# Australians at War Film Archive

## Donald Daniels (Don) - Transcript of interview

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## Tape 1

00:35 **Thank you, thank you Don for letting us interview you today.**

Pleasure.

**I would like to ask you if you could give me a brief outline of where you were born and in what year and if you could describe the place that you were born?**

Well, I was born in Burnley in 1923.

01:00 I attended state school and during this time or shortly after that time of course came to the Depression. And unfortunately during that time in 1932 my mother died, leaving my father with my two sisters and myself to look after. He at the time worked at Worth Irons, piano people and of course they were one of the first

01:30 to go during the Depression. This made living very, very difficult. The house of course was being purchased and fortunately enough the banks allowed not only my father but many people an additional twelve months to pay off the house rather than foreclose on the deal. So life in those days was fairly difficult. We went without a lot of things, although

02:00 my father being a good manager he managed to keep us together. And of course sister one did the cooking and laundering and at the age of fourteen my older sister went out to work. At the age of fourteen I left school on the Friday and started work on the Monday. I started work in a interior decorator

02:30 shop in Melbourne in the city. And he, my employer was the top decorator of Melbourne in those days. But in those days interior decorating wasn't a subject or a field. It was well sought after in terms of more departmental stores. He was the interior decorator and I had very, very good

03:00 grounding in the interior decorating field. At the age of fourteen when I started I said to my father when the war broke out in '39, "I'd like to go to the war with my brother in law who was going with the 9th Division". And he said, "Son, you are far too young. You don't know what you're heading into. No. There is no way known that I

03:30 would give my consent". So time went on but it was only a year after, that is in 1940, that I said that if I can't go to the war, I will join the CMF, which is the Citizens Military Forces, which again is what we referred to as Militia. Which I did, I joined the Victorian Scottish Regiment

04:00 where I served then for roughly a period of six months or more which we used to have in those days what they call three months in and three months out. My employer was very good. He put up with this situation, which most of them had to do of course. But during this time the Japs, of course, were getting a bit threatening and they

04:30 wanted to form a battalion, namely the 39th Battalion Expeditionary Unit to do garrison duty at Port Moresby. They called for volunteers from all over Victoria and all from militia units. So I was standing alongside my colleague Ted Stewart and he said, "I'll go if you go" and he maintains from

05:00 that day to this that I said it. That "I'll go if you go". But we have quite a bit of fun over that. So we did. We joined the 39th Battalion. Mainly I suppose we joined for the excitement, the fact that we were going to New Guinea and the fact that we were going to go in a liner. In those days of course all we had was pushbikes and to go on a ship was quite an adventure. So

05:30 I don't know whether we really joined the 39th Battalion for "King and Country". Nor did we join patriotically. We joined because of the excitement. Where upon we were told, when they called for volunteers, "We are going to Port Moresby as a garrison battalion. Bring along your sand shoes and your tennis racquets, what have you

06:00 and there will be Polynesian girls dancing on the beaches and it will be quite an experience". We thought, "This is really wonderful". This battalion was formed in the October in 1941. We were then sent to Darley. We formed up in Caulfield at the Caulfield Racecourse and we were sent then to Darley to do our

06:30 initial training. This of course is what they refer to as open warfare. The same as what you would see in the desert because our troops at this stage were in the Middle East, our AIF [Australian Imperial Force] troops. We did our training in open warfare. On December of that year the Japs bombed Pearl Harbour and of course the race was on. They shipped us

07:00 that Christmas, immediately to Port Moresby, having only had two months at Darley, still open warfare. So we arrived at Darley and as I say completed our two months' basic training and we sailed that Christmas and then we arrived at Port Moresby. And then that's the starting then of the campaign,

07:30 of the Kokoda campaign.

**How long were you in Kokoda for?**

What, Kokoda proper?

**How long were you participating in that campaign?**

In the campaign? We went in July. Dates... Probably about three months, two and a half, three months in the campaign itself.

08:00 **Okay. And where did you go after the campaign?**

Well after the Kokoda campaign, which is was the Kokoda Track. The Kokoda campaign, when you speak of Kokoda, it was the ones that actually fought on the Kokoda Plateau. And the ones who fought on the Kokoda Plateau was mainly A Company, who held it for two and a half days. A lot of other troops arrived on the track but never actually went down to Kokoda.

08:30 But however they were on the track and that's where all the big battles were. We held it for two and a half days and then we fought our way back. The last fight we had was at a place called Kagi, which is roughly about halfway. And we returned to Port Moresby with only thirty-nine of us standing on our feet out of the battalion.

**How many**

09:00 **were there initially, Don?**

Eight hundred. They weren't all killed of course but there were a lot killed, a heck of a lot wounded and of course there was a lot of sickness because we had this malaria, dengue fever, dysentery. And we returned to Port Moresby where we were reinforced. This is where again we were building up this reinforcement program. We were

09:30 reinforced to again, once the battalion came up to near full strength we were then flown over the Kokoda Track to a place called Popondetta and completed the Gona, Buna, Sanananda campaign. And we came back after that campaign to Port Moresby then back to Australia. When we arrived back in Australia having been formed

10:00 and disbanded by Blamey, which was a terrible, terrible thing to do. Why he disbanded us and not another battalion I don't know. Neither does anybody else. And we were disbanded having only lasted twenty months. And we were just thrown on the scrapheap.

10:30 **And how do you feel about that now?**

It was a shocking thing. It is written in the annals of history. It was one of the worst things that any army historian or history (UNCLEAR – bias) could be. The fact that he did stand up that day in front of the 2/14th Battalion mainly and the 16th and us

11:00 and refer to the fact that it's only the rabbits that run get shot. It's written in books and it was a shocking, shocking thing. I won't go into detail about the 2/14th Battalion but if it wasn't for the 2/14th Battalion, we wouldn't be here. We would have been annihilated. They lost a lot of men.

**So once that was disbanded where did you go after that?**

We had the choice then.

11:30 I came back off from a leave which they call operational leave and the battalion having been disbanded, I had the choice of either going to the 2/2nd Battalion or the 2/5th AGH [Australian General Hospital] or the Provo Corps. Well for some unknown reason I didn't fancy the Provo Corps. I didn't fancy being in the 2nd field ambulance. Most of us went to the 2/2 Infantry Battalion

12:00 where our CO, Colonel Cameron, was in charge of us for a while at Kokoda. So we stayed with them and we formed a platoon and spread around the actual battalion in itself. Once again we are getting this distinction between AIF and militia. We at this stage were AIF because we had joined the AIF prior to going over the Kokoda Track

12:30 although we came from a militia battalion. I was a sergeant at the time but like everything else you go into a new unit, they had plenty of sergeants so I had to revert back to being a corporal. All rank during the war was what they referred to as field rank. There was no actual active rank. So therefore they could give it to you today and take it off you tomorrow.

13:00 Whereas in latter years, after the war for instance, having a commission, they couldn't take my commission from me unless there would be a court martial but in the field they could so we had to revert back one. So I reverted back then to a corporal which I didn't mind, it's a good rank. So from there we went up to

13:30 Aitape, Wewak and completed the campaign from Aitape to Wewak. And then the war finished whilst we were still in the front line in Wewak and we came home. This was a period which I suffer with badly today is the fact that I maintain I spent too long in the front line.

14:00 When you work it out, it was almost three years of a period that we were in the actual front. See when we landed in Port Moresby we were bombed day and night from that Christmas until we left to go over the Kokoda Track in July. So for the first six months we were bombed day and night, strafed and this didn't

14:30 improve the mentality or the strain of stress, etc. Although we didn't call it stress in those days, you just went "Bomb-happy". But from then in July we left to go over the Kokoda Track it was towards the end, October, before we came off.

15:00 And then coming back to Port Moresby, we were in Port Moresby for a matter of few months to be reinforced and then back into Aitape-Wewak. So the period of time, it was all frontline, which is telling on me today. Which I've been to a psychologist and all he could do for me, he more or less said, "You've lived with this for sixty years,

15:30 I can't snap my fingers and bring you out of it. It's a thing that you've gone beyond recall."

**So your war experiences clearly had a large psychological effect on you, Don?**

Oh it has. Yes. Yes. We stood it for a while but I think the older you get you go back over it more. Occasions such as this

16:00 whilst you are talking about it that things come back into mind. It doesn't help. Well I haven't been able to. I haven't had a good night's sleep in years in terms of health-wise.

**So do you dream about it now?**

Yes. Oh yes. Yell out orders in my sleep.

**Do you remember your dreams?**

Oh yes, very clearly.

16:30 Very clearly, yes. I can remember the incidents that happened that do reflect back, numerous incidents. The first action that we saw. It was frightening. We had only heard what the Japs were like; they were small, cross-eyed, all wore glasses,

17:00 they were only about four foot six high and they couldn't shoot straight. But the first Japs we met were marines. They were six feet tall and they had had all the experience in the world coming down through Manchuria, and down through the Philippines and through Rabaul and down now to Gona, where they landed and met us at Kokoda. So they were big boys and they were well and truly experienced. And we were raw ... We didn't know what to expect.

17:30 We've always been taught to be quiet, element of surprise, be quiet and attack. When they first attacked they made that much noise rattling cans and yelling out to each other. And we thought, "Crikey it sounds like they are having a rock concert". This was frightening, terribly frightening. I know why now, being in a Scottish Regiment, I know why now that

18:00 they send the pipers in first. To frighten the hell out of the enemy with the bagpipes. And this was the type of a reaction that we had with the noise that they created. And of course when they started to advance that's when hell broke loose and we stayed, as I say, on the plateau for two and a half days with a lot of incidents that happened but the air force were supposed to have backed us up, landed

18:30 with our reserve troops, which were sitting on their backsides down in Port Moresby waiting for a plane to fly over once we'd taken the airstrip. This is getting a little bit out of hand here as you wanted a rotation of the Kokoda Track in itself. Do you want me to continue on, on that?

**It's okay. What I might do is we'll just go to post war now just to finish off our summary and I'll ask you what happened when the war ended, where you went after that. Did you go back to work?**

19:00 Oh yes. Went back to, yes. During the latter part of the war my employer applied for my discharge, so that I could come back to Melbourne and train to take over the managership of his business because he

wanted to retire. I applied from my end, which we were up in Wewak

19:30 at the time, for a discharge. I had married at this time, so I had quite a few points up. But unfortunately it didn't come to fruition. I couldn't get the discharge. So Mr Lyon, my employer couldn't afford to wait. He had the opportunity of selling the actual business rather than wait for me to come back

20:00 to take over managership or be trained for managership. So he sold it to Georges. And when I came back after the war he sold me with the company. So when I came back I went to Georges. And this took a lot of settling in because I was met at the front door on one occasion by the chap who was at the front door and he said, "I notice you're late this

20:30 morning, Mr Daniels". And I'm not used to that. "I mean who are you to tell me what to do?" So taking orders, it was very difficult because I had been so used to giving them. And this I found very, very hard. I do even today. When I was in hospital not long ago ... Well it's three years ago since I had all my bypasses, etc. A chap in the bed opposite

21:00 was wired up with all his necessaries. But he continually kept getting out of bed and he was tangled himself up with his wires. And the sister used to come in and say, "Now would you please stay in your bed". Anyhow he was getting up this particular day and I said, "Here look Ron, for goodness sake stay in bed". And he turned to me and said, "Who are you to tell me what to do?" It's a standing joke today. The fact that I have been so used to

21:30 well perhaps giving orders and so on, yes. "Who are you to tell me what to do?" I said the sisters are doing their utmost and explained to him.

**Keep him there.**

So it was rather difficult coming back into civilian life and being married. But however straight after the war they reformed the Victorian Scottish Regiment. And this, at the time was,

22:00 having experienced with my wartime experience, quite a few of us did join again the Victorian Scottish Regiment because a lot of us came from there. Secondly, the fact that it was an income which was non taxable. So the money that I received from the army was a great help in our early years of marriage.

22:30 Although we did have a changeover of CO [Commanding Officer] and the CO maintained that all officers, the money they receive will go back into the mess type of thing. But however, we did make money out of it, so that was a great asset. I stayed with that until what three or four, four years I think. And thoroughly enjoyed it,

23:00 it was good parade ground stuff. The highlight of my post war army career was, I was captain of the Escort of the Trooping of the Colour, which I think is a thing that you would very, very seldom have the opportunity of doing such a duty. But in general it was very good and then I decided I'd

23:30 give it away because of the commitment. Of course everyone was in the same boat too, all my other colleagues were in the same boat. I put in my resignation. My CO at the time was Sir Rupert Hamer and he said, "Look Don, we are all in a similar predicament here. Why not be just a freelance officer?" I said, "What's it entail?" "Well", he said,

24:00 "In the event of one not being able to make a parade we will give you a ring and say, "Can you help us out on a bivouac or a rifle shoot down at Williamstown or some other assignment?'" And I said, "That will do fine". I did that for a while but naturally of course the whole thing after national service fell in a heap and I resigned all together. But it was quite a lot of good fun.

**Did you**

24:30 **think about the war a lot after you came back?**

Not so much then because you were relating your knowledge on to the trainees, the National Service trainees. Not a great deal. You went over what you'd done and what you'd so and so, but it was a totally different type of training. You see the Darley training was what they referred to as

25:00 open warfare. When we arrived in Port Moresby we were supposed, I think, to do jungle training. But where was the jungle? All we knew it was on the other side of the airstrip where we were camped. We never saw the jungle. We were too busy unloading boats, etc and so on. We never saw the actual jungle until we left Port Moresby to go over the Kokoda Track and

25:30 it was a totally different type of warfare. Your whole concept of training changed, totally different. So I didn't have much trouble coping with my war experience in those early years. Then after a while, the rot started to set in, like us all I was no exception.

26:00 **So it wasn't till quite a few years later that it came back to you?**

Yes.

**Did you receive counselling for that, Don?**

Well, we didn't have counselling. Not in psychology or psychiatrists. We didn't have counselling.

**Have you ever received counselling for it?**

I've been recently, yes.

**Good.**

I had the opportunity. It was put on by the Vietnam Veterans through DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs]

26:30 and I took the opportunity of taking it. But I had an interview at Geelong here and they said, "It was a very, very tough course". You had to stay and possibly live in for a week or so but more or less said in a nice way, "You're eighty years of age. You've left it too late. There is nothing that we can do for you". It was mainly for the younger ones from Vietnam,

27:00 they nipped them in the bud as soon as they came home, which they called stress. And which quite a lot them today which we, it is not jealousy, it's just the balance of how things have changed. They came back with stress etc and so on and they're TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pension]. To us this is, "God, they wouldn't know what stress was

27:30 after the Kokoda Track and Gona in particular". Gona was a shocking campaign. And if they wanted to know what stress was but we didn't call it stress - it was war experience, etc.

**It was a different culture then, wasn't it?**

Totally different.

**So counselling wasn't in the picture?**

Well, we didn't know. We didn't have psychologists or anything, so it was not until the latter years

28:00 that we had the opportunity like now. But as I say they put it very nicely and say, "You're too old".

**So they didn't help you?**

No. I spoke to the psychologist, straight, man to man. I have a little bit of feeling about psychologists in turn because the first thing I went in and asked, "What branch of the service were you in?" He was going to interview me and he said, "I wasn't in any." And I said, "You're

28:30 going to ask me of my war experiences and help me understand, etc, and you've never been in the service?". He sais, "No". To me it's like a married couple going to a priest for marriage guidance. What would a priest know about marriage? I felt this same thing about the person who was interviewing me. So there was a barrier before we started, really. We just sort of spoke

29:00 and he did most of the talking and told me all about his house down at so and so and that. But we weren't getting anywhere. My own local doctor suggested that I go and complete the course because you never know. "He's been assessing you these three previous engagements and I'm sure on the fourth time you go he'll come out and" … So I went on the forth time and I said, "Are you getting anything out of this?" He said,

29:30 "No". I said, "Well, I'm not". He said, "I know that too". I said, "I think we're wasting our time". He said, "We are." So he agreed that I had gone by my used-by date and that was it. So therefore I just live with it with the aid of pills.

**Do they help you get to sleep?**

Well, they give me sleeping tablets but they keep me awake. I'm a bit allergic to the tablets. I'm not a tablet

30:00 taker. Except with Panadeine Forte though with my legs of course, with the pains but other than that, no I don't.

**Okay. We might just go back to pre-war now Don and I would like to start to talk about that time in more detail. If you could tell me …? You grew up in Burnley. What do you have … What earliest memories**

30:30 **do you have of Burnley?**

I suppose my memories of Burnley was the fact of having to school, I went to a state school. I was only in the fifth grade when I was sent to a health school because

31:00 I was undernourished. I've never been a strong robust, I'm very wiry, I'm very determined but I've never had the physique of an iron man. I was sent to this health school and came back for examinations, etc. But during my

31:30 life as a child in Burnley I had numerous chores to do. I didn't have the opportunity, perhaps like a lot of other lads. My chores which I used to hate, I used to have to get up and water the (UNCLEAR – cidonereas or sitting areas) of a morning and wash the frost off them before the sun came out. I'd have

to cut the kindling wood to light the copper on a Monday morning to do the washing on

32:00 a Monday morning. I had to dig dahlia bulbs and gardening in general, cut the lawns and jobs around the house. Saturday morning, I was never allowed out until after lunch. I did my chores around the house then I went out to play on the Saturday afternoon. Life then was

32:30 very ... all toys for instance were homemade. We had our trucks as we called them or pushcarts which were homemade with scrounged, not stolen, scrounged wheels and nuts and bolts and things of this nature and fittings, a bit of timber, enough to make it. But we never

33:00 had toys as such. After a while we managed to rake up enough to buy a pushbike which I had to do the ride to school. And then of course my mother dying when I was only eight years of age didn't help things in the family as a family.

33:30 And it was very difficult.

**How did she die?**

Cancer. In those days it was a "Growth", as my father would say but it was straight out cancer.

**Were you close to your mother, Don?**

I'll say yes to that but on the other hand, although I've got a very good memory, I can't remember my mother being vertical.

34:00 I can only remember her being in bed sick. And I could only remember we had to visit the hospital. Not had to visit but we visited the hospital. No, when you say close, not as a ... She was never in a position where she could play games or help me with my homework or things of that nature. She was always sick.

**And what did your father do for a living?**

34:30 He was a cabinetmaker come polisher. He was manager of Worth Iron's Pianos. And after the Depression closed that down, it was one of the first to be closed down. And during the Depression, like everything else, he just took a job wherever he could actually. And in fact he worked on the railways for a while. Whatever he did there I don't know. Laying the stones and

35:00 sleepers I think or the equivalent. He didn't drive them or wasn't a porter or anything like that and then after that he then went into the undertaking side of business wise and worked making coffins. And driving of course and numerous jobs in the undertaking field where he stayed until he died.

35:30 **How do you think the death of your mother affected you as a young boy?**

I don't say it's very hard for me. It didn't generally speaking, as one would refer to, it left a big gap. I wasn't ... My mother as I say, I can't remember

36:00 my mother other than being in bed sick or in hospital. So I never really had that closeness. And I am an unusual type of person to some degree, the fact that I regret or can't understand that when my mother died I didn't cry. And I thought, "Why not?" And

36:30 I've ... I can cry now because I lose my best friend or something like that and particularly during the war when I think about it now I can but at the time I didn't. I've wondered since then, "Why didn't I cry?" But other than that no, I didn't. I can't say that when you say closeness to mother,

37:00 it was not as though we had that bond, we had the bond but not active.

**Was she demonstrative? Did you know that she loved you?**

Oh yes, oh gosh, yes. We are, even today, very family-oriented. Very much so. We are a family. Even today with the grandchildren.

37:30 No, that filters through. We're just very family-oriented.

**Were you encouraged to show your feelings as a young boy?**

No, not really. No, we never had a ... We've never been what you'd say out flowing in expressing. Which people often say that I don't show

38:00 excitement. I accept things. But I don't get overexcited.

**So as a boy, do you recall any of your best mates as a young boy?**

Yes, yes. I had a very close friend. He and I used to go to Henley on the Yarra and get dressed up

38:30 in our duds and away we'd go. We would save our lunch money, which I used to have four pence a day for my lunch, which we'd buy a pie and a vanilla slice. But during that week I'd buy the pie but I'd save the vanilla slice. So I'd save that penny, which made five pence at the end of the week. Where I got the extra

39:00 penny from, I don't know. But I managed always to get six pence so we could got to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon matinee. And Malcolm and I used to go there and we used to meet a couple of girls inside. Who if I may just in brief say that one of the, I put an ad in the Mufti, which is a Veterans' Affairs paper. I have a beer tankard there, where it came

39:30 from I don't know and I advertised it and put Donald Daniels, so and so. And this lass rang and it was the same lass that I used to take, or didn't take, used to meet inside the picture theatre back in 1934, probably '35. So she is still going.

**A long time ago. Yes.**

So this friend of mine Malcolm,

40:00 I met him years after unfortunately it was… I saw his name in a paper and contacted him. And one of the first things he said to me was, "I've never forgiven you". And I said, "For what?" He said, "We were very, very close friends". He said, "You joined the army and you didn't even contact me". I said, "I never gave it a thought". We joined the army together. It was just one of those situations.

40:30 I just joined the army and so on and he was quite annoyed about it after all those years.

**We might just have to stop there while the tape changes.**

# Tape 2

00:32 **Right Don, I would like to ask you, how did the Depression affect your family?**

Fortunately enough, I suppose taking it overall we came out of it fairly well. We came out of it. But that was due to the fact that it was good management. I think a lot of people sort of fell in a heap, whereas my father being a very strong

01:00 type of person managed his financial situation and house duties, etc and so on. Which he did a lot himself as far as the ironing, for instance. I cam remember him in the kitchen ironing my sister's hair ribbons. She had plaits. So he himself did a lot of chores around the house

01:30 as I said before to keep the family together. The Depression days, they were very difficult as everyone found but I think with good management … It's like people today with pensioners. You can live on a pension. It's not designed to live on but you can if you can manage. We went without. I went without as far as toys were concerned, as far as

02:00 trips were concerned or excursions from school, for instance. I didn't go on any of those. We didn't have the money to go on such an occasion. So with good management…

**What about food?**

we came through. The house was the biggest problem. A lot of people lost their homes but the bank allowed Dad to extend it off. Instead of it being paid in 19-so and so,

02:30 they gave an extra year. This was a great help which was available to most people. But with good management we came through it all right.

**What about food? Did you lack food?**

No. How it came to pass, off hand, I was too young but I never went hungry. Although I had to go to this

03:00 health school. Which I don't know whether it was all together about being undernourished. I think it was a health situation whereby I could have been perhaps lacking certain vitamins and what have you. I went to this health school up at Blaxland for roughly eighteen months. It would have been a good eighteen months. Where upon as soon as you arrived you had a big bowl of

03:30 soup. Plenty of vegetables at lunchtime, etc.

**What about religion? Did religion play much of a role in your life?**

Very much so. Yes. We were not religious fanatics, but we went to Sunday school of a morning. I beg your pardon, church in the morning, Sunday School in the afternoon and church at night. We were Presbyterians. Dad was the

04:00 auditor of the books and he was a regular attendant. I had the job of, or often had the job of ringing the bells, the church bells at the Church of England. The Church of England was opposite the Presbyterian Church and I used to ring the bells and I got to the stage that I could ring four bells on my own which was one, two, three, four. Which were the hardest ones to ring because there's

04:30 continuity of it and at five to seven one bell tolled for five minutes which meant you got five minutes to

get in and sit down. During that time I used to race down the tower, down the steps, run across the road and go sit alongside my father and my sisters just in time before the service started. So it played a rather important part. Very embarrassing at times because you had to, to be in the cricket team

05:00 you had to attend church and it got to the stage that I was growing up and I asked Dad, I said, “Can I sit up the back with the big boys?” And he said, “Well yes, as long as you behave yourself”. I said, “Fair enough”. So I sat up the back with the big boys and during the service, the sermon, Dad looked around and one of the boys had said to me, “Would you like a lolly?” I said, “I’ll take a lolly

05:30 any day” and I was sitting up the back there chewing this lolly you see. My Dad got up out of his seat in the middle of the sermon, walked up the back and he said, “Take that lolly out of your mouth!” So I had to take it out and put it in my handkerchief in my pocket. Well, I got teased about that for months after. “The little boy. He’s not allowed to eat a lolly in church”. You see. And I’ve never forgiven my father for that. He could have told me when I got home.

06:00 But that was the sort of thing. And yes we attended church regularly. I’ve always been a little inclined, even during the war, to be very much aware of it. Very much aware of it. There were numerous occasions which I could relate about what sorts of things used to happen at church.

06:30 I used to volunteer to make the communion wine and of course I was the official taster at the same time. Numerous little incidents that we had when we were camped in Queensland with this colleague of mine whom I joined up with, he got badly hit in the head with a grenade and we were sitting in church and during the sermon again he was scratching his head

07:00 and he pulled a bit out and said, “Christ, it’s a bit of shrapnel”. We used the term in its context of the fact that “Christ” and the minister could not help but remark and say that “At least you gave thanks to God that you got the bit of shrapnel out” type of thing. And numerous little incidents. One in particular that

07:30 just before the big battle at Isurava there was an incident about a church parade. Whether you want to go into that or finish up with Sergio [Interviewer] about the battle of Isurava.

**You can mention it now, yeah.**

Mention it now? Okay, before the battle of Isurava we got out of Kokoda and came back to a place called Isurava which was where we reformed and we took

08:00 up the positions. Jack Flanagan, who was a very close friend of mine, a lay preacher, circled around and mentioned that we were going to have a quick little service in this clearing which overlooked Kokoda. And he sent the word around that it would be just a quick prayer. So the officer said, “Make it quick”. So we did. We formed up. There would have been about ten of us I suppose.

08:30 And he just said a prayer and we dispersed and about two minutes after the Japs shelled billyo out of it. They saw us grouped and thought, “What a target”. And we knew that we were submitting a target. And when I got back to my position I thanked the Lord for advising us to get out of there but next time don’t leave it so late. But that was

09:00 an incident of, even on the track you had these moments of religion comes into it in the fact that it’s amazing the number of people who say that they don’t believe but when the chips are down it’s one of the first things they ask for.

**So did you pray a lot during the war?**

Too right.

09:30 That’s one reason I think, several reasons people are, well particularly the grandchildren, I think. They say, “With all the casualties that you’ve had in your battalion, how is it that you came out?” And I thought, “Well, that’s a fair enough question”. So today, which I tell them I did a lot of praying.

10:00 I don’t say that it turns in one area but on the other hand I put a lot of my fortunate situations down to my scout training. I was in the boy scouts before I joined the army. And from that you learned how to look after yourself. I’ve always had clean shoes. My boots lasted longer than anybody else because

10:30 they were full of nugget. The other boots fell to pieces when they got wet. And things like this. We used to play “stalk the lantern” type of things. So you got behind a big tree or you camouflaged yourself. You crept very quietly through the bush and so on. All these little things added up to the fact of self preservation and I put down a lot to scouting.

**Did you feel afraid a lot**

11:00 **over there?**

Not afraid. Just scared stiff. You’re not afraid. You are just scared stiff. You go numb. You go beyond being frightened. When we first went into the first action we had at Kokoda proper, it was a numbness. Secondly, the fact

11:30 that you were there on the plateau and you more or less had no alternative. You had to fire your weapon

and you had to exist. So being afraid is a situation that you are afraid that something is going to happen but being scared stiff is

12:00 the fact that you are in it and you don't realise. Well you do realise very quickly. You learn very, very quickly just how dangerous war is when the bullets start coming around. Prior to that, no we weren't. The officers said you had better digging, start scraping a bit of a hole and get down under ground level. But we had no shovels, we had no spades, we had no,

12:30 nothing. All we had was the clothes that we stood up with and a groundsheet and that's all because all our gear we left up at Deniki. So when we arrived there ... But when the first shots came over it's amazing how quickly you can dig a hole with your fingernails. This was a sort of a thing because you were scared stiff, so you were being

13:00 afraid was one thing but being scared to that extent, you are scratching. You got the heel of your boot to loosen the ground and scrape it out with your hand. Just enough to get down as low as you can into an indentation.

**What happens with your body? Does your heart start to beat really fast?**

Oh yes. Oh yes. My experience is I think you are inclined to ... You're numb. You

13:30 can't realise exactly how dangerous this game is. I think you go past being afraid. I think you go into another bracket of scared. Frightening.

**Do you get so afraid that you can't move?**

Ah no. No. I don't ... I suppose

14:00 it does float. At times that you are scared stiff as the saying is. You just go ...

**Paralysed.**

Yes. You soon come to because you can't afford to do that. You must move. You've got to keep moving.

**Did you ever see any man, soldier not be able to move in that situation?**

14:30 Not being able to move but I've seen experiences of chaps that can't face it. Yes. I had one in my section.

**What was his story?**

We were again at this place at Isurava going into Kokoda, which was two villages back from Kokoda, we were going into action. And he just sat on the side of the track and said,

15:00 "Dan" which was my nickname then, he said, "I can't face it." I said, "Oh God," I said, "What the heck am I going to do here?" I was only a corporal then and I thought, "What am I going to do?" So I went to my lieutenant and I said, "I have a problem". He said, "What is it?" And I told him. He said, "Oh, we'll give him a job back at headquarters as a runner just until it,

15:30 until he comes to". Because I said, "I can't take him into action the way he is because it's just too dangerous for the other fellows because if he makes a noise" ... We're all in silence. "If he makes a noise or starts running for instance, it's going to cause, it's too dangerous". So we sent him back to battalion headquarters and he got over it.

16:00 In later years I found that he turned out to be a ruddy good soldier. So you do get a breaking point. And we had one chap who I won't name, but he is a very well known person, he accidentally shot himself in the foot. With all due respects these guns very seldom

16:30 go off on their own. So I'll leave it at that. But yes. Not everybody can face this type of thing.

**They don't all cope. Yeah. Okay going back Don, to your pre-wartime what contact if any did you have with World War I veterans?**

17:00 Not a great deal although I had two uncles in the Gallipoli who related stories that were very hard to comprehend in terms of the fact that I was too young to sort of understand fully what it was all about. Why they were there. The technical side of it, I didn't understand. In fact even

17:30 today I don't know why they even bloody landed there because it was the wrong place in the first place. Why they left them there for nine months, I'll never know. These are the stories of today but their conditions were shocking, absolutely shocking. I had a fair idea what conditions were like but not the actual war itself. Only the conditions which were similar to us

18:00 before we went into action. It was the conditions that we lived in Port Moresby for the first six months. The conditions half the time were a darn sight worse than action.

**I will get you to elaborate on that a bit later.**

I'd like to because I think it's an important bracket.

**Absolutely. Did the uncles, your uncles talk about their experiences?**

18:30 Yes. In a, well to me, in a light hearted… well they never went into the nitty-gritty, neither one of them. They were both rather reserved in front of the children. They don't disclose. Well things were different the way, today, totally different; blood and guts and you can have it spread out all over the table

19:00 in terms of that is concerned and so on. But in those days you never spoke like that. There was a totally different way of conveying their experiences, what they went through to us the younger generation.

**Were you curious?**

Yes. Yes. I've always been a bit of a what they refer to as a "Military Jill". I've been keen

19:30 on the army side of things. But they never related the horrors. They related incidents which we practice probably today but we're more openly speaking today than they were in those days. You never hear a '14 -'18 man, or I've never heard them,

20:00 relate the gruesome, the terrible ordeals that they had to contend with. Having time off to bury their dead and all that sort of thing. We never heard about that until recent years.

**So with school what did you … Were you a good student at school did you think?**

No.

**No?**

20:30 No. Simple as that.

**There was no subjects that you enjoyed or … ?**

There were subjects, yes. I liked drawing and I liked geometry. Algebra, I couldn't understand algebra at all. I still don't even know today why they even use it. In fact I don't think they do. No. I had difficulty with English and I had difficulty with verbs to be and

21:00 pronouns and goodness only knows what. No, I wasn't a good student. No.

**Did you enjoy school?**

Enjoy school? Hated school.

**Why?**

Mainly because of the teachers, they were tough boys, they were tough boys. And you would just, you would be sitting in class for instance

21:30 and occasionally you'll have a problem that you are trying to work out the radius by the diameter, or the circumference of the circle and you'd put the pencil in and you'd be thinking, "Now is that …?" And you'd be looking up at the ceiling and he'd pick you out of that and he'd say, "You can't work with your head up in the air. Come out here" and you get six cuts on the hand. Well, and these cuts, the strap, these cuts, it wasn't just

22:00 the hand, you'd have to roll your sleeve up and the strap would go from about here down to your finger but your hand would be numb for about an hour after and you couldn't write anything. They were tough boys. They were tough boys. And the class wasn't naughty in that sense of the fact they weren't rude or anything like that. It was just that they were tough boys. It was a tough

22:30 school.

