Australians at War Film Archive

Harold White (Snake eye) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **To begin with where were you born?**

Thornbury Victoria on 4 June 1921.

Did you grow up in a big family?

Yes, there was six of us in the family. Elder brother, elder sister, myself, a younger brother and younger sister and a younger brother.

01:00 The youngest brother was about seven years older[younger?] than me, the last of us.

Quite an age span between you all.

Just about eighteen months between each of the children and twenty months before the first five and then there was that a little bit of a gap, about four or five years before Alan arrived, because when I came back from the war I left him and he was a school

01:30 boy and when I came back he was nineteen, twenty and grown up.

What did your dad do for a living?

My Dad, he was a veteran from Gallipoli. He was an Anzac. He was in the Engineers in Anzac. Anzac Cove – anyone was liable to be shot there, and my father was wounded after about twenty days on Anzac,

02:00 wounded in the left arm and ruined his left arm a bit, and he was back from the war. He came back and he lived in a town called Casterton, up in the western district, and it was quite an event. He was the first war veteran to come back to Casterton, a wounded war veteran, and they drove him up the main street with my mother in a car and he was presented to

02:30 the locals, quite a person at that time. And then he came down to Melbourne and originally lived at South Yarra and then he shifted out to Thornbury and built his house out there and from there he become a builder. The building industry in Australia was

03:00 quite busy up until about 1928,’29 and then the Depression hit Australia and he struggled there onwards until the war situation come on. There was a terrible lot of people out of work at that stage. In your street there could be half your street could be unemployed. You went through that. And we went to a school called Thornbury School, and

03:30 did the normal things. It was a good Church of England family and we went to church every Sunday and sang in the choir down at Holy Trinity, Thornbury, and grew up, and nothing spectacular in the growing age when your family is struggling with the Depression, and your food...

04:00 Mother was great in getting minced meat and cooking it into a seasoned mince loaf type of thing. You are all on the low rations' scale there. I went to Thornbury State School to 6th grade and then went to Northcote High School. While there we had a little pick up job, work was hard to get,

04:30 very short and we used to get five bob a week for picking up the papers of a little sub-newsagency at Thornbury Railway Station and take them up to this place, and we had to sell Sporting Globes every Saturday night on the corner of Hutton Street and High Street. Being a Collingwood area whenever Collingwood lost we wouldn’t sell a Sporting Globe up there. That was the general run of it there.

05:00 That five bob a week that I got helped me. I had to pay my way through Northcote High School. It was only a minor sum but it was always helpful to have a bit of money. I went to there to what they used to call the leaving certificate and then had to find work and get employed, so around about 1939 I joined the metropolitan

05:30 gas company. They were the gas distributors down in Melbourne, and had a clerical job at that. At one stage down there was a gas strike and we had to go and work at West Melbourne in the gas ovens where they used to have coke coming down from the top and they would get the gas out of it, and we would have to work on that for a week down there. That is about

06:00 the most memorable thing about that. Then we reached a stage in 1941 where we were called up and the gas company used to supplement our army call-up with some sum of money. It was not a great sum of money, more than likely three, four, five, ten pound a week they used to put in there to make up the difference between our army pay and the pay we would be getting from the gas company.

06:30 We were called up in August 1941. I don't know what else I can recall about going down to Northcote High School.

Do you remember when war was declared?

Yes, war was declared in December, I think, the general war, even though the armies had gone over to....

07:00 **We were talking about the beginning of war. Do you remember hearing about the outbreak of war?**

The 6th Division...they'd been volunteered for the 6th Division and they had been over in Bardia and captured Tobruk.

07:30 They did a tremendous job, the 6th Division. I have a tremendous lot of respect for what they did, and then they went to Greece and they were chased out of Greece and Crete by the bloody Germans because there were too many of them. Not so much that, but we were very conscious of when the Japanese came into the war and they bombed Hawaii and then we were all called up, and I think it was round about the 19th of December '42.

08:00 That is as much as I can remember about then. You didn't get as much media attention in those days and all you could do was read it in the paper. Now there is so much media attention. The most minor events get huge publicity. We were called out and then we got our notices we had to go back in December, and back in the army, and went back to a place called

08:30 Trawool, which is just outside of Seymour. That is as much as I remember about the war. With our family life, going back on our family life, we had a very happy family and all good mates and got on well together with the six, and perhaps how you survived there and how you were disciplined by your family was a good background for what

09:00 you did in the future. We didn't drink or that [like] nowadays until, more than likely, you would drink perhaps if you went out for a ball or dance or something. You were restricted and to my way of thinking you grew up a little bit later in life than what they do nowadays. Nowadays they seem to be fourteen, fifteen, sixteen they are bloody going out and doing all these

09:30 things and we didn't seem to do them so much. We had enough to do playing cricket and paying a bit of attention to choir and this way of life. That's generally my background up to joining the army for full-time service in December '41.

You were called up for basic training first?

10:00 Yeah. We did three months in August, September, October. You did the three months and then you went out for about six weeks and then we were back into it in December. You did your basic training, but then again you do your work. I was into the machine gun company of those days and there were far more machine guns than what was in

10:30 the jungle battalion. We only had four in the jungle battalion but in the desert strength they had a whole company of them, they had sixteen guns, but it was a different kettle of fish when you got in the jungle. It wasn't such a big job for the Vickers machine gun.

How did you end up on the guns? Was that choice or were you allocated?

You were allocated. You either had to get into a

11:00 rifle company as they called it or into the Vickers company. I grew up there and I still see people that I was in that first tent [with] the first time I ever went into up at Mount Martha. And then again I see one of the old fellows, he is ninety now,

11:30 down at Frankston I see him once a fortnight, and he was the first chap I slept in with in the army. It is the thing that when you join up you are all thrown in together, you come from different aspects of life, there would be a farmer and there could be a few kids from around Preston and the others could be from.... In our original call-up we were the

12:00 twenty year-olds and then it went up to about thirty-four, so there was a mixed team of fellows went into our call-up. Nowadays they call them up eighteen, a group each year, but in that call-up that we did it was like a clean-up and there was a big mixed group of people. And a lot of the fellows that after we had done two years' training in Australia and went to go

12:30 to New Guinea, and some of them were too old to go and they were left out of the army because they didn't take anyone above I think about thirty-three, thirty-four up to New Guinea. They didn't think they were fit enough and old enough to be able to do that, to put up with it. That is as much as I can…you know, the general waffle up to when I was called up.

Can you tell us about your first experience with a gun and being trained on them?

13:00 Yes. More than likely in the first three months that we had the guns we more than likely had a "live shoot" as you call it, two or three times sometimes on the range, that is in three months. The rest would be you would get out there and they'd pull the gun down, put it up again, you would do it blindfolded and put it back, and

13:30 that's what we would do. You would do stunts there and you'd carry the gun around. The gun weighed about forty pounds. The barrel weighed about forty pounds when it was full of water and the barrel and casing, and the tripod was broken into two parts: there were the three legs of the tripod and then there was the holder that carried the Vickers

14:00 gun. That in itself weighed about fifty pounds as well, so you learnt how to hump them around. Most of the training there was marching, doing rifles to rifles and parade and this and that, but as you say you very rarely got that live shoot with a Vickers gun because we didn't seem to have enough ammunition to go around I suppose, and

14:30 then you had to have a range to shoot 'em on as well and get the allocation of a range day. That's in that early stage that you did that more than likely up to…We did three months at Trawoo and then we did a march from Seymour up to Albury. It took us about five days to do that march.

15:00 We stopped at different towns and bivouacked out on the open road and were fed out in the open. And then we went to a place called Hume, which was just over the far side of the Hume Weir, or the camp was running down into the Hume Weir. We stopped about three months there. And then we progressed up to a town called Casino up in, half way up the

15:30 top end of New South Wales and we stopped there for three months, and then we then went to a place which was what was called the Brisbane line I suppose and we went to a place just north of Brisbane called Caboolture. We spent three months there, and then we went to a place called Keroy. When I say these places

16:00 we would just pull up and carve our way into a paddock and put up the tents on the side of the road with a paddock there and carve our way into the scrub and we did training there. I suppose when we got into Keroy we were getting a little bit more into the hilly rough forest country, a bit similar to New Guinea in a lot of ways. But

16:30 we left Keroy and then from there half the battalion went by train to Townsville and got on board the Duntroon and went to Port Moresby, this is about in March '43, and the other half of us went down to Brisbane and caught a boat, the Kanimbla, and went up to Port Moresby.

Which one were you on?

I was on the Kanimbla.

17:00 I think we went from Brisbane.

How was that trip on the Kanimbla?

You were just put down in the cabins down below and that is what you did. Sea travelling didn't worry me so much. It went…

17:30 you just went up through and you had a mild escort and they just went up inside the reef and went up to Moresby. A bit rough in certain areas. Some of the boys when they used to go on board these boats they had to go down the cabins, they wouldn't get up, they would be seasick for the whole time, but it didn't affect me so much. From there we went to Port Moresby

18:00 and we were - Kokoda, Buna and Gona, they had all gone by this stage, and we were put in a place called Goon Valley alongside an airstrip called Ward's strip. On the Wards strip there were the Beaufighters and the Beauforts and a few Australians, mostly Australians there

18:30 and a couple of Yank planes, Hudsons. And it was from there that they did the attack on the Japanese that were coming down from Rabaul with troops for what they used to call…it was finally called the Battle of Bismarck. And the Beaufighters used to come back in and they would have a few holes in them, and they had been strafing these

19:00 Japanese cargo boats. I think there were cargo boats and destroyers. I was just reading about it the other week. There was about twelve little cargo boats and they were bringing a division of Japanese down from Rabaul to increase the size of the Japanese in New Guinea around about Finschhafen and that. Finally I don't think any of them reached New Guinea, they were cleaned up by the Beaufighters,

19:30 Beauforts, and the Yanks also had some planes there, and they cleaned up the whole lot of them. So we stopped there at Port Moresby for about four months overall. Three battalions of our Brigade, the 24th and the 58th and 59th, they

20:00 had gone up to Wau and they were in the Battle for Salamaua and Morobe and all around that area around there, which was very heavy fighting, with the 17th Brigade. We were still sitting in Port Moresby and the battle that happened there was about two aircraft attacks there and the last raid on Port Moresby, I think we were there with about a forty-plane raid.

20:30 They were just trying to drop bombs on Port Moresby. But we were over the hills and it didn't affect us. There was a bit of shrapnel coming down, but that's about all that happened there. Later in the war I asked Lieutenant General Savage why we were kept back in Moresby and he said, "Why you were kept back there, I was going to

21:00 take you boys over and land your battalion down at Nassau Bay and from there you were going to go up the coast of Salamaua, but the Yanks wanted to put in a show so, instead of sending a battalion of Australians out there to fight their way up the coast, we put in a regiment which is a brigade of Yanks, and they went in there and it finished up." The Australians had to go in

21:30 there from Rebo and lead them off the beach, practically. The Yanks weren't great jungle fighters and perhaps they weren't used to it. He said, "That is what we were going to do with you people." And instead what he did was, they were planning the landings at Lae of the 7th

22:00 Division and the landings of the 9th Division at Finschhafen to capture Lae, and they flew us up to a place called Tsili Tsili which was about forty miles outside of Lae, and they landed us there in this little airstrip and we fanned out, and we were protecting an aerodrome crew of Yanks, and they

22:30 put in this huge airstrip at Tsili Tsili. Tsili Tsili was a strip that they then flew over the Yank fighters, Thunderbolts they were, and they set up this airstrip at Tsili Tsili to give the fighter cover for when the Australians landed at Lae and Finschhafen.

23:00 So we spent about three months there, and the 7th Division were then flown over and one of their battalions landed at Tsili Tsili, which, as I said, was about forty miles from Lae, and they went down, marched through the jungle to where we were, down and went across the Markham, and they captured a place called Nabzad.

23:30 While we were there we saw, the Yanks did a parachute, they landed a parachute battalion and they parachuted artillery down in front of us, and we saw the parachutes coming down there. We were there not doing a great deal but there were three or four air attacks at the Tsili Tsili aerodrome.

24:00 A couple of fellows, one was killed there, and they were doing a church service while the Jap air attack was on, and that was perhaps our first casualty from the Japanese, and he was killed on that strip. But we were sprayed out about fifteen or twenty miles away from the air strip

24:30 just in case the Nips [Nipponjin, ie. sl. Japanese] came down. The Nips had planned an attack on us but they left it too late. By that time the 7th Division had landed and started cleaning up and the 9th Division was coming down from the Finschhafen area. Our job was completed there so they then flew us back to Port Moresby over the top, and then we went up to a place called Donedebu [?], which is

25:00 at the foot of the Kokoda Trail – it's at the start of the Kokoda Trail – and we did three months of jungle training there. We were, at one stage, we were playing the enemy with our own battalion mates, and we had containers with TNT [trinitrotoluene, high explosive]

25:30 in them. There would be about half a pound of TNT, might have been a little bit less than that, and we would light a fuse and when they came within about twenty yards of us we'd throw the TNT in front of them. It didn't have any metal in it apart from the detonator, but one of our mates was standing alongside of it and hung on to the TNT too long and blew his bloody hand off and got a bit of the shrapnel from the

26:00 detonator in his eye and he lost an eye as a result of it. That's something you remember of that particular incident there. Even though two battalions of our Brigade had done a great deal of fighting in that situation, our brigadier at that stage was a fellow named Brigadier Hammer. They used to call him Tack Hammer. He was one of the great fighting

26:30 brigadiers of the war and he was a Lieutenant Colonel in the 9th Division, and at Alamein three of his members won the VC [Victoria Cross, British military award] of his battalion. It was the 2/48th . It is a very well-known battalion from the Second World War, and Tack wanted his brigade to fight. Perhaps they considered we hadn't done enough. We hadn't done enough, for certain,

27:00 as an infantry battalion. By this time the 7th Division had reached the base of Shaggy Ridge, and we were flown up and the 15th Brigade flew up to Dumpu, which was the base of Shaggy Ridge. The 21st Brigade which was very well-known, 14th, 21st and something, they had gone up the

27:30 Kokoda, they'd gone up the Valley, as we used to call it, the Markham Valley, and we were flown up to Dumpu and to then do what we were supposed to do, fight the enemy. What we did then, the 18th

Brigade were attacking

28:00 Shaggy Ridge at that stage and they were taking a place called Prothero, because the Nips had built a road. They were endeavouring to build a road that come down from Bogadjim that went up the Minchin [Markham] Valley, and they used to call it the Bogadjim Road, and it reached the far side of Shaggy Ridge. And when we speak of Shaggy Ridge,

28:30 the hills there are 5,000 feet high. They're fairly big bloody hills, right? You had to have a blanket of a night time up there. They struck this, they hadn't put the road through the Shaggy Ridge area. They'd reached the bottom of Shaggy Ridge and that's as far as they got, and it was a mule track from there onwards. So while they were still pursuing and chasing the Japanese out of New Guinea,

29:00 the 18th Brigade attacked a place called Prothero, which was just past Shaggy Ridge. It was the back of Shaggy Ridge, and we made a feint attack up on the left flank of it and went to a place called Orgarana [?] and that is where we made our first contact with the

29:30 Japanese infantry. We went and did a feint up there and the whole battalion went up. There was a village on top of a hill at Orgarana and we did an attack there.

30:00 Then we went down the far side of that and one of our other companies, platoons, had sent… there was another river coming around another track and they had sent a patrol up that track and they had run into an ambush, and a fellow I knew, Frankie Brammel, he was killed. And they

30:30 said, "We will send up the machine gunners and the mortars and we will chase them out of this ambush spot." We went up these hills. You had to follow and hang onto the person in front, his bayonet scabbard to know where you were going practically. We went up and down there and set up the guns and set up the mortars and fired at where we thought the Nips were, and

31:00 Frankie was laying down there on the track. Then B Company went through us and they went up and down a couple of hills and reached where Japs had been. They settled in there for the night and we were still down the bottom of the track, and then we had to find our way back in the dark up this climb, 1500 feet or so.

31:30 We had to, with a gun on our back, forty-pound gun, carrying the barrel of a gun up the back. And then all of a sudden there was the Nips, start to shoot at our mates that were in this village, which was more than likely six hundred yards up above us almost, and we were going up a track back to

32:00 where we were bivouacked at the top of the hill, and here across above us was this tremendous fire out of machine guns and rifles and mortars going off, and it was amazing to see it. There was a lot of …I don't know whether they had incendiaries or what, but there were flashes going off

32:30 in the middle of the night and B Company were attacked, and as it was only a feint action the while the 18th Brigade got and captured Prothero, we were told they had to pull out, so they had to pull out then and go back to Dumpu, and we then went back up through a river valley and up below Shaggy Ridge and up to

33:00 this feature of Prothero where the 18th Brigade did a magnificent job. They had a mounted gun in a little defence up there and the mounted gun was firing at the Australians from fifty, sixty, a hundred and thirty yards I suppose, and we went up and took over from the 18th Brigade at Prothero. We then had to go down and

33:30 advance to Bogadjim. This is what our job was down what they called the Bogadjim track. When you say it was only a track, cars could drive along it but they'd have to go very slowly. Our battalion then went down this track, and, of course, the Japanese had the best defensive positions down there,

34:00 and all our fellows could do was go down and probe until they were fired at, until they were ambushed, and then endeavour to outflank them, go round the back of them, and then the Nips would pull out. And they did this until they reached Bogadjim, which was the seaport on the top coast of New Guinea.

34:30 From there they were taken by barges and a motor boat up to capture Madang, but the Nips were pulling out fairly fast from there, but it was down from Prothero and down [UNCLEAR] Piper and different…There is number of bridges and the bridges were

35:00 numbered the distance they were away from Bogadjim, and on the way down we more than likely lost twenty people on the way down there, and they were just running into ambushes. The first action they had there one of the lieutenants walked around.

35:30 One of our mates, I remember him particularly telling me, he said they were going down this track. Do you wait until you get shot at and killed? What do you do? He said to Lieutenant Sinclair, I remember him telling me. He said "I said to Sinclair, 'Listen, Sid, there are Japs here. You can bloody smell them." And you could smell them because they used to excrete everywhere and

36:00 didn't worry about digging holes and that. He said, "There's Nips here." and there was a broken down truck around the corner, and Sid Sinclair said, "No, there's no bloody Nips here," and he went around the corner and he was killed. They came back that night and the patrol that Sinclair was the leader of,

36:30 the platoon he was the leader of, they picked them out and said, the brigadier said, “You have to go down and recover Sinclair’s body,” and they knew it was nearly bloody suicide, so they went down and I think there was about five of them killed in the process of trying to recover Sinclair’s body. All the fellows I knew went to school and one lived fifty yards down the street

37:00 from where I lived, and these are people that you particularly remember. You never forget their faces. Donny Brown and Bernie Fox were the two particular ones, and I think the other three that were killed were reinforcements from Queensland. One was a 2/25th man and the 2/25th went over Kokoda, and they were…

37:30 When they arrived back from Syria we received a couple of officers and about five sergeants from the 2/25th Battalion, and a chap named Wright, Sergeant Wright, he was killed there too. That was perhaps the worst incident that did happen when the fellas were killed there, but the rest of them, they went down and they were hit

38:00 in ambush position and one would be killed and then the others would be wounded, and then they would go around cut the Nips off, and then they would pull out that night. That was the process until we hit Bogadjim, and then, as I said there was a race from the people coming up the coast to see who would be first into Madang, which was supposed to be a prize, but when you got to

38:30 Madang there wasn’t much there. I did go into Madang myself but when we reached Madang we were pulled out. We were a bit worn out because you get starved on the rations that you get up there and you are living on tinned food all the way. At one stage at Tsili Tsili – Tsili Tsili was over the mountain tops, and you had

39:00 to fly over the mountain tops in New Guinea at about 10,000 or 12,000 feet high and the old DC3’s, if there was a fog you wouldn’t come over. For about a week or so the DC3’s never flew over so we didn’t get our rations, and so anything that flew or moved finished up going into the pot. As well our food ration there could be four or five of us would share

39:30 a tin of baked beans, or four or five of us would share a tin of corned beef, but that’s how the food situation, it was very poor on it.

40:00 End of tape

Tape 2

00:33 **Where did you go after that?**

We reached Bogadjim. And we had a padre with us, very well-known. He was a chap named Geoff Sambon. He was a tremendous character builder in the army, and wherever we’d pull up he would organise a concert party or get us to do something to break up the boredom of what we were doing.

01:00 When we reached Madang they put us in a little island, a plantation. It was a (UNCLEAR) island just outside of Madang. And when I say it was a plantation it was one of the Levers, the people that made the soap. They used to have these copra plantations and we were put in one of these.

01:30 And their padre, Sambon, to break us up they had the battalion, they built a concert auditorium – there’s a photo of it there somewhere – and he built this stage and with palm trees and they cut down palms and covered it in, and we organised a concert party there. We were up there about three months sitting on our bums really. There was no problem to do that, and we were right on the water’s edge with coral and

02:00 we’d swim of a day time, if you missed the jellyfish – there were a few jellyfish around and a lot of fish there. You would throw a few grenades in the water and the moment you threw the grenade in, the grenades went up and the fish would float up to the top. There’d be just as many down below so you’d dive down ten or twelve feet and get yourself a feed of fish. Then you had the problem of coconuts dropping from up above.

02:30 You’d climb up a coconut tree with the aid of metal clamps on your boots and go up the tree and get up the top there. Often when you would get up the top, you’d cut the coconuts down and there’d be these bloody red ants and they’d be running around your head and running in your ears, through your eyes, and you would slash with the

03:00 machete and cut a few coconuts down and scramble down the tree to avoid the bloody red ants. We put three months in there, and then they decided we’d come back on leave to Melbourne. So we came back to Melbourne on leave about September ’43, no, ’44, and we came back to

03:30 Melbourne and finished up in Melbourne for about three months overall, that was with our leave. And we were out at Watsonia. Watsonia wasn’t far from our home, and we’d spend more time at home than what we would at Watsonia. We did that and then we did a march through town and we were there for

three months, and then hopped on board the train again and went from Melbourne up to Cairns.

