Australians at War Film Archive

Douglas McClean (Mac) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:33 Where I was born.

Yeah, where were you born Doug?

In Oakley, 1915. The third of three boys. In 1917 the soldiers' return brought something they called black fever [it was an influenza epidemic which killed nearly 12,000 people in Australia in 1919] but it was really a diphtheria which affected my

01:00 family, along with everybody else. The resources were strained to the utmost, and they couldn't send an ambulance unless somebody died. And my middle brother unfortunately did, he was seven, and left a gap in our family. Mother was so upset that we moved to Adelaide when father got an appointment

01:30 with a large dressing and dyeing fur firm there. I might mention that my grandfather pioneered the fur industry in this country in 1879, and it was natural that I should follow on helping build that up. And this is what I did prior to the war. I

02:00 worked in the fur industry; not necessarily with the family – we were out getting other experience at other branches of the trade such as distribution and manufacturing, whereas our people were mostly concerned with dressing and dyeing of skins. And having spent some time in

02:30 the trade, I was living in the north Melbourne area, they called it Hotham Hill, we were right up near Royal Park. So I was in the north Melbourne district for recruiting for football, cricket and baseball, and naturally joined them when I was about 17, I suppose, and stayed with them until

03:00 just before the war. But in the meantime I happened to read two books written by an English London correspondent with The Times who had written these books regarding Hitler's rise to fame in Germany. He'd entitled them Disgrace Abounding and Insanity Fair.

03:30 And they, in detail, described Hitler's ability to sway people with his wonderful command of their language, although he was an Austrian. He had influenced the people to the extent that a war was imminent, and I decided that I'd try and learn something about it if it was going to happen. So I joined the 6th Battalion,

04:00 the Royal Melbourne Regiment, in 1934. So I'd had quite a lot of training and experience by the time the war actually happened, or came to New Guinea. And therefore called for full time duty some six months before the war, posted at places like Truganina, the powder reserve at Williamstown. We also bivouacked in places that were likely landing points such as the peninsula.

05:00 We cut the very first camp out at Mount Martha when full time duty was installed. From training in that area we then got a signal from 4th

05:30 Divisional Headquarters asking for volunteers as a new garrison battalion was being formed in New Guinea, for service in New Guinea. And the officers were hand-selected by Colonel Conran who was the commissioned officer to raise the battalion. But an unfortunate signal was sent around which stated that

06:00 each command would supply a certain number of NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] and a certain number of other ranks. "Volunteers will be called for, but if volunteers were not forthcoming you will supply." full stop. It was obvious what the COs [Commanding Officers] would do: troublemakers in standing camps were drafted to this 39th,

06:30 and what they didn't realise, of course, was that the troublemakers were pretty vigorous gentleman who were the best blokes in a fight. We were pleased, after an early introduction to them, to find that they had succumbed to our discipline, which they realised they couldn't beat the

07:00 system. So they molded into a very good unit. Before we were sent away the CO called a parade to ask if anybody was not willing to go to New Guinea. And one stepped forward. I think about seven men fell out and were sent back to the units.

07:30 The remainder remained and were anxious to get away. So, in fact, they were all volunteers although it's many times been reported that they were shanghaied. But that did happen with the 53rd in Sydney to some extent. Some of the boys didn't even have a chance to say goodbye to their families – they were sent straight to the ship, which left Sydney on Boxing Day

08:00 1941. And that's why they were a disgruntled unit that got a rather bad reputation. But they were unfortunate in that their very first action, their CO was killed and their 2IC [Second in Command] called the company commanders together who were always accompanied by a batman, who was their runner in action.

08:30 And he said, "Gentleman, the CO's been killed. What will we do?" Well the troops knew what to do. So the message got back very smartly and they moved out, headed back for Port Moresby. So they weren't any good on our flank; they weren't to be relied upon. But later we got some of those troops for reinforcements when we had finished the Kokoda Track

09:00 and moved to the Gona north coast area, and they were magnificent. So I think Napoleon was right when he said, "There are no bad troops, only bad officers." The trip up there was uneventful. They were doing all sorts of zigzagging in this big Aquitania which was a troop ship converted from a luxury cruise liner.

09:30 And we still had some of our English waiters on, serving us in the officers' mess. We had one bright little spark who was a bank officer from Ballarat. And Peter was asked at breakfast by the English waiter, "Is there anything else you would like sir?" And Peter looked up and he said, "Yeah, I'd like a marmalade jam

10:00 please." And the waiter looked and he said, "Sir, we have jam or we have marmalade. Which would you prefer?" And so sat him back on his sandwiches a bit. But the trip, when we got to the other end they didn't know anything about the rise of the tide – about 13 feet rise and fall of tide. They moved us in and

10:30 alighted us toward the beach and said, "You can walk from here." And we stepped off into about six-seven feet of water. And saturated waded ashore, and then we marched four miles to Murray Barracks which was occupied by the 49th Battalion, a Queensland unit who were due to be relieved.

11:00 But as they hadn't left, they said, "Right, we'll have to march on to Ward's Drome. That's seven mile out." [aka seven Mile Drome] So on marching out there, our fellows' feet having softened up on the ship of course with sand shoes, there were blisters and complaints. They were, "Couldn't go on sir." And I'd take his rifle. I finished up with about four or

11:30 five rifles. And we got the seven mile drome, and they said, "Halt. Move to the side of the road, lie down and sleep."

On the side of the road?

Mmm. No nets, no blankets. Nothing. And that was a rather rough introduction to New Guinea service, but it was typical of what happened for the next 18 months. Our ship had been unloaded upside-

12:00 down. The things we needed first were on the bottom. Typical army. So we had to wait for some days before we got nets or any medication. And when it came it was liquid quinine which would take your breath away, it was so powerful. Not very much of that either.

12:30 So I would say that by the time the medication arrived everybody had been bitten by mosquitoes and would have malaria. I know I finished with a bad dose, and I must have had over 20 attacks of it during the time I was up there. But fortunately it was a benign type of malaria that was not

13:00 terribly serious. So all we did was perspire and feel rotten. But when they added dysentery to the line up that was rather serious. The very first bombing raid on Moresby I know I was down at place they called Lightning Ridge because the fellows were always in a hurry to get to the toilet.

Was that the latrine, Lightning Ridge?

13:30 Yes—

—Fantastic—

—a hospital as well. I really didn't care if the Japs dropped a bomb on us, that's the way I felt. However, they had uncontested air supremacy for quite a long time. Used to fly over leisurely and just drop bombs wherever they liked. But aerial bombardment on

14:00 troops on the ground, well dug in, is ineffective – not very many casualties. It's only buildings and things of that nature that air bombs are effective on. So eventually we got our [P-39] Aerocobras and Kittyhawks, but a very long time later. And they'd

14:30 been promised to us: “When are they coming sir?” “Oh, tomorrow” So they got the name of Tomorrow Hawks. When they eventually arrived—there were seven planes, I remember—by this time we had managed to consolidate all our old 1914-18 Vickers guns in a circle around the strip, the landing strip.

15:00 And air force at Moresby gave us a red alert when the Kitties were arriving. So Lieutenant Hall, who later became President of the Association, gave a fire order and they shot the seven planes to pieces.

The seven Kittyhawks?

Yep. Our own planes. Due to the red alert from – we had never seen

15:30 planes, you see, so they didn’t recognise what was ours and what was theirs. Because the Zeros [Japanese Mitsubishi A6M fighters] had been strafing them day after day, and they were just ready to shoot. And the Squadron Leader said to me later in the mess, “I did expect to get a warm welcome,” he said, “But I didn’t expect to get a bullet hole at one inch to the right of my right ear.”

16:00 That was sad. We put about five planes out of order for some time.

Any injuries, any casualties from that fire?

No, the planes got down safely—or fell down. But they were so low that the impact wasn’t great. One interesting thing was the last bomber, an old Lockheed Hudson out of

16:30 Moresby, had arrived on the strip some weeks earlier. As it pulled up the young pilot got out and he said, “Flight Lieutenant Green reporting … Douglas.” And I looked at him: he’d been in my section at the 6th Battalion before he’d gone to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]. It was rather unfortunate;

17:00 I had about 17 applications in triplicate to get to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. Due to the fact that I was commissioned with the first OTU [Officer Training Unit] here, they would not accept me because [General Thomas] Blamey had issued an order “Any officer relinquishing his commission to join the AIF would be court-martialled.” So I was unsuccessful, that’s why I grabbed

17:30 this 39th Battalion opportunity to see some action. And as I said, Conran hand-picked his officers, a lot of which were First World War blokes because old Huey was given a block of land up in the Mildura area prior to—or after his service in the First World War, and a lot of his mates had blocks around him. So they came into the army too.

18:00 Some of them were excellent; others not so good. And our doctor saw fit to board them and send them home after about eight months, six months or something like that, in New Guinea because of their age, and they weren’t standing up to the heat in the tropic conditions too well. Which, talking of age, most of

18:30 my troops were 18 and around about that age, 17. It was amazing how they were much more resilient than the older people in the conditions. One day a corporal was wounded twice in action. Fortunately the Japanese projectile was rather small and of high velocity, and the bullet

19:00 would pass right through. And he was hit in the most fleshy part of the shoulder, and I scraped the bullet out (it was just on skin level at the back) and put a dressing on, sent him back to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], which is the Regimental Aid Post where the equipment, I think, was a haversack full of aspirin and band-aids, a few service bandages, and nothing much else. He healed

19:30 up quickly, and they sent him back to me. And the action was still on. And blow me if a couple of days later he was shot through the fleshy part of the leg. I bandaged that up for him and sent him back. And he healed so quickly, being young, that he came back within about 10 days and he had tears in his eyes, and he said, “Mr. Mac,” he said, “do you mind if I don’t get too far forward?” He said,

20:00 “Every time I put me head up some bugger shoots me.” And I nearly laughed, but I said, “No, you’ve done a very good job. You go back and help the”—so I made him distribute the ammunition. However, one of the first words we had to learn in Motu [native language] was “Dori sesseena mirro” meaning “wait a while black boy” because as they came up

20:30 quietly carrying our supplies (ammunition, food we could get) they would deposit it very quietly in the dark and turn to go away, knowing very well if we nailed them they’d get a casualty to carry back stretcher. But having been given the responsibility, they were extremely gentle and carried them like a mother,

21:00 and looked after them remarkably well. So they knew very well that they’d have a very nasty task if they were apprehended. But by-and-large a remarkable people. Very intelligent and very loyal. Given a responsibility attached to one man nobody else could talk to him or

21:30 direct him to do anything; he was a one man boy. So that was a very good feature with the natives.

How long were you at the seven Mile Drome before the Kokoda action?

Oh, seven Mile we then had to move back and make camp and defences around Moresby. We got some

22:00 supplies: tents, and we even had stretchers in Moresby. And the first night we were in our camp there,

my friend, who was later killed at Gona, he said, “Mac! Mac!” he said, “There’s something on my chest.” And I put the torch on and had a look and there’s a little death adder sitting up on his chest looking at him like that. They’re only nine or 10 inches long, you know – little wee one.

22:30 So I pulled a bayonet out and chopped it in half. And every time—it was a terrible place. For 60 miles around Moresby in those days it was dry and arid. And every time we’d sleep on the ground we’d get bitten by something. I was bitten by a scorpion on the jaw. I got another one on the hand. But fortunately they were able to dig it out.

23:00 The sojourn at the seven Mile was pretty difficult because there was only one tap fed by a pumping station from the Laloki River 12 miles away, which frequently broke down. And we had 20 minutes per platoon, which is about 30 men, to draw water—fill our water bottle from this tap. And if it broke down

23:30 it was bad luck, you went without. But that water bottle had to do you for the day: shaving tea, drinking, everything. Whilst down at Moresby, the engineer shore-and-boat regiment of the Americans (they were American Negroes) were showering under copious water flowing. Made us very jealous whenever we went down. But we couldn’t blame

24:00 anybody other than the politicians who gave [US General Douglas] MacArthur priority one. He had first grab at all supplies and stores. So they did rather well, and we took the rest. There’s another interesting incident of that favouritism when Christmas 1942 on the north coast, we were asked

24:30 to, “Please be patient for your Christmas parcels and mail. We require the aircraft for the mignons of war.” About three miles back away from the front line the Americans were having turkey and cigars and everything that you could wish for because they had the aircraft and we

25:00 didn’t. I remember that Christmas day Christmas 1942 I shared a tin of bully beef with 11 men, and we had one boiled lolly which the old Salvo brought up and he’s, “Have a suck.” So we rather remembered Christmas 1942.

I’m sure you did. And if I may—

25:30 **If we may talk a little bit about moving from seven Mile up to Kokoda. We just need to cover the highlights on this.**

Well from—the move was made from Moresby, actually. We had to march out to the drome. And having heard that the Japs were landing—or they’d sighted warships on the way to New Guinea.

26:00 And coast watchers passed us information back to headquarters. So we were told to dispatch a company by foot to take defensive positions and to stop the Japs at the gap. They reckoned that one company would be plenty to stop people. They were talking about a gap, and you’d think it was a just a sort of a

26:30 ravine cleft in the mountains. But actually the gap was referred to by the air force, or the local fliers, who could see it was a gap in the trees. And actually the Japs rode push bikes up through it. So they dispatched B-company, Sam Templeton, on foot and it took them eight days to walk the Kokoda Track.

27:00 Then they had to go forward down to the lower ground at Gona, and they saw 13,000 Japs landing. Eight [thousand] formed a firm base and five pushed down the track to take Moresby in one week. 18 months later they still hadn’t achieved it.

27:30 But then reinforcements were suggested, but there were only two aircraft available - two American planes, DC-2s (that’s the old Douglas Dakota aircraft). They selected me and my platoon to half platoon

28:00 per plane. So we emplaned and took off, and we were at Kokoda in 20 minutes – the eight days’ walk. And as we arrived at Kokoda we found wooden obstructions on the strip. The platoon that Sam had left behind for defence

28:30 of the drome was evidently frightened that the Japs would land and thought we were enemy. So we circled that little tight area between the mountains about a dozen or more times. And everybody was getting airsick with tight little circle. And during one of these circuits I heard

29:00 the co-pilot say to the pilot, “Seven Zeros off the port bow.” And I grabbed a Bren gun and poked a hole through one of their windows. I thought, “Well, we’ll have a shot anyway before we go down” because we were unarmed and unescorted. And mercifully they passed us in a cloud, very dense cloud. They were trained by the Germans, and I presume that they had a one-track mind and they were going

29:30 straight to shoot-up the strip at Moresby. So they weren’t going to deviate just for one plane, even if they had seen us. So eventually they woke up on the ground that we weren’t wicked enemy, and they removed the obstructions and we got down. Very wobbly in the legs and we made our way across a wire and rope bridge over a crick that swayed, which added to our troubles trying putting one foot in front of

30:00 the other. And when we got over, our CO [Commanding Officer] met us, Colonel Bill Owen, who had been in charge of troops at Rabaul. He got out of Rabaul, and it makes you wonder about fate. They—there was a nasty massacre at Tol [150 men, including members of the 22nd Battalion, were massacred

by the Japanese at Tol Mission plantation near Rabaul, January 1942]. But Bill survived, and he got sent home

30:30 to Australia, went to a school in Western Australia for commanding officers because he was of lower rank, and sent back to command our unit. Within a week he was killed. So you wonder why he was spared the Rabaul bit to go home, and so on, and come back and lose his life anyway. But on arrival at

31:00 Kokoda, Bill Owens said, "Quick Mac, leave your gear – I'll get it up to you with the natives. Get up to Sam, he's up there." I said, "Where's Sam?" He said, "Five hours up there," he says, "and it's all uphill."

Crikey.

So we left our gear, we never saw it again.

When you say "gear", what was that?

Our haversacks with change of socks,

31:30 change of underwear, and a shirt. So we were in those socks for something like eight or nine weeks. And they had to surgically remove them eventually, they were embedded in the flesh. And you can imagine, the feet were white and pulpy. Had blisters and so on. We didn't have our boots off of course. And it rained every day around about four to

32:00 six o'clock in the afternoon and right through till two o'clock the next morning. So it meant that we were saturated every night. And 20 minutes after you'd start marching you were bone dry, and another 20 minutes you were saturated with perspiration. So this went on for months. It was a wonder people survived it. I saw flesh and blood strained to the utmost, and I couldn't possibly

32:30 believe how they could hang on under those circumstances. But life must be very sweet, according to Shakespeare, for even a beggar hesitates to cross a rotting bridge. And somehow they survived. But Captain Stewart, the Medical Officer of the 2/16th Battalion, I think, made the comment he said, "I have never seen people looking so gaunt, lifeless, pale,

33:00 with no sparkle in their eyes." He said, "I thought they looked like ghosts walking." It was a terrible sight, really, for the poor blighters. No comforts at all; and without food many times. Resupply, of course, was a huge problem. I later sympathised with the people trying to drop the food

33:30 to our troops, because the canopy of the jungle was such that it was hard to see anything. On the ground you had five and 10 yard visibility, so it was up there extremely difficult. And if they happened to miss the ridge, the ravine was so steep it would take two to three days to cut your way down from one ridge to the next.

34:00 And food down there was more or less gone. And it wasn't very encouraging when they first dropped the parcels they split on contact with the ground, and tea and sugar and flour spread all over the dirt, you know. It was hard to get anything to eat. The natives, of course, had robbed their gardens to avoid the enemy getting food and sustenance.

34:30 And it worked on us just the same. We were trying to eat little bananas as big as a little finger. We'd put them in the ashes of a fire and they'd still taste like acetic acid and rubber. Not very nourishing. We were eating lily roots and fern fronds on occasions because we were without rations. No fault of anybody's, I suppose, because the aircraft wasn't

35:00 available. But Kynesall, who was a planter—rubber planter at Kokoda—was a tower of strength in bringing natives to a compound and caring for them with giving them a blanket and feeding them. They did the carrying of all supplies. Everything we

35:30 got, in the way of ammunition or food, had to be carried. Until later they found a dried lake at Myola, and then they were able to cart quite a lot of supplies and dump them there, and then the natives would pick them up from there and carry them forward. But without Kynesall I think the operation would have collapsed. He did a marvelous job.

How long,

36:00 **in total, were you on the Kokoda Track?**

Well, I always seemed to be in action on my birthday, which is the 9th of July. So it was sometime in June '42

36:30 to about November. I'm not too sure about that, but I know that we were on the north coast again in December, late December.

This tape's about to finish in a couple of minutes and we'll pick up with another tape then. Just very quickly, where did you see action on the track?

37:00 A place call Oivi, the five-hours' walk from Kokoda. As I arrived Templeton said, "Would you like a cup of tea for your men?" I said, "Yes, give it to the men, but I'd be very pleased if you would show me where your gun positions and where the defences are." So we walked around for about 20

37:30 minutes looking at these spots, and went back about 20 minutes later I saw movement coming around the side of the hill. And sure enough enemy, about six feet tall, big strapping-looking blokes with foliage stuffed down their belts. And so when they paused they rather

38:00 looked like bushes. Wonderful field craft; they were very, very good, and very hard to hit. They got around us without any trouble, and at night they started to cut a gun platform to raise the elevation of the machine gun so that they could fire on the little knoll which was a bit higher,

38:30 and making quite a lot of noise and chattering, and so on. And I think it was perhaps an hour before that that Sam, expecting the other half of my platoon, the second plane, to have landed, felt that he should warn them that the Japs were on the prowl around us.

39:00 And Sam walked down the track, instead of sending a scout, which was normal drill, he used to do it himself. He was a First World War navy man, by the way, and held in great respect by the troops because he never spared himself in any way that he would do the walking to reconnoiter and make sure that it was safe for his men.

39:30 And Sam moved down the track and we heard a pistol shot and rifle shot, and we never saw Sam again. His 2IC [Second in Command] was an AIF fellow from the Middle East. We'd been reinforced by these at the time I was mentioning. Our doctor sent the older officers back. Many of these young fellows had been promoted

40:00 one rank, whether it was sergeant to lieutenant or lieutenant to captain. And this captain, 2IC to Sam, turned to me (and I was a lieutenant and still militia) and he said, "Will you take over?" because we'd been in the 6th Battalion together. And I said, "Yes, I will."

40:30 We had there a Major Watson [known as "Stand and Fight" Watson], who was an Australian who lived in America, married an American girl, and was seconded by the American Army to the Australian Army as a liaison officer. And every time we had a council of war Watson would take his pipe out of his mouth and we'd say,

41:00 "What do you think Watson?" He'd say, "Stand and fight!" I said, "Stand and fight be blowed. We've got bombs and bullets, but we haven't got bodies. How can we confront this horde of Japs out there?" I said, "I think it'd be better to indulge in guerrilla tactics: move around and patrol; hit them from the side and the back, and confuse them as to how few we are." And that was a wonderful

41:30 feeling of having the jungle as so dense you could hide. They couldn't see us – we could see them when we wanted to. And they had no idea how few we were, or they would have run over us in a minute.

On that note—

Tape 2

00:30 … islands, which included the Trobriand Islands. And he [Nobby Earl, Roman Catholic Priest] spoke the language. And he was a very fine, very brave man.

Is it possible—I'm sorry to interrupt Douglas. So we're still at Oivi? Is that how you say it, Oivi?

Yes. O-i-v-i. And I decided—oh, are we alright to go?

Yes, thank you.

01:00 Having decided that the Japs were going to attack, and surround us, at daylight I decided to attack them and move out in the opposite direction. So I arranged with a police boy named Sunopa, who was a magnificent specimen of a native and very clever, very brave.