**What school was this?**

It was a technical school.

**Yeah.**

My Dad wanted me to go up to a school which was quite a considerable distance away and generally speaking it too far, it was far too far to walk and even with a pushbike you had to ride over a pretty big hill. And most of my colleagues were going to the technical school. And that's why I'd sooner go

23:00 with my mates, as the saying is and went to the technical school.

**Did you think about Anzac much as a boy? The myth of Anzac?**

Oh yes. Anzac Day was always a day which we had learnt about Gallipoli and it was a day that you knew then the… The

23:30 chap who lived opposite us in Burnley was an architect and he worked on the Shrine. So we heard from him on the occasions when you would meet him out the front, of the Shrine and what it meant. So I had a fairly good sprinkling of when the light comes down on the eleventh day of the eleventh month … So yes, Anzac Day was always,

24:00 you always went into town and waved your little flag. It was quite prominent.

**So you understood how important it was for most people?**

Oh yes.. Well, it is a day to be recognised. That is history. Yes, it's a

24:30 very important day.

**Did you attend Anzac marches after the war?**

Yes. Yes. We marched every year. I was a, I've been Vice President of our Association for quite a number of years and have played a fairly active role in the march and our reunions

25:00 and our Kokoda day, which we have a pilgrimage to the Shrine once a year. Yes. I've always marched but I haven't marched now for quite a few years because I am unable to walk any distance. I can go down by train and go in a vehicle but it's not as easy as it sounds because the Geelong train comes in as number eight station and you've got

25:30 a mile and a half walk to get to the tram and then the tram goes to the assembly point and from there we get the vehicle down to the Shrine, they drop you off at the Shrine but how do you get home? They don't pick you up and take you back into town. They leave you and you've got to walk from the shrine down then to the tram, the tram once again back into town and then from there to Spencer Street

26:00 and from the Spencer Street entrance right down to number eight platform. It's just ...

**Too tricky.**

It's too far.

**How did you feel marching when you first finished not long after the war ended?**

How would one feel? I suppose very proud in as much as you survived the ordeals and you

26:30 completed your duty to your country, which we had more respect for then than we did before we joined. So that you felt that you'd done your job.

**So you have a lot more respect or you had a lot more respect for the country after your war experience?**

After the war. I must admit the country to me

27:00 prior to that, it was important. We were very proud of our country. We saluted the flag every Monday morning. I meant in joining up and going away fighting, it wasn't for King and Country, it was the excitement of going in a liner to New Guinea, a place where you had probably never dreamt of being able to go to. Because

27:30 owing to the fact I couldn't get my parents' consent to join the AIF to go over to the Middle East.

**Did you think about England much in those days before the war?**

What before the war?

**Before the war.**

Not really. Not when you say think about it. It was just that she was our ...

28:00 We have her flag up on the top left hand corner but as far as England herself was concerned, no, not a great deal. Not as a mother country, apart from when the Duke came out I suppose.

**So was your decision to fight in World War II ...? Did that have anything to do with loyalty to**

28:30 **the British Empire?**

Well, one would have to say yes to that. It was the fact that she was beginning to be in a very awkward situation and I mean, and we were part of England. I don't like using that word duty bound but I think having loyalty attached. Yes.

29:00 I think that did come into the equation.

**But did you predominantly feel that you were fighting for Australia more than England?**

Well, when I first wanted to join the AIF they were in the Middle East. I'd say, it was going over there to help England, which she needed because at this time the Germans,

29:30 they were well and truly on their way down. I'd say yes. When it came to the Japanese war of course, by all means yes. I was fighting for Australia. I was fighting more so for the fact that I'd far sooner fight them up there than down here. We had to go up and meet them. We couldn't sit on our backsides here and wait until they came.

**So there was**

30:00 **a real fear that the Japanese were going to invade Australia?**

No. Not a real fear. It was muted in the terms of ... It was a possibility that this situation could occur. That is why we were garrisoned at Port Moresby. But why we ...

30:30 Port Moresby was a mandated territory of Australia. So they could send the militia there and that's as far as they could send the militia. It is the only place they could go. That is why we naturally joined the 39th [Battalion] because it was the only way we could get away.

**So you were fourteen, I believe Don, when you left**

31:00 **school?**

Fourteen, yes.

**And you went into what job?**

Interior decorating.

**Yes. At what company?**

Mayer and Lyne, L-Y-N-E and he was the top decorator of Melbourne. In fact when I say the top decorator I think he'd probably be the only interior decorator in those days. Because all other furnishing stores were departmental, he was an individual.

31:30 Antiques, magnificent gear. Absolutely magnificent gear. I had a very sound grounding in terms of furniture and furnishings, interior decorating. We called it interior decorating in those days. It was what we call today interior design.

**What attracted you to that sort of work?**

32:00 Mainly I suppose two-fold: one, I liked timber and a lot of his material was either antique or reproduction. So I loved furniture, to learn the periods, etc. Secondly, my father always advised me. He said, "When you go into

32:30 a position never take your tie off unless you have to". Meaning to say if you can get a white-collar job or a blue-collar job before you take your tie off. It's most unusual that I haven't got a tie on today. So it was a position and when this position came vacant Dad took me in, in those days you didn't go in on your own. My father took me in

33:00 and we met Mr Lyne and found out what the position entailed etc, etc and there I started. I used to ride my bike into town to the office or to the store. Until Mr Lyne said, "I would prefer Don that you didn't ride your bicycle into

33:30 the business". He said, "I'm prepared to pay your tram fair weekly that you come in dressed preferably with a hat and perhaps the paper under your arm and look very businesslike". And that was at the age of fourteen. So grounding wise yes, it was very solid.

**So what sort of skills**

34:00 **do you think you picked up during that job?**

What skills?

**What sort of life skills or work skills?**

Well remember I'm only a lad and my duties then were very minor. I never actually attended to clients. I did all the stock wise and general duties until I then started to get into the sales side of it.

34:30 He would always let me approach to knock off the rough edges of a client to find out this, that and the other, then he could come in and take over. Because they were very, very ... They were all Toorak clients. They weren't suburbia, they were all Toorak clients; Macaweith, McLecklan and the Armstrongs and the

35:00 Mrs Armstrong. They all lived in St Georges Road, Toorak and this was their type of clientele.

**Upmarket.?**

Rymold and Panolla and all these sorts of clients. They were all big money people. They wouldn't want to be served or tended to by a junior. But he at least gave me the opportunity of meeting them

35:30 and just saying, "What are you interested in?" And if I knew they were interested in furniture he would come in and take over of course.

**Did you have a lady friend at this stage, a girlfriend?**

Yes. Yes, I used to be a very keen dancer. In fact I was a dancing instructor for quite

36:00 some time and did a few exhibitions and a couple of competitions.

**Really? What sort of dancing?**

Old time. When you say, mainly old time but it was a mixture, modern and old time but mainly old time.

**So you were pretty sharp on your feet?**

Oh yes. I was a real twinkle toes. Oh yes.

**And did you attend lots of dances**

36:30 **in those days?**

Oh yeah. My father was a good dancer too and he used to take me along mainly because he couldn't leave me alone at home. That's how it all started actually. When I was only a lad he would take me to the dance and I would sit there all night, reading comics etc and so on until such time as my sisters also and if nobody came up and asked them for a dance they used to come and grab me. I learned to dance at a very early age.

37:00 Until such time as I started to get professional and then my sisters used to have to ask me to have a dance with them.

**So you got quite good, did you?**

Oh for that era, yes. I was not outshining competition wise but quite good.

37:30 **Did you go and see the films with Gene Kelly in them?**

No. Well, I didn't do that type of dancing, Gene Kelly or Fred Astaire. No. Just straight out old time ballroom dancing.

**Now, do you recall the day when war was declared? Do you remember where you were?**

38:00 Yes.

**Where were you?**

In Collins Street, outside the Manchester Unity.

**You were still working at the store?**

I was working at Mayer and Lyne, yeah. Now I've got to be a bit careful here. See I put my age up a year to join the army. So war declared in '39 and I was born in '23. Sixteen.

38:30 **Sixteen.**

Was it seventeen? Sixteen.

**Sixteen. What was your initial reaction, Don?**

Initial reaction, I suppose a little bit bewildered. I didn't know what it was all about. I don't

39:00 no whether I had a great sense of there was a war on and what was so different. We heard so much about Gallipoli I suppose and it was only twenty-five years ago. It wasn't as though like today it was sixty five, or nearly apart from Vietnam. So no I don't think it had a great bearing, it was just a ... I don't say excitement by any means but it was one of those situations that happened.

39:30 I didn't immediately think about joining the army. I didn't even give it a thought. Not at that age.

**Was it a surprise, the announcement?**

What, that the war broke out? Well, we had heard in the paper of course that the war was imminent and quite a possibility that when Chamberlain

40:00 came back and waved his little bit of paper and everything was okay and then it started. It was then that it came back to reality the fact that the war is on. And needless to say you immediately say that there would be troops being assembled and would go overseas. That was the thing that I thought of.

**So you didn't think that you were**

40:30 **personally going to be involved?**

Oh no. It was miles away. No. "Nothing would happen in Australia. It can't happen here".

# Tape 3

00:31 **Don, I wanted to know during the 1930s before the war, what knowledge if any did you have, what political knowledge if any did you have about the situation rising in Europe?**

Oh I'd say very little.

01:00 I don't think we were politically minded nor politically educated. There wasn't a great deal spoken in the house politically apart from Labor. No, I'd had very little knowledge of political situations at all. Very

01:30 little. We didn't speak much of political things then.

**Did you know about Hitler?**

In the earlier years. Yes. Oh yes. I thought you were referring to the political situation here. We knew. Yes. We knew the uprising of Hitler was what was going on, etc. Yes.

**That's what I meant. I meant more about the overseas...**

02:00 Well, we knew that Hitler was on the building up, this that and the other and coined the youth movement and his SS [Security Squad] and various situations like those, bringing the country up in terms of being pure and getting rid of all the riff raff.

**So you were anticipating conflict?**

02:30 Well at my age I couldn't assess that at the time but from hearsay, yes. From hearsay people were saying that they wouldn't be surprised if he started another war which after the Boer War of course.

**So how long after the war was declared did**

03:00 **you start to think about joining up?**

I suppose it would be twelve months. This was brought upon the fact that my brother-in-law joined the army and started with the 9th Division. That was I suppose ... It sounded very

03:30 exciting, going overseas once again into this situation where there was excitement. As for going over there to help England, I don't know whether that came into it to any great degree. It was just the excitement of going. Where upon which I said, my father

04:00 maintained I was far too young and he was an ex-army man, although not a terribly active man. He was with a Black Watch.

**What was a Black Watch?**

Scottish Regiment, here in Victoria in Melbourne. After the Black Watch they changed it to the Gordon Highlanders,

04:30 which, I was a Gordon Highlander.

**Victorian Scottish Regiment.**

Victorian Scottish Regiment was Gordon Highlanders.

**And your father was involved in that?**

My father was involved years ago with my uncles, with the Victorian Scottish Regiment but at that time they were Black Watch.

**Okay. So there was some degree of military involvement in your family?**

Yes. But Dad,

05:00 he wasn't a military man. Not as cranky as me. No, I liked the military. I like the discipline. I like the uniform, It's very colourful and the parades are exciting,

05:30 The parade ground movements etc and so on, the bands when they strike up and the training in general. Apart from training military-wise, you also had training in our earlier years in looking after yourself, how to shower each day and put plenty of powder on and all this sort of stuff. It was more involved than just

06:00 firing a rifle. And that's what I liked about the army, it was good training for anybody.

**Just generally speaking, what do you mean by "military man"? What makes a military man?**

A military man is a person who is military-minded in terms of the fact of handling men,

06:30 giving words of command, being assured of himself, being capable of teaching and a leader, a leader amongst men. And that's the crux of the ... There are very few leaders even in the world today. Very few

leaders, they are all

07:00 followers, hundreds of people following. There are very few people who are prepared to step forward and say one thing. They all wait until somebody else says it and they either agree or disagree but they don't lead in the first place. They don't voice their opinion and a leader is a man who is military-wise. When I say military, I mean the

07:30 services in general; avy, army of course and air force. He is a leader and he's got a belief in himself that he is doing the right thing, that he knows he's in the right tram and capable of taking the troops with you and you lead them. You don't

08:00 send them in. Which is another thing I'll bring out later, it's another thing about leadership. You lead. You're out in front. You give the commands. You give all the orders and there are very few people who can do it and very few people who are prepared to do it. They'll sit on the fence and wait and then they follow. And we've got hundreds of them, hundreds of them. Very few good leaders.

08:30 That's a military man.

**Do you think you were a good leader?**

I would have liked to have been better. I'd have liked to have been better. A good leader is a person who your troops are prepared to go in with you. If your troops are not

09:00 behind you, if they have any doubt that you are going to falter or lead them up the garden path then you're not a good leader. I'd like have been better. I did what I could. But there were a few incidents that occurred and you always reflect back and say what I should have done.

09:30 I had consideration for my troops. As far as that your leadership in battle, I would have liked to have been better.

**In what way?**

I think without going into detail as far as an incident and that is concerned,

10:00 quicker. I was too slow off the mark in a few of the incidents that occurred.

**Do you want to tell us anything in more detail?**

Well, I had consideration in the first place with leadership when we were first going into action with this chap who unfortunately couldn't make it.

10:30 So I took steps to make sure we did something about it. I didn't just say "We're all in the same boat, so sit down, okay". I went to my officer and explained the situation. Prior to the battle at Kokoda, I was the only one who could fire a machine gun. So I had to teach one of my men

11:00 how to fire it. This was a situation whereby I should have done that earlier but we didn't have the gun. We only got the guns halfway over the track, they were still in grease. But it was a situation where by I should have made a point of it, of teaching him earlier how to fire it. Secondly, the fact

11:30 that some of the chaps in the 39th Battalion were, how could I say it? I could only say a bit slow. When that battalion was formed it was desperate. They took any Tom, Dick or Harry. We had a chap with one arm for instance. This was not unusual in terms of physique wise and so on. And some of them were a little bit ... One chap whom I used to write his letters or

12:00 read his letters for him. He couldn't read or write. And these were people who were slow. There was one incident in particular, which was the big fight, as we called it, the natives called it. At Isurava where I had my machine gun, only from here to the table away, and

12:30 the number one gunner got hit, clipped on the lobe of the ear and of course the blood spurted and he said, "I've been shot, I've been shot". Now this is where I was slow. I didn't think quick enough. I said, "Pull the gun out". Now that one was fair enough. I said, "Pull the gun out" because it was under sniper fire. "Pull the gun out". So he slid ... He wasn't worried about

13:00 the gun and his number two gunner, who was a young lad whom I sheltered for quite a bit because our rations were next to nil and I used to naturally see that my boys were fed first before I opened my tin of bully beef and biscuits. And he used to sit in front of me like a labrador pup and say,

13:30 "I'm hungry". Well, what could you do? I'd say, "Pud look, We've all got the same rations. You've had yours. I have to have something". But what do you do? You break off a bit and give him a bit of biscuit. When my number one gunner got shot in the lobe of the ear and he came out. And I said, "For god's sake Pud". I knew Pud couldn't fire the bloody thing. He could load it

14:00 but he wasn't any good as a gunner but it was a simple job. All he had to do was feed the ammunition in magazines. They couldn't give him a Thompson sub machine gun or a 303 rifle. So I yelled out to him, "Now pull the gun out". I sat in my position where I had a Tommy gun. Now a leader, I feel, should have gone in and pulled that gun out himself but I didn't.

14:30 And in two seconds, Pud was killed. Now these are situations you say leadership. I wasn't quick enough. Not that it would have saved his life, but at least I should have made an effort to pull that gun out. I didn't think quick enough. The fact I knew that he couldn't fire the bloody thing.

15:00 But however, unfortunately he was killed and it was shortly after that that our Sergeant Major came through, Jim Cowie, and said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Holding this position". He said, "I think you'd better go. There is no one up there in front of us" and we broke the gun around a tree and got out. But those were situations when you say about leadership.

15:30 And numerous little incidents where physically the trek over the track itself was so hazardous that you couldn't all the time be out in front. You had to help someone but I wasn't fit enough myself to show this

16:00 strength of leadership. I would have liked to have been up right, straight out in front and said, "Come on, lads". But I was pooped. I was buggered before I was, which we all were. So this is when they rely on a person to help them. But not only me there were other leaders in the simular situation. You just didn't have the strength.

16:30 The track was too hard.

**But you feel though, Don, that you did your best? Did the best that you could?**

I did yes. But as I said before I could have done better. I would like to have done better.

17:00 **So could we talk about when you first joined the militia?**

Yes.

**Now I believe initially you wanted to join the army, the AIF?**

Yes.

**But your father wouldn't let you. So then you joined the militia?**

Yes.

**Now what year was this?**

That would be 1941, beginning of the year.

17:30 **So could you talk me through that day where you actually joined the militia? Do you recall that?**

Yes, very well. I applied for the Victorian Scottish Regiment. And the first thing they said was, "How old are you?" So I said, "I was born in 1922". That made me eighteen. So that's

18:00 okay. I didn't have to produce a birth certificate thank goodness. And we joined in Gibbs Street, Richmond which was their headquarters then and no sooner joined than they went into camp at Mt Martha. They issued us with out uniform, etc and so on. And that was quite

18:30 an experience. The first time having worn a kilt. It took quite a bit of getting used to. We had lessons on how to walk wearing a kilt because a kilt should go sideways when you walk, not up and down. The kilt should swing this way, not that way. And numerous little incidents that occurred then in our training and age grouping.

19:00 We were up the back of Mt Martha when the brigadier walked through and he said, "Righto lads, how many of you are there under the age of eighteen?" There was not a sound. He said, "Righto chaps, man to man. I promise you nothing will be done. I just want to know". So half of us stood forward.

19:30 Some of them were only sixteen, at least I was seventeen. He pointed out to us, he said, "You know, you realise that you are very, very young. I hope you know what you are heading in to". But he said, "If by any chance you can not cope with it, you come and see me". Apply through your own officers of course. "But you come and see me and I can assure you I will give you fair treatment. Don't be foolish about it".

20:00 And we stayed on, under aged. So I remember joining up only too well. And on my first occasion down there wearing a kilt we went into Mornington to the local dance on a Saturday night. There were army girls in camp up the road at Balcombe and a bus used to come down past our camp and

20:30 we'd get on the bus and into Mornington we'd go. There was one seat left in the bus and everyone, "I'll stand up". I thought, "Oh God, if no one is going to use it I'll do it myself". And I sat down. I nearly died. It was in the middle of May and the seat was leather and it was as cold as charity. And when I sat down with my kilt on a bare bum in the bus I

21:00 nearly died. I jumped about six feet in the air. And of course from then learned how to sit down with a kilt on. So I do remember it very, very vividly the incidents of first joining. We then finished that first three months and then we were home when

21:30 we received notification by letter and it came over the air that all militia units had to report to their various respective depots. So that's where we were then called up to our depot on this particular occasion and from there they called for volunteers to form the

22:00 39th Battalion.

**Before you get to that stage could you tell me a bit more about the training that you undertook?**

Training at the Scottish?

**Yes.**

Once again I refer back to this open warfare, never mentioned about jungle at all. Our training was mainly learning how to use a pick and a shovel,

22:30 camouflage in terms of very minor in terms of camouflage - just to stick a thing over you. Mainly manoeuvres in so far as walking in extended line and various movements. A rifle shoot, I nearly died the first time I fired a 303. I had fired .22s,

23:00 which is a light rifle but ..303s, it's got a kick like a mule. And the first time I fired and like many others, we in the Scottish Regiment were more or less city slickers. When we joined the 39th they drew them from all over Victoria and of course all the country boys came down. They could ride horses and they could shoot but to us to fire a ..303, the kick. By heaven above, I nearly

23:30 broke my arm the first time I ever fired a rifle. The .22 I could fire but the training itself was once again open and very regimental. You didn't have this casual. You had a formal line and the line had to be straight and you had to keep up and all this, which was not at all relevant to jungle fighting, which we did. The training there was more or less

24:00 map reading and weapon training of course, pointing a Lewis gun which was the '14 -'18 gun that which we had in New Guinea. Which would fire two rounds and the thing would jam so you'd have to pull it back and fire it again. So weapon-wise it was very primitive. Very primitive.

**Were they tough on you?**

No.

24:30 No. The Scottish Regiment with all due respects, was a gentleman's regiment. I don't mean that in the context of in comparison with others. But the 6th Battalion, the University Rifles, they were well educated. Victorian Scottish were well educated personnel.

**When you say that do you**

25:00 **mean they came from well-off families?**

Old school. It was one of the hardest things in the Scottish Regiment if you didn't go to Scotch College. To get on, to get a commission like I did for instance, and not only me but several others, it was hard work because you didn't have the right tie.

**How did you get in?**

25:30 Desperation and at this stage they were taking anybody because the situation was the fact that we didn't have anybody home guard. We had our two divisions, the 9th and the 6th Division overseas and the 7th up in Singapore.

**Were the living conditions tough at Mt Martha?**

26:00 No. We had tents and floorboards and palliasses which were filled with straw. The meals were good. It was all local, all good meals. No, it wasn't tough at all.

**I mean in hindsight, Don, do you think it was a realistic introduction to military life, that training"**

Realistic?

26:30 Not really. The training then was pure and simply basic training. It wasn't top, it wasn't the training that you would probably go into action. It was, as they called

27:00 it, basic training. It was just purely and simply the fundamentals of how to look after yourself, how to so and so, how to handle a weapon, how to fire the weapon. Not tactical size and so on, it wasn't at that level. It was basic training.

**Did you form any close friendships at this stage, with anyone?**

Oh yes. Yes.

27:30 Quite a few. Which we all stuck together and went across to the 39th with.

**Who were your mates? Your best mates?**

Ted Stewart would be my closest friend. He was with the Scottish and we went with the 39th and unfortunately ... When I say unfortunately he

28:00 transferred from A Company to B Company so we were parted. Although we were on the track together, he was over one side and I was on the other, sort of thing. We met on the track but then he stayed with B Company and I stayed with A Company but we were very close. Even today.

28:30 **So what happened after you were with the Scottish Regiment? When did you join the 39th Battalion?**

When we had notification to appear at the drill hall, which would be in the September of '41. When it was explained to us that they were forming this 39th

29:00 Battalion Expeditionary Unit and calling for volunteers to go to New Guinea as the garrison force. And that's where Ted and I got together. And, "I'll go if you go", and so and so and we joined together. And the battalion was then formed in the October.

**So when you joined up**

29:30 **did you, were you mobilised straight away or was there a waiting period?**

No. We joined up. You had to sign the paper of course but you didn't require your parents' consent to go to New Guinea. This is where it's again, I say, mandated territory. They could send the militia but no further.

30:00 Having signed the paper we then had the call up that the 39th Battalion was being formed up at the Caulfield Racecourse in the October of 1941. We formed up there and we were issued with our new uniform and we had to hand in our kilt. Our new uniform was Khaki Drill.

30:30 This with a high patrol collar. And we went to Darley, which is just out of Bacchus Marsh, where we stayed then for two months. During that time on December '41 the Japs bombed Pearl Harbour and off we went the next week. We were on the water over that Christmas of '41-'42.

31:00 **What sort of training did you do in Darley?**

Again open warfare which conveyed nothing whatsoever to do with Port Moresby, it was still open warfare and it was only the fact that it was the period of time whilst we were there - it was only two months that we were there - at the time we had inoculations, needles for this, which flattened us for a couple of days.

31:30 It takes you a while to get over these needles. So at the time we had the TAB [Tuberculosis] and so on. So training wise was more or less restricted to very little because we were being issued with various gear and lectures and so on. So training wise I think we only did a

32:00 couple. We had one big campaign, well exercise they called it. It was at Cressy, which they called Corangamite, The Battle of Corangamite. Nobody knew what was going on. We went there, we mucked about. I don't know. We captured the railway station and had quite a lot of fun there. I wrote an article

32:30 for the Colac Times on the Battle of Corangamite. It was one of the unusual histories of the battle. But other than that exercise we got in the trucks, went to Cressy and spent that night. The air force bombed us the next day with flour bombs and we got in the trucks and came back to Darley.

33:00 Then prior to this we were pre-embarkation which we were being issued with various bits and pieces and so and so, field dressings to go to Port Moresby. So as training was concerned in Darley, it was very, very little.

**And where is Darley?**

Where's Darley?

**Where is it located?**

It's only about two or three k. north of

33:30 Bacchus Marsh.

**Okay, so it's not far from Melbourne.**

Just here. Not far from Melbourne. Thirty-two mile I suppose in those days.

**Did you have any leave during that time?**

Yes, we had a leave, a pre-embarkation leave and we had a big march through Melbourne. Very exciting. Came down on the train and marched and

went back to Darley and into trucks and then a train down to Spencer Street and then a train up to Sydney and from Sydney out to Woolloomooloo and onto the Aquitania and off. Very little time was spent in that initial two months of service.

**So the training was fairly minimal?**

Fairly minimal but

once again this open warfare, we were more or less being trained to go to the desert. No one spoke of the jungle. But the Japs bombed Pearl Harbour then it was on. But even when we got to Port Moresby there was no mention of jungle.

**Why is that?**

Mainly, I suppose because…

I don't think they expected the Japs to come down so far nor so quickly. See they came down at a terrific pace. The next thing we knew Singapore had fallen. How can you tell me today, or anyone tell me how so many thousands could surrender?

It doesn't make sense to me. However, they all surrendered. The English, not us. And I think we were the only ones who had a fight there from memory. And they came down and swept down through Rabaul and the next thing you know they are landing at Gona.

**Do you feel in hindsight**

**your battalion would have been much better off if it had had that jungle training?**

Oh yes. Oh heavens above, yes. We were up there six months and never saw the jungle. We were there. The entire six months was spent digging holes, defensive positions. Because the only way they could get to Port Moresby was by sea.

There was no way known they could come across the Owen Stanley Ranges. Wasn't even a track in those days, it was only a pad. Oh no, there was no way known. If they had landed on the North Coast there was no way they would come overland. It's impossible. They had to come down by sea. So they came down by sea and the Australians, assisted by the Americans, I like that bit, knocked them out in the

Coral Sea. Otherwise, they were on their way round to Port Moresby. And having been knocked out in the Coral Sea they had no alternative to land on the north coast and Milne Bay and attack Port Moresby from the north and from the east, from Milne Bay along the coast. But they were, fortunately

enough held back. They met us. That put a stop to their gallop.

**I would like to go back a bit, Don, to your journey on the Aquitania and even before then,**

**did you get a chance to say goodbye to your family and friends?**

Yes.

**You had a farewell?**

Yes.

**Do you want to tell me a bit about that?**

Well, we had had leave and I just can't recall offhand when that was. It would have been early December, I would think, or late November. But we did have notification that we were going to sail,

so they had an open day for visitors to visit. And my father and sisters came up to Darley and we had a little picnic and that was the last that we had contact with family. Away they went and we were then boarded onto trucks down to the Bacchus Marsh railway station

and from there to Spencer Street. But no contact. I beg your pardon, we had a march through Melbourne before we left. Which would have been … I've got the cuttings out there. I just can't remember offhand. It would have been the end of November.

**What was it like marching through Melbourne?**

Well, once again it was all very exciting in terms of the fact that it was, prior to this

the AIF had marched through. I think we were the first militia to have the occasion of marching through. But we were militia. At this stage if I may add, it was applied for, for the 39th Battalion to go as AIF. If, of course they had the numbers and at that stage everybody was more or less in favour of going AIF.

But once again you had to have parents consent and this put the kybosh on the whole situation right

from the start. No, we were very proud to march through Melbourne. And from there by train to Sydney and from Sydney out to the ship by train and marched onto the Aquitania. We did it openly and it was

40:30 all well organised. Unfortunately, the 53rd Battalion who I will mention later, they were, they didn't even know they were going. They didn't even know they were going onto the ship. They just bunged them onto the ship. So there was the 53rd Battalion, the 39th Battalion and attached troops like engineers and what have you and so on.

41:00 **The 53rd? What do you mean, they didn't know they were going?**

The 53rd didn't know they were going on a ship. They were on a train and just bundled into the Aquitania.

**They were militia as well?**

They were militia, New South Wales Battalion. And we were all herded onto the Aquitania and it was hot, overcrowded, terribly overcrowded. I was on

41:30 F Deck….Is that it?

**I'm just getting the wind up there Don.**

# Tape 4

00:31 **So we were talking about, Don, the trip on the Aquitania. If yould you elaborate please on the conditions on board the boat? Ship, I should say.**

Yes. It's a ship. Having arrived I was posted on F Deck. F Deck is right down below the water line and a lot of the bunk.

01:00 And it was hot, terribly, terribly hot. And I thought to myself, "This is no place for young Donald". I couldn't bare to, I suffer the claustrophobia for start off. So there is no way known I could have stayed down in the bowels of the ship. So I don't usually volunteer to do things but on this occasion I did. I volunteered to be a submarine spotter from a forward turret up on top deck.

01:30 You take your sleeping bag up there and you had the beautiful cool of the evening. So I had a very cushy job on the way up instead of sleeping down as I say down in F Deck, which I couldn't. We were escorted by destroyers. And mealtime was a bum fight. Quite good meals

02:00 but the crowding would be, to get one sitting in and the next sitting out and so on and so on. But the meals themselves were very good. But terribly overcrowded but well organised considering. Most of the activities were on top at the top deck,

02:30 whereby we had lifeboat training, how to put the life jacket on and what have you. And came in the tropical haircut. Here we had the barber, hardly what you would call a hairdresser, the barber who had great delight in putting some of the boys with a V from the front to the back with three dots in the middle,

03:00 which was the courage sign for V for victory. And I had my hair clipped. I didn't have it, I don't believe in having your hair shaven because the sun is extremely hot in Port Moresby, not that we knew but we were told. But I had mine cropped to a stubble. I suppose it would be roughly three-quarters of an inch. And most of us did.

03:30 And I think it's one of the best haircuts I've ever had. It is a lovely feeling when you were in the shower. This was a problem also in the toileting on the Aquitania. It was a case of actually of course, like anything else forming a queue. And you had to make up your mind wether you wanted to go to the toilet about three-quarters of an hour before you wanted to. The same thing applied with the shower. And the shower,

04:00 most of it I think was salt water. After which you felt very sticky and when you perspired it sort of stuck so your shirt and shorts which we had were most uncomfortable. The Aquitania, I think, I was only a corporal remembering at this stage.

04:30 Beg your pardon, I was a private. Not knowing too much tactically wise and so forth, I believe that we were being diverted to go to Rabaul. But knowing the powers to be, etc and knowing that some of the troops were not eligible to go any further than Port Moresby, it turned into Port Moresby. Because no sooner had we arrived

05:00 in Port Moresby, which was then the Bismarck Sea, but the Aquitania itself was a troop ship very well equipped. They fitted it out considering the number of troops that were on it. But the conditions, as I say, packed in. It took over a week to get there. So it was quite,

05:30 it was liveable but it was quite uncomfortable. It wasn't a cruise that we imagined being in deck chairs

out on the deck lolling around in the sun. It was very cramped. Activity-wise apart from having boat drill we had lectures from the doctor of course telling about the native women of course and the problems that may occur.

06:00 And there was no excuse for whatever happens. So it was taken up with a few small lectures from NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] of once again a map reading type of lecture or your own hygiene. But other than that it was quite uneventful.

06:30 Although we had to keep a look out for submarines, we didn't stand up there like the navy with binoculars and all that sort of business. We just looked over the side and much as to say, "Oh, there's nothing there, so everything's okay".

**So you didn't encounter any submarines?**

No, we didn't encounter any problems whatsoever. No, we had a couple of cargo

07:00 ships with us.

**What about recreational activities on board?**

Well other than boat drill we didn't play games if that's what you mean. There wasn't enough room. Everyone just sort of ... If you got a position you just stood still.

**Boxing? Was there any boxing matches?**

No.

07:30 I think I would have remembered if there were. I don't think so. No, there wouldn't have been. No. The space was, as I say, there wouldn't have been enough room to make a ring. No. It was very cramped.

**Any access to alcohol?**

Not on board ship.