04:00 From Cairns we went up to Mareeba on the tablelands and did three months training up there. Then they decided…we then left in late December or 1st of January and went over to Bougainville. Bougainville was one of these situations where the Australians were just

04:30 supposed to be a…They put, I think there were about four brigades over there overall and we were in the Yank.... The Yanks had a huge complex around a place called Torokina. They'd landed there and the defence circle went out about twenty miles, a big circle, and we were there, and the Australians could have stopped there but

05:00 they decided that we had to go down and kill the Nips, which were at Buin. There was about twenty thousand of them there, twenty, twenty-five thousand. They'd gone down and there was one particular action – hardly reported in the papers where I think it was the 25th Battalion,

05:30 the Queensland battalion – they'd got down and the Nip put in a reasonable sort of attack on them and it was about twenty-five mile out of Torokina – that's a place called Slater's Knoll and always remembered because we went down their path and we went on to fight and here's this sign up on the edge of the road.

06:00 There's a trench and there's a sign up: four hundred and fifty Japanese buried there. At this Slater's Knoll the Nips had put in a reasonable sort of attack on the Australians. They had a couple of tanks down there, and a whole regiment attacked a couple of companies of the Australians. That would be two hundred people versus three and a half thousand.

06:30 But they had the tanks there and a good defensive situation and the Nips were attacking the tanks and all the tanks were doing supposedly was just firing their guns at the Nips attacking the other tank. Their machine gun bullets were bouncing off the tank and killing the Nips, and three hundred and fifty Nips were killed in this particular…three hundred and fifty or four hundred, but I always remember the sign. Sheppy got a VC there

07:00 but it hasn't been reported a great deal. From there we went down and took over from a brigade, we took over about the 1st of April I think it was, of '45, and we then had a hard slog down to…we got within twenty mile of

07:30 Buin and this hard slog, and in the process I think our Brigade lost about three hundred killed and about seven hundred wounded overall. The fact that they did that and it was a futile thing. We could've been back at Torokina in defensive positions and let the bloody Nips

08:00 starve down there, because all they were doing was…What we were doing was taking over their gardens. They had these gardens. They didn't have any food, the Nips, and all they had was these gardens where they used to…Any of the bodies in there that you discovered you'd go through their gear, and all they'd have was a pumpkin or a few sweet potatoes and that's about all they were surviving on, the Nips. We'd taken their gardens.

08:30 We gradually got down to a place called…there's a series of rivers, and the rivers flow very quickly over there. If you went in them you would be washed down them. At one stage it rained for ten days, and we were in that much water that everything,

09:00 the Jeeps and that couldn't…Even though we had corduroyed all the tracks, the Jeeps were having trouble getting 'em. The corduroy was flooding and rising up. That's what we did there. I could go into more detail on that, but that's a broad coverage of it. We reached the

09:30 Mivo River, which is as far as the Australians reached, about the 1st of July I think , and we were relieved by another battalion then, and then we

10:00 pulled back about four or five kilometres and we were the reserve brigade and they never went any further than that. And by this time, as I said, we were twenty mile from 20,000 of the Nips and the Nips had discovered that we had gone too far, and it was my consideration that to the Nips we looked like fresh young chickens. We were bloody red meat that they would have loved to

10:30 eat and I've got no fear of what would have happened if that bomb hadn't have gone off in August time. The Nips had decided we had gone far enough. And we were a very bloody thin line and only the battalion, there'd be about 500 troops in each battalion, and they're spread out on

11:00 company positions, and behind the line, this is the line that you had to be fed. They did parachute a lot of food and supplies into us but we were still very…if we were going to be attacked they'd more than likely wear us down by numbers, the volume of people they had down there to attack us. So fortunately the bomb went off at that stage. From then onwards

11:30 we moved back to Torokina. We stopped at Torokina for a couple of months and they broke the battalion up. Those who had enough points went home, caught a boat home, and the others were sent down guarding Nips down at a place called Fauro Island and then we went up to Rabaul. We must have

12:00 arrived up in Rabaul around about end of November I would imagine, and went into a brigade show and

brigade headquarters and met someone I knew, and he got me into brigade headquarters, which was a bit better than out in the battalion. And from there, we stopped there until March and came home – I just forget the boat that I came home on, but came home in March, and

12:30 they still kept us in the army until May.

Which port did you come into? Did you come into Melbourne?

No, it came into Brisbane.

And then train down?

I'm sorry, it might've even come into Townsville, not too sure, but we caught the train down, the military train that you get up and

13:00 have to pull up for breakfast at somewhere and lunch at somewhere else, and they were more likely better fed on the train than what we were in the battalion. Perhaps our food did improve a great deal after New Guinea. They were able to supply you better after that. I think the worst food we ever had – I don't know if you've ever heard of it –

13:30 dehydrated mutton. They'd deliver it up to you and it would be like little rabbit turds, these little brown and black little things. They would throw it in the water and try and make rissoles out of it. That was the only thing they could make out of it. It was a shocking thing, to dehydrate mutton. I don't know how they ever got it. It was an amazing food, and the poor old cooks, they'd get this and have

14:00 to try and put it in a chewable state. That's more than likely the worst rations When we first went in the army our rations used to be one cookhouse would feed the whole battalion, and you had one cookhouse trying to feed twelve-hundred people. And the food, they'd get the food, ex-butchers and

14:30 this, and they would try and cook the food and then they would serve it up. You would line up with a dixie and put it in there and then you would wash your dixie in a half…a forty-gallon tin had been cut in half and you'd wash your dixie in there. It's no wonder we got diarrhoea and that type of thing. The hygiene was shocking in the early stages, but it did improve as we went along.

15:00 You had to eat something and you had it with dog biscuits.

So what did they have you doing when you came back to Australia? Were you back in Melbourne for a couple of months before you were demobbed [demobilised]?

Yes, I was in here for two months in a stationary corps, they were just buggering around. There was a few old fellows

15:30 looking after us who wanted to stop in the army, and we wanted to get out, and we come back there and I went back to the gas company and the fellow I met was a great footballer, and he was President of the MCC [Melbourne Cricket Club]. And

16:00 I went in and said, "Hello, Mr Chadwick." "Hello, Mr White. Come back from service have you?" "Yeah." Chadwick was a great air force man and a terrible lot of the fellows in the gas company, there were a few DFC's [Distinguished Flying Cross award recipients] amongst them and there was a few Military Crosses amongst them. And he said, "Mr White," he said, "why didn't you

16:30 ever go above a private?" "Mr Chadwick, have you ever shot someone or killed somebody or had anybody fire a gun at you? Ever seen an angry man?" He said, "Mr White, that is not the question I am asking you." I thought I didn't see any future in that and I decided, I went up to the Rehab[ilitation] Course and I did my Bachelor of Commerce. I did my Bachelor of Commerce

17:00 at Melbourne University from '47, '48, '49 , and from then onwards I was out in the commercial world. I went to a place called Cowry Timber Company. I was the Assistant Secretary there for about two years, and while I was there I built my house out of their beautiful timber and I have got beautiful Tasmanian hardwood flooring

17:30 in the place. You never see that, wouldn't know what it was nowadays. I stopped there and then went to a firm called Elastic Webbing. They were a textile company in Victoria Parade, and I worked there from about '54 to '78.

18:00 I bought a little firm, I had helped a couple of mates and he said, "We've a business that is making cup washers." I bought this little business and I had a couple of people working for me then while I was still at Elastic Webbing. I was Secretary and a Company Director there at Elastic Webbing, and they employed four-hundred people at one stage, and their big business was making

18:30 elastic braid. Then they started off making safety belts and I was in the first part of using safety belts in Victoria. We did a few around about '58, we had a couple of models come and they did tests on safety belts and we did that, and in about '75 I bought this little business making

19:00 windmill cups and then I was working at Elastic Webbing for a couple of years, but I'd had enough of them. They were gradually going broke, a Jewish family, so they went and started to make broad elastic and put in a huge investment in that

19:30 just as bathers went out of fashion. Elastic, woven elastic, went out of bathers and they were a bit stiff there in their judgement. Then they bought into knitted elastic. It used to be made into women's pull-ups and corsets and that type of thing, but mainly down below women used to have these belts that they had stockings coming on and then nylon came out

20:00 and that, and they started to have the pantyhose and that type of thing so that put that business out of business. They were gradually going broke, and from there in '78 I went out in making the windmills and I've been working in the windmills up 'til this year.

I would like to go over some of the areas now. You mentioned Mr Chadwick,

20:30 **the conversation you had with him. Did you find that it was common that people who hadn't served overseas or been in the army or seen action, really couldn't understand?**

He had more than likely seen action in the First World War. In the Second World War he was an air commodore back here and he was a big man, Sir Albert Chadwick. He finished up being a knight. That was his attitude to me, if you hadn't got above the ranks

21:00 even though you were an infantier. I graduated from the machine guns. We had three of the machine gunners killed out of thirty, and I thought… I graduated from there to the Intelligence Section, the I Section. The last two months of the war I was in the I Section. Being an air force man he wouldn't appreciate

21:30 what you went through as an infanteer, right? He wouldn't have any idea of the trauma you went through sitting in the foxhole. From January or February of '45 when we were in Bougainville, every night we'd…ok we'd do our work of a daytime and then of a night time you'd be two hours on picket

22:00 duty and four hours off, so you are more than likely up three times during the night doing picket duty on a track or sitting on a booby trap or sitting behind your gun waiting for Nips to come and spray the area where you were, and there would be no appreciation of what you really did do. Some survived it

22:30 and some didn't.

Did you talk much about that with people to help them understand how stressful your position was when you came back to Australia?

No, not really. When we came back to Australia to me it felt like I had been in prison for five years, and come back and did my three years of university

23:00 life. As infantry we accepted everything. We didn't see much of life, particularly while we were in the army, because wherever we went there would be more than likely twelve hundred…when we were in

23:30 Australia, there'd be twelve hundred fellows thrown into a little country town. Some of the fellas used to go dancing and try and win a sheila, but to me, I never went to the dances, all I would do is go out and have a drink. I was only on two bob a day. I sent the other three bob a day home and went to Mother, and she put it into a bank account.

24:00 But I had two bob a day to spend, and I suppose once a fortnight you'd perhaps go out and go into a pub and have a few beers. This is what you do, right?

Did you find it strange coming back to normal society or non-army life when you were back in Australia?

No, not at all. I didn't notice that. We got up to a few tricks at times when you'd

24:30 have your reunions and that, but when we came back from the army – we were a fairly close body in the battalion, and we organised that we used to have a cricket day, a football day. And then as we started to get a few kids we used to have a day down the beach, down at Aspendale and these went on. We used to have a ball, a

25:00 dinner dance every show weekend, and this is what we did. Ok, you intermixed with your family and grew up and changed, but we still had that reasonable contact with our mates from the army, and still have. We have a committee and we meet once a month. We don't go through a great deal but we meet once a month and

25:30 we've still got two hundred people that are members of our battalion association.

You were saying before you have been treasurer since 1946.

1946. Yeah.

Wow. So it's been important to you to maintain that connection?

Yes. Not only have I been treasurer, but I used to organise all the functions and used to, say, the beach day we had to get stuff for the kids, and I used to

26:00 get toys and trinkets, and I'd have to run the…to MC [act as master of ceremonies] them and line up for their foot races. We used to do that, organise where to get the grounds and that to play our cricket games, and organise the areas where we used to have our battalion reunions. When the reunions come I had to pick up the grog and pick up the food and beer was hard to get in the early stages and you couldn't go into a hotel and get it.

26:30 We had one of the ex-officers, a chap named Kelly, his mother was well known in the Northcote area and Ma Kelly, she had a pub and used to manage the pub and that's where we used to get our beer, otherwise it would have been hard to get. I used to pick up the barrels and pick up the women who used to do the catering and pick up the food. Amazing. One year

27:00 one of our members was in the managerial side of Huttons and he offered me three hundred pigs' trotters. He said, "These'll be good for the reunion." So I took them home and the wife cooked the pigs' trotters and I took them along to the reunion. They were terrific but they flattened all the beer, so the moment they got into the pigs' trotters all their beer went flat, so we had a lot of trouble with that. Organising food and finished up

27:30 my family, my two girls and my son-in-law, the last fifteen years of our reunions they've been doing the catering. I would get the food, we used to get a bit of free food. We used to have pies and little boys [small sausages] and sausage rolls and salads. When chicken got a bit freer we used to get ten or twelve chickens and get them cut into eighth and quarters,

28:00 and that's our rations, some ham and that. But always been bloody busy doing that. Our last fourteen years we have had them down at the Northcote Bowling Club and I was only concerned with the catering when we had it there, and then our last three or four we've had down at Preston RSL [Returned Services League]. Our battalion was drawn from the Preston-Heidelberg area.

28:30 When we were called up a terrible lot of the fellows came from Northcote, Preston, there and Thornbury, Heidelberg, and we had one crew were drawn from up at Finlay and that is why we have a reunion up in that area because there's a few of our people up at Finlay. When I say as far being treasurer, I have been doing a terrible lot of organisation work

29:00 because I have the time and I'm able to do that.

What do you suppose a connection with reunion groups and continued connection and contact with the men provides for returned servicemen?

When you are an infanteer you've got perhaps a better bond than when you are in another unit and there is more of you went through because, as I said,

29:30 originally there was twelve hundred and when we went to reach Casino they broke up from…The twelve hundred was what they called a desert size battalion, and when you went to jungle battalion, instead of having sixteen machine guns you finished up with four machine guns. Instead of having twenty-five

30:00 trucks and jeeps you finished up with about ten or twelve of them. There's this revision from desert strength to jungle strength, but to me you have a bond when you've been living with people, you are dependant on them. As a machine gunner we used to be put out with a different company. The forward company would be two guns with two of the forward company, so that's where our forward guns went so we met a terrible lot of

30:30 the fellows. I knew a terrible lot of the fellows, and you'd be in company with them. And you are going to be put in with a platoon or a section that were covering the track or something every night, and you would put your guns down there to give them a defensive area. Strange enough, the Nips never approached us a great deal of a night-time. They came in a couple of times and sprayed the area but not a great deal.

Some of the men we have talked to

31:00 **found the first year or two after the army years as being really unsettled and quite difficult.**

Oh yeah, there was a few. A few have had problems.

What sort of things would they go through?

I don't know why it worried some people more than others. I haven't had that worry at all, but a lot of people have had concerns. I don't know. We've more than likely had ten suicides.

31:30 I don't know why. Happy buggers and happy nature but something got them down. They took pills and died as a result of them. All of a different nature, just the same as when you are in action, that some people would get flustered, but it never flustered me at all. If it happens it happens. And you are looking after

32:00 your skin and making sure you survive and weren't so much scared when you are fired at and that, you just have to do it. It did affect some people. I don't know whether it might have been people come back and some were married and had a reaction from their marriages. Their marriage reaction

32:30 could've come from their duty in the army. This is difficult to, you know…you give a bit of thought to

this. I was only discussing this – I was up in Surfer's Paradise and had a discussion with a fella stopping there and we were going over a few people, happy buggers, and yet they…in some way they did away with themselves and you can't work them out.

33:00 Some of them get a bit morose and I don't know what caused it, whether it was their army service or what, but sitting at night time, looking at the stars, and you're doing this….

Do you think reunion groups have helped some of those guys who've been unsettled or who've gone through hard times?

I would think for certain.

What is it about the reunion groups that helps them, do you think?

We chat and catch up,

33:30 "Where is So-and-so, and what's he doing, and when did you see him last?" When we went up to Surfer's Paradise and we had this reunion at Surfer's Paradise, we started this it would be eighteen or twenty years ago, because there had been a few of us had shifted up there and we used to get forty people up there. This one I went up, there was about fifteen up there, and of the fifteen

34:00 I think there was about six widows and the rest were with their mates, they were up there at Surfers Paradise. But it has diminished. There is that many have fallen off the perch, mind you. This the problem. But there were a few people were up there that we were disappointed in, that we'd gone up there and a couple of

34:30 thousand miles or fifteen hundred kilometres to say hello, and when we get there they are living twenty kilometres away and they don't even have the bloody time to come up and say hello to you. We go, and when we discuss it we don't discuss our problems or actions so much a great deal. You're discussing the personality and who they are and what they do, right?

35:00 But that's what reunions are about.

It seems to be an important social function for widows as well.

Yes, we've got a great gathering of widows. We have got two hundred and twenty-odd members still, people that come in. We put out a sixty-four page magazine of all the correspondence we receive. The chap does a tremendous job of it and people love getting this book we call

35:30 Hardenbold and it comes out once a year, and as I said there's sixty-four pages. He analyses the letters that come in and through our gatherings a lot of the widows have met each other and they look forward to going up to, say, Finlay, which we do in the first week in October.

36:00 We'll go up there, and I think last year there was about fifty or sixty people up there, but of that there is more likely to be fifteen widows up there. Their family may drive them up there or they may drive with some of the other members, but they go up there and they enjoy the company of…I don't know what it is.

Outside of those reunions have you talked with other people about your experiences,

36:30 **your family, for example?**

Not a great deal, no.

Do you find that common?

I suppose the family see us, and how we perform and perhaps how we yapped. My two girls have been along to our reunion for, say, fifteen years, and they see it and they know a lot of our members and say hello to them and talk about them.

37:00 At times you say you put up with this and put up with that and you are starved there, but you don't perhaps discuss actions or that or situations. It's almost like boasting if you tell somebody

37:30 what you did and what you didn't do. The situation sometimes was that if you were in an ambush you had to make sure those that you ambush were killed, are dead, otherwise when the rest of your mates come through, if you didn't kill them, even if you had knocked them down, they'd

38:00 jump up and shoot them. But this is what you had to do, but you don't discuss that, you don't mention that to your family. Perhaps the funny side of your life you talk about, different things.

Somebody I talked to once said reunions are all about drinking beer, telling lies, winning the war. Everything gets bigger and larger and more fun. You just tell happy stories.

38:30 Oh yeah, there are more happy stories. You don't discuss winning the war a great deal. You discuss your misfortunes rather than that, the unfortunate part of what happened. You can always tell a

39:00 story. I've told this to a couple of people, boasting I suppose. When we were in Bougainville we did a series of outflanking movements. We cut behind the Nips, and we went through the jungle, the first

movement for about five days and the second movement for about seven days. And we cut behind them to try and pull them out so they didn't have the continuous battle of going along Buin Road,

39:30 wait until they hit an ambush and lost a couple and then bring up the tanks and fire and bring the artillery and they would pull back. In the second movement they took our guns off us and we were put in with the rifle company. I was put in B Company, and

40:00 in B Company the section I was in, seeing I was an outsider, used to nominate me to do different jobs. He said, "Oh well, you've sat on your arse. There are the Vickers guns." So he gave me more jobs as forward scout than…even though we were following generally a wire along. We went through an area with a Nip track and

40:30 when we went through the Nips were pulling down on this track, and our whole battalion, the three companies of us, were going there, there would be about four hundred people coming, and they had an ammunition line coming through. They put one company on the top side to let the other ones come through, and most had got through, and at the end of the time the Nips

41:00 put a banzai attack on the section that was there. They ran into trouble. It didn't affect our troop, didn't get any casualties, but the Nips came through and put this banzai attack on the section that was there and they ran into trouble. Our troops didn't get any casualties, but the Nips came through and put this banzai attack on and then that company followed us through. And we had gone on about two or three mile. Somebody said, "They've cut the wire," so the section leader said, "Whitey, you go back and fix the wire." So I had to go back and fix the

41:30 telephone wire where this banzai attack had been. I thought, "The Nips are bound to be there for certain." I grabbed the wire on my side of the track and put it up in a tree, and then ran it across the track and nothing bloody happened, so I connected the wire on the other side and I thought, "Well these buggers are sitting down waiting for me to go back. They've let me come through the one time," so instead of going back on the track that I went [in on], I went

42:00 about fifteen yards up the far side.

Tape 3

00:34 I ran across the track and fixed the wire up and hung it up in the trees and I thought, these buggers are more than likely sitting back there. They've set an ambush for me knowing that you'd have to come back and fix the wire. So instead of coming back immediately where a wire went across I went about fifteen yards back up the track and shot across. And they put a burst, fired a burst at me but they had to be fast.

01:00 The burst went through my haversack and I had a Yankee tent, which I'd pinched from some Yanks back in New Guinea. It was a beautiful little one-man tent made of nylon, of all things, and they put the burst through the nylon tent on my back. They ruined my tent but I got through that situation and followed the wire. This is what you had to do if you were in that situation – you would follow the wire

01:30 and catch up to the B Company boys - and went onwards from there.

You were so lucky, inches away from you.

Not lucky. You had to think, even though you had to try and think what they were thinking, and that is what happened. My poor old beautiful Yankee tent had a burst of machine gun through it. I was on my back

02:00 when it happened.

Better the tent than your back.

Yeah. That's true. That's when I was with B Company, and about the night after that we arrived down in Buin Road and we'd cut behind Buin Road, and as we arrived at Buin Road we

02:30 pulled up and started digging our… The moment you pull up in an area and thinking you are going to stop there you start to get your defensive position and dig your foxholes and put your guns up. We did this, and tanks came up and there was a bridge about forty yards away, a bridge across Buin Road, and the tank came across the bridge. And he said, "I don't think it's booby-trapped," but

03:00 he should've been quite aware of it, and he came across the track and, of course, it was booby-trapped. We don't know what charge it was but it threw the tank up in the air and killed the driver of the tank and the tank, with no driver there to turn the engine off the engine went for about an hour and a half until they ran out of

03:30 petrol.

