Australians at War Film Archive

Salvatore Macinante (Don or Mack) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **To start with, we can't thank you enough for sharing your (UNCLEAR) of memories with us. As I said before, if we can just start with a bit of a summary of your life. I'll ask you a few questions and we'll just move through the details. So can you tell me a bit about your childhood and family, and where you grew up?**

My childhood was very varied because my people were new immigrants to Australia

01:00 and they themselves didn't know where they were going to settle. My grandparents came out here as interpreters for the Australian government, because they spoke seven languages and they were teaching. All the migrants they had here in those days were mainly Greek, Italian and German and these were the predominant languages that my grandparents spoke.

01:30 Now my greatest and earliest memory of life with them was we were living at Glebe. My parents and a couple of his brothers had a fruit shop and it was the days also of the cut throat gangs, the razor gangs. I had seen the razor gangs come into the fruit shop demanding money from my parents and they just didn't

02:00 give it. They attacked these razor gang people that came at them.

So you lived in Glebe? What other places did you move around to?

From Glebe we moved to - I think it was – I've got to think on this one. From Glebe I was still only a child. I remember I just used to sit on the footpaths. Talking to friends on the footpath, in the gutter. We'd be sitting on the gutter talking

02:30 and from Glebe they moved to - it was Sans Souci. They moved out to San Souci because we had an uncle out there, who had an American wife. Sorry, she was a Scottish wife and she used to do a lot of haberdashery work for a firm called Snows. In those days and as children we had to poke out

03:00 the corners of the pillow slips that she made for Snows because they were haberdashery people. After that we moved to Carlton – no, I'm sorry, it wasn't Carlton. We moved down to Bowral. We were living down at Bowral and I went to school with Don

03:30 Bradman. Don Bradman was in higher classes than me, because he was an older person. And Don Bradman's people had a haberdashery shop in Bowral too. My father was involved with an American who - they tried to create a nightclub down there. It was a huge milk bar type of thing. They turned it into a restaurant night club for all the young people of the rich families that owned the big shops

04:00 in Sydney. It was called The Ambassador and it had a huge fountain in the middle of the floor where the people used to dance around it. Then the Depression years hit, and they lost all their money in this place. This chap who was my Dad's partner at the time, his name was Ernest Hillier and he went down to Sydney and formed a company. It's well known today, Hillier's Chocolates. The same as Darrell

04:30 Lea chocolates are known in New South Wales. But neither of those people are alive today. I think it's their families that run it now.

What happened to your family during the Depression?

In Depression years? Well my Dad - we then we moved back up to Sydney. That's where we went to Carlton and my Dad was on the - what they called the dole in those - no it wasn't the dole, I forget what they called it. They had to work to get the money the dole people get today.

05:00 They had to work three days a week and he worked on Parramatta Road. And there were various promenades around the Eastern Suburbs. They put the concrete promenades in, and we used to go and do our fishing. Get our food down at Rose Bay where they have the Rose Bay Wharf today. For

vegetables we - my people used to get the dandelions

05:30 from the big park there. There was a vegetable which was a chicory and put the iron into our system and the fish were the staple diet to keep our health up to date.

You were quite young when the war came. How old were you when you joined up?

I was seventeen when I went to the war. I was working in a protected industry doing variable pitch propellers as part of my training for a fitter and turner

06:00 for a firm called Emco. I had a friend who was a lieutenant in the schooled services and he was part and parcel of the people that were acting for the government, to send out the call up notices. When they brought in the call-ups I got him to do a little bit of finagling and he had me called up in the seventeen and eighteen

06:30 age group because I was too young at seventeen and they couldn't call us up. But I was amongst the young ones, because I was still only seventeen when I went in.

You went into the CMF [Citizens Military Force]?

We went into the CMF first of all and went to Ingleburn for our basic training. After the six weeks at Ingleburn they moved us around to various other places. Because of my so-called training as an engineer fitter, or fitter,

07:00 they assumed in those days. They assumed fitters were engineers and engineers in the army were entirely different to engineers in civilian life. Even now the engineers today are a different set-up in the armed services today but we did bridge building, road making, building or constructing of camps for various other troops that came in. So we were moved around all over

07:30 New South Wales and at one particular stage we did all the fortification of the beaches from Wollongong right up to Palm Beach where we destroyed a lot of properties that lived right over the top of the water and the cliffs over there. We put barb wire fences and all that sorta thing in and Bondi, Manly, where was the other beach?

08:00 Oh all the northern beaches. We put railway tramway lines and railway lines facing out at an angle on the beach in the beach sand facing out to the water to stop the tanks from coming in if ever they came into Australia. We removed all the steps that led down from the causeways and down to the sand, all those were taken out and we finished up in Frenchs Forest.

08:30 At St. Ives, at a camp up there. Alongside of it there was the St. Ives Showground and there were a lot of troops up in the whole of the area and we did more fortification from there on the northern beaches. We'd go from St. Ives down to Warriewood and all those beaches. We did all the fortification down there: Manly, whole lot of them, and from there we

09:00 were allowed to transfer from the CMF to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], which I have two army numbers: a CMF number and an AIF number. From there at St. Ives we were told that we were going overseas. But before we were going they took a lot of reinforcements from our unit to send to the Middle East because they were having a shortage of troops in the

09:30 engineering units in the Middle East. So we were sent overseas. We went to Brisbane and we were in Ascot Racecourse up there and instead of having a full complement of three hundred and sixty five I think it was, in the engineering unit, we only had about two hundred because they'd taken all the reinforcements from us. From Ascot we were sent up to Townsville

10:00 and from Townsville we were put on the boat and sent up to New Guinea. We arrived in New Guinea at the time that - I think it was the Macdhui, there was a ship the Macdhui where the Japanese dropped a bomb down the funnel and blew up in its engine room and it was sunk in the middle of the harbour. When we arrived in New Guinea we were sent to Murray Barracks.

10:30 We were at Murray Barracks and we built a cordial factory for General Blamey and his officers because the troops weren't allowed beer or anything like that in those days. But they still wanted something apart from water and there was a huge shortage, it was in the papers too at the time, there was a great shortage of sugar for the troops and the reason there was a shortage for the troops was because General Blamey had seconded it all for

11:00 the cordial factory at Port Moresby. From Port Moresby we -

Did that factory get finished? Did it...?

Yes it was in full production within a couple of months because after we'd finished it, we were sent up to the Gulf of Papua. There was this - don't know whether they classified it as a coastal

11:30 steamer or what but it was a boat called the Dunbar. The Dunbar took us up to the Lakekamu River. Opposite the Lakekamu River, at the entrance there was an island called Thule Island and missionaries around that island, and then the water transport people took us up the Lakekamu River to a place called Bulldog.

12:00 From Bulldog we commenced building a road to go right across the up over the Owen Stanley Ranges to the other side to come out at Lae and it was supposed to be for a transport road to come in behind the Japanese. But General MacArthur said “That was too slow”, so he decided to have all the paratroopers drop in at

12:30 the Markham in the Markham Valley and the Markham River. We were seven months building that road, went up to a height of about eleven thousand feet. There were various places and that. I can't remember all the names of them now and the dates or the times that we were there, but we came out after a certain time then there were other engineers working from the Lae end towards us and they met at

13:00 a point called Eccleston’s Gap, I think it was, and at that particular point when the two roads met there was about ten feet difference in the height because they were coming from different directions. They rectified that anyway and it was completed wide enough for convoy of jeeps to go in. Then they widened it out, where they were able to put the equipment in

13:30 and take all the - I think they were classified then as three toners. They weren't three ton trucks but they got a bigger truck than the jeep to do it. We'd build sections of the road until night because there were no lights like they have today. When they're doing roadwork they have all these lights like you've got here even. We just had to finish when there was no more daylight and we'd wake up in the morning and the section of the road that we'd built had just disappeared into the valleys and we'd have to start all

14:00 over again. It was quite frustrating really, to have all that done. But nevertheless it was done.

Sounds like an amazing piece of work.

Oh…

I mean…

It was. It has been listed as one of the greatest feats of any war and but it didn't receive the recognition because of Kokoda. Kokoda deserved all that they got, but still they denied and mostly the denial of that came because

14:30 the person who was in charge of building that road for the Australian Army, he was a Colonel of Royal Engineers, a Colonel Reinhardt, and he came from Brisbane and he didn't like our CO [Commanding Officer]. Our commanding officer was a very pushy sort of a bloke and he'd do anything to get his crew what he wanted, food, or anything like that and quite often we had no food and this Colonel Reinhardt didn't like our commanding

15:00 officer. We were never recommended for - or never recognised with all the stuff. But they did a lot - I have reports in the news of what was done - but it was never publicised the same as the Kokoda track.

We'll come back and talk about the road in some detail 'cause I think it's a very, very worthy project to talk about.

The road itself

What happened after that? Were you taken?

It’s disused now because the

15:30 government took over and it - just in sections where we had to build it, we had to carve it out of the side of a mountain. And that's what I say, go back in the morning and it had all disappeared. There were points in it where we were building - it was called the Mossy Forest - and in this Mossy Forest we had to have mountaineering ropes tied to each other as we traversed through this forest but it wasn't on the ground,

16:00 we traversed through the roots of the trees which were about up to ten feet from the ground itself and there was all moss in between. If you missed your footing you went between the tree, the roots and you landed in the ground down below and it was like looking up from hell. You were looking up at all the roots of the trees. This is why we had the ropes on us - the mountaineering ropes just to keep us up but there was also

16:30 the pygmies. Little pygmy natives up there called the Cu-Ca Cu-Cas and these Cu-Ca Cu-Cas had a blow dart. They didn't have arrows or anything like that, they were just a blow dart with a poisoned dart and they were no higher than about, oh, just over a metre, possibly about maybe four feet high, and even the large natives there were afraid of them because of their blow darts.

17:00 They had very beautiful women and they were like little Kewpie dolls and all the big natives up there used to like to get onto these little women and the Cu-Ca Cu-Cas knew it and they used to guard them with their life but they never, never spoke a language like the others. They were more like the old cavemen. They spoke with a guttural noise and it was like a (UNCLEAR) like you'd hear animals talking, like

17:30 the chimpanzees and that sort of thing. But they understood each other. They didn't worry us very much

except of a night time they'd be trying to steal our axes and anything steel because they wanted the sharp stuff, although they never used them. We never saw what they used them for because they mostly used the poisoned darts for getting their food. One of our past times when we got into the lower valleys was trying to catch the

18:00 cassowary bird, who's very similar to our emus, and the reason to catch the cassowary bird was to hop on it and ride him like a cowboy. That was a peculiar past time.

We'll come back later in the interview and talk about the jungle. We'll just finish this summary now, so what happened after you finished building the road? What happened to you?

Well when we finished building the road we got to Lae and they took us down so fast because we'd been in this cold country for so long that people didn't realise there was snow.

18:30 We even had snow up there in the mountains and people couldn't believe that of a tropical place like that, but they took us down to Labu Lagoon, which was on the other side. There was a big lagoon on the other side of the water to Lae and at the staging camp there that they had. Taking us down from the extreme cold to the extreme heat we all fell head over Charlie with malaria. I finished

19:00 up myself there on my twenty first birthday in the 2/6th AGH [Australian General Hospital] at Lae, having my twenty first birthday with the malaria. After coming out of there back to the staging camp, we were sent out to a place called Nadzab and Nadzab was one of the huge airports out there that the Americans used to use. We had to do repair work on all the steel matting that they

19:30 had from the bombs that were done and we had to weld them up and do a lot of fixing to the buildings and that, that were up there. It was a huge place and from there we came back and we had to do the repair work on all the wharves at Lae that had been blown up through the Japs and by this time we had an officer who'd been sent up to us, he was a

20:00 WO1 [Warrant Officer, Class 1], and he accidentally shot one of our blokes in bed one night while he was cleaning his rifle. I was taken back to Port Moresby to give evidence because I was in the same tent when it happened. I was taken back to Port Moresby when he was court martialled and sent back to Australia and by that time, my company had moved on. They'd moved them up to,

20:30 oh, I think they moved them to Jacquinot Bay and from Jacquinot Bay they went to various other islands and they did work on the other places. But at that time when I came back from Port Moresby they weren't there. I was just floating around. I was nothing, nobody wanted me and I got malaria again very badly, and dengue fever, and they sent me home to Australia and I finished up in Concord Hospital

21:00 for quite a few months. I went blind and I used to get these terrific headaches and they finished up discharging me. That was in 1944 but then my unit went further on and they went to other places. I was never privy to where they went because I was still pretty sick after the war.

Where were you when the war ended?

Here in Australia.

21:30 **But do you remember that time?**

I was ye -

What happened?

I was discharged from Concord Hospital. I was sent to the Showground, which was what they called in those days the leave and transport depot, LTD, and each morning they'd call out names on parade or names beginning with A, B, C or D or whatever, and then you had to stand at a nominated place where it had that letter.

22:00 They called my letter out and I went over to the Ms and then they started calling out names and you were sent to another position from there and next thing I was marched into a hall and given a medical examination and told "Hooray soldier, you're out" and I said "What do you mean? I'm expected to go back to my unit" and they said “No, you're discharged. You are no longer serve of service as a competent soldier

22:30 because of your illnesses," and they discharged me with a thirty per cent pension at the time. When we came out they took us down then to - not Murray Barracks - to Victoria Barracks in Sydney and from there we were given tokens to get a suit and coupons.

23:00 Because I was a tradesman, or learning to be a tradesman before the war, we were given coupons to get a set of tools to start our work again. And the people who we were working for before the war had to re-employ us after the war, but the war hadn't finished. Then in December 1944 when I was discharged, I found that the place where I worked was at North Sydney and

23:30 when I got there, I couldn't tolerate the noise of the machines again. The screaming used to set me off and the nerves and all that sort of thing. I'd be sitting on North Sydney station and train after train'd be coming into the station and I couldn't get off the seat to get in the train, my nerves were so bad. They talk about post-traumatic stress now. We were never told any of that sort of thing in those days but

that's what it was and the nerves were so bad that

Did those effects stay with you for a long time after the war?

Quite

24:00 a long time. In those days, because I lived at Randwick, I had to report out to the Randwick Military Hospital once a month and be checked over by the doctors. They'd give us a load of medication and stuff and go away and come and see them again but we'd have a lot of time off from work because of the way that the nerves would go. We just couldn't tolerate it, sort of thing, and also it was being

24:30 cooped up where we'd never been cooped up for all the years in the services. But no, there was many a time that we queried what was going on. The worst thing of the whole lot that we didn't realise at the time, because of the knowledge that the war was about to end, the unions were starting to get a

25:00 bit hoisty and one particular union was the Iron Workers' Union. The Iron Workers' Union at the time was a communistic union and they were the unions that looked after all the women that joined into the work force to take the place of the men. The women were going back to home duties and the iron workers were the beginning of the downfall of the whole of the union set-up in Australia because they went overboard.

25:30 They went too far but they wanted the ex-servicemen particularly because they thought that because we were ex-servicemen, we'd prepared to get up in arms and even create some sort of revolution in Australia but it didn't happen. We'd had enough of war, all of us, it was quite a traumatic experience really for young people and we were put into the services because we were

26:00 engineers. In those days they had peculiar ideas of what engineering units should be and then we were put in amongst men, we were as I say seventeen, eighteen year old, men who were thirty and forty who were fettlers off the railways and miners and cockies off the farms. Real hardened men and tough men and it was entirely wrong. They just had no conception but now they've got a different idea of what they've learnt: a lot since then.

26:30 **Did you go back to full time work after the war?**

No. Couldn't settle down. There was myself and another friend of mine, we just couldn't settle at all for about three or four years I suppose. Then eventually, also at the time they had Manpower like they have now this Centrelink, but in those days it were a crowd called Manpower and manpower tried to put us

27:00 into work and they just couldn't do it and in the end they just told us "You find the job or whatever you want and then come and let us know and then we'll make it right with the employer or whoever," and I saw an ad in one of the local papers where I lived, the National Cash Register Company was prepared to train people who had engineering experience from the war years. They were prepared to train them as

27:30 cash register mechanics and they had a system now that they should have today even instead of this dole where everybody gets money and they just sit on their backsides in the water. But their set-up in those days was that for the first year, the government paid the equivalent of, I suppose, not as much as the dole now but in those days they paid about a third of the wages and the boss paid, sorry the government, paid two-thirds and

28:00 the boss paid one-third. In your second year of training they each paid fifty of your wages and the third year the boss paid two-thirds and the government paid one-third and then the fourth year, it was like an apprenticeship, the boss took over the whole lot of the pay providing he considered that you were capable of doing it. But I passed all their tests and god knows what after one

28:30 year, because I was a fairly quick learner and all the rest of it. I was out on the road after about - as I say in the first year I was out on the road earning money for the cash register company and earning good money for myself too. I stayed for ten years working for them but still the itchiness was in the body from the army life of not knowing what you wanted to do and it was quite a

29:00 battle within your system to stay at work and go to work each day and go home and all the rest of it and the strangest part of the whole lot of it was that every job I've had, even the National Cash Register Company, because I became the chief mechanic in the City of Sydney for the leading hotels and the leading stores like David Jones' and Farmers and all those and I had about

29:30 four, five, seven apprentices under me that did the work around the place too and they had the ten o'clock opening and six o'clock closing in the hotels in those days. We started work at the National Cash Register Company at seven thirty in the morning which was in Barrack Street, opposite the original lottery office. We'd have to be in the hotels working behind closed doors before they closed. The hotels

30:00 opened at ten o'clock and the manager or whoever was in charge of the hotel always insisted that you had a couple of drinks. Well, being ex soldiers and that, we used to get our beers free and every job I had since throughout the whole of my life always entailed something to do with drink.

Did that cause any problems for you?

No, because we were in such a way you didn't go overboard because if you got

too many, after you'd finish at ten o'clock you still had to had to do your other work in the big stores and you couldn't smell too much of drink when you were handling. Fortunately those stores had a room where you could take the cash register off the counter and service it in the back room. But gradually, as the years progressed, you had to do them in situ because the cash registers changed too during those ten years.

Did you retire then or after

that ten years did you continue working in

Oh no. Then

Different jobs?

I went to another firm that gave me a better pay doing cash registers. A break away firm and they were up in Broadway, up past Grace Bros' big store and I worked for them for five years. Then from there where did I go after that? As I say the memory's not quite right in these

- from there I went to the Firestone Rubber Company. I'd decided I'd had enough of that sort of work and there was too much drink starting to come into it then. I went to the Firestone Rubber Company up at Auburn and I went back to my trade in engineering using my tools. I worked on the very first machines that came

here into Australia to do the steel radial motor car tyres, mostly because the machines and the books and everything on it, the instructions were in Italian and because I was of Italian lineage they thought that I'd be able to read the instructions and that. But I couldn't, because it hadn't been kept up, but we bluffed it through. There was an electrician and myself, we bluffed it through and we became the first two that knew all about the

rad steel radials in Australia. Earned a lot of money doing it too, because we were in demand. So much in demand, we got a lot of overtime out of it and we played on that sort of thing too.

What about your personal life at this stage? Did you start a family or?

Oh yes. I'd married a girl that I'd met in Sydney prior to the war. Been going and going away. Married her and we were,

we lived at home with my parents for a start at Randwick and my mother had died during the time I was overseas in the war also and my father became too demanding of my wife. So we got out of there and we moved in with her mother at Surry Hills amongst all the,

what would you call them? The underground life. I became also a part time runner for Kate Lee, who was a famous madam in those days, going around getting, well, in those days threepence or three cents' bet on horses and taking them to Kate Lee because she was the SP [starting price] bookie in the area. Threepence each way and all that sort of thing and then on top'a that I used to run the sly grog for her.

As I say I made a lot of money in those days too but it was easy come, easy go and this Kate Lee, every Christmas, the whole of Surry Hills, she used to hire a local theatre in Crown Street and she'd give about two thousand children a big Christmas party. All the underprivileged children in Surry Hills. She was a fine person, even though she was a madam.

What years was that?

- god

After the war?

- yes

Shortly after the war?

- that was after the war. It was -

The exact dates aren't important but roughly.

I can't remember the full time of that, but she also had a hotel where she was and she had a house over the road from the hotel and from the hotel to the house she had a tunnel underneath where all the sly grog used to go out of a night time. People'd come up and they'd want in those days -

well I say the pubs closed at six o'clock and you've no idea, six o'clock swill and all that sort of thing. You'd have to buy your beers and line them up. They had a shelf like a picture shelf around the pub, the wall of the pub and you'd buy as many schooners as you could and put 'em up on that wall and try and drink them before the police came in at twenty past six and cleared you out. The police gave twenty six minutes' grace to get out, drink your drinks and get outta the place.

They were times that a lot of people would never realise what happened.

Well let's talk about that. That's very interesting. In the end of your life the problems that had

started in the war started to get worse or?

Yes ye - . The eyesight started to go and other parts of the health started to go, too. Not realising that, and well, nobody realised

36:00 in those days that when I was ten years old, I had rheumatic fever and I was in hospital for three months out at the what do they call it? The infectious ward out at the coast in Sydney and rheumatic fever effects your heart and effects lots of things and this is why I have all the trouble now. I've had three open heart surgeries. I've got about half a dozen spare parts in my body. I've got a pacemaker and I

36:30 suffer a lot now with gout through all that sort of stuff. Uric acid's all a build up through all this, all that stuff but I would say that for the whole of my working life I would have at least one day a week off with illness. Not because of just havin' a sickie but actually ill and it was found that we should never have been in the services, particularly in the engineers because it was all heavy work.

Tape 2

00:30 **Come back a little later on. What we're going to do now is just go back over your life in a bit more detail.**

In

Go back to the prior

Pre

Very beginning.

The very beginning of the war.

No, the very beginning of your life. Way back before the war.

Way back. Well -

You mentioned in Glebe you

The razor gangs?

Your father ran a grocery shop? Do you have many memories of that time?

The only memories I have of is of the razor things with all these, the people they had and the drunks that they

01:00 had down there in those days. Now it's an in suburb but it was a very tough suburb, 'cause my Dad, he was the youngest of the family that came out here. He was only ten when he came out from Italy, and he went to Fort Street Boys' School, you know, which was a pretty tough school too in those days and living in that area of Glebe, well

Can you tell us a little bit about your family heritage? You mentioned to me off camera about how long

01:30 **your family has been in Australia. Can you tell that to us?**

Well my father is on the computer. As you probably know there's a family web page on the computer. It deals with a lot of the people and the old people and our children came into the era where they could go overseas because they had the aeroplanes and there were trips and all that for the young ones but we have, a lot of us haven't been back to the country of where our

02:00 parents were born, but our children have, and they've gone looking for our heritage and there are streets and canals named after my people over in Naples. - it's on the internet but it's in the family genealogy stuff. It's not on general stuff.

When did that family come out to Australia?

It was 1885,

02:30 I think it was. 1885. They, when they came out, I think they came out on the big windjammers. They came out the original family and then my father went back because in those days they had, as they have now, pre-nuptial marriages and all that sorta thing or a arrangements. There was a wife picked out for him when he was a child and he went back

03:00 to marry her when he was twenty four. Because they weren't allowed to be adults until they were twenty four, as we had the twenty one, he went back when he was twenty four and - they married over there and their honeymoon was on the way over from Italy back to Australia. The ship that he came back on was a steam ship and a sail ship. When they had the winds, they came with the winds. When

they didn't, they

03:30 came with the steam. - and that was about 1919. 19? It was after World War I when he went back.

And when you were growing up, were you part of a strong Italian community in Sydney?

No, no. No, we wouldn't let our parents - as we got old enough we wouldn't let our parents, this is why

04:00 we lost the ability to speak the Italian and all the rest of it. We could understand our mother but we couldn't return the speech to her. We couldn't talk back to her in Italian. Never to Dad, never spoke with him in Italian, but mother was the one that spoke to us in Italian all the time. As I say they were very well known in Naples where they were, because they had the vineyards and the orchards and all that sort of thing. They had

04:30 canals and streets and areas named after them. The Macinan still there today because these young ones have told us they've seen them and my mother is part of the Monaco family, of the Grimaldi family from Monaco. With Princess Grace and Prince Albert and all the rest of them. She belonged to that family and we were always told you know “Keep your head up high, you come from princes” and all that sort of stuff but it doesn't

05:00 cut any ice with us here in Australia.

What do you mean by that? Then you don't feel much?

Well they don't know. We’ve tried to make overtures to the people over there and even from the Macinante side there are bands over there. - the what do you call them? The people who run the bands. It's a Macinante band. The Macinante band, they're on the internet too, and they're the pop bands. Macinante pop

05:30 bands, but in Monaco they're the very busy, very rich people. They run airlines and they run bloody shipping lines and God knows what. They're doctors. I've looked them up on the internet. They're doctors and they're opera stars and you name it, they're there and people in Australia, well we're nothing really. The

So, for most of your life growing up your mother spoke Italian?

Yes. Ye - .

Just Italian?

No. No, she became quite adept at Australian because we refused

06:00 to speak back to them in Italian and she had to learn to speak Australian back too because of the neighbours also. She couldn't speak to the neighbours unless she spoke Australian 'round about her and she became a very sick woman too. She had three strokes before she died, all of them whilst I was overseas as a matter of fact, in the services. I didn't know my mother from the time I went away and when I was seventeen. Didn't know her at all because she was dead

06:30 when I came home. Father, I knew him for quite awhile afterwards because he lived until he was seventy nine. He finished up with cancer of the bowels, same as I did. I've got cancer of the bowels. Same thing, but they've been treating me for that. So it was a hereditary thing.

So how did your parents get on in Sydney at the time when your mother spoke Italian and your father

07:00 **obviously came from Italy? Did they get a lot of lot of prejudice and...?**

No, no, because the children were used as interpreters. We were used as the interpreters and this is why we used to insist that they speak English eventually. But Dad spoke English because he went to Fort Street School. He was quite okay in business all the rest of it, and the other uncles - they all had - one two three, there was about four of them, had barber

07:30 shops. They had barber shops in Sydney and they all spoke very fluent, because well, they had to, too. First of all, I mean a lot of it broken English and all that. I remember when we were kids, but when we were kids the children had to be seen and not heard sort of thing, but most of us, there was seven of us, all called Salvatore Macinante. All in the services.

08:00 All used to get each other's mail at odd times because they didn't have the good postal service for the servicemen in those days. One day you'd be a captain, next day you'd be a sap, the next day you'd be a corporal and next mail, whatever. It was rather confusing. It was a bit of a joke at times in the services, but seven of us all in the services. Not all in the army. There was navy, air force and army.

Were you close to your extended family growing up?

Oh yes. We were all

08:30 like brothers and sisters, the whole lot.

And what did you do together?

Oh all sorts of things. The most of us all lived fairly close to each other too in those days, but the family's spread out over the whole of Australia now. Queensland, Melbourne, everywhere, but no, we all lived fairly close. Within, I'd say, from suburb to suburb sort of thing, or even in the same suburb but never any more than

09:00 about five miles - say about seven or ten kilometres. Ten kilometres at the most.

Um…

Away from each other.

What kind of things did you do?

Oh we played tennis. We played football. We played, we swam. I was a life saver at Coogee Beach in those days. Other cousins were life savers. Tennis, cricket, football, all the usual games and that. Even in the

09:30 kids games at parties and that, it was always big parties. Family parties for children and the parents, even in those days, used to make their own grog and we used to love to go and see them when they visited each other. They'd be opening these bottles of grog with the bottle between their legs and take the top off and the stuff'd shoot out because they didn't know how to make it properly. There was too much gas in it.

Did…

But

Did you celebrate the

10:00 **Roman Catholic holidays and…?**

Oh yes, ye - . They were all very… the mothers were very strict upon that. We had to go to church and when we were living at Randwick, we were at what they called North Randwick, and the nearest church to us was about five miles away. We had to walk there. There was no trams or trains or buses or cars to take you there. You had to walk there in time for mass and walk home.

10:30 Ye - so we

What do you remember about those times you had to go to mass?

Mostly, I would remember that we had to walk there bare footed because we couldn't afford shoes and it was rather hard on the feet, walking five miles in the streets of Randwick. From one end of Randwick to the other end. Was near enough to Coogee. Ye - . That was the worst thing,

11:00 just walking there and walking home bare footed, 'cause most of, a lot of people didn't have shoes in those days. It was – this is still the Depression years that I'm talking about. The big Depression as they call it.

Just go back a bit to when you were in Bowral, do you have many memories of that time?

Oh yes.

Can you tell me a bit about Bowral in those days?

Same thing in Bowral. That's where I first started school and the school

11:30 down there was, one teacher had three classes. He was also the cub master and he was also the scout master and his wife worked there too and she was the girl guides girl, and they what I forget what the… Brownies was the young girls. There was only two teachers in the whole school and once again, winter time. Go to school walking bare footed in the snow and then Dad would…

12:00 he'd have a rifle and a shot gun. He used to go out in the mountains shooting rabbits of a morning and I was the retriever dog. I'd have to go and pick them up out of the bushes, put them in a chaff bag hanging on the side, carry them home and then go to school after that and he'd take the pelts off them and he'd make us sort of moccasins out of that, so we wouldn't have the cold feet going to school in the

12:30 snow afterwards. Then of a night time, in the snow time, we'd sit around this fuel stove in the kitchen with a board between all of our laps and a blanket over it and we'd play these Italian card games and things like that.

