Australians at War Film Archive

Desmond Mulcahy (Des) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **I would just like to start today by getting you taking us through the major points of your life, just touching on where you were born with to begin with and growing up?**

Alright, I was born on the property ten miles due east of Temora a place called “Bronxholm”; Dad purchased it just a few months

01:00 before I was born. There were no doctors in those days, there was a midwife came around and done the deed and I think I was four years old before I saw the first doctor. I lived there on the property right through and did my middle level schooling. We used to have to drive a horse and sulky six miles on a gravel road, rough road, on a gravel road through rough timber country

01:30 and we used to pick up two other girls aged seven, and we couldn’t all get in the sulky so two used to have to get out and hang onto the back spring and run for a mile, then they would get in and two more would get out and run for a mile. We did that every day. Then the school was moved up close to our property and we could just walk across the paddock. The first teacher I had of any consequence was a chap named Selby Kilby,

02:00 he came from down around the Yass area, a very fine teacher. He finished up head of Bexley High School and he died very young, Selby. From there I progressed, I passed the QC [Qualifying Certificate] when I was 10 years of age and at that stage Dad couldn’t afford to send me away; the Depression was starting to bite and he had other children ahead of me who needed education so I waited two years at the little primary school teaching

02:30 the little kids in first and second class what I could and then I went to St Pat’s College, Goulburn. And I had never worn a pair of boots until I went to St Pat’s College Goulburn. And I had two years there and then things got so bad on the farm it looked as though Dad might lose the property so I volunteered to forego the education and come back and work on the property.

03:00 He accepted that and he sacked the man and I took the man’s place. I was only fifteen years of age, just coming fifteen years of age and I took over an eight-horse team of horses. We used to have to get up two hours before daylight of a morning, get up and light the fire in the stove and call the horses and feed them, put the blinkers on them and come back up for breakfast and go back down to the horses and put the collars and winkers on them and lead them out

03:30 and be out in the paddock at sunrise, and that went on roughly, on and off in the working period for ten years. I stopped there on the farm for ten years until everything settled down and Dad got a bit of a hold on the farm. I said, “I’ve had enough now.” I said, “I want a new tractor.” so we sold the horses and we bought a tractor and we had a big old Hudson Super 6 car

04:00 and we sold it and we bought a Chev [Chevrolet] car. And that was the end of my education and the start of my working life. I did ten years on the farm at home and then when you weren’t farming you were milking cows or feeding pigs or you were rearing turkeys. There was always something to keep you busy. We made a fair bit of money and we got quite comfortable in the finish.

04:30 Then I used to play a lot of sport. I was very good at cricket and hockey. I captained the Riverina Hockey team two years in Sydney at Country week and I scored the fastest 50 ever scored on the Wagga Cricket Ground in the Farrell Cup match and the record still stands. That was wayback in 1939/40 so it is a good record to stand that long. We have had a few come in

05:00 and play in our test cricket but they haven’t beaten it. Then the war broke out and things got progressively worse and when France fell I thought, “Well if we don’t do something the whole bloody world will fall.” So I was in town this day and they had the recruiting drive on with a truck in the middle of the street so I went up and I signed up.

This was in Wagga?

Temora, in Temora and

05:30 I got notified about ten days later and they sent me a pass to put me on the train to take me to Wagga. I arrived at Wagga Camp that night at about ten o'clock and there was a picket duty to pick us up, he said,, "Now you can get in the picket truck to come back to camp or you can have your last night on the town, whichever you please." A lot of the boys said,, "We will have a night on the town." I said, "Well I joined

06:00 the army to get in the army, so I am going back to army camp." So I went back to the camp and I slept in the Hammer Hall that night. There were three of us there - Danny Cullen, Costello and myself. I didn't know that Danny and Costello were two bagmen off the road, so I slept beside them all night and it was freezing weather. I couldn't get to sleep at all; all we had was seven pounds of straw underneath us. Got up next morning and these two blokes

06:30 were fully dressed and I said, "When did you two blokes get dressed?" They said, "We're on the road." they said, "When it gets cold you just put your clothes on and go back to bed again." so I learnt something the first night in the army. Anyhow there was another chap from Temora went over with me but he went down to the town for the night, by the name of Frank Crutchett. Frank was doing accountancy and we palled up together and we got

07:00 together in this big old hall, and Major Stutsbury was in charge of it so he came around this first night we were there, we were sitting on our palliasses polishing our boots to go down to the town and he said to us, "Tomorrow morning when you two boys when you go out on parade you will be full corporals." And I said, "What does that mean sir?" He said, "You have to call the roll." I said, "Is that all? Okay." So went on the parade the next morning

07:30 and there had to be a bloke in the line up whose name was spelt "Fuks." You can imagine what I said when I called the roll out, there was nearly a riot. We got through that and we all started to train, got training and that and we were there and Anderson [Lieutenant Colonel Charles Anderson VC [Victoria Cross], MC [Military Cross] was there going with us and then old Brig [Brigadier] Maxwell came down to take over the battalion and he made a speech and he wanted all the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] who were in the Wagga Camp

08:00 to relinquish their stripes and go to Wallgrove and train and become the nucleus for the 2/19th Battalion. That night Major Stuchberry came around and he said to Frank and I, "Now I hope you two boys aren't going to leave me?" he said. "If you stay I will guarantee you a commission before you get out of Australia." He said, "Think over it tonight."

08:30 So he came around the next morning and he said, "What were we going to do?" I said, "I am going to Sydney sir." Frank said, "I will stop with you." Frank got his commission, and I never saw one. Frank went on and became a captain in the Middle East. It just shows the luck of the draw. Anyhow I went down to Wallgrove and got going there and I got the stripe back, I got two stripes back and then we trained there for a while and then we moved over to Ingleburn.

09:00 Ingleburn was a better camp. There we had huts to sleep in. I always got the dregs of the army; I had the knack of handling hard men. So if there was somebody in the battalion they couldn't handle they would say, "Give him to Mulcahy he will straighten him out." I never had to hit a man or anything in my life but I could get him going. I had all the ning nongs [fools] in the world, but I tell you what they were good fighting men when it came to the pinch. I had one little bloke with me

09:30 by the name of Terry Finn. Terry came from Yass and he had a good education; he had done five years at St Pat's College, Terry. He was the only bloke in 7th platoon who had a five year education and he and I got on very well together so I made him the 2IC [2nd in command].

How long were you at Ingleburn?

We trained there, then we went up to Bathurst, moved to Bathurst and

10:00 I had had a hernia operation before I joined the army and it recurred at Bathurst and they wanted to discharge me, but I said, "No, I don't want to be discharged, I want to go on in the army." Colonel Money was in charge of the 7th Hospital going overseas, he came up to do an inspection, so he operated on me at the St Vincent's Hospital there in Bathurst, the Catholic hospital, whatever it was

10:30 I had six or eight weeks on light duties and then I sailed as a corporal and arrived in Singapore with the rest of the troops. But this Terry Finn had an amazing career, they formed what they called Tulip Force and they picked odd men from all around the battalion, capable men,

11:00 and they formed a nucleus, a bit like our special troops now and they sent them off and they trained in Burma and they went up into China. And the Chinese war lords were raiding all the stuff that was going over the Burma line so they had a couple of little flurries there with them and then the Chinese got around them and held them prisoner for some months before they let them out. Terry went right through that and he came back out through Burma and came back down to Australia and got his commission and then went on back to New Guinea.

11:30 And after the war I contacted him and he was in the Indian Army and he was a major and he had not seen a shotl fired in anger, the luck of the draw again

You were stationed at Singapore initially?

We were at Singapore, yes We were dropped in Singapore. The only thing I could say that made us laugh in Singapore was we used to heat a penny with a match and drop it over the wharf

12:00 for the little black boys to pick up. They would run to grab the penny and burn their hands and they would drop it, pick it up and they would dance around and wait until they cooled off in the finish. All the top brass were there, and we were throwing it down to the top brass but the brass were not interested, they were letting the little black fellows pick them up. They took us from there then by train up to Seremban. There were two camps, two places up there. We had the King George

12:30 V building which was a beautiful, big old school and then there was the primary school and I was in the primary school. We did our training and while I was there then I was selected to play cricket for the Negri Bilan Estate [?], a chap by the name of Renfrew was the solicitor, he used to arrange it with the battalion commander to pick myself, and Frank Collins and bloke by the name of Pettit,

13:00 who were three fairly good cricketers. They would pick us up of a Saturday morning from parade and take us, we might go to Perak, we might go anywhere at all throughout Malaya. We would play cricket for the weekend and they would bring us back that night. That was a little sideline we had going. It was very good.

Did you see action not long after?

We didn't see action for quite a long while after that. This was funny playing cricket over there,

13:30 you'd get a thunderstorm and you go out and play straight afterwards, and you would get hit in the eye with a heap of mud, the ball would hit the ground and throw the mud up and you were just as likely to get hit in the eye with the mud as you were with the ball. They played cricket all the time. They moved us up then, we went up to Port Dickson, and put us down at Port Dickson for awhile and brought us back up to Seremban, then they took us down to a little place called Tuan. It was a terrible camp, it was

14:00 in rubber and it was wet and everything went mouldy. They took us out of there and bought us down to Jemaluang. There were a lot of tin mines around Jemaluang and that is where we had to dig our defence line there and that is where we were going to stop the Japs. So we laboured away there for a month or six weeks until we had completely re-bedded all the dug out trenches and re-bedded them all and lived on wild pigs as they were around there. Had Christmas dinner there

14:30 and then we were called out in the middle of the night, loaded onto the trucks and said we were to cross the island to a place called Bakri, and we had a brigade of Indians on the river and they were Garhwals, and they had only been in the army for six months.

15:00 It takes six months to teach an Indian to wear a pair of shoes because they don't wear boots; they get these poor people out of the mountains. They were illiterate and all this sort of thing, so they had only been in the army for six months and when the Japs hit them they just didn't know what to do, they just shot the officers and ran riot. They came down the road like; they ran past us like a mob of cattle. You couldn't stop them, they'd go down and Japs would mow them down, and then they would turn around and then the Japs would mow them down again.

15:30 There was no hope of handling them at all. So they put us in here at Bakri and they took us up the tracks and the 2/29th [Battalion] had gone in and got surrounded and got cut off and couldn't move one way or the other, so the [2/]19th was sent in to relieve them. They just drove us up and dropped us off and we went straight into action. We got our positions for the night, we fought back and got our positions for the night and then

16:00 just after dark, I was acting sergeant there, we had left our sergeant behind at Jemaluang to show the new troops into their quarters, so I was moved up from a corporal to an acting sergeant in charge of 7th Platoon. The lieutenant said to me, he said, "Des, we have to do a patrol out to the little village of Bakri to see if the Japs had occupied it."

16:30 I said, "Alright, how many men do you want?" He said, "You and I, and we'll take one other man with a Tommy gun." So the three of us set off and we sneaked up through the gullies along side the road and we got up to the village and there was a truck in the middle of the road with all the lights on and they were loading stuff out of the store, it looked to me as though they were looting. The officer said to me, "Duck over and see what they are doing." I said, "Not on your bloody life." I said.

17:00 I said, "I am not going over there with all that light, it will draw the flies like maggots, I am stopping here under cover until I see what happens." I had hardly said the words out of my mouth when a burst of machine gun fire burst out, and the three Indians fell dead. I said, "Now just wait awhile, don't move, just stop where you are." So everybody stopped and we waited for about three or four minutes and after a while a lone Jap walked out and he surveyed

17:30 the dead men and he beckoned to his men and they came across, there were eight of them, and they stood around. I gave the order and we machine gunned them and we killed the whole lot in one hit, bang, got the lot of them. So I said to Ritchie, "You can go back Sir and report in and let them know the job has been done."

Now this was at Bakri, you say?

It was at Bakri. That was our first contact with the Japs at Bakri, but on the way in there that night,

18:00 we lost one man, Tommy Murray. We went in ten yards apart through this lowland grass which was about five feet high and when we got to the outskirts of the village we checked out and we were one man short, Tommy Murray was missing. We went back looking for him and they had sunk a well, one of these four foot pipes, stuck it down in the lowland grass and hadn't covered it, and the lowland grass had sort of fell over it,

18:30 and it had about a foot or fifteen inches of water in it and Tommy walked in and fell down in this hole, he had no hope of getting out. We had to get hold of his rifle and pull him out with his rifle to get him out. He said, "I wish I knew the bloke that sunk that bloody hole." he said, "I'd give him bloody something. But these were funny little things that happened to us and he was dead serious and that was our first real contact of the war.

I believe the actions at Bakri and again on the Marura River were very serious actions?

19:00 It got serious after that, that was just the thick. In the meantime B Company were on the right and they had made contact through to the 2/29th and we were trying to withdraw them back through the roads, as many as we could but they got cut off. They got cut off and they got split up into different sections and it was a terrible mess but we got quite a few of them back but a lot of them had wandered off into the jungle and they came out days later. We got the bulk of them back

19:30 and we got some of their equipment back but not much of it, we lost a lot of equipment with the 2/29th. Anyhow the next morning, during the night the Japs had come in and they had occupied a ridge running around in front of our position. So Anderson said, "Alright I want that ridge cleaned out." He said to A Company, "Clean the ridge out." So 7th Platoon went in first and we went through and

20:00 we cleaned everything out and I lost one man, one of my snipers was shot, and it was a Tommy gun that got shot, and the rest of us got through and we left 15 dead Japs behind us. The sniper we shot because he went on the wrong side of the tree to shoot, instead of shooting around the right hand side of the tree he shot from the left hand side and exposed his whole body, and the other bloke with the Tommy gun stepped right out

20:30 in the bare paddock where there wasn't a patch of grass to hide himself, sat down and used a Tommy gun. You don't sit down with a Tommy gun; you've got a Tommy gun and you just pull the trigger and swipe it. He sat out there, a sitting shot and of course the Jap sniper hit him, so that was two men I lost, so I gave them a talking to after that. Never had much trouble with them after that.

Des, this sounds like a very involved and detailed campaign you were first involved in; if we can I would like to touch on

21:00 **this in more detail a little later on. Can you let me know briefly which other campaigns did you get involved in before returning to Singapore?**

The only campaign we were involved in was this battle that went on for four days and four nights, continuous battle all the time, until we went back to the bridge and the bridge was surrounded by Japs [Parit Sulong Bridge]. And when we left it we left a platoon there to guard it and then they moved the platoon away and put an English unit

21:30 in it [Norfolks] and the English unit as soon as they saw the Japs they took off. We couldn't get across the bridge so we were anchored there and we had to either get out or get massacred, so we got out. We found our way back to Yong Peng and I will tell you about the episode getting back later on if you want that. So we got back to Yong Peng, and we had been four days and four nights continuously fighting and I couldn't eat anything. They offered us a hot meal but I couldn't eat anything, eventually a bloke gave me a

22:00 tin of pears, preserved pears and I ate most of those and I laid down and had a real good sleep. They put us in the trucks first thing next morning and whizzed us back to Jahal Maru to form the 19th on the four system, not the three system, on the four system which means four men to each platoon, four sections to each platoon, which gave us a lot more men, a lot more mobility but we were never able to use it.

22:30 Anyhow that went on then and as soon as we got reformed and had a week's training and they popped us back on the island to defend the island. There were no defences dug at all on that island;

Singapore Island?

Singapore Island, it was just a bare island with nothing on it. And they had all the garrison troops were stationed up in the north east corner because they were sure that was where the Japs were going to go. We sent one of our officers across the straits at night with two men with him in a little boat and they went along and

23:00 they slept 48 hours over there and they watched the survey and they could see all these trucks going up north, they were empty trucks and they were just running the trucks backwards and forwards to make it look as though were taking everything up there. All the boats they had they were stored down below

and they wouldn't take any notice of us; they said, "Oh no, the stuff is all going up top." We suffered the crux of the matter down here and we got hit very hard down the bottom. The good troops who were up there they hardly fired a shot, we did

23:30 all the fighting down the bottom end. We had a man to every 100 yards, that's how we were strung out to try and block the Japs and you can imagine what a mess it was? So anyhow they wiped us back out and we tried to reform and then we got out and we got cut off, and I found myself with five men so we joined what they called Merritt Force. Merritt Force was a force of odds and sods so we went back up and we went back up into battle

24:00 with the Merritt Force and we marched all through late evening into the night. I didn't like what was going on at all. I could see we were being led into a valley with hills all around, and you could hear the Japs with the 2/4th machine gunners were firing all around the hills. I knew that the next morning the Japs would have occupied all the hills. Sure enough they did and the next morning the first thing we got was "Every man for himself!" so I tried to get my men out around through

24:30 the right flank but I lost two of them, got the others all out. We came back then and we got a house, a big old home and we were all packed up ready to leave, so I had five men with me so I said, "I am going to lie down and have a sleep." So I layed down on the carpeted floor and I slept for two hours and when I woke there wasn't a sound and, I thought, "God, what has happened here? How long have I been down?" I shot out the door; one man was left and the others had all got up

25:00 and gone. I went on down and got through down there and I virtually got right into the city of Singapore before I picked up anybody that I knew and they led me back and I got back over onto the 19th and we eventually formed a perimeter around the botanical gardens. But Anderson had been taken away just before the war had started on the island with diarrhoea and he came back and we had

25:30 another lieutenant who wasn't very popular and he didn't do a very good job in my opinion. I won't mention any names but as soon as Anderson took over it was a different unit again. They all gathered around Anderson, "We are here boys, this is where we are going to fight and stop." That is where we stopped until the war ended in the botanical gardens at Singapore.

At that time the war ended for you?

26:00 The war ended then.

You were placed in captivity?

Yes, we were notified that night that all firing was to cease at eight o'clock. The next morning we were told to pile our arms, we weren't supposed to do any damage to them, but everybody took the bolt out and threw it away, piled their arms and they formed us up and they marched us out then all the way to Changi.

You stayed at Changi for some

26:30 **length of time?**

I had ten months in Changi. I was in charge of a working party and built a road across the golf links up to a shrine they built for the Japanese who were killed. I was in charge of that and then they came back into Adam Road Camp and I was in Adam Road then and I got put onto A Force to go up to Burma and I got dysentery and I was taken off it and put into hospital for four days. And when I came out,

27:00 A Force had gone and B Force had gone and I was put on to C Force, so we joined C Force. C Force was 2,200 men, mainly Dutch, coloured Dutch, Indonesian, a few Yanks [Americans], Australian and Pommies [English]. There were 2,200 on the ship at the camp at Kamakura Maru. We took Brigadier

27:30 Maxwell and General Heath up with us, they were the last two senior officers to leave Singapore. Heath had been left behind because his wife was having a baby; they left him there until she had had the baby. He had been in charge of the hospital, so when they came up we dropped them off at Formosa and then they took us and dropped us at Nagasaki. We arrived at Nagasaki after going through a

28:00 monsoon and we had a cold, bitterly wind coming through from Siberia and they put us on a big open patch of the wharf with ropes around us and machine guns all around us. We sat there for 16 hours without anything to eat or drink. We had been in the tropics for two years; and they gave us the British uniforms but nothing underneath them.

28:30 I was going around all the time, around the Aussie troops having a yarn with them to keep going and then they put us in a heated train and the train pulled in and all the senior officers of course got up in the front. The Japs knew how many head were in each carriage as it was a seated train, and away we went, and they took us up then to Kobe and they wanted 400 men in a new camp at Kobe so they went along

29:00 and they just took 400 men in so many carriages off and the rest were away. All that went away were the medical staff, the senior administration, all the rolls, everything went with them. We were left 400 men with nothing. We had three officers, captains, only one had seen action, the other two were behind the lines, back base men.

29:30 We had five lieutenants who were alright for toothpicks, not much else, real sea officers, never been out in the open before. Anyhow we got to the camp this night and it was a bitterly cold night and it was a brand new camp, everybody had five blankets and we put on a bit of a donnybrook [fight] and hunted everybody out of one hut and got all the Australians in one hut, made the Dutch and the Pommies get out and get their own huts

30:00 There were four or five huts so they had to get their own huts. Next morning this Captain Beverley came around and said, “Des, I want you to come with me.” I went down with him and when I went down there were three captains, there was Beverley, there was Arthur Gates from Headquarters and there was Patterson from 8th Sigs [Signals], they were in the room and the first thing they said was, “We have a problem.” I said, “I could have told you that a week ago, we’ve got a big problem, we are prisoners of war.”

30:30 He said, “No, we have a bigger problem than that.” I said, “What is it?” “The Pommies have four senior NCOs [non commissioned officers] and four senior warrant officers, and the Australians haven’t got a warrant officer, all we have got is sergeants, we are going to make you a warrant officer and put you in charge of the camp, will you take the job on?” I said, “My God, you don’t want much do you?” I said, “Look get me the four warrant officers from the Pommy unit and I will have a word with them.”

31:00 We sent a runner up and we got these four blokes down and the situation was explained to them that the Aussies wouldn’t work for a Pommy but the Pommies would work for an Aussie so to keep harmony in the camp they wanted me to be the senior man with the Pommies to work under me. So one of the men, Sergeant Major Guest, I made him my 2IC, he was a fantastic bloke, came from the 2nd Battalion, so that ironed that out. Then I found myself with 400 men,

31:30 most of them couldn’t speak English. We had one Indonesian who could speak Japanese and they brought another 200 in and I had 600 men in the camp. You had to have a set figure to go out to work every day, you weren’t allowed any extra sick men, the poor bloke could be almost dying, he had to go to work, whether he worked or not he had to go out to make the numbers up and

32:00 we only worked the day shift there, it was all day shift all the time. And we were in the ship building business so we had no chance of getting any food or anything, their was no food, only just at the kitchen but on the wharf on the other side, I’ve got a letter there from a bloke on the other side, all the ships that came up from the south bringing all the food back they were bringing up, they docked on his side and they lived like kings and he’s got the cheek to say

32:30 it was very similar to what I went through. Anyhow we put it in and it was so cold, and the trouble with the cold was if you touched the iron it would almost stick to you a lot of the time because it was so cold. The boys were freezing and I lost, the first month or six weeks I lost 17 men from pneumonia

33:00 because we had no medical treatment, so if you got pneumonia you died. That was the worst period of the whole camp, after that things did better.

During that time at Kobe you weren’t just working at shipbuilding?

All ship building all the time.

Did you move on from Kobe to another place?

Yes, we moved out of Kobe when the Japs came through on Paddy’s Day [St Patrick’s Day] in ’45 and we burnt Kobe to the ground. We cooked 40,000 Japs with it; and they moved us and we had a week off on half rations.

33:30 They took us down to Fukuoka, 15 kilometres from Nagasaki and they put us in the old coal mines, they opened up the old coal mines and we did 82 days straight in the coal mines without hot water, very little soap. And day and night worked the two shifts, Des took the day shift out and I took the night shift out. Then

34:00 when the war ended we got word to catch this train and move down to the Nagasaki wharf. We loaded up and got on the train and down we went and I got out of the train and walked over and saluted the senior Yank I could see there and he looked a bit perplexed this bloke and I said, “What’s the trouble Sir?” He said, “You give me a fright.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “I was sent down here to meet a trainload of Aussies

34:30 and when you got off the train I thought it was black Americans.” I said, “We’ve had eighty two days in the coal mines Sir without a break.” I said, “And no soap and no hot water.” I said, “You will have to bear with us for awhile.” He said, “Alright, we will fix all that up.” and they took us over and lined us up and went to a little bloke and he was sitting at a table and you had to take your watch off it if you had it and put it in a bag

35:00 and then it was fumigated, and we went down the line and you had to come around the back and you got it when you went out. You went into the next tent, you took off all your clothes, you threw them in a heap in the middle because they said they wanted to burn them all, they were all lousy. We went into the next hut and there were all hot showers, about 30 or 40 hot showers around the wall and we had lashings of soap and hot water and we had a fantastic time with this. It was the best bath I had ever had I think.