The sound of the engine was running the whole time.

The engine was running the whole time, these bloody engines, and here this poor bugger was dead in the tank, and we were all thrown up in the air when the booby trapped one.... It was a fair sized booby trap. Somebody said it was an air bomb but I don't know whether it was there, and we were a bit fortunate there that the

04:00 brigadier said we had to move on that day even though there was a tank smoking down there, and they brought up another tank and it went past the forward tank. It was one of those fortunate times we were supposed to be the forward platoon at that stage and our platoon corporal did the right thing. He was setting an ambush down on another track that'd be

04:30 about two hundred yards away and he was late coming back so the company had to move off without our section. They went about a hundred and fifty yards around the corner and there is a boom and the Nips had a hundred and fifty millimetre gun in front, about forty yards in front of the tank, and hit the tank with three shells and

05:00 sprayed the section that we should have been in – they should've been alongside, we should've been alongside the tank. The shrap' from it, about five of them were wounded on that occasion. That ended that day, and that night we sat in the track there on the right hand side of

05:30 the track and we were fortunate the Nips attacked up the top. They walked into an area on the top side of the track and they sprayed a few bullets around up there and one poor bugger was wounded and was laying there all bloody night, but we couldn't do anything about him. If we had've picked him up to take him back to the RAP [regimental aid post] you would've been shot on the way back going through the defensive position. That next

06:00 day I reported to the RAP, because with the seven days that we took to go around our flanking movement, we weren't allowed to take our boots off and I never used to wear any socks, and when I took the boots off I didn't have any skin on my feet, because the water, there is that much water in there,

06:30 and when I took my boots off there was no skin on my feet so the medico said, "You have to go back and get your skin covered," so I went back to the casualty clearing centre and then from there they sent me back to the hospital until my feet recovered. When I went back to the hospital they discovered that

07:00 I had hookworm. A terrible lot of us got hookworm because we were going through these Nip gardens and they used to use their excreta to manure their vegetables, and a terrible lot of them had hookworm, and when I went back there to the hospital I had this hookworm. The hookworm is a little worm that burrows his tail into your

07:30 intestines, into your bowel, and they had to clear that out and give us a bomb, and that meant I went back and it took me about seven days for my feet to clear up and it took me another seven days to get [rid of] this hookworm infestation. The first bomb, they give you a bomb and that is supposed to knock them out, and then they then

08:00 gave me a second bomb and had to get a clearance on that. They said, "All you troops are worn out. You have to spend five days down at the rest camp," so it meant more than likely I was missing for about twenty five days.

Were you grateful for that time off or were you keen to get back to your unit?

I would have been happy to be back in my unit, because

08:30 I'll just emphasise... I used to set the booby tracks, and the booby traps – I used to tie a grenade around with a bit of wire or put it in a jam tin and tie it around a tree and you would trail a wire across about twenty yards, and then I used to do this in front of the machine guns and in front of the track to give us a warning if any Nips came through.

09:00 One morning when we were doing our first outflanking movement we went out to clear the booby trap and my mate pulled the wire before I grabbed the fuse, and I looked and here is the grenade starting to smoke. And you've got seven seconds to get out of the sixty four pieces that flew off. I moved – I couldn't run anywhere.

09:30 I'd set the booby trap on a log and the tree would be four foot diameter and I thought, "I can't run anywhere here." So I went

10:00 about ten feet and tried to get under the log. I couldn't have had my right leg quite under it and one of the pieces went right through my leg in the back, it went through there and came out there.

Through your calf muscle?

Yeah. So I went back to the casualty clearing spot. We were doing this outflanking movement at that stage, and the

10:30 fellow looked at it – by this time the company had got up and started moving – and he said, "Looks

alright." He put a bit of wire through it and said, "There is nothing in there," and put a bit of plaster over it and he said, "If you want to come back with us you can come back." We'd been two days out on a march and he said, "You can come back with us." I said, "No, I will follow the wire and

11:00 catch up with my mates." I lost that day there, and that night one of my machine gunner mates was killed on the gun, but then the next morning I followed the wire and caught up with them. That is what you used to do in the jungle, follow the wire. That is when you said in reference to "Did I miss going it?", I could've had the opportunity then to pull out but I thought, "What's the worry about having a hole through your leg", right?

11:30 It didn't worry me.

It sounds like you narrowly escaped being wounded or killed then as well.

For certain. There is sixty four bits in a hand grenade.

And then the night you had off, as well, was when someone was killed.

Yeah.

Did you think, "It could have been me", or "There was my time", or "My number was up", or....

Oh no. You just remember…I always think I'm like a cat. How many lives do you have?

12:00 I can put them down to one of the two that you have that you avoided them. I always consider one of my lives was saved after the war where we used to drive around a bit and take the family and we went down and I was driving down to Bairnsdale or the Gippsland Lake, and I was driving through the hills of Moe and we had just come over

12:30 the top of the hill and there was a mile pull up the hill, and here is two cars coming at me head on. I went down the centre of them and the fellow on that side scraped all down one side of my car but I missed a head-on by going through the centre of them, so I reckon that is another life saved. But in the

13:00 army there's different incidents where for certain you could've been killed. Every night when we were down Buin Road they would shell us every night and you would here the shell go off, and then you would hear it come and then you would calculate whether it is going to miss you or not as you're getting down in your foxhole. Oh well, that's another one, and then it'd hit the trees. But then

13:30 the Nips had that many dud shells with them too. Perhaps two out of every five that they would fire at you would be duds, so they would hit the tree and wouldn't go off. They knew where you were to some extent.

I suppose different people had different reactions to being in dangerous situations or thinking about their number coming up. Did some people react better than others, or deal with that possibility better than

14:00 **others?**

Those poor buggers that were killed in the early part, two of them handed in their paybooks before they went, and those that were killed up at Piper they had doubts whether they were going to survive that, when they went to bury Sinclair.

14:30 Some of them did that. You didn't really think that you were going to be killed, I don't think, otherwise… you didn't have time anyway basically a lot of the time. You had your reaction from when some event turned up.

15:00 Some boys used to get a bit nervous. They tried to sort them out if some were particularly nervous and they could be endangering you when you went into action, but 5% of your battalion was left in LOB, Left Out of Battle, and some of them would have been left in that situation.

15:30 When you are thrown into an infantry battalion you get a lot of different situations and you get a lot of different personalities, and no matter what happens there is that time when you go into action and bullets zipping around you and shells being thrown at you. That is when your reactions come up.

16:00 Perhaps those that survived the best were those who were able to cover that situation. Other people may have reacted slightly differently and thrown a grenade that hit a tree and bounced back at them or fired a two-inch mortar when they are lobbing them, say, fifty yards in front

16:30 and so they are going straight up in the air and forgot there was a tree up top, and they hit the tree up top and went off. These are some situations that do occur. Fortunately, I just thought of survival perhaps and what you had to do to survive when circumstances come upon you.

17:00 **What do you think is crucial for survival in that situation?**

Perhaps the survival in the normal man-to-man conflict, perhaps our country boys were better survivors than what we were. They were used to going out and shooting rabbits and doing that,

17:30 where city people, a lot of them more than likely the first gun they ever fired was when they went in the army. I have had some experience with .22s and shotguns when we were kids. I knew how to fire it and where to point it , but a lot of people wouldn't have had much idea of what to do. It was only firing on the firing range, but again more than likely a lot of people were bad

18:00 shots. When you fire a gun you always have a tendency to pull the trigger and you are more likely to pull the rifle down. It is just like a golf club, if you do that wrong thing you hit the ball and you don't aim it where it should be going, do you? I don't know, I always considered that the fighting, the jungle fighting and that,

18:30 that is the last of the man-to-man conflicts and we are gradually getting out of those now, our jungle fighting in those days and perhaps Vietnam, but in Vietnam they were driven in personnel carriers to fight or flown in helicopters,

19:00 I would think. I have read a few books on the SAS [Special Air Service] and in Vietnam they were tremendously good troops and they were individual fighters, but they are really professional troops, those, and this is what they are taught to do, but a lot of our fellows had to learn it on the way. Survival is a thing and it is normal, but

19:30 you have to think what you are doing and one of our mates always used to make sure if you are behind a tree you only had your right side hanging out, you didn't have your left side hanging out, that was your non-firing side, your right side. You used to invariably fire from your right side. There were a few left-handers, but most of them were right-handed.

20:00 That's what I think with survival – perhaps country fellows had a better survival rate than the city fellows.

Did people get superstitious or have personal rituals under those situations?

I couldn't really truthfully say that.

20:30 I suppose if you had beads or something to play with or you'd do something. You would have had your rituals in getting up and doing it, this is what you had to do. Say you'd have to pack up and go, then you'd have your ritual what to do – wrap your tent up, and you'd still have your gun there, and fold everything up – your blankets and

21:00 your clothing, but you didn't have a great deal of that, your tent cover, and then pick up your gun and march. That was your only rituals up there. You'd have rituals on planning what to do, how to put your tent up and your bed up and this and that. I suppose you'd have rituals to some extent. But

21:30 you are ritualised the moment you got into the area and surveyed where you were and dug your foxhole so you had something to put your body into if you could.

That is not much of a lucky charm, is it, the foxhole?

You would have to think about where to go and perhaps have a field of fire where you could look out and yet you still had to be under certain

22:00 cover, which would be hard to see right.

Did you find that your training served you well or did you learn a lot of things on the job?

Training did serve me how to handle things but you had to learn on the job, I would think. Different in New Guinea, Bougainville was entirely different to anything we had in Australia. You are living in areas of…

22:30 you'd have areas where you camped in and they were just open clear spaces with your tents up, but when you are in actual contact it is a different kettle of fish I'd say. That's about the only comment I can pass on that.

Was there anyone, perhaps an officer

23:00 **or someone experienced, who told you something that served you really well, some little bit of information or a trick or a technique? Did you remember any particular thing like that?**

No, not really. I suppose they were all in the same learning process as what we were. Most of the officers and sergeants and that, they were all like us. They had done their

23:30 discipline training and their training in respect of handling the guns and what to do with that, but they were still in the learning game. And they would plan their defensive positions and where to put up the wire, but they were much the same as we were. We were as close to the sergeant in the field as what the

24:00 same as anyone. Out when you got back into a camp it was a different matter, but in the field they were part and parcel of you. Their survival was equal to what yours was, and they were just as intent on trying to survive as what you were.

That bond you were talking about before, in infantry especially, did you find that was true with the sergeants and with the officers?

Yeah. With

24:30 some of the particular members, perhaps in the rifle companies, they were very close to one another and they were…in some particular officers they were tremendously well-respected and they were part and parcel of their platoon, and you hear different officers' names being mentioned and, "Terrific, he was with us," and they get to, that's in the platoon area, and

25:00 you had your platoon commander which was a lieutenant and then you have a couple of sergeants, then you have your section commanders, and we had four sergeants for the guns and we were good friends with them always. They'd tell you what to do and you'd do it, it was only common sense to do it. Our lieutenant, he was

25:30 a bit more distant from us, but you would still say hello to him. The sergeants, we were always close to them, and our corporals, that is as far as I felt.

You must have really got to know each other incredibly well to share situations of fighting and surviving.

Oh yeah, for certain.

26:00 Yes, you'd got to know each other and you'd get to know the families and their life history. That's what you'd talk about, right? You know, what's doing and what you used to do and they would try to tell you what they were doing. We more than likely had as many country fellows as what we had city fellows, and the machine gunners, and you'd have a close contact with them. They could always perhaps impose their ideas on

26:30 how survival was and a bit handier with chopping down trees and putting things together and putting up tents and what we were, but you learnt from them. I still keep in contact with some that I know. I still keep in contact with the chap who pulled the booby trap on me. He's an old mate from way back.

You haven't held that against him?

27:00 Ah no. We're great mates. Great mates with all the battalion.

How did he fare in that situation? Did he get injured?

No, he would be twenty yards away. The wire would stretch over twenty yards and he was at the end of it, and he'd see the grenade smoking and he' d run the other way. It went off. I still see him once a

27:30 month. He's on the committee. We are very good friends.

I suppose with such a bond and a connection the loss of one of the unit must have been particularly hard?

Yes. The night I had the hole put in my leg one of the mates was killed that night and he was the other gun crew to what I was, but he would have been

28:00 over the track. You'd have the guns about forty yards apart, I suppose, covering the track and he was on the other side. The other two mates were killed when I was hospitalised – Tubby Sheehan and Tommy Hurt – they were killed there. Tommy was out with the rifle company

28:30 similar to…he wasn't with a Vickers gun when he was killed, and Jimmy Sheehan, he was… they should've had the guns there but they had the guns were about a hundred and fifty yards at a Jeep head and they didn't have the Vickers guns when they were attacked, which was a bit unfortunate. That's where Jimmy was killed.

29:00 The whole of Bougainville, on reflecting on it, was such a bloody waste of time. The Australians should have been sitting back in their defensive area at Torokina, and that was the same with the 6th Division . They were up at Aitape and Wewak and they were in a similar position that they should have been in a defensive position

29:30 doing bloody nothing hardly, just watching and let the buggers starve, but they had to go out and kill and be killed in the process. But that is how we looked at it, on reflecting, as far as that last part of Bougainville was concerned.

Were the men angry about that situation, or frustrated?

It didn't affect you at the time. You

30:00 just had the job to do, what was in front of you. That's all we did, was go down the track and do what we were told to do. There's no frustration, but you realise after the war it was a frustration, and perhaps there was no need for it to happen. But anyway…

30:30 **From our perspective now it seems such a tragedy, such a waste.**

Yes, just a waste of human life. I don't know who benefited from it. No-one would have benefited by it. The Nips would have just about starved their way through where they were at Buin because they weren't getting any supplies then. All they were doing was living on the land. They were vegetarians really.

Did you know that then, or is that since,

31:00 **you found that out?**

We knew what we were doing, that we were cutting off their food supply, all the garden areas that we used to go through, and that's what they were surviving on. They must have had some particular system where they grew the vegies and fed somebody, but I don't know how they were feeding the people back in Buin where there was this big base. They must have had some system

31:30 where they were growing the vegetables and bringing them in to them.

So you had no idea that they were a depleted force and they weren't really that much of a threat any more at that time?

When you say that, they were a threat in their own self-defence, and perhaps they, after Slater's they would have been quite happy to just go down to their garden and remain there.

32:00 I don't think they were concerned with attacking Torokina. By the time they'd more than likely trail over there to do an attack on Torokina they would have been debilitated in itself, because you have to be fed to do these trips and they just didn't have the food supply to be able to do that.

32:30 That's my only comment in relation to Buin and how the Japanese might have felt.

When men were killed in those situations were you able to have a service or some sort of memorial for them?

Not really, no, because all you would do is....

33:00 See, we were moving the whole time. We didn't have time to do that and we were out with the rifle companies and the padre would be back at battalion headquarters so they were unable to do that. What we did do, we had a memorial service back at Torokina when the war was finished, but

33:30 at that stage the bodies would still be scattered throughout the jungle with name or a dog tag sitting on a post or the rifle or something. That's all they'd be doing, and then they recovered their bodies later and brought them back. The bodies at Bougainville are back at Port Moresby, at the gravesite at Port Moresby.

34:00 But we had a memorial service after the...in September some time. We went to a grave area that was up there and had a memorial service up there.

That must have been quite moving?

Ah yeah. It's always moving. It's an amazing thing, you can only

34:30 think of your mates of twenty and twenty-one-year-olds, which they were then. You recall them, and the numbers that, as I said, went to school with a few of them and lived all around the area, apart from those that I had personal contact with when I was with the machine gunners.

35:00 But those people, I'd lived with them for three and a half or four years, so you know them and you know their families and what they are doing. Only one of them was married, Tommy Hope – he was the only one that was married. Tubby and Shadbolt were still single. And funnily enough…

35:30 Shadbolt – I knew his family, they come from Ascot Vale – and didn't hear anything from them. I rang up a couple of people – we had a grave-side photo album of his grave up at Boama at the grave and one of our fellows was up there when they had that tour in fifty years or something after the war, and I had a photo of him and then

36:00 at the last reunion a fellow rang up and said his name was Shadbolt and he was a nephew, and out of the blue he come along to the reunion and we gave him a photo of his uncle's grave, his stone. As far as Tubby Sheehan was [concerned], he didn't have a father at the time but I think he

36:30 had aunties living up just behind Thornbury Railway Station, but I have lost contact with him. Tommy Hope, I haven't had any contact with his wife, either. I don't know what happened to them. It's just a matter of whether you chased them up or find them out. At some stage when we were putting the book together we did chase up all around Australia and try and get photos of all our

37:00 decoration winners, and found out then a couple of them had passed on. This is some of the work you do when you are on a committee and it brings back memories to you of your mates.

Have you thought of going to the graves?

Yeah. I would be quite happy to go up there. I would be quite interested to go up to New Guinea

37:30 to see the place. A chap up at Surfers Paradise, he had the trip, and they went up there and they went by boat to Moresby and they flew them around the place, and they said if anyone wanted to go and look at their old battlefields they could. So they flew them by plane up the Markham Valley, up to Roma Valley, over Shaggy Ridge and followed

38:00 the road down to Bogadjim and you went and landed at where we made the… we captured in April ’45 and we landed there, and they didn’t know of us. They had put a memorial up there for the coast watchers and that, a big memorial stone,

38:30 but they didn’t know who landed or who made the first landing there in ’44, on April 25 ’44, they didn’t know who it was, but he enjoyed it, had a tremendous trip up. He went up with the, I think the VC winner was with them, that chappie

39:00 that’s still alive up at the western district, and they went up with a chap named Lindsay Bair. He was with the 2/14th , he got a DCM in that area and he said it was tremendously interesting to go up on this trip with those people. I would be quite happy to go up and do a trip, but how would you do it?

39:30 He was fortunate. He won the toss and he got the free ticket up there.

Tape 4

00:32 **I wanted to ask about, for example, the booby trap incident which put a piece of shrapnel in your leg, that was an accident, but I imagine accidents like that killed and maimed a number of people.**

Oh yeah. We had a field fire day before we left Australia and they were firing mortars and they had what we call a drop short and it landed amongst a group, and one fellow was killed

01:00 and four were wounded there.

What is army procedure when that happens?

They have an inquiry for it. They wouldn’t have a court-martial but they would have an inquiry.

Well no, not for an accident, I guess, but do they, for example, if you were witness to that, would you be called forward to give evidence?

Yes, you would.

And at some stage does somebody get reprimanded when it is an unfortunate accident?

Yes, someone would be. Someone would lose

01:30 his stripes. More than likely the sergeant responsible would lose his stripes. What that could simply be, it could have been accidental in the case that the missile, something happened to it when it went off, but it could have been they had the wrong charge underneath it, and instead of having a charge it had sent it another hundred and fifty yards, had the wrong charge in it so it never went as far, and that is how it dropped amongst these field firing.

02:00 They tried to instil in you what was going on and they would have mortars going off and then they would fire it, and they’d have Vickers guns firing too, but they would try and make sure they were well in front of you.

In civilian terms, if you accidentally kill someone it is manslaughter. In army terms was there a differentiation? Was there a precedent that was set regarding that?

No. It is just accidentally killed.

You were talking earlier about the

02:30 **excruciating pain and frustration of seeing men die in pursuit of reclaiming a dead body, or Sinclair’s body. What about incidences of friends getting knocked out by friendly fire, or even American friendly fire?**

We had a casualty at this place called Orgarana and the night before there was Nips in this little village,

03:00 and it was up a hill and all scrub and jungle there, and one of our mates, he was a corporal and they decided that A Company was going to attack this position and they started off to go up it, and one fellow threw a hand grenade and it rolled back and killed one of those fellows. That was first up, right? That’s what happened.

03:30 More than likely the bugger who threw it, he wasn’t a good cricketer, he more than likely shouldn’t have thrown the hand grenade, but he did that and when they reached the top of the hill there was two platoons coming up from both sides, and there was supposed to be Nips up in the village. And a chappie coming from one side seen a movement and fired, and he hit our mate who is President of the Battalion

04:00 Association and put a burst in his hip with the Owen gun. That was in the one morning. This poor bugger, he went up there and he got wounded. There was two of them wounded down below, and then there was one was killed down below and one was wounded down below, and they reached up top, and one of his own mates had a shot at him and put a bit of a burst of Owen gun in his hip.

You were saying earlier that, for example, the fellow who accidentally

04:30 **set off your grenade incident, evidently no harm, no hard feelings.**

No. Great mates. Most accidental.

Were there incidences where someone would be really annoyed at someone else for accidentally doing something and they might have a bit of a stoush amongst themselves without it going to command?

They wouldn't have a stoush. There would be very harsh words spoken.

Can you recall incidences of that

05:00 **in mess halls and similar?**

Don't know whether…The night that we were down Buin Road and the big a hundred and fifty hit the tank in front and we pulled back about a hundred yards, and we were on the right- hand side of the track

05:30 in case Nips came up the track – they would often wander up there – and on the left-hand side of the track a couple of our fellows were out on picket duty and they let a Nip wander through and shoot a fellow, put a burst into a fellow. I always recall this poor bugger. As I said, he was up there during the night

06:00 making scream and that because he was suffering, but to me whether that fella that was on picket duty should not have let him through. He should have fired at the Nip but then some of them might want to fire, right?

Well I guess that is the understated arbitrary nature of war.

Yeah, it is that.

I would like to talk specifically

06:30 **about your involvement with the Vickers gun and what it was like learning to use the Vickers gun, and also just what it is like for a soldier to become involved or attached to a piece of ordinance. Did you have a natural or a native confidence with firing weapons before you entered the army?**

I had fired a .22 and a shotgun. We used to go away every Christmas [with] my father, we used to go and shoot a few rabbits and that. We

07:00 used to go to Casterton every year and on occasions there I used to fire a .22. I had fired a shotgun but when you are a kid about fourteen or fifteen years old and you're holding a big a shotgun up and fire it and it hits you back in the shoulder, you're not over-confident with it. But a lot of our mates who were in the army with us were living in the country and they had to get a few rabbits to survive, and

07:30 they would go out shooting and they were good shots with rabbits.