08:00 I'm trying to remember whether we did have a bottle of beer. Sorry, I can't remember that one. I don't think so off hand. I don't think there would have been. Officers would have.

**So when you first arrived, you sailed into Bougainville?**

No, Port Moresby.

**Port Moresby. What was your first impressions of Port Moresby?**

08:30 Perhaps not unlike what we had seen on Movietone Theatre captions of islands. The natives came out in their lakatois [canoes] and pulled up while we ... The Aquitania couldn't berth. She was too big. So we had

09:00 to be transported from the Aquitania onto the destroyer [HMAS] Achilles and then taken to the wharf. During this period of waiting the natives came over in their lakatois and the obvious thing of course, you'd throw over a shilling or coinage and off the lakatoi and down they'd go and bring it up. And hold it up

09:30 in the air that they'd got it. So it was quite interesting. They didn't come out with fruit or things like you see with leis around your neck and all that sort of business. But other than that no, there was no other activity. It was a problem getting off the ship onto the destroyer and then into the wharf.

10:00 And the wharf was where the Catalina air base was. But the big wharf, the Aquitania couldn't pull in there.

**What was the landscape like, Don?**

Port Moresby itself is in a harbour. One isle over to the left was Aleppo Island. The first hill as you see on the point

10:30 was Paga Paga [?], which was just purely and simply a residential hill. And to the left of that it started the native village of Hunterbudder [?] where all the huts were built out onto the water. Very picturesque but a lot to be desired as

11:00 far as hygiene-wise is concerned. But the hill above, behind that which we referred to as Ack-Ack Hill is where we had our ack-ack gun. So the point in itself had Ack-Ack Hill, the town of Port Moresby, where when you came off the wharf you had Burns Phelps trading company on the left, and behind that was the Papuan

11:30 Hotel. On the right you had the British Trading Company, similar to Burns Philp, a general sort of store, Hardware store and so on. The rest of it was residential. Toward the back of that was a little island off Keyla [?] Beach, which was

12:00 a gaol. When we got off then, onto the wharf it was dusk and we had a walk then, seven mile -

everything was in miles in those days - seven mile out to the Seven Mile Drome, which today they call Jackson's Strip. Jackson being the air ace when he bought up his Kittyhawks. That's an interesting story.

12:30 So we walked out in the dark. So we didn't really see anything going through past Murray Barracks etc and so on. We were hot and we had all our gear. Having sea legs, we were straight off onto the wharf and into a seven-mile boot march, which was with all our gear and we dossed down that night. Woke up in the morning

13:00 and didn't have a clue where we were. But there was an airstrip and we were right on the airstrip when we woke up. And that was our base then for most of the time we had before we went over the track, most of the time we were on the air strip.

**What did your base consist of?**

Tents.

13:30 Tents and hessian bags filled with grass for bed or a palliasse. Later we got a couple of stretchers but mainly palliasses on the ground. This is where the conditions started was when we landed

14:00 in Port Moresby and I maintain that the conditions we had for those first six months were nearly as bad as what we were in action. They were absolutely shocking. Mainly in hygiene, the fact that we didn't have mosquito nets, we didn't have any picks and shovels to dig our latrines.

14:30 Malaria started setting in. Dysentery was rife. Dengue fever was rife. Why didn't we have our mosquito nets? Why didn't we have our picks and shovels? Why didn't we have half our mosquito repellent? The only thing we had was Quinine, liquid Quinine. Why we didn't have all these goods? Because they were on the wharf down at Melbourne. And what were they doing on the wharf down at Melbourne? Because the bloody unions and the wharfies were on strike. Could you imagine, on strike? And here we are up there

15:00 fighting for them and they're on strike. Needless to say we had to go without. Liquid Quinine, we had to line up every night and the officer would come along with his bottle of Quinine, neat, with a spoon. The first in line was okay. Pour it out, next one. If you were on the end of the line by the time you got yours at the end of the line the spoon was green.

15:30 Green. Quinine is worse than turps. It's shocking stuff, absolutely shocking. The conditions then, as I say, were very bad. The cooking was very primitive. We only had Bully Beef and biscuits, literally speaking. We didn't have any fresh food or meat. Everything was tinned.

16:00 Tinned butter, which was melted. It was always liquid because it was so hot. We didn't have any refrigeration or blocks of ice. So the conditions in that early stage. And of course the mosquitoes at night were unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable. The noise alone, just those, all night you could hear these mosquitoes going. Millions and millions and millions of them.

**Did you**

16:30 **have any repellent?**

Repellent? No. No. Not until later. It wasn't sort of like Rid [brand of mosquito repellent cream] that we get today or the repellents now. The repellent we had mainly which served us to some degree was the repellent we had for scrub typhus and that was oily. We used to wipe it around our shirts

17:00 and so on in the scrub typhus area but no we didn't have the repellent, only the mosquito net at night. Then of course you would get into your mosquito net and there would be a couple of mosquitoes flying around and you'd strike a match and burn them hoping to goodness you wouldn't set the mosquito net on fire. So the conditions generally were very, very hard.

**So how many of you were there at this stage, Don?**

Compliment-wise in the battalion is

17:30 rough, I'm talking rough figures, roughly eight hundred.

**Now how many of these men were in charge of you all? What was the percentage of officers?**

Officers to men? Well I think you'd have to work that out in what ... Battalion-wise there would be thirty-five, thirty-eight officers

18:00 in ratio. Then you've got your warrant officers and then your sergeants, corporals, and then your privates. Per company you have a major, a captain and three lieutenants, two sergeant majors; one is sergeant major and the other is quartermaster. Then you have three sergeants and nine

18:30 corporals to a company.

**What was your company?**

A Compnay.

**You were A Company. Now who were your mates at this stage? Who were you most friendly with?**

Well once again of course Ted Steward but then came in JD McKay and Charlie Smith. These were names ...

19:00 Shady Smith as we called him. And JD for instance...

**Shady?**

J.D.

**Why did you call him Shady Smith?**

Well, God only knows. That was his name. Shady Smith. And it's like, I didn't find out till years later that his name is Charles. It's JD, if you haven't somebody will and he has been interviewed for this program

19:30 because he's A Company, Alex Lochead. JD only not long ago, he rang up and we were talking away and he said, "Don, I wish you'd call me by my right name". And I said, "Well, what is it?" Sixty five years later. He said, "My name's Don". I said, "How the heck would I know that?" JD, John Donald McKay. So I said, "Oh well, I'll try".

20:00 But he's JD, he's always been JD.

**Now where did you sleep? What were the sleeping quarters like?**

The sleeping quarters were on the ground, out in open until we got our tents up. Once again this was back to getting our supplies up from Melbourne. Until the fly went over the, tent fly

20:30 went over the cookhouse. I mean they had problems naturally of course with the flies in general and the heebie-jeebies that run around the ground of course.

**This air strip that you were based at, was it a functioning airstrip?**

Yes. It was a functioning airstrip. It was the airstrip.

**The airstrip at...**

It was always known as the Seven Mile Drome. It was the airstrip but like everything else

21:00 in those days we only had very light planes. They used it for what they call a junker. It's a corrugated iron airplane and the airstrip was used to bring gold either by the Junker or the old Ford, was what they had, another one, a Ford, called the Ford which is a similar

21:30 type of thing or Tiger Moths. They used to bring the gold down from Belower [?], which was up on the north coast down to Moresby because, once again, you couldn't walk over the Kokoda Track. If anything came down from there and they couldn't fly it down from there, they would bring it around by lugger, by ship. Not a ship, a boat. They were not ships, but boats. They would sail around Milne Bay and up to Port Moresby because nobody ever

22:00 walked the track.

**Was the air force using that strip?**

The air force used it, yes. Well we had, we didn't have an air force when we were first there of course. It wasn't until later that the air force used it. It was rather unusual. They were based in Townsville. And whilst we were on the drome

22:30 the Flying Fortresses, Mitchells and Bostons, they used to fly over to Rabaul, drop their bombs, come back to Port Moresby. We'd roll the forty-four gallon drums off the airstrip in case the Japanese gliders came in, we'd roll the forty-four gallon drums off. Our planes used to come in, refuel and fly back to Townsville.

**This is the Australia Air Force?**

The Australian Air Force.

23:00 Oh, I beg your pardon.

**American?**

American. Sorry, we didn't have planes. We only had the Wirraway. And back to Townsville. So the Japs used to follow them down or shortly afterwards. By the time the Japs arrived at the drome there is nothing there. Not a thing in sight. So they said, "Aha, they've got underground hangers. It is as simple as that". So they used to bomb

23:30 up and down up and down, day and night, each side of the airstrip where we were camped. We used to do drome guard. And this was the idea of drome guard that you would roll these drums out. And when our planes went back to Townsville we would roll the forty-four gallon drums out. So it was quite a plastering for months. Then the Zeros used to come in and strafe.

24:00 But then came the arrival of the Kittyhawks. And that was a great day but a disastrous day.

**How come?**

Well we'd heard so much about these Kittyhawks, we ended up calling them the Morrowhawks. They were always coming tomorrow. The Kittyhawks were coming tomorrow, or the Morrohawks. When there is an air raid you fire three shots in the air

24:30 is an air raid. The air force - I've got to emphasise this, the air force gave out a warning that there is an air raid pending. So the three shots went up or the siren which you can't hardly hear, that there is an air raid. So these planes came, a squadron, Jackson and his mob, Wackett. They came in and down the airstrip they flew, you see.

25:00 I said, "Cheeky bloody Japs". Which they did because they had no opposition. We had nothing to fire against them apart from our revolvers and Tommy subs, they would only go from here to the front gate, however. We opened up with whatever bloody thing we could find, Lewis guns and God only knows what. Well we saw this great big red thing on the side and one plane had a J written on the side.

25:30 And one chap said to the other ,"There bloody Japs alright, J for Japan". But it wasn't, it was J for Jeffery's, Squadron leader Jeffery's, it was his plane. And we shot the headpiece of the back of his seat and shot the whole squadron except one plane. Was fit to fly after we had finished with them. They were flying around and the all clear was one shot, one rifle shot.

26:00 Could you imagine trying to hear one rifle shot and every Tom, Dick and Harry is firing everything they can get their hands on; ..303s, Thompson sub-machine guns, revolvers, Lewis guns, you name it. Everything was firing at them and to hear one single shot for an all clear. That's how stupid the warnings were. So needless to say we didn't until someone passed the message around. "Don't fire. Don't fire. They're ours". And of course that big red

26:30 circle, which they delegated later. They had a big red circle and a very thin outline of the blue and white, which was our insignia. But when a plane is flying past like that and you can see this red circle, it's a Jap. And we didn't know what a Kittyhawk looked like. We know what Zeros look like, they've got a blunt nose, they've got a radial. The Kittyhawk's got a pointy nose like a shark, like a Spitfire.

27:00 Even then we thought, "They've got a new plane". We just thought they were Japs so we just shot them up, which wasn't very well received.

**Did any crash?**

No. They repaired them all apparently. They stuffed the holes and goodness only knows what. One plane came down, Wackett, landed his

27:30 plane and shortly after he did, a Japanese recognisance plane came over. And he went up and shot it down over Bootless Bay, which is down the back of Port Moresby.

**Do you recall, Don, the first time you were bombed by the Japanese?**

Record?

**Do you recall...**

Yes.

**the first time you experienced bombing?**

We didn't

28:00 take a great deal of ... This was out at Seven Mile, which was bombed day and night. But the first bomb didn't ... You say, "Look at that". They are all up in the air and so on. They weren't anywhere near us. We didn't take much notice. But after a couple of raids, a few days later, they bombed us and

28:30 blew up our cookhouse and boys that's awfully close. But we had slit tranches and it was frightening. You then start to know what it's all about. But then everyone is yelling around, calling out, "We're returned soldiers. We're returned soldiers". Because you've been in the front battle line, you see. These are the first bombs that have been dropped and so on. When the Japs bombed first and foremost Port Moresby itself,

29:00 all the civilian population went back to Australia and left all the stores wide open. What could you do but to get a truck and what have you, back it in and we ended up with cane lounges, raffia to put on the floor of our tent and someone beat us to the beer but we ended up with, I will never forget it, a bottle of Crème de Cacao,

29:30 a liqueur. And of course when the air raid comes you grab your bottle, sit in the slit trench, and pour out a ... Of course we were only seventeen and two of them would knock you flying. We didn't care whether the bombs landed on us or not. So the funny side of it is one thing but no, bombs are frightening. It's bad enough on land and we knew we were the targets because they bombed up and down the airstrip

and they built

30:00 a pillbox. There was a little hut that we used to ... See we used to help the planes when they came in to refuel and do what we could. 75 Squadron, the famous squadron and they'd bomb up and down it and they built a pillbox for our safety out of cement. It was a circular thing that we ran into. But an officer came down one day and said, "How strong is it?"

30:30 And I said, "Oh oh oh", so he fired a shot and the shot went right through. The pillbox wasn't worth a bumper. But alongside that was a drain.

**What is a pillbox?**

A pillbox? A bunker, a cement cylinder about half the size of this room made of cement and it's like a big tank. Bullet proof but it's not, we shot a ..303 and it went right through it. But at the time we were

31:00 growing watermelons and alongside, not far away of course, was our toileting arrangements. And the Japs came over on this particular day and they dropped one bomb on our watermelons and one bomb on our latrines and mixed the both of them up together when the watermelons were just about ripe. We never forgave them for that. That was the last straw. Hated them for it.

**Did you ever grow your own vegies?**

No.

31:30 To some degree we were fairly stationery but we did move from one side of the drome to the other and so on and we had to move in further into Port Moresby to dig more holes for our defensive positions but most of the time we were unloading ships, or the ship. And that's where you say about fighting the ... I was on the MacDhui which is the one that's in the harbour today. I was on that when she got bombed. And I was in charge,

32:00 I was a corporal then. I was in charge of a working party and we used to stay on board and go for a cruise around the bay. Bloody marvellous. Captain used to give us a beer and it was marvellous until one day the Japs came over one day and decided to try and sink the MacDhui. And I thought, "Oh gosh". When you know you are the target it's a totally different feeling. If you are in a slit trench, I mean the bomb's just going to go anywhere. It's just very lucky

32:30 if you get one. But when you're on a ship and you are the target. And they dropped a bomb right at the back of the ship and lifted the back end of it, the blunt end as we called it, out of the water and loosened a plate. She came back into wharf and the following day I said, "No more for me. If an air raid comes I'm off". So the air raid came and as soon as the air raid goes they slip the ropes off the capstans

33:00 and it drifts away from the wharf you see. And this day an air raid came and no sooner did the air raid went and the ship drifted away from the wharf and I jumped from the ship onto the wharf and it's the biggest jump I have ever done in my life. I made it. So up the wharf we ran. And of course the native boys, they leave us for dead, boy could they run. They screamed away and of course by the time you got up to your slit trench there is no room. So

33:30 it was rather a first in best dressed. But the following day, the day I jumped off, the MacDhui went out into the middle of the bay and they dropped one down the funnel and killed seven of our men. And then she sailed around over here and she tipped over on her side and she is still there today.

**What sort of ship is the MacDhui?**

Cargo, semi passenger.

34:00 A few cabins but mainly cargo.

**So that was your main job at that point, was unloading ships.**

Unloading ships and digging holes around Port Moresby. No training. Once again we didn't have any training. We didn't go out on the rifle range. I did a school, an NCO [Non Commissioned Officers] School where I learned to fire the Bren gun and I learned to fire

34:30 the Thompson sub-machine gun which is that big Al Capone gun. A big drum in the front. And I was section leader and I carried a Thompson. Having completed the school, I knew how to fire and load and so on we were sent over the track you see. This is when the big race was on.

**And you became a corporal at that point?**

I was a corporal then.

**Okay.**

But prior to then ... I was a corporal,

35:00 that was quite early in the piece, until they started... This goes on to how our old soldiers, our '14 -'18 officers were withdrawn from the battalion and replenished with AIF officers.

**Right.**

That's where it… the friction started; they're AIF and we're militia and never the two shall meet. So there was a lot of dissension.

35:30 **Can you give us some background on that, Don, what you are talking about there?**

We went up there with '14 -'18 officers. Our colonel, our company commander and his 2IC [Second in Command], our sergeant major. Quite a number were '14 -'18 war diggers.

36:00 When the time came to prepare to move to Kokoda, they weeded these old boys out because of ill health mainly and they would not have stood the journey. Because it was almost impregnable as far as we were concerned then. So they weeded all those out and replenished us with AIF officers, who we maintain were bowler-hatted from the Middle East and we ended up with them. They maintain

36:30 they've come to take over this militia battalion to show them how soldiers should act. So it was a sort of a dissension, right from the very start. In as much so that our officer turned to me, and not only me but to people in my category and said, "You are a corporal. You wish to progress in this company as far as?" "Oh yes sir. Yes indeed". He said, "Well, unless you join the AIF you won't be. In fact if you don't join the AIF you'll

37:00 lose your two stripes". So I had to write back to my father and say, "For goodness sake, Dad, sign the paper. I am a corporal, I am here, and I can't do anything about it. For heaven sakes sign the paper", which he did. And that's how I at last got into the AIF, although still in the 39th Battalion.

**What was your rank then?**

Corporal then.

**Still corporal?**

This is quite early in the piece.

**So you went into the AIF**

37:30 **still as a corporal?**

Yes, as a corporal.

**That's interesting.**

Then of course they weeded out the ones under eighteen who they had caught up with. So by the time they weeded out all the under eighteen and by the time they weeded out all the '14 -'18 diggers except a couple got through; Jim Cowie, George Mullet.

**What did they do with the under eighteens?**

Held

38:00 them back at Port Moresby. They didn't go over the track, and there were quite a few. Then we got reinforcements.

**Because it was an official AIF expedition?**

No. It wasn't an AIF. They wanted us to go AIF. But a lot of them said, "No, we are militia. We've been here. You had the opportunity of sending us AIF, you didn't want it, so we will stay militia".

38:30 So you are getting this sort of friction. Not continually but it was there.

**So the privates stayed militia?**

Yes.

**Whereas if you wanted a leadership role you…?**

If you wanted a leadership role you had to be AIF.

**Okay, I'm with you.**

Otherwise, you got nowhere.

**Tell me about the AIF officers who came over?**

39:00 Well they came and the first thing they did of course was sort out the rank, and say that was it and so on. Then they started training is as much as far as the training in basic was concerned. They no sooner joined us than we started on the track. So there wasn't a great space between the time they arrived and when we went on the track.

39:30 But they weren't great … They weren't received with open arms. We took a little bit of, "Just because you're AIF don't think we're militia chocos". And we as such had our own pride too, of course.

**How did they treat you?**

The treated us all right in terms of

40:00 treatment-wise. No, they were good officers. Except a few occasions, like in any army you get the goodies and the baddies. We had one sergeant major, Jim Cowie, whom is mentioned on numerous records. He was a father to us. He looked after us like a mother hen. Wonderful chap. On the other hand we had,

40:30 we had an officer who we went into Kokoda, leadership. He stood back. He drew his .32 revolver out and he said, "If any of you blokes shirk this fight, I'll be right here," he said, "And I'll shoot you. So in you go". And he was right up the back and we were right up the front. That is not leadership. He should have been up the front leading us in but he waited at the back.

41:00 And this is the sort of thing, leadership. We got into Kokoda. We lasted two and a half days and we had to get out. Who was first out? Who partly knocked down a stretcher case trying to get down the stairs to get out? The AIF officer. The other one, of course he stayed there and he got us out. So give and take. But he was very soon, shortly after, sent back to Port Moresby.

# Tape 5

00:31 **I'd like to elaborate, or ask you if you could elaborate, Don, a bit more on the conditions that you men had to cope with at the Drome. Did many of you get sick?**

Yes.

**What sort of sickness did you have?**

I think the main sickness in the first few days, as I put it, was dysentery. That is absolutely shocking.

01:00 You had to go to a, what they call a RAP, which is a Regimental Aid Post and then to the, it wasn't a hospital, it was an area where all the cases of dysentery were assembled. It was absolutely a nightmare. They had thunderboxes, which is your toilets, along on a great big

01:30 long trench sort of thing and lanterns placed. And you had to make your way. You couldn't walk. You were so weak and so, oh ... You'd stop halfway not being able to make the distance. Oh, it was just unbelievable. I stayed there. Well I went in one lunch hour and I stayed there

02:00 all night and then the next day the doctor said, "I think you'd better stay". I said, "Doctor, I can't bear it. It's absolutely ..." And he said, "How are you?" I lied a little bit and said I was fairly well to go back, which I did. But that was a nightmare, absolute nightmare. Malaria started to take shape.

02:30 Not so much dengue at this area nor scrub typhus at this area. But tinea, heat rash and things of that nature which naturally of course developed under the arms.

**Ulcers?**

Ulcers, yes. It takes a while for ulcers to, how shall I put it, come out. In the initial stages it was mainly dysentery. Then it branched into the malaria,

03:00 dengue, etc, etc and ulcers and conditions of that type.

**Did you have good medical support?**

Well, we didn't have any medical support in terms of ... Although General Morris was a medical man. But our medical supplies were very restricted. We had nurses in the inner hospitals which they moved from Port Moresby to what they called Rouna Falls which was

03:30 up the track toward the starting of the Kokoda Track. There, hospital wise, was one out at 2/5th AGH and 2/9th AGH at a place called Hombrum Bluff. Hospital-wise, when I say packed, there were a lot of troops there with

04:00 with complaints of that nature.

**What sort of treatment did you get for dysentery?**

To tell you the truth I have forgotten now. I was going to say cheese or something to the equivalent, Massy Harris [?] as they call it. Binder But I don't know

04:30 offhand. I don't know what medicine they ... There was a medicine but the name of it evades me off hand.

**You mentioned nurses.**

Yes.

**Did you have much personal contact with the nurses?**

No. I was only a corporal. You had to be an officer. Few of the nurses went home on the MacDhui. Majority of them stayed.

05:00 They had the option of staying or going back when all the civilian occupation left Port Moresby.

**Now these are army nurses?**

Yes. They were army nurses. There did have civilian nurses when we arrived and I a few of those may have gone back. Possibly an age group, I think.

05:30 They wouldn't have been young nurses, of course, in such a situation. Even our army nurses had to be of age and of rank.

**Did they do a good job?**

A good job? An excellent job. Oh yes. They were tough as old bloody nails. That's for sure.

**They kept you in your place?**

Well, I went to hospital, I don't know what for. Something I had wrong with me apart

06:00 from dysentery and the matron or the head nurse would come around of a morning or a night, "Have you had a movement today?" "Yes sister. Too right". You daren't say no. It wasn't worth it. So they were, when I say tough, they were very, very efficient. Very efficient. They were officers.

06:30 **What about the local population? Did you have much contact with them?**

Not a great deal I suppose when you say contact. There were occasions, yes, when we went through. When we landed and we went up the main street and I better not say that bit but …

07:00 **What's that?**

Oh, young lads would come along and they'd say, "Pop pom taffeta? My sister. Very clean very clean". And you'd think, "Oh God". You couldn't break the line, you weren't allowed to go anyway but they were very friendly. There wasn't any sort of exchange but of course they were the biggest

07:30 scroungers out. If they can get a token of food or a trinket or a knife or something like that, a cake of soap was one of the greatest presents you could give them. They'd used to get down there. They were very naive, the natives. Not like us. If we went into the water and if you didn't have a bathing tog stiff luck.

08:00 Even when I was up at the hospital we used to swim in the Amboga River. You never wear … We didn't have bathing costumes so we went in the nuddy. We didn't think anything of it. We'd go and all shower together. We didn't think anything of it. But the native boys, I can only speak for the boys, I don't know where the girls were. They certainly weren't dancing on the beach. But they would go into the water with their lap lap and they would partly squat. And they would get the soap ... They loved soap.

08:30 And so and so but they would never walk out in the nuddy. They would make sure that their lap lap was ... It would float in front of them when they washed themselves. Then they'd pull it down under the water and wrap it around then they'd walk out. They never walk around in the nuddy. Which you think would be a natural thing to do with a native, more than us. Friendly-wise, yes, they were happy, a very happy race.

09:00 We did a reconnaissance out on the Logi River on one occasion and had to sleep out this particular night. And we got talking to this little village and one of the Marys, which were the lasses, said, "Would you like some scones?" This is pidgin English, which you pick up.

09:30 But I don't know why it is in any foreign language, why do you always learn the swear words first? And it just took … You know we learned all the language before we learned how to speak pidgin English. We learned all the rude words. And she said, "Would you like some scones?" and she baked some scones, which was more like…

10:00 **Damper?**

Damper. Thanks. Which was more like damper but very pleasant and hospitable in relationship in that area. The big village of Hunterbudder [?]. That was banned. We weren't allowed to go down there at all. But the natives in general were pretty good.

**Did any of the men**

10:30 **that you know of, did any of them have relations with the native women?**

Not that I know of. I do know, no way bloody known. First and foremost you could smell them a mile off. They maintained that the longer you stayed in Port Moresby, they got whiter by the day.

11:00 By the time we had finished in Port Moresby they were still very, very black. No, no way known. Any of them you'd ever … The attraction wasn't there. No way known. None of our boys. Of course it was out of bounds but there were occasions where you did have opportunity when we went in and raided the

11:30 stores. I ended up with a car, an old Chrysler. I bought it back out to the drome. I was the only one who could drive it. I don't know how many blokes I taught how to drive a car. We used to run it on aviation fuel. It used to go like a rocket down the runway.

**So when you say that Port Moresby was evacuated, what sort of civilian are we talking about? Are these…?**

12:00 The traders, the white population who were the traders of Burns Phelps or the British Trading Company, the people at the post office…

**So what nationality? British?**

Yeah. British.

**Dutch?**

I'm not in a position to clarify that to that extent. I don't know.

12:30 **But they were white, anyway.**

They were white, yes. There was such a mixture of course. There were German too. The chap who showed us the way over the track was Bert Kienzle, he was a German. He'd been out here for many years but it doesn't alter the fact that he was of German descent.

**In the AIF?**

No. He was a rubber planter. He showed us the way over.

**Bert Kienzle?**

Bert Kienzle.

13:00 **That's interesting.**

We made him an officer and then was awarded an award for his native train. He carried up all the supplies and showed us the way over. I doubt we would have found our way. It was just one of those things. It was just jungle.

**So he knew the track?**

He knew it. He walked back when the Japs landed at Gona,

13:30 he had a rubber plantation at Yoda, in the Yoda valley at Kokoda and from there he walked back over the track. There was a pad from village to village but not a track from Kokoda to Port Moresby. It was just a pad from village to village. And he showed us the way over because he had walked back to us. It was the only way he could get back because the Japs were all around Gona, Buna and

14:00 Sanananda.

**Did the natives help guide you as well?**

Oh well, when you say help guide us, we were in a train, in a line, Bert Kienzle with his native carriers and he could speak their language. Then we as company by company went over.

14:30 **So they were carriers?**

So to a large degree, yes. They were carriers, they knew their way over. Yes. Because they were recruited from all these villages. They were Kanaka boys. They were from the villages.

**Now while you were in Moresby, Don, how did you get information about the war? What was going on generally in the war?**

15:00 I suppose that would be mainly though the air force. They seemed to know what was going on only because of the fact that pilots with 75 Squadron were in contact, of course. And flying back to Townsville they were up to date with all the movements and all the shipping movements. Where the Japs were and how they were coming down. We got information mainly

15:30 from the air force. We didn't have radio. I guess our army headquarters would have had radio. But the bulk of our information was through the air force.

**Can you briefly describe the lead up to your deployment along the track? I mean how did that come about?**

The starting?

16:00 **The start of going up the Kokoda trail?**

Well the starting of it was the Japs had landed at Gona. That set the ball rolling. The Japs had landed at Gona and the most important feature was the airstrip at Kokoda. The Japs having landed at Gona,

16:30 we had to leave Port Moresby and get to the airstrip before they did. It was a most important part of the campaign to capture that airstrip. So the race was on. And we were assembled and off with very little notice. And over the track we went and they of course left Gona and comming down towards ... But they only had

17:00 twenty mile in round figures, twenty mile over flat ground and we had eight five mile over terrain which was almost impassable. So the odds were in their favour. But unfortunately they had a very big river to cross and that was a big hindrance, the Kumusi River. So it sort of ... And by the time they landed and got their stores and of course we

17:30 bombed them with our Mitchells and Bostons repeatedly, so it hindered them getting a start. So that gave us a bit of time to get ... And we got there first, B Company.

**Okay we might just finish up there... Okay, I would like to just ask you one question before we move on to the campaigns, your campaign experiences. On**

18:00 **the Victorian Scottish Regiment.**

Yes.

**And you said before that this was the Gordon Highlanders?**

That's correct. We were affiliated with the Gordon Highlanders in Scotland.

**Right. That's what I wanted to know. You were also saying that the 6th Battalion was the Melbourne University Rifles Battalion.**

Correct.

**How many Battalions did this regiment have, The Victorian Scottish Regiment?**

No, there was only one regiment.

**But how many battalions did it have?**

That is a battalion.

18:30 A regiment is a battalion, one.

**Some systems work differently that's all.**

You are perhaps being confused with a brigade. There are three battalions in a brigade.

**Okay.**

There was the Victorian Scottish Regiment, 5th Battalion, the University Rifles the 6th Battalion.

**Right. Now, this particular battalion, the 6th Battalion, that was exclusively the Victorian**

19:00 **Scottish Regiment?**

I missed that part, when you say the 5th Battalion was the Victorian Scottish Regiment.

**Was it the 5th or 6th Battalion?**

5th Battalion. The University Rifles were the 6th Battalion.

**Okay, I get you now. So to get into the MUR, the Melbourne University Rifles, you had to be at Melbourne University of course. Is that?**

I wasn't in it but I don't think so. Not necessarily.

19:30 We, the Victorian Scottish Regiment preferred that you had Scottish descent but that was not necessary. It was not necessarily so.

**It was highly traditional?**

We were in a situation at this stage when you are talking about from 1939 on, the situation was in fact they would take anybody. And they weren't so particular about you being six

20:00 feet high and credentials that warranted that you join such a battalion.

**So what sort of reputation did the Melbourne University Rifles have?**

Oh very good.

**In the AIF and the militia?**

Well the militia. They were militia.

**Well, how did the AIF view the Melbourne University Rifles?**

I would say, it wasn't the University.... It wasn't how they viewed ... It was viewed the militia.

20:30 It was not one in particular battalion. It was just, they were AIF, we were militia. And it wasn't until the show started, more of less, that a lot of militia joined the AIF but still in a militia battalion.

**Okay, so they remained in their battalion but they were AIF?**

Yes. The 6th Battalion remained as the 6th and the 5th as the 5th

21:00 who eventually went to Western Australia and then up to Darwin.

**Why did they do that? Why not transfer the people who enlisted in the AIF into AIF units instead of militia? Why couldn't they recruit new people into the militia?**

They didn't have them. There weren't any. The only ones left were us under age personnel.

**Shortage of manpower?**

Shortage of manpower.

**Yep. Okay.**

We were all literally speaking one, under age or secondly

21:30 we couldn't get parents consent. You had to be twenty-one to get parents consent before you joined the AIF.

**You could join the militia at a younger age.**

You could join the militia, yes. Provided you were eighteen.

**Okay, I see. And it also keeps the level of experience within the militia as well, having professionals.**

Yes.

**It was never seen by other units ... You see I look at the AIF and I can see it's a predominantly**

22:00 **a working class army in the sense of....**

They are of course.

**most of the troops of course. Except say for the officer corps which are almost always middle class. Wouldn't they still have seen units like the Melbourne University Rifles as being something like upper class or snobbish in a sort of way? You know as a result...**

I think there is always that sort of class distinction. They say it is

22:30 not so today, but believe me you've still got to have the right tie. In those days most of the AIF officers would have been in the militia prior, pre-war, then they transferred to the AIF. Most of the AIF that were formed in 1939 were, as we say, middle class people. It was the tail end of the Depression and a lot of these people were

23:00 still out of work. See the Depression didn't end. The Depression started in '32 wasn't it? Well, the Depression didn't end. It was the tail end of the Depression where a lot of these personnel who joined the AIF were only glad to get a job. So there's a big ratio of people there and there weren't that many jobs available, so they joined the army. You are getting that sort of balance of manpower.

23:30 **I see. Okay. Did you ever come across class distinctions?**

Not in the army. No.

**Ever? In the militia?**

Oh in the militia. Yes.

**Tell me any sort of... ?**

Well, I don't like to overemphasise that, but I think as far as, how can I put this one? As far as promotion-wise is concerned

24:00 in the battalions I have mentioned, to get on, to receive a commission or to receive a promotion you had to have a fairly good background and a good standing. It had been told to one of our officers, when you speak about class, which was post war, he was told that he wouldn't get any further than he did because

24:30 he didn't have the credentials nor the education required. There was, yes there is class distinction. There is in a lot of ... More so in the British Army. You can't buy your commission in the Australian Army.

**When you say class distinction, are you also speaking of discrimination in promotion?**

Yeah, but it wasn't predominantly there. It was just the fact that we just

25:00 fact, it was a known fact. To really get on you had to have a pretty good background.

**What about in your view, how do you think the problems that existed before the war between Catholics and Protestants, for instance, how do you think these problems were resolved during the war? Do you think they were? Or did you see**

25:30 **these problems?**

I think yes. I think the war broke down a lot of class distinction come religion.

**Why is that in your view?**

Possibly the fact that you worked together as a body. We had quite a few, if I can mention religion, our padre was a Catholic. We had quite a few Catholics in although I still maintain that on the whole

26:00 the majority, if you called a church parade on a Sunday morning the whole parade existed as a battalion. The officer in charge would say, "Fall out the RCs [Roman Catholics]" as they were referred to, "Fall out the RCs" and they had a little service, but there was only a handful fell out so the majority of them were protestants. The RCs fell out and had their own little service. Mainly because of the fact that

26:30 Archbishop Mannix was in power at the time and I'm only speaking from my point of view. He made sure that his flock were in protective industries, making ammunition for instance or making army equipment.

**So Mannix was always anti-establishment as far as war was concerned, with Catholics participating… ?**

27:00 Oh well everybody was anti war. None of us are sort of warmongers. We are all anti war.

**What I meant was, as a result of the conscription problem of World War I, which was predominantly between Catholics and Protestants.**

Yes…

**With Billy Hughes. Mannix of course was…**

We didn't have conscription as such, we had call-ups.

**Yeah the referendums that were. But see it was different, see in World War II you actually do have … It's a form of**

27:30 **conscription none the less.**

Oh, it's a form of but once again you are coming back to this, "You can't be sent overseas".

**Yeah. That's right. So it's a limited form of conscription?**

Yes. They were limited in what they could do with them.

**Yes. It's quite different to the First World War.**

Oh yes.

**Because at the Western Front all together. Now I want to move towards more the campaign areas but before I go there, there is a training aspect. Now you said that your**

28:00 **battalion, the 39th was formed out of how many companies? How many different militia regiments contributed, or militia battalions?**

To forming the battalion?

**Yeah, the 39th.**

The whole of Victoria. It was sent around to the militia units of Victoria.

**So it was exclusively a Victorian battalion?**

A Victorian Battalion.

**Okay. Now you trained for two months at Darley?**

28:30 Darley, yes.

**Is that the Caulfield Racecourse?**

We formed at the Caulfield Racecourse and we were sent to Darley for our training.

**Now describe to me what you meant by open warfare?**

Open warfare is desert, desert campaign. Like Tobruk, Tobruk is open warfare.

**So they were planning to send you towards North Africa?**

They were training us, yes. In the event of they're, of alternatively as a home guard here.

29:00 **Okay in the desert for instance.**

It's still open. Australia is open warfare. New Guinea is jungle warfare.

**And you only received basic training at this period for two months?**

Only received basic training.

**Now what was the morale of men in the unit at the time?**

Well, the morale was very high because we had our officers being '14 -'18 war Diggers

29:30 who nursed us and explained to us numerous areas of a war, etc. Secondly the fact that we were all then, particularly at Darley, a little excited, the fact that we were in the army and we were able to be sent overseas, that is to New Guinea, because we couldn't join the AIF because

30:00 of not having parents' consent. So it was quite an exciting time and we thought it was a wonderful achievement that we were going to go overseas and not AIF.

**What was the class composition of this battalion predominantly? Was it more of a working class sort of a... ?**

Yes. Yes.

**What about the officers?**

Well, our officers were, a lot of them were '14 -'18. The remainder were still,

30:30 well how could we put it, well bred. They had a very good standard, yes. The men, at this stage the situation was fairly desperate because there were very few, shall we say, left that could be eligible to join the army.

31:00 Because the bulk of them were either in Singapore, Tobruk or Greece. And we could only muster three divisions.

**And what was the age group of these people in the militia, the 39th?**

Eighteen.

**So all of them were pretty much young chaps?**

The majority of them were eighteen, being the fact that they were under, they put their age up which I did, were under because of the parents' consent business.

31:30 **How old were you? You were sixteen or seventeen?**

I was seventeen then. I put my age up a year to get in.

**Not unusual for the time, of course.**

Not unusual. Some of them were only sixteen.

**I came across a guy last time who was fourteen.**

Too young.

**Yeah. Getting a bit young.**

When you look back on it today.

**So you were taken by the Aquitania to Port Moresby.**

Yes, by the Aquitania .

**What idea,**

32:00 **did you know what your battalion was formed specifically for?**

Yes, to guard Port Moresby.

**That's all you knew?**

A garrison battalion to guard Port Moresby and at the same time to relieve the 49th Battalion who had been there for some eight months I think.

**Was that regular or militia?**

Militia, we were all militia at this stage. Well, when I say militia the majority of us were. There were a few AIF mixed up in us at this

32:30 stage.

**Now when you went to Port Moresby you relieved the 49th?**

Well, we didn't relieve. They stayed.

**So the defences were beefed up?**

Only because the situation was the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, we were to relieve them as a garrison battalion but owing to the fact that they bombed Pearl Harbour and the Japs were on their way down so every Tom, Dick and Harry was needed,

33:00 so the 49th stayed and the 39th Battalion along with the 53rd Battalion from New South Wales. They were all New South Wales.

**Yep. 39th?**

53rd and 49th made the 30th Brigade.

**Were they the only militia units in New Guinea at the time?**

At the time, yes. Battalions, not units. I'm sorry. I'm getting

33:30 a little bit sort of ... I mean we had the ack-ack for instance. Militia ack-ack. Anti-aircraft. They were on Ack-Ack Hill who did a marvellous job. But there were a lot of attached troops to us, supporting people like engineers and so on.

**And they were militia as well?**

Well yes. They were all militia.

**Now you said your battalion was also**

34:00 **unloading ships?**

Yes.

**Can you tell me more about that?**

Well the ships came in. The MacDhui and the Wanaka, mainly cargo ships. They had to sort of dock and we had to unload them as quickly as possible. We were taken from our digging, which we dug that many holes in New Guinea it is a wonder the island didn't sink. We had to go down and unload these ships. Our job was to ... I had my section down there

34:30 and had to work the winches where we would bring up a load, swing it across and dump it on the thingo. This was all fairly well and so on until such time that we worked eight on, eight hours on and sixteen hours off. During which time, when we took the eight hours on, when we finished the crew would come up and man the winches. The first couple

35:00 of nights we were unloading and they were always late. It got to a quarter of an hour late, twenty minutes late, half an hour late. I said to the purser, I said, "If your guys are not up here tomorrow night", or tonight as it was then, "By the said time, we're walking off". I said, "It's not fair. You guys are being paid ten times more than what we are. We've worked our shift. Be fair. Get your

35:30 chaps up here otherwise we're off". Well came that particular night, I said to my boys, "If they are not here by ten past, off we go". Ten past came, they still weren't there. It got a few minutes after that I said, "Righto. Close the winches down. We're off". So we closed the winches down and we were off. So the trucks are lined up along the wharf and the captain is screaming his head off. In the end result after the event, after we had

36:00 unloaded and finished he lined us up and thanked us very much for it. "You know", he said, "It was mutiny". I said, "It was stiff luck", I said. "Your chaps should have been up there. We gave them plenty of warning". He said, "Fair enough". He gave us two bottles of beer each and away we went. So it was quite a job unloading them and we had the occasions of course. We didn't like unloading the Wanaka because that was all ammunition and air force

36:30 material. Whereas the MacDhui, she had tinned peaches and condensed milk. And you would get a whistle from down in the hold, "It's on its way up". And it was never on the winch. You'd swing the actual load across and soon as it got about three feet from the wharf you'd let it go and of course the tin would break or dent and that was, you know, so you grabbed that tin and dashed it off underneath the wharf and

37:00 into the peaches.

**So these are the tricks?**

Oh, we had it worked out pretty fine.

**And I understand that at this point the Japanese were… They hadn't landed in New Guinea at that period?**

No.

**So you weren't being strafed or anything like that?**

Yes. Right from the very start. I forget when the first bomb landed but it was very, very soon after we got there.

37:30 **So you're telling me when you're unloading ships the Japanese were doing air attacks?**

Yes. My word.

**Okay.**

They came over and bombed and strafed, day and night. They didn't have any opposition. We didn't have any air force. We had one ack-ack gun, the three point seven I think they called it, on Ack-Ack Hill. And they got a very good record of shooting down planes, more so than they shot out in the Middle East. And they were militia.

38:00 No, they didn't have any opposition. They used to fly around at night time, quite low, because there was no opposition until we started getting our searchlights in and our Beaufort guns. They came over one night and the search lights came on and the Beauforts let fly and they got the shock of their lives. They didn't fly around as much as they did after that. They flew twenty thousand feet up.

38:30 **Now, with the landing of the Japanese at..**

Gona.

**Gona, Buna and their subsequent advance to Kokoda. Can you walk me through the period where you were sent up the track from Port Moresby, your battalion?**

Well being in Port Moresby, as it was, remembering at this stage

39:00 that the battalion is scattered; we had one company down at Bootless Bay, one company over here, A Company are out on the drome. So the Battalion never at any one time got together as a battalion parade ground. We never got to know the other people, the other men, in the other various companies. We didn't get together at all. They were separate.

39:30 When the word came through that the Japs had landed at Gona, word came through that we had to get to Kokoda to hold the airport, the airstrip. So everything was rushed. We were equipped with our shorts, shirts, we had

40:00 leather leggings. It was like the leather leggings like the police wear on their motorbikes, leather leggings with a strap around it along which we used to carry a knife down the side. And the preparation for it, we carried naturally of course the usual things which you would enough; your towel, your soap, your groundsheet and your jumper and a change of shirt and a change of shorts and a pair of socks, you name it, talcum powder

40:30 writing pad, and this made the load of about a thirty-pound pack plus your haversack which contained your mess gear and your ground sheet, plus your knife and bits and pieces. We had a slouch hat, we didn't have tin hats, we had a slouch hat. And the race was on. Now to face this Kokoda Track, which to the best of our knowledge up till now had been impregnable.

41:00 The Japs having landed at Gona were held up with their advance down because of our continual bombing and by the time they unloaded their boats, which were LCIs, which were Landing Craft [Infantry], to get all their gear organised there gave us a bit of breathing space, for us to assemble and start marching.

**Okay, I'm going to have to stop you there because we have to change the tape.**

# Tape 6

00:31 **Yes. So you were saying that you were marching up towards Kokoda.**

Yes. We were prepared and we marched up. We were transported by truck up to a place called Koitaki, which was on the top of the hill from Port Moresby, only about thirty k [kilometres] out. Which ended up in the end result as a convalescent area. And known as McDonald's Corner is the starting of then the Kokoda Track.

01:00 Not knowing the actual track itself Bert Kienzle, who was a rubber planter at Kokoda had walked back over the track and was prepared to form a “Bung train” because we endearly called them, the natives, to carry our supplies. B Company were the first company over the track and we, being the A Company were the second company. And we set off

01:30 from Koitaki or McDonald’s Corner, where Mr McDonald, who was again a rubber plantation owner, took photos which is down in the annals of history of us marching off over the track. The first part of the track was slippery and slimy. It rained every afternoon at four o’clock and

02:00 it wasn’t pleasant at all. But the first village arrived and it was achieved within reason quite comfortably. So we slept there that night. The following morning, up. This was a forced march. Only because we had to get to Kokoda before the Japs did. It was most important that we take and hold this airstrip.

**And just before we proceed, how many companies were actually involved in this advance, all up, from the 39th?**

Well B Company had

02:30 left, A Company followed, followed by C Company and Don Company.

**D Company?**

So there is four companies on the track.

**The rest didn’t come?**

The rest, E Company, which was a machine gun company, were on the drome or stayed back with other reinforcements or our supporting weapons, our mortars our machine, heavy that’s the Vickers. And all that type of thing.

03:00 Once we secured the airstrip they were then to be flown over by DC3 Douglas aircraft. That was the plan.

**I see.**

So we set off and from the very first, well the second day then from Uberi up to Ioribaiwa is what today they call the “Golden Stairs”. That’s a hill that is about seven thousand feet.

03:30 When we went over it, of course, it was just a track. Later on the engineers laid down logs which made it easier to climb and they laid down two thousand logs to get from the bottom to the top. Once we reached the top we immediately assessed the situation and the loads we were carrying were far in excess of anything that you could imagine for the rest of the journey. It’s...

04:00 The track itself is eighty-five miles long and at this stage it was a pad. Now when I refer to it as a pad, it was a pad like a goat track going from village to village where they traded such things that if you’ve got a pig you take it to the next village and say, “Well here’s a pig, I’ll give you a pig for a Mary” - for a girl. Or they’d trade food. They’d give you some corn for some taro root or something equivalent.

04:30 It was only purely and simply as an access from village to village. Not used as a track from Kokoda to Port Moresby. But having arrived at the top of this we immediately started to unload our gear. Such things as, “What do you want boot polish for?” The mud was up to our knees there. And our towel, “What do you want a whole towel for. Half a towel will do?” “What do you want a writing pad?” We got

05:00 no communication as far as mail was concerned. So needless to say our things went left, right and centre, which the native boys appreciated. And we were just more or less left in our shorts, a shirt and our leggings, slouch hat and more or les a pack which carried the groundsheet and a jumper because it got cold at night. The groundsheet was most important because it rains every afternoon.

05:30 So it lessened the load considerably. But the going, it was so hazardous. Occasionally, as you were walking along it had been known that you would see things like a bird of paradise or wild life, a wild pig or something. In general you were lucky to see anything. To my knowledge, we didn’t any birds of paradise, we didn’t see any snakes, we didn’t see any crocodiles.

06:00 So walking along the only thing we noticed in particular was lantana, which is our battalion emblem today, the lantana. But that grew in abundance all the way along the track. Then of course there were things like wait-a-while, which was a vine which was very, very prickly. And as you went through it would stick on to you and you would have to get your knife out and hack at it,

06:30 so you could get through the jungle, rush through. Owing to the fact that one company had been through before we had, it gave a little bit of leeway, the fact that at this stage it started to widen. The company came up behind it was a little bit wider and the rest of the company so and so. The more troops that went over the wider the track got until at the end on the way back it was about a metre wide. So it made the going considerably

07:00 less hazardous but it doesn’t alter the fact that it was the terrain of the country. The hills were so high and you never could decide whether it was easier to walk up or easier to walk down. It was one of those

things.

**Did any men actually get killed on the way?**

Not going up.

**Not going up? Like on the way to Kokoda, none? What about on, well besides enemy action?**

Yeah. We fought all the way back. Village by village

**Yeah, but no accidents took place?**

07:30 There were no action on the way up.

**Okay.**

Well they were still at Gona and still pumping up their bike tyres.

**No, sorry what I meant was on the way back … no accidents took place even though you were fighting your retreat?**

No, we didn't retreat. We withdrew.

**Okay. If you want to put it that way. You withdrew.**

Big difference. We didn't retreat, we withdrew.

08:00 **We'll to get to that anyway later.**

Sorry about that.

**No, that's okay. So when you're walking through the villages, how many villages actually comprised the Kokoda Track?**

How many?

**Yeah. Like all the villages you had to pass.**

I haven't counted. I would say roughly off hand about fifteen.

**Fifteen villages. The local population, they were all friendly throughout?**

Yes. They didn't know at this stage what was going on of course. They were very naive about the whole situation.

08:30 **So what about the Papuan Infantry Battalion? The PIB?**

They were with us. Yes.

**So they were already formed.?**

They were seconded, yes. Near us. We had one boy in particular, Sonopa who got the MM [Military Medal]. Brilliant man.

**He got a military…**

He got an award.

**So that unit, the PIB [Papuan Infantry Battalion] was already formed when you were marching up the track?**

Well they were formed in Port Moresby, yes. They were in existence when we got there.

**Okay. So they were actually supporting… ?**

09:00 Well, they were seconded to us as guides.

**I see your point, okay. As guides.**

Yes. They were seconded to us as guides, not as a battalion. They didn't fight individually as a battalion. They were seconded to various groups and to us in particular. Well as I say one was our guide and our contact man when we were at Kokoda, he went off and got the message back because

09:30 our communication fell down and nobody saw it.

**Why was it important to have guides? What purpose did it serve?**

Well, you couldn't define the track.

**Give me an example how difficult it would be to find the track?**

When you look at the jungle, it's just jungle and if you turn your back it grows over in two seconds type of thing. One company would go through and then all of a sudden the branches all fall back again. It is

very hard to find which was the track and there would be little

10:00 indentations going off left, right and centre around the villages themselves where they had a little pad, so it was very hard to find which track you took, unless you had a guide.

**So there were multiple tracks in certain areas?**

Similar, Yes. Mainly around the villages. Not in between the villages but around the villages there were because they go out and hunt.

**So people would have got lost I take it?**

No problem at all.

**The militia, that happened quite often?**

Yeah. You can

10:30 get lost all right. Yeah. We were out in the bush for four days. Not lost but disoriented. In other words we didn't know where we were. That was getting out of Kokoda. But we marched onto the next. The village people welcomed us enthusiastically. Of course we gave them a cigarette, which they thought was marvellous, of course.

11:00 On the way back of course we didn't have any cigarettes and we had to talk our way into, for them to give us a smoke of a "Bung twist" as we called it. It was like a liquorice strap. You would roll that up in a bit of newspaper.

**Why were they called Bungs?**

Why were they called Bungs?

**The actually indigenous people.**

The name I really don't know. But they were Bungs. A term of endearment. We don't say it

11:30 in a derogatory manner. It was a term which we used - a Bung. It's not a probably pleasant word, but it wasn't meant in that way, the 'Bun train'. But they, as I say, carried all our gear and our weapons in grease. We didn't get issued with them until we got halfway over the track.

**Now, were there Australian units**

12:00 **that were actually stationed in the villages to construct defensive positions? While you were marching up to Kokoda were Australian units stationed in all the villages to construct defensive positions?**

No.

**Or the whole unit just marched forward. They didn't leave behind any small garrison units for each village?**

Not into each village, no

**But in certain areas they did.**

Just marched through it.

**Just marched through it?**

Yeah. Just marched through it. We didn't have the numbers.

12:30 No. We had to go to the front. No we didn't leave anybody at the villages.

**And as you were approaching Kokoda, which was the actual hardest part of the track?**

Which was the hardest part? The hardest part would be form about half way, which was a place called Efogi and Kagi. They were the highest points on the track

13:00 and very, very hard to navigate. The creeks were very, very difficult to ford. This is where they are doing it today. They call it leadership or they call it teamwork, etc. This is where we started teamwork. We found out by walking this track that you became individually within yourself ... You had to team up with

13:30 a mate. The two of you could work together. And this is the team that we started very early in the piece because once you forded a creek and clambered up the other side the first thing you did was to turn around and put your hand out to help your mate up. Alternatively, we found that by using a stick was a great help, to dig it into the ground and ease yourself up

14:00 into these various parts. So teamwork come into it and we found also the fact that you had to start working in groups. You couldn't work… the word of command was too difficult to organise an entire company. It was hard enough to organising a platoon, which contains thirty men. It was hard enough for people like myself, a corporal, handling eight men in my section. It was very ... Communication

14:30 was hard. You could use sign signals etc. That's if you could see them or if they could see you. They might be dragging their backside somewhere and being not able to keep up. This was a forced march and it was starting to tell halfway over that the majority of us were conked out. We couldn't keep up. It was just so exhausting and we weren't fit.

15:00 We didn't have exercises and what have you in Port Moresby before we started.

**Did any soldiers actually fall out of the line?**

Yes. Some of them just couldn't make it.

**So what happened to them?**

They stayed there. One of them I can speak of. He just stayed in a village for a while and then retired back to Port Moresby.

**He had to walk back himself?**

He had to walk back. He just couldn't make the grade.

15:30 Or failing that, they caught up two or three days later. But no, it was very hard, hazardous the track in itself. It was not everybody who kept up.

**Now was there any units stationed in Kokoda at the time?**

No one.

**No one.**

There were administrative but they had left. That is the rubber plantation owners and the administrative ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit] which is an administrative body.

16:00 **Of the plantations?**

On the plantation itself. But they had gone by the time we got there.

**It was completely desolate then.**

It was desolate.

**When did your battalion start to expect resistance before it was reaching Kokoda?**

We didn't expect any resistance although we were very much aware. Communication was very, very lacking mainly because we were in the middle of the track and

16:30 the only communication you could get and not having carrier pigeons was by wireless. But of course they are finding out now with our sigs [signals] that the cable in which we had laid, which they called the Don 3 I think it is, wireless was subject to dampness and they weren't functioning as well as they should have. So communication was very hard to run a line

17:00 from Port Moresby eighty-five mile long in relays, so they had great difficulty with communication. It was bad enough communicating within our own section. And this is where in the end result we found that all this secrecy, all this whispering, and all this be quiet and the element of surprise, it's a waste. You can't do it in the jungle. You've got to yell out. And that's what the Japs taught us. They yell out their orders.

17:30 We couldn't understand Japanese. They couldn't understand us. It was quite okay although they knew where you were and we knew where they were anyway. So putting it all together, the only way you could communicate was to yell out.

**Now, can you actually remember walking down the track and looking up and seeing the Kokoda Plateau? Can you remember that moment?**

No. You walk along the track and you can't see a darn

18:00 thing until you reach Deniki and then you look down and Kokoda is right down the bottom. Deniki is the last village before you go into Kokoda. Kokoda is on the flat, it's in the hinterland of the northern coast of New Guinea and from Kokoda to Gona is flat.

**Is that what you refer to as the plateau?**

No, the plateau itself is a flat piece of ground with a fall all the way around.

18:30 **I get you now. I was a bit confused.**

A fall all the way around, about a sixty foot drop. When you walk onto the Kokoda Plateau, which is only about five hundred metres wide by about a thousand metres long give and take, it was all rubber up the top then but all the way around there had a steep grade down which had steps down which lead out to the airstrip. But it had a steep cliff all the way around.

19:00 And that is what they called the Plateau.

**Now your unit was the first to arrive there?**

No. B Company arrived first. They went through Kokoda to the other side, to the next village up, Oivi.

**So what was running through your minds when you reached that area? Were you expecting Japanese resistance then?**

When we reached Deniki we waited then for C and Don Company to come up. We had a couple of days

19:30 as a breather. And here we had outstanding patrols of course in the various areas and we discovered that amongst the foliage was this phosphorous moss. And we thought, “We’d be smart here”. Because when you get an outpost out the chap had to be relieved every second hour so we put down this phosphorous along the track out to the outpost. So that the next

20:00 bloke could follow this phosphorous track. “Righto, I’m here. You can go back and have a couple of hours sleep”. That was very good, smart move until the Japs found the track and they followed it in. So it wasn’t a good move after all. We had two days there. And this was my first taste of taro root which we were running out of, well the supply of food at this stage was reliant entirely on the “Bung train”. And that was only

20:30 two men to a tin of bully beef and two biscuits each.

**Now, are these the Fuzzy Wuzzy angels?**

No. Well, they weren’t then but they are.

**It is the same lot doing the same job?**

They were, yes. Carrying the goods up. And as soon as the ... We were the first battalion to be wounded from Kokoda and we carried our wounded from Kokoda

21:00 up to Isurava and that is when we had to carry them back eighty-five mile. We didn’t have helicopters to fly them out. We had to carry them back over the track, which took two weeks to carry one patient back. And they became, the natives carried our supplies up and carried our wounded back.

21:30 That was the starting of the Fuzzy Wuzzy angels at Isurava.

**Oh because they were carrying your wounded back?**

They were carrying our wounded back, and that was the start of the Fuzzy Wuzzy angel.

**Now these bung trains, how many people are we taking about?**

Oh gosh, quite a few hundred. A lot. Relays of various groups led by Kienzle mainly and his offsider, Lord.

22:00 And then came other personnel from ANGAU and whatever who organised the native train. They carried so far and then had a rest, naturally of course, and fed them.

**Were they actually paid for their services?**

Unfortunately, this is another diplomatic error which I don’t know exactly,

22:30 but no they were not. And nor were they very happy about it. Because when we revisited our battleground twenty-five years after the event, they were very, very upset because the Australian government promised them this and promised them that and they didn’t meet the promises. They promised food and recompense for their

23:00 efforts shown and they were lucky to get a ribbon.

**How do you feel about that?**

I think it is a bloody terrible thing. We wouldn’t have been able to do it only for them. We wouldn’t have been able to carry our gear over. We wouldn’t have been able to carry our wounded back. We couldn’t even take prisoners. What would you do with a prisoner? You had three men to take a prisoner back to Port Moresby. What for?

23:30 We couldn’t afford three men. I only had eight in my section. I ended up with three men. It would take the whole unit if we had taken a prisoner. And ditto with them. Sam Templeton, one of our captains, they wounded him but what would they do with a wounded man? They can’t take him prisoner, or they didn’t.

**The Japanese? So there was no prisoners in this?**

24:00 It wasn’t brutality. It was the fact that you could not handle it.

**So it was logical?**

We couldn't afford three men to take one Jap back to Port Moresby.

**So it is a matter of survival really?**

Yes. And we were under strength well and truly before we started.

**So can you walk me through your first actual combat experience at Kokoda, the day it actually happened?**

Yes. Well we went...

24:30 we had the experience where one chap couldn't make it and sat on the side of the track, where we relocated him to battalion headquarters where it wasn't as dangerous. It was still dangerous but not as dangerous. Then we formed up at Deniki, which is the last village on the track before you go into Kokoda. B Company had already withdrawn from Kokoda, having lost a colonel, and over run, naturally of course, by

25:00 weight of numbers there was only a company of them against ten thousand that landed at Gona. They were riding their bikes up from Gona to Kokoda because it was flat. [Major] General Horii rode his white charger up, his horse. However, Kokoda had been taken. It was in Jap hands. We were sitting up at Deniki and the word came through that we were going down to

25:30 retake Kokoda. So we prepared ourselves. We took our, most of our gear we left at Deniki. All we went down in was our shorts, our shirt, our hat and a groundsheet.

**Can I just ask you, what sort of weapons did you have when you were going to conduct this counter attack?**

Well to my section I had a Bren gun, I had a Thompson sub-machine gun, one.

**Okay.**

26:00 **You had that as your personal weapon?**

I had that as my personal gun, yes. The rest of them had ..303 rifles, huge things. Too heavy. They were for open warfare. They could fire from here to seven hundred yards away. All you needed in the jungle was something you could fire from here to thirty-five yards. The ..303 was oversize and it was a darn nuisance going through the jungle because you put it over your shoulder and it stuck up in the air eighteen inches.

26:30 It got caught in vines. It was a problem. Whereas the Thompson sub-machine gun … You'd just tuck it under your arm.

**Machine guns are best for jungle warfare?**

Oh indeed. Without a doubt. You wouldn't use a rifle as such. Short bursts with sub-machine guns, that's the only way. You can just spray the area. So we formed up there and left most of our gear at Deniki. We thought we'd get it on the way back or have it sent down, I should say. And

27:00 down we went. C Company and Don Company went straight down. A Company went to the right down a disused track and down they went and so on they went and so on. C and Don Company had no sooner got half way down and they bumped into the main force that had moved out of Kokoda and hit C and Don Company.

**They were expecting C and Don Company, the Japanese?**

They were coming out of Kokoda to go up to Deniki and C and Don Company

27:30 were going down to Kokoda and they met in the middle. And hell broke loose, the way they say it. A Company went down this disused track and walked up onto the plateau and there wasn't a soul there. They had all gone up to meet C and Don Company.

**Okay.**

We walked onto the Plateau and we shot one Jap. He was pumping up his bike tyre. That was it. We walked in roughly at about one o clock. We sat on our backsides

28:00 or when I say, we rested there knowing full well that they're going to turn around and counterattack or send up another wave from Gona. So we are going to be caught right in the very middle. But we, in that position immediately sent off a signal, a merry pistol, a flare. It was

28:30 to go back to Deniki, be relayed back to Port Moresby. "Send over the plane. Send over all our reserves, our mortars and our machine guns and what have you and so on". But the message didn't get through. The message eventually did get through by Senopa, our PIB boy who walked back up to Deniki and managed to tell them, and the message went through by wireless and the planes came over

29:00 or were going to come over, one did come over, but they wouldn't land because they didn't have fighter support. So the air force in our book … I mean we're at war. We didn't have any support either but we

were there. Without our support we weren't going to last long. With all due respects to the air force at that time, which was mainly American, they wouldn't land

29:30 because as I say not having fighter support. So therefore we didn't get… One plane came over with Doug McLean Captain, well Major now with a couple of our machine gunners. We didn't have the machine guns. We had one mortar but we didn't have any bombs for it.

**Now was this a DC3?**

DC3. Yeah. It landed at Kokoda.

**And this was Australian Air Force that dropped the bombs.**

No. DC3 would be American.

30:00 **Now only one plane got through?**

One plane landed, yep. It landed and they jumped off and they immediately turned around and went back. You had to get in and out of Kokoda very, very quickly because at four o'clock in the afternoon the cloud used to just ... down and it was worse than a fog.

**What, it'll come right up the jungle?**

It'll come right down onto the jungle. There was this area of villages

30:30 which was the worst was Kagi and Efogi which was the highest. It was on the point of there and Mt Victoria which they called the Gap or the pass, it was known as the Gap. This was impregnable and this is where Blamey and his crew maintained that you could put a force across there and they would never get through. But it was seven mile wide. The planes used to fly through it, the Gap.

31:00 They could fly though it when it's clear. Their ceiling was only about five thousand feet. They couldn't go any higher because of the cloud, which had come down and if they didn't get home in time they were history. It was like when the Japs came down. The Japs would go down to Port Moresby, either strafe or bomb it, but to get home they had to fly through the Gap. They couldn't get any higher. They never had

31:30 pressurised cabins and they couldn't fly any higher than eight thousand feet.

**Now I see what you mean.**

Don't hold me exactly to these figures. Well it gives you some idea. They couldn't fly very high but they had to go through the Gap, is the only way they could get home. And if the cloud came down there was planes galore crashed into Mt Victoria because they couldn't find their way home.

**Now how many actually machine gunners were dropped off there without their… ?**

We didn't have any machine gunners.

**You said some men were dropped off in the first**

32:00 **plane that came over.**

No. It brought Captain McLean over and some of his troops but we didn't have any equipment. They then just formed up with us as infanteers.

**How many are we talking, how many troops?**

I think there was only about twenty I suppose.

**Twenty odd. What developed in the battle after that?**

Well they formed up with us

32:30 at went up to Deniki. They had met us up in Deniki.

**So you retreated from the Plateau back to Deniki, your company?**

Well we went down, captured Kokoda, sent the message through, the planes wouldn't land because they had no fighter support, needless to say that we were stumped there with nothing. Only what we stand up in. But we lasted two and a half days.

**At the Plateau?**

At the Plateau.

**What about in the meantime while you were there, can you hear the gun**

33:00 **fire?**

Oh yes. You could hear it in the valley but they went back then to Deniki. They were push back to Deniki.

**The two companies were pushed back?**

C and Don Company which left us completely isolated, with no one.

**You had no choice but to retreat?**

We had nowhere to go. But we fought it out and of course we were getting wounded until the second night came and…

**So you had to fight your way out to Deniki, your company?**

Out of Kokoda.

33:30 We were at Kokoda on the Plateau.

**So your company had to fight its way out back to Deniki?**

Yes indeed.

**Right. So the Japanese actually surrounded you?**

Yes, we were surrounded. They were at the front of us, the back of us and you name it.

**And were they counter attacking?**

Yes. Yes. Which we expected, naturally of course.

**Can you tell me about your first combat experience?**

When we went into battle, this is where our company commander, the big AIF man who told me if I didn't join the AIF he'd de-rank me. His leadership is where he stood

34:00 back with his revolver.

**That's right, you were saying that before, yes.**

He said, "If any man shirks this fight I'm here and I will shoot you". And he was up the back and we're down the front. And we went in and took Kokoda and we were fighting for it for two days. This is where JD McKay, a mate of mine, and Alec Lochhead. We were only three corporals. They both won the MM. Reardon, one of the other boys, he was on a machine gun and he couldn't move.

34:30 The Japs shot his legs off. But we got him out and he still lived. He died not long ago in Ballarat. But we had to get out. We had no ammunition, we had no food. So that night, at dusk, our '14 -'18 sergeant major, Jim Cowie, organised the withdrawal. JD, which was this mate of mine, he was last

35:00 out with Jim Cowie. He was cool. He was the coolest man that JD said he'd ever met, the fact that he said, JD he said, JD off the Plateau. After we had gone off down the steps and along the track and there is a Japanese setting up a machine gun right on the corner. You'd only have to look around to his left and seen us down below. He could have wiped the bloody lot of us out. He didn't. He stood up there and he is looking to his front. And we walked down the back of him,

35:30 across over the airstrip and up into the Jungle. JD was coming out with Jim Cowie and he said, "Let's make a run for it". Jim Cowie said, "No. Let's walk out. They won't know what we're up to". And they did. They walked out. Last out. Down the steps, over the airstrip. Then we were out in the jungle then for four days. We had to circle right around the back of Deniki up to the next

36:00 village which was Isurava.

**So was there a track to follow in this?**

Yes.

**There was a track.**

There was a track. Yes. Yes. Well we knew. Well you could see Deniki. It was the point. It was like looking at Mt Masson.

**Right.**

You just walked around the back of it but there were bung tracks there. The first night we came into a village and they made us very welcome in as much

36:30 as they cooked some bananas for us and gave us some pawpaw and a bit of sugar cane, which was very acceptable because we were starving. We slept up the top end of a garden and in the morning we woke up and the Japs are down the bottom. We didn't engage them because we had nothing to engage them with.

**So you were out of ammo?**

Out of ammo.

**Did the Japanese know you were there?**

No. Didn't even know. Didn't know we were there.

37:00 We walked on up then, right around the back of Deniki and came out at Isurava.

**Before we get to Isurava, there was a big battle there?**

That's a big battle there.

**That's a big battle. Okay. Can you tell me about your actual first sighting of the Japanese? And you obviously fought in the Kokoda Plateau area. What was it like to fight against the Japanese? What sort of tactics were they using up front?**

Right. We were all very

37:30 secretive ourselves. We weren't yelling out anything at all until we heard them. They came in rattling cans and yelling out to each other. "Good grief. What the heck is going on?" It was frightening, the noise. Let alone the shots.

**You are talking about the noise and them yelling with tin cans? How much noise are we talking?**

Stones. It was just…

**Give me an example of what sort of noise you mean like in terms of how loud it was?**

Oh, it would be about eight decibels out of ten.

38:00 Are you talking strength?

**Yeah.**

Eight out of ten if you are on a phone. Because it was strange noise. I mean we didn't expect any noise. We expected to be creeping in through the rubber plantation. But the rubber plantation was open and you could see in between the trees, apart from undergrowth which they sneaked along under of course.

38:30 But the noise. They rattled tins and yelling out to each other, etc and so on. We didn't even ... Well I say we didn't know what was going on until we found out later that that was their words of command and that was the way they operated. And so we then found out their tactics.

**So did it cause a lot of confusion amongst your soldiers, this noise?**

Not confusion. We were in our little nick.

39:00 A little indentation in the ground or behind a tree. I was behind the biggest tree on the Kokoda Plateau. And my position then was exactly where Colonel Owen was shot, our Colonel. But they made so much noise coming in. But then we were approaching this, this is when we were told they were small, they were cross-eyed, they couldn't shoot a barn in a paddock and all this sort of thing. We struck marines

39:30 and they were experienced, darn good fighters. But they would do things like tie a piece of string on a bit of grass for movement and you'd say, "There's one there", so you would open fire. He wasn't there at all, he was over here but he knew where you were because you fired and he could tell where the shot came from. All these little lurks. Or they would call out, they'd get to know a name, a name that they could pronounce, not with an L in it.

40:00 They couldn't pronounce L. That's why all our passwords were 'Woolloomooloo' or 'Lullaby'. They'd have a word and call our and get the name of a corporal for instance. And they'd call out, "Are you there Corporal Wilson?", and if you answered they'd say, "Well cop this", and they'd … But all the lurks we learned very quickly.

# Tape 7

00:31 **So they used all these sort of tactics, they called out names. How do you distinguish between a Japanese voice? I mean you said they used L words.**

Once again. They're not foolish. They wouldn't call out a name which they couldn't pronounce. And it was only just, "Are you there someone?" Smithy

01:00 or whatever, he'd pick up whatever the name was. But it wasn't as though you are picking up the ... At the same time you are in the heat of battle. You are not going to stop and say, "Is he a Jap or an Australian calling out?" So everything was so quick. It was that quick in terms of movement and so on, as JD would say, "His gun ran white hot. You could see the bullets going out the barrel he was firing that heavy".

01:30 We lost one chap during the night, disappeared. Don't know what happened to him. A Jap must have

sneaked up this embankment, got onto the plateau, strangled him and pulled him down or rolled him down the embankment. Of course it was a sixty feet drop to the bottom. So these are areas that you had to be more than alert. And of course every half hour or twenty minutes or whatever the case may be they would send over a two-inch mortar. Their two-inch mortars

02:00 was not as dangerous as ours. We didn't have two-inch mortars then because they weren't invented. We got them later. But they'd send over their two-inch mortar and of course kept us awake. In the end of the first night you were that tired that you felt, "Oh crikey. Is it all worth it? Let them have

02:30 New Guinea. I mean what the hell would you want a place like this for?" So you are feeling completely drained of that enthusiasm to fight or to carry on. You think, "Well what's it all worth? If only I could get an hours sleep. If only half an hour". And this was of course their tactics. They just kept you awake, kept you awake and as soon

03:00 as you started to nod, bang goes off another thing. And of course they would vary their range and vary the distance, so you never knew where the next one was coming from.

**Did they kill any people, those mortars?**

Did I?

**No. Did the actually mortars ever kill anyone?**

That I couldn't account for but a mortar normally wouldn't. I mean it may if you caught one in your arm sort of business but they didn't have a great deal of shrapnel.

03:30 I got hit in the leg with a two-inch mortar or the result of a two-inch mortar but it burned and it concussed the leg for a while but no it didn't do any damage.

**So how did you deal with the prospect of engaging and killing Japanese soldiers when you first were involved in battle and after that?**

04:00 For a while, well for the first action at Kokoda you weren't really sure whether you shot a Jap or not. We knew they were there. The fire was coming from that direction and you fired. You didn't wait to see the whites of their eyes, as we were told to, to conserve ammunition. That's again another fallacy. Can you imagine sitting there waiting to see the Japs with the whites

04:30 of a Jap's eyes He never opens his eyes, they are just little slits. And this is the sort of technique on which we had been taught and told which was absolutely useless. You don't wait to see the whites of their eyes. If there is movement and you think there's a Jap you give them a burst. You don't wait till they stand up.

**What were the attacks like? Were they mass attacks on your line?**

Mass attacks, yes. En masse. And everything under the sun opened

05:00 up and then there would be a quiet and they would withdraw and then they would come in again and then they'd withdraw. And then until dusk on the second night that we had no, well very little should say, very little ammunition. No food. Hadn't had anything to eat. One chap made a cup of tea and from that day to this, I don't know how he did it because we couldn't light a fire. But how he made a cup of tea, God only knows.

05:30 I think he must have found a kerosene lamp or something equivalent in one of the administrative huts.

**On the Kokoda Plateau, was there any instances where you experienced very close combat with the Japanese?**

Not me personally. No.

**Or your unit in that area?**

Units, yes. Oh toward the end they were ... The Japs were coming in as we were going out and there was a bit of a mix up. You could take partners for the

06:00 barn dance I think. It was a ... nobody knew. It was dusk and nobody could distinguish who was who. So they let us go and we just went down these steps and out over the airfield. It was close but no, we didn't actually battle bayonet-wise.

**No bayoneting encounters?**

No

**And what sort of distances are we talking when you're saying you are fighting with the Japanese here?**

How far?

**Yeah because if it's jungle warfare it would be fairly close I would imagine?**

06:30 Fifty yards.

**Fifty yards. Okay.**

It was fairly open on the plateau. The plateau itself. It was administrative buildings. A school house and administrative buildings. It was a big village. And it was a big rubber plantation.

**So when you were advancing through the jungle back to Deniki the Japanese decided to let you all pass because of the actual problem**

07:00 **at dusk that they had with you and you had with them as well in distinguishing friend and foe?**

When they say let us past they didn't know we were there at the village, at the top village. When we got out...

**You said you had to fight your way out of the Plateau?**

That was before we sort of went down the stairs. We were fighting up until then and one by one more or less we were withdrawing.

**I get you.**

But there was covering fire

07:30 going on all the time.

**So they weren't aware of you withdrawing at the time?**

No. They didn't know we were depleting our ranks down the steps. No. We just ... We stayed there and kept a couple of Bren guns still firing while the bulk, we all got out. When I say all, we had to get the wounded out too of course. We had to leave a few there.

**How do Bren guns handle themselves in jungle warfare?**

08:00 Well the Bren gun again was an excellent weapon without a doubt. The Bren gun again was designed to go in open warfare because it had a fantastic range and it was very, very accurate. But we didn't want accuracy and we didn't want a long range. We wanted a short weapon that fired quickly. A short weapon that fired quickly. Which the Thompson gun or the Own gun does. And it's light.

**So how much does a Bren gun weigh?**

08:30 I thought you might ask, twenty-three pound.

**Okay that's reasonably heavy to carry round.**

A .303 - weighs ten pound, or nine and three quarters, ten pound.

**So I assume the strongest man in the section would have to carry it?**

Normally it was shared.

**Two people would carry it?**

Well shared. Anyone who was prepared to carry it for a while was more than accepted. But not

09:00 necessarily the number one gunner. He didn't carry it all the time, it was just too heavy.

**So you are saying that even though it was of use in jungle warfare it was also quite clumsy thing to carry?**

Oh yes.

**So you are better off without it you would say?**

It was a length of getting through the jungle with it. You couldn't carry it over your shoulder. You had to carry it under your arm and push it through and you went after it. You couldn't carry it up top like a rifle, you couldn't carry a rifle over your shoulder, sling it.

09:30 **Now what about Japanese weapons? What sort of weapons did they have?**

Well they had the rifle. They didn't have a smaller sub machine gun. They had a Juki, which was like a woodpecker. It was a machine gun and then they had of course their mobile mountain gun. One carried the wheels, one carried the barrel and once carried the ammunition. That was a very, very

10:00 effective little weapon. Only a small ... It was a cannon. Very effective. The Juki was similar to our type of Bren but heavier.

**Heavier than a Bren gun?**

Heavier than a Bren. Yeah. It was a fairly heavy machine gun.

**So they didn't have any light machine guns like the Thompson?**

No light machine guns like we had Thompson.

**And what did you think of their rifles?**

Their rifles?

**Yeah,**

10:30 **compared to the .303?**

Oh. Just in brief I'd say nothing would beat a .303 for accuracy and reliability. They were a very, very good rifle, the Enfield. Their rifle wouldn't have been ... They were lighter, fired a smaller bullet

11:00 but wasn't as accurate. But you didn't need this accuracy. You didn't need it in the jungle because you weren't firing at a specific, unless there were occasions that you did. I'm talking in general. In general you sprayed the jungle. You didn't individually wait till you saw the whites of their eyes and then fire. You needed a near weapon for that. You knew where they were and you just sprayed that

11:30 area. And if there was deadly silence after you had done that you knew you'd got them.

**Did your unit, your company suffer heavy losses in that Plateau battle?**

Yes. Yes. Not only killed but wounded. Nasty wounds.

**What sort of wounds?**

One chap in particular got shot through the mouth and it came out the back of his ear. One

12:00 chap had a shot in the shoulder but it was only just a little hole but the back of his shoulder blade was blown out. This was proven, I think I can speak for this, explosive bullets were banned by the Geneva Convention. Japs didn't believe in the Geneva Convention. A lot of those bloody bullets were explosive bullets because we were in a position, on numerous occasions that

12:30 we were down and the bullets were hitting the tree above us and exploding because all the leaves came down.

**So these were hollow points?**

Hollow points. Yeah. When they hit they go off again. Dirty work.

**What sort of wounds did soldiers fear the most?**

Fear? Facial.

**Facial wounds?**

If you can keep your head in, you're right. Body wise you can usually,

13:00 well unless it hits your heart of course or the equivalent but wounds generally in the shoulder or the arm or in the leg. They are repairable to a large degree.

**I mean you would rather not be injured.**

If you could keep your head, you're right.

**I understand also a lot of soldiers were very fearful of being shot in the genitals?**

Oh. Well, we would be.

13:30 It would be very sore.

**That's an understatement.**

I haven't heard of anyone unfortunately being shot there. Although we did have one casualty, a native lad got the inside of his leg, he didn't lose his knackers but he got the inside of his leg blown out by one of our air force planes at Gona. Which if you want to know about Gona I will tell you a little episode there.

**Oh well, we'll**

14:00 **get to Gona for sure. So you work your way down to Deniki?**

We missed, we walked around Deniki and arrived back to Isurava and now we've got a few days up our sleave. By this time the Japs had been completely disorganized. They had never been attacked before. Attacked. Right up until Kokoda they had come down through the Philippines etc, they

14:30 walked over everybody in their path. They had never been attacked. A Company of the 39th was the first company to actually attack when we went down and retook Kokoda which upset them considerably. They wondered what was going to follow.

**What was the strength of the Japanese force?**

Well, I don't know what they were at Kokoda but they landed

15:00 ten thousand.

**At Gona?**

At Gona. I don't know what force actually met us but there were a bloody lot of them.

**Did it seem like there was more of them than you?**

Oh cripes yes, we knew that. Oh heavens above, we would have been ... If we hadn't got out we would have been annihilated without a doubt.

**So C Company and A Company withdraw to Deniki?**

15:30 C and Don Company withdrew to Deniki.

**And your company met up with them later?**

No, we bypassed them. We stayed at Kokoda and fought for two and a half days and then walked around the back of them while they were still fighting. We walked around the back of them to Isurava.

**That's right. Isurava, yes. Now I remember. Okay. Now what happened to them after that?**

Well, we had a bit of a blow there because the Japs as I said before had been attacked, they didn't know what was in the wind and they had to regroup.

16:00 They wondered what in the hell was going on. Because they had to withdraw their attack on Deniki to reform at Kokoda to come back up and continue on with the battle. So it gave us a bit of breathing space. And it wasn't until the 26th August. We did Kokoda on the 8th August and we stayed there for two and a half days which was roughly about the 11th or 12th. But by the time we got back to Isurava it was four or five days later, we then rested until

16:30 the 26th of the month. So we had about, give and take, fifteen days of a blow or two weeks. During which time there were skirmishes along the track from Deniki to Isurava. Numerous. Mainly fought by C and Don Company with their withdrawal along the track coming back, back, back to Isurava.

**So like a rear guard action?**

A rear guard action.

17:00 Withdrawing, not retreating. Until we all then met at Isurava where we all had a bit of a blow for a couple of days and settled in to our respective positions. Now my position, as it turns out, was over looking the memorial that our Prime Minister John Howard did the unveiling of that monument at Isurava?

17:30 That was my killing ground, exactly where those stones were. It was a disused village. I was in that position there when I had to take a patrol out to my right. You could stand on that clearing and look right down the valley and vaguely in the distance you could out line Kokoda village, outline vaguely. I went down on a patrol, my section, and we went down to the right

18:00 to this village and we could hear a lot of movement and so and so. So obviously the Japs were coming up that valley. I came back and reported it to the officer and he said, "Don't worry about that, Don. The 53rd Battalion are down there and they'll bump into them. It's not our worry. We've got them on our right flank".

**So you had reinforcements apparently come up there?**

We had the 53rd Battalion by this time, yes, on our right.

18:30 So we were sitting in this position. We had a little quick prayer church service on the clearing…

**That's right, you told us.**

And then the natives referred to all this at this stage as "The big fight". It was commonly called when it started, the big fight. The big fight was, apart from Kokoda and Deniki, which was quite lot of fighting,

19:00 but the big fight was at Isurava. Now the 39th Battalion, at this stage, are still on their own. The 53rd Battalion on our right. The battle is to begin. When I look up, I had my position down along side the track. We weren't very far off the track. You couldn't get very far off the track. It was more or less confined

19:30 to the track because of the density of the jungle and the terrain of the country. And I look up and I see this huge man. He was a corporal and he looked absolutely magnificent. He was a 2/14th Battalion. He had come up to relieve us.

**AIF are they?**

AIF, Victorian, returned from the Middle East, seasoned troop and he looked so fit and so well.

20:00 And here was us, “Ragged bloody heroes” as they called us. He just stood there looking absolutely huge as I looked up. He said, “What’s the position?” So I passed over my position to him in terms of the fact that they are down there and this, that and the other when the big fight started. We stayed with them for a while and we then were withdrawn back a bit

20:30 to another position and the big fight started. So we withdraw back to a, not very far back past down the track, when I’m in a position there and unfortunately I lost my number one gunner and secondly I lost my number two gunner. He was shot dead.

**In your skirmishes?**

And I

21:00 knew that this bush moves and I didn’t wait to see anything. I emptied a magazine on it. However, it was just either side of the ... We were up an incline and our sergeant, we were holding a position up this little bit of a rise and on the right hand side was where Kingsley won his VC in the 2/14th Battalion. And our platoon sergeant

21:30 and myself were almost side-by-side and I had my section around the back of me. And a two-inch mortar came over and hurt my leg. Nothing much to worry about, I wasn’t even evacuated, and he got one in the leg, a bullet. So we had to withdraw down to the track and off we went back to an AD, which is an advance dressing station. I stayed in this position just by the track when I lost my number one gunner, I lost my number two gunner

22:00 and another lad who was a little bit further down the track, he was killed outright. I was holding this position for quite a while and running out again ammunition-wise, etc. when the cook came down the track and he said, “What in the hell are you doing here, Don?” I said, “I’m holding this position”. He said, “I don’t think there is anyone behind me”, he said, “I’m out by the skin on my teeth”.

22:30 I said, “I can’t take orders from a cook” so away he went. Then 2/14th chap came down and called out, “Are you there sergeant so and so?” and there is no answer. And he said, “If you don’t answer by the time I count to ten we’ll have to open fire because we are being overrun”. So it cut that sort of short, there was no noise and

23:00 hell broke loose and we just opened up on every bloody thing we could see. Well, I was still in that position when our ’14 -’18, well I refer to him as our ’14 – ’18, he was a captain in the ’14 – ’18 but he was a sergeant major at this stage, a quartermaster. He came down the track and said, “What are you doing here, Don?” He said, “You’d better come with me, there is no one after me”. I said, “I’ve got a Bren gun.” He said, “We can’t carry that”. So I took off the barrel and smashed that around a tree and he got the gun and smashed

23:30 that around a tree and threw it down the side of the pretty steep incline we were on. And he said, “Come on. Come with me.” I was last out of that and we walked down only a short distance we came across a native garden. The native gardens were built up about six feet high with logs to keep the wild pigs out from eating their corn and their crop, whatever they were growing, although this was fairly disused.

24:00 So I jumped over the fence, we jumped over the fence and we were walking across the actual garden and he said, “Hang on for a second, Don”, he said. “I’ve dropped me knife”. And I said, “Oh for heaven sake”. He said, “I must have dropped it when I was getting over the fence”. The Japs were up on the track only a hundred or so yards away and you could see them walking along the track. Thought, “Christ”. They started firing down but we must have been in sort of an indentation and they couldn’t get their range down low enough.

24:30 I was kneeling and I was kneeling and I was kneeling and I was getting down lower and lower to the ground. Jim Cowie walked back to the fence, came back and I said, “This is no place for me”. I walked to the other side of the fence and waited for him there. I wasn’t going to stand out in the middle of the paddock. He caught up with me and he said, “I found it”. I said, “Great, I’m glad you did”. Well then we got back to the next village. There we were reorganised. Bods were everywhere, mixed up with the

25:00 2/14th Battalion. Some of my blokes went, I don’t know where they were and some went so and so. It was a great, sort of organised shemozzle. So we lined up at that village and the 2/14th was still forward of us. And our CO, who is a magnificent man, Colonel Honnor, lined us up and he said, “Well chaps”, he said,

25:30 “I’m going to ask you, not order you, ask you”. He said, “As you know the 2/14th Battalion saved us from being annihilated”. He said, “They are now in big trouble. Are you prepared to go and help them?” And we all went back into action. So we fought there for, it seemed like ages. Quite some time,

26:00 until we withdrew then to Eora Creek, which was the next village down. And we pulled up there and I met up with my mate who was with B Company. I met him down at Eora Creek. And I tell this story of friendship or comradeship however you would like to put it. I said to Ted, I said, “Ted, I would do anything to clean my teeth”. We never had toothbrushes or toothpaste or anything of the sort.

26:30 And he said, “Don, use mine”. He said, “You’re the only one I’d loan my toothbrush to”. I thought, “You’ve got to be pretty friendly with a guy before he’d loan you his toothbrush”. So I had great pleasure in cleaning my teeth. So we had another scrap then at Eora Creek until such time as we then withdrew then

27:00 to Kagi, which was this very high ridge and withdrew again to Efogi and then we all came out together. Thirty-nine of us were left standing on our feet.

**Out of the whole battalion?**

Out of the battalion.

**Geeze.**

The rest had gone back sick or gone back wounded or stayed up there killed.

**How many got killed in the campaign?**

Figures?

**Are you aware of the figures?**

27:30 **The actual killed in action figures?**

I have got them Sergei [interviewer], but I can’t remember just off hand. There are figures in books of how many were killed and wounded and sick.

**It is clearly something you don’t regret doing, going and helping the 2/14th, is it?**

Never. Never regret it. It wasn’t easy because we were on our way down to Port Moresby.

**You must have been so exhausted?**

28:00 Oh exhaustion was ... We had gone beyond exhaustion. We’d gone beyond that. We were exhausted before we started fighting. It was just a matter of… from then on in it was, you did it in a state of numbness to some degree. You were completely buggered. That’s all there was to it.

28:30 The terrain of the country, the conditions, the heat, the mosquitoes, you name it. It was just unbearable.

**Did it get to a point where you didn’t care if you lived or died?**

Yes. Yes.

**It did. And this is a general feeling amongst everyone?**

It was a feeling. They say, “What in the bloody hell do they want this country for? Let em have it.

29:00 Lets all pack up and go home and they can have it”. Well, that wasn’t unusual to hear such a comment because who the heck would want it, you know? Heavens above. It was just a situation whereby, was it all worth it in terms of this impassable ... And here is Blamey and MacArthur and all his offsiders, they’re back there, “Why don’t they build a road over? Ought to build a road over the Kokoda Track”. You could hardly stand up

29:30 on it, walk it, let alone put a vehicle on it. And of course Blamey was getting the blame for our withdrawals. And this is where the rock set in where he then blamed his generals. So he went through Vasey, General Vasey and then he went through Potts, Eather, and he blamed them all and replaced them

30:00 and with some of the officers to counter his underestimating of reconnaissance. He wasn’t aware of this terrain. He wasn’t aware of the difficulties we were having with supplies and things of all that nature and air drops. When we got back to Myola, which was an airdrop ground was a swampy clearing, which

30:30 they started dropping food and ammunition, etc. But of course in the earlier days of dropping they just kicked it out of a DC3 biscuit bomber, as they called it. By the time it hit the ground it all broke and it was very, very hard to recover until such time as they started using parachutes.

**Now in that engagement where you assisted, the remnants of the 39th assisted the**

31:00 **2/14th…**

Yes.

**The 2/14th was infantry?**

They were infantry. Yes.

**Can you walk us through that actual battle where you assisted them, your remaining number of men from the 39th?**

What, the battle itself at Isurava?

**Yeah. Where you went back to help the 2/14th?**

Well, we went back in to help them and at that point they were almost depleted themselves. There were very, very few.

31:30 And one of my colleagues who was a corporal then at the time, he walked back to help the 2/14th right in the middle as they were just going to do a bayonet charge and he said, “The next thing I know I’m charging up a hill with a fixed bayonet”. This is where we worked in with the 2/14th. Our position was just more or less holding ground. The whole battle of

32:00 this was a delayed action. It wasn’t ... We couldn’t beat the Japanese. There was no way known we could have beaten them at this game and under these conditions. Our supply line had extended too far. You couldn’t keep up the supplies even with airdrops at Myola, which was about half way. You couldn’t keep the Bung trains, they were overworked as they were. So you had no alternative but to withdraw

32:30 but we had to hold and delay, delay, delay, everything was delay until such time as our troops came back from the Middle East. And this is where Churchill in his...

**Yes. I’ve heard all about that.**

He said, “No. I need them here. Don’t worry about the South Pacific. We’ll sort that out later”. And that wasn’t good enough for us. It was our ground, it was our country that was being attacked and it was Anthony

33:00 Heedon [?] I think it was off hand - don’t hold me too closely on these names - He had a big say in it. He released the 6th and the 9th Division back to Australia. But the 2/14th, they got there. Then after we had withdrawn right back to ... We pulled out at half way, which was at Efogi. But we only had 39th left anyway and

33:30 we went back to Port Moresby. But the Japs then continued their advance right down to Ioribaiwa (Ridge) which you could sit on the top of Ioribaiwa and see Port Moresby. It was only thirty-five kilometres out from Port Moresby so they were very, very close. But they struck the same trouble as we did. Their supply line, eighty-five miles. They had to do it on foot. They commandeered and captured half of our native boys

34:00 and treated them shockingly I believe apart from their own who they ran into the ground. They couldn’t keep up the supply. So they struck the same trouble as we did and they had no alternative but to withdraw when the 6th Division landed at Port Moresby and pushed them all the way back to Gona.

**When were being pushed back by the 6th Division...**

Yes.

34:30 **Were they doing also delaying actions as well?**

To the best of my knowledge, I wasn’t there so I can’t speak to that but there was very little resistance because they didn’t have any strength left in them. They suffered badly with sickness and diarrhoea or dysentery as they call it. They suffered badly. Apart from the fact that there was very little sympathy given. I mean a hell of a lot were killed. So there was very little resistance.

35:00 **When you say a lot were killed you are saying that... ?**

On the advance back because they couldn’t keep up. They couldn’t run, they couldn’t walk.

**So the 6th Division would catch them and kill them?**

The 6th Division would walk through them.

**Now did you find that ... You were saying before about POWs [Prisoners of War] in the Kokoda campaign weren’t taken by both sides. Now this was an established**

35:30 **from day one?**

Yes.

**From the first battle. What would happen if you did capture a Japanese, would you interrogate them first?**

Well, we did when we did the Aitape campaign for instance.

**But not on Kokoda?**

Not on Kokoda.

**There was no interrogation?**

No.

**So what would happen if the soldiers captured a Japanese, what would happen?**

You didn't actually give them a chance to surrender.

36:00 He wouldn't surrender anyway. He wouldn't put up a white flag. They don't surrender. They die for their country. I'd die because I get shot but I wouldn't die from stand up and ... No, they didn't wave a white flag, they just died for their country.

**So you never saw a Japanese actually put his arms up and surrender in Kokoda campaign?**

No way. They would come through

36:30 a gap for instance. Snowy Powell, one of our machine gunners, the first one came through and shot him, the second one came through, he shot him, the third one came through, shot him. I don't know how many came through, they just kept on coming. So Snowy Powell just reloaded his gun and kept shooting. That's how they were and that's how they were at Gona. They had nowhere to go. They had their backs into the water and we had to dig them out.

37:00 So they don't surrender. They may be accidentally caught but they don't surrender.

**So if they got accidentally caught they'd be shot on the spot?**

What could you do with them? This was the problem. As I said before, you can't carry one man back a fortnight's travel when it takes three men to look after him.

**Would they ever let them go, the Japanese?**

Would they let them? No. They used them as bayonet practice.

37:30 They stood them up like they did the nurses at Popondetta. Our boys, you could hear them screaming from Deniki. You could hear them screaming. They just put them up against a tree and used them as bayonet practice, you know. And then when they fall in a heap they shot them. They were ruthless. They weren't human. They were animals. They weren't even animals. Particularly Aitape – Weewak campaign

38:00 they were starving, and there were signs there of human…

**Cannibalism?**

Cannibalism, yes. Ghastly things. Villages where you, went into a village in one instance and there was a Mary strung out on the ground and I think every bloody Jap went through her. They were just shocking, absolutely shocking.

**Would you say that the Australian soldiers**

38:30 **had an absolute hatred of the Japanese?**

At this stage, yes. Yes. Mainly because of the episodes that we'd heard then, as course from Rabaul, you see and from Singapore, from prisoners of war. How they treated the prisoners of war. So we had the choice. You could either go a prisoner of war and go through Changi or something equivalent or

39:00 be shot. Well I think the average person would say, "You may as well shoot me now than later".

**So the Australians were equally merciless as well when they captured Japanese prisoners?**

The Australians?

**The Australia soldiers were also merciless when they captured the Japanese?**

Oh they did it a nice way.

**What do you mean a nice way?**

Well, it was…

39:30 Smoky House, he had a Jap that had been wounded. We were right up at Isurava and he said, "I can see those eyes now, just pure hatred. What can you do? The officer wouldn't do it. I had to do it. So unfortunately, I just had to pull the trigger". So it was

40:00 a situation where it's not easy. Not easy. But in the heat of ... That's hard to do but in the heat of battle you don't really know whether you have shot them or not. This is where it's confusing in accuracy of weapons, etc. You just spray the area and it's not until after the event that they go in and count the number of dead. How well you did.

40:30 So it's very difficult to turn around and say, "How many Japs did you kill?" Nobody knows.

**So what took place after you actually were withdrawn from the Kokoda Track, after you had helped the 2/14th and you withdrew, what took place after that?**

Came back to Australia.

**So practically immediately you were withdrawn to Australia, the unit?**

Well, we came back to Port Moresby naturally.

41:00 There again we...

**So how many were left?**

Thirty-nine on our feet. By the time we got them back to Port Moresby, we were starting then, and they were there, our reinforcements. So we were reinforced again to another almost full strength battalion of reinforcements. These were

41:30 personnel, who once again as I said, quite a few of the 39th Battalion boys should never have been in the army. They weren't military material. They weren't just. However, when we went into Gona for instance a few of them didn't even know how to load the rifle. It was just...

**And these were 39th people?**

In the 39th Battallion.

# Tape 8

00:31 **Okay now once you got withdrawn from Port Moresby from the Kokoda campaign, you were sent to Port Moresby and then withdrawn. You're unit was sent to Australia.**

No. No. After Kokoda we came back to Port Moresby.

**Yeah. The original 39th Battalion, the remnants of it.**

The remnants came back to Port Moresby and there we were reinforced, heavily, to almost

01:00 then again battalion strength. This was only a matter of a few months when once again Brigadier Porter, in his wisdom, gave us the honour of going to Gona to spearhead the attack, having won the battle honour of Kokoda.

**Now with you, were you actually taken to Australia from Port Moresby or you were just reinforced and then went later to Gona?**

01:30 No, we came out of Kokoda, off the Kokoda Track to Port Moresby. We were reinforced there and then flew over to Gona.

**To Gona. Okay, I get you now. You didn't go back to Australia?**

We didn't come back to Australia, no.

**Okay. I thought you said something about that.**

It was after the event, after the event.

**I see.**

After Gona. So we were reinforced in Port Moresby with odd bods from wherever they could get them. I had a couple of chaps in my section from South Australia, so

02:00 it was a mixed...

**So they've now got people from different states?**

They were just from anywhere where they could collect them because they had very few left. But however, we were formed into a battalion and flew from Port Moresby to Popondetta which is roughly half way between Kokoda and Gona. By this time the 2/16th, 2/37th etc

02:30 troops had pushed the Japs back to the beach head at Gona. We flew over and landed at Popondetta and from there we marched toward Gona which would be a distance of roughly about fifteen kilometres - if my memory serves me right - and took up our positions outside the perimeter

03:00 of Gona. The battle on the due day started and with our reinforcements were new troops so we had quite a job explaining to them exactly what it's all about. We didn't have time before we left Port Moresby because they were ... Although some troops were there, other troops came in later. The time factor

03:30 was not there to train them in any way. Needless to say that there were several troops who didn't even know which end of the bullet came out of the rifle. So the advance started. Now what battalions were here and there, I couldn't give you a placement off the top of my head. The Americans were on our left somewhere along the line.

04:00 The attacks started and the Americans, at one stage were in a position whereby one of our officers walked up to a couple of the Americans and he said, "What are you doing in that hole there?" They said,

"We're fighting a war, sir." They were firing up in the air. He said, "The Japs are not up there". "Oh, you've got to have the sound effects." And I thought this was fairly weak.

04:30 However, the attack started and we went into Hades village, which was a village just near, on the beachfront which was then captured. But the Japs then congregated at Gona and it was here that the big battle started. It was very, very hard. They were very, very stubborn. They were well and truly dug in. They had had plenty of time

05:00 to build bunkers, logs, surrounded, camouflage. We didn't have flamethrowers.

**And was this all jungle or was this open?**

Fairly open, fairly open. There were parts of jungle but mainly kunai grass and swamp. It was the hinterland of the flat going to the beach which most areas are.

05:30 It wasn't dense jungle. There were certain parts thick but we didn't go through there. We stuck to open kunai, which could quite often be about six feet high so there was plenty of cover. Their air force was almost extinct. Our air force had command of the skies. We weren't troubled greatly if any by Japanese aircraft.

06:00 The battle itself raged on for quite a few days. Time-wise everything seemed so long. But in the end result we did eventually drive them out, the ones who could get out and they went down the coast, or up the coast, whichever way you look at the map to Buna. We then took Gona

06:30 and consolidated there for quite a few days. During which time there was a wreck at Maru, a Japanese boat that had been sunk by one of our bombers. But we were on the beach when our planes came over and we stood on the beach and waved our slouch hats. "Hooray, we've made it", you see and everybody

07:00 was standing on the beach and they came down and strafed us, our own planes. Needless to say, this is what I was saying about this native boy, he copped a point five machine gun and it blew out the inside of his leg. And that is the nearest shot that I had seen in that region.

**Hopefully they realised their mistake?**

Well, how they mistook it, they couldn't surely to goodness wouldn't expect the Japanese to

07:30 bluntedly stand out on the beach and wave their slouch hat. Visibility in terms of aircraft, it's pretty fine. However, they got their own back and strafed us and of course we shot them down when they came in with their Kittyhawks. It evened up the score. So we stayed in Gona

08:00 for quite some time. We moved out and headed down toward Buna. This action at Buna was not unlike, to the best of my knowledge, I was not there. I had to come out with appendicitis. I came back to the ADS, which was an advance dressing station, and to a mini hospital as it was and I had been shaven and

08:30 prepared and the doctor said, "You'll have to have it out now". And he prepared it and I was in the operating tent when the Japs came over and bombed the hospital and we all dashed out of course into a slit trench, which was around the thingo and were mixed up with the Americans, of course, and so on. They bombed the operating theatre and blew the table cockeyed. So

09:00 I couldn't be operated on. So he said, "You'll have to go back to Port Moresby." I said, "Right." And he said, "How are you feeling?" And I could hardly walk. So I literally speaking almost crawled for five kilometres from Popondetta - they couldn't land at Popondetta because the airstrip was all grass, it was like Kokoda and it was too wet - so I had to crawl on my hands and knees almost for five kilometres over to a place called Soputa,

09:30 another airstrip and there again I met up with a lot of our fellows. And it was here waiting for a plane back that the 39th Battalion then came out of action having completed Gona, Buna, and Sanananda, which was the last battle which they had. And when Colonel Honnor marched them down the airstrip

10:00 and somebody remarked, "Who's this mob?" And our 2IC remarked, "This is not a mob. This is the 39th Battalion". And there were twenty-five of them came out of the Gona, Sanananda campaign.

**So this was the full strength battalion that was deployed at Gona?**

Yes.

**There were only twenty-five left?**

They went on to Buna and Sanananda and after that episode of that battle,

10:30 twenty-five came out.

**That is enormous losses.**

There were five officers I think and twenty-two ORs [Other Ranks]. So the battalion was in effect wiped out twice. It was then after that Gona episode that we came back to Port Moresby. The battalion then was reassembled and that's when we were heading off back to Australia. The battalion

11:00 left without me because for some unknown reason I'm ready to go and I wasn't feeling very well, and the doctor took one look at me and he said, "Dengue fever!" I had to go into hospital for dengue fever and I didn't come home until about a month later to Australia. When I got back to Australia we were informed of the fact that the battalion had been withdrawn from the order of battle

11:30 and was being disbanded having lasted twenty months, gone through two reinforcements battalions, the heaviest reinforced battalion in the AIF and disbanded and just thrown on the scrapheap. Just discarded, finished. And that was the end of the 39th Battalion. And that is then where we started off again where we had the choice of going to the 2/2nd Battalion,

12:00 the 2/5th AGH or the Provo Corps. And most of us, the few that were left…

**Sorry, just a sec.**

So we had a choice of going to the various units, uou had to be AIF to go to the 2/2nd Battalion. The ones who were still militia and had no intention whatsoever of joining the AIF, and still today stayed militia, they went to militia units

12:30 and quite a few of them went to the 58th, 59th Battalion, etc. But me at that time being AIF I went to the 2/2nd Battalion. Whereupon we went to, we were stationed in Queensland at Wandecla and there we again did our open warfare training. There was very little jungle. There is a jungle training school there at Canungra.

13:00 We didn't need any jungle training, we'd had enough of jungle training. And we stayed there for a short period, had a leave, returned to Queensland and then boarded the Jane Adam [?], which was a victory ship by the Americans, which was a cargo ship cut out for troop movement but

13:30 it was very, very primitive. And we sailed then up to Aitape. Arriving in Aitape they couldn't berth it at a wharf, so we had to scramble over rope nets into LCIs [Landing Craft, Infantry] and onto the wharf. At this stage the Americans were leaving. They had occupied Aitape.

**They had attacked it and took it?**

14:00 They had already held it. They already held the main points along that coast. But we were going up there as a mopping up campaign.

**I see.**

This was brought about by the fact that MacArthur said to Tom Blamey, "Don't you worry about anything, Tom. You keep your troops down here. Do not advance any higher than Bougainville. We'll carry on and do the rest". Which they

14:30 did. They went back up to Rabaul and up to the Philippines and up to Okinawa and then dropped the bomb of course. But we then started this mopping up campaign. And Aitape to Wewak along the coast was entirely unnecessary and we lost a lot of men. We had already lost, well the battalion was wiped out twice with the 39th and our platoon once again…

**The 2/2nd. This is the 2/2nd?**

The 2/2nd.

15:00 And there was a lot of, you talk about rivalry between the battalions, again we had this, "I want the medal" type of attitude. And our battalion commander advanced to a certain part but his objective was to go to a certain place, and that was as far as he could go. Then he was taken over by the 2/1st Battalion and they leaped frog. But our battalion moved to this particular part

15:30 and it wasn't a very good position for a defensive position. It was on low ground and a very good defensive position is on high ground, commanding ground. So up the hill we went and we sat on the top of the hill. We fought our way through it. A few Japs. Nothing much to worry about and we commanded that ground, that night. The next day up come the 2/1st Battalion. "What's going on here? You've gone

16:00 too far. You should be so and so and so and so." And there is a big stink about the brigade headquarters etc. We had to withdraw back to where we bloody started from. How ridiculous. The 2/1st Battalion the next day, they went up the hill and they got shot to misery. The Japs had reinforced. They came back up knowing that we were coming through. So they reinforced the top of the hill.

**So they had heavy losses?**

And the 2/1st got

16:30 knocked around unnecessarily. And this was the stupidity of this entire campaign. It was just...

**The Wewak campaign?**

The Wewak campaign. So we went … Having completed that episode we arrived duly at Wewak. And all along the top coast there we mainly stuck to the beach. We had a few isolated patrols going inland at the Butt airstrip etc.

17:00 We had quite a few nasty ... It was in our battalion once again with Albert Chowne, he was a VC [Victoria Cross] winner. Albert Chowne, a good soldier, and worthy of a VC but on the other hand he used to go out on his own. And he'd search around to reconnoitre the area, find out where the Japs were. And the next day as we went into attack he knew the lay out of the land.

17:30 Very good, but not on his own. On this particular day he took one of our guys, a 39th boy with him, Nick Austin, who wrote the book Kokoda and Beyond. He went with him. Chowne got shot dead and Nick came back with a wounded leg, which he still carries around today. These were the stupid things that, I think, that happened. When we eventually arrived at Wewak, Having arrived at Weewak, we then pushed the

18:00 Japs out of Wewak and up what they call the Alexander Road. Still as we were, still in the front line and pushing. Well we pushed right up the Alexander Road until we arrived about ten kilometres out of Wewak, up the Alexander Road when we were doing training, or starting to do training with flamethrowers. That's how late in the war it was.

18:30 **So it was basically almost after Wewak?**

It was during Wewak.

**During.**

Which was almost the end of the war because when we were up the Alexander Road, word came through that peace had been declared. This was marvellous, the war was over, so let's just pack up and go home. But no, the CO said, "We can't just sort of, we'd better check and see just how far these Japs are away and try to tell them

19:00 that the war is over". They had no communication with Japan. They were just there existing. That's all they were doing, General Adachi. Communication ... We couldn't get to it. A very, very close friend of mine who was with us, he joined the 39th, went through, we went AWL [Absent Without Leave] together. Slim his name was, Slim Journo,

19:30 went through everything together. I was sitting at the side of the track on this occasion when he said, "I'm going out on a patrol". I said, "Good God, what for?" He said, "It's only reconnaissance. We just want to know where they are and that will be it." I said, "Fair enough". I thought, "He won't come to any harm by doing that". So they walk away round the first corner and Slim got a machine gun burst from his toe up to his head. I heard that he had been shot.

20:00 I thought, "God, the bloody war's over." And this was the day after. And I said, "Oh surely not." So I walked back about a kilometre to the Advance Dressing Station where he lay and he was alright. When I say all right he was bandaged from head to foot. And he said, "I'll be right, Dan". And I said goodbye to him and I walked, only just walked out of the

20:30 area in which the little hospital was in when one of the chaps came, I've just forgotten who it was off hand and he said, "Slim's just died". I thought, "Oh crud." So that's the things that get to you in terms of the fact that the war was over but we had no communication with the Japanese and the Japs had no communication with Japan. They didn't know the war was over.

21:00 **So do you think the reconnaissance was necessary?**

Well, it's one of those areas. It's a safety margin if you are in command, you've got to look after your troops. Who's to say in hindsight? If you went out on the reconnaissance and did it, it was part of the thing. You must do reconnaissance all the time, you must know what's going on. So it was a natural to find out just

21:30 how far away they were. And to endeavour in the event, not that you walk in with a white flag, and that was the idea to the best of my knowledge of what the CO did. But if he hadn't have done and the Japs had surprise attacked us while we were marching out there would be hell to pay, hell to pay.

**So it was a bit of a no man's land situation?**

Exactly, it was. Exactly.

**Yes. That is unfortunate.**

22:00 So we saw the end of the Wewak campaign and we came back into base camp which was by the ocean and you filed up with your point system and got back to Australia the best way. I came back on the Implacable, which was an aircraft carrier. I came back to Australia and discharged. That was it.

**I want to ask you a few more questions about Gona.**

22:30 Yes.

**Can you give me a picture of, if you can tell us about a difficult encounter you had with the Japanese in one of the battles in Gona?**

I suppose the biggest difficulty.

**Personally that is, personally for you.**

For me?

**Yes. What you experienced personally at Gona?**

23:00 Well, I suppose the biggest difficulty was movement in as much as normally you can move. You can move forward, crawl, do anything and move. At Gona you seem to get stuck in the mud. It was swampy, kunai grass and it was very, very hard to advance because they were in a box seat. They were in pillboxes.

**Were these concrete or wooden?**

23:30 No wooden, all wood and mud surround, camouflaged with trees. As soon as you moved there would be a shot. They could see you. They had had months to prepare this. So they covered the ground, their killing ground, as they called it, their killing ground, very, very smartly. Well done. And their observation was from point A here and they could see every movement that we made.

24:00 But as soon as we moved, bang, would go down a shot. You're lucky you missed it.

**So even in the kunai grass they could see you?**

Well the kunai grass, when you're crawling through the kunai grass has got to move. Not that they would say, they taught us don't shoot at the movement, shoot alongside of it. But with kunai you've got to go, you've got to press it down to crawl over the top. Whereas in the jungle you can sideswipe a tree or a bush or

24:30 a vine. With kunai grass, if you move you press down kunai.

**So it is a dead give away.**

We were in open land. And it was just swampy and it was very difficult. You're in water, you are in water and mud for hours and not being able to move. And this is there you can pick up a drain occasionally or off the side of the

25:00 road or an indentation. If you can, well and good. But the high ground, you wouldn't go onto the high ground because you were too obvious. So I'd say movement of getting into those positions. ..but we couldn't, we didn't have flamethrowers, we didn't have bazookas, we didn't have anti tank guns, we didn't have any heavier type weapons

25:30 until later when the artillery came up. And until then we didn't have artillery support.

**Tell me about your first actual battle encounter at Gona where you came up against the Japanese? Your personal experience.**

Well, we were charging in when they were running out. All we could see was their backsides, type of thing, running down the beach. Quite a movement. But they

26:00 were quite a distance away before we actually got into Gona. There was a cross, there was a mission station at Gona, school rooms and at the end of the clearing there is a big wide cross, which to the best of my knowledge is there today. But that's riddled with bullets, apparently, riddled with it. The air force had a go, we had a go, everybody had a shot at it in the fray. When we went into Gona itself,

26:30 it was a horrible sight because they persisted in holding that ground. And they literally speaking were slaughtered. The field, the beach was stinking with bodies.

**Whose bodies?**

Japs. Jap bodies. They had been shot

27:00 up by our air force and us, etc etc. It was just a slaughterhouse. They were just the ones on the beach and the surrounding area. Literally speaking Japs and it stunk to high heaven. And there was a hut there with a lot of rice in it, which we didn't attempt to eat because we were frightened that it had been poisoned so that was left.

27:30 When I say left, it wasn't eaten by us anyway. We had enough food at this stage, we were better equipped. But as far as the bunkers and that were concerned. Literally speaking, by the time you crawled up to that bunker and got within a bull's roar of it to throw a grenade in. This, I didn't personally do it myself, but my men had to. They had to go up and when you throw a grenade you pull the pin out

28:00 and you've got to let the lever fly but you've only got seven seconds. Now, if you throw it too soon they can pick it up and throw it back. So you pull the pin out, let the lever fly off which goes down the detonator and sets the grenade burning the fuse, and it goes round like that until it hits the cap. And it takes seven seconds to go round. So you pull the pin out, let the lever fly and you count

28:30 five, four if you are in a hurry and throw. So when you throw, you throw it in and no sooner than you

throw it in and it goes off. But if you throw it too late or too early they can pick it up and throw it which has been done on numerous occasions. It has been done in the ’14 -’18 war, it was quite often.

**Have you ever seen that happen in your combat experience?**

Oh not in wartime. I’ve seen it in peacetime.

29:00 I was always given the job of priming grenades. They used to call me the cold-blooded one. I don’t know why. But the poor little devils. They used to come in and they would be like this, you know. And I’d say, “You get the detonators, you put it in here, and screw and you tighten up the base plate. Not too tight because otherwise there could be a crack in the wall and it could explode”. Oh God. I didn’t want to frighten them. I don’t believe in frightening people. I said, “If you handle it correctly, it will be okay”. But every now and again you’d throw a grenade,

29:30 the lever flies off of course and then it goes and doesn’t go off. It’s a dud. But you don’t leave dud grenades lying around. You’ve got to go out, find it, pull another one out, put it alongside and run like hell back to the bunker. That was usually my job.

**Now in Gona, how would troops approach a bunker?**

Crawl. Crawl up.

**This would be under fire of course?**

This would be under fire…

**And I assume**

30:00 **artillery fire as well?**

…and you weed out the best way possible. Particularly the fact that if they are getting close, well within ... The slits weren’t very wide to get this grenade in. So you had to get up, literally speaking, fairly close. Normally a grenade is bowled, like a bowling action. Because you’ve got to get it up in the air and take these seven seconds before it hits the ground and then at the same time when it hits the ground

30:30 it should go off. So you’ve got to keep it in the air, you bowl it up. You don’t throw a grenade but with these slit trenches you had to throw to get it in. And the only way you could get it in was to attract their fire. And the only other way of getting it in was you had to infiltrate or angle. The fact that the chap who is throwing the grenade is coming in this way. You’ve got to attract a lot of fire. You had to fire at them to keep their heads down

31:00 with a Bren gun, keep their heads down and give this chap a chance to creep up before he could throw the grenade in.

**So how close would he have to be next to the… ?**

Oh he would have to be on top of it.

**So he’s literally got to be in on top?**

He’s got to get up to the actual slit. Because underneath the slit you are safe because they can’t look over the top of it. The slit is built up so they can survey the ground.

31:30 **So they’ve got what, sandbags in front of it?**

Sandbags, yes. Sandbags and logs.

**Did you lose a lot of men doing that?**

I don’t know about losing a lot of men doing that. We lost a lot of men full stop but it was part of it. It was mainly ... Most of our men were popped off in terms of movement. This was the hardest thing, movement in this open

32:00 field where they were sitting pretty and they had their backs against the water. They had nothing to lose. They just stood there in their slit trenches and just fired and fired and fired.

**So it was sniper bullets often that killed the men under your section?**

When you say sniper, I don’t know whether they were specifically sniper.

**Right.**

We had snipers at Kokoda. They used to climb the trees.

32:30 **The Japanese snipers, yep.**

They’d climb a palm tree or coconut or rubber. They’d climb the tree and just sit up in the tree and pop. This is where you need a spray gun because you can’t see him. You know he is up there so you just spray the top of the tree.

**I see. This happened quite a bit at Gona, where you had to go to pillboxes?**

Yes.

33:00 We had to literally speaking dig them out, as the saying is. And the same thing apparently, I wasn't at Buna but the same thing applied.

**Did you have any narrow shaves at Gona?**

I suppose I did. It was too close for comfort, I can tell you that.

**Can you tell us about that?**

Well, only in as much as that you know that when you were in the mud and lying down you

33:30 get a little splash of water and you knew darn well it was a bullet. But other than that no, I never experienced what you call a close shave, but you don't know. You know where the shot came from, it came from that particular pillbox. The Japs themselves weren't exposed in the open like they were at Kokoda for instance. They were all in pillboxes. Dozens of them.

34:00 **So what would happen if you ... Did they ever withdraw to the next defended section? Did they do that or they fought to the death?**

Well they did in the end result because they were overwhelmed. Some of our boys got up there and got grenades in. And they then of course in the dead of the night, headed off backwards down to the beach which was only about fifty yards I suppose. From there to the beach to the water's edge. Then they

34:30 went along the water's edge. You don't need a light. You know there the water is in moonlight. And just walk along the beach until they got to Sanananda.

**Is that what happened?**

They got out at night. It's quite easy to see at night.

**How big was the Japanese garrison at Gona?**

Well it was the whole village. How would you put it in width?

35:00 I suppose it would be half a kilometre wide as a front.

**Okay.**

We had the Americans on one part. We had the Americans there but I had very little to do with them. The Americans were there somewhere but the report were that they were making any headway. The Americans were, how could I put it,

35:30 good fighters en masse, but not individually. Whereas the Australian soldier, he is a good fighter on his own or with a pair, as a pair. Whereas the Americans, they are not very good unless they've got heavy coverage, heavy support and...

**They've got a lot of resources to expend.**

Yes. Exactly.

**Now, throughout your**

36:00 **experiences, did you ever encounter cowardice on the battlefield?**

No. I don't think there was ever anyone. No. No one ever turned their back. No.

**So...**

36:30 Cowardice, it was a different thing. There was only this one experience of this chap who couldn't meet it but he ended up a darn good soldier, but not cowardice. Nobody turned their back and ran for instance. In relation to the other battalion whom I don't wish to speak about ... But the officers blamed the men and the man blamed the officers. But the whole battalion shot through and that's why we found the battle

37:00 of Isurava so hard. There was only the 39th Battalion there until the 2/14th came up. The 53rd Battalion weren't there. When you say cowardice, it's a horrible word. It was the situation that eventuated that Brigadier Porter didn't appreciate and he removed them form the order of battle

37:30 and put them onto carrying goods for us. But I prefer not to talk about that side of it. But I don't like cowardice. It is a hard one.

**Why do you prefer not to talk about it?**

Cowardice. I don't think there is. Cowardice, I think it's more the situation. I don't think any Australian soldier would shirk a fight.

38:00 He would fight. He wouldn't turn his back I'm sure. I've never known. It's only a situation arises where

you have no alternative but to withdraw to fight another day. We don't retreat. Retreat is when you turn your back and go.

38:30 When you withdraw, you withdraw backwards. You always face the enemy. There is a big difference between retreat and withdraw. I've never experienced anyone of our boys shirking the fight. They held their positions right to the end. Right to the end.

**What about lack of moral fibre?**

39:00 No, I don't think... Our morale was fairly high, tt was high. We were a very proud battalion.

**I understand you are talking about the 39th Battalion here. You were proud.**

That's all I can talk about, yes.

**Not the 2/2nd.**

No.

**Okay.**

39:30 I can speak very vaguely on that but it wasn't as important as the 39th. It's a situation. Morale was very high in the 39th where as morale in the 2/2nd was mediocre because we all felt this mopping up campaign. Leave them there. They had no communication with Japan. They could have been left at Aitape-

40:00 Wewak. There is no need for us to have gone there.

**What about Gona? Do you feel that was necessary?**

Gona? Oh, we had to get rid of them in Gona.

**In Gona.**

Oh yes.

**But not after that?**

Not after that.

**So Gona, Buna, Sananda...**

By the time we had finished Gona and Buna the Americans at this stage then were past the Philippines and on their way up. There was no need for anything after Gona and Buna. Well when I say anything after, it was from our point of view

40:30 that we weren't invited. We weren't given the honour of being in the front line from then on. We had to stay back, no higher than Bougainville.

# Tape 9

00:31 **Now that story about LMF, lack of moral fibre, did you ever encounter it in anyway whatsoever?**

What, as far as morale is concerned in the... ?

**Not morale so much, but people who ... Can you define LMF to me, lack of moral fibre because that was**

01:00 **a commonly used term at the time?**

Well it would have only been applicable to Aitape-Wewak. But moral fibre, if you are speaking about moral fibre it wouldn't show in the actual Kokoda campaign. It would only be applicable to, I'd say...

**Would lack of moral fibre be also cowardice? Can that be considered cowardice as well?**

01:30 No. I think, in my interpretation there is a big difference between moral fibre and cowardice. In any situation I don't think ... I have never experienced anyone apart from that battalion that I speak of, but even then it wasn't cowardice because they proved themselves later that they were good fighters. All that needed was good leadership.

**So are you saying it's lack of**

02:00 **experience on their behalf?**

The same thing applies to ... you say lack of moral fibre in terms of Gona for instance. It wasn't that at

all. It was the fact that our reinforcements didn't know. They weren't experienced. So no, I just don't like that cowardice. I don't know of anyone who shirked the fight. It was very difficult

02:30 fighting under those conditions in Aitape-Wewak because nobody was interested. They couldn't see the point.

**Morale was very low there?**

Oh very low. Yes. A waste of a campaign. Lives were wasted, heavens above.

**The way you are feeling now is how a lot of people were feeling about just fighting at all?**

Yes. It's like when we left, morale was high. The fact that we were

03:00 going to New Guinea again. But when we landed at Aitape, the Americans were driving Jeeps off the end of the pier with this Lend Lease business. We took over a few of their Jeeps and so on but the Americans were leaving. They had finished with New Guinea. There was nothing more to do. They had secured the airport at Aitape. The Japs were up in the bush there somewhere. Leave them be.

03:30 There was no need for us to mop around going up to Wewak. Morale was ... And particularly when you are getting men killed. For what? Wasted campaign, it was a ridiculous campaign.

**Did you start to dislike the Americans about then?**

Dislike the Americans? I loved the Americans.

**You love them?**

Love them.

**Why is that?**

Well

04:00 they saved us, Australia for a start off, and they saved us from doing a lot more fighting. We would have been still up their fighting if they hadn't have dropped the bomb.

**What about MacArthur?**

MacArthur was a, how would you call him? As a leader he was good. He didn't stand for any ... He was very aggressive.

04:30 But of course he had the troops and the power to do it. But as far as his leadership as a soldier, whereas I do know Tom Blamey.

**What do you think about Blamey's speech?**

Blamey?

**Yeah.**

Disgusting. Absolutely disgusting. It was the worst passage of words anyone's ever heard. A shocking thing. Terrible, terrible thing. A shocking thing.

**So where were you that day?**

05:00 On the parade ground.

**You were there?**

I was there when he spoke to the 2/14th Battalion.

**So what did he say in a nutshell?**

In a nutshell the words were the fact that, "It's only the rabbit that runs and gets shot". Needless to say that we should have been still holding the Japs back and so instead of running. We didn't run. The 2/14th, they didn't run.

**He was saying that at the parade ground?**

It was written in the annals of history.

**What was the reaction?**

It is a terrible thing. The reaction? It's a wonder

05:30 he wasn't killed that day. It was a wonder the troops didn't just rise up and get rid of him. He's a very lucky man to be alive. That's how the troops felt about him. Oh disgusting, terrible thing. Oh yes. There is no love lost.

**So you are telling me you were this close to a mutiny?**

He was a lucky man.

**What did the other**

06:00 **soldiers say?**

The same thing. It was aimed more so at the 2/14th and 2/27th and 2/16th Battalions, more than it was at the 39th Battalion. It was aimed at them more and they suffered badly. They fought beautifully, they were wonderful fighters, very, very good. Brigade Hill was a battle in itself fought by the 2/14th,

06:30 2/16th, 2/27th. And to have a thing like that said was the biggest downgrade ever said. Terrible thing. Oh he is a lucky man that he lived so long.

**So did some soldiers actually say openly…?**

07:00 I didn't hear them say it. It was everybody thought it and it was discussed later. It was the sort of thing, he is lucky to be alive.

**What about officers, how did they react to that speech?**

Oh they were the same. He wasn't a likable man at all actually. He made the mistakes and to counteract his mistakes he sacked his ... Vasey for instance. Brilliant man. Potts, Eather. You know, they're

07:30 good soldiers, good men. Our colonel, Colonel Honnor had the occasion of going up to Blamey at one stage and he said, "What was your name?" He said, "Honnor, Colonel Honnor, 39th Battalion". Honnor would say, "He didn't know who he was. He didn't care a damn. He didn't care who I was".

**And he was CO?**

He was CO of our battalion. And if you didn't know anything about the 39th Battalion you wouldn't be a very good commander.

08:00 However that was … .He wasn't a popular man at all. Nor a good leader in my book.

**Did you think that … Well the 39th for instance on that note, how much respect did that have amongst AIF troops, the 39th Battalion?**

The 39th Battalion were very well respected with the

08:30 AIF. The 2/14th Battalion and the 2/16th are very closely knit today. We go to their functions, they come to ours. It's a very close association. Very close.

**Now what did you learn about heroism? Did you come across**

09:00 **instances of heroism that you could tell us about in your experiences in war, in combat? You must have seen many instances.**

Yes but it is very difficult to individualise.

**Do any stand out?**

Well there is Reardon. He was A Company at Kokoda. He held his position while a Jap was up a rubber tree shooting his legs off. But he held his gun

09:30 and he kept on firing. There was JD McKay, Alec Lochhead, numerous, they held their guns. There was Snowy Powell, Arch Killbeck [?], machine gunners from the hip, charged in and flattened. Similar episode to - the name's slipped me - 2/14th, VC…

10:00 Sorry. I missed that one, I can't think of his name. He was alongside me. Numerous little instances such as that where they just stood up and faced the enemy and let it go. Snowy Powell just stood there with a Bren gun and shot the Japs as they came through one hole or break in the jungle.

**So this is all the 39th boys?**

The majority of 39th boys, they held ground.

10:30 They didn't give a bloody inch.

**What is it about the 39th that has this, there seems to be…?**

I think it was the bond of morale. I think it was the bond that was created firstly by enduring the track and getting over the track before we started. The teamwork, the association, the fact that we were militia and proving our worth

11:00 against the AIF. I think it was a ... So happened to be they were volunteers.

**Militia and volunteers as well?**

Yeah. Well we were volunteers. The 53rd weren't. They were shanghaied onto the boat. And there you are getting this again. This break up of who's who. We were all volunteers.

**And the 39th remained volunteers?**

11:30 The were all volunteers whereas the other battalions weren't. So you are getting that volunteer against a conscript.

**And that's what the 53rd were, conscripts essentially?**

Well, they were conscripted. I don't say they were conscripts. The fact they were marched down to the boat and onto the boat before they knew what day it was. They didn't even get to say goodbye to their parents. Straight onto the ship.

12:00 **Were there any other militia battalions that were volunteers?**

Yes. 49th Battalion who were already there, they were volunteers.

**How did they fight? Did they fight well?**

The 49th stayed at Port Moresby while we did the Kokoda Track. They didn't go over at all.

12:30 But then they came over with us when we went to Gona. We did Gona, the 49th went in at Buna and having been in Port Moresby for twelve months, well eight months before we got there, and having they that period of time still in Port Moresby, they went into action at Buna and were almost wiped out in a day.

**Really.**

Their first action. Once again

13:00 they had been all that time there, untrained. They didn't know what the jungle was. They were like us.

**They weren't doing field manoeuvres while they were there?**

No. They weren't doing field manoeuvres. All they did was like us, unload ships. We relieved them from unloading ships. And that's about and digging holes. They had no actual training at all.

**It almost sounds like a labour force in a way?**

It was, that's all we were, lackeys. And when they went into,

13:30 I may be wrong but I think they went into Buna and they went into an action and ... I don't know what the figures were but they were nearly wiped out in a day, the whole battalion. They were Queenslanders.

**So what did you learn about mateship through this experience?**

Oh a lot. Mateship was a very important factor.

14:00 You could not have existed without a mate. You worked in pairs or trios. It was so hard to command half a dozen, eight, ten, fifteen people. It was just ... You worked more or less in pairs or in three and you kept within, not only earshot but within signalling range of each other and you covered each other. If he fired,

14:30 you crept forward. You fired, he crept forward. So without that, you wouldn't have existed. And you couldn't work any more than say a trio because the scope was too wide. You couldn't reach number five fellow on your right. He was too far away.

**So there's almost practicality**

15:00 **set in here?**

**Well it was, yes. It was a situation where you made a mateship, as I said earlier about going over the track, the first thing you did was turn around and gave him a hand.**

**Was Kokoda the defining experience for that mateship?**

15:30 **Was it the Kokoda campaign that was the defining experience for you in regard to mateship?**

Oh yes. Yes.

**It was totally different, wasn't it, to Gona and Wewak?**

Yes. Yes. It was the closeness of ... The other actions were more open and you worked more as a complete section or a platoon, or individual company. There was more scope

16:00 for group. But Kokoda was more, as I say, in trio come pairs that you carried out these actions. It was very, very difficult communication to control any particular size force. Particularly at Isurava, it was a big fight. It was scattered. We were mixed

16:30 up. Movement created, not chaos, it was a situation where by you had to move from that position because you were under sniper fire. So you moved but you didn't know where the other person was. And this made it very, very difficult when you were in a position and you start opening firing because you've got to be jolly careful you are not going to shoot up the 2/14th Battalion and you've got to be careful you're not going to shoot up the 2/16th or someone.

17:00 **Friendly fire was a real danger?**

There had been quite a few cases, unfortunate cases that we've accidentally killed.

**Can you tell me more about that? I mean those instances.**

Well one instance, one of our officers was endeavouring to cross a creek and the rifle went off

17:30 accidentally and he got the thing caught once again. The bloody thing is too big for the jungle. He got it caught in the trigger guard and shot himself. Or he didn't shoot himself, the rifle discharged. We had drop shorts with mortar fire at ... Oh it was between, near the Wairopi River. That was the Aitape Wewak Campaign. A mortar

18:00 landed in our headquarters. Drop shorts of artillery awfully close at times. Not so much in the jungle fighting. See once again you are getting back to this sight unseen. The volume of fire that goes on is almost impossible to

18:30 actually define in terms. You knew that the Japs were there but exactly your disposition or knowing where your own troops were. You knew now but in half an hour's time they could have moved. And it is very hard to communicate and say, "We're moving here". So you had to be very, very ... It was like the 2/14th chap that came down the track calling out.

