

Australians at War Film Archive

William Nankervis (Frank) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:30 I was born in Essendon, not far from the Essendon Football Ground actually. I am one of four children; I am the third eldest and my parents really -
- 01:00 their family came from Daylesford. We were able to ancestry back on my father's side to three brothers who came out in 1853, one of them was a grandparent. And on my mother's side, we can trace our connection back to Scotland with whom
- 01:30 over the last thirty years we have formed a very close association with the Laird of the Scottish Clan. In the '90s we visited them perhaps five times and stayed with them, Joy and the wife of the Laird are particularly friendly people now
- 02:00 so that's something that's really been the cream on our life, to have been able to make that association. We lived in a modest house in Essendon, as everyone, Essendon was eighty year ago it was fairly well developed even then. There was a tram and
- 02:30 well established out there and the school which I went to was the oldest state school in Victoria and a few years ago celebrated its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, so it was a well established workers' area as it was. My father lost his leg as a
- 03:00 youth and he was in the printing trade, as our family have been for a hundred odd years, and I'm the first one to have drifted away from the industry. Even though I worked in The Age office when I was young before the war. There has been a member or our family in the printing trade ever since our fore bearers came to
- 03:30 Australia. My grandfather actually worked with David Syme - they established The Age, so we have a connection with the printing trade. But of course when Dad lost his leg, he left the trade and he taught himself to be a watchmaker and you can probably
- 04:00 understand that a self employed watchmaker during the Depression had a pretty hard time, but he worked every day, he went to town to his little office every day and we always had enough to eat. We certainly never considered ourselves to be poor
- 04:30 but we were not rich by any means. We had an interest, as everyone did during the Depression, to look out for the poor and to that end we take an extra lunch to school for a kid who couldn't bring a lunch to school. And it often was only bread and jam,
- 05:00 but it was a meal, and so the four of us went to Essendon State School and for some reason Dad considered that I should go to a secondary school and he sent me to West Melbourne Technical School, which was the roughest, toughest school
- 05:30 in Melbourne. Why he choose it I never, never knew although I must say in those days the surest way of getting work was to have a trade, and I think he saw that if I had a trade whatever it might be fitting, turning, plumbing, any sort
- 06:00 that would stand me in stead. In the 1930s it was hard to imagine or to see us coming out of a Depression that this could very well have been our lifestyle, and so that's what he did, he sent me to tech school and as an
- 06:30 illustration of how tight things were, I had to ask him for four pence every day for the tram fare because he had the find it in his waistcoat as well, it wasn't - "Well, there's two bob [shillings], there's your week's transport costs." He had to find it and he had to find it for most things.
- 07:00 His greatest pleasure was to put a bob each way on a racehorse, a shilling, and that was almost the extent of his enjoyment. So you can see life was tight, but we never felt depressed I must say, I think today when I hear of kids being bored, we were never bored.

- 07:30 We had so much, cause the street was our playground, after tea all the kids came out in the street and played cricket, played footy in the street and the parents would hang over the front gate and talk that largely was our social life. Living
- 08:00 at Essendon of course our great fascination was the aerodrome, as kids I suppose the aerodrome was three miles from home but we could walk across the paddocks up to the aerodrome and we would go week after week up there and consequently we got to fly in World War I aircraft.
- 08:30 "Can we come up, mister, on a Sunday evening?" In those days people used to go the aerodrome on a Sunday just for an outing and there would be fellas walking up and down spruiking, "Over Essendon for five bob," and people would buy a ticket you see, or, "Over the bay for a pound," and when these plane owners
- 09:00 finished their days work they always did a bit of maintenance, they would take their planes up again just to make sure they were right and they would always take kids up as cargo you know. I flew in some marvellous old World War I planes in 1925, '26, those years and so I have always had a fascination for aeroplanes.
- 09:30 **Do you remember the exact planes you went in?**
- Oh yes I can remember, an old De Havilland DH8, a Sopwith Gnu, G-N-U, was an old bomber, in the First World War, the most famous Sopwith was the Sopwith Camel which was a fighter plane, an old Sopwith was what they used to call bomber
- 10:00 it probably would fit in this room, you know, but it was a marvellous. Well I used to think it was a marvellous old plane any way, and so we were there when all the great airmen came to Melbourne, Smithy, Holme; CWA Scott, Hinkler and we saw them all and you know, "G'day Smithy," you know, you know, it was a marvellous period for kids. All of these men
- 10:30 were heroes at the time and to see them in the flesh was like today seeing a footballer you know. That was the highlight of our early childhood.
- How do you think those experiences with World War I planes and heroes affected your vision or your perception of war?**
- 11:00 Well that's another thing because in that period we were constantly bombarded with what people would say today is propaganda, but we never looked at it as propaganda. We all had friends, relatives, neighbours who had been to war. Joy's father was at the war, my immediate neighbours were in the war
- 11:30 they came home with war stories. Of course we had books galore then of war experiences and particularly on Gallipoli, we - in that telephone interview, I told the interviewer that
- 12:00 I can still remember a poem that we had to learn at school on Anzac Day and I can remember the names of some of the people who used to come and address us at the Anzac Day services, it was compulsory to have an Anzac Day service at school on the day before Anzac Day.
- 12:30 Actually one of the speakers of an uncle of a friend of mine I went to school with, went to technical school with, went to the war, served as a prisoner of war official with him for years and years, he is just eighty-nine now, but we have been associated all our lives. I can still see his uncle with his
- 13:00 bowler hat addressing us on Anzac Day. Yes, we had a very full conception of war service, no doubt about that at all. We didn't know much about the air force in the First World War, because as I said it was Gallipoli and 1916 in France that we
- 13:30 generally that was the information that was fed to us. I don't think anyone resented it we never, we were not aware of the problems that a lot of World War I ex-servicemen were having, repatriation problems for instance. We knew the Caulfield Hospital
- 14:00 was a place were a lot of permanently incapacitated servicemen were, but unless you had someone there you never went there, it never concerned you at all. I think we were aware too that there were a lot of severely handicapped people
- 14:30 in places, for instance in Bundoora and Mont Park there were a lot of shell-shocked soldiers there and we were well aware that they were there. But whether it, well it certainly didn't affect us as children, youths, because we were more
- 15:00 aware of the glamour of the war. We had at the time in 1934 the opening of the Shrine of Remembrance which was a significant social thing because the same thing prevails today, people said it was a waste of money and we should have been building a hospital,
- 15:30 and of course if that was the case the hospital would have been pulled down and the shrine was still there. It was things like that, that kept on reminding us of the war. People like Captain [Albert] Jacka, the first VC [Victoria Cross] winner, Melbourne was well aware of his death for instance. When Sir John

- 16:00 Monash died Melbourne came to a halt, because they were the figures. So I think probably as a child we were conditioned to war to some extent and certainly as youths when we started going to pictures as it was called then - we never went to 'the movies',
- 16:30 we went to 'the pictures' - every film session started with a news reel of about ten minutes' duration I suppose and from 1933 onwards you could be assured that a feature of a news reel would be Hitler, Mussolini or
- 17:00 Japan with their military strength you see. Pictures as you still see them on occasions now of huge bodies of soldiers stomping the streets and the crowds waving their Nazi flags. Japanese navy in particular the strength of the navy
- 17:30 and pictures of them and the size of the ships and the guns and the numbers and things like that. So, in those years up to 1939, we were well conditioned to the prospect of war no shadow of doubt about that at all, and perhaps to that end that controlled my earlier life as well. I said that
- 18:00 my passion was as much as anything was sport and I played cricket with Essendon Thirds when I was young, and I trained with Essendon Seconds for a while until I went to the amateur association, which in those days was a very strong competition: four grades and we played A Grade amateur football.
- 18:30 And that was our social life that the fringes of sport as it was, and perhaps it even encroached into my work life before I played at Essendon I worked at my first job, I should have perhaps said that,
- 19:00 after going through West Melbourne Tech, after three years I got my Intermediate Technical Certificate and the day I was fourteen I left school and walked the streets in town until I found a job. And the job I got was as a message boy at A G Healings, who were
- 19:30 a big wholesaling company, perhaps the biggest in Melbourne at the time. Wholesaling in radio cars, electrical goods, motor cycling servicing, radio the whole lot, manufacturing and distributing and wholesaling and I got a job with them and became their message boy and my poor father, it
- 20:00 almost broke his heart; he had spent three years encouraging me to go to a technical school and what do I do? I go and get a clerical job. I assured him it was only temporary but as things go on and it didn't become temporary. I enjoyed that and most people did enjoy working for their firms then, there was a social life associated
- 20:30 with a big company. Joy found the same thing, she worked at Myers and the same thing happened; a social life becomes part of your working life and I really enjoyed working for Healings. I worked for three years I suppose there, but the Depression was starting to lift
- 21:00 a bit then and I was getting a bit older and a bit more ambitious and I was thinking of buying a car even in those days, a most ridiculous thing, but you could buy a good second hand Chev for about seventy five pounds in those days. That was what I wanted you know? By this time I was playing cricket at Essendon and I had a
- 21:30 friend who was playing in the First and he said to me one day, "We are looking for a man over at our workshop over at the explosive factory, why don't you go and see if you can get in?" and I went and applied for the job and sure enough it was a clerical job, an engineer's clerk job and they
- 22:00 paid twice the wages I was getting at Healings and I went back to my boss who was a fine old gentlemen and I told him that I had been offered this job and I told him how much they were going to pay and he said, "Well we can't afford to pay you that," so I left Healings and I worked in the explosives factory at Maribyrnong. Well, we worked from seven
- 22:30 in the morning until five o'clock at night five days a week so it was great for me, it was close to home, I could play sport and I was earning more money and this was pretty good and then the war came. And the workshop which I worked in for instance had thirty-three men at the start of the war, and when I left there were one hundred and fifty men in the same workshop.
- 23:00 We worked then from seven thirty in the morning until nine o'clock at night for four days a week and seven thirty to five Fridays and Saturdays so there was no sport, there was only work. We worked those hours, even the shop was open on a Sunday as well and the factory changed to
- 23:30 almost a city because they worked three shifts this was in the explosive factory, and they were simply turning out ammunition as fast as they could. Well, of course that meant that I was in a reserved occupation and for the first year of the war
- 24:00 the first eight months I suppose, I worked in this explosive factory. And it was about this time that Tobruk situation occurred, Dunkirk occurred and our thoughts began to turn more towards the war. So my
- 24:30 mate and I decided one Saturday night that we would enlist. And so on the Monday instead of going to work I upped and enlisted, and came back to work and said to my boss who was the only non-serviceman in our workshop, by the way, because that a condition then of working for the Government that you had to be a,

- 25:00 he and I were the only two non-servicemen, and I said that I had enlisted and he said, "Oh you can't enlist," and I said, "Well I have," and he said, "You had better go and see Mr. Bloomfield." Now Mr. Bloomfield was the engineer in charge of that whole of the maintenance area so he was a retired commander in the navy, so I thought well I was half way there then and so he gave me approval
- 25:30 to enlist. So I went back and confirmed it then and the sergeant said, "What's your occupation?" and I said, "Labourer." And he looked at my hands and said, "Oh yeah? Labourer!" I wasn't a labourer but still at the time they recruited anyone.
- 26:00 In August in 1940 in the second year of the war anyone that wanted to enlist could enlist because they became desperate for men and the government and promised to provide another division at the time. I had a bit of a problem because I got
- 26:30 very poor sight in my right eye so we were standing in the queue and it was a pretty notable sort of a queue, Hassett was in the queue, Bonnie Muir was in the same queue waiting to be examined at Royal Park and I said to my mate, "I'm a bit worried about the eye sight,"
- 27:00 and the fellow behind me had a broken nose, and he was obviously a good solid heavy drinker and he said, "I know what we will do." And he said to my mate Len, "You go in first and read the bottom line and write it down and I'll go in next and I will read the line backwards. I will memorise the bottom line backwards," so in they went in front of me
- 27:30 and he came out and he said, "That's the bottom line forward," and Norm said, "That's the bottom line backwards," so I had half a minute to remember these and I went in and the doctor said, "Read the bottom line forward," and I quoted it and he said, "Right you're in!" That was it. So I was in the army.

I wondered if you felt you were enlisting more for Australia or more for Mother England at this stage?

- 28:00 Well, you must appreciate that in our time Mother England was a critical thing, you must remember that Mr. Menzies on the Sunday night when he announced Australia was at war, he said England is at war and so are we that was all there was about it.
- 28:30 I think the majority accepted it. Today it would be inconceivable to think that such a thing could happen but it did. And yes you're right, we were thinking as much for England because Dunkirk was a shocking thing to us
- 29:00 even more than Tobruk, Tobruk had a certain amount of romance about it I think, the siege when the Australian units were in Tobruk people sort of thought, "Oh yes they will be all right there." But it was hard to believe that the British Army could have got themselves into the mess
- 29:30 they did and that they all finished up in a heap at Dunkirk. A great number of people wondered where on earth it was going to finish and I think you are quite right that was as much a part of our concern as anything else.

Do you remember where you were when Menzies said those words?

Yes I was home because we always on a Sunday night

- 30:00 listened to The Shell Show, which was an hour radio play. If I recall I think The Shell Show was interrupted when Mr. Menzies came on, and we were sitting around the radio, oh yes I clearly remember saying to my father, "Well I won't be going I'm in a reserved occupation." My two brothers, one was too old and one was
- 30:30 too young and I was the right age and I remember saying that. That was in September 1939 and in August 1940 the situation had changed considerably of course. So there I was, the first day I didn't know anything about the army and I must say in retrospect that if I
- 31:00 had my youth to live over again I would have joined the militia, as it was known then, before the war because I saw the value from a soldier's point of view of the training; the experience that militia men had and the advantages they had over the raw recruit
- 31:30 and that's what I was, I was a raw recruit. The first night they let us go home, I went to Royal Park and I must say that first of all we had to report to the drill hall and in those days every suburb had a drill hall for instance, the 58th Battalion, a militia battalion was centred at Essendon. We had to report to the drill hall,
- 32:00 and there was Len, my mate and Norm, the broken nose fellow and myself and a fellow named Reg Urquhart with whom I also played football, and I'd say that our football team had, our football team won one Saturday the next Saturday they wouldn't have had any players because the whole team enlisted. So we, my friend Len had
- 32:30 a car which we had pushed for miles I might tell you from time to time before then because it would never start, and the Sergeant said, "Righto, we will go to Royal Park now." And we all piled into Len's car, and as we were going to Royal Park and the sergeant said, "Oh pull in here," and we pulled in and it

was outside a pub. So we all went in and

- 33:00 guess bought the sergeant a drink? He certainly didn't and I have often thought in later years he must have got hundreds of free drinks in his job. But we went to Royal Park and were sent home the first night in our civilian gear and I remember sitting in the bus and the women sitting opposite me were all giggling at me my jacket
- 33:30 did up here and I had my hat turned up on the wrong side and I had yellow boots and I felt like an idiot but after a week the Salvos [Salvation Army] had brought my uniform to button on here and I knew where to turn my hat had up and my boots were a nice brown so I settled in to become a soldier.
- 34:00 We spent some time in Royal Park, thinking about it of course it was easy to be critical, but thinking about it with hundreds literally hundreds of recruits who didn't know anything about discipline, anything about the army, milling about and being told what to do
- 34:30 by in our case a lance corporal, who did what to do either, it's understandable that there was a certain amount of chaos there. But it wasn't long before they started to sending us out to other camps and I was sent to Benalla
- 35:00 and that to me was a wonderful introduction to the army. Great lot of fellows and that's perhaps another characteristic that, because of our lifestyle, we were able to get on one with the other. We all were in about the same social structure, we were all subject to the same
- 35:30 family discipline and school discipline and really civil discipline most of us behaved ourselves pretty carefully really and we would never fall foul of the law or anything like that. So we were probably good material for training as soldiers and
- 36:00 certainly the troops who went to Benalla were of quite an excellent type. I think probably they were a type who like myself had considered the situation over the previous six months, had got their
- 36:30 own domestic problems solved. There was a lot of married men enlisted at that time and I'd, perhaps it might be vanity to say it, but the types that enlisted then were a more accurate cross section of Australian youth. And so we
- 37:00 enjoyed our time up there. At the time there was some publicity to a group of fellows from a light horse unit in Numurkah, fourteen of them enlisted the day I did and they all came up to Benalla
- 37:30 and they were terrific types of fellas, they were all country boys. This is where I said this militia training struck me, they were all well trained soldiers and I know it sounds ridiculous but at lunchtime we used to practice rifle drill, ridiculous when you think about it.
- 38:00 But these fellows because we had to mount a guard on the camp at night, these fellows used to turn out at lunch time and used to practise and so we untrained fellows and we formed groups too and we used to compete against them to see who could do the procedures as well as the other and consequently they brought us along as you can understand.
- 38:30 So we really thoroughly enjoyed our stay there, the people in Benalla were sociable, and the life itself was great, and the war seemed to be a long way away from us then. It wasn't long before a brigadier came into the camp and
- 39:00 some of us were called up to be interviewed by him and as a consequence four of us were sent to Melbourne University to do a course. Well, you said you didn't know where Essendon was, I lived in Essendon and Melbourne University is only four miles away from Essendon, and yet
- 39:30 I didn't know where it was. And that probably explains the social structure; at that time I did not know a single person going to university, and what's more I didn't know a single person going to a private school of the social scale in which I lived.

I just have to swap tapes there.

Tape 2

- 00:30 **Well we will just pick up from where you were speaking about on the last tape regarding your enrolment at Melbourne Uni to become an officer I think?**

To become a non commissioned officer.

An NCO, yep.

The whole place overawed us for a start but it was an excellent course and

- 01:00 a touch of irony that my platoon section leader at Melbourne University served with Joy later in the armoured division together and she knew George Arhn, my lieutenant in charge of my group quite well you know it's a small world. It was a good course.
- 01:30 A few things I learned, you hotfooted down the donger on your little flat feet to have a look see. That was Colonel Rolfe was the officer in charge of the course and everything we did we had to have a look first make a reconnaissance, and that's the way he said it you flatfoot down the donger on your little flat feet having a look see.
- 02:00 That's something that I have never forgotten. But we qualified the four of us qualified for that, went back to Benalla to find our camp had moved to Wangaratta and the way camp move they simply packed up and marched to Wangaratta. And
- 02:30 that was, try marching from Benalla to Wangaratta today, you'd be killed but that was the way it was done and it was done with no problem at all. So we got to Wangaratta and it was much the same sort of lifestyle there, a good social life with the town. The country towns loved having soldiers. You
- 03:00 probably you know you've heard of Albury's Own, the 2/23rd Battalion, Albury was just wonderful to that battalion. They were in Bonegilla and they presented the battalion with a set of drums which was a most significant gift in those days, and I went to that parade they
- 03:30 presented and blessed the drums and the community bought them and they loved having that battalion there. As a consequence the 2/23rd Battalion have an annual reunion today in Albury and so to a lesser extent because we were a much smaller unit so towns like Benalla
- 04:00 Wangaratta, Shepparton, Bendigo, Dandenong all of those towns had troops billeted in their show grounds because the camps just could not cater with them. At the time there was only Puckapunyal and Mt. Martha, no Darley wasn't completed in the early days.
- 04:30 Darley was not built till later on in the 1940s. So they had to rely on these showground camps to accommodate troops. But we weren't in Wangaratta for very long when we were sent to Duntroon and that probably was the hardest work I have
- 05:00 ever done in my life and I have done some hard word. I was in effect a student had left school at fourteen and was doing a tertiary education course and that's what it amounted to. We had the opposition of the cadets who were in those days selected from the very
- 05:30 finest of cadets and they could do everything better than us and we had to make ourselves as good as them, and we did it. We worked and worked and we never had leave of any sort for a month, we were allowed into Canberra after a month
- 06:00 on the very strictest of rules. For instance one man drank more than he should have and he was just sent home, sent back to camp and that was the sort of discipline, we were in the charge of. In those days there was a unit called the Army Instruction Corps, the regular unit generally known as the AIC [Army Instructional Corps]
- 06:30 all the instructors there were warrant officers, and as an example when we arrived in Canberra after having been on a train for two days just about, we were a pretty bedraggled lot when we got out of the train and we were formed up and the senior warrant officer walked up and down and looked at us
- 07:00 and then he spat on the ground, and that was his attitude. Of course we were determined that we were going to do better than that and we did. We worked hard really physically hard. Mentally, I used to work every night on homework and lights out and I
- 07:30 was practically exhausted by the time the course was finished, it was five months. When it was completed I gained my commission that was on the 1st June 1941. Of course the first thing we wanted to get on to reinforcements
- 08:00 go away somewhere and it wasn't as simple as that. A few things there was one thing in Duntroon to give an order and everyone would do it immediately if you didn't you would have been in trouble and if you said, "Right turn" and some donkey turned left, well it wasn't the instructor who was in trouble it was the fellow who turned left.
- 08:30 So everyone did as you were told and when you came into a camp and you said, "Right turn," and you might find a dozen fellows turned left, they were recruits and that was part of the learning process. I remember clearly newly commissioned with a group of men having to make a mark and I was addressing them
- 09:00 and I addressed one man as, "Son," and he said, "Sir," he said, "I'm old enough to be your father," and I was sensible enough, and I have never forgotten it I was sensible enough to say, "I'm sorry," and I have never, never referred to man other than by his rank, Private Jones
- 09:30 off parade I would call him Danny or Bill or whatever, but on parade I always referred to a man by his rank and so I could expect them to do the same for me. It was a lesson that I learned and I know some officers didn't learn it, but.