35:30 They said, “When you have finished with the towel do the same thing, throw it in the middle of the room because we are going to do away with that too.” They said, “When you have finished that, go into the next room and you will be equipped with your equipment.” So we went into the third hut and the Yanks had all this stuff lined out to fit everybody ready to wear. You put your new clothes on and when you came out the other end we were like Paddy’s Market. The bloke on the outside had our watches

36:00 and he said, “Now the girls have some donuts and coffee down there at the wharf if you would like to go down.” Now I had some blokes there that had joined the army when they were fifteen and hadn’t seen a white girl for three and a half years. You had a job to get them down there; we almost had to frog march them down. Once you got them down there and got them started they were right. We went down and we had a good meal of food, donuts and coffee and then they put us on the little boat called the PA200,

36:30 one of the little boats that drop the front and you walk straight off. They took us across and put us into Okinawa. There were dozers going everywhere there, they had just taken over, they were putting airstrips and Lord know what in and they put us on a little hill, and there was another hill on the other side of the road and we hear these dozers going all night and we woke up next morning

37:00 and there is 200, where this hill had been the night before there was 200 tents on it, the Sea Bees [US Engineers] had come in overnight levelled the top off the hill and put 200 tents up to take the troops who were coming out. I never saw such…. I didn’t know how they could do it in such a short time. Anyhow we waited there for five or six days and we were fed if nothing else. I could see down on the plain

37:30 and I could see this airstrip with the planes landing on it, so I walked down this day and I said to this bloke there, “Any chance of getting some men back? I have got about 250 Aussies up there I have to get back to home.” I said, “You are coming out of Manila? He said, “Yeah” and I said, “Can you get them back to Manila?” he said, “Yes, by all means.” He said, “Bring a few down tomorrow and we will do a trial run.” I took a few down the next morning;

38:00 the first two planes took off alright but the third one blew a tyre and cartwheeled and killed one of the POWs [prisoners of war] and one of the pilots so all trips were cancelled for that day. So I went down the next day and I got on the second plane and I thought, “I’m getting out of this place too.” so I got on the second plane and we took off and we no sooner got airborne than we all got sprayed with petrol.

38:30 A fuel line burst, so we had to taxi around and we came in to land and we were knocking on the door of the plane saying, “Open the door and let us out, let us out!” This Yankee voice said, “If we let you out we will never catch you again.” he said, so we had to stop in the bay all the time while they fixed the fuel line. They flew us back into Melbourne and the troops started to come in pretty regularly and they gathered them all up and they put us into huts, big tents, 28 to a tent. I got most of the

39:00 Aussies as they came out I got them pretty close together and I had a bit of a nominal role that I had made out myself. I struck an Aussie colonel there one day and I said, “Look, I have been here now for the best part of a week and I have been going down to intelligence nearly every day for three or four hours and then back here, I want to get on home.” I said “Here is a list of the men I had with me, can you look after me?” He said, “Leave it with me, I’ll take it.” So he took the list and he said,

39:30 “We will get them all home.” He said, “Some of them will be going home by boat” and he said “Some will fly.” So our tent dropped from 28 to 4. They used to come and take so many away every day and we were still drawing a 28 day ration from the army PX [canteen/store], they gave a little book to everybody and they would hand the books back

40:00 so there were four of us drawing rations for 24.. We had thirty odd pairs of boots stacked in the corner of the hut and we had I don’t know how many boxes of Corona cigars; there must have been 50 boxes of Corona cigars there. You are allowed four cigars each a days so when you have 28 blokes you soon use up a few cigars.

How did you actually get back to Australia?

40:30 I flew back. I was just going to say I was there this morning and a bloke poked his head in the door and said, “Is there a bloke by the name of Mulcahy here? I said, “Yes.” He said, “Des Mulcahy?” I said, “Yes, who are you?” He said, “My name is Lieutenant so and so I am flying out of Tocumwal, your old girlfriend is in charge of the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] down there and she has had us looking for you for a fortnight.” He said, “We are taking you home to get her off our back.”

41:00 So next morning I had to go to headquarters and they flew me right home.

Tape 2

00:15 **Did you have any photographs taken at the end of the war when you came out of the camp?**

Yes, yes.

Were there any where you were all black with the coal dust?

No. We had the photos taken after.

00:30 **Des, can you bring me to where you landed back in Australia?**

We flew into Darwin and we were unloaded there and I was put into hospital for ten days because my medical records had gone ahead of me and they showed that I had TB [tuberculosis], but what it was, I had a lung drained at the prisoner of war camp and the fluids reformed and I had lost a third of the lung and I had this bad scum on it on the side of it,

01:00 it looked as though I had TB so they did a ten day test there and it proved all right so they sent me home. When I landed back in Sydney, most of the family were there to meet me but poor mother had died, I missed her, still miss her actually

01:30 This is one of the fallacies of war - you go, "You must expect things to be different when you get back." But overall I came out really well. I became engaged to the girlfriend from

02:00 the Tocumwal camp. She became a Shire Councillor, head of the council at Cootamundra; she was the head in the office.

You mentioned she was in the WAAAFs?

She was in the WAAAFs, yes but then I had my jaws broken eight times in the prisoner of war camp and they were badly out of alignment, my teeth The army had spent a couple of days on them

02:30 but they did a reasonable job, but I still didn't have proper occlusion. My favourite cousin had married a dentist while I was away and he had set up business in West Wyalong, so he invited me out and said he wanted me to spend a week and I will give your teeth a good go over. I said, "Right." so out I went and went down this morning and got in the chair

03:00 and looked up and this little vision sort of poked its head around and I said, "Where did you come from?" She said, "I am the assistant." The next morning she was there again and I said, "Where do you live?" I switched horses and became engaged to her, cancelled the other one, became engaged to her and married this one. It was a very happy marriage, we just missed 50 years

03:30 before she passed away.

Where was she from?

West Wyalong. That's her there. She was from West Wyalong she was and there was a mob of West Wyalong girls - there was her good friend Joanie Oswald, she was Joanie Kearns, married Ron Oswald the multi-millionaire in town. I don't know whether you know him or not? He is very sick so

04:00 I must ring him and see how he is getting on. He is a multi millionaire and I think he has 70 odd hotels at moment, got nothing in his name, wouldn't know he had a bob [a shilling].

When did you get married?

We were married in 1947, we were married.

Where were you living at that time?

I was living on the farm at Temora, living on the farm at Temora

04:30 and we got married and moved out there. We lost our first baby, it died at birth, a little girl and went on then and had eight others. Half way through that business I drew a soldier's settler's block at Gunnedah and I was a bit forced into it. When I came home Dad said, "Well you

05:00 worked for ten years for nothing you had better take the farm. I will pull out now and make a few quid for yourself." So I took over the farm and I had three good seasons. When I drew this block up there I had a new header, a new car and I had a very good plant, not a lot of new plant but quite good plant, and I had £10,000 in the bank so I didn't look back.

05:30 I got stuck into it up there. I became a Shire Councillor of Coonabarabran Council for six years. When I retired and left up there I held an executive position in ten organisations. They used to call me 'Mr Gunnedah' in one place and other places called me 'The Squire' and someone else called me something else. I had names all round the place up there.

06:00 **You had some children?**

Yes we had eight children; we had four boys, four girls. The eldest boy is a doctor and the eldest girl will be a doctor soon. She has just done a PhD [doctorate]. She is a professor at the moment. I have a school teacher/housewife with six kids, who married a solicitor. I've got a veterinary surgeon; I've got a pharmacist,

06:30 I've got an accountant, I've got a naval officer and I have a lawyer. I have eight kids and doing it on 1500 acres is quite an accomplishment, 16 hours a day, seven days a week most of the time to keep up with the flow of money I wanted.

When did you move to Sydney?

07:00 We sold out in 1974 and moved to Sydney and bought a nice big home at Chatswood, Hestley Street, Chatswood and I brought all the kids back then. I had kids at all the universities and schools and I brought them all back and that saved me a lot of money, bought them all back home. I stopped there until the first five had gone through and then the wife wanted a change so we moved to Tamworth.

07:30 Her mother and father were living with us at this stage. The old lady fell over and broke her hip so we had to bring him down too and I had to two of them there with us. I got them flown up by air ambulance from Sydney to Tamworth for us. We stopped in Tamworth until the two old people died and then the wife got itchy feet again and wanted to move so we sold up everything

08:00 and invested it for three months and we went and lived with our son who had a home at Summer Hill, a veterinary surgeon who had this big old home at Summer Hill and we were living with him for three months. We had a good look around where we thought we might like to settle. We went up the coast and down the coast, we finished up at Katoomba.

08:30 So we bought a nice little home in Katoomba and we were quite happy there then the wife developed cancer. I brought her down to Sydney and they operated on her leg and took a lump out and everything else and went on then and the next November they gave her a clean bill of health and by February she was dead. You can't take much notice of these doctors giving you a clean bill of health. I stopped there on my own for another two years. We'd moved back then,

09:00 once the wife got cancer we moved back, sold out at Katoomba and moved back to Chiswick and I stopped there for another two years. I got the daughters to hunt around and they found this place for me. I had one at Dural, but they said that was too far out, nobody will visit me there. So they got me this one at Ashfield and I come over here and I liked the look of it and I said, "Yes, I'll take it." I didn't want one of those real pokey little rooms,

09:30 I wanted a double room. So they said yes, and then this big one become available and they rang me up and said, "There's a big one come available, come and have a look at it." I went over and the girls came with me and I said, "This will suit me fine." so I bought this. You have to pay to come in here. You can't walk in for nothing; you have to pay for everything. You pay so much a week and you pay your own telephone and your own electricity and that's all you pay.

10:00 **I am sure it does suit you fine, it is a lovely place.**

Yes.

You certainly have moved around a lot and seen a lot of different places?

I have been all over Australia. There is no place in Australia I haven't been. I have been all over New Zealand and all over Tasmania.

You have seen very much….

I have done a lot of travelling. I met this air pilot just after the wife died. I had a car accident and

10:30 I wiped the new car off, and a big semi trailer hit me coming on the freeway and didn't stop and took all the side of the car off, and it happened on the Thursday, I put a claim in on the Friday and they rang me on the Monday and they said it was a write off and they had the money in the bank within the week. They took $350 because I didn't get the other bloke's number. This young bloke pulled up one day

11:00 and he said, "Where was your car?." and I told him and I said they took this money off me I had no chance of getting his number. He said "I do a fair bit of work for them I will have a yarn with them." So he took the folder and he went away and came back about ten days later and said, "You are going to get a letter from them." and sure enough they sent me a cheque for the $300 odd dollars. I though this bloke must have a bit of pull. He said to me one day, "Do you like flying?" I said, "Yes, I love flying."

11:30 I said, "I tried to get in the air force but they wouldn't take me because I didn't have a good enough education." He said, "I fly about a lot and if I have to do insurance work out west, would you like to fly out with me?" I said yes. I have been flying all over the State with him ever since. We have been up the coast, we have been across to Goondiwindi, right down the Darling River, Temora, Cootamundra, Wagga all those places.

12:00 Take the weekend off and away we would go. A lot of the farms I know on the properties and some of them have put their own airstrips in so we could land on their airstrip. So when they put an airstrip in we would buy them a flag to put up so you could get the wind velocity.

That is interesting Des. I would like to take you back to Temora. You mentioned that you had actually wanted to join the air force? When you were a child did you have any knowledge or do you have any

12:30 **recollections of the air force training ground at Temora?**

No. That wasn't there in my day, wasn't there in my day, came after I left.

What sparked your interest in the air force?

My little doctor was a flight attendant in the air force. He was a doctor, Aden Cook, and he operated on me with the hernia I had and he was talking to me one day and he said, "Why don't you join the air force?"

13:00 So I packed up my traps and I went down to Richmond. They gave me a test there and they said, "Yes you are good but you haven't got enough education. We are only taking university students. Go back and come and see us again." The day after war broke out I was on the door step again. They said, "No, we are still only taking university students but here is a form. If you join the army and get your colonel to sign this

13:30 and if we want you before you get out of Australia he has to release you for it." So I got the form signed but they never wanted me. I just stopped in the army.

At the time when war had broken out, were you in service at the time?

No.

What was your first enlistment?

The only contact I had with war was one of my mother's brothers was in the First World War, Bernie Crisp. He was in the First World War.

14:00 **Had you had much occasion to speak to him about that?**

No, very little actually, very little. I only saw him once or twice in my life. He was in the foreign business down in Sydney and we lived in the bush. He did visit us a couple of times. I remember he was shot in the hand and he had a deformed hand, the right hand, the bullet went through his hand.

Would he tell you stories about it?

No he never spoke much about the army at all, never spoke much about it.

14:30 **Did you know much about the First World War?**

I had read a fair bit about it, yes But one of the big things that stuck me with the [2/]19th Battalion was the NCOs they had were bushel heads from the land and had done a lot of shooting. When they brought

15:00 the officers in they were nearly all bank johnnies [bank clerks], school teachers and so forth and they had no knowledge about outside at all so they depended almost entirely a lot of them on their corporals to tell them what to do and how to go about it. They soon learnt, but a lot of the corporals were promoted, but they should have gone up a lot earlier in the action part but they were held back because these blokes from the banks

15:30 were there and you had to wait until they got shot before they could move in. The second line of defence was really calling the shots most of the time.

When you were growing up in Temora did you have much of an impression of Anzac Day or the Anzac legend?

Yes. We used to have a little Anzac parade every year at a place called Springdale where Bernie Crisp

16:00 is on the cenotaph there. Bernie's name was on it and every Anzac Day there would be a few people gather around it and say a few prayers and put a few flowers on it. That would be about the only contact I had with it.

Did it leave any mark on you do you think?

I think it made me conscious of war, I knew what war was all about, and I wasn't going into it

16:30 blindfolded. I knew what I was going into.

Looking back after your experiences in the Second World War did you fully know do you think what was in front of you do you think?

Looking back now, I could have done a lot of things, I could have stopped at Wagga and got a commission, I could have stopped and waited and joined the air force and I would have probably been shot down and killed in that time

17:00 when you look back over your history, you had to take it as you played it at the time, you can't go back now. Yes, I would like to go back now and I'd like to take Terry Finn's job, the bloke that did all that travelling around and finished up a major in the British Army - the world he saw.

At the early stages of the war many air force personnel were sent to

17:30 **England to participate in the defence of the mother country. Did that play any part in your desire to be a pilot?**

Every young fellow in those days wanted to be a pilot; it was the ultimate to be a pilot.

Did you want to rush off to England's aid?

Not particularly, not particularly. I wanted to get up in the air, that's all I wanted to do. Get up in the air and learn to fly and get a bit

18:00 of power underneath me, sort of thing. Unfortunately in those days we had no planes here in comparison at all with what they had in England, so if you wanted to get into the game you had to go to England. The young fellows who were over there, education wise, could have joined the air force.

18:30 **Did you see many opportunities in front of you in the years leading up to the war?**

Very little, very little. See I lived ten miles out of town and it was nearly all horse and sulky; I had to breed blood horses and I usually rode a horse. I could ride from my home to Springdale, seven miles in 23 minutes. I always had a real good blood horse underneath me.

19:00 **Were you keen to leave the land or any regrets about leaving?**

I loved the land, I loved the land, I loved the land but at that stage things had got to the stage where I thought I would be wanted overseas in the battle line and when I came back I was quite prepared, I would have got on the tractor the next day.

19:30 I was the first man in NSW to grow an 80 bushel crop of wheat on dry land farming.

At the time you were considering enlisting did you talk about this with your family?

Very little. Coming home that day in the car, Mum turned around to me and she said to me, "You joined up today didn't you?" I said,

20:00 "Yes I did." She knew what was going on because she and I were very close. I had built her a yard about two acres. She was a great turkey breeder, and she used to breed up to five hundred turkeys and I was always making turkey nests for her. She would have all these turkey hens there and she would come up and say, "There is

20:30 a turkey hen who has a nest outside, I want you to go and find it." She would lock her turkey hen up and I would go around and I would crawl up a tall pine tree and she would let the turkey out and I could see for a hundred yards all around and I could see exactly where the old turkey went and when she had settled in I would go down and get the eggs and bring the old girl back.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had one brother and three sisters.

21:00 The eldest sister died here in June, aged 93.

Did any of them join or consider joining?

No. The eldest brother was in the fire brigade during the war. He was conscripted he couldn't get out and my youngest sister she joined the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and she was stationed in Canberra and used to drive all the big

21:30 wigs around. She had a good knowledge of Canberra and she used to drive all the visiting heads of staff all around the place. She did a very good job. The other two were both married.

What was your mother's reaction on that day when you admitted to having enlisted?

She took it very well. It was never discussed afterwards, she just asked me and I just told her and

22:00 it was never discussed. It was one of those things I had to do and she realised it.

And your father?

He never queried it.

Did they see you off when you first left home?

Yes. There was quite a crowd at Temora railway station to see us off that night. You couldn't get near the station and there must have been 20 or 30 of us going. There were people for miles

22:30 around the place.

What were your feelings?

It was a sort of elation, you were getting away from one form of life into another altogether and you were just wondering where it was going to lead you and whether you would be suitable for it and all the rest of it. It was something you didn't do without some thought

Did any friends join with you?

23:00 Yes, Frank Crutchett was the only one. I still keep in touch with Frank. Frank is retired, he is in Wagga Wagga.

Did you go through training and being stationed together?

No, we only did one month in Wagga camp and then I left him. He stopped there and went through officers' school.

23:30 **Did you make friends when you were in training camp?**

Yes, yes I made a lot of friends, a lot of friends. One of the best friends I had was old Tim McCoy and Austin Hayden. He came from up Bibbenluke way up in the mountains. I had a lot of boys from up there. I had Tim McCoy, I had Ben Hall, I had Slogger Rye, I had Wally Evans,

24:00 Bourke, these are all.... Horrie Hewson, Horrie Hewson was the bloke who always wanted to shoot me. He said, "You will be the first bastard I'll shoot Mulcahy when we get into action." One night I was leading these blokes out through the jungle in my socks and that and someone said, "Who's this silly bugger up the front leading us?" Hewson said, "I don't know." He said, "I have followed him for 12 months."

24:30 he said, "I am going to follow him a bit longer." I thought I have won Horrie over at last. Poor old Horrie didn't make it, he had his leg amputated up in the line and died of shock.

From what you have told us already it sounds as if you assumed some roles of leadership? Did these sit easily on you?

It never worried me in the least.

25:00 The job had to be done and I wanted to get in and do it and I didn't muck around. Anybody I took in the platoon with me knew when I said something had to be done knew it had to be done, there was no mucking around. Some blokes would put it off and put if off, and all this but I didn't do that. If I had a job to do and it had to be done it finished up gone and then we got onto the next one straight away.

25:30 The experience I had in Japan with all those foreign troops was a very good experience, with the different cultures and all that. Some of it I found very hard to stomach at times.

26:00 **Growing up in Temora, how much exposure to other cultures and different people?**

Not a great deal over there, there was just the little local area around Combaning where I lived. We had our own little farm, Claverton had the farm next to us that way and Otto Worth had the farm here and Bill McCrane had the farm there. You had all the little 670 acre blocks or 750 acres blocks along the line and

26:30 McCrane had a bit more, he got in early. Dad worked for him when he was only young and old Bill used to go away every six months down to St Pat's College and he would give himself six months schooling, he would leave Dad in charge of the farm and then he would come back. He would work on it for six months and then go back for another six months training. He finished up with about 2,000 acres.

Were the expanses of the country something that you

27:00 **enjoyed?**

I loved the western country. I loved to get out into the western country where you could drive for miles. I have just been out there now and some of the properties are up to 12 to 15 to 30,000 acres, it is absolutely fantastic what some of those blokes are doing on them now.

Was that space something that you felt an absence of during your service?

27:30 The land was always in my blood, born and bred on the land, and it was the only thing I knew. I had no education, only two years, and I couldn't hold a job down in town, only just a labourer's job and I could make more money on the farm. Some of my best friends who didn't join the army went they went contracting with the army and helping them build

28:00 the air strips and all that sort of thing. And a particular bloke called Georgie Butts, I taught him how to play cricket and he turned out to be a good cricketer, and heavy smoker, and I couldn't get him off the cigarettes, he ended up with lung cancer, went and had an operation and the doctor told him not to smoke any more or he would be dead in 12 months time. I saw him this day puffing away, I said, "George you are not supposed to be smoking." he said, "I want to prove the doctor wrong."

28:30 He was dead in 11 months. I have a photo of his car, all smashed up.

You mentioned that your family had a car on the land?

A photo over there of a big Hudson Super 6, have you ever seen them?

I don't believe I have.

Enormous big thing. They had two little dickie seats in the front of them, in the back between the back

and front seats they had two little dickie seats, they used to fold down and you could sit two people on them. It was an enormous big car, a big high car.

29:00 When we sold it, we sold it to the bloke who had the funeral service; he bought it and had a hearse made out of it.

Was it a rare thing for a family to have a car like that?

We bought it second hand off a doctor in Sydney. It was during the Depression. We got it very cheap when we bought it. There were about twenty odd spare tyres came with it. We had all these spare tyres

29:30 We never had any trouble with it; we never had to do anything with it. It had plenty of pace if you wanted it.

Was the Depression a very hard time for you and your family?

The Depression was a very hard time in those days, there was a shortage of everything, and you had to watch every penny. We had

30:00 in 1939 a very hot summer and you couldn't kill a beast, couldn't kill a sheep, we only had the old cool safes in those days,

30:30 there was no such thing as refrigerators. What we did that month, I used to go out with the shotgun and shoot wild ducks, plovers, mallee fowls and anything at all we could eat. I kept the family in meat for a month just going around shooting rabbits and hares until the weather cooled off and we could kill a sheep.

31:00 **It sounds like you had become a fairly resourceful young man?**

Yes I suppose I was in those days. You had to be resourceful to live. Being involved in so much I became an excellent shot, I could knock the eye out of a rabbit at forty yards

31:30 **These were skills that kept you in good stead during your service?**

Yeah, I had to teach the snipers, I was given the job of teaching the snipers.

I imagine being resourceful must have helped you during your prisoner status as well?

Yes. It is a funny thing during the prisoner of war how it affects some people, other people it didn't. We had one bloke with us

32:00 I called an uneducated psychologist, Freddie Brown was his name. Freddie had no education at all but he finished up in charge of the garbage can in the Cronulla Shire after the war before he died. I had to give an oration at his funeral. But Freddie had a knack with people. If I saw

32:30 one of the blokes started to get a bit down in the dumps, a bit morose, I would say to Fred, "Fred I think so and so could do with a half hour of your talk, would you go and have a yarn with him?" Freddie would go down and sit down with this bloke and before you could say Jack Robinson he had him laughing and joking. He would completely change him around altogether. He didn't do one; he did a dozen blokes that fellow.

33:00 He was absolutely fantastic the way he could get these blokes out of their mood, getting them back up on their feet again, he would cheer them up. He had no education whatsoever it was just his manner. You meet all sorts in the army.

Humour was something you relied on to get you through?

Yes a lot of humour

33:30 went on and the boys would banter and they would play tricks on one another. There were some funny things went on during the training period when you would be out in the bush.

Can you tell me an instance of one of those cases at training?

34:00 Horrie Hewson was a bit of a devil. He lived just out of Young and he and his brother used to go into Young every weekend and get full and have a fight with the police so this had been going on for some months and the copper got him this day in the gaol

34:30 and said, "Why don't you wake up to yourself Hewson?" he said. "You come in every weekend and we give you a hiding and you come back next week for more." "Oh" he said, "I am learning, I am learning." Pretty slow learner Horrie.