01:30 He said, "Yes, Taubad [pidgin for mister, boss] I can take you around to Deniki another way." So I asked for volunteers. I got a lad to come with me and carry extra grenades. And we went down and we were able to creep up quite close, and we wiped out the gun crew. And meanwhile our troops had moved

02:00 out along a dry creek bed, and I joined them. And we had something like three days of slogging through almost impenetrable jungle to get to Deniki, bypassing Kokoda. Had we known my aggressive action had so shocked the

02:30 Japs, because they'd moved through all the previous islands without much obstruction, and plenty of houses to raid for food. There was nothing like that in New Guinea, of course. We subsequently made Deniki, and two men who had been left behind in the confusion at Oivi walked straight

03:00 down the easy path, the track to Kokoda, and up to Deniki and reported that there were no Japs at Kokoda. They hadn't moved forward at Oivi. 20-20 vision in hindsight, if only we'd known, we could

have moved down the easy way. But we thought that they were all around that track too. So one of the

03:30 things that you look back on and laugh at the obvious. They took quite ten days to get troops down to Kokoda, by which time we had reoccupied it. And that's where Colonel Owen was killed with determined attacks with far superior numbers. While General Blamey was always convinced that we had superior

04:00 numbers and superior equipment. And our equipment was 1914-18 weapons, which had been in drill halls and stripped so many times to explain the workings and the stoppages that a good slap on the barrel group and they'd fall apart. So we didn't get the Bren guns until quite late. We got a tommy gun first,

04:30 which weren't much chop. And then finally we got the Australian iron gun, which was magnificent. You could pick 'em up out of the mud and they'd fire. So we were very glad to get our new weapons, but we seemed to get them on the eve of a fight as we were moving up to attack. And I can remember sitting in a tent at one spot in Moresby explaining the workings of the Bren gun.

05:00 And we installed a number one and a number two who'd never fired a shot out of them. So it was rather sad. We got the tommy guns on our first action and then we got the Bren guns on our second. I think that our blokes adapted themselves very well indeed to the strange weapons. The Australian,

05:30 fortunately, was mostly country boys with a ton of initiative and a lot of bush-craft, cunning. They'd been using guns since they were little boys, so it was not strange. We got a bit of a surprise when we found the Japs sniping from the tops of trees, but we soon adapted to our problem, and we did the same.

06:00 **Was that on the north coast, they were more in the tops of coconut palms and so forth?**

No, no, that was all the way along the track. In fact, at Isurava, when the 2/14th Battalion joined us—thank God, we were just about on our last legs—they suffered more casualties in the first afternoon with us than they had in the six weeks in Syria because they were used to the

06:30 open warfare. And they'd stand up and say, "Come out and fight you little B's," you know; and bang, over they'd go with these snipers from the tops of trees. So it was—they soon learnt, but lost a lot of men beforehand.

And how long—the Isurava battle was a number of days, wasn't it?

Yes, yes. I would say

07:00 we found the first elements of them coming down, I was the forward company, and our CO asked me to put a forward post 200 yards forward of an obvious killing ground which we could see over the creek.

07:30 And I got my Corporal Bolan to go down it, ten men, and they covered this narrow track that came in over the creek. And he said that he saw two or three men coming round this big boulder, and they shot them. And then, with that penetrating scouting, they

08:00 find out your position. So the hill almost seemed alive, they said, with men walking down. So they turned around and ran back through to my platoon headquarters and reported this, and we decided that there must have been anywhere up to a thousand Japs coming down through the trees on the hill. We got back to the boss and prepared our defenses, and we

08:30 fought there for about four days. We would have been wiped out if the 2/14th hadn't arrived. But we were then ordered out of battle after we'd been—supposed to be relieved by the 2/14th. But our CO, seeing the odds so much against us, he said, "We won't desert you. We'll

09:00 stay and help you." And we stayed another week. Fortunately, during that time the tide was turning, and this allowed us to be actually withdrawn with reasonable safety. We went back to Koitaki to rest and recuperate. And that's when they sent me out on this

09:30 patrol to the right of the track to find out which part of Moresby they were going to hit, right or left. And they sent Colonel [Ralph] Honner up the left side of the Goldie River, and they sent me into the Jawarere track on the right side of the Kokoda trail [This rugged local track left the Kokoda Track at Koitaki and went east into the Owen Stanley Ranges and across the Adai River]. And that's when I found Captain Ben Buckler and put him on the track.

10:00 And we went further on and found this hospital with so many dead in it, and only a few with bullet holes in them, and found that the Jap was actually pulling out – they were going back. But we had difficulty reporting this because of the radio we were given. And eventually sent the message in clear, which was

10:30 relayed on to Moresby headquarters, and that was the end of their forward thrust. But they moved back to the north coast where they had been digging in for 18 months. And they had these huge logs arranged across the front of their weapon pits. And they'd cleared all

11:00 the kunai grass for about a hundred yards in front of their defensive position. So they had the sea at their back, and 180 degree fire field which they set up approximately nine inches above the ground

which meant that the fellows were being hit in the legs and then hit around the body.

11:30 It was almost an impregnable position. We lost a lot of men there because Blamey was being pushed by MacArthur for a victory by the 11th of December. He wanted to go to [United States] Congress to request more arms, men, ships and planes to get back to the Philippines. And I understand that he received

12:00 $500,000 for that job returning to the Philippines. Some of the generals got smaller amounts, all except Ike [General Dwight D.] Eisenhower who said, “Thank you, but a letter of thanks will do.” Which reflects the quality of the man. One amusing little incident while we were at the north

12:30 coast, they actually sent us some hot food.

How did they manage that?

We were staggered. We couldn’t eat it of course, our tummies had shrunken. We’d one mouthful and that was it. And we had this hotbox left over and I happened to look up and see an elderly native with a stick making his way along the path. And in my very best

13:00 Motuan I called out, “Dory sessino, miro. Naamoo kai kai, you catch ‘em.” And he looked over at me and he said, [in very refined voice] “Thank you very much sir, I should be delighted.” Turned out he’d been studying to be a priest for seven years; played the organ in the church at Rabaul. So that was a bit of a shock to the system.

I’m sure that would have been a real shock.

13:30 **Would have been a nice light moment too amidst all the blackness.**

Thank God for a sense of humour. Our Australians always could laugh at the situation somehow. One batman came to me offering me a fried egg and two fried tomatoes one morning when we hadn’t eaten for about seven days. He said, “Captain Bidstrop couldn’t quite manage these sir” he said, “Would you care for

14:00 a fried egg and two tomatoes?” I said, “Get out of it Looms.” But humour… We were on pumpkin, boiled pumpkin for about three or four days. And Manol the Greek fellow in that picture [indicates picture off camera] came to me and he said, “Oh, can’t we get a change of tucker sir?” And I said, “Just sit down

14:30 and shut your eyes and imagine you’re in a restaurant on the boulevard and you’re enjoying soufflé.” “Ohh,” he says, “Still tastes like bloody pumpkin to me.” So we always had a laugh.

How were conditions on the north coast? It was Gona you were involved with, wasn’t it?

Ooo yes, oh yes. The nastiest conflict,

15:00 according to a Western Australian paper, in the entire war. Casualties far too great to achieve what? Nothing. We could have bypassed them and let them starve. But, oh they were determined. They were even piling bags of rice on top of their dead and then standing on that to fire and shoot, you know. It was a filthy area.

15:30 My CO went down to clean his teeth in the creek that was flowing near there. They stopped very smartly when dead bodies floated by.

Good lord.

It was a shame to see. Every time I see pink or white frangipani I think of the Gona mission, because there were lots of it growing around the mission. Terrible.

It’s amazing that you could find time to notice and remember that—

16:00 —Oh yes—

—amidst the carnage.

We went in some—oh, what would we be? 860-odd troops, and about a week later we moved out seven officers and 25 other ranks, all the rest were casualties. Now that was pushed by Blamey: “Go in at the point of the bayonet. Go in,” you know. And there’s this impregnable

16:30 field of fire that’s enfiladed and criss-crossed. All the guns were sighted that way. And I found some of my blokes a week later lying against their foxholes with an unexploded grenade in their hand. They must have been hit in the legs and crawled to try and get revenge. But you can’t write a citation about a thing like that because you didn’t

17:00 actually see it happen. You knew it happened, but you’ve got to be able to see it, and the citation has to be worthy of the award. As I walked back from a patrol one day a chap I went to school with called out, “Good on ya Doug! You got the VC [Victoria Cross].” I said, “Oh, don’t be silly.” And he said, “I signed it”—he was the clerk in the battalion orderly room. He said, “I’ve seen it

17:30 go away.” He said, “The CO’s signed it.” But of course, when it gets back to Bonehead Cottage at St

Kilda Road—

—Bonehead Cottage!—

—the wise ones look at the citation and they say, “Oh he’s still alive; he can’t have earned a VC.” But there you are. A gong [an award] is a terrible thing. I saw them distributed to fellows who told a good tale. And I’ve seen them

18:00 earned and not got. One captain from Western Australia said to me, “Did you see so-an-so what’s-a-name got a bar to MacNamara’s DSO [Companion of the Distinguished Service Order]?” I said, “Yes, I saw that.” You see, these things happen.

I believe the fighting at Gona and the northern beachheads in particular was some of the bitterest fighting.

18:30 Absolutely. Oh, absolutely. Yes, they were so determined to die for the Emperor. Thank goodness for Ralph Honner’s knowledge of artillery. He was able to order delayed explosion artillery shells, because when our shells were landing on their weapon

19:00 pits, they were so covered with sheets of iron and dirt and timber, that they’d explode harmlessly. But when he got the delayed explosion shells they penetrated and then exploded. And that had an effect on the occupant of sort of making them not only unconscious, but some were killed and others were

19:30 dazed. And we were able to move in and finish the job.

How long was the action at Gona?

Gona? About seven days.

And from there, were you moved back to Moresby or to Australia?

No, we then had to go around with the 21st Brigade to Buna and Sanananda, and I was in a position

20:00 near what they called Huggins’ Roadblock. It was held up by a Jap .5, and by this time General [George A.] Vasey had taken over. And I was given the job of taking Vasey around to have a look at the position of the Japs. When he arrived he had his red-banded cap on. And he said,

20:30 “Son, I believe you’re taking me around to have a look at the positions.” And I said, “Would you mind wearing this?” and I offered him a tin hat. He said, “No, no, I’ll be right. I always wear this.” He did too. I said, “Well it might be alright for you sir, but it’s not alright for me. I’ve been with these boys for a long time and I happen to be fond of them. And we pass within 30 yards of a Jap machine-

21:00 gun post. And your red band will stick out.” And he thought, and he said, “Sorry son.” And he took the hat and he put it on, which again shows the quality of the man. He was a delightful man. Couldn’t resist using the word “bloody”, so he got the nickname of Bloody George because

21:30 one of his famous lectures was the Three Stages of Bloody War. “There’s the bloody preparations for the war,” he says. “And then there’s the bloody war,” he says. “And then there’s the bloody recuperation after the bloody war.” And he said, “If you don’t have the fight, you gotta send them home on leave so as to let down the tensions. Bring ‘em back and start training again.” That was George. Poor man was killed in

22:00 an aircraft that took off from the Townsville area. And there are pockets of air in that area that have no resistance. And the plane just fell out of the sky after about five minutes off the ground – straight into the sea. George was killed. Very sad.

Were you involved, then, in the battle for Buna

22:30 **and for Sanananda as well?**

Only inasmuch as we were available, but we weren’t used.

And so from there was it a refit in Moresby, or was that around the time the 39th was disbanded?

We were called back to Moresby and told that the unit

23:00 could not be reinforced, there weren’t sufficient people, and correction: we were brought back to Queensland, that’s right, the Ravenshoe area. And that’s where the movement of personnel to other units. The Victorians were sent to the 2/2nd Victorian Battalion,

23:30 and the New South Welshmen went to a 2/3rd I think it was – but their own state people. And I got out of the 2/2nd and went over to the 2/8th Battalion, Stateshausen. And he used me as his battle 2IC because they had spent a long time up in Darwin

24:00 after the Middle East. I had the New Guinea experience so he used me as his battle 2IC for training purposes. And he had 35 officers under his roof, and he’s only entitled to 15, and to avoid his embarrassment I felt when the call for volunteers for the paratroops came around that I’d take it.

24:30 And he said, “Oh, I’m very sorry Mac that you’re leaving.” He said, “I’ve got a job.” And that was when they went to Aitape. And a dear mate of mine who was there—a regimental sergeant-major—got a machine-gun burst down the side and he wore a corset until he died. So I was probably lucky not to be in that: Aitape.

It was pretty heavy stuff up there at Aitape

Yes,

25:00 oh yes.

And Wewak. So you volunteered for the paratroopers?

Yes. Yes.

Bit of a change.

Oh yes. Well, a paratrooper is really only an infantry with a glorified form of transport. You hit the deck and you’re just like the infantrymen. But of course you’ve got to be a lot fitter.

25:30 Doctors reckoned that one jump was equivalent to eight hours hard work, and he wouldn’t let jump twice in the one day.

Really? What causes that extra stress on the body?

Oh I don’t know. I suppose it’s more mental than physical. But they certainly insisted on physical fitness. And I was a B-class. The CO asked, “What height are you? Oh! You’re the bloke,” he said when

26:00 I walked in. I said, “Oh, am I? Is that good?” He said, “How tall are you?” I said, “I’ve had varying height measurements given me from the air force and army. He said, “I’ll tell you why. I’ve got a signal here from the C-in-C [commander-in chief] General Blamey: ‘Deplore the ignorance of 19th Brigade sending an officer over six feet to join the parachute battalion.’”

26:30 And I said, “Why?” And he said, “Well, early in Britain,” he said, “the experience was that they took the cream of the army, the guards, who were all six feet two and over. And casualties from sprains, broken legs and so on was about 28 percent. And then they tried little Northumbrian brigade—well-knit little coal miners, you know—who rolled

27:00 better than the big bloke: a short stick is harder to break than a long stick.” So I said, “Oh that sounds very upsetting.” I said, “Do mind if I might reconsider joining.” He laughed and he said, “What height are you?” I said, “Oh, about six feet.” (Actually, my height was six feet four at the time). He said,

27:30 “Adjutant, measure this bloke!” So John Overall was the acting CO. He was chosen by Ali Baba, who was the General Leslie Morshead, and he was selected in the Middle East when he heard Blamey was calling up forming a parachute battalion, because it was his baby and he entrusted

28:00 Moorshead to pick a commander. And he sent John Overall, who later became Sir John, the man who reorganised the roads around Canberra. And John made history on the army by going through in GRO from lieutenant to captain to major. So he was a major when I arrived there.

28:30 A brilliant architect, and a brilliant soldier. MC [Military Cross] and bar. And all his troops swore that he was trying to win a VC for them, because he was fearless. But a very fine man. And John’s record

29:00 couldn’t be equalled or criticised. But I do think that being married to a politician’s daughter was a bit of a help. He had married a South Australian lass; very nice lady. And they moved to Canberra when he got this appointment. And then he was later knighted for it.

29:30 So that was John. John passed away about 12 months ago.

That’s sad.

He wanted to go straight to New Guinea when he joined the unit, and I talked him out of it. I said, “John, there’s too much in the way of disease and discomfort up there.” I said, “Why not North Queensland? With the high speed of modern aircraft we can make New Guinea overnight, and you’re not risking

30:00 the health of your troops. It cost about £1000 to train a paratrooper, and 12 months’ hard training.” He saw the wisdom of that, and so that’s how we moved to a place in the Rocky Creek area, on the tablelands, Mareeba.

30:30 **And so you were with the paratroopers for a couple of years, I believe.**

Right to the end of the war, yes. And then we were ready to do Tarakan. The death march at Tarakan where 25 hundred Australians died. And MacArthur wouldn’t give us planes.

31:00 We were plane-loaded, measured up, weight, everything, ready to go and we were knocked back. So that was a sad thing for a very fine unit. I think they would have acquitted themselves remarkably well

too. I was then halfway through my discharge at Royal Park when the brigadier in charge of administration, Southern Command sent a message for me to report to him.

31:30 I wondered what I'd done. When I got there he offered me a position on the staff. He said, "Would you take over movements and general duties?" I said, "I'm not a staff officer sir." He said, "No, but I've had good reports." I said, "That's Q isn't it? I'm a G man, fighting and training, not the

32:00 housekeeping and house-wifely duties." He said, "Oh, this is pretty important." And I found out that we were responsible for the movement into and out of Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania of all personnel in the services, army, navy, air force, and their equipment. And as a

32:30 case I had nothing else to do. I had 17,000 vehicles to watch too; check on COs; correct use of, and so on. And I had 82 NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] on the staff and seven officers who were there to protect the army's interests when there was an accident. And I found that they were inclined to prosecute people that they had very little hope of succeeding, and pay

33:00 where they might have. But that's the army. I remember whilst there I got a call from the camp commandant, sometimes affectionately referred to as the camp comedian. He was a 7th Division staff officer and brigadier, and he was on the Footscray Road broken down in a staff car.

33:30 And he rang back to me, and I ran through to my vehicle park. And I said, "Johnny, Comber, race a car out to Mapriff and so-and-so on the Geelong Road." I said, "The brigadier is standing there in the rain." So Johnny got the car out there, and two or three days later at 339 Swanston St where we had the Southern Command mess at the

34:00 time, we were there at lunch, and the brigadier came over and he said, "McClean," he said, "Finest bit of staff work I saw during the Second World War." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Oh," he said, "the car you got out to me at Footscray." I said, "Oh, yes. Well I'd like you to meet the man that did the job. I only passed it on." And while Johnny was coming over he said, "Well there has to be a directing

34:30 brain." Goodness me. I said, "John, this is the brigadier that is grateful for you sending the car." And while all this is going on my immediate boss, who was a colonel, he said, "What was that? What was that?" I said, "Oh, that was the brigadier just saying thank you for us sending a car out to him on Footscray Road." "Oooh, you shouldn't have done that," he said, "He should have

35:00 written a letter." I said, "What? While he was standing in the rain?" I said, "Sorry sir, I'm used to direct action."

That's outrageous isn't it?

Yes.

In the last five minutes of this tape may we talk a little bit about your immediate postwar experience. When did you demob [demobilise] from the army?

1947.

And that was when all the cars had

35:30 **been sent out to pick up all the brigadiers I take it?**

1947. And retired as a substantive major, which they generally offer an honorary rank of lieutenant colonel. But I still stick with the one I felt I earned. Yes, I hung on to the army posting because I couldn't find

36:00 premises to operate back as I used to be in the fur business. And I went back to my office in Tasmania House, in Flinders Lane, and there was a Jewish gentleman in occupancy. And I said, "Do you really want this office, or could I have it back?" I said, "I had it before the war." "Oh, yes," he said, "You kann haaff de office for two

36:30 tousand pounds." I said, "I've been away trying to make the country safe for democracy, and Jews, and people like you." I said, "You know what to do with the key. I don't want it." So I hung on. About two months later I was in Ince Brothers getting some ribbons, and Russ Ince said, "Why are you still in the army Mac?" And I said,

37:00 "I can't find a place to operate." "Ohh," he said, "How much do you want?" I said, "Oh, not very much really; you know, about the size of a dining room sort of thing." "Oh," he said, "Look, go upstairs and have a look at our third floor." So I went up and had a look and there's old dummies and paper and cobwebs and dust and things. And I came back and said, "There's enough room there Russ,"

37:30 I said, "How much do you want for it?" He said, "Don't be silly Mac," he said, "You've been away fighting for us. You can have it for nothing." In Swanston Street near the corner of Elizabeth! I said, "Oh, that's much too generous." And then I thought, the three flights of stairs: my elderly customers would probably have a cardiac arrest walking up the stairs. So I then mentioned that to him. He said, "Oh, yes

38:00 Mac," he said, "Look, you can use one of our fitting rooms on the ground floor to interview them." So there was no limit to the wonderful Ince family. And I very gladly accepted and operated there for quite a while. I said, "I really would like to get out and show something."

38:30 He said, "Look, I've got—you can have that showcase in the front, on Swanston Street downstairs. You can put something in there and put your card in and so on." So he was wonderful. And at that stage I used to go up to the Victoria Market where I met bookmakers' wives and doctors' wives and all sorts of people, and the most wonderful border collie who jumped in my car when I was coming home one day.

39:00 We had him for 19 years.

Well, on that note, sorry to interrupt Douglas, but this tape's about to finish—

Tape 3

00:32 **Doug, what I'd like to do now is to go back and we'll look at your life in more detail now, having run through it quickly in the two tapes there. I'm quite interested in talking about—you were born towards the end of World War I. Did you have**

01:00 **any family members that were in the first war, perhaps?**

My mother's brothers. One was gassed and lay in a field at Flanders before he was found. Came home and became a plasterer of all things, and one of his outstanding jobs was the

01:30 corner of Swanston and Collins Streets: Manchester Unity building, which he did.

The reason why I asked is I wonder if any of your uncles, or any other men, told you much about war, in terms of the First World War, as a boy?

No. No, they weren't very

02:00 communicative about it. No.

Was there a generation, then, of silent men who wouldn't or couldn't talk about their experiences?

Most hate talking about it.

Why do you think that is?

Even I don't enjoy it because I know that I'm going to have a sleepless night or two. You do your best to forget the bad memories.

02:30 But people keep reminding you of them.

I'm sorry for that. I hope the next two days aren't too arduous for you. Growing up, then, you lived throughout the entire Depression. You would have been a small boy or a young man by the time it broke out. Can you tell us about your recollections of perhaps how it affected your family first of all?

From 1928

03:00 I would say we began to feel it, until '32. It was a good long four years. And from the age of about 12 my parents decided that we'd move up to the country, which Belgrave was at that time. We went to a place called Selby, just a little further on.

03:30 And had a home on what they called the Devil's Elbow, which is about a mile-and-a-half out of Selby. At it's a very sharp bend overlooking the Monbulk forest and sawmills. Kangaroos, wallabies, lots of rabbits. In fact, my mother often said, "If you hadn't

04:00 been trapping rabbits we may not have been able to eat."

How were you trapping them? What method of trapping were you employing?