Can you tell me more about your philosophy of being an officer?

- 10:00 Yes in the first instance I thoroughly enjoyed being an officer. If the situation was reversed today I wouldn't be anything else but an officer. I think that I had the qualities to be an officer put it that way, yeah,
- 10:30 I was confident being an officer, not at the start mind you. But I fitted into the position and I'm glad that I was an officer. I've seen a lot of people who shouldn't have been officers who never learned the lesson
- 11:00 of humility perhaps that I learned. I've had set backs as an officer but generally as I said I wouldn't have any other rank other than officer if I went into an army you know, if I could re live that part of my life.
- 11:30 I must say that the circumstances of my service later on meant that I never got a lot of the privileges of an officer. For instance an officers' mess in a battalion is quite a social and I never had any of that, I had an officers' mess which I was in training but I
- 12:00 never had a battalion officers' mess because of the circumstances of the war and that's something that I missed because I realised that was part of bonding among officers that, its not exactly essential but its desirable I should say. There's responsibilities
- 12:30 that are more easily recognised today than probably they were fifty years ago probably comes under the heading of democracy these days. But from the other point of view, from a private soldier's point of view, I think that a lot of private soldiers
- 13:00 accepted that they would not be officers. I know a few who chose not to be an officer and regretted it for the rest of their life, but I would say, and I'm not being snobbish when I say this because I've got no basis in life to be a snob, but a lot of men
- 13:30 just saw themselves as being troops and they had no aspiration to be an officer and probably they wouldn't want to accept the responsibilities. There are responsibilities, if were talking about the philosophy of officers, I think I've carried the officer philosophy through all of my
- 14:00 life since I've come home from the war. I've spent a fair bit of time, for instance I lead a panel of people, two women actually and myself a panel, on a pensioner advisory panel
- 14:30 for fourteen years. I helped people get a pension for their disabilities from the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] and in that time, I saw fifteen hundred men to the stage where we, well we got to the stage at the end where I was the only one who kept working and we got to the stage where there were no more prisoners of war who needed assistance
- 15:00 because they had all got assistance. It was such a successful operation that the DVA used to provide me with an office and facilities in 339 - down in St. Kilda Road and they expected me to come down there every Monday and that was one service. I've been
- 15:30 the elected leader of my battalion for twenty-five years and the president and I have led the battalion in the march for all that time, so I feel that I have carried out my responsibilities as an officer and I am jolly well proud of it too. I have I think I have had the respect of the men with whom I have served.
- 16:00 Some I suppose I'm still a bloody officer to, generally, and you must remember that there is always a barrier between the private soldier and the officer. There always will be, but there is also a situation where
- 16:30 there's the closest of friends. One of my closest friends in the battalion is a fellow who abused all the time I was a serving officer, "Bloody officers, you can't do this," and so on. He's Uncle Paddy to my children and my grandchildren and every Anzac Day he comes my whole family all come to the march.
- 17:00 Joy has stood in the same place for seventy-five of her eighty years in St Kilda Road, and the whole family stands there and Paddy never fails to hug and kiss the lot of them and yet he was a burden to me. But if I was in trouble, he would be the man who would be standing along side of me, but he walk away muttering about "Bloody officers, can't look after themselves."
- 17:30 So there you are.

Can you tell me more about the specific qualities that you deem important in getting through as service as an officer?

Well the first quality of course is know what's its like to be a private soldier. That's the first quality and I don't think there is much doubt about that, and the second one is that you have got to have confidence in your own ability.

- 18:00 Yes but you must know what it is like to receive orders, and that's probably a failing of cadets from Duntroon that they never are really a private soldier in the true sense of the word. They
- 18:30 there are a lot of things a private soldier has got to do that go against his grain in the early days, I am

talking about the training days. Menial work that he probably doesn't want to do and having to do what everyone else has to do, get up, go to the showers, go to breakfast, put your bed in order, get dressed, make sure that you are dressed

- 19:00 properly, get on parade and do these things and they are chivvied, the echelon between officers and men they are chivvied along by the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] all the time. You know, "Come on you blokes." If I can be a bit rough and it's perhaps demonstrating what some officers see as a virtue,
- 19:30 now we as a battalion lost our regimental sergeant major who was a stern disciplinarian, but a gentleman of the old AIC, the permanent type, and he died and on the line on the railway, if I say the line
- 20:00 I'm talking about the Burma Thailand railway our CO [Commanding Officer] had to find a new sergeant major. He had one who was our company sergeant major but for some reason we lost him as well through sickness and the lot fell to a sergeant. Now this sergeant wasn't particularly
- 20:30 popular, but when the battalion was at its lowest he was able, through abuse when I say abuse, he would say, "Come on you bastards get up," that was the sort of discipline that he had, he was a former policeman and our CO who was the most reserved
- 21:00 formal type of man you would ever meet and he remained that way all his life, he thought that was marvellous. In later years Joy and I had a lot to do with our CO in his final years, and in later years he always said that Metham kept the battalion going
- 21:30 in the tough days because of that sort of attitude. Now a point in talking about that little story it illustrates that man have got to be bullied in some circumstances and accept it. And once again you could say, "Would they accept it today?" The CO
- 22:00 our battalion CO thought that was the way in the most difficult circumstances that warrant officer or sergeant as he was really, kept the battalion together. Now that's not an officers role and there is not a great number of NCOs who
- 22:30 can get away with that, certainly they wouldn't get away with it today, but that's the soldiers lot. And of course when it comes down to the nitty gritty of battle a junior officer's lot and a soldier's lot is the same anyway if you're a platoon commander, you've got to be where your men are. If you're not
- 23:00 well, you don't remain a platoon commander and its as simple as that. Does that answer that question?
- Yes, thank you. Can you take me through what happened at Wangaratta from your early days as a commissioned officer?**
- I came, at the end of our time at Duntroon we briefly went to Wangaratta and then we went to Darley,
- 23:30 that's right. At Darley we did some sort of training for a while, and Darley had three training battalions the 2nd, 4th and 6th Training Battalions and we really never got much further than parade ground sort of training. Some rifle range, but certainly
- 24:00 no training like field exercises or anything like that until the 39th Militia Battalion, have you heard of them? The battalion who were on the Kokoda Trail. They came to Darley, the brigade commander at Darley called for volunteers to over to that battalion
- 24:30 as instructors and I volunteered and I went over, they were at the 2nd Training Battalion, I went over with two or three of us to the 39th Battalion. They had some officers, several of their officers were First World War men who had stayed in the militia and they were fairly well trained.
- 25:00 Now we embarked straight away on field exercises and refined small arms training and in the period I was part of the training cadre, they developed into a real good unit. Now they were a militia battalion AIF [Australian Imperial Force] camp
- 25:30 at the time, at the inspiration of General Blamey I might say, there became a deep division between the militia and the AIF and it stayed all through the war. He was the originator of the 'Chocolate Soldier' taunt and consequently they were called 'Chocos',
- 26:00 and I came under the same cloud because I was working with them, but they were Chocos and we were AIF volunteers. The Chocos were simply militia men who had been called up, and this animosity remained in that camp all the time until one infamous night
- 26:30 when we were conducting a night exercise and a fairly untrained unit from the 2nd Training Battalion were supposed to be the enemy. Well the 39th ran all over them and the whole exercise became a free fight and the 39th fellows,
- 27:00 oh we were man-to-man fighting in the dark, it was a disgraceful thing now when you think of it. The 39th grabbed these fellows' rifles and took the bolts out and threw them away. Well next morning there was a row, you can imagine everyone was out scouring the bush looking for these bolts and it

demonstrated

- 27:30 the spirit of the 39th and they were ready for anything and when they were considered fit to be moved up north the CO of the 39th invited me to join them. Well it just goes to show what life has for you, I suppose I was tarnished with this little bit of Choco, and being an AIF man and I declined.
- 28:00 If I had accepted I would have been on the Kokoda Trail, I declined and I became a prisoner of war so you know what do you do in life? You sort of pay your money and you take your chance don't you? And so I declined. I suppose what influenced me to some extent
- 28:30 was that at the time there were rumours that reinforcements were being formed for the Middle East and that was something that was in the minds of all recruits of course, and sure enough I was posted to the 6th Reinforcements of the 2/23rd Battalion in the Middle East.
- 29:00 We went on final leave and when we came back off leave we used to assemble, the Melbourne Board of Works had a building opposite Spencer Street then, and we used to assemble on that side of Spencer Street and get your men together and march them across Spencer Street onto the train. When we got there, there were officers we didn't know, saying,
- 29:30 "Quick get your men together!" And we got our men together and marched him across onto the train and up to Darley. This was eleven or twelve o'clock when we got to Darley, the men were given modern equipment small arms, Bren guns
- 30:00 the officers were issued with modern pistols, and we were put back on the train back down to Melbourne. The train pulled up at Port Melbourne Pier and there were troop ships along the wharves there and all the fellows speculating, "Which one is ours?" you know and we marched down to the lower deck and put on the paddle steamer Weroona.
- 30:30 The paddle steamer which plied between Port Melbourne and Sorrento and Queenscliff and the fellows couldn't believe it, of course, and down we went to Queenscliff. We had to prepare a defensive position in the Queenscliff area, well we worked for a fortnight preparing these positions and someone came down and said, "But you are facing the wrong way,
- 31:00 you should be not facing the sea you should be facing the land." The CO of the camp had completely misunderstood his instructions. We had to turn around and reconstruct the whole defensive positions. Well we were there for a while and yet another brigadier came down
- 31:30 and he said that he had an important mission and he wanted volunteers for it step forward for anyone who would volunteer for this position, well the whole unit stepped forward and we should have woken up because he said, "Step back the married men," and as I said there were a lot of married men and they all stepped back, we should have all stepped back shouldn't we?
- 32:00 We were - immediately we were bundled onto trucks and put onto the Weroona again back up to Darley where our modern equipment was taken from us and we were issued with 1918 rifles. The Bren gun equipment was taken from us and were issued with leather pouches and we were issued with old Lewis guns
- 32:30 instead of Bren guns. And even my rifle, my .38 Smith and Wesson pistol, was taken from me and I was given a Colt .45, a cumbersome blunderbuss. It probably came from the west somewhere and we then our
- 33:00 numbers which were greatly depleted by the married men stepping back, and some specialists, they simply took recruits who were in the camp, and they even took prisoners from Bendigo Gaol, the military jail in Bendigo and they made up the numbers. There would have been ninety percent of the men who were untrained.
- 33:30 We had a job, the officers had a job of even controlling these fellows on the train, they were poorly disciplined. The we went to Sydney and we boarded the Aquitania and each of the eastern states Victoria and New South Wales and Tasmania
- 34:00 and Queensland had all taken raw recruits out of their camps to put on this ship. The only trained unit was the 4th Machine Gun Battalion which had been in Darwin previously to this and had some training, they were brought down from Darwin and put on the same ship.
- 34:30 I think there was about three thousand of us all together and away we went. Now it started off badly: in that we went to Fremantle and the 4th Machine Gun Battalion was a Western Australian Battalion to a man, and we docked, we didn't dock, we anchored just off Fremantle.
- 35:00 The machine gunners could see their relatives on the pier, and the commander of the troops on board refused them leave to go ashore, but of course what did they do? They went over the side and they went over in their hundreds. And of course once they went so did our untrained troops, and so we had a major incident of seventy- ive percent of the troops on the ship all went
- 35:30 AWL [Absent Without Leave]. There was a massive clean up of troops because the ship had an escort waiting outside Fremantle to take it, and they rounded as many as they could and they were literally

dozens and dozens of fellows who were never picked up, and never came with us.

- 36:00 Sp the attitude on board on the ship was one of resentment, because the troops were not trained, they were difficult to manage. We had a situation where there was a revolt and the commander of the troops, who I must say he was a Colonel who left a lot to be desired
- 36:30 issued the officers with ammunition for their pistols and I took my six bullets and my gun and I went down my bed and lifted up the pillow and put them under the pillow. I wasn't going to use a pistol on troops on board a ship, it was the stupidest thing out. We regained discipline
- 37:00 but it was an unhappy voyage, I must say. We got to the Sunda Straits in Java, as it was know then, when the ship dropped anchor at sea we sort of looked around wondering what had happened and along came a little flotilla of cattle boats. They,
- 37:30 I can even remember the name of our mighty vessel, it was called the Reynst, R-E-Y-N-S-T, a Dutch cattle boat that hadn't been cleaned from its last occupants. It was so low on the water the men could lean over the bow and touch the sea and we were packed into these lighters as they virtually were.
- 38:00 We put up a Lewis gun as anti aircraft defence that was all we had and off we sailed to Singapore. We were blessed for two days that we had a constant fog because Tokyo Rose we could pick her up on the radio telling us exactly where we were and how she
- 38:30 expected that the planes would eventually find us. There was virtually no food on these lighters and we just sailed, we could hear the planes above the fog into Singapore and as we sailed into Singapore the fog lifted and we landed in
- 39:00 an air raid.

Just to clarify we are at the latter part of this tape, Tokyo Rose was the Japanese propaganda that came across the radio?

Yes she was a Eurasian girl of some sort, I've got an idea she was part Dutch and part Japanese, I think that was what she was. But she was a constant

- 39:30 propaganda thorn, she was much like Lord Haw Haw in Europe in Germany. Actually she even knew the names of the officers of our battalion.

That must have been frightening to hear that all the way across on the ship?

Yes, she knew the roles and she constantly taunted

- 40:00 us as we were going across.

We are just at the end of that tape.

Tape 3

- 00:30 You right?
- Yes.**
- We arrived in Singapore during an air raid and we were sent immediately to a camp and now I might, to introduce this part, tell you that the battalion. I told you that
- 01:00 we were going to the 2/29th Battalion, the battalion at about this time, this was about the 17th January 1942, and the battalion had been sent, less one company
- 01:30 to Muar, to the Muar River. There was Japs procedure down the mainland generally was a surrounding technique wherever the Allies made a stand, the Japs would engage the front but come around from behind and that was the procedure. They came down the east coast to a large extent but
- 02:00 the Muar River is on the west coast of Malaya as it was then, and the 2/29th Battalion was sent there to meet some Japanese movement that was suppose to be there. Three companies, one, Don Company was not sent with them. When they got there they found that they were engaged
- 02:30 with the 1st Imperial Guards Division. Now there were about seven hundred men in that battalion, the Guards' Division was about twelve thousand men. The battalion fought them for four days, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and by this time they were decimated. They had lost three commanding officers,
- 03:00 there was one company commander left and there was about one hundred and sixty men left. They were extracting themselves out of the situation. General Bennett sent the 2/19th Battalion in to help the 2/29th Battalion. Now what I'm going to say is probably

03:30 biased from the 2/29th point of view, but I think it is an understandable bias. The battalion engaged the Division and fought them for four days to a standstill. This other battalion came up and history has recorded that the 2/19th Battalion

04:00 was the battalion who had significance in the Muar battle. Now the fact of the matter is that they were never at Muar battle they were at Parit Sulong, which incidentally Joyce and I have visited and walked around, and they were considerably south of the Muar River. To add,

04:30 I don't want to sound too biased in this because I wasn't there, but I had years of listening to people who were there and one of the things that really upset the battalion was its part of the history of this battle has been largely lost

05:00 to the glamour of the 2/19th Battalion which a more glamorous battalion perhaps than ours. The leader, Colonel Anderson of the 2/19th Battalion won a VC, where our battalion after four days of fighting odds ten to one they got little or no recognition;

05:30 two officers were decorated and one NCO and that's all. So that's the frame of mind of these men when they came back to Singapore. They were told to find their own way back to Singapore which was a hundred miles south. So, as a consequence,

06:00 the stragglers arrived back exhausted, disillusioned, disappointed, bewildered on their side and we arrived after three weeks at sea under rather coming in under rather extraordinary situations largely untrained men. And there was the conflict,

06:30 we had a new commanding officer, Colonel Pond who was the brigade major of the 27th Brigade, our brigade, he had always been a staff officer. He was as new to the job as indeed we were. He had

07:00 to reform the battalion he had to find six hundred men, he had, at his disposal he had troops who were really at the stage of troops at camps like Royal Park and Caulfield Race Course, not even to the Darley stage.

07:30 The men I had, had largely never fired a rifle. They weren't subjected to discipline as they should, a trained soldier if he is told to do something he jolly well does it but these fellows had no idea on how to obey an order, no idea why an order was issued, and certainly no idea of field work whatsoever,

08:00 and as a consequence, through no fault of their own, reinforcements to the battalions who were engaged on the main land all had a bad reputation. It was not their fault at all, and really no senior officer in Australia should ever

08:30 have considered sending untrained troops to war as they did. They knew very well when they dispatched us that these troops were going directly into action. If I had gone on, if circumstances had allowed me to proceed with my reinforcements to the Middle East I know for certain

09:00 that we would have been sent to a training camp in the dessert and we would have trained for six months or more until we were acclimatised to the conditions, we knew what our part was in the battalion, and we knew what the battalion's part was in the overall picture. These fellows, and bear in mind that they came from four states and we the Victorian battalion had

09:30 men from four states bewildered young men, they were younger, even today we still pick at some of these fellows who are not eighty yet you know they are youngsters. They were younger, they were bewildered they didn't know what they were in for and they were give a rifle and sent into it. That was it. Many of these

10:00 boys as they were, and I must say I was only a year or so older than them, censoring - their letters were saying, "Dear Mum, I'm in the army." And that's how ill equipped they were. Colonel Pond recognised this after all he was reinforcement himself to some extent,

10:30 but General Bennett told him to have, this is stupidity, told him to have a battalion ready for action in twenty-four hours. He didn't ever know his officers let along any of the workings of his troops, he persuaded him that he needed more time and he said, "I will give you a week to get a battalion together."

11:00 We had, we were living in tents alongside thirty-two oil wells the size of a gas comet you know. I had three roles: I was a platoon commander, most of my platoon were Queenslanders whom I had never met, and I must say prior to this I had to be interviewed by Colonel Pond and of the six reinforcement officers

11:30 who came over with these reinforcements he only selected two of us, and if I can say the two he did select were literally his backbone among junior officers for the next three and half years probably that is incidental. We were given this role of first of all training the troops, we had

12:00 no rifle range never fired a shot. We told them how to load the rifle. We had Lewis guns, they had taken the Bren guns away, we had Lewis guns, I was only the one in my platoon among thirty-three men who had fired a Lewis gun and so I was the only one who really in action who could have fire the wretched

thing.

