

Australians at War Film Archive

Colin McKinnon (Sonny) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/476>

Tape 1

00:37 **Colin, I was wondering if you could start for us by just giving us a brief overview of your life?**

I was born in Sydney at Drummoyne and my first five or six years I spent at Northbridge. Okay. That was just prior to the Depression.

01:00 And my father's an architect. Had a lovely home at Northbridge but I just remember, I was about six, my mother on the verandah crying because our furniture was being taken out. Cause dad couldn't pay the mortgage and we'd lost our home. And they cut the water off and they cut the power and light off. And I remember the workmen,

01:30 the removalists wouldn't take my cot or my toy box. So that's the only things they didn't take, everything else. I remember that night I was, all of us were sleeping on the floor, and I wanted to sleep on the floor too cause I wanted to be with them. And I had to sleep in the cot, which was most annoying. So then I was taken out to my grandmother who lived at Bellevue Hill. And

02:00 knowing, looking back, she had dementia. You know and she was a very strange lady. We weren't allowed to smile or, on Sundays you couldn't laugh or do anything, you just had to sit round. Haven't got very happy memories of that but then she died and dad must have got a bit of money. We came to live at North Sydney

02:30 and I was suppose reasonable, I loved being home but I didn't like school much. Not that I was a bad scholar or anything, but I could always learn apparently. And dad was still, couldn't get any work, you know, he's, and mum didn't go to work, you know, I don't know how we lived really. Used to hate rent day cause the landlord'd come round and dad didn't have the rent you know.

03:00 We got shifted from home to home, trying to, well I don't know, we must have been living on charity. But holiday time I was taken away and my brother and I were sent to the country to live with relatives at Dubbo and those sort of places to.

03:30 So I don't think dad could afford to feed us, so that was that. That was that. And I was away for six months. But Tenterfield was, the, you know about the Depression don't you? And the farmer I used to go to at Dubbo, my grandfather, they closed him down and he got a block of land at Tenterfield.

04:00 And me brother and I went up there. And we were away from school for six months so. I was about twelve then and I was sixth class and I passed to go to North Sydney Tech [Technical College]. Then I couldn't go cause I missed the first sixth months. So

04:30 when I did come back I spent another year in sixth class and I got selected with the North Sydney Boys High. And that's what I really loved the high school. It was wonderful. And I was always so poor couldn't get text books and that sort of stuff, it was very difficult. By this time the war had broken out and my brother,

05:00 to my surprise, he didn't join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], he just he didn't join up at all until he was called up in the militia. And he didn't show any inclination to fight for Australia. Then

05:30 I got through high school, right, and I was a bit older than the average, I was eighteen and I was called up. And they wanted me to, and I of course had the leaving certificate, they wanted me to go in the air force. I didn't want the air force, all my life I wanted to be a soldier. I used to have little toy soldiers to play battles with them and.

06:00 One of the places I lived in North Sydney was a vacant block of land alongside it and I dug meself a trench. And every afternoon I used to pretend I was a soldier, fighting the Germans. And I was wounded over and over again but I wouldn't surrender you know. Then mum'd come and call me in for tea so I had to stop the battle. But I really wanted to be a soldier

06:30 and I was delighted when I got call up papers. And I was very skinny and I was scared I wouldn't pass

the medical. And I was like just a walking skeleton I really was. And the morning I joined up I went to Miller's Point Drill Hall, near the Garrison Church. And this is eight o'clock in the morning, we're all standing around. First time I got sample of humour.

- 07:00 Somebody said, "Oh what's the medical like?" They said, "Oh all they do is feel you, and if you're warm you're in the army and if you're cold, they dismiss you." And then I, to my surprise I passed the medical and I was delighted you know. I felt really happy. And they took us out to the showground, the old showground on a tram. So I felt really great.
- 07:30 Cause I's getting a free ride and I was gonna be a soldier. And got to the show ground and the usual thing. Telling you you'll be sorry, and they yell at you. "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry." And I don't think I would be and I never was. But I looked at blokes dealing it out and they looked like they had never left the show ground. They didn't look like
- 08:00 real warriors at all, they looked like typical base people. And I got me first free meal, it was, I can still remember it. I knew what army food was like and it was a roast with roast veggies and the gravy. And then the sweets was peaches and custard.
- 08:30 And, which was one of me favourites. And then they were came round saying black or white. I presumed it was black or white tea so I took the white tea. I loved tea ever since. That afternoon they had us make this declaration and affirmation of loyalty I suppose to the King. And that was okey-doke. And then I lined up
- 09:00 to get your pay book and everything. And the next disappointment was that it was six shillings a day. And so the clerk there was filling in the pay book, and he said, "Now how much you gonna allocate to your mother?" I said, "Nothing." I wanted the six shillings for meself. He said, "Oh you gotta give mum something." He said, "Let's say three bob." So I didn't see the three
- 09:30 shillings, gone already. And I said, "Me brother hasn't, he doesn't do that." He said, "Oh he's probably twenty-one." So when you're twenty-one you could do what you like so. But next thing was that I looked at me pay book, it had an 'N' number. In those days if you got called up and just through the militia, or the Star Military Forces it was you had
- 10:00 an 'N' number. If you joined the AIF and volunteered to go anywhere you had an 'X' number. And my pay book said 'N'. And I said, "I want to join the AIF." He said, "Oh you gotta have your parents permission." And I said, "Oh dear. I could get that pretty quick." But there was a chocco. And didn't get a uniform that night, they sent us home. And had to
- 10:30 come back the next morning. And they took our photographs and x-ray. And got a uniform which I'm amazed the amount of stuff you got, a great big kit bag full of shirts and trousers and all sorts of stuff you know. And I thought how can the Government afford to pay this? And that afternoon,
- 11:00 we were allowed to put the Rising Sun badge on your hat. And which sounds easy but it was hard to do. Cause they gave us a razor blade and had to make a little slit on the slouch hat. And put these little rings sort of thing through. And I made the slit alright but then I couldn't find where I made the cut you know. And a nice bloke helped me, you know, he helped me put the badge on.
- 11:30 Those in AIF got Australia, metal shoulder Australia badges on their shoulders. And I'm not, we're allowed to go home that night. I really didn't want to cause me big red boots and me hat was stiff as a board. Everybody could tell I was just a raw recruit you know. I did go home but that's the last time
- 12:00 I went home. Cause, even though we were there for five days I wouldn't leave the, I didn't want to show meself in public as a recruit. And then we went to, they said we gonna go to Cowra, which is a lovely town. And we're going to our kit bags and everything and walk to Central Station. And there's a huge crowd there to see us off.
- 12:30 And a fella there called Dusty Rhodes, he had a sister was in the (UNCLEAR) and I missed, she's a beautiful girl. I thought I want to kiss her but I couldn't. But eventually the train took off and for some reason everybody started cheering. We'd done nothing, we you know,
- 13:00 but every time we went through a suburban station there'd be cheering and yelling out as though we just won the war or something. And we got all night on the train and got into Cowra next morning. And it was, it was the middle of summer. And was a really hot morning. But and they took us by truck out to the camp. This is the 3rd recruit battalion
- 13:30 I was in. And had a funny, sort of bacony sort of smell, you know like fried bacon, pervaded everywhere. Then we got that afternoon they gave us our rifles and equipment, you know all the haversacks and packs and pouches and bayonets and all that. And they showed us how to put it together.
- 14:00 And then we got a big bag was a palliasse, which you supposed to stuff with straw. But seeing there's a drought on there's no straw so it was just a plain bag and which was alright. But then the Recruit Battalion is, I loved it, cause I loved
- 14:30 being a soldier and getting three shillings a day for it. And there was nothing like an American movie,

no harshness or anything. They taught us how to march and you know turn, turning, you know, turn to the right by numbers you know one, two. And then there's the rifle drill, you know sloping arms and presenting arms and that sort of stuff and marching and sloped

- 15:00 arms. And we used to sort of be a, I generally be an officer because we used to do, have to do fatigues every now and again. My first fatigues was in the officers' mess. And we had to lay the tables for the officers and then the big sergeant cook and they had
- 15:30 steak that morning. And we served all the officers with their meal. And then the big sergeant cook said, "Now we'll have the good stuff." And you know he had these huge steaks on our plates. And he said, "You don't want the fat do you?" And a big rind of fat on it. So I'll cut that off and he ate that. But we were getting fed better than the officers were.
- 16:00 But then you had to get back on parade yourself. So, and then they taught us all sorts of things. The big thing was gas, you know, gas warfare. Never happened but we had to be prepared for it apparently. They showed us how to put a gas mask on. And there was a gas chamber. They had to
- 16:30 go there and to put gas in the room and you walk round with your gas mask on. Then just to show what it was like without the gas mask, you'd have to walk around inside the gas, so it was a bit creepy. And they taught us all about the rifle, you know the three-o-three. And a great day the first day went to the rifle range.
- 17:00 And they'd given us a lot of instruction how to use it, how you gotta hold it tight, otherwise you break your shoulder. And I just really loved it, you know, put the bullet in and did everything right and I hit the target. Not bad, I wasn't a really good shot but I was consistent, I could get a good grouping on the target. So
- 17:30 this went on for about three months I suppose this recruit training. And then we had a little test on all the things that you done. And if you passed that you went to Infantry Training Battalion. Or they gave it a choice or not, I suppose it was a choice. They said once you go to recruit training, decide which corps you gonna go. Everyone wanted to be a driver or artillery or ack ack [anti aircraft guns].
- 18:00 We all finished up being infantry. We went to the 19th Australian Infantry Training Battalion at Cowra. And did the same things again but bit more about the Bren gun and how to throw a hand grenade and a few military tactics on open warfare. How to advance and camouflage and all that sort of stuff. Map reading. And that was great.
- 18:30 Then finished about three months there and they sent some of us to Bathurst for specialist training. And I was sent to the 2nd Machine Gun, no the 1st Australian Machine Gun Training Battalion. And I learned all about the Vickers machine gun. And how to fire it
- 19:00 and how to. Don't know if you know about the Vickers gun but it's got a belt of ammunition goes through the lock and there's various stoppages and you had to work out what the stoppages are. And at the same time I was qualified to be a range taker. That's a, had a (UNCLEAR) range finder, that's a thing about that long, fascinating thing. You
- 19:30 pick an object, which you gotta work out how far away it is so the guns can fire it. And you look through the little eye piece and you gotta do two things. You gotta get the, say you're pointing at a sharp stone, you gotta get both stones to come together. It's called halving. And then you gotta
- 20:00 twiddle little dials to make sure they coincide both, they just touching, no vary on either side. Then once you got that done you little flap to see how far away it is, so maybe a thousand yards. You gotta do that twelve times. And you gotta make your setting up and everything and do it twelve times. You disregard the
- 20:30 one first away, bottom and top. And you just divide the, average out the other ones so. Give very accurate reading, how firing away, that lasted two weeks, that was marvellous. And then there's a stage we got six months, ah,
- 21:00 twelve days leave. You'd been in the army six months, you got two days leave for each month so that's twelve days leave. And I went home and it was pretty boring at home cause I loved being a soldier. And uniform didn't show anything, I had no Australia's on my shoulders, no colour patch. I just moped around home
- 21:30 really. I tried to pick up a girl but I couldn't find one anywhere. I did slightly know a girl round the corner, I met her a few times and I asked her if I could take her out and I did take her to the pictures once. And then back to camp and another Infantry Battalion just to fill in time till we went to this place called Canungra
- 22:00 in Queensland. And we went up to Canungra and it had a terrible reputation which was pretty well earned too because you had to run everywhere, or double everywhere. And rations were very light. And you wake up in the morning and they'd run you down to the little river to have your shave and wash and everything.

- 22:30 And run you back for breakfast. And then you'd go do this jungle training, mainly firing you know Howard guns and Bren guns from the hip and rifles from the hip. But the main ones were they'd take you out the jungle; there's a lot of jungle up there. And spend one night to start with and you could find how hard, how terribly uncomfortable the jungle is. And
- 23:00 sort of things grab you and insects and all sort of things. And that was one night and did, oh river crossings. You had to learn how to cross a river. And the, they'd show you how to go oh these little wire rope bridges across the river. And one was, one
- 23:30 way was, one wire to put your feet on and another wire to hang you by your hands. And it was not too bad to start with then you get towards the middle and you'd be stretching your, sometimes your feet'd lose a wire and you'd be sort of have to trying to get across somehow. And then the next one was a bosun's chair or a flying fox. You'd climb a tree and get to this flying fox and you'd go down across the river
- 24:00 to the other side. And you'd soon be coming a million miles an hour and you'd have to get your legs working before you landed. And the, another one was just ordinary wire bridge. And then had to show you how to pack up all your gear in your ground sheet, make a little sort of parcel, and put your rifle on top and swim across the river
- 24:30 just pushing it in front of you. And that was very hard to do but. Then they had a tower there you do a practise jumping off a ship if it got torpedoed or something, you'd have to jump off the ship. And this tower's about oh fifteen feet tall I suppose. Had to climb up the tower and jump into the river with all your equipment on. And
- 25:00 I knew if I got to the top and hesitated I wouldn't be able to, they'd have to push me off which they weren't allowed to do. So I just walked up and went straight off. Wasn't brave or anything, just feel that I'd freeze. Cause the thing that drives you at Canungra was that if you didn't pass, you had to do it again. And they had a three day stint in the jungle in the final
- 25:30 week. Was seven days and we walked along the border track between New South Wales and Queensland. Really hard cause there's huge hills you had to climb and, if you dropped out, well you, if you didn't catch up that night, well that was it. You, they took you back and started again so. I remember once I just, we had to carry a Bren gun and you pass
- 26:00 it between, you didn't carry it for long, you just. I don't know we walked the first morning out, we walked and walked and up and down, up and up these hills. And had lunch then we had to climb this Mount Cain & Abel in the afternoon. And I had the Bren gun to start with and I must have gone oh about ten minutes I suppose, and I really exhausted.
- 26:30 And I had to give the Bren gun to somebody else, I just lay down on the track, I just couldn't go any further. This officer came over he said, "Get off the track or keep on going." But I caught em up just on dark, I caught up the rest. So I was paying for that. The 6th, they just marched
- 27:00 and lay down bushes and practising camouflage. And I remember one time, I didn't like me officer very much, and, we had to camouflage our steel, this is just by the way, we had to camouflage our steel helmets and put leaves and stuff in it. And I had some wildflowers on it, I had a little flower arrangement on me hat. And I didn't realise we had to
- 27:30 show it. And we stopped for a smoko and we had to show our hats and he just blew his top you know. Thought I was making a fool of him you know. But and then the last, it rained terribly, the last night out was a true thunderstorm and lightning and everything. We got soaking wet and a miserable night. And then
- 28:00 the last night I realised I was gonna make it which is the last thing. And I felt wonderful you know, I must have got me second wind cause I could have walked forever, I felt like I could. And I got back to camp and relaxed a bit. And about seven days after that, they wouldn't let you relax or anything. They used to
- 28:30 give you bayonet training for hours on end. The corporal down one end and you know, fixed bayonets and point and high port and point and lunge and everything, make your arms ache. But the corporal'd be up that the end, every damn behind him had stopped doing it you know. And he'd look round and then these blokes'd start so. But anyway that's
- 29:00 by the way. We had a final parade, Canungra, it's called a passing out parade I suppose. They told what units we were going to go to. And about a dozen of us were sent to the 31st/51st Battalion. We went to Yeerongpilly I think it was, staging camp
- 29:30 the night and then next morning they took us the truck out to, where the battalion was, Strathpine. Which is, was an outer suburb then, but it was all scrub. And now it's a thriving metropolis. And got off a truck and they said, stand there and there's a battalion parade on. And when the last company goes past you can hook on the
- 30:00 end and go and see what's going on. And I just very proud of meself you know, I was gonna be a real soldier at last. I'd get a colour patch and by this time I had joined the AIF and I could have put Australia

badges on. And all these happy looking fellas came past this five companies. And they just marched down to the theatre and hooked on the end. They were, there wasn't really a ridgey didge parade, it was sort of a,

- 30:30 happy go lucky sort of thing and they just walked down to this amphitheatre. And the colonel got up, Colonel P.K. Pabray. We used to call him Wrigley's cause the P.K., P.K. chewing gum. He said, I'm very sorry but I'm gonna leave this battalion, you're a fine battalion." They'd just been in, touched New Guinea for fourteen months and they come back for leave. And
- 31:00 excuse me, and he said, "You did a marvellous job in New Guinea I'm very sorry to leave you, but you're gonna get a new CO [Commanding Officer]. And this battalion is now warned for overseas service. All colour patches will be removed, no more leave." And oh this pleased me greatly cause, he said I can't tell you where you're going it's a secret. But
- 31:30 you know got back to the battalion orderly room, orderly tent. And I was allocated to C Company. I found out that this 31st/51st Battalion was like Territorials. The 31st came from Townsville and the 51st from Cairns .
- 32:00 And why it's a composite battalion, they found in the First World War that they seemed they weren't getting many reinforcements, that they used to do four battalions to a Brigade. And they'd try and break one battalion up to make it three battalions in the Brigade. And this upset, that's the closest they got to
- 32:30 mutiny in the First War , they wanted to stay with their own battalion. And since then if they had to join two battalions, two weak battalions, they'd combine them, that was the 31st/51st. And there's as I said from far north Queensland that was the first little problem I had, cause I was from New South Wales. And they thought that Queensland, north Queensland was the
- 33:00 only place in the world to live. And they were so proud of north Queensland, if you didn't come from north Queensland there was no sense you'd be a good soldier or good anything. So cause there's C Company. It was different to a battalion, to a training battalion, cause you were treated really nicely. You know, and they said, "Before
- 33:30 you go, before you sail, we're gonna have battalion manoeuvres." Which is the whole battalion went out on manoeuvres. Which was good fun. And then they say we're gonna give you a three day rest at Redcliffe. And we had to walk down to Redcliffe from Strathpine. I don't know how far it is but it seemed a long way. And they gave us three day's holiday there but
- 34:00 food and go swimming or do anything you liked, just for three days. Then back to Strathpine. And the only training then we did was climbing up these rope ladders. Cause in the islands you, there was no wharves or anything. If you had to get on a ship or off a ship you had to climb up the, this rope netting. And it sounds easy but it's not cause
- 34:30 you got all your equipment on, you've got your rifle on your shoulder and all your stuff on and you've gotta climb. And if you don't hold the uprights, the whole thing starts swaying out. So we practised that for days, climbing up these rope nets. Then the big day came and we, the sailing day was the sixth of December , 1944.
- 35:00 They took us down to the, right through the main streets of Brisbane. I felt proud as Jackies sitting up there in our jungle greens and slouch hat and all me equipment on. And I felt, you know, I could feel me head swelling, cause people yelling out, "Where you going?" and everybody yelled out, "Bougainville!" It was a secret, everybody knew we were going to Bougainville, cause even though it was supposed to be a secret.
- 35:30 Then we got down to the wharf and we had to have a boat number to get on. I don't know why but they put a boat number in your hat and they check you over to see if you're, I don't know what they were checking but. And we got the boat we were gonna take and it was the USS Sea Sniper, American Liberty boat. And I always had the impression that boats'd have white decks you know, wooden decks and everything. But this was just
- 36:00 plain steel decks and. And we got on and, we went down the hold and the hold was real stuffy. Dark and had layers and layers of bunks up about twelve high I suppose and put your equipment on there. And took a long while to, there was two
- 36:30 battalions going on this one little boat. And as I said it was so stuffy but you, when you laid on your bunk with all your equipment, the bunk up here'd be just a few inches above your nose. And we were allowed out on deck just before we sailed and we were, I still felt wonderful.
- 37:00 I didn't think I was gonna go overseas you know. I'm only nineteen you know and here I am, leaving Australia. And there's one, big office blocks there, at Hamilton wharf. And there's one little handkerchief waving from a window you know. And just as the boat started pulling out, an American submarine must have been going on patrol just sailed past us. And I thought this is a wonderful,
- 37:30 this is a wonderful war you know. And at night time you had to get below decks. And then in the morning you had to get up on deck and you weren't allowed to go below decks all day. And you had to wear a life jacket all the time you know. Sort of blue American Navy, sort of hood

- 38:00 round your neck and you weren't allowed to take that off. And it was just so crowded there wasn't time to have three meals a day. Used to, each battalion, each company would line up in turn and go right down in the bowels of the ship and walk through the engine, or all the electrical stuff and you'd get to the mess deck and the American food was you know sloppy stuff.
- 38:30 Tinned turkey that sort of stuff and they put jam on it, most horrible food. And cup of coffee which by the time you finished that you up on deck again you just. This went on for six days you know just two meals a day and below decks all night,
- 39:00 on deck all day. And I just, good fun, saw flying fish for the first time. And the water was calm as anything; it was like a mill pond. Must have been going inside the reef I suppose because there was no, there wasn't a ripple on the water. And on the sixth day we were up on deck. And the, we do get a lecture about Bougainville from the intelligence.
- 39:30 officers . They, I don't know where they got their information from but they said the Americans had landed at Bougainville at a place called Torokina. And they'd patrol the perimeter. And there was actually about sixty thousand Japs there but they were in such poor condition, you won't have any trouble with it. Their equipment's rusty and don't, they got no morale. Which was all a pack of lies.
- 40:00 And of course they stood, the American, don't want to jump the gun but as the boat came in towards Bougainville there's a huge mountain sort of stretching up out of the sea you know. It was an awe inspiring sight Bougainville. The mountains are higher than Kosciuszko, they're eight, nine thousand feet high and there's a huge volcano, Mount Bagana, there's a big stream of smoke coming from it. Just looked like a fairy
- 40:30 land you know. We got in close and the American were going to the Philippines. And this Emperor, this Augusta Bay, didn't look like a bay at all cause you couldn't see any headlands or anything. Just like a, looked like open sea, it was covered with ships, there was ships of every description. Warships and transports and huge landing barges, it was like a,
- 41:00 the biggest war you could ever be in, hundreds of ships. And ...

I might stop you there if that's okay Colin, we're just about...

Tape 2

- 00:30 **Yeah, absolutely fine. Okay Colin, we just got to Bougainville. Could you just keep leading us through your...?**
- Yes well we finally allowed to go onshore. It was about, I suppose anchored about half a mile off, cause there's a lot of coral there and everything. And couldn't get big boats in too close and. The American barge came out
- 01:00 to pick us up. And we waved to American troops, they were leaving to go to the Philippines. And they were dressed, not like we were. They were in their sort of spottled uniforms and they still had their steel helmets on. I dunno why cause they would have been a couple of days before they got into any action. But they still had to wear their steel helmets.
- 01:30 And we went to the beach. And I just thought to myself am I ever gonna get off this island again? The beach there is not like white sand, it's black sand and it was covered by some sort of metal matting. So you could drive trucks and things over it. And there's a
- 02:00 lot of aeroplanes flying around called Corsairs. They're American dive bombers but the New Zealand Air Force had them. And it looked like big bombs underneath their, what do you call it, fuselage, or what it is. And I thought they were bombers but it turned out they weren't. They were just big belly tanks full of oil.
- 02:30 And what they were doing was going over the Jap gardens and spraying oil on them to try and kill the veggies. I didn't think that was very sporting but. There's this Torokina was an amazing place, it was sealed roads. Like I imagined it was just a jungle sort of place. It was a beautiful plantation, huge plantation. All the tops of the coconut trees had been blasted off by the bombs.
- 03:00 They were just like totem poles sticking up. But then we went past picture shows and buildings, all sorts of real, typical American base. It was nothing an Australian base at all you know. Just a few miserable tents we had. And went out to the perimeter, where the Americans had been. And they still had
- 03:30 their weapon bits and everything there. We sort of camped there. We didn't have any tents or anything first few nights cause and we just pitched up our little mosquito nets. And I was really starting to enjoy myself but even though they didn't like us New South Wales people very much, they sort of took us under their wing and sorta were sorta friendly. And they kept on
- 04:00 talking about how hard it was in New Guinea. At a place called Mawaraka which was very swampy and,

and hadn't seen much action there but once they learned to speak Malayan, they were speaking Malayan to each other. Was alright. We were there until about Christmas Day. They gave us a Comforts Fund parcel.