Oh, the usual metal trap. How I got to know how to do that, when I was about 10 I used to go visiting to some relations in the Wonthaggi area, and

04:30 the son of a neighbour was a professional who used to sell the skins, and so on. And on my school breaks, Christmas holidays and so on, I would help him set up to 140 traps. And they are very heavy to carry, traps, they're metal of course. And

05:00 remembering where they were, and so on, teaches you a little bit of field craft. And it stood me in good stead, the upbringing of the mountain air and the bush life. Very hard work sawing timber by hand – two-man saw on some of the logs that were left lying

05:30 about after the bushfires of ’39 (Black Thursday they called it). And they were all encrusted with coke where the tree had been burnt and left this residue on the outside. So it was as hard as iron. And we were able to knock out a bit of money from

06:00 cutting this wood. And my brother had an old A-model Ford truck with a tray and we used to cart the wood down to the grandfather’s fur customers and deliver the dried wood. It was very, very hard work, but I think that’s probably what helped me build up some resistance to the rigours of New Guinea.

I’m sure it did.

06:30 That’s about the length and breadth of it. We had a couple of horses. I used to ride a horse that father bought at Dandenong. It was a broken-down horse in that every time he trained he’d develop a hot fetlock. So he was a very fast other than his training periods. The locals used to say, “That boy of yours

07:00 will kill himself.” I used to ride it bareback and it used to go like the wind. Back from where we’d been using it to harrow. We planted peas and beans and potatoes down on a block that a fellow Maskell, Jim Maskell, he’d had a big plumbing contract in the Brighton area and had made a lot of money, and he built this house up on the hill at Selby.

07:30 And he had fruit trees; and he grew a lot of vegetables. We used to work there and help him when I was about 14 and 15; cutting hay and that sort of thing, all the things cockies do. But never really took to the farming life, you know. I was

08:00 always intrigued with the growth stuff and how it developed, but it never appealed to me as a taking up a block after the war which we were offered.

What were your ambitions as a young man? Did you have dreams for yourself, or was it just to get any job and make a quid [make money]?

I think one was preoccupied with getting something to eat and the usual ambitions of growing up. I had sport-

08:30 mad ambitions of playing cricket for Australia. Unfortunately the war cut that short. I used to open the batting and bowling with Milthorpe club 11, and left them of course to go away.

What sort of a batsman were you? Were you a dour opener or were you a flashing blade?

No, no, I was a dour, yes.

In the Boycott mould. [England cricketer Geoffrey Boycott]

A round-the-

09:00 wicket player. Alan Kippax [Australian cricketer]: delicate glances and fine leg, and so on. But having a long reach I used to be able to smother the spinning ball too.

And as a bowler were you an express opener?

Yes, fast bowler.

Right arm?

Yes. Hurt my back bowling fast. So I can remember going home after cricket and lying on the bed and

09:30 being frightened to move. You’d get into a position where your back was just locked.

And there was obviously no medication in those days for that.

No, not much. Anyway, we couldn’t afford it. I can recall my father getting vouchers that they had to earn, of course, on projects like

10:00 the building of the Yarra boulevard. The men worked on that—nothing much in the way of mechanical equipment, so it was all hard work with pick and shovel. And these vouchers, one for the butcher, one for the baker, and various green grocers, and so on. And that was about all. “Sustenance” they called it

10:30 in those days [welfare].

The “Susso”.

Yep, that’s right. It was a very hard time. But I think this is what makes the Australian a better soldier than the Yank. Press-button living always makes a person soft. And they didn’t like putting up with the rigours of New Guinea. Neither did we, but we could stand it better than they could.

11:00 Many of the bush boys had been used to carrying a tin of hot water up for their Saturday bath – kerosene tins full of water. And, you know, the Americans couldn’t even imagine that.

How was your school career as a young fellow?

Very mixed and staccato. As I mentioned, we went to South Australia. I had my

11:30 6th birthday in a place called Inda Flats opposite the Colonel Light Gardens. I recall a policeman used to occupy the flat above, and you'd hear him come home at all hours of the morning and night. And he'd always take his boots off and he'd drop them from somewhere above the wardrobe I would imagine. They made a terrible noise. But

12:00 then I had, I think, my first schooling was at a place called Unley. And as father worked in a trade that was considered noxious because of the fleshing of the skins and so on, we moved out to the Torrens River area which is Hindmarsh at Thebarton. We lived in a place called

12:30 Henley Beach Road, and then Beans Road – two places. Huge old stone homes; nine-foot ceilings and 37 different kinds of grapes and seven different fruit trees; walnut trees, two of those – that used to bear so much, so well, that we'd harvest them and sell them to the chocolate factories. Oh, half a ton a year sort of thing. We had a horse in a jinker [a wheeled cart]. And we used to go driving down Henley Beach Road on a Sunday. Father was very proud of his grey Arab and we'd go all the way through to Glenelg. And I think that was

13:30 where we moved from… It was the first move we had, and mother had a grey cat that when we left Beans Road and went to the other place in Henley Beach Road.

14:00 I had the pleasure of nursing the cat on the removalists' van, and when we got to the new place mother said, "Oh, we must put butter on the paws so that it licks its paws and thinks it is a nice place and won't go away." But when she went back to collect the rent on the previous place that we had, here was the cat sitting up on the gatepost waiting for her. Marvellous how it found its way back, about seven miles.

14:30 So from Hindmarsh we came back here and we had a home at Northcote. So then I went down to Westguard Central where I got my qualifying certificate. And that's when the

15:00 Depression really hit us, so we had to move where we could get something to make money and to eat. And that's when we went up to Selby. That was the end of my schooling. But I went on with self-education with the school-by-correspondence, and

15:30 I think I really went to school after I left school.

I think I understand what you mean there. Your parents and your grandparents involved in the fur trade. Can you explain to us what sort of furs they were using and where they would obtain them and so forth?

In those days, owing to the lack of transport from other countries, we were using local skins that have now become

16:00 pests: rabbits, foxes, kangaroos. That's was the rather stupid reaction of a person who decided on animal liberation being a wonderful thing, because today those things have become pests. And we feel that unless animals are culled they will die of either starvation

16:30 or disease. But their talk of cruelty was all wrong, because if you pay £10,000 for a pair of breeding foxes you don't ill treat them; you look after them like race horses – delicately. And I personally think that the emotive angle

17:00 came from seeing little baby seals killed on the ice, and seeing the blood on the snow was rather an impact on the eye, you know. But when we think about it, they were just hit on the head. And that's the way they dispatch cattle in abattoirs; just hit on the head. It's the quickest way; the least painful

17:30 way of dispatching them. Anyway, people who talk animal liberation still wear leather shoes and lambskin coats and so on, and they still eat lamb chops. I thought that they did a great disservice when they started this animal liberation because they put about 1500 people out of work in Victoria alone;

18:00 people who sowed in linings, and importers of various accessories. I still have about eight articles that I've carried over from the end of the business. My wife has a very nice mink coat, of course. She graduated from musquash when she met her husband. There's a lovely

18:30 story told about the elegant lady walking down Collins Street wearing her beautiful, fully stranded, imitation mink coat; and an undesirable character wheeled up alongside her and nudged her with his elbow and he said, "Hey you! Do you know how many animals had to die for you to wear that fur coat!?" And she said, "Do you know how many animals I had to sleep with to get it?"

19:00 **That's a good story.**

It's a strange thing that people should feel so strongly about wearing fur, because there is nothing more beautiful, more durable or warmer than fur. The leather keeps the body warmth in, and the fur attracts warmth from the normal

19:30 atmosphere. Quite amazing.

Were you involved in the actual making of garments or the sewing of furs?

Oh yes. Importing the skins and physical work of matching. And when we worked on a natural skin you might go through 3000 squirrel skins to find 210 to make a coat,

20:00 with the same colouring. And where they varied a little bit we would blend them from the lighter at the top down to the darker at the base, and you wouldn't notice the difference unless you held the hem up against the top row. But that being so difficult, we then would resort to dying and changing the colour. And that was much easier because

20:30 having dyed them, the female skin would grab the colour more than the male, but we could adjust that by top-brushing the lighter ones to make them blend.

Well that's some very good insights into the fur trade at that time there. I'm wondering, when you played cricket for North Melbourne did you receive any payment at all in those days for district cricket?

Oh no. No.

21:00 And footballers used to ride the bike sometimes 10 miles just for the honour of wearing the jumper.

Did you ever have a tryout for the shinboners?

They tried to kid me. Charlie Meares was secretary at the time, and we as baseballers would train prior to the footballers. We wore football boots with huge metal stops –

21:30 vicious-looking things compared to the footballers' stops. And talking about stops incidentally, if the footballers today wore only one in their heel instead of more, there wouldn't be so much strain thrown on their ankles and their knees and their hips when they're spinning. They'd glide around. Yes, I used to be able to run at 100 yards in even time. My brother was a professional runner at one stage and I could beat him. He couldn't stand

22:00 me up a couple of yards. I could mark and I could kick, but I wasn't worth two bob on the ground. Little blokes would run alongside me and get their shoulder under my hip and over I'd go. So when Charlie said, "Mac, I'd like you to have a go a centre half-forward," because we used to have a run and a kick with them after we'd trained at baseball. But I said, "Oh, no thank you Charles. I know of lots of easier ways of getting killed than playing

22:30 footy." And he said, "It's three quid a week, you know." And that's the basic wage for a married man with children. I said, "No thanks Charlie, I'll stick to cricket and baseball."

At six' four" you would have been a very tall person for those days.

Yes. I played with the school and we had an extremely good side at Westguard Central. We had

23:00 a fellow named Smith, who later coached Melbourne.

Norm?

Ginger Smith, yeah. Norm. And we had Ron Baggart, the Richmond man too. So we used to clean up at footy [football].

Did you know Norm Smith at school?

Oh, very well. He sat next door to me.

What sort of a lad was he?

Oh, a lovely fellow. Yes. Very nice. Very nice lad. And a brilliant centre man.

23:30 And we used to have his brother Len come over from Fitzroy to coach us.

Gee, you can't ask for more than that.

No. No.

I'd like to talk about—you joined the militia I believe in about 1934 at the age of 19.

Yes.

And before we get to militia, the two books that you read: Disgrace—what was that one?

Disgrace Abounding.

Disgrace Abounding and Insanity Fair. Can we talk about those

24:00 **for a moment please?**

Well, it spoke about the poverty of the people, and the fact that the Jewish community had bought up a lot of property after the war (the First World War) and were selling it back to the Germans, who wanted these buildings for certain

purposes, for inflated prices. So it wasn't hard for Hitler to stir up an animosity. And with his rabble-rousing and building up a big army, he couldn't afford to feed it so he had to steal from other countries like Poland and anybody who was around about the boundaries. And that's why the invasion was absolutely imperative,

because he didn't have enough money and he didn't have enough food.

Was it unusual for a 19-year-old to be reading these books in those days?

Rather, yes. Going back even further, when I was seven, my schoolteacher came home to talk to the parents. And she saw I was reading the Wars

of the Roses. She said, "That's a strange taste in literature for a seven-year-old." So I suppose I've always had a strange taste in literature.

I wasn't suggesting that it was strange, but we've spoken to many men through the course of these interviews who've said that they had really no idea about what was going on in Europe prior to '39, or '38 when it became quite a dangerous situation. So I'm just intrigued about someone who sat down in the early

30s and thought "I'm going to follow this." Was it easy to follow the progress of the Nazi buildup in Europe? Was there much information out here?

He was a correspondent, so he was very well informed because he was in Germany and he saw it all happening. And I was really impressed with the fact that it was inevitable.

Did you think right back then that there would be a war?

Oh yes. Oh yes. I felt so.

And was that why you joined

the militia?

Yes. I thought that if there was going to be a war I wanted to be able to look after myself.

So in those days there was no AIF then, were there – there was just the CMF [Citizens' Military Force].

That's right, yes.

So tell us how you go about joining the CMF in 1934.

Just a matter of going down to the drill hall when there was a parade on, and giving them your name and address.

And then they issue you with a funny-looking uniform: riding breeches and putty and things like that.

That sounds very much like a World War I uniform.

From the waist down, yes. Up above, being a city of Melbourne regiment, they had a rather ornate jacket with blue tabs and this sort of thing.

They also were fortunate in having their band subsidised by the city of Melbourne. And eventually they brought a fellow named Lieutenant Cobb, from England, as a band master, and he was rather taken with Waltzing Matilda as a marching song. And our troops used to march

through Melbourne—we were the only people allowed to do so with fixed bayonets, by the way—and that was how it come to be a popular song overseas, whistled by our blokes marching through Greece.

When you were on those marches through Melbourne, how big was this regiment in those days? How many men?

Well, in

those days we were what they termed "fours". We used to form fours, and our drill was different. Later we became threes – three companies to a battalion, with ancillaries like the machine-gun company and headquarters. But in those days it was four, and I would say that

the change over was perhaps an improvement because there were less people to keep an eye on or command. And mobility became more important than fixed-trench warfare. All-round defence was taught, so that you're watching from north, south, east and west when you took up a defensive position.

Right.

But movement was more important than the stationary idea of warfare; no front lines, you know.

How did the—because I've heard other chaps mention that when they initially joined the AIF in '39, they would have some officers that would train them in fours and others that were training in threes depending on whether they were World War I vets [veterans] or different.

Did that training in fours and threes have anything to do with that operational

30:00 **train of thought that you were mentioning then in terms of trench warfare versus all-round warfare?**

I don't think so. No, I think it was a general's idea of cutting down on numbers to per platoon, section, battalion. I think it was possibly forced on them through the small number of people available to them in this country.

30:30 **What sort of training did you receive in the militia in the early 30s?**

Tremendous amount of parade-ground stuff, which is recorded in the bible as being vital, without which no force could take the field and fight with success.

31:00 Close-order drill. A lot of that inculcating rapid and instinctive order to command. You respected what you heard and you did it instinctively rather than thinking about it. And that was the secret from jumping from aircraft too. You never gave them time to think about it. We practiced on

31:30 the ground, we practiced in the air, we practiced on a high stand that was about 100 feet off the ground that only had a sliding thing down a clothesline, more or less, into a sandpit. And that was the worst experience of all because when you got to the end of the rope it snapped you like a whip. But it still inculcated a rapid, instinctive

32:00 obedience to orders.

Is that same thinking behind the constant drilling of men bayoneting sacks so that it becomes automatic, you don't think of—

That's right. Yes. Lots of marching to harden people up and brings about a camaraderie and singing while you're marching and that sort of thing. The remainder was taken up with arms training,

32:30 and then occasionally we were allowed to go down and shoot at Williamstown. And having been a bush boy I managed to get a cross-rifle and crown as the best shot in the battalion. So it came in handy when I was sniping from the tops of trees.

I bet it did. Did you mention to any other people, or did you mention to your fellows in the militia at that time that you had read these books, that you

33:00 **were following the progress of Hitler in Germany and that you thought there might be a war?**

It wasn't necessary to speak a lot, but I discussed it with some of my closer friends, yes.

Did everyone agree, or did some people think, "Oh, you're crazy. There's gonna be no war."

Well not the boys that were in the unit. They felt that the training was essential. No,

33:30 I should imagine a lot of civilians would have thought that way.

And when you were training, were you training as—how shall I put this—did you believe you were training as an Australian to defend Australia, or as a British subject in case Britain was invaded?

Well, going on past performances we'd always become involved in other peoples' wars. We had no idea.

34:00 But I was convinced that it's better to put a bushfire out at a distance than wait until it's on your front doorstep.

Were you an Empire man? Did you believe in the Empire?

Very much so, yes.

What did that entail in those days? What sort of feelings and emotion about Britain and the Empire would you have?

34:30 I suppose it brought out a feeling of loyalty and respect for the royal family. And I still have that.

Was England "home"? Did you refer to it as "home" as many Australian did at that stage?

Oh no. Never. This was my home here.

35:00 **How did you rise up through the ranks in the militia, because I believe you were a lieutenant by the time war broke out?**

I started as a private, and apparently impressed some of them to become a corporal. Full corporal and later lance sergeant. And that's when they sent me to this OUT [Officer Training Unit], 140

35:30 NCOs from the 4th Division were selected to attend the OTU. And a sergeant from the MUR [Melbourne University Rifles], the Melbourne University Rifles, topped the school and I second-topped it. We were immediately granted a commission, and that put the stopper on me joining the AIF.

36:00 **When you were granted a commission you were an officer in the militia. How much time out of a year would it take, your militia time? Did you have long training camps? Or was there an occasional…**

A camp usually was a fortnight, bivouacked. And we had several on the peninsula, one at Bittern. And then a permanent camp when full-time duty was installed to

36:30 Mount Martha.

When was full-time duty installed?

The outbreak of war. Actually, no. Three months before, three months before September.

What was a lieutenant paid in the militia in those days? What princely sum did they award you?

Not very much. That's a hard question to recall.

37:00 Yes, the paybook… It wasn't very much. You wouldn't give up your day job.

Paybook's a very important thing to a soldier, isn't it, in those days?

Oh indeed, yes. It's got all his details: next of kin, and the amount that he receives. Six bob a day they were paying the private soldier at that time.

37:30 I think we were only getting about five, little bit less, because we were home troops you see. And when we joined the parachute battalion everyone, providing he did a jump every three months, was getting another six bob a day. So it was quite handsome.

38:00 But I must say the pay as major was well worthwhile.

I'm sure it was. A lot of responsibility, so I'm sure you would earn that.

Yes.

Well this tape's about to run out—

Tape 4

00:31 **You've mentioned your father quite a bit, and I'm interested to know what advice he had for you when you joined the militia.**

What advice?

Yes.

Dad hadn't been a soldier because he was involved in making sheepskin vests for the troops. And they said, it was a sort of sheltered occupation.

01:00 So I don't think he knew what to think, really. Mother was a little bit concerned. But as I said, she was a Christian lady, and her prayers saved me in many a situation, I can assure you.

Did they encourage you to go to church as often as you could, even when you'd joined up?

Oh yes.

01:30 Oh yes. She taught me faith very early, and I found it very comforting.

Was it possible to maintain that faith in some of the dirtiest, wettest, soggiest places in New Guinea?

Yes. I found it a constant source of comfort. I carried the issue New Testament that the army gave everybody.

02:00 And we often referred to it.

Did you ever conduct group prayers amongst your men before a battle?

No, although we did have several of our troops who subsequently became lay preachers. We had, as I mentioned, we had our

02:30 Roman Catholic padre who used to conduct church parades regularly, when possible, of course. And also the private soldier who used to conduct a Protestant parade. And then there were others who claimed that they didn't have any sort of interest in church parades, so I used to get them to pick up papers – clean up the lines.

03:00 **So you didn't have any Calathumpian [any religion] padres up there?**

No.

Back in Australia it was a fairly common thing for the Protestants and the Catholics to get into stoushes and brouhahas [fights and quarrels] in the playground and the footy fields from time to time. What about in the trenches or on the front line?

Nothing like that. No, nothing like that. There was a brotherhood of men among the boys that you relied on

03:30 the others to watch your back, and they did with us; and it was just as though we were all of the one family.

So, for example, if a Catholic padre was the only padre in the vicinity at a point of a man being either very wounded and possibly passing on, would he accept Last Rites or the comfort of a— would a Protestant accept the Last Rites of a Catholic padre?

The padre

04:00 always conducted the burial and this was the one thing that struck me as rather silly to have any antipathy for the other religion because the same padre buried the Calathumpians as well as the Protestants and the Catholics. And I thought, well how silly to maintain any hatred or

04:30 feel that they are wrong or we are right. The same bullet killed the same bloke. It just didn't matter.

I was curious to know about your brother's involvement in the services. You're in the militia; did he join a service?

My brother? No, he was much older, and he was working as a

05:00 housing commission carpenter after he left the fur trade which he felt he wasn't getting enough outdoor air and so on. He preferred to leave the fur trade and take up carpentering, which was probably a throwback to my great-grandfather who came out to Australia as a ship's carpenter.

05:30 **Highly skilled, ships carpenters. They have to bend wood in ridiculous ways.**

Yes. Alec was always very handy with his hands. He loved fiddling with motors too.

Now, you were fabulously well-read by the sounds of it, and unlike a lot of other men. Did that mean that you ever were in the company of people who would've considered themselves intellectuals during

06:00 **the '30s?**

I don't think so. I don't think so.

The reason I ask is that, in hindsight, just about everybody would agree that going to war was necessary, that something had to be done about both Hitler and his activities and also the Japanese. I'm wondering if there were any anti-war stalwarts making noise at the time in the papers or in the

06:30 **beer-halls and so on?**

No, I can't recall any demonstrations or outspokenness. I think as the years have gone on we have made education more important. Universities have become a hotbed of dissent, individual

07:00 thinking. Often we educate our youngsters to laugh at us and criticise us. I don't know. But we notice that most countries seem to have trouble with their educated group.

Now you spent a fair amount

07:30 **of time in training, and training others in the militia, while the AIF was sent overseas. Was that a bugbear of yours?**

Oh no. No. I enjoyed it because I understood it. And I think that is the secret of doing any job well. If you understand it and like it, there's no fears or frights about what's likely to happen.

So you didn't have a

08:00 **yearning ambition to head overseas. I notice that you had filled out 13 applications to the AIF in triplicate.**

Mainly because I felt that I was trained well enough. We had trained a lot of the people that went to the AIF, and that was probably the reason why Blamey retained some knowledge to help the uninitiated. And it was a good thing.

08:30 **I wondered if you could talk to me a little bit about Colonel Conran.**

Yes.

He was able to hand-pick his officers. Was that uncommon for its time?

No. I think everybody would be very proud of their officer group because they personally had recommended them for promotion. And

09:00 it would be a little uncommon in that the situation of calling up a battalion for service was very uncommon because battalions were established and then troops volunteered or were drafted to the battalion. But hand-picking his officers was one of the reasons that he accepted the commission.