The weapon in training, that would have been a Leonfield?

Yes, 303.

Did you have to work with broomsticks before they gave you guns or did they….?

No, we always had a gun.

So the kickback on a Leonfield, did that give you much of a shot?

Yeah. You knew when you'd fired it. That will bruise if you have it a bit loose.

What about hearing?

08:00 I consider I am deaf in my right ear due to my hearing….

Because of ….

The Vickers gun, not firing the rifle but firing the Vickers gun, because we were on the right hand side of the gun feeding the…I was number two on the gun.

I was going to ask you, could you give us a word picture as if nobody has ever seen or heard of a Vickers gun? Could you go through it, piece by piece, and how you put it together and

08:30 **what each man's role on it was?**

A Vickers gun. You have the gun and it sits on a tripod but as well as the gun, which is a water cooled barrel, it had a rifle barrel inside and then it had a metal casing on the outside which was filled with water, and that would keep the gun cool, because it is a rapid firing gun.

09:00 That was what the water was for. You used to have a rubber tubing that used to run into a five-gallon drum of water whenever you were firing it and that would give it a bit of cold water, but the barrel of the gun sat on a gun holder type of thing and it was like a…how can I describe it?

09:30 You had this tripod and on top of this tripod was a gun holder that used to ease down into the tripod, the centre piece of the three-legged tripod, and there would be about two and a half inches with this neck, the male that used to go into the female, you would tighten it up there, and there was this arm that

10:00 came back and the gun was attached to that with two bolts that slipped in and you had to attach it to this gun holder. I don't know how you can picture it with the best description of it.

How many pieces did it break down into for movement?

10:30 **Firstly there is the five-gallon water, there is the tripod and then there is the gun holder that the gun used to rest on and the gun itself, so there is three pieces.**

And so would three men be responsible for that one gun?

At times, yes. Sometimes there would only be two men but there could be three men.

11:00 The number one carried the gun, the number two carried the tripod and number three would carry the tripod gun holder.

And the ammunition?

There was a four and five for the water and ammunition. You would have two boxes of ammunition.

It is quite a team.

It was a compact team.

Did you start as a team in training and then move into the service together, or did they continually split you up?

No, we generally kept the same team. We went to

11:30 New Guinea as one team. When we came back from New Guinea we had some reinforcements and fellows that had come from a machine gun battalion and they reinforced us. They came from Sydney and they came and one of them become number one on the gun. I was always number two on the gun, and they were spread

12:00 amongst us.

You said that your battalion were very northern suburbs centred.

Yes.

What was that like having reinforcements come into what would be a pretty tight group?

What actually happened, evidently the army decided even with the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces] battalions [that] were raised, say, from Victoria or from Queensland and that, so

12:30 from about '44 onwards all the reinforcements were generally from a different state. They tried to break up the entity of coming from the one suburb perhaps and we generally had from then on Queenslanders, New South Wales and a few South Australians come and join us. But they amalgamated alright within the little group that we were. We were only thirty men.

13:00 **On the light side, state rivalry is still a fun issue.**

Always.

In the '40s I would imagine it would have been more interesting, especially with the Queenslanders.

Yes, the old banana benders they were there. The banana benders were a terrible lot of country boys, and chaps from sugar cane areas, and they were very good troops. When we were at

13:30 Casino, and I mentioned before that we were given some of the 2/25th Battalion that had been over in Syria and 7th Div, and we were given them to try and give us some battle experience. From Casino I went up and I spent about three weeks with the 2/25th Battalion and being a Bren gun carrier – I was in the

14:00 Bren carriers there – and I was put with the Bren gun carrier platoon of the 2/25th Battalion, and they

were all cane cutters and it was an education for me to go up, a little city dweller from Melbourne, a young skinny bugger, and to go up in this mixed population of cane cutters and Italian mixtures and boys from up in Queensland. It was an experience.

14:30 **There would have to be been some island mix in the Queenslanders at that time, from the northern areas of Queensland.**

Oh yes, there was a few of them a bit dark, a few aborigine types amongst them.

There definitely would have been, whether they owned that heritage or not, so I imagine it would have been a massive cultural difference.

For me to go up to 2/25th Battalion?

What did they call you?

I don't think they called me anything. They didn't call us Chocos [former militia members] or anything.

15:00 **Oh no, they didn't have some sort of vernacular rivalry between north and south?**

Yes, they reckon you are second class citizens to some extent because you played Australian Rules and they played rugby. But for three weeks we were up there and they were a hard knit team and they had been over in Syria as Bren gun carriers, and if anything they were older than what we were, they were more than likely five or six or eight

15:30 years older. And those poor buggers, they went up to, I often wondered how they survived when they went up in the jungle because they had been shooting, driving Bren gun carriers around. They were the troops that met after the 39th and 14th and the 2/14th had come back and gone to Isurava, they were the crew that took the

16:00 Nips back over the top even though the Nips were pulling back, but they still had to do Buna and Gona and all that. Gona was one of the hardest parts of the war.

Just on the Queensland situation again, while you were in training it must have been around about the time of the so-called Brisbane Line.

Yeah, we were in the lot that they called, the so-called Brisbane Line.

So were you sent out to defend

16:30 **the so-called Brisbane Line?**

We were stationed there and doing our training.

I am quite fascinated in what the locals thought of that. They must have been aware that there was a supposed scorched earth policy and….

There was a bit of waffle but we didn't have much contact with the locals. I didn't myself. A few of them did, but as I said, we are twelve hundred people and we're thrown into Caboolture and there is more than likely only a thousand people there. And when we went to Keroy and Tewantin

17:00 we would've exceeded the local population. That is all you did.

I have heard people tell me that there was an actual line, that somebody painted a line.

They did, you have seen it in the paper. We were scattered from Casino, and there was troops, they would come back all in the situation of moving up to New Guinea and they were scattered all round the place.

17:30 And our brigade was down there the same time as the 22nd and 25th Brigade were up and around Caboolture and up all there and doing their training behind Bribie Island there. There would be a definite area there. I have heard it discussed, but to me, ok we said we were in the Brisbane Line, but

18:00 it would be the last gasp for the Nips to come down there, I think.

With these chaps who had returned from the Middle East, they would probably be 6th Div guys.

7th Div.

Did you have occasion to hear about their experiences in the desert?

Just a little bit. The crew that we did [hear about], they went up through Lebanon, they weren't in the

18:30 desert warfare and they went up to Lebanon and fought the French, they did that. It wasn't any great contact, discussion, about what they did.

Did you feel at that stage that you had missed out on anything? Did you have any burning ambition to travel overseas apart from the normal….?

No, not at all.

So what was it that got you into the army, apart from….?

Being called up.

19:00 I applied for the air force twice and I have a bad left eye, and I applied for aircrew. I didn't apply to do normal duty but I applied to be an aircrew, applied in Melbourne, passed the IQ [intelligence quotient] test but just had that bad left eye and I failed every time for aircrew.

19:30 They came up and looked at us again at Casino so I applied for it again there and did a trip down to Sydney to relieve the boredom and got knocked back again and come back again. And from there, I had a younger brother and he went from Casino down to Sydney, went into aircrew. He did pilot, he went through up New South Wales did one training,

20:00 and then he went and did training in America and arrived in England. And he was a fighter pilot and they had too many fighter pilots so he never got a job.

He was probably very lucky.

Yeah, true.

You talked about the boredom. That is a major part of being in the Australian Army in the Second World War, I think.

Yeah, it certainly was.

What did you do to break it?

You couldn't do much. You

20:30 used to annoy one another and have shots at one another. We had a concert party up there and we would swim, we would box, we would play football, we would do anything to do something.

I imagine the idle hands are the devil's work, et cetera, and Australians have a fantastic sense of the absurd. Were there any high jinks that you witnessed or were a part of?

21:00 In the early part of it we reached Cooroy before we had any grog in the army and I suppose grog is the thing that affects you, sends you off. I used to…I was almost like a

21:30 professional WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken] stealer and I robbed a few hotels of their fowls. You had to get four fowls because our rations were shocking, and to get a couple of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and have them cooked. But when you had to get two WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s you had to get two for the cooks otherwise they wouldn't cook them. I

22:00 knocked off the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK house at Trawool, a little hotel at Trawool, and then a place called Tewantin. Tewantin is just on the beach just above Noosa. And then at Mirraburra I knocked off WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yards. I used to wander down.

Did you have a reputation for that?

Yeah. I had a reputation for doing that. I will never forget, we went and had a drink at the

22:30 Tewantin Hotel and I'd seen they had a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yard. You had to be prepared, so we had this little hessian bag. So I went down the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yard and got my WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, you used to grab them and pull their heads and then break their necks. And we went out the front with this little hessian bag with the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in it and we were waiting for a truck to pick us up and

23:00 one WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK got out of the bag and he had a broken neck and run across the road with his head hanging on one side. And we [went] after him, we put him in the bag and took him back to the cook house.

Did you ever get caught?

No, no. We were chased a couple of times but never got caught.

Chased?

Not with the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

What were you caught with then, if not with the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s?

We

23:30 helped ourselves to the kitchen, a tin of biscuits up at Trawool, and the old fellow chased us out of the pub and told us we were barred from the hotel after we knocked off a tin of biscuits from them, from the cook house.

It sounds

24:00 **like you had a fairly healthy buoyancy amongst….**

You had to do something.

What about the obvious? Perhaps drink is the obvious. What about the second obvious, girls. Were you able to get to areas like Charters Towers and so on?

No, never got there. I can only say I didn't have any contact with women at all from when I went into the army.

24:30 You used to see a few. We would have our sports day and twenty AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] or something arrive, and twenty nurses. We always finished in the officers' mess but we were always quite distant from them. I went to New Guinea – I would have more than likely seen two women there. Did the whole lot and then come back and the same, didn't hardly see them at all.

25:00 **What was it like then for a young man to be so separated from the opposite sex?**

Don't know. Having sexual experiences is about fourteen now, but it wasn't in our days.

Not even sexual experience, not as extreme as that, but just being separated from women at all.

More than likely it did have some effect. It more than likely had the effect if you were a married man

25:30 or if you were going with a girlfriend down here, but I wasn't experienced.

And didn't sort of seek to find a girlfriend to keep you….?

No. A lot of the boys used to go out dancing but, as I said, a lot of the boys had a few contacts with them. It is an amazing thing – I was telling you about when the fellow blew his hand off with the

26:00 TNT, he said to us, "Listen, see if you can get that ring, I have got a ring on that finger." That was his interest. The girlfriend had given him a ring at Casino and he had this memory ring and that is what he thought of after he….

That was on the hand that….?

On the hand that got blown, yeah.

Did they find it?

No, couldn't find it. Don't know where that would be.

26:30 **That is a bit rough. Just before we leave Australia I wanted to also ask about the obvious presence of the Americans in and around Queensland and Brisbane.**

I only went into Brisbane once the whole time I was at Caboolture. A few of them used to go into Brisbane and the Yanks, what they had, a PX [Post Exchange store] or something, that is

27:00 what they called it, I don't know what street it was in Brisbane that they had it. There was a fellow that was in the independent company and he was married to a Miss Victoria and this same fellow, real hard man he was, really hard man, he was a captain at this stage and he had lost his…

27:30 his wife was going out with Yanks down here, and he came down and they took on the Yanks and I think someone was shot when he was down there.

In the Battle of Brisbane?

In Brisbane there.

There was that Battle of Brisbane.

Battle of Brisbane, yeah, and they were independent company boys, they used to call themselves commandos. This fellow

28:00 became a very good soldier, too. He went back and had the independent companies behind Mubo and Salamaua which was tough fighting, and then he finished up a brigadier, and about 1960 he went over and was teaching the Yanks how to fight jungle fighting.

28:30 Terrific good soldier, but a bad man.

What about your attitude towards the Yanks? Obviously a lot of people are very grateful that they were so involved in the South Pacific. It was at a fairly high price.

They did it. The Yanks used to fight the war a bit different to what we did. They used to, honestly I do think that when they went into anywhere they were more prepared than what we were.

More fire power?

29:00 In firepower. All we had was four bloody guns and then we had some tanks in Bougainville but apart from that we didn't have anything like that. Whenever they were fighting they would have a few and they might drop a few bombs there. When they dropped bombs there they would be likely to get you as well as the enemy, when they are trying to drop them close.

That certainly happened at Torokina.

Yes.

29:30 At Torokina we had (UNCLEAR) from New Zealand and they were giving us defence, they were dropping bombs in front of us. But we must have had about eight guns, twenty-five-pounders, but they threw a couple of thousand shells at one stage down there so we had a bit of defensive force there, but to me the Yanks had that far superior

30:00 fire power wherever they went into. They more than likely had a hell of a team of aircraft and they would've had a ton of armoured protection with them and they did a bit better than we did to get their bases. They had those little carbines where we had 303's.

They also had, for very obvious reasons, they had a lot of assistance from Australian taxpayers'

30:30 **money to help them fight.**

I didn't know anything about that.

Better rations, for example

They had better rations than us. When we were at Tsili Tsili and we were living on a tin of baked beans for six of us the Yanks were living on ice cream back there. And we are looking after them and they were back at Tsili Tsili and they were on full rations and what food there was available, fresh food and that, because we didn't have fresh food in

31:00 those circumstances.

I am curious about Tsili Tsili because you were particularly protecting their aircraft, were you not?

Yes.

Making it possible for them to do their….

Making them, while they had their team putting in the airstrip.

I am curious about the relationship between the two services. Obviously you have a dual purpose, or a single purpose. Did you have occasion to deal with any of the Americans at any stage?

No, not at all.

31:30 **For no games of sport or…?**

No, didn't have any contact with them at all.

What about their aircraft then? Did you not, were you not in the vicinity?

No, they would have…they may have dropped a few bombs when we went from Shaggy Ridge to Bogadjim. But the problem whenever

32:00 we were, they were trying to drop little bombs on a small locality and it was basically all infanteers up there.

What made a city boy like you such a good soldier?

More than likely disciplined upbringing.

32:30 Always think. Survival thinking, a pattern of survival.

Sort of smarts, basically being able to…?

I don't know whether it was smartness but I was always conscious of what to do, and you don't rush in unless you have to rush. You perhaps take things a little bit quieter and plan out the

33:00 possibility.

It is pretty amazing that the Australian Army managed to take so many completely untrained men and put them through training and send them up to some excruciatingly harsh conditions, and they did so well. How do you feel about your training in retrospect? I am sure it was tough, but did you feel that they did adequately equip you for what you were going to enter into?

They must have disciplined us and perhaps

33:30 our equipment could have been better but we were reasonably fit. On one occasion with packs on we did six to eight mile in twenty four hours and another day we did – this was a try-out, and the other group did a hundred and five mile in forty eight hours, so we were reasonably fit and that but

34:00 it is very difficult to say. With some you would go and had a job to do and this is what you did. If you considered what was your job you did even though afterwards we think that Bougainville was such a waste of war effort and waste of lives, but when you're there and doing it you didn't quite consider that.

34:30 You just went out and did it.

Arriving in New Guinea – I take it this is probably your first trip overseas?

Yeah.

Did you have an image in your head of what you were going to find? Did you have some idea of what the jungle was?

No idea.

So what was it like coming into Port Moresby then?

Port Moresby is a

35:00 rough old looking town. Have you been there?

No, but I have read a lot.

We were stuck there and we were about ten mile out of the town in a rough old open place, no trees or jungle around there, it is just open country and hills rolling and that is where we were put in. A place called Goon Valley is where

35:30 we were and it is still there. I think it may be a suburb. If it was it was an overflow because Ward's strip was right at the end of where we were. We were just stuck there, very open country, hard country, hot weather. You perspire a lot and that is all it was and we just dug ourselves in there and perhaps

36:00 did our normal training. We didn't do any jungle training up to that stage. They started to do a bit about the second month, but we didn't do a great deal of jungle training. Perhaps that first part of the jungle would've been a hard learning course for us.

Quite probably, and I am just trying to sort out the dates here when you landed in Port Moresby. I think you said earlier that

36:30 **Kokoda and Buna and Gona had all been fought.**

Yeah, they'd been fought. I've got it somewhere there It could have been about March of '44, I would say.

You said before it was March '43. I was just thinking, I looked at some of the photographs in your battalion history, and Goon Valley apart from anything looks like a very

37:00 **benign, lovely bit of tropical area that you could go on a holiday if there wasn't a war going on.**

Yeah. You wouldn't have a holiday there.

What did you make of the staggering tall mountain peaks in New Guinea?

This is the thing that people don't appreciate was how tall those mountains were.

37:30 When you're here, they are only little hills here. Those peaks up there I think up around Shaggy Ridge, they could have been five thousand to nine thousand foot high, some of them, and they are huge. At one stage we were up one and the Nips did a strafing attack up the valley, and we looked and the pilot was underneath where we were in this situation.

38:00 I'll never forget that. They flew up the valley strafing anything and firing guns, and we were almost looking across at him and he was only the same height as what we were. They were huge, those mountains up there.

I guess it didn't take too long to realise that if you were going to go up there you had to walk every step.

Yeah, and carry a Vickers gun at the same stage.

Did you come up with any sort of plans

38:30 **at the time, thinking that now that you can see the picture in front of you, here's what I'm going to need to do to survive?**

You wanted to survive.

I guess what I'm asking you is at that point you realise the army will enable you to survive to a point. After that it is up to you.

I don't know whether...

39:00 Yeah, perhaps you are always conscious of that, but I am certain that survival is the thought that you do have continuously, and you have to improvise and do something so that you do survive.

And at that point is it more about survival or is it about winning a war? Do they merge, or

39:30 **are they separate ideas?**

It is more or less survival. If that led to winning the war it is the other matter.

Tape 5

00:16 You're drinking a lot of fluid and you would have the salt coming out on your clothing and you would wash them off and then put them straight back on. You would put your wet clothes straight back on.

00:31 My problem was, I got that wearing my socks and so much contact with the water when you didn't take your shoes off you walk in water and it rained for seven days in Bougainville and you're wet through. My feet were getting a bit sore and then when I took my boots off there was no skin on them at all. Bloody bare feet.

I have heard it is not uncommon for you to lose your socks

01:00 **for one reason or another – they wear out or they turn to holes or they turn to mud or something. Were there any army stipulations, ie. like taking Atebrin? [anti-malaria medication] You had to take your Atebrin.**

We took our Atebrin.

So what about things like...was it against army regulations to not wear socks, for example?

No, they weren't interested. They didn't perhaps pay that much attention to you. Our battalion was a

01:30 great Atebrin eater and I doubt whether we would have had thirty malaria cases when we were going through this Dumpu area, and that would be one of the worst malaria areas in New Guinea. It was malaria and scrub typhus because you would get scrub typhus from a flea or a tick off the rats

02:00 that used to live in the kunai [grass], and there was about half a dozen of our fellows got scrub typhus, which is a shocking disease.

Did they survive?

We lost a couple and most of them survived.

What provisions were there for you in New Guinea in regards to replacing lost or rotted uniform?

02:30 You would get an issue every...I don't know how often. You would get an issue of shirts and socks. If your socks were worn out you supposedly could get a replacement for them.

What were the procedures you had to go through to get those?

By the Q Store. [Quartermasters Store] Every company had a Q Store.

Even when you were out on not so much patrol, but...?

Yes, there is a Q Store to look after the food, too.

03:00 They had...but they wouldn't when we were in action, they wouldn't have socks or clothing and that. You would put it on and wash it and put it back on because it was only a bloody nuisance carrying extra stuff around with you. You used to have a bag, a duffel bag type of thing, where you would put your tunic and that in before you went into action, and you would put your extra clothing and that in that and that'd be

03:30 stored away.

What about other curious things? Again I looked in your unit battalion and there were photographs of little booklets that the army produced when you got to New Guinea – how to deal with the natives, and how to find bush food or medicine.

No, didn't take much notice of that.

Were they the sort of thing that would be issued to every soldier though or would just your corporal receive one and issue them out?

I didn't truthfully see them a great deal.

04:00 I couldn't in my memory say that I have seen something like that.

And the other thing I'm always fascinated about is, for example, Australian Second World War strategy was that you would send in troops and there would be those in reserve and you would shift them around so people would get a break. I have often wondered what it would be like to be relieved from the front line and end up in a reserve, having a rest or washing your clothes or getting

04:30 **something to eat when you know that it is still raging not far from where you are. Do you switch off mentally?**

We did that in…You would switch off mentally if you are out of it, but in Bougainville we had been in action from 1st of April until 1st of July, reached the Mivo River and we were put in reserve then,

05:00 and we were drawn back I suppose about ten mile, but you would get in a defensive area and the Nips were starting to annoy you 'round there, so you would send out your patrols every day. We did a huge number of patrols – I think in Bougainville we would have done about five hundred patrols. Your patrol would vary from, say three people, five people,

05:30 up to seven or ten people but you had to do this continuous patrolling around your defensive area to keep them away.

You changed towards guerilla tactics?

Yes. The Nips were starting to come up to the wire there even though we were back a little bit.

What did you know about the Japanese before you left Australia?

Not a great deal.

06:00 **What about rumours or propaganda?**

We used to read about them, and they were supposed to be the best troops in the world. They had proven that until they met the Australians. They didn't frighten us at all. If anything they'd have to, if they were attacking you they'd have to

06:30 shout and cheer and work up something to attack you.

I have heard in Bougainville they would shout all sorts of things in the middle of a battle.

They do their banzai charge and the officer would be cheering and that to encourage his troops to do it, but from what I'd seen of them they were more scared of us than what we were of them.

