They make sure that their equipment is in first-class working order. Well that is instilled in all service personnel, but more so in an infantry battalion because that is his best friend, that and the bloke alongside of him.

08:00 **And how often did you write home?**

Not very often, about once a month if I was lucky. I am not a letter writer, plus the fact that I didn't have time, really. I was very busy. But when the Salvo [Salvation Army] caught up with me I used to have to write a letter. They were great, the Salvos. Whenever you stopped to see a Salvo he always had a cup of tea and a biscuit and a

08:30 pen and paper for you to write home. And they used to virtually stand over you until you did write home. I have always got a lot of admiration for the old Salvos.

And where would they catch up with you?

Anywhere, anywhere and everywhere, they were all over the place. But one particular place as you went down the road to Tongduch'on they had a NAAFI on one side selling a cup of coffee and a

09:00 biscuit or bun for two bob or something and on the opposite side of the road you had the Red Shield [Salvation Army] set up and everything was free. So which one got the most attention? The freebie. But they did, they done a marvellous job. And they are the only ones that can knock on my door and get something.

And did you receive any letters?

Oh

09:30 yes, oh yes. Shirley used to write me quite regularly. And my mother, not very often from Mum, but Shirley used to correspond. She was a quite avid writer but I am not. One page is my lot. I get everything in one page.

Did she send you, or your mother or anybody

10:00 **send you any little parcels?**

Oh yes, I used to get my parcels regularly up there with some tobacco in it. What was the queerest thing? Oh yeah, that's right. I got a big scarf in the middle of summer. But no, we used to get these home comfort [Australian Comforts Fund] parcels. They were good. A little bit of home.

10:30 **And what other things would the family or Shirley tell you about?**

Oh just what daily, daily things what was happening around home and everything you know. The usual things. But not that it was a great interest to me because as I said, I left home when I was fourteen. Because I virtually didn't relate to a lot of things that were happening around home.

11:00 But it was still nice to hear these things. It's a lonely life. It's lonely in that respect. It's, you are more separated then because it is virtually forced on you. If I wanted to do it on my own bat [myself] it would be different to what being forced to do it. It's

11:30 hard to differentiate between the two, but if I was just going on a holiday and that type of thing it would be a different proposition to being there under the circumstances that I was there. And I think a lot of other blokes felt the same way too, you know, even though they volunteered to be there, you know.

And how comforting was it for you

12:00 **to have a girl at home writing letters to you?**

Oh great, a great comfort. I knew the one that I was going marry. I'd only just met her but I knew that

she was going to be mine. And that was the way it worked out.

How did you know that?

Oh I just felt it. She was prepared to wait for me, so. And

12:30 that's since 1946, '47, '46, '47 we got married, been together ever since.

That is quite extraordinary.

Only had one argument in our life. It has been going on for forty-seven years but it's the only one. Not really.

13:00 **Well you mentioned a couple of things earlier on today that I would like to come back to, and one of them was that at one point you were the fastest man in Korea over a hundred yards?**

Yes, I had this distinction of winning the Coronation Gift in Korea on Coronation Day in 1953. It was a Commonwealth forces sports day, a parade and sports day

13:30 to commemorate the coronation. So I was fortunate enough to win the finals.

What was the field like?

It was quite competitive, actually. The chap that I beat, I actually borrowed his shoes to run my heat and

14:00 he wouldn't accept them back, and I only just pipped him at the post. Whether or not it was his shoes or my ability, I don't know, but anyhow it was a close finish. There was only a second between us. God only knows what would have happened if he had worn shoes and I had have run barefooted.

And what did you receive for first prize?

Oh, I got a pewter cup with an inscribed, they inscribed it.

14:30 I get it out every now and again and polish it up.

Well how often were sports days held?

In Korea not very often, but in Japan they were quite a regular thing. And I competed in a lot of sports events in Japan because that was my sport. I was an athlete so I used to enjoy my running.

15:00 Even to the time I came home from Japan I still continued to run. I represented the army at… We went to the Inter-Service Sports in 1956 and just prior to the Olympic Games. So I feel quite proud of my achievements.

And was a hundred yards your race?

It was, yeah.

What other races did you run?

Well

15:30 I run the two twenty and the four forty. But I used to like the hundred yards better and I was the third runner in the relay team for the army. We set up a quite a record on that and I believe today it still stands, I am not sure. I'd have to see if I could find anybody, but up until a few years ago the record that we set in

16:00 1956 still stood.

And what record was that?

For the four by one hundred and ten relay. Something like forty something seconds for four of us to run over the hundred and ten yards each. It was a good event.

And so who would you be competing against?