- 12:30 We had one Tommy gun which was an American gun, which the platoon sergeant who had been on a Commando unit drive up in Malaya had brought back with him, and so I had a Colt .45, rifles with .303 ammunition and I had a Tommy gun with different size ammunition, .32 ammunition
- 13:00 so I had three different sorts of ammunition for thirty-three men. And a platoon bike, which was a most terrible machine that has ever been invented. We trained the men every, second night I took out a patrol, in the first instance we were on the mainland in Johor Baharu, and the first night I joined the battalion
- 13:30 the very first night I had joined the battalion I took out a patrol of raw recruits, at night, in the jungle. Can you imagine anything more ridiculous than that? And the only thing that saved me was I knew how to read a compass and I patrolled using the compass, and got home safely.
- 14:00 That's the second thing. The third thing was we were to guard the oil wells, and the Japs constantly bombed them of course until the whole thirty-two of them blew up, and that was our role until the Japs landed, we had withdrawn to the island by this time, until the Japs landed on the island. We went,
- 14:30 our role because of our untrained condition was a reserve battalion to the 22nd Brigade. Not our own brigade, 22nd Brigade. 22nd Brigade were on the western side of the island once again, I don't proposed to go into criticism of British command because
- 15:00 they made such a mess of this whole campaign, it probably doesn't become a lieutenant to be critical but the logical place for the landing on the island was the north western section of the island, and yet the British Generals considered that it would be on the
- 15:30 north eastern side and so they concentrated troops there. The 22nd Australian Brigade were on the western side with the 4th Machine Gun Battalion the battalion that came over with us and the Japs landed there. The machine gunners just fired and fired and fired and no more ammunition left and the Japs came over then
- 16:00 we were immediately behind the battalions of the 22nd Brigade and I had the forward platoon in the forward company and I saw the whole picture in front of me, as the Japs came, dawn up the hill towards us and we held our position. I could see the Japs firing and they were firing at us, and as they advanced they hadn't
- 16:30 changed their sights and were hitting my cobber's platoon on the right, and I could see that platoon disintegrating, whilst we more or less suffered light casualties. We held our position there until, we had a few casualties, and one incident sticks in my mind shows the
- 17:00 inexperience of all of us for goodness sake, it was the first time I had commanded troops under fire and like most people I found it was almost difficult to talk even, with so much emotion and fear and having to do a job, and one of my men
- 17:30 was shot in the jaw and he jumped up out of his slit trench and his jaw had disappeared and he ran and I shouted to him, "Don't leave your rifle there," the kid turned around and ran back into the trench and picked up his rifle. I have never forgotten it and I never saw, he died somewhere, I never saw him again, but that's what orders do, and he did that instinctively -
- 18:00 he had no use for his rifle and I suppose I had no point in telling him to take it. It was procedure and the kid ran back and picked up his rifle without a jaw and -

You don't know what happened to him?

Well no I don't know what happened to people. I remember I sent my runner with a message

- 18:30 and he kept running till he came to the coast and I think he ran across the water, I never saw him again but there it is and we stayed there until.

Is this still at Johor Baharu?

No this is at Kranji, on the island.

Johor Baharu, just to clarify when did you come back?

Oh I'm sorry, we came back from Johor Baharu within three days of us being there, we came back to the island and the oil wells as we called them.

- 19:00 So when the landing took place we were within reasonable marching distance of Kranji where the landing took place,

That makes sense yeah sorry about that.

Got it? So we stayed there until I was called back to a battalion conference and I went back and the CO said, "We are withdrawing."

- 19:30 And he said, "You'll stay in your position until the battalion is cleared," and I said, "Righto," and I ran back to my platoon. We stayed in the position until I looked around and found that they had all gone and so I started to withdraw my platoon which was in pretty good shape I must say then. We withdrew to the road, and we found
- 20:00 we were the last on the road back to Bukit Timah which was the centre of Singapore. We found a crew in an English armoured car and between us we agreed that we would withdraw depending on each other and that was on
- 20:30 Monday morning. We withdrew down the road which was about seven miles over two days and we engaged the enemy all the way down that road, we were attacked constantly, we were attacked by, the Japs had captured the Tiger Moths, Royal
- 21:00 Kuala Lumpur Flying Club and they would just drift over us and the fellow out the back seat would lean over and just toss grenades out. He'd call up then and we called them 'Navo' and consequently called 'Zeros' and he'd called up the Zeros and they would come down and they would attack us as we came down the road.
- 21:30 I tell the story that the only ammunition we had we pinched off fellows who withdrew through us at Kranji and the original place when I was still holding my position, we pinched a box of thousand bullets and we weren't going to let these go,
- 22:00 and coming down the Bukit Timah Road we had to cross in an open section with a little creek at the end of it, and so I got my men on this clearing and I sent them over a section at a time. And my sergeant and I had this valuable box of ammunition we looked around and I said, "Right," and we started to run
- 22:30 and we ran across the clearing and I swear this is right, a plane came and machine-gunned us and the bullets went between Dorrett and I and we caught up to the bullets and passed them. You believe that?
- You tell me I believe you.**
- But the fact is that the bullets went
- 23:00 between us as we ran across the clearing and never struck the case of bullets and never struck us, but gee did we run. But we got back to Bukit Timah and I think then, and it was only then, that I realised that we were in serious trouble. We got back, there was confusion -
- 23:30 we got to an area there was a group of troops, all who were told incidentally that there were defences built in Bukit Timah, barb wire enclosures things like that and when we got to Bukit Timah
- 24:00 there was just nothing. There was only confusion and chaos, and people didn't seem to know what was going on and I realised then that there was serious trouble. Our company commander had taken on the roll of battalion commander at this stage and so when I got back
- 24:30 and rejoined the company there was a lieutenant whom I didn't know who was in charge of the company and his is going to remain nameless. But he had absolutely no experience what so ever and he didn't know what to do and he led us into a position that was almost inescapable, and the consequence was
- 25:00 that, tanks came down the road when we were in this position and they separated us. We were on one side of the road and the rest of the company were on the other side. He was killed, and I had a group of men whom I had gathered on the other side of the road so we withdrew
- 25:30 back because we had nowhere else to go, and we met up with Colonel Anderson's group 2/19th Battalion. So went into a defensive position at a place called Tanglin Hill which was close to the centre of the Australian defensive position
- 26:00 and there we stayed, and in the two ensuing days I was there I gathered up stragglers. I suppose in the end I had about one hundred men. The stories you hear about Australian troops in Singapore town in the last few days, they might be true, but I can swear and I would that not one of my men left the position.
- 26:30 We were in a defensive position under the supervision of Colonel Anderson - who was awarded the VC whilst I was in his command, and as far as I'm concerned my men were where they should have been and we received an order to lay down our arms
- 27:00 and that was it. We never in a week from Sunday night until Sunday night my platoon never had a meal and we were never reinforced with food of any sort, we were not enforced with ammunition other than what we scrounged. We had some memorable
- 27:30 things to eat; I remember I had a good sergeant who remained my friend until he died, ten years ago I suppose, I used to ask him to go and see what he could find and he came back with pineapples that grew on the side of the road and they were green, and have you ever eaten a green pineapple?
- 28:00 Oh your mouth just fills with ulcers and you could hardly talk and so that was one meal and another memorable meal that he came back with, he had raided a naval store and the navy have chocolate in

blocks about that big and about three inches thick it is chocolate and sugar, and we cut this up with a bayonet and issued

- 28:30 the chocolate to all the fellows and it was so sweet and sickly as you can imagine, and that the pineapple and the chocolate were the only two meals that we had in a week. Now there was no organization whatsoever as far as we were concerned in the battle.
- 29:00 And that was our experience on the island. As I say we were in position, we were armed and we were in an approved defensive position, and whatever is said about reinforcements or about troops being in Singapore it cannot be levelled to my men the 2/29th Battalion and that's something of which I am particularly proud.
- 29:30 As time has gone on that matter has been raised particularly by British officers. There is a lot of contention about the lack of discipline and I think British officers like to blame the Australians for the faults of a lot of their own troops,
- 30:00 but the fact of the matter is that the Australian troops lost more in that six weeks of fighting than any other division and of course the only way to lose casualties in a war is facing the enemy. So we had nothing to be proud of because we finished up as prisoners of war but
- 30:30 we were instructed to lay down our arms. I remember I received the order about five o'clock on the Sunday evening a runner came up and said, "At eight o'clock, you will lay down your arms," and that was it. That was as simple as the order was. By this time I was occupying a house that someone had abandoned, left the meal on the table
- 31:00 even left their passports in the dressing room as they got out of the house. Oh we had a bit of food there was a ham, I remember the ham in the fridge that was another meal we had. We spent a terrible night Sunday night as you could imagine we had no idea what was in front of us and
- 31:30 we had no idea because we hadn't been into Singapore, of why we had to surrender. We couldn't understand why we were constantly being told to withdraw because we didn't know the broader picture. The broader picture of course is that once the Japs got down to Johor Baharu on the mainland
- 32:00 they simply turned the taps off, the water taps off because Singapore buys its water from Malaya as they still do today they are not silly, in Singapore today, they sell the water back to Malaya that they buy for something like three cents a gallon they sell back to Malaya, they are on a ninety-nine agreement or something like that. But in those days all the Japs had to do was turn the taps off. And the civilian population
- 32:30 was just not prepared for occupation. It's another side of it I suppose, and once again I can't speak authoritatively on that because I am not aware, I can relate some anecdotal evidence for instance going over on the ship
- 33:00 there were four nurses, four only. I befriended one, a dear little girl, little Ben [Bennos], she was over there as a reinforcement the same as I and she was ordered to be prepared to get out, her hospital had been invaded by
- 33:30 the Japs and the Japs had rushed through bayoneting patients and staff as they went through, but she stayed in the hospital and when the matron said they were to go she hid in the cupboard and the military Police came through the hospital and they literally dragged these girls out and put them in the back of ambulances and drove them to the wharves and pushed them
- 34:00 on board two ships. Ben was on Margaret Vyner [Vyner Brooke], I think, was it, Joyce? Both ships were badly bombed, one was sunk as you well know, the other one and this is one of the ironies of life. We had dear friends in both ships, Betty Jeffrey was a dear friend of ours,
- 34:30 she was a prisoner of war as you know, she had a terrible time getting to shore, she swam for thirty-two hours, swam. But those girls all had the glamour of being rescued, now these other girls on the other ship, their ship was just as badly bombed,
- 35:00 half of the ship was occupied by fare-paying wives of planters and workers in Singapore and these girls, some of them whom we knew, Margaret Anderson for instance, she was the first woman to receive the George Medal
- 35:30 in the Commonwealth. She had a another nurse with her called Torney whom we knew, who was also decorated on the ship. They had dozens of casualties, they lay over these people on deck, they nursed them, through all the strafing they dragged these people off the deck, when things subsided
- 36:00 they were drenched in blood as you could imagine. The occupants of the cabins were not even let them wash their hands in the wash basins, and those girls got to Java. Ben got to Western Australia in a submarine. The Australian Government put them in camps, isolated them for six weeks,
- 36:30 never ever even gave them a clean uniform. The first mail Ben received was a pair of running shoes, and she received a white feather in the mail, these girls, she literally was punished. All of her war time

- service she was posted to the worst of the hospitals in New Guinea,
- 37:00 she worked in gumboots nursing men in New Guinea. Margaret Anderson told me herself that when she came home they had uniforms with their oval colours at the time she was attacked in Myers, a woman told her that she had deserted her son and she was attacked; her face slapped and knocked down. This was a woman who had won the George Medal.
- 37:30 So that was the reception these girls got, yet when the war was over, Margaret Anderson serviced right to the end of war as did Torney, little Ben volunteered to come back on the hospital ship they called the 2/15th Field Hospital,
- 38:00 she came back to Singapore to help retrieve us. Actually she is knee high to a duck. She walked, when she got leave, she walked from Singapore docks out to Changi, sixteen miles to see me and when she came, she and another little girl, they were exhausted
- 38:30 of course as you can imagine and we put them to bed or what we had for a bed, and it was the only time in the three and half years that I was a prisoner of war we went out and we stole from the Chinese. We found a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK pen and we stole four eggs and went back to camp, and fried them and gave them two fried eggs each
- 39:00 and sent them back to Singapore. But Ben is Aunty Ben to our children and our grandchildren and I ring her every fortnight, poor little thing she has dementia now. She married a fellow whose service was quite unique, who looks after her wonderfully. Poor little thing, it saddens me now because sometimes when I ring her
- 39:30 she doesn't know me and we, you know, we have been talking for fifty years. She is almost part of our family and we feel that we are losing her gradually because she has times, a few weeks ago she had to talk to Joy and we wondered whether this motivation to talk to Joy,
- 40:00 we generally talk on a Sunday, and she rang during the week and had to talk to Joy and we just wondered what the significance of her wanting to talk to Joy was.
- We have to change the tape. We have one minute.**
- Well that's it those girls had as hard a time
- 40:30 as emotionally as the prisoner of war girls did. The prisoner of war girls, I wouldn't say for a minute that they never did it hard but they had a reward all their lives in some way in their fame if you could call it and the adulation that's been. Look at Bullwinkle for instance: everyone knows her. And yet these
- 41:00 other girls, if you asked who Margaret Anderson was for instance no one would know her and yet her service was just as meritorious as the other bunch and it was just fate. Just fate.

Tape 4

- 00:30 **What transpired then following the surrender?**
- We were told to assemble down on the road the next morning and we went down there and there were troops everywhere. We got into order fairly quickly, which I suppose in retrospect it is surprising, but we rejoined
- 01:00 the battalion, as I said we had been with Colonel Anderson's battalion and we rejoined them. We began to realise that we were prisoners of war when the Japs came by pinching watches and valuables off us while we stood on either side of the road and the Japanese General drove up through the road
- 01:30 reviewing us. They took our arms of course, and almost immediately we were started on the march out to Changi. We called it Selarang, because it was the Selarang Barracks, they were the barracks of the Gordon Highlanders who were based there.
- 02:00 They were three storey buildings, and there would have been ten buildings I suppose around this huge parade ground, that's where the Australians were headed. We marched, well we must have started in the afternoon because we marched during the night and I only have one recollection, and it is a peculiar one, that as we marched left right, left right,
- 02:30 the fire flies flickers on and off, on and off almost in time with our marching. It's the one thing that I see today - the one thing that I can recall vividly was the fire flies and they switched on and off as we marched out. We saw the shape of things to come,
- 03:00 the Malays spat and laughed at us, the Chinese would dash out into the middle of our ranks with something to eat and dash back again and that's why there were so many Chinese heads on stakes around. The Chinese never, never gave up helping us in Singapore; never ever. The Malays they were never any help at all.

- 03:30 The Indians, if there was a bob in it, if there was something in it they would do it. It was the Chinese who never, never let up in their resistance. The remarkable thing was the number of Japanese flags that were flying from houses and buildings which must have been there all the time.
- 04:00 We of course were in the mood of despair we didn't know just what we were in for. We got to Selerang, and the battalion was allocated the gymnasium in Barracks Square. I immediately was given the job as hygiene officer
- 04:30 for a thousand men, as you can imagine. So I arranged the traditional slit trenches as the first thing which, seemed to work reasonably well until one morning the CO said, "Nankervis come with me to this area," and the whole area was in flood, it had rained torrential rain during the night and
- 05:00 and he said, "What are you going to do about that?" And here was I, and I knew all about hygiene didn't I? So I said, like a fool, I said, "I have heard that there are augers in the camp somewhere." and he said, "Well get them." So augers are about eighteen inches diameter, propelled, they had a shaft and they are propelled by a horizontal shaft fixed to this one
- 05:30 and you would have six men on either side and you would walk them around and around and gradually it sunk and we would dig these bore holes to perhaps twenty feet. And quite frankly they worked well. Over the years more sophisticated hygiene groups managed,
- 06:00 but the by the time we go to Changi Jail, of course they had a sewerage system working, but prior to that they worked these bore holes which was quite a serious problem because everyone had dysentery we had to have an efficient toilet system. So that was my first job. There were all sorts of bright ideas
- 06:30 for escapes and resistance and all sorts of things. Our hierarchy decided that we would probably all attack the Japs with pick handles one day, you can't believe it, can you? So I was appointed the next job I had, I was the brigade unarmed defence officer.
- 07:00 I had never done unarmed defence in my life. When I was given the job I dug up a warrant officer who had done unarmed defence, I started this wretched unarmed defence school in a building in Selerang in Changi, with the Japs about, and the fellows I trained or I had trained
- 07:30 became quite efficient not that it did them any good. But probably it helped morale a bit for these thirty or forty fellows who became quite good at disarming some one with a knife or a pistol, whatever and so that was my second job. It was about this time
- 08:00 that the Japs started realising the great labour force they had and the huge pool of facilities they had in Singapore. The warehouses were packed full of food, equipment of all sorts, aeroplanes, guns and factory machinery. Anything that could be moved the Japs
- 08:30 wanted it moved, and that's what most of the working parties went into Singapore to do; they moved the warehouses of food and equipment and put them on boats and sent to Japan and that's what they jolly well did. Our working party on the other hand was sent into Singapore to build a war memorial to the Japanese
- 09:00 and it was a bit of a sinecure as far as jobs were concerned. We lived in a row of houses in a place called Caldecott Hill, which was about two miles north east of Singapore town, quite a respectable area and the houses were quite comfortable, we were packed in fairly tightly but never the less it wasn't a bad environment. We had the job of constructing
- 09:30 a road to the war memorial, and I became an expert in road construction. We had a team and it was our job to literally design the road and pave it which we did, and it was if you had to do that sort of work you know it was quite reasonably enjoyable.
- 10:00 There was a bit of knocking about, but anyone I suppose you could say anyone who did get hit in those early days you could perhaps say they asked for it.

You mean physical abuse from the guards?

Yes that's right and then one day all of these, I must say the guards who were guarding us were combatant troops like ourselves,

- 10:30 and so we go on pretty well with them really. And one day they just disappeared just no Japs left, of course everyone went walkabout, we went to Singapore walked around and bought things in the shops, and for two days we just walked around Singapore and there were thousands of troops
- 11:00 literally just walking around.

Do you remember when this was approximately?

It must have been about August 1942. Then one day the Japs came and these fellows were second echelon Japs who had trained

- 11:30 in occupation. They rounded everyone very smartly, and very brutally, and we realised that we were

entering another phase of our working life. Things got tougher then because these fellows didn't want to know us and they had nothing in common with combatant troops at all.

- 12:00 They were occupation troops and they had come from Nanking and places like that, where their discipline was simply to kill and it was as simple as that. So that was our taste of real occupancy by the Japs and it was about this time that the Barracks Square incident occurred in Selarang or in Changi,
- 12:30 when the Japs insisted that we sign a non-escape certificate of some sort. In the end, our commander compromised by ordering us to sign it, which meant that we signed it under duress and a lot of 'Mickey Mouse'
- 13:00 and 'Ned Kellys' signed, and a lot of 'Don Bradmans', but everyone signed a non-escape form of some sort. To force the commanders to order this signing they confined all of the people living in Changi into the Barracks Square in Selarang;
- 13:30 all the sick and everyone who was there which amounted to several thousand men all occupying about an acre of ground. Toilets were dug in the sacred Barracks Square, and there were some cooking facilities and almost no water and they remained there for
- 14:00 four or five days. And I think the bitterest irony was they were guarded by Indian troops who had gone over to the Japs, Indian troops who had fought with the British troops and they had gone over they had joined the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Scheme, is what they were called and they literally
- 14:30 were the Japanese army. And the worst of all was that most of them were Sikhs who performed as well as anyone during the war, which is very tough on the officers who commanded as you could imagine. But that incident didn't affect us because we were in Singapore.
- 15:00 We had one memorable occasion in Caldecott Hill before it broke up. We had a sports meeting which was unheard of and even today I know of one day who still has his little cup that he was presented, beaten out of a jam tin or something, and he still carries that cup, he won the hop, step and jump.
- 15:30 We had a marvellous sports day and the Japs all joined in as well and it is something that we always remembered. Then we were moved, when the memorial built we weren't concerned with that because we built the road, which was mile or two long,
- 16:00 and we then moved into Singapore and we were involved in working in the godowns too. It was acceptable work put it that way, I suppose there wasn't a great deal of brutality, food was reasonable because you could pinch a lot of food, and the camps were reasonably well
- 16:30 organised. We lived in a camp rather than in houses in Singapore but towards Christmas the Japs began closing these working parties in Singapore and concentrated people back into Changi and it was then that the parties started moving up north.
- 17:00 The first party was A Force which left Changi early after Christmas and they sailed to Victoria Point in Burma and they started the railway line from the bottom of Burma to come north up through Pagoda Pass. The next party was B Force which went to Borneo, and I was on B Force
- 17:30 and I didn't want to leave my mates, my two mates incidentally are still alive and I asked the CO if I could be replaced and he agreed which was really surprising to me. Probably it was a life saver because as you know the officers were separated at the last moment but all of the troops
- 18:00 were murdered, as you know, in Borneo. So we remained in Singapore until early April when we were formed into F Force which was probably the biggest force. There were three thousand five hundred Australians in F Force and seven thousand in the whole force and we were told that
- 18:30 we were going to the land of milk and honey we could take sick and weak people with us, that we were going up there because facilities were better than in Singapore. And as a consequence there was a clamour among a lot of people to get on to this force. They were not fit anyway
- 19:00 when they left, and we soon realised that you had to be fit because when we got into Singapore we put into steel rice trucks there were about twenty-five to twenty-eight of us in a truck and away we went. We were on the train for three days or four days, and in that time we
- 19:30 stopped at perhaps one or two stations and had something to eat. On my truck I opened the door, I organised opening of the sliding door and organised rosters or shifts so that some people could sit by the door and get some air. The toileting as you can imagine was a huge problem almost constantly there was diarrhoea and dysentery
- 20:00 among the troops. And there was a lot of malaria and dengue fever, it was a constant companion. So by the time we got up to Ban Pong, which is about twenty miles west of Bangkok we were fairly well exhausted, and when we got off the
- 20:30 train the Japs literally fell on us and they beat us to a camp about a mile away from the station I suppose. And when we got to this camp it had been occupied by native troops who had messed where they sat, where they ate, there were dead bodies

- 21:00 lying about the Japs had not buried them, and the place was just a mass of blow flies and filth. We sort of settled down as well as we could for the day and we were told that we had to march that night and we and I must say that we remained in battalion order all of the way,
- 21:30 and that, if I can digress, was our salvation. We were settling down as a battalion of reinforcements and original people and this was our test really, we had command from the colonel all the way down through companies
- 22:00 and to a large extent that was our salvation because we had this chain of command and responsibility, right down to corporals with their handful of men to look after. We set out, and our first loss was that we lost our regimental medical officer. The Japs would not let anyone who was not well march, and they had to wait until they recovered
- 22:30 and then they were pushed on so we picked up a young doctor named Roy Mills, who had just finished his internship. He had a basket about that big full of medical equipment and we decided that we would carry it. If you carried two hundred pound of swinging weight in the night through the jungle, it was the most difficult
- 23:00 proposition. We started off on this march and we started on a bitumen road which was ok, and 'we'll manage this all right', and about half way through the night we turned off the road onto a dirt track and we marched on these dirt tracks through the jungle. I got another job, I brought up the rear,
- 23:30 which meant keeping every one in front of me, the stragglers. I started to find out the stragglers, men with sore feet, men with dysentery, malaria, pushing them up all the time. The Japs had a procedure that they would stop ever hour for ten minutes but by the time I got to the stop it was time to go again.
- 24:00 So I was on my feet all night every night and of course in the end the basket of medical supplies the first night came back to us and we were carrying this wretched swaying basket of medical supplies. We were told that we were going to go to a camp where we
- 24:30 there would be sufficient food and rest and beds and things like that. The end of the first night when dawn came, we found we stopped just at a clearing in the jungle. There was no facilities whatsoever. We were given some rice and our cooks had to fossick around to find some fire wood and find some ways of cooking food.
- 25:00 Our doctor had to treat the dozens of fellows who were beginning to suffer from stumbling in the night and we then had to try and sleep through a tropical day without any shelter. And so the next night we were assembled and off we went again, and this went on for eighteen nights. And we marched three hundred kilometres.
- 25:30 Each night more and more would drop out of course and we would push on.

