Australians at War Film Archive

Geoffrey Swan (Geoff) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Well good morning, Geoff, it's a pleasure to be with you.**

Thank you.

What we'd like to do is to start at the beginning with your early days and perhaps you could tell me something about your parents?

Yes surely. I take over here and carry on?

You take over, that's right, and I just relax.

01:00 My full name is Geoffrey Milroy Swan, my second name is a family name and it belonged to my grandfather on my mother's side. I was born on 31st May 1920 in Melbourne, Australia, and I was one of three boys, I was the eldest of the three,

01:30 Vern my second brother was 2 years younger and Noel, my youngest brother, was 3 years younger than Vern. Just the 3 boys in the family. And I suppose in the early days we lived a very normal sort of existence. My father before the war was a commercial traveller with a company called Cornbloums[?] who were carpet distributors. Then my knowledge of him after

02:00 the war he was representing General Motors, General Motors Holden today, but it was General Motors handling Buicks, Oldsmobiles, Pontiac in the early days, so we always had a nice motor car to drive around in and as I mentioned I think my early days were fairly normal. Father was a returned Ex Serviceman from World War I.

02:30 He had served most of his time overseas in France, he was gassed with mustard gas during his service and was hospitalised in both France and London. He was overseas from 1915 to 1919. When he returned to Australia he continued to suffer from the effects of mustard gas and in 1932 died.

03:00 During his lifetime his duties with General Motors took him around the state to quite a considerable degree and as a result I think I once added up that I attended 19 schools in my days of education, completing my education at Melbourne High School in 1935 after having completed leaving in those days which today I think

03:30 is 11, Form 11. When Father died he left Mum with the 3 boys in the middle of the depression which was not an easy time for her, as you can imagine, and for the first 2 years after his death things were pretty torrid in the Swan family, Mum spent a lot of her time doing

04:00 duties on behalf of more comfortably situated members of our family and we were on the dole and it wasn't exactly easy during those years. I myself became the senior member of the male side of the household and very often after having attended school and gone off to my sporting

04:30 activities which were usually considerable, I would go home and cook the meal and when Mum came home it was already set up on the table or ready to be served. So our life was fairly hectic and fairly difficult. In 1933 Legacy made a difference to our life. They approached Mother and managed to get a war widow's pension for her which started to make things

05:00 a little easier, or certainly made things a little easier, and made life more comfortable. In 1935 I left school and 2 interesting things in my happened in 36. I was nominated by Legacy to attend Lord Summers Camp which in fact had a big bearing on my life and

05:30 has until today and I joined the Commercial Bank of Australia Limited as a junior clerk and started my business career with that bank. The introduction to Lord Summer's camp was interesting because I was at that stage just gaining maturity, I didn't have a father bearing down on me so

06:00 although I had a fairly well developed sense of responsibility, Lord Summers Camp substituted in some

way for

I wonder if you could give us a bit of background on Lord Summers Camp? Tell us about that organization?

Well Lord Summer's camp is an interesting organization in that it was designed by the Duke of York or it was designed

06:30 on a camp run by the Duke of York in London. The Duke of York turned or eventually became King George VI. He gained the idea from a rugby match that he witnessed that social barriers could be broken down between young men and barriers were fairly rife in London, or England generally at that time. He ran this camp

07:00 in London, I think it started in 1926. He bought together 100 boys from industry and 100 boys from colleges and mixed them and taught them to learn from on an other and developed those young men so that they would go out into the community as leaders and

07:30 at the same time you would try and break down the social structure. The camp went until the war and didn't continue after the war. Now Lord Summer's camp was commenced in 1929 by Lord Summers as a memorial to his friends that died during World War I. It was first conducted at Anglesee and the staff of the camps in those days came from the

08:00 what were they called, the Forresters, but they had another name too, but they were a scout group. And their role was to act as the workers and provide the camp for the young fellows who went down from Melbourne. Unlike the Duke of York camp our camp was about half the size, there were 50 boys from public schools and high schools and 50

08:30 boys selected from industry, up and coming leaders in their trades and apprenticeships. The camp was a great success from the time it started and by 1931 Lord Summers had raised enough funds from his friends and business associates to build our own camp at Summers on Western Port so our first camp there was in 1931.

09:00 And the first 2 camps down at Summers were run by the head of the Otway Forresters, that was their name, the Otway Forresters, and in 1931 the camp was taken over by a gentleman, a friend of Lord Summers, by the name of Dr Cecil Gordon McAdam. He was a leading surgeon in Melbourne at the time and had had a lot to do with the running of scout camps and the like

09:30 and Lord Summers asked him if he would head the organization, which he undertook to do. Very interesting character, Dr Cecil Gordon McAdam. I always thought until fairly recently that he was English but I found out he was Australian. He looked like a little Englishmen, he had a thin moustache and always wore a black homburg [felt hat] when he was walking around the city. He had wonderful command of the English language

10:00 and was a tremendous [UNCLEAR] and he had a big influence on our early lives. He had one phobia, he made it known that he believed the Japanese would attack Australia because they needed to expand their area and that it would not be long before they made a move to gain Australia as part of their mainland. He was

10:30 rebuked fairly heavily by authorities having made such a statement but his belief was and he made it quite clear to us that he believed we should all be involved in preparing ourselves for war because whether we liked it or not it was going to come and we should be ready to accept it. And so in 1937 or early '38 he went to the

11:00 14th Battalion which was in those days located on the corner of Commercial Road and Punt Road in Prahran. That was a very short distance from our own City Headquarters which had been developed on the shores of Albert Park Lake just at the end of Lorne Street, which is a continuation of High Street. He approached the CO [Commanding Officer] of that regiment and asked whether the gentleman concerned who

11:30 was Clive Steele who later became Lieutenant General Clive Steele, he was the Chief Engineer of the Australian Army at the end of the war but in those days he was a Lieutenant Colonel commanding 14th Battalion. He asked Colonel Steele whether he'd be prepared to allow members of Lord Summers Camp to enter an officer training school in the battalion if he was to provide up to 100 young fellows he would

12:00 guarantee the types and calibre of the men he recommended. And Steele very rightly said that would be most unfair to other members of the battalion to have boys from outside come in and do no general training and be put straight into an officers training course. But he then suggested to Gordon McAdam that he form a company of his battalion for the exclusive use of Lord

12:30 Summers Camp. And so C Company of the 14th Battalion became the Powerhouse Company, powerhouse being the name of the organization which followed Lord Summers' camp. In other words, Lord Summers' camp once attended made people who had attended eligible to become members of Powerhouse. And the name Powerhouse being

13:00 a thought that it would become a generating point for young leaders in the community. Having formed C Company the pressure was applied to us very gently that we should become members of the

Powerhouse Company, which was my very early introduction in to an army I would not have considered joining at that time, I'm talking late 30 early 39. I would not have considered joining because I was 18 years of age

13:30 very immature for an 18 year old, I think, and anyway as you do with all your cobbers I joined C Company of the 14th Battalion. We did our first camp in the army in March of 1939 at Mornington, an area just outside Mornington which is now a complete housing estate, it's just a mass of houses.

14:00 1939 went on, in the meantime I'd involved myself with banking and Lord Summers' camp and so on and playing my various sports which in the main in those days was lacrosse and athletics. I was not a good athlete, I was a run of the mill athlete, perhaps better than average but still run of the mill, but I could play lacrosse.

14:30 And so as 39 drifted on so the clouds of war started to loom very menacingly and on the night that war was declared on Germany I can remember it was though it were yesterday, I was playing tennis in the front street in Hampton, Littlewood Street, Hampton with my brothers and my then girlfriend now wife.

15:00 A large black Lancia, I don't think you'd remember a Lancia, they were a very posh car and much longer than the cars of today, very narrow, built like a greyhound. And from the car which I recognised immediately, stepped one Major Viv Lovejoy who was a senior member of our battalion, and he went inside so I followed and was promptly told that war

15:30 had been declared and I was to report at 8 o'clock the following morning in uniform at Victoria Barracks to commence my war service for the Second World War. That only lasted a fortnight in actual fact but it was a very interesting fortnight. We were given guard duties at Victoria Barracks, the Fishermen's Bend Aircraft Factory, the oil refineries which in those days

16:00 were on the shore at Port Melbourne, and we divided up into guards and we proceeded to look after things and change guards in front of Victoria Barracks each evening at 6 o'clock. We were on a day on or 24 hours on, 24 hours off for that fortnight and we were 2 hours on and 4 hours off on guard right throughout that period and I don't think I've ever been

16:30 as tired in my life as when we finished up because of course when we should have been resting we were in a drill hall in the Victoria Barracks in those days, it's since been demolished, but we were sleeping on straw mattresses, palliasses and in between times on guard duty we were playing rugby with a paper football

17:00 so after a fortnight we were ready for the scrap heap. But it was an interesting fortnight.

What happened to your job at the bank during this time?

Well it's interesting and the bank accepted it very well because for the first 12 months we were in and out of camps, I don't remember exactly, but they'd give us a month's camp and then they'd send us back to work for a month

17:30 and then there'd be another month's camp. And then eventually about June of 1940 we were called up on full time duties. In the meantime the 6th Division had been formed, it was being formed. I hesitate to say it but the 6th Division had a lot of rough young gentlemen in it, you know fellows who were out of work and in trouble

18:00 and having wife trouble or some such, and I'm not denergrating them at all, they were wonderful fellows. But the thought of joining such an organization was quite far from my mind, I didn't like the sound of it at all. Anyway, we continued until I think about June of 40 when we went into camps and occupied positions around the coast and did all sorts of strange things.

18:30 And in 1940 we were at a place called Balcombe out of Seymour and volunteers were called for the 2/14th Battalion and a number of our fellows became members of the 2/14th, not a great number, but those who went were terrific fellows. I was rather

19:00 hesitant at that stage about going to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] for a number of reasons and some of them were selfish. I had been signed up for my commission in about July of 1940 and had volunteered at that time to go to the AIF and there was quite a lot of delay in the commissions coming through

19:30 the system and when they called for volunteers I thought to myself now if I wait for another week or two my commission will be through and I was just selfish enough to think if I wait for that fortnight or month or whatever it is then I'll be able to get a job as a an officer rather than start at the ground floor again and work my way up. That was a bad decision as it turned out.

20:00 I had other reasons. In the battalion of course most of my mates from the early Powerhouse Company days were still members of the battalion and we were pretty close-knit group. And in addition to that my wife was having some problems at home with her Mum and Dad separating and she was at a bit of a loss and I felt that it wasn't the right time to leave her to sort herself out and so I

20:30 **Were you already married at this stage?**

No, I'm sorry, I said wife, not then, my girlfriend. We weren't even engaged I don't think at that stage in the game but we were going together quite seriously.

You must have met when you were very young?

We met when we were 16. I belonged to a tennis club in Hampton called Milwala Tennis Club

21:00 and her brother was a member of the club and we went on a club picnic and she came to the picnic with her brother and thereafter we became very friendly. So yes, we were together from the time we were 16. Anyway, getting back to 1940, during the time

21:30 I deferred making that decision of going to the 2/14th Battalion and my commission coming through the government had decided that they would institute national service training and that no more enlistments in the AIF would be permitted until the national service situation had sorted itself out. So I remained with the battalion

22:00 and then right throughout the later part of 1940 we were training national service youths. In 1941 the situation changed a little and we were put on operational tasks around the coast. We were first on the Mount Martha Mornington

22:30 Peninsula side on then moved over to the other side of the bay and did the Bellarine Peninsula and the coast down through Barwon Heads, Anglesea and the like. We were on patrol in defensive positions, standing patrols in case vessels arrived on our doorstep. And that went on right through 1941.

Can I just take you back a moment before

23:00 **we get into that period in detail. I was very interested when you were talking about the period after your father died when you had to step up and take a lot of responsibility for the family. Did you feel that responsibility very keenly?**

Yes I did. I think, looking back, there was great loyalty in the Swan family. My mother

23:30 had a terrific job to do with 3 young bucks to bring up, no money with which to do it, and education and just clothing, food, major considerations. And I think that I had a very strong, in fact I know I had a very strong feeling towards my mother. In fact it became an embarrassment to me and the army helped me in one way.

24:00 Mother depended on me very heavily and as a result I virtually became tied to her apron strings and it needed something to break that and the army gave me that opportunity. It would have been very hard for me had it not happened because all 3 of us felt a responsibility towards mother because of the outstanding job she'd done bringing us up.

24:30 In fact she went to one very senior clerk person, no names, no pack drill here, but he said, "Look, you've got no alternative, put them all in an orphanage." And she said, "That's the last thing I'll ever do, put my kids in an orphanage." So you know, things were fairly desperate at that stage in the game.

Given your father's

25:00 **injury during the First World War and the fact this contributed, if not caused, his death ultimately, it must have been very difficult for your mother when you became involved with the military?**

I think more to the fact is that it became difficult for her, I joined the infantry of course and my father was an artillery man and she couldn't bear the thought that I hadn't followed in Father's footsteps, which was

25:30 rather painful for her. And I'll never forget the night I arrived home with my first issue of britches and putties and boots that were the colour of saveloys. She was rather shocked by this outfit having come through her early war days with a dapper looking young officer with lovely artillery britches and leggings. My uniform was rather

26:00 dowdy by comparison.

So she didn't have any concerns about you getting involved with military, it was just you joined the wrong branch.

Just that I joined the wrong branch. No I don't think she was particularly worried that I had joined the army. I think she saw the need for it. I don't think she was happy about it but she was a realist and you know,

26:30 all realists eventually look at things in a logical light.

And from your personal point of view what was your sense of the motivation that you had to be involved? Why do you think you wanted to be so involved?

Well I mentioned that Cecil Gordon McAdam was a very good orator and I think he'd convinced us all that it was our

27:00 responsibility, whether we wanted to or whether we didn't. And it's the old story of mateship you know, if your cobbers are doing it then you do it too, in fact we all do these things together very often. And that was the reason. I had no great aspirations towards becoming a soldiers or becoming an officer, it was just part of the system at the time and I just went along with the flow.

Had you previously

27:30 **considered a career in banking? Was that what you really wanted to do?**

Let me say that when I was at school I wanted to be an architect or an artist of some description. And my uncle, uncle by marriage, distant uncle, was the chief inspector of the Commercial Bank and he said to mother, "Look, get him into

28:00 banking, that's the business that he should be in, enough of this nonsense about being an architect or what have you." Anyway, after mother went to Melbourne High School and spoke to the art master. He said, "Yes he's a very good drawer, but so was I and this is where I finished, so my recommendation would be that he goes into the bank." So whether I wanted to become a banker or not that's where I finished.

28:30 And I was quite happy in the bank. The bank suited me because I was very good with figures, not that I was a genius with them but I could add like a calculator and that was all you needed to be able to do in the bank and my hand was good so I was able to

29:00 punch ledgers without any problems at all, there weren't machines of course, or very few machines in those days, and all the ledger work was done by hand. I was perfectly happy in the bank I must confess. I wasn't when I came out of the army. I went back to the bank and it didn't take me long to realise that there were aspects about the bank that

29:30 I wasn't happy with. I mean, when you've been a major in the army for the last 4 or 5 years making decisions and you got back to a bank where the bank manager was frightened that anything would go wrong and so it was a bit of a let down and it affected me greatly, I didn't think I could stay in the bank. There weren't enough decision makers.

During the late 30s and early

30:00 **40s what was your understanding of the political situation in Europe and the reasons for the war?**

It's a long time ago and I think when you're young you don't put a great deal of thought into things of that nature. You were always aware that things weren't as they should be in Germany and you were concerned that Hitler would go overboard in his

30:30 desires to produce a super race and the like. And you watched with interest whilst Chamberlain went over and came back and waved a piece of paper and said there will not be a war and then 5 minutes later we were in the middle of one. So all those things I think registered with us but apart from that I don't think I had any deep thoughts about the situation

31:00 in Europe.

Did you feel that you were fighting for Australia or for King and empire at that point?

I think it was very much Commonwealth, one in all in. In fact, that side of it worried me later in life when the Commonwealth started to break up and I always reckoned that there was strength in unity and that it would have been much better

31:30 had the Commonwealth remained as such. No I felt when the war started we were part of it, didn't matter whether it was at that stage on England's doorstep we were part of the Commonwealth and it was our duty to be part of the activities that were going on at the time.

32:00 **You said that in 41 you were being moved from positions like Mount Martha over to Bellarine Peninsula and so on. What did your day to day duties consist of at that time?**

I look back with interest on it. It was quite an exciting life for me personally. I was a Lieutenant, I was promoted lieutenant in

32:30 1940 as I mentioned I was waiting for my commission card to come through and it eventually came through in September of 1940. At that stage I was 20 years of age and fairly soon after that I was placed in charge, or given command of one of the senior companies in the battalion. And in the capacity I was in, I was commanding support company,

33:00 and the OC [Officer Commanding] of support company had on establishment a motorbike and I had an [(UNCLEAR)], was a very nippy machine, which I rode all over Bellarine Peninsula at a great rate of knots. So it was quite an exciting experience and that went on for quite a long time. But then

33:30 rumblings came from the regular army. I had been promoted when a war starts as you've probably

heard, promotions are made in the field and I'd been promoted without any examination as had a number of my fellow officers. These rumblings eventually meant that we were asked to attend an officer training school at Bonegilla

34:00 up near Albury, to prove that we were worthy of the rank that we held. And so in November 1940 through until February of 1942, about 10 weeks, we attended that officer training school. It was very, very hard. They made life very difficult for us, regular warrant officers were in charge of the course

34:30 and it was a wonderful experience but it was a very difficult time, physically it was very demanding. And of course the Japs came into the war in 1941 and we were at that school when they bombed Pearl Harbour in December 1941. When the course was finished we of course returned to our unit

35:00 and by that time the Japs had started to make a move on the Malay Peninsula. So there was a very alarming feeling that the Japs were on their way to Australia. And almost immediately after we arrived back at the unit which at that time with Headquarters at the Geelong Racecourse and the outposts along the Bellarine Peninsula. We were moved to

35:30 Western Australia and we arrived over there early in 1942 and spent 12 months on the west coast, again patrolling, exercising, training, and doing all the routine things. By that time I might add we were becoming a little bit disjointed because we were a pretty efficient organization. Mid 1942 we got a new CO, a gentleman

36:00 by the name of WB Caldwell, a lieutenant colonel who served with the 2nd Battalion overseas. He had an MC [Military Cross], he later got a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and an OBE [Order of the British Empire] I think so he was OBE, MC, ED and he was a very proficient soldier. The first thing he did so far as I was concerned he said, "You're too junior to be in

36:30 command." he said it in a nice way, "You're too junior to be in command of one of the senior companies." there was only two majors on the establishment in those days and one was support company and one rifle company was allowed a major. And I was commanding support company so he said, "I'm going to give support company to one of the more senior officers and I want you to become

37:00 my adjutant." the adjutant being the staff officer of the battalion. So WB Caldwell and I became very close, he was a wonderful fellow and he increased the standard of the battalion noticeably. By the end of 1942 we were a very efficient unit unable to get ourselves

37:30 any experience in the field of battle and it's like a boxer who's trained for 10 years and never has a fight you know, you become very disenchanted with things. So we were disappointed that we hadn't managed to see more action than we had. Well we got the opportunity early in 1943 the battalion was order to return to Melbourne to take leave and

38:00 recreation for about a fortnight then to reassemble at Mangalor camp which was just north of Seymour. And then we were moved to Woodford in Queensland which was just outside Brisbane to commence our jungle training.

Before we go to Queensland and that training which I'd like to talk about in some detail later, could you just explain to me what an

38:30 **adjutant's role is?**

Well the adjutant is really the staff officer of the battalion, he promulgates the orders of the commander, the instructions for movements of the battalion and things of that nature and generally is the link between the companies and the command element and so I was Bill Caldwell's right hand man.

39:00 I remained that for the next 43, 44 for the next 2 years and at the end of that time I was seconded to Headquarters 5 Div, 5th Division.

I also wanted to ask you about the officer training school.

Tape 2

00:29 **Geoff, I'd like to take you back for a moment to the officer training school at Bonegilla did you say?**

Bonegilla.

Bonegilla. That was a training school as I understand it that was run by the regular Army and they had insisted that officers from the militia come to the training school and prove themselves.

That's right.

Can you tell me a little bit more about your time

01:00 **there. Was it a pleasant time?**

Yes it was, it was very enjoyable but it was very hard physically. The reason we were there is quite interesting, I'd mentioned that regular soldiers had to go to Duntroon or to similar establishments to gain their commission and there was a feeling of unrest that we'd got through so easily and so

01:30 most of the Lieutenants at that stage, and I was asked the question by Brad Hammond from your organization as to whether I was ever a probationary lieutenant myself and I said no. And the reason I answered in that manner was that I always wore 2 pip, a probationary lieutenant wore 1 pip. However I noticed in a record of service

02:00 after I spoke with Brad that in fact I was promoted probationary lieutenant and confirmed before I ever got to Bonegilla. Now Bonegilla was a 10 week bastardisation course as well as training course. The physical side of it was quite immense, long periods

02:30 doing all sorts of things like diving on to barbed wire fences, rowing a pontoon which required 8 men to row it for the full length of the Hume Weir and getting out and being forced marched back to camp and lovely little things like that. Being put in gas chambers where they released tear gas and kept us inside for long periods then we

03:00 came out and vomited our hearts out. All sorts of funny things, it wasn't totally pleasant but we reckoned we were pretty tough and we took it in the spirit that it was dealt out.

You don't think it was excessive at any times?

A couple of times I think it could have been regarded as excessive but generally speaking

03:30 it was just the hours and the constant work we were doing. And there was a lot of fun, we built pontoon bridges you know, when people were running across them we pulled ropes and tipped them into the weir and all sorts of idiotic things like that to lighten the days work. Overall it was a wonderful experience and there's no doubt that our proficiency improved as a result of the training.

04:00 **There's always been a reference made to the uneasy relationship between the regular army and the militia during this period. Did you have any sense of that while you were at Bonegilla?**

No, that feeling was more between the AIF troops and the citizen military forces at the time. The regulars didn't look down

04:30 upon the CMF [Citizen Military Force], it was just this one aspect of training and military life that upset them, the fact that we were being commissioned without having to do anything like the amount of work and preparation they did to get to the same rank. And I think it was a very reasonable feeling that they had, I had no broach with that, I was quite happy to do any training that they wanted me to, I think it was quite reasonable.

05:00 **When you returned to your battalion that was when you were working as the adjutant.**

Well when I returned to my battalion in 1942 that was about February 1942 the battalion was just on the verge of being moved to Western Australia. In actual fact I was the Assistant adjutant at that time and we had a bit of trouble again in

05:30 support company, we had some scallywags in that company who gave another young officer a bit of a bad time and he was moved to another spot and I was shot out to support gunnery to whip them into shape. I must have been a nastier type than my [(UNCLEAR)].

Tell me a little bit about that. How do scallywags give an officer a hard time?

I don't even know whether I should tell these stories.

06:00 We had part of a Prahran gang in support company, Prahran being the suburb from which our troops initially were drawn. And they were really bad young fellows, you know cut throat razor and bike chain, people who beat up there fellow man on odd occasions and so on. And they were a bit hard to handle.

06:30 I remember on one occasion when we were moving to the west we were in a train which was divided into 2 parts at Port Pirie to go across the Nullarbor Plains and I was OC of one half, the second half of the train. I remember

07:00 it was rather undignified but accommodation on the train was fairly limited and we had a number of these young fellows who'd gone AWL [absent without leave] just before we left and who'd been rounded up and for their naughtiness they were put in an open cattle truck to travel and when we were leaving Port Pirie in South Australia

07:30 and a number of them jumped the train and ran off into the bush. We had the train held up for an hour whilst we went through the bush and rounded them up and returned them to their cattle truck. They were a bit disjointed from being put in a cattle truck I might add but there were lots of other people who rode in cattle trucks, it wasn't unusual for every form of transport to be utilised by troops. So it wasn't that we were treating them in an

08:00 ill fashion, it was just that if anybody deserved to be there at that time they did, and it was a much easier way of restraining them than having them in carriages because they could have jumped the carriage every time the train slowed down. Anyway, that was just one little occurrence.

These blokes must have been about your age and you were in a position of having to discipline them

08:30 **and manage them. Were they, were they about your age at the time?**

Yes they were, not much younger than I was, I was 20, they were 18, 19 year olds.

How do you discipline a bunch of recalcitrants like that? It must be quite a challenge?

I was bigger than they were.

Is that it?

No, man management is something that you learn and you've got to

09:00 bit of a gift for it, decent officers I think have some qualities that make them capable of handling situations. I never had any trouble, I was very soft with troops. I have no hesitation in saying that, I always treated men in the way I would like to be treated myself by a senior officer and troops react to

09:30 decency and you had the odd one or two that play up. And I can't say that I remember anybody for that reason because most of the fellows I had command of during my war years were just members of the team and we were all in it together. It was part of soldiering.

10:00 **You were going to tell me about the amalgamation of the 14th Battalion was it?**

14th and 32nd. Yes, about mid 1942 or early 1942 you'll appreciate that the battalion had taken over national servicemen and had then become half old soldiers and half national servicemen.

10:30 And it was a complete and well-trained unit by 1942, which I mentioned. And then we were told that if we could gain, I can't remember the exact percentage, but 90% comes to mind, if 90% of the unit was to volunteer for the AIF then we would be made an AIF unit. And the difference between a citizens military forces unit

11:00 and an AIF unit in the citizen military force unit could only be used in Australia and in the islands north of Australia whereas the AIF Battalion could be moved anywhere outside Australia. So we started on a very hectic recruiting drive and by about mid or just before mid 1942 we had about 85%

11:30 of our fellows who had volunteered to serve in the AIF and be sent anywhere. What happened, the 32nd were not quite as successful in gaining AIF recruits and so the decision was taken in mid 1942 that the AIF volunteers from the 32nd Battalion would be moved over to 14th Battalion and the non

12:00 AIF volunteers in the 14th Battalion would be moved to other Battalions including the 32nd Battalion. And when we got their AIF members we became 14/32nd Battalion as an amalgamated Battalion with the title 14/32nd Battalion or Australian Infantry Battalion, AIF in brackets. Then we were eligible to serve anywhere. And so by the end of 1942

12:30 we got the message that we were going to move back, state leave as I mentioned, and then commence jungle training proparatory to going up the islands. And that was our first bit of refreshing news because we were long overdue to show our colours. The early messages we got

13:00 were that we were to involve an attack on Lae and Finschhafen on the north coast of New Guinea. Unfortunately things got a bit serious and the build up of Japs in that area was far stronger than it was when we were designated for the job so again we took a bit of a set back. We were originally landed at Port Moresby in New Guinea

13:30 and then we were flown over the Owen Stanleys to a place called Popondetta. Popondetta was an airstrip, or a serious of airstrips, just behind Buna on the north coast. So perhaps an interesting story there was that as the adjutant it was my responsibility to plan the movement by plane across the Owen Stanleys and that was a bit of challenge

14:00 because normally when you move a Battalion you're given a quota of trucks and you throw everything on it, you're troops, but when you're travelling by air every pound has to be accounted for. So you had to know exactly what stores had to go, there weight and size and everything else. So it was a bit of a detailed exercise. Anyway it worked to perfection and off we went, dawn one morning shortly after we arrived at Port Moresby.

14:30 And as we got through the gap of the Owen Stanleys a signal was received that there was a Japanese Airforce approaching Buna and it turned all the transport planes back. For some reason my was at the head and I managed to get through and landed at Popondetta and the brigade commander, a fellow by the name of Ray Sandover,

15:00 a brigadier, he had commanded 2/11th Battalion in the Middle East and came back and commanded 6th

Brigade of which 14/32nd Battalion was a unit and he met me on the strip and said, ‘Get your troops dispersed and stick them in the kunai grass over there.” Which I did. “And then come and see me.” which I did. And he said

15:30 that was the first inkling I’d had that the remainder of the battalion had been turned back. He said the remainder of the battalion had been returned to Port Moresby, “You’re the only one here and we are to take over from an American regiment at Gona.” which was just up the coast from Buna. And he said, “You’re the only one here so you’ll

16:00 have to take over from the American Regiment.” I said well that shouldn’t be any worry. So we were trucked around to a point called Cape Endaiadere from where we were, or at which point we were put on LCMs [landing craft medium] which are medium sized landing craft and we were floated around to Gona and I proceeded to take over

16:30 this large American.

You were telling me you were put on some landing crafts?

Yes, we were put on the landing craft and we were floated over to Gona and I took over from the American Regiment which was some thousands strong with my 30 little Australian soldiers and there wasn’t a great deal of concern about the task. There was a few Japs located in the area but they were stragglers and our role

17:00 was to be the mopping up of the area and the capturing and bringing back any stragglers, Japanese Army. And we remained at Gona for a period, the rest of the battalion joined us and I think we were there for roughly a month before we moved to Buna. By this time our role to go to Lae and Finschhafen had been changed and in fact we

17:30 remained in an area behind Buna, place called Semimi I think from memory and we were given the role of patrolling further up the coast. We would send companies up for a period of time and they would patrol and there were different types of patrols, fighting patrols, standing patrols which were the 2 main types we were involved in. Standing

18:00 were purely on lookout duty making sure that the Japs were not landing on the coast and again there was mopping up duties so fighting patrols were sent out to round up the stragglers from the Japanese Army that had been pushed back from there.

Can I just take you back to the training that you received for this sort of campaign? I think you said you’d had your jungle training in Woodford in Queensland?

Yes we did.

18:30 We were first moved up there in March of 1943. We did training in and around Woodford, which in those days was just low scrubby forest. Wasn’t terribly good area for training in jungle work because it wasn’t thick enough but we did do trips down to a place called Tambourine and we camped at Tambourine

19:00 for some time, only a matter of a week or 10 days. And the jungle in the Tambourine area which is not far from Canungra which became the jungle training school was very thick and very nasty, had lots of wait a whiles which was a vine which had little hooks on it like fish hooks right down long tendrils and when you went to slash it with a machete usually ran up your fingers and opened them

19:30 like a can opener and it was very hard to cope with. It used to hook onto your clothes and then when you tried to get it off it cut you very quickly, cut your fingers. And we did quite a lot of work in 10 days getting to know the jungle and move through it and that type of training. We went back to Woodford and were moved from Woodford by train again up to Cairns

20:00 and then onto a place called Cooranda which is just north of Cairns and the jungle there is very, very heavy, rainforest. It’s not quite as savage as it was at Tambourine but it was thick enough for us to do our jungle training and we were there for about 2 months. We eventually left Cooranda

20:30 and returned to Townsville and were put on the Taroona to sail to New Guinea. The Taroona was a ship that was designed to sail between Melbourne and Tasmania and it had a round bottom so that it could go up the Derwent I think it is River to get into Launceston.

21:00 And when it was put to the open sea it became the most dastardly ship to get seasick in that I have ever had experience with. I was sick for 2 days, and I finished up dry retching and hanging onto pegs in the bathroom with my stomach in a knot. It was unbelievable how sick I got.

21:30 I was fortunate on the first trip up on the Taroona, I had a second one later on when I was given some leave during our stay in New Guinea. But on the first trip up I shared the honeymoon suite with my Commanding Officer, and even on the Taroona that was quite luxurious, we had our bathroom and toilet and the rest. The second trip I did on the Taroona after having leave I was in a tiny cabin with another

22:00 Officer and I think he wished I’d died before we got there. But they were 2 experiences that I wouldn’t like to repeat.

What were the conditions like for the troops on the Taroona?

On the Taroona it was pretty good. Certainly some of them were down in hulls but there were lots of cabins and in order of rank they went from cabins down to hold. But even in the hold they were pretty good except that because it rolled so much

22:30 of course troops suffered the same seasickness that I suffered and a lot of them spent most of their time up on deck. Because being down the hold with a hundred other fellows and everyone being seasick is not a very pleasant experience.

Not pleasant, no. Is it 5 or 6 days to get from Townsville up to Port Moresby? How long was that trip?

Two days.

Two days only. And what were the conditions like?

23:00 It might have been 3. We embarked on the 1st and we got up there on the 4th but I think it was about 3 days travelling.

When you got to Port Moresby what were the conditions like there?

I have only vague recollections of Port Moresby. We were moved straight through Port Moresby which seemed to be a normal sort of a village or town, to an area on the far

23:30 side. One thing that did stick in my mind, they had converted a restaurant that had been built over the sea with a thatched roof into an officers' club and I had dinner there one night and it was a magnificent experience. All the native boys were in black and red laplaps and looked magnificent and the service was

24:00 wonderful and it was a lovely experience because on a balmy New Guinea night there is nothing better than sitting out watching over the water at reflections, it was quite lovely. But the rest of time we were just doing little bits of training, we were only there for a week. And most of my time in that week was spent checking on stores and working out with our quartermaster how many

24:30 aircraft we were going to need and who was going to go on what aircraft to get us over to Popondetta.

Was there any sign of the bombing raids over Port Moresby at this time?

No, most of the bombing raids were launched on the airstrips. I don't think really Port Moresby got a lot of it, it certainly hadn't when we were there, there were no visible signs of it.

And were Americans

25:00 **in Port Moresby at this stage?**

I don't think so, no, I think we were all Australian.

So they were on the north coast?

They were on the north coast, yes.

When you got over to the other side this was the closest that you'd been to the action.

This was as close as we got at this stage in the game. We'd been

25:30 bombed a number of times, in fact we lost a few boys on the wharf at Buna. When they decided that we weren't ready to take on Lae, Finschhafen [(UNCLEAR)] we were allocated tasks of patrolling the coast as I mentioned, but our secondary task was loading ships at Buna for resupply of the forces further up the coast.

26:00 That was hard work, sometimes unpleasant, and I say unpleasant because there was one vessel, a liberty ship, that was carrying 9th Division troops up the coast and it was hit by a torpedo, an aerial torpedo, from a Japanese fighter bomber and it hit the ship right in the stern area and

26:30 burst through the outer shell of the vessel and it actually rolled up troops that were asleep inside the rear end of the vessel, the stern of the vessel. And of course they were killed but the ship came back and it was our unenviable lot to remove the bodies from the ship and carry out the necessary funeral arrangements and things of that nature.

27:00 That wasn't a pleasant part of our world, or for those who had to do it. We had a few fellows killed when an aircraft attacked the wharf. In fact it was interesting, the first boy we had killed in New Guinea, and I can't recall his name, but he went AWOL just before we left because he was sure that he was going to die and

27:30 we got up there, got onto this job at Buna and one of these bombs struck the mast of the ship he was working on a lump of shrapnel sliced his head off. So his prediction was very accurate. So that young gentleman was our first major casualty.

28:00 **Do you recall the first time that you came under fire or experienced a bombing raid?**

I was fairly fortunate in that there were plenty of bombing raids that went on at the coast and at Popondetta and each time I was in the middle of them, in other words ks away from where it actually happened. It was just by fluke of chance we were set up in the middle of the jungle or

28:30 in a little to me what had been a village, a little cleared space in the middle of the swamps really. Only on 1 occasion was I standing with our 2IC [Second In Command] on the edge of a creek that ran by our headquarters and there was a loud whistling as a bomb came down and it was pretty obvious it was coming fairly close and we were both about 6 or 8 feet

29:00 above the slowly running creek in the bottom of the bank we were standing on and both of us automatically stepped off the edge into the creek. And the funny part was that the bomb landed with a terrific thump but didn't go off. So we were fairly fortunate, that one wasn't far away then and it was a big one, so I was glad on that occasion that it didn't go off.

Did you actually see it, see the bomb?

I didn't see

29:30 it, no. The engineers were called in to remove it and they defused it and carted it off.

This must have been though such a contrast from your previous years in Australia training and so on and now you're in New Guinea in the middle of a campaign that at stage wasn't going too well for Australia. I mean

Well they'd

30:00 already cleared the Kokoda Track and had come down into Gona, the 2/14th Battalion, the 2/16th Battalion, had attacked and lost a lot of casualties at Gona. And we took after some considerable time after they were in spite of the fact there were lonely Japs walking around it was quite a while after the area was taken that we occupied it.

30:30 The area of Buna and a place just to the east of Buna called Oro Bay and this was an interesting part of my military life. Oro Bay was virtually swampland and we had exercised in the area and in the hills behind Oro Bay and we got word that the Americans were going to

31:00 bring in a huge number of troops and occupy Oro Bay. And we smiled to ourself, we thought they'd picked the area off a map because it was so unsuitable for troops with the swamp lands around. And we drew attention to this fact when we were talking to one American, the CO and I, and he said, "Oh that's not a worry, we'll fix that up." And they sent an engineer regiment in

31:30 and I've never seen such a transformation. They ran canals through the area to take the surplus water and all the sand that they dredged up from the channels that they made they filled the areas in between the channels and when they'd finished it was like one huge parade ground. And unlike our troops, we'd always been taught, and rightly so

32:00 that you never concentrate troops when there's a likelihood of bombs or shell fire or anything of that nature. So when we set ourselves up in the jungle we had little hotchies spread about 20 yards apart and no more than a few troops in any particular area at the one time, so that if a bomb did land among them it would killed 2 or 3 but the rest of them

32:30 would be okay. When they set this camp up at Oro Bay it was just like a camp they'd set up in the States. There were rows of, as they called them, peramital tents, they were pyramid type tents, row after row of them for as far as they eye could see. And then the Japs started to bomb Oro Bay, I don't know how many casualties they suffered as a result of that but from the hill on which we were

33:00 located at the time the Americans were in Oro Bay it was one of the most spectacular sights I've ever seen. They had more anti aircraft guns posted around those tents than it was humanly possible to imagine. It was much better than Sydney Harbour on New Years Eve whenever the Japs came over. The sky was just filled with tracer, it was almost solid going up from their camp areas to the aircraft.

It must have been a huge

33:30 **logistical operation to get all that equipment and all those men into that area?**

It staggered us Annie [interviewer], it really did. The Americans do some remarkable things you know. Their equipment is sensational and they way, I'm digressing here a little bit, but our 2IC went on the landing the Americans did

34:00 I think the name of the place was Arrowee and he said he had never experienced anything like it. They went in wave after wave and they had mortars set up on the landing craft as they went into the shore. He said by the time they landed it was a heavily occupied area on the south western tip of New Britain, was before we went to New Britain,

34:30 and the area was just flattened, there wasn't a coconut tree with a shred of foliage on it and those Japs that were alive were so stunned by the ammunition that had landed in their area that they showed no resistance at all, they were just bombed out of their minds. And that's the way Yanks did things, you know.

35:00 They never used a tack hammer to crack a walnut, they used a great big FD [field] engineer's hammer.

What time of year are we in now in New Guinea? What month was this?

We were on the mainland of New Guinea until we went over in November

35:30 44 to New Britain, so prior to November 44 we were occupying areas of New Guinea, including a stint for a month for recreation. We'd been up there a long time, I think we'd served in a continuous capacity more time than any other Battalion who was up in the islands. Because we hadn't been involved in heavy fighting I suppose it was fair enough that we had longer stints.

36:00 We were up there from July, early July 1943 until just before the war ended in 45. So we had the best part of 2 years in the islands.

Did you have any doubt at any time that you were there about the, that we would win the war?

I don't think so, not in my mind. We certainly had doubts

36:30 about the time the Japs started to pour down the Malay Peninsula, and then when the Coral Sea battle took place and the Japs landed at Milne Bay and landed at Gona and Buna things were looking very sick at that stage in the game because if they'd got through to Port Moresby they would have had a launching place for an attack on Australia.

37:00 And I don't think anything could have stopped them at that stage. But we were fortunate that the 2/14th and 39th Battalion, which was a Citizens Military Forces battalion, militia battalion, and 2/16th and I've forgotten the other one, but they stemmed their movement across the Kokoda Track which really floored the Japanese because the Japanese were quite sure that they could cross the Kokoda

37:30 Track and come down into Port Moresby. And they were only carrying the food, I think from memory, they had something like 12 days rations on each man, they thought by weight of numbers they'd push over the Kokoda Track and get to Moresby before they needed resupplying, and that was there big error. They were stopped by the battalions I've just mentioned and even though

38:00 they pushed on down through Isurava they pushed on down there to Templeton's Crossing I think they got, that was past down towards Port Moresby but then they were in diabolical trouble because they were starting to get hungry and ammunition supplies had been used up and they were in real bother so they had to pull back.

38:30 **What were your supplies like at that stage when you first**

Well we were really well off. We didn't suffer any of the deprivation of that sort of war. In fact we had a wonderful quartermaster who took great interest in his job, even when we were on bully beef and biscuits they were converted somehow into pasties and pies

39:00 and bits were added and so on. And he would have the cooks making ovens out of 44 gallon drums and he would get hold of flour from the Americans. So we were eating bread regularly, freshly made bread, instead of the bully beef, and that was a great relief for troops. So we had an easy war up until that stage in the game. Although a couple of times we looked as though we could've been in the midst of it and we

39:30 did everything we were told to do and did it well. The hectic part of war, the dreadful part of war hadn't reached us at this stage in the game. It wasn't until we went to New Britain that we actually got our first taste of losing troops in direct conflict. And that was very late in the war.

Tape 3

00:30 **Geoff I believe it was at Gona where you came across an American food store. Tell us about working your way through that?**

Well the food store, Martin [interviewer], was one of the many things I signed for when we took over from the Americans, that included refrigerators in the officers' mess were left behind by the Yanks, they didn't bother to take

01:00 things like refrigerators, they could easily be replaced from base supply. But they also left for us a food store which was on a road in fact the beginning of the Kokoda Track from Gona going up towards Popondetta and up to Wau and onto the Kokoda Track proper, was just a gib track with swamp on either side and they'd built a small platform

01:30 of earth out from the track and on this platform they'd located a food store. I signed for the food in bulk, not knowing what was in the store, and we were told that we were to eat our way through that before they'd resupply us from Australian supplies. So we started eating and the first rations that we struck were American K rations, which were a hospital

02:00 ration. We couldn't believe our eyes when we opened them, they contained canned chicken, chocolate, smokes, delicatesy of pressed preserved fruit, cans of fruit, and all sorts of things of that nature. They were an individual ration with a small supply of each of those items that I mentioned. We ate those I suppose for about a week

02:30 and we were almost getting sick of them they were so good but then we struck the next layer of food stuffs, which just happened to be herrings in tomato sauce. The troops very quickly named them goldfish and after a week of eating goldfish they troops were nearly going bananas. It was the most horrible foodstuff after a protracted period

03:00 of time that I've ever tasted and so we had to call for rations, bully beef and biscuit was like turkey and caviar after eating the fish for a while. We did get through it eventually but we managed to split it up with whatever we had from the local supply.

The Americans seemed to have amazing resources. Everyone we speak to talks

03:30 **about their dependence on ice-cream. Did you see any of this in action?**

No but we heard about it. I did have a cobber in the battalion, my Battion 2IC who was a gentleman by the name of Patrick Mannix Shanaghan, I think he was Scot from memory, but Pat accompanied

04:00 as an observer an American landing on Arrowee, I'm pretty sure it was called Arrowee, it was on the south western tip of New Britain, and he was amazed by 2 things. One was the fact that in the early waves mortars were mounted on the medium landing craft which approached the beach and by the time they reached the beach the area occupied

04:30 by the Japanese was so flattened that most were dead and those alive had no capability of resisting the advancing American troops, so they had a very easy landing. Second thing that amazed him and it became a Battalion was that the ice cream machines were always in the fourth wave. Now I don't know how accurate was that statement but there's no doubt that they got the ice-cream

05:00 machines in very early when they occupied a location.

Tell us about the action. It was after being in Gona that you started to get a bit closer to the front line.

Yes well we had been doing this patrolling activity and loading and training and running schools on a Brigade basis

05:30 and that sort of thing. In fact I was detached for a period of time to instruct at a Brigade school at Popondetta and eventually we were told that we were to have a bit of a rest because we'd been up for about 12 months and the troops were starting to get a bit jaded and we'd a few cases of very sensible people going troppo and that was becoming a bit of a concern. And so we were moved to a place called Bulolo which was a few

06:00 miles short of Wau and it was a wonderful place because it was up in the mountains and the temperature was so easy to cope with after having been down on the coastal strip where the temperature and humidity were very high. So we spent our time up there playing basketball and baseball matches and softball and all the rest of it. And that was a great relief. And then when we'd finished that stint

06:30 we were returned to Lae and we were in a holding pattern at Lae. We were just gathered together under 2 man tents on a piece of flat ground in just behind Lae in preparation to going to New Britain. We hadn't been told very much about the situation in New Britain and as the

07:00 embarkation date arrived we were told that there were 90 thousand Japs on New Britain and that our role was going to be to land at Jacquinot Bay which is about mid way down the island and we were then to force our way up the south coast of New Britain towards Open Bay and eventually to clear the Japanese from a feature known as Sugi Mountain which was just above the Tol Plantation. Tol Plantation

07:30 became infamous during the war because the troops that were defeated at Rabaul poured down towards the Gazellele Peninsula which is the narrow neck which runs between the main part of the island and the south part of the island. And at Tol the people that they caught, the troops belonging to the Australian forces, were made to dig their own trenches and then were beheaded and booted into the pits

08:00 and covered over. And so Tol was an angry name for Australians and particularly for our own blokes who were hell bent on getting it back and taking over Sugi Mountain.

How much did you know of the details of that initial campaign at Rabaul at that stage?

Well again we were a little disappointed, Martin. We understood we were

08:30 going to have an opposed landing and from a psychological point of view our Brigade did the wrong thing, he managed to get there first, landed further down than Jacquinot Bay then moved up. When he got there he discovered that the Japanese had withdrawn up the coast. And so our opposed landing was fought by the BM [Brigade Major] arriving in a lakatoi [small fishing craft] to greet us which was rather stupid

09:00 and rather disappointing for the troops, they were all sort of keyed up to become involved in a nose to nose conflict and finished up going ashore in medium landing craft (LCMs). I suppose the only thing that happened there that was out of the ordinary the south coast of New Britain is quite unusual. It ranges in distance from a couple of hundred

09:30 metres and sometimes less than that up to a couple of kilometres between the shore line and the mountain which runs down the centre of New Britain, a very high spectacular looking mountain. At Jacquinot Bay it's roughly 2 kilometres I would think from memory from the foot of the mountains to the seashore and in the 2 days that we arrived, the first 2 days that we arrived,

10:00 on New Britain there was 12 inches of rain. Now if you could imagine 12 inches of rain falling on the side of a mountain and then running across a flat coastal plain the water was running across the ground inches deep, perhaps 4, 5, 6 inches deep. And the result was that you couldn't sleep. So for the first day that we were there every effort by engineers to get the water to run away and to get the tracks motorable

10:30 were in vain because as soon as they dug a hole it was full of water and likewise I don't think I slept for about the first 3 days on New Britain. We would cock ourselves in the fork of a tree and sort of hang there to get an hour or two of rest. That was an interesting experience.

I'm interested in the way you talked about the psychology of the battalion that you know you've been

11:00 **trained to do something and every time you seem to go to do it the opportunity's taken away from you. You mentioned that even in New Guinea some of the blokes had been finding it too much, what in particular was too much for them? Was it the tension, the anxiety, fear, do you know why some blokes**

11:30 That's a good question because we weren't under great strain from a physical fear point of view. We had been away from home for a fair time and the monotony and we tried desperately hard and in fact we had for years I think like the Americans with their ice creams in the fourth wave I always had a set of basketball backboards and basketballs in about the second wave of our battalion and the moment we settled in

12:00 anywhere we would clear a 90 foot by 60 foot stretch and put a backboard on a couple of palm trees and thereafter started playing basketball. And we entertained the troops by running concerts and where we were able running athletic meetings and cricket matches and all sorts. So they had plenty to do but it's different having something to do than for some people to be away from their families or their wives

12:30 for long periods of time with just the thought in the back of their mind that they may never get home again. And I think that's in fact what happened.

As staff officer did you have a responsibility in terms of administration for when this happened?

Yes, both from the point of view of trying to avoid it happening but also from the point of view of ascertaining

13:00 I had good assistance in that area but quite often I was able to pick people by their change of habits or by some particular action. I remember on our way up to Bulolo we had a staff sergeant by the name of Allan Satchell and I found Allan at the back of a jeep cramming Atebrin tablets down his throat as fast as they could be pushed down. Atebrin was the drug that we used to

13:30 stem the malaria taking over in the system. I said, "Don't do that Allan, put those down or give them to me." and I took them from him and then I made a beeline for the doctor, the medical officer of the battalion, and I said, "Look, have a look at Allan Satchell and assess what's wrong with him." and I told him the incident. And very quickly he said, "Yes, he's over the top, he's

14:00 gone troppo [unstable]." and they led him away quickly. I struck a couple of people on things like that doing things that they would not normally have done and that change in habit or practice made you realise immediately that there was something a bit astray.

Is it more important for the morale of the rest of the troops to keep these people away or

14:30 **is it specifically the welfare of the individual?**

It's the welfare of the individual. Once they went they had to be rested and treated in certain ways and taken away from any thought, even if it was only training you know it registered battle when they were

training and so on and so forth. And they had to be taken to hospital and given very special treatment. Allan Satchell just the one that I remember very well came back to Australia and

15:00 he was never quite the same but he got over the actual troppo side of it. When I say he wasn't the same physically he wasn't as strong after he'd gone off.

And do you have to write a report about such people?

No, that sort of information went through the medical sources. There's a thing called an A46 which was a form that had

15:30 to be filled in. We had a doctor by the name of Charles Lloyd Coughlan was with us most of the time in the islands. Charles came home eventually as a tropical ear specialist, he wrote a couple of thesis whilst we were in the island and he was shifted back to Heidelberg as a specialist on tropical ears. But he had for years, I shared a tent with him for a long while, and all the time I didn't

16:00 at the time realise how important it was, but we was always saying get yourself on an A46, if you've got a stomach ache get yourself on an A46 and the reason is, it's quite obvious to me now, more so now, I did learn it late in the war, unless your medical records showed treatment and record of some disease you've got no hope of getting compensation in any form

16:30 in the form of a disability pension or your wife getting a war widows' pension because of something you could attribute to war service. And so when somebody, for any medical reason, reported to the doctor he was immediately put on an A46 and those 46s were sent back and eventually stored in Melbourne in Records Office. You can draw on your file today and see those copies of

17:00 all the A46s. When I say see the A46s it might have been written on another sheet to save space but they were all recorded. One of the big problems with getting fellows to put themselves on an A46, as you can imagine in a mass camp situation there were lots of things that broke out although we managed to keep control of them fairly well but

17:30 there were, no soldier ever went without having a bout of dysentery or diarrhoea of some such thing. And because we all had and could put up with it you didn't put yourself on an A46, or even report, you just went about your duty as best you could and no record was taken of it. And it's vitally important, always was, always will be now that I've been through the mill to even get things like diarrhoea and dysentery reported because fellows

18:00 get bowel cancer and things like that in their old age and quite often it helps their widow get a pension if they happen to die from that cause.

Did you have any reason to be on an A46 in all your time?

No I lived a pretty good existence whilst I was in the army. I can't recall, I cracked up a bit when I came home, I had

18:30 an appendicitis and diphtheria within weeks of having arrived home but prior to that time I lived a trouble free time. Mind you I was probably as fit as any man had ever been in the AIF because I never smoked, I never drank, I don't think I'd had a been until I came out of the army and still don't. Whether that has any affect on your system or not,

19:00 but I was as I say always mad on sport and what have you and continued and walked miles and miles in the islands. No, I never had anything at all. Think I might have strained my back once lifting a 3 tonne truck or something of that nature.

Let's talk more about the New Britain campaign. After the rain eventually stopped, I presume it did at some stage,

19:30 **and you came down out of the trees, what was there to do then?**

Well, we established a base at Jacquinot Bay and at that base they took the top or the side off a mountain and made an airstrip, we didn't do that so I'm just indicating that that was going to be a means of supply by air into the air. They set up a brigade area and then we started to patrol along the coast

20:00 to push the Japs back towards Open Bay. They hadn't gone very many kilometres before they struck a bit of resistance and from time to time that happened. But the Japs who were low in morale, short of supplies, didn't really want to fight. Now, there was a book written after the war, in fact I read it fairly recently, which was called The Unnecessary War.

20:30 The attack on the islands of New Britain, Bouganville, Borneo could really have been done without, they weren't going to win the war. They were done because General MacArthur wanted to see Australians involved so that they could say they had a part in finishing the war off and he talked Blamey into accepting the task of clearing the islands.

21:00 Now a lot of men were lost as a result of that and frankly could almost, I'm sure, have been done without. But they were the rules and the orders were given and away we went. And we did it in a

number of stages. From memory our first major move can when we moved beyond a little village called Cutarp and then we moved Headquarters up about 20 ks and

21:30 re-established it at Cutarp and so it went we leaped frogged through other Battalions until we got up to a river just short of Mount Sugi and I can't think of the name of it and at that river it became quite interesting. I was the first of our brigade, and I don't know who I went up with, there was a small number of us went up to check this river out

22:00 because we wanted to know whether we were going to have to cross it or B: whether we were going to sail into the mouth of it with our LCMs, landing craft mediums, and land on the far side and then push on from there. It was very interesting because the Japs had wonderful observation posts from Sugi Mountains, they had established little viewing points

22:30 observation posts in the tops of the trees and we learnt later that they used to climb up a rope ladder and get in these things and they could see everything. And we I arrived up first, I don't know how we got across the river but I got onto the other side with this small group and no sooner we were there than we were fired upon by the Japanese. We later learned that they had created

23:00 mortar bombs out of huge naval shells, they'd welded fins onto the side of them and they'd made a barrel from an old gun barrel or something of that nature and they used to fill it up with an explosive and put a little fuse over the side and light it and the pressure build up would throw these shells down into the area we were moving into. The big advantage was they weren't very accurate,

23:30 but the disadvantage was if you happened to be in their road because they went off with a terrific wallop and did a lot of damage. And about 2 days after that first experience when they fired a salvo of these wretching things at us and we managed to scuttle out. Another thing was they were a little bit predictable. They had to change the position of the base plate when they wanted to change the area in which the shell was landing, they had no elaborate

24:00 screws on them or anything of that nature, can't think of what they were called on the mortar but you used to have an elevating screw and a directional screw. These had nothing like that, they were very primitive, so if you knew where one landed if you got far enough away from it you knew that it would either land to the left or right or down or up so you were able almost to predict where the next lot were coming.

24:30 Two days after I had that first experience the brigadier said to me, "Would you like to, we're going to land by landing craft mediums, we'll sail into the mouth of the river, and we'll land at this point on the bank and then the troops will start to move in and occupy beach head so that we can move behind them." I said, "Yes I'll be happy to do that." so I landed with the first troops on the far bank

25:00 and we copped a real burst and it was a bit of a shock to our troops because as I say although they'd been bombed not too many bombs had landed close to them, they'd seen plenty land in the distance and that sort of thing but when you suddenly find yourself in the middle of where they're going off it's a much more disconcerting experience. I landed with the troops and it was my first experience of being involved

25:30 with a group of troops under that sort of situation. It was an interesting one to me, I had 2 strange experiences that stayed with me for a long while. First one was when those shells started falling all the troops automatically went to ground and having just come out of barges they were not deployed at all, they were in great packets and they just poured off the barges and my first reaction was to

26:00 roar at the top of my voice, so and so get those troops dispersed because had an artillery shell landed in the middle of them half the force would've been wiped out point 1. So that stuck with me as an interesting point because I hadn't been involved with troops, I was always, of course, conscious of the need for dispersement, but it was an automatic thing as soon as I saw them go to ground I thought phew, we're going to lose a pile here.

26:30 I responded immediately to it.

Well you'd obviously had good training?

I had had good training and I'd always enjoyed my training and I'd been an instructor over the period of years for so many occasions that the lessons had well and truly sunk in I think. We got to

27:00 the other side and eventually moved across Tol Plantation with little resistance but we knew there were plenty of Japs up on Sugi Mountain. We established a headquarters at the base of the mountains and about that time I got notice that I was to be moved to divisional headquarters as a senior liaison officer. That was in January of 1945. I went to division straight away and took up my new role

27:30 and I was promoted to the rank of temporary major in February 1945. At that stage I was pretty young among the majors in the AIF, I was 24 when I was promoted to the rank of temporary major. So I'd gone through in just about 2 years span lieutenant in 1940, mid 1940

28:00 to captain and early 1945, major. So having been sent back to division and my young brother, Vernon the middle one, had asked to be permitted under the rules to join his brother in the 14th Battalion. He'd joined 5th Battalion, which was the Victorian Scottish Regiment

28:30 and he came to us before we went to Western Australia as part of the thing. I had a bit of thing about the fact that he was sticking his head out and I was back at divisional headquarters so my instant reaction to that was to spend as much time as I was able with the forward battalions.

How much younger is your brother?

He was 2 years younger than I and very much different in

29:00 physique, he was shorter and he was built like a reed. He'd been sick as a kid for a while and he hadn't the same growth as the first and the last of our family. My other brother is as tall as I am, he's very skinny but the 2 of us were tall and Vernon was the middle one and he proved to be a very good soldier actually.

29:30 He was in our intelligence section. The intelligence section is a group of about 12 commanded by an officer and they are detached in twos and threes to go with the forward battalions to report back information upon which future action can be based. So he was always with a forward company, he seemed to like being in the thick of things and he did a very good job.

But you felt

30:00 **just a little bit of rivalry you were saying?**

Not with my brother, no. No, Vern and I were great mates and

You were saying that you wanted to have the same sorts of experiences

No what I was saying, it wasn't rivalry, it was sense of guilt. I hated being back at divisional headquarters when my mates and my younger brother were up just about to go into their first action and I'd managed

30:30 to avoid it for the millionth time. So I spent a lot of time with the forward troops, both on the north side of the island and on the south side of the island where my own battalion was.

Did you go on patrols?

I didn't go on patrols. With my own battalion they actually finished up capturing Sugi Ridge and I was I hate to tell the story but I arrived

31:00 up I wanted to be there when things were going on and I arrived at battalion headquarters and Colonel Caldwell greeted me and I said, "I want to go up and see the boys." He said, "How do you think you are going to do that?" I said, "Well I thought I'd walk up the track and follow the ridge along." He said, "Well I can't give you troops, Swannie, to do that, they've been in too much trauma over the last few days for me to

31:30 be sending patrols out on jaunts like that." I said, "Well, give me a rifle and a bandolier of ammunition and I'll take a walk up myself." He said, "If you're mad enough to do that you go for it." So I walked up the mountain and it was about a kilometre and a half, two kilometres I think from memory and I walked right along the ridge to where the troops were and I can remember a platoon commander who'd taken command of one of the

32:00 companies, cobber of mine by the name of John Pugh, since deceased, won an MC [Military Cross]on the mountain. But when I got up there he said, "What the bloody hell are you doing here?" I said, "I came up to see how you were getting on." It was really a case of flag flying too you know, it was bravado because so many troops say that's alright for division to tell us to do this you know, they're sitting back there enjoying life, and that was a fact you know.

32:30 It was far enough away not be involved and feel perfectly secure. So my I don't know what you'd call it, my conscious told me I should be up there seeing what was going on. So I stayed with them for a few hours and by that time it was starting to get late in the afternoon and John Pugh said, "You'd better get out of here if you're going back because you know what it's like up here."

33:00 Strange in New Guinea, there was no twilight. When the sun went down the lights went out, it was quite dark. And I had to walk down this kilometre and there were Japs obviously here, there and everywhere. I think most of them had scuttled I might add, there were dead ones lying here and there along the track or on the side of the track. So I started my walk back and it was getting darker by the moment and it was almost well it was pretty

33:30 dark and I was wondering along by myself and I told you there were two things I had vivid memories of in relation to training, all of a sudden there was a big tree on the left about 10 yards away from me and there was a rush of action through the ground noises, twigs and things like that, which I was quite confident it was a Jap behind the tree and it was

34:00 intriguing to me because I was carrying a .303 rifle, an old Lee Enfield, with which I had not been involved for 5 years or some such thing. I mean, an officer walks around with a pistol on his side and not very often when he's not in contact with the enemy does he ever get his hands on a rifle. So almost in a flash, I couldn't believe the speed with which I moved, I had the rifle up in a firing position, at my waist, and the safety

34:30 catch off and I was perfectly confident that whoever it was behind the tree I was going to be the one that won the battle. I was way out in the open and this great tree had whatever it was behind. It was an interesting experience because I must admit that I'd heard people speaking of fear or fright and their hair standing on end, I can tell you the hair on the back of my neck must have

35:00 stood out at right angles to my neck because I got such a fright you know to think that there was someone there. Anyway, when I stood quietly for a moment and eventually a large goanna type lizard poked its head around from the side of the tree. So to my relief I moved on down the track and eventually got back to battalion headquarters unscathed. But it was an interesting little trip.

35:30 **I'm interested in the, you've explored this yourself, the psychology of what makes you go and go up to the front line. You've talked about the fact that it was a sense of conscience, maybe a sense a bravado, was it perhaps also at the back of your mind a sense of pride in the future? You wanted to**

36:00 **be able to say to yourself that yes, I was able to do what was called upon me?**

Well I think more a sense of duty to be quite honest, Martin. A liaison officer on a divisional headquarters has the role of conveying information both forward and backward. Now the plans made by the divisional commander are

36:30 assisted by the information which is given to his staff by a liaison officer who knows what's going on up forward. And so it was part of my duty to get forward as far as the brigade headquarters and then the battalion headquarters. Where I was silly, I got forward of the battalion headquarters on many occasions because I enjoyed being part of it for one thing but I also felt that it was important that

37:00 you know divisional troops were appearing on the scene where there was something going on.

And yet there is always that need to balance, I mean you don't put a General in the front line because you can't afford someone with that experience cause it creates command problems and so you need to balance your own feelings against a professional –

Common sense.

37:30 **Mm.**

Yes we do. I had a very interesting experience on one occasion, just to give you an idea of what sorts of things liaison officers did in areas like New Britain. We had a battalion on the north side, the 37/52nd I think it was, I've almost forgotten,

38:00 but they were occupying the northern end of the Gazelle Peninsula and on one occasion I spent a period of time with them, 10, 12 days perhaps. And to get to them, instead of being able to fly across the mountain on the first occasion, I think the second occasion I did fly across the mountain, but on the first occasion I caught a flying boat from Jacquinot Bay

38:30 to a place called Salamaua which was not far from Lae, it was the only place on the Lae coast that they could safely land the plane boats, was a little secluded bay. I got in a launch at Salamaua and went to Lae. I flew from Lae to Finchhafen, I changed planes at Finchhafen and I flew to an island somewhere in the middle of the Southwest Pacific Area occupied by Americans. I can't even tell you

39:00 know where that island was. And then from that island I flew to a place called Hosking, which was an airstrip on the north coast of New Britain, which was about, I think 80 ks short of where the battalion were actually fighting. And I got in a landing craft at Hosking and went up the coast to the battalion and stayed with them there for about 10 days. And then coming back I did much the same thing. I

39:30 think I flew to Finchhafen or I might have flown direct to Lae coming home and then went across, picked the flying boat up and came back again. But it was interesting stuff to have to travel that length because they wouldn't send a special plane over with me, I had to catch routine flights you know that were moving between the various areas and that's how got me to the north side.

Tape 4

00:30 **Geoff, you've just been telling us about some of your responsibilities as a liaison officer. I wonder if you can give us some details specifically about what you were required to do and how you went about it?**

Right. I was a fairly free agent in the role of a liaison officer. It was up to me to decide where I wanted to move and when unless the divisional commander

01:00 or his staff required some particular information about what was going on in a battalion. For a start there is a meeting every day of the senior staff and the junior staff on a headquarters. The liaison officer

was privy to be with the senior as well as the junior staff officers at those meetings.

01:30 **For the benefit of people who aren't familiar with**

Army procedure?

Army and structure. When you talk about junior and senior officers, what ranks are you talking about?

Well the command group and senior officers would comprise the G1, GSO1, that's the general staff officer Number 1, and the QMG, the gentleman responsible for administration

02:00 and quartering, and the general and his general's staff officer and they would have their meeting and then those who were required for the junior staff officers, that's the majors, the G2s and the AQMG, assistant quartermasters generals and the information that was

02:30 divulged at the senior staff meeting would then be relayed to the officers for action. I suppose in an odd sort of the way it was the brains working out the thoughts and the juniors would be the people who carried out the thoughts. My role was to attend both of those meetings and I would be given roles by the G1 normally.

03:00 G meaning operations. So that the gentleman in charge of the operations in the battalion area was going to tell us what was going on, what movements there had been, what action had taken place, and then say I would like you to go up the east coast and see such and such a Battalion, see how they're getting on, check on the morale and that sort of thing. And away I would go. I would make my own arrangements for transport and move off on whatever task

03:30 I had been allocated. And whilst up there I would endeavour to assess other things that were going on in the battalion, how the troops were reacting to the role that they carrying out at that time, and then I would come back and see the G1 and say look, I think they want a bit of a rest or they're doing well, no worries and they're not striking much trouble, they can continue on in their present time for a while without worrying about

04:00 change over and so on. Just snippets of information, which may be helpful to the senior Divisional staff to make changes.

I can imagine that at the battalion level people would be keen to milk you for information, to say have you heard, what's going on?

Yes I suppose you were a carrier pigeon both ways, forward and back. They were certainly interested and

04:30 usually unless there was a pending operation which they were not allowed perhaps to know about for security reasons until the last moment, information coming forward from division headquarters would always involve going to the intelligence section and talking with the intelligence officer and telling him what was going on on other fronts or in other areas. So one was an information bureau

05:00 you knew all the things that were happening in and around the division and perhaps further back. They had liaison officers who's responsibility was to come forward from other formations outside the division, that wasn't my role, my role was within the division.

Were your loyalties ever tested? For instance you might

05:30 **know something about people at battalion that they might not want to be known up above, or you might know something about division that you're not allowed to divulge but a mate lower down might say, c'mon, let us know?**

I can't recall any incident like that. I will mention this, Martin, because I think it's interesting, the majority of the officers in my battalion, 14/32nd Battalion, evolved from

06:00 the Lord Summers' Camp organization. Now keeping in mind that Lord Summers' Camp had a particular ethos of friendship and mateship and bringing the best out of you and all those things that are desirable in young men, there was a tendency for that to be relayed into the activities of the battalion. And my reaction when I went to other Battalions was there was never the same feeling of

06:30 camaraderie in some of those battalions as there was in my own battalion. You could feel it in the mess you know, the mess was a happy place in the 14/32nd Battalion, if there was a mess. Normally there was, we spent most of our time out in the field so we were operating in company and battalion headquarter messes. But some of the battalions that were back in the divisional area and I visited them all, they didn't have the same

07:00 sort of spirit that our fellows had, I didn't think they did, perhaps it was just me. I found I bumped into a lot of my cobbers in other battalions too, people I'd played sport against and with whom I'd gone to school and things of that nature so I managed to become one of the family of each of the battalions fairly quickly. But no, most

07:30 people in those situations are endeavouring to their best and they're all keen to be the best battalion so they train hard and do all the things they should do. I didn't strike any bummers as I went around.

We've spoken to people who

08:00 **6th div and 9th div people who talk about General Blamey very affectionately, their time in the Middle East, they've got the highest of opinions of him and we've spoken to people who were in New Guinea in the early months of the campaign who have a contrary opinion, they say you know why, he never came up in those early**

08:30 **blah, blah blah. We've talked about this paradox for command to be seen but of course to be safe. Did you have much to do with General Blamey during the war?**

Not personally I didn't. Actually, you've almost answered the question that you've just asked me in the form you asked the question. Blamey had a big reputation, he was

09:00 the troops in the Middle East, from what I can gather, have a great opinion of him. He made one fatal mistake when the New Guinea campaign occurred, he became terribly critical of the withdrawal on the Kokoda Track. And on a large parade he told them in no uncertain terms it wasn't the practice of the Australian to retreat, I think he used

09:30 the words that rabbits run from people with guns but the Australian Army doesn't, words along those lines. And that bought him, he was heavily criticised and particularly by members of the forces in later times. Phil Rhoden who was a mate of mine in the 2/14th Battalion, commanded the battalion, and

10:00 I know he didn't talk much about it but I know that he and his officers were very, very unhappy and they spent to the latter part of their lives trying to alter the opinion that might have been created by Blamey's statements. It was very sad. I only on one occasion got within kicking distance of General Blamey. He went to New Britain

10:30 and I've got a photo somewhere in my files, I'm not quite sure where it is, and my commanding officer and the brigade commander are marching through the mud with General Blamey, but I wasn't there at the time. I think, it was in the latter part of the war, and I think he went up when I was liaison officer on div [division] and I might have been on the other side of the island or something. But I didn't get to talk to him so I never actually met him in person.

11:00 **And not after the war either? I'm just interested in your role in the army afterwards?**

No. I think I saw him on a parade on one occasion but I never spoke to him, never had that pleasure or honour. I mean look, it's easy to be critical of these fellows, he did a magnificent job when you consider the role he had but sometimes they make

11:30 a slip in speech or action that draws criticism and General Blamey did on that occasion.

Do you think perhaps it was said for the benefit of the Americans as much as the Australians?

That wouldn't be a question I'd like to answer because there had been a lot of discussion between Blamey and Douglas MacArthur

12:00 about the role of the Australians in the islands. And General MacArthur I think it's fair to say was jealous of the way the Australians conducted themselves in the battles that they took part in. And so he wanted the major thrusts towards the end to come from American troops so that he could claim the accolades for their success. And that's why this whole situation of the

12:30 **We were just talking about MacArthur's –**

Yes, I think that General MacArthur was keen that the accolades for the finish of the Pacific war would go to the Americans and so Blamey was talked into allowing Australian troops to clean up the islands I've mentioned previously as their part in the wind up campaigns.

13:00 **You've mentioned that subsequently people have written about those campaigns as perhaps unnecessary. Again we hear two versions of this discourse between Blamey and MacArthur. One that these campaigns were a soft Blamey, that you know so that Australians could be**

13:30 **involved. Other arguments which say Blamey desperately wanted to have the Australians involved and MacArthur wasn't interested in these campaigns, said they weren't necessary. I don't know.**

I think it's a combination of the two from where I see it actually Martin. I think that MacArthur wanted the accolades and Blamey wanted

14:00 to be involved. And so after discussion Blamey agreed to MacArthur's wishes that we do the assaults on those three islands, Bougainville, Borneo and New Britain.

A lot of that, in hindsight of course, if there hadn't been a bomb then those campaigns would have been a lot more important I suppose?

Yes. Yes, well the bomb of course

14:30 bought it to a sudden halt. But the Coral Sea Battle was probably the turning point, major turning point in the war because the Japs who were destined to land on New Guinea and push over to Australia were soundly beaten and many thousands of troops were lost in the Coral Sea Battle. I think that put a different slant on the whole

15:00 of the war from that time on. Those who had landed didn't get the supplies they needed nor did they get the reinforcements, and some of them were badly knocked about. Then the might of the American Airforce was turned on places like Rabaul and those troops were almost bombed out of existence. Life must have been a misery for them. A lot of those bomb raids were carried out from Oro

15:30 Bay that I mentioned earlier. They used to send out huge fleets of aircraft to carry out bombings on the islands that were occupied by the Japs.

Were you privy to the debates in at divisional HQ? When you say you assiminate information, were you

16:00 **privy to debates at a higher level?**

I think that a simple answer to that one is no. My information or input would be asked if information was required about something that I'd possibly had the opportunity of picking up or seeing. But when you use the word privy to the decision making

16:30 process that depended solely or was solely the responsibility of the Divisional Commander and as relayed through his G1. My input to saying where somebody went or whatever would be negligible.

You had a variety of roles and responsibilities

17:00 **in New Guinea, which ones did you enjoy the most?**

I suppose that's a fairly easy question for me to answer because whatever we did I was part of and I never had the misfortune of having to have people shoot at me continuously.

17:30 Now that makes a difference. Life, although you never know what's coming next and there's constantly in the back of your mind when you're at a war as to what role you'll be playing or where you'll be playing it, if you're not constantly under threat life goes on in a fairly normal manner. And my life throughout the war I enjoyed it, I

18:00 was planning all the time to move troops and involved in passing on the information that was given to me by my commanding officer and later by me G1 from divisional headquarters point of view, and then I just went about my duties. There's a certain sense of excitement of course about any army job, and sometimes I smile when people

18:30 say look he's only 30, you can't get him to do that job. In various walks of life, Lord Summers' Camp as we've spoken about you know, do we make a 30 year old fellow in charge of a department and you sometimes tend to say he hasn't the experience or some such thing. When I was 19 I was commanding a company of 120 troops and responsible for their eating, their behaviour, their training and their everything.

19:00 It's amazing when you give young people responsibilities what they can produce. I think it's becoming more obvious every year, you find that in business younger executives are being appointed. Sometimes they make a mess of things but generally speaking they're just as successful as the older blokes who themselves sometimes make dreadful blues.

19:30 **Can we talk a bit more about the end of campaign of New Britain. How was that brought to an end?**

Right. After we'd captured Sugi Mountain, 14/32nd Battalion, 19th Battalion were brought in to Tol Plantation and the artillery support was moved up to Tol Plantation and situation stabilised very quickly because the Japs didn't want to be

20:00 part of any more. They weren't equipped to handle it and although they had bodies they didn't have anything from which to fight, their ammunition was almost out and they started to pull back towards Rabaul. The 6th Brigade were relieved by 13 Brigade I think it was. They came forward and took over the position on the mountain

20:30 and in the plantation and at the river crossing which I'd mentioned they'd moved over and established a bridge head. And the 6th Brigade were then withdrawn to Jacquinot Bay. The 13 Brigade maintained their position and didn't push forward at all after the capture of Sugi Mountain. The next step in that battle from the divisional point of view was

21:00 that Robbie Robertson who was the divisional commander, major general can't think of his proper name, Robbie was his nickname, Robbie Robertson, was sailed up on a vessel and was met by the Commander of the Japanese forces on Rabaul and the surrender was signed. Reverting to our own people, I was

21:30 detached from divisional headquarters to brigade headquarters to move 6th Brigade on their way back to Melbourne. I did the staff work required to get them on board a vessel, I can't remember which vessel they came down on. But they left just before the end of the war, would've been about July, late July 1945. They came back

22:00 to the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland and then they were returned to Melbourne where they were demobbed and returned to civilian life. My role was a little bit different. I remained with divisional headquarters which changed from 5 Div to 11 Div. Many of the officers remained in tact and on about the middle of August

22:30 just before the war ended, I was sent on a ship, not with the remainder of the Divisional Headquarters. Some of them had gone before me and had returned to the Atherton Tableland. I was made OC of a ship, it was an Indian vessel with a Dutch name. It was called Van Outhoorn.

23:00 I started my problems as I arrived at the wharf because the vessel had on board in the hold a small flock of sheep and other animals, goats and all sorts of things, which were to share the sleeping quarters with the troops who were moving back. And instantaneously I had a rebellion on my hands because the troops refused to sleep with the animals. But they were all keen

23:30 to get home. And I can't remember what compromise we reached, I think they slept on deck but the sheep remained in toto. The sheep were on there to give the ship fresh supplies, they didn't carry it in refrigerators, they carried it on the hoof. And I must confess, it was a most interesting trip because the vessel was tiny by comparison to the other vessels I'd sailed on. Even the Taroona

24:00 was a giant liner compared to this little Indian vessel. Can't tell you how many troops were on it. But my cabin was in the front of the vessel and it was in the form of a room about half the size of this room and it was completed furnished with beautiful rosewood, solid wood panels and furnishings and it was a very luxurious

24:30 suite with a big window in the front looking out to the bow of the vessel and watching the oncoming spray. I had a very enjoyable, I think I was 6 days on it coming south and I was look after like a Greek god and fed like a fighting cock. So my trip home during which time the war finished incidentally, the surrender was accepted from the Japanese, and I arrived back in Australia with the war over.

25:00 **Did you know on the voyage back?**

Yes I did know. We got message through that the war was over. When I got back I reported to my headquarters on the Atherton Tablelands, was immediately granted leave and went home, had my leave. When I completed leave, or during my leave, I had learnt that a fellow officer by the name of Major Piddelcome had

25:30 he hadn't gone away with us, he'd been left behind, and in the meantime he'd been appointed as the DAAG, that's the deputy assistant adjutant general of Vic L of C [Line of Communication] personnel in brackets. That meant it was his responsibility to post the officers of the Australian Army. And

26:00 so I went in to see him and he greeted me like a long lost brother and then said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "Well what have you got to offer?" He said, "Well do you want to go back to your Divisional Headquarters?" I said, "Well I can't really see much point in that, they're going to be disbanded any moment from now and I'm going to be like a ship without a rudder so I might just as well fill in time down here if you've got a job for me."

26:30 So he said, "Yes I have, I'd like you to become the DAAG Administration Headquarters Vic L of C." I said, "What would that entail?" He said, "You'd be responsible for 101 odd jobs that are going to come up between now and total demobilisation and you'll be responsible for planning those odd jobs."

27:00 So I took that job on and remained in Melbourne. It was a very interesting job, as he said I had all sorts of odd jobs to do.

What was your rank at this stage?

I was still a temporary major. In fact my rank wasn't confirmed until after the war when I rejoined the Citizen Military Forces.

27:30 I helped form the victory contingent. After the war there were a number of people who volunteered because remembering the fellows being away for about 5 or 6 or 7 years, it wasn't easy for them to get away from their jobs to go off on a victory contingent and each country provided a contingent to appear and march down The Strand I think it was in London before the Queen to

28:00 celebrate the end of the war. I actually applied for a job on the victory contingent and I missed out by one. At that stage I'd never been overseas other than to New Guinea and New Britain so I thought it would be a good opportunity. Anyway, I was totally disappointed because I hadn't seen much of my wife at that stage and it wasn't very fair really for me to be running off on a victory contingent because

28:30 it was going to encompass London and then across to America and back home again and I think there was about 3 months involved. And I missed out by one as I say so I wasn't terribly sad about that. Then I got a much bigger job. I was involved very heavily in the repatriation of prisoners of war of the Japanese

so it was a matter of I had nothing to do with their

29:00 return from overseas but I had a lot to do with their arrival, their medical examination, their demobbing and things of that nature, which was a very interesting job. Because as you know, most of them came home in a very poor state of health and lots of them required hospitalisation. It had its traumatic moments, not that I was closely

29:30 involved, but even at a distance it was sad to see these fellows on news reports arriving back skin and bone and being shot out to Heidelberg and various places like that for check up and rehabilitation. So I remained in that capacity until 1947 and early in 1947 the army reckoned they'd had enough of me and I think by that time I'd had enough of the army come to think of it.

30:00 And so I returned, I was discharged and returned to civilian life in the bank.

Tape 5

00:30 **Geoff, you were going to tell us something about Sandover?**

Yes, it was an interesting little tale on one of my adventures forward. I called in Brigade Headquarters and Ray Sandover, the brigadier, was about to move forward to the 19th Battalion which was positioned on the river about which I spoke earlier, the river we had to cross to get to Tol

01:00 Plantation. He was about to move up to that battalion. I suppose we were a kilometre and a half or 2 kilometres from the actual 19th Battalion Headquarters and we had to cross a river on which one of our companies was in charge of the crossing area, you had to cross by lakatoi. It was a river that was fairly substantially supplied

01:30 with crocodiles and it had to be kept clear so that anybody moving forward could get across without fear of attack by the enemy. And I remember Ray saying, "Swannie, I'm going up to 19th Battalion, would you like to join me?" He was one of your countrymen as I mentioned a moment ago, he was English, very upper class English voice.

02:00 So I said, "Yes, I'd love to go with you, Sir." Much to my dismay we had a section of about five infantrymen, he put on his red cap to go forward and I thought you know, you can do silly things but sometimes you go over the top with this degree of silliness. Anyway, there was not much one could say but go along. So we walked forward, we crossed this river

02:30 that was held by C Company and went forward to 19th Battalion. He was obviously a very brave man because we were shelled whilst we were at 19th Battalion and I immediately stepped very quickly into a slit trench, he never moved, sort of stood there and went on talking. When we turned around to come back he

03:00 was talking and he was speaking in this high pitched English voice that you could've heard for about half a kilometre away with his red hat on here we were wandering along this little jungle trail. And I kept saying to myself I wish to goodness he'd stop talking. Anyway, we got back to C Company on the river and within 3 minutes of us having arrived at C Company and crossed the river the Japs attacked C

03:30 Company, killed 2 men and we must have walked right through the middle of them, honestly. It was extraordinary to me that we didn't shot up. But that was the sort of fellow he was, he just seemed to me to have no fear to the extent of lacking common sense.

Would it have been absolutely inappropriate for you to ask him about whether it such a good idea to wear a red cap?

04:00 I felt it would have been at the time. I don't think I'd have questioned his wish or what have you to wear a red cap but I just felt it was a bit foolhardy when we knew there were Japs in the area and we were walking along with these 4 or 5 fellows tagging a couple in front and a couple behind. But we must have walked within I'd think feet of where the enemy were parked preparing to

04:30 do their attack on C Company.

He was obviously blessed?

Well he must have been because he went through the Middle East and then came to us when we were in I think the west, command of 6th Brigade, and then went right through the islands. And he arrived home unscathed. He's since died unfortunately.

I wanted to also ask

05:00 **you about your marriage because we skipped over that really. You'd gone**

Yes we did a bit actually because I've kept talking about my wife in the later part of the interview. I was actually married when I was in the advance party when we were returning from Western Australia to Melbourne prior to going north for jungle training. I came forward with the advance party and spent

05:30 a fortnight on recreation leave, during which time Joan and I were married. That was in 1943, January 1943. I then went back to Mangalor and prepared the camp at Mangalor with a few others who had been given leave. And we then awaited the arrival of the remainder of the battalion. They then

06:00 had their leave and we reassembled at Mangalor and off we went north.

So how long did you have after you were married before you went away again?

I think we were there for about 3 weeks, not much more, bit less than a month. Can't remember the actual date we took off. I might have been there a month between the arrival of the first part of the unit and the departure of the last part, I'd

06:30 have been about a month.

Was it usually for people to marry during the war or did they usually wait until after the war? What was your

Interesting question. It was a matter of preference. We'd decided before the war that we wouldn't get married until the war was over but then time was dragging on, it was 3 or 4 years before that point in time and we were off to have another go

07:00 in the islands and it might have been another couple of years and it seemed an awfully long time. We both felt that we'd probably be better married. We didn't, in the initial stages, particularly want to be married in case we had a nipper or some such thing and I didn't particularly want to leave Joan a war widow if something happened to me so my common sense told me we'd be better if waited.

07:30 However, we decided that we should be married half way through and that was an appropriate time.

At the time was Joan living with her parents or did she set up a home for the two of you?

No, she lived with my parents, my mother for a time and then she thought it appropriate that she got somewhere of her own and she went to live at a place called Airlie

08:00 in St Kilda Road, 452 St Kilda Road, Melbourne. There was a gentleman running that place, his wife was actually running it, he was a detective in the police force and it seemed a good place for her to be because he was a very protective fellow.

And what did Joan do during the war? What was she involved with?

During the war, that's an interesting one. Her actual employment was with

08:30 armoured fighting vehicles. She was in a clerical capacity doing things like pay and general administration at the headquarters of armoured fighting vehicles. It was interesting too in this place called Airlie, which she stayed, there were some very interesting characters living there at the time she was there. One of whom was Roden Cutler, VC, who later became

09:00 Governor of New South Wales. He was a terrific fellow, I only spoke to him a couple of times but she grew to know him quite well.

Were there people who were attached to the Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road or were – ?

No, there were a lot of people from the services though. I never met most of them but there were American fellows who worked in headquarters just across the road

09:30 there were a couple of Airmen that shared a room there whilst Joan was there, she mentioned, I couldn't tell you their names were. And there were civilians there too. So it was quite a big place.

At that time, your responsibilities changed obviously quite dramatically. You went back to New Guinea as

10:00 **or to the islands as a married man. Did that make any difference to you personally in the way you conducted yourself, because you'd obviously been pretty keen on getting up into the action.**

I don't think it made any difference in me. I just went about my business the same way. I didn't go back incidentally, I was on the way over from the west and that was my first trip up to the island but it didn't

10:30 **That was your first time?**

First trip to the islands after I was married. It made no difference. I just, as I say, went about my business. We were all, it looks or feels strange now to look back and think what on earth we did all the time we were away. It's commonly said that 90% of the time in war is spent in training

11:00 or resting and 10% in battle, even with units that are in battle pretty often. So there is a lot of free time that you've got to fill. Training of course takes up a considerable part. Fitness takes up a considerable part. Troops will go off route marching at the drop of a head. I used to take my troops, when I had support company, I'd take them away on a 20 odd mile route march, and

11:30 about 2 kilometres from camp I'd say the last man home is lousy and I'd start running. And you know they straggled in a bit and it looked a bit untidy but then we'd strip off and play basketball for an hour after that you know. Quite staggering the strength of man when he's put to the test. I remember after the war it always amazed me if you were out in the field for 2 or 3 days and you'd walk 50 ks or 60 ks or what

12:00 ever it was in that time and you came back and all the troops looked as though they couldn't lift one foot after the other. Five minutes after they went to their tents, I'm talking post war now, five minutes after they went to their tents and somebody dragged out a football they'd all be out trying to get a kick. Quite strange.

There a couple of things I wanted to ask you about because obviously you were very involved with the

12:30 **administrative side of things. We've heard mention often of something that people refer to as the Bible, and I know there are initials, I think it's Australian Military Regulations and something –**

AMR and O, Australian Military Regulations and Orders.

Well I've heard a lot about it but I don't really know what it is.

Well it is the bible. It's actually the set of laws that govern behaviour in the army.

13:00 It covers everything, you know from doing something that you shouldn't do to straight out disobeying an order and everything in between. It's a great reference manual but most of it, strangely, is common sense. It does lay down from time to time the penalties which are,

13:30 it is possible for various levels of commanders to administer. In other words a company commander has total power, it might be in those days, fined 5 pounds and confined to barracks for 21 days or something like that where as the CO's power might be

14:00 3 months jail and 100 pound fined. It just differentiates between the 2, and in between.

And with respect to discipline, what's the relationship between the military police and the commanding officer? How does that work?

The military police within a unit are known as the provo.

14:30 The military police unit which is established outside the battalions and other units is a force of trained police officers virtually in military uniform who are responsible for the general behaviour of troops when on leave. In other words they're a police force that keeps an eye on the discipline and the behaviour

15:00 of the various soldiers. The provo within the battalion are there mainly for purposes of traffic control, when the units moving by convoy most of them are on motorbikes and they ride alongside and clear the crossroads before the traffic comes through, gives them free access, they escort people who are in trouble within the battalion family and do jobs of that nature.

15:30 **Would there just be the one within a unit?**

I think we had a section of 6 people, a sergeant, a couple of corporals and a couple of privates, 5 or 6 members in the provo section.

And would they be people that were designated as provos by the command? Would they be designated or have they been specially trained?

No they were not specially trained, they were just soldiers who

16:00 volunteered or were appointed or posted to that role. They had no real training although there were schools being run constantly for specialists of that type and each one in turn or in pairs would be sent off to those schools so that they understood their role in the scheme of things.

I'd be interested in your

16:30 **comments on dishonesty within the forces because we've heard a lot of stories about because of the shortage of supplies, smuggling and people doing deals and making money in various contexts. Particularly where there is such a shortage of you know essential items or food, is it very difficult**

17:00 **because the logistics are so complex aren't they of keeping track of all these things?**

They are and we didn't have a great problem, I don't know whether we were luck on the whole or whether our officers were pretty good. We had minor crimes, for example when we were at Kuranda in north Queensland a 9-gallon keg of beer was stolen from outside the canteen.

17:30 And the CO got very scruffy about it and said if that barrel isn't returned within 24 hours, I've forgotten

what the threat that he made was, there'd be no further leave granted until such time as it is. It was discovered that one of the platoons had nicked the beer and gone off and had a party and it got so bad that

18:00 the other troops were complaining about not being able to go on leave because no body had owned up. And then one of the officers came forward and said I didn't steal it but I knew it had been stolen and where it was. He was given a nice old dressing down and he was not promoted further, he remained a lieutenant for the whole of the war. Whether he'd been a captain in the long term or not I can't say but he certainly

18:30 didn't do his cause any good by withholding that information. I suppose petty theft occurred, in fact it occurred more between other sub units or units than within the units. So my way of thinking soldiers wouldn't pinch stuff that belonged to their own teammates

19:00 but it almost became an art form to get something for nothing by nicking it from some other unit or that sort of thing. So that was something you did have to watch. In fact, one of our platoons became known as the hydraulics because they could lift anything. But generally I don't think we ever got

19:30 it to the stage or it never occurred to the stage where it was of a concern. They were pretty simple things that people nicked. Swapping was a great thing in our battalion. The quartermaster I mentioned to you who's name was Leo Slutzkin, a gentleman of Jewish persuasion and a very keen

20:00 bargainer and he'd come to me and say do you think I could borrow a couple of fellows from the intelligence section for a week? And I'd say what on earth do you want a couple of people for a week for? And he'd say well, if I can get 2 fellows to make a sketch map of the area of the field ambulance, the field ambulance will do such and such for so and so and so and so will do such and such

20:30 for someone else and we'll get this out of it. He was constantly doing this. We were swapping Americans. He loved swapping bully beef to the Americans and he seemed to get anything for it, you know, jungle boots, all sorts of things we should never have had by swapping various items of equipment with which we were issued. So that was a bit of problem, I had to keep my eye on him to make sure he wasn't going over the fence.

21:00 **What about souveniring from the enemy once they were vanquished?**

I don't think our fellows were as bad at souveniring as the Americans. The Americans would pay anything for anything and the troops became a bit tricky in that regard, you know, they'd get an old shell case a scratch the name of a

21:30 Buna or Gona or something on it and then sell it for about 50 times what it could ever had been worth. And the Americans had no hesitation, they just loved souvenirs. We had a fellow by the name of Lee, what was his Christian name, Sergeant Pat Lee, I think, he was a cartoonist for an Adelaide

22:00 paper and in fact I've, no I haven't, I've got a cutting in that stuff I looked at to show you afterwards, his watercolour of our doctor which was an excellent watercolour, but he used to do that in his spare time for the Yanks and he'd paint the head of an American and do it very, very well

22:30 and behind it he'd put a spitfire diving or a something diving, a lightning was their main airforce plane when we were in the islands. Beautiful looking aircraft and he'd drawn one of these lightnings at the back of the head and they'd pay an enormous amount of money for them. But we, the kids made little ornaments out of

23:00 cases from old shells and that sort of thing, cut them down short and weld a little cigarette scoop on the side and make ashtrays. We discouraged it because troops very often got hurt fiddling with ammunition that they shouldn't be playing with. They'd pick up a shell find it somewhere and tap the head of it on a rock

23:30 or something to loosen it so they could pull it off and empty the contents out. I think at one stage we had a fellow had a couple of hands removed by doing that which was very unfortunate.

What about taking things from the bodies of Japanese soldiers? Did you come across that much?

I know it happened but I'm not aware of it

24:00 first hand, I wasn't near enough to the Japanese that were just killed to, and really I think it's honest to say that when somebody's engaged in shooting somebody else and somebody else is likely to shoot back again, you're mind's on other things really, more interested in your own life that you are on gaining a watch or a whatever

24:30 as a souvenir or for value.

What was your view of the Japanese as a soldier?

Well, I don't think there's any doubt that they were extraordinarily competent, particularly as they came down the Malay Peninsula. They were well trained and although I didn't have first knowledge of it I kept

pretty closely in touch with their operation. They created a new type of warfare.

25:00 It was normal in the jungle to push forward until you struck resistance and then to encircle that resistance and try and get in behind it and ekk it out. When the Japanese started to come down the Malay Peninsula, they took great bites in their encirclement, they didn't go until they touched somebody, they'd ascertain where they were by reconnaissance or observation and then they'd got deep behind them

25:30 and establish a force behind and then come back on to them. Cut them off, cut their supplies, attack them from the rear which was most disconcerting. And they were extraordinarily good at it. The same applied I think on the Kokoda Track, although the countryside, the terrain, didn't lend itself so much to the encirclement because of the height and the steepness of the mountain

26:00 ranges in which they were operating. But there's no doubt they were very good. And they weren't all small. The fellows I saw dead on Sugi Ridge would have been 6 feet tall and weighed 15, 16 stone. They were guard troops, I've forgotten what they called them exactly, but they were the elite troops and they were big boys.

What had you been told to expect

26:30 **then of the Japanese?**

I think generally speaking one was warned not to take them lightly because they were a: courageous and they were a little different to Australians where Australians would endeavour to lay low as they approached a position the tendency of the Japanese was to drag out swords and scream out "Banzai!" ['hooray!'] and rush straight at you. And that was

27:00 pretty unnerving. And they struck a lot of that on the Kokoda Track. I'm not sure what happened elsewhere but I'm pretty sure the same sort of Japanese endeavoured was carried out everywhere. They were not frightened to die in fact on the contrary they would die rather than be captured, they hated surrender, it wasn't acceptable.

And yet once they did surrender

27:30 Well they surrendered en masse and then the stigma associated with that sort of surrender was reduced.

Did you take any prisoners while you were there?

The Battalion took prisoners, yes. I didn't have to interrogate any prisoners. In fact, I can't remember quite where they took prisoners. We took a few prisoners

28:00 and we killed a few in our patrol activities north of Buna. There were some prisoners taken when we attacked Sugi Mountain but of course I wasn't with the battalion at that stage so I had nothing to do with them. I knew they were returned to Division for interrogation but didn't become my lot to have anything to do with them. It would not have been any good because I can't speak English let alone Japanese

28:30 **With the intelligence section that moved with the troops, were they particularly well trained or how were they selected, the criteria to work in intelligence at that time?**

Well, they were always hand picked, let me say that for a start. They

29:00 were intelligent young men. Our intelligence section was commanded by a lieutenant by the name Alan Callander and he was a real brain of a fellow, he finished up in charge of the loans department of the Commonwealth Bank after the war. So he was a pretty knowledgeable sort of a character. And he was immensely conscientious and the would train them himself

29:30 to the enth degree. But like the provo there were a lot of intelligence schools and in turn all of these fellows were sent off to gain formal training at these intelligence schools. It was unusual training. It included interrogating prisoners of war and things of that nature but in the main it related to guiding companies into

30:00 a position, mapping areas, the layout of enemy positions and that sort of thing and feeding it back to the battalion commander and just generally being familiar with all that was going around the battalion, in other words the location of our friendly forces and the general positions of our own companies and that sort of thing.

In your

30:30 **role as liaison officer would you have been involved in transmitting information between various groups?**

Mainly verbal information. Yes, I'd be told some particular situation or some particular outline plan and that information I would go forward and discuss with the commanding officer and then come back and report the reaction of the CO to whatever it was or as appropriate. And

31:00 yes, I don't think I wrote very much at all whilst I was at 5 Div. I would have written an occasional report, but nothing in the way of orders, just information, a report on a trip forward or something like that which I would hand in to the G Staff.

When you were performing that role you must have been in a particularly privileged position to get

31:30 **an overview of what was happening in a number of different areas, intelligence, supplies, the front line. It seems to me unusual, most of the people we talk to have got like a very narrow view of what's going on around them.**

Right.

Were you able to use that overview that you had? Were you able to

32:00 **feed that back to those who were making decisions about tactics and strategy?**

Yes. Everything that I noted of interest and in the operations that we took part in going up the coast of New Britain on both the north and the south coast, although we were moving constantly, the unit positions were fairly static.

32:30 So it was a matter of when I went forward establishing where the headquarters was. And this information was pushed back of course through the intelligence sources. But when I came back I would give an overview of what the battalion was up to and how many troops they had forward and how many in reserve and what sort of patrolling they were doing or whether their patrols were in contact

33:00 or whether they'd lost touch with the enemy and so on. And all that information of course is helpful to a commander saying either push forward, keep them on the move or do this or do that. So certainly I had a wonderful appreciation of what was going on in the divisional area and I knew every unit and where it was and it is true that you become very isolated forward. You might know where the other battalions of the brigade are

33:30 but beyond that you wouldn't know where your supporting elements were, not to the same extent that I knew where the artillery was, whether there was any armour in the area where your supply was coming from and what sort of establishment it was. That was all part being useful as a liaison officer. So it was an interesting job in spite of the fact that I didn't like not being with my troops.

34:00 **No one ever seems to tell them either it seems to strike me that people who are up at the front seem to know least in a sense about what's going on and no one really tells them. They're very badly informed often.**

Yes. That's an interesting observation. There's a tendency not to supply enough information to troops who are serving in the front line. It's a vital

34:30 importance for their own morale for them to know exactly what's happening on either flank and what people have run into and so on. That information is fed forwards but sometimes not far enough and sometimes not in enough detail. But it can be wonderfully reassuring for troops in the front line if they know what success is being, not only

35:00 on their own front or their sister's battalion's front, but in other areas of the war. As you could understand if we're not having much of a go in New Britain and Balikpapan is being overrun by Allied troops, it's very morale boosting for our troops to know that things are looking good elsewhere. Because a war isn't won in one battle zone, particularly when it comes to island

35:30 fighting, it's going on all around you.

And for that reason obviously, information and misinformation is something that must be very critical in that situation. Were you ever put in a position where you had to actually misinform people about the status?

No.

No?

No, and I would avoid misinforming anyone. I think that

36:00 news that's bad or is no news good news, in other words if things are that bad it's better to keep that information to yourself. But that is rarely the case, it's better to know that things are a bit iffy on another front than to take action on your front not knowing what's happening to your next

36:30 door.

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose [Japanese radio broadcaster in English aimed at demoralising the Allies]?

Yes I did.

Do you recall what she was saying at the time?

I suppose if I could use a parallel she wasn't unlike the fellow in Iraq who was giving the news of their version of the war.

Oh, Baghdad Bob.

Baghdad Bob. It's very similar to the way Tokyo Rose

37:00 was. I mean, we didn't take any notice of the things she said because they were so ludicrous they weren't worth listening to. She did it in such a sweet and syrupy manner it was hard to believe anyway. Yes, I heard her on a number of occasions, I wouldn't say a great number of occasions but I did hear her and as I say it was like

37:30 Iraqi Bob. What's his name?

Baghdad Bob.

Baghdad Bob.

He's a bit of a cult figure now apparently.

He is, yes.

He was so ludicrous. What Americans? He said as the tanks are coming up behind him.

Yes that's right. That was just farcical the way he was carrying on and saying they'd never take Baghdad and there are tanks firing at the palace from about 50 yards away. It's had its moment that sort of rubbish.

38:00 **I think it's interesting that you say you didn't take any notice of Tokyo Rose, that she didn't have anything sort of sensible to say because I think Lord Haw Haw in Europe, it was slightly different there, that he often, that his information often appears to be very accurate and so it was very unnerving for troops.**

There was a difference in the two. One was a straight out spy who was relaying information

38:30 be it correct or otherwise and they other one was just a propaganda merchant, so she was pouring out whatever sort of nonsense she wanted to, irrespective of how accurate it was and so on. So there was a very great difference in the two. I can't remember Tokyo Rose saying anything that really reflected her

39:00 knowledge of the war situation at all whereas the other gentleman knew pretty well what was going on and distorted it to suit circumstances, or used it rather than distorted it used it as a propaganda medium to make people uncertain of what their role was to be.

Tape 6

00:28 I think actually Tokyo Rose was smiled on by the troops, she was a joke as far as Australian troops were concerned, I don't think anybody took much notice of her patter at all. And its probably been deemed as of little use to have someone doing that for the same reason as your Baghdad Bob you know. Nobody took any notice of him. I would reckon that he was a mobile concert party

01:00 for most of the troops.

Now you can buy a t-shirt with Baghdad Bob printed on it apparently.

Is that right?

Yeah, big seller.

I often wondered, they haven't got him yet have they, did they pick him up?

I don't think they have, no.

I think he disappeared with his master and hasn't yet been located.

He's one of the pack of cards [playing cards issued to American troops with photos of the 55 most wanted Iraqis] isn't he?

Yes, that's right. Secret Seven or whatever they call themselves.

01:30 **If we can go now back to the post war situation. Perhaps you could tell me once you'd returned to Melbourne and you'd accepted a position, I can't remember the name of the position.**

DAAG Administration.

Thank you. Tell us some more about that.

Well, that was an intriguing year or so that I spent

02:00 doing those odd jobs like the victory contingent and the repatriation of prisoners of war from Japan. To be quite honest I find it difficult to think of anything in particular other than those two jobs that I did do, but I was doing things all the time in the way of liaising with hospitals and I was always very busy. In fact, I missed a bit of time

02:30 I think I mentioned to earlier that I got an appendicitis and then I got diphtheria and shot into Fairfield Hospital. I think although I didn't believe I was pretty I was run down come the end of my tour of duty overseas. I had really worked fairly hard at it. When I came back and did that job

03:00 at Vic L of C it was more or less a continuation of what I'd been doing overseas, it wasn't unlike the task I'd been carrying on at divisional headquarters. Early in 1947 as I mentioned, it came to an end because there were no such things as victory contingents and all the prisoners of war were back in civie street or in hospital still and the need

03:30 for a DAAG in that area ceased and so I again returned to my banking duties. The army virtually ceased at that time too. Units were written off the order of battle and the army generally was closed down.

04:00 They reformed the Citizen Military Forces in 1948. And because my old battalion was not on the order of battle and I felt there was a need to still be involved in the army, mainly because the Russians were being a little difficult to handle and nobody knew which way that situation was going to go and so I again assessed that if I was in and up to date

04:30 I'd be better off than if I had to rejoin as a private soldier and start again. So I went along to 6th Battalion, the Royal Melbourne Regiment. There were 3 battalions formed under 6th Brigade banner, not sure if it was 6th then, it might have been 4 because we had a couple of changes of name with the brigade headquarters. One was 5 Battalion, the Victorian Scottish Regiment, 6 Battalion, the Royal Melbourne Regiment and

05:00 58/32nd Battalion, which was the City of Footscray Regiment. I chose 6th Battalion because it was located in the heart of the city so it was convenient for me to get there rather than taking half a dozen trams or a motor vehicle out to Hawthorn which was the headquarters of 5 Battalion. The other one was out of the question. When I went along for interview by the CO,

05:30 gentleman by the name of Roy Gordon, DSO, he spoke with me for a while and then said, "Geoff, I'd like to have you as one of my officers but I have a number of very experienced company commanders who have been in action as company commanders and I'm forced to give them preference

06:00 to you because of their experience. But what I would like to do, in view of your experience as a LO [Liaison Officer], I would like you to become a member of my" – what did they call it, that's dreadful, it's just gone from my mind, his – "list of officers. And if I can, I will arrange you be seconded to

06:30 Headquarters 3rd Division as the LO, which occurred. And for about a year I used to go up to divisional headquarters, go out and see the units but I was doing nothing because there was nothing to carry forward from the divisional headquarters to the battalion and there was nothing to take back from the battalion to divisional headquarters. So I found that a bit frustrating.

How much time did you have to devote to those duties?

In those

07:00 days we were devoting about 1 day per week and a weekend perhaps every 3 or 4 weeks. When I went out as a divisional liaison officer to the battalions I walked around and watched them do their training and that was okay but they were all doing the same thing. They had new troops and they were teaching them how to fire a rifle or how to do minor tactics and battle drills

07:30 and things of that nature which wasn't terribly exciting from my point of view. And as I say very little to report back because they were all doing the same thing and doing it equally well as one another. So I went back to the CO and I said, "I'm quite happy to keep doing what I'm doing, but if you've got anything you'd like me to do I'd be happy to have a job." So he said, "Yes, I can use you

08:00 I'll have a word with divisional headquarters and see if you can remain with the battalion and carry out a job for them." So I became the training officer of 6th Battalion and I ran NCO classes and officer training in the field and all that sort of thing. And it got a lot more fun out of that because I had a definite job. And then

08:30 as prior to World War II we had had a C Company of 14th Battalion I thought well there are lots of young fellows in Lord Summers' Camp who might like to be soldiers in 6th Battalion. So I made the suggestion to CO that C Company of 6th Battalion become Powerhouse members. And he said that sounds a good idea. So I rapidly started recruiting the boys from Lord Summers' Camp.

09:00 And I think I got up to about 50 young fellows joined the company which was pretty good in those times because people immediately following a war weren't all that keen to start soldiering again, there were lots of things more interesting than soldiering to do. These fellows joined up and eventually they

became NCOs and quite a large number of them became officers. And so the eventual back bone of the officer strength of the 6th Battalion

09:30 was made up of members of Powerhouse again. So that was well conducted and executed idea. Then I became 2IC of the regiment and in about 1954, just by virtue of the fact that older majors got themselves into jobs that didn't allow them the time

10:00 as you got up in the listing of course the workload became heavier, it became perhaps 2 nights a week and a weekend every fortnight and that was pretty heavy on families, young families. So as I say, some of them gave notice and moved off to the their civilian jobs, one of our commanders was a fellow by the name of Bill Vines, a major who

10:30 became very, he became Sir Williams Vines, he was the chairman of the Wool Commission of Australia I think was its title, and became a very important gentleman around town. So obviously fellows like that couldn't be fiddling around with soldiering and he went off to do his allotted task in life. Others just got too wickety and decided that they were physically unfit and eventually as I say I became 2IC of the

11:00 Battalion to a fellow by the name of Frank Davies who was a former pre war 6th Battalion Officer. He lasted 3 years. The term of service for a CO in Citizen Military Forces post war was 3 years. That was all anybody got. You were appointed, you did your 3 years and then off you went to some other job or to retirement. I lasted 3 years and at the time

11:30 I was about to complete my 3 year I received notice that they were taking 6th Battalion off the order of battle, they were contemplating changing what they call the establishment from a tropical establishment which was the way we were formed as units for tropical warfare and they were about to follow the example

12:00 of the American establishments and form a pentropic division. Now pentropic division whereas a tropical establishment allowed for 3 Battalions of about 850 men all under a Brigade Headquarters the 3 Battalions and supporting troops, and then there were 3 Brigades to each division, in the pentropic division there were 5 battle groups

12:30 which comprised much larger battalions, about 1300 troops. They had a permanent allocation of an artillery battery, a squadron of tanks and their own medical supply, medical establishment. And the theory was that if a war was to take place and it was considered in the mind of the commander of the division

13:00 that 3 battle groups were required he had under his command and on his own headquarters what they called a taskforce, which was a brigadier and then the staff officers required to carry on a battle with 1, 2 or 3 battle groups.

Let me see if I understand this properly. So a battle group would have its own support

13:30 **units associated with it, supply and field ambulance and so on. But a battalion would never have had that degree**

Original battalion never had that degree of support.

So it was up at the next level?

On the tropical establishment if there was an operation to be carried out there were divisional artillery regiment and divisional armoured regiments and they would be allocated

14:00 to the battalion commander to use in that particular battle. With the pentropic you had your own battery of artillery and your own armoured squadron and if you were allocated for battle you knew you could depend on having those unless there was some specific reason to take them away. They actually remained with their own regiments, the armoured regiment and the artillery regiment, but they were permenantly

14:30 allocated to your battalion.

When that happened in that situation, would it mean that they would have training exercises together and that sort of thing?

Very often we had training exercises together, yes. I did a live firing exercise and the squadron of tanks I had were regulars, the battery of artillery I think came from 10th Field Regiment

15:00 one of the CMF regiments, and we did a very elaborate battle with live ammunition and I once remember one of the regular majors from the armoured squad came to me when I was doing a course up at Canungra at the jungle training school. He said, "That exercise was the best peacetime exercise that I've ever taken part in."

15:30 He said, "It was realistic without being stupid, it was a real experience to take part in it." Yeah, we used these people, they were allocated just for that exercise in a peacetime set up but the theory was that they were available to the battalion commander to use in an operation that he was nominated

16:00 to participate in.

So does the battalion commander then take precedents over the regimental command? Say if you've got the artillery coming to join with you in a particular battle formation does that mean that the battalion commander would run the whole show?

The battalion commander, although this was a pretty 50 / 50 thing, it wasn't

16:30 a case of saying you will send me, it was a case of saying I've got a job of work to do and I'd like to use a battery, perhaps you could spare me a second one, it would be handy. You know, that sort of conversation went on at that level.

Sort of diplomatic rather than just ordering them to come.

That's right, yes.

Cause I can imagine that it might set up difficulties?

Well I suppose it could but invariably when

17:00 a battle group went into battle it didn't go in on its own, it went under the command of the taskforce headquarters, the brigadier and his team of staff officers, and it would then be the taskforce commander to say to the artillery 6th Battalion will carry out this battle and you will allocate 2 batteries of artillery to assist them.

17:30 **What year did they introduce this new – ?**

1960 I ended up my command of 6th Battalion, June 1960. I was then posted to what they called commander and staff training unit as an instructor. In 1863 I received a phone call from General Roy

18:00 Gordon, who was my original commander in 6th Battalion, who said, "I want you to do a job of work for me." And I said well I don't think I can do anything to help you at the moment. He told me the job, he'd had an argument with the then CO of the battalion who was the 2nd Battalion Royal Victoria Regiment and it's about them I'm speaking now.

18:30 They were part of the new pentropic division and 2 Battalion had companies in Mildura, in Shepparton without posts at Eucha, at Ballarat and at Warrnambool and it was very difficult to get fellows who were capable of commanding those companies as independent

19:00 companies way out in the bush by themselves. And the CO of 2VR with whom Roy Gordon disagreed wanted to use regular officers, he wanted to import regular officers to take over the roles of OCs, officers commanding these various companies and Roy Gordon didn't agree with that. His idea was that the Citizen Military Forces was a citizen military force

19:30 situation and that the commanders as the troops had to be civilians. And so the answer that Roy had was that he'd get rid of the commander of 2RVR and he wanted Geoff Swan to take over because the battalion was not in good shape. They'd been into camp just prior to Roy Gordon ringing me and the gentleman who was in command of the regiment was a wonderful soldier, was an ex

20:00 member of 2/14th Battalion and I have the greatest admiration for him but he was a little bit off track when he came back. He'd seen so many of his mates die and the Kokoda Track meant so much to him that he used to treat everybody as though another war was going to start tomorrow. And that was an unrealistic outlook for somebody who was training

20:30 and trying to encourage young fellows to become soldiers and better themselves in the field. And so one thing that he did, the first weekend he got his troops into annual camp he force marched them for about 20 miles to see how they could take the rigours of being soldiers, and half the kids had never put an Army boot on in their life before and so they spent the next week in their cots with their feet up, with their feet bleeding

21:00 and blistered and so on. And he took something like 360 into camp and 200 of them never reappeared when they came back to Melbourne. They just didn't want to be a part of what had gone on. And so Roy Gordon said," I want you to take it over and whip it into shape." So I told him that I'd just taken on a new job in the advertising business and I knew nothing about

21:30 advertising and more to the point, I thought it was unfair that I was rushing around soldiering with my main source of income coming from a company that expected me to do a day's work for a day's pay. So Roy Gordon's attitude was he said, "Who's your boss?" And I said Colonel 'Kem' Kempsley, who was a First World War digger and a member of Melbourne Legacy.

22:00 So next thing I was summoned to appear in the Managing Director's office and he said, "I've got a new job for you." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "You're to take command of 2nd Battalion Royal Victoria Regiment." I said, "I don't think that's fair on you." He said, "I'm the one that's to decide that so I want you to report on Monday night to General Gordon, Divisional Headquarters, and he'll tell you what your role is."

22:30 So I was totally different to Ben Buckler, I was a very laid back soldier. I spent more time during the war getting soldiers out of trouble than getting them into it. I'd been bought up on this Powerhouse ethos of team work and everybody doing more than they were expected to be doing and relying on the goodwill of the people you were commanding to produced the

23:00 results. So having taken over 2RBR I took them to camp the following year, I took them to camp a second year and in 1965, I think I'm correct in saying that date, 1965 I had 650 troops on strength. And Mildura grew to such an extent

23:30 they had to make it an independent company. I've forgotten how many troops I had up there, somewhere ranging from 130s to 150s. And it was all a matter of making the troops feel they'd joined a new club and including the families in what was going on you know, involving the girls in going along to basketball matches and watching the husbands and boyfriends having a game basketball and then having a bit of social afterwards.

24:00 And the word got around in country towns and very quickly all those country sub units became in excess of establishment. So 2 years after I took over I had it at about 650 and then they decided that the pentropic division wasn't the answer to Australians at war and we switched back to the tropical establishment. I'd gained the rank of full Colonel

24:30 when I went to 2RBR so I couldn't go back to one of the old Battalions so I was a Colonel at a lose end and I was posted immediately back to commander and staff training unit as the CO of CSTU and I then started training officers up to the rank of

25:00 lieutenant colonel for their examinations and that was interesting. Further down the track in 1968 I think I'd had about 3 years of CSTU, I had a head on clash with the divisional commander and he decided I should be sidelined so my military career came to an end not by any

25:30 act on his part, just on age and the fact that they thought the young fellows should be produced and I was bypassed so I retired and went on the reserve of officers.

Australia was involved of course by this time in Vietnam.

Yes.

What was the relationship between the CMF and the regular

26:00 **Army at that stage in terms of – ?**

Well there wasn't a great relationship. The Vietnam force was a separate thing altogether. They were national servicemen as distinct from volunteers. We supplied quite a number of troops to the Vietnam and the Korean conflict. I had one officer killed in Korea, one of my 6th Battalion officers. A very fine young

26:30 fellow who volunteered to go over there. He didn't last more than a month and he was killed. I had another one who is currently the President of the Vietnam or the Korean Vietnam Veterans Association, fellow by the name of John Brownville who became a clergyman after getting out of the army. Lots of young troops and joined up,

27:00 they could volunteer to go to Vietnam.

So if they belonged to the CMF, they could transfer directly into the regular Army or what was, were they able to avoid national service in some way by being involved in the CMF? I've got a feeling –

I think so to be quite honest, Annie [interviewer]. They could say I would prefer to go into the army

27:30 in Vietnam than do national service. We certainly discharged them and they were re-enlisted into the Vietnam Army. So they were completely separate things, they had to go out of one and into the other.

Did they use the pentropic system that they had just for a few years in Vietnam? Was that

28:00 **one –**

No, the Americans were always on the pentropic division in Vietnam but I'm pretty sure when I say that the Australian troops operated on the original tropical establishment.

And do we still use that?

Yes we do, yes. It's very much the same as it was when I was in a battalion, hasn't changed much at all. Every now and then they change a platoon in support company when a

28:30 particular weapon comes out. Support company comprises the support weapons used within a Battalion framework, you've got mortars, anti tank or tank attack weapons as they call them now, assault pioneers and medium machine guns, they used to be Vickers in my day, I don't know what they're using now. But that has changed from time to time. The carriers were another platoon that came in for a time but when we went up into the

29:00 islands of course carriers couldn't rush through the jungle. Carriers being a personnel carrying vehicle with an armoured capability. So they were dropped off the establishment.

Was there a formal change of name from the CMF to Australian Reserve at some point? Do they still – ?

Well there was certainly a very definite change. Somebody wrote out from headquarters and said the CMF will henceforth be known as the Reserves

29:30 **When was that?**

Oh goodness, it was during my time in 6th Battalion from memory. I would say about 1950, 55, somewhere in that group.

And were there women in the CMF at that stage?

No, I never had a woman on my strength, ever I don't think. I may have had attachments

30:00 from the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] on battalion headquarters to do things like pay and that sort of stuff when I was commanding 6 Battalion. 6 Battalion was an interesting period in my life, it was a very fine battalion. As I mentioned all these company commanders had had a wealth of experience, the CO was a wonderful man, Roy Gordon, he had steely blue eyes that would look

30:30 right through you and he never raised his voice but he could cut you down to size in very quick time. And he was very fair but quite friendly in his approach to soldiering. The company commanders were all excellent and the 2IC of the battalion was a fellow by the name of Ian Malloch, he had a Military Cross. He had his leg badly injured and it was still weeping

31:00 when he died in about 19 – be around 1950, something like that shell cut half his leg off and it never actually healed. But he was an Officer who was very steeped in the English tradition of a mess. I found him very hard to handle initially because

31:30 every lieutenant in the battalion was referred to by his surname, except the senior subaltern and he was Mr Cranswick or whatever, and all the others were Smith, Johnson, do this, do that. And that was totally contrary to the way I believed life could be conducted and I wouldn't go along with it. I said to him, "Look don't expect me to call people by their surnames, it's

32:00 not within my nature to want to make people feel inferior by being ordered around and being addressed by their surname." So he went along with that, in fact we were great mates Ian Malloch and I but he, the mess was magnificently run because of all these quirky bits that he had introduced. And some of our mess

32:30 functions were absolutely superb. I remember at my farewell dinner at the closure of my term of office in 1960 we always had this but the mess was magnificent. We had a lot of four stemmed candelabra and the mess was set up in the form of a hollow square and on the top table we had a candelabra borrowed

33:00 from the mother-in-law of one of our officers, this fellow's name was Ivor Carolan and his wife was Betty Jones, and Betty's Mum was, I don't know what her Christian name was, but she was the Jones of Maples fame. Now Maples' probably a bit before your time. Maples were the biggest furniture store in Victoria, they had branches everywhere. They were immensely wealthy

33:30 in fact they owned Rippon Lea, in Hotham Street.

I do, yes.

I'll tell you an interesting little story there. But she had this magnificent home and amongst her treasures she had this 16 stemmed candelabra, it was huge thing, about that wide and it stood up about 3 feet off the table to the top of the candle holders.

34:00 And every time we got it we had to insurer it for $3000, 3000 pounds which was quite a lot of money in those days. And they set up in the mess, which was a beautiful mess in the depot in Victoria Street. Do you know the army depot just down from the city baths?

Yes I do.

Well that was our headquarters and the mess there was quite lovely. With the colours uncased and the candelabars

34:30 and we had everything, half our pay went in having the knives and forks and cutlery generally emblazoned with the or engraved with the Regimental Badge and likewise all the glasses. It was a magnificent sight. And that was a wonderful occasion that I'll never forget, we had all sorts of senior officers and we were affiliated with the City of Melbourne and we

35:00 supplied guards of honour to all major functions held in Town Hall and in return their counsellors were invited back to dinners and social functions in the battalion. So there was a lot of brass at that particular function and it was a memorable night, believe me. And with that stuff I looked at I noticed there was a program or the menu or something, I didn't look at it closely,

35:30 which interested me. It was a spectacular night. 6th Battalion was very fortunate; I had some amazing experiences with 6th Battalion. I suppose the first one was that we supplied a guard of honour for every dignitary who arrived in Melbourne and for whom there was a special function held, Bill Slim was one of them, Governor General,

36:00 Princess Alexandria, the Queen Mother, I don't think the Queen ever went to Town Hall, I can't remember. We had a very flash mess kit; it was probably the best mess kit in the army. It belonged to the Royal Fusiliers in London with whom we were affiliated, the City of London, Richmond. And whereas all other infantry

36:30 units wore a scarlet jacket with white facing and white cuffs ours was scarlet with black facings and black cuffs with a white piping around it and it was really a spectacular looking mess kit. So that when you had 30 or 40 officers lined up in this garb with Navy pants and red slashes down the side, it was quite spectacular. I had

37:00 the dubious honour, the honour, at the Royal Ball for Elizabeth the Queen Mother, being invited by the Queen Mother to dance with her. So, I had that experience which my soldiers and my friends gave me a rough time over, but it was quite interesting.

Was it a waltz?

37:30 No it was a foxtrot, and I'm a rotten dancer, believe me.

Did you have notice before hand?

No.

No?

It was a bit frightening. I was dancing with Joan and a tall gentleman came up and touched me on the shoulder and said, "Colonel Swan?" And I said yes. He said, "The Queen Mother has asked that you come up onto the stage

38:00 she wishes to dance with you." Poor Joanie was – he didn't say 'you come too'.

So what did Joan say?

Eventually he said, "You'd better come along." he was a bit impolite to Joanie. Anyway, she went up and knew a few people and started chattering and I took the Queen Mother and down we went and round the hall a couple of times. It was an amazing experience because half the hierarchy of Melbourne were battling to shake her by the hand you know.

38:30 And when this old commoner Geoffrey M Swan was asked if he'd dance with her it was a bit of shock to some of the systems of the hierarchy I tell you.

What did you chat about with the Queen Mother?

Well, I tried to remember protocol and it wasn't easy. I almost took her by the elbow as she went down a comparatively rickety set of stairs from the stage of the Melbourne Town Hall

39:00 down onto floor level. I just touched her under the elbow to reassure her, she had a great frock on you know, and I visualised if she tripped and went forward, what do I do then. Anyway, she got down safely and I remembered also that Royalty should start the conversation. So she just asked me questions about the army and what the Citizen Military Forces, she'd heard that that was what we were called,

39:30 and what was the name of our regiment and where did all the young officers who looked so magnificent on parade come from, and were they civilians or were they regular soldiers and how does that fit in with our territorials and, you know odd questions. Most of them army oriented. But she wasn't hard to talk to.

And how did the dance go? How was your dancing?

I thought I was magnificent.

40:00 No, I got by. She was quite light on her feet at that stage in the game. She was a tiny lady, I couldn't get over how small she was, she came up to about my navel, that was a little difficult to handle but apart from that, she didn't complain.

Tape 7

00:30 **Geoff, you've been off camera and telling Annie about an occasion when you were in camp up near Jamieson. Tell us about the experiences there.**

Yes well on the occasion I was relating a story to Annie we'd been out on an exercise, brigade exercise in the hills surrounding Jamieson, about 20 ks from our camp

01:00 site.

Do you have any idea roughly what year this is.

I would think that it would have been 64, 65, 64, perhaps 1964. We'd been out on this exercise and the troops were absolutely jiggered, we'd been on the move for the full 4 days or 5 days we were out and nobody was terribly sorry when it was all over and it was time to move home. So we loaded up the vehicles

01:30 that had been sent down to us by ASC, that's the army service corps who supplied bulk transport for the movement of troops, and we loaded ourselves up into these vehicles and set sail back towards our camp site. When we were about half way home and I suppose 10 ks out from the camp site a military policeman on a motorbike drove up to the front of my column, I was sitting in a jeep, the first vehicle in the convoy, and he said, "You're Colonel Swan aren't you?" I said, "Yes I am." He said, "Well I've got

02:00 some bad news for you, the smoke you can see in the distance is a huge bushfire which is bearing down on your camp site very, very quickly." He said, "We've managed to get a gentleman in a bulldozer out and he's cutting a break about a couple of hundred metres on the far side of your camp. What I want you to do if you will is to get your battalion back as quickly as you're able to and have them line that

02:30 fire break and see if you can stop it before it gets down into your camp." Ours was a tented camp and there was many, many hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of vehicles and equipment there and it looked like being a very nasty situation. Anyway, I said I'd do my best and we raced back and set ourselves up on the far side of the track and somewhere in my memory I'd

03:00 heard of people burning back into the fire so I instructed all the companies to light a fire on the side of the track nearest or nearer to the fire and then to beat it out as it crept forward. We did that for about 10 or 15 yards and then it started to take off and got out of control but we'd at least widened the firebreak to quite a considerable degree

03:30 and with the breezes that had been whipped up by the fire itself the fire that we had lit started to tear down the slope towards the oncoming fire. And that was quite exciting because I'd never seen this happen before. But when the two fires met it was almost like an atomic explosion, there was a loud roar and the flames leapt hundreds of feet into the air. It was quite a frightening sight, it frightened

04:00 me so much that I wouldn't let the troops who were extraordinarily tired go back to their camp, I said, "It's not going to get further than this track, we're going to mount a guard right along and if it springs up again or gets through again we're going to be here to stop it." So being very unpopular with the tired troops we sat it out and the follow morning it had died down to almost nothing. But it was an interesting experience with that amount of equipment right in the path of the fire

04:30 and nobody with any knowledge as how to handle a situation like that.

I remember reading in Charles Bean's official history of the First World War he's describing the Australian troops and how many of them went to war with the experience of fighting fires in the bush. And he was saying they spent 2 or 3 days sometimes

05:00 **in the privation of being in the bush, and he likened that to what its like to being in a battle. You know, he said you spend a couple days fighting a fire –**

I have the greatest admiration for these fellows who are out fighting the bushfires as they were in New South Wales. It's a frightening experience to see a wall of flame roaring at you and quite out of control, there's no way you can stop it particularly when it gets in the tops of the trees

05:30 and starts jumping from one line to the next, very frightening.

Do you stay and fight or do you withdraw?

Yes.

Another important event was the freedom of the city. Can you tell us about this?

Yes, surely. My Regiment 6 Battalion at this time in my last year in command in 1960, was granted

06:00 the freedom of the city of Melbourne and it was possibly one of the most spectacular and delightful parades that I've had the pleasure of indulging in or being involved in. The setting for the parade ground was a flat area just outside Government House in the Alexandria Garden. It was in March and the floral displays

06:30 around the hedge of Government House was spectacular and the City of Melbourne – the council – had set our parade ground up with about 20 flagpoles of equal height running across the back of the parade ground, each mounted with a national flag. And the dais in front of the parade was raised about 3 feet off the ground surrounded by a white rail

07:00 and decorated with flowers on the platform itself and shrubs all around the base. It was, well you don't speak in terms of military parades as being pretty, it was a very, very pretty sight. And added to that of

course it was summer dress and we were wearing khaki drill. I had over a thousand troops on parade and they looked quite spectacular, they prepared brilliantly for the occasion, it was beautifully ironed and all their

07:30 blanko and brasso was spot on. After the ceremony we marched down a path onto St Kilda Road and then proceeded from Princess Bridge in a northerly direction up Swanson Street immediately prior to the commencement of Moomba Parade in that year. So there was something like 3 or 4 hundred thousand people lining the barriers knowing we were

08:00 going to perform as well as the Moomba Parade. That was quite a thrill too, marching along with all those people cheering and yelling and then being halted by Selwyn Porter who was a general in the army and at that time was the Commissioner of Police in Victoria, a very fine fellow, and he challenged me and I responded that I'd just been granted the freedom of the city

08:30 with permission to advance with bayonets fixed, drums playing and bands playing or whatever the correct wording was. And then he said, "Pass, Colonel Swan, with your regiment." and off I went again. We continued our movement up Swanson Street and as the tail of our column cleared into our headquarters, which was in Victoria Street, the Moomba March started. So it was quite a wonderful day with this freedom

09:00 parade and then followed by the Moomba festivities, it was good.

Geoff, I was just wondering, we've talked a lot about your work with the army, the CMF, the Reserve as it then became [(UNCLEAR)], you haven't talked a lot about your commercial work. Can you, apart from mentioning at one stage you were with an advertising firm. I wonder if you can fill us in on some of those

09:30 **changes as they [(UNCLEAR)]?**

I returned from World War II and immediately discharged, took up my former role with the Commercial Bank of Australia. I was immediately posted to Moreland Branch and it wouldn't mean anything to many people but we had 850 accounts at Moreland, all very active because it was an industrial area.

10:00 And one poor little ledger keeper, your's truly, to keep those in hand written ledges and I would start in the mornings out there at 8 o'clock and finish 6 o'clock at night and it was pretty heavy going. I suppose it's an interesting story and I'll make it as short as I can but I'd become a bit disenchanted about the lack

10:30 of leadership by senior officers in the bank. Seemed to me that they were hen pecked, or whatever the expression might be, and that they were scared out of their wits to make moves on their own to make decisions. After a few years in the army at a fairly senior rank I found it a bit difficult to take. On one occasion posting this huge amount of stuff that came in every day

11:00 I paid a cheque for 9 pounds 3 and 6 pence or something and it set alarm bells going in all directions. The only way we had of checking these stock payments, and there wasn't only one there were dozens, people lost cheques and things like and put through stop payments, we used to record it by putting a wavy red line down the page of the ledger and a little red sticker in the

11:30 top left corner. And if you were posting flat out and you became accustomed to seeing these things it wasn't hard to ignore the marks or not register the marks. And this cheque came in for 9 pounds, some shillings and pence, and I paid it. When the statement went out to the customer who was a Greek fishmonger, he came marching into the bank and made a dreadful noise to the manager

12:00 and straight away instead of the manager saying, 'look we'll fix it up,' and writing into headquarters and saying look we're operating under difficulties, there's a lot of work to be done and sure, the ledger keeper should have noticed it, immediately he has me writing out reports as to why I'd made this frightful mistake. And somehow that didn't align itself with my life in the army, I thought it was pretty important that when one of your

12:30 subordinates got into trouble you, provided the reason was satisfactory, you did your utmost to support them. Anyway, I did all I had and eventually I said to the bank manager, "Would you mind if I went out and saw this Greek fishmonger and see why he stopped the cheque?" He said, "No, you can do that." So I went off to see this old Greek fishmonger and told him what had happened and he

13:00 said, "Well why I stopped the cheque was I ordered 3 sacks of potatoes from a fellow up at Kallista or somewhere in the hills, and I only got 2, so I stopped payment of the cheque I'd given the driver, I didn't realise he'd only left 2 and not 3." So I said, "Okay, who was the gentleman who supplied the potatoes?" And he gave me the fellow's name and number and rang this fellow and said

13:30 "Look, I'm in trouble, I don't know whether I'm going to lose my job or not." And I related the story to him and he said, "Well what's he stopped the cheque for?" I said, "He ordered 3 sacks of potatoes and your driver only left 2 so he stopped payment straight away." He said, "Is that all?" I said yes. He said, "Why didn't the silly old bastard ring me, I'd have sent him down another bag of spuds!"

14:00 So that ended that serial, he sent the old boy a bag of spuds and the whole problem was solved in a matter of about 10 minutes. So I thought after that, you know, I don't know whether the bank's the

place for me, I couldn't put up with too much of that sort of nonsense. And so eventually I met my old quartermaster, LP Slutzkin who was running an import export business

14:30 and I told him the story and he said, "Well why don't you come and join me, it'll give you an experience that you haven't had before in importing and exporting goods and you can be my office manager and cost all my imports and do all the importing detail and exporting detail and so on." So I did that, I became the office manager I think my title was of LP Slutzkin Pty Ltd and that was an exceptionally interesting job

15:00 but there were 2 brothers of the Slutzkin family there after a couple of years I realised that there was not a great deal of future in it and I was offered the job of Victorian manager of Peacock Brothers who were a systems warehouse in Bourke Street, Melbourne and I did that for a number of years and

15:30 again reached dead-end status and so somebody , "Why don't you….." one of my officers from 6th Battalion, "Why don't you come and become an account executive at USP Needham?" I think it was USP Benson at that time, later became USP Needham, one of Melbourne's biggest advertising agents. And I went there and did a few years there and then a friend of mine

16:00 in the football club died and he was running a manufacturers agency business and one of his friends approached me and said, "Look, we don't know what to do with the business, there are few good agencies, would you be interested?" And I said, "I'll certainly consider it." and after a bit of consideration I thought it would be worth having a go on my own having had the experience of importing and

16:30 exporting it fell into my sort of field of endeavour and I took over in partnership with the Shirley Johnson, the wife of this friend of mine in the football club. She eventually remarried and didn't last very long, died, but she just walked out of the business and left me with the lot, said no you, she was marrying into money, she married one of Melbourne's big estate agents

17:00 and so I was left with the little business to myself which I then continued to conduct until the time to retire arrived and then a change in the whole set up of the people I was representing meant that I closed my little business down and retired. But, that was my civilian lot in life.

17:30 I suppose going along with that, there were 2 areas of interest, which had a big influence on my life. One was Lord Summers Camp, which I became heavily involved in when I came back from the war. I'd got a bit cheesed off with Lord Summers Camp just before the war, Lord Summers was coming out to visit a camp in 1937 and I applied to be a slushy

18:00 it was my first camp after I'd go through, a group of slushies being one of the boys who had been through a previous camp then returned to look after the newcomers at each succeeding, at the camps that followed. In those days there was a maximum of 48 slushies required in camp, they wouldn't allow more than 48 to go to each camp, and of course because Lord Summers was coming every

18:30 body in the organization wanted to go down to camp. I, being a virtual newcomer and very young, I'd been accepted as a 15 year old and most groupers were 16 to 18, that was the age requirement, so I was very young and I wasn't selected and I became very upset, I thought oh this is not for me, I'm not going to stick around here if they don't want me so I didn't go to the following camps

19:00 prior to the war. And when I came back from the war Phil Rhoden, Commander 2/14th Battalion who's name has been mentioned during this story was camp chief of Lords Summers Camp, and he asked me to do a number of things on the organizational side, organise the founders day dinner

19:30 and reorganise the kitchen for big camp and things of that nature. So I became heavily involved although I didn't attend every annual camp in those days, my reason being that I was then in the Citizen Military Forces and in those days the annual leave in business was 2 weeks and seeing the army demanded 2 weeks I wasn't able

20:00 to go down to Lords Summers Camp and Joan missed out on holidays on a regular basis whilst I played soldiers. But I did manage, being in my own business, I managed to go down for a few days to each camp each year until eventually I finished my Army service and then I went to camp on a regular basis. But I'd been committed in many ways by that time to helping organise

20:30 things and to try and restructure the place so that sporting clubs at Powerhouse were more in touch with the requirements of Lords Summers Camp and all those sorts of funny little things that they got me into. And I'm still involved and as I mentioned when I was chatting a few movements ago, I've now started what we call

21:00 oldies camp which members over 50 go to once a year. They're a magnificent fellowship camp where all the oldies get together and it lasts only 2 days, that's about as much as most of them can put up with, but as well as singing and talking and all the rest of it, we play gaulkie on a very

21:30 well manicured nine hole golf course next to the camp. We play with tennis balls and hockey sticks and that's a tremendous competition between the fellows. And we play bowls and bocce and croquet and all sorts of games that are not too strenuous and there are trophies awarded for the winners of each of those sports. And it's turned into a great couple of days for the old blokes so

22:00 that's my current interest, keeping that up.

You mentioned a second aspect that had been important apart from Lord Summers Camp.

The other one was Legacy. I mentioned that Legacy took mother under her wing in 1933 after my father died. They firstly put us on the road to reasonable living by getting mother a war widow's pension, they looked after the education of

22:30 my brothers and I and they were generally very helpful, they ran boys classes in those days and ran camps. And in fact, my 2 brothers when the Japs looked like attacking Australia were sent away to live with a family called the Markhams at Kiabrim up near Shepparton, and they were up there for quite a long time. They were sent up there because if the Japs were to overrun the place

23:00 it was thought there'd be enough leeway between their arrival and when they swamped the country to get the kids to some place other than where we'd been taken over by the Japanese. So Legacy were good in thinking of all those things. Then along came the war and my activities in Legacy ceased for a time, and when I came back from the war I thought about

23:30 becoming a Legatee, that's a senior member of the organization, and Ian Malloch who was the 2IC 6th Battalion I mentioned earlier, said you know, "When you want to join Legacy I will be your proposer, but until you get rid of some of the jobs you've got on your plate at the present time I think you'd be unwise to tackle Legacy responsibilities." So it wasn't until 1972

24:00 that I actually became a senior member of Legacy. However in the meantime I'd been approached by one of their members who had said they were having great difficulty with the children of fellows who'd died during World War II. In that they were reaching an age where the girl's classes and the boy's gymnasium classes were no longer an interest to them, they'd been doing

24:30 it for years and they needed something to occupy the minds of young men to keep them out of the field of pinching motorcars and getting into mischief that would cause lots of trouble. And his request was that I might approach the management of Lord Summers Camp and see if it would be possible for members, junior members of Legacy, to become involved in the sporting clubs

25:00 of Lord Summers Camp and Powerhouse. The reason they wanted us to do that was that they were incapable of administering the sporting clubs that would have been necessary to run within Legacy. So I spoke to the Camp Chief and he agreed readily and between 1960 and 1970 we ran camps for junior Legatee's 3 times a year. And they were tremendous camps

25:30 we used to have 100,150, on occasion 200 kids down there. They were spoilt rotten. We used to have golf pros down there teaching them how to hit golf balls and they were taken on flights from the Tiab Airport, and they were taken out on yachting expeditions out into Western Port Bay and all the sorts of things that kids loved. And they were great camps. But then again, the boys and girls got older

26:00 and they found other interests and so we stopped the camps at the end of 1960 and at that stage I had cleared the deck, and so I joined Legacy in 1972. I'd been associated off and on in various ways from 1932 to 1972 and then started a long period of looking after the widows of deceased ex-servicemen and their kids

26:30 and in 1992 I accepted the responsibility of being the President of Melbourne Legacy which was an immensely interesting year of activity. The President of Legacy only does one year as a general rule, it's been the practice of Melbourne Legacy for that because there are plenty of people who are capable of doing the job. And thereafter you continued to work the same as you'd ever worked and

27:00 it was a very big period of time. And that has continued until the present time and only now am I trying to take the foot off the pedal, I've recruited a lot of young fellows who are learning the trade and doing it very well. The rules of Legacy have changed quite remarkably in that once we were all ex-servicemen before we could gain membership of Legacy now really anybody who has like ideals can

27:30 join Legacy provided with investigation of their background proves that they're the right type that we're looking for. So it's a changed organization but it's functioning very well and it's just going through that difficult period when the old diggers are dying off in droves and the women are living a bit longer so we have a lot of widows who will go perhaps for another 10 years

28:00 and then there will be a rapid decline in the number. But there will be a rapid increase at the same time endeavouring to get them pensions and all the rest of it. And naturally it's not getting easier to get widow's pensions because by the time their husbands die they would have died anyway, whether they'd had war service or something happened to them during the war. And so it is becoming hard to relate their cause of death to their war service.

28:30 And the older Legatees are getting older by the minute as per yours truly and the younger ones are just learning the trade, so it's an interesting time.

I'd like to take you back now to your childhood in the 1930s and to what you knew about the Great War [First World War] when you were growing up. Your father had served

29:00 **in the Great War obviously and had been injured, did he talk at all about his service, about his campaign things –**

I was 12 when he died Martin, and as you can appreciate, although I listened at times of tales that he told, they were not specific tales about what that he'd done or anything of that nature, so I had a little bit of knowledge about what went on

29:30 I was always interested, my grandfather had given me a history of World War I and it was far beyond me at that age to read it, in fact I presented it to the headquarters of 2RVR when I was CO, I've got no idea what happened. It was a beautifully bound series of World War I history. But I looked at the pictures often without reading much of the

30:00 detail. So I was always impressed. My mother had war book in those days which were snippets of what my Dad had done and photos of him in Egypt and London and so on, but they were just photos of men in uniform. Although I grew up with a knowledge of the horror of war that was about as much as I got myself into

30:30 in those days.

Can you remember Anzac Day parades in the 1930s?

I can remember Anzac Day pretty well. Again, somewhere in my collection there I have a photo of a very angry looking young man, I look quite sulky in the photo, I tend to hide it because it's not very flattering, but I was at Melbourne High School in 1933 and I attended, and I think it was the first Legacy

31:00 Anzac service for students on the steps of Parliament House. And I laid a wreath on behalf of Melbourne High School at that service. I think I went to most of them then until they moved the service to the shrine of remembrance where it's been held ever since. For a long time in Legacy I was the chairman of Commemeration

31:30 Committee, and I rewrote the book on the service of the shrine of remembrance, which has now become a big function, there was over 3000 kids there this year and it's likely to increase more next year. It was at a difficult time this year because the school children now have 4 holidays a year as you're probably aware, and one of them falls about Anzac Day, so the kids service we've got to

32:00 we have to place adjacent to Anzac Day but not necessarily close to it. And this year it was a bad one because Anzac Day was swallowed up by the school holiday so they had to hold it on about the 19th of April, and that reduced the numbers because the kids were getting ready to go to school and the teachers

32:30 were getting ready to have a holiday and 3000 was the maximum mustered. But it's a thing that can grow, it's regarded by the shrine trustees as possibly the best service held at the shrine and it's become very meaningful because young kids immediately post war were discouraged by teachers with the term glorification of war

33:00 and the tendency was to steer them away from anything that savoured at remembering the war. That has changed over the years and now the tendency is for the young teachers to talk about the importance of what soldiers did during the war and so they're encouraged to attend these services and hence I say that

33:30 the Legacy service will grow in the next few years and almost become unmanageable if it gets much bigger.

What you knew about war before you went was gleaned from your father a little bit but also as you say from Legacy involvement and just what any chap of that age you know would've

34:00 **known. How much did, if at all, did your war experience change that idea? Can you remember what you thought about war in 1940 and what you thought about war in 1946?**

Well I suppose the thought of war scared me when I was a kid, I mean I'd read enough about it and seen enough pictures

34:30 to know that fellows hanging on barbed wired fences or turned upside down at the bottom of a trench wasn't a very enviable position to be in. And so I had no particular desire to become a soldier if ever soldiers were needed. And if those days of course for the first 20 years after World War I little thought was given

35:00 to another war starting. World War I as you know was referred to as the war to end all wars and so we never thought a great deal about it, life was too enjoyable to be worrying about things like that, and sport was the main thing at the back of one's mind, I suppose secondary to trying to get a job and do that well, sport was one's great outlet. As things grew a bit

35:30 sticky in Europe I think we became more conscious and when Doc MacAdams started to pour words of wisdom into our ears and say you young fellows can't afford to be sitting around enjoying yourself when there's a war coming up. And it became then a serious consideration and I suppose I had by that time, no great fear or knowledge of the consequences

36:00 so I went with my eyes wide open but my knowledge very limited on what was going to happen if ever we did go to war. In actual fact I enjoyed army life, I enjoyed the regimentation and the challenge of improving your position by becoming commissioned. I was a very timid youth, and I use the word timid advisedly, having had no Dad and

36:30 not being a natural toughie I rather, I felt ashamed of the fact that I even hated getting up in front of anybody and speaking. And I remember saying to my mother at Melbourne High School on the final speech night I attended, a fellow by the name of WAG Scott who was our school captain, spoke during

37:00 the speech night and he was a very, very brilliant young fellow, he finished up a, I think he was a doctor in the end. He was at Monash University too as a professor for a time, but he was a bright boy. And he spoke beautifully and I said to mother who was sitting next to me, "I hope I never aspire to being the school captain because I just don't think I could stand

37:30 up there and try to do what WAG Scott has just done." And I remember when I joined the C Company of the 14th Battalion, I hadn't been going along very long to night parades and Phil Rhoden said to me, "Next Thursday night when you come to parade you're going to give the lesson on piling arms." Now, the lesson on piling arms with the old 303 rifle was the most difficult

38:00 exercise or operation that you ever struck in your life. There were about 30 movements to it, on the command do such and such, you do such and such, and so it went. And I thought, oh, I'll never be able to do this. Anyway, I swotted up for the whole week and when I came back I thrashed it out and people were leaping around and doing the things they were supposed to do and I felt

38:30 thoroughly satisfied with the success of my first venture and was told it was good. And it made a remarkable difference to me, I thought well if I can do that I can do anything in this business of teaching blokes how to do things. So I then set my sights on becoming an NCO and a few weeks later I was made a corporal and a short time after that I became a sergeant and then I was on my way to becoming

39:00 an officer. So the army had a big affect on my life in that regard. It made me more confident, more self reliant and helped me a tremendous amount. And I would recommend to any young fellow that they spend a period of time in the army, it's a wonderful experience for young blokes and they don't realise the value that they get from it, particularly if you improve to the stage where you become commissioned and

39:30 you start to learn about things like making appreciations, an Army appreciation is a consideration of the factors affecting your arrival at an aim and then considering the courses open to you and deciding on the best course available to achieve the aim. And you do it every day of your life, but the more training you have in it the more proficient you become at it. And it doesn't matter if it's going to the football

40:00 on Saturday and how you'll get there and what you'll take with you to prevent you from the weather or where you'll eat or what you'll eat or how you'll get what you want to eat. All those things are part of making a mental appreciation. But of course the army one becomes far more detailed than that and it does help you tremendously in life when you've got to make big decisions and you do from time to time if you can logically think through

40:30 the problem and arrive at a decent solution.

Tape 8

00:33 **I'd like to ask you a bit about Summers Camp and the models upon which it's structured and the things it tries to achieve. Your involvement, you said**

01:00 **immediately after the war you were too busy doing other things, when did you first sort of go back, did you go back as slushy?**

No, strangely I never became a slushy in Lord Summers Camp. I was made an honorary slushy by the slushy king at some stage during the piece and I have a pair of black shorts with Swannie printed right across the backside. But that's about as near as I got to it, although I always helped them when I went down to camp on a part time basis

01:30 I was always doing things with the slushies but I can't say that I ever lived in the squalor that the slushies endured at camp. I always had a decent room and a bunk in a civilised fashion when I joined their activities.

So your involvement was more administrative was it? Can you remember what year you went back?

02:00 I could check that very easily. It was about in 1970 I suppose that Gordon Trinca became Camp Chief of the organization and he immediately ask that join him as Deputy Camp Chief. I'd been going down full

time before that, I'd been part of the games staff and I was what the called a commasaret controller, he was the gentleman who organised

02:30 the distribution or the preparation of rations and the distribution and handling of the rations in the mess hut and they hygiene and cleaning up aspect of the mess hut after each meal. I did that for a couple of years and then I joined Gordon as his Deputy. I think I did 6 or 7 years as the Deputy. And then when Gordon gave I

03:00 didn't want to particularly be a member of the hierarchy any longer so I became public relations officers and they have quite a strong PR team in camp and we have guests from all those organizations and schools which supply the groupers for camp and they were invited to go down one day during the camp to see their money at work or some such thing

03:30 and it was my role to make sure that a: they enjoyed themselves; b: they became informed and; c: they knew we needed money if they had money to give away. So that was my role for a number of years and when a recent Camp Chief, John Davies, 3 years past, took over he decided that he wanted much more youth leadership direction

04:00 and that all these departments of camp should be lead by young fellows with an occasional old bloke there to advise. And I decided that it was my time to stop going to camp on a regular basis, it's a pretty hectic lifestyle as you're aware and in the end I was taking afternoons off to have a couple of hours sleep to make up for the couple of hours that I didn't get after midnight each

04:30 night.

You've talked about the relationship between Legacy and Powerhouse, and I seem to remember there's a Legacy Hall down at the camp. Is that right?

Cultman Hut. Is that to which you are referring?

It's a while since I've been there.

When we were holding 10 years of camps for junior legatees we struck weekends when the weather was most inclement and it became very hard to entertain

05:00 100 little kids running all over the place and getting sopping wet and all the rest of it. Legacy, in their wisdom, to a grant from a family by the name of Cultman in memory of their son who was Major during World War II and they used that money to built a hut half the size of a full sized basketball court. And that was to be extended

05:30 to a full sized basketball court when that action was necessary. As it happened, I mentioned the kids started to get tired of the similarity of the camps and got too old to enjoy them and so we discontinued them with half a basketball court undercover. That hut is in the throes of being

06:00 transformed at the moment, it was not lined, it's currently being lined, there's a mezzanine floor being put in, or has been put in, there are sleeping quarters for various departments in the Cultman Hut, there's a games room downstairs, quite a large one with a couple of table tennis tables and dart board and coights and things of that nature

06:30 and they're building a toilet block up against the wall on the north side.

With those links, are there also strong links with veterans apart from Legacy. You've talked perhaps about a number of people being involved having been veterans or –

There's a strong military flavour in Lord Summers Camp as you're probably aware, and particularly

07:00 post war when all the old boys went back, there are 72 names on our honour board at camp for those who died during the war, lost their lives, and those of us who were fortunate enough to get back and maintained an interest and most of us showed some interest post war, it's quite amazing. It was a wonderful fellowship before the war and there was a definite

07:30 need or desire to meet up with your old mates when camp was restarted and so we did have a large influx of men who had served during the services. That company of C Company that I mentioned to you, when the war started I think we had 128 members in that company and of that 128 I've only ever been able to

08:00 say that about 12 of them didn't finished up with commissioned rank in one or other of the 3 services. So we achieved, or Doc achieved his aim of having his young blokes trained and having them prepared for war in that when the war started we provided over 100 commissioned officers to the army, navy and air force.

The week of camp in some ways can be likened to

08:30 **boot camp in the way that you're pushed around a lot in the first few days and there's tension and almost antagonism encouraged and then resolved by the end of the week, it's one of the ways the camp works. You've talked about how you regard army service as a very positive**

thing that someone can learn a lot about themselves about ways of

09:00 **approaching life, dealing with problems. Can I also say that it's not for everyone, some people fall fowl of life in the army. You've talked about how some chaps in New Guinea had to be sent home, they just found it too much for whatever reasons. Does that sometimes happen with people at Lord Summers Camp?**

Yes. Yes, I have made a statement

09:30 many times and I've always tried to abide by the statement I've made, and that is that nobody should feel it's necessary for him to go home from Lord Summers Camp because he can't take the pressure that we put on them. The reason for putting pressure on the boys, it's put on in a humorous vein as you will recall, but the idea is that when you take

10:00 20 total strangers and the camp is designed that a college boy is never put in a bunk next to or above or below an industrial boy, it's very hard for them to develop a friendship quickly enough for the lessons of camp to be learnt unless they can depend on somebody else to help them get through it. And by applying this pressure

10:30 which is mainly annoyance like throwing water all over them when they've just got dressed for mess or going through the sleeping quarters at night banging dust bin lids to keep them awake every hour on the hour, and things like that is to make them bond together more quickly so that they can cope with the annoyance of the slushies. And it's an amazing thing how it works.

11:00 The leaders push themselves forward, c'mon, lets do so and so, and before you know where you are where 20 young cowering youths are terrified with what's going on, suddenly the feeling of confidence which develops as a result of being part of a team makes them almost cheeky, they want to take the slushies on. And then by a series of manoeuvres throughout the week

11:30 that bonding becomes team work and in turn the team work develops around the team being as strong as the weakest link.

What happens when one of those weakest links gives way though?

Well, that happens as I mentioned, and I have had cause to intervene and there is a system

12:00 whereby within the structure of the camp the group leader says to the slushie king look, we've got a fellow, he's number J10 or whatever his number is in the hut, and he's finding it hard to cope with what you're up to, will you make sure that you ease off on him or encourage him or do something that will ease him of the concern that he's got about the way the camp's conducted.

12:30 We did have a number of kids who when boat people started to arrive 10 years ago from Vietnam refugees one of our members, a fellow by the name Jeff Byrne who was living in the Sydney, became involved with that aspect of life, trying to help them settle in to their new Australian way of life. And he thought it would be great for them if they were brought down to camp.

13:00 Well the first year we tried 2 of them and within 24 hours one of them was terrified and I was told about it, I was deputy camp chief at that stage. And I was told about this young fellow so I took him aside and had a long chat with him and I explained to him that everything that was being done was done for a reason and that if he could weather the storm for the week

13:30 he would gain a tremendous amount of benefit from it. I then said, "If he wanted to get out of the group I was quite happy to move him out of the group and put him in one of the departments." And he said, "Yes, I think I'd like that." And I said, "Well where would you like to go?" And he said, "I like the radio and the noise that's coming out of the radio room, I'd like to be in that department." which was called technical department. And so I immediately attached

14:00 him to that department for the duration of camp. And I spoke to him every day as he was going along. And when the camp was over he came to me and said that was the most amazing experience I've ever had. There's no doubt he learnt a lot from it and he had coped admirably not being in the thick of it in a group hut

14:30 and we haven't seen him since. But I think that was more due to his geography and his location in Sydney than to his interest in the organization. But it does indicate that if you explain to people why they're being bullied and gradually get the message over that the pressure is going to ease and that by the time the camp is finished they will be thoroughly enjoying every aspect of it. And then you usually finish up with a full

15:00 camp of satisfied customers.

What about the slushies?

Horrible little men.

Yes. Is there ever any danger that they go too far or that they're there for the wrong reasons?

Yes. Yes, you get fellows as you know, in the form of discipline, I don't know what it was in 1980, in the

early days when anybody committed an

15:30 indiscretion, the slushie king at mess pulled them out and had word with them at the top of the mess hut or and then said go back to your seat and they had to walk between the line of slushies back to their table at the mess hut. And he'd flick a finger or scratch his nose and immediately a great group of slushies would grab that poor individual and take him on to the bridge over the creek and hurl him in a most undignified manner into the creek.

16:00 Unfortunately the creek has become so polluted that we daren't use it for such things. And it's a great pity, everybody used to rush out to see their poor mate hurled with a double twist and a [(UNCLEAR)] pike or something into the creek. Nowadays they take them away and put them in a cage or paint them all colours of the rainbow or their group colour or whatever.

16:30 So there is a certain amount of physical activity in throwing a fellow who doesn't want to be thrown into the creek or doesn't want to be punished. Because they're encouraged to kick and carry on as you know, they're encouraged to be as strong as they can to show how manly they are. And you'll find, to answer your question, that there are people who'll twist a thumb or tweak a big toe to stop the people

17:00 wriggling so that they're easier to manage. But we at the top end of the mess hut keep a very stringent eye on people who do that sort of thing and very quickly advise the slushie command, the slushie king, that he should exercise his command and let his slushies know that nothing like that is permissible or nor will it be tolerated. So

17:30 yeah. All those things are very carefully marked, Martin. And as I say I have done all I can over the years to try and keep things on an even keel and so have others who think the same way as I do. Some are less worried by the fact that we tend to bully people. My own son didn't like it. My own son went through camp and he reckoned when it took 20 slushies to get him to do

18:00 what they wanted him to do it was time they adopted another system. I think he could've handled those 20 of them in most cases.

You've talked about how you very much enjoyed army life, the discipline, the regular hours and systems. Have those sorts of bonding, social bonding

18:30 **practices have they remained with you do you think?**

I regret to say that I think most of the army has stayed with me Martin. I'm a standard joke in the Melbourne Football Club where I can't help but use army expressions and talk of meeting places as rendezvous or RVs and talk in military times, 1030 hours instead

19:00 of 10.30 a.m and things like that. When I was at my peak with the football club I managed most of the pre season training trips interstate and the end of season trips when footballers became fairly high-spirited as you know and a lot of them get into mischief, and I never had a skerrick of trouble with them at any time. But I laid it onto the line and I made my own rules and I stuck by them

19:30 and a couple of the simple ones were that you never engage yourself in any activity which in your own mind might be offensive to anybody who's nearby. And the second one was that if you do any damage we will all share the cost of it in full, no matter how expensive it is. And it's amazing how quickly other fellows stop somebody who's getting up to high jinx

20:00 when they know that they've got to pay or share in the payment for the goods or equipment that's damaged. And they were 2 rules we always abided by and I'll guarantee that the Melbourne Football Club can go anywhere into any hotel, 5 star or below and be well received because they were never in doubt.

More than we can say for the St Kilda Club I'd reckon?

20:30 Well, I managed the last Melbourne Football Club premiership side in 1964 and I've been looking for somebody to pinch that mantle from me.

Not this year.

No, it won't be this year.

Can I ask you then, you've jocularly alluded to this, but are there aspects of your army training and Army

21:00 **aura that you regret. Are there things that you think, have you learnt ways of doing things from the army that you would rather have learnt a different way?**

That's a fairly deep question but in a short answer I can't think of anything that I dislike about the army. You can think of individual instances

21:30 where I was horrified and when one of our patrols was seeking out Jap people who were left behind when the war moved on and I remember one of the them who hated the Japs, got 3 of them up a re-entering, that's a sort of short valley with a steep wall at the end, and stood them there and carried out his own execution.

22:00 It was a story I didn't like and steps were taken to see that it didn't happen again but it was better in light of what had happened to this fellow's family that we left that story untold rather than take the appropriate action. And I'm not saying we protected him, we

22:30 probably we did. But that sort of thing happens in war and today if we were in Timor and somebody did that it would be probably frowned on very much more than it was in the days of World War II when terrible atrocities were carried out on Australian soldiers and there had to be fellows

23:00 in a group of a thousand men who were very antagonistic towards the enemy they were fighting. And that fellow could have said, "Put your hands up, now put them behind your backs and we'll tie a bit of string around them and we'll march you back." But I think in the words of that type of person there's only one good type of that type of enemy, and that's a dead one. So, whether you do the right thing

23:30 when you overlook something like that, hard to know. But generally speaking, your question was more embracing.

Yeah, your approach to life, whether or not you think, I'm not saying negative, I'm saying has the army instilled in you certain characteristics,

24:00 **manners, apart from using words like rendezvous, 1030 hours, I'm just interested if you think –**

Well I think that all officers who have occupied senior positions carry the army for the rest of their lives, they do things in a methodical army manner. And I found it a great training school, it's like 'Checker' Hughes, the former coach of Melbourne who said

24:30 he had a wonderful education, it came from the school of hard knocks. I think the army's a bit like that, it's not always easy but every time something happens and every action that you take part in, and I'm not speaking of fighting action I'm speaking of operational movement or planning of activities or organization of any

25:00 function or anything of that nature. The part the army plays in it is quite amazing. And I've always regarded it as having been a tremendous asset to me and I don't know many people, even those who have attended national service training, who don't say that it was one of the best things that ever happened to them. So, you know.

Do you think that experience and that

25:30 **amount of discipline and training helps people deal with their emotions?**

I didn't quite get the word before emotions?

Deal with their emotions.

Deal with their emotions.

Understand their emotions.

I think that strangely I've got a theory having been part of an organization

26:00 in the army which practices certain actions and certain forms of training until they hate the sight of it and dread the thought of doing it that those things tend to make life easier because when you're confronted with a situation and you haven't got time to think about doing a logical

26:30 appreciation of what you should do then you do things on what you've been taught to do. And the army helps in this way and I've been trying to get our team of league footballers, in fact I spoke to Robbie Flower about it at one stage and he thought it was a great idea, to practice certain things on a football practice night so that when they get into a tight corner under similar circumstances they do an automatic action

27:00 rather than try and work out something for so long that they get grabbed holding the ball, you know, where do they hit it, do they hit it forward or back, lots and lots of things that you can do automatically on a football field, centre it when you're in a pocket and all those things.

What about in life though? In relationships?

Well, life's just an extension of a football match. There are lots

27:30 of occasions when automatic action or something you've been taught helps you get through the problem. I think when you've got time you want to think every problem out on its own merit but I think when you're caught for a quick answer sometimes the way you've been taught and some of things Lord Summers Camp teaches are very good in this, their only rule in camp as you know is play the game.

28:00 Means a lot of things to a lot of different people, or a lot of different things to a lot of people. And if you're mind is drilled to play the game you invariably think about doing the decent thing rather than doing something that you might be tempted to do.

I remember that very clearly because there was a moment when I stopped playing the game during the camp, I found what was going on was too revolting to continue.

28:30 **And that's where, I don't know, I'm not going to go through it now, but this is what I mean about I guess I'm trying to work out about emotional response rather than mental response. And you're telling me very well how you're able to control a mental response, and I see the benefits there. I'm just interested, if I can take you back to your role**

29:00 **I think it was in 1947 when you were responsible for repatriation of POWs [prisoners of war], 46 perhaps,**

Vic L of C.

You would have seen men who were suffering enormously. The trauma that those men went through is unspeakable really. A lot of those men were

29:30 **so shattered emotionally that they found returning to life almost impossible.**

Surely.

How do people recover from that. Is it good to suppress the emotion then or is it good to learn to express emotion. I'm just interested because you've had a lot of leadership roles in your life and I'm interested in how you would –

The emotional side and the areas that you're touching is a psychological thing. It's

30:00 not a layman's department at all really. But again I say that the lessons that you learn at Lord Summers Camp are pretty handy there because you show compassion towards people who are in that sort of state. You rely on people who have the knowledge to redirect them to get over their state. And that requires expert application.

30:30 It was shocking to see fellows in hospital who had been prisoners of war of the Japanese and they were skin and bone and so I mean you could talk to them and you felt a tremendous pity for them and you tried to cheer them up but you did no more than that. The doctors were looking after them, it's the old story of when you try to use artillery without asking the advice

31:00 of the battery commander you want you're head read because even though you know a fair bit about the general use of artillery the experts are the one who can say yes, the guns are in a position that we can provide that sport or no we can't do that because the hill in front of it is too high for the trajectory to land the shell on the target area and so on. And the same thing applies with medical things and with things you've been talking about

31:30 You can feel sorrow and you can endeavour to ease that sorrow by being friendly or compassionate or whatever but the experts are the ones who've got to say how you've got to get over it because I always find that when you talk to people you give them crook advice and it takes them another 12 months to get over that.

I know there were lots of debates at that time

32:00 **as to whether or not POWs should have special treatment or whether or not they should be encouraged to be seen as normal as possible and to work out which was the best way. Can you remember how you felt the best thing for them?**

I suppose that the best way I can answer that is not to say during the war that I had any feeling

32:30 in that area but one of the things that has worried me most post World War II is the effect that the war has had on the lives of Vietnam Veterans in particular. Now they are a different species of individuals to the World War II blokes altogether. What caused that difference I don't know except that they were under a different sort of pressure

33:00 They didn't know who were the goodies and who were the baddies for a start. And that's terribly, terribly difficult to cope with. They sometimes had to rush into a village where they knew there were people acting as normal village people but also knowing that they were terrorists or had killed some of their troops the night before in a raid on a particular

33:30 locality and they would blaze away and kill everybody in the village and when they went to sort of tidy up or find out the result of their attack they would find kids and women and people who never should have been killed in a war battle. All those little things, I think, have had a great effect on the Vietnam Veterans. They really are a totally different people.

34:00 Their feeling towards their entitlements as a result of war are totally different to the average World War II fellow. I mean, there were World War II fellows who came back and expected the government to look after them and clothe and feed them and give them extra. And there were those, and a much higher percentage, who were so glad to be home that their only thought was to start living a normal

34:30 life and to start and improve their business capabilities as quickly as they could. It's been a totally different story and we find with Legacy that we have far more problems with Legatees from the

Vietnam War than we ever had with World War II Legatees. They can't handle pressure the same way as our blokes did

35:00 or do.

Is it perhaps these chaps have learnt to express themselves? I say that because we spoke to a chap during this interview who, because of his war service, couldn't ever leave his house to go somewhere new without vomiting, he was physically sick just leaving his house, never spoke to you know

35:30 **was something which lasted with him for 40 or 50 years. Now, I don't know whether the Vietnam vets got the same condition but perhaps society has listened to that more or perhaps they've learnt to speak of these anxieties more.**

Sometimes they don't even have to speak of it Martin, it's pretty patently obvious that they have been affected by the war. I know

36:00 of young Legatee who lives up at Wangaratta and every know and then he goes completely off the planet, the whole world's against him and he suffers greatly as a result of his war experiences. And I don't think he saw anything like the war that some of our, some of my mates, saw and have coped with quite adequately. For some reason

36:30 the boys from Vietnam, and it's far more general than the boys from World War II, so there must be a reason for it, and I've given you a couple of thoughts on the sort of reason, and some of them were national servicemen, most of them were national servicemen which means their name came out of a barrel and they were sent off to war against their wishes

37:00 and took part in something that nobody likes to be part of, I mean the actual action part of a war is diabolical, when I talk of having enjoyed the army I'm talking about the camaraderie before and after a battle and the friendships you make with the fellows with whom you serve. These boys were under a lot of pressure and a very high percentage of them have been affected

37:30 by that pressure. How you overcome that? A lot of people have been trying to work it out. So I can understand how it's happened, I wouldn't have the faintest idea how you cure it.

Tape 9

00:16 **One last aspect of Lord Summers Camp which I'd like you to talk about is the change that's happened, I'm not sure when, in the last 10 or 20 years, of women**

00:30 **coming to camp. You probably were involved in some of the debates about that.**

Yes I was.

Can you tell me how that debate was conducted?

Well the period immediately prior to the decision being taken that women could become involved in Lord Summers Camp the girls were saying the fellows enjoy camp so much

01:00 why can't we have a go at it. And so the debate started as to whether it might ever happen. I was pretty open minded about it although I realised had it been mentioned in Doc MacAdams' day or even Lord Summers they'd have died on the spot. However, it was a changing world and they're not here now to judge whether it's right or wrong so

01:30 it certainly required the consideration that it got. Peter Johnstone was the camp chief at the time the decision was taken to allow the girls to have a camp based along the lines of the boys' camp. I mentioned I was open minded, I was worried whether they did or whether they didn't but at that time I envisaged that the girls activities in the Lord Summers Camp

02:00 would be like the football clubs, they would be an appendix if you like, but not part of Lord Summers Camp. And only in recent times, and I must say the girls camp have been a wonderful success so from that point of view I have no argument at all, but all of a sudden some bright spark decided we had to update our constitution

02:30 and somehow in the mix the girls became equal shareholders in the overall organization. And then the talk came around how we'd achieve the selection of camp chief, and there was going to be a time that there was going to be a woman as the camp chief of Lord Summers Camp. And that stage I lost interest, the day a woman takes over

03:00 Lord Summers Camp, Martin, and it won't matter because I'm too old to affect anything too much, it's just quite out of court as far as I'm concerned for women to be making up part of council and having equal voting rights as the men and all the rest of it. Mainly because of my background

03:30 over the years in Lord Summers Camp. And I'd be perfectly happy for them to have their camps, and even to have a say on council but when they start talking about the constitution and how they'll be considered and who will form part of the College of Cardinals who will select the next Camp Chief then I get very testy. And the camp has changed over the years in many ways,

04:00 that make some of us oldies a bit upset the way that things are developing generally. It's become far more commercialised, once upon a time we ran on a shoestring and we collected money from the businesses that were sending young fellows along to camp and we ran our dances every Saturday night and made money that way and we worked hard to keep the show on the road. Nowadays we're

04:30 biting all the old members to contribute towards a foundation so that we can raise a million dollars so that if there's a short fall in running a camp we've got a ready reserve and all this sort of thing. I think in a lot of ways we've lost sight of the original aims of the camp, namely to bring young fellows together and give them a good time and teach them to appreciate each other, no matter what side of the track they're born and bred on. It's now

05:00 far more commercialised.

I suppose that that's a reflection of wider changes in society as well, I mean it's not just something that's happened at Lord Summers Camp.

Yes, that's true.

That male bonding what a sociologist might call homosatiality.

05:30 **is that something which people would use, I mean obviously people look forward to the camp, was it for some people like a chance to get away from the trouble and strife for a week?**

That's an interesting question. I'm not prepared to answer on behalf of my friends. The story of

06:00 homosexuality is always a problem when you've got a group of men living together under camp conditions. It's been very strongly watched but it has still occurred on a couple of occasions down at camp and those would probably be shot on sight but there's been a very quick evacuation of the perpetrators of that sort of thing down at Lord Summers Camp. Mateship's a wonderful

06:30 thing, I suppose it's based on some sort of homosexuality or whatever.

Sorry, I didn't mean the word homosexuality, I was talking about homosatiality.

Homosatiality, yes that's a different word. Homosatiality. Well, there's no doubt that men enjoy each other's company, that's always been the case. When you haven't seen your mates for

07:00 a while, the urge to do so is more pronounced, and that's why this oldies camp of our has been so successful because there are fellows from pre war and immediately post war who dropped out of the organization for that number of years and now they're all back together enjoying each other's company and rubbishing

07:30 each other and carrying on like schoolboys. I think it puts them back 50 years in their life and makes them remember the goods times that they enjoyed together down at camp.

You mentioned sex, I'm not talking about Lord Summers now but back in the army perhaps, how did blokes cope when they're away in New Guinea and New Britain for a few years

08:00 **away from loved ones?**

Females. It's an interesting question and I've had it posed to me on many occasions or I've had people make, I've heard people like Derryn Hinch [journalist/commentator] when talking of homosexuality talking about it was rife in the army and General Montgomery was a homosexual or some such thing. And I get furious when I hear it, if I had the guts I'd get on the

08:30 airwaves and tell him what I thought about that sort of comment because I was in the army for 7 years in war time, I suppose in 6 with contact with the troops, and I can only remember one case of someone saying that bloke's causing trouble in the company, he's a poofter. And honestly, it is my belief

09:00 that if a bloke had indicated that he was that way inclined he would have been torn from limb to limb, just my own feeling on it. We were totally intolerant of that sort of activity in war years.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

I suppose my feeling on it is that it's a good thing because if it did enter

09:30 or open up in the army it would be an awful situation because there are some male individuals who become very agro when they see people carrying on in a homosexual relationship and I think a lot of bodily harm would come to those who were involved in it. That's a personal opinion

10:00 I mean I'm terribly masculine in my outlook on life and I find it sad I suppose is the best word, that there should be fellows involved in that sort of activity. But, here again I've learnt to become terribly

tolerant of it because of my Lord Summers Camp training in which we, as you know,

10:30 appreciate the needs and ideas and feelings of others.

Well I think we've probably covered everything plus today. We'd like just in closing Geoff, I'd like to ask you to reflect on your war experience, and also

11:00 **if there is anything you'd like to say about being part of the archive?**

No I think probably my life and I have been talking about my life, has been as varied as it's possible to get one's life. My only regret is that I didn't concentrate my activities on to

11:30 making money instead of doing everything as Lord Summers Camp service without recognition. All the things I've done I've loved every moment of it. I've been very active in everything I've belonged to. The Lord Summers Camp as an early experience was wonderful in its teaching and getting me going along the right lines. The army

12:00 when I joined it made a colossal difference and I've never regretted being the army, I regret having lost very close cobbers during the war years. My sporting activities, whether participating or from the administrative side, have always given me great joy. My family which

12:30 is, which hasn't been mentioned very much has always been the backstop for everything. I must confess that my wife bought the kids up in the early days of my army activities and I was away from home quite a lot and she taught them and disciplined them and made them good citizens. Both my kids I'm very proud of,

13:00 my daughter was captain of St Michael's Church of England Girls' Grammar School. She's veered off into the art scene, she's quite arty, she's just completing her masters of art at the age of about 52 years. She's been a bachelor of arts for many years. Her husband was one of the major entrepreneurs of spectacular displays in Australia. He

13:30 runs fire displays, he did for 5 years a spectacular at the Canberra Festival on the last night, he does the last night of the Woodford Festival and my daughter has built huge castles out of wood and burnable materials and painted them all spectacularly, and then my son-

14:00 in-law dashes in and pours kerosene over them and sets fire to them. They're amazingly spectacular the works he does, one of these days he'll grill himself I'm afraid but that's his lot in life. My son who he didn't ever become captain of Brighton Grammar but they told us on good authority that he would have been had he not been captain of football and cricket and every other ruddy thing and

14:30 they reckoned that if they made him captain of the school, and in retrospect I'm a bit cross that they didn't give him the opportunity when they thought he probably deserved it, but he was prefect at the school. He's done very well, he's now in Narellan in New South Wales with his family, he's had 2 kids. My daughter had 5 kids and she parted from her first husband and

15:00 involved herself in her second venture which has been most special. And I now have 7 great grandchildren which is rather surprising or, my friends all think it's a pretty good effort, I'm quite proud of it. Yeah, the kids have all done well and the grandchildren have all done well. They've all got degrees and are involved in a million different things.

15:30 Life's been pretty good to me, I've been healthy all my life and my interests have really kept me alive and moving. I hope I've got a couple of years yet to go.

So do I. Well thanks very much Geoff.

Thank you Martin and Annie.

INTERVIEW ENDS