Did you have much family in Bowral at that stage or was it?

No, there was only us then. There was only the immediate family.

13:00 **And were you the only Italian family in Bowral?**

No. There were others down there. There was another fruit shop. There was a fruit shop, because this is a restaurant that Dad had, or restaurant cum night club. It's still there as a matter of fact and it's called

the Railway Café. I've been down to have a look at it. Even the house that we lived in. The first time it ever snowed, we got a hiding that night, because we were all in the one bedroom as kids.

13:30 We got a hiding because we were thought to be jumping up and down on our beds, but in the morning we looked out the window and yelled out to our parents “Look at the thick frost" and it was snow and all the drifts of the snow coming off the side of the house was making the house rumble and shake and they thought that we were jumping in our beds.

Was it common for the Italian families to run fruit shops and restaurants?

Mostly the Italians, yes.

14:00 In those days the Italians ran the fruit shops and some restaurants, the Greeks mostly ran the restaurants and the fish shops and the Chinese had their Chinese restaurants, which are entirely different to what they are today. Today they're high class. The Chinese restaurants in those days were… aaargh they were yuck.

And how did that multicultural… the different cultures in that sort of area mix with the white Australian

14:30 **population?**

Wonderfully. Always the whole of the multicultural mix in those days and now is entirely different.

Can you explain a bit about what you mean by that?

The multicultural business in those days were much friendlier and accepted between each culture than they are today. There was no backstabbing and all that sort of thing. It was all very friendly.

15:00 Nowadays, it's entirely different because you've got all this Muslim business. The Muslim thing unfortunately has created more strife in the whole of the world than any other any other type of religious set up. I even saw it. I went to Sri Lanka in 1983. Went over there to do a semi-government job to teach the fishermen to use refrigeration on their fishing boats and this again shows you how idiotic some of our

15:30 politicians are. Fancy, can you imagine trying to get a refrigerator put onto an ordinary putt-putt thing that you go out on the water to do social fishing? And this is what the government were trying to do with the fishermen over there because there was about five hundred children a month dying of dysentery and all that sort of thing, because of their poor hygiene from the way they caught their fish and sold their fish. But

16:00 the people that… I went over on a prawn trawler that used to be up in the Gulf of Carpentaria, right up north. We got it down in Melbourne and did alterations to it, to turn it into a boat that was supposed to catch sashimi, the blue fin tuna over the other side for the Japanese market. Because the

16:30 people that I was involved with at that particular time, they control all the stainless steel in Australia. They had a lot of black money that they didn't want the taxation people to know about so they spent a lot of money on boats and forming this company. The proposition went to the government because the government were giving a lot of money to Sri Lanka and, as they've done now, to a lot of the downtrodden nations

17:00 and they supplied or they paid for most of the fuel that we used. At that particular time we were getting diesel fuel for the boats at three cents a litre and you can imagine? One of those boats has three tanks with about five or six thousand litres in each tank.

Just to clarify, about what period was this the…?

This was 1983.

This is after the stuff we talked about before?

Oh ye - , this was 1983 when

Mm.

I went over there. I was retired at that

Oh okay.

At this time

17:30 and friends of mine were a social circle we got into because of other work that I used to do before. They knew that I was pretty good with boats and pretty good with engineering and all that sort of stuff and because of my age now, I said “I wouldn't take the responsibility of chief engineer” but I was second engineer in the company on this prawn trawler that went over to Sri Lanka that they purchased down in Melbourne.

18:00 And then we brought it to Sydney. We worked on it in Sydney to change it as we found out from the fisheries department in Sydney what was required on it, then we changed things there, then we took it

up to Townsville. Then from Townsville, we did some more work on it. From Townsville we took it to Darwin, did some more work on it and - because of things that had happened in Sydney Harbour where we wouldn't let the wharfies touch the boat and they were going to bung on a big strike here in Sydney,

18:30 we had to get the boat out of Sydney a minute after midnight 'cause none of the fishermen will take their boat out of a Friday night. It has to be after midnight, so we took it out a minute after midnight. We had to clear Sydney Harbour and by the time we got to Darwin the prejudice had caught up with us and the people who had to fuel us to go across the Arafura Sea to Sri Lanka

19:00 put water in our tanks. When we got out in the Arafura Sea we started to break down because the fuel wasn't getting through and we had to use all the toilet rolls we had on board. We had to put them in all the filters, every one, and as they'd fill up with oil, you'd have to get rid of them, throw them overboard. Very interesting. It was a very interesting…

Sounds like the

So I've had an interesting life.

It sounds like you

So Sri Lanka

had a range

19:30 **of experience?**

Sri Lanka was very good too. When we got over there, the bosses of the crowd they were - there was one, he was the director of the company. He was in charge of the financial side and the skipper was a young bloke who thought he knew that his poo didn't stink and first of all we had to leave Australia with what they call a local skipper and an international skipper. So we had an Australian skipper and we had an international skipper,

20:00 who was an English skipper they brought out from England. When we got over to Sri Lanka, those two were elderly skippers and they wanted to get back to Australia or England, wherever they came from, so we got a skipper from over there who was a floating skipper, who was over there getting onto any of the yachts that came down from the Riverina and all that sort of thing. They finished up in gaol anyway afterwards but the, oh,

20:30 I was going to tell you about that.

We might come back to that. We'll get things a bit more in order, so as we don't get too confused. I'm going back to your childhood again

Mm.

Can you tell me a bit more about your father's restaurant-cum-nightclub?

I don't remember much about that, except the people that we used to laugh at of a night time. Watch the people when they were full of grog where they'd be dancing and they'd fall into the pond or the pool. That's always

21:00 in the memory that one. And then the business of catching the rabbits.

Did he use the rabbits in the restaurant or were they just for your own table?

Oh they were just for our own table, because the people who were the clientele of the restaurant were the young children. When I say young children, they were the youngsters of the farmers and David Jones and all that, like the young Kerry Packer's sons and that playing.

21:30 They were all the playboys and that was the nearest place from Sydney where they weren't ostracised by the publicity hounds and they used to go down there and play up. But the Depression hit them too, their parents and they had to pull out and the place went broke and this is how Dad and the other bloke Hillier had to break up.

Did you stay in Bowral when the restaurant went broke?

22:00 We were still down there for a few years. I'd say, no, it wasn't a few years. Be about a year and that's when we came back to Sydney. And when was this? That was before the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened, because we walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge when it opened. I was almost trampled by De Groot's horse when he cut the ribbon

22:30 with his sword. '32… I think it was '32 when the bridge opened.

March '32, yes.

Yes, I think it was '32. We came back from Bowral prior to that. It was about late '31 when we came back. Because my birthday's March. It was prior to that and the night that we came back, we never forget, was a hell of a stormy night with lightning and rain and god knows what and all I can remember

from that

23:00 is we were in a tram up near the lighthouse up top and then we went down to Watsons Bay. We were living at Watsons Bay. They had a shop there. One of his brothers had a shop there, and he went into the shop with his brother there at Watsons Bay.

23:30 One of the other uncles, he had a barber shop at Rose Bay.

Do you remember how the fruit shop worked? Where did you have to

Oh well

go to markets and stuff?

No I didn't, I was too young in those days. I didn't go to market. They did. I did market business after this part time, when I was working for the Firestone Rubber Company. I'd go down

24:00 to the markets. I'd work, do the end night shift, go down to Sydney Markets and pull those barrows of fruit and vegetables to the big trucks. Coles - even Coles we did, supplying Coles.

Did your father stay in the fruit shop business?

No.

When you came back to Sydney?

No.

What did he do after that?

No, he went into the government printing office. He worked at the government printing office for the rest of his days, until he passed away.

24:30 Oh he was there many a… down in Harris Street. He was down there many years. Yes.

Did your family's financial situation improve? Can you tell me a bit about?

Not really.

About the hardships you suffered in Sydney? You mentioned not wearing shoes. What other things did you…?

No, they never improved again, because at the particular time, before all this business started with the restaurant-cum night

25:00 club down at Bowral, we - the family - they had so much money that we had our own personal servants. I know as kids we had our own nursemaids and things like that 'cause after we came back from Bowral and I got older, I used to go down and see our old nursemaid who lived down at Wollongong. Florrie. Florrie was her name, but um

25:30 no, as I say it's there but chronologically

Yes - oh you pull bits out of it.

Yes.

Can you tell me about your school life? What memories do you have of school life?

School life? Oh most of the time when we came back from when we were living down at Watsons Bay, we were living in a place very similar to this with a backyard. It was alongside the

26:00 school and we had a gate in the backyard where we could go through this gate to school and it had caves in there and there used to be goannas in the cave and we used to steal potatoes and onions out of Mum's larder and go and have a fire and cook these -how's that?

That's the only one…

You were saying your school had caves…?

Yes, there were caves down there where we lived. At the time there was sort of

26:30 a rather hilly area. It was below - I know that we could look up and the North Head lighthouse was right above, way above us. These caves had these goannas in it and they were big, too. We used to be scared hell out of them. That was part of the being kids and being daring, where we would go into these caves to light the fires and cook these bloody potatoes and onions in the embers of the fire and thought it

27:00 was great fun. That's all I remember about those school days there.

What about later on? Where did you go to school in Sydney?

From there - later on we went to - it was Carlton. Went up to Carlton Public School. Don't remember a

great deal about that now. Then from Carlton School,

27:30 we moved around a fair bit. The family moved around. From Carlton we went to Hurstville. I was being groomed to go to Hurstville Tech [Technical College], and from Hurstville we moved down to Randwick and I went to Randwick Public School and this grooming to go to tech was forgotten

28:00 and I went for what was called the QC [qualifying certificate] in those days, which is the when you finish 6th class. I don't know what they call it here now. The school certificate. Might be the school certificate. I had registered my name to go to Randwick High School, just to do clerical work and bookkeeping and stuff like that, but my marks were so high that the Education Department said “It was a pity for me to do that sort of work”, when with the aptitude tests and that that they'd given us

28:30 in those days, I would go into engineering, and they gave me a pass to go to Sydney Tech High, which was the second highest school in the public system. The highest one at the time was Sydney High School itself at Moore Park and Sydney Tech High was on the other side of Moore Park towards Paddington. I went there and became quite adept at German. I learnt German because then they'd decided

29:00 that I was going to become an engineer and all the engineering books in those days were in German because the Germans were classified as well before World War II.

Were you a naturally bright student or did you have to study hard?

No, I didn't. It came normal. In fact it was so normal that I used to get quite cranky at the tea… The German teacher used to make me the one that would get up in class and

29:30 do the interpreting because, well, I had the Italian in me too in those days. Even though we didn't speak it at home, it was there. The knowledge was there and I picked up the German very quickly. So quickly in fact that when I was in the services they wanted me for the ma… When I was telling you about the ones that they sent took from our unit to go over to the replacements for the ones over in the Middle East, they wanted me. They wanted to pick me to go over as -

30:00 interpreting the Italian and German prisoners that they were getting in those days and I said "No, I wasn't going to be a bloody spy" sort of thing.

What about sports at school? Did you play any sports at school?

Oh yes. I was in the swimming teams and the cricket. I could never do the football because they didn't realise at the time that the rheumatic fever had affected my breathing and all that sort of thing and my

30:30 ability to go for a long time running. Swimming was alright because it was a lung thing. It had nothing to do with the strength of your muscles and things like that but later on as I got older too, when I left school, I did a lot of physical training and one of my mother's cousins was Vic Patrick. Vic Patrick used to teach us to do physical stuff, fighting and what looking after.

31:00 Don't know if you knew, know of Vic Patrick.

I don't. People listening to that might.

He was an Australian champion. Vic Patrick. Lightweight. He was a lightweight champion and he was beaten in the war years, or straight after the war years by the American negroes they brought out here and he fought - he had to fight out of his division.

Was he Italian descent?

Same as me.

Ye - .

Ye - same as me. Born

31:30 here.

Were the Italians known as good fighters?

Not really, no. Not in that respect. Oh they had Primo Carnera. They had had quite a few, they had their fair share of them but they were migrants to American of Italian descent but not from Italy itself. I they were mostly singers, opera singers, and all that sort of thing.

What about?

Still are.

What about the migrant population in

32:00 **Sydney? Was it a rough group of people at all? Were they…?**

No. No they were, you'd say towards the refined. Very refined type of people. They weren't just ordinary rabble sort of thing that came out here 'cause in those days also they weren't assisted. They had to pay

their own way. There was none of this ten pound trip or twenty pound trip like the English had after the war. They had to

32:30 pay their own way and they had to have a certain amount of education. They had to pass. This is why my family were brought out. Because of the languages that they all spoke.

Do you think the same goes for the Greek population and the Chinese?

In those days yes, but the Chi- no, in those days the Chinese were assisted passage because they worked on the railways. They were cheap labour on all the railways, particularly the

33:00 railways over in West Australia, South Australia and out to Alice Springs.

Did all the moving around you did as a child have any effect on your ability to make friends?

No, no.

Did you make lots of friends?

You made your friends at school.

Tell us about some of your friends that you made at school?

Well at Randwick School and at Sydney Tech High,

33:30 they were the other migrant children that all became friends together because there was that attitude of the Australian, even though he was so proud to say “He came from convicts, that all the other people were dagos, whether you were German, French, Italian or Greek or what, you were a dago” and there was that attitude in those days. Not now. It isn't there now.

34:00 **So what did that mean for you as a group of migrant children?**

Well we sort of stuck together for protection for each other because we had a lot of fights because of that sort of thing. You get a lot of bullies would attack you. There was a lot of that but I think this is possibly what helped a lot of the Aussie fighters come up, because of that sort of thing. Well you got the bloke you got today who's the champion 'cause Koos Koosta [Kostya Tszyu] or whatever his name is, he's copped that and

34:30 that what made him the fighter he is today.

Did you personally get into many fights?

Yes. As a matter of fact I used to stand up for the others that wouldn't fight particularly. I had a very good Jewish friend. He and I grew up together when I when we moved to Randwick and we went to school together.

35:00 His mother and my mother became great friends. - I'd go to his place because I liked the Jewish food and he'd come to my place because he liked the Italian food. And as I say, the two mothers became very good friends and after the war his father was an auctioneer and we both used to do freelancing work for the father and we made our bits and pieces

35:30 at the auctions through the father

Can

And

you tell us about those occasions you used to stick up for him?

Well he'd be called - he had a car first of all. He had a model T Ford I think it was in those days, which was a very crappy old car but all the others used to get into his car, just hop into his car and say, "Righto Brownie

36:00 take us here, take us there" and he'd let them do it. No petrol, even though petrol was only six pence, five cents a gallon, not a litre in those days, and they wouldn't put any petrol in his car and then they'd quite often make him drive to places where he used up all his petrol then get out and leave him and he didn't have any petrol and gradually he'd ask me to go with him and I'd go with him and I'd stop them from doing this sort of thing. They'd try

36:30 and get a bit funny and I'd start to use my fists and they knew then that you didn't interfere with Brownie and Mac. But he died after the war and strangely enough he was in the artillery. And the artillery was always very close to the engineers when they were in their camps and he was a Don R on the motor bikes and every time

37:00 that he came anywhere near our camp, all the chaps in the camp used to say "Here comes Mac's mate. Lock up the cookhouse" because he had a very, very big appetite and he'd eat anything. But he died. He had encephalitis when he was a kid and he was told at that particular time that by the time he was forty, he'd be dead and also he would

37:30 also be a real crook type of a person, a con man. He never became a con man but he was dead by the time he was forty two. He died on the toilet. I had to go and identify him in Sydney Hospital when it happened.

Horrible experience. Can you tell me a bit more about when you were growing up? You mentioned that you got a lot of name calling from the other Australian children?

Mm.

How did that make

38:00 **you feel about being Australian?**

It didn't interfere with any way of not feeling Australian. It was very hurtful and I know these are times when we were much younger that we'd go home from school howling our heads out and Mum'd say, "Oh," cuddle you and say "Don't worry. They don't realise but always remember that you come from a family from princes." We never knew in those days what she was talking about but she was

38:30 talking about the Monaco family that she came from.

Do you think this name calling at school had anything to do with you not wanting to speak Italian to your mother?

No. No. No.

Why was that?

The reason that we wanted them to assimilate with the others. To be able to speak when we weren't around. We had the fear that they would be in positions where we couldn't interpret for them, they went shopping or had to do any banking or anything like that and we weren't there to do the thing for them and it still goes on today.

39:00 lot of the children of new migrants that come out here today will tell you the same thing. That they have to be the interpreters for their parents until their parents learn but they retain the fact that they could talk to their parents in their own tongue, but we didn't. We wouldn't. Not in those days. It was too hurtful, whereas now it isn't. It's accepted. We were (UNCLEAR). I think they've grown up to

39:30 that extent.

Did you feel Italian or Australian?

Always Australian. Always. Otherwise, I wouldn't have gone into the services and even today a lot'a friends that I have left out of my unit, and there's only about fifteen of us left now out of three hundred-odd because we've all had very great sicknesses and - we're all into our eighties. Some of them are older than them, much older than me. Some are in their nineties.

40:00 But no, never had any other feeling. In I'm quite fierce about the Australian nationality and I don't like a lot of the things that I see and I have a reputation for being that way. "Don't talk against Mac and the flag" and all this sort of thing and I'm all for republicanism.

40:30 I don't like what we're having now in this country of ours. I think it's being ruined by the politicians. Politicians are there for their own gratification. They're not here for the benefit of the country. Whole lot of them.

Tape 3

00:30 **(UNCLEAR) God Save the Queen?**

Always. No, the King. "God Save the King" in my day. Every morning. Every Monday morning. None of this goes on now. It's disgusting. We used to have parade. You paraded outside first of all in the quadrangle. Roll were called outside then you did "God Save the King", then you marched in to your rooms.

01:00 Every Monday morning. None of that now. There's no - what shall I say? What do you call it? Patriotism. There's no patriotism in this country. It's gone and it all happened after or during Vietnam. The patriotism vanished in Vietnam because of what they did to the troops in those days. The people of this country, and the government

01:30 doesn't realise the damage that they do when they damage veterans.

Did that singing of the national anthem make you patriotic or was it just something you sung as kids at the time?

Oh no, it was something that you were proud to do. "I honour the flag" and all that sort of business and sing "God Save the King". As I say, we did "God Save the King" and even there was the other thing that they used to

02:00 have was - I forget the date of it now. It was Empire Day. That was for the Queen and the King and England but “God Save the King” was for Australia and the King and England.

On Empire Day. Did you

Empire Day was

participate in that?

Cracker day. That was when we had they had Guy Fawkes Day over in England, right? We had cracker day here. It was Empire Day and I forget the date of it but that was when you had all the big fireworks and that. Everybody. As kids we'd be working all year in

02:30 any paddock and that, to build up the big bonfire where all the families'd get around and have a sort of a big barbecue and picnic thing and let off the crackers on cracker night.

How did your the Italian community become involved in that?

They loved it because it was part of what they used to do over in their own country too. That sort of thing. The patriotism in their country and it, not now. They don't have that now because all this

03:00 communism and that came in and interfered with all that, but they didn't have it in the days when they were over there, when they came out and in the migrants of that time, not the migrants of now. Migrants of now are different to the migrants of pre-World War II. Or no sorry, straight after pre World War II the migrants were entirely different to the migrants that have come out since well, I've got to say, Korea.

03:30 Start from Korea.

Can you remember anything of the Italian national anthem?

No. No.

Can you describe how the family talked to you about your Italian heritage?

No. The only thing that they would talk about that we'd hear them talk about - I think it was counties that I've seen since, I've looked up on the family tree and stuff

04:00 were the… funny names. They had funny, or we thought they were funny, names. Pontacanyan, Pointacanyana, and things like that. We didn't know what they meant but I've seen them since. I've looked up on the net with all this other business of the family but no, they only amongst themselves. The funny thing and strangely enough it was funny things that they used to talk about. What they remember

04:30 of their life in Italy. We'd hear them talking and laughing and that, but not understand what it was all about. We never understood because, as I say, in those days, children were seen and children could not be heard. We had to get out of the room or go somewhere else.

Do you think your attraction to Australia was in part a reaction to your Italian heritage? To become

05:00 **different from your parents?**

No. I think it was just because of what we were taught at school in those days. We were taught a reasonable amount of patriotism.

Do you think you can teach patriotism?

Yes. Yes.

Isn't patriotism something that might be earned?

No. No. You can teach it from the children in the beginning and then as my mother used to say, when you get older then you can decide

05:30 **Is that what you?**

For yourself.

Is that how your parents brought you up?

That's right. We were taught their values and then they would say when we'd say "But why are we got to learn this? Why are we got to do that? Why have I got to go to church every Sunday? I don't want to go all that way to church." “You'll go to church now to learn about god. You'll learn about values. When you get old enough to think for yourself then you will be allowed to decide," and that's how our people taught us.

How long did you have to go

06:00 **to church when you were made at that time?**

Right up to the time I went in the services. Then I started to buck. I used to cop KP [Kitchen Patrol] duties in the kitchen, peeling spuds and all that, because I'd refuse to go to church with a bayonet on and I'd say, "You don't go and see God with a bayonet on. You don't go and see God or talk to God with a rifle on your shoulder," because we still hadn't learnt at that time that it was a different

06:30 thing. You went there just in case there was a fight or something and you had to be prepared. It wasn't because you were going with a bayonet on or a gun over your shoulder, because we'd be doing patrols and that and you'd be scared outta your wits at every noise in the jungle. You'd say "Oh God, I hope it's not a Jap. Oh God, I hope it's not a-"

You did, you were going to church on a regular basis in Sydney at the time?

Yes. Ye - . Every Sunday we went to church. Every Sunday. Not only

07:00 me, but the whole lot of us. Then my two sisters and friends and that. We'd all have to go to the same church.

Do you remember the priest from that time?

Ye - . I don't remember his name but I know he was an, he was a funny Irishman. He used to be full of jokes, Irish jokes, and he used to make us laugh.

Do you remember any of his sermons?

- yes ye - most of his sermons. There was this honour your moth - honour your parents, be truthful and all that sort of thing like the commandments.

07:30 Always. That type of thing but as we got older they - this is while we were young, and as we got older, their sermons started to change because the - the music started to change, jitter bugging and all that started to come in and the priest used to talk against that sort of thing. That it was against God's way of dancing and singing.

Were they ever political, the sermons?

No. Never. We

08:00 never copped any politics from any, not in those days. Not in those days. Copped it afterwards. One of my very dear friends, he was an English Minister in the High Church of England and he was a gay person but we didn't take that against him because that was his way of life. We didn't consider him different to us except that he was gay and he had all the funny things and that but he was the type of person when he'd come to

08:30 our house to visit me, my father used to meet him at the door and say, "Colin, take your back-to-front collar off before you come in this house" and Colin would laugh at him, say, “Alright, Mr Mac" and he'd take it off and put it in his pocket and he'd come and visit but - there was nothing I mean, I don't know whether Dad did that as a real gesture against he, Colin, for his gayness or he because he was a minister. At that particular time he was

09:00 learning. He was going to the what do they call it? The - not a seminary, not a monastery. He was going somewhere to learn to be a minister. He finished up as one of the chief Church of England Ministers down at Wangaratta in Victoria. He must, oh god, he'd be in his nineties now at least. If he's still alive, I don't know.

All school kids joke

09:30 **about these sort of things. Were you aware of homosexuality at the time?**

In those days, no. Not the true sense of it is now as we've got older. We just knew that he was different but it didn't worry us because he was a friend that we grew up with

Mm.

And he, we'd all remember that he was like that even when we were little kids, that he was that type of person.

Would you say that the church was a was a big influence on your life

10:00 **as you grew up through adolescence?**

No, not a big influence, but it was an influence. I remember even at going into Port Moresby harbour we were being strafed by the Japanese and we were lined up all along the side of the boat on the, getting ready to go down the gangplank and I had ducked seeing the padre all the time

10:30 and they finally had me trapped with him and he's givin' me the, "Watch yourself and do this" sort of thing and as we're being strafed and trying to get off this boat and I'm actually wishing him to hell and in the end I said, “Oh for God's sake father, leave me alone" and he said, "For God's sake, I will leave you alone." I'll never forget that.

Um who would you say, apart from your family, was a major influence on

11:00 **your life at that time, around adolescence?**

Who was a great? Me two cousins. No particularly one cousin's family, the whole lot. There would be the eldest son, the second eldest son and the eldest daughter. The eldest daughter was, she was much older than us, she'd be in her nineties now.

11:30 She's still alive and she was a lady author, an authoress. And she used to write for the Sydney Morning Herald. Her brother, the next one in line, her brother he became a nuclear physicist and he worked with Professor Messell.

How did they influence your life at that time?

Because they were my what we considered very brainy and educated people and we wanted to emulate them

12:00 and the other brother, the eldest one of that family, he became the headmaster of Wollongong Tech. He's dead now.

What sort of advice did they give to you?

Learn. Learn. Learn. Learn. Always. Learn. Look for answers. All the whole, the three of them. Always. I used to go and visit this, the nuclear physic cousin of mine. He - when he

12:30 was at Sydney University.

When you were growing up at that time?

No, this is after the war. After the war even.

I'm more interested in before the war.

Oh well before the war I'd go and see him. He was still at the university growing when he was doing all the research work with Professor Messell and I'd go to the university at - Broadway I think, yes. Sydney University I'd go, and I'd go to try and see him and it was impossible to get in to see them because they were doing all this nuclear stuff and as soon as I say,

13:00 they'd say, “Who are you?" I'd say, "I'm Salvatore Macinante." "Salvatore Macinante. You can't be. You're not old enough," because the older one who was the headmaster and who was the brother of this one, he was down at Wollongong and eventually Joe'd come out and they'd say, "Oh ye - he's my cousin. Let him in," and I'd go in and see, watch what they were doing. Not understanding anything that they were doing and Joe'd be trying to explain the formulas and all this sort of thing and even on the blackboard in the room and I'd say, "Joe, I don't understand

13:30 it" and he'd say, "Learn. Learn." Always remember. His brother'd say the same thing down at Wollongong and the sister, well she his sister Ann, she was the authoress. She was a different kettle of fish. She'd say, “Now, I've written these beautiful words." She'd do poetry and stories for the Sydney Morning Herald. They haven't got, we never thought in those days to keep any of their stuff you know.

Were you a reader? What books were you reading?

Oh always. I

14:00 always read historical books.

What time? What was your earliest book that you remember reading?

The earliest book that I remember reading would have been Horatio Hornblower. Horatio Hornblower, ye - and if the even if the movie came on now I'd I wouldn't miss it, even though I've probably seen it a hundred times.

But you read the - it was the book you read?

That was the first book that I remember reading.

How did that influence you?

14:30 Well it was an adventure, adventurous book. Look I've always been an adventurous type. Always been and I remember even one time I read - oh Gone With the Wind. I was in hospital. I read Gone With the Wind in one day and night. The whole of that book and that was a lot of pages and that because that was all the adventure stuff of American history.

15:00 Ye - .

Were you aware at the time of growing political unrest and tensions in Europe when you were growing up

No.

in the mid 30s?

No, we didn't realise that until... hmm no, I must – no, it goes back a bit earlier than that. My father at one time he was influenced when Mussolini, he wasn't influenced, he was written letters from

15:30 Italy because they had records of their migrants that came out here. He was written letters from - at the time of Mussolini when Mussolini was doing the big highways, he was building the big highways in Europe, the - I forget what you call them but he was building

(UNCLEAR)

These big highways and they were looking for - young people to join their forces before they were getting ready to go into Abyssinia and those

16:00 places. And he had written over and or they had written over and told my father that they knew that he had a son and that they wanted me to join the black shirts and the black shirts was like - boy scouts or Hitler's group, the young what did they call them? The Hitler's Youth brigade. Well Mussolini had his black shirts. I said, “I don't want to belong to any bloody black shirts."

16:30 **How did your dad explain to you about that at the time?**

Well he just asked me whether I wanted to join 'em because he put it down that it was very similar to the boy scouts.

So he was actually considering send you back to Italy to join?

Yes.

To (UNCLEAR) this?

Yes, because he had come under this influence because the Mafia was alive here in Australia.

So

The Mafia was alive here in Australia, and still is.

At the time your father was sympathetic towards Mussolini do you think?

17:00 No, he was just influenced because of the fam- there was still family over there that if they were afraid if they didn't do as they were asked, the family over there would get the backlash.

And do you remember that conversation with your father at the time?

Oh quite well. Yes, when he said that “He had been asked to nominate me for the Black Shirts in Italy, whether I'd like to go to Italy” and I, “No, I'm quite happy here"

17:30 and I forget - I about fourteen or something like that at that particular time.

How did you - he must have actively considered then what that meant, though did you at the time?

I don't know because at the time, as I say he come out here when he was ten, so he wouldn't have remembered a great deal of that sort of thing and I don't think in those days that Mussolini was in. It was King, it was a King I think.

18:00 I'm not sure.

Did you have much knowledge of what was going on in Italy at the time?

No.

The rise of fascism there?