Can you tell me what the guards would do in those instances?

There generally was a guard leading the march and I always had a guard at the tail of the march and one memorable night we were marching though a cutting and

- 26:00 the guard nudged me and there was a tiger on the bank above me and he gave me his rifle and said, "Shoot," and he dashed off, he shot through. And I said, "I'm not going to shoot him," and so we pushed on and it took us half the night to find the guard. I carried his rifle until I found him, but he wasn't game to shoot him, he wanted someone else to shoot it.
- 26:30 I had a guard with me at the tail of the march all the time. As the march proceeded we found we were beginning to carry more and more fellows who would break down.

Were there fellows who had dropped off all together?

Well, when we got to camp we had to drop them off, they would collapse

- 27:00 during the march because you see; we weren't adequately fed, and we couldn't sleep during the day because of the tropical sun, and by this time we were literally stumbling over rough tracks. Men's footwear was beginning to disintegrate, and some of them even at this stage we were in bare feet.
- 27:30 We proceeded on, we pushed on, each night we never had a rest in all the time we marched up and we marched every night. We eventually got to a place called Konkuita and we got there in the morning and the Jap officer in charge was the greatest animal
- 28:00 I have ever encountered in my life. He was the most vicious, brutal, individual that you could possibly imagine anyone to be. He made a practice of brutality and he was constantly angry, there was something psychopathic about him. He was a captain, a fellow named Muriana. And he
- 28:30 only had one rule and that was his fist or his pick handle or what ever he had, and he would just belt you over the ear if you didn't know what he said, and he spoke no English and he would give an order and if you didn't understand it he simply he'd just go berserk and that was our lot.

- 29:00 As soon as we got to this camp he called for a working party and of course who was the officer for the working party? Me, and out we went. We were not engaged, we were separated from F Force, our battalion by this time we started off with about seven hundred by this time we were down to probably four hundred and fifty,
- 29:30 and a number had dropped out. Our job was to maintain the road that was servicing the construction of the railway line alongside the railway line. My first job was to build a small bridge. We had a pile driver and we drove piles into the - and these poor men
- 30:00 who had been marching all night and not had a meal they had to pull this wretched donkey pull him on a shaft, pull the donkey and drop it on the pile, the pile driver and that was our job. We worked the very first day, we worked until dark and I didn't even know where I was going to sleep when we got back to this camp which was
- 30:30 a collection of buildings without roofs. We gradually settled there and we gradually settled into a working procedure; building the road, maintaining the road, which had all sorts of traffic upon it. Among other things it was used as the
- 31:00 line of communication for troops that were landing at Bangkok coming up as far as they could as far as they could by rail, as far as the rail was constructed and then marching the rest of the way through Pagoda Pass into Burma. These troops, by this time it was raining and it rained and it rained, and these troops would march mud up to the
- 31:30 knees on this road that we were maintaining. And they had little trailers on iron wheels they would put all their gear on and they would all harness themselves to this trailer and the warrant officer would give the call, "Ushta," and they would all respond, "Ushta ush, ushta ush."
- 32:00 You could hear them coming up the track, "Ushta, ush, ushta." We'd go out and watch them and to us a lot of our fellows who were young, they looked like kids. I clearly remember the Japs thrashing them as they staggered through the mud with the flat of their swords thrashing them along like they used to drive horses.
- 32:30 I remember one night one of these little Jap kids, I suppose they were only nineteen or twenty, he fell into the mud and the Jap pounced on him and bashed him as he lay in the mud and a couple of our fellows jumped down and pulled him and put him on his feet. To me showed a compassion
- 33:00 that, we had no love for the Japs we were developing a hatred too for the Koreans who were as brutal as the Japs. But it showed a side of Australians that was there all the time, this care of someone else and it was a characteristic
- 33:30 of Australians on the line. Well we had a saying, "If you didn't have a mate on the line you died," and everyone had a mate, and every mate looked out for his mate. I saw hundreds of men die, but I never saw an Australian die unattended.
- 34:00 I have seen other nationalities die, I have seen English people turn their back on a dying man, in a hospital turn their back on him. But I never, never saw an Australian die on his own, I have seen them comforted, cuddled and nurtured, but I have never seen an Australian die on his own.
- 34:30 That was an example that these fellows just could not stand to see this kid being beaten, pulled him up on his feet. We worked up and down that road in the monsoon for weeks as fast as we would we would repair a section of course the rain would wash it out.
- 35:00 We developed cholera, we were the first camp, because we didn't live in camps we virtually slept on the side of the road. We had no camp after we left Konkuita because we were nomadic, working up and down the road, often we just our only protection was a banana leaf, we would sleep under a couple of banana leaves.
- 35:30 At night even though it was in the tropics and it was raining, it got bitterly cold you had no clothes, and we would lay two or three huddled together for a bit of warmth.

What were you wearing at this point in time?

Most fellows had a pair of shorts, I personally still had a pair of boots, I had

- 36:00 a pair of shorts and I had a hat and that was about all I had at that time. And most were in much the same condition I was lucky that my boots held together for some reason, I had a pair of socks and I had a pair of shorts. I was fair skinned as you can see and I was
- 36:30 sunburnt all the whole time. I had a blister in my breast bone there that never healed as soon it would burst it would come up again and I was constantly in blisters because I am so fair skinned. But other fellows went as black as anything. In some ways it protected them

37:00 What were you eating at this point in time?

Rice, that was about all. What we could scrounge, some onions, some bamboo shoots and one

memorable occasion we had smoked sting ray I remember. But we would get a cup of rice and we were skin and bone, there is no shadow of doubt about that and when

37:30 cholera struck it just went 'bang!', like that - a man would be alive tonight and dead in the morning. It was as quick as that. And that once again, that highlighted yet another example of the Australian spirit, that our doctor who was indefatigable, he was so dedicated

38:00 that he contacted TB [tuberculosis] on the line and yet he still worked and nursed and nurtured these fellows. He established a cholera camp, knowing the penalty imposed on anybody in contact with cholera patients, when he called volunteers to nurse in the cholera camp which was just on a hill above

38:30 any number of fellows volunteered. Even people the broken nose fellow with whom I joined who was always regarded as a no hoper, he had cholera and when he got out of his bed he volunteered to stay there. We developed, in the end, we developed to defeat, combat cholera

39:00 with salt water. And I have personally assisted in administering salt water with cholera.

How did you go about that?

How did we go about it? Cut his ankle and expose a vein. Roy Mills dismantled his stethoscope, and he had fashioned a

39:30 needle made out of bamboo and he had a funnel made out of bamboo and he would open the vein and shove this bamboo needle in and pour salt water into the funnel. People say it's not right, but I saw a man nearly dead lying in a clearing

40:00 and he was given this salt water treatment and he sat up in my presence. In that time he sat up and that was the start of, saline solution was the start. People say, "Oh no you couldn't do it, oh no," but it did, I saw it. And I know that Roy Mills defeated cholera.

40:30 He, a characteristic -

We are just at the end of the tape right there.

Tape 5

00:30 **Lets begin from that point in time when you were sort of in camp and were in the process of working as a POW [Prisoner of War]?**

By this stage we had moved right up to the river, which separated the Nikki camps from ours. It was in Nikki and a few camps

01:00 further north towards the Pagoda Pass that most of the dropouts if I can call them that, had eventually were gathered. If a man dropped out he was not allowed to rejoin and he had to go on past us and finished up in either Nikki or Thanbyuzazat camp, I think was the name of the other camp. There were dozens and dozens of camps along this railway

01:30 line, and there thousands of people working there. And at this stage I might tell you, because we were so hungry, on our maintenance job we had a lot of tools we needed to use on our constructions job so the Japs gave us yaks

02:00 with high-wheeled carts in which to load our tools. Well yaks well they are the next stop to beef aren't they? We developed a technique of isolating a yak now and then, we'd all form a circle and someone who knew what he was doing, would hit it on the head

02:30 and immediately butcher it, immediately, and before what it was we each had a portion of yak boiled up and we ate it. I might tell you that sometimes we passed it out almost as quickly as we ate it because it was still trembling, and we ate and we got into the habit of this didn't we. We went up to a camp and stayed there for a week or so.

03:00 I might say that the engineer in charge of the whole of the section of mine was a gentleman called Colonel Banno, who was a gentleman. You see his type every type in the news as Japanese business men. He was a farmer actually, but he was a gentleman, polite

03:30 old gentleman. He wore long shorts, he wore socks with suspenders, and a pith helmet and he was invariably polite and he ordered us to go down the road to repair a washout. We knew what was what so as soon as we got the order

04:00 we all trooped off down the road as fast as we could go and I'm in the rear guard when I hear, "Shoko, officer, shoko, stop!" And I said to my men, "Keep going, keep going," and down we went and these Japs they rushed up, "Stop! Stop!" and I said, "No worku,"

- 04:30 and this was our conversation the way we conversed, and he rushed up and he pushed his rifle into me and put a bullet in and he said, "Campo!" and I said, "Oh campo, oh all right," so we turned back and marched back to where we left but I was so mad. There were all the yak carts loaded up with tools and not a yak left in sight, we had eaten them all.
- 05:00 Well Muriana, well he was furious and he called all the officers out and he lined us up, and he called the lieutenant and he pulled his sword and the lieutenant pulled his out and said, "Who's responsible for this?" Or words to that affect, and our CO said, "Well, all of us I suppose," And he said, "Right!" And the lieutenant and this is true, the lieutenant
- 05:30 walked to one end and Muriana walked to this other end and my neck stretched to about six inches and I thought, "Well here we go," And this very minute this absolute minute Colonial Banno, "Oh Muriana San, Muriana San where are the men?" and Muriana replied, and Banno said, "All men down to work,"
- 06:00 and we of course were dismissed to take our men down to the job. We were that close to being beheaded. And Muriana said, "Oh I will get you, I'll get you," but he never ever did. I saw him administer some terrible beatings. You remember Ben Barnett the Australian test wicket keeper
- 06:30 at the time? Barnett wasn't in our battalion, but we picked him up some way, he was in the signals battalion and he went to school with our CO and so they were friendly. He was a captain and he became acting adjutant of our battalion, because he was an administrative
- 07:00 officer and I saw Muriana hit him one day and he rolled oh twenty yards I suppose, hit him so ferociously with a pick handle. And after the war Barnett job he got a job with Aspro people as their representative in Singapore.
- 07:30 And Muriana had been found guilty of brutality and had been sentenced to ten years' gaol. Barnett went to the gaol, and took presents to him, and opened communication between Muriana and his family in Japan. To us that seemed to be
- 08:00 unimaginable, but it shows the spirit of some people; the ability to forgive. He regularly - whilst he was representing this firm in Singapore, he regularly visited this animal. I would have taken an extra lock and made sure he couldn't open the door but that's what Barnett did. You learn
- 08:30 there is no limit to the capabilities of people in little things like that.

Can you tell me a little bit about the communication between the Japanese and the English? Were there some that were quite fluent? Others that made themselves?

We leaned to pick up pidgin Japanese, pidgin Malay it was quite surprising

- 09:00 that we were always able to communicate, and it didn't always work of course. The Japanese I picked up for instance was colloquial Japanese the English that they picked up was probably much the same. As an officer who worked all the time with troops whose responsibility was when
- 09:30 we got out to the job, to approach the Jap, "What's on today and what do we have to do?" he could explain with gestures and the odd word, and I must say I could generally understand what my instructions were.

Could you give me an example how that interaction might go?

Well you put 'u' on the end of every word for instance, worku and so on.

- 10:00 We would walk over the job and in more congenial circumstances for instance, a couple of years later when I was working on the Changi Aerodrome, I never had trouble with Japanese understanding what I had to do. Mind you after three and half years we all got a smattering of Japanese because it was constantly
- 10:30 spoken to us all the time, and they on the other hand, those who were working with English speaking people they also got a few words as well. And whilst there were stormy sessions and there were beltings because of misunderstandings on occasions, generally I would say that we
- 11:00 did understand. It was only when people like Muriana who would not try and understand, who would create situations where there would be a shouting match and of course we never, ever, ever won shouting matches. Because it invariably finished up the same way. It didn't pay you to lose your temper, really, because you had to
- 11:30 negotiate and the as I say, the colloquialisms were the things that got us through. Well it went on for three and half years, as I say, and working among them all the time you just had to, if you hear German prisoners of war
- 12:00 talking the same thing largely happened there, they picked up slang terms and slang expressions and so on enough to get them through too. He, that monster would not negotiate at all. And so we repaired the bridge but another feature of our time there was
- 12:30 that the Japs were terrified of cholera, terrified. And they insisted, or perhaps because of the conditions

the muddy conditions, they insisted on us cremating all of our dead and guess who got the job again? I had as a few officers did I

13:00 had a cremation party which entailed us carrying out the bodies to a clearing, we almost had a fire going all the time and when I talk of fire it would occupy the whole of this room because

And enormous pyre really?

Yeah and the fact that it was almost constantly raining. We would carry a body out

13:30 if Roy Mills our doctor couldn't do it, we had a couple of other ranks we had one in particular was a medical orderly who must have come with Mills when he came to us, who was an Anglican Minister and he revealed himself as a Minister and

14:00 so we used him for a simple burial service. That's yet again that every Australian that I knew had a burial service of some sort, even I have conducted a few myself. Simplest words and no one would presume a minister's role but in the simple terms of cremating a body or something like that

14:30 every man had some recognition. Cremating a body is something that especially a comrade that you never, never forget. I have seen some terrible emotion situations where men have cremated their dearest friend, the friend

15:00 who kept them alive. We kept the ashes, we made bamboo casks and we kept the ashes in casks. We kept the ashes and we had a great number of them stored and we had an enormous flood and it took the lot of them, that was one of the, but we also meticulously kept records, we kept

15:30 personal belongings unless something could be utilised for the good of the rest, the personal belongings were kept. That's another thing to our credit I think, in our battalion the men's history, personality is recorded.

16:00 We have the most immaculate records of every man's sickness, where he died and where he was buried and where he is buried today, a lot of the bodies, the ashes they are all recorded in Kanchanaburi, and in fifty years we have never faulted in answering a question on the history or a member in our battalion because of our records.

16:30 **Can you tell me about how you recorded this information especially in the difficult conditions?**

On sheets of paper, scraps of paper. One or two had diaries but the diaries became water logged of course, but our records, Roy Mills kept I have got a book and he has the medical records of everyone in that camp.

17:00 As I say the records are unchallenged in fifty years. Actually we have shown the book to the people up in Canberra and they said, "Oh we must have that," but we won't surrender it until there is none of us left. We think we looked after each other there.

17:30 One of the most notable memories of mine, I have told this to one or two people, and I have told this to the son of the sergeant involved. We had a sergeant who came to me and he was virtually old enough to be my father and he came to me and said, "My wife gave me a watch when we were married and I have been carrying it," and he said,

18:00 "Do you think I should sell it for something to eat?" And I said, "Well, Leo, you have just got to decide whether you want her to get your watch or you back at the end of the war," and he sold the watch. There was means of selling some things on the line, there were traders who infiltrated the camps in places

18:30 he sold his watch but it didn't, he bought some food. But it didn't do him much good, and I remember, bearing in mind that he was a sergeant who are always suppose to be the tyrant of the army. I remember coming back into camp one day after working and three

19:00 of Sergeants Styles's men were sitting on the ground and they had cuddled him, they were nursing him and they were trying to persuade him to eat and they said, "Come on, sarge, eat this, come on Leo," they were trying to spoon some of this rice gruel into his mouth and he just wouldn't take it. So one of them

19:30 put a spoon full of rice in his mouth and chewed it and he leaned over and spat it into his mouth like a mother bird, and he did that forcing the food down Leo's throat. It didn't do him any good. He died whilst they were doing it and those three men cried. They were rough tough men, one was a miner from Wonthaggi who died just a year or so ago

20:00 and these men these tough men with a sergeant who no one is suppose to like, they wept as they cuddled him. That's what life is about, that is what Australians were like there. They were terrific they really were. We know his son well now, and he is a grandfather now,

20:30 and I've told him that story and it is something that he cherishes it because he met the fellow who spat the food into his father's mouth and you can't do more than that, really can you? And so that life in that

time was as tough as life can be. We had little or

21:00 no food and our medical resources were down to nothing, but just the same the scourge of the railway line as I was to learn later, was ulcers. I was in a camp where dozens of men had lost their legs through amputation and yet in nine months Roy Mills

21:30 never lost a limb in his camp. Well we had no surgery anyway, but in nine months he never lost a limb.

How did he go about preventing the ulcers or healing the ulcers?

Spoon, a spoon, you hold, Joyce has got two ulcers now and I tell the doctor every now and again, "I will bring my spoon in and your can scrape

22:00 it out." Some hard-hearted fellows, and you've gotta be hard-hearted who had a spoon and sharpened it up and they scraped, scraped it out that brown flesh and put a green leaf over it.

What sort of leaf?

Oh any sort of leaf with chlorophyll in it, and that was it. But he never lost a limb and that's something that no other camp can boast about.

22:30 And so about the, once again I suppose around about August 1943 the Japs realised that our camp was in a situation of desperation, and Muriana agreed that the sickest should be sent down river

23:00 and I was selected to go with these troops. I had four disabilities: I had dengue fever, and I had dysentery and I had what we used to call,

23:30 what do they call it today? I will think of it in a minute. And I had an ulcer on my ankle. So I was despatched with another junior officer down the river in flood, in a barge being towed by a motorboat.

24:00 We went down the river sideways in front of the motorboat that's how fast the river was flowing and we got to a camp called Chungkai which was run by the British. It was run by the British sergeant majors. The officers never had anything to do with the troops at all

24:30 they just never were aware of them - a typical British officer attitude - and they accommodated us at the camp there had paths marked out with white painted rocks to define the paths and it was a real sergeant major's camp. And I should have woken up,

25:00 I was put in a hut, two officers were sleeping side by side and when I arrived they separated and they put me in the middle of it, and they conversed across me in French all the time which I thought was fairly typical of English officers. One night there was a great raid and the Japs came down

25:30 and we were in bamboo huts and there was a bamboo stay at the foot of my bed, and the Japs with a knife prised the thing open and there was a radio there and that's why these two officers had put me in front of the post so they could claim it was not theirs.