Well, I wanted you to

09:30 **explain to me, because I don't understand, what was involved in a garrison and what made it different to any other fighting unit?**

A garrison is an established group placed in a position of defence. Other fighting groups are mobile, moved about to places of threat

10:00 or invasion. But a garrison duty is moved to a spot to protect perhaps a town or a bay mainly to see that no harm comes to that area, that's all. And then sometimes they are relieved and taken away from that spot and put in somewhere else.

So when

10:30 **Conran was given the job of forming the garrison in New Guinea, was there a good amount of threat from the Japanese at that stage, or was it…?**

It was reported that they were moving down through the islands with consummate ease and not encountering any trouble at all, even when they got to Singapore. The British had sighted all their guns in one direction,

11:00 and the wicked enemy came in from behind them and rendered them useless.

Did you have knowledge of the Japanese situation as much as you did the German?

Not really, no. No, we heard of the fall of Singapore, and of course we heard of the attack, treacherous attack on

11:30 September. But no, we didn't really think of the Jap as a threat. And in any case the cartoonists had always depicted him as a little man with big, thick glasses. And you can imagine our surprise when we found these six-footers, well-built, until we woke up that they weren't Japs at all. They were North Koreans.

12:00 **And Marines to boot.**

And the Japs were pushing them in in front, as they do with civilians when they're sometimes attacking.

So I wondered if you can tell me a little bit about those last days before they shipped you out on the Aquitania. Did they give you much final leave?

I think we had a week, but it was mainly a

12:30 move from Darley by train to Sydney. And when we got there we went straight aboard.

So that last Christmas in Australia wasn't really much of a Christmas then.

No, no. We were rather anticipating action – that is movement. We weren't anticipating the action so much because they hadn't landed in

13:00 New Guinea at all. They were still a long way away. And that's a very interesting thing that they were raiding homes for food, and when they got to New Guinea there was just nothing. It was completely devoid of any food, gardens or animals. And that rather shocked them because although

13:30 they were marvelous in their sustenance—one handful of rice and a dried fish and they could a week on it—we couldn't do that; our boys had to have more food than that.

That's interesting. You mention often that the Australian soldiers were made strong by their bush upbringing, by the fact that they'd spent a long time, you know, camping and fishing and hunting—

—They were tough, yes. They were tough—

And the Japanese had

14:00 **a different sort of advantage, I guess, in that they were more used to jungle conditions.**

That's right. And very well trained, and—

And a different diet.

And a different attitude to danger. They were prepared to die for their Emperor, and we weren't prepared to die for anybody. We were going to help them.

Yes, I often wonder what happens mentally for soldiers. If you are defending, I guess

14:30 **I can understand the psychology of hanging in there and doing what you can; if you are attacking and invading, it must seem stranger to put your life on the line for your country's desires.**

Well, there's always the comforting thought that a moving target is harder to hit than a stationary one. And I many times I ran at a fellow that was pointing his rifle at me, and it rather upset him and he missed.

15:00 Yes. I think our action, which was aggressive was hard for them to understand. They had the greatest respect for the Australian soldier. I've heard it many, many times. "We could not have done that," I've heard Japs say. But the Aussies

15:30 seemed to take it in their stride. Just an attitude—well, it's almost like a sport. You couldn't let your mind dwell too seriously on death and being maimed. It was a rather inevitable thought toward the end of the campaign, that the only way you'd ever get out of it was to get a homer (that's, to

16:00 be shot). But it even happened that some of—a troop here and there would damage himself with a rifle bullet: put a bullet through his foot, for instance; or through his hand. Two of the most complicated parts of the human body. And they little realised they'd finish up with a claw or maimed, you know. But that was the horror of how long

16:30 it they'd been in. My I-officer jokingly said one day, "I'm going to have a form roneoed [copied], I didn't know the gun was loaded," to take care of the odd bloke that just couldn't take it anymore. But it was a terrible strain on human flesh and blood.

It's interesting to me the self-inflicted wounds that,

17:00 **as you said many would choose their hand or foot, and yet it was so obvious to medical officers and senior officers that they had inflicted the wound themself, which I imagine would mean a court martial or a dishonourable discharge at least.**

Yes. Not court martial. That was something generally reserved for officers. But, oh yes, they were sent home, and

17:30 depending on the time they'd been there it was overlooked occasionally because they weren't of sound mind when they did it.

Well, were there any other mercy measures that soldiers could have to get out of their situation?

Well, sometimes parents had a business back in Australia which they couldn't operate without the son being

18:00 called back. And they would appeal for his return. Or it might be a farm that father and mother just couldn't manage anymore and they wanted their son home. It was a rather sad fact that a very dear friend of mine was killed after the Gona campaign when he was wandering around the enemy position

18:30 looking, I'm sure, for souvenirs. And one sniper, strapped up a sapling with a brown thing over the face (and you could hardly see him), fired one shot – got him through the heart. Killed him. And back at Brigade Headquarters there was a recall notice by his parents which had been approved.

19:00 And it was probably the last shot in that campaign. When you think of these things you wonder how fate was so kind in that you get home with only a bit of grenade in your bottom.

I'll get to that – the derriere wound.

Not running away, either.

No. You couldn't have been running toward him though.

I didn't push down quick enough behind the log when he threw it.

19:30 But I didn't miss with mine.

A proverbial pain in the butt.

Yes. We had a brigadier who was shot in the tail. He was in Syria, and he was hiding behind the edge of a building, but he had a big tail and it was sticking out. And that's when he got wounded. So we used to joke with him. Selwyn Porter. He later became Chief of Police here. "You must have got it

20:00 running away, sir…" He arrived on the island to take charge of the new command, and he used to walk

up to us when we were like this [leans forward as though lying on his stomach?], and he'd shake hands, "My word, you're looking fit McClean." "Yes sir, yes sir." I got my own back about a month later. I saw him on the side of the track when we were going back into action. And he had his down and he was perspiring and shivering with malaria, you know.

20:30 And I walked up to him and said, "My word you're looking fit sir." And he looked up and he said, "I'll never say that to anyone again." Poor old Selwyn.

When you take a shot in the posterior how do they carry you on a stretcher? Do they turn you over and you have to lie on your stomach?

Never had the experience.

What did they do with you when—

—I did have a fellow who was shot there [indicates his leg].

21:00 And he was being carried out of action at Gona, and Charlie called to me—

Excuse me Douglas, for the sake of the camera can you tell us where he was shot, because we couldn't see where you were pointing to. You just have to tell as opposed to show us where he was shot. He was shot in the thigh close to the genitals, for the record.

Oh yes, yes. Very close. And he'd just come back from leave, having been married. He said, "Me Mac, will you have a look and see if I'm alright?"

21:30 And I looked and said, "Yes Charles, you'll be right." He was a Port Melbourne publican's son.

Well I would lay bets that was a major fear for men.

Oh yes, I suppose.

They'd take a bullet in the arm or the leg, but getting hit in the wedding tackle would be the end of things for them. But when you were hit in the bottom, apart from the fact that

22:00 **there's hardly any treatment up there anyway, how do they treat that? And while you're recovering are you just flat out on your stomach?**

It was so minor that I had no idea until I took my underwear off about three or four weeks later and saw the blood on my underpants.

That's outrageous!!

So it wasn't terribly serious.

Numb perhaps. Alright, I'll move on.

22:30 **Completely off the track, I'm interested to know about saying goodbye to Gwen. I've worked out the numbers and you must be either courting or engaged by this stage, when you take off for New Guinea.**

She was in Western Australia.

What was she doing over there?

Accountant with Goldsborough Mort [wool-broking and pastoral firm], doing the work of three men who had enlisted. And she managed to do the job they were doing in normal

23:00 working hours and they used to claim overtime. How about that?

I don't think I'll go into the politics of that.

This was the second time we were engaged.

What happened the first time?

Oh, usual disagreement, I suppose.

You wouldn't let her drive the car?

No, she was strong-minded and I was strong-minded too. So I suppose you wouldn't give in.

How did you patch it up?

23:30 Oh well, when I got marching orders I rang her in Western Australia and proposed again. And I was able to send her the same ring that we'd had before. So she was very happy to accept.

I wonder if would tell me, please, what

24:00 **your impressions of New Guinea were when you arrived?**

We had a company commander named Hughes. And his name wasn't Banana, but we nicknamed him Banana Joe because he said, "Oh, it's a wonderful place. You'll be able to lie back in bed and just pick bananas and paw paws off the

24:30 trees," he said. So when we got there, of course it was a little far-fetched. Although this time I went there I found in Moresby a tree outside the hotel where we were staying that had over 200 avocados on it. And so, Joe had remembered some of it. But no, we had a very grim introduction. First of all we were dunked in the

25:00 water, and secondly we had that long march. And then another three miles tacked on afterwards, and then halt, get to the side of the road and lie down and sleep.

Had they introduced Atebrin at this stage?

No dear. When that was introduced Blamey issued an order: "Any man with malaria will be court-martialled."

25:30 Every man in our battalion had it by then. It gave you some idea of how little he was in touch, because he also said, "We have superior equipment. You have superior numbers." And honestly, 140 against 5000 was a little bit far-fetched. But the General in charge of New Guinea Force Headquarters was

26:00 very much upset by Blamey. I think they were daggers drawn. They didn't seem to get on too well at all.

Blamey doesn't seem to have come out of it very well in terms of the history books, or what men—

That's true. Well, he wasn't exactly a frontline soldier, you know. He was an administrator in the First World War.

26:30 In fact, as my revered CO, Ralph Honner, said, "He was only Monash's potbellied clerk." (That's in Disgrace Abounding—no, no: Crisis of Command). And he was extremely

27:00 rude to our troops. "Not the man with the gun that gets shot; it's the rabbit that runs." And our blokes had been fighting, then, for the best part of 15 months, and they were ropable. Oh! Even his aide-de-camp was horrified at what he said because he knew that it was different, so much different.

I read there was almost a riot at that point after the Kokoda success and

27:30 **General Blamey's speech.**

Oh, he didn't come on the island until the Japs were turned and going back. Then presumed to take command after he'd sacked Brigadier [Arnold] Potts, who had done a wonderful job in fighting a very difficult withdrawal under shocking conditions (no ammunitions, no food). And he just sacked him out-of-hand and sent him back to Australia.

28:00 But that shocked everybody. And then he got rid of the GOC [General Officer Commanding], New Guinea Force Headquarters, and put another bloke in charge. He didn't do any better and then he said, "I'll assume command myself." because the Jap was on his way out I think.

28:30 He didn't cover himself with glory at Greece and Crete. He left with his aide-de-camp and his son. I do think, of course, that a senior commander should try and preserve himself because of his knowledge and position. That's why, I think, poor old General Gordon Bennett was vilified but

29:00 did a very good job while he was there. And I don't feel that the senior blokes should be sacrificed when you have people like scouts who are trained in the movement and observation of the enemy. Why do it yourself, like Sam Templeton. I think he should have used forward scouts to

29:30 penetrate that track to contact our second plane. I don't think he should have taken the risk of going on, because he has superior knowledge to help the remainder of the troops. He owes it to the rest rather than take that risk.

Speaking of that, if you can give me an answer to this; why would Sam Templeton make that decision to go himself? What sort of a decision is that to do that?

Because he

30:00 was a fearless man who felt his troops were paramount, and he wanted to know himself what was happening.

And as an officer, with regard to Blamey's fairly insensitive response to the success of Kokoda and the rest of the work that the soldiers were doing. You are, as an officer, responsible for the men and their morale;

30:30 **so what do you do when you have a situation like the General Blamey speech, to keep their morale up and stop them from wanting to tear him apart at the same time.**

I was at a loss as to what to do. I was absolutely flabbergasted. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. But the boys took it on the chin and wiped it off as ignorance rather

31:00 than criticism. Yes, I often find when I attended reunions after the war, the troops were saying to me, "You're a different bloke sir." I said, "Well, it's a different situation. Then, I was responsible for getting you home to your mothers, your wives and your sweethearts. And I would not

31:30 brook sloppy discipline or silly mistakes in anybody. But I'm sorry if I was a bit tough, but that was a tough situation." And I think that's what motivates most officers to try and look after your men. You watch their health, their feet. And

32:00 you let them eat first, and you eat what's left. And I remember marching back, I about had the remnants of my battalion, we were coming towards Isurava, and I saw a blue shield hut:

32:30 Church of England. And I made my way up ahead of the troops and I said, "I've got about 14 men here," I said, "I wonder if we could have a cup of tea," to the fellow in charge of the hut. "Oh yes," he said, "If you can get somebody to go down and get some water," he said, "I'll boil it up and make some tea." And he said, "I've also got a cake here, but

33:00 only enough for the officers." I said, "Well, we've been together quite a lot, put up with a lot, and gone without a lot together." I said, "We won't have the cake, thank you." Couldn't eat it in front of the blokes after what they'd been through. So the Australian troop is an amazing soldier in this way that he's not worth two bob in defence, because he wants to get out and

33:30 attack. Tell the English soldier to stay there in a place and he'll stay there no matter what. Obey implicitly the order to defend. But the Aussie, he gets a bit itchy feet and he wants to get out and have a look and see if he can have a go. And that's why he's always been the best defensive troop in the world. And I think to that

34:00 they have an unusual sense of aggression: when somebody threatens them, they feel that "They've got no right to be threatening me," you know, "I'll fix him." Wonderful resilience in action.

What are the breaks of being an officer, then, in a situation like that? It seems

34:30 **like being an officer is twice as hard as being a private.**

Yes, yes, because you can't sawdust [deceive] the Australian troops. You can't kid them or put anything over them. You have to be able to do everything as well as they can, and a little better if possible, and do anything that you ask them to do. Then they respect you. The British Army had an attitude that the officer was to be with

35:00 troops but not of them. Because, if you get too close to the troops, they feel that they wouldn't show you the respect and obey you to take unnecessary risks. But we never found our troops ever failing in that regard if you asked them to do something. You'd say, "Come on,"

35:30 rather than, "Go on," and they'd always support you.

Yes, they had the reputation of saluting the man rather than the rank.

Yes. I think so. I used to teach our fellas when they were on leave and they see an officer, I said "Salute him, because you are saluting your own uniform and the fact that he has been commissioned." You're not

36:00 saluting the bloke; you're saluting the uniform.

What about the Americans in comparison then?

The Americans were a softer type of person in action. I remember sending three of my men ahead of a group of about 40 yanks to show them where the enemy were and to attack the position.

36:30 And as soon as the firing broke out the Americans hit the ground, and our blokes were still going on because we're taught to keep moving. The moving target: harder to hit. And it intimidates the enemy too. And I called the yanks everything I could lay my tongue to trying to goad them get up and go on and support my three blokes. Not on your life. No, they wouldn't.

37:00 **How does that operate between national services? Do private American soldiers have to respond to your senior rank? Or are you irrelevant in terms of command when it comes to ordering?**

Yes, we're equal, equal in command. But what I found was that the American was inclined to keep his head down in the defensive position.

37:30 For instance, taking over or relieving a group of about 80, we had about 30 fellows. And I walked up to the defensive position, and I said, "Are you in charge?" And a lieutenant looked up from the hole he was in, "Yes," he said, "I'm Lieutenant….." and he mentioned an Italian name.

38:00 I said, "We've come to relieve you." "Oh boy. Oh boy. That's great," he said. "Have we had hell. We've had hell." I said, "Yes, I can see the saplings still falling over," from the rifle shots that had been going on. And I said, "Where are the enemy?" He said, "Man," he said, "They're over there [points ahead], and

they’re over there [points left], and they’re over there [points right], and they’re over there [points behind].” And I said, “Well, they’re not over there [points behind] because

38:30 we’ve just come in over there.” “Oh.” I said, “Now, I want you to come out of that hole and show me your gun positions.” And he said, “Right.” When he got out he said, “Is it alright to leave now?” I said, “No, you wait until you can get your men and we’ll want to check your gun positions.” They couldn’t get out quick enough. And they had fouled

39:00 the area too, because they didn’t leave their weapon pits for any purpose. And so in the subsequent move out, I got my batman to go along with his direction along the track. He said, “There’s a gun up there.” And so I said, “You go up and locate that gun Skilly,” and he went up. And on his way back in at dusk a Yank shot him. Killed him.

39:30 They were very trigger-happy, and very nervous. So I said to him, “Well, you can go now.” And I got my boys, and two of the officers were very close friends, and one of them I said, “Dudley, will you take that track down there.” I said, “We can’t stay in this area; it’s fouled one and two.

40:00 One bomb would kill the lot of us.” So I said, “If you’d move, we could spread out a little bit.” But in the subsequent move down the track Dudley got a burst down the side and was killed. And these are the things that stick in your mind when you have command of troops – you’ve killed your mate. And that’s why I found some peace in finding the graves of these two lads

40:30 back in Bomana [war cemetrey, Port Moresby] because we’d left them on the north coast. And I often wondered what happened.

Tape 5

00:30 **[Would you] care to talk about Dudley, your batman?**

Oh no, that wasn’t Dudley.

Oh, that wasn’t Dudley; that was somebody else. I’m sorry.

He was a dear friend of mine. In charge of a platoon.

Are you okay to talk about your batman, and that experience of sending him out?

Well, I thought I had

01:00 covered it.

Okay. Alright. I want to cut back a little bit to the arrival in New Guinea and marching all that distance, and some of the preparations that you made with your soldiers before you were sent out to Kokoda. I’d like to talk about, say, the first time you saw the planes coming over. And I’m wondering if you saw enemy planes before those Kittyhawks came over that you shot up.

01:30 Yes. Mitsubishi heavy bombers, used to drop bombs on us at will. They’d fly over the island from Rabaul and they’d bomb anything they liked because we didn’t have any air support. We did have a group of youngsters—18-year-olders—on a place called Parga Point, which is a high hill beyond Port Moresby.

02:00 And they didn’t have sufficient ammunition to fire box barrages, as was the normal thing overseas. They fired direct, and strangely enough had the record in World War Two of direct hits; the young fellas, all about 18. And you can imagine the delight of our troops when they hit the first Mitsubishi—shot the tail off it—

02:30 and the tail-end gunner crashed down on the road at Moresby. We though he’d be like a raspberry tart, but his leather flying suit kept him together, and he only had a mark over his eye. Quite dead, of course. But there was much cheering and hooraying and jubilation over that one plane because they’d been flying over at will, bombing whenever they liked.

Did you get a good look

03:00 **at this tail-end charlie that fell out of the sky?**

No. I wasn’t far away, but we didn’t go down.

And I also wanted to pick up on Lieutenant Green, who turned up. You mentioned him before, and I wondered if I could ask a bit more about him and your relationship early on.

He was in my section as a private soldier.

03:30 We just knew him from bivouacs and camps together, and so on, and parades in the drill hall. But he remembered me because I’m afraid when you sticking out in front commanding even a small group, they remember you sometimes more than you remember them.

Was that unusual, that

04:00 **sort of a coincidence, for a chap to turn up and to know him from somewhere?**

Oh, very. Very unusual indeed. Yes. Yes, he was the last plane out of Rabaul. And I can see the shrapnel holes in the plane, and also I did have a piece of metal from one of the projectiles that I found on the floor of his plane. But

04:30 he was unscathed, fortunately.

Now, what about—you were quite a good shot, I imagine, from your rabbiting days, and so on. Do you still get to fire as much as an officer, or do you…?

One interesting experience was when we were around on a place called Bootless Bay [east of Port Moresby]. Now this was the bay that was prolongationed

05:00 to the air strip. And we were on one of the few eminences around there. I had been trained as anti-aircraft officer with the 6th Battalion. One morning we were having our "mush", which was the broken biscuits that fell from the planes, and dried milk and water; that was our breakfast.

05:30 Suddenly there was this flight of Zeroes coming up very low, about the same level as we are—just above the water level—heading for Moresby to shoot up the drome. And we stopped our gourmandising, and I said, "These fellows have been trained by the Germans. They probably will come out exactly the same

06:00 way as they went in." They were flying low to avoid radar – which we did not have. Sure enough, they were going out the same way; but we were ready for them we our old 1914-18 Lewis gun on its mounting [points at the camera]. And as they came I started aiming off and firing. And I saw a line of holes appear along the engine cowling

06:30 right through to the tailplane. Must have hit the poor fellow around the chest somewhere. And it peeled off and swung out of formation and crashed in the Rouna Hills, which is over behind us, not far from Moresby. That struck me as rather strange that an old 1914-18 gun could bring down

07:00 the latest aeroplane that the Japs could produce: the Zero, which was a very, very efficient plane. It flew so fast that our old Kitties that were operating in the Rabaul area were so slow that the Zeroes couldn't hit 'em they went so fast. It was quite amazing. We used to have a couple of old Dougs [Douglas Dakotas]

07:30 that came down, we called them "the milk run." They'd go over from Moresby and bomb Rabaul. It was quite interesting to see them coming back unscathed when they had these wonderful Zeroes about. And talking about bombing Moresby area, the Japs had a

08:00 flight that were so accurate they'd drop a bomb in your hip pocket one day, but the next lot that came over couldn't hit the island. And the bombs were falling in the bay, and the natives would be out in their lakatois [small boats] picking up stunned fish. But on a day the good bombers were coming over you'd never see a native anywhere. They knew which was which. I don't know how. But there's also an interesting story about bush

08:30 telegraph. Prior to going over the track I was sent on a patrol to establish the areas of rock to be crushed to make tracks, roads. And I had about 30 natives, and about 15 troops; just reconnaissance –

09:00 no Japs on the island at this stage. And we took off through Itikki-namu, which was a rubber plantation (and "namu" meaning mountain). And as we headed out through there the Johnson brothers were still in occupancy, and so were a lot of civilians in town when we first arrived. And we continued on, made a

09:30 long detour and found some rock, and came to a village. The ashes were still warm, but there wasn't a soul about because they'd have a scout down the path and would warn the village of any impending danger. And they didn't know us at that time. So

10:00 we camped in the village that night; it was just a couple of huts, really, all up on stilts because of the rain and the wogs that get around on the ground. And next morning one of the boys woke me and said, "There's a pig down there drinking at the creek, sir." I said, "Oh." Now, we'd been warned not to shoot pig because village pigs

10:30 were a form of currency: three pigs would buy a wife. Dogs too: dogs' teeth. They used to make necklaces out of the teeth. And I said to the police boy, "Are these village pig, or are they wild pig?" [rubbing stomach] "Oooh, namu kai-kai sir." I said, ""Never mind about the good food," I said, "Are they village pig?"