Did you enjoy your early time after you enlisted?

I enjoyed it.

35:00 Tommy Murray was a nice little fellow. Tommy and his brother had a little store in Cootamundra and he was a very decent fellow Tommy. He died soon after the war; it was too much for Tommy. Poor old Tim

McCoy got on the boat and he said to me the night before he got on the boat,

35:30 “I want you to come with me on the boat, I want you to be my 2IC [2nd in command]. I said, “Why, what are you going to do?” They are going to run a crown and anchor [card game].” I said, “Alright.” We got on the Queen Mary and away we go and we got to Perth. He sends £2,000 home, crown and anchor.

36:00 A real old tough bloke, he had a big hooky nose on him and we used to call him Roman nose, but he would do anything at all for you. The night that we found Lloyd Cahill lying on the road, on the track and I rolled him over and found out who he was and I just turned around and I said to Tim, “Get a bloke with you and cut a couple of those saplings down and

36:30 take your shirts off and make a stretcher and put Lloyd on it and bring him up to the top.” Tim had been wounded twice but they never queried it. He would say, “Oh I have got a wound.” He was wounded through the buttocks and through the leg he was but still going strong. He was a strong as an old horse. He died only about four years ago.

Can I ask you about the training camp in Wagga? Was it a large camp?

37:00 We were there when it opened and it was a real cold winter and everybody had the flu and they were coughing up, spitting and it was a horrible camp. All the people

37:30 coming out there, the army tucker wasn’t very good. There was a big lagoon in the middle of Wagga, I don’t know if you’ve ever been there? And it had hundreds and hundreds of wild ducks on it, and they issued us with a giggle suit and an overcoat, an army coat.

Des, can you tell us what a giggle suit is?

A giggle suit is a bit like a flappy thing that just sits on you and folds down the front

38:00 and opens up and buttoned on the top and it’s got pockets all around it and that sort of thing. You would never wear it on parade; it was just something you wore when you were working.

Do you know how it got that particular name?

I don’t know how it got the name giggle suit; I think people started to giggle when you put it on. What used to happen was some of the bright boys used to wake up, I am afraid I was one of them.

38:30 We bought some fishing lines, a bit of bread, and we would go down to the lagoon at night and wait until you got a nice big fat duck and throw out this fishing line with the hook on it and reef him in and , wring his neck and stick him in the pot. Take a couple of ducks home and pluck them, take them down to the cook and he would cook them in the kitchen for you. In three of four weeks they suddenly discovered the ducks were disappearing so they had to put a guard on them.

39:00 **What was food like normally at camp?**

It wasn’t too bad. Because in Japan all we got was rice and green veggies, it was all we got there, we got nothing else. When we first started there we used to get a meat ration every tenth days, it was about four pounds of meat for 400 men

39:30 We used to get fish every third day; that only lasted about six months. The fish cut out too. That was one of the reasons I got my jaws bashed, I wrote a letter and complained about the lack of food and how our Red Cross parcels were disappearing and all the rest of it. I told the boys I would write the letter and I would take the consequences, so I wrote

40:00 the letter and about four days later I was coming back to camp and there were Japs running everywhere. This old bloke called Morimoto who had come over from Osaka. He put up a bench in the front so he could stand on it. He got up and harangued us for about a quarter of an hour all he was on about, he said, “It doesn’t matter what you thought of the Japanese

40:30 as long as you didn’t write it down, you didn’t write it down because somebody else could read it.” I realised then they had just read my letter and they took me around the back and gave me a hell of a hiding. Every morning they used to break my jaw again, it went on for eight days. You had to go to work, no medical treatment, the doctor refused me treatment. They told the doctor if he gave me treatment he would get the same treatment.

41:00 The kitchen bloke used to bind me up with a big four inch bandage he had, put the teeth back in the holes, bind my jaws up and then on the eighth day it held. The jaws had got away a bit but they held until I got home.

Tape 3

00:31 **You signed up as a private but were fairly quickly promoted to corporal, how did that come about?**

It came out of the blue as I had no army training whatsoever. I went into camp this night and the next night the major came along and said, “You are a corporal.” I said, “What do I have to do?” He said, “You have to call the roll, that is the first thing.”

01:00 Once we called the roll the next day they started to form the sections you found out you were in charge of the section with 10 men under you and you had to take them away and train them. You had your little book on training, you read your book for an hour or two then you would have a go with the men.

What is the most difficult thing about being in charge of a group of army men?

01:30 The most difficult thing, you have ten men under you as a corporal, ten under you, ten completely different men, all have completely different ideas of their own and you have to turn around and mould them into one actual fighting force. You can’t do it overnight. You have to learn all their habits, what they like or what they

02:00 dislike so you blend them in together and get a real working organisation.

How do you think you managed to do that?

I think I did it well. Some of the people said I should have been promoted a lot earlier than I did, but I was quite happy to go along with the flow at the time. I did as I was asked to do and I did it

02:30 properly. I have a letter there from an officer who was in charge of me who said, “You should have been promoted a long while ago.” A bit late to tell me that now. I was on the next draft to go through the Officers’ School. Colonel Anderson told me that after the war. They said, “You were a bit unlucky Des, if you had stayed in

03:00 another month you would have been at officer school, you would have been an officer but you missed out by a month.” So I missed out all along the line.

Do you have regrets about that?

No. I have no regrets. It irks me greatly when they go to an Anzac march and you see someone who was a lieutenant and can’t control the men under him, they are dragging along

03:30 like a mob of old cats. I would never go back to Temora to march there. The last time I was there the parade was just dreadful; I wouldn’t be associated with it anymore. I believe in doing it and doing it properly or not at all.

What was your secret to good command?

I think getting the confidence of the men.

04:00 You can’t do anything unless you have the confidence of the men behind you and know the men are going to back you If you get into a tight corner you are not on your own and you have your men to help you out and I think that’s is it. If you can weld that body of men together as one and they look along the same lines and they can see what you are trying to do and they can help you do it, you are on the right track. If you have got

04:30 ten men going in different directions you have no hope whatsoever of controlling anything.

Did you feel confident yourself going into battle?

Yes I felt very confident. I had trained for twelve months, we were considered to be one of the highest trained troops to leave Australia. We had been together for a long while

05:00 the same men underneath us and we went in as a competent body. Unfortunately we went in and were put into an action that was half fought and half not fought before we got there. We had to sort of pick up the pieces to try and make them a whole to get a whole out, that’s what it amounted to.

05:30 It proved very difficult for the first day and the first night, after that we got a bit of order back into it and we were able to withstand whatever they threw at us.

Which campaign are you referring to now?

I am referring to the Battle of Bakri. The Battle of Bakri the battle when it was fought one of the head men of the army said:

06:00 “That was the most significant battle fought by Australian troops in the Second World War.” It held the advance of the Japanese force at bay and allowed the whole fighting force in Malaya to come back down past the danger point, otherwise they would have all been cut off and the war would have ended very soon. We delayed Yamaguchi’s [probably means Yamashita, the Japanese general who led their 25th Army to victory in Malaya and Singapore] entry into Singapore for about

06:30 a month, he was a month late getting there than what he anticipated and that month would have enabled him to have gone on and he could have landed in Australia. There was nothing there to prevent him at that stage from going on and that’s what he wanted to do, but after the battle that we caused the

5th Division [Japanese], the head bloke in Tokyo said, “You are not to go there, you are to leave that alone” - not to go down to Australia.

07:00 Yamashita wanted to go to Australia straight off, he was going to put a bridge head in the Northern Territory somewhere so he could get his troops in. The delay that we caused there was a far greater action fought than anything in the Vietnam War or the New Guinea War this year as far as helping Australia out. A lot of people don’t realise that because they don’t know anything about it.

07:30 The war was never discussed, that battle was never discussed.

Can you take me back to the beginning of your action at Bakri? What happened on the first day?

We were taken in this afternoon on convoy, and we were dumped off and the convoy couldn’t go any further and we had to walk in and carry our gear with us.

08:00 We had only gone half a mile I suppose when we hit the first Japs. There was a bit of a skirmish, I think it was B Company in the lead. There was a bit of a skirmish and we got through them and we got into a place down there and we consolidated overnight, we were within cooeeing [calling] distance of the 2/29th Battalion, but we couldn’t get up to them because they had road blocks and all that in the way. We had to sit there overnight

08:30 and we sent patrols out and we made contact then with 2/29th Battalion and eventually they got through to us on their motorbike, got through to us and unfortunately the colonel was shot on the way back in, but we got word back to move back to a certain area on the road where we would have troops guarding them. Well they got back to a certain

09:00 thing and then the Japs counter-attacked and threw them out of line and they started to scatter and we only got a portion of what we wanted back. The Indians were just a hopeless crowd, some of them came back too ; we had to disarm them the first night but most of the 2/29th we got back in that night and then the next night we were able to form the battalion and get everything organised around it. But the Indians were a blasted nuisance,

09:30 we had over 150 of those in there the first night and all of a sudden they all started to put their rifles up in the air and fire. We were dead quiet so the Japs wouldn’t know where we were. These 150 blasted Indians fired off bullets in all directions and we had to take the rifles away from them, give them back the next morning. Once we got the 2/29th back with us we became almost a composite

10:00 battalion again. The bombs dropped and dropped and killed all the senior officers and left Anderson in charge and that was the crucial turning point of the whole action. Once Anderson got into control it really was controlled.

You mentioned earlier that as a corporal you were in command of ten men

10:30 **and at Bakri you became an acting sergeant. How many men did you have?**

I had a platoon, 30 men.

Was that more of a challenge?

Yes it was more of a challenge

11:00 but it was something that you evolved all the time, you had been in the army, you saw how it worked and you knew your move from this step up to that step, you knew the steps that you were making you knew what you had to do.

How much is a campaign or an action about good strategy as much as confidence?

Strategy is the most important of the lot. If you don’t know where

11:30 your men are, or how they are facing or where they are going, you are in trouble. You have to know where every man is at any stage of the battle so that no matter where the other bloke comes from you have the troops there immediately to throw in against him. If you haven’t got that, you are down the drain straight away.

Some people might describe battles and war as

12:00 **quite chaotic, but you seem to have quite a different approach, is it always easier to be strategic?**

No. It can get very complicated at times, very complicated. Unless you have your mind on what you are doing

12:30 things can get out of hand very easily. That was one thing about Colonel Anderson he was always on the spot at the right time, the right spot at the right time, all the time. If something was going wrong Anderson was there. He would correct it and he would move somewhere else and make sure that was right too. You can’t have a battle

13:00 with a bloke sitting a way down the back there and just hope everything goes well. Anderson was among the troops all the time, talking to them, urging them on. Telling them where to put their troops and the senior officers there, and he'd say, "No, don't do that, put your troops over here, get yourselves organised here and I will have someone come into this gap here." He was organising all the time. He had the whole thing at his fingertips. Absolutely

13:30 magnificent brain.

I believe you were fairly good at handling artillery and a gun?

Yes.

What type of guns were you using?

Only used the rifle and the Tommy gun that was all I had contact with. We did have a special little grenade discharger and

14:00 we had an anti-tank rifle, that was all the equipment the troops had. We had our special senior men that had the 2 lb and 25 lbs with us, that was a separate unit with us.

What is an anti-tank rifle?

An anti-tank rifle is something that kills you; you have to carry it all day, it's a big heavy thing

14:30 and it fires a .5 mm round which is a big round and it kicks like a horse. You have to lie down to fire it, you can't stand up, it will knock you over. You lie down and put your whole weight behind it. It will penetrate armour, they use it for anti-tank.

Do you use that gun to detonate a tank?

To shoot a tank, to hit the track and knock the track off or something like that.

15:00 **Did you prefer the Tommy gun?**

The Tommy gun was the best weapon they ever brought out, fantastic weapon the Tommy gun. Provided you handled it properly and not used indiscreetly.

Can you describe what the gun looked like and how you used it?

The Tommy gun we had was the Thompson Sub-Machine gun which has a circular

15:30 magazine and held 42 rounds. It shot at the rate of 12 rounds per second so you only had enough ammunition in it for six seconds. You had to be careful that you aimed it to shoot with a short barrel and at 30 yards it would pull you three feet off so if you wanted to hit a target 30 yards off you fired three feet to the left.

16:00 The pull of the gun would take it back to the right angle.

That is quite complicated?

It is, yes, but when you get used to it, it just comes automatically.

Was it heavy to carry?

Not a great deal heavier than the rifle. Fully loaded it was a bit heavy, particularly if you had to carry extra bandoliers with it.

16:30 You had to carry a couple of spare ones because if you got into a fight it didn't take long to run off 42 rounds.

What are bandoliers?

Bandoliers are the extra thing with the fully loaded magazine you just slip one in and slip the other out.

In a battalion and a platoon everybody has a different role.

17:00 **As acting sergeant can you take me through if there is such a thing a typical day when you were on the front line?**

Yes, alright, the first thing you do of a morning you make sure that everybody has their rifle. Make sure they've got their rifle and it is clean

17:30 and ready for action. You can't have rifles that had been thrown about over the night and dirty. Have to be cleaned and have to be ready and you make sure he has had his breakfast; make sure he has enough ammunition for the day. Make sure he is in the position that the officer said he should be in. You have an officer in charge of you and you do the dirty work and make sure everything is laid out and everybody in order.

18:00 You come back then and report to the officer and say, "Alright Sir, I have done an inspection of the line

everything is right, so and so, was there anything else you would like?" If he wanted something else done he would tell me and I have to go and do it. You go along and make sure they look after their rifle first, make sure they've had their meal if there is a meal available, make sure they are in the right position and make sure what they should be doing on a lookout.

18:30 **When you were at Bakri was your ammunition just the guns, did you have any other ammunition?**

We had a Tommy gun and two spare rounds of ammunition and the two riflemen that had the rifle, they had 50 rounds of ammunition each.

19:00 **You were on foot?**

Yes on foot.

What happened after Bakri?

We went back to our lines and we were put down for the night. The Indians came in and caused trouble, and we got them quietened down. The Indians coming in as they did displayed our position to the Japs and the Japs came in overnight and they surrounded

19:30 us right around on the side on the river ridge, they surrounded us right through. The next morning they started to snipe at us so we had instructions to go ahead and clear the ridge again so 7th Platoon went through and cleared the ridge, 9th Platoon got into trouble on the left and they said swing left and go and help 9th Platoon, so we had to swing left go through and they brought B Company around the front

20:00 B Company came on the other side and we pushed the Japs this way and we got them into a bunch in the finish down. There it was a slaughter when we finished we counted 55 dead Japanese. 9th Platoon suffered pretty badly. They lost their officer, Crawford was badly wounded, he was taken away and he had lost two or three men. I saw one of the, I don't know how I'd put it but one I suppose you'd say it was one of the

20:30 strongest things I have ever seen happen there, we had a chap with us by the name of Sabo Horne. Sabo was a champion potato digger around Teralga. That doesn't say much but I tell you what he had the physique, the typical physique of a man. A sculptor couldn't draw a better man and he had his rifle and bayonet,

21:00 and the little bloke, Roy Hobden, who was the weights and measure man from Wagga, at the time, he was with us and he was the corporal in charge of the platoon, the Jap got around behind him and was trying to strangle him. Sabo Horne came up with his bayonet and rammed the bayonet right up into him and lifted him off and wiped him on the grass as if you would wipe a knife. It was as easy

21:30 as that, just amazing. Then I had my little skirmish with a Jap. I went back to see the first morning of the 15 dead ones, I wanted to go back and be smart and go through their pockets and see whether they could tell us who they were and what they were and I had looked at three or four, I came to this big bloke and went to roll him over

22:00 and put my rifle down on the ground and he jumped up on his feet and he had a grenade in his hand. This is one of the times when your mind works at a million miles an hour, so I immediately grabbed his left hand, the reason for that was that he couldn't pull the pin out of the grenade he had in his other hand. My right hand has his left hand and he has a grenade in his right hand and I am trying to punch

22:30 him and knock him out and I couldn't because every time I would go to hit him he would swing his right arm round and counteract me. This went on, we were jumping around like two little kids for quite awhile so I sang out, "Some of you blokes come and give me a hand!" They were only 20 yards away, they didn't hear a word. Frank Thompson came running across and he bayoneted the bloke through the ribs and pulled the trigger and shot him and that was it, cleaned him up. He was a big fellow; he was bigger than what I was.

23:00 After that I never turned a Jap over unless it was with a bayonet.

I haven't been in a war so I am relying on you to tell me exactly what it is like, and this might seem like a gory question.

23:30 When you are in the battle, you're in the battle, nothing matters, you are there doing your job, it is just like going in there and getting on the typewriter and writing a letter, you've got to do it to finish it off, you have a job to do and you have to get out and do it. When you have finished, you say, "Right we have to go back and see what's happened" and you go back and count the dead Japs and you organise yourself ready and you're ready for the next lot. There are times when it is not pleasant.

24:00 I had one occasion one night, it was just on dark and we were digging our little fox holes with our bayonets below the ground level of a night to stop the ricochet of the bullets so we wouldn't get hit and they started to mortar us with mortar bombs. You would hear this going on and all of a sudden we heard this one coming down, it gives this special screech when it is getting close to you.

24:30 Captain Beverley was over there, I was here, Archie Arnett was here, and this thing came down and

exploded and blew all the limbs off the trees, I am reaching up over my head and getting limbs and throwing them off. I got hold of this big limb, I looked at it and it was one of Archie's legs. The mortar shell

25:00 had landed between his thighs and blown both the poor fellow's legs off and he bled to death. In a few minutes he bled to death. He was a nice little bloke from Taralga. The funny thing is most of these old originals you knew where they come from and all the rest of it. I still have a friend I visit down at Taralga, Albert Whipp. I still go and visit Albert Whipp down there now.

25:30 All the others who came from the Dipenbook area are all dead except for one. H is now up in Queensland. I keep in touch with him; I ring him on the phone. Alf Rump, he was a very big man Alf, a great footballer. All those little fellows from around the place there they all came from around the Goulburn area, had quite a few from around the Goulburn area and we had quite a few from around Wagga.

26:00 I seemed to get all the blokes from around the Goulburn area, they were the rough and tough fellows, they were the ones I had.

Are the sight and sounds of battle that you have just described difficult to cope with?

Not difficult to cope with. It happened so quick you have got to be moving to keep with it.

26:30 No battle is stationary; it is on the move all the time. You have to be moving with it. You are fighting here this minute and the next minute you're 50 yards away fighting down there. Wherever you are wanted you have to have your mental link, "This is clear, needs someone there. First we will do this one and then you have to work out who you are going to hit first and where are you going to

27:00 get them." Snipers up in the tree, you have got watch out for them.

You have talked about the strategy of battle and now you are describing quite a different sense, I am getting the sense there is quite a rhythm to the battle and the action. Do you rely on your wits as much as your strategy?

It is 50/50. There are a lot of things

27:30 you do that you can't realise as you are doing it but there is a purpose there behind you, but your nature tells you, you have to do it, so you go and do it. It might be just to cover a back point, you might have a line of troops here but there might be one little spot that is not covered and if you leave that spot uncovered the enemy can come through on you,

28:00 so you have got to cover it all. Go down and make sure that little spot is covered. The rest of the line look after themselves, but that is your danger spot and that's the one you look after it all the time.

After Bakri you had what you have described as a four day and four night battle at Moa, that is a very

28:30 **intense period of time to keep on fighting. Can you take me back to that battle and tell me what happened?**

That battle raged four days and four nights. As I said earlier it was one of the most important battles fought by Australian troops in the Second World War. 2/19th battalion was up against 14,000 Japanese troops, the Imperial Guards, the best troops the Japanese army could throw at us.

29:00 They had 750 vehicles with them as well as tanks and we held them at bay, they couldn't break through us, we held them at bay for four days and four nights at a great loss to ourselves, I think we lost 231 men killed. It allowed the whole of the force who was fighting north to move back below Yong Peng, once they went back through Yong Peng then it didn't matter if the Japs got through because the troops

29:30 were behind them. We fought there for four days and four nights and when we had gone through this village up to Bakri, we left a platoon of men under Lieutenant Varley, to guard the bridge over the river. After we got up there he was relieved

30:00 of his post by a British unit and he came back up and he joined us. We didn't realise that the British unit had had no training in bridge and jungle warfare and as soon as they saw the first Jap they took off back towards Yong Peng. They left the bridge unguarded, so the Japs got in and they reinforced all the bridge, put sandbags on it so you couldn't get across it and we got back

30:30 thinking once we got to the bridge we were safe, but we weren't, we were just locked in, we couldn't move. We made two attempts to break through the bridge and we lost about eight very good men because we realised it was hopeless we couldn't get through it. Anderson gave the order then because we couldn't get through the bridge not to worry any more and we would have to escape or we would be annihilated one way or another. He put a thrust down

31:00 the river down the river, down on the southern side of the river, and he got some of the troops to move down there and the Japs thought we were going to try and push and go down to the coast, so they whipped the troops away from the top end here and moved them around to counteract us. As soon as he

did that Anderson said, “Right now everybody retreat at five minute intervals out through the gap.” and we on the top of the hill called Buka Eenis..

31:30 We were about the second lot to go, Beverley and I, we were right at the bridge. So we set off and Beverley said to me, “You go ahead and when you get to the top of the hill,” he said, “Gather up all A Company, I want them all together so I can take them out in a group.” I said, “All right sir.” I took off and I had the Bren gun and I had two rounds of ammunition, and I had I think it was

32:00 three bandoliers of ammunition, and that was all we had, we only had about 15 rounds a man left, that was all the ammunition we had left. I came to this little stream about 15 to 20 feet wide and it didn’t look very deep to me and I thought, “I’ll cross here” as I could see where the elephants had been going through. I walked in there and in no time I was in about 10 foot of water, I couldn’t get my head above water, I had so much on so I had to shed half the stuff I had.

32:30 When I got out the other side I thought “Will I go back for it or not?” I thought “The Japs will never find it I’ll leave it.” I went on up the hill and half way up the hill I came across this bloke lying on the ground in the bush on the side, I thought “He can’t be shot he is too far away from the action, what has happened to him?” So I rolled him over and it was Captain Lloyd Cahill. I said, “What’s the matter Lloyd are you wounded?” He said, “No, just let me sleep, I have had four days and four nights

33:00 and I haven’t had a wink of sleep. I am just exhausted let me have a sleep.” I said,” I am not leaving you here mate.” I said, “You are coming up to the top of the hill.” I looked around and I saw these blokes who were there Tim McCoy and Freddy Power. “Tim!” I said, “Get your parangs [machetes] and cut a couple of those saplings down and take your shirts off and make a litter and put Lloyd on it and bring him on up to the top of the hill.” I said, “I will go on up there and

33:30 I’ll grab any sugar I can get from the boys and I’ll give him a soft drink, a sweet drink when he gets up there.” So when I got up the hill and I got the A Company together, I think I gathered five or six little capsules of sugar that the boys still had and when Lloyd came up I made him a pannikin of water we had with some sugar and gave it to him and he laid back and he went to sleep. The troops were coming in and we were sorting things out and getting organised

34:00 and I noticed there was one officer there by the name of Bunny Austin. Bunny had been wounded in the first morning in action, shot through the lung, hadn’t taken much action but he did roll the trucks back across the bridge when they couldn’t get across it. I said to Bunny, “You have got a map there, have you got any maps?” He said, “Yes” and I said, “Could you show me the maps please?” He said right.