Against army and air force, against navy and air force. So the army puts a team on the field, the air force and the navy.

16:30 Believe it or not we had the strongest tug of war team too in the army. We used to beat the navy hands down.

How much satisfaction did that give you?

Oh look. It's competitive in that it is all in fun, but it is one against the other. You know, our side against their side. And if we can one up them it is

17:00 great, great feeling you know. But after, at the end of the day, you sit down and have a beer together.

And did you practise very much or…?

Training? Yes I used to train very regularly in Japan, not in Korea. I was surprised that I run a hundred yards in Korea without any training. But then again the other blokes didn't have training

17:30 either, so I suppose you're even par there. But no, I used to train quite regularly in Japan because as I say we used to have our sports days once a week, and within the unit I think it was a monthly show within the Commonwealth forces around Hiro and Kure. I think it was

18:00 organised to break the monotony. As I say, we were very, very sports minded. They had lots of activities. When I first went to Japan they asked me if I had any interests and I said, "Oh yeah." I said, "I don't mind a bit of sailing." And they said, "Oh, you've done a bit of sailing, have you?" And I said, "Oh yeah." "What sort?" "Oh I was forward hand on an idle-along in Melbourne." And they said, "Oh

18:30 yeah." And they wrote me out a ticket that said 'skipper'. I said, "I have never skippered a boat before in my life." But that is the sort of thing that. They had boats there that you could sail. You could go sailing and archery course, archery things, and whatever you wanted, whatever sport you wanted to play they had it.

So you got to skipper what sort of vessel?

No, it was only a little

19:00 two-man trainer. Not that I skippered it. I didn't know how to skipper a boat. I went down and let the other bloke skipper it. I just had a skipper's ticket, "Sign here, sir."

And where did you sail?

Oh, in the harbour at Hiro. Plenty of water, deep water too.

19:30 **So you it sounds like you kept very fit during this time?**

Yes, well I thought I was fit anyhow. I'd like to be as fit now. But no, it's a good thing to keep up your fitness level because you can become a couch potato

20:00 and that's what you finish up.

And the other thing that you mentioned, after armistice you had a hand in a concert you had a part in it?

Yes there was an Australian concert party in the area and I got to hear about it. So

20:30 I thought that I would do my scrounger bit and go and dig em up and see if they'd come back and give us a concert. And fortunately for me they said yes. So we dutifully went around and organised it and set it all up for them. And they came down and gave us an impromptu concert for the day.

And so this was at the static base in Seoul?

In Seoul?

So where did you set up a stage?

Well our

21:00 canteens and tents were actually on the foundation of a building. And the building had been demolished and all it left was the foundation and the flooring. So we just sat the chairs down below the foundation and used that for a stage in front of the canteen.

And where did you get the audio gear from?

Oh these things are available if you know where to go. You can score things.

21:30 Yeah. I invited a lot of Americans to the concert party and that was their entrance fee.

To bring the microphone and…?

Yep, they had to supply the audio gear. It was quite interesting. I would like to meet up with these people again but I don't know how I'd go about it. I think next time I go to Sydney I will have to go to one of these agencies and find out if they had anything to do with

22:00 sending them over to Korea. I'll have to look that up.

And what sort of songs did people sing?

Oh strewth, I can't remember. It was all modern, and it was the hits of day at the time. You know, we had a comedian and a bloke playing the piano accordion and two young ladies doing the singing. It was a bit chilly – they never even took their overcoats off. But no,

22:30 as I say it was an impromptu thing. Gave my CO a bit of a boost, you know, he was a bit tickled pink that he could stand up in front of all these people. I let him have the glory of organising it.

So it was well attended?

Oh yes, we had people from, we had this film crew from Cho Chong House, the Americans, we had all them come down.

23:00 Had all the Americans form the camp next door, plus our own blokes. I'd say there would be the vicinity of three or four hundred people there.

And where did you get all the chairs from?

What, they had to stand up. If they didn't have a chair it was their bad luck. And we had trucks parked around so they were all sitting on trucks all sorts of vehicles.

23:30 Oh no, it was well attended and well enjoyed.

And broke the monotony?

Oh yes, for sure. And it was the only Australian concert party that I knew of that came over there. I don't know of any others. But that's just one that I heard about so I went and teed it all up and then told the boss.

24:00 He was tickled pink.

The other thing that you've mentioned today is that you were quite affected by the state of the kids, the children in an area?

24:30 Yes, but it doesn't matter where you go, in what field, wherever there is conflict it is always the kids that seem to suffer. You know, it was heart breaking, they are defenceless, they can't fend for themselves, but they are resilient as well.