- 04:30 We remember this; every soldier got a little Christmas cake in a tin. And when you opened the tin it was all mouldy. There wasn't, not one soldier opened the tin wasn't mouldy. That's just by the way. And we used to go to the pictures at night time. And big marine air group there, MAG [Marine Air Group] Twenty-five.
- 05:00 The Americans, millions of Americans there. And they, on sunset they'd put up trestle tables and have a market. And I thought this is beyond my belief that this is an island which has been captured a year or so before. And it was like a little city. They had neon signs on the picture shows and the Americans had ice cream factories and all sorts of. They'd got their Postage Exchange,
- 05:30 the PX's [American Army Canteen] they could buy anything. These markets, you could buy, you could beer or you could buy jewellery, all sort of things. I don't know whether it was official or not but the Americans didn't seem to worry. And but that was great. And we were there for about just on, just after New Year. The
- 06:00 battalion was gonna be sent north to attack the Japs at right along the north coast. If you know Bougainville at all, there's a huge central range of mountains and a very narrow coastal plain. And the morning we were to leave we struck our, we took our tents down and everything.
- 06:30 We were to leave about two o'clock in the morning. And there was a tropical downpour, the rain came down straight. I reckon if you didn't have a slouch hat on you'd drown cause it was so thick with water, you know, just sorta, and made a terrific roaring noise too. Anyway got on these trucks and went down to the beach. And got onto these barges again. And
- 07:00 went out with a little ship called the Pooltar, a little, oh I don't know how many tons it was. It was big enough to take a battalion I suppose. And it started, starting up the coast to the north. And it was pretty close into the mountains and by about, just after sun up I suppose, the rain stopped and beautiful sunny day again.
- 07:30 And you could see these mountains on the starboard side I suppose it was, port side, starboard side. And every now and again there'd be a little plume of smoke come out of the jungle. I've never found out why but there it was. And we travelled about thirty or forty miles I suppose up to a place called Sipapai.
- 08:00 And we landed there and set up camp. Beautiful little spot. And I was keen as mustard then and they were gonna send a patrol up into the mountains, a little reconnaissance patrol. And I didn't ask to go on it but I made sure that I was round the bar if anybody did ask me I could go on it. So I did go on it. And
- 08:30 I said to meself probably no white man's ever been on this track before. Went about, oh about five hundred yards I suppose and come into a little clearing. And there was a little lean to shack sort of made out of palm fronds and everything. And a mat on the floor and a big tin trunk. Well I couldn't believe me eyes you know. I said no white man's been here before but here's, must have been a white man,
- 09:00 cause he had a big black trunk. Anyway we kept on going up. And a fair way up the mountain I suppose. And right up there saw a few natives and they didn't seem too perturbed at seeing us. We couldn't speak their language, they couldn't speak ours. But
- 09:30 we just came back and that was that. But by this time I'd been transferred to the mortar platoon, three inch mortar. Not that I knew anything about them but and we had a Lieutenant Back, Ces Back, we used to call him Spider or Red Back. He's a lovely, nice bloke. He,
- 10:00 but he'd grown up with them. He came from Townsville and he used to play football with all the blokes and everything. In my opinion he's a bit too friendly with everybody, you know. He's nice to me but when an officer's friendly, things aren't fair sort of. But that didn't last long because these long range patrols started going out and they, we started getting a few
- 10:30 casualties. And they came to a place called Tsimba Ridge, T-S-I-M-B
- And that's where the Japs had decided to make a stand. Until this they'd been falling back, you know, retreating. And that's our first major battle. Poor old, my Lieutenant
- 11:00 Backy, he's a Batman, he decided to change holes. And the Japs were shelling and he went, changed one hole and the next minute the Jap shell landed right there with them and blew them both to pieces. And that's
- 11:30 like, I came across the most marvellous soldier. We had a new lieutenant, Lieutenant Kelso-Knight, he came from the 2/5th Battalion, he's a Middle East veteran. They did that, they got the nucleus of good officers and put them in the chocco battalions to strengthen them up a bit and give them some leadership. And this Kelso-Knight he's the most marvellous soldier.
- 12:00 He's a Victorian from the 2/5th Battalion. And he never showed any emotions at all, whether he was

pleased with you or angry with you or. He always had a poker face except this one day, first to go to the platoon. And he read the riot act to see where everybody was. And whether hospital or where they were.

- 12:30 And he came to this Private Lewis and there was silence. And he sort of cranky, "Somebody must know where he is." And they said, "Oh he's dead sir." Cause he was the bloke who was killed with Ces Back. He looked a bit mortified then that he'd sort of cranky cause the bloke was dead. But apart from that he was most marvellous soldier. He'd do anything and he's
- 13:00 like Captain Hornblower. He'd take any risk or do anything. In my first experience in action was really great because we landed at this place called Puto. And were told to dig in round the jungle headquarters. We dug, wasn't a very hard dig. We dug these
- 13:30 pits. And we had no intention of sleeping in them cause they was too uncomfortable we thought. Outside and late at night these big explosions started. And we didn't know what to do but some of us started going towards the pits. A bloke said, "Don't worry, they're ours." So
- 14:00 this bloke said, "Ours be 'effed'." So really they weren't ours at all, they were the Jap shells. Landing just pretty close to us in the trees. And you could hear the shrapnel sort of cutting through the jungle. So I was really amused the fact that I been under fire, didn't realise it. And the next morning we had the reserve, the Don Company, I was with Don Company,
- 14:30 in the mortars. When a battalion goes into action the four rifle companies, there's always one in reserve and the two machine guns go with each company and two mortars and attached with the signallers. And there's a tank attack component too, and pioneer. But
- 15:00 I said well to carry the supplies up to C Company. C Company, we hadn't taken Tsimba Ridge at that stage. And C Company tried to outflank it, they got across the river called Genga River. And they were very heavily attacked there. And they lined us up and this, Mortar Platoon, and we had to carry the food.
- 15:30 And had to carry a barrel of rice. Which was, it wasn't very heavy but on me shoulder, had me hand up like that and rifle in me other hand. By the time I'd gone about half a mile I suppose, me arm was aching and just couldn't. And bloke in front of me, Morrie Maccas, he had a bag of bully beef tins in the sandbag, just hanging over his shoulder. It looked really comfortable. I said, "Morrie would you change
- 16:00 for a few minutes with, you take my load?" And he said, no, He wouldn't change. But as we got up, well we owned a little bit of the ridge called the Pimple. And got up there and the walking wounded came past from the night before. The Jap warrant officer had got into our perimeter. And
- 16:30 our Bren gunner, Slim Anderson, he had the cock handle, he was uncocking it, put his hand out to get the cock and a Jap chopped his fingers off with a sword. And I spoke to Slim later on Anzac Day and he said, "I saw you coming past with your hand held up in the air, like bandaged." And he said,
- 17:00 "That's the only funny thing ever happened that day." He said, he got back to the casualty clearing station. The doctor said, "Don't go swimming cause you'll attract the sharks." Because of the blood. And but I was a bit nervous about seeing these casualties coming past. But it wasn't too bad and I got down to the river itself. And they said that Jap officer that Jap warrant officer that, with a sword he,
- 17:30 they shot him and rolled him into the river. And I wanted to see him, he was just floating across the other side of the river. And I poked me head out through the jungle to have a look and suddenly a machine gun started firing and I didn't see the Nips, I just lay down flat and. And then we went back to Puto and Field Security had this Jap
- 18:00 warrant officers uniform. And it wasn't a soldier's uniform it was a naval uniform cause they were, we were fighting naval troops. But had been in the Rape of Nanking, they were war veterans. And I looked at this, as Field Security opened his pockets and they took out his and all his little papers and things. He had a
- 18:30 photograph of his wife and kids. And I thought how sad you know, he shouldn't have been out there dying for his Emperor. He should have been back in Japan with his wife and kids. Then in the afternoon I had to take another load up, this time to stretcher, to take up. And had a big tin of those army biscuits, big cubic tin of
- 19:00 hundreds of packets of biscuits, you know like dog biscuits, they were real hard stuff. And we sort of would open the stretcher out and put the tin of biscuits, on the stretcher. And that worked pretty well till we got to the Pimple again. And I had a couple of hand grenades in me pockets. And me trousers started falling down and
- 19:30 I had to keep on pulling them up. And there's a slope and the big tin of biscuits started sliding back towards the back of the stretcher and kept on shoving it up. It was pretty hard going. And we got to the top and they said, "Don't stop there." cause the Japs had cut a fire lane from their part of Tsimba Ridge across to where we were. And sort of thinned the jungle out so they could get a good field of fire.
- 20:00 And getting half way down towards the river again and this party of stretcher bearers came up. And you

could see from their face they were pretty, really distressed. And it was hard work carrying a stretcher, even though there's four people on it. Gotta be on your shoulders and everything. They put the stretcher down, this poor bloke, who I knew slightly, lovely

- 20:30 wavy hair but he'd been shot in the face. I don't know whether he pulled or what but big bandage over his face. Where his nose was sort of sagged in where his nose should have been. His eyes had been, disappeared into his head; just see the whites of his eyes. And he's obviously just about dead; he died a few seconds later. But
- 21:00 every time they say the Ode [of Remembrance] in the RSL [Returned and Services League] Club, they say you know, I think of that bloke, he was a beautiful bloke, and he had this marvellous life, and he died there that afternoon. But it's still, seeing him I've lost all
- 21:30 ambition to win medals or promotion or anything, I just wanted to survive cause I wanted to get back to Australia. And then we dropped our load and went back to Puto. And they said oh, apparently there's Jap Commandos are trying to infiltrate back to Sipai, where the Casualty Clearing Station was.
- 22:00 And they sent us back down to, back there to guard it. And that's where I started seeing more casualties. The casualties started coming in pretty thick. And we had a patrol round there at night time to make sure there was no Nips anywhere. I didn't watch any operations myself but they, the fellas described it to me. They
- 22:30 said that when the blokes died they crossed his hands and sewed his thumbs together and sewed his lips up. Which is a pretty gloomy sort of thing to think about. But in the morning we had to carry the ones who had died during the night across to the barges. And
- 23:00 in big body bags. And I remember we carried one bloke across and he's a bit loose. And I said Jeez he, I wonder if he's still alive. Cause the bag was still moving a bit. And cause it was a bit loose. But just little silly thought goes through your mind, you know. And spent a few more days there. Then by the time we
- 23:30 went north again, this time we were ready to go into action with our mortar and. We'd just about, Tsimba Ridge had been captured. And we'd, the Nips had retired behind the Genga. And there was great for a few days cause
- 24:00 we could wander round behind where things had happened and looked at the battle field. And Tsimba Ridge itself was not very high But the holes that the Jap weapons were dug down and another in, let's say they were safe from anything, from a direct hit from a shell. You could never have got them out. And the
- 24:30 Japs had been there a fair while, preparing in this place. And I dunno why but this is a strange little thing. But the Japs had, must have been a sculptor amongst them cause they'd got these coconut logs about this big and they'd sculptured their officers. You know like Japanese faces and little uniforms, like these little logs. You know fascinating.
- 25:00 But then there was all the graves, there was about fourteen Jap graves. And about fourteen Australian graves too with the, Australia just had one big wooden cross, the Christian cross. And the Japs, little mounds of earth in em with a stick with their helmet on it. But they all looked the same, they all the same sort of mounds with except one was the cross and
- 25:30 one was. Then just after from Tsimba Ridge they crossed Craterland, the Japs had a headquarters there. We sort of went and looked at the headquarters but there's a huge crater that, the air force had dropped a depth charge, they said.
- 26:00 And the crater was a big, like one of those ant line nests, it was round and you could have put a house in the whole thing. And this other Jap building, they must have dropped, must have devastated that building. That's why I always kick meself now I didn't go inside. But there's another little bamboo sort of hut which is part of the headquarters. Inside there was papers and the telephone was still connected. And
- 26:30 some of the fellas walked inside and started playing around having a little pay parade. Ringing up Tokyo on the phone and having a great time but I was scared of booby traps you know, I'd been told about booby traps. But I, thinking back, there wouldn't have been any booby traps cause the Japs would have been so scared of this depth charge dropping, they would have skedaddled straight away without any bother. But
- 27:00 we went back and some Jap shells starting landing near us one day. I'm getting a bit above meself now but depends how quickly you can think. The Japs had retired and there was weapon bits scattered around. And these Jap shells started landing near us. And
- 27:30 I knew that I wanted to get me head close to the ground. And on the way down jumping in the pit, I'd snatched a banana leaf off a banana tree. And I put that on the ground to, put me fact on it, so I could press me head into the ground. Just little funny things that stick in your mind. And the next day I, we were in position. C Company was just ahead. And
- 28:00 I was gonna fire me first shot in anger, I'd never fired a mortar, that was in the mortar platoon. And all I

knew was that when you dropped the bomb down the barrel you had to get your hands away straight away, otherwise the bomb'd hit your hand and blow up. And I watched the other fellas as number one gunner controlled the sight. And there's

- 28:30 two bubbles, one this one. One they had a little aiming mark, I don't know much about it but there's an aiming mark out and you'd set your sights on the aiming mark, how far you wanted the bomb to get away. Like, there's a, well a mortar bomb itself has got pins to keep it straight on the way down. And little,
- 29:00 little bands you could put, there's a primary charge which, when the bomb goes out it strikes the pin. It fires, but, but if you want the bomb go further there's little secondary charges. I put six charges round the thing to make it go further. And that's where Kelso-Knight he, for some reason he thought I was brave, so, he thought I knew what I was doing anyway he said.
- 29:30 When there was, we were supposed to start firing at the mortar bombs and there's only a few people around. And Kelso said "Sonny'll do it." Yeah I'm never firing, I'm firing number two on the gun. So had to keep the bubble straight. When you're in the middle you say, you yell out, "On!" And there's fired and dropped a bomb.
- 30:00 I fired three bombs and they ceased fire for some reason. So that was that, I fired me first three shots in anger. I's really proud of meself. But very shortly after that the battalion been in two months, we, I got relieved. And the 55th/53rd came up to take over from us and we went back to Torokina
- 30:30 which was great. Lovely place Torokina, you, like going on home leave. And no dangers. And you could walk round and go swimming, or do anything you liked. Then we were sent up to Ash, next camp was up to Numa Numa Trail. That's a trail that goes right across the mountains to the other side of the island. And
- 31:00 the only hard part there was getting up there cause it's a big zig zag path. For a start we went by truck up to Laruma Valley and had to cross this little river about thirteen times before you got to the base. And we walked up this zig zag, oh miles, it seemed miles anyway. But when you got up the top there it was, the air
- 31:30 was sort of cool and fresh and the jungle, no jungle up there. It was too cold for the jungles I suppose. And the trail was pretty skinny and so it wasn't very dangerous. There was huge valleys either side you know so the Japs couldn't have climbed up anyway so. But we went up to about
- 32:00 six weeks I suppose, it was really nice. They used to supply us mainly by air, big biscuit bombers'd fly over and drop their parachutes with all the supplies on it. And really pretty sight to see the parachutes floating down. And it wasn't much activity. They say only, we only lost one man up there. And he was killed by a stray bullet. He, fella
- 32:30 called Lugey Lucas, his name was Luigi but we called him Lugey. And the Jap, he was shot through the head and he, I don't know how but he fell down and said, "You alright Lugey?" And he said, "Yeah I'm right." And he wasn't right, dunno how he said it
- 33:00 or. And I saw them carrying his body past with just a ground sheet over it. And they'd taken his boots off and there's a bit of blood on his feet. And said oh you know only light casualties but for poor old Lugey it was a terribly heavy casualty. You know, to think oh poor fella.
- 33:30 But that was really nice up in the mountains and back to Torokina. And this time it was go north again. It was only one brigade was going north, it was the 11th Brigade, which is mine, the 26th Battalion, 55th/53rd and 31st/51st. And we were
- 34:00 take it in turns to have a spell and go up and. And we got taken by barge up to Soraken Plantation. Which is the most beautiful place you know. It's got lovely coconut palms. And in plantations it was, you'd always get a cool breeze. And so shady and so pleasant. It must have been a huge plantation
- 34:30 cause there's a railway lines going into the plantation to bring the stuff down to the wharf. And the artillery regiment was there. And we used to wander down there and watch them firing you know the. And they tell me that, they told us that they weren't allowed to chop many, to get a field of fire they couldn't chop many coconut palms down cause the Dutch owned them. And
- 35:00 they'd have to, Commonwealth Government would have to pay them compensation for chopping down the coconut trees. I thought that was a bit rough. And they had, across this Soraken Harbour they had posts, like army posts, way across over. And they had skulls on the posts. And oh I really loved it there. And I felt then I was,
- 35:30 I'd been sort of a lonely sort of bloke. And I was with these fellas that we used to go swimming every day and I used to have a little trick, I used to, we used to chuck easy up over our shoulders and I'd dive down and I had me legs sticking out of the water. And they thought I'd broken me neck or something, me legs are sticking up and I wasn't moving. They
- 36:00 took me back to the tent and looked after me. I wasn't hurt at all. But I really loved being with them you know. In the force because we were really good mates we were. And if that could have lasted, I would

have loved it now and forever. But we were warned for action to relieve the 26th. And

- 36:30 anyhow in a battalion they always have, left out of battle, have ten percent of the battalion taken out of battle to, in case their battalion's knocked around they can have a nucleus to start it again. And I said gee it would've been marvellous if I didn't have to go you know. And that's the funny thing about yourself, you didn't want to go. But somebody said
- 37:00 "Sonny, you've been, (used to call me Sonny), you're LOB." that's left out of battle. And somehow I didn't want to be left out, I wanted to go with them. And I went down to the orderly tent and I said, to the sergeant, Sergeant Fleming. I said, "Am I left out of battle?" And he sort of looked at me, he thought I wanted to be left out of battle. And he looked at me with real compassion in his eye and said, "No Sonny you're not."
- 37:30 Which pleased me in a way. I was gonna go with them and they, I had a really good mate, Jimmy Parsons from Julia Creek. And he said, "I'll look after you son." And I don't think I needed looking after but. And another one was Major Collins, he was a Private, his Christian name was Major. And he was a Thursday Islander.
- 38:00 He used to dive for pearl shells and things. He's a marvellous fellow, you know he could swim, we used to go swimming and he'd swim under water and he'd pop up about fifty yards away in the water. And, we went by barge to a place called Ratsua. And we went past the little Jap boats they had, they'd captured. Like
- 38:30 two ends they'd join it together, one, there's one in the War Memorial. They could join em together or make em separate, two separate boats. Would have been interesting except that I knew I was gonna go into action. Salvation Army bloke was at, when I got off the boat he gave me a packet of chewing gum and he said, "God bless you Sonny." And I, I said oh you
- 39:00 I hated him cause I didn't like being called Sonny by him. And he was a young bloke twenty-five or so. And I'm going up and you're not. When we walked through the jungle it was terrible jungle there, it was really thick. And when you walk through jungle it's so
- 39:30 oppressive. You can't see the sun and you seem to go for miles. You might have only gone a few yards but it seems a long way. All we were hopeful for was that 26th would have good weapon pits for us when we got there and be quiet. And well there were weapon pits alright. And we got there and there was a
- 40:00 one bloke left behind from 26th to tell us the lay of the land and everything. And we got into his pit and Major, I was with Major. Major and I. And he said oh, took his shirt off straight away but he said, "Oh I'll stop around for a while." And he's with us and very soon the Japs started firing at us. And
- 40:30 this is not very common knowledge but when a high powered bullet goes past you, close to you, it breaks the sound barrier. And these machine guns started opening up on us. And we were in the pits, we were quite safe. But apart from hearing the machine gun firing you hear a crackling sound over your head. And no, stuff's
- 41:00 nerve-wracking and I started trembling and I fixed me bayonet. And I remember sticking the bayonet up and I was waving backwards and forwards. And I thought gee if anything, if a Jap jumps into me I hope it's, the bayonet's straight ahead when he jumps in otherwise I'll miss him. And that went on
- 41:30 oh for quite a while, I don't know how long it was. These bullets were, just missed, cracking over our heads. And their artillery opened up and started landing shells just in front of us. And beautiful sound, and they stopped when the Jap, when the artillery stopped and it was dead quiet and everything. The 26th bloke said, shook your hand and said, "Oh I'll be off now, this happens every afternoon."

Tape 3

- 00:33 **You were just describing action at Bougainville.**

Yeah, keep on going?

Yes please.

Sure. The next day well I better say that we had a platoon of Papuan Infantry Battalion with us. They, we had half the perimeter, they had the other half.

- 01:00 I think the Japs were very scared of the Papuans so, they're such marvellous jungle fighters, they could glide through the jungle, you wouldn't know they're there. That's sort of why I think the Japs weren't too anxious to get into, real close to us. For example they went out on one patrol and they come across a group of Japs.
- 01:30 And they threw a hand grenade at, amongst them, and killed two of them. And they brought their equipment back to our perimeter. And had their rifles, were almost brand new. They, we were told that

they were rusty. The ports were real shiny. And the Papuans are marvellous, they love

- 02:00 throwing things. And they got these Jap bullets and they threw them at a banana tree and they stuck in, the leaf part. And they used to make patterns with them, throwing these bullets. And they only had one weakness and that was the risk of ghosts at night time. They were like a, you know they were terrified at night.
- 02:30 And probably my next little adventure I'll describe to you. We were supposed to have one off all night in the pit. So be somebody awake all night in each pit, all the time. And Jimmy Parsons and the bloke from Julia Creek and I decided we'd like to double the time we had at resting. So we got a bit of sig [signal] wire and
- 03:00 Jim's fit to mine. And we had this thing, this none in particular, I had the sig wire around me leg. And he had it, next pit down he had it wrapped round his wrist. And oh dunno what time it was, we had no watch or anything. But the Papuan must have thought he saw a ghost. And I was just
- 03:30 about to pull the wire and I popped over me head over the top of the pit to have a look round. And this Papuan fired his rifle. And you know arrived at night time and you see a flash of flame. And out of the blue this big flash of light and recoil of the rifle. It so startled me I jumped backwards. And he had his, slip knot
- 04:00 round his wrist and jerked his wrist. And he couldn't, for a while, untie the sig wire you know. And he wasn't really amused about it. And, but we set up a trial out, Don Company did. And we had these native scouts called Puka-Poys. And
- 04:30 black as the ace of spades. And I walked up to the Papuan Company platoon and I saw this Puka-Poy, he was just about to go out and he's, and he's terrified, he was sort of trembling. And to try and make him feel confident I sort of stood up there and pretended I was nonchalant, you know I didn't care too. But he didn't live much longer cause they, the patrol went out
- 05:00 and they, poor old Joe Hillier got killed here. The Japs were ambushing a lot. And they, Joe Hillier, he said, "Oh I'm happy today." cause he used to be first or second scout. This time he's second last. And when the Puka-Poy stopped, he sort
- 05:30 of froze in the middle of the track for a while and he. And he just froze there for about a minute. So then the Japs opened up and sort of almost tore his arm off with a burst of gunfire. Poor old Joe Hillier, back second last. He got a burst of machine gun right through his chest. And he went. And they got back to our perimeter and
- 06:00 the Puka-Poy's bleeding so badly they wrapped his arm up. But we couldn't anybody to carry him back. And what happened, one of ours I suppose we would have carried him. But we eventually got few soldiers to carry him back. And the deal was that if you carried him back you wouldn't have to come back that night. So,
- 06:30 but he died soon afterwards. But we were there for about three or four days and the Battle of Porton Plantation started. They, A Company, it's a land Porton and we were to link up with them. But our intelligence was so bad they were, they were told that there was a big swamp between the Don Company and A Company and we wouldn't have got it through anyway.
- 07:00 But at the landing, you might have heard about the Battle of Porton? The first few barges got in and the supply barges more or less got stuck in the reeds, and almost wiped out. We could hear every shot fired in the battle. But we couldn't do anything about it. So, well that's another story.
- 07:30 I won't go into it now but it should never happened. And that left our, when the Port Moresby evacuated, was a terrific lot of casualties. Left us exposed, we're on the edge of another plantation called Buoi Plantation. B-U-O-I. And we had to go
- 08:00 further inland. We weren't told we were retreating, it's exactly what we were doing, y'know had to get a more secure position in the jungle. It was a terrific hard day. The first thing I could do was roll up our signal wire. And a fella called Joe Russ and I were sent out to roll it up. Which is a nerve wracking thing to do cause the Japs like to get signallers. And I was rolling, little harness
- 08:30 on his back with a reel on it, I walked behind him reeling it in. And I was so busy looking around that I let the wire get across the wrong outside of the spool. And it jammed up in the thing. But Joe, he's a lovely fellow, didn't go crook or anything. He took the harness off and untangled it and carried on. Then we had to carry our mortars and all our mortar bombs and our own stuff into
- 09:00 a ridge. I don't know how far away it was from our first position but, bout half a mile or so I suppose. We were told to dig in and it was getting pretty dark at this time, late in the afternoon anyway, you don't get much twilight in the jungle. And we were exhausted, we had to dig our mortar pit first then our own pits.
- 09:30 And poor old Major Collison, he had a pick and I had a shovel. And we started digging. And I was so weak at this stage I just couldn't handle a shovel. So Major, he was a...

We just have to stop for a second. Colin, we were just, you were still in...

- 10:00 Sure, yeah I was digging a pit. And even though he's a dark fellow he showed such strain in his face and it turned a bit whitish. And I had to get the clods of dirt and lift them out with me hands cause I was too weak to hold the shovel. But we just made a pit big enough to both sort of crouch in. Cause we had to be below
- 10:30 ground level, and the rule was anything above ground level could be shot. I'd be over the Japs out at night time. Most uncomfortable night you could possibly think of. Every time my wife growls about how uncomfortable the bed is or something I just think of that night, all night, it was a long night. You know just sitting there in a pit, you know, bit nervous as well. And
- 11:00 so nice to get out the next morning. And when we did get out the next morning we made a really nice pit, with a sleeping bay in it and everything you know. Bit packed. I spent three weeks in that same hole so I made meself really comfortable, made little shelves and all that. And little, not furniture but I got some tarred paper and lined the pit.
- 11:30 It was like home, little shelf to put me hand grenades on it. But we were quite safe there really. Cause we'd put booby traps out at night time. Which was just a hand grenade tied to a tree with a signal wire across it. And Major and I, it was our job to set the booby traps at night. And I took his Owen gun and looked after him while he went round the perimeter putting these booby traps down.
- 12:00 And we got barbed wire eventually and we made a double apron barbed wire in front of us. So if you stopped there you were fairly safe. But we set the mortars up and we had to support the Don Company every evening and we fired. Porton Plantation was, you know,
- 12:30 that's made us so weak we only had two companies left. And went on for all this time so we got relieved eventually by the 23rd Brigade. But they, as I said, we had to keep on patrolling. And the morning I was ambushed, I was ambushed in the afternoon, but in the morning
- 13:00 I was on a patrol through this wild banana trees. And it's a terrible jungle there plus banana trees, you know wild bananas. And all banana trees looked alike. Normally in a patrol you stay about five yards away from the person in front of you. So if you, if one gets shot, the other one got a chance. But I was almost treading on the bloke in front of me's ankles. Cause I was dead scared if I lose sight of him there's no way I'd be able to find me way back. And I was on patrol
- 13:30 all morning. Or a couple of hours in the morning. And in the afternoon I was sent out on the listening post. You crawled out in the jungle, about fifty yards in front of your perimeter, just to listen. See if any Japs were
- 14:00 coming in or anything. And quite a good pleasant task, you had a field telephone to ring up in case anything happened. But I was there for about three hours in the listening post. I got back, getting on towards dark, about four o'clock in the afternoon I suppose it was. And the corporal said to me, "I want you to go out." The only
- 14:30 water you could get was from a swamp. And soldiers had to go with buckets to get the water. And had to escort with the other soldiers. And they said, "I want you to escort the watering party down." And I got cranky. I said, "I was on patrol all morning, and I was listening post most of the afternoon, and now you gonna send me out again. That's three times, there's enough soldiers there to...." And he said, "Oh we've
- 15:00 got nobody else to go." I liked him, he's a lovely bloke, the corporal. But you gotta go. I should have been terrified cause the Japs had left their footprints in this swamp cause they had sort of sneaker shoes, one toe in the, and their footprints were down there. And they were warned that there would be Japs hanging around. But I was so cranky,
- 15:30 I had me rifle and me hand grenade. So I'll go, I went forward scout. I went down first and blokes with the buckets and things were behind me. And I just got a, felt happy for a second cause I said, "This is as far as I'm gonna go." Cause it was swamp was behind me. And I stopped there, that's it. And suddenly this Jap machine gun opened up.
- 16:00 And I don't know what happened to him but when you fire a machine gun you fire a short burst then travels a bit and he let the whole magazine go at one go. And I don't know why or how but he missed us all. But, after the first shot, everybody's on the ground. And this is where I fired, threw me first hand grenade.
- 16:30 On the way down to the ground I pulled the pin out of the grenade. And I lost the pin so I was there laying on the ground with me hand grenade and me hand around the lever. And you know, you won't, nothing happens till you let it go and the lever flies off and you've got about four seconds. But there was people throwing hand grenades and I felt something hit me.
- 17:00 Didn't hurt at all but it must have been a bit of shrapnel from a Jap hand grenade. Cause I didn't know then I was bleeding pretty profusely from the head. And I was by meself, just everybody else had disappeared off the track. And I stupid, I just, I was still on the track. Hand grenade in me hand and I

was fixing me, to any second. But

- 17:30 it was dead quiet. And a bloke called up to me, called Tommy Cahill. And he was the, remember the Premier Joe Cahill, that built the Opera House, it was his son. He was a corporal and he became a Member of Parliament himself later. He said, "Are you alright Sonny?" I said, "No I've got this hand grenade, I've lost the pin." He said, "Well you can't stop there
- 18:00 the whole war with a hand grenade in your hand, you betta chuck it." He said, "Wait till I get away." And so I waited until he got away then I threw the hand grenade and I scarpered meself then and I ran back. I can remember me back bones were quivering. I expected a bullet any second you know. I know it's a queer sensation but you sorta, you know what I mean. I just remember
- 18:30 me back bone sort of quivering. When I got back to the perimeter and the first blokes back reckoned I was dead you know. But I wasn't badly hurt, I stopped bleeding and it wasn't even reported, you know we were in such desperate circumstances then. There was only a few soldiers left in the company.
- 19:00 So I was sorry it wasn't ever reported cause we had other things on our mind at that stage. But I don't know I was, I smoked and smoked and smoked and I was still trembling, I didn't want to ever go out on patrol again. But a few days later the word came through that the 23rd Brigade was gonna come and get us out
- 19:30 They were a fresh brigade that hadn't been in action before. And we couldn't use the, there was a jeep track, a corduroy jeep track, almost to us. And couldn't use that cause the Japs controlled it. And so sent us natives sort of scout in to take us out. We had to go out in two lots
- 20:00 and I was the first lot out thank heavens. And this native sort of had a little tiny knife and he kept on slicing bits off the branches on the tree. I don't know why. Got back to Ratsua and here's this 23rd Brigade, the whole company just waiting to come up. Some of them were up there already. But they looked so young and fresh. And I felt so old and.
- 20:30 I hadn't had many noble thoughts but I thought geeze I should get back in their place cause they look too nice to go. But that didn't last long. I was so pleased to be back in the. And the Salvation Army bloke was, the bloke I didn't like, Harry Classvoijusen[?], had a record and a gramophone playing. And
- 21:00 I felt so wonderful you know, I was just alive. And you were always drinking this swamp water for oh this week. I, you could chuck it away now but so, and the music, and our clothes had rotted off just about. And we went into the sea and we had our packs there. We got a dry set of clothes. And I know my
- 21:30 shirt just peeled off and I walked in the sea. And when I come out I looked at me feet and me feet had sort of rotted and skin had come off. And the black sand it was like pepper on me, cause the sand sort of got up into me feet. But, we got taken back to Soraken Plantation and that night
- 22:00 the barges came and took us back to Torokina. Which was, which is great. And we rested there and we were going to get two months off, two months out of action. And this is when I realised now how we loved each other. Cause I got a letter from
- 22:30 me girlfriend to say that she didn't want me anymore you know. So she's got engaged to somebody else. And that didn't upset me at all. We were laying on the beach and I got, I had that letter on the beach, we were going swimming. And I showed Jim Parsons me letter. And he made a funny little noise and I found he was crying.
- 23:00 I said, "Gee you must like me." But anyway we were having a great time. The only worry was that we had to get back into action. And at that time the Governor General was gonna come to Torokina. He was touring the battle fields, you know. And we got fresh uniforms and we
- 23:30 practised a big brigade parade. And marvellous brigade parade that holds three battalions. You present arms and that sort of stuff and get inspected. But just before the parade, Curtin died, the Prime Minister. And the Governor General was taken back to Australia. So,
- 24:00 we didn't see the Duke of Gloucester. Missed out seeing him but we got paraded before Lieutenant General Savige, he was the GOC [General Officer Commanding]. And he made a speech. And we done all the things, present arms, and before we marched past, he said what a marvellous brigade we were.
- 24:30 What a marvellous job and we had a right to be in it to kill. He said we're gonna send you down to Buin. A sort of sigh went, funny sound, the whole brigade sort of, no sound except this sighs, you know. Like we thought that maybe something had happened and we wouldn't have to go. Well it did happen too cause a few days later the atom bomb was dropped and
- 25:00 we didn't, the war didn't stop straight away, about the twelfth of August I think it was the, that night. And suddenly a lot of noise going round. And people yelling and everything. And bloke come to our tent and said ...
- 25:30 ...he said, "The war's over. I'm sorry." He said, "The war's over." Oh you feel so marvellous you know.

- 26:00 We didn't do anything much. Some base units were firing their rifles and carrying on. But we were so quiet; we just made a cup of tea. And wasn't official for three days. And, I hope I don't do that again. But the army, they hate you seeing, doing nothing,
- 26:30 so, they kept us going. They arranged cricket matches and things. And the day the actual war finished, on the fifteenth of August had a company cricket match. And don't know what company we were playing but my side was batting, Don Young was batting. And I was one not out. And the announcement came over the loud speakers; they played God Save the King.
- 27:00 Said war, the war's over. So we pulled stumps up and we went back. And I thought I might have reached double figures. It was doubtful. But then it was a most marvellous time you know. The war was over and we still kept our discipline and there was no nonsense or anything. It's,
- 27:30 we were told that in a week or so we're gonna go to Rabaul, help with the surrender. In the mean time the Japs had, they laid down their arms in Bougainville. The aeroplanes flew over their lines with Japanese writing on the wings saying, "The war's over." And we had a great time just.
- 28:00 And then we had to go to Rabaul and we were told to strike camp. And I was mess orderly the day we struck camp and for some reason the cooks had put a big greasy stew on. And these big aluminium dixies I had to clean them. I had to get me own stuff ready to leave. And I'm not a wasteful person at all but I did everything I could
- 28:30 to clean these dixies out, so greasy, I put sand and stuff in it. And it was beyond me you know. Eventually I said this is no good, I won't be able to get me own stuff packed up. So I got the dixies and I threw them down the latrine. But I don't know, they still be there probably. They could be found again some time. But
- 29:00 just on dark we got down to a beach and with all our gear and we climbed up the HMAS Kanimbla. It's a converted boat; it was a landing ship, used to go out on the islands with landing craft and for landings. Then after had a really great trip on that for a day and a half. But
- 29:30 to see the Australian sailors they looked so young and fresh faced and clean. And they had a meal of sausages and salad at night. We had nothing like that at all you know. Had that meal and then, nothing like the first trip on the Sea Sniper. It was like a pleasure cruise. And we got to, past, sailed past New Ireland.
- 30:00 You could see it across in the distance and we entered the Simpson Harbour. I don't know if you know anything about Rabaul but there's a lot of earthquake and there's a sort of sulphuric smell in the air all the time. And the ship sailed past, a lot of wrecked ships there in the harbour. And the, past little rocks sort of sticking out of the harbour.
- 30:30 Apparently it popped up, during one earthquake it just popped up out of the middle of the harbour. We landed there and we went ashore on landing barges. There's Japs everywhere. Lot of them had little masks like you see now with the SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome] thing. They had these, I don't know why they wore em but.
- 31:00 It was amazing to see the Japs. You know we'd been fighting them and they were filling in the tunnels, there was a honeycomb of tunnels in Rabaul. We had to walk across from Rabaul itself which was just about wiped out, there was hardly any buildings standing, across Tunnel Hill to Talili Bay. And set up camp there, they didn't bother to give us any food or water or anything. If we
- 31:30 had water in our water bottles we were right. But didn't last long and they told us that if you wanted water you went down to the water's edge, you could scoop a little hole in the sand. And for some reason the water come through fresh and it was. You know and it was beautiful. And the Japs sort of looked at us and we looked at them and they were,
- 32:00 funny sensation. There was shell, ah, bomb craters everywhere. There was like, someone with a pimply face, there was, almost more holes than there was ground you know. Must have been bombed out of existence. The hillside was covered with big wooden crates and had aeroplane engines in them. That Rabaul was the biggest base they had. It was,
- 32:30 they would never have captured it because it was so well defended. And we set up camp in this Talili Bay, a delightful place. And seeing how that was that somehow good officers we'd loved so much, they were, their time was up cause they'd been in the army since in started '39 or
- 33:00 some of them. And they started taking them back to Australia. And they were replaced by young officers that hadn't seen any action you know. They'd just got up there and they tried to treat us like recruits. We had one called Major Cronk. And the first thing he did, he said "Those tents are not in line." He said, "They gotta be in line." So
- 33:30 he made us pull the tents down and put them up again and he wanted the flaps to be on the ground. In the tropics you gotta get the tent up on and you've the fly and the tent itself and had sort of rails and sort of let a little bit of air circulate. And he said, "No those flaps gotta be down cause it's regulations."

We just ignored him but. He had a real funny name of Cronk. And

- 34:00 in the mornings we woke up and somebody started yelling out, "Honk honk!" And one tent'd be, "Honk honk honk honk." And sar major'd run round. And one tent'd stop saying honk honk and then the next one'd say honk honk. And oh he's a, you know, he made a silly statement, the sar major. He didn't say it himself,
- 34:30 but he said at mess parade he said, "There'll be no more honk honking in lines." But he, you couldn't respect him. Our CO, Colonel Kelly was a marvellous man. We all loved him. And if he said, you had to shave even if you were close to the enemy you gotta shave. We all shaved.
- 35:00 But not cause we were scared of him or anything but just wanted to please him. You know he apparently had no time for these young fellas who come up here. Cause he tried to put one of our soldiers on a charge sheet for having his shirt off. We used to go swimming a lot and this fella took his shirt off before he got to the beach. And this
- 35:30 Major Honk put him on a charge. And I, trying not to get sunburned I suppose. And when it came up before the CO, the CO said, "Oh are you in danger of sunburn are you soldier?" And this is the story, I didn't hear it meself but. And he said to the Major, "This is dangerous, get a working party of Japs to build some beach shelters down there on the beach for these soldiers." So he didn't get charged
- 36:00 at all. Poor old Major Cronk was humiliated by trying to be nasty to us. But then the CO he did leave. And the Japs were put in compounds. We had one compound when my company went down to look after ten thousand of them. And they were no trouble at all.
- 36:30 But they were well looked after, there was no nastiness. We were told not to fraternise but we did a little bit you know. Cause you felt sorry for them cause they didn't want to be there during the war any more than we did. So. But we used to go on patrols through there, through the compound
- 37:00 and look after their hygiene and that sort of stuff. And one time we got some Japanese horses and instead of walk round the perimeter, ah the compound, we rode round it. We called ourself Light Horse, we got feathers put in our hats. We had a Jap officer with us. He made himself a beautiful white shirt out of a parachute. He could speak perfect English.
- 37:30 He sort of escorted us round and we rode these Jap horses round. And we went to one place where there was a Japanese submarine captain was, had his own little hut. Went in there to have a look at him and he's sitting on his bed cross legged. He had a battery with two wires coming from it to
- 38:00 light his cigarette. He dressed up to the nines in his naval uniform and he was smoking this cigarette. And this Jap officer took us to a tea house they had. They'd been there since '42 and they really developed the place and little Japanese tea house. And he took us in and, we didn't take our boots off which we supposed to have done I suppose.
- 38:30 But he gave us a little cup of tea with little tiny cups with real weak tea with pure bone china. So what a contrast, you know a couple of months ago you're fighting and in great danger. Now you're mixing round with them. And we were there for about two months I suppose.
- 39:00 And then went back to Rabaul and you couldn't be discharged all at once. So they were gradually taking people back. You were discharged on a points system. If you were married you got double points. And you got points for how many months you been in the army and how many months you been overseas, that sort of stuff.
- 39:30 And I had sixty-five points I think it was. And eventually I was told that you'll be able to go home now. I was warned to get ready to go back to Australia. And that was a great sensation. And we went down to the harbour again.
- 40:00 And the hard part was leaving all your friends and just coming back by yourself. I'd been away for two years without leave so I suppose that's another reason why I was being sent back. And you got on to the HMAS Manoora. And it, it was a great boat too. And half way down we ran
- 40:30 into a tropical cyclone. And everybody aboard was seasick. You get out on deck you see, the ship would sort of climb up on top of a huge wave then you look ahead of you there'd be another big roller. And you look behind there'd be another huge one. And it was marvellous sight you know to see all the, you know up and down and climbing up this thing and up the top of the hill and
- 41:00 down again. But as I said everybody was seasick and they had a big sort of water tank in the middle of the, cut down to waist level. So that's where you'd go to be sick. By the time I got back to Australia it was almost full you know. As the ship rolled all this sea of vomit'd sort of be getting close to the edge and down again.
- 41:30 **We might just stop you there Colin**

Sure.

Cause we're about to finish.

Tape 4

00:31 **Okay Colin, we just got back to Australia.**

Yes oh yeah. Well we anchored not far off Manly Beach; you could see the old Norfolk Island Pines there and looked beautiful you know. I was gonna see Australia again. And we waited there about half an hour I suppose before we came through the Heads. And that was another sensation, coming down the harbour. All the ferries are blowing their horns and cock a doodle doo

01:00 and that sort of stuff. And we sailed under the Harbour Bridge and into Walsh Bay at one of those finger wharves. There's a huge crowd of people on the wharf. Mostly relatives I suppose. I'd sent a telegram from Rabaul saying I was coming home but it hadn't got there so my parents weren't there so. That didn't matter but.

01:30 There was a band playing, an army band playing on the wharf. And feel just about ready to burst with pride and happiness, you know you're back in Australia. And took us out by bus to Marrickville LTD, to Leave and Transit Depot. And this is the middle of winter. And they didn't give

02:00 us any winter uniform or anything, we were still in our jungle greens. And they gave us leave that night, had to come back the next morning. And I got a taxi from, you know I had plenty of money cause I hadn't spent any money for a long time. I got a taxi from Marrickville to my home at North Sydney. I remember I wanted to walk through the streets. I thought I was sensational cause I had me rifle

02:30 and all me pack and haversack and bayonet and everything. Just like I was in a jungle patrol you know. I thought I'd be a sensation. So I got the taxi to drop me at North Sydney Station which was about half a mile from home so I could walk through the streets with everybody admiring me. And that's when I got the first shock, just, people just ignored me. I don't know why but, I know why they ignored me cause the war was over and everything was

03:00 back to normal. There'd be at rush hour and there's people everywhere but nobody took the slightest bit of notice of me and I walked through the streets, bit dejected I suppose. I got to home and then, just as I got in me own street, one of me neighbours, a lady, a nice lady, she said, "Oh you're home again are you?" As though I'd been home every weekend, you know I'd been away for two years. And

03:30 mum and dad were sort of pleased to see me. But settled down for a while. But nobody seemed to take much interest in what I'd done or. One of the nice things that happened to me while I was still in Rabaul was that Ben Chifley Prime Minister] came to visit the troops just before the New Year in '45. And

04:00 he came to the our mess and we all sitting there and he spoke to us and he said you know what do you want and all this. He said, "Now don't tell me you want to go home, don't tell me you want this or want that. You know anything I can do for you." And a bloke called Kangas Albany, real rough sort of bloke he said, "Why,

04:30 why can't we go home?" he said. Ben said, "There's not enough ships." Kangas said, "You had enough bloody ships to get us here now you should have enough bloody ships to get us home." And the CO looked cranky; Ben had a little twinkle in his eye. As they came, he had a civilian bloke with him, I don't know who he was but as he came down the aisle he sort of shook a few hands and I was on the aisle and shook me hand. And here I was a young soldier

05:00 and I was shaking the Prime Minister's hand, I thought it was marvellous. But I told me father that and he said, oh, me father was a real Liberal, a UAP[United Australia Party] in those days. He hated the Labor Party. He hated the Catholics too. He hated the Victorians. And he sort of made no, if I had a son that had shaken the Prime Minister's hand in those times I would have been really proud.

05:30 But he's, thought it was nothing. Then I was, had twenty-four hours, twenty-four days leave I think. And I sort of moped round home, not doing much, just felt restless. And when I went back to the LTD they, I was sent over to Liverpool. And then I was sent to a base unit at Clifton Gardens called the 2nd Australian Army

06:00 Sarah's Walk Park which was, you know Clifton Gardens, one of the nicest spots in Sydney. There was a soldier there in the Clifton Gardens looking after the landing barges and the, with little launches and things. Had a wonderful time there. But eventually I was discharged. I got one scare before I was discharged. They, I went to the Mosman Show grounds

06:30 engineer barracks near Victoria Barracks. And you had the x-ray before you got out. And they said, "There's something wrong with your x-ray, you gotta, three more days leave, gotta come back in three days time." And I thought oh jeeze, I saw me paper had T.F. on it. I said oh that must be something for TB or something. Tuberculosis. I thought jeeze I'm at death's door and I started feeling crook.

07:00 For three days I, excuse me, I couldn't think or doing anything. You know I was, I thought oh, people tried to cheer me up and say, oh get a pension anyway. But I went back to the depot and they, it turned out with the T.F. stood for Technical Fault. The x-ray picture hadn't come out. So it was alright at all. I

was discharged , discharged A1. I was,

- 07:30 real good medical inspection to get in but the one to get out, they said, are you alright. And had a very cursory look and then you're discharged A1 cause that's, they wouldn't want to pay you a pension or anything so, A1. And they, what are you gonna do. I could have had a Commonwealth Reconstruction Scheme, go to University or....
- 08:00 I said I had a Teacher's College Scholarship and took up the Teacher's College Scholarship. Which was great for me cause I didn't really want to be a teacher or anything but you look at the long holidays and the short hours and think that's great. But Teacher's College itself was marvellous. Cause there was people from all over the State you know, girls and boys and. And used to get three pound ten a week
- 08:30 from the Commonwealth for training. And the Scholarship was sixty-four pound a year. So a lot of money in those days. I got four hundred pounds in one go. So I really loved college, I thought it was wonderful. All good things come to an end and I
- 09:00 got appointed to a little one teacher school out at a place called Garthowen, out from Attunga, that's near Tamworth. And I tell you that, one teacher schools were, they great in one way but they were a lonely sorta, especially the weekends. You board at farm houses, they turn about, you stop at one farm house for one term and then next term you go to another one. Which is alright but sort of there's
- 09:30 nothing like. Once I started playing sport, I played league and cricket. Enjoyed meself away but you know one year at that place then I got transferred to a place called Yarrowyck, near Armidale. And I spent two years there. I liked it, had good people to board with but I still,
- 10:00 I wasn't meeting any girls or having no social life at all. So a friend of mine I went to school with said he's gonna go to England. Said would you like to come with me and I said oh yeah. So I resigned and had a lovely trip to England. And
- 10:30 The Orantes, the old Orient line. Six weeks trip, oh beautiful. Got to London and just like a storybook it was in those days. the day I got there was the day they had the Trooping of the Colour. And I went to the Mall and there's a huge crowd there. And suddenly there, one of the Guards Battalions kept marching passed. And the Queen, this is 1952,
- 11:00 her dad had died, King George VI, and she was Queen but she hasn't been coronated. And she came riding past on her horse and Princess Margaret came past in an open carriage. And she, I really caught her eye, she sort of smiled. You know she was so lovely. Cause she was pretty in those days. And the band was on horseback,
- 11:30 you know the big bass drum. And they could, he had little wires on his feet to make the drum work. Oh I thought it was just marvellous. And I loved London but me mate was going to Scotland where his girlfriend was at a little place called Leven in the Firth of Forth. And I went up there and it was the middle of summer, it was lovely weather.
- 12:00 You know, I had to get a job of some sort; I applied for a few of them. I didn't want to be a teacher really but I saw a job advertised in The Fife, Education, dunno what they call it, the Council or something. Anyway the equivalent of our Education Department. And I went in there and asked for a job and they said yeah and I could start
- 12:30 as a casual. And I got sent to a place called Beath High School at a town called Cowdenbeath. In between Edinburgh and Glasgow I suppose near Dunfermline. And I spent a big long term there. I was an Australian amongst all these Scots teachers. And
- 13:00 I'm not, didn't feel like a colonial but they sort of treated me not quite right somehow. I was pretty proud of meself, I thought I was a good teacher and everything. But they sort of didn't think I could. But I stopped there for a whole term eighteen weeks. It was a big long term, I resigned from there. And
- 13:30 came back to Australia in February. And don't know if you know Scotland at all but the summer time's beautiful but the sky's sort of covered over with clouds and didn't see the sun again till I left England to come back to Australia. I had a couple of months in London which was great but it was cold and.
- 14:00 I stopped at a place called Willesden Green. It's on the Tube [subway] in one of the outer suburbs. And the landlord there was a bloke, he's a little Englishman. And he'd been in the first war and he'd somehow he got transferred in Australian hospital, cause he was sick. And he thought the
- 14:30 Australians were marvellous people. They were all tall and they all looked after him so. So he looked after me pretty well. He used to take me out to the hotel and give me a whisky and. He worked in the Ritz Hotel and he reckoned, on the switchboard. And he said the Shah of Persia; every time he made a phone call he'd sent him five pounds. That was a terrific lot of money in those days. And I come back to Australia on the
- 15:00 Orion, another lovely trip. And I got back and I thought I better go back teaching so I went back. Got a casual job first of all in Sydney at a school called Ashbury. And I was very happy there. Then I got told I was going to be sent to Deniliquin

- 15:30 relief. Which is way out west. I didn't want to go but I did go eventually. And I'd, that's where I met me wife, Robyn, at Deniliquin. It's a very dust sort of town way out in the Riverina. And I was there a year then I went, to make some money, I went back to one teacher school.
- 16:00 Cause you got an extra allowance, in the one teacher, you got an extra pound a week. I got sent to a town called, not town, not even a village, a place called Bulgary, out from Wagga Wagga. And Robyn got transferred to Narrandera. And we used to meet at Narrandera on weekends. But I got transferred back to
- 16:30 Sydney. And we got, I went to Rosehill, Robyn went to Castle Hill. And we got married in Easter time, '56. And that was a very wet year the '56. You wouldn't have been alive then but, it rained just like it did a couple of weeks ago here. It rained and rained and rained and poor
- 17:00 old Robyn thought it was, Sydney was a terrible place cause everything in your cupboard went mildewy. And I had four happy years at Rosehill. Our first child was born then, young Jim in '57. And we moved to this place in the same year. And after a time at Rosehill I transferred down to Ryde, Ryde Primary.
- 17:30 And I spent the next twenty-five years there. I retired from there, I really loved the place, it was a lovely school. Old stone buildings, big fig trees around it. Ah yeah. I thought it was great. And then had the two boys, Jim and Lachlan. And retired in '85 I think it was, 1985.
- 18:00 And a really great time since then. I was involved with the RSL, I became RSL President. Became President of the Licensed Club, the Ryde ex Services. I became a Rugby League referee; I refereed twenty years with Balmain.
- 18:30 And that's about it.

Fantastic, thank you Colin. If we can go right back to the beginning now. I just wondered if you could just, I mean you walked us through a little bit of your experiences growing up with your folks and through the Depression . Can, I was just wondering if you could tell us specific memories that come to you from growing up

- 19:00 **during the Depression, what you sort of saw around you?**

Yeah I remember everything was so tight. One thing, you appreciated money. A penny was a fortune you know. You could buy six chocolate tops for a penny. That's six like lollies wrapped up in paper with

- 19:30 toffee on the outside and chocolate in the middle. I remember poor old dad, he you know he was a good architect apparently but there was no work for architects. His father had been an architect too. Famous when he designed the gates of Parramatta Park. And he designed the Town Hall of Forbes which is a
- 20:00 magnificent building. But poor old pop he had no money, I think he relied on his brothers to give him a hand out every now and again. Me mother didn't work and that was the hard part. Me mum had been brought up in Ryde here and from a fairly wealthy family which itself gone broke. But I can never
- 20:30 remember ever hearing me mother and father having a kind word to each other. You know they were always rowing [fighting] and squabbling and the only fun they seemed to get was running other people down sorta. Other members of family. So as I said before the, me father hated the Labor Party.
- 21:00 He hated Catholics and well that was pretty general in those days, we were Church of England. There was never a kind word said about Catholics, they were all dishonest and you know take you down. To give meself some credit, I didn't, actually I wasn't brainwashed by him, I thought I would make up me own mind about both Catholics and the
- 21:30 Labor Party. So I became a pretty staunch Labor Party person meself. I found out that Catholics are, well I won't say good or better, but they're marvellous people. As most people are, most people are great. There's a few rat-bags around. Oh,
- 22:00 I often didn't have enough food to eat. Clothing was always a worry; you know you'd get hand me down clothing. Have to make shoes last a long time. And I just, miserable sort of time. That's why I was pleased to join the army cause I was just fed and clothed and didn't have all this constant bickering between my parents.
- 22:30 That about sums it up I think.

Do you have any fond memories of growing up before you went into the army?

Oh yeah, I...

Or what you'd do for fun I guess?

Yeah well I used to love going to the pictures every occasion I could go. I loved high school and I was very skinny in those days. I did manage to make it in the school football team. Which I really loved playing [Rugby] Union.

- 23:00 I wasn't ever a good player or anything but I was actually in the school team. I thought oh, gave meself

a bit of prestige I suppose. But, no, there were no outstanding pleasures. Oh I used to like me own company a lot. I used to walk and taught meself to swim and,

23:30 I was always pretty observant I think. I used to like watching things. Used to go to North Sydney Oval and watch the North Sydney Bears play. Oh, but didn't call them Bears in those days but.

How did you teach yourself to swim?

Oh there's a not there now cause the Council's closed it down, it was a little tidal pool. And

24:00 used to go there, I was desperate to learn so I used to dog paddle and I never had any good long strokes I used to swim with me head out of the water mostly. But just determination I suppose, just a desire. If you want to do something bad enough, you do it. Like learn to drive a car, it wasn't, if you didn't want to drive a car, you'd find it very hard to do. But seeing you want to do it,

24:30 you do learn it. That's the seat of all learning. I mean according to the education standard, you've got to want to learn, to learn. Cause if you don't want to learn, it's almost impossible.

No, that's fantastic. Did you hear much, any stories about World War I as you were growing up?

Oh yeah, yeah. My uncles, my father had volunteered but he, even though he was a good athlete

25:00 he had a pretty small chest expansion apparently. And they reckoned he had flat feet, he got knocked back, physically. But my uncles, one, Uncle Cuth, he was in the artillery. He's wounded in France and he, I used to talk to him a lot. And the other uncles they been in the services too. And used to

25:30 have Anzac Days and those things. I was surprised I found out we'd lost that Anzac. I was so imbued with the idea that Australian soldiers were so marvellous, I didn't think we could possibly lose. I thought we'd won the war by ourselves just about. And, no doubt they were marvellous soldiers but they weren't as good as I thought they were.

What sort of stories had you heard or had you been told?

26:00 Oh me Uncle Cuth, he, I used to go to his, he lived at Ralston, used to go up there for holidays. He had another, I don't think he was no relative but he used to listen and talk. And one story that's stuck in me head, they reckon a soldier they saw had his head blown off and but he kept on running. Like a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK with his head shot off you know.

26:30 I sorta thought about that but. And I used to love, dad used to take me out to parades you know. And he used to take me to Anzac Day. And one day there was a big parade out at Centennial Park. With all the militia, all the CMF [Citizens Military Force] were parading. And I went out there and saw them marching and I thought this is marvellous, I'd love to be one of them.

27:00 And the Scottish Battalion, the 30th Battalion must have been, they marched so good with their white, what do you call them, spats. In time and was all glorious. Then they had one of those (UNCLEAR), where they fire their rifles in a row. And the Scottish mucked it up, I heard people say at least they could march well. They weren't firing these rifles very well.

27:30 But I used to love looking at any magazines or books about the war.

What was it about it that you think you were attracted to?

I don't know the uniform I suppose and, well when I was at high school and getting on towards eighteen and the streets were full of soldiers with girls you know. And I thought

28:00 I've got no hope of getting a girl while I'm still in civilian clothes. And I thought I'd give meself a better chance of getting a girl if I was in uniform. But I was at high school in the early parts of the war. And stories coming back of the Middle East, how well we'd done in Bardia and Tobruk and those sort of places. And then

28:30 the HMAS Sydney sank that Italian war ship, the Bartolomeo Colleoni in the Mediterranean. And oh I was really proud to be Australian sort of. And the Japs came in it looked pretty bare you know. We lost the 8th Division in Singapore. And the Japs were getting closer and closer. There were black outs in

29:00 the town and, I suppose you've heard about the war time trying to get all the glass and put paper strips on it to stop it shattering. Took the Town Hall clock down, not the Town Hall, the Post Office clock. Dismantled that. And brown outs and you couldn't buy any, much, no clothing to buy or lollies or sweets or

29:30 anything. But then we heard about Kokoda, you know how good the Australian troops were up there. And that was that. I thought gee that's a great army, the Australian Army. Oh we had talks about the air force you know the Australian pilots, the Battle of Britain. And how they were doing so well.

30:00 Yes.

Were you aware of I guess the trouble in Europe and Hitler before war actually broke out?

Oh yes, I was aware of it yes. Pretty young, you don't pay much attention to those things. But did see newsreels of Chamberlain with his "Peace in our Time." sort of talk. And

- 30:30 me uncles used to say to me, "Oh you're lucky, you're too young for this one you be too old for the next one." So I think they didn't realise the war was gonna last for six years. I'm glad it did. I don't know what I would have been if I hadn't of been a soldier to start with.

Do you remember where you were the day that the war was declared, or what you were up to?

- 31:00 Yes I was out at, uncle's place out at Hoxton Park at Liverpool. Yeah I sort of was thunderstruck you know. Everybody said it was gonna come but when it did actually come you were sort of, not worried I suppose or concerned . Every confidence
- 31:30 that we'd win. Didn't think there was any doubt about that. Then when the news came about France falling and all those disasters you know. Started to worry a bit, get second thoughts. But that didn't touch Australia much in those early days did it? Wasn't till the Japs came in that it really came home to us.
- 32:00 Cause before the war was the other side of the world. And I saw the troops coming back from the Middle East, the 9th Division in those gee, they looked marvellous. No white, what do you call them, gaiters and white webbing and white pokery in their hats and they looked grand. Oh
- 32:30 jeeze I'd love to be like them. When I did join up meself, , I could never be an Anzac you know. You hear so many famous stories about the courage of the Anzacs, I didn't feel brave at all so. I wonder what the difference was, why I didn't feel so confident I would be a real Anzac. Still, looked back, probably they were a bit doubtful
- 33:00 about themselves too.

What, do you remember what you were doing the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed and the Japanese entered the war?

Pearl Harbor. Oh, I don't remember exactly what I was doing no. That was a big shock though wasn't it. Gee whiz. Yeah.

What'd you think?

I thought it

- 33:30 might be all over to tell you the truth. Cause they weren't doing much good in the Middle East were they. And Germany was attacking Russia and they were rolling them back. And the Japs in too, crikey. I think, I thought that might have been the end. Yeah, it's hard to think back in those days cause you know what the outcome
- 34:00 was. You weren't to know that it was gonna be victory on our side. It was touch and go for a long time. And especially when Singapore fell and those two battleships went down. Cause you used to be taught at school you know, the British Empire's so strong you know. And you never be in any danger while you got the Royal Navy
- 34:30 to look after you. And they used to kind of Empire, well the Empire Commonwealth Day, you hear stories about how they'll stick together. I remember one time they had a, bloke had a whole lot of rulers, thought he could snap em easily. You put all the rulers together and you couldn't snap them at all, you couldn't even bend them. "That's like the British Empire he says, if we all stick together, we can't be beaten."
- 35:00 But, he was sadly wrong.

So when you decided to enlist, did you feel that you were doing it for Empire or Australia?

No, no, no. No patriotic reasons whatsoever. Just, as I said before, I thought I'd be a hope to get a girl. And, like most people were in the army or the services. So you,

- 35:30 you couldn't very well stop out.

Had you seen much of the American servicemen in town?

Oh yeah they were pretty thick. They were, they all seemed to have girls too.

What were your impressions of them?

Oh I had thought they were, they looked very smartly dressed and everything. Always

- 36:00 clean and, I had me doubts about them being good fighters but.

Why was that?

Oh just a, well I heard about the First War you know, how they had hardly done anything at all. And I don't know just general impressions that the Yanks are no good. Australians are marvellous, Yanks are no good. But I thought they had, I thought Australians were better

- 36:30 than Germans, British, anybody. I thought they were, the Australian digger was full of courage and initiative and not scared of dying or. So I had greatly inflated impression of it.

As you were sort of enlisting and joining up, did the

- 37:00 **idea of death or being killed ever come up for you?**

No I thought that'd be far removed. All the time you're in training, this is only a theoretical exercise. I won't ever actually use this action. But I started to think maybe I might at Canungra, you know when you're getting close to the, as you finished your training. You had four grades, DP4, DP1, DP2.

- 37:30 As you did your recruit training and infantry training and so on you got a different draft priority. When you finished Canungra you're draft priority one. So, but everyone seem to be taken so I thought gee it's, this is fair dinkum. When we're told we're gonna go overseas, I'm actually gonna be a soldier. I wasn't really scared or anything. Over confident I suppose, I thought I was

- 38:00 be better than I was. I still couldn't see meself as being a Victoria Cross winner or anything like that. I knew I was pretty timid inside meself really. Even though I was so well trained and I was technically alright. I knew how to fire all the weapons and, I knew all about camouflage and all the rest of it. I

- 38:30 actually thought I'd be better than I was. And in the battalion itself I was confident because everybody else didn't seem worried at all. So, they all looked on top of the game, you know they, I thought oh I'll fit in here alright. Just one little, just our last few days in action we had a

- 39:00 path going down towards that swamp I was talking about. Coming down to set up, putting down a track to, in case any Japs came down the track we could take them down. But one afternoon we just sorta standing around. And the Bren gunner, he used to take it in turns to man the Bren gun. And he made a sudden movement, and everybody sort of, didn't actually dive to ground but everybody shrunk back

- 39:30 sorta in alarm cause this Bren gunner had made this move. And I realised then that everybody was just as scared as I was. Just as nervous. And I really started to worry then cause I thought I was the only one that was worried about things. But that was that.

Okay, we'll pause it there. Pause it there Colin.

Tape 5

- 00:32 **Colin you mentioned earlier that your brother hadn't joined up when he'd had the chance. I was wondering if you could tell me, he did end up in service though?**

Oh yeah. He got called up, he did three months called universal training. This is before the Japs came in the war and then he got put out again. Then

- 01:00 like national service today. The Japs came into it and they got called up full time, and in the militia. He made no attempt to join the AIF. Which I was disappointed really cause he didn't belong, supposedly more intelligent than I was and cause the parents always treated him that way. And he's always a lot better built than I

- 01:30 was, he was stronger. But he was in the militia. And he used to, I think he used to, no he probably good, he became a sergeant so he couldn't have been too bad. But he didn't go overseas but he was sent as a, an engineer unit called the Docks Operating Company. They

- 02:00 used to when they had trouble with the wharf labourers, he used to send the troops in and these Docks Operating Company to look after them. And he went to Darwin with this Engineer Docks Operating Company. He become an orderly room sergeant there. Excuse me. But I always felt he was jealous of me cause I, when I came back

- 02:30 I'd been overseas and I had veteran's medals. And he found it hard to believe that I could be better than him in this regard. He's dead now so I shouldn't speak ill of him I suppose. But a different type to me completely.

Was there a lot of

- 03:00 **pressure on young men to join the forces?**

I don't know you had no option really cause you got called up. That's, when you get called up that's when you joined the AIF. If you had the parent's permission which I didn't have to start with but I got it later. And I got that lovely 'X' number and the word Australia on me shoulders, that's all I wanted. The colour patch had a grey background, the

03:30 militia blokes, the choccos didn't, they just had a plain colour patch. And they weren't supposed to wear white gaiters or white web belts or white pokies in their hats either.

Can you tell me a little bit about I guess the term chocco and how it was used?

Ah yeah well the AIF they were all volunteers and went to 6th Division and 7th Division in the Middle East.

04:00 **They used to call the people that didn't join up or came in later, they called them deep thinkers. Rather derogatory term. And then they sort of said, "Oh you're only weekend soldiers." these choccos or chocolate soldiers. And they not really, willing to have a go sort of thing you know. Cause you couldn't be sent overseas if it's chocco. Later in the war you could**

04:30 **be sent, but not north of the equator or a certain distance out in the Pacific, I forget as far as any International Dateline but was only a certain part where you would be sent. And my battalion was at Townsville. And Cairns Regiment. And they, funny thing,**

05:00 **when the war finished, one of our company was to go to Nauru an ocean island to take the surrender there. And to be called an AIF battalion you had a seventy-five percent of volunteers in the battalion. And we had that naturally cause we had AIF in brackets after our name. But when this, theywere gonna send B Company to Nauru,**

05:30 **the choccos weren't allowed to go. Even though they'd been fighting together so desperately during the war. The rule was the choccos couldn't be sent north of the equator or a certain distance west. So the ones in the B Company were still in the militia, weren't allowed to go. And they really upset, they tried to join the AIF then but they weren't allowed to.**

06:00 **So it caused a lot of hard feeling cause seeing they were fighting together I suppose they thought there was no need to really join the AIF but that little thing that stopped them going to Nauru. But apart from that we did our training days, we didn't see the blokes in the AIF and those that weren't, didn't seem to cause any problems.**

06:30 **When you were first enlisted in the militia, did you ever encounter people calling you chocco or....?**

No, no, not personally no. I didn't mix with people really cause as I said before in the show ground I wouldn't leave the camp because I looked so horrible. And then went to Cowra, there was no girls in Cowra to take out.

07:00 There's one I took out, could I tell ya? We'd been in the army about four or five weeks. And nobody had any sexual desire at all. There used to be rumours that they used to put bromide in your food, I don't think it was true but nobody felt that way inclined at all. But one night, one day rather, we got town leave. And three of us

07:30 sort of go to town and sort of try and pick up some girls. I didn't have much prospect meself cause I didn't, I hadn't seen any girls in Cowra that looked any good at all. But we went to the Golden Key Cafe, had a feed and walked down towards the river, the Lachlan. And met two girls and they looked very young to me but. These three fellas, this is me and two other fellas

08:00 started talking to them. And they were getting on pretty well and I said, "Oh I'll go now." And there's this one girl said, "No, no, you can't go. If you go, I'll go too." And I don't know if you know Cowra at all but we walked across the old wooden bridge towards the tennis club and it's got club rooms. And sitting on the verandah there and I kept on trying to go, cause there's two girls and

08:30 three blokes. And she well, dunno if she liked the look of me or what but she wouldn't let me go. And eventually we went inside the little club room, it still was open. You know it was pretty dusty and dirty I suppose. And these two, one bloke one girl went into another room and

09:00 me friend and I in this other room with this one girl. And I was still trying to get away but they lay down on the floor. And it was obvious what the fella wanted. And she said, "You can have it if you ask for it." He just wouldn't. I just still kept on trying to get away. But eventually he did

09:30 get what he wanted, he didn't ask for it but he got it. And once I got up to walk away she put out her hand out and grabbed me and stop there. I was terrified cause I didn't know how old she was and talking about VD [venereal disease] and all sorts of horrible things. But I didn't feel like doing anything to any girls at all. Eventually on the way home,

10:00 walking. "Do you think I'll have a child or something cause I was dribbling a lot before I got in." And I said, "I don't know." Anyway he got back to camp and he must have gone to the RAP, the Regimental Aid Post to get treatment in case he had VD or something. But I didn't I was

10:30 so pleased to get back to camp. I had no idea of ever going out with a girl again not for a long time. But all the time in I was there I didn't see any girls at all in Bathurst and Cowra. Used to get town leave occasionally. But there's one girl in

- 11:00 Bathurst, I didn't see her myself, but they used to call her 'Goodnight Irene'. That's right, 'Goodnight Irene'. And she was supposed to have laid every bloke in our battalion, our whole training camp. But I didn't see her at all. And
- 11:30 as we staged from Bathurst to go to Canungra, I had one night's leave at home. And I'd asked this girl round the corner whether I could take her out. She said no. But I went out to Luna Park to try to pick up a girl. And I wasn't successful and I came back at eight o'clock and had a message from her. Her mum said that,
- 12:00 June her name was, they come round and said she wasn't going after all and would I like to go round and see her. I did that, I was very shy. Had her elder sister there. And ended up I was allowed to kiss her. And I'll never forget it; you never forget your first kiss. I put me arms round her and my Australia patches caught in her jumper.
- 12:30 And me hat fell off and it was the most marvellous sensation. I said "Oh, this is heaven." She let me kiss her four times and she said, "That's enough." And she sent me home. And that kept me going for months and months and months. I was just thinking that I'd actually kissed a girl and it felt so wonderful. And all through the hardships of Canungra I said, "Oh gee at least I've kissed a girl."
- 13:00 So apart from that I didn't see any girls at all except a few black ones up in the islands. Didn't see any nurses or anything like that.

Was there ever anything between the Australian soldiers and the native women in the islands?

Oh no, oh don't think so. My friend, Major Collis, Private Major Collis, he,

- 13:30 he was a Thursday Islander and he said they don't look too bad but they didn't look any good at all. They were naked but their breasts were sort of hanging down and like black and sort of repulsive. So we didn't see many of them either. They kept out of our way. I think they tried to keep out of the way of the Japs too so.
- 14:00 **Can you tell me about your first day, the very first day in the militia when you'd been called up and I guess what they put you through?**

Oh we were just getting uniforms. Funny feeling, you're a soldier but you

- 14:30 don't feel like a soldier. Cause your uniform doesn't look much chop. And they put us in little working parties. I was sent across to one of those big buildings in Victoria Barracks to sweep the floor. I don't think the floor needed sweeping at all, cause it was just something to do I suppose. And this AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] came half way across the floor. Just, she was a blonde girl, she didn't have a
- 15:00 hat on. She looked beautiful and she came towards me. And I'd like to speak to her but I wouldn't you know. And she said, she smiled at me she said, "That's a good Government stroke you're using there soldier." And I said oh this is marvellous, I'm in the same army as that girl. And then we were only there for five days before we went to Cowra so, few little working parties but.
- 15:30 I volunteered for picking cause I didn't want to go home, in me uniform. Yeah.

What was your parents' reaction to you being called up?

Oh mum seemed to be upset but dad was, he didn't seem to mind. No, oh I suppose they thought at least he's doing something.

- 16:00 And mum got this three shillings a day but, would have helped her a lot. And I thought I was on clover, being fed and clothed and three shillings. That's twenty-one shillings a week just for enjoying meself. And it was enjoyable; you always had someone to talk to.

How quickly did you make friends?

Oh yeah, lot of, lot of

- 16:30 acquaintances more than friends, not real dinky-di ones. Not till we went in the, actually joined the unit. But there were people around to talk to and talk, things to talk about. It was a great time. Once went past the wet canteen and I was with a soldier and he said, "Come in and I'll buy you a drink." And I didn't like him much but he bought me
- 17:00 a drink. And I started to go out again and I realised he wanted a drink back. I thought, I took him literally, so, I'll buy you a drink. I didn't shout him back. I thought jeeze he must have thought I was terrible. But yeah no I got along well with people. But in action with these
- 17:30 this boy was really several, Jimmy, Jimmy Parsons from Julia Creek. And he spent the whole time I was with him telling me what a marvellous place Julia Creek was. And I had the mental picture of flowing water and palm trees. And when I got a chance to travel after I retired I went to Julia Creek and the most desolate looking place you ever seen in your life. It was out in the plains and no

- 18:00 water. A few miserable little buildings. And he thought it was paradise. And then there was Major Collis, Private Major Collis. And a really good mate, he's still alive, I ring him up every now and then, Frankie Rolls, he's a cane farmer from Gordonvale just south of Cairns. And we used to spend all night talking. You know he told me the same stories
- 18:30 over and over again. I just loved him. And funny thing, we went back to the battalion reunion oh he about fifteen years ago now. And the 51st Battalion paraded in the afternoon, we walked through the streets and we had the reunion in Innisfail RSL that night. And Frank and I, I reckon we talked from, all through the speeches
- 19:00 and everything. It was like a huge, like an express train you know through a tunnel. And all the talk going on, everybody was talking, they had official speeches but nobody listened to em. At close to midnight I was still talking to Frankie Rolls and he was telling me the same stories he told me when I was in the islands with him. One story, I'll never forget it. He's one of the few Queenslanders that ever been to New South Wales. He come down to the coast and caught some crabs
- 19:30 in the afternoon. They put the crabs in an enamel dish. And they put a cover over the dish so the crabs couldn't escape. Said in the morning the crabs were still there but all the enamel had been peeled off the dish. So there wasn't a bit of enamel left. And he told me that same story at, in Innisfail. That was marvellous, Oh yap, yap, yap, yap.
- 20:00 Gee we talked. He's a very slow speaking fellow and he rings me up every, I ring him up and talk about different things. He never married but I took Robyn up to see him. And I don't like visiting people at all but I made an exception with Frankie, I went out of me way to go up to Gordonvale.
- 20:30 And we talked away. Great feeling. Have a really, somebody, a real friend, not a.... The other two have died, Jimmy Parsons died and Major Collis has died. But Frankie and I are still going.

Was it difficult getting used to the communal life of the army or the discipline?

Oh no no.

- 21:00 My home had been so poor really it, I was never homesick at all. I really enjoyed the company and the regular activities. I started putting on a bit of weight, you know I was so skinny I was like a skeleton. But with the good food and exercise you felt really great. Could have got boring at times I suppose. I don't know but I sorta, can't remember that. As I said before, when you
- 21:30 want to learn something, you learn it. And I was a, we used to have these TOET Tests [tests of elementary training] at Elementary Training. And I'm not a clever person at all. But you had the corporal give me the test he asked me all these questions and I could answer them straight off. And he got down to muzzle velocity, how fast the bullet leaves a three-o-three . And I told him that and he thought he had me, he said, "What's the muzzle
- 22:00 velocity of an Owen gun?" And I could tell him that. I knew everything. So I told you I'm not a marvellous soldier but I knew the theory of it. I loved it.

Had you done any shooting before the army?

No. no, the three-o-three you

- 22:30 had to, you had to know it so thoroughly they gave lectures on it. And how fast the bullet slows up. You know it's got a range of two miles. But as soon as the bullet leaves the gun it starts to get drawn by gravity and pushing its way through the wind so, through the air, so it slows down. And they debunked all these cowboy stories about,
- 23:00 you know marvellous shots or anything. They took us down the rifle range and showed us how big a human being looks half a mile away and what a small target it is. So, to musketry's and things, they try the old tricks, you know they tell you what's the weight of a pull through. You know the pull through, the thing you clean the rifle with. "What's the weight of the pull through?" We said "Oh
- 23:30 two ounces, one and half ounces." everybody's guessing. And they say, in the finish they say no it's the little weight on the end of the string you know, that's the weight. And where's the bullet leave the rifle. And you have to hold the front of rifle. And the answer was at the shoulder cause the bullets gone and the rifle's still at the.... And the question was where's the bullet leave the rifle and the rifle's still at your shoulder. But
- 24:00 you learned to love your rifle and you were told never to leave it when you're in the front line. You always had it with you. I broke that rule once, I, it was the first morning up at that north of Ratsua. The Japs used to attack in the afternoons usually. And this one morning I hopped out of the pit to go to the toilet. And while
- 24:30 I was out of the pit I left me rifle in the pit. And the Japs attacked and bullets were flying across. And I jumped in another pit without me rifle. And I was really scared. All I had was a clasp knife. And I took it out and I thought this is me last hope. If a Jap comes in I gotta try and stab him with me clasp knife.

- 25:00 Yeah. But oh it's a magnificent weapon the three-o-three. You gotta hold it very tight. There's two pressures. You gotta take a first pressure and then, they say never pull the trigger you always squeeze, you gotta squeeze your hand. And otherwise you jerk it and a little jerk down this end means a big difference the other end. So
- 25:30 yeah. We learned all the other weapons too. The Owen gun and the Bren gun got quite skilful with them really.
- Had your training do you think prepared you well for...?**
- Yes. We knew how to shoot, we knew how to camouflage, we knew everything. But didn't translate much into actual
- 26:00 practice you know. All the training in the world doesn't prepare you for the real thing.
- Was there ever an anxiety amongst, I mean I guess amongst the people you were with or yourself that you wouldn't get overseas? Did people want to get to overseas service?**
- Yeah we all, all the young fellas did. When I joined the battalion I was warned they'd been overseas for fourteen months. And they weren't all that delighted about it but they went willingly.
- 26:30 There was no, there was no desertion or anything like that. They seemed quite happy with it.
- Was it difficult slotting into, with a group of men who'd already seen so much service?**
- Yeah was really. As I said they were all from north Queensland. And they didn't think much of anybody who didn't come, came from elsewhere but. Oh they were reserved
- 27:00 and they, oh they were really nice blokes, they were, made us welcome. Yeah, you had a lot of these acquaintances but these special four blokes you knock around with, you'd do anything with them.
- Were you one of the youngest?**
- Yeah I was pretty young. Course they were twenty-two, twenty-three, I was only nineteen.
- 27:30 So, we had one old bloke we used to call Pop Lynch, he was twenty-eight or so and we thought he was ancient you know. He was a, he's a lovely fella too but, we used to look up to him.
- Did they talk much about the service they'd already seen?**
- Yes they did, yeah. It was a terrible place Mawaraka. They were in Dutch New
- 28:00 Guinea, a very swampy place apparently. The Japs weren't very numerous there but they did see one action, one company did. But we only, the battalion only lost one killed and a couple wounded, in the fourteen months so. But a lot of Malayan spoken up there and they used to speak Malayan to each other, bagus, and that sort of stuff [actually Bahasa Indonesian].
- 28:30 And they kept on telling us young fellas that this is not as hard as it was in New Guinea sorta, you know try to old soldier us. They got over that after we got into action the first time. They realised it was far worse than Mawaraka.
- How did you get the nick name Sonny?**
- Sonny. I don't know. They used to call me the pup sometimes too but mostly Sonny.
- 29:00 Suppose they felt a bit fatherly towards me I suppose. I'd a reasonable education I suppose and they thought I was a genius. I'd taught German in high school and I could say one to ten in German and they used to often get me to say one to ten in German. They used to love it.
- 29:30 Oh got on really well with them.
- What was the, out of your while time training, is there something that stands out as the hardest moment, or the most difficult thing you had to do?**
- Oh I suppose jumping off that tower at Canungra I suppose. It was hair raising. It takes a bit of effort to
- 30:00 jump in the water, with all your packs and everything on you. In full marching order. Pack, haversack, pouches, water bottle, bayonet. But once you in the water you sort of pop up like a cork you know. Only under the water for a second. Some of the route marches were pretty hard.
- 30:30 We had one long one from Bathurst, about twenty miles. Would be thirty kilometres I suppose, it really hard. But no I can't think of anything, nothing outstanding.
- Can you tell me about when you,**
- 31:00 **when you heard you were heading away, that you were heading overseas for action?**
- Oh I felt marvellous yeah. I wouldn't have swapped places with anyone I wouldn't have. I just really wanted to be a, I didn't know if I'd be a returned soldier or not but I wanted to have a go overseas. Then

I'd be different to all the soldiers that weren't overseas you know. I was actually a real soldier.

31:30 That kept me going for a long time, that thought I was overseas. You weren't allowed to tell anybody where you were in your letters home you, after being there about a month or so you could say you were in Bougainville. That wouldn't have meant much to people cause it got no publicity back in Australia at all. They didn't mention the, cause the war was getting further and further away from Australia, all the war news was Okinawa and

32:00 the Philippines and all those things. And the Australian army didn't get any, hardly any mention at all.

Was that a frustrating thing, having been there?

Was at the time yeah that, we were annoyed that, people used to send us newspapers; there was nothing in the newspapers about us at all. And we sort of thought we were forgotten. Still the 11th, 3rd Division, 11th Division in Bougainville

32:30 and the 5th division in New Britain. And the 6th Division was in New Guinea. 7th and 9th went to Borneo with Alec Patten. But they got a bit of publicity. But that sort of annoyed us cause they, we thought they were well equipped and had everything that we didn't have. And getting all the publicity.

33:00 We were getting nothing. Yeah. You couldn't write much about, our letters had to be censored, you couldn't say much about what was happening.

Did you ever try to, did soldiers try and write more than they were allowed or?

Yeah I suppose they did but you had to give the officers a read before you, before it was sent so.

33:30 If you put in too much you gonna get chopped out anyway so.

What could you write about?

You were allowed to say you had been in action or little bit like that. But you couldn't give the details of where or casualties or anything like that. Yeah. You get a letter from home, didn't worry me much.

34:00 This girl I talked about, the one I first kissed, she used to write to me and I used to love getting the letters from her. But as I said before, just before war finished I got the letter saying, she was gonna marry somebody else. So, mail didn't mean much to me after that.

Were there a lot of letters like that, being

34:30 **received?**

Oh I believe there were yeah. The blokes were really worried up there were the married blokes. You know they thought their wives might be playing up. I don't think they were, I think most of them were loyal but. The married blokes would have had a reason, they weren't as determined as soldiers as we single blokes were. They had more to lose I suppose.

35:00 **Did people talk a lot about their families or loved ones?**

Oh yeah we used, yeah, as I said we used to talk twenty-four hours a day usually. Yeah, give every little detail about ourselves to our friends. That's why I knew so much about Frankie Rolls and Major Collis. I knew every little detail of their lives.

35:30 Yeah I suppose I used to talk too I suppose and tell them about meself. That's one of me fondest memories of talking to people. And when you come out of action you'd talk about it. I think that was the best counselling. Should have had people have a (UNCLEAR) being counsellor, you know. We couldn't have had a better counsellor than we gave ourselves

36:00 cause we'd talk about every little detail of the action you know. And talk late at night, we'd be talking about it. Especially about the, if you got a bottle of beer inside yourself. Even though the beer ration was very light, it was one bottle a week. And always took the top off before you got it so you had to drink it, there.

36:30 Couldn't save it up. It was always warm but I can remember the most beautiful taste. I often thought to meself I'd, to give meself a real treat I'll get a bottle of beer, put it out in the sun and I'll put it up and sit up in the back yard. And just try to recapture that pleasure you had of drinking that whole bottle of beer just gurgle, gurgle, gurgle. The most beautiful feeling you'd have you know. That would have last you a week.

37:00 But if you in action they'd save it up for you. So if you in action for four weeks you'd get four bottles when you came back. And they wouldn't take the tops off those so you could have a real party. That's when the talk used to start, with a few bottles of beer, and we'd fight the war again. Kill more Japs and gee, crikey. Be bullets flying everywhere. And the base strip used to come round and visit us you know.

37:30 And they, I don't know why they do that but they'd come around and try and get a, their knowledge from the war second hand. Talk to you, ask you what had you done, what you'd seen, what you'd done. Used to feel real superior to them too. They were in the field bakeries and the engineer units and the

workshops and all those sort of base units that they have

38:00 And you'd go past and feel oh gee, I'm a better man than him. Just conceit I suppose. That's what, all through later life back here, if any school inspector or anything, or head master went crook at me. I used to look at em and say to meself, I'd never say anything, but I've killed better Japs than you,

38:30 better looking Japs than you. It feels sorta I've seen more life than you'll ever see. But once again that's just being conceited.

I've heard people say that they come back with a sense that I can get through anything.

Yeah, that'd be right too. Yeah you can face up any hardships.

39:00 You'd still get scared though wouldn't ya. Yeah.

I might leave it there just cause we're about to...

Tape 6

00:32 **Okay Colin, just wanted to go back to Canungra for a little bit.**

Sure.

What did they teach you about the Japanese?

Oh how deadly they were and how tricky and how skilled they were at, in the jungle. They scared us in a way; they told us how good they were. Cause they'd had plenty of

01:00 practise I suppose. But it turned out they weren't any better than we were. I don't think so were anyway.

Do you remember some of the specific things that they said?

They warned us about their tricks they could have you know. They pretend to surrender and they wouldn't be surrendering at all. They'd have machine guns hidden in the back and they'd suddenly pop to the ground and the bloke behind would

01:30 start shooting. And how they could sometimes get on the end of a patrol and join in and pretend to be an Australian. And they talk about booby traps. Like they'd leave a dead body with a hand grenade underneath so they go off as soon as you roll the body over. That sort of stuff. That's about all I can remember about that.

02:00 But they didn't sell them short at all; they reckoned they were very good. They used to show us films, not at Canungra but at training camps, about the Chinese campaigns and how they used to shoot the Chinese. Trying, didn't, made a bit scared rather than angry. Yeah they were, they certainly were good soldiers.

02:30 They had a lot of qualities that even though you didn't like, you had to admire their persistence, how they you know would never surrender or, even though they were given every chance to surrender, but they didn't take it. I don't, we wouldn't have surrendered either cause, not because we didn't want to cause we were scared of what they'd do to us if we did. They didn't take any

03:00 prisoners after Singapore. Yeah so, I don't know I suppose were taught to hate in a way I suppose. Stories were coming back about the other prisoners of war you know how they were badly being so, the bad treatment they were getting so. We didn't enjoy that.

What, just for the record, what sort of things did you actually hear at that time?

How they were being starved and

03:30 couldn't communicate or. So, nothing specific I suppose but the general impression was that they were having a lousy time. Which they were.

And what did they teach you in Canungra just in terms of I guess hand to hand fighting with the Japanese?

We had unarmed combat and that sort of stuff.

04:00 But we got that all the way through, all the training battalions, unarmed combat. How to treat yourself. How to attack somebody if you're unarmed. I don't think many of it would work in actual practise. But when you throw somebody in unarmed combat, usually the person co-operates you know they, it's

04:30 part of the team sort of. I just don't know how it'd work if you're fair dinkum. Yeah, it was better than nothing I suppose. We didn't see many Japs like during the war they, saw a few dead bodies but, they were almost invisible in the jungle. You would hardly ever see them, you'd hear them, quite often.

Hardly ever laid eyes on them.

- 05:00 Just the contrast after the war, we saw thousands of them. Yes, was a funny sort of feeling. They weren't like they were pictured to be. They were sort of, they laughed and they smiled and they cried, they did everything. At their camp Compound Ten I was
- 05:30 telling you about, they were dying very rapidly cause there was malaria and, be mainly malaria. And one guard post we used to have to count them as they went past in the morning. They carried their ones that had died during the night past on stretchers. And that was common practise, at Compound Ten they had their faces wrapped up in coloured cloth. And
- 06:00 mourners'd come behind the stretchers, they'd be crying and obviously upset. And, they could have been professional mourners, I don't know. But they didn't seem to be, they seemed to be really sad, that their friends had gone. There must have been a terrible death roll there with the malaria, cause they had, didn't have the things we had, they didn't have Atebrin to start with. Which didn't stop you getting malaria,
- 06:30 but it stopped you, it just suppressed it while you were in the islands. And it was compulsory for us to take. We had to take a tablet every day. So we were pretty conscientious about it. We did actually take them, even though it turned your skin yellow and got yellow stains on your clothing, it came through.

What was

- 07:00 **some of the other rituals or customs I guess of the Japanese POWs at that time that you observed, that you hadn't seen before?**

Ah well they, well they were mainly in working parties, they worked hard all day. But they were just like us. When they weren't being supervised, they'd do a bit of bludging.

- 07:30 Their main job was taking out the old, most of the coconut palms had been bombed and all the leaves had gone and everything. They were grubbing the stumps out, they used to dig a great big trench round the stump and be a terribly hard job. And they, when they were doing some really hard job they had a funny sort of chant they'd, in unison they'd be making, something like a
- 08:00 ee-aw sort of noise, you know awe, awe. Sort of rhythmic sorta. I don't know what it was for, supposed to, keeps them in time I suppose. But as I said we got on well with them. They, at one stage they gave us a concert party. They had Japanese soldiers dressed up as Geisha Girls. They played musical instruments for us and. Just one little funny
- 08:30 thing. We were in a sort of a little open air hall, made out of bamboo and those sort of tarp leaves, those sort of things. And alongside the edge was a railing like a timber railing. This fairly high ranking Japanese officer was leaning on the railing. And he was proud as punch of his
- 09:00 troops for entertaining us so well. And he must have leaned back a bit hard because he, the railing broke and he fell onto the ground. And somebody said, "Made in Japan." He looked mortified. He pretended to smile but he was really mortified that he'd sort of lost face. You know they hate doing that. But we used to trade with them. We give them tobacco and they'd give us
- 09:30 parachutes and all sorts of stuff for the, that. We weren't supposed to but we did. Yeah.

What other, what else did they have to trade, as POWs?

Well they had, they were pretty artistic some of them. I'll show you one in a minute. They used to get the silk and make beautiful silk handkerchiefs with drawings on them and that sort of stuff.

- 10:00 One gave me a fan. Oh they didn't have much but what they did they, they certainly liked Australian tobacco. Which we had plenty of really. Only cost a shilling or something for a tin of Log Cabin, and get all the smokes out of it. That was a very pleasant time in me life that Rabaul.
- 10:30 We were being, so well looked after ourselves. And the Japanese doing all the work and we were just sort of supervising them. They were cleaning Rabaul up really well.

Given the losses that Australian forces had suffered, through the whole New Guinea campaign, were there any troops that had any difficulty with being in such close proximity with Japanese?

- 11:00 There could have been. They were nearly all concentrated at Rabaul. They took them to Nation Island and Nauru and all from Bougainville and all the places, they sort of concentrated them at Rabaul. They still had some Japanese destroyers that hadn't been sunk and they took em back to Japan on those. Would have been an uncomfortable trip but they got them back as quick as they could.
- 11:30 Yes so I don't know, we were taught to hate them, I couldn't in me own mind hate them. On patrol, Frank and I were walking along, we saw three Japs laying on the side of the road. And it's unusual for a Jap to lay down because they supposed to be working But we went across and saw they were dead. They looked alive but they were dead, they had their mouths open and sort of flies crawling round them.

- 12:00 And I said "Oh how sad, they've come all the way from Japan, they didn't want to be here and now they're not gonna go back to Japan. And somebody must have loved them." And I'm trying to make meself out a real goodie goodie, I'm not really. Still I don't know you, when the war's over there's a funny feeling that, well
- 12:30 what was all that about? It's so horrible. And then when it's finished it's get back to being normal. And so many people died during the Second World War that it's unbelievable. It just stopped like that. I suppose it wouldn't have stopped except for the atom bombs. Don't know whether
- 13:00 or not, I'm sure, they would never have surrendered. I don't think they would have anyway.
- And was that something you were taught at Canungra as well?**
- Oh yeah they wouldn't surrender yeah. Yeah.
- So an engagement was a fight to the death, one way or the other?**
- That's right yeah. Mmm. Yeah.
- What was, what were the CO's like at Canungra?**
- At Canungra?
- Yeah.**
- Oh well they...
- 13:30 **And instructors?**
- They were pretty hard men but they, once again they were pretty fair. They, none of, I don't think any of them had been overseas themselves. So they knew a lot about jungle warfare. They were hard men but there's no unfairness. Our officers had to take us through too. We had a Lieutenant Bestwich,
- 14:00 nobody liked him very much but that's just a personal feeling. And the CO of, yeah the CO of our training group, he was just as hard on them as they were on the troops. At one stage we left a, not my Section but another Section left a Bren gun out in the bush. And the CO when he heard about it made the
- 14:30 made the lieutenant walk back all the way to fetch it. Not the men, they made him go back, cause it's his responsibility. I've heard since that the actual CO of the whole training brigade there was a very strange man. And he's very hard on officers there. The entrance is to the guard gate near the headquarters. And
- 15:00 this CO used to always look out the window at the guard. And he'd try and catch somebody going past the guard and not saluting. Any officer was that had troops that didn't pay respects to the guard he got called in the office and was brow beaten for something terrible. One of our lieutenants told me this. This is years after the war, he found out. But they were
- 15:30 just as hard on them as on us. But you can understand why they were hard cause the jungles no easy place to live in. And you had to be fairly, not tough but oh, what's, can't think of the word. Dunno what, keep on going in difficulties. Not persistent but...
- 16:00 **Endurance?**
- Endurance yeah. Had to endure a lot. So they tried to teach you that.
- And do you think you walked out with it?**
- Yeah, fell, when we graduated we felt wonderful you know. Think you could face anything. Nothing was hard physically again as Canungra. Cause in the islands was more dangerous, but nowhere near as
- 16:30 demanding physically.
- Just moving into the islands up in Bougainville, you mentioned a couple of times the natives. I mean can you tell us a little bit about your experiences with them and working with them?**
- Well we had some carriers that, on the Numa Numa [Trail].
- 17:00 They were amazing men, they were skinny fellas. The Solomon Islanders were black as, black as anything you know. And the New Guinea natives a bit more brownish, coppery colour. But the Solomon Islanders are jet black. Some of them are fairly skinny and they used to carry these huge loads. They'd almost trot, up the Numa Numa Trail, up the zig zag part and up to the top. And take us you know six or seven
- 17:30 hours to get up. They'd trot up in half an hour and come back. Seemed happy. They had a lot of, they were fed by us and used to get tobacco called Plantation Twist. And they used to, their cigarette paper was newspaper. They'd get great big shred of newspaper and roll a huge cigarette. Be about two or three feet long and they'd stick behind their ears, reserve.

18:00 A lot of them used to chew betel nut; you know that, make you big red mouth. And big red lips and tongue'd be red and spit it out. Spit'd be all red and horrible. They tell me it used to make them inebriated on the betel nut. Don't know if that's true or not. Up in the Solomon Islands, up where we were, they were pretty scarce but they still had bows and arrows and spears.

18:30 So they weren't armed, not with any modern weapons. I think there was, I've heard tales about them collaborating with the Japs and vice versa. You can't blame them; they'd be on ever side which was nearest. We did get some Indians, we found a compound of Indians that been,

19:00 been there since, they'd been captured at Singapore and taken across to work at, in the islands. And there hundreds of them, and these poor Indians they were very poor condition. And we got a group of them out, took them to the beach and this is where religion comes in. I don't know which sector can't eat beef. But we tried to give them bully beef and stuff. And even though they were starving, they wouldn't touch it. Wouldn't even have it,

19:30 even if it meant saving their life. So they were, yeah dignified men, you know they were soldiers. They were soldiers that'd been captured. They seemed very pleased to get released. I think they had a bad experience going back. I think one aeroplane taking them back, crashed and they didn't survive at all.

20:00 But I, that's just hearsay, I don't know whether it's true or not. The natives, yeah they, used to come down the beach sometimes and sort of, look at us and try and talk to us. But yeah we had no trouble with them.

I think you mentioned before, working with them on patrols?

20:30 Oh yeah.

Did you, did they ever engage with you in fighting?

Oh yeah well an island called Buka. B-U-K-A.

And the Buka Boys were really good scouts. And they'd go out in front. They'd, they reckon they could smell the Japanese. And they only be, they could smell us too cause we weren't real clean. And we'd keep a long distance between us and the

21:00 Japs. Yeah they were very good. Yeah. We got along very well with them. Yeah, there you are. They had a lovely little uniform, green lap lap, naked. All strong physically men you know. They all real dignified and proud

21:30 of themselves. And rightly so cause they were doing a marvellous job.

Had you heard much about them before you actually got to meet them or work with them?

I'd heard about them yeah but I hadn't, didn't know much about them. Cause there were New Guinea Regiment, Pacific Island Regiment, the Papuans. I think there was about two battalions of them.

22:00 And they'd send a platoon or a company with white battalions, they worked really well together. I don't think they ever took any part in any formal attacks. But they good patrol work and reconnaissance, that sort of stuff.

In your experience what do you think made the Papuan Infantry so good?

22:30 A long history with the white people. You know the white men up there they, before the war they sort of treated them pretty badly you know, not badly but they didn't give them any sort of, like today they'd be sort of equals but there the white man was sort of supreme and they keep the black fella down and make sure he in his place. But here the

23:00 Pacific Island Regiments, they suddenly got a status. You know they got a uniform and bit of kudos in front of their own people. And they were so proud of their regiments sort of thing. They do everything so smartly, their march and rifle drill. They were really top class. Yes. I believe some of them did a good job at Kokoda too.

23:30 They were mainly the carriers there. In our two actions at Tsimba Ridge and Porton we had no carriers at all. We'd have to do all our own carrying. I don't, why that would be, I don't know. Mightn't have been enough of them round to yeah.

24:00 **By the time you'd got to Bougainville, I mean your unit had formed and all that kind of thing. Had you made some good mates by that stage?**

Not real close ones, no. No, still kept us more or less reserved. But when we got into action with them you know, you could share a pit with a, you get to know them very well and

24:30 vicey versa. And I was with a, first time action, a bloke called Bimbo White. He had a radio store in Townsville and he sorta, he thought I was well educated. He liked talking to me and he said until I'd heard you had an education he thought I was a (UNCLEAR) or something. He said, "Oh I got a lot more respect for you now." he used to say you know.

- 25:00 Oh the word seem to spread around, there was three or four of us from New South Wales in the same company, in the same platoon rather. And no we, by the time the few months were over, we're just, you wouldn't know the difference. They still skited [boasted] about Queensland but I suppose we skited about New South Wales too so. But they really
- 25:30 were parochial with their love of north Queensland. They didn't even like people who came from Charters Towers or any further south. They, even though mixed battalion, the 31/51st, they didn't really mix, they get on well. But the 51st fellas kept to themselves a bit aloof from the 31st vice versa. They, my particular friends came from 51st. So,
- 26:00 when we came back to Australia, we given a choice of colour patches, you could wear your 31st or 51st. I chose the 51st one, the round one with the blue and brown. I was so proud of that one. The colour patches are, that's how it distinguishes the infantryman from any other. Like artillery. Artillery have all the same colour patches and infantry have two colours always. The
- 26:30 brigade colour and the colour of the state that you come from. And green was New South Wales so. Used to be four battalions in the brigade so. 1st Battalion was green and black, 2nd Battalion green and purple, green and brown, and green and white. So the 4th Battalion in the regiment, in the brigade would be, used to have white over green.
- 27:00 You don't want to hear about colour patches.
- No that's perfectly alright.**
- In the First War that was a very scientific thing. The shape of the colour patch showed what division it was in. Rectangle for 1st Division, square for 2nd Division and so on, so. You needn't know what the unit was, when you saw the colour patch you knew what division it was and what the state was that person came from and the position in the brigade it was.
- 27:30 So we followed on with the same colour patches, ones that, Units that had survived in the First War. The 51st was formed in 1916, a Western Australia unit. And they won the Victoria Cross at Villers Bretonneux. And then they disbanded many units but they kept the 51st going,
- 28:00 it's been going ever since. It's still going now as a far north Queensland Regiment. Still wear the same colour patch. And they do a lot of patrol work up there in Torres Strait and the Northern Territory. Even though they're not a regular unit they're just a reserve unit. So some battalion.
- I'm just wondering Colin if you could walk us through**
- 28:30 **I guess your first encounter action with Japanese enemy, and what that was like?**
- Yeah. Well very first day we'd landed at Puto. It wasn't opposed; we were the last company ashore. And I'd me equipment down,
- 29:00 I had everything could possibly need in me pouches and ammunition and everything, and First Aid kits and reserve food. I was prepared for anything. I'd bought a block of chocolate, Cadbury's Dairy Milk, I'd put it in this top pocket. Those old green uniforms had pockets everywhere. One each this side and the trousers had pockets in them and on the side as well.
- 29:30 Rumour was that the manufacturers got, the more yardage of material they used the more they got paid so they used to put all these extra pockets on them. But we came ashore on this barge and about fifty metres from the shore the officer at the back of the barge said, "Load." And I said, oh gee. I hadn't, I'd forgot to load me rifle. But suddenly I thought I might have to actually do some shooting you know. Might have to
- 30:00 fire me rifle. By this time, this was a hot day. And the chocolate melted and I had a streak of chocolate all down me stomach. Smelled like a chocco really. So I was chocco in name and could be chocco in actual smell. But I felt marvellous. Cause the air force were dive bombing about, oh a couple of hundred yards in
- 30:30 away from the beach. And the aeroplanes are going over and I knew there was no danger. So we landed and dug in. That's when the Japs shelled us that night. And didn't realise it was Japanese shells that were coming. We had a mountain battery just down the coast a bit, and we thought, to start with that they were shooting.
- 31:00 But they weren't, they were just Japanese shells. I suppose taking those loads up to the front line were sort of encounter. I fired those first three mortar bombs, there were, gave me a great feeling.
- 31:30 You couldn't see the result. As I said we had a marvellous, Kelso-Knight, this mortar officer. I kept in touch with him for a long time after the war and he's, he was a 2/5th Battalion original. And he didn't really want to be cause the militia were Italian. But he's marvellous soldier and he'd
- 32:00 do such things as to get a, there's a big artillery piece up the coast that used to fire occasionally, it's a big high calibre gun. And they couldn't locate it. So Kelso disguised himself as a, he got a sort of canoe

and put a lot of foliage over it and he went out off the coast. And with his binoculars and

32:30 with his compass and he got a compass bearing. When the cannon fired he saw the smoke and he got it, he located exactly where the canon was. And the Corsairs came in and dive bombed it. And destroyed it. And he's up in Numa Numa, I wasn't with him at the time. But a Jap was hiding behind a fig tree and he had Captain Owen from the 26th Battalion.

33:00 He was, had it round the side of the tree, he's gonna fire it down, out where Kelso and his mates were. And Kelso very calmly, he had an American carbine and he shot the Jap's trigger finger. As soon as he shot that, the Japanese behind the tree. And Kelso chased him round the tree and killed him with the carbine. So he was a

33:30 fearless man you know, we didn't actually like him but we respected him much and. After the war he got in touch with us and he used to write me terrific long letters. And I used to write back to him. And he took me to his 2/5th battalion reunion out at Moore Park Golf Club.

34:00 And he got up and introduced me as this Col McKinnon, he was in my platoon at, on Bougainville. But he wasn't my batman. And it was really, really good fun. He's still alive but he's got dementia, doesn't know anybody in there.

Was there a particular moment through that or another

34:30 **part of Bougainville where you, that stands out as a moment where you thought, where it became clear to you that I guess the war is a serious business that you're...?**

Yeah. Yeah, seeing that first casualty I told you about this morning. That sobered me up a terrific lot.

What did you think about when you saw, you kinda quit then?

35:00 Oh the same thing could happen to me you know, I thought, you know. I was always terribly thirsty up in the islands cause you couldn't get much, any water. You couldn't get, I just wanted to get back to Australia and have a drink you know. Not necessarily a beer or a milkshake, anything at all. Ginger beer or lemonade just to be able to drink as much as I wanted to when I wanted to. Cause you go there for days just crying out for water you know.

35:30 That last action we were in, that month we were in, the only water we were getting was from the swamp and we used to put chlorine tablets in our water bottle to disguise the swampy taste. But never very hungry, but always thirsty. And I still enjoy a drink. I never get drunk or anything but I seem to think, just think of the times when you couldn't get a drink and I got plenty here now and. Makes me

36:00 appreciate it even more than I would otherwise. Yeah. Can't think of much else that stands out. Being thirsty, being frightened. Never lonely. Had some things, terrible

36:30 things did happen on. I told you about that patrol where the Buka-Boy lost his arm and Joe Hillier was killed. Well they didn't get his body back for a long while. And a few days later another patrol went out and the lieutenant got them lost. They left from our perimeter and they're

37:00 out all night, and they couldn't find their way back. The lieutenant, he's dead now, Lieutenant Devlin, he was a sort of a showy sort of bloke. And he was sorta you know gung ho sort of bloke. And "I'll lead you men." and sorta. He went to pieces really. Cause when the

37:30 patrol, they didn't know whether, they spent all night listening to the Japs loading up trucks. They didn't know actually where they were. They didn't know until we started firing the mortar bombs and they could sorta get a fix on where they were. And one mortar bomb hit, didn't hit, but apparently, nobody knows for certain, but his leg was badly injured. And he had to stop running, he fell down.

38:00 He was still alive apparently but the patrol kept on running. And there's only one person behind this one got hit. And eventually got back to our perimeter. And this lieutenant realised that he's one man short, that one bloke was still out there. And he was most upset and it wasn't actually his fault. But

38:30 his troops didn't, sort of blamed him. And he tried to get them a tailor made cigarette, which were a luxury then, I mean you had to roll your own. But the officers had tailor made. And he tried to give his soldiers a tailor made and most of them wouldn't take one. And you could see he was so upset and the poor fella was out there all day. They tried to get a rescue mission to go out and get him.

39:00 But about five o'clock in the afternoon there was a single shot from an Owen gun which he had. And either he'd committed suicide or the Japs shot him so. You don't know. But the strange thing is that his name was McDonald, and Joe Hillier. And after about three weeks they got, recovered their bodies. They never got McDonald back but they,

39:30 Joe Hillier, when they looked at his body it had, it's hard to believe this but he had McDonald's dead meat tickets on him, his I.D. disks. So the Japs had transferred them over. Why they'd do that, nobody knows. But poor old the McDonald chap, Scotty McDonald was still there but Joe Hillier got brought back and

- 40:00 buried in, he'd be in Bomana War Cemetery now. Just one of those, your morale sorta sinks when you how much, of course Australian soldiers don't like leaving your mates out. That's the worst thing you can do but this was unavoidable in a way. That's a very gloomy story.
- 40:30 **Okay we'll pause there.**

Tape 7

- 00:32 **Colin, you mentioned this morning that you were often doing some guard work or patrol work, or somebody was booby trapping the perimeter?**
- Well that was standard procedure putting booby traps out. Right round your perimeter so the Japs couldn't come in. The only hope they had of getting in undetected, at the Genga River they had a big,
- 01:00 pretty smart the Japs there, they had a big long bamboo poles. They'd poke them in, try and set the booby traps off before they came in themselves. Which worked for them so they, he must have got right in with his swords. Yeah. We had a thing called Jumping Jack mine too. You had a sorta, big long sorta rope. And if
- 01:30 you pulled the rope, the mine'd jump up in the air and explode about chest high. But we never pulled it. I didn't pull mine anyway. You were tempted to at times cause you'd hear something out there and you. But in retrospect the Japs probably didn't come near us. Cause they would have had difficulty crawling through the jungle at night time, just like anybody would.
- 02:00 But you don't think of that at the time, you just imagine there's Japanese everywhere.
- How far away would the Japanese be from your, where you were camped generally?**
- Oh it depends where you were. In the front line they were very, very close. They'd be, they'd call out at times and coo-ee at you. At Downs' Ridge they
- 02:30 used to, they'd think of somebody's name. And they'd say, "Come and help me. I'm...." they'd pretend to be somebody else and they'd pretend to be Australian. They'd come out and, bring me in I'm wounded sorta. And they had, a lot of them had a good command of English. And they got a lot of weapons from the Americans, cause a lot of them were using American rifles.
- 03:00 So they must have thought they were better than their own. After you'd been there a while you could tell the difference between a Japanese rifle and Japanese machine gun and your own. There's not much difference, but there's just that little subtle difference of sound. And the shells going over, you could tell within a few yards how far the shell was gonna land, because of the sound of the whistle. The high whistle you'd know it was gonna
- 03:30 land a fair way away. But when there hardly any whistle at all, 'whft', bingo, she'd blow up. And funny thing where we were the last time, we just had two company's left in the field. There was C Company was still in reserve. And some of them had been knocked off at Porton. And B Company were little, bout half a mile further inland. And we
- 04:00 could communicate with B Company by telephone. And several mornings in a row a battle'd break out in the jungle between the two Companies. So a full scale battle'd there'd be hand grenades and machine guns firing and. B Company'd ring up Don Company and say, "Are you being attacked?" And, "No, we weren't being attacked." So the Japanese were having their own little private, I don't know what they were doing, training or. Nobody could work
- 04:30 out why these battles were happening. But they were. Yeah imagination works at night time. It's a long night and towards the end of our time there, we heard these engine noises. And we immediately thought they were tanks. And didn't please us very much at all. I arranged with Major that if the tanks came in, we're gonna shoot through and try and get back to
- 05:00 Torokina. It would've taken us months but, gonna have a go. Each night they seemed to be getting louder and louder and getting closer and closer. And they sent us up, like a bazooka they call it, Projectile Infantry Tank Attack. It was like a rocket that would explode against a tank. And we didn't have much confidence in them but, we didn't know actually how to fire them. But turned out they weren't
- 05:30 tanks at all. It was, they had these big cannon there, the artillery pieces. And at night time they had little trains or tractors, they'd take them out of their hiding place in the jungle, so they'd be ready to shoot. And the noise we're hearing were the tractor noises, they weren't tank engines at all. You had to, it was worry for nothing. But you can understand why we were scared.
- 06:00 Yeah. It's funny things happen like that. I was telling you about the wire we had between the two pits to, we were at this other place for three weeks at least. Lyle Jenkins and myself, we thought we'd dig a little communication trench between for two pits. So we could have instead of one on, one off all night. We'd have

06:30 one on and three off, so there's four of us to share the guard. And we used to have, to go to the toilet you couldn't get out of the pit. So we used to have like a peach tin, a fruit tin. And sorta nervous, you'd sorta fill them up during the night. One night, Lyle Jenkins he came crawling down through the communication trench. And

07:00 he started using our tin. And my mate Major, he stuttered a bit and he said, "D-don't you p-p-piss in our p-p-pit." Oh, sounded funny. Yeah.

Can you tell me, you mentioned there was a time when you lived for about three weeks in the one pit?

Yes, that was it. Yeah.

Can you describe, you mentioned that your

07:30 **pit had shelves. Can you tell me how big it was and...?**

Oh yeah it was big enough to lie down flat. With a place where you stopped the, if you were gonna shoot over the parapet, little sorta pit like that. But behind that was a dug out piece, be about six or seven feet long to, so you could lay down at night, which was nice. You never got cold or anything because we had a half a blanket if you wanted

08:00 it. And you dug a little shelf for meself to put me hand grenades on. Little bit to put me haversack and my stuff on. When you use the haver, pouches for a pillow. Oh it was quite home away from home really. But wouldn't want to do it permanently but, I had no regrets when I left

08:30 it either.

Was it just you in that pit or were you sh...?

No there's gotta be two people in each pit. Like in a jungle perimeter you've got a circle, cause the Japs could be anywhere. So you got a complete circle so you're facing in all directions. And night time you'd see the fireflies blink away and, it's a long night. Yeah.

09:00 We used to amuse, we used to play a game call Rickety Kate with, I don't know if you've ever played it or not. But it's like a reverse game of Bridge. So we used to play that in the pit for hours you know. The game was Queen of Spades was Rickety. Like in, when you're playing Five Under Bridge, you wanna take tricks, well in this game you can't take Hearts. Cause

09:30 any Hearts you get, cause you can't avoid it, counts against you. So we'd, we played Rickety Kate for hours on end. That was that. Sometimes there'd be diversions, the aeroplanes'd fly over and drop bombs. When they dropped a bomb close, the whole ground'd shake. Just like an earthquake. I mention that now,

10:00 the earthquakes, those islands have a lot of earthquakes. They were an awe inspiring thing. When we were up in Numa Numa, there was a huge mountain, millions of tons of rock. When the big shake was on the whole mountain would move. So much so you couldn't stand up. You'd have to, lay down. Just think of the awesome power underneath there to shift the whole mountain, make it quiver. We used to pretend that we,

10:30 see I'll keep me rifle clean, I'll do this, I'll do that. Trying to see if He'll spare us from this. So that be, even Rabaul, almost everyday there'd be a shake and trees'd shake and the ground's shake. We didn't have any fierce ones up there like they've had recently. The whole town was destroyed again a couple of years ago, wasn't it?"

11:00 **Going back to the pit that you were describing, how far apart were the next, how far away were the next two people in a pit?**

Bout four or five yards. There's about, yeah perimeter there's about twenty pits I suppose. There'd be twenty, and the Papuans had their pits too.

11:30 So, you wouldn't know much about, except the two pits alongside you, you wouldn't know much about the perimeter. Only that. Except Major and I, we used to crawl around and put the booby traps out so.

What kind of booby trapping were you doing?

Only a hand grenade with a piece of wire in the, round the ring of, you know the ring. And you'd tie that, bout this far from the

12:00 ground to a tree trunk. So if the rope was pulled, the pin'd come out and the grenade'd go off. You had to be very careful with grenades too, cause there were occasions where the, they hadn't been used for a while. The ring had rusted and you couldn't pull it out. So you had to keep the pin sorta with Vaseline or sorta grease or something, so it'd slide out easily

12:30 They worked cause one of our silly corporals we had a, across the track, we had a gate, like a hurdle gate. You know a cross piece with a barbed wire across it. And we put a booby trap across that. Two

mornings in a row, the corporal, he walked straight through the booby trap wire. You heard it go off so you had four seconds to get away but, it was most annoying. He did that

13:00 two mornings in a row. He's dead now too so, better not say anything about him.

Were there times when the Japanese would set them off during the night?

Not in my perimeter but there would have been in other places. Yeah.

You mentioned that you'd hear noises during the night, what would you hearing in the jungle?

Ah

13:30 oh little sort of movement. Whether it was animals, there weren't many animals up there. But funny thing the jungle, I suppose, anything that cause a noise I suppose. But sometimes the Japs'd call out. In Japanese sometimes otherwise used to coo-ee a lot you know. Like an Australian coo-ee.

14:00 The jungle is you know, during the day time it can be very noisy, all the insects and birds are going. And creepy, I don't know if it was general everywhere but there'd be all these jungle noises going flat out then suddenly it'd all stop. Like, it wouldn't just die down it'd be going, then it'd stop immediately. And you'd wonder why

14:30 you know. Then a few minutes later or a while later, they'd all start again. At the same time so. I don't know whether that's general in the jungle or not. Was there where we were. It was very creepy. Trying to think, oh what's happening.

Did anybody every respond to the Japanese calling out in the night?

Don't think so. No.

15:00 No we were, that's another thing, I didn't mention that. At Canungra we were warned about that, about the Japanese would try and entice you out by pretending to be wounded and giving a name that, a common name like John or Jack, that sort of thing. Not supposed to say 'el' sounds so they wouldn't say Bill or anything like that. Whether that's true or not I don't know.

15:30 **Did they ever sound convincing?**

No. No, bit scary though, they were out there though.

Would you talk amongst yourselves to the pits next to you and...?

Only at day time you would but not at night time. That was strict silence, you couldn't smoke, couldn't do anything. Had to keep as quiet as you possibly could.

16:00 You had to wrap your identity disks up, they were metal, you had to put sticking plaster round them so they wouldn't rattle or shine in the sun. They thought if you made them look unattractive the Japanese wouldn't take them as souvenirs. That's what we were told anyway. And you didn't take a knife, you had a fork,

16:30 your mess tin and a spoon, and you had to wrap those up so they wouldn't rattle in your pack, in your haversack. You had to be as quiet as you possibly could. And your rifle, all the metal parts are painted green. We were pretty invisible I suppose with the green uniform and the, wouldn't be much colour about you at all.

17:00 And one time, another funny bit, you'd often put a soldier out about ten or fifteen yards down from the perimeter on the track to make sure no Japs came. This is my duty one morning and as Frankie Rolls was coming out of the vegetation I was completely invisible. I just hoping a Jap'd come down the track.

17:30 And shoot him, free of charge sorta. But the first person came in the track after about two hours out there was a war correspondent with an escort. And we had a, I could see him about twenty or thirty yards down the track. And this war correspondent, he looked a bit nervous, and he was looking left, right and his escort, he had a rifle over his back with a bayonet on it.

18:00 And as it got closer I thought what am I gonna say. I can't say, halt, who goes there or. So when he got closer and I said, "Good morning." And he just about, like you see these comics, they jump up on the table when the mouse scares em. Well this fella he must have got that far off the ground. And dropped his camera and the escort just smiled you know. But oh

18:30 he came back to earth. Very humorous, I'll never forget that.

During the times when you were at the front, how often would you be involved in skirmishes with the Japanese or in...?

Oh well I was in mortars so we weren't involved very much at all. There weren't many skirmishes after Porton Plantation.

19:00 We were completely on the defensive. Any patrol we had wasn't a fighting patrol it was just

reconnaissance or security, to try and keep our tracks open. So all our aggression was strictly on the defensive. Even in the 23rd Brigade, when they did relieve us, in the end of June. And they tried a few attacks, that's where Frank Partridge got his VC, in the 8th Battalion.

19:30 Just where we were but they made no progress at all. They'd had to go on the defensive as well. It's, the whole campaign was like that. It needn't have been. I'm glad it happened because I've had all this marvellous experience. But on Bougainville there was over five hundred killed. That's in ten months. So that's more than was killed in Vietnam in ten years. So it was pretty intensive.

20:00 But not one that needed to happen because the Americans had that perimeter at Torokina. And they'd, they were pursuing the war up to Japan. And the Australian, they needn't have gone anywhere, just stopped at Torokina, but were perfectly safe and the honorary garrison. The Japs weren't going anywhere; they had no ships or aeroplanes. So what we did was, they call it mopping up or. Must have been

20:30 political reasons only, to get a better place in the peace talks. I don't know what the reason was but, makes you a bit sad to think all those fine young men died that needn't have. The same in New Guinea, bit different in Borneo and Balikpapan I suppose cause the, a lot of oil wells. But what we were doing was completely useless. The Japs were like in a big prisoner of war camp cause they weren't

21:00 going anywhere. Couldn't go anywhere. So makes it tragic. As I said I'm delighted cause I survived and, that's being mean and selfish. But I have all this experience that you couldn't get anywhere else.

How much of a problem was disease, the tropical diseases in Bougainville?

Not very much cause

21:30 we had the Atebrin. Without that we would have all got malaria and been evacuated for that or out of line. But the Japs didn't have the same luxury, they were very disease ridden, with the malaria mainly. But we weren't allowed to take our boots off because we could have got hookworm. Hookworm gets through your soles of your feet, on contaminated ground and gets up high in your ears apparently.

22:00 There was no scrub typhus I don't think on Bougainville but in the islands, in New Guinea those places, they had a lot of scrub typhus. Was a little mite that got in your armpits and gave you terrific fever and often killed you. But we, wasn't much sickness at all. Course as soon as you stopped taking Atebrin, when you came back to Australia, a few weeks later, you were

22:30 down with malaria. Nearly every soldier on Bougainville got malaria. And that's a terrible disease. I got it and I didn't know what was wrong with me. I just wondered how sick you had to be before you died you know. And I got taken to Concord Hospital. In there, they couldn't actually

23:00 find the malaria, the parasite in me. For a while me temperature kept on going up to the hundred and three degrees and down again. And oh I was three or four days like that and they found out I did have malaria. And started treating me with a new drug called Paludrine. And for three weeks I had to stop in bed and not allowed out. And this new drug apparently cured it. And funny thing

23:30 was that once I was allowed out of bed, I wasn't allowed back in, cause they put you on light duties. And I really loved that cause I worked in the big kitchen. Making toast and stuff for the, and take em round, and I really loved it. Cause it was, lot of nurses and nurses aids were, they were waiting for discharge as well as we were. One of the

24:00 happiest times of me life, after I had that malaria and on the mend again. I would have stopped there forever but they discharged me eventually. Back to Clifton Gardens.

Is that the only time you had malaria, just that once?

Just the once yeah. Found, it's still in your blood apparently. I was a blood donor for many years and they couldn't use all my blood

24:30 cause a lot of it was affected by the malaria germs and it's still in there. But they never, hasn't ever come back on me again. It, as I said before, I didn't know how sick you had to be before you died, because I felt so terrible. Once again it's great when you finished you know. When you feel

25:00 well again you, you forget you were ever sick.

Were there any incidents of people in your area, I mean you hear about people in the tropics going troppo, I guess they call it? Just not being able to cop with the...?

Yeah, we had a few like that. One fella, yeah last

25:30 time in there, he started crying and calling out for his mother. And he was evacuated. It was a bit sad in a way cause the Papuans, they sort of mocked him in the morning. He cried fairly well through the night and cried out for mum, mum, mum. In the morning the natives are saying mum, mum, mum and sort of pretending to cry so.

26:00 Made us feel a bit ashamed of ourselves. We had quite a few self inflicted wounds. People who shot

themselves in the foot etc. Yeah. Our company sig [signaller] did that, he, after a few attacks in, he, I saw him, I didn't actually see him shoot himself, but he was sitting there really dejected.

26:30 And you know he eventually plucked up courage and he shot himself in the foot. Of course he was charged with that. And I don't know if he got a dishonourable discharge or what. But no doubt he could have been killed but he could have survived too. And he never come to an Anzac Day or anything like that. So he cut himself off from all the things. There was quite

27:00 a few, not in my platoon, that was the only one in my platoon. But in the company, in the battalion there was quite a few we heard of, shot themselves. Yeah.

You mentioned before that everyone was scared?

Yeah. They didn't show it but

27:30 as I said I found out they were scared. Just as much as I was, and worried. So. Went on for a long time, just, months we were in action. Every day you'd feel, you wouldn't know whether you were gonna live through the day. I never got fatalistic about it. I did

28:00 everything possible to, I wouldn't run any unnecessary risks. But I didn't dodge doing anything I had to do either. So that was that. Anyway the last action I fired sixty mortar bombs in about half an hour. The Japs are pressing very hard and there was bullets flying everywhere. We were landing our mortar bombs just in front of our own

28:30 troops. And as I said before that we had a primary charge and secondary charges. Cause they were only short range we were firing it, we had to knock three charges out, just use three charges. In me excitement I was working like a slave firing all these bombs. And I left six charges in, instead of knocking three of them out. So the bomb must have gone about another half a mile

29:00 than it should have gone. Kelso-Knight rang up and said, "What happened to that last bomb?" He said, "You hit the Salvation army tent." He was a funny man. Then our corporal had to explain it, he hadn't taken all the charges out.

You mentioned that you were learning basically how to do the mortar work on the run?

Yeah well I hadn't ever, I was

29:30 a range taker, machine gunner and rifleman. Just before we sailed it looked like we couldn't stop the battalion. Cause they'd been in Mawaraka and they'd all gone on leave and a lot hadn't come back. But I was in C Company to start with and they had enough troops came back, so they didn't want me in C Company. I was sent up to Headquarters Company and the sergeant said there,

30:00 "You might have to go to the Field Ambulances, there's no room for you here." So must have got to hear about it and said oh we can carry a few extra troops. And so I first of all went to the machine gun platoon which is Number 2 Platoon. Then I wasn't a bad machine gunner but we went out on these manoeuvres and they'd

30:30 set up the Vickers guns and had to prove that we could actually work it and I got the range. And the target was a log the other side of the valley. Bout fifteen hundred yards away. I set the machine gun and I pressed the triggers and every fifth bullet was a tracer bullet. You could see the bullets climbing up in the air and going across the valley and they hit the target, zonk.

31:00 No correction, I hit the target first time. And just a fluke. So I said this is good, I put the whole belt through, two fifty rounds into the one target. And they said, "That's no good, you're supposed to have a short burst then tap the handles to, and have another burst you know." Take you about a minute to get through a whole belt; I let the whole lot go at once.

31:30 So they said, "You're no good as a machine gunner." So I don't know what I was gonna do. And this Kelso-Knight, he was in charge of the Pioneers at the time. And they sent us down to Kelso and he said, "Do you want to be a Pioneer?" I didn't know what a Pioneer was, so I said I'd rather go back to rifle company. And he said, "Oh you know I understand that." And this Ces Back said, "Oh, I'll take them." So

32:00 I finished up being in the mortar platoon. I'd never even seen a mortar until we got to Torokina and I actually saw one. Next time I saw one was in action. But they told me what to do, get the two bubbles level. And how to put the bomb down the barrel and take your hands away. It's a magnificent weapon cause the bomb goes straight up in the air and down again. If you hide behind you can see them

32:30 actually leave the, climb into the sky and turn over and come down again. They're only a short range weapon, the enemy don't like you cause it's a terrible sound apparently the mortar bomb coming straight down at you.

Were there difficulties you found in I guess learning in action?

No, no. They were a very simple thing

33:00 really. But I suppose in a training battalion they go through all the technical stuff and you know, have to

know a terrific lot. But we were, just learned like that, through necessity. Cause nobody else there to do the firing but Kelso said Sonny'll do it, so I did. And when I fired the sixty bombs, like there, there's about a dozen or so of us there to fire the two mortars at.

33:30 Strange how when you fire them the other blokes they disappear. And Major and I were left there by ourselves. So, I just had to fire it. Yeah.

Is it, are you in a crew or is it just a...?

Yeah there's three in a crew. Number One, he's the main sight see, he got the sights and

34:00 all the aiming marks and everything. Number Two drops the bomb down, Number Three hands the bombs up to Number Two to drop down the barrel. That's what the trouble was when I left those six charges go, because I was, beside grabbing the bomb meself, cause there's no Number Three, I had to knock the charges out as well before I fired it. Yeah.

How much,

34:30 **I mean would you see afterwards the damage that the mortar would do?**

Yeah. Apparently we cleared the nips away from the front of Don Company. And we went down there and it was like a scene from a creepy movie, where all the jungle's sort of been flattened and not just been mortar bombed but from the artillery as well. The jungle had sorta semi disappeared, there was just occasional tree and.

35:00 And it was opened up. And the fella said, "You can come with us anytime you like." So, felt pretty proud of ourselves. We didn't drop any short at all. Like artillery are renowned for dropping short. And we never did, we always accurate.

35:30 **Be a good thing.**

Yes I'd hate to kill someone in friendly fire.

Was sixty rounds in a half hour...?

Oh it was mighty going yeah, gee. There was two guns working too so would have been hundred and twenty bombs. And they make a terrific noise when they off the mortar bomb. Almost as loud as a twenty-five pounder.

36:00 A lot of noise and smoke. And get a bit of a headache from it, you know all the noise and there's a lot of smoke comes out of the barrel too. So I was pretty well exhausted when I finished. But now one, I'm proud of the fact that bloke called Billy Heals who said that, "In the

36:30 last attack, Sonny was the best soldier of us all." He would've forgotten he said that now. He was a funny sort of bloke but at least he said it then. So, for a while at least I was regarded as being a good soldier. Yeah.

It would have been a great moment I reckon.

Yeah. I still remember it so it must have been.

37:00 He would have said a lot more to me too but that's the words I remember. Yeah, funny man. When we had the reunion, a couple of, the time I was talking about when I was talking to Frankie Rolls. They sent a bus down to Gordonvale to, to Innisfail to pick us up. And we went through where Billy Heals lived. And as

37:30 he got on the bus they said, "Now you haven't paid yet Bill." He said, "No I'm not gonna pay till I get there." He said, he's supposed to have booked his, paid for his bus trip a week before. He said, "I'm on a diet during the week and I wouldn't have got me money's worth." So he waited till he got there before he paid. He's still alive too, old Billy.

Were there any particular larrikins in your group?

Yeah

38:00 oh there was a few funny people, I don't know they weren't actually larrikins. Always having something funny to say. You know they'd split your sides sometimes. That old Pop Lynch I told you about before, he had an expression, I've never heard it before or since is, That gives me an attack of the 'sturks', he said. I looked up 'sturks' in dictionaries over and over again, I can never find the word. He must have made that up himself you know.

38:30 At the time I thought it must be a proper word but. Yeah. He always had something funny to say. No matter where you were or what it was. Lot of blokes like that, they make you laugh. They still do when you meet them again; they still got something funny to say.

I guess, was that quite an important thing to have?

Oh yes,

- 39:00 yes. Yes, far more laughter than tears I'm sure. Yeah. Things'd be desperate but somebody'd say something very funny and. One used to, one was if you were really desperate, you were hungry and tired and thirsty, everything's wrong with you. But somebody'd say, "Oh while we're doing this, we could be doing something worse."
- 39:30 Yeah. Another famous one, I don't know if it was all throughout the army, but one bloke'd say, "Don't be effed around by just anybody, join the army and get effed around by experts." Things like that you know. And the famous old one about the only person to get
- 40:00 VD from the toilet seat was the padre or the CO. Oh lots of funny things.
- That's great, thanks very much for that Colin, we're at the end of that...**

Tape 8

- 00:32 **Okay. Colin, I've often heard that during battle and shell fire and all that kind of thing, that shrapnel is just as bad or can be worse than some of the mortars and things like that. Can you, with the experiences that you had, can you speak to that at all?**
- Oh shrapnel can cause a terrific
- 01:00 wound. And that wound is usually quite safe. Because the shrapnel's so hot that it sorta sterilises all the, so I've been told. During one bombardment, the shells were coming in very close. I looked down and alongside me was a shiny bit of metal. I picked it up for a second and burned me
- 01:30 fingers. It was a bit of shrapnel around, right alongside me. And high in the air and come straight down but it was white hot. So would loved to have kept it as a souvenir but, had to drop it like a hot cake. Yeah but certainly causes damage that shrapnel.
- Were there times during battle where you'd**
- 02:00 **have to take cover, I mean to avoid I guess shrapnel fall out from explosions and things like that?**
- Yeah. Like I told you before, I dived for cover from the shells and I grabbed a banana leaf on the way down to the ground so I could push me face into it. Amazing how quickly you can react you know. I'm still jumpy.
- 02:30 If I hear a loud explosion I don't hit the ground but I sort of duck and my body sort of jerks. But yes it must be, must have learned it so thoroughly then that it doesn't leave you. Muscle memory I suppose you'd call it, you just react instinctively. Yeah, amazing what, how fast you can move and do things. But wouldn't
- 03:00 in normal circumstances you wouldn't do it half as quickly or as well. Yeah.
- Were there any times where you or any of your mates were hit by shrapnel during any of the campaigns or fighting that you were involved in?**
- Yeah one of our platoon was hit by shrapnel in very close to the groin.
- 03:30 So yes he got evacuated. I can't think of much else though. Cause there's not like a normal battle in the jungle cause there, you can't see very far, you're limited by the few yards. That would muffle a lot of the noise too I'd imagine. That, when those bullets were
- 04:00 crackling over our heads they'd hear, you were close then. That's as scared as I've ever been. Think oh it's all over you know you can't see any way out. And little things can save your life, well mightn't have saved me life but. But pit, Major and I, we'd taken this 26th Battalion pit over. And the next morning
- 04:30 out of the side of the pit, a lot of little red flies came crawling out. They weren't stinging or anything but there's a whole swarms of them just coming out of the side of the pit, flying around. We, you couldn't shoo them away or anything. So they were that persistent, so we decided we'd dig a new pit. And which we did do, just a bit side and a bit back from this other one. And
- 05:00 we take the new pit and after next attack we had a look in our old pit and there was two Japanese hand grenades in it. Like they used to call ink bottle grenades, they, like an old bottle of Swan Ink. They weren't very big. And some poor Nip must have crawled up while our heads were down and tossed these grenades into the pit. And whether didn't go off or he's hoping we'd jump out so he could
- 05:30 shoot us, I don't know. But I reckon those, mightn't have saved our life, but could have, those little red insects. Cause we didn't like them. Haven't thought about that for years.
- You were talking before about how mountainous the country was that you were fighting in. What were some of**

06:00 **I mean, but it was also, I think you've also said it was really quite beautiful.**

Oh beautiful island yeah.

Yeah.

Be a tourists paradise I reckon, Bougainville. They got the copper mines there later, and I've talked to people who've been there they'd rave about the beauty of the place and the climate. The only part we didn't like was being in the jungle itself. It was very thick jungle. And that's kunai grass, but once you

06:30 get to the plantations it was beautiful. And the water, you know the little creeks; they were cool and crystal clear. At Sipai there was a creek each end of the beach. And when we were relaxing we'd just, go and have a swim in the cold creek and pretend we were crocodiles, then we'd get in the warm water of the sea and pretend we were sharks. Different contrasts of the water you know. The water up there is milky

07:00 warm, the creek was icy cold. By contrast anyway. Yeah, this Laruma River that was, yeah it wound down through this valley with the steep sides. It was oh, we didn't have much time thinking about scenery in those days. But even then I could, I realised how beautiful it was. So that was that. I'd love to go back and have a look. Although there's been a lot of trouble in

07:30 Bougainville the last few years, unfortunately.

In the times, however brief, that you would actually get a bit of time off, I mean you've mentioned a couple of the sort of things that you did get up to. But what would you do to entertain yourselves?

Oh would be so, we were out of action lot longer than we were in action. Like only in action a brief time cause in a brigade

08:00 there's three battalions and always one resting. And in a battalion there's always one company resting. So, but times in action, even when the battalion's in action, fairly limited. But recreation, we used to have a recreation hut. Run by the Salvation Army. That's where, we had a cranky one, he only young bloke but he hated noise you know. If anybody sort of laughing or started hijacking he'd say, "Send you all back to your

08:30 tents." you know. Wouldn't stand any nonsense at all. They had ping pong and they had table ah, bobs, like a little, you know bobs. Like a, you got a cue and ball and little arches on the other end of the table. You gotta try and knock the ball through the, you get a point score there. And oh you could swim as must as you like. But the army doesn't like you resting.

09:00 Even when you're out of line, even though you're a trained soldier, they still keep on training you. They send you to schools and like, just local schools. Like teach you a few tactics or weaponry or that sort of stuff. So the company, the battalion would still have practise, they were, didn't have that much leisure time. But

09:30 no, it was good being out of the line, it was really great fun. And we played cards, we had little quiz shows. Way back at Torokina when we got there, there was concert parties used to come up and you could go and watch them. There were movies. No, the time just seemed to go. Especially when you're out of action. It was, you'd like it be going slowly but it always went fast.

10:00 Just the reverse in action, every day seemed like a fortnight.

What kind of, do you remember any of the concert parties that you saw?

Oh I nearly saw Gracie Fields but, she come up just before the war finished. In fact she was giving a concert the night the war actually finished. And people were there reckoned she sang some sentimental songs, it was a great show. But

10:30 they, lot of the base strips got there but in the battalions they only took a certain percentage from each company to go and see her and I missed out. I don't remember ever seeing any concert parties at all. Saw a lot of movies. But no.

Any favourites that you can recall?

Movies?

Yeah.

No I can't,

11:00 no. No, nothing like Casablanca or any of those famous ones now. I just can't remember. But they were always open air movies you know. You'd sit on logs and hope it didn't rain. They'd tell me you could sit the other side of the screen too and see it back to front. You could see it both sides of the, if you wanted to. But the Americans had it sewn up, they had

11:30 oh they must have had dozens of picture shows there. In one they had a neon sign above the screen.

This is in the islands, you know, this is base camp. Lowes, there's a famous movie, ah cinema in New York called Lowes, L-O-W-E-S or some name like that. Anyway they had this name up there above the movie screen. No, they were a different thing altogether the American Army.

- 12:00 They had so much equipment; you know when they left to go to the Philippines they left all their earth moving equipment behind. They left all their tents, they didn't take a thing. The Australian Army, you had to look after your tent cause you couldn't get another one if you lost that one so. We had to be very careful with all our equipment. But they were very prolific. As much as they wanted.

Was there much souveneering that happened

- 12:30 **because the Americans were kind of so careless with their gear?**

Oh yeah, you could have an American forty-five pistol, if you wanted one. I never wanted one but, you'd, they were easy as winks to get em. And bottle of beer'd get you a pistol. Yeah. So they were strange people those Americans. They, you know they were particularly brave but they weren't sorta

- 13:00 skilled at soldiering somehow. We were always taught to spread out and sorta be careful on patrol. But I believe they were very careless. They used to bunch and they'd make noise. Different sort of attitude altogether.

What was the relationship like between the American and I guess the Australians forces, like on the island itself during the campaigns?

Oh we'd get along alright with them.

- 13:30 We'd go down to their PX or, and they'd let you have anything you like. You could exchange your money for American dollars or. If you wanted, have a bottle of beer for sale, they'd give you a dollar for a bottle of beer. Which was worth about twelve shillings. The beer itself would only cost you about a shilling. You'd get twelve shillings for it so. That's when we first got there. But after a while that bottle of beer was you had every week was so precious,
- 14:00 you wouldn't dream of selling it. You'd drink it yourself. Yeah. Ah, well we used to use their airstrips and we used to use a lot of their equipment. But when we'd meet them, we'd be very friendly sorta. I remember one big American landing barge took us back from Puto, first time. And it was a huge thing,
- 14:30 it was one of those ones that landed trucks and tanks. I'll never forget the big ramp came down onto the beach and you'd go across. And our signal officer had a box of signal equipment was in an ammo box. And the American captain he's way up on the bridge there. "Tell that man he can't bring any ammo on this barge." This Wilbur Figg he said,
- 15:00 "That's not effin' ammunition." And the American sailor turned around and said, "Sir." he said, "That's not effin' ammunition." Anyway we got on. But the sailors they're like pirates. One or two, a real dark skinned fella, and he had a, rare in those days, he had a curtain ring in his ear. And you know he looked something out of a pirate movie. These sailors they were,
- 15:30 they were friendly and everything, they were different. And they took us back on this barge back to Torokina. So yeah. Oh no animosity. No, some Australia, American come up almost up the front, to the rear area. And at Puto there was a dead Jap that nobody bothered to bury a couple of hundred yards down the beach. And
- 16:00 when this American got to hear about it he got so excited he, I'll give you anything to take, to take him down to the dead Jap, to see this dead Jap. He just wanted to see it. Morbid or something I don't know, but he would've given us anything to go and see the dead Jap. They took him down and they had a look.

Do you know what they got for it?

Oh they would have got, I don't know, dollars probably.

You

- 16:30 **mentioned before how you felt that a lot of the campaign was a bit useless because it was quite unnecessary, because of the unnecessary casualties. Did you, was that, did you feel that at the time?**

Well we knew it was happening and we knew the Japs weren't going anywhere. And we weren't gonna save Australia by...

- 17:00 But I've read the war histories and everything and they said the militia battalions, they fought just as well as any AIF battalion. They just, I don't know, that aggressive spirit that they, they were a bit browned off at the finish I think. When they said we're gonna go into action again I don't know how we would have stood it. Because we got a few reinforcements come up from Australia but we were still under strength.

- 17:30 And would have been terrible to go down to Buin and those places where the Japs were really thick.

Was there much talk about it, about how unnecessary it sorta was?

Yeah, oh not all that much but it was mentioned you know at times. People wondered what we're doing here and. Why can't we stop in Torokina and have a good time.

18:00 I don't know the mood was you know sort of the battalions going into action. You, it's so, like a big family the infantry battalion. You're so closely knit. You know the, each company represent, respect each other. And in platoons they, with your friends, as I said before, I didn't want to go into action but I didn't want to get left behind from me mates, I just wanted to go with them even though it was horrible. So,

18:30 I think that'd be a lot hard to do with it. You were going so you put your heart and soul into it. Did the very best you can. Yeah.

You mentioned that overall it's kinda combined with a lot of sort of waiting around and non action too, and a few moments of concentrated action. Forgive me for asking, but what was

19:00 **I guess kind of one of the worst kind of experiences that you went through. Just in terms of I guess dealing with the Japanese, or battle in general for you?**

I think the very worst, the ambush was bad but I was doing something. But the most horrible part I found was just sitting in the pit with the bullets going over your head. Wondering what was gonna happen and

19:30 how much longer you could hold out you know with the. Used to wonder such things as if you got killed will they, Japs just leave me there or will they bury me or, will they cover me over with dirt or what will they do. And for that reason, even though I was terrified I tried to compose me face so when I did die, if I did, that the Japs wouldn't think I was

20:00 scared. So even though I was terrified, I had that much pride to try and control me face. So I don't know what looking scared is really like. I suppose, your eye balls sorta stick out a bit, and face goes pale, but I tried to compose meself. But yeah putting so much thought into that I think. But those times of terror

20:30 and extreme hardship were so much outweighed by the fun I had and the pleasure I got. All the lovely memories. I remember the hard parts too but with a bit of pride and. Often at a concert I'm bored you know the music and something, I like the music and everything, but me mind drifts back to when I was in battle and, sort of take a pride in thinking of the things

21:00 that I did and what I, how I felt and how I reacted to things. I suppose I see meself in a better light than I actually was. But in your imagination you're, I was a pretty good soldier.

I don't know, m you made it through. That's pretty good.

21:30 **You mentioned before just how morale would sort of go up and down at various times.**

Yeah.

How would you as a unit kind of I guess deal with, I guess some of the harder moments after battle or...?

Yeah. Oh you'd do a terrific lot of talking.

22:00 They reckon, well after our first action at Tsimba Ridge and we got back to Torokina, they first wanted back to have a battalion parade. And they told me that the Pioneers do that and the Duke of Wellington after the Battle of Waterloo the British Army won the most glorious victory of all time. But he made his soldiers parade the next morning to let them know they were still only soldiers. Even though they were heroes

22:30 he wouldn't let them think that. He, they had, I think that must have been part of their thinking. They went parade, full battalion parade which is a bit of hard work. With inspections and the whole lot and presenting arms and all the rest of it. And a bloke came to the parade and said what a good job we'd done, we'd beaten the Japanese and we'd also beaten disease cause they hadn't evacuated anybody sick. So that was that.

23:00 But after the third time we were so exhausted that even the officers wouldn't wanna parade. We just sorta, more or less collapsed in our tents and, few days we were non compos [non compos mentis - irrational], going round sort of dazed. So, but your contrast from being up at the front and back at Torokina was, oh it was so, such a marvellous contrast you know. Bit like

23:30 you're in dream world.

And what sort of things would you talk about with your mates on those sort of days?

You'd talk about the war a lot. We used to get a bit of news from Europe. You know the, in May the European War finished. And we thought oh gee, they'll be able to come out and help us now. Course we had no idea the war was gonna finish. We thought

24:00 the English'd be coming out in droves. But we knew that the British fleet was out here. A lot of the fleet was here and we'd heard a lot of Spitfires and things around here. No we talked about the war in

Europe. But we, mostly local things, about our CO and our officers and we'd talk about the blokes that won medals. And

24:30 you know, how good they were, all our experiences. We talked and talked and talked. We still do I suppose on Anzac Day. Although we don't talk about the war so much now, we talk about arthritis pills and walking sticks and that sort of stuff.

I think you touched on this with Isabel [interviewer] before but was there a moment in all of your battle experience, or

25:00 **through that time that stands out as a really proud moment or really...?**

Yeah well I can, that time when I fired those sixty mortar bombs, I was standing up, exposed. And they told me a Jap came across our, the edge of the perimeter and looked at me and he disappeared again before they could shoot him. But there's a lot of bullets whistling round, not whistling round but crackling around. And

25:30 yeah, to fire the mortar you had to stand up so I's exposed from me waist up. And I didn't think about that I was sorta, I thought I was gonna die anyway so I just wanted to die sorta getting me own back. So I was firing and. Sounds strange but I felt really good for a while. You know, I suppose the fighting madness in me and I didn't care about anything except firing those

26:00 mortar bombs. I wasn't much chop after it, after we stopped firing. I was a, went back to me normal self I suppose. Just a timid little soldier. For a while I was like a lion, you know I was, I was really fighting the Japanese. That's when Billy Heals said Sonny was the best soldier of us all.

26:30 But you, if I told him now he said that, he wouldn't believe me.

On any of the patrols that you did, did you ever come across any stray Japanese that were suffering from lack of supply lines?

No. Some of the patrols up in Numa Numa did, but I wasn't on any of those but.

27:00 They found that they were sort of very poor condition. And one of their messes they found that they were eating the bamboo shoots. I often wonder whether it was a, might have been a luxury, cause I was in a shop once when I saw on a shelf, bamboo shoots. I thought oh gee they mightn't have been starving at all, they might have been having a luxurious mess. But oh no that's

27:30 no, I don't think they really were starved up there. Down the flats they had gardens going. And they had plenty of veggies and they, good fishermen, they had plenty of fish. The ones we saw that were dead were always, they weren't skinny at all. They were very well built and strong.

So they'd died in battle?

Yeah.

28:00 **What was it, you mentioned before that for the most part, you hardly ever saw the Japanese because of the jungle and everything else. Can you I guess what it was like fighting an enemy like that. Or, like on your forward patrols, I mean...**

Yeah

like an example of what might have how, what might have happened?

Well,

28:30 patrolling's terrible, cause you had no idea, anybody could lay an ambush so easily. It just a matter of luck you know the. Often the Japs would let the patrols through and just pick off the last couple. But we lost a whole lot of people on patrols. The,

29:00 as I said before the, all our ideas of fighter patrols was out of the question up at, after Porton, cause I was strictly on defensive. Only patrols we did was sorta little ones in between the platoons to try and keep the lines of communication open. Our supply trains were getting ambushed daily. And I never got hungry but the food was very

29:30 short. And yeah. Oh it's just so generally oppressive the jungle you know. If you go to a jungle now it's great fun to walk along a well made track and glory in the mother nature. But then you're closed in and the tracks were always skinny and the vines'd sorta catch on your clothing. And you'd have to,

30:00 you're rifle'd sorta get in the road. You'd have to untangle it from bushes. And you just couldn't get, you could get off the track but you couldn't make much progress cause the jungle was so thick. You know you almost had to stop to the track, even though it was so dangerous. There's no guarantee because you'd driven the Japs away from one area that they couldn't come round behind you. Because there was no set

30:30 line like a first row of trenches is nothing like that, it was little isolated perimeters dotted over the jungle. So, well communication was the hardest part. We had these field telephones. But in fact you had

the sig wire. The little tin sig wire'd go for miles. No, was a

31:00 it nothing like a set piece battle like a general sorta commanding his troops. It was up to the mainly the corporals. They called it the Corporal War. They ran the perimeters; they ran the whole show really. And they were mighty. Looking back you wonder how they were so good at such a young age. You know they were only

31:30 twenty, twenty-five, twenty-three, twenty-four. But they were so competent. And they knew what they were doing. And this Kelso-Knight I was talking about, our Lieutenant Knight, he was a wonderful soldier. He gave that sort of confidence, you know you, some officers would, you know you wouldn't trust them or you, nothing wrong with them but you just didn't have that

32:00 final confidence. But with Kelso you'd go anywhere with him, and you'd do anything to try and get his good opinion. So yeah the jungle was a, I hated the jungle more than anything.

Would, I mean if you did run into some Japanese,

32:30 **and would you have, would the jungle itself become as much an obstacle ...**

Oh sure yeah.

as taking cover? Things like I don't know just jungle vines, insects, all that kind of stuff?

Yeah. We were taught at Canungra you know, if you got ambushed one section'd go right and another'd go left and sorta try and get round the first ambushing. But it didn't work out in practice, it was just a matter of luck really. You could fire,

33:00 chuck hand grenades back and fire back but didn't know exactly what you were firing at or if they were still there or what. So, they reckon it's a lot safer in the jungle than it was out in the open. Like in the Middle East, those places, lot less casualties but mentally it was a lot harder. Cause you're sort of groping in the dark all the time. Don't know exactly where you were going or why you were

33:30 going or what was there or who was there. And your imagination's so vivid, you know you imagine things that couldn't possibly be there. Yes.

Can you give us an example of that in terms of Japanese or...?

Oh I should, couldn't possibly

34:00 but it's hard, so hard to find your way round. Like you had to stick to a track. And even a compass'd be no good to you. Cause a compass is only good if you've got a landmark, but in the jungle there was no landmarks. And no I just can't actually explain the jungle but. You wouldn't know where the

34:30 attack was gonna come from. So that was the worst part of it. Yeah I just can't...

I can't imagine, it must have been horrible.

Yeah, wonder I'm still sane.

35:00 **I think you're doing very well. Were there any other things that you were I guess that you found out in the jungle that I guess that Canungra didn't prepare you for?**

No it

35:30 was pretty legitimate, Canungra was. They told us what to expect and everything. And worked out very much like in practise. Except when you were training, you knew there were blokes out there pretending to be the enemy and so you knew that it was there. But in the jungle itself you didn't know, just didn't know who was there or. You knew it must have been there cause at times you could

36:00 hear them. And they were firing and shooting and that sort of stuff so they were there. But yeah they were completely invisible. Yeah.

I've heard from a lot of fellas about, and both particularly by this stage after everything, that everybody knew about the Japanese and that no prisoners would be taken. Was that the same?

Yeah. Well we

36:30 presumed it was. They, lot of our fellas went missing. Not a lot but five or six went missing and they never turned up again. They went out on patrol and didn't come back. So whatever happened to them, nobody ever knows. Nobody'll ever know. So.

37:00 It's always wanna, hard to be by myself, there's always another big, there's always somebody with you. That was a terrific comfort and you thought they were pretty good so. That was that. They, you couldn't do it by yourself.

Were you or other fellas in your unit, ever requested

37:30 **to take Japanese prisoners?**

No, not personally but the CO did ask, he wanted one prisoner or two prisoners before Tsimba Ridge to cross examine them I suppose. But they never got any. Any Japs they got either committed suicide or just wouldn't move you know so they'd shoot him.

38:00 Cause you're all the way out in the jungle on a patrol and you got a Jap with you, just too hard to bring him back. I suppose it is possible but the natives got a few, the Papuans they certainly got a few. I never saw them meself but sometimes they told lies the Japs, when they were caught, they didn't give very

38:30 good information. This is only hearsay now, I don't, nothing, I don't know from personal experience. But a Jap doctor did surrender up at Numa Numa. And he gave himself a much higher rank than he actually was. And he told lies apparently. They tried to persuade them after Numa Numa

39:00 which was a strange battle, cause they had, used to set up loud speakers on tops of some of the hills and broadcast, send a little Japanese music. And surrender and come in we'll feed you and look after you. We'll feed you well and you'll be able to go back to Japan. But not one Japanese came out from those. Psychological Warfare I think they call it.

39:30 Not one Japanese as far as I know ever surrendered.

It wasn't too effective then.

They tell me one Jap did pop out of the jungle and waved the Japanese flag to the blokes with the broadcast unit. Then he popped back in the jungle again. But that once again that's only hearsay, I didn't see it meself. It's probably true though. I know the loudspeakers were.

40:00 **Okay we'll hold it there Colin.**

Tape 9

00:33 **Colin you were, you told us earlier about when you heard about the end of the war. Did the Japanese surrender straight away, was...?**

Yeah. I believe there was no trouble at all, not in Bougainville anyway. I know they do what they were told and the Japanese Emperor said that the war was over so that was it.

01:00 They had bit of trouble getting the word to some of the outlying units, like the Japanese were sort of scattered round the islands and the place. And some of the units I believe they didn't believe it, that the allies were telling the truth that the war was over. But they very soon laid down their arms and they came in. They seemed relieved as well. Yeah. You heard stories

01:30 years after the war that some Japanese hadn't surrendered, they were still fighting on in the Philippines and places like that. So takes all sorts to make a world I suppose. There could be, could be some still there.

I've heard people, when they heard about the atom bomb, just couldn't believe that a bomb like that could exist.

Yeah.

02:00 Well we believed it cause it happened you know. Well the general reaction was relief but we still didn't like the fact that so many civilians had been killed you know. So it was a mixed reaction even though the relief was so tremendous. Apparently the atom bomb wasn't the worst

02:30 that the Americans had done. They'd fire bombed Tokyo with, killed hundreds of thousands, just with the fire bombs. So those Americans with their weapons of mass destruction, they've soon led the way haven't they.

Can you tell me, you mentioned briefly your coming home?

Yeah that was great up to a point. And I felt

03:00 sorta let down you know. Parents didn't seem very interested in what I'd done. And so consequently you couldn't tell them. Me brother certainly didn't want to hear any war stories. No it was a funny feeling, sorta empty sorta feeling. I'd convinced meself that I was very tired you know. I just moped around till I went to Teachers College.

03:30 Then I really came to life again. No the end of the war was a strange time. That joyous day of coming home and the Sydney Harbour, I can still think of it. All the ferries going cock-a-doodle-doo-. And the crowd waving on the wharf and the band playing. You feel as though you're really hero, a great hero.

04:00 But trouble is, nobody else thinks so.

How hard was it I guess to settle in to civilian life?

Most difficult. It was much more comfortable. I had a bed and had plenty of water to shower and everything. You could drink as what you liked. It seemed as,

- 04:30 oh I just longed to get back to, I would have loved to gone back to me battalion so. Not to fight but just to have the pleasure of being with people like meself. At Clifton Gardens I was there, I always liked being a soldier. But it was a different sort of atmosphere, they'd been there all the war you know. And we had ribbons on and we'd sort of swank around the place, and
- 05:00 they sorta respected us. But, and they left us alone, they, it was easy life down there too. Just didn't feel right, didn't feel like a real soldier anymore. But looking back on Clifton Gardens, they used to, they tried everything, I was only ever a
- 05:30 private. And the hardest thing an officer can do is reduce you in ranks so I was already down the bottom so I couldn't be reduced any further. So I didn't mind annoying the officers cause they couldn't do anything. Yeah. Just supposed to guard these boats at night time and I don't know if you know Clifton Gardens or not. But there's a big long jetty goes out where the swimming pool is. And
- 06:00 used to have all these little launches and barges tied up outside there. And when you're on guard you're supposed to go out the end and, which I did do, I used to go out and have a snooze. This officer came out one night and he must have been a bit scared, cause he wouldn't come the whole way out. And the next morning he said, "You weren't out there."
- 06:30 I said, "Yes I was I was out there all night." And he said, "Well I came half way along the wharf and I couldn't see you. And I even whistled." But I would have slept through the whole lot. He was real cranky with me but he couldn't do anything. He couldn't actually say he'd been out the end of the wharf to see me asleep. Then they put you on
- 07:00 subsistence pay. You could take a choice; you could still eat at the mess, at the camp. Or you get three shillings a day and you'd feed yourself. I took the three shillings cause it was a fair bit of money. And I used to get into the cookhouse at night time when I was on guard and great big fuel stoves there. And I used to slice up big loaves of bread. And I'd feed meself at government
- 07:30 expense, all these lovely toast. I used to toast it on the oven. Have a real feast. I ate so much toast, I couldn't hardly move. But they did get their own back in one little way. Cause when you're been in the army about six months, they'd give you a test to see if you were a proficient soldier. And if you were a proficient soldier you got sixpence a day extra.
- 08:00 I just noticed in the, the other day I was going through my Record of Service, and the last few weeks at Clifton Gardens, I saw in me pay book, that proficiency pay had been removed. They didn't tell me they were doing it but I was getting sixpence a day less than I should have been getting. Cause I wasn't proficient any longer. But
- 08:30 no at Clifton Gardens, had a tennis court there and billiards, old dance hall where they had billiard tables, oh it was a wonderful place.

I've heard at the end of the war that, while people were relieved, there was also a lot of worry about what you'd do, you know?

Oh sure yeah. I thought I was unemployable. When I was in the islands I wondered what sort of job I'd get when I got back to Australia.

- 09:00 But there was full employment pretty soon afterwards. As I said I went to Teachers College so I had no worries that way. But a lot of blokes just went from job to job. They had no trouble getting a job. There was preference for ex servicemen but. No it was a funny time cause there was a lot of shortages still. You couldn't
- 09:30 buy many clothing, still had coupons. Lot of food was rationed. And so it wasn't a real nice time. But least we were still alive and had the prospects of getting out of the army and getting a job.

Did you see, could you see your mates that you'd spent time with?

No. Most of them were Queenslanders and

- 10:00 I came back on the Maru by meself. It was a troop ship full but I didn't know anybody. I got a few mates, nothing like the ones in our battalion, but I got friendly with quite a few people in Clifton Gardens. Used to go up to the little, before it burned down, Clifton Gardens Hotel and have a drink there. But was a lovely little, hole in the wall they call it. It was great.
- 10:30 And I always wanted to be, I used to, when I was a boy I used to go outside dance halls and look inside and everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves so. Me mate and I, we, there was a dance studio down at Cremorne Junction. Near the old Orpheum Theatre. And every night I could, I used to go down there and, you'd pay two shillings and the girls'd teach you to dance you know. They'd hold you by the shoulders and push you round the dance floor. Only

11:00 jazz, waltz, quick step, the fox trot, that was about all they taught you. My proudest moment of me life was when I'd graduated through all the holding with the shoulders. And Percy Jupp was in charge of the thing. He said you can hold the girl the proper way now. And I thought it was Christmas cause we were actually holding a girl in the right, proper stance you know. Used to love it.

11:30 Yeah.

Did you ever, you mentioned before the girl that sent you the letter while you were away. Did you ever see her again?

Yeah, she broke off her engagement. She, I had a feeling she would have liked to have me back but I didn't jump at, I didn't take the opportunity. And I'm pleased now. As I said I knew I had a

12:00 true mate in Jimmy Parsons cause he was crying. So I've only got a very hazy idea of what the girl looks like. But I've got a very clear recollection of what Jimmy Parsons looked like.

It's such a beautiful image.

He's the man from Julia Creek. So proud of Julia Creek. It was worse than Hay or one of those little west

12:30 country towns we got in New South Wales, it was terrible. I went to the Post Office and asked if there was anybody called Parsons there, cause I knew he'd left Julia Creek. He was the Clerk of Petty Sessions after the war. I knew he'd left Julia Creek. But when I went there I went to the Post Office and said are there any, I thought the family might be still there, any Parsons there. But there weren't any Parsons there. So

13:00 we used to write to each other occasionally, Jimmy. But we were sorta stuck down here in New South Wales, and we hardly ever got to Queensland, of course we didn't travel much in those days. And Jimmy died oh about fifteen years ago. Major Collis he died about the same time I suppose. Just Frankie Rolls left. Plus quite a few other ones that,

13:30 I know we have a brigade reunion, and another one coming up in July we're going up to. But that's great to go back to those reunions. And one of the organisers, a fella called Dick Tellamears, he was in my platoon. He was a corporal. And this is another sorta half funny story. He had been up a couple of days, and he

14:00 came to our pit and his testicles had swollen up like these big emu eggs you know. If it happened now he would've been terrified. But he was so proud of the fact. He said, "Look when the doctor comes up, he'll send me back." which he did do. And he's like he was carrying the Melbourne Cup round. You know they were big and swollen like, they were huge. He had some tropical disease and he got evacuated. As he knew he would be. And

14:30 I often talk to him about that of how proud he was of his swollen testicles. He was like treating them like a trophy. Every time I go to the reunion I see him and talk about that. He doesn't say that. He says he got an infection of the testicles he said. Didn't stop him having a family, he had three or four kids.

You,

15:00 **you spoke earlier to day about I guess how much you wanted to be a soldier.**

Yeah.

Did it live up to your expectations?

Oh yes it was marvellous. I loved marching, I loved parading, loved doing rifle drill and all those things. Big brigade parade, the whole brigade, does things in unison. Like they, from they order arms, they slope arms then you present arms. And

15:30 you take pride in slapping your rifle. The belt comes down over the magazine and the whole brigade would be snap, snap, snap. And you'd put your leg behind the other one and present arms. Marvellous sound you know. Just thump, thump, thump, all in unison. Oh I loved being a soldier.

When you reflect over your experience during the

16:00 **war, and your experiences in the army, do you consider it to have been a positive or a...?**

Oh positive yes. I just couldn't imagine what I would have been without it. I joined the RSL Club and I, you know became President of that. Ex Services Club and I became President of that. Life member of both. And without that army experience I wouldn't have had the confidence to do anything.

16:30 I don't know what I would've been. But I enjoyed it so much I told both my sons about how, what a good time I had and I didn't he want to be an officer. And my eldest son joined the 17th Battalion Militia. And he did become a corporal. I told him not to but he did. But he was a really good soldier. And my other son

17:00 he joined when he went up to Katherine, Northern Territory joined NorForce. I don't know if you've heard of it or not but they do a lot of surveillance work up there in the Northern Territory. So both my sons were soldiers. And now my grandson, he's joined reserves too. He's in the engineer unit out at

Penrith. He might be, he's a different type to the rest of us, he might become an officer, I don't know. He got those sort of

17:30 grand ideas. Not that I dislike officers at all you know. Some I hated but most of them they were marvellous. They take that responsibility. Especially our CO, Colonel Kelly. It still amuses Robyn, I, every time I, how he said you've gotta shave even if you close to the enemy, you gotta keep your respect by

18:00 being clean and. If I have a day off at all I say, "Oh gee will I shave or not?" I say, "Colonel Kelly would like me to shave." So. I've axed it a few times but usually I have a shave. Yeah, Colonel Kelly, he would've only been forty-five or so. You think that's young now but he, he was a marvellous

18:30 soldier. When we first, I didn't go to Anzac Day for a few years but the first Anzac Day I went, I was told where to meet and everything. And being different, I didn't know whether they'd know me or you know have any regard for me at all. But the CO, he didn't stop with us, but he was there when I arrived at the corner of George Street and Barrack Street.

19:00 And the CO as soon as he saw me he said, "I know that face." So you know it made me feel really great that the CO would recognise me. Yeah.

How long after the war did you start marching in Anzac Day marches?

Would have been oh about five years or so. I thought it was just for Anzacs in World War I you know I didn't realise for a couple of years that

19:30 I was entitled to march too. Then I was out in the country for a while you know, then in Scotland. I've been a regular ever since. I wouldn't miss it for anything.

Can you describe that first march that you went in?

Yes, oh well we started near the library, up, in those days, today the march just goes down a little bit of Martin Place. But that day was a

20:00 beautiful sunny day and I got to the top of Forest Street and looked down Martin Place and it was just a sea of people. And once again I felt wonderful you know. I felt a bit as though I shouldn't be there as though I hadn't done anything. But the crowd sort of cheering and clapping and oh. It's a sensation you just can't believe. Ah yes you get a bit above yourself at times don't you?

20:30 Then to talk and have a drink with the blokes. You know I was, just a, thing you wouldn't, you couldn't do without, you, just so much a part of your life.

What does, I mean to a returned serviceman, what does Anzac Day mean?

21:00 Ooh, well you, the official version is you sort of think about the fallen and that sort of stuff. But that hardly crosses your mind, not my mind anyway. You regret all the fallen, all the thousands and thousands that have fallen. But you're so pleased to be a survivor and you're grateful to em because without them

21:30 having died at Gallipoli and those things, there wouldn't be any Anzac Day . But I just look forward to the companionship and the, no deep patriotic sentiments at all. I suppose I'm patriotic up to that extent. Yeah. I wish there was an Anzac Day every week.

I mean how did your time in the army change you, or did it change you?

I'm basically, I've never been very aggressive at all and I've never been aggressive since. Just like being alive. It's a wonderful thing. And when you nearly lost it you realise how sweet is it, you don't need drugs, you don't need anything to make it better.

22:30 Just being alive's a marvellous sensation. Just like, I suppose when you just come through a serious illness, you're still alive. You realise then that life's so precious. Yeah. I don't think, I couldn't add much to that.

23:00 Yeah.

I wonder, given that you've had two sons and a grandson in service, is there any advice you'd give, especially your grandson if he came to you and said I want to go to war?

Yeah, oh well, I'd say you know just do what you're supposed to do and go. But I did write to me grandson

23:30 when he was at Kapooka doing that six weeks recruit course. Pretty hard time. I wrote to him and said just keep your head down, don't do. Just do what you're told and don't try and be smart or anything. Just do what you're told and you'll be fine. He, lovely thing, the day he had a big parade, graduate. And all the relatives and everything went up to the mess and he

24:00 he bought me a bottle of Crown Lager. I just couldn't believe it you know. Cause when he's a boy, he's a little wimpy sorta kid. He couldn't wait to buy me a bottle of beer. I didn't actually want it at the time but I pretended it was wonderful. So,

24:30 yeah. I told me, something I said, told me son don't become an officer, just stay in the ranks and you'll have a good time. He was good enough to be an officer, they all wanted him to go to Op Two and become an officer. But he resisted it. I don't know whether I did the right thing by him or not. But he could have been an officer easily and.

25:00 I think his wife would have liked him to been one. But, another thing, he sorta respect for me and he took my advice, he stopped in the ranks.

That's lovely, thank you Colin. Before we finish, is there anything you'd like to add, is there anything we haven't covered?

No.

Any final words?

You've been very thorough as far as I can....

25:30 I often think about things but I didn't realise how much I did know. The story about those flies coming out the side of the pit, I hadn't thought about that for years. Just sorta popped into me mind you know. But no I'm so pleased that you picked me out to talk to, it's been a great day.

Excellent,

26:00 **we've had a great day too, thank you Colin.**

Thanks.