34:30 He got the maps out and we spread them on a big rock we had there. I got the general impression of where we had to go to get back to Yong Peng, the compass bearings and all that on it; I said, “Alright I have got it in my head now, I am right, I know where I am.” Next thing I hear all this noise going on and I looked across and it was Lloyd, he had woke up and when he stood up he found he had lost his boots. The boots had shook off and they

35:00 had the laces undone and the boots had shook off. I wasn’t going to ask anybody to go back down the hill and get them. I said, “What size do you take Lloyd?” he said, “Size 8.” I said, “That’s mine.” I said, “Here, you take mine I’ll walk in my socks.” I gave him my boots and they fitted him and he said, “Yeah, they’re good.” So he took off in my boots. I walked the rest of that night and we come to go through and we got lost.

35:30 Some of the unit went to sleep and we were in a mess. So I was sent up along the line by Ritchie, Ritchie was on my back, he sent me up the line, I counted the heads in the dark, you couldn’t see anything just the fluorescent glow on the floor, I was counting heads as I went along, I got to 84, no more. Walked around in the jungle and sang out and there was no response so I come back to the last head I counted and woke him up

36:00 I said, “Where have the rest gone?” He said, “I am sorry sir, I must have gone to sleep, they’ve gone.” I said, “Don’t move, you stop there until I come back.” I moved down the line, there were three officers, there was Ritchie, Captain Steele; he later escaped from Borneo in the Philippines, and Lieutenant Thompson. We had a bit of a conference and I said; “Now there is 84

36:30 men here, I want to get them out.” So they argued the toss and they had no maps, I said, “I am a bushie, born and bred in the bush, I think I can find my way around.” I said, “I have seen the maps, if you give me a compass course I can set you a course and we can go through.” “All right.” they said, “You do it.” So Ritchie gave me charge of the group. We went off that night and I was making for a place where I saw the rubber

37:00 plantation came in and then stopped and then went around and there was a bit of a lagoon, I realised there was a swamp. We battled all night with our parangs, cut our way through the jungle and crawled around and over these logs and under them and all the rest of it on this compass course and got there eventually. I started to feel the soft ground underneath and I realised we were getting close to this swamp. So I

37:30 pulled up and I said to Ritchie, I said, “Listen Jack ,I think we are getting very close to the open rubber. Do you want to break out at night in case the Japs are there or is it better we stopped in the jungle at night and come out first thing next morning?” He said, “We will do that.” I said, “Right” so I put the men

down, I said, “You can lie down and have a sleep for awhile and we will get up at daylight.” We got them up again at daylight, we only got a couple of hundred yards and we broke out into the open rubber.

38:00 We formed a perimeter straight away and Captain Steele and two other blokes went out on reconnaissance out about three hundred yards to make sure there were no Japs around and when they came back he brought this little bag of rice he had with them. We set off on this compass course straight through for Yong Peng, and I am still in my bare feet paddling

38:30 along in my socks. We came along to a stagnant water hole and I said, “We have a bit of rice and some of the boys have bully beef, can we pull up and have a bit of a feed?” We counted the men and we had lost 12 men overnight. The 12 Indians had disappeared; we didn’t even see them go. Nobody saw them go and nobody knew where they went; they just left during the night. It dropped me back to 72 I think it was I had.

39:00 “I want six hats, 12 to a hat.” So I got six hats and I took the canvas out of it and I put the pin back in and put some water in it and Ritchie got a fire going and we boiled the water and poured a bit of rice in each hat and I had six cans of bully beef, got that and broke it up and it put it in, the six cans and gave iit to them to stir with a stick, it boiled for

39:30 awhile and I gave it to them and told them to get a few leaves off the banana trees and share it out amongst themselves which they did. It was the first hot meal they had had for five days.

Tape 4

00:31 **That is a very resourceful story you have just told me of cooking your dinner in your helmet, could you just finish telling that story for me?**

After we had the quick meal we had there we gave the helmets a slush out with water and put the webbing back in and the top nut back in and handed them all back and

01:00 we took off on then and went on the compass course and headed for Yong Peng and got to the river andwe had to cross the river. There was a little village there and there was a bloke there who had two log boats, two big long logs that he had hulled out, each one held eight men so I was able to get the men across the river, 8 at a time, 16 at each time, it didn’t take long to get them across the river, and then we took off then for Yong Peng, and we got half way to Yong

01:30 Peng and we caught up with another batch of Australians who I think Captain Keegan was in charge of. Once we got to the other officer I handed the troops back to Lieutenant Ritchie. I said, “Well here you are Sir they are yours now, I am going back to the line.” “Thanks very much.” he said. So away he went and I went back and brought up the rear of the troops. We reached Yong Peng just before they blew up the bridge. We asked them not to blow up the bridge because we knew that Anderson and few more

02:00 were coming along, so they delayed blowing the bridge for about an hour. They offered us meals, and they had no footwear to give me, so I had to stop in my bare feet all night. I couldn’t eat any food at all. One of the cooks gave me a tin of preserved pears, and I ate most of those, that’s all I could. I laid down and I had a glorious sleep for about three or four hours.

02:30 They got us up and put us on trucks and took us back to Batu [Pahat]. They gave us a clean up and fresh uniforms and straight back into trouble and reform the unit again. We had no rest, no week off, no nothing, just straight back into the army. They formed the four system and straight back onto the island then.

03:00 **Were you aware of the success of your campaign at Moa, at the time?**

Yes. We knew we had a job to do and we were doing it to the best of our ability, and we were unable to know at that stage just how far down those troops had come from up north. All wireless communications had finished, our batteries were flat, and we couldn’t get any telecommunications whatsoever from headquarters. The last message they gave we never got, just

03:30 wished us well and thanked us for what we had done. We knew that five days should have been ample. We gave them almost five days and they had got through, they had got everything back through and they were all consolidated down around Jemaluang when we got back.

Do you think it was a very just war?

04:00 I don’t see that it created anything at all other than it gave all those nations in East Asia independence. They all got their independence since the war. They were all run by Dutch or British or some other outside unit and they are all now on their own. Whether they are any better off or not I don’t know.

04:30 I probably don’t think they are. At least they are looking after their own affairs.

Were you frightened of a Japanese invasion to Australia?

Yes. We were very mindful of the invasion, very mindful of an invasion. When we got to Singapore we realised that we were going to be in the forefront of any attack coming down. We were just

05:00 wondering in our minds which way would they come down. Would they come down through Singapore and hedgehop down through the islands? We didn't know where they were going to go. We had an idea that they would make for Singapore because that was a great base for them. Actually all they wanted down there was the oil. They wanted oil from Java and that is what they were after and of course they got a lot of tin from around Malaya.

05:30 There are a lot of tin mines there.

Do you feel as if you and your company have received enough thanks and recognition for your campaign?

Yes, we were well equipped and we had everything we wanted except tanks and why they

06:00 didn't use tanks I don't know. The British Army said, "No, you can't use tanks in Malaya" but the Japs used them, no trouble at all, used them all through the islands. That was the only thing we were minus. We had no aeroplanes of course. We had nothing in that line. An old Wilderbeest, which was an old thing about 40 years out of date, the only thing our blokes had at the time.

06:30 We had nothing else until we got to Singapore where they had a few Hurricanes and then they got shot down and took off, went back to Java. We fought them for four days and four nights and only ever saw one plane, an allied plane and it came in one morning and dropped us some morphine. We asked for some morphine and dropped the morphine and dropped

07:00 half in the Jap line and half in our line and away it went and that was the only plane we saw that we recognised, the rest were all the Thai planes with almost identical markings as ours were. They strafed us day and night on the river. They were up and down all the time on the road. They would start at about 8 o'clock in the morning and finish at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. They were as regular as clockwork. They had no

07:30 opposition, no nothing, they would just come through, just fly backwards and forwards. If they saw something glint they would fire a shot at it.

How would you know that you were about to be strafed?

Strafed?

Would you hear a plane coming?

I would hear the planes coming in all the time. You got to the stage that you knew exactly where they were coming over you or on the side and where they were if they were coming over you, you got down quick smart and got into a foxhole. If they were a bit on the side

08:00 you never worried about them.

Did you have a particular method of protecting yourself?

The tin hat wasn't much good. The only method we had of protecting yourself was by digging a hole in the ground. Some of us were that quick you could dig a hole with a bayonet.

08:30 **You mentioned the four system, after the battle at Moa and you were completely exhausted, you had a sleep, what happened then?**

We were loaded on trucks the next morning and we were taken on trucks down to Jemaluang

09:00 We had a shower and a clean up and went down to the Q [Quartermaster] Store and got fresh uniforms and boots, and all the rest of it and equipped ourselves and went back on the parade ground and they were formed into a battalion and you took your place in the platoon and that was it, straight back into action. You didn't have any counselling.

Did you want counselling?

I don't think so, not in those days. We never dreamt of it.

09:30 It might help some of them eventually. Nowadays with war they always seem to get some complaint or they are re-counselled or something, nothing like that in our days.

How much is the state of mind important when you are in a battle?

10:00 It is like a rock behind you, you have to have it there all the time. It is not nice to see a bloke go around the twist half way through an action.

Did that happen to you?

Yes. I saw that once.

Can you describe it for me?

I would prefer not to.

10:30 **You mentioned first of all the four system, I am not sure what that means, can you tell me what that means?**

The system now in the army is three, three sections and three platoons. You go in threes. You have three platoons to a Company, three companies in a battalion sort of thing. We were reformed on the four system so instead of us having 30 men in the platoon

11:00 you have 40 men in a platoon. It gave you a greater variety of troops to spread out and that is what Anderson wanted. He reckoned he didn't have enough width in his troops; he wanted extra troops so we were formed on the four. In the older days in the Boer War it was all fours in those days. In the Great War it was fours and then it was altered back to threes.

11:30 **Do you know why it was altered it to three?**

I think bureaucracy. Someone got the bright idea and they thought they would try it and saw it was working all right.

How did you find the four system?

We didn't have much of a chance to work on it. We formed it and then we went in and then they split us and we lost the four straight away. We were sent down to the river and as I said we virtually had one man to every one hundred yards. You can't run a section like that.

12:00 **Did the doctor ever thank you for giving him your boots?**

No, he only ever mentioned it once. That was when I visited him in St Vincent's Hospital when he was having his two knee joints done and he had a little doctor whose father used to have the Imperial Hotel in Coonabarabran when I was on the Shire.

12:30 He was visiting him there and he said to this other doctor and he said, "Doctor, you know only for this man I wouldn't be here today." That was the first and only time; and the only mention I have heard him speak about it. He was a very nice bloke, very nice doctor.

Were you ever wounded or injured?

No, the only wound I got was a cut on the head from where I was hit with a grenade.

13:00 The scalp was sore for a while and I had to go and get some iodine and put on it during the battle, they cut a bit of hair off and stuck some iodine on it. That was all the treatment I got. I have a cut about that long on my scalp.

That is pretty amazing considering you have been in so many actions. Did you have a lucky charm?

13:30 No. I had bullet holes through my pack, I had bullet holes through my shirt but not one hit my body. Very very lucky, very fortunate. Seeing as I saw men getting shot around me all the time. I just seemed to have Paddy's luck some how.

I've asked you whether you had any lucky charms, did you have any

14:00 **superstitions?**

No, no.

After the four system you mentioned the Merritt Force. What was that?

The Merritt Force was a composite force gathered up with all the bits and sods to take up and try and hold the Japs back,

14:30 but they were cut to pieces the first morning when the action started. When the action started they were cut to pieces and they would have been better off if they had never gone up there, Merritt Force. I lost two good men getting out of that battle that morning. One was shot through the stomach and the other had his legs badly wounded and I couldn't get him out. There was no hope of getting him out because there was the exposed area and if I tried to carry him out

15:00 there would have been three or four dead men around, so I just had to leave the poor devil. I propped him up and made him as comfortable as I could and gave him his rifle and just told him to fight on right to the death knock. You have some sad times.

15:30 **Can you tell me what happened when you surrendered?**

Well very little happened actually when we surrendered. We were just told to stop where we were,

16:00 and all shooting had to be ceased at 8 o'clock and no weapons were to be destroyed. It wasn't until next morning when the Japs came around and they gave us instructions to pile our arms and march down the

road and join up and we had this great line of men, thousands of men going out to Changi.

16:30 The Chinese were very supportive and they were getting a terrible time; the Japs were knocking them out and bashing them. The Malays weren't so bad, they didn't worry about the Malays. They would give us a drink of water occasionally if they saw there was a gap between the Japs they would come over with a glass of water and give you a glass of water. The Chinese were out to help us all the way right through. When we got out to Changi of course we were put into the barracks that were built for the Gordon Highlanders.

17:00 These great big brick edifices were built, a company, each one. Each company was supposed to hold 110 men. We had 1100 in ours, to give you an idea of how crowded we were. The toilet system was broken down, the water system was broken down, everything was in a shambles at that stage and we had to dig great big slit trenches, and then we got onto bore drains, bore holes, we put down bore holes..

17:30 When we got the water flowing again it wasn't so bad but a terrible lot of people got dysentery in the early stages. I was one of them. It was a bit of a shambles for the first week or so in Changi and then it sort of straightened itself out and things got a bit better then. There was a ship load of Red Cross supplies came in from South Africa

18:00 That was unloaded there and the ration actually in Singapore was quite good. You couldn't complain about the rations in Singapore. I was 13 stone 4 when I left Singapore. I went out to 6 stone in Japan. Eventually I went back up to 7 stone before I came home.

I seem to have heard lots about Changi

18:30 **Prison but I am just wondering if you can describe for me your impressions of the prison when you first got there, what did you see?**

All we saw when we got there, there were bombed out buildings and on the parade ground there were three great big bomb holes, where the bombs had gone down and still hadn't exploded,

19:00 they were still underneath the ground there. We had to parade over those. As I said it took about a week before we got organisation into it. Got the water going and got the bore drain dug and got things a bit ship shape. Then the Indian troops took over and they built the big wire fence all around us.

19:30 It wasn't very successful; it was a zigzag fence where people could get out with no trouble at all. Still, there was a wire fence there. It was the boundary mark. If you were caught outside it you were in trouble. But I found the food in relation to what we struck in Japan was excellent in Changi. You couldn't growl about the food, whatsoever the first ten or eleven months

20:00 whatever there.

When you were first taken there did you have your army uniform on?

Yes. Everybody wore their army uniform and continued to wear it too. The Japs didn't issue any more uniforms, we just stopped in our old uniform.

You didn't get any other clothes?

No. Not until we went going to Japan where they gave us an issue of the heavy British uniform

20:30 that they wear in the cold climate. We were given the trousers and a coat was all we got, with a zipper on it. It used to button up here and it would fit around your waist and then you come round your legs and it just fitted around your waist and trousers.

What was the weather like when you were in Changi?

Changi was always warm, completely warm. You got around in just a singlet and that was all.

21:00 No trouble there, fair bit of rain.

Can you describe the room that you lived in?

Yes, it was a big room it was about, well over 100 of us in it, the one room. We slept like sardines in a tin, touching one another

21:30 all along. The feet on the other side meshed in the others, you were compacted in, you didn't have, your feet were jammed up like this. Then as the troops moved away of course, as A Company went away or B Company went away, we were able to expand out and got more room, more space.

22:00 It eventually turned out they could put them all back into Changi Goal and Blackjack Galleghan was put in charge of them. He had charge of the camp there and would hold a parade every morning and make the Japanese parade and he would inspect the Japanese.

I can't imagine what it is like to go to sleep at night in a room full of 100 men with your feet touching nearly.

22:30 **How did you sleep?**

It is like everything else, you get used to it. One man turns over you all turn over.

What sort of beds did you have?

No beds, just slept on the concrete floor, just laid on the concrete floor, no beds.

23:00 **Did you have a blanket?**

Yes if you were lucky enough to have one. If you didn't have one you didn't have one. Lucky I carried one with me most of the time. It was a light one, it was very good. You used to take your coat off and put it under your head as a pillow.

Was there much thieving in the prison?

23:30 Well there wasn't a great deal to thieve. Nobody had much at all to thieve. After we had been there two or three months anybody who had stuff that they wanted to get rid off they sold to the Chinese through a fence for food. I had a watch that they had given to me for my 21st birthday, it was a gold plated watch and I kept it under cover and I carried it right through the war.

24:00 The Japs never took it off me. Other blokes displayed it and they lost it as quick as. I saw one bloke, a sergeant major, marching out of the Changi Gaol with a pair of binoculars around his neck. The first Jap he came to he just swiped it off him like that. Some blokes had no brains at all. You hide things like that; you don't put them out and let everybody see you have got it.

When you went to Changi

24:30 **you were with officers from your own company?**

Officers and troops, mainly troops.

Is prison a great leveller?

Not at that stage. When you speak of levels, of course the officers had their own dining room, I say their own dining room, they messed separate to the men. They didn't mess with the men, they messed separately.

25:00 I know later on when we were in Changi they left us with an officer there and then towards the end of the war he was being taken away and we all knew he was leaving the next morning and I went up to his room to say goodbye to him and he had gone.

25:30 There was half a roast chicken on the table. We hadn't seen a chicken since we had been in Japan, so the Japs were looking after him.

What was your relationship to your captors? What did you think of them?

There were two Japanese I would invite into my home. After all the Japanese I met

26:00 there was only two that I would invite into my home. One was Smelligasan who after I had my jaw broken and when I lost all the weight and I developed fluid on the lung, Tim McCoy took me to him this morning and he said, "Smelligasan, Mulcahy too ill." "Right

26:30 Mulcahy, you come with me." He took me around to what we called the rod house where the rods of iron are. He said, "Can you get up on top there?" I said, "Yes." he said, "Well you get up on top there and stop there until I come and get you this afternoon and here is an apple for dinner." He gave me a nice big apple for dinner. I said, "Thank you very much." He came back that afternoon and got me and brought me back down and he took me to the guard and said, "Mulcahy is too sick, he is not to go

27:00 to work, he is to go to hospital." They had more power over the Japs because they were running the camp. Kawasaki Ship yard they were running the camp, so they told the Jap guards what they had to do. When I went back that night I was taken to what they called the hospital, it was only just a special ward and at that particular stage we had a second doctor came into the camp. McSweeney, he was an English Air Force doctor.

27:30 He would have made a marvellous woman's doctor as he had a very good approach. I was in the hospital for two or three weeks and he came to me this day and said, "Listen Mulcahy, you are going to drown in the fluid in your lung, it is going to fill up and you won't be able to breath at all, I think I can drain it off your lung if you will let me have a go. I have a pretty primitive set up

28:00 made up here but I think I can do it. Are you prepared to let me have a go?" I said, "Doctor I have 250 men out there I want to get home, if you can save me you go ahead." He took me in, sat me on the table, got me to bend over and put my hands around my knees, and he got his finger and pressed all down my ribs until he got into a certain little spot and he pressed it hard

28:30 and put this great big long needle with a hollow point on it and he pressed it in through into the ribs until the fluid started to come out. He had a little screw on the end of it with a pumper on it and he pumped the air into the lung and took the end off and drained it into a bucket. He took off 3¾ pints of

fluid off my lung. He said,

29:00 “I want to see how that goes. “ It started to gather again. I said, “Do you want to have another go?” He said, “No, I wouldn’t go again. We were lucky the last time, we got away with it. I would hate you get an infection.” He said, “I think what’s left there will dry up. It will affect your lung but you will get over it.” I said, “Alright.” He left me there for a while. I have lost about a third of the left lung

29:30 because it is all scarred inside. He said, “To get you going you really want a blood transfusion.” I said, “Have you got anybody in camp who has enough blood left in them to give me one?” He said, “I think I can find one for you.” He found a little bloke by the name of Bunny Sheriff of the 2/20th.

30:00 I knew Bunny. So he gets Bunny and I and he sits us in chairs opposite each other and he has this lump of rubber tubing with a needle in each arm. He sticks one end up in the veins in Bunny’s arm and the other in my arm, which lets the blood flow through. He just timed it there for so long. He said, “All right, I think you have enough now.” and he took it out. I never looked back after that, I started to put on weight. I put on a stone weight.

30:30 **This happened in the prisoner of war camp in Japan?**

Yes. We had virtually no medical services whatsoever. Everything we had was just bits and pieces the doctors were able to get and make up.

How on earth did you cope with no anaesthetic? I can’t imagine experiencing that.

31:00 It is just one of those things you put up with.

Did they give you anything to bite on? Didn’t even have like?

No. If someone had put their hand on your mouth you would have chewed the finger off.

Did you hold anything in your hand?

My hands were around both knees. He must have pressed on the nervous system when he came down

31:30 I think the way he used to press his finger in used to numb the nerve I think. I didn’t feel the needle going in hardly at all. It was a big long needle too, about that long.

That’s a pretty amazing story. Just tell me again who performed that operation?

A Doctor McSweeney, a British RAF [Royal Air Force] Unit.

32:00 **He was in the camp with you?**

He was in the camp for the last six or eight months. Before that we had a Dutch doctor, who was a veterinary surgeon, we made him our doctor. For a veterinary surgeon he did a pretty good job too, the Dutchman. He could speak German and some of the Japanese

32:30 could speak German so they could confer.

Why do you think your health went downhill in Japan?

When I had the jaws broken I couldn’t eat anything for over 2½ weeks. I lived on soya bean sauce and water, that’s all I lived on. When I had the jaws broken and the only treatment I got was to wash

33:00 my mouth out with soya bean sauce to kill the infection and salt to kill infection. I couldn’t chew anything at all. It was a month or six weeks before I could chew anything, so I just didn’t eat anything at all. I lost a lot of weight.

Can you tell me about you getting your jaw broken? Why did you get your jaw broken?

33:30 We had a lot of trouble with our food and we had a little smart Japanese bloke and he was pinching our Red Cross parcels, not many, just one now and again, and taking them out and selling them on the Japanese open market, and also some of the rice was disappearing. We had a Captain

34:00 Patterson there with us, but he wasn’t interested, just let it be. This particular day I was called up to the officer and they said, “Mulcahy.” See they used to bypass the officer because I was in charge of the men in the camp, I was in charge, not the captain, he was in charge of the camp, I was in charge of the men. They called me up and they said, “Mulcahy….

34:30 Mulcahysan we want everybody to write a letter of 100 words of what they think of the treatment they have received by the Japanese since they have been a prisoner of war.” When I took the papers down and gave them to the NCOs, I said, “Now look, tell the boys not to be silly, put in anything at all but don’t put in anything that is derogatory at all that will cause trouble, just write a little bit of a note, and I will write the main letter and put it in,

35:00 I will take the blame for the camp.” I sat down and I complained about the pilfering of our parcels, the selling of some of our rice, the lack of meat which we were supposed to get every ten days, the lack of fish which we were supposed to get every three days which we weren’t getting, all the items of as far as

food was concerned that we weren't getting, lll to do with the health of the troops.

35:30 I took the letters in and nothing happened for two or three days and we came back this day from work and there was great activity. There were strange Japs running around everywhere, there was a stage built on the parade ground and all the rest of it. This little Morimotum we called him, Morimoto, after one of the pigs that won the prize at the show that year, that was the nickname we gave him, he was in charge of the camps from Osaka

36:00 and this was in his area. He got up and he gave a great talk with the Japanese interpreter. It all boiled down to the fact of whatever you think of the Japanese you mustn't write it down because someone else can read it and could find out. So that was alright and he called me up and said, "Break off the parade." so I broke off the parade and he said, "Now I want you and you, come here."

36:30 The other bloke was Horrie Pauley. I don't know what Horrie had put in his letter, because we all had numbers on. He took us around the back where no one could see us and got the interpreter out and had a bit of a talk with Horrie and gave Horrie a hit under the ear and told him to get back to the hut. So Horrie just got one hit under the ear and away he went. He came over to me then, the interpreter said,

37:00 "Mr. Sukiama doesn't think you understood what you had to write about." I said, "Oh yes, I did, I had to tell all the troops, I knew what I had to write about, I had to tell all the troops what to write about." "You are sure you knew what you had to write about?" I said, "Oh yes, I am quite sure." I said. Right he said, he called three of his Japanese guards with bayonets on, they got one either side of me with a bayonet underneath the armpit and one on the back with a bayonet in my spinal column and he got into me.