26:00 Fortunately for me, I was able to prove that I had just arrived there, but they found the fellow who owned it and they kicked him to death right in front of us so they were looking for it.

Was it one of those two officers?

No it wasn't but they knew it was there and they didn't want responsibility for it - they were a pair of heroes the two of them. But that camp

26:30 there was a few significant things there was a Canadian surgeon there who perfected blood transfusions. This was the camp where there were dozens of fellows hopping around with one leg, dozens. He walked, I was sitting in this hut one day and he

27:00 said, "What's your blood group?" and I said, "O4." "Righto," he said, "I want you." I said, "What's up?" and he said, "I want your blood," and I said, "I've got dengue fever," and he said, "That doesn't matter," and he laid me down along side a fellow whose leg he was going to take off and took my blood directly to him, stirred it

27:30 as it went and poked a needle into this fellow along side me and as my blood was going from me to the patient he sawed his leg off. He was doing that, he claimed, I have got a letter from him, his name was Markovitch, he claimed he had performed thirteen hundred blood transfusions

28:00 and he must have amputated dozens of legs, dozens. He was one of the few working officers in that camp. Later on I believe Weary Dunlop came down to that camp but he was not there when I was there in 1943.

Can you explain a bit more to me about that process how it worked how he stirred it?

28:30 Well he found that if put the blood directly in from one individual to another it would clot and this stirring kept the blood active apparently, and it was only from here to there distance apart. He and an orderly had perfected some way

29:00 of stirring this blood and it went whilst he was operating he was able to supplement the fellow's loss of blood.

And did he add anything to the blood?

No he had nothing to add to it.

Can you describe what he was using?

He had a needle he took it out he had a steel needle that he put in there.

Tubes?

29:30 And the tube, and so it went in and he must have, he took my blood, O4 was an unusual group in those days. I don't know what they would do now, but he was keen for an odd blood like that. A class blood would have been common, and he would, as I said he claimed that he had done thirteen hundred blood

30:00 transfusions.

It must have very hard to be very close to an amputation?

Well the worst part of it was there was a fella, a butcher at the end of the bed and he said, "Oh come on, doc, I want the saw back because I've got to cut up some meat for lunch." That was it.

Was that a joke?

No that was serious yes. They had ample food in this camp, ample.

30:30 One of our problems was that F Force was never released from Malayan command it was always retained under Malayan command, obviously they had expectations of using us later on. Consequently we were not supplied with food on a regular basis,

31:00 because there was no organisation in the Jap hierarchy to keep us supplied. We found that in camps run by the Thailand command they, well I think in Weary's book he complains if he ever less than three thousand eggs a day for his camp. Well we never saw an egg, we never saw meat, we never saw anything

31:30 but rice and when we got to Chungkai it was revelation to see the way these people were living.

Do you know why you were sent there?

I think it was the first hospital sight that we came across and we just landed there. The rest of the party,

32:00 the very sickest of our group were admitted to this hospital, the rest of the party went down to Kanchun, or as we called it Khanbury called today Kanchanaburi and I was left behind to look after these sick people. I had some money and I was able to buy, of all things

32:30 limes, that was the only thing I could buy. And I, every day I used to walk through these huge huts and most a good number of them had ulcers, and the floor in the ulcer hut literally ran with pus from these terrible injuries. The leg would be open from there to there and you could see the

33:00 bone green in that distance, and I would walk through this hut and there would be a cry, "Aussie officer!" and I would walk across and there would be an isolated Australian whom I didn't know from a different party. All they would want to do was talk to someone, an Aussie, and I had few limes and I could give them a lime to suck and that was their only comfort.

33:30 My responsibility amongst other things was to bury the dead there, and on my best day there or my worst day whichever way you like, I buried eleven in one day there and,

There was no imperative at this time for cremation?

No this was in a civilized part of the line. These were all buried, there was a burial party digging all the time.

34:00 Each of those had a burial service and I didn't know them from a bull's foot really, and eventually they woke up that I in this camp that I was a member of F Force and no one wanted F Force. So they bundled me out and I went from Chungkai to Khanbury on a train

34:30 on my own because the rest of the party had all gone and those who stayed in Chungkai had largely died anyway, and so I was dispatched out of that camp down on the train.

Why the prejudice against F Force?

Because it was Malayan command they just didn't want anything to do with it.

35:00 So F Force gradually started gathering down in Khanbury and the sickest of other camps also came down there. I got down there I suppose it would be November by the time I got down there

- 35:30 and I was immediately given a job again, there must have been some magnet that attracted them to me for jobs. I was given charge of a hundred bed ward and my responsibility was to see that they were fed and there was adequate food, there wasn't a great amount of food but adequate amount of food there.
- 36:00 And each morning to go down the ward to remove the dead so that we could get more people into, when I say bed they were simply a bamboo slab on which people got two feet or something like that and they were cheek by jowl even though they might have all sorts of contagious illnesses, they just lay there and it was the doctors'
- 36:30 duty and there were plenty of doctors there by this time. My doctor had a brother who was a priest as well, two brothers, one was a doctor and one was a priest on the line together. And this doctor in the camp, he was at was up on the line where they had a lot of ulcerated legs
- 37:00 his first thirty operations resulted in death so you can imagine his morale. He had picked up when he was working with me he would come into the ward first thing in the morning and we would go down one side and up the other, and he would look at the ulcer patients, he would advise
- 37:30 on treatment and it was my responsibility to get, there were trained orderlies who attended to these things the man with the spoon for instance. We would go down and he would say, "Operation for you," and I would take a note of that and he generally in a morning he might pick out four people for surgery or something like that but not necessarily
- 38:00 amputations but sometimes they could do some surgery to remove proud flesh. On this particular morning after he had gone I went checking with these fellows who had to go to theatre, which was just an area with mosquito netting over it, by the way, nothing flash. And there was a wonderful surgeon named
- 38:30 Kevin Fagan a major, a wonderful man, an absolutely wonderful man he performed dozens of operations. One day he performed forty-four various operations I a day, you could imagine how taxing that would be. I was walking down the ward and I
- 39:00 saw a fellow sitting up nursing a huge ulcer and I said to him, "We didn't see you when we came through this morning," and he said, "Yes, I know," I said, "Where were you?" I was really mad and he said, "Oh I hid," and I said, "You know you are supposed to go on medical report," and he said, "I know but I hid."
- 39:30 I stomped out of the hut and went and got the doctor and said, "Come and have a look," and he came back and he went down and looked at this fellow and the doctor said straight away, "You've got to have that leg off," and the fellow said, "I'm not going to," and the doctor said, "If you don't have the leg amputated you will die," and
- 40:00 the fellow said, "Righto, I'll die." And he had a bit of a rag for a blanket and he bent down and pulled the blanket over his head and he lay down and by the evening he was dead. Willed himself to death and he was another minister of religion. He was a private soldier but he was a minister, he was one of the few men I saw who
- 40:30 literally willed himself to death. I almost, and there was another case I remember up the line when we had a man we turned him over and we saw his backbone and someone stupidly said, "Oh I can see your backbone, Bazza," and the fellow said, "Oh that's it," and he willed himself to death, but they were the only two cases I ever
- 41:00 saw where a man deliberately willed himself to die, and that fellow did.

Tape 6

- 00:30 The railway line, I think I should mention the native workers who were there. If we had a bad time they had a shocking time they had no organisation, no one to lead them, no one to help them, and they died in the tens of thousands and I have seen camps
- 01:00 where the Japs have made them dig a big hole before they vacated the camp and they simply pushed all their dead in there and then the Japs would go around and push in the dying ones as well and just leave a great heap of these Tamils, Tamils in particular I suppose. It is rather ironic that today the Tamil is an aggressive race,
- 01:30 in our day they were the most down trodden, despised lot. No one had any time for them, no one would turn a hand for them and I can remember down in Khanbury when some of them found their way down the line, there was a train line running along side the camp and often you would see Tamils waiting on the side of the line waiting
- 02:00 for the train and as it came they would just stand in front of it they were that down in life that they would wait to be run over by the train. The vultures learned what they would do and they would line up in the trees waiting for the train because they knew there was going to be a feed there. That's the most

miserable example of mankind that I have seen,

02:30 to see those people and I suppose now I feel sorry for them but I suppose because of our own condition, our own position, we never gave them a thought, but they were without doubt the most downtrodden of the lot of us, really.

Were they singled out by the Japanese more?

03:00 In many cases they were encouraged to go up there they were promised work and pay but most cases they were conscripted. They were the lowest labour force in Singapore and Malaya and they were just rounded up in their tens of thousands really, and it would be safe to say that a hundred thousand of them must have died there because there was just no life there for them at all.

03:30 And no records of course of them?

No records. Who knows who their employers were in peacetime now? They were just part of the casual work force in Singapore. It has got to be born in mind that Singapore and Malaya were real colonies then, quite strongly ruled by the English

04:00 and what Dutch people were there, and two lives, the lives led by the native people and the people who were in charge of them were so different there was no social contact at all.

Did you ever see an Allied prisoner of war get so desperate that they would kill themselves or hear of that?

No. Yes I know of one, that's all.

04:30 But as I said before the desire to die, was not just not part of our psyche at all. Most people were encouraged and urged to live, certainly giving up was not a common thing at all.

05:00 No I can't remember anyone committing suicide. I have heard a few rumours who might have, but to my knowledge I don't know anyone, which is another credit to mankind generally I suppose because as I said we were living in the very depths of adversity,

05:30 and there was still that desire to keep going. Because the other fella did I suppose, and that was another reason.

How was that morale maintained?

Well I must say that I don't think the morale ever got

06:00 to the stage, in the people with the people whom I lived and worked I would say it never got to the stage of desperation. The feeling always was, "We'll get back to Changi." Not 'we'll get home' - 'we'll get back to Changi one day'. If you picture a camp of people dejected and

06:30 desperate it's the wrong, they were sick and they were slow moving, they were thin, and they were probably disgruntled, but no I would say they always thought of getting away. I would say that's a fair comment. I think its

07:00 exemplified by the fact as a group, prisoners of war have stuck together for sixty years, it has perhaps been one of the strongest ex-service movements. Even today you can still find someone new among the prisoners of war and I must say the affinity is not always welcome but

07:30 its still there. When we were living in Khanbury before we came home, came home, there I go you see, there was a pretty good community spirit in the camp. One I particularly remember there was a provo [Provosts - Military Police] captain named Captain Menz,

08:00 a big fellow from Adelaide, policeman, and he during the march up the line for instance he was in a camp where a fellow was cooking a meal and he had a bucket of hot water and he went to lift this hot water off the fire and he slipped and he poured the lot over himself.

08:30 And the Japs ordered them to move from this camp and Menz carried that fellow in his arms because he couldn't walk and he couldn't lie down he carried him in his arms all night through mud. Menz had dropped out because he had a bad knee but never the less he carried this man all night twenty kilometres in his arms

09:00 and they tell me they cried for the last ten miles together as they finished the march. When we came down I came to Khanbury he was down there and he had found a well, and the only water supply for this camp was a well and he used to stand at this well with kerosene tins on a rope and he'd haul water up from this well

09:30 all day. This was his service, and you know most people were weak and sick and yet he did that day after day, good fella. He was a friend of ours for years after the war until he died, he used to come over and visit us and he was a provo which was one of the despised units in any army.

10:00 Yet everyone admired this fellow. So that's an example of the community attitude there. I have

mentioned the doctors of course they repaired so many people by the time we got back to Khanbury.

I was wondering about the situation with surgery with those doctors.

10:30 **Did they have an assistant or someone or a nurse in a role like that?**

Well they had all sorts the anaesthetist for instance, his simple task was to grasp the fellows' hair and bang it on the table that was as much anaesthetic as a lot of them got. But for an amputation they would give a fellow an anaesthetic. Some Dutch doctors for instance knew of a

11:00 plant that provided an anaesthetic which some doctors utilised. In Khanbury there was sufficient anaesthetic for amputations and there were a lot of amputations there. It was there that I saw Kevin Fagan perform

11:30 his first skin transplant. He had a fellow with an ulcer and he said he was going to try a skin, and I might say when I first started on this job I used to go in with the fellow carrying the patient up and we would stand in the surgery and when I first went up I used to stand in the corner and sort of look over my eye at it, and in the end we would all be around Kevin and he would have to say

12:00 get out of the way so he could work on the man. He sliced the skin of the fella's backside put it over the ulcer and put a green leaf over it and wrapped it up with a bit of bandage, a bit of rag actually. And in a fortnight he took it off and there it was. And I saw him about just before he died

12:30 about five years ago up at a memorial service up in Canberra and I reminded him of this and I said, "One of the ironies of the incident was the man you did perform the task on was not liked by anyone he was inclined to be a bit of a thief and you know no one had much time for him," and Kevin said,

13:00 "He was a patient," and that summed it all up, it didn't matter what he was like and he remembered that first graft as I did.

Did the experience of being a POW level out like and dislikes?

Level out? Yes that is probably a good way of putting it. I suppose by the time we had finished on the line

13:30 although we were prisoners of war we more or less regarded ourselves as a unit, as a group and the essence of the whole thing was to get back, and to bring people back. And certainly in Khanbury the Japs left us alone.

14:00 I can't remember any roll calls even. They left us alone and they left the people who were in charge who were responsible to get some sort of order back both physically and mentally into these people.

They left discipline and control within the ranks?

Yes indeed. This was the very essence of all our incarceration, the

14:30 officers expected to run the administration and the discipline and the order of the troops. And that's as I said earlier that probably was our salvation even as we reassembled as we did in Khanbury in November, that we quickly became absorbed

15:00 into our respective units so that by the time we were ready to come back down south we were a unit.

Was there much need for discipline or charges?

Oh absolutely, yes. Well I think the natives were an example of that were there was no discipline and no order there was no one to help.

15:30 I think the discipline at times it was hard, I'd say that our CO was perhaps the most disliked person on the line and it took troops, the ordinary soldier, years to realise just what Colonel Pond had done. And it was

16:00 really and truly ten or fifteen years before the odd soldier would come up to him and say, "I realise now what you did on the line." They thought it was stand over tactics, the discipline he insisted on, he insisted on his officers and his NCOs enforcing discipline

16:30 too and the discipline was hygiene, morale, everyone doing their bit there was no room for anyone who was trying to shirk his responsibility and shirking your responsibility meant doing your share camp site tasks that might have to be done.

17:00 Everyone had to do it and that's what remained, that's what created our sense of discipline, our sense of battalion order.

What sort of punishments were you able to enforce?

Well that's was a contentious thing. On the line I don't think we had any sort of punishment because you couldn't administer punishment.

- 17:30 I know of cases where officers ordered six cuts of the stick and I know a couple of people who carried out that punishment but in my experience and my time there was no certainly no corporal punishment at all. In
- 18:00 better times when things weren't as hard as they were on the line, the CO fined some people, fined them their army pay, not their Japanese pay. The Japanese used to give us token money, they weren't fined the Japanese pay but they were fined a fiver in their pay book pay.
- 18:30 I don't know if those fines were ever enforced when we came home. Certainly one of the bones of contention was our CO in particular because of the casualties we suffered, promoted men as they proved suitable during our incarceration into NCO positions, with the expectation that the army would honour them when we came home.
- 19:00 That sergeant major I mentioned for instance, who was a sergeant, a substantive rank for two years he acted as the regimental sergeant major and when he came home, the army refused to pay him. There were perhaps two or three dozen, I have a list of their names still here, two or three dozen who were just not paid for the work they did. They jolly well worked hard,
- 19:30 if a corporal had a difficult task as an officer inasmuch as he would be given a party to take to work and he would be responsible to the Jap for that work and if they were any trouble he was the one who got into trouble and I think it was really tough that these fellows, who knew what they were in for when they accepted this promotion
- 20:00 the promotion was not honoured even though they were still referred to as corporal or sergeant whoever it might be within our ranks their position was never acknowledged.

As yet you still considered yourself part of the army, the whole system?

Oh absolutely, and the discipline and I think if you talk to people who were on the line

- 20:30 you will find that that discipline was maintained particularly in Australian camps particularly. And that's a funny thing because we were suppose to be the undisciplined lot and yet we were the ones who maintained strong discipline.

What were the other differences between the other nationalities as prisoners of war?

The main difference was Australians were innovative,

- 21:00 they could always find something to make a cup of tea, they could always find a bit of fire wood, they would always find a bit of shelter. The only thing that Australians were actually mugs at was actually carrying out work the Japs would say, "Now that's got to be done," and the Australians would say, "Righto," and they would get stuck into it and
- 21:30 they do it in a short time. The English would look at it and think, "Well, this will last us a week," and they would work with that in mind. And the consequence of that was the Japs would say, "Oh you finished that in five hours, well we can't waste daylight we had better give you a bit more tomorrow," and it took us a while to wake up to the fact that we should be spinning the labour out.
- 22:00 The Japs had a saying, "One elephant, ten Australians, twenty Englishmen, to do a job." and that summed it up pretty well. If the elephant saw the job shifting logs out of the jungle he didn't think he could manage it nothing could persuade him to try he'd just turn his back and walk away, the Australians would say, "Oh righto, all right," and they would grizzle like mad
- 22:30 and would struggle up and stagger out of the jungle with a log on their shoulders and the English would say, "Oh we have got to have more men than this," and they would get a crowd of twenty men under the same log.

English troops complained that you were making expectations larger?

Well no we worked in different area generally, I don't think there was that sort of conflict particularly on the line

- 23:00 I don't think so no. But we our battalion never encountered an Englishman on the line at all because as I said we were isolated, some camps further up there was some conflict between English and Australians and there always was of course, not necessarily bitter but it was conflict.
- 23:30 Ironically some of the best officers or the better officers on the top part of the line were English. The leader of the English troops further up from us was an excellent officer and everyone admitted and admired him for it. But we had
- 24:00 most good leaders, we had a disaster of a leader who shall remain nameless but he was not a leader and he should not have been a leader of our troops on the line. He was the leader of the whole of the Australian force there but he never coped at all.

What would he do that was wrong or - ?

He just wouldn't face up to his responsibilities

- 24:30 I'm one of the few officers that actually ticked him off and got away with it I suppose I can tell this story of my clobber, whose photo is there, and I owned a bucket it was a kerosene tin. The most valuable possession you could have on the line because you could always get a wash with a bucket of water.
- 25:00 And of course we used to go to bed with it and one morning this officer's batman appeared and walked up and took the bucket and I said, "Hey, hey where are you going?" and took it off him and he said, "I was sent down to get it," and I said, "Well you are not having it," and I shoved him away. And I had a working party and I had
- 25:30 them march off and this senior officer came and tackled me and he said, he was living with us at the time in this camp and he said, "Don't you realise that I am the commander of three thousand five hundred men and what I need I must have?" and I said, "Three thousand five hundred men sir? You can't control nineteen officers in this camp.
- 26:00 Party attention, right turn, quick march," and out we went and I got away with it. And the irony was when I came home was the war I joined the staff training corps and he was a brigadier by this time and he was the commander of the corps and we were away at camp down at
- 26:30 Mornington and I was one of the junior officers in this camp. And I was confronted with giving an appreciation in a mock battle situation and I walked out and thought, "God I don't know where to start here." And Cappy walked up and he put his arm over my shoulder in front of all these troops and said, "Nankervis and I have been through a lot together," and I thought, "Oh God,"
- 27:00 So but he just, he was a brilliant staff officer but wasn't suited to command men, and there were officers like that and they all had to know their correct place of course.

What were good qualities of a good POW officer as opposed to a field officer?

Beginning and ending compassion for the men. The Japs generally didn't expect officers

- 27:30 to do physical manual work but they expected them to lead the men on the job. It wasn't a matter of just marching men out, sitting down and watching them work, I don't say you stood over them but you helped them. Personally I physically worked when it was necessary pushing a rail into position or
- 28:00 something like that. I always was the person to whom the Jap supervisor spoke and it was my responsibility to see that the orders were passed on correctly. Towards my time at the end of the line the Japs insisted on an officer working party and it didn't last very long, for some reason or other it just wasn't satisfactory.

28:30 Was that a working party made of only of officers?

Yes only officers. After F Force there were a couple of working parties that were compete officers parties and I don't know anyone who was on one but for some reason or other they don't seem to have been very successful or lasted that long. Generally the welfare of the men was the prime responsibility.

- 29:00 And as I said our CO certainly on the line he insisted that his officers saw his men got the best that was available in whatever it was, whether it was food, accommodation, working conditions, what ever and that was our job.

Would you have to defend men from the Japanese?

Oh undoubtedly, that's how, the more you intervened the more you got belted yourself.

- 29:30 Certainly if I saw a man of mine being harangued or being assaulted it was my responsibility to go and intervene and I did that all the time. Not being heroic that was just my job that was it. And sometimes through a bit of negotiation you could cool the situation.

Because you had established communication with the Japanese?

- 30:00 Yes and the fellow might not have understood what the Jap wanted. Mind you, on the line it was more difficult because of the speed, hurry, hurry all the time but generally that was my job.

You mentioned before that the skin graft recipient was a bit of a blighter, a bit of thief. Was there much of that on the line?

No not much and it was very, very severely frowned on.

- 30:30 I can almost remember the incidents. I remember, well I will tell this story: there was one fellow and there always is in a group there is always someone who's got an edge, the few dollars in his pocket you know you strike it in life,
- 31:00 who knows someone who can get something and dodge a job and we had one fellow like this and he died. When he died and when he died his wallet was missing, as I said before possessions were sacredly guarded and any personal possession were kept in the event of
- 31:30 us being able to pass them on, and his wallet was missing and I was cremations officer. As we carried

this fellow out the men bitterly argued between themselves who pinched the wallet, who didn't pinch the wallet they argued and they were a disgruntled lot and we got out there and we got the fire going and we put this fellow on the fire and bodies move when heat is applied,

32:00 and it was miserably wet and we were all standing there next to this huge fire in a circle and this body sat up and raised an arm pointed to a man and he just screamed, he screamed and went right out of his mind straight out straight away. The effect on the men

32:30 was electrifying and they thought that Snowy had pointed out his thief of course. And this is what this poor fellow thought, well we collected the ashes and went home and when we got home we found that someone had found the wallet, it had fallen down the slats between the bamboo and it was on the ground. And this fellow died in three days, he just went completely out of his mind and that's

33:00 theft. Now I have another incident when I was in Khanbury, you never stole from particularly from a dying person. There was this English fellow in my hut and he stole this fellow's bit of tobacco, and it was always terrible stuff anyway and he stole it.

33:30 Everyone ignored this fellow, he was found to have stolen it, and I mentioned before that everyone turned their backs on him and he died that night and no one turned to look at him just because he stole from someone. It was an unforgivable offence if you were caught because of the implications of course.

34:00 Mind you stealing from the Japs was encouraged you know most enthusiastically. If you could get away with it.

What could you get from the Japanese?

Bit of food that was about all, that much else.

And the money they gave you was that useful in any way?

We were never paid on the line, because we personally we never say any

34:30 regular traders at all. There were some black market traders who were at the camps, but some of the lower camps, they had regular trading and they were able to buy regular supplies that came up the river but we never generally were able to buy food in bulk to supplement our battalion ration

35:00 Did any of you use money in the form of control?

When we were in more civilised areas officers were paid better than the men were, but once again the Australian force, generally the officers, well, they weren't asked to contribute because they never got the money .

35:30 A deduction was made from our pay, our paper pay into a battalion fund that fed the whole battalion, troops were paid and as I say there was a scale, troops, NCOs and officers.

Did the Japanese offer an incentive in a monetary sense or disincentives?

Yes, not on the line at all absolutely

36:00 no incentive at all. The only incentive was the golf club or the pickaxe. On the aerodrome if we were going to come down to that yes. I can tell a good story about that have I got a minute have I?

You have got five.

I was working officer on the drome and the biggest mortal sin was to hit a Japanese

36:30 if you hit a Japanese you could bet that the Kempetei, the military police, would come out and you'd be lucky to escape death. We were out on the drome one morning and I looked across and there was a working party in the charge of a sergeant who obviously hadn't been out before and he was having trouble and his Jap was hitting him because he couldn't understand what he was doing, so I walked across

37:00 to see if I could straighten it up, and getting the thing in order and this Jap said something to the Sergeant and he couldn't understand it and he got stuck into the Sergeant again and I said, "Don't do that," and grabbed the stick he had, and next minute we were wrestling and I hit him and he went down on the ground. I looked around and two or three or men came over with their chunkles and they were standing

37:30 around me and the Jap looked at me and my Jap had come over too, and my Jap never said a word and we restored order and I went back to my party and all day we were looking out for the Kempetei and they never came, and on this job the Japs used to pay what they considered the best working party ten cents all men.

38:00 And we never ever got it because my party number of party number ten, number one is always number one to the Japs and number ten is always number ten, and they used to think my party was number ten because we were the worst in camp you see so we never got it. Anyway knock off time came and my sergeant said,

- 38:30 "Looks like you got away with it boss." We got to the assembly point and we were just about to head for home and the call came, "Number ten party commander," and I gave my sergeant my haversack and I took my teeth out, you never kept your teeth in your mouth when you were going to get a belting, went down and there was this Jap outside the officers' tent and he is looking at me and growling away and I thought, "I'm in for it now,"
- 39:00 and at last this Jap commander bounded out of his tent and said, "Number ten party commander?" and I said, "Hai," and he said, "Number ten party, number one ten cents all men." And the poor Jap's face, the Jap I had hit, his face just fell like that, because he knew that if I wasn't going to get a belting he was. So obviously my Jap corporal
- 39:30 must have said, "The silly arse, he started the thing, he should have done better." He was the one who was going to get the belting.

You were actually defended by your Japanese commander?

My Jap commander had obviously told him that this fellow had started the argument.

We have got like a minute left.

- 40:00 **We will just swap tapes.**

Tape 7

- 00:30 Well we were in Khanburi before I digressed weren't we? We gradually picked up sufficiently for the Japs and also I think the Malayan Command were beginning to want us back home, and once again it shows the luck of the draw some people instead of being dispatched back to Changi as most of F Force were, they were sent to
- 01:00 Japan. And you might not know it but the highest casualties of prisoners of war were not on the line or in Changi, they were at sea. They most notable ship of our time was the Rayuko Maru which had quite a lot of our battalion on it, men from A Force the men who had started
- 01:30 in Burma and had come down the full length of the line from Bangkok and the ship was sunk as you know and we lost quite a lot of men on that. Some survived, and some of our men got home in 1944.
- 02:00 They were lucky to be picked by that submarine, and they were home late in 1944. We have got a friend who we were very close to and he is still alive, who was in the water and he was actually touching the submarine and he saw the fellow get on and said, "Me next, me next,"
- 02:30 and the officer on the submarine said, "Sorry, no more we can't fit any more in," They were all standing hugging each other, that's how many were on it, I think they picked up seventy-eight out of the water. Darkie, my mate, was left touching the sub and sink and drift away from him he was in the water for five days, that's life. And Darkie
- 03:00 was sixteen and he lived to become self employed and make a good living but it affected him emotionally. He was picked up eventually by a Jap destroyer and taken to Japan and worked in a coal mine on his knees for eighteen months in a hole that deep,
- 03:30 and the fellow in front on him was home in Australia in 1944.

Did he ever meet that submarine officer?

The Pompano the submarine, is the only naval war memorial retained by the American navy it is regarded as the official war memorial of the navy for the Second World War. The Pompano,

- 04:00 they sunk it and they came back two days later and came back and started rescuing and they just couldn't take any more on board it would break your heart wouldn't it? You live through that, poor old Dark. The fellows of ours who came home were put on the most strict censor regulations that you could imagine. They weren't allowed to talk
- 04:30 of their experience at all. They were allowed to talk about how bad things were as prisoners of war, they were kept under this blanket for months after they came home because the government would not admit that things could have been so bad.

Was that for morale back home, what reason?

Well that obviously was the reason, although by 1944 the battle for

- 05:00 New Guinea was truly won and they could have easily have done more. They could have saved the people in Borneo for instance, seventeen hundred people were slaughtered there. So anyway when we were fit enough we were entrained to Singapore the same way we came but strangely the trip didn't seem to be half as

- 05:30 arduous on the way back and I clearly remember when we got to Singapore were put on trucks and turned on the road to Changi some of my men cried with relief because we were going home. That's where they had set their minds to, and that probably is the time to explode the myth about Changi.
- 06:00 If you asked anyone one word to describe the experiences prisoners of war of the Japanese I'll bet they will say Changi. Well almost every prisoner of war in the southern Pacific went through Changi in three and half years, almost every one. And yet in that three and half years there only was two hundred and thirty deaths in Changi
- 06:30 and the good number of them were either battle casualties who died 1942 or F Force people who died when they were brought down from Changi. Changi itself as a place was not the cause of any number of deaths at all, and it was literally what we called home. There was a
- 07:00 strong division between the regular Changi people, and some who made it their business to stay in Changi and those who went out on working parties. The only concession really that these Changi people made, many of whom particularly officers would never have seen an angry Jap,
- 07:30 people don't believe that but compared to a working prisoner of war they lived a cloistered life. The only thing in their favour when we came we virtually spilled the fellows out the trucks they were weak and the Changi population was shocked to see the condition of these fellows
- 08:00 and they had been saving up a portion of their rations for Christmas, and they decided when they saw the condition of our fellows they would forfeit the Christmas meal and they provided extra for us. We were segregated, we were not allowed to mix with them,
- 08:30 we were in an area separated from the people in Selarang not allowed to mix. I mentioned chocolate soldiers before, I can illustrate that. I'm digressing but when the Japs, the Changi Japs were shocked to see us, and they said, "You'll never, never work again." Well in a fortnight's time
- 09:00 we were working on the drome, in a fortnight. Once we started to get to the drome job we had to march through Changi and the Japs would not let the Changi people and us mix. We used march through and the Changi people would run to the road and look our for mates along the marching group.
- 09:30 We were marching through there one night when one of my fellows sang out, "Chocos!" and that summed up the situation. If you look at the comparison AIF and militia and the working parties and the Changi occupants really summed up the situation in how they felt in one word. And whilst we were living at Selarang
- 10:00 there was never any joining of the two groups. The Japs wouldn't allow it and we of course became established as a working party again. I mentioned the other reinforcement officer the battalion as I did, we were obliged to provide a working party every day of a hundred men and
- 10:30 it was Arch Dall and I who volunteered to take out this working party and we between took it out for fourteen months while we built the line, and no other officer of the battalion took that party out and there were thirty officers there if it was necessary.
- Does that mean you were going out every day or fourteen months?**
- Oh we had a day off in the week yes. We could alternate
- 11:00 the men we had about four hundred, at this stage we probably had four hundred men from whom we could get a working party. Arch and I would substitute for each other and you know to give each other a break now and again but he and I took the party for fourteen months. That was a more congenial job,
- 11:30 food was beginning to get a bit short in Changi and, or in Selarang then, but we worked on that line we started from the jungle and built the airstrip with the same tools that we used on the line, the chunkle as we we called it, it was nothing more than a heavy hoe with a blade about that wide and we built it just with hoes, scraped it.
- 12:00 **What did you use to cut down the trees what did you use?**
- Axes, and then we had to dig the trees out dig the roots out physically as well. There were no bull dozers to my recollection at all, on that job. There was a couple of shovels no bull dozers. My party had a train, and these steam shovels were cutting down a hill side
- 12:30 and they were loading trucks on this train and our job was to build the runway that ran out to the sea and that's what we did over the next fourteen months. We worked fairly congenially, it was regular, and we managed a few rorts as time went on but it was a time when
- 13:00 a good number of officers never lifted a finger. They had no work, some of them worked in the vegetable garden. Whilst we were working on the line we moved from Selarang to Changi gaol and it probably shows you how organised we were as a force that,
- 13:30 I marched out from Selarang when we finished our days work we marched to Changi gaol two miles in

towards Singapore and marched into a hut, into the same hut that the men had come out of in the morning; it had been dismantled and carted physically, manually on trailers from one spot to the gaol.

14:00 It had been assembled and the men marched into that same hut, and they had more permanent huts built as well. We moved whilst there was a working party on the drome of about fourteen hundred, that party never missed a day's work, and the rest of the force moved the camp entirely, we are talking about twenty thousand men.

14:30 They moved a good number went into the gaol of course the gaol was six storeys high I should think they were packed pretty tightly into the cells there and the rest of us were scattered around the building in huts, and we settled down pretty well there and we marched out from the gaol to the drome for

15:00 at least eight months.

Did you make any objections to the other officers about not?

No not at all. It was my choice to work and I preferred to work it didn't concern me, and socially of a night I'd go down and we would have a talk and a smoke and sit

15:30 around. It never concerned me at all.

On what basis would you choose the hundred for the working party?

Well once again that sergeant major I was talking to you about he had the responsibility to find a hundred men he would roster, some preferred to work. A lot preferred to work. For instance when I worked, I generally had the same sergeant

16:00 and when Arch was working, he had a sergeant who worked with him. We you know we knew each other and we knew what the other did and what you could expect. We also had a lot of these NCOs that I mentioned before who knew their job and it was a working party that worked pretty well really.

16:30 I would meet the party, because I lived in a separate, the working officers lived in a hut away from the rest. I used to meet the party down at the gate and the formalities of counting ourselves out and things like that, the Japs expected that. Then we had to give them an 'eyes left' and we had our own interpretation of that.

17:00 Eyes right and cast your eyes, the term was Ka sura suradi, 'eyes right', and we used to say cast your eyes to this lot, as long as you got the 'cast' out the Japs were generally satisfied. Generally they weren't a bad lot of Japs either, there was conflict from time to time as I said

17:30 but compared to the line, the working conditions were so much easier. We had a lot of native women working with us then and for a long time we watched the Japs accumulate a great pile of rocks and virtually a mountain of rocks

18:00 and then one morning out came truckloads of Chinese women. They formed a chain from this pile of rocks to the airstrip and passed rocks like this all day and in a day they paved a landing strip with rocks. Just, and they did that all day with a chain hundreds of yards long

18:30 and this mountain of rocks just disappeared in a day. That's manual labour and they didn't seem to concern themselves, Chinese women of course they were used to labour of that sort I suppose. And so we finished the job there. In the time we were working there was a small working party in

19:00 Singapore and then a more sinister working party developed to dig caves just across the cause way in Johor Baharu. It was then that we became a bit restless because we soon learned what the caves were supposed to be for, they were for our burial ground.

19:30 There was nothing much we could do about it. There was a working party working there, and they knew what the task was and after we finished on the drome and almost immediately it was occupied by the Japs by

20:00 the Jap air force and almost immediately, indeed before we finished the Americans were bombing the northern part of the island. Usually about ninety-six B29s would come over each day and they knew what they were doing. I remember one night, because I was a working officer I always felt that I was excluded from camp

20:30 responsibilities but one day I was told I was orderly officer which required attending the office in the gaol, which was the head office, and spending the night there. I went up and I reported to Takahashi who was the officer in charge up there and there was nothing doing and I said, "Oh I'm going to have a spell."

21:00 And so I went off and found somewhere to have a lie down and have a snooze and after a while he came and shook me and he said, "You had better come with me," and there was an air raid and the sirens were going. And we walked outside gaol and we sat and we exchanged smokes and talked about the raid as it was going and wondered where

21:30 they were going and what they were doing, and spent about an hour there talking in English to each other. And I learned that he had been to Oxford actually and talked generally about things, what we were going to do when we got home and things like that then when the raid was over we said, "Oh well, we will go back to bed," and that Jap when the commanders of the camp

22:00 spoke to him he always insisted on an interpreter. And they were going to interview him or talk to him which they did almost every day, they always took an interpreter and he would speak to them through an interpreter never let on that he could talk English.

Why did he do that?

Ah, that's just the Japanese, but the emotion at the time

22:30 the bombing raid with the planes coming over he just relaxed he just talked and I was one of the few people that knew that he could talk English. But if he saw me again he would never have spoken in English again, it was just the circumstance.

And was the drome bombed?

Oh yes and the naval base.

How did you feel about all that work?

Oh it didn't worry us

23:00 at all. As time went on the raids became more intensive, generally ninety-six in the flights, big planes for those days and the Japs had no chance in the world of ever reaching them. Certainly not with anti craft guns or the Zeros because they were thirty thousand feet even in those days

23:30 and they were supreme. Mind you it took ninety-six American planes to hit one target, that's what happened on the line the American constantly tried to bomb the bridges over the river as we were building them and they always missed. They killed many prisoners of war dropping bombs on the camps instead of the bridges.

24:00 So the British sent one plane and one bomb and dropped it right on the bridge and it was so pointed, they showed them how to do it. The American had the numbers so they could afford to be more wasteful, I suppose that was it.

And was there a mix of nationalities in Changi the second time around?

24:30 Oh yes indeed, almost all the American were airmen who had been shot down. We had a lot of Dutch who had been sent over from Java and the Dutch officers were the most arrogant bunch you would ever strike, they treated those Javanese troops, and all their troops were Javanese as we called them then,

25:00 they treated them like dirt. They were the most arrogant officers, they were all colonials themselves of course, most of them had interests in Sumatra and Java. They, to us, they were just a group apart. A lot of English,

25:30 Irish. We had a concert party not so much in Changi gaol, but in Selerang the concert party was a terrific concert party. The Australian concert party, it was a variety concert party. The British had more theatre groups, their entertainment groups. And this is the sort of thing that went on in Selerang

26:00 quite a lot of good entertainment; there were discussion groups. A member of our battalion who is still alive did a university course in Changi, so thorough that he went to Hobart University for six months and obtained his degree in forestry of all things. We never saw him he just spent the whole time

26:30 at university.

How was he able to do, that was he being instructed by ?

Well the place reeked with professors and teachers and lecturers, particularly from the British troops and from the Malayan Straits volunteer groups. All of their teaching staff there were caught and they were all either Singapore volunteers or

27:00 Malayan Straits volunteers. There were plenty of highly educated people there and if you committed yourself to these courses and you were smart enough, you could get out of all sorts of work and that's what a lot of smart people did if you could call them that. A lot of people

27:30 took religious courses. Religion was generally strongly supported. Each denomination had its own little church of some sort and there were many groups, who after the war the Bishop of Singapore came out and baptised a lot for instance.

28:00 The padres as different to the doctors, and the Australian doctors were such a wonderful group but the padres were a mixed lot, some were good and some weren't so good, and it was just a matter of luck.

28:30 Our battalion padre was a commander from the First World War, and he was an MC [Military Cross] and

bar winner. He was more a military man than a religious man, actually he was a director of a company a fairly big company in Melbourne when he got the religious bug and he resigned from his commercial life to become a minister.

29:00 He came home, but he was ill for a lot of the time. We had a few indifferent ones as I said and outstanding ones.

What made a good padre what qualities?

Well he had to be selfless for a start, and regrettably

29:30 some of them weren't. Some of them their only concern was themselves and I suppose, the best example we had a padre when the battalion, or our brigade in particular, was at full strength we had a compulsory church parade

30:00 on a Sunday evening after roll call; I'm talking about a couple of thousand men. The padre was a real Billy Graham type of padre and he stirred the men and they used to think he was marvellous. And all of the time this was going on there was talk of a, and it sound ridiculous today

30:30 of a Vegemite stealing racket. Vegemite was the key cause it is full of vitamin B2 you see? And it was the lifesaver for people with eyesight trouble with was rampant throughout, because it was a vitamin deficiency. The one thing that saved men was a spoon full of Vegemite, and no man whoever

31:00 had this treatment will ever eat Vegemite again. Its such terrific stuff on bread or toast but if you are forced to eat a spoon full of it every day it was almost a matter of forcing them to eat it. And there was this rumour that the Vegemite was being stolen from the hospital and sold around the camp in small quantities. The military police investigated it

31:30 and found that this padre was at the head of the racket. Well, the next Sunday there was the order was fall out for church parade and there was just stony silence, no one would go to church. That was quite regrettable really. We had a padre on the railway line and after one sermon the CO stood up and said, "There will be no more church parades in this camp,"

32:00 and that was it that was what he thought of that padre. But then others, what was the name of the Methodist padre? Others were virtually worshipped and I was in a camp somewhere with a Catholic padre named Paddy Dolan

32:30 who was a senior priest and he was like a father to me; when I was crook and he looked after me like a bad step father, he really did. And he was a man for whom I had the greatest of affection, he was like that to much younger people, what ever he had he would share he didn't care what your religion was

33:00 he could give a man a little bit of comfort just by talking with him. He had an Irish brogueish accent he was a terrific old man. And so despite that, religion had a fairly strong hold I would say.

33:30 So strong that one of our official memorials is one of the churches that was built in Changi is now in the grounds of Duntroon, and it is an official war memorial.

Did you have religious convictions back then?

