Australians at War Film Archive

Bertie Anderson - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 14th July 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2163

Tape 1

01:00 **We'd like to start the interview by talking about your childhood and growing up in Charters Towers and Townsville, can you tell us about growing up there?**

Born in Charters Towers, what was it the 10th December 1916? And that's where I started off. When I became six years of age went to the Charters Towers Girls' School, wasn't there

01:30 very long and then we went up to Mossman then. But in the meantime I think the only real momentous thing there that happened at that particular time was the paw paw trees were very hard to grow. And my father he planted this one and it was his pride and joy; and it was just getting fruit on there and I found a tomahawk around the place somewhere and of course I go down

02:00 and thought I was George Washington and knocked the tree down at the base, and of course the whole damn lot fell over. So I propped it all up again and just before he came home, he was a miner working in one of the mines in Charters Towers, the damn wind came up there and blew it over again. And of course he comes in the front fence and sees his tree down there, he said, "What happened?" Mum puts her head out there, "I

02:30 don't know." And he goes down and sees the tomahawk marks. There's the scar still there from where he hit me with the buckle end of that belt and he was tearing into me. And he realised there was blood gushing everywhere and he got stuck into me with the other end of the belt then. And all the screams going on from the women around the place, they just come over, and one bloke laid him out cold [knocked him out]. But ever since that day I've never

03:00 ever considered my father a near worthwhile person to know, but being young and everything like that, well yes, had to tolerate it. But in 1923 comes along there, and he wanted to be a big time farmer, so off we got to Mossman and we get there, it was sometime during the crushing season, living in the cane barracks there until another lot of cane barracks became available. Listen

03:30 to the Italians there driving their horses and that sort of thing; they only knew two words, "Christian Madonna, Sacramento," in other words they were swearing at the horses. I don't know what that ever meant but in their language there, they didn't want anybody else to know that they were happy. But the horses didn't hear anyhow. And from that there the father turned around and built us a humpy,

04:00 twenty feet long, ten feet wide with a skillion roof at the front for another ten feet. And in it a catch system with a wood stove; and above all the luxuries we had was a dirt floor, you'd get the bags from the grocer's there and cut them open and then put them down. Our furniture was all the Laurel furniture, that's another name there for the cases there, that kerosene and petrol and everything else came in in those days there.

04:30 Laurel was the trade name for Mobil Oil, that's Mobil Oil now, it was known then as Vacuum Oil. And that was all the furniture there; oh you could do a lot of things with them. And then for all the wardrobes there you'd put a bar across there. It was one of the most interesting things about that house, there was not one piece of sawn timber used, and of course when it rained, which rained very, very frequently up there, along all the ceiling there

05:00 and there's more billy cans there than you'd find in the grocer's store, catching the water. But we had Herbert Underwood, he used to come out there and of course like my mother was a very good cook too, and even though we didn't have any money , she'd come out there and soon knock up a batch of scones or something like that. Now where's Mr Underwood going to sleep?

05:30 We'd chase the dogs out of the bed outside there and he could sleep out there. Yeah, but he found it was worthwhile, he'd come back.

So your father had been a miner in Charters Towers?

Oh yes he died from miner's silicosis when he was 44, luckily, for us anyhow, that's when we started to make some progress. He didn't believe in education, didn't believe in military service, didn't believe in

anything

06:00 except talk and get into fights at the pub and belt us kids up. There was six of us altogether, well five then,the youngest one came later. He wasn't what you call a good person.

Do you remember anything else about Charters Towers at all?

Charters Towers, oh only the muleteers there and the rubber vines, the goats.

What sort of a house did you have in Charters Towers?

06:30 Oh that was a house there that the front steps there were about, one, two, three, four, five steps to go up the front and at the back there was about twelve steps. And one of my favourite pastimes was to grab the crockery there and take it over the back, there was a bit of a landing there to go down the steps sideways, and throw the crockery over the side to see how many pieces it would break into. So mother didn't think that was a very good

07:00 idea so she bought me a couple of tin plates, and I couldn't understand why they wouldn't break. Another time I lost her favourite half sovereign, to go up to the butcher's there, you know those old three wheeler tricycles we'd have in those days, no asphalt roads or anything, you had to have a good constitution to push the damn things. Get up there and when I go to put the money over to get the bit of meat that I was supposed to get, I had no money left. And gee there was one

07:30 of the greatest dust storms of all times there in Charters Towers; they were all looking for this bloody half sovereign, you don't see those things now.

When you moved to Mossman, your father changed to farming?

Yes well he was a cane cutter, cane cutting there, and he was pretty good at that too.

08:00 He cleared seven acres of ground, of the virgin scrub, fair dinkum beautiful rainforest timber there; you'd give your right arm to get it now. One tree in particular, it was seven foot in diameter and it must have been at least 56 feet before the first branch, and it took him several days to get it down.

08:30 And when he got it down there it took up so much room he couldn't put the cane in. But anyhow after it was all cleared there the farmer decided, or the person he was leasing the ground off there, didn't have the facilities for him to get it out. So he used to bring it out on a sleigh and got a loan of a horse to pull it out. In the first year his total income from the crop, for the first year, was

09:00 nine pounds, and the second year was three pound and the third year absolutely nothing, for the pigs, rats, wallabies and the pademelons [small wallabies] and all the other things there destroy cane, they all got stuck into it, grubs and all, and he never harvested one stick of cane. So Mum said to Father, "If you don't go, I'm going." So we had five children,

09:30 she had five of us at the time. So we walked into town and Mum went to the hotel doing the laundry work and that, and of course the glorious old trade union blokes there were very, very severe in those days. He came out to where Father was cutting cord wood for the sugar mill and told him there if his wife did not cease work immediately he'd go

10:00 over what we called the bump, that was the range and end up out of Maryborough, go through that way. So my mother had to cease working there, and of course a woman in those days couldn't get credit, you couldn't get anything at all, where there was only disputes there with the husband, well there was only one alternative for her: to put up with it. But anyhow we got around that one

10:30 because we got a bit devious in many respects. I knew there was a lot of cane cutters in town and there was two barbers and they all wanted laundry done. So I went up to the first barber there and I said, "What about giving my Mum there the chance to do all your washing?" He said, "Oh, why not?" I said, "I'll come and collect it and take it back and bring it away, she's very good you know." I learned to be a

11:00 salesman straight off. Anyhow the next thing there we had more work than what mother could cope with, and we got enough money to get out of Mossman.

So that's how you survived really?

That's right because we couldn't depend on Father there bringing any money in. When he did get any, in Charters Towers he was known as "Flash Jack," a bloke that had all the best clothes

11:30 possible and no money in his pocket. Anyhow we managed to get away from Mossman there, because in small towns there's no room for the children growing up to get jobs. My eldest brother, he got seventy three percent of the state scholarship; and the one who got the best

12:00 result was going to be a pupil teacher. Well he and the headmaster's son both got the same results but he gets the job, the headmaster's son, he's a pupil teacher, when they're only fourteen years of age they start teaching the other kids. So we got out of Mossman there. The eldest brother he missed out,

12:30 he was unemployed for the next twelve months, or near enough to it. The next brother he was to go into the post office. When I was old enough to go to Jack Newell the grocers, and there was nothing else

there for the younger brother and the sisters, nothing for them. So anyhow we got out of there by launch from Mossman

13:00 down to Cairns and we were warned about looking up there at all the tall buildings, you'd get a stiff neck. All these big tall buildings there, they were only about two storeys high.

What about school, did you go to school in Mossman?

Oh yeah.

What was school like for you?

Oh pretty good for fighting; yes we used to fight nearly every afternoon.

13:30 There was always one bloke Jimmy Cook there; oh, we never got along. We were down the horse paddock or into the church ground there and we'd have a punch up. My mother used to say, "Oh poor Bert, he can't take much more of that," poor old Jimmy there, he was getting done over nearly every day.

Can you describe the school for us?

It was only a five teacher school I think.

14:00 There was two hundred odd kids thrown in together there. The first headmaster that was there, a fellow named Stendrick he had a silver plate in his head and he was three quarters loco [crazy]. And they had the school cane paddock there too, like a rural place. They had the cane growing , and nine times out of ten the bigger blokes there, always out there in the cane, or else running their own horse race

14:30 meeting in the school grounds. The horses were the little blokes and the jockeys were the big blokes, and they'd put up a string around you there and in the hand in the middle of the back, and for the money they'd use bottle tops, you know the old Crown bottle tops. Oh they had the bookmakers and all there and this went on for nearly twelve months. Then they decided to send a fellow named John Wasley up there as the headmaster and of course the first day

15:00 he done his block [lost his temper], all the kids were professional bookies [bookmakers].

What did you enjoy studying at school?

It was a shanghai chasing birds! I wasn't very keen on school work at all. But when it came to mathematics and all that sort of thing there

15:30 and mental arithmetic, anything of that nature there, I always come good at that. And the same with the freehand drawing, but I was never any good at that, but scale drawing I learnt a lot of that later on. But at that stage that's where my interests were. At home there my favourite pastime was to go into the scrub, or we call it scrub, rainforest as it is now, should be called

16:00 and just sit there and observe to see what was going on. And you'd see a snake, and it was that that enabled me to survive during the later years in the world, knowing all this sort of thing, just observing all the wildlife around the place. I even had a red bellied black snake crawl over my feet one time there, but I just stayed still, it never worried me, it couldn't eat

16:30 me I was too big for it, and it went across. And the birds, everything like that, you just watched their habits and that sort of thing. And of course when the war came along, or in the scouts, well all those things came back, "Don't do this and don't do that, do this and do that," and so forth. And it turned out to be a wonderful experience for me because when we first

17:00 went to the humpy the old man gave me an eighteen inch barrel, .22 rifle, single shot, no safety catch, or anything like that. And it was my job there to make certain that no hawks or goannas or snakes or anything else came around and pinched the fowls or eggs or anything of that nature there. So I was learning to shoot a rifle when I was six years of age. I gradually made it into a

17:30 first class shot later on. But at that time there, and if you wanted Christmas dinner for instance, if the fowls were still laying, they were kept. So you go out into the rainforest there and you knock off a couple of scrub turkeys and that would be your Christmas dinner. And one time there I bought back a couple of Italian ducks.

18:00 Mum was looking at them and cooking them up, yeah, we won't eat them and put them out for the dogs, they wouldn't even eat them.

So you would actually go out to shoot a turkey for Christmas dinner when you were a boy?

Yes, oh yes oh yes I was only what six, seven years of age when I was doing that. There were hardly any ducks up there, there was a couple, there was a branch of the

18:30 Mossman River there, and now and again a couple of ducks would land there. You didn't have a shot gun, you had to be good, and of course when you're getting hungry it's remarkable what you can achieve by using what's available.

So what was Christmas's like, apart from shooting the turkey?

Christmas? Pretty poor,

19:00 I got a pair of cart wheels for a Christmas present one time there. Went into Jack Newell the grocer's there and I got , you know they used to sell lager in, they were twenty six ounce bottles they used to be, and they were packed in straw and two dozen to a case. And they were very good substantial things. And here I am only seven years of age, eight years of age and

19:30 humped this blooming big box over and went home, four miles out from town. And I got there and put on the wheels and got a couple of saplings there for the shafts, got them in and away we go. Oh I built myself a road to bring the firewood up and somehow or rather I acquired a half axe, half axe, they often use the term now for someone that's not all there in the head,

20:00 half axe. But the axemen, mostly use their four and a half there for the standard chopping and their five and a quarter there for the underhand. But this one there weighed anywhere between two and three hundred pounds and that was quite a weight to swing for a young fellow. To learn how to sharpen and grind and all the rest of them there. If you want to know all the technical facts of sharpening an axe I can

20:30 tell you all of that.

What sort of things did you, what sort of games did you play with you and your brother's and sisters?

Oh go down and pinch [steal] some of the native [Aboriginal] spears there, of course they were all three quarter wild in those days. Go down and pinch some of their spears and start throwing the spears at each other and shanghais, you know the paper wasps, they'd be there and you stand back and bang and wait, or wait till somebody's coming past, and bang! and stick a stone through the paper wasps.

21:00 And then you just lie down flat on the ground and they go over the top of you and chase the person who's running. The only trouble I had was a dispute with a mechanic there. I went there and said to one of them, I forget his name, "We want some

21:30 really round ball bearings there for our shanghai?" and he said, "Oh here take these." He said, "Now you get your Mum to soak them in vinegar and in the morning you should be able to get the ball bearings out of it." And of course I go home and I got a damn blasting for being so damn silly and of course I go back to the mechanic there with the things and threw them at him,

22:00 threw them at him. And then of course he after me, but I could run faster than he. But all the games there, go down to the river there and have shanghai fights, swimming, like in the school holidays you'd be swimming there till everything went blue, then you'd race backwards and forwards.

Did you play any other sport apart from swimming?

Oh yes running, anything at all with athletics and

22:30 gymnasium, that was it. That's the only sports, now and again, until we come to Townsville. In Mossman there they never had a football team or anything like that; there was nobody there to tell you how you could go about it. But with the running and swimming, I got, Ross has got my little gold medal there for the swimming, 1927. You know nine carat gold, those days

23:00 everybody was as poor as a church mouse, yet they could afford to buy these things. The eldest brother and the next brother they got one for swimming and the running, but I missed out on the running, they didn't have any gold medals for my category. And the younger brother he got the consolation prize for diving, a little squirt like this standing up on the end of a blooming board, in he goes.

23:30 **So how did the depression affect your family?**

That was a terrible experience in our lives that. When we left Mossman to come down to Townsville we left there and we come down in November to Townsville and the following February, 4th February my younger sister was born. But on the way down we were supposed to, that was 1927,

24:00 we were supposed to stay with my father's mother at Ingham. And when we got to Ingham Railway Station, a ten minute refreshment stop they had in those days, the bloke she remarried, a fellow named Bill Chard, he was on the platform waiting for us there and he says to my mother, he said, "Lil you can't stay here; our house got washed away in the 1927 flood." Well that was in the January and they hadn't had the sense to tell us that it

24:30 had been washed away and there was no accommodation. So here's me Mum there with us five kids trying to get us, all the luggage relabelled and the tickets changed and to go down to Townsville and walk up the hill to her aunt's, my mother's aunt. And here's mother and five kids trailing behind, we all turn up about half past six in the evening there

25:00 and of course their faces drop down half a mile, "What the hell are you doing here today, you're not here for another fortnight yet?" That's where we ended up, and her husband, a fellow named Jim Fuller he was a cranky old cow but still he said, "God almighty don't tell me I've got to look after you mob

there for a while." Anyhow a couple of weeks after the old man turns up,

25:30 we head down to the station to meet him there, dutiful sons and so forth and here he is a brand new Stanton hat, brand new coat and vest and a silk shirt and a tie and trousers, new boots all highly polished and springing as if he's a spring chicken. And of course when he gets up to the house there's old uncle Jim there says to him, "Don't think your going to stay here mate." He says,

26:00 "I'm not keeping you." So he was only there a couple of days and he went back to Mossman to start work again. So his new suit and everything else was "Flash Jack," he was. The mother had been all hand-me- downs there. In fact in Mossman there my mother got so desperate, she never went to town or anything cause she had no clothes to wear, but she made herself

26:30 a dress out of a sheet, it was the only good piece of material left in the place. She made a dress out of that and that's how she got into town. Lined up there on Christmas Eve there and a bloke there that Father had done some work for there, he come along he says, "I'm sorry I've got no money for ya, I didn't get paid." But anyhow somebody there shouted us a threepenny ice cream each and that was our Christmas dinner, or Christmas fare. But that was 1926,

27:00 '27. And when we come to Townsville of course the mother got septicaemia with Mary my youngest sister, it was lucky she lived, she's got no eyebrows, the loss of hair everything. So she couldn't go back to her aunt, living back in Blackwood Street in Castle Hill there. So we go out to another cousin of hers, oh

27:30 cripes no money, five kids, or six kids then and the youngster sister didn't stop howling from the time she was born until she walked at seven months.

You have refrigeration, what did you have instead?

Well if you had enough money to purchase

28:00 the Coolgardie safe, I gave you the wrong name before, what they called a Coolgardie safe. And that was generally nine hundred millimetres square of twenty four gauge galvanised flat iron and the lips on the edged lipped up to an inch, twenty five millimetres. Then it went up to another seven

28:30 hundred and fifty millimetres and came to a peak in the top and you put a hook in that. And on the sides you covered that with hessian, and on the tray underneath you put water in there. Now you'd hang that up underneath a tree somewhere, and with luck air came through the water bag , and by the time it got to the centre, you could set jellies and anything in it. That was our refrigerator. And of course as you progressed in time well you got an ice box

29:00 and later on you got a refrigerator, a Silent Knight, rattle like hell and not very effective. And from thereon, well you've got all the modern stuff now. In those days there it was very, very primitive, there was no such thing as electric stoves and gas stoves and all that sort of thing, except for somebody who was fairly well off, they could get it.

So when your mother was doing the laundry what did she use to wash the clothes?

Kerosene tins,

29:30 the end of the four gallon, they're twenty litre containers now, they'll all made square. There's four point five, five litres to a gallon and that meant the kerosene tin held, well close enough to twenty litres anyhow. And you put a handle on the top of it and of course a couple of bars down, and of course fire wood was pretty easy to come by. And I'd be there stoking up the fire and Mum with this cut up soap,

30:00 there was no washing powder or nothing like that, cut up all the old Ma's Kerosene soap and all the others bit of soap that was left, and put that in and pop it up and down. They used to do a really good wash, and then starch it there with the old Silver Star starch and then take it in, when it's all dried and everything, take it in and iron it there with the old iron, you know put that on the stove and when it got hot.

30:30 Now and again it would leave an impression of the iron on the shirt or whatever you were ironing, or it would be too cold or something. And for ironing your trousers you'd line them all out and put down a piece of brown paper, not newspaper, brown paper, or a damp cloth then you go over it with the iron and that's how you got the creases in it. When we graduated and got up to the dicky front we used to send them down to the Jap laundry and

31:00 twirl a mo [fancy] job.

Did you have a wireless, a radio, did you have?

Well we had, the first time we used electricity is a house in Greenslade Street in Townsville, somehow or rather me mother, like by this time the three of us were starting to work, not much money but still got the work and

31:30 she got enough money to get the power turned on there for the electric light meter for the house. You had ten lights and five power points, that's the maximum you could have in any house at that particular time, that was 1930, must have been 1933, my father died in 1931, '33 it would be. My mother

somehow or rather she got hold of a hose

32:00 from somewhere and hosing around, all the water's running and of course the next thing she's got a blooming decent sort of shock, water everywhere, dirt and the rest of it, yeah she got a decent sort of a shock. Anyhow that was the introduction to electricity; that was the first time I'd ever switched on an electric light.

What about a radio, did you have a radio?

That come about 1934,

32:30 '35, about 1936 the eldest brother started to become financial, he was with surveyors too and he saved up enough there to buy, what do they call a radio, cabinet model, and all the static and everything else coming through. I never heard of wireless until 1928, 1929, 1930 and we were invited down to this Bill Cassis place to listen to the radio and

33:00 oh all you'd get is just damn static and this great big thing on the wall, not like these little transistors now. But it wasn't a very enjoyable night at all, it was really lousy, we ended up walking out, we didn't even wait for smoko [cigarette break]. He had a bicycle shop. But we had to tolerate a fair bit because we used to get our pushbikes fixed up from him and he wouldn't charge us much.

33:30 **So you said before that your mother didn't have a dress that she could wear into town, what about you children, what sort of clothes did you have?**

Well just the normal things there, me mother had a very good, very poor education, very oh way beyond, right down the list in education standard, but she had a very acute mind when it came to values. And whenever she bought anything it was always for the future,

34:00 and the eldest brother she'd tuck everything in and he could never wear out. By the time he had grown up, too big for it, was still good material for the next brother and even then I'd end up with it and sometimes the younger brother, the four of us. And me sister was the lucky one cause she didn't have anyone to receive it from.

34:30 But that's what it was.

And did you have shoes, did you have many shoes?

Oh no, no that was taboo, crikey every year you'd get what we called toe rot, it was the wet season there and you're walking around in the water and mud all day long and all your, it's like a form of tinea and you'd get that in your toes and the skin would come off,

35:00 sometimes real bad. And for fruit and that stuff to eat, you'd wait for the season fruit, you'd get guavas and they were generally full of worms anyhow, you'd eat them half green, eat the worms. And then the five corners, they've got another name for them, then there was a lemon tree that was very, very sweet, a sweet lemon that was growing on the bank of the river, we used to knock that one

35:30 off when we went past it. There's those lychee nuts and another berry about the size of a cherry and you'd soften that up with your fingers, and the Burdekin plum, you had to bury that in ashes until it got ripe. Paw paws, and bananas of course, you'd pinch them from the Chinaman's garden. And sweet corn,

36:00 you'd pinch that from the Chinaman too, and watermelons of course, so we had fairly good variety. But there was one banana in particular the plankton, and it grew about three hundred and fifty millimetres in length, about fourteen inches, and it would be anything up to two and a half, like forty five to fifty millimetres in diameter and it was pink and

36:30 it was in good demand there for the hotels, it was a cooking banana, banana fritters and all sorts of things are made out of these damn bananas. And there's only one bloke there used to grow them, a fellow name Georgie, we used to call him a Kanaka, he didn't come back where he came from, he stayed there. Yeah but miserable life, poor old cow, we'd go and pinch his stuff and everything.

Did you have much to do

37:00 **with the indigenous people up there?**

What the natives? Oh not a great deal because look, as I said before, they're still three quarter wild and they still had their gunyas [huts] down in the river and walkabout and all that sort of stuff there. And of course when they clear out to go somewhere else we'd go and burn their gunyas down. Now and again we'd get them on a fishing

37:30 expedition, the old man would get some gelignite, we graduated to grenades later on, and come to a pool of water there and we see a bream or a perch there running around, and a couple of eels or something and sling the geli [gelignite] in and of course when it went off our kids would be down stream there waiting to catch it. Oh we used to get

38:00 quite a lot of fish that way, there's no good trying to catch them on a line. The last time he used it, he and the farmer there, Victor Christie, they went down there and us kids all lined up down stream

anyhow they threw the blooming gelignite up stream and they were standing on a log and the current came along and it just got underneath the log they were standing on and up she went! Yeah, they got a bath, that was the last time he ever used it.

38:30 There were blokes running with only one hand, was nothing unusual in those days, they'd been out fishing somewhere and forgot to throw it away. Oh yeah.

So what sort of a person was your mother?

Well for anybody there that never had any money and never had any clothes, she had a wonderful sense of duty to her family.

39:00 She could have diced [left] us many many a time there, particularly when the father died, there was an Australia Day 26th January 1931, and she went through the house there and couldn't even find a halfpenny. So whoever paid the funeral expenses I don't know. She went into town to get the pension there for us kids, I was worth five bob [shillings] a day until I turned fourteen and same with Ross

39:30 and Lil and Mary she was, she was still a few days off her third birthday when the father died. So that's all the income the mother had. One brother was in Ingham, the eldest one, he's with the surveyors up there, he had two [shillings] and six [pence] a week left for himself anyhow, that's all he could do. And the other brother was working at the picture

40:00 shows in town in the city as a projectionist, for one pound nineteen [shillings] a week I think, and that's all the mother had to try and keep us, to pay rent and everything. No clothes, no furniture nothing. The last twelve months of my schooling the year before and so forth, this is Townsville now, this is 1928, went to the Ross Island State School in Townsville

40:30 a fellow named Ross Crossman there, and he seemed to take an interest in me because I used to go and do the first aid. He could see I'd knock all the other kids flying, bottle tops and God knows what they called me, "Boot Lace."

Tape 2

00:30 In the outhouses there, this is when we moved into Greenslade Street with the first lot of electricity. In the outhouse is a real big rambling old house it was, and down there the outhouse and the night man used to come along and from the vat outside. And of course this bit of a shed there, and I used to be trying to do a bit of work there and anyhow Mum's gone into the little house [toilet]. So I get an idea. I go round, because there's a lot of burr screws up there, so I got

01:00 one there at just the right length and the right end of it there. And of course Mum puts her postern on the seat and I was with this burr and I'm tickling, and the next thing there's a hell of a yell, thought a Joe Blake [snake] was in there. I thought it was my eldest brother at first. So I scoot down to the fence and up the side and over the fence again and on our front veranda of the house we had the old time squatter's

01:30 chair. And here I was, grabbed a book or some other damn thing there and here I was lying back and Mum comes, "How long have you been there Bert?" "Oh I've been here a long time Mum, what happened?" "I won't tell ya." Gee, she must have got a hell of a fright.

You must have been quite a character as a young boy?

One Christmas time there, this is in the same

02:00 house there. We still didn't have much money there, still we got a lot of bones from the butcher and a couple of blue bags, you used to get the blue for the whitening up the clothes and that, oh and a few other things there and a bit of spring and that. So we got a sugar bag, that was a seventy pound bag of sugar, I don't know what that is in

02:30 kilograms, but still two point two pounds is a kilogram. But got that there and tied it all up, nice card on the top of it there, all handwritten of course and tied to her big toe and then the blue bag got up around here. And of course Mum wakes up, she couldn't get out of bed. So eventually she gets out and here down the end of it there Merry Christmas

03:00 with a bag full of bones in it. And it made her day.

You were a real practical joker. So Bert can you tell us before you left school you joined the scouts, can you tell us about what you did with the scouts?

What I did in the scouts? I learned practically all me army training from there, particularly on the compass. I'd go out by myself

03:30 there I didn't worry about anybody else coming with me, if they wanted to come with me all right, if they didn't well it was just too bad. And this Rowen Crossman, he was the schoolteacher and he set the

courses and everything like that. And to get your proficiency badge you had to follow this, it would be anything up to, oh for the weekend; it would be anything up to about fourteen, maybe twenty odd miles you'd cover. Camp out by yourself for the night, and that sort of thing,

04:00 make your own shelter and everything, cook your own lot. Sometimes you'd be with a group and other times you wouldn't be. But all that there, then the first aid and the firing training, we used to go into the fire station there, pretty frequently and there was a fifty foot tower and a rope hanging down. And one of the things was up and down, I done

04:30 it two and a half times, up down, up down, and I started on the third trip up and about half way up there my hand froze and I had to let go. Lucky they had the ring underneath to catch me, the net underneath to catch me. I wasn't quite so enthusiastic after that.

So what did you enjoy about doing the scouts?

Oh all the outdoor life more than anything

05:00 and learning how, everything is possible there, like making fires without matches and how to tie knots and how to use rope and all that. A lot of the things there came in very very useful for you later on. There's another one they used to call scout meet scout, at night time. You'd be on, say a football field or something like that, and the grass would be oh about that high and

05:30 it didn't matter much if it was wet or not, if there was a dew. And then you'd go along and if you spotted somebody from the other side you'd yell out, "Umpire," then direct him to go, if he's still on the bloke there that your directing him to, well he was out then. Learning concealments, and even if you did see somebody there if you couldn't protect yourself well you didn't call out. Like all those sorts of things, making you think hard and fast.

06:00 But that was with the football, I was never any good at cricket there, they thought I was a good bowler there, they knocked me for six [over the boundary] all the time. With the football, the all school captain there for the second last year of school, the next year,

06:30 football season had just started and I got the opportunity again, the technical college allowed woodwork on Friday afternoon, the day they played the football. So I said, "I'm finished with the football I'm going into learn something useful." And I used to go up there every Friday afternoon now and then, because that was always my ambition in life, to be a first class cabinet maker, that's all I ever wanted. And I started gathering

07:00 tools there when I was about, oh about six maybe seven, if I couldn't buy them and I thought I could make them I'd have a crack at making them.

So you always wanted to do that?

Oh yes. But unfortunately, well the last six months of school there I got this opportunity to go to the technical college and a fellow named Tommy Miller he seemed to be fairly interested in what I was doing

07:30 so I said, "Yes Mr Miller do you think I could make one of these sort of tables like that, only that type of leg over there, a plant stand leg on it?" and he looked at me and he said, "All right." So he told me where to go to get this timber and what sort to look for and all the rest of it. And I got it and I got the legs there for two and six pence, I don't know where the money came from,

08:00 but I got it. Then I went to another place there and got the top and the little bit for the shelf and that cost a total of three and six pence. And then I got a shilling's worth of shellac and some methylated spirits there from the grocer store. And I go up there and I spent the next, rest of that term there making this god damn table, oh nicely, like that one there, nicely

08:30 polished up, had a real French polish on it. And going home on the bus and oh the head was out here like this [with pride], anybody would think he had an uncle.

So when you had to leave school you started work with the grocery store, is that right?

Yeah at the, the only trouble was when I left school there it was,

09:00 that was 1930, born 1916, 1930, so I was looking for work there in 1931. No couldn't have been, must have been after that—fourteen and sixteen makes 1930 doesn't it?

Hmm?

My father died in January

09:30 1931.That's right the same year, that's correct. And because this is the height of the depression then, you just couldn't get work anywhere. I tried every furniture factory in Townsville there, and even anybody just doing bits and pieces for themselves, could never get started. So anyhow this

10:00 manager for Rhys Thomson, the grocers there, I pestered the hell out of him because we owed him a fair bit of money, as I say he thought it might be an opportunity to get repaid. Anyhow he made

arrangement through the mother there to pay back two and six a week out of my wages, fourteen and four pence a week. And that's where it started off, delivering groceries on the pushbike.

10:30 And how I come to get the job there, you go through the simple things of arithmetic and all that, you got twenty five articles there, how many? Whether it was a hundred and twenty five baked or something like that. It was just a matter of adding the two noughts and dividing by four, that sort of thing, you do that all in your head there. And so I kept going back every week, "Anything doing?" "No, No." He said, "Wait a while." He said, "We cook our own hams

11:00 around the side there, we want somebody to bag hams, bag the smoke." I said, "Mr Warrant you give me the bag and hold the smoke and I'll do it for ya." "You can start on Monday," cheeky cow.

So when you were growing up as a young teenager what did you know about war?

About what?

About war, what did you know about war when you were growing up?

About war, well my father and my mother,

11:30 they were very antagonistic about taking the King's shilling [payment from the Crown] and wouldn't have anything to do with, my eldest brother there he lost his job there at McEwan Richardson there, behind the counter at a grocery store there and that time the Scullin government was in office, that's Labor government and they decided to cut out compulsory military training. And they went for this other one, the Australian Instructional Corps, as they called it later on,

12:00 to go in there and to get five bob a day with their clothing and dentist and all the rest of it there. And he was going to join up there, it would have been the best thing that ever happened. But, oh gee wasn't there an ungodly row at home there. Anyhow he decided not to go. But when it did break out there, the 1939 war, well

12:30 he was the assistant to the shire overseer at Longreach, and he joined up because he wanted to be a civil engineer. He done the international correspondence course with the qualifications, but nobody recognises them. And so he goes into the air force and does his six weeks rookie training and then goes straight in as a navigator on the Short Sunderlands. Well you had to be pretty good to get on those, and they stay in the air for over twenty three hours, those things,

13:00 and they travelled a long, long way in it. And then he goes over to England there and the 19th January, that's the day I nearly met my waterloo, two days after on his thirty second birthday he went out on the navigational flights to get information for this D Day stuff [Allied invasion of Europe] and they never ever came back, four hundred and fifty miles

13:30 north of Scotland, so that was the end of his career. Never found his body or anything, nothing there, we don't know where he is. But at home, even when I joined the scouts there, they were very antagonistic towards me; they wouldn't give me the money to buy the uniform or that. I used to go round

14:00 selling bottles and rags and collect horse manure, that's how I got me uniform for the scouts. And a pair of shoes there that were too damn tight for me.

So what did you know about the First World War, did you know anybody who had been in it?

Yes I had two uncles in that, Bert Jones and David Jones, both in artillery. Bert Jones he later on joined the catering service there

14:30 in the last war, when we were in Dutch New Guinea I missed him by about two hours. As I come back from the intelligence course down here at Brisbane and made my way back, the ship I was on was waiting to come into the mouth of the Merauke River, as he was going out. So I missed him, so I don't think I ever met him and

15:00 David the older brother well, I never ever met him. My younger brother used to go and see Bert Jones in Adelaide.

So you'd never spoken to anyone who'd been in the First World War?

Not really, I worked with people there that were in it, Lance Harris and Bluey King.....oh the other joker, still owes me twenty five bob,

15:30 Leo Weston and Tom Collins, there were a few more that I worked with there, they were in it.

So when you decided to join the militia?

I didn't decide at all, that was decided for me.

Oh how did that come about then?

Well I got a letter in the post to say to present myself to the medical board on a certain time and a certain date and that was it. In the meantime

16:00 I had been going back to the technical college to do fitting and turning, or turning really, and you had a ten hour course and then you'd have this trade test at the end of it there, to get a piece of one inch steel, I think it was fifteen inches long and you'd put a five eighth thread on one end, and a half inch SAE on the other end. And if you done that within the specified two hours

16:30 you passed. Well I passed it there and the younger brother he passed and the older brother there, he had an accident and had a clot in his brain and he didn't go there even. But the younger brother, he elected to go, went down to Rockhampton, some place down there and then later on back in Townsville. But I said, "No, I'm going to go back into the army."

So had you had any desire to go

17:00 **into the militia, was that something that you wanted to do?**

It's not what I wanted to but I realised there, "Well it's going to be an all in effort," it wasn't very hard to work that one out. Because Germany was in it, and Japan. October 1940, that's when I got called up to go into first camp at Merinda. You go into the medical there, yes

17:30 just counted heads and said, "You're right," and off you went. Even one bloke there was practically three quarter lunatic, with his rifle he put the muzzle down to the ground and put his chin on the butt. And Jim Carey, you might have heard of him, he was the solicitor in Townsville there, died just not long ago, he was the instructor, he was a sergeant then. "I don't know what I'm going to do with him," anyhow next thing he was out, he was useless. See when we got

18:00 off the train at Merinda there was about eight hundred of us all marched up to this assembly point there and a fellow named McCabe, he was the fellow in charge of the parade, a Captain McCabe. And the first thing he called out he said, "Bert Anderson?" "Yes, yes mate." "Don't call me mate, you call me captain or sir."

18:30 "Yes mate." "You'll learn." He said, "You're in intelligence." I said, "What for?" He said, "Well you've had survey experience." Before I got there I was the only one there that knew what a compass looked like.

So it was 1940 before you were called up?

1940, 10th October 1940.

So you were about twenty four by then?

That's right.

Prior to that you had

19:00 **worked, you'd been working for about ten years?**

I done all sorts of work there. I started off as a grocer, then I was on bread deliveries and in the meantime there I was selling life insurance. And for a part time occupation on me Thursday off, I'd be selling water and Rawley products, and I'd make more in a day there then I would in a week, I couldn't get the franchise.

19:30 And then I was making furniture, I learnt enough by then, nobody taught me I had to just watch and come back home and practice and buy the tools and get all the literature I possibly could. I used to get The Woodworker there, an English publication, for nine pence, every month it used to come out.

20:00 I had a stack of them about this high; get all the information out of that. Because after all that's said and done what is the role of a teacher, they're only getting it out of a book anyhow, so I became the teacher and instructor.

So what did you enjoy the most during those years, what sort of work did you enjoy doing the most?

Oh well they're all on a par, I got well paid for all I ever done,

20:30 I always done better than the award rate of pay there, even on the bread deliveries. The going rate there when I finished was five pound and three pence a week, but I was getting six pound a week, six pound and three pence a week. I got an extra pound simply because I put a proposition to the employer, a fellow named Gordon Terslake at the Mymy Bakery there, that there's two hundred and forty loaves a day as recognised as the quota there for,

21:00 So I worked it all out and had the figures all there. And in the meantime I was doing accountancy to at night time there, and I used to do with Terslake, he'd allowed me to have a look at his books and all that. And I said, "Now if you pay me a pound and the youngster a pound, that's two pound, you should be able to get another pound for yourself out of it," and away we went. Good idea,

21:30 he provided all the expenses and I got an extra quid a week out of that. And then there was always ways and means of making a few bob on the side to, which I took advantage of.

Were you still living at home?

Oh yes, couldn't leave me mother go, she had boarders. That's how I came to get involved with the surveyors there, the eldest brother he'd

22:00 been up in the Tully Falls area, that was long before, used to take eighteen hours to go by packhorse from Ravenshoe out to Tully Falls, and now you drive out in three quarters of an hour, less than that really. He came back and he bought the Lance Harris and Reg Jennings, Reg Jennings became deputy, he came deputy commissioner in Townsville and the chief engineer

22:30 in Whistlewood afterwards. And anyhow when they get up there and the eldest brother said, "You'd better come up for tea" he made arrangements with my mother, dinner you call it now. And we go up there and Lance Harris was so impressed and Reg and they said, "We'll pay you thirty bob a week, thirty shillings a week for us to stay here." Because thirty shilling a week, the going rate for

23:00 a boarder those days was only twenty three.

What do you remember about Townsville during those years before the war?

Before the war, it was always dry, water restrictions and not a great deal of, if you didn't make your own entertainment there of picnics and all that sort of thing there well you just didn't do anything. You couldn't go out with the shanghais and shooting birds any more.

23:30 **What about movies or dances?**

Oh used to go to the dances, oh had me dancing pumps. And for the formal dances there for the balls and military balls and all those sorts of things, wore the tuxedo, black bow tie, sometimes you even had gloves on, oh that was a big day, big night. And later on there when I was working with the, this is after the war

24:00 now, and was working with the timber mill, ply mill there, there was a big place in Townsville it was, that's before the bloody greenies [conservationists] got onto it. And every year we had the Masonic debutante ball, and I used to make all the frames and all that sort of stuff and be up there.

So before you joined the militia, what about girlfriends,

24:30 **did you have any sweethearts?**

I didn't have money to buy anything, we never had any money. Rita is the only girl that I've ever been with. I first met her when we were in Stagpole Street, that's when the father died and Rita would have been about nine then. She used to come from round the corner and her mother used to send her down to the green grocers or the other mixed business to get something there. And

25:00 I'd be there and see this scraggy little girl come around. But it wasn't until she was about eighteen that I met her again and that was out on a picnic. And of course from there we go to the dances, with the college with the dancing instructors, put a glass of water on your skull up here and dance around the floor without spilling the water, oh yeah.

25:30 Cause I was getting a bit more money then. But Rita used to keep me nearly always broke, she always wanted blooming chocolates and go to the pictures, they were good canvas seats though, oh wow, good for cuddling.

So when did your relationship get a bit more serious?

Oh well in those days there, the mothers wouldn't let the daughters out

26:00 before they were eighteen, you'd want a blooming bodyguard, she had to always be with somebody else. But after she turned eighteen well that's when we started to go fair dinkum.

Do you remember when war broke out?

Oh too right.

What do you remember about that?

In England or in Australia,

26:30 here?

In England yeah?

In England 1939, well it didn't worry us too much there because it's a long way away, and there was still no restrictions or anything at all like that. Like for most people of our age anyhow we didn't, oh just another thing going on. But it wasn't until we started getting our call up notices there and things looking serious here with the Japanese that we started to take notice of what was going on. And when

27:00 we realised that well that's when you started to think a lot more, at least a lot of us did anyhow. But I would never get, under any circumstances would I volunteer for anything because I think that's one of

the most disgraceful ideas that ever to devise. Because the same few always come to the light, the others sit back there and look on.

27:30 But I never joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] until July 1943, that's when we left Australia, until that time I would not under any circumstances volunteer at all. I could have been, had my commission in 1941 but I refused to join the AIF, just wouldn't do it, cause it had to be compulsory for everybody. And that's the only way I still believe at the present day there, that

28:00 compulsory military service of some shape or form should be still enforced, and not just covering one person but covering the lot, everybody, right from the time there about oh say sixteen, seventeen years of age. As soon as they finish high school, whatever age that maybe.

So when you got called up for the CMF, what did you think about that?

Well I didn't think much at all about it, I said, "Oh, what is to be will be," and that's it, I didn't try to get out of it at all.

28:30 When the initial things there, your filling in the forms, what work you'd done and all the rest of it and what would you prefer, I put it down there as despatch rider, cause I was pretty good on the motorbikes, and not only that you had a motorbike and you could always blow [leave] camp.

What about your mother what did she think about you joining up?

Oh well it was a loss of income, see I was the main support for the family and

29:00 I got a shilling a day there for the first three or four years for my army service, the rest of it went to my mother so she could get the supplementary allowance, that's all she had. Plus the money she got from the boarders and that sort of thing, 1942 it was, who was going to be there. 1941 when the Japs came into the war there the whole thing in Townsville was get out, get out.

29:30 You know you could buy a Vauxhall motor car there, not six months old there, for twenty five quid, twenty five pounds, how you going to take all these things with you?. So the brother older than myself he was declared medically unfit from that motorbike accident he had so he was doing manpower down at the Goodna Asylum,

30:00 for the……where they've gone fair dinkum off the rocker [insane]. And he was there and he was the male nurse there. And of course the mother came down here, to Brisbane there because he then became the main support. And the sister she went over to Rocklea there to some munitions works over there, then later on went into the taxation department. And when the younger sister there

30:30 finished school she went into Paul or Peters [ice cream manufacturers], one of those places there and later on to the local butcher shop there. I think she had sticky fingers there [thief] and he didn't like it.

So after you got called up for the CMF can you tell us what happened when you went along?

Went along?

What happened when you, you got your letter to be called up and then what happened after that?

I called up there

31:00 and the next thing there I had to present myself to the Townsville Railway Station and climb into this train. And off down past Bowen to this Merinda, we got there about two o'clock in the afternoon or something like that. And as I said about eight hundred of us piled out and "Bert Anderson if you're here?" I was one of the first called out, "Yes mate." He didn't like that one bit, he

31:30 was a cranky pampered quot.

So what did you do on that camp?

Just all the basic, the first two weeks they thought oh well he's going into the intelligence section there so we'll make a bit of a joke out of this so I was the steward at the sergeants' mess there for two weeks. I never had any basic training, I missed all that.

How did that happen?

Oh well I was in the sergeants' mess

32:00 carting the tucker around for the sergeants and washing up and things like that, that's what they thought of me.

But why did they do that, you didn't get any basic training there?

Well I couldn't be in two places at once.

So after that first two weeks?

Well two weeks there then George Roberts came to life, he was the intelligence officer and one of the

first things he said there was, “I want.”

32:30 We had a sergeant a fellow named Jefferies, he was three bob [stupid], he didn’t have three bobs’ worth in his skull either. But still he was a sergeant he come from the RSC [Regimental Service Corps] ranks, “Want a corporal.” Well I said, “Well I’ll have a go at that.” He looked at me and said, “Cripes,” cause I was the lowest educated of the lot, all the others there, there was a schoolteacher there, a lawyer, bloke doing law,

33:00 they all had had at least high school passes, and here’s me not even a state scholarship. So he goes through all the process of drawing maps and see none of the others there had been out of the house into the bush or anything like that, they just didn’t have a clue. And night time exercises there they didn’t know where to put the feet or anything else.

33:30 And of course when it come to the manoeuvres at the end they couldn’t keep their eyes open, they didn’t know how to. And how to camouflage and all that sort of thing, find their way round and use the compass and that. And of course the next thing there I’m made the corporal next, I went back to the backer again in January and Mr Jeffries came up to me and said, “Hey.” He said,

34:00 “You’re the corporal now you know,” all the others there, well they just didn’t have a clue, they couldn’t do it. And then from that we went into couple of weeks' break, oh about ten weeks break I think it was and then into a camp again. I ended up as the chief instructor there for the map reading, well that was my expertise, that’s something that

34:30 I was interested in, not that I’m a draftsman, I do all the rough stuff and the other blokes do all the fancy work.

So who was responsible for giving you that position?

George Roberts.

George Roberts. And so he recognised that you had those skills?

Oh yes, he come down to the tent one afternoon there and he said, “I’m going over to Pool Island to get some oysters, anybody like to come with me?” and the others there looked and said, “No,” I said, “I’ll go with ya.”

35:00 And anyhow he got two pushbikes there, and of course on the way there one got a puncture, George doubled [dinked] me down the rest of the way. And no sooner, when we were there he said, “Cripes it’s getting just on five o’clock.” He said, “I’ve got to get back to the officers’ mess by six o’clock. It’s a formal mess tonight,” and I said, “It’s about three miles or so from here back to camp.”

35:30 I said, “Can you run?” He said, “Looks like I might have to.” I said, “Well right oh you’d better start.” So he no sooner gets on the pushbike and I’m running after him and he gets a puncture too, so right oh you’ll run fair dinkum now. So here he is, I’m leading the way, with his pushbike in one hand and when we came up to the other one that had the puncture I grabbed it and here I am with a pushbike in each hand and going for me life,

36:00 and George behind hanging on. That’s what made it, I really admired him for that effort there because it’s not too many officer blokes there that could think about doing it, but he done it and he got back and he was in time for the formal mess. That’s what clinched it, that’s what I believe anyhow. The next day he come down to the tent and he said, “How you feeling Bert?” “Oh

36:30 quite all right,” cause I used to run, I calculated it out on the bread delivery I used to run at least twenty three mile a day, not in one go but all short stops and that, but I used to run, I never used to walk, I had to get me quid, me extra quid [pound]. So he said, “Oh I can hardly move.” I said, “I didn’t expect to see ya walking at all.” I said, “No trouble to me.”

37:00 And straight from that on there any special jobs going there I was the one. Even when he went to Cape York there, there was only two go up there first a lieutenant and myself, I heard them discussing it there, the CO and a few others there. And, “Who we going to send?” “Oh well Barry Smith

37:30 will be the most likely bloke,” he was the lieutenant, “And what about somebody else?” and George pipes up, “Bert Anderson.” “Why him?” “Nobody else, him.”

So you made an impression on him?

Oh I did, well George comes down here, every time he comes down here, at least rings me or he’s been out here several times. Several years ago

38:00 he used to come down to me at Sherwood there, he wouldn’t stay with his two sons, either one of his son’s places here, one’s over at Bardon and the other one’s over at Coorparoo, anyhow somewhere over that way, I know the address and everything. But he used to always stay at the Queensland Club there, I suppose a five thousand dollars a night, fees would be nothing.

So in those early

38:30 **days of training with the CMF what were your first impressions of the militia and the military?**

Lack of equipment, see when you got off the train there here was the blokes from the transport platoon there training with blooming horses. You had to perch on the back, you know pulling those field guns behind them there and the guns looked as if they'd been raided,

39:00 taken out of one of the parks, these things of the First World War, and it's hooked up behind these horses and the blokes are up there flogging the horses and galloping around and around. And I said, "Cripes how the hell are we going to fight a bloody war with horses? You can't do it. The horses don't match the mechanised material." And then we got issued there with rifles and oh some of them you just couldn't see through the barrel,

39:30 it was all corroded up, they were all from the First World War, all the discarded stuff there. Cause we were called the broom stick warriors, like the scouts, we never had, I never got a new rifle there until 1943, the end of 1943, that's when I got a new rifle. Every rifle I had before then was all from the First World War or been

40:00 used on rifle ranges or something like that. It was a terrible state of affairs. And that's where I say this compulsory military training; you've got to have the equipment to do it. As it stand even now we haven't got nowhere near enough, we couldn't even defend the blooming…what could we defend nothing, you couldn't even catch a fly

40:30 on the back of a horse.

Tape 3

00:31 **Tell us about the camps that happened in Townsville?**

The camps?

The CMF camps that you had?

The CMF, well……

Well when we came back from Merinda the next camp was in the Townsville Showground, that was in March, I think it was a ten week camp I think it was. And we were trained, I was the map reading instructor for that there and

01:00 we had the fellows from 11th Brigade come in for our intelligence, fellows like Bill Stovall and Eric Hamet and Dave McDonald and Allen Malone. Those four, it was primarily to get the training for intelligence work so they could go back to brigade. It didn't do them much good because Eric Hamet was playing around with a blooming Jap grenade at Lae, short time afterwards blew

01:30 himself up. Allen Malone he joined the air force and he didn't come back, David McDonald become a public accountant there, and twenty one years of age too he was when he got that, and the same with Allen Malone, not bad going. And he went in charge of all the supplies and that sort of thing in Cairns and other places there. And Bill Stovall, he become the

02:00 depot keeper there for the Mobil Oil company at Cairns later on, afterwards, but he was a clerk or something there at the time, so that was the four of them. We had another fellow named Bluey Hench, he was a sergeant and that's where I give my first address to three hundred and sixty odd people, the brigadier and all thrown in, first

02:30 time, two and a half hour lecture, oh.

What was that about Bert?

Map reading.

So what was involved in the lecture, what were you telling them?

How, right from the start to the finish.

Can you tell us a bit about that?

Oh gee well in the beginning you've got to get all the field information first. And in the military, in our level of survey work it was all with the prismatic compass. You'd take the bearings

03:00 and seeing we had no, it wasn't practical to use a steel tape or anything of that nature, you used to do all the measurements by pacing, you learnt to pace exactly two foot six, that's seven hundred and fifty millimetres each step. I mean to say there that a hundred and twenty odd paces, come back to a hundred yards at that particular time. Well there you went from the field work and as you're going along in a straight line on the compass bearing

03:30 from here to there, had taken all levels, all measurements at a level. So if you're going up you had to

allow for the hypotenuse of the triangle and so forth until you got a level, because all maps are based on a level measurement. There's no good giving the hypotenuse from here and there and something else. Once you got up to the field work and you noticed on either side any tracks or the nature of the country, whether it was rocky or

04:00 soil or swamp or whatever. All the different symbols you use there to denote whether it's swamp or wind pumps or trees, anything like that, fences and railway lines and road, had all these symbols there, you'd soon know on any map what they are. That's going right through with that. Then you had all the contours the distinction between formed lines and contours and then the latitude and longitude,

04:30 we never worried about except for the magnetic variation, because you had to know that, otherwise you had a prismatic compass there like in Brisbane here, there's a seven and a half degree magnetic variation to get true north. If you don't take that into consideration you'd be going along and every degree latitude you'd end up seventy miles out,

05:00 so you've got to be a bit careful on that. And whenever possible there you done the triangulation which I done a lot of in Bougainville for instance there. That is where you establish a base line, we made our tape for that out of sig wire, and you got it more accurate there. So you've got the two points there for the base line dead accurate, and when you take the bearings from there

05:30 and see another one there, that point there, particularly if there's another one coming in from over there and another one from there, and they all come into that little dot there, well you've got a pretty good indication there. See that came in very useful in Bougainville there for artillery and our own troops and everything else there. Because once we established the tactical headquarters get this base line established and I'd go

06:00 out, or one of the other fellows would go out and do the travessing until we got points there where you can intercept. Like a ridge is a classical one, and that would give you more or less the position of where the Japs had their pill boxes and their major defences and all the rest of it there. It was very good, port is another one. What's a point, what's a straight line,

06:30 all these things, the point out position, I've still got it there, point out position and know length, breadth, depth or volume.

It's amazing that you can remember that?

Well that's right yeah, and there's sixty three thousand three hundred and sixty inches in a mile, that was a representative fraction. And these things meant for the scales and that. And one later on there, not that lecture another one later on there, there was a sergeant

07:00 oh Tiffin I think his name was I said, "Can you put on the board here just what your version of these scales and units are?" "Oh yeah," and he comes out and he draws a bloody fish, that was his idea.

So who were you lecturing to, what was the importance of, where were those people going?

Where were they going?

Yeah?

Just into their own squads and that there later

07:30 on and to go out and do their manoeuvres and exercises. See I used, not that particular lecture but after that lecture was over that's given all the, everything about maps and how you plot them out and all the rest, right from start to finish. And then when they go back into their own part of the unit I used to take different representatives out

08:00 from each unit, might be twenty, thirty and take them, all blindfolded, take them right out in the mulga somewhere say, "Right now get back to camp." Because if they hadn't been paying attention to what they had been taught well they'd still be out there, we had to go out in a search party and find a couple of them, we found them all right, Townsville it's a bit hard to get lost there.

08:30 But all those, then when it comes to the base camps there, like in Townsville again, and the base camps there the reconnaissance work there I used to take these brigade blokes out there to the Ross River. George sent us out there to do a reconnaissance between points for the feasibility of tanks and all the rest, tank obstacles and all that sort of thing.

09:00 But then a proportion of it that George didn't know anything about it out there, we only got as far as the Ackenvale Arms Hotel and we all lined up there, go and take them out to the sheds and then come back three quarters stonkered [drunk]. But I'd do the report on the bar and then they'd put their own version in it, because that's where I used to go out there with the scouts, crikey I walked up and down that bloody river there dozens

09:30 and dozens of times. You know one of the most peculiar things about Townsville and Ross River there's not one creek or inlet comes in from the north into the river there, everything all comes in from the south or from Mount Stuart and those areas there, all comes in, Mount Elliot and that. Not one thing comes in from the northern side, it's unusual that.

10:00 But we didn't know at the time, I found out later on. All the reconnaissance work and……

What were the maps that you were doing about Townsville, in the defence of Townsville, what happened there?

Well when the Japanese came into the war we went onto really full time training seven days a week twelve hours a day. And our section there, which I was

10:30 the main part of, I was still only a corporal then, go in there, see there was nothing, no maps or anything that you could use. So George got some maps from the council and then we'd go out and bring them up-to-date. Now from, you know Townsville at all? Yeah from Rose Bay where the swimming pool is, around about that area there from there

11:00 down to the mouth of a creek. But we got to there and we made a map taking that whole area in of one chain to the mile, when it all rolled up there it was like rolling up a carpet. And twenty two yards to an inch, that's

11:30 a damn hell of a big scale that. And on that thing, anything that was over fifteen feet in height we had to mark in like all trees, all the out houses there, where they were, any new tracks that had been put in and then it went from the foreshore of the Strand right through to the base of the hill. Now it was from that drawing then, plus Harold Park on the west end,

12:00 Garbin and all the rest of it, go across Garbutt airdrome. There's a point of interest Garbutt Airfield was all tunnelled and heavily mined, cause that's how close it was, so if anything did happen there it would just go boom, they'd think the atomic bomb had gone off, it would blow everything sky high. Right back, all those other areas there, and from there they were a larger scale,

12:30 that probably would have been about, would have been somewhere around twenty five thousand, one to twenty five thousand, in other words about two and a half inches to the mile. And from there, and then you'd have all your symbols again for your different weapon pits and barbed wire and all that sort of stuff there, mine fields, the whole lot, that would be all, where it's going to go. There was only actually

13:00 one mine field laid with mines in it and that was at Cape Melville and that's the Many Peaks Ranges, Pallarenda from there you go out there across Saltpan around the back there, northern side of Pallarenda, there's only one live mine fields put in there. There was only one fatality there too, one bloke happened to take the wrong turn and put his truck into a thing and of course it went up bang and he went with it.

13:30 But all the others there is all, everything's all barbed wire, barbed wire was put up, there's no gaps put in here and there. But from the Strand back to Alexander Street, which is very close to the base of Castle Hill, that present road up there now, that was all to be demolished the whole lot. And the fire plan there, we only had a couple of Vickers machine guns, that's the heaviest

14:00 equipment we had, one was sighted there at Bishop's Lodge, that's on the Belgum Gardens side , overlooking firing down into Rose Bay. And the other one was in Molten Hill, Cleveland Terrace, on the bank of the Ross Creek firing over into the railway yards, so that was the sight plan for that. There was only two Vickers machine guns there. Later on as the anti aircraft blokes come in

14:30 so they got downpipe there from the buildings, a short length of that and a couple of car batteries and when the Japanese reconnaissance planes came over they'd just short circuit the batteries and the flame would come up through there and make it look like an anti tank gun, anti aircraft gun going off, and of course they'd take photographs, oh that place is well and truly defended. All the ruses in the world.

How real was the

15:00 **threat at that point?**

Hmm?

How real was the threat of invasion?

Very, very real. On the 8th June, 8th May the 10th, on Thursday morning, it must have been the 10th May I think it was, at two o'clock in the morning the last message came through from the main signal place in DNW

15:30 building there, from there, come through there, large transporters sunk seventy miles north east of Townsville. Now from that there we already knew there was a transporters of at least three thousand Japanese commandoes, equivalent to our commandoes, on board, it was a definite raiding party, they could do a hell of a lot of damage. The threat was real, real, real there, there's not too many realise

16:00 just how close it was.

Did you think we were prepared enough for that threat?

No, no. Our battalion there was responsible for constructing the road from Hervey Range through

Dotswood Station up to Mingela and out to Charters Towers to get away from the place, that's a scorched earth policy. All tunnels, Cairns was the same up the Gillies Highway and the Palmerston Highway and the Smith Highway and

16:30 the Palmerston. The four highways up to the Tableland they were all mined not just proposed but mined. And if the Japs had landed the scorched earth policy would have come into effect and culverts and bridges and everything like that would have gone sky high. The only thing there the Australian army did have plenty of was explosives, they didn't have rifles or guns or anything like that, no field pieces, we never had any artillery

17:00 or anything of that nature there. Nothing at all, no tanks, no carriers, nothing, a lot of pushbikes, that's about all and that threat was very, very real. In fact at the time 1940, early 1941 my mother had Lloyd Kitson and another bloke there from the recruiting centre for the air force boarding there, and might have been a couple of others,

17:30 boarding there. And Lloyd was telling my Mum there, "Pack up and get out while you can, pack up and get out." Well you see a Vauxhall motor cars and less then six months old for twenty five quid, what was the threat like? And how'd they feel in Cairns it was worse still, you couldn't get in or out of the place there at one stage. When you look back on it, just how stupid can

18:00 the authorities be when they don't worry about the fence?. It's no good waiting for the bloke comes along and then clocks [hits] you and then do something about it. Even now what can you defend?

Did your mum actually leave?

Oh yes they came down to Brisbane here in early 1942, they come down here where the brother was in Murray Street in Karinga.

18:30 They rented the house up there in Townsville, they managed to buy that house there, it was a beauty that one. Where we were living in Greenslay Street this big old rambling place there the owner of it there said, "You've got to get out because I'm going to sell it, I'm going to do something with it." And he gave us a certain time to get out, otherwise we would have had nowhere to go. So the eldest brother he managed to save fifty odd quid,

19:00 fifty odd pounds and didn't know anything about stamp duty or anything like that at the time. Anyhow he goes to Sid Bartlett the estate agent up there and he goes up there, nobody else would buy the goddamn thing up in this blooming hill there, no access or anything. And he's jumping up and down on the veranda, "Good solid house this." He said, "It will stick together for a while," and all the rest of it. Anyhow he got the fifty quid, fifty pound deposit on it

19:30 and paid the balance off at a pound a week. You know he paid that off in exactly twelve years, well I did anyhow. And it's joint, see my mother couldn't get credit so that meant to say it was the mother and us four brothers there we were all joint owners, in joint tenancy. And the eldest brother got killed, or didn't come back from the air force and his wife thought she was

20:00 going to have a share in it and she wouldn't sign the documents and it took over eighteen months to get it cleared up. You can't do that with joint tenancy, joint tenancy there that's it, it's the names that's on that deed there, that's all that gets paid. When he got it, it's the first time my mother had ever had so much money in her life, cause when the cheques were made out for all of us, well we promptly give it back

20:30 to her, said, "Here you are you've got something at last."

How did you come to be full time in the CMF?

Full time?

Yes because you started out, you weren't full time were you?

Oh yes well there was a carter going up to Saline and of course I had to be up there too and we get up there and

21:00 and we're standing out in the bull ring bellowing out there orders and all that sort of thing and one bloke there, Sergeant Jimmy Hickson said to him, "What's the characteristics of the .303?" "Oh yes," he said, "made out of wood and steel." He was back to a private next day.

What were you doing up at Saline?

Training for NCOs

21:30 and potential officers. And then we went down to Townsville and who should we cop down there to practise on, there was a mob of blokes there from the Marine Meat Works, oh they were dead beats that lot. But they couldn't do much and get away with it in the army there. We no sooner got them domiciled there and they were a reserved occupation and out they went and said, "Ha, ha."

22:00 They laughed at us all the way back to the meat works.

So you were up at Saline for, how long were you there?

Only up there for a month and then came back down to Townsville again in the exhibition hall there, in that hard wooden floor.

Did your brother get sick at that point, something happened with your brother?

Oh he got sick there at nineteen,

22:30 he was selling these Rawley products and he used to take over on the bread delivery there when I was in camp. In 1941 the Japs came into the war, wasn't it? Yeah well in September of 1941 there he had the motorbike with the sidecar on it and once before he had tipped the bike

23:00 over the sidecar, and this is in Flinders Street in front of the Café de la Appetite, and this is the second time he done that. And of course he ended up with a fractured skull, blood clot and God knows what, his face was all out here. In fact he was very closely [nearly dead], that's why my full time service, I lost almost twelve months because I had compassionate leave there for three weeks before I went up to Saline.

23:30 My full time service doesn't start until I got to Saline, and done almost twelve months for nothing. The pay, all the other things there, oh I haven't forgiven them for that yet.

So what you were in the CMF for twelve months without getting any pay, is that what you mean?

No twelve months service, oh you only got paid for the time you were in there,

24:00 you got paid for that. But I got compassionate leave because thinking the brother was gonna [die]. I also wanted to wind up his business, wind up the Rawley products business, I sold his motorbike, I sold everything. And of course when he comes out of hospital he survived and come out he didn't recognise me for a long long time. He even owed his guarantor there ten quid, and I didn't even know until

24:30 oh a long time after I come back. I went to see old John Shaw and he said, "The worst thing I ever done was go guarantor for him," and of course he come out, I had to fork out the ten quid there, with interest to reimburse him. You can't have a guarantor and then him in the lurch like that. Well he never knew what it was to have money because he wanted to be a composer of

25:00 music, well fancy wanting to be a musician there in 1929, cripes they were sacking them there instead of putting them on. And he kept going and composing and he composed one piece there, something about the gateway bridge there, he had a back operation. He was showing the blokes there how to break concrete with a fourteen pound hammer, and he forgot about the clothes line overhead.

25:30 And he swings it up, anyhow the hammer got caught and got him on the back of the neck and bounced off there and he ended up in hospital, then they sent him to the Roselea Hospital there, rehabilitation centre. And while he was there he done this composition about the gateway bridge or something there. And he give me a copy of it, it's here somewhere and stone the crows [exclamation] they wouldn't even play it at the crematorium it was

26:00 so dead. He was a really good violin player but he lost that, the tip of that in that same accident, he lost that tip of that finger. Every year they had the competitions there at Easter time I think it was, concert societies

26:30 and all those sort of things.

He didn't go into surveying?

He was, oh he done it too, he was up there in the Cooktown, Daintree, Cooktown area for a long, long time. But he elected to stay up there after the job finished up there; that was triangulation survey, elected to stay there and go tin mining at the China Camp. You ever heard of that place? That's China Camp, that's in between the

27:00 two points there and bring the water down from the higher mountains through the fluming and bring it down into the nozzle. And if you don't know how to use a nozzle there you go flying. And hosing the dirt down and going through all the races and all the rest of it there. And all the loose stuff there ends up in the Daintree River, and filled up the Daintree River, it's a wonder any of the mines departments never closed it down.

27:30 Oh there's still a lot of tin up there, but they used to get anything up to thirty pound a bag, well a bag weighed one hundred weight, in the old time seven pound syrup tin, about that high and about that round. And take it in by pack horse into Cooktown, they'd get anything up to ninety two percent of what they were mining there. But he, course typical of

28:00 those blokes there, they go in there get the cheque for the tin they'd do and go to the pub and when the cheque cut out they cut out with it, and off they go home, go and do some more work. Ratbags.

When the Japanese entered the war Bert, how did Townsville change?

Oh gee once the Yanks turned up, they started to turn up in January 1941 that's the first lot. We put up the, our battalion there,

28:30 fellows from our battalion put up the lot of the stuff there in Gulliver, had rooms. And they no sooner moved in and it rained and all that black mud, oh gee what a christening for them. And blooming hundreds and hundreds of these blooming Yanks turning up there; and there's another point of interest there is when that first lot of armaments arrived there from American for Japan, for the Americans

29:00 in Townsville here, it all turned out to be mustard gas aerial bombs. And of course the wharfies [wharf labourers] are going along merrily there, until suddenly they found out that it was mustard gas and they didn't want to walk off the job, they ran. But all the cargo from those ships that come in there was all put out there where the Lavarack Barracks, where that is now, in that area, Ross River Plains we called

29:30 it, that was the first airdrome. That's where I saw the big, the first big whirlybird, a Douglas that carried thirty passengers, a DC1. Oh this great big thing and we're all there with the pushbikes looking oh what a beautiful thing flying, how does that get off the ground? Out in the paddock there amongst the shiny apple trees, it was a sight and a half.

So what did you think of the

30:00 **Americans?**

Americans, they're good to have on our side, but that's about all I can say for them there. You ever tried their food? How would you be a plate of rolled oats, some powdered milk over the top of that and then a hand picked, ladle full of stew on top of that and then to cap it off some blackcurrant or some blackberry jam on top of that again,

30:30 breakfast. Ice cream and all the rubbish in the world, they're into it.

And how did it change the town, what happened in town when all the Americans turned up?

Oh the town went down the drain there, well there was terrific water shortages for a starter, because Townsville never did have good water supply. And of course the influx there, there must have been up to a million odd

31:00 troops there at one stage, for a town of thirty thousand to carry that is a bit over the fence. Bringing water from Alligator Creek, I think that was the first one that had water in it from Rolling Stone. And from the Crystal Creek, water tanks on the tanks, well petrol tankers actually cleaned out and were carrying the water from

31:30 there down into the railway workshops opposite Flinders Street, opposite the old Mansfield Hotel there. And it was pumped from there up into the reservoirs. And there was a terrific shortages, in the morning you could get water there, just provided you were on one of the lower levels, and again in the afternoon. But during the day nothing, night time it was turned off also, they used to turn it off at the reservoir to make certain that they'd

32:00 get enough water in there to get pressure to get for the next day. That was one of the main things, all the roads there deteriorated to hell, nobody painted their buildings. There's very few street sweepers employed, if ever any at all, the place was all dirty, dilapidated . I went back, like I said with Rita several times there but oh cripes

32:30 I don't think I'll ever live here again. But of course when the war finished I managed to get the job in Townsville there with the Queensland Housing Commission, in charge of their depot. But once George Ralston's councillors got into office there, I had a lot of fingers on that one to, not in the front room I was in

33:00 the back room, the boy at the back, counting out the spuds.

What about fights Bert, were there fights between the Americans and the Australians?

In Griffith here there were quite a few.

Not in Townsville?

Hmm?

Did you witness any?

Oh it would only be minor ones up there. On one occasion there I happened to be, I don't know how I happened to be there, but a Yank was standing there against the glass window, or leaning back on the

33:30 glass window of Woolworths, that's in Flinders Street, Blue Bird Café on the corner and Horn and Peters, the jewellers, down the other way. And he's there and these three Australians, they're young blokes apparently they just come back from up New Guinea, and one on his left hand side put his hand on the glass and the other right hand, put his other hand on the glass. And the bloke in the middle was going to sock him,

34:00 and anyhow this Yank reacted. The next thing there this bloke here ended up about fifteen yards down the road , this one ended up down there, “You can’t do that to me, you can’t do that to us,” and the other bloke was out in the gutter. And the Yank just looked around. He said, “Listen Aussie,” he said, “I think you’ll find out I just have done it,” and just went back to leaning up against the window. They didn’t find out, they didn’t realise

34:30 that he’d been trained in unarmed combat very, very well, because a lot of the Yanks were like that, some of their training there was very good. But other than there to go out on patrols, your heart’s in your mouth there all the time, noisy, bunched up, all want to be together like a mob of ants. Not like the Australians, they’re spread out.

35:00 There is a way they do things but physically they were quite good. In Cairns they had a parachute battalion training and that was at Gordonvale and the training field was between the Mulgrave River and Aloomba and there’s a big open paddock there. And of course these planes would fly over and these jokers would jump out. The next thing we’d get a call there was somebody

35:30 missing, one bloke we found inside a fern house, another down near the rocks of the Mulgrave River and another one down there at the Josephine Falls. Oh their all over the place there, broken legs and broken arms, bring them back.

When did that happen?

That was in Cairns in 1943.

36:00 I don’t think they ever really used anywhere, I don’t know of any Yanks going into as a parachute battalion, I don’t think they went in for, but they were training just in case anyhow. Not like D Day, because D Day over in England there was thousands and thousands of parachutes there. At the end of the war a lot of the parachuter’s there went into Singapore and other prisoner of war camps, because that’s the only way they could get in.

36:30 But they didn’t say anything about how they were going to get out.

What about the black American soldiers in Townsville, did you see many of those guys?

Yes on one occasion they decided to revolt, see they were on the Stuart area, out that way there and the whites were all on the thing and they were prohibited from coming in, they had a line of demarcation there, it think it was

37:00 Ross River, I think that was the line of demarcation there. Anyhow we got this call one night, one afternoon, or night was it and the next thing there’s a scramble and the blokes go out with their Vickers guns and we had, yeah we had a few Brens at that time too. And some of the old time Lewis guns with the magazine on them, they still, that’s all they had. And oh

37:30 there was a whole lot took up positions there on the, where there was any access across Ross River there, like round at Rooney’s Mill there, where I used to work there later on. And that railway bridge, that footbridge there and the Ross River bridge, then scattered along the bank right up to the weirs there. Because the boongs [Aborigines] reckon they were going to come in there and wreck the town and of course everybody’s there waiting for them.

38:00 **So what happened?**

Hey? Well somebody with a bit of sense prevailed and all the Negroes went back to their camps, nothing happened. But on another occasion there a Negro skipped the camp and apparently he jumped on a train and got off at the railway, central railway station in Townsville there and his walking up Blackwood Street on the

38:30 right hand side near the pub there. And just as he’s getting within range one of the American provos [Provosts – Military Police] there turned the corner and see this black fellow, bang shot him on the spot, killed him too, no beg pardons or anything. And of course there were a few Australians there, “What the hell you do that for?” “He’s not supposed to be there.”

39:00 **Were you there when that happened?**

I saw them, I saw them. Oh yeah, I can’t give you the exact dates and all that sort of thing now.

And how did you react at the time?

Well what could you do, you couldn’t take on the American army, because we already knew that that was their orders and therefore it had to be obeyed. See like Americans

39:30 there and their discipline and code of conduct is far different to ours. See even there was an incident there when I went up to Cape York and I was staying in the same tent as three signallers and meself and the Americans in charge of the construction of the airdrome there used to send one bloke over at six o’clock in the evening until six o’clock the next morning. Now he had to stay awake all that time,

40:00 but this bloke turned up anyhow and of course we’re all there and he’s got a .30, carbine eight shot self loaded, all real good rifle it was. Anyhow somehow or rather the damn thing went off and gee that bloke

there he never stopped shivering from then until the next morning and he said, “They’ll come and shoot me, they’ll come and shoot me.” We said, “Oh don’t be so blooming silly.” He said, “No, they will.”

40:30 That was there, I was eating with the white officers there, they had nothing to do with the Negroes at all. Cause you weren’t allowed to mix with them I said, “What would happen there if you thought it wasn’t me or one of the other three there that fired the shot?” He said, “Oh we’d just went over and

41:00 shot him,” the Negro was right.

Another tape.

Tape 4

00:31 **You were going to tell us Bert about a story in Cairns to do with the American soldiers, something in Cairns, you just started to tell us something about?**

Oh the American, oh yes it’s nothing unusual to see the jeep with an officer and two others, a driver and another person there in low gear following a bloke with all this blooming big weights on his

01:00 back. And I got to know one of them later on, I said, “What’s that?” They said, “Oh that’s just one of the ways their doing punishment.” “What for?” “Oh I didn’t clean me boots or something else,” some minor thing. And they had to do anything up to fifteen miles carrying this pack and here’s these blokes at the back, the officer there carrying his revolver loaded and ready to use if this joker decides not to

01:30 carry on. They would have shot him on the spot.

That was a black American soldier?

No that was a white one.

Right, hmm, so that was their punishment?

That’s their way of doing things, I don’t know how they expected to win the war if they had to lot of corks(?) around the place. The idea was to keep people alive and well, even if they did come, cause we had a lot of blokes in our own unit there that were fair dinkum they were really, well

02:00 you’d throw petrol on them if they were on fire, give them a send off.

Really they were, why what sort of blokes were they?

Oh they were always one to question everything there and do all the things their way, very hard, very hard, but still you needed them because they were useful in many respect. Because as long as a person there knew how to conceal themselves and to fire

02:30 and eliminate the other bloke on the other side well that’s all you were really interested in. But to achieve that it took some doing in many cases.

In the early days of the CMF when you became full time, after you came back from Saline?

Saline.

Can you tell us what happened after that when you came back?

Oh well we had all these Merinda meat worker blokes there, that was what I was saying before. That

03:00 was the first time I was called upon to charge a bloke there for being late on parade, and here he is eating an ice cream and I just wanted to go over and say, “Good, you got one for me too?” But he got seven days CB [Confined to Barracks] there, but nothing worth worrying about. That was just, he just didn’t want to be told what to do and when to do it and all the rest of it there. He only just came

03:30 into the army. The best part of it there was later on in Bougainville he got the Military Medal, that’s how useful his was, Colin Jorgensen. But to me I felt, “Oh how stupid can a person be?” But at the end of this meat worker blokes there getting them into shape and so forth, like military shape of course. And the,

04:00 they had an examination then, written examination for those who had been on this cadre from Saline and just finishing off this training. And practical Bert there couldn’t do the damn thing, I didn’t do very good at all at it. The other chap there he was a private, he become the sergeant. And I felt oh really good.

04:30 Joy Roberts said to me, he said, “I wanted you to be the sergeant,” he said, “but I can’t do it. My hands are tied,” he said, “but I can find a transfer for ya?” I said, “I’m staying here.” I wouldn’t go to a rifle company, doing the same thing over and over again, that’s no good to me. That’s why I’ve had too many jobs and learnt so much in me time, crikey.

05:00 I've had me own business and the whole box and dice [everything], the longest job I ever had was in the army, five and a half years and I couldn't get out. Two years and nine months was most times.

How long were you in Townsville, Bert before you went?

We went there in end of 1927 and me mother came down here in 1942, I forget what part of 1942,

05:30 and then I went back again in 1946 and then to Tully in 1957, and from '62 from Tully down to here.

Can you tell us a little bit about the headquarters in Townsville, for the intelligence, and what you did there?

Well brigade headquarters was up there in Will Street, or Walker Street, Will Street it must have been behind Poltanies,

06:00 the carrier people in Townsville there. Whereby a lot of our fellows from the 31st Battalion had gone into the Castle Hill and put in a great big bunker in there, a great big room out of solid granite rock there. They constructed that and that's where our brigade headquarters operated from, later on 5th Divi and all the rest of them come and used it later on. In the initial stages there when we left the showgrounds

06:30 there was a make provision for the 5th Division headquarters, we went out to a place called Black Forest, that's out near Mundingburra, out there. And camping underneath the shiny apple trees and everything like that, but the Ackersvale Arms Pub was pretty close by. The only trouble is they could never get enough grog, not that I ever drank me self, but the others did. I was what you call a two bob screamer, take the top off and I've had it.

07:00 That was the thing and of course the companies are spread out all over Townsville. See in the initial stages there was only the 31st Battalion in Townsville and then the 51st come down from Cairns and they were stationed a bit closer to us. Then the 26th Battalion come from Saline down to Townsville also, they were based at Hughenden come down. And between the three of us there, the three battalions

07:30 that formed the nucleus of the 5th Division. And three battalions there made on brigade and then when the 5th Division headquarters moved in the 61st from here and the 9th Battalion and the other one, I think it was 42nd I think they moved up into that area up there. And the other lot there from Rockhampton they come up there

08:00 so that made it the whole division. Three, six, nine, nine battalions there, three battalions made one division and they all scattered all the way around. And that was the entire defence of Townsville, up until the Coral Sea battle, May, there was only the 31st, 51st and 26th in Townsville, that's all.

08:30 Another point of interest there too, when this Japanese reconnaissance come over, the Everley classes they called them, operating from Rabaul they'd come over, oh anything up to twenty five thousand feet. And all the Americans had here at Garbutt was the Airacobra and that had a ceiling of only eighteen thousand feet. And of course the Cobras would take off and the Japs up there would be throwing them peanuts, they couldn't reach them.

09:00 And they had no three point seven anti aircraft guns or anything there, nothing there could touch it, no Bofors or anything. And of course the Japs had a field day there at the reconnaissance work, there's no doubt about that. When they did drop a few bombs on Townsville there, there was only one bit of damage done at the Innisfail experimental station there, it chopped down a coconut tree and the legs off a couple of fowls, that's about all it done.

09:30 And the other ones that were designed for the harbour, of course that was always full of ships, terrific number. But there they would take the barges, they bought their own barges out with them, unload the ship into the barge and the barge would run into the sand on the Strand there down between Rowes Bay and Pallarenda. And then the trucks would pick up the stuff from

10:00 thereon. But the other lot of bombs dropped about six on Many Peaks Ranges and that's about all I think, didn't do any damage at all.

If there wasn't a very good defence of Townsville as far as you were concerned, why didn't the Japanese just come in and take over?

Oh well they had to get passed all the other things first, like Milne Bay and Port Moresby, they were the two major areas at the time.

10:30 **We were being defended off shore?**

Yes that's right off shore. See the Japs come in there, it was in February 1942 that they took over Rabaul. Well from Rabaul, the Simpson Harbour there and they put their own submarine pens in there and everything. Gee they made a magnificent job there, all the tunnels, cripes knows what there.

Yeah we're going to ask you about that later, it's very interesting?

Oh that was a magnificent job.

11:00 And then over at Bougainville and down to Guadalcanal, and nothing happened until they could take Guadalcanal and use it as an airbase. The Coral Sea battle, if we had of lost that, if the Americans and the Australians had lost the Coral Sea battle well I don't think we'd be here talking now. I know I wouldn't be because I would have been up the chimney [cremated – dead] long

11:30 before this. Because we had no way of getting away.

How important at that time was the intelligence and what were you doing?

Well our level there was keeping track of all the defensive positions, that was the major consideration. And then fire plans, see every machine gun and every other thing you've got has got what they call an

12:00 effective zone of fire, that's six hundred odd yards there. There's that little bit of vibration that the bullets are landing at the other end might take up there three hundred yards, two hundred yards or a hundred yards and only that wide or something like that. And from knowing which type of rifle firing you'd effect a zone, and that's where you'd get your fire plans for the most effective part.

12:30 So that if anybody did come along there, well you try and direct it so that it would come to the most effective part there to inflict the maximum number of casualties.

So would you have meetings to decide those points?

Oh that's what our job was there as an individual, situation report and see what's going on. And also to develop the fire plan.

13:00 **Would you go out to the location and look at it?**

Oh yes, yes.

Can you describe a little bit more about that, what would happen?

Oh well in a defensive position you've got a weapon pit, well it's just a hole in the ground just big enough to get into. Because the smaller the area there, well the less chance they have of hitting ya. Get down there and at night time there and dig underneath and cover over and you can sit in there and have your smoke,

13:30 and hope they couldn't smell the smoke. And then you'd actually sit with the machine gunner, wherever it was, and get him to fire just to find what the effective zone was, how high off the ground, any hollows or anything of that nature. See there's not much good having a machine gun here if you've got a hollow over there, they could go along and get around the other way, it had to cover the whole lot.

14:00 So elevate or depressed, whatever it might happen to be, just that little bit. And then you'd put up stakes there so you couldn't fire any more than that, otherwise he could of hit the other blokes see. Because when you got that all established there and there'd be another bloke there, only about five or six yards at the most off where you expected those bullets to land.

14:30 And he'd be in his own hole there and he'd have his own rifle fire, or automatic fire or whatever it happen to be, how far he could throw a grenade and that sort of thing, and discharge the cup, if it was a seven second grenade. We had it all worked out so that different stages there, if there was anybody attacking you, you could know exactly what weapon to use to get at that particular point.

15:00 But you had to be as strong defensive position in the first place there, you had to be there for some time, it's not something you just walk along and bang into it, it had to be well and truly worked out. You wandered around about three days at the least to get everything all established.

How did you learn that?

Trial and error really. There again it comes back

15:30 into to me scout training…….

Surveying?

Surveying and that sort of thing, your knowing quite well there that you can, instruments on the machines will only do a certain amount and they've got to be directed by the person operating them. If they don't their useless.

So there was a lot of trial and error going on at that point I suppose?

Oh yes, oh there would be. Because it wasn't only our fellows there, we were all, in our section there we were all

16:00 really soloists, we could be by ourselves there, used to have a terrific amount of authority or responsibility. Not that many realise it there.

In what way?

Well if we didn't get things right, well your whole lot could be wiped out.

And did you realise that you had that responsibility at the time?

Oh you never give it a thought, never thought about it.

16:30 If you thought about everything that might happen there you'd never get no where.

So was George in charge of your?

No he was only in charge of us there until we come back from Cape York, that was the end of 1942.

Can you tell us about Cape York and that whole trip, what happened there?

Oh that one. Oh jingos, that would take a month of Sundays [long time].

That's all right we've got time, we're very

17:00 **interested in that because it was really quite an interesting trip wasn't it?**

I must have been down to Liverpool in Sydney there for six weeks down there for gas and camouflage and like intelligence work. I ended up

17:30 with laryngitis, God she was cold down there. Got back, as I come further north I was started to be able to get my speech back again.

So what you did training down there?

Yeah.

Was that six weeks of gas ?

Gas and.....

What was involved in that training?

Finding out how to use gas and camouflage, how to camouflage yourself. See all that come back again, to me wasn't anything new except there,

18:00 had big areas like airdromes and all that sort of thing. Like that anti aircraft gun there with the batteries flashing it, see all those ruses and things there, all come from that. Somebody in the class there found out how to go about doing it and of course the knowledge just spread and away it went. But a lot of it was still your own ideas and that, if it didn't work well you never told anybody about it.

18:30 When I come back there we went on manoeuvres in Townsville, and then this time there it was formulated there that a force had to go to Milne Bay. And we were earmarked for it, but as we had so many cane cutters and reserve occupation blokes in there, and not only that we were only getting leave once, twelve hours every three weeks, or two weeks, once every

19:00 two weeks, officially we were only getting twelve hours leave in that time. Well the blokes said, "This is no good to me," cause when they saw the trains coming and the wheels going around, "Ain't ya coming, ain't you coming, ain't you coming?" Of course they hopped off the train and off. And when come through to go to Milne Bay there wasn't anybody there to go, only about a third strength of the lot. And then it rained and churned up the grounds,

19:30 so they decided to send the 61st and the 9th and the 42nd, they went up to Milne Bay instead. And you know what happened up in Milne Bay there, it was no picnic up there. But we reorganised again, got reinforcements and so forth like that. And then it come to life there that if Milne Bay goes and Port Moresby goes

20:00 we want another drome there instead of Horne Island. So that's how Higgins Field, as it was called in those early days there, came into effect, in other words Jackson and now known as Bamiga. Came in and so we come along there and on the Monday morning it was, I think about the 4th September I get, somebody comes along and tell me I'm wanted

20:30 over there, and it happen to be the CO's rec tent. So I go over there, Percy Cardall, I go in there and here's Percy Cardall, Barry Smith and George Roberts and Stan Strange and Harold Blum. And I walk in and here's all these majors and captains and all, "Take a seat Bert." Then George comes out as the principal speaker

21:00 he says, "This is a high security job, there's nobody to know you've been here or anything else and you can't tell anybody what you're doing." And it turned out we're going up to Red Island Point there at Jacky Jacky. And he said, "The advance party will be Barry Smith and Bert Anderson." Anyhow we go out to the airdrome there on the Friday, that was

21:30 the first Friday after the 4th, anyhow the Monday and that must have been the 11th. And he we are with a box of grenades, the 303 ammunition there of all kinds, the rifle and Barry Smith had his blooming .38 Smith and Wesson. I don't think he knew how to fire it, he probably would have shot himself. He was a school teacher,

22:00 I don't like them. Anyhow after a lot of haggling and everything else like that somebody come along and said, "You're not going, you're going back to camp, you've got a different priority." So we go back to camp again, and still not able to tell anybody what we're doing or anything, "Where you been?" "Oh just went out there to see if a dog has lost its tail," or something. And then the

22:30 next thing, "You're going on Friday," the next Friday. So we get out to the airdrome there and everything has all been sorted out by this time, they've got all our grenades and ammo and everything, the old Stinson, the three engine Stinson, that damn thing. It's already out and they had only three, and two of them had already crashed, and that was the first time I'd ever been in a plane.

What did you think of that?

I was hanging on there looking to see if I could get out and

23:00 walk, but it was off the ground then I had to stay there. The next stop was Cairns, then Cooktown, then Bowen, gee a magnificent sight at Bowen there all the ant beds, just like somebody had got the blade of a knife and stuck them in. Hundreds and thousands of these ant beds, magnificent ant beds, gee wonderful. Oh

23:30 lousy country, awful. Later on I had a chance to ride through there on horseback and found the rain came with it and flooded the whole lot. And the next thing there's this howling explosion all the ants, they were great farmers there had put all the grass in and put in their ant beds, and of course with the internal combustion, bang up she'd go when you got wet.

24:00 And the horse would wanted to bolt and you'd end up in the drink and go knows what. Oh it was a nasty place. And then after that Iron Range, that was for Portland Rose and then Horne Island. Horne Island there over to Thursday Island and then by launch from there over to Red Island Point. And Red Island Point there we picked up by an American Negro in a six wheeler

24:30 and boy did he go, he went zoom in a straight line for the drome, he didn't take any bends he went zoom, no wonder the road got wider and wider every time he went through it. And we get there and then we end up there with the Yanks. Our accommodation had been arranged, I ate with one lot of American officers and Barry Smith he went down with another lot. But the briefing on that

25:00 Monday morning was that we were to go up there and to establish sites for a whole battalion of where they could camp and where they could get water and everything like that, without, like I went mainly as the camouflage. That was the main reason why I went.

To camouflage the accommodation?

Make certain that we could keep the accommodation and everything so that when these blokes arrived that

25:30 the tree cover, right from the Jardine River, that's about fifty three miles from the top, twenty seven miles from the turn off. There was just one canopy of yellow stringy bark, hundred and hundreds, they were all trees around about that diameter, round like that. We found a good use for them, we go along with our trucks, stand on the roof and chop around all the, ringbark the thing all around the back

26:00 and another bloke would do all around the bottom and then split her down and open it up and put it on the truck and then cover our tents.

That's a great idea, the bark all came off?

All, yellow stringy there has got bark that thick, oh beautiful stuff, took about six blokes to lift it. Well the length would be at least twelve feet long and spread out there for twelve, thirteen feet in width.

26:30 **Who came up with that idea?**

Oh well that was part of the survival.

It wasn't, I don't know how they ever picked him because he wasn't suitable for the job there. And when the advance party turned up there three weeks later that was George Roberts and the CO [Commanding Officer] and all the others turned up, he reckons he had a report there,

27:00 maps and everything there. He couldn't have because there wasn't any. All we had was what Captain Cook had surveyed or done on the east coast and nobody had ever done the west coast. And the names of the points, there were a few points there named, through the Australian navy put it there, but the map we had there came from the Lands Department. There was an outline there and nothing in the middle, nothing, like Skull and Burster Creek

27:30 and all these other places there, the name of the station. And now he's writing a report, I've got it in there I'm sending a copy of it up to George Roberts to find out if he wrote it, I know what he's going to say. Anyhow there because when these blokes turned up, "Where do we go?" well they didn't know where to go. So

28:00 anyhow, we worked it out there.

What did you do to get the right locations?

Oh based on the airdrome and the overland telegraph line there from Cairns, I think they didn't terminate at Cairns, there was some other place and right up through the middle of the Cape York Peninsula, right up into the top and then into the water and over into Thursday Island. But it wasn't

28:30 operating, it only operated as far as Wenlock I think it was. Where we were it didn't operate, that's why they had the three wireless blokes up there. Well anyhow we sorted it out there, well George Roberts sorted it out anyhow for that matter, he sorted it all out there. But then there were things we used to call Honeycomb Ridge,

29:00 that was from the northern side of the drome there, that was the name of the captain in charge of B Company. And then Cardo Ridge, that was because of Percy Cardo in battalion headquarters there. And then there was Theodore Ridge and Doug Ridge and then of course as soon as George comes along on the job there were things getting organised then. And by this time the vessel called the Poombar had arrived and it had some carriers on it,

29:30 that they used over in the Middle East there, and they had some of these carriers there. So we get hold of one of these carriers there and get through the road, the only trouble was the blooming green ants in the branches and the wasps used to land in the carrier and the bloke would get out. And they'd get air locks and everything, they weren't too good at all, but they got there. And later on we got nine General Stewart tanks,

30:00 and they were like pill boxes really and we got them, so I grabbed one of them. And I had to find a suitable water point and from there I rode back to the camp, road location that was one of my expertise. And I just about run into the TO's [Transport Officer's] tent, "Where the hell are you going with that tank?"

30:30 **How did you find that road, how did that work?**

How'd it work?

Yes you said it was one of your expertise, what did you do?

Well we went up to the junction of the telegraph line and the airdrome; I put a datum peg in there at the top end of the airdrome. From there I knew where I was going every time, from there I'd take compass bearings and pacing and everything there. And

31:00 at the telegraph it was much easier because a telegraph pole is always a hundred and ten yards, half a chain it's facing, that's the distance. Well all you had to do was count them. Getting the position of the airdrome, the datum peg that was the hardest part because you had to go from Red Iron Point down to this part there, you had to traverse that first and get the peg there so you could work on that. And from there well you could go anywhere then,

31:30 and by going down a distance down the telegraph line across this Skull Creek and Burster Creek and a bit beyond that, and just by looking for the lay of the country there and the ridges and that sort of thing, that must be it and you go there. Well you offset all your bearings and that sort of thing, well……

Was it much harder country to do the

32:00 **surveying on then what you would have been used to?**

Oh we were up there with the surveying part of it there, how do you find your way around a new country, there's a lot of good luck. Well you've got all the aids there, you've got your compass, you've got your two feet there to count with the pacing and that sort of thing. And as long as you've got an eye for levels,

32:30 as I said before you've got to have a level measurement, not the hypotenuse of the triangle, level. And where you obviously got to make a thing well you take an offset and come back again. The type of country there, we didn't know it at the time, but was this bauxite, these bauxite ridges and then it comes into gulleys, when

33:00 it gets heavy rain they were the only time they'd have water in them. The best part of the lot there when we did eventually get around to it and digging the wells there for the water at eight feet, you'd just come into water and it's all very coarse sea shell. If you've ever seen the shell that come from Shelly Beach in Townsville there, well that was it, layer and layer, oh well we didn't go down any further then that but that was all

33:30 shell. And the water was very sweet but it was still wholesome, it was still good, being so close to the salt water on either side, it had something going for it. I done a lot of roads up there and different things.

34:00 **And what were the Americans doing?**

They were constructing the airdrome, it was all Negroes with the white officers, the white officers didn't do too much. Now and again one of them would come over to the tent and have a yarn with us there, but he was a weirdo too, he come from Hollywood. You wouldn't take too much notice of what he

was telling ya, he'd tell ya a frog had feathers, blooming ratbag he was.

34:30 But those Negroes there, they were the classics. While we were there, that's right, they got three months pay in one hit, so the first thing they do they go in and their playing this crap and cards and everything. You know one bloke there he had a schoolbag, you know those square type on the back, and not just money poked into it but all just laid out, and he had that full. I don't know what else he had,

35:00 he had an entire payroll for the whole mob of them, there was sixteen hundred I think that was there.

Sixteen hundred Americans working there?

Yeah Negroes, used to work day and night. They had the heavy equipment too; oh they had done pretty well for themselves. Only one night there was a big commotion there and we go over and have a look and during the day they'd dug a trench right across the drome, where the run had already been constructed

35:30 for drainage and they hadn't filled it in. And this Negro from the southern end he comes tearing up there in his six wheeler and didn't see the hole in the ground and then bang straight into it. And of course the truck tipping over and he was still down in the hole, killed the poor cow.

He died in the accident?

Did he died, oh yeah squashed to a pulp,

36:00 there wasn't much left of him at all. The white officer said, "Oh well," he said, "dig a hole for him." Oh, they didn't worry about him.

Were there any other incidents up there with the Negro soldiers?

Not a great deal there, they're so subdued they weren't game to do anything at all. One afternoon there

36:30 somebody made a noise like hitting the wheel for a plough and it sounded like an air raid warning. Well the Negroes went zoom, straight through, it took a while to round them all up again, but they got there. That was the only other incident we had; Negroes were very, very placid, they're quite good, I found them there quite good around the place. But the Yanks never, because white and black they didn't mix up there at all,

37:00 but now it's a different story now.

So how many white soldiers would there have been there guarding them, they weren't doing the work as well were they, the white soldiers?

There wasn't any white soldiers there.

White Americans?

Only the fourteen white American officers that's all and the sixteen hundred, I think it was sixteen hundred, anyhow a lot, of the American Negroes.

37:30 There was just four white, five white, like Australians there, three of the signallers and Barry Smith and me self. When we got out, getting towards the end Barry Smith said, "We'll go along and see if we can't find a road from here to some way down the telegraph line to make it a cut off there, to make it a shorter route in."

38:00 I said, "All right," because I was only the boy around the place there, he wouldn't ask me for anything. In fact I don't know what he done. Anyhow he was talking about blazing tracks and God knows what and sooner worked that one out. Anyhow we left about six o'clock in the morning there with the American rations there for lunch, a tin of meat and ham, meat and vegetables and some other tripe they

38:30 give us, no bread or anything like that, no tea you never had a cup of tea for three weeks, oh that really rattled me. Anyhow when we get out there and get down to the telegraph line, you couldn't help but miss it, you only had to go in one direction, you either hit the telegraph line or you end up in the ocean, one or the two. So we're coming back and the next thing he cracked up, because his knees give way to him I said to

39:00 Barry I said, "Well I've been carrying all your spare gear since somewhere, Skull Creek or whatever it is there." I said, "I can't carry you too." I said, "Well what do you want me to do? Will I go on and see if I can get somebody to come back and pick you up? Or will I put you up against a tree there and cut the grass," with the bayonet, I was carrying a bayonet, "Cut the grass and build a fire around so that if there's any

39:30 Joe Blakes there won't come along and think you're a good bite." And anyhow he thought for a while and then next thing he had a remarkable recovery and he walked the rest of the distance. When we got back it was eight o'clock at night and I said to the officer there I said, "Do you think I could get something to eat around here?" He said, "Oh yes." He said, "Just take this note to the cook." So I went up there and roused up the cook and

40:00 he said, “Oh Aussie you want something to eat?” He said, “Oh I’ll fix ya.” So he got this great big frying pan and had fresh eggs, twelve eggs all in there and stuck it on the fire and I’m looking around to see what else he had. And he tipped it out onto a plate and he said, “There you are Aussie that ought to fill you up,” twelve blaming fried eggs in one go. I said, “Do

40:30 you think you could get me some sugar?” “Oh yeah.” So he got a tin of carnation milk, took the lid off it and straight down there in the dirt, cleaned it out and filled it up with sugar and said, “Here you are, how’s this.” Oh fancy getting twelve eggs down your gizzards there after all day, oh, luckily the

41:00 other mob turned up there a couple of day later on, dear I was pleased.

Tape 5

00:31 **Can you just tell us a little bit, can you describe for us the conditions that the black American soldiers were living in?**

Well they lived in tents and the food wasn’t anything out of the bag. And they never got any amenities at all as we know them, in other words from an Australian’s point of view they were treated very badly, at least I thought so anyhow. I thought living in fear all,

01:00 they couldn’t do anything, cause the discipline and the American white officers to the Negroes, you’d have to witness it to believe it. It’s different now of course.

What sort of things, when you say you have to witness it to believe it, what sort of things did you witness?

Well like the thing in Townsville for instance there where the provo just turns around and shoots the bloke, bang, because he was out, out of his own territory.

01:30 And there was a fellow come over there for the guard duty for the night and accidentally the rifle goes off and he’s shivering like a, really frightened that he was going to get shot because he let the rifle go off. Irrespective of whether we backed him up or not, if the officers thought that he

02:00 had fired it, well he would have been a goner [killed]. He even came and told me that they were shooting the fish down the end of the drome because they were disturbing; they think they’d get the same idea. I used to go down to the end of the drome, bit of landing there and wait for the mullet to come along and shoot them with the 303’s and then get something to eat. I lost me brand new watch on that blooming place there, I shot the

02:30 damn thing and I put me left hand in to get it out and I forgot about the watch, ruined it.

That’s amazing. So when you, you actually conversed with the black American soldiers, you had conversations with the black American soldiers?

Oh yes I used to talk to them quite frequently, particularly when I wanted transport to go from one place to another, they were the most, that’s before their own lot turned up. Once they turned up

03:00 well we had a truck and a motorbike and above all five pushbikes, nobody would ride the damn pushbikes up there, nobody would ride the motorbike either.

So the American soldiers drove you, did the Negro soldiers drive you?

Oh yeah but your heart’s in your mouth all the time, as I say going from Red Island Point to the drome there, zoom straight through, no bends in the road for him, flat out, bang, he was a ripper that joker.

03:30 But normally they weren’t too bad.

So how did you get on with them?

Oh quite all right. I was was a passenger really, I didn’t have to tell them what to do or anything like that.

Did they ever complain about the way they were treated?

What would be the good of it, that’s the trouble with the American Negroes there they could not complain to anybody cause

04:00 if the white officers even thought it, well they just wouldn’t be about any more, they’d just blown then off. Practically everybody else will deny it, but it’s a fact of life there. What I found with the American Negro there they were really scared out of their brain to know what to do, if they could of got away they would have. But there’s no way of getting away.

04:30 A lot of people have said to me, “Oh you could of lived off the land,” one person there couldn’t even live of the land up in those places up there. Because you’ve got all the tropical diseases in the world for a

starter, you had Tarzan running around loose there at Cape Tribulation at Bloomfield River there at one stage.

05:00 He lasted about fifteen months I think, covered with ticks and God knows what, you just can't do it. There's plenty of cattle up there, I know I knocked a few off there and bought them back there into the camp to eat. Pigs we wouldn't touch because of the tuberculosis [TB].

05:30 I think it was about 1890, 1875 or something like that old Jardine [early settler] went up there and he established himself at Somerset and he bought up the cattle and the pigs and there was no wild dogs there. But they bought up another, I think they must have been Rhode Island red fowls, you know the big red,

06:00 and they'd gone wild there, I knocked off a lot of them but they were really good eating too. And the Torrens Strait pigeon and sundry other things like that, other than that there, crabs and, plenty of crocodiles, black lip oysters there. But with the American Negroes there, well they didn't have access to that, they couldn't take their rifles

06:30 or anything like that, couldn't take their arms out of the camp area. In fact I don't think, I can't even remember seeing a Negro carrying a rifle, because they were there for an engineer unit and they were there to work and that was it.

So what other sort of wildlife did you encounter there in Jacky Jacky Creek and around there?

Well I found the spot where Jacky Jacky [Aborigine] swam the Jacky Jacky

07:00 Creek, I found that. I done the survey of the Jacky Jacky inlet river as a possible Catalina base, done all that, by gee that was a tough one that, estimate distance over water. The first attempt when we came to plot it we had a little map about that bit. Anyhow we tripled the distances and everything and it come out pretty accurate, it was not too bad. But in the Jackie

07:30 Jackie River itself there you had everything there, the biggest hammerhead shark I've ever seen in my life. You saw this big fin sticking up and of course inquisitive Bert again stands up in the twelve foot clinker built boat we had with an outboard motor on it, stand up and they're getting up closer and closer. And when I saw the thing, and next minute I'm looking up there like a skyscraper with the tail up in the air, oh.

08:00 Anyhow we all settled down and looked over across the river and here's the biggest crocodile I've ever seen, gee there were some whoppers up there. We done that survey of that one there and that's where we discovered all this blooming red rock there. One creek we went up there, one of the creeks coming in, and we went up there and the tide must of just been on about

08:30 full, and we went up as far as we could go. Anyhow the tide apparently went out and whoosh down like that and we got stranded. And that's where I found this blooming red rock there, we didn't know what it was, it was blooming bauxite. And cause I was going to put me foot over the side there to see if I couldn't push the boat into the water again and I looked down, and a pool of water about from

09:00 there to there and down about eight feet deep, here was one shark about four feet long, oh God knows how many more were there about two foot long, a stingray and a blooming stone fish thrown in. All in this one pool of water, nothing there good to eat, I got me foot back in the boat quick smart. I named that creek Ruddy Creek, that was after one of the lieutenants there.

09:30 **What about your own living conditions there in the camp, what was it like for you?**

Oh the conditions weren't too bad there really but the food was very, very short, never had any fresh food or anything, other than what I shot and bought back.

What did you eat?

Bully beef and the biscuits, we never had any bread and the M&V, that's the

10:00 meat and vegetables. And plenty of goldfish, like herrings in tomato sauce. For dessert you'd have custard and pears one night, the next night you'd have pears and custard and the next night you might have custard and peaches and the next night you'd have peaches and custard, like that. You had about three, apricots, peaches and

10:30 pears and custard always remained the same. Now and again you might get porridge for breakfast, you know oatmeal porridge, there was no such thing as Cornflakes and Weetbix and all that sort of thing. I survived but the Christmas lunch, we were going to have Christmas dinner, we were still there at Christmas time, Christmas Day. So what we had there was one tin of bully beef, that's the corn,

11:00 corned beef and one tin for three of us and one packet of these biscuits, dog biscuits for three of us. And as a complimentary goodwill gesture one boiled potato about that round, and that was Christmas dinner. It was all devoured with the greatest of pleasure.

11:30 But luckily the night before I'd gone out there and I come back with five turkey and three of these wild fowls and a couple of Torres Strait pigeons. And they were good enough to roast them up there for us

and George Roberts arranged for them to be cooked and roasted and all the rest of it. And during the night Gordon

12:00 Phillip, he was the sergeant at the time there, he grabs the centre pole of this blooming tent, it was balanced on another thing there. And one of the beer bottles had gone down and broken and because he fell on it and we ended up taking him down to the doctor full as a boot [drunk] and they put ten stitches into him, sewed him up. I was talking to Gordon the other night there and he reminded me about the God

12:30 damn thing.

Bert what did you do for entertainment while you were there in Cape York?

Well the battalion used to put on a concert every now and again and Harold Bud the 2IC [Second in Command] of the place there at the time, and he thought he could sing. So he rendered an item there and of course, "Good on ya," and they thought they wanted an encore, and of course he comes back on, "Get off you silly cow, don't you know you can't sing."

13:00 This is the 2IC of the unit, Major Harold Budd, he ended up being the manager for the gas works in Townsville. But as a sideline there he was on the troop train at Rockhampton when the Yanks were coming down, and the Australians were going up. And they both pulled into the station at the same time and of course the banter that went on there, particularly referring to the women people,

13:30 women and the next thing a fight starts. And eventually one bloke got his gun and shot one of the Yanks and killed him. And it came out afterwards there, so many ended up in hospital, Rockhampton Hospital, they were flat out coping with that number. It comes out there that no Australian and no American train would pull into the station at the same time, so it achieved

14:00 something.

Were you there when that happened?

No, that was only all second hand information. But some of the blokes I was very, very closely associated with there, they witnessed it.

Who were your mates by this time when you were in Cape York, had you made some good friends by this time?

Oh all our section there

14:30 worked really good. In our section there, there was George Roberts he was the lieutenant, Gordon Philip he was the sergeant, I was the corporal then we had Bill Pepils he was a traveller for the liquor department there in Townsville there. Jack Perth he was from the post office in Charters Towers, turned out a wonderful draftsman that bloke, wasted talent. And

15:00 Jack Guy, he was a teacher, he ended up the head teacher of the Cooparoo State High. And Harry Green the batman for George and he used to pull out a ten bob note, ten shilling note there, and set fire to that so he could start a fire, quite unnecessary. And Arthur Benbo from Mackay, he was the driver for our vehicle.

15:30 Jack Gruvey, he ended up with the Ford franchise in Ingham, he was a clerk at the Burns Philp in Townsville there, but they'd all be in this high school.

And what sort of things did you do together when you weren't actually working there in Cape York, what sort of things did you do together in your spare time?

Well I don't know I don't think we had any spare time.

16:00 When we went across to Dutch New Guinea, that's after Cape York, we never had any spare time there at all. Now and again I might go out there and see if I could land another couple of scrub turkeys or something there.

So there was no gambling or drinking in Cape York at all?

Oh no, with the drinking part of it there I think we only had one issue of beer and that was for the

16:30 Christmas. But even then, later on all you could ever get, there was two bottles a week. When we were in Dutch New Guinea there I went away for twelve weeks on one job and the other blokes there had got the two bottles for me and kept them and of course no refrigeration or anything there. And of course when I come back we had twenty four bottles amongst six of us, there was some jokers kicking the grass there [passed out].

17:00 **So can you tell us how you came to leave Cape York and go to Dutch New Guinea?**

Christmas day, the next thing we got the movement order to move back to Cairns. Now Gordon Phillip he was laid up there with his sewn up leg, so we're not going to leave him behind in the Thursday Island Hospital.

17:30 So between us we got all his gear and everything and I ended up putting him on my back, because I was pretty strong in those days, and piggy backed him and that's how he made him mobile. And go out, we went down to the jetty that they had there, cause nobody would swim in that jetty cause they used to use it as a slaughter house and

18:00 it attracted the sharks and the crocs, plus other things there. Anyhow we got Gordon on the tug, Willis Vanderlin, that's right, Dutch ship it was. Got him on and we took off and on the way back there, at one point there the joker didn't have a pilot

18:30 on board and coming back on the Inner Passage there nearly wrecked the whole flaming lot, there was anchor chains go and he stays there until daylight anyhow. And the tide was, more water came up with the tide too. Anyhow eventually we came back to Cairns. At Cairns there well we got off this Willis Vanderlin there and taken by truck to a place called Saw Mill Pocket,

19:00 that's on the bank of Wright's Creek, south of Cairns. And on the other side there was where the Yanks used for their landing field, for the parachuters and all that sort of thing. But from there I used to go into the Cairns High School at night time for, I was told my English wasn't any good, this

19:30 time George Roberts had been transferred to the officer in charge of the intelligence training school at Tenterfield. And we had another bloke there and I had to take over doing the war diary then, for that short time anyhow. And he told the officer there a fellow named Gordon Smith, he was another school teacher, he said, "You'd better learn the English language," because I didn't know much about English, that's what I failed in. And anyhow

20:00 I go into the Cairns High School there and I'm the only adult amongst all these kids there. After about six or eight times I'd been in there, riding the pushbike the blooming search lights are going up looking practising picking up things there. Another bloke on a pushbike coming in the opposite direction and went bang and I got this bone in me hand there broken. And then they sent me up to Rocky Creek, I was up there for three weeks and then

20:30 came back and another six weeks, it was ten weeks altogether before I got the plaster off me hand.

So you attended high school classes in English?

Yes, oh yeah.

Did it help you?

Oh too right oh yes, when I did eventually have to write the war diary full time there, well I don't know how many dictionaries I wore out, that's something I was never interested in.

21:00 **By the time you'd left Cape York what was happening in the war by that time?**

Well Milne Bay had been won and Salamanda and Gona and that area there was still in full force. But after those were taken and retaken for the Yanks and the Australians there, in force there, well virtually say all New Guinea was safe then.

21:30 That would have been around about March 1943.

So how important did you think the work that you were doing in Cape York was?

Well we looked at it this way. Up until Milne Bay was considered safe and Moresby as a consequence, it was very, very important there to get more air bases

22:00 further up there. Because well, it became so intensified there that the defence force there even put in a radar station there, they put up another great big hospital there, whole lot of things there to accommodate any casualties coming back from the theatre of war up there. See from Moresby to Port Island there, it's only a hop, step and a jump, it's only just going from here to there, quite within fighter

22:30 range. See the only thing that saved us at Merauke there was the Japs had their fighter range at Kokopo, fighter range there but their big base there, Freemount I think they call it now, was much further on that's why they had all their bombers and that sort of thing. Well when you come from that end there, from the west and you've got it from the east

23:00 then it would have been a great place there for any army to use as a base for the mainland. Because even though the overland road, you got some very major obstacles like the Jardine River, gee that's a wonderful river that, rises in sand hills, silicon, it's covered with what they call a turkey bush, plenty of death adders too.

23:30 You go up there and it's got this huge stream of water there, it would have been about say one hundred and fifty yards wide, at least a hundred yards wide anyhow. And the shallowest there would be two foot six, seven hundred and fifty mills yeah, and running at not less than four knot current. I done the traverse there from the mouth, all right around up until I struck the east coast there again there. Not following the

24:00 Jardine all the time, around. Just this time this year, September and that when the crocodiles are out, by

meself, nobody else with me.

So were there any air raids, were you involved in any air raids in Northern Queensland or Cape York when you were there?

When the air raids in Townsville were on I was down at Liverpool. When the Japanese submarines got into Sydney Harbour I was down at Southport.

24:30 Horne Island I don't know where I was there when the air raids came there, they had quite a few up there, I missed them anyhow. And over at Merauke there I missed them to because I'd be out in the bush somewhere, I wasn't actually in the centre of it.

So when did you finally leave for Dutch New Guinea?

25:00 July 1943, 1943, we were up there for fifteen months.

So can you tell us about leaving Australia and the trip over there?

We were at Cairns so we get down there on the old Canberra, that's a passenger liner that used to run, that was the same boat that took us from Townsville up to Port Douglas and then into Mossman, it was the same tug.

25:30 And of course going from Townsville up you go through the Hinchinbrook Channel and on the Canberra you get on the right hand side of the boat as it's going along and you just about grab the branches there off the trees. Gee remarkable some of these things. Anyhow we get on the tug there and end up at Thursday Island and go from there over to

26:00 Horne Island, that was a lousy place there. But you weren't game to use any of the utensils lying around like tins or anything because there's been a fair bit of gold mining went on there and of course they just threw the tins away with the cyanide still in them. Nothing better to do, we were there, getting acclimatised to taking the Atebrin, before we went to Dutch New Guinea.

26:30 And there was nothing better to do so we go down to the mangroves and here are these great big crabs like that, blooming claws on them there like your arm. So we found a container there didn't have any cyanide in it and we lit the fire and boiled the crabs up on the beach. And the next thing bloody shells start landing around us, the blokes over there,

27:00 you'd soon know if there were fires there once it started to get dark. So we put the fire out quick smart, but we got our crabs cooked, oh we'll get back undercover and we'll be right. But oh gee we had a wonderful meal that night, oh crabs. And then we went from there over to Merauke there, I forget which one it was, I think it was,

27:30 I know I made one trip from there over to Merauke there on the Paluma, the same name as the ship that used to go from Townsville to Magnetic Island. And we got there well of course; oh the living conditions were really bad there. We never had one skerrick of fresh food for nine months there, eight months and three weeks to be exact,

28:00 nothing, no bread, everything was out of the tin. They were even giving us tablets to try and keep the skin complaints down. Blokes with bags under their eyes and water. It's possible to go from about fifty miles east on the Fly River, that's between Moresby and the Fly River,

28:30 you could get in a twelve foot draft vessel, cross the Fly, go up the Alice and then go up, anything up to two hundred odd miles from the coast right up to almost the other end of New Guinea there and no sight the coast, with a twelve foot draft vessel. That's how much of it is under water. Terrible place, and mosquitoes, oh you'd have the tent and

29:00 when you wake up in the morning the ridge pole along there, and for at least two foot six down on either side, you wouldn't see any canvas, and that's blooming mosquitoes. We had quite a novel way of dealing with that, so we got the carbide lights, we'd light up the carbide lights and we used to go down and pinch some of the hundred octane petrol, what they used for the aircraft, and put that in the blow gun, you know the fly sprayer. And then one bloke would hold the light up there

29:30 like that and the other one there and a big sheet of flame would go up. Only trouble, we burnt a couple of tents down, and nobody appreciated that. But the mosquitoes, one was…I think they got the design for the delta wing aircraft, like the Concorde, where it comes back from a point and comes out, gee it was a beautiful streamlined thing.

30:00 Oh it was about that long and you could see it come along there and it would go zip in, no beating about the bush with that bloke. For nothing better to do lunchtime you couldn't miss them anywhere, but we used to lie down in the bed, we had bed boards and the mosquito net drawn and you put one hand up under the net and around

30:30 so you got your finger, just the point of the finger there exposed. And with the other hand you wait there and, what did we used to give it there, thirty seconds I think it was, thirty seconds and with this hand here go, and catch em, the best count was fifteen, all shapes and sizes.

So can you tell us when you first arrived in Merauke

31:00 **what you had to do?**

Well the first thing there was to find a place to put your tent out of the water. But that was quite a novel place, American Negroes there to building that airdrome, and it turned out to be all this bauxite.

Can you describe the camp there for us?

The camp, well we were spread out, everything so we wouldn't get all lobbed [bombed] there with the one air raid or anything like that.

31:30 When the new CO turned up he made certain that everybody filled their weapon pits in, you don't have weapon pits around there for counter air raids, so that was all right there. Other than that there the patrolling outside to find out where all the other villages were in what they called roads there and that sort of thing. I even camped in a tree,

32:00 well two occasions there, couldn't find anywhere to even stretch out for a night's sleep there so we made a bed in the tea tree, there was only three of us. Another time, there's a lot of these timor ponies around the place, little things like that. And we grabbed a couple of these things and used them as pack horses. Tommy Far, that's right that's the other,

32:30 he was with us then, he went to Z Force [Special Reconnaissance Force]. But I wasn't going to stay out in the swamp any longer, we'd already been out three nights and I said, "No more for me." So I got Tommy Far with the lead on the horse, to go ahead to make certain everything was going all right. Then Jack Groovy with the lead on the horse and I was behind the horse. And every time Jack, he was a lazy cow,

33:00 every time he'd slow up I'd slap the horse, so he had to put a spurt on otherwise he would have ended up in the drink and he didn't like that one bit. So we got back in time anyhow, we had a dry bed for the night.

Bert at what point did the 31st Battalion merge with the 53rd?

July 1943.

So was that before or after you went to Dutch New Guinea?

That's when we come back from

33:30 Cape York, they still had a lot more reserved occupation fellows there. That was another point of interest there, when we come back from Cape York a lot of the fellows in our unit, that's the 31st and the 51st to for that matter, they had been cane cutters or farm workers beforehand. And the season started while we were still there and they were getting ready for the planting and everything so blokes used to jump the fence and go to

34:00 the cane paddocks; they'd work there all day and then come back at night. And of course when it come to going away, roll call, somebody missing, not enough blokes. So that's when they joined the two battalions, they got discharged because it was a reserve occupation, a lot of them anyhow. And they made one battalion out of it, and the surplus there, well they scattered all over the place.

34:30 We managed to get rid of a lot of the no hopers in the place. The fellows I'm referring to in the officers, NCOs there, there were quite a lot you know I don't know how the dickens they ever got there in the first place. Because when it come down to the crunch and they struck trouble for the first time, well they just couldn't cope. So it was just as well they did get out, they all went.

35:00 Anyhow we made one good battalion out of the two of them anyhow.

And when did you, was that when you actually became part of the AIF?

I joined the AIF when I was at Horne Island.

Okay so why did you do that?

Because we left Australia and it was no longer, it was getting to the stage there where they were already past the boundaries there for the AIF, for

35:30 the CMF to move to, oh that's down Geoff Allen's got that map. No, I might even have it in that book there, it gives you the boundaries on the western boundary and the eastern boundary, but they could not cross the equator. After taking all factors into consideration there, it wasn't very likely that our unit never ever get past the equator anyhow. And so that's when I joined

36:00 the AIF, because as I said before, I don't believe in voluntary stuff.

And what difference did it make to you to be part of the AIF?

Nothing except that when I was in Townsville there, coming back from Cape York I went into the air force there and there was a recruit there for air crew and I passed all their tests, everything like the nature there. And I was waiting

36:30 and waiting and waiting and till eventually I wrote a letter to the adjutant in the battalion and he sent back another curt letter saying, “Don’t apply for a transfer under any circumstances; you’re a trained intelligence and therefore you’re going to stay here.” So that was the only difference it made to me, irrespective of if I was still CMF or AIF or anything else, I could not leave that place. When we were in Merauke there

37:00 they wanted volunteers there for the parachuters, so I put me name in again and old Jerry Jarrade, he was the secretary for the Commission of Railways here, that’s where he ended up, he was the adjutant, “If you put another application in I’ll make life so miserable for you, you'll wish you’d never been born,” “Yes all right.” We used to call him “snake eyes.”

Why was he so opposed to you

37:30 **making that application?**

Well who else would they have there to do the work that I was doing? They never had anybody else to do it. See, even though all the training in the world will not make somebody intuitive……..you know foresee what’s going to happen. Well that’s

38:00 one of the things that I’ve had in the past, like even in our business and that sort of thing there, they call it impact, but that time we used to call it feasibility. Well what’s going to make it feasible, you get all the information like an appreciation, you know you’re going to do something, then you want all the information there, not from just yourself but from everybody else and then

38:30 when you form that opinion there, whether it’s going to be practical or otherwise there, well then you can go in there, next step there and think, well how am I going to do it? And of course it goes on and then when you say you’re going to do it, it goes into what do you need to do it, finance and all the rest of it. Well it’s just the same as out there, what weapons and all the rest of it, so it all comes back. There again that was all training but, and what,

39:00 which I was pretty good at, not that I knew it meself but that’s what it turned out there. Because I had some very, very successful business.

So what were your thoughts about going to Dutch New Guinea to fight the Japanese right there in the thick of the battle?

That’s where they were going to send us that’s where we go, nothing to it. You can’t argue the point with the army or the air force or anybody

39:30 like that. That’s what makes it so hard for those fellows there in the armoured regiments, they’re sent over to Western Australia and when they come back they get absolutely no recognition at all. They never had any say in where they were going to go, they volunteered, everything like that. What bought it home to me first was that first camp at Merinda where I suppose about thirty

40:00 percent, maybe forty percent of those in camp at the time wanted to go to AIF, where’d they end up over at Malaya. Most of them were in the 26th Battalion in Malaya. Well I thought at the time there, that’s my idea was there; don’t volunteer if the situation warrants, well you’ve got the pool to draw on.

Tape 6

00:31 **Can you tell me about one of the longer patrols that you went on from the very start?**

Oh we went on so many of them there.

Maybe the first one?

The first one there we met up there with FELO, that’s the Far Eastern Liaison Office, Donald Thompson, he was an anthropologist there with the Northern Territory government prior to the war,

01:00 with the Japs of course. And as soon as it cleared here he was seconded and it turned into this Far Eastern Liaison Office, which is a propaganda unit. Well it must have been somewhere around about June, July, August, about August I’d suppose it would be. We took off with Donald Thompson and oh I don’t remember the others. As I said before we were soloists. And our group there comprised

01:30 nine of us, nine Australians and a couple of the Kargi Kargi natives there, they couldn’t be trusted at any price and one Indonesian, like what do you call, what do they call them now, we used to call them Javanese. Well we took off there and we went down to, what’s the name of the island Prince Frederick Island I think it is, in that area there. And the whole objective of the exercise was to recruit suitable natives,

02:00 so we give them a tomahawk and a knife, one of these big things there, what do they call them machetes or something, and a white singlet, a pair of white shorts and a mosquito net. Then at the appropriate time we collected about twenty of them altogether and sent them back into what they

called post six on the Ederah River

02:30 and from there these natives had been bought back into Merauke there, cleaned up, get rid of all their diseases and sores and God knows what, so they're fit to come back to Brisbane here, where they were entertained there at the expense of the military. They give them tram rides, rides on the trams and take them out to Greenbank and other ranges there to see how the big tanks worked, and how the big guns worked, and how the masters, worked and all the rest of it there.

03:00 And after about four weeks down here, they give them adequate clothing of course, take them back up there and of course they were the great, oh they were the swelled headed [arrogant] coots they were. And they were lord over all the others there and the thing with that, the whole objective was to get these people there. Only this Thompson, he should have had more sense, getting towards the end of the twelve

03:30 week period we were away for altogether, we had rations, they had distributed at different points there, we get that all right. But there was hardly any other fresh food around, it was all tinned stuff. And we get there and he decided there that he'd get a souvenir, well he pinched one of those blokes' headdress. All the bird of paradise feathers, oh beautiful thing it was. And

04:00 four of his skulls. See they were head hunters up until a short time ago. And they declare their importance in the tribe depending on how many skulls they had hanging up around the, if they didn't have enough accommodation on their little humpy there, well they'd hang them up in the trees. And I saw a lot of skulls, and of course the cannibals were inside. I don't know what, whether they preferred white people to black people, but it didn't make any difference

04:30 they'd eat the lot anyhow, the only thing they couldn't eat was the bones, they didn't have a mincer. But anyhow this chief there he didn't like it, so in the early morning there was a whole group of warriors come up with their spears and bows, bows are made out of black palm. Some of their spears there, arrows were pretty good. One bloke got up

05:00 close enough to Donald Thompson and stuck a tomahawk in the back of his right shoulder, stuck a decent sort of gash in it. But of course the rest of us there retaliated, we were going to be speared and eaten. Anyhow we managed to get Donald Thompson back to the post six and a Catalina came along and picked him up and took him back to Tarakan there, but that was the end of his days there with FELO, you couldn't trust a bloke like

05:30 that. Instead of getting the native onside he got them off side.

Yeah by taking the head dress?

But he was the only one that done any silly thing like that.

Did you fire back on the people?

Of course yes, oh yeah, there was quite a few of the natives, well they weren't around, not around any more but quite a lot there, a lot of it was over their heads and frightened it off more than anything.

06:00 **How many got killed, how many of them were killed?**

Oh I didn't count.

Around about, about?

Oh maybe six, eight, you didn't have to kill too many before they start running. Anyhow we got him back. But that particular patrol lasted twelve weeks.

On the one patrol?

On the one yeah.

So what were you trying to achieve on that

06:30 **patrol?**

I went as the intelligence representative there to see how things were going and all that sort of thing, report back to our own brigade headquarters.

So what sort of information were you looking for?

Enemy activity, disposition of the natives towards us and towards the Japanese, anything at all there that you didn't want to see, that was it. But actually disposition towards the Japanese;

07:00 the natives there didn't like them, simply because the Japanese were too brutal, they'd bash them up there quick, they were worse than the American officers were with the Negroes. Not only that, the Japanese would infiltrate if possible and do all sorts of things there to make like uncomfortable for anybody. But that was the longest one I ever went on, I had several there of a few

07:30 days, few days few nights, and a few weeks.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the conflict that happened with the local people, when they came to confront you, how many of them were there?

Oh around about five hundred, around about five hundred there with their bows and arrows and all the primitive weapons there, none of them had rifles or anything like that. And of course we had the Thompson machine gun at that particular time

08:00 and when that opened up well they could, never heard one go off before so they panicked and they off quick smart.

How many of you were there?

Nine of us. We used to always try and arrange the patrols there in groups of three, three, six, nine, twelve or fifteen. Later on in Bougainville I went on patrol there of thirty eight Australians, well that's too much, fifty carriers,

08:30 oh no good. But in Merauke there they still had, like the fellows giving the orders out hadn't learnt from experience just what numbers were required to do a certain job. They thought the more the merrier, well it wasn't the case there. But on that particular patrol there, once the Thompson sub machine gun started firing and well they could have had

09:00 three or four hundred I suppose there, but there was no sense in doing it, we wanted them on our side, not their side, not the Jap's side. You had to prove to them beyond a doubt that we were the better ones to come from and side with than what it would be the Japanese. Because that was proved later on there when the post six, I never ever went up there me self like passing through. The Japanese

09:30 come down onto that post there and that was the 23rd December 1943 and they had three launches and five barges that we saw and each one had approximately thirty odd troops on board. Well they went up and because we, our blokes laid, there was only fifteen of our blokes on that particular thing. Laid doggo [quiet] and they went up

10:00 and then they come back and all the Japs standing up there upright on the launches and in full view and everything, trying to get somebody to start something. Anyhow they went back and one of the barges pulled in there, the story's in there somewhere. This local woman, "Queen" they called her. She had a missionary education then, because she knew a lot of the things, the others didn't, so therefore she was the top

10:30 dog. And anyhow they come back and this Alec Rudercoff from Tully,he later changed names to Ross. He opened fire on the Japanese and as far as we can ascertain they killed at least eighty odd of the Japanese on the barges and the things. It was one of those situations there where on the Ederah River

11:00 there was that island at the mouth and then at the other mouth, this other mouth further on, eastern mouth it would be really. It was there where that American Rockefeller, that very rich American got lost up there anyhow, that's where he landed there. But not knowing the nature of the countryside or anything once he got his foot out of the canoe or

11:30 whatever he was in and touched that mud he'd never get out again.

When you were surrounded by, when those local people came and surrounded you do you remember what you felt and how you reacted at that time?

Oh cripes I can tell you this, no one was rolling cigarettes.

12:00 **What did you do at that point?**

At that time there I grabbed me rifle and started firing, that's firing over their heads in my own case, most of us did the same thing. Because that was an understood arrangement there before we started, if we strike any trouble, don't actually kill anybody, or shoot anybody, until you know exactly what the situation is, only do it as a last resort. But

12:30 you knew that before you started.

So do you think it was necessary that some of them got killed at that point?

Oh I think so, because it's like all situations, there's always someone there wanting to be the top dog and if he thought he could do with another skull on his humpy there well he was going to be in it.

And what happened to the bodies of those people?

What happened to the bodies?

13:00 We didn't stay there long enough to find out but we were pretty certain there that they become a meal for that night. It's just like this post six coming up there, that's why we took the Thompson there for the Catalina, in that area there, there was quite a bad blue on between the natives there on one occasion there. And it was the first time there somebody said, "Well it's the first time we've ever known

13:30 a bloke to get a sore stomach from eating his son." Oh yes there was nothing thrown away in those

places.

Did you go through their village, did you walk through?

Not that particular time, no, but I went on another one up the Fly River and then that way, backed out of that one quick and lively too.

In Merauke?

Yeah, well based at Merauke, well finishing off that one, that first one,

14:00 we got Donald Thompson onto the Catalina, well we finished with him then and he went down to, we were always afraid that gangrene would set in, cause it's terrible place with anything like that, with open cuts. And anyhow he survived it, but he was no longer of any use for the army.

Did the chief get his headdress back?

Oh yes, got everything all back. We made certain

14:30 he left everything there.

How did he go into the village and take it, how did he get it from the chief in the first place?

Oh well they all those natives at that particular time were very friendly towards us. None of us could understand why he actually took them, why, nobody knows. But he took his headdress and took the four native skulls; well that's just like taking a thousand dollars

15:00 off a bloke, a thousand dollars a head, that's how they count their currency, how their wealth is. The type of headdress they've got and also the number of skulls they've got. And a lot of other natives up there in the different areas, it all depends how many tusks, pig tusks they've got hanging around the neck or how many cassowary toes, sea shells, things that's useful.

15:30 When, it's a bit hard to come back to it because that's 1944 it's a long time ago now.

Absolutely, it's amazing your memory

Things like that stick in your mind.

Absolutely

Another…….

Before you go on from that one, on that particular project did you come across any

16:00 **enemy opposition?**

Oh we saw signs that they had been there, they had been through there, their patrols were going through there all the time, just like our blokes were. It wasn't until the 23rd December, did I say that before, June, July, August, September

16:30 December, December that's when the Rosemary launch took off, actually built it in Brisbane here with Wright Brothers and sailed up there into the things. And a fellow named Max Phillips he was the skipper of it, the captain of it, he was a sergeant and he goes up there

17:00 and he picked up Angelo Barbudis from our battalion, he was the intelligence representative, and a couple of what they call field intelligence from 5th Division. And the total crew of that particular one was in charge of Charles Wolfe,

17:30 he was another FELO bloke, but he was a different bloke altogether. And they sailed up all the inland, right through all the waterways and everything up to a place called Jayapura. And as they come around one bend in the river, I don't think that river had a name, it's just one of the channels there, and it was getting narrower and shallower and here's three Jap barges there, all

18:00 camouflaged with seventy odd millimetre mountain guns mounted in them. And the other blokes on the bank, they were establishing an outpost there. And of course as soon as each one saw the other bang! away she went and a terrific firefight went on there. And the Rosemary, when it got back to Merauke there a couple of days later on

18:30 one bloke counted over a thousand odd bullet holes in it. Angelo Barbudis, he was the only one actually killed on it, oh another four or five there got wounded, even Max Phillips and somebody else. And Charlie Wolf he was in the getaway boat there, which was towed behind the other one, God she was a powerful thing that. And that was there and

19:00 he got into there, because once he saw that our blokes had got the better of the Nips [Japanese] well he stayed, he didn't have to clear out. But if our blokes had of been killed well Charlie Wolfe's job was to get this spare boat, really get it going, oh gee it was fast, and off and back to get help and report the situation.

19:30 **How did you know about this story?**

I just knew. It was a very bad situation. But anyhow this Max Phillips, his foot and a few other things badly

20:00 wounded, but he got away. And back tracked a bit and then took another channel and then got out to the side of the ocean around about eight o'clock at night and the tug was bouncing on the dirt underneath, until eventually they got out in deep water. See deep water could be anything to, oh up to three miles up, all the mud and stuff coming down. And it got into deep water there and that's when Angelo

20:30 was put over the side, a funeral for him. As soon as we got back into what they called post six there well virtually all our troubles, except for the possibility of gangrene and that and the other chaps there wounded the Catalina come up and got them and away they went. But that post six

21:00 was in another serious there, that's the one with the barges and that, well after they killed about eighty, they estimate eighty and they all cleared out, nobody could see them any more. Next day there the RAAF Kittyhawks patrolling up in that area and just about giving up the ghost [giving up] and they spotted the barge trying to be hidden under the mangroves and that

21:30 a bit further up, and they spotted it there and got in and cleaned the lot up. And a patrol went up, a Dutch patrol went up there about two weeks later on, we found over two hundred odd bodies in it, so it's not a bad effort for fifteen blokes hey? One bloke there, Curly Green, I think it was or Henry Jewel, one of the two of them had the boys anti tank rifle, the point

22:00 five zero, the single shot job. And it had a kick better than any Clydesdale. Anyhow he fired it, I don't know he might of fired about thirty odd rounds altogether and nobody seems to know how many. But all his shoulder here and his neck here was, it went blue, oh bruising. But it had its desired effect, it put a lot of the engines of the things out of control, they couldn't very well manoeuvre them too well.

22:30 But there was a very close shave for those fifteen blokes.

And you were going to tell us about another patrol that you went on, after that big long one?

Oh the small ones in, what in Dutch New Guinea, oh they were only more or less back in, not out from Merauke itself there. Following their roads there and you come to kargi kargi bloke and you find out how much further to go to so and so,

23:00 and he'd put his hand up like that and go "Wyandra" and you had to count the number of taps. And we thought it was hours, but it turned out to be days, one, two, three, took us three days to get there. And water from your ankles up to here, never out of it. We did find for two nights enough ground to sleep on, but the other night we slept in the trees, the

23:30 tea tree, made a bed up in the tea tree, it was the only way you could get out of the water, lit a fire and everything up there.

How do you sleep in a tree?

Well you cut the branches off and make a bed out of them, you think you're a monkey at times. Oh yes there was three of us on that patrol, Jack Rubie, Tommy Farr and meself.

And was that the one where you went through the village?

No that was later on again there

24:00 we got word there that an American aircraft had come down and they give us roughly the position of it. But it entailed getting a launch and going around Merauke River, round the mouth and then getting into the Fly River, gee that's a massive thing that. And going up stream and just before you get to the junction of the Alice, that's another major trip we went on, we had to go into the west of that and follow

24:30 that for a distance till eventually got to this place. But the funny thing about it all, that trip altogether was the first time I'd ever seen a black bloke go white. He was going along and you could hear this noise in the distance, and it was getting louder and louder. And the natives there were awake up to it, blooming water about that high coming down, it would wreck everything in sight.

25:00 And of course they saw another little creek coming off the side and full belt up there and grounded the damn thing, grounded the launch we were in. And then we had to use the block and tackle and the trees on the side to pull it back into the water again. But we got up there to this starting point, and there's only the nine of us there and we're going along there and I say, "By gee this is, doesn't look so hot here," cause there were still cannibals

25:30 according to the Dutch up till 1937. And they said, "Oh there's no more now," but I doubt it. And anyhow going along there and we see a blooming skulls and they looked pretty fresh too, and the bird of paradise feathers on a few of the blokes. And anyhow we didn't, why worry about the aircraft we just backed off and come back. There's always somebody walking

26:00 backwards, just to make sure that everything was right.

So you didn't actually find the aircraft?

We didn't worry too much about it.

Did you see anything of their village?

We didn't get to their village, like I was in charge of the party and I wasn't game enough to go any further because I didn't think we'd ever get back. And if you don't get back, well it's not much good going in.

26:30 **What were the conditions, what were the weather conditions like in Merauke?**

Actually it's a very high rainfall area. The strange things about it there on a couple of occasions we nearly froze, that's because of the winds coming from Mount Juliana, that's on the west end of Dutch New Guinea, with a glacier

27:00 and actually snow capped. The wind would come down and onto the flat there and didn't have time to warm up and nearly freeze ya. Another occasion we had a bit of a cyclone and with the tall coconut trees they go over and come back and the next lot with their backward swing with the wind behind it, and coconuts would fly everywhere. The trees were around sixty, fifty to sixty feet high.

27:30 Some reckon they were seventy but they weren't that high, but just one canopy of coconut trees. You got out of that, nobody got hurt. One tent had one line across it, another tent there, oh well it went pretty close to it but nobody actually got hurt. There's only one fellow there, the signaller, fell out of one of the things and he was never the same afterwards, he fell about twenty feet or so. Now there's

28:00 a bloke you can get onto Allen Hunter in Townsville, Davidson Street there, he's got a port [portmanteau – bag], bigger than that one over there, about twice the size of that yellow one there and there's photographs galore in it, right back to the days when he first went into the army and he had a camera nobody knew anything about. But he's, he'd be gone to skull now, all the different

28:30 badges of rank and colour patches and oh all sorts of things, he's a real bower bird [collector].

Did you get sick when you were in Merauke?

Oh people got sick there all the time.

Did you?

Malnutrition really. We were on the atabrin, three tablets a week. We never had one ounce of fresh food there, other than what I'd,

29:00 like geese, magpie, geese and ducks I shot there, but from the normal rations there, no more than, it was eight months and three weeks I think it was, we never had one ounce of fresh food in that time, no bread no nothing. I think I said that before anyhow. But after that there somehow or rather a consignment of fresh meat and apples was diverted to

29:30 Merauke, come off an American ship destined for somebody, anyhow they couldn't get it there and it come to us instead. And gee did we have a feed of apples and fresh meat, we thought it was Christmas.

So how did you come to leave Merauke?

Well the things there, got to that stage where there was not much good going out on patrol any more cause the Nips

30:00 that were there had decided not to come. And they had no air force, virtually no air force left, so what was the point. And they had an airdrome there which could be used by the allied forces there, it was used extensively when they landed at Hollandia. They used to take off from Merauke and go up and there's a gap in the mountains

30:30 and they come through there and then out a bit and then they'd come back into Hollandia that way. They never, they had the Kittyhawks there, they spent most of their time flying from Merauke over to Port Moresby to get the whiskey and the spirits there and their beer, and put them in the wings of the plane and then come back and they were nice and cold when they got back, they found a use for it.

31:00 The fighters were always very nice people to know.

Were you keen to get off Merauke?

Oh yes, everybody was, it was such an unhealthy place there. Why it was established in the first place I don't know because there was no drome, there was nothing there. There was a sulphur spring right in the middle of where the township was, but the Japs had bombed everything off the face of the earth there, there was nothing left there at all.

31:30 And now I believe there, the last I heard of it, there's a population of over thirty thousand there, now where they park and live I don't know, they must be up in the trees somewhere, because there was nothing there when we were there. They still had their zebu cattle there for pulling the cart behind them. They wouldn't believe the zebu was like deer, there was a lot of wild deer up there.

32:00 Particularly between the Fly River and the Merauke River, in that area there, gee there's a terrific amount of deer there. Anyhow this day there I saw this bird went there and I thought, I didn't worry much about it. And I saw a head coming up, bang, and here was this blooming zebu stuck, tied up to a stake in the grass.

32:30 I said, "This is no good." We had a couple of those tomahawks, so we cut the zebu up the best way we could and back into the camp and that evening there, put it on as the evening meal. And then there was a hell of a commotion, the owner of it found out where it had gone, "No, no nobody knows anything about your cattle here." "What's that there?" "Oh that's deer." You couldn't tell the difference between deer and

33:00 zebu cattle, zebu have very dark flesh.

So you shot it and took it back?

Shot it yeah, cut it up with the machetes and bayonets, whatever we had, tasted better than the tin stuff.

So what happened after Merauke, where did you go?

Well from Merauke we come back to Brisbane, Strathpine and we were out there for a couple of months.

33:30 **What were you doing at Strathpine?**

Resting, getting our health back again, and further training of course. We knew we were going to go into Bougainville next, that was our next move. And a lot of recruits from Canungra had been through Canungra come to us. And a lot of our blokes went to Canungra for training and come back. And then when was it, on the early December, we got on a ship called the Sea Snipe,

34:00 American Liberty ship converted, "This is your captain speaking." It's the only ship I could see where you could have purple tea, tea was purple and not only that boiled eggs were purple. I don't know how they made them purple. But with the tea we found out afterwards they get the tea leaves put

34:30 in a pillowcase, put the whole lot in the water and then bring it to the boil. And when you look at it it's so black there, and then get the carnation semi liquid stuff and pour that in, and that's what made it purple.

Why did they do that?

They didn't know any better, see they don't drink tea, they have coffee. As I said, before breakfast that morning there are your rolled oats, the stew

35:00 and the black currant jam on top of it, to set it off.

And what sort of training did you do to prepare for Bougainville?

Oh just our normal, just what we were doing before, that's like in our particular section. But for the rest of the people there, well they only just become more versatile there with their weapons and that. Like the standard weapons there, we never had any heavy equipment.

How were the new blokes from Canungra accepted?

35:30 Oh they were accepted all right, we had one new bloke, a fellow name Wattie Crawford, we called him junior. He was eighteen, he hadn't had his nineteenth birthday when he come to us and we called him junior. Oh he turned out to be quite good at Bougainville there, he excelled himself, he was in that Porton turnout. And then

36:00 Gavin Long, the "Long Campaign" the report he wrote from Porton, is sighted on that. There was another one, it was in the Australian, I think every newspaper in the capital cities of Australia has got his report published somewhere in it, and I included it in our war diary and not only that in the unofficial history, I lost that in the flood, unfortunately . Geoff Allen's

36:30 got another copy that I had, I wrote it all out by hand, I got it from Jack.

You wrote the copy by hand?

Yeah, oh about that much of it.

So you completely re-wrote the war diary?

Not the war diary, this history.

History right?

Of the Bougainville campaign, about that, I think it was about three hundred, three hundred or more pages in it.

And how often would you write that when you were there?

Once a month, every month it had to go

37:00 in, three copies, one you post, you got the CO to initial it and sign it and say it was authentic. Then the, one month afterwards, or when you received acknowledgement that the first copy had been received you sent the second copy. And when you got acknowledgement of that, well you could do what you like with the third copy then. But there

37:30 had to be two copies there, down there at the one time, that's in the military history section in Melbourne at that time, that's before they shifted to Canberra. But for this Merauke coming back to Strathpine, Strathpine nothing much happened out there except we went down to Redcliffe there to find that PK Pardbry, he was marketing manager there for

38:00 Lysaghts. Oh he was a wonderful bloke that joker. He knew what he was doing, somebody you had faith in. And then you've got this other joker there, Joe Kelly and he come up through the ranks through the AIC [Australian Instructional Corps], never had a job, went into the army and that's all he ever knew. And of course he was a bit better than most of them, so he got a commission and then

38:30 he went into, eventually became CO and lieutenant colonel, how I don't know. But still.

So what was the trip like up on the……?

On the Sea Snipe?

Yeah?

Oh, "This is your captain speaking." It was so bad, all the bunks there. A bunk's coming down and there was five on each side, there was only that much room between the bottom ones, the ones on the row. And

39:00 you couldn't smoke and you couldn't do anything, you get underneath there. And they'd have the air raid drill and so forth and you had to go down and stay down in this blooming cabin, and of course blokes used to light up, "Put out that thing. This is your captain speaking." I didn't know they had smoke detectors in those days, but they did, he had them. And anyhow it got so bad there that one of our officers

39:30 got it organised and he and two others went up to the captain and told him they'd throw him over the side if he didn't let up, and that tamed him down a bit. We never got any lunch, with Thomson's there at least we got an orange anyhow for lunch.

How long would it have taken you to get to Bougainville?

Five days, cause all the zigzagging and everything. You still didn't know whether all the Japanese submarines were cleaned up or not.

40:00 And when we get to Torokina there we go over there, at least the tent had been put up for us.

Tape 7

00:30 Things got really fair dinkum there. But anyhow we got off this Sea Snipe as they call it and I get into where our tents were pitched, they had an advance party gone in beforehand and had the tents pitched. And before I could take the pack off me back the bloke came in and he said, "You're going out tomorrow, be ready at four o'clock,

01:00 four o'clock in the morning." Anyhow I had some sleep, and four o'clock comes and we had a meal and the trucks turned up to pick us up, it turned out to be with Joe Huxley, he was the platoon sergeant. Harry Riley was the platoon commander, a fellow named Harold Robertson the 2/ 8th Commando Unit he was the patrol leader. Now there's a big distinction between a patrol commander

01:30 and patrol leader; patrol leader has the last say, the lieutenant, or other ranks have got to take notice of what the patrol leader says. And my role there on many many occasions was patrol leader; well irrespective of whether you had lieutenant colonel or anyone else there they still took notice of what you had to say. Even Bert Callingham, one of the best lieutenant colonels you'll find anywhere, he was in the Timor

02:00 war, in charge of the Timor war force. He was on a patrol with us there and I said to him, "What do you think there major?" He was a major at that time. "Don't ever ask me that again," he said. "You're the patrol leader, now get to and do it." So that was his attitude, you're the patrol leader, you do it. Well anyhow I found meself there as just the representative of the intelligence section, which Jeff

02:30 Allen from down at the thing, and we toddled off there with, oh I think it must have been 18 Platoon as they called it. It would have been about twenty eight of us altogether I suppose, far too big. So anyhow we go along the beach, that's where I reckon I got all me sun cancers from, walking those beaches there. But the vegetation would come right down and there's only, might only be a gap

03:00 like a two metre, between the vegetation and the water line, high tide. And you're walking in all this loose sand. But anyhow this particular place, when we got to a place called Cape Monty, I was way back in the line there, I must have been about fifteen, sixteen back, and of course I'd been taking notes all the way, compass bearings and so forth. And then I'm looking up there and right at the base of

03:30 this cliff about two hundred, three hundred feet high I see a native bending over drinking, this is in the middle of the ocean, I thought, "What the hell, they don't drink salt water surely." Anyhow we got up to it there and here's one of these springs, you ever been to Ban Ban Springs out here? One of these things there had just come up from the ground, all beautiful fresh water and the tide being out and here was this

04:00 mound of water right here, and of course they're drinking away to their heart's content. Coming back the blooming tide was in and we had to climb the hill. But we get past there and on the other side, I didn't know much about pranks, some joker yelled out, "Jap footprint." And this Riley went berserk, "Every man for himself." And that's when Ernie Huxley took over. Anyhow when everybody settled down there

04:30 and made a few observations it had to be a prank because it's low tide when we were there, there's one and only solitary footprint right up there on the bank and nothing in between there and the water. Somebody, I don't know how it came about, but it wasn't genuine anyhow. So we got on from there,

05:00 anyhow we carry on from there and end up at a place called Sabi…yeah Sabi. So they established the base there, then there was Joe Huxley, Henry Jewel, Curly Green and me self and Howard Roberts from the 2 /8th Commando,

05:30 we take off and we go, next morning we take off and go up to a place called Amun. One week beforehand then the 2/8th Commando blokes had been up there and they knocked off two Japanese and left them in the water. And of course we go up there, it was seven miles altogether and after three miles we turned into the vegetation and

06:00 followed, no tracks at all. And we noticed there too that the water was red. You ever been on the Great Ocean Drive [Road]? You know all those paddocks there on the side of the road after you leave the Port Campbell and those places there, all the soil is red and the water on top? Well it's just the same, only the vegetation on this lot. And we get up there and oh yes that's where the two Nips are

06:30 still there. So we get up there, and in the meantime I had to pass me compass over to the Jeff Allen who went on the eastern run, eastern direction. So I left me compass there behind and got up there and it was getting a bit late and had a good look at the ground and there's certainly Japs around the place. So we camped in a banana

07:00 patch for the night, I don't know why they had a guard up because, your hand up like that, you couldn't see it, gee it was black. The next morning there before the sun rose we were out, here I am making a sketch of the Jap positions that were there. One of the two natives that were with us, he went across this creek and then through their camp, and as he went through it because the Japs didn't take any notice of the natives,

07:30 went through it and he counted the natives and how many huts and all the rest of it. And when he come back to me he told me where they were and of course I plotted them on this sketch, but not having a compass I couldn't get it dead right. Anyhow I got that there and we go back and there's nothing happen to us, got back there to the rest and that's where we found there, by having two meals a day, about nine o'clock in the morning

08:00 and again at four o'clock in the afternoon, don't camp in the same place where you've eaten, move on and two meals a day was quite adequate to keep us going. And this we found out was very practical to do that and you covered more ground in the same time. It was a total of forty seven miles from Torokina to this Amun, that's one way, going up, we had to come back. And because on the way back we come to this blooming Cape Monty

08:30 there and the tide was in and we had to climb this blooming hill, I think these rock climbers would have been in their envy there, cause on the, it would be the south eastern side of the thing there was this blooming river and it had been raining like hell up in the mountains there and looking down there now what would happen if I fall into that.

09:00 The ledge we were on was only about that wide in places, oh god it was nerve racking. And I think they measured it out there, it was two hundred and twenty odd feet. And we get down to the bottom there and how are we going to get across? So one bloke we knew he was a good swimmer, so we kicked him into it, and we all carried toggle ropes, their pieces of rope six foot long and a cleat on each end

09:30 of it. So we joined enough and got him right up stream and as soon as the current comes, and he just went past us like a loco [locomotive]. Anyhow he got onto the other side with the rope, he hung onto that and managed to get it anchored on something he got there. And then we anchored on our side and we all got across

10:00 there. Well one bloke, there was three mishaps on it altogether, one bloke dropped his Bren gun and it

went down into twelve feet of water and the current and everything like that, but we got it back again. And another bloke he was hanging on the rope and he tried to put his feet up stream and all the stitching of his trousers come undone, the whole lot. And that's Allen Hunter

10:30 I'll telling you about, he said, "That's no good to me." Apparently he'd seen somewhere where skip bombing, or skipping, you throw a rock onto the water and it…….so he find these great big grey granite rocks there and his pack on and all and he comes galloping along and of course he goes down like a rock. He got swept out, we had to go and fox him, get him back again, we never lost him but we got him back, that was the only mishaps we had.

That was an

11:00 **incredibly long journey, what was the purpose of that?**

Finding out how close the Japs were to Torokina.

And did you find that out?

Oh yeah, oh they were there all right.

When did you encounter them?

Oh about three days after we left, left Torokina. One night, two nights, that was the forty odd mile, we would

11:30 have done twenty mile a day, that's right. And the seven miles we went up there, that was the third night, and then come back, and as soon as we came back, we took off and we had another two nights on, two or three nights on the road coming back. But when we got between this Cape Monty and Torokina it was pretty, we were confident it was pretty

12:00 safe there then. So all those places lay just in from the beach, from the sea, ocean, is always sea, water, and I could see these blooming fish swimming around there as large as life, oh things about that long. So we said, "Gee we'll have some fish for breakfast now," and pulled out a grenade, we had five, four of them and the others had four each and throw them in there and nothing happened, the damn things wouldn't

12:30 go off. So we, these are what we got from Brisbane here, none of them were, oh we tried about a dozen of them, between the lot. Then when we got there, wait a while we tried a lot at Torokina and they did go off and we got fish for breakfast, oh must of got a couple of dozen, the natives

13:00 went and got them then.

So on that long range journey, on that mission what contact did you have with the Japanese?

We never actually had any contact at all but we knew they were there because of the two dead ones and the information supplied by the natives. And as soon as we got back to Torokina I presented my map to the 2IC of the unit at that time, that's Major Carlton and he

13:30 immediately had it, made tracings of it and sent it to the RAAF, who went up there pronto and bombed hell out of the place. And then the next day the other lot moving up were able to go into Armon and they counted twenty seven dead there, all fresh ones. So there were Japs there, there's no doubt about that. And…

So during that mission, during that forty seven

14:00 **miles, who was on that patrol with you?. What actual roles did the people have who went on that mission?**

Well we had four blokes carrying two pairs of homing pigeons, and they never ever got back to Torokina. One bloke said, "Where's the pigeons?" He said, "I ate em," yeah he never ate them they'd already gone.

14:30 We had signallers carrying these walkie talkie wireless sets that didn't work, they were useless damn things. And I was responsible there for the SFIA, Jeff Allen was also the assistance for me, he was a member of our section there. The two signallers, two or three signallers, and then we had the stretcher bearers and one of them cracked up and

15:00 he had to be carried back. Then we had all the rifleman of course, Joe Huxley he was the actual platoon commander really, you couldn't count Riley, he was out. And who else was there, Curly Green, that's about all.

What do you mean the stretcher bearer cracked up?

Oh he had crook legs, Tom McLean, he

15:30 was, our stretcher bearers there were all bandsman and most of them come from the Cairns Citizen Band. They were up in the world championship at one time, they were really good, and of course he wasn't physically fit for that type of work. Anyhow some bright spark says, "He goes," and that's it, well

he went up all right but on the way back he just couldn't make it. So we got a couple of saplings there, trees there and course

16:00 there's plenty of casuarina growing on the beaches along there.

What were the difficulties you faced on that journey?

Oh the soft sand was one of the main things there the flooded rivers. See all the rivers there you could drink the water right, even right out into the ocean. The fresh water coming down was on top of the salt. Well now when the tide was coming in you've got

16:30 the current underneath and all the fresh water coming down over the top. So if you got out of your depth, the tide was going out after full tide, you'd just go out into the sea. That was one of the major difficulties and any short person there, had to get the tall people, one on either side and hold him up. And everything, we had water proof containers there for our rice and anything else. I had made

17:00 with the log cabin, or Champion tobacco tins there, cut the bottom out ,it was made so that it would fit over a piece of galvanised iron turned into a downpipe and that sort of thing from the house, in there. And the pioneers they had a soldering iron and things

17:30 so I went over and soldered that onto it and then on the lid it had a rubber band inside and that went onto the top of it. And the get the buckles off our equipment, go and pinch them from somebody else's there and put that, two down the bottom and two up the top

18:00 and with the strap, that kept the lid on it. Because without the strap, I found out to me sorrow there that the lid would come off and you'd loose all your paper and pencils and everything else, lost the lot. So we had a little portable stereoscope, you know those things at all? Stereoscope, a Stereoscope there is a stand where you're looking down on aerial photographs,

18:30 verticals and this eye here sees over there and this eye sees over there and brings up the relief, that's when you get the photos matched up. And we had the little one there, so as you're walking along you'd have this little thing up in front of your eyes and hold it steady and you could see what the country was like ahead of ya.

How were the conditions there in Bougainville different from Merauke?

19:00 Oh much much better, only much more dangerous because there was many more Nips there, they were all willing to take a shot at you.

So how did you stay calm in that situation where you thought there were lots of Japanese around.?

Stan Tame, he was a coast watcher and later on went to the ANGAU force there and he had his own personal group of twelve

19:30 natives there for his own body guard I always reckon. And it amazed him when we went up to this long range patrol. And this Alec Rudercolff of course he was the patrol commander and he was an aggressive cow, he didn't take enough precautions there. But anyhow he goes in and sees half a dozen or so in the hut there

20:00 having a talk. Like any other group of people, I don't know whether they were spinning any yarns or not, but still. Anyhow of course our blokes opened fire on them and they didn't like it one big, because they retaliated. And then Rudercolff got wounded, bullet hit him in the compass there and went into the stomach.

20:30 And so we had to get him back somehow, so the police, the sergeant there, and I went back with him to give supporting fire in case somebody fired on them while they were down there. When we got there it went zip, straight through me bloody hat there. Looked around and that's where me Mossman experience chasing turkeys and other things come into hand.

21:00 And I'm looking up in this blooming big tree there and I could see something that wasn't supposed to be there. Bang, and it turned out to be his knee, and of course lets go and he's hanging onto his knees before he hit the ground, although I hit him again, he was dead when he hit the ground. And the another joker there, another shot comes through, through me blooming pack there and chipped me pannikin, what I drink me tea

21:30 out of, that was insult to injury that one. So anyhow he made the fatal mistake of moving, because as soon as he moved there that was the stone end of it. As I said before in the early stage you never move fast, all slow steady movements.

How far away were you from this Japanese who shot at you, who shot him back in the tree, how far would he have been from you?

Oh about twenty two yards, maybe less.

22:00 Oh you never had any long range stuff up there, it was all short stuff.

Was that the first time you fired on someone directly?

Oh yeah, yeah.

And how did you?

Well when I got back that's where I came into the game there and Major Stan Tame there, because the other fellows there coming back from there, they couldn't do any more good there. It turned out to be there was over eighty odd Japanese there. They come back and they were shaking and I was rolling cigarettes for them.

22:30 It didn't worry me in the least, not that particular occasion, didn't worry me in the least. Just after we got Rudercolff back, Rudercolff said, "Bert, now make certain you get all this information back." "Yes, yes of course, Rudi." And of course the morphine was already in him and put

23:00 him on a stretcher and we got him back and he survived. But in the meantime, while we're still making up our minds to make certain everything was clear, further back there was the two signallers there, this fellow that wrote that book over Bill Hughes and Keith Emerson. Anyhow Keith Emerson heard somebody call out, "Are you all right there?" and he put his head up and of course straight off,

23:30 took that piece clean out. And I was right alongside him actually, silly cow, before I could stop him from putting his head up, he put his head up and it was just enough. And of course Hughes or meself didn't move we just stayed pat. And eventually this bloke stood up to see if there was anything clear and Hughes shot him with the Owen gun, knocked him out. Oh there was a hell of a lot of firing going on there for a while.

24:00 **So how well did you know Keith Emerson?**

Oh I went to school with him.

And he was shot dead right next to you?

Oh right along side me.

What did you do after that?

Oh well we abandoned the patrol there, that's where there was thirty eight Australians there on it, that's white Australians. There was fifty odd carriers and Stan Tame had his own personal body guard of

24:30 twelve, so when it all stretched out in single file it covered a distance of about two hundred and twenty odd yards, two hundred and forty odd yards. And that's far too many people to be strung out over a single track, you couldn't walk side by side or anything you had to walk single file. The night, on the Thursday night, on the Thursday morning we had a fairly good breakfast, but on Thursday night we camped just a short distance away

25:00 from this patrol. And couldn't have any fires, just cold stuff, no cup of tea or anything and then the next morning you'd take off again, because a lot of Japs walked up and down the road, we got well back there, they couldn't see us.

25:30 Anyhow next morning we took off again and there was a native there that used to work for Stan Tame was there when he was manager of the Sarakan plantation. There was a coconut, like copra was a very big business in those days, pre war. And Stan Tame was the manager and this fellow Pumpkin we called him. So he singles out Stan Tame and

26:00 tells him what the lay of the land was, he was one of the natives there that wasn't working for the Japs luckily, he was there to make certain that he knew who was and all that. So anyhow he reports to Stan and after the firefight there at the village, this Pumpkin decides to take off to see what the gardener was doing, they had a big garden there, oh beautiful garden, sweet potatoes, they called them yams, sweet potatoes. And taro

26:30 and all these long beans and oh snake beans and all this sort of thing, fruit and all different types of stuff was growing in the tropics there, all well tented and everything. Anyhow this chap was up there sitting down not taking any notice of all the firing that went on and Pumpkin goes up to him with the rifle under the big banana leaf. And as soon as he gets within a short distance just went bang, and of course the Jap dropped dead, but he wasn't satisfied

27:00 of that, he just about decapitated him. And of course the rest of us there are pulling out from the place and walking along, here's Pumpkin with the Jap by the head letting everybody see that he'd cut his throat. This is half past five in the afternoon. Oh yes see some funny sights.

Why did he do that?

Oh just to let everybody know that he could cut a bloke's head off

27:30 I suppose, nobody asked him.

How did the other blokes react to that?

They weren't too happy about it but they didn't say anything, that's their custom let them be. So anyhow we kept walking till eight o'clock that night, hanging onto the bayonet of the fellow in front of ya until we got to this river, the Ganga. Well we had to cross it, cause I'm being the senior NCO left

28:00 in the place there I was what they called the "tail end Charlie," that's right at the end of the group. One bloke is walking backwards all the time just to make certain nothing coming up. And I was there to take over. Anyhow in this blooming river there this damn Bill Hughes again, he stops and has a drink of water. And waiting for anything

28:30 else he just off and this is pitch black at night, you could still hear them and he knew which way to go. And with the water rising and heavy rain here was us the four blokes left in the middle of the river. And I was just going to get my torch out there and blackout little dot in it to see to get out and I hear this voice, "Master, master," oh gee, that's when I did get a fright, because I didn't know whether it was a Jap or what.

29:00 But anyhow I took my chance, it was either take the chance or drown one of the two, and it turned out to be one of these natives that Stan Tame had sent back to see if we needed any help or anything. But that night we stopped at this camp where a lot of natives were and it was two o'clock in the morning and I couldn't stand it any longer, so I crept over to where they had a little fire going and with me pannikin got the tea boiling, got the water boiling and I put me tea in it and I had a drink of tea.

29:30 It's a wonder some cow didn't shoot me, you're not allowed movement above the ground level at night.

You were so desperate for a cup of tea?

Oh yeah. So anyhow it rained, oh gee and they did a patrol there, it was really humdinger. It was a terrible state, miles from anywhere.

30:00 You get down to the Ganga River proper there at the crossing where there were a lot of track branching off from there in the bank. And we get there and here it is, and you just stood there and you see the water coming up and as the rain would ease off you'd see it going down. And there's blooming rocks that size, zoom! But Stan Tame had sent the natives across early in the morning, we left their camp at four o'clock and he'd sent them there earlier

30:30 than that to get a vine or rope or something to go from one bank to the other before the water got too high. And they done that and here's this vine about this thick and with the toggle ropes there, one on each end, oh might have used two on each end, but anyhow sufficient there to carry it, and here we go crossing hand over hand with the rocks hitting you on the shins. Oh and everybody got across.

Bert I just wanted to go back to

31:00 **that incident where Keith was killed, so you'd known him at school, you must have been pretty good mates?**

Oh yeah we were, he wasn't what you call a very bright bloke, but still he was a good fellow to know.

And how did you react to seeing him killed right next to you like that?

Well the law of self preservation prevails and,just too bad Keith, and that's it. You feel

31:30 a lot but you can't afford to relax in those situations, because if you relaxed you're a goner.

What was done with his body?

Oh we bought him back with us; we put him on another stretcher. We lost one fellow we couldn't find, just before we pulled out of the place there Joe Horton, oh he was a champion on the Bren gun.

32:00 Oh he come down and sat along, took up his position right alongside me and just one movement there and ready to fire, oh he was a masterpiece. You know at the time you don't know it but when you think back on it, he was well trained that bloke. And anyhow we got back looking for this Owen Davies Griffiths, he was the lance sergeant. He thought he must have been

32:30 Carson or somebody and he left his own section and went off by himself. One report came in just recently there where he said they saw him pointing the rifle towards the ground. But according to the briefing at the time, as soon as it was all over, like I was questioning everybody there to see what's what. Anyhow I went back with Joe Horton and the other fellows there and it was getting dark and all that sort of thing, but you just couldn't find

33:00 anything in that type of country. So we just had to leave it, about a week afterwards bought in the captured documents to say there that the Japs, describing the action at this Kunua. The next morning, the morning after we left two hundred marines, Japanese marines arrived, the reinforcements. And while we were there, there was approximately eighty odd Japanese manning the fences. If we'd

33:30 have tried to press the attack any further, after we fired and all that sort of thing and got out, if we'd have stayed there any longer well they would have got the lot of us.

So when Australian soldiers were killed on those patrols what sort of ceremonies were held for them?

What sort of ceremony, well if you could get them back

34:00 you just put them on a stretcher of some kind and throw a blanket over them, or whatever was available, ground sheet. Try and keep the rain off them and somebody would carry them back. And then put on the barges and sent back to Torokina for the cemetery there. Later on a lot of them went over to the cemetery at Port Moresby, that's where Keith Emerson ended up there. They've got the headstone for Owen Davies Griffiths

34:30 over there. Anyhow in our battalion Keith Emerson was the first to be killed on Bougainville, he was the first one to be killed. Cripes I thought I'd met me waterloo too. Oh I had many a close shave. Another time there I was going along and just turned around to go along the beach there and a Jap

35:00 there, oh about from here to the clock over there, stood up there with a Nambu, that's one of their light machine guns. And we were all walking along in single file and only about oh say that much between us and he opened fire. He missed me but he got another fellow by the name of Tosser Keene, he was wearing a pistol, Smith & Wesson six shot and he was the two inch mortar man.

35:30 And because he was carrying a revolver they thought he must have been an officer or something so they knocked him off instead. And by gees.

He was killed?

Oh yes, yeah.

And he was how far from you?

Oh about from here, yeah about from here to the wall.

Just a couple of metres away?

Yeah wouldn't be that much, I don't think.

So you really did have quite a few close calls while you were in Bougainville?

Oh yeah.

36:00 **So what do you think kept you safe during those situations?**

Being frightened I think, and able to run. Another time there, there was an ambush we got into and I thought I was fast but I wasn't fast enough and right down the leg of this trouser here, there's five hole starting from here, down to there, blooming five holes, never even burnt the skin.

36:30 I couldn't even get a homer [repatriation home] out of it.

Can you tell us about that ambush, what happened?

Oh it wasn't much in it because there was only two Japs, as far as I can make out there waiting for the truck to come along with the food. They were ambushing the track there to get the food, with jeeps pulling up the food for the people in the fortresses there. As far as I could make out there were only two of them there and of course when he saw, when they saw that

37:00 they didn't get us, well they just up and off, there was no good us running after them. And that happened twice to me actually. I used to go up to the companies from the battalion headquarters to the companies quite frequently. And it was very rare that you take any more than one, maybe two others with me, there was just one or two of us

37:30 there on the track at the same time. And you had a better chance that way. And the next occasion there, must have been the same type of thing again, because a bullet went through and hit the steel on the heel of me boot there, bent it, oh gee it was hard to walk on it. But that was, oh I suppose. Others little bit too close there, and they got whacked [killed].

So you

38:00 **were never injured?**

No, came back there and that was the only injury I ever had on the pushbike at Cairns, that's the only thing.

But a lot of close calls?

Ohh.

How many times were you forced to shoot at, directly at Japanese and could see whether you hit them or not?

Oh more than enough I suppose. I had occasion to go to the 26 Battalion, we got word to say

38:30 the ANGAU [Australia New Guinea Administration Unit], one of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, that's right, they were on our eastern side there, and we got word to say there that they'd killed twenty seven

Japs. Crikey I said, “This can’t be right,” cause that would change all our order of battle and the whole lot there, twenty seven killed. And somebody said, “Oh

39:00 I’m going over to have a look,” and I had another bloke with me and the two of us marched off and we caught up with this Bernie Calgan again, he said, “Oh this can’t be right.” He said, “I’ll come up with ya.” And on the way up there a Jap jumped out from behind the tree there with an Nambu and before you knew what happened there Bernie Calgan, they’d riddled him, God he was quick that bloke. And then he goes crook on us two blokes there because we weren’t quick enough. You’ve got to be quick in this

39:30 game.

What did you think of the Japanese?

Oh they were very tenacious there and they were really first class soldiers, irrespective of what they reckon. See one night there these three naval marine blokes got into the perimeter, how they got in I don’t know, but they got in. And they’re using long,

40:00 turned out to be we found, one piece of bamboo that shouldn’t have been where it was. Apparently we worked out there that they were using this long bamboo, piece of bamboo at night time in the pitch dark, and they put this in and bring it down and a hook on the end of it, drag it to get any trip wires or anything, make certain there’s no booby traps going to go off. And they got into the perimeter. And Charlie Anderson, Slim we called

40:30 him, the Japs stood over the top of him, one time there Charlie didn’t have the Bren gun he was carrying there cocked, he didn’t have it cocked. And the Jap just come along and, oh, a decent sort of slash on his arm and, he lost the use of his arm, used to walk around with his arm out like that afterwards. He only died just a few weeks ago. But the other two there, one got away altogether but two of them, we got two of them.

41:00 But they had all these bandages over them, their ceremonial death bandage, naval blokes they were, oh they were really dedicated, nobody can tell me they weren’t, weren’t dedicated. By gee and nothing would stop them. The unfortunate part about it was not a great deal, not a great number of them were really good shots, they

41:30 really didn’t have that knack. But as far as their courage was concerned nothing could beat them, oh.

Tape 8

00:31 **About the reconnaissance of Pontu?**

Well that was another one not very well know. But two other blokes and me self, two batman, the Italian officer Bert Sprilian his batman and Jerry Jerard the adjutant, his batman, the three of us take off, cause there’s only around about seven or eight miles to go up to Pontu there. Go up there and have a good look around and everything there, and I counted twenty seven concrete pill

01:00 boxes there. Not much sign of any activity there, recent activity or not.

What did the pill boxes look like and where were they situation?

Oh just almost down level with the ground and overhead cover, pretty bullet proof. With the twenty five pounders it had to be a direct hit to demolish it then and the right type of ammo to go with it of course, but that’s what we called the pill box. Some of them, like in Europe

01:30 were much more elaborate, they’d have anything up to three feet of concrete. And anybody shell there it’s just like hitting into, just like them board berries taking the sugar mill at Mossman. Oh no we went up there and had a good look around and just noted the tracks and activity and all that sort of thing. That didn’t make any difference, but then the aerial photography there, me self and Jeff Allen and others there,

02:00 we got the big stereoscope out there and the stereoscopic pairs and pointed all out the mega heads, or out crops of coral. And then we discovered also there that the barges they intended using were used over in Normandy and they only had ply wood bottoms, and ply wood and coral don’t mix. But they were hell bent on using it, because they didn’t want anything else. But there was also

02:30 the unofficial part of it was there was there was also a VC [Victoria Cross] going for the top end of the island up there. And that had an incentive for the brigadier, well the brigade major really, a fellow named Hassell, and our own CO Kelly, might be an opportunity to get it. Because you’ve got to have one officer of not less a rank than major, and two other officers

03:00 not less a rank than lieutenant, you must have those three as a witness to the event. And nine times out of ten, well ninety nine out of a hundred there the recipient there is a corpse anyhow, so he doesn’t know what’s going on. That was one of the driving forces there for putting all this stuff in to get it

going. And a fellow named Richard Sampson from Tasmania

03:30 Launceston he was one of the top men of the Commonwealth Bank, worldwide, could go anywhere and everywhere to banking business for the Commonwealth Bank all over the world. He was no slouch, he was a real good type of bloke, everything, he was the battle 2IC. But all this information that our section compiled and presented, intelligence officer didn't present it at the

04:00 meeting for the battle, you know the meeting they have just before a battle takes places, he didn't present it.

Why?

That's something we'll never find out, he did apply to be transferred to the Indian Army there one time and they wouldn't have him. So that must be why, they woke up to what he was like. He claimed to be an accountant there from the Kalgoorlie Gold Mines and gave his address as

04:30 West Australia address there. Anyhow one of our blokes went over there later on and it turned out to be the officer's club. And all he was at the Kalgoorlie Mines was a clerk, not an accountant at all. Oh tell you lot more stories about that bloke, and of course he was our officer. Well he didn't present all the information that we'd collected. And if you ever strike up with Jeff Allen from down the coast there

05:00 he'll tell you the same thing.

So how long had it taken you to compile all that information?

Oh we went about three months I suppose, altogether. When your looking at aerial photographs there it take a long time cause you do an eighth of an inch at a square at a time. When you get really good ones and you've got the right information you can tell the height of the trees and everything, by measuring the shadows,

05:30 the time of the day. See when the aircraft take it they generally fly at twenty thousand, twenty five thousand feet, and then they take these focal length of the lenses, as they call it there, and that determines what the scale of that photo will be. And once you work it all out and you get the scale and then the time of the day and the time of the year and all the rest of it , well there's books published everywhere about that sort of stuff,

06:00 you get that and then you can measure the height of the trees. Most of it is all based on shadows, and if you get a photograph taken early morning and there's been a bit of rain or dew or something like that, you can see the white line going along, it's just like a pencil mark as clear as a bell. No doubt about what's, what's underneath ya. But all that information there just wasn't presented and of course they go

06:30 ahead with it there and it was a complete failure.

Did he miss the meeting or did he, did he miss the briefing or didn't he?

Oh he was at the briefing, he was there, oh too right. All the active participants in that meeting there was the CO, Lieutenant Kelly, Jerry Gerard who was the adjutant, he had to make up all the battle orders and all that sort of stuff. Captain Clive Down who happen to be the

07:00 officer in charge of the operation, of the landing party. Bluey Shulton from Toorak and he was a stockbroker, he was the 2IC, he was a company commander to a captain. Did I say Bruce Sprillion the IO [Intelligence Officer] he had to be there, oh Ben Cailer the quartermaster. That was a must, they had to be there.

Wouldn't they

07:30 **have asked him for that information in the meeting?**

Oh yes they ask for all that sort of thing. Something there, you don't just go into a shop and blindly buy something, when you go into a shop you know pretty well what you want before you go in. You might pick things up to compare them but you know what you want before you go. Well it's the same with a battle, when your playing with a lot of live bullets you certainly definitely want to know, everything,

08:00 whether it's relevant or otherwise. How much ammunition you want, how much is there, they didn't even have enough ammo or anything there, all just hell bent on getting this publicity. Blamey was camped at this Saposa, S-a-p-o-s-a, Island, oh beautiful place too, he was kept there in full range of the Japanese at Buka there with their very powerful telescope.

08:30 Because the Japanese there were, they were the leaders in what would you call it….optical stuff, anything of that nature, cameras and all that, they were the world leaders at the time. So they had this great thing and they just looked down and they sent two frogmen, the Japs sent two frogmen down there and they wrecked one of his barges, so he shifted around the other side of the island.

09:00 It's a pity they didn't put Blamey in with it.

How did you react when you heard they hadn't received all of that?

Well I didn't know till after the event, I didn't know until it was a disaster.

What did you hear about the event?

What did I hear about it, well

09:30 I got about ten hours' sleep for the four days it was on. I went to bed at about ten or eleven o'clock on the Thursday night, I was up again at four o'clock there on Friday morning, that was the 8th June, and that's when they landed. And the wirelesses were still going and I was the distributor for all the messages going through. This one goes there and this. And in it,

10:00 that was Friday, and they couldn't make any progress, by this time by Friday the Japs realised that the landing had taken place, there was no opposition when they actually landed, only the barges got stuck on the reefs, they couldn't get in with the barges. All they had was what they could carrying, and that wasn't too much. And when you're going through water and stepping on coral and go up to here, no good at all. So on the Friday that's when the Japs retaliated

10:30 and one patrol went out, Noel Smith with eight others, and as far as I know there was only Bill Hughes, Heck Brandford, another bloke and two others out of the nine that went out altogether, they were the only survivors there, they just went and got to the stage where they could see everything was hopeless there. Noel Smith had been wounded in

11:00 the forearm and he was in agony and pain. But his batman Skriven his name was, no Duck, Duck was with him, Skriven was the other bloke that got blown up with a shell. That's right Heck Bradford's brother got blown up with a shell, that was Cecil, got blown up with a shell and Skriven went up with him. That was at the mouth of the

11:30 Ganga River, after Semba Ridge. And anyhow the chap Duck stayed with him but all the others, well Noel Smith said, "Well look I can't do anything more out here see if you can't get yourself out of it and get back." Well Bill Hughes and another fellow they got back late in the afternoon, Friday afternoon, nearly got shot up in the process. Bradford and

12:00 the other fellow he was with, they walked at night time and had a conversation with a Jap at the food box on the way out, and didn't answer back of course. And crossed the rivers and ended up down at where we were, and they'd really had it. And Claude Palmer, I don't know where the hell he ended up; his father nearly drove me mad when I come back. His father used to work at the taxation

12:30 department with my sister and they lived only a short distance away from where they were in Taringa in Brisbane here. And somebody had told him that his son had been captured and tortured and then they ate him, that's what somebody told him. And that's what he wanted somebody to tell him, and of course I wouldn't be in it. I give him the record as far as the briefing was concerned, of all the knowledge that I knew about it.

13:00 But he died just recently, an article appeared in the Brisbane Courier Mail just recently, where this fellow said, "Oh yes I recognised Claude there by the colour of his hair," in the water when they were evacuating there." But he wasn't there at all, in fact Claude had gingery hair, this bloke was talking about black hair, he didn't die it up there. Anyhow after that the

13:30 like the fellows that did land there were running short of ammunition, the twenty five pounders they were back at Sarakan and they started firing and give them a bit of sprite. And of course Saturday morning comes and they wanted an air drop, ammunition. And this joker Hassell from brigade, the message he sent back, like through the signallers, and I saw it all through there,

14:00 sent them back, "How many tins of water and chlorination tablets?" and here they are up to the neck in flaming water, in bomb craters. The less you had out of the water the less they had to hit. He was a real rustic that coot, and he was the director of the whole operation.

So they asked for ammunition?

Oh they had hardly any left. So anyhow later on the morning there

14:30 the urgent messages keep coming back, "Want an airdrop, want an airdrop." So anyhow this Dick Sampson comes into the picture then and he arranges then to take the ammunition of the 26 Battalion that was on our right and the Torokina was to send up as much twenty five pounders as they possibly could. And the mortars, they never had any mortars, the three inch mortars, or two inch mortars or anything

15:00 because that was on one of the barges that had been stranded and the Japs kept that well under fire. So that was Saturday and Saturday afternoon they decided to clear out. And Clyde Downs he was the officer in charge. He said, "We're going irrespective of what they reckon." So anyhow barges turned up for them and damn well they all got stuck on the reefs too. And they tried to wade out to them but with the wooden bottom

15:30 got on a coral and just come straight through the bottom. And there was about sixty aboard that thing. Like any port in a storm, get on as soon as you can. And others decided to swim.

Did those sixty people get killed?

No most of them got back again, our representative Wally Crawford was on that thing and he was one of the last twelve to come out. But still

16:00 during the day, during the night it's just an easy target there, it's not far off the shore at all, but just far enough not to be safe. And oh they really pelted the daylights, cause this is all the information coming back and the air force, New Zealand air force with the Corsairs came into the picture. One of our fellows Jack Kent, he ended up as the chairman, shire

16:30 clerk there for the Bowen City Council, he could do shorthand, and listening into all the aircraft there and all the conversations going on, by gee they could use some language those blokes. And he was taking it all down in shorthand so we had a wealth of information about the whole lot.

What sort of things do you remember them saying?

Oh one of the main things there that they really got stuck into, they saw a Japanese convoy Japanese

17:00 trucks, seventeen of them, they were able to give us the number, and each one was carrying approximately twenty odd people. And they bombed and strafed these seventeen vehicles there and according to the gist of the whole thing there was they cleaned up the whole lot of them. Well that would be three hundred and forty. But we couldn't count that as enemy killed or not because we couldn't verify it, we had to see, get it verified there as being fair dinkum, we didn't put any fictitious figures in.

17:30 So that was three hundred and forty there that went up in amongst the trees somewhere. And twenty five pounders there they started up, they fired seventy odd tons of ammunition that afternoon and they ended up with no shells at all except a few smoke grenades, smoke shells. The blokes calling out there, they still had an officer with them, they still had one wireless working and they

18:00 relayed out to a barge and the barge relaying back to the guns, the blokes getting out wanting them to bring the safety factor back to twenty five yards instead of the fifty. And of course the gunners at the other end there, this was getting close to seven miles away, and they never hit one of our blokes. Oh eventually they cut out of ammunition altogether and of course the Japs came back in force again. Oh a lot of them there, one barge

18:30 cleared there fairly quickly and the second one cleared just as it was getting dark and didn't have any real structural damage. But the other one that had the sixty on the first place it was well and truly wedged onto the reef and a big hole in the bottom. And the water would come up, and you only had that twelve inches of free board to the top. And that's where our bloke, Wally Crawford was on that one there. And during the night

19:00 a Jap got up into the bow, or some part of the barge and blasted away and he cleaned up a lot more. And of course when the surge to get away from it, Clyde Downs went over, well they never saw him again afterwards there, whether he got killed and somebody threw him over the side. Because in the dark what can you do?. We do know there from a fellow, Eric Hall at Redcliffe, that he did get a piece of shrapnel in the cheek and he couldn't get it out and he

19:30 bled a fair bit. But that wouldn't give reason to throw him over the side, so he was either dead or he jumped over himself, one of the two. Because there was plenty sharks there to. Funny thing that noise in the water attracts sharks there, whereas most other kinds clear out, just the differences.

How many Australians died altogether in that?

The remarkable

20:00 thing about it was there was a hundred and ninety odd there actually landed and a total force there amounted to two hundred and twenty with all the barges and air crews and everything like that. And if I remember rightly I think there was only about nineteen maybe twenty odd killed, and most of them were the water transport blokes. But we had a hell of a lot wounded, there was over a hundred, there was a hundred and nine wounded I think it was.

Based on your intelligence that you had collated over that two month

20:30 **period, how should they have done that?**

They shouldn't have gone there in the first place, none at all, they couldn't possibly, they didn't have the reserves, they didn't have anything to do it. And you can't go along there and say, "Oh here's a beach here I'm going to go and land there." Particularly barges there with wooden bottoms in them, if they'd have been steel it wouldn't have been too bad, might have had a chance. But night time when they landed

21:00 four o'clock in the morning, here's the beach along there and coming around a point there and a point there, look at the cross fire. Cause when they're starting to get off, going in was all right but coming out, look at the field of fire they had.

Why did they do it then?

What our blokes? Because they were looking around, make a name for themselves really, that's what I

reckon.

21:30 Fellows named Graham and Gruper, they were in charge of the two canoes that went in and got the last, got fourteen off in one boat with about that much freeboard. And then there was twelve in the last lot, that's Wally Crawford, he was one of the last, one of the twelve in the last to come off. Well they just

22:00 threw everything over the side and dismantled what they could and so forth and, see they hadn't had a drink of water or anything to eat there since Thursday. We got the message at two o'clock in the morning on the Tuesday, that's the last message came through they were on board and they were heading for, back for what they called Freddie Beach there, Sarakan plantation.

So they hadn't eaten

22:30 **from Thursday to Tuesday?**

They had nothing to eat, what could you eat? There might have been a stray can of bully beef or something like that around the place, but they couldn't cook anything, there was nothing there to cook. You've got to witness these sort of things, I wasn't actually in it, I was sitting back there, oh safe as a drum you might as well say. I was pretty safe until they started ambushing

23:00 the tracks. But you just couldn't cope with that sort of thing, all through somebody there wanting to put on a show. The same thing happened in the First World War at the Somme and all those places there.

So when those guys came back what did they look like?

Oh you ever seen a person that hasn't eaten for a long time, oh they were really looking haggard. You couldn't give them too

23:30 much to eat, like their stomach was so empty there, they only had, the favourite there used to be bread and milk, just a little bit and a little bit, and then rice and milk. But plenty of milk and plenty of sugar, get that in until you can, looking pretty good. Until that happened there well you didn't give them much to eat, if you give them anything to eat there you'd kill them.

Were you angry

24:00 **about that when you were there?**

Oh was I what? In fact this lieutenant come to me and he said, "I'm going to write a book and expose them blokes," and I said, "You'd better expose yourself at the same time because you're just part of it," and he didn't like me after that. He never asked me why or anything else because he knew why. We knew this thing was on around about four months beforehand, cause Geoff Allen down the coast down there

24:30 was showing the photographs of the site where they proposed to land. I was a sergeant, Geoff Allen was a private and yet they didn't show me, they just kept away from me.

Because they knew you'd oppose it?

Oh I'd oppose it all right. Because in the tropics you see you just can't have unsheathe or untreated timber in salt water because the sea worms, get in there and just, there worse than white ants, just knocks them out. Oh

25:00 you only need a month and it's all gone and these here blooming tugs are being used over in the Normandy, God knows what they'd been doing on the ship there when they bought them over. It was one of the English naval vessels called in HMS Gloria, I think it was, bought these things in said, "Oh yeah use our barges."

So you must have been really angry that the guy from your unit died in that situation?

Oh yes

25:30 because actually in the Bougainville turnout there there was absolutely no necessity for it. Peter Charleston he's one of the top notches in the Courier Mail here. And he wrote a book, 'The Unnecessary War', well he states very clearly there just what it was about, what was it about? And all the blokes

26:00 there that write into the magazines and everything like that, even major generals, lieutenant generals all got the same, what was it all about?. And of course John Curtin, he was the prime minister at the time, As he

26:30 wasn't worth a cracker either. He was a pacifist and got run in [jailed] there in the First World War. He was a printer over in Perth.

So what happened, how did you come to leave Bougainville?

How did we come to leave? Well when the war finished 15th August, well just prior to that we were destined to go down to the southern sector. That would have been

27:00 in my own opinion formulated, because I had two people in each company who used to keep reporting

back onto me about just what the moral and all the other things associated with troops and that sort of situation were. And there was one slight revolt at the Buka Peninsula, that was

27:30 where these twenty two people from C Company told the lieutenant in charge, a fellow named Joseph Patterson to go and jump in the lake, and they weren't going to take any orders from him again. And he was going to court martial them and God knows what but, it's lucky Joe Patterson didn't get court martialled. But anyhow all these things come along there and the consensus I got was I really think

28:00 that if they had not been provided with the equipment you needed, like tanks, heavy artillery and piat guns and these rocket launchers and all these sort of things there, if they wanted to knock the enemy out, well why not do it with the equipment available instead of just running around with a couple of Owen guns and couple of rifles and a couple of hand grenades? Oh big fellows, it's not on, again nobody could see any reason for

28:30 it. Anyhow I'm quite certain there the whole battalion would have revolted, because I can't make that known because, doesn't matter now anyhow because I'll be up the chimney before long, it won't worry me. But that's my own opinion.

Aand you're totally entitled to that being in the middle of it too

Yeah I was in a position where I could and it had,

29:00 oh cripes there in 1940, and then I had all that training right up until 1945, I had to learn something in that time.

So what happened after that then?

Well when the war finally finished, the 31st Battalion was given, 31 and 51, was given the role of accepting the surrender there from Nauru and Ocean Islands. So one force went up there and Arthur Tidely from Charters Towers

29:30 he ended up the major in Charters Towers for many years. And meself and, with the Italians, and another group from the battalion there we went over to Rabaul and established everything over there.

What did you think about the end of the war, what was the feeling?

Oh the end of the war, I never felt so happy in all me life, you should have seen the fireworks displayed that night. You know I've read many articles

30:00 around that and they reckon that Gracie Fields was there, it was twelve o'clock in the day and everything, we never knew anything about it there until after seven o'clock. And we were all in our tents thinking about going into the Salvation Army hall to have a game of cards or write a letter or something there, and we hear these explosions there from right over the other side of Torokina, about seven, eight miles away and just very slight. And the next thing they got louder and

30:30 louder and fire, anything that would make a noise, rockets and star shells, everything, navy and all, the ships out in the harbour, all up in the air. One of the massive firework displays you could ever see. And then it come through on the wireless there, the war's over. Oh gee, everybody was like a dog with two tails [very happy].

31:00 **What did everyone do, when you heard that?**

Well I don't know what they done, they didn't go to bed for a while. Each one talking to the other there and really jubilant to think it was all over. But there's another one of the strange things about warfare, at seven o'clock the next morning the air force was all up, every available plane they had, painted underneath the wings of the things there. 'The war is over', and the sky was just

31:30 literally raining leaflets. Now you don't make leaflets overnight, and you don't paint signs on hundred of aircraft overnight. So it must have been agreed that the war would finish on the 15th August 1945, at least two months beforehand, to get everything ready for the final thing. God knows how many got killed in the meantime, or badly wounded.

32:00 See it's just not possible to have all these things done without knowing what's going to happen. I had a whole heap of the leaflets that they tossed out and some bright spark took them down to the Corontina and sold them for twenty five, for, yeah two and six a copy.

32:30 And of course the FELO blokes there said, "These are no good to us," so they took them down in the trail loads, took them down there and cramped their style, everybody could have a copy for nothing. I had quite a lot there, I must have had about, oh maybe thirty odd different, a copy of everything they had.

What did they write on the leaflets?

Oh the Japanese have surrendered and the meeting point will be at such and such

33:00 a place at a certain time and how to go about it. Unless they knew what to do, well if they come up to say the southern sector for instance there, like we were in Torokina when it happened. But say the

southern section there, the Piriatar River, that's a very wide river. Well if the bloke came out and stood on the bank there, well somebody would have shot him for certain. So it was all, had to be notified that the war was over and they could come

33:30 and talk with the Australian officers. They had to cross the river and talk to the officers there and then arrangements made for the whole lot to come in then.

So what happened, did you hear about the atom bomb at that time as well?

Oh the atom bomb was on before that, the atom bomb was on the 6th and 8th of August wasn't it, something like that.

And how did you feel about that?

Oh, "Good on ya mate, drop another one here."

34:00 Oh that was the greatest news we'd ever heard, other than when the war finished of course, that was it. Because your thoughts immediately turned to getting home. They didn't have the ships to take us home, didn't have the transport, enough planes or anything else there. Going over to Rabaul.

What happened on Rabaul?

Rabaul, oh that's where all the Japanese were sort of

34:30 concentrated, a hundred and ten thousand of them altogether. There was ninety odd thousand when we went there. There was one part I missed out altogether there when I went down to this Southport, this course for six weeks and I was over at the university for two weeks getting briefed. They went over to the south coast of Jacquinot Bay to find a suitable location there, three of us went over in a corvette to find a suitable location there for

35:00 a division, that's about nine thousand men altogether, no it was only a brigade, that's right about three thousand, to find a place for them so that they could form a base and attack the Japanese at Rabaul from the south. And stone the crows, when the war was over there was ninety thousand there.

35:30 And when you went through all their tunnels, oh boy massive things. One tunnel in particular you could drive a five ton truck through. Two way traffic, illuminated, the whole box and dice and these caves that they had the Chinese prisoners of war, was actually slaves, plus the natives and anybody else

36:00 else they could lay their hands on, these massive caves there. They'd have a ceiling in there anything up to thirty feet in height.

What did you find there?

Oh found all sorts of things there, but we were more interested in the aircraft, maintenance tools, they had these big boxes there, that long,

36:30 that wide and all the tools necessary to maintain an aircraft. And all we wanted out of it was the little pair of pliers, so we'd toss the rest out. And we found another lot, sort of a shell they fired and when it went up in the air it would illuminate and little parachutes would hang onto it, silk, pure silk,

37:00 and that let it keep it up in the air long enough for it to throw the light. And of course, oh silk gee, and of course we got stuck into that too, only some silly cow there set fire to the lot, we had to clear out in a hurry.

Just started firing at it?

Hmm, these things are already primed ready to go and I don't know what ever happened to it but we didn't hang around to wait for it,

37:30 because you hear explosions going and everything else, they had all sorts of things in these tunnels.

Can you describe a little bit more of what you were seeing in the tunnels, when you say there was all sorts of things, what sorts of things?

Anything at all used in the Japanese army, they had boots, they had their gaiters, they had their caps, their webbing equipment, general clothes, they had food stored like rice. They grew what they called ridge rice,

38:00 that's rice that didn't need water but grew on the ridges. They had rows and rows and rows of their… what's the drink they have, their favourite drink? We call it gin.

Saki?

Saki yeah made out of rice, and there was rows and rows of it, and everybody looking at it there, nobody was game to touch it. So one brave spark there get up and,

38:30 nearly burnt his tongue off and, "Oh this is good." And the next thing there's some sick blokes around, they got stuck into this blooming rice wine. But the Japs used to just down with it. Oh lot of that there,

they had all types of dried fish stored, what else would they have, anything at all relating to the

39:00 use in an army anyhow.

So there was enough room down there for sixty thousand men, is that what you were saying before?

No in the total area, the whole area, the whole peninsula where we were suppose to, some bright spark reckon we could take, there was ninety thousand Japanese in that area. In fact one of the coast watches there he belonged to the AIB [Allied Intelligence Bureau], he was stationed there not four miles away

39:30 from the centre of the Japanese headquarters. He was in amongst there, but he was pretty dark himself, he could be mistaken for a native, and he operated there for oh at least eight months anyhow, oh he was a wealth of information there. But, that's why we didn't go there because they got hold of him and he give the information.

How long did you spend going through the tunnels?

40:00 I used to organise reconnaissance trips there and take all the officers there, one at a time. In a jeep there would be two or three of us there and we always had it there that we had the driver and he had a Bren lying across his bottom. And then I'd be sitting on the other side, I had to wear me regulation revolver then and then three blokes in the back.

40:30 Two of them had Owen guns and one had a rifle, now that was going along. Now if anything unforseen turned up there I'd jump out and go to the front of the jeep and if anything looks really bad I'd go down and kneel and the other blokes would stand up and out of the jeep, that's the two Owen gunners. One bloke would be standing up in the jeep and the driver would be ready to put his Bren in the front there.

41:00 We only had to do that once though, we struck a party of eight.

Tape 9

00:30 **Ambush?**

Oh yes only on this one occasion there where we're going along there and this group of eight are standing on the side of the track. And of course they all had to stop and bow to ya, what our blokes had to do to them in Singapore. Anyhow something attracted my attention and I stopped the jeep, the driver stopped, I told him to stop and I jumped out

01:00 and I went out to the front and I knelt. And in the process there these eight blokes are all reaching over and I didn't know what they were going to do but I didn't take any chances. So I just bought the revolver up, I was ready to fire it when these blokes there went into what we were going to do. Like the other two Owen gunners had got out and the rifleman standing up and the Bren in the front there. And they off, but we went there to investigate there

01:30 and they all had pieces of wood about that long. In other words my deductions were that they would have bashed us up there, just for the sake of doing it. One was an officer I know that much about it. Oh you couldn't trust them.

The surrender, what did you observe of the ceremony for the surrender?

I didn't observe any of the surrenders at all because

02:00 I didn't go to Nauru Island, I went to Rabaul.

Oh okay, Rabaul?

So I didn't see those.

Okay but you did see Chinese POW's, what was their condition?

Oh pretty poor, in fact one of the women who work up at the dispensary here her mother was an internee up there at Rabaul. And they had to carry the water for approximately three miles, just carry

02:30 water in whatever container they could get. Food they had to depend on getting it themselves and work all day, while they could stand up they had to work. That's women and, even young kids there really. Beltings there by the Japanese were unmerciful. I was seconded to the war crimes commission there for four weeks, just after we arrived over

03:00 there. And we went down to a place called Kokopo and there's a Catholic mission there, mission run by the Catholic Church. And the war crime blokes were all there, my role was to establish the correct location, that was my role. Because you get these bright lawyers in the court cases there, well they come out with anything,

03:30 so you had to be dead right. But these six girls, about fourteen years of age at the time knelt and behind their knees they'd place a lump of bamboo about that round and then the officer in front gave the signal and the fellow standing behind the girls, and cracked all their knee caps, just walked away and left them. Oh yeah that's fair dinkum.

04:00 cause there's no medical attention or anything else, cause after the end of the war they were still crawled up, they couldn't, they were still walking around on their knees really. Oh that was a terrible thing to do to anybody.

That was on Rabaul was it, where did that happen?

Well Kokopo's only about twenty miles south of Rabaul, at the Catholic mission, just after the

04:30 occupation in February 1942, not long after that they done it.

And you saw those women at the war crimes?

Oh yeah I saw the women there, you add another four years onto their age they'd be about eighteen when I saw them. Our CO at the time he bought back a Nissan, a sedan car from Nauru and donated it to the girls on that mission station there so that they could get round somehow or rather, get a driver or something.

05:00 **So what was their physical condition when you saw them?**

Oh not too good. You never saw anybody in real good physical condition after the Japanese had been there. When we went to this Chinese interment camp there oh gee I never seen so many happy people there. There was about eight hundred of them altogether and oh they were all over you

05:30 like a plague of fleas there. Get the hair and the next thing, they'd be hiding food and everything and one of their speciality was roasted peanuts. And they'd got a forty four gallon drum from somewhere and made an oven out of it and roasted their peanuts in that. And I think they must have given us half a drum of peanuts, peanuts everywhere. Because we give them, oh big blocks of cheese about that round and that high,

06:00 I think each block weighed about fourteen or might have been more, pounds in weight. And big tins of bully beef, we didn't take anything for nothing we give them all good, something very good in return.

So those eight hundred Chinese, how did they look?