Did you believe that they were

07:00 **intending to invade Australia?**

I think they perhaps would have but they would have really been stretching themselves out. I think with the Brisbane Line, to reach Australia and get down to there – heavens above, they were going to leave themselves open, weren't they?

Well certainly, and I have talked to people who are much less circumspect than you, in that they believed that the Japanese definitely wanted to invade. But I have often wondered what people thought the Japanese would do if they actually managed to land here?

07:30 They would really stretch themselves out and they had so many people stretched out all over, and at Rabaul even, they had about 40,000 people up there. They had a lot of troops up there but they were endeavouring to capture Port Moresby and that would have isolated New Guinea from Australia, but I don't know whether it would have been any benefit or not.

No, they tried twice and didn't succeed.

08:00 **Were they then a conglomerate to you? Were they just the enemy? Did you ever see the Japanese as individual men like your own men?**

No, they were just a conglomerate, just another face, just another number.

And did you ever, particularly in Bougainville, did you ever encounter any Japanese close enough to hear them talk or to have any involvement with them?

No, I didn't.

Did you have…were you emotionally involved?

08:30 **Did you hate them or were they just the enemy and that you had a job to do?**

I always considered the…Now I consider the Japanese look at Australians as a second rate citizen. I don't know whether…it may be the way they look at you, their appearance. A lot of the eastern people, to me, always look at Australians as easy-going types. Well,

09:00 we will take advantage of them, but up there perhaps they didn't consider us second rate citizens and if anything, I don't know whether they had eyesight trouble or what, but they were bad shots and they would fire above your head and that was the Japanese.

What about…there's been many accounts of souveniring from dead Japanese and so on.

09:30 **Was there anything like that in your patrol, your platoon?**

Yeah, I've got a mate he has got some medals, Japanese medals, and it was a matter of you were always on the move when you struck them, truthfully, and if you ambushed them and they were killed you made a very quick examination of what was in their gear and away you went.

10:00 Some of my mates have got…I just heard recently, one had a parchment diary that.... He has been dead now about twenty years, they come upon his, and he had this parchment diary that he recovered from a Japanese body up in the Bogadjim area. It has been sent up to Canberra somewhere. They'd do that, and

10:30 one of our fellows used to knock the gold out of their teeth. He went through an area just past Dumpu and the Nips had made an attack down there and there were all these skeletons on the side of the track and

11:00 this fellow worked in a…he was a grave digger and he could see gold and he used to knock the teeth out and take the gold out of their skulls. That was the most callous side of it and unfortunately he was a chap who had a Havelock tin of gold from teeth, he was one of the early ones killed.

11:30 Amazing situation, I struck his brother and he heard that he'd had this gold and when he used to get drunk down at the RSL he said, "Where is the gold? Where is Frankie's gold? But that is most callous thing I have ever heard of.

Do you know what happened to Frankie's gold?

Don't know. He was in a rifle company, so where it went I

12:00 don't know.

What was the army's view on looting Japanese corpses?

They used to look at…there maybe something to recover that'd be handed back and they'd get information from it.

So maps and papers and things?

Yeah, maps, and they did do that, and diaries and that. Some of the Nips were great hoarders and they used to carry these things around with them. They got some very valuable information from different areas, of

12:30 battle set-ups, and I do know that this has been recovered from bodies, but as a rule you didn't have much time to do it.

I know I am being a bit morbid so do stop me if I am going too far, but I am curious to know, in a battle situation out on patrol is a dead Japanese body different to a dead Australian body?

13:00 For certain. You would give it more respect and endeavour to acknowledge the fact that his body is there, and let somebody know that had a trenching tool so they could bury the body and put some

13:30 designation of who it was with his dog tags, whatever it was, hang them around, so it would be recoverable and be distinguished to who it was.

I believe that the reason there were two dog tags was you would leave one with the body and return one. What was the average soldier's position upon discovering a dead Australian? Was there a procedure you followed to record their position and their name and so on?

Yes, you would take it back and

14:00 let them know at company headquarters where it was and they would look after that.

Are you a religious man at all?

No, but I've got respect for religion.

So what was your faith under those circumstances or your belief, or what rituals did you follow with regard to

14:30 **the death of an ally?**

I just accept the fact that someone has been killed and I have my serious thoughts about the hereafter and it is an event that has happened.

15:00 I think, perhaps think of their parents or their families. What has been has gone. They are irrecoverable, their futures and their souls, aren't they? That's what I think.

Did it start to affect your ability as a soldier as you advanced further

15:30 **into the theatre of war?**

No, not as a soldier. You just accept it. Perhaps it affected you that you thought that you have to be more careful, and if you are out on patrol be careful when you come to bends in roads or a lift in the track somewhere.

16:00 You're always careful if you come to a straight section of a track as to what was down the end of it.

Luck and superstition – did that play any part for you?

You had to be lucky. Not superstition, no.

No rabbit's foots or four leaf clovers?

No. I think you had to be lucky to some extent every time they fire a mortar shell or

16:30 an artillery shell at you. What do you do, whether it hits the trees and showers all over you or it could be a dud and land alongside of you.

You mentioned the duds before, how the Japanese ordinance had a lot of duds. I can only imagine if something's coming and you are expecting the worst and then there is nothing that could also play some havoc with your nerves.

17:00 It's just a bloody relief. It's one that didn't go off.

And one that doesn't go off, is there a chance it will go off at any minute after that?

No, I don't think so. More than likely the problem is that their ammunition had been down there for that long, I think that could have been old ammunition in the tropical conditions could have upset the fuses. I think that may have been the reason, but I don't know. I am not an artillery man.

17:30 **I believe it. Back in New Guinea again, the native police boys and also the native men who did a lot of carrying – what was your appreciation of the locals in New Guinea and did you have an interaction with any of them?**

I didn't have a great deal of contact with them. The PIB [Pacific Island Battalion] fellows were tremendous. They would be more than likely the best jungle fighters in the world,

18:00 the PIB, but there was a few police boys rolling around but not too many in the carriers, but we perhaps didn't use carriers a great deal. There was a few of them, they were more than likely being used by other people and there weren't so many to go around. When we were going down Bogadjim Road there were a few carriers there but we had to do all our own carrying,

18:30 and if you weren't forward company then each day you'd have to go back and bring the food and rations up from…go back ten or twelve mile and bring it up. We used to carry twice as much as what the carriers used to carry or far more, not twice as much but a bit more than what they used to carry. And they used to have these coffee stalls were all staggered down the road.

Was that the Red Shield?

19:00 The Red Shield, yeah, and they had these staggered there and you would have a drink of coffee on the way.

I still find that incredulous, that there was coffee in the middle of the war.

Yes, and it was a spot to have a smoko and a drink of coffee.

They must have been a welcome sight if you've been trudging.

Anything was. The chap who used to do it with us, he was

19:30 brigade, attached to brigade, and he was a type of padre from the Salvation Army, and his son played football for Carlton, actually. He came from down Bairnsdale way. He got some decoration while he was there but he earned it. Coffee and condensed milk it was.

20:00 I don't know whether…I can imagine drinking it but that is what it was.

When you are trudging up a pathway somewhere around ninety thousand feet vertical, and the Red Shield does appear – and I am not sure how they distributed their resources or their men

– was there again some army procedure as to who was allowed to have a coffee at which

20:30 **stage? Did it go from captain down to private?**

Ah no, you just line up.

Would they move off after you had moved off and go somewhere else or would they just…?

No, they were stationary. They were at that particular spot. They'd move after – as we progressed upwards they'd move behind us. They could be five mile behind but there'd be

21:00 a progression upwards and they'd pick a spot where they'd have to be able to get water and that's where they'd set up their tent. They were in Kokoda still, they had their tracks.

Gee, they made a difference to the men of Kokoda by the sounds of it. Interested to talk a bit more about your padre, Geoff Sambell.

Geoff Sambell. Geoff Sambell, he finished up Archbishop of Perth. He would've been

21:30 Archbishop of Melbourne if he had've married but he was a bachelor all his life and he… Hollingsworth, he broke Hollingsworth in the brotherhood of St Laurence. At the Brotherhood of St Laurence they've got homes down at…on the way to Seaford, just behind Seaford there. Some Downs or something. Geoff was a great doer and

22:00 he finished up over at Perth. He worked his way up through there and he was Bishop Sambell and he got the Brotherhood of St Laurence really up and going down at Fitzroy and he got that group going, that is where Hollingsworth got his start, through the Brotherhood of St Laurence down here. And he had these homes

22:30 for older people down in Carrum Downs. He was a great worker, doer, and he went over, finished over at Perth as Archbishop of Perth.

So chaplains, they would have the rank of captain, would they?

Captain, yes. We had another, the Roman Catholic

23:00 chaplain. He was a terrific fellow. Sambell was attached to us and a chap named Father English was attached to, I think it was the 58th or 59th and he finished up he had a church down at Mordialloc, and as you come underneath

23:30 the bridge, there is a church up there. The 58th, 59th put in the stained glass windows and there is some terrific stained glass windows down there from the 58th 59th showing the action up at Salamaua.

I will have to check that out. I am curious to know what place the chaplains or the padres had in terms of the men. I guess a lot of fellows there would have been your garden variety C of E's [Church of England], or some RC's [Roman Catholics].

Yeah, they were a mixed lot.

24:00 **But under such extreme circumstances and without the kind of modern use of, say, counselling, a padre would have played a pretty particular role for a lot of men. Was he a friend first and foremost?**

Ah yeah, great mate.

And was he one of the unit inasmuch as everybody else was one of the unit?

Yeah, for certain.

And were they ever expected to take up arms?

I would think it very unlikely. Wouldn't carry a gun.

24:30 **No, I would assume not, although I guess under extreme circumstances that that might occur. So, when the men are sitting around having a laugh if there is a chance of having a smoke or having a sleep or something to eat, there'd be a bit of general army chatter, I suppose, chit chat, a bit of….**

Bad humour.

a bit of banter and humour and so on. Would the chaplain be included in that?

Yes, he

25:00 would be there. Geoff would join you very often and he was a group man, but they more than likely would have to hold onto their tongues a little bit because he's a very Christian sort of fellow, Geoff Sambell, and they would have to forget about dirty stories and that when Geoff Sambell was about.

So they did watch themselves?

Most certainly. He was tremendously well respected.

And how did that happen when

25:30 **you are in a fairly tight group? You know, at the end of the day you've probably just got a patch of turf to sleep on, and so on. How were divisions formed in such tiny units when you were out on the march?**

Geoff was back at battalion. The padre was always back at battalion headquarters. It's generally they're not, as a rule, amongst the fighting

26:00 going on. They could be three or four hundred yards back. They would have a defence crew, either the pioneers or the tank attack would be their defence, battalion headquarters defence group, and Geoff would be there, but he'd be going around, and if he knew of anyone that was wounded or killed or that, he'd go and do the rites

26:30 at the grave himself. He was tremendously well looked at. He organised a ladies' welfare and he would try and get a bit of food and extra stuff up to us if he could. When we arrived at any sort of a camp the moment we'd arrive there he would organise some sort of entertainment to get us going in respect of concert parties and sports and so on.

27:00 **What specifically? Would he find talent amongst the men and get them to get up and sing a song?**

Oh there was a ton of talent.

Such as?

Singers, and they made their own bass. One of the pioneers made a big bass, and one chap used to play the bass and they had a piano there. When we had a camp we always seemed to get a piano. I don't know how a bloody piano

27:30 arrived there. You had your band and you always had trumpets and drums and that. There was always music there. Dirty Dan Caster, he was the man that was on the piano, and he was tremendous. He was a dirty little bugger, he was.

You are going to have to explain that in more detail.

He never used to wash.

Just literally dirty.

Yeah. He used to get up and

28:00 it was always raining up in New Guinea, Bougainville or wherever you went. We had these tents and they had a tent and he used to wash himself in the water that was sitting in the bloody tent that would collect in the tent cover. And he finished up, he used to have this beard and he used to have dyes because he used to have skin trouble as a result of he's there. Terrific pianist he was

28:30 though.

As long as you stayed upwind.

Yeah. Poor bugger. He finished up dying in 1960 I think. Didn't last long.

Now that you have mentioned that there was a bit of banter most nights among the men,

They're all bloody bright, have a shot at one another.

I'd like to know a little bit more about the kind of humour that existed. I'm sure it

29:00 **was a means of survival. Like, for example, Australians were brilliant at nicknaming everybody or....?**

Yeah, we got a terrible lot of nicknames there. Have you seen them?

No. What's your nickname?

Snake Eyes.

And how did you get that? Bad craps player or...?

Ah no. Good vision, good peripheral vision, they said. I could always spot something. That's how I got called Snake Eyes.

That's curious, given that the air force weren't too keen on one of your eyes.

Yeah. But

29:30 peripheral vision is where you can see sideways while you're walking. But anyway they called me Snake

Eyes. Cray Eyes, one fellow, his eyes used to stick out a bit. There's a whole list of them there. Two Pot because he was a two pot drunk. Wombat – I don't know why this fellow was called Wombat – he was always called Wombat. He might be a bit dull or sticking his nose in

30:00 fences. I don't know why but we had that. They used to call the bald-headed fellows Curly and a whole tradition of names that have come up. I always called a fellow Wimpy. I remember Wimpy used to be a cartoon character.

I will gladly pay you….

30:30 I still see Wimpy, too. A few of the characters you didn't know their Christian name. Cray Eyes, I never used to know him, he used to ring up, and there's another mate, Joe the Goose. I've got a mate called Joe the Goose, and there's a ton of them. You knew a character by that and not his Christian name, truthfully, a lot of them.

31:00 **What about officers? Did you have names for them that they didn't otherwise know about, or if they did they didn't mention it?**

Yeah, there was a few officers. There was a few characters.

Such as….?

We used to have one in the machine gunners. I'll always remember that this fellow used to get up on parade and he used to say, "You are going up in the jungle. Water bottles will boil. Men will fall

31:30 by the wayside." And he fell by the wayside first up. I don't know whether he made New Guinea or not.

He didn't even get out of Australia?

Yeah. I don't know whether he made it. And there is another lad.

So what was his nickname then, the guy who fell by the wayside?

I just forget his nickname,

32:00 but he was a funny character. He finished up he had three wives too, so he was another funny character.

Evidently not at the same time though?

No.

What was your relationship with the officers like, especially when you were in the thick of it?

We didn't have a great deal of contact with them because we were separate sections and the guns were sent out

32:30 and we would go out in the rifle companies, but it was just a talking relationship, as far as I was concerned, with the officers there. They told you what to do, always little smart arse bastards saying a few things and I used to upset them. That's why I stopped at private more than likely, simply for that reason, that I always had a quick reply for them.

A bit of lip, ey?

Yeah.

33:00 **I also believe that Australians were well known for saluting the man, not the rank.**

I don't know. I didn't salute a great deal. You'd salute if you were on a formal parade, but that would be all it would be. There wasn't a great deal of saluting. We didn't go in for saluting, truthfully.

What about

33:30 **extraordinary acts? Did you witness anything that you thought really took a lot of guts from the men, or even yourself. I'd be happy for you to tell me about that. Did you witness anything like that or gravity or great grace under pressure?**

As being machine gunners we didn't go out under

34:00 patrols a great deal. I look and I've heard about people in the battalion that did mighty things and you have a tremendous respect about, and the bods that got awards, and they did their actions

34:30 on the spur of the moment, but some of them were continuous. They were sergeants and corporals that were in charge of sections and platoons and they did this day after day. When they were in action they looked after themselves and looked after their men as well. Different people in the battalion that I truthfully had

35:00 not witnessed a great deal of it because we were in that situation where we were carrying the guns around and you'd do this, you'd put them down and fight, but to me it was the chappies in the rifle companies that did the hard work and they are the ones to be looked at. What I heard was hearsay but

they

35:30 were unrelenting in what they did, and they went out to fight the enemy and that is what they did. They may have made some slight errors and got themselves blown up as a result of it. The men in the rifle company, I've got a tremendous respect for all of them. They did it and fought

36:00 and went out in attacking positions, which we as machine gunners did not do. We never used to be in the action.

Was there a certain sense of safety being behind a machine gun?

Yeah, for certain. They had to come and get you.

You were pretty unlikely to be picked off if you were busy firing something with that amount of ammunition behind it.

You could be picked off.

36:30 You're spitting a few bullets out there and you're cutting trees down and branches down with it. You would get a lot of respect for your gun.

Did you think the Vickers was up to the job?

For certain. It did the job there, and it didn't have a great deal of stoppages and it kept firing. Some of the Thompson machine guns, they would get a lot of stoppages. Even some of the little Owen guns would get

37:00 a few stoppages and cause problems when they fired, but the Vickers as a rule kept on firing.

Tape 6

00:32 I've said that my father was on Anzac for about twenty days and then he was wounded and then he came back. He was the first war veteran back from this western town of Casterton, which is just out of Hamilton, and he was an original war hero there,

01:00 to come back from Anzac, but he wasn't particularly in love with the war from what I can gather afterwards. He never mentioned a great deal to us. He never ever told me at all what happened, just that he was hit at Gallipoli. That is all he said about it. He came back and then he shifted down –

01:30 he was a carpenter and he shifted down originally to South Yarra in the street where the well-known entertainment place is, Darling Street. He lived in Darling Street and then he shifted to this new housing estate in Thornbury, and that would be about

02:00 1920, and it was into a house. And he extended the size of the house and as the family increased he put it up to four bedrooms, and from there he started building. And he had a partnership – White and Williams their name was – and they were building a few homes around the place. Then when the Depression occurred,

02:30 in about '29, he was out of business and didn't do a great deal of work until the late '30s, and then he started to pick up a bit of work and he was in a job as a carpenter/builder from then onwards. He used to work for people after that.

How did the family survive during that ten year period when work was scarce?

03:00 We survived. I don't know how the father truthfully survived. I don't know whether he was on the dole or what, right? I truthfully don't know. I didn't think he was on the dole because those that were on the dole had to go and work outside. He must have got a little bit of work and what he'd put aside before when he was building to survive. But he was definitely not on the dole because the bods that are on the dole, they

03:30 finished up doing the roadworks and they did the Great Ocean Road and they did the road that goes from Kew there that winds 'round the river there, they did that road. That was done by the "sussos", as they used to call them. They used to do a bit of work and it was amazing the number of people that'd be on the road with their swag. You'd go and see these hundreds of people

04:00 with a swag. We still used to go up to Casterton so father must just have been surviving there and getting a bit of work here and there, enough to survive on, because every Christmas we would go up to Casterton and Hamilton. With six children we'd be progressively dropped off. Some were dropped off at a place called Orford just outside of Port Fairy. I was dropped off and spent a few years at a place called

04:30 Tahara West with one of the relations up there. I did spend a time at Hamilton where there is another auntie, where they had a butcher shop up at Hamilton, abattoirs, and then I had spent a little bit of time up at Casterton. At the end of my stay I would stop off at Tahara West and then my father and mother would be up at Casterton and they would pick us up after about six weeks and do the rounds and we

would go home again. That is how we used to

05:00 spend each Christmas up in that particular area. Then after the war he got work as a subcontractor and working around, and he was always employed.

Did his war wound or injury give him trouble later in life?

It should have given him trouble. It did give him trouble because he had a weak left arm. He got hit in the arm, just about on the elbow and he must have had a bit of bone fracture associated with

05:30 that. But he never applied for a great pension.

He didn't really associate with Returned Services Leagues or associations?

No, he wasn't so much in that. Being in the Engineers they were a small unit. There was only about a hundred and fifty of them, and they would have gone on…the people that he was with, they would've gone on and more than likely been gobbled up in France.

06:00 Because to me France was a dreadful situation, over the fighting in Belgium and that. More than likely by the end of the war the people that he knew originally were not…very few of them would be in existence. He used to march on Anzac Day but he was never involved in the RSL. And to me, his army unit was the 15th Field Ambulance, I think it was, or 3rd Field Ambulance,

06:30 did not have a great body of people to be an association like we did. We more than likely would have had three thousand people go through our battalion, whereas he would more than likely have had only two or three or four hundred perhaps.

Did he express his opinions about the Second World War to you?

No. It's an

07:00 amazing thing. He never asked me and didn't query it at all. Because we had, of our family there was… two brothers were pilots and my sister was in the AWARs. Out of the six, four were in the army – they were away – but he never had a great yap about it.

07:30 Perhaps one of the things was, in five years he more than likely would only see me for a very limited time because we were away from Melbourne, and we come back for twelve days leave in '43 and then, when we come back from New Guinea, we were around the place for two months I suppose, and then you were very involved

08:00 with your other mates and going out and perhaps didn't have a great deal of contact until after the war. I came home, and I was home for '49 and I was married in '49, so that would be our main contact. Father didn't discuss with me a great deal.

08:30 I suppose our lives were a little bit different in that respect, that he was in the army for, I don't know, six months, where I was in the army for five years. He always assisted us with building our homes. The younger brother and I,

09:00 we built our own homes and the father did all the carpentry work on it and assisted. We got our own brickwork and dug our own sewerage but the father was always there, and when you put an extension on the father was always there to help us with it and do the carpentry and work on that.

What did you learn about the First World War growing up?

09:30 Well, growing up, perhaps you used to hear of Anzac and the Dardanelles and that type of war and you used to hear a bit about France, but it is nothing to what I've read about since. I have read a few of Bean's books and read the book on the 14th Battalion

10:00 and that, and our own battalion was in Fromelles in the First World War and they entered the Battle of Fromelles, and one of the battalions had about 70% casualties in one morning at Fromelles. It's a shocking war, that First World War, in relation to human bodies.

I suppose you didn't really find this out until

10:30 **later on, not when you were younger.**

No, I only found that out in the last twenty five years I suppose, that I've read a little bit more about the trauma of that First World War.

Do you think you perhaps had a romantic idea about war when you were younger?

I never joined. They had a militia unit and I didn't join the militia.

11:00 A few of my mates were in the militia and they used to go up there. The militia, they used to go up to the drill hall there when they were cadets and that, they were never in the 57th 60th which was that unit after the war. I don't know where they got to. Some of them might have joined up and gone into other units and joined up with the AIF, which a terrible lot of them did do.

11:30 Not too many of them hung on and were in the unit when I went back for the war, when I was called up.

I am interested to know what you imagined war would be like perhaps as a youngster or a young adult and what war was actually like? Did you have an image or an idea of how war would be before you went away?

No, not a great deal.

12:00 I knew…I honestly did know that the First World War and the casualties from the First World War, but it's only by reading and dissecting it. There is a bit of heroics attached to it and you would hear of the bods and the deeds that won VCs [Victoria Cross awards] and that.

12:30 And then I did read about at Gallipoli where they threw the Light Horse boys in for a particular action at Gallipoli. I don't know whether it was Lone Pine or where it was, but it was a bit similar to Fromelles, that they were jumping out of trenches and running across

13:00 seventy or eighty yards and having machine guns poured at them, and it was only after the third lot of them jumped up and had been slaughtered in front of them that they stopped jumping up. I think that was the Light Horse crew from Western Australia. I had read a little bit about that, and a certain amount of gallantry and a little bit of foolishness about it.

13:30 The war that we went in is entirely different to any of those. I've said that war in the jungle is more a war of the individual than a war of the masses that they had in France and a certain extent Gallipoli.

Did you know any other World War I veterans when you were growing up?

Yeah, I met a few of them.

14:00 I met a few that were gassed, and they are sitting back and – this would be in the late '30s – and they are sitting back at home spitting and coughing, affected by gas. And then I did see up near our place, Bundoora,

14:30 that was a repatriation hospital where they had all the poor old bomb-happy buggers that were affected by the masses of artillery that they had there, where their brains were like boxes that had been punched and bumped around, and the poor buggers are a mental and a nervous wreck. I did see a few of them wandering around and you would see them locked up in their cages up there.

15:00 I have seen them there. I did know quite a few World War diggers, First World War diggers that were about, and I was playing cricket with the sons of soldiers, Preston and that. There were First War diggers that were looking after us when

15:30 we were fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, and they were looking after us with the sons of soldiers, so I got to know them then. But it was a most violent trauma to be in that, so thank the lord we weren't in that. That's all my comment about that as an infanteer and the two wars are concerned. The First World War was a frightening, chaotic sort of a

16:00 war compared with the Second World War. Just recently I was reading about the Somme, about some of the casualties that the Australians…twenty thousand, forty thousand people killed and traumatised in more than likely about three months there. And I have a lot of respect for the people

16:30 who went through that First World War as much as some of the people who went through the Second World War. Some of the fighting brigades, the 15th, 16th, 17th Brigades, were in the 6th Division and they went right through the war. By the end of the war there would only be about ten or fifteen percent of the originals would be amongst them because they were all

17:00 reduced down, but that's the comments I can pass on about it.

I have talked to a couple of people whose teachers were diggers in the First World War. Did you have any teachers who were?

As a matter of fact, we had a teacher, he was not only a veteran of the First War, he was a veteran of the South African War, a chap named Andy Dwyer. He was a major in the South African War.

17:30 When I taught school at Thornbury, he was a teacher there. And then there is another teacher we used to call "Mousy Martin". He was a teacher down Northcote High, and we were good friends because I used to take a reasonable interest in geography and I used to know quite a deal of geography and he was the teacher in geography. And old

18:00 Mousy Martin said if we didn't have white hair we wouldn't have a good geography class. I don't know where he was in the infantry but he was a big old straight-backed fellow, he was one chap that I particularly met there and I remembered as a teacher from there. Andy Dwyer – "the South African liar", they used to call him –

18:30 he was a Boer War soldier and he was a major in the Second World War, but I don't know what area he was in.

South African lion or liar?

Liar. He used to exaggerate the truth at times, they used to say.

About the war or just about everything?

About…evidently he had this reputation about the war

19:00 and what they used to do there.

You mentioned before – I was surprised – you grew up in the suburbs, which is what is the suburbs now, but you had experience with guns and things like that. Did you go out into the country to use things like that?

Yeah, see we used to go up the country for six weeks at Christmas time and we used to go up there. My father used to go out shooting. They shot pigeons. There were

19:30 a few pigeons around, shot quail, apart from rabbits and that. At that stage they would eat wallaby, they would eat anything.

Did you shoot for the pot?

I had a shot with a shotgun. I was only fourteen or fifteen, with a shotgun. Most of the kids up the country had a .22.

20:00 If you went out with a cousin or that, he'd have a .22 with him, and he'd give you a shot at the rabbits. I can always recall having a shot with a shotgun and clapping my shoulder and nearly knocking me backwards when I was about fourteen or fifteen. I can recall that.

Did you ever have any accidents or near misses or anything like that?

No, no. All very careful. No stray bullets

20:30 flying around.

I was wondering also your experience in training. How did you find the life at first, the discipline, the accommodation, the regimentation?

I took it but I perhaps always used to annoy people with my backchat a little bit, but I still survived and

21:00 met a lot of people that I got on well with and always got on with people. You had to know your place. You can go to a certain degree and then you knock off, right? What do you do? You don't go away and upset people. What I say even now, life is too bloody short, isn't it? I withdraw from having arguments with my children or anyone.

21:30 You have your opinion but you keep it to yourself to some extent, but when you are a bit younger you perhaps voice your opinion more.

It is a pretty full-on experience to be thrown together with a lot of strangers, basically.

For certain.

And have to work together. Did that take a little while to iron out, to get used to?

We were youngsters and this fellow that is ninety now, we are still mates, and

22:00 he more than likely looked after me in those days, he tried to look after us. The people that I was closest to was this Jack Morotti and another fellow, little Ocker Connell, and when we reached Casino they made a decision what you wanted to do, whether..... I went and applied for the air force and

22:30 while I was down in Sydney, these fellows applied to go to the AIF and they were sent over to Egypt with the 2/43rd Battalion and they reached Alamein as reinforcements the morning Alamein finished – thank the Lord for that – that was another heavy stoush, but they continued with the 2/43rd up into Finschhafen.

23:00 He said, the old fellow said to me about a month ago, "Whitey, you bludger, I don't know why you never come with us to Egypt." I said, "OK, you went to the 2/43rd." They were separated and they went out in the rifle companies. I will tell you a story about this little Ocker. They were at a place called Jivernek [spelling uncertain] just outside of Finschhafen

23:30 and they were cut off in a fairly tight situation, and little Ocker, he must have opened his mouth and a bullet went through his mouth and out his neck, and he put one of the bandages on the back of his neck. They were there for two days, and the officer came up to him and said, "What is wrong with you?" He said, "You've got a bandage on the back of your neck." He said,

24:00 "Yes, sir, a bullet went through there." This was little Ocker, he opened his mouth, it didn't affect his teeth and went out his neck. That was a 2.5 bullet. He just put a shell bandage on it and kept on, he couldn't get out anyway. Anyway, that's the two people that used to look after me

24:30 in my growing up stage in the army. There was another old bugger, Wrinkles. We used to call him Wrinkles because he had a wrinkly face and neck. Wrinkles, he soldiered on with us. He was about thirty five but when we went to New Guinea they put him as the…he used to look after the sweets and chocolates and selling that. He had a little shop that….

25:00 I just forget the term they used to call them, but he finished up a sergeant there. His name was Wrinkles Reardon. When I went in these people tried to assist me in my passage through the army, and take me down the hotel. I was always looked after, but the people

25:30 I used to drink with were generally older than what I was. I don't know whether that answers your question in that respect.

Yes.

But they are mixed team of people that you went in with and you're thrown into and you never met them, and here you are thrown into a tent and there are eight of you in a tent and you are thrown a palliasse and all your bloody gear. You know what a palliasse is, do you? You would get a bloody

26:00 bag and try and fill as much bloody straw in it and then try and sleep on it. It would break up and you are left with hardly anything. But they're all different types of people that you are thrown into and you laugh about them and think where they went and who they finished with.

Was there much of a dropout rate in that training period?

No. We all went in August and

26:30 by the time we went back in December there was a few dropouts due to farming. Farmers got out, a few industries were claimed and some would have left and perhaps joined the air force, navy or gone into the AIF. But there weren't

27:00 that great number of people. When we went back in December there was, I would say out of our a hundred and thirty in the machine gunners, there would be about a hundred and twenty of them still there.

Were there any dropouts just because they couldn't cope, couldn't deal with it, weren't soldier material?

I always consider in the army there is always

27:30 people that can't quite cope but you still carry them. They still perhaps shouldn't be in an infantry unit. They could be in a different type of unit but not an infantry unit, but they are still kept in there and some would finish in the LOB [Left Out of Battle]'s, but they would still put in.

28:00 Whether under some pressure they perhaps wouldn't be quite as fit as what you were, but they still stuck to it and I think the army had provision within it to cover for those type of people. There is some certain allowance built in that we are not quite aware of that does accept those bods.

What was your experience with

28:30 **the training officers?**

With the officers you have a platoon officer. That's your main contact and they tried to train you. They did their best to discipline you

29:00 that you did your duties. Some of them used to give you the craps but you put up with it and they more than likely put up with you even though you had given them the craps. We got along with them alright. But they did send a few out

29:30 and when I said we went from desert strength to jungle strength, at that same stage they reduced divisions from four brigades down to three brigades. In the finish they had a surplus of battalions and they intermixed battalions and some battalions went out of business.

30:00 We finished up at Casino. The 24th Battalion was brought into our brigade, the 58th and 59th were combined into one and we finished up with a lot of 58th and 59th boys from there. More than likely at Casino we would have been five hundred over strength, and a terrible lot of them went out to…

30:30 they went out through all sorts of business. They went out to transport companies, some went to reinforcement for all the 9th Div basically and that's what happened to them, the surplus, and there is always a certain sorting out of people. We were yakking the other week there and

31:00 my mate said that Dougie Wardell – John Connell, he was our major, he told him he didn't want him and he told him he put his papers and said, "You will have to go." And this is what happened. When the 39th Battalion was formed in 1941 the 39th originally was formed by twenty or thirty people from each battalion,

31:30 and before we came out of camp in the November they came 'round and said, "We want nominations for

the 39th Battalion," and they said, "No nominations? We'll draw from the hat." So they drew them all out from the hat, and they drew thirty fellows from our battalion and they drew thirty fellows from all these different battalions and they went up to Darley just out of Bacchus Marsh, and that is how the 39th Battalion

32:00 was formed, the original 39th. When they reached up there, there was a few of our fellows went up there and there was too many. They had about sixteen hundred of them where they only needed twelve hundred, so they said to them, "You can go back to your unit, some of you if you want to." So some of them came back to our unit. That was the original 39th Battalion, how it was formed. They were drawn out of a bloody hat.

Do you think that much about those forks in the road for you, where you could have

32:30 **ended up had things been slightly different, if your name had been pulled out of the hat?**

Oh yeah, you think that. The 39th they were sent up there and they were the first to meet the Nips [Japanese] and when they went up there they were under-gunned, and I don't know whether they had Bren guns or not. They may not have had Bren guns, they may have had Lewis guns, and this is

33:00 the situation. A lot of them went up in, they said they didn't have rifles, some of them, when they first landed at Moresby. I don't know. They wouldn't have had Owens. There may have been a few Thompsons – they had the original Thompson sub-machine gun up there. They may have had some of those.

It could have been you there.

Yeah, it could have been me, but the poor old 39th went up there and then they had to march over the Owen Stanleys. Shit, that would've been a tremendous trauma, wouldn't it ey? We've only been to the bottom of it there, at Owers Corner. That's as far as we got there, and that was very forbidding country there, the way those mountains went up. We had similar in the Owen Stanleys up around…you had to cut your way into the track, and

34:00 put timber in there to climb up there, but the only problem is after a while, with the rain, you put your foot over, and with the water there, there's about a six inch drop where you are putting your…you're climbing up, putting one foot after the other, there is about a six inch drop full of water where you put your boot in. Then you pull yourself up somehow or other. We carried the old Vickers gun around

34:30 in that country. You got whacked and fell over and climbed and wrenched your knees and ankles and that. That particular time when we carried this bloody gun up the bloody mountain in the middle of the night when there is bullets flying over the top of us, I'll never forget that occasion.

Can you tell me more about that? Where were you heading and

35:00 **what were you doing?**

There is a place called, we had been to this place at Orgarana and I told you about Frankie Brammel was killed and he was laying on the track and they sent us up. We had to make a feint attack because B Company were going to go forward and we had to break up the ambush for them that had killed Frank. And we took up the Vickers and the mortars, and this would be

35:30 around about 2 o'clock or something, and we fired our guns and our mortars and the Nips shot through. Then B Company went forward and we're still down in this ambush position, and B Company went forward and they went through to a place, Mataloi the name of it was, and

36:00 we were down at the base of the hill and we had to get back up this more than likely about fifteen hundred feet climb up, and we had to do it in the dark with a Vickers gun attached on your back, and we were in a long line of people and we are hanging onto the bayonet scabbard,

36:30 and you walk up and they say, "Tree here, tree here, root here, root here," and it was passed all down the line as you went up. It more than likely took us about three hours to get back up this bloody hill. While we're doing it the Nips are attacking B Company at Mataloi and we could see the bullets and grenades going off

37:00 up at Mataloi. They must have had tracers amongst it, and these were coming and firing over the hill as we're climbing back up this hill. Ketoba was the name of the place. It was the name of a little village, which was on the top of a hill.

In a situation like that what kept you going? It was physically almost unbearable. How do you keep going up there?

You just have to keep going.

37:30 Otherwise you get left behind. There is no future in being left behind. You kept going because you had the physical capabilities. We were that fit and weren't carrying a great deal of flesh, but you kept going to get up there and sit on your backside and have a sleep for a while. That's why you did it, right? Very momentous to go up in the dark

38:00 up a climb of fifteen hundred feet, climb and get up there, and all you are doing is more than likely following a piece of bloody wire. That explains Ketoba and Mataloi and that situation.

Tape 7

00:31 When we were over at Bougainville one day he arrived there and he was flying DC3's.

Was this Bluey Truscott?

No, my brother, and he brought me over a bottle of whiskey. We were still at Torokina at the time and he arrived over and said hello, and then he had to fly back that same night. That was another craft he was flying.

Did you know he was coming?

01:00 No, I didn't know he was coming. He just arrived.

Did you have any news about your brothers?

We used to hear from our mother, but there was no communication between us individually.

Did you lay awake at night wondering what they were up to or where they were serving or whether they were alright?

I was a bit concerned wondering about myself than wondering about them. You would often think.

01:30 As I said to you, we used to do two hours on, four hours off and those two hours on you would think a lot of things when you are sitting there, apart from observing, to see that no-one is coming down the track at you. You would be thinking lots of things, what was going on at home and what wasn't, that sort of thing.

02:00 You had plenty of time to think in a lot of instances. You would be on the gun, you would be sitting on your tail behind the gun waiting for something to happen. If nothing happened you are still sitting there and you have to keep yourselves alive and talk and think and banter and joke and laugh. I always had that ability to entertain people in a lot of ways.

Did you have that reputation?

02:30 Yeah, I have been able to have a joke, always find a joke about something.

That is a pretty valuable person when you are in unpleasant situation.

I can see humour out of something, humour out of trauma. Yes, you must be able to do that.

I was wondering about your communication with home. Did you manage to get letters and to send letters off?

Yeah. We'd get letters, I suppose once a fortnight.

03:00 **Generally people have said that it meant a lot to them to be able to get news from home.**

Yes. You would get news from home. And I had another mate, and a couple of their mothers were in the mothers' welfare and they would often say, "Mother said to say she had seen your mother at the welfare," and pass on that information.

03:30 Mail from home was definitely a good thing to see and hear.

Did people read out letters to each other and share details?

Yeah, they would share if something happened, a particular event, a birth or a birthday or a marriage or something like that. We got to know one another reasonably intimately.

You must have known all the details.

You're living with people. You have to

04:00 know them intimately. Say later on you are living with six or eight people fairly closely, that you are relying on them, your crew that you must get to know them.

I suppose people got bad news from home as well.

Yeah. We had one poor bugger, he got bad news. He used to work at Myer's and he came

04:30 home with wife trouble, and he came back and put the rifle up and committed suicide just laying in bed one night.

Where was that?

I think it was at Bougainville. Poor bugger.

It must have been quite a shock

05:00 **to the unit as well.**

Yeah. Amazing thing, he did that and the fellow alongside him didn't know that he'd done it. Amazing. He put the rifle up in his mouth and went bang.

05:30 That's about the only case I've known of that in the army.

And he'd had bad news from home about his wife?

About his wife. He'd been home and he'd come back from leave, he had compassionate leave, and come back from compassionate leave and did it.

Had she been unfaithful or was she ill?

Unfaithful.

In cases of hearing bad news would

06:00 **you find people talked about it or kept to themselves?**

No, definitely talk. They'd talk and often tell you what is happening back there, any troubles, mothers, fathers and their family. We were very close people. As I said, you don't live with people for three or four years and not

06:30 know what they are doing and how they are thinking and try and relate to them. Relations means that you are relating to their family background often.

It must have been quite amazing when you came home and you met all these people you'd heard about, brothers, sisters, wives.

Yeah, you often wondered who they were and what they're doing. It is, you hear about them and they are all beautiful, aren't they? And then come back and have to

07:00 make your evaluation. People in their mind they are very proud of their families and that's… we met them all. You often wonder if you would have preferred to have met them a little bit closer than what they were,

07:30 because often the people that you really knew lived a little bit further away, come from Sydney. Another good mate of ours from up the country are up at Bright and around that area up there, and you come back and you are parted from them. Some of them you'd see at a reunion and others, you wouldn't see them any time.

08:00 That is what relationships are in those circumstances.

Just while we're talking about letter writing, did you find censorship inhibiting, or were you conscious of censorship when you were writing?

Yeah, for certain. You had to put your letter in and someone would censor it and delete and then tell you, "You are talking too much of that."

08:30 One sergeant that we know, he was court-martialled because he used to write home in particular circumstances. I think he was having a bit of trouble at home and writing home, and he would come to an understanding that his officer would let him write and wouldn't censor it.

09:00 And then that officer was moved to hospital, he got scrub typhus, this fellow, he signed the signature and sent the letter or put the letter in to be sent out with the forged signature of the officer on it, and someone picked it up and he was charged and he was

09:30 demoted from being a paid warrant officer, WO1, and he was demoted to a corporal but they still left him with his WO1 duties, the company sergeant major.

Why did he do that? Because he wanted to write private letters?

He wanted something extra private.

10:00 That is what he did but he was demoted because of that.

It must have been hard for guys with girlfriends or wives to have somebody else reading their letters.

Yeah, for certain, but you were more than likely reduced to nice things you put in the letter.

I have heard a few stories of tricks around the censorship, too, of ways of getting around it, like codes and maps and things. Did your mates do that?

No, I don't think they'd do that. I don't think they would do that, truthfully.

10:30 **Sometimes there is little things, like, the first five letters of some word, or pinpricks in letters and you would put it over a map and it correlates to a place in a map, or something.**

They could do those ones. I don't know. Some people might have done that. It wouldn't be my interest but you still have to get a map and have to copy the map down to where they were, wouldn't you?

Did many of the blokes have wives or girlfriends?

Yeah, I would say 80% of them.

11:00 More than likely 40% would be married. I think that would be a rough calculation. When we went in we had a lot of older fellows called up. They were about twenty four to thirty four, and a lot of them would be in some relationship of some sort.

Do they talk much about those people?

11:30 Oh yeah. We knew them almost as well as what they knew themselves and they would discuss what they were doing and not doing, and what was happening. We did know their wives as well. They were a different bod to when we met them.

Did you have someone special you were writing to?

Yeah, I did. I used to write to

12:00 somebody, and then I wrote a letter back from Bougainville and I just voiced my opinion, "Bloody Yanks," and "Yanks were crap", and we never…I lost that relationship. I had to laugh.

She disagreed about your opinion of that?

12:30 Yes, so there it was, we parted then. Funnily enough, I received a letter about five days before my mate set off the booby trap and I didn't know whether I'd be reported as accidentally wounded, but it never went in.

13:00 It wasn't reported as anything. I smiled afterwards, the thought that within about a week of receiving it I actually wounded myself, but it was never put in the casualties. It was only a minor thing.

I'd just like to ask you now about some of those ambush missions or patrols you set up. Could you run us through, detail by detail, how they would run, how you would

13:30 **be told, what sort of time of day you would go out that sort of thing, how many of you there were?**

I said to you that we as machine gunners didn't do a great deal of that. We had done patrols and what they'd do is, if it was a long patrol the I Section used to draw up a map and give you an overlay on a map.

14:00 We had all maps of all these areas that we were going through and they'd give an overlay on a piece of paper you can see through, and they would do an overlay on that and draw the direction of compass bearings that you would have to go on and they'd mark where they suspected there'd be Nip ambush positions and this and that, and you would have to go out and try and observe where they were and what they were doing, or

14:30 sit on a track and what's the movement, how many would pass up and down the track, what they are armed with, what they were doing. That you could do in relation to a patrol. You would be given instructions from the I Section as to what to do, as a general rule.

So you'd have a specific mission every time?

Oh yeah. On these patrols that's what you would do.

So you would go out and observe the enemy sometimes as well?

You would have to go and observe and see

15:00 or you would hear them and try and observe them and find out where their positions were.

Would you make the decision to attack then or would you report back?

Oh no. You would bring it back and then they would decide what to do. You would more than likely send out a three or four person patrol where you would be doing a platoon or company attack. You are trying to find specifically where they were and what they were in numbers

15:30 and where you would think their guns would be, and then the attack would go in from there.

So you wouldn't take the Vickers on those ones?

No, you wouldn't take them at all. All there'd be would be a Bren and a couple of Owens and the 303's.

Did you have any contact with the enemy during that period on your observational patrols? Did you exchange shots?

Yeah. We saw them and then

16:00 we set an ambush when we're doing one of these outflanking movements. It was with the 2nd, the bigger one, and they said we'd come upon this garden and it would be three hundred yards long and a hundred and fifty yards wide, and

16:30 they said there was a path running through it, and they said, "There's ten Nips coming through," and they said, "Hold fire until they reach a particular point," and then we fired and knocked them all over, as we thought. And they had said, "You have to go through and make sure they are dead." So we went through, and those that weren't

17:00 dead were shot. But that was just war as it is. We couldn't possibly take prisoners because we are doing this outflanking movement. That was an experience, where we had to go and shoot somebody because they weren't dead.

17:30 That's what happens, right?

Do you remember the first time you had to fire upon someone, you had to fire a shot in anger?

It was when we set that…tried to break up the ambush in New Guinea when Frankie Brammel was killed. We took the guns there and fired five hundred bullets into

18:00 where we thought the ambush position was.

So you couldn't see the enemy that time?

No. Not at that time.

Is it a changing experience personally to shoot with the intention of killing someone?

When you are firing from a distance, when you are firing from an ambush from

18:30 fifty or sixty yards away, it's almost like shooting at a pigeon shoot. But when you are a yard away it is a bit of a difference. It's an experience you don't forget. You get a certain amount of traumatisation from that. That is why I maintain that

19:00 you sometimes would remember it of a night time, and it does affect you. It's happened, but what has been has been, hasn't it?

How would people deal with that, that trauma that experience?

Well, it is very difficult. I take a pill, which helps me sleep,

19:30 but you don't know, it affects some people differently. I do take a pill each night and that helps me sleep about four or five hours. Prior to that I was waking up a bit early and thinking things. There, perhaps, when

20:00 it's that close to you, you are affected by it. Not so much from a distance, but when you are right on top of them and they are looking up at you it is slightly different. But what has been has been. You can't go back on it.

Was it sometimes necessary to conjure up

20:30 **anger or hatred to get the job done?**

No. You don't feel that in any way. I didn't. You just bloody do it. These things are done on the spur of the moment and you go on with it. It is not so much an anger associated with it.

21:00 Perhaps later you have an anger, after you've seen a few of your mates killed. It serves you to do it a bit easier.

Did it help to think that you were following orders?

Yes, I suppose. Your orders were telling you what to do. That is why I did it back then, but it is more or less in self-defence that

21:30 you could do it. Most of these things are done in self-defence. If you don't get them they will get you. That is one of the aspects of looking at it and I suppose that is how we looked at it.

Survival?

Yeah. That's why I say, apart from the SAS we are about the last of the individual individuals.

22:00 And if you're from the wrong end as well that's what happened, right? But that's just a comment. You asked the question.

I wonder if you could you tell me more about the different sorts of patrols or missions you were doing in that period? Sometimes you'd go out and observe and report back, and you would set up ambushes.

And ambushes, that's bad, and that's the only thing you can do. It's

22:30 either observation or ambush, and you do one or the other. You may sit on a track and nothing will happen.

So you would set up an ambush based on intelligence or those reports of observations, of where movements were?

It was mainly to find out what your opponent was doing. That is one of the regular things, to try and find out what is actually going on so you are prepared for what they are preparing to

23:00 do. That is in relation to that, but as I say, as machine gunners we didn't do a great deal of the patrol work or the ambush work, but they're particular cases that I did know of.

How long would you be out for in one of those missions?

You could be out

23:30 all day, or you could be out for two days. It just depends on how far you go. If you're out for two days then you just had to sit there and try and get some sleep, lay in a bloody hole or something.

Was it just one gun crew or more people?

It wouldn't be a gun crew. You wouldn't have the gun. It would be a Bren gun and

24:00 two Owens and four rifles I suppose. That would be a normal one, or a bigger one could be ten or twelve people. It could be a platoon, it could be twenty people. It just depends on how much opposition they expect you to get.

And that was true of the ambushes?

The ambushes, yeah, but the other problem when you set an ambush is the more bloody people you

24:30 take with you the more you have to worry about.

In terms of noise and visibility and so on?

Yeah, noise when the action starts, or when you have to pull out, how many people do you have to look after, you have to make sure that you get [out]. That is the general situation with an ambush and that type of thing.

Did you have an experience where you had to get a casualty back as well?

Yeah, we've carried a casualty back.

25:00 One of our mates was knocked over and we had to carry him back to the RAP, get him back there on a stretcher. That was the first part of the action and we took him back to the RAP. And from there on the RAP would get them back to the casualty clearing centre and from there they would be hospitalised.

Was he badly wounded?

He had a hole in his leg. He couldn't use his leg and that was

25:30 all he did. He didn't have a gunshot wound in the body, it was just in his leg.

Was that hard terrain to carry him over?

No, it was just a matter of getting a couple of sticks and a blanket and tying them together and putting him on that and carry him along. You improvise and that is your ability to do it.

26:00 **It must have been incredibly difficult, I can't imagine.**

If you are in flat country and you're walking along a road it is alright. There is a photo done by that chap who just died and it's in our book and there is a drawing there of…they carried one of the fellows

26:30 back. I don't know whether you can see it there in the front of the book, and there's a sketch done by the war artist who just died and they are carrying him back from behind Bogadjim Road and it's bloody shocking, the situation of it. And he was a big fellow and it took about six of them to get him down the mountain.

27:00 **Is that William Dargie….**

William Dargie, yeah. He did a sketch of it. It's amazing. They carried this fellow from about Bridge 6, around about that area down there. It was on the Bogadjim Road, and there is a drawing of them carrying him down. It was in the middle of the night too. A chap named Aussie Newton.

He was a hard man to handle. He finished up he got a whack in the bloody leg, too. They brought him down in pitch black and bloody dark and tried to get him out. Dargie wrote up a bit on that. I don't know whether it's in the book, but he said it was amazing to see this fellow come down and going with him.

You had a personal experience with a war artist as well.

There's a painting of you on the gun?

Yeah. We'd gone through and reached Bogadjim and reached Madang. William Dargie came with us a bit along the Bogadjim Road. I don't know whether he went straight through to Bogadjim but he did drawings and he's done a few of them, and we reached Madang and we were at this plantation and this chappie

Harold Hanke, he was a war painter and artist, and he came and he asked us to pose behind a gun, which we did, and then he put a bit of background behind it. He did one of the Vickers crew and he did one of the mortars crew and he did one of a couple of sigs[signallers] on their

radio. And I happened to be going through the War Memorial back in the '60s and here was our little painting was up there in the War Memorial and I didn't know that it was in the War Memorial but there it was. I finished up I have a copy of the painting here and you can have a look at it. So we made

the war museum.

How does it feel to be immortalised?

Yeah, in colour. We are very proud of it. Amazingly enough it was alongside a painting of the first VC winner, a chap that won the VC at Bardia, I think he won it, and I think he lost his life at the same time and here it was, and we are alongside of it.

We're very proud of it. I tried to see the painting at the War Memorial since but every time I go up there they've got that much painting and it's all hidden away somewhere. Last time I was up there I pursued it and after ten telephone calls and prompting I finally got a copy of the painting from them. We had another painting that had been done by one of our

chappies, a chap named Bill Ploughman. He was in our unit and he did a painting – it's in our book somewhere there – and he did a painting of an ambush scene, and I have a copy of that at home, so I had this one blown up to be about the same size as this copy of Bill Ploughman.

The Bill Ploughman painting is down at Preston RSL and it's a tremendous big painting. This Bill Ploughman, he was an artist, a nice fellow, but he was always in the LOB's, furious. If you sent a fire cracker off and Bill Ploughman would start digging a foxhole. We were a bit concerned if we got him down where there was a few bullets flying around he would bloody dig right through.

He did this painting on a piece of Indian tent – it might've been a Yankee tent – he did this beautiful painting. It would be worth a bloody fortune. He donated it to the battalion. It was in Duckboard House for a while, and then we thought we would prefer it to be up at Preston because more of us were up there and we would want to look at it, and now it is in the centre part of Preston RSL.

Do you think that depiction of an ambush scene was accurate?

Yeah, the photo of it, I think it is reasonably accurate. Someone had to tell him the story and that is what they did. Bill Ploughman put it in colour. He has got the same faces. We know the faces of the people who were in the ambush.

He has got I think there is four people in it and he has got two faces the same, two of his mates he put in there, so they are in there for ever and ever in the history book. Bill Ploughman, he finished up an artist in Sydney. What's that little suburb of Sydney where all the artists are up near the Cricket Ground? He used to live up there, but he died twenty years ago,

W Ploughman. I think he never did any paintings that were very well recognised but he did do a few, and he had a few minor shows, and he always asked us to have this big painting put there and it was generally the centrepiece. So there we are in the painting on a canvas.

I would like to ask you also about the

Victory March in Melbourne. Could you describe that scene for us?

We did a march when we come back from New Guinea and our whole brigade marched because most of our brigade were from Victoria, and we did it down the

Swanson Street – we were at camp at Watsonia. We formed up down St Kilda Road, went around the back way and then marched down past the Town Hall in our full uniforms and with the bands in front and rifles on our shoulders, and finished up down at the Gardens down at St Kilda.

34:30 It gave you a kick to do a march like that. Our trouble was when the war finished we were all sent home in dribs and drabs, so we never ever did a march at the end of that. I suppose by that time there were so many units coming back home they would be hard to have space or time to fit them in and collect the people to march. But while you are still in uniform and we were at Watsonia

35:00 then they were able to do that and that's what they did.

Were there people lining the streets with their confetti and….?

Yeah, lining the streets and waving their flags.

Any ribbons or anything like that?

Ribbons, yeah. It was a big occasion, particularly when you are in uniform, to do the march. It is a wonderful feeling to march behind good brass bands. Our battalion had a good brass band and that is what we marched behind.

35:30 **Your unit pride must have been quite strong that day?**

Yeah, it is a big moment to march in your home town in your own battalion and the celebration when you are back from New Guinea. Little did we know that we were going to bloody Bougainville, but we still enjoyed it.

What sort of things would people yell out from the streets?

36:00 They would cheer, "Digger. You're wonderful digger." Some would throw, give a kiss to some of them. That's what they'd do. "You are fighting for us and we love you," but that is a long way away.

36:30 It is a good feeling to have done that march, and to think that you have come home and there was a lot of us together there. From then onwards they started to get a few drop out, a few killed, and disease, and start to fall a bit apart I suppose from after that day. So that was the march.

Tape 8

00:31 **Earlier on today you mentioned the difference between desert strength and jungle strength. Evidently when the Japanese entered the war there was a need to bring the boys back from the Middle East, but it was some time before Canungra got going. So you wouldn't have actually had that intense jungle training?**

No, we did not. I would be in agreement with that.

Did you meet up with any battalions later on who

01:00 **had been through Canungra? Did you notice marked differences in abilities.**

All our reinforcements came from Canungra. They used to do a course at Canungra, a terrible lot of them, and we used to call them the "Canungra kids", that was the name that we used to tell them. A lot of reinforcements that came to us at the Tablelands before we went to Bougainville had all been

01:30 through Canungra, and very good troops they were, and we told them, "Alright, you have been to Canungra. Now you have to learn what it's really about." There is nothing like war experience to give you that sense of reality. Funnily enough, I don't know whether you looked at our casualties,

02:00 but in Bougainville, more than likely 50% of our casualties would be youngsters who had been through Canungra. Whether it was through inexperience or what I don't know.

Probably the lack of experience, I guess.

A minor difference, they might have been a bit too keen. Keenness is a good thing, but it has to be well and truly put together in the war.

02:30 To have that expert training, as I explained when we came back from Tsili Tsili, we were trying to do that up at Bulolo's Corner by throwing the TNT to people, and we were working it in the jungle, but they were fairly fit and a nice lot of kids, too.

03:00 **Did you ever have any instances of people going AWL [absent without leave]?**

Yeah. When we went to Queensland on our trip and come back we had seventeen days of leave available and they only gave us twelve,

03:30 so we all finished up having an extra five days. There must have been three hundred in the battalion had the extra five days. I was a lance corporal at this stage and it only cost me one stripe as a lance corporal, we used to call the lance corporal "extremity corporal" because you did the work and didn't get paid. So we traded that in, but the other people that went AWL on that occasion,

04:00 they got confined to barracks for a week, not that that meant anything, and fined five dollars. There were a few that when we came back from New Guinea disappeared. They reckoned one trip away was enough, and they were never found.

So no instances of anyone ending up in the stockade or boob [prison]?

They used to finish up at Bendigo.

04:30 I've got little mate that, when we were at Caboolture and he went into Brisbane, and he got picked up trying to get on the train at one of the railway stations. We used to have an arrangement where we'd get on a goods train and as he went through parts of the camp at Caboolture he'd toot his steam whistle

05:00 and slow down, and they'd all jump off. And on this occasion Ronny was just getting on the train and the provosts [military police] caught him. So they took him into the lockup at Brisbane and he had to get in there, and when he went into the lockup there they gave him his duties. What they

05:30 used to do, you'd fill up bags of sand and take them over that corner, empty them out and empty the sand over there, and when you had emptied them out and cleaned up all the sand they'd send you with a shovel and a bag and you'd have to fill the bag up over there and bring it back. This was some of their duties that they used to give them. They used to say the camp where a few of our fellows finished up was at Bendigo, and they say there was some hard bloody provosts

06:00 screws [prison warders] up there and they used to try and torture them mentally by doing different actions there.

Mentally and physically, I am sure, in certain areas.

Yeah, it would have been there.

Now on a slightly lighter note, you said that you had a bit of a habit of back-chatting. What is the worst thing you ever said to somebody, and what did they do to you?

I'd be struggling to remember. Honestly I would be.

06:30 They'd say something and I'd turn it around. That's about all it was.

What about the worst thing you ever did as a soldier?

That's very debatable. I've done a few things but they'd all be

07:00 in devilment and that.

I have no doubt.

I tell some funny things with it. When we come back from action in Bougainville before we went away we used to get two bottles of beer a day issued to us, and when we came back from…we'd been collecting seven hundred,

07:30 which is our ration strength of two bottles of beer a week. We finished up with two [UNCLEAR] huts full of grog. We hadn't had a drink for six months, and we were down on strength. Instead of being seven hundred of us we were more than likely down to five hundred, and we had that much grog, and we used to drink it there. I always remember a mate – he just died just recently.

08:00 In the centre of the lines you used to have 44-gallon drums and they were cut in half and these were "wee" tins, and of a night time you would empty into those. This night, this fellow, he come back from… he was a drummer in the battalion band. He'd come back from a night out at the officers' Mess and he'd been drinking spirits and he fell in the wee tin head first and he couldn't get out, and I had to drag him

08:30 out by his bloody feet. I saved a man from drowning on dry land. He passed on about a month ago, the poor bugger. He used to...Under alcohol you do a few different things, and, as I said, stealing WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s was one of those items that you used to do.

In terms of stealing WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s

09:00 **what about when you were in New Guinea with the natives? I don't know if they had too many WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. I know they had pigs.**

No, we didn't have much contact with the natives.

I am amazed that you never really bumped into them along your travels.

Very few and far between.

So you didn't come across any gardens, native gardens or….?

There were a few but not a great number. Where we went, I will just describe in these points: Mataloi 1, Mataloi 2,

09:30 Paipa 1, Paipa 2. These were all native huts, but they were all deserted. The natives had fled in front of

the Nips and they had gone. I don't know where they had gone to but they were gone. In a few areas there was a few natives but not too many of them. They had all been ill-treated by the Nips so they used to get out of the way.

Can I ask you

10:00 **some specific questions about the Owen Stanley Ranges and also Madang? I haven't met anyone who went to Madang before so I was just having a quick look through your unit history. There wasn't much of a battle there, by the looks of things.**

No, there wasn't a great deal of battle. Evidently Madang was a big airstrip there for the Nips but it had been cleaned up by the Yanks and there were aircraft wrecks on the air strip.

10:30 I never went into Madang myself, but it couldn't have been a very big town. It might have been a trading town before the war.

What was the point of the 57th 60th taking it?

It was just to…The Nips that were down in Lae and Salamaua and Finschhafen, they had gradually been driven up north and containing them,

11:00 and the Nips were cleaned up, and they finished up at Wewak and Aitape. That's where they finished up, but they fled up all 'round the coast and there was more than likely twenty thousand of them would've gone up from around Lae and Salamaua, and they had drifted up all through this Bogadjim Road where they'd tried to run a road; instead of going down the coast they were trying to run this road, and they had

11:30 Indians and that, POW's working on making the road, and they never quite got there. They reached this huge mountain which is where Prothero was and Shaggy Ridge was, and, as I said, they were five, seven or eight thousand foot high and they had to get over them, and there it developed from a road to a mule track. And this mule track used to go over the hill and down the far side and then they used to come up from Lae

12:00 by motor truck or motor vehicle, that is if they come up. Madang was the centre of…was a coconut plantation centre, where they used to get the oils for, the coconut oils for all the soap, and they had these huge plantations there.

Why did they keep you there for three months?

More than likely the lack of shipping, I suppose.

It was probably one of those

12:30 **foolish questions to ask, where the army is concerned.**

Lack of shipping to get us home. I think that would be the only reason that they would. Australians had very limited use of shipping around there and that would be the reason why we put our bums down there. We had to rest because we had walked bloody miles from there over the top there and carried backwards and forwards. We didn't have any black

13:00 carriers and we had to do all the work in the carrying up and down, so we covered a lot of miles. You never had a peaceful day. You were doing something all the time.

They let you come home for a while. Was it a big reunion with your family when you got back?

Oh yeah, a big gathering. We had a gathering at the Town Hall at that same stage. We had a big army reunion

13:30 organised by the welfare and the padre at the Melbourne Town Hall.

And did you know that you'd changed? Was there a sense that you'd well and truly grown up since you joined up?

Oh yeah, for certain. You develop.

What changes were really obvious to you about coming back to Melbourne in that time frame, knowing that you had to leave again?

Knowing that you had to go away again?

14:00 **I guess you would have known you had to go away again. The war was still going.**

Yeah. I come back and our daytime would be…we used to still go and see a lot of army mates during the daytime and call and have a drink with them and then drift around.

Were you in civvies [civilian clothing]?

No,

14:30 in uniform a lot of the time. In uniform most of the time. More than likely our civvies would be out of fashion and we would have slimmed down a bit in weight and grown in size, but reduced in weight I'd say.

And what about for your family? Had they experienced any noticeable hardships?

No.

15:00 I found my mother and father…my mother was always one of these busy types always doing something. If she wasn't in the church mothers, down there, she was in the battalion association. And then she still had the younger brother at home – he would still be going to school. The elder daughter, she finished up going to…

15:30 The moment the war finished she went up to Labuan, to the goldfields up there and got married up there. Mother…old country people always survive. They find ways and means with their limited amount of money. They would more than likely go down a couple of prices in shopping lists, but they are able to survive and get by, no matter what happened.

16:00 **So when you were given orders prior to going to Bougainville, what did your orders stipulate?**

About going to Bougainville?

I am sure they didn't say you're going to be going to Bougainville. They would have told you to front up at a certain HQ [headquarters].

We were up at Mareeba up on the Tablelands, and we were told we were going to Bougainville.

Oh ok, they did say. And were you entitled to tell anybody else?

16:30 Oh well, you wouldn't tell anyone else. Mother and father would be interested in [my] telling them, but I would think they'd get it through the…mother would get the information through the welfare.

I had read that Bougainville was kept a bit under wraps for a fair amount of time.

I didn't know that. When we arrived there was three other brigades over

17:00 there and we were not aware of the fact that there were three brigades there and they were just taken over. There was four brigades finished where I think there was about three divisions of Americans – [UNCLEAR] division, and there was a marines division and another division were over there and they just shifted onto the American island-hopping operation that they did. We

17:30 took over in Yankee quarters, in Yankee tents.

You said earlier that you joined the Intelligence Section, you became an "I" man.

Yeah. I was always, whenever I could, in the I Section every day they would put up a sit rep [Situation Report], and I was always interested in seeing what was going on in the army around the world, and they would have an intelligence sit rep, [they] used to call it, and I

18:00 used to go up and read this.

And a "sit rep" is an acronym for or an abbreviation for…?

I don't know whether it would be the situation, but it used to give the details of what the Australian Army was doing, all the divisions, what they were doing, and it gave a ten line paragraph briefly on each of the

18:30 battles that were going on and where they were doing it and I was always going and having a look at it, and I could always read maps easily. I could always pass the examination and show a bit of intelligence. I don't know whether, not that everyone in the I Section was perhaps extremely

19:00 intelligent.

They probably got a little bit past Leaving Certificate though, I imagine.

Yeah, gone on to somewhere, they weren't all [UNCLEAR] or gone out to work at ten or twelve or so.

So did they put you through training and teach you?

I had done 'I' schools before that. I had done an 'I' school before that.

And do you get extra in your kit, then, in terms of pay?

You would have.

19:30 Not a great deal, three bob a day. They weren't a great deal of money but there was still some designation of extra ability.

I would imagine they would give you a compass and protractor and so on?

They would, yeah. They were there.

On arrival in Torokina I have heard tale of the cornucopia of

20:00 **American equipment lying about everywhere. What did you encounter when you got to Torokina and Bougainville?**

No, not a great deal of Yankee equipment.

Didn't encounter the Yanks there?

No, I didn't sight it. Some areas might have been, perhaps the ordinance and that, the Engineers Ordinance, they might have come upon some treasures, but we didn't find a great deal, there was no great deal of stuff.

20:30 **Physically how different did Bougainville strike you as a bit of land than, say, New Guinea had?**

You have a few different aspects of New Guinea, the hills and the mountains. They are the big factor there, whereas Bougainville is far flatter. It had the volcano, Mount Bagana, the volcano on it. It had a bit of a ridge on

21:00 the far side of it, but not in the area where we were. It was a fairly flat area, rise and fall, but there was no mountains compared to New Guinea.

Are you still with most of the mates that you started up with in Bougainville?

21:30 I am with the battalion association, and that has been a big lifeblood with me. Machine gunners, there was only thirty of us and I think there would only be about three alive now.

I meant when you arrived in Bougainville, was that group that you enlisted with and became friends with early on…?

No, they had all drifted away. They all went with the 9th Div, most of those, and I had come back

22:00 and got married and went around the country and I used to see little Ocker. And then I see this chap Morotti now and he is ninety, and he's been on his own down at Frankston for about the last six years, and I go and see him once a fortnight just to brighten his life up. They are the two people that I went into the tent with the first day I ever went into the army.

22:30 I put up with an old cantankerous bloody old ninety-year-old. They are funny people that hate Shane Warne and hate little Johnnie Howard, right? It's funny in life, isn't it?

I've just got a few more questions about Bougainville. One thing I am interested in, you said you went the furthest south of any battalion, down to the Mivo River.

Yeah, the closest to the Mivo River.

23:00 **And I think somewhere in my notes I had written that your orders were not to take any Japanese prisoners.**

It wasn't, our orders were not that. On the occasion that we were doing our movements around, we couldn't take prisoners, and our battalion did take about six people prisoners

23:30 down there. They come up when they were in fixed position and gave themselves up, but while we were going around it was better to have a dead Nip than a live Nip.

Did that mean there would be occasions when you would have to kill a wounded Japanese soldier?

Yeah, that happened.

Can you talk about that at all?

24:00 I did mention it in that ambush position where we killed a Nip simply because they bowled over about ten or twelve of them, and on that occasion they missed one and the rest were following behind and all following the wire down, one forward company, and the others were following behind it.

24:30 The bloody Nip came up in the centre and fired. There they had these huge trees and they used to have the roots coming out and he was in there, and that was one fellow that we missed. That was the situation that occurred. He could have killed one of ours fellows.

No doubt. I've have noticed in sporting leagues or

25:00 **when you play a game of sport, if you are not happy with the game that you've played I know of a lot of sports people will beat themselves up that night: they should've kicked left, they should've done this, they should've done that. Would that happen in the tents at night? Did you go over what your actions had been that day and think about how you could have done them better? Did you give yourself a hard time at any stage?**

No. For six months in action you are only

25:30 in a two-man tent so you've only got one or two of you together. You have only got one opponent, so you either have to live with them or...

No but I mean even in yourself, did you find yourself questioning your day's activities and thinking how you might have done it differently?

Yeah, you'd think of it. You'd always think of that in life, no matter what you do. You recount on what you'd done,

26:00 and if you made an error, you might have made an error, and hope it wasn't as a result that you had a fatality.

And earlier you also said that you think your food rations were slightly improved after you left New Guinea.

Yeah, we started to get a bit of fresh food after that.

What would you take with you when you were on these patrols down south?

You'd take a pack that were already done up and closed in, and it would have

26:30 a couple of tins of stuff inside it and a packet of dog biscuits and sugar and milk, all done up in a pack, a day's rations as they called it, and this is what you'd have, and perhaps have a small tin of beans or something or a bit of what they called bully beef, these would be in your pack.

27:00 In Bougainville there were a few day packs if you were going out. When we did our seven day movement we would have taken seven days' rations out with us in our bag and would have been eating that stuff every day.

Were there soldiers that would eat more than their ration's worth and sort of try and cadge food off others?

There was always the

27:30 gabbits as they used to call them.

A gabbit?

That is the bugger, wasn't it, who ate his mates'.... Where did he do that? Gabbit. I think he was, might have been in...I don't know whether gabbit was in the convict days in Tasmania, or what. Down there I think there was

28:00 one of them, that is why we call them gabbits, right? The cook would say, "Anyone for any more?" and all the gabbits would run up and put their dixie out for more.

Were there occasions of that and did it cause tension in the ranks?

It would cause a bit of tension, but you knew the bastards so what was the worry?

Well if that's the case then, how did, I am sure the army had its way of dealing with

28:30 **things unofficially.**

No. For a certain amount of the time, more than likely 50% of the time, there's a limit in the amount that was available and it was all eaten on the first run through. And in the early stages, when they were cooking for the...

29:00 one cookhouse for the whole battalion, the food was that shocking you had to be a gabbit to go it twice, to overeat on it, right? It was so bloody awful, a lot of it, but their stews and their roasts, they would slaughter roast meat. I think on the food situation it definitely improved.

29:30 How it finished up, you used to have company cooks. There'd be three cooks for a hundred bods, and as a result of that some of them would experiment a little bit with the food and try and cook that bloody dehydrated mutton and try and put it in with flour or water or something so that was edible, but it was very faintly edible.

Onto something completely different, what

30:00 **part or what time in your service would you say that you experienced great fear?**

Quite honestly I didn't experience great fear. These circumstances happen in split minutes and you don't have the time to get fearful, I don't think.

30:30 When you're sitting back and you're being shelled and you hear them go off you may have some sense of fear or feeling "Where is this bugger going to land?", but generally I would say in the circumstances you don't have great fear. You are so watching your own existence and looking

31:00 after yourself that I don't think you have great fear, truthfully.

Apart from shocking feet problems with the hookworm and also getting a shot of shrapnel in you, you were reasonably unscathed compared to what could have happened to you.

Yeah, I could have....

Did you consider that just down to luck?

Definitely a certain amount of luck.

Was there something else that you had that kept you

31:30 **out of harm's way?**

You look after your body by having your Atebrin. I am never very...Perhaps my hygiene habits have never been extremely well but I still survived them. I had a certain amount of tinea but not a great deal of tinea, as different from this foot trouble that I had. I didn't get a great deal of tinea in the crutch and that type of thing,

32:00 which a lot of people would have got. I don't know why that was the reason for that, but I didn't get malaria because I took Atebrin. I had diarrhoea a few times but that was due to food. We would be perhaps drinking water and there could be a carcass three hundred yards in the river. You don't know. You wouldn't know your luck.

Did you just drink the water wherever you were, the local water?

32:30 Yeah, generally speaking.

There wasn't any chance of boiling it, I would imagine.

No, you wouldn't be boiling it.

Considering, you are lucky you didn't get sicker in many ways.

Oh, for certain.

The amount of mosquitoes around.

The 9th Division got 100% casualty rate due to illness and sickness, where our rate would more than likely be about 30%. They got that through sickness and

33:00 dysentery and malaria and that when they went up in Finschhafen. They were only in the place for about six months. We spent eighteen months up there and we didn't get half the complaints that they got.

What were your thoughts in regard to, for example, New Guinea was a fairly clear-cut arrangement in that you were defending the area from a potential Japanese invasion. Bougainville, as you mentioned earlier,

33:30 **and as the history books indicate, those Japanese were never going to be a threat to Australia. Did that have any effect on your attitude as you were going out on patrol?**

Not when going on patrol, but we definitely considered it was a waste of time since then.

Was that talked about amongst the troops when you were together? Was there any sort of conscious decision that something should be said or done about

34:00 **that?**

It used to be talked about a little bit, but never a conscious decision that we should do anything firm about it because we considered that Tack Hammer [?], he reckoned we were terrific, he was gong to send us back into action after we'd been out for a bloody month. He said, "My boys will go down and beat those Japanese." He wanted to do it, right, even though we had four months in action

34:30 and we were starting to fall apart bodily, physically, and perhaps some mentally, too.

Did you have any idea while you were in Bougainville that the war was close to finishing?

No, not to the extent, to the quick extent that it happened.

So the Guinea Gold didn't give you much?

No. There was no guide ever because the war finished dramatically quick. They reached the Philippines and then they dropped

35:00 two bombs and the war was over, wasn't it?

How did you hear about that?

We were back in the reserve and they said, “They’ve dropped an atomic bomb off.” And that was the first one. Where was that?

Hiroshima.

Hiroshima. That was the first one and Nagasaki was the second one. We said, “That is terrific.”

35:30 **Did you know what that meant, that they’d dropped an atomic weapon on Japan?**

There had been rumours going around that it was a massive bomb but you didn’t know what the extent, the havoc it created.

I suppose, I guess after being in your circumstances you probably just thought of a big bomb that you had seen.

A big bomb that made a bigger mess, instead of the bomb that it was.

Did that shock you at all when you found out the extent of it?

No, we were as happy as buggery,

36:00 very happy that it did go off.

Can you give me an idea of those last few days when they’ve dropped the bomb and they are pamphleting the Japanese and the American liberators are flying all over the place? What was that like for you? Was it strange to realise it was all coming to an end?

Very happy people. Very extremely happy people, even though the Nips were still chasing

36:30 us. They had decided we had gone far enough and they were chasing around the wire. It took them a week before they stopped coming around the wire. We still had to have our defensive patrols out for a week after that to make sure that they weren’t coming around the wire. We had a theatre night down there and they said they reckoned the Nips were watching from outside the wire. They had a movie night down there one night and this is what they said.

37:00 **Did you get to have a party in Bougainville?**

No, only when we came back. Nothing greatly to party with down there.

You couldn’t find any cases of beer anywhere?

No. The CO used to have some beer sent down there and someone used to knock it off on him, some beer and some whiskey, but it wasn’t me, I wasn’t in that situation. It was his batman had some mates and he used to get his mates to knock it

37:30 off for him.

Tape 9

00:34 **Did you have occasion to see any of the Japanese CO’s who registered their surrender? I think one was called Tanaka.**

We saw one down at Bougainville that came in, and he presented his sword down there. We had a

01:00 field day down at the football ground and they brought him, I don’t know where they brought him from, but it must have been from down at Buin. And they brought him up and he presented his sword to a General. It was one of them up at the Ridgeford oval, the oval where we played football, and there was

01:30 a space for it and that is where he came and presented his sword to us.

That would have been quite odd because the chances are you would have only seen Japanese infantry in your time. Was it an unusual sight seeing the commanding officer?

Strangely enough, there is a report in our book that in the middle of the jungle in Bougainville,

02:00 not as far as the Mivo River but one of the rivers back from there, C Company of our battalion set an ambush and down the road marches a General and he is in full regalia with a sword and white boots and everything, and he had another Officer with him, a red-tabbed Officer,

02:30 and they shot both of them and knocked over a few others, and then they got out as quick as they could. This was amazing. It must have been a divisional headquarters or something right in the middle of the jungle there, and our fellows did see and win a General there. He was a Canungra boy. He was on the Bren gun, and

03:00 he did the job. He said it is so amazing that here, they would be about twenty mile from the coast on

this little jungle track, and out of the blue comes this official party and the General was marching. They don't know where he was going, but he just come down the track. He might have been going to go back to Buin. He got gobbled up and that was right in the midst of the

03:30 jungle in Bougainville. I think it was patrol number 324 or something. The Lieutenant named Harold Patterson from up Cobram, he was the chief that was in charge of the patrol, and this is what happened so we have had our experiences with Japanese Generals.

I would imagine that would be a bit of a feather in your cap.

I don't know whether Harold Patterson…he finished with an MC [Military Cross award]. I don't know whether he got it for that, but I often wondered

04:00 if he had've been a Yank, the chappie who shot the General, more than likely he would have got a Congressional Medal, but he didn't get a kind smile, strange enough.

It happened a lot, didn't it that some men would be recognised and some would just not be recognised. It is arbitrary, as far as I can read.

He was a farmer and he's still up at Mount Gambier. Amazingly enough his son breeds these Japanese

04:30 cattle, some name of it, outside here near Craigieburn way and he sells them to the Japanese. I said to him later, "Mate, you'd better not tell the Japanese buyer that his father shot a Japanese General."

Speaking of Generals, you had a chat with General Savage, did you not?

Yeah, I did.

After the war?

Yeah, well after the war. I was working in the same building as him

05:00 in Queen Street, Melbourne and I asked General Savage, I said, "General, what did you want to do with us? We were sitting on our backsides near Ward's Strip." And he said, "Mr White, I had a job lined up for you. I was going to take you people and land you at Nassau Bay, but the Americans wanted to put in a show so instead of landing a battalion they landed a regiment, and then we had to send the 17th parade

05:30 down from Mubo to get them off the beaches. The Yanks would go out and do a patrol and hit the Japanese and then instead of stopping there they would come back into their bivouac area that same night, and the next morning they would go out and do the same thing . They weren't getting a great deal of distance. Your battalion would have gone through there with no worry."

06:00 That is how we finished. We didn't get into action at Mubo or Salamaua.

That's curious. That kind of set the pace for what happened in Vietnam by the sounds of it, similar results.

I don't know. I have read results in Vietnam and more than likely the Yanks over there would have done about a third of the casualties themselves. I am not degrading the Yanks, they are more than likely

06:30 terrific fighters in a lot of ways.

Different strategy. Just cutting back to Bougainville again, I was fascinated by your thoughts of the possibility of being eaten by the enemy.

Yeah, there was a certain amount of cannibalism went on when we were going down Buin Road.

What evidence of that did you find?

A strange body with a bit removed from him, and

07:00 close handy there was a fire with a cooking utensil on it. They were terribly short of red meat over there or white meat.

That is gruesome.

Yes, it is gruesome, but it's just the thought of what they would have perhaps done if that bomb had not gone off.

Was that the only time that you came across it, because I've heard this before.

That is the only time that we come across it, yeah.

07:30 It did happen, we think.

And if you'd found the body in reasonable shape then it must have been fairly recent, given the decomposure that had happened.

It was a matter of a couple of days. You could tell by the decomposition. The body hadn't decomposed in

any way.

Was he someone from your battalion? Did you know him personally?

08:00 Yeah. I knew of him.

How would you report that back to your mates, what you'd say? Or was that something you wouldn't bother to tell them?

It was reported to me, really. It was told to me.

You weren't there to actually see that?

No.

I am glad for you that you didn't see that. Were there other situations that you

08:30 **encountered like that in Bougainville? Things were pretty hectic there.**

No, not that, with ourselves. I think that's the attitude of the enemy and what they would do.

Were there times where your rations were so low or so average that you were pretty hungry yourself?

Not looking at my mates, no.

I'm sure you weren't sizing them up for a size 7 pot or anything, but just by contrast, did you experience that sort of deprivation?

09:00 We've been short of rations but I suppose you would go without a feed for two or three days, but you wouldn't be quite under the pressure that they were under, though.

No. By comparison, things were shocking at Changi, for an example.

It is just not the Australian way of life.

I think we probably have a different kind of appetite.

Yeah.

So can you just give me a little bit of an idea of what those last days

09:30 **or last weeks in Bougainville were like, the cessation of hostilities?**

It was still a tense situation and we didn't know. We were still in action even though the brigade had been pulled out, and we were still there in action as a reserve brigade, and we hadn't been pulled back to Torokina. We were just sitting in the background.

10:00 I forget the name of the brigade that went through us but they had taken up our positions, and they were in front and we were about ten miles back, not a great distance. The Japanese were starting to consider that we had stretched out too far and all they had to do, more than likely, was to set an ambush as people went through and they more than likely would have got the rations of the

10:30 people who were forward. And with their numbers they could have perhaps whittled us down. As I said, they had twenty thousand at least up there at the town of Buin.

How did it come about that you were sent to Rabaul?

Simply because I didn't have enough points to come home.

I meant actually, literally. Did they put you on a boat or a barge?

I went by boat.

11:00 **Rabaul had obviously been hit twice very badly in the course of the war. By the time you got there it probably would have looked fairly wiped out.**

No, we were out about five mile out of the town and didn't go into Rabaul a great deal. It all looked a beautiful spot, the best harbour in the world was Rabaul. It was. A beautiful harbour.

11:30 And there were a lot of caves the Nips had dug and a lot of caves in the place and they had a lot of stuff hidden away there.

Were you able to get around and have a look?

No, it didn't worry me. I wasn't greatly interested in touring around.

You picked up a few souvos [souvenirs] from Bougainville, did you not, a few souvenirs that you brought back?

No, not a great deal. All I brought back was a box and a few maps.

12:00 That is all I brought back. I brought back a little lakatoi [canoe] from up at Rabaul.

You mean a miniature lakatoi?

Yeah, it'd be about a foot long. They are carved and they do it with…they burn a pattern in the woodwork with a hot steel stick or something. I brought that back.

12:30 That has aged a little bit since I brought it back.

I am glad you didn't try to bring back a full-sized one.

Some people have brought back – I don't know how they got them back – brought back rifles and Japanese rifles and different matters like that, swords.

There must have been a few favours done to get those things home.

Yeah, to get back rifles. I don't know how they possibly got rifles back, and helmets and that type of thing,

13:00 and phones and handsets and that. We finished up, he was a major who had the two rifles and he passed one to us.

That's certainly not leading by example, is it?

No. We perhaps didn't want to…We wanted to leave the army, and

13:30 we'd had enough of it, we wanted to get back as a civilian. That was my outlook, and for a lot of that what did you want to bring home a lot of stuff that would still be memories for you? Perhaps later on you wouldn't have minded having some it.

Can you tell me what it was like guarding the Japanese POW's in Rabaul?

What used to happen, they used to give you work parties, and

14:00 the little Japs, twenty or thirty of them would come marching up and present themselves to you every morning and you would give them instruction of what to do to clean up around the camp site. We wouldn't be doing a great deal of supervision of them. They just had their designated jobs and they would come up and do them.

You would speak English to them in terms of giving them orders?

I would speak English to them, but I didn't have a great memory of them.

14:30 I wanted to lose it. When we went up there we had forgotten the action and used to play cricket and have as much recreation as we could with the limited ability that we had.

What about the sight of these Japanese that you have been fighting that are suddenly very submissive, trotting out to working parties?

Yeah, very nice people, yeah.

15:00 That's amazing, with their character. As I said, when you see them nowadays and you are equal with them…. I always considered the Japanese reckon we are second-class citizens, but up there they would bow their head and very smile. I used to line them up and give them a roost in the tail for good measure. They used to bear it and enjoy it. I don't know whether they were infantry or what. They were more than likely

15:30 people that used to be a base job for them, but all that smiling, and that is typical of the Nips, but now when they are on equal with you they don't bloody smile at you. They give you that steely grin, don't they, as if to say, "Bloody silly Australians."

Were they people to you then or were they just the enemy still?

They were people. Didn't think of them as the enemy at all at that stage.

16:00 They were someone we had beaten. That is how I looked at them then.

What was it to be the victors? What did that…how did that come across to you in Rabaul without points enough to go home? Did you feel very victorious?

No, just felt a normal Australian that you are in this situation. You try and do your best with what you are. You've gone a little bit further away from home but, well

16:30 at some stage you have to get back there.

Were you fed up?

Fed up for bloody certain.

Did you have any thoughts of just jacking it in and saying, "Oh blow this, I'm just going to get

out of here whatever way I can”?

No. I had a mate, he didn’t have sufficient points, and he was in Bougainville and he got rowed out to a boat where they were going home, and he hopped on board the boat and he got into a cabin and went down

17:00 in the cargo area. He didn’t know, but they closed the cargo area and put all the people going home on top of him, and he was down in the cargo hold and couldn’t get out. He saw a bit of a light and he knocked on it and knocked on it, and someone heard it and he opened it up, and bugger me, it is one of the fellows from our battalion doing the same thing but he had got on board the boat by

17:30 altering his points, cheating on his points. He got someone to put his points down at 156 instead of 106, so he let him in. He is on board the boat and he had to get off the boat and they are all lined up with their name tags and he accidentally bumped into this fellow and whipped [stole] his name plate off him and stuck him off and got off the boat and he said he didn’t know what happened to his mate. So then he worked his way and he got on a train,

18:00 a troop train coming down here. He come down and got down to Melbourne. He said, “I am down here, what do I do?” So he went to report at the… he said, “I will report at Russell Street,” the police station. The police said, “We don’t want you.” He said, “Where are you from?” He said, “I am from Bougainville.” He said, “We don’t want you.” He said, “We will put you in gaol for the night and then send you out to Royal Park to the army.” He said,

18:30 “I will come back in the morning.” So he said, “Alright,” so he went home and then he come back in the morning and he sent him over to Royal Park. And he fronts at Royal Park and who does he see but Tack Hammer, the bloody brigadier, right? And this mate was a terrific footballer and Tack knew him as being a footballer up there in the 15th Brigade, and he said, “What are you….?” He said, “I got home from Bougainville.” He said, “You are a deserter, are you?” He gave

19:00 him thirty days confined to barracks and sent him up to Bonegilla so he finished up there, but he never really got charged for being a deserter. That’s what he actually did in desperation.

So after the hostilities ceased there was a loosening of some of the strict….

Oh yeah, there’d be a

19:30 loosening of…Oh well, if you’d been in the infantry for five years and put up with the trials and tribulations of it you have to have some release when you get down, and you have been shrewd enough to work your way down to your home base, isn’t it? It was a tremendous effort. We often wondered what happened to the poor bugger who didn’t have the name tag, how he got off the boat.

And your last days there,

20:00 **you didn’t pull any stunts like that?**

No, I just quietly went along with it, because I had a good spot where I was. I was in brigade headquarters being well fed, didn’t have any responsibility, didn’t have to do anything. All I had to do was play cricket, and that was enough for me.

When you came home and you left the South Pacific,

20:30 **was there something momentous that happened for you? Did you know that you were farewelling an experience of a lifetime, or was it just another day?**

More than likely another day to some extent. But as I said, we booked our way to Stawell and went and saw the Stawell Gift [running race and carnival], and we were minor celebrities there too, turkeys and all.

Turkeys and all. Indeed you were. Alrightee.

INTERVIEW ENDS