11:00 "No, no." So I gave the boys firing orders for three pigs: "You take that one. You take that one. You take that one." And they went bang, and over they went. That was Sunday morning about six o'clock. I gave one to my natives to cook. And they scooped out the sands at the side of the creek. And they started a fire. And they put

11:30 the—skinned the pig and put him in there, intestines intact. And then they put more rocks on top of the pig and then palm leaves over that—no, it was skin first, and the fat dripped through, you know—and

then palm leaves to keep the heat in. Oh there was great rejoicing among my carriers. They enjoyed the pig. We weren't allowed to eat it because it was

12:00 supposed to be wormy and dangerous. And I said, "We're taking two back to Itikki-namu, for the Johnson brothers, for their natives." So we did that. And I got back there about five o'clock in the afternoon, and Roy met me at the clearing and he said, "You've been shooting village pig." I said, "Well, I asked the police boy and he said no."

12:30 He said, "Well, they're village pig and I have Wyreema here, who's speaking for the village." I said, "How did you know anyway?" He said, "We knew at nine o'clock Sunday morning." I said, "We shot 'em about six o'clock." And it's, you know, hours and hours away walking. He said, "Bush telegraph. We knew." He said, "They can send a message for three days."

13:00 And anyway, I sat down with Wyreema and introduced. Mild-mannered, quiet, big fellow. And Roy said, "How much for the pigs," he said, "Wyreema?" He said, "six pound per pig…" "Don't be silly!" Roy swore at him and

13:30 he said, "These blokes are on six bob a day," he said. "Don't be stupid!" he said, "They can't afford that!" He said, "Now, come on. Fair dinkum, how much?" "six pound per pig." He wouldn't be shifted from his six pound per pig. Roy, fortunately, used tea, sugar and flour, at inflated prices, to square off. And we got out for about five

14:00 bob each. But goodness me!

No compensation from the army there. You just had to cough up.

Oh that's right, yes. And then after we'd negotiated, Roy said to me, "You know, that bloke's been arraigned for three murders." I said, "Now you tell me, and you had me arguing with him!" "Yes," he said, "Some boys from another village pinched his sister and didn't pay for

14:30 her, and took her away to their village. So Wyreema followed them. And one night during a sing-sing he swung his club, and he bashed three heads in." And the administrator at the time couldn't punish him because it was tribal law: payback. So, that was the story of bush telegraph.

How did it work out between the Police Boys and the PIB [Papuan Infantry Brigade]? I believe they were quite separate

15:00 **in their rankings.**

Oh yes, quite distinct. The Police Boys were apart and very much patrollers. The PIB were fellows that were stationed with Army Reserve for any trouble that occurs, and had the same sort of ranking as the British Army. They had a band, magnificent band. We saw them this time

15:30 dressed in their blue lap-laps with their big golden bird of paradise on the front, and their lovely tunics. And they played very well too; three or four different well-known army songs and marches. And I had the pleasure of inspecting them during this recent

16:00 visit in October. Their roles were, as I say, quite different. One was permanently situated around Moresby. The Police Boys kept tabs on the surrounding district – everywhere. If any offences took place they would grab them.

Would you be assigned a number of Police Boys, and would they have to work for you and with you?

16:30 We had one particular boy, Sanopa; a magnificent lad. And had nothing but respect for the Police Boys. The PIB weren't very good in action; they didn't like the firing much. But some of them very fine men; like every organisation

17:00 or nation there's good and bad, I suppose.

So were you given the right of disciplining them? Were you given any right of punishment, or any rights over the Police Boys?

Not really, no.

So could they just desert if they felt like it?

Oh, they did. Yes. We found with carriers, quite often, if we were moving at

17:30 night—on the patrol I told you we moved 208 miles in a fortnight; we had to move at night. And the roots of trees across their little native pads, which were a foot to two foot wide, they'd stub their toes on these roots protruding out of the ground. And they didn't like that. And very often after a couple of days, three or four days, they'd dump their gear over the side of the track and go back to their village. But fortunately

18:00 quite a few stayed with us.

And what about the village meris [women]; did you encounter them from time to time?

The…?

Meris.

Oh! No, they were always out of the village before we ever got near it. And while we were in Moresby one brought his fiancée to me to have

18:30 her leg fixed up with tropical ulcers. There was a seed that used to work its way into the flesh; pointed seed. And that caused the ulcer. There was also a hookworm that used to be able to penetrate wet leather; get into the blood stream. And after a few days you'd find that this attached itself

19:00 to the inside of the bowel and could consume a pint of blood a day. So there were other hazards than the Jap.

I just noticed among your photos there's some photos of some of the women in New Guinea.

Oh yes.

And I'm just wondering, men being men, was there ever any trouble between Australian soldiers and Papua New Guinean women?

No, only I can recall when our blokes

19:30 used to bathe on the very rare occasion they got a chance in a river, that they'd go in with nothing on of course. And the local men would protest strongly because they would say, "You are trying to take our women." There was nothing further from their mind. They used to eat a lot of coconut, and the perspiration and

20:00 the odour coming from stale coconut oil was most unpleasant.

So enough of a contraceptive was it?

Oh, worse. Worse. You'd never get downwind to them, you know; you'd always lead and let them come behind.

Speaking of smells, the Australian troops must have just stunk to high heaven, given the diet and the conditions.

Oh, absolutely!

Did certain fellows have certain smells that you could recognise by them?

20:30 Can't recall. Can't recall.

It's an oblique question, but I certainly know some people who have a certain smell, I mean obviously usually very pleasant. People have a certain smell; and I wondered if in the trenches, being so close to each other you would know who you were next to in the dark?

Did you say "being in the trenches"?

Oh, well slit trenches occasionally I'm sure you were in, or…

Oh, foxholes we'd just skirmish and get down below the level if we could. But we didn't have anything to

21:00 dig with, only tin hats and a bayonet. So you couldn't make very deep holes.

Now, I'd also like to pick up on the story of supplies being dropped from planes in the dense canopies. Did you say you saw—you would see them fall, the supplies drop. Would they cause accidents when they fell, if they fell, say, on a line of soldiers marching up a hill?

I saw one poor fellow flattened with

21:30 a box of bully beef; heavy tin, you know, dropped from the air and landed on him.

Was he alright?

Oh no. Oooh no. Dropped from a couple of thousand feet it was travelling at perhaps 70 miles per hour when it hit him. Regarding the other supplies, once—as I say a lot of them even missed the ridges, went down ravines. And

22:00 they were so deep that the two ridges, a man could stand on that ridge and another could converse with him in a slightly raised voice. But if you were wanted to join him it would take two-and-a-half to three days to cut your way down through the lawyer vines and dense jungle up to the other side. The depth of the ravines was enormous, and if food fell down there it was just goodbye.

22:30 **In a situation of supplies falling and killing a man, as an officer is it your duty to write to his family?**

I never—I wasn't so close that it was my responsibility. It was another company.

Because that would be a very awkward to write, wouldn't it?

Shocking.

Or would you leave out the detail?

Oh, you would. You would. You would just say "Killed in action," you know, "He was a brave boy" or something of the nature.

And given the Australian sense of humour

23:00 **and its penchant for, say, gallows humour from time to time; after that man's death and the company has accepted it, would that be the sort of thing that would raise a bit of a laugh further down the track?**

No, never. Oh no, no. There's a certain respect among the men for one another. No.

Okay. I think we might just go for a few more minutes.

23:30 **I'm sure there was no love for the Japanese; and I'm sure there was no love lost for the deaths of the Japanese in combat.**

I try to be Christian, and I try to be adult, but I could never forgive them for what they did to my troops. They would tie them by the thumbs with fishing line, which they carried, behind a sapling and then practised bayonet on them, or sword drill. They had a firm belief, the officers,

24:00 that a sword dipped in the blood of the enemy had a certain quality of protection as they came whirling their sword and calling out "Banzai." And one of my little machine gunners, who wasn't terribly well-educated little boy, he was like all the little ones: full of fight and courage

24:30 (I was sometimes ashamed to be a big man – it was some of the big men let me down). Anyway, this little bloke Skilly (Skillbeck) was on the gun—he wasn't a gunner—but I said, "What are you doing to that gun Skilly?" And he said, "Oh, the bloke what was there." he said, "Doesn't need it no more, so I thought I'd take it up." And he said, "By the way, is it true that officers run and 'Banzai' with the blood dipped on their sword and it's

25:00 supposed to protect them?" I said, "They think so, Skilly." And he said, "Well, it didn't do that bastard no good. I split him down the middle like a bloody banana." I said, "Oooh, that's not nice Skilly." Anyway, yes. That was one incident of—that we found: bayoneted, tied to a tree. And the other one was the massacre at Tol,

25:30 on their way out of Rabaul. Rusty Law told me how they just surrounded these blokes and beheaded them. We didn't take any prisoners on our side either when they got to Papua because we couldn't feed ourselves; how could we feed them? It was them or us anyway. War is a game

26:00 of kill or be killed, and that's your attitude.

So would you have to dispatch wounded Japanese soldiers after the main onslaught of a battle?

Oh there must have been a lot of that done. I remember the only prisoner we took was when we were having a bit of a conference before moving down

26:30 to the beachhead, and a bloke jumped out of a hollow log. And he was in the middle of us, and you couldn't do anything about it. So they bagged him and sent him back to Brigade to be questioned. But whether they had interpreters there, or could speak the language, or whether he'd be any good, I don't know.

What did you have to do? Send him back with one of the Police Boys and a Private—

Two. Two of our troops

27:00 took him back

Because I imagine you couldn't even spare many of your troops at certain times to do that.

That's right. On another occasion, not long after that incident, as we moved down to Haddie's Village on the coast, a young pip-o came up to me (an officer with the artillery), and he said, "We can give you some support

27:30 sir." I said, "Now just a minute, you'd be almost extreme range here, wouldn't you?" "Oh yes," he said, "But we could fire a couple of sighting shots and see if we can help you." I said, "Well, if you think it's alright." The first shot they fired landed in my company headquarters and a piece of shrapnel went through another batman's back. So that was

28:00 the end of him. I said, "Thanks for your support; we don't want it anymore." It was extreme range and very hard for them to be accurate.

And I think one final question before we finish this tape for today; as an officer how do you face your men when, for example, one of your own has been waylaid by friendly fire?

Everybody was very

28:30 realistic about it. C'est le guerre, this is war. Just happens. You often, by lack of identification, planes were brought down in this recent Iraqi business. The Yanks shot down a British plane. And these mistakes occur, and unfortunately you have to accept them.

Tape 6

00:31 **for the MC [Military Cross], please. Then we might have a chat about the action that led up to that being awarded.**

I wasn't present at the ceremony, but my wife went in with little Rowan, who was in arms. And a picture was taken that appeared in Washington

01:00 And we got a telegram from Spokane in Washington saying, "If you send 50 cents in coin we shall send you a photograph of your wife and baby being photographed at the Vice-Regal presentation." So I think mother sent the 50 cents in coin, and received a very nice

01:30 letter and little note back. We have it in there [pointing to a room off camera] if you'd ever like to see it. [reading from an article] "Among the recent nine awards for bravery announced by the Governor-General was that of the Military Cross to Lieutenant Douglas Ian Hamilton McClean of the AIF, late of the Royal Melbourne Regiment. With his small force encircled, and the enemy preparing

02:00 to storm his position, Lieutenant McClean, despite heavy machine-gun fire advanced to within 10 yards of the enemy threw five hand grenades and enabled his men to withdraw without further loss. Lieutenant McClean is well-known in sporting circles in Melbourne, being a member of the North Melbourne Cricket Club and the Park Hill Tennis Club. After a recovery of wounds Lieutenant McClean

02:30 has now returned to operational bases."

Thank you Doug. Perhaps you could describe for us what the action was that you were cited for. If you could run us through that.

I think I covered

03:00 the fact, before, that we were surrounded by the Japanese early elements. By dusk they were building a platform to raise their gun to a position where they could fire upon the higher ground. And having heard the noise I decided to move out, creating a diversion on one side, and move out on the other. And arranged with the Police Boy,

03:30 who said he could lead us in a round-about way to Deniki, avoiding Kokoda. And so I said, "When the explosions start, you move off." And I asked for a volunteer. A fellow named Pike, Charlie Pike, came with me carrying extra grenades and we attacked the place, killed the

04:00 gun crew, and apparently startled the remainder of the force to the extent that they withdrew and didn't move on to Kokoda for over a week or 10 days. Again, the density of the jungle precluded them realising how few we were, so they weren't willing to push on.

The reason why I asked you

04:30 **to go through the action again is I just wonder if that action, at that time, struck you as a particularly brave thing to do; or is that not even in your thoughts as you were working?**

Wasn't in my thoughts. Something had to be done. And the obvious thing was to create a diversion to get 140-odd men out safely. So, having created the diversion, we did that.

As an officer,

05:00 **did you feel it was incumbent on you to create that diversion?**

Well, I thought of it and I thought I'd better do it. No point telling somebody else to do something you weren't prepared to do yourself.

Is it the case after an action like that which is particularly—I'm sure it was very challenging, and I'm sure it was highly dangerous. Is it the case that afterwards you sort of have a comedown, you think, "Crikey that was close," and you

05:30 **maybe get the shakes then, or something?**

You don't get the shakes, but you sometimes think, "Was that me? Was I silly enough to do that?" But it was very effective, so I was highly delighted and pleased that it worked.

You mentioned earlier on that you don't put a tremendous amount of store in medals and the awarding of medals because you thought that some were awarded perhaps erroneously or for questionable

06:00 **reasons. What do you mean by that?**

Some people go back and tell a good story. Others describe marshalling of troops when in fact they were not even present and it sounds as though they've brought the troops out safely when they've left it to someone else. That occurs. Other occasions you see men who have died under very

06:30 dangerous circumstances and obviously have earned some recognition, but because they were not seen no officer can make a written citation about the action.

I take it you're referring there to the soldiers you saw who had been machine-gunned at Gona and yet had crawled up to the pill-boxes in an attempt to throw grenades in.

That's correct, yes.

07:00 **Is that something that's—it's obviously sat uneasily with you all these years that you couldn't cite those men.**

Among other things, yes. Oh yes. A different battalion on our right flank had the most covered approach into the enemy position but failed to use it, and our open position was absolute murder. It was

07:30 obvious suicide, but the troops still went on.

How do you think the troops steel themselves, or how do you put the steel into them, that will enable them to charge such an open gun position?

God knows; I suppose only by example, and

08:00 clearly explaining what the task is in hand. That was something that was strong in the Australian Army but not in the British Army, and with a result that when a commander was bowled over somebody was always there to jump up and take his place because they knew what the plot was. And knowledge is power. If they understand

08:30 what the job is they know how to go on about it, because it was thoroughly discussed in a previous briefing.

And do you think that helps to motivate the men if they feel included in the knowledge?

Oh yes. Oh yes. That's the task in hand, and it's got to be accomplished. My word.

What sort of qualities do you think go to make a good officer and a good leader?

09:00 Physical fitness, dedication, a determination to succeed, and a strong sense of discipline.

Is it also important also to have compassion for your men, would you say?

Oh unquestionably. That comes about through

09:30 feeling that you're responsible.

Did you see any outstanding examples of that? Any men you thought were particularly outstanding leaders?

Every officer must exhibit it, otherwise else his men become sick and disabled and fall out, and he hasn't got a force with him. He must look after his men.

Do you think that was the case with

10:00 **the 53rd Battalion, that their leadership wasn't strong enough?**

The 53rd, yes, was unfortunately not well led. And with exceptions, of course, some officers were good. But the fact that the troops had been shanghaied to—I don't know what percentage—but they were not very anxious

10:30 to fight. And as I mentioned, the word got back to the troops that there was some confusion with commands. They didn't know what shall we do; and the troops knew what to do. They shot through and became carriers and wharf labourers, and pulled out of the fight altogether.

Did you ever come across—and

11:00 **I hope I have the name right—did you ever come across a man by the name of Albert Moore, the Salvation Army chap?**

Oh yes. He was the man that provided our boiled lolly for Christmas dinner in 1942 on the north coast at Gona.

What sort of a man was he?

Oh, wonderful man, like any Salvo. Completely fearless and

11:30 always trying to do something for the men. Yes. Great character.

I've read that he would have a sign saying, "Hop in"—or something—"for a cuppa," and he'd always have some tea or something.

When he was stationary at his hut. Otherwise he was out with the troops. You'd always find the Salvos up with the boys, which was one of the reasons why no soldier would ever knock back a Salvation Army appeal can.

12:00 They always appreciated it.

And that in Christmas '42, with the bully beef and the lolly; did the fact that your Christmas dinner was so meagre, for want of a better word, did that conversely unite you together a little bit more in that you were sharing another adversity together?

Must. I think that's one of the secrets, yes. I think that once you share adversity

12:30 you feel a bond formed.

Is Christmas a time for—what's the word—the differences between the officers and the men to be relaxed a little? Is it a time to let your guard down a fraction?

It rather depends on the battle situation, but always the postal boys would try get us up our parcels and our mail, which

13:00 usually incorporates a Christmas cake in some cases, and cards and that sort of thing. But it's wonderful to get word from home after such a long absence and silence. Yeah, mail was great. That was a morale boost.

I'm sure. Would you share your letters or read the best bits of letters out to each other?

Oh yes. Oh indeed – especially to the blokes who didn't get one, yes.

It must have been very lonely for those chaps who didn't

13:30 **receive mail.**

Yes. Of course, I used to tick them off: I said, "You know, you've got to write 'em to get 'em. If you don't write them home, you don't deserve to get them back." Everything was censored of course. Every officer had to censor the mail as to position that the troops were in, where they were moving to, what the plan might be,

14:00 enemy numbers, our numbers. Those things we struck out.

Did you find there was often much to censor, or were they pretty good at self-censoring?

Oh, there was a little bit of work to be done. Yes, a bit of work. They were always advised as to what they should put or should not put in a letter, but they get carried away with their news. They were also told not to keep a diary, but some fellows did.

14:30 **Did you keep a diary?**

No. No, just written in letters of fire in my rather capable memory. I was born with a photographic memory. My father had it, and his mother had it; which is nothing to boast about, it's just a fluke. And it's a wonderful fluke. After about 10 months in New Guinea, I don't know whether it was the

15:00 fetid atmosphere or the heat or what it was, we became a bit vague in recollection – which annoyed me intensely. I wasn't alone, because the company commander next to me was a chartered accountant and Bachelor of Commerce and he couldn't work out simple sums. The natives call

15:30 it "The land of Da-ory" which means "wait a while". You feel like going for a swim or a run or a swim or something, and you think, "Oh, tomorrow. I'll put it off." And this creeps into your whole make-up. And I began telling very silly stories to try and oil the machinery and get the rust off it. Repeating stories like the difference between an Ambassador and a Lady:

16:00 when and Ambassador says "Yes," he means "Maybe." If he says "Maybe," he means "No." But if he says "No," he's no ambassador. When a Lady says "No," she means "Maybe." If she says "Maybe," she means "Yes." But if she says "Yes," she's no lady.

I must remember that.

Keep saying silly little stories like that. And repeating them, and it makes your memory jog. I

16:30 have got it back to a great extent—not completely—but to a great extent.

Do you find, then, that having a photographic memory must be a boon and a bonus in most situations?

Oh yes. For instance, all officers were issued with an aide-mémoire, a little thing that reminded you about firing orders, and dispositions of troops in occupying a position, and

17:00 all-around-defence principles. It went right through the Principles of War, the seven principles of war. The first one being Conservation of Effort; the second one being Surprise (and that's what came off at Pearl Harbor). These aides mémoire, of course, also included the firing order. For instance DRINK,

17:30 D-R-I-N-K, meaning: Direction of fire, Indication of target, Number of Rounds, and Kind of fire. This went through as a normal thing that you had to remember. And also occupying a position: your location of your

18:00 meal place, your latrines, your defences, and wherever you were placing you reserves, and so on. And that's what the modern officer was taught. First World War blokes didn't know anything about it. And this used to annoy me with the company commander that Hughey Conran had chosen for our company because he couldn't remember anything,

18:30 and when we occupied a position he'd just say, "Oh yeah, just go over there," and he'd get them all backwards and inside-out and around-about. No sequence to it, you see. And that's how we were taught, the sequence. And happened to say to the colonel, "I'd like to be transferred to another company," because I was a senior lieutenant in the first company that was formed, A-Company. And he said, "Oh, really? You surprise me. Why?" I said, "Well,

19:00 Captain so-and-so is a bit confusing, sir, with giving our battle orders and when we occupy positions. And I am inclined to get my latrine mixed up with my cookhouse, get it all out of sequence." And he said, "Oh, how surprised." He said, "Harold's a friend of mine." I said, "That might be the trouble, sir." Anyway he said, "The only place I have for you is reinforcement in O-Company."

19:30 I thought, "That'll be alright." So I went down there for a while, but Don-Company commander asked to transfer me into his company. And that's how I come to meet Banana Joe. Yes.

It must have been quite difficult for

20:00 **both sides in terms of the men who came through the First World War were obviously in their 30s, 40s, 50s then, very much ingrained in a certain way of working. Men like yourself who came up in time for the Second World War—**

—Different pattern of training—

—new ideas, different war. Was there a constant tension between the two groups?