No. As I say we were 'round about fourteen. Thirteen or fourteen when this occurred. I wouldn't have remembered.

You say that the Mafia was strong in the Italian community at the time? How did that influence your family?

Not us particularly but it affected cousins of mine who lived down

18:30 in the Griffith area. And the Mafia was in power down in the Griffith area because at that particular time they were, we'd been down there and seen it. They had

At the time you?

Yes at this time that I'm talking about.

And you were aware of that at the time?

We were – no, we weren't aware of the Mafia but we were aware that this cousin of mine had married one chap but we didn't know what he was. They're dead now, so I can talk 'em but they

19:00 had the grape or orchard or a vineyard or whatever you call it. And they used to grow the grapes for the wine producers in New South Wales and underneath the grape vines they used to grow onions. Now besides the onions, they had marijuana and the Mafia told them what they had to do and the Mafia used to connect, otherwise they wouldn't have known about the onions to -

19:30 that the sniffer dogs couldn't tell the marijuana was there because it was onions and when the grapes or before the grapes were harvested they'd go and get the marijuana. They weren't big bushes, but they'd be big enough to make money in those days and that's - I'm going back pre-war. Marijuana then.

At the time when you'd left school and you were moving around Sydney and started your apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship, ye - .

Were you associating with

20:00 **descendants of Italian families or?**

No. It was mostly my friend who was a German chap, that we knew at school. He was an Indian who became a doctor, Dr Sh - I forget what the Indian, the German chap's name was, but he was a rather, I remember he was brutal like the Germans and then there was this Jewish friend of mine.

So you really have mixed

20:30 **a fairly mixed group of people. - were you all as patriotic as you?**

Yes. All fiercely Australians. Very fiercely Australian because it was our country. We were kids here. We were born up here. Bred here.

But Australians at the time were under the Queen, the King.

Under King George V.

So you felt essentially British?

That's right. Not so much British but

21:00 Australian, for Australia. As far as we were concerned, always we have never had true love of the British Empire itself, but we had the love of Australia

What did?

and still have.

What did that mean to you at the time, love of Australia?

Well it was our country. It was our country and this is why when the war came with the Japs,

21:30 we went to the fight the Japs. Not to go to Egypt and those places. We only went to save Australia. World War II veterans were the ones that saved Australia. No other veteran has saved Australia.

You didn't realise that at the time though? You couldn't know what was happening?

Yes.

The

We knew. We knew.

war originally broke out in Europe

In '39.

Ye -

Broke out before that actually. The war in Europe started

22:00 before '39. It started about '35 when all this strife started over in

But you were you aware of the build up of towards that at the time?

No, no, no. No, we weren't aware of it until the news came over about Hitler going into Poland and marching on Poland and we were aware of the weakness of the British parliamentarians at the time in dealing with Hitler.

How did you hear of the news of the war

22:30 **specifically?**

It was a Sunday night when we first heard that war had broken out and we went racing around to get all the newspapers that the papers had brought out a special edition and we grabbed the newspapers that were selling for a penny and we were selling them for a pound and ten shillings, which was quite a

lot of money.

Why were you?

Prof- we were profiteering on the fact that the -

23:00 all the news of the war. You wouldn't, it's incredible. You- you'd have to be there at the time to know what was, we don't even know what was in our own minds but all we knew was there was a buck to be made sort of thing because the war had broken out. That was '39.

Who's we? When you say...

Oh friends and myself. We'd a heard it and we were playing outside 'cause where we lived at Randwick we had a huge footpath. It was, oh the grass

23:30 part of the footpath was as wide as this here, maybe a bit wider, then there was the concrete part of it you walked on and we'd be playing touch ball and all that sort of thing on the grass and we heard this news that the people, the news people from the newspaper shop came down the street with their parcels of paper and we'd grab the parcels of paper and go selling them and we knew that the big headlines, God you look up the archives of all

24:00 the newspapers and you see the size of the headlines that they had.

So you quickly

So

seized the opportunity?

That's right. There weren't many but we were, I suppose at the most in a bundle we got about fifty.

How much more did you sell them for above the recommended retail price?

Oh God. As I say they, at that time papers were only a penny each and we'd sell them for up to ten shillings. Sometimes as we got to the end they became a pound, which was equivalent now, because of our devaluation I

24:30 supp... well pound in those days was two hundred and twenty, two hundred and forty pence.

And on that day you were selling them for a pound?

Yes. Sunday, it was a Sunday night. Late Sunday night, yes. After dark. It was after dark when we were playing outside after our dinner at night before we went in to bed. Incredible. Incredible times.

Were you aware that you might be drawn into that conflict?

No, no. It was,

25:00 it's a sort of a- it was an adventurous thing for us to do. It was something naughty sort of thing you know. Selling the papers and-

But how about later? Did you actually pause to reflect that you would go on to join up, or did you think about joining up at that time?

No, no. No, nowhere near it. It was only through contact with my friend who was, the one was a captain and one was a lieutenant

25:30 out of the old school cadets and they were immediately commissioned. Now even they were under twenty one, but they were immediately commissioned into the war and this is why when I, we could see that they were going to the war we thought, “Why shouldn't we go too?"

Were you in the cadets by the way?

I wasn't in the cadets, I was too young. I was too young for the cadets at that time but these blokes were older than me. And

26:00 one, the lieutenant bloke after the war, he owned about half a dozen butcher shops and the captain became - he wanted to be a dentist but he had something wrong with one of his wrists, that every time he withdrew a tooth he'd break it off, so he became a dental mechanic as they called them then. They're prosthetists now and he became a wonderful dental mechanic. And when I came home from the

26:30 war, I had teeth where they'd taken teeth out without anaesthetic up in the islands because of toothache and they'd made false teeth and they were terrible. And the moment I came back from the war and he saw me and he said, “Go and sit in that chair" and he made me sit in the chair and he made me a new set of dentures that day.

Mm. Had you left school at this stage and were doing your apprenticeship, weren't you?

No. I was in doing my apprenticeship I was with a firm

27:00 at North Sydney. They were, first of all they were in Liverpool Street, Sydney and they were above at the old Sergeant's pie factory and the cracks in the floor were so wide that when we slept the floor upstairs the muck used to fall through into the open pies before they closed them.

Right. I'd be a little suspicious about those.

Oh that's true. It's true. It happened there with, they moved over to North Sydney

27:30 and I was over at in Little Walker Street. It was a place called Little Walker Street and it was off just off one'a the main streets in North Sydney in those days, was nothing. Nothing there but to walk from the station down Walk - no it wasn't Walker Street. Walker Street was the main hill that's there now. From the station up to Walker Street and then down into Little Walker Street, there was a theatre and right opposite the theatre was a lane way and that was called Little Walker

28:00 Street and they had this factory there, it's still there, and there was a phone box just past a hardware shop and one morning going to work, we were being held back by the police and we could hear shots being fired and they caught a criminal who was in the phone box and they were firing on him in the phone box. Don't know who, I don't remember

28:30 who it was.

That's a pretty tough town Sydney at the time?

I'll say it was. You've no idea. Sydney was a real, when I say I could go back to the cut throat gang days. Lot of people don't believe it. I don't, I haven't got the book here to show you. I've lent it.

At the time were you aware of the cut throat gangs?

No, we weren't aware that they were cut throat gangs, but we were aware that they were bad people

29:00 and they.

You avoided them?

We, that's right because they had this blasted thing sticking out of there. They had a special pocket with a, the big cut throat fitted into that pocket and you could see it sticking out and that's how that was their badge of honour sort of thing. There weren't too many people, they didn't have their throats cut but they got marked about, you know it's they got their faces cut and their necks cut but never, never cut the throats

29:30 right out to kill them but they were marked about.

You were in a prescribed profession, is that right or a protected profession when you were studying to be an engineer?

When I was, before I went to the war yes, I as part of my apprenticeship I was working for this firm. Em- Emco Machinery and Emco used to make refrigerators and things like that. They're no longer in existence now, but they were taken over by the Department of Air I think it was, the Department of the

30:00 War to do these variable pitch propellers for the Australian Boomerang plane. And being protected, we weren't to be called up or anything like that but all of our friends that were older than us had gone and we wanted to go to the war, too.

Were you actually in the propeller assembly line or?

No

What was your role?

I was operating a machine that cut the grooves for the variable pitches and the machine it was

30:30 the first time they'd seen anything on a lathe that used diamonds, industrial diamonds instead of the steel cutting tool and the industrial diamond cut very smoothly and they still use it today in automatic machinery.

So you were pretty handy on this lathe, were you?

I was in those days, yes. Well I could still use a lathe I suppose if I had to.

Did you know what the actual thing you were making was for or?

Oh yes. We were told

31:00 and we were shown because you had to maintain a certain amount of quality control and the quality control that they had were people from the government. They weren't just people from the factory, they were the government people that came to see that all this equipment that was being produced for the planes was up to scratch.

How long were you in that factory for?

I suppose I was there for about six months and the only way we could get out of it was by playing up.

31:30 To get sacked. You had to get sacked.

Is that what you did?

Yes. Coming in, oh supposedly drunk and/or late and all sorts of things. Any endevilment to do sorts of tricky things to not sabotage but play tricks on people and make their machines so they wouldn't start and all that sort of thing. You get warnings and after the third warning you were sacked.

Had you tried already to leave and to join the army

32:00 **or?**

Yes. I had tried, first of all I wanted navy because I've always loved the sea and I was told “No, I couldn't join the senior services in Australia because I was of enemy alien extraction”, which are the Italians at the time, but they told me, “You can join the army" and I thought that's, I started to get my back up.

Was there much prejudice against your family because you were Italians?

Oh yes.

At the time?

Yes at

32:30 the time, yes. I'll tell you a bit in a moment. So I went from the navy, I thought, oh well, I'll try the air force. Air force - the same thing. “No, you're of enemy extraction." I said, “Why?" “Because you can cause a lot of damage. You can do sabotage work in all both of these fields, but you can join the army." I said, “But in the army I can do the same sort of thing, can't I?" “No, you can't." So I thought, oh blow you, and then I started to think about it with my friends and that and I thought, no.

33:00 When I did join up and Hitler and Mussolini were getting very chummy, the government came to my people and I was in uniform at the time, I was in the militia, they came to my people and they took the valves out of their radios. I said, “What have you done that for?" They said, “Because you can contact the enemy with your radio with these valves" and I thought, that's bloody ridiculous!

That was to your

33:30 **parents' house?**

Yes, in my parents' home and I was living at home… Oh well, I was in the services but I'd come home on leave, and they took the valves out and they weren't allowed to have a telephone. Telephone was taken from them. So my father had a very good friend from World War II who was also a Victoria Cross winner.

Vic World War I, you…

World War I, sorry. From World War I and he was also a parliamentarian and he was in the

34:00 Hurstville area or Carlton, he was a parliamentarian. He lived at Carlton and his name was Bill Curry and his photo's there in all the archives. And I went and saw Bill Curry and I said, “What's going on here? I don't like this. I've joined up or I'm in the militia and I'm prepared to go to the AIF" and he said, “Well, we'll get everything changed over to your name." I said, "But I'm under age." He said, “Doesn't matter." He said, “You're a serviceman for

34:30 Australia." He said, “We'll get it all changed over. Everything in your parents' house is in your name", which he did as a parliamentarian and they got their valves back and they could listen to the radio and all the rest of it again.

What about people on the street? Did they?

Oh they thought it was bad but

But did they think that Italian

No.

people?

They knew Mum. My mother was a very popular person in the street.

But a lot of the Japanese people were, I think, taken into detention

35:00 Well that's different

At the time so the

Japs were a different set up because the Italians didn't want to be in the war anyway. As they later on became allies of the Br- oh, of the-

Well people weren't aware of that at the time though. Mussolini was

That's right

Mussolini

He was detested, that's right, but Mussolini had been apparently had been inveigled into joining, I don't know what.

Do you remember discussing this with- the situation in Italy with your father at the time?

I'd asked him “Why

35:30 he thought that he shouldn't have his valves taken and all the rest?”, he said, “Well I don't care about what happens to Mussolini." He said, “"I wouldn't have a clue what goes on over there." 'Cause they had no contacts. They weren't writing to any people in Italy. For years I hadn't seen them writing to anybody in Italy or received any letters from Italy because at the time I loved the stamps, I used to do a bit of stamp collecting in and I wasn't getting any stamps but

36:00 it never, you never, never got a full answer from the oldies in those days of what was going on, because they still had the fear of what would happen to their people back home. It doesn't happen now so much. I mean in those countries it doesn't happen there but no, it's - it was one of those

36:30 turn and twists of events in life that we didn't know. We didn't know what was ahead. We just didn't know what was ahead but it did look very bad at the time. It did look very bad that the world was going to go either towards communism or towards that set up of Hitler and -

Is it, do you think that

37:00 **influenced your decision to really side with the patriotic push to join the forces at the time?**

I think so. It could have been. It could have been.

Can you explain a little bit more about that? Your decision at the time?

How do you mean? The-

You were, must have been concerned for your family given that they were these things were happening. That people were taking away their telephone and the possibility that they could be interned because they were of Italian...

Oh we got our back up.

37:30 We got our back up about that sort of thing.

Would this have sort of made you more keen to really try and be as patriotic and as Australian as you possibly could be by joining up?

I don't know. I don't know whether it, that had any influence on it or not, or whether it was the more the adventuresome part of it because remember I was only still only seventeen at the time.

38:00 - no, I don't know.

Do you think you were a mature seventeen year old?

I reckon I was because I'd been working since I was ten years old and I knew the value of money. I knew the value of work. I knew the value of - at the time, even of detesting bureaucrats. I started way back then. I detested the bureaucrats

38:30 for what they did and they didn't compel me to work, but I did. I was ten years old, still going to school, when I was taking around all these things like you get in your letter box today. The “Dodgers”, as we used to call them then. I was taking around the dodgers before I went to school. I was standing out in front of the school gates as the kids came outta school handing out more dodgers. I became a lolly boy at the local theatre with the big tray of

39:00 lollies or ice creams at ten. They weren't supposed to employ people at that age but adults couldn't get any jobs. The best tray that we used to fight to try and get was the ice creams because people bought ice creams in preference to chocolates, especially in the summer time, and we got paid two shillings in the pound for every pound's worth

39:30 of stuff we sold. We got two shillings and I was a cheeky little bugger too and I used to get good money. I used to get more money than the others because of the way that I approached people to sell 'cause I had a very good friend who showed me how to do things. The Jewish people are very good and he showed me how to do things. No, I think it was more at that time it was more venturesome

40:00 and the patriotism came after. Patriotism came after being in the services and amongst a great variety of other people, and plus they were older people. The older ones that knew hard life too. They all knew hard life, the engineers that I was in with, because they as I say, fettlers on the railways you know, how

they did their job? They camped alongside the railway lines in tents. Away from

40:30 their families and they'd be the ones when they - even the trains came up here to Gosford when the train passed through little places like Woy Woy and even that Woy Woy was a little place in those days, they'd be alongside the train line, asking for the newspapers or whatever. So many things, but it's all in different areas in this brain.

Tape 4

00:30 **Were your German friends also subject to these, I don't know, pressures or...?**

Yes.

To be interned or?

Yes. The silly part about the whole lot of this as I say my parents were naturalised many years before that and yet they were treated as

01:00 enemy aliens because of Mussolini and the phobia that went on in those days with the different nationalities and the bias that the uneducated people of Australia had. Not so much the educated people, or people who had travelled. We always found that people who had travelled through other

01:30 parts of the world treated you differently - as equals and things like that. As to people who hadn't travelled and were uneducated people, they were the ones that had had the bias, more bias than anybody else.

It's often the way (UNCLEAR) xenophobic.

Yes.

You were studying German at the time. Did this arouse any particular suspicion from people?

No because they all knew that I wanted to be, well they used to use me

02:00 and ask me a lot. I'd do a lot of their repair work and things like that on cars and any other sort of thing around the house and always have, and still do because of my ability and capability as a person with tools.

And what about you were studying German to do?

To

To translate the manuals?

To translate out of the Germans books to become a- well, no nobody knew what that would lead to because they didn't have the firms here in those

02:30 days. Didn't have the big engineering firms. The only big engineering firms were commencing were BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] and places like that and the railway workshops. The railway workshops in Sydney were the place that developed and trained more engineering train apprentices than anybody else.

Did the studying of German arouse suspicion in people because?

No.

You were studying a language of the enemy?

03:00 No. No because, well as I say

How fluent were you?

It wasn't war years.

Oh sorry. How fluent were you?

I was very fluent. As I say, I had been asked after being tested, I had been asked by the Australian Army Services to go into the interpreting service to go to the Middle East. They were starting to get all these prisoners of war, the Italian prisoners of war and the German POWs [Prisoners of War] that they were getting and even my mother, one of her brothers,

03:30 an Italian in the Italian Army was a POW in West Aussie.

How was your Italian at the time?

My Italian, well I'd also trained up on the Italian to speak Italian properly, but I only spoke the dialect of my mother but there were so many dialects in the other places and other Italians that would come out

later on to Australia and I'd try to talk to, Italian to them and they'd laugh at me because I didn't have the pure Italian which you had, but with the German I had I was

04:00 taught the pure German.

When you joined the CMF, were you with your colleagues from um, who were you with, a bunch of friends?

Oh yes, yes, we all came from the same area, or most of us did. The ones that I joined with at, it was a Randwick drill hall. We joined that and we all came from the Randwick area. Randwick, Waverley, Coogee - what was the other suburb?

04:30 No it was Waverley, Randwick and Coogee mostly from there, they were there, and then there were other people that came in the same unit. They came from up around about Hurstville way.

When you joined up, can you, were the people from German parents and Jewish parents as well or was it...?

No. I was the only one in the whole of the unit that was an odd bod, but a strange part about it is talking about all these people

05:00 that these fettlers and engineers and all the rest, and miners, they were all big people, tall people like yourself but bigger, broader, much stronger and there was four of us were of small stature like myself and the four of us were split up, one into each division or one section and we were mascots of each of those and we all had different names. I was Dynamite McGinty because I was ruthless with

05:30 explosives. Daredevil like. Then another one, he had great big glasses and he looked like Tojo, the President, the big boss of Japan and he was called Tojo and then they had another one who was very similar to Mr Chamberlain of England, so they called him Chamberlain but no, I was the only one that had any foreign extraction in me

06:00 and I'm still everybody says, “Well where's Mac? Where's Mac?"

So this was in the CMF, is that right? The

The CMF and the AIF, yes.

In

Because we all transferred over at the same time.

In the CMF, you were mounting, establishing the fortifications along Sydney beaches. How did, as a surfer yourself or somebody who was involved in that, how did you feel you were desecrating the Sydney's...?

Oh yes

Beaches at all or?

Oh god, yes. Yes definitely. Definitely when we saw the damage that we were doing to the beaches, plus the abuse

06:30 that we copped from the people while we were doing it, like the civilians. When they saw what we were doing but then they realised also they used to say especially tram lines. Can you imagine bashing tram lines into the beach off Bondi Beach? The whole of Bondi Beach, we had tram lines first right near the water high water mark then from the high water mark up to the promenade there was a what they call the double apron barb wire fence. Then after the double apron barb wire fence there was

07:00 another line of these tram lines stuck in, then the steps leading off the promenade down into the water, they were all jack hammered away and then we'd get up to the hills of um, Palm Beach and all up over there, Warriewood and all those beaches, all along the cliff tops and that we had these tram lines and barb wire fences all put up again, double apron fence. Going through some beautiful properties. Even Sir Frank Packer's place up there.

Were people able to still use the

07:30 **beaches?**

Yes. They had spots where they could go into the beach but they'd have to go to the far end of each beach instead of being able to go half way and walk down steps. Oh no, they still used them.

You couldn't have been too popular though, could you?

Oh actually, when we got to Bondi, we were parked in, you know all the grass area over Bondi they had tents there. We were in the tents there and all the young girls used to come down and look for the uniforms.

08:00 And Manly was the same and all the northern beaches. We'd be camped alongside the beaches themselves on the grassed areas and well 'cause as I say, all the young ones, we were sought after.

How did the women, how was the change in the reaction of women to you once you put on a uniform at that time? Did you notice it?

Oh yes, definitely. Definitely. Especially you see that thing up there.

08:30 He was a go little bloke in those days. In fact the women in Mar- I got a white feather in Martin Place at one time. I was told to get out of it and quite often I'd be told by the old ladies, “Take your, go home and take your brother, big brother's uniform off and stop playing soldier."

Who gave you the white feather?

A woman.

What happened?

She just came up to me in Martin Place down near Martin Place and George Street and said “Here you [go]

09:00 soldier" and gave me an envelope and in the envelope was a white feather.

How did you feel about that?

Like clocking her. Yes, it was very, it was the only time a thing like that happened but and a lot of it was going on at that particular time. Even when we were camped up in - in the Frenchs Forest all the communication lines, the telephone lines and that were

09:30 laid between trees or down on the ground and we knew that there was, they called them the “Fifth Columnists” in those days, not saboteurs, they were fifth columnists, and this woman had a motorbike with – um, like a big rake at the back of it and she was going through all the bushes up there on this motorbike and tearing up all the lines. They caught her and we never knew what happened to her, they,

10:00 whether they put her in jail or what but she mucked up all the lines of communications for about a week.

What was this white feather thing? I've heard about it but I don't know much about it at all. What?

The white feather was to say that you were doing the wrong thing. To get out of it and stop being a dingo sort of thing, against other people.

Where was it coming from? Was it coming from women whose husbands were serving overseas or?

Don't know. I don't know. We don't know. I don't know to this day either and I don't think they knew just what it was all about

10:30 but they knew this white feather thing was being given to a lot of servicemen first. Well then they started giving it to men who weren't in uniform.

Did they single you out because you were in the CMF?

No. At that particular time I was in the AIF because we after we'd finished our basic training at Ingleburn and we started getting moved around to other camps, then we transferred to the AIF.

Well then, why did they give you a white feather?

Nobody knows.

11:00 Nobody knows why that happened.

They were giving soldiers

Yes.

A white feather?

Yes, they were giving soldiers white feathers and civil after that, first of all it was the civilians. Then they started giving it to the soldiers.

When was this?

Oh it could have been at the time, I think now when you'd been in the services for six months you got a stripe on your arm and we had no stripes on our arm at the time.

What was then going on in Australia around that

11:30 **time? What was it the feeling that?**

Hard to say. Hard to say the general feeling. The- a lot of it came from the influences that the newspapers had and of course there was no television. If you wanted to get any news of the war you

had to go to the movies and see the newsreels that they had, and the newsreels were very popular and in Sydney at the time

12:00 they had about three, there was one down Market Street near the State Theatre. There was one up in Pitt Street near Castlereagh near um, Park Street and I think there was one down towards the railway somewhere and they were all they had was newsreels. You could go in there and pay a shilling, ten cents, and sit and watch the newsreels all day.

What was happening in the war at the time?

Everything. You'd

12:30 see news, you'd see newsreels of what was going on in Egypt and what was going on over in Gaza and all those places.

Had Japan entered the war at this stage?

No. No, Japan didn't come into it until '42.

So I'm just trying to establish some sort of why this

Yeah

the white feather thing was...

I'm, not 1940, no this white feather business was back in 1940. About '39, '40. About '40 because our troops

13:00 didn't go overseas until '39, early '40.

Was there any note inside as well?

No, just the white feather.

And did you hear of anyone else getting these things?

No. No and I, at the time it happened, I was with a couple of my other friends and - 'course they were bigger people than me, taller people than me, and as you see that there, my hat was always on the back of my head, the provo 'cause I couldn't stand it, the hat because I used to get a lot of

13:30 headaches and provos [Provosts: Military Police] used to pick me up all the time because I didn't have my hat on properly.

Can I just talk about that? That transfer to the AIF? Do you remember really actively seeking that or was that just something that happened in the course of events?

We were advised to seek it because of the treatment we would get after the war unless we were AIF, which turned out to be quite true.

14:00 **So you didn't actually, you were quite happy in your job doing the fortifications and everything else that you?**

Oh yes, but we knew also eventually that we would be sent, we could be sent overseas because it was in the pipeline, so we were advised and I was particularly advised by this William Curry, Bill Curry that (UNCLEAR) “Get into the AIF, otherwise you'll be treated like dirt” and we, it's turned out that that's the way it has happened because there were a lot of the troops that were away

14:30 that were still only - infantry were AMF [Australian Militia Forces?] that didn't get treated very good by the DVA [Department of Veterans’ Affairs],

But

Department of Veterans’ Affairs.

You also were enjoying yourself though. The women were, weren't all like that, were they?

Oh no, god no, no. We were lauded by the women, especially they had all the - there was the Albert Palais. There was the big dance palace out at the showground, the old showground out at Sydney, which was the Hordern

15:00 Pavilion. There was, what was the other? There was three big dance palaces where the soldiers were there until the Americans arrived.

And did you go along to those places?

Oh yes. Yes.

Can you, did you, do you know the Trocadero?

Trocadero? Yes the, that was the place where the officers and all the sergeant NCOs [Non-

Commissioned Officers] people higher up in the army went there because it was the classy place.

Where did you go?

All

15:30 of them. We were defiant of all that sort of thing. Besides down at the Trocadero had my uncle, had one of my uncles had the barber shop down there and we used to go and see him and then go to the Troc [Trocadero] or next door to him was the Glaseiarium where you went ice skating.

What was your favourite dance palace?

The best one was the one out at Leichhardt.

What was that one called?

16:00 Just trying to remember the name of that one. It was out near the Leichhardt stadium, the old boxing stadium.

Can you describe perhaps the Trocadero for us? An evening in the Troc, Trocadero?

Oh the Trocadero was very similar to what? That people who'd know from television or movies. There used to be a

16:30 movie or a show on TV called Fame. Trocadero was very similar to that.

Can you describe in your memory the Troc or the Trocadero? An evening there? Particular

Size, as I say'd be about half the size of the or Hordern Pavilion out at the old showground. Um

17:00 **How many people would be there on a busy Friday night? Saturday night?**

Busy. Couple of thousand. You barely room to move.

Was

Barely room to move. Of a weekend.

All service personnel?

Yes. Mostly service personnel, yes . You had a certain, a smattering of civilian people because as I say it was a high class place. That's where they had all the big bands that used to come out from America. Big

17:30 bands from England used to put on their shows there at the Trocadero. It was a, as I say, it was a high class place, whereas the other ones were like big barns, great big barns. What's the one at Leichhardt? That was one of the most popular and there was one up at Grace Bros.

Is there any particular girl that caught your attention during this time?

Oh

18:00 about three or four of them, that particular time. I had one girl who was madly in love with a priest. She eventually became a nun and her father was, belonged to a family, I think they're still in existence today but they don't have the business, Podestas. They were a Maltese family and they controlled in those days all

18:30 the butcher shops had to receive their meat with these great big wagons. The wagon'd pull up in front of the butcher shop and even double-parked if there was a car parked in front of the shop and even if they blocked up the tram lines, the tram lines'd be there and they'd drop the ramp down the back and they'd cart the meat on their shoulders into the butcher shop.

Were you particularly fond of this girl?

Oh yes, yes. She was a very good looking girl and her mother was very nice too and the family was

19:00 Podestas and they owned all these butcher wagons. They don't exist today but the family does, and I think the family is into accountancy and all that sort of thing today. I'm not sure but I know the Podesta family's still in business today. Yes - but Peggy Podas Podesta, she became a nun because she was madly in love with a priest, and there were others.

19:30 There were others. You remember them. You remember them.

Sounds like happy days were they?

They were. I even remember when I went away there was a, what was the name of the song? There was me, we didn't know what the hell the songs were but oh, there was a couple of songs. I think I've got them there somewhere amongst all my tapes.

20:00 **Where were you after you joined the AIF, how did things change from the CMF for you?**

No change at all. Just that we got a purple background on our, a grey background on our colour patch. 'Cause all the engineers, anything with a purple colour had something to do with engineers. You might have a T, T purple that was the 9th Div [Division]. You had an oblong purple, that was the 6th Div.

20:30 You had a diagonally square. It was the 6th Div and oh God, forget them all now.

Mm. Where were you, at what stage were you sent away to train?

Soon after the submarines hit Sydney Harbour. We were taken down to Sydney Harbour, the 9th, the submarines come in but we didn't know what it was all about. We were up in Frenchs Forest and we were

21:00 put on trucks and taken down to Sydney Harbour. We were given ten rounds of ammunition to put in our magazine. Up 'til that time we had no bullets in our magazine in our rifle. We were given ten, we thought, hello it's on now. We were told lots'a stories but we didn't know what it was.

This was sending you to basic training, was it or?

Hm?

This is when before?

Oh no, this was after basic training and after we were doing all this work on the fortifications of the

Right

21:30 **okay.**

The foreshores.

(UNCLEAR) go back to the basic training a bit. See where were you, where did you receive your basic training?

At Ingleburn.

Can you tell us any particular thing that struck you about the basic training or a memorable event at that time?

Yes, it was just too much pack drill and marching. Always pack drill and always marching and learning to take orders.

You were a pretty rebellious sort of a person 'cause you didn't like bureaucracy. How did you take to army discipline like that?