37:30 He turned out to be the champion boxer of the Japanese Army this bloke, heavy weight boxer, I didn't know that. He belted me about eight times but couldn't knock me down or knock me out and he lost faith because the troops were all there to see this bloke knock hell out of this Aussie and he couldn't knock me down, so he lost face straight away. So he walked away disgusted and the little medical orderly, not medical orderly, the little ration sergeant came up then and

38:00 he was done up like a little turf, brand new suit and everything was lovely and flashy. He came up and he went whoosh. This time my mouth was full of blood and when he hit my jaws the blood spat out all over him. He was blood from the top of the head to the boot. He looked at his uniform and he couldn't get away quick enough from me. Another little medical orderly was lined up next to give me a hit and he wasn't game to hit me at all. He just swore at me and

38:30 told me to get back to the camp. So I went back down to the hut and I said to one of the boys, "Go and get the Dutch doctor." They came back and said, "No, he can't, he won't come down. The little Jap has already been down there and he said if he comes down to treat you he will get the same as what you have got." I said, "Okay then." With that over came this great big old Dutchman, Von Zonda,

39:00 from the kitchen. He said, "Give me a look at your mouth." I think he had done a bit of first aid work on the ships. He had a look at my mouth, he said, "You have both jaws broken and two teeth knocked out but don't let anybody touch it until I get back." I said, "Alright." So he went away and he came back a bit later on and he had this

39:30 big crepe bandage in his hand and he had a glass full of soya bean sauce. He said, "Here, rinse your mouth out with this soya bean sauce, it is not an antiseptic but the salt in it will kill germs and heal it up a bit quicker." So he did that and he said, "I am going to put my hand in your jaw and put those two teeth back in the hole. There is a hole in each side and

40:00 if I can put the teeth back in they are still hanging by a bit of the skin. I will poke them back in and close your jaw they might grow back in." I said, "Alright." So he got his great big hand, it was as big as a foot, and got it in and he got these two teeth and put them back in the holes, bound my jaw up. Next morning of course I had a head like this and went on parade, and as soon as I went on parade this bloke came over and he pulled the bandage off my head and threw it on the ground and said,

40:30 "Now run around the parade ground." The first step you took your jaw went down and broke again. Some of the boys as they went out of the camp would pick this bandage up and pass it up the line to me and put it back on my head as best I could. Anyhow the jaw healed up, the jaw healed up and the teeth.... one lasted 15 years and one lasted 20 odd years.

Tape 5

00:31 I will tell you a few little stories about our camp at Tagatori, this was the camp we went into when we first arrived in Japan. It was a brand new camp built by the Kawasaki ship building company because they more or less owned us and we worked for them so they built the quarters. It was situated in the valley and it had a little pond in it. The Japs called it a lake and over there you might get

01:00 an earthquake every night or every week some time you would have an earthquake. The theory was that any fish in the pond would be stunned by the earthquake and come to the top of the water. It was

interesting to see that every time there would be an earthquake you would see the Japs running for their lives down to this little pond to see if there was any fish they could fish out of it. There was one fish they couldn't get out so they decided this day they would get the boys to bail it out, so they got all the sick men down to this pond and

01:30 they bailed and they bailed. They bailed all day before they got the water down low enough to catch this damn fish and then he wasn't edible when they got it. Also when we had the earthquakes all the interior lining of the huts would fall down and you would have to put it all back up again, just fit it into slots. You would have to put it all up. You would be asleep in the middle of the night and then bang all this stuff would land on you. We would have to shift it and put it up again the next morning.

02:00 The latrines were made at the end of each room and they consisted of a great big concrete tank built underneath with all the seats on top. About every month or two months, the refuse that was underneath was sold to the gardeners. They brought their trucks in and they ladled it all out into their trucks and took it away and put it on their gardens. That is how the vegetables were grown in Japan was our urine

02:30 and all the rest. We didn't like eating any of their food if we could help it but we had to. Another episode we had which was quite interesting. A little chap in charge of the go-down [warehouse], where I worked number 20 go-down, by the name of Hasigo, he was a well educated Japanese and spoke quite good English and he had never been out of Japan in his life. He took a bit of a liking to me and we got on very well and

03:00 after a couple of weeks he said, "Would you like a Maynichi Times paper.?" Maynichi Times was the only paper published in Japan in English. I said, "Yes, I would." So he gave me the paper he got that morning off the stand. Then I had the problem then of working out how I was going to get it past the guard. So I folded it all up and stuck it down in my underpants and I got it through. That night I got a lump of cloth and I sewed a

03:30 piece of cloth inside my trousers leg about an inch square and every day when he would give me a paper I would fold it up and I would slip it down like in a sheath so when the Japs feel your legs they couldn't detect it. I used to bring that paper in every day, and I would give it to a Captain Bathgate who was there at the time. He would read it and he would give us a talk the next night on how the war was proceedings.

04:00 That went on for about roughly 12 months I suppose. He said to me this morning, "I have some bad news for you Mulcahyasan." I said, "Yes Hasigo, what is the problem?" "I can't give you any more papers" I said, "Why? Have you been caught?" "I haven't been caught but…." he said, "Before I can buy a newspaper tomorrow morning I have to hand this old one in, it is a new system they have devised. They must suspect there is a leak so I have to hand this old one in. Every morning I will give you the paper you can take it down

04:30 to the toilet and you can have it for 20 minutes and read it." I said, "Thanks very much." That carried on right through the war. He is one of the only Japs and a little bloke called Smelligasan who I would invite into my home. They were the only two Japs who had a personality and a bit of candour about them. They were two fine Japs. The rest were useless in my opinion. We had another unfortunate incident there, we had a black

05:00 South African who was caught in Java and who classified himself as Javanese and he was always at logger heads with the Japs. It was a good friendly banter. He used to call them "Yellow man no good." and "Black man no good." and this would go backwards and forward. Anyhow they issued us with a raincoat to wear in the winter out in the yard. Sambo took his out and used to carry it out

05:30 for about a week, he sold it to one of the men down the workshop. Of course this bloke put it on and walked down the street and he no sooner walked down the street and the Kempetai [Japanese Military Police] grabbed him. He had army uniform on, "Where did you get it from?" "I bought it from black in the prisoner of war camp." They came back to us, they grabbed poor old Sambo straight away, he had no hope of getting away. They put him in the gaol which was 4 x 4 and 8 foot high gaol. He couldn't sit down, he couldn't lie down comfortably. We were allowed to give him two

06:00 rice balls a day is all we could give him. The guard changed every hour and it was the middle of winter and they would bring him out in the middle of the night when the guard changed every hour and take his clothes off and poor a bucket of ice water over him and put him back in the thing and throw his clothes in with him, nothing to dry himself at all. He lasted nearly two months before he died of pneumonia, poor fellow. Nothing we could do about it. It was their way of treating him.

06:30 That's about three of the major things that stick in my mind of the camp itself. There were lots of stories that flowed to and fro down from the shipyard. All the old equipment they had in the shipyard was stuff that they had been given by England after the First World War. All the press and all the mechanical gear all had the English names on them. You could see it was the old stuff. They tried

07:00 to modernise it and to bring it up to standard, but it wasn't very good. Some of the cranes wouldn't work properly, so what they would do if they had a big sheet of metal, they would line 10 or 12 prisoners of war up, they would lift the sheet of metal up with one crane and sit it onto their shoulders and tell them to walk it down 20 or 30 feet to the next crane and they would drop it off there and the next crane would pick it up and take it on so you had a permanent gang there some days. They would be all day

carrying these big steel sheets of metal. If one man dropped it the whole lot had to get away otherwise they would get crushed.

07:30 It was very primitive. For my sake in the workshop the work I did, we had I had five men with me. Only one man of them is still alive, a little bloke by the name of Bloomfield down at Leeton. We had to supply all the zinc ingots, the iron ingots and supply all the big electrical cables, sulphuric acid

08:00 and a whole lot of odds and sods that had to be distributed all over the camp area. We had little trolleys that we would push around wherever you wanted too. The acid was very dangerous to handle. The boss was there one morning and he dropped the bottle and broke it. By the time we got him to hose, to hose him down it had burnt his rubber-soled shoes off him. That's how strong the acid was. We used to go up to this great big pit where they used to dip all

08:30 the piping to put the galvanising on them. We also had a German submarine used to come in and refuel at our base and it had come in this time and it was too high for the wharf so they built a little platform, about six feet up to the door where you could walk into the submarine. And we were given strict instructions were we were not to go up on that platform at all. We had to bring the stuff and leave it at the bottom

09:00 of the little ramp they had built. We took this load in this day and we had a new guard, a new Japanese, it was an army guard, we usually had a workshop guard, and this day we had an army guard so he waited around for awhile. So up he went in the door and down into the submarine, and after about five seconds you would have thought there was two cats having a fight. The Germans got this bloke and they bundled him and they kicked him and they threw him and they

09:30 pelted him out. He landed about six feet behind us on the wharf. All his dignity was gone in one hit. In no uncertain language never was he to go inside that ship again. The Germans could nearly all speak English so we'd wait until they went to the toilet and a couple of us would go to the toilet and have a yarn with them in the toilet.

10:00 They would tell us they were getting hell belted out of them down south. The Yanks had done this and the Yanks had done something else. They didn't know they weren't telling us anything at all because we kept up to date with all the stories with papers about the Japs with what we could get. We really kept a finger on the pulse as much as possible. Later on when we were brought down to the southern island to Fukuoka

10:30 and the war had ended we posted our own guard and hunted the Japanese men and their officer outside and told them not to come back inside the camp unless I sent for them. The first thing I sent for was the old chap and got him to get us a wireless. He had that there probably. We then got a message from [General] MacArthur who said if we wanted any food for the welfare of the men we could

11:00 commandeer it and pay for it, sign for it and they would pay for it so we got that organised. I am down in the kitchen this day and a runner came down and said, "Quick you are wanted up at the main gate." I said, "What is the trouble?" He said, "The guard has gone up on the road and he has stopped a big Jap truck and he has brought them down here. He said he has a full bullock in the back; you had better go up and see what you can do with it." So I went up, they had a dressed bullock about 300 lbs weight

11:30 in the back of this army truck, these two Jap corporals. I said, "Open the gate and send them straight down to the kitchen and tell Jack Nichols to get the bullock out and cut it up as quickly as he can and get it into the soya pits to get it cooking. The faster he can do it the better. Then bring it back here and wait here for me." I went over to the truck and I said, "Right-o you two blokes, you can get out and walk back to your barracks.

12:00 I am keeping the truck. I might want a truck later on. Some unknown reason might crop up and I might need a truck." So I said, "You can go back to your barracks and I'll keep your truck." So away they went and of course they lost face, they lost their army truck. They went back to camp and we could smell the meat cooking and the boys were all walking around with their nose in the air, with this beef. We hadn't had beef for two years. Another runner came down he said, "Quick, come up, there is a car load of senior Jap officers up there want to see you."

12:30 I walked up; I could see they were pretty senior men so as I went past the guard house I said to the sergeant, "Have four of your men out here with rifles standing ready, something might develop here." I went on out, I saluted this bloke, he was a full colonel, and he saluted me back. He spoke good English. He said, "Excuse me sir, but you have confiscated the week's ration supply for

13:00 my thousand odd troops. They will not have any meat all this week and they will be very disgruntled." I said, "That is bad luck. I have 200 men here who haven't seen meat for two years." I said, "They have been disgruntled for two years and I have put up with it." I said, "If I were you I would advise you to get in your car and go home and leave the meat here." I said, "If you put a song and a dance on I'll confiscate your car and

13:30 you and your officers and friends can walk home and lose face too. Now you make up your mind what you want to do." He blinked his eyes a few times and looked around and saw I meant it; he saw the four blokes lined up there with rifles, so he saluted and got in the car and went away. I never saw a sign of them afterwards. We had the truck, we had to cart all the injured men into the aeroplane when we had the message to go and we had to take all the injured and sick blokes who couldn't travel and we took

them into Moji,

14:00 we put them on the plane. When they got them on the plane there was a car load of signals went in. Jack Nichols the cook went in ahead of it, he took a party of signals with him, when they got the men on the plane, this Yank poked his head out and said, “I have room for two more if some of you blokes would like to come.” They all said, “Yes, but what about Mul, we can’t go away and leave Mul.” Jack Nicholls said,

14:30 “Don’t worry about Mulcahy, I know Mul, he will see it in the right light, he won’t worry about it, you blokes go.” So two of them got on the plane and away they went, Todd Morgan and Russell Moss. They flew them down to southern Japan and they struck a cyclone and they had to land at a little island and spend the night there. The next morning they were offered a plane trip to America and

15:00 they refused that. A plane picked them up and took them down a bit further, and another plane took them down a bit further. Eventually they landed in Townsville about three days after we were released, they were in Townsville. This Russell Moss’s sister was married to the editor of the Daily Telegraph and they rang up and spoke to him. He said, “Where are you?” He would have people there, “Don’t move, just wait

15:30 there. I will have a vehicle pick you up.” They picked them up and got them out to a plane and they flew them straight down to Sydney. The Tele had a big write up the next morning and I’ve got it there in that book of mine somewhere. There were 16 men listed in camp with them. My name was one. That was the first news the family had had that I was alive. There was a great to-do and they got back to Sydney and they spent the day out with the newspaper blokes and

16:00 the next night they came home and they heard the Provos [Provost Marshals – military police] were after them. They were AWOL [Absent Without Leave] these two men. The press fellows came around the next morning and so they loaded them all up with decent coats and they put press notices on them and took them around for another day on the pub with press notices on them. They went out the next morning and reported into Victoria Barracks and got a rap over the knuckles and were told to wait for the

16:30 rest of the troops to arrive. They were very enterprising those two boys, they got home no trouble at all and they were still in the old dirty clothes that we had in the mining, little sandals on, dirty trousers, dirty singlet just as though they had come out of the mine. I don’t know what the people of Sydney thought they had when they arrived. That just about covers all the little bits I wanted to tell you about.

17:00 Another thing was when we had to paint these big POWs on our roofs, we got the Japs to let us paint big POWs on our roofs so the planes up above could pick the prisoner of war camps out. The next day they came in dropping food and what they had done they had two 44 gallon drums the top and bottom of them cut out and they were welded together into an 88 gallon drum, and they just tipped all the stuff into it and put a top on it with a board across it with nails to hold it and

17:30 they dropped it out in parachutes but they were too heavy and they snapped all the ropes of the parachute and these great big 88 gallon drums came hurtling down into the camp. There were blokes going in all different directions. We didn’t have any injury there, but one of the camps nearby, it fell and hit one of the buildings and killed an officer inside. There were four planes came in; the first three dropped this food on the camp and the fourth bloke could see what was happening so he

18:00 dropped his into a little lake beside us, it was a much bigger lake than we had at Kobe but it was a much bigger lake but only a shallow one, in there. The boys swam out to it and they were there for a long while. “What are you blokes doing?” “We have all the tea and sugar and coffee here and we are having a great time.” So we gathered up all the broken tins we could find. That night we had bully beef, we had Spam, we had meat and veggies, we had

18:30 cake, we had everything it was all put into the kitchen stores to be cooked up where we ate everything. They gave us another drop after that and we had it pegged out with parachutes. That was a good drop, they dropped everything in cardboard cartons, four cartons to a flag and down it came and it just floated down nicely, it didn’t damage anything at all.

19:00 We had a little bit of medicine sent in. We had four medical officers in that camp. The Japs had put in two special medical officers just before we left Kobe. We got two RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] officers, a flight lieutenant was one, I can’t think of his name, Sweeney was one and Carter was the other

19:30 and we had two Dutch surgeons. They had nothing to operate with. When they opened all this stuff up they got some of the boys in who had cysts on their arms and they had a great go there. They sterilised one little room, and they had chloroform around the place and the blokes were popping in getting this out and that out and something else out. They couldn’t do anything major of course but they could only just do superficial wounds.

20:00 They certainly got the work right as soon as they got the stuff to work on it. One night when we were in camp, and I got called up to the guard house about 8 o’clock. They said, “There is a Chinaman up here wants to see you.” So I went up to the office and this Chinaman is there, he turned out to be a Korean but could speak English. He said he was from a work party down the line

20:30 and they had just killed their company commander and they had taken to the bush because they feared the Kempetai would come and kill them all because they helped them. I got five men with rifles and said, “We will go back in and get things organised for you.” So we walked back down the line and I said, “Now you tell me when we are getting close to where your men are, I don’t want to get into a fight with your men, you tell me when your men are here, close by.”

21:00 We got to a certain stage and he said, “I think we are getting pretty close to the men.” I said, “Well you go ahead now and if your men are there tell your men I want tem all to come out and stand on the railway line where I can see them. To stop there because I want to come down straight through the middle of them, I won’t hurt them, I’ll come straight down through the middle of them and I want to lead them back into their camp.” So he did this and he came back and he said, “The men are all up… “Sir!” We walked down through the middle of them; and they had pick axes, they had crow bars,

21:30 they had baseball bats, you name it, they had it, anything they could find to use as a weapon they had it on them. We marched back up to camp. and I said, “You form your men outside and I will go inside the camp and have a look.” I had five men and I posted a guard at the gate and said, “Don’t let anybody in.” I went down and the camp commander was lying in the middle of the parade ground bashed to pieces with baseball bats

22:00 Other than that the place looked quite good, well kept, cleared and tidy so I came back up and I said to him, “I want you to march your men down and number them off, I want to count them.” He marched his men in and formed them up and numbered them off and I think there were 135 he had. And the story was I found out afterwards the Japs had brought him over, as a young fellow,

22:30 treated him like a little god for about six months, sent him back to Korea to tell his mates what a great place Japan was so he would recruit these blokes and bring them over and they would put them straight into the coal mine. All these young blokes came over and thought they were going to get treated well by the Japanese and instead they got stuck straight into a prisoner of war camp and put into the coal mine so they were very anxious. The commander was still left in charge so that is why they killed him. He got them into trouble so they did away with him.

23:00 While this is going on, this car load of Kempetai rolled up, he wanted to take control of the camp. I said, “No you are not taking control of the camp. I am in charge of the camp.” He said, “What rank are you?” I said, “I am a warrant officer.” he said, “I am a colonel.” I said, “I don’t care what you are, I have the weight behind me here and I am in charge of this camp.” I said, “Don’t you do anything that will fringe on that.” I said, “Have you got any lower NCOs with you?” He said, “Yes I have got a warrant officer.”

23:30 I said, “You get him out of the car and I will let him stay here, but you senior officers have to get off the scene as quick as possible, I don’t want you around. I want that body taken away immediately and the rations increased by twenty five per cent for these men.” He saluted and got into the car and he left the corporal with me. I took his pistol and gave it to the officer then I took him in and I showed him where he could sit and where he could move and he wasn’t to go past a certain thing. Then I did a tour of the camp

24:00 and down in one of the back rooms I found there were eleven people minus legs and arms and that from accidents in the mine and they were put down there and they only got half rations, the poor things. I had to keep a guard on that camp then right through for the next week until we got a call to leave and I had to send a man to relieve the guard. What happened to the Koreans after that I don’t know but I don’t think the Japs would

24:30 have done anything to them because the American influence had spread very quickly that first week or fortnight. They knew that the Americans meant business, they were there and they had to behave themselves otherwise they wouldn’t have done all the things that I asked them to do. I think they would have been quite safe in their own hands. That is about all the stories I can tell you towards the end of the war that happened of any consequence.

25:00 **Can I just clarify you spent some time in gaol inside the POW camp in Japan, I am not sure whether that was the first camp or the second camp?**

We were all in gaol, I didn’t spend any time in gaol, no, I was just in the camp, I never spent anytime in gaol.

25:30 **Sorry I got that mixed up so could you just tell me again how you became a warrant officer inside the POW camp?**

Yes, I went up as a sergeant, I was made a full sergeant after the war ended in Bakri and we came back and reformed the battalion and I was made a full sergeant. I carried that rank right up until we got into Japan and we arrived there and then we had three captains and I think it was five lieutenants went up with the party

26:00 and there was only one officer who had seen action and that was Frank Beverley who I had fought under all the time, the rest were from headquarter companies and battalion headquarters back behind the line. The first night we were there, there was a bit of a ruckus, and we decided we would put all the Aussies in one hut so we had to kick all the Pommies and the Dutch out so they could go and get into another hut, it caused a few fisticuffs, but it wasn’t too bad, we got them out reasonably well.

26:30 So the next morning Beverley came up to see me and he said, “I want you to come down with me Des. I want to see you.” These three captains were there together in the room and he said, “We have a problem.” I said, “We’ve all got problems, what is your problem?” he said, “We haven’t got a warrant officer among the Australians what so ever, we’ve got

27:00 several sergeants.” he said. “The Pommies have four senior army officers who have been in the army for 20 odd years some of them and they are very senior officers and we realise that the Pommies won’t work under Australians yet the Australians will be able to carry on and get the Pommies to work under them. We want you to become a sergeant major, we will make you a

27:30 sergeant major and get you to take control of the camp.” I said, “It is a pretty big order. He said, “I know it is.” I said, “You get the four warrant officers I would like to have a word with them first.” They sent a runner and got the four warrant officers. I explained the situation to them and I said, “Would you be agreeable to that?” and they said, “Yes, no trouble at all.” One of them from the 2nd Battalion, the Sergeant Major Guess,

28:00 I said to him, “Well I’ll pick you out and I am going to make you my 2IC and you will be in charge of the Pommies, if I want something done with the Pommies you will be the man to do it.” He said, “All right, I’ll do that.” That’s how I came to be made a warrant officer but I never ever got paid for it. I only ever got paid sergeant fees the whole time although I was doing a colonel’s job really; I was paid the sergeant’s wages. It was given to me to hand in to battalion headquarters

28:30 to get a promotion I put it in an envelope and I have left it there for 50 years before anybody saw it. I never got it out until my wife was dying. I was about number five, there were four sergeants who were senior to me in rank, had been held at that rank a lot longer than me but they picked me out because they had seen me lead men and the others hadn’t and that’s how I got the job.

29:00 **What was the most difficult thing about being a warrant officer in the POW camp?**

The crux of the whole matter fell on your shoulders. You were responsible for the whole men. They eventually took all the officers away and left one officer, from 8th Div Sigs and the lieutenant with him but they were more or less just to keep the numbers

29:30 in order and to make sure the rations were drawn and things were done in camp. When it came to the work party everything fell on me so I was responsible to take the work party out and responsible to bring the work party home. Any troubles with the work party it was my trouble not theirs.

Did you have a rifle as a warrant officer?

No they gave us nothing.

30:00 **You had quite a lot of power?**

The only power I had was my own power over the men, that was all. Actually I couldn’t do anything as far as power was concerned, I couldn’t dock the men, I couldn’t say I’ll put you on a charge sheet, because we had no law with us, you just had to look after the men and do the right thing by them and hope they would do the right thing by you. That is what it amounted to.

30:30 **Were there any weapons of any sort inside the prison?**

No weapons allowed. We never had a weapon whatsoever.

Did anybody make one?