25:00 To survive they do all sorts of strange things. We had one who set up a shoeshine stall outside the camp. Everybody that comes in and out of the camp had to get their shoes shined and he made them shine too, he was very good at it. That was just one of the nicer ones. We had another one down the

25:30 street there, he was selling off his sister to the highest bidder to survive. And we had one kid who come in and adopted us. Everywhere that we went, he was there. If we stand on parade at midday for our salt tablets, he was there to get his salt tablet. And he used to get salt tablets between each person in the run. Wouldn't let him line up for the rum ration, though.

26:00 We drew the line at that. No, he actually adopted us, and through him we indirectly supported a local orphanage. But not to the extent that it was a big money thing, it was whatever

26:30 could be spared at the time. We used to float them a few rations, there always seemed to be a little bit left over.

Did you visit the orphanage?

No, couldn't bring myself to that. It was seeing the kids wandering around the streets was bad enough. But to see them in one community, I don't think I could have hacked that so I didn't give myself

27:00 the opportunity. I don't even know where it was because it was done through one of the local Christian organisations. I think it was Methodists, I am not sure. I think the Salvos might have had a hand in it somewhere along the line too. But it was all done indirectly. We didn't advertise the fact that we were

27:30 doing it. But it is soul wrenching to see these poor kids and the old folks, they live in these little hovels that they have made up out of whatever they can get together, scrap that they can put together.

And this boy, young boy, that

28:00 **your unit, or he adopted you and you adopted him. Did he speak English?**

Oh yeah. We taught him English. Such that it was, it was all broken. He survived, he could make himself understood, he knew what he wanted and he knew how to make us know what he wanted. No it is surprising how quick these kids pick things up.

28:30 **And how well did you get to know him?**

I didn't get really too attached to him. He was there and he was… We virtually, if he was getting too close we eased him back, you know, fobbed him off to someone else. And we kept on swapping him around so that he didn't get attached to any one person because we didn't

29:00 know what was going to happen to him. We weren't going to be there forever so I don't even know what happened to him because he was still there when I left.

I was going to ask you how much you got to know about his background or…?

Nothing. I know that his parents were killed, but I don't know about the rest of the family

29:30 and I didn't really go into it. As I said, it is enough to see them without going into it.

And why do you think it made such an impact on you?

Because I think the fact was that I wasn't that old, you know. I think I was only about nineteen then,

30:00 eighteen, no, nineteen, going on twenty, and that's not an old age. And here's this kid who's about eight or ten, so I am only ten years old than him. And he is experiencing this at his age. When I was his age I was experiencing a completely different

30:30 lifestyle, it was more happier times, and yet he was making the most of his predicament.

Do you know where he was sleeping at night?

Oh yeah, he was sleeping in one of our tents. Oh yeah, we put him up a bed. And we even made him a uniform, got the tailor to make him a uniform for him. So.

31:00 **And it was a uniform?**

Except, less the hat, we couldn't get a hat small enough to fit him. No, he used to go on parade with all of us, you know. He was a tonic. I think that what kept a lot of us going was the fact that he was such a livewire.

It sounds like he was a camp mascot?

31:30 Yeah, well as I say, we didn't adopt him, he adopted us. And I think most camps had one or two of those somewhere in the camp. They just seemed to materialise, you know. There is always one, you see a mob of them and there is always one that stands out as more receptive to you than the others.

32:00 Either they're cheeky or they're withdrawn. And this particular one, he just latched onto us. Even if we told him to go, I don't think he would have.

And did you give me a name, or did he have a name?

His name was Joe. We used to call him Joe because we didn't know what else to call him. Everybody was called

32:30 either Kim or Sung and we named him Joe cause that was his way, "G'day Joe." He was always calling us Joe so we called him Joe.

He would say, "G'day Joe," to you?

Yeah. "Hello Joe," he used to say when he first came, so we called him Joe. His name was probably Kim or something, Kim or Sung.

33:00 But no.

It is interesting to hear him calling you all Joe. Did you have your own personal nickname that others called you?

No, he called everybody Joe, not me. I think he picked it up from the Americans because they used to call everybody Joe. But

33:30 you don't want to know my nickname.

Why is that?

It was 'Birdie'. Bird of paradise, a bower bird. So they used to call me Birdie.

That is quite an appropriate nickname.

Yes. Yes I was the scrounger.

Did others have nicknames that you

34:00 **remember?**

Just the common ones, like a red-headed bloke was called Blue, and Snowy was the dark-haired bloke and that sort of thing. Lofty was short bloke and Tiny was the big bloke. All that type of things. And blood nut, was a redhead.

