Australians at War Film Archive

Kenneth Knox - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **So where were you born Ken?**

Right in Melbourne Cathy [interviewer], 1924. Hard to believe isn't it? I was the youngest, I had two elder sisters and they gave me hell right through me life?

Did they, hey?

01:00 They were brilliant at school and I spent a lot of time at the bottom of the ladder and if there was a class of twenty eight I'd get twenty six or twenty seven. I was always furious at Christmas time when Granny used to come down and ask for the report cards for the year and she'd give my sisters a shilling, which was a lot of money then, for their excellence and I think I probably got a threepence or something like that,

01:30 because I really was not a good student.

What school was that Ken?

That was Melbourne Grammar. We were pretty lucky in that father could send the three of us through public schools, Victorian public schools being private schools I suppose today, whereas a terrible lot of parents couldn't but he could just afford it and when he died and I went through his books it was pretty touch and go.

02:00 There wasn't very much left over every week. Anyway he sent us through school and I appreciated it in the end but and there was a state school just down the road from us and I can remember in the thirties seeing kids walking to school in bare feet, which fully hit me more now than then but that was what the Depression was like then.

So what suburb were you in?

I was in Toorak which was an expensive suburb then but Toorak

02:30 then was divided into up the top of the hill, St John's the Presbyterian Church, above Orrong Road and then down into the little houses and the Toorak State School and that was one tenth the price for houses there than up on the hill. I don't know whether that division exists today but Toorak was quite a divided.

03:00 But it always worried me later in the army, people would say, "Where do you come from?" I'd say, "Toorak" and they'd say, "Well you've got a pocketful of money," well that was far from the truth but Toorak always had that reputation.

So what did your father do for a living?

Oh he was in a business, wholesaling copper pipes and anything to

03:30 tractors to people who'd be using them. The wholesalers in the city in Collins Street and I can't tell you much more about it than that. He was not secretive but I just was never encouraged really to find out and when I got out of the army years later I didn't really want to go into Collins Street with a tie every day. I finished up

04:00 almost going to college for, but that's another story. I couldn't have got out of the army and gone into his office where I would have been welcomed with a pen and a pencil and they wouldn't have even had a typewriter in those days. I didn't want to be cooped up, but that's jumping ahead a lot.

So was he around much your Dad? Did he have a lot to do with you as a child?

Not a great deal, nothing like today. He had a very

04:30 bad leg, in those days thrombosis and they got the legs and they were not really curable and he had to have bandages around his legs all his life, so I didn't realise it then but he didn't play cricket or football

with us, even in the street or the backyard, because of this. So we had much less contact with him than say I've had with my children, where I get goaded into making a fool of myself on the golf

05:00 course and things like that. No, and he was dramatically punctual. He'd leave, he'd get the five o'clock tram home and he'd get on the five past eight tram every morning and it never varied. Anyway there were people like that then.

And what about your Mum?

05:30 Oh yes, a wonderful woman. She was treasurer of the Royal Children's Hospital for many years and spent a terrible lot of time doing social work, Red Cross and etcetera and etcetera. But I don't think the children then saw as much of their parents as they do now or they don't interchange with romping on the beach or barbeques and things like that because today you've got cars.

06:00 It was right to the end of the thirties that we had our first car and that was a second hand canvassed topped old Austin and it didn't always start. So they were there, we loved them and we didn't fight but there wasn't the communication I think there is today.

And your two sisters, did you say they were older than you?

Yeah, both older than me, both very successful, they 'd get

06:30 their matriculation a year earlier than anybody else. In those days there was a leaving certificate and matric was the top one and then the intermediate certificate, well I had to do my intermediate certificate twice to get promoted to leaving. In fact I didn't. I remember the headmaster of the school saying when I was sixteen, "You're too big to do intermediate anymore, so we've got to put you up to leaving," and I still didn't have it when I left there. I was interested in all sorts of things but

07:00 not passing exams and I had a little excuse. I used to get dreadful bronchitis as a kid and I spent a lot of winter months up with my uncle at Narrandera in New South Wales. He had a sheep property up there so I'd go up on the ordinary train to Tocumwal and then little motor train that

07:30 chugged through Jerilderie and Finley and etcetera and I spent three or four months up there. They had a governess, which wasn't uncommon then for a sheep property and other kids would come in each day and we had a little school at the sheep space. So I lost contact with my parents for three or four months and I didn't get any asthma or bronchitis or whatever it was up there at all and really came back healthier, I don't know but I

08:00 enjoyed it up there. It was sunny and I was a bit homesick I think sometimes but my uncle and my aunt were very good to me and I was happy.

And they had a little school on their property?

Well that's not quite true. It became a school but it was in fact a wing of the building. They were pretty big, the old homesteads of sheep properties because they had another cook and another cook and they had someone they used to call a 'kill

08:30 milk useful' who did the killing, the gardening and what and a gardener. They had four or five on the staff of the house and there was a school room down one wing. I remember it very, very well and we had about four or five of us there and they'd come in from other places round. They might have to drive ten or fifteen miles but at least it was better than maybe driving twenty miles into

09:00 Narrandera itself.

And the governess, who was she?

The governess? Oh they could often be a different one every year because they might have had lovers in Sydney or something and they didn't want to be away for three months and didn't like to be stuck out there on their own. Not much social life on a sheep property. It would have been, the governess would not have gone out to a dance

09:30 with one of the boundary riders. There were social levels which were indispensable so I can imagine why, after six months, usually took about three months, but the governess would be there for a year and she I think, a year I think would be enough and then she'd be happy to become a schoolteacher again in Sydney or Melbourne or whatever.

So were you just there for one season or did you go back?

Yeah, for about probably five years in a row,

10:00 in the middle of Melbourne's worst of the winter, say from the May school holidays to September or near abouts and I'd come back and start wheezing and coughing again for a while but in the warm weather I was right. But you get over it, here I am, eighty one and happy.

Yeah, because the air's a lot drier up there, isn't it?

Yes, I can't tell you any real medical reason

10:30 why and it wasn't psychosomatic in that I was terrified of schoolteachers or my parents. I wasn't. It must have been something physical. Air, yes, air, maybe lots of milk that day with great layers of cream on the top and that may be why I've got heart trouble now, but yeah, anyway I went up there in winter. I just didn't get sick, if I stayed in Melbourne I'd

11:00 miss three days of school a week, so that's why I had a little excuse of finishing at the bottom of the class nearly always. And I was terribly tall too. I'm not bad now, six feet six and nearly two meters now but at the age of eleven, ten, eleven, twelve I was about the same height and I barely cast a shadow. I was terribly, terribly thin.

11:30 So I could play football but I was always frightened of getting hit by anyone, I'd fall over and I was just terribly, terribly weak. So I was pretty shy and backwards in a lot of ways. I remember one, when father got a car in the late thirties. He got a load of bricks dumped outside the house to make a brick pathway to the

12:00 garage, which we had to build, there was no garage there and the family went out one Sunday and I saw the bricks. I knew where they had to go and I can remember the first physical thing I'd fully done without someone saying, "Don't overdo it, be careful." I carried about a thousand bricks up the drive that afternoon and I remember looking at my biceps that night, they were as sore as hell, and I was a bit surprised they hadn't changed into

12:30 (demonstrates). After that I think something happened in me that I could do things and I think, getting back to my parents there was a terrible lot of, "Be careful, don't overdo it." I was made to feel poorly and sick as a child and they were only trying to be protective. Anyway about the age of fourteen I started to go out, like that (demonstrates) and going up, thank God.

13:00 And I could join in cricket and football all right but those early years. When I had my own children, you haven't met my eldest son, Ian, he's much the same, he's way up there and you've got to look up to him and he was a very spindly child too.

Was your father tall or your mother?

No, but the family was. They both came, I was six feet, my father and my mother [were] tall, but their brothers and sisters

13:30 they were tall and big and strong.

What's their background, what's their heritage, your parents?

My parents are both from Melbourne. My grandfather, old William Knox, he was in the first Federal Parliament

14:00 in Melbourne and he had a lovely big home out in Oakley, which was then out in the bush virtually. This was 1890's to 1900's, and he'd done well and he'd built a two storey mansion but it was half a day's trip into Melbourne and there was no train lines or bus lines or anything. I think they'd

14:30 horse and cart for half the way and then pick up a train at East Malvern. They had their own little theatre. They had seven brothers and two sisters, my father had and they had a large dining room type thing with a stage on it, at the end and come Saturday nights they'd have their own little singsong and get together. There was no television,

15:00 no radio and this was fairly normal for people that could do these things but they could all do something. Father could sing and his sister was a marvellous pianist. I say marvellous but to us she was talked of as being so they all had some little thing they could do. That was on my father's side and on my mother's side, well her father at one stage, he was the same, was a

15:30 part owner of The Age [Melbourne newspaper] but then The Age split up, way back and none of the dollars he sold out for have filtered through to my pockets a hundred years later, but he was a pretty successful man too. I've got to think now. I can't tell you much more.

That's fascinating. So William Knox, you said, your grandfather, he was in Federal Parliament?

16:00 Yeah, the first Federal Parliament was held in Melbourne and he was the first secretary of Broken Hill Proprietary Limited and became a director of BHP and he floated BHP in England because BHP had had this enormous find up at Broken Hill, gold, copper, silver, you name it. And there wasn't enough money in Australia

16:30 too build the mine and do what it was capable of so he went to, he was sent to London to float the Company there and because he had good presentation and Australian shysters weren't really known in London then, he could talk to businessmen, big business over there and say, "Look, invest a million dollars in this and you should do really well." He came back and he was met at Station Pier

17:00 and we're talking about the 1890's roughly now, by the Chairman and the Chairman said, "Well," there was cables running then and you could send messages and the Chairman said to him, "You've done well, now where are the contracts?" And Grandfather said, "There are no contracts Mr Chairman, my word is my honour and the word of the people I've dealt with is their honour," so no-one let him down.

17:30 They said they'd subscribe a million dollars or pounds as they were then and they all landed eventually. But he learnt to play golf over there. Golf had been played in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia since the 1850's, it came out with the early settlers and it wasn't, there weren't the clubs around Melbourne there are now, so he became, he was at the first meeting that formed Royal Melbourne Golf Club.

18:00 And he was, I shouldn't say, into all these big ventures, that's sounds as though he was attempting to do. He was in some demand because of his ability to organise, make a good speech, etcetera and etcetera. He wasn't a great golfer himself but his children all were, not great but they were pretty handy golfers. And he was one of the first members of both Royal

18:30 Melbourne and Metropolitan Golf Club, which were the two major golf clubs then and just about now, socially prominent clubs I mean. Their fees are high and you get a lot of legal, medical professional people that belong to them etcetera. Sounds a bit snobbish saying that but there are class distinctions in golf clubs

19:00 just as there are in hotels etcetera,

Okay, taking it all in. Do you play golf by yourself, by the way?

Very late in life. I've got, if you walked outside to the back, my old horse paddock here, I've got nine holes out there now because I did belong to the Lonsdale Golf Club, five miles away, which you went past yesterday when you got lost coming

19:30 Here. I thought, "Now I don't want to play golf down there late in the afternoon, have six beers after the game with my friends and get picked up on the road for being over five [point 05 blood alcohol level] or waiving on my feet so the best thing to do is I'll make my little course out the back here." and twenty two years later the fairways are planted, the rabbits love burrowing in the greens, and what used to be a bare

20:00 paddock is, well I think it's quite lovely, though you've got to hit the ball straight or you'll get in the woods and it can take a long time to find them. And I did have horses in for a while but horses love leaning over fences to get the bit of grass on the other side and a ton of horse on a fence, the fence doesn't look too good after a while, so I told my neighbours who were using it, I was getting a bottle of Scotch every Christmas for free choice actually, nothing each week, I said, "Look out, I'm turning this into a little

20:30 golf course for me and my friends," and well we play to this day. You get things wrong and one of my arch rivals whom I'm playing with every Wednesday; he's had all sorts of things wrong with him, in the last year, we'll come back to it later but I've done a good job with cancer and this pacemaker up here, and my knees they give up work. When you get to eighty you'll

21:00 find out, so it's there. I mow it every five or six days. My kids come down and play but they're getting a bit good for me and I sometimes think, "Stick to bowls" so I made a little bowling green there and I can play bowls without much walking and at five o'clock every night at this time of the year, Jean and I play croquet on a little croquet lawn I built down here.

21:30 It's as rough as can be and a good croquet player wouldn't even start but we enjoy it and she wins as much as I win and it's really the only time we come together each day in some social function other than eating. I'm down the paddock and she's in her studio and five o'clock each night we play for half an hour and then I come in, have

22:00 my cool drinks and expect dinner to be ready at six thirty, seven according to the season. But we've also got here, how did we start on this? We've jumped a few years now.

It's okay.

I've got a dam here and I put in rainbow trout. I was a mad fisherman and they're going well. You buy them for about thirty dollars, we did then, thirty dollars for a hundred, little fellows about half an inch long,

22:30 and they grow up to about that size (demonstrates) and they get bigger but as soon as they get to that size or that the cormorants find out they're here and you come home from Geelong one day and there's six cormorants with bellies like this (demonstrates) and of the hundred you might end up getting about two rainbow trout, so anyway.

Oh well, you've tried a few things. Well I wouldn't mind going back to,

23:00 **way back about seventy years back, if that's all right to discover a bit more about**

Seventy years back?

Yeah, there about to talk about your childhood?

I don't want to get too ego. There are a couple of little ego bits that would worry me.

Are there?

Well there's nothing modest about me today, is there?

You don’t have to modest.

After I’d changed from

23:30 being a bean pole into something more square and because I was tall I suppose I became a better than average high jumper, which is probably natural, built like a giraffe or a kangaroo or something. I did become Victorian Public Schools high jump champion in 1941, the senior one and the Under Sixteen one when I was fifteen and I broke the Victorian Public Schools

24:00 record that lasted for twenty seven years, which is a long time for records to last. And then I suddenly found a friend at school, I used to hero worship those big American wrestlers that came out here, so he and I introduced professional wrestling to Melbourne Grammar. It lasted until the headmaster found out what was going on and he said, “Not in this school.” I said, “I’m not sending children home with cauliflower ears and broken noses

24:30 because of you.” But I could do these things. I suddenly found out I was enjoying it and I got boxing then. You might be surprised to know it was a compulsory sport in many schools, including Melbourne Grammar and I was in the heavyweights and I got through to the semi-final of the School Heavyweight Championship and that was quite a thrill. And I played

25:00 a couple of games with the school First Eleven in cricket and suddenly I found I could do things quite naturally. You’re born lucky or not lucky. Some people are awkward and this just all happened between the ages of fifteen and seventeen etcetera. There you are, I’ve told you all.

It’s like you had to find your own masculinity, didn’t you?

I suppose so.

25:30 **You had two older sisters who you…**

They used to bring home their school friends but they were always two or four years older. They never bought back one my age, a friend my age. I think I was too gawky. I was terribly frightened of schoolgirls and you didn’t go out at fifteen then like the kids do now, particularly girls go out dancing Saturday night. The word chaperone was still used you know then where if you were seventeen or

26:00 eighteen you could only go out with a boyfriend with a chaperone to keep an eye on you. But they used to get away with that I believe out at grandfather’s place. Croquet was the in game then. Lawn tennis was only just coming in and the adults there and also in England thought that croquet lawn was a very pure and nice place to be. The truth was all the fellows had a hip flask in their pockets and they’d take the girls down there

26:30 and dreadful things I’m told could happen around the croquet lawn on a Sunday afternoon, whereas today the girls are wearing shorts and bare midriffs and on the beach with fellows, wonderful scene today but it’s so different to then, hard to believe.

So you spent a bit of time out at your grandfather’s at Oakley, did you?

No, this is all hearsay.

27:00 We did the family history, my cousin and I about five or ten years ago and we more recently updated it and asked the surviving members of the family to be more specific about certain things. Asked the sort of questions you do, you probe and probe and embarrass people so I’ve learnt a terrible lot in more recent years, even though there’s none of them surviving now but they were

27:30 when we, a couple of them when we did this. No, I never met my grandfather. He died before I was even born. I knew his wife, his widow. She moved into town from Oakley but we’ve got a very good picture of what happened there but the one I do remember mostly is the one I was telling you about; the piano shows and the singing and the dancing and father was a great friend of Peter Dawsey. I don’t know whether Peter Dawsey’s name

28:00 is known by but he was the great Australian baritone of the nineteen, tenor or baritone, I’ve never been too sure but of World War One and father couldn’t get away. He tried every possible avenue to get away as all his brothers were winning military medals and getting commissions but because of his legs they wouldn’t have him in anything. That hurt him very, very much. In fact the most

28:30 terrible thing that happened to him he got a white feather sent to him through the mail, from an anonymous person and maybe by the time this talks sub-edited, people might know what a white feather is. I don’t think the expression is used but in those days if someone was a coward you sent them a white feather in an envelope and they got the message that it was time they joined up. Well there was no possible way that father could ever join up but he had a hobby.

29:00 I don’t know if it was a very good hobby of saying farewell to all the people going away as friends and then welcoming them home His dinners at Menzies and Scots were the two in hotels in Melbourne then, were quite famous and notorious and wild and he’d get a hansom cab and race another hansom cab around the block or whatever.

29:30 This was, and the young fellows of that age then the police were pretty tolerant to them, no breathalysers. They could make you walk down a straight line. They could make you say the British Constitution as truly rural and if you couldn't walk on a straight line and say that they could charge you with being what today is [point] 05.

30:00 But anyway father had a wonderful reputation as a party thrower at Melbourne pubs for either close friends that went away and came home from World War One wounded or in one piece.

Oh that's fascinating. So he would just get, he would invite people to the pub and then throw a party?

Well they were pretty formal dinners. I think they had a guest list and they

30:30 were like a buck's party, not today, then. You had invitations; you didn't come unless you had a cardboard invitation. Yeah, it was still talked of in his time. My father once complained that the chickens, they were each served half a chicken, hadn't been properly cooked and they called for the chef and the chef at Menzies, who was a pretty high powered man in Melbourne. If you

31:00 were a chef at Menzies you were something in the city and it is alleged by father's brothers that father took aim at the length of the dining room with half a chicken and scored a direct hit on the chef. I think they moved from Menzies to Scots after that for some time anyway.

Fantastic, so did you ever attend any of

31:30 **these functions?**

Oh no, I'm talking about World War One now, it was before I was born. It was when my father was trying to get away to France and Egypt with all his contemporaries but his legs were so bad with this thrombosis that they wouldn't accept him, they didn't want to know him.

So was he an outgoing, social type your father?

Yeah, within his own group of

32:00 friends. Not going out, not outgoing like people are today, where they go and dance make noises and jitterbug. I think going out for him was a night at the theatre. No, I don't think you could say outgoing and I think financially he had to be very careful where he went and how often. I think it applied to half of Melbourne, well in the Depression anyway.

32:30 Most of Melbourne didn't have money to go out much.

And your uncles that were in World War One?

Yes, they were very successful. One of them got a Military Cross in Bar. They were all captains and majors, because, this is an interesting thing my father once said and it's recorded in the family history, because of Grandfather being in the first Federal Parliament

33:00 he had, I'll use a loose word, important people came to dine with him at their house so the kids grew up knowing people in authority. They weren't terrified of someone who was the chairman of this or the member of another constituency and I think parliamentarians might have had a little bit more respect in those days than they do a hundred years later now. And

33:30 I think father used to say, it was a part of his education although he didn't know it was talking with people in real authority, maybe the Governor of Victoria would be out there and they moved in a circle where they knew people and they weren't terrified of them, didn't do their tie up straight just because the Archbishop of Melbourne was coming to dinner. In fact the Archbishop

34:00 of Melbourne was often a visitor there, lunch on Sundays after church. Church was mandatory, they all went to church every Sunday morning and the preacher would come for midday dinner on Sundays and people like the Archbishop coming was not a sensational event, it wasn't like you coming here this morning where I had to tidy my hair and put on a clean shirt. But there I think the family just kept on doing what they were doing and

34:30 they could talk to people so freely, without being loose about it and not respecting seniority.

And was this something that continued once your father had a family and?

No, it didn't continue but what he'd learnt then from talking to people and lived through

35:00 but we certainly couldn't have afforded to have the gatherings after he was married and had young children to send through school. It was one of the best things he did in his life was to send his three children through public school at the same time. I had the same thing with my three children. We put them down for Carey Grammar and they decided they'd all have to go in the one year or they mightn't be able to go in next year, so I didn't know where the next threepence was coming from for

35:30 a while. No, so it was something he learnt and all the Knox's had the ability to, the wonderful ability to be able to talk to the local garbage collector and the members of parliament or chairman of this and

golf clubs, just as easily as anyone, the gardener, wonderful method of communication. I don't think I've explained that well but you know what I mean.

Yeah, that's fine. Are you related,

36:00 **is this the same Knox family as Alistair Knox?**

No, Jean knows them well but I don't know them but I know who you mean. No, but all Knox's are related from way back in Scotland, eighteen hundred years ago because one of the Knox's then, he wasn't a Knox then, they had Christian names, and in the family tree it has, "this particular one

36:30 was awarded by the King and granted the lands of Nock," N-O-C-K, and that's how the name of Knox, it's been spelt so many different times different ways. Clerks of court then weren't always really good with spelling and then you had the Scandinavians and the Norwegians invading Scotland and England, so if you were NOCK they had to put a K in front of it, like they do on half their things now

37:00 and I think the Clerks of Court spelt things phonetically. If your name was NOCKS or NOCK, they could choose NOX, NOCK, KNOX and this was pretty normal for those times. How did I get onto that subject? I don't know.

Oh we're free ranging, it's fine, it's fine. Now your Mum, you said she was a Syme, so she was….?

Home a lot.

But she was part of?

37:30 Yeah, her father had been a partner, one of the partners that owned The Age but the family split for quite a long time, like fifty years before one side of the family would talk to the other and when I eventually went to work for The Age the Chairman David Syme and Company, as it still was known, before it got sold.

38:00 I was just an ordinary reporter and he was Chairman and he called me into his office and made an almost tearful welcome back. Old Oswald Syme, he was then probably close to eighty and I was just in my mid twenties but this couldn't have been the first meeting of the two sides but at least I'd started to work for the paper founded by one of my grandparents

38:30 and Ozzie knew I was coming and the salt was broken and he was a wonderful old man but they didn't speak for years. I don't think we have those scenes today do we where families are broken up by legal?

What was the cause of the rift do you know?

It was a libel case that Melbourne dined on I think for months and months, about what one of the Symes had been saying about another Symes and etcetera and honestly I've

39:00 never really investigated it thoroughly. That was their side of the family and the Knox side was much stronger, stronger people, more interesting. I shouldn't say stronger so I think I'm a Knox and the Knox family interested me, not so much the other side of the family.

And you said your Mum was treasurer of the

39:30 **Royal Children's Hospital?**

Yes in the 1930's, and her mother had been before and that took up, I wouldn't say a lot of time. It was an honorary treasurer's job. Every Thursday they had their meeting there and signed cheques, but the Children's Hospital was run by committees etcetera and anyway she was on the finest committee and a treasurer for years and years, probably a life member

40:00 although I can't remember that now.

Did she do a lot of fundraising, involved in charity work?

She might have told people how to raise funds but in as far as going out rattling tins, no, I think she might have approached the chairmen of big business rather than rattle a tin. And Red Cross, she was very much involved in that, particularly in World War One,

40:30 bandaging people's legs when they came home from overseas at the hospitals or the temporary hospitals that were around Melbourne. It was always her life. She was a bit of an angel looking after other people I think.

Tape 2

00:33 **I'd like to know a bit more about Narrandera and that experience for you as it's quite a contrast going from Toorak up onto a sheep station every year?**

Yes, socially and the way they lived it was a much more extravagant life up in Narrandera on the Syme family property.

01:00 They dressed for dinner, this was in the 1930's and my uncle put on his dinner jacket and my aunt put on her long evening frock. This was normal and the dining table you had finger bowls for the asparagus and my kids don't even know what they are, that you dipped your asparagus in melted butter and then dabbled your fingers in.

01:30 It happens at Government House now and probably at the top hotels but it doesn't happen in every place around the place like that, but that was accepted as normal then. I do remember once though going up there I mentioned the motor train from Jerilderie but Ansett Airways, which are no longer in existence, we flew up one May school holidays there on the Lockheed

02:00 Electras and they had twin tails behind them and they used to land on the Narrandera Racecourse and this was probably the biggest thrill of my life, to actually get into a commercial aircraft; they took about twelve passengers and they went to Narrandera about I'd say three or four times a week. And that was a lovely one hour, one and a half hour trip instead of nearly twelve hours by train from Melbourne to there, changing

02:30 trains at Tocumwal. The size of the property, people find it hard to believe now as Narrandera's so broken up and my uncle had about twelve thousand acres there, but after the war it was broken up into soldier settlement blocks. And he had about four boundary riders

03:00 that used to, they had their houses, little houses and they'd go right around the boundary, not as a team but individually and there was always work to do for them. They didn't get paid too much but they got half a sheep a week and a couple of pounds a week, or something like that. The big event was the Sydney wool sales and while we talk of wool now

03:30 of oodles of dollars for a kilogram, you could top the mark of that in Sydney with twelve pence a pound and if you got thirteen pence the champagne was broken out or whatever. But Narrandera itself, the main street hasn't changed much. It's still two hundred yards wide almost and that's a bit of a laugh and that originally

04:00 they were that wide so that the camel teams and the ox teams could do a u turn in the main street and you'll see the same thing down here in Queenscliff and in a lot of country towns, but that hasn't changed very much. I go through it quite often when I'm heading up to Queensland on the old highway.

I didn't know that. I didn't know that's why those streets were so wide in country towns.

I can't say that's always the case but it takes a lot of area to turn a camel team or a ox team and the bullock team, so that's why the streets were

You

04:30 **can't do a three point turn with a bullock team, can you? Now all this activity that was going on on the farm, were you involved in that?**

It was a station, it was a cattle, sheep station and there was a big difference between a farmer and a grazier. The farmers had the small places, the graziers had the bigger blocks and

05:00 their children went to boarding school and a farmer they went to the local state school or whatever or did correspondence. I think it's still big isn't it in some parts of Australia but probably in Victoria we run buses here and there from one city to another.

Did your aunt and uncle have children attending

05:30 **the school?**

Yes, they had, they were with the governess up to a certain age and then the eldest son he came down to Geelong Grammar here and there was a couple of others and myself and the governess and one of their children, only about four of us there and then I got healthy then so I didn't have to go back.

06:00 But eventually all the graziers' children were boarders at Melbourne Grammar or Geelong Grammar, Geelong College etcetera and Geelong Grammar was the in school socially and I think it still is too, most expensive anyway. I drove through it the other day and the only school I know that's got horse stables and dozens of them for the students horses and it's a great school.

06:30 **Now did you ride at Narrandera?**

Yes, they gave me a horse, a horse called Donkey, whereas my cousins who owned the place, they had like thoroughbreds or very good quality horses but Donkey was a lovable old thing and I think not too fast for me. People weren't taught to ride then and you rode

07:00 and when you were moving sheep from one place to another very often the horse just walked behind you because it was just as easy to walk as it was, easier to walk than to sit on a horse all day. The big day, the big week was the shearing. It took about ten days at a guess and the shearing team would come in with their cook and the [wool] classer and

07:30 the [wool] presser and the shearing team and the whole team came in as one and they were contractors and they would spend ten days at this place and then they'd move onto somewhere thirty miles down the track and that was exciting. School was forgotten then because you were there dipping the sheep or getting in the way of the people who were doing the wool classing but best of all the shearers did love their food. And the

08:00 shearers' cook, he had to provide a pretty good breakfast but morning teas were, you always had very nice cakes and we made sure we were always there with the cakes. And the woolshed was well away from the homestead and every day a truck would come out from Narrandera and pick up the bales that had been filled that day. Oh it was

08:30 just an exciting time.

So what did you think of the shearers?

Well I didn't have very much communication with them. They were always good humoured but they were paid by the hundred, five pounds a hundred or whatever it was. I've forgotten so they weren't people who wanted to stand around and they wanted to get there, shear their sheep, put it down the ramp, grab another one and put it there.

09:00 I think one of our jobs was to keep the sheep up, put them in behind the shearers under a shed so they wouldn't get wet overnight with dew or rain and we always had jobs to do. Today they might say only a union member can do that, I don't know, so communication with the shearers themselves wasn't great. They had a reputation of being

09:30 a lot of them, they'd go to a pub and put money on a counter and say, "Righto, I want to cut this out." Whether this happened as much as it's been written about and recorded but shearers were thirsty people and I don't think after work of a night time they'd want to go all the way into town and get full of beer, they'd want to put their heads down and they were pretty fit people. The one person I really used to

10:00 admire was the wool presser. Today the bales are filled and pressed automatically by I suppose electricity or whatever but in those days the presser he had a long iron bar and he'd push up and down and this was compacting the wool and this particular presser who used to come up there, the same team came every year, he was probably one of the most beautifully muscled men I've seen

10:30 in my life and I've probably wanted to, in some ways, wanted to be like that but his whole life was doing this (demonstrates), marvellous.

Well it must have been very satisfying for you seeing yourself getting better and getting stronger and becoming fitter?

Yeah, it was a whole change of life. Looking back it happened so quickly, the fact that I didn't

11:00 have any excuses to make about the school work then if it was down.

Now were there any sort of characters down there at Narrandera that impressed you or?

Oh yes, I remember there were not bad characters. There was the local doctor, Doctor Lethbridge, and he was an authority on snakes and we used to have to go in occasionally, I can't remember

11:30 what for, to get a needle or something like that, and he always had snakes in bottles. And once when I was there he gave me a living copperhead about eight inches long and I took it back to Melbourne with me and tried to feed it insects etcetera but mother and father weren't very thrilled having even a baby copperhead around the house and mysteriously one day it disappeared.

12:00 I don't think I really was in love with it but going to him you always learnt something about snakes.

So where did he have his snake collection?

In his waiting room, come, well in those days the doctor's rooms were in his house, they were part of the house and I could see them wherever, bottles and bottles of them. Some were wound around and around and put in spirits but

12:30 he was fascinating that he knew and we'd always been told to be careful of snakes but even up there you don't see many snakes. Down here it's a bad snake area but I might see two in the summer. I've got a dam full of frogs, twenty yards from where we're sitting but you don't see them. You see the shredded, the skins they shed but you very seldom see the snake itself. You just take care and

13:00 I think that's what it was like up there.

It sounds like a really interesting community, both on the station and in the town?

In the town, yes. There was a place called the Riverina Club was there, which is the same as the Melbourne Club here and it was more for graziers than business people and the fellow who repaired your car, don't worry about that and that was the social centre of the town. And people would drive in, often five, ten,

13:30 fifteen miles out to spend a night there and there were no .05 policemen on the road going home, so you didn't have to worry much but that was the central meeting place in Narrandera itself. And my uncle and aunt they had a tennis court at their place, a grass court, and they had tennis parties every, might be six, eight weeks, I don't

14:00 know, where everybody came and tennis parties don't exist up there today, do they? A tennis court up there was a meeting place and I can't remember who actually looked after the grass. I suppose the gardener, who did the vegetable garden and things like that, but it was a good surface, properly wired and surrounded by orange trees.

So were you at Melbourne Grammar for the rest of

14:30 **year?**

Oh yes, yes, yes, right, the first and third terms, there were three terms a year, and then I'd go back to school for the last. I don't know if I enjoyed school. It was only when I started to get strong and healthy that I enjoyed school really. I think they,

15:00 I used to get mocked a fair bit by the other children, "Tall and lanky, skinny and cranky," I can remember words like that thrown at me.

So you got to your intermediate level?

Yeah, it was normally people at age fifteen would pass that but I was sixteen and hadn't passed it and you would normally go and do leaving.

15:30 Leaving certificate was the one under matric and matric was the qualification to get into Melbourne University or any university, so now you've just got your big one, isn't it? My children have been through it, it's a hell of a year. They spend all their time at night time complaining about the work they've got to do.

So you were sixteen when you got to intermediate?

Yes, I did it twice

16:00 anyway and failed each time. The exam was held at the end of the year at Melbourne University. It wasn't internally held within the school.

Did your sisters tutor you at all?

Teach me?

Yeah.

No, oh no. No-one tutored. You went to school and came home and did your homework and that was it. No, there was no tutoring. I think I needed a bit of encouragement

16:30 from them, it might have helped a lot. I didn't get the encouragement and I don't always put down very much but I decided my place was probably at the bottom of the class.

What subjects did you enjoy at school?

Oh geography, I developed a love for history later. It

17:00 just depended a lot on the teacher. I can remember the first history teacher we had to learn the order of Kings in England, William, William, Henry, Stephen and their dates and I think that's what history was, I was appalled. I wasn't then but then that was what you had to learn, the dates, and then we got a good history teacher to whom things like architecture and warfare and

17:30 how Scotland came to be individually Scotland and the social attitudes of the people then and I suddenly enjoyed it. It wasn't long till I left school but to this day I'm fascinated by history and I know it's not pursued generally but sports history. I once had a programme that went for quite a few years on

18:00 Radio Australia called "The Sporting History Book," when people all around the world would write in and say, "tell us about the origins of lacrosse?" or something like that and there were some marvellous stories there about how lacrosse was the American Indians game and when the white settlers were opening up the west of America, they took it up too. They were asked to watch at one

18:30 particular game an example of lacrosse and there were twenty or thirty on either side and the squaws came to watch and they all sat down and the American soldiers came out of their fort and when they were out of their fort, the squaws produced a tomahawk from under their thing and chopped them to pieces. There's a story and now my grandchildren are playing lacrosse here in Melbourne and I've found people are terribly interested in these things. Most of them don't know the background

19:00 to the sport they're playing. I've deviated again. I'm pretty good at that.

I know. I've got to ask you what the origins of golf are?

Well if it's in Scotland, it's the old shepherds. You're a golfer, are you?

No.

Well the shepherds spent the day out moving the sheep very slowly and they had to do something so originally they probably used stone pebbles and

19:30 there's a thing called a crook that you move sheep on with or pull them out of a bog and that wouldn't have lasted long and they would have made their curved sticks and originally pebbles and then they used balls made of leather stuff with feathers. And then it became so popular it had to, at one stage it was against the law because no-one was practising bows and arrows, which

20:00 was necessary under the defence of the country. Golf was very much a game for anyone, from shepherds right up to the King. That's a pretty rough story. The Dutch more recently claimed that they developed it with a cane called coff or some name like that and it was played with a stick and a ball but Scotland was the home of golf and it was by the shepherds. And the bunker of today is where the sheep used to lie down to get out of the wind

20:30 in these holes in the side of hills and we talk about golf links today, well golf links in Scotland or England is the land, sand dune country between the sea and the arable land. It was a link between the sea and here. You wouldn't have a golf course on land where you could run good sheep but you could wander through the

21:00 links and that's how the word links [evolved] and there aren't many proper links courses in Australia. There's one at Barwon Heads, where you were yesterday, just down here, in the sand dunes virtually, and it's the link the sea and the arable country. There you are. Might make you play better golf knowing the history.

Yeah, it's a great beginning. Now just a little bit more about your education.

21:30 **I'm particularly interested in, you mentioned it earlier about the class distinctions within Toorak, the people at the bottom of the hill and people at the top of the hill, were you very conscious of that yourself?**

No, no, I don't think I was conscious of it then. I was probably conscious of the fact that we didn't have a car or a steel roofed, steel topped car

22:00 when uncles did have. Yes, my uncles they were up the top of the hill and one of them lived up at Fern Tree Gully. He was the local member there but he was as down to earth, there was no snobbish within the family, except one, Uncle Solly, that's another story.

22:30 No, there weren't class consciousness. I wouldn't have even thought of. I was rather happy to be going to a public school but I do remember the kids with the bare feet and the unemployed people coming asking, knocking on your door, asking if Mum could spare a slice of bread with a bit of jam on it. This was going on but happily it didn't happen to, we always had full tummies and went to

23:00 school.

So how old were you in 1939?

I was just turning fifteen and that was when my life changed and started. I think fourteen was when I really started to, but it was the ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, years, that was when the Depression

23:30 was very much on in Melbourne, the early thirties. And when you went up to Narrandera by train the railway workmen were calling out "paper, paper," hoping you'd through out a paper for them to read on the railway line etcetera. Money was very, very short and I probably know more about it now than I did then.

24:00 **So were you aware, were you very conscious of the war approaching?**

I was probably, I couldn't wait. I'd been in the school cadet corps and enjoyed that. We used to go and camp up at Wodonga. What's the name of the big army camp there? I've forgotten, I think it's still there, Puckapunyal, oh that's at Seymour. Anyway we used to go away once a year to army camps

24:30 and my big embarrassment came. I wanted to get into the army, whether it was to get away from school, I can't tell you but I used to get the Toorak Road tram down to school and I used to have to bend to get under the hand rail that you hung onto so you didn't fall over, and there were little soldiers coming back wounded from the Middle East, half my size and I thought, "There's something wrong here. I'm going to

25:00 school." This was not when I was fifteen. This was when I was sixteen, going on seventeen and there were people coming back from overseas wounded and here I was, bigger, don't know about stronger, but healthier and I was going to school and that really got to me.

So you were in the school cadets at Melbourne Grammar?

Yeah, every Tuesday or something after school and

25:30 I was fascinated by history then too. The Battle of Omdurman [The Charge of the 21st Lancers at the Battle of Omdurman, Lord Kitchener, 2 SEP 1898], you mightn't have come across that in your history and reading but the Battle of Omdurman was the last battle fought between the British and a group around Turkey there, a little bit along from Persia, where there was a horse charge, a cavalry charge with

26:00 people on horses on both sides and the trumpeters going (demonstrates) to urge their men on and the big name in the British force was Lord Kitchener and he led the British. But there were hundreds of horsemen there but the bugler, or the assistant of the bugler was a man called Alex Brady and a boy, he was a boy bugler and he was the cadet

26:30 master at Melbourne Grammar who could link us and tell us what it was like to be in a horse battle where you had your lance and your horse and you went into attack. And to jump ahead, I shouldn't do this but three years later I'm up on the top of a hill with a mate in New Guinea wondering what to talk about and he said to me, he said, "You know I was at school with a fellow who was a bugler at the Battle of Omdurmen" and I said, "Laurie, I didn't know we were at school together," and

27:00 that was how you meet people like that. Alright.

What an extraordinary story. So he was one of your cadet instructors was he?

Yeah, he was in charge of the cadet force. He was a major eventually and looked the part of, quite a big man with a round face and

27:30 everything was very correct but he was a very down to earth guy and it was worth joining the cadets to be in his company, it was quite fun in cadets anyway but he was always interesting.

So he inspired you?

I suppose so, yes, yeah, but my physical size inspired me to get into the army when I saw these people coming back wounded from the Middle East. I felt "Jesus,

28:00 what do they think of me? I'd be better off over there."

Can you just give me a bit of picture of what you were learning at cadet school, or as a cadet?

Oh yes, a terrible lot of parade ground stuff, as was things that happened then; soldiers did an awful lot of time sloping arms, presenting arms, turn right, turn left but we learnt to navigate with compass and maps at

28:30 night time. This was when we went away on camp and we learnt to pull down machine guns and put them together. The fact they'd be out of date by the time war came around didn't matter much but it wasn't all just marching. We were learning how to be soldiers I suppose, discipline, how to throw a grenade. They didn't have any explosives in them.

29:00 And even how to use, how artillery would help you if you were a foot soldier. They could be back there putting down a bombardment in front of you, all sorts of things but too much parade ground work to really. It was never necessary when war came around. How to polish your shoes of course, that was dreadfully important.

29:30 **Do you remember where you were when you heard the news about war?**

Oh very well, Sunday, September 3, 1939. I'd gone to bed reasonably early. I think I always liked going to bed early and mother came up to my bedroom in tears saying, "Britain has just declared war on Germany." Well she'd been through World War One, only just over twenty years earlier and she knew

30:00 what it was all about and she'd lost a couple of brothers. She spent a terrible lot of time, as I said before, at Red Cross homes or wounded people came back, looking after them, so to her that was the start of another tragedy in her lifetime. And to me I think it was the start of, I probably got a bit excited. I was only fifteen

30:30 and had a couple of years to go then.

But I guess she could see the very likelihood that you would go to war?

Yeah, but at that stage only a few people were worried about Japan. That's a later story.

So once war was declared what can you recall of how that impacted on the city, just from your own personal life?

31:00 I don't think it made any difference to me at all. To mother it probably did because there was food rationing and you mightn't have got so many raisins or sultanas. There were food coupons that you had to have to buy butter as we were shipping so much to England. You needed coupons to get petrol and cars were fitted with, not all, things called gas

31:30 converters that converted charcoal into a gas that made your engine run. Don't ask me how but quite an industry grew up along the Murray River of cutting down red gums and converting that to charcoal. You burnt red gums in containers I gather and you were left with. Colin might know something more of it

than I do about converting

32:00 charcoal to fuel to drive a modern motorcar.

He knows a lot.

But they did exist and they were big things on the back of, like a big suitcase on the back of cars and you ran on charcoal.

So you had a car like that?

No, we didn't. I can't tell you why. Probably because we lived so close to a tram line but everything was rationed.

32:30 There weren't blackouts at that stage. In fact I can't remember if Melbourne ever had them. Sydney had blackouts but I can't remember about Melbourne.

Was there a Militia force around training?

Well there was a Militia, they'd been training for years and a couple of battalions were sent to New Guinea later but they could not by law be sent overseas apart probably from Australian mandated territory, New Guinea as it was then.

33:00 You had to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] to go and a lot of them did, straight away. I couldn't really answer your question. Every suburb virtually had a Militia unit. Geelong had a big one and there was one in Hawthorn, the Victorian Scottish Regiment and all sorts of regiments around and I imagine a lot of them vanished virtually when people joined the army.

So did Melbourne Grammar cadets, did you do any training

33:30 **with the Militia, the local Militia?**

No, only during our annual camp up on the Murray River we would have had permanent soldiers training us and telling us what to do and how to run or do what you do with a pack on your back and how to load your rifle. It was interesting to get away from home. It was as cold as hell

34:00 and it was a change of life but I don't think it taught us very much about killing people.

So you stayed at school for another year?

I stayed at school until the start of 1942. I would have turned eighteen in 42 but I didn't last that long. I only went back for a couple of weeks and

34:30 me and my mate put our age up and got into army. Do you want me to tell you about that, do you?

Yes, tell me about that?

Well we'd planned it pretty well and our parents wouldn't sign the papers. To go overseas you had to be nineteen, to join the AIF and you had to have your parents' signature on a sheet of paper.

35:00 So my father eventually relented and signed mine and did my mate, who'll I'll just call Robert and we went to school one Monday morning knowing full well we weren't coming home. We had our cut lunch, which we eat in the Domain, in the Shrine, next to the Shrine there, and instead of going back to school after lunch we hopped on a tram and put our school caps in our pocket and went to the Town Hall, which was '

35:30 the big recruiting centre. And filled in our forms and we coughed when the doctor grabbed you in the right places and he said, "Where's your birth certificate?" to me and I said, "I haven't got it. I was born near Alice Springs." "Jesus," he said, "it will take us months to get it back from there." He said, "You're big enough anyway, go on, keep going."

36:00 And my mate also he had some story about being born in southern New South Wales and he was fit and strong and he got through too with a parents signature. So we went from, we were right. We were accepted in the army and by three o'clock that afternoon we were in the Australian Imperial Force and we went out to Caulfield Racecourse, which was the receiving

36:30 ground for new troops, from all around Victoria and whatever and we slept, we were given a great coat and a big kit bag full of gear and slept in the grandstand. The next morning I remember the horses doing their 4 am training and that wasn't very funny, them thundering around my favourite sleeping place. But every few days at Caulfield they had something called a selection parade. People

37:00 were coming in all the time and going out again and on the selection parade the sergeant major said, there might be two hundred people there, "Righto, everyone who wants to be an infantryman, over there," and twenty or thirty people would go there and, "Who's interested in the artillery? You go and stand over there. Any bakers? Have we got any bakers or butchers?" And three people would go over

37:30 there and eventually there's two of us left, my mate and myself and the sergeant major came over and he said, "I think I've called out every, what do you pair want? Do you want to be batman to the

general?" And thank God Robert spoke better than I did in front of society and he said, "No, we'd like to go to the school of guerrilla warfare at Wilson's Promontory."

38:00 And he said, "How do you know about that? No-one's supposed to know about that? It's all hush-hush, it's absolutely secret." And he said, "Are you keen boys? Do you know what it's about?" He said, "You'll be behind enemy lines." He said, "You want to be a commando?" He said, "How do you know about it?" We had to say we had some friends who'd already done the course and were away, some school friends but

38:30 a couple of years older. "All right," he said, "Take a day's leave and go home and come back and I'll ring the school of guerrilla warfare and find out if they're interested in you." Well we came back and he said, "Do you know, I'm going to tell you something, the commanding officer of that company that's being formed down there, has been to every camp in Australia asking for volunteers,

39:00 for people for a very dangerous mission, where you'll be asked to make decisions far and above your normal rank would be asked to make, and out of hundreds, probably thousands, he picked out about a hundred and eighty people, the CO [Commanding Officer], and you've come here and you just want to go straight down there." "Well," he said the CO will have you

39:30 he said if you've got enough initiative to come down." So the next morning we're on the train and we're at the school of guerrilla warfare at Wilson's Promontory and became members of the 5th Independent Company. We had three names during the war, Independent Company, Commando Squadron, Cavalry Commando but it was same unit and there we were. I was the baby for a while until a friend of mine

40:00 from Williamstown joined up. I was seventeen and I think my little mate from Williamstown was sixteen and Robert was all right. He was he eighteen but I loved that and that's virtually how I got into the army Cath.

Tape 3

00:31 **Okay Ken, we're back on and you're going to take us to Wilson's Prom where we're going to hear about training there but I can just ask, you mentioned your mate Robert and your parents and you'd managed to get the signature, did you get to see them before you went off to Wilson's Prom? What sort of?**

Oh yes, we got some leave from Caulfield to go home, probably spent three or four days back home eventually but the memories not too good and then we got the train down to, the Gippsland Flyer or

01:00 whatever it's called, to Foster, picked up by the truck and they'd been in, Fish Creek it was and they'd been at the Fish Creek pub all day so by the time we got into their creek, going down that road to the Prom, very, there were no police on that road, thank God.

When you say, "they," who was they?

Oh the transport people who picked us up from the station. You've been there. It's about a three quarters of an hours drive down to the Prom, to the bottom and

01:30 they'd been waiting for us, got in there early and spent the time at the Fish Creek Pub.

Okay, so how many of you went down in that mustering?

Oh only two of us. The rest of the unit had been selected from all around Australia and we got down there and we met the CO and the fellows driving the truck of course had

02:00 terrified us. They said, "Oh he's a terrible man, tear you apart," but the truth is he only had one thing, he was a Pom, being an Englishman but everyone loved him. He had horn rim glasses and he was an Englishman, he'd been to Cambridge and the most unlikely looking man but he was, he took over

02:30 that unit and everyone loved him. He met us and told us what we could expect and what we could do and if we wanted to get out, just say, "I can't handle it, I want to get out." But to elaborate on him his name was, I'll come to that later. He was a boxing blue at Cambridge and one of the few people who realised that Japan might come into the war. He was

03:00 administrator of the Solomon Islands, which was then under British control from London and then he next appeared as batman to the major in charge of an Australian artillery force in New Caledonia as New Caledonia was half Vichy French and half de Gaullist and a lot of Japanese there too and it was an important

03:30 step between America and here. And in three or four months there as a batman he compiled an extraordinary document that I've got there of every notable in town and what their politics were, whether they were pro-Japanese or what. I could sell that to some of the people in New Caledonia for millions. He was missing quite often from his batman duties I gather but one day he came into his CO

[Commanding Officer] and the story

04:00 is his CO said, “Yes Paul, what is it now?” And he saluted and he said, “I’m sorry to tell you sir, my name is not Paul Keane, gunner. I am Major Paul Kneem of Allied Intelligence and I’ve been ordered back to Australia to form the 5th Australian Independent Company,” and as to what the major said I don’t know but he kept up this cover all the time. And I

04:30 had a couple of mates in that artillery unit and they never guessed that he was not a genuine. Anyway he was the CO and one of the things, if you joined it he didn’t care how old you were and he didn’t care if you could slope arms. He was not the least bit interested in parade yard stuff and one of the people he recruited, he was damn near sixty then I’m sure, was the son

05:00 of the first Governor of Dutch New Guinea and he was recruited because he could speak the lingo, the native lingo of some many parts. And the 2IC, Norman Winning, he was a, he looked as though he, he pretended he lived on whisky, he was a planter from Sumatra or Java. He was very necessary if we ever went that way. That was the hierarchy and they were

05:30 just marvellous people.

Can you put us on the calendar, when did you actually go down to Wilson’s Promontory?

That was March, the 2nd of March, 1942 and Japan had just come into the war in November, December, December 41 and they’d just made a swoop down Hong Kong and the whole of Malaysia and the Netherlands East Indies, which we

06:00 now call Indonesia, and the north coast of New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Borneo, it was a great umbrella and it was only a matter of time before we would be going there. And all our Australian troops were virtually in the Middle East, so we did a normal course, it was pretty short, six weeks, with the emphasis on guerrilla warfare, meaning not just living off the land, living with it.

06:30 But self-sufficiency you’d do it in parties of two and three, making booby traps from hand grenades put inside a jam tin, and a trip wire across a track, simple things and we became very proficient with Tommy guns and Bren guns anything three or four or five men could go out and do together. They tried to teach us Morse code but I don’t think there was any,

07:00 we never mastered it. We had a special signals unit anyway with us.

Can I just ask Ken, I mean when you signed up you were still under the legal age, you were just seventeen?

I was.

You could have perhaps done it earlier. Why was it at that very time that you decided, “we’ve got to do this”?

Because I think my father made it clear that, “When you get to eighteen I might sign your form for you,” although I was still a year younger, a year or two younger.

07:30 No, I couldn’t have done it without a little bit of consent from home. I think father was probably a bit proud that I wanted to get away and did, get into the army and I’d done a year in the army before I was the right age. You had to be nineteen to go away, so that’s why I waited. It would be family reasons.

Yeah, and why did the idea of being a commando appeal to you so much? You said you and Robert were the last two left

08:00 **and you knew?**

Well that unit was full and they weren’t recruiting in Caulfield but the word “commando” then had a real glamour attached to it because the British commandoes had been landing on the coast of France and playing hell with German installations. They wore a beautiful battle dress that we eventually got too. They looked different. They had berets and if you were

08:30 a commando there was a certain [aura] about you. Anyone could be in the infantry. So that was one reason but to jump ahead, we were in the 5th Company, 5th Independent Company, which later became Commando Squadron, the first company was wiped out up in New Ireland, New Britain when the Japanese came down completely. Wasn’t a dozen left. Second Company was cut off in Timor,

09:00 believed to be no more. I forget where the Third Company was. The Fourth Company also went to Timor and our Fifth Company had a terrible record of disease and starvation in New Guinea so by the time our company came back there was no glamour about, young fellows didn’t want to join our units, that’s when they had to change the name independent company to commando, hoping it might attract some more people.

09:30 Now that covers more or less, but independent companies we always were early, but you were called commandoes which goes back to small groups in the Boer War in South Africa virtually.

So what, the CO, now his name was?

Paul Kneem

Paul Kneem.

And he was a major. I can't, go on.

Well I was going to ask you mentioned in passing that he'd, when you

10:00 **joined the unit there that he explained what the unit's function was?**

That's right.

Can you tell us what it was he said? How was that explained to you?

He said, "You'll be in action pretty soon. We'll be going." The going away was obvious and he said, "You'll be hunting in very small groups," and he himself probably wasn't certain exactly where we were going but he said, "There's two hundred plus of us here but you'll probably

10:30 be trained to kill the enemy if you're behind their lines or in their occupied territory, but we're there in thousands of numbers so you keep jabbing." And the motto of his unit was, "He who fights and gets away lives to fight another day," and we weren't people who went in and stood and fought to the last man. We went in, killed and shouted and making noises and harassing their patrols and that's what we were doing down there.

11:00 We didn't know we would be starving for a lot of the time, literally starving too but that was not his fault. We did learn an extraordinarily number of things about blowing up railway lines out. To me there was always one railway line and if you wanted to cut it you put some explosive beside it but railway lines are measured by, or they were then, the weight they are for one metre.

11:30 So you have thick lines, a small line and we learnt that say a pound of gelignite or Ammonal [Ammonal is an explosive mixture of ammonium nitrate, aluminium dust and stearic acid] would cut through a railway line of certain weight and these were things that we (demonstrates). There were no railway lines where we went so that was that, only trouble. So explosives were very high on our list of what to do. Sleeping out, well that was just, we knew

12:00 it wasn't going to be hotels and even native villages, so we were taught all those things and quite a lot of night activity. For instance you might put up a kerosene lantern here with four guards around it and you had to turn the lantern out getting through them from two hundred yards away, that sort of thing. And I think a lot of the training,

12:30 they didn't use the word, was to make yourself feel very confident and self sufficient in yourself, so that went on and on. And in April 1942 the Japanese were now entrenched in that umbrella over Australia, the unit got a movement order that they were heading north, except a few of us, about thirty stayed behind

13:00 for three weeks as the rear guard. I had a foot that I'd hurt and the first unit that went away, the first half, three quarters of the unit, they went to Brisbane and Townsville and got the Manoora to Port Moresby. We, the later group, we had to hurry up and we travelled in luxury to Sydney on the Sydney Express and then Sunshine Express to Townsville

13:30 and then we became the first Australian troops to be flown into a war zone on DC2's from Townsville to Port Moresby, and some of them were Australian National Airlines planes, still with the tourist guide and the barley sugar in the thing there that they had [been] commandeered overnight. We landed and were immediately bombed, the Japanese

14:00 were bombing Moresby every night but our other guys, they'd got used to it and weren't much worried. The communication between our unit and others was not good. They were always talking about the Kittyhawks that would come to Moresby the next day and they became known as the, "Tomorrow Hawks" because the Japanese could strafe at ground level. They had no opposition at Moresby and knock out American planes but when the Kittyhawks eventually

14:30 arrived no-one told us that the Tomorrow Hawks were actually there and they got a nice caning from the 5th Company machine guns at ground level too, but we didn't kill anyone happily. And then.

Can I just ask, you've gone through, so Wilson's Prom sounds like it was a pretty intense sort of experience. By the end of that, before you embarked for New Guinea, I mean how good a soldier were you? Did you feel you were ready for what was to come?

15:00 Well if you couldn't slope arms when you went there, you couldn't when you came out but you knew a lot of things about compasses, reading maps, your fitness, your physical fitness was enormous. You could do anything from cutting railway lines, as we talked about, to blowing up bridges, and how to blow one shaft of a trestle bridge so the bridge would collapse if

15:30 a train went over it. Very, very complete but quite unlike the ordinary soldier. We had a rifle range and we used them but we always trained with live ammunition too. The Fishery and Wildlife rangers didn't like us much, there were still some down there then because our rations we did supplement with wallabies

16:00 and deer, that are now almost in plague proportions on some parts of the Prom, just before you get I, there at Darby River and we loved the deer if we could find them but it was all good hunting experience. They had a dance at Fish Creek every second Saturday night and the fellows who could dance went in on a truck and came home half drunk at two in the morning and wake everyone up. We had beer twice

16:30 a week from our rations and they were marvellous guys. They ranged from solicitors, company executives down to kangaroo shooters, boundary riders, the whole cross section that this man from his trip around Australia had selected, a lot of young intellects, that became important in the

17:00 intelligence section. I don't think you could say we were typical of anything, we were untypical of everything and there we went. Anyway.

What was he looking for do you think in a potential commando?

Someone would could look after himself, someone who wasn't Errol Flynn (actor). He won many wars, loudmouthed, swashbuckling, pistols, I think he wanted just the opposite of that, someone who could sneak

17:30 in, set up a guard post a few hundred yards from a Japanese aerodrome and look and watch and come back and say, "Right, they change the guards at four o'clock." Totally different, although he was a boxing blue himself, he only used his hands once that I know of and that was at Port Moresby. One of our guys had to go to the dentist and we had three or four, the rest of the guys had three weeks

18:00 There. I think and one of the guys had to go to a dentist and he wasn't, he didn't use many anaesthetics and he told the dentist what he thought of him and the dentist told him what he thought of him. We all carried pistols anyway and we were given them down at Wilson's Prom too. So our guy put

18:30 a couple of pistol holes in the roof above the dentist's head and an immediate inquiry was called that one of our guys had to shoot the dentist, not a very formal inquiry but Kneem went along with the inquiry, he had too. And he said, "Look, mistaken identity, if it had been one of our men, our men don't miss." The next day another fellow went back to the same dentist

19:00 and the dentist opened up and he said, "You're from the 5th, I've got no time for you people, you're bloody rebels," and he didn't use much anaesthetic on him.. This guy went back to Paul Kneem and he said, "Look that dentist is still getting into us. He told us what he thought of you and your unit." "Did he?" Paul jumped out of his tent, grabbed a motorcycle, went to the dentist and said, "Come outside mate," and bang,

19:30 bang, bang. And he suddenly learnt that's what a Cambridge boxing blue and captain of boxing at Cambridge could do, end of the story. That's the sort of guy he was so no wonder the fellows sort of worshipped him.

You mentioned, I'm just going to keep you at Wilson's Prom a little bit because we don't get to talk to many people who were there. You mentioned Fish Creek, the dance every two weeks, were you much of a drinker or dancer or?

20:00 No, I hadn't had an alcoholic drink. Father used to have a glass of sherry on Sundays and I knew naught about it but I soon learnt. They taught me what a beer was. Dancing, no. Even when I got married twenty years later they had to postpone the Bridal Waltz or whatever. I could never dance. I can't to this day but the local country dances I don't think you had to be a skilled dancer to go.

20:30 But that was just not, I was probably terribly frightened of girls, still am.

You mentioned laying booby traps and the explosives?

Yes.

Blowing up trestle bridges, I mean were they actually built, would they construct things?

The trestle bridges weren't there but there were the posts in the ground to show us where to place it and we did blow them up. How to drop a tree by having explosives on one

21:00 side and cutting a little bit of a nitch and what it would do and which way to make a fall. We did have, just before you get into Tidal River, up on that hill on the right, some pits where we had posts and grenade training, pretty actual stuff because we were using live ammunition, had to be pretty careful and you were wary.

21:30 **Were there any accidents while you were there?**

No, not at the Prom but there were a couple later. We were issued with Thompson sub-machine guns, American sub-machine guns with that big round magazine on them and unfortunately after you've cleaned those it was very possible to have a slug that had been there all the time in the actual gun and two of our guys were killed in New Guinea later

22:00 from guns that were being cleaned and the fellows just. But they were terrible guns anyway and when the Australian Owen gun came on that took over and the Thompson gun didn't like dirt, dust, mud and

the ammunition weighed a ton to carry, a couple of hundred rounds, whereas the Australian built Owen gun had cost thirty shillings compared to fifteen pounds and you could put all dirt on it, but that was the best gun we could get and there you were.

22:30 **You mentioned the Owen's, were you training on those or the Bren's?**

No, they weren't, they were only invented I think in 42 and I would say it was 43 before they were widely accepted by the Australian Army but they were so simple it was just unreal. They went off and their percussion send a bullet out and they'd fire three hundred rounds a minute or whatever and invented by a fellow called Owen, who got precious

23:00 little thanks for his work from memory and they could stamp them out by the thousand. Took a lot of convincing before the army would believe that anything so simple was good and in the jungle you were only, you're not shooting at people half a mile away, well not always, usually fifteen to twenty yards and they were ideal things, light.

So the instructors at the Prom what were they basing

23:30 **their instructing on?**

Well first of all an English military group came out to teach the Australians and the New Zealanders how these units should be formed and what they should learn. Right, there was a school for the instructors with twice as many as necessary and half of those people would train the first company,

24:00 and then the second company would come in and the other people had been trained to have another group but there was the ongoing school for officers at Darby River, that chalet, Darby Chalet [A chalet for visitors was built at Darby River]. You know that Colin?

Yeah, I've been through.

You've been through and always there was a supply of people being trained but the British people had gone home but if it hadn't been for the British people, they had to convince the Australian Army that there was real scope for independent companies in the

24:30 jungle, up north etcetera.

You mentioned that your CO, Paul Kneem, had said to the guys, "Look if any of you think it's too much, you can walk, that's fine," did anyone take up that offer?

I don't remember. I probably came as close as any. I slipped down at Mount Bishop on some wet slippery mossy thing and landed on my foot and I probably

25:00 broke a toe and the medical man looked at it and he asked me, the doctor and he said, "It's not going to get better if you use it. If you want to go, go, otherwise I'll give you a week off in Melbourne and come back." And actually what the local boot maker did in Melbourne was to put a bar across the metatarsal [A metatarsal fracture is a break of one of the long thin bones of the foot.] head I think of your foot and within days I was okay

25:30 and I came back and I never said anything. It didn't let me down but it aches a bit sometimes. I told Vet's [Veterans] Affairs about it when I went for the pension and they were suitably impressed and gave me three marks I think but if you've ever slid down a bare rock face, covered with water and moss, it can be as slippery as ice and that's where I landed from.

26:00 **So can you just give us an idea of what the day involved at Wilson's Prom, from whoa to go, what the routine would be?**

Well it could be wake up in the dark and do a very foolish thing, but they thought it was good then, run for a couple of miles before breakfast, on an empty stomach and you're only breaking people down by that, training taught me that and you'd come back to a good breakfast of, beans I suppose,

26:30 baked beans. You had plenty anyway, wasn't short and then you would pack your, you were given a pack, oh bread, a loaf and bully beef and then you'd look at big Mount Oberon and then they'd say, "Righto, I want you to go up there and see if you can find a new track around the back," or "How long it would take us to get six troops from here to the back of that because we know there are Japs on top." This is all synthetic makeup and

27:00 doing things like that. Come home in the afternoon, might have been grenade training. We had an unarmed combat man come down to give us unarmed training but you don't learn it in one or three lessons. You've got to it so many times that it's instinctive and we just didn't.

Do you remember what that entailed?

Unarmed combat?

Unarmed, yeah.

If you came at me with a bayonet or a knife, a machete in your hand

27:30 and went like that (demonstrates) I was supposed to go flip, flip, break your arm and I'd have the machete or you'd be flat on your back but I don't think any of our blokes, oh a couple of times maybe they used it but unarmed combat sounds good as part of your repertoire but it just wasn't much. When you've got a pistol and an Owen gun the last thing you want to do is to [fight hand to hand].

So by the end of that period were you

28:00 **specialising in a certain area or were you?**

Some were and I must have been fairly competent with a Bren gun because my little mate, younger than me, from Williamstown, Cliff Biggs, who later died after the war, years and years ago, I was given the Bren gun to be number one on the Bren gun and he was my number two and we

28:30 were the two youngest in the unit, which I don't know how well it went down with other people but that was our job. So I specialised in that but yes, we had people who were specialists in booby traps. Old Harry Zok, one of the old men, he was a genius. He'd put down a beret on the ground for the Japanese to look at and they'd come up and

29:00 they'd lift it up, and aah, booby trap underneath and they'd delouse it and go home. The next day Harry would put the same thing there and they'd walk up and they'd think, "Old fool" but Harry had three properly buried ones out here and that was what it was all about, to find a real booby trap, it was having the second ones that they didn't look for,

29:30 where you ruffle a bit of ground to make it look. So we had specialists in normal sections, and we had engineers and cooks but they were also pretty good soldiers too, I mean fighting soldiers. So yes, there were specialists within the, but most of us were pretty good all-rounders I suppose and we were fit anyway.

And how many men were there in the company?

30:00 Yes, I think there was just over two hundred, divided into four main platoons, maybe between, I'd say two forty. That's a terrible question to ask somebody who should know an exact number and when we got to Moresby we absorbed some mortar section, so the number changed but way under three hundred anyway. And usually, we'll come to later,

30:30 there were often a hundred, a hundred to one against us but that's another story.

Yeah, we'll get all that and more. So you've sort of mentioned briefly the train up to Sydney and then up to Townsville, was there a period of leave before that in Melbourne?

No, there wasn't. The original group that went up first, they were furious that they'd been told that they'd get leave but some of them managed to get on the phone and friends came

31:00 to the station in Sydney and Brisbane but there was no real period of leave and we had the afternoon at Spencer Street Station. We had time to ring our parents and some of them got to the station but that was not good but they had to move in a hurry, so it was whoosh and go. The last

31:30 group that went, that I was with, we had to do all the packing of the explosives and etcetera and etcetera and when we got on the planes to Moresby the aisles of the plane were just packed with explosives and etcetera, ammunition, no food and I suppose it was a bit scary. The Zeros that were out patrolling, if they had of come in when we landed but they didn't.

32:00 **What about the train trip north? I mean is there anything you can recall from that, any incidences or?**

There were some incidences with the original group. I hope they're not all watching, listening to this ever but the 5th had a very bad habit of removing other people's property, particularly if it was publican's property. If they stopped for instance at Rockhampton with the train,

32:30 they knew the train, they found a bottle supply locked up in a cage at the back of the pub and the fellows would be keeping the publican busy there and what was going on at the back of the pub was another person's business and they did very heavily, they did some heavy stealing at one town. When a CO said to Winning "Now listen, this has gone too far, the

33:00 train's full of grog [alcohol], I want to know who's stolen all this stuff?" Well in those days the train going north to Townsville, they were individual carriages with no corridor. You had to get out of a carriage and there were running rails along the side of a carriage, if you know what I mean? So when you had to go from carriage to carriage, get out and being a thirsty man he enjoyed

33:30 a couple on the way and I don't know what the outcome was but Winning had a lovely day trying to find out where all the booze was and he found a fair bit and enjoyed it. I think and he was a man who could find whisky anywhere, anywhere at all.

So why do you think the 5th was of that particular bent?

I think a lot of Australians put together are thieves

34:00 but our people we stole, goodness gracious the Fish Creek pub lost quite a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s there and the fellows would go back and cook them and it was a bit of a gamble but as far as thieving things that would hurt someone, no. They bought some wine at Innisfail. They found a scorpion in the bottom of one

34:30 bottle because the Italians up there make all their own wine and the train hadn't left and they went back and helped themselves to the rest of his bottles that he was selling on the railway station as punishment. Yeah, they were wild and they fought the Americans in Brisbane one night, they took the town on. But the first night before they left, Kneem said, "Look paint the town red but you've got

35:00 to be back here by midnight." And every guy was and they came back with bleeding shoulders, they'd fought, they'd drunk, and that's how much they liked him. And our group that went up, we were much better behaved, thank you, if my friends are listening but they did have a ball at Townsville the night before. A couple were missing and had to go to the police station to find out where they were, drunk and disorderly. That's all right, pretty harmless.

35:30 **That sounds like it's not a bad talent to have, if you're going to be behind enemy lines, to be able to scrounge and thieve or whatever?**

Oh right, yes, we loved scrounging from the Japanese but they were a little bit too clever for us. The next move from Moresby was over the Owen Stanley Ranges to the north coast to the goldfields of Wau

36:00 and Bulolo there. Again we flew, we packed the planes in the morning and that was really close. It was five minutes flying time from, am I jumping ahead a bit?

We've only get a few minutes left on this tape. Do you want to tell us a bit about, how long were you in Port Moresby?

We were there for two nights I think from memory. The other people were there for three weeks and again that's a little bit of give and take.

You mentioned a raid the first?

The Japanese

36:30 raided and bombed every day. They came over and my figures would be a bit wrong but our anti-aircraft could only fly, throw the shells say to seventeen thousand feet, I should be talking metres shouldn't I?

That's all right, it was feet then.

Say five thousand metres, so the Japanese just sat above it and it was a spectacular sight to see the searchlights on the Japanese planes

37:00 and the carpet of anti-aircraft. But they had superiority. They could strafe the airstrip. They could bomb from up there, we had no planes at all, three or four planes. There was a Lockheed came in from Townsville every day with mail and there was us, oh Flying Fortresses used to land there and they weren't a pretty sight.

37:30 The Zeros would get on their tails and they were so manoeuvrable the Zeros that sometimes they'd have to hose out the rear gunners cockpit of blood and guts or what was left of the guy but they were Americans and we didn't see much of them.

What went through your mind though when you experienced that raid there?

At night time, we were there for the raids at night,

38:00 I just knew the war had arrived. I don't know if I was ultra frightened because they hadn't really started to drop within a hundred yards radius of us. They dropped on airstrips and the wharf but I don't think we got any bombs within a quarter of a mile of us, but you never knew. You could here them coming down, swish, swish, swish, woomp.

38:30 I was much more frightened than that later when the people on the ground were shooting.

And that last night in Townsville, how had that been spent?

I would have gone to sleep because I was still doing my apprenticeship of learning how to drink but there were, most of the guys they got pretty rotten I suppose.

But you were being initiated during that time, were you?

I'd been done to Foster.

39:00 I knew what my capacity was and later on I mean it became a way of life almost. There were times when we had our own still at different places, but no, we behaved reasonably well. We all got away on those DC2 and 3's on time. Some arrived just and we had very tolerant and very understanding, there were four officers with us.

39:30 They didn't say, "Right, you didn't get here, you're going to the boob [gaol]," or something like that.

They gave them a kick in the pants and said, “Don’t you bloody do that to me again mate.”

Now you obviously by this stage were pretty well trained as commandoes but what were they, were you being lectured at all about what to expect in terms of the way the Japanese operated?

Yes, we were, particularly on hygiene and medicine, what not to do

40:00 and that didn’t go down very well because we’d been issued with shorts and shorts in the tropics are just absolutely, the mosquitoes can see you from a mile away and move in, short sleeve shirts and you had to take, we only had liquid quinine which the old planters used to drink and they used to wash it down with Schweppes Tonic Water, which has still got

40:30 quinine in it but liquid quinine did nothing really to stop the mosquitoes biting and within a month of us landing in New Guinea half the unit was out of action each week because they had malaria. Oh yes, very careful of your feet because hookworm used to come in through bare feet, or the eggs did. There were all sorts of things we were

41:00 told but we didn’t have the, we had to wash our clothes in something to stop bush ticks getting on our clothes and through to our skin but we didn’t have any of the stuff to wash. But we did know their tactics from Malaya, they’d come down and intelligence did tell us that if you strike a Japanese patrol he’ll go around in a circle and cut you off at the back and make a circle around you. We knew that and we knew some of the units would only have fireworks to frighten

41:30 you, but the information was good but we didn’t have the equipment to.

Tape 4

00:39 **Okay so let’s talk about, yeah getting from Moresby over the ranges there?**

Well I remember going down to the airfield in the dark one morning and here were the three, four, or five Douglas aircraft. They had tried to get in the day before but the, our destination

01:00 was the Ulalu Valley, which was a tremendously rich goldfield, the towns of Ulalu and Dilalo and Bore and they were behind Lae and Salamaua, the big towns on the north coast of New Guinea, but that valley is full of fog for many hours each day and one group of planes that went over the day before, had to turn around and come back. But the big problem was the Ulalu Valley is only five minutes

01:30 flying time for the Japanese Zeros at Lae and Salamaua where they had a huge air base at Lae and a smaller one at Salamaua and five or ten thousand men. So we had to get over there early and hope that there were no Zeros having a look around and we went up the coast, the south coast of Moresby, inland. Didn’t go over the Owen

02:00 Stanley’s, we went through the ravines and there is, one of our guys, you’d swear to God that he could see the colours of the rifle birds and the bower birds and the flowers, the orchids in the trees, we were that low. And I can remember saying to the pilot, “Listen, what do we do if we see enemy planes?” There were four Aero Cobras circling us all the time and they were American single engine

02:30 planes. They weren’t made for fighting Zeros. They were made specifically for I think shooting tanks in the desert. They were very fast. They’d come in, shoot a tank and go on and low level, yes, but not manoeuvrable like the Japanese Zeros. “Well,” he said, “If you see any Zeros put your rifle out the window and pull the trigger and hope.” But anyway we all got over that day. Some of them landed at Wau

03:00 and the Wau airstrip is a forty five degree angle virtually and you come in over a mountain and you pull up in about a hundred yards. When you take off you start off you take off up here and when you get to the bottom there’s a coffee plantation and there’s about, well there was then, ten or fifteen commercial aircraft still resting in the coffee plantation. But the Wau airstrip was covered in forty four gallon drums and

03:30 when we came in from Wau there was a group of natives there, always assigned to roll the drums off, that was to stop Japanese craft landing and below that they had wire hawsers across the airfield. And we couldn’t land that way. I can’t tell you why, maybe the traffic was, other planes were stuck in the middle and we landed at Ulalu and we went off the strip into the tall kunai grass and I don’t think we killed

04:00 a guy but we made a mess of him with the wing of the plane. But all the American pilots of that plane could do was, “Hurry on, out, out, throw it out,” and he kept his engines revving so he could get back to Port Moresby as quickly as we could, so explosives and everything were thrown out, thrown out, thrown out. And they probably made about ten, each plane probably made two trips that day. I can’t be sure about that, too busy with other

04:30 things to know about that but we came over the Ranges and we all got there. But one of the planes at Wau did kill a couple of guys, native carriers but that was, I don't think anyone worried much about that.

Killed them how?

Uh?

How did?

Oh ran into them, because the strange strip, if you're off the strip you're in that kunai grass about ten foot high and

05:00 there was a, the first thing we noticed at Ulalu was there were no roads into the Ulalu Valley and all the gold was got out by these enormous dredges, they'd weigh a couple of hundred tons and every bit of those dredges, the long booms, all the structure for them that floated in the river in ponds and moved their ponds forward; were flown in on German Junkers, tri engine Junkers with corrugated iron or aluminium,

05:30 corrugated fuselage. Well when the Japanese had landed at Lae and Salamaua a month or so earlier there were three Junkers on the Bulolo strip, and it was the beer flight, tens of thousands of bottles of beer for the miners and the Japanese strafed these planes. They all caught on fire

06:00 and our hobby for the next week was sifting through this glass, terrible piles of glass in the hope of finding one single beer bottle. Never found one but anyway, there we were. We'd landed at Bulolo, and some of them had landed up at Wau and the miners had left and their wives a few weeks earlier when the Japanese had landed on the coast and "get out quick"

06:30 was the message. So we moved into houses complete with radios and a bit of sugar and tea and the rats hadn't done much damage and the natives there wouldn't have dared go into a European's house. And we had sheets and blankets, quite cold, three thousand feet off the Bulolo Valley, at night time, so we had good food for a week.

07:00 Then we ran out and we'd been promised, before we left Moresby that all our clothing, toothbrushes and things, would be coming on the next plane and all the supplies, and gawd, sakes it was about six months before the next plane came in and we were living in the same shoes and clothes for the best part of nine months or more. And when we did get our own, half of it was mildewed

07:30 and rotten but the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles they were wonderful people. The Volunteer Rifles they were the Militia at Lae and Bulolo and in the Valley and they were easily picked because they all wore a bird of paradise feather in their Australian slouch hats. Well they taught us Pidgin English and showed us tracks and how to get from A to B, that was close to the

08:00 airport and how to treat natives and speak to them and command a bit of respect. Australians have got a habit I think, I found out later in the Netherlands East Indies of reducing the barrier between native and European very quickly by fraternising with them and treating them as friend but there the miners for years had had to have very firm control. And were told

08:30 to never, never let them into your house without, the house boys could come in and you could trust them but that was it. So we learnt an awful lot there.

So the group that landed at, now you landed at Bulolo?

Bulolo.

And the others at Wau?

Wau.

When did you join up?

The CO decided that a third

09:00 of unit would go down to the Markham Valley, just above Lae, a huge river that drains a zillion miles, about half a mile wide, and Lae was the big Japanese base. So a third of the unit would go down there, a third of the unit would stay in Valley and another third, including myself would down below Salamaua and we knew before we left the Valley that our big

09:30 job was going to be to raid the, a classic commando raid, of Salamaua of night time. Well I suppose that's when you start to get a little bit shaky, when you know you're going to meet them for the first time but the walk over there was terribly interesting. I wish I'd been a bit older. We had to go up over mountains, trying to be metric, about three, more than three thousand metres high, ten thousand feet,

10:00 freezing cold and there we were probably forty Europeans, started to use that word, "white," you're not allowed to use black and white now, about forty of us, New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, a few of them were down there, we had a boy line, which another term you don't use today. Native carriers carrying a lot of heavy gear, explosives, a little

10:30 bit of food and bags of rice and they just wore lap-laps and going up the mountain in bare feet at night time, they spent their nights just shivering, shivering, shivering and some of them then and later, just threw their loads down the Valley. The track was a metre wide. It was used by miners to walk from Salamaua to Wau,

11:00 four days, it was on the side of a mountain, huge valleys and gorges down below and they just went bush the natives. They could have thrown over half a ton of explosives, that's a bit of exaggeration but they had two natives with a pole between and a box of gear there and a couple of them threw their gear away and later they did it more often, not on that walk.

11:30 I was reminded of the first night out we stayed at a patrol officer's camp, called Vallam's. They had these patrol camps all over New Guinea. The patrol officers were virtually kings of their area there and he just happened to arrive when we came in and he had a line of about thirty boys, native carriers, behind him but the most remarkable,

12:00 and I've never once, he had two boys, a long pole and a porcelain bath hanging from the middle of it. So wherever, it was a Key-up they called it, so where ever Key-up Murphy went a fire was lit under this bath and in the world's worst village he had his bath and his soapy water to have a nighter. They lived well the Key-ups. But they had, they inspected the village books kept by the

12:30 headmen of the village, settled any legal rows between one person or one family or another. They had, called them lick-lick doctors, all doctors who could fix up some of the sores. The natives had terrible sores up there and generally they used to call once every several months and they were, they controlled the area and they had police boys with them too.

13:00 **You mentioned that some of the carriers would shoot through, were any of them caught?**

The natives?

Yeah.

No, I don't think they were caught then. If they had been caught, they probably headed back to their own village but there were lots of different carriers. There might be a group in your line, three or four of them from the Sepic country, some from another part and they always tried to get the one talks

13:30 together and the one talk wouldn't have been very popular with the Sepic boy around the Bilola River unless he was working. His chances of cadging food from another village wouldn't have been bright but I couldn't tell you where they went too. If they'd have been caught they would have, the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles they used the cane across the backside. He would

14:00 have got a good caning and maybe offered another job. They used to get paid in marks which was like a shilling, or a ten cent piece with a hole in the middle and they hung them around their neck because they didn't have any clothes. You could tell very quickly if a fellow had any money but they loved gambling at night time. Anyway the next stop after Vallam's was Skinneewhy, strange sounding name

14:30 but neewhy is a tree and Skinneewhy is the bark of a tree and this little group of huts at the skin of a tree, hence skinnneewhy, so I learnt another Pidgin word. And that had been used by miners who were stopping overnight or prospecting but the roof used to leak like a, it rained all day up there and the roofs leaked and you couldn't get a fire going, terrible country and

15:00 the natives, I said were just virtually frozen then. The last two days, down to sea level to a little village, a deserted village called Luvo, where the natives had left, cleared out. There was a little airstrip there that a Tiger Moth might have been able to take off from but all over New Guinea there were emergency landing strips and there we were,

15:30 three hours walk from the Japanese camp at Salamaua. But you felt quite safe because the forward scouts, who were then NGVR [New Guinea Volunteer Rifles] people, they had camps as close as a kilometre on a ridge from the Japanese airstrip and their forward scouts used to work in the swamps observing Japanese movements, right down to hundreds of yards only.

16:00 And we knew that we were going to take this job over too and it was a little frightening actually.

Sorry, on the walk down had you come across any signs of Japanese people?

No, Japanese hadn't even come out to Mubo, we were only just waiting for them and one of the highlights for me was being told by Winning, the Red Steer we called him, I mentioned him earlier, he was in charge of the raid and he said, "You and young

16:30 Cliff are going to have the Bren gun on the airstrip and there are houses where the Japanese sleep on the airstrip and other buildings and we're going to send fifteen people in there and you'll have the Bren gun." Well that was a very high compliment but a frightening one because when you've got a machine gun, wherever you fire it from that attracts fire and then you've got to move to there, there, there, there, there,

17:00 all the time but that's jumping ahead three weeks. I was taken by one of the NGVR to, I think they called it Lookout Golden Voice. That was less than a kilometre from the Japanese camp and it was a river and it was in thick jungle and there you could here the Japanese ringing the gong for breakfast or

lunch. They got three meals a day, beautiful fish,

17:30 they'd steal American bombers too and Salamaua was an isthmus that went out into the sea, the jewel of the Pacific they called it, what you see on a postcard, could be a marvellous tourist town now but there's no room for tourists up there. Anyway here I was. I could see the airstrip and the houses that Cliff and I had to attack, where it was, the swamps we had to get through to get there although we weren't going to be alone but the scouts

18:00 every morning, this was before they started using Morse code, my wording will be a little bit incorrect, "Hallo Moresby, this is Golden Voice calling, here you are five." And Moresby would say, "Come in Golden Voice, twenty seven Betty Bombers, you should see them, should be over your place in about an hour from now and it's got thirty

18:30 Zeros as escort above them," and the Japanese were naturally looking for these people like crazy. They never found them. The Americans would have found them in a day but the tracks when you went in, you had to cover the tracks with bits of timber, bark, anything and why they were pleased to know that we were going to raid Salamaua, they just didn't welcome us and

19:00 they had a couple of other observation posts. One up a tree, limb bomb lookout and you climbed up the back of the tree into the foliage and from there with your glasses you could look down into the town of the Japanese and know exactly what was happening. So we had the place well covered and they couldn't have got from Salamaua to Moobo to Wau without the NGVR or later ourselves, knowing. We had every

19:30 movement covered there.