No. We were searched regularly. It was a peculiar thing they put a search on every thirteenth day, it was supposed to be an S Pay Day. They would make you take all your gear up onto the parade ground. They would come through the hut and make sure there was nothing left

31:00 and you would spread all your stuff out on your groundsheet. The Japs would come along and look it all over and the word would go around after the first two or three they were looking for pocket knives. So you hid all your pocket knives, if you had a pocket knife you hid it. You could leave a grenade or something else there and they wouldn’t see it, they were looking for a pocket knife. They were very one eyed and one minded the Japs. They got told to do a job and look for one thing, that’s all they looked for. The next week they would be looking for that thing so you would leave it and you would take it out and you would put

31:30 something else back there. Nobody ever had trouble with the search. What it developed into eventually was that they would put all the 600 men on the parade ground which was supposed to be the S Pay day and they’d leave one Jap to do the searching and he would have to do the searching, he would be there for hours. That was one of the reasons I wrote the letter and got my jaws bashed because the men weren’t getting their rest, they were standing all day

32:00 on the parade ground. Whether it was a wet day or a cold day they still had to be out they couldn’t go back into the tent. They had to stand there all day until the bloke completed his search. Instead of leaving ten men there they would just leave one man. It did alter after I had my jaws bashed, they speeded up things.

Did those searches happen when you were doing the work party, when you were going out to work?

They put the search on any time if they

32:30 saw someone they thought might have something, they would grab him and run their hands over him and see if he had anything. He might be going out to work or they might grab him coming back. If they saw a bloke and thought he might have been working somewhere where he could pinch something they would grab him and search him. We had nothing to pinch. A steel rod was the only thing you could pinch. Who would want a steel rod, you couldn't eat that? Yet on the other side of the harbour we could look across and we could see all these ships coming in with all the food of the world, coming up the other side.

33:00 They were living like kings over there.

Did anybody try and escape?

Yes we had two Englishmen got away in the early stages after we were there about a month or so. It was four days before they picked them up and paraded them back in front of us

33:30 and took them away and we lost track of them altogether. We didn't know what had happened to them until the war was virtually over and we were doing the coal mines and I am walking out to the coal mine this day and I had an old civilian guard with me and there was a big building over on the left. I asked him what the big building was and he said it was a gaol. , He said, "There are two Englishmen in there." I pricked my ears up straight away.

34:00 I said, "Two Englishmen?" he said, "Yes." When the war ended I notified the authorities that there were two prisoners of war at that camp and they went and found them. They had virtually been held in solitary confinement in dark all the years. They were blind, they were a terrible mess. They shot the two Japanese guards and took the blokes away.

As a warrant officer was it difficult to instill

34:30 **discipline in the men in the camp?**

Not really, you had the odd rascal. You had the odd bloke who would try and beat you on a point or two but you wore him down eventually. It was just a case of just battling on and keeping things churning over and they got into a routine,

35:00 a certain routine worked out in the camp and the men got to work in it, and there was no trouble at all. We had to post a guard every night in our tent with a book and a piece of paper. Everybody who went to the toilet you had to take his number, when he came back from the toilet his number was crossed off. The guard came in took the bit of paper and found somebody was missing, he hadn't been checked off, the bloke who was in charge would get a belt under

35:30 the ear hole, as he wasn't doing his job properly. The night of the bombing we had Freddy Brown gave a running commentary of all the battle as it was going on. The regulation was that when the air raid siren went I had to get up and get dressed. When the air raid went the second time I had to report to the guard house, you went up there

36:00 then and they would tell you if the planes were coming in our direction or not. This particular night the phones were running hot and I thought Scobie has got together tonight. They sent me back, they said, "Go back and get all the men out of bed and put them in the trenches." that we had dug beside the huts. This bombing went on for over four hours. The Japs got tired of watching it so Freddy Brown sneaked back and went back into the room and

36:30 he opened the window and was giving a running commentary to all his mates down below. "Here comes another one, whoops he has dropped it there, look out, it's coming down." Freddy went on there for about an hour giving a commentary on what he could see. The Japs never saw him. We had three incendiary bombs lob in our camp area, which we were able to put out and they didn't do any damage. We had to take

37:00 one of those old fire pumps with two men on each handle that pump up and down in the middle like this sort of thing, and they had a fire team and the Jap took it out. The boys went out, about eight or ten of the boys went out to work it. Those that weren't working the pump filled their shirts up with tomatoes and all the rubbish they could get out of the gardens. They came back well satisfied as they had a great big feed. Later on they gave us a big citation

37:30 for the wonderful work the fire brigade did protecting the civilians of Kobe. I don't know what happened to that; I would have liked to have got it and brought it home as it was a memorable piece of writing.

38:00 **I am wondering how did you cope with the absence of women for such a long time?**

All you are interested in doing is going to the toilet every hour to do a wee. Every hour you used to have to rush to the toilet to do a wee and run back into bed and just get warm and then you would have to rush to the toilet again. Every hour it was, once an hour you'd be running backward and forward to the toilet with this rice diet. God, it was shocking

38:30 **Your energy was a bit low?**

Energy was very low. Sexual energy went right out the window.

You still had to go to work in the shipyards?

We worked in the shipyards. They had two or three old women there who used to clean the muck out

39:00 underneath the line, rubbish would blow in and they had this special little stick and hook it out and clean it out. They would go to the toilet with men in the toilet; they would just drop their tweeds, wee in the toilet and walk out as if nothing happened, men would be all around them, two or three old women. It didn't do anything for the

39:30 sexual desire I can assure you.

Tape 6

00:33 **I would just like to ask you about your commanding officers and your impressions of them?**

We had some very, very good officers and we had a few weak officers. In fact we had one officer who when he went into action he couldn't get out of the fox hole, he sat there and cried. The corporal had to take over the platoon. I won't mention any names, the poor man is dead now but he was a leading light in legal history.

01:00 The average bloke who came from out in the bush turned out to be good officers, the ones they picked up from around the city some of them were a little bit dubious. Most of them had all seen army service in the friendly battalions like the 30th Battalion and the one that was formed around Bathurst

01:30 2/10th, they were nearly all local officers from there but they did dig up a few people around the city area who got in for different reasons. We had some very, very good corporals, excellent corporals and they made things very, very easy for some of the officers.

02:00 **Generally how were relations between the ranks, between yourself and the high ranks?**

We only had one officer who was very cantankerous, he has passed away now, and his son has become a member of our association. His son was with the Special Forces so he must have been a fairly good soldier but the old bloke was a real, if he had a set

02:30 on you he would go to no lengths at all to downgrade you, no matter what it was, whether it was in the war or after the war. If he could do you harm he would. As far as the battalion was concerned he was a great worker for the battalion, he did a lot to get the battalion on its feet. I won't mention his nickname because as soon as I mention his nickname everybody will know who I am talking about.

03:00 **How did you find the command in the Malayan Peninsula and Singapore, both the British and Australian command?**

We saw very, very little of the British and they more or less stopped in Singapore, they hardly came out of Singapore at all and they were all defending, and they had these batteries facing the ocean, all the great big naval guns.

03:30 They had them for years running on the perimeter and when they wanted to turn them around to fire up country there was only one that could go ,the others had worn down that far they couldn't get the weight over where the wheel was. There was only one and you could hear this thing as they went over. It was like an express train going over you, the twelve inch one. The Japs had an opip [observation post]

04:00 in the old sultan's palace and they wouldn't let us fire on that at all because they were keeping in good with the old bloke from the palace and the Japs had these great big binoculars, 5 foot long on the top of it and they would look over the island. They could see every move we made. They could see every machine gun post, everything, they could see where every Australian was before the war started. They gave them to the old bloke as a present when they left and they've still got them there and

04:30 when I was over there in 1962 he took us threw it and it showed us the binoculars that the Japs used to look at us and they're sitting up there still facing out over the island.

Did you feel satisfied with the level of command from the Australians?

I had nothing to complain about in the level of command from the Australians. They performed quite well

05:00 with the little exception, but I mean to say you get that in anything, you can't get 100% all the time. Overall I think most of our senior officers behaved very well and acted very well.

What was your impression of General Bennett?

Bennett was a man who was hamstrung before he started. He was told that he would never lead a brigade

05:30 and the army made sure of that. They sent some of us to Singapore, they sent some to Timor, they had battalions all over the place. If they had sent the whole lot of us over there it might have been a different story. We might had been able to hold the Japs back for another couple of weeks. Bennett was the only senior man as far as the British and Australians were concerned over there that knew anything about jungle warfare or how it shold be conducted and he and Anderson got on famously

06:00 and they were a great pair. But then of course he lost Anderson at Muar, the contact disappeared on radio, he couldn't contact him, the batteries were flat, he couldn't receive what they were trying to let us know. Bennett had the idea and he knew what was going to take place and how to counteract it but he didn't have the men to do it.

Did you feel he was justified in his departure from Singapore?

06:30 I have no worries about that at all. He couldn't do any good stopping there. The Japs were about to take control and he would have been, I wouldn't have been surprised if he had been beheaded, Bennett, if the Japs had got him. He was going to be a dead loss if he stopped there so he may as well get home and bring back what knowledge he had and he had a job to get home. There was a plane load of Australians and officers coming through from South Africa

07:00 and they landed in Batavia and Bennett wanted to get on the plane and they wouldn't let him on the plane. They looked after old Blamey.

Is beheading something that did happen to some of the officers who stayed?

No, there were quite a few Chinese beheaded and I think there were four or five Australians beheaded.

07:30 That was a different matter, that was escaping and fiddling around. If the officer kept his nose clean he got on fairly well, he didn't have any trouble after they were taken prisoner of war.

What sort of arrangements were put in place by the Japanese after the surrender for the proper conduct for the Australians?

Strange to say we hardly ever saw a Jap. They put us in this great big perimeter, put this wire thing around us,

08:00 got the Sikh guards to go over to them and the Sikhs paraded around it and the only time we saw a Jap was if a car load happened to come in for some particular reason and then they would go out again. If you went outside the wire you would strike the Japs but if you stopped inside the perimeter, you would stop there for weeks and wouldn't see a Jap. Towards the end of the war when they had everybody gone, all the people were moved into Changi goal.

08:30 Black Jack [Lieutenant Colonel F G Galleghan DSO, OBE, ED] used to call the roll every morning and make the Japs go on parade and he would chip them if they didn't have their proper clothes on.

Were you ever asked to sign an agreement to not try to escape from your enclosure?

We had to sign that the day they had us on the parade ground in Singapore. They had us all on the parade ground for 72 hours. We had to sign it and we signed it under duress in the finish.

09:00 **How did you take that?**

There was nothing we could do about it. You either signed it or starved to death and you had to stay on the quadrangle, no toilet facilities, no nothing and everybody was starting to get sick and go down with the diarrhoea so the officers said you have proved you don't want to sign it, so you have signed it under duress. It doesn't count for anything as far as our law is concerned, so we all signed it

09:30 and they let us go back to our barracks.

You have told us that you had a strong perception of the Japanese threat to Australia at this stage and earlier in the war, given the very intense fighting that you were involved with in Malaya and then the subsequent surrender at Singapore, how did the collapse of the British garrison fall on your shoulders?

10:00 We were very perturbed about it because we realised there was nothing between Singapore and Australia. If the Japs had wanted to they could have diverted their troops and gone straight down there and carried on, and there was nothing to stop them whatsoever at that stage of the battle. The combined navies had been done away in the Sunda Straits and there was no naval, the [HMS] Repulse and the [HMS] Prince of Wales had been sunk, and

10:30 there were no battleships, there was nothing at all, and they had complete airpower. We had a few Hurricane planes that had left Singapore and gone back to Borneo and they were virtually obsolete as far as the Zero were concerned at that stage. They weren't up to the mark so there was virtually nothing and Yamashita had the right idea, he was going to take Singapore and go straight down into Australia but old Toho said no.

11:00 If they had set back in Malaya and consolidate there and then we will go up in through Burma. It was a good thing for us he did.

Was there any sense of disappointment or even letting the side down after the fall of Singapore?

We were very disappointed that the war ended so quickly and the way it did but we had fought a good fight as far as we were concerned and

11:30 it was just that the organisation, the Pommies had been there for years and years and they had been given hundreds of thousands of dollars to put defence forces in, dig trenches around the perimeter and they had done nothing, the money was still sitting in the bank. They never even had a foxhole dug, not one. A bloke came out from England and they made a report on it and they shot him back to England and they told him not to say any more about it.

12:00 **Did you feel any resentment towards the British?**

Oh yes, a lot of resentment towards the British in the early stages after the war.

When you entered the war did you have a sense of not only fighting for Australia's protection but joining the battle to protect the Empire?

No. My main thing was to protect Australia when I joined the army. I knew

12:30 it was tough overseas, but my main thought was that Australia had to have an army and have it quickly and get it as strong as possible.

When you went to Malaya did you see it necessarily as a very important theatre of the war?

Not at that stage, not at that stage. In fact we laughed about it when they gave us these giggle suits to wear. We thought we were all going to go to the Middle East instead we finished up with these giggle suits over in

13:00 Malaya in the jungle. It paid dividends. We had plenty of time to learn to train and get out in the jungle. We did quite a lot of jungle training, climbing over the moutains and all the rest of it. You would sleep in the rain. You would wake up in the morning and you would lying in about three or four inches of water. You didn't realise because the water would be warm and you would be warm . You would get up, you wouldn't take your clothes off , just get up and clean your clothes as you walked around.

13:30 A short time in the sunlight and you would be dry again.

In the operations you were involved in Malaya did you ever have any air force support?

We had one plane, one plane, an old Albatross, it dropped in some medical supplies the last morning we were held up in Muar. We had all these wounded men and no morphine or anything for them.

14:00 They flew in at daylight and dropped it off. A message came through and said look up in the air at 'sparrow fart' [daybreak] tomorrow morning and in came this old plane and dropped the stuff and away it went. Half it fell in the Jap line and half in our line.

Did you feel the absence of air support?

Yes, felt the lack of air support, God yes. There is nothing worse than sitting down under a tree and having planes fly over you all the time and you can't make a move until

14:30 they have gone. They see everything that moved. They didn't bomb anything on the road because they had to use the road. They would bomb either the side of the road where we would have our vehicles parked and were meant to be sitting. They didn't bomb the main road, they would bomb right along the side of the road all the time. If they could see something happening somewhere else and give it a burst over there to but their main line was up and down the road all day, pp and down, turn around and come back again. Every little bit of

15:00 light that showed off the road they would give a burst of machine guns or drop a couple of little bombs on it as they went past.

I must imagine it created almost a feeling of entrapment?

It made us very frustrated I can tell you, very frustrated. It was a funny thing, the foliage on the rubber

15:30 trees was so dense so you couldn't get a decent shot at them with a rifle. You were shooting through all this rubbish all the time. You couldn't pick out when they were coming on an angle you would see a bit here and a bit there and a bit somewhere else, and you didn't know where to shoot.

That frustration and control or the loss of control you might have felt

16:00 **did it lead to any acts of desperation on your soldiers part or yourself?**

No. It was frustrating but I mean to say whenever we had a chance to get hold of a Jap we took it out on

him, we didn't take it out on anybody else. He paid the price. We lost 320 men and they lost about 3,300.

16:30 **Did it ever lead to times when the frustration became too much for any soldiers?**

No we didn't have time for it to get to the boys there was so much going on all the time. You couldn't let frustration take over. If you had a collapse and let frustration take over you would have men running in all directions doing mad things. You had to keep them under control all the time.

You have mentioned before the importance

17:00 **of that sense of control and discipline, the chain of command keeping things in order. Was this something that applied equally to the POW camps as well?**

Yes, it went right on through. The discipline they got in the army helped a great deal in the prisoner of war camp. They knew what discipline was and they were prepared to accept it. The only trouble was we had a lot of the young boys that came over there

17:30 and had only been in the army for about a month. Some of them couldn't even fire a rifle when they got there because they went straight into prisoner of war camp. Some of those were a bit hard, but they soon learnt. Some of the old boys got them by the neck and scruffed them around and they soon learnt the trade and got back into line.

Is that the only way that discipline was enforced on new arrivals?

We didn't have to do that very often. It was

18:00 something you more or less tried to do by experience and show them how to go about things and tell them "That is how you do it. You don't do it this way, you do it that way." They soon caught on. They realised they were prisoners of war and we were old hands at the game and we were doing all right so they fell into line. They came around fairly quickly, fairly well.

18:30 Some of them were only 15 or 16 years of age.

You have mentioned about procedures like roll call and using that as perhaps a means of maintaining a sense of discipline and military decorum. Were there any other procedures or roles that would play that part?

Not really, no, not really. It was all laid down there in the good book

19:00 and you did it this way and you did it that way, you impart that into your men. It becomes the gospel and you have to live by it.

Was there any isolation of men who didn't live by it that closely?

No, as I said I used to get all the rough and tough blokes but I found that all these rough and tough blokes after I had them

19:30 for a couple of weeks I had them eating out of my hand. Just treat them with kindness and gentleness and get on their side, look at things from their side and show them how to do well, show them how they were looking at it at the wrong angle, teach them to come around. Once you had them on your side you had a friend for life.

Did you ever try some of those strategies on some of your captors?

No, not on any of the captors, no.

20:00 **Was there ever any attempt to try to get some of them on side?**

No. We had nothing only contempt for them. We didn't want them on side, we kept as faraway at arm's length as possible. As I said only these two, this Hessigara and Smelligasan, they were the only two Japs that I would bother talking to in the shipyard.

20:30 **In control of one of the camps as you were and presumably knowing the comings and goings of your own men, was there a system or scheme whereby goods or favours may be bartered for?**

No, nothing like it at all, nothing at all. The only time when anything was bartered for was when a bloke was in hospital and he was too sick to eat his rice and

21:00 word would go down the line and they would buy the rice off him or he would say, "I'll take this rice and I'll return it to you on such and such a day, so they kept a record of it. I might take your rice tonight, you can't eat it. I'll take it but in a week's time we are having a party so I have to give you back that rice that night." There was quite a bit of that sort of work went on but nothing about stealing or anything like that. When I was sick I was there

21:30 for a month or six weeks and couldn't eat hardly anything and Horrie Paul used to come along and take my rice away and as I got better he used to keep bringing it back to me as he had laid it out, he had a

record of it, he kept bringing it back to help me start to put weight on again.

What were rations like in the camps?

We got a bowl of rice,

22:00 not quite as big as those little plates there and about twice as deep and just levelled off the top, plain rice.

A palm full perhaps?

A double handful of rice and some watery vegetables, that's all you got. You had a weak tea made of cherry leaves, that was your meal.

22:30 Out at the shipyards for a while they gave you a little bread bun, just like a small one; they took that out for a meal. In the workshop then they decided in the winter time they would give us two vegetable patties, two packets of vegetables just fried and stuck together and they would dish it out, about two per man in the work party.

23:00 That only lasted about two or three months then that cut out too.

Were there instances where the rations were decreased?

Very seldom ever increased, nearly always a decrease. We got the same ration as the population in Kobe. The civilian population they said got the same ration as we did. They could deal a bit in the markets there but we couldn't do that.

23:30 **You were aware of that at the time?**

Yes. We knew what went on but we had no access to the markets whatsoever. We were supposed to be paid so much, a corporal was supposed to be paid twopence a day, a private got a penny a day but we never ever saw any money

24:00 but once a year they would come around and they would give you an orange and that took all your money. Where the rest of the money went who knows. We had two visits from the Red Cross Society while we were there. We weren't allowed to speak to them. They were allowed to walk up and down and in through the hut and out the hut. Before they came the Japs arrived and they bought these big baskets with the biggest apples I have ever seen and sat you down with an apple and as you went out the door they came along with a basket and picked the apples up again and took them away and you never saw them again, weren't allowed to eat the apples.

24:30 **When you worked in the shipyards I presume there were civilian workers in the yards as well?**

A lot of civilian workers there.

Did you have a lot of contact with them?

Not a great deal of contact with them. They were all working for their lives in different departments. The only one we had time to chat with our civilian guard who used to come around. Snarler we used to call him,

25:00 a big healthy looking Jap and he was in charge of us most of the time, if he was away a Jap guard took us but Snarler was with us most of the time. I got on reasonably well with old Snarler. He taught me how to use a hoist to lift and stack all these great big drums of stuff and you used to have to work and stack it on the two-way lift to get it all done. You had to be careful you didn't throw one off and lob one on him

25:30 **How did the civilian Japanese come across to you?**

They got a terrible time the civilian Japanese. We used to walk to work and you would be strung out in batches of fifties and there would be a gap if someone might be a bit slower there would be a gap of about 10 to 15 yards and a taxi would come up and cut through. A Jap would pull him up

26:00 and pull him out of the taxi and basically knock him unconscious and leave him on the side of the road and go away laughing. I saw that several times. The civilians were the same, if the civilian did something wrong, the Jap would be right on to them. They had to abide by the laws and do it all the time. Very strict they were. Even the little children walking to work, the walls of the side of the street

26:30 was one great big solid wall with a hole in the wall for a door about every 20 feet and when you went in there you went up about three stories so you had probably four or five units up to there, they all came out the one hole. Sometimes there would be 20 or 30 kids come out each morning out all these holes. They would be all formed up and marched off to school. Everything was regimented.

27:00 **What sort of physical state did they seem in?**

They seemed quite all right. The men weren't overfed but they were in good condition. They weren't poor and rangy. They were quite good solid workmen. The women, you never saw much of the women, because when the men

27:30 were going down the street the male would walk in front then the mother would come along about three yards behind him and the children behind her. If the father wanted to do a urine he would just pull up and walk over to the gutter and pee in the gutter of the main street and they would just wait there until he finished and put it back in and away they would all go again.

28:00 They lived a funny sort of life.

Was hygiene something that was very important to you in the camps?

Hygiene was very important in the camp. Nothing worse than to come back from work and these pits filled up with urine and excreta and that and these great big white maggots, this long would be crawling about all over the ground, the place was full of them as they were looking for a place to pupate. They used to get the blokes to bring these carriers in, they would bring these trucks in with a

28:30 great big wooden box on it and they would ladle it all in there, put it in these buckets and tip it in, take it away down and then they would open the sluice gates and let it run down through their gardens. They paid for it; they didn't get it for free, they paid for it, all a commercial enterprise.

Were these the same gardens that some of your men had taken some vegetables?

I wouldn't be surprised. It was dark you couldn't see.

29:00 They all look the same in the dark.

No one hesitated to eat them?

No one died. They grow about four crops a year over there. Nothing is allowed to take its full time. They grow a tomato plant until it gets so high then they break off every second stem, just let every second stem have four or five tomatoes until it gets about five or four foot high and they break the top off it

29:30 and they are forced ripe. In three months time it is out and another plant is put in and the next day it is all dug up. They grow about four different crops a year in their vegetable patches. All around the hills it is all corridored. There might be a little strip of wheat, be four rows of wheat, four rows of rice or something. Not an inch of ground wasted.

30:00 **Was life outside the camp something you took an interest in or was it something that attracted your interest?**

The only thing that attracted an interest was one night I took the work party out to the coal mines.

30:30 The main office was up on top and you had to go right down to the chute, when I got there the boss of the mine came out he said to me, "Don't you go down the mine tonight Mulcahy, I want you to stop in the office with me." I thought "This is going to be good I will have a nice warm night." The men all went and he sat in his office and he was working away and after awhile he got up and he said, "All right come on." He went over and he got four girls out of the office and he picked up a couple of buckets.

31:00 I couldn't see what they had in them and out they went and out where the contour was there was a little stream of water running along there were eels. He made these girls get in the paddy fields and walk around with their bare feet to get these little snails or whatever it was and they would feel them and would toss them out to him and he would put them on a hook and he would put a peg in and drop a line in. He must have put in 12 or 15 lines in the waterway and

31:30 went back to the camp, the girls warmed and dried their feet at the brazier and went back to work. After about an hour and half or so he said, "We will go out again." so out we went with a torch. I think he got six eels about 15 to 18 inches long and brought them back, cleaned them, sat them on the griller, grilled the lot, ate the lot and never even gave me a mouthful. I was hoping he got a bone stuck in his throat.