I soon learnt. When I copped all the

22:00 KP [kitchen patrol] and all the rest of it that restricted me plus being restricted to base and all that sort of stuff. I soon learnt to accept it but buck at any chance I had without getting into strife again.

Can you tell us any tricks you learnt at the time?

Ha ha. We learnt how to lie. We learnt how to lie to officers

22:30 and NCOs but I had one particular NCO, he took to me and he was an NCO from World War [I] and he used to say to me, "If you want to have a good life in the army, volunteer for guard duty" and everybody hated guard duty but this bloke told me how to do it and he said, "Volunteer for guard duty and volunteer for the late shift of a night time." I said, "Why Alex?"

23:00 He said, "Because you'll be able to go out without a leave pass, show that you're on guard duty and on the late shift if the provos pull you up. Get back in time, have your fun and do what you want to do, get back in time to do your change of shift and then in the next day when everybody's out marching and doing the rest of it you're sleeping. Getting ready" and that's what I used to do. Poor bugger. Natives up in New Guinea clobbered him with a hammer at one time.

23:30 A hammer with a shovel. They clobbered him on the back'a the head with a shovel and we thought we'd never see him again and he came back to Australia and six months afterwards he appeared again with a steel plate in his head, back to his unit.

Can you tell us a little bit about KP duty? Your first experience of that?

Oh KP. Haven't you seen it? Haven't you seen it in some of the American movies where the bloke sits in front of a pile of potatoes and he has to clean the potatoes, peel the potatoes? That was part of

24:00 KP duty, plus the pumpkins but in most of the American movies all you saw was potatoes.

KP? Can you, I think I know what it means.

kitchen patrol. Kitchen patrol. KP, yes. You did all the washing up, the dirty dishes and that afterwards.

Did you spend much time on KP?

No, not after a while. I learnt. I'd go to the church parades with my bayonet on and all the rest of it 'cause I learnt the difference

24:30 and then eventually when we got up into New Guinea we kicked all of our cooks out because they were no good. They couldn't cook and we had to take turns. We volunteered to take turns then.

Did you inherit any of your mother's skill at Italian cooking?

I was just going to tell you, I finished up doing it for three months because I was one of the better cooks of the whole lot. And I had to bucket that too, to get out of doing that, otherwise I'd a remained a blasted cook instead of becoming Dynamite McGinty, which I

25:00 loved to do.

Is there anything else in that training period, Ingleburn that you, particularly stood you in good stead for later on as far as...?

No. I just remember my very first night. We got off the train at Ingleburn Station and we had to walk up a hell of a lot a big hill. It wasn't the station, it was past the station. We walked out, got out of the train at a

25:30 big paddock I suppose it was. We go through the paddock and march up or walk up - we didn't march in those days, we walked up this great big long hill to Ingleburn camp, into K block then we were given a bag - a long bag and said, “Right, there's the grass or chaff over there. Go and fill it up. That's your bed." We had to learn to sleep on chaff in a in a palliasse. We'd get our spot in the hut and then there were a lot of screaming going on. It was just before tea

26:00 time. A lot of screaming going on and we see a big bloke come racing through this hut and then a Australian Aboriginal chasing him with a meat chopper and he was trying to kill him. He'd given (UNCLEAR) the sergeant and giving the cook in the office in the kitchen what he had to cook for us blokes. Never forget that night and the fight

26:30 went on all night. Ev- all night, even after we got fed they were still chasing each other. Yes. I did know his name. Al Dark, Darky Afflick. Darky Afflick.

Were there many Aboriginal people in the services or in?

Not at that particular time, but later on they learnt the advantage of having the Aboriginals in one unit and the reason they did that was because the Aboriginal language as -

27:00 radio operators and things like that tossed the Germans and the Italians. They didn't know the Australian Aboriginal language, so they could speak quite openly without worrying about codes and they could send messages through and had the Germans tossed.

So...

So there was a complete Aboriginal unit and they've never received the recognition they should.

Is it in the 7th Division?

I forget what division they were in. I forget. Might have been the 7th. It wasn't the 6th, it must have been the 7th. Wasn't the

27:30 6th because they didn't learn until after the war was on for a while how

But at the time did you know that was going on?

We knew because of the scuttlebutt as they call it. We knew through the scuttlebutt that this would happen or was going to happen and that they used them for because of the language, the Aboriginal language.

Did you meet any Aboriginal people at the time in the?

Oh yes. I used to work a lot with the Aboriginal. I lived and worked up in Queensland at Bowen.

When was that?

Oh God,

28:00 about 1970.

Oh so, it wasn't before the?

Oh no. No, this was after the war.

Okay but at the time in Ingleburn?

No, no.

Um how did you take to bayonet drill?

Well that was one of the things that was very obnoxious to most of us because we couldn't realise that we would have to use the bayonet on a human. The ordinary drill itself

28:30 yes, we took to that alright but there was another thing with the bayonet drilling that we had to do with this other stuff that I didn't know that they were trying to train me for was for the interpreter work. I was sent to a school at Ingleburn, not Ingleburn, at Raymond Terrace which turned out to be an initial training ground for Junun - Canungra jungle training and at Raymond Terrace we had to

29:00 throw ourselves on a barb wire fence with our rifle and bayonet attached and we had to collapse that barb wire fence and all the rest of them would have to come racing through where we'd dropped the barb wire fence. And they'd be trampling on the wire and it'd be going up into us all the time and that took a bit of guts to do that. More guts than using the bayonet practice.

Can you describe

29:30 **how that works again?**

We had - to a barb wire - imagine a barb wire fence right across there, right? One of these double, what we call a double apron gar barb fence. There's a picket there holding it up, or a steel rod and a picket there holding some of it up. So you'd have one bloke running it at this side and another one running it that side, so you hit the wire and the wire collapsed in and you were still laying down on the ground on top of the wire

30:00 and then all the others come through. This is if you had to go through a mine field or whatever right? Now whilst you were laying on that wire all the rest of the troops have to come through that opening and go through to where they had to go and while they were going through it, they were trampling on that wire and the wire was bouncing up and hitting you all the time. Then we learnt we could do it by using our great coat. The great coat stopped all the wire going into us, the barb wire.

30:30 Took a bit of guts to do that, I can tell you. They don't do it today. I've never seen any of the training where they do that one today because they use what they call a Bangalore torpedo that we developed that was no good. The Bangalore torpedo was a length of water pipe or something like that where we'd fill that up with gelignite and then we'd ignite that and it would blow that section of wire out of the way without anybody having to worry about throwing

31:00 themselves at it.

Did you get training on that at the time?

Yes. That's how I got the name of Dynamite McGinty because we thought of it.

That was in Raymond Terrace?

Yes.

(UNCLEAR) so how did you?

No that training came up at - it was Raymond Terrace at - what do they call it? Something training school and the bloke who was in charge of that training school was a Major Post and he was a major in the provos.

Do you think you got your interest

31:30 **in dynamite from VE [Victory in Europe] Day? Cracker nights?**

Possibly. Possibly because we used to make them as big as we could to go 'round blowing up people's letterboxes and things like that. In those days the letterboxes were very - they were mostly timber and easily blown up but everybody took that in part. Part and parcel of cracker night. They didn't go crook like they do now. Some of them go – ‘ead now and they use heavy stuff and it's not right because they're blowing up brick

32:00 letterboxes and heavy metal letterboxes and I'm talking when we did, it was just they were just wooden letterboxes, yes .

So a lot of you got in, particularly interested in explosives at the time, was that?

Yes, yes. Mm.

So and can you tell us about the development of the Bangalore?

The Bangalore torpedo. Well we got sick of this training of getting hurt, somebody possibly getting really hurt

32:30 with the barb wire and we decided it was much quicker and much easier to use the Bangalore torpedo with the tube loaded with gelignite and a fuse, a quick fuse, and just light the fuse and it'd go off in about fifteen seconds.

Did you, who thought of that? Where did you get that idea from?

Oh, a couple of us thought of it together. Why would we have, why have we got to do this? And we took it to the, this CO [Commanding Officer], Major Post, and he said, “Yes, that's a good idea. We'll

33:00 try it" and they tried it and found it quite successful and it was developed.

And where did it get the name Bangalore torpedo? Did you call it that at the time or?

Don't know. I don't know whether the army did it or we did it. Who, I don't think we called it anything. We just called it an explosive to get rid of the (UNCLEAR) the wire instead of human beings falling on it.

'Cause I've seen it, I've heard of it but it not 'til later in the war

Yes. Bangalore

And so this and so

Bangalore torpedo.

But at the time you didn't call it that?

No, we didn't call it anything

33:30 at the time. It was just an explosive to get rid of the wire.

So can you describe how you, how it worked and developed it?

Oh we just fiddled. We fiddled in our spare time and got the measurements between the two posts because they had a set measurement, I forget the measurements, between the two posts before you strung the wire up over it. And I believe they got a different set up now because they've got that roll wire with the razor blades or whatever on it,

34:00 they've got that all different but we measured through that and we got some, oh we just worked it out and said, “Why not get this bit of pipe with an explosive in it to blow it up instead of doing what we're doing now?"

Is?

Be much quicker, much safer and also it'd clear the wire quicker.

How do you get it into under the wire and?

You just push it under. You just push it under like you're carrying a staff over your shoulder.

34:30 It's all loaded and ready to go with the fuse on the end and all you got to do is light the fuse. It's got the cap and everything in it. You just put it under, wait for it to blow and it just blows up just like a like a long bomb.

And the army, did the army run with this idea?

Yes. Apparently it's used now as part and parcel. I don't know whether they still use it on that because they've got other things now. I'm talking, god, sixty-odd years ago.

35:00 They must have developed something better in those, in now they

Did you get any credit for

No.

this piece of initiative?

No, because that, later on that school, as I say we we'd found out it was a try out for jungle training at Canungra. Now at Canungra we also had to go and show them how to do that after this training. We went to Canungra and we had to crawl, they had all the barbed wire and you just above your body while you were flat out and that was also where they

35:30 used this Bangalore torpedo. As you got to the end or if you got half way through it and you wanted to blow it, you slipped one under then you kept going and by the time you got to the other end the fuse was long enough. You had to work out the length of your fuse, so that by the time you got to the other end of it, it would blow and you were out of the way.

Yes I know, I'm going over it but I just, I'm wanting to know where the name Bang did, were you calling it Bangalore torpedo at the time?

No, we weren't calling it a Bangalore torpedo. We were just calling it a torpedo.

36:00 **You didn't actually give it a name?**

Yeah, we just called it a torpedo because of the torpedo out of the ships for the boats and it was meant to be like a torpedo.

And where did the name Bangalore come in it?

I wouldn't haven't a clue.

That was after the

That was after

the war years. Heard of it or during your service time?

After, well we'd passed through and gone away. We, 'cause we never used it again up in the islands anywhere. We had no occasion to. The only time we used anything similar to that, but there was no torpedo. There were trees up there that were so hard

36:30 you couldn't hit them with an axe or a saw and we used to have to fall them for the road and we'd put a band of gelignite around the tree and it would just blow it down. Just cut it like a great big axe. Made a hell of a mess of it, splinter it and all that, but it'd blow it down.

So when you're training you took particular interest in this and did - what other things did you find, use for explosives or other explosives you were using in training?

Oh one of the things we shouldn't have used it for. We used to use it to catch fish.

37:00 **This is while you were training?**

Yes. Down at one of the beaches with the lake. What's the lake down near, there's a lake down near the eastern beaches. There's a bridge that goes across that lake and we used to use it to catch fish. We'd blow it in, you'd put some of it in a bottle. You'd drop it in the water

37:30 and it'd blow and the stunned fish come to the surface and you'd catch them, but we got into trouble for doing that.

Who caught you?

The locals. The locals complained to the police and the police complained to the army about us doing it but they used to grab the fish too, not only us but when we got up in the islands we used to use it to catch fish in the rivers up there, because we couldn't spend the time catching fish too - for our meals and we were quite often without food. Our

38:00 supply lines were very bad when we were building the road.

What other explosives were you dealing with during the training period?

Oh there was amanol. Amanol, gelignite, gun powder and that was it. Before we went away, I'll tell you something else too, before we went away we wired Sydney Harbour Bridge to blow up into the Harbour in case the Japs took it

38:30 and that's how they also evolved the idea of being able to use oxyacetylene to cut steel under water, because they had a big competition in conjunction with that too, to find out whether they could cut gelig, cut steel with - oxyacetylene under water and the reason they did that was because if they dropped, if the Japs come they would block the supply or the road main road north and south to the

39:00 Japs. And there was three defence lines in Australia. There was the Brisbane line, Townsville line and there was one in between. Bundaberg? Might have been Bundaberg. They were the three lines of fighting and then the last line down to Sydney was Sydney Harbour Bridge, North Sydney. That was the last line of defence.

39:30 **And did you actually participate in putting the explosives on Sydney Harbour Bridge?**

Yeah. We were the first ones that ever walked up and over those things where they're charging people a hundred dollars now to go over Sydney Harbour Bridge. We wired the Hawkesbury River Bridge. We wired all the tunnels leading up here - then after the war they wanted us to go back and do it again,

40:00 to unwire it all and take it all out because the gelignite was still there and once gelignite gets wet and dissolves it becomes very dangerous and in those days there was a lot of smoking and if anybody threw a cigarette out the window, it could blow one of those tunnels

How much explosive would you place on the bridge?

Oh God, I forget. It was tons. Tons. There was,

40:30 we did one lot from Sydney side and another crowd did the other lot from the north side and there were two switches, one at either end and the main control used to be up in the tower of each one of them and that's where it was silly, because whoever blew the things on top went with the bridge, because the pylons'd go, which was silly. They hadn't worked that out or not to our knowledge at the time. They might have brought it down

41:00 below. There was quite a lot. We put up I think it was about - they always worked on the number of years, number of days in a year. Three hundred and sixty five. I think there was about three hundred and sixty five that we put up.

Sorry? What, what's?

Three hundred and sixty five. On all these sort of big jobs they worked on days of the year. I don't know why the government worked that way.

What's that got to do with the explosives?

It was the number of explosive that they wanted to put and anywhere else that

41:30 they did big jobs, they put three hundred and sixty five charges.

And so, can you just describe, I mean it's fascinating to know this, I think they?

They were all interconnected with electric wiring.

Yeah.

And once the one switch went, it was like you having all this wired up. One switch. Pull one switch and all these'd go out.

You determined how much explosive would be required to bring the bridge down?

Well they had worked it out. The experts had worked it out and we were told what

42:00 to do and where to put it. We were told what, how much to put and where to put it.

Tape 5

00:31 **Could you see them?**

No, you wouldn't know. They were more or less camouflaged and they looked the same as the steel on the bridge and Paul Hogan

Can you take your hand away from?

Oh sorry. Paul Hogan and all of them, they didn't know it when they were painting it after the war. They didn't know those charges were there. See Paul Hogan, he was a rigger. He was classified as a rigger.

I think that was some time after the war though, wasn't it?

Yeah.

He was up there.

Yeah.

But I

01:00 **just want to know a few more details. I'll need, I think it's important for the Archive. So was there any safety device to prevent this thing going off accidentally?**

I'm not sure of that one. I'm not sure of that. I know that just the charges were put in, the wires were put in then, they must have had some of safety set up. And I, 'round about this where the switches were because, as I say, there were one at each end.

01:30 **Was the general population made aware of that at the time?**

Oh they still wouldn't know unless some of them see this. They won't know it was, ever happened and the army will deny it, the way they are now with all the lies they tell.

How were you packing the explosives onto the bridge without letting everybody on that this was happening?

They just thought that the army were doing safety checks.

02:00 The army, the people, normal people and the reporters and that were never told of all this stuff that was going on and if anybody did question, they just said that “Nobody else was capable of doing, the army were just doing safety checks in case the Japs hit it.” In case the Japs hit it, not us. Japs had no idea that they wanted to get rid of Sydney Harbour Bridge. Why would they?

Do you know approximately how much

02:30 **explosives were placed on the bridge at the time?**

Oh wouldn't know. Wouldn't have a clue. Wouldn't have a clue actually but I know that we put about three hundred and sixty five charges in various spots of the bridge to bring it down. To make sure it come down.

In any one of these charges, how much explosive was there?

Oh god. Each stick of gelignite weighed- it was fifty

03:00 pounds in a box. Pound, each stick weighed a pound. So what's that? What's that in kilos?

Well how many sticks were at each charge?

Been about five. Five of them to one, two, three, four, five and they were put in a box. They weren't just gelignite stuck there, they were put in a metal box. They were all in metal boxes.

03:30 Yeah. I suppose, yeah it'd be about two just trying to visualise the way that we stacked 'em. Two, three, four, five. Five pounds, ten pounds - be between five and ten pounds. Be five and ten sticks, yeah, depending upon the position of the box.

It's a bit, I mean that that would be enough at any one point to?

At any or one point no. Be like

04:00 they hoped it would've been, like the business now that happened with those two towers over in America on 9 the, in November [September] in the 11th, yeah in November [September] because that was a matter of the towers collapsing because of the weight coming from top to bottom and the way the building was created that they didn't have to hit all over the place. It was just the weight of coming down. It was like a big mechano set,

04:30 those buildings and Sydney Harbour Bridge was the same way, and one of the big things with Sydney Harbour Bridge was if you cut those great big cables, the bridge would go but they couldn't be sure the gelignite would do it, so they had to try and work it into the, what they classified as the weak points that would make it drop into the harbour.

How long did you work on that job for?

About three months.

05:00 Yeah about three months.

It took you three months to wire the bridge with explosives?

Mm, mm, mm.

Desperate days.

Desperate measures. See they were flying blind in those days. They didn't know like they do today. The technology wasn't there. The technology was there to build the bridge but it wasn't Australian technology. It was Hornibrook from England.

You also wired the bridge north of

05:30 **on the Hawkesbury?**

The old Hawkesbury Bridge was wired also. The tunnels on either side were wired. All the tunnels leading down to the Hawkesbury Bridge, they were all wired. Gelignite in all of them. As I say the people of Australia don't know what happened to their country and it's never been publicised. It's never been even catalysed, catagalysed,

06:00 catalogued. Never been catalogued. I mean the army made, I've been looking up there now there's things of all the units in the war. Who they were, what they were? The archives of the war itself, not this new business and they've got every engineering unit listed with all the people but no 9th Engineers, my company. I've looked everywhere. We came under corps troops, what they call corps troops.

06:30 We were used wherever they were needed, because of that first set-up when they were taken, they took in, they took the reinforcements from us before we went overseas to the 2/1st Field Company. These 6 Div, all the 6 Div Engineers. They were chopped to pieces overseas.

So you can, what specifically was your title and role when you were doing these jobs?

We were corps engineers. What they call corps engineers.

Yeah. Is that the same as sapper?

07:00 Yeah, it's still sapper. All sappers. As I said, even these blokes on the boats that took us up the Lakekamu River, they were classified as sappers too. They were classified as engineers.

What rank were you at this time?

I was an artificer group 1.

Sorry?

I was an artificer group 1. Because of my engineering training as a apprentice first of all, plus what I'd

learnt later on through basic training, I finished up getting ten shillings a day.

07:30 That's a dollar a day, whereas the other troops were only getting six shillings a day.

I've never heard that before, artificer.

It's still there. Still there. Group 1 artificer.

And what's the equivalent, private corporal or?

Oh that, well we were allowed to go into sergeants' messes. That was, that's how high our grouping was because we were tradesmen. There was plumbers, there were carpenters. We all had some sort of training

08:00 **And your particular?**

There were groups

Your particular skill was in explosives, is that right?

Yeah. At the time.

Was there any training accidents when you were dealing with explosives?

Yep. We had a few people killed through accidents and mostly they were killed because they were fishing and they didn't know that the what they call the FID, fuse instantaneous detonation, at the last fifteen centimetres it goes 'tooong'

08:30 like that. They would try and set a small fuse like that to throw in the river to catch fish and before they threw it, it blew up in their faces and blew them up and killed 'em, so you had to use a minimum of almost a metre.

Did you know anybody who was killed?

Oh yes, yeah a couple of our people were killed that way. Several of the other units that were around us that knew we had the explosive and they wanted to do it too. They'd come to us and ask

09:00 for the explosives, so they could go fishing and we'd ask them, “Yeah, you know how to use it?" because we couldn't go with 'em to spare the time 'cause they'd possibly be about four or five, or maybe ten miles away from- or kilometres away from us and they would kill themselves because they didn't use it properly.

Where was this fishing taking place?

Up in the islands.

Oh okay. This is

Yeah there's plenty of rivers up there with beautiful fish where because a lot of the lines of communication

09:30 with the Australian troops was lousy as far as food was concerned. Quite often we had no food at all.

Mm.

We had to rely upon, we'd go to the native villages. Send someone into the native villages to get food from them and once the Americans were there, they demanded money but before the Americans arrived up there, we could give them old razor blades that we had or bits of glass from any glass bottles we had and they were quite happy. And once the Yanks came, they learnt the value of this

10:00 and still have. Gold, we were amongst all the gold up there.

Can we just sort, of before we get up to New Guinea, can you just sort of stick with your departure and going up there? I think it'll help us structure some of the experiences there for you. Can you tell us a little bit of the time of when, how quickly you received notice of that you were heading off to New Guinea and tell us about how you got out of Australia at that time?

10:30 Oh we received notice that we were going about- wouldn't even be a week that we were going from Australia. That we were going up to New Guinea. We were at Frenchs Forest, up at Frenchs Forest at the camp there. We had, what did we have? What did we have there?

11:00 One of the big things was we had had a big party because we had one chap in our unit that nobody would go and have a shower with because Andy developed female breasts and he was also, everybody loved him and looked after him as a pet because he was such a harmless bloke. He could never keep step in marching and he didn't know himself. He was very

11:30 amazed at why he suddenly developed these breasts and his people knew that we looked after him very well and they were quite rich and they gave a big party when they knew because they'd gone to the politicians and got him out. He was gonna go out instead of comin' with us. Well he was a medical thing that they had to take out. So they gave a big party in our mess hut for him and for us for looking after

him so much

12:00 and that was the night before we left Ra - Frenchs Forest to go to the trains. We went to, they went to Hornsby. They took us to Hornsby in trucks. We got on the trains at Hor- I think we marched, I wasn't there at that time. I think they marched through Hornsby. They did, they marched through Hornsby, got on the trains and went to Queensland.

12:30 **But what happened to Andy? Did you never know what?**

No he, no we never ever chased it up and a lot of the people in the unit today do not remember him, because I'm one of the originals. We received a lot of reinforcements throughout the years.

Excuse me. That's quite extraordinary that circumstance

Yeah.

But he was, you were a good group of people and you

Oh everybody today, they're all still very good friends,

Mhm.

Very good friends. As I say it's interesting those

13:00 those couple of tapes I got from our secretary. He's still alive but he was one of the original 9th Field Company too from pre-war and the choco days as we call 'em.

Was that, would he have come under severe pressure this man if?

Who Andy?

Yeah. The prejudice from say if the army had found out about this or?

Oh no, no because as I say it happened suddenly where he developed those but he was always, as I say,

13:30 he marched awkwardly. He looked awkward on everything he did because his female genes came through and his skin and all that was all milky white, the whole lot of him but I mean you imagine going to a shower with a bloke that suddenly has floppy discs right in front'a you. Poor Andy but he didn't know, he didn't realise what had happened to himself. He was as amazed as anybody that these developed

14:00 but he had a very nice sister too and mother and father. As I say, they were very appreciative the way that we looked after him sort of thing.

Mm.

Yeah but engineers, the engineers he, the division that I belonged to and most of the engineers in Australia before we went away on our trucks, the insignia was a black fellow with a poised spear standing on a boomerang

14:30 in purple. Even the provos were scared of us because we had the explosives. We blew up a couple of our officers because they weren't very nice blokes. One was dropped in a river at Penrith because he was an officer that came from the University Regiment and he thought he was just it but he found out he wasn't and today

15:00 nobody knows who dropped him in the river.

What was this, during this was before you went to?

This is before we went away, when we were doing our training.

Can you tell us the story of that particular incident?

We used to have to go up to Penrith and do our bridge training on the Nepean River and it was a period of time in New South Wales when it rained and rained and rained for about six weeks. And we were in the camp, we were at the Penrith Showground,

15:30 that's where we were camped, and this officer, one night he decided he was going to put some discipline into us and he called a parade to do some bridging training over the Nepean River and the bridging training was- I don't know if you've seen 'em, they're like a big flat pontoon and you've got to lift them up, about twenty blokes on either side, it takes that many, and take it to the water, put it in the water and then you've got to connect it like a,

16:00 the old miniature train sets the kids train set, you got to connect all these and push it out across the river 'til you get it out into place and it was a stinking rainy cold night in the winter time and it was after tea and we didn't like being called out after tea to go out in the rain to do bridging. If it was the war proper, different story, but here in Australia we objected to it but we fell out and they got all the bridging equipment ready and he's roaring to try and get the people to

16:30 get the first one in the water and they were very, very slow getting it and they waited 'til he got in the right position on the water's edge, it was overlooking the water about, oh about eight feet up from the bank of the river I suppose to the water. Next thing he's in the water. He's got his torch and all we could see was his torch going down in the water and come up. That bloke changed his attitude towards his men after that. Engineers were a very tough crowd.

17:00 You didn't cross them, do things like that. We had another bloke, we called him the “Green Hornet”. He was another one that came. He came from West Aussie this bloke. He was a little bloke, smaller than me and he had a green, emerald green dressing gown with a dragon on the back. He'd come out of his tent every morning and he'd stretch in this green thing of his and he'd come in

17:30 and he'd try and get us to do all sorts of military things. My unit were very unmilitary, the whole lot of them, and he'd come through in the mess every morning the officer'd come through, “Any complaints? Any complaints? Any complaints men?" And as he'd come, started to come through they'd all go "Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz" until it got so loud he couldn't figure out what was going on. Then he found out it was somethin' against him and he got

18:00 all the worse. He tried to get the discipline into them a lot more and before he went away they used to have a football games and soccer games and all that and a lot of our blokes were soccer players and they had a match worked out and they said, “We'll get the Green Hornet onto the field. See if he'll play." So he agreed. He got on the field on one of the teams. They didn't know that he was a champion bloody soccer player for England. He got on the field

18:30 and he ran rings around 'em and they had a great deal of respect for the Green Hornet after that. And he had respect for the men too but they couldn't get him. We had some funny blokes and we had other officers that were made in the field. Now it very seldom happens that you get a man from the ranks, works his way up and becomes an officer from the field. Doesn't happen like it does in the Yankee movies, not in the Australian Army.

Can you tell us

19:00 **about the incident where your officers were blown up in New Guinea?**

We had another one. He was from the west too. He was from the west and he decided he was going to put in a lot of discipline in us and that was at, I think it was at Wallgrove camp and that was a camp they put us into where a packhorse unit had been and it stunk of horse poo and God knows what and he'd picked himself a real good tent in an area where there was no stink and there was

19:30 no horse poo but he put all the Ors [other ranks] down in an area where all the poop was and that time, another time it was raining. So they waited until he wasn't in his tent while everybody was at dinner, came back to his tent and went to sit down to read and as he sat down, ‘boom' up it went. Only a small charge, but it gave him a message. Oh, they did lots of things like that.

What, how did that work again? What?

20:00 Well they had it set up with a- what they call a contact set up like when he sat down on his bed, it sat down and it hit the battery with the charge, the thing to go off, electric charge to make it go off. Once it went off, it was only about half a stick of geli [gelignite] but it gave him a good scare. Half a stick of geli doesn't do much.

What?

Even here in Australia before we went away, we had, they had a big - the government decided to show the people how good their troops were and

20:30 their Dad's Army was that stayed home here to look after Australia. They put on a show where the army had a war against the home forces, what they call them? The, God they had a name, like I'll call 'em Dad’s Army but they had a name.

Home guard?

Home guard. They were home guard but they were all these elderly people that had, knew nothing about war or discipline and that. They just went around with broom

21:00 sticks and all that and they had a war with them up in the Frenchs Forest and we used quarter sticks of gelignite as bombs against 'em and they complained about it that we used live stuff. Big stink in the papers about it. Yeah engineers, the engineers and the home guard. Another time they wanted, we had no meat so these big meat wagons I was telling you about that Pedestas have, we were out on

21:30 a patrol, meat wagon was pulled up and the bloke was taking the meat out, getting it out to the shop. One of our wagons pulled up his back to the back of the meat wagon, hopped in, grabbed a carcass of meat, put it in the truck and away he went. Some old woman rang up the police and put 'em in. Oh it was a truck that's got the boomerang with the black fellow with the spear and they figured out the only engineers in the area was our place. So we got

22:00 the message from other people and when the truck came back to camp we told him, “Go around the back, don't come in the front. The provos are waiting for you." Which he did and we got fresh meat that

night. They were villains, the engineers.

Um, how was the boat trip or how was leaving Sydney Harbour? Who did?

