

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Donald Parncutt (Don) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/514>

### Tape 1

00:41 **Well Mr Parncutt, we will begin at the beginning and I'll ask where were you born?**

I was born in Hawthorn East, well you're not from this part of the world. Well, Hawthorn is about five and half miles east of the city of Melbourne and I was born in a street near the Camberwell Junction.

01:00 It was quite a centre then but it's a very busy place now, and I was born in the house where I was brought up.

**Did a doctor come to the house or a midwife?**

There was a midwife came to the house and I think the doctor may have come at some stage, because they talked about the doctor there. It is a bit hard to remember that in great detail.

01:30 **You were a bit young?**

Yeah

**So tell me about your family?**

Well my father was in the First World War as a soldier and three of his brothers went with him and they all got a little bit knocked about in that war and he worked as, he was a trade of a boilermaker and he added to that and became a welder.

02:00 In his very young days he worked in the shipyards, there were shipyards in Williamstown I think it was but in all my growing up he was an employee of the Victorian Railways and he worked in, it's not there now, there is a great tennis centre there now, but there was a rail workshops there, as a welder mainly. So he was working through the Depression years when in those bad days even some of his colleagues were stood down a couple of days a week

02:30 and things like that, but because he had two trades he was employed for five days a week so the Parncutts were comparatively well off to some other people, and even I went to the Camberwell State School which was just the other side of the Camberwell Junction but it was in a different suburb, but it was only a walk to school and as a kid you would cross the Camberwell Junction going to school which if you tried to do it on foot now you would be killed, it was so different, years ago.

03:00 Well my father worked and paid off his house and things like that. I mention the Camberwell school because in the Depression days there were even kids in a good suburb like Camberwell coming to school in rags. There was a free hand out of milk for kids whose parents were out of work and all that sort of thing. So quite often you talk to earlier generations, like my children,

03:30 about the Depression days and they look at you in disbelief in a way because they were fairly tough times for a lot of people. My mother came from a family where her father had been a coach builder and he had a business in Richmond which was quite a business. He employed a few people, they were by the standards of the time, reasonably well off people. My grandfather was the first person to buy a motorcar in Richmond so history tells us.

04:00 But however, my childhood was against a background of poor circumstances in most cases but in our case we managed to get through reasonably well, and I went to Melbourne High School when I got up to what ever age it was, fourteen or fifteen or something like that. So I left school when I was just under sixteen and went to work.

04:30 Is that a fair background to the childhood do you think? I had a sister by the way, she was important to me too. There was just the two of us.

**Absolutely, just you and your sister. Are you older or younger?**

I was younger. My sister died about ten years ago she was three years older than me.

**I'd like to ask you a little bit more about your growing up years if that's okay. What did you hear about the First World War from your father and uncles?**

- 05:00 Well, I think it's rather a noticeable thing that ex-servicemen don't tend to talk about wars. I've often wondered why. In lots of cases there were hardships that aren't the sorts of things that you feel like talking about. I think also it was a thing in your life where you became regimented for a few years and you lost your identity in a way, it might have been heroic even but you were still not your own true self.
- 05:30 And as soon as the thing was finished you threw those old uniforms away and you never looked back on it, and I think my father and his brothers were rather like that too. That was it, they wanted to come back to a normal life but occasionally they would talk about things and you realise that life in the trenches in France was a pretty horrendous sort of affair. You know they lived in filth, and I remember the old man talking about being on leave in Amiens
- 06:00 or Ypres, one of those places in France where they set up a whole lot of old wine vats and filled them up with hot water, and everyone got in these wooden tubs and had a bath for the first time, and some of the guys in the trenches had lived in such damp and freezing conditions that they started to get gangrenous feet and all sorts of horrible things. One of my uncles had his arm shot off.
- 06:30 And the family story was that Uncle Arthur wouldn't have survived other than he had a bottle of rum and he lay in the snow nearly frozen to death but the rum kept him a little bit alive, and then the Germans picked him up and he was a prisoner and he was traded back for one of their prisoners a few months later, back to England, but he lost his arm but the German medical people stitched him up you know, and another uncle remained in the permanent army
- 07:00 in peace time and he was a warrant officer. He was in charge of the barracks down at Point Nepean, which is now a subject of some interest because the Government are talking about selling it, but it was off limits to anybody else. There was what they call a quarantine station at Portsea where incoming visitors to Australia, if they had any medical problems
- 07:30 were put in quarantine before they were allowed into the country, but once you got past the quarantine station the territory was purely army and uncle was in charge of that. The other brother, my father was one of nine surviving children. I think there were a couple who'd died, and his parents came out from England on a sailing ship in 1870 something, the other uncle who went to the war got gassed and he died and didn't have a very comfortable life,
- 08:00 and only lived till he was fifty-nine. So the effect of the First World War if you start looking into it is there and very much part of your childhood. Even though perhaps they didn't talk a lot about what happened you gleaned a lot of what did happen by, you know, the little bits I have told you there.

**Absolutely, you would have been aware, with your uncle not having an arm and your other uncle having been gassed, aware of the pains and traumas of war?**

Yeah my own father had some disabilities which finally took him off.

- 08:30 He became classified as a TPI, a totally permanently incapacitated soldier. I think he had been in a trench where a bomb blew them all up but he didn't actually get anything penetrating his body but it damaged his ear drums and gave him spinal conditions and all sorts of things you know. So the truth of the matter is the war did have quite an influence on your childhood.
- 09:00 I think I grew up knowing that I was going to go to a war. I can't explain that but I always had that feeling as a child that when I grew up I would go to war.

**It just seemed like what grown men had to do?**

I think that's probably it, Dad and three of his brothers is a fairly powerful influence surrounding you.

**Was there much talk of what was going on in Germany and the dangers of a Second World War coming on?**

- 09:30 That's rather a good question, I think we were rather conscious of it, in the sense that everybody had heard of Adolph Hitler and furthermore we were slightly aware of the Japanese being at war with China which they were pretty well right throughout the thirties but the prominent thing was, I think, what was happening in Europe, we saw more of that and Hitler did publish a book called Mein Kampf
- 10:00 which means 'My Struggle' and that had a lot of notoriety. I must get a copy, I have never read it. I've got quite a lot of books about Germany's part in the game but the German people were just like us really, but the things that happened Nazi Germany as we all know from the history books now were starting to change a lot of things for just ordinary folk. And when I got to Melbourne High School we had quite a few German boys
- 10:30 and I guess they would have been from Jewish people, I never thought of whether they were Jewish, or what they were, they were just German boys. I was learning German in one of the classes and so we used to try and talk in their language to them. I was once top of the class in German and there was a kid top of the class in English who was a German boy. So we were conscious of those influences because of the refugees that were

11:00 around us and we had quite a few conversations with people like that. And I think by the time you get to 1939 or '40 the fact that war was announced was no surprise, I have that feeling. I remember being at my grandmother's house and we listened to Sir Robert Menzies say it was his, "Melancholy duty," and I remember being a kid of about fourteen and full of information about what the Germans

11:30 were going to do. I could see the old man thinking, "God it's all on again," you know. So that would be a bit scary and I remember one of my children came home in a soldier's uniform when he joined the school cadets and it nearly frightened the life out of me, seriously, to see one of your babies in a soldier's uniform. So that when I started to talk about enlisting this would have stirred my father up quite a bit.

12:00 **So you were just a boy of about fourteen maybe fifteen when the war actually started.**

Oh fourteen, so, I just didn't take much notice of it. It was that age and you went to school and then you went to work and when I was seventeen I went to join the navy because that was the thing to do, and my father, that really got him going, he just wouldn't sign the papers.

12:30 If you look at a kid of seventeen now it's a very young age you know to go to war, and a colleague of mine, where I worked joined the navy when he was seventeen, he was under the deck of the Australia or one of those big ships, when the Japanese suicide bombers dived on it and he lost half his face and never looked the same again, pretty scary stuff.

**So you wanted to join the navy but your father said no.**

13:00 I did actually join it. I went down and signed it all up and gave my father the papers for his consent which he wouldn't give. I won't put on tape what he said but he was pretty serious, but that brought him to realise that sooner or later I was going to be drawn in to something, and we had a neighbour, an older person than me, a neighbour nearly the old man's age

13:30 who had taken an administrative position in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and he was down at the St. Kilda Road barracks in some rather senior job. I don't know, I have worked it out that my father probably got a clue from him as to what was a good mustering for me to be in. My mother would have resisted any attempt to fly aeroplanes which I would have liked to have done as a kid. I said I wanted to be a pilot. So I had the sort of parentage who were terribly protective,

14:00 and that was the reason I became a radar operator.

**So they just really felt that was going to be a safer option?**

I think they had seen all this First World War stuff and it was so vivid, it was only twenty years before, now if we were talking about something happening in 1983 you'd say, "Oh that's not very long ago," so it was twenty years after the last one that they started the Second World War.

**So did you keep up with a lot of the news of the war and what was happening in the different services during those early war years?**

14:30 No I didn't, I was more interested in where I was working at the time and I was getting to the age where I was starting to take girls out to the pictures and dances and so on. The war was there and it was just something that you read about in the paper. I'll have to admit to that but I think that's just being a seventeen year old.

**Did you get the sense that your parents and aunts and uncles were attending quite closely to the news?**

15:00 My father certainly was, listening to the news and what was happening was more important than anything else to him. He'd listen to the news, turn the wireless on. Oh no, to all the adults of that time there would be no question that the war was an inescapable fact, probably rather terrifying because the Japanese were so close to Australia.

15:30 I think there was talk at the time about the Brisbane Line, a line across Australia about the latitude of Brisbane that we might cede to the Japanese rather than try and fight them. There were a lot of things that were happening that didn't get into the news for security reasons, like Darwin was bombed far more than Pearl Harbour which was a terrible thing but Darwin was really given a tremendous pounding by the Japanese air force.

16:00 So that those things were happening, and as I say to people who had lived through the First World War, what they were hearing in the news was pretty frightening stuff.

**Do you remember that point at which Japan entered the war?**

Yes oh yes, well Pearl Harbour was December the 12th '41 I think. The Japanese had already infiltrated down through the islands.

16:30 When did we declare war on Japan? I can't remember the exact date we did that.

**You're right Pearl Harbour was December 7th '41. I was wondering was there was a strong sense of fear in the general community about invasion and about the sense that the Brisbane**

**line could be taken up to that point?**

- 17:00 I can't say. I'm just saying that I'm sure people of my father's generation would have had a sense of fear about it but I don't think I felt it really. I went to work and a lot of people who used to work where I worked had already joined the services so they would come in in their uniforms when they were on leave to say g'day to old friends so that, oh no you were very, very conscience of the fact that there was a war.
- 17:30 People who weren't going to war found themselves man-powered into industry or in to various services where they were useful, and it was pretty well total, it effected everybody, there was nobody getting out of it.

**What was it like in the terms of peer pressure from mates in terms of to join one of the services?**

I didn't experience much except from that fellow that joined the navy, and I was working sitting at the desk next to him and so I responded to what he did and went and joined myself, but it wasn't pressure so much from him except that he was saying that it was important, and at about the same time,

- 18:00 I've got an older cousin and I'm going to see him tomorrow, and he might be a candidate for your interviews. He is a couple of years older than me and when he joined up, and I remember him saying, "This is something that I've got to do," you can't shirk the issue. So he was an eighteen year old who said that to me when I was sixteen or seventeen.
- 18:30 So yes there would have been peer pressure. For instance I started work with the AMP [Australian Mutual Provident Society] in 1941, it wasn't exactly the first job that I did but it was the main of my career. A lot of the fellows that are good friends of mine now, if they are still alive, who were four or five years older than me and had been working in the AMP society say in 1935, '36, they all belonged to a militia unit.
- 19:00 They were training because the war was likely to be such a thing, and there was one senior member of AMP staff who had been a First World War man and involved in this sort of thing that encouraged the younger men to join the militia and they used to go on camps and train and meet regularly at parades and so on.
- 19:30 So there was quite a little bit, well more than a little bit, of awareness and some pressure on young men to get up and go on this thing you know.

**Do you remember any posters or campaigns in the public eye for enlisting?**

Like 'Your country needs you'? Not particularly, no I can't say I do, but there were advertisements for recruitment and that sort of thing.

- 20:00 But no it didn't really affect me a great deal. I suppose I wasn't in the habit of really reading the daily papers as a kid. You were getting up, you went to school or if you were starting work you had to, you know, so I think I was just a normal kid of seventeen or eighteen. What influenced me was what other kids were doing or said they had to do.
- 20:30 **That's pretty normal for that age. What effect did you notice rationing having early to middle part of the war, before you actually went away?**

Well that's a good question, I suppose rationing must have come in in the early forties. I don't remember at home being greatly affected by it at the time.

- 21:00 And it might have been that my parents having grown up through the Depression, like all other people of their generation were mainly fairly frugal especially by today's standards. If we today had that rationing imposed upon us now we'd faint away in horror probably, but after the Depression they could probably handle life on a rationed basis.
- 21:30 But what I do remember about rationing is when I was at that air force station in Geraldton we seemed to have an abundance of things. We used to get down to the beach and have barbecues and things when people at home were probably limited to a couple of sausages a week, and we would have a whole lot of them down on a barbecue and I don't know how we managed to be so well looked after but that was in contrast to going home on leave and hearing them talk about rationing.
- 22:00 We started to realise that we had been doing all right in that station in Geraldton, but other than that I don't remember a lot about rationing. Petrol rationing of course. A lot of people put their cars on blocks so that the wheels weren't touching the ground because they were going to leave them like that until they could buy petrol and they didn't use their cars, they just put them up on blocks. And the old man who had a few little English cars,
- 22:30 managed to buy a Chrysler Plymouth which was a beautiful car, it was in 1943, it's in some of these photos I've got somewhere and it was only a six or seven year old car which to him was as close to a new car as he'd had for quite a while, and he bought it for a hundred and ninety five pounds and at the end of the war when the rationing ceased he could have sold it for six hundred pounds.

23:00 When he did sell it a couple of years later he got four hundred and fifty, but that was the effect of the rationing of petrol. You'd see a lot of cars travelling around the streets with gas producers as they were called, which would be a bit of equipment, most of those old cars didn't have much in the way of trunks, the Americans would call it, but a boot on the back, and they'd have a frame out the back with this gear on it that cooked up

23:30 charcoal which produced a gas that they drove. I don't think the cars ran very efficiently on it but commercial vehicles that had to be on the road a lot used them, and there was a large frame on top of the car that had a huge gas bag on it full of some sort of gas that the car ran from.

**So there was this enormous bag of gas sitting in a frame on top of the car?**

24:00 Yeah. Like an overly large pack rack on top of the car with a bag of gas in it. And the other thing about cars was most of them had covers over the headlights with tiny little slits for just a bit of light to shine through because we were almost, well even in Australia we adopted black out conditions, and strange enough the Japanese were much closer to our capital cities than we ever knew at the time.

24:30 They did come into Sydney Harbour at one stage and sunk a ferry and killed some sailors. So black out conditions that's another topic, but you asked about rationing and peoples clothing of course, and they had to repair clothing and that sort of thing.

**Yeah it was very difficult to get enough coupons to get a particular item of clothing when things wore out you had to be very careful. Do you remember your mother**

25:00 **having particular tricks for working within the rations, like people traded the rations sometimes, coupons?**

No I don't think so, but with her and her sisters they probably did if they needed it. I remember my mother having ration books, seeing them in the top drawer of the dresser in the kitchen, that sort of thing.

25:30 I can't tell you if there was any special negotiations with them.

**Now what was that first job of yours like?**

Oh the very first job I went and worked for an authority called the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commission. My father would have preferred me to stay on at Melbourne High School for another year to do what was called the Leaving Certificate which is the year before VCE [Victorian Certificate of Education] these days but

26:00 it seemed to him, after a life time of bringing up kids in the Depression, that here was one of them going to get a job in a government department, see everybody's considerations were security you see, a steady job, a safe job, which it was, and I started work on one pound and threepence a week, which by the way I got a rise to one pound and nine pence because of something,

26:30 but my sister had been working in the AMP Society, which has come in to the news recently because it's in trouble, but it was the very most solid and extraordinary organisation in the country then, and my father had always wanted me to work there really and when I found out that the conditions where I was working weren't all that secure, not secure, they were quite secure but they weren't very well paid and the opportunities for advancement didn't seem to be all that extraordinary,

27:00 he renewed his efforts with a connection he had with AMP and despite the fact that I hadn't gone to that Leaving Certificate standard as it was called, which they wanted, I managed to pass an entrance exam with the next bunch of boys and because there were so many fellows had gone to the war, I got a job there, that was the reason. In normal peace time, my status, I wouldn't have got that job. So that was the first real job, that was my career then, the life insurance business

27:30 and I started in the AMP in July '41.

**And what kinds of things were you doing very early on in your career?**

Oh you would be the postage boy or something like that, ran messages for the cashier and deposited cheques and stuff, in the bank. And the AMP society, its basement was full of records and you would work down there and they would ring through on a little intercom thing

28:00 and ask you to bring up papers, you were that sort of kid but you progressed though a place like that to jobs where you had to do calculations and keep records and so on, and the other thing was you were required by them to pass the Insurance Institute examinations before you were twenty one or they could consider terminating the appointment but they did put the pressure on you to improve yourself which was pretty terrific.

**Where you located in the CBD [Central Business District] during this time?**

Oh yes in Market Street, Melbourne.

28:30 Market and Collins, corner. The building is still there but it's been a long time since it was AMP, it's a Heritage Trust building now that old AMP building.

**When you were in the CBD during those years were you seeing a lot of servicemen and what were your impressions of them?**

We actually had some of the servicemen in the upstairs part of the AMP building. Part of MacArthur's outfit was there,

29:00 and MacArthur took over some other buildings in Sydney, and oh yes there were servicemen in evidence anywhere you went.

**Did it feel like wartime to you as a result, had the war really hit home?**

No I don't think so at that age, no I was interested in what I was doing and you know, you're starting to take out girls and go to dances and all that sort of thing.

29:30 Yeah there was a war on and you knew that you would have to be in it one day, but you just went along without getting too upset about it or involved I think is a better word.

**What were your impressions of MacArthur and the Americans when they came into Melbourne?**

We accepted that they were a pretty smartly turned out looking lot of people. I would have only had impressions of looking up to them I would say,

30:00 but what an older citizen's point of view, it could be a different matter I suppose. I think broadly we accepted the Americans as allies and we were glad to see them.

**And in particular how was the response to MacArthur when he arrived?**

I don't remember any particular responses in the press. Oh no I think he was portrayed as a fairly heroic sort of character. You know, "I will return. "

30:30 And you felt with MacArthur there was a bloke who was going to do what he said, mind you that's the portrayal too, and when you would go to the movies the newsreels would be all that sort of stuff. We didn't have a television but we had visual portrayals which were propaganda for our side, and the Americans were portrayed well, and most of the films we saw were American productions anyway.

31:00 There were very few Australian films made in those days and of course in wartime there were quite a lot of films made that were of war themes, then there was a lot of British films too made that had war themes. But no, I feel generally speaking, I think the public accepted MacArthur and anyone with any sense would have accepted the fact that we needed those people. There was only seven million of us in those days against

31:30 the most powerful army in the world, the Japs. The Japs had the biggest navy in the world I read somewhere recently, incredible things. My father talked about the Americans in the First World War too you see. They came in 1917 or something, and I remember the old man saying they met up with a bunch of Yanks and they said, "Where's this God damn shootin' gallery?" and he said, "The poor buggers soon found out. "

32:00 No, but getting back to the early 1940s all I can say is I was a fairly, hopefully, a normal sort of kid, but you knew you would have to be in it sooner or later.

**There was a sense then that it wasn't going to be a short war?**

Oh yeah I think that sort of came out early, they declared war and then nothing really happened for the first few months and they gave it the expression the 'phoney war', but then when things started to

32:30 happen, when the Japanese were right down, we had that as well as what was happening in Europe and then when the Battle of Britain and the bombing and the Spitfires and all that, well you could see, well you could just sense that you were never going to get out of that in a hurry. There was no sudden end to that you know, it was just too serious.

33:00 The bombing raids in Great Britain, we saw plenty of that in our news reels, and the armada of aircraft from Germany that was coming over, you just wondered if you had a chance, and I suppose we just believed that we did and we did, but the fact that it was going to be a short war never entered my mind. It was just a matter of sooner or later you've got to be in this because it was going on and on and on.

**33:30 Can you tell me about those newsreels that could come on before the pictures?**

Well I suppose a newsreel might run for about half an hour and might have perhaps half a dozen segments in it so that, like any news media, it would have the big headline stuff at the beginning, which in those days would have been something from the European theatre of war,

34:00 and what the political leaders of the world were doing and so on, and there would be some items of sport with what sport there was, and there might be something of general social news like a bathing beauty parade or something and it would be interesting to get hold of. I have actually got some old newsreel footage in there somewhere that they put out on video

- 34:30 but it wasn't wartime, I've forgotten, but images of skies full of aeroplanes is one of things that lingers with you from the newsreels of those days.
- Of German aircraft in particular?**
- Oh yes coming over London and then later on the British Liberator bombers were featured quite a bit in some of the films that were made about bombing Germany
- 35:00 and of course those sorts of films went on after the war.
- Do you think people felt anxious upon seeing the news reels, was there a sense of that?**
- Oh yes I think now that we are in that sort of area and think about it, as a kid I felt a bit anxious myself. What happens if we don't win this thing?
- 35:30 **Certainly in the early years of the war there was a perception that that could be the case?**
- That we couldn't win, may not win, yeah well it would have been an obvious thing to more experienced people than people of my age group, especially my parents and my
- 36:00 uncles and so on. They would have been, where are we going from here, as you can imagine because Britain was comparatively unprepared when you put it along side what Hitler had done with Germany. They had amassed well, the British knew they were doing it but it was against the original Versailles Treaty, Hitler just went on and did it. Pulled his country out of a morass of inflation and poor times.
- 36:30 It wasn't a good country to live in if you were a worker I don't think, but they did enormous things you know. Hitler was one of the most extraordinary people of the twentieth century, probably one of the most hated but he nevertheless did rebuild a country all in those years, to a terrifically powerful army and air force. Of course he took on Russia at the same time which was biting off a bit more than he could chew thank goodness.
- 37:00 We were a bit of a side line compared to the Russians. I think the Russians lost twenty two million people. Did you know that? Scary stuff, scary stuff mate.
- We are just in the later part of this tape, we have time for one more question though. I'm wondering in the early years of the war did you know anyone in your community any boys that were coming back with injuries, any families that had lost a son or brother or uncle?**
- No, straight off I don't,
- 37:30 not in the community, but in the office the AMP society had an Olympic champion, a fellow by the name of Gerald Backhouse, and Gerald was a runner in the 1936 Games and he represented Australia, and he was a true champion, and he worked in the AMP and I remember one of the older ladies coming in and breaking down in tears because he had been killed in the war.
- 38:00 I think I heard of casualties more through where I worked than in the immediate community that I lived in.
- Certainly being in a large group of people you would have heard of their relatives and friends.**
- Yeah. The AMP society was a pretty large staff and there was a fairly representative number of its' young men away in the services and a chap that I used to
- 38:30 play table tennis with he was a bit older than me, he went off to the war and he was killed in New Guinea. That was one I knew. I'm just trying to think about the Camberwell, Hawthorn area. It doesn't come readily to mind that there was anybody in the immediate vicinity that we knew of but I guess it was happening.
- We'll just swap over tapes now.**

## Tape 2

- 00:31 **What did you learn about World War One at school?**
- I don't recall any specific thing much about the war at school, probably more conscious of it, as I mentioned earlier, because there were a few kids from Germany, refugees,
- 01:00 but I don't think in our school subjects there was any direct reference to the war, but that doesn't say there wasn't. I just doesn't filter through if there was.
- What about Anzac Day marches, did your family participate?**
- No my Dad never marched and actually his old unit used to have reunions in
- 01:30 South Australia but he never went there until after the Second World War. I remember he had a great

time, met up with some old friends and that sort of thing but he never marched and I don't think it turned him on a great deal. I never marched myself until perhaps about twenty years ago, one of my colleagues said, "You ought to do that. You will never see the Shrine like you'll see it walking down the middle of St. Kilda Road. "

02:00 I tell you what, it is something to be proud of.

**Do you know why it was that your father wasn't interested in marching?**

Oh I'd only suspect that he would prefer to put it all behind him, that was his feeling and also he, well, they had to live through a Depression and life was pretty tough without a lot

02:30 of extraneous things, you know and then it's a matter of personality, and some people might say it was the one day of the year and all the rest of it, and if his own unit had reunions in Melbourne that might have been different thing to him you know. I think Anzac Day whilst it was observed isn't quite the same observance as you have now.

03:00 It's been getting a much ever-increasing popularity or interest in it in the last few years. The Shrine was pretty new in those days it was finished in 1929 or '30 and it took a lot of public subscription to pull the money together. Kids at school used to bring their pennies and all that sort of thing. My mother thought they should be raising money for a hospital for ex servicemen,

03:30 there were various points of view on it, but I think history shows that they were right the guys that really got together. One of them was the founder of Melbourne Legacy and various public spirited people, we do have a monument in Melbourne and I don't think has got an equal any where in the world and I'm quite serious about that. It is surrounded by beautiful gardens, and stands for what it stand for but it was

04:00 a new thing in the thirties, but I can't explain my father's or his brother's reaction to Anzac Day, I don't think it ever came much in to the topic of conversation. But on Anzac Day you would wear your father's medals to school, and there would be a ceremony in the State school and the raising of the flag and all that sort of thing, so I used to wear my father's medals to school.

**Can you tell me about what this ceremony involved, what was said and done?**

No not really.

04:30 It probably would be you would get the local Councillor or the local Mayor would be there and you know it didn't mean that much to kids that someone was talking about the heroic deeds of their fathers way back, you could never imagine anything before 1925, if you were born in 1925, no there would be something about it and of course it was slanted towards King and Country and

05:00 loyalty to the throne and loyalty to Great Britain and so on, there would be a couple of minutes. On November the 11th there was always and we still do at eleven o'clock in the morning, have two minutes' silence in remembrance of the Armistice of the First World War, and I think there would have been a moments silence for those killed in a war on Anzac Day parades at school.

05:30 When did we have it? I'm trying to remember if Anzac Day was a public holiday, I think it was in those days, there have been a few changes to the Anzac Day observance and in more recent years it has been put firmly back on the calendar as a public holiday, for a while there I think it was added on to a weekend, I have forgotten now. Somebody in Air Force House could give you all the details about that.

**Did your father's brothers ever march, did they have the same view?**

06:00 Well the one that lost an arm lived in Western Australia and we only used to see him when he came over every few years and I don't know what he did in that respect and the one that was a permanent soldier he would have been in some sort of commemorative parade probably at Queenscliff, which was across the other side of the bay where the headquarters of the military was. He looked after the Port Nepean side of it.

06:30 Undoubtedly he would have been in a full regalia turn out down there. I don't think he ever came up to Melbourne to march.

**I was wondering in those years when you were getting ready to go into the services did you feel as though you were going into it for Mother England or for Australia?**

Oh for Australia.

07:00 I suppose there was always a strong sense that we were allied and part of England and in my young childhood days a lot of people would refer to England as home, like one of those uncles of mine he married an English girl and naturally to her that was home but the family in general conversation would easily refer to England as home, back in the thirties,

07:30 so if England was at war we were at war too. My personal feelings were that I was involved in something that effected Australia.

**Would you say that you felt more Australian more than you felt a British subject?**



Oh yes I think I have always been fairly conscious of being Australian and being distinct. That's why I remember this home thing

08:00 being a little bit strange to me because that's not home this is home.

**So can you tell me about the details of your enlistment and that process?**

Well as I mentioned I enlisted in the navy but that wasn't accepted by my father. Then he came up with this idea that I should be mustered as what they call a RDF operator, a radio direction finding operator, later on the name was changed to radar, not long after I joined the air force.

08:30 I don't remember it but I must have had some pre-examination or did I, or whatever happened beforehand, on the day, which was the 26th of March, the day after my birthday, I turned eighteen the day before, I went to Russell Street, Melbourne,

09:00 to the showrooms of Rhodes Motors which was a fairly large motorcar house at the time, and that had been taken over by the air force as a recruiting centre. On that day we were put through various medical tests, they took blood tests and I remember someone fainting in the queue and so eventually,

09:30 and throughout all this we were being treated in a very polite sort of manner, and then there was the swearing in process where you put your hand on the bible and swear to serve King and country by the way, as well as Australia. So it is the Royal Australian Air Force you see and as soon as we were sworn in the discipline started.

10:00 It was like, "Now righto you bastards, we have been polite to you all morning. Make a move and you are now in big trouble and this is the way it's going to be. " But I think that was common to all those military, they immediately applied the discipline and you wondered what had struck you, and at the end of that day we were put on some trucks and taken to Shepparton which is one hundred and thirteen miles from Melbourne, whatever that is in kilometres,

10:30 to the show grounds in Shepparton which was the training ground for new ground staff personnel, well one of them, there were several of those around Victoria, and I remember we reached Shepparton probably ten o'clock at night. We were put into tents and the next day they started to put you on parade but in the very early days you had to be fitted out with uniforms and all that sort of stuff.

11:00 So recruitment in to the air force is one particular day which I have just described of which I remember most, it was the sort of day you didn't forget too easily.

**Well your life was changing remarkably and very quickly.**

Yeah, you're suddenly on a different direction to what you'd ever thought of before.

**What was it like getting used to the discipline in those early days of service?**

It's not that hard, drill sergeants and corporals and those sorts of people, their training is to be extremely tough,

11:30 and breaches of discipline were met with fairly tough measures which I didn't ever have, it was silly to go against it, you knew that you wouldn't go against it, but there were some fellows that would kick over the traces and they might be made to run around the show grounds carrying a full pack and a rifle or something, more than you could almost imagine doing

12:00 till they dropped, you would get punished fairly severely and if you still kicked over the traces I think they might have locked you up for a while. But military discipline, naval military or whatever it is, you know, if you got out into operational areas where breaches of discipline cost other people's lives or mutiny and those sort of things, they could shoot you on the spot.

12:30 The idea of being in a military thing has got to be taken fairly seriously so there was nothing very soft or gentle about that training.

**And you came to terms with that fairly quickly?**

Oh yes I think we all did, well of course we did.

**Any blokes that were particular larrikins?**

No well we were all young fellas of eighteen or nineteen,

13:00 and I think we were nearly all about my age and not long from school, we would accept discipline any way, and we were fit enough, young enough to do it anyway but no, there might be somebody who would be a bit flippant but a drill sergeant or drill corporal would fix him up in a flash you know,

13:30 they were trained to deal with those sort of things. But that was only about four or five weeks we were at Shepparton and I think it undoubtedly it would do you the world of good, you were getting a lot of physical exercise and applying new skills and you got to learn a bit about guns. We carried rifles everywhere even though we were radar operators, so it was a very military style of training. There was nothing gentle about it.

**Tell me what your training entailed during those weeks?**

- 14:00 As I recall it mostly you were being drilled in marching drills and drills with handling rifles, carrying them, marching with rifles and we went off on one occasion for a few days to camp out, which they called a bivouac and we had to live in those sort of conditions for a few days where there was no real shelter,
- 14:30 small one man tents and ground sheets and so on. That was a bit of fun any way I suppose in a way. There was a near enough to a commando course in one part of it. We were out in the bush somewhere and we'd you know, you've seen pictures of soldiers clambering over creeks and hanging off ropes and that sort of thing and crawling on your hands and knees under barbed wire while some one fired a machine gun
- 15:00 over the top of it so that you didn't put your head up. A little bit of practice at throwing hand grenades, that's scary stuff, when you have got that in your hand you get rid of it quickly, I can tell you.

**Any one not get the basics of hand grenade work?**

Not while I was there, no. The guy in charge of that he was a pretty tough cookie too you know. He's explaining what a hand grenade is, he said "When I pull the pin out of this thing it's got, whatever it was, five or six seconds before it goes off,"

- 15:30 and we're sort of in a trench and he said, "Now you watch this," and everybody was down in the trench and it went off over our heads, they pulled some startling little tricks on you to wake you up to the seriousness of it all. So that was part of that recruit training course and there was a lot of endless drilling, marching drills and so on but it was interspersed.
- 16:00 And of course you would line up on a medical parade fairly regularly to get injections and that was timed so that you would feel sick with the injections on the weekend leave that you got, you never felt sick during the week but some of those things like anti-tetanus or small pox injections. The effect from them can be quite feverish and that sort of thing. I remember lying flat on my back in the gardens in Shepparton one day, couldn't move,
- 16:30 but I felt all right the next day and there we were back drilling again.

**So was this the first time you handled a gun?**

Yes, well one of my uncles had a small pea rifle, no I had fired a gun when I was a kid but not very much of handling of guns in my lifetime no.

**How did you feel about having a rifle for the first time?**

Oh well I think it was just part of the scene you were in and you'd been trained to look after it and how to clean it, and what it did and

- 17:00 the only time you ever fired it was on a rifle range any way, but marching around with guns they never had any live ammunition in them because that would have been chancy if someone had let one off somewhere. We must have been on rifle ranges somewhere on that course too. I was in rifle training in a couple of other places, even when we were up in Marble Bar we all went
- 17:30 to have a bit of go at the rifle range.

**Did that include bayonets on the top?**

Yes. I've got an old bayonet out there.

**How was the training on the bayonets?**

You fixed the bayonet and charged at, you have probably seen pictures of this, a bag of hay or something and as I say you can get a person and train them in these ways

- 18:00 until they are, and I think in the heat of battle it would be second nature to you after the training, an horrific sort of thought as a civilian, but once you have been trained you respond to it. They're the sorts of things you put behind you when you come out of the services.
- 18:30 **Did you get to see your family during this training period?**

At the end of that first training period I went home on leave which you have probably seen a picture of me in a great coat, well that was that point in time and then after that, the leave would only have been a matter of days it wasn't very long I don't think, then up to a place called Richmond in New South Wales, I couldn't tell you exactly but I think it was probably about forty miles west of Sydney, and it is still today a very large air force base.

- 19:00 **So what did you do there?**

That's where I was trained as a radar operator there.

**What had you heard of radar before you went in?**

Well nothing. It was called radio direction finding and I think as a kid interested in wireless sets as I was, I'd seen or read

- 19:30 articles about how radio waves were reflected especially from metal objects and in the early days, actually the Germans started to look at this before we did but they didn't seem to go on with it the way the English did. They conducted experiments where if you sent a beam out this way and a beam out that way and you got echoes back, where the beams crossed was where the object was.
- 20:00 The radar managed to do everything from one source so you didn't have to have fixed places all over on a grid, radar, that was how it was made with an aerial that transmitted and received all at once. A milestone achievement electronically, you know, for its time. The significant part of the training at Richmond Air Base was
- 20:30 secrecy. To be a radar operator really, I think you could train some body to be a radar operator in a day or two almost, although you did have to know the routines of plotting where you'd pick something up and how to transmit that to headquarters which was somewhere, people with a great big board pushing things around on it but the actual handling of a radar set at the time was probably not much more than someone setting up your video today. It's not that complicated.
- 21:00 Radar mechanics were a different breed and they had a longer course of training, ideally they had some radio training before they ever got to the air force, some of them were very clever radio engineers, but an operator needed only reasonable intelligence. Half the course was we were indoctrinated with secrecy and, strange enough, a lot about radar didn't come out till about twenty years ago,
- 21:30 it was still on the secret list. Strange, the ways of government but that was the nature of the course, and when I came home for a bit of leave after that and my family wanted to know what I was doing I just wouldn't tell 'em.

**So the secrecy was very much drummed into you during that course, did they say why it was important to be so secretive?**

- 22:00 Oh well yes because they didn't want our enemies to find out about it. It's a little bit strange I think because I've read the other side had developed some forms of radio detection anywhere, and I think the English development of it was unique at the time and was the most efficient and also the English had put radar stations all up
- 22:30 their coast, which at the time of the Battle of Britain I don't think the Germans were fully aware of it, so the German planes would be on their way to Britain and long before they got there they'd be being attacked by fighters that had already taken off an hour before and some claim, and you have to watch that its not a radar person claiming it, but in some of the writings about the war you'll find claims of what a significant thing
- 23:00 radar was in the Battle of Britain, the early warning that it gave was significant in the struggle. So that was why it was very important for people not to know we even had it but in Australia, I showed you a picture before of an English radar establishment, and we had English gear where I was at Geraldton, the Australians developed a light weight and it was called LWAW [Light Weight Air Warning].
- 23:30 They developed that here in Australia and there are books about the development of that, it is very clever. The New South Wales Railway Department, their workshops were used for a lot of the manufacture, some clever blokes designed all this knowing, having got the secrets on how it was done from the English. Light Weight Air Warning, it was a light weight. Any way Richmond Air Base was a big base and we
- 24:00 on the weekends we weren't having injections and we didn't feel crook and we went into Sydney and it was interesting for us, never been to Sydney before, had a good look round Sydney on our leave and I went on leave once to Windsor which is a town not far from Richmond. It was a little tiny town in those days.

**Now just going back to your time at the Richmond training base to a total novice can you explain the basics of radar?**

- 24:30 I can explain it I think reasonably well, it is not all that complex. I start by saying this to you if you stood on a hill and yelled out to another hill over there you would get an echo, now if you timed how long it was before you got the echo that's saying it took six seconds and you would say well it has taken three seconds to get there and three seconds to get back,
- 25:00 so it must be thirty three hundred feet away because sound travels at the speed of eleven hundred feet per second and now radio waves travel at the speed of light which is a hundred and eighty six thousand miles a second so it's very hard to, but you do get an echo and you get exactly the same principle as when you yell at the hill as when you send a radio beam and it reflects off a metal object. Can you imagine a pond with a reed sticking out of the pond
- 25:30 and you drop a pebble here. The ripples from the pebble will go over and when the ripple hits the reed the ripple will start from the reed, that's the way sound waves, water waves, air waves and the timing device for a radio signal being transmitted, is what they called in those days, an oscilloscope it is the

forerunner of your television tube and the picture you see is really made up of a dot of light that travels

26:00 across and across and scans the picture at such speed that you can't imagine, with one such device as an oscilloscope a spot of light starts from one side of the screen and moves across. We can slow it down and there it is moving across and when we've received an echo from something, the receipt of that echo will deflect the spot of light,

26:30 so we've got a spot of light that goes from there to there, and we know that the distance is relative to say about one hundred and twenty miles of travel and I think the light weight gear that we had in Australia worked on about four hundred, the spot started off four hundred times a second so when we picked up an echo, like when the ripple comes back from the reed, the spot of light is deflected and we would have this deflect, we called it a blip

27:00 and so we know which way the aerial is pointing and we know how far away the thing is so it's pointing at two hundred and sixty five degrees and it's fifty miles away so on the map, two hundred and sixty five degrees, fifty miles, there's your aeroplane. Modern radar, which I have seen is just astonishing, you can imagine what happened to that in fifty years of electronic development but it was still quite an achievement what those English people did because you had to have an aerial that

27:30 transmitted a pulse, turned off and received four hundred times a second, and you couldn't do it by any physical means, they had an electronic switch, a little valve that flickered and that was invented by or developed by Robert Watson Watt I think his name was, and later Sir Robert so that was a very secret thing or so our training told us.

28:00 Did I explain radar to you in a sensible way?

**Yes.**

So we would sit in an enclosure and above us would be the aerial that rotated and in three sixty degrees and the English equipment and there was more than one sort of English equipment, it was called a mark five gear, it had quite a large console with

28:30 two screens on it and one was this, you would call it a trace, it was the dot of light going backwards and forwards four hundred times but it was just a trace of light and it would be all tiny little things flickering on it and we called it grass, it was just like grass, but in the grass you would see the blip would rise up out of the grass, the grass being the interference it was picking up or small echoes or whatever, echoes is the word we used and on the other screen

29:00 instead of a horizontal trace of light we had a trace, the spot of light is going from the middle of the screen to the outside and it's going around as the aerial is going around.

**Like a clock?**

Yes. So instead of the spot of light being deflected it brightened up and so we would turn the volume down

29:30 so that you could hardly see the trace of light, but if you picked up something there would be a spot of light light up on it. So there you would have a whole round screen and the aerial is pointing that way so the little thing is pointing that way and you would have the plan of the area on the screen so you'd your position straight off the screen that was pretty classy stuff but as the aerial went round the trace of light went round and round, have you got that picture? That was called a plan position indicator

30:00 Now I worked on that at Geraldton and that was pretty exciting sort of stuff that gear, the other thing that was developed along the lines of radar was a device in our aircraft which was triggered off by receiving our frequency and it was triggered off to send back a signal every three or four seconds, so that

30:30 the blip would suddenly enlarge and we knew that was one of ours and it was called IFF Identification Friend or Foe and I think all our stuff and the Yanks they all had it, we knew our own planes. Oh one of the things that would happen with radar was you would get different layers temperature in the atmosphere especially over coastal areas, you know if you put a pencil in a glass of water the pencil looks as if it

31:00 is crooked, it is refraction. Well you get those layers in the atmosphere which supplies the same sort of affect and the radio waves, like a television transmission instead of going straight out to space get curved around a bit and you'd pick up something over the horizon, we were picking up a Qantas air, was there Qantas in those days? I suppose there was, a large empire flying boat left Perth going to India and it had it's IFF ticking away there and it came up past us

31:30 and then it was gone and after a while it came back at zero, right above us. well it couldn't be above us, it was two traces away, you see it had, do you follow what I mean, the dot of light had time to go out once, come back and go out again before it picked him up and we got very excited about this and our radar mechanic adjusted the thing, you could do this, you could adjust the time base of it,

32:00 very complicated but we tracked him for over a thousand miles. That's somewhere in the history books, that particular thing. But today I was over in South Australia the other day with a radar operator, we

were tracking a plane going from Bathurst Island to Darwin, that's what radar now does but in those days that was quite an exceptional thing but it was one of our own anyway. We couldn't have plotted an unfriendly plane that didn't have that gear,

32:30 we would rely on that tick tick that kept coming back to us. Now we have drifted off the track a bit haven't we?

**No, that's really relevant information. Once you had the blip can you tell me how you plotted it on a particular location, did you have a map or. . ?**

Oh yes we had a big grid map and across the top you would have the letters of the alphabet, A, B and so on, and the letters

33:00 now the First World War chaps had a different code, I'm trying to remember it, but ours was Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy, Fox, just for the sake of transmission, some people might say A and it sounds like an I so you needed to have a word Able, do you follow? If I had something up in that corner of the map and it was down, A there and C there it would be in Able Charlie

33:30 and they would know that that was the square to look in, and within the square it was ten miles wide and ten miles deep and you'd say, "Able Charley, six five," so we plotted those things and in Geraldton we were connected by a land line to the plotting room in Perth and we also had a wireless telegrapher there and I've been thinking about him lately because he was a mate of mine and on what occasions we used Morse code,

34:00 we might have used Morse code for the sake of coding certain things that had to be coded, I forget now. Confidentiality stuff, but in the radar stations, way out on the back blocks or the islands, everything was by wireless telegraph.

**This sounds probably funny but can you go through the alphabet with the letters?**

No I can't. I think when I get up to Easy, Fox, what comes next G,

34:30 it might have been George, Harry, no, the reason I don't know it all is we didn't have it all, and I think our section of the map started at Able, Baker and went to there and also it's a fair while ago to remember all that.

**What were the ones just up to H?**

Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy, Fox, George and Harry, I think, I'm not too sure about George.

35:00 But that was just a means of identifying a spot on a grid which was common to what they had in the main ops room. We'd work about six hour shifts, we would do one of those a day and at the end of the week you would have a couple of days off or something. So it wasn't arduous in some respects. Although there would be midnight to six am shifts and the next one would be six am to lunch time but there was plenty of time for getting down to the beach.

35:30 **Well you certainly had to be very focused during those six hours.**

Yeah well there would be three of us and a mechanic on duty and we'd take it in turns sitting in front of the screen, on the phone or on the plotting board, and the mechanic would be doing whatever routine things he had to do with the gear and sometimes he'd come in and operate it to see how it was working.

36:00 But that wasn't very arduous. You always had a bit of traffic especially on the Western Australian coast but it was pretty well always friendly, we picked up a strange object about sixty miles out to sea once that only moved at about forty or fifty miles an hour and we think it must have been a Japanese sub, but we never found out from the ops room, they wouldn't say what it was, but there were, we used to pick up surface vessels like that, you see,

36:30 this came to the surface on three mornings running at something like six fifteen in the morning, just at daylight and we never figured out what it was.

**So you could get surface vessels all the way up to air how many and how high in the air did it matter?**

Oh no theoretically that didn't matter for the height that aircraft could get to in those days, the beam from the radar

37:00 was like, we called it a lobe, it was a big lobe shaped thing coming from the radar, and with little lobes you know, and we used to attempt to say at what height we thought things were and I found out that it's still not a very exact science these days, saying what the height is, but if you can imagine the surface of the earth and you've got a radar here,

37:30 and this thing spreads out and goes across the surface so out beyond the horizon if the plane's high enough you're still looking at him but it could be a hundred and twenty miles away and depending on the height of the hill that you can get your radar put on in the first place. I think, a six foot tall chap standing on the shore can see three miles

- 38:00 on the curvature of the earth, you see, I think his horizon is three miles so if you can go up a few hundred feet you have gone a long way further. However that was it's limitation but with the speed of aeroplanes in those days if you had a hundred mile warning you could get your planes off the ground and if you didn't get them off the ground they could be shot up on the ground and you'd lose them anyway, so there was a double advantage of being in the air,
- 38:30 the main advantage that you might deter them or shoot them down yourselves.
- It certainly made for a major advantage having this technology?**
- Yeah well it, there's a book called Whispers on the Pacific, which is about the Morse code fellows who were trained to crack Japanese codes and what they did in the way of warning was, as good as we ever did.
- 39:00 It was fantastic what happened with some of these, they had been trained in Japanese and the Japanese cipher and the Japanese with their language didn't think we would know much about what they were saying, but we reached the stage of knowing what the Japs were doing before Tokyo did at once stage of the war I believe. So there was an arm of the service that was just as effective as radar. But then radar was important in other places I guess. It was used for a lot of things, radar. They started to use it to set guns, they would pin point a target with a radar setting
- 39:30 and some how set a gun to fire on it and things like that, and radar was in the aeroplanes themselves. There were radar sets that would pick up a plane that was in front of another plane and they could almost identify what it was and they could shoot him down because they were right behind him and he didn't know. Things of that horrific nature.
- And just to clarify, the friend or foe identification process had to do with a signal that was sent from the Allied vessels**
- 40:00 **or planes.**
- Allied planes carried a little box of tricks I have forgotten the name of it now that was triggered off when our radar beams at those frequencies were picked up by it. So it just in effect amplified the echo that we got.

## Tape 3

- 00:33 **Well I'd like to speak now about your time serving in Geraldton, Western Australia, first of all you might tell me how you got there?**
- I got there on a train. I was posted to Geraldton radar from Air Force Station at Richmond after training in June 1943 and,
- 01:00 I'm a little bit lost on the details. There was a constant flow of service personnel back and forth on the east west trains and they weren't much better than cattle trucks, you would get off the train a couple of times every days and someone with an army field cooker would be at the other end of the train and dish out some stew or whatever it was, I remember that trip not in great detail just the sheer boredom of it.
- 01:30 But we weren't actually in cattle trucks, but that did happen to some service men, they were in cattle trucks, we had a carriage but it wasn't all that comfortable and we just sat there. Where we reported in Perth I haven't got a clear memory of that. There would have been a depot for us to arrive to and there was a train to Geraldton, from Perth. It was the Midlands and Northern Railway Company or something, a privately
- 02:00 owned railway pulled along by a steam train and it carried freight and it stopped at various and many, many points on the way to Geraldton, and in between those points it seemed to travel about twenty miles an hour, and you could really have got out and walked beside it at times and the three hundred miles to Geraldton was about a twenty four hour trip and so we left in the afternoon, the late afternoon and I remember we got to Geraldton,
- 02:30 and it was dark so it was June you see. Geraldton is reasonably well up it is the about the same latitude, nearly up to the same latitude as Brisbane so you don't have the sort of long twilights in the summer or the winter but it is not tropical. It was still never the less dark in June when we arrived there, and the radar station was about a mile and a half from the township of Geraldton, and the chappie I was with was a little bit
- 03:00 more better prepared sort of bloke than me. I didn't have a clue where we were going but he found out so I was always grateful to have his company on this adventure, because we just walked out of Geraldton and it was just along a desolate coast line virtually except there were one or two houses here and there, and it was stormy and a bit scary, not wartime scary but just a kid a long way from home trying to find some place where he didn't know where the hell it was but we did find it,
- 03:30 and it was, I showed you a picture before of an old house where we were billeted, and I think we had

some wooden frames with straw mattresses but we slept well on those just the same, so that's how I got to Geraldton is that what you meant by that question?

**Yes, very much. How many of you were there?**

04:00 How many on the unit itself? I don't know the exact number but because half the radar staff were girls that needed a lady commanding officer, and I think she had an assistant, and we also had a male orderly officer as well as the CO [Commanding Officer], so that all up and a few guards being civilian territory it had to have a guard on it, although we had to do guard duty ourselves half the time. I think the compliment of Geraldton might have been thirty-four, thirty-two people.

04:30 And we had a cook and a mess man who was the cook's assistant, and the mess was in a house, at the top of a hill, halfway up the hill. If I used the word doover, that was the official word for a radar station, and it was employed firstly by the British, doover being a sort of a loose slang expression meaning anything, like give us that doover over

05:00 there Fred, you know, but they used that loose expression because then when people were talking about it it would just be part of ordinary slang language and part of the secrecy thing, and it became known as the doover, so a couple of blokes walking along the street would be saying, "Have you seen the latest doover?" and it could mean anything except to the people who were talking to one another. So the doover was on top of the hill, and nearly to the top of the hill was another old house that was used as the

05:30 mess hut, and closer to the road on the way up that hill was a building that had been put up for the girls. The Department of the Interior was the department that used to go around and build things for this occasion and we had a recreation hut on that unit too which had a radio in it and some sort of heating,

06:00 and we actually had our own dances a couple of times just for fun, but mostly we used to go over, there was a main air force operational base on the other side of Geraldton and we'd there for dances, or into the Yacht Club in the township of Geraldton where there were dances. So the Geraldton unit was fairly civilised and we were living in a house with a front lawn and you know,

06:30 across the road there were a couple of civilian people a couple of elderly ladies, they might have been forty but they looked old to us, and then there were the girls just a bit further up and I'd really like to get a map of this and refresh my memory. The CO had an office, a proper building, oh it was quite a set up. And as I said once earlier today we weren't too restricted on food, we had fairly good food.

07:00 **Tell me more about that?**

Well if you go back to say Shepparton and other big camps, frequently at breakfast eggs would be made from egg powder, I'm not quite sure, and it depended on the skill of the cook and if he was making a lot of it it came out as a fairly rubbery sort of, almost inedible thing but I think in Geraldton I think occasionally we used to get a few real eggs

07:30 you know, and meat and vegetables so we lived pretty well and we would get in the town and we were never asked for ration tickets I don't think, we would just go to the restaurants and pubs and have whatever was available for food in those days so all in all we were pretty well looked after.

**You had the unique experience of serving directly with women in the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] as radio operators?**

08:00 I suppose a lot of personnel served with women in the army and air force and the navy too, there were women services but in those days there was no talk of them ever, the only women in war areas were the nurses, I think I'm pretty right in saying that.

**Tell me about the experience of serving and training alongside these WAAAFs?**

08:30 Well they were a very nice bunch of girls really, one of my colleagues said to me some years ago, it was a long time after the war, he said, you know I think we got into radar some how or other by some process, we were sort of sorted out a bit I think, the fact that my father knew someone with a position in the air force, was why I was able to walk into that was that, because I had come from a good family, there was a question of reliability about your background, all this secrecy thing you know.

09:00 And yeah, I'm not claiming that we're from some special elite, I didn't mean that. You'd find nearly all the guys that I service with were rather similar in the way of their concepts of life and their backgrounds, there wasn't anybody that was from the razor gang around the corner in Bondi or something, or Bondi is probably a nice place, I shouldn't say that. They were all from that respectable middle class

09:30 people and the girls were too, they were a bonny bunch, there is no doubt about that. They were very good people.

**And I think you mentioned off camera that they were very good radar operators?**

Oh they were, they took their job very seriously and they would keep the concepts of accuracy up to the highest levels,

- 10:00 you would find the girls were almost stern task masters about the way it was done, no they were terrific. We had one sergeant WAAAF who had come from a big installation near Kiama somewhere up near Sydney and she was a Tartar, well we liked her all right but she was very strict about the way things ought to be done, no they were good girls.
- 10:30 **And were you allowed to have barbecues and parties down at the beach?**
- Oh we just did that ourselves you know, somebody would say, we would get a few sausages from the mess and say can we take them down and make our own lunch down at the beach and we would light a little fire down in the sand. The beach was a fairly well attended place by us and it wasn't a bad surf beach,
- 11:00 and from the road out of Geraldton where we were, a good five or six hundred yards down to the beach through sand hills and tea tree and that sort of thing, and somebody made a surf board once out of some pretty heavy old timber, and one guy was in the surf and we lost him and he got bowled over and he must have hit himself on the head, and we didn't find him till five days later,
- 11:30 it was very sad. He was a great looking young bloke and he had a wonderful singing voice. He was a very popular boy in the camp, any way I helped carry him back a few days later when we found him about a mile down the beach, he got washed up again, so those sort, there wasn't much glory in his death for the war, got knocked out in the peaceable part of it but those sort of things happened.
- Were there other losses or casualties during your service?**
- 12:00 No I didn't experience much in the way of any casualties. We were pretty lucky I suppose. Up in Borneo we were bombed once, but down in Geraldton it was a peaceful place you see. It was a great way to win the war and I shouldn't say that, this is being archived. But you know we had girls, dances, surfing beaches, good food, and the best English radar gear to work on, so
- 12:30 it was really quite a place and I would get into Geraldton sometimes and play billiards at the service clubs and I had my first taste of beer in my whole life in a pub one day.
- How was that?**
- Oh well it went to my head.
- The first time you had been in a pub?**
- Yes I had come from a family that didn't agree with that sort of thing and,
- 13:00 but there you are. There was an incident that occurred in Geraldton that is a bit scary when you look back on it, the mess man, the assistant to the cook, oh incidentally there were rabbits out in those sand hills and people would go out shooting rabbits 'cause we had rifles, and you weren't suppose to but we went out one night with our rifles and we didn't see any rabbits,
- 13:30 it was dusk and it was just getting dark and we fired at a target like a tin on top of a post or something and the next day there were guys around the camp looking at everybody's rifles and they looked at ours and we hadn't cleaned them, and yes we had been out there shooting, and a bullet had gone through the roof of a house near the town, a 303 rifle is a very powerful thing really,
- 14:00 and the bullet must have ricocheted from the sand and in its downward trajectory had gone through the side of the roof of a house and outside wall and just over the heads of the family having their dinner, and not very far from a couple of kids, and when you look back on it, it could have been something much worse than it was. So yeah we had had done this, and when Win and I went to Geraldton some years ago
- 14:30 I went to the library at Geraldton to look up the newspaper and I finally found it, a copy of the report in the newspaper which in my memory had been headlines, but it wasn't, it was on about the sixth page and it was a column about a bullet entering the house and how two youthful members of the RAAF, Donald Lloyd Parncutt and Robert Lionel Deyoung were charged with this, the whole story of the court case and we were fined five shillings and three shillings costs,
- 15:00 and our commanding officer had to put us on a charge because we had appeared in a civil court, and I'd like to be able to remember all the things that he said. He was a young man, the boss, about twenty two or twenty one. He said "Now look you blokes were out on a closed camp night, you were using ammunition which you weren't supposed to, you were shooting in the sand hills which you weren't supposed to, your rifles were dirty which is against the rules, they should have been cleaned,"
- 15:30 and he went on, there were ten things but he said, "If I charge you with all of those I don't know where we go and I'm going to charge you with having not behaved in an airman like manner and you are confined to barracks for a week and you've got leave to go and fix Mrs What's-her-name's roof. " Well that was a bit of a circus too because we were up on the roof of this place with a wind blowing a gale from Geraldton, trying to get a blow lamp to run some solder on to a bit of metal to patch up the hole on the roof, so we got their dust bin lid and put the blow lamp inside that,



16:00 burnt the bottom out of the dust bin but we finally got a patch on the roof, but no, it is a funny sort of thing and we laughed about it at the time, but I often, you know, how lucky I was that somebody didn't get hurt with that. We still don't know whether it was him or me that fired the bullet but we were both firing guns, so that was an incident in my time at Geraldton.

16:30 **What was the town of Geraldton like in those days?**

Well when we went back there, the surroundings have developed with more housing, but the actual main street wasn't vastly different. The Yacht Club, I was looking at it the other day it was 1990, so not very recent at all I suppose but the Yacht Club, the building was still there but they had built a new Yacht Club, but the original building was still there and it had a plaque on it saying

17:00 that it was the Yacht Club and the Club Hotel which is where I had my first glass of beer was still there. There was, I forget the name of it, a hotel where some of us went in and had a meal once in a while, it was still there, but at the end of the main street as we walked into it, you are walking into the main street and you're going to turn left and go up that way, down that way wasn't

17:30 so much of the town but just near that corner was the Globe Brewery. Geraldton had its own brewery during the wartime, I think it was the Globe, and that had ceased to operate and was no longer visible. They've got a very nice cathedral or a very big church there and that's still there and it looks very good.

18:00 But Geraldton to me was still very recognisable to me as such, and I didn't know until I got back there that the place where I fired the gun and caused all the trouble was in an area they call Mohammed's Flats, we just called it the back beach but it was some Arabian name like that, Flat.

**Well there were lost of troops in and around the Geraldton area, did that influence the town?**

18:30 Yeah. I can't tell you what the disposition of those sorts of things were because we were a mile or so out and we didn't take much notice of the others anyway I suppose, but there was a lot of army fellows in that district and there was also the air force operational base, where they did a lot of training. They had a number of aeroplanes called the Avro Anson, which was a twin engine English plane, but a little bit antiquated

19:00 for the style of warfare, but they were training a lot of pilots with Avros at that thing. One of the girls one night walked into an idling propeller and nearly got killed but it wasn't one of our girls, it was one of the girls from that particular unit. It was somebody that we knew too 'cause we had met her at one of the dances. However there were quite a lot of air force people there and trainees, and down on the water near the Geraldton pier

19:30 there was a Catalina base. You know Catalina, aeroplane, flying boat and so there were American servicemen that were flying the Catalinas, and they would sometimes go off without a flight plan and we would pick up a plane, there'd be an alert because if it was an enemy but it was the Catalina blokes, they had gone down to Perth to get some more beer or things which Americans seemed to be able to do quite easily without having to ask anybody.

20:00 And in the main street, which I can't quite pin point 'cause I never went into it but there was what they called a wet canteen, a military bar, not a hotel in the true sense but a place for drinking, where they sold beer and I looked in it and passed by it and it was predominantly full of soldiers, army blokes.

20:30 So that's a few recollections about Geraldton at that time. Yes, it was a base for quite a lot of people.

**What was morale like in and around Geraldton?**

I think our morale was pretty good. Our morale in our little unit it was good and I think over at the operational base when we went there the people were all pretty efficient and liked what they were doing. I'm trying to think at any stage during the war was I ever in an atmosphere of low morale, I don't think I ever was.

21:00 We did a bit of whingeing occasionally but I'm talking about day-to-day living. People were getting on with what they had to do.

**You mentioned that the equipment was top class in Geraldton, can you tell me what made it superior?**

You might remember me saying how it had

21:30 two screens, one was to plan the position so you could have two operators and presumably like, if you had the Battle of Britain where there was a lot of planes in different directions you could have two people plotting things but we didn't have those circumstances, and the other thing was the aerial on top of it rotated by being driven by a power, whereas

22:00 in the little gear that we had we used to wind a handle to make the aerial go around. That was all power driven. To that extent it was superior you know. But I don't think it was superior in what it could pick up in the way of range or accuracy, it was the same principle, it was just better equipped and more comfortable.

**Now were the shifts or the way in which you worked different in Geraldton than they had been?**

22:30 No that was much the same as what happened later. We worked six hour shifts, there were four shifts a day and I think we used to work for six days and have three days off or something, three whole days and you would go swimming.

**What was the sense in Geraldton of the likelihood that there could be a Japanese invasion on the west coast?**

23:00 Not any that I'm aware of and you have got to remember we are well into 1943 now and MacArthur's island hopping was starting to have some effect. I could have been there a year before and I could perhaps give you a different answer maybe, but we in the radar were conscious of the fact that there had been submarines off Geraldton

23:30 and I think they got down further closer to Perth too. The general atmosphere from the people around you were, well there you were, just doing your job. No, there was no sense of imminent problems or disaster.

**What was your sense of why you were there, what your purpose was?**

24:00 Oh just we understood what radar was supposed to be doing and we understood its first priority was to pick up enemy aircraft and knowing that that the likelihood of that was pretty slight we knew that we were at least tracking the local traffic which included Catalinas and Avro Ansons and other air force planes in the district going up and down the coast and the commercial

24:30 aeroplanes and so on, and to what extent that was of any value it is a bit hard to say. Except that on one occasion the Americans came in unannounced, and the commanding officer over at the bigger unit, rang the doover and I was inside it and I was the young mug that answered the phone and he said, "You people are plotting a plane coming in from somewhere," and I said "Yes sir," and he said,

25:00 "What height was it?" and you couldn't tell heights but I looked at the chart and I said, "Well it could be thirty two thousand feet sir," and it could have also been twelve hundred feet, it was actually twelve hundred but when I told him it was thirty two thousand they put the whole outfit on red alert because it was an unidentified plane coming in at high level and it could have been a Japanese raid, so they were on the alert you see, so the people were trained to be ready for that sort of thing.

25:30 I never got into any trouble over it but I could have done better at it I suppose, whoever had been me at the same time could easily have said the same thing. I think the Americans got their supply of beer for the weekend and they might have shared it with the CO for all I know.

**What happened when you went on alert, how was that notified to everyone?**

It didn't upset us where we were, we were a mile and a half out of town in our own little houses, we didn't do anything,

26:00 but the air base people went on alert and would have gone to their stations where they had to be or trenches or what ever, they would have had a routine. There would have been places to be manned, and I don't know if they had guns out there I suppose they did, they would have had some ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] I suppose but I think the answer to the question is that you have got to realise that we are talking about late 1943,

26:30 and the Japs are getting pushed back.

**When did you sense that turning point had occurred?**

My quick answer is about the time I enlisted I suppose. It was about then because up until then you had thought this thing was going to go on and you'd get caught up in it sooner or later it didn't matter and you didn't think of it having an end,

27:00 but I think people started to realise that we were starting to get somewhere and they were making some advances against Hitler over there, and the Russians were absorbing a lot of Hitler's energy. Service people, by the way, were keenly aware of the impact of Joe Stalin's Russian people were having on Germany. You would go to the movie theatre and they would play

27:30 God Save the King and at the end of the National Anthem all the servicemen would say, "What about Joe?" Have you ever heard about that before in your discussions? Oh that went on quite, especially up in the islands when we would go to outdoor theatres, so I don't think the servicemen were the least bit orientated towards Communism or otherwise or

28:00 any political bent but they knew that Soviet Russia was, you know, a great, what's the word, a great opponent of Hitler and by the time we were getting towards the end of 1944, VE was the middle of '45, wasn't it? Sorry, my history recollections aren't too hot just here,

28:30 that is the sort of feeling that was starting to filter through, that the Battle of Britain had been won and the Germans had thrown everything they could at Britain and then didn't invade Britain, so that was a

sort of turning point and people were conscience of it.

**So they would sing God Save The King and then what about Joe?**

Yep it was quite common.

**This is slightly off the subject but were there other things that men shouted out at the pictures, during the pictures, newsreels, music?**

29:00 No I don't think so I think we were just entertained by the movie that we went to see. You're going a little bit ahead of Geraldton here because you got a lot of open air movies up in the islands which I might never probably have gone to a movie show in Geraldton,

29:30 that's out of context.

**We'll talk about the movies up in Borneo in a moment. So how were you getting news about the rest of the war while you were at Geraldton?**

Well on the radio, radio news, principally that because I don't think any of us bothered to go and get a newspaper unless you put a hole in somebody's roof.

30:00 That local newspaper we would have seen so you would look at the front page and it would have been about the war but we had a Geraldton, Geraldton had its own radio station. We used to sit of a night listening to the radio and it used to close down at eleven o'clock with its own little song, and I'm not sure where the song came from. "I'm only a wandering vagabond so

30:30 goodnight pretty maiden, goodnight." There would be people who'd know that song but they had that as their closing song, "Good night pretty maiden, goodnight." I don't know when they started up in the morning, but those were not the days of twenty four hour radio stations.

**Can you sing that little bit for me?**

It goes, "I'm only a roving vagabond,

31:00 so goodnight pretty maiden, goodnight." I don't know the rest of the words but that was it. You hear it occasionally on the radio. It's a very old song out of something.

**It must have been quite touching to have that at the end of the night?**

Well I suppose after you heard it a number of times it was just another thing you know.

**Speaking of pretty maidens did many of the blokes develop maybe sweet hearts within the WAAAFs or within the town of Geraldton?**

31:30 Yes one or two of us and I had a pretty good friend, one of the girls, she was about a year older than me, you know, our association wasn't very long lived and I think she got moved down to Perth to another station in about December that year and I went and saw her while I was down there. I got sent to an aircraft recognition course, something like that.

32:00 And another time I was in Perth on a weather, outlying things like radars had to know about giving in weather reports too but then I went back to Geraldton and I got sent up to Marble Bar, and you sort of, wartime romances are subject to that knowledge that they can't last that long, something's going to happen,

32:30 you are going to be moved off or whatever.

**So that knowledge affected the way you interacted with someone?**

Yes I suppose it did in a way and you were quite far from home and you somehow knew that there couldn't be anything permanent in those sorts of relationships, and I suppose you could be fond of somebody like that and if you went back to your

33:00 home town and that same person was living in your home town you could easily pick up the relationship and start from there. That would have happened with some guys I suppose, but the other thing was of course, at that age boys and girls of eighteen and nineteen are tending to have a lot of different romances aren't they? Not necessarily very lasting.

**So did you write to this girl after you were separated?**

33:30 I probably did I think but not for very long, once or twice but you get into another environment and your life goes on to a different track.

**Anyone else you that wrote to or heard from, probably your family during your time at Geraldton?**

Oh while I was away did I write letters? I wrote to my mother fairly regularly and she would write to me, oh my

34:00 mother and father, and I would write to other relatives of the family, it's almost as if I wrote to my

mother every day but I didn't. I wrote several times a week and I would get letters frequently and occasionally I would write to uncles and cousins and to my oldest mate from school days I used to write to him occasionally, and he was in aircrew somewhere up in New Guinea,

- 34:30 and we still corresponded, and it's a funny thing isn't it, how none of us properly preserve our history but my mother kept all my letters and I kept a fair number that she sent me and I couldn't keep them all, because you couldn't carry too much stuff around during the war, you only had a kitbag. One day my mother said to me, oh you know years and years later I had already had some children, she said,
- 35:00 "I've still got that bundle of old letters of yours. I don't suppose you want them?" and I said "No," but now I do. It just makes you think doesn't it? Yes I corresponded with a lot of people quite regularly.
- 35:30 When you get far away letters coming in are very welcome.

**Did blokes tend to share the letters around especially if some blokes didn't get any letters?**

No they never shared letters in my experience but blokes would talk about things that they had heard from home, look, my mother says this you know, but there was a sharing of information that came by from that.

36:00 **And parcels?**

Oh yeah. We used to get Comfort Fund [Australian Comforts Fund] parcels as well as parcels from home, my mother would make a fruit cake and send it up and that would be good, "Parney's mum sent him a fruit cake," you would have a few mates all of a sudden on that. But we would get Comfort Fund parcels too, which would contain some food and cigarettes,

- 36:30 tobacco and that sort of thing, even some gramophone records if I remember correctly, you know all sorts of things came in Comfort Fund parcels. About writing letters, you couldn't talk about those days without giving the Salvation Army a bit of a wrap up every now and then, and I will come to them later on too, about another thing but not now.
- 37:00 One of the first things that happened to me as a recruit was that somebody said you should go over to the Salvation Army tent, and they had a tent amongst all the other tents and the Salvos would say, "Now come in son," and, "Now the first thing, you have got to write to your mother." So they were always there, those blokes doing good work, they would get young kids like that to do things, you see.
- 37:30 That was the start and you just wonder if it hadn't been for them whether you would have done the same thing, they got hold of you and put you on a good track, now it's bringing a tear to my eye thinking about that.

**And they provided all the things you needed?**

Well yes, the writing paper and everything, and I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't the Salvos, no I think that was official, you were eighteen and as a serviceman you could make a will.

- 38:00 At the age of eighteen these days you can make a will, but in those days the age for making a will was twenty-one, and I think once again they said go to the Salvation Army Officer and he will help you make it out. Getting away from correspondence during the war, so that's where it all started with those sort of blokes, the Salvos.

## Tape 4

00:33 **I wanted to ask you again about censorship and how that affected your letters?**

Well I remember being aware that your letters could be censored. I don't think I ever attempted to write anything in them that I felt wasn't allowed to be written.

- 01:00 I don't remember exactly when, but there was some occasion when we were up in the islands somewhere where something in my letter must have indicated something and the boss, the CO cut it out because my mother said there was a bit cut out of your letter, but it didn't happen very often because I just wrote about day to day things. A cousin of
- 01:30 mine, who in his later life was a journalist, but he was always pretty good with words, he'd arranged with his family that upon a certain key word they should take the first letter of each sentence down a page and it would tell them where he was. I saw a letter when he was up in Queensland in a place called Maryborough in Queensland, and all the way down the first, M for something, A on the next, so you could take the first letter and people were making efforts to communicate past the censorship, but
- 02:00 well we wouldn't want to indicate the location of our radar gear even to our folks because it didn't help them much and it wouldn't be the sort of thing you would want people to know. Although Geraldton, everybody knew that was there I think.

**Did you hear of other tricks that people used to get around the censors?**

Not really. That one does remain in my mind because I saw it you know. But then there wasn't much need for the

02:30 ordinary chap to want to, I don't think, contravene that because you were writing to tell your folks how you were and how your mates were, and it was almost that they didn't need to know much more but you were going ok.

**You mentioned just a moment ago about the Salvation Army fellow that provided music, can you tell us about that?**

03:00 Look I can't tell you too much about that, but he turned up a couple of times while we were in Geraldton. He was travelling in a truck and I presumed that, he obviously did go to various and many units around that district, of which there were a lot, army units and the air force and the air force base and so on, occasionally he would pull up at our place and give us a hoi and say, "I've got some music," and he'd play the music,

03:30 but he couldn't do much for us because we were a reasonably well off sort of a group, but it was good to see him, he was a bright chap and we didn't have any gramophones at Geraldton but he had some of the latest records and played them and we thought that was pretty smart.

**You mentioned that there were some dances especially with the WAAAF girls can you tell us about that?**

04:00 Well the operational base, the main RAAF unit had a hall in it where they held dances from time to time, and the Yacht Club had a regular weekend feature of a dance and we must have danced to the music on the radio in our own recreation hut, but going to a dance mainly meant going to the Yacht Club which was down the main street of Geraldton. The Yacht Club had a balcony that looked out over the sea at the back of it,

04:30 and you know you would go out and sit there with the girls between dances and look at the moon on the water, it was pretty you know, but in the dance itself the lights had been covered up with just a thin slit to let the light out so you were practically dancing in a blacked out sort of thing, and there was just the three or four fellows in the band, just had enough light to see what they were doing. Well it was right on the coast and there wasn't much point in having a highly illuminated object but that's the way they ran the dances in the Yacht Club, it was a black out situation.

05:00 **Did that make the dances slightly more romantic?**

Yes I can remember one occasion when I think it did, yes.

**What do you mean by that?**

Well you asked me and I said yes, it did.

**What were the other recreational activities that went on in your leave time, your free time?**

05:30 Well I must say the surf beach tended to dominate that thing. Occasionally you would go into town, there was a serviceman's club and there were servicemen's hostels all over Australia in the cities, and they would be places where you could get something to eat, and there was one in Geraldton.

06:00 It was named after one of the First World War generals, anyway doesn't matter, it was probably their RSL or something. I used to go and play billiards there with one of the chaps. Somebody had a guitar and we used to play a bit of music together. I had a mouth organ. I got a banjo mandolin and took it away with me, but that was after Geraldton.

06:30 We played cards in the back of our own little, there sometimes, but I didn't have a lot of time myself for playing cards because the beach or taking a girl to a dance were a much more entertaining idea for me, but Geraldton, there was everything you could think of to do really. Not everything but they were good things to do.

**Now tell me about your movements from Geraldton,**

07:00 **you went to the second hottest place in the world I believe?**

In July '43, while I was at Geraldton they set up four or five extra radar stations up in the north west of Australia and some of them were inland and necessarily such very hot places, and one of them was not far from Marble Bar which was renowned for its consistent and extraordinary temperatures,

07:30 and we had heard about this and we used to think that would be a terrible place to be posted to and in March '44 one by one, about four or five of us were posted there. So we thought that we were headed for something pretty horrific and we didn't all go on the one day, it was over a couple of weeks.

08:00 The original people that had set up those radar stations of which this was one, were gradually being posted off to other things because they had been there for nine months and that was about enough to be out in that sort of place in a way, so we were moved in and we arrived in late March, me and a mate, and just before and just after that there were two or three others of us. So

- 08:30 we arrived in that place, got off an aeroplane and you walked into the colossal heat and people were just dressed in shorts and covered in flies. It was a fly ridden joint if ever there was one and there's some pictures in that taken in 1993 after they had had some rain, shows a lot of grass, but for the most time it was rather a barren sort of a place.
- 09:00 The radar unit had to be where there was a hill and on that rather flat arid desert there was only one hill for hundreds of miles so that was it. But we weren't far from a RAAF base where aeroplanes took off to go up to bomb Sumatra and Java and those islands north of Australia, they were American Liberator bombers, and that was the reason for the radar station,
- 09:30 as a network of protecting all that, and in the earlier days and they did pick up Japanese planes and so on and so on which we didn't, we picked up all the local stuff but I can't remember any enemy planes, so there we were, about twenty miles from Marble Bar and the name of the place is Corunna Downs, a sheep station. I don't know how many acres you need for one sheep,
- 10:00 but they do pump water from under the ground and it's good drinking water, we had unlimited amount of good drinking water, beautiful, and a lot of it was pumped out into troughs for the livestock. The other thing about Corunna Downs, across the plains you could see a green line and there was a creek that flowed through the sand, it wasn't on the surface it was just below it and the kangaroos would scratch away at that and if you scratched a hole in it it would gradually fill up with water.
- 10:30 So the country did support a lot of bird life and a lot of kangaroos, and it was an unpleasant place in a lot of ways but it was also a very interesting place, very large goannas about six feet long and they are a famous bit of Australian
- 11:00 animal life, they were there and the first time I saw one of those it was a bit scary, his head popped up out of a bunch of spinifex grass and his long snake like tongue, not a very animal, the most harmful thing there was the death adder which was a small sausage shaped snake with a tiny little tail. He'd lie in the sand and wiggle that little tail and a bird would come at the tail and in a minute his head would be where his tail was, and the bird was gone,
- 11:30 but if he bit you, you didn't have a great chance of living I don't think. He was a very highly poisonous snake this fellow. But the original guys that settled that area, they burnt a lot of that spinifex grass, it was like tumbleweed stuff and it was mostly clear of those snakes by the time we got there. But the bird life was interesting, galahs and parrots,
- 12:00 but it was very hot, and these days we talk about a hundred degrees is about forty degrees it would be those sort of temperatures all the way through to about the end of May and right in the middle of June it cooled down to about sixty two Fahrenheit,
- 12:30 but only for a few days and then it would climb back up again. It would be, I can't help but think in Fahrenheit, about one hundred and fifteen or one hundred and twenty and dry as dry as dry, but you got used to it. You wouldn't want to go too far out from the camp without water because you would dry up.

**What about your skin it must have been hard on some of the fairer blokes?**

- 13:00 I don't remember anyone having particular trouble but we used to play games out in the heat, medicine ball and cricket and so on but it was just hot. We had our tents had been camouflaged and that was an interesting feature. A camouflaged netting was over the tent and then they put spinifex grass, great quantities
- 13:30 on top of the camouflage and then another net to hold that in place, so you would have about that much depth of spinifex grass over the top of the tent and it acted as an insulator and the nights were very cool. That open space would lose heat in the night time, and in the morning the tent would still be cool inside until about midday but it doesn't matter, the heat was so intense that eventually everything heated up.
- 14:00 No we didn't have a bad camp there. The tents were pitched on the red sand of that district, we put strips of hessian over it and tacked it down and we had floors to walk around on. I think the best thing of it we had a wonderful water supply which we pumped out of the ground.

**Just really nice and clean do you mean?**

Oh it was as good as Melbourne's drinking water, it really was.

- 14:30 And an army unit from somewhere used to come and get some from the bore that we sunk. We had enough water to run a hose over the side of the hill where the radar was and we grew watermelons and tomatoes and beans. The biggest watermelons. You could grow stuff in it if you wet it, it was marvellous.

**So you ate a bit more fresh food than perhaps some other blokes?**

Yeah well after someone got the bright idea of planting some vegetables

- 15:00 we did, but prior to that it was whatever was flown in. We had a good cook. He could even make powdered egg come up to something, it seemed like a real omelet so we thought our Henry was pretty good. We thought a lot of Henry.

**Now how was your equipment set up in this camp?**

It was a Light Weight Air Warning, LWAU radar. There are pictures of them in those books out there and you can have a look at them after.

- 15:30 It was a structure with, well you know like a tripod, a big tripod and you would have a metal pipe structure covered with tarpaulins and the aerial on the top of that, the main column was up the middle of it and there was an aerial up the top, and you wound a handle for that to turn around
- 16:00 and if you looked up the column there was a ring which was marked out in three hundred and sixty degrees. You didn't look up there because you had a mirror there to look in to the mirror and you'd see what was up there so you were looking at a screen with was only a little screen this big, and winding the handle but it was just as effective as the fancy stuff down at Geraldton.
- 16:30 We were in an unrestricted sort of an area, like at Geraldton there was the whole coastline with a few mountains and hills that would restrict what you could do, this had almost an unrestricted sweep around that district so we plotted things pretty well there but under that, now radio equipment of those days, transistors had never happened so they were all driven by valves and there were so many valves in these things that
- 17:00 the machine itself was hot enough let alone the sun so I think it would be hotter than any sauna bath working in this gear up at Marble Bar. I think I had the same size frame you see now and when I left there we had to weigh up some things and I weighed nine stone, eight or something, so you would never put weight on I don't think.

**Did you have any precautions or any measures for reducing the heat?**

- 17:30 **No the way the tents were camouflaged helped in that respect but not really, you sort of walked through the flap of the tent that surrounded the doover and you'd probably leave it out hoping you would get a bit of breeze through it, but you got used to doing it I suppose. At the back of thing there was a**
- 18:00 **lean-to where the wireless operator used to send off his messages of what we were plotting down to where ever the headquarters were, Perth, I think. But that was that, we did the same sort of work, only in a less comfortable situation.**

**Now you mentioned that you mainly picked up American Liberators?**

- 18:30 There were Liberator bombers taking off from that base unit, about three miles away it was but they did have a technique. I think they were called roving squadrons, they might have taken off from there and they would go to another base somewhere else, they moved around a bit, it wasn't just an American location, it was an Australian station
- 19:00 but we worked with the Yanks on all that. I was only there once so I can't give you much of a picture of it. So that was our reason for being there.

**Were there other kinds of aircraft that you would have picked up?**

Well carrier planes like the old Douglas DC3s, maybe you have heard of them, a twin-engine monoplane well that's how I got there, in one of those.

- 19:30 We would also, if we picked up anything from the coast, it might have been commercial air traffic over that way, but it was mainly RAAF or US Air Force that we were picking up there.

**Was it interesting work?**

- 20:00 Well as I say, there is something fascinating about that sort of gear to me. There mightn't be to other people. I think for the most part the radar operators, we were interested in what we were doing, and if you were picking up something and plotting it on a map, it seemed to be a useful thing to do and its pretty interesting to young blokes to be put in to that technical area, well it was interesting to young ladies too.

**No girls there?**

No,

- 20:30 there were no ladies for a long while. There was a homestead there on Corunna Downs Station, it was operated by a Mr. Frank Vend and the property belonged to a family originally called the Drake-Brockmans. One of the Drake-Brockmans was a Commonwealth politician back in those days. You wouldn't have him at Corunna Downs
- 21:00 but the family that owned the station. Our boss knew Mr. Vend, I never went over to that homestead but some of the fellows did. I don't know why I never got there, I just didn't. We had communication with the homestead which was a fair way away but we would see their sheep you know. We would go out trying to shoot kangaroos and things you know. We all had rifles. Through Frank Vend
- 21:30 our boss, this is Arthur Irvine, his name is, there is a fair bit about him in that story, he became the

commanding officer of the Corunna Downs, Marble Bar thing shortly after I was posted there, and he stayed the commanding officer of that unit until we all finished up after the war, he knew Frank Vend and he found out a bit about the district and

22:00 he found a water hole which was a wonderful thing to find out in the desert, and it was probably about thirty miles from where we were and there weren't any real roads so it wasn't a quick journey, and you would get there and you could have a swim in it which was pretty good. It's even in the official, air force records sent me down a copy of all the CO monthly reports he used to send in and he has got it down there, how we went to the Koogan River, reservoir

22:30 or whatever it was, it was only a puddle really. We all had a good day.

**What were your other opportunities for recreation or free time?**

In Corunna Downs, I'm calling it Marble Bar but Corunna Downs is its real name. We had some pretty sporty blokes and one mate of mine was a great leader of all the sporting activities and we'd get a cricket game going or football, and at nighttime we would gamble.

23:00 We used to play a game called pontoon which has got various names, it's based on the turning over of a card, and I remember on one occasion writing home for money because I had lost all that I had up there. I didn't bother much for money there, you could ask that your pay just be put in the bank when you were in places like that. I used to get ten and six pence a day, now I don't know what that means to you,

23:30 but it wasn't bad pay because I think an ordinary soldier was getting six and six pence, it was a little bit more than half a pound a day, and I used to have a fairly large proportion of that put in the bank because up in that part of the world there was nowhere to spend it except on your requirements for cigarettes or a bit of beer would come up occasionally, but we would gamble and I don't know whether other servicemen were the same, but

24:00 we were outstanding as gamblers, they would bet on two flies climbing up the wall, anything that came up would be settled by, "I betcha he did," or, "I betcha he didn't." "Ok, I bet you ten bob." And then you'd have to find out whether he did or he didn't, and settle the debt. It was an interesting thing in our reunions, returned to wearing white collars and going to work in offices and looking like managers and you would only have a reunion going for half an hour and someone would say, "I bet you he bloody didn't,"

24:30 and they would go back to that mind set you know, whereas during the week they were managers of departments where they worked.

**So do you know if other blokes lost most of their pay as well?**

25:00 Oh well people lost and won, it just circulated really, the money just went round and round.

**Just a way to keep amused as much as anything?**

Yes oh, we would play cards too and we would bet on that of course. Play a game called Euchre or poker, we never played two up at Kuranna Downs that I can remember.

**We saw a funny picture of some blokes playing two up but I'm not sure where that was?**

25:30 One of my pictures, that was after we left Corunna Downs and we were getting ready to go to Borneo. We were over in New South Wales at a camp for a little while and we were playing two up there. But I don't remember playing two up at that camp. The radar stations had to have power so we had to have a generator of our own so we had electric lights in our tents.

26:00 One of my friends there, I think he was from South Australia, I can tell you this but you might not understand it. Back in those days there used to be a soap powder called Persil and this fellow's name was White and we couldn't help but call him Persil, Persil White you see. Persil was a very clever radio engineer and odd bits and pieces that he scrounged were in our tent we had our own short wave radio.

26:30 We used to listen to the Americans. The Americans were broadcasting the most fantastic stuff. Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw and Duke Ellington and all these bands, they had them on all the time so it seemed. That was one of the entertainments of being there and being in a radar unit we always had a radio.

**Yes that was unusual in many ways to get that opportunity.**

Yes it was.

**Were you a fan of the music of the period?**

Not as much as I am now. I was starting to realise

27:00 in those days. Actually my earliest recollection of hearing some music by Duke Ellington. I've since belonged to a group that collected his music over the years, but my first recollection of hearing his music was on a Comforts Fund record out of a Comforts Fund parcel and somebody had a wind up



gramophone and we played this record.

27:30 **Can you remember what it was?**

Yeah it was a record called 'Chloe'.

**How did the tune go?**

Oh look I would have to play it for you, 'Chloe' was a sort of a popular thing of its time. No I don't think I could sing it right now and I'm trying to think what was on the other side of the record, however there was a golden age of swing and jazz music and there were some extraordinary musicians

28:00 and the Americans used to make these and we didn't get any but I have struck them on American ships. You could buy them after the war, they were called V discs, the Americans brought out, there was actually a strike of musicians during the war, a recording strike they didn't stop playing but they wouldn't record and the American army or authorities got a lot of these great bands to perform on Victory Disc, a V disc,

28:30 and they were rather a big disc they were more than twelve inches I think, and the old seventy-eight speed but they contained a lot of music, Fats Waller and Bing Crosby, Crosby was a vocalist but the bands were marvellous. I know I'm getting old but they don't make music like that any more.

**You won't find me disagreeing. I have just watched the whole Ken Burns Jazz series. Fantastic. What were some of the other really popular songs of the war period?**

29:00 To just pick them out of the air, I think quite a lot of the popular songs of the war era came from the English themselves, Vera Lynn,

29:30 you know, 'We'll Meet Again' and a song called 'A Nightingale Sang In Barkly Square' gave the image of a serviceman with his girl, but I think the song was written just at the beginning of the war. Then there was 'Run Rabbit Run', which you mentioned before which was a wartime song. You need to ask Win to come in and ask the titles of these songs.

30:00 I tell you a song that became famous at that time it was 'White Christmas' and you had a song like that and of course it is nostalgic so it became part of our consciousness I think as service people and 'I'll Be Home For Christmas' now there's a wartime song,

30:30 there were a large number of wartime songs but I am sort of stumbling over what their titles were.

**Yes there were lots on the theme of love or missing someone.**

'I'm Coming Home on a Wing and a Prayer', for instance.

31:00 'The Slip Of A Lip Will Sink A Ship'. That was one of the sort of songs about censorship I suppose, and I'm struggling a bit to think of the titles. A Zero was the name of a Japanese aeroplane and there was a song called 'Johnny Shot a Zero', which wasn't much of a song but indicates the tenor of the times.

31:30 The song was saying that Johnny as a kid got a zero because he wasn't much good at school but now that he is an American pilot and he got a Zero that means...the fact that he killed somebody was rather secondary to the whole thing, that's the way it is with war and I think people become callous to the idea of war,

32:00 you know don't think about what was really going on, so 'Johnny Shot a Zero' was one of the hits of the week.

**I haven't heard of that one before.**

I don't think it had enormous popularity, but I have heard it since played. There are one or two stations, little stations in Melbourne that play nostalgic stuff, they'll come up with all this old time music you know.

**Glenn Miller?**

32:30 Yeah. Well Miller took his band to England in uniform as you probably know and I'm trying to remember when some of the things that came out with Miller, 'In The Mood' was an extraordinary piece of music, not a marvellous piece of music really, but had a wonderful thing about it. Was that wartime? 'String Of Pearls' and all those things that Miller did.

33:00 But he was a renowned personality before the war and he took his band to England, the story is that they were raided and they just kept on playing through an air raid I think.

**Were you a musician already before the war?**

No I'd tried to play the piano a bit and never done much about it but I have sort of puddled around with it since the war, it's more since I have retired I have tried to take a serious interest in learning something about the piano. That's good fun.

33:30 **We had one veteran who picked it up at the age of sixty-two. What was the correspondence like during the time you were at Corunna Downs, or even newspapers, other things getting to you, parcels?**

34:00 As far as getting information is concerned? Well we would have listened to the news every day in the mess I think we had a radio, and we listened to the ABC in Perth which we could pick up and so we knew the news that way. Maybe someone posted up a newspaper once in a while but that didn't matter, secondary, I think

34:30 we had our news from the radio and the other thing that we used to listen to, at lunchtime sometimes was Tokyo Rose. Tokyo Rose was on the shortwave and she used to try and titillate us with all sorts of suggestive things, you know she was supposed to be undermining our morale and telling us how our girlfriends at home were carrying on with other blokes you know,

35:00 but it was just so funny that it had no bad effects on us and the best part was she had an opening tune which was one of the American bands with Buster Bailey on the clarinet playing 'I Know What You Know' and it is still a fantastic piece of American jazz and that's what she used as her opening theme, Tokyo Rose.

**Bizarre. So you actually laughed at it?**

Oh we thought Tokyo Rose was

35:30 a huge joke.

**What sort of things that she said would prompt your humour?**

Just that I think it was aimed at unsettling us and we knew it and it didn't unsettle us. That's what we laughed at.

**What sort of things would she say?**

Sort of suggestive things about the sexual adventures of different people and trying to disturb you knowing that you were a long way from women folk.

36:00 I don't remember having heard her perhaps more than half a dozen times. We thought it was a bit of a joke. I heard her up in the islands too I suppose,

36:30 but the Japanese broadcast occasionally in English you know about the Co-Prosperity Sphere of the Japanese and 'Asia Marches On', you know they were always talking about expanding into these islands and what they were going to do. The people in those islands weren't doing at all they were starving half of them but I got around to seeing what happened to them later on.

**When did you get word that you would be going overseas?**

37:00 Well we closed down that Corunna Downs unit, it was something like the middle of December, 16th December '44, and we packed it all up and we burnt down the mess and we piled up all the tents and all the old camouflage because it has all been blistering out in the sun for a long time and we just set ablaze to it. We packed up our gear into its boxes and things that had to be kept of course.

37:30 We headed off to Marble Bar and from there we went to Port Hedland in a railway truck, there was a railway line from Marble Bar to Port Hedland, Port Hedland's right on the coast and we knew we were going to be sent back to the eastern states to form up to do something but we weren't quite sure what the purpose was but we found out when we got over there.

**So tell me more about that?**

38:00 Getting the movement to the eastern states?

**Or what you found when you got there as well.**

Well before we got there we were put on a little boat that travelled up and down the west coast carrying things and passengers and there was a lady and her daughter and a couple of other people as passengers, we didn't have anything to do with them, but they were passengers on that boat and we came on, a whole group of us, about thirty

38:30 and we had quarters on the ship for the time being, and they had a bar on board and you had to be a corporal to get into it so we our corporals shared their shirts around and we all became corporals for the time being, not that any one really cared I suppose. That was a bit of a change and smelling the sea air after having been out in that hot dry climate was wonderful, just

39:00 to breathe the air you know, and we had to help unload that ship at a place called Derby which is further north, it went north before it went back again. The wharf labourers were on strike, a great thing, we were having a war and we've got blokes on strike, so we had to unload their ship, think about that, and when we got to Perth we couldn't get our gear unloaded because the wharfies down there were on strike too but eventually that all got straightened out.

39:30 I had actually got over to the eastern states on a plane ride once while I was over there. My father's

friend knew somebody that got me a ride when I had some leave. We went back to the eastern states by train and we took leave and then we went up where you saw that picture of playing two up, and then we finished up at Archerfield which is an air base outside Brisbane.

40:00 That's were the forming up for the landings in Borneo were put together.

**And how long were you there?**

Well we actually embarked on a ship to go overseas on the 2nd May 1945 so from the time of pulling down Corunna Downs till then it was, we were staging around in this place or that, Castlereagh in Sydney,

40:30 well it was mostly Archerfield, there's a bit in-between that I am not putting my finger on at the moment. We had to be refitted out and all that sort of thing and when we were refitted out we had a whole new radar set. We had to practice pulling it apart and putting it back together again because that was going to be the operation when you got there, it had to be assembled wherever you were put and we had a few practice runs at assembling it.

41:00 Then we took leave off into Brisbane and so on. We weren't far from Sydney for quite a while in all that, it was an interesting period of time between that and May.

## Tape 5

00:33 **I'll just ask the question I was going to ask at the end of that tape, what kind of preparation if any did you really have to go to the jungle?**

In the way of training, I can't say I recall any thing specifically except you were kitted out with jungle greens which was a different type of gear,

01:00 and new boots and so on and so on. I think we just digested all that and didn't take much notice of that, it was just routine but we knew that we were being sent away and we had the new gear that we had to set up and practice its assembly so when all that was going to happen. It wasn't the most uppermost thing in our mind. We saw a fair bit of Brisbane while we could.

01:30 It was a nice town then. It's still a nice town but it was very nice then.

**What were your perceptions of wartime Brisbane?**

Well now more servicemen per square yard than anywhere I have ever seen, that was my sort of recollection, but then Sydney wouldn't have been too bad for same sort of thing but I think except Brisbane seemed to be very noticeable. All the services and

02:00 Americans too. Because you know you were rather rigidly trained to salute superior officers and you would be walking around Brisbane and you seemed to be saluting all the time, there'd be air force officers and WAAAF officers and RAN [Royal Australian Navy] officers, all sexes and lines of people there. Townsville, I wasn't up there, but was another place that was heavily populated by service people at the time but Brisbane certainly to my recollection had a very large percentage of people walking around in uniform,

02:30 and service hostels. You could find somewhere where you could stay for the night for a small fee you could have a bed or there would be things being done all the time, like a dance. I remember being very interested in a girl called Jacqueline at a dance but she wasn't allowed to go out with the boys, she was there as part of the group that was providing this dance, she just didn't want to become involved with any of the boys

03:00 'cause I wanted to take her home, but I think that was a fairly common thing that people as their war effort got into entertaining, helping the soldiers on their leave, that sort of thing.

**She was a civilian girl?**

Oh yes.

**We've heard a bit about that, that they would organise dances but the girls were not encouraged to become involved?**

Well yes, that's why

03:30 I'm aware of it because I met one that I liked and I couldn't take her home.

**What other activities did you get up to in Brisbane?**

Well we wandered around the town, a place we hadn't seen before and we seemed to drink a lot of milk. Brisbane seemed to be different to Melbourne, where we'd come from. You would get milk from the dairy in Melbourne and this is a funny recollection, but in Brisbane the shops would have a little sign that said licensed milk retailers this sort of thing.

- 04:00 And there was a bit of licensing on the distribution of milk but we would get cold milk and drink it. I don't think I ever went to a pub in Brisbane, we drank a lot of milk and found a place for a good feed. Had a look around the gardens, and all that sort of thing. I have a good picture of me and some other blokes walking through the gardens in Brisbane but no we sort of spent the time moseying about really,
- 04:30 going to whatever dances and things that were on you know, and the pictures and they smoked in the pictures in Brisbane. You would be looking at the movies through a haze of cigarette smoke, we were smoking ourselves but you couldn't do that in Melbourne theatres. The arms of the seats had little ashtrays for you. People smoked in the picture theatres.
- 05:00 I think people smoked in British picture theatres too from what I've seen but they certainly didn't smoke in Melbourne theatres.

**Did you smoke before you went into the services?**

Yes.

**But you hadn't been a drinker before the services?**

I wouldn't say that I came out of the services a drinker. I had had a few drinks in my service time but it was, you know a social part of the office that I worked in.

- 05:30 We learned to consume a fair bit of beer or wine and that sort of thing like we do to this present day. I had been brought up to be not a drinker.

**Just to draw a comparison I didn't ask you about your leave time in Sydney, how did that compare to your leave time in Brisbane?**

Well leave time in Sydney was from Richmond Air Base mainly.

- 06:00 It would have been a few weekends that I spent in Sydney and quite a few of the blokes were interested in going to the races in Sydney which didn't interest me. I sort of just looked around Sydney, and Sydney had trams in those days which they don't have any more and the Sydney tram was quite an experience because the conductor used to swing along the outside of it. They'd be so packed with people that he would be on the outside on the running board, swinging along and that's the way he operated, he collected fares that way.

- 06:30 It was a death defying experience for him but they lived that way, the Sydney tram drivers. Another guy and I went to the Blue Mountains one weekend while we were there and stayed in a tiny little guest house called Villers-Bretonneux which comes from, there was a famous battle of the First World War at Villers-Bretonneux in France and they had named their guest house after it,

- 07:00 so that was another thing I did. I wasn't in Sydney I was in the Blue Mountains on that particular weekend. I don't remember anything unusual just browsing around and having a look at the town, that sort of thing.

**It must have been quite amazing seeing Sydney and the Harbour Bridge?**

Yeah that was a good thing to see for the first time. You knew all about it but seeing it was another thing, well I still go to Sydney and there are heaps of places that I haven't even looked into.

- 07:30 It's a big city and it sprawls this way and that. I went to the head office of the AMP Society which I had been working for and introduced myself while I was in Sydney as a kid. I thought that was the thing to do you see, as a youngster before I'd enlisted, our service men in the AMP Society in Melbourne would come in to visit because they were on leave and that was where they worked.

- 08:00 So I thought I'd introduce myself to the Sydney office while I was there, I did that one day.

**Now how did the Australian servicemen both in Brisbane and Sydney get on with the American servicemen?**

Oh as far as I could see they got on very well but there was an incident where there was a big brawl and it's been written up in the history books, and what started it I'm not quite sure. We did have a little sense of jealousy about our American comrades.

- 08:30 They were so much better fed and better dressed than we were and you know, we were a little bit inclined to think they could've attracted our girls when who in the hell were they to come in and do that but it didn't personally get to me very much, but have you heard of the incident of the brawl in Sydney between the, it raged for quite a few hours I think. The riot police were out and everything.

**We have heard of one in Brisbane, there may have been many others?**

- 09:00 Oh there would have been a few.

**Did you see any reactions between them when they weren't getting on?**

No I really didn't see anything like that and the times that I came across Americans we were on a very friendly basis and I found them great blokes really.

**This was more in the islands?**

In Borneo we struck a few, and on the landing ships. They were American ships that got us to Borneo and Morotai and those places.

- 09:30 The American crews, we played two up with them and they thought it was terrific, playing two up, we had something to show them you know. They were good guys.

**So you didn't get the opportunity to see your family again before you went overseas?**

No you have just reminded me of something, talking about Americans, while I was at Archerfield Air Base there were Americans air crew there and their planes and

- 10:00 a couple of us went over to their outfit and said, "What, are you flying down to Melbourne?" you know. They said, "We are going up and down every day," and they said, "Well hang around and we can give you a lift," and we must have had a little bit of leave and I don't think I contemplated going absent with out leave, I must have had a couple of spare days that I could do this.
- 10:30 And we waited and where they were encamped they had a few American lasses there making coffee and they were giving us coffee and doughnuts and we sat there and read magazines. We waited all day and they kept coming back and saying, "Sorry Aussie we just can't put you on board today," so it didn't happen that I got a lift down there but I had a pleasant communication with the American boys and the girls so they were lovely girls. The
- 11:00 American's food, it was unbelievable.

**What made it so much better?**

The American food? Well I will come to that when we get onto landing ships if you like, in this area, and I'm trying to describe it was like the building where the American flyers and admin belonged and they had the whole set up there to make coffee and flapjacks and all that the things that Americans have.

- 11:30 And you know, "Oh Aussie sit down, have coffee," they were so generous, but they were fair dinkum and if they had a plane going down where they'd had a bit of room, they would have put us on board, now the only big questions is would we have got back you know. It was a pleasant encounter with some of the American fellows and the girls. They would have been,
- 12:00 I don't know what their title was but they'd be like our WAAAFs, they were part of the American Air Force.

**So just before you went over seas you didn't get a chance to see your family again?**

When we got over east we went on leave and I think when we were up in New South Wales before we moved off from there, to go to Archerfield we were down in Melbourne again for a week.

**How was that?**

That was good. The family was still wondering what the heck I was doing because I wouldn't tell them.

- 12:30 **Did they know that you were going over seas at that point?**

Yeah, they did. You often wonder how your parents felt you know.

**Looking back now I suppose we all realise how much anxiety they must have had?**

Yes, that's right. I have often thought of that. If it was one of my boys you know you'd be thinking about it.

- 13:00 **Did they ever articulate to you later on what they were thinking or feeling?**

No not really, they were, I think no, they were visiting somebody in Bendigo which is ninety miles from here the day I got home and I knew how to contact them and they just dropped everything.

- 13:30 **Pretty fond of their boy.**

They probably were.

**You were going to tell us your impressions of Arthur Irvine?**

Yes we are going back to when I first mentioned him he became the commanding officer of 321 Radar that was the radar station at Kuranna Downs and that was

- 14:00 in something like April or May of 1943, shortly after I turned up there. The previous commanding officer I hardly knew, his name was McDougall, he was just another, a lot of the radar officers were very young blokes, they were technical fellows, like the man who was at Geraldton, he was twenty one or two you know, but Arthur he had been a radar mechanic but he had also been a school teacher in civilian life, and when we found Arthur
- 14:30 at Marble Bar, Kuranna Downs, Arthur would have been thirty three, I think, round about. So he was a

fairly mature man to us bunch of school boys but for all that he was a good leader and he thought ahead about things. I think even in that account I've written about the unit, it wasn't long after that Arthur got there that he

- 15:00 managed to get some huts assembled so that we had a better place to eat and when I was talking about Tokyo Rose before, we would be sitting in that mess hut that he had had built that we had a radio for instance. Now where are we, where would you like to go from there?

**I have read a bit of the unit history that you wrote, could you tell us more about that new mess hut that he had built and the old one it had replaced?**

Well there was a prefabricated

- 15:30 hut common for the services which was made out of panels and I have forgotten the exact size of it. It probably would have been about eight feet high by about four feet wide, and you could bolt them together so that you could have a long structure or a short one, and a very similar thing tilted up on the roof. They would come as a great big pile of stuff, all the pieces the same size and they bolted together to make a, I think I have made a reference to their being erected.

- 16:00 **I did read that and I would love you to tell us that story?**

So that was our mess hut and it would have been based on that, probably about twenty four feet long, a bit longer than this room, and probably nearly as wide with a table down the middle, and of course there were thirty people in the unit but not everybody had a meal at the same time, there were always four or five of them up on the hill running the machine. So that accommodated most of us for lunch, and Arthur would sit at the table and

- 16:30 he was like the head of the family. As I said before, I have a very high regard for him and my regard for him only increased as we got into more difficult places in the islands and in the landing in Borneo and so on.

**I read also of his attitude towards your gambling in Kuranna Downs?**

Oh I don't think he was the sort of fellow that would have been interested in gambling himself as such but,

- 17:00 as I said about gambling, the money went round and round the camp and we gambled and gambled and he could see that it was a side to our character that was probably good for morale rather than the reverse, there was a game atmosphere most of the time, so he tolerated that which wouldn't be a thing I think he would be very interested in himself, that was just my feeling.

**And I got the sense that he used that spirit**

- 17:30 **it to his own end, he was a good table tennis player?**

He was but I beat him. I didn't mention that in that book but he did chop wood once. You have read that part have you?

**Could you tell us about that?**

Well the type of hut that was made out of these sections, we had a couple of spare sections and in the old structure, you could hardly call it anything, it was a big long lean-to up against where the kitchen was,

- 18:00 and in it there were a couple of stumps where we just rested things and we sat at tables. This was before he built this new mess, and I suggested to him that we could use those stumps that were there, and I forget exactly why they were there, to put one of these things on and we could have a table tennis table, and that's why I remember they were I think about eight by four those sections, because a table tennis table is nine by five, the proper size, so it was just a bit smaller.

- 18:30 I'd actually played table tennis quite a bit and we had an undersized table tennis table at home so I was quite accustomed to that size and that's why I had a good winning streak as a table tennis player. But Arthur was also a good tennis player and a good table tennis player but he challenged everybody to play him at table tennis and the loser would have to cut some wood for the cook and he cut wood once.

**You should have put that in your history as well?**

I did somewhere there.

- 19:00 **That you made him cut wood.**

Well I didn't feel like being quite so boastful, it was just something that I remembered well. But he was a good sport and a good loser and he chopped the wood.

**What qualities do you think a CO like that needs to be a good commanding officer?**

Well I suppose like any manager or any leader they need to really know what their people are doing and talk to their people as distinct from say being afar and

- 19:30 issuing orders at arms length. So Arthur would come into the operations room and he would walk around the tents, he'd wander in when you were playing cards and say g'day. So he knew us and understood, but I think also being an older man he was a man of some experience and also being a school teacher he had
- 20:00 to be a leader to much younger people which is what we were, and he had the ability and he thought ahead to things that needed to be done. He also had a very able assistant in the form of our orderly room sergeant. You'd call him the chief clerk in the main business and his name was Bryce Carter. He was very capable bloke and quite a character in his own way, and we lost him a few years ago which is a pity,
- 20:30 because he was a bright man. But Arthur made good use of him and he responded to Arthur pretty well. Things like I mentioned to Christen, one of the chaps wanted to get some seeds to plant vegetables on the side of the hill and Arthur gave great support to doing those sorts of things and to finding a water hole where he'd take us swimming, etc.
- 21:00 Those sort of things didn't have to be done but they were the sort of things that do wonders for morale you know.

**Do you think at the time you appreciated his skills or has that been more recent understanding?**

I've appreciated it more in later years and as you grow older and have children of your own and all that sort of thing. It's the same, as I said, as young blokes we, "Bloody old Irvine," sort of thing you know, he was older than us but he was good for us and none of us would deny it these days.

- 21:30 **I also saw a photo of the hill on which you had a doover.**

That's a recent photo, the colour one.

**Is that how it was pretty much before?**

Exactly the same except those colour photos were taken in 1993 which happened to be a freak year with a lot of rain and there's a lot of grass evident. When we were there, there were clumps of spinifex but fairly much an arid wasteland.

- 22:00 It was the sort of territory up there that on the one occasion that it rained the next day there was a haze of green over the whole lot of it but that just burnt away. There must be just endless amount of seed and stuff in it but it will grow things any way.

**Would it rain up there?**

Well after that blow that I described in the account of Kuranna Downs it rained. There is a sheep station there but they pump a lot of water out of the ground for their stock,

- 22:30 and they obviously had rain before those photos but I don't know if it would be very reliable from an agricultural point of view. We had that cyclone or whatever the disturbance was followed by rain but not much, it might have been ten minutes of rain. I think there was one other occasion when it rained but not for very long.

**It must have been quite an event if it rained?**

- 23:00 Well when we had that very hefty blow it rained and I think the temperature dropped to ninety-one or two and we put pullovers on. Everybody, it was cool.

**Could you describe from the beginning the approach of that blow and how you weathered it?**

- 23:30 I think it was a weather pattern like you will see in a newspaper now that they have a cyclone going along, not today but in present times and they will show how they give a cyclone a name when it goes across the coast, and they have them, it is a regular occurrence in that area and when it strikes the town it just about blows it away, the old towns.
- 24:00 They rebuilt them so that they are pretty much proof of that I suppose. I don't know if it was one of the worst ones but it was quite a colossal thing. We knew it was coming 'cause it was coming from the south but as I recall it we only got about an hours warning I think and we started to lash down the aerial of the radar set and you know, run for cover and then you could see it right across the horizon, the red sand being lifted up,
- 24:30 and this ominous cloud approaching you, it was quite, yeah.

**Do you remember what you thought when you saw that ominous cloud?**

That was the blow, we had read about them and we knew that that district could be subject to it but we really didn't know what the outcome would be, and I think I mentioned in that account we had one of those little prefab huts, only a small one and it hadn't been long put up,

- 25:00 I don't know what we were going to use it for but it still had a bit of timber in it. A couple of us were inside and I was on duty at the time this all happened and that's why I was up on that hill and so we

held against it where the hut nearly got blown away, and we just had to stand there for a while, while it blew but you couldn't see anything through the little apertures, it wasn't a window, I don't know, but you couldn't see the camp below,

25:30 the air was just full of dust.

**I read in that account you had to prop up one of the wall?**

That's what I was just saying, yeah.

**Was that a frightening experience?**

Well we seemed to be equal to it. We had a pretty good chunk of timber that we managed to wedge against it but it could've have been a nasty experience if it really had collapsed it would have taken us with it.

**And what was the aftermath of that blow?**

Well I mentioned to Christen this morning that the tents were

26:00 all held down by camouflage netting then a lot of spinifex grass and then another netting, and they were pegged down in so many places that oddly enough the tents didn't blow down. I think the openings to a couple of tents got ripped or something, within the tent there was a couple of inches of red dust and everything was covered in dust. We were back on the air as a radar unit pretty soon afterwards and we swept out the tent and shook the dust off everything

26:30 and back to normal.

**Was dust a problem with that equipment?**

It was pretty well sealed up and it was made with going to the tropics in mind and it was also, inside the structure which was surrounded by pretty hefty tarpaulins and all tied down and so on. But it was like an old fashioned radio set, it was all full of valves and

27:00 there were some moving parts but not too many. There was some fans to keep some of the valve sections cool, so I guess dust could do it harm but not like dust could do harm putting it in a carburettor of a car or something.

**Could you tell us more how it was dug in or sat on top of that hill, the radar?**

27:30 No I can't tell you exactly that. The pictures might show but certainly there were pegs driven in to the ground, see the pegs for our tents are still in those coloured pictures, if you look closely you can see steel tent pegs. You know a star peg, well they were driven fairly hard into the ground and they are still there sixty years later.

28:00 And nothing rusts up there because there is no moisture in the air so around the radar, the doover, there would be quite a lot of those pegs driven in where they can. They would have had to do a bit of drilling because it was on a bit of hard stone rock that thing up there but the gear would sit where it sat, and that was also a turntable, and of course the whole thing went around, as you wound a handle.

28:30 You were sitting in front of a bit of gear on a turntable going around as you worked the handle and I don't really know what's underneath all that, expect it's set on the ground and it had plenty of guy wires holding it down, pegs and things of that nature.

**Were you having to crank that the whole time you were working on it?**

Whoever's turn it was to operate the gear, he turned it around until he picked up an echo on the screen and he stopped and went back and forth until he lined it up,

29:00 but you weren't in a sweat over it, it was just quietly turning it and going around.

**How many people would be manning it at one time?**

A shift of us would be about three, someone would be on the plotting board, someone looking at the screen and somebody keeping a log book and you'd rotate. In the six hour shift you were on you would probably change over every hour and move round

29:30 and so on, and there was usually one of the radar mechanics was part of the shift too. He was there to monitor what was happening on the gear.

**What was the best job?**

I don't think we had any real considerations about that but I suppose the actual radar screen, operating the gear was probably the most interesting,

30:00 and it was more interesting if you were actually picking up something. Then if you were plotting it you were doing all this and sending all this information to a plotting room down south somewhere. From up there we sent all the information by Morse code, we had a wireless telegraphist, it was a secret thing and he couldn't come into the doover. He was in a room outside the doover you see.



30:30 **So you had another room attached to that?**

Yes we had a bit of a lean-to at the back of it.

**And were you kept busy with echoes or blips, were there many things to chart?**

No you wouldn't say we were kept busy but on every shift there would be a few things that you would pick up, but you might at certain times of the day you could be sitting there for hours and there wouldn't be anything happening but from the operational base nearby there was a bit of activity as a rule.

31:00 In the original part of that story of mine, my friend, who wrote up some of the earlier notes, when they were first there they were plotting and we used to plot them too, the raids that went over to Java and Sumatra and those sorts of things. They were friendly planes so it didn't matter, the purpose was to pick up enemy ones but up there the enemy had been pushed further back and never came near us I think.

31:30 I think while we were there, there was some attempt at Port Hedland, but we didn't pick it up, it was just out of our range.

**So you find out about that later on, you didn't pick it up as it was happening?**

Well I think it was slightly out of our range but the other radars in the area probably did.

**So you had six-hour shifts so you had four shifts every twenty-four hours?**

Yes.

**How did that work?**

32:00 If this week I was on say six am to midday that'd be that and then you would have a few days off, and it was sort of rostered around so the next time you came on you did from midday to six o'clock. So there was a few days off on a weekly basis, not that you need much spare time up there, you'd be better off working, although we did have quite a few sporting activities.

32:30 **What was the best shift in the twenty-four period?**

Oh I don't know that we felt any particular way about that. In some ways midnight to six am because you only need to catch up on a little bit of shut eye and you had the whole day free and in Geraldton, West Australia, you might just go straight down to the beach and have a sleep on the beach and then get up and go for some surfing.

**Sounds pretty good.**

Oh in that respect it wasn't very difficult.

33:00 **Was heat a problem in the doover hut or tent?**

Well I don't know about a problem but it was very hot. A very hot environment with radio gear with heated components, valves and so on.

**You also mentioned something in that book about the shower system you had rigged up, could you describe that to us?**

That, in those pictures that's still there,

33:30 the showers were some forty four gallon drums that were standing on a platform that was timber and under the showers there was a circular shallow cylinder with holes punched in it, it was made that way and attached to it was a lever and you could pull the string and that allowed water to run into the

34:00 bowl underneath and you would have a shower, and I think there were four of them and we filled them from our well, we pumped water in them and at the end of the day it was the water was too hot to stand under but by at eleven o'clock at night you had a good warm shower. In the morning it was too cold.

34:30 **So it was a land of extremes there isn't it, cold at night?**

Yes when we left that environment and we folded the whole outfit up in December, the last night, having put all the tents in a heap to be burnt we slept out in the open and by golly it was cold and it was December. It probably wasn't cold in the sense of the word cold meaning here but after a hundred and fifteen during the day, I don't know what it cooled down to

35:00 but it was pretty cool by the morning without a tent.

**I was wondering if you could tell me about kangaroo shooting?**

There were lots of kangaroos in the district. I think a few were shot. There was one that

35:30 some of the boys that knew a bit about it butchered it and cooked the meat. Kangaroo meat does appear here in restaurants here in Melbourne some times I've heard. I don't think I ever tried it but we didn't shoot that many. They are not an easy target, they are moving. There would be herds of kangaroos,

quite large numbers of them, and on the move, you would fire a shot and they would all be moving, and they are rather graceful creatures when you see them like that.

- 36:00 We think of a kangaroo as a rather awkward animal but in their natural environment and when they are all going, there is a gracefulness about it that is quite interesting to see, well I thought so.

**We have time on this tape for to tell us the story about taking the kitchen scraps to the tip?**

Oh yes, that was just a little funny things. In all camp environments,

- 36:30 you mightn't be on duty on the radar, but somebody will say, a couple of you blokes do this or do that or you've got to clean that. Everybody got detailed into doing something on any given days and someone said, "Parncutt you had better go with," I've seen his name in the reports it was Corporal Kerr I forget his first name now. He was a guard he wasn't a radar operator so his line of activity was away from ours,

- 37:00 so I hardly knew him and we hopped on the truck and we had some rubbish that had been at the back of the mess all on the truck and some sort of spontaneous combustion had got going probably through something rotting and he said, "Jesus Christ!" and I said, "What's the matter?" and he said, "The truck is on fire," and we stopped the truck. We were about half a mile out of camp and he was quick as a flash, and there were some ropes over the truck holding

- 37:30 all this stuff down and he grabbed the axe that was clipped to the side of the chassis and cut the ropes and drove the truck and all the stuff, and he drove the truck away from the rubbish, you see. So we heaved a sigh of relief and we were standing there looking at the truck and the woodwork of the tray was smouldering and it was only that far from the petrol tank, so that's when we peed on it which was the logical thing to do and drove like mad into the camp. Now driving fast

- 38:00 in that dry air, the smouldering started to go again and it didn't take long for it to recover and so we drove into the camp yelling screaming and fellows came from everywhere with a bucket of water and we put it out. It's one of those things, if you think about a truck with a wooden frame getting on fire in that sort of dry temperatures and close to the petrol tanks it wasn't funny. It's funny to think of it now.

**And it actually got written up in the report?**

Yes the CO

- 38:30 mentioned it in his monthly report. The air force headquarters gave me copies of all those when I was trying to do that exercise.

## Tape 6

- 00:31 **I was wondering about the process of a wireless operator?**

Well we did have a land line, it was just simply a couple of wires running across the open territory between us and the operational base unit, it was called an OBU, [Operational Base Unit], that's why I keep calling it that and I think it was the best part of two or three miles, it was some distance like that

- 01:00 and occasionally it would break down, most likely from a kangaroo or something tripping over it and breaking it. The wireless mechanics had, I think it's called a signal generator, it was a thing like the old telephones, they used to wind up, it would be something like that that wound up and created a current and by some means they could check the resistance in the wire against the current they were creating and this does need a technical bloke to talk to you about it, I mightn't be right

- 01:30 but my understanding of it was, by measuring the amount of resistance to what they were trying to do with the wind up generator it gave them a pretty good idea of how far down the wire the break had occurred. They would come back and we would say, "Did you find it?" and they would say, "Yep." So they would get pretty close to it. But they had to repair that at reasonably frequent intervals because of the local

- 02:00 livestock, sheep and kangaroos.

**They would cut through the wire occasionally?**

Tread on it, yeah, well you can imagine a heavy animal like a kangaroo if he got his foot under it and he was hopping along it would just break somewhere.

**I wonder if you could also describe the trip to Port Hedland, you were trained there weren't you?**

There was a train from Marble Bar to Port Hedland, it was just open trucks and it was a distance of a hundred and ten, hundred and

- 02:30 twenty miles, not a very long distance but it was a slow train and there was other material that was

being transported by the train, not just us. We had our gear and ourselves in a truck. I think I made the wise crack in my account about this, that we went in to the Marble Bar hotel at nine o'clock in the morning and had a beer, people said we said to one another we were just waiting for the train to

- 03:00 stay out in the sun long enough to get up enough steam but it wasn't an eventual voyage, except that I think within ten miles of the coast you could smell the sea air, you could smell the moisture in the air and it was a very welcome sensation after the very extraordinary dryness of where we had been, you know, the scent, a bit of sea air, it was quite remarkable. we stayed in Broome for a day or two and we went to the open air pictures in Broome
- 03:30 which was mainly occupied by the local Aboriginal people going to the movies and we were amongst a very few whites. They smoked in that picture theatre too of course. Broome I don't think was a very big town at the time but it had a beautiful sweep beach, lovely golden sands and blue water and so on, and those great big fat trees, baobab trees,
- 04:00 you would see a few of those in the township of Broome, and the next place we stopped at, that's where we boarded a boat. We stopped at Derby and that's where we had to help unload the boat and the interesting thing about that part of the country, the tides are quite enormous and we pulled into Derby at three o'clock in the morning
- 04:30 and went back to sleep and looked out the porthole and we were on dry land. We couldn't open the cabin door because the ship had sort of twisted a bit, it was curious, anyway outside as far as you could see was mud and seagulls pecking on it and that's as far as we got, we turned around and went back down to Perth then.

### **Where you in Perth for long?**

On that occasion we would have had a few days leave in Perth to get sorted out.

- 05:00 I had relatives in Perth and I got to Perth a few times during that time I was in Geraldton, but there was no break from being in Kuranna Downs, up there for the full time.

### **I'd like to move a bit forward now and talk about the process of leaving Australia to go overseas?**

Well, we

- 05:30 left Brisbane newly equipped and we left from the Brisbane River and it was the 2nd May and I am quite accurate about that 'cause I remembered the date and the United States had produced quite a lot of troop carrying boats that they called Liberty ships and they were produced by a shipping magnate by the name of Henry Kaiser. Henry Kaiser
- 06:00 would have done pretty well out of this I think, but he made them. These ships were just all steel, they were very basic, and as we boarded one of these ships in the Brisbane River and I have a book about this, I mentioned the fact how wharf labourers went on strike, in any other country they would have been put up against a wall but in good old Aussie they could go on strike in the middle of a war,
- 06:30 but on the deck, where we were getting on the boat there was a whole lot of lead acid batteries that should have been loaded on to some boat but the wharfies wouldn't touch them because it was dangerous or something, would you believe it. But as we went on the boat and we were loaded up with our kit and the rifle and the whole lot, we each had to take a sheet of three ply, they had a great stack of it and the sheet of three ply was six feet
- 07:00 and three feet wide to put on the steel decking where we would lay down to sleep, and down in the hold my friend and I were putting down our thing, putting our ground sheets over the top of the bit of three ply. The decks were steel and greasy so that's why they gave us the three ply and bit by bit people kept coming down the ladder and coming down the ladder until the whole floor was covered with bits of three ply,
- 07:30 with not a gap between any of it, we were all crammed up and there was no ventilation down in the hold very much, and so I said to me mate, "We have got to get out of this mate," and he said, "I think we better too." He was a good scout, and you know up on the top of ship you often see those sort of funnels that come up and open out and face the way you're going. They are ducts, I think air intake ducts, there was a stand with a couple of those on it and we went up on there and the space was partly taken up by the ducts but we managed to put our blankets around them and find a place to curl up out in the open.
- 08:00 It's reported in one of the books about the radar, the conditions on that ship, it was unbelievable really and that ship and others of the same thing were quite overcrowded really for what they were meant to take. They had eight hundred of us on this thing and to feed us, see the army had a thing called a field cooker, a truck on wheels with a kitchen in it and they had a couple of those on the deck,
- 08:30 and they were there to provide meals and they only had the capacity to provide two meals a day anyway, so if you got up early and waited until they opened. You might have been at the head of the queue but you'd wait two hours and if you didn't, wherever you were it took about two hours to get a meal, which didn't matter much, we had nowhere else to go

- 09:00 so we just stood in the queue and that was very poor quality of food that we were given on that boat, just canned stuff and they mentioned in the book that this is referred to, that we all put in a pound or something to buy some fresh vegetables. I don't remember doing that, but apparently we did and we did have something that helped us along a bit. But we played two up and all sorts of gambling games on board that ship and we had an
- 09:30 American crewmen joined in and thought that that was a great game, that was probably the most significant part of being on that Liberty ship. I think we were on it for nearly a fortnight because it took a long time to go where it wanted to go because it was doing some sort of zigzag. We were in this convoy, we had naval cruisers or destroyers or what ever they were around us and we had a bit of aircraft cover too. But they zigzagged around and it took a long time to get to Morotai Island up in the Halmaheras
- 10:00 because there was a bit of submarine activity they thought up in that district. I think it was actually picked up, none of the convoy got knocked about so that, and if we had, I don't know how we would have got on because I don't think there wasn't too much in the way of life boats on these Liberty ships, anyway we got there. They didn't have toilets on them.
- 10:30 They had a great long trough hanging over the side of the boat and you had to hang yourself over there and see what you could do about that so it was pretty primitive, pretty crude but then we were at Morotai for a few weeks and Morotai Island had been in the hands of the Japanese a year or so before and it was now totally taken, well there were still pockets of Japanese resistance in some corners of that island but it was mostly in the control of the Americans and us.
- 11:00 So we went to the movies on Morotai Island and somebody lost our tents along the way so we slept in the open in the jungle and got wet every night, but it was an interesting place Morotai Island, palm trees and coconuts and all that sort of thing. An island that was mainly built out of old coral, it's a funny substance that crunches under your feet and sticks to your shoes, you tend to get a little bit taller as you're walking around. But we were there for a couple
- 11:30 of weeks I think, and we opened up our radar doover and assembled it and got it working. We might even have had a couple of practice runs at doing that and we were starting to get good at it and I think we could get it up and operational in under a day which wasn't a bad effort sort of thing. Then the next thing we were put onto an American ship which was a landing ship,
- 12:00 and they had quite a few landing ships in the war and they probably still have them, an LST was a landing ship tanks, they actually put armoured vehicles on them and roll them. The ramp on the front of the boat, instead of having a sharp pointing bow on the boat it had a ramp that fell down and I'm trying to think of the other various names, there were other LSs.
- 12:30 I think it was an LST that we were on and there was quite a bit of heavy equipment on it. There weren't that many of us, just a couple of our units and the Americans. They had flapjacks and maple syrup and coffee and real eggs and meat and fresh meat and you know we would line up for breakfast and they would say, "Well here's your flapjacks you guys," and give us a packet of cereal and we would say, "Well how many people have this," and, "That's for you two. Go on. " Suddenly we were overwhelmed by all this food.
- 13:00 And we used to eat in the mess with the Yankee boys, they were a good bunch of fellas and they were so accustomed to this sort of standard that after a few days out to sea the fresh meat had run out, and I remember one of the Yankee boys got up from the table and threw his knife down and said, "Goddamn, canned turkey again." Turkey was a delicacy compared to the sort of thing we had been accustomed to ourselves.
- 13:30 That was the Americans reaction but maybe he was a bit of a bad tempered character, we were enjoying it just the same. So we had very good food. For some reason on Morotai I and a couple of others picked up some form of dysentery and so we weren't in good shape on that boat but once again, I'm not sure of the time taken but it seemed that we were out to sea for perhaps ten days or so and finally
- 14:00 we lined up with or before we left Morotai the amount of shipping there was something to be seen, you would look at it and think you could walk from one boat to another for miles, ships in all directions, they formed up a huge flotilla of stuff. So we got to Labuan Island which is off the north west coast of Borneo. I think it was the 10th June, whatever the landing date was and the area had been bombarded
- 14:30 by the navy, and the air force were flying in and dropping bombs on it. We would have gone in the next morning, was it the 6th Division, the army blokes had gone in, the first wave, so we didn't go in firing you know. We went down the ramp of our landing ship and
- 15:00 no, I have missed a point here, somewhere from that landing ship we were transported, our particular outfit was transported in to a smaller thing just for troops and I remember we stood out there in the sun in a steel thing, it was rather uncomfortable, with all our gear and emergency rations and then we went ashore. It was a tropical island and the palm trees were sort of cut off at that height,
- 15:30 and not much was growing, and I mentioned the Salvation Army before and this is really true, we moved in there amongst, the jungle had been quite devastated, my memory, which won't be accurate, tells me there was one tree standing and under the tree was a bloke with a thing on wheels and a big urn on it and he is saying, "Do you want a cup of tea chaps?" Guess who?

- 16:00 It was incredible and we said, "How in the hell did he get there?" you know and someone said, "Well God put him there." But quite apart from those speculations it was once again, an incredible thing about the Salvation Army, you must get some wonderful stories from those blokes that did that sort of work, they were there anywhere where service people were. They were there to help. So then we were on Labuan Island and
- 16:30 all our gear was coming ashore and so we had a great pile of boxes full of radar gear, a refrigerator and a motor to drive it all and so there was a great heap of stuff and we just had to camp out, and just up behind us on the hill was part of the army with a battery of twenty five pounder guns that were firing into a hill and we could see it, over there where a whole lot of Japanese were installed in to the place.
- 17:00 That was quite an interesting experience because up behind us were these twenty five pounders and the shells are whistling over our heads. I don't think we were in any danger, we didn't feel danger but you knew something was going on. So we camped out there and we weren't with proper food arrangements. The emergency rations that they issued us with were
- 17:30 in a tin about that high and that, three inches by six inches by fourteen inches deep and it had a marvellous array of stuff in it, it had compressed fruits and chocolate and it had things you could cook on I think, and it had tea and it had a little tin of paraffin wax that was filled with some sort of inflammable stuff
- 18:00 and you set a match to it and there would be a haze of flame over it and you could heat up some hot water, and there was enough in that tin to keep you going for a couple of days so we did use those for the simple reason that we weren't camped where there were messing facilities of any sort, and we did sort of stand guard on our own gear and I think that's one of the few times. People have asked,
- 18:30 were you scared, and compared to some experiences of some other fellows in the war who were really you know in very tough situations and who had every reason to be scared, I don't think we had many reasons to be scared but there were a few times when you felt a bit stirred up and being on guard in the middle of the night around all this gear and there's a jungle all around you, you start to see things moving
- 19:00 and you just start to see 'em, and one or two fellows got up with their rifles and shot at something you know, that happened a couple of times without mishap and on one other occasion I think somebody did get shot by our own fire you know, but then they got things set up and camp set up there were instances of Japanese snipers still in some of those trees around those camps that took a few fellows out of the meal queues from time to time,
- 19:30 and those sort of things happened but by then the Japanese were getting close to being very badly beaten and undoubtedly they would have resisted for a long time except for the atomic bomb put a stop to everything in August. We were in Labuan Island and our destination was not on the island but on the coast, a little further south of that, and if you look at Borneo straight on
- 20:00 the north west coast sort of slopes across much the same angle as North West Australia so it's going from northeast to southwest. We went down the coast on some sort of transport, it must have been one of those landing ships, I'm vague on this because I wasn't so interested in the thing we were in as where we were going. That coastline, you pass an area called
- 20:30 Seria [Bandar Seri] which had a lot of oil wells in it and large tracts of land and the land was on fire, the oil was so close to the surface. I have read something recently that the Japanese set that afire on retreat, we thought that it had probably been set on fire by the bombing or something, however it was massive clouds of black smoke rising from the land,
- 21:00 and dotted all over the country-side were tall towers, derricks, and from under the derrick there was a pipe line into the subterranean oil and they used to pump the oil out of the ground. I don't know how they did it but these derricks were pretty tall, they'd be I would say that ceiling is eight feet tall and I'm talking about thirty or forty feet tall, they were quite big structures. With the heated ground the nozzles that came out of the ground were spurting flame and
- 21:30 that was quite a bonfire night you know. A coloured flame spurting right up these oil derricks and we could see this from the ship we were on but it was pretty much in the distance. Now we got down to a place called Luton, which was just south of that Seria area, and Luton had been occupied by the Japanese. I think we put our doover together there as a practice run,
- 22:00 but it wasn't our final destination and I'm lost on this, it might even be in that book, my friend's diary, I have a diary in there, we were there for some days and we went pottering around and, I don't know how far you have got my account, but there were a lot of native people that had been in dire distress you know they, I remember one poor old bugger they could hardly move along the ground you know. They had been undernourished and knocked about and there were a couple of,
- 22:30 I think they were Indians, they were very dark skinned men in white shirts and shorts who were doctors looking after them. So they were starting to get some treatment and being looking after these people and we'd been picking up a few words of Malay and so we sort of went and said, "Tabay" and a few

things and they said, "Oh you needn't bother about the language old chap we are Oxford grads [graduates] you know," so they had done their medical courses in England,

- 23:00 and that sort of thing. That was a very interesting part of the world. We got down to a place called Murri where we put the radar up in an area called Canada Ridge, it was part of a hilly ridge. Down one side of the mountain was the native population with their crops and bamboo houses and some Indians, there were some Indian people there.
- 23:30 Now there is a picture there of a fellow just in shorts and carrying a gun, that was in that territory and I think he put the tin helmet on just for the sake of the effect, although we had them. I forget now when we wore them, I remember one occasion when we had to, but we would wander around amongst those people and we were gradually picked up some of their language and talking to them.
- 24:00 You'd see the looks of fear in their faces and we were only boys, light weight kids really, but we were monsters compared to these people, they were skinny and we were strapping young blokes of twenty carrying rifles, pretty scary. Once they realised we were friendly towards them they started to relax but I think they had a lot of that sort, they had the Japanese who hadn't been very good. The Japanese were quite cruel people in many ways.
- 24:30 Well at least their warlike attitudes were cruel. I can't really bring myself to believe that human beings are naturally cruel but the Japanese did have a war ethic that led to a lot of cruelty. So we got to know some of the people and go into the houses that were built up on stilts out of bamboo, so it was quite interesting.
- 25:00 And I don't know how far you got with that account of mine. There was a guy we got to know who could speak a few languages, and I think not only our boss but somebody else had him to do a bit interpreting, and he lived down the hill, and he had a couple of younger sisters and they washed clothing for us so we paid them a bit of money for it. It didn't cost very much. They had our jungle greens and shorts and things all laid out nicely.
- 25:30 They didn't put laundry tags on them but they knew whose was what for some reason. We were warned not to fraternise too much with the local girls because firstly there could be bad relations within the community that you were there, and secondly the involvements and even the transition of disease wouldn't be a desirable thing and all that sort of business, and as far as I was concerned,
- 26:00 I didn't have any worries about that and I think most of us, I'm pretty sure we all did, we kept our proper place in that sort of thing. These girls were quite clearly tending to be quite friendly, you could tell there was a bit of warmth when you called in and their brother said, "Oh my sisters would like to have a relationship," he might not have used that word, "and if they could marry an Australian soldier they could go back to Australia and get a much better life than they have here."
- 26:30 So, but they were an interesting people and some of them, in some families girls as young as fourteen would be carrying a baby but you wouldn't call them primitive people but they were very simple peasant sort of folk. Their Malayan language was a simple form of Malayan. We found some, the boss had a house which had been
- 27:00 an oil company's executives and we used that as the headquarters for our little unit, and there were some books on the Malayan language in it and in its higher form it was quite a complex language we decided compared to what we were picking up and using amongst the people. There is a copy of the Japanese flag in that book.

**I saw a photo of that could you tell me more about how that came about?**

- 27:30 There was one of the, a young boy perhaps ten or twelve year old came into the camp one day, he had a Japanese flag which was about that big and it was simply a white calico thing with a red circle in the centre that had been stitched in and there was some Japanese ciphers printed on it and we never forgot him because
- 28:00 it was very hard to get in Murri, he reckoned it was a very rare object, and somebody bought it from him for a Malayan dollar or whatever and he was back the next day with quite a supply of these things that were very hard to find, and most of us bought one and somebody got the idea of passing them around the camp for each to sign them with an indelible pencil, and we all did much the same thing, in the red circle we put our name and 325 Radar,
- 28:30 Borneo. So I had one and it was fairly legible really, the blokes had written and I lost it. I was living in Mt. Macedon, Victoria when we had the fires in 1983 and that house got burnt down and we escaped, fortunately, but I lost things like that flag. There is a guy that I mentioned in that account because he had a diary of this,
- 29:00 he had a flag too and he died a few years ago and we went to visit his widow and she said, "Oh he had this Japanese flag and I don't think the family are very interested in it would you like it?" and of course I thought that was a marvellous thing but then I thought it's not really my flag and it should be in the War Memorial and they were very interested to have it and so I went up there,
- 29:30 and something happened that reminded me of the date it was 1999 I took that up to them and they acknowledge it as a relic of the war and all that sort of thing, and I when I came to write that account

and I realised that I would like to have had the flag to talk about it in that thing, they photographed the flag and they wrote a list of all the names that they could decipher from it, you can read some of them even in the photo.

30:00 So that was a very handy thing and that's how we came to have, the interesting thing about the War Memorial getting the flag was that they came back and said it was a real Japanese flag, that the Japanese Army distributed into the conquered countries and told people where they had gone in that they had to fly those flags at their front gate, so that was a very commonly used thing.

30:30 So it was a genuine Japanese flag and there were some things on it that they couldn't decipher, they weren't sure what some of the markings meant. So I have got that correspondence from the War Memorial about that.

**They couldn't work out some of the Japanese?**

Oh it's in the letter at the back of the account and they say something about there was some Japanese and another form of character they weren't able to decipher, they weren't sure if it was another Japanese name but however.

31:00 It might have been the name of the Japanese Army unit or one of those sorts of things for all they knew. So they were some of the interesting things in Borneo. I have just rattled on about Borneo do you want to ask questions?

**Do you remember any of the phrases you picked up of Malay?**

Well not very well no but Tabay was g'day. Twan was like Sir. They say, "Tabay Twan," was like, "G'day sir. "

31:30 If you spell it, it's pur oom puwan is a woman, but they pronounce it poompwan, just like that, a quick way of saying it. Saya is me I think, saya mau, I want. I have a reference to that there with one of the fellas, those girls said to him, "Saya mau ini chinchin," and he said, "Parney what does that mean?" and I said, "She said to you that she would like your children. "

32:00 And he said, "Oh Gawd. " That bloke you saw with the tin hat and the rifle, he was brought up in the German speaking part of South Australia and his family were Polish and as well as going to an Australian school he had a mixture of family background of various languages and I had learned German at school, and Joe and I actually had our own language which was whatever was going in Malayan that we understood, and

32:30 if we didn't know another word we would pick a German one or he would put in a Polish one, or American slang, so sometimes we could converse without anybody else in the camp knowing what we were going on about. It was a bit of practice in using Malay really but it was quite interesting after a while how quickly you do get your message over to people, it's a big language difference really but you could understand what they were after and they could get hold of your message.

**33:00 What else do you remember about their life style or their culture?**

Oh well I remember, as I said, they had crops like beans and stuff that they were growing on the side of the hill and pineapples and of course the bananas, I don't know if they harvested them or not, but they grew in abundance in that sort of climate. A lot of monkeys living in the trees that would raid their crops

33:30 in the afternoon because the people seemed to go and have a siesta and when the people were inside their houses the monkeys came down and ate the beans. So they must have been growing enough beans to keep the monkeys as well as themselves it seems. I don't remember what sort of religion they were, I really don't because you go into places like Singapore and Hong Kong and you see their Buddhist temples and those sorts of things. I'm not quite sure what their religion would have been, they were fairly simple peasant folk.

34:00 The women would be dressed in a long gown pretty much down to their ankles but nothing very attractive, and the fellows would be in shorts and they would have some sort of crude foot wear I think, but the people I didn't get to set eyes on much were the Dyaks of Borneo.

34:30 Have you heard of the Dyaks, the headhunters? I think I saw some from a distance once, another fellow said there were some Dyaks were further down and they knew that they were there, but Australia had a thing called the Z Force which trained people to go behind the lines to try and get our prisoners out of some of those camps in north Borneo, and I'm sort of connected through a relative to one of the Z Force members.

35:00 I've read books about it and they were able to make good use of cooperating with the Dyaks who were pretty ferocious sort of hunters, and if anyone got killed they wanted the heads, they used to save heads and dry them out and hang them up in their huts. So they would have been a different kettle of fish again to the ordinary Malayan crossbreed Chinese sort of people that we saw.

**Did you know about the Dyaks at the time?**

Oh yes some of our men said there were some Dyaks down the coast a bit, or somebody said they saw

them.

- 35:30 I'm not sure whether I did briefly see some Dyaks moving around once. They were friendly, apparently they were with us but I can't tell you much about the Dyaks. The orang-utans, we got a pet monkey once and someone has got some pictures of different characters walking around with a monkey on his shoulder.

**How did you catch it?**

I'm glad you asked. One of the local natives

- 36:00 hollowed out a coconut and left the kernel of the coconut rattling around inside the coconut and chained the coconut to a tree, and the monkey put his hand in to try and get the nut out and once he clenched his fist he couldn't get his fist out. He wouldn't let go and that's how they caught him.

**That's brilliant isn't it?**

- 36:30 **And did you give it a name?**

Not really I don't think we had it for very long, it wasn't the cleanest thing to have as a pet in your tent.

**Was it a bit destructive as well?**

Yeah. I mentioned earlier that Arthur Irvine was worth a mention again especially in the Borneo thing, we got there in June and Arthur Irvine knew that it was about time for some heavy rain in that district and heavy rainfall up there is a lot of water,

- 37:00 and he formed us into working parties to go and raid these oil derricks for some of the timber that was in them, at various levels there was timber flooring and that was pretty hard yakka by the way, and we were cursing our boss, Arthur Irvine. But we put floors in every tent and we put walkways along the middle of the tent line and over to the mess and the headquarters and

- 37:30 when it rained we were high and dry, I think we appreciated his forethought in that you know because the rain, the tropical rain is just a million showers all turned on full at once. Water flowing. We tried to dig a well at one stage and you could only get down a few inches, and oil comes out of the soil, there was an amazing amount of oil.

- 38:00 **I'm just wondering if you had any other recollections of wild life in those areas?**

Orang-utans were there and I was walking up to the doover one day and there was rather a lot of long grass and the path in between the long grass suddenly had a nice big shiny body sliding through it and I stood there for a moment and let it go, and the tail of this snake kept on going,

- 38:30 and I actually saw this reptile but I can't tell you what it was, it was a very large one. I don't remember much about the bird life but there must have been bird life I suppose but it was a very jungly sort of a place.

## Tape 7

- 00:35 **If we can pick up from where we left off I think which was telling us about digging a hole and there being oil in the soil?**

Oh yes that was just a brief moment, having had a unit over in Western Australia where we were able to take water out of the ground our boss Arthur Irvine thought if there was a chance of finding some subterranean water it would be very handy.

- 01:00 I'm not too sure where we got our water from but we weren't too badly off for it but if we had a well that would be good. We started to dig and we really only got a few inches below the surface and there was this black oozy stuff coming up out of the soil so it was a very oily bit of country over there right throughout.

**Did it strike you as a beautiful part of the world?**

Oh yeah I think tropical places have their beauty and some stately trees and the vines and things.

- 01:30 Where the local people lived on the side of the hill there was a lot more cultivation, cleared a fair bit and there were crops and other things that they were dealing with there, yeah well the tropics is the tropics I suppose. The coastal areas of those islands can be quite attractive with the palm trees, and the beautiful beaches and all that sort of thing and the blue of the water, the bluest water you could ever see sometimes I think in the tropical areas.

- 02:00 Although it wasn't too blue in the China Sea because it tended to have an oily film on it from this oil that was everywhere you know, when you have oil on water it sort of rainbows. We went for a swim in the China Sea one day and that was my memory of it, the water had a sort of an oily appearance.



**Did that get on your skin when you came out of the water?**

Oh I forget that really. The sort of thing as a kid you wouldn't care about much.

- 02:30 There was an incident not long after we got to Borneo and I mentioned once again in my account and worth bringing up I think, you can change the subject if you like but I just thought I would mention it. For some reason we were down on the beach and I think it must have been because we hadn't fully formed up and we were still a cluster of people, but a Japanese plane came over and
- 03:00 suddenly they picked him up and there were search lights came from various points and this plane was pin pointed in the search lights and there it was and tracer bullets going up to it and it came down with a terrific wallop, that was a sort of reality experience for a kid, thought, "Some poor bugger just died," you know, but there were lots of others doing the same thing and the Japanese were doing horrible things to our fellows only a hundred miles away in Sandakan and those places.
- 03:30 So I just thought that I would mention that, in old soldiers' stories there is a lot of war action, there wasn't much war action in my story because I didn't see much. The other thing that we were close to, we did have Japanese people hiding away there somewhere and the army caught a few of them on one occasion and they were a pretty ragged looking lot,
- 04:00 they hadn't been feeding themselves too well for a while I think.

**So you saw some Japanese prisoners?**

Yeah I don't know what happened to them but I don't think we were treating them as badly as they were treating our fellas a little way away from where we were. Lord knows what we would have done to them if we had known, you know. But a plane came over one night that we didn't pick up and it sounded like a very ancient plane,

- 04:30 I don't know if it came in low under our radar or what but it dropped a bomb right near our camp and that stirred us up a bit.

**Had you seen bombs being dropped or had you been near that before?**

Oh at the landing they were bombing and we had the guns behind us when we got out there firing away at things. Yes, we heard a bit of artillery in your time by then.

**At that stage during the landing and immediately after did you have a sense that the war was winding up, that the Japanese were losing?**

- 05:00 Yes oh yes, I think we realised that because this landing had been a complete success basically and the allied forces were just so powerful and also we knew that we had come from New Guinea right up to Borneo on those stream of islands and you know there had been some pretty bloody battles but they'd been won. I'm sure that we were aware.
- 05:30 The atomic bomb shut it all up in a matter of days without that Lord knows we could have been there for some time later you know, some estimate that a lot more people would have died if you know, if it hadn't been dropped. It was an awesome thing that was done, who knows, some argue that it would have been worse if it hadn't been dropped,
- 06:00 that the Japanese would have resisted for longer and longer and more of our people would have got killed and more devastation and so on but however that was the 15th August that happened, oh no the Japanese formally surrendered on that date.

**I think it was the 6th of August, Hiroshima.**

Was it?

**Yeah, it's my nephew's birthday.**

When the Japanese Government or the Emperor decided to surrender was a week or so later than that.

**Also at that stage what did you know of the Japanese as an enemy, what had you heard?**

- 06:30 Well before I even enlisted there was anti Japanese war propaganda and it might be on the radio, somebody talking about the evil things that Japanese would do, but it was war propaganda and you wondered if it was true and later accounts showed that some of it was,
- 07:00 but no doubt the Japanese were told what barbarians we were too but they were the only accounts that you had of anything like that, and well, not too many prisoners got back, one or two but then they didn't talk about it much, they had had a bad time and turned their back on it and walked away. No I can't say that I can fill in a lot there about what we knew about.
- 07:30 the Japanese as people. I know a lot more now from reading histories.

**What sort of things were they saying in those propaganda messages?**

Oh I recall them describing torturing messages, torturing people, inhuman sort of things.

- 08:00 A bit of a test of memory frankly to try and drag anything out of the back of there for that. I think we had been subject to more anti German propaganda because that was a much bigger squabble, well it had a lot more prominence, Great Britain being involved in it too and then the Americans,
- 08:30 all these different sides to things. I suppose when the Americans came in that would stimulate a lot of anti Japanese stuff too because they were a pretty powerful nation, the Yanks. President Roosevelt said, "A day that will live in infamy. " But the Japanese war crimes, there were a lot of them that didn't get badly treated, I think the Americans wanted to restabilised Japan and got on with the peace, and a lot of things were
- 09:00 pushed aside and all the rest of it.

**In that last stages of war at the place where you put down the floors and walkways, where it rained, how long where you there for?**

Just a bit over two months, it wasn't too long really but some of the fellas were there longer because they were still there for months after the war before they got sent home. I got posted out of it straight after the war because

- 09:30 of a rather strange thing I suppose. Another chap and I, when we were at Kuranna Downs and it was the middle of the year and it was a very hot place there was an air force notice on the orderly room board that they wanted some of us to remuster as wireless telegraphists,
- 10:00 and my mate said, "This is what we ought to do," and I said, "Why?" and he said, "We would get out of this joint and we would be doing a few months course of wireless telegraphy down at Point Cook." And so, "Yeah, it'd be better than being here, wouldn't it?" The posting to become a wireless telegraphist came through about eighteen months later, the day the war ended or the day after, so it was still a posting to go there. There was another man who for some reason had been granted compassionate leave.
- 10:30 His father was very sick or something. It was pretty hard to get compassionate leave you had to have a pretty good story so there were three of us had to get up to Labuan Island which is where we landed in the first place to the air strip to get flown back home and the boss put us in his jeep and the boss of another outfit, I think his name was Aldrich, it was another radar outfit, also had a man to take up to Labuan so
- 11:00 there were two jeeps and the two COs and us fellows. The roads in Borneo and around those oilfields had been bombed out of usefulness pretty well so we travelled up the beach. The beach was a fairly wide beach and we travelled by jeep on the sand, and this is still in the monsoon and it's raining and everything else and we got the land on fire one side of us and the sea on the other and
- 11:30 the storms, and one of the guys also was due to go to hospital because of a fit of depression and I won't go in to too much in the archives on that because he is still a great mate, but he's all right now, but this was a terrible thing and he was wanting to get out of life all together and we were marooned on the bloody beach because one of the jeeps broke down and so on, not a very pleasant day actually.
- 12:00 But Arthur Irvine got that jeep going, he knew how to fix it, it was something to do with the carburettor I think and we finally at another stage we got back inland because there was a road when there was no beach. It was quite a journey getting up to this joint. We went through some, well some of those native villages didn't seem to be greatly affected by the war, kids playing around happy and everything, and we stopped and talked to them for a while but we finally got up to Labuan anyway.
- 12:30 So that was an adventure in itself getting there. The guy that had the medical problem, that's a long story, but it is fair enough to say that they got him off on a plane and he was fixed up. The other guy and his compassionate leave got sent off, and something got stuffed up with that posting of mine so I was stuck on Labuan Island not attached to anything basically and I used to go over to one of the camps and keep nagging them as to when I was going to get out
- 13:00 and finally it got itself straighten out so I was on a plane, and I think I went to Morotai and then on a B24 which was a Liberator bomber that had been stripped out and there wasn't much in there, it was just an empty shell flying through the air, and I got down to Darwin and it stopped and then we went on to Melbourne and that was an experience coming back to Melbourne because
- 13:30 we had gone all the way up there eating these Atebrin tablets, which was an anti malaria thing and they sent your skin a funny colour, yellow, and we used to think that our skin hadn't changed because we all changed together and when we got to Borneo there were people with darker skins than ours and we didn't realise the colour that we had gone, if you can imagine that process, and God I got down to Melbourne and there was all these pasty faced ghosts of
- 14:00 people, and so anyway, but that fortnight I spent, and another thing that we were issued with, and the boss used to line us up on parade and make us take it, was vitamin tablets because our food wasn't very, I forget now, but the diet we had wasn't very nutritious and I was a fortnight there without Atebrin and without any of that stuff, without that vitamin, I put it down to that, I broke out in tropical ulcers we called them,

- 14:30 and they were great big patches on your skin full of pus and I had them all over my body which was rather painful rather like having ten boils all at once you see, however I got an infected toenail then from all this and I finished up after a few weeks in hospital. There was a hospital out at Ascot Vale at the Melbourne showgrounds, the RAAF hospital and Win mentioned this earlier, so they got hold of me so
- 15:00 I had bandages around my head and round my neck and I had my arm in a sling from all these things they were patching up and at the same time they gave me a whiff of chloroform and removed a bit of toe nail that was infected, the ingrown toe nail. There were groups, like the Caulfield mums and dads, would come around with cigarettes and chocolates for the boys in the hospital.
- 15:30 I have never forgotten this, there was a group of them, they stood at the door and they were looking at this boy, me, and they were saying, "Look at this fellow," and I must have looked like I had fallen out of an aeroplane or something and so they came in full of good cheer and, "How are you old chap, and what are you in for?" I said "I'm ok. There is nothing wrong with me." "Aww." And, "Honestly, I just have a sore toe." Well it broke them up as you could imagine.
- 16:00 They had this and I was suddenly the super hero, I just couldn't convince them that I was just there for a sore toe. But other than that I didn't have any ailments except a bit of dysentery on the ship, but once you get back to normal diet and living and if you are twenty-one years of age you'll clear up quickly.

**How did they treat those tropical ulcers?**

They just cleaned them up and get the pus out of them a decent diet and cleanliness,

- 16:30 once you are away from that environment I think you are half way there.

**What were your other thoughts about Melbourne having come back?**

Oh well it was home so I wasn't greatly overawed by it one way or the other, except I was walking around yellow and quite obviously a hero, the Atebrin tan you see

- 17:00 but no there was no real, and I wasn't home long, they couldn't discharge everybody at once but I had to go to Point Cook 'cause I was posted there to do a wireless telegraphers course and it's a big RAAF station. So I went through the procedures and signed into everything, the mess, the Salvation Army and the library and everything else, got back to the orderly room, walked all the way around again and got discharged. All in one trip.
- 17:30 But they couldn't discharge me from the air force and I was posted then to a radar that had been operating down at Cape Otway down here in Victoria and that wasn't really operational because the war was over but I was there. We used to get as much time as we could in places like Apollo Bay and go to dances or whatever and then I was actually attached to a radar at Essendon for a few
- 18:00 weeks before I finally got discharged. There'd been one there, the Essendon aerodrome. So I was discharged in February and I was rather anxious to go back to work. I was just as happy to go straight back to work. When you were discharged you were given some ration cards and a voucher to go and get yourself a civilian suit and I did that and decided that I would like to go back to work.

- 18:30 **It was pretty cursory discharging, just a handshake and thanks very much?**

The discharge, well they couldn't have much time for ceremony I suppose, but they gave you a discharge certificate and the official return from active service badge and your discharge stated that you were discharged honourably and I think there were a few other things put on it like if you had won any special awards, or what awards you had won

- 19:00 but I don't remember much about it other than getting a voucher to go and buy a suit.

**Did your find it difficult to reintegrate into non-military life?**

No I don't think I did. I think I was young enough and hadn't been in it long enough to disturb my pattern of existence. I think it took me a while before I started to concentrate properly in my job environment,

- 19:30 but you know that was just a matter of settling down.

**What did you miss most?**

About being in the services? I don't think I really missed anything particularly. I was glad that it was all behind me and you know I even felt I don't care if I don't see those fellows again. But within a year or so somebody comes up and says hey there is a reunion on and you can't get there quick enough.

- 20:00 You do make some very significant, you make unique relationships in those circumstances, I think you've got friends, if you met them in the ordinary course of civilian life they mightn't be anyone particular to you but because you have been in those circumstances together, I mean I'm not talking about the horrors of war, I'm talking about the service thing where you are under a particular set of discipline and you have

- 20:30 to live a certain way together and you are put together and service men, as a group, as you can imagine, they don't bother with any ceremony and anybody that's tending to put on airs or anything soon gets pulled apart. So your own basic true self is what every body knows and you know the same about them. You find that after the years you meet up with an old colleague from those days and
- 21:00 you know him probably a lot better than other people you would call your closest friends, and that's what Anzac Day and reunions are all about, and I think a lot of people say, "Oh well there's those old blokes they've won the war again." And we might joke and say, "Oh yeah we won the war again," but it's not that, there are you know quite an underlying understanding between people

- 21:30 that comes to you. So I thought I didn't miss it until the first time there was a reunion and there is a picture of that reunion out there, that old black and white which is not too clear.

**And have you maintained a connection with reunions ever since?**

Oh yeah, I've been the instigator for some years now of getting us together, but of that unit there's not that many in Victoria and now there are only five or six of us really. Well one is in Sydney and a couple aren't too well you know and so it's not what it was but I like to get them all together and they like to have it happen but they have left it all to me, I think mainly because I started it.

- 22:00 I didn't really start it, our orderly room sergeant was actually after the war probably the most noteworthy, and doing the job that he did he knew a lot of our particulars, he kept our pay books and everything and he sort of remembered us individually and he rang us up and he was the sort of bloke that got us together. Now there are other over all reunions of RAAF radar people where people from all the radar units from all around Australia get together from time to time and a very well run organisation too, terrific,

- 22:30 but I'm talking about the 325 radar. There are a couple of us over in South Australia, and they both came over on one occasion and the guy up in the Blue Mountains, up in Sydney comes down occasionally, but that's you know that's the sort of relationship that defies description in a way.

**It is a very unique situation to be living and working with the same groups of people for so long?**

- 23:00 Yes that's right you had to get on with one another.

**What else do you think it gave to you that connection that bond with the men?**

- 23:30 Oh well I suppose your youth is part of it. You are young and a major event like that comes into your life and other people have shared it with you or you have shared it with them.
- 24:00 I think that has a fair bit to do with it because you were all sort of boys together well virtually out of school you know, and the joint experiences of course, but of the few little ones I get together one of them is a wireless telegrapher he is not radar man,

- 24:30 but he was with us any way so.

**And what do you get up to on reunions?**

Oh we just sit and have a couple of beers and a feed, have lunch together or something but the RAAF Radar Association has run quite a few reunions in different places and earlier this year there was one in Glenelg in South Australia and it will be for four or five days and I think there were a hundred and fifty of us there in March or April,

- 25:00 and we stayed in some motels in Glenelg and we had buses that picked us up every morning and we went here there and everywhere. I think I might have mentioned earlier that I was sitting beside a radar operator in South Australia plotting a plane up in Darwin. That was part of the exercise, we all went and had a look at this thing. They are very well run reunions.

**Did you find that you talked much about your war experience in the years after you came home?**

- 25:30 Sometimes, things come up that get talked about but there is not a heavy concentration on that but sure it's talked about because some of things that you were involved with were quite interesting especially with a technical thing like radar, and other people remember incidents that have occurred,
- 26:00 say on that landing and so on. But there is no focus on the war as such when we meet. We are just as inclined to ask one another how our families are getting on or things like that.

**We found that the men have said that they've got to know the details of other people's families as well when they were away?**

Well when we were away we probably didn't have families of that age group. Is that what you mean?

**And sisters and parents, things like that.**

- 26:30 Yeah. One or two close friends or fellows, their families knew of me and I knew of their families but it didn't result in any long term connections after the war as far as I was concerned, just mainly stayed as

the fellows I knew, we'd still get together and we'd talk about things and I might say, "How's your sister?" or something.

27:00 **And would you talk at all to people who you hadn't served with about your experiences?**

Well I wouldn't avoid talking about it but that doesn't seem to come up very often. If you were talking to another ex servicemen would he say what did you do, sometimes you might I suppose. Or who were you with?

27:30 But there's a wealth of stuff that we don't talk about, just because it is behind us I suppose. I guess that's why you're doing this.

**It is, yeah. And with family and friends when you came home, would you talk with them?**

As I recall not a great deal. I think my parents were glad that I came back safe and sound and then I,

28:00 you know my sister had small children and that was the focus of the family a bit, I went back to work and so things were quickly back in place and within well within a year, I met my first wife so then I became engaged and so talking about the war you know. It's just like when you have done something and you are finished with it, you're finished. End of the cycle.

28:30 And there is so much stuff from the war that went into stores, what do you call them, they sold it off and everything. We've got a radar station up at the war memorial now and it has only been there for a couple of years and it took years to find enough bits to build one of these things and yet there'd been hundreds of them and they have restored a Liberator bomber down at the Laverton

29:00 air museum and apparently it took a heck of a long time to find enough bits of one of those and there were thousands of them made. We finished the war and we ploughed it all into the ground and said goodbye to that, let's get back to normal. I really do think that is fundamental to ex servicemen not necessarily talking about things, because I've done it but for some poor buggers, such horrible things happened to them that you could understand they wouldn't talk about it.

29:30 **Does that describe the feeling in the society that you came back to, that things should just be got on with?**

Yeah I think there was a general feeling of let's get on with it, we've done that, and Australia, we had factories that had been working three shifts a day and machinery that was worn out so there was room to buy up new machinery and start new things and open up.

30:00 Fellows coming back getting married, there was land being subdivided, and we really went through quite a post war construction boom and we had a bit of recession in the early sixties but Australia went for years getting over that war, the same as everyone else I suppose.

**And when you came back was there still a secrecy aspect to what work you had done?**

Well there was officially. A lot of that radar stuff didn't get published until the 1980s,

30:30 which was a bit, I don't think I had any hesitation about talking about it to anybody after the war. But you were very secrecy conscious of it while you were doing it, during the war.

**Just to go back a little bit, can you tell me how you found and what your feelings were about the atomic bomb being dropped?**

31:00 Well I heard about it in Borneo and I remember our orderly room sergeant saying, "They are interfering with nature, you can't do that," people had a reaction to it and it was a stunning thing that happened, and I sort of felt and I don't think I would have proclaimed that it was interfering with nature but it was certainly a pretty stunning

31:30 thing to think, that you crack the fundamentals of nature and blow up a whole city in one wallop [go], it was pretty scary stuff in a way but it ended the war, so I suppose we felt that was a benefit and in all our big towns, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and so on there were wild scenes of celebration

32:00 and we listened to the reports of that on the radio and boy was that a feeling of homesickness. Well just because you weren't there and how would it be to be in Melbourne now.

**Did you have a celebration of your own?**

32:30 No I think we just listened to the reports on the radio in almost a sort of stunned silence, there's this great bomb and it had gone off and we would be going home and what do we do next. I remember we all felt pretty glad at the news that Germany had capitulated which was a few months just earlier than that and I suppose there was a feeling of uncertainty of how long we would be up in those places.

33:00 No I don't remember any particular celebration on our part. We didn't have much to celebrate with any way.

**Just more bully beef and biscuits I suppose.**

We still had Henry the cook and he wasn't too bad with the food. And our vitamin tablets. That sort of takes us through to the home coming.

33:30 **In those days immediately after the atomic bomb how would you describe the change in the mood of the men?**

I don't know, just a general feeling of well, that's it. I suppose there was only the one uncertainty then of how you would get out of the place and back home,

34:00 and some of them were still there in January still in Borneo and I forget how they disposed of all the radar gear but I think they dismantled it and sold some of it to the locals as curiosities and things like that. I heard some strange tales about what they did with it.

**What did you hear?**

34:30 Someone sold the oscilloscope out of the radar gear to one of the local natives who hung it from his belt because they told him it was an electric torch, they showed it to him while it was all lit up. I don't know if that story is true.

**Do you know what your family did when they heard about the end of the war?**

I don't know if they did anything in particular, they would have been relieved like everybody.

35:00 The war overall was a fairly draining sort of business and the rationing and all those sort of things was going to continue for awhile, so that you just didn't get up one day and everything was back to normal, it took a while to restore everything to the way it was and you still had a lot of ex servicemen returning to normal life and being absorbed in industry and those sort of things. It set up a new set of problems.

35:30 I guess everybody was happy that it was over but it was new thing to be attacked and you had to turn the whole ship around. For all the people were up there fighting there were a hell of a lot of people working like buggery down here in factories and things. Civilian life wasn't a piece of cake either for a lot of them. It was all right for the wharfies I think, they were on strike but I've got no time for them over that.

36:00 But you know a lot of people had jobs that they didn't like, and there was a Department of Manpower that could really direct people in to what they had to do. My first wife's father had been in the First World War and he was a good tradesman and he found himself working up in Darwin on buildings and all sorts of things, as a fifty year old civilian. There were a lot of people like that.

36:30 **And how did you feel about those months after the official end of the war when you were being placed in different areas?**

Oh I didn't mind too much, down at Apollo Bay was a bit of fun. There were some nice people in the town, it was a tiny little town and they got to know us but I had that bit of a spell in hospital and it was a bit of

37:00 broken time really, and I didn't mind it but when I finally did get discharged and I think with the AMP or whatever the arrangements were I had till a certain date, I had weeks that I could have taken off on leave, and I was only home a few days and I rang up the office, "Can I come back tomorrow?" so I was that type of bloke I suppose. As soon as I could put a collar and tie on and look like I was going to business the happier I felt.

37:30 **I was just wondering if AMP had made a guarantee that your position would be there?**

Yeah. They guaranteed that they would make up your salary and as a junior I don't think my salary would have been quite equal to the ten and six that the air force gave me anyway, so that didn't matter, but if I had been a slightly more senior officer and don't laugh at these figures but if I had been earning something like ten quid a week, and you went to the army on six bob a day,

38:00 they made up the difference of their pays and guaranteed their jobs back. Oh there were quite a lot of things done for servicemen and in the case of the life insurance business, while a serviceman was away there was a bit of a moratorium on paying premiums under his insurance policy. We still kept them covered I think. I can't give you all the details but there was certainly something waived there which provided some widows with money when blokes were killed

38:30 with policies that would have lapsed you know, and after the war there were all sorts of schemes of rehabilitation. I did the Insurance Institute exams or finished them but I didn't have to achieve quite the same high standard as normal, they gave you a bit of a leeway. And there were Commonwealth Government sponsored rehabilitation schemes of education in all sorts of fields. There was a lot going on in those days.

**Thanks for that.**

00:33 **I was wondering if we could talk a bit more about diseases that you had up in that area?**

Well I only got an attack of dysentery on one notable occasion and it was quite severe and I had that skin problem that they call tropical ulcers,

01:00 but as a general thing I would say I went through war service without anything ever going wrong. Occasional tummy upsets came into the game, and once at the Richmond Air Base, it's a big air base, and the toilet block was a long long room with toilets all along one side and all along the other side but no division between them because it was just all blokes and I had a tremendous urge one morning, about six am,

01:30 to go there and when I got there it was full and everybody was laughing, and I said, "Well there's nothing to laugh about, what are you laughing for?" and they said, "The last one in, we have got to get him to go and get some toilet paper, because this place has run out." And it was a rather an

02:00 agonising thing but that was one of those things, whatever it was we had had in the way of food it had affected us all in that way. It wasn't very common I would say, and whatever the dysentery was caused by on Morotai Island that a few of us got that I had to put up with on this landing ship, when it went it went, but there was a strange follow up to that. I worked in the AMP as I mentioned which was a life insurer and we had a couple of medical officers examining people for their life insurance

02:30 and I was feeling fairly sick really with pains in the belly and so I went to see him one day, oh this was 1950 something, and he said, "Have you ever been in the islands?" and I said "Yeah," and he said, "Well we are starting to find fellows that have come back from the islands with a thing called amoebic dysentery, which was something that they picked up and it stayed with them and it's only starting to affect them." That's what he said.

03:00 So I went into the military hospital to be checked out for this and when you go in there, their routine was to say, "Sign this form," and I said, "That's an application for a pension. I've come here to get better." I wasn't worried about the pension you see. That's what you sign. So I stayed there and they weren't in a great hurry to look at you, and in the time that I was relaxing this thing was starting to clear up a bit. I had studied accountancy in the insurance institute and a company administrator's thing all in about eighteen months so I hadn't stopped day and night doing something

03:30 and that's really what screwed up my stomach frankly but I had a history of dysentery on that boat and they came up with that it wasn't amoebic dysentery but some sort of ulcerated condition and ever since then I have been getting a small pension and I told them that it's gone away, but they said once you've got that it'll come back but it didn't. So don't show this to the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] they'll cut it out but it is a very small pension. However,

04:00 there were fellows that had those sorts of things that cropped up years after the war. The fellow that provided me with some of that diary note that I have included in that account, he talked to me about the way he was affected and I was a bit inclined to doubt him because I just thought he was as fit as me, but some parts of that adventure in the landing and other things did have him a bit on edge it transpired, and

04:30 he had conditions that lingered with him years later and he's gone, he died when he was seventy-four, now that's too young to die, as you can see, because I am seventy-eight and you can still keep going a long way further and you had a lady of eighty eight that you were talking to the other day. We tried battling with the Veterans' Affairs on his behalf and got some sort of result but it is pretty tough to prove that what's wrong with you is caused by war, and

05:00 probably for good reasons it might have been pretty tough but on the other hand for a lot of people had effects, like I had a friend who became very depressed after the war and see we are not all the same and some of us will get an illness or go down in some respect, where others shrug it off, it just depends. Where there is no sense there is no feeling, I was all right but others weren't and the fellow that died a few years ago,

05:30 he at one stage just in ordinary manoeuvre, he fell off the back of the truck and landed on his back and that affected him too you see. I don't think we had any notable damage done to any of us. In the commanding officer's reports that I have got copies of now, after I left one of the fellows had trod on a land mine that had been lying around up in that district and from what I gather it could have been one that I could have walked on myself.

06:00 He was pretty badly damaged but I don't think he lost any limbs but that would put your system out of gear for a while to have a thing like that happen. But when you ask me about health I have launched on to other peoples because mine was only effected in a minor way.

**That was going to be my next question what other ailments other people got over there?**

Yeah.

**Was there much in the way of tropical ulcers?**

06:30 I heard about it a bit from some of the army blokes and it wasn't uncommon. It you got a little bit undernourished which is where I went down hill your body was prone to attacks and it was like a golden

staph thing and it was a very warm damp climate, there's all sorts of things ready to attack the body I should think. That would have been reasonably common.

07:00 **I was wondering about the general living conditions over there on Labuan or Morotai, what was the food like and the accommodation?**

Well our food wasn't too bad, as I said we were put on diet supplements and we used to get a few greens from the local people you know, some beans and things but food by the standard that you and I enjoy today would have been fairly ordinary. They talk about bully beef by the way, bully beef is quite a wholesome sort of product,

07:30 it was pretty tough sort of stuff but it was good chewy meat. Some of the stuff we had on the troop ship was canned pilchards in tomato sauce which was ghastly stuff and I've never really liked tinned fish ever since. Those biscuits were very tough but you could crunch them up,

08:00 and you have got to remember that you are feeding this to young people of eighteen or twenty, they are strong, and their resilience is enormous, but if we take the general run of food in Australian military establishments, it was just the bare necessities really. When you put yourself along side the Yanks there was quite an incredible difference, but the Australian Army, navy and air force were pretty resilient and tough sort of characters. Maybe it was adequate but it certainly wasn't luxurious.

08:30 **Did you have much contact with the army and the navy?**

No I can't remember ever having any real contact with navy except American navy cause we were on American ships. There would be army units sometimes near by and they might say g'day and there was an army unit that used to come to our place in north west Australia because we had a supply

09:00 of fresh water, and I think our blokes who played cricket had a team against some army blokes but I wasn't in the team. It would have depended on the circumstances if you were in a particular air force group you know, there could have been army groups and others there depending on where the gun emplacements were and where the air fields were etc. I think generally speaking they operated.

09:30 as army or air force and were fairly distinct in what they had to do.

**Was there much in the way of service rivalry**

Between the services? Not that the ordinary run of the mill fellow could be bothered with, you know. The navy was the senior service and the army used to sling off at the boys in blue but if you were in a service hostel you know, you would meet a couple of blokes and you would get chatting to them and they were the same as you were. I think everybody realised that whichever service you were in you were the same sort of lads that you lived next door to a year before.

10:00 **Even so was there some sort of idea that you were in a better service or a worse service?**

Oh I think there was that idea, the boys in blue were probably a bit better paid, the air force blokes, well that is not quite true but the army had a very large mustering of foot soldiers who were out there

10:30 at the front and I think foot soldiers were six and sixpence a day and when you joined the air force it was something like that but when you got to a mustering like wireless telegraphist or a radar man you were up to ten and six, and if you were a radar mechanic it was eleven and six and if you got a bit of rank it went beyond that. I have got a feeling and the history books will tell you, but I don't really know, but I've got a feeling that

11:00 there would have been perhaps a bigger percentage of army chaps just on ordinary pay than there were in say the air force. The navy would have a fair number of able bodied seamen too but then within the navy you've got a lot of technical musterings. Gunnery and radar and radio and depth, sonar you know and all the stuff the navy blokes. No, I can't remember having much to do with any navy fellows. I suppose they were out there at sea.

11:30 **I'm just wondering how the tropical conditions affected the running of radar?**

Not unduly as far as I know but tropical conditions will get into any sort of material and start mould, we had to keep the radar components and all the stuff around it pretty well cleaned up. Within the radar set there were a few little fans that kept things cool, so it was probably dryer.

12:00 Like the clothing I bought home from the islands it smelt mouldy forever after, even years later when I used it, lying down under old cars to fix them, you could still smell the jungle in that stuff, that mould. But from memory we didn't have any operational problems because of it.

**And how about the environment of that area, jungle as opposed to outback?**

12:30 Well it was vastly different of course, one is very dry and one is very moist.

**Did that effect the radar at all?**

No, I don't think it did. For the same sort of reasons. It was gear that operated with a certain amount of heat in it any way and where it would build up heat there were little fans to keep it cool. I don't



remember, we went from one extreme to another as you were pointing out, I can't recall any particular problems. Some of the stuff that we had up there would have been coated with a wax, as a waterproofing

- 13:00 as the same as like some of the engines in some of the cars that would have to ford rivers might have a snorkel coming out of the engines but if you looked at the engine it was all encased in some sort of waterproof wax and I think we had a bit of that sort of stuff in the racks of gear.

**Did the different geography affect range and things like that?**

Oh the principal thing was how high above the ground you were, the radar,

- 13:30 and the other thing was what natural obstacles were in your way. In the case of Kuranna Downs we were on a little pimple in a vast plain and there was nothing in any direction that would restrict what we were doing in Geraldton, just a little bit north of Geraldton there were some flat topped mountains which were quite large things and you would pick
- 14:00 up what we called permanent echoes all the time and if you had these temperature inversions which tended to refract your radio waves, you might have picked things up further along the line but you also pick up the obstruction's along the coast line, and on that gear in Geraldton it showed a map of the coast line under certain weather conditions, you could actually see the coast all mapped out on it.
- 14:30 And I'm trying to think, up in the islands we were pretty high up and had a pretty good out look for most of the part, jungle trees and things didn't really affect the radio gear to any large extent. We operated fairly well there, we had trouble with generators in those sort of places, because you were relying on some great big V8 motor to be running twenty four hours a day, and we would have to turn the whole gear off sometimes to service it
- 15:00 or it would break down on us if we didn't. It generated enough electricity to run the radar and put a light globe in most of the tents.

**And in terms of the work you were doing over there, I wasn't quite sure about in Labuan you set up to do some basic?**

Labuan was where we arrived, there was a landing, the Allied forces took over that island and then went to the coast, but our operational point wasn't there.

- 15:30 We set the radar up purely for practise a couple of times and then we put it on a barge and went down to Luton. I recollect being on a river on a barge one day and I can't quite figure out, we weren't all there but some of us got to Murri the final destination in one way and it depended on what gear they had to take to where they went but we broke up in to different parties to get there and I recall floating down a big wide river
- 16:00 with some native bloke propelling the thing somehow, but Murri was our location for the full operation.

**How did the work compare to that in Western Australia in Murri?**

Oh the actual work was much the same, when we were in Western Australia we had power driven aerials and you know but you were still using the same skill on the light weight gear.

- 16:30 You just had to be vigilant when you were looking at the screen when you were on it or you had to be awake when something came up and you had to plot it you know.

**And what would you do in your time off in Murri?**

Well we weren't there that long and being a new thing to us quite a few of us wandered around and talked to the natives and there were some Indian people and we went and had a cup of tea with them in their bamboo house.

- 17:00 The boss had us working a fair bit on putting planks down or we'd play cards or we would gamble and I took a small, see that machine down there, that's a banjo mandolin or no, that's a mandolin, I had what you call a banjo mandolin which is just a round drum, instead of that shape there, and I bought one in Melbourne before I went up because
- 17:30 I knew I could play a stringed instrument so I had that and someone else had a guitar and a ukulele or something. So we you know fiddled around with things like that. It wasn't anything serious musically and I also, and that's right, I had a book of Shakespeare's plays and I memorised the whole of Julius Caesar because that's how much time, when you weren't in the radar that you had.
- 18:00 There were very few places to go after you had wandered around. One of our mechanics when we were taking or stealing the wood from the oil towers in part of the oil refinery he came across a small lathe and he brought it back to the camp and set it up and there were a few crashed aeroplanes here there and everywhere, and the propellers and a lot of the fittings on those planes were made out of stuff called di-aluminium,
- 18:30 an aluminium alloy which is quite light and quite rigid and we used to cut those sorts of things up on the lathe and you could turn a finger ring and cut a lot in the top and put a bit of stone in it, and I had one

of those that we made and I lost it in those fires when I lost that flag. There was a house which was the headquarters, is too big a word,

19:00 the boss and the orderly room sergeant had this old house anyway and there was a piano in it and it was quite inoperable. I didn't have the proper tools but I had a pair of pliers and a couple of things and I tried to tune it but its mechanism had been given a terrible time by somebody, probably the Japanese and there was some music there and there was a book of Japanese marches with an illustration on the front cover and it was an illustration of a bird,

19:30 a bird in flight and if I could show it to you you would agree with me, it was of an oriental design the way that it was, it was the sort of thing you would expect to find on some Japanese crockery you know. Anyway I traced that on to a bit of perspex. Perspex was another bit of equipment that was used in aeroplanes, a clear plastic and there was a lot of perspex and I cut out a sheet of Perspex and I

20:00 inscribed this bird on to it and sort of sculptured the shape of the bird out and it got lost eventually and I think that was in the fires of 1983. Nothing that was very smart about it, they were sort of hobby things to do when you weren't in the doover and so I had some music and some playing around with some perspex and di-aluminium.

20:30 Most of the instruments out of the aeroplanes had been removed by keener people than me and you know there would be Jap planes shot down, and I've got some pictures of my friend Joe standing on a Jap plane or the wreck of it you know, so that sort of wreckage was fairly much in evidence around the place.

**I was wondering also about what you knew about people who couldn't deal with the situation up there, sometimes called troppo or bomb happy?**

21:00 Well we didn't have much experience of that. We did have one chap who became quite depressed about the whole thing and he had been accustomed to open spaces and that suited him because he was a great sportsman and a great organiser of activities. He might have been better off if he had tried to learn all of Julius Caesar for all I know, but I do think that if you had some things that you decided to put yourself into,

21:30 it was something to do and he was probably at a bit of a loss because the only thing we could do was gambling and even then we were sort of separated in to tents. It was quite different to being at Kuranna Downs where we would all get in to this great big mess of a night, however there was one very good fellow who had a depressed state and lost confidence in himself but he survived all that

22:00 and became a very responsible man in the job that he held after the war and a good family man and a wonderful fellow but there was the side that we did see a fellow go right down hill which was upsetting.

**And that was quite extreme wasn't it?**

Yeah, in my young experience. You'd hear, soldiers in much worse conditions than us you know First World War fellows that were nearly blown out of their wits,

22:30 shell shock was the name given to the First World War guys. If you are subject to enough loud noise long enough something is going to go. We weren't subject to very much of that sort of aggravation. In Kuranna Downs we were subject to incessant heat and flies but it was peaceful otherwise, and in Borneo it was a very interesting place, the wild life and the people and learning of a new language

23:00 so you see I was fortunate, the sort of interests that would grab hold of me there was a lot of things there to take note of.

**Did other people take such an interest in the environment?**

Yes they did quite naturally as you can imagine. It had been a fairly large establishment, Shell Oil Company or one of those places where were all these oil derricks around the place and oil refinery

23:30 equipment and so on. It had a civilised aspect to it in peacetime, there would be a lot of people working there and so on.

**There wasn't then what we now call counselling or anything like that, how did people deal with feeling depressed or down or having bad news?**

Well you just depended on your mates I think. That would apply right throughout the services I think, army, navy or anywhere. I don't know what we would do, if we had a war now everybody would get wiped out I suppose.

24:00 Take these guys over in Iraq, they were only there for a while I suppose but that would be a pretty nerve wracking thing that they went through. Would the American army have a bunch of counsellors with them for fellas who felt they're going tough, I wonder. It's hard to say. A war is an all out sort of thing and there is not much room for sitting around on a psychiatrist's chair.

24:30 **Was it made clear that you could talk to a padre?**

Well we didn't have one on a small unit like that. If you were on a large outfit there would be a padre

and there'd probably be more than one medical officer and a dentist and a whole gang of things you know. In the radar unit there were about thirty people and they were nearly always isolated in one way or another,

- 25:00 and some of them were very isolated on a small island or out to blazes somewhere where they depended on a boat getting out to them with supplies and those sort of thing. The stories of some of those guys could be a bit harrowing at times I think.

**Would you talk to Arthur Irwin about these sorts of things?**

Well would a person feel like talking to him.

- 25:30 I don't know I think we would have felt that he was no exactly aloof, but he wasn't as close to us as the guy in the next bed to you in the tent, I think your mates were the closest ones to you if there was anything on your mind, and so we counselled one another.

**What do you think were the defining characteristics of the radar units?**

- 26:00 Oh well I suppose firstly the technical nature of them and their small size. You've got a small group of blokes on one technical purpose and not too many others, probably a guard and a cook and we had a medical orderly

- 26:30 and he was with that unit from the beginning to the end, the same bloke. I can't tell you what his medical training would have been but you know he had plenty of first aid material and he also performed the job of being the barber, he was our hairdresser as well. To define a radar unit you have got to be simple about it. Technical and small.

- 27:00 You'd probably have a large technical unit in the army with a whole battery of guns and things and they're all very specialised blokes but there was a lot of them but in a radar unit they're out there where nobody can see them and there's not many of them. Am I making any sense to your question?

**Yes. I suppose that would have made your friendships, relationships more intense having fewer of you?**

- 27:30 I think the small number did put everybody, whoever you were, your personality was sharply in focus and to hear us talk you would almost wondered if we hated one another but a lot of the blarney and a lot of the studied insults were a part of the humour,

- 28:00 accompanied by bad language and all sorts of things but nobody took any notice of it. I think we might have been a fortunate group, despite all the exterior appearances but within it we got on pretty good terms with one another really. I think that anybody that sort of had a notion of himself being a bit better than anybody else was quickly

- 28:30 put down and pulled into line, so we all just fitted in and that's my feelings about it, and as I said earlier when the war was over I said I couldn't be bothered with those blokes any more, I don't want them back, and within a year or two when we had our first reunion I couldn't have got there quicker.

**What are your thoughts on the role of luck in the war?**

- 29:00 What do you think of the role of luck? Well what's the role of luck in any undertaking I suppose, being at the right time in the right place you know. I could have been the bloke that walked on that land mine or a couple of bombs that were dropped on us that missed might not have missed and so on. It's a matter of whether you believe in luck or you don't.

- 29:30 **What did you believe in during the war?**

Oh I don't know if I was that much steamed up about any particular philosophy. I was just a boy and that's what I found myself in and you went along with it and did what you did. I suppose I really believed in the authority of what I was working under and that it was Australian.

- 30:00 I don't think I ever had any misgivings or lack of confidence in being an Australian, you sort of felt that it would work out all right. You might have been wrong.

**Did you have much faith in the Australian war effort?**

Well that's another thing, at that age whether you have really made any assessment of what a war effort is or what it should be and so on. You might ask me now about our war effort and

- 30:30 I would have a lot of things to gauge that by but you come, haven't been long out of school and also you've grown up in Australia with seven million people, you don't realise how big the world is. You probably thought Australia was everything. The Russians lost twenty two million people in the war and that was three times our population,

- 31:00 so I think what I am saying is I came from a protective environment, a calm sort of society that Australia was and we went to school and we saluted the flag on Monday morning and you know if you were barracking for Richmond and they won everything was all right. But things were pretty much in place

weren't they for Australians?

31:30 And we still have a marvellous country in Australia and we still have lots of opportunity but I think we are a little bit more aware of ourselves now as part of the global picture, of course we are because we have international communications, instantaneous communications and we realise where we stand with the world more now than we did then. I had no particular belief I just knew that she would be right mate.

32:00 I suppose also my uncles and my father being in the services that had happened before and we'd lived through it, and the army, that's all right, the air force is all right. So the reason that I didn't have any doubts was my inexperience.

**Can be very helpful can't it?**

Maybe it can and I think overall looking back on it our organised military forces

32:30 were mostly pretty good. there has been some general criticism about General Blamey in some of the things that have been written and he didn't agree with MacArthur and MacArthur didn't agree with him, but MacArthur was by far the stronger trump card in the pack. Their disagreement according to the books upset some of the efforts of the behind the scenes fighters that were trying to get people out of

33:00 the jungles of Borneo where the Japanese in their final days of desperation really killed them off to get them out of the way but I don't know if people lay the blame of that on Tom Blamey as such, but they talk about the things that needed to be done and he and MacArthur didn't reach proper agreement.

**Did you have an opinion about him when you were serving?**

Only by hearsay.

33:30 Tom Blamey wasn't spoken of highly but it was hearsay. People would say things about his private life and what he was mixed up in you know. No it wouldn't mean a thing to me, I just didn't know about such things.

34:00 **How do you think the war changed Australia?**

Well I think it started to make us realise how small we were in relation to our neighbours for a start because pretty soon after the war we entered in to a very strong program of immigration to introduce what we called our new Australians, and that's thirty per cent of our population now is the descendents of all those people who came out and that is an enormous change.

34:30 It's a change to our way of life and it's a change to the restaurants we go to and the things we use and the wine we drink and the way we feel about our neighbours. I think Australia handled that pretty well by its own personality, its own nature. We had a fellow who wrote a book called They're a Weird Mob, well we split our sides laughing at this because

35:00 it was the trials and tribulations of an Italian man who came to work here and all the trouble he had trying to understand us. So we were laughing at ourselves at the time we had a lot of these new people coming into the country and so I think we accepted them, and you know I have really good friends and people who I admire from other countries and that's the big difference. Everybody was a Smith or a Johnson there weren't too many strange names when I went to school. All English names anyway.

35:30 **How did the war change you?**

Oh I don't know really, I was very happy to be working in the AMP and I think I was cut out for that sort of work and I got back to the office wanting to get into it, and finish off exams and all that sort of thing and I suppose the war only sharpened that in a way.

36:00 I thought there's a few years gone where I wasn't doing these things and there were a few years gone where I wasn't going to dances and taking girls out and the normal things that boys do most of the time you were away. I don't know if that changed me much but when I settled down which was a little while after I came back, I think there's a realisation that there were things to be done you know and perhaps it accelerated the doing of the things because you realised that you had lost a year or two.

36:30 So you were better for it in that way.

**Did you feel that you had lost time?**

Well yes, that is what I'm trying to say, you realised that you had lost some time away from your home environment but as I say it sharpened you up and you had to make up for that time. The result was that you more than made up for it.

37:00 So in the long run you might have been more advanced by the time you were twenty five, twenty eight, thirty or something than you might have otherwise been if it had just been a easy going life. I'm not in favour of war to get these results.

**We are nearing the end of this tape and the interview I'm just wondering if there is anything**

**that we haven't covered you would like to talk about?**

I don't think so. It's mainly focused on those few years I was in the services and we have talked a lot about that and you have even got back to my childhood and my family background and other things. There is nothing in there that is left out as far as I am concerned.

37:30 If you're happy about it.

**And finally what do you think you learned from your experiences?**

Oh I suppose you learn a bit about people which you might not have otherwise learned. You're always learning about people but there was a particular set of circumstances surrounding a bunch of people. There we were, a bunch of boys, cooped up together for years, and I mention this, it might be an odd thing to say but there is so much emphasis these days on homosexuality and all different lifestyles which I am ok with but that sort of thing never ever crop up and I would like for the record. You would almost think that ten per cent of our population have chosen different lifestyles now,

38:00 but there wasn't the slightest suggestion of that, and there we were cooped up only ourselves and pretty enthusiastic young boys but we were mainly talking about the girls that we left behind, we weren't looking at one another. It was rather an interesting thing that I have often pondered. There must have been fellows amongst us who had that tendency or had that feeling but it wasn't proper to even express it and so they moulded

38:30 themselves along the other track. But you do learn about people in a slightly different way in those circumstances. I tell you what, I'm glad we won!

**That's a brilliant way to end this tape, thanks so much.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**