32:00 **You would have eaten if he had offered?**

Yes I would have eaten, of course I would have eaten, my word I would have eaten. I would have eaten the whole lot if he had given it to me.

Working in the shipyards and in other camps where you were asked to perform labour, were you conscious of what the labour was going towards? How was your labour being used?

Our particular

32:30 camp we were down 275,000 tons of shipping in the Kawasaki shipyards when we worked there. We put in three aircraft carriers, one was a big 35,000 tonner, and it went out about three times and came back for repairs and alterations. Eventually they got it out and it had 50 odd planes and 700 men on it and they got it out on the inland sea to do its trial run and a Yank submarine came in and sunk it

33:00 with one torpedo. They said there must be something wrong with it the way it has been built, one torpedo should not sink a ship that size. I thought to myself "It's probably the bad building we did when we were putting it together for them."

Were there conscious acts of sabotage?

Yes in a small way there was, not a great deal. If you could do anything to upset the thing like that you would do it.

33:30 **What sort of things would you try?**

We had in our workshop we had a great big room, twice as big as this room and it was the paint room and all the paint was in old four gallon drums. Some of them must have been 40 years old the way they were bashed about, they had all different coloured paints and Snarler would take us up and say, “That heap of paint there I want it moved and taken and put over there, all the empty tins put out.”

34:00 We would go through all this, empty tins, if you had a full tin you would take it over. We always carried nails in our pocket so when we got the tin over there we would punch a hole with the nail and sit it up again. When you cleaned this all up you probably shovelled out buckets of old dried paint. In a months time we would have to shift that heap because it was all leaking too. They never ever caught on that we were punching holes in the paint all the time we were there. Hundreds of gallons of paint

34:30 must have run out on them.

How long would you have spent doing forced labour?

I had 10 months in Singapore and 2 years 8 months in Japan.

In Japan your labour was being used by what are now well known companies.

The Kawasaki Shipyard Company. Yes.

Has there ever been a move for compensation?

Yes.

35:00 The Japs knocked it back because our crowd signed it off when they signed the armistice. They signed all that off. They said they didn’t owe us anything. Some bright person.

I imagine that decision wasn’t met with much pleasure by yourself?

You would get a different version now if you could find him.

35:30 It is all over and done with now, so you have just got to put up with it.

Is that how you look back on much of your experiences, just putting them behind you?

You just get rid of it. It would annoy you if you hang onto it, get rid of it. You are not going to get anything out of it, so just get rid of it. Wash the slate and sludge and start fresh again.

Have you ever been back to visit Japan or…?

Never want to go back to Japan. I’ll visit most

36:00 other countries but not Japan.

Have you been back to Singapore?

I have been back to Singapore three or four times. Hong Kong, Bangkok, India, been all through there but never back to Japan.

Have you made any specific visits to battlefields in Malaya?

Yes, I went back,

36:30 I was one of the party of seven who went back and I was given the honour of putting a plaque on the bridge at Parit Sulong where we lost all our men and then here about two or three years ago someone pinched the plaque and they built a new bridge and I was given the honour again of going up and making a speech and putting a wreath on the new plaque which is on the top of the arch of the bridge now.

37:00 **Given that you have put a lot of these experiences behind you as you say, what do you take from these visits?**

It is good to go back and have a look around and just see the progress that has been made since you were there. Unfortunately at Parit Sulong, the hut where the boys were badly treated is still left there, it is going to be kept as a memorial and they have surveyed

37:30 the whole battle line now from Parit Sulong to Bakari. The Malay Government, they realise there is money in the visitors so they are going to declare all the main patches there where we had that battle as sacred sites. I have a little bloke named Clauseman down here, he is a Malay in Canberra, he is married to an Australian girl and he is coming to see me next week actually, and he has been over there several times and he took my service record over

38:00 and the Malaysian Government want a copy of it in their memorial in Kuala Lumpur. I haven't given it to him yet, I am waiting. He is going to write it all out for me and he wants to put a bit in it himself. Whether he brings it up with him this time I don't know. I have got on well with Malaysian people during the war and after the war.

Have you ever taken any family members back with you?

No, never.

38:30 I took my daughter with me once and we bypassed Singapore. I couldn't take my wife because she had just had an aneurysm and the doctor wouldn't let her go, so I took my daughter with me. We flew to Hong Kong, and from Hong Kong across to Bangkok, then from Bangkok over to India and then we went over to Greece and from Greece we flew up the Adriatic on a moonlit night and had a look at the whole of Italy. We had a day in Zurich and then we went to France

39:00 where we had a week in Paris, went to London. Had a Rolls Royce car pick us up and take me from the airport out to my hotel. Sir William Davis Hughes, Australian Agent General, who I knew very well he looked after us while I was there for a week. The old bank manager was there who I had in Gunnedah, so I had no trouble with money. We had a good time in London then they bombed a

39:30 club the army and navy had just down the street in a little street where we were, the daughter wanted to get out of London so we went down to Southampton where the other daughter was who married the doctor and we borrowed their car and did a trip up through to Manchester and across to Ireland, all around Ireland and Wales, came back and flew down to Italy. The embassy arranged accommodation for us there. I had two blokes that I knew in the embassy there.

40:00 They used to pick us up every afternoon and take us for a drive around Rome and showed us all Rome. I had a very good trip around.

Tape 7

00:37 **Did you receive any jungle training before you went to Malaysia?**

No. We went straight to Singapore and had our training there. Mainly at Johore and up through the mainland. The English troops were there ahead of us and they used to have a siesta from two o'clock in the day to four o'clock

01:00 in the afternoon. We didn't have that, we would have lunch and go straight out training and it created quite a bit of fish between the two units for awhile and then the Pommies had to break into line and do the same as us. They had to get out in the field as we did and they had no siesta.

What did you do for jungle training to prepare you?

You had to load yourself with a full pack,

01:30 get yourself on a compass course, have a look at the map and see where you wanted to go. You had to get your direction, leave point A and be at point B at such and such a time. You had to work your way out through the rivers and creeks, work it through. What parangs or whether you had to go through a lot of jungle tracks, elephant tracks or anything like that, you just had to do the best you could. When you couldn't get through you just went on your compass course

02:00 to arrive at your destination. At night you would camp down in the jungle. The bamboo grows big around over there, about 80 feet high so you would cut them off with your parang [like a machete], everybody had parangs, cut them off with parangs, cut them into four foot lengths and lay about five on the ground and then cut another one and cut it into seven foot lengths and just split it so you could open it out like a book,

02:30 two or three of those you just lay on top of them and makes sort of a spring bed and you would sleep on that and that would keep you up off the ground, about eight inches off the ground. With real heavy rain of course the rain would come up over you. The main idea was to keep you off the ground away from the scorpions and all that sort of thing.

Was jungle training dangerous?

You had scorpions,

03:00 you had poisonous snakes, you had boa constrictors, you had elephants, you had tigers, you had all that there and you had to safeguard yourself against that all the time.

It sounds dangerous?

It never worried us, never worried us. We were bush lads and you just carry on as normal. One bloke we had there he used to

03:30 catch all the snakes he could find and put them in bottles and bring home, a bloke by the name of Benny Rosetta. Snake bottles around everywhere around his tent. You would get these big boa constrictors, about as big around as my knee, about 18 foot long, and they give you a fright when you walk over one.

04:00 **You have described the actions at Bakri and Muar River as in your mind some of the significant campaigns in World War Two. Were you fighting the environment as much as your enemy?**

No. The environment didn't worry us there. In fact at that particular time the weather, we had mostly

04:30 fine weather, nice and sunny weather actually. There was nothing in the environment there to worry us at all, the country was all cleared and it was all under rubber, bar a few little strips of jungle in between and if it hadn't have been so serious it would have been a good picnic spot.

Why in your mind are those campaigns

05:00 **so significant to you?**

It was the major campaign that I fought in. When you read history, I read quite a lot of army history, I realised that it was the main battle that was fought in the whole of the Malayan campaign. The [2/] 30th Battalion

05:30 a few days before put the ambush in at Gemas, on the bridge at Gemas, but it wasn't carried out to completion. It was badly thought out, it went off all right for a start and then they had no communications, they had lost their communications so they had all this Japanese traffic pulled up at the bridge where it was blown, and they never fired a shot in it. Galleghan wanted to blow it apart, but he only had telephone lines because the Japs

06:00 cut the lines, if he had signals, bullets these buffalo guns as they fire different coloured shells, to let him know and he could have created terrific damage to the Japanese. They got away scot-free because he lost his communications. On the other hand we had nothing to worry about just ourselves and we had to block the Japs; our job was to block the Japs, they were not to get past us.

06:30 We had to fight for dear life to hold them back on that road despite the fact that we were fighting more than 12 to 1 or 13 to 1 all the time. We had to maintain control of the road in our area and make sure they didn't get through on us. A couple of tanks got through and the bloke on the artillery had to whip his gun around the opposite way to shoot a high explosive shell into him, he fired

07:00 a shell into it when it was coming down and it went straight through it, it didn't explode so he turned around and followed the H [High] explosive and blew it to pieces. Armour piercing shell head to start and it went straight through the tank it was only made of a light tin it went straight through and never exploded. The Jap kept coming he got around behind him so he turned the gun around and put an H explosive shell in, hit it and blew it to pieces

07:30 We had a little two pound anti tank gun there too and they did a great job.

How important was it to you as a soldier to feel like you were advancing on the enemy?

We weren't advancing on the enemy, we were retreating on the enemy all the time but at least we were holding him in check. He wanted to get past us

08:00 to get to Yong Peng and cut the main road and if he'd cut the main road all the main fighting force that started off at Kota Bharu was still up there trying to get back so we would have lost the whole of the Australian and all the other English troops that were up there they would have all been gone, they'd have been cut off and lost There would have been nothing back in Singapore only the garrison troops. They would have just gone straight through them like a dose of salts, no trouble at all and Singapore would have fallen two months earlier

08:30 than what it did do. The only severe opposition that the Japs had was the 2/19th Battalion. They realised they said after the first hour that they were up against a very highly trained unit.

Your allies were?

09:00 **Were you fighting with the British?**

We had no-one there, just our own.

Just you?

Just our own, just British and Australian troops, there was no one else. There were a few Indian troops got back with the English officers who came from India. There were two or three of them performed very well, but the bulk of the officers were shot before they got back to us.

09:30 They wore their insignia and the Japs picked them off whereas the first morning we went into action we lost our first lieutenant, Anderson gave the order that all badges of rank had to be removed from the clothing straight away so the Japs couldn't pick one out from the other.

You helped to win the war, what about the peace?

10:00 When I got home we were given a reception at a little hall called Springdale and there were about 12 of us who had enlisted from that area and the speeches were made and it came my time and I said, “Ladies and gentlemen, peace has just begun, but the war is not over by any means we are going to be fighting wars for the next 20 years

10:30 at least, no trouble.” I was howled down, terrible thing to say. Everything I said is proved right. I could see in my mind then that there was going to be little wars break out everywhere, all these countries wanting their own freedom. Countries up the east near Japan had all been fighting for freedom and over in Germany all the other countries would all be fighting for freedom. It has turned out just as I thought it would.

11:00 **Why did you believe that at the time?**

I had the sixth sense that that was what was going to happen and I had studied the situation pretty closely. During my POW days I would discuss tactics with different officers, all the rest of it and

11:30 how you go about this and how you would go about that, and we formed our opinions. Who would be fighting if this one started off what would this one do and all the rest of it, and we had it all worked out in our minds, who would be enemies and who wouldn’t be enemies and they carried that right through. Bathgate was a very clear thinking man

12:00 although he had no actual fighting experience but he was a good man behind the scenes. He knew what was going on behind the scenes.

Good war strategy seems really important to you, what do you think of Australia’s strategy at the moment?

Australia at the moment? I think Australia has done a fantastic job at the moment.

12:30 What I like about the Australians are they are very versatile people, they can do any job you want them to if they are trained for it. They are just not one tracked mind people. My son tells me that when he had a bit to do with the Afghanistan war there

13:00 they would send out the platoon or patrols in the hills around Afghanistan, they would send the Pommies out, give them their rations and send them out to do a bit of reconnaissance, they would be back in two days for more supplies, and the Yanks would be back in 24 hours and they would send the Aussies out and they wouldn’t see or hear of them for a fortnight. They’d get away up in the hills and they would live off

13:30 the land and they would pick up all these stragglers and sort them out and shoot the ones that were no good and all the rest of it and you wouldn’t hear a word about it, they were out there working all the time. Where as the Pommy would be just in and out, in and out that was all they done but our blokes were out there all the time, following people and watching them and sitting down all day just surveying the scene and seeing what went on and at night they would attack them. They did a fantastic job those Special Forces men

14:00 **How do you think the war changed you?**

I think it gave me a broader perspective of life, I realised there was a lot more points to be answered than one or two. If you get a curly question there are a lot of answers you can get around it.

14:30 I don’t think you can avoid fronting up and making the hard decisions at times when you have to do. If it is there to be made you have to make it and live with it. I don’t think war is an evil thing, it is a very sad thing and it costs

15:00 a lot of lives. It is not costing near as many lives now of course but in our days it cost a lot of lives and there were a lot of very innocent and very young people lost their lives in it but they were all given for King and country and I am sure they all have no regrets.

What do you think was the hardest decision you ever had to make?

15:30 I had two or three, one was a chap by the name of Dick Rule I had with me, Dick was a worker from down the irrigation area, just a labourer, he used to make a living and to supplement his income he used to go to the chemist shop and buy a couple of packets of condoms on a Saturday

16:00 night and go up to the picture theatre and sell them to all the young blokes going to the picture theatre who weren’t game to go into the chemist shop and buy them themselves. He used to charge double for it, that’s how he supplemented his income Dick so he was a man of the world and he knew his way round. We went into action this day and Dick was on the left flank and me about 50 yards away, on the other side of the rise, and

16:30 we had a bit of a fierce fight and I heard this voice say, “Mul, they have shot me through the back, the pain is killing me, shoot me please, shoot me please, don’t let me die like this.” That when on for 20 minutes before it became quiet

17:00 and he passed away, poor old Dick. Nothing I could do, I would have lost my own life if I had gone over to him. Anybody else had tried to get to him they would have lost their life. It was one of those little bad spots where you couldn't help him out. Several things like that, little things happened; they all have a similar trend and a similar ending.

17:30 I lost some very good men on the bridge trying to get over the bridge. A great friend of mine Bob Ivers, Bob lost his life the first day we got to the bridge. On the last day Jimmy Clarke, a sergeant I knew very well from out west, he lost his life on the last charge they made.

18:00 We lost about five or six good men on the bridge for no result.

Did you find it difficult adjusting after the war?

No, no, I didn't.

18:30 I just wiped the slate clean and started off and went back to where I was before I joined the army. I went back on the farm and started the farm straight away. I had no hangovers, no hang-ups and I just went straight back to work like any workman would and carried on

19:00 doing the job that I had always learnt to do.

Did you suffer any nightmares?

19:30 Yes, I suppose for about three to six months you would have a nightmare, but then I got over that eventually, and it never worries me now. You were always being chased by somebody or you were chasing somebody, and something was always just about to happen when you would wake up.

Do you have any dreams about the war now?

No.

20:00 No, it never worries me the war now.

Just a couple of more questions about being a prisoner of war, I was wondering earlier when you were describing life in the camps in Japan whether there is anything that you can't do now as

20:30 **a result of being in those camps?**

No. I lost a third of my lung which cut my air capacity down but I have learnt to live with that, it hasn't become a problem. I worked right through for 24 years and the army had me on

21:00 a 10% pension for 24 years, and I retired and went to Sydney and found all these blokes in Sydney who hadn't done anything much in their life, only just bludged around and they were all on TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] pensions. They said, "You are a fool you want to get on a TPI pension." I stopped in Sydney for about four or five years and

21:30 we sold out and we were moving back to Tamworth so I wrote to Repat [Repatriation] and said I would like a review of my pension. I got a letter back when I arrived back at Tamworth. They wanted me to go to these four doctors, four doctors I didn't know from a bar of soap and make an appointment to see them all and they would report back to Army Headquarters,

22:00 back to DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs]. I saw these four doctors and they never told me anything and they examined me and all the rest of it and went on. I got a letter back from the Repat Department, full page letter saying I had about 8 or 10 things wrong with me but it wasn't due to war service, but they would lift my pension up to 25%.

22:30 I appealed against it and I went and had a yarn with one doctor who had said I had a bad heart, the heart specialist. I said, "Listen you said I had a bad heart." He said "Oh yes." I said, "I haven't had a heart attack, I haven't had any trouble with my heart at all, the old heart is good as bloody gold." He said, "You have a very bad heart Des. If you don't believe me we will put you on the medical record and you can go up

23:00 and a doctor will put you through the tests at the hospital." I said, "Alright, I'll go through that." He took me to the hospital and put me on the treadmill and he had me blowing in tubes and all the rest of it. I came back and saw him the next day and I said, "How did the tests turn out?" He said, "Just as I thought, Des you have a very bad heart." I said, "What would cause that?" He said, "I suppose a lot of things, stress."

23:30 I said, "I was in charge of a prisoner of war camp for two years and eight months in Japan, do you think that would be enough stress?" "Yes." he said, "That would be plenty of stress I'll put that in." He wrote a letter to Repat and said that in his opinion my heart was due to stress related injuries and they put me up to 100%. So I appealed against that.

24:00 They sent me a letter and said I would have to appear before a Board. They sent me an air warrant and I flew down a week before I was due to see them and I went to the organisation that supplies solicitors

for you and got this little girl to look after me and explained the story and she said she would look after me.

24:30 She said, “You be here an hour before you have your appointment next week.” So I went home and I drove down, went into the appointment, saw this girl, picked this girl up and we walked around to the office and walked in the door and took us over and signed me in. I was called in. There was the President of the Board, there was a doctor

25:00 and there was another chap, one of the Board members, there were three people in charge of the Board. He said, “Mr. Mulcahy, you are querying our rate of pension we have paid you.” I said, “Yes that is right sir, I have appealed against it.” He said, “Don’t you think you could do that job, the bloke who met you at the door there, that opened the door and brought you in here?”

25:30 I said, “Are you offering me the job sir?” He said, “No.” I said, “Well I can’t do it, can I?” He said, “Oh I see.” The little solicitor gave me a wink as much to say you are on the right track. They asked a few more questions and got negative answers. He turned around to the secretary who was there with him and asked “What pension is Mr Mulcahy on now?” She said, “He is on 100%.” He said, “I see.

26:00 All right Mr Mulcahy that will be all now we will write you a letter.” When we came out the solicitor said, “You are going to get a TPI pension, nothing surer. You handled yourself so well in there, they couldn’t fault you at all.” About a month later in 1980 I got a TPI pension. If I had stopped on the farm I wouldn’t have worried about it, I would have just kept on working. I never had a heart problem until the

26:30 last six months and they put a pacemaker in. The first time I have had heart problems in my life, it’s wheels within wheels.

I was also thinking can you tell us where you were the day the bomb was dropped?

Yes I was in Camp Number 22 and I was just about to lie down and go to sleep for the day. I had been on the night shift and we heard this terrific boom. I walked out and I looked in the sky and we could see this terrific cloud rising up. I didn’t think much of it, I though “That must have been a terrible big ammunition dump

27:30 they hit down there, look at the size of it, it is enormous.” I went back to bed again and it wasn’t for about three days until I realised that it was an atom bomb, even then I couldn’t comprehend it until the relief team came in. The relief team came in and said it was an unconditional surrender. I said, “What made them surrender?” They said, “The atom bomb.” I said, “What do you mean atom bomb? I never heard of it.” They said, “The one they dropped on Nagasaki, a tremendous big thing, it knocked the whole of the city out in one bang.”

28:00 It was very interesting because we came out through Nagasaki and we could see what damage it had done. It certainly was a big bang.

You could see the plume?

Yes you could see the plumes going up. We were about 15 kilometres away, and you could see it going up an enormous height.

28:30 **I understand when the bomb went off there was dust that carried for many kilometres all around. Do you think you were close enough to have suffered?**

That’s a problematic question that. I don’t know, but I do know that out of these men I had with me in Japan when they came back a lot of them got married and there were five of us lost their first baby,

29:00 for some unknown reason. Whether that was the cause of it I don’t know but there were five of us who lost their first child. It was never investigated; it was just a bit of research I did myself. It could have been more, but I found out about five that lost their first baby. It could have been the result of that, I don’t know.

It is an interesting coincidence or pattern?

It could have been that quite easily, it could be

29:30 something else because we came out through Nagasaki. We spent about 12 hours in Nagasaki coming out after the war. Walking all round through it.

So Nagasaki was affected as well?

Nagasaki was where they dropped the bomb.

Hiroshima?

That was the first one, Nagasaki was the second one.

30:00 **What could you see?**

When we got there, there was nothing to see virtually. Everything was flat on the ground, burnt, rubble with just an odd brick wall standing, that was all, everything else was flat on the ground. It was built on

a, there were two little rivers come in and this isthmus here was the main industrial centre, the hills on either side had houses on them. Now you could draw a line

30:30 with a pencil right around the hill, right around like that to the other side, from there up was green as you like and from there down there wasn't anything. It was just as though you had cut it off with a knife where the blast of the bomb hit it, everything went down. As the blast went down the valley the further down you went the less damage was done, but to start off every house was on the lean and as you got further down there were only parts missing off corners and all that sort of thing until you got

31:00 about a mile and a half or two mile down then you got out of the damage all together. Done tremendous damage.

I can't imagine a site like that myself, it must have left….

Just like a wasteland.

31:30 **Did you have to actually walk through the centre of Nagasaki?**

We walked about for eight to ten hours.

Because you were free?

We were free, we were free and the Yanks were there all re-equipping us, with all our equipment and uniforms. We would go down and have a feed of donuts and coffee and take a walk around, have a stroll around and have a look at this and that and then come back and have another cup of coffee.

32:00 **How were the Japanese people at that time?**

Never saw one. Just seemed to disappear. We never saw a Japanese there.

After the bomb was dropped?

After the bomb was dropped we never saw a Japanese at all around Nagasaki, never saw one Jap. The same thing happened in Kobe after the bombing in Kobe

32:30 there were no Japs left, they were all burnt. The place was denuded of people.

You are painting a picture very much like a bit of a ghost town?

Yes very much like it. All down the main street area all the lines were down, the ambulances were burnt the fire brigades were burnt, the trucks were burnt,

33:00 trains, trams, everything was burnt. It was all just there as if a great big holocaust just hit it and that is where it all stopped. Down through Kobe where the fire went it was that intense.

How did you get to a boat to get back to Australia?

They brought us by ship to Okinawa and

33:30 from Okinawa I was able to get on some planes that were flying supplies in from Manila to Yankee troops still fighting on the island. I got most of the men on the planes and flew them back to Manila and then I was picked up by two Australian pilots and flown back as far as Darwin and I had 10 days in hospital in Darwin and then I was flown back to Sydney. A lot of the boys came back by aircraft carrier. They were a lot slower getting down there.

34:00 **I wanted to ask you who were your best mates through the war and why?**

The best mate I had was a chap named Mark Fitzsimmons. He came from the irrigation area. His father was water bailiff down there. Mark took his job after the war. Mark was a very

34:30 sensible young fellow, fairly well educated and always willing to help someone else. He never had a mean streak in his body whatsoever. If he could help somebody he would help them. He and I slept side by side all through the Japanese occupation in Kobe and also down in the coal mining area we slept side by side in our bunks. We looked after one another's gear and

35:00 kept a tab on things for everybody. I got on real well with Mark and I used to visit him quite regularly after the war but he passed away about four years ago. I had to go down to Wagga and do the eulogy at his funeral. His wife was still alive.

35:30 Tim McCoy was another great old friend but he passed away some time ago too. Tim came from up near Bibbenluke in the cold country of Goulburn.

You had great respect for Colonel Anderson. Did you have any contact with him after the war?

Yes I had a lot of contact with Anderson after the war. I was very active in his political campaigns.

36:00 I was the letter writer for the first time after the war when he got into power and after that I was a constant member of his team. I used to have to go into the office and advise him on different matters. I got on closely with Anderson and he used to visit me out at home, the old home. He used to come up

around that area and he always called in and saw us. Fine man old Andy. His wife was a lovely woman,

36:30 his family were a nice family, had a lovely property at Young. It has been all split up since then and sold to the boys there were four in the family and they each got 500 acres of it. One boy is dead and the girl is still alive and two girls are alive and the other boy has a property up in the mountain area near Tenterfield. Andy lived in Kings Way in Canberra when he died.

37:00 I was there about a week before he died to see him.

You mentioned earlier on that while you were a prisoner of war it was difficult for your family to know where you were. Did you have a girlfriend at that time?

37:30 I had five girls writing to me when I was a prisoner of war. When I was at Singapore I never got a letter after I became a prisoner of war I never got a letter, a parcel, no communication whatsoever from the outside world. I was just cut off dead. I had five girls write to me every week before the blue erupted.

38:00 I was keeping company with one lass, I became engaged to her after I was home for about a week or so, she was 2IC of the WAAAFs down at Tocumwal. Her family lived out at Rose Bay and I saw quite a bit of her, she was the Town Clerk eventually and then when I went to get my teeth done at West Wyalong by

38:30 the chap who was married to my first cousin, I took a fancy to his little assistant. So I swapped over, got the ring back and bought another one and started off afresh. I rang the old girlfriend the other day to have a yarn with her; she is still living in Paradise Street at Roseville. Rang her the other morning and had a yarn with her.

39:00 She has got very deaf too.

Tape 8

00:34 **At the very end of the war upon your exit from camp life what was your impression of the Japanese civilians you saw? Were they in a starving sort of condition?**

They had been through a terrible time the Japanese civilians. They had been on a meagre ration which would be enough for them to live on, that's all and they were completely controlled by the

01:00 army and they had to do what the army told them. When we walked past them they used to break down and cry after the war. If they had done it during the war they would have been bashed by the Japanese. They were very sympathetic to what we had been through.

They had been blockaded for sometime?

They had been under control for years

01:30 It was mainly the women. We never got much contact with the men, it was chiefly the poor old women who walked by and wiped their eyes and sort of nod their head in shame as you went past them.

What sort of feelings did that arouse in you?

We were sympathetic to them, very sympathetic to them. We were free and they still weren't free. They were still under the control of the army. At that stage they didn't know what the future held for them

02:00 **You have spoken before of your knowledge or awareness of the atomic bombs being dropped on the country, was there any sense of sympathy for those who had suffered?**

Yes, yes, of course there was sympathy. No two people are built alike, there is always a weak link somewhere.

02:30 Some of them had the best of intentions and when the going got tough they just couldn't stand it, got too tough for them so they just cracked. You just had to put it behind you and hope things would settle down and see if they come good.

Is that sympathy you spoke of, is it something that you still carry

03:00 **with you?**

Yes. I don't deride any of our officers for what they did. I realise a lot of them went through very tough times and tough actions. It is only natural that someone would break somewhere along the line.

03:30 **When you were released were you debriefed at some stage?**

No, never debriefed, never. Never saw the army whatsoever from the time I got out of the plane other than to be issued with a warrant to travel back to Temora and home and then I went in again and I was, I went in and reported to the doctor and I was sent straight out to the hospital, I can't think of the name

now, a big old hospital they had there.

04:00 They put you in hospital for 28 days and went over you and checked you all out and you got your leave pass then to go home and that went on and I went backwards and forwards. It went through until about March when they discharged you.

Were you ever asked to provide testimony

04:30 **against any Japanese camp guards?**

No.

Did you ever volunteer any information?

No I didn't volunteer any information. The only ones, we never got any information from the guards themselves, they knew very little about the war. Probably not as much as we knew. It was the people outside like Hassigasan who I used to get the papers from they were

05:00 the ones who knew all about the war. We did have two Americans with us in the camp, and after we had been there for six or eight months they started to be able to read the Japanese papers, they could read quite a bit of it. They got to the stage where they could read about 70% of it and they were giving us quite a bit of information out of that.

In the war trials that happened following the surrender, did you

05:30 **follow the progress of these?**

No not after the war. Only just the immediate friends I had in the army they were the only ones I followed, I didn't follow the whole battalion, they were spread all over the state. The immediate friends I had made I kept in touch with them and I still have about five around the state that I ring,

06:00 two up in Queensland.

You have touched on the efforts they took to organise the return of yourself and a lot of your fellow soldiers. Can you explain to me in some detail about that organisation, what it took to get soldiers returned?

Yes. It was quite a simple matter really.

06:30 Eventually we were put into this camp in Okinawa, brand new camp, these big bell tents and we were left there and fed and nothing happened. I could see down on the plain this airstrip these planes landing and taking off. After about three days I walked down and I struck a senior officer on the parade ground near the tarmac and I asked him

07:00 where the planes were coming from and he said they were coming across from Manila. I said, "I have 150 to 200 men I would like to get back home." I said, ?is there any chance of getting back to Manila?" He said yes. "Bring some down in the morning and we will give it a trial run." They used to have to empty the plane out and they would put planks in the bomb bays and you used to sit on the planks. We brought these men down

07:30 this morning there were three planes went off and the third plane blew a tyre and cart wheeled, killed one of the pilots and one of the POWs. They cancelled all further flights for the day and said come back tomorrow. We went back tomorrow and they started off again. The next day I thought "Well I am going to get on this plane today." I took quite a few down about

08:00 30 or 40 men and I got on the second or third plane and we took off and we just got airborne and we got sprayed with petrol. Petrol came right back through the bomb bay. We knew the plane was circling around and we felt it land again, it landed again and we are tapping on the bottom of the bomb bay and said, "Let us out, let us out. This yank said, "If we let you guys out we will

08:30 never catch you again. Just stop there we will only be about 15 to 20 minutes as we just have to fix the pipeline." One bloke appeared through a little hole and he got in and no trouble at all he had the pipeline reconnected and we took off and away we went. We had no further trouble. On that particular plane, it had been used that much that the engine, it was propeller engines, the propeller on the right hand side of the plane

09:00 was held on by bolts and the plane was jumping about 2½ inches off the frame of the plane, the bolt was holding the engine on all the time. I thought how much longer will this go before this bolt gives away. We got back to Manila. They were getting to the stage where they couldn't keep up with the maintenance on the planes. They would slide into the ground and that was it.

09:30 **Had you been officially relieved of your command of the camp?**

No, I didn't. I handed in all the books and paperwork I had. For about three days I had to go down to security and give all the particulars that had happened, a list of all the deaths, who they were and all the rest of it; I did all that because they kept all those records. Then I met this Aussie colonel and

10:00 I still had a list of all the personnel with me and I told him what I had done and what had happened, all the rest of it. I said, “Look I want to get home.” “All right.” he said, “You give me the list and I will look after the men as they come in, you go on home.” That was it, that was the only permission I got. So I hopped on the plane the next day or the day after and away I went.

Can you take me from Manila to home finally?

I flew from Manila through to

10:30 Darwin non-stop and it was quite interesting to fly over New Guinea and those places and see the extinct old volcano hole in the ground. We landed at Darwin and got off the plane and they come along and said, “Mulcahy?” I said, “Yes..” they said, “You had better come along with me, you are a hospital transfer,

11:00 you are listed as a hospital transfer.” I said, “They didn’t tell me that when I left Manila.” They said, “Oh no, it is on the list here.” They said, “You have to come into hospital.” I went into hospital I had 10 days in hospital. After about the first three or four days they realised I didn’t have TB. I had been in a ward with TB and it had hit me in a few places but it wasn’t active. The nurses used to put us in cars and they took us for a drive all around Darwin

11:30 You couldn’t see that much in Darwin, you could drive around it in about half an hour. They took us for a couple of drives and then we got on the plane the next morning, and they flew us down to Sydney we landed at Mascot and got off the plane and went through the door into this office and the family were there to meet me. I said to them,

12:00 “I will try and see if I can get a leave pass to go home for the weekend,” it was Friday. I went into the recruiting room and who should be there but an old doctor who had booked me into the army at Wagga when I was going in and he was there. He said, “You are back again.” I said, “Yes, I’m back.” He had been an old boyfriend of my mother’s years ago when she was young. He said, “What can I do for you?” I said, “I want a leave pass until Monday.”

12:30 He said, “I shouldn’t give it to you, you are supposed to be a hospital transfer.” I said, “I have had 10 days in Darwin hospital and they found nothing wrong with me.” I said, “I want to get home.” He said, “All right I’ll give you a pass but when you come back on Monday you come in here and report to me, don’t go to anyone else, report to me in person otherwise I will get into trouble.” I said, “That’s fair enough.” I got the leave pass and we hopped on the train and went up to Temora and had a great weekend and visited all around and saw all my old friends and that.

13:00 I got on the train on Sunday night and arrived back in Sydney on Monday morning and reported for duty and went in and they sent me straight out to Herne Bay, that was where I went to, Herne Bay. I hung about in Herne Bay for awhile.

What were you doing there?

They were just checking you. They put you through all the tests; they were x-raying you and giving you tests for this

13:30 and tests for that, testing your blood and all the rest of it There was a little sister there and I got interested in her. We got talking one day and she said, “We will go surfing tomorrow, I’ll get you a day off and we will go out to Bondi.” She got the leave passes organised with the Matron and out she and I went. We got into a taxi and went out to Bondi and spent the day on the sand. We both got

14:00 horribly sunburnt. I was that sunburnt I could hardly move. Every inch of me was red. Went back to hospital then, it was a week or 10 days before all my bloody sunburn got healed up. Then we came back afterwards I had had two or three bouts in hospital, I came back for the final one to go through and be

14:30 discharged and I went out to Herne Bay. My brother was living at North Bexley; he was in the fire brigade. I went through everything bar one, I had one test to do the next day so I came back home and

15:00 woke up in the middle of the night with wet pleurisy, back to hospital again for another month of hospital. They didn’t have to drain my lung they had the drugs to do it. I had that month in hospital, that delayed me quite a bit, I finished up I got away March/April that I was discharged.

15:30 I went back home and settled down and went straight back to work. Dad gave me the farming plant and I set to work and started to work the ground. It was a dry year and I didn’t put any crop in that year it was too dry. I kept it to the next year, we had three good crops. I drew the soldiers’ settlers block

16:00 in 1949 up at Gunnedah, and never looked back after that.

How was it to find yourself out amongst such space again?

I didn’t affect me. The quietness at night used to affect me for a while. I wondered why everything was so quiet.

16:30 **How did you find settling back into family life?**

I had no trouble settling back into family life. At that particular stage there was only one daughter at

home. The eldest daughter was married, the youngest daughter was in the AWAS in Canberra and the other daughter was married and living in Temora. She used to come out on the weekend and check on Dad at the house.

17:00 When I went home there was just Dad and I and the house to ourselves. I was the cook and we lived there right through until I got married and brought Norma back to the farm, 1947 bought her out. She couldn't boil water when I married her. She soon learnt, she was a good wife. We just missed out on our 50 years

17:30 married. I had the rowing club booked and all for the do but she died five weeks beforehand so we missed out on it.

How did she take to living on the land?

She took to it like a duck to water, no trouble at all. She used to get in the Landrover and run out the meals but she wouldn't get on a horse. She couldn't ride a horse and she'd get in the Landrover and

18:00 she would drive the car into town and out. I always had big cars. I had imported Dakotas and Pontiacs and she could handle them. She would hop into the big car and she would run it into town with no trouble. No, she was quite a good, competent woman.

You mentioned that during both your service experience and camp experience that you had a lot of contact with different nationalities.

18:30 **You've spoken of Malays and some of the Indian soldiers. What are your lasting impressions of these different nationalities, these different cultures you came in contact with?**

The Malays I found were quite good. I got to know quite a few of the Malay volunteer forces. When we were in training around Singapore they used to come out and train with us some of the time.

19:00 The only Indians I saw were these galloping Garhwals who had only been in the army six weeks, poor fellows. After the war they had the Sikhs. The Sikhs were there in force but they went over to the enemy and they became our guards so they didn't get a very high mark at all. The Dutch, I found the bulk of the Dutch were unhealthy,

19:30 unclean people. They all had two aluminium dishes for their meals, one for rice and one for soup, and they would use them for urinals during the night and tip them out next morning and rinse them out and then get their rice and eat it next day. We had a terrible job with some of them to try and get them out of that habit.

20:00 The Pommies weren't much better. The 2nd Battalion Loyals were a battalion that formed around London, had all the deadbeats from London in it. They weren't worth two bob. The warrant officers were all right, they were good. They had no officers with them; no Pommy officers came with us at all.

20:30 We had 20 Yanks. There was a warrant officer, he was quite a big fellow and he kept his troops in order, but they wouldn't carry a dead man out. If one of their men died we would have to get a party from the A Company to carry the dead Yank out as they wouldn't touch a dead body whatever.

21:00 We didn't have many of them die, but we did have three or four of them pass away. We lost 10 Australians in that camp. It was the lowest death rate of any POW camp in Japan for the length of time we had been there.

Are there any particular noises or sounds that you associate with your war experience that you now

21:30 **can't bear?**

The only noise is if I go to a rifle range and I hear them shooting rifles, that is the only noise I hear. It brings back a few memories. I used to on the rifle range, I used to train the troops with the Tommy gun and all that sort of thing and .

22:00 you got to the stage that you could tell by the sound what calibre the rifle was. You could tell what was shooting at you and what wasn't shooting at you. We would have liked to have got hold of the Australian made Tommy gun but there was so much procrastination about it and all the rest of it, it would make you weep

22:30 the obstacles they threw in order to get it out. The Yanks gave them an order for 60 or 70,000 and they never produced one. It was the best little automatic rifle that was ever made. Throw it in the sand and the mud and you would pick it up and it would keep firing whereas the Tommy gun if you got it wet you would have to dry it out.

You mentioned earlier when you had moved back to Temora that the

23:00 **silence at night were sometimes a little much to bear?**

Yes.

Why was that exactly?

You were so far out and you were away from the town and there was no noise and you could hear only a horse whinny or a cow bellow and that would be only once or twice a night. The rest of the night would dead still unless there were a curlew or something about, some of the birds you would hear at the night. You'd hear them some nights. It was an entirely different

23:30 sound to what you had been used to over the years.

What sort of sounds had you become used to?

When you settled down you realised, you picked out the noise what you knew it was a soon as the bird spoke or made a noise and you knew whether it was a cat or a dog or a fox if it was outside your unit

24:00 you knew straight away what sort of noise it was. If foxes were in season they would yelp.

What about in your camps, what sort of sounds were the norm?

The camp was pretty quiet. You weren't allowed to make much noise in the camp. Everybody had to go to bed, lights were out at a certain time and came on at a certain time

24:30 I think they went off at 10 at night and came on at 6 in the morning. Five in the morning in the summer time and we weren't allowed to have loud parties or anything like that. You weren't allowed to have a sing song without permission. We got a priest in one day for mass, the only time they allowed a minister in, we got a priest in to say mass one day. The Japs sat the priest up at the alter and they all sat in front of him so we couldn't get near him and we had to sit behind them

25:00 for the mass. We weren't allowed to go to confession or anything at all. At least they did get a priest in to say mass for us.

Was faith something you drew on in your camp experience?

No, religion never played much of a

25:30 say in my army life. It was something that I put in the background and kept there for future reference. I was conscious of what I was and all the rest of it but I never lambasted anybody and tried to throw my religion down their neck. I respected their religion and that was it.

26:00 **Taking me back to when you left for war did you carry any personal effects with you?**

I may have carried a couple of personal photographs, that was all I would carry, nothing else. I had a watch with me which was given to me for my 21st birthday and I carried it right through the war and brought it home with me.

26:30 It was the only thing I had to tie me to the past all through the battle. I brought it home and took it in to get it cleaned and it hadn't been cleaned since I took it through the wars; I took it into the jewellers and gave it to him to clean it up for me and a week later the main spring broke in it. He said, "Yeah, that is all that happens with a watch you have had for years and years and you do it up and the first thing it does, the spring goes."

27:00 So I bought this one then, an Omega. I have had it ever since. I gave it to the boys and the boys had it through college and gave it back to me and it is still going strong.

Did you ever have a camera with you?

Yes. I had a beautiful little camera; I had a Zeiss Icon, only a little tiny one. You press the button and everything popped out ready to shoot. I took a lot of photos there, you can see a lot of photos there that I took with the Zeiss Icon and it was

27:30 put it in what we call my kit bag and stored and I was supposed to pick it up during the war but one of the Japs got it, so someone got a nice Zeiss Icon camera.

Did you ever come by another?

No. I bought a Canon, got a Canon at the moment.

Having seen some of your photographs you have a number from

28:00 **inside camps that you spent time in. Was it important to capture these memories or these sites?**

Yes it was interesting to capture to send the photos to the people at home so they could see what we were doing. Most of those photographs I took there were all sent home and developed back home and kept here. They weren't left in Singapore or I would have lost them all, they were all sent home and developed back here..

28:30 **Is your experience something that you have endeavoured to talk about or to pass on?**

No, I have never been one to get up on the stump and spruik about my war experiences. I have let it all slip past me. I like to go to Anzac Day if possible, but I don't like the speeches or anything like that.

29:00 I leave that to somebody else. I like to go and join the fraternity and just dwell in the power of the people who are around you.

Do you think the POW experience is commemorated?

The POW experience taught you anybody who is a POW is taught in the world, they have got a lot better knowledge of what goes on than someone who hasn't been a prisoner of war.

29:30 They have seen things from all angles, and they are seeing all the angles again on them. I suppose you say it is a good way of defining things, defining, quickly getting there. If you see a problem and decide which is the best way to fix it immediately without it dragging on and on.

30:00 You have some people working for you and something would break down and they would be an hour fixing it, but if you had happened to get there yourself you could have done it in five minutes and got them going again. They were making a big job of doing something that was quite simple.

In your life after the war did you ever draw on the lessons you had learnt while a prisoner?

Yes, yes, quite a lot. The handling of men. One harvest there I had 19 men on the farm. There were bag sewers, contractor carters, contract harvesters, men of all breeds and nationalities and they had to be all kept in line. The day we cut out

31:00 I had my brother come up and give me a hand so they cut out and went to town and got a 9 gallon keg and put it on the back of the truck and put it under the shade of a tree and I said, "When you're finished boys, you can go up, there is a 9 gallon keg of ice cold beer you can have." I had one beer and I went home. The blokes drank and drank. The last bloke who came out ran over one of my water troughs, about $150 damage to a water trough.

31:30 Half a tank of water went the next morning and it wouldn't have been so bad but it ran down over the gateway where the trucks had to cart the wheat out. He got a little bit of a talking to that bloke.

Did you become associated with the RSL [Returned and Services League] after the war?

I joined the RSL about six months after I got out of the army and

32:00 I have been a member ever since. I am a life member at Summer Hill, the other one, the other side. A very wealthy club and two years ago they turned around and made all the old diggers honorary members for life.

32:30 We don't pay anything now. It has a LS subscriber on the badge.

Is that a measure of distinction for you?

No, no, it doesn't mean much. It just means I am a member of the club. The other business just shows that I am a financial member of the club. If I want to go in the club I can't be refused, I can go straight in.

33:00 **You have maintained touch with your battalion association?**

Yes, I have maintained touch with the battalion association. I have been a member of the committee since the day it was formed in Wagga in 1946. I had four years as president when I retired and went to Sydney. I have been a member of the committee that looks after the sick and injured and

33:30 I have been on that committee there for about 10 years. I have been going to all the meetings until I got sick this last six months, it has thrown me out, other than that I went to all the meetings. I have kept an interest in the 19th Battalion. They have now amalgamated with the first 19th Battalion [AIF – First World War unit].

Are there friends from your time in the camps in Japan

34:00 **that you are still in touch with?**

Yes, I have an old friend down at Taralga, one up at Caloundra, one up in Queensland, terrible lot of widows; I must have a dozen or 15 widows on my books. Boys who have died, Merv Donaldson at Temora,

34:30 Joe Coombs lives in a suburb just around here, I wasn't thinking of the city boys. There are quite a few city boys we have around the place. I like to keep in touch. I'm a bushie myself so I keep in touch with Percy Bloomfield down in Leeton, keep in touch with Perc, a little runt of a bloke, about five foot six high.

35:00 It doesn't matter where I go around the state I can stop in any town I like and I'll meet someone I know. I have this young pilot about three years ago and he started to fly me around. We flew to Dubbo; to Mudgee the first time we had a flight and we got out and parked the plane

35:30 and got a taxi down the street, and I met two or three people I knew and I introduced him to them. A few weeks later we flew to Narrabri, walked up the street and met a married couple I knew andI introduced him to them. He didn't say anything. When we came home he said, "How come?" he said, "I fly you around you seem to know people in all these country towns, how do you do that?" I said, "I lived in this area and I worked all this area for

36:00 for the Country Party and I know virtually everybody who lives in this area. I know hundreds of them out here." "Do you think you could talk some of them into letting us have a weekend?" I said, "No trouble at all." I rang a chap at Nymagee said, "A pilot here wants to fly me out and spend a weekend with you, Peter can you put an airstrip in?" "Yes, no trouble at all, I'll put one in the front paddock." He got his bulldozer out and his grader out and put a 1000-yard strip in. We

36:30 flew out and landed and had two days there, a weekend and this pilot had the time of his life. He couldn't believe, it was such a fantastic area. They put another airstrip in up on the son's place. Bartley had one up at Goondiwindi and we've been up there and no matter where we go if they haven't got an air strip they put one in for us. The pilot said, "You are the best thing since sliced bread."

37:00 **What is the most abiding memory you have of your service time?**

I think the best times I had in the service was the month I spent in Wagga. It was near my old home town, and we had a woman there by the name of Mrs Baldwin, she used to play

37:30 piano accordion and this friend of mine Frank Crutchett and I got to know her very well. We used to go down to her flat and pick her up of a night and carry the piano accordion up to the hall, and she used to play every night in the hall for the boys to have a dance with and we used to mix and dance with all the local girls. It was a very good atmosphere. You got to know all the people around the town, all the young girls around the town. Mrs Baldwin introduced us

38:00 to any of the adults who came along and you got to know a fair influx of the people and one little girl, I'll show you there later, Meggsie Maher, I got very friendly with Meggsie. She was a secretary to the big industrialist down there and I used to correspond with her after I went to war but she married an air force bloke, she couldn't wait until I came back. She sent me over a photo of some nice flower bulbs she took of her garden, the fruit trees

38:30 in blossom.

Is there anything from your war experience that you would like to share, any last words you would like to give us?

Yes, I don't want to become political

39:00 but I think Australia did the right thing in going to Iraq. It was like a sore that was going to get worse and worse and worse, it would have caused an awful lot of damage later on. And I think although John Howard [Australian Prime Minister] has been polarised for putting Australia into it I think in the long run it will be realised that he has done the right thing by Australia. And having such a fantastic run with

39:30 all these boys in the special forces to go through the two wars Afghanistan and Iraq and not lose a man speaks volumes for the training they are getting now and I would like to congratulate [Lieutenant General] Cosgrove and all his men for the work they are doing for the army at the present time. I think they're just fantastic.

INTERVIEW ENDS