Oh yes I did because my football team as I mentioned earlier in the day in the amateur association

34:00 was a church football team the only church football team in forty-eight teams. So you can imagine the ribbing that we got, bible bashers and the lot. A condition as a member of the football team was that we had to go to church just as simple as that, and so on a Sunday the three back pews would be occupied by young men in suits. Yes so when,

34:30 I think most people had religious characteristics in 1939, 40.

How was your faith affected by what you saw and experienced?

Not at all. I don't think I can recall anyone expressing a loss of faith because of the conditions. We were a fairly uncomplaining lot

35:00 in that time because you must bear in mind that we had come out of the Depression as a society, we knew hardship, we knew how to share hardship, in that sharing was commonplace. When I say that, in a street you could depend on

35:30 the society of the street generally would share its problems, its children minding, or no one in the street would go hungry and that's a certainty. And so we took what was presented to us in life generally I would say. I don't think I can remember people, people always grizzled of course, but I don't think

36:00 there was any blaming God for what had happened to us no.

And how about the reverse conversion towards?

As I said, I suspect that some people became religious while they were prisoners of war just for

something to do. It was possible to study, among the

36:30 Changi residents it was possible to study any sort of subject. If religion appealed to you well you know it was as good as anything.

Did you study in your time?

I never had time. I honestly worked for almost all of the time and I don't object to that at all.

37:00 I mean it was my choice to work, I think I was suited to it temperamentally to work and so I never attended any of these courses. I took part in some discussion groups, but very few, the only I attended

37:30 concerts when they were on, played cards. I vowed when I came home and one thing I have done, I vowed I would never play cards again and I never, never ever have. Bridge was the game, contract bridge was the go then and I got heartily sick of cards, but it was an occupation during the night of course.

38:00 Very little reading, always looking for a smoke and my word I have smoked some decent stuff in my time too. I could tell you we used to be able to buy on the line a packet of tobacco that big for a dollar, for a tickle which

38:30 was a dollar, and it was so strong and I don't even know if it was tobacco, we used to put it in a bucket of water for a day or so and then put it out and dry it out. We would roll it in a bit of newspaper or holy smoke, a sheet of the bible, the rice paper and

39:00 we would lie down smoke it and you would feel your head go, it was terrific. We were also able to buy one of the best smokes I have ever had and they were Burma cheroots; about that long open ended either end and they were beautiful. If you could buy a Burma cheroot you would only smoke half of it you know and you would have a pin and we would have it in the butt

39:30 smoke it right down until it burnt your lips. We always had some sort of smoke, those who didn't smoke were always hungrier than the smokers. There were various ways. Of course, some fellas would roll a cylinder of paper and come up and say, "Could I have a light?" they would put the hollow sleeve of paper over the other

40:00 fella's cigarette and of course their paper would disintegrate but they would get a drag of smoke. So yeah, always some smoke.

That's a great trick, it's the end of the tape again.

Tape 8

00:30 **So we will just get through this story I think where we left you, you had finished working on the aerodrome. What were you doing next?**

I told you that there were a lot of mouths to feed and it required an enormous amount of firewood. During the Jap occupation they had gone through Singapore and they had literally razed

01:00 the countryside, cut trees off at ground level used the wood and left the stumps. I joined an officer working party that went out and physically dug these stumps out of the ground and brought them in for firewood, because they consumed an enormous amount of firewood there. That was what I was engaged in right up to the days of atom bomb.

01:30 It was fairly hard manual work. We dug them out and had to cart them home on manual drawn trailers, but there again that was my choice and I didn't mind that. That brought me to a close really of work there.

02:00 I should have mentioned that in all the time we were working we were there we always had a news service. The fellows who carried out this service really, and they were only a handful, really deserve some recognition; not only did they build these sets from

02:30 stolen pieces bits and pieces but they built them strong enough to pick up the BBC. It was a procedure that in three and half years in Changi never failed, and there was never ever any detection by the Japs. They knew that there was radio receivers in the camp but they never ever found them

03:00 and the system was perhaps an example of discipline. It went in networks all the way down, there was never more than a dozen in a group, the original dozen might have been news spreaders themselves and they would spread until it got down to the lowest permissible level. And our news

03:30 reader, if you could call him that, was a company director in a company that is still in Singapore today. He was a lieutenant in the Singapore volunteers a fellow by the name of 'Bags' Bourne, and I don't even know what his Christian name, was because every one called him Bags. And had a worn out old pipe

which he

- 04:00 used to suck away at, and everyone smoked then I might tell you. I remember coming home hot and dirty from this stump digging job when Bags called a news conference, and as I said there was generally only a dozen or so in a group and we always had a cockatoo outside just in case a Jap should come by and
- 04:30 sat down and he said in his studied English way, "There seems to have been something going on in Japan," and he puffed away and he said, "It appears as if the RAF [Royal Air Force] have dropped a bomb on Hiroshima," and he said, "We understand that eighty thousand people have been killed."
- 05:00 You know there was no jubilation at all among us, or any of the other groups from what we ascertained later. No one said, "Hooray!" I think that the fact that it killed eighty thousand in one go set everyone thinking, and it was received with reservation I think that was
- 05:30 the best description. It was, in retrospect, it was rather peculiar this body of men who had been subjected to Japanese brutality for three and half years never reacted in a more celebratory way.
- 06:00 We digested that, and talked about it of course, we knew little or nothing about it other than it was a bomb, we didn't know what an atom bomb meant. A few days later it was Nagasaki, and we began to realise that something was on because we were also getting rumours of Japanese surrender. Nevertheless
- 06:30 I still went out to work next day because we had to have firewood and I was walking back to my hut when I passed a Dutch hut. A Dutch man jumped out and said, "Hooray! The war's over!" And all this and I turned to him and I abused him for some reason or other, in terms unusual for me I abused this fellow.
- 07:00 And having done that I walked on to my own hut and Bags was there again and he simply said, "The war is over," and that was obviously what the Dutch fellow was celebrating, and we just received it and just accepted it. We never saw any Allied troops
- 07:30 for a day or so after, when after two days an English officer jumped into the camp from a plane and he told us officially that the war had finished. And then gradually a few people started to come in, they generally jumped in. Then an American plane came over
- 08:00 with a treat for us and they had big long cylinders which they released from the plane and they had goodies in the plane and what do you think was in the cylinders, jars of barley sugar. So you could imagine what they were like when they hit the tarmac, all we got was glass.
- 08:30 But things picked up fairly quickly. The 1st Australian Parachute Battalion came in, and they were an excellent group of fellows. A recovery unit came in and they were awful, they made you feel ashamed to be Australians
- 09:00 they were the most ill disciplined lot that we ever, ever encountered. When you bear in mind that these were prisoners of war that had three and half years internment, and here we were resentful of the poor discipline of another force. They were so poor that they came in to take over the duties
- 09:30 of maintaining the camp, we took over those duties ourselves again, we manned the cook houses again, manned the hospitals, or kept charge of the hospitals, we did all of that work. We maintained it to a stage where in six weeks time when a ship was available to take us home; we organised ourselves from Changi to ship and on board the ship
- 10:00 and I must say that my job was at the head of the gang plank ABCD Company was scattered about the ship and as every man walked up and I didn't ask his name or his company I just said "There, there, there, and there." I knew every man in the battalion and knew his company and that was it.
- 10:30 We are off again are we?

You were just telling me about the saddest thing for you after the war?

After we were released was there were still deaths, and a lot of the photographs that are on record are of the funerals that were held after the surrender. One of the men who died actually whose funeral I

- 11:00 was in charge of was the man who told me he was old enough to be my father. He was a First World War man and he lived all the way through it and died in August 1945 so.

How did he die, was he ill?

Oh just ill, yes. The older men and when I say older I am talking about

- 11:30 thirty year olds in that group, they well not to a man, but there were more deaths among the older men than among the younger ones. And if ever there was an example of the strength of youth it was on the line because youth stood out, stood the test
- 12:00 probably stood the test mentally as well because there's perhaps not as much imagination in a young persons mind as there in a thirty year old. Thirty year old has probably got a lot more to think about,

but a younger twenty year old lives for the day and hasn't got to the stage where he has got to think.

12:30 Particularly again I talking about the type of young man whose education finished at the eighth grade generally, fourteen years old who never had the opportunity of an extended secondary education, let alone a tertiary education. I'm not saying that they were fools by any means, but their minds had not been broadened as yours has for instance

13:00 in university. That's probably why as a group we were not as complaining as one could imagine, is that a reasonable thought?

I was wondering if you noticed any change in the Japanese behaviour towards the end of the war that might have indicated a changing?

13:30 I don't think the Japs thought it would ever end against them I don't think that. They were subjected to massive propaganda with Shintoism and I think that they thought they were going to win. In 1945 they were telling us they were coming over to rape our sisters and so on. I don't think that they thought

14:00 that they would ever lose.

How would they tell you that? The guards themselves would say that?

Oh yes that was common place, but it went in one ear and out the other you know. But they were quiet and the other thing to our credit at the end of the war the Japs were

14:30 all paraded and some officers were instructed to take troops with them to identify offenders, war criminals and in Singapore when these Japs were lined up, not one prisoner of war struck a Jap. As they walked along identifying

15:00 fellows they had some objection to, not one struck a Jap. The feeling among us that we had objected to that sort of treatment and we be hypocrites and extend the same sort of treatment and that was a fact that the change over went with the minimum amount of animosity, which was pretty good I thought for us.

15:30 **It was extraordinary the temptation must have been great?**

Oh yes but it didn't occur. Quite definitely never occurred, something else to be pleased about I guess.

Did the end of the war the atomic bomb cause a lot of reflection?

Yes indeed. The major thing of course is

16:00 that as a group and as a group we represented a big country town as a group we got all of the happenings, the disasters, the wife separations, the girlfriends going, deaths, babies born, all that we got in one mail

16:30 virtually. Three and half years of drama in one mail. You can imagine the feelings, I think there was more emotion on the receipt of that first mail than there was at any other time. It was all of the things that had happened in the last three and half years came in one day

17:00 and we had to cope with it.

How did you cope with it?

Well it was fairly dramatic as you can imagine. I had been trying to ring my father there was just no answer. We got our first mail really in Liverpool in Sydney,

17:30 we only got scratchy messages prior to coming home virtually no mail delivery at all, and I got a red telegram in those days red was an urgent telegram from my brother in which it said, "You obviously don't know that Dad is dead?" And he had been dead for eighteen months or something, and my mother was dying.

18:00 I was only one of thousands who got similar advice, found their wives had left them and children had grown up and got into trouble all sorts of things, and it all happened in one day.

I can only being to imagine can you describe it?

18:30 I think the most people walked around as if they were lost until they sort of came to reconcile it. A lot of men thought they were coming home to resume the lives that they led five years ago see we had been in the army five and half years by the time we came home and

19:00 babies were grown up, and kids just about in secondary school and things like that. And fathers had to accustom themselves to that, had to accustom themselves to children they had never seen. It virtually meant a new life, civilian life to so many men.

19:30 **Did men react in different ways to this idea of a new life?**

Well I suppose they did. We had lived and worked together for three and half years, we started off as a disorientated battalion when we came home were unified group

20:00 and some thought it would be a good idea to have a reunion and bring wives and girlfriends, and we had it at the Hawthorn Town Hall and it ended up in a free fight.

Over what?

I don't know just emotions I suppose. I must say that it doesn't happen today it was probably just emotions

20:30 that was a reaction. And so many of us met girlfriends like me and there were plenty of people like me who, I suppose half the battalion were married within two years of coming home, and there was an anxiety. Mind you we were a minority

21:00 when we came home, we certainly never had the notoriety as a group that we have got today. Prisoners of war are a prominent group in people's minds today, and whether it is deserved or not is another matter. I have always maintained you pay your money and you take your chance.

21:30 If I hadn't been a prisoner of war I could very well have been killed in New Guinea, and that applies to everyone. I think we have been a bit fortunate that we have led the sheltered, protected life that we have led since we have come home. A lot of it

22:00 has been fairly clever propaganda on the part of people like Weary Dunlop. I don't know if I should say it but Weary Dunlop was only one of many great leaders. Colonel Coates for instance, Sir Albert Coates,

22:30 he had a far more difficult job than Weary Dunlop. Kevin Fagan had a more difficult job, our own doctor who never had any resources at all, these doctors were just magnificent. Bruce Hunt there were twenty-six Australian doctors on the line, every one on them either gained a military or civil

23:00 decoration and Bruce Hunt who didn't because he died within a few years of coming home. He was a major a doctor and he was also a camp leader he was almost a saint to the men who served with him. As I say Weary was only one of those men; Weary never had more than a thousand men.

23:30 And there's a story of course as why he was so determined; he was in Java and he came through Singapore fell foul of Black Jack Gallaghan, the senior Australian officer. Black Jack wrongly and outrageously he referred to

24:00 his group as the Java rabble and that name stuck even when they went out at camp, they were still referred to as the Java rabble and Weary Dunlop never ever forgave Black Jack. Black Jack should never ever said it. I was Weary's Vice-President in the POW Association for a great number of years and I knew Weary pretty well.

24:30 He worked the propaganda in a subtle way but he always succeeded as being representative of prisoners of war again if you asked most people for a personality they would say, "Weary Dunlop," and I've got no doubt that his prominence

25:00 is one reason why there is a receptive attitude towards prisoners of war; probably illustrated by the fact that the Government gave every Japanese prisoner of war twenty-five thousand dollars a few years ago. If you, you know the Prisoner of War Association is an organization embracing all prisoners of war

25:30 and there are seven thousand German prisoners of war. If you talk to a lot of those fellows they did it very tough particularly the private soldiers, and I have always thought that they were entitled to any consideration the same consideration that we were. They have just been pushed to the background largely because they never had a representative.

26:00 And Weary pushed the POW barrow, I don't think there is any doubt about that, many people would deny that but as I said I had the opportunity to watch him closely for a few years and that was my view.

You said something that you were a sheltered bunch could you explain that more?

You know we got a Gold Card

26:30 for all medical services, and I don't object to because I have carried it and used it but we have been having free medical service for over thirty years. Now, it was only last year that they issued Gold Cards to other people. That Gold Card has been worth tens of thousands of dollars to me and not only to me but the thousands of

27:00 Jap prisoners of war. Its considerations like that, that have meant a great deal to us and I'm quite sure because strong representations were made at the time politically and we have been the beneficiaries of it. I don't object to it at all, but I do feel it's a bit rough on other people.

27:30 I said earlier in the piece benefits to ex-servicemen from the DVA have been far more generous to our generation than they were to Joy's father's generation, and we as a group have benefited more than

most.

28:00 There's five per cent of Australian ex-servicemen classified as TPI, totally and permanently incapacitated, twenty-five percent of prisoners of war are classified as being totally and permanently incapacitated big jump isn't? I'm not objecting, I'm a recipient. It does appear to me as if

28:30 some people miss out. Mind you when Joy and I were applying for a pension we had to fight for it and it was only the fact that I walked out of the hearing, I couldn't stand it and Joy stayed and won the pension. But it never came lightly, but as I said I have assisted some fifteen hundred people in getting a pension

29:00 and I know that a lot of them got the TPI pension, well, twenty-five percent of us.

Have you ever sought recognition from the Japanese Government singly or collectively?

No.

Are you interested in that at all?

No that was only a plot for some people to get an overseas trip think. I think it was explained pretty clearly

29:30 that the Americans had exonerated the Japanese from financial responsibility very soon after the war, when America virtually took over Japanese industry, I think they realised that the quicker things like that were settled the better. So it is a written agreement that there would no Japanese compensation paid and they have stuck to it

30:00 perhaps rightfully to that agreement.

How about verbal or a recognition?

What does it mean? It doesn't mean a thing to me, I'm sorry. It's very much like the white Australians attitude to Sorry Day which is today - isn't? Aboriginals - isn't it today?

It is this week, yeah.

30:30 Most Australians would say, "Well what have I personally got to be sorry about?" and I think most Japanese people would say the same thing and lot of Japanese could say, "Well what did I ever do wrong? Why should I be sorry? I was doing what I was told to do." That's it. I think I've got a turning point

31:00 in my thinking; I was a Rotarian and we had a Rotary convention in Sydney and Joy and I decided to take the whole damn family so we went up and we took an apartment in Manly and there were thousands of Japanese Rotarians there. We had to catch the ferry from Sydney to Manly to go home at night and we were

31:30 going home I noticed Peter talking to a fellow on the rail and Joy and I were sitting somewhere on the ferry and Pete walked over with this fellow and he said, in Rotary you exchange banners as a sign of friendship, your club banner with the banner of the person you are talking to's club.

32:00 And Pete walked over and Pete was only a youth and he said, "Dad, this kid wants to swap banners." And this kid turned out to be a Japanese fellow a bit older than Pete and the Japanese kid spoke to the person next sitting to us and it turned out it was his grandfather.

32:30 I had to make a decision: do I go through with this banner swapping or do I turn my back on him? And I realised in an instant if I didn't go on with it I might as well have gathered the kids up and taken them home because the whole thing was about international friendship. If I wasn't supporting it I might as well not have been there. So

33:00 I stood up and shook his hand he gave me, and he had a banner in his pocket and I had a banner, and we exchanged banners but he had the last word. The bugger, he was an old Japanese gentleman and he ran his fingers along my banner and he only had two words of English, he said, "Rayon," and he took his

33:30 banner off me and he ran his finger along it and said, "Silk." So he had the last word then, but there you are that was the point. I've never, and as I have said I went and learnt Japanese and w had a test again in Rotary when a Japanese student came

34:00 and stayed a day or so and I had,

In your house?

Yes. We had to reconcile that, and I did.

Was it important for you to educate the Japanese people that you met?

I wouldn't presume to do that. We have some acquaintances who have never ever forgiven the

34:30 Japanese in our battalion. They won't buy anything Japanese, they won't discuss it they turn their backs, they abuse a Japanese innocent grandchild of a soldier and our conclusion is that they live a bitter life and it's not something that we would be party to.

35:00 I'd like to go to Tokyo, Joyce wouldn't, when we were travelling I would have loved to go to Tokyo buy Joyce didn't think she could stand being pushed into the trains by the gloved station attendant so we didn't go, but I would like to go.

And what are your thoughts now on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Well I have one major thought on that and that is

35:30 those tunnels that were dug in Johor Baharu. I've got no shadow of doubt and I've seen sufficient evidence to convince me that if it wasn't them it would have been me. That's where my consideration begins and ends as far as I am concerned. The only thing you've got to reconcile is whether that their deaths which would have been

36:00 instant and ours would have been at the end of a bayonet. There was plenty of evidence to indicate, if you take the 2/21st Battalion, whose commander lined them up to surrender and the Japs walked along and stood man to man in front of each person and just drove their bayonets through them while they were standing on parade and killed several hundred of them. That's the sort of

36:30 end that we jolly well knew that we could expect. That's my view if it wasn't them it would have been me and it's a simple as that.

I don't think I clearly understood what the caves were for you think?

Oh undoubtedly we were going to be buried in those caves. That was clearly understood

37:00 we were going to be either machine gunned, poisoned or whatever and bundled into these caves because the Japs just didn't want any evidence to be available no doubt about that as far as we understood.

Was there any plans afoot for an uprising?

No it would have to have been every man for himself and that was all there would have been.

37:30 Certainly the Jap guards never gave us evidence that they were preparing for something like that. It's only subsequent written evidence that confirms this, but those who were working on the job had a fairly substantial ideal of what was going on.

Did you think much about that fate?

Not particularly. We sort of

38:00 put it off until tomorrow, that was the attitude generally. You must remember we were a community of several thousand and we were living day to day and death was not uncommon in Changi. So it wasn't that something that kept us awake at night, that's fair enough I think.

38:30 It's a difficult thing to talk about generally because the evidence that we see of course is generally in Japanese and we rely on interpreters whom must tell us the truth when they explain what these instructions were,

39:00 and so among our fraternity we have no doubt that we were destined to be killed, and I think that's what sums it up.

That's three times now you have escaped?

That's not bad in a war is it? That's not bad in a war when you think what can happen.

39:30 The shots that were fired at me were hitting the platoon next to me at the time so that's all part of war. And bombing raids come and go and we could have been sunk coming across through the Sunda Straits and talk to any soldier that has had combat experience and he can tell you how he escaped death one way or the other.

We are generally nearly at the end of this tape I just wondered if you thought you were lucky or unlucky in your war?