Yes, well we didn't speak the same language in movements and occupying positions, or even v

20:30 on reconnaissance. And that's why I was unhappy in that company. So, anyway, I moved out and the young fellow in charge of reinforcements later became my best man, Don Simonson. He was later also President of Legacy. And Don, now, is in a home. His mind is completely gone; short-term memory-loss, and so on. It's rather sad.

Very

21:00 **sad.**

He was fortunate enough to be at our 60th, and we got a wedding group that came through from the original to the 40 years, 50 years and 60 years. All were present and correct.

Oh, that would have been lovely.

My son put them all on a sheet of—one sheet. You could see the lot at once. Very interesting.

I imagine with the photographic memory, as well, it would be very hard for

21:30 **your men to put one over on you because you'd remember every—**

—Oh yes, particularly as I'd been a private soldier, and I'd learned all the lurks: where to hide and what to do and when to know. "Never volunteer," was the axiom. So when I didn't usually have trouble with volunteers, but if I did I'd say, "Right. I'm calling for volunteers. You and you and you." And they'd give a laugh

22:00 and join in quite happily. You could always get away with a sense of humour most situations, no matter how grim they were.

I think it's an essential tool if you're in a management position, which being an officer is basically, isn't it?

True. Yes.

I wonder if you could tell for us a story, that I unfortunately interrupted you in the middle of earlier on, about the giant carpet python and the padre?

Whilst we were in Moresby, before

22:30 we went up to the track, we were fortunate enough to have tents. And each platoon commander would act as a host on a night for cards. And this particular night I had the lantern swinging up in the old tent, the old kero lantern. And Nobby Earl, our padre, was arriving a little bit late.

23:00 Anyway, suddenly a white face appeared at the flaps of the tent and he said, “Christ!” he said, “A snake!” I said, “ ‘Mr’ until you know him better, Nobby.” And he said—I said, “Where?” Went out across the little native pad to our tent door, about four or five paces up was a snake that was about [indicating off camera] that wide on the path

23:30 and about that wide—

—So nearly a foot wide and nearly a foot deep…

Yeah. And we didn’t know which was the biting end and the other end, so I gave it a prod and it started to go that way. And there was a bit of a clearing up there in the sentry, so I raced around and I got his rifle and bayonet. And as the snake appeared out of the bush, his head was about the size of my hand – so I didn’t have any trouble banging a bayonet through it and skewering him to the ground.

24:00 Everybody was out watching, of course; and he thrashed around on the thing looking for something to get his tail around, because if they do they can pull, you know, they can kill a horse. And he got his tail around Nobby’s leg, would you believe, “OHHH!!” he goes – called on higher authority again to help him. Eventually we got him untangled. But

24:30 when I got the snake out, it was 18 feet six inches long. He was a big fella. The poor things are pretty mild though: they don’t touch you if you don’t touch them, you know. But they generally hang up in trees and drop on what they want to eat. And they can swallow quite big things like the little wallaby with the “baganie,” the natives called them – “baganies.” And, oh, they were like,

25:00 I suppose, a seeing-eye-dog in size, you know, and they could swallow those. And then they’d lie dormant for about a week or two while the acids worked on the body and dissolved them. But I skun that and took it home, and naturally being interested in curing skins, and so on, we cured it and had it at home for a long time.

And how many pairs of boots did you get out of it?

Oh!

25:30 Didn’t make the skin up into anything.

Do you still have the skin?

No. No. It fell to pieces I think owing to old age.

That’s a shame.

Pretty pattern too, like all snake-skins.

Well apart from 18 foot six pythons and mosquitoes, what other sort of biteys did you have to put up with on New Guinea?

Cockroaches, the

26:00 hookworm, leeches, and scorpions. Nothing much else. The rest were rather beautiful: butterflies the size of your hand. Gorgeous colours. I sent a few home. And magnificent birds of paradise. On one of my sorties into the scrub

26:30 an old chieftain gave me one that they had cured; beautiful thing. I brought it home and I found out that anybody that had this was likely to be fined a thousand pounds at the time. So I got rid of it. But marvellous plumage. And all the Papuans in the band up there now wear a blue lap-lap with this huge bird of paradise in gold

27:00 embroidered on the front. Very pretty. There’s a picture of them in there [indicates to a point off camera].

We’ll have a look at that afterwards. You mentioned earlier on too that you wouldn’t have your boots off for weeks and weeks on end.

True.

Could you describe to me the stench and the appearance of a foot that’s been in a boot for weeks on end?

White, pulpy, certainly on the nose but

27:30 often the boot heel is gone in the mud and slime. Some hills you'd be walking up you'd take a full pace forward and you'd slide back about half a pace every time you put your foot down. So it was a bit frustrating, and very tiring. But boots were a problem, naturally. Sizes

28:00 became the main problem because if there was a pile of boots you'd be lucky to get one. I have a 10-and-a-half foot. The good Lord never put a small foundation under a tall building, so you know I've got a big hoof to go with my six feet four.

Was 10-and-a-half a size you wouldn't often find in boots?

No!

Would you get a smaller size and cut it then?

Well, we cut the

28:30 corner out, and sometimes down the sides. But anything over your feet was worthwhile. The track was usually pretty rough.

I was very intrigued—there have been quite a few gems that you threw up this morning. One of which was eating food from the jungle. You said there were certain bulbs or roots that

29:00 **you might have eaten.**

Oh yes.

Can you tell us a little bit more about those please Doug?

Well, we were warned not to touch any red berries, but there was a certain nutriment in lily roots fern fronds. And we had to take, of course, to that on occasions because 18 days without food on one occasion. And I lost four stone while I was up there.

29:30 And I never seemed to put it back on again after the malaria and malnutrition and dysentery and so on. But I don't want to carry a lot of weight anyway; keep fairly well.

How does one cook lily roots and fern fronds?

Oh, if you're close to the enemy you don't light fires.

So you just eat them raw?

If you're

30:00 forced to, yes. We used to have a mess tin that you used as a sort of a pot; this little square thing that had a long handle on it so you could boil in it and cook.

I've heard of the men up in Kokoda on the track, and in New Guinea, cooking what they called austerity cakes. Does that ring a bell?

Well, they must have been luck enough to get

30:30 some bran and perhaps some flour, and even salt. But I think that's all that they could find – perhaps a little bit of dried, powdered milk. Naturally the water—plenty of water. That's probably what kept us alive, I suppose: drinking.

Certainly if you've got nothing else for 18 days you certainly need water.

Yes.

31:00 **How does one continue to function as a soldier, having not eaten for over a fortnight?**

Well, life's very sweet, as I mentioned to you. You soldier on. Hope springs eternal in the human breast. You keep walking until you hope you come upon some food that's been dropped. At one stage we called for air support and food when we were in Kokoda, and

31:30 the Yanks came over and dropped the bombs on us and the food to the Japs. And I sent a classical signal, which is still in the archives down there, "Seriously considering suing for separate peace. Call them off."

You must have been a very dry stick [humorist] during that time.

Oh well, nothing much else to occupy your mind, I suppose.

Nothing much else to occupy your mind as you're being bombed by your own

32:00 **troops, your own side. I think that's enough to occupy your mind. Tell us about—we've got about 10 minutes left on this tape—I'd like to talk just very briefly at the moment about the first time the 2/14th Battalion and the 39th Battalion met in, I believe it was—was it the village of Deniki or was that Isurava?**

No, Isurava, yes. And were we pleased to see them.

32:30 We must have been on our last legs at that stage. And even command called us out of battle. And that's when the CO said, "We can't leave you in the lurch because there are too many enemy. We'll stay and help." And to look at them walking in fit and strong and healthy, we thought

33:00 "Goodness me,"—shook our heads—"Did we look like that once?" We couldn't believe that—they looked like young gods coming up the track. And strangely enough, they seemed to have heard a bit about what had gone on because they seemed to have some respect for the choccos. And they referred to the choccos, of course, as chocolate soldiers

33:30 because they were militia. And we'd been asked many times to join the AIF, and the officers had the job of going round the men all the time asking them to join, because if you got a certain percentage the unit could become AIF. I think it was two thirds. And they kept refusing. They said, "No, they wouldn't let us join before. Bugger 'em,

34:00 we'll stay as we are. We'll fight anywhere. We'll go anywhere." They said this, "But they can stick that…" So it wasn't very successful, our selling the AIF. But as Roden, who commanded a company of the 14th at this stage, he said, "The two, AIF and militia, came together without let or hindrance."

34:30 There didn't seem to be any resentment either side. We were so delighted to see them that we were grateful for their arrival. And, as I said, they took unnecessary risks with their aggressiveness and lost a lot of men unnecessarily, standing up and

35:00 calling out, "come out and fight you little B——s."

Do you think that was because they were fresh to the jungle war and hadn't really worked out its nuances?

Yes. Oh yes. 600 yards was close in the desert, and here they were at 10 to 20. And they couldn't work it out. One man went white overnight; dark hair went white with fright. So, you know,

35:30 such a strange thing to see. But I remember it quite distinctly.

You mentioned how they looked to you as they came in. How did you look to them?

Scarecrows. Rotting clothes, half-naked I suppose, and very limp,

36:00 slumped forward sort of thing because you couldn't even stand up straight. But they admired. They said, "Who are these ragged bloody heroes?" as they came. That's Peter Brune, used the phrase in one of his books [Those Ragged Bloody Heroes].

I think it was the title of the book as well, or was the title of a book.

That's right, yes.

Did their arrival, and their god-like demeanour and appearance, cause you to look at each other and

36:30 **realise anew what sort of state you were in?**

Yes. We shook our heads and thought, "Did we look like that once?" Yes, it was rather a shock; something we could compare ourselves to. Indeed.

Was that the time when militia finally got the respect, do you think, they

37:00 **deserved from an AIF unit, or perspective?**

That would be the first time they would have any room for respect, I'm sure, because they all thought we were back home enjoying the flesh-pots while they were out risking their lives for us. Yes, they suddenly woke up what we'd been doing.

It seems quite strange, looking back from today's point of view, that there should be one army for one country

37:30 **divided in two. Was it really that big a divide?**

The AIF, of course, were enlisted to fight anywhere, whereas the militia were only supposed to fight within Australian territory.

I think we'll stop there—

Tape 7

00:33 **I wondered, Doug, if we could start off by talking about the, I don't if it was a patrol or what**

action it was, where you went out the right side of Moresby to see if the Japs would be coming down that way and you found Captain Buckler? Could you walk us through that please?

On that occasion our battalion had been withdrawn from battle and were resting at Koitaki. And

01:00 the very first day we started our rest I was called in to New Guinea Force Headquarters, and we were given the task of finding out which way the Jap was going to hit Moresby. So I didn't have much of a rest at all. My CO, Colonel Ralph Honner (Middle East veteran, very wonderful soldier; and he was later ambassador to Ireland;

01:30 delightful man, very brave man), he took the patrol from the left side, or the Goldie River side, of the Kokoda trail. And he was allowed to take, I think it was, 16 carriers and about 12 sigs [signallers].

02:00 And I got the same. And we could order anything we wanted in the way of rations, which was surprising. And it was reconnoitring only, not fighting patrol. And we were to move out over the Jawarere track, which went over an 8000 foot range near Mitre Range. And Ralph didn't find anything. But we were lucky. In moving up

02:30 we came across a hospital that a tremendous number of dead, but only a few bullet holes; the country had done the rest. And we feel that we were lucky because we'd held them up long enough for the country to defeat them and their own extended lines of communication; getting food down and that sort of thing. They'd been used to plundering houses on their way through the earlier islands. But

03:00 there was nothing in New Guinea like that. And in trying to send the coded message back with the 108s fitted with a key, in Morse, we had no response for four or five days. And suddenly I decided that they should know and I said, "We'll send the message in clear." And a pedal wireless

03:30 operator down on the coast at Rigo, which is about a canoe day's sail from Moresby, picked it up in clear and passed it on to Moresby. And we eventually got back to find we got a kick in the trousers for not sticking to the signal diagram they'd given us in code. And when the general asked me why, I said, "Because the equipment you gave me, Sir, was totally inadequate

04:00 to the task." And that's when he said, "That's insubordination, sounds like to me." I said, "May I go back to Australia?" "No," he said. "Get back to your unit." So that's all the thanks we got for the good news about Moresby wasn't under attack at all.

And how did you come across Captain Buckler in that situation?

Oh, right out on one of the spurs we came across a village. And I was sitting talking to the head

04:30 man – very dignified. They come to you and they put their hand out, and they shake your hand once, you know, and then they invite you into the hut. This old gentleman had a little—I presume it was his grandson, sitting beside the fire. And while I'm talking to the old man, the little boy looked up out the corner of his eye, and he reached across and he

05:00 took a piece of newspaper and then a bit of boong-twist—the kid would have been about six or seven. Boong-twist was like a stick of liquorice, and it was native tobacco. Black-looking, horrible stuff. And the kid started to roll this in the paper. Then he looked up at me again to make sure I was watching, and he leaned over and he took a stick out of the fire and put the cigarette in his mouth and lit it and

05:30 started puffing away. I got a surprise seeing one so young was allowed to smoke. But while we were talking the old man mentioned, "Another white man see in bush this a-way." [points to the right] And I thought, "Better investigate that." And that's when we found Ben. And we put him on the right track back to Moresby. And

06:00 we didn't think anymore about it. But he had been lost, you know; completely lost.

How long had he been lost for, do you know?

Well, the 27th Battalion had been engaged further up the track about a fortnight earlier, as I knew it. But I don't really know how long he was disengaged from them.

And was he overjoyed to see Aussie soldiers again?

Oh yes. Yes.

06:30 He was rather delighted to get back on the track. It's difficult country, but somehow I was blessed with a north, south, east, and west in the head. I always knew where I was in relation to the points of the compass. And I never felt lost in the jungle. And I don't know whether it was the colour of my eyes or what, but I always see in the dark too.

07:00 So walking round my sentries, I used to frighten the hell out of them sometimes. I'd creep up quietly to them and just say [whispers], "Are you alright?" [imitates a sentry starting with fright]. We couldn't afford to talk loudly because the Japs were always so close, and we never knew how close. So this was a necessary thing: to remember to be as quiet as you possible could, no rattling of equipment or anything like that. And after the battle of Brigade Hill,

07:30 which was a very sticky affair where huge numbers of Japs split up every Australian unit that was engaged. People took off because they were isolated. And I came upon a group of people walking in single-file in these little native pads through a native garden. And I tacked on behind and I followed for about an hour-and-a-half. And suddenly

08:00 there's a hand goes up. Incidentally, it was so dark they used to pick up the iridescent growth—sort of a moss of growth—on rotting wood and put it on the pack so that you could follow the man in front. And suddenly this halt business. And back came the whisper, "Is there an officer in the ranks? Is there an officer in the ranks?" And I went forward, and he said, "Are you an officer sir?" I said, "Yes, 39th Battalion.

08:30 Doug McClean." He said, "I'm a sergeant from the artillery," he said, "And I'm lost." I said, "Now you tell me. I've been following you for two hours in the jungle." He said, "Will you take over sir?" "Yes, I will." So, I thought for a moment: "I think the track's over there." And I said a prayer, and I veered around; and sure enough, after about an hour-and-a-half's walking we came on

09:00 the track. But now the track's going this way and that way, of course, and you think: "I think Moresby's down there, but I'm not sure." And I stopped the fellows and I walked down the track for a little way. And within about a hundred yards I saw a cigarette glowing, and I thought, "Oh oh." I went a little bit closer and I heard, "What a bugger of a bloody war." I said, "Well he's no Jap, so I'll join him" So I went

09:30 down and announced who I was. And he said, "You're lucky, sir. We're the tail-end of the 2/14th. We were told to stay here. We're leaving in another 20 minutes." So if we hadn't arrived then we still wouldn't have known where we were. So I brought the fellows through and we went down and got back with the troops. It was rather fortunate.

Very fortunate.

Yes.

You were profoundly blessed with night

10:00 **vision and an in-built compass and a photographic memory. They should have made a few more of you. And you say that when you were with those fellows tramping along for two hours, and then you said, "We veered right," you thought the path was over there; was there a path, or were you going through the jungle at that stage?**

We had a choice of following a native pad, they ran in different directions, from the garden.

Was it possible, say if you were here and you knew that 40 or 50 yards

10:30 **to your right, say, was the path you were supposed to be on, was cutting a swathe through the bush a possibility, or would that take you hours and hours and hours to do? Was it that dense?**

Well, it wasn't always dense. It was very dense in the ravines where water was more to be found. But sometimes on the ridges it was open. And the pad was still only that [indicates about 12 inches] wide, and the ridge wasn't much wider.

11:00 And on many occasions we had to lie across the track with our feet against a tree, try to sleep. And as you relaxed, of course, the knees would bend and you'd finish wake up with your chin between your knees; raining of course. So it wasn't the most comfortable experience to try and sleep. The natives taught us to make little

11:30 banana palm shelters. A one-man affair that you'd just put up on a couple of little saplings with stakes forks in the ground, you know. Put these palm leaves over the top. And the rain got so heavy by about one or two o'clock the palm would give way and you'd get swooshed right in the moosh [indicates splashing on the face]. That'd certainly

12:00 wake you up and stop the light conversation, or start it.

You've mentioned a couple of times a gentleman who I have read a smidgen about, and who I've heard other men mention glowingly to, and that was Ralph Honner.

Yes.

Tell us a little bit more about him, if you would.

Ralph has written a book: Gona's Gone. He's

12:30 a wonderful man, this Ralph Honner. When he joined us at Isurava he immediately instilled confidence in the men. He's written A wee band of brothers here [indicates the book he is holding]. They liked his bearing, his calm approach, his quiet manner, and his

13:00 confident manner. He'd been in a lot of action in the desert—Greece and Crete. He was a very religious fellow too. He used to get on very well with our padre because they were both what the boys disrespectfully referred to as "left-footers." And I remember our machine-gun company officer was

13:30 down having a shave in the creek when Ralph was down doing the same, and Ralph evidently got a

message from a runner, and he said, “Captain Merritt,” he said, “When you finish your shave, would you return to your company; I believe the Japanese have broken through.” Nice and quietly sort of business. And Merritt took off like a startled faun, and tore back up the hill.

14:00 But the Japs had pushed through his sector. Just another one of those withdrawal things.

I hear that Ralph Honner was rather heart-broken when the 39th was disbanded.

Oh, absolutely. Yes. To say nothing of the troops themselves. They thought it was a complete insult. They could’ve not struck them off the order of battle altogether because

14:30 they had a very proud record: Kokoda, Oivi, Isurava, and Gona. We finished Gona, although the 2/14th had been there for a while; they couldn’t manage it, but we did with Ralph’s knowledge of the delayed-action bombs. And as I said, unnecessarily, lots of

15:00 wonderful Australians were killed there unnecessarily, because we could have bypassed the place and not bothered. But MacArthur wanted his victory to approach Congress for more men, planes and ships to get back into the featherbands. And it had to be done by the 11th of December, so Blamey was, “Push on. You must go in at the point of a bayonet.” Oh!

Did you have, at the time;

15:30 **were you aware of this at the time, or was this something you learned about at a later time?**

Oh yes, subsequently.

At the time…?

We just had to take the place we were being driven.

Was there much, or was there any ill-feeling towards MacArthur at the time?

We hardly knew him. We just saw his pictures, swanning around in high places. No, we didn’t know much about MacArthur at that stage.

16:00 **What about the Australian hierarchy at that stage? Were you thinking that they were somehow letting you down, or were you still supportive of them?**

We were thinking that it was an abortive thing to take Gona in the first place. And as I said, we were reduced from between seven- and eight-hundred troops down to seven officers and 25 other ranks. And

16:30 we asked for transport to drive fly the boys that were left back to Popondetta (the airstrip to fly back to Moresby) and they refused. They said, “We can only send transport for those who can’t walk.” Well, everybody walked, but there were a few peoples’ from other units who took the transport. And we arrived at the end of the drome. And as we were walking on, there’s a Yank sitting alongside his

17:00 tent, in an anti-aircraft chair with his Garrand [M1 semi-automatic] rifle. And he called out, “Where y’all retreating from Aussie?” And little Skillbeck, my little cocksparrow with a wonderful heart, he called back, [with an American accent] “Pearl Harbor.” And the Yank got up and went into his tent. And another fellow called out, “What mob’s this?” and our 2IC said,

17:30 “This isn’t a mob,” he said, “This is the 39th.” Thirty blokes left out of 800.

That’s awful, isn’t it?

Yeah. So…

How do you, as an officer, how do you cope when you’re told to go and attack a position that you think, “This isn’t worthwhile attacking, and I know I’m going to lose a lot of men.”?

I use my own initiative.

18:00 I think to myself, “If we can wait and feint at one point and attack at another,” I do it that way because I know that tactics on the ground are more to be relied upon than people who don’t even reconnoitre the situation. So they don’t know what’s there. We were told there were 27 Japs at Gona.

27?

27. That was the form of our intelligence.

18:30 After, I think it was, two weeks we’d buried about 500 and the place was terrible – the stench. But to me, the foolishness of attempting to take a place that was of no tactical value to us whatsoever, and just to kill Japs was

19:00 unforgivable because we lost so many men trying to do it.

I believe at that stage of the war, of the battle in New Guinea in particular, both sides were very tired and fed up and quite bitter, and there was no attempt on any side, really, to take

prisoners at that stage—there was nothing you could do with them—

No. Well, food was so scarce we couldn't feed ourselves let alone feed them.

19:30 And it was a tragic situation, as I said, I was calling my blokes out to such an extent that the CO said to me at one stage, "Have you been to the RAP Mac?" I said, "About 17 times, mate." And he said, "No, I mean for yourself." And I didn't realise that I was covered in blood.

20:00 Head wounds: they bleed rapidly and so on. I said, "I haven't been hit, sir." I said, "I just stand side on; I'm so skinny they can't see me."