The NGVR you said they weren't totally keen on?

No, the NGVR scouts, the forward scouts because every time somebody walks up a track, no matter how you cover it, it leaves a mark and the Japanese never found that secret track in there. And the natives from a nearby village, I believe, I've been told, they were frightened off because the scouts said they'd seen

20:00 a pink snake there and if you see a pink snake to a native, to that group of natives, you never go near that territory. That was, so they weren't worried about natives coming in. They had a petrol engine, I was once asked if they used Morse or voice, well to my knowledge they used both but probably later in the piece they used petrol more than voice, but they were well known as Golden Voice, "Hello, Golden Voice," and they

20:30 were happy people. And one of them, terribly sad, after he'd done about six months up there, I think he was coming back, Leigh Vile, he was a naval guy, and he'd been there within a kilometre of the Japanese for months and months and months. He was coming back and did what many planes had done, the pilot of the plane flew into a cloud and the cloud was made of solid rock,

21:00 which happened in New Guinea a lot. So he was never accorded the, he should have got a VC that man for just staying there, with his three or four other people.

So what was sort of the makeup of the NGVR? Were they Australians and locals?

No, they were people who had worked in Burnsville, QANTAS or Air New Guinea, I'm sorry, QANTAS might have flown but Air New Guinea was the other one. There was New Guinea Airlines, local airlines, banks, people who were building,

21:30 plantation managers, pretty big city, a thousand people or more in Lae and Salamaua was more an administrative centre. I wonder if the name Amelia Earhart [Famous female aviator] rings a bell with people today? Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly around the world in a Lockheed Electra.

22:00 Well one of the guys, NGVR guys that I worked with a lot and still alive, ninety five, Bob Emery, he was in Lae in 1935 or 6 and you can correct me, when Amelia Erhardt landed in Lae and was heading off the next morning [2 July 1937] with her co-pilot for, she had to cross Japanese occupied territory. Well she went down the Lae airstrip with a

22:30 absolutely full of petrol, it was a fairly long flight, and the airstrip was about six feet higher than the sea, they got to the end and they nearly didn't go up, she went down and her propellers threw up this great cloud of petrol, sorry, sea water for a hundred yards and eventually (demonstrates) and he saw her take off, probably for the last person still alive. But she never landed at Howland Island where she was heading for, whether she was shot down by, it was in Japanese control territory even then or whether they just ran

23:00 out of petrol, they never found the plane or anything. That's diverting a bit, isn't it?

That's worth it.

Amelia Earhart, yeah. Her husband was a millionaire publisher in New York.

Well you've got us down to

I've got you to Salamaua.

You have, now I'll just a general question about the units, the sort of the morale and what the expectations were and how

23:30 **you were coping with the terrain there until that time?**

Coping with the terrain all right, coping with clothing, no. That was terribly bad, boots that stank terribly bad, food was unbelievably bad and short because they couldn't get anything into Wau from Moresby. But I must say when it became obvious that the Japanese had such complete control that they couldn't fly cargo planes into Bulolo,

24:00 an extraordinary communications line was set up from Moresby, supplies would go up the south coast of New Guinea for about three or four days, I think. I've never done the trip to a place called Yule Island where there was a mission and they'd be unloaded there in canoes and they'd go two hundred miles inland by canoes, this is your bag of rice or your mail, with boys paddling canoes.

24:30 Then they went on the natives backs and after five, or six or seven days they'd get to Wau and this could occupy two months, depending on the rain or the whether there was a lugger available and then from Wau you were lucky they would get down. So the guys had no tobacco, which didn't worry me then and a lot of them used to smoke rolled up native tobacco, which for a sheet of the Women's Weekly you could buy a good leaf.

25:00 or maybe a few leaves, and dreadful stuff and they'd keep the butts and make some more. They had no alcohol. Morale was pretty good considering because we all had something to do. In our case we had to raid Salamaua, we had to learn all about it. The guys in the Markham Valley, their conditions were a bit worse than ours food wise and they had a raid coming up. We'll tell about that later,

25:30 it's a diversion but yeah, we were okay but the tropical ulcers, goodness gracious. You only had to scratch and you know what they are? They go in deep and they cover your legs and what not and malaria every week or so and it just become an apparent thing and you got used to it. And there weren't people who said, "I can't do a patrol today, I'm too sick." Sometimes your officer might

26:00 say, "Listen mate, you have a day in bed will you?" He could see that you [were sick], and so you lay back and you sweated for an hour and you froze for an hour and whatnot but morale was pretty good and it was an experience. It was before the raid and next thing we're talking about the raid but that's another story.

Well yeah, just one last question, as you've come down to Salamaua you had no engagement with the enemy at that point had you?

No, they

26:30 never moved inland.

But were you setting booby traps or anything of that sort?

No, not then, no, that came later when they started to move out. Our role there in the Valley I imagine, I couldn't say it was ever written, was to tell the Japanese at Lae and Salamaua that there were two thousand people in the valley behind them, which there weren't. There were sixty or seventy and not much ammunition and no aircraft so that's why we kept,

27:00 we only started this thing, we kept raiding down at Lae and always let them know we were there. The Japanese commander at Salamaua, this is after the raid, I'm jumping ahead, he had communication would you believe, with our commanding officer, Norman Winning [NX65553], in charge of the

27:30 raid, and after the raid, which I'll tell you about later, we'd done very well and they'd done very badly, he sent a message by native carrier to Winning. He said, which said roughly, "I'm surprised what you have done to us. If you don't stop doing this I shall get a company of Daquoit jungle fighters to come in and get you," and Winning sent a note back, "Go and get stuffed!"

28:00 to this CO of Japan. Now the word Daquoit is not used today but in the old days of the Phantom [Comics] of forty years ago, the Daquoit jungle fighters they were really bushrangers up in Burma, northern India, all around Rangoon and that area and their speciality was blowing poisonous arrows

28:30 at Europeans or anyone going through. So it was quite a well known word then, but my kids have never heard of them but I read about them and they were very much feared. And while they might have been good with the blow pipe, how they would have gone against Thompson guns or trained troops, that fact that the Japanese admiral said to Winning, "If you don't stop these raid I'll send some Daquoit jungle fighters in," he didn't mention

29:00 his own thousand troops and I've never forgotten that. Anyway, there we go.

So how long were you sort of on the outskirts there before that raid took place?

Oh we were there for two, two and a half weeks, two weeks. We knew every rock, knew every rock and

every creek because to avoid leaving tracks we tried not to walk in tracks, walked up creeks, even if the

29:30 creeks were only little wash aways and I slept one night I remember with my backside against a tree and my feet in the water. And the Japanese there, most of them wore a rubber soled shoe with a separate toe, so there were two fronts and they could walk across timbered little bridges and in the mud and rocks, much better than we could. They were thoroughly equipped,

30:00 well trained and you give him a couple of pounds of rice he can go out for three or four weeks on his own, all right.

Were they sending out patrols at that point?

No, they were being a bit careful. They knew we were there and they knew the NGVR were there. See the natives, we always knew about the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, how wonderful

30:30 they were to Australians but when their village was within two miles of a Japanese village, they couldn't help otherwise they'd be absolutely, they'd burn their village. I remember one day we passed an American airman and the NGVR bloke with us said, "My God, you were lucky to get out mate, the Japanese were offering a bag of rice for every American airman and all we can do is show you the track home." So the natives liked a bag of rice, I can tell

31:00 you but the Japanese knew we were there, probably not in any numbers or what they knew but they had not then, once we stirred up their hornet's nest yes, they came out in numbers.

Yes, let's get onto that, can you please tell us about that raid on?

We do that next?

Yeah.

Right, now?

Right now.

It's a long story, it's a gooey storey. Cut

31:30 that. It will take, it's a twenty minute story.

Yeah.

The raid and what followed.

We've got ten minutes. I'll tell you what, if the tape ends in the middle of it, we'll just do another, you know what I mean? We can whack in another tape, yeah? We've got ten minutes.

It's a long affair.

That's all right. We've got a good ten or twelve minutes here and we'll get started and if we needed.

I heard your countdown before this tape started. Is that still going now?

Yeah.

Oh I'll tell you the

32:00 story then. I'll start, so tell us about the preparation, the immediate preparation?

That's exactly what I want to hear. You said it was quite an honour to be told that you were going to be doing this, so yeah, what were the preparations for the raid?

Well Norman Winning, who was in charge of it, he had a sand table made of butt and he broke the fifty of us who were

32:30 going in up into seven groups. John Kerr was my lieutenant and we were going to do the airstrip. There were others who were going to do the radio station, the others a bit of the town, etcetera, the native hospital, they all had very specific jobs. We were all well briefed, with maps and from seeing it visually

33:00 and we knew when the Japanese guards would change positions at night time and the raid was to start at three o'clock in the morning. So we moved down there two days ahead, as it turned out, spent the night at a little camp about a mile away from Salamaua, where the Japanese hadn't come into. I know it sounds silly but, and there was terribly

33:30 heavy rainfall and for some reason it was immediately postponed to the next night, not just because of the rainfall. This was on the, about the 29th of June, 1942 and we'd asked for heavy bombing support before the raid because American Independence Day was on July 4 and we guessed that the Japanese would think that the Americans were celebrating that, not making it easier for

34:00 us. So we spent the whole day there in a creek, swatting mosquitoes, doing nothing and on darkness the next night we moved the off at last to our positions. Some of them had to leave early, we had to be in

position by three o'clock in the morning and this meant moving, waiting, looking and we had to go

34:30 around the back of the airfield and the butts of the rifle range were there and I'm tail end Charlie, there's seventeen of us and I'm at the back and I've looked up and there against the moon, ten yards away but standing up with a bayonet, is a Japanese sentry looking down right at me. We're right in a line and I thought, "Jesus, I'm going to get one through the back," and

35:00 the other fellows had got past and I said, "He'll think we're a mob of pigs coming home," oink, oink, so I honked and I don't know whether he heard it and I kept crawling and I never got the bullet I expected, which would have upset the whole raid because it was going to go, everyone was going to hit the town at the same time at three o'clock. Well we've all got into just about positions

35:30 and I think it was ten past three or whatever and bang, from over the other side of Salamaua there's a shot and then more shots, so something had happened. Well what it was, Paddles, one of our colourful fellows, he was in position behind a log, a big log and there's a Japanese sentry he could see there and his job is to shoot that Japanese sentry

36:00 the moment the Very light [flare] [Very flares were British signal flares] went off. But the Jap he wanted a wee and so instead of having a wee in the trees there, he came over to the log and he looked down on the other side of the log, and looked into the moonlight face of Paddles looking up at him and Paddles only had his pistol and his Tommy gun and he couldn't do anything. And the last thing he wanted to do was to fire early, to alert, so the Japanese had a bayonet

36:30 and he lunged with the bayonet and Paddles has got a knife and they're having a bayonet fight by moonlight, but no-one had fired a shot until finally one of his guys, something's going to happen, so he killed, one of his mates killed the sentry but that's how it started a few minutes early. And our guys,

37:00 well Cliff and I took position on the drome [aerodrome] with our Bren gun and the other guys had gone behind the houses, which were pretty packed with Japanese and they too had trouble with Japs who wanted to urinate during the night because the houses, a lot of them were up on stilts and some of our guys were hiding underneath the houses. And the Jap, he wouldn't go into the bushes to go to the toilet, he'd just wee over the edge of the verandah upstairs but

37:30 anyway came a quarter past three and we heard the noise. We had sticky bombs and a sticky bomb is a round bomb like a pineapple, usually made for throwing against the side of a tank and you run away and the thing explodes and leaves a hole in the side of a tank. We'd attached two things of gun cotton to those and at three fifteen or

38:00 when the shooting starts our guys very politely opened the backdoor, knocked on the door, threw in the gun cotton and got to hell out of it quickly and the houses went (demonstrates). But those it didn't kill, who didn't get killed they came out the front door and that was the job of Cliff and me to give them the treatment too. The only trouble was they bought up some reinforcements and as I said before the Japs wouldn't agree, but if you've got a machine gun

38:30 about a minute in one place is enough because they're throwing grenades and fire at you, so you move. And in the course of moving I got a bit badly burnt. The barrel of the Bren had turned red hot and I fell over that in the dark but I remember Cliff abusing me once. He was right beside me and the number two on a Bren gun reloads your magazine and he said to me once, "Hey Knocker, you're firing the gun into the ground,

39:00 I'm getting covered in mud." I said, "No, Riggsy, they're the one's coming towards us that are doing that," and he shut up then. He was a wonderful guy and then he said, "Look, I've got to have a shot at these people, give us the gun," so he became gunner for a while. Then, oh yes, we had excitement and a couple of Japs climbed up into the hangars because they could [get] a shot at me from

39:30 high and then fortunately some of our guys saw them and then it became daylight and we could have taken the town. Not our group but the whole group but with Lae so close they would have had seaplanes up and over us. Now the best story that came out of Lae, out of Salamaua, the RAD [radio operator], Bill Harris, who was often called Australian Professional Ski Champion,

40:00 I don't know if that title is right but he was incredibly wonderful runner and I don't [know] whether they had professional ski championships in the 1930's. But during the day our scouts had seen a Japanese seaplane land off Salamaua and a very senior man in white came off it and he appeared in front of a gun about twenty minutes after the raid started, immaculately dressed, carrying a satchel.

40:30 Well they probably fixed him up, and he dropped the satchel and so they got the satchel and they took a quick look and it was packed with documents and Winning said to Bill Harris "Bill, it's a four day run to Wau, I've got no food to give you, you might get some at Mooba, get this satchel to headquarters at Wau. And Bill ran. He did it in two days instead of five and in

41:00 it was the landing plans of the Japanese for Milne Bay at the other end of New Guinea, and their plans for invading Buna, Gona and going over Kokoda, which gave them time to get Australian troops back from leave and when the Japanese landed at Milne Bay, would you believe there was no-one there and there were troops there so that satchel made an incredible lot of

41:30 difference and they were given by Bill Harris to Colonel Flay at Wau and Flay got onto his radio, or one of his boys did and Blamey got a, he was General Officer Commanding of Australian Forces and a plane somehow got in next morning and took Flay and the satchel back to headquarters in Moresby and that's virtually the end of the story at that stage.

Tape 5

00:32 We do our best, give us something funny to start.

Right, well, I can't think of anything funny.

Are we on voice now?

We're on now, yeah, yeah, yeah. So I'd like to just go back over the raid. You gave us quite a good sort of starting story about it.

An overall picture of it?

An overall, I guess so, yeah. If you could get into the?

01:00 Yeah, most of the seven groups did exactly as they had to do. I think we were probably the high scorers on the aerodrome but that's because we had more targets to shoot at probably. But the main object of the thing was to get as much information as we could, documents, to kill anyone we could, to burn buildings like the wireless operation of the Japanese

01:30 etcetera and to let them think there were many more people in the hills than there actually were. And we could have had the whole town I think but when it became daylight and there's ten thousand Japanese up in Lae and they could have had their aeroplanes down in five minutes, daylight is not a good time for people who strike by night.

02:00 And getting out was probably harder than getting in because they were all alerted. Getting in we knew where to go, crept, tried not to cough near a sentry but getting out they were well aroused, like bees, old saying but it's rich.

So did you have, what was the strategy, what was the approach? Did you have a number of?

Different jobs to do?

Yes?

No, everyone had one job and then after

02:30 they'd destroyed say, the wireless mast or whatever then to kill anyone they could see. We're talking about an area no bigger than the Melbourne Cricket Ground, plus an area beside it and there were plenty of targets, blowing up bridges, but the one thing we wouldn't do is go down the isthmus, which was a couple of hundred yards long and only fifty yards wide, with a hill at the other end because once you got down there

03:00 you mightn't be able to get out. So we did nothing more than we had to do in this saucer shaped thing with the sea there. And in getting out we had to cross a river, a big river, full of crocodiles but they don't seem to go for big groups. If you go across with twenty or a dozen people they're less inclined to eat you than if you go

03:30 across on your own. Yeah, I suppose I haven't made the raid as dramatic as it should be but it was a job to do. Getting out was difficult because once we got across the river, and through a couple of little plantations, we were in open kunai [grass] country with tracks going through it, like wheat fields,

04:00 but kunai and the Japanese put up planes. A couple of seaplanes from Lae came down and they went high up over the mountains and cut their engines off and then they came circling down and around and around and then when they saw on a track they moved in with machineguns and bombs. Our little group only joined, we only got hit once but it was a deterrent to cross these

04:30 couple of miles and then some jungle and then another couple of miles, because of these planes that were up ahead, up above us and then they started bombing Mubo, where they knew we'd come from. So it was a case of run, aeroplane, you didn't always hear them until they were a hundred yards away because they were just swish, swish, swish and they'd gun their engines and come in and the tracks

05:00 were only this wide. So the only bad one I had I threw myself beside the track, down a little thing and I swear to God his bombs landed five yards away on the track but there were different sorts of bombs, anti-personnel and things and these were daisy cutters I think, hit the ground and go like that (demonstrates) horizontally. Well I was below the horizontal level so all I got was a bit punch and

05:30 bleeding nose and ears, and that's probably affected me all my life, but then we got back to Mubo. And the raid was over and we'd lost two wounded, officially, and I was number three. They didn't count me getting burnt as one of the wounded heroes but I got nasty burns off it and a tiny bit of shrapnel when

they fixed me up. Two wounded, well the first count was we called a

06:00 hundred and twenty but the forward scouts from the NGVR came back to have a look the next day and they said it was probably about the right number and how many we wounded as well, that wasn't bad for about forty odd people to get a couple of hundred or more. And get the, the big thing was the landing plan for the rest of New Guinea from that Japanese pilot that I talked about.

06:30 I mentioned before Colonel Flay and I don't know whether I mentioned Kanga Force. Know I should explain the 5th wasn't the only group in that area, the goldfields, Lae and Salamaua, there was the NGVR, police boys and they'd probably all add up to about three fifty, four hundred people and they became Kanga Force and in charge of that was Colonel Flay.

07:00 He was over Kneem, Winning, he was the trump of all trumps, if you know what I mean and I said that Bill Harris ran home with this satchel of information to Wau to give to Colonel Flay and I don't like doing this often but can I read two paragraphs of how Flay describe the raid? He said, "It was

07:30 just too easy. All we had to do was shoot the first fellow that wandered across our sights. We had the place absolutely. At dawn I decided we'd have to get out because of the planes at Lae etcetera," and you say hang on if he was in Lae, if he was in Salamaua why didn't they give him the parcels? The truth is he was never, ever, ever near Salamaua. He wasn't within

08:00 four days walk of it and he was awarded for his courage and bravery there and at Lae, he was never in Lae, and October 13 after we'd come back it all came to a head, if you could call it that, "When in the House of Reps at Question Time the Minister for the Army was asked about the claims made by Lieutenant Colonel Norman L Flay

08:30 who had just been awarded the DSO [Distinguished Service Order]," and it just goes on and on. But here we had, as a CO of Kanga Force a man who lived in dreams, like an Errol Flynn, and the only time he went into action, he deserted at the first shot and would you believe when we went to Borneo later, who was in charge of the commando regiment there but our old friend, Norman Flay.

09:00 So this fairly unhappy, really nasty experience and I didn't believe those sort of things happened in this world. I was still a wee babe and I think it made me distrust leaders probably for the rest of my life, without, "Is this man another Flay?" Here endeth Norman Flay. We've got back to Mubo.

I'd still

09:30 **like to go back to Salamaua actually.**

Right.

John Kerr was your commanding officer?

Yeah, of my group and of our little platoon actually but yeah, he was the eldest. He was in his late thirties, wonderful man, very understanding. If he's not dead, he was a very senior officer with the State Electricity Commission

10:00 but he was old, very understanding, kindly, everything that a CO should be and he'd been my CO since Wilson's Promontory, all the time. We knew each other and Cliff Biggs.

So did he brief you on what you would be doing that night?

Oh yes he came in with us. We knew exactly, he came in with us. Winning who was in charge of the raid, and he briefed each group

10:30 and I think we all knew what each person was going to do, but John Kerr was very much amongst it. In fact he was a very brave man. He threw a, one of the guys threw a stick bomb and his hands were wet and it dropped at his feet, so it had three seconds to go off, or four, and John Kerr picked it up and threw it through a window of a house, which was a bigger gamble than I'd have ever taken. I'd have turned my back and ran.

11:00 **What were your specific instructions?**

To kill as many as we could see that came out of the houses.

But where were you located?

Well if an airstrips a long thing like this (demonstrates), the hangars are at one end of it, you don't have hangers today, but in those days planes overnight were all housed in these great big hangers. They do have them for Europeans I suppose and the houses where the Japs lived were there (demonstrates) and as they came out the front doors we shot them down.

11:30 Now that might have only taken ten minutes because if they didn't come out they were dead but then reinforcements came off the isthmus and wanted to drive us off the airstrip so that's when Cliff and I and the other guys too, but we had the machineguns so we drew the crabs, as the expression in the army, so as simple as that.

12:00 **So you were doing that? You drew the crabs when the Japanese reinforcements came down the isthmus?**

Because you had a machine gun. If you had a machine gun, it was not good news. I wouldn't do it again today. We didn't even have car tyres or old logs to hide behind. We were on the side of the airstrip but you're young and stupid. I'd be old enough now to say to John Kerr, "Listen I want a little bit of protection mate. I don't want to sit out there firing at these people,"

12:30 and he would have said, "Yeah, I suppose you're right." But it was all over quickly but if you asked me specifically what happened in the other groups, well they went in. They destroyed the bakery I think, the wireless thing, a bridge and then you clear up this and then you see some action, some movement there and a lot of time even in a raid is spend looking, waiting.

13:00 **So was the chronology of the evening, was it such that there were attacks on the houses?**

At three o'clock exactly, the same as the whole raid because when you fire a Very gun it goes up in a circle of light but in this case Paddles got engaged with a Jap who was having a wee over a log, so that started a minute or two early but that doesn't matter. They were still

13:30 asleep, or some of them were drinking upstairs in the two storeyed rooms I think. But yes, I remember one of the guys saying he came down, the Japanese came down the stairs and as he came down he (demonstrates) just kept shooting but that didn't last for long and the other one's wake up when there aren't any left to come down. I don't want to be flippant about it but it worked well but if we had of been sprung earlier

14:00 going in, goodness gracious, I don't think we would have got anywhere if they'd known we were coming.

So were you throwing sticky bombs into their?

No, Cliff and I had the Bren gun. That was enough but my mates, in John Kerr's section. I knew how to handle them. I'd been taught but I wouldn't want a Bren gun and sticky bombs but once they'd thrown those bombs in they were gone, the bombs were gone and they

14:30 just had their Tommy guns and rifles and it was just normal shoot anyone you could see. And there were a couple of times when they had to call out, "Is that you Mick or are you a bloody Jap?" sort of thing because in the dark and very heavy rain, on and off, and good moon and if the guy didn't answer, then you knew he was a Jap.

15:00 But that wasn't, that happened half a dozen times, no more during the whole raid.

So how long did it take for the Japanese reinforcements to come up?

Oh I would say within, from their buildings down by the isthmus, probably ten, twenty minutes, thirty minutes but before that it was all one sided, our side. They probably started throwing things

15:30 even in the first ten minutes but not very much organisation. When they got organised a bit but it seems silly that the other six groups in the raid, I know what their assignments were, but actually individually I couldn't tell you much about them at all. And going back, we didn't go back as a big group, we went back as little groups. As soon as it got daylight it was off and get out as quickly as you can

16:00 and that's when the Japanese bombers, seaplanes came over from Lae to catch us going back to Mubo.

So when you were briefed was that the day before?

Oh we were briefed ten days before back on Mubo, on so called sand tables, they were mud tables but we knew where we were, we knew what we had to go and do.

What's a mud table?

Because there's no sand.

16:30 **So what's a?**

You make it out of mud or gravel but they drew the isthmus and the airstrip but I'd been lucky as I'd gone to the observation post of the scouts and looking right down on the Salamaua town from a kilometre away, so we all knew where we had to go and we could have easily go lost going out and a couple of them did but they got back.

17:00 We had no food and you might ask, "Why didn't we go to native gardens and get some bananas and things as we passed?" Well it's one thing we could never do, no matter how hungry we were, because the natives would have shopped us immediately to the Japanese. Wild sugar cane, yeah, that's all right but anything in a cultivated garden, no wouldn't at any price

17:30 go near it no matter how hungry we were. We did get hungry. I remember now, we'd sat down. We were pretty tired people, sat down and where the Japanese had been and they'd been looking for us on foot and they'd had a fruit break and there were skins of pineapples that they'd munched around, as you do and thrown their skins down. I remember Cliff and I looked for about half a minute and we grabbed and

we munched

18:00 the skins again. So you've got to be pretty hungry to munch a skin that's been skinned and munched by a Japanese soldier. See we never actually met the Japanese so we got a good run through.

We you using any kind of code? I'm thinking for example after the raid was done and it was time to get out of there how people were organised or communicated with to join up?

Oh we didn't join up. The object

18:30 was to get back to Mubo. That was the village about four hours walk away from Salamaua and it was get back there as you could, when you could and as soon as it go daylight. So we didn't pass anyone and no-one passed us. We really didn't know if the others were behind us. There were seven groups and away.

And who were you with?

John Kerr and the aerodrome party, that's the best way to describe it.

19:00 **And who were those people or how many of them?**

Yes, there were about fifteen in our group, two from the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, John Kerr and thirteen of us, this is one or two out, I forget, eleven of us privates and I think there was a lance corporal or so but

19:30 ranks didn't mean much there. You didn't wear things and you didn't wear Australia on your shoulders and sergeants weren't called sergeants and it was a very family affair.

And what did you wear for the raid?

Unfortunately shorts, so your white legs stood out in the moonlight. They got cut going through gardens or over native fences or anywhere, short sleeve shirts and some of the guys

20:00 had got an idea they were going to get head lice and they'd shaved their heads, so they stood out like a beacon in the moonlight too because for some reason I don't know whether we had our berets on then, but slouch hats in the jungle don't go. They get torn off by the vines and I do remember them afterwards, "Gee I'll never go into action with a bald head again." And we had beards. We'd all

20:30 let our beards grow but those who cut them off, they regretted it because you could be seen and they weren't bad protection for mosquitoes.

So nobody thought to put mud on their faces or?

I don't know, I didn't certainly but oh maybe a couple of them did put on charcoal but I honestly don't remember that. It was something you did and the next day there was plenty to do

21:00 again somewhere or to get a day's sleep.

Now tell me again the story of finding the satchel of plans, landing plans for the Japanese?

Well on the daylight of the raid a Japanese seaplane came in and out of it got a man in white, almost white, not overalls, a workman's overalls, pretty groomed guy

21:30 and I suppose he passed, the scouts saw all this from our positions up on the hill looking down. And I suppose he went to the headquarters at Salamaua with his satchel and he appeared foolishly twenty minutes after the raid, after he was promptly or fairly soon shot. But his satchel had been mislaid in the grass and they looked for it and got it

22:00 and even then when they opened it, Winning must have sensed, "Look these aren't crosswords for killing time, mate, these are important things." So that was when Bill Harris was told, "Bill get out. See how quickly you can get to Kanga Force headquarters. This will be sent over to Moresby deciphered or translated." And what a goldmine it was,

22:30 the landing plans for the Japanese in the next six months in New Guinea. I felt sorry for him, he was a very good looking, conscious, impressive guy that officer but he didn't last long in front of a…, but what he'd been doing up at three in the morning, maybe drinking whisky with his friends. Maybe he was trying to run away and escape when he heard the noise of

23:00 guns. He might have said, "Right, I'm going to get this away from here." Who can tell? It would only be a guess Kath.

Where was HQ [head quarters] in relation to everything? Is that down on the isthmus?

That's back at Wau.

Oh no, the Japanese?

The Japanese headquarters? Probably down near the isthmus somewhere but I think there must have been a CO's hut or something but I never knew of that, if there was well. I knew where the native

hospital

23:30 was where the Japanese got treatment or what became the Japanese hospital I suppose. But they just bombed an Australian hospital just out Port Moresby so there were no questions asked about who was going to be in this little hospital at Salamaua. It was done over properly.

So making your escape, you were going through this kunai grassland?

24:00 Kunai grass, they burn it once a year so cattle can graze on it in certain areas, not there but in New Guinea a lot of us think of it as all jungle but there are huge tracts of, like five miles, ten miles of open, open country with the native tracks going through it, from A to B, from one village to another and those tracks have been there for hundreds and hundreds of years.

24:30 And the track we took to get in over a place called Commiartem, I didn't want to confuse you with too many names, you could see Salamaua from the top of this ridge, which means that they could also see us if they had a telescope or binoculars on that ridge. But whether they ever did that I don't know, but we used to scuttle across that hundred yards as quick as could be, going and coming or whatever.

25:00 **So how long did the raid take?**

Three and a half hours and about. It was over soon after six o'clock. I can remember a horse coming flying towards me down the airfield. I don't know where it had been and why it was there and I thought this is, "If I can see a horse, they can see us," and John Kerr then said, "Righto, time to go." We were all within a thirty yard, fifty

25:30 yard radius, his section. It might have been half a mile to the other group or a quarter of a mile or other groups.

So the Japanese seaplanes that flew in, what time did they fly in?

Oh the one that flew in the day before with the man in the white?

No, no, the ones that came just then?

Oh I'd say by eight o'clock because it was only a twenty minutes flight away. You could see Lae from

26:00 Salamaua, twenty miles but they would have had to get their planes ready and have their breakfast and there was no use coming to search the kunai while we were still in the jungle around Salamaua. They wanted to catch us out on the kunai planes. They knew damn well where we'd come from. There was no other way to get in.

And what were they dropping on you? They were dropping bombs on you there or they were strafing you?

26:30 Yeah, bombs and strafing with machine guns but they had to find us and they found us by switching their engines off way up on top of the mountains and coming round in noiseless circles, when they saw you they'd cut in and zoom. Oh it was, it wasn't a dramatic thing. It happened.

What was it like trying to hide in kunai? I mean was it easy to hide in?

27:00 No, I didn't have much time to worry about hiding. I did once, we crawled through it and the Japanese were trying to set, this is a different occasion, but it was a bit green, too early in the morning. There was dew and mist on it and they were trying to smoke us out and they couldn't get their fire started. But when they did burn it, acres and acres would burn and I think they did this to rejuvenate

27:30 the grasses, that's in grazing areas, also to rejuvenate the grass perhaps which they used for the thatching of their huts but they burnt it regularly. Kunai was burnt once a year.

Were you firing back at the seaplanes as spiralled down to you?

No, didn't want to know where they were and by the time they switched their engines on

28:00 and came whooshing in and dropped their bombs and these seaplanes had a cockpit at the back that they could fill with a machine gun firing down and it was all over in fifteen seconds, from, "Hey, here they come," dive off the track and then they're down there and then they'd go up again, way, way up and they mightn't come back down the same path that we were on.

How many did they send out?

28:30 I don't know Kathy whether the ones we saw were the same one three times or whether they were three different and I don't think they would have had, they had oodles of bombers, and strafers at Lae, fighters but not much place in war then for seaplanes. You could go from A to B in them, you could land on lakes in them and you can land at places along the coast that didn't have an airport,

29:00 taking the CO up to have a look at his troops up there. But actual, oh they could circle, like the Australian Catalina's, when you're in convoy they could be up above you for twenty hours a day, going round and round looking for submarines. And then they'd wave goodbye and off they'd go. But they were twenty four hours a day in the air but they were a hundred twenty miles an hour, slow, big things

but marvellous for

29:30 convoy work. So seaplanes, do they exist today? I don't know, I don't think so.

In a museum I think. Down at Williamstown. Okay, so it was a four hour journey back to Mubo?

To Mubo, and it probably took us a lot longer actually because of our stops and starts and we did have a few rests because I was the Bren gunner but it was agreed earlier that the Bren, which weighed

30:00 a lot of pounds would always be passed from one to the other to share the load and I didn't volunteer too much out of turn and we just needed the rest. We hadn't eaten for the best part of a full day and if you came to a little clearing under some trees well it was just marvellous to sit down, even if there was food.

30:30 **So when you got back to Mubo, did you, I mean what happened? Was there a debriefing then?**

Well we were debriefed, the CO of each group, John Kerr, would have talked to Winning and said, "This happened and that happened," and Winning would have spoken to me in passing, "How did you get on? Good

31:00 to see you back and now, go and put your head down." That sort of debriefing. It wasn't what they do today with an intelligence sergeant there asking question about what were the Japanese wearing and shooting and all that. We knew what they had, how many were there and what they could do.

It must have been considered very successful, I mean given that it was the first raid, the first offensive?

It was the first offensive land

31:30 action in the south west Pacific. Yeah, it was, spoilt only by my friend Mr Flay claiming he was there and did it all. That wasn't the only time, I've been through all that. We won't do Flay again. But anyway, Kathy after a couple of weeks I was in a pretty bad way. My burns

32:00 had turned into nasty ulcers and I had the same fever as anyone else but these were getting bigger and bigger and Winning said to me one day, he said, "We don't want to carry you back to Wau, you're going to walk." He said, "Look, go tomorrow morning, I can give you a tin of bully beef, you've got eight ounces," and I forget what else.

32:30 There wasn't much else I don't think and he said, "Its going to take you four days and there should be someone at Vallam's after three days, so don't eat all the bully beef in one meal will you?" So I set off alone over those ten thousand foot mountains, feeling a bit nervous about being alone and steep drops down into the valleys but not nervous about Japanese as they were behind us.

33:00 Every footstep was one away and I got to Skindyway [?] and I think I was the fever wasn't too good then as the head was going around. I needed food and a sleep but you don't sleep much as the water drips through and lo and behold who should arrive; you will both know as students of film history and everything, Damien Parer [Australian War Correspondent], who was the doyen of war photographers and Oslow

33:30 White, who was the Melbourne Herald's rep war correspondent in New Guinea and they offered me a cuppa of warm cooked rice. I thought they could have been a bit more generous but they had carriers and I was very happy to get that and they spent the night there then and went on down to Mubo and Salamaua, where Ossie got, they all got beaut stories and beaut pictures.

34:00 Damien Parer got marvellous pictures down there but the forward scouts down there who were just overlooking Salamaua, they were furious, furious because they said, "If you come out here and take photographs of Salamaua and they're printed in the newspapers you can tell from where they're taken where you were, by looking back and they'd find out where our camp is."

34:30 Sure enough, three weeks later, a picture of Salamaua taken from the scout's camp and the Japanese then started bombing that hill at random where the scouts were and it was only recently, in the last ten years that they were going Damien Parer's films and on the back of the film, the box it was in, had, "Not for publication until the end of war." But some clerk in

35:00 War Department in Canberra said, "Here's some good pictures of Damien's, have them," so he was forgiven twenty years later or fifty years later.

He would have gone over to Kokoda shortly after that?

He spent most of the time down there but that Kokoda hadn't started when we were there. Yeah Damien Parer and Oz White they worked more or less together a lot of

35:30 the time. He was marvellous. He got wonderful photographs and he wasn't frightened to go right down where there were bang bangs.

So did he want to know from you what you'd seen, what you'd experienced, what was down

there?

I didn't volunteer that I'd been in the raid and they were dumb enough not to ask me but they could have had a bit of a story from me because once they'd got down there they would have had

36:00 the complete story. But I thought later, not at the time, if I had of been in their situation I think I might have, it was too late. They probably asked, I don't remember, "I hope you get your sores better and here's a cup more of rice we've just cooked." And it was later that I thought to myself now, as Oz and I worked in the same reporters' room at the Melbourne Herald after the war. He was much

36:30 older than me. When I started there, there was Oz and he wouldn't have remembered me or cared much from the guy he gave a box of rice to at Skindyway.

What did Damien Parer have with him? Did he have a lot of....?

A boy line. Yes, he had a lot of carriers and I'm thinking of cameras with tripods but I wouldn't have seen that. I think I'm going from photographs taken of him taken in action but they would have had ten

37:00 or fifteen boys carrying, native carriers carrying their gear for them and unencumbered by explosives and ammunition because I think war correspondents were allowed a pistol or something and that's about all but I'm really sure on that.

So it was quite a big party really that you came across?

Oh well they came in probably after I got in at four o'clock in the afternoon. I don't know but the huts at Skindyway are pretty

37:30 close together. They all leak, everyone swears the moment you look up and see what's up there and eventually I suppose they came to me. I wouldn't have rushed over but when they started talking about cooking rice or something I was very, very interested then.

Was there an RAP at Skindyway?

RAP [Regimental Aid Post ~medical facility] at Skindyway?

Yes?

No, there was nothing there at all unless people were going through

38:00 it. It was an old camp where miners stayed or native lines stayed overnight. There was one of these each days walk, Salamaua, Mubo, I haven't mentioned that, Skindway, Summit Ballomes, for a four or five day walk and in between times, nothing. There was no point. There was no gold there

38:30 and if they had of found a bit of gold it would have been a very different matter and it was so cold you couldn't grow anything, no, up there.

So you were heading to Ballomes to get treatment, were you?

No, I was going to Wau. Wau was the big major city in the Bulolo Valley but there was a permanent patrol officer at this place called Ballomes and they had a bit of food. The patrol officer always had food and the NGVR had a few caches of food around

39:00 the places as well and they had their own little things and quite often they'd share a tin of something with you. Sorry Kath. So I got back to Wau and I got put in the hospital there and there were no doctors there but there was a lick-lick doctor,

39:30 a native who'd been trained and sometimes the sergeant of ours must have come up from Bulolo and looked and felt and they were using something like a spoon to take that juice out of the ulcer. It's revolting I know and that went on for a couple of weeks and I don't have the name of the, hydrochloride [hydrogen peroxide] something they put on and it fizzed, wherever the infection

40:00 was. This lasted a few weeks and I started to get better and we're going to leave Wau now in a moment. An officer, I'd forgotten, came to me and said, "Listen, the boss wants to know," talking of Flay he was, "If there's any Japanese in the mountains between Lae up there and Salamaua there, along the coast? We want about five blokes to go.

40:30 Can you come with us?" I said, "Yeah, I think I can walk." I was pleased to get out of hospital. I was getting better, so that was a whole new experience of going away with people I really didn't know. Some members of the 1st Company which had been wiped out in New Britain had come across by lugger to our area and made their way on foot and come across us, more or less by accident.

41:00 And there were a couple of them in this group, and NVGR and we had to go up to these most marvellous high hills which was like going into stone age territory, because the villages up there, there was no gold, and they were as they were long before BC [Before Christ] except for the patrol officer visiting and it was a marvellous, marvellous trip. Tell you about it when you've got time.

Tape 6

00:31 Most of my action was walking and looking and being frightened who was around the next corner. Borneo was a whole different story. We're not on air are we?

Yeah, we're on air.

Right, well we're heading for.

No, no, I just wanted too, you were telling me about this journey that you were making, was it Wau to Salamaua, was it?

No, the one I'm about to do, I was asked to join a patrol to go out into the Boomerang Ranges.

01:00 Now on the map Lae is here and Salamaua is there and in between is a very high group of ranges. I said stone age villages, really and truly and we knew the Japs were there and there but we were worried that they were coming in to infiltrate the gold [Gona] valley via these old villages. And they wanted us to find out what was up there because

01:30 there nono of our troops had been in there. So off we set to a town called, oh Wau going down to Bulolo and then Bullawah, a little gold mining town and then say a prayer and up into the mountains. They were so backwoodsy that when you came to a village about three or four miles before you got there,

02:00 there was an old guy on a thing like a lifesaver's stand on a bench and I can't yodel so I won't offend you and yodelling the fact that there were people coming up the track and he'd pass it onto the next yodeller and eventually it would get to that village. Of course by the end of the day the whole of that Snake Valley, as it was called,

02:30 knew that we were on the way. If the Japanese had of been at the top end of it they would have had no trouble sitting but around the villages they had old fashioned picket fences to stop intruders coming in and stealing their pigs, their women, or what. They were still living in this fortified village area and the patrol officer's book was still there and

03:00 still kept and we slept in the patrol officer's room, or rooms, once we got rid of the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s under the bed. And what else was there? I don't know and the only thing we had to eat was kow-kow, sweet potato, with that much charcoal on it and we'd get enough for the group of us, for a sheet of newspaper. Newspaper was a wonderful

03:30 trade commodity there and that's about all we had for about ten days or so, kow-kow. We learnt later that charcoal gives you cancer of the stomach and as my little mate Cliff Biggs who got cancer of the stomach and died after the war before Vet Affairs would acknowledge it as a, it could have been caused by your

04:00 diet. Now if you get cancer Vet's Affairs [Department of Veterans' Affairs], I know, I've had it, gives you everything. Single rooms in hotels and the best surgeons and he had to die at home and have a special nurses, terribly expensive setup for anyone who got it. And that's all we had for a long time.

So you were there for ten days?

Up in those mountains.

Tell me what you were doing there for ten days?

Walking, walking and looking and I wish I'd have been older to understand more of the history.

04:30 This was a kunai valley and the higher you got the more wonderful the view back to the gold valley at Bulolo, just absolutely wonderful but there were no books on sex education there and as you went up the mountain, outside every village, you would also come to an old man with a young lass, of about say twelve or thirteen who was about to be married.

05:00 And it was his job to teach her the life she was going to be get when she got back, whether it was a good, bad job or what but here was this dirty old man with a young virginal lady there and they used to spend two or three days out there together and then she was, then when the old man had broken her in he would take her back and say, "Righto, she can get married now." Extraordinary but that was true, we asked why always the old man

05:30 and that lovely young lady?

Did you come across them doing this initiation?

Yes, came across one and then a mate of mine who was out there later, he came across them and he interviewed them at much greater length. It's all recorded in our war book, Double Diamond,

And what were they doing when you came across them?

Well they heard us coming Kathy. I suppose they got out of bed. I don't know. I don't think they were then

06:00 but I don't think they were playing crosswords either. Don't ask questions like that?

I was just wondering what you saw?

I can't really remember. I turned my head the other way. Anyway we went on up there and up there.

Now, just one other question, you were talking about, like you said it was real backwards, had these people seen white people before?

Yes, white prospectors had gone through

06:30 in the thirties, early thirties but when they found their gold no-one went back there and they'd seen patrol officers and I should know, I think the patrol officers probably called two, three times a year and they had a lick-lick doctor with them. And it was there I learnt why the 'Marys,' the women, a lot of them had a pig suckling their breast.

07:00 It was because the death rate of babies was enormously high but you get a disease if you don't express your milk called, is it mastitis or something? Well they had no cure for that and the only cure was to let a piglet suckle you and I never, never knew. I just thought it was fattening the local thing but it was because the babies, so many of them died. And I must say out there, I don't know what it is now

07:30 but an old man was forty. They didn't, they were lucky to reach the late thirties out there but we got up to the end of the main trail to a place called Malaposs. I'll mention the other places, Tocanin, and Quasang, in case you ever go back there and they were the ones we slept at as I remember. I don't remember but Malaposs was a bigger village at the top of an enormous

08:00 rise and the Zeneg River rose up there and it was a quiet river most of the time. You could walk across it on the boulders and when it rained, as you get three inches at a time up on those ranges, and the noise as the boulders, millions and millions and the more that went down the more formed up on the top I suppose and it was just the most incredible noise that a river could make.

08:30 And there was no way you could cross it when it was in flood. There were a couple of single strand bridges. Anyway we got to Malaposs and the natives told us there were no Japanese in the near vicinity there and we were almost looking down on the sea, between Lae and Salamaua, the Quean Gulf, and then the natives got very upset.

09:00 And we spoke bad, they didn't speak much Pidgin there and they said, "Big troubles at Mubo" over that way and unbeknownst to us the Japanese with a patrol a thousand strong had moved down to Salamaua and taken Mubo. They didn't have much fight because we knew, not me but Winning and his group had been told by the scouts that a thousand Japanese were on their way, so they had time to withdraw and get out

09:30 and peck off a few if they could. Strangely before they sent out one patrol, we're back at Salamaua, from Salamaua to Mubo, and although these were experienced Japanese soldiers, they'd been in Malaya, Netherlands East Indies and there, they sat down and had their evening meal on the Mubo emergency landing strip in full sight of our unit's guards, with the

10:00 machine guns pointing down at them and at a given moment, bang, and they killed. They must have killed a hundred of the two hundred in the Jap patrol but by the next morning the Japs had carried everyone of their dead back to Salamaua on that dreadful, dreadful track and in the dark. They were tough guys but with all their experience, we were told all the time, "keep apart" no matter where you were, don't

10:30 be near another guy because if he's going to shoot one, he'll get you both. And here they were, four or five hundred of them sat down under our guns and then they got cross then and then they came in and took Mubo and we had to withdraw again, not me, but my men, up into the hills up towards Wau.

Yeah, I wanted to actually ask you what was the outcome of the raid?

Of the raid? Well that was it.

Because you'd gone off I know because you had to go and get treatment

11:00 **but?**

Winning told the admiral in charge of Salamaua what he could do to his, the Japanese commander was going to get Daquoit tribesmen in to hunt us down. Well Winning's reply was rude so eventually he send his own men but we were outnumbered there. There might have been forty or fifty of us but at least we knew

11:30 they were coming as we had scouts watching the track out of Salamaua and everywhere. And a rather interesting one, one of my mates had rations for a four day patrol out of Mubo, just after the Japanese had got there and he got cut off, about six of them and it took them four months to get back to civilisation and they had to get natives to ferry them from one village to another down the coast at night time.

12:00 Because the natives were always fearful that if the Japanese saw them helping our guys they'd burn their villages, steal their Marys', destroy their gardens or etcetera. I've digressed a bit too much but they got by with hand grenades in rivers getting fish, four months with four days rations. Right, we're back at Malaposs in the Buon Ranges and we knew something was wrong. We had a wireless operator with us with a radio,

12:30 which was pretty ineffective. We only had batteries and he said, "Something's gone wrong, the radio traffic is just increased a hundred fold." You might not know that radio operators can tell the dit, dit, dit, a dah, dit, of another guy that they know, like in the same unit and they said, "That's, but he's not using our code," so they knew

13:00 the code had been broken or suspected it had been broken and he said, "He is now at Mubo that guy," and the traffic was non stop. Then a police boy came running to us up the hill one morning and said, "The Japanese are advancing on the lower valley, they're expected to take Wau; Bulolo and Baur have been burnt." They scorched earth the whole

13:30 valley. Flay didn't wait for them to get there. He burnt the whole lot and in came the crunch of the message, "Your patrol can head for the Markham Valley above Lae and if the Japanese are not there," because we thought they were coming up, "You can head for the south coast of New Guinea," which I don't think many people had ever done and there words on our school atlas we had "uncontrolled territory." So that

14:00 was a nice situation to be in. We had no food, no contact with anyone and we said goodbye to the Buangs and walked back down through various villages, across this Inang River at low tide when the rumblings weren't too bad. Still got pretty badly bashed on the legs but we felt we had to keep moving. I remember when we came, I was forward scout this morning and came to a little village called

14:30 Wompit where our guys used to be, the people who had gone down to the Lae are originally and there was an airstrip there and I could see there were ten or twelve buildings, smoke coming up out of the huts and I stood there and I thought, "What on earth am I going to do here? Walk on with my gun ready or just wait for someone to come out" and

15:00 they'd had a big sleep in that morning or that lunchtime or whatever it was Eventually the guy, the head serang had bought us by plane from Townsville to Moresby on the DC3's, I am going back a long way now, walked out of a building with two pistols on his hips and it was still in Australian hands. I'm not keen on kissing

15:30 old men but I nearly walked up to Lloyd Jivault that day and I said, "You don't know how wonderful it is to see you." So I could call the other half dozen guys on and there we were at a place called Wompit and the Japanese hadn't come up from Lae and we spent a few days at Wompit. There was a lovely river there, getting cool and clean and then down we

16:00 were sent, you can't have everyone in one place, a couple of hours walk away to a camp called Bobs. It's a name to remember because in the Markham Valley there was that huge stream that runs down from the highlands, that you know, and Lae is the city at the mouth of it on one side, that was Japanese territory over there, we were on this side. They had thousands on that side, big airstrip. Bobs was probably

16:30 fifteen miles inland but you could hear the Japanese planes warming up in the mornings before they took off to bomb Moresby and we kidded ourselves that this side of the river was ours, but Bobs being so close to such a big base was built under very thick jungle and no sunlight had ever got in there. And we had a doctor, a sheila doctor there and a Regimental Outpost

17:00 and that was our headquarters for the 5th Company in the Markham Valley area and every week or so we'd send patrols across the river, by native canoe. It's half a mile wide and we had to take canoes to get across and they do a patrol to see where the Japanese were and I did miss a point. The headquarters of the people up from Lae was

17:30 Heath's Plantation and soon after the Lae Salamaua operation we heard that Paul Kneem had been killed on the first raid on Heath's Plantation. It was the first time the group in the Markham Valley had gone into action and they were going to blow Heath's Plantation, which housed a lot of Japanese and he got his tummy blown away, either by a

18:00 mortar or one of our own grenades that rolled off the roof etcetera. And so going to Bobs was a sad thing but we met people we hadn't met since Foster and Moresby and they were sick people. The food down there was absolutely dreadful. And then there were two crossings to get across the Markham, where the Japanese would have had to have used to come across to our side,

18:30 Kirklands and Sheldon. I was sent to do my fortnight at Kirklands and we had a hut and we manned the crossing visually with a gun twenty four hours a day and two hours at night time down there with the crocodiles, they had a lagoon behind us, bark, bark, bark, (demonstrates), you heard them. It was the worst two hours I ever spent in my life and we had mosquito nets and the

19:00 mosquitoes had long ago learnt to get through the mosquito netting in our hut. And in the morning you looked, they were too fat to fly, you just squashed them like that, they couldn't fly, bloated great things

but some of our guys, I wasn't there, they said, "Look we're so hungry we've got to do something," and the natives caught flying foxes by having a bit of

19:30 kunda with thorns on it, on the end of a bamboo pole and they flew low over the little hill there at dusk to the bananas and they waved this in front of the flying foxes who ran into the kunda. Then they boiled, the story was they boiled the flying fox for three days and threw away the meat and eat the feathers but they were absolutely, you couldn't eat them I don't think. But they said

20:00 they tried to catch them but they did and I wasn't there. I went walking one day. You had to do something when you were there and I came across this beautiful looking tree and I said, "That's got nuts on it." I don't think I'd tasted anything like butter or a fat of any kind since virtually leaving Wilson's Prom. We had nothing like that

20:30 and if it's a nut, it's edible and it was beautiful, absolutely lovely. So I had ten or fifteen of them and stuffed my pockets full of them to take home to the other guys. I got back and I went inside the mosquito proof room, where we lived. That's a lie, it wasn't mosquito proof but it was better than outside and I said, "Listen, look what I've got and

21:00 they're lovely." And there was a native in there, one of our trusted cook boys or whatever and he laughed, and I won't talk in Pidgin, but he said, "You eat?" And I said, "Yeah" and he said, "Oh how many?" "Oh" I said, "Seven, eight, ten," and he burst into laughter and he said, well he meant if you were constipated you ate half a one, if you were badly constipated you ate one

21:30 and if you were mad you ate two and I'd eaten seven or eight. I won't tell you what happened for the next three or four days, but it was a castor oil tree and that's what they used to give kids in my youth, doctors or mothers, if he weren't too good, give him castor oil. No wonder the damn tree had been left and no-one was eating from it except in an emergency. But to get from Bobs to Kirklands you had to go through a village

22:00 called Maree and they were the sorcerers of the valley and all villages have got this sort of thing and I remember on my first walk down there I remember how terrified I was. I came on the native track a stick in the ground, two sticks like two legs, a round head with thorns sticking out of it or something and I thought, "There's a thousand

22:30 eyes looking at me from the bush, what do I do here? Do I stop and find another way?" And I was really quite frightened that if I violated that sign I'd get a spear in the back of the head or whatever. I'm sure I was being watched and deviated through the bush and did a great big walk around it and left the thing there. But

23:00 they were very, they were sorcerers, they thought they were anyway.

What did you expect would happen?

I expected I'd get speared for going through their trail with their sign on it. I think it was a thing of grass with a head, two long legs, right in the middle of the track. It didn't happen there by accident. It was put there by whoever by however but the luluhi,

23:30 the headman of Maree, was also the paramount luluhi of most of the Markham Valley, the headman and we always had to be suspect of him because he had cousins across the river, on the Japanese side. He lived on our side but he also had a lot of control

24:00 so one was never entirely sure whether he would let the Japanese know that we'd crossed the river to do some reconnaissance work or tell anything about us, how many of us there were. Quilan, and a magnificent, not like the ordinary villager, he was a six footer, fully thirteen or fourteen stone, I probably exaggerate a bit, but a magnificent man.