34:30 That's the thing that used to amaze us, amaze the Yanks, was that we had nicknames for everybody because they used to call everybody, talk to everybody using their surname, whereas if they talk to me they'd call me Jarrett instead of John. Same with everybody else, but we called our officers 'Boss', the captain was,

35:00 the CO was 'Boss', the sarge [sergeant] was corporal or Bluey, it was never formal, and so this is what intrigued the Yanks a lot.

And what did you think of the chain of command in your unit?

In ours, I thought we had a good

35:30 chain of command. It was, whatever was asked it was done. It wasn't… And you didn't baulk and say, "No I am not going to do it." It was done to your… If you didn't like it you bitched about it, that was our privilege, but you didn't refuse to do it. You done it then grizzled.

36:00 But it wasn't as bombastic as the Pommy army. They demanded that you do things. We were asked to do things, there is a difference, but we were asked in a way that you couldn't refuse.

36:30 Trying to think of how I can describe it. It's the chain of command is the same, whether it be in the Pommy army, the American army or the Australian Army or whatever army it is, but it is how the message is passed onto you. Whereas, as I say, the Australians say,

37:00 "We are going to do so and so. I'd like you to do that," you are still being told what to do. But in the Pommy army, "You, you and you, you. Do that." To me that is a different way of approaching the same, and getting the same… You get the same results, but you get better results from the Australian Army by asking to do

37:30 something than by telling them to do something.

Different results?

Yes, no, you get the same results, but you most probably get it done quicker and more cheerful. There was would be a lot more go into the doing of it. The others would do it reluctantly or because they have to.

38:00 **And how would you have describe the bath unit in terms of, I mean earlier in the day, we are talking about ships and you said that one of your ships was a very happy ship. How would you have described the bath unit?**

We were happy, we had a ball. We were always joking about, always carrying on because we knew that we weren't going to be out there for any length of time. When we were out in the field and when we were in Seoul we were as safe as a

38:30 bug in rug. As I say we had it cushy compared to the front line grunter. He always gets my sympathy the old grunter, he goes through a lot.

And the young boy called, that you nicknamed Joe.

39:00 **Did you feel like that he became to close to your unit?**

He didn't to me. He could have quite easily, could have. He was that type of kid, you know. But I didn't want to get too attached to him because I knew that I wasn't going to be there.

Did you trust him?

Yeah.

39:30 What's not to trust? What could he pinch? We had nothing to pinch, except equipment, and he was getting everything he wanted. He was getting a bed and three meals a day, he didn't want for anything.

I was just wondering whether he would take intelligence outside of the camp somewhere or…?

What was to tell? Everybody knew where the camp was, it wasn't a, there was no secrets there,

40:00 there was nothing that he could hurt us with. Nothing that couldn't be seen from across the street, so no, there was nothing to distrust him about.

Okay, we will just stop there and that's the end of the tape.

Tape 8

00:31 **Now John you were about to talk about how a Korean got shot.**

Oh yes, this Korean, we had been out over the American camp. We'd got back just before curfew. Now curfew was ten o'clock in Seoul. Anything that was out, if it wasn't a military vehicle or military personnel, got shot at. And this

01:00 Korean was out after curfew. And the storm drain that used to run down the street behind our camp met up with the twenty-foot storm drain that run across the front of our camp. And he was walking down and it was in stages, going down the road, and as he went and got level with the compound over the road with an American guard on it his head come above the top of the storm drain, so the guard shot him,

01:30 blew his head off. And we thought that was a bit mean of him and we never thought any more of it. And a couple of nights later we were in, over at the American camp carrying on. And there was this little car, they had a little car like the Mini Minor, like we had here, very similar, and so we picked it up and we put it in the storm drain, but across the storm drain, with the driver sitting in it.

02:00 And he couldn't get out of it because it was after curfew; he had to sit there all night.

Was that a Korean?

Yeah. We just done it for devilment. He knew that if he didn't get out of the vehicle he was all right, and he knew that to so he sat there all night.

Did you… Were there many instances of when you were in Korea of people actually being shot at after curfew?

02:30 Hmm. It happened quite regularly because you have got a lot of people, remember, who are homeless and they have got nowhere to go so they are trying to find somewhere to go down for the night. So naturally they are going to be on the move and that's what I was saying, this one that got shot earlier, I think what upset us more was the fact that this guard had shot across the road

03:00 towards our compound and if he had missed somebody in our compound could have got hit. I think that's what upset us more than the fact of this Korean got his head blown off. But as I say, we overcome that a couple of nights later doing this dirty trick to the bloke in the little car.

How did you feel about the curfew?

Didn't worry us, because as I said, if

03:30 you were in uniform you were reasonably safe. It was basically to stop any insurgents, but how they were going to stop it I don't know because you get a North Korean and a South Korean, how do you tell the difference? And if you don't know, how do you tell the difference between a Chinese and a Korean? So it is very hard. So

04:00 I think it was just an exercise that they put on to give somebody something to do.

Where the guards trigger happy?

Most of the Americans were, very trigger happy, very volatile. The least little thing

04:30 would set, as I said earlier about Bed Check Charlie and the fact that they used to man the tower with the twin 45 calibre, 40 calibre machine guns on it. The two guns wouldn't work so but they still cocked them, for what reason I don't know. I think it just give them a sense of security,

05:00 for what of a better word. No we found them very trigger happy.

What opinion did they have of the Koreans?

They were gooks, they called them gooks and I dislike that word intensely. Cause they used to say, "Hey gook." "Come here gook."

05:30 They are human beings. Why they treated them that way, I don't know. But they treat their own people like that so I suppose it's understandable.

What sort of respect did they have for the South Koreans who they were there to help?

Well that was who they were calling gooks. Anybody that wasn't a white man or a black man or in the American army, he was a gook.

06:00 They used to call the, what did they call the Turks? They had some name for the Turks. And the wogs, the wogs up there, the Italians and the Greeks, they have got no respect for anybody outside their own country.

06:30 **Well I mean I did read in our notes that there was an American orphanage?**

Yes, actually that was funded by the Wolfhound Battalion, an American battalion, they started it. And if you remember me telling you earlier about that film crew that was in Japan. Well they were actually making the film called The Gentle Wolfhound

07:00 and it starred Aldo Ray, Chuck Connors, Dick York, but unfortunately never got to see the film. But that's what it was all about, all about this battalion starting up and getting this orphanage going.

Did you know much about the orphanage?

No, I didn't know about this until after I left Korea and I went back to Japan, and that's

07:30 when I met up with this film crew in Lake Biwa where they were actually filming it. And this American that I had chummed up with that I stayed at his house, he was actually a demolition expert and he was

doing the sound effects for the movie for the explosions and everything else. So I got, and that was how I actually got on the set and actually meet all these big stars

08:00 And that's how I got the photograph. I took the photograph of them.

And that was in Japan after the Korea…?

Yes.

And just before we leave Korea, we have spoken a lot about the winter but in the summer how did you control things like mozzies [mosquitoes] and insects and things like that?

Well after sundown you had to roll your sleeves down for a start, you couldn't have rolled up sleeves.

08:30 You had to have them fastened down to protect your arms from the mozzies and you put a repellent on your hands and across your neck and face, face and neck. And that was the only protection we had.

Was that from malaria?

That was to protect it. But it didn't stop a lot of it. A lot of blokes still got malaria. But the biggest problem was not only the mosquitoes,

09:00 it was the dust and the heat. It was a completely different heat to here, but it was so dusty because the roads weren't sealed. There were no sealed roads then and every time you drove the truck down the road, the one behind got all your dust. And you couldn't drag behind because if you got too far behind you could get waylaid, so you had to keep up reasonably close, so we used to drive with goggles on and masks like

09:30 the old cowboys used to wear, you know, bandanna around the nose and that with a mask on, and we had the windscreen lifted up so that it didn't dust up.

So was that no shielding then?

Yes, no shield in the front, because if you lowered the windscreen it would just clog up with dust. So you would lift it up so it would blow through.

How dangerous was that?

Reasonably.

Were there any

10:00 **accidents with the mobile unit?**

We never had any, fortunately. Well we had one accident but that wasn't on any of our sorties into the… It was just one particular bloke that got a little bit inebriated and rolled the vehicle and found himself in hospital. But

10:30 that was his own stupid fault.

Well we have spoken a lot about your time in Korea. How did you hear the news that there was going to be a signing of the peace treaty?

It came over the radio. We had two radio stations as such in Seoul. One was the

11:00 run by the Stars and Stripes, which was the American broadcast network, and the other one was run by British Commonwealth Forces radio. So we actually heard it on the radio.

And what happened when the news came through?

A big sigh of relief and a lot of rejoicing. To think that

11:30 nobody was going to throw any more lead around for a while. But it was very apprehensive because it was very… It was a critical time. It's not something that can last. The least little thing could blow it up again, so you had to tread very carefully. And we had to obey the rules of the treaty and one of them was that the troops in Seoul,

12:00 within the Seoul limits, didn't carry weapons. Only the frontline troops were allowed to walk around armed. So if we went for anywhere outside the unit in Seoul, then the only thing we could carry was a bayonet.

And how did that make you feel?