40:00 Well every soldier would like to think that he took part in a victory, we never took part in a victory. But I think on reflection I am glad that I experienced being a prisoner of war, I think I probably learned more about life

40:30 and people and how to conduct myself, as a prisoner of war. I was at the right age with the right sort of responsibilities and I think that I benefited from it I certainly had benefited from comradeship. I think I

41:00 would have liked, like I said when you think on people on the Kokoda Trail or Tobruk or Milne Bay or the 9th Division, they were fortunate, today even -

Tape 9

00:32 **You were just telling us about your experience compared to those at Milne Bay.**

Yes, I think infantry men in particular would like to think that they took part in a victory and the victories that we talk about are the 9th Div [Division] in that final push, Tobruk, Milne Bay

01:00 and Kokoda Trail and those fellas obviously relish the thoughts of being part of that. I think any soldier would want a victory but that wasn't our lot. I feel that you can only do your best anyway in conflict

01:30 like that and the results as they turned out were a momentous experience for us and as I was saying on reflection I'm not sorry that I had that experience. It's not only the comradeship and the friendship that's developed and been maintained

02:00 for fifty odd years but it's what else we got out of it if you wanted to get out of it and that's the lessons we learned about men, lessons you learn about yourself, your own capacity and your own limitations and generally I feel that I benefited from being a prisoner of war and

02:30 I've benefited from my experiences and what's more I think you'd find a lot more people if they were honest would say the same thing. Despite the hardship and despite the losses that I mentioned, that they gained a lot, they gained a lot from the experience and time is showing that historically it's

03:00 one of the most difficult parts of military life that any group has ever experienced and we were part of it. A lot of people claim participation who shouldn't. We do find in

03:30 publications that people who never left Changi can speak authoritatively on the railway line. Even today you'll strike the same thing. When I was interviewing people, helping them with pensions for instance, the first question I would ask them, "Where did you serve?" and I'll bet you ninety nine per cent of them served with Weary, "Oh, I was with Weary," "Oh yes,

04:00 and where were you with him?" "Oh, up on the Three Pagoda Pass." And I say, "Oh, yeah." Weary wasn't within a thousand kilometres of it or so but everyone served with Weary and everyone served on the line. That's the attraction of course, everyone wants to claim to have been part of the best and the best was being with Weary and

04:30 the best was to have been on the line. That was where the character building was.

Why do you think that has a special status, both prisoners of war and the Burma Railway?

I don't know. As I said I think some of it is part of clever propoganda on some people's part. I must say that I've never beaten the prisoner of war drum even though I've been an

05:00 executive for years. I must say that very few of our battalion have ever been active members of the prisoner of war association. I was sort of dragged into it by accident really. We had a major reunion in 1984, those

05:30 photographs I referred to before, and I was asked to go on the committee running this thing and it was a committee extending over two years work and when it was over the national chairman of the POW association asked me if I would form a panel to help prisoners of war and that's virtually what started it. I should have said no

06:00 perhaps but it was something that started and like Topsy, it just grew. I became involved in the running of the place and I enjoyed it, but like a lot of other things it's time to get out and then we started travelling as I mentioned before. It was time to devote ourselves to something private.

06:30 **It does seem to Australians to be particularly important, can you reflect on that?**

Yes. FEPOW, the Far East Prisoner of War Association of Britain is a pretty active association as is the American counterpart. It's fairly worldwide. The Americans

07:00 actually led the race in compensation. The Americans in the Philippines, Canadians in Hong Kong, the British and then the Australians were the last to compensate prisoners of war. So it's a worldwide thing that sort of captured the imagination of everyone.

Just because we

07:30 **are on our last tape I wonder if we could go back to your time immediately after the announcement of the Japanese surrender, what happened next?**

Well we didn't do a great deal really. We sort of stooed around wondering what was going to happen. I think we thought that we'd be on a ship and be home in a couple of weeks

- 08:00 not really appreciating the fact that ships had to come to Singapore, they had to be available, they had to come to Singapore in the first place. We were restless. The first order we got from our own authority was that we weren't allowed to go to Singapore and of course we all went, didn't we? Actually
- 08:30 I obeyed the order until I discovered that my company commander was in Singapore anyway so I thought, "Well if it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me." So a group of us went, some of the fellows who are in that photograph. When we got into Singapore we sort of wandered around and a fellow, a voice behind us said, "Are you Australians?" and we said, "Yes." and he said, "So am I, I'm the only Australian
- 09:00 in the whole of this flotilla." the Royal Navy flotilla had come in, were anchoring in the roads there. He said, "Would you like to come out for a drink?" and we said, "That'd be great." So we walked to the pier and signalled and the next thing a little powerboat comes out from the HMS Tartar, a destroyer, and four, five of us I think we were in the group,
- 09:30 we all got in this little thing and out we went to the HMS Tartar and they treated us like royalty. We started, they had no beer, they only had spirits and we were drinking this and it wasn't having any effect and we were all terribly worried, alcohol's not going to effect us any more. It was our first
- 10:00 drink for years. We settled down and they gave us a meal and then this fellow whose name I can't remember but whose parents owned the milk bar that our football club used to go to, how's that for a coincidence, that was the first one. He said, "Would you like to have a hot shower?" and we went,
- 10:30 "Oh, a hot shower!" and the cubicles were about this by that so we said, "Oh yes." We all agreed to have a hot shower and that was a one by one thing and we were sitting in the ward room and there was a pile of magazines there and I went through. Again, as I said, I was aeroplane crazy and there was a copy of Flight, a magazine that I used to get before the war from time to time and I
- 11:00 grabbed it, picked it up and went through it and there was a casualty list in this Flight of air force personnel. I just read down, it was RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and then RAF [Royal Air Force] casualty list, read down and there was A.G. Pearsall, and my cobbler T. G. Pearsall was sitting right here. A.G. Pearsall, missing, believed killed
- 11:30 and there I was sitting with this magazine with Tom's brother's death notice and Tom didn't know anything about it. Here we were, lining up to have a hot shower and a meal on board and so I just closed the magazine up, shoved it down my shirt and sat on the information all night.
- 12:00 They eventually, I remember we then watched a film on deck, a Laurel and Hardy film and the ratings all sat in front of the screen and the officers had to sit behind the screen and watch everything in reverse. Eventually they loaded us up with cigarettes and chocolate and put us on the boat and sent us home
- 12:30 and we had to find our way back to Changi. We found a jeep somewhere and it had about eight people on it when we stopped it and we crowded on and we're all hanging on to this wretched jeep, half full of course by this time as you can imagine and me clutching my magazine down my shirt as well. I got the other three on their own and we decided
- 13:00 we'd tell Tom in the morning and that's what we did. Alan was Tom's idol, he played league football for South Melbourne and he played state cricket for Tasmania. He was Tom's star. He flew a Mosquito into a hill in Holland. Subsequently, John
- 13:30 and I have been to the air force church in London and we've looked up his name in the books that are around the church of those who were killed and Tom's never been able to bring himself to go and look at it, rather sad really. Life's funny how it dishes out
- 14:00 coincidences isn't it? So that was our major experience. One other thing, not that we're great drinkers but Tom decided, Tom was the lurks man in our group, Tom Pearsall. He was a politician when he came home for twenty five years so he was into the lurks.
- 14:30 He had heard where you could get some Chinese whisky so he went off first thing in the morning, out of Changi into Singapore to get this Chinese whisky and he said, "I'll give you enough for the whole of your platoon." "Righto." So I lined all my fellows up and told them what was on tonight. After tea that night they were all
- 15:00 sitting along the table all with a mug, waiting for Tom to come back with this Chinese whisky. He knew where he could get two cases of it. We're waiting and waiting and I can still see my sergeant major who was there walking up and down encouraging the fellows to stay, "Won't be long, he'll be back soon" and then we hear someone singing and we hear
- 15:30 an old truck drive into the camp and there, the Chinese fellow driving this old wagon and Tom is sitting on the tailboard and he was as drunk as a lord, not a sign of a bottle of whisky anywhere. He must have drunk almost all of it and he was singing lively away and this poor Chinese man was promised a fortune
- 16:00 if he would only drive him out there and my platoon who'd been sitting patiently waiting for an hour or

more, they were furious, there wasn't a drop of drink. They hadn't had a drink for years and there they were waiting on Pearsall bringing back Chinese whisky. I don't know what Chinese whisky, to this day I don't know what it is but poor old Tom, he fell down badly

16:30 with the Chinese whisky. Whatever there was, he'd drunk and he just fell off the tailboard of that truck and we dispatched the poor old Chinese fella back to Singapore without a red cent. So that's how we spent our time.

And you were fattened up, you said you put on a lot of weight in that three weeks.

Well you can see the difference even in those photographs; it was quite remarkable the way we fattened up.

17:00 That photograph of me eating a piece of toast, the photographer was an air force fellow who jumped into the camp, as I said so many of them did and I don't know how we came about to be cooking a piece of toast or even a slice of bread but he came along just as we were cooking it and he posed the photograph. It was a fairly famous

17:30 photograph apparently in the papers at the time. We got the copy, a neighbour lifted her linoleum in the seventies or something like that and that was the practise in those days, to put newspaper under the lino and she found this photograph. I think that was the first information we had on it.

And then when did you finally return home and how?

18:00 We came home on, what was the ship? Uneventful it was. As I said I had a good job. I remember as PT [Physical Training] officer, I stubbed my toe on deck one day, that was about the most significant thing and we came to Sydney. We were bussed

18:30 through Sydney to Liverpool. Whilst we were on the ship I prevailed on the ship's carpenter to paint a battalion flag on canvas, about that big with the colour patch and 2/29th Battalion. We tied that to the front of the engine of the train that brought us to Melbourne.

19:00 It was a bit uneventful. I was wakened, I was asleep as we came down and I was wakened by a fellow who said, "I always said that Herbie Matthews was a better footballer than Dick Reynolds," and I thought, "What a stupid thing to say!" Because I was Essendon, Dick Reynolds was Essendon, Herbie Matthews was Port Melbourne.

19:30 I turned around and there was a work mate I used to work with years ago who was the rail travel officer, he was conducting the train, they had RTOs, they called them, whose responsibility was to transport troops from here to there by train and he was the RTO on the train.

20:00 I remember we had some sort of Red Cross ladies on the train who had baskets of apples and I sat up most of the night eating an apple for the first time talking to this fellow. Then we got to Melbourne and we had a parade through Melbourne, straight from the railway station. We went out to the showgrounds and when we were at the showground someone

20:30 came up and said, "You're not to be sent home, you're to go to Heidelberg Hospital." I didn't know where Heidelberg Hospital was, and once again that other reinforcement officer, Arch Dall with whom I was never a chum in the proper sense of the word but with whom I'd always been friendly and who I saw a lot of after the war actually,

21:00 his mother was there in her car and she drove, he had to go out too strangely enough and we went out and we were admitted because it was thought we had TB. After checks after a day or so they discharged us, never find anything. But that was my home coming.

Something else happened on that day didn't it on a personal level?

21:30 Yes indeed it did.

Could you tell us about that again?

Well a friend, another officer in the battalion with whom I was quite friendly but not a bosom pal, I met him in town and he told me that he'd met this chap who knew me and had served with me in Darley before the war. He said he was going up to the mess to meet this fellow who

22:00 was a captain. He said, "Come up with me," and I said, "Oh, righto." So I didn't know anything about 339 Swanson Street and what it was, Southern Command Headquarters at the time and General Rowell was the general Joy was talking about. When I went and I was introduced to this fellow I just never remembered him at all and to this day

22:30 I can never ever recall meeting him before we went away. As Joy said he was called away and he'd asked Joy to look after anyone he brought up. My friend Phil went home fairly quickly, he was never one to, I don't think he drank, Phil and I had to fill in the time, there was nothing else to do but talk to this Sheila, was there. And that was it.

23:00 We sat and we talked all night. The next, one critical thing and that's how I met Phil, our quartermaster

ran a family business called James Thelwell and Company, a men's supplier in Collins Street. In those days it was a prosperous thing to do, a men's outfitter place and he sold,

23:30 when he came home his daughter was running his business and among other things he sold military officers' clothing and I'd bought a beautiful cap. I should have told you when I alighted from the train in Spencer Street one of the four of us who'd gone to Melbourne University

24:00 and Duntroon walked up to me with a uniform on a coat hanger on his finger and he said, "Frank, I thought you might need this." He met the train; I don't know how he knew I was on it or anything. He said, "I thought you might need this" and he handed me the uniform, turned his back and walked away and I never saw that man again. He knew, he was the adjutant,

24:30 he was a captain when I saw him then, he became the adjutant of the 2/14th Battalion and as I say, he said, "There's a uniform, see you later." turned and walked away and I never, ever saw him again. So I had a uniform without a cap and I went down Bert Kemp's shop and bought a beautiful cap. I wore it to Joy's mess

25:00 and we were the last to leave the mess I might tell you and when I went there instead of my beautiful cap was a dirty old thing that when I put it on came down around my ears somewhere and I was stuck with it. I had to take it because someone had pinched my new beautiful cap. I went to Tasmania

25:30 the next day in this terrible camp. So we parted that night and it was a fortnight later when I come home from Tasmania that I re-met Joyce and that started. I went straight into hospital then.

How come?

I had stones in my kidney.

26:00 We separated again. I met her briefly, I went to hospital and the next thing I saw Joy in hospital when she came out and that was it.

Many coincidences and lucky moments for you.

Indeed, I've been lucky, haven't I? That was it.

And how come you'd gone to Tasmania so quickly?

My mate, my closest friend, the politician. He wasn't a politician then, we talked about

26:30 farming together. We looked at a few properties, that's why I went over there, we were contemplating buying a farming property but there was just nothing available. After a fortnight I realised that it was another project that at the time just wasn't practical.

That's pretty soon to be making plans about the rest of your life.

Well, we had to.

27:00 The day I was discharged the officer who discharged me said, "Righto, off you go and get a job." and that was all the counselling we had. We were well, I had made before I went to hospital I was making enquiries about a job.

27:30 I met an old World War I sergeant who was on the training staff when I was a recruit and I can still see him, a fella named Bernie Collins, and I met him in the street and he said, "Well if you want a job straight away I'm working at the Repat [Repatriation Department] now."

28:00 after he was discharged and he said, "If you want a job, come down and see me. I can get you a job down there," and so I had teed work up even before I'd gone to hospital and that's how desperate it was. Bear in mind that there was almost a million people in uniform in 1945 and there was a good half of them looking for work. There was

28:30 no time to be hanging around. You had to get on with it. That was the counselling we got when we were discharged, "Go on, get out and get a job." That's what we were doing. That's why I was looking for a farm because I knew that we had to get on with it. It was as quick as that.

And your home, the home you'd left wasn't there.

There was no home. I stayed with my sister when I came home

29:00 for the brief time that I stayed there but most of the time I stayed with Joy's family. That was my new life.

Did you have trouble reintegrating into civilian life?

I don't recall, no. Probably hankered for the lighter side of army life a bit particularly as Joy was still in the army and she had

29:30 army contemporaries with whom she was mixing and also there was a lot of army weddings at the time

and there was talk of people staying in the army. A lot of people considered staying in the army but no, the job I took, I took a job in

30:00 the Repatriation Department and it was involved in repatriation into the work place of ex-servicemen. They were given a grant for tools of trade and things like that to help them get established. So I was in a quasi military atmosphere

30:30 mixing with these people for the twelve months I worked there I suppose and then I left that and joined [Leonard] George Parker in his pastry cook business. But that period I suppose was a gradual easing out of military service.

What was the hardest thing about coming back?

Outside of the

31:00 family problems, the hardest thing, rationing rather shook me I think. We bought a car fairly soon after a came home, a car, of all things. To my shock I realised that you only got two gallons of petrol a month or something, some ridiculous figure like that. When I ran out of petrol I just pulled up to

31:30 a garage and said, "Two gallons please." and the fellow said, "Your ration ticket?" and I said, "What are they?" I learnt a hard lesson of conserving petrol. I don't know. Life was easier for me because I had Joy. It probably for someone unattached it could have been far more difficult. And I had that

32:00 period from October to 12th February in hospital and in convalescent homes which was also a letting out of army discipline, army control. Life in the con [convalescent] depot, it was in a luxurious house

32:30 in Toorak in which I spent three weeks or so simply lounging around. There was little or no medical care; it was simply a recuperating area. In the end I was glad to get out of that because I was restless for something to do. Something to do was getting a job and I got the job and started work almost the week after I was discharged. There was no going away for holidays or anything like that.

33:00 Did people ask you what had happened and did you talk about it?

No. I never talked. I remember I talked briefly to my uncle who was married to my father's sister; we were quite close to them. I talked briefly to him and then I never talked until about

33:30 six or eight years ago. Rotary asked me to talk and I've spoken perhaps twice or three times publicly, that's all but I never talked to invoke sympathy or anything like that I always say the same that I've said to you, you take your chances on these things, you go where you're sent. That's virtually what happened.

34:00 Has it had any long term effect on you do you think?

Yes. I spent five months in a psychiatric ward. I was working with Joy's father and I just blacked out. I was suffering a few black outs and I just blacked out and before I knew it they whipped me, Joy's parents had whipped me into hospital and I did the full treatment,

34:30 full insulin treatment in Heidelberg. That's one of the great experiences of my life as well.

Can you tell me about that?

Well you had to, two things, you had to be prepared to be force fed, stay in bed, stay in a locked ward, stay in

35:00 a ward full of mentally deranged people and go through the treatment of intensive insulin treatment. That's what I did. It was fairly intensive and fairly hard and they used to send us home on weekends, didn't they love?

35:30 After the course they more or less said, "That's fixed that, you should be right now." The Repatriation Department said, "Yes, you'll be right now, that's ten per cent." Ten per cent pension and that was it. When they took half my kidney out they said, "Yes you'll be right, that's ten per cent,

36:00 get on with it." Ten per cent pension for that.

Does that mean you had ten per cent less?

No, ten per cent of the full pension so I got two ten per cents.

I just want to clarify something, were you suffering from kidney problems throughout your POW years?

Yes.

Was that painful?

Yes. Often in the last six months on drome the fellas would carry me home on occasion.

And you kept working?

Yeah.

36:30 **Why?**

I don't know. It's just one of these things. Actually there was a doctor we used to call Holiday Bob the subaltern's friend because he would always give anyone sick leave if they wanted it. Why people who weren't working wanted sick leave I don't know. After one of these attacks I went down to him and I told him I had this pain

37:00 and he said, this is Holiday Bob, the subaltern's friend said, "You wouldn't worry about that in civvy [civilian] life, you're all right." and sent me away. But yeah, it was severe, no doubt. They got a bottle full of stones out of my kidney and they decided that was dietary at the time.

37:30 The operation today of course would be far more serious but I had a scar from the front to the centre of my back. The wards were full of casualties and that's another lesson I learnt, that the more severe the injuries, the higher the spirit of the patient.

38:00 The blokes with a sore toe were the grizzlers and the blokes with legs off were the ones who bore it patiently. That's a thing you learn in life. In the first ten years I was home I was in hospital for twelve months so I paid the price I think.

Why do you think people were reluctant to talk about their war experiences for so long?

I think they tried to push it

38:30 to the back of their minds for one thing and the other thing was that people were not interested then. Once again you've got a million people who had had some war time experience and the experiences were so diversified. Even people like RAF pilots who had

39:00 such a romantic sort of life and everyone saw RAF pilots with the little white patch on their cap and thought what great people they were and how you had to be better educated to be a pilot, you had to have your intermediate certificate and so on and they were the ones who perhaps captured the imagination

39:30 and the Middle East battalions captured the imagination as did the Kokoda Trail and I think there was a general reluctance to talk over the first few years until this emergence of Rohan Rivett I think was probably one of the first authors, Rivett's the

40:00 News Limited people, as they were then in Adelaide. He was one of the first people to write a book, Behind the Bamboo, and he started the story and then there came a rush of books and it still continues to this day. We have just printed the fifth edition of our book that we first printed in 1983; the fifth edition and they sell. We've sold a hundred

40:30 since the 24th of April. We've got the material, the draft for a second book and we're quite confident that this one will go. The Professor of History at Melbourne University instigated this one with a class of honours students and they came out and they interviewed us, about twenty of us

41:00 and they put their own interpretation of what you'd said into journalist type of literature and that's the basis for yet another book and we're quite confident we'll sell it. We don't need to sell any books now, we've got that much money and we're all in our eighties that we don't need to make money.

41:30 No one wants welfare any more. Widows and members have all got twenty five thousand dollars. We had a pretty substantial - we have a substantial welfare fund. We've still got sixty thousand dollars in our welfare fund and we look for ways to spend it.

I'm terribly sorry but we've actually run out of tape.

I'm sorry I've kept you.

42:00 **Not at all, thank you so much.**

INTERVIEW ENDS