I'm intrigued, and I know this is difficult, but in terms of not taking prisoners, was that a directive from anybody or was it just a case of—?

Oh, no. No. It was just necessity. They wanted to die for the Emperor, and

20:30 we were delighted to help them. And we had no food to give them in any case. Didn't have any for ourselves.

Does that mean throwing a grenade into a pillbox rather than ordering them out? Is that how that works?

Oh, absolutely. Yes. They wouldn't come out. They wanted to die for the Emperor.

Apart from that head wound and the bottom wound,

21:00 **did you suffer any other wounds during the war?**

Not really, no.

That's enough I suppose.

Oh, yes I suppose. I was very lucky, really. Biggest target in the AIF, but as I said before, I'm sure my mother's prayers saved me.

And the slim profile.

Yes indeed. Thank you.

21:30 **Sam Templeton: he seemed to be, from what you said earlier, fairly headstrong man in that he would say, "I'm going to go and do this." Do you think that was a mistaken attitude, perhaps, for an officer to have?**

It proved to be. Normal procedure would be to send two or three scouts to investigate. Not necessarily to take risks, but to investigate and report back.

22:00 So yes. I would say Sam made a foolhardy decision – thinking of others of course; trying to warn Sergeant Morrison (who was my 2IC in the platoon) that the Japs had arrived. And to be careful.

They named a crossing after him,

22:30 **didn't they?**

Yes. Yes indeed.

Do you know the thinking behind that and why that particular place?

I can only think that he was the first over it; and in honour of him having given his life. Can't imagine who did it, or why. But it's nice to have his name

23:00 recorded to posterity because he was a fine man.

Several parts of the track were named or renamed by Australian troops. There was Templeton's Crossing and there was the Golden Staircase. Do you remember the Golden Staircase vividly?

Yes. Kynesall had

23:30 formed a compound of the natives and had them work on cutting logs and putting the step across and then flattening it, and then another step. So this went on for miles – we've got a picture of it in the book there somewhere. Straight uphill. This was the thing: coming downhill I must have torn the heel off of every

24:00 boot I had, catching on this log.

The Golden Staircase. I've heard that it was a terrible thing to climb, but a much worse thing to descend.

Yes. Yes. Going down was jarring on the kneecaps. Oh yes, ankles and knees. It's true.

Were there any other parts that were given any other particular names, do you think, or do you remember by another name?

24:30 Only Moresby's Lightning Ridge.

That's a great name for the latrine.

Dysentery hospital, yes. Well, they named Ward's Strip, the aerodrome where they landed. They called that…

25:00 It should have really been "Hall's Folly" where he opened up on the Wirraways and Kittyhawks. But no, it wasn't really.

25:30 **The Australians are very good at handing out nicknames, aren't they, for places and so forth.**

Yes. Oh yes.

And what about handing out nicknames for officers. I'm sure they were very good at that too. Did you cop one?

Oh, indeed yes. Oh, I think I didn't. I escaped. They called me lanky at school because I was such a long-legged kid. But I escaped a nickname until I got to the parachute battalion.

26:00 And then I used to indulge in the night and morning run wearing a wesley jumper; purpley jumper. And I got the nickname of the Purple Pull-through because I was so thin after New Guinea experience.

A pull-through is a piece of cloth used to clean a rifle barrel, isn't it?

A slightly rounded piece of metal on the

26:30 end of a piece of rope, with a cloth on that end. And you dropped it down the barrel of the rifle and pulled it through to clean out the rifling.

"The Purple Pull-through." Well, I suppose there are much worse things one could be called.

I no doubt was, on occasions; when I gated the battalion at Christmas time.

Did you ever have occasion to come across Damien Parer [war cameraman]? I know he took photos of your

27:00 **platoon.**

Oh yes, yes. He spent some time with us. When he first got to New Guinea he spent something like three or four weeks with us up forward on the track. And as I mentioned, he would never take a staged picture. He would go up the track when he found out we were leaving at six or something

27:30 like that; he'd go up the track a quarter-of-an-hour ahead of us and get the pictures of the fellows cursing and swearing and slipping back. And everything was realism with Damien

Did you ever have him in an action situation with you?

No. No. No, mainly movement on our way up to action.

And what sort of a fellow was he?

Oh,

28:00 he was a little bit taciturn, but he was still a very pleasant man to talk to. And obviously an artist, you know. He'd like to have everything just so for his filming. I can understand how he got killed, getting in front of the Americans. Iwo Jima, I think it was.

28:30 **What about other war correspondents? Ever come across any of those?**

No. I don't think they were silly enough to go where we were.

I remember reading something that George Johnson wrote once, and he said most (or a lot) of the frontline war reporting was done in the bar back at HQ [Headquarters]. When someone would come in from the front, you would have a chat with them, buy them a beer and that's how you'd write your "from the front"

29:00 **story.**

I would think that would be pretty right, yes.

What about war artists, any of the chaps who painted up at the front?

No, I never saw one. No. 'Cause we were there in the early days, and I suppose they were in Moresby at the time.

Did you or your men see someone like Damien Parer

29:30 **as just another thing to worry about, or was it important to you that someone was out there documenting what you did?**

Never crossed our minds. We thought he was very brave to do what he did – come forward and keep in front of the troops. But foolhardy in the finish, apparently. In the sake of sincerity and authenticity, I suppose.

30:00 **How about when you were up, say, several days walk from any kind of base up in the highlands there on the track. What happens if you get sick or you get an injury that can't be sufficiently treated at an RAP?**

You walk eight days back to

30:30 Moresby. I had a—one of my men, Bill Hosking, was shot. Bullet went through his neck and came out of his mouth. And he walked for eight days back to Moresby just sipping water. He only died about 18 months ago, old Bill. But, oh no. If you were wounded it was very serious because if you couldn't be carried and you couldn't walk

31:00 that was it.

We talk a lot about this track, the Kokoda Track.

Yes.

Was it one long continuous track?

Pretty much, yes. Yes. The word "trail" was used early in the piece by an American journalist because anything that winds like that would be a trail because that's the sort of thing they drive cattle

31:30 along. But you couldn't take cattle along this. But anyway, the Australian word is "track".

Well we'll stick with "track".

Hmm. Yes, but we got into the habit early of saying "trail," you know. Sometimes even some of the boys who were there say to me, "What do you refer to it as, Major? 'Trail' or 'track' ". And I say, "Well, I prefer 'track'." But the early reports all said "trail" in the papers.

32:00 **Well, the reason why I ask was it was one long, continuous track is that if you've got to walk back for eight days, you don't want to get to a fork and go, "Is it left or right?" or, "Do I turn here?"**

Oh, I see what you mean.

Was it possible to walk for days and get lost?

It was wider and more used. The side tracks were very obvious because they were smaller and less pounded, sort of thing, with footmarks and things.

And over these

32:30 **eight days, would he be walking alone all the time?**

Most of the time, yes.

That must be quite an eerie experience.

Oh yes, poor devil. Life's very sweet. Yes, he'd be in terrible agony I would think.

I think for certain. After eight days infection, and so forth, would be setting in as well.

Yes. Certain nerves would be affected too with a bullet, I'm sure.

33:00 **And just in the last five minutes or so of this tape, the kind of warfare you're fighting there it's all about secrecy and surprise. So if you've dug in there somewhere, say, and you're leaving that to move on to somewhere else, all you've done is dig a slit trench, perhaps you've had some rations as well; do you fill in the trench and do you bury the rubbish so they don't know you've been there?**

We hide the rubbish, yes;

33:30 always hide the rubbish. But it was an interesting thing that on the way back, whenever we had any rations we couldn't use, the instructions were to bayonet it and allow the weather to send it off. And there'd be a number of casualties among the Japs for eating contaminated food; because they were starving, the poor devils. So,

34:00 that was the price they paid.

There was a rumour that they had to resort to cannibalism at times too.

Oh yes, yes. We found the fleshy parts of the buttock and the legs cut off, and we know that they were eating our troops, yes.

They were eating our troops?

Yes. Oh yes.

That must have been a horrible, an unusually horrible sight to come across.

Nasty, very nasty.

34:30 Unbelievable. Inhuman, which I use as a tag to the Japanese people in war.

Did the native people find that practice of the Japanese disgusting too? Would the carriers have seen it?

No. Some of them, of course, did indulge in cannibalism themselves. They used to believe in eating the enemy up in the Sepik River;

35:00 and head-hunters around that spot. The Dyaks [a native tribe], they would dine on the enemy. One of them was reported by our troops rather amusingly that they had killed this fellow and cooked him. And they were eating him and they found that a part they couldn't chew at all. And when it was

35:30 discovered they were trying to chew his rubber galoshes… Hm.

I think that little anecdote you told then is – to me it sounds indicative of the kind of man you must have been in the war, and in the face of the bleakest stories and situations you'd try and come up with

36:00 **something uplifting. Were you renowned for that, for being able to come up with a bon mot or a well-turned phrase, or uplifting line?**

I always tried to see the funny side. Yes. Nothing so crook that it couldn't be worse.

Tape 8

00:30 **I wanted to ask you about the amount of money that you said was given to, I think it was General MacArthur. You said there was a sum of $500,000.**

According to

01:00 the book Crisis in Command, that was documented in there. I have the book inside.

No, I just hadn't heard that before, and I was unaware that there were financial incentives apart from the obvious. And Ike Eisenhower turned it down, you said.

Yes.

Do you know of any Australian senior ranking officers who were offered any incentives like that?

No. None.

01:30 No.

Alright. My other question—completely unrelated—was about getting messages sent back to H

You said at one stage when you were out for seven days up on the Kokoda that you lost contact for a long time, a long period of time. So when you did send a message, can you just take me through the process of doing that, and how you were sure that the message had arrived?

02:00 We had some 16 signalmen who were instructed to stick to a signal diagram and to use encoded messages sent in morse. And these were sent everyday for about five days. We got no response. Obviously they were not being received, owing

02:30 to the height of the Owen Stanley Ranges. And the set probably wouldn't send a message over a tall man with a hat on, let alone over an 8000-foot Imita Range. But the message was received in clear along the range to the coast. And that's how it got back to New Guinea Force Headquarters, in clear. So it was just

03:00 a brief message that the Japs were in fact retreating, as we found a hospital with a number of dead in it, and no fighting troops.

Now John [interviewer] mentioned before that you were quite a dry stick at times during the war. I'm wondering if you ever sent any other messages similar to the note about surrendering to the Americans? If you sent anything else?

Not really, no. I was never close enough to the

03:30 communications radio. We were always somehow out in front. Don-company traditionally is a reserve company, but somehow my Don-company always seemed to be in the front of the battalion. I don't know why.

Did you ever entrust messages to the police boys?

04:00 No. No. It wasn't necessary. We had our own runners when that was needed.

And about that Japanese hospital, can you just describe what that was like fronting up and finding it? I believe it was deserted at the time, was it not?

It was a native hut that there were only dead people in it, yes. And on inspection,

04:30 naturally, they'd been dead some time and the stench was pretty awful. We only inspected a few, but only half of them had bullet holes in them; they'd died from disease.

Do you concern yourself with booby-traps at that point?

No. We did at one stage have wires that crossed the path.

05:00 But it was never needed. We had to remove them because we were then moving on forward.

And what about souveniring in a situation like that. Is that something that occurs, or is that an experience that would not happen?

I remember capturing a sword at Gona (in fact, I captured some 14 or 15), and they said,

05:30 "Send them back through Brigade with your name on them and they'll be returned to you back in Moresby." So I sent these all back, except one which I kept. I tied a bit of binder-twine around it and slung it over my back. And that was the only one I got home. All the rest were souvenired; because the Yanks were paying $50 for a sword or pistol.

06:00 I hung onto a little 9mil pistol—German-type Luger—because it was a very accurate little weapon they used, whereas our big Smith&Wesson .45 had a kick like a mule. And when you fired it you had to fire it low and left because it kicked high and right. And I couldn't hit a haystack

06:30 at 10 yards, I guess, with that. But with this little Luger I could hit anything I fired at.

That's interesting because often when I've watched movies, and you see these men firing with their revolvers and they miss and they miss and they miss, and you think, "Oh come on, this is ridiculous." But perhaps they were fairly accurate, and it was just me that was ignorant.

If they weren't used to the kick, there's quite a jump that way [moves his hand up and to the right].

Well, speaking of the booby-traps, were there times when you were going up the track, or

07:00 **anywhere in Gona or Buna, where your scouts—**

—The Japs hung a few tins with pebbles in them that were hanging from trees, and the wires ran across tracks and up to the tin and it would rattle if you kicked it, you know, walked on it or caught it in your foot as you were walking. Only useful at night because you could see them in the daytime.

And I've also heard, this may be incorrect, that the 39th Battalion were one of the few battalions

07:30 **that ever moved at night.**

Oh. Well, being concerned only with my battalion, I wouldn't know. We certainly did a lot of moving at night, yes. And that's how we lost some carriers: stubbing their bare feet on the roots that were uncovered across their paths. Walking at night they couldn't see them.

And were you also the only battalion that was honoured with

08:00 **the title of "The Kokoda Battalion"?**

I think so.

Right. Now, leaping out of New Guinea, I wanted to ask about the time that you were given leave to go home and get married. I'm not sure if that's why you had your leave, but…

This was just prior to disbandment, up in the tablelands. And they gave us leave before making the announcement and then sending some of the troops

08:30 into other battalions, because they didn't have any reinforcements for us. And that's when I sent the signal down south. For the number of times we had sort of thought we'd get married, my wife had made a booking and a time and a date and invitations had been issued backwards and forwards, and leave was

09:00 cancelled. And suddenly we had leave, and Gwenny was ringing up people saying, “Would you like to come to a wedding?” “Who’s?” “Ours.” “Oh. What, at last?” So we had about two weeks, half of which was taken up with travel. And that was how it occurred. Then when I went back to the tablelands they said, “You’re in the 2/2nd?” I said, “No thanks,

09:30 I’ll go to the 2/8th if it’s alright.” So that’s how I met Stace Howden, very fine soldier. And must have been there about eight months, I suppose, when the call for volunteers for the parachute battalion came around.

Okay, well I better back back a bit. Tell me about receiving notice that you were heading back to Australia. Where were you, and was it expected or unexpected?

10:00 There were rumours about disbandment, and apparently the rumours had some foundation because it ultimately happened. And that’s when I sent the signal to my wife. It was rather interesting too, about a year later when, after we had been

10:30 married of course, I was with the 2/8th and she sent us notice that the baby had arrived. And one of my friends who knew Gwen sent a telegram down congratulating her because his unit was going back to New Guinea and they had a clearance to send mail. But because

11:00 we were staying there our mail was not sent out, which meant that about a fortnight elapsed before she got any word from me and she thought, “He doesn’t care!” you know. But it was only the hold-up of mail being delivered.

So I imagine Gwynneth had no idea what you’d been through and what had been going on for you.

Not really, no. I sent back a couple of photos of the

11:30 thing, but we couldn’t really discuss it much.

So did she have much sympathy for the constant interruptions to your schedule?

I just think she was frustrated and annoyed about it all, blaming the army. But she had a bit of a problem on her hands at the time because her Dad was about to leave

12:00 her mother. When we got back I was in charge, as in Training Officer, of all the troops coming down from Queensland to Melbourne and had to issue leave-passes and so on on the Spencer Street station. And she came on the platform and she said, “Dad’s left Mum,” she said,

12:30 “Do you still want to marry me?” I said, “Of course,” I said, “I’m not marrying them.” She was very concerned about the split in the family. However, I sort of soothed her, placated her about that. But that’s what she had on mind as to rather than being upset about the alteration in timing.

And also of interest is the fact that she was over in Western Australia all this time.

Oh, she’d come back by

13:00 that time. They’d brought her back.

Because I was just thinking that, you know, to receive word you were coming back to get married, to come back from Perth and then it didn’t happen, that must have—but it didn’t happen like that. So were your men and yourself close enough for them to know that you were heading back to get married? Were they the sort that would well-wish you, or did you keep that private?

On no. At this stage, of course, they were preoccupied with movement to other units,

13:30 and they had more to think about than what I was doing. Some of them had already gone before that was established.

Did they give you any sort of a send off?

Not really, no. But when we had our reception at, I think it was the Coffee Palace at Little Burke Street. An aunt, a very religious aunt

14:00 put it on for us, and of course we couldn’t go to a drinking place like a hotel. So the 39th boys, who were also on leave at the time, we gave them an invitation. And when they came they presented me with a box that looked like a bomb or something. I remember it sitting alongside the chair for some time. And when we got it home it was a figure in

14:30 bronze of a lady holding a lamp. Rather nice thing they’d gone to the trouble and expense of getting.

That’s very decent of them; men who’d been in the middle of some terror or torture coming back and doing something as sweet as that. Alright then,

15:00 **having your unit disbanded, was that a low point in your personal morale?**

Oh indeed. Indeed. Everybody's spirits were dampened and we were very down about the whole thing. In fact, many other people from other units—officers and so on—were similarly disgusted to think that they should do that to a unit that had fought pretty nobly and didn't deserve

15:30 a kick in the teeth like that.

Was it simply army bureaucracy that they couldn't reinforce you, or was it just too ridiculous?

No, absence of personnel. They didn't have enough people. Too many chiefs and not enough Indians. But what they could have done was send us back to Australia as a unit and not disbanded us, because all of them had had an absolute gutful

16:00 of war, and most of them were B2 (which is a classification that they shouldn't be in action). All had been rotten with malaria for nearly two years and they should have really been sent home and not insulted by disbandment. Anyway, I suppose they wanted reinforcements in other units, and they thought, "Oh, we'll use the 39th Battalion up."

16:30 **Did you think that you deserved to be discharged at that point? Honourably discharged of course. Or discharged from active service overseas at least.**

Oh no. The war was still raging. I didn't think, you know, discharge until the war ended. So that took place I think in '45, after the war had been declared

17:00 over. And that's what I said before, half-way through my discharge, I was called in to Vic. L of C (the line of communication) and offered this job by the Brigadier in charge of Administration. Which I took because I couldn't find any place to restart by business.

17:30 **And you said you didn't like the CO of the 2/2nd. Could you say why, for example, you didn't like him?**

I could, but I'd rather not because I was in a

18:00 forward position at Gona and the people were over on the right flank. And we were all hooked up to Brigade on the one phone line. And I'd hear on the phone, "Have advanced 10 yards and killed 11 Japs." I'd look over and there hadn't been any movement at all.

18:30 And another thing, Bill Owen wouldn't talk to him after they'd both got out of Rabaul. They bumped into each other at the mess in Moresby, and apparently he'd done something that upset Bill. Whether he'd left him early or—don't know. But I'd

19:00 rather not say anything bad about a person who I can't say anything good.

But I would like to hear your views, then, on High Command. I've heard a few of your views on Blamey and MacArthur. You said General Vasey was an excellent fellow, but the incident of the red hat indicates perhaps a diminished IQ [Intelligence Quotation] at that point, to be wandering around in a red-banded hat.

He was very proud of the

19:30 fact that he had qualified to wear it, from Duntroon I presume. But, of course, dynamite to wear it in action because you're an obvious attraction for a sniper's bullet. And you're not doing your troops any good if you don't take precautions.

No. And inasmuch as the sergeant majors and the lieutenants

20:00 **and the captains have to keep their mens' morale up by representing their unit well and acting as good as, if not better, than their men; it seems that then there's this gap between that and High Command, and High Command didn't seem to have any real idea what was going on in the field.**

High Command were a bit remote, but then you wouldn't expect them to be in the forefront of battle because they're more-or-less planning

20:30 all the stages of war: resupply, movement of personnel, strategic moves in keeping with the navy and air force plans. And they had more to do than run around the field looking at things that are happening. They rely on their intelligence.

21:00 And it behoves them to appear occasionally to lift morale among the fighting troops, because otherwise people will say they're sort of hiding from danger or something like that. Set an example of taking to the troops and letting them know they're

21:30 real people interested in their well-being.

Now, when you went to the 2/8th Battalion and became the 2IC there in training; first of all, how long were you there?

I would say about five or six months. And I couldn't get to go any higher in rank because

22:00 the 2IC of the battalion was the most senior in the AIF, a fellow named MacDonald. So I was only used as a battle 2IC in training because of the jungle experiences.

As a married man, were you entitled to any leave at that point?

No.

So were you able to phone Gwen from time to time, or did you just rely on the mail?

Just the mail.

Okay.

22:30 **Tell me a little bit about how you operated the training for the men there. Did you have faith that you could train them up for what they had to go to, or did they seem just like skinny boys with no idea?**

Oh yes. I was able to pass on Japanese tactics and prepare them for what they could expect. Probing: putting men out to attract fire to find out the

23:00 enemy positions so as they could bring fire to bear on them. And encircling movements when any resistance was struck, they would peel off and go around and startle the enemy by shooting at them from behind. And of course the sniper-up-the-trees trick.

What was the sniper-up-the-trees trick?

Oh, they used to

23:30 put people up there so that they could see over a greater distance and perhaps pick off gunners, machine-gunners and little groups—nests. And a lot of casualties were suffered that way. And they would pick out anybody who was waving his arms around giving instructions that obviously was in charge.

In a situation like that, as the officer, did you ever have to take

24:00 **up a situation of laying low while your sergeant major, perhaps, gave the orders? Did you set up decoys or dummies within your units so as to obfuscate who was the senior officer?**

No. But we took care not to wear any obvious badges of rank, and speak softly and quietly, and indicate with signals by hand.

24:30 **I'd like to talk about your time in the para-battalion. You said it was a glorified infantry position, but I'm sure it was a little bit more than that. I'm wondering if you can give me some good, clear understanding of the training that you had to become a para-military?**

The first shock we got was when the physical culture people.

25:00 And they were our top-line wrestlers like... We had an American and top-line boxers, athletes, half-milers and so on. Always setting us fairly difficult tasks.

25:30 And wrestling with us, being good instructors – not actually hurting us but letting us know how to do hand-to-hand combat and so on. And the line up of people all sizes and weights in two rows. And they'd say, "Right. Number two,

26:00 jump on number one's back, piggyback fashion, and run 100 yards. And after you've run 100 yards change places, run 100 yards back again." This was a bit of a shock to us because sometimes you'd cop a big 12-stone bloke, you know. Training was very, very hard. Living off the land, forced marches.

26:30 The worst thing was the training, I suppose it was called a tower (training tower), in which we'd climb up this 100-foot tower and then strap on the harness, attach it to the clothesline from the top and then slide down about, oh, 60 or 70 yards and finish up in a sandpit. But having jumped

27:00 off the tower it would crack you like a whip. And that was much worse than just jumping out of an aircraft. They say "jumping" but really it was an exit, a position where you stood at the door as I'm sitting here. Grasp the door by the two hands there, and then exit and drop into a space short of the propellor-blast and away

27:30 from the slipstream of the plane. You'd drop in there, being careful to keep you feet and legs together and your arms at your sides. Otherwise if you had a hand out or a leg up the propellor-blast would spin you and that meant that as the rigging lines came out—there were 36 - 18 to the front of the 'chute and 18 to the back, all on four risers to the belt, two in the front

28:00 two in the back, eight on each. And instead of going down and opening properly the twisting of the parachutist would twist the lines, of course, and cause the chute to what we termed "Roman Candle" and go straight in at tremendous speed. Early jumps were done from up to 3000 feet, and we were trained to lie on our back and scissors-kick,

28:30 and that would unwind the twists. But you had to be pretty quick and very fit to be able to grab the four risers and pull down on the chute as you hit the ground to minimise the impact. And if you were a bit slow it was awfully sudden – dumped into the ground like a bag of spuds. But if the wind was blowing, then

29:00 you would have to race around upwind (to stop the 'chute billowing and drag you into, perhaps, trees or wire fences or something of the sort) and collapse the 'chute and get out of your belt (which was easy to do because it was a twisted metal clip that you'd turn and hit and it would fall away). So that's how we did water jumps too. As you were getting

29:30 near the water you'd release the 'chute and it would blow away and then you'd swim. We lost two officers in the big dam at Yarrawonga who were testing how much equipment they could water-drop with. And they had too much weight and they just went straight down. It was all a case of trial-and-error early in the piece. We had an ideas

30:00 man who was designing special boots with springs in the heel. He was a funny man. He was really an optician, Wally Winray from Geelong. He used to produce some weird and wonderful ideas. One good one was a storepedo in which—the thing looked a bit like a torpedo, and stores were placed inside it. And it had a nose that would,

30:30 on impact with the ground, retract and stop it busting. And we found that that worked alright providing it was dropped accurately, but otherwise we'd get back to packaging 'chutes. We would have a red 'chute for ammunition, a blue 'chute for medical supplies, and of course we jumped in white 'chutes. Early on we were using

31:00 silk which was unfortunately subject to electrical influence in the air—upper atmosphere—and they would not open. And we got away from the silk to—that's if static electricity was present in the area—we got away to nylon 'chutes which always opened. We still

31:30 found that we had to train the fellows to slid to a position where they were going to drop on a DZ [Drop Zone], which was a dropping zone, and you could do it by pulling down on, say, two at the front to go that way—downhill—it was like an umbrella being tipped and the air got out the back and down you'd go. You'd get up to 180 miles an hour in a forward

32:00 slip. Side-slip, same thing. Backwards. And you'd have to remember that as you got to about 80 feet above the ground to let those go and take the opposite two and pull down on those down to your belt in order to turn the 'chute that way [indicates the chute levelling off] to put the brakes on. And then you'd perhaps start to oscillate, swing like a pendulum on a grandfather's clock. And from the ground the person was doing that [indicates a side-to-side swinging motion],

32:30 but the person in the 'chute looked up and thought the parachute was doing that [indicates the same side-to-side swinging motion], and he didn't know he was oscillating. And that meant that he had to slip again and be prepared to land quickly. So there were a few little traps in it, you know. But by-and-large you could take the next 100 people that walked past the front of Myers and drop them and you wouldn't have more than five or six percent casualties. I didn't

33:00 mention that the 28 percent casualties from the tall blokes of the British Guards was reduced to about eight percent of the Northumbrian Brigade. The little coal-miners, with well-knit figures, rolled better. Didn't break like the long blokes.

So before, you mentioned that you had a sort of native ability to know compass points (north, south, etc. east, west).

33:30 **When you'd jump out of a plane or fall out of a plane did you retain that sense of direction?**

Yes, I have it everywhere on land but I get out on a ship and I'm all-at-sea in more ways than one, unless I can see the stars, moon, compass, you know; something like that. But I'd never make a happy sailor.

Your first

34:00 **plane trip up for the practice-run, do you recall approaching the opening of the plane and saying…?**

Yes. This we tried to take care of with intense training and absolute discipline to inculcate rapid and instinctive obedience to orders. As we got them into mock-ups

34:30 (which is just a plane about two feet above the ground; and we'd have another one about four feet; another one about six feet). And we'd march them into the plane, and they'd emplane, they'd sit down in their place, and the man behind would strop up. You see, it was really a statischute, not a parachute as such; meaning that we didn't control its opening. The

35:00 strop from the 'chute was hooked onto the wire in the plane (which ran along the port side) and a sort of a dog-collar clip—snap it onto the 'chute. And then the lights were all red in the plane, up the top; you'd watch that. And as it approached, as he's over the dropping zone the light would go green and the jumpmaster would say "Go!"

35:30 So everybody would go. And they were out before they knew it. This stopped any hesitation at the door. But it was a rather interesting thing that on the third jump we got the most refusals to jump. And we had a GRO (a General Routine Order) struck which allowed us to march people back to their unit if they propped at the door. We didn't stain their character

36:00 or their courage, or anything like that; we just said, "Unsuitable for parachute training." Send them back. Because, our greatest problem was conservation of keeping the troops together. You couldn't have a number one on the gun dropping here and then his number two propping and being such a long way away from him that he was of no use – didn't have any ammunition for the gun.

36:30 On a mild day we found that a stick of 11 or 12 men would spread out to over half a mile on the ground. So keeping them together was our major problem. That's why they had to jump with [claps seven times at a rate of 116 claps per minute] action like that. And good jumping from the ground. As the parachute blossomed to its full extent the next trooper's feet was on the top of it. But they had to get out quickly

37:00 otherwise they were not really a force; they were too spread out.

So what could you carry down with you? What could you jump with apart from a rifle?

We carried full equipment, yes – after training, of course; a lot of training. In the case of carrying heavy things like the mortar and the base-plate, which was about 90 pounds in weight, they had those on

37:30 long ropes which as they were getting near the ground they would let go because contact with the ground didn't affect them, they were solid metal. And they could attend to their own landing drill.

Did you have much fear of jumping?

Oh, everybody has a bit of a quirk the first time. But it's amazing: everybody then wants to run around and do it again.

38:00 "Oh, I'm in one piece." But the medicos wouldn't let them because they reckoned that one jump was equivalent to eight hours hard work.

Would it give you a bit of a high?

Oh yes. It's a wonderful experience, sailing through the air like a bird, and being able to control your descent to go where you want to go. Yes, quite an exhilarating experience. I did feel that the Germans made a bad mistake dropping

38:30 on occupied areas, so I developed a tactic whereby we had some wooden shapes made like a person (looking at from the ground you'd think it was a man), and bored holes right through the make-up of the thing with little charges that sounded like

39:00 rifle fire, two-inch mortars and louder explosions. And we would fly over an enemy-occupied area with night movement, and they'd hear the planes going across two or three nights before an attack. And then on the third night we'd drop these dummies, and when they hit the

39:30 ground the percussion caps would go off and cause the explosion. Sounded like troops had landed and were firing. The idea was to attract the enemy patrol out there [points to the right] while we dropped in further back here [points to the left] and did a false march and came on when they'd discovered there was nothing there and they'd just sort of relaxed, and you'd hit 'em.

We'll just swap tapes.

Tape 9

00:33 **You said you had difficulty getting aircraft into Mareeba [North Queensland].**

Because it was necessary to arrange a drop every three months, I think it was at the time, otherwise we would not get our extra pay. And the CO did his best all the time to get planes up so that they'd do this jump to qualify. And

01:00 it was a shortage of aircraft that causes our troubles. We had many times prepared for action and, as I say, Tarakan would have been a wonderful opportunity for us to have saved perhaps 2000 men, and planes weren't available.

01:30 But it hurt us, really, because I think it was around about September or a little earlier we were told that the unit was going as a whole to fly to Singapore to stop the Japs killing the Australian prisoners of war.

02:00 So we were all tensed up, and plane-load tables were struck, and everything was ready for action. And the planes didn't come. Then they said, "We've changed from air travel to travel by sea. Prepare the battalion to embark." So we prepared the battalion

02:30 to embark. And I think I got seven different signals. I was 2IC at the time, and my CO had taken his five-years' leave which meant that I was left in charge of the unit. And so we prepared for sea travel. And the next thing it was on, it was off, it was on. And suddenly they said, "One company will fly to

03:00 Singapore." So I had to select a company. And I selected one of the blokes who hadn't seen much action to take his company over. And they had a very pleasant time. They were flown in and they did their guard duty and took over the garrison of prisoners. And the next signal I got was,

03:30 "The parachute battalion is to be disbanded." So the second time we prepared to disemband and disembark and move down to our various states, issuing of leave passes and returning of stores and goodness knows what. Our accountancy system in the Australian Army was

04:00 following on the British accounting system, whereby every bullet and every round of ammunition had to be accounted for. Whereas the Americans, when their blokes were going on leave, they'd give 'em 50 rounds and say, "Go out and pop 'em off boy and have some practice."

And keep the change.

Yes. They also had a wonderful idea of bombing an enemy-occupied area into a hole in the ground and then moving their troops in to occupy

04:30 it. I remember I spent some time in the Queensland area as umpire on amphibious exercises by the Americans in which they used to have three days on and one day off. And the one day off I went to shore and I had a swim. And I lay down to sleep in the shade of a gum tree

05:00 and the tree moved. And I got the most fearful sunburn. I had the colour on my legs where my trunks were for seven years. The keratosis is still bothering me on my head here. But I was lucky not to go into hospital after that lot.

It was lucky you didn't get a stroke from it.

Yes, it was fearful.

Can you tell me what sort of a plane you would use for parachute jumps?

05:30 We were given DC-2s early in the piece, which was one of the first Douglas [Dakota] aircraft. And then we got DC-3s. But they were all door exits from the side of the plane. You might of have observed later developments of planes where parachutists got out the base, in the back, the underbelly of the aircraft.

06:00 That was a progression, but we never had those aircraft.

And how cold did it cold before a drop? Did you go high enough for it to get cold, or were you jumping from a fairly low altitude?

Operational height was a thousand feet. Some occasions 700. But training drops were never under 2000, to give the person a feeling

06:30 of manipulating his 'chute. And one amusing story from the 503rd regiment of Americans that went into New Guinea; the doctor was talking to me and he said, "Man," he said, "They didn't worry about their altimeters when they left Queensland. And they went in," he said,

07:00 "We were dropping at Nadzab." He said, "I don't mind dropping low, but I sure hate having to part the coon-eye grass to get out the door." And they suffered a lot of bad leg injuries from dropping too close to the ground.

Apart from the two officers that died testing the weight of equipment they could drop with, were there any other unfortunate incidents?

Very few. We had, I suppose,

07:30 it wouldn't number more than 10 or 12. I was put in as 2IC because the 2IC had just been killed in a light aircraft. They were doing a reconnaissance in a Piper Cub and it went in and so... Ivan Smith was his name. He held a record for half-mile in Melbourne.

08:00 Fine bloke, I believe. I never met him because he was gone before I got there. So I took his place. But by-and-large I would say that was three officers and about seven other ranks.

So were you engaged in the para battalion when peace was declared?

Yes.

And where exactly were you?

08:30 Correction. Correction. Peace was declared when I was still with the 39th, and the break-up occurred—no it wasn't. Correction again. Troops went back to Aitape which was a very sticky situation from there.

09:00 '45... I must have been, at that stage, with the 2/8th. No, no, because I went to the parachute battalion.

I spent almost a year with them, and that's when it was declared.

09:30 So I was with the paratroops.

On home land, Australian territory?

Yes. Queensland.

Not far from Brisbane, or too far?

Mareeba, which is up on the Atherton Tablelands, quite a long way.

Was it a climactic day for you? Or was it an anticlimactic day?

Oh indeed, yes. I think everyone,

10:00 everyone relaxed; even non-drinkers got drunk.

Was that perhaps why they never sent you over to Singapore? The fact that…?

No. There was no hostility occurring when our troops flew over there,

10:30 so it must have been the cessation of war when we were on duty with the paras at Mareeba. Now, I've got the declaration of peace in Rabaul, signed by the Japs' commander.

Yes. How did you end up with a copy of that?

A friend of mine gave it to me because his brother was there and he's got this copy.

11:00 Would you like to see it?

11:30 **Sorry, can you tell me again how you ended up with a copy of that?**

Yes. A friend of mine at Huntingdale asked me if I would like the copy and he gave it to me.

Okay.

Jack Epstein. Evidently his brother had been in Rabaul at the time.

So what were your prevailing conditions around armistice? Did you think that you'd be demobbed and heading home soon?

Oh yes. We were sent back to our home states and discharge was the next move. So I went out to Royal Park and that discharge was interrupted.

You said, in terms

12:00 **of being offered that position on staff, that you were a G-man and that position was a Q-man's position.**

Yes. I'd always been in fighting and training. And this was mainly concerned with administration and supply.

So what does the G and the Q mean?

G means fighting, training; but Q means quarter mastering and looking after the food and ammunition requirements.

So

12:30 **was it a little bit insulting to be offered that position?**

Oh no. I felt that I would be hard-pressed to do it justice because I hadn't been trained as a staff officer. Unaccustomed to writing letters; we gave direct orders, and action was our forte, not "you should write a letter."

13:00 **So, my first question is: what did Gwen think of that?**

I think she though the money was alright and I wasn't in any danger to go down to Albert Park. That was about it.

Would she get regular access to seeing you when you took that position?

Oh yes, I got to go home every night.

Okay.

13:30 The only danger was I was so bored sitting at a desk that I got up to four large packets of cigarettes a day. Some of which would burn away in the ashtray while I was talking on the phone I suppose. But one day I took a long look at them and said, "Who's in charge of this ship: you or me?" and I chucked 'em out the window and never smoked since.

So I'll backtrack then and ask you what it was like being able

14:00 **to come, you're not out of the army, but to come home and know that you wouldn't have to go and fight anymore?**

Yes, a complete alteration to the last couple of years' experience, but most welcome. It was lovely to be home.

How soon after the surrender of the Japanese did you land back in Melbourne?

I would say within a fortnight.

14:30 Yes, very quickly. But we were only on the Tablelands.

Did that have anything to do with the points system, or just sheer convenience of location?

No. The points system referred to five years in the army and you could apply for a discharge.

Could you tell me a little about coming back to Melbourne, then, and meeting up with Gwen. I understand she didn't know how much danger you'd been in in your training and service, but

15:00 **I bet she had an inkling.**

No. I met some funny characters in staff. Sydney-siders that I would bring home, and he'd spend the night. And she used to get a surprise and wake up and find Joe Grace sleeping on the couch in the front room. We had a place at Canterbury then, Chaucer Crescent. The only danger I think was from

15:30 nicotine and alcohol. It was terribly boring down there. Still, I met some very fine people.

What about any of the men from the 39th? Did you have occasion to catch up with any of them?

Oh, we always had our Association reunions, yes.

But in that period just immediately post-war? Did you see each other?

Within

16:00 six months an Association was formed and we took our places. I think I was the first President in the 39th [Battalion Asocciation] And it meant that you had to buy the beer and the cakes, bread rolls and things. But it was a great privilege

16:30 to get the boys together again.

And had you noticed much change in Melbourne and Australia?

Oh indeed yes. Yes indeed.

What was the most obvious changes?

Yes, I suppose mainly to do with business. We found it rather difficult with the rationing on, and so on. But, oh

17:00 you cope somehow.

What about attitudes, and especially the degree of emancipation on the women's part?

Wasn't noticed until long after that. The man stops home and looks after the children, and Mum earned more money so she went to work. No, I

17:30 didn't notice it until long after the war.

And in that position it sounds a little bit tedious and so on, and I'll ask you some more about the detail in a moment; but how did you cope settling down, or were you a bit antsy for a while?

It wasn't easy, but I think my wife had more of the trauma than I had – trying to adjust to

18:00 me being around plus my noise at night, thrashing my arms around. She was frightened of getting a black eye, I think.

And this position, this sort of enormous position you inherited at the end of the war. You had 17,000 vehicles to sort out, and 82 NCOs and seven officers and

18:30 **looking after the army's interests. Is that as difficult as it sounds, trying to sort out the army's equipment at the end?**

Well, I decided I didn't like sergeants telling me what to do or my job, so I burnt the midnight oil for perhaps six months trying to find out the ins and outs. And it was very complicated, but we managed to cope.

19:00 I think it was ’47 when I got an opportunity to get back into business and took my leave.

And just before we leave that subject, what sort of tactics did you employ to work out the infrastructure and the machinations of looking after the interests of all the servicemen exiting service? Was it, you know,

19:30 **cross-checks and dotting your I’s and crossing your T’s?**

Do you mean…?

I’m just trying to work out basically what you actually did in being responsible for the movement of men in and out of the service, and so on. Did you have to go through their records and work out what their were owed, and their pay entitlements and so on, or…?

We had to issue travel warrants and tickets with

20:00 authority for the person to move either himself or his home and his gear to a new destination, and provide transport to help them settle in.

And is this men who are still in the service? Or is it also men who have been recently demobbed?

Both until they were struck off the army roll.

20:30 **And what about fellows who had been married whilst overseas? Did you have to organise getting their wives back home to them?**

No. That was an A-branch duty to see that the wife got a pension. And my wife got the magnificent sum of £5 a fortnight to feed and clothe the baby.

21:00 And it wasn’t very much, but I suppose every bit was welcome.

I just had a few questions about getting yourself set up again. You mentioned the fellow who basically exploited his position when you asked for your old office back in town. And you also mentioned the Ince family.

21:30 **Were they stalwarts of Melbourne at the time?**

They’d been there for over 100 years in that building. And Russell Ince was a First World War veteran who invented the parachute to get bombs down to the mortar crews dropped by the—well, they only had fighter planes at the time. But

22:00 being a tailor, he thought of the ‘chute to ease the bomb down to the ground. And that’s probably how he had some sympathy for a silly fellow who had been to the Second one.

And how did you feel setting up your business again, kind of hanging up your army—?

Oh, quite excited and most enjoyable. And everybody with

22:30 whom I traded early before the war were most sympathetic and helpful.

And they all came back to patronise your business again?

Oh yes. Oh yes. What I meant was the supplies, and that angle. But I had to create my new clientele, of course. That was quite a challenge.

And your mum and dad? What was their response to having their boy

23:00 **back again?**

Oh, wonderful. My mother was over the moon. Father wore out two pictures I think, two photographs, of me carrying it around in his wallet and showing everybody. He was immensely proud. Yes.

Did you find that you could talk to them about what you’d been through, or did you put it in a box and close the lid?

Yes, well I couldn’t expect either of them to understand,

23:30 really , what we went through. But we never discussed it as such. My son has been more inquisitive about these things than they ever were.

And, now, if I may be so bold to say this, you’re quite a circumspect gentleman and have been able to offer us a lot of insight into your experiences. But I’m wondering, if you were me,

24:00 **what would you ask you at this point? What have we not covered and what have we not missed in your experience?**

I feel a little like a lemon that’s been squeezed dry. I think you’ve done a wonderful job. I can’t think of

anything. Possibly when you go I will.

I'm sure we will. I guess what I'm broaching is who you missed when you got back, and

24:30 **who you'd lost, and how you dealt with their loss.**

Yes. You form close friendships when you are both subjected to privation and pain and hunger and sharing things. And three of us were known as the Three Musketeers, three young officers.

25:00 One was from my own battalion, and the other was from the Victorian Scottish. And they were both killed. And they both had everything to come back to, and I virtually had very little in that I had to re-establish my business. One was the son of Valentius Hughes, and the other people had a

25:30 business at Lord & Kingston, umbrellas. They were the people that applied for their son come home. A delightful family. Lovely people. And I died a thousand deaths when I was caught laughing at a collection of people that got back home at the Australia Hotel, and saw the mother

26:00 of one of them come in to ask questions. And here's me carrying on as though nothing had happened. And I shrivelled up inside when I saw the mother as I had to tell her all about the circumstances of his death. And I was responsible, having ordered the unit to move out a bit away from this foul American area. So, that's one of the penalties of

26:30 command I suppose. Didn't feel too good about it at all.

And just to end on a slightly happier note than that, your first Anzac Day after the war you're still in service and enlisted, but…?

Yes, I was still in Southern Command and

27:00 I was asked if I would lead the parachutes people, and I was asked if I'd march with the 39th. And I had to make a decision; and the 39th, being a Victorian unit, had a good number of men marching. The paratroop unit, being called up from every state in Australia, I think we were only about 40. And I elected to

27:30 march with the smaller number. And often the 39th said, "I wish you were marching with us, Sir." I'm lucky in that they are the unit immediately behind me, a little group are together. So I can kid myself I'm marching with both.

Well, I'm sure that you wish it hadn't have happened at all, but it did happen,

28:00 **so do you feel that it was a just war that Australia fought?**

Yes – a struggle for survival, I feel. I loathed the experience on many occasions; but thinking back, I made such wonderful friends and I wouldn't have missed it for anything. It's a mixed bag of feelings.

INTERVIEW ENDS