A little bit unprotected, a little bit naked,

12:30 because all the time you'd actually virtually slept with your weapon or very close to it. Except in the winter time when it was actually in the bed with you to stop it from freezing up. It was never any further than your arm's length from you. And all of a sudden this protection is taken away from you,

13:00 and then we were actually relying wholly and solely on all the blokes up the front line to keep their eye

on us. This is when the insurgents could have infiltrated into Seoul. But as I say, fortunately it never happened, not to my knowledge.

And was there still a 10 p.m. curfew after that?

Oh yes, yes, yes they maintained that.

13:30 I don't know what their reasoning was. We had a lot more freedom within the city, what was left of it. But as for, as I say, we just felt naked. Before we'd walk around, we'd either carry

14:00 a sidearm, which was a pistol, or an Owen gun or a rifle, and now all of a sudden we were walking around with just a bayonet stuck on our side. I don't know what that would have done. I suppose it is some sort of a protection.

But you had quite an arsenal by this point?

Oh yeah, but you weren't allowed to take it out of camp. Before when we used to go out

14:30 either wear a 9 millimetre pistol or a 45 on my hip or carry my rifle or an Owen gun so. But as I say, this was the rules of the treaty so you had to… Well not treaty, ceasefire, because that's all it's been. It has never eventuated into anything. That ceasefire has lasted since 1953.

15:00 It still holds today. But the least little thing can flare it up. They still have their little set-tos now and again, even now.

At the time, did you think the ceasefire would last?

We were very dubious about it because they had, it had been talked about for a long, it was… There was so many

15:30 obstacles put in the way of it by the Chinese that we didn't even think it would happen until it did happen, and then as I say we had to make sure we fulfilled our side of it so they wouldn't, it wouldn't surge up again.

Did you think at the time that it was possibly a war to be won?

16:00 Well actually it could have been won early in the piece only for MacArthur. To my mind he was the cause of the Chinese coming into the war, because he insisted as going as far as he did. Had he have stopped when he had, if he had stopped before he got to the Yellow River,

16:30 everything would have been all right. But the fact was that he pushed on and brought the Chinese into the war, which extended it.

So how did your time in Korea wind up?

Just my time in Korean had come to an end. It was, I had done more than my six months that I was supposed to. It was only

17:00 supposed to have been a six months tour of duty but up until then I had done fifteen months in total, and I said to you earlier before, "You never volunteered for anything." Well I actually volunteered to go back to Korea the second time just after the ceasefire because it was worth my while. I got my rank by going over there the second time. Had I have stayed in Japan I wouldn't have got it.

17:30 So it was a speck to catch a mackerel.

And what happened to the unit? How did the unit wind down?

I have no idea because when I left it was still operational, so I suppose when they decide to withdraw the troops all the equipment would have been closed down and sent back.

But you weren't there for that?

No.

So,

18:00 **how did you feel about leaving Korea?**

Relieved to think that it was over. I didn't have to stay there any longer if I didn't want to, I didn't have to stay there anyhow if I didn't want to. I knew that once I left that I was in the clear again. There was no fear that if it happened to break up again I didn't

18:30 have to go back because I had done my tour.

And so you went back to Japan, where did you go back to?

I went back to the laundry and dry cleaning unit.

In Hiro?

In Hiro, yes.

And how long were you there?

Oh until 1955, I come home in ’55

19:00 and then got stationed in Albury-Wodonga again, Bandiana. And from Bandanna I got reduced to the ranks for a little misdemeanour.

Can I ask what that was?

I threatened to grab a corporal by the inside of him and turn him inside out

19:30 because he was being obnoxious. I had a photograph of Shirley on my bedside table and there were four of us in the hut and he was hut corporal for this particular week, it was his week to be hut corporal. But the story getting around camp was that the boss and one NCO was going to America to learn heat treatment packaging. And I was on the

20:00 short list and to make sure that I didn’t get the job he picked on me. And knowing how volatile I was at the time, I retaliated. So unbeknownst to me he put me on a charge and when the RSM come and asked me to come and see the CO and I marched into the CO and he said, “Now what do you have to say?” I said, “I don’t remember.”

20:30 And then they brought him in and he told a pack of lies, but I couldn’t say anything because I had already said, “I didn’t remember.” So I got reduced to the ranks and he got my job. But unfortunately for him the captain had a car accident and the trip was cancelled, and so he didn’t get to go to America anyhow. But then they sent me off to do a course. An NCOs course up in Wagga and

21:00 on the conditions that if I passed the course then I would get my rank back. And I passed, only just, but I passed and I come back and asked to see the CO to get my rank back and got it back the next day. So all it has got in my pay book is that no charge, just ;Reduced to the ranks’. And then ‘Reinstated’.

And when you were reinstated,

21:30 **where were you posted then?**

Then I was posted off to National Service Training Battalion at Puckapunyal. Good old Pucka, lovely place. Should give it back to the Aborigines and apologise for what they had done to it.

So what were your duties, or what were your responsibilities?

I was an instructor with in the battalion, in 20 Battalion, and funny enough it was the same battalion that I done my National Service in. I done my National Service in the 20th Training Battalion

22:00 and I finished up there as an instructor.

How did it feel to be going back as instructor?

It’s one of those moments where you blow your chest out, you know, you say, “Ho, ho, back here. I am, this time I am boss cocky.” You know, it was educational in at that particular time in our history. I don’t know whether you remember the term, we had the bodgies

22:30 and widgies. Well this is the bodgies and widgies area and all these bodgies got off the trucks and stood on the side of the parade ground and they got into their little groups. So all the instructors were on the other side of the parade ground and we say, “Right, I’ll have him.” And somebody else said, “I’ll have him.” So we split them all up, so we broke that little cycle so they were individuals and not a group.

23:00 And that’s how we treated them. And we got on much better with them, we didn’t have any problems.

And how did they respond to National Service?

A little bit uppity. But then I had experienced with in my National Service. For instance, now there was one poor bloke, National Service, he was always in trouble. Every time his girlfriend came up to visit him he was on guard duty. He said to me

23:30 just before he marched out, he said, “Corporal Jarrett.” He said, “How is it that when I went hiding you knew where to find me?” I said, “Because you used to hide in all the places that I used to.” But I felt sorry for him, but I couldn’t let him get away with it.

Well how would you describe yourself as an instructor?

24:00 I thought I was quite hard. I expected them to do the things that I did. And if at the time I was in training for running, so if they misbehaved, like lights out, for instance, I would give them two warnings. If they didn’t settled down and then everybody, not the ringleaders, just everybody was out of bed, greatcoats on and we’d go for a run up Mount Pucka. Done me the world of good, I was getting training,

24:30 I used to go with them. But I never asked them to do anything that I didn't do myself. But I expected them to do it equally as good if not better. And that's where, I think that was where I think my downfall was because I was too hard.

Well how did your time wind up in the army?

Well it was getting close to reenlistment,

25:00 I was back up in Sydney at the Holsworthy and Shirley was, we hadn't long been married and Shirley was getting a little bit homesick. She was first time away from home, she'd had a couple of miscarriages and she was pining for her Mum. I had asked for a transfer to South Australia and they refused it and said I was going to Queensland, so I decided to take my discharge

25:30 so they had to send me home. And that put the end of my career in the army. I would have quite willingly signed on again but I even got a letter from them, I think it was about six months down the track after I got discharged, if I was prepared to come back in the army again. But I thought about it and I said, "No, we won't do it."

So when looking back on that time, on those six years with the

26:00 **army, how do you think it changed you?**

It made me more independent, more self sufficient, more aware of me mates, more thoughtful towards me mates. It's a bonding that only an ex-serviceman

26:30 can experience. You have a football team and they bond, but it's not the same as in the services because the bloke on your left and right, he is your Mum and Dad, he is your protector, so one looks after the other, and doesn't matter who he is. And even to this day,

27:00 that bond is still there. You go out of your way for your mate, you know, if your mate is in trouble you go and help him. If you're walking down the road and you see your mate and he is getting a thumping from a bloke, you get in. You don't think, you just go in and give him a hand. That would never happen outside of the services. You really can't explain the feeling

27:30 it is, even to this day. I have got a lot of mates that I didn't even serve with but we have got that bonding.

And those mates are also Korean veterans?

Yes.

I noticed that you have got a sticker on your car saying 'The Forgotten War'.

Hmm.

Why do you believe it was the forgotten war?

28:00 Ask anybody about the Korean War, what do they know? Nothing. When we first come home from Korea we were not even accepted into the RSL [Returned and Services League], they didn't want to know us. Nobody wanted to know us. I went up to join the RSL, half a dozen of us went up to join the RSL in Albury on an Anzac Day and they wouldn't even let us in.

28:30 It's the government didn't want to know us. They didn't want to help us. We got no assistance whatsoever from the government. It's only in the last ten years that we have been actually being started to be recognised by the government. And this War Memorial they built in Canberra, took em a long time to build that. The Vietnam blokes got theirs before we got ours.

29:00 **Would you think that the unit has been duly recognised?**

The?

The unit, your unit?

What do you mean duly recognised in what way? What do you mean by that?

Your service has been acknowledged?

Yeah, because everybody that served, doesn't matter what job you are, you have got a job to do and one can't work with out the other. You can't have troops up the front line unless you've got,

29:30 for everyone up the front line you have got to have at least eight to ten people back to keep him there. So everybody has got a job to do, so it is no good belittling or praising everyone. I praise the front line troop up because he is the first one. He is our protector. But we have got to service him. And that's what it is all about. That is what I am

30:00 saying. Mateship, it is one helping the other and you can't have any service, whatever it might be – army, navy or air force – unless you can't have your backup troops.

Well you mentioned the difficulties you had joining the RSL. When did you start marching on Anzac Day?

Well the first time I marched was as I say, was in Albury in 1955,

30:30 yeah ’55. And then when we got knocked back then, I didn’t do it any more until, well it was only about ten or twelve years ago that I actually joined the RSL again, or actually got into the RSL. But I didn’t want to have anything to do with them. It meant nothing to me and it was only because

31:00 another friend of mine said, “Oh, I see that the Korean veterans are having a meeting.” So I went along to the meeting and that’s when I got involved again. Only because I could see what was happening to it all. So I thought if we combined to do something, we might be able to help somewhere. We are fortunate to have in this state that I know of,

31:30 all the other organisations, the RSLs, are all pushing for membership. We had at least two new members a month at a meeting; we are increasing our memberships whereas others are decreasing. So we have to have something going for us now.

And when you march on Anzac Day, what does it mean to you?

It’s a great way of remembering

32:00 your fallen comrades. Once again, it is this bonding. You are together with people that have experienced exactly what you have experienced, exactly what you have experienced. It is a time for reflection on our survival and what our mates that didn’t survive, what they contributed so we can do

32:30 these things. So it’s just a way of saying thank you to them and remembering them. That is my own personal view.

And you said that ask anyone today and they don’t really know really very much about the Korean War, well this is now historical reference to an experience of the Korean War.

33:00 **What would you like to say or make known about your experience of the Korean War?**

For those that don’t know anything about the Korean War, I wish to God they could get all the literature they can and read about it and find out because it wasn’t a police action as first stated, it was a war, and if they look up the statistics they will find out that there was more ordnance dropped

33:30 and used in Korea in the short period than was used in the Second World War, pro rata I am talking about. So it doesn’t matter whether it was a police action or a war, those little pieces of lead that they were throwing around still hurt. People still died. So doesn’t matter what conflict it is.

34:00 People should be more educated and, if they are interested enough, to read about it and look, listen and learn. A lot of people say these police actions that they are doing today are… I was one of them. I was very sceptical. They say, “Oh, it’s only a police action. They are only going over there as peacekeeping forces.” Until my son went to Somalia with 1 Battalion

34:30 and I have changed my opinion considerably on a police action. A lot of pieces of lead got thrown around there too, as well. So it doesn’t make any difference whether it is a police action or a war, they still served their country to their ability and done what they wanted to do.

35:00 And I feel that the general public should be more aware of this and not to criticise. And all these people that are coming back from these things, they should have the support of the people, not look down their nose at them and say, “It is only a police action.”

Well looking back on all of your six years

35:30 **with the army and specifically Korea, what would you say for yourself, personally, what was one of your proudest moments?**

I don’t really know. My proudest moment was I think when we went to Canberra

36:00 and actually seen our memorial for the first time. I have actually got two proud moments, because we have got another memorial down on the Port Road, the Korean South East Asian forces, along with Vietnam. I don’t know whether you have seen it down there, have you? Well I had a little bit of assistance

36:30 in that design along with a lot of other people. When that came to fruition that was a proud moment for me. The next proud moment, or the biggest was the, was together at Canberra and meeting up with a lot of old friends that I hadn’t seen for yonks [a long time], and seeing

37:00 our memorial in its entirety and to know what it stood for.

Well this is a piece of history to look back on, for future generations to look back on, what we have done today. What word would you like to leave for those generations that are going to look back on this today?

I’m sorry?

What last words? What words of advice would you leave for any future generations,

37:30 **would you leave, are going to look back on this today?**

Be proud to be Australian. Doesn’t matter where you come from, if you are living in this country you are an Australian. Abide by the laws of the country and defend this country because it is the greatest country in the world. I have travelled all over the world, I have been to a lot of countries, I have seen how other people live –

38:00 no place like home. We got the best of everything here, and we have got the privilege and the right to complain. And we grizzle something shocking, but you wouldn’t give it away for anybody.

Well, John, are there any last words that you would like to finish today with?

No, but I would just like to thank you for this opportunity

38:30 of expressing my views on this program. I only hope that it’s amusing and that they learn something from it. I don’t know whether they will learn something from it, I just hope to think they would. And I’d like to say thank you both for a very enjoyable day.

Our pleasure, John. Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS