

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Leslie Semken - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/538>

### Tape 1

00:35 **Thanks Leslie for allowing us to talk to you. Can you give me a brief overview of your life where you were born to where you are now?**

I was born in Tasmania, in Burnie in Tasmania 1921. My father, my mother had gone to Western Australia as a nurse and met my father who lived in Western Australia and

01:00 He, or she, came back to Tasmania and Dad followed her and then I was a result of that. And I think I was about two when I left Tasmania, and well we lived in in Victoria for a while and and I think about 1923 or something we drove from Victoria, from Eltham in Victoria up to Sydney in an overland

01:30 motor car. I vaguely remember the trip because the road was almost non existent and it took two or three days. I think which it's amazing these days, and well then that a child of the depression... Dad was a powerhouse manager and at that time powerhouses were the province of local councils.

02:00 every little town had its own power station and they had a electrical engineer and garage managers and battery minders and all that sort of thing, engineers and Dad was in that field. He'd come from the coal, the goal fields at Kalgoorlie and about that time the small councils were being overtaken by bigger power stations which were coming on grid and

02:30 were far more economical. Yallourn was opened about that time, that was the biggest thing in Australia on brown coal then, and then that started a trip where Dad was chasing jobs. He'd get into a little powerhouse somewhere like Gosford and was just down probably a year after he got there then he'd have to go somewhere else. And we finished up, when I

03:00 was 12 I was in Crookwell and he was the engineer at a butter factory 'cause the powerhouse at Crookwell was shut down and again the same thing happened so we came back to Sydney later on. That's a story of, Dad was Lang's right man and he lost his job at the butter factory because Lang put a special tax on wages for the unemployed and

03:30 the farmers didn't like that so Lang was unpopular. Dad made an impassioned speech in the street of Crookwell and lost his job next week with five kids, and off to Crookwell, off to Sydney. I finished schooling at when I turned 15 because no work, Dad was out of work and I was the eldest in the family

04:00 and we had to, well every penny counted you know. So I got a job at 12 [shillings] and threepence a week at Rockdale after attending 11 different schools and I left school in the first quarter of of seventh class which is first year I think, so I had all the advantages of a primary school education and

04:30 I got a job with a well known firm in Sydney as a cabinet maker, chair maker and served my time as a cabinet, a chair maker. I never quite finished it because the war broke out and I'd always had this desire to travel and I'd done nothing but travel really moving from town to town and so forth, and

05:00 so I was sort of set on well travel, that's all I wanted to do was travel. I had a cousin who lived in Samoa. Mum's, my mother's sister's daughter so that was always a sort of a place, fantastic you know place to go to, so I sort of prepared myself for that and got into the carpentry business and I'd gone to gymnasiums.

05:30 I'd wrestled in the New South Wales championships in 1940 so I was pretty fit, could handle myself and I had this desire to travel but the war broke out and that sort of mucked things up a bit because I didn't want to really get in the army and be told where to go and how to go and what to do. So I got a job in Darwin as a carpenter

06:00 so off I went to Darwin to be on my own and do my own thing. We were building on the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] drome in Darwin, a building what they called the SMQ, Single Men's Quarters accommodation. There was a big building program on in Darwin and so I got this job in Darwin and sort of settled in until the 19th of February when they blew the job out from under our feet

- 06:30 and we were told of course to get out of Darwin because we were civilians. And we did, we got out of Darwin went down to Katherine and then realised that the Japs were coming because everyone knew they were going to be there next day or the day after or something like this, you know, so we joined the army, a mate and myself, a whole group of us, actually 10 I think, all construction workers and
- 07:00 they put us in an engineers group. So we became carpenters and all that sort of thing, but now we were soldiers and it was, well the Japs were coming. We're all getting ready for this for the invasion and well that's the early part of my life I suppose up to there. I mean the only, yeah.

**Excellent, excellent.**

- 07:30 **So Les what are your early memories of childhood?**

My earliest memories of childhood I've got, I have got an early memory and I don't know what it is but it seemed as though I was, like my father was

- 08:00 was in the, the powerhouse made a lot of noise and somewhere hanging up on the fence or something the shed where I was, there was band like the bands around the barrels you know that sort of, kegs that we used to have, the timber kegs, oh just an iron band a lot of them, and I used to shake them and make a noise and that was a powerhouse. That's my earliest memory
- 08:30 and it's sort of vivid but there's no surroundings, nothing. I don't know where it was or what it was but it was early memory. I remember all the packing Dad had a big box about six foot long and three by three square you know, and we always seemed to be packing the house up and putting everything in the box and the box'd go and we all knew we were on the move again you know.

- 09:00 **So Les growing up you moved around so much how did you occupy your time and entertain yourself?**

Well five of us in the family to start with and I was the eldest so I had to look after all the others. I think that was time consuming but the fact that you moved around so much meant that you had new places

- 09:30 to look at, new people to meet, new kids to play with in the street and it all seemed to be, you know, a busy sort of period. I don't, we didn't have organised sport you know. We played cricket in the street at different places when we grew up there. I spent more time in Crookwell than anywhere, that's down the southern tablelands
- 10:00 I think I was there from about age nine until about 12 or something like that, nine to 11 or 12, and that, we had a rented house of course but it had about 30 acres of land with it which was wonderful for kids, and it was up in Crookwell. There were rabbits everywhere at that time and so we used to
- 10:30 go hunting and rabbit trapping and fishing in the little creek that used to be down the bottom of the street, the bottom of the paddock, and they were busy times really 'cause it was sort of farming and there was no money. So Dad, and Dad used to go to the sales once a year and he'd buy sheep and we used to kill a sheep every second week and that was the meat for the family you know, and we had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s to feed
- 11:00 and vegetable gardens and and rabbiting of course. When I was 12 Dad gave me a rifle, 22, for a birthday present which I used for shooting foxes and rabbits. I never shot anybody really, no danger, that was much later someone gave me a gun and, but it's a waste of time the gun law you know, they've taken the guns from the wrong people.
- 11:30 So life was pretty busy and country towns have always got things on. I tried to join a band I wanted to play the bugle, ah trumpet I'm sorry, so I joined the band in Crookwell which was an adult band there was no kids band but that was pretty difficult cause you couldn't get music lessons anyway. Yeah that's how I kept busy mainly with new people I think.

- 12:00 I know we used to play pirates a lot, get dressed up like pirates and dream about going down the river, the river at Crookwell yeah.

**You mentioned that you'd moved around so much what was schooling like for you?**

I got a year behind, I don't know where that happened but somewhere along the line they must have put me back or I didn't go up or something.

- 12:30 Schooling was difficult because you kept changing and I think I was always looked upon as being some sort of transitory person. A lot of people were travelling around in those days, families that, we had people friends that used to, the whole family lived in a sort of a caravan and all they did was busking around the country, and so there were sort of people that you knew and interesting people.
- 13:00 I don't know, there were, we never had any, I don't ever remember being bored or sick of anything. Had to go to the Royal Easter show, not no, not the Royal Easter Show, the Crookwell Show or whatever show, we were always there. Later on as the depression started to ease Dad built himself a shooting gallery, four shots for
- 13:30 sixpence with a with a pea rifle, and that was a turning point for him. He started to travel around the

the shows and it was all cash money and no one paid taxes anyway 'cause no one's supposed to have any money, and he did very well out of that and it was good but he scrambled and got everything aboard an old T model Ford truck and built the whole thing on the back of the truck.

14:00 So then Dad and I went round at the shooting gallery you know, trying to whip up - "Come and show the little lady how you can shoot son-o," you know that sort of thing so he, this is probably interesting... We lived in Chatswood and I got a bike, a pushbike, a real old bush bike somehow. I think I paid five shillings for it or something you know, and we fixed it up and

14:30 Dad went up to Newcastle to show on the beach, was sort of a charity thing you know and business was very brisk, and he, I don't know whether he rang up or what, no one had telephones of course you know, we didn't have a phone, anyway, and somehow he contacted Mum and probably sent a telegram that's what we did, and I had to get my bike out and I rode up to Newcastle from,

15:00 I think I was still at school in the day it just took a day on this old pushbike, and then we we had the shooting gallery up there for a week or something, yeah, it was good yeah.

**So just describe for me how the shooting gallery was set up in respect to what you actually shot and how it operated?**

Well Dad designed all this thing himself. He had no money

15:30 like he'd even sold his gold watch and chain which the union had given him for stoic service in the goldfields. We lived next door to a builder who was scratching around and trying to make a living too in Chatswood, and he agreed to let Dad use the machines and I think gave him timber and stuff.

16:00 So Dad made the, was on the back of the truck in the back, used to drive the truck into say a lane or into a spot and open up the doors and take shutters down, and there was the shooting gallery which was elaborately painted cream and green and had mirrors and things on it and a little tray bench like where you could rest your arms to shoot down

16:30 long tubes, long galvanised iron as thick, I don't know how thick maybe like 32 gauge or something like that, heavy galvanised iron which they rolled and shaped and riveted together. I don't know how long they were, they were maybe 30 foot long and they stood on trestles but they all used to slide up like a telescope, and one

17:00 on each side of the truck you know, like down the side of the truck and about 30 foot long. And at the end there was a box made of metal welded together which he designed. Underneath it was was like a sump which was filled with lime and water, like slacked lime. There was a system of pulleys in a plate, steel plate

17:30 about, you know three quarter, three eight, I'm sorry, three eighth widths, no one knows now, three eighth, what's that about 10 mill thick, and it had a hole in the middle of it and that was a target, the hole in the middle, the black hole because it dipped in the white and it'd come up, and there's the hole, and behind the hole was a lever and if the bullet hit it it'd fall back and ring a bell, very scientific you know. And

18:00 so he designed it. He was a clever engineer really but it was all very you know, what do you call it, Heath Robinson sort of thing, you know, and that worked very well and with the idea. I was a kid in Burwood in Sydney, there was a lane, a couple of shops had a lane between them and he used to go over there on New Year's Eve I think and he'd park in

18:30 this lane, this access area between the shop, pay rent of course to the shop owners and we'd try and get a competition going, put a cup up, we're going to shoot for the cup and come and you know four shots for a sixpence and we'll give you a score on your hits. And there were different size holes too that you could pick, the big one or the small one you know, and try and get a competition going, but the big problem with that was of course,

19:00 it was all illegal and the council'd come down and say, "You've got to move," and Dad'd say, "Well you have to get an injunction," or something and by the time they'd done all this he'd packed up and gone yeah.

**So did your Dad give away prizes to people?**

Oh yeah, got a prize yeah. I can't remember what they were. The cup was the prize, that's right, was suitably engraved yeah, 'Best Shot in Burwood'

19:30 or wherever it was. Every summer we went across to Narrabeen and there was a lot of campers all that near the lake, that was all camping area, and people used to camp there. A lot of people lived there permanently and everyone'd get the competition going again, they were funny, yeah.

**What were you like as a shot?**

Pretty good,

20:00 yeah, I could shoot pretty good, yeah.

### **Now what was your dad like as a man?**

Dad was a very hard working, he was a good family man. He unfortunately Mum died when I was 16 and my little sister was I think four,

- 20:30 and there was five of us and he had the shooting gallery job. He'd done so well that he'd bought a house in Chatswood, in Kogarah, had bought this house, cost 500 pound and he was able to raise a loan and and he bought the house on the proceeds of this shooting gallery, which was, in a couple of years, it was very, you know, but Mum
- 21:00 died and Mum died of, you don't hear about it now but she had goitre trouble and it's supposed to be a septic thyroid goitre which killed her but nobody knew, even when she was in the hospital the doctors were arguing actually about what was wrong with her and she died of a massive heart attack caused by the goitre and she was 45 I think. So Dad then
- 21:30 set about raising the the kids, had to give the shooting gallery up because he couldn't be away from home. I was the eldest and I was 16, just started my apprenticeship you know, and there was no way I could stop home although we shared the work between my brother and myself. I had a brother who was about 20 months, I think younger than
- 22:00 me and we, Dad and the boys, the two boys, myself and my brother, battled on and so we stuck with the kids. He really stuck with the kids and got a job on the Water Board as a winding driver, like a hoist driver, crane driver because of his experience with the mining,
- 22:30 but that entailed getting off to work very early in the morning and things were hard you know, and that sort of.. Oh well the year after Mum died, my brother who'd got himself apprenticed to a plumber he came, we were all living at Kogarah and he
- 23:00 was coming out to Cronulla on a motorbike and sidecar with as a plumber, that was the thing a plumber travelled on and in front of where Sutherland Hospital is now they had a head on collision with a, the front tyre blew out and they had a head on collision with a council sand truck, two people, the two of them, there was an old older fellow plumber killed and my brother was killed on the spot, and
- 23:30 the other fellow broke his back and neck and never worked again, it was a shocking accident. So we were just sort of recovering from that I think and then the war broke out and I really did the wrong thing, I left home and left Dad when I was 19, I was going on 20, but 19, I said, this is it I'm out,
- 24:00 and I left which I regret doing. But I think at the time the the question was when you went in the army, sort of did your own thing, so when I went to Darwin, like where I was working at Chisel Brothers, the furniture makers had now become, doing war work and so we were in a protected industry and you couldn't join the army. Anyway I went up to Darwin and the only way I could do that was by going to another protected industry which was building
- 24:30 aerodromes, really that's how I got out of it and kept myself out of the army which I wanted to do, yeah.

### **Was your dad close to your mum?**

Yeah very close. Mum was well, this is an open, Mum was a Catholic and Dad wasn't, and Dad's mother was very very big in the Church of Christ

- 25:00 in Western Australia, and to her, my grandmother's disgust of course, Dad took off with this Catholic which was a bad thing. They were a very close and very loving couple.

### **So how did the the death of your mum and then your brother affect your dad?**

Well it was shattering of course, you know.

- 25:30 I wasn't aware of like emotional problems and things, as I say I was 16 years of age and I know Dad was very upset about it all, but he had this, well it was a bit funny really, because a little while later we lived next door to a retired policeman, an inspector of police bloke, called McGrath and he, like the two families, he was
- 26:00 much older than Dad and he'd retired and, but as a policeman he was sort of a, bit of a, what would you call it counsellor something like that, and he advised Dad that the best thing he could do was get a woman in to you know shake, put the kids in other rooms, so I had to get pushed out on the front veranda and I slept out there
- 26:30 for I don't know, a year or so and we made a little room for the new lady and whacked an ad in the paper, and I think we had 27 people arrive out the street, and up the street, all come for the job you know, and Dad and the old police inspector interviewing them, and well they were, that was another exciting thing you know, they'd come but
- 27:00 five kids is a bit of a problem you know, and they didn't last very long and there was all sorts of angles you know. We had a lot of woman wanted a get settled somewhere or they had kids, they wanted to bring their kids in and was a real, and we started to get a name for our, or Dad started to get a name for himself because every month or something he was advertising for new women and they'd all line up in

the street and

27:30 he'd he'd pick one, so we had all sorts of funny things happening you know. The bloody people pinch the clothes and we had to go and find them, and oh and the other one'd get drunk and he would come home from work and the bloody woman would be bloody crazy, he wouldn't yeah, so there was a lot of funny things happen there. And

28:00 yeah, I don't know they, I think it's one of the funny things you know, but we made some good friends too. I fell in love with a little girl that was the daughter of one of the housekeepers. That didn't come to anything cause I left, I went to Darwin. She became a school teacher and I don't know what happened then, and so you know 19, I suppose you fall in love with, she was a pretty girl yeah.

28:30 But she was, they didn't have any homes you know, they were all looking, not all looking but some of them were, they were looking for somewhere to live because it was like keep, not very much money. Of course there was no money, like we didn't have any money, nobody had any money much. They just like you can't realise, people don't realise now but there just wasn't any money. The lucky ones and they were few

29:00 and far between, public servants maybe working three or four days a week. Twenty five percent of the work force was unemployed during the depression and the work force didn't include women, they weren't included and anyone under 21 wasn't counted so I don't know you know the must be 50 percent of the work force. If it was today, if it'd been today you know, those sort of numbers, because the women,

29:30 and I don't think there was any pension, there was the dole but the dole wasn't much. You didn't get money. No there was, they were hard times so these women were looking for accommodation as well as, and some of them were nice people, some of them were bloody mad, excuse the language but that's...

30:00 **So Les you've said that there's no money around during the depression what was Christmas like for you?**

I don't remember Christmases. I don't I know, we used to have a big meal but I don't think there was any toys you know. I know we used to hang our socks up but

30:30 I don't really... I know I had a teddy bear, no I don't, oh Christmas. Christmas was go to church, we all went to church with Mum, Catholic you know, but you didn't go Christmas shopping, that was unheard of you know, and if you got presents it was usually presents you needed like a pair of socks or

31:00 something like that you know. I don't know, Christmas. Christmas was important as a well as a holy day I suppose or more so than it is now, but it wasn't the sort of major.. We worked, I think Christmas Day was the only day you didn't work. We didn't get Christmas holidays, the kids did but that, there was no sort of break like we have now.

31:30 It was no, I don't remember many Christmases but we we didn't go short on Christmas Day. We had, I think we had a big Christmas dinner but we'd kill the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in the back yard you know. Yeah that's right we had our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and when they'd go off the lay you'd have a couple of roosters there that you'd be keeping for Christmas. There'd be

32:00 WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK chicken dinner was a big dinner you know you, it's not like it is now when you can go and buy half a chicken or anything, that wasn't possible.

**You mentioned earlier that your dad used to buy and kill a sheep or a lamb was it?**

He'd go and buy sheep, yeah.

**How did you keep the meat so it wouldn't?**

Well we had what we called a Coolgardie safe and the house we lived in was quite big. It had been

32:30 a hospital in Crookwell, this is in Crookwell, a hospital before the First World War and it had a lot of rooms in it, so we had one room that we used to call the kids play room or something. I used to play the trumpet in there and make a lot of noise and didn't worry anybody too much. It was just sitting out on this paddock, big paddock so we didn't have any trouble with the neighbours and we had this safe which Dad made, was just a knocked up

33:00 thing you know and hessian stuck all over it and you'd put water on the top of it and and the water used to drip down and go through the wet the hessian and meat would keep for two weeks you know. Every two weeks anyway we'd kill a sheep and cut it up and the first day would be the brains and the tongue and all the intestines you know, the

33:30 liver and all that sort of stuff, had that for breakfast, and then we'd gradually eat the sheep. And I think probably Mum cooked the meat like towards the end of it, she'd cook it and then keep it. We'd kill a pig once a year too and we used to hang that up on the roof in the smoky kitchen, with smoky stoves you know, they were fuel stoves not electric.

34:00 All those sort of things happened, but anyhow the meat would last us two weeks. I'll tell you about

killing the first sheep. No I'd never done this, and I would have been 10 I suppose nine or 10, and there was a fellow at the work where Dad worked, Billy Weir was the old farmer, and Billy Weir said, "You'd better get yourself some sheep," three and six for a sheep, could buy a whole sheep for three and sixpence,

34:30 at the show, at the saleyards which was just up the hill from where we lived. And Billy Wear said, well you do this, you've got to make a, and so he made a bit of reinforcing rod to hang it up and we had to gut it and oh. Anyhow we got this sheep and we had to get it down on the ground which we did and dad got the knife and started to cut its throat and e he didn't really cut its throat properly,

35:00 and it got up and it was in a barn and we had to chase it around and we caught it and eventually we got it. It died or something and course we'd wrestled it, had to wrestle it. Dad had it and I had it and I remember coming out of this barn shed and Mum was standing outside and I was blood from head to foot from this sheep and she cried. What you do of course, we like,

35:30 he tried to cut its throat like that and you don't kill a sheep like that. You get a knife and stick it in here and go like that, slice its throat, dies quick and still we did it right ever after that, but I'll never forget that. That frightened the life out of me, terrifying thing you know. I'd never killed anything like that before, yeah.

**So you were meant to be holding the rear of the sheep while your dad had?**

Oh well we kneeled on it,

36:00 like I was sitting sitting on its bum I think sitting on its back and trying to, I can't quite remember but I know it got up and went and we had to chase it and catch it in the barn like round and round a little room like this, and the bloody thing it terrified me. I had nightmares for weeks after that, yeah.

**What are your, Les what are your early memories of**

36:30 **toilet and plumbing and showering through and household things like the fridge?**

Well first the thing about, well where we lived there was tank water and no town water, there wasn't any town water in the town I don't think, Crookwell, at the time. Everybody had tanks, the roof water used to drain into the tanks. There was certainly no hot water, you had to when it, well we only bathed,

37:00 everyone did it in a, we only bathed on Saturday, so Saturday you'd fill the copper up with water in a bucket usually unless you were very lucky and had a tap over the copper. You'd fill it up with buckets and light the fire and get the, boil the copper, and the bath we had in Crookwell was a galvanised iron bath it was shaped, I don't know whether you've ever seen one

37:30 and painted you know they used to paint them but you didn't have to have them painted and so Saturday was bath day and we'd get the copper going and Mum would be in charge of course, you know, and the girls'd be put in the bath first, the youngest one first and then all the girls had baths then the grubby little boys had to get in because there wasn't all that much water you know, no showers. The toilet was a,

38:00 what do you call it now, I think you call it a privy hole in the ground at the back, the church, the toilet was called the dunny or the lavatory and it was away from the house. I don't know hard to tell, I'd say we'd have to get the hurricane lamp to go to it if I suppose it'd be maybe 40 feet or something

38:30 away from the house 'cause they were a bit smelly and there was just a seat and the drop. They call 'em drop toilets I think now and so that was the toilet facilities and the washing facilities but life was different. We used to have to cut the wood and Dad'd get, well he'd buy wood but you'd have to saw it up.

39:00 We had a big saw my brother and I and we'd come home from school and cut so many logs every afternoon and then Dad'd come home and split the logs and that was the firewood you know, and then we had we'd go and get kindling which was little branches of particularly the bark that falls off gum trees you know. You'd get that in an old chaff bag and bring it back and that was ideal for lighting fires in

39:30 the morning cause it'd blaze up easily. And we used to take it in turns my brother and myself, one every second week, we had to catch the horse 'cause Dad used to ride his horse into the butter factory and so one week you'd catch the horse that would be your job which was terrible in the winter cause you know the ground'd be frosted up or be raining, that was a bummer of a job,

40:00 and the other one'd stop home, be the cook, light the fire and boil the porridge and get the stove hot yeah. So you say what did I find to amuse myself with? I think there was plenty of things to keep you busy. We used to grow potatoes and had to chip the potatoes, dig the weeds out. Mum used to always be making jam and if we get fruit we had fruit trees and we'd pick the fruit and Mum would make jam and Dad used to go down to the pub and

40:30 get the bottles over the you know, the old bottles and we'd bring them all home he made a wrought iron, no not a wrought iron, a reinforcing rod put it in the fire and get it hot and put it over the bottle and throw water on it and crack the neck off so they became jam jars and then you put, well Mum would put

greasy paper over the jam and we had bundles of that every time we moved,  
41:00 we had to shift the jam yeah.

## Tape 2

00:33 **So Les refrigeration and getting bread and milk and how did all those things happen?**

Well we had a cow yeah, we had a cow. Mum used to milk the cow so that's how we got our milk, bread, she made the bread, what else? The meat I told you where that came from.

01:00 We grew, like during this moving round we learned, like depression times you had to learn how to survive you know. When we moved from one house to another which we rented and I think we got kicked out lots of times I think, I'm not sure about that, always suspected it, but the first thing Dad'd do is dig the whole back yard up and plant fruit, ah potatoes and turnips and you know, the good bulky stuff that

01:30 grew quickly and you got a lot of it, and the whole back yard would have been dug up and planted with all sorts of things and we'd live on that you know. When he, at Chatswood when things were really crook Dad worked as a relief worker because he had so many kids he got relief work, and you know the restaurant now in Willoughby,

02:00 it used to be the old incinerator thing you know where that is, no? They built an incinerator, the council built an incinerator in Willoughby and they made it out of sandstone and it's now a restaurant but it was the incinerator and Dad worked on that with all sorts of people he'd talk about, you know stock brokers that never used their hands sort of thing, physical and that you know their hands had blisters and

02:30 you know, it was terrible really but you did these things and Dad and his mate up the street who worked for Benjamin's in Chatswood which was a big firm, he was one of the executives you know, he was out of work and he had a big family, they decided, and they went and hired a horse and cart in Sydney somewhere, Redfern and they went to the markets and bought up all this fruit and vegetables,

03:00 all this sort of specky stuff you know, it was cheap and they went door to door selling it and what they didn't sell we ate next week you know, and we were eating spinach for a week and that and carrots for a week yeah.

**What are your early memories of Anzac Day before World War II?**

03:30 Well I've got no memories. I had two uncles that were both in the First World War. One was called Leslie, Uncle Les, I was named after him, for him, and they were both, well not killed. One one died of wounds on his way home I think or maybe when he got home

04:00 and the other bloke never worked again with, had trench feet and wounded, had wounds in his back and he was an invalid you know. Anzac Day wasn't very big with my father. He, when I joined the army and came home on leave he called me a licensed murderer you know, he was really like, "You'll be killing." He was a socialist you know and like it's only

04:30 workers killing workers and it's terrible which was true, but that wasn't the argument, we didn't have any argument, with the workers, the only argument was they were trying to kill us. So Anzac Day wasn't a big day really because the war had shattered my father, my grandfather's family. I tell you about my grandfather? My grandfather was a builder

05:00 in Western Australia in 1890 when they the boom burst, they had another depression about in the 1890's 1896 I think something like that, so he was in trouble, and he well you, I don't think he went bankrupt but he couldn't pay his debts so he packed his whole family up and they went to the gold fields in Western Australia looking for gold.

05:30 They thought they might you know be able to pull themselves up because everybody was picking up gold. Paddy Hannon found the gold in Kalgoorlie. Anyhow they went, they all went off to Western Australia and Dad, Grandpa first worked in a timber yard as a salesman selling timber. Next thing we know is that he's in Leonora in 1908,

06:00 he was the Mayor of Leonora which was another gold mining town, found while he was there and it was set up by what the Hoover, Hoover, Edgar [actually Herbert] Hoover. Edgar Hoover was in Leonora, he was a young bloke 22 years of age and he set up the Sons of Gwalia mines at Leonora and

06:30 he at that time was living in Kalgoorlie. Not many people know this is the President of America, later became the President of America, he was a mining engineer 22 years of age when he set the mine up in Leonora which turned out to be it was called the Sons of Gwalia. There's still a company called that on the stock exchange. Anyhow Dad Grandad went to Leonora and it wasn't very long before he was the Mayor of

- 07:00 Leonora, he was the builder in Leonora, he was the undertaker in Leonora and he had two sons one was the blacksmith and they ran a livery stable, you know what a livery stable is? It's sort of like a hire, you can hire horses or change horses and that sort of thing much like hire cars you know and they had the franchise, a Cobb and Co franchise from Leonora to Kalgoorlie,
- 07:30 and all this was going right really swinging and the war came and two of the sons, one died in some, I don't know some sort of an accident or something Bert was my second name Lesley Herbert you know, he died clearing some land so he was going to be a farmer I think, but the other two,
- 08:00 the the blacksmith and the livery stable operator joined the army and they went off to the war and they both got killed, so the three sons went in that period and that ruined grandpa. He just sold up and left the place and went to Perth and set up
- 08:30 an undertaking business in Perth and then of course retired there but it ruined him as far as Leonora went, yeah was a pity.
- So that was your mum's dad?**
- No, Dad's dad.
- Your dad's dad?**
- Yeah.
- So your dad was too young or didn't want to join the war?**
- Well he was the youngest he was, and there were three, there were four boys, four boys and one girl in that family and two
- 09:00 of them were in the army one already died in the bottom, I don't know exactly where, I think it was Musselton, ah Busselton or something which left only Dad. Dad's the youngest and there was a split up with my grandfather and my grandmother and I think Dad favoured the mother and took her down to Perth,
- 09:30 but that's what I'm interested in this for because there's all lost records. I've got no real records you know what happened but you don't know why or the feeling or what what caused this to happen you know, so you don't know.
- So your view, how did you feel when your dad made the comment 'licensed murderers'?**
- I thought he was wrong. I for some reason or other
- 10:00 I became very active in the Liberal Party later on and that lent, so I was always that way inclined and Dad was, well I used to call him a you know, a hot, what do they? IWW [International Workers of the World] I think it was, World, no Workers Will Unite or something so he was really a socialist and I think he had a
- 10:30 conflict with my grandfather who was all on, hard on right winger if you like, you know. I don't call 'em right wingers I call 'em goers you know, so yeah.
- So your dad's comments were they just a joke or were they serious?**
- No he was very serious he didn't want me in the army. That never influenced me about not, I didn't want to be in the army because I didn't want to be controlled.
- 11:00 I didn't want people telling me when I could get up or when I could go to bed and where I had to go and where I didn't have to go. I wanted to be my own man and do my own thing and I planned this all out. I'd gone to gymnasiums and I'd done the tech courses and I'd got my trade and I was all set to go and the bloody war came see so it upset the plan
- 11:30 so I took the second step which was to go to Darwin which was, that was a long way away. Darwin was unheard of to sort of go to Darwin and then I finished up in the army, but I didn't have any objections to joining the army and I was all for you know taking on Hitler and I always saw Stalin as an even, at that age you know,
- 12:00 he was a threat as far as I was concerned, untrustworthy and a trouble maker you know.
- So was there much discussion in the home during 1936, '37, '38 given obviously Hitler's rise to power and the movement of?**
- Dad didn't believe in it. Like I used to tell him that there's going to be a war, it's obvious you know. This is when Hitler got to power about '36 and he'd say
- 12:30 no no there'll never be another war you know, like it was, it's a slaughterhouse and it doesn't solve any problems. He was against war for obvious reasons you know like who is, who isn't against war? If they're not against war they don't know what it's about and he was, I think he had this thing about that, like the politicians



- 13:00 make the war and and the workers fight the war and lay it on the line and I think my approach was a lot better in saying that like certainly well my experiences in Japan tells me that I'm right but no one wanted to go to war. I didn't and the Japs didn't and I made good friends with fellers in Japan that were very active in the war and
- 13:30 nobody wanted to be in it. Nobody loved it, nobody wanted it. I don't think that except for the you know, I certainly don't think anyone in England wanted a war. People in the army and navy well that's their training they didn't want a war but if there's going to be a war you're going to get stuck into it you know, so Dad's attitude to me was I felt very unfair and
- 14:00 at that time like by that time the the Japs had, Jap submarines had been in Sydney Harbour and I was harmlessly nailing a roof on one day and they dropped bombs all around me you know, like I didn't want the war to start. I've never been so terrified in all my life but the war came to me I didn't go to it.

**So share with me if you would the story of making the decision to go**

- 14:30 **to Darwin. What was it that you thought oh I'm going to go to Darwin and then what happened when you got there?**

I think I wanted to do something for the war really but I didn't want to be in the army and I didn't want to be in the public service job anywhere you know and I wanted to travel and Darwin was going north to the tropics.

- 15:00 I'm interested in oriental stuff I think it's pretty obvious isn't it and I've always been I don't know why really. I often, I don't know, this is too long I went to Darwin because it was the start of my world travels. It was going up to that area, that's where I wanted to go and I certainly wanted to go to Samoa
- 15:30 and the Pacific Islands and so this was a step in the right direction. That's why I went and we all thought the war'd be over in three months you know it wasn't going to last, bloody Germans haven't got anything but..

**So what was the other story that you didn't want to it was too long?**

Oh no,

- 16:00 Oriental, I was talking about Orientals you know I've always had this yearning to go to the East like the tropics and the Orientals, I was interested in Orientals and I always think that at the Crookwell Show when I was about 11 I think, we used to, Jimmy Sharman you heard of Jimmy Sharman? No oh you obviously don't know. Jimmy Sharman troop used to have a team of boxers and he used to take 'em round the show
- 16:30 and they'd challenge anybody in the district and we always had scouts out ahead at the town and they'd be picking blues with people, and they'd say well we'll fight, and they'd have a championship fight at the show you know, to build up the crowds you know. And so at the show when we went to the show as kids, as I say, there was no money so you had to get into the side shows so the way you got into the side shows was
- 17:00 go and help the showmen. So Jimmy Sharman, we'd go and hold the tent up or or do something, do a little job so you could get in and there was a group of Chinese people had a sort of a show a side show and they had these little girls and they were spinning plates and doing all this contortion and and I involved myself somehow with the the China, I couldn't speak Chinese
- 17:30 and he couldn't speak English very well but somehow we we became friends and he sort of had me helping him, and there's a little girl there same age as me, Chinese. She was a pretty little thing you know and like I'm only 11 and she, I don't know what happened, but she, one day I found her at the back of the tent crying and it really upset me that she was crying and I went to help her and I
- 18:00 touched her like my sister you know like, and the boss Chinaman got very upset and I couldn't understand that. He told me not to come back but he was protecting her of course you know and that upset me but I never got over the fact that this pretty little Chinese girl, see and not that that made me go but it I think, made me aware of Chinese
- 18:30 people you know. The kids at school used to throw stones at the Chinese, a greengrocer that used to go round the streets of Crookwell but I thought he was a good bloke.

**So was there much racism?**

Not really no, but there was, I don't, the kids threw stones at the Chinaman and called him a 'ching chong Chinaman' and all that sort of thing so I suppose there was a bit but there weren't

- 19:00 any around. But there were always Italians that we called 'Dagoes' and we didn't like them very much because they always ran the bloody milk bar or something but, yeah that wasn't racism it was just you know it happened during the war didn't it? Soon as Mussolini, in Rockdale as soon as Mussolini declared war against England in the Second World War
- 19:30 people rushed up and down the streets and smashed up the fruit shops in Rockdale, in Kogarah, around

there but this rabble rousing mob isn't it? It wasn't a, I think it was just an opportunity I don't think it had anything to do with them being foreigners. I think that was just an opportunity to go in and call them bloody Dagoes and and pinch their fruit.

20:00 Think looters that's what they were, yeah.

**So how did you end up with the nickname Aussie?**

That's another yeah, when I was in in Crookwell I'd been to school in Hurstville I think or somewhere like that, and we went to Crookwell and one of the things you had to do when you went to school was to have a fight, you had to fight the top boy because

20:30 you get challenged. Every school I went to I got into a blue. The bully of the class or whatever would pick you and you know it's part of the thing, so every time I went to a school I had to fight someone and this, so the feeling wasn't good in schools like that because I came from the city and I carried a bag, a handbag you know like a suitcase

21:00 which all the kids in Sydney did and I had this suitcase but in Crookwell only girls had suitcases and this bloke came and called me a woman or a sheila or something and he kicked the bag and knocked it out of my hand and I jobbed him and that caused trouble you know, and then they found out that I came from Tasmania and then they called me a

21:30 foreigner. We had trouble in the playground with this, kids were telling me I was a bloody wog or something you know because I came, I'd come from overseas and when we went back to the class room the teacher said now what was the trouble you know, like what happened, because I think some of them were saying that I hit this bloke or I caused it and I said that,

22:00 that it, and anyhow what I got out, I said that, "I'm an Aussie, an Aussie, an Aussie. I'm an Aussie. Aussie, not Aussie like they say I was Australian Aussie, Aussie you know, and I was impassioned about this and the kids called me Aussie from then on and that followed me no matter where I went until I got into the army and when I got out of the army I kept saying I don't know Aussie, my name's Les.

22:30 So that's the story about Aussie, yeah Aussie, not Ossie like, not Oscar Ossie you know, yeah.

**So Darwin, how'd you get to Darwin and what was your first job there?**

Well with Darwin I looked at the Herald one day and there's carpenters wanted in Darwin and I wanted to be a carpenter and

23:00 and I was trade skilled you know, and I'd been to tech like while I was learning being a cabinet maker, apprenticeship doing a cabinet maker and chair maker. We made beautiful chairs and things Chisel Brothers, I don't know whether you've heard of them or not, they were very famous for making period furniture in Sydney and I went to tech at the same time and did a carpenter's course, lower

23:30 trades course and like you know, I was sort of at that time going to be an architect and it was going to take 11 years to be an architect, get a architect's diploma but I never finished it of course because the war came, you know. So I didn't want to be a cabinet maker I wanted to be a carpenter and so I'd done my trades course and I'd

24:00 been doing a little bit of work around the place at the carpentering game and so forth, so the paper said 'Carpenters Wanted, Darwin' so I applied and I got the job and that was a big thing. I had five pounds in my pocket and they gave me the tickets to go to Darwin so I went to Adelaide on the train.

24:30 My little sister came and saw me off and she would never look at a steam train because it took Les away, and when I got to Adelaide I got on an aeroplane and I'd never been on a flight on an aero, I'd been on flights from that's something else, another thing, but I went to Adelaide and I got into a little Lockheed Lodestar which carried 16, 16 people

25:00 and got flown to Darwin and that was big time I'll tell you, to go in an aeroplane and fly up there but they needed carpenters so I was right and I took my kit of tools up and they put me in a, I was working for a private company Wilmot, Wilmot, H.A. Wilmott from Western Australia, company still operates and

25:30 went and lived in a big sort of a dormitory shed it was. It was built out of corrugated iron you imagine what it was like bloody hot, and this is up in Darwin, and beds were just poles with hessian on them or bags you know and you laid, well I didn't know what to expect but you're young it doesn't matter and by the first week I was there I got dengue fever

26:00 which I'd never heard about that either and I was that crook I couldn't get out of bed but you didn't worry about doctors or anything you know. There was a red headed bloke used to come and look after me and he was an Italian red headed, Italian carpenter and he took pity on me and he used to bring me cups of tea and things like that you know, and after a week or so I was alright, I got and I went and started to

26:30 work on the drome and later on there was a a young feller the same age as me who later joined the army with me, Ron Robinson who had just come up to Darwin anyway so we were in about the same

situation and we bought a humpy,

27:00 20 pounds it cost at the end of this strip. The aeroplanes used to, was right at the end of the strip in amongst some trees just made out of timber, bush timber and concrete, cement bags dipped in, not cement bags, hessian bags dipped in concrete, you made a slurry and put it in and nailed it up and it went off hard and made a wall you know but you didn't need anything you know,

27:30 didn't try to keep it cool you never had to warm it up so we had our, I had my own house. There I was up there at 20 with my own house with my mate yeah it was that, was a big move.

**So just share with me what Darwin was like when you arrived and what they were trying to do building wise to build up there?**

28:00 Well when I went there, well like up to this time Darwin was getting rid of the civilian population all the women were being told that they should move out women and kids. You realise it was I think it's only about, what's that, six weeks after Pearl Harbour that the Japanese had come all down the Malaysian Peninsula through Singapore, taken Singapore, taken Indonesia

28:30 which was Dutch Indonesia, and Dutch West Indies or something or East Indies, and they'd got right down to Darwin in a matter of about three or four weeks. Is it December, you could check the dates, December, January six, about six weeks. They'd conquered all of China and all of South East Asia and they were moving very fast you know,

29:00 so things were happening very quickly about that time and with the bombing of Pearl Harbor the Americans started to come into Darwin but only aeroplanes and battle ships and things no troops at that time, so Darwin was slowly being emptied of its civilian population. There was a great flurry at the airport

29:30 extending runways and building hangars and a lot of activity there. We were building like, the Wilmot had the contract to build these quarters the Single Men's Quarters they were called. They were, ever been to Darwin you say you've been to Darwin you've been out to the airport? They're still there these buildings what's left of them they were sort of up off the ground about 10 foot,

30:00 nine foot off the ground on piles and then the barracks were made and they were all louvered so you'd get cross breezes and things. We were building them at the time you know which was a big job cause they were built to last forever and they will, they'll last forever but they did, they took too long to build. You know, they just, it was silly the government again

30:30 you know I don't know what, I think probably the Defence Department was saying well let's get the aerodrome built it'll last forever. They didn't realise that the war'd come to them as quick as it did.

**So before you left you're in Melbourne is that right?**

Sydney.

**Sydney, before you left Sydney to go to Darwin did you already have the expectation that the Japanese might land there?**

No never thought the Japanese had a chance of, bloody no.

31:00 I didn't think they'd ever come to Australia, no one did. The Japanese had invaded China years before and we thought, 'Well they'll get bogged down in China, they won't, they had millions of Chinese, they'll never conquer China,' and I don't, I think I'm like the Americans like everybody, no one expected them to go out of Asia. The Pearl Harbor raid had to be the biggest surprise

31:30 ever and I just can't imagine the Japanese ever thinking they could beat America. They have nothing, the Japanese have got nothing you know, they've got nothing, they've got no mineral wealth, they've got very little land everything's got to be imported, all they had is people and America is fabulously wealthy as far as like foodstuffs and minerals.

32:00 It's a rich country, it's rich as Russia. Russia's a rich country, it's never been exploited but America's been exploited and and it is now very powerful whereas the bloody Japs have got nothing, they never had anything except the will to work you know, so I don't think or very few people expected the Japanese to get into the war anyway. The previous war, the First World War they were on our side

32:30 not declared on our side, but they helped us. It was through the Japanese that we found the Emden and sank it you know. And the British told the Japs how to make navy ships and guns and you know it was all sort of, the navy was based on, Japanese navy was based on English navy, and the army was based on the German army and so they picked the best of

33:00 the world, best sort of ground forces was the Germans by a long way and in both wars yeah, so no I didn't expect they'd come to Darwin. I didn't think it was a problem. I just like, I didn't go to Darwin to

33:30 avoid the war, that wasn't a consideration I don't think it was part of the plan, world travel, yeah.

**So when you arrived in Darwin you said what you were building. Were you working seven days a week?**

Well yeah it was a great thing like I was getting six pound a week down here as a cabinet maker. When I went up there I was getting over 20 pound a week which was a big increase in wages and accommodation

- 34:00 was great, yeah, and we later on started to do a little bit of sub contracting too which helped, selling sand to Wilmot and stuff like that you know and so you could make a bit of money but not like we're talking about now. You could make a couple of pound a week extra you know yeah.

**And how did the the civilians**

- 34:30 **relate with the navy, the army and the air force? How did all the communities interact?**

Well I think there, well the army we had trouble with the army cause they took over one of our pubs, the old Don Hotel and there was trouble there but we ran out of beer and that fixed all that up. Darwin ran out of beer

- 35:00 but there was young, you know we're all young and I didn't drink, no one really drank much because we didn't have any money you know, not like now kids go out and spend big money on drinks don't they but we didn't have that sort of money see and wasn't a lot of drinking but these bloody larrikin kids came and you know swaggered around the town and and we used to have a bit of trouble with 'em.

- 35:30 But could be a bit of trouble here and there but nothing serious, it was a bit of a joke but I think on the other, on a higher level I think the population of Darwin accepted that there was a risk finally and they were pleased to see the army there and I think the relationship was good, certainly was administratively anyway,

- 36:00 the government.

**So share with me the the story well the two stories of the army taking over the Don Hotel and the second?**

Well there was more of them that was only, just that's why they took it over they just said, "Well this is the army pub and you shouldn't be here," you know, "why aren't you in the bloody army? We're all in the army." So if you civilians want to drink go and drink somewhere else you know this is the army pub.

- 36:30 It was conflict but it was more of a joke but people got drunk and they bloody hit each other I suppose but yeah it was our pub and they took it over they shouldn't have been there yeah.

**And what's the story of Darwin running out of beer?**

They ran out of beer because most of the

- 37:00 ships had been taken for wharfs you know, Darwin was very short of supplies because it was a sort of outpost thing you know, nothing's ever going to happen in Darwin it's a real outpost and we didn't have any beer there the load of beer that should have come up they went somewhere else, they always thought the army got it somewhere and that was not right but so the the pubs all shut they had no beer.

- 37:30 It became a thing like there was a ship going to be there tomorrow or a couple of days later and it's going to have some beer on it so the pub'll be open on Wednesday but it never did yeah.

**I can imagine it'd almost be like riots there?**

Well you could, there's no good rioting because you know, no there was just no beer in the town but so I like I wasn't a drinker so but I suppose some people got upset about it and...

- 38:00 **I think Slim Dusty sang about that didn't he 'The Pub with No Beer'?**

'The Pub with No Beer' yeah no wasn't there.

## Tape 3

- 00:41 **So Les can you tell me about your first impressions of Darwin when you arrived there?**

Well it was just a little town and it was

- 01:00 like, I knew no one there I didn't have anybody at all I could go and see or talk to it was just I got off the aeroplane I don't know how I got to where we were, where the airstrip was. I probably got a cab or something like that and had to ask for somebody and they said that's where you put your bunk there you know and then as I said I got sick very quickly got this dengue fever which is a hospital,

- 01:30 they put you in hospital now and they're very worried about it because it can have side effects but I was fit and young and it didn't it just set me back for about a week that's all and I always regarded it as the flu like I had the flu but it was more serious than that but it didn't worry me and there were no side effects. So my first impression of Darwin is nothing really. I

- 02:00 went out in the bush to the aerodrome and they said there's a bed and it was a bed made out of bags like not like bush timber and wasn't a room it was in a big shed and I suppose there were about 30, 40 people there and there was like you put your, I think I had a little suitcase with some clothes in it under the bed that's where it was. There was no wardrobes or anything
- 02:30 and the showers were of course cold showers we didn't need hot showers that was just a concrete slab and a bit of a wrap round hessian wall and that was the facilities the sleeping accommodation and up there's the cookhouse you go there and get your meals and you had to go up and sort of go and march for Joe or somebody
- 03:00 who was the cook and that was pretty big. It must have been I don't know I'd only be guessing but 60 or 80 people would be there all for every meal because they were provided by the company. Then I went out on the job and they they said, you know, I'm the new carpenter and he's the foreman, so I introduced myself to the foreman and said, "Where do I go?" and he said, "Well, go," and we were putting frames up which was easy you know,
- 03:30 really heavy work and because you're young and strong that's where they put you and I had no trouble just falling in with the people there that were all young blokes and none of 'em were locals they were all like me come from different parts of Australia and so we set to work and that's where we would have lived really. There was like we didn't have
- 04:00 cars and we didn't go sight seeing and we worked and then we could work long hours and we could work weekends so I think we we couldn't work on Sundays but we could work like a six day week and the money was amazing. I was making double what I made at Chisel's which was great you know. I put it in the bank and
- 04:30 nothing to spend, wonderful and young, it won't be long before I'll buy a house or something. I've got my foot on the ladder that's how it felt on the way on the go.

**So who were the other 30 or 40 people that you were that were in that big shed?**

Who were they? They were as I said just people all ages it was a frontier town, a real

- 05:00 frontier town Darwin. There were people that you know were, what do you call it? Alimony they were ducking alimony there were young people like myself there were wanderers that were just doing what I wanted to do eventually wander around the world, they work here, there and everywhere and do all sorts of different jobs and they were a real mixed up lot of people but they were mainly Australians. My friend who I've mentioned who
- 05:30 befriended me when I needed a friend was an Italian. I don't know where he came from I don't know where he went to but there was certain people they used to say watch him, like this was bloke'd play cards and he was a card shark or something or reputed to be you know those sort of people you see on the Mississippi boats you know, there's always the crooks, the smarties
- 06:00 and had to watch yourself and protect yourself. I never had any trouble really. I made friends with an Italian. Can't remember his name now because I don't even know what became of him. Probably when they sorted him out after the raid he might have been interned. I wouldn't be surprised because we were at war with Italy at the time so if he didn't have his right paper work he would have been interned.
- 06:30 Ron Robinson who came from St Auburn's up on the Hawkesbury River well he and I bought the house well not a house, a humpy 20 quid. One thing that happened I had been there about three months I suppose and we went into town one night. I think we got one of the company trucks
- 07:00 and stood up on the back of it and went into town and I got introduced to gambling. We played ins and outs that was a card, a dice game and there's a place in Darwin called 'The Spot' and that was a gambling, it's a shop in the street like gambling wasn't illegal or if it was illegal the police didn't take any notice so we just walked into this shop and I had like a weeks wages
- 07:30 in my pocket and, "I said how d you play this?" Like I'd never gambled and I, that night I won 480 pounds which is, Dad bought his house in in Kogarah for 525 pounds so I won the price of a house and they really protected me like I was protected and we got driven back to the camp
- 08:00 and the blokes looked after me and next day we went into the bank and sent it all home and Dad thought I'd robbed a bank, he didn't know it was very...

**So that was like winning the lottery or something like that?**

Well it was like winning what something like 300 thousand dollars now oh well no not, 300 thousand. I suppose a house that Dad bought for 525 pounds would be

- 08:30 equivalent to about 350 thousand pound house in Sydney today and I won it and I went very tight never spent it, kept it yeah or Dad kept it because Dad had needed money because he had these four kids or three kids yeah and he used it I think when my little sister went to boarding school
- 09:00 and things got a bit better for everybody yeah.

**So can you tell me about this dice game how did that work and kind of game was it?**

It's called ins and out's. Well it's a table set out it's got ins it's divided into very much like roulette in fact it is sort of based on roulette but instead of spinning a wheel

09:30 you throw dice and ins and out's can be odds or evens it's often called odds or evens. An odd number you throw like a five and a five and a five say that's an even number and then you can back numbers. You could say you can back doubles or and there's all prices like 35 to one and all that sort of thing. For different numbers you can back a double you can back a

10:00 particular number and you get a big odds and that's what I did. I was innocent I didn't know and I had this money and I kept shifting it round and putting it all back until they said, "Look stop it, you're like, you'll have to stop it because if you keep going we won't be able to look after you, bit too much money," and it was a lot of money.

**So did you do something?**

Very happy about it.

10:30 **Did you develop a taste for gambling?**

No I don't gamble. I gamble on Anzac Day every year and I well one Anzac Day I got the paper, saw me in town and they sort of followed it up and went with me for the whole day and

11:00 we finished up going gambling. I went to Miranda RSL [Returned and Services League] and I wasn't in the place more than half an hour and I won two and a half thousand dollars yeah because that's the way I gamble anyway, go bang bang and if you get a run you get a lot of money and you don't spend all day and it's paid off I suppose I've won a lot of money

11:30 but I don't gamble I don't back horses. I buy lottery tickets. I buy tickets in the million dollar house up the Gold Coast and a friend of mine won one so I've got to match him, her rather, and I think I'll win it one day so every time I get a letter from them I buy some tickets. I buy a hundred dollars worth of tickets actually and

12:00 I haven't won a thing but it'll come yeah I'm sure.

**Hope so.**

In the army I ran a game.

**You ran a game?**

Ran a game yeah at Adelaide River the army always plays two-up and so we set up a two-up myself and a mate not another different feller and we used to run two-up run the game

12:30 and that was good we made money out of that. I never bet because I ran it, better to run it be the banker yeah.

**You were working at the RAAF aerodrome is that right?**

Yeah yeah.

**And can you tell me about what kinds of activities and duties you were doing in that as a carpenter?**

I was putting, building

13:00 Single Men's Quarters and that's carpentering that's we started putting the frames up and then finishing them off with windows and doors and floors and all the rest put the roof on yeah so it entailed all the construction work yeah.

**And how much contact did you have with the activity that was happening in in the aerodrome?**

Nothing

13:30 they were the air force they looked after themselves. They even used to blow the, like they'd have air raid what do they call it like trials or,

**Drills or?**

Drills, drills yeah aerodrome drills and we used to laugh and we'd just keep working and they'd be all running around with their gas masks and tin hats and things and it'd only be a drill so and they never insisted we

14:00 do anything else, they were drills yeah so we had nothing to do with them. We didn't eat in their mess we lived our own life on the airport yeah. We used to laugh at them all lined up and having parades and strutting round and playing silly buggers you know. That's what we said, that was the description playing silly buggers yeah.

**So you thought it was all a bit of a storm in a teacup**

14:30 **what?**

What the war?

**No just their their activity and...?**

Oh no, they no, they were army and they we expected they should act like army and well they were air force really on there but they had their discipline they'd oh they'd all get dressed up and have a evening parade and all that sort of thing and we wore shorts and shirt and pair of sandshoes

15:00 they'd have to do all the well that's what they did. We understood, I understood anyway but we thought that's for them it's not for us this silly nonsense of parades and all the rest of it yeah.

**You mentioned that your dad was a socialist or had socialist sensibilities?**

He was a Labour man yeah, really hardcore Labor man yeah.

**It's, in terms of**

15:30 **your own political views what were you were sort of thinking at that point when you were working as a carpenter at that stage?**

I think I was apolitical more than anything. I used to have squabbles with fellers I worked with particularly in factories you know in Chisel Brothers where they'd be saying the boss is screwing us or that wasn't the terms. In those days it was

16:00 there's them and us sort of attitude and I never accepted that. I used to think it's us you know we're all together. The company is having a bad time we've got the depression they're having a bad time we're having a bad time and I accepted that as being the norm you know. I didn't think that you should take advantage of them or do anything than a good day's work

16:30 and get whatever pay was the award which was what we got. There were always people that I felt didn't work properly. They'd you know they'd get away from the bench if the boss didn't turn up they'd be late and or they'd just yak and talk and 'cause things were a bit different then. We had to punch a card when you went to work so they knew you always arrived on time and then there'd be morning and

17:00 morning tea I'm not sure yeah I think there was smoko I think they called it in the morning. They'd it'd be nine o'clock whatever time and they'd ring a bell when you had to start but all our bosses worked with us. This was Chisel Brothers there were five brothers. They were wood carvers and wood turners and and machinists and cabinet makers and they worked on the bench they were all the company, they

17:30 owned the company and they worked physically worked on the company and they used to take Wednesday afternoon off play golf. Some people used to object about that think you know the bastards are all playing golf again you know but I always thought they were entitled to it so I had a little bit different attitudes than my father about, not my father my father was very fair. I don't, not saying he wasn't you know trying to

18:00 get something for nothing. He believed in socialism, it's got its merits too as we all know.

**So what was his views on the war?**

Well he, to start with he didn't think there'd be a war like he was very sure. We had long arguments about that not arguments so much as 'cause I was young see like I could see it I could see it happening and he couldn't which always amazed me cause he'd been down this

18:30 track before why doesn't he know you know? I think he was very agitated about worker's killing worker's you know he always felt that it's the workers that bear the burden and for that reason it was a sort of you know there's all these stories I talk about corrupt or

19:00 or money it's, well they're saying the same thing about America now that it's oil or it's this or it's that you know and really it's not at all in my opinion. I don't think that America's in Iraq to get the oil I don't think the oil's enough to pay for Iraq's problems. They'll need every penny they've got to to reinstate the country. There'll be no

19:30 surplus left for anybody but that's my belief anyway and I think that was his his sort of attitude he didn't believe in these furrphies but somehow or other it was the worker's were going to get killed and you know we don't hear much about the First World War but that was a slaughterhouse an absolute slaughterhouse you know. Like 15,000 killed in an afternoon

20:00 you know that's like the crowd that go to the football. It was more than it was 50,000 I think in in the Somme in one day you know ridiculous but it was the way the war was the way it didn't happen in the Second World War except in Hiroshima and places like that but it's the worker's isn't it was the worker's got killed

20:30 and that was his objection like why can't they fix it up.

**So how much of your Dad's views did you share about the war?**

About how his views?

**Yeah how much how much of his views did you share about war?**

I don't about war I've said what we both, I'm against war. I think that war is ridiculous but then I

21:00 think these people that say no war they're ridiculous what about like if we'd said no war the Japs would have been here and you wouldn't be here and my kids wouldn't be here. We know what they did in other countries they just wiped the population out so what do you do? People say there's no, we don't want any war and they get attacked, what do you do then? You say you know go home because we don't believe in fighting? I'm not going to defend myself

21:30 what do you do? You've got to get involved haven't you and that's what happened to me. I got involved I had the bastards were trying to kill me one day really try to kill me. They were and I didn't have a gun so where am I going to get a gun? From the army that's where you get the guns from yeah.

**Les can you explain describe that day for me**

22:00 **where you were you were almost a victim of being killed by an act of war?**

Well it was just an ordinary day. The same day we all went up as I tell you we went up to the job and that particular day we were putting a roof on like not the tiles but the frame the roof and I was up on the roof on the like the purlins in a roof and

22:30 it was about I think 10 o'clock in the morning and maybe we'd had morning tea I'm not sure. I don't think we took morning teas you know anyhow that's beside the point and you've got to think about the situation in Darwin at the time. We were at the airport and we're up high so we could sort of see over the airport and we'd been looking at it and things had been happening that normally didn't happen.

23:00 There were a lot of ships in the harbour American, two American warships and I'm not sure no one really knows how many ships or boats really boats a lot of boat people in the harbour we call them now, boat people. They were people that were being pushed down from everywhere from Singapore some people you know you've heard of them got in boats and rowed even

23:30 down the they came to Darwin they were, Darwin was their first encounter with Australia so there were a lot of like luggers and in the air there was a lot of fighter planes American Spitfires they were coming we'd see them every day. They'd have a Liberator bomber in front because the fighters didn't have any navigation instruments and the bombers did so there'd be a bomber and they're a wave

24:00 of I don't know up to 20 or something like that Spitties, not Spitfires, Kittyhawks they were were coming in and they'd land at Darwin and refuel or stay overnight or something like that but there was a lot of activity in the air. There were also a lot of there was also a lot of activity with our American our Australian air force. We had oh what are they called Lanc, not Lancasters,

24:30 bombers anyway Hudson's they were Hudson bomber that the air force were flying and they were going away and coming back with wounded and some of them were shot up. You could look through the wings holes through the people were getting killed and they were trying to support our people in well

25:00 in the areas being invaded so there was a lot of activity a lot of planes. This particular day, nine o'clock, 10 o'clock there was well we looked up and someone said gee there's a lot of planes around today you know and then there seemed to be more and more of them and we were on the roof and a bloke said to me, "Look at that they're dropping something," and he said, "Oh it's leaflets what are they dropping leaflets on Syd, on Darwin for?"

25:30 We thought they were Americans, never dawned on us that it was Japs you know until we realised how many there were. There was 11 waves of nine, nine in that sort of shape and there was 11 of them 99 planes. There were actually 180 odd planes that turned up at Darwin that morning. They came in and then all these little silver things dropped out and they shined in the sun, the sun wasn't very high and they fell

26:00 down on the town. Next thing there's all these black clouds of smoke coming up and and a lot of noise and it was, the raid was on and we scrambled down out of the roof as quick as we could and I had a white hat on and I got rid of the hat it was too obvious because when that was happening while we were looking up there the fighters came in behind us

26:30 and started to shoot up the drome. They were machine gunning it like it was a real air raid and I found a trench the air force were always building slit trenches making slit trenches never built one they used to make 'em and when they dug down about six inches where the aerodrome is they'd hit rock and that was it you couldn't go any further so that'd be abandoned you know. So there were really

27:00 no slit trenches no shelter but six inches was better than nothing so we scrambled into these six inches



and tried to make yourself as thin as you are and and the raid was on and the noise, the noise was the thing like it hurt your ears, made my ears bleed. There was all these bombs bursting everywhere and they

- 27:30 go off like a crack you know not like on the pictures go boom a really shattering noise sharp shattering noise and the buildings we were building the fibre roofs were getting smashed and the glass was breaking and things were being blown up and like big lumps of concrete were falling down the bloody piers and stuff. It was a nightmare an absolute nightmare
- 28:00 and it went on and on you know and then by the time we straightened ourselves up they cleared and you could like you could look up and see the Nips sitting in the plane and guns everywhere blazing. You're sure he could see you you're waiting for him to turn around and come and get you and and of course there's dog fights going on and everything. It was amazing a real display you know but it's the first
- 28:30 time anyone or I'd been in anything like that and you're frightened to look up because deadly you know and the noise was deadly, and then they came in, the second wave came in and they carpet bombed it with big explosives from one end to the other just knocked everything over and that was worse than the first one yeah and that was the raid
- 29:00 so what did we do? It was strange it seems strange. We thought well this is the aerodrome it's full of bloody troops so we got our truck and went straight into town because we thought the town's been obliterated so we go and see what we could do and when we got to town it was an absolute shock you know, there's stuff burning
- 29:30 houses burning and and they were calling for volunteers to go down there were injured people on the Neptune a ship called the Neptune which was tied up at the wharf and they were calling or asking come and help us we need help with our stretcher bearers, so a mate well we had about four of us. I think we said ok we'll go help and as we had to go down a lot of steps. If you go to Darwin
- 30:00 you see where the wharf used to be and had to go down the cliff face and as we started down a fellow came up to us and said, "Go back, go back, go back, she's going," and like, "it's going to blow, the fire's out of control," had a big fire going on and we went back up onto Caverner Street I think it is and it did go. It was the biggest explosion that you've ever heard you know
- 30:30 like there was big beams from the wharf 20 foot long and a foot square 100 foot up in the sky and coming back at you know and well you know we was shattering you know. I don't know we just wandered around in a daze after that and the the concussion of that ship just knocked you out just bang.
- 31:00 I sort of we were in a bit of a daze about that and we had nowhere to go we didn't know what to do and the Provos, the Military Police were there saying you've got to get all your civilians out you know so we went back to our, back to the aerodrome and found all our sort of mates and fellow workers and we drove a truck down to Katherine
- 31:30 and then we waited there and the raid like you realised that you're helpless and you think like all they've got to do is just fly a plane down they can shoot up the road and we'd all seen these pictures of the refugees in Europe and you know what do you do so we said ok we've got to get in the army. At least we've got a rifle yeah and maybe they need us. Maybe we can make a stand to help
- 32:00 but the best place to be is going to be in the army so that's why we joined the army that's why I joined the army because we needed to defend ourselves and we all hated Japs we'd all seen people, dead people after the raid the feeling's pretty high you know.

**When it, when the actual, that**

- 32:30 **vista of seeing these Japanese planes which you assumed were American Kittyhawks when that happened how did that trickle down and affect the the pilot's and all the all the Australian troops in the RAAF aerodrome how was that affected? Did you have time to work out what was happening around you and how that was affecting and being?**

No I was being, they were

- 33:00 being raided like most of them were crouched in trenches and all that sort of thing you could there was not very much, I don't think there was any protection to the airport. I don't think we had any ack-ack [anti aircraft] guns there. There were guns in Darwin guarding the the harbour like round the perimeters of the harbour. There were people, there was a hospital there called Baghdad with an ack-ack battery
- 33:30 and they were involved in the you know but no most of us had your head down you know there was nothing you could do you can't fight an aeroplane you know not with your hands no. Like the Darwin raid was a a secret up until only a couple of years ago, no one's ever known and they say now that I'm not sure how many two hundred and something were killed or
- 34:00 I'm not sure what they say but that's nowhere near right. There were at least a thousand I think. The Mayor the Lord Mayor of Darwin himself estimated that there were over 980 I think or something he

said but no one knows who was in the harbour. We know 180 I think got killed on the on the Perry the SS Perry, USS [United States Ship] Perry

- 34:30 but that, 'cause that sunk with all hands and then the other one there was another battle there I don't know how many got lost there. The only records we have is that people that were known. Like if I'd got killed in Darwin that day I wouldn't have been counted because I didn't have no ID [identification] card no one knows who I am or what I was and you know in bombs a lot of people get dismembered and you're not sure you know.
- 35:00 People on boats in Darwin harbour which were strafed from one end to the other and just sunk and the place is, we've got ferocious sharks in those water and crocodiles and I like if ere there were over 40 craft at least in the harbour at 10 a craft that's 400 you know and and the
- 35:30 only ones there that know people in the town that were known in the town such as the Post Office which I think there were six or something they know of those people. But they don't know who, they don't know how many people got killed in Broome when they shot up the the refugees that had to stop on the planes overnight because there was no accommodation in Broome
- 36:00 for them so they said, "Let 'em stop on the aero," and they shot 'em up and sunk everything and no one knows. They know each plane must have had about so many and that's the only and so if you got lost in Darwin you got injured in Darwin or killed in Darwin and didn't have any ID on you, you weren't there it's not a number. All they've got'
- 36:30 people that had ID on them and they were mainly service personnel who had, what do you call 'em dog tags so it was a big raid. Let me tell you about the raid. Do you know about the Darwin raid yourself? The Darwin raid happened I don't know six weeks or something after the Pearl Harbor. It was the fleet that bombed Darwin
- 37:00 it was the same one that bombed Pearl Harbor same aircraft carriers same administration same admiral the same aircraft. They killed two thousand people in Pearl Harbor you know in that number round about that number. When they bombed Darwin they had more air no not more aircraft
- 37:30 nearly as many aircraft over Darwin at one time. They dropped more bombs on Darwin than they dropped on Pearl Harbour most people don't know that and nearly twice as much weight of explosives on Darwin and in the words of General, oh Admiral Yamamoto, the Japanese General Admirals in charge of it he said we have used a sledge hammer
- 38:00 to crack a walnut here you know cause they expected to be more shipping more people a bigger town than it was but they had more bombs some people say more planes and that was only the first raid. I think there was something accredited now something like over 60 raids on the Northern Territory and most of them were on Darwin. I believe there was 58 raids in Darwin and I was
- 38:30 there for 33 raids which is a lot of air raid.

## Tape 4

- 00:41 But you get used to it you it's amazing isn't it, you get used to it.
- To air raids?**
- Bombing yeah, yeah I could go out in the finish and you'd say, "Oh we're safe, they're over there tonight, look," and watch the the whole show you know.
- 01:00 But the first one we're in the middle of it and you couldn't see the whole thing you know and if ever I can make a point it's the noise of a bloody war yeah it's absolutely unbelievable noise. To me people say, "What was it like?" I say, "I don't know, it was the noise the worst part of it," and then after that when you walk along and you see people wounded
- 01:30 and you're just lucky that you can but that's the two extremes of it, the noise and the damage.
- 02:00 **You were saying you were saying that they they initially said only one or two people had been killed?**
- I think they said six had been killed at the Post Office. I think six.
- 02:30 There's a thing there about it I got it out to show you about someone said they were there and they said this is what really happened not what was said but the government had a problem. They didn't want to panic people. You know they fired a couple of shots into I think Bondi or somewhere didn't they with submarines? Half the population went out to the mountains. You could buy a cheap house at
- 03:00 Bondi after they'd shelled it so like they had to maintain order they couldn't tell people that the Japs were like invading Australia in the next 24 hours or something and that's what was thought. I'd had

nothing to do with this but my unit, the unit I got associated with they got into Arnhem Land and rounded up all the natives and

- 03:30 hustled them all back down to Adelaide River and other places further down to protect them and they put them in compounds and locked them up, because if the Japanese had come they'd have tried to use them for scouts or whatever and and they'd try to make them work, and the Australian aboriginals you know they, I'm not saying they're lazy they just can't
- 04:00 comprehend and they can't do things very well, they can't, they've got no construction ability or anything you know so the Japanese would have just shot 'em, they'd have said they're not worth feeding you know. So we rounded them all up, the Australian army rounded them up all in Arnhem land all up along the north coast and got them back as far as they could to protect them and I went up to Arnhem land with my children
- 04:30 20 years ago I suppose and I couldn't get into Arnhem land because I had to get a passport from an aboriginal camp, an absolute disgrace but anyhow that's not what we're talking about, let's not talk about it now, but they had to be very careful about panicking the Australian population. I don't know whether we would have acted
- 05:00 as stoically as the British did, the British put up with the bombing and just Churchill just said, "We'll fight 'em on the beaches we'll fight 'em anywhere," and I think the Pommies, English were prepared to do that or it seems to me. I know there must have been people that didn't agree with it but the majority of the population seemed to agree and I don't know that Australians would have done it. I'm not denigrating Australians at all I just think that
- 05:30 we've got a big wide open country I think we'd have thought well ok we can move back a step or two and it'll all get fixed up eventually I think that might have been our attitude. Brisbane line as part of that deal if we can't defend the north let's let 'em take it and we'll defend it from here back.

**What gave you that impression that that was the attitude?**

Well Brisbane line to start with and it was like we've got such a big coast

- 06:00 line if we put a person in those days put everybody around the coast I don't know how far apart they'd be they'd be a long way apart, they would be useless wouldn't they? So I think the government when they talked about the Brisbane line which has become a dirty word now but there's no chance of defending it all.
- 06:30 They had to make some decisions about that like if you've got all your equipment all round the coast you couldn't fight anybody could you really? You'd have to concentrate and try and have a battle somewhere and the result of the battle would determine the the future of the country so you know but they could, we couldn't have fought a battle
- 07:00 a proper battle in Darwin because we couldn't service it couldn't get up stuff through the, couldn't get stuff up through the through the desert you couldn't have maintained an army. The maintenance of the army up there would be beyond our capacity so we'd have where are you going to fight 'em?

**Just to clarify that**

- 07:30 **was the attitude that Darwin was left for dead was it just that it was just no hope of?**

I don't think so no.

**This attitude of wanting to defend from Brisbane down?**

Oh yeah that that was sort of policy I think. Darwin, like if the Japs had landed that would have been implemented but they didn't and I think we'd have made a stand. Whether we could have got

- 08:00 reinforcements there quickly enough I don't know and it probably depended on the Yanks. If the Yanks had brought in a couple of aircraft carriers or something we could have defended Darwin if we keep the aeroplanes out we could have defended it but if we'd tried to defend it...

**You were talking about the the Brisbane line and...?**

Yeah

- 08:30 that was policy you know and it caused big trouble politically because you know like later on I think Menzies, I forget the details but it was said that we were prepared to sacrifice all the north and as long as we looked after Canberra sort of thing you know there was a political thing about it. The Labor Party often throw it up now and I'm not speaking politically I'm just saying that it often comes up but there is the truth
- 09:00 of the matter is that if they'd taken Darwin they'd have had to make decisions like that because you couldn't defend the whole place. You know that there was a Japanese you could check this with the records a Japanese fleet one day's steaming from Sydney they were headed to Sydney to bomb Sydney

09:30 and they were one day away. In other words they were within striking distance by aircraft and the Coral Sea battle broke out and they had to turn around and go back and assist there and the only thing that saved Sydney from being bombed was they didn't want to disclose that they were down there. That's how close things were. Like they could have easily bombed Sydney invaded Darwin and

10:00 once you got Sydney and knock Canberra out you know it wouldn't have been hard. It was very, very dangerous a very, very dangerous situation. If you don't believe in war how do you defend it? How do, what like someone's got to come and do it for you haven't they?

**At that time in Darwin in the first raid how much how much damage did you know had actually been done**

10:30 **how much were you aware of the actual damage?**

We were, well were aware of all the damage I think. We knew that what they did in that first raid was destroy the shipping. I think there were four or five ships laying on their side on Darwin Harbour when the war finished. The Japs came and broke 'em up and took 'em away, we sold 'em but like the Manunda and the Kanimbla,

11:00 they're different ships, big ships that were sunk in Darwin Harbour and that was obvious to everybody. They hit the oil tanks and set the tanks on fire and that was obvious to everybody. If you drove around the town there were smashed up buildings everywhere and that was obvious to everybody. It was obvious that Darwin had been

11:30 really destroyed as a town, there was no civilians there any more really only service personnel and odd bods like ourselves and we weren't much use to anybody because we didn't belong to anybody we weren't ..After they settled down a bit they knew that we would be valuable in engineer groups and so we went to an engineers group because we just that's where we were. I'm sure a lot of office workers went

12:00 to headquarters as administration and that sort of thing. They couldn't go home, they couldn't go home because you couldn't get through the country there was no way and it was the wet season and so if you drove off the road you got bogged and once you got into the desert there was no roads no communication nothing so they were isolated, we were isolated up there and..

12:30 **You mentioned that when you came into the town you just you mentioned that civilians had already evacuated?**

Well no most of the women and kids had they'd been taken out. Was only there, was only about two and a half thousand people lived there in the whole sort of Northern Territory and all the woman had gone and all the public servants had sort of gone and become an army town frontier town yeah

13:00 yeah.

**Do you mind if I go back Les and just ask you a couple of questions about that first experience?**

No.

**No? Just a couple of things you mentioned that you noticed there was some dog fighting going on?**

Yeah well it's not dog fights like the First World War it's you know they don't fight like that anymore do they? They straight past you know and the Japs

13:30 were higher than than the Americans and like the pilot'd scream in and there'd be a shoot and it was just avoided evasive action, the American would take evasive action. We had no Australians in the air, no fighters it'd be evasive action, but generally the Wirra, the Zeros were a far superior plane

14:00 you know one of the best planes in the war at that time so was you know superseded later but the American, the Zero was a really good fighting plane was light manoeuvrable fast see and it was fatal. If they got onto the tail of a Kittyhawk, the Kittyhawk was gone you know.

**You mentioned that you were standing up on a scaffold?**

14:30 No on a roof.

**On a roof?**

Yeah.

**And that you could see the planes dropping?**

Yeah.

**The bombs?**

Yeah.

**Did you actually see and could you describe the impact what well could you see after they were dropped?**

Well the two things there. One was that you could see them dropping bombs on the town and the town's four miles wide, four mile, the aerodrome is at the four mile from Darwin

- 15:00 town and it's a bit obscured like we couldn't actually see the streets of Darwin but we could see Darwin buildings you know, and all you could see really was you know, the Japanese use picric acid in their bombs as the explosive and when that detonates it's a big black cloud of smoke, so all these black clouds of smoke went up. Wherever ,on impact with a bomb, and the bombs impacted there was
- 15:30 a big cloud of black smoke so that's what you see, but on the aerodrome like bombs were going off just over there and you could see that happening but that's, you don't see much just the impact of it sort of, I don't know, it disorients you and and it's quick like, it's so quick like the shrapnel from a bomb moves
- 16:00 faster than a bullet. You can't see it you know but you could see big, like I said about the the girders, from the beach, from the wharf, you can see them because they're great big things that had been thrown up. They'd probably start off at the speed of a bullet and slow down a bit and then they fall yeah.

**So there were explosions happening very close to you?**

Oh yeah very close machine gun fire,

- 16:30 bullets were kicking up the dust everywhere.

**Can you give me an idea of some of the things that you were thinking, things that were going through your head at that point?**

Hope I don't , I think, that my only thought was I hope I don't get hit and I wasn't too sure whether that was going to happen. I thought it could be the end you know, I thought bloody silly place to be you know, that's about all.

- 17:00 I think you close your eyes and hope they didn't hit hope they couldn't see you because you shut your eyes yeah. I think that's about it cause you couldn't do anything about it. Be different if you're charging into battle I think but you go in with your eyes open but you've got a chance haven't you, but you've got no chance in those circumstances and that's the terrifying part about it.
- 17:30 You might be the one that cops it and it looks as though you'll be lucky to miss you know like in fact I think you're sure that you'll get hit so you just try and squeeze into the ground a little bit further that's it, shut your eyes and hope for the best.

**What were you and the other construction guys saying to each other during this time?**

We weren't saying anything, we weren't together,

- 18:00 we just spread which is because there was no real trenches. Later on I've been in trenches where we're all standing up in a trench sometimes full of water up to your neck and because of the rainy season it was full of water and and you'd stand there and you'd watch what was happening and if a plane came really close then you put your head down. The first raid we kept our head down all the time. I kept
- 18:30 my head down all the time and it wasn't until it all stopped and you started to get up and you we were dazed and disorientated and frightened I suppose. It was funny we just wandered round and found each other and I don't think we even had a roll call or anything we just sort of wandered off and and then decided to go to town because that's where we were needed,
- 19:00 we thought we'd be needed in town and the aerodrome airport could look after itself and not saying that there was any friction between us but we didn't associate you know. They could look after themselves. They would have hunted us off anyway like what are you doing here you know, like this is our job, this is our place. There'd have been a corporal in charge and he'd have been giving orders and and well air force people would have been taking note of them they wouldn't take any notice
- 19:30 of us, so we took our... I remember taking a pinch bar and a hammer with me because we might need it but we were going in there to do what we could ourselves you know, if anybody was in trouble we'd help them but they didn't need that sort of help on the aerodrome that's how we felt anyway.

**Could you make an assessment of how much damage had been made of the of the airport hangar in terms of casualties?**

Destroyed, it was destroyed,

- 20:00 they'd burnt all the hangars down, there were planes on the ground blown up and shot and on fire and airport was destroyed. The runway had been punctured with craters so they couldn't use it. It was obvious a raid to destroy the capacity of Darwin to to defend itself or retaliate that's what it was about, that's what they did so we were well aware that.
- 20:30 It wasn't just a nuisance raid it was a raid to destroy Darwin.

**What about casualties in the airport?**

I'm not sure they, whatever was on the airport would be part of those numbers that they talk about because anyone that was killed anyone that was wounded you would never know because they would have been flown out or got out as quick

21:00 to hospitals down south or something cause anybody that was lost their lives would have been accounted in those figures cause they'd have known.

**And there were no casualties amongst your, the rest of the blokes?**

Not that I know of.

**Or anyone wounded or anything?**

Not that I know of see we moved out see. I don't know, there could have been. We were, you know how

21:30 carpenters work or builders work, this is our building we're working on that we might have a dozen people there and there's some people down there another dozen or could be all the same company but that's the group on that job. So I think that our group I don't know that I ever saw, I only knew of the people we were with and I don't really remember who they were except one man and that was this Ron Robinson who was my

22:00 fellow like a friend and so I don't know about that.

**When did you realise that you were bleeding from your ears?**

I think, at the time as soon as it dried up I had blood you know, it was dried up in me ear and it was alright, I didn't worry about it. Later on

22:30 I was in a very serious thing where, I've lost hearing in this ear not altogether but high notes I can't hear above a certain level but that was another thing altogether another time.

**Connected to that or another air raid?**

No wasn't another, no it was in Japan an explosion that killed people.

23:00 We've talkd about a lot of killing tonight I don't normally talk about that. I started off telling you killing rabbits.

**Do you think that when you went into the town that day**

23:30 **you could describe the kinds of people that you encountered and the sorts of things that you saw when you walked into into town when you'd parked the truck?**

Well we drove into town in the back of the truck and well I think we sort of drove round the town and first thing that happened to us was when we went down a street this feller was saying, "Come on we need someone," well that's what we were there for, so we

24:00 started to get down to the ship but we didn't get there fortunately you know. If we'd been 15 minutes earlier we probably would have been on the ship but we didn't get on that so that the end of that part of the thing you know. Then I'm not really sure what happened but there were people walking round the town they were dazed and people not knowing where they were going

24:30 and people racing out of town in motor cars and then everybody was sort of dirty they'd all been on the ground or in the ground or everybody had dirty clothes on. We normally had dirty clothes cause we were workers but office workers with their white shorts and socks and shirts, they were covered in red mud and dust you know and they were all,

25:00 everyone was going their own way until the police said well you've got to get out of the town, that's the army police, like martial, declared martial law so the town's going to be taken over so where do we go and they were I don't know where you go but get out of the town you know, which is what we did.

25:30 **So what were the, can you describe the kinds of smells and conversations and things that you could, that you came across during that time of walking in after the bombing?**

Never thought about this I just think that it's ordinary, well I think the big thing was there's going to be another raid like, it'll be on again this is only the beginning

26:00 and they'll be back. And everybody was sort of thinking well where are we going now you know, maybe they come back in numbers maybe they'll just come back and you know there was fear among everybody that I spoke to about they'll be back. They're not going to leave, this is the first one when's the second, tomorrow or this afternoon or when you know.

26:30 I don't know where we ate our meals or what we did I can't remember, and we did it you know we had to I suppose but I can't recall any details of of the rest of that day. I don't even know where I slept that night, I've never thought about it ever until now until you asked the question but I suppose we were

back at the RAAF,

27:00 that's where we had our house that's where we had our clothes and our tools and our bag and and the hut, the humpy so that's where we would have been I suppose. Never thought about it but it was a terrible feeling of being isolated and alone and undefended and and not being able to do anything about it that well, made it obvious that you had to do something

27:30 and the obvious thing to do was get in with a group and the group was the army as far as I was concerned yeah that would have been the way it was I'm sure.

**From the time that you'd spent in Darwin before the bombing how aware were people of war or the threat of war?**

Well as soon as Japan declared war

28:00 on America by the bombing of of Pearl Harbor everyone was very aware of the war. Everybody in Australia was aware of the war. We had troops overseas and and we weren't doing very well either that's why the Japs took the picked the time like it was sort of very iffy about that time with the British and the bloody French had given up and you know

28:30 and most of Europe was already occupied. People were very aware of the war and it was going badly and we had troops overseas which were in jeopardy and troops coming back we hadn't said anything about that time but at that time, but there were troops coming back to Singapore they were going to put them in Singapore and Singapore fell before they got there thank God you know otherwise would have been another disaster.

29:00 **What about the people in Darwin how aware were they of?**

I was talking about, that was the general feeling of I'm sure the troops and and the people of Darwin were well aware that the war was on the war was going badly,

29:30 and Japanese were now in the war and that was another further threat as far as we were concerned and you couldn't like, as it got later and closer to the bombing you could not have been, you could not have been unaware that the Japs were flooding through all of south east Asia and the fact that all the troops were there

30:00 and all that sort of thing and the planes were coming in from the Yanks. Darwin was certainly at war and it going either be a big base for further activities by the allies but the Americans were untried at that time no one knew what the Yanks'd do, the warmongering Yanks we talked about these days never wanted a war they never came into it they just sat there as they did in the First World War. They were not the first cab off the rank

30:30 by any means and Australia was very much on its own in the Pacific at that time and so the feeling in Darwin would have been that, I'm sure, that the Japs are coming.

**You've mentioned that you noticed a couple of American planes involved the Kittyhawks and**

Yeah.

**What what contact had you had with American troops prior**

31:00 **to the bombing?**

None there was no troops no American troops. There were two ships that came into Darwin and I don't know if there had been any more American ships but there were two ships in Darwin Harbour on the day of the raid and I don't think they even came ashore. I think they'd come to escort the Australia, I think it was the 2/2nd that were going up to Timor

31:30 and they did go up on the way but they got bombed so we were like, the authorities were aware that the Japanese were bombing within range of Darwin and this convoy turned around and came back to Darwin and thank God they got the troops off the troop carriers that night and took them ashore, the thought was well leave them on you know we'll take 'em somewhere else tomorrow.

32:00 But they didn't they took them off the ships and the ships were sunk so they were lucky they got them off, so we were very aware of all the activity that was going on and the threat there was to Darwin.

**What were the impressions of the Japanese that what did the Australians think of the Japanese as an enemy?**

What are you talking about now before the war?

32:30 **Before oh during at this time of the bombing and prior to...?**

Well I think the the official attitude was they were blind, they all wore glasses, they all had buck teeth and they weren't worried much about it. We were fighting them in New Guinea and there's stories told is true that Tokyo Rose

33:00 said I believe someone in parliament said in Australia that one Australian is worth 10 Japanese and she

said so we're going to send 10 for every one of you and that was a threat that was weeks, months Kokoda trails when the Kokoda trail was on so if you think that one Australian's worth 10 we'll

33:30 send 10, which didn't make the troops very happy or anybody very happy so we thought that they were they wouldn't be able to fight that they couldn't see properly they wouldn't be able to shoot straight they couldn't make anything they only used to make cheap junk used to be sold in Woolworths they all be in tin tanks and things like that you know, that's what we thought but

34:00 we were wrong very wrong. They were tenacious fighters and fanatical fighters good soldiers and if there's such a thing as a good soldier. If they're defending you they were good soldiers if you're fighting them they're not yeah.

34:30 **And what about at that time of the bombing what was the impression of the Japanese then?**

Well I think the attitude was about the same I think. We hadn't stopped them in New Guinea I don't think at that time and they were still winning victory after victory everywhere and we just knew

35:00 nothing about what they were doing to prisoners of war, that hadn't sort of started. We didn't know about that. I think we started to realise they were not comic characters they were a serious threat, very serious threat at that time. I'm talking about the general population. I think the army

35:30 knew more about it and the Australian government knew more about it but weren't saying it I think, like they were doing all sorts of things to try and, well it was Chifley wasn't it, went to America and beseeched them to come and give us aid that's how serious they regarded it but the general, you got silly posters, you probably see copies of them even now where the Japanese were considered to be

36:00 pretty silly and they wouldn't be hard to beat and that was the attitude of the general public I think, what they'd been fed by the propaganda machine.

**You mentioned the Aboriginal compound?**

Yeah.

**What was the Aboriginal people's response when you were involved with that how were they responding to being rounded up and that kind of thing?**

36:30 I think they didn't like it but I didn't have anything to do with it. My unit built the compound or helped build the compound we had nothing to do with it really so I don't know but I know that the Japanese, the Chinese, the aboriginals would have been very upset about being rounded up because they separated men from women and kids and

37:00 and they are nomadic and you can't do that. They eventually fixed it up but the first time like it had to happen now because the Japs'll be here tomorrow so there was no sort of, it was pretty rough and pretty, not saying anybody was cruel about it but there was rough and ready rules get 'em out, get 'em out of the bush because they'll be killed if we don't yeah.

37:30 Little known fact I think that.

**And this happened after you'd already, this is the day after when you enlisted or this is actually happening?**

This was happening straight away, this was some of the units that were there in Darwin so some officers or somebody well I suppose they had a plan and the plan was like these, if we leave them there they're going to be used as scouts that's not going to help our defences and

38:00 if they behave, like the Japanese are vicious and cruel people militarily I know there's stories that I could tell you about other Japanese but homeland Japanese were different people. You just can't imagine that they're the same people. They would have under the stress of war been ruthless with people that have, were no use

38:30 to them, they would have just liquidated 'em they had the mentality to do it.

**And looking back on it the idea of of the Aboriginals being used as trackers and scouts was that a likely scenario looking back on it or?**

I don't think they'd have been,

39:00 I don't think they'd have done it. I really don't think they'd have been, like there was no patriotism amongst them they were a scattered group of people that had no sort of, there's no coercion, there's no unity amongst them. They mainly live in little tribes and they were mainly at each other's throats anyway about hunting grounds and areas which

39:30 they guarded jealously but they were very primitive people at that time, very primitive. There was a few missionaries places up there and mostly they were well nomadic people.

**Did you hear any stories about how they responded to the army's involvement with them at that time?**



No

- 40:00 Nothing, I don't know what happened. I know that very soon after that they were all let loose again and they didn't stop in a compound very long and I think we realised that they were pretty useless as far as the workforce, they were no good as a workforce, they've got no ethnic, no well I think it's ethnic thing, they've got no ability genetic ability.
- 40:30 I know I'm talking racist nonsense now but they just didn't fit in somehow with doing things, you couldn't get them to work. We tried to get them to work but they were they just sit down and you know, they're pretty useless and I'm not saying that derogatorily I'm saying they're pretty useless in our system of things. They were alright, they were good people. I've known a lot of them and been in their tribes and
- 41:00 I find them good people to talk to but you can't do anything very hard you know. Well Australia's finding that now, we're doing all sorts of things about universities and giving credits and so forth to try and encourage them to universities. It's working, not working really well is it? It's been a long time 30 years now I'm not going to start an argument but
- 41:30 it's been 30 years and we're not, I don't think we're succeeding yet but I know they're being used by the wrong people who've got a lot of the benefits we give them don't get to them, sort of milked off on the way. We've got court cases on at the moment about that.

## Tape 5

- 00:49 **So Les share your story from the point you've left Darwin and you went down to the Adelaide River I think you said and enrolled in the army?**
- Came back to
- 01:00 Darwin to join up yeah.
- OK so tell me the story what happened then?**
- Well I joined up an engineer group and well we found we were the only qualified construction people in the unit. They had all these kids that'd done the six week army course you know so we built the 117th, 119th I think hospital which was built in Darwin to
- 01:30 take care of the casualties. It had already started, a tent I think it was a big tent hospital and we started to build buildings and we had a lot of help from the CCC [Civil Construction Corps] which is a, I'm not going to tell you what we called 'em but the Civil Construction Corp.
- What did you call them?**
- Lady's here.
- She won't hear.**
- We called 'em
- 02:00 Curtin's cunning cunts, yeah, CCC, but there was always this sort of rivalry. They were civvies [civilians] sort of in the work employment field that groups going, that had been sent up to Darwin and but they were all on 10 pound a week or something which made us very envious and we were on six bob a day see so.
- 02:30 **So your wage dramatically dropped when you joined?**
- Yeah it dropped from about 20 pounds a week to six bob a day, six shillings a day yeah which was a big drop but we were in the army then and we were qualified you know, it was all tradesmen surveyors and engineers and you know all sorts of construction workers so we were put to work with the army
- 03:00 troop which was an engineering unit and they did a lot of work in Adelaide. One of the things we did was go up to Darwin and we started to strip out things where you often hear about the the looting of Darwin. Well we looted it alright but for the army because the Japs were coming and the civilians had left, a lot of them had left and just left the houses got up from breakfast and gone
- 03:30 and they wouldn't be coming back of course you know, so we took everything we could lay our hands on out of Darwin. I became a truck driver. I'd never driven a truck in my life that was one of the first jobs, a three tonne truck and we went round and took refrigerators and went back to the airport and took booster pumps and all sorts of stuff, anything that we could use and the idea of course they were gonna burn Darwin
- 04:00 if the Japs came that would be the first thing they'd do is destroy Darwin and the big plan of course was to blow up the dam and cut the water off. Darwin had all these plans so we were getting stuff out of

Darwin that would be of use to the army and we were putting it all together in Adelaide River. We were responsible for the power station

04:30 in Adelaide River and building of the hospital and numerous work building camps and we built a picture theatre, open air, all sorts of little things you know the usual things that army does. Build bridges and we had a crew of people on the road who were sinking bores all down the highway. They were like a bore just a group of blokes with a drilling

05:00 thing and they just went down and drilled bores and to get water in case we had to retreat or something like that you know, it was all part of the plan with nine army troop.

**Often when people speak of the looting of Darwin they seem to be more inferring about the taking of people's possessions such as gold jewellery, money clothing?**

Yeah I don't know I think people took

05:30 most of their money with them but there's stories about people, soldiers living in tents with carpet squares on the floor. There certainly were you know but they were left and the Japs were going to get them and you know there's always a certain amount of larrikinism in an army anyway and what better than having a big carpet in your tent. Didn't belong to anybody, they'd gone you know. I don't think very much jewellery would have been left

06:00 anyway. What would you take when you're running? Stuff you can carry, jewellery, money mainly anything, bicycles and motorbike, if you could find a motorbike you'd take it you know but you never used it. It was taken back down the road where it could be used. Refrigerators was big then because we didn't have much refrigeration in the army

06:30 even, and furniture we had a few chairs here and there was a good idea but you know I don't think there was any real looting. There's always an element I suppose that would take things but what do you do, you know? You've only got a kitbag you can't take very much away in your kitbag when you put your clothes in it so you couldn't have taken it out of the country anyway.

**How were the provosts the MPs [Military Police]**

07:00 **managing the situation?**

Very good yeah, I never had any encounter with them except when we went back to Darwin we asked them for directions about you know, where do we go to join up and there was no facilities to join up it wasn't, there was no recruitment officer there was no bloody, so they said, "Well you better get yourself down the road, back down to Adelaide River, that's the engineer's unit, go down there." So we got down there by truck and

07:30 that was it, we were in the army. I was in the army for three months I think before I got an army issue uniform and we never had any, never did any army drill you know, the six days we never did any of that, we didn't need it. We only had to be carpenters and that sort of thing.

**In all communities there**

08:00 **are men and women who are cowards and there are men and women who are brave. During your time in Darwin what do you remember of the bravery of some Australians and what do you remember of the the coward side of Australians?**

I didn't see any cowardice in it at all you know. I suppose we're all cowards when it comes to an air raid you take cover and that was all we dealt with really.

08:30 No I didn't see much heroism either because there was no call for it you know. Certainly the navy and the air force were involved in that sort of thing but it's always away from, you're not part of it so I'd say heroism and cowardice didn't count in Darwin,

09:00 it wasn't necessary one way or the other.

**How during your time in Darwin how frequently would the Japanese attack?**

I think in the next 12 months or maybe a little longer they attacked about, I know 58 times but I know they say about 60 odd now but I think that included they bombed Batchelor

09:30 airstrip which was south of Adelaide River, they bombed Katherine which was south of Adelaide River and I think even the bombing of Broome which was not in the Northern Territory even was counted as attacks on Darwin whereas they should be classified as attacks on Australia you know. They were spread right across the top but I think Darwin probably got raided around 60 odd times, so over

10:00 over say an 18 month period what's that four or five times a month yeah but more in the beginning. But particularly we used to call, a moonlight night was a 'tay ja moon' [?] we called it because they always come over on a moonlight night. Darwin was a hard place to bomb it's not a big city, and when the lights went out of course when the town shut down as soon as an air

10:30 raid alert was on we turned the lights off and it was all bush they had big trouble bombing Darwin. They

used to you know, I think in desperation just drop a few bombs at anything they saw yeah.

**Was later Darwin supplied with anti-aircraft equipment?**

Oh yeah Darwin became a big centre. They built huge underground storage

11:00 tanks for oil in Darwin and then the Darwin air strip became a major bomber strip. They used to, there's a place called Winnellie there and they put an army camp there and it was right at the end of the runway you know another stupid thing they do, and planes used to start about two o'clock in the morning and they'd be going for hours going up into the Celebes

11:30 and so forth on bombing raids, New Guinea, and of course the heavy bombing started from the Liberator bombers which were at Fenton flew at Batchelor field which is Rum Jungle not far away, you know, by plane but down the road a bit. They were big air strips, Rum Jungle later on became the uranium mine area.

12:00 Was a good pub there the slogan is it's oh 'the smartest pub in the scrub' I think they called it.

**So your time in Darwin was just building?**

What with?

**With the army?**

Well later on it became different things. We we were attached later on to a unit that was mixed up with

12:30 hygiene and we were attached as instructors to instruct them in the construction of ablution blocks and toilets and all that sort of stuff and I did a lot of trips up and down the road. We used to go down to Mount Isa to the different units all the way down and then go to Adelaide River and Tennant's Creek, really like back to Tennant's Creek and down to Alice then up to Darwin and have a couple of weeks in Darwin

13:00 then go back down the track again which suited me fine, I was moving. As long as I kept moving I was happy yeah. What else did we do? Well it was mainly construction and then this instruction thing and then we got sent down to Adelaide to Fort Largs and had big six inch guns there so they put us in the Fort, we became fortress engineers

13:30 and that was maintaining the Fort that was all, but then they sent us back to Darwin again which is a bit, for me was terrible because everyone I knew that joined the army in Sydney went somewhere else and I thought I'd joined the army in Darwin they're going to send me somewhere else but they didn't, they sent me back to Darwin and ultimately like towards the end of '43 I suppose, something like that, they sent us to

14:00 Canungra in Queensland which was a jungle training centre. And we were on staff at Canungra and that was a preparation for the invasion of Japan, it was called jungle training, was nothing to do with jungle really. It had been a jungle training centre all during the war mainly training Americans actually but also Dutch and Indonesian. There was

14:30 like a lot of people there I forget now but it was all training in jungle warfare and it's a known fact now that the invasion of Japan was to take place in November, December of '45 and Canungra was really booming in that time because of the jungle training and I was mixed up with explosives and demolition

15:00 and that was part of the things we we're talking about I think.

**So Les how did how did you get mixed up with the explosives and?**

I volunteered for bomb disposal, we volunteered for everything to get out of the Territory. I volunteered to be a paratrooper and they knocked me back, I volunteered to be a rear gunner or something in the air force and the army wouldn't let me go and then the chance came up to really get into something so I

15:30 I joined the bomb disposal group which suited me fine, I loved it.

**And that was 1943?**

'44,'45 maybe, '45, yeah.

**So you went to Canungra and did you initial training there?**

No training was done through engineers, like it's, part of engineering is bomb disposal and

16:00 most of the nine army troop had a group little group that was interested or their responsibility was disposal of ammunition. They're mainly concerned, the army groups was interested in ammunition fires and that sort of thing. Adelaide River was a big depot. There's a place there called Snake Creek at Adelaide River and that became a very big arsenal area

16:30 storage area. In fact it's interesting to go and see it, it's still all in tact you know you can't use it it's derelict but it hasn't been dismantled and so they had this group that was to take care of unexploded ordnance, unexploded ordnance mainly as a result of fires or or bombing or whatever you know, had to

have crews that knew what they were doing,

17:00 so that's where I got involved in it and then to Canungra and then from there to Japan.

**So just coming back to your time there your initial training what did that involve?**

Study of ordnance why it works, how it works, how fuses can work and different explosives and different demolition

17:30 tactics you know, want to blow a bridge up or blow things, well instruction in demolition.

**It was your point to blow things up or your point was to defuse things what were you?**

Everything, bomb disposal is bomb disposal, to get rid of bombs, unexploded bombs and

18:00 can be enemy bombs or your own bombs or from accidents like motor accidents, truck accidents where ammunition's got out of control somehow you know and you had to know how to deal with them.

**So were you sent once you'd finished your initial training what operations did you go on?**

Well nothing much happened in Australia because we were you know we were advancing.

18:30 We were all at Canungra and that was training so I did a lot of training there but other like training of troops as well and then we got shipped to Japan where we did a major course with the Americans in Japan and that was the study of Japanese ordnance because they were you know was thousands of tons of it and it all had to be dealt with and

19:00 the Yanks were there before the Australians and they, what they'd found out about it they passed on to us and so that became a major job of dealing with American bombs and unexploded Japanese ordnance from arsenal areas, and also on the ships and things that were sunk in the harbour. Like

19:30 Japanese ships with a load of ordnance on it and all that. It was mainly getting rid of the, there was more ammunition stored in Japan at the end of the war than we used during the whole of the war, 600,000 tons of explosive ordnance more than that, more than 600,000 ton. What had happened before the

20:00 the terror raids started on Japan, Japanese factories were fragmented. There were big factories of course where the major construction but there was also factories in every little town and village making bits and pieces and towards the end of the war the allies had control of the air, nothing could get in and out of Japan. The Americans mainly

20:30 submarines controlled the coast of Japan particularly round the inland sea and the oceans around south China, southeast China so they were making this stuff and they couldn't get it out cause they didn't have control of the ocean, the seaways so the stuff was getting made and the Japs had nowhere to store it so they started..

21:00 The prisoners of war mainly were set about digging holes, tunnels in the sides of the mountains and warehouses in villages were filled with you know, it was dangerous things to do. Sidings of railways were full, everything was full of explosives enormous quantities when we got there it was mind boggling. Like my unit the 10th Army, 10th

21:30 Bomb Disposal alone and there's only really there's 18 of us when we first went there and we got reinforcements later on but we alone moved 150,000 tons of explosives, 18 people, enormous job all over Japan and that suited me fine cause I

22:00 never stopped travelling in Japan yeah.

**So coming back Canungra, I take it the war ended while you were there?**

Yeah it it ended yeah. We were in Canungra and it wasn't an open disclosed thing that we were getting ready to go to Japan but we all knew sort of like we were front line troops by that time. I'd been in the army five years or something and we knew our jobs.

22:30 Five years in the army is enough to make you something of an expert anyway and that's when they dropped the bomb. Greatest thing that ever happened as far as I was concerned of course and history's now proved that it's just as well they did come to some arrangement, that they did keep up the bombing, the terror bombing. The bombing of Japan was real terror bombing, saturation bombing with incendiaries and

23:00 high explosives and set the whole town alight. In Tokyo they had 16 square miles of Tokyo on fire at one time, in one day, a lot of people died Tokyo and Yokohama but it wasn't until they, it was suddenly found out they could wipe out a town with one bomber that the Japanese capitulated and

23:30 we went in and we accepted their condition, one of the conditions we handed to them was that we wouldn't assassinate or kill or execute Hirohito who was the sacred, and that's what saved us really cause he did tell the the Japanese people you've got to bear the unbearable and

- 24:00 put up with these mongrels that are going to come in. Well they didn't, the victors I suppose be nice to them and there was no conflict in Japan. There was no spies or partisans or none of that. We expected it but there wasn't any. We particularly expected it because it was so dangerous you know you could
- 24:30 set a little bit of a fuse in say their little warehouses attack Adzuki and you could have a 3,000 ton detonation on your hands you know with just a little fuse and it would have been easy to do for just one crazy man to do it, could have done, didn't do it because Hirohito said no.

**Just coming back to your thoughts from your perspective**

- 25:00 **are you saying that the saturation bombing didn't really work but the atom bomb did work?**

No well what I said was that the saturation bombing they kept making ordnance up until the time that the saturation bombing started. With the saturation bombing they were taking out a city every

- 25:30 few weeks and it was getting that way that even to the Japanese it was obvious that they couldn't continue and that saturation bombing of cities stopped the manufacture. Up to that time they kept manufacturing it but couldn't get rid of it and the terror bombing, and the Japanese did call it the terror bombing because it was that
- 26:00 hit the perimeters of the town and had all the people trapped in the town and they couldn't get out and they'd wiped the whole town out, just as terrifying as an atom bomb. The people in well Tokyo particularly Tokyo, Yokohama area which is really all one area I think there was more people killed in those raids than there was at Hiroshima only because you could sort of set the perimeters on fire
- 26:30 and thence gradually take the centre out, and that's the way it was done but then the Japanese Hirohito moved to stop the war because it was obvious, we said we were going to well America said we've got plenty of bombs. We know they only had two now one for Nagasaki and one for Hiroshima but they said we've got a lot of these bombs and we're going to take a city out a day
- 27:00 until you capitulate so they didn't have much time. Some people say it was one city a week but apparently they said that they could take a city out a day so your country will be destroyed by Christmas, you won't have a country, you won't have a country, you won't have any people and you won't have any country, and that was the end of the war which saved God knows how many lives. We know from Japanese archives now that
- 27:30 they were prepared to spend 10 million Japanese lives to get an unconditional surrender, to alleviate an unconditional surrender. Now if we'd have lost 10,000 Japs how many of us would have got ashore and we saw the stuff, they had unlimited amounts of explosives and like we talk about
- 28:00 kamikaze's in planes but there were kamikaze's in boats and they would have been in everything. Plenty of explosives and suicide suicide bombers and we would have been trying to take the place, would have been slaughter so it was a good thing the bomb in that regard. I don't advocate them of course.

**OK so you left Canungra.**

Yeah

**How did**

- 28:30 **you get to Japan?**

Went up by ship not sure of the name of it now Kure, Kure used to be the naval base in Japan and Akazukin was a secret naval base the Americans never bombed cause they didn't know about it and it was where all the

- 29:00 the elite navy personnel were trained at Akazukin which is just across the water from Kure. Kure was a big naval base and it was bombed out of existence with like heavy bombardment lot of ships. The Kure harbour was
- 29:30 full of Japanese ships all sunk and on their side and smashed up and loaded all with ammunition which had to be all got out of the boats and destroyed and then there's American bombs everywhere that didn't go off, a lot of American bombs didn't go off, a real lot was about something like about 20 odd percent,
- 30:00 20 something percent of American bombs didn't go off because they had too many safety devices on them and the American rule was make 'em safe because they're with us a lot longer than they're with the enemy which was good thinking you know.

**So before you'd actually arrived on Japanese soil had you actually defused been under the pressure of diffusing ordinances?**

Yeah only from accidents we'd never defused

- 30:30 a Japanese bomb. The Japanese had very few failures cause they they were pretty simple things, there weren't any safety devices on them and they were pretty good as far as the Japanese were concerned because they all went off. You landed a bomb somewhere, it exploded but the Americans figured if you

wanted one you'd take 10 and if two of them didn't go off it didn't matter much.

31:00 **So what ordnances had you defused because you actually?**

Never defused like an enemy shell, no nothing until we got to Japan and then the first encounter was American.

**So you got off the boat and?**

I got off the boat and we went to

31:30 camp Point Camp I think it's called which is an old Japanese naval barracks and in two days we went up by train to Tokyo to, I think it's called Zushi where we had a school, there was a school for Yanks. It was run by the American

32:00 army and navy and there was I think there was four of us Australians, four Scotch, some Pommies, couple of Poms and the rest were Americans and because they'd found this mountain of ordnance they were trying to train people as quickly as we could so we sort of split that up into underwater ordnance

32:30 and American ordnance and Japanese ordnance and then we specialised in that ourselves you know from then on. After six weeks of that we went back to Kure and we ran a school for our own like we, there were four of us out of 18 so we did the same course with books and things. I wasn't

33:00 involved I went down to, I was on, we called it the Burning Island they burned all the stuff and people that were gathering it up were sending it to this island so I stopped on the island and and we burned what we could burn and detonated what we couldn't burn and that was me I was there for that six

33:30 weeks while the school was going on but I'd go back to camp every night too. And well then we had more more people that understood Japanese ordnance and we all started really and well we just played the game the way it was then. We took everything out of back of Akazuki where I was involved mainly and got away

34:00 from the burning island and a bloke called Scotty, Scott Waters he was on the island, on the burning island and I went with him to Akazuki and by this time we'd had Japanese mainly navy men, I had a captain of a destroyer, a Japanese destroyer, he was my guide my, not well my guide but also my interpreter and he spoke English and he could read

34:30 the like the nomenclature on the packages and boxes and ordnance so he could say this a type this and type that and certain types do certain things so you had to make sure you knew what you were doing.

**So you're in the initial training with the Americans?**

Yeah.

**What group did you actually go into you said there were three areas Japanese ordnance underwater and American?**

35:00 Well Japanese there was Japanese underwater and well ordnance, ordinary ordnance like artillery shells and and bombs and then there was the bomb disposal part of of Japanese bombs and American bombs but the Americans had their own bomb disposal groups that mainly looked after their own bombs. But I got into the underwater

35:30 mines and stuff like that and I didn't do much with that to start with like we were at Akazuki getting rid of the Japanese, the Ridgeway, General Ridgeway the American and he gave us all certificates at the finish and all that sort of thing. I lost mine, I don't know where it is, but

36:00 he gave us these certificates and he said, "Your job is to go and extract the teeth of the Japanese war machine," and that's what we did, like wherever the ordnance was we got rid of it and it didn't matter. Like we were getting in Kure there was a lot of bombing of the Japanese fleet which was in the inland sea and there were bombs everywhere up on the shore and in the water and our first job was to get

36:30 rid of some of these, they were all American bombs. There was like, we all did different jobs and we all did every sort of a job as it came up and clearing mines was a navy job but there were always loose mines that used to come floating in the inland sea and and we'd be told about it. We had a crash boat

37:00 and we used to go out in the crash boat and get these mines and get rid of them in various ways, depends where you were and what you'd do. If you were near buildings you couldn't blow them up or you could delouse them if you had to or you could hook it on and try and tow it away somewhere and get rid of it that way.

## Tape 6

01:00 **Can you recall for me one of the stories of when you found one of the American bombs on the**

## beach the process of

Well yeah ok the first principle of bomb disposal is the initial BTBIS, Blow The Bastard In Situ, try and detonate it where it is. That's the safest and best thing

- 01:30 so you make an evaluation you know, you've got to look round and if it goes off what damage is it going to do and then if you decide that you've got to get it remove it without detonating it you've got to find out what sort of a bomb it is, there's all sorts of bombs and warfare's a very serious business.
- 02:00 The bomb that doesn't go off in many cases is better than one that does and you think now that's crazy but that's right. If you can drop a bomb on a railway station or an approach to a bridge or something like that and it doesn't explode nobody can use it until they work out how to get rid of it so you can tie up a whole railway system with one bomb
- 02:30 that doesn't explode because you can't use the facility and the Germans were very good at this. The Japanese didn't practise these sort of things but the Germans used to have so many bombs in a bomb load that were just full of concrete and drop them and London is on clay and these bombs'd go down 80 feet sometimes and someone's got to dig down and get it. So if it was in a
- 03:00 railway roadway or anywhere you've got to divert the traffic and everything until it goes. Another thing that they did with bombs was bomb disposal, bomb disposal was very accurate sort of work you could take out, the Germans had a campaign at one time of killing off the bomb disposal blokes. That will
- 03:30 be the way to go so they had all sorts of things. Had bombs that had anti-disturbance fuses fitted. You could drop the bomb it'd go through a building perhaps and bury itself in the ground and wouldn't go off and if you dug down and hit it or moved it just a little bit, trembled it, it would go off and you'd be the bomb disposal bloke there and that's one out of the way.
- 04:00 You could put delayed action fuses in them which may go off in an hour or a week so you tie the place up. One, a very effective thing they had a bomb it killed a lot of bomb disposal people, was an ordinary bomb ordinary looking bomb that had a cover plate on it. Had to get to the fuses in the cover through the cover plate
- 04:30 and as soon as you lifted the cover plate off it blew up because it had a light activated fuse. There was, to delouse a bomb you've got to get the fuse out that's, there's always a fuse in the front maybe one in front one in the back. You could mix the fuses up but you could have a anti withdrawal fuse. In other words you can screw it in
- 05:00 but if you try to get it out it'll detonate so there was all this to find out and often times these fuses would be stamped with the wrong stamp, be stamped to say that it was a X1ZK which was an impact fuse and you'd think ok examine the army wires, examine the propellers on them and the reason this didn't go off is because,
- 05:30 well, because the striking pin came forward or something like that and it didn't detonate which'd be very dangerous. There's certain bombs you can't remove because if it's got an anti disturbance fuse in and it's anti withdrawal you can't get it out, you've got to blow it or you can crack it sometimes you can crack the casing. In the case of
- 06:00 German bombs because they were cast you could crack it and steam the, expose it out of them but this is all long drawn out not battlefield stuff you know. There was a bomb dropped at St Paul's and they had to do that otherwise St Paul's Cathedral in London would have been seriously damaged, so what do you do with a bomb? You find out what,
- 06:30 well you try and blow it where it is that's the first thing, then you find out what type of thing it is, why it's being used. Is there an armour piercing? A lot of those bombs in Kure were armour piercing bombs. Had a big flat nose on them to punch their way through the iron decks of destroyers, ships, battle ships
- 07:00 so what do we do? The ones that we dealt with about two of them. One was in the water and it was an American armour piercing bomb that had somehow or other finished up alongside the retaining wall. It'd been there a while about a year and we had a look at it,
- 07:30 the nose was bent over the fuse where the fuse protector was bent. It was obviously fouled up and it was alright so if you handled it, we couldn't detonate it because it was too close to major (UNCLEAR). It was about a 500 pounder bomb so we moved it onto like a little raft and towed it behind the boat, right out to a little island and
- 08:00 just set a fuse up on it set a charge up on it and blew it just off the beach where there was nobody. Another one which I've spoken about before was a bomb that was dropped obviously onto a naval ship and there was a very steep hill you know like a fiord type area,
- 08:30 steep cliff down to the water in the inland sea and in the back of it was a hill and behind the hill was a village and this bomb had been misaimed, hit the side of the mountain and skidded down the mountain all the way down the mountain and finished up in the village and that happened about the termination of the war, about the end of the war and the village, a little fishing village, there weren't many people there they had

09:00 notified the Japanese but the Japanese army fell apart and so they didn't do anything about it. Nobody else could handle it so when we got there it must have been about nine months later they sent me out. Out I went with an interpreter and police officer and all that sort of thing and in our boat and had a look at it and I built a fence round it to keep the kids away from it and the women were absolutely terrified the kids would get in there

09:30 and it was a dangerous place to live cause no one knew what sort of a bomb it was. No one even the Japanese they were simple people you know and I did delouse, that took the fuses out and it was safe and we picked it up with a horse and cart and took it down to the pier and put it on a barge, a landing craft and took it out to the island and blew it,

10:00 so that's two that's yeah ok and there's others. That's always the sort of thing that happened.

**You make it sound like it sort of it's a five minute process. What's the actual process of delousing?**

No I was down at Shimonoseki and there was a bomb down there alongside a big building and it was in the ground. New Zealanders

10:30 were in Shimonoseki and they didn't have a bomb disposal group so I went down. I had two Australians and I got an interpreter from the New Zealand people and we went and had a look and they'd dug down to it, but once they found it was a bomb they just left it and we had to get dig it out and find out what it was you know, that was the first thing,

11:00 and I always tell this story because this is suited, this is my style I think. No one ever, when we went to camps you know, when you go from one camp to another in the army you take movement papers with you and your movement papers always say what you're there for and it says under what conditions you go, so if you're a foot soldier and you went to another camp you went to the camp for

11:30 rations and discipline that means you had to obey all the rules of the camp. When I went anywhere I went there for rations only. That meant I never had to be on a parade or go to meal time or be home at a certain time or out at a certain time, so you were your own boss which suited me down the ground. So we're doing this, looking at this bomb

12:00 and I couldn't figure out what it was and we had our own telephone thing, get back to the Yanks find out what sort of a bomb it was, what sort of fuses are on it, and communication was pretty slow and there was this pompous bloody major who came down and said, "I want it out quickly," and I said, "Well ok we'll get it out quickly," and he started to pester me and I was only a corporal of course you know, and

12:30 I said, "Mate look if you want it out quickly you get the bastard out yourself because I'm not doing it," and he reported me for insubordination and all that sort of, and then he came back and he apologised, he said, "I'm sorry but when can you get the bomb out?" because he didn't want to live with it, it was in his patch you know. I said, "Well you know I'm waiting for information about it. As soon as I get the information I'll tell you whether we're going to blow the building down or whether we get the bomb

13:00 out," and we did find out what sort of a fuse it was and it was American and we knew that it was safe so we got the stilson wrench out, took the fuses out and lifted the bomb out and took it to a safe place and blew it yeah, so that's what happens it takes a long time. I'll just enlarge on that. The most terrifying moment in a bomb disposal blokes' life is, you've

13:30 got a bomb down the ground or in a hole in the ground or wherever it is you know, and we get the local police, you're gonna do it you know, and it's dangerous it's going to blow a building down if it goes off and you've taken all the precautions like this one I'm telling you about. The Provos turned up and they make sure that army you know, our personnel are out of the way and the Japanese police are there and they make people,

14:00 make them go back quarter of a mile away you know, and you're waiting for them to tell you that everything's clear, and you get a little bag of tools and you walk off across the paddock or wherever it is and you're on your own and you're backing yourself, well I've obviously been right a few times you know, you back yourself and you get on with it and

14:30 well you face death of course you know, which is not much of a problem you know like for me, I used to think if this goes off I'll never know about it, I'll never know what happened. It won't hurt I won't be a cripple I just won't know about it, I won't be here anymore but I know I'm right and that's how you do it. I wouldn't touch a bomb unless I knew exactly what it was and how to

15:00 handle it so that's a long speech.

**Was there ever a time because you were waiting on information with that bomb in the New Zealand area,**

Yeah.

**Was there ever a time when you were given wrong information?**

No well no, obviously the information I got was true correct. We had trouble with Japanese stuff



because you sometimes didn't know

- 15:30 but I would blow it, it wouldn't matter what was there you know. If it was alongside the Cenotaph I'd blow it if I couldn't find out cause if you can't find out you can't be sure, it's in the lap of the Gods isn't it and if it goes off it's going to blow the bloody thing up anyway so you m'ose well blow it up and still have your life yeah.

**So just so I understand correctly what you're telling me is the most important part of of a bomb**

- 16:00 **is actually the fuse rather than the TNT [Trinitrotoluene]?**

TNT's not dangerous. You can beat it with a hammer it won't matter. Japanese shells, bombers were full of picric acid which is they couldn't make TNT they didn't have trinitrotoluene so they made what was used a lot in the First World War, picric acid the Germans called it lyddite, different explosive. Not as good as TNT

- 16:30 but good enough you know. It's got a, you measure the brisance, picric acid is about 75 percent of what TNT is but TNT we got things now called RDX? Yeah RDX I think AX? I've forgotten see R it's either RX or RDX I think it's RX which is nearly twice as strong as TNT, really

- 17:00 crack you know if it went off, go off like a whip, very strong.

**So then just so I understand the bomb with TNT if you can smack it with a hammer and nothing happens how does it actually cause an explosion the fuse sets it off in what way?**

Well you really need say this is a bomb right, the fuse is in front. Now a fuse is usually a firing pin, in it it's got

- 17:30 all sorts of things like safety devices but there's always a firing pin and there's an initiator like the cap, it's always, nearly always formulated of mercury, a slight impact will set it off but it's weak, they couldn't do much with it, need a ton of it to blow a post hole you know, but it's very sensitive and it's very unstable too.

- 18:00 But a similar thing is in every every fuse and on impact the firing pin hits that formulated mercury or whatever and that explodes and then they have what they call a gain, a gain is in the fuse part of the fuse and that is different types of explosive gradually building it up

- 18:30 to a stronger explosive and then big bombs are big gain, which screws in before the fuse when they put, when they load it, load the explosive into the shell they then screw the gain in. It's just a little bit more sensitive than the TNT whatever the bulk of the explosive, lots of different explosives. They use torpex [torpedo explosive] for underwater explosion different it's got to be different. You want to break a

- 19:00 railway line you don't use torpex you use TNT or better RX you know that sort of thing, it's different explosives for different jobs. The gain then, this is a big gain builds up to the pitch the wave of the explosion equals the wave of what you've got in there so you've got it up to detonation and then it'll

- 19:30 fire the whole lot and what happens then there, well the bulk of the explosive which say 500 pounds will bulk itself up to as big as this building and anything gets in its way gets knocked over, and it's got such a shock there's a shock wave which makes things crumble and there's the, you know the wave, the pressure wave but strangely enough

- 20:00 after if you're near an explosion after the pressure wave goes off there's a vacuum, suck all the air out of your body because it's blowing all the air out and the heat and then it'll all (UNCLEAR) back and you'll find you know, the air, it sucks the air out of you.

**That's fascinating. So to delouse the bomb what are you actually how are you actually making it transportable so that you can blow?**

Well you take, you're taking the fuse out,

- 20:30 you're taking the little bit of formatted, I said it before formulated mercury out the sensitive part that is where the firing pins strike you've taken that out, and then it, the order moves down the chain. I think a good example of it is if you have two bombs and you put them side by side and

- 21:00 detonate one the other one will detonate at the same time because the concussion wave is the same speed and temperature, so that's what you're doing you're taking out the firing mechanism and only leaving them behind the explosive, the explosive which, well we've talked about the burning island we took like thousands of tons probably of high explosives

- 21:30 and just packed it up in their boxes and set it alight and let it burn, burnt like cellulite, won't detonate just burns. You've got to have the shock wave. We used to get into trouble at this burning island. Someone I was talking about the other day, the Japanese packed bomb castings that's explosives pressed in like

- 22:00 cheese to fit in a bomb they pack it in you know. They could carry it round in boxes and then put it into bombs when it got to the factory they'd make the bomb, instead of pouring it in they'd put the castings

in and on top of that. They used to put a cast, a wrought iron plate and these wrought iron plates were in the boxes and we'd put like 20 ton of explosive and light it

22:30 some of it'd blow and bloody break windows and all sorts of things you know, and we never could find out why, we thought fuses must be in there. The hospital started to complain because was upsetting the patients and rattling the windows and all that sort of thing and we had to do a bit of research and we found out that this plate that if it got over a certain temperature the burning of it would cause

23:00 pyrites which became very sensitive and would detonate and set the whole lot off, so tricky stuff you know yeah.

**The Japanese bombs you were saying that they have picric acid [?] is it no no?**

No we called it picric acid.

**Picric, right.**

The Germans called it lyddite but it's an explosive a high explosive yeah, yeah.

**Were they made**

23:30 **almost similar to the Americans in respect to different obviously Americans had TNT and Japanese had this this lyddite?**

Yeah they didn't have any toluene like TNT is trinitrotoluene they didn't have any toluene so they made lyddite instead. Germans ran out of toluene in the First World War and they were using lyddite, that's why you see the black explosives you know yeah.

**So delousing then a Japanese bomb**

24:00 **just explain to me the process of doing that?**

Well like what's in the explosive is nothing it doesn't matter. It's the fuse that you concentrate on, the fuse. Once you've got the fuse out it doesn't matter you know, you could burn it, you can you know I wouldn't advise burning trying to like burn put a bomb in a fire and try and let it melt,

24:30 I wouldn't advise that but if you can get it out or wet it or do something you can neutralise it it wouldn't matter.

**So the process of of delousing both an American and Japanese bomb is the same?**

Exactly the same yeah.

**What different types of fuses you said the Germans had different types of fuses depending on the bomb did the Americans and the Japanese have**

Yeah they did.

25:00 America didn't use many we call 'em booby trap fuses you know. Traps, they did use a lot of delayed action fuses and things but I don't think they had many booby trap fuses. The Japanese only had one booby trap fuse, that was the anti-withdrawal fuse. It's a silly thing really the Japanese government I suppose safety maybe Japanese fuses, all

25:30 Japanese fuses had spanner flats on 'em you didn't need a wrench to get it you could get it out with a spanner cause it had spanner flats on it. The only one that didn't have spanner flats on it was the anti-withdrawal fuse that's true yeah.

**So what would you do if you came across an anti-withdrawal fuse?**

Well you're not going to withdraw it, that's the first thing, don't withdraw the fuse then you'd have to think about what you're going to do.

26:00 If you can't withdraw it you've got to figure out then if you can why it didn't go off. Like if it's fallen out of a plane you see it must go off but there's arm, you've seen the bomb with a little propeller on the front of it? You see you been to the museum? Yeah, an unexploded bomb in an aeroplane has got a little fan on the front and back of it

26:30 that's not a propeller it's an impeller. As it falls through the air it'll spin and it screws itself off and lets a little spring loaded detent fly out so that the firing pin can move back so it's safe, see, as long as it, and if you find a bomb and you find that it's got the impeller on the front

27:00 no problems. The detent's still in there, you can unscrew it, do what you like with it because it is safe you can screw it out do anything but if that impeller's not there well you've got to look then and see whether their little armour has broken off or whether it's still there. When a bomb's in a plane it has the little, like a split pin that goes through the fuse

27:30 to hold everything together so it won't, if the plane gets hit you don't want the bloody bomb going off do you? You know it's bad enough if you get a direct hit, a high explosive it would blow the bomb because you'd have this thing about close together, they call it sympathetic detonation. One goes off the other

one then the whole lot will go off, so well I say go off but I should be saying explode, the whole lot would explode but

28:00 when it's in the plane it always has a wire connected to it like a split pin which goes through the fuse so the fuse is stabilised, can't move, nothing can move it and the other end of the wire is connected to the bomb rack so when you discharge your bomb drop your bomb the bomb will fall away, the wire stays in the plane the cotter pin pulls out and then the impeller

28:30 starts to spin off and when it spins off it falls away and the bomb is ready for detonation when it hits or whatever whatever it wants to do whatever it's designed to do so that's what it's about.

**That's fascinating so basically what you're saying to me is the bomb arms itself by taking the impeller off on the way down?**

Once it's loose yeah a bomb in a plane's safe got two safety devices. Got

29:00 the impeller and it's got this cotter pin type thing too and that's hooked to the plane. While it's hooked to the plane it can't ever detonate unless it's hit with another, with a shell or something yeah.

**Is that both the Japanese and the American bomb?**

All all bombs I think well now these days we call those bombs, I'm talking about dumb bombs, they're dumb bombs cause we dropped them and they just

29:30 fell and they did all the things we're talking about and they hit where they hit, but now we've got guided missiles heat seeking bombs, guided bombs, bombs with little television cameras in them that can look to see where they're going and you can put them through the window which they do, often do put them through windows in buildings and by guiding them they can be guided. They're not dumb bombs.

**You mentioned that the Americans**

30:00 **had a number of safety devices on their bombs. What did they have?**

Yeah they had more well they've got all those safety devices but then they'd have another different systems of making 'em extra safe you know, particularly shells for artillery. They had like centrifugal detents because the shell'll start to spin the detents'd fly out and all sorts of things you know

30:30 They didn't they didn't have one like that once that bomb (UNCLEAR) there's only one other safety then it's the impeller so they're got two. When it's in the plane there's two. When it drops out of the plane there's only one left. When that spins off there's no more safety but the Americans'd put another one, another something in there.

**Such as?**

Just well be another detent or something

31:00 like that within it you know like within the apparatus be in the design of the thing. It's different like a time delay they give it a time so that if it, they'd put the these fuses in bombs and the fuse itself has got to be carted round in a truck and all

31:30 the rest of it you know, like it's got to have safety devices yeah.

**So you were sharing that bomb that landed on the beach or washed up on the beach?**

Yeah.

**What safety devices did that have on it?**

It had a broken spindle on it in the finish. The spindle that should have moved forward and it wasn't it was still there so it didn't move so you'd know that it's safe. Safe not that

32:00 to chuck on the back of a truck or anything but safe enough to be gentle and which is what we did. We put it on a little raft, like a pontoon thing which we commandeered from some Japanese fisherman like putting it in a boat really same thing, and we took pillows out of the, was a water transport an Australian water transport people, they didn't like what we were doing but we had to do it,

32:30 so we took the pillows they slept on their boats, we took their pillows and put them on the deck and tied ropes around and got it tight so it wouldn't move except for the water you know wouldn't roll off or anything and so it was not hit too violently and it was safe, so it was safe so we didn't have any trouble with it.

**Just a couple more questions on**

33:00 **delousing it. Is it a case of just actually physically cutting the wires?**

There's no wires.

**No wires the fuse sorry?**

Well ok we're talking about...

**So the fuse is not a wire is it?**

No no it's not a wire no. The fuse is cast, is usually made of bronze, it's a metal thing all metal and it screws into the top of the bomb or shell or whatever it is, all machined and it's all

33:30 it's no, it's not a bit of, no nothing like that. It's, I haven't got one, I haven't got any pictures of any either. I can't think how to describe it. It's a piece of equipment that is very finely engineered and it's

34:00 loaded up, a detent is like a little weight that's contained within the fuse, it's all within the fuse and it'll only move like a 16th of an inch when the shell starts to spin with the centrifugal or fly out and that will allow another spindle to move back. It's like a carburettor, have you ever pulled a carburettor to pieces? Uninitiated

34:30 yeah so a fuse is not a piece of fuse wire or like blue butt we call it, blue butt fuse where you lit it and the cowboys throw 'em you know not that.

**So ultimately the idea of the bomb coming down is so that a pin can come out the front and that's what?**

I don't know how I can show it to you.

35:00 I'm wired up, so it's all depending on the size. Like a bomb fuse is about this size that long and it's usually got a point on it. Probably better to describe a shell because you know that the shell's shaped like that don't you and the fuse fits

35:30 into the top and screws down into the shell. Now it's all machined and it's made of bronze and in a shell it's got rings round that you can turn it you want 30,000 feet, you set it for 30,000 feet or this sort of thing you know. You seen that? You must have. Inside that there's all safety device thing so that it doesn't go off

36:00 like you've got to stop that pin coming back into the explosive otherwise you've got a detonation on your hands. With mortars, American mortars, you know what a mortar is where they drop the the American mortars in the fuse in the mortar they have a barrel riding detent they call it so it can't go off when it's in the barrel so if you drop one down in the, and something

36:30 happened and it stopped in the barrel so the balustrade didn't ignite or only partially ignited which can happen because it can get wet under battle conditions. When it went down and the shock would let the barrel riding detent spring out to the side of this bronze turned machine and that would ride against the side of the barrel until the mortar came out of the barrel and then

37:00 it'd fly out because it's spring loaded and then it's ready to go off but if it went off before that happens so if you, someone crazy, bloke drops another mortar down on top of one and they're in under battle conditions you could drop two mortars in and if they were timed or something you'd have trouble wouldn't you? But if you've got a barrel rider on it can't go off and that's the sort of thing that happens

37:30 with shells and with bombs it's got to be made safe and it's all made safe in that fuse mechanism and unfortunately I haven't got even a picture of a fuse mechanism, threw them all away years ago, books. Oh I've got some books upstairs I could show you yeah I've got a book upstairs I could show you exactly what it's about yeah.

**So in**

38:00 **the case of the sea mine that you came across that sort of had detached is it the same theory in delousing that?**

No different story altogether. Now there's all sorts of sea mines. There's what they call contact mines and they're the ones that everyone knows about. They have 'em on the movies all the time they're sea mine, contact mines you know.

## Tape 7

00:39 A ship was in the harbour and it was loaded with this stuff for fertiliser nothing to do with the war at all and it had about 3,000 tons of it on and it blew up and blew the town right out and they didn't know why,

01:00 you know this is a true story. You're smirking but it's a true story and it blew up and then a lot of inquiries started about why and they found out it was something to do with oil, the oil leaked, diesel leaked out of some tanks or something and got mixed up with it and it did detonate the whole thing and it did cause a lot of,

01:30 wasn't a 3,000 ton bomb but it was a very big bomb. There was 3,000 tons of potential bomb material

there and they then found out that you can do this and this is what they use now, the terrorists get this fertiliser and mix it with distillate or whatever distillate and they can make a bomb and it's a very effective explosion. In fact it's used

02:00 in the mines they call it something like amatol or something so that's how you make explosives.

**Let me come back to and ask you about the sea mines?**

OK. Well let me I'll tell you two stories about sea mines. First of all my mate got killed with a sea mine like and there were two Australians killed and about

02:30 70 Japs or something because the main thing about bomb disposal you keep exposure small you know, like as I say you go ahead like the condemned man one man, you don't have a partner. You might have a telephone line between that's all, so you keep exposure small but in that case it was considered to be safe and the school kids were coming home from school and the local fishermen came and the thing went off and killed

03:00 70 odd Japanese and four, and two Australians. One bloke who's never really recovered lives in Melbourne now and he was there with them and he went to get something like a pair of pliers or snippers or something and as he came back he thought he'd wash them in the water or tobacco tin or something he had the water in, he bent down like that and the bomb went off the mine went off,

03:30 there was a ton of TNT in it and it demolished a lot of the town killed all these people mainly school kids and he he was knocked unconscious by this bang you know. He didn't get hurt really except by the concussion of the detonation. Now that was a sea mine a moored mine. A moored mine is the one I say everyone has seen

04:00 with all the horns sticking out of it. They are used they have an anchor and a cable, a chain that reaches from the bottom of the sea to the mine and depending on what they're looking for it might be 15 or 20 feet below the surface so it can't be seen, but if a ship goes through it'll hit the mine and these horns are made of lead or lead material, soft material and inside that's

04:30 a glass file which is full of acid and underneath that are the the plates of a battery all built into one machined piece of, screws into the top of the mine and the electrolyte which is, the acid falls into the battery generates a current which fires the strike,

05:00 the pin, the firing pin or if it's, some of them have got batteries in and it will just short circuit the battery and the electric detonator in the explosive and do all the things we said before but a gain, they've got to have a gain you need a gain with high explosives and I told you about a gain fuse, the gain yeah. Now these mines are made in such a way

05:30 that they are buoyant, they want to float because they've got a box inside which is full of the explosive made of metal only light metal just a box to hold it and they're quite waterproof and tight so the explosives in the box and the horns are all wired together all round the mine so it doesn't matter which one you hit or how many you hit it'll short circuit the thing or

06:00 supply the current generated in the battery or batteries. Now to make that safe so that you don't have it blowing up when you're trying to manoeuvre it about, the cable that is attached to the anchor is attached to a spindle, well a spindle, this is a mine say the spindle, the mine floats like this and you know it's a round,

06:30 a ball not like that but a ball and the horns are sticking out here so we've got a cross section of it. Now there's a spindle fits in the bottom a bush fits in the bottom the spindle comes through it and the buoyancy of the mine pulls the arms down over the top, break the circuit so the electricity from the batteries runs down to a terminal here but it can't do any damage,

07:00 can't do any damage because if the mines if that springs up and so on it's not ready to fire. It's only when the weight comes on to lift it up and the contact is completed that it's ready to fire so you put 'em in the water and crustaceans build up on it and it everything gets rusty and cables get broken and so forth

07:30 and the mine floats to the top and that's when we see it then. You've got a mine floating in but what's happened is the spindle can't go back because it's covered with crustaceans, barnacles and things seaweed can't go back so it's floating but it's ready to go off at any time so what have you got to do about that? Simple you go by boat and make sure you don't bump it so you've got to get into

08:00 the water and you take a knife and you scrape this spindle and scrape the barnacles off it and try and get the bloody spindle back inside. Once it's back inside safe. You break all the horns or get a spanner and screw them all off and then you've just got to a box of explosive which you can handle that mine. Now

08:30 in Shimonoseki and this is where I spent a lot of time there's straits between Honshu and Kyushu and the inland sea that I told you before, the sea lanes were blocked and the aircraft were blocked and they were having trouble getting their shipping out and the submarines are all waiting outside, waiting for..

- 09:00 We couldn't get into the inland sea cause it's got mines everywhere dangerous Japanese mines. They're the ones that were washing up you know and they'd been there since the war started a lot of them but the Yanks said ok we can't get in there it's too dangerous to send submarines in the inland sea because we don't know where the mine fields are, and the Japanese were saying well instead of coming out into the ocean Pacific further up where the submarines are we'll go down and
- 09:30 we'll go through this little narrow strait and bolt off through the Chinese coast, that was the idea. So the Yanks method was then we'll seed this channel so they drew cross drills and they were going to put a mine, an acoustic mine it was called acoustic and we put one mine in every hundred metres, hundred metres, yeah hundred yards
- 10:00 actually in one and the ships when they come along this mines got three things going for it now. It's acoustic so it listens to the noise of the propeller, it is pressure so that when the pressure increases only marginally of course but the bow wave, you make a bow wave so when that increases that's two and in pressure and magnetic
- 10:30 you know it's got a steel ship you get the three of them together and bingo it goes off and these things weighed one and a half ton each, they were full of torpex and they're made out of metal like you make a motor car out of because you don't need shrapnel under the water, all you want's a big explosion so that you can break the ships back which is what they did. Big ship come along and made crack its back you know
- 11:00 so it had a little delay section in it so that it didn't sort of go off with, you know like someone running a magnet across an aeroplane there. And so it became a game of wits you know but the things were fragile because they were not made like bombs, they had a heavy metal you know, make shrapnel to do damage they were made of light metal because all they're interested in is the firing mechanism,
- 11:30 which is a big battery and these things had a life of a year and then they were supposed to self destruct and a lot of them didn't self destruct obviously, and so but they were dangerous because you never knew when they might self destruct but they then flew them over in aeroplanes and they had to be landed by parachute because if you dropped them and they bent that they wouldn't be any good so they'd sink
- 12:00 and get wet and so forth. So they'd drop them by parachute but the Yanks being the Yanks they say ok well we lose a few because of the wind drift and all that sort of thing and people you know missing the target and people under fire and test traps we can lose a few, so we'll send twice as many which is what they did and when we went down to Shimonoseki the bombs everywhere, mines everywhere
- 12:30 in rice paddies they were in the town down the railway track on the beach they were all over up in the mountains everywhere mines that had not detonated. A lot of them had been deloused by Japanese but a lot of them hadn't and so that was me at that time with all this stuff and we had
- 13:00 a translator, Japanese to tell people to get out of the way. We vacated towns and everything else because they are very, very dangerous bloody things you know and we cleaned them out.

**So more dangerous than the previous mine you were?**

Well because there's a an unhidden, there's a hidden thing they like, they had a self destruct which didn't destruct so they were very dangerous you know, very dangerous

- 13:30 to leave there and very dangerous to move so most of them, like it was terrible what we did really but they were so dangerous but we just went through and no matter where they were we blew them blew houses out, made people homeless everything.

**So are you saying you didn't bother...**

Was too dangerous.

**Delousing as such?**

Too dangerous, too dangerous yeah, far too dangerous

- 14:00 **So how would you blow them up what's the process there?**

Process is pretty simple. Evacuate the area and make sure that people, like people took their, you say that maybe you'll lose your house now but we can't do anything about it, it's here we can't move it nobody can move it. The Japs can't move it. Maybe we could delouse it and that's when you cut the cables with the little plate on the side undo the plate and

- 14:30 cut the cables, but that was too dangerous to do. So we'd say to people oh we'd say to the police the Japanese police and our own police, "Tell the people to take all their windows and doors out of their houses lay them on the floor and take all their valuables because we're going to blow at 11 o'clock," or something and take everybody out of the area and then we'd detonate it.

- 15:00 And the way we'd detonate it was you use what they call gun cotton. Gun cotton's only another name for another explosive. It's got, it's pretty good for blowing railway lines and things you know cuts everything high brisance [rapidity with which an explosive develops its maximum pressure] and just

strap it on the outside of the mine and either if you're using a fuse you just set it up with a fuse on a cable and just blow it and

15:30 the gun cotton would detonate the one and half tons or torpex which is very bloody, very strong explosive you know, really shifts a lot of water. If you see it under under the water it blows a cavern in the water, shifts something like thousands of tons of water, can move it in a flash and or just wire it up with an electric detonator which

16:00 I always used because I thought it was the best 'cause you had control of your, you got a black stump and it goes out you're never sure, you don't want to lose, you don't know whether you should go back near it or not until you've given it you know, a margin of time like 12 hours if you can, you know so it ties the whole place up for ages or you wire it and we used to have these little electric dets you put an electric detonator and run the wire out, got to be careful about wiring

16:30 because that can pick up like radio waves and it can detonate but very unlikely, never seen it happen but it's said to have happened to other people.

**So how far were you away from the actual detonation?**

In those situations at least half a kilometre.

**So you'd wire for half a...?**

Yep 'cause you never know like

17:00 you could blow a tree across a whole block of land, you've got no idea the power of those so about half a kilometre you know, clear everybody out everything. Blow tiles off a roof and they go hundreds, a couple of hundred yards, no trouble.

**Just in respect to protective clothing I know you're next to a bomb**

17:30 **but did you wear any particular clothing for this job?**

No there's no protection, there is no protection. The only protection is being right, gotta be right. They always say the successful bomb disposal bloke is the bloke that's still alive.

**So were there accidents over there?**

Yeah, yeah we lost well

18:00 Doc Sword and we had a ship blow up with 40 tons of explosives on it just out of Kure, was a junk, it blew detonated. There was a big explosion we were involved in but it wasn't our fault really

18:30 where they were trucking on the railway, hired the railway and they put about 60 ton of explosives on the railway in different carriages and whoever was in charge, it was all coming up to the burning island for us to burn and something happened and it detonated as it went through a village and caused absolute mayhem at night, it blew and blew houses away,

19:00 we didn't lose any any of our personnel there. We loaded at one end and we were waiting to accept it at Kure but it didn't arrive. All we got was the news that the train had blown up, killed everybody on the train bad accident.

**And had these ordnances been deloused or they were just shells?**

Just a load of ordnance and we think that they'd packed detonators with high explosives

19:30 which was a no, like if you've got detonators you don't don't transport 'em in the same truck or car or anything or even the same convoy you separate them yeah.

**And the ship what happened there why did that go up?**

They were, they had this cordite, it was all cordite and we think the Japanese in the winter it's cold over there of course and

20:00 these people that, we used to employ a lot of Japanese to do all the carrying and that sort of thing and we were technicians, we were very thin on the ground so we employed Japanese and we used to instruct them in safety but they didn't sometimes didn't understand or the interpreters didn't tell them or something like that and we think in that instance that they'd lit a fire like to boil some rice or keep warm or something. Used to have a lot of trouble with

20:30 lighting fires in, get 44 gallon drums and they'd light fires we'd have a chain carrying stuff sometimes and they'd light fires all along the, carrying chain they'd be carrying explosive past it you know and we used to come and put the fires out and fire 'em and you know, all sorts of things to stop them doing things like that, but they were mainly farmers a lot of a lot of them were ex service people,

21:00 the Japanese ex service people you know. I actually met a bloke that had bombed Darwin the day I was there. I didn't kill him yeah, so that, what are we up to? Yeah we lost a lot of people there. We and we killed a lot of Japanese not deliberately but

- 21:30 because of bad management. I think the case of the ship that was bad management. Doc Sword who was my mate got a George Medal the only award delivered in Japan because he managed the rescue of these people out of the water. A lot of them jumped in the water luckily jumped into the water. Those that stopped on the boat died and those that jumped in the water,
- 22:00 he managed to get a lot of them ashore, and a bloke called Frame who was on the jetty trying to, he was only a young bloke that came to as one of the reinforcements, he'd only been in Japan, he was 19 years of age and only been in Japan for a couple of months and he was out with Doc and he was trying to help them up onto a pier or something, and we don't know what it was. I saw the body

- 22:30 I think it must have been an anchor or something big just took him in half like just when it blew up, so he was on the wharf and something big hit him, chopped him yeah. Frame he's still, he's in the cemetery at Yokohama now. I didn't know him personally because I wasn't, I didn't spend much time in Kure.

**Just in respect to the burning island.**

Yeah.

- 23:00 **I take it the armaments came to you by boat off the train?**

Yeah well they did.

**What did you do with them then?**

Well it depends what they were. Now again if they were ordnance say shells and that sort of thing we'd dig holes in the beach, big holes in the beach and we'd put the shells in the holes,

- 23:30 maybe about four or five tonne of them and then we'd load block, heavy like about half a ton of well anything, maybe usually picric acid on top of them, on top of that so as it'd blow and blow down and detonate everything, so we destroyed it that way.

**Why would it blow down?**

Well because,

**But how**

- 24:00 **did you make it blow down?**

You'd detonate it, you'd you know set it up with fuses and everything and just detonate we'd have big noises and bloody shrapnel flying everywhere you know, it was dangerous that that sort of stuff. If it was bulk bomb fillings or cordite which is a propellant you know used in the big guns. We'd stack it up and

- 24:30 light it put a fuse in it, used to call them squid. They were like a flash thing that, it wouldn't, doesn't go bang you know just throws a lot of flame out and lights cordite and gets it burning. When it burns, it burns in a couple of minutes. It goes shwoo you know, cook you if you're within half a mile of it yeah, big lots so that's how we dealt with that. Other stuff land

- 25:00 mines not, well any mines, a lot of depth chargers that the Japs had tons and tons of depth chargers which you used to break up submarines, and we used to take those over to the burning island and just stack them up like 20 of them at a time and detonate them and well like they'd all explode all at once, but a lot of you know big, big detonations used to

- 25:30 shake everything yeah, but the thing was get rid of it. Like there was that much of it you couldn't fiddle about with it cause they were frightened it would fall into the hands of terrorists, not terrorists but partisans you know get rid of it, get rid of the explosions and the Jap, the Yanks at Hiroshima before the Aussies got there, they were faced with I think a thousand

- 26:00 torpedo warheads all weighing about a ton or maybe half a ton but I think about a ton and they were young blokes like ourselves, about 20 years of age bomb disposal get rid of it the boss said, get rid of it. What are we going to do? Take forever like how we going to shift a thousand torpedo warheads? We'll need trains and boats and the blokes well let's play with the bastards you know like it's only Japan and they did they set a fuse

- 26:30 and blew the lot and it blew the top right off the mountain, blew like big iron doors half way across the bay towards Kure and it left a great hole that you know, it's still there the hole absolutely destroyed the beautiful arsenal area, the whole thing. Big lumps of concrete as big as buses were flew out across the bay. I wasn't there but that's what they said, Christ don't do that again you know that's

- 27:00 don't do that, we've got to get rid of it quickly but not that quickly so we used, we unloaded it then like we became, our area and we took it out box at a time and burnt it in 10 ton and 20 ton lots yeah.

**What accidents happened on the island and injuries?**

Nothing happened ever on that island. I was lucky I owe my life to a Japanese who we set up one of these things and



- 27:30 there was, first sort of day or first week I was there and we took the Japanese over and we dug all the holes and set the whole thing up and then we put all the, we had boats like barges and they were landing craft really and we had about I think about 50 or something labourers and cart this stuff up the beach and put it all in the holes and packed it all in, got it all
- 28:00 ready and then we set the explosion up and sent everybody back to the boats and told 'em the boats to go right out you know, a mile away from the island and we had a little boat, this Joe and I so I set this all these things up and lit all the fuses and we went back to the boat and the bloody tide had gone out and the boat was
- 28:30 too heavy, too heavy for us to get in the water so no we can't go back there. And the shortest place, because we'd like I think a 10 minute fuse and we raced to the headland there was a rocky headland and get down behind crouch down behind the headland and we ran across this rocky thing and I tripped and of course big army boots that didn't help a great deal and I broke a bone in
- 29:00 my ankle, and there I was trying to, the thing's going to go off and Joe pushed and shoved and helped me and we just got to the shelter of this outcrop and it went, the first one bang and the stuff was falling all round the place but we were safe you know, so he saved my life Joe, he was ex navy bloke, he was a good bloke, Japanese.

**Is this the captain of the destroyer?**

- 29:30 No this is another bloke, he was good, he was good. He was an explosive expert he knew all all about it. Joe and I blew up the big guns, big, big 18 inch guns that were absolutely worth a fortune, beautiful guns and we destroyed them with shape chargers which punched holes through
- 30:00 four foot of metal, the guns were you know big barrels, they call them rifles yeah.

**Where were these guns sorry?**

Akasuki yeah these were for the battleships, they were battleship guns, big guns.

**And how did you blow them up what what are these things?**

You shaped your, you'd call it a shape charge.

**What do they do?**

They concentrate the energy

- 30:30 of the explosion onto a a piece, a very small piece and fire a hard piece of like, they fire a piece of metal which kind of, they call them shape charges because they have a cone inside which is made of hard steel and you detonate it and they only weigh a couple of maybe four kilo each or something like that, and it will drive, they use them anti tank.
- 31:00 It's a you know, Japanese had 'em, the Japanese'd walk up to your tank with a broomstick with one of these on the end and knock a hole in the side of your tank it'd just go through metal and we we shot at about two foot six through these heavy guns which were steel wrapped, and I've got a lot of pictures I could show but you haven't got time to look at pictures.

**So just quickly explain to disable a gun what part of it are you trying to disable,**

- 31:30 **of these big guns?**

Well we'd put holes through the barrel not through but into into the rifling of the barrel so it couldn't be used and gun's not a big chunk of metal, a gun's made, it's got an inside liner miles and miles and miles of steel tape wrapped round and round and that's why they can flex a bit you know, they've got to flex otherwise they snap

- 32:00 so Joe, Joe was good at that he knew what to do, he was a Japanese.

**So you were blowing up the guns. Land mines did you come across land mines in**

Yeah we had

- 32:30 to get rid of yeah, but they were normal ordnance to get rid of you'd delouse 'em and but they weren't set for anybody. We never found any land mines. I did hear that there were some land mines at Ouso, place called Ouso that our some of our fellers found and detonated, I never saw any.

**Did you delouse land mines?**

- 33:00 No never had, didn't have any there, like there was no combat in Japan so there were no land mines except someone said they found them like found them set up on a beach to be, they were dangerous they were set as land mines yeah but I never saw any. They were terracotta too at the time so they couldn't be picked up with metal detectors which was the first time I'd ever heard of that,

33:30 now it's quite popular.

**So your role was obviously during that time on the burning island. You said you also took out some of the sea mines that were in the straits there. What else?**

Yeah I I took out dozens of them yeah. What else did I do? Well what's the question?

**Well, you took out the big guns that were being made**

Yeah.

**And still wrapped in plastic?**

No no, they weren't wrapped in plastic

34:00 no they weren't wrapped in anything. They were out in the open stacked up ready to be put onto ships. I'll show you a picture later.

**And were you, were there other armaments or ordnances around the country that you were?**

Yeah yeah ack-ack guns, we destroyed ack-ack guns near Hiroshima that

34:30 were put there to defend Hiroshima, we destroyed well I did myself but with two other Australians and a bunch of Japanese. That was the first time that we went to this island, we knew they said there's an ack-ack gun there and it hadn't been you know destroyed. We'd, this is when we first arrived so we went down,

35:00 like the arrangements were made, they knew we were coming and we went down on this big crash boat we had like a fair mile thing and you know blaze of spray and everything, conquering heroes turned up and it was a little fishing village. We went pulled into the wharf and the Japanese got out and the interpreter got out and this is when I had this captain, destroyer captain as an interpreter and

35:30 we went ashore onto the wharf and there were the police there and there were a couple of policemen and the Mayor in all his robes and two or three older people and as soon as we walked up the, like I walked up with my two sappers assistants and this fellow they all started to cow down and bow right down and we suddenly realised that they'd never seen white people before,

36:00 and we realised too that there's no one in the town, everyone was gone except old people, really old people no young people at all. And we said ok let's go and have a look at the gun so we had to climb right up this very steep hill and they'd tunnelled it all out at the top and they put two ack-ack guns up there and the thing was all tunnelled out and they'd made like magazines which were

36:30 full of ordnance and you know shots for the the gun, and then we said ok now and the captain came with us and we said, "Now we'll be here about a week with this thing. We're going to get some of these explosives out and destroy the gun and and we want a house, we'll take that one there and we want two girls to look after the house for us and we want

37:00 20 labourers tomorrow morning," and they turned up tomorrow morning. We got the house the people got tossed out and we took the house over and then we started to cart this stuff down the mountain so, which was an enormous job and it was steep and steps and people were falling and it was dangerous so I thought again you know, what are we doing, what are we doing,

37:30 let's approach it a different way and we'll destroy it that's what we're told to do so we just took out what we had already which was you know, quite a lot of ordnance and left the rest up there and we wired it all up and detonated it and blew the top off the mountain really it destroyed the top of the mountain. The gun, we blew the gun and blew the magazines and that was alright.

38:00 By that time the people had started to come back particularly, the women. The women vanished they weren't there I don't know where they went but they all came back in the finish and they gave me like us really a send off party because we were the kind soldiers, so from terror, they thought we were going to rape the women and

38:30 kill the babies and all that sort of thing but we didn't and they gave me this present. I'll tell you where we shifted that bomb, they gave me a kimono which was a hundred years old then and it was some sort of prize that was

39:00 very valuable in recognition of our gallant efforts. I've still got that too, I kept it, yeah.

## Tape 8

01:00 **Les you mentioned before that there's different types of bombs smart bombs and dumb bombs.**

Yeah.

**Do you mind explaining the difference between**

01:30 **the two?**

Well a dumb bomb all the bombs pretty well all the bombs in the First and Second World War were dumb bombs. In other words once you released it from a plane it just fell you know and if your aim was right it fell where you wanted it to but most of the time it was subject to atmospheric winds and pressures and all sorts of things

02:00 tended to get it off target. The ones they talk about now the smart bombs, bombs guided by, they're self guided bombs. They're bombs that can manoeuvre and make compensations and what they can do now is they can have a heat seeking bomb and like a heat seeking rocket

02:30 it'll go where the heat is if you know it if you're trying to bomb a vehicle on the road it would seek the vehicle and chase the heat and there's other ones that have little television cameras in the front, and the bomb or bombardier would have a little screen and he'd be looking at where that bomb's going and he can adjust it and they use this for accurate bombing such as

03:00 in the recent war they used nearly all guided bombs, bombs with some sort of guidance system not dumb, they're smart you know, they call them smart bombs because they can chase their target a bit one way or another.

**So things like acoustic mines booby traps on detonation systems in bombs, they're distinct from smart bombs or?**

Yeah nothing to do with

03:30 it. The smart bomb is a bomb that will seek the target within certain limits, it'll seek the target. The different types of fuses was a different era altogether. You could still have those sort of things in smart bombs if you wish but it'd hardly be necessary but anti withdrawal fuses, anti disturbance fuses all those things which

04:00 things that were included in the dumb bomb can make it a bit more difficult to deal with for bomb disposal personnel and other people of course.

**So how much experience did your initial training give you before you went to Japan how much experience did you have with different types of bombs and situations?**

Very little really very little because we we didn't have any bombs here,

04:30 we were bomb disposal without bombs it's a good way to live you know yeah but you know it was sort of secondary consideration with bomb disposal. We were busy doing other things like driving trucks and doing carpentry work and being an instructor and things like that.

**So did you acquire these kinds of expert this kind of expertise through, how did you develop?**

Well mainly

05:00 hands on of course. We did a course in Japan which dealt with the things that we had in front of us. We had our background knowledge I think which was important, it hadn't been utilised to any great degree at all in the latter part of the war because Australia was out of that combat area and and I was in Australia so when we went to Japan we

05:30 went and did this course with the Jap, with the American bomb disposal course which was to do with Japanese ordnance mainly but there was a smattering about American bombs but we didn't encounter many American bombs. There were American bombs of course but there weren't a lot of them.

06:00 **So how much did you know about atomic warfare before you left for Japan?**

Before I left for Japan? Well I think I knew as much as as anyone like technically you talking about or just no...

**Across the board, yeah.**

Across the board well I think we knew all about it because the papers were full of it though you know, they had pictures of bombs we knew about,

06:30 Big Boy [actually Little Boy] and Fat Boy [actually Fat Man] and we knew the name of the plane that had dropped it and we knew something about the crew. We knew that it was the Manhattan project I think they called it and that America, and it was done in America but it was mainly British now how that sort of initiated with Australian help too. Much as the Yanks say that it was their bomb it wasn't really it was

07:00 a joint effort. We knew how it worked we'd seen pictures in the paper and what do I think of it did you want to know about that, like we were tickled pink that it happened because it meant the end of the war and I still maintain that and I've heard people say we shouldn't have dropped it but it seemed to be alright to keep going and taking cities out one at the time anyway,

- 07:30 the same number of people would have got killed or a lot more. It brought the war to an abrupt end it saved probably a million allied soldiers' lives including mine which I thought was a good idea and I know from experience in Japan that the reception that they'd planned for the invading forces and I'm quite sure that it would have been a blood bath you know,
- 08:00 so I was happy that we had it. I felt sorry for the people and I've expressed that before that you know it was the worker that paid again if you like as my father would have said, it was the worker that would have paid the penalty for his nation's stupid adventure so I was very happy that the bomb was used and
- 08:30 I was pleased that it was used because I think that if they hadn't used it there would have been somebody else anxious to have a go and see what it did, damage and that I think. We're able to say it is a terrible, terrible thing and I saw Hiroshima early in the piece and I've seen people that are still dying of of the results of the bomb blast and it's terrible hate to see it happen again. Hope it won't but I don't
- 09:00 see much difference between getting killed with an atomic bomb or a bomber, like a suicide bomber whether it's one or 10 if you're the one that's dead you know you're just as dead aren't you with a suicide bomber as a atomic bomber, but there's more of them that's all.

**I think you'd know more about that than me I mean do you think that you could**

- 09:30 **outline any differences between different types of bombs compared to atomic bomb and the different ramifications of the two types of warfare?**

Well I think the sort of warfare we're involved in now which is sort of fundamentalist that's being caused by fundamentalists is a dreadful thing and it's attacking people, the last people that should be attacked is innocent people in the street and

- 10:00 while the bomber, the suicide bomber doesn't survive this I think the people that tell him to do it or her or encourage it far worse people than the the fellow that will lead a charge into battle. You know I can't understand the mentality whether they're Irish or Islamic or whatever
- 10:30 the sheer terror of doing what was done in America and I think 3,000 people was it just innocent people that went to work one day and there's no war, there's no warning and there's no sympathy from the other side for what they did and although they sacrifice their lives I don't think they're heroes I think it's not even clever. Anybody could do it like I could blow a train up
- 11:00 Easily, that doesn't sound good, I've got no intention of doing that but I think it's a coward's act, a war crime simple but it was different I think if you're driving an aeroplane and you're going to drop a bomb but not much different to what the Japanese did to us. We were busily building houses and they dropped bombs on us to kill us,
- 11:30 doesn't matter whether they're in an aeroplane or in a car what's the difference? It's mad, warfare's mad it's madness, it doesn't achieve anything.

**You were, I guess I was also talking specifically within that time frame you drew the comparison between the sacrifice of lives through bombing**

- 12:00 **compared to dropping one big atomic bomb and that relatively speaking that the sacrifice was going to be less with an atomic bomb do you think before that situation had happened do you think people knew about the ramifications of atomic warfare?**

No I don't think anyone knew much about atomic, we didn't discuss it atomic weapons before the Hiroshima bombing. We knew there was

- 12:30 some sort of progress going there was talk about secret weapons you know and Germany was of course battling to try and get their nose in front with atomic knowledge and they didn't get anywhere, I think mainly because we bombed their, was it heavy water plants and that sort of thing,
- 13:00 we did to Germany, the Americans and British did. I can't see any difference between dropping one bomb on Hiroshima and destroying it and having a thousand bomber raid on Tokyo and having the same result kill the same number of people. I don't, I think it's the same isn't it? It's the same, it's just so much easier to kill 180,000
- 13:30 people with one bomb than all the thousands of people that are involved in a thousand bomber raid and I hope it's enough deterrent to stop anybody ever using it again you know. Why would anyone use it except fundamentalists, crazy people would use it if they could get their hands on it I think, they'd use it and I think that's a terrible threat to the world
- 14:00 and I just hope that we can come to some sort of understanding of different people, just different people, people want different things for themselves and they're prepared to take it and that's bad, I think it's bad.

**So is it possible to tell me about your impressions of Hiroshima when you went there?**

- 14:30 We knew roughly what to expect but I didn't really think it was gong to be like it was. It was absolutely cleared it was like a new subdivision all the road patterns were there and but there was no houses. All

the houses of course had been timber and light construction had been destroyed and if you walked down as we did, walked down the streets or drove round the streets

- 15:00 they were just heaps of rubbish, absolute rubbish like the roofs and any metal that was in them was twisted and bent and burnt and the roofs had fallen in and it was just a great big rubbish heap, as big as well like a subdivision a big subdivision like and I know it's hard to tell you how big it was, I'm sure you've seen pictures of it you know,
- 15:30 but to see it in the actual. I climbed up to the top of a, I think it was some press building that was built of concrete and it's right in the centre of Hiroshima, it was burnt out and you could climb up, it was about eight or 10 storeys high I think it may have been higher and I climbed right up to the top of that and took a photograph north, south, east and west and when you got up there and looked at it and thought
- 16:00 God you know, one bomb all those people and they were all sort of getting breakfast and all that sort of thing, going to school and then when you saw the little things like the person's backside shape on the, on the steps of the Post Office and that's where a man had sat or a woman and they just were vaporised and absolute unbelievable destruction
- 16:30 I thought you know...Until I saw Tokyo and Yokohama and they looked the same they'd just been burnt completely the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was really a big incendiary bomb it set the whole place on fire at once and people couldn't get out and those that did suffered immensely and mostly died within a year or so at the most. Terrible to do it to anybody either way whether it was
- 17:00 Tokyo or whether it was Hiroshima, it should never have happened but it did, didn't it? A crazy man Adolf Hitler said you know we're going to have a third, a thousand year Reich or we're going to dominate the world or conquer the world or God knows what he wanted to do. What point is there in it? What was the point of it all, what was the point of it all? If there hadn't been a war what would we be doing now?
- 17:30 It'd be five, fifth, 55 million people alive today that are dead if there hadn't been a war that's the only thing that was different isn't it? What else did we get? Politically we achieved nothing. Financially I don't think we achieved anything. The money that was spent on the war could have perhaps sent water into the dry parts of Australia or civilised the people in Africa or something
- 18:00 there's better things to do than waste money on and lives on explosives and warfare. Here endith the lesson I'm sorry yeah.

**So how did it, don't be sorry I appreciate everything you're saying. What actually led you to come to Hiroshima in the first place?**

Well we're bomb disposal and we went down to look at the damage yeah. I've got some reports here written by

- 18:30 people that were there, the people that lived there and I've also got the reports that were made to the army when they were trying to figure out what happened. They didn't know about atomic bombs any more than we did and they thought it was some sort of special weapon. They didn't know only one plane went over and all this happened, must be something secret, that's what they thought, the army. They didn't know how to deal with it and you've got to imagine a city like Hiroshima's like Sydney. Say if that happens
- 19:00 to Sydney everything goes. There's no police force, there's no parliament, there's no doctors, there's no nurses, there's no anything it just goes and all the records are gone too and if you happen to be wounded where do you go? There's nowhere to go, you're on your own and you don't deserve that.

**You said you were going there for bomb disposal**

- 19:30 No

**reasons you said the bomb had already been disposed?**

No we just went to see what sort of damage this you know, this is supposed to be a big bomb and let's see what it did and we did, we saw all sorts of things. Twisted metal, it flipped a bridge over a whole bridge underneath it just flipped it over like that, opened up like a pack of cards you know like a bridge like that and it just flipped it amazing that this could be done, and

- 20:00 like and Hiroshima railway station there was a sign painted, white sign, railway sign I don't know what was on it because it was in Japanese but the writing was in black, the sign was white paint. Where the black paint had been it was all burnt off and it was all charcoal, the white was not even blistered off things like that, melted bottles, it's all in the
- 20:30 museum in Hiroshima. If you get a chance have you been there no? Go and see it there's things there that you can't believe happened with this heat, the absolute maximum heat, things just melted and including people.

**What about the earth, the land and the actual terrain?**

Very flat, very flat. Two rivers run through Hiroshima, a lot of bridges across the

21:00 that well didn't do anything to the earth. The earth was well it didn't blow any mountains over or anything it just broke up buildings and right underneath the epicentre they call it of the bomb was, I thought it was a museum and I believe it's some sort of institute was there, it was a fine old building. They've kept it as a memorial now

21:30 but that was all sort of just collapsed and fell and the iron was all twisted the roof iron, roof timbers and not timber roof structure, like unbelievable things happened with this new fangled bomb it didn't happen with other bombs. The other bombs were just brute strength but this was really a big incendiary bomb I think. It was hotter than the sun apparently

22:00 and just everything set on fire and it was the sort of Japanese city was a very flimsy city, and it was someone called it a slum clearance it certainly did in one hit yeah.

#### **What about things like plants trees flowers?**

I'll tell you a story about that. I was over there a few years ago and we're talking about the bomb and everything

22:30 and then we had a a tour guide and we went past, and there's a gum tree and they said this gum tree is the only tree that survived the detonation the bomb and it's in Hiroshima not far from the epicentre but it survived, it's still the same tree that's growing but it's a bit sort of rough you know to,

23:00 and someone said, "Well, why don't you prune it up like the rest of the trees in Japan?" Every tree in every park in Japan is it grows where they want it to it puts branches out where they want it to and they shape it the way they want it. If they've got to walk down somewhere they'll bend the trees over the walk, they do all sorts of things like that. Why don't you fix up our Australian trees and the guide said, "Sir that's an Australian tree, we can do nothing with it,"

23:30 that's just like the rest of Australia which brought the place down you know. Pretty good description so that's a tree, all the other trees died round, the all the pine trees they just burnt but the gum tree survived and that's what they do don't they? It certainly broke the tree off but it all sent up suckers and there we go, away we go again and now it's 50 years old so there's a lot of big suckers. Have a look for it if you ever go there the gum tree

24:00 they know it.

#### **And what could you see the how could you see the affect of the atomic bomb on things like other plants and flowers and trees and things?**

Well there were no plants and flowers plants and flowers. What we were told like we didn't know we should never have been there it was dangerous and all the people that I know that were in Hiroshima particularly the women are all dead. I don't know of anyone my age

24:30 that was in Hiroshima with me, particularly women. The women that worked in the hospital and there's a lot of troops, Japanese troops came back to Hiroshima that was the main boarding place for overseas expeditions expeditionary troops. They all died, they all died of cancer in their early '50s, late '40s, early '50s, they're all dead

25:00 so we were not told anything. We like we thought well we've all got to go in Hirosh like as soon as we had time we went down to Hiroshima, get a truck and let's go down and have a look at Hiroshima and people were saying well you know, we don't know, have a look because maybe tomatoes'll grow as big as pumpkins or something like that you know, there's gonna be some genetic, we didn't talk about genetic there's gonna be some

25:30 mutations or something like that and we gotta watch this place because we'll see what happens but in 1946, six months after the bomb there were the Japanese setting up stalls on the side of the road trying to trade and you know, you could, people'd, there was no food. Japan was starving they didn't have anything. They had no money, no houses

26:00 and no food. Farmers were trying to bring products into town to swap them and the Japanese people were giving farmers anything that was tradeable and farmers were trying to get, you could get anything for a packet of cigarettes or a bar of soap or sugar or like anything at all could be easy to procure in

26:30 Japan because they were starving. There were people in Tokyo, when we went to Tokyo there were burnt out trains on the railway line it was an absolute disaster area and you'd see people, we used to walk past them or drive past them going to well wherever we were going at the time and you'd see them, there'd be a woman with a couple of kids you know or something like that or old

27:00 people or a couple of kids and obviously grandparents or part grandparents you know, one other or and they were starving and they were coward and beaten, they were beaten people and you couldn't do anything for them because there was so many of them but if you started to go back on a regular basis you'd see there'd be one less tomorrow and another one less the next day,

- 27:30 and give it a couple of weeks and there's no one then that's what it was like terrible yeah, can add to that but that's what it was like and of course people were trading things like binoculars or pictures or anything, they'd take it into town to get some money to buy some food.
- 28:00 **What other things did you notice about Hiroshima when you went things like the effect of it on animals?**
- I don't think there was any, didn't see,
- Those little details?**
- There were no animals no dogs I think probably the dogs were all killed and the animals well maybe they were out of town or they'd eaten them I suppose, you know I'm not sure I don't
- 28:30 know, there was no, wasn't any animal place. Hiroshima itself is, was a big city and there weren't many people like very few people. It's a big city and I don't know whether it was a million or half a million but it was certainly a big city and there were big barracks and lots of army and big hospitals and some sort of a, things to do with the navy and but they were all
- 29:00 gone like there was no people they just the people were gone and all that was left was the roadways and heaps of rubbish like the buildings just collapsed and they're not like these buildings they weren't brick they were burnable combustible stuff and they just disappeared with the people, there were no people dead, dead city.
- How long after the bomb were you there?**
- 29:30 Well the bomb was in August so four months.
- Four months later?**
- About four months later.
- So did you see any people?**
- Oh yes there were people, like there was no people in the centre of the city but there were people that were starting to do things. No one thought about it being dangerous. People maybe thought about it they didn't know about it you know they thought maybe it's crook nobody's telling us that it's, we shouldn't be there and besides I don't suppose
- 30:00 a lot of them had anywhere to go anyway, that's where they lived they had no nowhere to go in the country and don't forget I think there was about 70 percent of all the cities in Japan were in the same situation. I don't think there's anyone in Japan, no one I met in Japan there was nobody I met in Japan that hadn't lost people civilians in the bombing raid. The people that were were country people had relatives in the city
- 30:30 and the relatives had all gone but in the country they were the farmers and and they were the only people that were really saved. Hiroshima was no different really to any other city it just vanished didn't exist any more.
- So four months after the bombing what was, were there any signs of sort of nuclear damage or**
- 31:00 **when you're saying people were starting to get on with their lives but they may have felt that it was a bit crook what why were there any signs of that at that stage?**
- We saw people that had been burned and they had terrible burns and disfigurements and things like that but there was a hospital there set up by the Jesuits I think that was trying to handle them and that was a pretty hopeless task I think but gradually everything got better,
- 31:30 but all the hospitals had been taken out there was nothing and no government really either to run it you know. The government had been taken out. The government was too busy in Tokyo trying to fix Tokyo up to be worried about Hiroshima or Nagasaki or anywhere else. Japan was in complete disarray it was absolutely beaten to their needs there was no fight left in them.
- 32:00 As people I don't think they they felt or the people we had like I was on Itajima, Miyajima. Miyajima was a plant that used to load shells put the explosive in the shells and there was a lot of ordnance there, and this factory was there and they said go and get, destroy it which we did and we used to get, like 400 people came from Hiroshima
- 32:30 in the ferries and we had them on the workforce but they were all sorts of people that a lot of them were ex service a lot of them were people that had lived overseas and were being repatriated back to Japan. Japanese occupied Korea as you know, and as soon as the war finished the Koreans kicked them out and Manchuria kicked them out and people I knew that came from
- 33:00 what we used to call Formosa which is now Taipei [actually the island is now called Taiwan, and its capital is Taipei], what's it the Chinese are arguing about it now yeah so there's a lot of people came into Hiroshima and they were all sorts of people and we had them on the workforce and they were

mainly young people or older people that were sort of too old to hold a job anywhere else

33:30 and they worked for us, there was the Japanese government paid them and we just supervised them.

**So when you say there was no government that everything had been levelled how**

Yeah.

**Was there any indication that there was no law and order anything that sort of went awry?**

I don't think there was, I'm not aware of any looting, there was nothing to loot when you come to think of it. Maybe there was thieving going on

34:00 amongst them but I don't know about that, I don't think so. There was no police force, the police had been taken out as they had been in a lot of other towns. Hard to explain isn't it? You realise that it was a, what was a thriving town is suddenly there's no people and no administration and I don't know how they ever sorted it out. They must have had

34:30 deeds and people came back and cleared it up their blocks of land, I just don't know how it worked. I don't know how they worked in London I don't know whether people that lost their houses in London what happened there? Did the government build them for them and they moved back into their houses or the new houses that were built? Was it a loss they had to bear the owners or I don't know about those sorts of things.

**So what kinds of things were you doing there?**

What in Hiroshima?

35:00 **In Hiroshima?**

Well I was only in Hiroshima, we went we picked up some ordnance that was up on the hills that had been some sort of an army depot was small stuff like mortars and grenades and we got a truck load of stuff that had been put away in a room and locked up and I don't know who was caring for it.

35:30 We were told to go and get a key which we did from somebody. Funny I asked him for cary and a cary's a nail he didn't know what I meant and I thought it was mad because I was speaking Japanese, kugi's a key and a kagi's a nail [it is actually the other way around] and I got it mixed up which caused a lot of trouble. Mostly like Hiroshima is quite

36:00 close to Kure and Hiroshima's on the inland sea and so we were in Hiroshima, out of Hiroshima doing all sorts of things but not there was no bombs in Hiroshima. Hiroshima was never bombed except with the atomic bomb and that wasn't a dud and so there was no reason for us to be there really except to drive through it to go to other places and that sort of thing. There was a rail terminal

36:30 a lot of stuff came to there and we'd truck it out but the people we sent most times there were the people dealing with the returning troops, Japanese troops from overseas and they were the ones that really paid the penalty in the finish I think with the radiation. I'm sure it must have been radiation. I don't think the Australian government recognised it as that but even now I don't think they recognise it

37:00 but I'm sure that's what it was, how could a whole battalion or squadron or whatever they have, of nurses all died young out of keeping with the normal life span has to be something that happened in Hiroshima I would think, can't prove it though, just my thoughts

37:30 **I want to ask you something which may be a little bit difficult to answer but in all the descriptions that you've been giving about bombs and different types of bombs I just wanted you to describe how you actually would die with a bomb? Is it through the shrapnel**

38:00 **is it through the explosion is it through the impact I mean I know there'd be various ways but I I know it's a difficult question but I was wondering if you could possibly outlay some of the things that?**

Are you talking about as a bomb disposal?

**As not as a, no, no just as a bomb itself not a nuclear bomb but not an atomic bomb but**

An ordinary bomb?

**just an ordinary bomb?**

What as a what as a soldier or as a, like as a combat soldier or as a bomb disposal person like?

38:30 Like if a bomb fell there like what would it do to me?

**Yep.**

Well it depends how big it is. If it's a little hand grenade thing you'd die with shrapnel. If it was a 500 pound bomb it'd just dismember you, there wouldn't be too many parts together so this is, people don't realise a lot of people in the First World War



- 39:00 and the Second World War get killed by being hit with body parts. Somebody's head would kill you if it hit you in the head it'd kill you and there's lots of heads get blown off, arms get blown off, legs and you hear them talk about that with the terrorists, there's the body parts, it's a terrible thing to pick up body parts. That's what happens you just get, you just blow apart
- 39:30 that's the answer.
- So the impact will cause the body to explode in itself itself will get dismembered?**
- No the bomb, like a bomb is, say you've got 500 pound bomb like this high and that round here and if that went off that would blow the walls out and the floor
- 40:00 out and the roof out and its expansion of the gases would be so violent that it just destroys everything in its path and there's also with a bomb with high explosives, there's a difference between low order detonations and high order detonations gun powder which they used in the civil war and up to the time of the First War.
- 40:30 They're low order detonations they it's not a detonation at all it's an explosion of gas like that but a detonation sends out this shock wave which precedes the expansion of gases and it just shatters everything. I can't describe it any better than that I don't think, like you don't explode, the bomb will explode and
- 41:00 just blow you apart because of the the rapid expansion of gases. They're so violent like a thousand miles an hour, 10,000 miles an hour, the wind, you know, the gases would be they cut you to pieces.

## Tape 9

- 00:42 **So we're talking about what a bomb will do and how it will kill a person theoretically how does that how is that different from how an atomic will kill a person?**
- 01:00 Well I think most of the people killed by an atomic explosion are killed by burning, by burns but they actually vaporised people, you just, you know the water in you dries up and there's nothing left. I don't think there's much difference
- 01:30 between getting' killed with an atomic bomb or an ordinary, conventional, high explosive. The atomic bomb were, I'm sure you've seen this the pictures of what happens when a bomb goes off and they put tanks and cars and they put buildings up and and there's a shock wave, you can see the shock wave move through and that concussion that stuns you really,
- 02:00 and then there's this wave that blows the building over and pushes the trees and rips 'em out of the ground and that's the expansion of the gases and so I think that one's just an extension of the other. High explosive go to a certain level and then, from then on if you want more and more power the atomic bomb is the one because it just does
- 02:30 more of the same thing but I think there's more heat involved in it so you get a fire, you get fires going everything that you don't with high explosives. High explosives will cause fires but it also just blows things over and smashes them up and then of course there's the residue of atomic bombs that can kill people you know five years later even
- 03:00 and do all sorts of other things to you, they mutate and infertility and all that sort of stuff happens it doesn't happen with high explosives. I suppose it'd just destroy you that's all within a short range but if you get bigger range I suppose bigger explosive it would just spread the damage further that's same as they'd done, we started off with
- 03:30 an atomic bomb and now we've got the hydrogen bomb which is so much stronger than the atomic bomb. It just, like you've got the three ranges and if you like it's four ranges isn't it? Started with gun powder, there's explosive was gun powder which we think now is like kids stuff it's for crackers, and then gelignite and all that sort of thing
- 04:00 is weak and by comparison, in comparison with high explosives. High chargers explosives are just so, so strong and so brisk. They call it brisance the power of it, power of the explosives and the atomic bomb is just an extension that's all my feeling anyway. I wouldn't think it'd make much difference how you died
- 04:30 one way or the other.
- Did you change your impressions of atomic warfare after visiting Hiroshima?**
- Well what my first impression about the atomic bomb was a great thing because it stopped a war but I wouldn't advocate starting a war with atomic weapons. I think it'd be absolutely disaster for the world, I've never changed my opinion about that.
- 05:00 Just think explosives ordinary explosives are bad enough, atomic it's just ridiculous. Any nation to try

and win a war with nuclear with a nuclear threat and a threat's going to be worse the it'll probably save us in the long run the threat of atomic war certainly saved us in the business about the Cuba and missile crisis, it was a threat

05:30 of atomic warfare that sent the Russians scurrying back and I think that's maybe the way it'll go and I hope that's right, but in the hands of somebody that's losing you know, say you've got a crazy man like Hitler and he's losing the war do you think he wouldn't use the atomic weapon if he had it? Course he would. What about China and people, the way they treat people's lives with their humanitarian

06:00 attitudes to people. If they were losing a war do you think they would not use the atomic energy or nuclear energy?

**How's that distinct from the Americans dropping the bomb? Weren't they losing at that point?**

What against Japan?

**How's that different from anyone else that's losing dropping a bomb, an atomic bomb?**

Who was losing the war?

**The allies were losing the war. How's that different**

06:30 **from them dropping an atomic bomb to anyone else dropping the bomb?**

Well we weren't losing, we weren't losing the war were we? We were winning the war.

**But the Japanese had won every single battle up until...?**

Well we didn't have the atomic bomb when they were winning. We didn't have the atomic bomb until after they were pushed back and after months and months of terror raids with ordinary conventional weapons on Japan. Japan was beaten I thought I might have made that clear

07:00 that they couldn't, they'd destroyed, we'd destroyed their cities bottled up their air force and made their navy useless so they weren't winning the war.

**So what was the point of dropping the bomb?**

Well they wouldn't give in they kept fighting and they were going to defend their shores to the very death to the extent of killing 10 million of their own people. They would have defended China, ah

07:30 Japan to the extent of a loss of 10 million of their own people and that's in the records of Japanese archives so they can be looked up and researched and cert, we were winning the war they had nothing.

**So what were your impressions of Japanese people when you came to Japan and your contact with them in your time there?**

I went to Japan prepared to hate them.

08:00 I'd lost a lot of my I'd lost a lot of my friends and I'd wasted my life I felt up to that time, my years in by that time I was when the war finished 24 something like that 24, 25, I was 25, and I was sick and tired of it and the Japanese and the Germans

08:30 of course, but the Japanese had, they weren't my friends you know but when I got to Japan I found that, well I think the best description I've heard of it was when we went down to Hiroshima and looked at Hiroshima and one of the fellers with us said the poor bastards and I agree with that they, you know they had suffered,

09:00 all of them had suffered and I don't think any of them wanted the war. I think they were all relieved that it was over and I don't think there were many families in Japan that weren't grieving lost relatives if not lost you know first children and parents and that sort of thing. They were

09:30 a cowed and beaten people, cowed and beaten people and I found them on a one to one basis of being a very courteous people very well, they were well mannered they were after you got to know them they were good friends and I got, I

10:00 completely changed my mind and that's I suppose where I've got this thing now, that war is ridiculous because the Japanese caused the war and they didn't win anything all they did was suffer. We were in the war but we were defending ourselves. Like I didn't rush off and 'cause the war all I did was defend myself and my country which only happened, it wasn't, I didn't go to war to defend my country. I defended

10:30 myself and then later on I'm proud of Australia and I would defend it if anyone attacked it and I found the Japanese they didn't like us when we got there but who wouldn't like, they resented us being in their country but they were courteous and they were kind and I've got good friends in Japan now that I met when I was there. I don't,

11:00 and most of them are dead but I know their families and their sons and we do a bit of meat trading and I

go to Japan and I meet people that sons and daughters of people that were in the, like interpreters and people I met there and I've got an admiration for the Japanese. I've been called a gook lover but

11:30 that's not quite true I just think that they are a strange race and really want to be left alone. They don't want to be pushed into world battles and things. We're having trouble with them now, the Prime Minister wants to go to Iraq send some troops to Iraq but the Japanese people don't want to do that. They want to, they don't want to go to Iraq. I believe they should

12:00 but that's my belief you know I think that we've got to try and do something about dictators and people that break all the rules. You've got, we've got to abide by rules in our own country I think the world should abide by the rules and we shouldn't be talking about bombs and wars and things. We should be talking about getting on together not making, ramming our opinions down other people's necks and

12:30 as we are being as happening to us now isn't it? When we think that we can't get on an aeroplane without all sorts of checks and because someone might do something to harm us and I think that's a great pity. I'm not good at making speeches, I lose my point.

**No, no, it's actually really good because**

13:00 **in terms of getting an impression of how you related to Japanese people did you you early you mentioned earlier that Japanese people thought that that Australian troops were murderers and and rapists**

Yeah

**How did you get that impression?**

It's not an impression it's a fact. A Japanese people the first thing that the Japanese did was take everybody's weapons from them and that's, I'm for people having guns

13:30 you mightn't agree with me but it's on record that the Japanese when they were talking about invading Australia doing the homework you know and wondering what all the logistics of it would be they were told by the central their central Intelligence that you would need five hundred thousand troops to take Australia and the question was asked, and this is all in archives of course that's where I got it,

14:00 they were asked why would you need so many people like we've conquered China and there's millions of them that was no trouble, we did that in a couple of years like two or three years, and then we conquered all of Malaysia and Singapore and everywhere and we haven't had any trouble much, so why do you think you're going to need five hundred thousand troops to conquer Australia and the explanation or answer was given was 'cause everyone in Australia's

14:30 got a gun and they can all use it, and I think that's right because when I grew up in the country everybody could shoot we all shot guns we and we didn't kill each other either. We shot prey or or rabbits mainly 'cause there's plenty of them and what's anyone do, what did Hitler do when he first took over? Took the guns out of the people's hands.

15:00 What did Stalin do, not Stalin, Lenin, take the guns from the people. Once you've taken the guns from the people you do what what's his name [Robert Mugabe] now in Zimbabwe what has he done? Taken the guns from the white people and taken their farms and what can they do? In Zimbabwe they've taken the country over 'cause people can't defend themselves. America's not a good example

15:30 but there's problems in America aren't there, race problems in America which don't make it a good, wouldn't happen in Australia.

**So by taking the guns from the Japanese that gave you the impression?**

The first thing they did was take the guns right? But the, and then the government's the only people that have got the guns then so they can do as they like and what what did they do? They started their propaganda thing like Germans had propaganda departments,

16:00 they then stopped the no importation of magazines or newspapers into Japan that wasn't allowed. Like you couldn't send the Reader's Digest into Japan, you can't do it into Russia even now or maybe you can now but you couldn't a few years ago and I know you couldn't send it into China a few years ago because I've got a Chinese that I know in China and I send him a bundle of of Reader's Digest over a period. This is only

16:30 two or three years ago and he never got them. He got all the other bits and pieces but he never got the Digests because they weren't allowed to have them. They're still not allowed to have this. They've got Chinese got big trouble with the net as you probably know they can't control the net they don't know how to do it so in Japan they banned the papers they banned and the radio short wave you weren't allowed to own a short wave

17:00 radio you weren't allowed to listen to foreign broadcasts. The ordinary radio sets that they had had a range of about 16 to 20 miles so they couldn't listen to foreign broadcasts so what they told the Japanese is what the Japanese believes, that Australians were uncouth animals all had red hair they were all big people and if they came to Japan they would rape and murder

17:30 all the kids and there'd be mayhem, they'd kill everybody and what do they believe but that? What do you believe? Everybody in Australia believes something that they read in the paper and a lot of opinions are made by the media or I won't talk politics but anyhow what the government tells you is what you believe.

**For a country like Japan having**

18:00 **no weapons and being infiltrated by the presence of another country do you think they had any grounds for feeling what they felt about Australian troops or BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces] in general?**

I've read the book, one of the books about what in fact, it's in a thing called The Forgotten

18:30 Force. There's a little bit there about prostitution and all that sort of thing, venereal diseases and a woman's talking about that woman in fact is a communist active member of communist party and as far as I can make out she's only ever tried to stir up trouble and the situation with me in Japan

19:00 was that I was, well for the first three months in Japan I walked round with a 45 gun on my hip and I took my rifle everywhere and I was very careful about what I did and where I went. Not three months probably two months but it wasn't necessary I was sort of welcome in most places I went to and never had a row or an argument with a Japanese at any time

19:30 and I did some terrible things to them with you know because of explosives. Damaged their houses or interfered with their planting of crops and things like that you know which stopped stopped them working in a field for maybe two or three days sometimes, but I never had any trouble with them and I can only say that I wasn't in these places where, I wasn't in Kure I don't know where

20:00 the hot spots were or anything I was never involved in that because I didn't spend any time in Kure. I was over there on the 50th anniversary and we went to what used to be called the Cusa hut and I couldn't, I didn't know where it was and said well you couldn't have been in Japan if you didn't know where it was and I said well strangely enough I was and I didn't know where the Cusa hut was because I never spent enough time.

20:30 If we were in Kure we were mainly at our barracks and doing something that was related to the work we were doing and there was not much social life for bomb disposal personnel in Kure until we got the relief but we kept working because we were the, they used to call us the vets because we'd been years in the army before the end of the war and all these bloody

21:00 high school kids came up, they were 19 years of age or something and they were a bit of a problem really we couldn't send them out to work and we had to, they were more of a problem to look after we felt you know because we were by that time we were experts and we well we thought we were anyway so maybe not, maybe there was a lot of venereal disease in Japan but you forget

21:30 that it, no venereal disease much in Australia so Australia got pretty clean troops but Hiroshima and and Kure were main assembly points for the navy and the army and they were troops coming back and forth all the time and well you're young blokes and you could get anything for a bar of soap

22:00 or a packet of cigarettes and I think they all tried it, like they were there so you know it was a problem, was a big problem but I don't think it was a problem really the Japanese as a nation or police cooperated with the allied troops in trying to stamp it out and shut these

22:30 houses down and all that sort of thing so I think the relationship my relationships with the Japanese was very good and such that I've maintained them. I think the others well most had the same attitude as me. I don't know anyone

23:00 really that had trouble with the Japanese if it wasn't for their own making. We had some people would you know go and bash a Japanese up or something like that in the streets but they were bloody larrikins and they're still doing it aren't they to each other in some of these pubs and things no different.

**Were you ever in a situation where you had a conflict of differences with Australian troop**

23:30 **where they felt to stand stand up for what they believed in and you had a different opinion about how to treat Japanese people?**

No the only thing we weren't allowed to fraternise with them and I think everybody thought it was a good idea to fraternise so we just agreed with the powers that be about that and it was almost impossible not to fraternise with them because I was working with

24:00 them and most I think infantry units were different because they were isolated but what we were doing was involved closely with or anti combatants not anti Japanese combatant troops and and we needed our support we needed their support and they needed our support and we respected each other and there were a lot of people. Like we had

24:30 landing barges that we had Japanese crews on them was no way we could have done any of the work we did without having hundreds of Japanese immediately associated with us and I never had to I never had any difference with Australians about how to treat them no never.

**Did you form any social groups**

25:00 **or any particular relationships with Japanese people?**

Yeah I used to go, we used to know a fellow that his main thing was, "I was tried for a war crime, I'm innocent." He was in Manchuria and he was tried as a war criminal and he was obviously innocent because there was no charges against him in the finish and he had a little

25:30 shop that he used to fix radios up and things like that. He'd been in the diplomatic corps or something and we had a very good friendship going with he and his family and father and you know brothers and it was a good relationship and that's one that I've continued. Now I know all the next generation and that was a good relationship and like he took us

26:00 or the two of us took us to his country village home and introduced us to the villagers and all that sort of thing. That was a good a good relationship yeah.

**A lot of the BCOF troops formed, fell in love when they were in Japan with Japanese women?**

A lot of them brought their wives home too yeah,

26:30 so what's the next question?

**That's a leading question.**

Yeah.

**Anything you can tell me about that?**

I don't think so no. I had good relationships with the Japanese they were friendly on a friendly basis and on a permanent basis all the time when I was there I, when I'd go to Kure I'd meet the people that I knew and

27:00 knew their families and it was a very big I was sorry to leave Japan actually, but there was no future in it at the time because no fraternisation law and you couldn't marry them and all that sort of thing and it was getting too involved so I thought I'd better come home because

27:30 otherwise I'll stop in Japan that's how I felt. I was even anxious to stop in Japan. I may have if I my family had been more settled in Australia but I didn't and I didn't have any other ties in Australia anyway so.

**Did it worry you that you couldn't marry a Japanese woman?**

I thought it was unfair, yeah, I thought it was unfair. I thought that if I'm old enough to fight a bloody war for them

28:00 surely able to make up our minds about our life that was my attitude. Bloody kindergarten stuff and I was upset about that.

**Was there anyone that you were prepared to fight for?**

Well yeah I had a relationship going with a Japanese girl and you know which was a heartbreak for me to give up I thought it was,

28:30 well you realise the sort of thing that was happening. We'd been in the Territory where there were no women and we were very unskilled with dealing with women and I went to a Catholic school and there was no co education so girls were a bit of a mystery and I suddenly met this beautiful girl, a really beautiful girl. She was a school teacher in

29:00 in Formosa well-educated, lost all her family, brothers, father and she was a lovely girl really, a lovely girl and we discussed all this and at that time there was no fraternisation, no chance of bringing her back home because there were, so what do you do?

29:30 I couldn't stay there cause that would have been stupid. Most people, anybody that, very few people stayed in Japan 'cause conditions here were much better than they they were in Japan and pretty hard to get on in a country if you can't speak the language. I think I would have been right with certain companies for the duration of the occupation but then I think

30:00 I thought then that once that's over they'll be only too pleased to get rid of us so what's the point in, and we didn't again have any money. Like there's no money, no one had any money. I never had a camera really until I went to Japan 'cause you couldn't you know box camera you buy 'em for 12 bob but we didn't have 12 bob that was a weeks wages so it was a sorry time for me to leave

30:30 Japan. I corresponded and she, you know we had a lot of envelopes written so we could write to each other. She could get my letters interpreted but there was no one in Sydney could read Japanese. It's not like now you can get SBS or a dozen places or meet people meet Japanese people but there was no way of interpreting letters and that was a heart break getting letters you couldn't, didn't know what they

were saying

31:00 and started to get a letter every week sort of thing you know, unbearable so it's a big pity, so I had to say that's the Japanese, think that's finished you know. It's a chapter that's finished and I became very interested in what I was doing. I was building, a developer one of those dreadful developers still am and I devoted all my time

31:30 to building up a company which I did so that's that story. She was a lovely girl, Japanese well-educated and I think I could have made a good life out of it but what we had would have had to do I think would be out of Hawaii you know, we discussed all these things. I had a job in in Truk, I got a job in

32:00 Truk which was for 25 pounds a week or something building the air strip in Truk which is still occupied by the Americans. I thought we'd go there and perhaps we can live there but when I made inquiries that wasn't the place to take anyone, take a woman anyway not a Japanese anyhow. That was a sad thing, sad thing to come home.

**Did you interpret the letters**

32:30 **were you able to?**

No I eventually lost, I lost a lot of 'em then someone told me they could get them done translated and I gave them and foolishly gave most of the letters to get them all done and that was it, they never got them back I never got them back so that's one of the missing links in my life which is a sad thing as far as I'm concerned but I'm quite open. Jenny knows about, it we've spoken

33:00 about it and it was a disappointment well wasn't just a disappointment it was a heartbreak thing you know, and see I don't think it's altered my attitude towards Japanese in any way. Wasn't their fault, wasn't our fault it was the bloody rules and there's those rules exist today. Other nations do it and I think there still is the Islamics do it at the present time, they won't you know, you can't go picking your partner

33:30 can you?

**Could you speak Japanese at the end of your...?**

I can, yeah, no I can't speak Japanese I can't discuss philosophy in Japanese but by the time I finished I could work I could get round on the roads and on the trains and with these people 'cause it was a big of a joke. You're young and everything was easy and had these interpreters and you pick up a word a day sort of thing

34:00 and we spent all our time with them and we'd be trying to teach them English and so we'd be speaking Japanese and they'd speak English and we learned the Japanese like that. I can't really speak quickly quickly enough I can't pick it up quickly enough to ordinary conversation but I have a ball when I go to Japan. I can ask people directions and

34:30 and little school girls mainly in Japan love to talk to you about English and they if you start to talk to one of them they'll gather round they still do it you know. They want to know how old you are and they say yeah it's you learn it but the big thing is about it too that here we are big, rough, tough Australians you know

35:00 and we learn most, we learnt most of our language from women, Japanese women and so when we get into male company they know, they laugh at us because we speak women Japanese learnt all your all your Japanese in bed and they know the Japanese know say oh you know yeah.

35:30 **What were the, what were the implications of bringing back a Japanese wife to Australia?**

At that time?

**That time?**

Well you couldn't do it, it wasn't wasn't allowed you weren't allowed to talk to them. Her name was Toshiko and Toshiko like I'd go somewhere move to another place. We could never go together you couldn't put her in the Jeep and take her down or something. She'd have to go by train and I used to go with the boys

36:00 and I did alright in Japan actually one way and another you know we moved about so much and she well, you weren't allowed to fraternise with them weren't allowed to talk to them so you can't marry 'em you know and they weren't allowed in the country. It was just a no deal situation. Have you heard of Gordon Parkinson Parkins?

36:30 He married a Japanese girl about the same time as I was there he was courting her and he really put the pressure on. He tried to you know buck the law and I think it took him two or three years before he could get her out here you know. It was a nightmare thing but he persisted with it and and he won eventually. Got two lovely Japanese daughters,

37:00 Japanese-English-Australian daughters and they come to Beecroft shows they're nice but they're

Victorian you know. We went to Japan to the 50th anniversary of the occupation of Japan I think it was, all the troops in our troops in Kure at the invitation to the, you've probably heard about this of the Council

37:30 and he was there with his wife Japanese and his two daughters and they were accepted and we had a lot of fun you know with the Japanese people and all the talks about what used to happen. I never knew him in Japan, he was with the hospital group and all they ever did was complain about the noise we were making I didn't know him.

**So how does one keep secret someone that**

38:00 **that you're in love with when you're in that situation?**

Secret from whom?

**Well secret from?**

From the powers that be?

**Powers that be when you're in?**

I was lucky I was lucky cause I was a loner I suppose in many ways, not with my own group but with the social side of things and I was

38:30 moved around so much and well there's plenty of hotels in Japan the same as here there were then and not being attached to any rashes in discipline I could spend the night anywhere I liked or a day anywhere I liked and so there was no secret about who she was among, the people I was working with. We had to mainly keep it a secret from the Japanese anyone that knew where she lived

39:00 that sort of area it would have destroyed her life and I hope it didn't but I don't know, I don't know. That's one of the things used to upset me not being able to get letters whether she was ostracised because of her association with the allied troops could have been a bad thing for her.

**So in spite of what you were describing that things were ok that the Japanese people were polite and courteous**

39:30 **to Australian troops what was the ramification of being found out to be fraternising with Australians?**

I think she would have been treated pretty much like an Australian girl would have been treated in Australia if she'd brought a Japanese girl ah bloke home you know they, there was in those days you think about having children God knows what would have happened to a half Japanese kid at school. The Australians wouldn't have taken kindly to them. It's taken a long

40:00 time 50 years, so it's taken about 30 years to have any acceptance of Asian people in the country isn't it? Pushed all the Chinese down in Chinatown and as long as they stop down there we didn't care too much but now there's a bit of resentment in Hurstville and places in Sydney where the Chinese are coming in force and I just would have I think I'd have been in constant combat

40:30 with all my mates in the RSL and the local population you'd have school trouble I'm sure with school teachers and I've known and had mates in Australia who won't, wouldn't go to Chinese restaurants. Mainly they were prisoners of war but they said they looked like bloody Nips and I wouldn't yeah. I've heard a bloke say

41:00 to a bloke in a restaurant, "I've killed better bloody Nips than you," you know like there's a hard but if you're a POW [Prisoner of War] I think it's a different thing. My experience in Japan was they were friendly people. If you're a POW they were not friendly people so that's how you find it isn't it? I'm aware of what happened in the POW camps and that doesn't ingratiate me with Japanese but in Japan they were courteous, kind

41:30 you cannot imagine the people that in Japan the civilians in Japan could ever become such cruel people in the services. I don't know what they did to them or how they how they made them this way. There's a thing that SBS movie they've got about

42:00 this

## Tape 10

00:45 **What kind of man were you when you came back to Australia after Japan?**

I was liberated I was right, I was out of the army which suited me fine

01:00 you know. What was I? I was single I was in shock a bit because it was like one day we came back by plane one day I was, you walked down the street in Japan and people'd get off the footpath you know in

front of you and what I said was law in certain things

- 01:30 you know, and I came back to Australia and I was nothing. I was just another bloke which suited me fine but it was a shock not in that I felt I'd lacked authority but it was a shock to be not stared at and not bowed to and not you know, not cow-towed to in many cases you know that sort of
- 02:00 attitude. I was very busy wondering what I was going to do. Here I was a carpenter and I didn't have any tools and I'd been administrative sort of work really and in bomb disposal it's more you know like I felt like I was a bit of a professional like you study the case and deal with it accordingly
- 02:30 and here I was back to where I'd been five or six years ago and I had to make a start. So it took me, what I did I they gave me when you got out of the army they gave you a railway ticket. I joined the army in Darwin that was one of the troubles but my family was in Sydney and I could have gone to Darwin and got discharged which I regret I didn't do but because my family
- 03:00 and my little sister and that sort of thing I came to Sydney and we I suppose I got this railway ticket and I thought I'll get it as far as I can go and the furthest I can go is Broken Hill can't go any further in New South Wales and I bought a new kit of tools and had a tool box made and off I went to Broken Hill.
- 03:30 I thought I'll get a job in Broken Hill, get a job in the mines or get a job with a builder there or something you know that was the idea and when I got to Broken Hill I left my kit of tools, you'll find this hard to believe. Anyway I left my tools at the station and went down and booked myself into the, I think it was called the Castle Hotel or something like that and
- 04:00 got my then I got a cab and went out to pick my tools up and my tool box was smashed to pieces and tools were scattered everywhere and I had to go and get a bag and gather up my tools and I was at a loss to know what had happened you know and then I was told that there was no way I could get a job in Broken Hill and I was saying, "Why, why, why, why can't I get a job?" They said, "Well if you're not
- 04:30 born here mate you can't get a job you'll have to go and see the Barrier Council." So down I go to the Barrier Council and I say, "I'm told I can't get a job in Broken Hill, is that right?" and they said, "Yes," and I said, "Well you know I need a job. I haven't got a job and I'm just out of the army," and they said, "We don't care where you're from mate you can't get a job in Broken Hill." So that was it, like really. I persevered
- 05:00 with it long enough and the rules are that if you're not born in Broken Hill you don't get a job in Broken Hill unless everybody else in Broken Hill's got a job and then you can only have a temporary job you know, so I was a bit, I was very upset about that. I thought, 'God bugger me, I've been in the army, I've been taking risks and these buggers have been here making big money all during the war,' you know, so it was unfair I felt.
- 05:30 So anyhow I went down to Adelaide and I got a job in one of the posh restaurants as a waiter and I got big tips and I made a lot of money there but it wasn't my scene not being a waiter so then I thought oh well I'll go back to Darwin that's what I'll do so I went to Whyalla which is in South Australia, is in BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary]
- 06:00 mine, BHP. I got a job in the smelter and that was a stupid job but it was a job and I didn't have any money anyway so when they pouring the steel I used to have to hit it when it went past with a crowbar and I knew nothing about smelters and I wore my just ordinary clothes but when you hit these sparks
- 06:30 used to fly up and when I got home I looked at my clothes and all full of holes where these sparks had gone through the clothing. They said "Oh yeah you've got to get flannel," got to have a flannel have to buy a flannel so I went and bought a flannel and a pair of these heavy working pants and went and worked at the smelter until I got enough money together to get me up to Alice Springs and
- 07:00 I got on the train and I got as far as the as Gawley I think or Hawker in South Australia and like sitting in the train and I thought this is stupid I'm like a ship without a rudder at sea I've got no purpose I don't know what I'm doing this is ridiculous so I got off the train and bought myself a ticket and went straight back to Sydney and
- 07:30 saw Dad and by this time I'd got some deferred pay together and a few dollars and you could buy a block of land in Sutherland for a hundred pound, a hundred pound a block it was so I brought a block of land in Kirrawee and I went and I had, still had this job at Truk was still on offer and I'll build a house here on this block of land get a bit of a loan from the bank and build a house
- 08:00 and the family can move in there and I'll go to Truk I'll be right. And so we started building but it was hard to get material you couldn't get materials very difficult so the house took a lot longer to build and you couldn't get labour, there wasn't much skilled labour about that you could get and we couldn't afford to pay the wages anyway so my other brother who was 21 about by this age,
- 08:30 we started to build this house and when we got it finished we were going to move into it and an agent came along and said, "Do you want to sell it?" and I said, "Oh no not really, built it to live in." Yeah so it was very brief I suppose that
- 09:00 I can fix that up in no time at all. The question is what did I really think about the war was it yeah?



**Yeah what how would you sum up your experiences of the war?**

I don't regret my army service at all. I enjoyed it for the most part. I didn't like to be in the Northern Territory as long as I was

- 09:30 but I did see a lot of it and I accepted that as being you know a bonus. I felt in many ways that I'd missed out a lot not social life but I had university, not university, tech programs and things that I, if it hadn't been for the war I would have been finished them by then pretty well and I'd have been
- 10:00 on my way to be an architect or a builder or something and so I felt the war had been an intrusion but I didn't regret it. I thought it made me more experienced and I was able to get on better. I was, I'd grown up. I suppose I would have grown up no matter where I was but I think you learn a lot very quickly in a war about looking after yourself and
- 10:30 being told what to do, how to do it without fighting everybody I so I didn't regret it at all. I particularly enjoyed my experience in Japan because I felt I was really doing the best job I'd ever done in the war as a sort of an aftermath of the war but it was a very important job. It was a highly technical job which I enjoyed, and I enjoyed the
- 11:00 the kudos. I think if you like that was associated with it and that's being pretty selfish I know but I enjoyed that so all in all I think I enjoyed the thing, I resented the intrusion of the war I thought it'd taken away a few good years of my life. It destroyed my friendship basis I never had any, the friends I'd had before the war were all sort of spread some of them didn't make it
- 11:30 some did and they were married and had families and they were a bit difficult to get on with you know, well not difficult to get along with but was no longer a buck's party you know, there were other people involved and all in all I thought it was a good experience and I've got no regrets. I wouldn't do it again but I would if I was the same
- 12:00 age, I'd do it again yeah.

**If you had what would you say to future generations about war what's a message that you'd give to them?**

I don't think they're ever going to have a chance to make a decision. There'll either be a war or won't. If there's a war I don't know if these days in the old days it was easy if you went to the war you went to the battle field that's where the battle field was but now the battlefield

- 12:30 is in the cities and the countries, in the towns and of the cities, the towns so the risk is not any greater I don't think really going to war or stopping home so I'd say you'd better get into it and go I think and get into something that you enjoy doing like don't go in and just be a you know a dog, a what'd they call them you know just a
- 13:00 an ordinary soldier, try and be something special. Try and get rank or something and get in I think yeah. Be in the army it's just as safe there and you've got, you can take counter measures but you can't if you're in a civilian situation so get into it I'd say but don't think it's any fun, not fun at all
- 13:30 like war's not fun it's a risky and stupid business it's absolutely stupid so try and avoid it with all by all means, but if it's going to be a war try and get yourself into into the army or something you know unless you want to be a fighter pilot or be a captain on a submarine or something. If that grabs you go for it you know
- 14:00 that's what I'd say.

**Thank you and is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview today?**

Oh no I'd like to thank you both for your courtesy and that sort of thing but and I mean that, I mean I think it's been gentle conversation and conversation really. I don't think I can add anything no except to say I hope that people future generations

- 14:30 can see this and I hope it can satisfy the need that I feel I have for not being able to talk to my uncles and people like that that you know were in a similar situation and I know nothing about them, nothing but I'd like to get a copy of this put it on there so they can read it so I can give it to my
- 15:00 kids, my grandkids after I'd edited it all and made it make sense.

**Excellent.**

OK thank you very much.

**Alright thank you very much Les.**

OK.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