We didn't leave Sydney Harbour. I left from - I got colic up in Brisbane,

22:30 it was so hot. We'd been out on the town looking for girls and a bit a fun and all the rest of it and we were at Ascot Racecourse and my crowd were put on board the- oh I forget the name of the ship. Anyway, they were put on board the ship and I collapsed on guard. I was doing a guard duty and I'd been drinking so much beer and so much cold drink afterwards that I collapsed when I

23:00 got on guard duty when I got back to camp. I'd done the old thing of volunteered for late guard duty and I collapsed with these hellishin' pains in my stomach and they all thought that I had appendicitis and they raced me off to Brisbane General Hospital, 'cause there was no hospital there in the camp, it was only a trading, a training, a transit place. So they got me all decked out for an appendix operation and got a doctor out of bed

23:30 early hours of the morning and he looked me as they started to shave me to get ready to cut into me and he said, “This man's had his appendix out. Give him a dose of oil and send him to bed" and that's what they did. But in the meantime my unit had been taken down to the river and put on board a ship and sent away and they sent me over by plane. I, that's when I connected up with them at Port Moresby I, sorry

24:00 at Port Moresby, I connected up with 'em at Townsville because the plane had called in the boat, had called into Moresby, called into Townsville before I went to Moresby. Yeah. Yeah, “Give him a dose of oil and put him into bed."

And you picked the ship up in Townsville? Can you talk about the trip up there to New Guinea? This was

Yeah, we were on our way to Moresby and the Coral Sea Battle

24:30 started and they turned us into Thursday Island and we had to offload at Thursday Island. They route marched across Thursday Island, so we wouldn't get bored and then the Coral Sea Battle had finished and they continued us on to Moresby and that's when we came into Moresby with the - I think it was the hundred plane, there was a hundred planes strafing Moresby at the time and

25:00 bombing Moresby. It was all recorded in the paper.

This was the first action you'd seen, was it?

Yeah. Yeah and the -

Can you describe seeing those planes coming in?

Frightening. Frightening the, all you see is this, the cloud that you can see is covered with planes and they're coming in strafing with their machine guns going and bombs dropping at the same time.

Any of the machine guns hit your boat?

25:30 No, they missed us. As I say they, the bombs that they dropped hit this other thing that was in the harbour, the Macdhui, and one of the bombs was lucky. It went straight down the funnel and hit the engine room and up she went but by that time we were ashore. Yeah.

Where did they take you to when you first landed?

Took us to Murray Barracks and we were right over the road from the canteen.

26:00 We hadn't seen cigarettes or chocolates or anything like that for the trip over from Townsville, which was about five days. About five days we were on that boat because of the delay at Thursday Island and that night they came over again and they dropped bombs and they hit the canteen right over the road from where we were. We were a bit cranky on them for that.

This was a bit different to training exercises you'd been involved in Australia. How was it to be

26:30 **in an area that was open to attack?**

Well it was a rude awakening. Very rude awakening but not to be unexpected because we'd, like everybody else we'd seen the war movies and all that sort of thing and it wasn't unexpected. The fear was there, of course the fear was there, of being bombed and strafed and all the rest of it but the raid only lasted

27:00 for I suppose about twenty minutes and it was over by the time they came over and did 'cause they only do the one run. They come straight over and they, then they head out towards to sea and then they can't go too far because they were coming from the other side of the island, from over Finschhafen and the other side’a Kokoda. Yeah.

Was there still the fear in Port Moresby that the town could fall to the Japanese?

Oh yes.

27:30 The Japs got within fifteen miles of Port Moresby.

At that time when you arrived what was the situation?

No, it was after we left there when we'd gone up the Lakekamu River, this is when they decided that they wanted to build the road to come in behind the Japs but MacArthur, as I say MacArthur said, “That's too bloody slow. You're not fighting a war of the 1900s." He said, “This is 1939, '40-odd" and he sent those, when we were building

28:00 the road we were looking down on the paratroopers dropping down into the Markham Valley.

Did you feel you were fighting a modern mechanised war?

No. No, we felt that we were fighting an antiquated war because we could see and we knew the equipment because of the way we built the road and we built it with picks and shovels.

At the time when you landed in Moresby, did you feel you were part of a modern army?

No.

28:30 No because all the equipment we brought with us that our CO [Commanding Officer] scrounged to see that we had good equipment was grabbed by the Yanks and taken from us. We had nothing. When we went to build the roads and build that thing out at Murray Barracks, we had nothing. We had to use the tools that they had there.

So

Hammers and saws and God knows what, but they had plenty of timber.

So the engineering unit of the Australian Army that you were with, was it adequately equipped do you think?

29:00 When we left Australia and arrived yes, because our boss made sure that we had it all and this is why the colonel hated our guts, hated his guts, and why we didn't receive any recognition because our boss would fight to get us equipment and he didn't like it. He wanted, he reckoned we had to do it the same way that they did in Queen because Queensland in those days was an antiquated state too. Queensland, Brisbane was a country town

29:30 at World War II. They got the shock of their life when they saw the bloody Yanks arrive there.

They hadn't, had the Americans arrived when you were in Brisbane?

Yes. Just.

Was that your first contact with Americans at that time?

Yes. Yeah.

Can you describe your first impressions meeting Americans?

Awe. Great awe at what they had, the way their uniforms were. Everything that they had and

30:00 detesting of the way that they treated people. They were God almighty and the Yanks never ever lost that feeling amongst Australian servicemen because of that attitude that they had. They were God almighty and they were too with their equipment.

Was there some sense of gratitude though or?

No.

Or relief that they were there to protect Australia?

No. None, none at all and it got worse when you got

30:30 over a, when we saw what dingoes they were. They were. That they relied too much upon their mechanical equipment, whereas we had to rely upon the bayonet training that we were given and that was a rotten feeling to have with your allies. Very bad. Very bad.

But it,

31:00 **was that feeling there straight away or did it evolve in your relationship with the Americans as you associated with them?**

Oh it evolved straight away because it was sort of scuttlebutt stories that came back from the Middle East about them. We had no contact with them in the Middle, oh my crowd. We had no contact with them from the Middle East because we weren't there and the first contact that we had about them was the 7th Division. When the 7th Division were brought

31:30 home by Curtin and they were just given a brief experience in Syd… well they hit Perth, they bypassed

Adelaide, they came straight to Melbourne, they came straight to Sydney and then straight through to Brisbane by train.

And that's

They weren't

And

They weren't even given leave.

That's when you picked up the 7th Div at?

Yeah.

And joined them in Brisbane?

Yeah and

32:00 we had fights. We were, American trains were coming down from Townsville down towards Sydney and we were going up. Trains would stop alongside of each other. What do you think happened? Blues.

Were you involved in any of those blues?

No, we weren't fortunately. We just kept going, we, our trains missed all'a that. The train that we went up on missed all'a that. We certainly had stops because we had to stop and let the -

32:30 the what do you call it trains, the goods trains past. They'd put us on sidings.

So this is after you'd flown up to Brisbane and after you'd been in New Guinea?

Yeah.

Is that right? This is

Yeah.

Were there any fights in Brisbane at the time when you first met Americans?

Yes - there was one big fight in- before we went. We were at Ascot Racecourse for about

33:00 two weeks. We were there for about two weeks and during that time we couldn't get into the theatres. We couldn't get into the hotels because the Americans had it all. There were so many of them. So very many of 'em. We couldn't in the hotels, you could imagine they were ten deep at the bar, Yanks, and we'd come in and try to

33:30 get to the bar to get served and the girls wouldn't serve us 'cause the Yanks were givin' 'em good tips. So eventually they had to form a special canteen for the Aussies, out of town. Not in town, out of town, and that created a lot of friction that that occurred. That we couldn't get in to get a beer anywhere and get as far as picking up a girl and going to the movies, forget it, it was impossible. Once again the Yanks had all the theatres

34:00 filled and even the theatres that were out of town a bit where you sat on canvas chairs and you smoked. In those days you could smoke in the theatres, all the theatres in Queensland and there was one particular time where the Yanks had one of the newest buildings that they had in Queensland and they had taken it over as their PX [American canteen unit] store as they called it and they could get their

34:30 cigarettes cheap and they'd get their everything. Cameras. They got the whole lot cheap and they even had in the beginning, we hadn't seen the very first time was these little transistor railway radios. We couldn't get anywhere near that stuff and something happened between a provo and a girl near the entrance of this club and the girl got smacked around a bit and the Aussies wouldn't stand for that that were there, so they had a bit of a blue

35:00 then, they were all taken to task by the police and by the various army charges in charge of everything. So the 6 Div boys, 6 or 7th? No, it was the 6th Div, 6 Div boys decided to go into town and teach 'em a lesson and it was a Sunday morning and they did go in with automatic weapons that they'd brought home and had ammunition for

35:30 and they attacked this canteen and after that, they were allowed to go into the American canteen.

Where were you at that time?

I was in hospital with this business of this stomach but they were going to give me an operation for the appendix but my unit had gone on. They had gone on to Townsville.

And you heard of this incident at while you were in hospital you?

36:00 Yeah.

You heard of this incident?

It was in all the papers and everything, was all over the place.

Did they kill any Americans?

No. No, they just shot up the building. No, there was nobody killed, it was, they just shot up the building to let 'em see, “If you don't come across and give us a bit of a go, we'll give you a go” and then the American authorities realised that they were doing the wrong thing. They were alienating the Aussie troops but it worked out alright. The building's still, you people go up there, a serviceman

36:30 can take you up there and show you, there's the bullet holes from that Sunday morning in the walls of that building. They never repaired them.

Still in Brisbane to this day?

Still in Brisbane to this day. I think it's Adelaide Street. There's Queen Street, is the main street, Adelaide's the next one. All the main streets in Brisbane going one way are called after women and all the cross streets are named after men because of the sexual intonations.

Tape 6

00:30 **(UNCLEAR) company engineers?**

It's the 9th Field Company.

9th Field Company?

Yep, you always must remember the full name of the unit because there are so many units, very similar names.

Right.

You got the 2/9th Field Company, the 2/9th - what do they call them? Mechanical engineers. You've got all sorts’a things and unless you get the right name and we were the 9th Field Company AIF.

Okay.

Prior to that, we were the 9th Field Company chocos.

01:00 what do they call them? AMF

AMF

We all became AIF at the one time.

Were there any changes in the company between, you mentioned the whole company joined the AIF together?

Mm.

So you were pretty much with the same guys from the moment you joined up?

Yes.

To when the reinforcements were taken out to the Middle East?

Yeah and right through until I was discharged and even now

01:30 there's a lot of them that are left now are still the original crowd or as a lot of the reinforcements died because they were silly. They just got themselves into trouble and they died. Got killed.

Can you tell me, just take me back to when you first joined up, when you entered into the CMF? You mentioned engineers were an interesting bunch’a blokes.

Yeah.

A lot of them had been from fettlers and other

Yeah.

All trades?

Yes - all parts of trades

02:00 - hard trades. The hard trades like even down to cow cockies off the farms. Don't know why, but this is some misconception they had from the old British Army days that people who lived off the land or did hard labour, they were engineers and originally the original’ers were called pioneers. Still a British idea because the pioneers were the ones that did the pick and shovel work and built the toilets and all that sort of latrines and

02:30 sewers and that's what the Australian idea was too. Until now. They've learnt to change.

How did you initially get on in this new group of men? I mean you were a, quite a studious young man. You weren't big or particularly rough bod.

Took

How did you get on with them?

Took awhile because of their background and my background. We were the smaller ones and younger ones, we were a bit afraid of them until we were assimilated.

03:00 They accepted us and we learnt that they weren't going to stand over us you know. They, that we became part of them. We all became a united body after our training. That happened after the initial training in Ingleburn.

So when you were in Ingleburn, just the initial time, you said you were a bit scared of them?

Yeah.

Did anything ever happen that that between?

No only that initial night I said about the Aboriginal

03:30 cook and the officer, the sergeant NCO. It was the only time that was anything oh partly terrifying that happened in our lives because we weren't accustomed to seeing somebody chasing somebody else with a meat cleaver but no, that was the only terrifying thing really.

Can you tell us about some of the characters from that company?

Some of the characters?

Well some of the personalities you particularly

04:00 **remember who were interesting people at the time?**

well we got, we still got him. There's JJ. A lot of them were a lot of them were called nicknames like myself, “Dynamite McGinty”, and all that sort of thing and that bloke you just heard talking, he was called “Pussy Burnell” because he used to sort of get along on his tippy toes. God knows why, but he used to and he had a twin brother who was a particular friend’a mine who he lived down at Queanbeyan and I used to go and visit him quite often until he

04:30 died down there. - then there was a bloke, JJ, he was the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] orderly like you see in “MASH” how they have those things and the orderly in charge of the office was what's his name? Radar, and all those things? Well this bloke was like Radar but in our unit. Anybody that got hurt, you went and saw him first and because we were non-combatant troops and we never ever had any more

05:00 than ten rounds of ammunition and our rifle was just carried on our on our back even while we were working as a as a deterrent in case but - no, JJ his name was John James Bain and we just called him “JJ” and now he is a well renowned doctor up in the Blue Mountains and he does a lot of work for Legacy Ladies. The Legacy Ladies. As most of us do.

05:30 We do a lot of work for the elderly ladies that are left behind. Their husbands are gone and well they knew us too, (UNCLEAR) because we all fraternised even. This is how close we became prior to going away and after going away, 'cause at my place my sisters used to bring home the girls from work and I'd bring home the boys from the unit and we'd have parties and my Dad used to love it. So did Mum. Dad used to love it because this is how we were

06:00 and… well there's, see now there's the young sister up there. She died in America of cancer. She was one of the first ones that they tried the - the atomic gun on. The, what do they call it? Radiotherapy and it was a huge thing and I was working at the particular time I was doing engineering work for the Daily Telegraph Woman's Weekly. These are all parts of the work that I did that

06:30 have come into my life. I worked for the Daily Telegraph Woman's Weekly for ten years and we were looking through the paper as it be, while it's being printed and here's this big double photo of this girl on a bed with this great big machine being pointed at her and it was my sister and she died after that operation at twenty four, because cancer wasn't very well known in those days. She married an American serviceman and went over. But

She married an American serviceman?

Yeah. She married an American sailor. Yeah - he turned out to

07:00 be a chap that came from a very strict Catholic town in America, Spokane Washington, and they were trying to have children and through her not having children his family started to ostracise her and they eventually went to doctors to find out why and they found out that she had cancer of the thyroids and he divorced her immediately and then she eventually married another chap, who wasn't a serviceman.

07:30 He became a like a God to her because he showed her America and he treated her well and treated us

well and told us all that happened with her life

Did she?

And then he looked after her.

Did she marry her first husband

She married

just at the end of the war or?

Yes. She was a war bride that went to America on one of the ships.

And her marriage was in America?

No. She, they married here. They got permission to marry here and - then she went over

08:00 there and she was only over there for about, oh barely twelve months I suppose, and no children were showing and the family didn't like it and that's how they found out that she couldn't have children anyway because of the cancer of the thyroids.

At the time you were home in Australia. Did you go to the wedding?

No, I wasn't home. I

You weren't home?

No, I was overseas.

Okay. How did you feel when you heard your sister was marrying an American?

Oh it was alright because I knew him before I went. I had come home on, I was granted through being one that had been

08:30 overseas for a long time, I were, I got one of the priority leaves for being away for so long without any home leave when the Yanks were getting leave every six weeks and we'd been away for about two years then and I got leave and I met him then because the Yanks were in full control of Sydney then and he was a tall Yank and he drank gin. All he drank was gin. Never forget him. Yeah, big Yankee. Tall. Slim, naturally.

09:00 Slim, I forget his surname but they weren't married long and then as I say she married this other chap and he was quite good to her and he kept us in touch with everything that happened to her but as I say, I didn't know it was her until I saw that thing.

Just go back to the friends you had in your company. You mentioned there was a pretty fearsome - renowned as a fearsome company by

Yes. Yes that's right.

a, who was the most fearsome

09:30 **member of that**

Oh

unit?

A bloke we had who was an ex-fighter and he always insisted on carrying the flag on Anzac Day marches and he was, his last birthday, I think he was about eighty six and if he grabbed you with one hand around your muscles, he hurt you because he was still training and punching the bag and all that at eighty six underneath his house.

10:00 **Did you have any times during the work you did for the CMF in Australia or later on in New Guinea where his fighting skills came into play?**

No, he never did any because he had been hurt in the ring a bit and he, I think he'd copped too many punches, he was getting a bit punch drunk and he hadn't done a lot but oh God he was fierce and he had - how shall I -

10:30 fall outs with most people in the unit and even at one time I used to pick him up. Used to go to his place and take him out and his wife and his children and we lived pretty close when I was living up at Parramatta and for some unknown reason he just turned on me at one time because of this affliction he had and then suddenly out of the blue I became his best mate but now he can't carry the banner. Sister Susan has to carry, which is

11:00 true because one of the girls carries it now, one’a the daughters of the other blokes.

What about the other big blokes in your unit? Any other characters stand out?

Yeah, we had, what was his name? Ee. There was Woodward, Keithy Woodward. He was the Sergeant.

He lives down at Wollongong. He's still alive. He was

11:30 always pulling pranks on people. Big bloke. Very big bloke but he's the president of oh one of the RSLs [Returned and Services Leagues]. Not Wollongong RSL. Thirroul. He's the president of Thirroul RSL.

What kind of pranks did he pull?

Oh you'd hear him short sheeting beds and putting a lot of pepper or salt or whatever in your meal and

12:00 even if you had a drink he'd put some stuff, they had special stuff in the islands for making you go to the toilet and he'd put some'a that powdery stuff in your tea. Silly pranks like that you know. Nothing that did any great damage but they were all fantastic drinkers. Always, and every job that ever I had too always entailed

12:30 drink. I had to be able to drink. I can't now. Not allowed anyway but every job I ever had always had to do, had something to do with drink. You had to be able to drink and all of our blokes were the same. All damn good drinkers but - and oh there was another bloke who used to be a, don't know what you'd call him but he used to work in the Hotel Australia and he was only a young chap.

13:00 Um and he was like, he helped the people with their baggage. Used to get their baggage out. He wasn't the, not the head man that you see in the big hotels but he was under him, like an apprentice, and when we got rid of our cooks he used to make terrific buns. I'd love to know how he used to do it. We had no yeast but he used to make terrific buns out of bread but he now controls a big engineering company in Sydney and his sons have it now. He's

13:30 so big. God he's huge. He used to have a place on the island out here. Tt was

What kind of things did you learn as a young man from these elder men in your unit?

How to be self-sufficient.

Can you explain that?

How to be self-sufficient. Look after yourself and not rely upon anybody totally. To learn to rely upon yourself and your own judgment and your own

14:00 capabilities.

How did that teaching come through?

How did it come through? It come through in such a way now that I tell politicians and everybody else, "I'm going to be here 'til I'm a hundred" and they say to me Why?" and I say, Because I want to annoy Christ out of you."

How did you learn that then? How did they teach you that?

By their attitude to life too but especially the older ones and the way that they had gone through their life in the fettlers. The way they had to sleep alongside the railway lines while they were away working,

14:30 away from their families. And the blokes off the land, they had to be off the land. I love all the people on the land and I love these type of people because I have an affinity with them more so than people with accountants and things like that. Lawyers. Lawyers and those sort of people I detest because they to me are mm like an octopus. They suck the

15:00 life out of you, whereas the others ones do something, have done something constructive for the country and their families and their life but the others are just - as I say they take all your money and give bugger all in return. I just don't believe in those people. Same as politicians. I don't believe in politicians. I have nothing but - well I have actually got contempt for those people.

How, getting back to your unit, how did you win

15:30 **their respect? These older men?**

By doing what I did with the explosives. By being part of the set up where they'd do their silly things. Being one of the, by being one of the how shall I say it?

16:00 Well, mascot is the best way to put it. By being one of the mascots and wanting to be, show them that I could do the fun things like they did. I'd start fights and things and get out and look at them and watching them fighting and laugh at them. Then they'd grab hold of me and pull me in too, so I became part of them. Their life. Even today, same thing happens you know. If they do things in the march or whatever there you know. We go in the Anzac Day march and they'll whisper

16:30 out of the side of their mouth, "Go on Mac, fall out of step." You fall outta step and you get the other blokes behind you going crook. You do silly things.

How would you describe the relationships you formed within a smallish unit like that in war time?

They're like family. They become like family. Very close knit. Like all for one and one for all. It's a hard

thing to

17:00 describe the affiliation that you do get with those people and it spills over into their family, their immediate family too, because they assume that you're part of their family also and it does. It becomes good.

You weren't combative troops but if it had come to it, would you have died for your?

Well we were combatant troops at one stage. It was all on the newsreels here in Sydney or in Australia. We were working on the road at

17:30 Wau, 'round about Wau and there's an airstrip at Wau and the Japs were pretty close. They had tried to come around the back way to get into Moresby after Kokoda had beaten them and our blokes were being flown in with the old Biscuit Bomber planes [supply planes], where they had the opening on either side and they were hopping out of the planes and trying to get in into cover and the Japs were just shooting them as they got outta the planes. And they called on us to come off the road with our ten rounds of

18:00 ammunition and we had to fire at the Japs to keep the Japs from knocking our blokes off as they got out of the planes but once our guns stopped firing then we made this show of attacking with bayonets and the Japs just went for their lives and they

Did

Left our blokes alone.

Did anyone get hurt?

No 'cause an airstrip's fairly wide and the .303 rifle fires a fair way but they knew and they anticipated that we were a big force that had come to

18:30 help the blokes getting out of the planes and then when our bullets went, we didn't let them know that our bullets had stopped, we just had to fix bayonets and then make a charge at them. If they had they charged back at us or fired back at us, we were gone, but they just assumed that we were a bigger force and they went. Went for their life.

Did that experience of fighting together as a group change your unit in a way?

No, because it was a thing that we did without thinking.

19:00 It was just - well we were there to do something and we're going to do it sort of thing. It was something you did do without, just without thinking or considering. You just did it. You…

How, I'm just going back to your relationship with other fellows in the army, did anyone at any time after you joined the army still call you a dago?

No. Never. Never.

How did they deal

19:30 **with - after the Italians left the war? Did you get any prejudice at all about?**

No they - it became a good hearted banter then but you know, “Oh you, you're going to eat your bloody frogs tonight?" and I say, “No frogs, Italians don't eat frogs," you know. That sort of thing. Yeah. "You going to cook spaghetti for us tonight, Mac?" “No. Cook your own bloody spaghetti." You know, that sort of thing. It never became a biting thing like it was earlier.

20:00 It used to be very insulting in the early days but not afterwards. Never.

Did?

It has even happened to me recently, this business, and it was a Vietnam veteran that said it to me. I could have jumped over the counter and got at him and it was a person in the Housing Department that I went to see about something here that's going on here.

As a young man,

20:30 **were you a very easy person to wind up if you like?**

No.

Did you get frustrated easily?

No, I was always pulling jokes. I was always pulling jokes and things before doing all sorts of things to get laughs out of people, not because of any need to do so. It was just the way I was. We used to do things like that. The whole crowd. There used to be a whole crowd of us 'cause I belonged to the, as I say I was a life saver at Coogee.

21:00 There'd be about oh twenty of us I suppose at least that used to go to a place down at Coogee Beach

called Stones Cabaret and it was once again something similar to that ‘Fame' place that we were talking about earlier. And Stones Cabaret at Coogee was a place where the young people could go and you couldn't get any drink or any beer or grog of any sort but the young and upcoming entertainment artists

21:30 came down from down Stones Cabaret and then from there they went on to, well all there was in those days in Sydney was the Theatre Royal, which had all the operas and little stuff like that, or the occasional big stage play from overseas and then you had the old Tivoli Theatre, which was a burlesque theatre, where you had people like

22:00 a bloke called Mo and Stiffy and Mo. And they got arrested every Saturday night and it was in the newspapers every weekend that they were arrested for smut because the police in those days were very narrow minded and you couldn't say “Bloody" or “Bugger" or anything like that on the stage. You were arrested but these blokes used to go beyond. But um, they had a lot of the stars, some of the very old stars. I think there's a couple still alive today. There was Queenie Ashton. She was a very big star

22:30 who was Jack Davey, Bob Dyer, they were stars, they came off the Tivoli circuit.

Did you ever get anybody coming to entertain you when you were in New Guinea?

No. We never, never had any entertainment groups at all. We had to if we were near the areas - Port Moresby before we were sent out at Lae. When we got over to Lae, when the Americans were over there too we'd have to sneak into their

23:00 entertainment set up. Even if we were a long way out, we'd steal, we'd walk to get there or hitch a ride if we could go to get out and you sat on long log seats but to get home we'd steal one of their jeeps and then abandon it in the bush before we got near our camp but they couldn't prove it, so we didn't worry about it.

What sort of entertainment would they have?

Well they had some of the ‘has been’ and the unknown movie

23:30 stars would come out. They had Una Merkel. Una Merkel was one. She was an unknown star but she used to get around. She'd have lipstick on that was dripping off her lips and she'd put about half a dozen cigarettes in her mouth, light them and hand them to the audience and they used to think that was good for the women to do that sort of thing. Used to disgust us. Um Betty Hutton, I saw, I got a hell of a headache one night

24:00 from Betty Hutton who was out there. I was right next to her drummer. Uh what a noise. Movies: they had the movies. They had the very latest movies that weren't even shown in Australia at the time because as I say there was no television or anything like that in those days. It was only the newsreels, if you saw well we didn't see the newsreels up there, they only showed the other things and

24:30 then it at home here they only showed the news that they wanted the people to see what was going on. It was a very restrictive sort of thing. They didn't want to show the bad things you know to get the people upset, whereas now you see anything that's going on the TV over in Iraq and all that sort of thing. Children being killed and all that but no, it was entirely different. It was a very

25:00 different era. Very different.

When?

Bef

Sorry, go on.

I was going to say, before the war and after the war it was a different era altogether. Even after the war it was so different because the women had learnt what it was like to earn their own money - and good money - and not to rely upon men for their livelihood and this is when what's her name - the woman come in with

25:30 this woman's lib thing and it hasn't changed since. Women are now become that way that they have got their place in the world.

When you snuck into the American entertainments, what would have happened to you if you'd gotten caught?

Nothin’. They didn't mind us going to see their shows. They knew that we had no entertainment and at this particular time

26:00 we were very restricted on the meals and diet that we got and this is something that the Australian Government has never come to terms with and will never admit. That we didn't get the sustenance that we should have been getting or as the Americans were getting, as we used to become very jealous of them. They were getting steak and egg in a tin. Boil it up and tip it out and they got a steak and an egg and we were lucky if we got

26:30 bully beef or meat and vegetables, which stunk to high heaven, and the dog biscuits that were so bloody hard you could wear them as soles on your shoes or our shoes wore out every three months anyway and

we didn't get any new ones. You still had to put a pit, put them together and hold them together with - what they called the kundy vines, which is a very tough vine up there in the islands, like you see Tarzan swinging on. They had a vine up there that was very tough. We used to use that to bind our

27:00 legs together - shoes.

A lot of Australians acknowledge that the Americans were better supplied but

Yeah.

But they say that it made them harder soldiers. They were better for it.

Who?

Other Australians that we've talked to for instance can say that, that they thought that they were better soldiers because they weren't necessarily supplied with all this sort of equipment.

Oh that's right. That's right. The Aussie soldier was always more self-sufficient than the American soldier. As I say the American soldier relied upon his

27:30 equipment. The Aussie soldier relied upon his own ingenuity and his own guts.

Did, was that recognised by you at the time?

Yes. Always. We were, we always recognised that.

Did you feel in some way superior to the Americans?

No, we didn't feel superior to them. We just felt that they were bloody weak and their administrative people were too full of bullshit because none of our

28:00 people get around with all that fruit salad on their chest, like we don't get around mu - look what I've got. Four medals over there and they get a medal for even tripping over, which we saw quite often and their purple heart. Everybody used to go nuts over a purple heart in America and all it was, if they got a cut finger and got it bandaged up they got a purple heart for it because they drew blood. We didn't.

Was there any

28:30 **jealousy or animosity towards the Americans**

Oh no

because of that?

No, there was a great deal of surface camaraderie. Very much so. In fact at one time when I went down for that court martial for the officer, the one that shot the bloke – headquarters, the American headquarters was moving from Port Moresby over

29:00 to Lae because the war had gone further on and they had a lot of equipment and stuff in their so-called PX stores, so they put on a huge carnival in Port Moresby. There was no fighting, no strafing or bombing in those at that time, so they put on this huge carnival and they were giving away all the prizes and anybody and everybody that was around. Aussies, Yanks, whoever. The Australian services, the nurses

29:30 that were all there at the time, they were attending this and it was just a carnival like you'd have in the whole of Sydney and it was Port Moresby. They had the whole of this carnival over Port Moresby and if you were walking along and you, no lights and that, of a night time they'd just have these flares here and there and if you tripped on a root or something, somebody would suddenly come up and give you a carton’a cigarettes. “That was for almost falling over Aussie" you know or like this sort of thing. All that sort of thing. You,

30:00 they were very generous with that sort of thing. No grog, but all this sort of thing. Cigarettes and even these tins of stuff they were talking about. They'd have that sort of thing 'cause they knew that we weren't getting it. They were very good that way. Very generous. The cigarettes and they had also um - at that particular time they had cans of beer then too but it was like lolly water to us.

30:30 Very poor the American beer but - no, as I say they were very generous. There was no animosity at all.

Let's talk about lolly water for a while?

