Australians at War Film Archive

Colin Richardson - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Colin, I was just wondering if you might be able to start by telling us a little bit about your early life and where you grew up. What life was like when you were a young man?**

Oh, okay. I was born in 1920. My father had come back from World War I

01:00 and we lived in Sydney and at the age of nine we moved to Brisbane, where he was transferred as state head of his department then. After three years we moved back to Sydney and I went to school there. I was at Sydney Grammar School and then my father was promoted as head of the department Australia wide

01:30 and we moved to Canberra after a few years. I was at school for a couple of years in Canberra. Finished up at Canberra High School doing my leaving certificate and in the meantime had become interested in rifle shooting. I had a match rifle and cherished that and also getting top marks for Saturday afternoon shoots.

What

02:00 **was your father's role in World War I?**

He was a staff sergeant. He was bitten by a scorpion in Africa, in Egypt and he was telling me one time his arm where he was bitten swelled up like his leg, it was so huge, and the treatment then was to put it in boiling water and keep it there until it got all the

02:30 venom out. He was one of with two brothers. One was on Gallipoli and one in France. He had the top of his head taken out with a piece of shell. He was a captain, got the MC [Military Cross]. My father went from Egypt to hospital, back in England and his younger brother was on Gallipoli. He was one of a party,

03:00 flag party they were called, to raise the flag so that the navy could shell. Two parties a hundred yards apart would raise the flags and the navy would be able to see where they had to shell and immediately they got the flags up the Turks'd mow them down. They were sitting ducks and Harry came home with a shattered shoulder and his left arm. That was his role.

03:30 Dad anyhow he came back in 1920, 1919. I was born in 1920 and he went to Taxation Department first and then joined war service homes division, or repatriation department rather, and became ultimately head of that department in Canberra and that's where he was when World War II started, before then.

04:00 He had a large responsibility, like most top executives I suppose, looking after the war effort but he was responsible for getting all the housing required by returning service people going and then he stayed there until he died actually. Mm. What else

04:30 can I say?

Was the war services homes commission was it set up in the lieu of World War I?

Following that, yes it was. They had it was called war service homes commission. They had branch departments in each capital city around Australia and they saw some harrowing times through the

05:00 Depression because a lot of soldiers had taken on a mortgage with the war service homes commission, which although at more favourable rates I think than was going otherwise but during the well the Depression in the '30s a lot of soldiers who were still suffering from wounds or service problems

05:30 couldn't find a job and I remember my father saying some ex veterans had come in to his office asking for relief from paying off the mortgages, which loomed rather big to somebody who doesn't have any work, but there were millions round the world in that Depression out of work and Dad saying

06:00 he'd had one or two men say, "Look, here's my savings book and I can't..." Oh the banks shut at one

time or wouldn't allow so much drawing out but I remember him telling me that fellas had offered to sell their savings deposits

06:30 for immediate cash. Very distressing but that's the sort of thing you do if to a money lender if nobody else'll give you money or you're flogging something but however that was the situation then. We got through the Depression. I didn't know much about it as a school boy but all the adults and particularly the

07:00 people damaged through the war, World War I, and still disabled. My father's younger brother, Harry, he had a lot of trouble with his left arm. That continued forever. One of my mother's brothers had a touch of gas on his face, mustard gas, and forever I remember him

07:30 when he shaved he had to be careful because his skin was still very tender and what else can I say about that era? Bill, my father's elder brother, had a piece of his skull taken out by a shell. He was a company commander, captain, and he got the MC. They're the ones that got really

08:00 damaged.

So your father and his brothers were well-educated as well before they left for the war?

No, they weren't. Oh as far as well-educated at school, no. His father came from Yorkshire near Wakefield. His father was a farmer. Went out to Peak Hill and in 1990 roughly

08:30 they'd had drought. Then they had a flood and the flood washed away everything that they'd had above ground at that time. Two or three years ago we went out to Peak Hill and tried to discover family connections there but all records have been sent of births, deaths

09:00 etcetera were sent to Sydney at the time my father was born out there. So he went to school I think till the age of fourteen or fifteen and that was the wrong time to be looking for support for further education. His father had been wiped out and eventually came to

09:30 Sydney but I think all the boys suffered from that lack of early schooling. Dad was very well-read. He did write a few poems but they were not for publication. Yes.

And yet he went from being a staff sergeant during the war to a quite a senior public service with the war services homes commission.

Correct, yes.

How did he make that

10:00 **leap do you think to a senior position with the public service?**

Well he was he was fairly intelligent and he knew how to handle men or obviously if he was selected to be the head of his department in Sydney and then later to be commissioner for the whole of Australia he must have had some ability that the public service board and recognised and

10:30 so he had that job. He was the youngest public service commissioner in Australia at that time.

And how did he come to work with them? Was that something that he a position he sought out or was he selected?

I'm not too sure how he came to be in that but he went from taxation department in his early years over to war service homes. So

11:00 I imagine somebody suggested that it might be a good thing for him to do that or the might have been the public service board in Sydney at that time. That's where we were and I can't remember him being in the taxation department but I suppose it would have been in the early '20s that he was moved from one department to the other. I think they recognised an inherent ability in the family.

And clearly he had some

11:30 **motivational or first hand experience of the difficulties that were faced by returned servicemen.**

Oh yes. He was very much aware of that and actually when he died we had some very nice compliments from different people, particularly the RSL [Returned and Services League], and I had a telegram from the head of the RSL in Melbourne at the time to Canberra

12:00 saying how much they appreciated all the work that he'd done in support of ex-servicemen. That was in 1960, ah 1953 that he died and he got on well. He understood what it was like to be poor. He understood what it was like to be to have rather members of his own

12:30 family really smashed about with his elder brother with a piece out of his skull and his young brother with a useless arm and a brother-in-law with gassed face. So these were all very close in to his awareness of what it was like to be you know an ex-serviceman.

13:00 So he was very sensitive to the needs of those who'd died because there were a lot of widows involved and also fellas making the best of having been wounded or whatever.

That's quite an environment for you to have grown up in. What were your early impressions of the First World War or what do you remember about being taught?

My impressions of

13:30 the war, of World War I, was with my uncles getting together and whenever they got together the boys, because the my mother had six brothers altogether, and the boys who'd been in the war and knew what it was about they'd immediately get together, start rolling a cigarette

14:00 and chatting. So if you say with father's two and him that's three. So the always a few to get together and they'd want to know how old so and so was going or so and so had died or whatever you know and we followed that I suppose as grandsons or nephews into

14:30 World War II. I had some cousins who were involved also and some close school pals. So we grew up with a strong awareness of what we had to do. The job was that the Germans were overrunning Europe. It was obvious in the '30s with Hitler and his massive parade grounds full of

15:00 thousands of steel helmets you know that something was going to come up again. Hitler was all the time propounding the fact that they'd been hardly done by and he wasn't gonna stand by and put up with the provisions of the pact after World War I. I've just forgotten for the moment but there was stringent conditions on Germany

15:30 after World War I that they wouldn't do this and they were there was a lot of the economy of Germany then required for reparations to the people that had been involved, dominated and wounded by Germany in the World War I you know.

What were your family's reactions to the second rising of Germany? Having been over there and fought and defeated them the

16:00 **first time? Do you remember their attitude towards the strengthening Germany?**

Oh yes. They were concerned. They could see it even in the middle of the '30s. I think those of us who were old enough as a school boy our parents would talk about rising Germany and the fact that they were very positive about this German

16:30 the Germans were very strong. They weren't going to be put down and so it was inevitable. You can't - Germans are pretty strong people. Strength is really one of the ways of life with Germans I think and so it was fairly apparent that this was going to be on at some stage. The big problem was that all

17:00 the countries in the end, after World War I, most countries were depleted both financially and with man power and then the Depression came and nobody had money. No countries had money to spend on armaments. Germany was spending all its accord and running into a lot of debt I suppose

17:30 by building her arms, more and more arms and you might remember Churchill, not Churchill, Neville Chamberlain flying to Munich and coming back waving his the paper, "Peace in our time." Well that was an urgent effort to try and solve the problem but it was apparent nobody believed that Germany was going to sit down and take what had been imposed on her

18:00 and they were going to rise up again, which they were intended and Hitler said, "We are going to take what we want." So it was obvious that it would come on some time and actually in Canberra where I was then while I was at school the local militia, which was peace time, that was being pushed a little bit

18:30 I think through army. So that it was possible to join the local militia group, that's in peace time, and I think a lot of the people in that unit were public servants and they had a fair idea also. They were intelligent people. You know the large broad

19:00 level, level of education was fairly high. So I think everybody recognised that there was gonna be another stoush. The other problem was Japan. In the '30s they'd gone into China. You might remember the rape of Nanking where they slaughtered Chinese by the thousand.

19:30 It's not forgotten. China I think one day will tell Japan what they they're going to do and they might even do it. It might take another twenty or fifty years but China will be so big that Japan will not be able to match it but the Japanese were coming down Asia and as we know took some of our a lot of our boys in Singapore.

Can I

20:00 **just stay I guess in your school days. How important was the Empire at that point? I know you went to Sydney Grammar for a time.**

Yeah, oh fairly much so. Yeah I mean we honoured the flag and king and queen and this sort a thing. It was a binding force. I think attitudes now are a little bit different

20:30 but in those days king and country was really did mean something.

Do you think your father or your uncles, did they fight more for Australia or more for the kingdom do you think?

I think they were it was amalgamated. King and country were part of the Empire and, as you know, king and country that's

21:00 about it I think and also it was a fashion then to support the British Empire because we sent troops from Australia to the Boer War in the 1900s, 1901 I think, and you might remember photographs of Kitchener, "Your country needs you," or, "Your king needs you." You know so the Empire did mean something in those days, yes

21:30 and we were part of the Empire and as Robert Menzies said, "It's my melancholy duty to tell you that England has declared war on Germany and as a member of the British Empire Australia now is at war." That was the 3rd of December 1940 was it?

September, yeah. '39.

22:00 **You stayed at school until you were about eighteen, is that right?**

Right, yes.

That was relatively late for that time was it?

Yes, because I'd moved we'd moved from Sydney to Brisbane and two schools in Brisbane because we moved from one suburb to another and then back to Sydney and then

22:30 one school and then to another so and then to Canberra. I went to Canberra Grammar School first but I had to ride five miles to school every day on my bike and I was very allergic. In fact I wanted to get out of Canberra as soon as I could and a lot of people has have said that and other school

23:00 mates wanted to do so but I was particularly allergic to some of the grasses around there and although my duty was, job was mowing the lawn every Saturday morning I hated doing it because the fresh cut grass just sent me and riding to school also from where we were was not so good and

23:30 I used to have a sedative tablet to help this allergy and so my father decided Canberra, the new Canberra High School, was opened then and much closer. So I went there. I was there for a year. That's where I finished.

And did you have an academic aptitude?

24:00 Not really. Only where it was necessary. Actually I couldn't do much in Canberra but with war coming and a fair idea that I was going to be involved in it, I tried to get into the air force. I was a bit somewhat colour blind and because of that I couldn't become a fighter pilot, which I wanted to be. I

24:30 studied at the Canberra University College, which was an offshoot of Melbourne University. The only two subjects I could do were mathematics and German but I did the maths, although I'd done it at school. German I hadn't done. I thought, "Well German's probably gonna be very useful some time in the future. It won't be long." And so I was doing that for a year.

Did you know any German Australians? At school or through your family?

25:00 No. Not at all. No, but it was interesting. I did French at school but not, and Latin, but not German and I've not been attracted to speaking German at all.

Did you were there any career path that seemed a possibility for you at the time? You know if the war wasn't to break out, did you see that there was a natural path for you?

25:30 My inclination, well I wanted to be a chemical engineer and I studied subjects towards that.

What inspired that for you? Where did that idea come from?

I was more keen on chemistry than anything and I wanted to make things. I had an aptitude for doing things. As I say, I'd done maths and I and II and mechanics and

26:00 physics and chemistry and French and Latin and English. That basically I wanted to do chemical engineering and so when I came back from the war I continued on with that but it was chopped around quite a lot because I was in and out of hospital for a few years.

And were you into sport? Were you athletic as a young man?

26:30 I wanted to be a good shot and because of the allergies to cut grass and some of the grasses in Canberra, it was sheer murder for me. So I had to be doing something a bit quieter. I could do you know shooting okay but that was a pass time rather than a sport.

Where did that come from? Where did your introduction to shooting

27:00 **come from?**

No idea to be truthful, except that I found that I could do it. I had a good eye. So I joined the Canberra rifle club and I could shoot the eye out of a magpie at six hundred yards. So that didn't last that long. So it wasn't intended as a long term hobby or sport but having

27:30 gone to the war I was hit in the chest with a massive wound and that put paid to being active in sport.

Was there a sense there for you that, like the German, those skills may well come in handy in terms of your shooting?

German I think only really I thought at some stage because of chemistry. The Germans were pretty clever in lots of science

28:00 subjects and I thought German might be handy if I had to read some stuff in German.

It wasn't a political context that you meant coming in handy?

No, not at all. No, I had no political aspects.

Or even military? You weren't thinking that you may need that if you went off to war?

Oh yes, that was really the reason that I started on studying German

28:30 because I thought, well they were the logical enemy at that time and if I was going to be involved with it, it'd be better to know something about speaking some German. It's a sort of vague thing you think of in the future, that it might be handy. I didn't know whether it was ever going to be handy. I might have studied Arabic or something like that but that wasn't in the picture at all and nor Japan,

29:00 Japanese. My young sister did six years Japanese but she was a few years younger than I was.

And do you think Australia was culturally informed about Japan or even aware amongst most were most people aware of Japan's expansionism during the '30s or do you think that was something that being more a little bit more educated you were aware of?

I think everybody was aware of

29:30 Japan's expansion.

Was it cause for widespread concern during the '30s, in your experience?

Oh as a school boy I could only talk about what we read in the paper. There were politicians talking about the threat of Japan, particularly as we were a long way away from Britain, our real source

30:00 of service army if you like or navy headquarters for the Empire, but you know Japan was close our closest possible enemy at that point. In 1936 or '37, I was at school in Sydney. '36 I think it was. 1936. The Japanese training fleet came to Sydney.

30:30 They had a lot of midshipmen there everywhere. It was reported on the front page of the papers. Japanese midshipmen with cameras. They were everywhere you looked throughout Sydney. They were photographing every street corner and a pal of mine wagged school one afternoon, went down to have a look at the Japanese, one of the

31:00 Japanese cruisers. We got talking to a young fella, a young midshipman, who invited us the following day to come to the reception, civic reception, by the admiral in charge. We got on board and got pally with a few of these Japanese midshipmen. They were speaking very little English and we no Japanese at all however the day after, I think it was the day that we were invited to this

31:30 reception, in the morning while I was at school my mother was surprised to go out the back door and see this Japanese midshipman asking for "Corin." That's all he could say, "Corin," and he handed, she wondered what on earth was going on. She had no idea that we'd wagged school the day before and gone on board cause we'd said nothing about it and anyhow when I came home of course

32:00 she knew what had happened but he'd come out to our place, we lived at Bellevue Hill at that time, come out, found my address which I'd given him of course. We'd exchanged friendships and this sort a thing with the people like that at the time and delivered this invitation for me to come to the reception. So he'd had to get out from I think Circular Quay was where the ships were berthed,

32:30 out to Bellevue Hill, which is you know if you know Sydney it's a fair way out and back again to find our actual address. I dare say they took he had taken a photograph of it, the front of the house. I don't know but anyhow it was a big surprise to everybody, me particularly when I got home, but then it was obvious

33:00 that they were out searching, researching where they were going to invade or when they did invade they'd have a total photographic record. Well by this time they were recognised as being a, they were a big threat to the Asian centre, the area you know.

33:30 **Yet in amongst that sort of global tension that's quite an unusual personal connection that**

you established, that young midshipman.

Yes, actually we responded for two or three letters I think and then there was nothing. I didn't hear anything back from him. So I think we'd moved to Canberra by then. So you know I didn't really have any

34:00 great interest in pursuing that. There was not going to be any anyway. He was part of their war machine.

Was Bellevue Hill the upper class suburb that it is now at that time?

Oh I think so. Yes. It's one of them I should say. All the eastern suburbs, particularly from Vaucluse, Rose Bay, Double Bay.

34:30 **So you did have quite a privileged childhood then? Or a privileged upbringing?**

No. No I didn't. I won't say it's privilege is relevant, ah relative. There were boys that I knew that hadn't gone to Sydney Grammar School. In that

35:00 sense you might say I was privileged. I was. As a matter of fact we had a fellow called Smallberg. He was a Jewish boy and he came to the school in our year. He had the wispy whiskers of a young Jewish boy, typical facial features and he must have been very poor.

35:30 However he came to school in very ordinary used clothes and he had to have a uniform. The uniform was just a grey suit with a Sydney badge, Sydney Grammar School badge on the pocket. Well after a week or so he came to school in a grey suit which obviously was, could have

36:00 been his grandfather's. It was so long, the arms were so long that his the tips of his fingers nearly came out the only the tips of his fingers came out. It was about ten times too big and the suit was for a big fat man. That was a bit of a problem. He then had to get a badge on it and I think after about two or three weeks he had a badge embroidered. It was just you

36:30 could get them done by people in town but at lunch times he used to go over to the city, Sydney Grammar School was in College Street just on the side of Hyde Park, and this fellow used to go over at lunch time. We found after a bit he was going over to a pawn broker's place in Castlereagh Street

37:00 with three balls outside. So we were a bit sympathetic to this fella's predicament and it must have cost the family a lot to send their son to grammar school. We weren't the most expensive grammar school by any means but there's a prestige about it because it was the first one established in the new colony, Sydney Grammar.

I guess my interest is in that you did go to

37:30 **what was a prestigious school and living in Bellevue Hill but your father had come from quite humble beginnings and was obviously dedicated to you know serve serving the community.**

Yeah.

I'm interested in how much those values were passed on to you in terms of a sense of civic duty and civic responsibility.

When I was in my early teens I joined the Boy Scouts and we did some

38:00 civil support things, I've forgotten now which, but awareness of poor people and that some in a community didn't have very much at all and actually milk and eggs were delivered from a horse drawn cart and occasionally

38:30 men would go round selling rabbits, calling out, "Rabbit-oh, rabbit-oh." Rabbits were plentiful and they could bring rabbits to the door and clothes props. I don't know whether the present generation would know what a clothes prop is but instead of the Hills hoists as we have now, lines were strung across the back yard and the mother would hang clothes there. You had to have something to

39:00 hold the line up in the middle and that was quite a common sight. Fellas calling out, "Clothes props. Clothes props."

So did you have a sense of that as a young man? Of having a responsibility to help people or contribute to the community?

Oh I think only having a an awareness through my uncles

39:30 also, particularly ex-service people that had been damaged and consequently their perhaps career paths upset and damaged. We were not all academics but general responsibility. My uncle's younger brother, Harry, with his arm, he had aches in his arm forever I can remember

40:00 there and Bill up in Queensland with this piece of steel plate in his head, this restricted their movements and we did not have one of the prestige homes in Bellevue Hill, although there were some and there are now and they're extremely valuable a lot of the areas there, but not every

40:30 house in Bellevue Hill is a prestige home. I swam at Bondi. Went there as a boy often after school three or four times a week you know. So we were pretty well aware of other suburbs.

41:00 Bondi then was sort of middle class if you like. Middle class. Not the middle class as we call middle class now but you know. We had pals not as well off or as people like to think I have a privileged background in that my father had a permanent job and that was the really the essence

41:30 of existence then. Did your father have a permanent job? Was he in a he was in the public service. Well that was good, he was assured of a job but I remember seeing photographs …

Tape 2

00:32 One thing that impressed me a lot was my pal was at school had his father in those CSR Colonial Sugar [Refining Company] over in O'Connell Street in the city and we used to go over there sometimes and

01:00 outside the Sydney Morning Herald, who was headquarters were there, were always at least a dozen men looking at these glass cases on the wall outside the building with vacancies, employment opportunities you know and I learned that fellows could be waiting there at four o'clock in the morning at when the tomorrow's [Daily] Mail was published

01:30 and the lists were put on or into these cases. There might be twenty or thirty or fifty waiting for these lists to come out and I'd heard often that fellows'd be waiting there and as soon as they saw what they wanted or what job they wanted to go to or apply for they'd be off in a flash to get out to a

02:00 suburb of the commercial job vacancy. They'd be there in the flesh perhaps six o'clock in the morning to apply to be at the head of the queue waiting at a factory if they you know to respond to the advertisement. We knew all about that. It was published in the papers too. That sort of existence would a been awful. After I

02:30 became a permanent employee of the army at the showground, that was in June 1940, there were fellas there that hadn't had a job for some time. One particular fellow I remember he applied for pay for his family. They had to make out a statement,

03:00 which was then sent into the pay office and wives would get the payment that the soldier arranged you see. Well one of these went astray and it was three or four weeks I think before this was discovered missing somewhere along the line and this poor fellow would come in every few days asking if his form, application

03:30 form for pay had gone through. Eventually the OC [Officer Commanding] of the company chased that up but he said the local grocer was extending credit to his wife for groceries and he couldn't keep giving her more credit because there was no pay coming from this soldier's pay arrangement you know and there were a few that at that

04:00 time, that's in June 1940, that were very aware of the poor situations. Even then in 1940 things were not good with employment.

The sense I get Colin is that towards the end of your schooling, life was pretty serious for you. Were you serious about life?

Oh I think so.

Did life occur as serious for you?

Well we could see a year or so in front. You know we when we were in

04:30 Canberra most of us were pretty serious because they were serious people down in Canberra. Heads of departments were being transferred down there. My father's headquarters were actually in Melbourne and he went he was down there after we were in Sydney and he was promoted to commissioner and then his departmental head office was

05:00 to be transferred to Canberra and so after a few months that's where it happened. So the head office of all the Commonwealth departments was to be in Canberra and that's where they are now. They were you know gradually all moved there.

Was religious faith an important part of your upbringing either at school or at home?

Oh can't say I was overly religious

05:30 but I recognised we did go to church a bit, not too much, and I think the boys having been in the war, I'm referring to 'the boys' as my uncles as they referred to each other's they were pretty sanguine about god's

06:00 being, god being in charge of the world and everything's really rosy. It's only that we muck up things

and god's on the side of the Germans and god on god's on the side of the Japanese and god's on our side too and only he's right in being on our side. So you get a more balanced view and

06:30 I still believe that we have a, the maker. It's hard to come to grips with. Our kids went to a church school and that hasn't altered them in any more way. We've all had a bit of church anyway and all have a belief.

07:00 We don't look at trying to push our beliefs to the on anybody else but I believe there's a, I had an experience, I believe there's somebody looking after me sometimes. Irrespective of whether it's, I don't believe the spirit that's was looking or is looking I'm not sure now but it wouldn't have mattered

07:30 which faith which religion, what it's all the same somehow. Particularly in war you know if you're getting fellas killed one way or another you go to their aid, they come to yours. It's not a matter of whether you think you're waiting for god to do it. You don't do that.

You sound like your uncles were a very significant influence on you.

08:00 Oh I was the eldest grandson in the family out of all those uncles so I had a little bit more attention I suppose in that respect. Not that they were all around us but at least being the first born of the grandchildren after World War I

Did you have brothers or sisters yourself?

Two sisters younger. Yeah, no brothers.

08:30 **Did you see something in their camaraderie or in their brotherhood or the bonds that they had from their war time experiences that was appealing to you as a young man?**

Oh yes. That was very definite. Yes. Repatriation in those days was not as extensive it has as it has developed, nor the numbers I suppose

09:00 involved but looking after wounded diggers was something that had to be addressed, and it was in large degree, but there was still a lot of things that now are commonplace with the Department of Veteran Affairs and

09:30 a better recognition and more facilities but I was as the eldest of the boys, of the grandsons, I was accepted by my uncles as being gradually old enough to go and sit with them or I won't say have a beer, I could have a beer which made

10:00 me sick anyway but I was welcome one of the boys, one of the family. You know and it was obvious that I was gonna be involved I suppose, some way or other, and a couple of cousins. So they had, were similar towards us. We were following generation but it was a warm caring one

10:30 from my uncles, yeah.

You mentioned earlier your awareness or consciousness of world events and that war there was a strong sense that war was looming but what actually inspired your was there why did you go out and enlist at the point that you did mid way through '39? You joined the militia on a part time basis is that right?

Yes. We were doing I've forgotten now

11:00 once a week or once a fortnight, I've just forgotten now. The just the colonel, Colonel Paul, well decorated man from World War I and a very good soldier. He was responsible for that area and he was gradually getting a lot of competent people into his unit.

11:30 We were all part of a regiment, the Werriwa Regiment which included part of Sydney area down to including Canberra and his battalion was the 3rd Battalion and yeah and we were slowly getting acclimatised if you like that there was going to be another stoush out there.

So how did you come to actually enlist and in the 3rd

12:00 **Battalion?**

Oh just there as part time weekly evening training or on occasional camps. We went on camps too.

But what were the circumstances you of you actually signing on and it going from being an idea of something that you thought you might do to actually committing?

Oh just that it was apparent that we should do it. It's you know we all we were getting concerned

12:30 about the future. That's where we're going to live and Germany was a big problem then, yeah so there's no question about it. I tried to get into the air force and I went to Sydney from Canberra to be interviewed. I was a bit colour blind and the air vice marshal who interviewed us said, "Well you passed everything but if you can't pass the eyesight test you're out." You're not in,

13:00 not out anyway.

That was to be a pilot?

Yeah.

Did you consider doing anything else any other roles within the air force?

Nothing at all for six months. I was in such despair I think. The air force seemed the place to be, even though I'd joined the local militia unit in Canberra but anyhow that was a two year short term commission.

Was there a prestige or

13:30 **a status associated with being a pilot at that time?**

No. Not particularly but if you think of being in the air force you get into the air force to go to out and shoot up people, whatever. I didn't think much about bombers, being a bomber pilot, and being a pilot was a first

14:00 choice if you're going to get into the air force, that's right but I could have got back in at a later stage doing something else but not as a pilot. I couldn't manage the eyesight test, which means you can see a pinhole five miles away with a red light or a green light and you've got to react in half a second. You know so you're not much good as a pilot if you can't do that.

14:30 **Now did you speak to your either of your parents or your uncles before enlisting into the militia? Did you seek their counsel or their opinions?**

Oh I can't even remember. It would a been my father but I think he would have been in agreement anyway. I mean it was going to be a problem for the defence of

15:00 Australia or the Empire. So it was better to be aware and have some training about what you're going to be in. That's why I started learning a bit of German and learning how to shoot.

Was your mother concerned?

Oh yes she was. Yes. She'd had oh well father's two brothers and three of her own brothers over there

15:30 and my father they were engaged before he went away and so she was really quite distressed in her way that it was all going to be on again and I think that'd be the most common reaction from mothers of sons you know just becoming adults, that they're going to be off to war and half of

16:00 'em are not gonna come back. So that's the normal attitude for mothers. Seeing their sons go off and now of course bloodshed and mayhem, bombs and all the rest of it is every day news isn't it? They have to read this in the paper every morning, every night on TV. Now I don't know that it was any easier for

16:30 those that join up, mothers of sons going into the forces however that's how it was then. She was very, she didn't want me to, my mother didn't want me to go into the air force cause she had a feeling that I wasn't going to be doing anything more than be killed easily, quickly. I had a pal

17:00 who became a sergeant in our unit. We were both wanting to go into the air force. He wanted me to go with him and despite our stripes as sergeants at that time we could get into a ship going to the States, well to Canada rather with the British Empire Air Training Scheme.

17:30 His brother was in a position where he could get us in on the Aquitania when it came to Sydney Harbour and if we went AWOL [AWL – Absent Without Leave] that weekend on leave we'd be able to get away and despite the fact we had some other responsibilities once we were on the ship then nobody could catch us sort a thing.

18:00 Fortunately, I wouldn't have gone anyway, but this poor fella flew into a mountain in Canada during training with five others. So if I'd gone with him that's where I would most likely have been.

So if we're to understand correctly that he wasn't actually selected for the training scheme? He just jumped on the ship and

Oh he joined the air force, although he was then in the army like I was

18:30 but having got in the air force and left Australia nobody could catch him and I'm not sure just how he got on the Aquitania but I didn't have to worry about that but his brother got the passes for us to be allocated a berth on the Aquitania. I was glad I hadn't got into the air force,

19:00 or with him anyway.

Were there quite a few young men or guys that you went to school with who were signing up boosting up their age.

I don't know about putting up our age but there were a few boys from school who got into the army mostly. I knew a couple a fellas in the air force but not intimately.

19:30 We were more army oriented.

You mentioned Colonel Paul, was it Paul?

Yes.

Colonel Paul who was

CO

Building up, CO [Commanding Officer] and building up the 3rd Battalion in Canberra

Yes.

And you mentioned that there was a lot of very equipped, very intelligent powerful people who were, oh sorry not necessarily powerful, intelligent and capable people who he was pulling together to form the 3rd

20:00 **Battalion. Who were some of those people who were enlisting in the 3rd Battalion militia at that point?**

Oh mostly they were already when I got into it because I was one of the youngest and so I you're pushing me a bit now trying to remember the names

Well I guess I'm I don't want specifics. What sort of backgrounds were these people coming from?

One was from taxation. One was from two were from the audit department,

20:30 accounting. One was another one from real estate. Two were from the banks there and all those boys became I think assistant chief general manager of the Commonwealth Bank in Sydney but there were

21:00 oh there were two others. That's four out of the local banks, different banks. So what have I mentioned?

A lot of white collar jobs there. Were there

Yes. We had a few farmers too and a few mechanics, mechanical people I should say.

21:30 That included Goulburn. We had actually one of the warders from the Goulburn gaol. He was one of our officers, yes, and some graziers there, who had some sizeable properties. They were officers, even down to Goulburn, Mossvale. That included our area. Harold Prell had a large property

22:00 and out to Yass too, as far as Yass. So we had a fair spread of officers and the officers, some of the officers had been in for a year or two. Just peace time soldiers you know. One or two of them had been in World War I and they had joined up. Colonel Paul, a very courageous soldier,

22:30 got the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Cross, he was a signaller and he'd been decorated in World War I. He ran a tight ship and we were very lucky to have him as our CO because he'd insist upon discipline and doing things right. You did it until you got it right and then you stuck with it and you knew what you were doing and

23:00 we actually our unit later went to Papua New Guinea and in Port Moresby we had a flood of measles through the company and the 39th Battalion went up to Isurava, that's just by near Kokoda, when the Japanese had landed and the 39th were the first there to get into action

23:30 with the Japanese. 2/14th followed with them to a terrific confrontation. They'd lost a lot. It would a been our job to go up there as we were in Moresby at the time but we had measles. So that we ended up inoperative for a time being but it was recognised that we had

24:00 a very well disciplined battalion. Everybody was glad of that because you - there's no slackness.

In what ways did they set about creating that? When you were performing your part time training?

Oh I'm not too sure. I think in peace time it was possible to have

24:30 units that were artillery units besides signallers and infantry. There would a been other service units like people required to bring up supplies, ammunition and troop stuffs to the fighting troops you know.

You were in infantry training?

Yes. Yes. Infantry battalion. That's a fighting battalion.

25:00 **And do you think that the discipline that the 3rd Battalion was known for it was that a an result of Colonel Paul's training or his overseeing or do you think that was part of the sense of that war was impending or that the conflict could well**

Oh no, we recognised I think everybody in the unit recognised the CO as being of some substance. He was. You know being a

25:30 decorated twice. Once as a signal, signaller in World War I and secondly as an officer getting the MC.

He had plenty of guts if you like, yeah and he knew how to handle men. He was no nonsense. He wasn't a tyrant but he was a good disciplinarian.

26:00 So everybody benefited. The only way to be.

Although your commitment was only part time at first was there an urgency about the training given the world you know global

Oh in 1939, yes. We had gone to one camp at Wallgrove and another one near Camden before

26:30 the end of '39 or early 1940 it might have been. Now but in 1940 seven of us were picked out and sent to Sydney. I'm getting into the fact the point now where I'm committed into the war scene.

Ah yeah I'll let just one thing I want to cover before we get to that is the actual outbreak of war itself.

Yeah.

Do you recall where you

27:00 **were and what went on around you when you heard that you were at war?**

Yes, I was home in Canberra. We were listening to the important broadcast from the prime minister tonight, I forget the time but might have been six o'clock or seven. Prime Minister Menzies said, "An important message for the people of Australia. I've been informed that

27:30 the prime minister of Britain, Neville Chamberlain, has declared war on Germany in consequence of them not agreeing to a peace arrangement and in consequence of being part of the empire Australia is also committed to war. It is my melancholy duty…" You've heard that often I dare say. So that struck

28:00 everybody like a bomb and at last it was resolved, all the tension building up. The fear that something was going to happen. The most likely resolve was going to be declaration of war some time. All the flying backwards and forwards from Berlin it was only going to be resolved one way. Hitler was gonna make

28:30 sure of that so he had to be stopped, yeah. After marching into parliament.

Are you suggesting that the fear and the tension actually took on a new form once war was declared? That that energy was somehow directed into resolve or …

I think the argument was resolved. We weren't there's no doubt about the outcome then. We were committed

29:00 you know. So that resolves the doubts that they'd been trying to make success of with Chamberlain going backwards and forwards. "Peace in our time." You might remember him coming back waving the papers. "Hitler has signed the paper ensuring that we will have peace in our time."

29:30 But everybody knew that it was going to there was going to be another war. There's no doubt about that and I think prior to that oh the general manager of BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary], Essington Lewis, Mr Essington Lewis,

30:00 he was appointed director-general of works for Australia and I think that all thinking people responsible for that sort of activity had been quietly organising their thoughts as to what should be done. If war did break out how long we would have in Australia to do whatever. Now it was needed time. So I think

30:30 Churchill, ah Chamberlain coming back from Munich was as much doing his best to make time to do things, get things moving in England particularly.

You said that with the declaration of war that sort of resolved the doubt about whether it was gonna happen or not but was there still doubt for you or your family or the broader community about the likelihood

31:00 **of success?**

I think we were all hoping that there would not be a war. I mean my father and mother both my closest who had known World War I they knew what it was all about. They didn't want it to happen and I could only sort of repeat what they felt, yeah.

Did you believe that success

31:30 **would be inevitable for the allies though or was there serious concern or doubt over which way the war would go?**

You don't believe anything but for success. In a situation if you can't see an end to it there's got to be some way round it, over it, under it to resolve it but there's no fear of

32:00 not resolving the situation however that was going to come. Hitler wanted land, wanted countries more and more but of course in 1940, in June 1940 when he marched into France then things really started

happening.

For you personally hearing the declaration of war did that make you question or re-evaluate your decision to have -

32:30 Get involved?

Yeah.

No. I knew that I would it was inevitable for me

But when you're faced with the reality of it, the actuality of it did you have any moments of doubt or re-evaluation?

No. None at all. No. No I suppose, well all the eligible boys in the family both sides having been there and come back

33:00 successfully even if wounded and damaged it was just a fact of life, yeah.

When did you become involved full time with the 3rd Battalion? At what point after the declaration of war?

Ah 4th of

33:30 June I think. I don't think I was yes, that was right. On the 3rd of June things started happening in England, in ah Europe.

1940.

On the 3rd of June, on the 4th of June I was made I was a corporal at that point. I was given a marching order as a

34:00 permanently in the army with half a dozen others to get my kit bag on my back and get the train at 4.15 at Canberra down to Sydney and report to the movement officer in central to be moved to the pig pavilion at the Sydney showground and we went down there as we were experienced NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers],

34:30 all six of us, in marching fellas up and down who didn't know left feet from right and we were sent to the Sydney showground and all the fellas joining up were coming into the showground. So we had to get all these civvies and organise them to onto palliasses. We had

35:00 palliasses filled with straw and some floorboards to sleep on. The pig pavilion in our case, A Company, and then get these civvies now soldiers to know which foot was which and march them up and down and frog force you know all this sort of thing.

So there were NCOs, militia NCOs, training AIF [Australian Imperial Force] recruits? Is that right?

Yeah. Right. We

35:30 were experienced soldiers with our country experience as corporals. I became a sergeant in a couple of weeks.

And was there any what was the relationship between the AIF and the militia like at that time? Was it seen as one big team or were those divisions apparent even at that point?

Oh at that point we didn't have time for that. We were NCOs

36:00 training these boys to be have some army background. Know what it was like being in the army. Later on of course and I should mention here, I became a lance sergeant, which means you have three stripes and the privilege of being in the sergeants' mess but you're only paid as a corporal,

36:30 and then I was sent on officers' training school. So that was June. By August I was at the school and I didn't get out of that until November. So there was not much hostility shown but later on, I should follow this

37:00 up, when I got my pips, commission I was still in Colonel Paul's battalion, see, even though I'd been sent to Sydney and then when I finished there I was sent up to Tamworth. I was still then a militia officer officers I was told by the CO in Tamworth I didn't know just

37:30 what I was going to do. I was trying to go away. I wanted to go away but having sworn to Colonel Paul when he said he wanted to send me to an officers' training school and I was also recommended from Sydney also to twice recommended to do this school.

38:00 I was part of his battalion and he said he was going to take his unit away and he wanted us all to be stay with him and not go looking elsewhere. He fully expected to take a unit overseas. As it happened, whether he was thought to be too old

38:30 as a commander I don't know however they weren't taking any (UNCLEAR) officers when I got through and I was in Tamworth because I saw a couple of boys that I knew at school who'd done another school and I was searching out what possibility there was of getting into an overseas unit that was about to go. I was very lucky. One went to Singapore and got caught there. So

39:00 I was lucky in that respect but I went back to being in full time with Colonel Paul cause I was one of his boys, one of his lieutenants at that point, yeah.

Was that something that had you'd been thinking about for some time about you know perhaps leaving the militia, joining the AIF so that you could go overseas, even before you did your officer training?

39:30 **Or was there a particular -**

Oh yes.

event or period where you thought where you began to think that overseas service was …

I had the option there but he'd even in, that was in June I went to Sydney. I'd thought about going overseas. I'd definitely I'd sort of I was still learning a bit of German. So I was hoping you know that I was going over there

40:00 somewhere and then in July I'd seen Colonel Paul and anyhow it was not up to me really then but having joined him in a sense as an officer after I'd got done my course, well I was committed

40:30 with him anyway. So what I wanted to do was beside the point.

What commitment did you make to him? What did you just promise him or what was that arrangement you made with him?

Well he said you know, "I want if you'd like to be I'll send you to a do an OTS [Officer Training School] and

41:00 I don't want you running off somewhere else." He knew we were all, particularly the younger ones, so I had a I'd given my word to him that I was going to be one of his officers and he said, "I'm going to take my unit and I want good men. So,"

41:30 you know, "there's no argument about it Richardson," you know. "I'd be pleased to let you do this course. I want you do to this course."

Tape 3

00:37 **I'd just like if you could just talk me through a little bit more with the officer training school. The just I guess sort of set the scene for me and what sort of training you took the men through. This is at in at Liverpool and Camden. You were there for three months?**

01:00 Yes. Three months. What can I tell you about an OTS? We're subject to, in those days it was under permanent Australian instructional corp. They were the ones that knocked everybody into shape. They were all

01:30 permanent warrant officers class 2 mostly but when they barked you jumped and in our case we jumped twice in case the first one wasn't good enough but they knocked us into shape. We learned how to handle machine guns. How to

02:00 use live grenades and do map reading. Run courses and how to oh read maps of course. What else did we learn? All the things that you should know about handling men. How to work out how to

02:30 attack an enemy position. How to win. And that's all that's about it.

When you say learning how to manage men how can you teach that? How is that taught?

Well you have to learn a bit about psychology of handling people to start with, or in particular

03:00 men. To start with you start from the basics in that you look and act in a presentable fashion yourself. You expect your men to follow suit, have their boots polished and smart and have some confidence, a lot of confidence in what they're about for themselves and for the team as a team. To be able to look after their

03:30 welfare. What else? The whole raft of things that you can learn as a civilian handling men or situations. The psychology of people if you like and keeping fit. I'm pushing it a bit

04:00 there.

When you have a group of men and you know that you're gonna have to you know make them

gel together as a team do you sort of scan them and see who are the ones that are gonna be a bit sort of playful or who are the ones that are gonna need a little bit more encouragement? Like can you just talk me through how you sort of you know just assess a group that you're gonna have to manage?

Ah just tell them what you want. What you want them to do and how to do it.

04:30 Where and when and see that they do it. Those that are a bit reluctant you have to have a little word with or those that are a bit stroppy about something. You might have a bit of a word with them privately somewhere along the line and just generally let them know what you want, what the situation demands anyway and that we're

05:00 going to achieve it together and when you want them to do something that they understand what you've spoke what you've told them that they listen to what they're asked to do and not their interpretation but your interpretation of what they are required to do.

So it sounds like clarity from your point of view's obviously a very important thing, so

Oh very. Yes it is. It is.

05:30 So if you do that I never had any worry about getting what I wanted to.

When you get to know your men is it does it ever get difficult to sort of I guess it it's that balance between you know being close to them so that they can come to you with anything but then needing to keep a bit of distance from a discipline point of view? Is that a tricky balance?

I think you develop that. It's something you must

06:00 do but you always stay in command. As long as they know that you'll solve any problem that they might have or do your best to do it and do it quickly and get it out of the system whatever is troubling them. There are odd situations like fellas saying they can't handle it. They can't they're

06:30 they want to be they want to escape from the situation cause it's not something they can handle. That's a bit of a tricky one. You have to talk through or somehow convince them that they still have to be part of the team and they're needed and wanted and appreciated. Just the normal things, handling people in situations I think.

07:00 **Sounds like it would be very challenging at times.**

It is. Sometimes you don't succeed. We had one fellow who put a bullet through his foot accidentally and I know it wasn't my responsibility but I'd talked to him earlier.

07:30 That wasn't the result of me talking to him that he put a bullet through his foot but he was overwhelmed and he just couldn't manage the situation, yeah and there's a problem there. People have a bullet through their hand or their foot. For the rest of their life there's a scar there or they have

08:00 a psychological thing. Then having if you like chickened out would be however I suppose that's only a short term problem. You're not going round the world with something on your back saying, "I couldn't face a situation so I put a bullet through my foot." That's only known by

08:30 a certain number of people anyway but it that does happen sometimes. Not often.

What kind of impact does that have on the rest of the men when someone hops out to that degree?

It's a tricky one. I think it probably gives them a bit more confidence

09:00 in being able to handle part of the same situation and that he might have been, the fellow might have been worried out of particular problem that wasn't anybody else's problem. You know fellas have all sorts of problems, personal family problems. Sometimes fellas are worried if they're away that somebody else is playing,

09:30 paying attention to their wife back home or the wife's out partying a bit while they're away at the war. I met one situation like that where it was a marriage breaking up because the wife thought her husband was in the in Cairo playing up.

10:00 She'd been given information from there by somebody else. I'm not sure just what the expression is, is it, "Dear John. Do you know your husband's playing?" Or Dear, "Dear So and So, your wife's playing up with somebody, or your husband's playing up." Somebody it doesn't happen very often but this one I'm think of was about

10:30 a nurse back here whose husband was in Cairo with the troops and playing up. So it's not really relevant in this conversation actually is it?

Well yes and no because I mean what you're saying is that you know while men are away at war there's a lot they have a lot of other worries that influence them I guess. So I think it's very relevant, the social kind of pressure.

Yeah I suppose it is a

11:00 problem, worrying about those at home worrying about the boys at the front.

I was just wondering with a case like with the self-inflicted wound like someone shooting themselves in the foot, what would your reaction be in terms of kind of rallying the rest of the group together? Like would what's the procedure for someone who does that? Are they instantly dismissed or what how does that work?

No they wouldn't be dismissed. Be sent back as a casualty.

11:30 Not having had the personally to face that problem I can't really say.

So just back to the officer training school, how you talked about you know map reading and various things that you did. How intensive was that training? Like was it did it do you feel that people were prepared given the training that they had?

12:00 Our map reading was devoted to Australian conditions of course. That's where we trained and that's where we became trained.

What about the training in general? Do you think it was adequate?

Map reading is one thing but

12:30 applying it on the ground and knowing what you're looking at. Reading maps is largely connected to experience on the ground, recognising if you're looking at wavy lines on a map that you interpret it that's really a matter of experience and getting used to interpreting

13:00 what to expect in the country that you're in but we only had map reading in Australia. Map reading would be similar anywhere of course.

So what happened after the three the initial three months training? Where did you go after that?

Well I went straight up to Tamworth and most of the boys that I'd been training up and

13:30 down, running up and down in the showground in Sydney they were up there at Tamworth. They were already ticketed to go on the [Queen] Mary and that's what happened to me. When I got up there the CO of that unit, that was a reserved training unit in Tamworth. He said to me, "Well they're not aren't sending any more reo [reinforcement] officers to the Middle East so,"

14:00 you know, "that's the latest news. So don't have your hopes about going overseas." So and at that time I'd been away from the unit from Colonel Paul and I was just exploring my options of course. What were available and he had

What were your options at that stage?

Well I

14:30 didn't know whether he had any marching orders about going to the Middle East and the fact that he didn't have as many in the unit then as he would require if he had a full battalion to go to the Middle East and the war situation overseas was fluid at that point. The boys had been back and forth across the desert

15:00 with Rommel and in Syria. So we lesser lights were only pawns in the game. We were just moved around as required. So I didn't know what the situation was going to be. Colonel Paul had not been told that he was to be prepared to take a unit away and then the

15:30 war situation overseas was improving in relation to the desert and the Japanese threat was worsening. So of course 1 Division was brought back from overseas by Curtin jumping up and down and demanding from Churchill that he release or be prepared to for that division to be coming home to

16:00 defend Australia because Japan was getting worse and more successful everywhere they went.

Can I just ask you a little bit about that escalation of the Japanese threat. Was that something that was in the media or was it could you just sort of talk about how you were aware that it was becoming more of a threat or how the general public was aware? Was there propaganda about it at that

16:30 **point?**

They'd come down around south east Asia and then of course I'm just scratching to remember the dates of the of Pearl Harbour and Singapore and the islands, different places. The Japanese had taken over a lot

17:00 of the small islands. So there's no doubt about where we were on the Japanese program and then they had started bombing Broome, our Darwin and Broome and the general public weren't told anything

about those bombings and Darwin had more than two hundred bombings by

17:30 Japanese bombers and the first one or two times that the Japs came over there I think they only had Wirraways up in Darwin for our blokes to go up and attack them but it was just a wide open target, Darwin and then Broome too. There was an embargo on news I think

18:00 to the Australian public, otherwise everybody'd be panicking, really panicking, and then they'd sunk the Centaur and we went from Sydney on the 17th of May '42. The Coral Sea battle had started and the Japanese submarines about and then

18:30 we had the midget submarines in Sydney Harbour and on the way up to Moresby, that's in May '42, we thought we'd seen the submarine some somewhere off the Queensland coast. We had one escort plane looking after us and they were up about ten or fifteen miles ahead and suddenly they'd

19:00 come down and they were looking at something and suddenly we saw a splash in the ocean. That was the plane. The navy had one corvette I think looking after us too and that was running around. Took them about an hour and a half to get there. We couldn't divert on our ship. So it was reckoned that the submarine, Jap submarine might have been recharging batteries on the surface

19:30 off the Queensland coast. They didn't they wouldn't expect much naval patrol or air patrol either.

Was that a bit of a shock to you seeing one so close?

Yeah it was a bit. Close up in the -

Can you describe where you were and what you saw?

I'd palled up with the third officer. It was a Dutch ship we were on, the Van Heutsz and I'd palled up with this fellow and I was up on the bridge

20:00 talking with him and we were just looking ahead at this plane flying some miles up ahead and then suddenly straight down in a big splash of water and that was it. No plane. So it reinforced the fact that we were getting into a shooting area. That ship unfortunately was torpedoed over in the near Malaya somewhere later on and yeah.

20:30 **Can you describe the journey over? Like how long it took and maybe what sort of things men were concerned with on board?**

Well when we left Sydney it took us about ten days to get to Moresby. There were other ships going with us but because we were a bit faster, I think we could do about eight knots and the others were reckoned to be about doing six knots, see, so that was a significant difference

21:00 in speed. We'd have had to be weaving, ah filling in time to stay with the slower speed. So went off on our own and I don't know the duties of that escort plane but we only had one. So he could a been flying down fifty miles and keeping a look out on the ocean somewhere and what we did

21:30 when we once we were on board ship we boarded at night. I was in a cabin with seven other officers and that was a cabin for two I think originally and oh we did whatever exercises we could, men keeping fit etcetera

22:00 until we got to Moresby.

Can I just ask what sort of food you got on board?

Food? Ah I don't know whether that's something I should, my brain would want to re, forget but it was adequate I suppose. At least we weren't on iron rations and, yeah. So I really can't tell you. We were fed well enough I suppose.

22:30 So you don't expect too much but lots and lots of tinned beef always featured, features in army life when they're moving anywhere. Seven pound tins, about this long. Argentine beef it was at that time or fish, that was another thing.

And what about seasickness? Was that a problem with the men at all?

Oh I think one or two were sick.

23:00 Yes they were and some couldn't eat and some, yeah. Oh you got over it after awhile. I dare say the MO [Medical Officer] on board would have dispensed a few aspirin and seasick pills, of some sort, yeah. It didn't worry me at all I think.

You talked about fitness drills to keep the men fit on

23:30 **board. Could you talk us through you know a typical day? Like how you would keep the men occupied?**

Ah well exercises all the time of course. Every part of every day I mean. Being able to strip machine guns

24:00 and put them together blindfolded. Practising throwing grenades, although we didn't have grenades to throw but mortar platoon would go through, you probably know what mortars are, small three inch mortars. Yeah. Go through drill practising that sort of thing.

24:30 More exercises. Having talks about army experience. How to do bayonet drill, that would be on the cards too. Very simple sorts of things.

With those talks you know were there specific talks about

25:00 **you know what the men were to expect from the enemy or any sort of more specific tips I guess that were given to them about what where they were going? What they were going to encounter?**

We didn't have any idea at all of what the jungle was like in New Guinea. We

25:30 understood we were probably going to Port Moresby when we were at sea and that was the case, we did get there. Around Moresby it's a dry area all round Moresby of course and nothing no jungle there. We weren't too sure about what sort of vegetation, how close rainforests came down to Moresby. All we knew was that it didn't have a good reputation

26:00 with people who had lived there or visited there into the islands. The back end of Port Moresby, back end of PNG I think nobody went to live there unless they had to. It's a it's hot, so we couldn't prepare much for any other particular terrain

26:30 than what we'd been used to at home in Australia. I think we had plenty of PT [Physical Training] drill and keeping fit, that was the main thing.

Can you describe the state of the men at this point? Like were they rearing to go? Were they excited about finally you know getting a chance to …

Well I don't know whether we were wanting to get

27:00 into holds with the Japanese but we knew we had to do it whatever. That dominated any thinking anyway. We had an awful history, a daunting history of the Japanese coming down through China and all the islands and the naval

27:30 battles that were going on. Everywhere they seemed to be moving quickly. They seemed to be able to go quickly on a small amount of rations and live off the ground, live off the captured territory, used captured arms wherever possible. We found that to be true later on but we only had this intimidating

28:00 history of the Japanese. Everywhere they went they were fast and bloody you know. Their reputation was for killing people and that sort a thing or slaughtering.

Did that kind of I guess brutality have a psychological impact on the troops at all?

28:30 I think it made us realise that we weren't playing fun and games. It wasn't a picnic we were going to and we had to be prepared and be able to know get used to what you know about your enemy. The more you know about your enemy the better you know. So I think basically we were all anxious to close with the enemy and get on with it. We knew we

29:00 had a job to do and the sooner we got to it the better.

Can you talk me through disembarking at Moresby? How you left the ship and what happened?

What happened? Right. When we got to Moresby when I, took us ten days to get there but we got off the ship and we went down to a place

29:30 called near Bootless Bay, that's just a few miles out of Moresby, and we camped there. Moresby had been bombed and we knew that's what we had to watch for, these Japanese bombers but

30:00 we didn't have any trouble leaving the ship, which went off after unloading stores and we had a settling in period. Where we were there was a lot of kunai grass and our Australian boots had leather soles with steel rims on the heels. So these very quickly slid on the kunai grass.

30:30 It's dry and or the whole area around Moresby's dry so the grass was dry too you know wherever we went but some of it six feet high or higher with the odd spider that's big enough to cover your face and we had to get used to those things.

Was there anything you could do to the boots to make them less slippery on the grass?

I don't know. I don't know that anybody found what to do

31:00 about it but that the grass would polish the shoes. They were leather army boots of course, yeah. The Japs used to come over at midday. They were reported from about branch about twenty minutes before they arrived at Moresby. So we had warning to get off the wharf or take,

31:30 make the preparations for the bombs. They were up about twenty five thousand feet and fairly predictable every day. What they were doing was bombing Moresby Harbour and there was a ship there, which was a regular trader called Macdhui. This happened after we not long after we were there but they came over one day with some of our boys

32:00 still on the boat, the ship. When the captain got word that the bombers were coming he immediately left the wharf and was out in the middle of the harbour when the bombers came over. There were a few of our boys still in the hold because he'd had to push off quick smart and we'd been there as an unloading party that morning.

32:30 A few of our boys were caught in the hold and were killed but the Japs caught the ship and it's still in Moresby Harbour well and truly sunk. I don't know whether they've pulled it out of the harbour or not but they were endeavouring to do that and they did pull out some of the ships that had been caught and sunk there but the Macdhui was there for a long time just rusting.

33:00 So that was a bit of quite a shock and we hadn't gone long down the road towards back towards camp when we had to get off the road and dig in when their bombs about five hundred pounders that landed about a hundred yards away from us. Like here to across the road just where we were beside the road and

33:30 I was very impressed. A tree near us with a trunk about this big was twirled around. All the leaves were small. Twigs and branches were stripped off. It was just like some you've seen in World War I in France where the bombing's blown everything possible off the tree, including all the bark. What impressed me very much was seeing this tree, the remains of this tree the main trunk

34:00 all twisted and all the threads of the main threads of the trunk all stripped as though all the soft stuff had been sucked out and blown away. It was very impressive.

Being that close to it how much does the ground shake or how much do you shake? What does it sound like -

I think we all shook our -

When a five hundred pound bomb ...

34:30 **Oh well the noise I think probably scared any worries about the ground shaking but it was all part and parcel it all happens in a multi millisecond of course but it was certainly a first hand experience.**

And was that just after you'd just arrived was it?

Not long yeah, not long after we arrived.

35:00 **So when you said when you arrived you got warning that there was going to be that the Japanese were coming to bomb, what happens: you're getting off the ship, you don't know where you are and there's a warning like that. I mean who greets you and gets all the men off safely into the right area? Can you talk me through that process?**

I was a platoon commander. I had about twenty eight men I think

35:30 at that time. Well whoever's responsible for establishing tents and that sort of thing, location, there'd be somebody there already. There were army personnel there. Administration, some of the Papuan New Guinea administration, so they would have decided where the unit was to go. So we were put in trucks and taken down to our camp

36:00 site. So we had to established we had little two man tents at that time. So you'd dig a slit trench and erect this tent, which was about this high about that wide and just enough for two men to sleep in, and you could have a slit trench in the bottom or next to it.

Very tiny tents. Like smaller than what we think of as a two man tent today from the camping stores. Very, very tiny?

Yes.

36:30 **So where was that camp?**

Near Bootless Bay and that's I think it's about eleven miles I think I read somewhere where in one of the one of these stories I think it was eleven miles from Moresby. I might be wrong, might be somewhere about that distance anyway. It was away from Moresby so if they were gonna bomb Moresby we were not going to be

37:00 the target but when they dropped the bomb sometimes they were a bit short and that's where we were nearly caught but the our boys that we'd left in the in the ship they were caught. The following day my company commander had to go out with a couple of others to retrieve what bits were left of the boys who were caught in the hold, which was rather

37:30 what, revealing for us new chums into the war scene, yeah.

So had the ship completely sunk by then? Did they have to dive to get the men's remains out or was it still partially afloat? The ship?

It was still afloat but immobilised. I don't know just to what extent it how quickly it sank

38:00 but anyhow all it might even have been the following day but anyhow, they did cause the end of the life of the Van Heutsz

I was just wondering if you could describe Bootless Bay and your camp

38:30 **site in a little bit more detail for me.**

Oh well the bay wasn't something like Bondi or Surfers or Mooloolaba. Nothing much like that. In any case we weren't swimming. We didn't take our swim trunks with us and we were concerned about

39:00 our spiders or picking up infections of some sort because there was natives there of course. So we didn't know what to expect for natives, native ailments that we might pick up or anything else, poisonous

39:30 plants. I suppose we were given some instruction, I've forgotten now. So whether we were told much by an experienced botanist or somebody who lived there and knew the area but we had a lot of this kunai grass and our big problem, the main problem was getting used to the climate. Although we were there in May,

40:00 it was pretty humid and having to do walks and marches just getting used to carrying a pack and carrying a load on our shoulders that was our big problem and then odd ones were getting dengue fever, like myself. I got dengue and after a couple of days you're in hospital and

40:30 that took out quite a few. You recover from that but it's an awful fever, dengue. You wish you were dead. A lot of other people wished they were dead I suppose too but you certainly did with dengue and malaria later on. The effect of dengue is harder to cope with than malaria I think but malaria continues might be for a few years.

Tape 4

00:31 **And what other complaints I've heard that a lot of skin irritations men suffered from that because of the weather up there, the humidity. Did you?**

That that's right. There were, yeah. I didn't have any worries with eczema or tinea and that sort a thing but we had at the

01:00 showers we had a bath or Condy's [crystals] solution for men to dip their put their feet in after showers and that tends to kill off any bacteria that you might pick up. That's a common thing in army camps but up there we had no idea what there might be to for us to expect. We were

01:30 drilled about mosquitoes though and so we had long shorts, Bombay bloomers they were called, and putting on I can't remember now whether we had any or what sort of mosquito repellent we had but you had to be careful about that and in the afternoon particularly sleeves

02:00 down and watch out for mosquitoes. If you didn't or not everybody who was diligent escaped getting bitten but and that was something that you had to avoid at all costs.

How big a problem was dehydration with the heat up there?

Yeah. We had our water

02:30 bottles of course and the main thing was the humidity and I suppose we sweated with the humidity just the same but it was very exhausting. That was the main thing that we had to fight in Moresby cause we didn't have any enemy at that point. So it was really the only thing we had to fight, exhaustion from the humidity and the temperature

03:00 and I think I wonder now whether doing a lot of exercises, route marching and so forth did us very much good at that time because we were getting exhausted with the fighting the humidity. Slipping on the kunai grass and going pushing through it and that

03:30 sort a thing. However we had to do getting used to the kunai grass because later on we had that to worry about but it's not very pleasant to be pushing your way through long grass which is higher than yourself sometimes and you walk straight into a spider web or …

And how big did you say those spiders were?

04:00 Well some of them there are bird catching spiders up there and they're big enough to cover your face. I don't know about the how big the body was but you know you immediately back off if you feel or look at

a spider web in front of you and the quicker you can get away from that the better but of course if you've got to go through it well that's too bad. The spiders are just

04:30 as worried about you intruding in their scene as we are from them but there were bird catching spiders. I've seen their webs.

How big are they?

Oh they don't have to be terribly big but they're very strong and in trees. Somebody's got to point it out to you so you know might be like this.

05:00 **What about other animals that were of worry? Were there snakes or anything like that?**

Oh now you forget about those animals and snakes, I suppose there were some but I can't remember. There was something else that concerned us though was the natives were able to come into our camp area. They were not supposed to

05:30 but they'd come selling things. One day I'd done my washing and I was finishing it and this little piccaninny came. About this high, wouldn't a been more than two years old bearing a coconut and all it could say was, "Chillen [Shilling]." "Chillen." It persisted and I was getting cranky. This child wouldn't go away and but just go away

06:00 a bit and then come back as though it was on a mission to get this a chillen. The other thing was Americans had come in. Some American flyers were there and the natives were there to do their washing and some of the smarter ones around the town. So the Americans would say when the natives said

06:30 in response to, "How much?" They'd say, "A chillen," or, "Two chillen." And the American'd say, "What each sock?" "Yes." Or each that was a favourite thing. "Handkerchief. Two chillen." But we were told if we were buying anything from the natives threepence was the going price

07:00 to offer and not to exceed it because the Americans down the road were pushing up the price on anything you see and we didn't have that sort of money anyway. So this child wanting a chillen was annoying in a way and it wouldn't go away and anyhow I was just looking at it for a minute. It was about the third or fourth time it had reappeared beside me and I'm thinking, "What on earth can I do with this child?"

07:30 and I sensed something behind me and I turned round and here was Dad with the bone through his nose, hot and sweaty. Done up in a lot of his native finery and sweating like natives do. I turned round and looked at this fellow with bloodshot eyes and betel juice dripping from

08:00 the ends of his mouth and a sort of cold fear went through me for a second and then I rejoiced in the fact that I had not scolded this child and hadn't incurred his wrath but he grunted something to the child and they went off. Yes, that was an introduction to native life.

How did you find the natives in general? What kind of people were they?

08:30 Oh they were wonderful. Absolutely essential to our campaign. We couldn't have gone over the mountains without them and there were about ten thousand of them recruited from all over PNG and I got to know one of the patrol officers up there who filled me in a lot with the background

09:00 for PNG. We didn't have much to do with the carriers personally because they were carrying food stuffs or ammunition. We couldn't talk to them. They could hardly talk to each other a lot of them because there were seven to eight hundred different dialects and they'd got these fellows

09:30 in from all over the country to be a carrier. They were promised a payment and so they came. They left villages all over the country. Well you can imagine seven hundred dialects and how many villagers that entailed I don't know but it was a lot and some couldn't talk to each other. Even some of the patrol officers

10:00 and others who had dealings with the natives would need to have one or two different ones. Even right now we have a son, the son of one of those carriers. He's in Sydney. He's a priest an Anglican priest in Popondetta. That's where he comes

10:30 from. He's aged thirty and he's doing a time down in Darlinghurst in Sydney in the parish there getting experience. We had him in Brisbane and he's coming back to Brisbane very soon, in a few weeks, and he was getting experience in Brisbane on how big city is and what happens here. So I met

11:00 a couple of other New Guinea people later on but at that time we had no conversation. All we could say was, "Thanks fella," or you know acknowledge that they were doing something and make way for them if we were resting beside the track and they were coming through. So we had no conservation with them but I was privileged when I had

11:30 fever I was sent from the hospital in Moresby up to low level at Koitaki where there's a convalescent home. Koitaki was the home of a chap I'd been at school with in Sydney. His father was a planter. They'd taken over that home as a convalescent home later as for surgery but

12:00 I was lucky enough to be in a tent with a fellow called Claude Champion. He was a patrol officer. He was having a dose of malaria and just come out of hospital also and we had a full size tent to ourselves and he talked to me about native life and being up there. His brother was also a patrol officer

12:30 and his father had been before him and a magistrate. Just as an aside to getting to know the carriers, Claude said would I like to see some stone age men and we went down to where part of where ANGAU were training some little ANGAU, little stone age men

13:00 in discipline. ANGAU is Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit. That was responsible for all things military etcetera prior to us coming there and even after. We went down to this area where there was an ANGAU sergeant training these stone age men. Now they wouldn't be more than four feet high and there were about a dozen

13:30 of them lined up with small shovels and they were digging into the side of a slope, getting a shovelful and taking it back and dropping it down here and making a small rifle range about the width of the length of that patio deck outside. Most odd feeling. These fellas they had nothing in life but no valuables except their little string bag hanging off their waist.

14:00 That was all their possessions. The fellow who was training them knew all about it and he'd been he'd apparently brought them down from the highlands somewhere. On the command "dig," they'd dig, get a shovel full of dirt and then wait for another command to turn round. They'd turn round and then looking from one to the other and then another command "march," and they'd march down there. Shuffle

14:30 rather and then on another command drop the shovel load down to the extending this, lifting this ground. So we were there for about half an hour. It was fascinating. These fellas were like we might be if some people from Mars suddenly descended on us and grunted orders which we couldn't understand and they were

15:00 absolutely scared stiff. Almost scared stiff and they wouldn't do a thing without looking to each other to see whether everybody else was getting the mess same message and then they'd go down slowly shuffle. It was quite an interesting day seeing this happen.

Were most of the natives there by choice or was there a sense that some of them had been forced to become part of the war?

Oh well the

15:30 Japanese had been successful. They'd landed at Salamaua and at Buna on the top side and they'd intruded into the mainland of Papua New Guinea and they had coerced, if they couldn't get natives to do carrying work by paying them or shoving a bayonet in their backside well they'd be brutal and they were.

16:00 So the feeling that, "Japan, he come," was well and truly in the background with a lot of the natives because this fear probably spread through different villages right round the country. It was a matter of concern for our Australian or PNG [Papua New Guinea] boys recruiting natives to overcome this fear

16:30 that the a lot of the natives had about, "Japan he come. He murder. He kill all you white fellas." You see so that was a problem they had. Some came I suppose from nearby on the southern side of PNG but others they had to say, well they might have had to use a bit of force. Tell 'em if they didn't do

17:00 this, come and help the Australians then they'll be in real trouble when they get rid of the Japanese. So

Do you recall whether there was I guess that would have united them but was there any kind of tribal differences that you knew of personally or had heard of?

Never met any there. The only problem was that, oh well I should say the main problem was

17:30 staying together and some of 'em had been brought you know a hundred miles or more to join the companies. Altogether about ten thousand natives were involved, and as they were further and further away from home of course they'd have to rely on being involved with everybody else but about ten thousand altogether

18:00 involved.

So say with your platoon like how many carriers would you be allocated to help?

Oh well personally as troops we weren't involved we weren't allocated any. They were all under the command of the people organising them who could speak the language. Like motu is one lingua

18:30 franca up there and pidgin English. That would extend a certain extent amongst the natives but a lot of them would be needing somebody else to interpret what the ANGAU officer would be saying, see. So they all understood that they had to do what they had to do but as troops we didn't have any more communion

19:00 if you like with the native carriers except wish that they'd drop a bag of something and we'd open it up

and find it was full of nice fresh fruit or some ham sandwiches or something like that, which never happened. I did have one trip and fall over going by. He had a bag full of tinned fruit ah tinned

19:30 butter and one tin was damaged and I considered that we should open it and I found he had twenty four tins of butter. So I shouldn't have done that but the tin was damaged and it wouldn't a been able to go on. So I was quite justified in doing that but, yes. We were largely on bully and biscuits most a the time.

20:00 When we were lucky we had rice. Burnt rice, cold rice, uncooked rice, medium cooked rice. Yeah.

Is it hard to keep morale up when it's so hot and terrible and you're eating terrible food? How do you manage the men in those situations?

Ah it's very easy. There's no alternative. The only alternative is to drop dead in then you or get

20:30 killed. So you recognise that there's only one way out of the army, as they say. There's nowhere else to go. A singer, "Boots, boots, boots, boots." You mightn't know that song. Dawson, Peter Dawson used to be about the World

21:00 War I time. He was a very popular singer. "There's no way out in the army once you're in the army. There's no way out." You know that was a very common marching song. However that's where we were and the only way out was to get into the Japanese and get the job done.

So how long were you given to acclimatise before you started

21:30 **your serious patrolling?**

About six weeks. Mm and then cause once you get up onto low level, which is a couple a thousand feet it's something like going from here to Toowoomba. Not as far, or going up from yeah, that's if you're on the north coast going up. So from Mooloolaba Beach up to the top of Buderim or somewhere.

22:00 I think it was about two thousand feet up you see so that was a nice cool change and that's where our convalescent home was but in the meantime we had to sweat in this dry area around Port Moresby.

So what happened then after you after you'd settled in? What happened next for you?

Well we got

22:30 word that we were moving up the track and so we left all the surplus back in our camp site. We weren't sure just what we were doing or what we were where we were going but at least or when we were coming back but if we had anything personal, well you could put it in your slit trench and bury it in the slit

23:00 trench assuming that you'd be able to find it when you came back. I had a tin trunk. All officers had a tin trunk and anything surplus I left in that. That arrived back at two years later it arrived at 113th AGH [Australian General Hospital] at Concord in Sydney. There's nothing in it except

23:30 a few oh might a been a magazine or an old sweater or something like that. Some socks but nothing of value. So I'd left a couple of tins of tobacco in there. Also I'd done a deal with an American. At that time we had not been issued with pistols, officers.

24:00 These were of limited use. Only if you were from here to the wall you can be sure of really hitting somebody where you want to. Officers were allowed a bottle of whiskey a month and the troops were allowed, I'm not sure whether it was half a dozen beer. I didn't drink whiskey anyway so I

24:30 thought I didn't have a pistol. I did a deal with one of the Americans I think somebody had been asking if there were any spare bottles of whiskey about. They were willing to trade whatever. I did a trade with this bloke with thirty rounds of ammunition in his .45. Now if you don't know what a .45 pistol is like

25:00 they're very heavy and they fire a bullet which'll sort of from here to there will put you back against the wall. Very heavy bullets and do an awful lot of damage but the pistols themselves are very heavy and they shoot this heavy bullet. I soon found to my regret that I'd lost the bottle of whiskey but I had a

25:30 wonderful .45 from the Americans. I knew that this was not right but we were on our way up the mountains to fight and I had to leave this lovely .45 with thirty rounds of ammunition. I didn't know what to do with it. I couldn't admit to having done this awful thing

26:00 but nobody would have minded. I left it in the tin trunk with the thirty rounds and I I'd locked it. I had a lock. I locked the thing. Somebody else was going to pick up all this stuff from where we were camped, at in camp. Needless to say it wasn't there when it arrived at Sydney two years later. Oh anyhow

26:30 one a the things you learn, but the weekend before we embarked, on the Monday I think, we had leave and I was in Sydney and my family in Canberra and when we lived in Sydney in my early days my father had palled with a fella next door who was a police sergeant and he was the sergeant in charge of the police at Paddington in Sydney. So I rang

27:00 up the station and asked to speak to Sergeant Cullen. They said, “He’s on leave and he won’t be back till Monday.” So I says, “Where… it’s urgent. Where can I find him?” So on the Sunday he was coming home from holiday and I explained I talked to him and he said, “Well Colin I can give you a pistol.” Cause they collect ’em from crims,

27:30 you see, in the police stations and a few rounds and he said, “I can give you a pistol and some ammunition now that I know why you want it but I’ll have to have a letter from your CO to authorise me to give this to you.” My CO was somewhere else on leave with this family for the last weekend. So I’d had to forget about getting

28:00 a pistol but we’d not been issued with pistols at that point.

So you’ve packed up everything in your trunk and buried it.

No I didn’t have to bury it because I couldn’t bury the trunk. Somebody else picked them up and got rid of ’em, you see. Put ’em into store.

Where were you off to? Where were you going?

Well then we started we embarked in trucks. Went

28:30 up to the low level and reassembled up there and moved on. I just forget where we camped but we were then told where we were going. We were starting on the track. You’ve seen photographs of this by

29:00 now, beginning of the track and the four thousand steps on one part on one mountain.

The Kokoda Track?

Yeah. So we knew we were off to see the wizard, such as it was.

What had you heard about the Japanese fighting at that stage before going

29:30 **heading off on the Kokoda Track? What reports were coming back to you about the fighting?**

Ah the Coral Sea battle was in actually by then it was over. The Japanese had I think landed at Milne Bay. There were some big naval battles. The there was another one. Midway

30:00 had put a stopper on the Japanese naval expansion but we didn’t hear much of this. News trickled down that you know, “There’s a big battle out in the Pacific somewhere.” And the Japs and American navy were involved. Some heavy engagements.

30:30 **What was your briefing before you headed off on the Kokoda Track? What were you told that you had to do and where the Japanese were? What kind of intelligence were you given?**

Well all we knew we were going up the track and there was some boys had already been sent up there to Kokoda and there were other troops coming home from overseas

31:00 that we would expect to see behind us going up there. So we didn’t know too much about what to expect but after a little while we met them on the track. The Japanese had come down to within oh or they came down eventually within twenty miles of Moresby and

31:30 and we had been up the track and met up with ’em. They pushed us back until Iorobaiwa. That was the limit they got to. We had been there and were pushed off that mountain and we went back to Imita Ridge but then

32:00 they the Japs had a problem. Their lines of communication were lengthening. So they were getting short of supply I think and also as they’d been pushing hard and fast, they were very good at running quickly and living off the ground or living off the area they were in and

32:30 using any you know arms and ammunition captured. So anyhow they’d got down as far as Iorobaiwa and we held them at that point and then it was a matter of us having greater resources than their outpost. Cause they’d come from the coast over from Buna over the other side from Kokoda. So

33:00 it was then a matter of pushing them back from one ridge to the next and keep on going.

I wonder, that’s a really good sort of general overview, I wonder if you could just take us back and just I guess in a little bit more detail sort of walk us through the track I guess with you. You know what was the terrain like? How were the men coping with cause it’s obviously very steep and quite difficult terrain isn’t it?

Well some of it was, yeah.

Well could you maybe just sort of

33:30 **take us back to the beginning and just move a little more slowly just to sort of give us a more of a picture of your journey?**

Early in the piece we ran into the mountains and started to realise that the weather was cooler and we

were climbing all the time. In the

34:00 end we were up six and a half thousand feet. Wet and uncomfortable. Wet most of the time at night with a rain coat, not a rain coat a ground sheet, which had acted as a rain coat and a half a blanket. Half wet too but look the terrain mostly we were on for

34:30 the walking track connecting one village to another through there with going through a village sometimes or going by past a village.

What did these villages look like?

Well some of 'em were mostly they're grass huts anyway. Low to the ground. Might be in a village there might be oh, fifty or sixty I suppose.

35:00 Might be a hundred. What we could see, we wouldn't know whether we'd seen all the huts in that village or how many natives would be we didn't see many natives living there when we were going through. They'd get out a the way and so what we did find was the Japanese had stripped bananas, even young finger sized bananas

35:30 off the trees cause they were desperate for food, the Japanese, and they might have killed or taken hostage or whatever. Any food they could get they were taken. So the natives would know to get out of the way just in case they were hurt you know and a lot of the men folk anyway in as carriers.

36:00 So mostly it was walking through fairly close jungle. Some of the jungles were very close. You could hardly see you know ten yards ahead. That's the length of this room. Be often half this length anyway and so we would have to have a

36:30 couple of scouts. Any component would have to have scouts out in front in case we walked into an ambush. This is a scout's life was a very uncertain one too and quite a few scouts have been killed because they were the first to be seen, first to see the enemy and they were the first the enemy saw of us coming. So most often they'd be killed or

37:00 badly wounded. That would alert everybody that there's an action right on our doorstep now. Not on our doorstep but in front of us.

How did you move along the track? Were you in small groups or - can you just sort of talk me through how much space there is between you?

We usually have a small party out in front

37:30 and you have a couple of scouts ahead of that and perhaps you might have had a section do a reconnaissance. So they carefully steal ahead, listening carefully. Well the scouts are doing that to start with and sometimes the scouts can only be a short distance away

38:00 because it's so thick to see anywhere and all the time the main body is stretching out back. So you've got to have people alert to any sort of false movement. Sometimes you might think a branch falling or a bird flying through the air suddenly alerted to some movement up ahead. So you're

38:30 more carefully watching what might be ahead of you and everybody's on very much on alert, particularly a forward section. You might have the whole company behind the forward section with the scouts in front then the section of half a dozen men but the rest of the platoon coming behind that, which might be twenty or thirty men. That might be the leading platoon and if there's going to be an

39:00 encounter well they're the ones that are gonna start. Everybody then comes to a halt and the CO's got to determine where he's gonna put his troops. How to handle it you know. What to do at the time. Cause things can be different. Japs had a lot of snipers in trees. I was hit by a sniper and the job

39:30 of forward scout was not a happy one but everybody had to take it their turn at that.

Can I just ask you said that the Japanese had a tendency to run through the jungle and they were quite fast. How did the Australians move? Was it a slow quiet sort of thorough movement through the jungle or how was it?

Well we knew that we had an enemy up in front of us so we had to go

40:00 as best we could to not to get into not to run into an ambush because it was very easy to have an ambush. When the Japanese were moving they had bicycles. They also had horses back in the early part of their movement over the country but as they got higher and further ahead we didn't see,

40:30 they couldn't use bicycles so much because of the ground. The mud, the roots of trees. Bicycles were not really any good then. Horses were used for bring up some of their stuff but I didn't ever meet any horses but they did have some but that was back further over much

41:00 further ahead for us. There's not much more you could use to carry your stores or ammo up except the fuzzy wuzzies, see, and the Japs had used those but they used to race ahead until they met opposition.

Tape 5

00:30 **So the Japanese had bicycles and so forth?**

Well they I don't know how far they used those but it was largely on the other side of the island, near Kokoda itself or back towards the coast. So they used those where they could and they had used those with great success in Asia where they went they went racing

01:00 on and sometimes making a noise to attract fire and then if they attracted fire they'd learn where you were firing from and so they quickly assessed that situation and they had their troops onto you quickly. That was their pattern. I've forgotten now what I was what more I was going to say about that but

01:30 that was when they didn't have very much in front of them, see, no opposition. So they could move and even if the opposition were light they could make as much noise as they liked. Kick tins or make noise. Talk and make lots a noise and very often they would use forward scout, their forward scouts like that purposely making a noise to attract your attention and fire and then they'd

02:00 stop there and they'd know where you were and quickly go left and right and know your position and attack as quickly as possible. When you're in close contact of course you don't do that. You don't have room for that because you're close up together. You'd always have the troops would always have one

02:30 bullet in the spout. One up the spout and the safety catch on. If you had to put one in the spout you've got to pull the bolt back and then make a noise and that tells everybody where you are, mm. So you're moving as quietly as possible not making much noise. As little noise and going from vantage point to vantage point. The scouts might use that particularly for them to be able to see areas and

03:00 they wanted to get a better view of something or other. There might be an ambush point that they might have to watch from a bit and then signal the others to come on. So that's how we would move.

03:30 **So I think where we left off was towards in late September as you're you'd head heading up towards Iorobaiwa, which was the closest point to Port Moresby that the Japanese had reached.**

Correct.

Had they actually started retreated by the retreating by the time your battalion reached Iorobaiwa?

No they hadn't. They were wanting to be forceful at Iorobaiwa although they were getting thin, however they were causing us enough

04:00 problems. We beat them back from Iorobaiwa but they were only back to the next ridge and they had a mountain gun there and some heavy Woodpecker, they were called, heavy machine guns.

Do you recall how the situation was explained to you when you got to Iorobaiwa? What the as you reached the other units up there what how did they describe the situation?

Just that

04:30 the Japanese were coming down fast and we weren't able to hold them.

What sort of positions had they been able to establish?

They were on the ridge further back until they beat us off Iorobaiwa and we retreated back towards Moresby a bit. They took over Iorobaiwa and then as we were able to marshal more

05:00 troops we were able to push them off Iorobaiwa and then they went back. They fought in defence all the way as fiercely as they did in attack. So there was no giving up on their part. Their object was to win and die for the Emperor. That was all they were interested in. So human life was not a matter of them living or dying. If they

05:30 went back home and didn't win they were totally disgraced. So the families at home didn't want them back if they were in defeat. So they would rather be killed.

How would you describe the morale or the state of mind of the Australians when you met them at Iorobaiwa?

The morale was all right. We just our first real

06:00 contact so we were getting shot at all the time. I had a batman runner and he was to dig a slit trench for me when we got onto Iorobaiwa. My job then was to look after my sections and position them and all the rest of it. So his job was to be my runner and also to look after my slit trench. As we could as we didn't have any digging tools this was very difficult and we had to use our helmet or bayonet

06:30 to dig any sort of depression. Fortunately for me he was a good lad and he'd dig about four inches in his slit trench and two inches for me, which was absolutely useless of course, but what I did see from this

Woodpecker that the Japs were firing at us, a heavy machine gun, one bullet went through Bill's bloomers. They were short pants but he was lying on his

07:00 stomach in this trenches, it was getting a bit rough, and I was just happening to look and I saw this bullet go through the bit of material above his bottom. Tore a hole though that. So we were fairly close in. The Woodpecker was a heavy machine gun and not very much liked.

Colin how did you prepare your men for going in to face their first contact?

07:30 **Did you speak to them as a group or individually?**

Oh yes. On the way up of course we were fairly cohesive. I think I had a good team. I prided myself on having the best team in the battalion, platoon and I feel it was. They were all good fellas. We discussed our job, our roles there and

08:00 if anybody had any thoughts of wavering in focus on the job at hand we'd always tell 'em you know, "Well think what's happened to all the women and kids back in China and wherever the Japs have been," and the natives that we knew by then back in PNG. They were treating the natives very badly and so this was a spur

08:30 to our resolve to be as [Shakespeare's] Henry V, "Summon up your sinews. Hard favoured rage towards the enemy." And I think we were steeled in our focus, in our earnestness about getting to grips with the Japanese. That was what we had to do. We hated them from the rough treatment they'd

09:00 given out to all their enemy and we had no compunction. All we had to do was to kill the Japanese. That was our total focus. No other room. No room for other thoughts about homeland except that we were protecting them and we had to get rid of this terrible enemy that was in front of us. I had no worries about any of my boys being

09:30 uncertain as to our job or his part of the team. I was very proud of my boys.

Anger towards the enemy was an important motivator at that point?

Oh yes it was. Yeah. All the time and then not so long after that we had a couple of our boys lost and then found

10:00 them. They were found by the 2/33rd who were next door to us. They'd been forward scouts and both of them had had, one had both arms cut off and another had and then some flesh cut off his thigh. The other one had pieces of flesh off his backside and we also found a couple of pieces of human flesh wrapped in leaves in one of the Japanese

10:30 haversacks and then there was another one who was tied to a tree and had been bayoneted. These had been captured when we'd been pushed back. So the Japanese overran wounded fellas who might have been ambushed by a party and the others behind them unable to rescue them and so they might have our blokes might have been

11:00 swamped at the time by the Japanese and had to leave fellas who otherwise would have been carried back. I mean it was a point of honour that you took back your wounded but sometimes if your total time was taken up with Japanese getting all round you, you don't have time to do anything else but keep mobile and firing at the Japanese and that's how it was and then if you've got to pull out, you've got to pull out. If somebody's

11:30 wounded you don't know how badly but if you stop doctoring them you're gonna be shot at. Quick smart you're going to be dead but when I was shot, my company commander came down after a little while and I was hit by a sniper in my chest and out the back and my company commander came down, got my field dressing out. I don't know how long after that was but

12:00 he was shot by a sniper also, which separated his haversack from his back. It he was very lucky. It just went out through behind his back but cut off the strap that was holding his haversack on and blew that away. So that's what one would expect. Now one of the other boys managed to

12:30 get this sniper but at the same time you had to put up with it.

Just have to ask you about the discovery of the boys from your battalion who'd did you say that they'd been scouts? They'd been forward scouts, the ones that were shot?

Yeah.

And then who discovered that they'd had bits of flesh cut off them?

Oh actually it was the some boys from the 2/33rd Battalion, which were

13:00 more or less parallel going up the track with us and I think at that point we'd gone up so far and then they were, I can't say it was leap frogging but after that style of thing. We'd been pushed back. We'd had a team up ahead and they'd been ambushed and the there were two forward scouts had been shot,

13:30 both shot, and the boys their boys had to move back and keep moving back until we were reorganised.

The 33rd went past us and then found these two fellas on the ground that had been cut up. So at that point they didn't know who it who they were but they found their dog tags

14:00 and then found the from their NX [army state registration number] numbers who they belonged to, because we didn't have any distinguishing marks you know except one brigadier who still wore his red band around his hat, his cap. Not a helmet, his cap. Very visible but if you did that they you'd be the first to

14:30 be picked off so naturally you don't wear any distinguishing marks but everybody knows who you are.

And I mean presumably the Japanese were driven to such measures by starvation or -

Yes.

The fact that they were unable to get supplies up there.

Right.

Was that a problem that you encountered as well? That getting supplies the further up the ranges you went became increasingly difficult?

Yes it was. It was. All the time. That was it was the big thing but in their case, in the Japs' case,

15:00 they'd come further and further away from their source of supply and so as their lines of communication are thinning out ours were actually holding and being reinforced from supplies behind. That wasn't a continuous business of waiting for us to go forward and then they kitchens come up. We didn't have kitchens but the supplies of ammo and food stuffs

15:30 would have to come up by carriers or whatever. You know but it was that was a big consideration.

Now I presume there was an angry reaction to finding that the Australian soldiers had been cut up by the Japanese.

Oh yes.

Did does that anger at any point threaten people's sense? Does it is can it ever be dangerous for people to for anger to become too strong for troops (UNCLEAR)?

By that time we

16:00 we had enough experience you had to watch every foothold and the roots of course in most of the time up there the roots of trees where the track was the roots of trees all the way and mud too. A lot of the places it was quite even walking in through the mountains parts that were okay to walk

16:30 and you could walk quietly without making a noise but if you're carting grenades and rifles and machine guns over your shoulder you can't help but make a bit of noise but the forward scouts were the they're in the sitting spot. They're there to make contact with the enemy and signal back if they as soon as they see something.

17:00 Send word back and somebody responsible will come up and assess the situation, see, or else if they have to somebody's gonna shoot 'em in a half a second they've got to shoot first and be ready all the time with a loaded rifle.

You mentioned earlier that everyone in the platoon had to take their turn in the forward scouting position.

Mm.

How frequently would you rotate that position and how would you decide?

17:30 It would depend on first that the fellow was able to do it, that he didn't have a ruptured knee or a ankle or something and that he could get along quietly. That he was his health was reasonable but everybody had to do their turn. That's how it was.

18:00 I mean you put out there's the target you had to go out, be the first to see the enemy and so you want to do that and you can't slack. Nobody slacks for taking it easy. There's not much room for doing that. Everybody's got to take their fair share of it at risk you know. So nobody

18:30 really slacks off. Everybody's dependent on the other bloke and some might be more pally with another bloke. Like his mate, who would take a bit more care of each other because they're mates or they might one might say, "Oh I'll go.

19:00 What about you Bill? We go?" "Right." "Okay." So they go off as forward scouts or volunteer for a patrol but everybody's contributing. They're kicked in if they're a bit slack about volunteering. I mean there are volunteers and volunteers and everybody's a volunteer if they're told they're volunteered. So we didn't have any problem about that.

There were no experiences of desertion or cowardice within your

19:30 **platoon?**

No. No way. We were in it to fight. That's right. We might have been a bit reluctant when you're likely to be in a sticky situation but reluctance is not something you've got to think about. You might be dog tired and weary and wished the Bren gun didn't weigh so much but if you're got to

20:00 go you've got to go and there are no two ways about it. No seats on the side of the road to sit on. So you have to go when you do you know and they did. I won't say anything but praise for our blokes. We had come from good direction, good discipline and a CO who unfortunately for Colonel Paul I think his age told against him once we

20:30 got up from Moresby into the fighting around Iorobaiwa and so forth. I mean the life up there was one of beating the odds, the geography, the track. The sheer physical exertion and exhaustion all the time, even for him. He was older you see than we were. I mean most of us were in our twenties anyway and

21:00 he'd been in the First World War. Also our 2IC [Second in Command] had been in World War I and eventually even Bob Grantham, our 2IC who's a major, he had to give up but our CO said to the adjutant, "I won't say goodbye." There'd be tears in his eyes that he had to go back cause he just couldn't cope with it and I read that

21:30 he said he didn't want to be seen by the troops as falling down and not being able to stay with them. Cause he'd built 'em up and that's why we were a good unit and that's why we were sent up there. Half our boys were original militia personnel. It didn't matter whether you had an NX number or an N number,

22:00 you're all getting shot at equally and your life depended on the next bloke whatever whether he's a QX, NX or N number or what. We were all in it together. Some of the boys said when approached up there, there was a brigadier up there who said that those still with an N number should now volunteer to be

22:30 changed to NX numbers and labelled AIF. Some of the boys said, "You can go to hell. We've been fighting just the same as any and what's the difference?" You know instead of being looked at as second class citizens none of those boys are second class citizens but they said, "We don't want to fight outside Australia. We're here to fight within," and in New Guinea, that was included of course,

23:00 and some of 'em were very, very strong about this. So it wasn't a problem but half of us were AIF numbers, NX numbers, and the other half were N numbers and then after the New Guinea campaign the N numbers were put to another unit and our NX numbers transferred to the 2/3rd. So the 2nd original 3rd and the

23:30 2/3rd from the Middle East came back. Our NX numbers from the 1/3rd were now in the 2/3rd. So that sort of resolved everything but some of the boys were very brave, still in N numbers. We had one stretcher bearer who absolutely refused to go fighting and he wouldn't kill anybody but he was killed going out in a

24:00 dangerous situations. He did do that. Go out risking his life to bring back somebody who'd had to be left out there on his own.

Did you take up arms at some point up the track?

Oh I yes I had a rifle all the time. I'd be earlier I said I didn't have a pistol

Right, so you had a rifle the whole time?

A pistol, a .38 Smith and Wesson

24:30 was standard equipment for officers. Pistol's not much good but it's better if you're walking around and having to jump around. If you have to carry a rifle you can't be jumping around from place to place so readily but all officers, even if we had a pistol we carried a rifle, which is much

25:00 more satisfactory. A pistol's a sort of good from here or over there. I could aim and kill that fella there. If he's the other side of the garden out here I wouldn't be sure of killing somebody out there. If I had a rifle it'd be much better and also I had to take my turn carrying a Bren gun or a Tommy gun. They fire

25:30 .45 slugs. They're damned heavy and I did my turn of carrying, I'd six grenades I think in my pouch here and pockets (UNCLEAR) of ammo for the Tommy gun or for the Bren or rifle. So I was just the same as one

26:00 a the boys, yeah.

I'm interested in whether you had a I guess a personal block to get through in terms of firing and engaging with the enemy. Was that something that you

26:30 **had to …**

You mean a psychological barrier?

Yeah. When you came up to Iorobaiwa and actually faced with that first contact was there was

it difficult for you to launch -

To get over a reluctance to kill somebody?

Yeah.

It wasn't with them, no. I wouldn't do it with anybody else but at that time I had to hate them as much as I wanted my blokes to hate 'em too and that was our, that was

27:00 what we were there for and we had to be successful. So you know it's a bit of reluctance to kill somebody and you know you've just shot somebody and killed them but they smelt, the Japanese smelt and I couldn't stand that and we'd been in a position where I'd had to I was located to where they had used an area with

27:30 all their excreta, yellow excreta. That made me more than ever anxious to get rid of 'em, to kill 'em off. I didn't have any war like ambitions when I was growing up. I didn't have anything like that but having the smell of Japanese, and you could smell 'em, that was more distasteful.

28:00 So there's more reason to get rid of 'em.

Given the narrow nature of the track that you were working up, did it become difficult to for the CO to be coordinating you all the different sections? Did responsibility largely fall onto you to look after your own platoon and have your own plan of attack?

Well the CO was responding from the brigadier back a bit

28:30 trying to keep control of the whole situation or direct attack and movement of units. 'Course it's dependent on his colonels in charge of a battalion. The colonels we did have some maps. At my level we didn't have any and there were very few to start with. In fact none for us

29:00 except an overview of from ANGAU I think to start with. Those tracks are mainly used by the natives and the ANGAU patrol officers only use them now and again, you see, so there's no real need for any detailed map but there were mountain ridges after mountain ridges after mountain ridges and there were native villages here and there and different places and so they would have a limited use on

29:30 any of these tracks. Some of the tracks might only be wide enough for a man to walk through, walk along. The track itself could be from, say, a foot wide, a couple of feet wide. I'm talking those days. Sometimes it would widen out and sometimes the vegetation's thicker. So it's difficult to see where you're going half the time.

30:00 Most of the time we were going upwards but at the rate that we were going up for a longer period than we were going down but we were going up like this and then going down and that's how steep some of the mountains were and very difficult to traverse. So you couldn't mount much face to face. Where you got a point of advantage

30:30 like on a bit of a ridge or the topography showed that you could get round here or around there and the enemy were over here and you hoped that you would get behind them or at least you'd meet them, see, and they'd be expecting you to do the same as they were doing the same. So somewhere along the line you'd be fighting in semi open or hardly open country at all

31:00 or not densely forest areas but you could be I could be as close as you and not know you were there if you were doggo and I came upon you, as one of our boys was. He just dropped down in front of a Japanese.

31:30 Looked him straight in the eye and they were both so surprised. He was able to fire first. So you know that's how close it could be and the track never really very wide and you wouldn't put more than a couple of men most of the way but then they wouldn't be together. One would be a bit ahead of the other.

So it must have made coordinating twenty-eight men you had in your platoon quite

32:00 **a challenge when you could often not see much more than a few feet in front of you?**

Yeah well you've got to use your noggin.

What does that mean?

You've got to use your head. The two forward scouts, most times you're assuming that you're the leading company towards the enemy. They are out there. The rest of their section might be

32:30 four or five men behind them, close in behind, length of this room perhaps but behind that the rest a the platoon would be strung out behind. Not too strung out because you're depending on the leading boys to search out wherever they're going. Even if the forward scouts have kept going, they haven't seen anything but they might

33:00 be walking through an ambush and they might a been let to go through there and the Japs on the you

know that's a favourite thing. You've got to sort that one for yourself, how many you can engage, how many you expect and what the situation is.

So was a system of hand signals used to communicate?

Oh yes. That would depend on you and me. If I just put up my hand or put

33:30 three or four fingers or something like that my next bloke would understand what I'm saying. "Quiet."

And how would you communicate then back to the colonel, back to the CO? Would you have a would your batman be running messages back and forth?

Yeah. I'd have to go to my company commander first.

34:00 That would be my next responsible officer, company commander. So I'd have to decide what the situation demanded at the time but in any case somebody'd be deployed to go back to company and tell the company commander that we've struck some enemy up ahead and then

34:30 he would want to come up perhaps and get a closer look. He might a couple a hundred yards back or whatever. Depends where you are. You might be sent out on a patrol just half a dozen men or perhaps a fighting patrol of twenty-five or thirty men and they would go out and find out what they could.

And would the platoons and companies continue to leap frog one another so that there were different groups of men

35:00 **taking the lead all the way along the track?**

Oh it might be, yeah. Could be. Yes the company commander knows how much duty or heavy going one platoon has had and so he might say this, "You, I want you to take over this morning and you can go out. Keep me informed as to what you find. Let me know if there's

35:30 anything doing up ahead, any signs of enemy being anywhere." So and my platoon might be resting to one side of the track somewhere in a vantage point in case there's an attack from the enemy and they come in swamping the boys, our boys, on the track and they might we might be walking into an ambush but you've got to assess the situation. It's

36:00 changing all the time, you know. You might be going through an area, a narrow area, on the top of a range where you wouldn't have much opportunity to mount an ambush on either side but further up there could be grounds or areas which could be full of the enemy and just waiting for you to send your boys up and

36:30 you know they'll let so many through or shoot the leading fellas and all depends. It gets very fluid all the time until you get into a real stoush and then like we had different times, quite often but you know that was the name of the game.

So were you constantly calculating where you would go or how you would respond should you be attacked at any one time?

Oh yes. All the time.

So is that what kept your mind busy?

37:00 Oh yeah. You've got to, as a platoon commander you've got give orders to your corporals. Where to do what and if we're going up there everybody gets to know what's got to be done. If we meet a bit of light resistance up ahead well you might wait until they sort that out or if they call for reinforcements or send a runner back with

37:30 information. Then you'd assess the situation and take it from there.

How did your nerves cope with constantly being on edge or constantly I guess being under such tension? Is that something you just learnt to cope with or was there a point where you become exhausted with having to concentrate?

Mm, well it's exhausting. I mean if you don't think right or do the wrong

38:00 thing you're dead. So you want to minimise that opportunity for the other side all the time of course. Our job was to kill the enemy and this is what you want to do. I suppose self preservation is the first thing you're thinking about. The second thing very closely behind that is knocking off your enemy you know. If you keep those two things in mind you'll keep your

38:30 skin intact.

Is that something that you had to learn almost on the job I guess? Was it the balance between the tension and the need to be constantly on the look out versus being calm enough to have the endurance and calm enough to respond should you be faced with contact? Was that a difficult thing to juggle? Or manage in terms of the tension and the stress or the focus?

Mm. Well it's

39:00 just keeping calm in the situation as much as possible, as much as you can but you're alert to what's got to be done. If you meet up with a situation, well you either lie doggo and report back. Depends where they the enemy might be. They might be forward scouts from their units whatever and what the instructions are. You know sometimes the

39:30 colonel or the brigadier might want a searching patrol. It might be thirty men to go out and search the ridges and see what response you get and where there's response here or somewhere else and report back the situation, the strength of the enemy. So if you keep doing that then you

40:00 you're giving him information that he needs. He might have other ideas that you're not told about but he's the boss, the main boss that is in charge of everything but general speaking it's the battalion commander who's got to assess the situation and go for it. If we run into heavy going well then the company commander's got to be in charge, as

40:30 we did at Templeton's Crossing where I was hit we had four days of heavy fighting there. Two hundred, more than two hundred casualties went back to Myola.

Tape 6

00:31 **Colin I just wanted to ask you if there were any sustained periods where you weren't in contact with the Japanese? Or was it a continual rolling back over the ranges?**

Yeah, with other units we were there for a week or two or so depending on our casualties and the strength of the Japanese. The

01:00 number of troops coming back from the front who'd been wounded and we knew the numbers that were coming out of the front and the fact that we had to go up and also that we were getting tired. You get exhausted, that's no doubt about this. You've got sometimes fellas with fever. Lack of nourishment. Some got diarrhoea from that.

01:30 Some couldn't manage bully and biscuits, bully beef and biscuits and that was a pretty hard diet for some time but oh general exhaustion was the main killer apart from that constant with us, you do your job chasing the enemy. So you had to manage this and not only just our

02:00 section, my platoon or our company. Our battalion commander would be giving directions. He wanted that ridge clear or the brigadier had said you know he wants certain progress by the next few days or something like that. So we'd have to make a special effort to keep him from getting criticised up top. So all the time we were getting

02:30 pushed. General Macarthur was riding General Blamey. General MacArthur was the overall commander of the Pacific area and would have got rid of Blamey if he could have because he was talking to Prime Minister Curtin. Didn't want to know Blamey at all and so General Blamey to help protect himself, his position as CO of the Australian forces,

03:00 he had to go along with some of MacArthur's directives saying, "We're not getting enough progress. You can tell by the number the small number of men getting killed." That's the only criterion that he had. So neither of whom had been in the jungle. They didn't know, so. This was going on all the time, assessing the situation and

03:30 other being in contact and being glad to see the another unit coming by going through us.

Colin in terms of the way in which that role or the cycle continued of units replacing one another in the lead, how often would you be out in the lead? Would it be a matter of every couple of weeks or…?

Oh yes. We'd what would decide that would

04:00 be first of all the position of the enemy and whether they were dug in well and the ability of us to mount an effective attack on that position. We'd have to assess the with forward patrols once you establish that the enemy has well dug in or a strong position, wherever it is,

04:30 then you've got to deal with it. The CO's got to decide whether he's gonna send a platoon round this way and another one to go up that way. Another one in reserve and deal with that and to detect from that action how strong they are and whether there is more to it than what we've found so far. You know so if we've been doing this and if we've been a forward unit

05:00 for some time the brigadier might decide that the other progress is not being made quickly enough. Everybody wanted more progress from up top but he would say, "Well," you know, "x unit has been up forward for a few weeks. They've had a couple of nasty clashes," or,

05:30 "Give 'em, give them a rest for a few days and get this other one that's nearby and put that up in put

them up in front." Well they would go through us and then chase the enemy, see, after having a bit of rest.

What was the longest period you spent as a forward unit?

Oh god. We seemed to be up either attached to the 2/25th or the 2/33rd.

06:00 So we had elements some of our troops were attached to both of those other units so we weren't except at Mile, the first time we had a rest time there when we were at Mile ah number 2 and they were dropping supplies and I think we probably had about a week there.

06:30 Might have been a week or ten days but

Of rest?

It wouldn't have been any more than that.

That was a week or ten days of rest at Mile 2 is that what you're saying?

Mm.

And you spent the rest of the time

Might a been a week.

And you spent the rest of the time as a forward unit?

Um on and off alternating because it was not just a matter of going up the track as

07:00 going up there and finding an area over to the left on the particular ridge might be held by the enemy and we could handle that. The enemy seemed to be over here and the brigadier would say, "Righto I want the x, y unit y battalion over there. I want you to take that," and so we could be in parallel. If both those units were involved

07:30 you could say, "Righto x and y are involved. I want this third unit, battalion go through them and hit them there," you see. Depends on the man power available.

Did the Japanese have good quality I guess methods of creating their defensive positions?

08:00 **Do they have good quality defensive positions? Do they have good do they have tools that enabled them to create solid defensive positions?**

They did have some shovels, which we didn't have, but they were pretty keen on digging slit trenches and they did it very well and they worked hard and they were driven hard all too. All their commanders were hard driving and I think that the Japanese had

08:30 to succeed and we've got to remember this. When they went off to war they had to come back as heroes. If they didn't come back as heroes they didn't go home. That's the simple truth of the mater and some had even said, "Shoot me." You know, "Don't take me prisoner. Shoot me." I didn't ever hear that but that was their reason for being there.

Were you taking many prisoners as you pushed back across the ranges?

I didn't.

09:00 No. We got a further up we had although we had some other troops had captured a few I think some of our battalion I think we might have had four or five as I remember. There could a been others but they were pretty sick and taken, oh that's right. Two of my boys

09:30 took a prisoner back fairly early in the piece. I forgot. Whatever reason he was not wounded but very sick. So could a been dysentery in that case or you know they were taken back and fed and then you have to get some information from them. That was another thing. Any dead Japanese of course we searched

10:00 for information that might be helpful to intelligence back at brigade headquarters. That was always on our, that's what they do too.

Did you find anything ever find anything particularly surprising?

Only photographs of wives or sweethearts. Occasional wife with a baby or a couple of children.

10:30 Family photograph. Something like that but we couldn't read Japanese. It was all double Dutch to us. So all we could do was to just look at what it was and then send it back with or without the dead body. You know or with a living body. You know that was the best source of intelligence we had up there.

Did you make any

11:00 **surprising discoveries as you passed through Japanese defensive positions in terms of equipment?**

Not much about that. Once we discovered what sort of equipment they had, their rifles, ammo. What they dressed in. The two-toed thing or big toe and the other, you might know that.

11:30 Some slipper type a thing and their little boxes or bags of rice that they used to carry. Also they had socks, white socks. If they go in to heaven they had to have white socks on. So most of 'em had their perfectly white small socks and sometimes they

12:00 had put 'em on. Other times they were on them on their body somewhere. It's quite surprising. We didn't know anything about this but that was their pathway to heaven, these white socks. A few of 'em were knocked off by fellas who had worn out their socks. That was quite a nice feeling actually but yeah, they were much like any ordinary soldier I

12:30 think with most things. We got a few bits of information that looked as though intelligence could interpret. I don't know whether we had a Japanese interpreter in back in the back of brigade headquarters. Probably I don't know anything about that really. Might a been somebody in Port Moresby that could have interpreted some

13:00 Japanese writings and yeah. Not personally.

Would bodies of both the Australians and the Japanese be left as you moved through? Was there a unit that dealt with …?

Oh as much as possible. Australians certainly we'd make sure that they were buried and location noted in the company diary or platoon diary.

13:30 **When would you get an opportunity to bury them?**

Oh only after things settled down but I mean that would be as soon as possible. Be the following day or that day if time came and things quietened down and the man was really dead.

They'd be carried on stretchers would they until an opportunity arose?

Oh they might be buried where they

14:00 were you know. I mean we didn't carry stretcher bear stretcher for this purpose but if we could we'd carry a man he could be very much nearly dead. If there's any opportunity for him to be saved we'd certainly do everything possible to get him to medical attention, which means getting the MO

14:30 from your own unit or the next adjoining battalion. That's happened with me where I was wounded about nine o'clock in the morning and the MO from the next unit didn't arrive till after four o'clock in the afternoon, see, so that could be common thing. We'd lost our MO earlier and also our chaplain

15:00 and I was personally an Anglican and the MO from the next unit, that was the 2/33rd, Geoff Mutton, he went to Kings and he had a Catholic priest in the same unit. They didn't

15:30 get on too well to start with but once they were in action they became good friends and after I was hit they came over and he pronounced me dead, the MO, and then the priest gave me the last rites. So then the next morning I was taken back to and

I just want you I don't want to jump in there just yet Colin. So in terms of burying bodies that you did find

16:00 **was there a ceremony that was followed or a ritual that was followed?**

Oh yes, well that was mainly that was really the responsibility of the medical officer. He had to pronounce a man dead and then if possible, as there's no favouritism about rites to heaven or to whoever whichever part of heaven you went to, the priest

16:30 could come if it was a Catholic, Presbyterian or Salvation Army man. If the fellow was conscious enough to ask for a particular priest well that might be possible but generally whoever the religious man was in the unit he looked after all the dying.

How many was there a chaplain or a clergyman per

17:00 Unit.

Per Unit?

Battalion.

Per battalion.

Wherever possible, yeah.

He had quite a bit of distance to cover I suppose and a lot of responsibility and for the full battalion.

Oh yes. They were quite often exposed and sometimes fellas might be badly hit and calling for the priest

wanted to confess something

17:30 and the priest'd have to go to this fellow and give him the last rites or give him whatever ceremony was required for his religion and so some of the padres were exposed to quite dangerous situations. The enemy didn't worry about what his job was, as long as he was alive he was

18:00 there to be shot at you know. So that was how it was. Some of the doctors too you know were exposed to some very difficult situations tending fellas. Going out under fire. So those two between them would arrange for anybody to be buried. They had to certify that they were dead unless it wasn't possible.

Digging graves must have been difficult considering you didn't have

18:30 **shovels and you were talking about …?**

Yeah, I never had to dig a grave myself but shovels were not what we had and bayonets and helmets they were the two, steel helmets, were the two means of digging a grave. Well we had to report that of course and a man wouldn't be buried unless the say if you were one of mine it'd be

19:00 reported back to me that so and so was dead, he was quite dead, and I would report this back to my company commander and I'd leave my company commander to worry about getting somebody to bury the fellow because he would have some of the troops in reserve or somebody from another platoon. He could say, "Look, there's a bloke out at so and so's been killed over in so and so. We'll have to bury him."

19:30 But the MO's the one that decides a man is going to be buried or not on the spot but as he said, Geoff Mutton said, reporting to me he wasn't going to bury me until the troops had gone further forward because they would

20:00 you know be sorry that I'd been knocked off and he didn't want to upset them you know. It's better to think that somebody's you don't know where he is or what's happened to him rather than say, "Oh yeah he was knocked off this afternoon and he's now been buried." It's a bit dispiriting if a friend is just suddenly left and you're told you know, "Too bad, they buried him this afternoon."

20:30 **In seeing other casualties was there an injury that you feared the most? That you were most concerned about having inflicted upon you?**

No. You take your luck.

Were there Japanese weapons that you feared the most? Or disliked the sound of most?

No, I wasn't really afraid. I was just scared the whole time.

21:00 That's not quite true. You had to get used to it, whatever it was. They had little two inch mortars. They were a nuisance. They could cause damage. Our three inch mortars were much more drastic and if they lobbed in a fox hole you know half a dozen men could be blown out and all dead but they had a woodpecker, which was a heavy

21:30 machine gun. That'd blow a nasty hole in you and they had the oh .22 rifles and sometimes one injury could be drastic. Not as bad as a heavier one. Fellows might get his have his jaw hit here.

22:00 One bloke I know was hit in the jaw and the bullet went round here and out here. It didn't break his jaw. It just travelled round inside the flesh. Another one had his jaw just blown off to about here. So it doesn't matter what it is that hits you. They're all nasty. So there's no good worrying. No good worrying about what

22:30 might hit you cause then you you'd just be immobilised. So it's all the luck of the game. You've just got to be quicker on the draw.

Do you become quite fatalistic in that sort of environment?

In a sense you are fatalistic. It's not that you sort of say, "Well I'm going to be killed so

23:00 let's get on with it." That oh you feel you've got to be fatalistic about winning. That's what you've got to keep in your mind all the time, not worrying about what might happen to you. You've got to worry about winning and organising yourself and your men to win the situation, whatever happens.

Did the relationship between officers and their men change in

23:30 **battle? Was it different from in training? Was it was there a different relationship there?**

Ah can't talk about that really. I think some officers took longer to acclimatise to the drastic situation or the intense situation.

24:00 You know in peace time it's okay. You can be smart then when somebody gets really angry and starts shooting at you or you feel that the lead's coming round too fast and you see one or two dropping you don't have time for worrying about things. You've go to do what the response says you should. You know get out of the line of fire.

24:30 I mean get down on the ground or behind a tree or a log or whatever you know. I don't think I don't know of any officers that didn't cope with the situation. We'd learn what our duties were and Colonel Paul had been a good instructor and, yes. We had the honour of the unit to worry about

25:00 besides our own of course, yeah.

I guess I was just wondering about whether the dynamic between the troops and the officers changed given that the changed circumstances between training and actually being in combat? Was the relationship between officers and their men did that alter in any way?

Oh. If the men have off have confidence in their officer commanding either the platoon

25:30 or in our case a company commander, which who'd be captain. If we have confidence in them it continues straight through. I didn't have any instance, once or twice I might have been told to knock it off when I'm

26:00 encouraging fellas who've got blisters and eczema on their feet and no socks and I'm shoving a bayonet into their bum to keep going. Get up and keep moving. I mean you've got to get the whip out sometimes and you do it in a sensitive way. I don't mean you I don't think I was ever

26:30 really come the heavy. You've got to cajole them. "Come on boys," you know, "keep moving. Look at my boots," or you know, whatever. It's all a matter of handling your men. Knowing that they're gonna die for you or the country or whatever or sit down and start crying. It's too easy to sit down and start crying. So that's not on. Yeah. I had a lot of

27:00 praise for my blokes. I was sorry to leave them when I got shot. Yeah. I don't think the situation changed, no. I didn't experience anyway.

Did the men work more closely as a team under combat situations than they did during training?

They did what they had to. I think I instilled them all the time

27:30 it was team effort. We all relied on each other and that was the name of the game. So I don't remember any occasion at all where somebody wasn't doing what he was supposed to or making an effort to do it. He might have had some might have been pinned down somewhere. I didn't have any cause for complaint.

28:00 **Was platoon leader a lonely position?**

Well up to a point. Any leader's got a lonely position but you know you're dependent on in the company there are three platoons and you're dependent your company commander's dependent on you, you're dependent on the other two platoon commanders doing what they have to do.

28:30 You're dependent on the other companies and them doing I mean you get might get mixed up and be next to one or another. You're all dependent on each other. So things get sorted out if somebody is a bit slack about keeping up the pace or something like that, yeah. Sometimes that happens. You couldn't help that. Getting caught up a gully or

29:00 you know that you didn't know about.

Was there anyone in whom you could confide your concerns or things that were bothering you because obviously

Yes, your platoon sergeant. Now he's like 2IC of a platoon and he can direct any one of the sections and he knows what instructions you've been given. I mean the word might come down from the CO of the battalion

29:30 or your company commander, through your company commander, and that comes to platoon commander then his sergeant. The two working pretty closely together. You might take charge of two sections and the sergeant might take charge of one or two other. So you're both responsible but the lieutenant's responsible ultimately,

30:00 but a platoon sergeant's a very valuable boy.

(UNCLEAR)

Ultimately he earns his pips as he becomes an officer. Good sergeant's worth his weight in gold.

Is he valuable as a sounding board for ideas or concerns that you have as platoon leader?

Oh yes. Yes. You discuss that mostly most of the time but you are in charge,

30:30 as a platoon leader you're in charge of the platoon. It's your platoon, your responsibility. If the company commander issues a direction to you well it's to me. I then tell the sergeant what work we have to do. He and I will then talk to the platoon commanders or let the boys know in general, depending on how critical it is, but the sergeant's as good as the

31:00 platoon commander. Just that he doesn't get paid as much as the platoon commander.

Is he a bit older usually as well? The platoon sergeant older than the commander?

In my case my platoon sergeant was I think four years older than I was, such as whatever that meant at that time. I was then twenty-one. I think he was twenty-five. Twenty-four or twenty-five, so that didn't

31:30 really matter but I felt it's the, there were two of us who are both commissioned the same day and in the gazette I think Harry Bray appeared in the printing in the government gazette. I think he was ahead of me in the printing. So technically he was ahead but we were the two youngest in our unit.

32:00 So I felt I would like to have been four or five years older because those boys had had a bit more experience of life in general. We'd sort of virtually gone from school oh study into the army and we hadn't had enough, I felt myself I hadn't done as much experience of life as I would have liked. Cause I had married

32:30 fellas and some blokes with children and how do you assess this if you're out on a patrol and you've got to take a patrol out and if you have four fellas who are single. Another one engaged who's weeping every time he can about his lost girl back home and a couple of fellas who've children at home. You know so you've got to make a decision who gets which job.

33:00 Are you gonna expose this bloke or that bloke to go out and be forward scouts. "We know you mightn't come back but too bad, well I'll send a letter to your wife."

Would those things influence your decisions?

No, you've got to balance all that. Mm I can't make a wide decision or a statement on that. You've got to balance it. They

33:30 expect to be assuming the same risks as somebody else and if they're being pampered and not given the responsibility of being shot at, well then that's not fair on the other fellas. We're all in it together. So he's assuming that's why he's in the army. He's assuming this responsibility even though he has a family at home. Yeah, it's not a

34:00 decision you'd take lightly but I must say you do consider the situation.

And did seeing the Japanese soldiers the photos of their families did that have an impact on you or make you think about …?

Too bad mate. That's what it's got to be. No good thinking and becoming a bit maudlin about a family that he left behind.

34:30 We have families that have been left behind too. So that's it's all part a the game. It's not a game either. Too bad you're in the wrong position at the wrong time. So on with the next one. Where is it?

Could you describe the Australians as having a fighting style? Is there a style that you could describe?

Oh

35:00 fighting style. You have to assess the situation all the time. Australians are fairly individualistic as proved in World War I where was it General Bird would the I don't know whether that's right. No, anyhow in the battles of France in World War I

35:30 they were all head to head. Germans versus the allies. They lock in and they fight each other till they're exhausted and then whoever won that day had a glorious victory. "Only thirteen thousand dead yesterday but most of 'em were on the other side." You know that sort a thing? The Australians were more free and independent and I think pretty responsible. Not having fought with English

36:00 naval or Pommies in the army I can't talk for that but they have been in a lot of very difficult situations. The English do have a reputation for being stoic in situations where they've got to be dig in. They'll accept a situation longer as that was proved

36:30 in Europe in the First World War. The Australians are more independent. They require a bit more freedom in general. They require that from their officers and they assess things for themselves. They take orders. I don't imply that they're not accepting things as come down but they'll grizzle.

37:00 They'll make it known that they don't like something or other. General Blamey came up after an instruction from General MacArthur and he roasted one of the units back near Moresby and it's a famous quotation was that only rabbits get shot in the bum, in the backside. He was saying that the because

37:30 the Australian troops had retired back to Iorobaiwa and then had to give up to the Japanese and then Blamey came up and under threats from MacArthur that things were not going and we were not producing results in New Guinea, Blamey came up and made this comment at a parade ground

38:00 up outside Koitaki and said to one of the units there that he was dissatisfied they weren't doing a job and they weren't slacking and they were retreating and there was another name for them but only rabbits got shot in the bum and that's what was apparently happening with our troops and they were running away. Well I believe you could have cut

38:30 the air with a knife and the or the whole battalion nearly exploded at that because it was all hard yakka and Blamey and neither Blamey and MacArthur had been in New Guinea. They hadn't been up and down the mountains. Very few senior officers knew what it was like anyway. So it was a big learning curve but

39:00 Australians will do everything you want. I'm very proud of even young Australians now. I think despite all the fact that we have music that nobody else understands if you can call it music. All sorts a things. The average Australian bloke like yourself

39:30 say, I'm really very confident if something's got to be done I feel very confident that the Australian young men would cope with it, cope with any problem. I have a lot of faith in them. I've some grandchildren too and despite the fact that I don't understand some things

40:00 I'd still be happy enough for them to sort out any problems.

Tape 7

00:30 **You were speaking just on the end of that tape about the Australian fighting spirit in general I guess but I was just wondering more specifically how you'd describe the combat style on the Kokoda Trail? That fighting style.**

Oh, a style.

01:00 Now that's a bit hard. It's got to be adjusted to the situation to start with and in the basic situation each has got to know the capability of the other fellow and what he can do. The equipment that's he's carrying and one boy might be carrying a Tommy gun, which is a one man operated thing. A heavy

01:30 thing to you can use it in close quarters because it jumps around a lot. Takes a little bit of training and experience to hold those effectively. Another one might have a Bren gun and you might have, as we did, we had three Bren guns, one in each section and I think we had four Tommy guns.

02:00 Now it depends on what armament one fellow might have at the time. If you're one a my boys and you're carrying the Bren and it's a situation where he can use the Bren, which is about this long and heavy with a couple a legs and so forth, he's got to be able to he's got to be the one at that time to use it because he has it. Somebody else might have a Tommy gun if he hasn't. He might

02:30 that might be okay for him to use or else it might call for somebody to throw a couple of grenades. Well the grenades you might you need a bit of practice lobbing these and you get that only through practice. Lobbing anything. You lob them as far away from yourself as you can but they've got to do a job so if you can lob them where there are two or three Japs or into a fox hole

03:00 well you might be the one just in the situation there might be some trees or something else in front of somebody else. You can call on somebody over here, "The fox hole over there Fred," or whatever, till you put a couple of grenades into there. So it's a very flexible it's got to be that way and you've got to know who can do it. Some may be able to throw

03:30 a grenade very well. Some might throw a grenade but he wants half an acre to land it you know. Not quite as bad as that but some are more expert at doing some things than others and others are in better health or just more energetic. So it depends on who's going to contribute most to the situation at the time, yeah.

I guess when

04:00 **the terrain's quite thick with vegetation sometimes it might be quite dangerous to use grenades.**

Oh it is too.

Could you talk a bit about that?

It can bounce back and you're in a bit of strife then, yes but you've got to be able to throw it fully and straight you know to get where you want it to go. Yeah.

I guess the other thing I was wondering is that you were a platoon moving forward and so forth;

04:30 **how were the Japanese organised? Were they in small groups or were was there a platoon of Japanese? Do you know how they were set up?**

I suppose that's a relevant question. I can't remember. I probably knew at some stage the organisation structure.

But just as you came across them on the track like what how many did there

05:00 **appear to be at any one time? Like how were they sort of fighting you I guess?**

Well where possible they would dig into and make fox holes. They were very good at that where they felt they were in a defensive position. They did that you know particularly well over at Gona on the north side of PNG

05:30 and at Buna. There they were able to dig into the ground cause it was a lot of it was soft. They could dig into the ground even to the extent of being able for a man to be totally hidden and then they'd have a log or something above another log and they could look through there but in any case they could be their body could be totally not visible

06:00 to our men. They were pretty good at that and they did it wherever possible but of course if you dig fox holes like that you've got to expect to stay there for awhile and that's why you dig the fox holes, so you can inflict more action onto your enemy and be safe yourself. It might be just a hole in the ground that

06:30 has been dug or depression in the ground and then two or three could be there so that if you can lob a grenade into there you might kill three men and they'd be blown out when the grenade exploded. That's one reason why you're very careful about making sure that your grenade goes where you want it and not hits a branch just in front of you and bounces back

07:00 **So when you're moving along the Kokoda Track though you were sort of chasing them back weren't you at that point? So what how what was their fighting style in that instance? Like were there large numbers of them that you were encountering or was it how would you describe that?**

They were usually pretty active and mobile. They didn't carry as much armament as we did so they

07:30 were more able and they were small and they were more able to be not quite like rabbits but they seemed to appear quickly and that was because they carried light equipment, didn't have a great deal of food and they expected to win anyway. So they were being and they were being driven also. Their commanders were driving them all the way.

08:00 "You've got to die, die, die. Die for the emperor. Kill the enemy," and that was the reason. So we had numbers of Japanese they we might have met a patrol somewhere and there'd be a clash between two patrols and both perhaps draw back or one might pursue the other and kill quite a few. Mm but it depends a bit on the land and what

08:30 they intend. The position of land features and so forth where they where you can dominate the enemy coming up that way. So that might be good position to dig in there and then watch your flanks besides watching your front and

09:00 they might invest quite a few score of Japanese into those defensive positions and they'll fight pretty strongly against any attack. Depends a lot on the ground and what the commanders think is valuable and if they think this area's more valuable than something else they'll dig in and that's what they wanted

09:30 to do at Iorobaiwa outside Moresby and also Efogi and then Templeton's [Crossing]. Then over at Gona. They dug in there because we'd pushed them out of the mountains but they were still there on the north coast and they were very

10:00 strong there. Prepared positions, dug outs so that you really need the grenades or shells, mortar bombs to come down and hit right on the right spot you know. So depends on how much reserve they have, how much armament, how many troops they have to

10:30 put into a position. Lots very flexible how determined they are to stay there and not retreat. You know if they've been pushed back to certain positions well then they're going to stay there and they're determined to stay there, well we have to work on that of course but yeah you can't say the number in any particular circumstance is going to be expected.

11:00 It depends on how many troops they have at that point. So if they have plenty of troops they'll give you curry and they'll be everywhere and as you attack they'll assess what you're doing and then go to attack you. So it's a matter of then who wins that one.

Were the Australians outnumbered to the Japanese on the Kokoda Track? Could you talk about that, how many there were relative to

11:30 **how many Australians there were?**

Oh about ten to one I think for a lot of it. Could a been up to five thousand I have seen reports I think up to ten thousand Japanese landed there. They were always outnumbering us. You know and they were more expendable, that was the other thing.

12:00 **When you say that you mean that higher up thought that their troops were more expendable? Is that what you mean?**

Absolutely. Yes. That's how the regarded them because some of 'em they had some North Koreans there because Japan owned Korea at that time you might remember. After World War I, who owned Korea in those days?

12:30 Anyhow Japan owned Korea and after the wars World War II, World War I was settled Japan brought a lot of Korean marines and we met some of them. They brought them down. They were bigger than the ordinary ones. Stronger

13:00 and heavier and we couldn't understand why these fellas were Japanese at first when we first met them. Then we learned later on that that's who they were, Korean marines because things were getting tough. What was happening back in Japan was the emperor had two aspirants for the top job, the army and the navy.

13:30 The navy their navy had the air force I think. The navy had been badly beaten by the Americans. Battle of the Coral Sea put a stop to their expansion seawards and down to Australia and so it was time for the army in Japan to seek curry with the emperor. So the army were going

14:00 to win at any cost and become ingratiated with the, is that the right word? They were going to be in favour with the emperor. So they pushed in troops from all the troops they could and that was the top Japanese generals well in the top of top part of PNG when they brought in these marines

14:30 that they were fine, hard, very smart soldiers.

So you noticed a difference between the Korean marines and the Japanese?

We didn't have much time to think about it but we noted that like a lot of them at one time were bigger and heavier, yeah.

I was just wondering what the visibility's like up on the mountains when the vegetation's quite thick during the day? How much is it

15:00 **quite like how much can you see ahead? How dark is it?**

Oh some parts it's quite overhead. Joined. So you're not getting much or it's not getting allowing much sunlight through. The vegetation can be quite close and, as I said before,

15:30 before to Simon [interviewer], one of our fellas dropped down beside in front of a Japanese lying on the ground. So it's very hard to see people sometimes or even hear them. You know just round the corner a little bit. This corner here not further down I mean it's pretty close. So that varies and the vegetation varies.

16:00 A lot of those mountains where you see from an aerial view close tree cover all over the mountains, up and down and then you see a little spare space. Some of those spaces could be just a bit of open land for some reason or other. Natives might have cultivated it for a garden, something like that. Or there weren't too many open spaces.

16:30 At Myola there were and cause both Myola 1 and Myola 2 were ex-volcanoes. The top had been eroded and so the base of the volcano had been gathering dead grasses and so on for years and years. So they were

17:00 prospects for a landing ground for supplies. Odd places like that were different. Other places I suppose might have been native gardens at one time or were gardens at that time we didn't recognise but because we didn't have natives still living where we went in. They cleared out as long before we got there.

17:30 **I was just wondering if you could talk me through you know the sun's just about to go down and you've got to make some kind of camp for the night or whatever like how talk me through that.**

Well okay. Well to start with it depends on whether you have charge of the situation. If you're in close contact you've got to stay there and so you might just stay where you are on the ground.

18:00 You mightn't even have a much time to get a ground sheet, which is normally rolled on your pack at the back. You mightn't want to make too much movement before it's totally dark. That'd be one good sensible reason that you're going to be shot at if you, if you sit up you might be falling down dead if somebody else can see you. So you would stay

18:30 where you are until it was safe enough to unwind a half blanket, which you might have, and or your ground sheet and you stayed where you were. You have the ground sheet on top of you because it's gonna rain tonight. It rained every night, nearly every night and if you're out in the open well you were nowhere else. Always out in the open. Not we didn't have any shelters to go to but you'd be

19:00 out and wet. So that's about where we slept every night.

And would you eat most nights?

Oh yes. We we'd have a pack a tin of bully and some biscuits. The ideal was five days' supply, five days in your pack. It didn't always happen because we would run through that and then want more

19:30 supplies you see and sometimes they the cooks did come up behind us but they had to come up when it was safe enough to establish a barbecue. Not a barbecue as we know it. It was a matter of collecting wood and in fact if you wanted a hot drink sometimes you only

20:00 got it if you produced a good bit of burnable wood to put under the copper. I remember one fellow who was a Salvation Army man and half the boys that went over the track would remember this fellow. When we got there it must have been about five in the afternoon and he had a fire going boiling up this copper and making tea. He had a couple of

20:30 native assistants. Word was you had to find a piece of burnable wood before you got a mug of tea and that applied to everybody. So I was looking for a piece of burnable wood, which was getting further and further away from the copper.

Were the Salvos generally in safer areas or did would did they put themselves in amongst you know where it was hot as well?

21:00 Ah the Sallies have always had a reputation for being closer to the front line. They were in World War I. They were in our show too and consequently they have a better acceptance and better recognised from any troops, army anyway

21:30 that I know of. Doesn't matter what religion you might have been before, those boys were not there too close but oh mainly the Sallies were there in front of the others. I can't say because the fella that gave me the last rites was up there where it was dangerous too.

It seems like the Sallies made themselves a bit of a target though with making hot

22:00 **cups of tea and burning and you know fires and stuff. Was there did you ever hear of them coming to grief? The enemy doing anything to the Sallies?**

No, I don't think they were that far in front but they were behind close enough or to be useful where they were at this point I'm thinking about was a fair cleared area.

22:30 "Thank God for the Sallies," is an expression that's been known for years and I can't say I wasn't, I wasn't a Roman Catholic. We had one padre, an awfully nice bloke

23:00 before we went away. When we went away we had another one, I forget now what religion he was. Anyhow that didn't really matter very much and then the when we lost ours and I was hit the fella that came from the other unit he was Roman Catholic and gave me the last rites. Well I was very happy about that.

23:30 I didn't know it at the time but I was later and I finally found out where he was buried in Brisbane just to say, "Thank you," you know. So religion really didn't matter heavily with most troops except that they themselves were involved

24:00 with one faith of whatever and they needed comfort from that particular padre. Well the padre in charge of all the chaplain services in the army he varies from one year to another and that would be the same. There are all sorts of faiths represented in the army or navy and air force

24:30 too. So in any case they were good blokes. I really liked the one that I knew quite well earlier you know. I wished I'd met up with this fellow who gave me the last rites later on but he'd already died by the time I found out who he was, yeah.

I was just wondering if you

25:00 **ever had any contact at night with the enemy? Any fighting at night?**

Yeah you don't do that unless you have to but of course there's a searching going on and like we're in a position and you can hear 'rustle rustle' somewhere down in front of you, a position somewhere. Are there any patrols out? Do we know of any patrols that are out that have lost their way? That

25:30 can be that can happen or they've been out and they're coming back. They might have been out in the day and they've come back. They know where we are somewhere and they are looking for a friendly sound or something like that. So you have to decide whether you're going to drop a grenade down there or what. You hesitate about dropping a grenade of course because they might be one of your own

26:00 patrols. If they the enemy they're getting up into our territory you mightn't want to do anything either. You mightn't want to do anything but let them keep coming and then find out what you're going to do.

Is there any signal for say forward scouts coming back at night? Would they do some particular signal or anything?

Oh they'd just have there'd be an arrangement

26:30 (UNCLEAR) arrangement between the fellas that are there.

It'd be pretty scary coming back and not knowing if your own fellas might accidentally shoot you.

If they were expected, if the patrol knew that the boys at the back were expecting them back and they hadn't arrived that night even and they could see their way of course that could be the case. They'd feel safe enough but

27:00 they'd feel safer moving forward to where they thought our boys were coming home than going into enemy territory.

I was just wondering like obviously you know you endured a lot of hardship on the track. I was just wondering what was worse, the day time or the night time in terms of …?

Oh you night time was worse. There's not that much movement

27:30 at night for obvious reasons. You get more easily lost and you could might trip on a root and something like that and fall over. Lose your way and if it's pretty dark you're taking a bit risk unless for a specific purpose you wouldn't have more than a couple do a recce [reconnaissance] at night and they'd have to be happy about the ground they were going over.

28:00 I mean you could be heard like a herd of elephants going through some parts of the jungle. You wouldn't be able to go this far without making a racket enough to wake the dead as it were.

So how dark was it in the jungle? Could you not see your hand in front of your face? Could you describe?

Yeah. It can be like that here at night sometimes

28:30 can't it? Depends on yeah, if there's a lot of overhead foliage as most of it was in the jungle it is dark. You wouldn't go you wouldn't leave your position at all and you wouldn't be able to see people even getting close up you know from here to the kitchen. If you

29:00 had rustling going on you'd hope you'd hear some sort of happy word or a quiet whisper for identification purposes but then you don't whether you're being researched. The enemy's sending out a team to locate where you are because

29:30 they weren't putting as much value on their life. They wanted results and they sent these fellas out all the time.

Did you find that either yourself or your men found that your mind played tricks on you in the night?

Oh sometimes you hear noises and birds make a noise. Something rustles in the undergrowth,

30:00 yeah. I don't know what it might a been. Bandicoots or whatever else. I've forgotten now what sort of animals there were. Not so many of them but you hear rustling. Might have been a rat or a bird you know fossicking around. So yeah, you're listening with both ears wide open to identify what noises you hear. In the meantime you have a snooze.

30:30 **We'll start now the day that you were shot. I might just get you to talk me through that day from, say, the night before and the sun's coming up and you're packing up. Talk me through the day before it happened and then what happened after that? Where were you maybe?**

We were at Templeton's Crossing.

31:00 Outside Templeton's Crossing if I can describe it like that. Anyhow the Japanese had gone back, retreated and at Templeton's Crossing it was a major defensive position. They'd dug in well and be remember that they had gone from twenty miles outside Moresby back about fifty miles to Templeton's Crossing and

31:30 slowly going backwards. This wasn't very good for their reputation back home I imagine but the fact was it was a good defensive position and was going to hold off. So the next morning we were to attack and I had my platoon oh we had three companies and my

32:00 company commander had given me an area and the two other platoons. One was in reserve and one was over here, say. Anyhow we were in contact with the Japanese. We were firing at each other, shooting I should say, and a sniper got me

32:30 in the chest up here with an explosive bullet that goes through and out the back. So that knocked me off.

Where was this sniper? Where were the snipers positioned?

Oh up trees. They tied themselves into position up there because when they were shot they might fall down or at least they'd tumble. They might be held by the

33:00 sig wire, signals wire, that they'd tied themselves in with. So even if they were shot they could still get off a couple more rounds to a target you see. So what happened was, he was not detected by our boys for a minute or two and then we were all very busy.

33:30 My company commander had not been far away. He came down, got my field dressing out because I was rolling on the ground at this point and put one fore and aft and got me pad fixed up and the same sniper managed to fire at him. Separated his haversack from the strap that went over his shoulder, that's how close it was. He was very lucky and then he fired

34:00 again I think this fellow and one of our boys saw the smoke and got him. So that was that morning

Can I just ask, obviously it's a huge shock when you're hit. What could you describe how it feels to be shot in the chest?

Well it's like a real thump. That's not very expressive is it? Feels as though you've been hit by one of those forty tonne

34:30 trucks that race down the highway. It didn't stop you know and mm.

Is there a sound associated as well or is it just more of a feeling?

I can't remember what sort of sound I made but it's like a pretty hefty thump and it knocks the stuffing out of you and it's a shock to the nervous system when you,

35:00 when you're shot. Generally it's a shock to the nervous system too and that means people can do things with you and you don't feel it or in the case of an accident sometimes people have to use a knife or do something and they can do it and the people don't have any anaesthetic but they the victim doesn't know what's happening but that's a normal reaction of the body but

35:30 I once described it as a, if you know Sydney, their double-decker Bondi trams. Do you, Simon you might know, the big dreadnoughts that used to run out to Bondi? They were big trams and they used to run one after another. Weigh about forty tons each I think but anyhow that's about as descriptive I think

36:00 but anyhow I was there and the action went on all that day. My sergeant took over. He got the military medal on this event and then for the next three days we were digging the Japanese out well in the afternoon. I was there until late in the afternoon and nobody had been able to come to see how I was going because they were all very busy.

36:30 **So at this point you're just on your own with a bandage on yourself is that what it is? A wound to the chest is quite serious. How were you feeling? That you would get out of it or what were your thoughts in that long day? It must have felt like a very long day.**

Yes, I didn't think too much about it. I was interested in how things were going on and off but I was bleeding a lot

37:00 and I was just propped against a tree a bit. So I think by the afternoon I was probably in and out of consciousness and bleeding a lot. So at that point a couple a the boys thought I was dead. They got the MO from the adjoining unit, that was Geoff Mutton from Orange

37:30 from the 33rd. He came over and oh there's a letter there from him describing this whole thing, his reaction. He said he thought I was dead but in any case he'd patch me up. He got out what cat gut he call he had and sewed me up this entry hole here and then rolled me over and to his

38:00 horror, I don't know whether you want me to read his words but he saw this bloody great hole in the back and horror of horrors no more cat gut. He said, "I did have half a dozen rusty safety pins in the bottom of my pouch. So I did what I could to patch you up with the pins and then the priest gave you the last rites and we had to leave you."

38:30 Oh he got a couple of boongs to carry me back to our company headquarters and I was put with a couple of other boys who were dead, truly dead. Next morning they came, the doc came, and his sergeant said, "Hey sir this fella's just opened an eye." Meaning I was still alive. So in that case he said, "Oh well we'd better get a couple of get a few

39:00 boongs to carry him back to the forward aid post." And that was at Myola and that's where they took me for after two and a half days carry up hill and down ravines and this sort a thing.

Can I just ask before you move onto that, what was your breathing capacity like when you were up against the tree? Were you gasping for breath or had your lungs been damaged?

Ah this one here was.

39:30 I only have fifty per cent breathing now ever since but it went down like this you see. It exploded and I had a great mess inside. So bulky and lung tissue were all screwed up and I would be relying on this

one. I wasn't thinking too much about just what was going on inside except that I couldn't breathe too well.

And when they put you with the boys that were already

40:00 **dead, do you have any recollection of coming in and out of consciousness during that period before they said, "He's opened an eye"? What do you recall?**

Actually yes, I do. In the morning a couple of my boys came were beside me and I must have opened up a both eyes by then and became a little bit more conscious and one said

40:30 "I'll get you a smoke sir." And oh anyhow he rolled a smoke, cigarette and started it going and he gave it to me and was putting it up to my lips. I'd had smoked at that time and I took a one breath and gave it to him back and I said, "I don't think I'll be needing this mate. You keep it." So

41:00 yeah. So anyhow the I was then separated from the others, the other couple there were who were dead.

Tape 8

00:31 **We'll just finish we maybe we just start pick it up from where the fellow gave you a cigarette.**

Oh yes. Well I was very pleased there were four or five boys around that were some of my fellas and a couple of others and the fact that I was alive, I they I'd been discovered alive and I think there were three beside

01:00 me who were dead waiting for confirmation by the doctor that they were dead. So I was pretty pleased about that and very pleased to see my boys because all of yesterday was a non-event for me except now and again and so anyhow the doctor said, "We'll get some fuzzy wuzzies

01:30 to take you back." Now this meant eight or ten of the carriers involved because we had makeshift stretchers as you might imagine, tree branches and whatever. A couple of blanket pieces to be the stretcher part and it was rather difficult to

02:00 carry a stretcher up and down some a the mountainous parts. Anyhow it took about two and a half days for them to get me back to Myola, where the forward dressing station was. A couple of boys also came with me for some or most of the way who were walking wounded and so with the

02:30 team of fuzzy wuzzies they were able to he was able to talk to me, whoever it was. I've forgotten now and a couple of times I fell off the stretcher because the going was very tough. You know climbing up and down gullies as you can see by some of the photographs it's extremely tough for a man on his own looking after his own safety but these fellas doing a forty five degree or

03:00 steeper climb with a dead weight who couldn't do anything but groan I suppose wasn't terribly a happy situation but they did a absolutely marvellous job and when we got to the end of it

So can I just ask how much do you remember of the two days coming back?

I do remember some in

03:30 a vague sense. Not all of it was up and down steep gullies. There were some level parts and now and again I'd become conscious because I'd lost a lot of blood and near extinction at the time but I remember falling off the stretcher one time. I was told I'd dropped off a couple a times

04:00 and got back with some difficulty. Cause they had to wrap a piece of vine or something round me to hold me onto the stretcher and then at night when we stopped I was still on the stretcher, put on a level piece of ground and covered over with leaves to keep the rain off

04:30 and one of the boys saying who was there he remembered me asking for something through the night, probably water, even though it was raining but if you're losing a lot of blood you get thirsty I think. Anyhow I needed something, whatever it was.

Do you remember sounds at all? Like do you remember the fuzzy wuzzies talking or do you remember specific sounds at all? What kind of things did you hear?

05:00 They talk in their own language of course and you can't understand grunts or whatever. They don't have to talk too much. They're busy hanging onto their precarious perches with their feet half the time and other times watching that I don't fall off.

Did it feel like a dream at times?

Oh never thought of it as being a dream. It was

05:30 just an unhappy situation that I had to put up with.

How much pain were you in?

Oh a certain amount.

Was it more sort of I'm just trying to work out how conscious you were or whether you were really that aware of what was happening?

I was reasonably aware. Couldn't do anything of course. If you lose a lot of blood

06:00 you're not as energetic and so anyhow they were absolutely marvellous. If I moaned about or groaned they'd want to know if I was all right. Difficult talking. You can't really talk to them but you could they can sense what's wrong. They were as gentle as you could ever imagine a mother with a baby and

06:30 when we got to Myola they, it was in the afternoon and they put me down on the ground or somewhere and all I could do was to raise my hand and give 'em a smile and so say, "Thank you," you know. If I'd had a bucket full of sovereigns I'd have showered them. So anyhow the

07:00 doctors there were very good. They couldn't do much for me except cut a hole, another hole in my back here and put a piece of garden hose or something like it to drain the, to organise the drainage and I remember passing more than a litre one day when I was there for

07:30 ten or eleven days. So I don't know I suppose it was gradually going down but I was still sewed up at the back except for where this hose was. See my experience then was I was lucky because there were about twenty others all dangerously ill were hovering night and day for days on end.

08:00 I don't know what had happened to the other fellas but they we were all top and top wounded. To get out of that place, Myola, Myola is in the middle in between Kokoda air port and back at Moresby. Now we couldn't walk but some walking wounded could start walking back towards Moresby

08:30 because the Japanese were still in charge of Kokoda and until they were pushed out, the battle of Isurava had already taken place up there. That was the one where the biggest casualties and the greatest heroism was early in the piece but we couldn't go forward, the wounded couldn't go forward because the Japanese were in control of the area.

09:00 So they tried to bring in some little planes. There's a photograph here of a Stinson that an American lieutenant, Notsky, Notosky, Noratake. Um his name's there, he volunteered to bring in a Stinson single engine plane. Now the problem was for this planes the only area

09:30 they could land was in the volcanic the remains of the volcano at Myola and the ground there was soggy. So it was a quite an anxious moment landing a little plane onto a soggy ground, which he managed to do. The next problem at

10:00 six and a half thousand feet and thin air was to get out of there because he had to get up enough speed to lift off and the mountains fore and aft. So it was a very dicey situation.

So did the plane actually land or was it a sort of a

Yes.

Dropped landing or what? How

The plane did land.

It did land?

Yes. He was very lucky and we were very lucky that he started the planes

10:30 going because Australia had no planes fitted as ambulance planes at all and New Guinea is full of mountains and in some places you land a plane you run up hill like this and take off and you run down hill and there's a thousand, two or three thousand foot drop there at the other end if you run off. So that's how critical it was. Anyhow back to Myola, he managed to take up one fellow and

11:00 in the fuselage and then another and I was number eleven to go out. Now the day after I went out and they there were two of us that went out and you had to be lightweights to go out on a plane otherwise it was very difficult. The plane, at even at six and a half thousand feet at Myola the plane had to get up over the mountains at either end, which was over seven

11:30 thousand feet. Very critical. The thing that determined when the plane could come was getting off Moresby they had to wait until the clouds lifted off the aerodrome there so the plane could take off. The longer they had to wait there the longer clouds lifted up in the highlands. So that the longer they were lifting they were obscuring the mountains and

12:00 visibility on the ground. So that the plane delayed here could then not find where they're going to land. They could do this reasonably successfully with one trip. The second trip would take would be at about eleven o'clock in the morning and if they were too late they wouldn't be able to land up at Myola at all. I went out on the second trip with this other fellow who sat beside the pilot

12:30 and I was lying on my back in the fuselage. It took us fifty minutes to do that twenty minute flight and I was sweating as much as the pilot was I think at whatever altitude we were but we he was weaving around and I had a hole in the fuselage in the side of the plane that I was watching. When the sun shone through that hole I knew we were going in one direction

13:00 and when it wasn't we were going in another and this was happening quite often because his compass wouldn't work in the highlands, very magnetic, and anyhow we're weaving one place to another trying to get locate sign posts to get back to Moresby. A twenty minute ordinary flight took

13:30 fifty, so we were pleased.

What was scarier, coming on the stretcher with the fuzzy wuzzies or going on that plane to Moresby?

Well I was a bit better when I was on the plane and I'd been looking forward to that. I hadn't been looking forward to the first one but and I'd recovered somewhat. I think, oh they're not quite good to

14:00 measure one against the other. I can't really say one was better than the other. Anyhow we got back to Moresby and two days after arriving there, or before, the first Sisters were in to Moresby Hospital. They hadn't been allowed up there prior to that because they're kept back if there's a danger of being overrun by the Japanese.

14:30 So I was there for a couple of weeks, three weeks I think and miss just missed the Manunda. Got the next trip of the Manunda. Loaded on there and we went down to Bougainville to pick up other wounded and when we were down there the captain said one night, "We have evidence that or we've been warned there's a Japanese submarine in the vicinity

15:00 and I have two, I have an option to switch off all lights or to keep them on. According to the Geneva conference as a hospital ship I must keep all lights on. The Japanese have already sunk one hospital ship," which was the Centaur I think. "So I propose to leave them on. All walking

15:30 wounded will gather on the deck and stay there tonight during the night. Bed cases," including me, "will take their chance if they put a submarine torpedo into us." See, so the Japs came. Shone the light their searchlight onto us for about half an hour and everybody at that point's wondering, "Will they or won't they? Where can I dive if I'm gonna have to dive?"

16:00 They then went away and we continued there until the next morning I think and then went down to Bougainville, picked up some extra wounded. Ten or eleven days later we were in Brisbane and I went to Greenslopes Hospital. Ward 3, which was the last ward to be demolished and years later the

16:30 Sister who specialled me there I found lived only half a mile away from where I'd been living for thirty years at Kenmore and that's her photograph of a I have it somewhere.

So did you catch up with her thirty years later?

Yes. So we were living there then. In the meantime I was in Greenslopes Hospital

17:00 then I was flown down to Sydney. It took five and a half hours in a De Havilland DH86 plane, which was a converted to a hospital plane. We landed at Coffs Harbour half way there. I was in Greenslopes for Christmas. First thing in January went to Sydney and went down to 112th AGH at Concord.

What was your physical

17:30 **condition at that point?**

Oh not so good. I was on the danger, DI [Dangerously Ill] list. I think I was on the DI list all the time I was in Brisbane but I was in a ward of forty and we were all DI or SI [Seriously Ill] lists.

What does that mean? DI and SI?

Dangerously ill or seriously ill and if you're dangerously ill that means, "Family get in here quick cause

18:00 we think the old boy'll go off tonight." Yeah and so I drifted from DI to SI and

Do you recall seeing your family for the first time?

Ah yes I do. My father was in Canberra, and my mother, and Dad came up shortly after I arrived here because I hadn't been able to communicate

18:30 very well. One of the nurses in Moresby wrote for me on my behalf and I was then able to say I'd arrived in Greenslopes or send a telegram then. Mm. He came up shortly after anyway and my mother followed about a week later. I was there in Greenslopes until some time early January and then flown to

19:00 Sydney into Concord. We had some odd characters in Greenslopes. One poor fellow had a bullet in the neck and it shattered his spine right here. So he was totally paralysed and all he could do was to grunt

and move his eyes and mouth but he couldn't speak and he had a cage over his body and the table that's normally on hospital beds, you know the ones

19:30 on wheels. A fella came in one night into our ward. He'd been a Don R [Despatch Rider]. Ran into the back of a truck, despatch rider. About midnight when he was coming out of the anaesthetic he had his only his pyjama coat on and an arm like this in plaster. We had a little nurse, night time Sister. She must a been about five feet high and weighed as much and she

20:00 was trying to quieten him down and he was coming out of the anaesthetic and next thing he jumped up, he had a table over the bed. He jumped up thrashing around unable to not knowing what he was doing. Pushed his table over the poor fellow with the bullet in the neck and the whole thing crashed to the ground. Talk about pandemonium. By this time the whole ward was awake.

20:30 Everybody calling out to whoever was available, "Where are the orderlies?" And oh we'll never forget this. Two tables of the bowls of fruit and whatever on crashed to the ground and this cage over this poor fella that was, I think that must a been on the ground too but the poor fella was absolutely terrified. He couldn't do a thing and he I remember particularly his eyes

21:00 looking in terror that he couldn't do a thing except try and hope that it would all go away. He died a couple a days later but yeah, it was a highly humorous thing at the time. This boy screaming out his head and this poor little nurse, he hit her not knowing what he was doing with his arm in plaster and it flattened her and she went under the bed next

21:30 so pandemonium. Anyhow that was Greenslopes. They were wonderful people and the girl, her name's Joffrett who looked after me, specialled me, I was overjoyed to catch up with her. Went to Sydney and the surgeons down there said, "Oh."

22:00 As they wrote to Geoff Mutton they didn't think much of his handy work as a surgeon and he reminded me of this and told me later on.

That was because of the safety pins, is that what you're talking about?

Yeah. Mm.

So you still had the safety pins in?

Apparently, yes. I haven't been able to find out where they were taken out and I can't

22:30 because they were in a different oh they were partly in the exit wound, which was considerable, and I had a this tube lower down. They'd opened me up there, put this tube with a flange on it, like a piece of garden hose to take all the drainage. You see I was still rotting to pieces inside and yeah, they said they

23:00 didn't think much of his handy work. So I was there all that year. That was '43.

It must have been hard it must have gotten you down a bit being in hospital for a whole year. Did do you recall if it affected you?

I was let out to the convalescent home at Waverley for awhile but then, that was for a week I think. It was safe enough for me to be out but I wasn't going round the town or anything

23:30 and in fact I did go into town one day six months or more after getting in there and I just managed to get into David Jones in George Street, have a cup of coffee and get back on the train. Go home. I was absolutely exhausted as you would be if you'd been in bed you know. So anyhow

Were you able to keep yourself mentally sort of active? Like how what things could you do?

24:00 Well I was fond of history and I read all sorts of books and a couple of law books. I was going to do economics also and so I read more general books of that sort. Educational books anyway. So at the end of the year they said

24:30 "Well you can go home now and your local doctor can look after you." Well I was home for that Christmas and then I was able to go back to study. I was in St Paul's College at the university in Sydney and I arrived back there after a couple of months at home I think. Oh in the meantime I'd been

25:00 in Goulburn. Goulburn had a psychiatry hospital and the army had taken that over as a general hospital and psychiatric type hospital. I'd gone home to Canberra, got sick because I was still (UNCLEAR) inside my chest and I didn't have the tube to drain all this stuff away and they thought it said that it I'd be okay, which I wasn't but it wasn't

25:30 healing round there and I was building up inside. So the local doctor said, "Well you'd better get back to hospital tomorrow. Go down to Goulburn. That's the nearest army hospital." I met a couple a mates down there who were in there for psychiatric reasons, much to my surprise.

Were they shell shocked?

Yes. Yeah. So

26:00 they were both responsible people. One was the son who'd been at school at the same time as myself and his father was a very senior man in the Commonwealth service. Top senior I mean and quite a bright boy. Anyhow he'd packed it in somehow and he was down there for treatment.

26:30 **Was he still able to talk to you?**

Oh yeah. Didn't want to talk too much and I wasn't feeling very bright myself. So he was in another unit. So we didn't have a great deal to talk about, both being sick. So after being a week there I went home and then I was sent back to Greenslopes ah to

27:00 Concord 113th AGH. Yeah. So I was there for another six months, eight months before I got out again.

Were you still losing your fluid?

Yeah. So every couple of months they'd open me up and do a bit of exploration. See if they could hose out what was the problem. Cause I still had bits of

27:30 bone and so inside that was rotting away and too difficult to get at cause it was when it went in it was right near my heart. So it damage, mm. So

So how did they stop that problem eventually?

Oh penicillin I think. It wasn't available in quantity until that year in Australia.

28:00 When they invented penicillin the limited supply, which was virtually teaspoons of the original penicillin but then they were developing it in England and the what they had to spare as they developed a supply had to go to the troops at the front wherever they were what you know very seriously

28:30 wounded. So that was all right. Then it slowly came out to Australia. So what happened next? I'm up to '44. '45 I was back in Concord. '45, '46 is half of '46 and then they said, "Well you can go out now. You can go home." Ha ha ha. You know I didn't

29:00 believe it then either. So I left. I went back, I was studying for the rest of that year, not doing the subjects I wanted but what I could study. Mainly some law and economics.

29:30 I couldn't do what I wanted. I had hoped to be a chemical engineer and the I did one year of chemistry but it was irritating my chest and I was in pain all the time.

How did you feel about your future at this point?

Oh little bit dismal. Yeah, I didn't know where I was

30:00 heading because I didn't know after two or three years it was very difficult to form a conclusion as to where you're gonna finish up. You know you mightn't be, mightn't have lost a leg and you know, "Well I don't have a leg. So I know I don't have a leg," but where it's not getting taken care of and

30:30 getting tidied up, cleaned up. It wasn't the fault of the doctors. It was just that we didn't seem to get to it. So they had to open up every couple of months to see whether the leakage would stop. If it didn't stop, well they hadn't done enough to do whatever it was but it's a rather difficult area to probe around in. So I had to be rather philosophical about all this.

31:00 **What kept you going in those moments when you did feel a bit low?**

Ah I'm not quite sure but I knew I'd get I felt I'd get there some time but I had no control over anything really except filling in time reading good books. Did a bit of weaving. Scarves and making belts and other things like that.

31:30 Physiotherapy's good and occupational therapy was there and the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment] used to come round with books. They were very good and find a book if they could that you wanted. So I didn't waste too much time.

When you say that you knew you'd get there somehow, that you'd eventually get well, did you have that feeling from the moment you were shot and on that coming down the mountains on that stretcher? Like did you have that will to

32:00 **live the whole time through your recovery?**

Ah I just had a feeling, "I'll get there." You don't think about it too much. You can become despondent if you want to but you've got to say, "Well," you know. Different ones I heard of course, different ones that I'd known that were dead, had died

32:30 and a good pal a mine had lost both his legs at this point. He was shot in both legs. They took off one. He came back to Sydney to Baulkham Hills Hospital. That's Ted Young. I've got a an article on him in here and he said, "I don't want to live if I'm gonna lose my second leg. I won't let you take it off." Well he had two children,

33:00 two young kids and a wife and he told 'em when he went back for another clean up on his stump and

they said, “Well looks like gangrene’s setting into this one too.” Anyhow he said, “I won’t let you take it off.” Anyhow the next morning they did just that when he went into the theatre for tidying up the first leg and he put on a turn when he found his leg wasn’t there.

33:30 So I used to think of Ted very often and if I ever felt miserable or sorry for myself I’d think of this poor bugger who was a great runner and a good footballer and anyhow he only died a year ago but however I used to think of him. So what did I have to whinge about? You know he’s a good

34:00 icon if you like.

Was it hard being in the hospital and seeing all these damaged men around you having you were all in the prime of your lives when you went to fight and then coming back and did you have a sense of sadness or knowing about that that was about that at all?

I’m not sure, what’s the question again?

When you looked around the hospital and you saw you know these young boys

34:30 **that had been through so much was you never in a million years would you probably have thought that that would happen when you left to go fighting when you were all so fit and strong. I just wondered**

How I felt?

What it was like? How you felt?

I didn’t worry too much when I was in Concord. There were fellas coming in with all sorts of problems. They were sick or have (UNCLEAR) or they’d been shot in an arm or

35:00 whatever. Some of ’em were very serious and one bloke in our ward shot in the pelvis on went through his bladder and he was in strife for about six months. They were trying to fix him up and stop the infection but he slowly died and he had a lovely girl. He wasn’t married but they were going to be married and she used to come out every day and poor old Church, Churchill was his name,

35:30 he slowly got worse and so they would a been good pair. Lovely both of ’em and one of our officers while I was away and I was in Concord he was up north somewhere at this point. A fellow came in one day. His face had been

36:00 bashed up so badly. It was one of our boys and I didn’t recognise him, one of our officers, and after a few days I asked who this fella was. Lieutenant So and So, ah Gable. Phil Gable. Anyhow after he was patched up and after about a week I was able to talk to him. He told me what had happened.

36:30 While he was away some thugs wanted the unit where his wife was living and she was highly pregnant about this time and they’d come up and told her that they wanted her out like as of now and she said, “Oh but I can’t leave go from here. I’m,” you know, “I need this place.” So they virtually said, “Well you either get out lady or I we’ll toss ya out.” So they gave her a bash over

37:00 the head and pushed her down the stairs just as a reminder that they meant business. So somehow she got a message to Phil Gable up north somewhere. He came home. When the thug came round the next time Phil virtually said, “You can’t do that to my wife.” He said, “You watch me.” So he bashed him. Knocked him to the ground and smashed his face into the floor. Down the stairs

37:30 on concrete and this was the face that I saw come into Concord. I just couldn’t believe that it was him. At this point they’d cleaned up his face. All swollen. His eyes hardly looking out and there was his name and army number. So I learned the story. These are just one of the little things. So I used to think, I was single. I didn’t have a wife.

38:00 I didn’t I hadn’t got emotionally involved with any girl. I knew had a feeling that I was going to be hurt or somehow damaged but that was quite incidental to fellas like him or other boys that had a wife and a couple a kids at home. So I used to think, “Be thankful for what you’ve got.”

38:30 **Did you ever sort of get a sense that either yourself or some men felt angry? Like that the sort of I guess part of the grieving process of being hurt and having fought for your country and then coming back? Was there any sense of anger at the situation at all?**

Oh not anger. Just at the situation. There was, not difficult to cope with so much. I

39:00 was never scared of a situation but I didn’t think I had a right to feel too unhappy because I focused on the fellows who were worse off and counting your blessings and saying, “Oh well we’re going down to theatre again tomorrow,” you know, “Let’s hope we get it right.” And I had visiting surgeons.

39:30 There’s the CO of the hospital, Colonel Ken Starr, who’s a top surgeon in Sydney. Lowey Lowenstein, whose brother was a professor of surgery at Sydney University, and he was a top surgeon and another one, Group Captain Huey Pope. He was a top kidney man recognised in Sydney. So I had the top specialists coming round once a week

40:00 at for some time on and off all the time for a year and being a bit sorry that they hadn't fixed me up, especially Huey Pope, whom I knew. I subsequently had his son-in-law to be put in a two bedder with me. I can talk about this now. He tried to …

Tape 9

00:31 **I just wanted to check in with you, in amongst your hospitalisation of course the war came to an end.**

Yes.

Do you remember hearing about victory in Europe?

I'm sure I do, I just can't recall.

And what about then -

Ah I oh I remember my cousin

01:00 coming back from Singapore. He was one of those that was released from hospital over there. He was shot in the knee, in the just below the knee. He was in the ward in the hospital in Singapore Hospital when the Japs came through bayoneting all the patients that were in bed and Bill was able to get out of his bed and he hid in the broom cupboard. He had to get out of there of course

01:30 after they'd gone through and he couldn't stay in that broom cupboard all the time or couldn't escape either, cause the Japs had totally occupied the hospital but he just recently lost his leg last year. He lives down at Exeter near Bowral. And he came into that hospital

02:00 when I was there. That was in '45 I think. Yeah.

Do you remember hearing about the bomb dropping over Hiroshima?

Mm. Where was I? Can't recall. I'd be in Concord Hospital.

Do you know what the reaction was around you in the ward?

Oh tremendous. Sort of lifted a cloud off everybody, yeah. Even though things were going our way

02:30 then you didn't know what we didn't know what the Japanese might come up with but because the American might in the Pacific was very heavy and all that. They'd had some big battles, Guadalcanal and Okinawa you know these places and they had a tremendous amount of armament in the Pacific. Japan was still

03:00 fighting, yeah. So it was a great thrill when that happened and then when Billy arrived home we had an influx of all the POWs [Prisoners of War] who needed, oh well everybody had to be checked in the hospital at Concord I think. I don't know whether they sent any to other hospitals but anyhow all the family were there to

03:30 greet him and couldn't do much until he'd been through this system that day. However he's otherwise healthy now.

Did at the time of finding out about victory did it feel like it had been worth all the effort and loss and pain for you?

Oh well whether it was worth all the

04:00 pain and loss we did we couldn't think like that and it happened. Irrespective of whether we wanted it the war came. We were involved. Now all we were thinking about getting back into civvie life, civilian life, and doing what we could. Like me. I'd, I had my career changed.

04:30 My mate, Ted, was still getting over a loss of a couple of legs. Bill was part of a family with a quite a large factory in the food business and he wasn't in a position to take over a senior job in that when his father died. It was too soon for him to assume the responsibility.

05:00 So another brother took over that job but all around everybody was wanting to get on and do something. You know it had all been a waste, a personal waste of time we felt. At one we didn't really think that we shouldn't have been there. Of course we should have it was just that you think now, "Oh five or six years

05:30 where am I? I've got all this to make up." So the thing was a mad race to get on and achieve something and get there. Mm. So eventually I left Concord in 1947 was the last time I was out there and the one of the surgeons, Lowey Lowenstein I think, signed

06:00 the certificate for me to be entered in for another operation and after that I was free. I did have malaria,

which had seemed to have been coming on. I have a fever every now and again and even after I left, I was married in 1948 and a couple a times I had quite a fever in 1948. So that was from 1942, if I'd been bitten about

06:30 that time, right through to 1948 but one of my company commanders had, oh what's the name a that? Blackwater fever and he'd retired up to Coolum or he was living up at Coolum, got a fever, sweated and sweated and sweated over about ten or eleven days and

07:00 just expired. They changed his sheets a dozen times one day he was perspiring, sweating so much but that was when he passed on. So can either think oh well a great deal of things you might have done yourself but it wasn't possible. World situation wasn't there for you to do all these things and in any case everybody else was in the

07:30 same boat so stop whinging and get on with it.

When were you discharged officially from the army?

Ah '44. Yeah and then I went straight into repatriation. Veteran affairs was that later that became veteran affairs later on, yeah but I was I had the same attention -

(UNCLEAR) was

08:00 **it a scheme**

Pardon?

Was it a scheme? Is that what you mean? You went to a repatriation scheme to be supported?

No. I still had all my medicals paid for and that sort a thing and it was only political reconstruction that changed that department into veteran affairs

08:30 department. It evolved better as time went on so that was okay.

So you were supported in terms of your medical bills and obviously you stayed at the AGH for a couple a years

Yeah, yes.

After that.

Mm.

Were you also supported in your retraining and in your studies?

Yes. I applied for Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme and as a student I think we got six pounds a week,

09:00 which was pretty good going. So while I was studying I got that. When I went into hospital I think I was under the care of the hospital like any other army person would be. They paid everything. So in that respect I was not bereft of some support or attention,

09:30 care and attention. I will say they were marvellous. I've never had anything to say but praise for all the care I had. I'd like to make a point of that in this interview too. I think they've been marvellous and the attention to Australian wounded wherever they came from or whatever field of action, my experience has been always positive

10:00 and one to say thanks for. Even now too. Later I you know after getting out of Concord I went to more study. I was offered the job manufacturing in a manufacturing concern by some people I knew in Sydney and I was there for a couple of years

10:30 as a manager of this factory. I wanted to build things and or have a thing in the back a my mind anyway, one thing and another and I'd been so disjointed in what I was doing for the last few years since seven or eight years I was not too sure just where I was going to finish up. So I met my wife in Katoomba.

11:00 I was in college, in university in Sydney. For a long weekend five of us went up there for a bit of a rorting weekend, five students. My wife had come from Perth with her sister. We met up there and on a year later, 1948 we married. So that was another start in my life.

11:30 After a bit I was not so well and she had a thyroid condition. She came from Western Australia. Not totally happy with living in Sydney because in those days Perth and Brisbane were like big country towns more than anything. We came up here for a holiday to Brisbane. Decided to come back here. I was having trouble breathing in Sydney. Too much wheezing for

12:00 the smog and humidity in at times in Sydney. Anyhow it was a lot happier up here. So we came up here and stayed. I joined an engineering company up here and was with them for a few years. I was promoted down to Sydney as Sydney manager and Australian sales manager

12:30 but the company was in Adelaide and I had a lot of travelling to do. This didn't suit me physically. I was

having too much trouble with one lung virtually okay and the other one problematic. Too much travel was getting at me. I resigned from that and joined another company, an engineering company, and

13:00 became rep a representative for a French water treatment plant, ah company. They had six hundred in the head office in Paris and I was the representative for Queensland-Northern Territory. So our main job was water purification and research and it was quite a new adventure. I was outside I found sitting over a desk

13:30 for long periods used to be quite ah what? Made me feel lethargic cause I wasn't getting enough breath and I had to get up every now and again and go walking. So being not dependent on the telephone or having to talk to somebody and do reports all the time was, that's

14:00 somebody else's demand, so I was able to be my own boss in the sense that I could go and visit plants and people that had to have jobs done and so forth and bit of travel and I was interested in the French situation. It was quite good. We when we were doing larger construction jobs I'd have some of the boys come out from Paris.

14:30 They'd send their specialists out. So we got on well with those and I had a couple of visits over there. So that was good and after ten years I decided I'd had enough of that and I joined another an American company, international engineering company then too. We were making a mineralisation

15:00 equipment for big mining projects. That was in line with my original thoughts about chemical engineering and so forth. So after nine or ten years of that it was time to knock off work. I had two children. We had two girls, both of whom have graduated science honours and one's a

15:30 an environmentalist. The other's a bio chemist. The second one is, the old one edited the report of the Queensland institute of mining, of medical research a year ago. Rosemary's quite a bright girl and …

How would you feel if they wanted to enlist in the services?

If they did? If the girls did? Depends what they wanted to enlist

16:00 in of course. Both of 'em have children and they're old enough to do whatever they want but one's married to a dentist. Rosemary's married to a computer specialist. He's senior consultant fellow in the computer business. I don't think that question would arise but one a the boys, Liz the younger

16:30 one has two small girls, ten and thirteen. Rosemary, the other has four children, one daughter and three boys and one of them's gone into this aerospace engineering thing. The others are computer whizzes. So that's where they are. If they if we had a war I think they'd be too old. If my grandchildren only two that

17:00 could think about that. If they wanted to do it that's okay. I don't have any control. I might give them some good advice perhaps.

What would that advice be?

Oh ho ho ho. Mm.

If they came to you determined to -

Yeah.

Go to the Middle East and fight?

Oh you're asking

17:30 me a hard one there but they're not through education yet. I haven't thought of that. I'll tell you tomorrow. How 'bout that? Now what else can I tell ya?

We've heard that your obviously your health was adversely affected in the years following the war.

Yeah.

But did your military experience and war time experience benefit you in your career? Did you

18:00 **learn skills or learn ways of carrying yourself that assisted you in your later years?**

No. Only handling people I think. If I learned anything it might have been that. Yes. I can handle people pretty well. Mostly get done what we have to do. Yeah. I think that's the,

18:30 I don't think learning to fire a machine gun or march men up and down helped me much more than just general training in life.

What about from your illness? Have you learnt to, I don't know, have you learnt a patience or a tolerance for pain and discomfort or sense of endurance from those,

19:00 **from your experiences? From your health problems?**

I think yes. My mother asked me one time the same question. She said, “One thing you’ve learnt out of all this is endurance and perseverance.” Putting up with it and being able to cope with it. You know you can put up with pain

19:30 if you’re operated on and that sort a thing but to it means much the same I suppose the way you look at it but perseverance. Never give up. That’s what our motto was up in the jungle climbing those stairs, those terrible stairs and up and up and up and dragging all the stuff on your back.

20:00 You know like a bag of cement. Everybody had a bag of cement on their back but we had to keep moving. I had to write an article for one of the army journals and I said the main thing that we had to remember was keep moving. That was the order from up top. Keep breathing was the personal requirement. Stay on your feet and keep breathing,

20:30 yeah and that’s about what it was. I think in that respect we learned something. I’m sure I did. Never give up. Never die. Never give up. If you give up you’re dead.

Were there any fundamental changes in the way you saw yourself as a result of the war? Were there any fundamental shifts in your personality?

21:00 I suppose I had a good lesson in mixing with and being with all ranks of fellows. Not so much females with fellas in the army and our war experience and I think everybody in their in the war

21:30 going through sustained or continuous lot of battling on and staying with it would agree with that. That you learn to put up with what you had to put up with, do get better what could be made better but accept the fact that you

22:00 have to respond and respond properly and well to whatever you have to do. Whatever you have to put up with. So in my period of being in the army I enjoyed being with the boys, having my own small unit that I was in command of and knowing that we were the best in the battalion as far

22:30 as what we did and how we did it. We, I reckoned we were. That might be disputed by some of the others but yes we had a certain amount of joy with that, particularly if we a couple of times we had competitions amongst the companies and then one time I’d been on guard for seven days with a guard and when we

23:00 came back, there were twenty of us on the guard, and we had a competition between the other companies all marked out and I’d been through this so often that I was a bit cocky I suppose and instead of halting twenty paces away I marched right up to seven paces from the review, reviewing colonel and I should have stopped there and I

23:30 was leading my group and I just sailed past the stop point up to here and called out, “Guard halt,” and I could see my company commander back there looking at me as though, “What the hell’s gone on?” I let them down that day, however it didn’t happen again.

What were the best of times in your war experience?

In my

24:00 army life?

In your war time experience?

Oh war time? Oh I think when I was in Tamworth and I had that demonstration platoon. I had a free go to do the things that I knew a little bit about. I was enthusiastic to have twenty-odd of the best performers in the different companies, a section out of each company, and we were doing something

24:30 constructive and they were learning something too and I was learning handling a group of fellas who were all had as much sense as I did, I think, or I had as much sense as they did, one or the other but that was a really good month I had then. Yeah I enjoyed that as much as anything I think. I was in total control and I had a

25:00 WO2 [Warrant Officer Class 2] answering to me. A fella who’s nearly old enough to be my father I suppose but had everything you needed that I needed and nobody to question what I was doing except the colonel. I think that would have been the happiest professional time in my army.

What was the worst of times during your war time experience?

Oh.

25:30 Probably acclimatising to the climate in New Guinea I think. It was not a psychological worst time but physically getting used to the climate. Sliding on the kunai grass and pushing ourselves and I was pushing I always felt

26:00 I had to be able to do whatever I wanted anybody to do in the in my any of my boys. I had to be able to do it as well or better. So if I could growl at them I could say, “Well I’ve done it mate. That’s the way we’re doing it.” Yeah. I didn’t have too many bothers.

What was your most fearful period?

Fearful? Oh.

26:30 Mm. Can't say I was really fearful. Ah I was pretty apprehensive once or twice but I didn't have fear.

27:00 If I did I quietened myself down against that. So you mustn't have fear. You've got to try and keep a level head and hopefully you do to you know present the best possible to the enemy. You can't get too fearful if you're getting surrounded or something's happening then you've got to make the best of it.

27:30 If you get fearful you lose control of your yourself if you've too worried. You've got to be able to look danger right in the face. If somebody's gonna pull the trigger or he's gonna press his trigger in the face of the I didn't have that happen to me but you've got to be able to do it.

28:00 I've thought sometimes, "What would I do if something came in here with a oh it hasn't happened but came against me with a cane knife and blood dripping down his mouth, from his mouth or some poor wretch who's lost his brain and going berserk?" Oh but I can't say I've been fearful

28:30 I've just not I've stopped at that point. Not accept it. Not accept it. Hopefully. You kid yourself I suppose sometimes.

Is there an incident or a moment that you're most proud of from your war time experience?

29:00 Most pleased about I could say. When I was a guard on I was in charge of the guard at Greta. Now as we'd lived in Canberra I'd met a couple of governor generals, the nephew of the Duke of Gloucester I met in hospital and I had an invitation I met the Duke of Gloucester and also his wife, Lady May or Lady Alice

29:30 but Lord Gowrie was governor general in Canberra and I think he might have been lieutenant general. Anyhow he came to visit us at Greta one time and I was OC guard, which is about half a mile from the head brigade headquarters, and we knew he was coming. He came and I rang up the staff captain. I said,

30:00 "Will you give us a ring when the GG's [Governor-General] coming down?" and I got roasted for asking that question. He was a very superior fellow our staff captain and anyhow when the guard on duty called out, "Turn out the guard," we knew what was happening. So

30:30 the GG came down, came out and general this is Lieutenant Richardson. There was a bit of a twinkle in his eye. He recognised me from Canberra you see and so we walked down the garden and he said, "Thank you lieutenant.

31:00 Good guard." Good guard or something. He said, "Thank you Colin," just quietly he said to me, "Thank you Colin." And something else he, I've forgotten now but anyhow he recognised me and this bloody staff captain behind him overheard our little quiet or his little

31:30 quiet few words to me and he recognised that I meant more to the governor general than he did. So I felt my day was made for about six months after that. It was just a minor thing but you know this other bloke didn't ever care for him very much after that but yeah. Yeah I

32:00 think I oh that was one event I was very pleased about. When I got my commission and I was I'd turned twenty one and I was chairman of the, president for the mess that night, mm. I was pleased with that. So that was a happy event. Oh I think I've been happy with lots of the

32:30 events in that army life of mine but that's about it. You're either going to be happy and do a good job, it's no good whinging about things and you find or as you said tolerance or sustaining your positive thinking.

33:00 You have to do that. If you don't do it, well you'll slowly go down.

Having said that if there any regrets in the background for you? Regrets from your war time experience?

I wished I'd been a little bit older. Primarily because I had fellas under me who had who were married, had one or two kids and I had to think about giving them the responsibility of getting shot whereas I had

33:30 other fellas who were single, like myself, and boys like me.

In hindsight would you rather have had that responsibility than not?

Of being what, an officer?

And responsible for other people's lives?

Oh no. It probably did me good. I might have thought sometimes, "I'd prefer not

34:00 to be here," but everybody else thought that too. So it's just a matter of accepting the situation and you

know making the best of it, whatever it was. You know I think that's the main thing that I felt about my war time war experience. If I'd been four or five years older I'd have been a lot happier. I'd have had

34:30 more living experience however it wasn't to be. I wasn't four or five years older. I was twenty, twenty one or two. So that was it. I met a lovely lot a fellas and I know quite a few lovely blokes now and have been, they were in the somewhere. Some I haven't ever known before we came here to Brisbane.

35:00 Others that I'd known in Sydney and have come up here. Slowly they're all dying off. There are forty five-odd now left from our unit, which was more than six hundred when we sailed in '42. So that's how it goes.

Did you dream of the war when you came back?

Did I dream? Oh yes I did a bit, mm. You

35:30 relive experiences, particularly where somebody else is at risk or yeah you're in action yourself and you go through some of those situations. I didn't make a point of doing that very much but you can't help it.

36:00 I remember in Canberra waking up a few times after I got back to Australia but and in Sydney. You've got to think about the fellas like the commanders. See films of when like Eisenhower walking through France and they can hardly put a foot down or Montgomery after battle. They can hardly

36:30 put their foot down without treading on a body and also the boys in World War I, my uncle, one of 'em in the Somme, Albert, getting gas on his face and describing where two massive armies of tens of thousands have locking face to face and blowing hell out of each other

37:00 and advancing fifty yards and saying, "We had a great victory today. We advanced fifty yards. Only six thousand dead but," you know, "we're fifty yards further into the enemy." All those things.

How did you feel about the way that the Pacific war was I guess interpreted or seen by the general public and the way that it's become or the place that it's taken on in Australia's kind of wartime mythology?

37:30 **Do you think it's accurate? Do you have an opinion about the way the public has taken on the Pacific war and particularly the Kokoda Trail?**

It's good. I think it's really good that so many now in the last year or two or so are making tracks over the Kokoda Track. You know and realising by personal experience how difficult it is to do

38:00 the track now, although it's well defined. They usually have a guide take them from one rest house to another and they can have a bed at night and a cooked hot meal and somebody to carry their gear and to wake them up in the morning. I imagine they might have a cup of tea in the morning but even if they don't they have somebody cook breakfast for them and get them on their feet and away walking

38:30 and they come home after doing half of the track, "Oh it was a terrible experience but I'm glad I did it." You know I have a booklet from the American police that they sent a couple of boys out here to do a special rapport, a get together cooperation with the Queensland police. They had a group go on the Kokoda Trail from America

39:00 and they reported it was something. They had carriers, all mod cons but boy that Kokoda Track, Kokoda Trail they call it, that was something. You know and they were all tough US coppers, tough US police come out here to do that track specifically. So

39:30 imagine that they were well tuned up for it and they'd been doing a few exercises climbing mountains.

Tape 10

00:34 **I just wanted to ask you about whether you'd ever been back or had further involvement in with New Guinea?**

Oh I haven't been back personally. I felt the humidity up there was going to be a bit much and I didn't actually need to go back, although some of our boys had and a couple had settled up there.

01:00 However following the time that I was saved by being transported on a stretcher by the fuzzy wuzzies up hill and down on these gullies I got in touch with the Rotary Club of Port Moresby to see if we could do something specific.

01:30 Sent them some money but things move slowly up there and it wasn't over after three years we hadn't done this job. So I decided I'd have to do something myself. Thought about it. Got a photo, painting I saw of native carriers in the jungle. I thought, "That's good. I'll do a mosaic." So I learned

02:00 how to do some modelling and did a plaque. I was in the RSL sub branch at Kenmore. The committee said, "Yes, we'll be pleased if you do this." So I had this done in bronze and it measures about this long

and about that high and it's on the war memorial at Kenmore now and that was in 1995. We had the

02:30 consul general for PNG come out to unveil it. We had thirty PNG students who were at St Peter's college at Indooroopilly come out and sing the national anthem and so on and we had a letter from Sir Julius Chan, I think it was him, who said he was pleased to hear that we had done this and

03:00 congratulated me for organising this plaque in remembrance of the fuzzy wuzzies. So with two thousand two hundred it was reckoned people turn up for that event on Anzac Day 1995 or 6 I felt very pleased about that. So that was my gesture.

Can you tell me about the clinic that you -

The clinic was through Rotary. I was a member of Rotary

03:30 for some years and it was decided that we would subscribe to a clinic up in the mountains. There was a grass hut run by a Salvation Army sister who'd been up there for some years and knew the natives and she badly needed a structure of some sort instead of this grass hut. Now all sorts of natives came to it, mainly women

04:00 having babies, children of all sorts sick, others wounds from spears or whatever but she was there in this primitive arrangement. I have photographs and so all this had to be transported by plane from Brisbane up to Moresby and then into another plane and all the equipment was including roofing iron, sheets of

04:30 iron for the walls and timber and everything pre cut. We had a plumber, a carpenter, a couple of carpenters, an electrician. They all went up under their own steam. About a dozen fellows. So we got this up and running in about three weeks. So that was a big deal. I was very pleased with that. Later we had the National Bank in Papua New Guinea there's a branch

05:00 in a called another bank however they had one a little girl come down aged about twenty. She was an accountant. Quite a bright girl. We offered to host her and we had her for a fortnight. The week I took her to a branch bank here in Brisbane in the morning and picked her up at night so she's getting experience. I've forgotten now the second week but she

05:30 said she wanted to see a train. She'd never been in a train. In fact I don't think she'd even seen one when we got her. I took her from Brisbane to Ipswich one afternoon and truly she did not say one single word. I was going on like a cook's tour operator pointing out various things. She was so fascinated but she said for her to go back home and tell her village and

06:00 so forth that she'd actually been in a train and they did truly run on wheels and people got inside them like a big worm on rails. So Josephine Dili was her name. Nice little girl and she went back to Lae and was promoted to a homes oh homes loan manager. Then we had two others, the principal

06:30 of the Bulolo Forestry Training School and his wife, they stayed with us for a week. He was here for a conference. You'd not believe that you could have so two bright very bright people from PNG, natives. He'd been to Germany, the US, the UK and he was obviously

07:00 a very bright boy and a conference here. His wife I think might have been even brighter than he was but they had an unusual story. Both lived in different tribes and both witch doctors in charge of their tribes forbid, forbade these two marrying and they said if they did marry both witch doctors said, "We'll point the bone." Now these were Christians and they had long hard

07:30 discussions about this subject because the witch doctors said, "Your mother will die," telling the wife to be, "If you marry well your mother will die." Well they said, "Too bad. We're going ahead. Do your worst." Well the mother did die and they didn't know just what influence but if the witch doctor says, "You're going to die," you just sit down and die and so whatever they could do

08:00 didn't save the mother. So that was the first lesson. Then they said, "Well if we told we'd your parents your father's going to die." Anyhow they convinced the father not to die and so it was only the one mother that did die but the witch doctors were very upset about this because they said Christianity is better than witch doctors, witch doctory and

08:30 they went ahead. Well when they stayed with us they didn't say anything about this until about Thursday night. We'd had them from, say, Monday. They're very quiet. He was doing something in town I think with the university. They didn't talk much about themselves but eventually opened up. They have to have the trust in the people they're talking to. Feel

09:00 they're trusted and respected and we had Christmas cards for two, three years from them but time moves on and I have photographs of them here and right now we have a an Anglican priest from Popondetta who's come down here for the first time of his in his life out of PNG. He's come down here,

09:30 sent down here by his parish to get experience. Well he's been in Brisbane for a month and then the next thing is right now he's down in Sydney in Darlinghurst and if you can imagine this fellow who's neve been out of PNG before. I mean coming down to Brisbane is one thing but having to go down to Sydney and at Darlinghurst and places like that,

10:00 I rang him a week ago and he said he's all right now. He's getting used to it and we're expecting him back in a couple of weeks. Anyhow I've supported these situations and these people and I feel now that I've done something to justify their care and attention years ago to me and particularly one of them being the, this fellow now being the son of a fuzzy wuzzy

10:30 carrier.

The priest, the Anglican priest is the son of a fuzzy wuzzy carrier was he?

Yeah. Yeah. His name's Roderick Vana, V-A-N

Nice little bloke about this high.

Were you able to share your experiences in New Guinea when you came back with your family and friends?

Oh yes. Up to a point. Whatever they asked.

11:00 I didn't go promoting it or talking about it much. I found mostly students at the university and others about my own age were a bit reluctant to want to ask. Some odd ones did because at the age of about twenty four or five after being in the war and students

11:30 being eighteen say, that they were quite removed. They had no conception. They didn't want they didn't ask to know. Odd ones did, like, "Did it hurt?" You know, "What was it like being in the army or being in the war?" Just general innocent enquiry.

What about your wife and kids? Did you talk to them much about your experiences?

12:00 Not really, unless they were wanting to know something. I didn't push it on them. My wife gradually learned most of my experience without the detail. You know you don't have to give them the gory detail and they don't want to know the gory detail. It's not like

12:30 women's work to or women's thing to know what men get up to slaughtering each other. They're sympathetic and all that, I don't imply anything else but I've had sympathetic with Ruth too. Our second marriage for both of us but our partners dead. My wife

13:00 had a sudden brain haemorrhage and died quickly and that's a few years ago and then Ruth's husband had a long illness and he died oh about four years ago.

Colin why was it important for you to speak to us today? Why did you want to have your story recorded for the archive?

Well I thought

13:30 it was a great thing for respect of the fuzzy wuzzies as much as anything. I thought the medical fraternity have all said, "Oh this is great." You know Geoff Mutton reckoned they did a good job and

14:00 it was important for me to say, "Thank you," to the fuzzy wuzzies because they did one wonderful job. Mind you, they'd have to have eight anyway and perhaps ten trying to drag a fellow on a stretcher that's likely to slip off the stretcher and keep him alive going up like this or climbing barefooted. Although they are traditionally

14:30 barefooted they don't have to walk on rocks, and sharp rocks sometimes, and they get sore feet from treading on roots etcetera. So I felt I had some I still have a responsibility. That's why I'm looking after this Rod, Roderick Vana now. I'm not only the only one here in Brisbane after him but I'm

15:00 doing a few things for him. I suppose I just owe it to them and I thought in a vague sort of way that recording this it would be recording for their memory as much as anything. The fact that I'm alive is apart from the doctors who at Myola worked were working night and day non stop because we

15:30 had more than two hundred battle casualties and another two hundred that were either victims of eczema, all sorts of problems. Sprains and hurts damage of some sort but there were more about two hundred and fifty battle casualties and some of us who were very badly wounded. Liable to die any time and

16:00 they had to keep an eye on us. So this event, my respect for them and for all the boys that were involved up there that helped me come out of it. I think that's about it. It's interesting for me to have gone through this and I appreciate it

16:30 but I hope somewhere somebody can see this and say, "Well they were the fuzzy wuzzies." And all the generous spirit that they showed not just me but other ones I saw there and fellas I've spoken to since. A lot of us fellas would never have come out alive. So whatever little appreciation this might be, that's it.

17:00 **Are there any final statements you wanted to make? To be on the record in relation to your war time experience or the things we've talked about today?**

In appreciation of the young Australian the youth of Australia that we were and I think still is in

17:30 Australia. We have a unique continent and a unique way of life and I hope if anybody is watching this program they recognise that the young ones like myself then responded and fought with great honour for the country and I hope in this next generation that they will

18:00 do as well. I expect they will. I'm sure they will and not to think about the personal cost, which seems to be in pervading our society these days. We have a 'me, me, me' society being developed round the world. As much as they can make money out of whatever

18:30 situation it doesn't matter about the moral values or anything else as long as 'me, me, me' succeeds. I'm sure if the time comes for a national emergency the Australian youth will respond as they should. That's all. Thank you.

I guess just one more thing. Would you like to read your father's

19:00 **poem?**

Yes I would.

To have that put on record?

Yes I would. Thank you.

No worries.

Now where are we? Where is it? Here. Do you want to photograph this at all or not?

No, you we'll just you can just read it out for the

Okay.

So that it's on record and it'll be transcribed.

Yeah.

19:30 Can I read it?

Sure.

Okay. Oh, glasses. Oh thanks. Ta. My father was one of my father oh, is that all right?

Yep.

My father was one of three brothers and with three brothers-in-law who all went to World War I. In World War II

20:00 I was at the war in 1942 and with a background of his experience in World War I this is a poem that he wrote. He wasn't a particularly religious person at all but he had a faith in some supreme being. It's called 'Reconstruction'. Written in 1942.

20:30 "Oh Lord, put straight our crooked ways which harvest death grief stricken days our dark paths lead where evil drifts upon us we misuse thy gifts."

21:00 Oh, "For will those free will though gave us thus full good builds horror now where beauty stood

21:30 life and grief befoul thy peace wherein we live and mock thy face. Stretch forth great God thy mighty hand the moment over every land so that thy ways are not the strife of war's mad hate be ours in life. For then our eyes would see a dawn of better things

22:00 plans newly drawn and by thy grace and vision clear of wretched scenes of want and fear." Signed by HH Richardson. 1942. Sorry, I didn't get that very fluid or flexible.

It's okay. I think we got the sentiment.

Yeah.

Colin, and you just found that poem didn't you Colin? You only just found that poem?

Yes.

22:30 That's true. It's been in my books. I had a lot of books packed up when I left home a few years ago and I don't remember seeing it before but it just seemed to come out a couple of months ago. So I thought, "Marvellous." He was commissioner then, in 1942 he was commissioner for war service homes commission and facing the responsibility

23:00 of reconstruction of the whole Commonwealth and all the housing that was to be required for all the services that were going to need it plus others of course but he'd experienced World War I with two

brothers and three brothers-in-law. He knew all about it. So I thought it

23:30 was very good that I found it.

Colin I want to acknowledge you and your family for all your contributions you've made to the defence of the country and thank you very much for sharing your story with us today. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you.

Oh thank you. Thank you Simon. It's very nice of you to say that. I'm glad that you've come today. That this event happened.

24:00 I should just like to tell you if we have a minute, when I went out to see Geoff Mutton the coincidence was amazing and I've got to tell you this. I go to a reunion of our battalion, which is usually held down in Goulburn now, but I met another officer six or seven years ago who I hadn't seen since the war and who

24:30 hadn't been to a reunion at all and he lives in Lismore. He came over. Cause I hardly recognised him and he said, "How are you Col? The last time I heard about you I was in hospital with a doctor who was also in for malaria. We're talking together and he said he'd stitched you up with safety pins. Who was he?" I said, "A Geoff Mutton. He came from Cremorne."

25:00 I said, "Good, I would like to find him." I rang a friend a mine who's a doctor in Sydney and said, "Could you find Geoff Mutton? He's probably dead now." He found him and then he was living at Orange. Wrote to him, I wrote to him and he said, "Come down and see me if you can." So I went down a couple of months later in October when the weather was right. His son is

25:30 an orthopaedic surgeon there now and Geoff has died since but the Western Daily came out and put this on the front page of The Western Daily newspaper there and got we had I had three days staying with them. So it was a great time. He said, "There's a priest I didn't get on with in our unit but once we got into action

26:00 we sort of got on. We had to and we became firm friends." And I said, "What's his name?" He said, "Jim Lynch." "Where is he living?" "Don't know. Haven't a clue." When I got back to Brisbane I rang the Catholic hierarchy here. "Can you find Jim Lynch? He was a padre in New Guinea in 1942." No sign of him. So I went to Sydney,

26:30 rang Sydney headquarters of the Catholic church. After ten days they came back and said, "Yes, he's buried in Brisbane out at Nudgee in the priests' cemetery." So I said, "Good." Got a lady friend of the family and we went out to have a look at this grave. I said to Geoff, "If I find where he is I'll send a photograph back to you." We went out there, nice clear sky,

27:00 and I said, I eventually found this grave in the priests' cemetery. I said, "Well Jim, I just came out here to say 'thanks' if you can hear me," you see, "so I don't expect you to respond." But there'd been one single little grey cloud and we'd noted both of us had noted, Ann and the lady with me, we'd noted this cloud.

27:30 So, "I'll take a photograph because I've got to send a copy back to Geoff Mutton." So I was taking the photograph. I'd taken one. I said, "I'll just go round and take one from this angle." Same tombstone you see and I said, "Well there you are Jim. I've done my best to make contact. If you can hear me this is thank you," you see. And do you know what?

28:00 This jolly cloud was above us and it poured on us as though somebody was up there with a watering can, a big watering can. My car was only from here to the end of the hall and both of us were staggered at this sudden response. My hair the hair on the back of my neck went up and this is the first time ever and the lady next with me a few feet away didn't say

28:30 anything for a bit but we raced back to the car and out of this deluge. It really was. We were practically soaked in as many seconds and we got back to the car, which was dry, and I said, "Gosh that was a bit scary wasn't it?" She said, "The hairs on the back of my neck went up." I said, "What? What? Mine too."

29:00 Separately. We were you know, there was no collusion or anything that if somebody had been up there hearing me and making contact, the fact that I'd spoken and said, "Well thanks Jim Lynch." It was hard to believe you know. I still don't believe it but with both of us and have you ever had

29:30 the hair on the back of your neck rise? Well that was the first time I can remember it. I might have had it at some stage but I don't usually get scared of something but this was something unbelievable.

Well here's to Jim and higher powers.

Oh thank you.

Thanks very much Colin.

Yes, thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS