Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Wall (Don) - Transcript of interview

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:40 **Thanks very much for doing this today. We're very grateful to you to begin with. The first thing I want to do is have a bit of a summary as we just talked about then. If you could give me in as little detail as possible a point by point summary of your childhood, where you grew up and where you were born and your family?**

01:00 **Start way back there?**

I was born in Bombala 1921 and we left the district there and my father took a position at Narrandera managing Wright Heatons. After a couple of years he went into his own business and remained that way until his death. So I was brought up in Narrandera from 1925 to the time of the war [Second World War].

01:30 My main interest at that stage was Light Horse. I joined the Light Horse, I fiddled with my age but I got into it. That was the 21st Riverina Light Horse and of course when the war broke out we wanted to transfer to the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces] and initially they wouldn't permit that but it was only a matter of time because we were all

02:00 into the AIF and posted to the 7th and 8th Divisions.

The 21st Riverina Light Horse was a CMF [Citizen Military Force] battalion?

Yes.

Was it in any sense a Light Horse battalion at that stage?

Yes.

There were horses and everything?

Yes. The 21st was used for that show, "40,000 Horsemen". They tricked us into falling our horses on out on the coast

02:30 and that was a dirty trick because we were galloping over sand dunes with drops on the other side and we were rolling off the sand with the horses.

We will come back and talk about that because it sounds like a pretty interesting experience, especially as the Light Horse was a legendary thing in Australia by that stage. You joined the AIF successfully, you transferred across, did you have much

03:00 **trouble doing that?**

No, not at that time. I went into the AIF in 1940 and I went to see an interesting bloke, a friend of my father's was Jack Scott, Colonel Jack Scott, famous for his blues at Ambon [a reference to the subsequent capture and imprisonment of his force by the Japanese on Ambon Island], and he said, "Go down and see Jack Scott."

03:30 He was in charge of Intelligence in the Eastern Command, I think they called it. Anyway, it's at Victoria Barracks." He said, "Look, son, go into the infantry," and I said, "What is good about that?" He said, "Get into intelligence," and I got out of Wagga [Wagga Wagga] and transferred to Sydney

04:00 and for a matter of a few days I found the 22nd Battalion at, just out of Sydney, Ingleburn and I went across to the 19th Battalion because it was a Riverina unit and a lot of people from Narrandera had enlisted. Reg Newton, a well-known figure, said to me, "Sorry laddie, we are full

04:30 up." I went across the road and joined the 2/20th and I joined B Company. B Company was a hell of a good company and I was pleased about that, and I eventually transferred to the I section which was Intelligence, and I only had about three or four months in Malaya doing I work.

05:00 I was allocated to a company commander who used to get lost without somebody told him where he was going and what he was doing and where we were. I couldn't get away from him. When I was in the I section I was posted to his company sort of to look after him, that is what it amounted to. He was no good in the bush, you could lose him in no time at all.

05:30 At that time I decided I should buy an eight mil [millimetre] movie [camera]. I bought this movie and then I realised I needed transport so I transferred to Transport, so I had my 8 mil movie and I learnt a lot on that. One day when we were posted to Mersing which is on the east coast of Malaya I had an opportunity

06:00 of going to Singapore with the vehicle. I remember driving past the 13th AGH [Australian General Hospital] Hospital and I did a U-ey [U-turn] and I went back and I thought I would get a few shots of the nurses. This is how this film came about. And I went in there as a private, a camera over my left arm

06:30 and I said, "I would like to see the Matron." "What is it in connection with?" I said, "I want to photograph the nurses." They didn't question my rank or my position at all. They came back and said, "Matron will be out shortly." She looked me over and said, "Yes, I will get them out, we are not very busy at the moment," so I was able to photograph all the nurses in the hospital at that time, and a couple of other shots. We drove down the road.

07:00 I had my brother-in-law with me, he was in the 18th Battalion and we drove down the road into Singapore and I saw a mob of people, quite a big crowd, and I got closer and I realised they were Australians. The 4th Australian Transport Unit had arrived and they were waiting for General Bennett to come and inspect them. So I waited around and then I took up a good position.

07:30 This is something that all photographers should learn, people will come to a camera. I went out by myself. I didn't have anyone with me on the parade ground. I went out there to speak to the bloke who seemed to be in charge and he said, "We are waiting for General Bennett to arrive to welcome the unit to Malaya." I waited in a prominent position

08:00 and Bennett came to me. That amazed me. He had his ADC [aide-de-camp] with him. We've got photographs of this, and he came over and had a long talk. I think it was at that stage that I told him that my father had served with him on Gallipoli. He was a company commander at that time. Bennett just posed for me

08:30 and I've got those photographs. I returned to Mersing which is on the east coast of Malaya and the Battalion's duty was to protect Mersing because that was the short-cut. A lot of people don't realise this. That was the short-cut for the Japs [Japanese] to land at Mersing and just travel ninety miles down the highway into Singapore. Our job

09:00 was to block them there. We did block them there, and the Japs admitted that after the war. They looked at it and they said, "We would never have been able to take this from the sea." It's interesting.

What operations were you engaged with in Mersing?

Defences, shore defences on the beaches and off the beaches and up the road further where there was a river. We'd have the mouth of the river and the banks for so many miles

09:30 covered. They would have got a belting in that area. In the mean time the Japs had decided they would go down Malaya and avoid Mersing and go straight to Singapore. We had to withdraw and at that stage we withdrew to Singapore and we were placed in the worst possible position you could imagine. Percival, the British Commander, had decided at that

10:00 stage the Japs would come in on the eastern shores, they would go for the naval base. Well, they did that. They gave the impression they were doing it. They ran vehicles up and down the road and our people fell for it. The main landing spot was the position we had. We had a front. The strength of our battalion

10:30 at the time was about 750. W had a lot in hospital because of malaria and the frontage, there was nothing prepared by the people in Singapore on the frontages where they put us, and it was boggy, a lot of water. It had been raining,

11:00 and we were stretched out over a 1650 yard frontage with 750 men. When they arrived that night,

beforehand they asked the 20th Battalion to send a party across, a party of scouts to see what they could find out, if the Japs were over there.

11:30 Four of them went over, they had a look around and they counted 450 artillery pieces. We were told there was nothing there. We couldn't use our artillery, that was under Artillery Command and the Australians had to check with the British first. It was a real foul up.

12:00 We were getting casualties at that time because aircraft were flying over fairly low, you could almost see the face of the pilot, and at that time I am told by the records that I had collapsed. I had been in hospital with malaria and I collapsed at Kranji. I can't tell you the date. I always

12:30 thought I was there at a certain time. But someone else told me one day, "No, Wally, you were with so-and-so and so-and-so," and he told me, but when I got to hospital I couldn't remember a thing. The hospital was being bombed at that time. That would be the 11th of February, so somewhere between the 2nd and 3rd, the landing, my malaria hit me again and I didn't think I would get out of it because we were posted to this

13:00 hospital where incidentally Pat Darling was there. I was there the day, I was able to get around the day they came and told the nurses they were being evacuated. Pat Darling has got that full story. And not long after we were evacuated to the Cathay Theatre which was the tallest building in Singapore.

13:30 When I interviewed the survivors from the landing, we lost a lot. We lost, as a figure, we lost more casualties in two days than they lost in Vietnam for all services over a ten years period. So you can imagine

14:00 when the first rollcall came it looked very bad. At that stage I was transferred to the Cathay Theatre and it was being shelled and I remember going down the stairs and the stairs wouldn't go any further because there was a hospital on the ground floor and they had wrapped all the dead up in grey blankets with big

14:30 safety pins. I remember them. I couldn't go any further because all the dead were stacked in the stairway of the Cathay Building. I ended up going out some other way and the war ended and we were all transferred to Changi.

You were in what kind of state, was the malaria still affecting you greatly?

It ended up I had an unusual type of malaria with BT quartan and

15:00 I didn't know much about malaria. I thought you got over it in seven days or fourteen days and you were right. I didn't know until later on when I went on the Burma Thailand Railway and I got malaria again and they called the medical officers together at this camp called Nikki, which was force headquarters, the Japanese Headquarters for F Force, and I

15:30 was told to stand up and I didn't know whose identity until later. The Medical Head of the Malay States happened to be there and he gave the other doctors a lecture on quartan malaria. I met him later on. He came to see me because often he would get, some other doctor would go through and he would say,

16:00 "Look, come on down here and have a look at this fellow." At that stage I was in the hospital, what they called a hospital. It was just a hut, and with what you had. But Changi, getting back to Changi, after the capitulation, Changi was a good camp. I just couldn't agree with recent publicity about Changi. Changi

16:30 had a concrete floor, water in taps and it was clean. You couldn't scrounged things but despite that you had to be careful because some I Sergeant said to me, "Wall, what would you do if you were in charge of so many men here?"

17:00 I often got queries like that. I said, "We haven't been here long enough to know the Japs but I would make sure we are burying a bit of tucker and I am sure other stuff would have been buried around here. We should check that out." They did check it out and they found a lot of stuff had been dumped underground by the British. Not many people knew where that was coming from, but we did find a fair bit of food.

17:30 We were kept there for a couple of months and sent to a working party. Most of the population of Changi were sent on working parties. We went to the Great Whirl. The Great Whirl was an amusement park in Singapore not far from the wharves. At that time we worked on the waterfront. At that time

18:00 I went on party number, what they call 46. That was a go down and that was a full loot. I went on that party and we marched down there. Incidentally that was the period that the tune "Colonel Bogey" came to the surface. We would whistle it or sing it on the way down and on the way back. Our

18:30 boots would be filled with loot . We would take a bike chain or packets so big, all sorts of items could be marketed over the fence to the Chinese and bike chains was a very popular thing to have, worth a fair bit of money, and our fellows would be the best scroungers. The best way to achieve anything was

19:00 to do it right in front of the Japanese and tell them something about it. I was carrying a lot of film, rolls of it. One slid off and I called the Jap, "Come over," and he picked it up and put it back in my arms, you

could get away with a lot and the Great Whirl was a great camp. The crowd that went there were mainly 2/20th, 2/19th Battalions, the Anti Tank people.

19:30 They had vehicles and they used to fill the hub caps up with loot and inside the doors. When they would get back into camp they would bring the vehicles back in and they would be pulling the door covers and getting their loot, condensed milk, all condensed food. So that was a good camp. Now, it was at that stage I was in a theatre next to the guard house. The

20:00 guardhouse was the cottage occupied by the Imperial Guards. They were the fellows who came across and gave us a hiding, all over six feet. They were pretty rough. I was in the theatre next door in the projection room and I had a fellow by the name of Sid Wansey, Sidney Berkley Wansey the proprietor of the Newcastle

20:30 Herald [newspaper]. Sid hadn't knocked about in the bush because I gave him an egg to cook one day and I said, "What did you do to that? He said, "I have never cooked an egg before." Anyway, Sid was my mate. But I found a radio and we got it going, Sid Wansey and a couple of others, and we stayed in the little hut up top of the projection room

21:00 and we operated the radio at certain times and went aground when the guards were all there. I found out right through the war if you are going to do anything, do it outside a Jap guardhouse. If they ask what you are doing there tell them another Jap sent me there. It was a matter of just being a step in front of the Japs.

21:30 We operated that for about a year. I heard the news break in Australia that Darwin had been bombed and we passed it around the camp. The average comment was, "That will wake them up." We felt that they might know a little bit about what the Japs were doing. We returned to Changi at the end of the

22:00 year and we were told we were going to go north on a project, good conditions, plenty of food, the usual Japanese story conveyed to troops going away. I missed out going on D Force, I had malaria so I stayed in Changi and I went on the next force which was F. I remember a mate of mine an I

22:30 man, I Section, came to me said, "There is a force going to Borneo. It is closer to home, why don't you come with us?" We could have changed things around a bit at that time in Changi, just get allocated onto another party. D Force was a very good party and it went overland and that was another reason I told my friend, Brinkman,

23:00 that I am going overland. I am not a good swimmer. That was my excuse for Brisbane. Brinkman didn't return from Borneo, or Dan Gaulton. He was an officer and didn't know it. He was another I Section man. Anyway, I waited and I went on F force. We went by rail. We landed at Ban Pong,

23:30 which was the linking locality for the Burma/Thailand Railway. They had already constructed the railway up about fifty miles. While there we were volunteers, were called to drive, and I put my name down for that and I nominated

24:00 others that I knew were drivers and that was the best thing that happened to me. Some awful things happened at the same time. My job was to make sure that we got all our loot, not only our loot, our hospital stores up to where we were going.

24:30 There were five Japanese to watch over me, no-one else. I was isolated and at night time they could belt the daylight out of you. A couple of events took place at that stage. I'm just building up to the time we get into action at the line. Anyway, I did several trips but I found out I had the Jap doctor and when cholera broke out

25:00 my job was to take him back there. At that time it was raining. The monsoons had started. I saw stacks of bogged vehicles, Toyotas, they were bogged. They didn't know how to handle the mud. The mud had them really bogged down. I got round them I always took

25:30 the bamboo and we had to drive over bridges which were made of two logs and they would be big logs and sometimes two on each side to drive over a gully. I tackled that, and eventually got the doctor up there and then he came to me one day and said, "Driver, tomorrow Ban Pong."

26:00 So I did five trips altogether going back that way and survived it. I had one British officer, I convinced the British officer who I picked up, and convinced the Japanese officer that he belonged to F Force. This British officer, awful bloke. The first night he said, first of all, I put

26:30 myself in command and I told the Japs we would stop for the night, and where we stopped you could hear the hyenas howling either side of a big valley and we were at the base of the valley, and the Japanese wanted to stop. They didn't want to travel at night. So I told everyone they had to go out and bring in timber to light a big fire. Some of them came in with little twigs, a handful of twigs and things, they had never been in the bush.

27:00 We got a big fire going, whole trees, and we stayed there the night and the hyenas howled all night and another animal I couldn't identify, but I knew the hyena. This British officer said, "Driver, I will have your seat tonight." I said, "You will do nothing of the sort." I said, "Bloody". "You'll do nothing of the

bloody

27:30 sort. "Driver, I will have you court-martialled." I said, "Go your hardest." I was already on very good terms with the senior British officer, of which I'll talk about later. I won that round and I had to supervise the fire. Blokes would get up during the night and go for a walk and their place would be taken if it was nearer the

28:00 centre of the group. But to be on the outside, no-one wanted to be on the outside. As the blokes got up during the night to relieve themselves they would lose their position. Trouble came, "I am having a leak here, I am not going to move from this spot," and that caused a bit of a problem. Daylight came and we got on and this British

28:30 officer reminded me that I would be court-martialled and I reminded him what I told him before, "Go your bloody hardest." We got to Nikki about midday the next day and I had twenty-six stragglers on board. I don't think they would have survived if they had to walk the rest of the way which would have been 190 all up.

29:00 We settled down at Nikki. There was a hut there, it was good. It was close to the river, about fifty yards from the river, clean water, water you could drink but we were told not to. Then I had to go on to all the other camps. F Force broke up into about four camps.

29:30 First of all, the first camp was Lower Nikki and they evacuated that. We carried the sick from Lower Nikki four kilometres in a muddy track which elephants had been over and left bloody great holes and you would fall into one of these elephant marks. They evacuated it and we carried this fellow, Hutson. I have never been able to

30:00 contact the Hutson family. He said to me, "I am not going to make this." He was in hospital. "If I don't make it will you tell the family, my wife and kids in Australia?" He was a British bloke. He was with British Tobacco, and I never could find anyone in England or Australia that was connected with this fellow, Staff Sergeant Hutson. The rain had come.

30:30 One day I grabbed Huts because we were very fit blokes and they said, "There is a dead bloke down there, we want you to bury him." We couldn't find enough dry timber when it was raining and that was a big problem. We carted him up to the burial area

31:00 at that stage and Colonel Bano , the Japanese Commander of F Force, I am describing him as a good old bloke. He had served with the Japanese Navy on a destroyer which escorted Australian troops to Gallipoli and I could put you onto other people who say what I said about Bano. He was a good old bloke.

31:30 When we were carrying this down he made us drop it and said "Stop, stop, stop." We put him on the ground and old Bano got on his knees and said a few things and said we could go. I didn't see any atrocity committed at Nikki while Bano was there. It was at Nikki we found the British senior officers. One, there

32:00 is nothing good I could say about him. I think I saw him once but he locked himself up all the time. Harry Birkhold, a friend of mine, Harry is since gone, Harry was in charge of the cookhouse. He took his food up, but the officer wouldn't open the door. He would just yell out, "Leave it

32:30 by the door." No-one saw much of him.

What was this officer's name?

Yes, I'll give it to you. It will come back to me in a minute. The British are very keen about getting information about him. There was a sportsman that wrote to me who was a cricketer and he was doing story about famous sportsmen and they had him, one, as a ballroom dancer, and I gave him a lot of

33:00 information and they were staggered by it. Harris, Colonel Harris. We didn't see him all the time I was there. I didn't see Harris. I saw the Australian failure, and the War Memorial have been given all the information I had on,

33:30 it will come to me in a second. But the chief, although he was in charge of the camp, there was a Colonel Dillon, Indian Army, outstanding officer, the most outstanding officer I have every seen. He said to me once, "Wall, where did you come from?" I thought to myself, you know, being a British officer.

34:00 I said, "New South Wales." He said, "Whereabouts in New South Wales?" And I said, "The Riverina." He said, "Whereabouts in the Riverina, Wall?" I can remember this so clearly, and I said, "Narrandera." "Nice town." I said, "How do you know it?" He said, "I went there to be best man at Colonel Bruce Deer's marriage." I said, "Who did he marry at Narrandera?" He said,

34:30 "So-and-so." I said, "I know the family well." After that Dillon said to me, "Wall, we have only got two choices, to either stay here and die of cholera or fight our way out. I know that you are going to Burma tomorrow. What were you in the army?" I said, "I started out in Intelligence." He said, "I want a complete I report

35:00 on everything you see." After going as far as (mlm? UNCLEAR) I spent two to three hours just talking to Dillon. At that stage it was fairly early in the piece, seven British officers had attempted to escape and they went on a compass bearing straight over to the coast, I think it's the Bay of Bengal, the top of it,

35:30 and they went through, foolishly, they went through bamboo. Bamboo is the worst thing you can encounter because when a storm comes it flattens a lot, it packs up like cards and there were great areas of it just stacked up that you couldn't walk through, you would have to make a tunnel to get through underneath. They didn't now about this, they didn't do any reconnaissance at all. They caught them anyway.

36:00 Each night they could look back and see one of the party where they died. That was the progress they were making. It was impossible to escape overland. I got to know this Dillon, he would say, "Walls, see if you can get into number two camp and see what the death rate is." He heard it was twenty-six a week, I said, "No Sir, some days they have lost twenty-six."

36:30 I told him, I gave him a lot of names, any names I could pick up, anything. I would get into the camp and tell the Japanese some lie about the mechanics of the car. For example, if you are having trouble with the car starting, I tried to explain to this Jap that there were two plugs missing

37:00 and he said, "Ichi, ni, san, shi, go." He counted them. He said I was "bagero", mad. They weren't missing. Then if you told him the battery was flat he'd say something similar because he didn't understand what a flat battery was. These were the difficulties they had. We had them too. That is why there were no changes at all, once we learnt a bit of Japanese and did the job

37:30 we were safe. Getting into a camp was always a problem. You had to fake a breakdown or something like that. Most occasions I was always alone. Sometimes they would let someone sit in the back. Initially there were five Japanese with the truck and they did away with them.

You were driving up and down the line to a selection of camps

38:00 **that were laid out there?**

Yes.

Can you just explain a little bit about the layout? Nikki was the base camp?

Nikki, first of all there was Lower Nikki and that was evacuated. It was isolated, four kilometres down towards Thailand and then four kilometres up there was Nikki, they call it Proper, and about four kilometres

38:30 up on the river, we were on the river, up on the river was the village and that was Nikki, real Nikki, and some of the hospital staff at Nikki used to go there at night time and they would come up the river. When Col [Colonel] Dillon knew they were getting some food he approached them direct. He got on very well. He encouraged them and he helped them

39:00 any way he could.

Above Nikki there were other camps?

There was number one camp, was Lower Sonkurai, and then there was Sonkurai, that's number one camp is mainly 2/30th Battalion and 26th Battalion, and you've probably heard about Cholera Hill, that was number one camp. And number

39:30 two camp was on the river, it was the bridge, was over the river there. At the end of the Kwai the two rivers go off to the right and beyond the camps, number three camp, up onto the ridge, there was the Pagoda Pass, Three Pagodas, one representing Thailand, one was the boundary, the centre one is the boundary, and the other one was

40:00 Burma, into Burma at that stage. It went down hill all the way from that point into Burma and eventually you come into really nice country as you get towards Thanbyuzayat which was the main A Force camp. A Force had come up earlier and worked on the northern parts of Malaya and southern

40:30 parts of Thailand on various airfields and anything of that nature.

We'll just have to stop there because the tape just ran out, or is just about to run out.

Tape 2

00:30 **Was it base camp, above that was 1, 2, 3 and 4?**

Further to the north west.

Further to the west?

North west.

Where was the railway line running?

The railway line was coming from Thanbyuzayat. Now, you'll want the spelling of that right.

Right.

I'll give it to her, will I? I have a book.

We can put that in the notes if you like.

Thanbyuzayat, but

01:00 Thanbyuzayat. Ban Pong at the bottom end, the Thailand end, Ban Pong, and in one of my books it will have the map and the names.

Yeah, there is a map I noticed. We can look them up.

They'll be right. But there was a general hospital which should be mentioned. It was Tanbaya, Tanbaya.

01:30 All the F Force casualties and deaths, most of them took place at Tanbaya, they were evacuated. I took part in the evacuation of the early ones. It was terrible to get a bloke who was so thin his hip bones were sticking out and you have got to lift him up and put him on the steel floor of a truck over a pretty crook road.

02:00 I did it for a while on the evacuation. We were just taking them there to die.

Did you remain driving a truck throughout your entire time in Mezali?

Yes.

What kind of work were you involved in?

We'd be there, and they wanted people for cremation. We would be

02:30 the ones they'd get because we were fit. It is an awful thing to have to bury or cremate. The cremation, was you really went through the antics of the body throwing its arms around and legs and doing all sorts of things. It is a punishment

03:00 on its own to just have to watch it, but this bloke Hutson, he was cremated at Nikki. In that book Singapore and Beyond there is a sketch there of a memorial. I sponsored that. I said to three or blokes when one bloke was on the fire, we didn't do great numbers there, but there was

03:30 a trickle all the time and someone had to be cremated, and we were bloody fit blokes and we got a bit of extra food for it, but we weren't looking for that, it was just a horrible thing that happened. After the war you would say, well, I only went to one family and that was enough for me. The people that

04:00 own Dymocks [bookstores], I'll think of their name, one there was a relation and he used to read a lot. That was all he was doing and they would get him, that would attract the Japs to give him a belting. They had a long stick and would just go up and belt hell out of him. It was a silly thing to do to have

04:30 anything of that nature. It had its good side to it because we had North Korean guards and they weren't that mad about the Japs. We always had a guard or two and Sigatarni was one. Sigatarni was quite a

05:00 typical looking journo's view of the Japanese, but one of my mates, his name is Albert Chamberlain, he comes from Merbein near Mildura. He drove the Colonel and we called him 'Neville' and he is still known by his army

05:30 mates as Neville, Neville Chamberlain [British Prime Minister]. If you went looking for him you would have to go looking for Bert, but Bert convinced Sigatarni, one of the Japs, when following one of the Japanese truck of supplies, it was going over a corduroy road, doesn't give you much hope of speed, to let him get out, run along and take a case of food off the back of the truck. Well,

06:00 we had that arrangement with the Korean guards and we made the best of it. We buried everything we stole or acquired. Wherever we went if there was tinned food on a truck somewhere and there was no-one around we would help ourselves and get out of it quickly.

I am interested, your role was driving for the Japanese? You are under their command

06:30 **directly and yet you also had your own structure of command within the camp?**

Yes. That was all the way.

We will come back to a lot of the details about this later. We'll skip a bit forward. During that period on the railway, you spent your time driving for the Japanese?

Yes.

And in your own way helping out your own men?

Helping myself, yeah.

What happened when the railway joined up, what happened toward the end of that period?

Well, we withdrew

07:00 and went by rail back to Ban Pong and by rail. Some went on a ship back to Singapore. We went by rail and the trucks went back to Singapore. The Japanese work in a funny way. They were still under the, Colonel Bano was still under the administration of Changi, Changi Command. If we wanted extra fuel it would

07:30 come up from Singapore. They would never work in like our units would work in, "Oh, they have got fuel over the road." They would never do anything like that. It would have to come out of Singapore. We did very well because, for example, Colonel Bano, there was a Q [Quartermaster's] Store there. We kept the parts of the trucks, batteries and things like that, in the Q Store.

08:00 We knew what was in the Q Store and we made good use of it. The Colonel's batman [officer's servant] used to come down and get a quota of four tins of condensed milk, Nestlé's condensed milk. He had twelve cases stacked up in the store, while he was working from the top. When we got

08:30 in there whether it was at 1.00 o'clock in the morning, we knew how to get in, we worked from the bottom, put the stack back, the right the number of tins exposed on the top everything was correct, and as time went on the Japs were using more milk and we were, it kept us in good condition. The milk ran out so they gathered,

09:00 they picked the drivers and they belted us with a crank handle from a Marmon truck about that long, and any of the fellows that are still around they would have marks on their shins. That's when it occurred. Now, this would be how you would deal with the Jap guards, one fellow, Beadman, related to the jockey killed by his own family,

09:30 he made a deal with Kuymoto, he took him aside and he said, "Australia soldier see another Australian soldier do anything bad, no speak. Australia soldier see Nippon [Japanese] soldier take anything, no speak." This was Beadman trying to knock out a deal. Well, he knocked out a

10:00 deal with the Japs, they let us go. And about that time, that was late in the piece, the line was well advanced because the Dutch had moved into the camp and we said it must have been the Dutch. We all got a decent belting out of that. I learnt to stand on one foot, I tucked the other one away and danced around but they still,

10:30 they would hit you with anything. After that we knew that they were selling Australian goods. For example, we knew they stole our sewing machine that went up with the force, I saw it in Burma. If you mentioned the words "sewing machine" to a Jap he'd floor you, but they were aware that the drivers knew what the Japs were stealing

11:00 and what they preferred. One day Nev Chamberlain came across this one, he found a Jap in a hole, he was one of our guards and he had some eggshells he wanted to get rid of. He couldn't have any evidence he was getting food from anywhere. We knew he was there and starving. Starvation is their punishment.

11:30 They would come on side. That was what we did in the end. About the middle, somewhere about July we made that deal and it worked.

You managed to get quite decent treatment in the end through this

12:00 **sort of dealing?**

We had no worries. I didn't see anything at Nikki that war crimes people would be interested in. Old Bano, as I said, there was no nastiness about him at all and the other ones I dealt with, they just felt they wanted to keep a good driver around. At night time

12:30 coming back if I go through a Jap camp the officer would say, "You come with me," and we would go in. He would order them, he'd be a senior bloke, he would order them to give me a meal. I told Tim Bowden once the story about the meal I got and the bugger took me out to dinner, to a Jap caf [café]. I could smell the same stuff, I didn't know what it was.

13:00 He told me what it was later on, but it just took me right back to the lines straight away, walking into this place and smelling the same.

Bean Curd?

That is what it was. You know?

That was a Colonel Fakoda?

Fakoda was there.

You have formed quite a, I won't say a relationship, but you had a lot of

13:30 **dealings with the same Japanese guards?**

An understanding.

An understanding, if you like.

They would say, "You understand?" That's how they'd speak. "You understand? I understand." They would learn certain words and we could communicate with them all right. I would have never given evidence against old Bano. I saw him on a log one day and my mate, Taperell, they were the drivers, Taperell has

14:00 since gone, I saw him sitting down delousing I think it was Taperell's pants. He was lying on the log going right round the cuff wanting something to do. No-one could have given evidence against the conduct of the Japanese

14:30 at Nikki, no-one.

What happened after that, did you remain a driver when the Railway was completed?

No. They took us back to Singapore around about late in the year. We were home in '43. We were home before Christmas and just after Christmas the last lot came down April the following year.

15:00 **Was that a return to the Changi you left or had things changed considerably by that time?**

No, they just changed quarters and different places. Changi was like our home. Really, it was, you couldn't complain about Changi. When they took us home they put us in a symode camp

15:30 which used to be a British Command camp and I started looking around then for radio parts. Two officers had been in Timor with the Sigs [Signals], they were Sig officers, one a captain one, a lieutenant. Alan

16:00 Hamilton was the captain and they had the makings of a set and they gave it to me. They knew I was looking around because I was digging up holes around the place. We got the makings and I got eleven blokes to take some item into the gaol when we went. We were searched at the gaol.

16:30 In the gaol there is a road that goes right around inside that is called the girdle road. In that road there is two feet of earth on one side of the concrete, the inner side, we used to use that to bury things, use our spoon to dig a hole and memorise a marker somewhere with it, and we got that in and I got that into operation.

17:00 That year was '44.

What did you do with the radio? Were you able to send and receive messages?

No, we couldn't send.

What news would you get?

We would get the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation]. We could reach American various stations but usually all near Asia.

How did that affect your time in Changi?

Nothing like

17:30 a news bulletin to keep the morale up. It was essential but I was a private, but I put it to command. There was a little hut in C courtyard, the British courtyard, and the British had been up on the line

18:00 and the little hut in the corner next to, I don't know if you can imagine Changi, but it has four large buildings two at either end and in the centre there is a very large building for the cooking facilities, and on one side of it was an alley way that went right down, right through to the boundary, and there was power on that. We would tap the power. I got these

18:30 other blokes, my team, we would have one sitting around somewhere near the main entrance and we worked out it would take one minute and a half to do a fast walk to where we had the radio. The easier one, when we were using part of the kitchen at night, we had one bloke

19:00 who could walk down and cut the power in the alleyway that goes next to the cookhouse. The cookhouse was huge as you can imagine. They had two or three upright boilers there, and Taperell, one of my mates from Thailand, we got him a job there because there was a room there barred up and it was not used, so we could use that. So one night I am on the air

19:30 with Thompson. Thompson was a pretty intelligent bloke, he was secretary of the Ford Company and a Canadian, excellent with shorthand. He was handy. We were there and Taperell, he got the worst of the beltings because he was a big bloke. He had all the timber lined up to go to the end of the boiler. At one stage we used

20:00 one of those logs to put the radio in to cover it up. If anyone came we'd dice it in. One night there was a guard outside and Taperell is talking to him, I am ready to get rid of our loot and I said, "What were you going to do with him?" He said "I was going to put him in the boiler." He said, "I could. I was going, for a start," he said, "I was going to

20:30 point out something that was in it, in the fire, that he could bend over and have a look." He had him lined up but it never happened. We were scared on a lot of occasions.

What were the penalties in getting caught?

Death, death.

Did anyone ever get that penalty?

Matthews in Borneo did. He was a fool though, he was a captain. Instead of getting someone to do the contact work outside,

21:00 he did it, asking for radio parts. He would have to be mad. Famous man, but not the way I would do it. That is the first thing you have to say, "What am I gong to do with them if the Japs come?" We had bore holes for toilets and they

21:30 were a diameter of about twenty inches and a depth up to about twenty feet and a box on top with a lid on it and they were the toilets for the gaol. We didn't mind being posted right next to the toilets. There was also an engineers' workshop in the gaol and they were converting all the British Army cabinets and furniture into

22:00 general useful items that could be used in the camp. You had to rehearse everything, what you were going to do. If you are going on air tonight, you do not always have the same bloke with you. Most Australians didn't have a clue where Guadalcanal was. They had never heard of it.

22:30 You had to change that around to go in the news bulletin. The arrangement was I had a mate from Narrandera, Don Garner, he was a sergeant in 30th and he was the contact with the commanding officer. The commanding officer, Garner came one day for some news and I said, "We are off the air."

23:00 He said, "The old man will be upset about this." I said, "I can't give you any news at all," he said, "He will be upset, you know. You will lose friends in high places." I said, "I would sooner lose friends in high places than lose my neck." That became well known, and we went off the air and buried the radio. This is after we had been on the air about eighteen months

23:30 and it is getting close to the end and we buried it. There was a fence in E courtyard, a barbed wire fence about thirty or forty feet long. We undid the fence from one end and we got about the centre and we put the, we had, you can see this in Canberra, they wouldn't have the container, but they have got the radio.

24:00 We put the set down there and strained the fence up, put it back up, there was only one outsider knew it was there. He told, he put us in and I requested to go on a work party.

24:30 Parties were sent out, this is a part that you might want to record. Parties went out digging tunnels. I went to the one at Jurong. I knew, had interpreted some of the codes that were coming through from the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] India radio. It was just jumbled up stuff, it was after the Americans

25:00 were killed at Pallawan in tunnels. It was about that time the American intelligence had broken the Japanese Naval code and it contained the message to all Japanese commands south in the

25:30 event of an Allied approach they were to kill all prisoners present. They did that there and one of the other reasons I got out of Changi was it was a bad place to escape from. You couldn't escape from it. That end of Singapore was defended. But they had these F Force blokes working on, one in Johor,

26:00 or two or three I believe, on toll parties and they were to be used to kill the prisoners. That's why I often use that name. I went on a party it only occurred to me lately but normally it was incredible. I get out there, three Japanese guards come and

26:30 grab me and they got me and marched me down to the Japanese in charge of the tunnelling program and I saluted him, half bow, and he produced my diary. He said, "You may have this."

27:00 That information could only come from an Australian officer. There was nothing in it. He was the interpreter at Nikki I used to drive.

Why had they taken your diary?

They had been through my gear, someone had tipped them off.

Did they find anything?

No, I never had anything around to involve anyone or myself.

27:30 It was just addresses of mates. I've still got it. It has come apart a bit, but I've still got it. There was nothing incriminating in it.

How did you react when that happened?

I thought it was a general search but when I started talking to the blokes, "Were you blokes searched today?" "No, no." No-one else was searched. That is since I have been researching, that's what worried me. And Sargi,

28:00 the interpreter, he is still alive but I sent a message to another Jap, Figatani . Anyway, is this the stuff you want to hear?

Yeah. We can tell this story now or we can come back to it and talk a lot about the radio and stuff later.

But

28:30 it had to come from someone who knew precisely what I was doing and I wondered, and I still wonder whether Black Jack, the colonel, organised it because he wouldn't want any incident to take place in Changi because everyone would suffer and they might have decided when I went off it was a good thing

29:00 that I was put off the air. That is what he might have done.

Was that the policy if something had been discovered like that, would have the whole camp have suffered?

Yes. The Japs used the whole camp. When the British were in charge they had Jap prisoners in Changi gaol and when the Japs were getting close to Singapore they cut off their water. So they

29:30 were aware of that. I think the Japs knew in '43 that we were to be killed at some stage. We would not survive. Looking back on them now, that only came to me the other day, the fact that I asked the other blokes in that camp, I said "Were you searched?" "No,

30:00 mate, no-one was searched." They had me.

Moving forward, why weren't you killed, what happened at the end of the war to stop this from happening?

The Emperor made up his mind and the order came from the Emperor and the all the Japs started talking about some of these

30:30 things and they would say, "All men", all men was a favourite phase they used, "All men die, all men die. When America come all men die." There was a story, there was an American, they called him the Yank, in the camp, Adam Park

31:00 it's in the first year, and he complained that our blokes were pinching his fuel. They were. He said, "It has got to stop." While he was giving this talk to the men some bloke down the road was milking his car and he said, "You will all die." That was on the menu

31:30 right in the early part of the war and it was just waiting for the Emperor's order.

So the Emperor's order never came, is that what you are saying?

No. I think there is a lot of other things but, "When American come all men die," I only heard that towards the end.

What did happen at the end of the war? You were in Changi until the very end, the radio had stopped

32:00 **by this stage.**

That raid on my gear, that was within the last week of the war.

Had you heard on the radio about the bombings?

We knew the Japs knew that things were close to the end, that's

32:30 why they were preparing big holes around the camp. There was one around, our blokes were out from Changi, they were used, air force personnel were used for Changi airfield. That is where they went, they went out from Changi and then they took these other parties and they were digging tunnels. We didn't realise what the tunnels were all about. We thought

33:00 thought they were for the Japanese, but they were for us. Since I have done a lot of American research, it was a pity about Edmonson, I would have gone over and seen him. He's the bloke that did the review of Pat Darling's book, lieutenant-general. We used to call him "the Colonel".

33:30 He was over Japan a hell of a lot.

In that last week, just getting back to what happened in Changi, these tunnels were constructed but no order came through to use them. What happened?

I think the Japs for about the first time got scared about it, they were thinking about themselves then.

You didn't know, this has all occurred to you later through

34:00 **looking at things in hindsight, but what specifically happened at the end of the war? Did the Americans come into the camp?**

Word came through, no, they didn't, Americans didn't come near us. No, we had an Australian group and on water it was a British group. I remember going out to a destroyer which was later sunk in the Adriatic. We went

34:30 on that and got some good food and we were different blokes. We pinched all the cars we wanted. We took a car from a Jap colonel and took what he had and just left him in a Chinese village. I didn't like his chances, but it's all

35:00 survival. Anyway, we're off the track a bit.

We are. I think we should get back on the track. We have come to the end of the war, we've gone through where you were in each part of it. I think what we will do now is go back to before it and talk a little about your pre-war life and come back to all these things we've glossed over now and talk about it in a lot of detail. Don't feel that we're going to miss out on stuff.

I will start by early life.

35:30 **I'll ask you some questions too. You don't have to talk without prompting. Can you tell me a bit about Narrandera in your early life, what was that like to grow up in Narrandera?**

It was a good town. It was a good town and very classy. My father got out of Wright Heatons and he started his own company.

36:00 It was a select sort of town, two clubs and one you would have about 10,000 acres to become a member. There were some famous members of that club. H.V. McKay, he was a machinery maker in Victoria, all the farming gear was made by H.V. McKay.

36:30 **What was this club called?**

The Murrumbidgee Club. I became a member of it and the old man was a bit cagey about that.

Your old man wasn't a member?

He was a member. His interest, as kids growing up in the house we had a pantry. We called it a pantry but it was odds and ends, but it had all Uncle Harry's gear of World War I,

37:00 and all his own stuff that he ended up with, and that got me interested in the army.

Your father was in the war and your Uncle Harry was in the war as well?

That's World War I. My father was also in World War II. He was MBE [Member of the British Empire], he was adjutant in the 14th Squadron which was RAF [Royal Air Force] in the western desert. He ended up in Algeria.

Did he put down his age to go into the war?

He put down

37:30 his age to get in there. I suspected when I went away, I suspected he would. You would only have to see a mob of blokes marching down the street and he would be in it.

Did you father, when you were growing up, talk to you about his First World War experiences?

We got about the landing. He was wounded on the landing and evacuated to Lemnos but he was

38:00 very much an old digger.

What do you mean by that, when you say "very much an old digger"?

Loyalty to anyone who had served. He would find out that Wall and Company was carrying a lot of farmers, ex-servicemen, battlers, he would find out that they would have quite an account with Wall and Co unpaid.

38:30 **How big a company was Wall and Company?**

The year I left it, it turned over half a million, and that's a country town. But my older brother, I went out of Narrandera a year after my father died because my mother made my older brother boss. He was in the airforce and never left Australia and he sent the business

39:00 broke in two years.

When you were growing up the company was doing well?

Extra well. It was pretty good to have a country business with such a big turnover. When I went home the company owned a wool scour as well and I went out and I did a call outside work on selling and buying wool between Narrandera,

39:30 Deniliquin, to Jerilderie right out to as far as Hay. I was the wool buyer and I was selling cars. We were selling (UNCLEAR) cars in those days, Humber Snipes. Most of those properties had a Humber of some sort.

Which period is this?

Early '50's.

Early 50's. We'll come back to that. We'll have to stop again and change the tape.

Tape 3

00:39 **Did you grow up learning to ride horses?**

Yes, my sister had a horse in the back yard.

Did you have a horse?

I had my own horse in the Light Horse.

Growing up did you have your own horse?

Yes, as a teenager.

What did you use the horse for when you were growing up?

01:00 First of all my mate had a horse and we used to go together on the same horse and then I got my own horse. We always had a family horse in the yard.

Was it for recreation or did you use it for transport?

Both. The horse was a member of the family.

What was your horse's name?

Ginger, a little red bloke. I trained him to sit down

01:30 when we were taking cover in the Light Horse, I would walk him up the gully and then I could get him to sit down.

Did you take him into the Light Horse?

Yeah, I had my own horse. In those days they all had their own horse, you got a variation. We would get him on a train, we would go to Wagga by train, down to Junee and then down to Wagga with our horse.

02:00 **This is when you were still in Narrandera?**

Yes. I didn't have a horse after the war, that was the end of horses in the backyard.

What did you know of the British Empire at that stage?

The old man, they were very British because our family,

02:30 the Wall family in Victoria, I think we were remittance men. What I can hear from some of the younger people doing research today there were three Walls came out from England as probably a place to get rid of them and

03:00 I think one of them, Tosh, he was a bookmaker but I think he was the bagman because everyone went to a good school. He was the bagman, he had to pay the education fees for all that clan and even religion came into it. Tosh had a row with a headmaster one of the

03:30 leading Anglican schools in Melbourne so he sent that part of the family to the Roman Catholic section. And that one, he's a doctor in the family, he is deceased, it is quite an interesting background.

What, were you brought up religiously?

No.

04:00 I think Uncle Harry was a Catholic. We had better things to do than get mixed up with churches. I

always remember Father Harding saying, "Where are you going, Wall?" And saying I was going fishing. I went to a Catholic School, St Pat's [Patrick's] Goulburn.

Were you a boarder there?

Yeah.

Why did your parents send you away to a boarding school?

I will tell you why I think.

04:30 Dad's accountant was a bloke by the name of Kenny, Kenny's brother was a VC [Victoria Cross] winner from World War I, Kenny had a mate, McCarthy who was at Waverley College Catholic School, the good one, but he had one of the brothers from Goulburn call and see him one day and they said, "Why don't you send Don there?" So that is how that happened. I'll

05:00 tell you something I organised the Sandakan Foundation and I organised the, my friend who was a Franciscan Father, I organised him to dedicate those six major memorials, Sydney, Burwood Park, Bendigo, Main Park

05:30 at Strathdale, Tamworth, Wagga, Sydney. A bloke said to me one day, "Wall, I didn't know you were a tyke [Roman Catholic]." I said, "What makes you think this?" He said, "Because you are always with this Father." He was a terrific bloke. Now, let me tell you this. I am a Protestant.

06:00 The Catholic members on the railway line were outstanding. The Protestants ones weren't worth knowing but the Catholics were outstanding. When I think of some of them they were terrific people. That touches on religion.

That's interesting.

06:30 **We might come back to that when we get up to the railway line, what kept you going up there. What about your schooling, did you enjoy school?**

I didn't mind it, but when I wanted to take a day off when I was younger, I would take a day off. I had a row with the headmaster there. When I went away to school I was very ill. I was eventually taken home and spent a long time at St John of God's Hospital Goulburn,

07:00 and I was taken home to die. When I got home Dr Lethbridge sat me out in the sun. I had an abscess on the lung and it burst in Goulburn, and I didn't know until 1954 I had a calcified cyst on the liver that I had gone into the army with. It's that size, a hydatid cyst

07:30 at that time but no-one picked it up.

Where did you get the hydatids from?

You get it from rabbits. I was always killing rabbits and skinning them as a kid, from the moment you could catch a rabbit, trap him, skin him and eat him. I learnt that at an early age. When I go to a different doctor and they

08:00 don't know about this cyst and they X-ray me and they find it and they get excited about and start talking about it, I say, "I forgot to tell you that I have had that since about 1950 and I served through the war with it."

Were there any lessons that you learnt in your early years that stood you in good stead through your time in captivity?

To be able to cook in the jungle.

Where did you learn to cook?

At home.

08:30 Mum and Dad, Dad would go down and see his mates and one of his mates was Coles. You've heard of GJ Coles? Well Arthur Coles, they were in Gallipoli together. He spent a lot of time in Melbourne, we had a sort of an office in Melbourne in 14 Queen Street. I remember loaning money, when I came home I married and I

09:00 moved into a flat that we had amongst our real estate and up the road was a lady with a big boarding house. One day she was leaning over the fence and she said, "I am going to sell out," and I said, "What do you want for it?" I didn't have that sort of money, so I cashed in my, I didn't cash it in, I used my gratuity to borrow money from the bank and I bought it. A cocky [farmer] came to me one day and said he was looking for, he was interested in buying

09:30 something in town and he said, "You own that thing up the road?" He said, "Yes, I own it. What are you going to do with it?" He said, "I will buy it from you." I said, "You will have to think of a good price." That is when I contacted the bank to see if the gratuity would be collateral. Anyway, I bought that and I sold it for a fair bit of money because it was chock-a-block

10:00 full of boarders, and then having sold that I loaned the business the money, I didn't have anything else in mind. There was a 2-storey building down the town, it used to be a general store, it had facilities for stables out the back. It was in town. Well, I bought that and it was vacant and I put two,

10:30 I created two businesses. One was a dry cleaner, I put him in there, and the other was a manufacturing tailor which was my idea. This is straight after the war and this bloke's name was Alec, he was a tailor and cutter and he had fallen out with the people up the road. So I said, "I have got the premises, we will go into business," called it Don and Lex Tailoring Company.

11:00 It supplied Wagga, all the big towns around for tailored goods. All I wanted to go was get something going in the building. We had to get dry cleaning done so I thought I'll do that, I knew where there was a steam donkey. My daughter never knew what a steam donkey was. When I wouldn't buy her a horse she said, "Will you buy me a steam donkey?" I got that tailoring going, but I sold the lot

11:30 in one hit. It was a fair bit of money then. It might have been something about £3,000 or £4,000, so I had built up quite a fair bit of equity as someone in the business, the family business. I was prepared to leave it there. After my father died and my brother took over I came to Sydney and requested my cash back and I got it, but

12:00 he sent the business broke. He wasn't a bloke with ideas. You had to have ideas to see opportunities.

Did you get on with your brother when you were younger?

Yes, some of the time. He was always a bit of a bully.

Did he bully you?

Yeah.

Did you learn to stick up for yourself at that time?

Yes. He went to Brighton Grammar and they taught him all sorts of things down there, he thought he could fight.

12:30 **What did he do to you?**

No, he was big, he'd fight a brawl. It would be a brawl more than a proper stand up go, but we didn't, if I had something or I had made a deal, I would go out, I'd drive out and stay at one of the station properties overnight.

This is when you were a young fellow before the war?

Yes. I started before the war, I just knew my way about.

13:00 After the war, because when you are locked up for a while you think of all sorts of schemes. I always remember the bloke, one of our blokes, he always wrote he was going to make dog biscuits when he got home.

Can we stay with the pre-war time, and can you tell us about your aspirations to join up with the Light Horse?

13:30 I was keen about it, I was really keen. I was in love with the horse and you could, when you are taking cover and there is supposed to be artillery going there is the horse on the ground and you have got your back up to it, right to it, and they were a wonderful animal.

Why did you join the Light Horse?

I liked the general idea,

14:00 the general concept. I had seen things that belonged to one of my uncles in the Light Horse, I had seen those in the pantry at the old home.

What things were they?

The saddles and everything you can think of to do with the horse, straps and what do they call, the main straps that officers now wear?

14:30 My memory is beginning to go a bit, but there were other things there that you wouldn't see. My sister was mad too and it has rubbed off in the family. My daughter has twenty or thirty horses up at Dungog. She has a property. She said she wanted to buy a property round there, and I said to her,

15:00 "You go and see so-and-so and so-and-so who is a solicitor in the Newcastle area."

What else was in the pantry?

Usually antiques, clothing, things that you would not normally see but it would end up in the pantry.

Can you tell us about the time you joined up with Ginger at the Light Horse?

15:30 I knew everyone already in the Light Horse and the first bloke I met when I decided to join I said, "How did you go about it?" and he told me what he did. I said, "Do you have to supply your own horse?" and he said, "Oh yes." I said, "I have got that, and what else?" And he said, "You are a bit young." I said, "Actually my correct age is such-and–such." It was borderline.

How old were you?

I was twelve months too young but I put it up.

16:00 **How old was that?**

I think it is the same as they had in the official history, eighteen or nineteen. Nineteen I think was the acceptable age but I was eighteen. It is in the main official

Can you tell us about the day you went down and first started going and training on exercises with the Light Horse?

16:30 We were in camp at Wagga, that was the headquarters and that is where they took us. We didn't so much enlist, I can't remember the actual day, but I know that we enlisted at Narrandera. There was an enlistment officer in Narrandera,

17:00 a local bloke, his name was Jim Growcock, Jim Growcock. He got lots. Then they put us on the train and they took us to Wagga. Instead of getting trucks and straight down the road to Wagga, they put us on the train at Narrandera and we went to Junee and some of the blokes got up on the roof of the train, and then we were taken down to Wagga. We got off at Wagga we went to the showground and from there,

17:30 that was when I enlisted in the Light Horse, the war hadn't started. We were in Wagga when the war started. No, in Wallgrove [Training Camp] in Sydney.

In Wagga did you have Ginger with you?

Yes, we had to load them up and unload them. After that we went to Wallgrove.

What exercises were you involved in, in the Light Horse?

Long marches.

On horseback?

18:00 We might go out for three or four miles and have a look around.

You said you became involved in the filming of the film The 40,000 Horsemen, can you tell us about that?

No, we didn't get involved with the filming, what happened is they took us on

18:30 an exercise from Wallgrove down to Cronulla and they played dirty tricks on us. Galloping in this direction arse over head. We didn't know we were being filmed, we didn't know it was on, but we found out later because it was part of a major event for us. You have got to look after your horse and I was very much opposed to

19:00 traps with horses and I said so. I said, "I didn't join the Light Horse to have him endangered in exercises."

Were you being filmed to be part of the

Yes, we were. We could recognise our horses.

At the time you were unaware?

Unaware, it was a complete trap. We had been exercising out through Wallgrove and

19:30 along the river. I have photos somewhere of where we were. I can't put my hand on them at the moment but they're in one of the albums.

What sort of things were they making you do to the horses?

I taught my horse to sit just like talking to a dog, and Ginger would

20:00 He'd go to his front knees and take his time dropping his back ones down. He would nuzzle you and sit up right next to you, as long as you were close to him you were friends with him and he felt all right. They're delightful animals. Horses and dogs, I love them.

What was your ambition in the Militia [CMF]?

I don't think I thought much about the future.

20:30 It was just a play thing. I can remember more about tanning my gear and taking it off and getting it nice

and polished so you could see yourself in it. Our gear always looked good.

What about when you left school, what were you wanting to do?

We had a property. My father had a few hundred acres next to town

21:00 and I used to go out there a lot looking for rabbits and shooting foxes.

What was your first job?

The family business of course. I always used to speak my mind about doing it this way, and why don't we do this.

Did you ever want to go on with further education?

I had medicine in mind but it didn't work out that way because I wasn't well enough and I started reading

21:30 a hell of a lot about, they were not sure what my problem was but once they started X-raying, X-raying wasn't very common at that stage in the late '30's. When one

22:00 of the Macquarie Street blokes found this cyst I had he asked for X-rays of it and I said, "there are no X-rays of it." I have had an X-ray of the top of the chest, you can't imagine anyone missing a bloody cyst that size.

You weren't able to get into medicine. Had you decided to do something else?

I thought of that, I used to clean up things when I was

22:30 in the hospital at Narrandera. Anything that would come out of surgery, they would wash it in metho and give it to us to polish. I had that in mind. I reckon I could have done a good job it too, but it didn't happen that way, the family business, because of the war.

How aware were you of events in Germany?

23:00 We would get stuck to the radio the moment the news was coming on. We talked a lot about Uncle Harry who died in France, he is buried there and he was in one of the localities they wanted to dig up. My son, who we lost last year, he'd been over there a few times and followed his tracks around.

23:30 **How aware were you of the rising militarism of Japan?**

We thought anything could happen but we didn't think about the Japs, we didn't think it would come from there.

Had you thought about going to war when you were in the militia?

Yes, we thought it might happen again, it was the same pattern

24:00 be in the Middle East. We thought it would be the Middle East. Up until the time we got to, I was on the Queen Mary, up until the time we got to Perth, Fremantle, I thought we were going to the Middle East until some blokes went down below and opened a case and the title was Notes on Malaya, and they broke that open

24:30 and the word got out before the ship sailed that they were heading for Malaya.

A bit of an intelligence leak.

Someone should have stopped that before, should have gone in a foolproof area. That night after the Queen Mary left the convoy and we headed for Malaya it was the first time you could feel any vibration in the

25:00 ship, she was flat out. Incredible. When we got into the naval base it was interesting. Our blokes were throwing pennies out to the British officers, they had all lined up down below with their wives.

Before we get there I think we should cover some of you recruitment into the AIF. Where were you when you heard that

25:30 **war had broken out in Europe?**

I think we were in camp at Wagga because it made us more conscious of what we were doing. They won't be using horses, another topic. What would you like to go into? We will be armoured before long, that was talking about it at that stage.

26:00 I thought I'm not going to hang around.

What happened to Ginger when you joined the AIF?

The family kept him. My sister Helen, she is still around, she was the horse member of the family, she always had various horses. My daughter now has taken after her. My daughter, Lorna the artist, she has an exhibition in the city in Grosvenor House each year.

You spoke of Jack

26:30 **Scott. Can you tell me why he recommended that you join the I [Intelligence] Section?**

He was, you know what is going on. You know more about what is happening and what you're likely to do than anyone else in the battalion.

What sparked your interest in intelligence?

I always had a liking, "Who is that mob over there, What are they here for?" That sort of thing.

27:00 I wanted to, I was going to write a fair bit about it but the whole trouble was the officers weren't good enough, the officers we had.

At the time had you been reading spy literature?

No, nothing like that.

What got you interested in the intelligence game?

27:30 The fact that he was talking about Jack Scott a lot and he would say to me, "You want to be well-informed in whatever you are doing," and we would talk about it. That is when I went over to Reggie Newton, he was a 19th Battalion famous identity. He was in charge of D Force, "Roaring Reggie" they called him.

28:00 We would meet the other I members at schools. On the Queen Mary someone I met when I was President of the Club was on the Queen Mary, Adrian Curlewis, Captain Curlewis then, but he was intelligence officer, 8th Div, so they got all the

28:30 juniors to a school on the Queen Mary. I invited Curlewis to the beach club one year as a principal guest, he was a legal man and he held a number of skills and I found it interesting.

Did you join up with the AIF by yourself or did you go with friends?

29:00 No, I went by myself.

Did you discuss that decision with your parents?

No. I told him I was going to join up. He knew it too.

What did he say to you?

He didn't say anything. By this time because it was Light Horse he knew how I had adapted to it and he never tried to stop me. I think he was disappointed in my other brother.

29:30 I had two brothers, one was in the bank and he joined the RAF and he was in Intelligence and he got to New Guinea. My other brother, he got further away from home down near Tocumwal, from Narrandera that is about seventy or eighty miles south of Narrandera. That's where he ended up with the air force.

30:00 **When did your Dad join up again?**

You only had to get a band our and strike up the band and he'd join up. He joined up when I went away and in a matter of a few days he was on the Elizabeth heading for the Middle East.

What training did you get in Intelligence when you joined?

Just discussions school, general talk

30:30 about it which you got to find out. If you are going to be sent in some district you have got to find out if it is a bad malaria district, find out about the numbers of the people that live there, the population, you would go through all sorts of silly things, it might be silly but you want to know. But in Malaya, Fifth Columns [people sympathetic with the enemy], he'll be there. You couldn't trust the Malays.

31:00 You still can't trust them, do you know that? You take the President of Malaya, the bastard. They should have got him a long time ago.

What did you enjoy the most about training when you first joined the army?

I think the company of other people. You met blokes from every town in the bush. "If you're out my way call in."

31:30 I think the Light Horse, it should never had been changed, it had to be changed to armour, but as for the Light Horse in a country like Australia you could use it.

Can you tell us why you bought the eight millimetre movie camera?

32:00 No-one else had one, that was the reason. I said to Brigadier Taylor one day, I said, "I bought this camera, can you give me the opportunity of getting a few group photographs?" And he said, "Certainly,"

and I didn't get around to that. It was my money, seven bob [shillings] a day.

32:30 We were on eight bob a day because I had an insurance policy and my mother looked after that. To buy a film for $35, the family kept sending me film and that is why I sent the film home.

What inspired you to buy the camera?

I thought an event like that being away should be recorded.

33:00 No-one else was doing it.

Had you developed an interest in moving pictures?

Not generally, I just wanted the 8th Division to be recorded properly, no-one was doing it. Official people would come along and when Miss Australia came to visit the unit in Malaya

33:30 I got a few shots there, but I didn't get much, but it was the same mob hanging around her, escorting her everywhere. B Company claimed her. I have a lot of photographs of her. I reckon the film I did which I sent home and got out of the place, that was a wise move getting it out of Malaya. I got it out. The Japs were in at the end of the year,

34:00 December the 9th, and I think I took the photographs out about September, October and sent it off home and my mother screened it at some ladies' guild and that was about it.

Important documents if they are still around. Can you tell us about the person who most influenced you when you were in your basic training in the army?

34:30 No, I can't. I don't know.

What was your feeling about being in the military?

I just felt it was our duty. We were part trained, that was a start, a good start, and I didn't have any special friend, girlfriend or anything like

35:00 that at the time, but when I came home they were all gone.

Can you tell us about coming up and joining the Queen Mary, that deployment?

All the characters came to the service on the Queen Mary. Just going up the stairs, like being in a huge hotel. It

35:30 was a wonderful ship, and getting a quota of beer in your dixie [cooking pot], you would be drinking out of a two-handled dixie and sipping it, and liking it too. I think I would have stayed in the army if we hadn't ended up where we did,

36:00 I might have stuck to the army for a while, but it still would have been in the field of Intelligence where I would have know what was happening and where we were we going, what we should take and how we should train. Some blokes didn't even think about where they were going.

What did you aspire to

36:30 **within the army at that time?**

I had no plans at all but opportunities as they came along. I'll just tell you briefly, after I left Narrandera I went to Sydney and I bought that lovely old home, I bought that out at Ryde and I

37:00 started putting some of my ideas to the market. I found a use for latex. Latex was used for carpets and all things like that but I invented a name and I called it Sacktex. During the war the farmers had a big drought and the mice had a party and they

37:30 ate many of the bags and drilled holes in them, vital assets that farmers couldn't get. I put Sacktex on the market and my father said, "Another one of your scatterbrained ideas." I took Sacktex, I took the utility, Chev [Chevrolet] ute [utility truck] to Sydney, I went to James Hardie Trading and bought a 44 gallon drum of latex

38:00 straight from the tree. I took it outside and I had bags in the ute and I opened the 44 gallon drum and I joined some of it together and I eventually put two pieces together and towed a vehicle and said it was strong enough. When the first Sydney show I went and I was selling it.

38:30 By the time I got back to Narrandera on that trip there was something like $800 worth of the stuff was sold. Containers were hard to get so I bought army water bottles which had a nice clip on top. I put Sacktex on the market and it sold throughout Australia and New Zealand. So that was my first one, and then I

Perhaps we could just perhaps come back to the trip

39:00 **over on the Queen Mary while we are moving towards Malaya in early 1940. You are off on an adventure of a lifetime I presume, you must have been very excited?**

Yes. We were exercising the rubber trees all the time and each rubber tree has a cup on it, milking this latex. I remember as POWs [Prisoners of War] using latex to patch up my trousers

39:30 and I thought this would patch up other things too. So after I got the first 44 I went down to the Land newspaper and put an ad in the paper that Wall and Company at Narrandera had been appointed Riverina distributors for Sacktex, mend any type bag, etcetera, etcetera, and they sold

40:00 it. It was selling when I got home. We were running out of it. Anyway, that was sold. That was a success and I thought of a couple of other lines. I put a fire extinguisher on the market, something simple, something anyone can have in a car. After was a toothpaste idea but I made it bigger, about that round and that long, and

40:30 I invented a little piercing cap that when you pierce the cap, you take a straight flat pierce that will produce a spray that wide for five feet.

Wonderful. We might have to stop here and change the tape.

Tape 4

00:32 Where are we up to?

We are up to the Queen Mary. We are going to sail into Singapore Harbour now.

Just to be on it and walk around it, I only felt vibration once, that was the night it left convoy. It was doing thirty odd miles per hour, thirty three someone told me. It was moving,

01:00 it was the first time we felt it shudder a bit, vibration.

What were the main recreational activities on the boat?

Two-up was. I didn't take it on. "Come on, be in it mate, you have got a quid [pound]," no way. Blokes running it weren't good enough for me.

What did you get up to?

I didn't get up to anything. I didn't

01:30 misbehave myself in any way. I sent odd an collection of spiders and things home to a doctor in Narrandera, he was interested in those sort of things. He wrote to me as a POW and his letter started off, "We have had a scorched earth policy in Australia since you have been away."

02:00 That was the drought in '44.

Can you describe sailing into Singapore for the first time?

We didn't have any ideas of what was coming up and when we sailed around Singapore we expected to see Singapore, but we didn't see it, we went up the back. We went to the naval base.

02:30 That's when our blokes started throwing pennies and coins to the British party and we got our train from there and headed for Port Dickson. I always remember blokes saying, "G'day mate" to the natives dressed in white. They gave them a rough go, and

03:00 of course on the train we had blokes trying to talk to these people on the train, running the train, in English and the average Malay public servant speaks perfect English and our blokes didn't accept they would know any of it. That caused a fair bit of embarrassment. We liked it, we

03:30 went to Port Dickson, that was right in the Malacca Straits, it was right on, and it was very close to two or three civilised towns. Later we moved to these towns. We went for a walk down the street one night at Seremban and saw a mob of blokes outside a house and decided to go in and see what

04:00 it was. It was a prostitute, she is in the bed with an Australian and she is talking Malay and he is trying to understand it all, and the mother is bringing out a drink and something for the girl, and there is a long bench outside and all of the Australians have got their heads over this bench, saying "Come on Barney, get into it."

04:30 The Provos [Provosts, military police] came along and told our blokes to keep right away from that place. It was a good town, good school. We had Charlie Moses in our unit. Do you know who Charlie Moses is?

No, I don't know Charlie Moses is?

He was a senior officer in the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission], Sir Charles Moses. At

05:00 Seremban there was this King George V School and the paper boy, a Malay, would come along and ask someone, any one at all, to read out the headlines of the paper so he can sell them. Our blokes would make up something. The one I remember was "Charlie Moses has got the jack [gonorrhoea], read all about it!" There was a hell of a stink over that because Major Moses didn't approve of

05:30 anything of that nature. The kids couldn't understand the English but they would practise it. Our blokes would make up things and off the kid would go. Moses was the bloke, Charles Moses was the bloke that was sent to convey the intelligence that our battalion got of all the artillery at massing on the waterfront.

06:00 Moses recorded it, he didn't record it on the story on Singapore, and he said to Percival, or Percival said to him, "Major, what will we do now?" That's a true story.

How did you hear that story?

It is in the ABC

06:30 book on the former Singapore. I've got that film.

Were you able to take film at the time when you were in Singapore?

No. On eight bob a day it is a pretty expensive hobby. The number of people who have said to me after the war, "I would have bought you some film," but that all came after the war, but the

07:00 whole unit knew I would retain it.

How long did you spend up in Mersing?

About six months.

What were your main jobs up there?

I was attached to C Company. The problem being attached to C Company was that I had to stop him from getting lost, the CO [Commanding Officer], Major Carter. He used to say, "Where are we, Wall?"

07:30 How he survived, but a lot of blokes couldn't read a map. Then I would have to put in. Anyway,

08:00 I was then posted at Endau which is another twenty or thirty miles north of the main base and then we had a river north of us again and we figured out that the Japs would go down Endau River which comes out just north of Johor Baharu, close to Singapore.

08:30 That's what the Japs were going to do. They were going to land ninety miles from Singapore at Mersing and Endau and that would take them out just near Johor Baharu, a short cut to Singapore. The Jap officer who visited the area afterwards, he admitted they couldn't have taken Mersing, it was too well defended.

How long

09:00 **were you with Major Carter?**

Long enough. He was a very decent bloke, but at Endau I came back to the camp, he was at Endau Point, I came back to the camp and it was heading on for dark, and when I got up on the approaches to Endau I saw a wire across the road.

09:30 I got out and I investigated and he had mined the area all the way to his headquarters which was, that was one of the problems. I used to, often he would say, "Wall, send a message back to give our location." "What is it, sir?" "I don't know but you have a look on the map" and I had that to put up with.

10:00 Then Carter, when I was in Transport I was posted to C Company, the blokes in C Company were the best bunch of wild characters you would ever find anywhere. You can wipe this one out, I'll tell you a story about C Company. When we got back after F Force we ran into the gaol in A block, first block, and we were allowed to send a message, twenty-four words,

10:30 and a bloke by the name of Bluey Walker from the South Coast, said to Leo O'Connor, he was an old digger but he was the sergeant in charge of C Company, and Bluey Walker said to him, and I heard part of this, "Hey Leo, what can you say in twenty-four words?" He said, "Well, you put it up on

11:00 the board." So Leo wrote, "Dear Flo, lost one ball, that's not all, nearly a goner" and he signed it "Leo O'Connor". "Are you fair dinkum, Lee?" And Walker wrote something similar. It never got out of course. The C Company was full of characters from the inner city, Balmain and Rozelle.

11:30 I thought they were a terrific bunch of blokes and they robbed the native shop at Endau. The natives left, they left their grog and everything. C Company blokes moved it out into the middle of the scrub. The officers didn't know where it was, but they used to go, the officer would take them on a tour and they would lose the officer. He wouldn't come into the camp until about 4.30, 5.00, to find his way home. But C Company was full of characters.

They were the Intelligence Company?

12:00 No, I was the bloke attached.

As Intelligence? What was your rank at the time?

A private, I was a private all the time. It's amazing, Scott told me, "If you want to go for rank, this is what you do." I wasn't competing with a lot of the blokes I know. We had some fantastic blokes.

12:30 **What preparations were you making for the possibility of a Japanese invasion at that time?**

Blocking rivers, blocking transport, and we had a big beach line and one night when the Japs could have been in the area

13:00 a mob of buffalos came ashore. They were out at sea and they came ashore and our blokes opened up on them, they just saw these black shapes moving up the beach. The word went out the Japs were landing and the poor bloody buffalos got it.

How did you

13:30 **know about the possibility of a Japanese invasion?**

Intelligence was coming through that they expected the Japs. Of course the Japs would have known about the intelligence, they would have had someone planted in the army in Singapore command. They would have known, they were very good at that. Every barber shop was an intelligence spot for the Japs.

There was talk of fifth columnists in the British forces, wasn't there?

14:00 That is where they were. Some of the British were crook. That's true. If I had my old mates I'd have names.

There was a particularly famous British spy at the time I think who spied for the Japanese. What were tensions like in the build-up towards the invasion?

Pretty good. I started off getting malaria at Endau and

14:30 that slowed me down because they got me to hospital, and that malaria knocks you about. It really knocks you about. The trouble is it kept on hammering away at me. I would get a relapse after about two weeks when I thought I was right and bang, you would cop it again.

Where were you when the Japanese did eventually invade?

I was at Endau.

15:00 I was on the way to hospital when they were moving in. I did ask one of the Japanese later on, the bloke that wrote about Endau, he said it was, Endau and Mersing was so well defended they decided they couldn't overrun it in time. They could eventually take it but they couldn't overrun it in time to get their vehicles on the road straight for Singapore. I can imagine

15:30 that. That was the idea. You look at a map again, and the road down to Singapore, you could get there within the hour without great notice.

We can have a look at it later if you like. Whereabouts were you, what happened after you were taken to hospital in Endau?

16:00 They moved us from one place on the east coast to, it was a hospital, but I understand it was the mental hospital at Johor Baharu overlooking our position. They took us there and then they moved us back onto Singapore. I had to ask people, some blokes do they remember me

16:30 at a certain place because I wrote that I hadn't been anywhere near the landing, but I was there. This bloke said to me, "Go and ask so-and-so." I think the malaria had still affected me because later on I collapsed and landed in hospital because they kept me there and not only that, had other people look at me to get

17:00 a second opinion. Malaria could knock you about, make a hell of a mess of you.

What were your symptoms at the time?

Shivering.

How aware were you of the retreat down the Malay Peninsula towards Singapore at that time?

I didn't take part in the retreat. I was already in a

17:30 hospital down at Johor Baharu when that was going on. I didn't know really what was going on except the patients would come in and they would have malaria, mostly malaria. They would say, "We fought over the river at Mersing" or "We came down from Endau", they would give me a run down on it. A nice little story about two of our C Company mates, they had been in the same hospital and when they got out there they wanted to

18:00 go and get a drink in Johor Baharu. Lee O'Connor and Hollis, now Hollis was the bloke with so much red ink in his pay book that his parents were ashamed of him. His father was a police officer. Anyway, they wanted to go somewhere and get on the piss and Leo

18:30 said, "Don't worry, I will find some beer." And it's just near the crossing. Have you been over there at all, Johor Baharu?

I've been to Singapore, but I don't recall it. I've been across that crossing.

Well just imagine this is where it took place. Anyway, he saw a Sikh looking after the building and he said to Hollis, "I will go over and see him, I'll ask him where we can get a drink."

19:00 He shook hands with the Sikh and they had a few words. Hollis said to him afterwards, "What were you talking about?" He said, "I asked him about his brother." He said, "How did you know he had a brother?" He said, "All these Sikhs have got brothers." He bought a carton of beer, he arranged it. I think it was a nightclub of some sort, they wouldn't let them take the beer over into Singapore.

19:30 The said, "Right, we'll drink it here." These two blokes sat down on the main public road and drank their beer, it took them all night. When the customs bloke came the next morning he said, "What are those blokes doing here?" He said, "They have been here all night they have got beer to drink and they won't take it across." He said, "For God's sake get rid of it." He said, "No, they have drunk it all now." They were a funny mob.

20:00 **What was your situation as the Japanese were coming into Singapore?**

I was in Manor House, that was a hospital of two school buildings, Manor Hall and Manor House. That's where Pat Darling was, 10th AGH [Australian General Hospital] and I was there when it was being bombed with four inch mortars, and they crack like buggery. You get a hell of snap, crack, and the nurses had been evacuated on the 11th of

20:30 February. That's right because Pat Darling, I saw her there and she was told to get under a table and she wouldn't do anything. I saw another nurse protecting a body who couldn't move and the nurse was on top of him with pillows around. I thought, "She is game."

What were you doing?

I think I

21:00 walked out of the building because I reckoned the building was due to be hit by any shell because they were dropping right around the building, I think they meant to flatten it. The girls weren't hit. I think one might have been hurt, but that one protecting a wounded bloke she wasn't wounded. She was just looking after him.

21:30 Anyway, they moved that day, and I think the next day they took us to the Cathay Building. That's in Pat Darling's book. That's one of the photos I took.

When were you first aware that the force had surrendered?

I was in hospital at the time and they were firing from Johor and hitting that building. It was

22:00 the biggest building in Singapore. I reckon when I went into it I was a walking patient but I moved from that side where the shells were coming from Johor straight up the road. I had no idea when we got there that a lot of people had been killed because there was a picture theatre next door down on the lower level and they were dropping them on the roof from Johor Baharu.

22:30 And I mentioned before, when I went down the stairs I came across all these bodies wrapped up in grey army blankets with big safety pins. I always remember that.

What were the bodies there for?

They had died, they had been killed. They were stored, waiting to get someone to dig a hole outside, they used the shell craters. Most of the shell craters around that building

23:00 were blokes killed during action.

When were you first taken prisoner?

It must have been before the Japs landed.

23:30 I was talking to our adjutant, he was the boss of the Manly Daily [newspaper], but I think he got the "Dear John" letter [letter informing that a relationship is over]. This was the opinion of the people, he got a "Dear John" letter from his girlfriend or from someone like that because he eventually led a charge straight into the Japanese without a tin hat on. He

24:00 was either going mad or he didn't know the situation.

What happened to him?

He was killed in action. Our battalion was spread out 1600 yards, 750 men and some machine guns from the 2/4th Western Australian unit were up front with the big

24:30 guns, but the Japs were in trees all around the place, you wouldn't be sure. Our blokes would never climb a tree and get caught up a tree. We were trained to climb but they jacked up, the men jacked up and said, "That is totally bloody silly, just making an easier target and shortening the range."

25:00 Our blokes told officers straight, they would say, "Don't be silly."

When did you first see a Japanese?

I think I saw, they were dead the first ones I saw, and I saw some

25:30 going by in a captured truck. You couldn't trust anyone and say, "that's one of ours". The Japs went as a group, three or four or five in a group, and they might pick up a few slouch hats and wear a bit of Australian gear, they might do that too. You had to be certain.

26:00 **Can you recall when you were in hospital the Japanese coming and taking you prisoner?**

No. I had to go to a lot of blokes and they said to me, "You were there, you were with so-and-so" because I couldn't remember. I couldn't claim I was there when the Japs came, and these blokes told me who I was with,

26:30 and I can't remember being taken to hospital. But I had my gear at the hospital, that is why I don't know.

You must have been quite ill at this time in hospital?

Malaria knocks hell out of you. I must have been because first of all I had it when whoever

27:00 took me. I don't remember anyone taking me to the hospital, it was when the bombing started, the cracking of the four inch mortars, gee, you don't forget them. I don't know how long before they mortared the place.

How long did you spend in hospital at that time?

It would have been another two weeks at the

27:30 hospital in Singapore, another two weeks in, and then it was some time before they had transport to get us to Changi because they had to use transport for the patients.

Can you recall coming into Changi hospital?

No, I can't. I can't recall the real early days of Changi. I can remember being in the building in the square but

28:00 as to getting there

You can recall the sounds of battle?

Yes.

What were the sounds like?

It was a real crack. The ones bombing the building, you couldn't miss them.

Can you describe that sound for us?

It is a sharp crack, you know, it's hard to describe,

28:30 but you are pretty close to the explosion point. They were on target, they were bombing even when we moved into the Cathay, they were still bombing the Cathay from Johor Baharu. That is about twelve miles. I don't know what the range of a field piece is, a long distance job.

29:00 **How did the realisation dawn on you that you were in captivity?**

Some of the blokes used to laugh about it, "Don't do this, don't hang around there, get on and hurry up otherwise the Japs will have you." I would say the men were well informed.

29:30 But then again we had volunteers that wanted to go across and go into the Jap territory and see what was happening. One bloke couldn't swim, they had a log they were going to use to float him back. Those blokes, I think they received an award, they were good to go over there. I think

30:00 the bloke's name, my memory was beginning to fail. I remember one reunion he described what he had seen over there and it was spot on to some of the things I had read. They were well back, the guns were well back. They thought at the time, the bloke I talked to, he thought that

30:30 the Japs had gone to get their boats and that may be right, and left all the guns there, and that is why

Moses was a Brigade, a I have it, Brigade, and that is why he was sent to Percival direct, to give a first hand report.

Can you tell us what the

31:00 **morale was like just after the surrender in Changi?**

Good. It was good. No-one was worried about it. We thought what food we were getting was good. A lot of blokes were talking about shooting through, but I said to them "Have you got any contacts?" "No, we don't have any contacts." I said, "No, well, you've seen

31:30 all the heads around Singapore, you have seen the trucks take the kids out to the point, the Chinese of military age." Kids they were, high school kids, take them out and they were shooting them out there. We had to go down to the foreshore on one occasion to fill drums up with salt water because we didn't have the salt for the kitchen. We saw a head

32:00 floating around, and I said to them, "That is a live person," and it looked like a coconut shell when they're about that size and haven't been cleaned, and I said, "Whatever you do don't point at it, because if the Japs see you pointing at that coconut shell they will go out there and kill that bloke." Later on we found out

32:30 that he survived, Chinese, sixteen year old. That is the only way we could get out and there would be a Jap with us and you had to be careful. What you would do, you would pull out your wallet and your family photographs and you would go to the Japs and show them to the Japs. He would want to know how many in the family, how many girls you got and that sort of thing. Everyone had a decoy of some sort and that was the best, but you didn't,

33:00 you mustn't be seen looking at someone who could be a friend in trouble, and we heard after the war that he thanked us for saving his life. Their heads and bodies were floating there. These are kids from sixteen, fifteen, seventeen.

You said there were heads around Singapore?

They were on display. They had heads on

33:30 display at all good shopping centres and that is what would have happened here. They would have got the Lord Mayor, they would have got some good targets, they would have found out who was in authority, who's got authority, but they'd chop their head off and comb their hair after a day or two. You get any other POW, ask him if he'd ever seen any of the heads on sticks

34:00 in Singapore. I think most of our blokes saw them at some stage. What they would do, they would move into a town and find out who the top man is in town and they would take him down and chop his head off. They were bastards. That was widespread in Singapore. We saw them when we went to the Great Whirl, they were all over the place. Sometimes they would take us through the city.

34:30 They would leading citizens as a warning.

Did you fear for your own safety at this time?

I was always confident that if you found out the natives were friendly, you would have a fair chance of escaping, but

35:00 if they were not, you just wouldn't take it on. I had all sorts of plans and made all sorts of maps and burnt them. To be caught with anything like that was not on. Those heads were around Singapore for most of the time I was there. We would go in working parties and the Japs would take us in along a road for a certain reason and start laughing and we

35:30 would know there was a head coming up.

Did you see much evidence of other things of how they persecuted the local population?

You only saw the heads and bodies. There was always something about like that.

Can you describe the layout of Changi for us?

Yes. Changi is, first of all Changi is a locality

36:00 with the barracks complex but it also, now that consisted of about a dozen buildings of about three storeys, at least three storeys, concrete floor for bedding down.

36:30 I would say one big building might take a battalion, as much as a battalion. A big square for assembly, that was the centre, and then away from that they had another set of buildings which may be the hospital, which in this case was the hospital, and then the officers' quarters would be houses, concrete houses,

37:00 quite a few. There might be another complex like that. That is what Changi consisted of but it had a lot of homes for officers, but the barrack building, Roberts Barrack was the building that was the most

common area we were housed in.

37:30 **Where were you housed?**

I can't remember the name of the lot, but when I see a photograph. I should have had these photographs out because I've got photographs taken of the square incident when they locked everyone, punished everyone

38:00 on the square.

What was that particular incident?

I have photographs here somewhere of all those.

Were you able to reunite with C Company?

Yes. I would say most of the C Company blokes came home on the same ship, the Arrowa, that is where I saw them last. I will tell you a story, we got into

38:30 Darwin and we were taken out to hospital as entertainment. We had never seen AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service], women in uniform. We had never seen anything like that. They took us out there and they were supposed to entertain us. Anyway, a bloke by the name of E.B. Jones, Hector

39:00 Jones, he was one of the talkative blokes in the group, he'd be making a lot of noise. Any rate, these girls were only about, AAMWS, they were about seventeen or eighteen at the best. They could be younger, and we were standing there and they had the radio on, the gramophone, they were playing tunes, they were playing the hokey-pokey, and one girl went over to E.B. Jones next to me on my left, and said to

39:30 Jonesy "Would you care to do the hokey-pokey?" Of course we had never heard of the hokey-pokey. He elbows me and said, "What sort of a joint are we in?" That was at Darwin and then we went on and we got off at Brisbane, and Stitcher Shearer, he was a tailor,

40:00 we called him Stitcher, from Newcastle, when we got there he said, "Let's get a cab and we will to and have a look around." He said to the driver, "I want to go to the nearest brewery." Balimba Brewery, the cab got there and he said, "You blokes wait here and I will go in and see my uncle." After a while he got out of the car, he's leaning on the door and he said, "Come on, come on, come in."

40:30 We all got out and we went in there and we meet the general manager and we had drinks all around. We had three drinks each, free. We said to Stitcher Shearer afterwards, "We didn't know you had an uncle." He said, "He is not my uncle" but he said, he just told the bloke, he said "You know I'm not your nephew, but we are POW's and we are just home and we haven't had a drink for three or four years," and he said, "Well, help yourself."

41:00 Talk about some of these blokes had been around a bit, the cheek of him to do it. Stitcher Shearer, anyway. We went back and I've heard that story being told by somebody who could have been in the group, about having drinks at the brewery.

We might have to stop there and change the tape.

Tape 5

00:30 **Tell me about Changi when you first arrived. Who was coming into this camp and what was the makeup of the prisoners there?**

It took about a battalion to a building if you were lucky, because we lost a lot. The 2/20th losses I think I have mentioned that compared with Vietnam were greater than Vietnam. In twenty-four hours

01:00 than they had over a ten year period.

People were coming from the front line, they were coming from hospitals, they were coming from all sorts of different places into this camp?

Yeah. Most of our blokes, there were a lot of bandages about when they came into the camp but they were intact. You would go into a building and someone would yell out, "Is Wally here? Is there

01:30 someone here?" That was common all the way. "No, you will find him up on the fifth floor." There was a story that has never been printed but I saw part of it and when we came back from the Great Whirl to Changi

02:00 we realised there was a concert, a large shed used as a concert arrangement, and I went to that one night, late afternoon and Colonel Gallagher, senior Australian officer, had invited several British officers to come over to the Australian concert party. Have you heard this story? He had

these officers coming, but first of all, the first thing he did was walk in and there had been a lot of shell damage to the building and it had been patched up, but there were blokes perched on the trusses, and he got on the stage and he had his stick with him and he pointed it up there and said, "The men up there, get down from there at once," and the mob started on him.

On Black Jack Gallagher?

On Black Jack, yeah. Black Jack, he got on the stage with his stick and he said, "I will fight any one of you," and they yelled out, "You couldn't fight my old woman." It started, and it was the best act of the evening but he made a fool of himself in front of these British officers and he didn't

take any action either afterwards because the mob would have started on him. A good officer should have said to the sergeant, "Hey Sarg, see those men up there, get them down quietly." That is what he should have done and you would expect that from him, but he didn't, made a goat of himself on the stage. But our blokes, POWs always had a lot of humour and they would create humour too,

but that was the most entertaining show I had been to.

What was the structure of command inside the camp, Black Jack Gallagher was in charge.

Yes, he was the senior Australian officer.

How did the command structure work within the prisoner of war camp?

As usual. Officers in charge of so many men, NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officer] in charge of so many men but they separated the officers.

We still had the senior NCOs and in many cases they were better than the officers. All officers got nicknames. There was always someone in a group with a lot of stories to tell with a good sense of humour.

As I said earlier, I enjoyed the company of the blokes from the inner city, they were fantastic and they were good and they shared things with their mates, and some people who didn't have a thing. They would say, "Here, have a bit of this, some fried rice."

Are there any particular personalities amongst those blokes that you think stand out or you remember particularly?

I would have to read up some of my own work. I found putting the story together has been hard work. It is hard work for a non-professional but I wanted to keep the flavour spot on.

I don't know if you have ever heard of a bloke by the name of Blacky, Blakey, George Blakey. George was an old 'Smith's Weekly' journo [journalist] and he wrote a few books. I'll find it, the review he wrote. George was a member of the Beach Club at Collaroy

and we were marching on the beach one day one Anzac Day and I said, "George, would you mind looking at a manuscript?" And he said, "I will on one condition, if I tell you it is rubbish I don't want you to be offended." I said "No, that's what I want. I want advice." He wrote a summary which he gave it nothing but praise. This is Singapore and Beyond and

then I started reading some of George's work in the Smith's Weekly days which were funny things. I was interested in getting together some humour and I made a start but I put the papers away and I left it. There is a hell of a lot of humour out amongst the general people, the ordinary ranks that could be

produced into something very entertaining. We lost George. It was only because the Association ever got me into doing anything like this. I just felt that a lot of stories should be told about our experience.

What did you spend your time doing on a day to day

basis in those early days at Changi?

We would be working.

Were you working from the very beginning?

Yes. Right from the start you would be working on something.

What sort of things did they get you to do in those early days?

Cleaning up, making roads, road making, but usually most of my work was done on the wharf, looking around the place and seeing what we could pinch and how we can move

some of the things we were going to knock off, we could move a bit when the Jap had got his back turned, we could move them closer to our point of retrieval. We were in the camp that you heard the story about the Jap taking-off [imitating] the Australian thieving something. He was showing everyone how they did it, put it under their hats, mainly under their hats, and he did all that sort of stuff but he would get something.

09:00 While he was doing this he had his back turned and we would knock it off and he would even take that off. He'd laugh at us and say, "You think I don't see," and then he would go and do it. The famous one about the tin of condensed milk under the hat, and the Jap got it and he took it all off and later on when he went back for it, it was gone.

The Japanese stole from themselves

09:30 **and you stole from the Japanese stealing?**

Yes.

How long did it take you to figure out how far you could push the guards and how you could work them?

After about three months we would move a stack of something, we might only move it over there and put something else there, and we kept the Jap, like "Mickey Mouse" was the bloke, we called him "Mickey Mouse", he

10:00 had big sandshoes and they were at that angle, and he would take us off. He would point out that we were pretty dumb if we didn't know this or that. We had him made. I remember taking a roll of film out the door like this, and it slipped off as a Jap was coming in and I asked him to pick it up and put it back, he did. You could bullshit to

10:30 them too, you know. Tell them they were number one.

Were there any guards you were particularly afraid of?

Yes.

Can you tell us about them?

We never trusted them in any way but we were always a couple paces ahead of them.

11:00 I was working at, go down 46 a while where Mickey Mouse was, but they changed them around a bit, but he used to put on a show, he'd put on, "Prisoner no good," he would say and "Prisoner steal,

11:30 no good," and he would go off and he would have a bit of English there. They didn't have the numbers to put in the shed, they put one man in there and he didn't have a ghost of a chance of watching twenty or thirty Australians. No hope at all.

How did they try and assert their control then?

They would try and set little traps.

12:00 We would recognise the traps. There might be a carton of cigarettes, he would put it out fairly close to our walkway and it mightn't have cigarettes in it. That is what they would do, they would set traps. The first Australian to find a trap he would tell everyone else. He would stand there and point out where it was, "Any where around there, don't touch anything in that area." See,

12:30 those buildings had a cage in the middle of them and in the middle of that cage that's where they had liquor, cigarettes and all the things that our blokes wanted. They would do it in stages, anything big they would do it in stages. It might take a week to set up what you are going to take on Friday. It worked.

13:00 When you are in a situation like that I think if you are hiding anything you want to hide it pretty close to where the Jap is fairly often, because you can always get the attention of a Jap to go away from where he is working or looking at, and tell

13:30 him a story about something. But family photographs were used as a decoy and everyone used them at some stage to keep a Jap there. "Look mate, I am knocking off something down the end of the building, see if you keep the Japs here," and they get their photographs out and the Jap can't resist having a look at them. You'd get a decoy, a bloke would say, he would ask him

14:00 in a very mixed manner, "Come down and have a look at this, is this OK number 1?" or, "OK, eat?" You would have him down there talking about something while the other bloke does the job. You could re-enact those things and you would think we were mad but we got away with it.

Did you always get away with it?

I did anyway.

What happened when someone got caught?

14:30 They would get a good belting. Might be hands, might be the nearest heavy thing they could pick up. They usually would start off with hands, and if he knocks him to the ground then he would put the boots in.

Were you afraid of that happening?

I was always, when I was with the radio.

15:00 I was always fussy how I behaved. If you know anything about a Jap they know you have done something wrong, they were a wake up to that. I found out you could confuse them a lot. Whatever you asked after that you usually

15:30 ask them, can you go somewhere and they would usually go along with you, but towards the end they were a wake up. You couldn't go anywhere without a Jap with you. I never had any trouble, once they find out you can help them. Most of those Japs and Koreans were never taught to drive

16:00 a vehicle, they don't know anything about the mechanics and this where I had the flat battery problem with them. He would just shake his head and say something in Japanese I couldn't understand. Our blokes were able to put it over the Japs when it was something worthwhile to scrounge. Our fellows would break

16:30 break into the access and not do anything silly. They might say, "We'll leave that over a week, we won't do a big job in one hit," because then it involves everyone. Everyone is around. It is like doing something in Changi, something stupid was done that affected the procedure in the camp, everyone gets a belting. Everyone gets

17:00 their food cut off.

Was there any stupid things that you can remember somebody else doing that affected the whole camp?

Anyone escaping, that is considered very stupid by the Japs.

Was there a particular incident of that happening?

Cut rations for the whole camp, that's happened.

17:30 That was always the danger, that is why the radio was always sensitive, too sensitive to involve too many people with it. I made the rules and the senior officer did not always go by the rules, and I think that it was the senior officer told the Japs I was in a different camp.

What did those senior officers, what was the

18:00 **Australian officers' view on all this scrounging and stealing?**

A lot of the officers would try and influence them not to go and take such-and-such. To see a search at the Changi gate at 6.00 o'clock when the men came back from Singapore, I was hanging around just to see what was happening. I saw

18:30 a bloke hanging his arms up like that and a little bloke walking around under his arms and touching his clothing and seeing what he's got, what he's taken. This bloke had a crescent spanner and another tool of some sort in his hands up there, he didn't see them. There were some really experts at it that had the guts to do that, holding them up

19:00 like. If there was a big bloke there, he would get his arms out like that and the little Jap would walk around him and he couldn't get close enough to him to search his pockets or anything like that. Some of our blokes were good. In fact they were all good. They would do it out in front of the Jap guards.

How did that work for the rest, not everybody was expert?

You would look after yourself.

You looked after yourself?

That was the rule.

19:30 **Was it the rule, did it ever bend in anyone's favour?**

Only in exceptional circumstances when someone might have had some other problem. If a bloke never went outside the camp for example, due to a crook leg or something like that, our blokes would give them a bit, they would always look after the other fellow. No-one would starve, they would get something that the other fellows had. Australians are

20:00 very good at sticking to their mate. I saw a lot of it. I would say when we are scrounging a bloke would say, "I want more of that stuff, I have got a couple of mates back in the camp who can't get out," and they would all say, "Well, take the lot, get it into the camp."

How did getting outside the camp work? Did you sneak outside the camp

20:30 **or did you would only go outside on a work expedition?**

Only on a work party, I didn't do anything silly.

People did sneak outside the fence?

Yes, well that was dicey because the whole camp was at risk when they started doing that and you have got to stop it. I know that certain blokes had support from command to go outside the fence, and I know one bloke, Tim Bowden wrote a book

21:00 about him who was a real professional thief. He was in the Light Horse. I knew him in the Light Horse, but he was a thief and he was still a thief when he was in the 8th Division. They had an officer that used to check over his gear each morning, early in the morning to see where he had been that night. He was supposed to be a hero but he was just a bloody professional thief,

21:30 Bluey Aspinall. Tim Bowden's book is somewhere.

Was there any heroism in being a thief inside a prisoner of war camp?

I don't think so. I think that you had to look after the bloke who couldn't go. He might have been badly wounded. One of the blokes I used was Alec Fisk. Fisk

22:00 was in business and around, and Alec was wounded in action during the fighting and he had a steel on his left leg and he could just hobble around. I used him as a scout close to the gate so the entrance of the gaol could be seen from wherever he happened to be. He knew where to

22:30 go with his walking stick, he hobbled around and his job was to watch the gate at night time, the main gate. If anyone was coming in, any force, he had to throw the mains switch. He knew where the main switch was, he had to cut the power. We had one minute and a half to walk from the main gate to where we were operating and we had to do that

23:00 without running. Everything was based on timing. We could get rid of a set once we got a warning from the main gate, or someone in sight of the main gate, if they really knew where we were, through equipment they may have had, they still wouldn't be able to make it, you know,

23:30 in line with what we were, the field we were working in. The other one was the power switch. It would take them two minutes to get to us from the power switch and that is how we operated. Really, the scouts I had were used on power, and power got the message to us but it went off.

Tape 6

00:50 **Don, you have shown us some footage you took on Malaya before the Japanese invasion. Is there anything that watching that, any memories, that that has brought**

01:00 **up that has made you think of now?**

No. Most of the people who were in that have since passed on.

One thing I noticed in that footage, is that the camp in Mersing was arranged in streets?

It was right in Mersing.

Was it the camp at Mersing

01:30 **that had Sydney Street names up there?**

Yes. The army put those there.

What were they?

For example the gaol, there was a gaol there, it's named after an appropriate place in Sydney and one other street is. I'd have to look at it again, but it was all typically Australian and New

02:00 South Wales.

We also saw some Bren gun [machine guns] carriers.

We had Bren guns in the unit.

Can you talk a little bit about them, about the Bren gun carriers?

I don't think they were suitable for Malaya, they had an open top. The Japs only had to climb a tree and a few grenades and pop one in as they went passed. They ended up by putting wire netting over some of them. They were vehicles made for the desert, not for the jungle. They were

02:30 an open go for the enemy to pop something in the open top. I inspected one after the fighting while on a working party and it had 120 bullet holes in the front of it that had gone right through them.

120 bullet holes?

Yes, through the front armour.

03:00 **Do you think that was a problem with the tactics in general in Malaya, that they were based on earlier**

Wrong equipment, wrong training. We were trained for the Middle East, for desert warfare and they sent us to Malaya. Brilliant officers.

Are there other examples of that, that come to mind?

Clothing and things of

03:30 that nature. I think I wrote somewhere I trained for the western desert and sent to the jungles of Malaya. There were some shocking mistakes made by the army.

Were you given any specific jungle training during your time away?

Yes, yes.

What did that involve?

Just finding your way there. With a compass you are right.

04:00 A lot of people couldn't find their way out of a jungle, they didn't have any idea of direction. A lot of Australians were used to the bush and could find their way in and out of a jungle.

Do you think that was one of the differences between the British and Australian troops?

I think it was is a difference. The British troops, we saw some of them, they were kept in fairly good areas.

04:30 I was never aware of seeing British troops in the jungle, never.

When you say "fairly good areas", what do you mean by that?

Country that has been partially cleared and regrown, timber for jungle.

What about the Australian troops, where were they

05:00 **generally stationed?**

They originate from the country, open country, and they were ideal for open warfare, a lot of them knew the bush. It is something that you can orientate yourself correctly, I mean when you go into the jungle you have a good look at all your markers and you recheck them going either way and you have got to be armed because of,

05:30 where we were we had a hell of a lot of snakes, some of them ten feet long, pythons, and there were animals we didn't know about. We had to learn to know the tune of the animal. I got to know most of them in Thailand, the jungle. We had all sorts,

06:00 I'm trying to place the names. The locals call them one thing and we called them another. They would start calling out to all their friends around about 5.00 o'clock. If there was a sudden movement in the jungle, are all sorts of birds and animals would have a say, "Where are you going and what are you doing there?" We didn't recognise them. It was only at night time they would

06:30 come in by the fire, and come in very close, and that is why we were always prepared and always kept a fire going, two or three fires going in a semi-circle. We didn't see the animals we had in Australia.

What were the most interesting or different or interesting animals that you came to terms with in Malaya that you had never seen in Australia?

We didn't come to terms with them.

07:00 We would hear them at night time but we didn't know which way they were going. Right out of the blue they would be silence for a while and then out of the blue there would be, right at your back you would hear this call. Our fellows were more concerned about wild animals, "Can you eat them? What do they taste like?"

Did that ever happen during your time in Thailand or in Malaya?

No. I saw them driving on the track staying the night and having to organise a

07:30 fire because some of these blokes didn't want a fire because they said fire would attract them. The animals in the jungle know what was around. You didn't want them to come and have a close look. They would call out to their friends over the next range and explain to them what was going on. You had to be able to read the animals in Thailand.

08:00 **There were also domestic animals. Can you tell us about the yaks that were up there in Thailand?**

Where we were we didn't see much at all. I always remember the bloke who was going to escape and went down to the river to have a look around, and he gave the idea of escaping away because he saw the pug marks of a tiger, and that was enough.

08:30 He was determined he would escape but he never tried.

Who was he?

I must mention his name, Ringer Edwards. Wherever you go see if you could find anyone that knew Ringer. Ringer was the star in A Town Like Alice, who owned the property who pinched all his neighbours stock? Ringer was the bloke who was at Nikki

09:00 and when they gave us yaks as part of our ration, Ringer was sent down to Ban Pong to collect a herd and when he arrived back at Nikki he had plenty. He picked them up from every camp he went through where people already had their allocation. Ringer, he was great, we had yaks for a long time. Ringer was the bloke that old Colonel Bano

09:30 got to fell a tree which was hanging over one of the Japanese huts. Ringer said he would lop it and he drew a line on the sand where the tree was going to fall. All the Japs out there they used to breathe in a lot and they were all doing that wondering what was going to happen, but Ringer

10:00 lopped the tree right on the line he drew in the sand. I got Ringer to help me in the Jap camps. The Japs wanted me to do a favour, they approached me they said, "Tonight tanko", that means parade time, "wooshi," that's what they call a yak, "you get wooshi," and do that."

10:30 We got the yak and Ringer, I approached Ringer to come and assist it. He hit it between the eyes with a short-handled axe about that long and killed it in there, cut its head off, and every now and again we would, we had two holes dug outside, one for the stuff we pinched from the Jap stores and another one for the bits and pieces of the yak, and eventually

11:00 we had a lot of stuff outside that we pinched from the store and the yak parts, and we had two holes, one for the yak parts, and we left the prepared body of the yak inside for them. That is how we got on with the Japs, we could do things. That is why we knew they had condensed milk in there which we got our fair share of, and when they ran out of condensed milk they looked at us and said we were in better condition than most people,

11:30 we must know something about it. We talked our way out of that.

You mentioned that story before, you ended up blaming it on the Dutch.

Yeah, that's right, but Ringer Edwards was quite a famous bloke.

Was he charismatic? What was it about Ringer Edwards that made him a special bloke?

He was a bushman, he could doing anything. He could go into the bush and kill something and bring it back and sit down and have a feed. Ringer was very ill

12:00 just before he died. I got Repat to do something about it in Perth. He phoned me up and said, "A bloke I hardly know has never done me such a good favour." He got everything that Repat was giving out at the time, but he died soon afterwards. He was a real bushman, a good man to have in a party like that. He had pinched so many other beasts,

12:30 on the way up. He went from one camp to another, he could case the place and see if there was anything there and increase his herd. We never had anything to complain about at Nikki, there was always meat.

Was that bush toughness the sort of thing that kept you alive?

It helped. You didn't starve. We didn't starve on the Burma line but we pinched a lot of stuff.

13:00 That is survival, but it is handy to have a fellow like this bloke in the camp because he always had something which he shared with other people. Old Bano looked at the kitchen, at the 44 gallon drum we used to cook in, he counted five front legs in the camp one day and he came up and said, "Australians no good, Australians steal."

13:30 He was interested to find out where we got them from. They weren't stolen in that camp. A bloke like Ringer would go out at night time to the nearest camp say eight miles away and knock off something and go into the kitchen and everyone would get a bit of it. He was a good man.

When you got up there, we were talking a bit about scrounging and stealing before and how it was every man for himself in Changi. Did that change

14:00 **when the situation became a bit more desperate on the railway?**

No, everyone shared things. The British were different, they had a different attitude altogether, rank was everything to them. All the sergeants would be in one corner of the hut and the officers would be well out of the way and you couldn't sit down and talk to the average British officer. Dillon was the only bloke and I talked to him a lot, I knew what he wanted. I

14:30 knew Dillon, I was one of the few blokes, there were a few others that could go into a camp, assess their rations and the extras they were getting and if they were getting any privileges that we weren't getting, and I would report back to Dillon and he was very well-informed. He would have taken one of the senior positions in the British Army if he got out. I think he was an outstanding bloke.

15:00 **That difference between Australia and Britain that the British were more concerned with hierarchy, they were harder to talk to, did that come out from the very beginning of your captivity in Changi?**

Right at the beginning, they would talk down to you.

How did the British and the Australian's interact in Changi?

They were separate. I don't think they did. They were in one section of Changi. Changi was a pretty big place and

15:30 we shared company in some camps but not a lot. I got to know a couple of blokes at Nikki, they were belonging to British Headquarters. They were looking after the death roll and they're both passed on,

16:00 and one bloke was from Cambridge, hell of a good bloke. We were very good friends. We scrounged a lot and we buried a lot. We buried food when we got it and we buried cartons of fish belonging to the Japanese. If anyone came into our tent we would entertain them, we would feed them. Those two, Lulham

16:30 and the bloke from Cambridge, they shared our tent for about five or six months and we had tinned food on the menu. "Where did you get this?" "We acquired it." We would never tell anyone anything that could embarrass them, but we fed them and we fed Jock

17:00 Frew, a doctor from Melbourne, he was in charge of the Melbourne Hospital. He was sent up with four or five blokes, medical staff, to look after the natives and he heard that Nikki camp was not far away from him, and he came over and we entertained him, we fed him and we looked after him. One of our blokes went to see him at Melbourne

17:30 Hospital once and he really turned it on.

You were obviously quite good at the scrounging and stealing and providing or however. You obviously were able to look after yourselves, did that ever cause resentment to people who weren't so good at amassing things as you might have been?

It could have been, but for example, our first death at Nikki was an English bloke

18:00 and he had crapped his pants and then thrown them away, which was not the thing to do. There was a river just there, you washed them, and I gave him a pair of trousers. Well, he didn't keep those long, he was the first bloke we buried, he just chucked it in and didn't know how to handle himself in those conditions. We gave him food.

18:30 I'll think of his unit soon, and it was at that stage one of the things the British did, and their poor point was hygiene. Dillon said to me, "See if you can get into number 2 camp and see how the senior NCOs are going." I got into the camp, I told the Jap there was something wrong with the car and I had to get some water,

19:00 and they had a separate camp. I don't print this sort of stuff, but I'm telling you the truth, I have never seen so much crap about and they were crapping up on the desk, on the path which was that wide, and then it thinned out until you got up the road a bit. Their hygiene was out of control.

19:30 That was the mob I saw at Sonkurai number 1 camp Sonkurai, and even today I could walk to the spot where they had their hut. I don't print that sort of stuff. But the British officers kept well away from their men and that was disgraceful. You wouldn't see a British officer sitting down having a

20:00 meal with the men, I never saw that. I think Dillon was the exception, I think he was an outstanding officer, but he was Indian Army and he never hesitated in going down the camp to the hospital with all the orderlies into the huts and talking to them. He said to me, "Where did you get the sugar from?" I had a bit of sugar and I told him if he wanted some I'd give it to him. "Where did you get it from?"

20:30 I said, "I got Bob Wilson to get it, they go out at night time." I said, "Why don't you make yourself known to them?" Dillon would

21:00 mix with any rank. We had a very well-known British bloke who signed for the surrender, he was in that camp. He was killed in a plane crash in Hong Kong after the war. Dillon would mix with the men. I heard him, he spoke to everyone in that camp, about 300 British there and about 100 Australians, they were medical staff

21:30 2/10th Field Ambulance, and he roasted his own mob for stealing. They were good at that and he said, "You are a disgrace to the British Empire," and an Aussie yelled out something about why was he born so beautiful. He said, "I will deal with you later," but they would steal from one another. Now,

22:00 if we found a bloke who was stealing from an Australian hut, he would go, he would banned from the hut, have nothing to do with him. It was one of their faults.

Where did that come from, do you think, that the British had lesser of a (UNCLEAR)

I don't know, I

22:30 talked a lot about various British units and so on and I got to know a number of British sergeants. We became good friends and we shared a lot of our tucker with them, no trouble at all, we got on well. When they were on their own they didn't seem to go as well as when they were sharing a camp

23:00 with Australians.

You mentioned hygiene as being one of the important factors that set the two camps apart.

Yes.

How did the, who were the people who were instrumental in controlling things like hygiene?

The hospital orderlies, the doctors.

When did they come into their own? Did they already have a certain prestige and importance in Changi? When was the first time the doctors asserted their influence?

I think on the railway line.

23:30 I have written about Hunt. I used to see Hunt because I was mobile. I'd see Hunt walking along in the mud to the next camp. At one of the camps, number 3 camp, they didn't call it number 4, that was a British camp, and I took a load of very sick men to Tanbaya,

24:00 the hospital, when they first decided to create the hospital and hygiene wasn't good at all, and I would blame the British officers most of all, they didn't encourage good hygiene. But when you strike fellows like Dillon, who was to me the most outstanding of

24:30 all, I had never met anyone who could match him. He picked on them for the hygiene and stealing. I didn't want this to go in.

Can I just stop that for a second?

A private, I have always taken the view that the AIF

25:00 was a volunteer force and they did what they wanted to do, but they never attacked anyone else. We exchanged troops in Singapore between units and we got on very well. On the line it was different altogether. There seemed to be a lot more of them there. That fellow that

25:30 told me he would have my seat one night and I just told him to forget it. He said he would deal with me. You wouldn't strike that in the Australian Army. Our blokes would camp out in the open and make their own tent, get their own wood and go their own way, they would do it. What he wanted was to kick me out

26:00 of the driver's seat, and what happened to me? He was lucky that I picked him up, he never thanked me for it. The Japs asked me who they were, they were right along the lines, they were miles apart these blokes I collected. I knew them to be airforce and there were twenty odd of them, and their effort to light a fire was

26:30 not good at all.

This officer you mentioned before, this British officer, was quite insensitive, quite disconnected from the troops, but that wasn't necessary a quality that was confined to the British commanding officers, was it?

I didn't see any others. The stragglers were the British. If there had been others they would have joined

27:00 another camp down below they had gone through.

I was talking more about the idea of the commanding officers having their own special needs and not listening or taking part in the problems of the main troops. There were Australian officers that took the same view, were there not?

There was. We had one of the worst officers you would find anywhere. Cappy. Harris was bad but Cappy, an Australian,

27:30 we called him "Cappy Armour" and he was a bastard. The elephant used to come over the Pagoda Pass and come into number 3 camp, and I saw this myself, an elephant had about six or eight cartons of fish and other stuff on board. This bloke used to get the lot, but he never gave it to the sick and the casualties in number 3 camp were higher than anywhere else.

28:00 He was a bastard and Peter Stanley phoned me one day and said, "Can you tell me anything about

Colonel Cappy?" I just said, "No, he was a bastard," but I said, "Look, talk to one of his own men, Sergeant Major Keith Meakin." He said he was a bigger bastard than what I told him about, that is well known. He stayed in the army, he

28:30 sacked two officers who were along a highway, got their car, but they were out having a leak by a tree, they were chucked out of the army by Cappy. There is nothing good I can find out about him. There were others, but the best of all was Dillon, he was outstanding, and not only that he would mix with the men.

29:00 Our people kept this officer that was later very well known, they kept him going with Marmite. They would get a spoonful of Marmite a day and it was scarce as anything. He would go down and get it from an orderly. It is better to talk to one of the 2/10th Field Ambulance fellows about that.

29:30 subject.

What other things kept the men going? You mentioned the doctors, let's talk about the doctors for a little while?

Hunt was hard to match because I used to see him at night time, I would see a thing moving in the distance, it would be Hunt carrying haversacks belonging to people who couldn't make it. They had to fall out and he would carry their gear, he was a big lump of a bloke

30:00 and sometimes he wouldn't have a shirt on at all, it would be just a singlet, and he would be available at 3.00 o'clock in the morning. He would rest during the day but he would always be available at the hospital. He saw a British officer there, I've got his name printed somewhere, about dealing with cholera and dealing with things like that and he said, "Don't worry about us,

30:30 we are alright, we know what we are doing." He gave him the brush off. They had a different attitude altogether to the ranks, not a good attitude. But look, I have never criticised the British in print at all.

You don't need to criticise the British now if you don't want to. It's not necessary.

No I don't want to.

31:00 They are big enough to look after themselves. Some of them were out of their depth up there and they wouldn't listen to an Australian. Hunt was absolutely outstanding. I saw him the day he was belted up. I said to him, "Why don't you get on the truck and come with me?" And I had a chap, I could convince the Japs to take on another bloke,

31:30 just stressed that he belonged to the airforce and belonged to our party, and when I asked Hunt about it he said, "No, I couldn't leave the men." He said, "I will stay with them no matter what," and he did.

Major Bruce Hunt.

Yeah.

What other doctors did you come into contact with?

Peter Hendry, he is up at Newcastle. Peter Hendry, good bloke. He sat

32:00 on me while he opened up my hand. I had a big opening there and he sat on me and he is laughing and he said, "I am glad I haven't got this."

Can you tell me that story, what happened?

It was just I had an ulcer on my hand and didn't have the anaesthetic to use, so he opened it up and he fixed it up but he was on me most of the time holding me down. That was at Nikki. We had some

32:30 good officers. The medical blokes, the sergeants, they were excellent. At home they had a pharmacy somewhere, no-one knew what they did. When I made some inquiries after the war he said, "He has got a pharmacy over at the Cross [King's Cross]." They didn't want to talk about it. They were a good team.

What were the biggest problems confronting the

33:00 **medical team?**

Hygiene was. You can get a bloke to take a pill a day or he gets it. If he hasn't got it hygiene has to be spot on. It was everything, everything. When we found we were allowed to go to the river and get in and have a decent wash the Japs were more interested in seeing what sort of penis you were carrying. They would laugh and point at it.

33:30 Some of them would say, "Number one," and they would use the word for "no good". They were a funny mob of people.

What sort of things did you do to control hygiene to help those?

Just boil water, boil everything. Keep clean. everything. You don't eat anything that hasn't been boiled.

34:00 **How did you keep clean? You mentioned the river.**

The river and also we didn't have soap but we would use, we would always drink boiled water. We wouldn't drink it out of the river, we wouldn't touch it, and we would always have a fire going with a big container with boiling water on it. In every hut you'd boil water.

34:30 The fire going right through the night always, and boiled water was, we had to dip our dixie into the boiled water before we took food. That was a regulation in the Australian Army. We didn't take a risk on eating anything unless it had been boiled or cooked in some way.

What sort of food were

35:00 **you eating at this time?**

We just about ate everything, or we would try it out. We would kill something, we would watch the birds and see what they were eating. We would take a bit of advice from them from time to time and give it a go. Anything like that, some of the animals, but getting into transport we were able to buy things like rice

35:30 and other seeds. We would find out what the natives were eating or if we had time to talk to them somehow we would ask them what is good eating. "Bird OK?" I heard that some birds were carrying diseases of some sort, you don't take it for granted that they are pure. Our fellows were

36:00 good at scrounging. They would go out, and I used to watch the birds and see that they were eating and so on. The same thing with flowers.

What sort of advice did the birds give you?

If they ate it I thought they are still around. A bloke would walk in and I would say, "Those birds are still hanging around." That was a good bit of news. We had it the previous day and nothing happened.

36:30 **Did they get eaten themselves, the birds?**

We didn't see anything eating them so we didn't touch them, these particular birds. If we saw something else eating those we would have one. Our best source of food was the Jap Q store. We could pinch from the Japs particularly when they were on move and going slowly over a corduroy road. The Korean guards went along

37:00 with it, but we'd bury it quickly because if the Japs came searching in the camp they would find nothing, nothing from us at all.

What was this scrounged food supplementing, what did the Japanese actually give you to eat?

A rice issue of some sort, rice.

How did that work?

You had to get vitamin B into you, you had to get some meat or something like that. That is what

37:30 we would ask the Burmese, we would seek local advice. Some of them could speak a bit of English and we would watch what the birds were doing. You could survive all right up there but you needed a sharp knife to start off with.

38:00 **How did the Japanese issue you with rice?**

They would give so much to the kitchen, they would give a bag and that would be cut up by the number in the camp.

Who controlled the kitchens in the camps?

Usually a sergeant, sergeant-major. But then they would want a couple of hefty blokes to handle the rice. If you are poor and starving

38:30 you have no hope of lifting a bag of rice so it cuts down the rations.

How did that then get distributed amongst the men, was there a daily issue of rice?

It all went to the cookhouse. The cookhouse used to have additional staff to police the area

39:00 where the food was left, they had to watch it very carefully. Old Bano went down when we were knocking off the yaks and old Bano went down to the kitchen once and found five front legs in one 44 gallon drum in the kitchen and he asked all the cooks what happened there. Very strange, five front legs. They talked their way out of that.

39:30 You had to keep away from something like that. If they were making an inspection you wanted to get the hell out of it because you might be the first bloke in reach to cop it.

Did you have to guard the kitchen from your own troops? Were there desperate people?

Yes.

Can you talk a bit about that? Did you ever see that?

I didn't know much about it because I was nowhere near the kitchen myself. I might be away from the camp.

40:00 The kitchen was on guard and there were a couple of heavyweights were dong the job, and for the job they got extra food. That is what people wanted to do, was to get a job at the cookhouse. Everyone wanted that.

You mentioned that you got issued with some bean curd from one of the Japanese you were working as a driver for?

Yes.

Did that happen often?

No, that only happened one night when we were

40:30 returning from Ban Pong and it was dark and this officer said, "Stop, stop," and he went in there and he said, "You come too". I went in there and he spoke to the Japanese in Japanese and pointed to me and said, "No mucking, since Nikki", and he gave me a bowl of this bean curd and I have never forgot it. It wasn't that

41:00 good but it was food. The thing is, the smell of it ever since Tim Bowden took me to that restaurant in Sydney. I wouldn't make it, I cook a fair bit of rice. Normally I would have put on a fried rice today which I normally do but we blew the bloody stove this morning, and

41:30 I've got a lot of people eating fried rice.

We'll stop there.

Tape 7

00:31 We were standing by and he quietened things down. That's the sort of bloke Dillon was and he ended up getting on very well with Bano.

Can we start that story again? What was the situation?

This officer from A Force, Brigadier Varley, he ended up as a Brigadier, 22nd Brigade, he was our Brigadier, and he went on

01:00 F Force. No, he didn't go on F Force, he went on A Force and they were at the Burma end of the line. He left Changi with a mob of mixed Australians and they started constructing the line early '43 and they had been working on airfields on the way up

01:30 to the Cry Peninsula on the Burma side. They eventually took them to Milmeen for a while and then they took them to Thanbyuzayat. I said I would give you the right spelling of Thanbyuzayat.

We can get that, that's alright.

I'll get the registers, names of people, any detail.

That's alright. We're more concerned about the story I think.

And then when

02:00 the line was finished on the Burma end, Varley came and called at Nikki and I recognised him walking him up the steps to pay his courtesy to Bano. Before Bano had a rough trot because Dillon didn't take anything from Bano, that is when he said, "How are you going to explain to the Emperor you have got so many dead already?" Varley was about to

02:30 copy the sort of approach being made because Dillon was an outstanding officer in every respect, but after that stoush they had together they got on well together. If I had gone to court and was questioned about the conduct of the

03:00 Japanese in Nikki I would have said we had no complaint about them. I mean that. We were more or less in isolation and when you are in isolation that is when the dirty things take place. You can be done over. But they treated us all right. I thought Bano was a good old bloke. I could give you names of people

03:30 to talk to and they would say, "He was a good old bloke."

Can you tell us a bit more about General Bano?

I don't know a lot more about it him. Nev Chamberlain is the bloke to talk to.

What did he ever do directly with you, General Bano?

I was a sort of a general driver mainly with the senior officers.

So you got to know him fairly well?

04:00 I didn't drive Bano. No, Nev Chamberlain, he had an Austin ambulance army type and that was Bano's car and Chamberlain was his driver and he's still around.

Could he speak English, Bano?

Yes, he spoke a fair bit of English.

Who was he mainly talking to at the camp?

04:30 I think it was an unusual camp, it was not a working camp, Upper Nikki, and the other Nikki was "Shimmer", is lower, Lower Nikki. There wasn't an established working party there. We were at certain

05:00 times in winter, monsoons, you couldn't move, they would put us to work in the jungle carrying timber. The Japanese guards, they were junior personnel. They would say, "All men today worko," but they were no-one special at all.

What was the primary purpose of Nikki camp?

Headquarters, accommodation

05:30 for the officer party. So they ran all the other camps from Nikki and I didn't do a lot of the, I did some of the work, I would take some Jap officer up to a certain camp.

Anything else that makes Bano stand out?

06:00 He was a very strong character. He ended up in Sonkurai, all the British went to Sonkurai and they were suffering high losses and I said it was only my opinion and that was due to bad hygiene.

06:30 Nikki, that was a good example. When the Australians went into that camp they had a fire going in every hut so that every utensil was boiled. I remember going into the hut there and there was a fire going and fires were everywhere, that was to make sure you dip your dixie in the

07:00 boiling water before you get food in it, and that paid off. The blokes I saw at Nikki, a famous person Reginald Renison, a pianist, religion had him, he was the bloke I pointed to the fire going up on the hill, which was the cremation and he said, "The Lord will look after me."

07:30 I said, "I wouldn't count on that altogether. You have to do something for yourself." They said he died in another camp but I don't know if that is right. I might have mentioned that in the book, F Force. You see a bloke look at his gear and he has religious paintings and sketches altogether on his pillow. He has got to do more

08:00 than that and that is what I told him. He said, "The Lord will look after me." It doesn't work that way up there.

How did it work, how did you look after each other?

Good hygiene.

Was there a particular form, one special relationship between a particular individual that you would both look after each other?

No, they would look after anyone, I have

08:30 seen blokes like I can think of various blokes, "We've got 500 blokes in that camp and we've got to do something for them," and they would save some of their own rations, that was common. They would get it into the camp or wait for an opportunity to get it into the camp, but you have got to survive like that.

09:00 **Did you have a special mateship system where one person would look after another person?**

No, you would just make a mate and he is a mate. You just do the right thing. If you are going out and you have a successful scrounging day and you got this and at muck-in time where you are getting your allocation of food, you just out of the blue, you say to your mate, "Would you like some of this?" whatever it is. Our blokes did this.

09:30 My two British mates that were sent back from number 2 camp to look after the death roll at headquarters, we had a tent at that stage and we invited them to stay in our tent and we shared our stolen fish with them, they were mates and we looked after them.

What happened to those who didn't look after their mates?

They didn't last. If they didn't look after hygiene and their

10:00 mates they didn't last. You have got to look after your mates. You have got to operate as a group. If you went out and you came back with something strange, some lizard or something like that, you would cook him up and then you say to the bloke once he has seen you eating it, you offer him a bit, you get different reactions.

10:30 **You said earlier the Catholics survived better than the Protestants?**

The Catholic ministers did, yes.

Can you tell us about that, why was that?

I didn't look at it. I just saw Paddy Walsh. Paddy Walsh was a senior and he was a terrific bloke. I didn't meet an Anglican padre

11:00 anywhere on the line and I called into most camps. "We've got Father so-and-so here." There was no doubt in my mind that they were outstanding. Paddy Walsh would sit on the dunny and he would be yelling out and describing what he thought of the Japanese. Someone would say, "Have you heard Paddy Walsh today?" He would give them heaps.

11:30 **Can you describe, what did he do?**

He would be on the dunny which would be on two sticks across a trench and that was the latrine, but he would be doing a job there and he would suddenly have an outburst on the Japanese and call them a pack of, but he was a wonderful bloke. If anyone was crook

12:00 and wanted a bit of help he was there, I thought he was outstanding. I had met him, and I got to respect the Catholics a lot in the army. I went to a Catholic school.

Were you able to maintain religious services for people who died ahead of cremation?

I had to go in a hut and find out if we had a bloke to bury or burn.

12:30 I said to the other mate, "There are only two of us and we have this bloke to cremate," and he was the one who said to me, "If I don't make it, my wife and children have gone to Australia." I could never find them, even publicity in the UK, I never got them. Apparently the widow didn't want to, it was all over, but I never found

13:00 them, and we had to cremate him and see him twist up under the fire. I said to my mate, Taperell, "We just can't cast this body into this fire without an appropriate prayer." I had never done anything like that in my life and I went through the hut to find somebody who had a prayer book. Denomination didn't come into it,

13:30 but we gave him a send off. After that I avoided getting anywhere near a cremation job. But you were the only fit bloke, this is what comes out of it all, you have got to do something. One of the blokes died and we buried this bloke and his family was related to the Dymocks, who owned the book shops. When I

14:00 told them that he was cremated at Nikki that was something definite and of course the mother broke down and said, "Was there a priest there?" I never went to any after that, never, it was something I didn't want to witness again.

You have said that this priest was giving outbursts against the Japanese.

14:30 **Was there anybody else who went mad during this time?**

He wasn't mad, he just didn't like the Japs and he thought he would tell everyone down at the latrines. It was a long trench, but he was a good bloke. But down the line further I asked some of the other mates down in D Force how they went, and, "That Minister so-and-so, he is a real bastard." He was Anglican, a minister

15:00 well known out from the Central West. There was someone came from somewhere Orange or Bathurst and they found out he was a poofter [homosexual], and they had him tied to a tree and a Jap went up and grabbed the old fellow. The full story of what happened over there really can't be told, I have tried to tell as much

15:30 as I can without upsetting a family but now I have got to the stage I am writing to the Awards organisation.

What was that particular story, he was homosexual, this priest?

Yeah, tied up. The Japs tied him up to this tree naked and this minister went up and grabbed his old fellow and shook it

16:00 around a bit, it was on D Force. He was a padre, no-one liked him at all. When I think about the padres we had on F Force, they were good people and as it turned out they happened to be Catholics.

What spiritual guidance did you get to keep you going?

None at all.

16:30 You make up my own mind.

What had you made?

I said I would be home next year, and I was. You have got to know the rules of hygiene, that is the first thing in the tropics.

Did some of the guards go insane?

No.

17:00 I didn't see anyone. I heard of a bloke that I mentioned in "Singapore And Beyond" but I didn't know of any.

What about the POW's?

No, not much at all, very little if any. I had every reason to go insane. On one of my trips I picked up some natives,

17:30 the Japs said, "Stop, stop, stop." I picked up a whole family moving along the road in groups carrying their baskets. I was told to stop and we took on about four or five and there were two sixteen year old girls and the Japs started fiddling with them in the back. There was belting on the roof and I heard a thud. I had run over a sixteen year old girl. The back wheel had gone over her head.

18:00 I hit it the first time at the neck and it went out and rolled in the dust. Her face was separate, it was mobile, it was just a thin sheet of the face itself, it was separated from the skull and I was alone, I didn't have anyone to go to or talk to. The natives saw that

18:30 happen, and they pulled their hair. They were pulling their hair like that. The older people, they saw it happen and eventually I got out of the truck and I was doing a mud map to the Jap, Ishimar, in charge of me, and he put the boots into me in the face. He said, "You kill girl." I just said, "No, no, no." At that time

19:00 a Thai policeman in uniform, an officer, turned up and he spoke to the women and the people who saw what had happened and they said, "Japanese interfere with lady in back of the truck." The lady probably tried to get out or went out between the cab, you know the Marmon, Ford Marmon, went between the cab and the tray. I felt the bump and I got out and the

19:30 Japs got into me. They did a lot of kicking, Ishimar, but that was stopped when the Thai officer arrived. I told him what happened. I told him everything and he understood everything I told him.

The Thai officer did?

Yes. The Thai officer.

The Thais were neutral, weren't they?

Yes. Nothing happened after that and we had all the way to go to Nikki and that was dicey. They moved

20:00 Ishimar from lower Nikki, he was sent somewhere else. He was a little bloke, I mean a little bloke about that high.

How did that affect you, you said you had every reason to go mad?

I tell you what, they would keep on belting you up all the time.

But how did this affect you?

It didn't, like getting back to Nikki was like going home, it was good to get there.

20:30 It was an awful sight to see the face of this kid flattened out and the skull was separated and the wheel had gone right over her head.

Was she trying to get away from the Japanese in the back?

Yes.

They were trying to rape her?

Yes, that is why they said, "Stop, stop, stop." All these women, about five of them.

21:00 The moment they got on the truck when he told me to stop to take them on board, there were about three or four Japs in the back and the Jap sitting next to me in the front. What they had in mind I don't know, but obviously they had something in mind and that Jap, Ishimar, never spoke to me after that. I think

21:30 he was concerned that I would make a complaint to Colonel Bano and I don't know that Bano was ever told.

Why didn't you make a complaint to Bano about that?

They would find a way of getting rid of me pretty quickly.

Did you talk to your mate about that?

I told my mates about it

What did you tell them?

Exactly what I told you. I told them what happened. You've got no control over it. That is why

22:00 some blokes wouldn't be drivers, could be placed in an embarrassing position. That happened. I think we had been there about two or three months down in the populated area on the main road leading back to Burma. That was the worst incident I can quote about Thailand. I saw

22:30 enough.

How was your relationship with the Thais?

They were all right. They would barter with you. They would barter, but they would want to know if you had any more. I sold a bit of fuel at night, petrol.

23:00 On that trip I was a loner, I had no-one else. The Japs were busy during the day and I was sitting in the truck at night time when a couple of Thais came along and they said, "Gasoline," and I said, "Mucken", food, "OK, mucken." Now, I got a feed that night and I don't know what it was, I have never tasted anything like it, but

23:30 it was meat, mainly meat, so he got a few gallons of juice. You had to have a go. I more or less complained to the Japanese when they mentioned there was a trip on and I said, "No stay night time."

24:00 You can get the message through because it is hard for a bloke on his own to look after the vehicle and look after himself in the dark in an isolated area. That was a close call. You wouldn't believe the name of the place, W-A-L-D-O-N.

24:30 Yeah, and the British wrote that up on a post, Waldon. That was one of the earliest camps on the Thailand end of the line. The British were there first.

Were you able to provide cemeteries or memorials for the

25:00 **people who died?**

We did. For example, one day we were supposed to be cremating a bloke and we buried him because we didn't have any,

25:30 we had to bury a bloke because we didn't have the firewood so we had to dig a hole. You feel like falling into their grave sometimes. If you are in sand country be careful, and your foot is too close to the edge of the grave the sand would probably collapse and you go in with the bloke, that happened to me.

26:00 One bloke with a sense of humour said, "Wally, what are you doing down there? It is not you we are burying, it is the other bloke." There was always someone. Last time I spoke to Neville Chamberlain he said he fell into the hole. That's what you've got

26:30 to watch, these blokes, if you don't record it properly they take the part, and interesting part, and there's a few about that do that. When I interviewed anyone at all during my first book I was very careful about who I talked to. They were known by me, that is why I interviewed them.

27:00 There is nothing I can find against them.

40:58 **END OF TAPE**

Tape 8

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

01:53 **We will just stop for a second and you can go over there. We will move on a bit away from what we were talking about and get back to**

02:00 **talking about the railway up in Thailand. At the time you would have seen a lot of different camps as we talked about before, travelling around, what can you tell me of the conditions for the working prisoners?**

The conditions were bad everywhere. The moment they left the camps they were out of the control

02:30 of the camp, the responsible POW's. The engineers took over and they put the pressure on the men, they conducted all the beltings, not the permanent guards, but held us in our camp. I think I mentioned before, even to get something for the truck it would have to come up from Singapore. A Jap unit in Thailand would not help any of the

03:00 POW guards, they would not help them at all. There was no cooperation between Japanese units anywhere I was told.

Did this mean that every camp had a different atmosphere and different structure of the guards and the Commanders?

Yes, they were under the engineers who were stationed in that area to do half a mile or a quarter of mile of the railway and

03:30 no matter what condition the troops were in they would go into that camp and they would say, "We want 500 men tomorrow at 6.00 o'clock." They cracked the whip and they got their men and that is why most of our blokes died on the job.

Did you yourself have dealings with those engineers?

No I didn't. I didn't at all.

Did you ever drive materials up to the railway?

04:00 No materials. I drove personnel. I helped take the first mob of prisoners who were British to Tanbaya which is inside Burma at the 55 kilo mark. The hospital was formed there and some of our vehicles were involved in carrying the sick from the hospital. Sometimes the Japs wouldn't let certain sick go. They would say, "He no

04:30 sick, he go." I picked up blokes that were very thin, very thin, very ill, I picked them up in my arms and had to put them on the steel back of the truck. Then the Jap would get in and he would get on the truck and he would have a stick and he would test everyone to make sure they were ill. He would give them a crack across the backside with a stick.

05:00 They were bastards. Sorry about that for the record.

That's alright, you can use whatever language you like, if it's true. What sort of communication did you have with these very sick prisoners?

We didn't have, the communication we had that if we killed a yak, I

05:30 started killing a yak at the cremation point up where we lit the fire, and the Japs wouldn't come near there. One day there was one there doing something and we nearly bumped him, but we killed the yaks ourselves. We buried the big stuff, if we were cremating at the time, which we would often had someone on the

06:00 fire, we would chuck the remains of the yaks, like if we had a head to get rid of. Bano went into the kitchen one day and he found five front legs. This is why I say Bano was a good old bloke. He didn't follow that up. We would put legs and stuff in the fire or bury them like a grave. They wouldn't dig into something that appeared like

06:30 a grave. We killed quite a few yak. The first Thai that came to us one day had a yak for sale and he had pinched it, he'd stolen it. What had happened, the monsoons had started and all the Burmese working in that area on the line went back to Burma, they left these yaks and the yak carts. I remember driving in there on the

07:00 first trip and seeing where some of these blokes died, and the natives would leave some food around their mouth. I would see that on the way back, it hadn't changed. The dead were all the way on the trip to Burma, to Thanbyuzayat. The natives died, the bodies were along the road to get of Burma at that

time.

07:30 You imagine how we felt just coming into and the Burmese getting out of it because of the high death rate.

What was the main cause of this death?

Cholera was. Three of us could be talking at night time and in the morning there were two dead. This is why you could only drink boiled water, you couldn't go down the creek and have a drink, never.

08:00 I remember one of our mates said he was having a drink out of the stream and the stream looked good. They said, "Stan, Stan, you can't drink that, it hasn't been boiled." He said, "It's alright." One bloke said, "You might die." He said, "Oh well, that is my choice." Some blokes were stubborn. The water I saw, just looking at it, it looked terrific,

08:30 but it wasn't.

Can you tell us about the worst time in terms of cholera?

When we first got there. When we were in Lower Nikki there was not a roof on the camp at that stage. This is why they moved out, but there was one lot, one small area with a roof and the officers took that. I arrived back down from a trip from Ban Pong and I was talking to two blokes, three blokes, they were two dead in the morning.

09:00 There was no sign that anyone was ill in that group, that is why they vacated from Lower Nikki to Nikki. Lower Nikki, only one small hut had a roof on it and the rest was nothing. That is where I used to hear the hyenas on either side of the centre gully. They used to call out at night.

09:30 **What would happen to a man when cholera took hold?**

You wouldn't know. The vomiting is the first sign, and a lot of that. You could carry cholera by what you touched, but the water was the main thing, water, and you just had to drink only boiled water.

10:00 Don't touch your face without washing your hands, that was the important thing. I was always very careful. I would be cleaning the steering wheel and the door locks and things like that, splashing hot water on them, anything I touched often because I didn't know who else had been in the vehicle.

How would you work that hygiene control when you were off on a trip away from the main camp?

10:30 I would usually, I always boiled the billy for tea and I would always wash myself well and wash my hands and be careful what I touched. I would always use a hot rag to clean things up, I moved about a lot. That saved me, really. The officers were selfish,

11:00 taking the first hut that had a roof on it. The doctor wanted it for the sick because the blokes were dropping out then, on arrival at Nikki. Cholera was rife then in a matter of days.

It was rife, as you said. Did you lose any particular mates to cholera?

11:30 No I didn't. I did, but they were in another camp, I didn't lose any in the camp I was in. I was in Nikki all the time. I watched the train come in and a bloke come up and said to a mate of mine, "Hey Joe, your brother is on the train, came in from A Force." He went through the train and couldn't recognise him. This bloke went back with him and said,

12:00 "That's him, that's your brother, Jack." He broke down. He died on the train when it got to Ban Pong but he didn't recognise him. He said, "You come back with me." The train from the Burmese had been evacuated elsewhere, they were in Thailand and then they got on the Rakooya Maru, one of the ships that was sunk. A lot of A Force blokes were sunk in

12:30 my book, "Heroes At Sea." Their names appear there but they started off in Burma on the lie.

Talking about train trips can you tell us about your initial train trip up there to Ban Pong?

Not much, we recognise the places we had been on the train only up as far as Nikki. There was nothing outstanding about it because there were twenty-eight men

13:00 to a truck, you couldn't see much. You had to get to the door to have a leak and there was not much food. We stopped somewhere near the border and they let us out for a walk, that didn't last long and we went back in, we didn't get any decent food until we got to Ban Pong, that was the main terminus. It would be interesting to see all the stuff,

13:30 the loot that the prisoners had with them. It was chucked into a well at Ban Pong. I went around and I saw one of the officers and I said, "You are going to find yourself in trouble unless you get that loot covered up in the well." Machine guns, stuff that we had. They could have been very nasty over that. Automatics and,

14:00 even when I went back there I went and had a look at that well and made sure it was well and truly covered in, I went back a few times. A lot of our stores were there and the one I was interested in getting some was Marmite. Marmite was a life saver. I got some there I gave six little bottles to my mate at

14:30 number 2 camp. He was the sergeant major of the 2/30th and he fell arse over head taking the men's food that night and he slipped in the mud and the stew went with it. He didn't know what to do but he used my Marmite which I approved of. At the time I didn't know anything about it, but when he apologised saying he

15:00 used it up, but he didn't tell me the real story, he fell arse over the head for carrying the food for that day at night time in the mud and there was nothing there, so he got the Marmite and boiled it up and gave it to the men, they were thrilled with it. Otherwise the Japs would have taken it down at the base. I kept three tins for myself.

15:30 Survival.

Surrounded as you were by men who were in much worse condition than you, did you ever feel guilty that you had it so easy in some respects?

No.

How did that make you feel?

I was upset about losing it, because I wanted to be in a position to help a bloke, fellows closer to me, which

16:00 I did with some the medication used for everything, the name of it, an American product, I kept three lots of it in a small carton and it was

16:30 for cholera and anything bad. I got back to Nikki and it was buried there and all the blokes close to me knew where it was. They all knew where it was and we still had it. I handed it in on the train when we were coming back and I pinched eight bottles of Quinine when we got to, I didn't pinch it,

17:00 I took it, the Japs had it, they had no further use for it as far as they were concerned. I took it, Quinine, eight bottles, 500 tablets in a bottle and I kept one, I gave my mate Taperell one and we gave the rest to the hospital and I was arrested by a British officer for having quinine in my possession. Cop that. His name was Lieutenant Dann,

17:30 a big red-headed bloke in charge of the Provos [military police]. When I started the radio in the gaol not long after, I reported to the CO about Lieutenant Dann, he came one day to collect the news, and I complained to the commander that I didn't want him near the place, I didn't trust him, that he was an untrustworthy bloke

18:00 because he would talk a lot about, "I arrested so-and-so the other day." That was Lieutenant Dann. I don't know if he survived but he didn't have any friends.

When he arrested you what happened to you?

I was put in a little hut the size of a dunny and locked up for twenty-four hours.

Was that your

18:30 **entire sentence or did someone release you?**

Yeah, that was his sentence. I told him, I said, "You are a marked bloke. You know it is proper to hand enemy products into the right appropriate department." I said, "I have given them eight bottles with 500 to the hospital and on that

19:00 act you have arrested me." I told him in Australian language that he would keep, and on second thoughts I said, "You may keep." When I was running the radio and he turned up one day and I sought an interview with the chief officer, the senior officer and I told him

19:30 he was a bad risk to have around in anything. He was never used, he was never seen around the gaol after that.

Was there ever any instances that you heard about or experienced perhaps where prisoners took retribution either against each other in that kind of situation or against the Japanese?

20:00 I've heard of a few but I couldn't back them up. They talked and said, "When the war is over I am going to do so-and-so over." There was a lot of talk but I could not identify anyone, I just couldn't. Takahashi was the senior Jap officer in Changi when we first got there. Now, I've since found out that

20:30 Takahashi was schooled in Melbourne and it was Takahashi said to our Commander, "We know you have a radio in the camp, we know who is running it and we will find those responsible, it will be bad for you and bad for me," and that is why I think it was Colonel Callaghan who told the Japs and the Japs came and took me away

21:00 when I was on the tunnelling party. It came from high up in command in Changi because they didn't want trouble to be in Changi because it would affect too many people. I'm sure. If that bloke was still alive now I'd tell him.

We'll come back to Changi in just a moment. There are a couple of things I want to ask you about your time in Thailand and Burma. You had malaria quite badly beforehand, how was your malaria during that period?

21:30 I got another malaria then and that is when the medical doctor for the Malayan Government invited all his mates along to have a look at me. It was called quartan and it lasted for twenty-five days. That's what he was telling these people. He said, "Look at the way he is standing." I reckoned I was standing all right, I was in a hospital ward at the moment but

22:00 quartan. Some doctors had never heard of it but he said it was common in Malaya.

Where were you at this stage?

I was at Nikki.

The Malayan Government, what were they doing?

They had already, I had already picked up the wog in Malaya and this bloke was very definite about it. He had this whole crowd around him and I was standing there like a real dummy.

22:30 When I got home I was on the bus from Sydney to this area and going up the hill after we came over the bridge, the old bus used to shudder and that would bring malaria on straight away, the vibration. You would shudder all that night and cover yourself up and get yourself really warm.

23:00 I had malaria for a fair time.

How did you deal with it in Nikki?

The Japs gave us some tablets and they had plenty of it for their own people. "Bioki" is the Japanese word for sick, illness. "You bioki."

23:30 I was lucky to carry it home where I could treat it because if we had stayed there much longer the malaria would have taken over. A lot of blokes died from it but it was malaria or cholera.

Another separate topic, but one that we didn't cover, you were cremating some of the bodies that you were dealing with.

Yeah.

Can you describe to me

24:00 **what a cremation is like?**

Terrible. They stand up, wave the body, all their limbs move when they get heat, it is an awful scene, you never want to see any cremation because you may be looking at someone you know or some family. You put

24:30 cremation right out of your mind. The two of us, I remember Ron Taperell saying to me, "Wally, when you get me into the fire I want a bloody better end than that poor bugger is getting." Body movement it is terrible. They moved

25:00 the sick out of Nikki but most of the deaths were August. It was fairly soon. Some of our blokes were experts at cremation, they just took the bodies away from the camp and they didn't tell anybody where they were going, they found a suitable area, you have got to have plenty of wood, good burning stuff, so

25:30 when the season changed and cremation was on, we stuck to burial because we might be able to find them afterwards and that is why I marked that tree, and when the Japs finished in the Burma end of the line they came down and cut that tree and used it for firewood. They cut it down. I could mark the space today it's all under water. Nikki

26:00 Nikki is all under water, it is a big dam. I haven't been back, I don't want to go back and have some young bloke telling me the history of Burma. It was awful seeing your mates go up in smoke and that was bad, it was a bad time.

Was that one of the worst images that

26:30 **you can remember from that time?**

It would be, cremating someone you knew. The first bloke, the monsoons had started and you couldn't move along the road. The roads are made of corduroy, limbs of trees, bumpy and no speeds involved and it stopped when the monsoons came on, it stopped

27:00 all the traffic, we were stuck to the one place. No, that is an awful thing, I never wish cremation on anyone. You hear so much of it these days.

You buried some bodies, did you try and mark the graves?

That is why we had that big tree there, we measured out from the like spokes.

27:30 We would have gone out about seven foot apart, but out from spokes from the big tree and then the bastards came along and cut it down, they burnt it all. The lopped the tree and burnt it, it was a big tree. I was going to offer one city a model of that as a memorial. I had been organising

28:00 the memorials at Sandakan. I have got the names from everyone from that locality that is listed.

Do you feel you have a duty to the men you saw die?

I think they have to be remembered in an appropriate way. All other memorials that come under the

28:30 Sandakan Foundation, I provided names of the people and where they died. If they came from Cowra, that would be on the Maitland memorial. Have a look at one sometime. There is one at Maitland, as you go out of Maitland. It's not far in to walk near a lovely memorial of World War I, it is fifty yards away from that.

29:00 That has got the names of the people that lived in the district in Newcastle, North Coast and half way to Tamworth. Anyone that has served as a POW, they will be on that memorial. In Tamworth it takes in all the north and north west. Wagga takes in the Riverina. The one in Sydney is at Burwood, Burwood

29:30 Park right in the middle of Burwood. It takes everyone from the city area enlisted and ended up there. The one at Bendigo, I chose Bendigo and that takes in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia and Victoria. Some bloke got up giving a talk and said that his mate organised everything. Well, his mate,

30:00 I never knew his mate, but people claim these things afterwards as having been connected with it. I did all the contacts, I walked down Newcastle, I told the Council. They offered us a site in the Central Park there next to the ladies' dunny, that was the best they could do. I said, "That is not good enough."

30:30 You would have to walk past the memorial to go to the dunny. They laughed at me when I said, "I will have somewhere by Monday." On Monday I went to Maitland and I saw the bloke and I told him about it. He said, "Let's go down and have a look. Where do you want it mate?" I said, "Anywhere along here." We put it in line with beautiful memorial of World War I, a big tower with a

31:00 figure above, one of the best memorials I have seen. I said, "In line with the existing memorial." Our memorials aren't attractive but they had to have the facility of, they had to be vandal proof to start off, it is the first thing to consider, and it has to be in an anti-vandal

31:30 situation where they can't do much damage and of course they do to all memorials. It has been free of damage so far.

How did those memorials help to put this stuff to rest?

People go there. What I did was to use a brass strip of the death march route and it is brass and it stays brass because they run their finger along it.

32:00 They say, "That's where Harry went." It goes up to where Rennoh would be and it means something to them. Most memorials I don't think are appropriate. I thought this was appropriate because they wanted to get some idea of Borneo, not everyone can go there. The trouble of people mourning a loss in Borneo, they can't afford it to get there.

32:30 That is why I got that thing together and Enid Maskey was the Secretary, she is a good contact if you want to talk to the female side sometime. She lost a brother there who was the Australian interpreter for the Japs and they shot him. They shot a lot. It was never intended that they should live. When you

33:00 look back and find out all the holes they dug, they just dug that trench and they were destined for the POW's I am sure from what I have found out since.

Do you ever think that with all this duty on your shoulders and what you have had to go through in remembering these events that in some ways the people who died had an easier path

33:30 **in a way?**

Yes, I have thought about all aspects but also the failure of men too and leaders and so on who, there was no effort made to stop the distribution of prisoners of war, not one officer went up to the Jap officer and said, "No, this is against the Geneva Convention." They didn't try. I have got

34:00 no respect for a lot of the so-called officers we had. They didn't make any effort and they could have made an effort. I reckon I could have negotiated something better than the officers did. Our blokes called it crawling to the Japs, you didn't crawl to them but you could always make a deal with a Jap,

34:30 always. As I said, I've got respect for old Bano and I agree with the other blokes who said he was a good

old bloke, but I never saw him direct any,

35:00 but no, I have not kept in touch with some blokes that actually crawled to the Japs. On the other hand I found that I could get on with them, I could talk to them in some way and piss in their pockets.

35:30 They often talked in numbers, "You are number 10, you are number 100, Nippon number 100," they would go on like that.

Did you in some way have respect for the Japanese who were in charge of you?

No, I don't because I saw the blokes with their hair cuts, their heads lopped off and planted on a stick in Singapore. That was very common

36:00 in 1942. I saw what they did to young people too, they just pummelled them with a machine gun and knocked them off. They gave the Chinese heaps. I have no respect, I can't say anything good about them when you know how many Australians they were responsible for. Women and children were knocked off.

36:30 **Do you still feeling as strongly about that today?**

Yes.

How do those emotions work over time?

You won't see me driving a Jap vehicle. The Toyotas, I passed many Toyotas, they were no good in the mud.

37:00 No, anything we could make, why not buy Australian? Keep your trade between friends. A lot of people say they make the best car, which is a lot of rubbish. I wouldn't, I have always bought Fords or Chevs, this is the twelfth Fairlane I have had.

37:30 I bought that second hand, I have done 90,000 in it and I have had to get the rust out of it. That's a big problem living over in this area, rust. When I was mixed up with the Club I used to leave it right by the water. That Fairlane lasted twelve months.

Is it important to keep

38:00 **an idea of who is responsible and somehow attribute blame for these events, is that as important as memorialising them?**

No, Australia is a big place and you have got to have memorials in suitable localities. They shouldn't have to travel overseas to see the one in Singapore, or the one in Thailand or any of the

38:30 memorials up on that railway. You shouldn't have to do that. They do it now. They should be able to go to a memorial within reach of home. I believe that situation, they shouldn't be ignored, other people should remember that someone else made a sacrifice. Another thing you have to remember about the Australians they were all volunteers. Not like Vietnam, they were all volunteers

39:00 and a lot of them came off big properties. I remember Sid Wansey and his wife staying at the main hotel in Singapore, but Sid didn't want to carry a rank. He didn't want any rank at all. It surprised everyone, they offered him commissions for this and that

39:30 and he just walked away from it.

We just have to change the tape once more.

Tape 9

00:28 **Don, can you tell me a little bit about the experience of coming home after so long a prisoner of war?**

We came home on the Arrowa and I think I told you the story of Darwin and the hokey-pokey, did I tell you that? Then we went to Brisbane, we went to, call it Brisbane, and then to Sydney and they took us out to Ingleburn. Some next of kin were at the wharf.

01:00 There was one case, this fellow, and he's still alive, he saw his wife at the wharf with a pram and two small children, weren't his. Some of those blokes had to face up to that, and he is still around but not the family. Others that had lost their wives they just

01:30 ran off with someone else, they had to face up to a hell of a lot. My father was back from the Middle East, his service ended in Algeria from the Battle at Alamein, he took his squadron

02:00 right through until it was disbanded and the permanent members went back to Britain. The 14th Squadron was quite a famous squadron because it had been founded in the Middle East in World War I. There was quite a big book about the 14th Squadron. It's available in the UK [United Kingdom]. I should

have one here and I've just got to think which member of the family has got it.

02:30 He had twenty-odd Australians on the squadron because they wanted all the stuff they lifted at Alamein like German refrigeration units and 14th Squadron was very well-equipped. Some captain, not captain, a senior officer anyway, called him and said he would have to hand that

03:00 over, and the old man said "Well, I have got sixteen Australians on the squadron and they took it, you will have to take it from them." He never heard anything after that, but that's the sort of bloke he was.

How was your homecoming, coming back from Burma and Changi, different from his do you think?

I didn't expect him to be home in Australia to start off with and I was surprised he was there at Ingleburn with my mother. And

03:30 I saw a lot of blokes break down when there was no-one to meet them, quite a few, they hadn't heard from them, some of them had passed on they learnt later. They didn't want to talk about it. There was no problem. My sister lived in Manly and there was accommodation and letters go home.

04:00 I remember asking my father what about work in the business. He said, "There is plenty of room for another one." I got on well with my father, but I didn't get on well with my brother. I have been successful, he hasn't been.

What issues did you have to face up to when you came home? What was different and how were you different?

04:30 I don't suppose I was different at all. I said I would fit into the organisation and that is what I did. I developed the business by moving around. I moved every large property in the Riverina west of Narrandera and down as far as Jerilderie to Deniliquin up to Hay. We had a truck taking merchandise there to them

05:00 and buying anything had for sale. If galvanised iron was very hard to get at the time we, bought it and made it available. We did a lot of that, it was a matter of normal trading.

I've read and I believe that it is true, one of the people said in one of your own books about how this experience is impossible to describe to other people, what you have been through, in a way

05:30 **it's impossible to even describe to yourself. When you came home how did you deal with people who hadn't had that experience, not being able to describe it to them?**

I didn't talk much at all when I got home and seeing as how I was in business in town, I struck a lot of wanderers, POW's, who wandering about from Victoria and they just couldn't settle at all. And I contacted the

06:00 Red Cross if they could do something to help them. They had, keep this in mind, they had earned £3,000 for a POW fund to go to POW's of the Japanese. Of course they never did get it. They got the money and they never did try and pass on any of it. I thought they might give a

06:30 little bit to these stragglers, but no, they didn't. So I never give anything to the Red Cross. My Aunt was chairman of the state, or Jean's Aunt. That is one of the things that happened with me, I don't give them anything. I don't trust them. You watch the farm hand bill and find out what they are doing with that. That is one of the things I learned about the Red Cross.

07:00 **How did your experience in prisoner of war change you?**

I don't know if it did. I really don't know, I haven't thought much about that. But I always think for myself and anything I have done in business. I have followed up my own ideas over a wide field. I never thought I would be in the building stone business and I have left my mark around the country on that alone,

07:30 but I have done what I wanted to do. I bought Lynwood House and it was a historical house, and I have never gone for anything out of this world. I have always had a shack something in the bush. I used to do a lot of beach fishing and I had this place in

08:00 Port Stephens, I had two or three. Dealing in land. There is plenty of opportunities, plenty around.

You said you didn't talk about the war, when did that change? I mean you are talking about it now.

I would talk about it occasionally if it was a certain subject that I know something about. I don't go and talk to people about it.

08:30 This today is rare. I have never done anything like it before. I have spoken to people about this and that, but for an hour so, but that's it. I have never had a long session.

Have you had any dreams about the war?

I used to get them, I used to get them. You'd be scratching and you would wake up and you'd wake up properly then, get up and walk around for a while and then go back to bed.

How long did they last?

Not long.

09:00 It happened over the one year, that was way back, '50s, '60s, but I don't lose any sleep over the war. I don't get mixed up with ex-service organisations. I think the way the RSL is now I think it has had it. I think

09:30 the fellows who joined who were called up for Vietnam and didn't go are now controlling the RSL, and that doesn't interest me at all.

This will be the last question, we are coming to the very end. You talked a bit about how important it is to make memorials and to remember them, do you ever think about the future and what these events will mean when the people connected to them have passed on?

10:00 I think it is part of history and history has got to be recorded, that is a simple answer. I have been in a lot of homes and seen photographs of relatives and so on. Those families will keep them forever, the ones I have of the family. I've got a family, I have lost one,

10:30 one out of six, and my son, he is with a British company, Man International, and he is a director and he just lives up the road about a mile away. He usually calls in at night time occasionally, but he doesn't have more than two drinks,

11:00 but he has done very well.

Have you shared any of your experiences with him?

No. I have taught him to fish. Chris died last year, about this time a year ago, and we still don't know what was the cause of it. We expect to hear from the

11:30 inquiry when they finish gathering what information they can get. He was driving along the road and had something like a stroke. The skid marks took him off the road about half a mile, a fair way away, and when the vehicle left the road it left its marks all along the road. Something of that nature, we don't know.

12:00 The others members of the family, they have been successful.

This is going to be kept for a long time. If in 100 years' time people are watching this do you have any that you could say to them, any message for the future, any final words to add to what you have said today?

Not really. I think the best thing is that people can do is honour their word in what they do.

12:30 There are too many people in business who change their mind very quickly. The worst people I have ever been involved with were the Theiss Brothers, they should have been locked up years ago. I took them in to help on the stone business. I overheard their accountant say one day, a lot of blokes out there near Christmas waiting for their cheques,

13:00 and I heard the accountant say, "Don't pay them anything until after Christmas." I thought what a bastard of a policy to have in dealing with people who are doing all sorts of work at their command. I am a loner when it comes to business now. I never thought I would write a book,

13:30 but that was a sort of a challenge when he said, "You do it." That was, I could afford it at the time, that took three years just to gather the information.

Do you think we can draw any positives from what has happened in this century, in the war that you were involved in in particular?

No, I won't

14:00 get into that. I think that there should have been various changes but I am a great believer in supporting the bush and there hasn't been a government we've had that has supported the conservation and the direction of water, or the man on the land.

14:30 I spent a lot of time in the bush, I understand them and I admire them and I think we should give them a little bit more support, and I would have a commission on the cotton industry straight away. Chuck some of these people out who are stealing the water from the Darling River. It's a long subject and the dams they've made off rivers are

15:00 huge and they have dead fish right around them. Next time you pass a cotton dam have a look at it and you will see dead fish, right around you'll see the farmers down the river missing out on water, he can't run an irrigation show, it is reserved for foreign people to do it. I'm going out there in a week or so.

15:30 **We might leave it there. Thank you very much for your timetoday.**

I'm sorry it's not what I expected to give you, but if it's any interest it's up to you.

There's plenty of interest in there I can assure you. It may not all be in there in one place but some of the things you've told us today have been said before and I think it's really important for you to say them and I'm really glad that you've decided to tell us about certain things, and thankyou very much for doing it.

16:00 I think there's a lot of information that has to be released and brought out into the open because our people that (UNCLEAR) about it, and yet if knew what sort of people they were you wouldn't want to know them.

Thank you very much again.

INTERVIEW ENDS