19:00 "If you don't answer me, we will have to open fire". And it was the same bloke who got my two gunners. Or I don't know how many Japs were there. It's very hard to define exactly but jungle warfare is very difficult to command, to control because bods are everywhere.

19:30 **With Kokoda, were there any actual songs or poems that you and your soldier friends had devised as a result of your experience?**

No. We left that to the air force. They created all the songs, you know, during the war. The air force.

20:00 **You didn't have any local songs, any sayings of Kokoda, anything unique that veterans would say about their experience?**

No, I don't think there is you know. I can't recall any outstanding...

**Any Kokoda jargon that is unique to the 39th experience?**

20:30 If there is I can't think of it. I don't know offhand. I can't say that I've ever thought of any saying or any quotations of the 39th. No. I know all the rude songs.

**You can tell them if you like.**

But they were all

21:00 created from the air force I think.

**Well you can blame it on the air force, eh? So did you actually feel you were part of Anzac being in the 39th?**

Part of Anzac?

**Well, the tradition?**

Yes. We, in latter years the fact that it was considered that Kokoda was another Anzac or was on a par as such was Tobruk

21:30 as was with Kokoda. Yes. We are very proud of our battle honour, Kokoda. We are the only ones who carry our battle honour - Kokoda - on our flag. Oh yes. It's a very proud feeling.

**Were you proud? How did your men react to being the first assaulting unit on Gona?**

22:00 I think you've got to take that with the fact that we were given the honour of being the spearhead into Gona. Just to complete the Kokoda Track because it starts at Port Moresby and ends at Gona. Whether you consider this to be an honour or not. We took it as an honour but

22:30 we weren't entirely rapt with the idea. We would far sooner have had the Americans go in first and we come in next. No. In general, yes it was perhaps an honour because we started it and we finished it. So looking at it from that point of view yes. So we started the Kokoda Track at Port Moresby and we finished it at Gona.

**Do you think it was the right**

23:00 **battalion to conduct the spearheading assault?**

Yes.

**Do you think if they had put in the AIF infantry unit they would have suffered the same amount of casualties?**

Oh well I would say yes to that. They would have suffered the same but we weren't the only battalion there at Gona. We took Gona ground, we were first into the village

23:30 but we had supporting troops. We had American on one side and numerous troops around. It was a big battle. It wasn't just the 39th Battalion. We were...

**No, what I meant was you said that the militia, the 39th, had young chaps who weren't competent militarily, that is in training. And do you think, in light of this**

24:00 **and knowing that your unit had been almost ninety percent reinforced, do you think it would have been better for an AIF unit to?**

I see what you mean.

**In terms of experience?**

Well there again. They would have been in a similar situation such as the 2/14th Battalion, they were nearly wiped out too. They would have been reinforced so all your reinforcements would have been distributed between the forces there at that time, not specifically the 39th.

24:30 Although we were the heaviest reinforced battalion. But a lot of those lads … The time wasn't there to clean up the entire thing. The time was not there. They were sent up to New Guinea, they were posted to us and in a few weeks they were sent into action. It was too quick. It was too ... They hadn't completed their basic training. They didn't know how to load

25:00 the rifle. A few cases. I'm not talking about the battalion. I'm talking about there were cases of inexperience.

**What did you think of your enemy, the Japanese?**

Well we had very little if any, time for him of course as an individual.

25:30 Mainly because of the fact I mean it was the manner in which he fought. He was not a clean fighter. In comparison with say the Germans. If you take a prisoner in Germany, of course, you were treated under the Geneva Convention. Whereas the Japanese, they didn't have any of that. There was no Geneva Convention at all.

26:00 So he was a very, very difficult enemy with very little if any compassion, come pride, come anything at all. He'd die for his emperor radically. He was just a radical fighter.

**Did you find them, I would assume that they fought just as hard as they did**

26:30 **everywhere else as in New Guinea. Did you find that in Gona, that Australians didn't take Japanese prisoners there as well? Was that the case as well?**

There were prisoners. Quite a few got off before we started. There weren't that many Japs left at

27:00 Sanananda that were actually still standing on their feet after we finished Gona, Buna and Sanananda. Not like at Wewak, quite a number came out, naturally of course. That was after the war. No. There weren't that many. They were in a situation where they had no

27:30 alternative. They either ... See one of the worst things a Japanese can ... a position to be found in is taken prisoner. That is very, very degrading and rather than have that he would far sooner commit hara-kiri. Oh they don't want to be taken prisoner either. So it was sort of a two-fold decision.

28:00 He didn't want to live and we didn't want him anyway.

**When you had heavy casualties, when your unit suffered heavy casualties or your section, what was the reaction of troops to taking prisoners?**

The reaction, what if we had taken prisoners?

**Well if your unit had taken heavy casualties, would your troops be inclined to take prisoners as a result?**

28:30 **They wouldn't, would they?**

Oh no. We just didn't, we weren't in a position to take prisoners.

**Even at Gona and Buna?**

Yes.

**You weren't in a position?**

Well we didn't take prisoners because we couldn't get them and they wouldn't surrender. So we had to shoot them. That was the battle of Gona. They didn't want to be taken prisoner. They wouldn't surrender.

**Were there**

29:00 **anyone who surrendered?**

Not to my knowledge. They sneaked out at night and went down to Sanananda along the beach. They didn't want to be taken prisoner. We would not have ... I would say in the Gona campaign we would have taken prisoners. I don't think we would have shot them. Because we only had to walk back a couple of Ks and we had air transport back to Port Moresby or

29:30 something, the equivalent. You could cope with them. But we couldn't cope with them at Kokoda.

**Would there be an interest to take prisoners after suffering such heavy losses?**

Would it have been of interest?

**Yeah. To anyone? To care for Japanese prisoners?**

Well the only reason you take prisoners is to find out information. That's the only reason. We took prisoners at

30:00 when I just left Aitape, yes Aitape and just down by the Matapi river. We took prisoners there. They were big boys too. We took them mainly because we wanted to find out what their disposition was in terms of, "How many are you? Where are you? What conditions you living under? What food have you got? What communications do you have?" That is the only reason you take

30:30 a prisoner, knowing what you are up against. And if you can get that out of him, which is very difficult. Interpreters have ways of doing these things. I'm not an interpreter. They have ways of getting information out of people.

**Have you ever seen a field interrogation?**

No. Never heard of it. These boys were taken in and were interrogated.

31:00 In what manner, I wouldn't have the slightest idea. I don't know what they do. But they got information because we were then given as much information as they allowed which wasn't much because after all we were only troops. We weren't in an official position.

**Can I ask you also,**

31:30 **with going back to some of the questions I asked you about heroism, LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] for instance. Did you ever encounter desertion?**

No. No. Nobody ever made a run of it. Once again, if you ask me, "Have you encountered it?" I'd say, "No". "Why wasn't there any desertion?"

32:00 "Because there was nowhere to go". If it had've entered anyone's head to desert and there were occasions when you wished to God that you could, to get out of this. But it was overrun by the fact that you were in the army and you were there with a job to do and that was all there was to it. If, in the event you did desert, where would you go? Where would you go in New Guinea?

32:30 You were eighty-five miles from Port Moresby. We were starving as it was. You would have been more than starving if you went into the jungle. You couldn't find your way around the jungle. No, it was far too dense and too big an expanse.

**Did you ever see any men who could not cope with battle any longer?**

Well we

33:00 were all in a situation where we were all completely buggered and we felt at times like throwing in the towel but men like Colonel Honnor encouraged us. Men like Jim Cowie, our '14 -'18, John Mouet [?], our '14 -'18 officers encouraged us and kept us sane

33:30 by talking and by action. By setting the example that we were there to do a job and let's do it and get it over and done with. The quicker we get it over with the better.

**Did you ever come across soldiers that went troppo?**

Well yes. There were two occasions where

34:00 before we went into action, when you say troppo we classified it at the time as bomb-happy. Because we were bombed, as I say day and night. It just took a toll in yourself. Even now I walk outside and I see a full moon, it frightens hell out of me.

**Really. Still?**

That's a bomber's moon. They always come over when there is a full moon.

34:30 It's like the Tokyo Rose, she used to broadcast? They call on the Rats of Tobruk, we were the "Mice of Moresby". And she used to come over the radio, "Hello, you Mice of Moresby", with her Tokyo blow. "We'll be over to see you later. There's a full moon tonight". Well this scared the hell out of you before the bloody planes arrived. Yes. We had two occasions. Two chaps who,

35:00 they were sent back to Australia. They were, well you could only say that they couldn't stand the strain. They call it stress these days but it was a situation.

**What sort of symptoms did they show?**

Oh just out, lived on, just walked around on cloud nine. Just not with it. They just...

**Did you know them well?**

35:30 One in particular I knew fairly well. Yes.

**Did you notice signs that he wasn't coping?**

No. Not really. No. I wasn't in a position to ... But he did then show signs of not being capable to do various duties. When it was suggested by our officer to go and see a doctor he

36:00 summed him up and said that,"You are not capable to be in the" ... They sent him back to Australia and discharged.

**Can I ask you also what beliefs sustained you in times of danger? In your combat experiences what beliefs sustained you in times of danger?**

What beliefs? Well, I have always been

36:30 perhaps religious, from a lad. I had a very strict upbringing in terms of religion. I think in times what sustained me or kept me going was the fact that you quite often said a little prayer and hoped that you would come through it all right. It was quite strong, quite strong.

37:00 **And with the war, do you think it was a 'just' war?**

Well as far as just, it wasn't a concern. It was the fact that the Japanese were coming down to take Australia. We had no alternative but to fight for our country. We didn't start the war. We had no alternative. Whether it was just or whether it was this, that and the other or so on,

37:30 we had to defend our own country. And there was no way known that we could have halted, that we could have delayed, which we did, the advance of the Japanese but it was the Americans who won it. The Americans pushed them back to Japan and finished the war for us. And if the Americans hadn't come in we wouldn't be here today. No way known we could have done it.

**I understand in twenty-five**

38:00 **years after the war you went back to Kokoda, was it?**

Yes.

**Can you tell us about that?**

Well it was most interesting. We were met first and foremost with the fact that the native boys who had been carriers were very displeased with the Australian government for not helping them with such things as RSL [Returned and Services League] Halls and recognition of the job

38:30 that in which they had done. Two fold. One is recognition of a ribbon or a medal. Secondly the fact financially. And I had to explain to one of them the fact that the government even in Australia, they don't supply us with the RSL. We, as a group between ourselves, we pay, we donate, we pay a subscription every year. And that is our RSL that we in effect pay for that. The government don't give us any

39:00 But the grant in which the government is doing, and still doing to the best of my knowledge now, giving to New Guinea is still several million dollars. So it took quite a bit of explaining. I think they expected the Australian government to reward them not only by medals and ribbons but to build them community centres and hospitals and

39:30 housing and things of that nature which we didn't. So they are a little bit upset about that, particularly the villagers. They got very little but we have been doing our utmost. We support Gona Mission for instance.

**Do you have any actual friends that you still see from the... ?**

From New Guinea? No.

**You don’t keep in contact with anyone?**

We knew,

40:00 I got to know a few of the boys; Bomba was one, and Burta, a young, cheeky little devil. But no, after the war you lose contact. When I went up there twenty-five years, I enquired but they were Kanaka boys and they lived back to their villages. I wasn’t going to tramp half way round the Kokoda Track just to say hello.

**So you went**

40:30 **up to the Kokoda Plateau?**

No. We only just stayed around Port Moresby. We visited the cemetery and some of them walked to the first village. No, no. We didn’t go.

**Now can I ask you, is there anything uniquely Australian about or something indicating the Australian experience about the Kokoda sacrifice, that’s indicative of the Australian spirit in general?**

41:00 **Do you see something about that?**

What in the form of what?

**The sacrifice that you underwent, your unit, your battalion.**

Recognition.

**Yeah.**

Only one minor thing. You see Gallipoli got a special medal. The ones on the Gallipoli. The Rats of Tobruk got an insignia that they were a Rat of Tobruk.

41:30 Kokoda there was nothing. We got a battle honour but we didn’t have a medal to signify that you were either at Kokoda or ... Which is a really difficult thing to have anyway because there were only two companies out of the battalion that actually saw the Kokoda Plateau. Not unlike Gallipoli; very, very few men saw Lone Pine. Very few. So no

42:00 I don’t think there’s any significant recognition where we know…

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

**NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2007.**

# Tape 10

01:13 **Don, what we'll start off by asking you, just about where you grew up. Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Bernleigh. I went locally to school. And we stayed in Bernleigh until I was

01:30 married which was then twenty-one and then lived in Caulfield. During the time in Bernleigh, it was during the Depression and needless to say we had little in the way of transport, etcetera. Do you want me to continue on? And it was about that time where I finished school at the age of fourteen and started work the following Monday which didn't allow

02:00 much time for a break, reached the age of seventeen and a half when my brother-in-law joined the army and went across to the Middle East, so I asked my father could I go with him? And he said, "No you're far too young, just wait a while." At the time I joined the Victorian Scottish Regiment at seventeen and a half, having put my age up a year and served with them for a whole

02:30 eight months I suppose, when they came around and called for volunteers for an expeditionary unit of the 39th Battalion. This I thought was the greatest thing that I could get at this stage. Just imagine going overseas, a huge ship, and I'll never get the opportunity again; never visualized anything further than a pushbike. And I joined the 39th Battalion and went overseas to New Guinea, which you

03:00 then at the time didn't have to have your parents' consent because it was a mandated territory. It caused a bit of problem this not being able to have your father's consent because it meant that you remained militia. Not that there's anything against the militia because they did a fantastic job. But when I arrived in Port Moresby, as a militia man, I had only been in the battalion a few months and I became a corporal. And

03:30 the only way I could retain my corporal stripes was to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] so I wrote back to Dad and asked his permission, would he please sign the papers that I could be AIF so I could

retain my corporal stripes. At this stage, yes, he did…

**I'm just going to…before we get on to what happened in Moresby and so on; I'm just going to ask you another couple of questions about growing up in the thirties. What effect**

04:00 **did the Depression have on your family?**

Well, it had a huge effect, really, because it was just prior to the Depression that my father lost his… well, my mother died. This left my father, who was a cabinet maker, to do the job of bringing us three children up which I have two sisters and they're both older than me. So it became a

04:30 very, very difficult job to do, apart from the money wise, was so far as the effort that he had to put in to iron my sisters ribbons and they used to tie their ribbons up in plaits and things of this nature. It must have been a terrible job for Dad to cope with this.

**What history was there in your family of any involvement in the First World War?**

05:00 Ah, not directly family, no, no there wasn't. Dad was in the Scottish Regiment but course they were, once again, home guard, as the saying is, in the militia.

**What did you learn about war as you grew up at school and by talking to friends and neighbours?**

Well, I had two uncles who were in the [19]14-18 war and I had…my wife had an uncle

05:30 who was with the 5th Battalion. Not a great deal but it was…quite…we were quite aware of it because a chap lived opposite us who actually was in the designing and the building of the Shrine. So conversing with him, not that I was on a level by any means architecturally in those days, but it got you interested. You wanted to know why are

06:00 they building this Shrine? And these are the sort of things that you pick up then and say, well, it is the 14-18 war and this is in memory of the fallen, so I was aware of the 14-18 war.

**To what extent were you told the truth about that war?**

Well, I wouldn't know

06:30 exactly what you refer to truth. You hear stories and to the best of your knowledge you accept them as said, which you do today, which is…you hear stories of the 39-45 war and some of them are really good, others are exaggerated without doubt.

**What were you taught about empire**

07:00 **and loyalty, and so on, where did your loyalties lie as a youngster?**

Loyalty, I suppose, we were aware of it…of being in the scout movement for instance…the scouts' law at school. You stood to attention every Monday morning when they raised and lowered the flag. We were taught awareness of loyalty.

07:30 **Can you tell me where you were when the announcement was made that Australia was going to war? Can you remember that and describe that to me?**

I was working at the time in Melbourne with an interior decorator and the news came through that war had broken

08:00 out. I think the first impression was that everybody's going to be called up. We found then…we only relied then on volunteers and you had to be over twenty-one years of age but you sort of got an inkling that you'd like to go. Loyalty, to a degree, but I think more the excitement of being in uniform

08:30 and once again of going overseas, I think it had perhaps more to do with it than loyalty.

**How patriotic were you?**

Only to the extent of the fact that if I weren't my father would give me a clip over the ears. But in general not what you'd say patriotic to that extent. You were aware of it because you saluted the flag every Monday morning.

**So**

09:00 **at what stage, just as we go over this story again, when you enlisted for the militia, at what stage did that happen after the war had broken out?**

Eighteen months after.

**So just describe that to me.**

I was still working. I was still wanting to join the army. Never gave the navy or the air force a thought. I'd like to join the army because of the

09:30 colour, of the actual idea of it entirely. I think it was more the excitement, as I say, of joining it rather than the loyalty part that came into it.

**What beliefs did you have in those days? Did you have any kind of political or religious beliefs that helped you along the way?**

Yes, once

10:00 again, religious beliefs. Sunday I went to church in the morning, Sunday school in the afternoon and church at night. As far as political beliefs were concerned, living in Bernleigh, I think everybody voted Labor and Dad made me aware of it just prior to the war more so than after. And I think it was religious wise,

10:30 yes, I think I was very much forced to a degree, it was only the fact that I had to go to church. In myself, having this drawn to my attention every Sunday, I mean I think you must gather a lot and a lot sunk in.

**To the Labor Party and its supporters, the whole idea of conscription was a pretty vexed issue, wasn't it?**

Yes.

**Were you aware of that debate?**

11:00 Not at that time. We didn't have conscription at that time.

**Yes, but clearly from the history...there'd been a lot of scepticism about it.**

Yes, well of course when that broke out, they were over in the Middle East. Germany…when the war broke out and we weren't greatly concerned with what was happening in Germany. We had to first and foremost to look at a map and find out where it was, you know, in terms of geography wise, so it wasn't really until

11:30 Pearl Harbor that we really sat up and took notice.

**When you volunteered to join up with the 39th ...**

Yes…

**... what awareness did you have then of a threat from, in Australia's region, particularly from Japan?**

I think the awareness was there, that the Japs quite likely would

12:00 start something but we really had very little, if any, knowledge of it. And the 39th of course, went to Port Moresby purely as a garrison force.

**So tell me the story about what your expectations were when you were about to head off, what you were told before you embarked to go off to Port Moresby.**

When we first volunteered, coming from

12:30 the Scottish Regiment, we were lined up at a drill hall in Richmond which was our headquarters and the officer stood up there and he said, "We're calling for volunteers for the 39th Battalion. You'll be pure and simply a garrison force, so when you do come, bring your tennis racquets, your sandshoes, all your sporting gear. It's beautiful Polynesian girls dancing on the beaches." and the

13:00 picture he painted was just unbelievable! So I turned around to a chap standing on my right whom I knew but got to know very, very well later, and he said "I'll go if you go!" So it wasn't sort of...myself, I didn't say to myself, 'I'm going, because it sounds great', it was between the two of us and we said, 'I'll go if you go,' and we both joined up. But the picture, it was very, very glamorous.

13:30 I mean, we had visions of walking around with swagger sticks, you know, like the old Indian chief walking amongst the tribe.

**So describe your departure.**

We were fully aware of the departure. We formed up at the Caulfield Racecourse and trained it to Darley which is just out of Bacchus Marsh.

14:00 Arriving there we were put into our various platoons and from there on we did open war training which was all we knew. And we stayed at Darley for a period of just under three months when we were told then that we were sailing in that Christmas…December. So we were fully aware that we were going to have

14:30 an overseas trip out of this. It was all organised. So we had a march through Melbourne and this was very exciting of course and everybody waving handkerchiefs and God only knows what. We then went down to the train and went up to Sydney and the Aquitania was berthed in Sydney and we were all herded, literally speaking, on to the Aquitania which had

15:00 two battalions and supporting troops, which I've forgotten the figure of how many were on it, but there were a lot of troops and we departed from Sydney.

**How well prepared were you for what lay ahead?**

Well, this is the problem we've had right through, when you say prepared; we weren't prepared in any way. In as much as when we

15:30 landed in Port Moresby, we literally speaking had nothing. We didn't even have a hospital. We had no mosquito repellent. We had very little camping gear, cooking utensils. As far as our training was concerned, we had the old 303 rifle and a Lewis gun which was very, very antiquated. And our training basically right through at that stage, was all open warfare.

16:00 When we arrived in Port Moresby, we suffered badly with malaria and dysentery, in particular. And did training again in open warfare but the main purpose we were there at that stage, we dug holes. I don't know how many holes we dug around Port Moresby as an offensive position. And we moved from point to point and dug holes again and it would just take…as far as

16:30 the jungle at this stage was concerned, we didn't see it, it was on the other side of the air strip type thing. It wasn't that far away but we didn't do any training in it. We didn't even walk through it. Not until the Japs landed at Gona and we actually when we left Port Moresby then to march over the Kokoda Track. But our time in Port Moresby was very

17:00 frightening of course, it was because the Japs came over and bombed us day and night. It was a situation whereby the aerodrome which you could refer to as a Seven Mile drome, was bombed, strafed, and you name it. Up and down the air strip continually because the Japs couldn't make out, having been bombed in Rabaul and the planes flew back to Port Moresby they thought

17:30 but what was happening was that the planes were leaving, this was the flying fortresses, were flying from Townsville over to Rabaul, bombing Rabaul and surrounding areas, coming back to Port Moresby, refuelling and flying back to Townsville. And of course when the Japs came over, they said well where are they? There's the air strip and there's no planes. So that's how we got bombed up and down each side of the strip continually. And of course at night

18:00 time they'd come over and bomb again so this was rather, a very difficult thing to contend with. It was very frightening, too, of course.

**How did this contrast with what you'd been apparently promised when you'd volunteered to join the 39th?**

Well the reaction was…I mean it was completely a turn around in terms of

18:30 appreciating the fact of where are the Polynesian girls and what have you. But all we had was a pick and shovel and digging holes. Or unloading boats, that was a major job that we had. I was on the Macdhui when it was being bombed and I thought, this is good, we'll go for a little trip, we'll just pull away from the wharf and go around the bay. So we had a cruise around the bay. We didn't really take much notice of

19:00 bombing after a while. I don't say you got used to it by any means, but you got adjusted to it. And we used to sail around the bay until one time they had a go at it. They came along an extended line and they came along in single file and I thought this is not for young Donald. They actually…when you knew that you were the target, you had nowhere to go. You were out in a boat

19:30 in the middle of the bay. So the next day they came over again and as soon as the air raid siren went, we all jumped from the ship on to the wharf. On one occasion, the ship had pulled away quite a bit and I think it was the biggest jump I'd ever had in my life but I made it, I made the wharf. And we used to run up to the trenches then at the top of the pier and it was a

20:00 case of everybody tearing in to get a position in the trench and we had the native boys down there with us at the ship and as soon as the siren went and we jumped off the ship on to the wharf, there was a race up to land and the natives left us for dead every time. We were far too slow but we got there and we got into a slit trench and stayed there instead of sailing around the bay.

20:30 **What happened to the tennis racquets?**

Needless to say, we were told our first parade at Caulfield, we had leave that night and we were told very quickly, you can forget about the tennis racquets and the sandshoes. If need be they'll be issued to you. So we didn't take the tennis racquets.

**So at what stage did you start to get into jungle training,**

21:00 **or get into the jungle?**

Well, when we left Port Moresby on foot and walked up to the Kokoda Track. And that was up to Koitaki which was the start really of the jungle itself. So prior to that we didn't know what really the jungle… this is the jungle proper, not just surrounding trees around Port Moresby, the jungle itself, what it was

really like.

**What did you know about the Japanese**

21:30 **at that stage?**

Only the fact that they were small, they weren't very good fighters. We got nothing much to worry about which we found out very soon after of course. When we first met the Japs, the odds were twenty to one at least. And they were marines and with the experience all the way down through China and down through Singapore, Rabaul, etcetera

22:00 so they were crack troops.

**So describe to me...take yourself back now to that time when you set off up the track. What was it like?**

The starting off, again, you get this adrenalin working in as much…it was exciting. You had a feeling that you were at last going into battle.

22:30 That's the starting of the track. And you sort of didn't fully realise how long the track was. We had a look at a hike over that track of eighty-five mile and about two or three feet of mud. We didn't know that at this stage. And when we left Port Moresby, and started walking out we didn't go very far before we got so hot.

23:00 We stripped off and our pack that we had was a thirty pound pack and we had leather leggings at the time with shorts. We didn't go very far into the jungle and you'd take your legging off that night and have leeches in your legging, of your leg. And of course, you'd light up a cigarette and burn them off. The pack, the

23:30 thirty pound pack we started off with, it got very, very heavy so we didn't go very far before we opened the pack and threw out things which we could do without. A towel, for instance, we'd tear it in half, you didn't need a whole towel. Half a towel would suffice. You went through your pack to get it down as light as you possibly could. The jungle

24:00 itself, it's dark. You very seldom…you go into a clearing and you get a bit of kunai grass or you'd be on the top of a range where you'd get a bit of a plateau or into a village. Once you hit a village of course, that's cleared, then you could see the sun. But other than that, the jungle itself was fairly well overgrown because we were the first troops over that track. When the Japs landed at Gona,

24:30 Bert Kienzle who had a rubber plantation at Koitaki, I beg your pardon, at Kokoda, up the Yodda Valley. He walked from Kokoda to Port Moresby knowing that troops were assembling but they wouldn't know their way over so he actually guided us over the track. Prior to this, they used to have a communication between village to village, the natives,

25:00 but it was only a [UNCLEAR] they'd only use it occasionally, probably for bargaining a wild pig against a string of beads, I don't know, but it wasn't an actual track as a track is known. The difference being that when we came back on the way back, the track, by this time all the troops that had marched over it, it was then about a metre and a half wide and twice as much mud. The jungle itself was very

25:30 depressing and you perspired all day and at four o'clock in the afternoon, it would rain. So you were continually wet, you didn't get a chance to dry. You didn't have a change of clothing to change to because it was too heavy to carry.

**What about morale at this early stage because there must have been a whole range of characters and personalities?**

Yes, oh yes, morale, I think

26:00 was fairly high, we were a very tight-knit battalion. Friendship there was very, very strong. The morale from where the officers were concerned was very good mainly because of the fact that when we first went up, we had officers from the 14-18 war which before going over to the track, they were seconded to other units because they were too old. That's putting it

26:30 bluntly. So we did have younger officers who did give us that encouragement to march it.

**What about your weapons at this stage, Don, on this first …?**

Well, we still had the .03 rifle; we still had the Lewis gun. I, prior to going over to the track, being a corporal and a [UNCLEAR] a school and

27:00 I knew how to fire and load a Bren gun. Now the Bren guns were new. A lot of the troops hadn't even seen one. I myself, was at the same time they brought out the Thompson sub-machine gun, you know the Al Capone gun, which is the big round drum in the front? And that was heavy. But the idea was you fire off the drum and then you reload it with box magazines. But the Lewis

27:30 guns, I mean they'd fire three or four rounds, stop, what they refer to as first [UNCLEAR] to pull back

the mag off and get the thing going again. The Bren gun picked us up, the natives carried them over roughly half way up the track, took them out of the boxes and they were still in grease. They hadn't even cleaned them before we got them. So needless to say, it was quite a job, you know, collecting grass

28:00 and what we could to get the grease off the guns. And me, at the time, once again, I harp on the fact I was a corporal, was the only one who knew anything about them. I knew how to strip one and I knew how to put it together and fire it. And this was the situation that came to light when we were in Kokoda Plateau proper, that the chap I had on the Bren, I had to really teach him how to fire the gun when we were in battle, when the battle started at Kokoda proper.

28:30 **So let me get this straight, you were the one person who knew how to assemble and fire a Bren?**

Well, the only one in my platoon at that stage, yes. There were very few NCOs [non commissioned officers] on the Bren gun at Port Moresby.

**What did you know about how far the Japanese**

29:00 **had reached at this stage?**

When we set off, we knew that they had landed at Gona, but other than that, no, we didn't know how far they had advanced inland.

**So what was your expectation then on this first move up the track? What was your objective?**

Well,

29:30 the objective was the Kokoda airstrip with the idea being that if we took Kokoda, or got there before the Japs got there…it was a race. It was a forced march when we first went over, to get to Kokoda and hold the airstrip and as soon as we took that and had it secure, a signal would be sent back to Port Moresby and the Douglas DC3s would fly over with our mortars,

30:00 our machine gunners, that's the Vickers gun, and the supporting troops would all come over and land at Port Moresby airstrip. The airstrip is only about half a kilometre from the Kokoda plateau.

**So what happened?**

Well, what happened, we got there and expecting to go into battle…I was A Company. On the way down there was

30:30 C Company one side, Don Company the other and A Company were in the middle. And we went down the middle and we didn't strike any opposition at all but C Company struck opposition, Don Company struck opposition and they withdrew to fight another day to the next village, which was Deniki which overlooks Kokoda. A company went straight in. Once again, the stories do go

31:00 that each reunion the numbers that we shot when going into Kokoda were unbelievable. They got up to about two hundred and fifty, I think, at the last reunion. But in effect, when we went into Kokoda, we shot one Jap and he was pumping up his bike tyre and he was shot by our sergeant major. So however, we sat at Kokoda, B Company had been there prior and came back but the

31:30 airstrip was under our security in as much as the message that went back which was a flare pistol but communications were so difficult, we didn't have radio that we could sort of say, right, we're here, we've got the airstrip. We had to get this message back to Port Moresby so the planes would come over. Somewhere along the line the messages were

32:00 not getting through and this was a big problem, the fact that we were there all that day which we held and that night they started to attack. Well, the planes came over apparently, to the best of my knowledge, and they weren't very happy about it because they didn't have any fighter support. Well, we didn't have fighters then. We had the Wirraway but I think that was still back in Australia. We were awaiting

32:30 the Kitty Hawk but it hadn't arrived so our planes didn't have cover. So we held onto the Kokoda then the Japs attacked through the rubber plantation and we held it for two days which was pretty heavy going. It was what we refer to as a battle and a half, it was very heavy fire.

# Tape 11

00:45 **Don, I was just going to remind you of something. You no doubt would have been aware that the militia were sometimes derogatorily described as 'chocos' [chocolate soldiers]. What response did you have**

01:00 **to that?**

Ah, it was...it was a situation whereby we didn't mind it that much because we had no alternative. We were 'chocos' mainly because we couldn't get parents consent. That's why the 39th Battalion had the problem of not being able…although they had applied to go to Port Moresby as AIF

01:30 but they remained as militia. We didn't mind it in terms of a name. We didn't appreciate the fact that there were 'chocos' that they melt in the sun and this sort of thing but we just had to take it because we had no alternative and that was the bulk I would say of the 39th, that they couldn't get parents consent.

**But how accurate was that description? The 'choco' description?**

02:00 Well, it proved itself…it wasn't accurate when you say 'choco' or melt in the sun because the 39th did do a brilliant job on the Kokoda Track. So I mean, apart from the 39th Battalion there were other units there too of course as far as 'chocos' were concerned and that was on the anti-aircraft guns in Port Moresby. Now, they were

02:30 'chocos' and they shot down more planes in Port Moresby than the AIF did in the Middle East so they should be proud of it actually. Just because you couldn't join the AIF doesn't say that you weren't in a good fighting unit.

**Let's take you back up on that track again and you're going into battle. How well psychologically prepared do you think you were to**

03:00 **go into battle at that stage?**

Well having walked the track at this stage and knowing what the jungle was like and how you had to carry a machete to cut the vines to get through, it wasn't very exciting at all and of course the weapons, which we were unaccustomed to…I'd never fired a Thompson sub-machine gun. I had one, but I never knew how to fire it…or I knew how to fire it but I never experienced what it was like.

03:30 It was very…you were starting to wake up, you say, look, we're going into battle. This is for real, the game's over. The training is finished, this is it. And then you stop all of sudden and you think, good God, I could be killed. So you become very, very aware of yourself and you think…I had an example of one of the lads in

04:00 my section that he sat on the side of the track and said, "Dan," that was my nickname, "I can't do it. I can't go in." and I said, "Well, the situation is this," we weren't full-strength as it was and I said to him, "It's not fair to your fellow man sort of thing. We need you. We need support." And he said, "I can't face it." And I thought well,

04:30 this is a situation whereby what are you to do? If we take him into battle he may falter, he may cause death to someone else. I don't know. So I went to our officer and explained the situation to him and he said, "Oh well we'll put him back further down the line and he may get over it." Well, he went back further down the line. Whatever happened to him from that day to this, I'll never know. So we're not all what you call brave

05:00 soldiers when the actual time comes. Ah, it leaves you, you go in cold. It's a feeling that this is real and it's a frightening thought.

**What feelings were going through your mind as you walked through that jungle?**

05:30 Well, I think the thought goes through your mind I was in a situation whereby I had ten men, well eight, it was full strength then, eight under me and they were relying on me for support. So I put on a…which a lot of people did, put on a false act in as much as you'd say "Come on chaps, we've got to do it, in we go." But it's not a John Wayne sort of story.

06:00 It's a feeling that you…well, we're here, we've got to face it, we've just got to go in. Apart from the fact our officer, before going into the actual battle, he said, "Now I don't want anybody shirking on this attack." And he stood at the back of us waving a 45 revolver around, which we didn't appreciate because

06:30 none of us had any thought of shirking it. But the feeling itself, it's almost a numb feeling going in. Fortunately enough, we didn't have to fight our way in but we certainly had to fight our way out…but the going in… and when the battle started, it was very, very frightening because, although we knew it was for keeps,

07:00 we knew they were real bullets they were using, but prior to the actual attack from the Japs, they made a terrific amount of noise. They had cans with stones in it and fire crackers and goodness only knows what to try and draw our fire so they could know where we were, which we learnt later. We learnt very, very quickly in the jungle of its commando type work. Most of the fighting is done individually, it's

07:30 not en masse on an embankment like Tobruk for instance. It was individual. We relied on each other. A pair, two together would go fire, and you'd see the Jap or a bush moved for instance and you'd say, "There, there's one behind that bush, open fire." Yes you'd open fire. He wasn't behind the bush. He was alongside of the bush. He had a bit of string and he'd pull the string.

08:00 And you'd fire, then he'd pick up where the fire was coming from. Then you'd cop it. So it was rather …

it was completely team work all the time. It wasn't at any one time that you could actually go in as, literally speaking, as a company; you had to rely on the bloke on your left and the bloke on your right.

**Describe the atmosphere, the mood, the sounds, the sort of smell of the jungle as**

08:30 **you're in that situation.**

Well, the jungle in itself, it does smell. It's got a …what would you call it? Like an old pair of socks, I suppose. It's a putridy smell that continually comes up and it's not what you'd say, very pleasant at all. The jungle, in itself, it's

09:00 surprising, it's so still. There's no wildlife. There weren't any birds, we didn't see any snakes. We didn't see any crocodiles, any of this sort of thing that you may see on TV. It's still and dark and frightening, it's a weird feeling.

09:30 **How long did that tension last? Were you ever able to relax?**

I think the only time you relax is when you're firing. You get a … well, they're out there and if I don't shoot first, they'll shoot me. So you haven't got time to think then, of what the jungle smells like. You haven't got time to think that it's dark. All you're concerned about is getting those bullets away.

10:00 **How close did you get to the Japanese?**

Ah, the nearest I suppose would've been about fifteen feet, twenty feet. I had one situation whereby it was the … coming out of Kokoda, or getting out of Kokoda for instance, we came down the steps at the side of this plateau, down to a path which led

10:30 out to the airport and coming along this path … this was dusk. We got out just before dark that night, at dusk. And only about thirty or forty feet up on the edge of the plateau was a Jap mounting his machine gun. Now, if he had have looked to his left down onto the path, he could have gone and got the lot of us. But as fate has it, he didn't. He was looking to where we

11:00 were and mounting this machine gun. Another situation was I had a Bren gun only about fifteen feet away from me. I don't like talking about this part … fifteen feet away and it had a chap on the gun and we could see the bushes moving. We held fire because the 2/14th Battalion were up there somewhere and we didn't want to shoot them up as well as the Japs.

11:30 We thought well they must have withdrawn out because the Japs were there but they're very cunning. However, the bush moved and a shot … and my number one gunner got hit on the lobe of his ear and of course, if you get the lobe of your ear there's a lot of blood there and of course, he calls out, "I've been shot. I've been shot!" So he came back, just crawled over to where I was and we slapped a field dressing on him and I said to the other gunner, "Pull the gun out." Because I knew it'd be under fire because

12:00 he'd been clipped on the ear, "Just pull the gun out!" and bang, it goes, another shot and he was shot dead. Now that Jap was just on the other side of the track so that'd be no further than fifteen feet, twenty feet.

**How did you feel about that death?**

Well, it's one of those things that spurs you on because when one of your men gets

12:30 shot, I mean it spurs you on because you'd like to charge up the hill sort of thing but … it was a situation … in this particular situation, the 2/14th Battalion as I say were in the vicinity. We went back because they got in a situation where they were in a heap of trouble, as they with us. When we got out of Kokoda, we came back to a place called Isurava and we were in the forward

13:00 position of Isurava when the 2/14th Battalion joined us to relieve us. Oh, and this was absolutely marvel … if they hadn't have come up, we would have been completely annihilated - there's only a few of us left anywhere - so we went back to the next village and no sooner had we got back there when we got word down that the 2/14th Battalion were in a lot of trouble. Would we go back and give them a hand?

13:30 Well, it was a situation where … it was nicely put, it wasn't an order, it wasn't a request. It was a situation, where they helped us and they were in a situation where they were getting, not beaten, but they were getting heavy, heavy fire so we went back then and helped them. In the end, of

14:00 course, we had to all withdraw and it was in that situation there that once again our sergeant major came down the track and he said, "What are you doing here, Don?" and I said, "Well, holding this position." He said, "Well, you better come out with me. There's nobody behind me." So we were still getting out, so he went over to this Bren gun which was only fifteen feet away, picked it up … we couldn't carry it, we had rifles and we had Thompson guns, sub-machine guns,

14:30 and he took the barrel off and smashed the butt, the gun itself, around a tree and threw it down the back of the hill. We came out of that along the side of the track and there's a native garden. Now the native garden is cleared, a blaze down the side of the track. And he said, "We'll go across the garden." and I said, "Alright." So we jump over this fence, built up with saplings

15:00 to about ten or twelve feet high to keep the wild pigs out of their gardens and so we jumped the fence

and about half way over he said, "Hang on Don, I've dropped my knife," and I said … he said, "Wait here." And there was a small indentation in the garden and I sat in this indentation and the Japs were up the top of the plantation which again would only be twenty odd feet away and

15:30 they're walking along the track. I couldn't open fire on them on my own. Jim Carey, our sergeant major, goes back, finds his knife, comes back and he says, "Come on, make a run for it!" and so we both dashed across the garden and then back down to the next village.

**Just taking you back to that time when you first experienced combat, how did you react in your heart to**

16:00 **the first casualties of your men?**

The reaction immediately would be the fact, I mean, this could happen to me and hope to goodness it didn't. But it stirred you in as much to say well, you were going to pay for this. I'll make sure I get you. And you sort of got a

16:30 built-up in you to, you know, really fight.

**By the time you got back to Isurava and just before you were relieved by the 2/14th what physical and emotional state were you all in?**

I think at that stage it would have been …

17:00 very depressed. How're we going to get out of this. We had wounded … knowing that they've got to be carried eighty-five mile back before they get treatment. We had a couple of doctors as advanced dressing stations on the way but … it was very depressing. You … naturally of course, immediately you say I wish to God I hadn't have come. I wish

17:30 we could get out of this. But in actual fact you say well, is all this … can we hold them, I mean, there's only a few of us there. Is it a waste of time? We may as well withdraw down to Port Moresby instead of doing it village by village. The fighting spirit, it's all very well being a hero, being this that and the other. It doesn't ignore the fact that we were cold, we were wet, we had nothing to eat and

18:00 we were just more or less ready to give it up.

**So how did you feel when the 2/14th arrived?**

Oh, marvellous. Oh, we thought we're right, we'd been saved which we were, we were. And that's why the bond today is so great with the 2/14th Battalion. They really did stop us from being annihilated.

18:30 **Don, the other thing about being a soldier in that situation, I guess for the first time, is not only avoiding being killed but having to kill yourself.**

Ah, I don't think the feeling ah … I don't think you have much … you really fire in anger and it doesn't come into the, you know, that he's a

19:00 mother's son, too. He's somebody's son, you don't think of that. You just think of him as 'he killed my mate' and you get that feeling of anger and you get very little … and of course we were getting stories back then of what happened to, chaps who were missing. See, we didn't have prisoners. They

19:30 didn't take prisoners. So you really had your back to the wall as they did at Gona. They had nowhere to go. And we had our back to the wall in terms of the fact that … knowing that they don't take prisoners, you say to yourself, well, I may as well fight it out because you had no alternative.

**What was your attitude to taking prisoners?**

Personally,

20:00 having these stories that we've heard up to date and the things that they had done on the way down … we saw one village where they'd been in … No, I'd have no hesitation to … I wouldn't take prisoners. Well, the point being you couldn't take them in as much … we had, if we'd taken a prisoner for instance at Isurava what would we

20:30 do with him? Behind us was eighty-five miles of track and mud. We would have had to have had three men to take that one prisoner back. We couldn't afford that. At this stage, I only had four left in my section and if three of my men went back I'd have one, myself, and one OR [other ranks – enlisted men] in the section so we couldn't afford to

21:00 take prisoners. And nobody would have taken them anyway.

**So what did you do with prisoners?**

What would you do with them?

**What did you do if people surrendered?**

Well, they didn't surrender. They didn't surrender. They didn't come out waving a white flag. They just

kept on coming. There was one instance where we had a Bren gun at the side of the track at Isurava. When

21:30 I say jungle; it's not jungle, jungle all the time. There are clearings and there are breaks that you can get a field to fire. Prior to this, you fire into the jungle because you got a pretty good idea of who is behind there. You don't actually wait until you see the whites of their eyes. That's not on. They're very cleverly camouflaged and it's very hard to distinguish but there's one

22:00 particular instance where there was a bit of a clearing and one of our chaps who incidentally won the MM [Military Medal], had a field of fire where he could see them coming through this opening. Now they just kept on coming. We, ourselves, if we had been in the situation they were in and if one chap went through and got shot then that chap would go and observe, where's that field of fire coming from and assess the situation. They just kept on coming, one after the other. I don't know how

22:30 many odd, didn't see the end of it. But it was just, as I say, they just poured in. They didn't come in, as I say, one by one.

**So could you deal with that number coming through?**

Well, up until such time as the, I don't know what the situation … well, Kokoda itself, they came in through the plantation. How many came in, goodness, but the …

23:00 you're trying to assess where the fire is coming from. Well, the fire is coming from the entire front. So there must have been a lot of Japs out there, and as I said, this one at Isurava, they just swarmed over like bees.

**Eventually, you had to retreat further …**

Withdraw, we didn't retreat.

**Withdraw further,**

23:30 **I'll rephrase that, you engaged in a tactical withdrawal. What was the morale at that stage?**

The morale itself was fairly high right through, as far as the morale was concerned.

24:00 With the withdrawal from Kokoda, it was well organised, it was well done. And I think everyone would have said that they were quite, will I say, happy about the manner in which it was carried out. The morale itself was reliant on your officers and they did a sterling job.

**When the**

24:30 **2/14th arrived, could you describe what those guys looked like compared with what condition you people were in at that stage?**

Well, we were pretty ragged. We had no change of clothing, as I said before. We lost most of our clothing because when we went down to Kokoda, we left the bulk, the remains of what we did have at a place called Deniki and all we went down there with was a haversack with a groundsheet and a bandolier

25:00 which carried fifty rounds of ammunition. So when we came out of Kokoda, we had literally speaking, nothing. When the 2/14th Battalion arrived and pulled up along side of us, we took over each one's positions sort of thing. He even when he arrived and that was a forced march, even when he arrived, by the time they got to us, they didn't look unlike us at all, because it was

25:30 a battle walking the track. And people today said, how in the heck you people walk the track carrying all the equipment. So by the time they arrived, they looked a little bit haggled, too, unshaven. They didn't look like the big, bronzed Anzacs that were marching down Swanson Street.

**In your withdrawal, was**

26:00 **there a strategy at work? What was the strategy in terms of slowing the Japanese advance?**

Being only a corporal at that time, I didn't know the full program. Colonel [Ralph] Honner having just arrived back from the Middle East, took over command. The strategy was, what we were told, the main thing was to …

26:30 to endeavour to halt, to delay, beg your pardon, delay their advance. We weren't expected to stop them because there weren't enough of us and we weren't trained enough. We weren't experienced in the jungle warfare. But our orders were to delay their advance as long as we could all the way down the track until our troops from the Middle East

27:00 returned home and any other support that we could rely on.

**How critical was this engagement for Australia?**

It was most important because we were the … the only thing between us, the Japs and Australia at that time, was the 39th Battalion. And that was a … having experienced in the past where they just marched

27:30 through Singapore come what have you, they just marched down through islands, at this stage people started to realise well, what have we got? They're going to march through New Guinea, down to Port Moresby and take Australia, which would have happened if we hadn't delayed. Of course, the Coral Sea was the big turning point. I'm not comparing the Kokoda Track with the Coral Sea but as far as land troops were concerned, the 39th Battalion were the only troops between Japan and Australia.

28:00 **How aware were you of this?**

No, we weren't aware of how close they were at this stage. We didn't know what their outline plan … we knew that the Coral Sea was a success, the Bismarck, but as far as awareness, the tactical side of this exercise, no we didn't know. See, we had very little communication

28:30 with Port Moresby and so that made it rather difficult apart from delaying them as much as we could.

**I guess I'm thinking that you went off on this adventure with a kind of, not a great sense of patriotism necessarily. I'm wondering what your feelings were at this stage whether … who were you fighting for now? Were you fighting for Australia, for the empire,**

29:00 **for your mum, for your family? What was going through your …**

Well, knowing what they did, first and foremost you fought for your family because we knew how ruthless the Japs were toward women, etcetera. But one of the biggest items were was the fact that I mean, where are our troops? Why haven't we got more support here? And it was the problem we had of getting our AIF troops back out of the Middle East which [British Prime Minister Winston] Churchill wouldn't

29:30 release and naturally, of course, we were a bit upset about that and we said, well, we can't do this on our own. The sooner they get here the better.

**I'm just wondering whether there was a sense amongst you all, and for you personally, that you were fighting to save Australia?**

We were fighting to save Australia. Oh yes. We knew at this stage it was really, really serious. We knew it was serious before but

30:00 I don't mean serious in terms of that but as far as actual … at this stage we were fighting, yes, for Australia without a doubt.

# Tape 12

00:40 **Don, at the time when the 39th and the 2/14th had come together, what happened to the description 'choco' soldiers at that stage?**

Well, immediately they accepted us as AIF.

01:00 At this stage, you must remember, by this time most of the 39th Battalion were AIF, we joined the AIF but still retained the 39th Battalion. So at that time of going into battle, most of us were AIF because we were able to obtain our parents consent. So the 'choco' business really

01:30 even if it had have lasted, it would have been accepted because they accept us straight away. And of course, we welcomed them also with opened arms, I mean, it was terrific.

**Following this campaign, there was General Blamey's infamous comment and speech. What's your recollection of that?**

Well, I heard about it. It was directed

02:00 at the 2/14th Battalion, which they lost a lot of men at Isurava, and fought gallantly. It was absolutely terrific. But that comment, it is down in history as one of the worst things you could say at any time, terrible thing to say.

**What effect did it have on morale, generally, amongst the troops?**

02:30 Oh, bottom, went down to the bottom. After all we had done, they get a comment like that – I mean, it was shocking. Of course it included us, it included anyone on the Track, really, because all they wanted to do was to push the Japs back off the Track which was, you know … I think it was [General] MacArthur who made the comment and said, "Well, build a road over it and send the transports." Well, they were back in Port Moresby, in fact, they were further back than that actually.

03:00 So, really, it was a comment which should never have been said and it would never be forgiven.

**What was the impact of the Kokoda campaign in the end, what impact did it have on the course of the war?**

I think it had a big bearing on it, in as much as the fact that it proved that the Jap could be beaten and this is where when they got

03:30 down to within thirty-five mile of Port Moresby that they actually were beaten and that of course they had the same problem from then on as we had from Kokoda back. They had it from Port Moresby back to Kokoda. The line of communication was just too long and too hard, much too hard, but as far as the actual impact on troops, in general, and Australia,

04:00 in particular, would be the fact that the Jap can be beaten.

**You were then withdrawn to Moresby where you were reinforced and then it was to the Gona campaign. Can you describe that campaign and how that differed from …**

Well, that differed, there was a little bit more open country, there was more kunai grass as far as the terrain was concerned. Secondly, the fact it was mainly flat country.

04:30 It was from Kokoda to Gona which was the hinterland which is fairly flat. We pushed the Japs back. We went over by plane and landed at a place called … an aerodrome called Popondetta and from there we walked, marched if you like, to Gona but we had little resistance on the way

05:00 there until we really reached the coastline. But having reached that, then, of course, the battle was on and it was very, very fierce fighting, not only from us, of course, but there were numerous other battalions there at this time but at this time also, the Jap, he had his back to the water. The only place he could go was out to sea and they had no transport, of course, no boats or anything at all

05:30 so they were backs to the wall and just fought until they died and this was a shocking campaign in as much as they just were killed. They wouldn't surrender. The opportunity was there, if they had of waved the white flag, okay, we could have taken them all prisoners and forget you know, this … because at this time, MacArthur's on his way up to the Philippines. So it was a situation whereby they

06:00 had glory in dying for their country where as we, we didn't go to that extent.

**So was there … to what degree was there some resentment about the fact that you were mopping up, if you like?**

No, mopping up was actually on the Aitape-Wewak campaign. This is when, having cleaned up this Gona, Buna and Sanananda, the completion of that,

06:30 we were withdrawn from the front and returned to Australia for a holiday. We were on leave for a couple of weeks and we returned then to the Atherton Tablelands. This is when the powers to be decided that the 39th Battalion had done their duty, we don't require them any longer and we'll take them out of the order of battle. Now this was very, very hurtful, to think

07:00 that they'd lasted forty-three, forty-five and their record which they had created was just wiped off the slate. The 39th Battalion was no more. We were then seconded to other battalions and most of us, well a large degree of us, went to the 2/2nd Battalion which was a NSW battalion and then from

07:30 Atherton Tablelands, having returned from a leave, we were then shipped in the Jane Adams which was a victory ship to Aitape and arrived at Aitape when the Americans were leaving and the Americans were driving jeeps off the end of the wharf because of the Lend Lease situation. And we arrived at Aitape and the Americans left. Now, at this

08:00 stage it was referred to … we had to mop up after the Americans left, which we didn't like at all, didn't care for that comment at all … that title. At this stage, MacArthur's on his way up to the Philippines and apparently, according to reports, he told Blamey to advance no higher than … I think it went through Bougainville eventually …we'll look after

08:30 the rest. So away they went and we were then left down back to New Guinea again, to Aitape and advanced toward Wewak to clean up. Now this is a shocking thing. It turned into a battle because we're still striking Japanese with no communication … they didn't even know that the war was … to what stage it was, they had no communication at all and General Adashi who was in charge of all the

09:00 Japanese troops in that Wewak area were still fighting for his country and his life. So we went through there and we had very strong opposition and it was a lot of petty things going on in as much as … one little example, our battalion, we took … we advanced up to a certain point and that was as far as we could go so we went up to that point,

09:30 but it wasn't a satisfactory point. It would have been better to go up the hill, sit on the top of the hill which is commanding ground. So we went up the hill and we sat on the hill but the powers to be said, 'you've advanced too far, come back'. So we came back and sat down by the creek. The following day, the other battalion, 2/1st Battalion, they had to go up the hill, they got up the hill there and oh, they lost I don't know how many men. They

10:00 lost a lot of men taking the hill again. So these were situations where it was really bad in as much as everybody's wanting medals or how you like to put it, I don't know. But it was a mopping up campaign, it was absolutely a waste of time. We eventually got into Wewak and out from Wewak is the Alexander

Road and we went up the Alexander Road and we were

still in the front line. I was with A Company all the time and even in the 2/2nd Battalion. We got up to the Alexander … and war was finished, so this was great. But you couldn't go out in the middle of the Track and put your arms up in the air and call out, the Japs were still there. So the CO sort of… they sent out a patrol, a reconnaissance patrol and just see how far they are away.

So a very close friend of mine whom I'd gone AWL [Absent Without Leave] with … a very close friend of mine, had to go out on this patrol just to see whether … he said, "Don't get involved in a fight, don't … just see where they are and come back." They went out and they just walked around the first bend and poor old Slim got a machine gun burst from his foot to his head and

… I went back to see him and fortunately enough I saw him that day but unfortunately he died that night. But when he was going, it was just one of those things, he said, "Oh, I'll be right, Dan." that was my nickname but unfortunately

… he died that night. But that's the stupidity of this particular campaign. If you died in battle, you get honours. But if you died in … he died in peacetime and this is … a situation which should never have been. We could have been just as happy to sit on our backsides down at Wewak and leave the Japs in the bush. They weren't doing any damage. They were quite

happy to … which … same situation in Bougainville.

**When you said you were AWL with him, was that back in Australia? Tell me the story about that. Was it when you were on leave?**

Oh, we had leave when we came out of the Kokoda, or after that campaign which includes going to Buna and

we had a week where I met Peg, my wife today. And it was during that time that we were due to go back on the train, back to camp, Queensland, when we went out to Royal Park and you had to parade in the morning and your name was called out and you were on that draft. It was a staging camp and if your name's not called out, you have the day off, you come back the next day and this happened

and having … this particular leave, it sort of … you took every opportunity you could so … but the day we were called out, I don't know what actually happened exactly but we both thought or we knew we were going to have the day off so away we shot before they'd finished calling out the names but we actually were on that draft and …

**Just mention the names. Just start again, just tell me who it was … it was yourself and …**

Slim Giorno.

**I'll ask you again. Just tell me what happened.**

Slim and I were on the parade, waiting for our names to be called out when we decided we were going to have the day off anyway, an extra day, so we went back into town and our names were on the draft and of course, when we reported back the next day, we were

charged for being AWL.

**Why didn't you want to go at that stage?**

Oh, I think it was more devilment than anything else. I don't think it was any specific reason. I think we just wanted to make the most of it … we were down in Melbourne, we had an extra day … which is a long way to go from Queensland down to Melbourne for a week's leave.

**Was there a situation, though, of war weariness? You'd been in combat for quite a**

**while. How weary were you of the war?**

You'd give anything, of course, at any one time to have a good sleep. You were weary … you were literally speaking, dog tired, but you couldn't sleep because there was always activity going on. Tiredness is … sometimes you think, oh, let them shoot me, I've had it. You just sort of …

You're that tired that … it's a horrible feeling actually of being in that position whereby you haven't got the strength to stand up and carry on.

**So why go back to the war when you've come back to Australia?**

Well, the war at this stage was well up, the Philippines,

they had been taken when we got back to the Tablelands but the biggest problem then they didn't know what to do with the troops. We had three divisions up there at one stage and off we go then to as [UNCLEAR] called the mopping up campaign. It was really … it wasn't a voluntary sort of episode, it was the fact that the battalion's going and so are you. It was sort of … there was no …

16:30 It's why are we going? What do we want to clean up this for?

**You say you met your wife to be ... at what stage did you become engaged?**

On the first leave after we came out of the Kokoda campaign, I met her at the Carols by Candlelight of all places and ... in terms of all the ... we went to the ... actually I met her first when I was in The Dugout which was

17:00 an area in Swanson Street which ... the troops went there and the girls, voluntary, made cups of coffee, etcetera and had a dance and I met her there and I went home. And I was home for ten days or so when we could wear civilian clothes when you're on leave and I thought, I wonder what that girl looks like that I took home, having a bet with my mate, Ted Stewart. He said

17:30 "I bet you five bob," he said, "You can't take her home." Boy, that was a challenge. I did take her home but she informed me, she said, "There's no kissing at the end of it, of course." I said ... However ... I put on civvy [civilian] clothes and went to see her where she worked in town. And of course she said, "You want to see me?" She didn't recognise me in civilian clothes. However, we went to the Carols by Candlelight and ... then I went back up to the Atherton

18:00 Tablelands then for six months and we had a pre-embarkation leave before we went to Aitape, came home on that leave and we decided we'd get married. So we did and we had a honeymoon for, I think, three or four days and off I went to ... back up to Queensland, to Aitape. So after the war was over,

18:30 we were coming home and she thought it would be nice to meet me at the station and ...which she came down and I looked out the window and I was rounding ... I was a sergeant at this time and I was rounding the troops up and I said, "That girl out there reminds me of my wife, that looks very much like her." never dreaming she'd be there and sure enough, got off the train and she said, "Are you Donald?"

19:00 and I said, "Are you Peg?" and away we went home! It was quite a ... well, having only known her for ... well, we corresponded during that six months but I met her, went away, came back and then started a new life from there.

**How hard was it coming back and starting a new life?**

Oh, very difficult in as much as it's ... getting back into civilian life,

19:30 it was very, very difficult in as much as that you're coming back into a situation whereby people tell you what to do instead of me telling them what to do in as much as ... as far as the manager of the department for instance and so on. I came back and, whilst I was away, my earlier employer tried to get me back earlier to ...

20:00 he could change over ... leave me in charge of the business, he wanted to retire. But to cut a long story short, I came back ... in the interim, Georges had bought out this interior design place that ... had so when I came back, he sold me with the business. So I went back and worked with Georges and of course this was rather hard, I suppose, in terms of readjusting from army life to civilian

20:30 life because I'd been at this stage in the army four odd years.

**And what was Australia like? How had people changed? How much did they appreciate what you had done for them?**

Ah, I would say yes, in a broad sense of appreciation. I think the American influence was still floating up in the air. I think the credit goes to the ... more to ... it was a different situation entirely

21:00 to the Americans because of the glamour or the advertising or the ... the Americans won the war and let's face it, they did in terms of ... the greatest thing they ever did was drop the atomic bomb. But appreciation wise, a lot of the Australians ... I went up to the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland fairly recently

21:30 and I spoke to a librarian and I asked her were there any photos of early Atherton of the Australian troops and she said, "What Australian troops?" and I said, "We had three divisions here during the '39-'45 war." She said, "Oh, I don't know." And I said, "Well, do you know anything about ..." she said, "Oh yes, I often used to hear my mother talking about the air force at Mareeba." Now this was ... they had about half a dozen

22:00 planes there, apparently, and all she knew about was the American Air Force but there were three divisions but not a word was ever ... so I don't really ... I don't think ... it wasn't as bad as the Vietnam return. That was a terrible thing. We were accepted and appreciated but not to overflowing ... not like the Americans. It wasn't as colourful as the Americans.

22:30 **How did you feel about that?**

Oh, I don't know, I don't think we ... I think we were just glad to get home. But ... I don't think there was much emphasis on appreciation in general. I think we were just glad to get home and let bygones be bygones.

**Just talking about the interior decorating business, can you describe that? Go back before the**

**period before the war and describe your work there, how that happened.**

23:00 Well, I mentioned earlier that I left school on the Friday and started work on the Monday. Well, this was a situation where my father came in with me, took me by the hand, and introduced me to Mr Lyon who was an Englishman and wore the rose in his coat. And he was the top decorator of Melbourne. He used to have beautiful materials and beautiful furniture, reproductions,

23:30 quite a few, and antiques. And I started off at the age of fourteen but I was only there for three and a half years of course when I joined the army. The shop itself was quite unique in terms but he was an unusual character in as much as you'd have … his clientele was very, very good. He had all of

24:00 Toorak for instance. His clients would come in and they'd say, 'Oh, Mr Lyon, I love that piece of Eric Boyd.' or Derrick Boyd which was the father of Eric Boyd, a piece of pottery. And he said, "Oh, I'm sorry," he said, "You can't have that, it's sold." And she said, "Oh gosh, I'd give anything to have a piece like that." He hadn't sold it at all. He just didn't like parting with it. And he had stuff there galore that when Georges took it over … he wanted me to come back out of the army and be

24:30 trained to take over the managership so he in turn could retire. His son wasn't interested in the business, he was a Master of Scotch [College]. And I couldn't get out of the army from that end and he couldn't get … and this was at the tail end of the Wewak campaign which really didn't matter whether I was up there or not, really, however, I couldn't get back and he sold the business to Georges and as I said before, he sold me with it.

25:00 But when Georges bought it, they were delighted with the gear that he had. Oh, it was magnificent stuff, beautiful stuff.

**I've just got a couple more questions. Just taking you back up to those**

25:30 **troops that you went in with in the 39th. What sort of age were those boys that went in with you there?**

Ah, I think most of them would have been eighteen. We had some exceptions. We had one sixteen and he finished off the Kokoda … the Gona campaign. Most of them came from militia units

26:00 and a lot of them like myself would put our age back to get into the army. So the average age would have to be overall eighteen and perhaps no more. We had a few strays in as much as I call strays for the fact they were older than we were. In fact, all the officers … most of the officers had been in the 14-18 war but they were sorted out before we went into action.

26:30 **It seems to me to be a very, very young age, virtually boys going into battle.**

There's one thing that stands out with the 39th is the fact that, although they were eighteen, in those days we were a young eighteen. We weren't worldly like a lad of, say, sixteen today. A lad of sixteen today, he's smarter than I am

27:00 and the experiences that they've had, I didn't learn all those things until I was twenty. So although we were young, we were young young, if there's such an expression. But some of them, again, were too young. Some of them were the … not only too young, there were quite a few in the 39th, really that shouldn't have been in the army.

27:30 We were getting into a situation, when that was formed, the situation as far as the southwest pacific was concerned was rising and there was great concern for the Jap of course. But there was a lot in the 39th really that were not only too young but they were far too inexperienced. They hadn't been in the Boy Scouts, for instance. I was and I knew how to hide behind a tree or camouflage myself and this I put down a lot … I knew how to look after myself

28:00 as far as cleanliness was concerned, etcetera, which I learned from the Boy Scouts so a lot of … some of them … there was two or three that couldn't read nor write. Now this is not a slant on the 39th Battalion but it's pointing out that there were a lot of those lads were far too inexperienced, not only in army life but also in civilian life.

28:30 **I want to just take you into the heat of the battle again on Kokoda and I want you just to try and describe to me the sound of battle.**

Well, not knowing … having had no jungle war training whatsoever, when we went down to Kokoda, having arrived, we had a hot drink,

29:00 that late afternoon, the Japs attacked. Now, we heard … they threw over a few mortars and made a hell of a noise. This we started to realise, this is the real thing so we started trying to dig holes. We had no shovels or spades and we started to scrape with anything at all that we had, a mess tin, some of them had tin hats,

29:30 most of us had slouch hats because we weren't equipped. You don't use tin hats in the jungle. They only use it for bombers out in Tobruk. So we were sitting, waiting, not knowing what to expect. But the noises, as I say, were stones in cans, banging cans together. You're calling out, yelling out,

30:00 words which we don't know of course. But they made unusual … the noise, we said, cripes, what's this? Is this war? Is it part of the deal? But then, of course, you hear a machine gun burst. We knew what that was because we'd been on firing ranges of course. So the noises itself … the noise were more frightening than the bullets.

30:30 They were so unusual en masse as they were coming through the rubber trees. So it was, it was quite an unusual feeling of what is going on. And even during the battle, they'd yell out … and particularly, they'd get that close that they'd hear me, for instance, calling out to Corporal James, or a name and they'd try

31:00 and pick that up and pronounce it if they could to a … and they'd call out "Are you there Corporal James?" and of course, if in the event the name, whatever it was, he said, "Yes, I'm over here." Well of course that's the worst thing you could say, naturally. But you learnt those … we learnt a lot at Kokoda than we did … well it was our first battle, but you learn very, very quickly of all the little tricks they were getting up to … as I say, pulling a bit of string and the bush moves

31:30 and you fire at the bush and of course, he knows where you are. No, quite unusual.

**Why did you choose to get married when you did?**

I think it was a situation whereby you've been

32:00 through battle, you knew what the situation was … meeting Peg as I did and then grabbing an opportunity on the following leave of living a married life before I went away. I may not get the opportunity again. An opportunity that comes once and I think the opportunity arose,

32:30 we very, very quickly assessed it and thought, well let's have it while we've got it. Which we did, we had three days honeymoon and I think that's basically the … it wasn't the reason we got married, of course, but you grabbed at life, to live part of it, anyway, together.

33:00 If I had been killed at Gona, for instance, well at least we would have had something.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**