24:30 And he came from a family of Padamant luluhi's who are like royalty, stepped out and he could, he was a very fine wrestler by native standards and in our unit down there we had a dear friend of mine, Tom Trevaskis, who had just been to Japan with the Australian wrestling team for the Pan Pacific Games and after the war he won the heavyweight title at the

25:00 Commonwealth Games in Auckland, or British Empire Games as they were. Well Quilan wanted to be matched against Tom Trevaskis but I wasn't there but my hearsay story is from my friends who were. I was down the other end somewhere, miles away. We also had a very good Victorian amateur, Bob Kirwood, who was runner up State Titles and Mick Dennis, he was

25:30 a wrestler from Sydney, all amateurs, very good, all of them. Well the little bout started in the village, as I know it, in Quilan's village and they had rounds like you do in boxing and after the first round Tom came back to his corner and the other boy said, "How are you going?" He said, "Look I can tie him in a knot in two minutes. He's strong but

26:00 he's not a taught, trained international wrestler," and they said, "Listen Tom, don't do that whatever you do, do another couple of rounds like this." Another couple of rounds went on and then they thought it out. They said, "Listen Tom, you've got to do something really dirty now, something like gouging his eyes or punching him and we're going to disqualify

26:30 you so that he can win." Because if he had lost face in front of his villagers we would have lost a goodly supply of a few bananas or whatever, so Tom did something, I can't tell you what, but the referee, one of our guys, stepped in, "Quilan, you are the victor," and Quilan must have known that Tom was so good. Anyway the strange

27:00 sort of people you got in our units, just after the war and before it, if you knew a bit about fashion, you would have worn perhaps Trevolla Robes from Flinders Lane. Tom and his mother ran this big dress factory, Trevolla Robes and he used to cut the thing, of Greek ancestry, wonderful markets but Tom could used scissors on a ladies dress or a pattern and here he was down

27:30 there with mud on his, everywhere, filth and hunger. That was Trevaskis. What else have I got to tell you? I've talked enough haven't I?

No, no, that's fantastic. Well look, something that's on my mind is just getting an understanding of what encounters you were having with the Japanese? I mean you've travelled a long way. You've done that journey from Mubo across to?

28:00 Down there?

Well up into the mountains, into the Bob country?

And then down to the Markham.

And then down to the Markham and this is all on foot and you're patrolling and you're forward scouting and?

Didn't fire a shot, didn't fire a shot.

Well lets just go back to the highlands episode, that patrol you were on, what intelligence did you get about the Japanese when you were up there?

Nothing, they weren't there. They'd never been there but we were worried that once the valley had been burnt the Japanese

28:30 had moved up towards Wau and we were told to get out by a police boy who bought a note to us and I forget who it was signed by, someone down the Mubo way and it said, "Listen you'll be in trouble if you don't get out." Someone in authority, it could have been Winning but I honestly don't remember.

So how, that's a police boy coming from Mubo that's getting you that information?

29:00 He'd been sent to find us. He was sent from Wau. I can't tell you where he came from but he said, "The whole valley has been burnt," so he knew that much and the Japanese looked like taking the Bulolo Valley.

So they weren't in those positions that you originally thought they were in?

At Mubo?

No, no, up in?

No, no, hadn't got there. They were about to do that but anyway

29:30 I was down the other end at, and I do remember one thing. The 7th Australian Division, a year later, at the end of 43 it would be, landed by parachute and carrier plane in the Markham Valley and took Lae, landing on the Nadzab airstrip and I know how that was reconnaissance, reconnoitred I think.

30:00 A little Auster aircraft that flies at very low level and used for artillery evidently came in and landed at Wompat while I was there and two guys got out, walked to the Markham, went across it and did a reconnaissance of Nadzab to see what plane could be landed there in a year's time. But they had red crosses all over their Auster plane so the

30:30 Japanese and Germans weren't the only people who hid behind red crosses etcetera.

So what were you doing at Wompat?

Wompat? We were just there for a few days after we'd come out of the mountains and then there were too many of us there because there was a permanent patrol there so we were sent down to Bobs on the Markham River with the Markham following along beside us, terrible place.

31:00 **And who was leading you?**

A guy from the, a reinforcement who was expected to join the 1st Company but the 1st Company had been wiped out so some of these 1st Company people joined us. If you ask me his name I honestly [do not recall], it was an incident, a two week incident and I'm sorry that's nearly sixty years ago, it

31:30 is, yeah more than sixty years ago but I can remember so much about the village, the valley, the rivers and trading bit of newspaper for kow-kow but if you ask me, you've asked me a very difficult question. It's probably, I could easily find out for you.

That's okay, just if you remember.

And then to cut the, I never went across to the other side of the river, to the bad side but our

32:00 guys that did had it pretty rough there because the Japanese had started sending out patrols of a couple of hundred people, after we'd attacked them at Heath's Plantation and after our CO had got killed. They didn't take kindly to our presence over the river but we still kept sending out patrols. You've got to know where the enemy is and there favourite way of killing them, the Japanese, was to put a string of hand grenades,

32:30 like it could be twenty yards long or more, with hand grenades in jam tins and when they hit the front one, or hit the, the string pulls out the hand grenade which has got the pin taken out of it and then it goes off, so you could get a daisy chain of booby traps and you could kill half a patrol with those. But that wasn't a daily thing. You didn't kill them every day with that but I go on hearsay

33:00 for most of the things over the river and how did I leave? I left the unit. The doctor at Bobs eventually saw me. I'd come down from fifteen stone to about ten with every type of worm you could get. I had hookworm, ringworm, fever and

33:30 hunger and he said, "Look, back to Wau." He said, "You're only a liability here if you've got to walk in a hurry," so back I toddled to Wau and the villagers were pretty good on the way back. I did meet people and I had a bit more than a mug of boiled rice most nights and then the doctor at Wau said, "Go and sit by the airport with this bit of paper," airfield at Wau, and

34:00 "You'll be admitted to hospital if you can get to Port Moresby." So I had to sit there for a couple of days because the planes couldn't get in unless the fogs had lifted and I was back in Wau, flown back to Australia, down to Heidelberg in Melbourne, this takes a couple of weeks, but the hospital trains going south from Townsville to Toowoomba and were absolutely marvellous. It didn't matter whether it was the middle of the night, if you went through Rockhampton

34:30 there was the local Red Cross girls pushing food through the windows to you and they were absolutely marvellous. I spent a month in Heidelberg hospital and a couple of weeks at Stoddington. You know Stoddington, the old Government House? And I still couldn't walk too well but at five o'clock

35:00 every night they rang a bell and that gave you permission to go up to the local pub and people who couldn't walk all day they left their wheelchairs or their crutches and they got up to the Glenferry Hotel or whatever it was called in Glenferry Road and they were there for the next hour. And I didn't see the unit again until it came back from New Guinea and I'm ashamed to say when the Japanese did move in on Wau,

35:30 the Japanese got right to the edge of the airport and then the 17th Brigade was flown in from Moresby and our blokes had been driven right back from Skindywhy, all those places and the 17th Brigade came out of the planes virtually firing as they got out and I had to read about this between clean sheets in Heidelberg hospital. I felt a dreadful heel. We lost a few guys there but

36:00 to be back reading about the places I'd just left and where those things was interesting but I was never quite the same happy person again I don't think for a long time. Then the unit eventually, there were so few of us left it was sent back to Australia after being up there for a year, they're round figures, and half of them never came back to the 5th and we re-formed at Canungra in the middle of 43 roughly. Yeah,

36:30 we were up there in 42, 43 and they came back in dribs and drabs and a whole lot of new faces that I'd never seen or heard of.

Okay, can I just get a bit of a time frame here? When did you leave New Guinea to come back to Australia?

I think it was about Christmas Day of December 42. I'd been there seven months and I wasn't too good.

37:00 **How long did you spend in the Markham Valley?**

I suppose a couple of months, two and a half months. We didn't have things, anything that had vitamins in them so we got a disease called beri beri, which I think is not used now because I told Vet's Affairs and they ask you what you've had and I say beri beri and they say, "What's that?" If you push your finger into your muscle of the leg the

37:30 hole stays there for quite a long time. It's a vitamin deficiency thing I think, so we were all pretty sick and I don't know why I got sicker than the others but we were all a wreck actually without the supplies coming in.

And Nadzab, that was an American airbase?

That was a year later when twenty thousand of the 7th Division flew in there

38:00 with American support and they hit Lae. Instead of coming in from the sea they hit it from airport behind Lae, called Nadzab.

So when you were there in 42, late 42, what was the situation at Nadzab?

The Japs used to patrol it and our guys used to patrol it and set down, might stay a night or two. Couldn't stay at villages because the villagers there were a

38:30 bit, very, very suspect and they had to be with many thousand Japanese there and a handful of us here. They're only human aren't they? They had to shelf [betray] a few people and they did and one of my dear friends I mentioned earlier, Bob Emery, he was over there on his own. He loved working on his own.

39:00 He loved to be by himself and he'd come back and say, "Right the Japs are moving here, they're there, going down there," and he was cleaning his Tommy gun in a little hut or a tent and he'd finished doing it thank God and he heard a click and he knew it was a metallic click and he looked out one end of his little shelter and there's ten or twelve Japanese.

39:30 They surrounded him and he'd been put away by a native, that he was there, and he put his head out the other end of the tent and I think there was a couple there and he ran out with his gun firing and made it to a jungle curtain a few hundred yards away and he only got one bullet through one arm but he didn't have his shoes on. And he had to run a mile to the Markham River or more and he had these hundreds and hundreds of thorns

40:00 in his feet, so when he got to Bobs eventually he met some of our guys or the natives had told us that Bob was in trouble there apart from picking out the bullet in his arm I think it was Lloyd Jillabare, a mate of mine from Wilson's Prom, lives there, spent three or four or five days pulling thorns out of Bob Emery's feet but that's the

40:30 sort of life. Thanks to him people like that, we always knew where the Japanese were and he'd been there since the early 1930's, as a builder. He was the first commercial vegetable gardener outside Lae. He used to go in and sell fresh veggies to other people. He ran a carrier line carrying supplies out to the

41:00 miners etcetera and he was Mr New Guinea but a silent man. He'd never tell you anything about what he'd done himself. Anyway he's in an Adelaide nursing home as we write this in his mid nineties or more and I must go and see him before he goes.

Tape 7

00:30 **So you got us down to Heidelberg, I think that's pretty much where we left off. You were there for how long?**

In and out with a very bad ulcer on my ankle for more than two months but originally I think my mother cured me. I had all sorts of plasters and treatments. They knew nothing about tropical ulcer treatment there and she said, "Get a week's leave," which they were happy to get rid of you. Heidelberg was pretty crowded

01:00 with people from Kokoda coming through then and she took me down to Barwon Heads and every day I paddled in the salt water and of course a doctor would say it was coincidence but after a week of paddling in the salt water it started to become human again. And then, yeah then it was back to Canungra

01:30 where the 5th Company was reformed. And there were only half of the originals left, not that half had been killed, certainly not but their physical condition was pretty awful. So Canungra had replaced Wilson's Promontory as the school of guerrilla warfare but they still tortured you in the morning. I remember the phys ed [Physical Education] instructors running you down to the river there

02:00 which looked as though it had ice on it the minute before. You had to swim across it and back but we behaved badly there, I think, I'm told and eventually after a little while we were sent down to, they didn't call it the Gold Coast then, to do some beach exercises, not landing, at what is now Palm Beach.

02:30 There's a little thing there called the Currumbin Creek. I'm not quite sure, am I on the right track with that?

Yeah.

And we put up our tents there and it didn't take long for local constabulary to know we were there. We stole things and went over people's fences, if there were any, took home pineapples and in my own case

03:00 we'd gone to the Burleigh Heads pub one afternoon and as we walked in one of my mates said, "Look," I was Andy then, not Ken, because when I went to Wilson's Promontory first the top jockey in Australia was Andy Knox and they took one look at me and said, "You're Andy Knox" and the name stuck to this day with army people. He said, "Andy, there's six ten gallon

03:30 kegs of XXXX beer there, just inside the pub door," and we got this worked out. We had to go and buy a couple of beers and, "You can stand outside the door and when you hear there's a blue inside, you come

in, lift up one of those things," sixty pounds it would have weighed because they were not light, they were tin and "Take it out

04:00 the door and put it underneath that cactus over the road," or whatever. So there I am waiting and the next thing I hear this terrible language coming from inside, "I'll get you, I'll wack you" and the publican's jumped the counter and he said, "Break it up boys." "Break it up like hell" they said, "We'll break your head before we break this up," and this is all put up between our guys. The publican thought it was for genuine and by the time he'd broken it up

04:30 I had done as told. Come in the door, lifted up a ten gallon keg, taken it outside, rolled it under a palm tree and life resumed and when it got dark, it's a fairly long haul from Palm Beach to Burleigh Heads as we had to roll that down the, what is now the Pacific Highway I think and barrels are not round, they're not square, they're not cylindrical.

05:00 They have a little curve and every time a car came along, which wasn't very often like today, it was every half hour, we had to roll this damn thing into the bushes. They don't want to go straight. We get it back home, about eight or ten of us know it's there, roll it into the bushes, we had to bung it with a hammer and a stick and it was pretty warm by this stage I might say and drink out of steel pannikins.

05:30 Well that went onto about five o'clock in the morning when I suppose the keg was empty. I don't remember. I know we were blind drunk. We went back to our tents and no sooner had we got into our bed I'm sure there's reveille, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, or whatever. The bugler's playing his trumpet and the sergeant major is shouting, "All out on parade, everyone on parade, come on, quick."

06:00 We get out on parade and he says "Righto, I've had a visit from the police, who stole the barrel from the Burleigh Heads pub last night and where is it?" He said, "You don't even have to hold your hand up." He said, "You can't stand up straight, and you can't stand up straight and you can't stand up straight either, come over here." And the publican was very happy to get the empty keg back

06:30 because he couldn't get another full keg in those days without having an empty keg. So the police said, "Good luck boys, look after yourselves," and the publican was happy and we had bad heads but we did a lot of this there. And that was one of many, many incidents and then we went back to Canungra. Where are we now? We're in the middle of 43 or so.

07:00 We went up to the Atherton Tablelands became the headquarters for the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions and we became, let me put it this way, there was a big unit in the 7th Division called 7th Division Cavalry. They'd never seen a horse but in the African desert they had these Bren gun carriers, little light weight tanks, well they're no use in the jungle. You couldn't use

07:30 tanks up there so when they came back the 7th Div Cav was virtually disbanded of their members and three independent companies became units Cavalry Commando Squadrons in the Cavalry Regiment. So from the 5th Independent Company, we became the 5th Cavalry Commando Squadron and then sensibly someone dropped the name Cavalry.

08:00 We didn't know a horse, some of the guys did but city slickers didn't and it was a whole different unit, officers and everyone. Some of them were still there, the old guys but parade ground drill became a must, saluting officers as you walked past them, it was just something we'd never heard of. But we got into big trouble in 44

08:30 and I'm skipping a few things that I'll remember eventually. We'd been out on a five day walk over Mt Bartle Frere [5325 feet] at the back of Cairns there, the highest mountain in Queensland, and we came back to camp filthy after five days getting fit walk. And to our surprise the 5th was told it had to mount regimental guard that night,

09:00 so that one of the other units could go to a dance they'd organised. Well we wouldn't have minded if they'd been sick or anything like that but we said, "No, we won't go." Well if two or more people disobey the command it's conspiring to mutiny, joining in a mutiny, etcetera, etcetera. And we refused and the CO, our new CO came down to talk to us, not Flay, he kept well out and

09:30 he said, "All those who still refuse to mount guard, slope arms," so we all sloped arms as one. We virtually given orders too, goaded into it like that as I remember and in the old days with the old unit if someone like Winning or Kneem had there they'd have said, "Listen, just for me go on guard, because you're going to get into a hell of a lot of trouble if you don't.

10:00 Your wives are going to loose their deferred pay and we can deal with the CO who's responsible for this later but go on and don't be so bloody stupid." But no, we were virtually given to, so we did and there was a field general court martial and we each got ninety days in field punishment and fined thirty five pounds I think and there were several

10:30 corporals from New Guinea reduced to the ranks. A couple had been mentioned in despatches and we were a pretty good group of twenty eight people to go into mutiny. You don't do it so we went out to the Unghur Burra [?] Field Punishment Centre and the screws [Prisoner Wardens] there are not nice people, in any field punishment centre. They're dealing all their lives with the very lowest echelon of hopeless soldiers

11:00 who want to be AWOL Absent Without Leave] all the time and don't want to do anything. And they tried to break us for the first couple of days with all these exercises and running with thirty pounds of sand on our back and finally they knew it was just part of our normal training and I think after about sixty days, for some reason I can't tell you

11:30 the general officer of commanding 7th Australian Division who must have been away when the court martial was held, the book says he found out about it and we were out of gaol the next day. I don't believe that's quite true as he must have got a message but when we left the CO of the gaol said, "Listen you can come back anytime." He said, "You're the finest bunch of troops I've ever had here," and they kept us separate

12:00 because they were frightened we might try to go through the wire. But after ten days we got jobs outside the compound which was unheard of, if you'd done that for the most of them. But there you are, it was costly for the married people. They were still paying off their fine a year later and I got a job washing the screws clothing and smoking was banned and I smoked in those days and I never washed a shirt without finding two matches in a match box and two cigarettes in a

12:30 pocket there. They just couldn't do that with the rest of the lags. They were, I didn't know there were such dreadful types in gaol, there you are.

So you've gone from Canungra to Atherton Tablelands. You mentioned that at Canungra you got up to some mischief there, is there?

Sorry?

Some mischief at Canungra, anything that springs too mind?

No, I don't think so, just petty drunkenness, not being on parade when you should be.

13:00 I can't honestly say Colin, they were not happy with us probably because we were supposed to, I would assume, setting an example for the younger fellows who were being trained for other squadrons and we just didn't want to do things. No, I don't think we looked like very keen soldiers.

13:30 We'd done it all and we didn't want to learn about how to slope arms. If you didn't know it you didn't have to know about it under the old regime.

Were you guys still considered the glamour pusses of the?

The changed the name to commandoes to try and attract more people because a lot of people weren't rushing into. Yeah, we still had British battledress, lovely berets.

14:00 Yeah, I don't know whether that glamour pusses, we were still a unique group and the magic had gone from the name because a lot of them weren't coming back but the other units respected us. The infantry we worked with later in Borneo etcetera and etcetera but on the Tablelands, oh yes it comes to mind up here we had several camps on the Tablelands

14:30 apart from the one we mutinied at. One was out at Ravenshoe and the camp there was beside a swimming pool, not a pool, a circular little lake, where the river came in one end under a waterfall and flowed through it and out the other end. And we were enthusiastic swimmers there. We'd go for a swim there

15:00 every afternoon and a feat, a difficult one was to dive under the waterfall and come up in this beautiful cave behind it, like something out of a fairy thing, green moss and light. Well one day, or one night some of our guys raided our officers' mess and they cleaned it out. I don't think they left anything and the officers searched every, every, every tent

15:30 and part we had in our bags and they never found it but if they'd have gone to that swimming pool five o'clock, the six or eight guys who'd stolen this booze from the officers' mess, if they'd dived under the waterfall into that cave at the back of it, they'd understand why the fellows were coming home half boozed from a healthy swim and that's where I, I never knew it was buried until ten years after the war and

16:00 they tried to get me for weeks there. On the Atherton Tablelands again, we got into trouble, terrible trouble, me, a few of my mates. There was a lot of sweet-corn, maize, grown up there and in the middle of the maize they used to grow peanuts and I was told, I'm not sure, that you had to have a permit to grow peanuts but the farmers didn't always do that.

16:30 They'd dig them up and let them dry in the sun and we went in a couple of times, night time, with our kit bags and came home with dried peanuts. They hadn't been scorched, cooked, and eventually this farmer growing corn it was too much for him. He couldn't go to the police I believe. He came to our CO, we were camped near there and he said, "Your boys have been stealing my peanuts," and

17:00 he said, "What are you going to do about it?" The CO said, "Well we haven't got any money, they haven't. I think I can tell you who they are straightaway without looking." He said, "Well I need my corn picked," and he said, "It will take a week and you can send over a dozen people." Have you ever picked corn in the tropics, this high, there's no wind, it's hotter than a furnace

17:30 and we had to shuck them, I think that's the word the Americans use, take the corn out of the husk and that was the worst week's work I had, in punishment for the theft. We all were guilty of course but a couple of the guys there, this is all recorded in print, so don't worry about me shelfing some of my old mates, the guys went into

18:00 a farmer's poultry yard there one day and came out with about four or five WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. So they've taken them back, cleaned them and kept them a day or so. Then they've done an extraordinary thing. They've asked three officers in charge of their platoon to come and have an evening meal with them, which was unheard of. So the officers couldn't refuse, they said they wanted to say thank you

18:30 and this was the greatest bulldust and lies I've ever heard, so the officers came over to this shed that the boys had built and they got not only freshly barbequed chicken but they've got a cold nine gallon keg there, and the officers were amazed. Anyway they enjoyed and they had plenty to drink and they went back to their own mess to tell their mates they had a good night

19:00 and to have a couple of beers and their mates said, "You won't get a beer in the mess tonight. Some bastard's stolen our nine gallon keg." They'd been drinking their own nine gallon keg, they'd eaten the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s that had been stolen, but this was life, went on.

You had to keep yourselves entertained basically?

I think so. It was a pretty boring life up there but then

19:30 we were.

Had you been doing rehearsing, had you been doing landings?

Well I was just going to say then we went down to Cairns and just above Cairns there's a place called Trinity Beach or Trinity Bay and there we did our beach landing. We'd go out to sea, not in the big, big landing ships we used later. We'd land with tanks too and they were called

20:00 LSVP's, Landing Ships Vehicle and Personnel that could run right onto the beach and one truck would come out and we did this for days and days there. We enjoyed it, and we had swimming races and no-one thought of crocodiles there then and I don't think there was much along the sandy beaches anyway, but we enjoyed that. But we knew what was coming. The Americans had taken Morotai in

20:30 the Halmahera's, up above the top of Dutch New Guinea and there were stories in the paper about this island hopping shouldn't go on when the Americans were right up near Japan anyway but eventually we left Cairns in the big landing ships that take about twenty or thirty tanks. There were probably six or eight of us in the convoy to sail from Morotai, around New Guinea

21:00 and right up there. The first port of call was Milne Bay on the east end of New Guinea. We started off as a convoy with seven LST's [Landing Ship Tanks] say from Cairns. There was only one of us got to Milne Bay in a more or less straight line. Oh we'd gone through a hurricane and the boats scattered and

21:30 I remember saying to one of the crew, "we're lost are we? Do you think he knows where he's going?" He said, "Man, this here captain was a New York taxi driver for twenty years, there's no way he'd get lost anywhere." So we regrouped at Milne Bay, which we have fond memories of, which was now in Australian hands because we'd found the landing plans and up around the top of New Guinea, which was a bit sad because going up near Finschhafen,

22:00 the 6th Division was still fighting on land there. And we were sailing two or three miles out to sea and you could see artillery shells and action going on and here we were sitting watching the lovely patterns of phosphorus in the water and eating American food, which was marvellous for a day then terribly. Australians weren't given to having Johnny cakes with treacle on the

22:30 top of them for breakfast. All of us wanted to have rice again. We got to Morotai which was a huge American base, Halmahera [Island] in the Halmahera's and there we were told we were heading for Borneo and the terribly rich Dutch oilfields at Balikpapan down the south

23:00 of Borneo. A strange thing, half of more of the island of Morotai was held by the Japanese and I remember me and two of my mates walked along the beach one day, told not too, came to a sign saying, "Beyond this point, you're in Japanese territory." "Oh," I thought, "that's a lot of bulldust, we'll keep walking," and then I started to see Japanese footprints and

23:30 I thought it was time, there was a big sign saying, "Beware mate, you're." That night the Americans had theatres, moving theatres wherever they went and they could seat a thousand people out in the open. I suppose they were the first drive-ins but they were walk-ins and when it was half way through I remember saying to my mate Steve, "I reckon that's two Japs sitting over there beside us," and he said, "Yeah, they'd have to be."

24:00 And he said, "Oh a lot of Hawaiian Americans look like Japs." I said, "When this shows over I'm going to tell the CO," so I think it must have been an American provo [Provosts. Military Police] and I said, "I think you've had some Japanese watching this show tonight." He said, "Oh that's not uncommon.

They've got nothing else to do. They're shoot anything." They were walking around the beach, coming in, watching these

24:30 giant screens and he wasn't the least bit worried. They weren't going to shoot us but over on the nearby island, I think that one was called Halmahera, in the Halmahera's, there were a few thousand Japanese and they were so hungry they'd reverted to cannibalism and they'd been living on green coconut juice and when our bombers, American and Australian, came back from Borneo and they had fuel

25:00 and bombs left and fuel and they strafed this island and here were five thousand starving and you could see it happening from where we were living like lords under the Americans, never hungry under them. Gawd knows they were cutting each other's thighs off when they died. A roast person never appealed to me and green coconuts, so they were as sick as dogs and

25:30 dying of starvation there. And then eventually right, we were put onboard LST's, landing ship tanks, with a most enormous unbelievable convoy. There'd be twenty thousand people in it, destroyers or what's the? Corvettes from as far as you could see there to the far horizon back there, fifty ships

26:00 side by side, from one horizon to the other and Catalina's going round and round all day and we had marvellous aerial maps of Balikpapan of where we were going to land. And we were moving along about six miles an hour I think that's all these big lumbering things would do, submarines would have loved us so that's why the Catalina's and the minesweepers out in front. I don't [know] what we did al day, studied maps, laid

26:30 in the sun. I do remember though that our beds were on the top layer of the LST or some of them were. Mine was anyway and they were across the ship like this (demonstrates) and our beds were stretchers with wooden struts underneath them, so when the ship started to roll, the stretcher went side to side, end to end and eventually crashed.

27:00 But you were living back on the boards but it was better than down below where they were in bunks ten people high and God knows what. And we were very well briefed of where we were going to land, where we'd go when we got ashore, turn right and go there and which beach we'd be landed on. And, well on morning on the 1st of July of

27:30 1945 my mate Steve was sleeping beside me and he said, "Wake up Andy, wake up, you'll never see this again in your life," and at the back of Balikpapan were these great, I call them gasometers. You know what a suburban gasometer used to look like in Melbourne? They're not there now are they? They've put all these natural gas but these huge tanks housed oil and as a defence

28:00 the Japanese had set fire to them and the whole of the hillside and it was like seeing the side of the Dandenong,s coming down to the sea in great flames and a marvellous sight. I don't know if you've heard of a group called Z Special and M Special? Well some of our guys went from our unit after to New Guinea to Z Special and one of

28:30 their jobs, they were put in six days early, terrible job, a lot of them didn't come back, not from there but any of the Z Special jobs. They had jobs to go into Balikpapan and find out the depths of the water that we'd meet when we landed and what underwater structures there were that can stop us and where the Japanese gunning placements were ashore. And anyway Keith Streamfellow,

29:00 from our unit, did the reconnaissance, was in our unit, of the depths. We knew exactly when we stepped out of a landing craft we'd be in water to here and how to handle that and etcetera etcetera. They were the bravest of the brave and they used to put two people in on a Japanese island with ten thousand Japs and pick them up by submarine hopefully. And a few of them were caught and under torture, well

29:30 some of them just had to talk. So we landed at, I've seen this wonderful sight and we've gone down the, we're five miles off shore and we've gone down the side of the LST into the smaller LSVP's and the Australian cruiser called [HMAS] Shropshire was just behind our LST. It started firing on the beach and if you've ever been in front of a

30:00 cruiser you'll know why sailors wear this enormous headgear and I don't think any of us have ever had proper ears since that morning. Then we started to assemble in these boats, ran into the beach and a mile from the beach the real blasting of the beach, this is just on daylight. Bombers started coming over in wave after wave after wave, fighters roaring in at sea level

30:30 and then we landed. We weren't actually the very first onto the beach, must have been second and we were in an advance group. Never say we were backward but we weren't the first to actually put our feet on the beach and landing on a beach is not too bad there because the aircraft and the naval people have killed every tree, coconut tree for a mile around.

31:00 And actually it's interesting, the Dutch sent the Australian Government a bill for a few million dollars after the war for destroying all the coconuts. We'd gone into rescue the Dutch territory, but that's another story. So we landed and then we had to go through the people who had taken the beach and that's where we started to get into real trouble. We knew where we had to go and later in the

31:30 Day, our forward scouts, I wasn't a forward scout then, I was back about three or four people, came across the first Japs, who'd been withdrawing in front of us. They were withdrawing and one of our

leaders said, “Righto boys , up and at them.” The scouts had said, “Three down and five to go,” or something and suddenly a year’s training went out and we’d

32:00 been lured into a beautiful, what’s the word I’m talking about?

Ambush?

Ambush, beautiful ambush by the Japanese. Down the middle on a little ridge, ringed by Japanese machineguns and they guessed where we would come in and land, so I was in number one section that was out in front there and I lost six of my best friends in the space of ten minutes there. We were really and truly done

32:30 over proper, all through the enthusiasm of a lieutenant who was one of my dear friends. However I carried him out, pushed him out, he wanted to, round through the kunai, did a long trip and he was bleeding nicely. They never shot at me, I don’t know why. But right beside me they got my mates through the legs and they were gone so number one section was only half a section after that.

33:00 We got back on dusk and we buried them and the next morning we had a wee service and we were off again. We got some reinforcements and for the next six weeks I was either joint forward scout of our unit, not of our whole unit, of our platoon, and I found that much safer than being behind with the other guys. I could

33:30 make decisions and my co-forward scout was a little guy from Robinvale, still a very dear friend of mine, Frank Stringer, about five foot five and we shared each night a shelter hole, which is like a raincoat with buttons down it, so two raincoats and Frank weighted about eight stone and I was back to about fifteen or sixteen and every morning Frank would wake up and a couple of hips like this and he was out in the open

34:00 and I had the whole of his little tent and we still laugh about it. Okay we had a lot of action and I was flattered once. I started to big note. The 3rd Company had landed with us, the 3rd Commando Squadron and I was loaned to them because I knew the topography of a hill we’d taken three or four days later and the 3rd Company had lost it when they moved

34:30 and then they had to retake it again and they borrowed two scouts and I was one of them, from the 5th to show them around. I can be flattered very easily but when we went up the hill with all guns blazing, the Japanese had heard us coming, we never had a shot fired against us anyway. We thought it was a suicidal sort of thing to move straight up a little volcanic like hill but there was a telephone

35:00 still connected there but they only answered Japanese at the other end so that wasn’t much value. But they did have, I do remember they left behind a few tins of Alaskan red salmon. It was the most beautiful red salmon and the most expensive you can still buy and they lived pretty well there. But they treated the natives, they never fed the natives. They died of slave labour

35:30 camps and God knows what. And then we moved inland, we went inland. I’m starting to talk too much aren’t I?

No.

Well we went inland and again I spent a lot of time out in front scouting. I always seem to get caught in these funny stories. I was out one day and I’ve got terribly bad eyesight. It was worse then I think but Vet’s Affairs don’t agree with me,

36:00 but anyway they still give me a little pension. I’m out in front, ten yards out with the second scout who you talk when you know them that well, “Sit down, shut up, don’t move,” or “Come on, we’ll swap,” and I see this thing coming down this narrow track, very narrow, an animal track. It’s coming towards me from fifty yards away and I thought, “God, one of our guys has got lost or an orang-outang or an Indonesian or a Jap,” and I

36:30 didn’t have a clue who it was and they’re zigzagging and he gets to within ten yards from me and I realise why I didn’t recognise him. He’s a Jap kamikaze suicide soldier and he’s covered in hand grenades, so I lifted my Owen gun to hit him and for

37:00 the first time in my life I’d loaded my Owen gun too full and if you load them too full they don’t go off, so here I am pressing a trigger that didn’t kill him. So he comes toward me this far away and I thought there was only thing to do, I lifted up my Owen gun with both ends to try and crash it down on his head and he was the smallest chap I’d ever seen and he looked up at six feet seven and, “Ooooh,” and

37:30 off down a side track. I didn’t follow him but I sent a lot of ammunition after him but our other guys did follow them. They found him but they got him dead and a little hut he’d been living waiting for [us]. Come to think of it later, if I’d had hit him from ten yards away we’d have both been blown up the high hill anyway. But those things happen to me and not long after that that was an area

38:00 there again and we were the bunny, our little group. We were sent in to see if the Japanese had been or were active or resident in this area behind Balikpapan. I was again forward scout, I loved that and I told the guys behind me, some of them were reinforcements, “Look I don’t want to hear not a crackle of footsteps, absolute silence, please.”

38:30 So I came to a clearing and something made me want to stop and listen, just listen, something might have alerted. Monkeys up there were a great giveaway of where the enemy were. They could throw sticks at you or them, and the birdlife if they were disturbed by a patrol, anyhow something disturbed me. I was standing beside six or eight vines that

39:00 hang down from a tree branch, just standing looking and a bit tense and eventually I said, “Come on,” and we moved on and one of the guys caught up with me from behind me in a safe place and he said, “Andy you’re lucky you weren’t eaten then mate.” I said, “What’s the trouble?” He said, “I nearly called out to you but I thought you were all right.” He said, “That wasn’t seven vines hanging down from that tree branch. That was six vines and

39:30 an eighteen foot boa constrictor!” And I learnt then how these great boa constrictors or whatever they’re called, different names, they’re all the same, they’re that fat they can eat a pig, catch their prey. They put their tail around a branch, hang down and a little deer comes running past or a piccaninny and they do just what I did. I never noticed it was there.

40:00 Beautifully coloured, like a yellow and green vine and this damn thing has been sitting there swaying with the wind and then I learnt how they actually catch their prey, by hanging from a branch. Then there were little, I don’t know whether you can say, you asked for incidents. We were way up behind Balikpapan and about six of us and we had a little perimeter and

40:30 we were watching the main highway, which wasn’t a highway. Had been a jeep track once and there was a creek and there were about four hundred Japs on the other side of it and we were on this side. I think there’d be half a dozen of us and we made a perimeter, not much bigger than the size of this room, with grenades and jam tins outside. Some of them

41:00 rattled and some of them went off bang if a Jap kicked it and all night long the local possums, they’re the ones that rattle, they played tunes on the ones that rattled. They didn’t like the ones with hand grenades. Seven in the morning we’re just about to get out of bed and bang, off goes a grenade so a couple of us up out of bed very quickly, grabbed our guns, off down the track

41:30 and we didn’t have to follow them, there was blood, blood, blood for fifty yards and we came to a clearing and here was a brave little Jap. He was sitting there and his mate had copped the worst of it and his mate’s guts were spewed out on the ground and this Jap who was tending him he said virtually in sign language.

Tape 8

00:31 **Okay, so you went into the clearing and?**

Yeah, we followed the blood trail down there and came to this one guy and he said by sign language pointing to his mate who’s guts was joining him to the ground and he wanted to surrender but in a situation like that we didn’t take prisoners. I know the enemy was blamed for not taking prisoners but we looked at each

01:00 other and filled them both with lead and were gone. It was something done and we went back and looked the next day. We’d forgotten to see if they had any good watches on them but the pigs had moved in and pigs don’t leave much litter and they got nice pork fed Japanese there. But I always felt sad about that. It was probably one of the only things I felt a bit guilty was killing someone who wanted to surrender

01:30 and was brave enough to stop by his mate. It’s silly to use the old clique that he might have been the guy who invented the cure for cancer but somewhere deep inside I still think it was the wrong thing, but we had to do it. You didn’t take prisoners when you were in little groups out in the bush.

They were your orders basically weren’t they?

I won’t say orders, we understood what was done and not done. If someone wanted to surrender

02:00 you had to by military law surrender. Anyway did another terrible thing there on a mate of mine. We were up, way up behind Balikpapan sitting with the Japanese pretty close. They’d camp and they’d stay till something really moved them on and I think there were about eight or ten of us

02:30 and we were there for three or four days bored to hell, just hoping the Japanese wouldn’t cross the creek but they didn’t really have any intention of. You can feel safe sometimes even though the enemy is very close. There was a lot of bad in me then, scallywag bad, and we didn’t have much food or didn’t like the food we had so I said, “Now listen, there’s a nice bit of mud here. Get your fist like that, clench your fist, bang it into the mud

03:00 and draw five little claws in front of it and do one over here and put a bit of a ring around the perimeter of mud.” So the walkie talkies had just come in and I get on the walkie talkie or I think I probably

conned a mate to do it, to our headquarters which was ten miles back and said, “Listen we’ve been attacked by tigers or lions. They’ve been through our supplies

03:30 and we’ve got almost nothing left. What can you do about it?” And it was a very dear mate of mine who was on the other end of the thing and he’s gone to the CO and said, “Look Knocker’s in a bit of trouble up there with the wildlife and the tigers and lions and they’ve raided their little hut of food and they’ve got nothing left.” And the CO must have said, “Go to the cookhouse and get some food. They’ll have stuff there and get the jeep and you’ll probably get through.”

04:00 So he got through and he delivered us some very nice little parcels of this and that and we’ve shown him the claw marks. “Gawd” he said, “They’re big. They must be enormous to have claw marks like that,” and he’s got back to headquarters and the CO was waiting for him and he said, “Did you tell me that those fellows up there had been attacked by lions and tigers?” He said, “Yes, do you want to see the marks?” He said, “Remember this,

04:30 there hasn’t been a lion or a tiger in Borneo for the last five hundred years.” He never forgave me for that but here you are, four hundred yards from the Japs and you’re doing crazies like that. Anyway it wasn’t long after that that we got the message that an atom bomb had been dropped on Japan and it took about ten days before these people

05:00 up the road in front of us actually surrendered and going up the road to get them, oh it was a shocking business. There were open graves, mass graves. I remember one shocker of a woman with a baby, probably aged three months. The baby was alive and flyblown and she was dead and the baby was trying to find it’s mother’s breast for a

05:30 feed and I was going to shoot the baby because it was so covered in sores but I think someone put their hand on my shoulder and said, “Don’t.” But they had these carrier lines for rice and they didn’t feed their natives. They just died. There were skeletons all along the track there but an interesting one; I missed out on this again. The

06:00 Sultana being the Sultan’s wife, the Sultana of half of southern Borneo of the Indonesian tribe Sultana and one day when I was doing another damn patrol, she came out of the woods with an entourage of people around her and she was being carried and pushed and she’d been living in the mountains during the Japanese occupation. Her husband had been killed and

06:30 we didn’t realise the importance of, it was like being the king of half of Australia I suppose and we were the first troops that she had met and we could tell her that the Japanese had surrendered or she must have known that. But she had a jewel box apparently and I was the only one of our group that didn’t get a jewel but not knowing her high status they sent her back to Balikpapan on the back of a rice truck,

07:00 when she was used to, in the days of a palace, a real sultan’s palace. I never got to meet the Sultana. I still worry about that. So anyway eventually the surrender, the Japanese surrendered and we went in to meet the group ahead of us. I suppose there was a thousand of them, I don’t know, with a row of four or five jeeps and I was very frightened. The lieutenant in charge of the

07:30 movement, there were two of them, made me sit on the front bonnet of the front jeep in front of the driver. You know what a jeeps like? And I said, “How do we know they’re fair dinkum?” He said, “Well you’ll soon find out,” but that was my reward for doing a bit of forward scouting I suppose. I should have been honoured but in fact I was terrified. We came to

08:00 them after a while and here they were all beside the road with their arms in neat piles, waving the flag, very sullen people. I suppose we would have been under the same circumstances but they did surrender and then the major force at Balikpapan surrendered aboard an Australian naval ship who’s name I should remember and there was a bit of a stir there.

08:30 The admiral had been asked to surrender for the whole of that part of Borneo which he did. He went and signed the papers and the Australian CO said, “You are going to surrender and the sign of surrender will be to present your sword.” and the Japanese swords were absolutely magnificent, being the old family ones. So he reached for his sword and pulled out

09:00 one that the lowest lance corporal might have carried into Borneo, covered in rust and our general had to be content with this filthy looking because the Jap had left his ceremonial family sword back there. So that was the surrender and very quickly after that, you got out of the army according to, if you were an old man and married with three kids and a job, you were sent home quickly. If you were at the other

09:30 end of the job without even a girlfriend, no job, they found something for you to do. So about twenty of us from the 5th were sent across to an island called the Celebes, that crazy island with the legs on it like a drunken squid and the town was Macassar, which I wish I’d known more about but the Portuguese held it first and then the Dutch. It was a fort for the Portuguese way

10:00 back in the fifteen hundreds, when the sailing ships used to call in there and our job was too, because the Japanese had had it right through the war. They had just released the Dutch prisoners and everything and our job was to, I suppose we were the first peacekeeping troops. They never told us that. We had to protect the Dutch from the Miraputi which were the red and whites and that was the birth of Indonesia.

10:30 We saw that actually happen in our six months there and the Miraputi, the local Indonesians, if a Dutchman went to sleep in front of an open window he'd finish up with a (demonstrates), this is out in the woods where we were. And we had to find Japanese caches. Do they say cache or cache these days? Underground caches of rifles and ammunition that the Japs had buried

11:00 and they were pretty sure they were going to come back one day and they'd buried them in oiled oilskin and we had to get the local natives to tell us where they were and unbury them and send them back to Macassar. So we were there from August I suppose, July, August, September 45 to the first quarter of 46 and we saw and we lived a pretty

11:30 good life there but the only trouble was we found the Indonesians who were trying to take the country, much easier to live with than the Dutchmen. I hope there aren't too many Dutchmen who are going to. The Dutchmen were very good settlers. They organised the Netherlands East Indies and they built roads and they did everything but the Indonesians wanted to have it as their country and it was a wealthy

12:00 rich country which they didn't take long to mess that up, the Indonesians and we had to go out quite often. Oh yes the natives had shelfed a Jap who had stayed behind and refused to surrender and we'd go out and get him or try to get him and the Dutch also they'd buried before the war started, deposits of

12:30 schnapps. Do you know what schnapps are? The most violently potent alcohol you could get and they'd found these old things and they'd bring them in and they'd start quaffing and have a glass. You'd have a glass and you couldn't speak and it's like a day's spent with you talking here, your throat was gone but it was better than the old Tiger Three Star Brandy that they sold in Macassar.

13:00 And the locals said, "Look keep it a couple of days. It's still hot from coming out." that's how old it was, "It's still hot from coming out of the stills, but put a bit of lemon juice with it." It was a rice made brandy and terrible and we set up our own still there for a while and in Borneo and put in any porridge we had and we had a thing called a chipper and we'd let it ferment and it distilled the liquor from the,

13:30 through a copper pipe with wet towels and you'd put your pannikin under it, I've cut a long story short, and pure alcohol dripped out of the end. It would send you blind as quick as could be. And then it was back to the Australia on, our points had come up.

This is early 46?

Yeah, early 46 and still wasn't ready to get out of the army so my mate and I from the 5th were assigned to Hawthorn

14:00 to the old Victorian Scottish Regiment which had now become a war graves unit painting war graves. We had to report to the sergeant painter, which we did. And poor old Fred, who was a little bit of a stutter, he said, "Welcome boys," he said, "I've only met the CO once but he's a ter-terrible man. They call him Fearless Fred and he was in a commando squadron and he got

14:30 wounded in Borneo and he was also promoted from private to lieutenant in the field in the Middle East and when you go up to the pub for lunch, you've got sixty minutes no more." Evan, my mate and I looked at each other and there's only one Fearless Fred and he was the guy I'd helped out when he was wounded from Number One Section first day ashore. He knew that we were

15:00 appointed to his unit and we hadn't been told who the CO was so lunch time comes. We go up to the pub. The sergeant says "One o'clock, exactly one," because it came one o'clock and there's no sign of him. The sergeant's had word from the city office, from the barracks that the CO's coming out to inspect. That was all bulldust. The CO was coming out to see two of his old troops.

15:30 So he come in, looked at the sergeant, said, "It looks all right here. Where are my two new troops?" And the sergeant had to say, "I think they've gone to the hotel sir," and he said, "I'll fix that up all right," and off he marched to the hotel. And we had the most wonderful reunion and we weren't sighted for two days, but Fred didn't like Fearless Fred, the city office, so being in charge of Victorian war graves he

16:00 loved to inspect a country graveyard where they were soldiers, in a little compound dedicated to servicemen. So one day he said, "Look next weekend we're going down to Sale," where the air force had a station there and a few people had been killed and the Sale airport, funeral parlour, what do you call it? "The Sale cemetery I believe is being overrun by rabbits, so we'll go down and inspect,

16:30 have a few inspecting other cemeteries and come back Monday." We'd gone down there and taken ten minutes to find out that there was about two rabbits in the Sale cemetery, booked into the local pub, had a couple of pretty wet days and gone back to my friend Evan, I won't use his full name, he lived down Brighton way, and we parked,

17:00 it was a truck we were in. Fred was driving it and he had authority to drive a truck and we parked the car under some oak trees, probably a few hundred yards from Evan's house and found Evan's place, well he'd shown us. Had a ball there that night, stayed and slept on the floor. The next morning we'd gone out to try and find the truck. No way in the world could we remember where we left it; had to ring the

17:30 provos and Fred made a speech to them and he said, “Terrible youth of today, steal anything,” and the provos said, “Oh they’ve found it but someone has run it through an oak tree and a branch has gone through the canvas roof.” “Oh,” said Fred “You can’t trust anyone.” Well eventually we were discharged and that was it and that’s sort of my war story but let me

18:00 point out, it’s not a documentary about the 5th. I wasn’t a brave soldier, very ordinary soldier and there’s people who really did eight times more than I did.

Well that’s terrific. Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions about that period?

Oh yes, as long as I can answer them.

Well I’m sure you’ll do your best. Just going back and we’ve interviewed a number of blokes who were in Borneo, Balikpapan but no-ones really given us as much detail as you have

18:30 **of the real, blood and guts basically of what was going on there so it would be great to hear a bit more if possible. Talking about Fearless Fred, he was that one you pulled out that first big attack?**

He was the CO of our section. Every section had a lieutenant and he was my boss, immediate boss up on the Tablelands and he’d been in the Middle East, come back and wanted to join a commando unit and he had been promoted in Greece from private

19:00 to lieutenant in the field. And Fearless was right, he couldn’t be restrained, nothing subtle about him. If there were Japanese there he had to go and get them and there wasn’t any circling around. Anyway he was a wonderful guy and we became terribly good friends after the war too and Evan’s still alive and we have a reunion once a year

19:30 at Canberra. We never talk about the war, just about growing pumpkins and the rabbits and your place and grandchildren. Go on, you had more question.

Oh no, I just said maybe you should have a glass of water because you’re sounding a little bit croaky there?

It’s not water, it’s lemonade.

Well have some lemonade.

Beautiful too.

Now can you talk us through in a bit more detail that skirmish that you had there where you lost six of your mates? That was?

Yeah, that was Number One Section.

20:00 **Yeah, because in the excitement of the moment you sort of rushed through that?**

It was kunai grass and the scouts out ahead, like they were, fifty yards ahead and they came across a couple of Japs at a little knoll where there were some trees and they quickly shot two and called out, “There’s two down, three to go,” or whatever and we were urged to move in and follow them. Well once we

20:30 got out of a few trees and into the open, down a track to chase those Japs, the one’s on the rim of the hill, two hundred yards away, they had this track under, they’d set the machineguns up expecting us to come, some troops, not us, around that way and they caught us badly there. And well

21:00 it was a nasty scene because like, I was here walking out and my really best mate Steve was shot through both his legs there and he wasn’t going to live for long as the blood was [pouring out] and anyone who went near him he was shot.

So people went to try to help?

Yeah, they did, foolishly I suppose and then of all things the doctor came down a bit later and he tried to help

21:30 and he was recommended for a VC for coming in, but the truth was that doctors aren’t employed to go down and help people who are under heavy fire or dead or about to die; he should have never have been there. He was a wonderful doctor but he got killed too so it was the first day ashore and not a very happy one.

How is it that you, I mean you’re twice the size of?

22:00 Well maybe I was smarter Colin. Maybe I kept off the track by a yard or a foot. Most of these machineguns that they have on these tracks they’re pointed at one place where they think they’ll see people. I was right down there with them but I don’t think I had the sense, maybe I was just lucky but from the moment I got this dear friend to carry out, I mean push out. You don’t really

22:30 carry people when you’re adult males. You support them and I kept telling them, “Get off the track, keep off this track, we’re going way round,” and they never fired a shot at us around there.

Where had he been hit, Fred?

It led us back to our track at the back, where the headquarters of our unit was but not in sight. Well in sight yes, in sight of the enemy but that was just normal training. You don't go up tracks that are being fired on by machineguns.

23:00 **And you said that you were always keen to go forward scout?**

Yes, I did.

Why?

It goes right back early days at Foster and I might have said something to someone like, "Gawd, he's an old man to be leading the unit," when I saw one of the old ones and I was answered probably by someone who said in rabid tones, "He's a scout," and a scout was

23:30 held in great reverence. They were boundary riders, bushmen and a lot of civilians, civilians being different to farmers, but a scout was always what I felt like and even now around Salamaua the forward scouts of the NGVR, they were revered as being people of their own clan of really wonderful people.

24:00 So when everyone got, not everyone, I became, Sergeant Charlie Fergy said to me, "Knocker you're forward scout," with my little mate Frank, who we still have a beer with once a year at Canberra and we did many miles. I was in front, he'd be in front, leap frogging but it suited two of us

24:30 sleeping under a shelter hole. There was no way he was under the shelter half when he woke up the next morning. A heavy hip can, so we've still got lots of friends. But our job at Balikpapan, I should have said probably, we had to go inland, a little bit, a kilometre, then along the coast, where the aerodrome was and we had to make sure there was no Japanese outside the aerodrome

25:00 because the Americans would only work, they wouldn't bulldoze it and grade it and bring in tons of gravel and stuff if there were Japanese right beside them. So our job was to clear those Japanese out and the moment the, in about four or five days they had that aerodrome, which was full of bomb holes from our bombers and they had it operational for Spitfires from Tarakan, an island further up that the

25:30 allies had taken and they were marvellous at building aerodromes the Americans. They weren't too good as some things but they could do that. So once we'd cleared that then we went chasing them inland.

So was it deemed a wise thing a man of your stature as a forward scout?

Oh I think that's, as long as you can see and

26:00 you don't make too much noise. It was probably a higher appointment in my mind than in the, it's not an appointment that the CO would have once known all his scouts but by that time you'd learnt what to do. Learnt to talk finger talk to the scout behind you or understand what your mate who was a joint scout ahead of you was trying to say (demonstrates), you learn

26:30 or if he looks up, monkeys up there making a lot of noise. You know they're making a lot of noise at you but if there's some further down, fifty yards down, maybe they're making a lot of noise because there is people there. I don't tell that story very well but the birds and things are very important to a scout.

Well that story was,

27:00 **I mean you told us a couple of great stories there but the one with the,**

Python?

Well that and then the suicide one?

The fellow?

Yes with the grenades and who was just basically awe struck by your size it sounds like?

Well he would have pulled the plug if I hadn't been so tall, so there's one advantage there. He would have never seen a six foot seven person with his arms held above his head, ready to crash a rifle down on this little Jap. Anyway

27:30 they're the tales that we don't tell at reunions because we've go family and children and wives and what's happened to so and so?

Were snipers a problem?

No, it was a problem for the Japanese when, we had wonderful snipers with very good rifles and the author of that book Double Diamond out there, Black Double Diamond, he was a sniper and they'd call him up, in fact they'd call him up

28:00 for this first day ashore to see if he could get the machine gunners. But snipers weren't a problem as far

as I was concerned but our snipers were very good snipers and I wouldn't have liked to be a Japanese if they moved. The big thing was never to move or shake a bush or anything like that.

How would you characterise the resistance that you, obviously it was pretty tough at first but as it went

28:30 **on what was the resistance like from the Japanese?**

Our resistance to them?

No, their resistance to you guys?

I think many times they could have steamrolled us up along the highway behind Balikpapan but they had enough brains I think to say, "What's the point?" We still had seventeen thousand people of the 7th Division back at the beach so their orders were probably just

29:00 keep withdrawing because the big prize was the oil fields further inland, up at Celerina and they were still producing and I suppose, looking back, there was no way the Japanese were going to protect them but that would have been what, that was where they were heading. They didn't do it in one go. They're good soldiers the Japanese. Not too good with the people working for them, the natives I mean, dreadful.

29:30 **You mentioned the mother and child, she was dead, the baby that was obviously in an awful state, did they end up taking the baby somewhere?**

I couldn't tell you what happened. This was just, it was like a set of stable up there at this place and what it had been in Dutch days I don't know but there were dead people everywhere, natives, not too many Japs.

30:00 **How had they been killed the natives?**

Starvation, fever, they never got any medicines anyway but starvation, as in worked to death and it was pretty common. And I think we'd just come to accept that as a scene but what sort of hurt me, I didn't like it was the Japs

30:30 made all the natives bow in front of them whenever they passed them and of course when we landed we also were getting bows from the natives. Well some how we had to tell them and I wasn't the world's best interpreter but one of the members of our unit had been brought up in Dutch New Guinea and he taught me to talk the common Malay, which is right through Malaysia, all the Dutch

31:00 East Indies to west New Guinea. If you can speak that you can communicate so I used to get sixpence a day extra for being an interpreter. That's right, old Sam had taught me and I could talk to the natives and tell them and I had one stock question, "How close are the Japanese? Where are they? How many? Long way away or a little way away?"

31:30 They were pretty smart over there. They'd had some education. In New Guinea a native would say if you asked them whether there was any Japanese near they'd say, "Lick-lick long way," which was different to "Long way lick-lick" and you really never had a clue where they were but in Indonesia they could do a kilometre or whatever and they could give you a pretty fair idea of how many people were there.

Do you remember much of the Malay?

Do I remember it?

Yeah, like what you would ask?

32:00 Yeah.

Do you want to try it on us?

(speaks Malay), shall I keep going? No, I'll tell you, it does stay with you, at the World Masters Games I was competing there last year and a little Chinaman was sitting at our table for breakfast at the Institute of Sport

32:30 at the University and we introduced ourselves and I said in Malaysian (speaks Malay), "From where?" It's simple and he said, "(speaks Malay) what is your name?" And I said (speaks Malay) meaning, "The tall one," and he said, "When, when you there?" And he'd been on Tarakan with our Australian troops there,

33:00 come to Australia just after the war and we both had a conversation over breakfast and he couldn't believe that I hadn't spoken it but when you learn things at seventeen and eighteen, God they stick. We had a funny experience there, talk about counting. We came across out of Balikpapan a building full of Japanese invasion money,

33:30 Dutch guilders printed in Japan and our boss said, "I want that burnt. The Dutch want to get their Wilhelmina guilders," she was the Queen of Holland, "Back into circulation and you go and burn that bank." So we put a few hundred gilders in our pockets as souvenirs and burnt, doused the rest of it,

millions and millions of gilders. We got across to Macassar and

34:00 the Dutch Government is paying six Wilhelmina gilders for every hundred Japanese invasion and we'd just burnt a fortune, a king's fortune there. How did we get onto that? I don't know.

Well I don't know, but it doesn't matter, you got there.

Anyway, any souvenir money we had we got six Dutch guilders which was the same as Australian pounds then, about three gilders to a dollar I suppose, I've forgotten but the black market over there would buy anything from us in

34:30 Macassar and the Celebes. And the Dutch Government was willing to, what should happen to get their Dutch money back into circulation. End of story Colin.

End of that particular story. You've talked about the war ending, I mean when you heard news of the A bombs being dropped where you able to get your head around that?

No, not too quickly. We still had telephone lines up

35:00 and in fact the day before the surrender one of our patrols had gone up with telephone cable, very fine cable through the jungle but they'd been frightened by something and they'd left the whole reel, three miles of wire and I remember the next day someone in authority wanted me and a couple of others to follow the wire up to where the end of it had been dropped. And I said, "No, bloody way.

35:30 If they've left a wire on the ground, they can follow it up themselves." That was my own little personal mutiny because if you were a Jap and you found a wire the first thing you'd do is follow it to where it came from I suppose. And then there were a lot of Japanese out doing reconnaissance work, maybe like that kamikaze guy, who wouldn't have known that Japan had surrendered,

36:00 so I think it was ten days after the 15th of August, was the official day, that the Japanese in our area, up that old highway, actually knew that they had to surrender. They had been told by their headquarters in turn, so it was an awkward period. You wouldn't go walking on your own because you didn't know who the hell you were going to meet around the corner. An orang-outang was all right

36:30 or ou-ran-u-tang "man from the jungle," didn't say orang-outang then, you do at the zoo here.

So in those ten days if you were to fire a shot it was purely self defence, was there any cause for that sort of thing?

I don't think so, not that I remember and one camp we had anyway at dusk a couple of miles away from the Japs, we did a terrible thing, I hope the Greens aren't going to watch this. But come dusk, do you know what a flying squirrel is? He

37:00 climbs up one tree and glides down to the next one, gliders? We had nothing much to do so we'd shoot at these with tracer bullets as they glided from one, never hit one, no way but it was our evening's entertainment at twilight. That's how bad we were in some ways.

37:30 Today I'd shoot the guy who was trying to do it but then it was, and we did get a few beers, Reich's Waverley Bitter from Sydney, in clear bottles. The sunlight didn't do it much good. Aye, but the great thing about having little Frank as my co-scout in the tent, he didn't drink so when we all got two bottles, I got four and good choice of friends.

38:00 **So you talked about the surrender and how sullen the Japanese soldiers were?**

With reason I suppose Colin.

Yeah, now did you have much to do with them? Were you bringing them in?

No, they came in and they got into, they were put into trucks. I think they respected the officers very, very much. They were very whatever an officer said. They wouldn't argue or anything and they were taken down to, oh, look I don't know what camp they taken too but come to think of it, yes there was

38:30 a bit of a row. They were taken home to Japan before some of our soldiers were sent back to Australia but again on second thought, what else can you do with them? You'd have to feed them and America had plenty of liberty ships doing nothing then because they didn't have to supply them. The war at Balikpapan and Borneo was so much out of place, Japan was getting bombed then

39:00 by Flying Fortresses from Okinawa, I think and here we were two thousand miles away, cleaning up little island down there.

Was that an awareness you had at the time?

No, I don't think so but some of the lieutenants, more intelligent, the elder people, they knew it at the time and they knew they could talk a government, a foolish man of the such and such government, that they wanted to, they didn't want to pull out of the war and leave the

39:30 Americans alone because they were probably interested in getting help from the Americans for something. I've explained that very badly but it was a political decision, not a military decision to do this

island hopping around there.

Tape 9

00:32 **Okay, so we're back on, yeah, your time in Macassar and what actually was your role there and what were you doing?**

This was, I spent most of my time up in the hills outside Macassar and quite a lot of time in Macassar itself, which was a marvellous city and I was too young to appreciate it because as I said earlier I think it dates back the Portuguese settlement there

01:00 and I think the Dutch kicked out the Portuguese. And of course these were the seafarers, the great seafarers who came across from Macassar, the Macassar men, to Cape York and those, not man wan trees, I'll think of it, the sacred something tree, that grow on Thursday Island now, they were bought across by the Macassar men in their canoes, sailing canoes, way back hundreds of years ago. They came across

01:30 every year, to collect beche-de-mer, those slugs that you get up there. I've never eaten one but they're a delicacy back in Indonesia, so the Macassar men were noted sailors and that was there. And they'd pull in there to Macassar from all over the Netherlands East Indies as it was, trading tobacco or rice or anything

02:00 and there was a terribly long wharf there with these families living on the, I think they were like prahoe, P R A H O E, or P R O W, prow was the way you announced it and they were sailors and that was their home and they were pretty good people. Because they liked us a bit more than the Dutch and out where I was at a little crossroads of a place,

02:30 who's name will come to me soon, there was an old Shell station, Shell being the big Dutch petrol company, the same as we've got here, half owned by the Dutch Royal Family I think. And there was this petrol station there and we had a guard duty, we were on guard there all night, one of us and I always felt quite safe. But if a Dutchman

03:00 had done, gone on guard and gone to sleep he wouldn't have woken up. So I've woken up there one night, we'd had too much to drink, old Tiger Three Star Brandy, and I've been on guard and I haven't woken the next bloke at three o'clock in the morning. I've woken up six o'clock in the morning, looked out, "Where's my gun?" God strike me, no gun and an Indonesian native appeared from the little village we were at and in sign

03:30 language and my sort of Malay he said, "Do not worry, your gun I put it on your bed." And as I said, if I'd been a Dutchman I'd have got the full part of the gun and the gun would have never been seen again. And at night time we always went to the local little coffee shop. I didn't like their coffee much but righto we went there and we used to play with the kids by

04:00 day too, football or anything, when we weren't doing something serious. They all had a little soccer ground, each of these little villages and I can remember quite distinctly going into one of these little cafes one night and they were only as big as this room. They weren't long, elongated rooms and one of the natives there sang to us and sang,

04:30 "Slamat malam," "Goodnight," and he said, "I nearly shot you today," and I said, "Thanks very much." They had a roadblock stopping the Dutch military trucks going north to Parri-Parri or whatever and they'd built a roadblock so the truck couldn't get through and of course our job was to protect the Dutch was to go along and break up these road blocks. Well

05:00 we never fired at the natives, fired over their heads and they had some guns and they fired over our heads. It was quite a, and he said, "Nearly shot your today," and I said, "Don't do it tomorrow will you?" This was a relationship that you couldn't believe but we didn't, we tried not to take sides with either the Dutch or the natives but we got on so well with the natives. We'd never had eggs for months, years and I remember buying

05:30 a bucketful of duck eggs and boiling them. Ducks are pretty plentiful over there and boiling them and eating duck eggs for about two or three days. We did have local food and the local rajah, in charge of a pretty big area. He asked us to have lunch with him one day, the twenty people who were at this village where I was at and we went

06:00 over and I still cook it today. I love cooking curries but I have a, I think you might know it as a reche-style fellor[?]. I have curried goat at one end, although it's lamb here or beef, then a thousand little selpacorns around the table of anything that will burn your throat to coconut milk to all sorts of things. And we walked into his

06:30 house and he said to me, "punass" which is "hot" to tell the boys and "dingin" is "cold." So I sat down and, "dingin, digin, punass, punass, don't touch that bloody stuff will kill you." But his idea of what was hot and ours, the coldest things there,

07:00 we all had a little bit of this with our goat's meat and headed for the..., there was no ice water but he lived in quite a palace there. He was only the local area sultan, so we got on well with him, and we got plenty of, we paid for it, pawpaws and mangoes and etcetera, etcetera, fish. We lived well over there and we sold a lot of our official army

07:30 clothing. In fact the pay office in Melbourne who used to get copies of how our pay book was working in Macassar sent an inquiry up, "Why are these people paying more money into their pay books than they're taking out?" Because we were selling our clothes and things to the natives, terrible I know but that's what the black market is all about, isn't it.

08:00 **So you were getting access to more clothing there?**

No, they were sending stuff up to us, particularly tinned food but we didn't like it, coffee, cigarettes, we had an allowance of cigarettes, we'd sell them for a carton and smoke those dreadful Celebian if that's the wrong word, Celebian cheroot's, very thin, cigars, black like that. Dreadful, no wonder half of us got lung

08:30 cancer later but we'd rather have the money in our pocket than good cigarettes so we sold the Australian cigarettes and smoked the dreadful Indonesian ones that we bought for next to nothing. And at night time too, I can remember, I'm not going to sing I can tell you I promise, no, not even here.

Go on.

Not while the machine's running but the kids and the families taught us

09:00 a local native song, "Turen Boolan," "The crocodile floats on the river, the moon shines on the river, beware young man or you won't see tomorrow," sort of thing but they also taught us, which we had to be careful where we sung, a rousing song "Indonesia, Indonesia," it was the birth of the Indonesian Mirraputti party

09:30 and red and white flags were not allowed by the Dutch anywhere and I can't say we fostered it either and they'd put them on shops and if the Dutch were coming they'd take them off and this was as close as possible before the war actually started, the shooting war and Winning, the Red Steer that we talked of some hours ago,

10:00 who led the raid on Salamaua, he became a mercenary soldier and in Java or Sumatra. He was actually fighting the red and white, the Mirraputti, because he'd been a planter there, a rubber planter pre war and he wasn't that fond of, but he was quite convinced he'd never get killed. And in New Guinea there were tales told of him, when I wasn't there, "Sit down there or you're going

10:30 to get killed, get down behind that log" and he'd be walking around quite fearless. He knew he was never going to get killed but he did, the Indonesians got him in Java or Sumatra in the war that lead to Indonesia becoming it's own nation. Another great guy, I've lost the track of Celebes.

That's okay, that's fine. You go where you want to.

11:00 I must tell you about the other guy, a much maligned guy who hurt my reputation and that of a lot of the people on the day that we landed on Balikpapan, General Douglas MacArthur, chief superior of the whole American Defence Force. And as you know he'd shot through from the Philippines when the Japanese landed

11:30 there and lots of people said he should have stayed but he came to Australia but when we'd been ashore there for half an hour, we were only just a couple of hundred yards inland off the beach, who should appear. He'd come in by flying boat, landed on the beach, come ashore without one weapon on him, General Douglas MacArthur. He was fifty yards from me and my little group and he stood there

12:00 with I might say ten guardsmen close to him all with rifles and machetes and whatever guardsmen have and there was a, as happens up there, a Japanese from somewhere had send a spray of bullets right across there and they all went down to the ground like that, except MacArthur and he stood there and he knew he wasn't going to get killed. And he was quite an inspiration

12:30 but I've heard him rubbished so much, probably with reason about illegal affairs but he and Winning were the two blokes who were sure they weren't going to get killed, and the fact he came ashore to an Australian landing in Borneo I suppose it gave us heart. I didn't think that way then but there he was, just incredible scenes. It only lasted for

13:00 five minutes and then he was gone but righto, that little story.

So on the Celebes what were you actually doing? You were there I understand the road blocks and all the Indonesians and the Dutch, but what about the Japanese, what were you?

Well a lot of the Japanese, not a lot but some in all parts of the world didn't surrender when their troop commanders told them. In fact there was one guy lived up in Borneo for forty years before they found him in a cave but

13:30 some of them were quite convinced that the Japanese were going to come back and that this was just a

temporary thing. Because this had become known, Indonesia, as the Greater South East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, that was the words on their invasion money and I think a lot of them realised that this was only a temporary setback. So they buried a lot of equipment,

14:00 guns, rifles, ammunition and we had to look for that ammunition and we also had to look for Japs that natives had told us, “There’s one living in that village there.” Quite often when we got there he’d gone because he had a bit of goodwill with the natives as well and I can remember watching the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration, they were the local police, they all came from Ambon I think because

14:30 they wanted people with pretty tough good policemen. And we wanted to know where the Jap was near this local village so the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration police guy who was travelling with us got a couple of the local Indonesians and made them sit on a chair, almost on a chair, and came back and kicked them in the groin with their

15:00 boot or bare foot and they talked very, very quickly, “Up the road, turn right, in that house there.” Some pretty rough treatment doing this but we had a lot of spare time, looking sightseeing, drinking.

So you were going out into these areas for the Japanese?

Well we were based out, the little town was called Moiross. It’s come to me after all this time and we’d go out to a little place

15:30 called Bantimorong, which had the world’s most beautiful natural swimming pool I remember, vines and it was outside crocodile territory and we spent a lot of time there. And we did have a bit of medicine and we could help people with ulcers a little bit. We were well thought of and we communicated with the natives and it was probably the wrong thing because the people who take

16:00 over native countries like the Dutch, they were the masters and the complete masters and they were called masters. Every white man was a master until they realised that some of our soldiers were anything but masters, but that was the old style native, the white man and the native which existed in the Netherlands East Indies until the end of the war.

16:30 At the end of the war then that’s when they decided it was time we become our own nation and there we are today, our nearest neighbours.

Why did some of the Indonesians not want to co-operate about the Japanese?

You do ask difficult questions Cath, maybe because the Japanese had bribed them with money. I really I can’t tell you. Maybe because they decided

17:00 not to co-operate with Australians or any invading troops. We had a couple of cheeky Indonesians who worked for us, yes at Moiross and we had to get, I feel this was a bad, we did a bad thing. We were due to go back to Australia and we were going to be relieved by these marvellously disciplined India Ghurkha regiment,

17:30 which was one of the great regiments of the world with dress and bearing and they’re all six feet six and we had two of the boys who had been in our area. We used to pay them to do the washing up or washing clothes and don’t be shocked but we only Knackers and Balls, they were their names.

18:00 So the Ghurkha’s were coming the next day and they wanted to know how to speak to the Ghurkha’s. So we taught them, parrot fashion to say, “Hello you great black bastard, welcome to the Moiross.” Well what a Ghurkha would have done, it was a terrible, we shouldn’t have done it but they’d become very cheeky and if they’d said it to one of those Ghurkha’s and got it right God help me I thought afterwards,

18:30 “We shouldn’t have done this.” Anyway we were stupid, we were young, silly, that’s no excuse I know but we didn’t have an officer with us. We made our own decisions and we’d get messages from Macassar. A bit of ego thank you, I was called down to Macassar to play in the Australian Celoision or Macassan Australian basketball

19:00 team, Australian military basketball team against the American naval team and I was quite glad that they played on the wharf beside the American ships or something and the game over I hitchhiked a lift back to Moiross. That’s the only time, I haven’t thought of that for fifty years.

Did you beat them?

God knows, I don’t think we ever beat the Americans, no. We played them a few times in north Queensland and basketball then was a

19:30 little game in Australia and it was already a big, big game in America. Every ship that called into Melbourne after the war had it’s own American basketball team.

And you were playing with the Macassan’s?

No, with the Australian forces at Macassar, or there abouts.

Now these sort of buried ammo [ammunition] and stuff

20:00 **that the Japanese had, were you actually finding this?**

Yeah, we were finding it. We had some pretty good leads to where it was. We didn't go along, we'd go to the head of a village who was probably sympathetic our way and we'd probably been told by Netherlands Indies Civil Administration who to look for and where to go and what to ask and who to see, because they were pretty short of people there, the civil administration. They hadn't been there for four years,

20:30 the country had been overrun, so we had pretty good contacts. You just wouldn't go to a town like Ocean Grove and start digging holes. You had to have a lead and then when you got to them, I remember best, I think it was called oilcloth, you can wrap things in oilcloth, paint the gun in grease, dig a hole and bury it and you could pick it up a hundred years later and it would still be pretty good, or five years or

21:00 whatever. What did we do with it after that? I suppose we put it on trucks. It was out of my mind. I don't recall.

Did you come across anything else beside weapons?

No, no money, no, never found any of the Dutch fine old whisky. They knew where it was though and sometimes they'd give us a bottle, Bols was the brands, B O L S. Schnapps,

21:30 Dutch schnapps is the, it's like a gin, strong, oh God. I suppose we drank a bit of it but it was too, for a little innocent guy like me stick to the Australian Reich and the fine old Macassan Three Star brandy, which was still boiling hot when you bought it.

What about documents, anything of importance?

No, we were too late for that Cath. You mean Japanese

22:00 documents? No, the Dutch, the local Dutch or the Dutch in the prison camp at Macassar, they had a lot of Dutch in prison camp there and some pretty sad tales too, they would have know who the cruellest of the Japanese guards were etcetera, etcetera and handed them over to the people who were there before us, just when the war ended. The first little group of Dutch people came

22:30 back in and what they did to the local Japanese gendarmerie I really don't know but life in a Japanese prison camp, for women particularly was pretty sad. And there was a big prison camp at Macassar but they had been actually released before we got there. They were still on the

23:00 streets walking around and able to, they had been given a handout of money. They hadn't been repatriated to, maybe Macassar was where they lived for years and years but they weren't sent back to Holland because most of them would have been in business around Macassar and Macassar was very famous for filigree work, silver filigree work. There were shops everywhere. They'd get strands of silver and make,

23:30 the natives would make these beautiful earrings of twisted silver thread and many, many, you could buy it terribly cheaply there and when you got home you made a very big impression on your girlfriend. I didn't have a girlfriend to take it home to though. I didn't even take it to my mother but the big thing was to buy this filigree work and they made it in front of you and it was beautiful stuff to look at. I remember Macassar as much for

24:00 that as anything.

What about the women over there? How were they treated by the Japanese?

The native women?

Mh, the native women.

Alright, except close to town or in the towns I think. In Borneo they were treated pretty badly. They set up their own brothels there and they did in other parts too, through my reading.

24:30 I can't fully answer your question in Macassar because I don't know. I just know from hearsay that they're pretty ruthless on women the Japs.

Were there brothels in Macassar?

I don't know, oh there were certainly brothels there. I think there were native ones because oh we were warned very much not to go near them because of the syphilis rate was just incredible. The Japanese carried it like

25:00 flies on their back but I didn't know anything about life like that at that age. I was uneducated. No way, I wouldn't have know where to find one. Red light, there were red light units that gave you treatment after you'd been to a brothel and I don't know what the treatment was but a lot of our guys, not a lot of our guys, quite a few of our guys got venereal disease and their pay was stopped and they sent to an island off Queensland I think until

25:30 they were better and the cure then was a pretty painful cure. But I don't profess to know much about

that Kath. I'm sorry it's a subject.

It's not something that the ordinary men or the more experienced men told you about?

I was still frightened of women when I got back to Australia.

Okay, so when did you leave Macassar?

Oh around March 46

26:00 and I joined the War Graves Unit until my number of points came up because we were at the bottom of the ladder, my mate and myself. Left school without a job, that's worth nothing to you, unmarried, that's worth nothing and you had to have a hundred and twenty points. Four years in the army, that didn't count for much. You needed a job, a wife, children and I don't know what else, a degree, but

26:30 people like us, we were the last to get out and we were finally discharged at Royal Park in Melbourne. We were given these bowler hats without a dint in them, civilian clothes and I don't know what happened then. Went down town and got full at Young and Jackson's [hotel] probably, I don't really remember the day itself but we were out of the army.

27:00 And we had to start looking and thinking about work and the army was pretty good. If you had your matriculation you could do a university course on Vet's Affairs, or whatever it was called then and they really did help a lot of people. But I had nothing. I didn't feel like helping myself for a while. The outside world frightened me. I couldn't do anything. I might have been skilled up to a point with a Bren gun or an Owen gun, up to a point,

27:30 but that was the only qualification I had you know, when I got out of the army. So I had quite a few jobs that led nowhere for the first three or four years. Went across to New Zealand, made egg pulp for an egg pulp factory, stuffed feather mattresses with feathers and it took me three or four years to settle down and do something. There you are.

Were you in an anxious state or just restless?

No, I was enjoying life very much. I still had some deferred pay to live on

28:00 and I was getting a few hints from Dad that it was time I did something more than go surfing in New Zealand with my friends that I had over there. But [I] never cried, I wasn't angry and of course I wore my army uniform which you're allowed to do for a year or so until you could get

28:30 civvies. Clothing was pretty short, suits and things like that. No, I was quite happy until three years I suppose, out of the army what in 46, 49, yeah, it was then that I started doing something or things.

What did you start doing?

I started managing the golf department at the old Melbourne Sports Depot and then Myers

29:00 asked me to go to them and did the same thing at Myers and I knew there was a richer life and I started free lance journalism. I had some contacts in the industry and then after doing that for a while the Herald asked me to join them as a full time journo and I did that for the rest of my life, crossing from the Herald to The Age, [Melbourne newspapers] back to the Herald, back to The Age. As you know it was an industry where

29:30 people move without loosing face, you're gathering knowledge all the way, freelancing, writing for magazines, Radio Australia, meeting Jean, getting married.

How did you and Jean meet?

I was then, a nice bit of ego again. In 1950 I was Victorian 100 metres freestyle

30:00 champion swimming, and she was swimming with the synchronised swimming group, you know those people who swim to music? And we were asked to go, separately asked, I had to do exhibitions at the country championships at Maryborough and Bendigo and the synchronised swimming girls were putting on shows in the water to music and we met and that was,

30:30 Cathy that was fifty one years ago, wasn't it? 1950 until today, it's lasted; it's worked out all right, so I became a full time journalist and loved the life.

So straight after the war you started training as a swimmer did you?

Training with women?

No, training as a swimmer, well you probably did that as well but

31:00 **training as a swimmer?**

Oh yes, I had a little talent which I'd learnt in the army. We had a junior New South Wales champion and I hadn't ever been taught or belonged to a club and I could hold him over a short distance and he said,

"Listen, you want to have a go when you get back," and when we were doing landing training at Cairns we used to have swims out to a buoy and back and I managed to win one of those. So

31:30 when I got back I spent a lot of time lying in the sun at the old Olympic Pool, wondering what job I'd eventually take and swimming across the pool and a German coach, a marvellous coach came to me one day and he said, "I can make you the fastest swimmer in Victoria," and I said, "Listen Gus, I'm twenty five years of age and I've learnt to smoke and drink and you'd have to be a genius."

32:00 "No," he said, "I" and three or four years later I was state champion and broke the Victorian 100 yards record and that was the start of swimming. Forty four years later I came to it in the vets [Veterans Games] about seven, eight, ten years ago, yeah and I'm still there, coughing and spluttering away up and down the pool.

What swimming in competitions?

Now?

Yes.

Oh very much so, but I've been out of action for the last, a terrible thing

32:30 happened a few months ago. I had the state championships in Melbourne. This is the Vets or Masters and the 100 metres event for seventy, eighty years that's right, I'm eighty now, eighty metres was on, eighty years was on and I got to the fifty metre mark of the pool, down and back and I couldn't go on. I had to crawl out of the pool and walk back to the... I had to go to hospital then

33:00 and that's when, that's why I'm puffing and wheezing a bit now, they said, "You've got this heart problem that doesn't drain out," and just before that they'd put in this pacemaker which tick, ticks away while you're trying to quiz me there but I'm well, I'm happy and I haven't smoked for fifteen, twenty years now. But we compete; we have a marvellous group in the eighty plus of

33:30 old timers that I knew from way back and I compete in athletics too in the same way, throwing things but if you're in the shot put in the eighty plus age group, I've got mates from Holland, these are people who came to Australia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, you name it, Serbia. Some of them,

34:00 Germany, my dearest friend. I must tell you a story about my dearest friend. You've got a second have you? Well I said, "Listen we've all got a war story," to this guy who speaks absolutely perfect English, a gentleman. I said to him, "I know everyone's story here except your's. What were you in the war?" He must have been through the war to be eighty see, in the eighty plus age

34:30 group and he said, "I was a fighter pilot" and I said, "Lucky you." I said, "I always wanted to be a fighter pilot. What did you fly? Hurricanes or Spitfires in the Battle of Britain?" "No," he laughed, "Messerschmitts in the Battle of Berlin." And he was with the Luftwaffe [German Air Force] and I made the point, so he was a German

35:00 fighter pilot and my closest friend and all my friends in athletics have been opponents or allies in some ways and I have another dear friend who was both in the German Army and the Russian Army. That's a mixed up story. He comes from Latvia and the Russians overran it first and he found that the Germans could offer him a meal because Latvia was pretty neutral.

35:30 It was in between the two, so I think he was in the Russian Army first and I don't know what happened there but at the end of the war he joined the German Army to fight his old opponents, his old army, the Russians, which we laugh and laugh about these things, never about graveyards and no. Go on Cath, what else?

Okay, well we've just got a few more.

You've run out of time?

No, no, not quite.

36:00 **I've got to ask you, you mentioned something about trading pages of the Women's Weekly in New Guinea?**

Oh a page of newspaper was even before we went there a very good trade. There wasn't much money up in the Highlands so the patrol officers, I gather, or the miners, they knew that a cowry shell for instance, from down on the beach

36:30 at Lae would buy quite a lot of vegetables up in the Highlands where they grew vegetables. You know what I mean but I can't think of it, I don't have a brain, the Highlands, the New Guinea Highlands. Very cold and they grow strawberries up there, beautiful but we learnt and were told very quickly that a page of newspaper was not to be given away lightly because they had nothing to roll their cigarettes

37:00 in and they cut up a newspaper and.

Where were you getting the newspaper or the magazines from?

Where did we get the information from?

Well where did you get the newspapers or the Women's Weekly's from?

Well we were probably told to keep any papers we could find in the miner's houses as soon as we got there to Bulolo. We tried to carry newspaper with us, any newspaper but the Women's Weekly was a favourite with the natives. I don't know,

37:30 it wasn't colour print then but maybe the size of it and it was a shiny paper, slightly shiny and it was better than newsprint and maybe that appealed to them, but the Women's Weekly was.

Did they read it? Did they look at the pictures?

No, they made cigarettes, no all they wanted it for was to make, they couldn't read, barely talk except the ones that had been around town but that was there, they really wanted. They didn't mind

38:00 in desperation rolling a cigar out of a leaf but it was much more economical for them to have a piece of paper and make short cigarettes than a long cigar type of thing. So newspapers bought us lots and lots of kow-kow and oh probably taro, that tapioca, not tapioca, that root thing like a lily that you eat the base of it. Oh you could live on anything with a few sheets of newspaper for a while.

38:30 **We're at the end of the tape.**

At the end of the tape, thank you Colin, thank you Cathy.

Thank you.

It's twenty five to six. I've missed my evening game of croquet.

INTERVIEW ENDS