Australians at War Film Archive

William Huxley - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Tell me about growing up in Charters Towers.**

There's not that much to tell about it. It's just an ordinary city. Most of it is

01:00 the era you lived in. Convention of that era is a big thing. I was born in Townsville. When I was ten days old I was taken to Hughenden because my father was wagon builder on the railway there. My early years was in Hughenden. We came down here before

01:30 I started school.

Do you remember anything about Hughenden?

Yeah.

What do you remember?

We used to go through the schoolyard to a grocery shop called Pool's. I can remember my mother sending us for egg cups. The elder brother and myself. Mr Pool up them all in an

02:00 envelope. In those days all the bottles had straw envelopes over them when they were forwarded. We got into the middle of the school and some kid was gonna belt me up. I was only a little fellow, about three, and the older brother got into him with the envelope of egg cups.

02:30 Things like that you remember. I remember all the goats in Hughenden. The slaughter yard that was at the back. Quite a lot. I remember coming down in the train too. I was a bit fearful about when the train went through a cutting and all these rocks passing the

03:00 carriage window. Things like that that stick in your mind. We came down here. We rented a house in Rind Street here and it was called Hanson's Terrace. There was five houses together. I can remember my Dad saying, "We'll shift out of here. People can see what you've got on your dinner plate

03:30 they're that close." So we went from there. He bought a house in the corner of Park and Boundary Street. We still had the house he built in Hughenden. So we used to commute back when he wanted to maintenance it and paint it and things like that during school holidays

04:00 until he sold it in the late '20s. Then I started school at the girls' central school.

What are your memories of that school?

I remember the first day bawling, leaving the mother at the gate. It was sudden death then. I think the principal they use now of pre-school and kiddies

04:30 when they come in, there's no sudden death like you suddenly you're home and all of a sudden you're thrown into the school. First day of school in those days, the kids had a bawling match. So you went to pinafore at the girls' school and then they put you over to the boys' school.

05:00 I went to the boys' school there in 1929. Then I went up to what they call intermediate. It was high school secondary. Put six months in there and then my people sent me to Mount Carmel. It was a college here. It's called Columba at the present time. So I went there

05:30 until I was 15. As I said before I sat for the grocer exam and got the job. I was put off when I was 17 because of the necessary to pay me higher wages and put a younger person on. Then I took an apprenticeship as a baking and pastry cook.

Tell me more about Mount Carmel and what you did?

06:00 At Mount Carmel we were involved in a lot of sport and there was a lot of Christian education mixed up

with scholastic education in those Christian Brothers schools. Sports, you had to be in sport. Picked what you wanted to play, but you

06:30 still had to be involved in those days.

What was your sport?

I used to play football and athletics and that. I done my knee playing football there, so Dad said, “No more football for you.” You took notice of your parents in those days too. If they said that then that was it. Parental

07:00 discipline was a lot better than it is today. I think you were taught right from the jump that you obey and that's all about it. That great saying was there if you stood around listening to other people talking you get a backhand and they say, “A little boy should be seen and not heard.” You moved away quick smart. Things like that.

07:30 I think it built a better society. You formulate your own code of ethics and everybody had it. Like standing and watching a funeral pass by, everyone stood and took their hat off. Now the cars drive in the middle of traffic will bust

08:00 up a funeral. They don’t worry. Things like that you were taught. They had a yellow chart with red printing on it. It was the manners chart. Once a week they designate a, it was numbered each, each phrase

08:30 of the manners. You went and learned that. And Friday you had to know it or else the Brothers, at the secondary school used to cane you with a lawyer cane, but the brother’s had a strap. They’d strap you this way. The others, the lawyer cane was at the secondary school

09:00 and the primary school the lawyer cane was that way. You learned before with the lawyer cane so you took the sting out of it. The brothers used to hold your thumb and strap you length wise. They had a nail bit in the leather strap to give it fall.

09:30 **Did you ever get that?**

Yes. We had one brother, he assessed all his pupils and say when it come to dictation, “You’re allowed five mistakes, you’re allowed four mistakes and you’re allowed six mistakes.” The six

10:00 mistake bloke got five and the four blokes got give. He got the cuts, the four bloke, but the six bloke, he got out of it because his average was. And you’d be caned on your performance. So it stuck.

What did you think of the brothers?

I had a lot of respect for them. I can remember

10:30 the principal. He give us a lecture once and he told us we were all potential fathers if we didn’t join the religious order. He said, “As a potential father you have so many things you should impart to your children. You’re

11:00 responsible for their security and maintenance of them, their spiritual education, their scholastically education and their worldly education. And don’t forget it.” Things like that you were taught. I think they were very complete in what they imparted

11:30 to you. But when the Depression came on and everyone was getting put off and out of work and the railways cut down my Dad had two and a half days he was transferred to Townsville and given two and a half days’ work. Being a leading hand carpenter they maintained him

12:00 by giving him two and a half days’ work in Townsville. So he had to keep a wife and three boys up here and himself in Townsville on two and a half days’ work. So it was a bit tight until they had a change of government and things picked up. That’s what the Brothers were all about.

How did the Depression affect your family?

12:30 We were better off than a lot of them. During the Depression the government used to keep those that were out of work circulating. They’d issued them a, it’s like dole today, they’d issue them seven shillings’ worth of rations a week. That seven shillings’ worth of food.

13:00 Seven shillings bought a lot of food in that day. Enough for a fellow for a week. They had to be so many mile away from their last issue. I think it was 50 mile, I’m not certain of that, I was never on the ration part of it. I think it was 50 mile they had to be away. So if they got a ration ticket off the police

13:30 here they had to be up at Pendleton before they got the next one. It kept the population moving. That went on until World War II started and it just absorbed all the unemployed like that. The Depression was over and everyone had work whether they were in the army or not.

14:00 **Did you have to leave school to get work because of the Depression ?**

That was the reason I had to leave. When Dad was transferred to Townsville. They used to pay three guineas and a quarter for my education at Mount Carmel. That was three pounds three shillings in those days.

14:30 That was the reason I had to leave.

Were you unhappy about leaving Mount Carmel?

Yes. I felt as though the mat was pulled from under me. You're at school one minute on the Saturday and I was working on the Monday. It was just boom, like that. It was not a good feeling, but you got on with life and that was it.

15:00 **What was the grocery job like?**

Go to whoa. You were flat out. You daren't look sideways, somebody else would be there, jumping in and take your job quick smart.

You had to do a test at the beginning?

Yeah, I did that exam as I was telling you. We all sat around with spelling and arithmetic.

15:30 That's how I got the job then. That was the grocer job. It lasted till I was 17, a couple of years. As I said I went to be a baker and pastry cook.

Tell us about what happened when you turned 17 at the grocer.

16:00 I used to be weighing up when I first started and I wasn't there long and they put me on the counter as a junior counter hand. You'd be serving people and you learned to stack the groceries and make a parcel of them. The hardest thing to wrap up was a pound of butter and a bottle of olive oil. So you made two separate parcels of them. But the

16:30 boss would be on your back to make sure that you didn't use excess paper. If there was a piece of string on the floor you had to pick it up and tie it onto the roll of string they used to have down when you made the parcel for the people to carry their groceries home and things like that. First thing in the morning you had to go out. The grocery shop

17:00 I worked for was Peeper Cash Store, it was near the post office there. Our first thing, as soon as the doors were open, this fellow and I had to go out and sweep the footpath. Then they had little drink things on each corner for the dogs that were running up and down the street to have a drink. You filled them up.

17:30 Then you came inside and washed your hands and put your apron on and got ready for the early customers. That was the way of the grocery shop. It was a dead-end job and I wasn't mentally attuned to it. I wasn't mentally attuned to the blooming baker's job either, but Depression time you took what. Now they say, "That's

18:00 not my line of work." Go on the dole then till they get something in their line of work. You took what was offering and that was it, whether you liked doing it or not, you did it. What I had mostly against the baker and pastry cooking trade was you were going to work when everybody else was going home to bed sleeping.

When did you

18:30 **start?**

One o'clock. You worked through to nearly dinnertime. Then you went home and slept till about six o'clock and you had, we used to call dinner, tea, quick tea, and jump on your bike and go up and make a bread dough. You'd work for about an hour and then you go home and if you wasn't going out you went to bed till,

19:00 put the alarm on and up at one o'clock and off to work. That was the routine. On Friday there was a bit more. You worked a bit longer because it was more smallgoods produced, because that's the way the public used to shop. I'd go to a dance then. Started

19:30 to go out. Go out to a dance and come onto work and I'd be standing up there half awake and half asleep. Things like that at the bake house.

Did they give you bread and stuff for your family?

Yes, you could take home a loaf of bread. I also used to eat a few buns while I was working and things like that.

20:00 If we had a few extra bits of dough, on the quiet we'd put it at the side, bake it and if any of the hobos came down and wanted to cut wood for it, we'd keep a spare loaf for them and give it to them. Off they went. If the boss wasn't around you were right.

How old

20:30 **were you when your brother died?**

I was working at the bakehouse. In February ’39 he got killed. It happened in our backyard up here at the corner of Park and Boundary Street. My Dad, a fellow come and wanted him to strengthen the chassis of his truck. So

21:00 Dad was hand drilling it and my brother said, “Look Dad, that’s too slow. I’ll get an electric drill and I’ll drill them and you put the hot rivets in and we’ll rivet it up.” So he got a loan of this electric drill and it had water in the armature. Moisture. He got a shock and he tested all the earth and started to drill

21:30 again and it grabbed him properly and knocked him on the ground and he got up with it and it knocked him again and that was the end of it. It was only a matter of seconds and he was dead.

Did that have a big impact on the family?

It did. My parents more so. When I was going to join up the

22:00 AIF [Australian Imperial Force] Dad said, “Your mother’s in a hell of a state. Don’t join up yet.” I said, “I’ve gotta be trained or something.” He said, “Go up and join the militia.” So I did that. Just before that, as I mentioned, the apprenticeship board, the

22:30 boss let the apprenticeship board know that I was thinking of joining up and they advised me that I had a contract with them and that I wasn’t to breach it. So I stopped and I finished in April 1940. I was straight into the army then.

Do you remember when

23:00 **war broke out?**

Yes. Menzies was speaking. I can remember we listened to it and thought, “Well, it’s on again.” All the First World War blokes wanted to join up again. Some of them got away with it by putting their age down.

23:30 Some didn’t. Depends on their aging process, how they looked.

Did you have a radio at home?

Yes, we had a wireless. Everyone had to keep quiet in the house while Dad listened to the news. He’d sit up and listen to the news with a finger up the side of his face like this, be listening to the world news.

24:00 That was when the war started. Our lives changed.

How did it change?

It changed to the degree that you were

24:30 aware. Ordinary things didn’t worry you too much. But then you started to think, “This is getting serious. We could be invaded,” and things like that. Then there was another side to it. More people started to got to dances and amusements and

25:00 things like that.

Throw caution to the wind?

Yes, sort of thing. You lived for the day, attitude. It was slow, the transition.

Did Charters Towers lose lots of young men at that time?

Yes. Up at the

25:30 RSL [Returned and Services League] up the road here there's on a board up of all those that joined. That was put there 30 or 40 years after the war, so there’s some names must be missing. It just cleared the towns of all the young people.

26:00 They were all in the army or navy or air force . Every young person in Pendleton was gone to the war.

Did they have any ceremonies in town when the boys left?

Yes, I remember the first lot leaving and there was a big dance on. They went.

26:30 They were given something too, but I just forget what it was. I can remember the first, about ten of them in the first batch that went. That was about September ’39, the end of September/October. There was a family here. I think they had about seven boys. Six of them were in the army and one in the air force .

27:00 All went. Most families there was one or two or them in the army.

What did you hear of World War I? Did you know many people that had been in World War I?

Yes. I think I married, well even before.

27:30 My mother had a friend, a Mrs Bell, who lived in Bouncer Street just down a block away from us. There was Billy Bell. He was a World War I digger. I can remember him giving me advice saying, “Listen, if they offer you a pension, don’t knock it back. They offered me a pension and I said, ‘I’m right.’

28:00 When I tried to apply for one later on in life they said, ‘You've already refused a pension. So you don’t get one.’” He was gassed from gas. We never run into any gas in the Second World War. He was a good bloke, Billy Bell. World War digger. There was quite a few of them in the town.

28:30 World War I blokes. They all joined the Volunteer Rifles here. They all trained. Some of them were in protected industry jobs. They were in this home defence force too. There was a mixture of First World War blokes and there other

29:00 fellows. So it became a good little unit here in the town. Then I believe all that changed. The Yanks came into the town, the Americans, after December the 7th ’41. The town was riddled with Americans here, because they had the aerodrome here.

Were you in town when that happened?

No, I was gone.

29:30 I was away when the Americans come here. I was in Townsville when they first landed. We were training down there in Townsville and the Americans come. I remember the first lot of anti-aircraft guns that come to Townsville. We were sent to the railway yards to guard them in case of

30:00 sabotage. They went out to Rowes Bay in Townsville and were set up there. We were still training in Townsville when the first Jap planes came over. They were just like moths on the ceiling, they were that high. Taking photos of the place. Then they bombed later on. Bombed Townsville.

30:30 Before I went into the army full time I used to go into the army barracks here and we’d train of a night once a week. You go there and learn rifle drill and machinegun drill and everything like that.

31:00 Then we went in fulltime in October ’41.

Why did you want to join the army?

I don't know. It was just something in here. I wanted to be in it. I could have been in the field bakers, but oh no,

31:30 infantry, I had to be in the fight. Many a time I thought after I’d be better off in the field bakers, especially when the bullets were knocking the leaves down on you like confetti. That was life. It was just something inside. Later on I used to think to myself, “A country worth living in is worth fighting for.” But that wasn't my initial

32:00 idea. I just wanted to be in it.

You wanted to be in the action?

Yeah. I could have automatically walked into a field bakery unit and sat there, protected. It just wasn’t my kettle of fish, that’s all there is about it. I wanted to stay infantry.

How did you react

32:30 **when your father asked you not to join?**

I was a bit confused for a while, but then he came up with the idea of going up there and getting a bit of training. It rationalised things a bit for me. In those days what Dad said was

33:00 law, and that’s all there was about it. He didn’t push it on you, but you knew that you had to conform with the requirements of our family to live as a family.

Did your mum say anything to you at the time?

She probably did, I just can’t recall. I know she was very distressed

33:30 over losing the, he was so much like her to look at too I suppose.

Distressed about losing her son?

Yeah.

How did she change at that point?

Change? She was talking about him all the time. It was uppermost in her mind all the time. It was only time that gradually - I wasn’t there for

34:00 that period. A couple of years after I was away in the army, we went to overseas in ’43, but before that

we went up to Cape York and places like that.

34:30 **How long were you in the CMF [Citizens' Military Force]?**

I was going up to there from October '39 till March

35:00 before a bloke came up from Townsville to sign us. There was a handful of us that were doing that at the drill hall, and they signed us up then in the March of 1940. We weren't in the army actually even though we were training, because he hadn't come up.

35:30 He was an enlistment officer I think they called him, from Townsville called Claude Stray.

What did you have to do when he came up?

We got a medical and signed our papers and that we were joining and things like that.

What was involved in the medical?

Just a routine and a urine test and eye test.

36:00 I bluffed my way through the eye test because when I was about four I got hit in the eye with a stone and I had scar tissue on. So I didn't see too well out of my right eye. He was asking the same questions to the fellows in front of me. You read the bottom line with your left eye and you read the second next line with your right eye.

36:30 He was asking the same questions of them, so I learned the blooming line. In you go.

Did that ever affect your ability to shoot?

I shot off the left shoulder, using my left eye. Once you get used to doing things like that it becomes second

37:00 nature to you. That was the only thing. Instead of shooting off the right you shot the left. That was the only thing with the eye. Didn't worry me too much.

37:30 In action with an Owen gun you have instinctive pointing sense. Like that. So it didn't worry me that much.

How did your mum and dad react when you were recruited?

38:00 I didn't have to go in. I just trained up there. It just become an emergence. The time factor was helping my mother along and Dad I suppose put on a grizzle, but I wasn't there to see it. That was another boy going away, might lose him sort of thing. The young brother, there was eight years between him and I.

38:30 He wasn't of military age when the war finished. He would have been in the next month. The war finished in August and he would have been 18 in September. So she still had the boy, the young fellow, home.

39:00 Do you want to get onto the army time now?

Before you leave Charters Towers, did you have a girlfriend in town?

Yes, I was engaged to a girl. When I was in Dutch New Guinea I got a 'Dear John letter' [informing relationship is over].

How did you meet her?

At a dance.

39:30 Then we got engaged in October '41. I could understand. There was an influx of other fellows.

40:00 I was in Dutch New Guinea. And apparently it wasn't to be, so that was that. I just told her she'd better send the ring back to Mum so she could sell it.

Tape 2

00:33 **What happened when you were recruited?**

First camp was at a place called Miowera. That's the first time I saw the full battalion, because we were just a segment of the battalion here in Charters Towers, training there. Somebody give me one stripe.

01:00 So I was a lance corporal. I became a section leader. That was in Miowera. Then there was a three month's camp and you come back and go back to work. Another three

01:30 months after that there was a second camp. That was in Townsville in the showgrounds. The full battalion was there. That was in 1940, early ’41.

02:00 In October ’41 the battalion was called up to fulltime duty and we were in the showgrounds in Townsville again. Just before that the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] were in Selheim down here had been put together then as an army training camp. They were in Selheim for three weeks

02:30 before they shifted the NCOs and officers to Townsville and the men came in then and then we had the full battalion. Then we were training there and all of a sudden there’s a group of them taken out and sent to New Guinea to the 49th Battalion.

03:00 We got some new fellows come in to fill their place that were untrained and they had to be trained. That was, we were in Cutheringa Park when I can remember an army truck pulled up. We were different squads around training, doing different gun drill and

03:30 parade ground drill. This fellow pulled up with a bandolier of bullets around his, a major. We were the closest squad to him and he came over and commandeered the lot of us and said, “Japan’s at war with us. They bombed Pearl Harbor this morning,” or “last night,” I just forget,

04:00 “We have to go and intern the Japanese residents in the town.” So we were allocated two soldiers and a policeman to each truck. The policeman was given the names cos he knew where to go. We were there to support him. I can remember we went

04:30 to a place in Denham Street, Townsville, Ashibi’s Laundry, and we took the bloke there. Then we went to the Seaview Hotel and got the cook from there. Then we went to the, I forget the name, but Rallys owned it, it was a Commercial down towards the wharf. He was a cook there. He was going

05:00 crook and reckoned he knew this had been coming seven years when the detective said to him, “You’ve had seven years to pack,” and kicked him in the behind and put him on the truck. He said, “If you’d known it’s been coming for seven years you should be packed, ready,” and put him on the truck. We took them then to the Stewart Prison and unloaded them there. I think we finished up with about

05:30 six Japanese and their luggage. That was all done in one day. Then our company got the job of loading all them on a troop train that had bars on it, like a prison train. They were all taken down south. The funny thing happened, I was walking past with a rifle and a bayonet on

06:00 my shoulder and a hand came out and said, “We still fliends, Mr Hux-e-ley?” And it was the Jap from Charters Towers. We had one Jap in Charters Towers. He used to do the laundry. If we were going to a ball you’d put your stiff collar and fronted shirt in and he’d have it spick and span for you. All was this hand, but I knew the old voice.

06:30 The hand came out between the bars and he said, “We still fliends Mr Hux-e-ley?” He lived in Australia for a good 20 years or so, but he never was sent back, he was sent back to Japan when the war finished. Bob Murikame.

The interns were sent back to Japan?

Yes.

07:00 A lot of them were in Cowra and in Cowra they had a big battle. They broke out of Cowra. I think it was because the Australians were a bit soft on them they took it as a weakness. A lot of the prison guards in Cowra were World War I blokes and there was a couple of them killed

07:30 in the breakout. That’s another story on Cowra. We loaded them all on. We had Christmas at the showgrounds there in Townsville. That was Christmas ’41. After we were training there for a while they took us bush

08:00 in tents. We were in different allocations. We were at Shelley Beach and we had to dig in and dig fortifications there because they expected if they landed they’d land at Shelley Beach and down at Cromarty way. Then we went to a place

Before you go further ahead,

08:30 **tell us about some of your very first training in Townsville and what Townsville was like at that time.**

Townsville only had about 30 something thousand at that time. Now it’s a town of over 150,000. Townsville, living was much the same as up here in the Towers.

09:00 As young fellows all your time off you went to the pub as a group and had a few drinks and then came back. I can remember one fellow getting real full and for our washing they had an ordinary fence with two wires on. This bloke was that full they put the bottom wire up over

09:30 the back of his neck and the top wire down under here and left him there to sober up. Different things like that. There was another fellow that used to go to sleep. We were sleeping in the big hall in

Townsville at the showgrounds. He used to sleep and grind his teeth. They picked him up and put him out on the parade ground and let him sleep out there.

10:00 Different things like that used to happen.

Was the training difficult?

Well, you were young and in condition yourself. You marched everywhere. I never ever fell out of a march the whole six years I was in the army. Because you were in walking condition, because the public walked everywhere that didn't have a bike. Only the young fellows had bikes, and the old men.

10:30 Very few women had bikes. Most the public would walk everywhere in those days. There wasn't that many cars. Anyone that had a motorbike had it confiscated and it was painted army green and given to dispatch riders to use.

Did you miss home?

11:00 Yes, you did. If you got a chance you'd go back quick. I can remember there was trouble in Ayr and Home Hill. Our company was Charters Towers and Home Hill. Home Hill blokes said, "We're going through there, the battalions down there

11:30 are getting cheeky with our women. We're gonna put the cleaner through them. What about coming with us?" We said, "No, we won't come with you, but we'll go through with you and we'll go home to Charters Towers." So we went AWL [Absent Without Leave] up here to Towers and they went to Home Hill and started a big snarl down there and fight

12:00 with the Italians. A lot of the Italians were interned, but the Australian born ones were getting cheeky with the women. So they went and did that. Nobody got into trouble when we got back. It was explained to the powers that be and everything was smoothed over.

12:30 **Was there an Italian community in Charters Towers?**

No. It was in Ayr. But rather than stay in camp and be the goodies,

You all left?

We all left. The Towers blokes went to the Towers to see their families and the Home Hill blokes went down to. There was another fight I was in on the wharf in Townsville.

13:00 We were sent there to load ammunition and that on this boat. These wharfies were calling us scabs [non-union labour] and everything like that. I went over to the toilet, or around to the urinal they had at the back of the toilet, and they saw me going over, these three wharfies. They

13:30 came over and started to pick me, but they didn't know there was one of our blokes in the toilet also. When he heard it was on he came out fast and it was on with us. Apparently they had communistic leanings and they were against the soldiers

14:00 and that, these commos. They didn't last long.

Did you throw a few good punches?

Yes. They weren't in the race with us. We were two young fellows. We were in condition too. Training all the time. If you weren't marching, you were doing unarmed combat and things like that. They thought I was on my own.

14:30 I thought I was too for a while. This other fellow was in the toilet and he raced out quick smart. Probably in there having a smoke on the quiet.

Describe the training camp like in Townsville?

There was a communal bath and a communal toilet. The toilet was a big, long trench.

15:00 44 gallon drums were split down, that put and arch over the toilet and there was seats put on. That's the toilet. Communal toilet. Everyone sitting next-door to one another. The bath was communal bath too. It had hessian all around.

15:30 You soon got used to that type of life. You had your privacy within your family, but army life was different altogether. Everything was communal. They used to designate a company pioneer and his job was to burn those toilets out. They'd put dieseline

16:00 in and throw a match down. I can remember one fellow in the company next-door. He put the diesel in and threw the match down, but he was yapping to a mate and the fumes of the dieseline had accumulated. I don't think he'd put the match down. He threw the dieseline in and was yapping to this fellow and the fumes all accumulated in the

16:30 enclosure. Then he said, "I'd better set this on fire." Whoom. He finished up with a toilet seat around his neck. A fellow called Carpenter. I always remember that. Everyone used to throw muck at him after

that. You'd go on

17:00 manoeuvres. You were on call 24 hours. They told you your pay was six bob a day but it was 24 hours in the day. So you might be sleeping and be called on duty for something. There was a routine in the army. You did the same things at the

17:30 same time each day and things like that. Then we started to go on manoeuvres then. Mock attacks on this and that, or defence. Even the cooks in those days, the cooks had horses on a cooking wagon sort of thing. You'd

18:00 have army stew and bread out on these manoeuvres. To get the cooks used to cooking outside sort of thing.

What happened on a manoeuvre like that?

You had to, the main thing was security. You had to, this is your line of defence and they might say, "You've gotta

18:30 dig in here." Then officers would make an appreciation of the ground and they'd say, there were three sections to a platoon, Your section area is from there to there, sight your guns accordingly. Yours is there to there and theirs is there to there." They'd coordinate the LMG fire, the Light Machinegun fire and things like that

19:00 so that they overlapped one another and give support to one another. You learned the topography of the country, to appreciate it and the best position to put your gun in and things like that in your training. At the same time you had to look towards security. So you had forward outposts as they called them.

19:30 You had a man out there watching for anything, because they'd designate an enemy to be part of their training also, to be reconnoitring our position and things like that. So it worked both ways in the training.

20:00 **As a lance corporal, were your responsibilities bigger?**

Yeah, than just a private. But you had to, you stuck in and learned things. I looked at it as though, "Well, I've just finished one trade, I've gotta learn another one now." I made it my business to learn everything I could because I said to myself,

20:30 "Your life might depend on it one day." You just stuck in and learned. We shifted out of the Showgrounds and went to the Shelley Beach and dug in there. The Japs were in the war by this time. Then we went up to a place called the Upper Bohle, this is all out in the outskirts of Townsville.

21:00 Then we went to Nome. When we were at Bohle we lost some more men. They went and reinforced brigades that were sent to fight at Milne Bay. We got a batch of new fellows and it was training all over again. It browned you off a bit, but it had to be done. Then the Japs were coming through

21:30 Kokoda. From Nome we were put on a train in Townsville and taken through to Chillagoe in the north. At Chillagoe we got into army trucks and we went straight up to the middle of Cape York Peninsula to the tip of it. Three weeks. We had a party ahead of us cutting down the banks. Nothing

22:00 that big had ever gone up there before. This was in '42 we went up there. Round about June/July '42, and the Japs were coming through Kokoda. To take Port Moresby, they had to take Thursday Island and the tip of Cape York

22:30 because they were all in the defence area, so we went up there and we were considered trained then and on active service. We dug in on the aerodrome that was put in there. A place called Higgins Field.

23:00 We stayed there when the Japs retreated from Kokoda, back to Kokoda and to Buna and Gona. The danger was over then and we were brought back to Cairns.

Talk more about the trip up to Cape York.

23:30 **What happened every night? Did you camp somewhere?**

Yes, we'd go into a bay like, all the trucks would pull up and everyone made their own sleeping place. The cooks would get busy and put on a meal. The hardest part of it was putting up with the dust. We'd all have

24:00 bull dust. I forget how many trucks were in the convoy. I know the advance party that were sent to cut down the banks of the rivers and creeks that we had to cross, they were three weeks ahead of us, working. They'd go for their life and make a suitable crossing and

24:30 they'd move onto the next one before we even got there.

How many in one truck?

There'd be about 20 something in one truck.

Was it more than five trucks?

Yes. There was, I've got a book there that somebody wrote. It's got the number of trucks in it.

25:00 It's just gone from the memory. It'd be a couple of mile long the convoy. It was 900 men they were shifting. Not only that there was attached troops. We had artillery fellows attached to us that had been fighting in Greece and Crete. They'd come back to Australia and was attached to us going up there.

25:30 The 2/3rd Artillery mob. When we got up there, there was a survey mob with us doing the maps of the area. Later on a hospital group came up. I can remember we did a compass traverse to put a road in to where

26:00 the area the hospital was being built. It was only a tent hospital, not a wooden one. We then got notice to move out of there. We went to Red Island Point, which is the jetty for the mainland between Thursday Island and

26:30 the tip of Cape York. I lost the trend of it.

When you got that point, what was happening on Thursday Island?

It was like a staging camp for troops, Thursday Island.

27:00 I was sent to a school up there. It was only a few weeks' school and I came back. I came back to Cairns and went up to Thursday Island on the boat. I forget the name of it. I think it was the Canberra.

27:30 I got off at Thursday Island, slept that night at the Quetta Memorial Hall, then got a boat and came across to the mainland to rejoin the battalion again.

What was the course?

Weapons and tactics. I was promoted to corporal after that course. So I became a two-striper then.

What happened in the weapons and tactics course?

28:00 You did mostly drill. They call you out to instruct such and such. They give you notice the night before, "Tomorrow morning you might have to instruct such and such." So that night you did your study and then you got out in front of the squad and started to spruik and impart the knowledge that you'd learned

28:30 there. On Christmas Day 1942 we were loading our trucks onto an American vessel called the Willis Van de Vantia in the strait between the Thursday Island and Red Island Point.

29:00 I can remember being a bit down in the dumps. I had bully beef and a dog biscuit for Christmas dinner and I thought, "This is living it." We loaded and we got back to Cairns then. From there at Cairns they put us out at a place called Edmonton,

29:30 which is south of Cairns. Then Australia was getting down in manpower. They weren't getting the reinforcements in, the reinforcements weren't enough. So they started to join battalions together. So we were the 31st Battalion and the north Queenslanders around Cairns were the 51st. They joined

30:00 the two together. That was after we came back down to Cairns to Edmonton. We trained again, doing manoeuvres, mostly route marches, because we were pretty competent with our gun drill and everything like that. So that was in April '43 then.

Did you lose a brigadier at that point?

30:30 We lost a colonel then.

What happened with that?

The brigadier and the colonel were doing a reconnaissance of an area, I don't know whether it was to be a training area or what, from an aircraft. The aircraft crashed. What made you ask that question?

31:00 This you hear this before?

We've heard a little bit about some of your experiences. I remember hearing about that. It affected the group quite a bit, didn't it?

Yeah. It affected the brigade to a degree that we had to get a new brigadier. We got Stevenson. Carter was our colonel and he was a First World War man and he was retired because of his injuries.

31:30 Then with the composite battalion, when they joined the two together then, we got a fellow called Brock. He was a Middle East man. He'd been fighting in Greece and Crete and Libya. He took us over. In

32:00 June '43 we sailed for Dutch New Guinea.

Was the colonel that you lost well liked by the men?

We didn't have that much to do with him. He was more aloof, little old fellow he was. Brock was a different kettle of fish. He mixed with the men: a younger person too. The old fellow was First World War.

32:30 Brock, he, but we lost Brock then when we got to Dutch New Guinea. There were skin diseases up there that doctors had never ever heard of. Brock got some skin disease and he died in Cairns. He was sent back to the mainland and died in Cairns. Then we got a fellow

33:00 called Parbury sent to us. He was a Middle East man too. He fought in Syria and those places. We got a second in charge of the battalion called Callinen. He was the man that had the 2/2nd commandos in Timor and they were cut off. The Japs had a price on his head in Timor,

33:30 Callinen. He came as 2IC [Second in Command] of our battalion. We were in Dutch New Guinea by this time. Dutch New Guinea, a place called Merauke was the base. A place called Jappro was where the Japs were, in the southern part of

34:00 Dutch New Guinea. But between that would be 500 miles. In the 500 miles there were outposts. That's where the clashes used to take place. Our fellows and the Japs in Dutch New Guinea. Patrolling was very hard there because it was the second biggest swamp area in the world.

34:30 We had little fellows five foot two and five foot one with us. Us taller blokes used to have to hold them by the arm and keep their nose above water to get them through some of the swamps.

Were you prepared enough for that environment when you were training?

I think so, because you just conformed with it.

35:00 A thing I noticed there was from being in the water all the time our greens became brown down at the bottom. The water had taken all the dye out of the green material. But you're young. You conform quick with conditions.

35:30 You soon adapt. I think Australians are pretty good that way. They adapt fairly well.

Did you see some men that couldn't adapt?

Yeah, we had a couple of blokes go off and got bomb, not bomb happy, but they were…

Troppo?

Troppo, yes, they were troppo. Just a couple of them.

36:00 I think they'd be fellows that'd be inclined that way in the first place sort of thing and just couldn't adapt. You got like brothers. If you see a bloke in strife doing something the wrong way you'd tell him and things like that. So that everyone, you were like a team.

When they went troppo,

36:30 **what happened?**

I remember one fellow from another company come through our company. He was climbing a coconut tree. The military police were chasing him. He was trying to climb this coconut tree. The cooks put their head out and didn't he give them a mouthful.

37:00 He was put on a plane and sent back to Australia. You didn't' see them any more. Once they got out of your sight you never saw them again.

What were your first impressions of Dutch New Guinea?

Learning the language. Learning Indonesian. As an NCO we were all told we

37:30 had to stick in and learn the language. It became interesting. It gives you a different trend of thought. The women there, they wear sarongs a lot of them.

38:00 But around the house, when they're doing the housework they're wearing the sarong just from the waist down and were bare topped. If you visited as a stranger they'd unhook it and put it up there. The sarong was then from there to just below their knees. After they got to know you and that you weren't too forward with them and things like

38:30 that they wouldn't worry about showing you.

Was that a surprising for a young Australian man?

To a degree, because you never seen any topless women around Australia. You get the smart alecs. They used to

39:00 categorise their breasts. They used to categorise them as lemons, pawpaws, droopers, super droopers,

and razor strops. That's the way they categorised them. You hear them talking. That was the way of it. I found them a very deep type of people. They wanted to know all your

39:30 business, but they'd close up when you interrogated them about their own: things like that. I remember saying to one bloke, "What do you do if the Japs come?" He said, "Piggy they oot an," go to the jungle. I said to him, "Kanapa?" why?

40:00 He said, "Australia soldato stay to fight for us." That was his attitude: that we were there and paid to fight for them. They were gonna clear out if the Japs came. They weren't gonna stay and fight. So we knew where we stood there.

What did you think of that attitude at the time?

40:30 Well, they had women and children. I suppose they'd take them with them. The Indonesians that were in Dutch New Guinea weren't the indigenous of the place. Apparently they were political prisoners that didn't fall in line with the regime that was in Indonesia and they were

41:00 brought there like convicts from England, were brought here in the early days. Doesn't matter how petty it was, they got a boat ride, just to colonise Dutch New Guinea. So to a degree you could understand their thinking. But that was their home then, so.

Tape 3

00:34 **When you joined the militia what were your expectations of what action you might see in the war?**

We were thinking it might be like World War I. You're thinking back. We couldn't visualise forward. So you just trained accordingly.

01:00 In those days the war establishment was built on the British system. They used to have four sections to the platoon and four platoons to a company. So battalions were bigger. But in, when was it?

01:30 March 1940 they changed to three sections to a platoon and three platoons to a company. The Brits did that and Australia changed accordingly.

As part of the militia that was going to stay in Australia,

02:00 **what did you think you might experience during the war?**

Well, you didn't know. You were always, we might be needed for this or we might be needed for that. Then when Japan came in the war you could see the war clouds were starting to accumulate. We anticipated them coming in, but we never anticipated

02:30 Pearl Harbor like it caught the Yanks with their pants down sort of thing. It flattened them for a while.

When you headed up to Cape York because the Japanese were coming through

They were coming through Kokoda.

What were your thoughts then about what you might have to do?

We thought then that we'd have a fight on our hands. Then we

03:00 got to thinking, when we got up there and seeing the situation, that they could have landed the lowest and cut us off. All they had to do was sit across the neck of the Cape York Peninsula and we were cut off.

What was the feeling in northern Australia at that time about what might happen?

We were kept in the

03:30 dark. There was such a thing as a Brisbane Line. The three battalions in the north were to be sacrificed. The Brisbane Line was across Nambour there. That's where the first line of defence. They were gonna let the Japs have the top of Australia.

04:00 Then the thinking changed once America came into the war. The strategy was changed. That was the Australian generals were gonna do. Use the latitude, everything for the southeast corner. They were just gonna defend that. When the Americans come their strategy was to

04:30 go forward. Hence the reason they went to New Guinea. If you're gonna defend a thing you don't sit on it, you defend the approaches, which was New Guinea.

Did you know about the Brisbane Line back then?

No, we were kept in the dark up there. All we were told that if we had to get out we had to go

05:00 from Castle Hill and The Strand in Townsville, we were dug in there, we had barbed wire up and everything, to Mount Stewart at the back, and from there across to Dotswood and Deeragun if we had to retreat. That's all we were told.

Was there a strong expectation that Japan would invade Australia?

05:30 When they were coming through from Buna and Gona and got to Kokoda there was. The 21st Brigade fought a rearguard action and they were superb, even though they were getting knocked back. But they were outnumbered and poor resources.

06:00 Ammunition and food was, they were only capable of bringing up enough for a one or two battalion front. They couldn't put their number of men in because they never had the resources. An army is only as good as its logistics capabilities. That's what happened there. The 21st Brigade they fought

06:30 a terrific rearguard action and that's what saved Australia.

Before you left for Dutch New Guinea, what did you think of the Japanese as an enemy?

Before the war we always thought that the Japanese were copyists.

07:00 If somebody invented something, they'd copy it. But if a thing was inferior made. They'd put toys on the market with lead. People wouldn't buy that for their children because they could get lead poisoning and things like that. That was the attitude towards them.

07:30 I don't know where it come from, but a lot of them were selling the Japanese cheap, that they couldn't see and all this. They all wore glasses. But they could see all right.

What were the soldiers told to expect of the Japanese as an enemy?

08:00 Most of it discredited the Japs, what we were told.

Had you heard about what was happening on Kokoda?

We were hearing it. Only what they wished to tell you over the radio. Communications weren't developed to such a degree then.

08:30 It was only radio and telephone in those days. So that was the score on communications. The whispers about the Brisbane Line came to us later on, after it was decided to go forward.

When you heard that,

09:00 **what did you think?**

You slapped it off sort of thing as a young fellow. I suppose now I'd have a different attitude. Then you go, "Oh well, it didn't happen. Let's get on with it." And away you went. That was the way of it.

When you arrived in Dutch New Guinea, how confident were you

09:30 **that you could face whatever came?**

I was pretty confident because I felt well trained. I'd done a couple of schools and I was the section leader. I felt pretty confident. As a child I was allowed a pea rifle when I was twelve to go shooting and

10:00 kids would go out in the bush and be shooting feral stuff. You became pretty confident in your capabilities of hitting something when you aimed at it.

Describe the base camp at Merauke.

We were on a bit of a ridge,

10:30 our company, well, the battalion was. There was an aerodrome there. I think it was 74 Squadron was there, or 75, I'm not certain of that. Over the years it's gone. They were meeting the Japs. We'd see the dogfights between our Kitty Hawks and the Japanese Zeros. Our blokes

11:00 were over the top of them. They were all blokes that had been fighting the Germans in the Battle of Britain, so they were pretty capable flyers. You'd get outpost duties sent to Ocarba

11:30 and another place called Ooram. Then there was the Eilanden River, Post Six. Thirteen of our blokes at six took on nearly 300 Japs. It was a case of hit first while you have the element of surprise or be wiped out. So they did that and beat them too.

12:00 **Tell me about the first time you were fired on in Dutch New Guinea.**

No, I never made contact myself in Dutch New Guinea. But some of my section did. They were sent to Post Six.

Did you observe what happened there?

12:30 No, I should have been at Post Six for that fight, but I was taken out and sent to a school. I was sent back to Australia to a school. I was taken out of Post Six to go to this school. When I got back to Merauke they found out I was too late for the start of the school, so they held me over until the next school. It was

13:00 a six week school in Victoria. So I was flown down to Victoria. It was hot as hell in Dutch New Guinea. When I got to Victoria it was snowing. I was lucky. A lot of the fellows got chilblains in the school, but I never got them, I don't know why.

13:30 The school was NCOs from all over the army. Different units. So I had six weeks there before I was flown back to Dutch New Guinea again.

It was while you were away when your section

Between the period that I was held over for the next school because

14:00 of being late. I was back at Merauke when the 13 of them.

What happened there?

In that fight? They were on the delta on the Eilanden River they had the outpost. So the Japs and they were in radio contact with Merauke and the Japs used to

14:30 jam their radio. Before this 13 fight, there had been a clash between two of our fellows and two naval men and some Thursday Island fellows that were on a ship called the Rosemary. It was sent up to investigate how far down the Japs

15:00 had come along the coast. They were on this river and they were coming down the river, our blokes, and the Japs were coming up the river. Two barge loads of Japs and one barge load of Australians. The fight started as soon as they met. The Australians cleaned out the two barge loads of Japs, but they had one fellow killed, a fellow from Townsville called Barbados, a

15:30 Greek born Australia. He was recommended for a Victoria Cross, that Barbados, the job he did. That was the first clash at Post Six. So when the Rosemary limped back to Merauke, 13 were put instead of just two and a few naval blokes and

16:00 Thursday Islander. 13 were put there under an officer called Rudicoff. He was a White Russian, but then the Russian Revolutions came on, his people migrated to Australia. He was a good officer. He thought these ten barge loads of Japs, who was about 32 a barge load.

16:30 The Japs sent eight up around that part of the delta and three came up this way. They pulled up and they were kidnapping some of the native women. They were all in a group. Rudicoff thought, “Well, they’re gonna find us in any case,

17:00 there’s that many of them. Best to hit first.” So he had firstly knocked over 90 before they knew the fight had started, it happened that quick. They panicked. What saved our fellows from them finding out exactly where our fellows were was the echo. They couldn’t define exactly where the firing was coming from, because the mangrove was that thick

17:30 and high it was echoing backwards and forwards and they couldn’t. So our blokes killed quite well over 90 before they started to panic and the barges were running hell of ladder in circles because of that. The Indians were going, but there was nobody guiding them because they were getting knocked off.

18:00 So they started to parade up in front of our fellows after the firing stopped to try and draw the fire, but our fellows were awake and wouldn’t fire at them. Our 13 went back to their outpost and they had pits already dug and they put the night in there expecting the Japs to come looking for them. When daylight came they found

18:30 the Japs had cleared off, licking their wounds. So they were a bit fortunate. And Man magazine in Australia, “Cheeky Australians had 13 of them taken on 300”. They either hit first or lose. That’s what

19:00 they did.

You said you should have been there.

I was the section leader of that section, but I was taken out to go to the school.

What was the purpose of that school?

To educate you in weapons and tactics. Things like that. It was a weapons and tactics school.

You were talking about the school.

19:30 Yeah, I went to Victoria and we were broken in squads. You put your name down alphabetically and then seven squad and the next seven in another squad. It was six weeks. You learned instructing, you learned making

20:00 appreciation of the situations, which was if you were in a tactical situation and you've gotta make an appreciation of it, factors for and against. Whether you attack this way or attack that way, things like that.

20:30 **What were the qualities you had that meant you became a section leader?**

I don't know. I suppose somebody must have thought I

What qualities did you need to be in that position?

There were different types of leadership too. When they amalgamated the battalion there was

21:00 another corporal and his nose was out of joint. He wasn't put in the battalion. He wondered why. Some of the other fellows wondered why too. He led by blackmail sort of thing. "If you don't do this I'll crime you." Instead of showing the way of getting in and doing it with them. I'd tell them, "We've got a job to do," not,

21:30 "You've got a job to do," but, "We've got a job to do," and I worked with them. He'd stand off and say, "Do this. Do that." He wondered why. He led by blackmail, which was a quality the army didn't want. Instead of leading by example.

What

22:00 **relationship did you have with your section?**

Pretty good. For years after the war I used to have fellows from Victoria come up and drive all the way up and call in.

Had you become good friends with anyone by the time you got to Dutch New Guinea?

With your section. You were like a family.

22:30 You looked out for one another. We were in Dutch New Guinea there and that's when we more or less shook down into a good

23:00 battalion, good group. When I went back I wasn't back too long and the battalion was withdrawn. We came home to Australia in round about September/August '44. We were there about 15 months in Dutch New Guinea.

23:30 **15 months you were there?**

About 15 months we were there.

Describe more about the living conditions there.

We were on this high ground and we had tents. We cut grass and thatched covering over our tents because the rain would go

24:00 that consistent that your tent fly and the tent was always wet. So we got timber and any spare time we'd get bamboo and split it down the middle and wire the end of the two pieces and lift it and put grass all along and thatch the roofs of our tents. It was a good

24:30 way of camouflaging from the air too, with these thatched roofs they looked like native huts and that. That's what we used to do in our spare time besides your washing and things like that.

How many people were there in that main camp there?

The full battalion except the

25:00 outpost people.

What was the typical way in which you operated there? How often did you go to outposts? What was life like there?

The turnover at the outposts used to be a couple of months at the time. They'd go back and be relieved by another mob, probably another company and things like that.

What was involved

25:30 **in going to an outpost? You did that.**

I wasn't there long and I had to come back.

What was involved in going to an outpost?

Patrolling. Doing reconnaissance, patrolling. If there was a Jap mob near them, sneak up. And numbers, strength, things like that. You did reconnaissance patrols.

26:00 If you think you'd have a contact with them you'd go as a strong fighting patrol. Therefore you'd have all your ammunition, everything ready to fight.

What were the challenges of the jungle conditions you were in?

For a start, first thing in

26:30 the morning, if you had an early patrol on, you looked at the cobwebs across the track. If they were broken, see the spiders would build a cobweb and there'd be dew on them. If they were broken you knew somebody had passed before you. So you were on the alert, ready. Another thing that used to alert you

27:00 is they had birds there. We used to call them "flying fortresses". If they were aroused and took off you'd know somebody had startled them and you'd hear their wings. You went into ambush position ready to ambush if it was Japs coming along or something like that. Little things like that that was self preservation.

27:30 They meant a lot. Especially on the tracks and things like that. If you were doing reconnaissance in a Jap village you never left a boot mark in their gardens and things like that. You stepped on leaves and things like that and wouldn't let them know that you were there until the

28:00 attack. Till you put in an attack on them, then they'd know you were there.

What would you be carrying on patrol?

Six-day patrol you were flat out carrying everything. You carried your ammunition and your food for six days, each person. Our foodstuff was mostly bully beef in tins and rice.

28:30 In Bougainville we had canned heat. We didn't have that in Dutch New Guinea. We used to make our own little fires. When we were fighting in Bougainville we had canned heat and it was a solidified methylated spirit so that you just put a match to it and it was alight. It was hard to see the flame

29:00 and you just put this can underneath on four sticks and put your dixie on top of it. In no time your rice was boiled. That was in Bougainville. In Dutch New Guinea we used to get our knife and pare a dry piece of bamboo. Pare the outside off

29:30 and get the little slithers of wood and make a fire. Once you got your fire going you were pretty right.

How much ammunition did you carry?

The Bren guns would have all their

30:00 magazines full and each man would carry a bandolier, that's 50 rounds thrown over you like a schoolbag. They'd carry about 50 rounds. That was on those patrols in Dutch New Guinea, but when we got to Bougainville we were trying to pinch

30:30 a few extra bandoliers because we were ready to using the ammunition.

In Dutch New Guinea, was the only weapon you were carrying the Bren gun?

I never carried a Bren gun. That's within your section.

What were you carrying?

I used to like to carry an Owen gun. In Dutch New Guinea I had a rifle

31:00 as a section leader. Each section had a Bren gunner, and he had an offsider, number two on the Bren as they call it. Then you had two Owen guns too. So there's three automatic weapons within seven men. The rest had rifles. That was it for the section.

How much weight were you carrying

31:30 **on patrol?**

80 or 90 pound I should think. It's a big heavy on you when you're in a swamp. I remember one patrol we were on we went to, it was in Dutch New Guinea, I forget the name of the village.

32:00 We went to see if there was Japs in there. We were a day and a half going through this one swamp. That night we slept strapped to the trees. We lengthened our equipment so that it'd go around the tree about that far and just leant back on it and went to sleep.

Why did you sleep strapped to the tree?

We wasn't out of the swamp. It was a day and a

32:30 half march through it. It was that wide.

You slept in the swamp?

Up to the neck in water.

What was that like?

A bit uncomfortable. But exhaustion overcomes everything.

What were the swamps like moving through?

33:00 It was heavy going. The swamps had a lot of bamboo in it. A lot of lilies, not the flowering type, although they could have flowered sometime or other, but more like these lilies you see in the pot plants with the leaves. There was a

33:30 big type of lily that had a big leaf like that and it used to catch the rain. When it got filled up it'd fall over and straighten up and catch more rain. A lot of blokes usen't to bother, but I used to fill my water bottle out of that because I knew it was pure water. It was from the rain.

34:00 We had chlorination tablets and then it had another tablet to take the chlorination taste out, but it wasn't effective. For the sweating we were issued salt tablets, and for malaria we were issued Atebrin.

34:30 **What illnesses did people get while you were there?**

Malaria they'd get. They might be slipping their what-do-you-call-them tablets and not taking them and over they'd go. A lot of skin rashes

35:00 in Dutch New Guinea. Skin rashes that some of the doctors had never heard of.

Did you get sick while you were there?

No, I was a bit fortunate. All I got was a type of wort that's in the ground in the foot, in the arch of the foot here it was growing

35:30 here. You could trace its journey in my instep by a red line where it was eating its way. They used to have a, if they had to cut a boil they'd freeze it first, the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], so all they did was put that same stuff on that and that froze and killed it.

36:00 That's the only thing I got. I was a bit lucky in the army. Only sickness I got was the German measles when there was an epidemic went through back in Australia, one part of it there. Everyone was getting German measles, so I caught them. I done my knee playing football at college and then I redone it a couple of times in the

36:30 army playing football. So that was that. When I got back from that school I was only there, we did a manoeuvre up to a village called Ooram, came back and the next thing we're on a boat coming back to Australia out of Dutch New Guinea then.

While you were in Dutch New Guinea, how close did you come

37:00 **to the Japanese?**

Just at Post Six. But I never saw any of them because they came down to attack that Post Six after I'd left.

So the Japanese villages you went into, they weren't there when you

No.

So you didn't come into any

No, they were doing the same as us. They were patrolling and going into these. The natives

37:30 in Dutch New Guinea, the indigenous ones are called Kai Kais. They're very primitive. Some of them practise cannibalism. So there was two types of people occupying Dutch New Guinea. There was the political Indonesians that were sent there like convicts, and the indigenous, which was the Kai Kai.

38:00 We used to use the Kai Kai natives as carriers when you were on patrol and get them to carry food and ammunition. The trouble is we'd have two sections forward, then we'd have the Kai Kai carriers and then our last section would be behind them. Because if you didn't the Kai Kais would hide the food on the side and the females would follow them up and pick up the food and take it back to the village.

38:30 So we had to out think them.

How did you communicate with them?

We'd have an Indonesian. We'd speak Malayan to the Indonesians. The NCOs were instructed to learn Malayan, some of them didn't learn too well, others became fairly fluent.

39:00 We'd have an Indonesian interpreter that spoke Indonesian and Kai Kai. So we'd speak Malay to them and they'd tell the Kai Kai and that's the way we found their tracks and everything. Especially when we were going through a swamp. They had different tree markings

39:30 and that that they knew where they were going.

How did you find the Kai Kai?

He stunk when he carried something in the hot and we had to march behind him. His BO [body odour], heavy. But then they were primitive people. They used to make huts and have a fire in it and all the smoke and that,

40:00 you could hardly see inside it. We had a couple of blokes that had false teeth and they went each into the hut and put their false teeth in their hand and went like that to them and they all took the side out of the hut in fright. Wondered what it was. They'd never seen false teeth like that. Our blokes just,

40:30 well, wouldn't it create a riot. So that was that. They were primitive. I believe at Post Six they had a war and the old chief's son got killed. They went to show the chief his son when he was killed and when they went over there his

41:00 head had been taken off and there was just a body there. They were still practising head hunting.

Tape 4

00:33 **When you came back from the school and you heard about what happened to your section at Post Six…**

I heard that before I went to the school.

How did you feel about missing out on being with them?

They reckoned I was lucky. You feel a big missing out, but you just take it in your stride.

01:00 We came back to Australian then in the August and went home on leave for a month.

What was that like?

Pretty good. Had a few sips. We used to meet uptown the boys and hit the pubs. We had

01:30 one old girl here at the, in those days there was drinking sessions in the town, because the Yanks were here, there was not much beer. The local blokes came home on leave and she'd say, "Drag on this one." We'd be slow and drink. This is the last one before the session finishes.

02:00 She'd say, "Righto, all out," and we'd be still dragging on the last one. After she closed the doors on them she'd give us another round of beers.

How had Charters Towers changed with the Americans here?

They were keeping company with all the girls for a start. There was an old maid in the town that had a boyfriend that never

02:30 had one before.

What was the atmosphere like here?

I didn't see it, but my Dad told me there was a lot of friction between the Americans and the Australians here. There was a fight in the main street. Nearly the full main street of Yanks and Australians fighting.

03:00 I was in Dutch New Guinea at the time. He was telling me about it.

Do you know why they were fighting?

Just type of jealousy I think. A lot of the girls went with the Yanks. A lot of them became brides and went to America too. There was

03:30 a girl Furlong and a girl Goodman and a girl Coles, they all went to America as brides.

What did you enjoy the most when you came back on leave?

The dances. I loved to dance. It was ballroom dancing then. There was no jiving. Jiving was just starting to come in. The Yanks brought

04:00 it with them. But I liked what we used to call "Old Time" and jazz, quickstep, foxtrot, waltz, all those. The old time dances used be the schottische and Vase of Vienna and a waltz cotillions as a square dance

04:30 done to waltz time and things like that. They were beautiful dances, the waltz cotillions, because everyone was doing the same movement at the one time.

What was the idea behind your month's leave in Australia?

Give us a break. And we were to be picked up, we were classed B class health wise when we came back. We never noticed ourselves

05:00 while we were Dutch New Guinea, but once we got to Nome, there's a staging camp there, and saw ourselves against the troops that had been in Australia, we could see that we were down. Everyone was yellow and skinny.

What does class B mean?

We weren't A class health wise. Not considered

05:30 A class health wise. We had our leave at home, which picked us up. That was at Nome where we dispersed. When we finished our leave we come together at a place called Clear Mountain outside of Brisbane. That's up Petrie,

06:00 Strathpine, in the mountains there. That's where it is. In Greenbank way. We gathered there and we were on milk and oranges there. By that time we'd picked up and we were right again. On

06:30 the 6th of December they put us on a boat called the Sea Snipe and sent us to Bougainville.

What did you think about going back into action?

A lot of us thought it was OK. You get browned off with training all the time. So on the 6th of December we were

07:00 taken down to Hamilton wharf and got on the Sea Snipe and we went to Bougainville. Six days. On the 12th we got to Bougainville.

Describe the trip and the ship.

It was continually zigzagging like that. That's because of the presence of submarines. I used to know how many seconds

07:30 they stayed on the same course and then zigzagged. It was different fellows put on aircraft watching and submarine watching. You copped duty. On the boat they give us plenty of PT [Physical Training] on deck.

08:00 **What was the boat like?**

It was ragged. You slept where you stood sort of thing. You got down on the deck and went to sleep. Put your, everyone was issued with a lifejacket made of kapok. Some of them were cork. You used that

08:30 as a pillow and went to sleep. You learned to adapt and just go to sleep. When we got to Bougainville, all we could see were ships: hundreds of them. It was the armada that was put together by the Yanks to invade the Philippines.

09:00 We took over from American divisions there. I think it was the 32nd Division our brigade relieved. The Yanks didn't like the idea that an Australian brigade would relieve an American division because there's three brigades to a division. Our blokes, when they'd mention it

09:30 would say, "There's a difference in the calibre of the fighting men," and leave it at that. They didn't like it at all.

Was there animosity between the Americans and Australians there?

Not there so much as back in Australia there was. There was a big fight at Rockhampton during the war. I don't know whether any of the fellows have mentioned it

10:00 to you people at all.

We've heard about that.

The Yanks, I forget what division of Yanks, was at Rockhampton. They were put into New Guinea and they wouldn't fight, so they were brought back to Rockhampton. As usual all the girls flocked to the Yanks with their flash uniform and plenty of money.

10:30 This Australian train pulled up. They had 7th Divvy fellows on that had fought in Syria and were back to Australia and were going up to the Atherton Tablelands. One bloke was married, this Rockhampton Aussie, and his wife was at the station seeing him off.

11:00 He was kissing her goodbye and the Australian train was starting to move out and some loudmouth Yank said, "Leave her, Aussie. She'll be right. We'll look after her." With that he belted the Yank in the mouth and all the Yanks had side arms of revolvers and he shot the Aussie. The Aussies on the train pulled the

11:30 chord and it was on. I forget how many Yanks was killed in that fight. But it was hushed up. The principle of troop train movement was changed to the fact that never allow an Australian troop train

and an American troop train at the station at the one time. Control was ordered to see that that not

12:00 happen again.

Did you hear that story from anyone who was there?

No, but it was a story that went through the Aussie army. I've read since about different versions of it.

Before Bougainville, what were you briefed in regards to what

12:30 A six day patrol, while we were still on ship. Our officer was a bloke called Riley. He called us and said, "We've got a patrol on as soon as we land." 16 Platoon Don Company copped it. So soon as we got on the I [intelligence] officer told us we had a six-day patrol

13:00 soon as we got ashore. The other platoons of the company put our tents up for us. We went to the officer and he briefed us on what our job was. We were to move up to a place called Kuraio Mission on the west coast of Bougainville going

13:30 north. Torokina was the base where we landed. Our brigade, 11th Brigade, relieved these Yanks, 32nd American Division. We went up there. When we were going up

14:00 there was an American outpost on the Laruma River. We were driven by truck to this Laruma River and we got out and started our walking. We walked up to a place called Kuraio Mission, which was two days and a bit. We got there. Soon as we got to Kuraio Mission we

14:30 formed a defence position. The officer was given orders in an envelope to be opened at Kuraio Mission. When we got to Kuraio Mission he had to send a patrol out to Amun, and a patrol inland. So a fellow called

15:00 Corporal Egan took the patrol into inland and I was in charge of the patrol. By this time I had been given a third stripe. I was a sergeant, or a lance sergeant they called them then. You were on a corporal's pay, but you did a sergeant's work. So you're lance sergeant. I'm a lance sergeant then and I took this patrol up to look at the Japs

15:30 at a place called Amun. I had an 8th commando bloke with us and about three natives and I took two of my own men with me and away I went. We got up there just on dusk of the third day. The natives took us in. There was acres of banana

16:00 trees. They were only about seven feet high. Never bore any fruit. They bore like a berry of some sort, but they were banana trees. We were only about 100 yards from Amun, which was occupied by Japs. We just went into these trees and slept.

16:30 The natives did the guard. Next morning this commando bloke suggested to me that we send a native up around and he put on Jap trousers and that, making out he's a friend of the Japs. Went right around in the jungle and back onto the

17:00 track up above this Amun, then walked down through, passed the Japs. He counted how many were there and how many huts. We went into the Jap gardens. They had gardens. Their gardens were mostly egg fruit and sweet potatoes and that.

17:30 There was a bit of a creek between the garden and their huts. I took a compass bearing on the creek so that it was plotted on a map. We had a man with us called Anderson. He composed the map of what we saw.

18:00 Him and I, we only saw eight Japs. That was the first Japs I saw. But the native come down and said there's 32 there and so many huts. We started to withdraw out the road, but the native

18:30 hadn't come back yet, so we withdrew back and I left two men in ambush position in case when the native come through a Jap might have followed him to see whether he was meeting anybody. He come through and my two men stayed in ambush position until he walked on. Then we all withdrew. Went about a

19:00 mile down the coast and we sat down then. The map was compiled. When that was done we went back to Kuraio Mission and picked up the rest of them. That was the first look at the Japs. That was by the 18th we got back, of

19:30 December, to the battalion. An incident coming back. Where that American outpost was, it was a battalion of our brigade had occupied the outpost and relieved the Americans. When I got up close this bloke sung out, "Hooa, hooa, hooa,

20:00 we are the boys of the MCC, pick them up easy, throw them down hard, come on, come on, ya, ya, ya." The officer was a bloke that went to Mouth Carmel with me, of a different battalion. He saw me coming and said that. We got back to camp.

That must have been a surprise for you.

It was. His name was Leisha Karooz He come from Ingham.

20:30 I remember him. He was a higher class than me at Mt Carmel.

What did you think when you heard that being sung?

I heard one bloke say, “Who’s this droop?” I knew exactly; he was a Carmel bloke as soon as he said the war cry.

21:00 We then went and our tents were up and everything. We had Christmas by then. Then it was on. As soon as Christmas was over, the strategy formulated by the general in charge was to drive the Japs out of the centre to the coast and then attack them from there. We didn’t have to, because

21:30 they lived around the periphery of the island. But we still patrolled just in case they were in. Deep patrols were done by B Company and C Company. After we had Christmas C Company of our battalion was moved to Kuraio

22:00 Mission, the place where we went earlier. They formulated a defence base there. Then they patrolled ahead. I think they killed one Jap. Then the whole battalion came up to a place called Sipaai. Then we had a fellow

22:30 in charge of our company called Major Arthur Titley. He was a local man, he’s passed on since. He was in charge of our company. We went to a place called Kuru River I think it was. We dug in. We started patrolling properly then, expecting to make contact.

23:00 We did a patrol inland just in case they were in there somewhere. But there was nothing. Then we came down over a big cliff and down to the coast. When we got down that cliff and looked up, here’s a big lookout that they’d made, the Japs had made.

23:30 So that was occupied. We went that close to it and not seen it. We went back to the company and the next morning we started moving up. 17 Platoon took the lead. They got to this outpost.

24:00 They put a section attack in on it, but the outpost had withdrawn. The Japs had cleared out. So 17 Platoon moved on then. Late that afternoon there was a couple of our blokes down there looking silly trying to read the blooming Jap sign. The Jap had a shot at them at put a hole through his hat,

24:30 a young fellow called Snow from Western Australia. Our men opened up and wounded a couple and killed one. That was the first kill of the company. Then 17 Platoon moved on a bit further. We moved up to the lookout, as

25:00 we called it, then, the rest of the company, 16 and 18 Platoon. 17 Platoon moved forward again. They made contact and they killed a couple of Japs and took a position they were holding. The Japs were starting to probe them, so they anticipated a counterattack from them. Titley sent 18 Platoon up to

25:30 side with 17, the Japs’ counterattack. They just got there and got settled in and the Japs counterattacked. Our blokes killed quite a few of them. One of our fellows, a fellow from Alpha called Keith Leech, he was kneeling up firing and a bullet hit him in the back there and came out the sole of his foot. He was wounded

26:00 and out in front. Every time somebody tried to get him the Japs fired at them. So they couldn’t get him. The RAP bloke came back and said, “Keith Leech is wounded and we can’t get him out.” Titley asked me to go up and get him. I said I’d take a section with me. So I took a section with me. I took 3 Section. By this

26:30 time I’d lost my section. I’d gone as platoon sergeant in the platoon. A fellow called Laurie Hooper, he was a local Charters Towers boy too, he took over the section. Teddy Sullivan was the corporal that come with me with the section. We got up there.

27:00 It’d be about five in the afternoon and they said Leech was out there and he was about from, I’d say it’d be about ten yards ahead of them. I said, “I’ll have to crawl out.” He was moaning with

27:30 pain. The Japs were quiet on us, they knew he was wounded. So just before we left that point there was a group of fellows giving quick RAP training and this young fellow had an RAP bag with him. He said, “I’ll go with you, Joe.” Joe was my army nickname. He said, “I’ll go with you, Joe.” I said, “Good.”

28:00 I started to crawl out and they had a shot at me, but they couldn’t get low enough. The fellow that was shooting was standing on a trunk of a tree that had been hit by lightning and it was like that and he was standing on this part and firing over that and he couldn’t’ get his rifle low enough to hit me. It was going over my head, the fire.

28:30 I couldn’t see where I was going because I was like a poached egg on the ground, flat out, crawling. A fellow called Reg Jeffries, he knelt up behind a tree and was saying, “More to your right, Joe, more to your right, a bit further, a bit further.” At last I got into the dip where this. And the young fellow came with me. I just forget his

29:00 name, the young fellow, but he was a thick set young South Australian fellow. Had a German name. He said, “I’ve never given a needle like this.” I said, “I’ve never either. Close your eyes.” So he closed his eyes and pushed it in his arm. The morphine was in like a little toothpaste tube

29:30 and he put the needle into the flesh and then rolled the toothpaste tube up and it injected him. 18 Platoon sent a patrol out and cleared all the front. By this time it’s pretty dark and we got this Leech on the stretcher and I thought, “Well, I can’t go back the track way because we can’t see.” So we went back

30:00 where the jungle hit the beach between the jungle. And we went back to the company that way. We got him back and then the doctor was in the tent with a light working on him in the night. He was a Doctor Hynes. He was in Brisbane for years after. In fact, he died down there I believe.

30:30 You could see him silhouetted against the canvas. I said, “Gee, doc, you’re silhouetted against the tent there.” I sung out and he knew my voice and he said, “Bugger ’em, Joe, I’m working.” He was working on Leech’s leg. Leech lost his leg.

31:00 He lives in Bracken Bridge now in Brisbane.

That was extraordinary for you to go out and get him under those circumstances. What were you thinking when you did that?

I was just thinking that’s a job I had to do and that was it. You did it. That was it. The next morning they shelled us.

31:30 They really poured the shells in. There was a lot of duds in the shells too. They landed but never went off. I suppose the climate had affected it. We had another fellow wounded then, a little fellow called Lolo. He was grizzling. He said, “I’m the smallest bloke in the blooming company and it had to hit me.” He got shrapnel

32:00 in the leg. There was two of them back. But we’d piled up about eight or nine dead Japs by then. That night 16 Platoon camped back at the company headquarters. The next morning, after the shelling, I

32:30 took a couple of blokes and we went forward with ammunition for them. I had no sooner gone back than Titley’s relieved 17 Platoon, which had been the point platoon up to that time, they came back on reserve and we were 16, we went up and joined 18. From that position we patrolled. Out in front was a clear area that had been the natives’ gardens, but they used to work

33:00 the country until it got poor, then they’d shift and clear another area and use that as a garden area for a while. It was clear out the front, so I was sent on a patrol and I went around the clearing. I had no sooner got around the clearing and I

33:30 struck a Jap cemetery. There was about five fresh graves there. Must have been our blokes had knocked them. They’d buried them there. And a lot of old graves. I moved through the cemetery to, there was a bit of a hill about as high as this house and about twice as big an area.

34:00 A lot of Jap huts that weren’t occupied. So I got my blokes and we moved into these huts. There were no sides to the Jap huts. They had floor and a big overlapping roof. I’m looking around and here’s the Jap flag. I looked up in the ceiling and there’s

34:30 paper stuck in the, and it had been headquarters of a Jap hospital apparently. I grabbed all these maps that were up there and brought them back, and the Jap flag and a pair of, you know what they look at

Microscope?

A microscope. I brought that back and give it to the doctor

35:00 and sent the other stuff back to I section telling them I wanted the flag held for me. But I never saw the flag again. Somebody found a home for it. That was the hospital area. I went back and reported to Titley what I saw and everything. So our platoon, Lieutenant Horace Riley

35:30 took us around and we occupied that high ground, which was about 600 yards ahead of where we were. So we occupied that high ground. When we occupied the hill Riley sent two patrols out. I had to take one around to the right and he sent Corporal Laurie Hooper’s one to the left.

36:00 Around to the right where I went there was no sight of occupation or being used, it was just, I got well ahead and then I came around and struck the track north that we were following. I’d no sooner got to the track I had a bloke called Henry Jewell and another fellow called Kelvin Green with me, and I heard firing break out. Hooper had struck some Japs

36:30 that were sleeping in the huts between the hill and the main track. So our blokes done them over and none of our blokes were wounded or anything. Soon as I heard the firing I came back with my three to pincer them. It was all over by the time I got back with them.

37:00 We went back and reported to Riley and he reported back into. We captured two mountain guns, one of

them at the present time is up at the RSL here. Hooper captured them and he put a grenade in another one, but the first one he thought, “Can’t take it with me and I’ve gotta dismantle

37:30 it somehow.” He said, “I don't know how to dismantle a blooming Jap gun,” so he put a grenade in the barrel. The I officer put the finger on him for destroying it like that. He says, “I didn’t want it to fire back at our blokes if it’s occupied again.” So that was that.

How many Japanese were killed in that fight?

Two. The rest

38:00 had cleared out. Two Japanese. A bloke, Keith Paulette, he’s a Frenchman he reckons, names. But he stuttered, Lockey. If he was telling me something I had to look over his shoulder, I couldn’t look him in the face because I’d be trying to help him with his stuttering.

38:30 He knocked one of them. He got two guns. Got back to the platoon on the hill. He told the major and Titley said, “I wanna know what the ground is like for a defence position where the track is on the coast

39:00 directly west of you.” So I was sent with two blokes again, down through where the fight was on and into the coast. When I hit the track at the coast here’s another gun looking out to sea with ammunition and everything there ready, a bit of a creek. They’d sent a

39:30 patrol out from back where 16 Platoon had left to come to the hospital area. They sent a patrol forward. I don't know why they sent them, but we were coming back from our patrol and they fired on us. They reckon they went back and reported they fired on a group of Japs wearing Australian hats

40:00 to cover their mistake I suppose. So I stopped them with a blast of profanity. Jimmy Golighty.

Who were they?

They were 17 Platoon blokes. They’d been brought up when we were sent to the hill, they came out of reserve up to 18 Platoon then. Those two platoons were in reserve and we were the point platoon see. You used to kind of

40:30 head in our movement like that. I stopped them with a burst of profanity. They realised their mistake when an Aussie swore at them.

Tape 5

00:45 **We’re on the hill with the Japanese.**

Then Titley wanted a report on what the country was like cos they’d stepped forward.

01:00 We went and did the reconnaissance from there and come back and was fired on by our own patrol. No casualties. They reported they fired on Japs with Australian hats on and the blooming I officer was that gullible he believed that. Where would they get Australian hats? Be different if we’d

01:30 had a lot of our blokes taken prisoners or something on Bougainville.

What was the fallout from that? Were you aggressive towards them?

Towards who?

To the Australians that fired on you.

Only verbally. No, we didn’t fire back. Your ear gets tuned to the sound of different automatic weapons. You’d hear, “brrrrr,”

02:00 and you’d say, “That’s Jap,” or, “That’s an Owen gun.” It’s a funny thing, but it’s part of your survival instinct I think.

How was the sound of the Owen gun different?

I don't know what it was. You could pick it. They both had the similar rate of fire, but there was a different

02:30 sound. Possibly because one was nine millimetre and the other one was .256 I think the Jap bullet. So maybe the calibre of the bullets that made the difference in the sound. You got that way your ear got attuned to it. You knew straight away. Survival once again.

03:00 The major then, I went back to Riley that had 16 Platoon and I reported back to company that it was exactly the same as where they’re dug in now except there’s a Jap

03:30 anti-tank gun position looking out to sea and a small creek in front. So he moved the two platoons there

and we come down from the hospital area. The company was three platoons together then. We had a meal there. A good meal.

04:00 Then on the 20th, this is the 20th now, of January, 16 Platoon was still the point platoon. We moved up the track. Off we went again, expecting to meet Japs again, which we did. It was the Saturday

04:30 afternoon and we come to a track junction like that. Riley put the platoon down and he sent Egan that way and I went forward with a fellow called Tommy Cahill. Tommy Cahill was the son of the premier of New South Wales. I think his father's

05:00 name was Joe Cahill. There's streets named after him down near Circular Quay. Tommy Cahill and I moved forward. Here's a Jap eating passion fruit taken off a tree. So I shot him. I mustn't have hit him vital, because he took off and run up

05:30 the track away from us. Then he got heavy and over he went. Tommy Cahill and I was laughing how he took off like a dog, scratching in the one place before he got traction. The next minute, crack. Cahill and I sung out behind, "You fellows fire there?" They said, "No." We realised it must have been a Jap that

06:00 fired. Just in front of me a ginger bush, wild ginger grows there, a wild ginger bush fell over like that. The bullet had gone through the wild ginger. Cahill and I looked at one another and we got up and were coming back and they opened up with an LMG, a light machinegun, and put a burst over our head. We took off back to the platoon.

06:30 I went in where the officer was and I looked over and there'd the officer's batman laying on the track and I said to him, "Get off the track," Jocko Jones was his name and I said, "Get off the track, Jocko," and he had no sooner rolled off the track than da-da-da-da, the machinegun went right along the track. With the first burst when we were running back. I said to Cahill after, "Where did you go

07:00 when I went in?" He said, "I was still running. My legs were going like that, but my body was turning like that and wouldn't turn for me. So I went straight down the track, then I came back." He had a hell of a bend in the waist of his body trying to turn in, but the legs were still going.

07:30 Egan was the corporal that went in and he come back after the firing settled down. He said, "There's high ground on the right." By this time the officer's panicking. He couldn't think straight. He had spittle bubbles in the corner of his mouth and he was saying,

08:00 "What do we do? What do we do?" And he's the officer. I said to him, "The Good Book says you go to the high ground." Egan had reported high ground there. I said, "The Good Book says you go to high ground," so we went to the high ground. We'd no sooner got up on the high ground, Egan's section was leading again, and this Jap officer,

08:30 there was about four or five of them, all looking the ground over that we occupied. Our blokes into them. They knocked a couple over. There was a little fellow with a sword nearly as tall as himself. All I saw was the back of him being helped over into the dead ground. What we used to call

09:00 dead ground is ground that is below the what-do-you-call-them [line]of the fire. They got back to the rest of. The Japs were only occupying that end of the ridge. The ridge was called Tsimba Ridge. So where we went onto this high ground we were on the same level as them and by moving in

09:30 there fast we occupied that end of the ridge and dug in. Firing was going on, being the platoon sergeant at the time I was placed with the sections that weren't firing in the defensive position. We occupied what they called the Pimple where we, we occupied the Pimple.

10:00 That was on the Saturday afternoon. There was no more firing that night. But that night we heard Indians. We thought they were tanks. Riley reported back and he said, "It sounds like the Indians or

10:30 two tanks are coming." We never had any anti-tank weapons. So we were sitting pretty tight there wondering what was gonna happen. After thinking, what happened was, they weren't tanks, they were barges, the

11:00 Indians. And they reinforced the ridge. In hindsight I think the mob we struck was doing a reconnaissance of that rest of the ridge so that these people could occupy it, but we beat them to the occupation. So we occupied the Pimple as it was called. But they thickened their defence with the two barge loads. The next morning

11:30 Riley got orders he was to attack. He worked out he'd take charge of the assault group and I had the support group. That was blokes with discharger caps discharging grenades over and two inch mortars.

12:00 Away it went. The attack went in. We put the mortars over. I got them all… put the mortars over in the discharger caps and the two sections forward and one in reserve, they went in and attacked. He was supposed to be there leading them, as the officer. He come racing back singing out, "Where the hell is my

12:30 batman?" I said, "Up the front where you should be." He ran back to his pit and the two sections have gone in. Hooper got hit. He was the left hand section leader. He got hit in the arm. Cahill was in the

reserve one, so he raced up and took over Hooper's section and they went through. Killed a few Japs on the left hand side.

13:00 The right hand section got pinned down. So I had to leave the support group and raced forward. I put the reserve section in to get the Egan section, which was pinned down with fire, out. So I got them out. Then we lost contact with Cahill's lot.

13:30 So I sent those two sections back. A fellow called Clusket stayed with me, and I'm in a Jap trench that had been taken. I bellowed out for them. They never heard me. But they came racing back after. They'd shot a few Japs and they had the epaulettes of a Jap lieutenant they must have done over.

14:00 That was the end of Riley. You couldn't get him out of his hole then. He was no good to us. So we were without an officer.

When you say he was no good to you…

He was gutless, to put it plain. He wouldn't get out of his hole to do anything.

So you

14:30 **had a lot more responsibility?**

I was the platoon sergeant, so I had to take over the platoon. But I didn't officially take over at that point in time, but I still took over because the boys lost respect for him and they come to me. So we were all in the one soup pot. So I had to

15:00 discharge the orders and that. So that was the Sunday morning that we put that attack in. Sunday we missed out. The attack failed because of no coordination. The officer, he was finished.

15:30 So we sent Egan around the left flank to see what he could find out. So him and a fellow called Henry Jewell, I think there was another fellow called Sater from Melbourne, Jewell was from Mackay. They went around the left flank. There's a big log like that on the lip of the

16:00 ridge. So they sneaked up to this log. Egan got a grenade ready. They must have made a bit of a noise. Egan looked over the log and he looked into the face of a Jap. The Jap's sitting in a hole on the other side as a sentry. He heard this and Egan thought first and smashed him in the face with his grenade, but

16:30 it still had the pin in so it didn't go off, but it must have flattened his face. They whizzed off back to us and told exactly what happened. A couple of nights after they threw the grenade back at us. Never hurt anyone, but it was one of our own grenades. Our grenades were a lot better than theirs. So that was the Sunday afternoon.

17:00 Then Monday all patrolling, testing their defences. Moving in close and they'd fire at you. You'd pinpoint where their LMGs firing, so you get a fire plan of their defence. Then

17:30 we wanted to know about the right hand side. In the no-man's-land that was between their defences and us on the Pimple was Jap trenches which they could have occupied had we not beaten them to it. I thought I could get a couple of machineguns in there.

18:00 So I took the three Bren gunners with me and I got Jack Duvall and a fellow called Malcolm Barry, they were two Charters Towers fellows, and they put over. I said, "Put over six bombs with a bit of space between them. I'll take the Bren gunners around into those unoccupied trenches and we'll have a go at them from there."

18:30 So I got them around in there. He put over six bombs and Duvall said to Barry, "Joe mightn't be there yet. Put another one over." Just as he was putting another one over I got the three gunners to open up on them and with that they must have had a sniper in the tree, and

19:00 Duvall was putting the seventh one in and they shot him through the arm. So they left the blooming, Barry grabbed him and brought him back to the thing. We had to get out of there, but us firing and that we put a few mags into their defensive position they had there. So we came back out of it.

19:30 They'd opened up and we'd pinpointed a couple of their defence position, put them on the map, made a fire plan, see. That carried on till Wednesday afternoon.

Did you have breaks in between?

We'd just sit in our trenches and

20:00 make them more comfortable. A bit of shovelling dirt and mud out. The 2IC of the battalion came up on the Wednesday. Cahill and I sneaked back out. We were looking at them. We got into these trenches and sneaked

20:30 along and here's a group of Japs in a hut. They had seven of them and they were playing cards. Curly Green came with us. There's three of us. I sent Curly back for a Bren gun cos we only had rifles. You could only shoot two and the rest would go. I sent Curly back for a Bren gun. When he got back there

the

21:00 2IC of the battalion's there, a Major Callinan, the Timor man. He's assessing the officer, see. Come forward. When Curly got back and he called for the gun Callinan sent a section out and said, "Tell Huxley to attack."

21:30 So Tommy Cahill looks at me and said, "What are you gonna do?" I said, "Attack. He told us." He went white as anything. He said, "OK, I'm with you." I thought to myself, "Didn't do me, I'd hit him," but he said OK. So we attacked. In the meantime, waiting for this section with

22:00 the Bren gun to come out, they'd finished their card game and were standing too back in their trenches. We locked our target and we had to attack. We attacked and there was a group of four on the right and they were throwing grenades at us. I remember Frank Jones, there was Snow Jones,

22:30 Ricey and myself and Snow Jones said, "Look out, Ricey, grenade." Ricey ran towards me. I looked up and there was another grenade coming and I said, "Look out, Ricey, back the other way." I can remember Ricey's face for just a flash of a second was white as anything, but he was freckly and they were standing out like that, the freckles on his face. Jones and I breached their defence,

23:00 I threw three grenades. The first one I threw hit a tree and bounced back. I thought I might have killed Jonesey or Ricey, but it didn't. No effect from it. The next two I got into the pit where they were throwing them from, two grenades, and I moved forward. Jonesey moved forward with me and he jumped into their hut and of course the

23:30 pit they were throwing from, he must have looked down. I never saw them. But he told me later on, "Gee, Joe, you made a mess of those four in the pit. I nearly vomited. It made me that sick to see them." They had four in a pit throwing grenades. We only kept two in a pit. Attacked forward and I found out

24:00 I was on my own. The fire from the defence had pinned the men on my left down. So I kept firing and I heard a sound behind me and I swung around. I was gonna… and it was Jonesey with me and he says, "It's me, Joe." I said, "We've gotta get out. I'm nearly out of ammo."

24:30 He said, "So am I." So we come back down, turned to come back down and two of them jumped out of their pit to get between me and the men that were pinned down. I still had about half a magazine of Owen gun and I gave both of them a burst and that was six

25:00 I got. I didn't know at the time I got six. I knew I got those two because they got between me and the section and it was them or me. I shot them. It was on that attack that they based me citation for my Military Medal.

25:30 I can tell you it was a hairy ten minutes or so, or whatever the time factor was. I lost track of time.

Looking back, what stands out as the most significant move on your part?

I don't know really. I surged forward.

26:00 Jonesey came with me all the way. Jonesey was a Pommy kid, come out here when he was twelve, during the Depression, his people came out, and he was only about 19 then, and he was fighting on sixpence a day and his mother was getting his sixpence a day. He'd had 28 crimes against him and three courts-martial. That's why he was fighting on sixpence a day, and he was fighting like a champion. A good 'un. He was a good

26:30 kid. I always appreciated the fact that he stuck with me. I moved forward and when I had to get out he was still with me. We got back out. We never lost a man. I think that factor, getting sixpence,

27:00 Jonesey told me after, when we got back to the platoon area on the Pimple he said, "Gee, Joe, you made a mess of those four in the pit." I said, "I didn't see them after the grenades went in." He said, "I did, I jumped across it. I looked down and I could have vomited I was that." That's how I knew I got six of them. We could have killed more because

27:30 him and I, he said to me, "You were firing everywhere you saw skin or hair and you were bellowing your head off." Tommy Cahill told me I was bellowing my head off. The next day I was complaining. I said, "I think I'm coming down with flu. I've got a sore throat."

28:00 Cahill said, "Is it any wonder? You were bellowing your head off in that attack yesterday afternoon." That's what it was.

You can't remember reacting like that?

Vaguely I can remember singing out to them to keep firing. That was the fact why we didn't get any casualties I think because the blokes kept

28:30 firing. That was what it was. We got back to the platoon and Callinan must have recommended me for the, but it was a fruitless exercise because it was sending a boy on a man's errand. It was seven of us to take the ridge.

29:00 We weren't in the race. We came out with what they call "fire in movement". I got them to keep firing and Jonesey and I and Ricey came back out. Then we started to fire and they came out. We got out that way, got back. It was a bit of a tight, hairy moment.

Looking back, I guess your adrenalin

29:30 **kicked in at the time.**

Yeah. When we were in action I was fortunate enough to be able to think clear and never had much anxiety. You had anxiety in the stomach, you know, but it wouldn't hit me until after we were relieved and got out of action. It used to hit me then.

30:00 In the stomach and that. Like an anxiety. I said to Doc Hynes, "Doc, I feel bloody terrible when I come out. I'm all right in, but when we come out." He said, "Yeah, that's the adrenalin rush still hitting you."

How long would it take to wear off?

I'm not sure of the time, but it would go.

30:30 **Then you would feel anxious?**

Yeah, you feel as though something's gonna happen. It's an anxiety sort of thing.

How did you come to terms with the idea of killing the Japanese?

I think you mentally attuned to that, that they were animals and that. You're mentally conditioned before you go in sort of thing. They're just the enemy, they mean nothing.

31:00 It was just like shooting a roo. I'd hate to have to do it now, see. Different. Unless you're mentally attuned to it. A doctor asked me that question once. I said, "It's just like knocking a roo, Doc. Now I've got a different thought. I'm back in civil life."

31:30 **When Cahill came back and said you had to attack**

No, Green come back and he says, "I've got a section." When Cahill heard the message he said, "What are you gonna do?" I said, "Attack." It was an order from higher up.

32:00 **How did Cahill go after the attack was over?**

All right. He was a good lad, Tommy Cahill. Later on, I'll tell you, I got asked to, when I took over the platoon I got him

32:30 moved up to platoon sergeant. He did the platoon sergeant duties. He was a corporal then. He became platoon sergeant. He was a good lad. Good thinking and a good organiser.

What happened to the Japanese bodies at the ridge at that time?

The

33:00 Japs used to bury some of them and some of them lay there. Terrible smell. That was on Tsimba Ridge. We stayed like that, testing for quite some days. Then we were relived as a company. We'd been going so long that we were relieved to come out for a spell and B Company

33:30 took over. B Company put in the final attack on that. We did all the reconnaissance and the testing and B Company put in the final attack and there was 19 Australian killed and 24 wounded in the final attack. So my attack, as I said, was a boy on a man's errand.

When were you awarded the Military

34:00 **Medal?**

The citation must have went in after that and it never come through then. It's gotta go to the Queen in those days, and parliament and that. June it come out.

How important was that to you?

Not that

34:30 important. It was the fact of coming out alive that was more important to me. I didn't want to go to any ceremony to be decorated. They told me I could have had a trip with the next of kin to Canberra or to Brisbane, and I told them to register it and send it by post. So that's what they did.

35:00 **Why did you choose to do it that way?**

I wanted to get on with living. I'd been in the army from 21 till 27 and best part of my life I felt was wasted. 21 to 27 in the army, that's a good time in your life. I'd've been playing the field if I was home. That was the way of it.

What happened after Tsimba Ridge?

35:30 We came out for a spell. Before we were relieved I was sent, see we were the most forward platoon at the time, I was sent… the next obstacle was the Genga River, which was about 500 yards further on. I was sent to find a suitable crossing for a

36:00 company. C Company was sent there. I found the crossing and come back to report it to battalion headquarters where the crossing was suitable. Give them a map reference and everything. C Company crossed and dug in on

36:30 that side. But before I made the decision of the best place to cross, I had made it mentally that this place was the best place. I had a fellow called Geoff Allen who belonged to the, he lives at Broadbeach now, he became

37:00 a solicitor after the war, he hadn't finished his law prelim at that time, and he was the I section bloke that came with me on this patrol. I took ten men and I left Cahill in charge of a little group where Tsimba Ridge ran down to this river. He had five there and I sent Egan up to assess the river up towards the coast and I went with Egan

37:30 to the right. It was swampy up into the right there. I come back and I was sitting. I said to Allen, “This is the best place. I might swim across and see what the country is like on the other side and I’ll be able to tell the company commander.” He said, “I wouldn’t if I were you, Joe.” I’m down to my underpants.

38:00 The next minute, swish, a noise to the right, and the biggest crocodile you’ve ever seen come out of the bull rushes and swam out about six yards in the front, turned around and faced me. I just put my shirt on and my trousers. He looked at me and grinned and we went back. No way in the world, if he hadn't stopped me, I’d have went on course and that gator would have had me.

38:30 I kind of felt protected. It would have, it come out and turned around and faced me. So I never went across the river that day. We went back and told the battalion. And a captain, Alwyn Shilton is still alive,

39:00 he lives in Toorak in Melbourne and communicates with me every so often. He took his company across. They dug in there and the Japs attacked them for 72 hours. Our blokes, say 110 or so of them, and they estimated

39:30 about 700 Japs attacked them, but they found out after the war there was 900 when they interrogated the Japs when the war finished. There was 900 Japs and our blokes just dug in and kept them out. Then B Company put the attack in on

40:00 Tsimba and as I said they lost 19 and 24 wounded. They moved on and after we had four days’ spell coming off Tsimba we had a shave and a clean up and new clothes and got the boots off. Hadn't had your boots and socks off for days. We went in then and relieved C Company because they’d been fighting for four days,

40:30 or nearly four days. Three days continuous. So after we cleaned up we… But there’s a couple of incidents with B Company. I was left behind when they were relieving

Tape 6

00:31 In the changeover from one company to the other, a couple of people who know the area are left behind for a day to show them. Myself and this Snow Jones was left behind out of the company. I was left behind and Snow said, “I’ll stay with you.” The idea was to

01:00 tell B Company everything that we knew about them on that Pimple position. There was an officer there. He’d been a permanent army bloke. His attitude was he knew everything. I can remember telling him, “No need to send anyone around

01:30 the left flank, because we’ve got a fire plan of the defences for that area. If you send anyone around you’ll lose men.” I was yapping away to him and I looked at him and he wasn’t the least bit interested. So I said to Snow Jones, “Snow, come on. We’re wasting our time here.” I walked back to B Company Headquarters. While we were going back

02:00 there was firing took place up where we’d just left. Nick Harris was the captain in charge or B Company. A Middle East man. I said, “What was the firing about?” He said, “Kilton just lost a man.” I said, “How?” He said, “He sent a patrol around to the left flank and

02:30 lost a man.” That was an unnecessary death. If he’d have listened. So that young fellow was killed. A Townsville boy it was. 21. Unnecessary. They get big in the head, “I’m an officer,” and me, a sergeant, telling him. Wouldn't listen. That

03:00 was, it didn’t fit too well with me. I was a bit dirty about it. I never had any contact with him at all later on. Those things happen. That’s it. It’s an unnecessary loss.

Were there other examples of people losing their life unnecessarily?

03:30 I never run into it. That was just a little thing that came up. He was uptight. His whole attitude. “What the hell are you doing here telling me?” First thing he did. It was a real negative act I thought.

04:00 Run counter to suggesting no trouble at all.

How many people were killed at Tsimba Ridge?

Overall? That’s one.

04:30 There was 19 in the initial. I don't know whether B Company lost others than the 19 in the final attack. That’s 20 that they lost in that. Our company hadn't had one killed. We’d had wounded, but none killed.

05:00 **Your company didn’t lose anyone in that battle in Tsimba Ridge?**

No, we lost wounded, but nobody killed. Laurie Hooper was wounded and Jack Duvall was wounded. None killed.

What happened to your company after that?

We went out for four days’ spell. Cleaned up, shaved, put clean

05:30 clothes on and socks and everything. I was smoking at the time and fresh tobacco. My tobacco had gone blue mould in the tin from the moisture. I was smoking this blue mould tobacco. I can remember coming out of

06:00 that, sitting on the beach we were back and had a swim and clean up. It must have been dark cos I could see the stars right at the bottom of the ocean. The Saucepan. I said, “That’s shining over home.” A bit of homesickness.

06:30 We had our four days’ spell and then we went to the Genga River. That’s past Tsimba as I said when I found the crossings for Chilton to go across. We relieved them. They come out. They’d been fighting for three days continuous and another day on and off. So they needed a spell just to have a sleep.

07:00 Our company relieved them there. I stayed behind the relief because I’d wasted a day or two handing over in B Company. So I stayed behind a couple of days before I. So I went back there on the 4th of February. On the 4th

07:30 of February Riley was taken off it, sent back. I was officially given 16 Platoon as 16 Platoon Commander. A sergeant doing an officer’s work. Our company commander, Tiger Titley, he was sent to Major Callinan’s place

08:00 because he, and he became second in charge of the battalion, Titley did. Callinan was sent to a sister battalion of ours in the brigade called 26th. They were mostly west Queensland fellows. Callinan took charge of the 26th.

08:30 We were at the Genga for about four days. After B Company took Tsimba Ridge, and the Japs had had a lot of casualties on the Genga and then there was another front, A Company was up at another place called Kunamatora. They’d pushed the Japs off a ridge there. So the whole lot,

09:00 this Kunamatora mob were reinforced came down and cut the Japs off. So the Japs decided to withdraw. We went out of the Genga and hit the coast. We hit the coast above the mouth of the Genga River, about 400 yards, and we dug in there. Then 17 Platoon went down to the mouth and they caught five Japs dug in there expecting B Company, who’d

09:30 just taken Tsimba, to cross there. We hit them from behind and done the five over, 17 Platoon. We had five of ours wounded, none killed in that fight, but we had five wounded that day. Snow Jones was

10:00 one and a fellow called Schiffer. I forget the other two. Vipen was another one. We had five wounded. That was five that went back.

10:30 After that we then started to go up the coast again. We got up to what they call the Track Junction. There’s a track that goes down from Kunamatora and the coast track meet there. Our company went to there and dug in. We dug in there and then

11:00 we had to go up the track the next morning. So 18 Platoon sent a patrol out. They came back and we all had breakfast and I was told I had to take 16 Platoon up the track. So we were point platoon, and away we set. But before we left off

11:30 18 Platoon Sergeant told me that they’d been 200 yards up the track and it was clear. So we set off. We went 70 yards and we come to a signal wire. So I pulled the platoon up, got the sig [signal] bloke that was travelling with us to

12:00 tee in on the wire and see, but it was dead. It must have been cut. I said to the two scouts, Curly Green

and Malley Barry, “Just go round the corner and take up position on each side of the track on the corner.” They had no sooner got around and brrroom. We’d only went 70 yards and I’d been told we was 200 yards clear.

12:30 I raced forward and threw two grenades and got them back. I saw Curly Green climb over the top of Barry’s body and Barry was flat on the ground. He come back after I threw the two grenades and was back to the platoon. Curly says, “I don't know where Malley is. I think they got him.” He didn’t remember crawling over his body.

13:00 Next minute, when everything got quiet, Malley suddenly jumped up and come back too. So we didn’t have any casualties. There was only nine of us left in the platoon, with sickness and that, by this time. It was getting towards the end of February and the battalion was due for relief. So

13:30 18 Platoon went in to attack and they got one wounded. Next morning we moved again and the Japs had withdrawn. The next couple of days we straightened up our defence position for a new battalion, cleaned everything up and waited for a battalion to relieve us. We went

14:00 out, back to Torokina then, and 26 Battalion took over. We were just at the base of what they call Soraken Plantation on Bougainville then. So we’d been going for a good six weeks of continuous contact with the Japs.

Describe

14:30 **what it’s like to be constantly in contact?**

The exhaustion of no sleep and the continual tension is pretty high. You have two hours on sentry duty and four hours to sleep. Then two hours on sentry and four hours to sleep. There’s a lot of noise and everything

15:00 going on with that. At the end of that six weeks, I’m sidetracking a bit, in 1982 I was coming back. I called in at Warwick, two boys who were in our platoon, Owens was their name, and

15:30 I called into there and see. He was at night watching the council yard property there, watchman. He wasn’t fit for much more. He was alcoholic, pretty heavy. Maybe so that I’m sure he had brain damage from it. I says to him, “Do you remember me?” He said, “Yeah, I remember you.

16:00 Kicking us in the boots and saying, ‘Keep awake. Watch your front.’” That must have been. When we were at the end of the six weeks they’d fire a few shots, a burst, and as soon as a lull come they’d go down, sleep. Exhaustion had taken over. I was walking amongst them

16:30 kicking. “Keep awake. Watch your front.” If they go to sleep the Japs could attack. He couldn’t remember my name, but he remembered that.

You were so exhausted you were falling asleep after firing a gun?

Yeah. As soon as the lull come you’d see their heads go down. That exhausted. Tired.

What was the most

17:00 **difficult about the conditions in that six weeks?**

Towards the end, because of the exhaustion, when you’d had plenty of sleep and you were lively and that it was just a bit of anxiety of self preservation, but when the exhaustion hits you it’s not the best.

17:30 **How often were you being fired on?**

Four or five times a day. Sometimes more. They’d attack you and you’d have to get down in your pit. If you were caught in the open you’d have to. Then you

18:00 patrolled, made contact all the time with them. You know when you were taken forward you were gonna step closer to them.

What was the landscape like in that six weeks?

The topography of that country?

Where you were during that six weeks.

18:30 Have you been up the Atherton Tableland at all? It’s an ideal way of explaining it. You’ve been to O’Reilly’s [Guest House, Lamington National Park]?

Can you describe it?

Something like O’Reilly’s. It’s pretty thick. Canungra and those places.

19:00 There’s the beach and we were pushing them back along the track that was parallel to the beach going north. There’s the beach. And then there’s about from that furthest wall there to here of

19:30 fir trees, what do they call them? Casuarinas. There's a belt of them. Then the jungle track and the jungle. That's pretty thick, the jungle. So much so that you're flat out trying to find out where the fire come from and things like that. But a lot of the Japs never pulled the barrels of their weapons through

20:00 so when they fired a plume of smoke would go up and you'd twig it. Whereas our boys kept pulling their barrels until they were clear of anything like that.

What weapons were the Japanese using?

The same as we had. LMGs. We had a Vickers, they had a Woodpecker. We had a Bren gun, they had

20:30 what they call a Shiki. But we'd got Owen guns over the top of them. That's where we had superior firepower. You were quick, cos they're only a short gun like that and , brrt, brrt.

What was the advantage of the Owen gun?

It was a good close range automatic weapon in the

21:00 jungle. The ammunition was only nine millimetre so it was easy to carry, not so heavy. The ammunition was heavy. Dead weight. The Owen gun, it was a good gun for close fighting.

What was it like carrying the Owen gun through the jungle?

It was a small light gun. I was carrying one in that

21:30 photo. It fired nine millimetre ammo and it was 30 rounds in a magazine. We used to separate the magazines with a piece of wood and tape two together so that you just took one mag off and fitted the next one without changing it.

Why was it

22:00 **better suited to the jungle situation?**

Shorter barrel, lighter ammunition. The Bren gun fired .303 and you got a gun that long you get tangled in the vines, more so than the Owen gun. Although the Bren gun was a terrific support weapon.

The Japanese didn't have an equivalent to the Owen gun?

No. They didn't

22:30 have an equivalent to the Owen gun. They had the Shiki. That was equivalent to the Bren gun. It was smaller than our Bren, but it cut the leaves down over you once they got firing at you.

In the six weeks of constant battle, how close did you come...

At Tsimba Ridge we

23:00 were about 50 yards apart. All the grass got cut down between us. I can remember there was a bit of a tree, it disappeared. Cut through it with bullets. On Tsimba I can remember a new bloke sent up there to take photos of us. He come up, he had a white belt on and white gators. I said, "Gee whiz."

23:30 Our blokes said, "You're a good target for them, mate." He said, "What do you mean?" They said, "Didn't you hear the firing going on when you were coming up here?" Yeah, he could hear that. He said, "Was any of the bullets around here?" I said, "Yeah, look at that banana tree there." The banana tree had bullet holes in it and the juice was running down. He looked at it and he jumped straight down into the pit and

24:00 his nice white gators were all mud and everything. He wasn't gonna stand up there any more.

So 50 yards away you could really see the enemy clear?

If you put your head up too much you get it taken off.

Could you see if you hit anybody you were firing at?

Yes. You sight a bloke up and you

24:30 fire at him you know whether you hit him or not.

What impact did it have on you when you successfully hit one of the enemy?

It's like shooting an animal, that was our attitude towards it. You were mentally conditioned and you just knocked them and that was it. Give and take

25:00 sort of thing.

Did the Australian soldiers have any contact with the dead Japanese after a battle?

We used to search them then for notes, maps, things like that called "intelligence". There was another incident I didn't mention either when we relieved B Company.

25:30 This Snow Jones and I was taking a platoon around the back of Tsimba Ridge to show them after I'd been talking to Coolton, he sent that. We had 18 Platoon around there and B Company commander said, "Pull them out with you and I'll send another platoon there." I'd

26:00 taken the platoon out, but the Japs noticed them leaving and they come in and occupied their pits and then sent a patrol forward. Snow Jones and I was leading the platoon in. I went as point scout. I'm looking everywhere and seeing nothing of course, as usual, and the Jap patrol, three men came down the track. He fired

26:30 a shot, before I saw them, at me and missed me. I went to ground and he went to ground and his two mates cleared off. He was lining me up with his second shot and I got a panicky first shot away at him. I missed him and he missed me. That put him off. Then he was lining me up with his third shot and I don't know whether I said it to myself

27:00 or whether it was hallucination or what it was, but I heard this, "Steady, go." I steadied down and I nailed him through the throat and it came out under his shoulder blade. The officer in charge of the platoon we were leading he's singing out, "What's going on? What's going on?" I got up after I hit him and Snow Jones come forward. He was there, and I

27:30 said, "Rat him, Snow." We used to say that if we wanted to be searched. Rat him for any information he might have on him in his pockets. I was smoking at the time and I always rolled a few cigarettes ahead. So I lit up and I'm having a draw. The officer came up and he said, "What happened? What happened?" I said, "We run into

28:00 a little patrol of theirs and had to have a shootout. There was only one end to it, him or me." He said, "Gee, you're pretty cool about it." But he didn't know the reaction had set in with me and my kneecaps were going like that. I was just having a smoke there and my kneecaps were going like that and he said, "Gee, you're pretty calm about it." "Oh yeah."

28:30 I said to myself, "You bogus bloody thing." I wasn't that calm about it. My kneecaps wouldn't stop. It's like a reaction. They were going, those kneecaps. He said, "Looks like they've moved forward. I'll take over from here and you and Snow can go back." So

29:00 we went back then, Snow and I. They went on. They struck them a bit further up the track.

How long did it take you to calm down after that?

About five, ten minutes. It was a reaction that happened to me twice in action. That was the first time that series.

29:30 **And the other time?**

The other time was when, it'd be about, that was in February that happened, the other time would be in June following.

What happened in that situation?

We come out of action, was relieved, and we had ten days' spell and then we

30:00 went into central sector of Bougainville. It was absolutely different the topography. We were up in the mountains in the central sector. I think we crossed the Laruma River about ten times to get up the mountains to a place called Barjes Hill.

30:30 We went on a bit further until we got to the top. I just forget the name of the ridge we were on. Pearl Ridge I think. We took over from another battalion, 55/53. In that sector you'd wake up in the morning and the clouds were below you. The valley was

31:00 a big, deep valley and the Japs were over on the next ridge sort of thing. You patrolled deeply. Every patrol that went out, went out as a fighting patrol with the idea of killing Japs or take them prisoners. I didn't last long there in that section session. While we were out, relieved from the top

31:30 fighting, and ten days' spell we had surfing, and the surf there was terrible. I'm coming in on a dumper and I'm like an octopus showing up around the beach. My ears were all full of sand. I washed them out as well as I could. But

32:00 it hit me about a fortnight after when I was in action up in the centre. I got, what do they call it? Mastoiditis, caused by volcanic ash in the ears. Talk about earache. I'd never had earache in my life before. I thought

32:30 toothache was bad enough, but it was nothing to this earache. It was like that in both ears. So they sent me to the RAP, the RAP sent me to the CCS, Casualty Clearing Station, it sent me back to the AGH [Australian General Hospital]. So the doctor looked at them and he said, "We'll try and dry them up. If I can't dry them up, I've gotta operate on you and scrape the mastoids."

33:00 They were able to dry them up with sulphur tablets of some sort, or powder. So I had a week or two in

hospital. By the time I got out of hospital they were back down for a spell. So that was my period in the central sector. We were there for a spell and then we had to go up to,

33:30 where we were relieved we were a bit further north to where we were relieved the last time. We had about a week there, having a swim and everything. Then we went into action again on what they call the Bonis Peninsula. We were two battalion fronts, we were by this time, that was in the first week in

34:00 June, and by this time we were well down health wise and everything like that. The two battalions were only made up like one. So we were in and the 26th was in across the peninsula. They thought they were going to

34:30 outflank the Japs, so they put in a landing at a place called Porton Plantation. A Company did that with a platoon of C Company. They never got off the beach. They fought for 72 hours, more, four days and about four nights

35:00 they fought for continuously. The Japs attacking them and they had to finish up taking their wounded into the sea with them. They left their dead in the pits, but they carried their wounded with them when they withdrew into the sea back to the barges who had the bottoms torn out of them with the coral. That's what caused all the trouble. They couldn't get supplies in, they couldn't get their wounded out, because the barges had their

35:30 bottoms torn out of them by the coral.

What did you observe of that battle?

We couldn't observe anything because we were in action trying to drive towards it on the land. We were killing them out of this lot of trenches and they'd replace them before you could occupy. If you did occupy them they only moved back a little distance.

36:00 **You said there was another incidence where you were really…**

Yeah, with the kneecaps clapping.

Was that during this?

During this, yeah.

Can you tell subsequently about that?

Yes, well the Japs were infiltrating through and sitting on our LOC, our Line Of Communication. We had a Jeep driver killed and another one wounded because they'd cut a road through the

36:30 jungle like that. It was undulating. So the Japs would infiltrate through the jungle and sit on the edge on the peak and they'd fire at the Jeeps that were bringing the food and ammunition up. So we lost a Jeep driver from Home Hill and another bloke from Charters Towers was

37:00 wounded, Melvin was his name. I was sent with a patrol to see if it was clear. I didn't go down the middle of the road like a lot of the patrols, I went the side the Japs came in from, and used to go up on high and move in against them, so that I'd have them pinned against the open road.

37:30 We went right through to B Company and never struck anything and we came back to our, what we called "Rear company headquarters". It used to be the company, the fighting mob, there, and then the Red Company headquarters was here. The cooks used to and all supplies came form this rear company headquarters and then they'd deliver it up to us. I finished that patrol and came back as far as rear company headquarters and

38:00 within our mind we felt our patrol was over. The captain there, Captain Roberts, he's in Townsville now, George Roberts, and he said, "Joe, the tea's ready. Do you think you blokes can take it back with you? Save me sending." I said, "Yeah." So we got the tea. I had four loaves of bread like this and an Owen gun in this hand.

38:30 Somebody else had a dixie of stew and something else. We're going down the track and I'd just sung out to the two scouts I had ahead, "Don't get too far ahead." The next minute, brrroom, the Japs opened up on them. But they were firing too high, it was over our heads. There was a little fellow behind me called Billy Harrison and it went between him and me he said…

39:00 But before those four loaves of bread hit the ground I was over there. I could see the smoke from the gun coming up so I whipped two grenades into them. I thought, "I'll go around and catch them coming off," but they were too smart for me. They went. So anyhow, I sang out to the fellows, "Righto, it's all over, move out on the road."

39:30 They moved out on the road and picked up the dixies and food again. I counted them and they were all there. The reaction hit me again. Boom. I hadn't lost any. I expected somebody to be hit, nobody was hit. I'm sure if you put our blokes in that position and them ten Japs going, they'd have knocked the lot of them.

40:00 That's when my kneecaps went bokos again. That's the only time, twice, it hit me. But when we came

out of action the first time, when we were spelling and going to the surf and that for the ten days, the

40:30 RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] came up to me and said about taking a field commission, make me a lieutenant. I said, “No, I want to stay with my platoon. I’d rather lead them as a sergeant than be a lieutenant and have to go somewhere with blokes I don't know.” That was OK. The adjutant did the same. I told him the same thing.

41:00 When we come out of the Bonis Peninsula lot the CO [Commanding Officer] called me up, that was Colonel Joe Kelly, that was the man in charge of the battalion, and he didn’t ask me. He said, “Your papers are ready, you’ll sign them.” Like that. I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “What’ll happen is we’re going back into action again in a few more days. You’ll take your platoon in as

41:30 16 Platoon Commander with your commission. Then you go to Woodside to an officers’ course and it’s in the lap of the gods where you go after that.” I’d probably be transferred to another battalion, see.

Tape 7

00:36 **When you were commissioned, was that toward the end of the war?**

Yes. When I was called up to the CO I thought, “What the hell have I done now?” All he said was, “Your posting is ready.

01:00 You’ll sign them.” Like that. He didn’t ask me, he told me.

How did you feel about it?

Went ahead and signed them. That was the last week in June, no it was in July. The last few parades of the battalion he said, “We’re going into action soon and you’ll take your

01:30 platoon in as the platoon commander. You go to Woodside and it’s in the lap of the gods after you do the officers’ school. You’ll go already commissioned.” The field commission I’d already signed. “But,” he says, “In another ten days we go down the south,” so

02:00 we’d have fought in the three fronts of the Battle of Bougainville. The next thing that dropped the bombs and it was finished. I thought, “This will suit me because I’m a,” the commission hadn't come through, they hadn't had time to process it before the war finished.

02:30 “So if I’m a junior officer I’ll be kept in the islands here for ages, whereas the senior NCO, I’ll get home early.” I thought, “That’ll suit me.”

You wanted to stay?

I was ready to go home. Start living. I was 27 by then.

So you wanted that commission to come through quickly?

Well,

03:00 when I finished up signing it I thought, “Well, that’s it.” I’d have lost the platoon in any case cos they’d shift me whether I wanted it or not.

What happened after that?

The war finished and…

Where were you exactly when the war finished?

I was getting ready for bed about nine

03:30 o'clock at night. When we’d come out of action there was a special sergeants’ tent and all the sergeants of the company would sleep in the one tent and we’d go to the sergeants’ mess to eat too. That was the protocol of the thing. There was an officers’ mess, sergeants’ mess and ORs’ [Other Ranks] mess, where the corporals and all them.

04:00 I was getting ready for bed and I heard somebody sing out, “It’s over.” What the hell are the talking about? There’s cheers and that going on. It must be something. So one of the sergeants went and found out and somebody said, “The war is over.” That was it. It was more or less half day sitting there realising,

04:30 trying to think that it was over. I heard a story that some of the blokes that were in Torokina all the time in what they call base troops, that’s ordnance and things like that, one of them got their rifle out and was firing haphazardly here, there and everywhere and shot some poor bloke in the next lot with, that had just come out of action.

05:00 The poor devil finished up getting shot. Some fool letting off his rifle indiscriminately.

Did you celebrate?

I went to bed, wondering whether it was fair dinkum or not. I was tired. Catching up on sleep and that. Infantry blokes, it was hard to realise for a while that it was over and

05:30 done with sort of thing. Our company, we were sent to Nauru, the

Tell me about the religion you followed in Bougainville. Did you have moments when you could…

Go to mass and that? Yes, that's another story too.

06:00 We had a Padre Ormond with us, a Catholic priest. We had Padre Went, he was a Church of England. There was a Salvation Army fellow too with us. I can remember when we were the point company going up the track, the Father Ormond was with us all the way.

06:30 He wasn't doing any patrols when he was with company headquarters. There's a photo taken with a group of us Catholic blokes all have a mass on the beach at Bougainville. I had a photo of that and I sent it to a bloke called Bob Burler in Ingham. He never returned it. He was using it in a battalion

07:00 magazine he was putting out. He never returned it, but I see the same photo's been illustrated in one of the magazines. I can see myself praying there at the mass. If we were out of action you could go to mass every Sunday.

Did being in a war situation make you doubt your religion?

No. Made

07:30 you ask for help. For safety. You'd say a prayer. I think a lot of fellows were inclined to turn toward religion when it was on, the conflict. Life was serious.

08:00 Sometimes I'd be picking blokes to go on a patrol with me and you'd say to them, "Come on, So and so, you can't blue." They said, "Can't you blue, sir? Look at So and so. He went out and copped it." Things like that.

What does 'you can't blue' mean?

You can't miss out. You'll be right, you know.

08:30 He's right. That was just a saying they had in the army .

Was God a comfort to you?

Definitely. I always have been a Christian Brothers boy; you always had spiritual education

09:00 with you. Tommy Cahill was another Catholic bloke. Egan. I forget how many, the photo I was telling you about taken at the mass, it was, there's about ten of us went and I think about seven of us were Catholics and we all went to that mass. Father Ormond said, "You've got a crook job on

09:30 tomorrow morning, Joe," I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, we're holding a mass if you boys would care to come." Seven of us turned out, the rest weren't Catholic boys. He had a Bougainville Island boy that was an altar boy for him could say the Latin. In those days the mass was said in Latin instead of

10:00 English. I'll tell you an incident with that Father Ormond. When we were in the first show and we caught the Genga River and 17 Platoon went down and killed the five at the mouth of the Genga, we took a chance to have a quick shave and a wash.

10:30 So Father Ormond's down there. He's having a quick shave and a wash. He's using the reflection of the water as a mirror. He finished his shave and he's looking down. And he looked through the reflection and here's a croc, about four or five feet from him. He come back. He was like this

11:00 white. "Joe," he said, "I got an awful fright down there." I said, "What happened, Father?" He said, "I was looking into an alligator's face and never realised it till I looked through the mirage on the water." He got an awful fright.

Where was he during action?

He'd be with company headquarters. Then again, if they attacked

11:30 company headquarters he'd be in the pit. Cos he had a batman with him. Him and the batman would dig a hole for themselves to get down. They had to be in the centre. He was a good man. And he was well on. I can remember us, we were waiting to do an attack on a bit of a Jap position. The artillery was coming over giving us

12:00 support. We were sitting in this kunai grass and he was sitting there amongst the boys talking to them. He took his hat off, it was hot in the kunai. He was grey headed. A fellow from South Australia called

Reg Lacey looked at him and he said, “Hey, sport. What racket are you in?” He said, “I’m the Catholic priest travelling with

12:30 you boys.” “Oh.” You could have cut the silence like that. Everyone knew Lacey had boo-booed and the poor devil, he got that embarrassed he got up and walked away. Took up another position somewhere. “Hey, sport. What racket are you in?”

How did you think the Japanese treated the local

13:00 **people in Bougainville?**

Not so good. They used to knock their women around. At Rabaul I saw a Javanese woman with her breast cut off. I asked somebody, “What happened to her?” They said, “The Japanese man, he cut it so that Mary’s boss man would work for them.” He wouldn’t work so they cut his wife’s breast off.

13:30 Then you ask, “What were you feeling when you knocked them?” They were just animals sort of thing. They weren't so hot. We went from Bougainville up north to Nauru in September. That’s the month after the war finished. Then by December we had Jap prisoners

14:00 cleaning up the island there. We had no field baker with us, so I got into the bakehouse, got it mended and made bread for the boys. Then we come back from Nauru in December and went to Rabaul. That’s where I saw the native woman with the breast cut off. That was in December.

14:30 I had Christmas there, at Nary, Christmas ’44.

In Nauru?

No, at Rabaul. And in the January I come home to Australia.

What was the cleanup about in Nauru?

Scrap iron and dirt and filth and rats and our

15:00 CO said to the Jap commander, “Your men clean the island before they leave.” They had to clean it all up and tidy everything up.

How were the Japanese POWs treated?

As long as they worked they treated, they got a kick in the backside if they didn’t, by our blokes. But there was no savage

15:30 acts. I see a mob of them. They were patching the roof of a, what do they call those big buildings that they pack things in in the warmth? Warehouse there on the wharf. It had been strafed with bullets, see. So there was a Jap up

16:00 there with tar, or bitumen it was, and canvas, and had to paint the hole, put the canvas back and fold it over and seal it. This bloke was sitting there doing nothing on the ridge. Egan was the corporal in charge of the work party and he said, “Those bludgers up there. They won’t work.

16:30 I tell them to [UNCLEAR] and they just look at me and laugh.” I said, “Put a burst of an Owen gun over their head.” And he did that. One bloke fell over backwards and broke his leg off the roof. So he went onto the boat in the stretcher that fellow. There was no sadistic stuff. If they didn’t work in the cleaning up they got a kick up the backside

17:00 with our blokes, because all the news came back how they treated the Singapore POWs. Then I come back and in January I left on the Taos Victory. A victory ship, and American, and came into Hamilton Wharf again. We expected to see land at daylight they said and all the boys at the ship

17:30 were awake well before daylight and sitting on the rail looking out to sea. See if they could see Australia. The first thing I saw was Glasshouse Mountain just over the top of the, “We’re home.” They took us from Hamilton Wharf out to Indooroopilly. At

18:00 Indooroopilly they give us leave. There were too many of us to handle, they give us leave to go into town. We got into town and the girls who had been cheering us when we came off the boat coming home, the same girls were cheering the next boatload to come in. We went to have a look to see if any of our blokes was on it. They said, “Get back, you base bludgers. We want to see the men that come home.” We’d been on

18:30 the what-so-you-call-it in the morning.

They didn’t realise you’d been fighting overseas?

No. They never realised. We got leave then, to go home. A month’s leave and come back and got discharged. Then I went back to, I had a job, before that they were picking people to go to the victory march in

19:00 England. I said, “I wouldn't mind going to that.” So I went to Chermside Barracks there and said to

some bloke about it and he said, “Yes, you’re right. You know your drill and you’ve got height and you’ve got decoration. You’ll be right tomorrow. In fact, I’m on the selection committee.” I said, “Good. Thanks,

19:30 sir,” and I went back. I went back to the hostel I was staying at, Lady Bowen, it overlooked Roma Street there in that terrace. What is the terrace where all the doctors are there?

Wickham?

Wickham Terrace overlooked that big park. I’m laying in bed and I said, “Gee whiz, all the blokes will be out of the army by the time I’ll be back and all the jobs will be gone.” I’m thinking back to Depression days.

20:00 You could throw a stick at the jobs that were going after the war. So I never turned up for the selection. I went back baking and pastry cook at the town here at Wallace’s, Wallace and Brophy’s. I stayed there for 18 months. I had a snarl with the owner.

20:30 I told him I’d put him in the oven if he didn’t look out. I went and worked with another baker. So I never missed a day’s work. Then I was very toey and uptight. The doctor, Doctor Ellis, and he said, “Listen, Hux, give that baking trade away. You’re living on the alarm. You’re uptight and you’re not relaxing.”

21:00 So I went to the railway and got a job in the railway. I got a job, sat for an exam and got a job as a cleaner and then I’d have been an engine driver and that. I said, “I don't know if this’ll do me.” I went back and told him and he said, “How did you go? Did you give up the baking?” I said, “Yeah, I’m gonna be an engine driver in the railway.” He said, “That’s no bloody good.” I said, “Why?”

21:30 He said, “You’ll be living on the alarm and they’ll be singing over your fence, ‘Railway.’ Get an eight to four job.” I said, “God, this is no good.” The railway had granted me a job, so I asked them could I transfer to some other segment, an eight to four job. They said, “All we’ve got is a bridges.” So I went onto bridges for five years. Then they built,

22:00 while I was at the bakehouse, going back, I met the wife. She was nursing at the hospital. That’s the rock I perished on. I never got out of the town. We got married in ’47, 26th of April ’47 and then I was in the

22:30 railway and it was taking me away from home, bridges.

What did that involve?

A lot of axe and adze work, dressing timber and putting it, mending railway bridges and they were all wooden structures in those days. Now they’re concrete, but then they were all wooden structures.

23:00 Then they built the Mosman Hall Mental Home here. I thought, “That wouldn’t be too bad a job. It’s a government job and I’m home.” So I went and saw them and they said, “Yeah.” So in April ’55 I started there. They started training in ’58,

23:30 so I did my training, sat for my exam and got my psychiatric nursing certificate and I became a registered nurse and I settled in there for 30 years, or nearly 30 years. The wife, when the youngest child was 13, that’s Robert, she went back nursing

24:00 again. So we were both nurses and we spoke the one language and it was quite good. Had the three kids at the college.

Did you enjoy being a father?

Yeah. Definitely. Quite good.

Because you had that advice from the Catholic Brother.

Yes, what was

24:30 our…

Duty?

I stuck to that too, although unconsciously, because they all had spiritual education, the Catholic kids. It’s up to them when they’re about 15 or 16 whether they wanna embrace it or not, but they’re not ignorant as far as spiritual education is concerned. And with the scholastical education,

25:00 well, I sent them as far as they could go. If that Little Fellow, “Little Fellow” we used to call him, he was six foot four mind you, if he’d have finished his, we’d have the three of them with university degrees. But he was halfway through and he got killed. Bill, he

25:30 passed with honours, the eldest boy, and he went into the army and looked like going to Vietnam, but Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pulled them out. He had his number on his hat ready to go on the boat and they pulled the battalion out. He was in 9RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. So he did a tour from here to Singapore to Hong Kong to Japan, Vladivostok and across the

26:00 Siberian Railway to Moscow and found out then they couldn't get into Germany because of the Berlin Wall. He come down through Bulgaria and Austria and all those places to Italy and across to France and up into West Germany that way, across to England and back home. Then he went back to St Lucia and did his honours and got his Master's Degree

26:30 for hydrology and geology. Estelle, when Robert got killed, she was ready to go to the conservatorium. She had a scholarship to go there and she put that on hold because her mother wasn't the best after losing Robert. She was only 17 when he passed and she felt she was a bit young to leave home.

27:00 So she stayed working at the convent teaching elementary music. After a couple of years she wrote to the conservatorium and asked them whether the scholarship was still available to her. They wrote back, no, that that scholarship is non existent now, but there's this one and that one and she put in for one of them.

27:30 So she put in and she went to the conservatorium then for four years. She lived overlooking the harbour there up from Breakfast Creek, Aspley's at the back. Up on Hamilton is it? She had a flat there for four years. So she went to the conservatorium. In '78 Miriam and I went to England for

28:00 a holiday, three months, from July till October. She had cousins over there. We come back out and Esther was transferred then. We went to her graduation in the December of that year. Then she was transferred up to Townsville and she's been teaching in Townsville ever since.

28:30 Miriam went back to work. She found out she couldn't handle the stress of being a casualty sister at the hospital, so she transferred to Eventide Home here, it's slower nursing. Then we both retired in end of January '82. Both retired on the one day.

29:00 After we come back from England I said, "You're working eight hours and you come home and you do another damn eight hours cleaning the house up. I'll get a piece of ground and we'll build another house." This is it. She still did the eight hours.

29:30 So nothing was really achieved, only the fact that it's an easier house to clean and things like that, because it's all tiles throughout.

When you first started as a psychiatric nurse, did you see many veterans come through the psychiatric system?

Quite a few, but most of them would go to Greenslopes Hospital and finish up in the psych ward for veterans at Goodna.

30:00 We'd get quite a few. Got a couple that was at Mount Carmel when I was there, and a couple of other college blokes. They were mostly alchies [alcoholics] and things like that. It was a tough job the first four or five years because psychiatric medication wasn't available and you had

30:30 three or four fights before breakfast in the bathroom with them. With the advent of this psychiatric medicine coming in it made them more pliable and easier to manage. Quite different. So the job became very easy, but it was a tough job from about '55 until in the middle '60s. These different

31:00 medications were coming onto the market and it made it a lot easier.

Did you talk to Miriam about your war experience?

Very little. She didn't seem that interested either. So I never pushed it. This is the most ever I've talked about it I think.

Did you talk to your children about it?

Sometimes they'd as a question

31:30 and I'd give them an answer.

What was the hardest thing for you about adjusting to civilian life again?

I think the freedoms. The freedoms in the army and when you were on leave you just decided something and that was it. When you were married you had to stop and think,

32:00 "It's not me, it's family." That's what this life is all about, family. So you had to stop. That was the hardest thing I found to adjust. I had a dose of war neurosis hit me in '69. I had a month off work over that.

What happened?

32:30 Anxiety I think. I was working at Mosman Hall at the time, but it was 24 years after. According to the psychiatrist a lot in that have it in that time space, 24 years after, bang, it hits them. I don't know why.

33:00 It was anxiety. After a month I was right. I went back over. I didn't have any troubles like that since. I get a bit of emotional instability sometimes. You water up and nearly cry when you're explaining things. Other than that

33:30 it wears off, the aftermath of it. Just push it back in, forget about it.

Did you dream about the war?

I have more so late. Different things crop up. Incidents. But every day

34:00 of your life you think about it. It's there. Every day of your life. It's with you. That's the combat. See, Australia left 514 dead in that eight months in Bougainville. You hear them talk about Vietnam, 11 years they had 516 killed in eleven years.

34:30 We had 514 killed in eight months in Bougainville. That was the intensity of the fighting between, the difference in the intensity.

Was there a particular loss of a fellow man that most affected you?

Not during the war so much. We had a lot of wounded, our company, but

35:00 we never had that many killed outright. After the war a few mates that passed on, it upsets you a bit. I had one mate, Bill Swenson, he's a local bloke, he died in his sleep in Townsville. Went to bed Saturday night and never woke up. I worked with him on the bridges and I worked him at Mosman Hall.

35:30 He was in my platoon, I was his platoon commander. When he went I was a bit upset about it. There's another young fellow, Sater from Melbourne, he used to drive all the way up to look the boys up. He was a Victorian that was reinforced

36:00 a Queensland battalion and he'd come all that way up to say hello to the boys and drive around and drove back. He was right for a couple of years and then he'd come up again and see them all. There's a fellow in South Australia named White, he was the same. He was a 17 Platoon bloke. Calls in. You get like brothers.

36:30 I suppose it's facing the same danger together and that. And you were there for one another. If one of them got wounded you never left him. If you had to attack, you attacked to get him out. Things like that meant a lot.

When did you first have a reunion?

37:00 There was one reunion, the first reunion I went to was about three years after the war, in Townsville. I went. Then I never went to one, they were holding them, but I never went to them till about the '80s. In Bowen, I went to that one. It was at

37:30 Miowera see. That was the first camp I went to, Miowera. I went there. Been to a couple of reunions since. You get talked out. And time. To me, family is the most important thing

38:00 in this life. It's better than money and things like that. Family and health. I've been fortunate with my health wise. I seem to be wearing all right. I'll be 86 in December.

Incredible. What's the secret?

38:30 Don't know. Genetics I think it must be.

Good fresh air in Charters Towers.

Something like that.

Are you proud of your war service? What are you most proud of?

The fact that I took part. I was talking to Laurie Hooper and I said, "I wouldn't

39:00 change the experience. I wouldn't swap it even though it was the best part of my 20s." He said, "Me too. I didn't last long, I got hit." I said, "Yeah." Good NCOs used get hit quick, cos they were doing their job and urging their men on. They'd pick them out, bang. He got hit early. I just seemed to be

39:30 lucky that way. A few close calls, but other than that I never got a scratch much. I got shrapnel in my hand, but other than that I was a bit fortunate. That bloke up there was looking at me.

You were awarded for your bravery. What gave you the will to do something so brave?

40:00 Well, at the time you don't think you're doing anything brave, it's the job on hand and you had to do it and that's it. Another thing, moral fibre, I think some people have it, some don't, and that's it. That's the way I saw it anyhow. I was

40:30 a bit lucky. I could think clear in action and see the situation. Wasn't so hot when we came out, admittedly. A lot of them couldn't think even in panic. Tommy Cahill said to me once, "When that first burst goes over your head, Joe, I panic till I hear you voice saying,

41:00 'She's right, fellows. Watch your front.'" He says, "It brings me down to earth."

That’s an amazing compliment.

Yeah. Tom. Somebody said to him

Tape 8

00:31 About he panics when the first shots go over his head and then he says, “Soon as I hear your voice saying, ‘She’s right,’ Joe. Soon as I hear your voice saying, ‘She’s right. Watch your front,’ or, ‘Watch your flanks,’ I settle straight away.” I had to

01:00 think twice whether I said it or not. I never realised what I used to say. It just come in, automatic action type of thing.

How does it impact on you what you hear your men saying you gave them assurance?

I don't know. It’s part of leadership I suppose. Some people have got it, some people

01:30 haven’t. That’s the way the cookie crumbles. That officer that they sent back, he was just considered he had no moral fibre whatsoever.

Do you know what happened to him after the war?

Yes, he was sent back. We heard he was sent back in charge of transport. But years later

02:00 I was in Legacy and I happened to get his history to prove that his widow was acceptable for Legacy and I read he was relieved of his platoon on the 4th of February. But the 23rd of March he had been released from the army to go to industry. So he married a girl who

02:30 inherited two cattle stations. So they just politely took the line of least resistance and released him to industry. So he was in action on the 4th of February and by the 23rd of March, which would be about six weeks after, he was back in civilian life.

What did the men think of somebody like him?

03:00 A lot of bad talk about him, but he’s not here to defend himself, so we just forget about him.

Did you have compassion or understanding for why someone might behave in that way?

Not at the time, because we had a job to do and he was falling down badly on it. Yet, he took the commission and everything as an officer.

03:30 He should have opted out of it before it happened, been able to have insight into himself.

You said at the time you couldn’t understand it. Have your attitudes changed since the war?

To a degree I suppose it would have.

In what sense?

04:00 Well, you’re not so dippo [stupid] about it for a start. It’s just something that happened in past tense and you get on with life. Forget about them. They fall by the wayside if the want to. That’s it. That was my thinking.

Have your attitudes about war in general changed since you were in that situation yourself?

It’s not a good thing,

04:30 but I certainly believe that if you live in a country, it’s worth fighting for. I always felt it was a good period of my life even though there was a lot of suffering. The end result, I was proud to think I had been through it and got out of it and got on.

05:00 That was a segment of my life that was behind me then,

Have your views of the Japanese changed since the war?

Not so much. They’re two-faced people. They’ll be slapping you on the back and be digging you in the back with a knife sort of thing. A lot of palaver, honourable gentlemen and bowing and scraping and all that.

05:30 But let them become top dog and they grind you under quick smart.

Did you have a close relationship with any of the POWs?

I have a schoolmate, James Lyle Miller, who lives in, I don't know, I think it’s Aspley, where’s that?

06:00 **Brisbane.**

It's behind Hamilton isn't it, Aspley?

Yeah.

There's another suburb going towards, you go Mount Gravatt and around and it's, he lives there. He was a POW. He was in my

06:30 class at the state school. He was an officer in the 2/26th in Malaya. Poor old Jimmy. He was caught. They cut out of land there and they became POWs. The officers were sent to Sandakan. He was sent to Sandakan with a fellow that was, when he came home from the war and settled down he

07:00 became the mayor of Brisbane, a fellow called Frank Sleeman. They were in Sandakan together. When the Death March came on, they were a bit fortunate. They were sent to, the Americans had bombed this Jap airfield and they were sent to work and fill in the holes. The rest of the camp was cleared out and sent on a death march. A couple

07:30 of thousand of them. Only about four lived I think, of that death march. The Japs just marched them to death. If they fell out, they were shot. That's what saved them. Him and Sleeman were that hungry he was telling me, that they had a banana and they had an agreement that if they got a banana you eat half, I eat half.

08:00 Then you eat the skin this time and I eat the skin next time. He said, "You know, we were that hungry, we had a stand-up fight over whose turn it was to eat the skin." That's that Frank Sleeman that was mayor of Brisbane after. Jimmy Miller, he married a lady that was in the army or air force

08:30 part of it and he lived down there. He left the town and never come back to the town. He settled down there and reared a family. I often wonder whether he's still going.

When the war ended, did you see a surrender ceremony?

At Nauru, yeah.

Tell us about that.

It was all

09:00 pageantry type of thing. The Jap officers were all paraded and our brigadier, we were all on parade. Our brigadier took the sword from the commander of the Naruan garrison, had him signing the papers. He surrendered Nauru Island, and Ocean Island.

09:30 It went on Cinesound News, theatres and that, in Australia. That was in September '45. Stevenson took that.

In New Guinea, as you were

10:00 **moving the Japanese back, were you moving into their pits that they had occupied?**

In Bougainville we were.

Describe what you found there.

In the pits? A lot of filth. They'd be eating here and their toilet would be there.

10:30 Their personal hygiene as an army was terrible. When you occupied their pits you automatically got a shovel and started cleaning them out. We'd build a lot of pits of our own besides them.

When you searched the Japanese bodies, did Australian soldiers

11:00 **take souvenirs?**

They'd take pictures. We were fighting 6th Division Japanese. The 6th Division Japanese were called the Nanking Rape Artists. They raped the Chinese town of Nanking. They captured it and

11:30 they had atrocious photos taken of things that they did in Nanking. I can remember just looking at one and giving it back to the bloke. It was all Chinese women. All they had on was a bit of a short blouse up top, some of them not, and they sat them on the footpath and their feet was

12:00 in the, just plus of the gutter, and spikes were put in the ground, and this one's foot was tied to that spike and this one's right foot was tied to that spike. There was rows of women and they were just there for the Japanese soldiers to rape. I seen this photo. I can remember looking at it and thinking, "Oh."

12:30 You'd get silk hankies off their bodies and 90 per cent of them would have Japanese women with their genitals exposed and things like that on their silk hankies that they'd have in their pocket. Things like that. Some blokes used to keep those things, but I couldn't be bothered with them.

13:00 Just memorabilia.

Were there other souvenirs taken from the Japanese?

Yeah, swords and things like that. When we were at Nauru they had to put all their swords and that in a heap as part of surrendering their weapons. Then Colonel Kelly had a raffle. You put your name in and a number

13:30 was put against your name and the swords were numbered. Then they just called out, “Number so and so,” and that sword was given to you as a souvenir. I brought a sword home for Laurie Hooper because I remember him saying, “I won’t get a chance of getting a sword now,” as they were carrying him out. He was wounded in the burst of a machinegun in the right arm.

14:00 So I brought this sword home for him. I also had what they call a hara-kiri dagger. I brought that home. I had it for a few years and I lost interest and gave it to somebody that was, this young fellow was saving wartime memorabilia and I couldn’t be worried about that. I kept

14:30 a pair of trousers. Shrapnel had hit here and hit through. It was a scratch on my tummy and blood filled my boots sort of thing. I kept the trousers. Before I handed it I tore the piece out and I kept that for a few years, but I thought, “It’s rotten,” and threw it in the rubbish tin after I finished with it.

Why did you keep it?

I don't know. Sentimental thing I suppose. That’s how close I went to

15:00 getting wounded. I got wounded a bit in the hand, a Jap grenade went off and I’ve got a bit of shrapnel still in there. No, I thought that rather hand the trousers in, I got a new pair of trousers for it, I took this square out and kept it

With all the death and killing

15:30 **you witnessed there, what method did you use to deal with the situation you were in so it didn’t drive you crazy?**

I usen’t to dwell on it. I treated it as if I was shooting a kangaroo or something like that.

But the Australian men were being killed and injured as well. How did you deal with people you cared about being…

I don't know, you just had to deal with

16:00 it and get on with it. That was all about. It’s something that happens. You don’t dwell on it too much, you get on with the job.

Was there a ceremony for the Australian men killed?

When we come out of action there was always what they

16:30 called a rollcall parade. Their names were read out and that. We’d have a battalion parade and the names of the dead were mentioned earlier and then the band played and you marched around. You really felt good to be alive. The band was playing, you had clean clothes and

17:00 everything. You couldn’t help but step out. That was the way of it. I always remember, just before we were to go back into action before the war finished there was a politician died, Curtin I think it was, he was the prime minister. I can remember he got in the plane and went back to Australia and we were

17:30 on this parade ground. So the general in charge of us, General S.G. Savige, he inspected us. We were ready to go back into action down the south and he come along the ranks and he asked me where I got my Military Medal from and I said, “Tsimba.” He said, “Tough show, hey?” I said, “Yeah.” He went down four or five more and there’d a little fellow from Sydney called Bluey McLaughlin, and you could see he was only

18:00 a kid and the general said to him, “What would you like to be when the war finishes and you get out?” “I’d like to be a returned soldier, Sir.” Everyone were there to hear him burst out laughing and broke the parade up for a while. Even the general had a good old giggle. Thought it was a pretty good answer. He’d like to be a returned soldier, get out of this lot.

18:30 **Did General Blamey visit Bougainville?**

No, General Savige.

General Blamey never went to Bougainville?

He did, yeah, when Porton Plantation battle was on.

You weren’t there for his visit?

No, we were driving in the Bonis Peninsula, but he was in a launch standing off, watching the Porton fight.

What did you and your men think of General Blamey?

19:00 Not much. He didn't go over too well. We thought more of our colonels, our battalion commanders, they were better men than that. Savige was a good man, but he had to be under Blamey's thumb. There was a lot of politics higher up in the army going on, political manoeuvres and that.

19:30 **Some people describe Bougainville as one of those unnecessary wars.**

Yes, well, the Japs were bottled up there. No need to, they could have just sat there for the eight months. There was 514 good Australians buried. Whereas if they had waited eight months the war would have been finished,

20:00 but the politicians wanted to have a say in the breaking up of the spoils of the war.

You believe it didn't need to happen?

I don't think we needed it. There's a book on it, The Unnecessary War. I read it and I thought, well, some factors are pretty right and others are a bit, what would you call it,

20:30 overdone. No, we'd have felt better, got more satisfaction, if they'd put us into Singapore to release the POWs who were into Borneo. But they didn't and that's it.

Did you think,

21:00 **"Why are we here" at the time?**

Well, we had the attitude that we knew it was unnecessary, but you had a job to do and you did it. That was all about it.

When you were there you didn't think it was necessary?

No. We didn't think it was

21:30 necessary.

Would you like a glass of water?

I'll get a drink.

You were saying that even then you didn't think it was necessary.

I didn't think it was necessary. A lot of us had the same opinion, but they got on with the job. That was what they were trained for.

22:00 **Was there discussion among the men about that while you were there?**

There would be, but. On Bougainville they weren't discussing it, but when they came out of action and that they probably discussed. We were in the sergeants' mess away from them sort of thing. They knew.

22:30 They were capable of constructive thought those young fellows.

You said you've been dreaming about the war more recently. What dreams do you have?

Different incidents. Things. They come up in your mind sort of thing. Mostly just as you're waking up,

23:00 as though the subconscious is coming to the fore. You think about the war every day. Every day of your life something brings it up in your mind. It's with you for life sort of thing, especially infantry blokes.

What thoughts do you have when you think about it every day?

Not bitter or anything, just of

23:30 incidents. They crop into your mind. Different incidents and things like that that happened. I think that's why the wife never talked about it too much. I used to keep it to myself. I don't know whether she ever read that

24:00 citation. She could have, on the quiet. I wouldn't know.

What does the Military Medal mean to you?

It's an honour and there's no more of them. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam came in and changed all that. They don't issue Military Medals any more. All the British decorations are wiped in the Australian ones.

24:30 So somebody can cash in a bit of money on it when I die if they want to. I won't know.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

You meet the blokes, fire a few shots together, quietly, verbally. There was about 30 of us in this town

after World War II, or more,

25:00 returned. But there's only about four or five now. About four. One fellow was a batman, another bloke a machine gunner, then Hooper, he was my corporal, and me. That's about it, I think. The march of time is catching up with us all. Hence the Archives, hey?

25:30 **Heading over to war you felt confident that you were well prepared.**

Yes, I was well trained.

How does the reality of war differ from your expectations as a young soldier?

I'm not too sure.

In what way were you

26:00 **unprepared or surprised by what you faced?**

Not so much surprised. See, the army used lessons learned in Kokoda and places like that to impart to us. So much so that you were prepared. When we first went in we were inclined to be a bit

26:30 inferior, thinking that we wouldn't measure up to other battalions and things like that. But after a weekend in action we found out we were killing 17 of them to every one of us they were killing, we started to shake down into a pretty good unit. They matured

27:00 as soldiers after a few weeks. Shake down into a good unit. We had some good leaders there and things like that that helped them.

What is it about the Australian soldier that made them such a force against the Japanese?

I think it's our way of life, our attitude, our training, the whole lot put together.

27:30 The Yanks weren't so hot. The Australians had to go in at Buna and help them out. General Douglas MacArthur. That's the thing that used to irk our fellows on Bougainville. We'd listen to the radio from Tarawa and you'd hear, "MacArthur's troops on Bougainville took so many miles of

28:00 country today." They didn't say, "MacArthur's troops," or, "The Australians under MacArthur's command." MacArthur wasn't even on Bougainville. But the American public would think they were Yanks doing the fighting. "MacArthur's troops on Bougainville has advanced and taken so many." Our blokes were, "Listen to those bloody things." They'd be going crook.

28:30 It wasn't good for morale because they weren't even getting credit for what they were doing. So it's a wonder they even fought so well. I suppose discipline and training and that made the difference.

That must have been incredibly frustrating for you.

It used to make you sour. "Turn that bloody thing off," they'd say.

29:00 "Listen to that rot." It was crook.

Were you satisfied with the reception you got when you came back to Australia after the war?

Yes, we got good reception and everything like that. We had a better feeling than the Vietnam boys got. We had a better reception than they got, because they were undermined through the trade union movement of Australia. The ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions].

29:30 They went out into the public and passed the marble against those poor fellows. Even though they only had 516 say in eleven years killed, they were still putting their lives on the line, weren't they? They were throwing eggs at them and tomatoes and that, all brought about by the communists in the Labor Party.

30:00 It wasn't good. I reckon it was a treasonable act myself. That's what happened to them. So there's no cohesion about them now with the RSL. They're not very interested in picking up the banner and carrying it on. Very few of them. You've gotta beg them to try and get

30:30 them to Legacy because we're getting too old for Legacy and things like that. Some of them are interested, but others. We've got a couple of ladies in Legacy now that are, they're not ex-service women, they lean towards doing a good job, so why not accept them? That's what's happening, because of

31:00 the lack of Vietnam veterans not coming to the fore.

Are the memories you have of the war the strongest memories you have?

That I've imparted, yeah.

Are those years significant memories

They supersede the memories of civilian life

31:30 to a degree. You think back. I've got nice memories of family and things like that. I remember Robert's mother saying to him as a little fellow, "By quiet, you're giving me a headache." He said, "Mum, you're no

32:00 Bex [analgesic] powder to me." Little things like that that happen within the family you recall.

How did your war experience change you as a person?

I think I'm the same old Joe, I think.

32:30 There could have been some change. I went up to the deputy principal of the hospital. Before I retired I wasn't in the ward, I was in the administration part of it at the end there, for the last seven years of it.

33:00 It was good. It was a government job, which in those jobs was security. You had your government job and you had your super [superannuation] at the end of it. This day and age everyone's a casual worker. So they become a casualty in the workforce, which is not good. Unionism flogged the system

33:30 and it's all come about because of that.

How do the war movies reflect the reality of war?

Some are all right, but some are stretched. Ridiculous. I see a bloke with a grenade blow a bridge down and things like that.

34:00 A grenade wouldn't blow a bridge down. That's people producing war that's got no conception of what it was like. Some war films are. D-Day and all that was good. Then Rommel's Story was another good one.

34:30 Rommel, had a lot of respect for the Australians soldiers. Soon as the Australians were in the front line he used to put his top troops opposing them. Tobruk and El Alamein.

What advice would you give you young Australian soldiers going into conflict today?

Keep your head down, mate.

35:00 Keep your head down.

What about anyone thinking about joining the army ?

I think it's a good thing. They learn discipline and whether they're needed or not needed, I think they've got everything to gain in life by the training that they get. Self discipline and things like that, which come into it. Because in schools today they're not taught that. Their mothers

35:30 are not allowed to slap their children even to censure them and keep them on the right track. That's a terrible travesty of a mother's right I think. That's our society today.

Do you have a final comment about your life or war

36:00 **experience?**

Not so much about the life, but as I said before, if your country's worth living in, it's worth fighting for. If we're gonna be invaded you don't clear out of anything like that, you stay and fight to hold it.

36:30 Because we've got a good life in this country, but there's a few segments of it that's not so hot, like discipline and things like that, not good. To put it plain, I feel we've got a sick society on our hands in this day and age. With the advent of a lack of discipline

37:00 and drugs. Things like that. They don't realise once they're hooked that's the end of their life. They're down the drain, aren't they? So you've gotta train your kids not to give in to peer pressure and things like that.

37:30 That's where most of the downfall happens to young people. The wife used to give them a tap on the bottom if they wanted it. They got it. Didn't do any harm.

38:00 **You reckon they need a bit more of that?**

Kiddies do. You can talk yourself blind, you give them one sharp slap and let them know that you mean it they wake up and they conform straight away. I can remember the youngest fellow had the wife uptown,

38:30 had him uptown and she bought him a little matchbox car. He thought that was the greatest thing going. So the next time she got up town he wanted another matchbox car and she said she never had a spare two bob in her purse she reckoned. He threw himself on the ground and played up and she said, "I felt ashamed." So

39:00 I got a piece of electric flex, cut it that long and took the wire out of it and give her the covering of it. I

said, “Put that in your purse and if he pulls the same act, pull that out and give him a couple of them and put it back in your purse.” Sure enough that’s exactly what happened. When he came passed he wanted one and he played up again and she went bang, bang with it. No more. That was it. No more playing up for

39:30 the little car. So that’s an instance of, it wasn’t overdone, he just got three or four slaps with this thing on the legs and he got up, shook himself and got mobile. That was the way to go with them.

Thank you for sharing your story with us.

40:00 You’re welcome. I hope I haven’t forgot too much.

INTERVIEW ENDS