Mm.

Talk about this cordial factory you mentioned.

Ha yes.

When did you get the orders to do this job? Was it the first major job you did?

The first

When you arrived in Moresby?

First major job we did in Moresby in December,

31:00 December '42.

How did you take the news that you were going to be employed to do?

We didn't know what we were building.

The whole time?

We didn't know. We were, just thought we were building a store room or something like. We didn't know. There was no machinery come in it. We just built the building, right? And there was another store room out the back where all the sugar was going that should have been going to the troops. We didn't know until afterwards and we saw it in the paper. There was a local paper that used to come out there

31:30 Guinea Gold that they used to bring out once a month and it was in the Guinea Gold that the people back home in Aus [Australia], it was in the papers here in Australia too, that there was a terrific shortage of sugar for the troops and they didn't know where it was. They just knew there was a shortage of sugar and this Guinea Gold said “Yeah, 'course there is. It's going to Blamey and his officers." The same as I don't know whether you knew it or not but Blamey and all his big chief officers over in the Middle East,

32:00 they had their wives over there. They were allowed to take their wives over. That's not in the dangerous plots but where the troops were in the semi-dangerous areas and their wives ran the brothels for the Aussie troops. Didn't go on in New Guinea because there was no place they could do it. I know because I got into trouble for writing home. My sister wrote and asked me “Whether it was the same as the, what happened in the Middle East?”, and when I asked them “What the hell they thought we were doing up there?

32:30 That we were given a pick and shovel in one hand and a broom up our backside and we were building a road” and next thing I'm fined ten dollars for corrupting the morale of the people on the home front. It was in my pay book. Only time ever I got a charge on my sheet.

Are they the exact words you used in the letter?

They, yeah that's what I said, yeah in my letter and when it came back it was, they were cut out. The letter came back, the whole letter came back through the censorship people that they had going at that

33:00 time and I'd been out on patrol 'cause we had our patrols, two of them of a day time and night time to see there was no Japs in the area, while they were working and I came back from one of these patrols and as I got back to the camp, the guard on the entrance to the camp, well when I say entrance, it was a part of the roadway and the tents were further back, they arrested me, took my tin helmet off, took my rifle off me - quick march you know each

33:30 one of each side of me, grabbed under each arm, marched me up to the CO's tent and told me to stand at ease. Stood at ease and the CO said, “You are being charged for corrupting the morale of the people on the home front." I said, “How the hell could I do that?" and the bloke beside me, one of the guards, he slapped me on the back of the head and he said, “Be more respectful to the CO."

34:00 The CO said, “Leave him alone 'cause this is a stupid charge" and he said, “I'm sorry," he said, “But I am instructed to charge you ten pounds for this offence." He said, “Did you write this?" I said, “I don't know. It's cut out" and he, the cut out piece was on another bit of paper and he put it in behind where it was cut out and he said, “Did you write that?" and I said, “Well I must have. It's cut out there. It's my writing" and he said, “That's fair enough.

34:30 Fined ten pounds" and away. Red mark in and then and it goes in red ink in your pay book and it goes on your record, so it's in my record somewhere in a department.

How did you feel about your commanding officers?

Good. We liked them all. All of our officers we liked, even the ones that I said the ones that copped a little bit of a bed upset and the bloke who was dropped in the river, they gradually

35:00 became like one of the boys but the Aussie soldier doesn't have the same respectful attitude towards his officers like they say they've got in the American movies and we never saw that sort of thing in the American movies. The ordinary officers, the real high up ones with all the fruit salad on, yes. They're afraid of them because if they don't salute them as they go past and all of that but the Aussie soldier doesn't do that sort of thing.

35:30 Or they didn't then. I don't know whether they do it now but you've got to remember in those days that we slept on grass palliasses on the ground and nowadays they sleep in beds with sheets and blankets and their own radio and lord knows what. We did it hard. This is why I say the Aussie solder even now the ones in Rwanda and all those places - they sleep well. They live well compared to the way

36:00 we did in war time. So there's a great difference in it all.

I imagine

But there's no animosity. It's just that we say, “No, we did it differently,” because time's changed.

I imagine if an Aussie soldier these days stuck half a stick of gelignite in his commanding officer's tent he'd get court martialled for it?

I reckon they would. I reckon but I don't think they would have the availability of the explosives like we did. Like even one time we were out this

36:30 same place where we were doing the bridging and the officer got dropped in the water. We had free time and we had one of these sections of the bridge and there was two, four, six of us out on this barge on the river. We hadn't had any decent food, even here in Australia, so our sergeant decided to take a bunch of us out fishing with the gelignite, which we did. So we go out with the oars, they had special oars for that, we go out

37:00 on the river out from Penrith itself, and we've got a box of gelignite, which is fifty pounds. That's fifty sticks of one pound of gelignite and the idea was to [make] a reasonably short fuse, but not a dangerous one, light it with his cigarette, drop it overboard and row like hell to get away from it when it goes up, otherwise it'd blow the bottom of the

37:30 boat out. So this particular time, we'd done some of it, and as the fish come up you'd have the nets that we'd drop out and pick up the fish that we wanted. So this particular run after we'd done a couple the sergeant lights his gelignite, we think he drops it overboard and he said, “Row you buggers, row" and we're rowing like buggery and here's the bloody stick of gelignite in the bottom of the boat. What did we do? Over the side and go.

38:00 We blew up the bloody barge. We got into trouble for that one, but we got out of it because it was a put over as an exercise run that we were doing to see the currents of the river and the accident happened with the gelignite because we were sounding the depth of the river.

Did your commanding officer know what the situation was?

No. He didn't have a clue. He thought we had to tell him, otherwise he'd a got into trouble too for letting us go out and do that but as far as he

38:30 was concerned and his orders were that we go out and find out how the currents were going because at night, bridging it was done and also to [test] depth, the reason the explosion was on was to see the depth of the river. So our officers were pretty good.

Tape 7

00:34 **Sorry, you're just talking about the numbers in each?**

There's about ninety in each platoon and each platoon is split up of four sub-platoons or sections, four sections, and you'd have a sergeant in charge of each section, a lance sergeant and a corporal and a lance corporal and then the ordinary bods in the section. We would have had

01:00 one, we had a Sergeant White, in Australia we had a Sergeant White and because he was so good he was taken from there to officers’ training. We didn't see him again. Then we had another one that was made, he was a sergeant, Sergeant Kear. He became an officer up in the islands because he was so good at his job. - then we had a

01:30 a Sergeant Bonnett, who became, he was vice there was the Major Boydell and Major Syndal. They were the two main officers we had and Major Boydell was too old to go overseas, he was the one we had in Australia, and Major Syndal, he was the bloke who got everything he could possibly get to see that we were well-equipped when we went overseas. So that was two

02:00 changes of officers there. Two other changes of officers (UNCLEAR) about four changes of officers altogether.

You were under Major Syndal, is that right when you first arrived in Moresby?

New Guinea, ye - .

What equipment did you have that he was looking out to make sure that you had? What are we talking about here?

Well basically we had to have troo - tipper trucks, ordinary trucks,

02:30 mechanical equipment like jack hammers and those big noisy things that give the air to the jack hammers. - what else? A D D D4 the smallest dozers you could have in those days up there because the terrain wouldn't stand the big dozer. Not until the Yanks arrived and the Yanks said, “Oh be buggered those, we're going to

03:00 have bloody D7s and B10s and all that sort of thing." They had the big stuff and they just put it in whether the rest of the people liked it or not and they grabbed all that when we arrived. They took the whole lot of that off him and all we had was picks and shovels to go and build the road, plus we had hammers and all that sort of stuff. The ordinary tradesman's hammers like carpenter's tools, plumber's tools - ordinary engineering tools to,

03:30 one of our jobs we'd have to do if any tanks lost their tracks we had to be able to put the tracks back on. You had special tools to do that but we had all of that and then it was just the whole lot of it was taken away from us and we were marched up the Murray Barracks in just the gear we had on our backs sort of thing and nothing else.

The road you're talking about now is the Bulldog rail road?

(UNCLEAR) road.

04:00 **Did you go up there on a boat? How did you get up to Wau?**

We were taken from Port Moresby up to the mouth of the Lakekamu River, which is in the Gulf of Papua practically straight opposite Cape York in Australia. I believe many years ago when the world was a lot younger, you could walk across from Cape York to the Lakekamu River. There was no ocean like it is now but at the mouth of that Lakekamu

04:30 River was a an island which was Thule Island and it was run by a mob of missionaries and a lot of the young girls from the areas where the Japs were known that they were going to take all the young girls, were taken there under the charge of this missionary. It was a fair size island and anybody caught going near it was shot because they had a mob called

05:00 ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit], Australian New Guinea Administration Services [Unit]. They looked after all that sort of thing. Plus they had the coast watchers that were in secret spots up in the mountains watching to see what went on but when we got to the Lakekamu, the boat anchored between Thule and the land or the mouth of the river and there was a village there called Terapo

05:30 and it was right on the mouth of the river, Terapo with the natives, and at Terapo there had been I think there was about six of these landing craft waiting for us to arrive and they took us, there was about forty on each of these landing crafts, took the whole lot of us the whole unit, seventy miles winding up the river to Bulldog, which was another native village

06:00 and from Bulldog there was a track up to… mm I've forgotten the track to… I forget the name of the other village but it was the beginning of the Capensa, might have been Capensa, it was the beginning of the road where the road work was to commence but between Bulldog and this Capensa,

06:30 there was a marsh and, no it wasn't, it was bigger than a marsh, because they tried to put a light cane train line across it to get the supplies up because the they had to get a lot of supplies up to the troops from Bulldog up to this Capensa and spread along to all the other people along the road that were working on it, who were going to be spread out along the road because we were all spread out in little groups of

07:00 five and ten people all along for seventy miles and to have that fed was worse than having a great big mob at say Port Moresby or something like that because there was no place for planes to land or ships to go or anything like that. The road wasn't there. There was nowhere, it was just jungle, and they tried to put this, we put the train line across on, we had these big logs and that, that we cut with the gelignite,

07:30 put them across and then the train lines across it and then they brought the engine and the carriages up with us one of the special barges that they load that they brought up, put the engine on and a couple of carriages. They didn't put the whole lot on, they just put a couple of carriages on it. It was alright, it was on reasonably firm ground. Then they set her out across the bog. She just disappeared. Went down. It was swallowed like quicksand. The whole thing disappeared and

08:00 then they realised they couldn't build the road that way, so they had to go 'round it.

So how much extra work did it involve to go 'round it?

To that created another, well, it was reasonably flat ground but the distance, it took about another three weeks to do that before we actually started on the main road. Yeah. The whole lot of the road took seven months to build but there were sections that they opened and said they were alright and

08:30 part and parcel of the set up of building the road apart from supplying the area was to bring troops from the Lae side of the island back to Edie Creek and Wau and those places for recreational purposes instead of sending them back to Australia, but it didn't work out that way, so they had to send them back to Australia anyway. But I've, it's all written here. I've got it all written there, all that story, written by the colonel of the engineers

09:00 that wrote it out. I got it all from the University of Queensland.

Oh.

They sent me all the reports when I was doing the research work on it.

So, the overall information is written down as you say, so we'll stick to your recollections of building

Yeah.

the road.

Yeah.

On a day-to-day basis, what kind of work would you be called on to do?

Slave labour work. Slave labour

09:30 work. Pick and shovel, as I wrote in my letter. Pick and shovel work. That's all we had. At one stage where we had to go up the mountains it was too hard. You couldn't do it with a pick and shovel, you had to have some sort of mechanical equipment because of, it had rock outcropping and so forth. We had to dismantle one of those compressor's bits and pieces as far as we could and then we had to carry it bit by bit to where we had to use it.

10:00 We had carriers, we had native carriers, so we had two about two thousand carriers on this job and we had to carry it plus there were in those days, they didn't have the round drums, they had the four gallon tins of diesel fuel. We had to or the carriers had to carry that on, stick on poles. They'd have it round about three of them on a pole between two blokes and they had to carry it up where we had to use it. Then we had to assemble it and then

10:30 we had to use the compressor with the jack hammers with ropes tied around us and our shoulders and the jack hammer on ropes too and we'd be swung over the side of the mountain and jack hammering into the side of the mountain to dig the road down because the mountain was like that and we had to dig in there, so that you got a road like that and move it out and as we dug out, the others were up there and there's photos of it

11:00 in there somewhere too, where you see the blokes shovelling, pick and shovelling the stuff over the side but no it was, it was slave labour and when we got higher up, when we got up 'round about the Mossy Forest as I was telling you about and the snow we were issued with ten blankets and we slept in ten blankets and our great coat and we were still freezing

11:30 and cold and that's when they took us, after that was done they took us down so quickly down below and everybody just went head over Charlie with malaria.

It sounds very dangerous?

It was extremely dangerous.

But did anyone get killed?

Yes, a couple when they first put the trucks up. When they had the jeeps on it was only about, I think it was about a six foot road

12:00 and the rubble on the side wasn't firm enough when they tried to make it wider for the two ton trucks and when they started to put the two ton trucks on the first lot of two ton trucks, about three of them, went over and killed everybody in those trucks but they weren't soldiers, they were the natives that they were taking to work up higher plus or there was the two drivers of each one. There was six drivers but the natives they (UNCLEAR)

12:30 went straight down and where they went would have been about a thousand, two thousand feet by the time they'd get to the bottom.

Well what happened after that accident?

Well then they realised that they had to get some sort of mechanical equipment up there to widen it and before they put the trucks on it and get it away from the edge of where they tip the loose stuff because with all the rain, it rained every day up there, with all the rain it just washed all that loose stuff down and it didn't have a chance to solidify, so then they

13:00 brought up a couple of the small D4 dozers and they were the only ones they could use and eventually they widened the road for the D4 with the D4s for the trucks and they did have, they had, they make a lot of malarky about it but they only had one convoy that went right through with the pardon me, with the big trucks because it was unsustainable. They just couldn't service it because overnight the

13:30 jungle would take over. It grew so quick plus it would slip away so quickly too and there was no way of making abutments and things and the bridges, you put a bridge up tonight over one of the chasms, go back in the morning the bridge was gone and the chasm was gone. It was all different. Then you'd have to move it over. That's why the road took so long to build and yet it was still built in a record time.

When those two truckloads of natives went over,

Mm.

did they find the bodies? What happened to the

14:00 **bodies of these people?**

Oh the natives themselves, they went down to get them because they had to take them back to their villages. That was part of, I suppose, the arrangement that they had with the Australian government. I'm not sure how it worked but I know that they were recompensed so much for every pineapple plant that was destroyed, every palm tree that was destroyed… coconut tree I should

14:30 say and every other tree, the paw paw tree. Every tree that was food, carrying the Australian Government, not the Americans, the Australian Government had to pay the native population for.

Did they get paid for their work?

Oh yes, they got paid for their work apart from that but on top of that where we were at Wau, first of all, oh no Edie

15:00 Creek was the first one, we were amongst the gold

Right.

Right? It was alluvial gold there and they had three big dredges and number three dredge was the biggest and they had one Australian Army officer when the Japs were coming through and looked like going to take that area, this bloke destroyed everything he could, which was ridiculous, but he destroyed the gold dredges, so that they couldn't

15:30 get the gold out and use it for their own purposes, right? So this number one and number two, they actually absolutely destroyed but number three was so big, it was something after the size of Sydney Harbour Bridge and the big arm that went up, I forget how high it went up, as high as the Harbour Bridge from water to the lower deck, it was that big, and each bell on it weighed three ton and each bell dug into the bottom of the river and

16:00 scooped it up and then brought it over and put it into the cradles where they did all the alluvial washing to get the gold out and the New Guinea gold is the pure, the weakest quality gold in the whole world. It's got a lot of silver in it and it looks like brass really. At one time we were, well there was an ack-ack [anti-aircraft] artillery company

16:30 that was up there helping us, they were defending us in case the planes come up at the time that they thought and they had a small airport to at Bulolo and there was these ANGAU blokes, they'd come through with their natives going through to another area and they'd stay overnight sort of thing and they'd say, “How you going with the gold boys, getting any gold out?" “Oh gold, there's no bloody gold here" and he'd say "I'll come down and watch you tonight and see what you’re doing" 'cause we'd have our steel helmets

17:00 with the inside taken out and we'd be panning away in the river. See this stuff in the bottom, “Oh that's not gold, tip it back in the river.” We were tipping out the gold all the time and he laughed his head off at us. He said, “You blokes wouldn't know what you’re looking at." So he said, “I'll come and show you how to get the gold easy." So he took us down to the, this number three dredge that was on its side and this big arm with all the bells and he said, “You had a look at that to get any gold off it?”

17:30 “(UNCLEAR) the gold's, there's no gold on that" and he laughed again and he said, “Come on," he said, “I'll show you where it is" and he took us up and he showed us where the gold comes down the riffle plates towards where it's all finely sieved and he said, “Lift that rubber up." We lift the rubber up and here's the, you can see the gold underneath the rubber and he said, “That's where your gold is," he said, “Clean it out there" and then when they these, this artillery people, they decided they were going, they were told they were going home 'cause they'd been there for a long

18:00 time, so what did they do? They worked out shifts and they went and cleaned out all these rifle places and there was a power station there. It had been blown up by this bloke too and we got all the, there were graphite, big graphite brushes that they used on the motors and out of the graphite brushes we made moulds for them and there were moulds of their spanners, 'cause we had the tools and we'd just all the moulds

18:30 of the spanners of the guns. They threw the real spanners away, put the gold spanners in, took all this home, all this equipment home, all gold it was in the papers here, they took it all home here to Australia and one of the silly officers that they had, only a new chum, he got home and he takes it to the Commonwealth Bank in Martin Place Sydney. Puts it on the counter and he says, “I want to transfer this to cash"

19:00 and the bloke says, “Yes sir, I'll do that for you. Just a moment, I'll go and get one of the managers." He goes inside and he phones Victoria Barracks and they come down with the provos and they grab him and they grabbed the whole of the unit and every bloke had at that particular time, five thousand dollars worth of gold because they'd all divvied it up when they got home here but this silly bugger

takes it to the Commonwealth Bank.

Was that?

But then they put provos in all the gold areas and we were

19:30 allowed afterwards to take one, we were allowed to take one gold ring and when I came home I had a gold ring on that finger that was so big my fingers were like that when I and out of it, I had wedding rings for myself made, ring for each'a my two sisters and a ring for my mother. All those.

Was this unit that took the gold home with them, was that your unit?

No. It was an artillery unit.

It was artillery

Ack-ack unit.

Sorry, okay.

'Cause they

20:00 made all the spanners. They got all

Yeah.

Lots of spanners, gun spanners that (UNCLEAR)

It's an incredible story.

Oh it was amazing. Well that was only at Bulolo.

Right.

But then there was a, at sorry that was Edie Creek and then when we got to Bulolo and Wau there was all the mines and all the mines, you went down underground to them but they put all the provos on all'a them then anybody that came out of that area had to go past the gold testers.

20:30 So

What were the gold testers?

Gold testers, it's like a meter and you go through like you march past like in the airports now when you go through and the bells go off, well these gold testers, they had a meter with a pointer that said they had, you had gold or something on you and they'd go through you.

Can you talk a bit more about the road, can you tell me a bit more about the natives that helped you on this job?

Well the two thousand natives

21:00 that we had were mostly a coastal natives. They were the big ones, the ones they call the Fuzzy Wuzzies, and they weren't angels. They dropped a lot of our blokes on purpose because they couldn't carry them, especially in the mountains because they weren't accustomed to the mountain lack of oxygen in the air, but we had most, they were, well they were all coastal and they would buzz off. They'd, once they got up into the cold areas or anywhere near their village they'd

21:30 buzz off and you wouldn't get them again. But you got the ones who were good workers, they were very good workers. You got the ones who were taught by the missionaries. They were like a bad unionist here. They gave you a lot of trouble and it was one'a them that cracked over our sergeant's head this time and the only ones that they would never, never ever get to work for 'em were the proper New Guinea natives.

22:00 He was a little nuggety bloke and he came from the highlands and he used to tell us, "Australia man too weak. Prefer Japan man." They didn't like us at all. They held us in contempt. And they were vicious people. They were very vicious people. So all the nice things you hear about New Guinea, you only get it from people who've been in one area and they struck just those people

22:30 in that one area, not the ones like engineers, we were all over the place.

What dealings did you have with those the little highlander blokes?

How do you mean?

The little highlander natives you mentioned, the nuggety ones that were, that said "They liked the Japanese?"

Yeah, they

What dealings did you have with them?

None. We made them keep away from us and they kept away from us too and we always had to be sure

that we had our rifle when they were around even though we had no ammunition,

23:00 they didn't know.

What situations were they around? Can you explain a bit more about how

Oh well they

you came to?

They'd come around trying to get tools and things because they wanted the metal tools and food, if they could nick the food, they wanted that too. No, they were and also they used to try and put the fear of God into you because they'd come down the, you'd be working on a track or walking along a truck to a track to go

23:30 somewhere and they'd start coming from the other end doing their war dances and with their spears and thing trying to frighten hell out of you. All we had to do was hit our rifle butt so they could hear us, that we hit the rifle butt.

You mentioned their women folk before?

Oh no that's the Cu-Ca Cu-Cas.

That's the Cu-Ca Cu-Cas.

That's the little pygmies.

So did you include the Cu-Ca Cu-Cas in your survey of the different native populations? Who were the Cu-Ca

24:00 **Cu-Cas?**

The Cu-Ca Cu-Cas were the pygmies, the little pygmy nomad and they travel around and they had a bark cowl and you saw them of a night time or on dusk, they looked like a log and you didn't know what they were going to do but they used to try and pinch of a night time, they'd put their hands underneath the tent and feel around underneath your beds to see if they could get any bayonets or things like that or any food. They'd go to the cookhouse and see if the cookhouse was open so

24:30 they'd pinch pots and pans and things like that.

Did any of them get shot for their trouble?

No. One time, we were on in one side of a valley. We were down the bottom of a small valley and there was a tribe of Cu-Ca Cu-Cas on one side and on the other side there was a tribe of the big boys because they'd been trying to get the little blokes' women. The little blokes had opened up on these big blokes with their blow guns and the other blokes

25:00 were throwing their spears across our tents and we were in the middle of a bloody miniature war between them.

And what did you do?

We just pulled out our rifles and just displayed our rifles and made them break it up and go somewhere else and they went. They were all the little trivialities of things that happened.

You mentioned that they wanted your metal objects?

Yeah.

Did they ever steal any rifles?

No. Rifles are no good to them.

And

25:30 **yet they feared them?**

Yet they feared them, that's right. They had no use for rifles because they were more dangerous with that little blow gun. God tell you what, the wild pigs we used to try and catch the wild pigs. No way but they'd just blow, use their blow tart bart and they'd get the wild pig 'round behind the ears somehow and the pig'd just go (UNCLEAR) drop down. Straight down. Very interesting. They had their prophylactics for the women, so they didn't have babies

26:00 and it was the bark of a tree. They had all sorts of stuff that the white people don't know they've got. They think they're real backwards but they're not. They're more advanced than the white people will ever be in lots of ways.

Can you explain these prophylactics?

They have a, it's a bark of a tree that stops them having babies like the pills that women have now but they had this bark.

26:30 The women used to have the bark of the tree and they had their nonsense the same as our young blokes have their nonsense with the girls because we'd be going up and down the rivers and we'd have the native boatmen with the river and you'd hear somebody call out from the shore, we couldn't see them, but the native boatman would be laughing his head off and he'd tell us, “A bit a bang-bang going on today" and he'd tell us that there was somebody in the bush having a naughty.

Just among the natives themselves?

Yes yeah.

27:00 **How did all you blokes get on in the jungle with without any women around?**

We just didn't. Then you gotta lot of ideas when you saw the albino women. They were beautiful 'til you got close to them, then they stunk to high heaven. Their skin was very flaky, the whites’a their eyes were pink. Their bodies were all good. They had grass skirts, breasts all exposed and they from a distance - fantastic. “Oh look at that."

27:30 You get up close to it and you smelt it.

What did they smell like?

Oh like nothing on earth. Very dirty and they also, the things that got us a lot. We used to get hookworm, hookworm used to go in through the sole of your boot, up your heel and into your body and it was because they did their business on the water's edge or on in the bush anywhere. With all the rain it got mixed up with the mud and we'd be walking through it and it'd get in

28:00 our boots and then the worms would form. Now my shin bones there, they're all corrugated from the mocka bites. They're a little grub that gets in. We were issued, eventually we had these small gaiters. The Australian gaiter was only there but the American gaiters came right up here with all the lacing. We were issued with them because they thought that'd be better for us instead of our small gaiters 'cause they'd fall off anyway but these American gaiters were quite good but they held

28:30 all the muck and mud and in their muck and mud with all this urine and poop and that that you went through there were these mockas and the mocka used to get into your skin then get into your bones and try and bore into your body. One time I had malaria and I had to go down to the 14th Camp Hospital which was about five miles away. I walked down to the camp hospital and they saw all these mocka bites when they took the

29:00 gaiters off me to put me in bed. Two of them took me out and they had a shower, tin up in a tree, not hot, cold water, put the water in it with Lysol and they got a scrub, an ordinary household scrubbing brush and a cake of Lifebuoy soap. Two of them held me under the tap and under the shower and another bloke got the

29:30 Lysol, the Lifebuoy soap and the bloody brush and they scrubbed me until all these bled and they said, “Now your legs will be alright. You're saved," and only for that eventually I would have lost both me legs because of these mocka bites but the holes are still there in there.

How did you keep a little bit clean out in the jungle?

Oh there was plenty of rivers there. You always went to the rivers.

30:00 Yeah we, there are plenty of rivers there and you always went to the rivers and you had to have your (UNCLEAR). Well in those days you couldn't shave much 'cause you didn't have any razor blades and I was worse than I am here (UNCLEAR). But as I say and the rivers were quite cold because as you can imagine - mountain rivers and when you finished

30:30 in those rivers, if you weren't up to it a bit and you were off a bit, next thing you knew you had malaria because you were down, your immune system was down and also if you wanted a day off from doing all the work, you went to the river and stayed there a little bit longer and you finished up with a slight bout of malaria and you had to stay in your cot for the day, or a couple of days.

Did you have anything to combat the malaria?

Only Atebrin. We were issued first, when we first

31:00 arrived there was nothing. We were first given Quinine tablets when we first arrived but after we got up onto the road working on the road there was no Quinine and then when the Yanks started to get into other spots they brought in the Atebrin, the yellow tablet, and that's what helped us a lot but I finished up, I had the brain malaria and the other malaria and I finished up

31:30 with Dengue Fever and it's a wonder today that I am as good as I am really.

Well cerebral malaria, people die from that, don't they?

That's right.

How did you, how were you lucky enough to survive getting a dose’a that?

Just through insisting to him above or whatever, “You're not going to get me and that's all there is to it," but I, well also after the war I did a lot of,

32:00 still did a lot of exercises even though I was crook. I always tried to combat it you know and I always said, “Well I'm going to live for a long time" and I have lived longer than I expected. Much longer and I think I'll go a little bit longer because longevity is in the family. My people all go to within a hundred. 'Round about the hundred mark. Some go over it

32:30 but with all the stuff the way they've, the doctor I cannot complain about the department, how it looks after me. I'm certainly well looked after the, when I get anything real bad they put me in hospital and they fix it. As I say I've got that many spare parts in me, I'm like a spare part car that's been rejuvenated. They have looked after me.

You look alright from the outside.

Oh yes but I get very breathless and all

33:00 that sort of thing but I can't, well walking from here to up the top where your car was, I lose my breath quite easily.

Can you?

As you saw I've got a special cradle in the bed there for the gout and I can't get rid of that blasted gout. That's my biggest bug bear at the moment.

Can you tell us a bit more about what you did in the jungle to keep your health alright?

Well you didn't do anything except the work. You couldn't.

33:30 There was no flat areas to do exercises. It was a, you were always working on a slope, always. Right through until we got through to Lae. I mean for seven months, I say out of this seven months there was three months we didn't see the sun. We just lived in the clouds and it was like living in fog all the time but afterwards it was a bit different, when we came down to Lae.

What hours would you

34:00 **work up on that slope?**

You worked from daylight until dark. There was no set hours. As I say, it was, there was no sun. You couldn't tell the time. We didn't have wrist watches and that we did have. They faded out because of the moisture and the dampness there all the time that we were in. There was no way of telling time except by the darkness or the lightness. You didn't know whether it was four o'clock in the morning, oh well you knew four o'clock

34:30 but you didn't know whether it was six o'clock or seven o'clock in the morning or seven o'clock at night or what. Just only by the darkness. When it got dark and that's when we were pulled in from the road.

When you camped at night, what were the conditions like?

Well that was when you went to the river and washed your hands and your face and went to get something to eat and then you just dropped in bed because you were so exhausted. In the morning

35:00 that was when you were able to go to the river and have your complete wash, bathe your whole body. Get into the river and the rivers up there were different to the rivers down on the coast because there was no pollution from the rubbish, the poo that the natives did

The villagers.

Because they did it all in the river and on the banks and that but up in the mountains where we were, there was none of that. The rivers were quite clean

35:30 and the fish were quite clean that we ate. It was mostly trout up in those rivers and

Were there any Japanese around this area?

The only Japs that we saw, as I say the ones down at Wau that time and we would look down, we were so high that where the planes come up to go to Lae, they had to come up through the valley where we were building the road on one side of the valley

36:00 and we'd be looking down I suppose about five hundred feet or more below us would be the dogfights that our blokes with the planes and the Japanese and even when the big bombers came through with no fighter cover, they'd be throwing out cigarettes and chocolates to us out of their windows because they knew what we were doing and they knew that we weren't getting any of that stuff. So that was, as I say it was very unusual. I mean

36:30 the planes only seemed to be crawling, so it didn't matter much but they'd bring this stuff through the, they knew they were coming through and they'd bring this stuff through in bags that were loaded with bricks or something like that, so that they wouldn't dissipate all over the place. Yeah.

Did you have to take any precautions to keep yourself secret?

No.

There was nothing on?

No Japs anywhere near us there. As I say

37:00 even when we looked down on all the paratroopers landing in the Markham Valley, we were looking down on them. Thousands and that was like watching a million mushrooms being dropped and then of course when we got further down we had to build a bridge across the Markham, one'a these barley bridges and where we were camped the Markham flooded and took away all our records.

37:30 There's no records of what our company did anywhere. This is why they try to beat us with what they say, "Oh we can't do this. You weren't there." We were there. We know. There's too many people. Well there isn't now, there's only fifteen of us alive. Even the CRE [Colonel Royal Engineers], the colonel he's dead. Got his records there.

Oh well you're putting down some more records here. Um, can you just before we, haven't got long to go before we have a break but I just want to stick on that sight of the parachutists in the Markham Valley.

Yeah.

38:00 **Can you explain in as much detail as you can what you saw and what that looked like?**

Well

What kind of a day was it? What?

It was as clear as the clearest day in Australia here, not a cloud in the sky, and the first thing we knew was we could hear, I suppose they'd be anti-air craft guns that were going off. We could hear this 'pop, pop, pop, pop, pop' away up where we were and wondered what the hell it was and where we were to stay with the brow of the mountain and we didn't know what it

38:30 was but we could hear what was coming. We thought, well they're coming towards us. We thought it was Japs coming towards us. So we'd go up over the brow of that mountain and we looked down on all these planes and these mushrooms dropping out of the planes and it was a fantastic sight. It was amazing and of course down in the Markham too there was a lot of this kunai grass. The kunai grass that grows about six or seven feet high and they were, it was breaking

39:00 a lot of their falls because a lot of them didn't know how to fall out of an aeroplane, I wouldn't know how to fall either but they had their guns and all this sort of thing and on top of that they were also dropping the cannons that they had at the time. I don't know what you call them, Howitzers or what they were, but they were dropping them out of the planes too.

Were they on parachutes?

Yes. They had special big platforms and they were on big, they had about four parachutes. They were dropping these out of the cargo planes

39:30 for them too, so I tell you the Americans really had the equipment, there's no doubt about it.

How did that make you feel knowing that you'd been building a road for them to do this?

Well, we didn't know what it was all about. We did know and we were very objective because we knew that the road was being built as a road for the Australian Government after the war. It had nothing to do with the war effort. Eventually it was a bet between MacArthur and Blamey.

40:00 A box of cigars against a bloody carton of whiskey and our boys eventually as I found out when I was, I went home, I was sent home. They kept our every- the thing that went through we even had a paper. I had one and I gave it to the archives of our unit. It was called The Good Guts and I used to write for that Good Guts too, because I've always done that sort of work besides the other work, and the Good Guts,

40:30 everybody used to say to anybody that came through from base areas, "What's the good guts? When are we going home? How's the war going?" We never got any news. We knew nothing for seven months in that area and eventually one night apparently Blamey came through with all his party and nobody knew who the hell he was because it was dusk and he came through and he was challenged. "General Blamey." "Oh yes, oh I'm fairy godmother too. Who are you?" "General Blamey." "Who are you?"

41:00 "General Blamey." "Come forward and be recognised." Nobody recognised him. We'd never seen Blamey, wouldn't have a clue what he looked like at that particular time, especially when he was covered in mud and God knows what but anyway they finally took him before the CO and the CO realised it was Blamey and everybody kept saying to Blamey "What's the good guts? When are we going home?" And when he'd finished with the CO, the CO come out and said "General Blamey said you will be going home shortly" and they didn't go home.

41:30 He sent them over to Jacquinot Bay to delouse a minefield where the Japs were.

Tape 8

00:32 **Um, at the time when you were building the road, how informed were you of the purpose and the necessity to finish at a certain time?**

We weren't very well informed in time at all. We were told just at the beginning of what it was supposed to do and then we heard from the

01:00 higher echelon that came through occasionally at the beginning, before we got into the mountains. While we were doing the flat stretch, that's when they came through, but none of them came through after the first one that went up in the mountain area and he must have told them, “Don't go up there." Because the whole of the area that we'd been through, we knew that down on the flat area it would be for the

01:30 future of the gold, future of fruit, because a wonderful fruit-bearing area, and also for the trees. For the timber, for the

But at the time it was a military objective, wasn't it?

It was supposed to be a supply line for troops to come in and food to come in behind the Japs when they were at Buna and Gona, after they were kicked back from the Kokoda Track

02:00 and Salamaua, Scarlet Beach. They were all still there.

And were you kept informed, or how informed were you of events in those battlefields?

We didn't know a thing. We didn't and then this is why we were so cranky at times. I've got a list of all there were about oh one, two, three or about ten or fifteen engineering companies on that road and most of them only spent a couple of weeks there and we were the longest ones there, the 9th Field

02:30 Company were the longest ones there. We were there from whoa to go, or no we weren't from whoa because there was another crowd, the 14th Field Company was before us. They'd done a lot of the survey. They had surveyors, they did a lot of the survey work of the road with the survey group, special survey group, and we were told then what it was supposed to be for and we thought oh you beaut, you know, something good, because we were losing the

03:00 war up 'til that stage, until Kokoda, and then we heard afterwards that they had actually got within fifteen miles of Port Moresby and had they got to, that close to Port Moresby and then gone further on, they had Australia, 'cause nothing

At the time, were you aware of how these battles were proceeding though, while you were building the road?

From people that came through. We had a lot of people coming through from I suppose

03:30 the lower groups in both parties. The Americans would come through and say, “You're mad. You Aussies are bloody mad. You'll never build this road here. Look at it, it's stupid. Where's your equipment? You want us to send some dozers?" and they'd look and say, “Oh, we can't send dozers. How can dozers get here?"

How long was your company on the road?

Seven months. That was just on the road.

And as you were building it,

04:00 **were you aware that the military the battles had sort of**

We

had moved on had?

We didn't even know the Kokoda Track. We didn't know. We thought we were still building the road to come in behind the Japs because they had such good control down at Buna and Gona and those areas and that they were going up. We didn't even know that they were going up towards Kokoda but we knew that they were within,

04:30 we didn't know what those names were in those days. Isurava and all the rest of them but we knew that they had got within fifteen miles, and that was at Rona Falls I think it was. It was, she was at the base of the mountains after you leave Murray Barracks 'cause Murray Barracks is a, I think was only a couple of miles out of Port Moresby, about four miles out of Port Moresby and Rona Falls was fifteen miles out of Port Moresby and they'd got that far to the

05:00 top of Rouna Falls and that's where the Kokoda Track started.

So was there a time when you were or a moment of realisation on the road or at any point where you started to question the sanity of building this road?

Oh yes. Once we got into the mountain area. Once we left Wau we started to question it. When we saw the terrain that we had to build this road, which was stupid. It was idiotic. Nobody, if you had property like that here with terrain like that and you had say a hundred

05:30 acres and you wanted to build a road into the other side and you copped terrain like that, you wouldn't do it, not the way that we had to do it. You wouldn't have tried it with a pick and shovel anyway. You'd have done it, you'd have got a bulldozer in somehow, but there was no way of getting a bulldozer in there until the road was built from Bulldog. They had to get somehow getting from Bulldog but they still had to get up the river. There was no way of getting from Tarapo, which was seventy miles away at the mouth of the river,

06:00 there was too much bloody jungle. They would have had to build a road through there first and they envisioned that it was quicker to go by the Lakekamu River and the Lakekamu River was Port Moresby side of the Fly River, which is the biggest river in New Guinea and that Fly River, God blimey there were mosquitoes up there.

Can you talk about that moment when the two roads joined eventually?

Ha, well that was,

06:30 well it was like Christmas Day and New Year's Day and Easter all in one when the final breakthrough come because it was all still very thick trees and jungle, up there even, and we couldn't see them. We could hear their voices but we couldn't see because of that area. You didn't know whether the voice was coming from there or from there or from there or where and there was no way of us firing rockets. We had no rockets to let each other know until

07:00 they were within the last ten feet.

And you

And we could hear them all morning. For all morning we could hear them coming and they could [hear] us coming sort of thing. There was quite a lot of excitement but nobody knew who was where or what was what and then when they broke through we were down below and we're looking up at them. They were ten feet higher than us. Then they had to make the gradient in between the two to make a little hill between them to connect properly.

Sounds like,

07:30 **more like a tunnelling operation than road building.**

Yeah, it was.

So how, why was that? Why was it different? Were you, was the survey out or was it just a?

Oh they didn't have the proper tools to make the right survey. A lot of it was well antiquated, it was antiquated Australian equipment. If it had’a been American equipment they'd a come in spot on

08:00 but because it was antiquated Australian equipment at that time, even though it was the war that was sixty-odd years ago, the equipment they were using was equipment of a hundred years ago.

Did you know?

Like the old convict days.

Did you know the blokes who were coming up from Wau?

The blokes coming up from Wau?

On the road, on the other side of the road.

No, we came up from Wau. They came up from Lae.

Right. Did you?

They came up from Lae.

Did you know the blokes coming in from Lae?

No, we didn't know who they were. We didn't have a clue. We just knew that somebody was coming

08:30 up from the other side because we were the only ones on the road after the others had been taken out to do other work because the CRE and the rest of them didn't like our boss.

How long after that moment was it, was the first convoy through on that road?

Oh practically the same day. The jeeps were waiting, jeeps on our side were waiting and jeeps on the other side were waiting. It was only wide enough for jeeps at that time,

09:00 they had to widen it later on. They widened it later on, but we were gone then. We were on other work and they had other people come through with the mechanical equipment because we didn't have dozer drivers or any of that sort of stuff. They had other engineering crowds who did that. The MEC company, Mechanical Equipment Companies.

How much was the road used after you finished?

Hmmh, I reckon it was only used about half a dozen

09:30 times because of this business of the road slipping away into the valley all the time and they didn't have the troops there to maintain it. They had nobody to maintain it after the road was finished.

Was there still a military purpose to that having,

No.

keeping the road?

No, no it was just pig-headedness. Pig-headedness on the Blamey's part but MacArthur wiped his hands'a the whole thing. Nobody came through it after the war

10:00 except our blokes that went back a couple of trips they did to revisit sort of thing after the war. Many years after the war and they said "They couldn't find the bloody road".

So it was reclaimed by the jungle?

It was reclaimed by the jungle. Reclaimed so quickly. You've no idea how the jungle, they talk about the Amazon jungle but up there you've no idea how quick it grew 'cause up there every afternoon, you could set your watch by it within a few minutes,

10:30 five o'clock, the heavens open up and the rains come down, yeah.

At the time were you aware that the road, it's sort of the reason for the road being there had passed and even though you were completing, continuing to work on it?

Yes. We all became very incensed at that fact and the fact that it wasn't given the importance and we know it wasn't given the importance because

11:00 they were ashamed of it. They were ashamed to admit that it was a wasted effort.

Was it a folly do you think?

'Course it was a folly and the worst part of it is that they refused to admit (UNCLEAR) we've had to fight many years for our pensions off the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] for this sort of thing and we still haven't finished getting what we should be getting.

And you were talking more a bit before about a bet between MacArthur and?

Yes.

What exactly was the nature of that bet and what was the wager?

11:30 Well MacArthur came through at one particular time and I think it must have been 'round about the time that they were about to realise that they had beaten the or were beating the Japs around about the Kokoda business from Milne Bay up, and MacArthur came through and they had a dinner at

12:00 the, there was a club that they used to call 'The Officers' Club' at Wau because Wau was a big, it was a sort of a meeting town because they'd had a, just before the war they'd started to grow coffee up there and they called it 'The Officers' Club' and they had a meeting at this officers' club to make the final decision because the surveyors had been through or the survey army and the ordinary other surveyors had been through when there was a group of

12:30 miners and their families came out of the jungle from further up at Edie Creek and they had said "How bad it was coming through there and they thought the Japs were close behind them" and MacArthur said, "Well it's stupid trying to build a road through there. If these people who've lived here all these lives say that and now they've abandoned their

13:00 plantations, whatever's up at Edie Creek and the mines and they're involved in the mines" and MacArthur said, "It's stupid going ahead with this" and Blamey said "Oh my Aussies will do it." MacArthur said, "Well I don't think they will" and they get heated sort of thing and away they go and next thing MacArthur makes his bet and Blamey makes his bet and it's on and they sacrifice the health of a lot of people's lives.

What was the bet?

Look. One

13:30 box of cigars to a carton of scotch whiskey. MacArthur's bet was a carton of cigars, American cigars for Blamey, and Blamey bet him the carton [for] the box of the carton of whiskey.

And

That would, that they would be able to build the road. No time limit. There was no time limit put on it but he bet that they would build the road and

14:00 MacArthur said, “You're nuts. You won't do it," but there was the Snake River, there was the Wattick River [?], the Bulolo River and what was the other river? There was about five rivers, all tributaries, that came in either to the coast of the Gulf of Papua or they all come down to the Markham River, which were two very big rivers. Australia would love to have them here at the moment at any time.

Um,

14:30 **and when Blamey came up to invest, to inspect the road, at what stage of completion was the road at that stage?**

Almost finished. We were right up the top of the mountain then. We were right up and also the actual height of the road was thirteen thousand feet. They only reported in various reports of eight thousand to nine thousand

15:00 because at ten thousand feet according to the world health organisations everywhere, at ten thousand feet even pilots in planes have to have oxygen. That's just to fly a plane but we were doing manual work at thirteen thousand feet. This is why most of us finished up with respiratory problems. Can't breathe and on top of that we were smokers, which made it worse.

Did the army encourage you to smoke?

15:30 Yes. They supplied us cigarettes cheap and at times they gave us cigarettes and then they even supplied us with a beer issue once a week, once a month.

Well that sounds pretty good.

Ay?

That sounds pretty good.

It was. Once…

Not very not often (UNCLEAR).

It was, that was quite a surprise for the army to issue. Issue, not buy, issue.

16:00 **How did you keep your morale up as you realised that this thing was possibly**

Aussies.

not a?

Aussies. Aussies have a fantastic morale. Aussie troops, I've seen Aussie troops even, show you what they're like, on a troop ship going through a typhoon. On board all up on deck seasick, couldn't stay below because of the stink

16:30 of everybody else being seasick, everybody up on deck and even the crew’a the ship were seasick, it was so bad the typhoon and they'd be betting, “I'll bet you that bloke's the next one to go to the rails and have a big spit." That's how the Aussies are.

I

The morale of the Aussie, I'll tell you, you'd have to be

But

in situations like that to appreciate and understand

17:00 what they are like when travesty is at

Not so much the Australian. I think that there comes a point where you must have realised that that's what it sounds like to me, that you must have realised that this thing was a folly and you?

The road?

Yes

That's right.

And yet you continued on to work towards its completion?

'Cause we couldn't get out of it.

Can you just explain that in a little bit more detail, that motivation?

Well,

17:30 we couldn't get out of it. We knew that we couldn't turn around and say, “Righto, Pitt Street's down the road, I'm going down there to get a bus and go home." We just knew that we couldn't get out of it.

What about your commanding officers? Did they have some say in this?

They were sympathetic towards our feeling but they knew also that we didn't disobey them. We wouldn't disobey them and get them into strife, and we didn't, and all of our officers,

18:00 even those ones I talked about that were dumped in the river when we were back here in Australia, they were with us and they understood the same thing and they were sympathetic and never, they never, ever doubted that we would go against them.

Did you ever have any bets yourself on the sort of, on issues relating to the road when you were working on it?

Only we'd daily have a bet on how much was left of the road, we'd go there the next morning because it happened so often.

You'd actually gamble on that?

Yes. You'd

18:30 gamble what cigarettes you had or you'd gamble other things that you might have had in your kit. There was no money because we never had any money. We never got any pay 'til we got out of there and got home. I don't, we weren't even paid when we, I didn't get paid when I got down to Lae. I don't think I got any money 'til I got home when I was in hospital.

Did you play two up on the road?

Up there you couldn't. There was no place to play two up there. Nowhere, not even in any of the tents and it was too cold of a night time.

19:00 The last place we played two up was in that camp at St. Ives before we went overseas. That was the last place. Not even on the way up in Brisbane or anywhere else, we didn't play two up. Amazing. Mm.

19:30 Yes, it was a very peculiar circumstances of the times and it's strange how it has changed with the various wars since then. I've had dealings with the work that I've done with the veterans. The Korean boys have a different attitude. The Vietnam, I didn't have much to do with them, even though we fought for them

20:00 to get a better deal with this big review that went on. - Vietnam boys I did a lot of work with them and they did a lot for me because I did a lot of travelling around NSW [New South Wales] with the EDA [Extreme Disablement Adjustment Veterans] people and the Vietnam boys also had their boys spread out all over New South Wales and they'd say to me, “Well Don, you're going up to Lismore. Will you call in and see a bloke at Coffs Harbour for us?" Which I'd do because they had nobody at Coffs Harbour since from

20:30 Newcastle up and I'd call in and take messages for the Vietnam vets in Coffs Harbour. They made me an honorary member.

I think reflecting on your war experience is very important for these people.

Yeah.

At the time, do you think that the issue of the road not being used, um affected your health and?

No.

Later?

No, no. No, we just put it down

So sorry

As shit. Shit. Another political bugger up.

And

It, that was

21:00 our attitude

And you moved on?

That's right.

You didn't think about it?

No, no. Never. Never.

Despite the fact that you were put through severe physical hardship?

Yeah.

And it did affect you later in life?

Yeah. No, we just put it down to that. That's why I'm so savage on politicians, because I know of the follies that they do and they are not competent enough to be in the positions they hold.

Do you put that road down to a politician or military?

Politicians mainly, because we had a politician in the days

21:30 who was a minister for the army, a bloke by the name of Ford and Mr. Ford used to spout about how good the road would be after the war for the timber. Not for the gold or anything else, for the timber because Mr. Ford was involved with big building projects here in Australia, big building companies.

Do you think it was part of Australia's colonial custodianship or

22:00 **ambitions?**

Yeah.

In New Guinea?

Yeah we, none of us have any other thoughts except that. That's what it was all about.

What?

Had it been used even partially after the war for the timber alone, forget the gold, because the gold came later, which we discovered for them too. I didn't tell you that one. Ok Tedi? You've heard of Ok Tedi, the big gold mine up there?

Yeah, that's up near the (UNCLEAR) head water for the Strickland, isn't it?

That's right. Well we were up in that area.

22:30 **Cross the Strickland?**

Yeah.

Do you know the Strickland River?

Yeah.

And the

We were up in that area and we were blowing up the big rocks and things for ballast for roads. The

What were you doing up there? That's a fair way from your

We'd gone up on a survey.

How'd you get up there?

We were flown up and then tracked up. We were flown up by the Americans in these - what do they call them? The twin bodied planes?

23:00 [Lockheed] Lightnings. Scared the hell out of us.

So sorry? This is after you'd worked on the road down in?

Yes. This was after Nadzab even. They took us up to Wewak. From Wewak we went up. Not all of us. There was a just a few of us that went up there that do the surveying and Dynamite McGinty was one of them because of the blasting that had to be done on the rocks and we never ever knew that. Somebody must have known that also.

Did you ever ask the reason why you were going up there to do that? Did they?

We were told, as I said,

23:30 we were going up there to look to see what the rocks were like for ballast for a road up there and we thought, “Where the hell they going to put the road up from Wewak up here?" and it was they were getting ready for Ok Tedi.

So they flew you in during the war up to?

Yes to Wewak. The Americans flew us in from Moresby from Lae, from Nadzab from Nadzab Airport they flew us up to Wewak and then when we trekked up, we the party of natives

24:00 that took us up, I'll never forget, and that Sepik River, the natives of a night time they go to bed in a

long sausage. Father gets in first, then mother gets in with the smallest baby or the baby that's still on the breast, then the eldest son and so on, right down to the last born child, who might only be about three years old and the family dog and you see this thing wriggling around all over the place.

So what

24:30 **from Nadzab, where were you taken in the Lightning?**

To Wewak.

And how do you fit in a Lightning? I thought they were single engine fighter, aren't they?

In the gun turret underneath.

So you had to crawl down into this thing?

And they scared the hell, living daylights out of us in that bloody thing, those Yankee pilots.

How many people can you get in a Lightning though?

There was only one of us in that, in each plane, and there was about four of us went up to do this job up there.

So could you see anything out of the Lightning when you're down in that

25:00 **turret or?**

Yes - you could see quite, all you could see is trees and the jungle. You can't see the sky or anything else because you're laying on your belly in the gun position. Rotten things.

So you landed in Wewak. What happened, where did you go to after?

Then we, then they took us up on the Sepik River and I forget the place they took us the name of the village they took us to, then we picked up the carriers there and then we went up onto the,

25:30 um what was the name of that mountain? Oh God but I had carriers with gelignite and I had to blast these rocks and keep samples of the rocks and in the sample of the rocks, I could see it myself, the fool's gold, the iron perides.

Did you know you were at Ok Tedi or did they tell you the name of the place?

No, I didn't have a clue. Didn't have a clue. Ok Tedi came out later.

That's quite a hike in from the head waters of the Strickland.

26:00 I'll say.

How long did it take you to walk up there?

About a week.

Crikey.

Hmmmm.

That's isolated country in those days.

I'll say it was.

So what

We didn't know what natives were there or anything and they reckon that no white people had ever been there when we went in but the natives that we had were the bigger New Guinea natives, the ones that came from towards Indonesia that was taken over. What did they, what was it called in those days?

Oh it was Dutch Papua New Guinea or Irian Jaya?

Dutch Ir, Dutch Irinia

26:30 Irania or something.

Papua

Yeah.

Yes. Um did you, were you given a specific objective on this trip?

No, we had to get to a certain spot. One of the piece blokes that come in with us was a, he was an officer and I think he had something to do with survey work, I'm not sure. We never knew actually who the others were but because I was such a foolhardy person with gelignite and all that sort of thing, and a light person to get into the

27:00 turret of that thing or the belly gun and we were told “To get certain rock specimens to take back”, which we did, and then later on, it was much later on as I say, I saw the iron perides because we'd seen that down at - Edie Creek and Wau and those areas, knew the fool's gold and I used to have some fool's gold here from that area and

27:30 **Who did you have to deliver the rock specimens to?**

Had to go to another officer back, it was an American officer, had to go back to an American officer at Nadzab Airport when we got back again.

Were you asked to take specific care of these rock specimens?

I were.

And how did you get back from Wewak again?

Same thing. The Lightnings came up and picked us picked us up. Designated time. Lightnings, we had to be back by a certain time for the Lightnings to pick us up again

28:00 and we were given twenty four hours’ leeway, if we weren't there on the particular day, they'd come up again.

And when? Was that an unusual mission - operation to go on or was it?

Oh it was very unusual. Very unusual. We didn't have a clue but it, once again it was a sort of a mystery set up, particularly when it involved the Americans and we didn't know and we didn't query it because as I say it was it was an adventure,

28:30 but later on we found out, and then we found out that from all the tests and the other, I don't know what the other chap was taking back too, but he was taking stuff back and we found out first of all, they told us, “Did you know what was in that area where you went?" "No, what the hell was it?" "The rocks that you brought back and the other stuff" they did checks on it and they said, “Did you see the mountain across the way?" I said, “Oh one mountain's as good as another. Why,

29:00 what are you talking about?" They said, “Well one of the mountains you saw up there was all copper" and I said, “So what? So it was copper. What are you going to do about it?" Then later on we found out when they got down past the copper, it was gold and then we knew it was Ok Tedi or we were told it was Ok Tedi.

Did you at the time speculate or what was your speculation on your actual objective?

Didn't

29:30 have a clue, because it was so far away from all the other gold we wouldn't, didn't think we were looking for gold or anything like that. Didn't even think we were looking for other metal.

Were there other occasions or can you tell me about other occasions that you were used in this way?

Never. There was never anything else that came up, no.

Mm.

No, not once were we used in a strange manner. The

30:00 only strange way was that up there.

Did you have any other sort of unusual occupations after you'd finished the road?

No.

Things like that?

No, the only things we copped after the road was that huge job out at Nadzab, Nadzab Airport. That was like Singapore Airport today now. It was just like Singapore Airport.

What did you, what?

It was so big. That was an American set up.

What did you have to do there?

30:30 We had to repair all the steel mats and that, that were blown up by the Japs when they were making their last stand before they got up and went to the other, went up towards Guam and those places.

That was the Madison matting, was it?

Yes. They had lots of holes and they anticipated I suppose they were going to use them again. I don't know. I don't even know whether they've used it since the war, that airport up out there, but it was so big that we got lost coming out of there of a night time. We got lost.

31:00 As I say, I've been to Singapore Airport and it was like Singapore, in those days but it was huge, and a lot of people didn't even know it existed in those days. Nadzab Airport. They just thought it was Lae with Lae Airport. The airport came out over the ocean. Right off the water. You went off 'Chooong' and if you didn't get enough height, you went straight in the water.

Was it around this time you were sort of doing the dynamite fishing up that way or?

Oh no, we were doing the fishing earlier, much earlier than that.

31:30 We were doing that up at the top of the head waters of the rivers up in the top, up near the mossy forest.

You must have had quite a reputation for your use of explosives?

Well

Were there any other tasks you were put to because of your expertise?

No, not then. No, just the, because they've changed a lot of the explosives now. I wouldn't know the explosives they use now. I believe there's a lot of different ones.

I was thinking of then at the time.

No, there was

32:00 nothing, nothing at the time. No, that was it.

On the

The trees, like learning how to cut the trees with it, without blasting hell of them that they couldn't be used. We'd use the trees on top of the mud and that for corduroy for the trucks to travel over or the jeeps to travel over, so that they didn't sink into the mud. It was very hard. Those trees were so hard that an axe would bounce off them or a saw

32:30 wouldn't even look at them. It'd blunt the saw in one strike.

On the road. On the, as you were building the road?

On the road, yeah.

Were you the first person to go in and clear with the explosives, the path?

No, not only me. There'd be others with me who would be doing the same thing. Clearing the trees out of the way, so that they could get to the stage even that they had to blow the stumps afterwards but the main tree had to be blown down first, then they'd have to blow the stumps after. We blew the main tree

33:00 down and then they'd have to pick and shovel and make it level and then the tree that was cut down had to be sliced up and used as corduroy across the road, so that we could get the jeeps to come through.

How many kilometres could you do in a week, say?

Oh God. Hard to say in a week.

Or how far did you get in a day? A good day?

On a good day we'd be lucky to do

33:30 half a kilometre. Very lucky to do and that'd be on flat area but on the sloping side, the mountain side, we'd be lucky to do a couple of hundred yards. Very lucky because you'd be cutting right into the side of the mountain, spreading it over the side, then go further in spreading over the side, so you could walk on just a walking path, then you'd come back in the morning and even that'd be gone because of the rain. The rain'd

34:00 slip it all away and you'd have to start again.

How long did you spend above, up in the sort of the alpine?

Well in

Alpine area?

In the alpine area without the sun, about three months. Seven months on the road or oh yeah, about three months up on the top.

And did you

Got through.

have any recreation leave at all during that time?

No. No. No.

Did

You were lucky if you got Sunday off. It was supposed to be every Sunday, you got Sunday off but

34:30 you didn't. We had to go. When Blamey said, "Go", you went.

Well

So we worked seven days a week.

Can you talk about the sense of possible abandonment you'd felt in this, at this task at when you were up in those alpine areas?

Oh you always had that sense of abandonment because you were fighting the unknown. You didn't know. It wasn't the Jap you were fighting. You were fighting the unknown terrors

35:00 of nature. That's what we were fighting there, not the Jap. We were fighting the unknown terrors of nature. That's why I've always got a wonderful respect for nature. I, we were there when Rabaul erupted the first time

So

And it turned, Rabaul turned the whole of New Guinea from day into night.

That was after the war though, wasn't it?

No,

35:30 no it was during the war. Then it, after the war that's when the big destruction came, where they couldn't go back to Rabaul but we were there when Rabaul erupted in

Can you talk about some of that, then was it a beautiful place, the alpine areas?

Awesome and beautiful. The mossy forest in particular we, a lot of us remember that, very much so. And also in the mossy forest

36:00 there was areas where we had to cut, I don't know how the hell he got them home but we had to climb trees and we used the spikes, like you see the people over in Canada and those places use a funny spike boot. We'd have to climb these trees to get orchids for our boss. I don't know whether he sent them home or what happened to them, but we used to see some beautiful orchids up there.

Could you please explain in a little bit more detail about

36:30 **that and the purpose of?**

We don't know. He used to love orchids and we'd have to, we'd each see an orchid up in the tree when he'd come down, so he'd say, “I want you to go up there and get that orchid for me" and we'd have to go and get the spike boots and climb 'cause you couldn't climb the trees with just climbing up with your hands, you had to use these spike boots and the rope, you'd throw the rope around, catch the other side, and put yourself up. I don't know if you've seen the bloke ever do that on the ordinary electric light poles,

37:00 put a strap around 'em and they go up with the spike boots, yes.

Yeah. When you...

Don’t know what he did with those, never knew what he did with those orchids, and never queried it. Whether he ate them or what but he used to want these orchids.

Was there a sense amongst yourselves or can you reflect on the fact that there was an actual war going on in the rest of the country? Did you actually?

Oh yes, we

What was your feeling towards the rest of the war? Did you feel you were still part of the war?

Yes, we knew it was going on.

37:30 We knew it was going on because’a the planes would come up the valley all the time and we'd see them going to Lae and it was the only way they could get to Lae. The planes in those days couldn't go as high as we were on the road and as I say even the dog fights’a the other planes, they were down below us, but the bombers they could go higher and even they could only get, just get as high as we were at ten thousand feet. They couldn't go above ten thousand feet. Whether the plane couldn't go or

38:00 it was because of that oxygen business and the only way they could go through was through this valley.

What was the significance of the contribution of the native population to the building of the road?

Well they were forced labour. They were forced labour. They weren't voluntary labour and they put conditions on their work, where we couldn't.

38:30 **Can you talk about those conditions?**

And their conditions were they were - not misogynists, they were a society that travelled with their little bum boys. If they didn't have their women, they had to have their boys and their women couldn't come on the road, so they had to have their boys and if they had fifty natives on one set up they insisted on having

39:00 fifty boys too. What they call their boys and we had to feed them.

Who did you have to feed?

We had to feed them all. Well we supplied the food to them, or they were supposed to be fed by us but we didn't have it to give them, so ANGAU had to get their food from the army, an Australian Army, and bring it to them. 'Cause ANGAU were a law unto themselves in New Guinea

39:30 and they had to feed, the natives and the boys but they had to get it from the Australian Army. Now how they got the food up to the mountain to the boys, we don't know, but they were fed where we weren't.

I'm probably, I can't explain it - bum boys. I'm sorry, can you?

They believed in having their sexual outlets with their boys and they wouldn't travel without them when they were doing work like that. So

40:00 if we had two thousand natives on the road we also had two thousand of the boys. So it was four thousand natives had to be fed by ANGAU. Now at the time that I was in the cookhouse, I had two. I had one cook boy supposed to help me doing the dishes, washing the dishes and all that sort of thing but he had to have his bum boy too. One was called Navi and one was called Kirihau.

40:30 I remember their names.

Tape 9

00:32 **After you finished the road and you were at...**

Nadzab.

Nadzab. Can you just take us through in a little more detail what your major activities and travel was out of Nadzab?

Well after Nadzab, as I say I got sick and I finished up in the 2/6th AGH [Australian General Hospital].

And when was Rabaul? You went up to Rabaul?

I didn't go to Rabaul.

Oh okay.

No, the unit went to Rabaul.

Oh okay. I'm sorry.

When I came home.

Okay.

01:00 **So you got malaria, didn't you?**

Yeah, malaria. I got malaria and dengue fever all at, both at the same time and I was in hospital at the 2/6th AGH for about, oh I was there for over three weeks and then eventually they could see that I wasn't improving, so they sent me home and I finished up in Concord Hospital, in those days it was called 113th AGH and

01:30 while I was there this macular degeneration or whatever it was must have come in 'cause I went blind and

That must have been fairly scary?

Oh I'll say it was. It just happened. I woke up one morning and I couldn't see. I'd been to sleep and before I went to bed I had, did have peculiar pains over my eyes as though somebody had a hot poker over each eyebrow but hold

02:00 just away from it, not on my body and I went to sleep and when I woke up in the morning I couldn't see and I had horrific headache. It was so horrific that I could feel a fly land on my forehead and it felt as though somebody had thumped me and they didn't believe me because my eyes were open. They did all the things with matches and God knows what, oh not matches, torches and all that.

02:30 Small torches in front of my eyes and they finally took me into an operating theatre and they didn't know what they were going to do and they got some sort of a specialist down and he looked into my eyes with these strange lights, I don't know what they were, but I could feel the heat of them and I could hear him say, “It's funny, his pupils are so dilated.

03:00 Has he had any drugs?" Matron said, “No, he's had nothing. He's only been here for malaria and we've been giving him the new malarial treatment" that they had in those days. It wasn't Quinine and it was oh some funny name. They'd just developed it and they reckoned it would get the malaria out of your body altogether but it didn't on mine because I still got it for years and

03:30 they didn't know what it was and they, all they could see was that the eyes were, my pupils were very dilated so they put me back into the bed and I'm in the bed there and they were talking about “Operating gonna do this and gonna do that”. No and they just said, “Oh we'll just wait and see what happens." So they, I was there for, I was in hospital for about three months and eventually

04:00 day after day I used to get these horrific headaches and I'd want to vomit with them too and they said, “He's got migraine." I said, “What the hell's?" they called it migraine. I said, "What the hell's migraine?" and they said, "It's a malady that women generally get, not men" and I said, "Well what's the treatment?" They said, "We'll give you gynergin tablets." I didn't know what the hell gynergin was.

04:30 They were giving me these gynergin tablets and they'd make me violently ill and I said, “No, I don't want those anymore." So they said, "Well we don't know what to give you. We'll have to put you out on a blind pension but you'll have to go through tests." I said, “I don't give a bugger what you do so long as you get rid of these headaches and I can't see" and they had one nurse in particular that used to look after me and she'd take me down to the

05:00 - what was it? Not an entertainment room, a sort of a - where they keep you occupation, occupational therapy, not occupational therapy

Physiotherapy?

It was some sort of a therapy room they'd take me down to where they'd go and learn to do raffia work and all this for their patients and so forth. She'd take me down there and she got me to listen to music and it was all I used to, like everybody else

05:30 in those days the latest pop music and all that sort of stuff, and she said, “No, I want you to listen to soothing music." They didn't have all these soothing records in those days so it used to be Tchaikovsky and all that sort of stuff. She used to play with the earphones. Not on the loud, I'd have to have 'em on the earphones and I gradually used to sort of calm down with the body with the headaches and all that sort of thing. They weren't so severe

06:00 but I still got the headaches and I still was blind and then they kept getting me this same nurse, she would, she must have had something to do with therapy. I don't know, I don't even know what she looks like. Even to this day I don't know. I only knew her voice and she'd take me down each day and I've have this music, I'd listen to this music, soothing music as she called it

06:30 and I got to enjoy it and I do appreciate it. I've got a lot of the stuff there now. I used to enjoy it and they'd do their tests with me and they still couldn't find out what it was and they were, I was up in the multi-storey building and they brought Sister Bullwinkel and Sister Savage, both of them came home from the war

07:00 and they were put in the hospital there in charge and Sister Savage was

This was, whereabouts are we now (UNCLEAR) we in?

Concord Hospital, military hospital.

Okay, yes.

It was Sister Savage or Sister Bullwinkel, I forget which one was, became the Matron of the hospital and everybody had to get out of their bed in the morning and Matron did her rounds and you had to make your bed, stand by the end of your bed, “Good morning Matron" and all that sort of thing and I couldn't see,

07:30 I couldn't make the blasted bed either and when she got to me, “What's the matter with you soldier?" and my eyes were open. I didn't have that funny look when you're blind. "What's the matter with you soldier? Put this man on report. Disrespectful, never heard of it." Oooh, she really got stuck into me and the Sister came in that used to look after me or the nurse came in that used to look after me. She said, “This man's blind Sister" - Matron. She said, "Well he doesn't look blind. Is he bunging on an act?"

08:00 And oh, she really went to town on me and tore strips off me. She reckoned I was bunging on an act and the Nurse said, "No, I've been looking after this man now for about six weeks." She said, "And he's fooled you that long?" and the Nurse said, "I'm sorry Sister, I must - Matron - I must go against you and say this man is blind. If you don't believe me go and ask Dr So and So." She said, "I will" and away she went and she came back with

08:30 this doctor and he said, "What is the problem Matron?" She said, "This man is bunging it on. He's not

blind" and the Doctor said, "Well," he said, "Are you going to go against my judgment or are you just going to persecute this man because you don't like him and you want that to have his bed made or what?" She said, "Well," she said,"I'm sorry." She said "You must be right. He is blind." So each morning when she'd come around again, my bed still wouldn't be made.

09:00 "Hmmm, still bungin' it on, are ya?" I'd say nothing. Oh God blimey she's tough. She was really tough, Bullwinkel. Yes - she was the matron, Bullwinkel. So shortly after she'd been there for about a week, they started to bring the POWs [Prisoners of War] home from Europe. No, it wasn't Europe. Yes it was, POW, it was the German

09:30 POWs that they started to bring home and they were going to put the, clean out the ward I was in and put them all in the ward that I was in and they had to move everybody but they said, "No, we'll leave him where he is" and they left me where I was until the POWs came home and the POWs, nobody could control them. Sister Bullwinkel and the whole lot, they just wouldn't obey her. She could go jump, fly a kite because they'd had all

10:00 the other buggers looking after them overseas and they wouldn't wear her doing what they, she was trying to do to them.

Had you recovered your sight at this stage?

No, I still hadn't. Didn't have my sight and every time she came near me and started to roast me, they'd get onto her and tell her to POQ [piss off quietly] and all this sort of thing. "Leave him alone," because they were helping me with my blindness. They could see that I was, really was, even though the eyes didn't look blind. So they came to the conclusion

10:30 that something had happened with this malaria and dengue fever at the same time, which was unusual, and something had happened to the optic nerves and they were getting ready to operate and see what they could do. So one day they, the specialists were, two specialists came, the one that was going to operate and the one that had been looking after it, and they were talking at the end of the bed after they'd had the

11:00 screens around me apparently and they were sitting at the chairs or whatever and I'm like this sitting up on the side of the bed after they'd been examining me and I could hear them saying, "Oh well, he's blind. We'd better discharge him and give him a blind pension" and I thought, oh Christ and I just went like that. The next thing 'bang', something just flashed in front of my eyes and it was like blood,

11:30 just saw blood in front of the whole of my eyes and I must have made some sort of a noise at with the pain that happened with it and they both come over to me and grabbed me and they said, "Are you alright?" I said, "Yes." They said, "Well, why did you cry out?" and I said "Because I got this sudden pain and this blood red flash in front of my eyes" and they said, "What are you looking at now?" 'cause I must have been like this somehow and I said, "I can see

12:00 something." They said, "What can you see?" and I went down like that and I said, "I can see over the top of my eyes." They said, "Are you sure?" and they started doing things. "Can you do, see this can you" "Yes, I can see what you're doing." Went up like that and they said, "Can you see anything?" I said "No, not a thing." So they said “The optic nerves got twisted” and gradually day after day it came that screen came down lower and lower but I still had these horrific headaches.

12:30 God, I had headaches. I could hear if a cat jumped off there onto the ground. It sounded like a horse jumping down and after three months they said. “Well we'll put you through a medical discharge. You're not going to get any better. Your optic nerves have been twisted somehow through that dengue fever and malaria," because it was the BT [benign tertian] malaria that I had the, which is the brain malaria, which had affected the eyesight.

13:00 This is why I've had glasses ever since and I still get, occasionally I get such a horrific headache, it's like somebody's got hot needles going on both sides of me and they discharged me. As I say, I was out after they put me out of the hospital there, they sent me out to the Showground. Showground sent me over to the stem that had M on it and "Oh yes - medical discharge. Right. Medical discharge",

13:30 and then they sent me out to Victoria Barracks to get all the coupons and things for clothes and tools and I was home about three months and I got a letter from them that [said] to go to the Randwick Post Office and collect my thirty per cent pension that had been accumulating. They'd given me a thirty per cent disability pension, thirty per cent and I had to report to Randwick Military Hospital,

14:00 the first Monday of every month and I'd see the doctors out there and they'd do the checks of the eye sights and the blood tests and my blood pressure tests and all the rest of it, then they'd give me oh a pile of, I used to get about fifteen or twenty tablets, they'd give me to take home and I'd tip them down the toilet. Eventually I told them. I said, “This medication's not doing me any good. What the hell am I coming here for? Wasting my time" and I

14:30 I worked, if I worked for a boss I won't be recognised the fact and they said, “Well if you don't take it, you'll lose your pension." I said, “So I'll lose the pension. I'll find some way of making money" and eventually I did. I lost the thirty per cent and they dropped me right down to ten per cent and then after seeing this William Curry again after he was in, out of Parliament and he said, “You're a fool." He said, “Go against them and tell them that you're

15:00 sick and you want your pension back" and he said, “And I'll write a letter about it too." Which he did and gradually I crept up again and now I'm up on the EDA, which is almost as high as a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] but it's not TPI, and yet they recognise that we are sicker than the TPI people.

Where was it at the time of discharge from the army? Were you happy to see the back of military life? I know you were quite ill but

Relieved,

15:30 relieved more than happy. Relieved because I felt myself at the time too that I, health wise I wasn't capable of doing the engineering work anymore and I couldn't see any sense in going to an infantry section or anything like that because all my friends were still in the engineers and at the time also my friends had been sent to other parts of the war from Jacquinot Bay up to

16:00 one that to I don't know, whether they went to Guam or one of the other islands but they also, they were brought back on leave because they hadn't had leave from the battlefields for such a long time and they made them do basic training again at Wagga and Kapooka. Engineers. Been at the war for four and a half years and they sent them up to wherever it was they sent them again and then they came home after they finished

16:30 that and they sent them to Kapooka again and they started to get so sick that one morning or several mornings they didn't have enough members to fall out on parade. So then they checked them out and saw that they were all so sick that they just wouldn't be any good as soldiers anymore and they discharged the lot of them.

They were all engineers, were they?

All engineers.

Was there a particular high rate of sickness amongst the engineers, your colleagues who had worked on the road?

Yes.

17:00 **Why?**

All had a lot of malaria. All had a lot of malaria.

Can you reflect on, was there a common experience that you all went through you think, the engineers at that time that led to this?

Well I think it was the cause of the time of when they brought us down from the mountains so quick in one day from an extreme cold area to the extreme hot area and everybody

17:30 went head over Charlie and finished up in hospital.

How was your, you know was it a very stressed, did you feel quite stressed at the time too when you?

Coming down from the heights from the [hot] to the cold?

Well more or less in your work, at the time, how was the esprit de corps? There was the morale of the...?

Oh the morale of everybody at the time was way down because they had been away so long and we were getting this story, 'cause there were a lot of Yanks around us too, there were - Lae at the time

18:00 and we were hearing about them once they did six weeks in New Guinea, they were given leave in Australia.

How did that make you feel?

Pretty bloody cranky. When we'd been there at that particular time, I'd been there for three years and then later on my mates had been there for over four years, four and a half years before they got any leave. Strange. They wondered

18:30 but gradually that sort of wore off you know, that hatred of the army life and all the rest of it and it was, it did become a hatred because it was reflecting on our on our home life with our people, our wives and

In particular how did that reflect with you when you entered civilian life again? In spite of

Well you became so short tempered with things that you thought were idiotic, like the way the politicians

19:00 did in the war years.

Were you like that?

Whereas people were just being normal and doing things that people do. Making mistakes and all this sort of thing. You couldn't, we couldn't tolerate people making mistakes.

You were? Did your parents or what did your parents tell you how you had changed?

My father wouldn't let me in the door when I came home. He didn't recognise me. I went away a boy and came back a savage looking man.

19:30 He wouldn't let me in the door. Didn't know me. He didn't think I was his son. Apart from that we were all yellow with the Atebrin but he didn't recognise me.

This was after you'd been in Concord?

Mm.

Did they not know you were in Concord?

No.

What, could you make any attempt to contact them?

No.

Can you explain why that was?

I didn't

The situation?

Did didn't want them to see me the way that I was, particularly when the blind section was on.

20:00 I didn't want to know or let them think that I was going to be blind for life because I did have a blind aunty and I know what the family went through with her and she was made blind through doctor's errors when she was eighteen.

Can you explain what kept you going through that particularly low time?

The music. That music kept me going. I love music today. Whenever I get down in the dumps

20:30 I put music on.

Did you ever consider ending your own life at the time?

No. Never. No, I've never been a finalist that way. I've always been a fighter, as I used to fight for my friends before the war and I was the one that all my friends used to, if they had troubles as we've got older before the war we got into teenagers. When they had troubles

21:00 with their girlfriends and boyfriends whatever, I was the one they came to help them.

Do you remember sleeping in your, can you tell us about sleeping in your bed back at home when you first back went to see your parents' again after this time?

Well I thought, I'm back where I was before I went away. We never had three bedrooms in the home that I lived in. There was only the front

21:30 bedroom for my parents. The other bedroom was for my two sisters. I slept on the front veranda with a canvas blind in front and that bed was kept there all the time and I was still there when I come home from the war and I thought. I hadn't advanced very far until I got married.

When was that?

Then I was married in February 1945 before the war ended and we had to

22:00 live at home because there was no place we could go.

When and how did you meet your wife?

My first wife I met because she was working with my young sister at a milk bar in Park Street, Sydney and from - just took her out a few times and parties, I told you we used to have at home and then I went overseas,

22:30 we wrote to each other.

Oh, so you were married when you were over in New Guinea?

Oh no. I didn't marry until I was old, I was, had my twenty first birthday in Lae hospital when I copped all this strife with my eyes, right? And I was not twenty two when I got married. My next birthday was the March.

23:00 **What March was that?**

March 1945 and I was married in February 1945. Yeah.

It was a quick romance, was it?

No, it had been a romance for all the time I was away.

Oh I see you'd met her before?

Oh I met her before I went away, yes.

Yes.

But I was in uniform before I went away when I met her at these turn outs. Oh no, I'd known her for four years.

And she'd waited faithfully for you?

Yeah.

23:30 Oh she was quite good. It was only when I was working so much to build a home and build a family and pay for everything. I was doing three jobs to build a home and she started to stray because I was never home and when the mouse is away the cats will play. No, she couldn't

24:00 tolerate that fact. She'd imagine that I was spending too much money chasing, too much time chasing money and I wasn't, I was chasing stability for the family. A home, to build a home and I did. I built a very nice home out at Baulkham Hills. Car. Bought her a car. Had a car myself. The children were well looked after.

You had

24:30 **kids?**

Yes, two girls. They're in their late fifties now but after thirteen years of marriage she finally decided that I was never home enough because I was always looking for that stability for the family.

How long after you came back from the army did you have your children?

Ten years after. 'Cause that was another thing that the army

25:00 never told us about. I became sterile because of all the rubbish and that that they'd put in me and I could have gone for a higher pension then with sterility and all the rest of it. I could have gone for a TPI then and then I had to go, we finished up both of us had to go through tests to see whether I was sterile. Whether all the other stuff had ruined me and then out of the blue, we were told that she was a freak of nature too. She had a double uterus. Could never

25:30 conceive a child, so we were allowed immediately to adopt. So we adopted. We were allowed to adopt one child first and then we had to wait two years to adopt another and that was the family unit and those girls today couldn't care less who their original parents are 'cause I looked after them so well. Life, that's life.

26:00 I have no complaints of that. She's well off. She's been well looked after for the time that she did give me. She got most of the money that came out of the divorce and the first home that I built. She finished up with two businesses up in Port Macquarie and a beautiful home and she's got security for the rest of her life and I live like this because I went for another ten years before I became involved with another woman

26:30 and that other woman knew that I had some money and she took me to the cleaners in a dirty way and that's why I went to Sri Lanka too, to get away from that life 'cause I didn't want it anymore. I'd had enough of that. Not to kill myself or anything like that, but I just didn't want that sort of life anymore. I wanted a complete change away from Australia but

27:00 I had no intention of coming back though either but I had the heart attack and I couldn't go to the hospitals over there because they were not very good.

Did you have any nervous problems or other

No.

issues or dreams

No.

after the war?

No. Oh after the war, yes - well we had the war dreams and all that sort of thing.

Can you talk about those?

Still have those. Oh the only dreams I had was the

27:30 events that occurred on the road of the coldness and all that sort of thing and one was that place going up towards Ok Tedi in Wau and what it was like up there. As I say then the mosquitoes, God, the mosquitoes up there you'd go like that. Squeeze your fist and blood would come out as though you were squeezing a sponge in your hand. That's in the day time. Night time was worse. So I don't know. No, I just had not now, that was just

28:00 for awhile, they just happened for awhile after the war. Not very often. That's why I think there were lots of things that I haven't remembered, that I've just wiped them out of my memory.

As you came out of the army and was were able to look back on your army experience and especially the experience on the road, when did it dawn on you that these things were not really talked about or

28:30 **recognised or when did you not feel that you were, had received inadequate [recognition for] your efforts?**

The whole unit hadn't received recognition for their efforts? Oh we recognised that soon as we were discharged, no it wouldn't be soon after we were discharged because there were so many things happening after discharge with the rejuvenisation of Australia and all the rest of it. It wasn't until, oh I got into my forties I suppose. About twenty years.

Did you feel that

29:00 **your youthful zeal had been taken away from you?**

Yes, we had no youth. We had no youth. When you go away at seventeen and come back when you're twenty one there's no youth. We've had no youth like the youth today that go, continually go out and do their thing. We didn't do our thing. We were boys amongst men. Living a hard life amongst men.

And how did that

29:30 **creep up on you I guess? How did that affect you as the years went by?**

Oh it didn't worry us. Didn't worry us because we know that even today all of my generation know having gone through even the big Depression that everybody say, "Oh, all you oldies can talk about is the big Depression." Not right. All us oldies can remember is, though it was a hard life it was a

30:00 better life then than it is now. There was less stress in the big Depression years of the '30s. Late '20s and '30s than there is in life today. There's much more stress for the- I do not envy the young ones today of their youth of what youth that we missed or I missed because I think that it tempered me. It'll never temper the young kids today because why are so many of them

30:30 getting the dole and just going to the beaches and not attempting to get work? There's work around if they want it. There's plenty of work around.

Looking back on your army experience from this distance, I guess how do you feel about that time now? And how is it affecting your life currently?

I think it's been very educational and I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

31:00 Even though there's sickness attached to it and all that. Who knows? I might have had this sickness anyway if I didn't go to the war because of the, originally where the most of the trouble did come from was the - rheumatoid arthri, the rheumatoid, rheumatic fever. The rheumatic fever that created the rheumatoid problems in the body.

What's your attitude now to the

31:30 **people who ultimately sent you to war? The Government of Australia?**

I don't think that the people who are in government ever since the war or even then, that war or right up until now the Korean War and all the rest of them, their police action whatever they, I feel that they don't give a hoot and I don't give a hoot about them.

32:00 This is why I am so savage on politicians and why I'm not afraid to talk up against politicians and I'm in a position where I would love them to come and say to me, "You've been very subversive." Put me in gaol.

What in particular are you?

And see what happens.

What in particular are you talking up against?

The attitude of the politicians that they don't give a hoot about the youth that they send away to war now.

32:30 It's alright - the older ones but it's all youth that they're sending to the wars now. It's not actual volunteers, the old volunteers that wanted to get away from their wives and their problems back in World War II. It's all the youth that they're sending away and I object to that because I also know - why

did the Prime Minister of Australia, when he knew the troubles were coming overseas send his children over to England

33:00 to universities to get them away from this? He's been queried on it and he gives some such smarmy answers. It's not right.

Who's that though?

The Prime Minister of Australia today, Mr. Howard, and I remember when Mr. Howard was a treasurer under Fraser and I'm sorry to say it but he wasn't a very good treasurer either.

Do you think on, did you feel that contempt for politicians at

33:30 **the time of the Second World War?**

No. No, we didn't have that contempt until we found out what Ford had done for this timber and stuff in the valleys where we worked for the road and what Blamey had done with the bet with MacArthur and the fact that Blamey was not a soldier. That he was only the Head of Police in Victoria. He was never a soldier, so he wouldn't know.

34:00 He would never be and everybody reckoned he was such a wonderful man. He wasn't a wonderful man at all, I'm sorry. The best man that they've got today as head of soldier is Cosgrove because he was a soldier.

Do you know but how the government also is, has taken some care of you I presume during these years?

They've taken wonderful care of me. I cannot complain at that.

34:30 They have taken wonderful care. It's the doctors who are at fault. The doctors are bleeding the government for the care that they take of me. I've only got to ask for something to be done and the government says, "Yes, have it done." They send a referral to me. Send an okay to me but the doctors are bleeding this government with all the ex-service people, not just me. All the

35:00 ex-service people and the elderly.

Ahh

Then as I say it's a complex attitude when you're talking to a veteran about sickness and all that sort of thing, especially a veteran who can use one of those at eighty. Be quite competent at it as against a Digger who gets sick and he just sits at home says, "Oh god I'm

35:30 sick.

What do you think

Oh god."

of Vietnam Vets? Are they similar to the Vets from the Second World War or...?

A lot of the Vietnam Vets are very good and a lot of them are over the fence. They've gone for this post-traumatic trip. We had post-traumatic stress. World War I had post-traumatic stress but somebody found this wonderful statement of post-traumatic stress. My discharge shows 'Discharge medical N.'

36:00 You know what that is? War neurosis. Post-traumatic stress but I didn't get the big pension they get. I didn't look for it until I got sick and they look after me but as I say it's the doctors who are not, they're not the competent doctors they should be to look after veterans. Veterans' ailments are entirely different to ordinary people's ailments because

36:30 of the malaria and all the other things that we've got. This SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome] thing that's going on now, you know what that is? A great big scare just to get people worried. There's no SARS throughout the world in the white world. It's in the Asian world because they haven't got the hygiene that we have. I saw it in Sri Lanka. I saw it in India and the only place

37:00 over there that was clear of it was the Maldives. Beautiful. Clear. Wonderful.

Don, we we're getting towards the last sort of few minutes of this. Can I ask you now looking back how do you regard war?

War is a waste of time created by politicians to serve ulterior motives. Even what they, the latest one that they've

37:30 done. If anybody with any clear thinking looks into it, what the hell have they done to Iraq? They've created havoc in that country to get rid of one man where they could have done it other ways. Gone in with a big army without killing all these children and destroying all these buildings that they have. Heritage buildings that have history and then they've walked away and left it for the sake of oil and they're trying to say it's not oil. Bullshit.

38:00 It's oil and now they're going to do the same, they're going to try and attack North Korea. They'll get a big stumbling block there. Bigger than they copped with Iraq and it's all political and this is one of the reasons I detest politicians today. They're not fair dinkum. I can show you now a friend of mine has worked a constitution

38:30 and they helped work a constitution for the, not only the veterans but for all people with this same man when Pauline Hanson was trying to get in and they ganged up on her and maligned her and did all they could to make her a nasty person and who's the nasty person now? The bloke that was in with her in those days and he's now being accused because he used his parliamentary powers

39:00 to try and sink a man who bought a property that he wanted. What a nice person he is and I can show you a constitution that's been worked out for this country to be a republic and it's got sense and nobody wants to take any notice of it and this man used to write speeches for politicians and he's an ex-serviceman and he was a captain in the navy in World War II.

Who's that?

His name is - he's using Ewan Smith now because they're after him. I won't tell you his proper name.

Okay. Um look we're really getting towards the end of the tape. Are there any final words you'd like to say to the people who might be looking at this in the future - (UNCLEAR) the future some time and the posterity?

Be aware and search the motives of politicians.

Very good.

I'm sorry to say but I am dead set against politicians

40:00 even though I've worked with them, I was the president of a Housing Commission Community Group under Aquilina, the one Aquilina now. His children and my children, first children, went to school together when he was a member over at Doonside, Blacktown way. I worked with the mayor of Blacktown who finally committed suicide because he could see the way things were going with drugs.

40:30 I helped them break a drug ring over in Blacktown where the police told me to mind my own business and I went to Aquilina and he said, "Show me the proof" and he said, "I'll get the special squad from parliament onto it" and he did and he broke that ring with this sister and her husband. Husband was in the air force and the sister was a Sister at Blacktown Hospital. They were supplying drugs to kids at Blacktown High School and my young daughter came home and told me about it.

41:00 I didn't believe her. I used to go to the school in the afternoon and watch this blue panel van call there every afternoon and they'd be selling these drugs to the kids. So I'm no idiot and I have done a bit of work with politicians, now Aquilina in those days was a good politician but now he's got a bit old and he's forgotten. He doesn't remember things. His portfolios are

41:30 failing because the man is being pushed by the party. He has to obey the party. There's that table down on the front, I watch parliament a lot. There's that table down the front of parliament. Prime Minister here, the Opposition leader here and they got four or five on either side of them helping them. They're the only ones that run the parliament, the rest of them just sitting there going to sleep. What sort of a government have we got? I tell you. The day that they threw me off the floor of that parliament

42:00 they had a fight come

INTERVIEW ENDS