Very emaciated, and as I say you never saw one healthy looking person there. The Japs themselves

06:30 didn't look too bad, and we soon found out by making them work and sweat they'd go down with pneumonia, and of course a terrific number of Japanese died that way. Because those blokes had been involved there with their atrocities or manners of conducting warfare before, well they had no mercy for them whatsoever. So that's why, the second time in my military career I had a bloke

07:00 charged was because he belonged to a medical unit. And as I was going past, here he is handing out cigarettes to the Japs, work party. And I went over there and put him under close arrest and drove him down to the boob [jail] we had there and that was it, that was only twice.

What was the first time?

Oh that's the bloke there Colin Jorgensen eating an ice cream, that was in Townsville in the showground,

07:30 that was only twice.

So the Japanese were put to work on Rabaul?

Oh yeah.

What did they do?

They built all the huts for us there and thatched them and oh they were pretty good at that. But when it come to using our tools they had no idea in the wide world. Because with the Japanese they like to sit down and bring everything towards them, like even the saw. And everything. And

08:00 of course all our stuff's meant to go that way, push it away from ya. And you used to get these Japs trying to use our saws and they couldn't, so eventually they bought their own.

How eager were you to leave to get home?

Couldn't get there fast enough. Oh cripes yeah. When we went across to Rabaul I was no sooner there

08:30 and Arthur Tidley said, "Your going down to Puckapunyal." I said, "What for?" He said, "To get your commission." I said, "Arthur if I wasn't good enough to get it while the war was on, I'm not good enough to get it now and I'm not going." So I got deferred for three months, I had to stay three months longer then what I should of. The war was over it had finished and I wanted to get out and get a job, cause I

can’t stand being in the one occupation for long.

09:00 **Can you tell me that story about the problem with your maps when you crossed Down’s Ridge?**

Oh Down’s Ridge. We came in from a new direction, we came into this bit of a plateau, oh beautiful looking thing there, cleared and everything, up and so forth. And I thought, “Now this is a great opportunity to get our position right.” So with triangulation again

09:30 there was all the islands out there in the ocean you could pick from, and I picked three of them there. And took there and the back bearings come, put me on the other side of the mountain range, a thousand miles away. And we were on the western side of the range and the map showed that we were on the eastern side. The range was about six thousand feet high; it wasn’t possible to be there. And

10:00 after a lot of measuring and calculating and everything, come to the conclusion there that when the plotting the map from the aerial photographs they missed out one run which covered a thousand yards, and that would have made it right then. But they’d put that in, then made the whole island a thousand yards wider, or the west coast a thousand yards out to sea further it would have been right.

10:30 **So was that a significant problem for you?**

Oh yes, with that well that put all the contours out and everything, you couldn’t, see that’s like reading a story and somebody’s torn three or four pages out of it. Trying to fill in the pieces in between there is very, very difficult.

And that was on that mission, that was on a big mission wasn’t it?

That’s right

Right, so how did you fix that problem?

We didn’t fix it there we just done it,

11:00 well this must be this somewhere here, and that’s when they called Down’s Ridge. Because later, not long afterwards there this Captain Downs with his A Company they went up on this ridge heading towards the north and that’s how the name came to be about, Down’s Ridge,

11:30 the crossroad. They all meeting, come in there and the Japs had dug in there and put up a very, very strong defensive position and took the A Company about three weeks to get rid of them.

Did you tell us about Alex, your friend, your mate Alex who was wounded?

Alec Rudercolf, oh yeah.

Oh it was Alec Rudercolff, okay so that’s that guy?

Alex Ross was his name, he changed his name to.

Oh okay, so we heard that story?

One of the most beautiful sights I’ve ever saw in me life there was the night we left Torokina. We got on board the Kanimbla, and I was third last to go on and had to go right up, right up, right up, and I thought

12:30 I was going to reach for the stars. And I get up there, and just as I get up there here’s the moon, this great big ball of fire, oh huge thing it was coming through the saddle between the two volcanoes. And here’s the two volcanoes putting on a turn, going hell for leather up in the air. And here’s this ball of fire in between and look down on the reflection on the water, it was just like a lump of glass. Oh gee it was a remarkable sight, you’d never get it on photo there because you had to be there just at that particular time and

13:00 to expect two volcanoes to go off simultaneously well it made it a bit difficult.

That must have been amazing?

Oh it was, I’ve never forgotten that scene. But there again cameras for most of us were out of bounds. That’s why I used to buy my photos.

So can you tell us about finally leaving Rabaul and going home to Australia?

13:30 I think I had a bunk coming back home. I got on the, climbed up onto the truck to come home, see I was the customs, acting as sort of customs there, everybody had to bring their souvenirs and everything to me there to get the clearance.

14:00 In the process this Bert Springer, the IO, he’d bought back a thermometer, a Japanese one from Nauru. And he had his eye on it there, he wanted it well and truly and I pinched it. But I only just stuck it in the haversack and he comes up there to the truck to get on the thing and here’s it in the bottom there and the damn thing fell out right at his feet. He said, “Oh you’d better take it now you’ve got it.”

14:30 **What souvenirs did you end up with?**

Oh crikey, not so much from Rabaul, but I ended up with a lot there from Bougainville. We knocked off a hospital at a place called Reputo, D Company Joe Huxley was in it there. There was no Red Cross marking ups or anything, nobody knew what it was until they started shooting back and of course you retaliated.

15:00 Anyhow as soon as it was all over I go in there looking for documents and all the rest of it there and you see the amazing amount of stuff there. And in their surgical part there they had metric chisels, or this blue steel they called it, they're worth about five hundred odd pounds in 1946. And they used these for knocking bones off and chipping bones and that sort of thing. And they had the full set of them from

15:30 three millimetre, yeah up to the forty five millimetre, and all those in between. Tea candles and this blue steel, beautiful things in there. That's one good souvenir I had. Medical scales, there the balancing scales, weights and all thrown in. And another one there was the pens they used the self filling,

16:00 but the rubber in them had perished and you couldn't fill them up, but we used to use them for the drafting, good hard nib. I think I got about three of them and they've lasted a long time. And these pliers of course, that's from Rabaul, plum bulbs, little medical brass plum bulbs. What else was there, oh bought back a

16:30 sword came from a lieutenant. What I believed to be a lieutenant colonel…….

Where did you get that from?

Over in Bougainville.

Was that from a dead Japanese?

Oh there was no live blokewould part with his sword, it's a good quality one.

Was it quite typical for the Australian soldiers to take souvenirs from the dead enemy?

Oh no Bert Hall, Darkie we called him, his favourite there was to take the gold out of the teeth, he had

17:00 the old wax used to come in tin boxes, well he used to put the gold in there. And even up until about four years ago anyhow, the blokes come down and I said, "How's Darkie going with his gold teeth?" He said, "Oh he still takes them out at the pub there and gets a couple of free beers out of it."

So when you killed Japanese you would search them..?

Oh yeah you searched every one you possibly could.

And the soldiers, the Australian soldiers would take things from

17:30 **them for souvenirs?**

Yeah they'd always pass them back to the intelligence representative. I don't know of anybody there that actually, well they didn't have any wrist watches for starters, they didn't have things like that. But Australians money there, oh crikey you could be a multi millionaire within three minutes. Used to carry it in a money belt, or in the lining of their helmet, and hundred and a hundred of thousands of one pound notes, invasion money they called it.

18:00 In fact my brother in law, Bill Smid at Bowen he managed to get hold of a whole swag of them and he had them up until he died, well Ross is the executor for his will, he might have thrown them all out, because he didn't worry about anything, just out. Oh they were quite a good invitation.

So Bert when you got back to Australia what was it like to

18:30 **arrive back in Australia, back home?**

Come back and there's no showers on the boat, I know that if there were it was only salt water anyhow. You come back pretty dirty and we was taken out to Wacol, and taken on the backs of trucks. I had me hat off so just in case me mother was in Queen Street that particular day, she might of spotted me, I don't know. But anyhow go out to Wacol

19:00 and as soon as we got ourselves established in the tent we were going to stay there, just grabbed our souvenirs, and any stray blankets around the place, anything else you could pinch. And there was a truck out on Ipswich Road and hail a vehicle going down, oh it was going that way. And I got on this truck that happened to be going down Oxley Road, Indooroopilly, and

19:30 when we got to the Five Ways at Oxley there I said, "I'll get off now," and he said, "Right," cause I only had five houses to go to where my mother was then. And I go up the front steps and here's me little nephew there, the one that lost his Dad, looking at this bloke coming up, with a sword in one hand and a big pack on his back and a kit bag across his neck, everything he could carry. And I said, "Phillip, you'd better go and tell your grandmother that somebody's out here to see her."

20:00 And what a reunion, because she didn't know I was coming.

So what was it like?

Oh fantastic, fantastic. You just can't describe how you feel on occasions like that. It was all over and done with, finished with. All I had to do then was find me self a job and. I went to the RSL and they had an office

20:30 in Adelaide Street and they said, "What work are you got offering there to suit me?" He said, "I don't know anything about that." He said, "I can tell you one of the best paid jobs you can get." I looked at him. He said, "Yeah it might smell a bit." "Yeah." He said, "A job with the cemetery cart." He said, "They pay good money." I could've clocked him, fancy that.

21:00 **So your mum must have been really thrilled to have you back?**

Oh was she what.

She'd already lost one son?

We lost the elder son, her elder son she'd lost. Oh yes nobody knows what it like to lose their children, you can lose your wife, you can lose your mother, lose your parents but you can't lose your children. That's the hardest thing in life.

21:30 Well at least for me anyhow.

So you actually went on soon after the war to marry Rita didn't you?

Oh yes as soon as I got back, I got back, and you're given leave, as soon as you got back you're given leave. First thing I done was arranged me self to get a ticket on the railway line and go up to Townsville and

22:00 saw Rit and I just got back again, had to come back here and the damn floods come on, the 1946 floods, oh real terrific things there. As soon as the water went down I got the first train to go back again. And I came back and I took me mother up on the Short Sunderland up to Townsville to see me other brother. That was the first time she'd ever been on a plane, had to take her into the chemist shop first to get something to

22:30 steady her down, and after that she wouldn't travel any other way.

So can you tell us about your wedding, about getting married?

Oh crikey I always say to Rit, it's the 3rd August 1946, but I always tell her it's the 4th and she's always retaliated, "No it wasn't it was the 3rd," I said, "it was the 4th when I woke up to realise what I'd done."

23:00 But the best man Gordon Philip, he used to be the sergeant in our section, he's down in Melbourne now, and Jack Ken from Bowen he was the groomsmen. Those two there they were really, I'm still very friendly with them even though both of them have just about had the royal fall [died] now, their worse than what I am.

Your doing okay, I assure you?

Well Jack Kent's lost his voice and can hardly talk

23:30 from strokes, oh it's a crying shame cause by gee, with the RSL he got his fifty year life membership. He was secretary of the Harbour Board and Treasurer and something else. Because his from inheritance, his grandfather was the first customs officer in Bowen. And his father inherited that part of it

24:00 and then he had a farm in Bowen and he made his money out of cucumbers. The only bloke in Australia had cucumbers at the right time and he sold them and made a fortunate out of it. All his other properties with the mangoes, the Kent mango's named after, Kensington is named after them. And then of course Jack he only had one other brother and,

24:30 one brother and one sister, that's right, and between the three of them they inherited what was lot there a lot of it's inherited, his house. It's right in the heart of Bowen.

So why do you think those friendships that you made during the war were so, and are still so important to you?

Well I don't know, each one helped the other I suppose, if anything went wrong the other one would come to your assistance. Like when I had the bone in me hand broken Gordon Philip

25:00 he done all me washing and looked after me like anybody else, like really well. Jack Kent he got hurt a couple of times, not wounded but hurt and we all looked after him. It was a real, you ever read that book, The Vander Brothers? That one down there, if you ever read that one it gives you a pretty good indication of military serviceman.

25:30 Like there's a lot of people that were in the military they just mean nothing to me, particularly those who came in later on. That cartoon inside, they're inside the room there well that was done by Frank F Hayes, that's right, all he was was a clerk in the bank in New South Wales Bank of, Westpac now, New

South Wales

26:00 and he, as soon as he arrived to us at Torokina he looked at me and got out a piece of cartridge paper and done this cartoon and I said, “Who the hell’s that?” and he said, “That’s you.” That’s the way he saw me at that particular time there. He ended up, as far as I know he ended up as a cartoonist for the Sydney Morning Herald or one of them big papers down there, it was just a natural gift he didn’t know

26:30 he had.

So after the war you got married and had a family?

Hmm.

What have been the most significant aspects of your life since the war, what have been the most important things to you?

Oh going into the business for the first time, that was a real trauma, no money, not much. Had to wait for the right opportunity and when the agency, I was working for the Mobil Oil Company at the time. And I went

27:00 there for that purpose to find out how these fuel depots operated, and all the names of the products and all that. And when this place turned up at Tully there for the agency, I’d been up there before and done bit of maintenance work up there. But when it came up there as a vacancy I applied for it and the company made a lot of incentives there for me, like the truck for a hundred and eighty five quid, and pay back, fifteen a month.

27:30 All these sorts of things there. Then I had trouble with the telephone people, they didn’t put the telephone on, we took over on the 1st February until middle of June, before the god damn phone got put on. That’s a story and a half too, I had that bloke sacked.

I bet?

Because he didn’t know that one of my good friends, Ronny Larson from Cairns, he was in charge of the telephone people

28:00 down as far as Tully, and this bloke wanted fifty quid to put the telephone one. So with the copper [policeman] and me self and the manager of Mobil Oil and Ronny Larson we go and give him this fifty, the notes like representing fifty odd pounds, what do you call it, the black black stuff, nitrate silver.

28:30 Put that on it and of course as soon as you touch it everything goes black. And give it to him there and after a short time we go in and start talking to him, Les Fox the police and Ronny Larson and Ronny the manager talking to him. And of course all the nitrate silver’s working, “And what about that fifty pound.” Oh what’s that black on your hands, and nailed him.

29:00 **So Bert what about being a father, have you enjoyed being a father?**

Oh yes, oh Ross he’s a wonderful, Greg, well that was one of the worst things that ever happened to me, losing Greg. Oh Ross he’s turned out good, he’s not broke by any means. He’s got one, two, three, four, his own house five, that’s five houses

29:30 and he’s got two holiday apartments up in Maroochydore there. And his wife’s a deputy principal at the Fernygrove State High School. Their superannuation alone there is, you wouldn’t get much change out of a million dollars.

So he’s doing very well indeed?

So their doing it right. And of course I helped him a lot in the beginning.

But the memories you have of the war. are they your strongest memories?

Oh yes, except when the old

30:00 man belted me with that belt. No one had the right to do that. Well we never got it easy in those days, no money, the father there liked his grog, cruelty seemed to be his passion in life.

Do you ever dream about the war?

Oh yes, I’ve had a couple of bad flashbacks there recent,

30:30 not so long ago. Particularly if I get upset about something. Fortunately it wears off after a while, I still have many many sleepless nights now, even now, everything still keeps coming back, you just can’t get rid of it.

What sort of things do you dream about?

Oh

31:00 just what transpired there I suppose. The six native girls at Rabaul, that was one of them, Kokopo, I

should say. That's one of the worst sights I've ever witnessed. And of course Tiger Emerson, Keith is his correct name and Alec Rudercolff. But of course pumping

31:30 the morphine into him there, when we were in Tully, it hadn't really taken the effect. Lloyd Bell the solicitor, Dougie Adcock the chemist, and Hanson the doctor, became addicted with some sort of drug there and oh it was my job to tell the doctor to leave the place.

32:00 Because the organisations I belong to there at the time, it ended up I drew the short straw to tell him to clear out. And the solicitor had to give up his practice and the chemist well he had to leave Tully, he went back to Townsville. And Alec there he eventually took his own life about two years after we left, about 1959, he lasted all that time. He was a wonderful accountant

32:30 honest and stayed long, you know, good worker. He left two sons, but that was all the effect of him being wounded. Well you take it he got wounded there at three minutes past four on the 19th January, that was on the Friday, and it was twenty past five before we got him back to a doctor, at Sarakan, Pontu really.

33:00 Got him back to there and then he had to go by barge from there down to Torokina, another five, six hour trip. And in the meantime they're pumping into him to keep the pain down and, when we were bring him back he was underneath a ground sheet to keep the water off him, the heavy rain, gee it rained, getting him across that flooded river and all that there. Course when I go back up to Tully doing the maintenance

33:30 work on the depot I go and see him, same with Tom McLean, he was the publican up there at the time, licensee. Met some of me old friends up there again, with Alec there well, but we never once discussed how he got wounded, never once, we knew it and that was it. He was one of the leading lights around

34:00 near Tully at the time and of course, I had to join in with him. And it was like a great big groper [fish] in a small tub of water and when we come down to Brisbane, like the sardine in the Atlantic.

So can you tell us about how Alec was wounded?

Alec was wounded there, he went up with the native first and had a look to see what

34:30 was going on, as any platoon commander would do, to have a look to see what's going on. Then he come back and took up the rest of the fellows and positioned them. And the first onslaught was at three minutes, at five minutes to four, and that's where they cleaned up about fourteen or so of the Japs that were in the huts and that sort of thing. And then there was a lull, Alec looked

35:00 around to see what was going on and he made the fatal mistake of calling out to us back in the rear to bring up the two inch mortar. And of course as soon as he opened his mouth and started calling out this bloke up in the tree logged him, and that's the bloke I bought down with the knee and then the other one. That's how, and hit Alec and of course

35:30 somebody came back to let us know that Alec had been hit, so therefore that's when Stan Tame sent his sergeant, native sergeant and me self back to bring him out. And that's when I got the few Nips that way.

What were his injuries?

Through the compass and it took the fragments of the compass into his stomach and just nicked the kidney.

36:00 It was a terrific wound, all on the right there.

And then he had this incredibly long journey back to get medical attention?

Yeah, I estimated it to be around about oh forty eight, maybe fifty two miles. On the way back I didn't even worry about, because we had the natives to guide us, we wanted to make all the speed we possibly could. Like I had, well by this time there was only thirty seven Australians left there and we still had two natives

36:30 short. cause Tame fired two burst, different times there from his Owen and when I counted the carriers there was two short. And then the twelve natives from the Papuan Police mob and that was it, so there was a few less coming back then what went out.

37:00 Well Stan Tame, in warfare there's no such thing as being a gentleman or anything of that nature there. On a previous patrol with him there he come across these natives and two of them had a Japanese arm band on. So his own blokes took these two blokes as prisoner and Stan said to them,

37:30 "Now take them back to Torokina," this is about forty odd, fifty odd miles away too, "and take them back to Torokina and you be back here in…" I think it was an hour and a half. Well how the hell were they going to go there? And of course the natives hadn't gone too far and of course we hear a few shots and they come back without any prisoners. Justice on the spot there, it's like the Americans in the early days, hang them in the morning and give them a trial in the afternoon.

38:00 Like unless you were in these sort of things you couldn't put that in any war diary or correspondence, crikey you couldn't criticize an officer, boy that was the last thing in the world.

So you said that Alec really never properly recovered?

No, no.

38:30 After all that morphine they stuck into him well he become addicted to it, that or something else, whatever they used I don't know. I never ever found out because the last time I went up there to get me final, get him to do me final clearance before he come down here he was in a bad way then. He said, "Bert," he said, "if I collapse here, just ring me wife and she'll know what to do." So

39:00 he was really bad then, it was only about two years afterwards. When there's four blokes get in the doctor's utility, two in the back and two in the front and they race up and down the main drag [street] and they take out the overhang [verandah] for a shop, jeweller shop, cleaned that up. And end up down Mission Beach Road and clean up one of the posts for the culverts, not

39:30 being satisfied with that they set fire to the utility, then have to walk back to Tully again. And the doctor was going out on a call parked his car in the showroom of the electricity board amongst all the refrigerators and washing machines and doing a lot of damage.

Tape 10

00:31 **Can you tell us about the submarines on Rabaul?**

I forget the actual number but they become a tourist attraction after the war there. And anybody on these ocean cruises they used to make a point of taking the tourists in to have a look at these things. But in the solid rock they had all this slave labour, like the Chinese and the

01:00 natives and anybody else, as I said before they could lay their hands on, and they made all this great big holes in the side of the cliff so the submarine could just about surface and come straight into it, big enough to take that. So that not only had the depth of water but they also had the height to go with it. But inside it was hollowed out right inside, that's where they had their machine shops and all that sort of stuff

01:30 to do the maintenance work for them. And they had, I don't know how many they had, I just don't realise, but at least one case there I counted six of them. Well those six submarines could be serviced at any one time.

They must have been incredible?

Yeah they were quite safe from aircraft with the skip bombing and all the rest of it. Oh it was a massive piece of work, there's no doubt about that. And of course Simpson Harbour is right in the middle of it is what they call the beehives,

02:00 that's 1937 volcanic eruptions, there's four volcanoes around that place. And these beehives appeared overnight, there was around about three thousand feet of water around it there. And so that become an obstacle for any aircraft, and even if they could turn sideways to launch the things

02:30 they'd run into the cliff anyhow. In Simpson Harbour the air force, particularly the Americans with the Mitchell bombers developed this skip bombing. And they'd come down, right down to the water, like the Dam Busters, come right down to the water and when they got down low enough, they'd let their bomb go and it would go, zip, zip until it hit the ship at the other end. And oh they done a lot of damage up there, in Rabaul itself there

03:00 it's no good looking for the township, it disappeared. I don't think I saw any one piece of concrete any bigger than that, it was all ground up there and stumps, all the stumps had gone everything. And the airfield, oh massive wreckage down there, not all there's either, lot of ours. And the Chinese there as internees when the plane

03:30 came down, irrespective of who it was they'd go there and try and salvage what they could off it to make their forks and knives and spoons, things of that nature, that's all they could use from it. Anything the Japs wanted well they just took off them. Oh they were pretty ingenious those. And of course they couldn't leave eight

04:00 hundred odd Chinese there, women and children, adults and men, all in the one area so they built a stockade, big thing and they put a six foot fence up all the way around it. They made steps on one said, pick up and put on the other side and jump the six foot fence, some bright spark [clever person] said, "We'll make it eight," and the same thing happened. So anyhow they made it eight feet high and instead of using the steps they just cut holes

04:30 in the fence. And then the other bright sparks, bit more enterprising, they'd see one of the launches or something of that nature hadn't been damaged so they'd go along and find somebody that wanted and sell it to them. And if they got paid on the spot all right give the owner of it

05:00 something, but if he didn't get paid well the owner got nothing. Oh if the Japanese had of owned it, or it had a centaury on it for safe keeping. Our blokes would go up there, you'd have to sign something there to say that you got it, rank and everything, oh yeah plenty of badges of rank around the place. The major would go up there, you know a supposed major, go up there and

05:30 he'd come back and he'd had to sign and he's put on, 'Ever been had, try again mate', and all these sorts of things. Until the Japs woke up, come the order that no more trading had to be done, but they still got away with it.

Did you talk to your son about your war experiences?

Not very much, he's got me sword and the chisels and a few others, I give him a lot of the

06:00 souvenirs. I give a lot of my stuff away, pay books and those sorts of things to the museum. A couple of years ago went up to see my wife's sister, she at the Canossa Home at Trebonne there. And on the way back we said we'll go and have a look at this

06:30 museum, eventually found it in the library in Ingham. And we go up there and I still don't know where it is, all the stuff that I presented there I couldn't see any of it, so I don't know where it's gone, some collector might have it now.

What were you most proud of of your service?

Oh the very fact that I thought I'd done a good job, that's what I've

07:00 always taken pride in whatever I do. It's got to be perfection.

So what part of your job were you most proud of do you think?

Oh the mapping was particular, that was the real thing, the real McCoy. The CO for ever afterwards there, you know in the Southbank State Library or

07:30 gallery, one of the places in there, one of the fellows living at the back of our place got a job there, he's not too bright but he still very, very persuasive in his methods. And from the Cape York he got to be the dyeline copies of all the maps, right from the Torres Strait Islands down to, oh a few miles south of the Jardine River there, and all the dyeline prints,

08:00 he got that for nothing. If they got the coloured ones they wanted eighty dollars a map, and I wouldn't be in that. It's a wonder George Roberts didn't show them to ya.

He did show us some maps actually, yeah?

Yeah well that's where they come from, I sent them up to him.

And how important is Anzac Day to you?

Nothing much, I like to see it on TV but I've never marched yet.

Why is that?

I don't know, I don't go to RSL meetings

08:30 although I'm a member, I've supplied a lot of information for them but I never go.

But it's important to keep in contact with your mates from the war years?

Only by telephone every now and again. Like each one knows what we're doing and all the rest. George Roberts is the only one you can say is more or less constant. He never comes down to Brisbane here

09:00 unless he rings me or calls out, been here several times. cause his wife Dal, she's got the Alzheimer's, [disease]. Gee, she's an almighty person that one. When you get a business like what they had, he's a solicitor, 1947 I counted up and he was a secretary, or involved in some way or another with twenty two companies, he bet like, on a fly crawling up a glass door.

09:30 He was president of the turf racing club out there, anything with horses; he was one of the instigators of the horse racing at Marooki there, on the road with these little tiny ponies. They're magic that, they call this race meeting there blokes like Angelo Barbudis and George Roberts and Grey Harris, he was in our section too. And they had bookmaker's umbrellas and bags

10:00 and oh all the stuff there, and of course I'm not a gambler in any shape or form. Anyway I went to this meeting they had on the roadway there and there was six events and about six horses in each event. Because I backed me money on five the first five and I lost it, so I said, "I'm not going to be beaten." So I backed every horse in the race on the last and I come out showing a profit of one and six pence.

10:30 Fancy backing every horse to get a winner, I couldn't loose.

Bert do you have some sort of final comment about your war or life experience that you want to put on the record?

Oh no not particularly I don't think. No, I do me level best there, all I can say there is war

11:00 is a futile exercise, but at the same token if you don't defend and put the funds and the equipment necessary to do it, well you won't be here. There's always somebody there willing to take advantage of you. We've got Indonesia, India, Russia, Japan and China, and now Koreans are coming into the picture. So as sure

11:30 as eggs somebody there is going to bite the bullet and it only needs one to start again. It's very, very lucky for us that they've been able to contain this Iraq business, based on me own experience, the power of deductions and all the rest of it there and the information available, that's what I firmly believe. Who in their right senses

12:00 would go along and see blokes like Cassius Clay, or whatever his name is there now, walking along and go up and throw a punch at him? Who in their right senses would go and do it? It's only simply because they don't do it cause they know quite well they'll get beaten. Well if you're in that position where you've got the best, like the Americans at the present day, that's why they've got to be our friends, not enemies.

12:30 My nephew spent nearly five years out at Pine Gap, he's a computer engineer. Somebody wants a computer he tells them how to make it. He's retired now. It's no good me trying

13:00 to have a conversation with him because his head's all round everything else.

What has made you happy in the last few years?

Oh nothing much, everything's coming to an end. Once I lost me licence there, that's because I'm blind in, practically blind in the left eye.

13:30 I had to get rid of the standard car gears on the car because I couldn't get me left foot off the clutch at one time. Had a terrific back operation, what they call a three level laminectomy, triple by-pass and all these sorts of things. I've had nothing to crow about over the last few years, just surviving there.

Well you've had an amazing life and you're very sharp.

14:00 **Your stories are incredible.**

Oh I've got no regrets there at all, not too many had the same full life as what I've had. And they haven't acquired the same knowledge as what I've got either for that matter. Because in the building industry, like going through reading and things there, a person will come to me and say, "I want a house built on that piece of ground there." Well I can go from there and put all the furniture in it and everything else that's necessary.

14:30 **Amazing.**

All the plumbing, the electrical, the whole lot, not that I'm licensed to do it, but I can still do it.

Well Bert we appreciate you telling us your stories today. it's been a real privilege.

I've never had anybody to hold a shoulder around for me to weep on yet.

Thank you very much it's been fantastic to hear your life stories?

Oh I don't know, yeah it's going to be of interest to somebody else there all right, but.

15:00 My experience of life, oh yeah he's right and probably forget all about it.

Don't think so, thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS