

Australians at War Film Archive

Don Tibbits (Blue) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/56>

Tape 1

00:37 **So Don, you were born in Victoria? Is that right?**

I was born in Albury.

In Albury, on the border?

Yeah. So most it was most appropriate eventually coming into "Albury's Own."

And who were your parents?

Guy Stephen Tibbits, and Catherine Tibbits. He came from Dubbo and she came from Young.

And were they farmers?

01:00 He was a bank manager. The bank manager right out at Bourke in those days where my sister was born, no in Sydney in 1907, and then when she was about fourteen they went to Bourke. I was never in Bourke you see because I came along later.

Because you weren't born until 1925?

Right In Albury in 1925.

01:30 **So by then you had one older sister. Any other siblings?**

No, only a sister, 16 years between us.

That's incredible.

Yeah and a shock I imagine.

I bet she was like a bit of a second mother - helped look after you?

Absolutely. Yes, that's right because my father died just after I was born. At the age of 52 he went to play golf and died on the links and so my sister was at boarding school at the time and she was brought back, and of course she was thank heavens, you know a strong girl, and stayed

02:00 that way for the rest of her life. And yes, I think she took over the father role, me being so young and you know she'd tune me up when I was naughty so to speak and that sort of thing, because my mother rather kept ill health too.

Did your mother go to work after your father died?

No never. My mother never went to work, so I think she never really had quite an understanding of work, not that well. He came from a family and the family

02:30 at Memagong and Young were well off, pretty well off and when she married Guy he was a bank manager and so bank managers in those days wherever they went were given a home, and the beautiful old Melbourne bank still stands in Bourke. The old London bank in Bourke is still there, beautiful building, one of the best in Bourke and he

03:00 was moved from Bourke, one of the greatest moves I ever heard of to Warrnambool in Victoria. Now a colossal climate change as well as anything else because Warrnambool, you know down on the coast in Victoria, is a very nice climate if you like a pretty cold climate, though compared with Bourke where the days after day after day of, well in those days in Fahrenheit, they were days of around the

03:30 90 to 100 and very hot, and then you get out to Warrnambool where it wasn't so hot. And although we were living in Warrnambool, I was born in Albury because my mother and sister lived in Albury and her husband was a doctor, Dr. Paton of Albury, so she was very keen to go to Albury so that's where I was born.

So were you born in a hospital?

Yeah hospital in Albury my word. Now it's still there, can you believe it? Right beside a marvellous motel in Kiewa Street and they used the old

04:00 hospital next door, they bought the building and they used it as an office.

So Don, did you grow up in Albury?

No, I didn't no.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Elwood, which was just the next suburb. Well, when I say that, when we bought this here this was Elwood and then all of a sudden they changed it to Brighton, but I was brought up down in a street called Martin Street in Elwood, ran between St Kilda St and the beach, a lovely, leafy beautiful street

04:30 with the sea at the end of it. Very very lucky.

So you obviously had a happy childhood?

Very very happy childhood and I had marvellous friends down there and the street just gradually disappeared when the war came you know, they went one after the other. The older fellas first, John Haslam, George Stooke and Tom Stooke and then eventually Gordon, my life long friend went to the air force

05:00 and Bob Evans, one went into the navy and his brother went into the army and all of a sudden from the leafy street from St Kilda Street to Martin Street, had no young men in it at all. My mother used to say that they were running around playing one minute and they were at the war the next, which was not a bad sort of a summing up really, sad as it is. And well a couple didn't come back, my lifelong friend Gordon did, thank heavens.

05:30 He was in bomber command and distinguished himself and wrote a marvellous book called Flack and Barbed Wire and he just died last April. So a great loss having as I say, a lifelong.... we were babies together so to speak and went right through our lives together. He went to the air force as I say and I went to the army.

Now Don you went to school in Elwood?

06:00 I went to Elsternwick State. Yeah

Elsternwick State. And I mean by the time you were starting school the depression was hitting in Australia, were you aware of that?

Well the depression was on during my childhood, I mean I was born in 1925 and the depression came on then, what about 1928, and went until 1933 I 'spose so I went to the Elsternwick State during the Depression years and I well,

06:30 I 'spose we were fortunate there, I mean we lived in not a big home, a nice home because my mother was always one for as real estate agents say, location location ,and she would spend all her money almost on making sure that we had a nice house, but she certainly wasn't wealthy 'cause I went to the army on six and six a day and I got three shillings because I gave three and six allotted to her to help her live because she was a widow as I say

07:00 and she needed to have the three and six daily. I got six and six a day and three and six I allotted to her. Now my sister was working because she needed to take a wartime job and she went and learnt to be a mail sorter at the M-A-I-L, the mail or the main post office in

07:30 Melbourne for all that sort of thing. The sorting house was the corner of Spencer St and Russell St and my sister went there and she worked a lot of what do you call that work at different times you know?

Shift work?

Shift work yeah, so my mother would be quite alone. Some nights she'd be all by herself you know, for night after night after night, and I was away and my sister was doing that. But that was her wartime effort and as well as that she was a

08:00 oh training to.... they had a marvellous name for it in training in case we were bombed, and incendiary bombs and that sort of thing...she went to.... it's silly not being able to remember the name because so many women did it and learnt a strategy to put out those incendiary bombs

Fire warden was she or bomb warden?

That's it. An air raid warden they called it.

08:30 So at the same time that she was working at the post office she became an air raid warden and well she was as I say, a very healthy person, so she was very good; I mean I think they made her carry the pump because she was quite strong anyway. Yeah for the time that I was away she did that all the time and

then at the end of the war transferred to the taxation department.

So everyone really pitched in back home didn't they?

Well, they did really didn't they?

09:00 Everybody did something and did voluntary work of some sort and you know there were all sorts of women doing knitting classes and they were making things and then they were making cakes and sending cakes away of which I was a recipient and oh yes, I think that's one thing about disasters. I 'spose war's been one of the worst of them but it does bind the community together no doubt about that, and the whole country together and all the communities. So I suppose they say there's good

09:30 things that come of war, I suppose the binding of men together too as far that goes because every one became a mate and you relied heavily on each other. I 'spose, especially in the infantry, but I think everywhere.

And Don what was your awareness of WW1 as you were growing up?

Well my main awareness was men that came to the door - hawkers. Now I don't know you don't see them in these days but WW1 men

10:00 that couldn't get a job would be given a bag of, well there'd be pins and safety pins and I can't think of all the other things, bootlaces, shoelaces all those sort of things and they'd come to the door and ask if you wanted to buy anything and they'd all have their returned badge on and my mother used to say to me, "Oh mum there's a hawker at the door." "Is he a returned man?"

10:30 And I would say, "Yes yes he's a returned man." Well of course she says, "Oh well you must buy something, we must buy something." so of course I really got in this you know, "Who are these blokes from the World War?" and also Bill our postie who was a marvellous fellow, he was a First World War fellow, Bill Bridges never forgot him as a kid, well he got me a cat and oh I was thrilled to have a cat. And how Bill Bridges ever finished his

11:00 round when it came to Christmas Eve I'm sure I never know . By the time he got to our place he'd be staggering in with the letters because everyone would, "Oh Bill you must come and have a drink." and Bill would mostly you know. But he got his round done and seemed to get he and his bike back to the post office and he'd appear the next day and of course they were pedal bikes in those days all red with PMG [Post Master General] written down them. So that was a big introduction too, and a bottle-o came around, Jerry the bottle-o and I was mad on his horse and so on

11:30 and he was a real character. Now he was a First War man too.

Did they ever talk to you about it?

Well Bill the postie did one day. And I said to him, "It must have been awful Mr. Bridges." And he said, "Oh yes lad, was not a good thing war you know." Oh I suppose my worst memory, "One night," he said, "I was crawling along trying to get out of the way of a bit of shrapnel, I put my hand out," he said, "I put it straight out on to a dead Gerry's face."

12:00 He said, "It's funny the things you don't forget, lad." and I've never forgot that and anyway we mustn't talk any more about that. So that's something that Bill told me but the point made was it was not a very good thing to go through, war.

That would have really stuck in your mind?

Well it did, I still remember it now. Here I am at 78 and I've never forgotten old Bill telling me that and of course you had your own things to think about. There were particular moments that...

12:30 that you didn't care for.

So your mum obviously felt very strongly about the World War I veterans?

Very strong, yeah, very strong, oh Queen and country and the flag and World War I veterans and those sort of things. It was the era of all that you know. I mean she was brought up in Victorian times and I think she was a pretty Victorian woman really you know. Her bringing up and her home.

Any of her family in the...

All her brothers yes...

13:00 **They all come home?**

Seven brothers all went. Yeah there was thirteen in the family and all the brothers went, all my uncles, hardly name them all now. Some I never saw a lot of, some I didn't see so much of. And well they were on a property you see. You notice in films the way the young fellows on properties couldn't really get to the First World War quickly enough.

13:30 I mean I know they must have been shocked later on because it was meant to be just one big adventure, but I think that some of the things were that on most properties their dads worked them pretty hard, you know. I mean all those boys there worked under James Mackinnon and it was a lovely property but

he worked them. And a lot of the times those properties were a long way from anything so to speak. I mean I don't suppose cinemas

14:00 because there weren't many around there, or talkies as they called them in those days. And here is a big opportunity and they were running trains through these towns you know, the recruitment train would be going through and they could see that this was an opportunity to have an adventure and get away from the farm and Dad for a while. And they took it. And I'm sure that that was getting away from the farm and the outback or away from everything.

14:30 It was quite encouraging for them when they saw they could get away and even if it was to go to the war. And of course the thing about wars, you don't know what you're really going to until you get there. And I don't know should I get onto myself and my version of that? I had a great friend in the battalion named Johnny McAlorum who was killed, worse luck, and John

15:00 I remember having this discussion with him because he hadn't been in the Middle East but he had been in New Guinea and I said to him, just having a chat one time, "By gosh John, who do you think it's worse for, you going back and you know what you are going back to, or me who's never been before, I think it is me who's never been before." And he said, "Well you're gonna find that you're wrong." he said, "It's worse for me and I know what I am going to." And I go along with

15:30 what John McAlorum said, I didn't know what I was going to and well, he was just so right. And that's where you've got to admire so much, I came into the battalion up on the Tablelands in June 1944 in the 2/23rd and so all the training and everything was for getting ready to where we were going, which we didn't know then. And of course, it would be

16:00 the islands somewhere. And off we went and of course the landing happened to be in Borneo, Tarakan in Borneo. Now I said about Johnny McAlorum, he'd been in New Guinea and he was going to a second campaign, but when you look back to the originals of the 2/23rd battalion when it was formed in Albury in August 1940, some of those fellows, some of them went right through every campaign. Now my great friend, another great friend of mine in the battalion

16:30 who I'm pleased to say lives in Sussex Inlet and is alive today, Slogger, yeah Slogger, Jack Collins, went through every campaign. And there he is today, not in the best of health but quite understandable really, and he's in a nursing home but he gets out and can have a chat about everything. And Slogger went through every campaign and lived to tell the tale. Now you know when you look at the 2/23rd and you go through all those campaigns I mean

17:00 Tobruk and Alamein and Syria and then home, and then land at Lae on the fourth of September 1943, Finschhafen Sattleburg, Kuranko, and some of those other battles, the Sio River all those battles that happened up there. You know, you say one name on a landing, like you say Finschhafen and so on, but then there are a whole lot of districts and plantation battles, smaller town battles you know

17:30 and all that sort of thing. And to go through all those sort of things and come out was just amazing.

That is really incredible.

And as a matter of fact you people are going to interview one of our chaps who did go right through, was an original of the battalion and did go right through.

Right Don, if we could back track a little bit 'cause I would just like to talk a bit..

I am jumping forward, I'm sorry.

No that's fine, that's natural, that's going to happen. But if we could just go back to your childhood

18:00 **I'm fascinated that you grew up near the beach, that must been a great thing.**

Lovely, marvellous.

Did you use the beach a lot?

All the time yeah and a funny thing in those days, I think what we had, I think mum or some people would say, 'You must put something on over your body.' The great thing, the only thing I ever heard of in those days was coconut oil. Now coconut you could put over your body, now that was supposed to stop the solar rays for a bit, I don't know whether it did or not, and the other thing is you could mix it up and use it for a hair dressing.

18:30 Marvellous if you had curly hair which I had and I hated it, you could put coconut oil on and when you did it warm and then let it go hard, it would keep your hair straight. Marvellous thing. It's a good tip for someone today.

So you would have been fragrant, quite debonair on the beach with the coconut oil and...

Well no, I was always a skinny kid. I always felt the position a bit... I used to read these magazines, "Come, lend us your body.

19:00 Come to us and we'll turn you into a Tarzan looking bloke." or something. I thought, "My God I should

do one of those courses." Next thing I was in the army, they did it. "My God!" they said, "You're a bit skinny."

Now did you have any particular interests as a child, as a young man, any hobbies that you pursued?

Well we were always doing something. A lot of time with the right weather we spent it at the beach. And another thing

- 19:30 I was mad on was the movies as they call it now, and the cinemas; but I used to go to the pictures, and that was every Saturday. We went to the pictures. The Broady down in Elwood, we went down every Saturday. You know there would be four of us I 'spose, five of us would go, we were friends and well the main attraction just about every Saturday was Laurel and Hardy, and we were very disappointed if Laurel and Hardy wasn't on. My sister used to say, "What's on today
- 20:00 Laurel and Hardy?" "Oh yes." we'd say, "Laurel and Hardy." and that was one thing I was keen on and I was always keen on model cars, so I made a collection of model cars which got passed on to the family. A matter of fact, I've still got a collection of them over the years and that was another thing, and in those days we were very keen on playing Cowboys and Indians. So you could buy marvellous metal guns, they were cast in those days, weighed a ton.
- 20:30 Then you made a holster and you were Buck Jones or Tom Mix, Ken Maynard. Of course those names don't mean anything now, but when we were kids, Tom Mix and Buck Jones, well they were the epitome of cowboys, you know. Shoot straight, ride a horse backwards and all that sort of thing. So there was that and also you know, you'd go to see these swashbuckling films that Errol Flynn would be in, like Robin Hood, so we'd rush home and get a long nice piece of wood and put a cross and
- 21:00 we'd have sword fights, we'd be mad on them. Making swords and that sort of thing. And of course we had bikes and we used to go for tremendously long bike rides. We went from Elwood to Laverton once. Crikey I think it was the end of us for a couple of days afterwards. We were stiff and so on, even as kids when you can go a long way to Laverton. And we did a lot of bike riding, and of course bikes they just had a cog in the front and a cog at the back in those days,
- 21:30 they didn't have any gears. You'd change speed and everything with the movement of your legs, you pedalled hard or not too much and that was just how it went.

And after leaving school did you get a job, were you able to find a job?

Well after Elsternwick State, I went to Melbourne Grammar and after Melbourne Grammar, I went into the wool

- 22:00 trade and....

I think Brad [Archive researcher] mentioned you'd been in hats before that.

Yes, I was gonna skip that bit. Well actually I went to work in Flinders Lane for millinery manufacturer, George Stook & Sons, I'll mention them 'cause the fella I mentioned a long while ago, my life-long friend was Gordon Stooke. And I went to work for George Stooke & Sons in Flinders Lane and well I was in the packing

- 22:30 department and then I was in delivery and you'd take these great hat boxes around town where they'd slip these boxes, these huge boxes full of hats, one on one arm and one on the other, then put the lashing, you'd put it under the lashing around the boxes and off you'd go. Well it's a funny time getting through the city, you see, getting up Nance Bannon's. I can't think of the other flash shops, Nance Bannon's was in Collins Street..

George's?

George's

- 23:00 and sometime to Myer's and there was another very flash woman in the block... Ann Austin, yes you'd ring up and there'd be specials going up to Ann Austin and that was there. And the other thing about that was that when I went up to the millinery manufacturers, there was no union cover there at the time and they gave me 14 shillings a week. And when I went, I mean, mother said, "Wasn't that great, 14 shillings a week?"
- 23:30 but by the time you paid your fare and everything I don't think when I got the 14 shillings I was able to give her very much. So there was no union, you see. Then anyway a cousin of mine got hold of me and said, "Look, you have to get into the wool trade. I'll get you a job in the wool trade and you must come down and I'll get an interview and you'll go you'll work at a place named Elliot and Dibb." He said, "Marvellous place to learn the wool trade." I said, "Okay then Gilbert right, yes
- 24:00 I'll do that." Now when I got down and got the job at Elliott and Dibb the foremen there said, "Well I'm afraid you know, you'll just get what the union ruling is." and I said, "Oh Ted what was that?" And he said. "Two guineas a week." Well I thought, "My God I hit some sort of paradise." So there was, I'm just making, hoping that people are interested in that sort of thing, the difference you see. They talk about unions but there was no union

24:30 they give the kid fourteen bob, you move to where there was a union and they give you two guineas, so that was that thing.

That's a huge difference isn't it?

A huge difference but then I forgot to say, I didn't know that Ted was going to hang me up by the thumbs every morning and you had to run everywhere. It was a marvellous place to learn the wool but what you did was you carried wool away from classers. There were classing tables, a classer each side of the table, you had to keep the bales up to them and open them

25:00 all the time and so that they could put the wool out and class the wool and throw them to numbers down on the floor. And then after you opened the barrel, you ran around and got the number and you had a corresponding bin somewhere and you took that wool from the floor to the bin. And if you went a bit slowly...as Ted called me over one day, Ted Jennings, an ex-submariner from the first World War, Ted worked like mad himself and expected everybody to do the same.

25:30 So he said to me one day, "Don, come over here." So I went over. "Yes Ted." He said, "Are you feeling crook?" And I said, "No no I'm alright Ted." And he said, "Well you're getting around like a bloody funeral, you better smarten up." Now that's because I wasn't in sort of a half trot all the time. If you didn't keep it at a half trot, to Ted, well, you were at a funeral.

Okay so you couldn't walk, you had to trot?

You had to be semi-running all the time, all the time.

You must've got covered in lanolin did you?

26:00 Yes. Lanolin, they say, is marvellous for things and everything, but by God, it rotted your boots and rotted your coats because I eventually became a wool classer. And so anyway I did learn a lot there, but by jove, you earned your two guineas, that's what I'll say, you earned your two guineas. So well it was very good. Well every job you went to, there's one great thing about it I 'spose, like the army too, that's the people you meet. Sometimes you mightn't like your work, but you looked back

26:30 at the job and say, "Well I'm glad I went there because of these people that I met." you know. And later on in life I went to jobs where I'd say, "Heavens! What am I doing this for?" and I look back on those jobs now and go, "Well look, I met him there and him and what lovely people they've turned into, they're still friends today." I suppose everyone can do that too. You think you don't like something, take a look back at the people you met at it, well I didn't like the job much, but by crikey

27:00 I did like the people.

It's always people who make life good isn't it?

Hear hear. Whether it be at work or wherever it is really.

So as a wool classer, did you get to go out to the shearing sheds?

Yeah well at that stage I used to... when I was at Elliot and Dibb, I went to the wool school every Saturday. I worked five days at Elliott and Dibb and every Saturday I spent the day at the Melbourne Technical College, and

27:30 let me see, from there I went away to some sheds and I think I classed a couple of sheds from there, but I am sorry, I'm missing the main piece. What I did from Elliott and Dibb... was the man there named Gerry O'Neill and at Elliott and Dib, I say I was going everyday and to the wool school every Saturday

28:00 and at the.. when the shearing season came on, a lot of them started up in Queensland, a lot went right through from Queensland to Tasmania. These fellas at Elliott and Dibb would work down there in the summer and off they'd go in the winter and start up in Western New South Wales. Now this fellow Gerry O'Neill did just that. What he had to do for a shed, he would tell the owner of the property,

28:30 "Leave it to me." and there were contracts, he was a contract classer, and, "I will bring the team up and look after your sheds for you." So he said to me, "Don would you like to come away as a rouseabout?" Well I was sixteen at that stage and so I said, "I'll have to ask mum." so I went home and said, "Gerry O'Neill

29:00 one of the classers at work wants me to go away with him as a rouseabout." "Where are you going to?" "Well we are starting at Bourke." Well of course, that won her for a start, because that's as I say, where she lived with my father, at the bank there for years before they went to Warrnambool. "Oh well, I'd have to meet him." I said, "Well yes okay, well I'll ask Mr O'Neill if he'll come down one evening." So I put it to Gerry... and he talked like this a bit

29:30 because he was a first World War bloke and he had a bayonet through the face here, he had a scar here, but a very nice feller and a well-known family in Melbourne I believe, and it was just that Gerry was a bit of the black sheep in the family. So he said, "Yes, yes I'll come down with your mother." and so he came down and met my mother and you know, he said about his family and all this sort of thing.

30:00 But we had a very funny evening that evening because my mother was one of those people that when she lived in a place, be it Warrnambool or Bourke, she knew everybody and I mean in Bourke, she

probably would know everybody you see. And if she didn't, she certainly wouldn't say she didn't. So we were talking about something and I can't remember the name that came up, but Jerry said with his voice like this, "Oh Mrs. Tibbits." same name. "Oh." my mother said,

30:30 "The Hames, I remember them well." Well my sister had to pipe up and say, "No mother same name, same name." "Oh same name." but she wasn't to be out done, if she didn't know the Hames, she was going to. Never existed of course, anyway, you know, Gerald passed the inspection and the questions and all this sort of thing. So the time came

31:00 and then off I set to Bourke with Gerald in a 1935 Ford, which was pretty flash at that time because you couldn't get cars you know, and one of the fellows he recruited, who wanted to learn how to shear said, "Well if you take me Gerald and teach me shearing, I'll drive you to Bourke." So luckily I got in with... fancy not remembering his name, he was marvellous to me, anyway he came from Highett and there was Gerry and he was driving and then there was Gerry

31:30 and myself. I can't think of who the fourth person was now... and Tiddles his dog, was only about that big. And then there was an old Armstrong Sidley the other car with another four in it, which was his team, but he did have some people lined up at Bourke. In those days when fellows were in the army and they were needed for industry or agriculture, or something like that....

32:00 so when we got there, there were four shearers up there and the four of them had been released from the army because shearing at that time had started up there.

That was protected industry was it?

Yes, yes a protected industry, that's right. Probably in the first place they needn't have gone at all but they were in the army and they were very short of shearers and so they gave them... I 'spose in other agriculture or industry things too, I'm not sure. Sometimes they claimed them right back out of the army and said, "We're just so short

32:30 of people, we have to have them back." and so the army would say, "Look we want you to go back." I'll tell you about a story about a sergeant that it happened to later. Anyway so when we got there, there were these four shearers and they were, they actually lived in a place called Winton in Queensland which is quite famous, I mean Winton, 'sposed to be where you know,

33:00 Banjo Patterson wrote his famous song, Waltzing Matilda at Winton and now of course they've got the dinosaur footprints there which are all under cover, and any way they were from Winton and they were there when we got there and also Charlie, an aboriginal, I can't think of his name, but a terrific shearer, he was gun of the shed if you know what that means.

Yeah.

Yeah he was gun of the shed and Charlie might have been I think, a local person, but anyway so we set off

33:30 in these two cars to go up there, and Gerry who was going to look after me and be so marvellous, well most of the trip this Alec, the other fellow who wanted to learn to be a shearer and had the car, between me and him we looked after Gerry all the way, because not long after we had left, out came Gerald with a bottle of whisky and kept it on his lap all the time we went away. We got to the black plain hills out of Hillston, plains not hills,

34:00 the black plains, black soil plains out of Hillston and boy the car just went, it went down like that you see. Oh Gerald said, beautifully dressed always in a suit, and tie and a boxer hat, that was Gerald, short thick-set sort of a man. And Gerald said, "All out and push, all out and push." So we all got out to push and when he got out, Gerald had the boxer hat on, pretty well full, put the whisky back under the seat

34:30 went round to the back of the car, and said, "Now when I say three, we'll all push." So Gerald went, "One, two, threeeee!" so we all pushed and by the time Gerald came forward, the car was gone. So I can see the boxer hat sitting on the black soil because we pushed the car forward and Gerald was too late with his push and "Bong!" down he went, on the black soil. All the beautiful suit and everything covered black soil.

35:00 I picked up the boxer hat and said, "There you go." "You all pushed before I said push." So you know as a lad, I was frightfully impressed with all this and I thought, "My gosh, it's going to be great when we get to the shearing shed." Jandra that was the name of the property at Bourke, "If Gerald's going to be on the grog all the time." Anyway when we got there, he was different altogether of course, he was too sensible then

35:30 not to get on it. He didn't even go to town when weekends come and the shearers come to town, which was some experience, I might say, especially at my age. And so that was a terrific experience, but there were other things about Gerald and grog, and we stopped at Balranald at the Shamrock hotel you know, and of course, pretty ordinary those hotels at those times, but you got a bed, a wire bed

36:00 and it had one of those horse-hair mattress with the mattress covers were all in those days, black stripes I think, little black stripes. That was all the mattress covers you saw, you never got gorgeous things like you get now. So we stayed at the Shamrock hotel at Balranald and of course Gerald got

pretty full and he came back to our room, and the three of us were in the one room,

36:30 Alec and myself and Gerald, and we're telling him to shut-up and he's starting to make a noise... and the Irish songs and all this sort of thing. And all of a sudden the wall next door, there was this... "Shut up, shut-up you, or I'll come and shut you up!" "What!?" ... Gerald did this you see, dancing around, "You'll come, will ya...ha ha will ya!" So Alec said, "For goodness sake Gerald shut-up, he'll come and knock us all down." So with that he knocked Gerald on to the bed

37:00 and almost put a pillow on him to be quiet. So the next morning the wash, there was a big basin in the back yard, a big bowl, and out you went and had your morning wash and it was freezing water too. Anyway Gerald got out of bed and he was shaking his head and oh, terrible condition after having a bit of a head. And he opened the door and all of a sudden he slammed the door like that and he turned around to us. And we are both saying, "What's the matter?" And he pointed outside....

37:30 and then he pointed to the room next door and he went... "I said well you better stay right inside Gerald, he is waiting for someone to step out of this room." And I said, "We'll put you in, we'll say it was you." Gosh talk about putting someone back in their box or in their room I should say. So anyway once again I say

38:00 as a kid of sixteen, it was all it was quite a show everywhere, I couldn't get over it all really.

Sounds like a great lark.

It was great, it was really great. And you see I came from a Victorian home and brought up by two women, so when I got out there with Gerald, you know, he used to get so full; anyway Alec handled him alright and then I got to the shearing shed with the shearers, you know of course, I was on the board, tar boy

38:30 as they called them, you know. The shearers keep you to it, when they yelled out "Tar!" they mean come here with the tar. Because if you hold them up, they are all on how many they shear, and if they're held up because a fleece isn't removed as soon as they have finished the sheep, you've got to get the fleece and throw it on a skirting table and if that's not removed, and they're held up at all, well of course it's time, it's time you're costing them time. And they can't bring another sheep out while that fleece is there. Well I have seen them kick the fleece aside, which isn't a very good thing to do

39:00 so when you're a kid on the board you're really kept pretty busy. I've forgotten now just the number of stands there were, if you know what that is, that's how many shearers are shearing in the shed. The board is...they shear on the board and I've forgotten what Gerald had; now I think he might of have five and anyway I tell you, it kept me very busy.

And the tar, you had to go and...

Yeah when they cut the sheep, there was a tar pot, you didn't run up the needle, he didn't get stitches,

39:30 he got a got a dob of tar on it. And it was amazing of course that tar would just set and close the wound.

And that would be the hand shears would they, they wouldn't have been electrical?

Yeah they were electrical they were. Listen, electric shears. Yeah well not electric... in every shed in those days you had a fella called an expert...thousands of experts around the world but these were really experts and they kept the motor going and they were big...

40:00 well I've got to think back now. I think they were diesel, most of them were diesel but I would say there'd still be some around that were steam driven but I'm pretty sure the one at Jandra in those days was a diesel type motor. You know the belt went around and it ran.... a big cylinder inside that of course turned over the shearing connection, down

40:30 to the blade. So they were real like that and they had what they called a comb and a cutter inside the shearing head and the shearers, you would see them very often sharpening them up a bit, when they had time off and food was extremely good...

Tape 2

00:33 **Earlier you mentioned the gun, a fellow called Charlie..**

Yes.

Now were they among the first aboriginal people you ever met?

I suppose so yes, I suppose they were really, when I went out to Bourke. I suppose Charlie would be the first one and certainly one of the first I'd ever worked with. There were a few in Melbourne, at the time you'd see about.

01:00 I remember of course that might not have been just then, it might be later when I worked on the wharf

and I think that probably that might have been when I was down Elliot Dibb they were at the end of Flinders Lane. And the trucks would come in there you know, and they were coming from the wharf or going to the wharf and so on with wool. And I think I may have seen them then, it must have been them. There were a few around, not so very many, just a few, and they worked alongside the other fellas.

01:30 **Now shearers were paid by the sheep weren't they, by the fleece?**

Yes they were, so many a day yes. That's right where you look back to the famous shearers, you know from Blackall in Queensland and who's never been beaten, you know when he did 300 sheep in one-day. Of course, mostly if a fellow got his hundred you know, he was getting good pay, you get your 100 a day. Charlie did 120, the fellow I mentioned,

02:00 which was pretty good. I think we go back to the champion shearers from Blackall and you know there is a monument to him today and there should be. And it is ridiculous that I can't remember his name because it is quite famous [Jack Howe] and I think we have really got to say.. and of course with blades mind you, we've got to say that the sheep, the merino then weren't quite, you know they got bigger, they got larger as the years went on, the sheep he shored. But still you can't, you know,

02:30 you can't take away from him doing 300 sheep in one-day..

That's phenomenal.

That's a terrific effort but I can't remember his name but after this, when I leave you, I'll think of it immediately probably, that's age.

Well you can tell us on Monday. Now how did the other shearers get on with Charlie?

Very good oh yes, yeah, yeah. When we shared there were two to a room in a hut. You know it was just a hut, divided with walls, and just a wire mattress

03:00 again like you got in the Shamrock Hotel with the horsehair mattress. I think we have a horsehair mattress there because in a lot of places you had a palliasse. Good you know, getting ready for the army wasn't it? And which I didn't even think about then. Yes well, the horsehair mattresses, I'm pretty sure we had there. But you know if you got enough straw a palliasse wasn't too bad at all anyway. Better than just sleeping on the wire bed because as you know

03:30 shearers were, well as I think I was about to say, meals were very good and morning tea. They had a marvellous morning tea too, cakes and scones, that sort of thing as a rule and then a very good lunch. The cooks, the shearing shed cooks were pretty good. Now that was another thing of course that Gerry.. we didn't take a cook with us, now cooks were often male or female of course in the shearing sheds and I'm just trying

04:00 to remember who the cook was when we went out there to Bourke. I've forgotten whether it was a man or a woman. I do remember in other sheds who they were. There was Harvey Beauwright in South Australia but I was the classer then, we are going on some years.

So you didn't notice any racial tension at all amongst the shearers then?

Not at all.

What about in Bourke itself?

No, no. Afghans in Bourke. My sister went to school with Afghans, because they were the great

04:30 camel drivers of the day and they carried wool and they carried all sorts of things on their camel trains, and my sister can remember them well. She has done an interview when she was a girl, and as I said she is 95 now. But she was brought up in Bourke and mad on the Darling River, she spent most of her time there. And seems to me, a bit of a tomboy because during the first World War when she was Queen of the War Collection or Red Cross day

05:00 or whatever it was I don't know, but I know my father could not find her and he said to one of his friends up there, "Have you see my daughter at all?" "Oh yeah, the queen of the day. Yeah I just saw her jumping across Harry Somebody-or-other's back fence." "Oh was she?" dad said, "I've been looking for her." So I think you know she was a bit of the tomboy but anyway that was Bourke in her time and I do think we have got to, especially with Afghanistan being so much in the news,

05:30 think of Afghans in this country, you know they went outback. And the shearing sheds around there, around there come; I'll show you a sketch I've got upstairs of him calling at the shearing sheds. And it also shows everything, it shows the squatter walking through it and every Sunday blokes playing two-up and a bloke getting a haircut, and all those things happen you see. Sunday came, one bloke would give you a haircut, another bloke would say, "Let's play a game of two-up." and all these things would happen you see in a shed. Another fella

06:00 had one of those box cameras and he'd get it out and want to take a photograph and they were delightful all those things that happened. But anyway getting back to Afghans, people do want to remember how they came to Australia with camels and how they opened up the black blocks really tremendously. I don't know if it was my fault, I can't get over it really, that there hasn't been or is there, this might be through ignorance, books, on the Afghans and outback Australia.

- 06:30 You know, you don't hear much about them at all. And as my sister said, they were marvellous people, and she said their children went to the school she went to. Their fathers banked at the bank with my father. It was just one big community, like country towns are, and there was no racial trouble there, I am sorry to say that in Bourke today there is very much a lot of trouble it, seems terrible. So you know in some ways you wonder if we've gone backwards
- 07:00 and of course I don't know, they all seemed to be so happy then and even when I was a kid, working on properties. When I went out to properties a lot of the stockmen and so on were aboriginal fellas and their wife might have been you know a housemaid at the house, or a cook or all sorts of things. And they all seemed to get along and most, if it was a big property of course, they gave education to, so I don't know, you wonder if things haven't gone backwards, don't you, to a great extent?
- 07:30 **Yes because really all the workers on Australia's outback farms were aboriginal workers.**
- Oh absolutely yes, tremendous stockmen, see, tremendous stockmen weren't they? I mean tremendous at so many things, I mean, brought the Kelly gang down. No doubt about that. See since Inspector O'Connor came down from Queensland with his black trackers, the beginning of the end, because I hate to say this, the Victoria police might come down and sue me or something. But they weren't doing very
- 08:00 much good at all until O'Connor arrived down here now with his black trackers and of course, they could never really shake them. They followed them all the time and that's when Ned said, "We've got to have a showdown." and that's what he did, Glenrowan, where I spent ten years. What's next?
- Oh alright, well after your experiences in the sheds, you came back to Melbourne...**
- My word I did, yes, yes, 18. No, when I was 16.
- Where were you when the war broke out?**
- 08:30 Living in Melbourne.
- Do you remember where you were the night that war was declared?**
- Yes I think so. "England having declared war on Germany, we automatically at war..." or something that R.G. Menzies saying to that effect.
- 09:00 And I think I was staying with a cousin in Culcairn in New South Wales on a farm at that time that I was fifteen, is that right? Yeah, fifteen.
- Had you been aware of the problems going on in Europe, were you aware of Hitler and his incursions into other European countries and so on?**
- Oh yes I think I must have been.
- 09:30 Well I you know, I must have been aware of it and my mother must have spoken of it, but I can't remember really, it getting me down and that sort of thing. Of course what reminded you of it all was when the war first broke out in 1939, is the disappearance of the older chaps in our street. Now when I say older, it made a lot of difference three or four years in those days and John Haslam, who lived at the end of the street, he was the first to go.
- 10:00 He was in the 2/6th Battalion in the 6th Division. And went through all the things they went through, and lived to tell the tale, went through to be the controller in Hamburg. But then he went and I can remember I used to go down and see his mother. His father died, I think just after he left. And his mother had two daughters, Molly and Betty. Perhaps that's why I went down there, anyway used to go down and see Mrs. Haslam and they would have letters home from John,
- 10:30 you know because there he was. They moved away pretty quickly, the '39ers in the 6th division went off as you know to Greece and Crete and a few disasters there. And then the older brothers of my lifelong friend Gordon who I mentioned before, and Tom and George. One disappeared into the army, went to the 9th Division that was. And I mean off he went to the 9th Division, never did I think in my wildest dreams that I would be in the 9th Division. So he went off and was in the 2/12th Artillery, 9th Division.
- 11:00 And George the brother went to the Navy. See they were older fellows, now I mean they were.... I suppose they could have been ten years older really, George and Tom and then they were the next to go. Then Gordon Stooke the younger brother and my friend. He went to the air force and I was younger than any of them. No, my other lifelong friend Bob Evans, he and I were the same age, but Bob joined the navy.
- 11:30 Now in the navy they took you at a younger age and I think Bob had his name down for some time, and I think Bob must gone to the navy at seventeen or seventeen and a half. So he went and then his brother Ken had gone and not long after was killed in bomber command. And well you know they had all gone, and it was funny, at that stage I couldn't wait to get into the
- 12:00 service, one of the services, and I thought well won't be long the government are going to say, right-o, you're eighteen, in you come. And so that's what happened, they all went and I was eighteen went to Ripponlea and joined and then to Royal Park.. so the old procession

So was it the fact that they had all gone that made you want to join so much?

Absolutely. Oh well that and

12:30 my mother, although I was the only son, and there was only two of us and no father, I think that her loyalty to the country and everything, her feelings were so great that she never said to me, "Don't join, whatever you do don't go I need you." and goodness knows she did, but never did she say anything like that. And when the time came she just said, "Right-o." and then of course

13:00 had to sign papers for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] which she did. She did it with a shaking hand, she wasn't too fond of it, but she signed the papers and that was to go into the AIF and being in the AIF means that they can send you wherever they wanted to.

So you mentioned that your mother was a Victorian woman and had a strong sense of the empire, what about yourself Don, did you then consider yourself an Australian citizen or were you a British subject?

13:30 Well I suppose I was both but perhaps a British subject first I think. I think with my bringing up, and the King and the Queen and the flag, it was all very strong in my bringing up and I mean you know when the First World War fellows, when you spoke to them, they fought for King and Country, that was a big thing, King and Country. Always fought for King and Country all the time. And so you know you looked....

14:00 to the Motherland as they called it, and all that sort of thing, it was just the time that I was brought up and I'm still well, quite inclined that way, in other words I don't want a Republic. But I know it is going to happen, but when it does, well O.K., one will accept that, a republic might be a good thing. But there is one thing I would be very much against and I'm in the flag association I hope everybody is, I mean ten dollars a year - marvellous,

14:30 and that's the history of our country, our heritage is all on that flag you know. There's Ireland, Scotland and England all on that flag and I mean all those were the people who were the pioneers whatever, and people want to come to the country now because of the country that they started. And I mean, they made such a good job of it didn't we as Australians before we had any immigrants out?

So you as a young man

15:00 **felt quite strongly towards England...**

Getting political aren't I?

Well that's alright, it's your interview.

Well yes I did yes, very much. And as a matter of fact I didn't go overseas, well I did with the government but I didn't go overseas as a holiday and go to England until I was sixty anyway and I must say that when I got there, I felt that I was home, you know. Funny isn't it, but I thought, "My God,

15:30 I feel as though I'm home here." And I suppose, because well that was.... my feelings were towards the old country and all that and you know, you think of all my forebears, well of course all yours, a tremendous amount of people came from there, but when you came back from when I was young, it wasn't so long ago sort of thing. Like the history of the country, what, we're only two hundred years old now or something, I can't do the mathematics,

16:00 from 1788, two hundred and what are we, eight years old or something like that? And in those days you see I was told about my grandfather, he was the first doctor in Dubbo, and he came out here in 1853 and all those sort of things are in your mind you know. And so when I went to England I thought, "Oh God." I said to Valda, "Crikey I feel as though I am just stepping home

16:30 somehow."

Isn't that interesting?

Yeah. And liked them and loved the place. And when I went to Warwick, where they actually came from I was even more excited.

So Don, going back again, you're sixteen -seventeen, you're here with your mother and your sister, all your friends in your street have already gone off to war, you're chafing at the bit, what kind of news were you getting about the war? You were watching news reels?

Well yes,

17:00 of course no TV as you know, but radio and also every time we went down to the local picture theatre, Cinesound News was one of the big things you know, and you got so much for your money in those days. They had this great newsreel first and Fox Movietone News, all these news would come on before the first feature I might say. And then interval and then another feature for your... it must have been a bob

17:30 and you got so much news there, but they didn't have the quick communications that they've got today, so when you saw something about the war, it probably happened a few days back. The papers of course,

papers, and we had the Argus delivered everyday.

And what were... one of the things that really impressed you about those news reels, both for good and for bad?

18:00 I think it was just that you know, to see so many parts of the other side of the world and these stories and the people telling you these stories from wherever they be, London or Berlin, or wherever it was you know, it was all pretty marvellous really.

And were you hearing about the Nazi atrocities? Were you aware of their treatment of the Jewish people?

No I don't I think so. Not then, not then.

18:30 No I was only aware of that after the war.

And what about the Japanese atrocities in China, were you getting any information on that?

Yes, yes. I can remember a film about that, the thing about that, the famous, Rape of Nanking as they called it. I can remember that well. Of course, we have to remember that the Japs fought for a long while, I meant they started off in 1937 when they started in those sort of places and fought right through to 1945.

Where you aware of Japan as a threat?

19:00 Before they declared war on December the 7th 1941, you mean? I don't know that I was really. I think I do remember some talk about at the time to think that the ambassador, the Japanese ambassador was standing up at a meeting in America, saying, "Japan is for peace, Japan is for peace." and that was about you know three days before

19:30 they bombed Pearl Harbour, December the 7th 1941.

So what with the atmosphere at home after Pearl Harbour and after the invasion of Malaya and the Japanese troops were you know, cutting a swathe through Malaya, what was the attitude in your home?

I really can't remember. I don't know, I can't remember...

The fall of Singapore?

I can't remember. I just can't remember really talking about the Japanese war

20:00 it was '41. We must have, we must have mentioned it but I can't recall us sitting down and discussing it. And even you know when I think going down, as I say to our neighbours and going down the road when John Haslam had gone and we were reading all about the war and well, he was in Greece and Crete and we discussed all those things all the time, but I don't recall... only that hate

20:30 being brought because you know...fancy that Ambassador going and saying peace, we are all for peace and all that sort of thing I remember that, and stirred up a bit of hate. But see nothing was brought up about atrocities, and they were about to start their big rundown through the Pacific which of course they did. And didn't have much to stop them and when they did, of course, it was

21:00 a different story you know. I suppose the Japanese Imperial Army led by Tojo [Hideki Tojo, Prime Minister of Japan in WW2] and that militaristic Government that they had, were clapping hands at the pace, I think they got a shock themselves at the pace that they were moving down through and took all the Pacific places. But I think it is important to remember that most of those really until they got to Singapore,

21:30 were garrison troops you know. A lot of those places didn't have that many troops in them at all and so they ran over them very quickly. Then of course they came through the Johore Peninsula you know Malaysia, and later they came through Singapore and there they met the 8th Division, who I realise were all taken prisoner, but until they were taken prisoner you know, they put up a marvellous stand.

22:00 And without going into it too much, I mean there were people you know, who said if they got reinforcements to them food and ammunition and everything else, it could have been a different picture. But of course as we found out the English had everything facing the wrong way, the guns were facing out to sea because they'll come in won't they, they'll come in from the sea, this is the way they'll come in. But they didn't. They came down the Johore Peninsula with 18,000 bicycles, didn't they?

Well the fall of Singapore was terrible tragedy for the Australian army and Australian people...

Terrible tragedy,

22:30 terrible tragedy, oh terrible. Oh yes, there were 22, 000 prisoners, no wonder the Nips had problems with what they were going to do with them .

So that must have been quite shocking for you at home?

Quite shocking, yeah quite shocking. Can't quite think now where I was when it happened. I was in the army at that stage, what was the date of that...isn't that terrible...

That's February '42.

February '42 was it. Well yes, that was shocking and that would stir one up no doubt about that,

23:00 to try and get going, to get into the services, to do something I'm sure.

Did you ever consider going into the navy so you could join a bit sooner?

No, I never considered going to the navy. I think that water frightens me a bit with sea sickness and that, and I thought, "Oh no that won't do, can't go in the navy." Air force you know, two of the friends went into the Air force,

23:30 but I don't know, I didn't, I seemed to think the army was my lot. Little Vic Smithers who was our orphan fellow who came and did the gardens around the area for years and I remember now, when he joined the army he was extremely poor. He lived with the Minister, as I say he was an orphan down in Cheltenham somewhere, was on his bike he used to hop on his push bike, and every day he would go out to the gardens

24:00 and he would come from Cheltenham to do our street, and five other places in the street, for which he got about four shillings for each place. And I remember when Vic Smithers first got into the army and he came around to our place to visit us to say goodbye, well he had his uniform on, the great coat and he said, "This is.. Mrs. Tibbits, this is marvellous look at me!" and he said... and he went like that, he had teeth.

24:30 Vic hadn't had teeth; he hadn't had teeth as long as I knew him. He said, "Look!" and they'd given him teeth of course, and along with the uniform and his great coat on, he looked marvellous.

You had to have teeth in the army?

Beg your pardon?

You had to have teeth in the army?

You had to have teeth in the army, oh yes. When you first went in... I can see them now being lined up out at...out at... I'd forgotten about Watsonia, must have gone to Watsonia for medicals and so on, I can see a fellow I went in with, Les Hayward

25:00 and Les came out..."Oh what have they done to you?" "Well they knocked all my teeth out." he said, "They said they were rotten." so they took his teeth out. And if they were, it was a good idea wasn't it. They took them because, well... I had what you'd call 'in the field' tooth done once. My God, you know where the dentist would drill with his foot. It would go at a certain rate then all of a sudden if he would go slow it goes... then does a bit more.

25:30 My God, talk about punishment. So if Les found that out later, it was just as well for them to do that and it was no doubt the things that they had in their minds. It was no good getting to the front or in the jungle some blooming where or wherever to say, "I've got a toothache." in the middle of it all, because it might be very difficult to get back to some headquarters where there was dentists. And then when you do get to him, unless it was a very big headquarters, if it was an island you'd landed on, it'd be going to be the dentist

26:00 with the wheel down here and he pedalled at the same time that he was drilling your tooth. Funny experience, but terrible experience really.

So where did you go to enlist?

Beg yours?

Where did you go to enlist, did you go Flinders Street?

Ripponlea.

Ripponlea.

Ripponlea drill hall, I don't know if I could find it now. With a fellow named Lofty Ratcliffe, who, we got separated worse luck. We went off

26:30 to a place called St Ives, God you know when you look at St Ives, Sydney now... fancy being camped at St Ives, people look at it now and say, "Camped at St. Ives?" It is one of the most expensive suburbs in Sydney, but in those days all I can remember the only thing I can see there was the St. Ives' Showground, which was a country Showground of course. Now, as I say, one of the suburbs now. Anyway Lofty Ratcliffe and I, we went to St. Ives together because it is a thing I am never going to forget because in the first part of the army Lofty

27:00 had to wear the shoes he joined up in, which was sort of a niblick golf shoe. Just, well it was a pretty strong shoe, he had to keep them on for months and months because he took size 13s and when he went to the Q-[Quartermaster] store, they said, "What size?" "13s. 13s?" The Q-store sergeant looked and

said, "I don't have 13s, mate." I mean see the difference now, I mean look at my grandson, he's 6-feet and takes 13s you see, and look at the swimming fellow,

27:30 what does he take, 16s. But in those days, to have 13s, now Lofty Ratcliffe and I, now we were at St Ives and on leave one weekend, we went skating at the skating rink in Sydney, I've just forgotten the name, anyway doesn't matter, and a very efficient bloke handing out, they gave you the skates, you see as you went in. You paid and you hired the skates. So of course I was in front of Lofty, and said, "8s, 8s." he went like that see and then I paid. Lofty said, "13s."

28:00 "What did you say mate?" He said, "13s." "We don't have 13s." "So, well what have you got?" said Lofty. "I think I got something here, might be 11, or a bit over 11 or something like that." Well stupidly, Lofty crammed his foot into it, well for the next week, just as well he did have his own shoes, he got around with these very sore feet. But anyway eventually

28:30 the quartermaster, walked up this driveway at St Ives one evening, God I can see him now and he yelled out, "I've got Lofty's boots!" and with that, the canteen emptied and everybody came out and everybody clapped like this. Then everybody else was just thrown their boots but Lofty was called up, "Ray, come here." so Lofty was called up, the quartermaster said, "Here you are Lofty, here's your bloody boots."

29:00 **Poor old Lofty.**

Yeah, so at last Lofty had his boots. And anyway later on he went off to another battalion and I didn't see him years after the war and I had to hound him down. One day I was at the Anzac Day march and I could never find him, I tried him all over the place, and I finished the march, and I thought I'll just go back and watch the rest of it. And all of a sudden, a girl just a bit in front of me yelled, "Hey Lofty,

29:30 Lofty!" And I looked too, thousands of Loftys around of course and I looked too and thought, "By God that is like Lofty Ratcliffe." And I said, "Is that Lofty Ratcliffe?" And she said yes. I said thank you, so I bounded through the barrier and I'm marching beside him and said, "Lofty, remember me?" I was tall, Lofty was a bit taller. "Tibbitts!" don't know if he called me Bluey or not I'm not sure. "Of course I remember you." "Well I've never forgotten you,

30:00 how are you going for shoes?" Anyway then we started to see a bit of each other, he lived here at Beaconsfield. We got to see each other so it was marvellous, but that was 20 years after the war I suppose. Which we look back on it, doesn't seem much now but that only took us up to 1965, but it took that long before I found him and that's how I found him.

So where was your initial training, Don?

30:30 We went to Royal Park of course then I mentioned Watsonia before. I must have gone there and must have had a full medical check or something. It was a very big camp and still is today there, and I think I must have gone from Watsonia to St Ives to where they really did have, although it was in St Ives, they had the 18th battalion,

31:00 I was training. Although they called it the 18th battalion, not training. I can't remember how long I stayed there...

And what kind of training?

Infantry training all the time, marching right, with Ming the Merciless, as we called the CO [Commanding Officer], man with thin legs, thinner than mine, like that, but boy-oh-boy he could get around on them, Ming the Merciless. He had that sort of look, this moustache out here you know and he'd say, "Lieutenant Bryce, you're not hard enough on them." And interesting

31:30 you know, Bryce was from the Bryce, no beg your pardon, his Christian name was Bryce, Bryce Killen. Now if you look through the big cattle properties of Australia, that's who they were. And he was good enough, he was my lieutenant and I was a private at St Ives, and one day he said "Don, I'd like to come to lunch with me." And I thought, "My God, I've arrived."

32:00 He said, "You really don't want..." I said, "Well I do have a cousin just out at..." it was there a little while ago too, not Mosman but right next to it anyway, "That I can go and see from time to time." And he said, "Well you know, we've got leave next weekend would you like to come to lunch?" And I thought, "Well this is marvellous." so we went to lunch and we went to lunch at the Australia, and I met his mother. I thought, "My God." and I'm sitting up, this private, and sitting up

32:30 in the main dining room, but that's who he was, you see they were these Killens with big properties. And this Bryce Killen was a very nice fellow and of course, you meet these people and then of course leave and I don't know, Lofty went off to, oh I've just forgotten, another infantry battalion. Of course we all went to infantry battalions and I went to the AITB, that was the Australian Infantry Training Battalion, the 23rd Australian Infantry Training Battalion at Bathurst.

33:00 Now Bathurst...

So that's when they started your more specialised training was it?

Well not really.

Weapons and...

Well weapons and so on and the bull-ring as they used to call it, you know, that's the bull-ring and you might pull down Vickers machine guns or Bren guns, all this sort of thing. And lots of route marches, well that was Bathurst and Bathurst was huts, all these army huts were lined up at Bathurst. It was a freezing place as

33:30 you know. It always used to tickle me, outside each hut they had a fire bucket, at the end of each hut, and I'd used to think, we'd look at the fire bucket and the fire bucket sitting there and if you turned it upside down a block of ice. Well it would be great if the hut was on fire, you'd be able to put out one corner, throw in a big block of ice and go out like that, and say, "Oh well that corner's out now we want some more blocks of ice." Anyway we were lucky it didn't happen to us, but it used to tickle us.

So what did you think when you got issued your weapons?

34:00 My rifle? Well I felt you know, pretty pleased about it and of course we used to march from this camp into Bathurst to the butts. The butts you know, where you'd go shooting and where all the targets are and you get your turn working.... Well it was a rifle range and the butts are where you work, in the butts, like a big trench, and that's where you pull the targets up and down, you pull the target down

34:30 after a fella's finished firing and you can see, you know, if any of the targets have been hit at all or you say, "You missed altogether." or "Marvellous, everyone went through the bulls-eye." just the usual big target. And so all this was at Bathurst then you would march to the rifle range, it was a long way I know that. It was.... well a 30 mile march was a march in a day that's what they'd like you to do. 30 miles is quite a long way to march really, you've got a pack on your back and a rifle and so on.

35:00 And they were the old Lee Enfields?

Oh yes, 80511. As an officer said to me one day, "Who's your best friend?" I said, "Sam Johnson." He said, "Sam Johnson, what are you talking about, Sam Johnson'd be a lot of good to you! There's your best friend!" I said, "Oh yeah sorry sir." My best friend was 80511. And a First World War rifle and boy did I look after it. Yeah 303 as you say.

35:30 And I looked after it because being in the First World War; it was as light as anything. But whatever wood they used and anyway all those years earlier all the wood had dried out beautifully. Now when you got a new rifle with new wood on it, you'd gain about 10 pounds. Mine weighed 7 and three-quarter pounds. Going to 8 perhaps, but 7 and three-quarter pounds.

You must have felt a bit impressed, a young man, handling all these guns?

Oh yes. Well I suppose you were pretty impressed.

36:00 I mean it just... all these sort of things were just... I suppose it sounds like I'm talking about these things, well were automatic when you get the Bren guns and all that sort of thing. Then later Owen guns, but that was later, that was the gun that won the war. And what did he get? You know, they gave him sixpence and a quid I think they gave him, the bloke, Owen, who invented the Owen gun and what a marvellous thing. See if we wanna get onto guns, see if you dropped a Tommy gun and it got mud

36:30 on it or in the desert it got sand in it, it would jam. Now you'd have an Owen gun, drop it in the mud and it would still go.

And it was a semi-automatic was it?

Yes, yes marvellous.

Because the Lee Enfields...

Oh no they were just a bolt action, single bolt action.

So you had to reload every..

Every time you shot a bullet. Oh yeah, it was a real handicap. And then all of a sudden you'd meet these Americans with these semi-automatics you know, they'd pull the trigger and five bullets went off or whatever.

37:00 I mean what an advantage, yeah that's right. There was a lot of movement too you see, I mean you had to sight him, the tip of the foresights, the centre of, and level with the shoulders and the backside. "Tibbits, I've told you that six times and if you don't remember that tomorrow you're on a charge." You'd say, "Yes sir." Did he impress me and I never forgot it. So anyway that was the thing, it was a bolt action and you had to resight every time

And were you taught to bayonet?

Oh absolutely, all the time,

37:30 yeah, yeah... thrust and then what did they call that? You thrust first and if that didn't get them you'd hit them over the head. Pretty effective.

Did it seem real to you?

Thank heavens though, once we were ordered to do a bayonet charge, it was a terrible thing to say, but no one moved, yeah go on...

Really well I'll ask about that later on. I'm just wondering, you've been given this rifle...

I won't use the language that they actually said when we were told to do that, I'll break it down, go on...

38:00 If it was a man doing the interview I might, but I better not anyway. Although you go to films today...

Oh don't feel like you have to protect me, I've been around.

You go to films these days, I can't get over it, anyway go on.

So you shoot at a target, you bayonet one of those hessian bags...

Straw..

Or whatever, did it seem real to you, I mean you know were you actually thinking, Gee I might have to do this to a person. Did that kind of occur to you?

No I don't think so.

So it was still like a bit of the game?

Yeah it was yeah.

38:30 Oh bayonet charge day was quite a jolly day, because there the thing was, it couldn't get away, it was all strung up at you, couldn't go back at you, marvellous thing.

Couldn't fire at you...

No couldn't fire at you or anything like that. Didn't even give you cheek.

What was the order to charge, what did they call out?

Well if you were going to.... I was only ever once in where an officer's said, "We're going to fix bayonets and charge"...should I go on?

39:00 **In a battle situation?**

Yeah.

Go on.

Well he said, "We're going to fix bayonets and charge at this." And some of the older soldiers and thank heavens ... my section leader... because we he lost some, was a fella named Tommy Porter. Now Tommy was an old soldier, he'd been through the lot, and I looked at him as soon as we got the order you see and so Sam Johnson, I don't mean my rifle, I mean

39:30 Sam who was beside me. And "God Tom, God, what do you think about this?" "Bloody mad and we're not doing it." so it went around the lines and we didn't do it, and no one got charged. Because I'm sure that.... I won't mention his name, he's deceased now but still... I'm sure that he must have thought to himself later, you know, how many of us would have got killed if we had followed that order. Anyway

40:00 you mentioned to me how often have you been ordered to charge? Never any other time.

Tape 3

00:32 **So we were talking about your training Don, your training in Bathurst and the weapons and training and so on, after Bathurst you were shipped up to the Atherton Tablelands for jungle training?**

No I wasn't.

No you weren't?

No I was not. I was sent to a place... when they gave our medals I always meant to check did they give out a Canungra medal because I was sent to an army jungle training camp in Canungra, Queensland, you know Canungra, beautiful little place it is. Well

01:00 I 'spose it was a beautiful little place, but in Canungra training camp where ...well I suppose when you look back on it, one has got to say what marvellous training it was because except for having Nips there, they had everything else. Like full pack on and all that gear going up to the top of the tower and you would jump in the water below. Well I got up to the top of the tower

01:30 and said, "No not for me, not jumping into there." And I looked around on the ladder behind me and the Sergeant said, "Yes you are." So I did, and of course you think you're never going to come up but you

do. But that is just one thing that it had. But Canungra was labelled the best jungle training school in the world and I would believe that because the Americans came out and studied it and the Poms came out and studied it

02:00 so it must have had something. But they put the barbed wire two feet off the ground, if that, and all mud underneath it, and you had to crawl in the mud until you got to the end of the barbed wire entanglement, so to speak. I mean you couldn't pop out the sides, you couldn't go out the top, it was barbed wire. So you sloshed on your stomach through it. I'm not sure what the idea was, but anyway that's what you did.

02:30 And then they had logs going over creeks. And as you were going over the log to go to the other side you often might have to do this, when you are going across a log they would throw a lump of gelignite in the creek underneath you, with the explosion and everything you're supposed to stay on the log. I did, luckily, but some didn't. It was the nearest thing you had to being in action and they had some fellows killed there, lost a few lives in Canungra. And you were never allowed....

03:00 there was no showers for instance. 5 o'clock in the morning the screaming came on, "Out! Up!" and you had to sort of get yourself to awake and you had to run a mile to the creek and washed. The permanent NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and officers had taps and things there. They had taps on the outside, but if you were caught using them, the penalty was enormous. And so

03:30 you ran to the creek every morning, that was your wash. And then you came back again and they gave you a little while then until you dressed. But that creek was freezing, the water was freezing. So anyway that is how you were brought up there. And there is no doubt about it; I've never been so fit in my life really as when I left there. I couldn't get over it and really when I most lost weight...I weighed myself on the train station at Mackay, and I'd put on a bit of weight, I couldn't get over it.

04:00 And so you left there and it either broke you or you were just tremendously fit.

Did they break some people?

Some people just couldn't carry on with it and they were sent away or made 'B class'. It certainly proved that if you were fit enough to go on, you're A1 and you need to be A1 to get through it. So anyway that was Canungra, a pretty tough place. Like a night exercise was to climb Mount Tamborine, now Mount Tamborine

04:30 in the hinterland of the Gold Coast, oh I drive up there and a lovely place, it's full of guest houses and shops and all sort of things. Well I can't remember, I think there might have been a guesthouse in those days, you know, when are we going back to '43, '44, '43. So that was Canungra training and Captain Black who was an ex-captain, I don't know how he came to go to Canungra, I don't know,

05:00 but they did this sometimes because we had some of our officers in the Middle East and they were recalled. One was an MC [Military Cross], Captain Rattray, and they were sent back to train troops in Cowra. Remember Cowra of course? We had W.A.Morrison, he was sent back there then from the Middle East, this was before I was in the battalion even, and they were to train those troops at Cowra. Well you remember at Cowra, the Japanese break out, things happened there.

At Canungra you were all new recruits, all the privates were

05:30 **new blood? But your officers were..**

Our officers were returned and some of the NCOs too. But mind you, when I was at Bathurst, most of the NCOs were 2/8th battalion; now the 2/8th battalion was 6th division, formed mainly from Ararat, Ballarat and that district. And they were the white and red oblong colour patch. 2/8th. Which was known as blood and bandages, and they were the

06:00 NCOs mainly at Bathurst. And so they came home and by my time '43, they'd been through the Middle East, you see, and they're home and retraining troops which was really marvellous. I mean they had done it.

So you obviously felt quite a bit of respect for those...

Oh quite, a lot.

...instructors?

Oh absolutely. And Canungra, well Captain Black, he was hard

06:30 but a lovely fellow sort of thing, I mean, it is no good turning around with him and saying, "I can't go any further." on this night exercise up Mount Tamborine because he'd go up, he'd do it with you, you know, he'd be with you too.

So discipline was quite harsh?

Very harsh yeah very harsh at Canungra. Always very hungry, the food was never enough to keep up all the energy we were using, so we decided, three of us,

07:00 to draw straws and we'll go down to Canungra township to the bakery and we'll get buns or bread or

whatever we could get you see, and try and get some butter or jam or something. Well okay, I drew the short straw. And, you know, you had to make sure you got out, that you weren't seen and all this sort of thing. And I got into town, I got the stuff and I was right by some bushes

07:30 to ease through the fence surrounding the camp, and all of a sudden, there was this booming voice, "What you doing there private?" And of course it was one of the Sergeant Majors and the butter and jam was taken from me and I was put on a charge. And the charge was... I got two charges there. This charge was for, of course, going to town and buying food and the only day you got off there, you had to do washing and that sort of thing, the only day you got off was a Sunday,

08:00 that was my day off so that was cancelled of course. And the answer of the charge was no fine, but no day off. So you went the whole seven days and on the Sunday... I know I peeled potatoes and ran all sorts, did all sorts of things. Anyway that fixed me from trying to go to town again. And because when I was at home I never ate beetroot or onions in my life, I wouldn't eat that. I'd say to mum,

08:30 "I'm not going to eat..." I hate all those things, boy-oh-boy. They'd put down onion or beetroot or anything, I'd eat the whole lot, I got so hungry. So that was Canungra and another time when I did jump off the tower, came back floundering in the water and he was convinced that I knew how to swim, so I got charged for pretending I couldn't swim. They used to get these bloomin' charges on you, now I can't remember the penalty for that one, and I wasn't a very good swimmer

09:00 a funny thing, even though I lived... I wasn't that good of a swimmer anyway.

Well even if you were, it must be very difficult...

Well with all the weight, that's right yeah. I said a rifle before, I don't think we took a rifle, just think we had a pack on our back and I've got an idea it was specially designed you know. It didn't have our bedding and proper things in it, it was a pack given to you to emulate those things like you know, that sort of weight. Sort of reminds you of Gallipoli doesn't it, all the weight they had to carry

09:30 ashore, and then they said now you have to take 80 pounds of firewood. Well they didn't quite do that to us, anyway that was Canungra and I have never seen a book on it. But the funny thing was though, a fellow there used to say, "This bloody place, I'll come down and burn this bloody place to the ground some time." And you know, it must have been five years after the war, I picked up a paper one day and it said, Canungra, township of Canungra burnt to the ground,

10:00 and I thought that bloke must have been true to his word, got under his skin and burn the thing, I imagine this isn't right mind you, but that's what came to mind, this fella saying he'll burn this bloody place down.

Sounds quite likely.

Yeah yeah, got burnt down. Anyway there it is now nice place. But mind you the camp I believe, still a marvellous training camp, well perhaps all sorts of warfare, but just specialised in jungle warfare then because that's what was facing it.

10:30 **So did you meet some of the British and the American troops that were sent there to train?**

No not really I just saw them because... I didn't see any of those sent there to train, they were officers inspecting the place, at that stage they were just inspecting, seeing what they thought of it. Now I believe later the Americans certainly sent some there. But there were no troops or privates as we know them, troops training

11:00 when we were training, they were all Australian.

Yet you would have met Americans in Melbourne because they would have come in...

Oh my word I did. I can still see them today, pouring off the ship now at Port Melbourne and running and going right along the esplanade, thousands of them. Yes and I mean you know the terrible case of those two girls murdered because he wanted their voice, the American private, he was eventually hanged...

He wanted their voice?

Yes, he murdered two women

11:30 one at Middle Park and the shop's still on the corner opposite the railway station, where her body was found, I'm trying to think of his name, Leonski, Private Leonski, and then another girl, I think around Royal Park. I think they were in Royal Park and he murdered another girl around there. That's what he said though, I just fell in love with their voices, I wanted their voices. Well he tried to get them, evidently. But later Leonski was hanged, yeah. So anyway bit of a diversion, but I certainly do remember them well

12:00 and I remember them well on leave. And believe me, they were very generous, well I found them... I mean some of them and our blokes used to fight like mad. I mean some in Melbourne here. They always used to tickle me, our MPs Military police] use to come up and give us a bit of a say like, you know, "How did you get into this, how did this all start?" or something. When it was three or four having a

go...

When you say MP

12:30 **you mean..**

Military Police, Australian Military Police, they'd have a black band with MP written on the side and they would arrive up in cars as soon as the fight started and they would ask a few questions. But it always tickled me with American police, they didn't ask anybody anything, they just went up to the American and he might be shaped up like that to a Aussie like that, and the next thing he'd be like that. They'd just go "Boing!" they knew how to and just knocked them unconscious, threw them in the van and left. And they leave an

13:00 Australian there, standing...

And what were those fights generally about?

I think jealousy you know, I mean whether the Aussies who got into these fights would admit that but when we were up in Brisbane, still mention today the terrible fights in Brisbane...

The Battle of Brisbane.

The Battle of Brisbane, probably, I think it was known as that as a matter of fact, in this big café, terrible fight, a couple killed, and all that you know, they would have been mad. Of course grog gets in you see, I mean, doesn't it? I didn't drink but grog gets into some. But I found them marvellous.

13:30 **What you think the Australians were jealous of?**

Well I think they certainly could win the girls. And they were beautifully dressed, you know, remember our rough old collars that came up here and the woollen uniforms and so on. Out they'd step with a tie and those beautiful jackets that came to here, I mean their clothes fitted them didn't they? They wore beautiful clothes. Well we got around in you know clothes sometimes, you'd put the belt

14:00 around here and the coat would be like that, all that sort of thing, and of course they had money. See they had money and they seemed to be able to always have cigarettes, miles of Lucky Strikes and Phillip Morris and all the rest of them, and I think that, you know, just a jealousy came in because they were just so smart and they won the women and I suppose you got to say they were....

14:30 I think they were more sophisticated in a way. I mean when you look at America in those days, they were very far advanced in lots of things than we were, than the world. Possibly the same now I think, it is their fighting machines they have and you know I think they were all so polished, and a bit more sophisticated than the old Aussie bloke of the day, like myself.

Were there black servicemen?

15:00 Yes there were black servicemen, in their own battalions, yeah. Now probably, the ones that I witnessed and where were they, on Morotai, there were a lot on Morotai, they were made mainly transport and boy could they drive those big semis. Well it's funny to say those big semis, I look at semi trailers today on the roads and they are about two in one but anyway, the semis of the day, which were reasonably long semi-trailers,

15:30 the way they could back them around wharfs and put them anywhere, they were terrific. And there were some in infantry battalions...

Mixed in with the...

No I didn't see that. When we got to Morotai and what the Americans had adopted there then, and it was a marvellous idea, they set up perimeters. They pushed the Japs back into the hills and of course they had the place cut off with their navy, so of course, supplies couldn't get to them.

16:00 They put them back to the hills and they set up perimeters. Now that was a terrific idea. Now I noticed the fellas that we spoke to because we were setting up the camp at Morotai too and training to get ready for our landing at Tarakan and I noticed that most of those were black fellows. But that when we were invited to have a word with them and so on, they had soaps on their pillows and sheets, if you please, I mean it was just incredible. And they had

16:30 big boxes of canned beer and canned turkey, thank you. You know as I say my God you've got to hand it to them, they just had everything. And of course they were well paid, well I just don't know the exchange rate in those days, but evidently when they were in Australia, I don't know what they got for the dollar, but it was a lot. And of course against an ordinary serviceman you know, well,

17:00 what did I get? Six and six a day, I think when the war started off, I must check this but I think our blokes got five bob a day.

Yeah five bob a day.

Yeah five bob and then it went up and when I got there, I got six and six anyway as I was saying about three and six and the three shillings before.

So how did you feel about all the Americans coming to Australia?

I thought it was marvellous, marvellous, I mean absolutely marvellous wasn't it to see them.

17:30 I mean the thing is to be remembered, as marvellous, as they were, when the Japanese Imperial Army came down towards Australia and set foot in New Guinea, not the English, not the Americans, but the first people to repel the Japanese Imperial Army were the Australians. Hence you know all about Milne Bay and especially Kokoda. They've got the 2/14th battalion, 7th division and the 39th battalion was a militia battalion. And between the two of them they were the first people...

18:00 and the Japanese Imperial Army of course they had had such a marvellous time they were stunned. But had they not been stopped there of course, especially at Milne Bay and Kokoda of course, their aim was, they were coming over into Moresby. And if those fellas hadn't done terrific fighting, and that enormous loss of life they had, they would have. Then of course other things came, the Coral Sea and so on, that really, really stopped the Japs from getting here. But boy-oh-boy

18:30 everybody's got to look at how close they came. Well they came that close you know they formed, as you were saying a little while ago, the fight of Brisbane between the Americans and Aussies, but they did form, the Australian government named the Brisbane Line. And you know that was where we were going to mass our forces and stop them landing in Australia.

Were you worried for your mother and your sister, while you were away?

I was, yeah, I was, yeah.

19:00 Well of course I've got all my letters upstairs which my mother kept which is quite amazing isn't it, which I haven't read since I got back. They were all handed to me in a bag and she said, "Son, there's your letters." I don't know, one day I must read them. But I wrote to them all the time and I know she was by herself so much with my sister working at the post office and the long hours she worked and a lot of night work. Well I used to think about her a lot

19:30 and how she was getting on. But she grit her teeth and bore it and never sort of wrote letters saying, "Oh son its terrible without you and I cry every night." she just tried to say, "Well you know we're alright son, yeah we'll be alright." She never gave me good advice like I saw in the paper yesterday, "Now son you look after yourself, you stick very close to the General." I read that in the paper and thought well what good advice, you know.

20:00 The General's usually a far way off from the war, off the actual action, you know.

She might not have known how to advise you.

No I don't think she would have known any of those things.

But it sounds like she was very supportive in her own way.

Oh very supportive, yeah, very. Quite marvellous really.

Sounds very important.

Well all her life, the fact of my father going out and he was 52 as I say,

20:30 the age he was, and kissing goodbye and saying, "Mum, well I'll be back about 4 o'clock." well the next person who appeared was the vicar, saying that he was dead, well, you know it never left her mind that sort of thing. I don't know you know whether that sort of thing would have prepared her if she would've got the telegram. You know I was reading one just the other day, not much to get really is it, I was reading one the other day, one of our fellas it was in Perth I think, and the bloke just you know, all she got was just a letter. Oh First World War fellow of course it is,

21:00 I got the letter upstairs and it doesn't matter First World War bloke it is, I should know his name. And the letter just said, "Very sorry to inform you but your son Private So-and-so, (Carrington was his name), was killed, was reported missing on Gallipoli and is now pronounced

21:30 killed in action."

People must have just lived in fear of that?

Yeah in fear, well that was just by letter, the Second World War was I think by telegram as a rule. Those letters from the First World War, there was an officer in a city and he was designated in charge of that sort of thing and of course the First World War, he'd be writing like mad everyday, wouldn't he?

22:00 I mean when you think that the Second World War went for six years and we had 30,000 killed, the First World War went for 4 years and had 60,000 killed, so that's the difference between the two wars as far as KIA [Killed in Action] was concerned, a huge difference. Anyway you know, either of them is terrible to lose 30, 000 isn't it?

So Don by the time you are in Canungra, you've become the 2/23rd ?

No, then

22:30 I was posted to the 2/23rd .

And where was that?

That was Atherton Tablelands, June '44 and they were in the Tablelands, and I was so well received by the battalion. You know, they used to say reinforcements in some units were not well received and I know of a fellow that went to another...I'll say tank regiment

23:00 and he wasn't well received at all. No, he went the same time as myself and I went to the 2/23rd infantry battalion. But of course the thing was with an infantry battalion, they had turnover all the time, you see, our battalion, an A battalion is a thing of about 800 men, now when you look at our nominal roll now, there is about 3,000 names because about 3,000 men went through our battalion. Because naturally after every action,

23:30 either someone was killed or someone was wounded as a rule. I shouldn't say after every action but in most actions you lost somebody wounded or somebody killed, and then of course there was disease. See in New Guinea, I mean they had the anopheles mosquito and so much malaria and those sort of things. So there was all those things in mind, that is why so many went through infantry battalions, and of course the fellows in them, like my good friend Slogger Collins now, you know when I first met him in the battalion, he didn't say,

24:00 "Where have you been, we've been fighting for three years?" or something like that, and of course he realised your age against most of those fellas, they were the original battalion. Like the chap, Keith Chrystal whom you are interviewing out at Ivanhoe now, see Keith's about 85 I think. Marvellous, marvellous fellow, through every campaign, but I am making the point that those fellows now the originals of the battalion, are much older. So along I came as reinforcement.

24:30 And you look at the deaths of the people that we lost on Tarakan, like myself, I was 20, my great friend McAlorum who I mentioned a little while ago, Mac was 20 and so many of the fellas were.... well they couldn't have been there much sooner. Now when I say that, I mean, I can name fellas in our battalion when they were in the Middle East when they were 16, you they put their age down

25:00 up I should say, and they got in.

So how were you received?

I was received very well, yeah, yes. I can see Ambrose Palmer, who was a sergeant, bit of a lair, with his hat well on the side of his head, "Yes mate what can I do for you?" I said, "Well Sergeant, I've got to report here to A company." "Oh yeah, a reo." [reinforcement]. "Yes Sir that's right, I'm a reo." And he was the first fellow I met when I went to A company the 2/23rd

25:30 and he was great. He's been gone a while now, so anyway, yeah, it was only ever one person, one night challenged me about my age, those days I was pretty quick with a comeback in the mind. This fellow Jack Hayes said,

26:00 "Oh where you been, yeah God yeah?" And he was on that line you see. And I knew it was an older man, you could see by looking at him and I was sorry because he had been...and this may be why he said it, he had been I think shell-shocked. I don't know why he was still there, Jack, but anyway he was very close to a shell

26:30 when it went off but anyway he said to me, he started on this line with me and I thought well, better say something in my defence. So I said, "Jack, how old are you?" And he said, "A lot older than you I'll tell you that." I said, "I know that, would you be 30?" He said, "Yes." and that was old to be in an infantry battalion. And I said, "Oh you're 30?" "Yeah." "Well how old were you when you come into the infantry?" He said, "I was in the army in

27:00 '41." I said, "Well it started in '39 so where were you?" He didn't say anything. Couple of the other fellas said, "That's a beauty." And that fixed that.

You say you thought he suffered from shell-shock, what were the symptoms of that?

Well some of the other fellas told me he suffered from shell-shock, well that must have affected him somewhat you see, because no one else said anything like that.

27:30 I think that must have affected him by making him bitter, he was a bit bitter. And here were younger men coming in, all he'd done, all the fighting he'd done, all these younger blokes think they're going to show us how to fight and all this business you see and he got these sort of thoughts in his head I should think. Anyway, after the Tablelands, I never saw him. He would have undoubtedly been sent out.

So shell-shock could make you bitter?

28:00 Well I think it did with him. I think with his fighting and that time he'd been in the battalion, it all got to him. Of course, somebody else told me about him being very near a shell when it exploded and I think they were saying it to me as much as saying, a lovely fellow like Sergeant Jack Rimmington who was a marvellous fellow, was saying to me as if to say, "Don don't you take notice of Jack,

28:30 it's not the rest of our thoughts, we're pleased to see reos." And I think Jack must have said to me, "Look it's shell-shock." I'm quoting Jack now, "I think it's affected him." and I think it possibly had and I was sorry to give him such a bitter reply, but you feel as though you have to protect yourself a bit and when you first arrive there, you are not going to be pushed around too much even if you were a reo. But I mean that was the only instance.

29:00 My greatest friends there were original blokes, 'Slogger' Collins and Tommy Porter my section leader, after our other section leader had been so badly wounded and so that was the infantry and they had as I say reinforcements pouring in.

So there you were in the 2/23rd , got the T colour patch

Yeah in the 2/23rd, got the T colour patch, very proud of course.

29:30 **What were the colours of the 2/23rd ?**

Black on light blue with a grey background. Well grey was for AIF and all the colour patches, got one there anyway. It was a T shape as you know, after Tobruk, the original 2/23rds went away...

With a diamond?

With a diamond, that's right and it was brown over red. Now I don't know whether you know that's, see that's how we got our name. We didn't get it because there was tons of mud in

30:00 Tarakan and New Guinea because lots of blood was spilt, we got it because it was brown over red and became known as mud and blood. Mud and blood and that's our magazine, our history is called mud and blood. It's just sitting there? No that's the 9th Division book.

Lovely name.

Yeah mud and blood was a good name, wasn't it? Well I said a little while ago about those NCOs in Bathurst you see, they were from the 2/8th battalion and they were white over red, so they were blood and bandages. Or it might have been red over white

30:30 I'm not sure.... whatever.

So from the Atherton Tablelands when did you find out that you were going to be posted overseas?

Well I remember I've never stated this before, very few times, that the question was where did we find out

31:00 we were going overseas? So we landed on May 1st , we got there in April... not until March '45 I 'spose.

Were you given leave beforehand?

No I hadn't had leave for two years.

Goodness.

Or two years anyway by the end of the war... I'll tell you something about that, about going to Japan.

31:30 Yeah I think about that time now, but I don't know if I should say this or not... Well the OC [Officer Commanding] of our company, not the CO of the company, the OC, he called me in one day, and I said, "Yes." "Captain Sedgley

32:00 wants to see you." "God, what have I done now?" that always comes in the mind. Anyway he wanted me to go into an officers' school you see and I said, "No thank you." And anyway he said to me, "Why not?" And I said...I knew at this stage we were going away, and I said I wouldn't do it because for my own personal gratification

32:30 and what people would think, if that mattered, we knew we were going soon, don't we Sir. He said, could be, or something like that. And I said well there you are, so then my great friends get back and can say, "Oh Tibbits isn't coming, he's decided to go to a school." So I wasn't going to have that. And my great little friend Tommy Porter

33:00 told me, not a bit of good in the parade ground but very good when it came to a stoush, like fighting, and I went back and I said to Tom who had been through all the campaigns, he said, "What do you want?" "Come here and I'll tell you." So I told Tom, he said, "You must be bloody mad." I said, "Well thanks Tom very nice of you to say, I thought I was

33:30 doing the right thing." He said, "Go, go mate, you've the opportunity, just go now." he said, "And don't worry about where we're going." I said, "I can't Tom." So I didn't and so there I joined a private and came out as a private. And probably, when I look back, I probably wouldn't have had the ability to do it anyway and I probably would have got over there, and they'd say, "My God, these dunces

34:00 that they are sending us, send him back." So you see with all they have to learn, but of course so many men became officers in the field even. They had been some time, well I say mainly older men, older than

me. But they just learnt their soldiering, and they just knew all about it because, they didn't go to officers' school, I mean a lot did, but a lot didn't, they learnt

34:30 the game the practical way from experience. But anyway you know, this Captain had been himself, I don't know if he had been in Duntroon, he might have been I'm not sure, but anyway he had done that himself and he thought it was a good thing for me to do.

So Don, you didn't get your chance to say farewell to your mum and sister?

No, no.

Had you taken anything special from home? Had you brought any photos or lucky charms or anything like that from home?

35:00 No I don't think I had really, no. Only in here and in here were memories of it all. And they were marvellous my mother and sister. You know they must have got a letter regularly and mail times are very big times, even when you're just on the Tablelands. I can imagine those fellas... well mail was always pretty good really

35:30 in the Islands when they're able to give it to you, it'd be given to you. And when you think of fellows that... I've forgotten now, I was reading just the other day...I opened a prisoner of war show in Albury the other, last month. Funny, I wasn't a prisoner of war but I think being president of the 2/23rd, which was Albury's Own, I was asked to do it. When I got there and they said there are five prisoners of war

36:00 in the audience, why didn't they get one of them? But evidently they wanted me to do it and the curator said to me, can't just remember her name, but anyway, very nice and she did ring me about someone to open it or speak at it. Now the local member of parliament opened it and I said to her on the phone, I thought to myself, "I'm out of this, I've got the very person for you. Our Ken Tonkin of the 2/23rd."

36:30 I said, "He was taken prisoner, escaped, was caught again, escaped again, and fought with the partisans." She said, "How marvellous." I said, "Well you give him a ring and he'll do that for you." So I thought, I said to Valda, "I'm out of that." So the next day the phone rang it was Helen again she said, "Oh." (I spoke first and didn't give her a go I think, I was so excited), I said, "Did you get in touch with Ken?" She said, "Yes and he won't do it." I said

37:00 "Well thank him very much for me." so anyway of course I had to apologise later because I went to see him later on and he wasn't well, is still not well. But anyway that's why he didn't do it and I was only too pleased to do it but it just rather tickled me, opening a prisoner of war exhibition. And well I don't know whether you know but it is going around from Canberra all over the place.

We saw it, in fact, we saw it in Orange.

Oh you saw it? Well it's in Albury

37:30 So wherever it goes somebody will have to open it and speak at it I 'spose.

Just out of interest where did your friend Ken escape and fight with the partisans?

Ken was in a German prisoner of war...

In Greece?

No, I think he was sent back to Germany and escaped.

38:00 Its really a marvellous story, he's just written a book, a marvellous story and he escaped and was caught and taken back and the second time he escaped, they'd come into Italy... or I may not be right there, anyway they got near where there was an Italian camp and they....

38:30 not sure if it was Snowy Greig or who was with him now, anyway the two of them had got German officers' uniforms, now that's interesting in itself. I said, "Where did you get those?" "Don't ask any questions." was the answer to that, so I thought I better not ask any more questions about that.

Tape 4

00:34 **So Don, where we left you on Friday you're up in the Atherton Tablelands and were just about to go overseas. Now you didn't get a final leave, you didn't get a chance to...**

No I didn't get a final leave no. We were told we were going very shortly and the next thing was to get on army trucks, I think we went by truck, and we went to Townsville and so we trucked down to

01:00 Townsville and then we left Townsville but first of all we were there. I just can't remember how long now, but it might have been a week or ten days. And we went into a place I 'spose most of us had never heard of it before because I'd never been to Townsville before. I mean in my day if someone had come and said that they'd been well to Brisbane even, but to Townsville, goodness me. And so off we went to Townsville. And Townsville we were as I say about a week or ten days, at a camp called Yeerongpilly.

01:30 So it sounds an aboriginal word and I imagine it is. So we stayed at Yeerongpilly and I remember that time the wharfies went on strike, so they got the army to do it so off we went and I got onto a ship where we were loading sides of beef. And as I recall of course, it went to a freezing area.

02:00 We were very fit, we'd gone to Canungra, but my goodness, sides of beef are very heavy. And that was just a thing that happened to us while we were there, just another experience, you saw how meat was loaded, in those days of course. And then we left Townsville on April 9th.

Had you been able to contact your mother or sister to let them know that you were leaving?

02:30 Well we didn't have access to phones like they did, I wasn't able to ring her up and say cheerio, I just wrote a letter. And I suppose really that was when I got onboard an American naval troop ship that was made for carrying troops by the American Navy they called the [USS] General Butner.

Just before we go to the General Butner, what did you say in your letter to your mother and your sister?

Well I don't think...

03:00 mind you all the letters are in a bag upstairs. I've just never opened them and she kept every letter I ever wrote. And they're still upstairs. I think I would have written on the General Butner and then when we got to Morotai it would have been posted there. Because Morotai was an island that had been captured and we were going there for training before the Tarakan landing, and so I would have written there of course just to say, that you can see that I'm overseas, because there would have been a stamp

03:30 to that effect, put on by the army, but not where we were of course. And here I was and I missed them both and don't worry I'm sure everything will be alright. I wasn't sure at all but hoped everything would be alright. And you know and then I'm here with my mate McAlorum and it's great you know

04:00 we're all mates and so friendly and all that sort of thing but I've got such good, well mates we always used in the army, mum so they'll look after me and I look after them and all that sort of thing.

So tell me about the General Butner?

Oh the General Butner was gosh, just a hell ship, it was a disgrace. It had no portholes, and

04:30 I was going to say that we went below of a night time, but you were almost herded below. The Captain wouldn't have anyone on the decks at all at night time, now you were going through the tropics on a steel ship and there were hammocks, we were given hammocks but they were just so close and down below all the time... you were virtually in a bath of perspiration all the time. I know that our CO, Colonel Tucker did complain about it, but all the complaints were taken up of course

05:00 after we got there, so it really didn't do us any good on the voyage.

And what happened if you were above deck?

If you are above deck when you should have been below? They put on very strong hoses, hoses that almost would knock you over. "Get them off the deck!" he'd yell out. So these American... I suppose that they were sailors, and you know I think they must have been military police the way they went on. And they'd hit you with these very strong hoses,

05:30 you'd get knocked over and you'd be convinced it was time to go downstairs. The only good thing was at least you were getting soaked in water and so you went down at least soaked in water, salt, I would think. So you know it was a terrible, terrible trip really. And funny thing, names that stick in your mind. In the area we were in, this American stood up in front of us and he was a nice chap too, it wasn't his doing, it was all Captain's orders

06:00 to get down, and he said almost as soon as we got to his area, "I'm Jesse V. Colvin, Mid-shipman Jesse V. Colvin I'll be charge in this area, you fellas come to me with anything I can do for you." Well we all complained, but Jesse V. Colvin, Mid-shipman wasn't quite high enough to argue with the Captain about these fellas aren't satisfied. "Hey these fellas aren't satisfied with all this, Captain." Well he just would have been told, Jesse V. Colvin, "You just do as I say."

06:30 So we just went in the hell ship until we got to Morotai. Mind you during the day, time when we were up on deck it was marvellous. And it was a two meal a day thing in the American... I think all their services, not sure if it was just the navy but we didn't have three meals a day like you did in the Australian tents and so on when you were in camp. So it was another thing you got used to

07:00 really but during the day time being up on deck, riding through the beautiful Pacific it was beautiful. And she did glide through the Pacific too, because we did take on an escort at one island which really slowed us up, when a sloop came to escort us, because the General Butner could do 22 knots which she did when she was by herself, well that was too fast for submarines. So that made

07:30 you feel very safe when they gave you that message and the shape of the ship was lovely, it was just that it was terrible down below, very very cramped.

And did some of the men get sea-sick?

Yes I think they did. I can't remember anybody, no, I can't remember anybody getting sick to tell you the truth. I think it was because we were most fortunate, I mean the Pacific is known usually to be the calmest ocean in the world and I think we were lucky it was calm.

08:00 **And did you see any enemy planes or enemy ships?**

Trying to think where the planes came over when we went into anchor at... I think when we arrived at Morotai Japanese planes came over; they dropped a couple of bombs that's all. Nowhere near us, thank heavens. But in twilight on the trip

08:30 it was always a marvellous sight. They used to call them black widows, I'm not sure why and these planes all of a sudden, they were allied planes and they would be coming in, doing sweeps across the Pacific. Just about every evening they would sweep over the ship, which we waved frantically, but I think they were going that fast. We were glad that they knew it was an allied ship. And of course they were a marvellous sight

09:00 and very reassuring that these allied planes coming over and keeping an eye on things.

So coming into Morotai, it was your first time going to a different land, wasn't it?

Yes.

What were your impressions coming into the harbour there?

Well you know I can't remember how many other ships there were there. There must have been a tremendous amount of ships there because the Americans had taken it sometime ago, and I got an idea,

09:30 I mentioned this before about how they pushed the Nips back about and left themselves... I've forgotten how many miles we had of beach area and going back into the hinterland. I suppose about five miles and they just pushed the Japs back into the bush and of course the island was cut off for them, they couldn't get supplies and they set up what they called a perimeter. And here were the....

10:00 well I think you asked me about black Americans once. Well a lot of black Americans were in this perimeter and they were well dug in, but still they slept in tents and had lots of marvellous comforts, that we never saw, I never saw at all. But it was a great idea and then we formed the camp quite a way inland a bit, and I think the only time that anything happened there

10:30 was a water point. Out in the front a bit it must have been, anyway this water-cart bloke, I think he was Australian and he had a water-cart used to fill up with water, well I don't know whether a couple of Nips had infiltrated to there or something and he was killed. That was the only person I heard of certainly, well I can't be certain that he was an Australian, he might have been Australian

11:00 driving this water cart and he was the only person and so we got on with training there for our landing at Tarakan.

Did you know where you were going by then?

Not then no. We were told while we were there, I think only a couple of days beforehand you know where we were going because we were doing training

11:30 on things called alligators. Now we were doing that with the Americans because these were the things we were going to land on. See most landings were done on LCI, landing craft infantry, you know the long barge looking thing with the front drops down. Well these things were, I suppose the best way of explaining them, if you think of a tank and just cut the tail off, cut the tail straight off across the top and you've got a big steel body left,

12:00 well then that would take about 25 men I think as I remember, would go into it, perhaps 30, perhaps it took a platoon and so you were all herded down there. And around the edge of it would be great because you had all this steel around you and around the edge they had all these guns mounted. And then there was these Americans, well there was a skipper to the alligator and then there were about

12:30 three other Americans on guns around the side.

So then you would...

You'd drop out of the front of an LCT landing craft transport and the front of the landing craft transport would open and the alligator would drop out of the front of it. And let me tell you, well the first time, every time really, you can imagine, this great big thing as heavy as a tanker, when it went down and hit the water for the first time you'd think "My God, this is never coming up again." because it would dip right down and come up.

13:00 We were lucky, you may have heard of this fellow called Tom Derrick V. C. [Victoria Cross] well he was in the 2/48th and they were training along with us, they were our sister battalion see. The brigade was the 2/23rd , 2/24th and 2/48th battalion and a brigade was to do the job on Tarakan and with some attached troops like some ambulance troops and casualty clearing and we had a

13:30 2/4th Commando unit and a few attached troops, but in the main the 26th brigade would do the job and Brigadier Whitehead, who was in charge was a 26th brigade man. So Derrick's alligator did go down and they lost one man, but not Derrick V. C., but one fellow was drowned.

So was the idea was that they would hit the bottom of the sea

14:00 **and then they would be able to drive along...**

Well you see, what their tracks... like tanks had tracks, well on the tracks of these things were like fins all the way around so they could go through the water and also when they got to land, they could go on land too. Now if you want to go forward to landing... like the Americans and the one we trained on and we went with the same American team when we landed, and his words were, "I'm gonna take you guys up the main

14:30 street of Tarakan." Well if you want to get on the landing now, that didn't happen because the Japs had other ideas and they made a 12 foot wall. I suppose the best description is railway sleepers, one on top of the other, which was a tremendous length. And so of course when we came in we just hit this wall of railway sleepers 12 feet high. Now there were two different things

15:00 there, some others, us in our alligators, we were able to get from the height of the alligator, and get over the top of it. But other ones, they had to stop short and they had to get out and they were in mud you know, they were in about two feet deep, three feet deep and they went down in mud and they had to carry on with the landing in that condition. But we were very lucky; you want me to go on with this landing?

Well we might just come back

15:30 **a little bit.**

Well we've left Morotai and we've landed at Tarakan but if you want to go back to Morotai.. I don't think there's anything else to tell about it really, except the date we left there... We left Australia on the 9th April, we left Morotai on the 20th April and we landed on Tarakan on May 1st .

No, I was just about to ask you before we get to Tarakan, by that time you had been in

16:00 **the 2/23rd for over a year, you'd been in the army for over two years, you must have developed quite close friendships by then.**

Oh very.

Yeah so tell me about your mates, who were they?

Well I mentioned to you Johnny McAlorum and of course in the army everybody is from different walks of life. John was a cattle drover from outback and he was always talking about these cattle big drives, sleeping under the stars and how marvellous

16:30 and he couldn't wait to get back to that, all this sort of thing. He didn't, but I'll tell you about that later if you like. And oh well I had many, then another great friend, Ted Wood, who's.... Ted's still going today in a nursing home down in Rosebud, who I still visit regularly and he and I are very close. I have so many, Kevin Daly from Sydney whom we remained friends all our lives.

17:00 These are some of those that you are very close to. I mean others you saw at reunions, but the very close ones you kept up your friendship. Like I didn't see Teddy Woods was very badly wounded, and if you go on with that, I mean to where he was wounded and how, I can do that now or later. He was very badly wounded taking a place called Margy on Tarakan.

17:30 Now Margy was the higher feature on Tarakan.

Yeah it was a mountain.

Yes.

Well maybe we should go onto to Tarakan landing because it sounds as though...

Yeah you're right, though all the friendships had been formed you know. I've been in the 2/23rd now well, as you say, for over a year and there was just so many people, Tommy Porter, my section leader, well he turned out to be our section leader

18:00 he was in the section but why he turned out to be the section leader I can... there are so many things I can go forward about and tell you now. He became our section leader because our section leader on the first day, Jack Rice, was so badly wounded. Anyway if you want to work up to that, we could say, okay we advance of course on foot.

First of all could you just describe

18:30 **coming into Tarakan, landing, for me? You were coming in on the LCTs was there already enemy fire coming at you?**

Well the LCTs stayed out a bit of course ... I can't quite remember how many alligators each one took. I

think it was three, you see one behind the other you see, then we went to land on... the 2/23rd was to land on Lingkas, Lingkas it was called, didn't look it up, Lingkas Beach

19:00 and the first feature to be taken was Tank Knoll.

So as you were coming in on the alligators what could you see, what could you hear?

Well the shore had been blasted to pieces by the B 24s and that was from the Australians, they were an Australian squadron that came from Morotai and they blasted all along the shoreline,

19:30 even the day before and that morning. And also fortresses from the 13th American Air Force. Now both supported us, not just on this day, but on other days too. And so they blasted along the shoreline and as we came and by the way, the time was 7:30 in the morning, and we came in,

20:00 it was the first time rocket ships had been used in an Australian landing and these rocket ships would zoom sort of around a circle and come back in again, and if you hold your hand up to the angle at about 45 degrees, that's about how these rocket things were set. And there would be one behind another on those things, of about six I 'spose and there could have been more. And they were all lined up

20:30 as I said, at an angle of 45 degrees and they would come towards the shore at great speed. And all these rockets would come along the shoreline. The effect was just tremendous, it was like something that I saw in a Hollywood war movie, I think. And the noise of course from the shooting and then the bombing noise was gone because they couldn't keep bombing naturally, they've done that for us. And then these rocket ships would come in zooming past us and letting

21:00 a few rockets go, well talk about Guy Fawkes day when I was a kid and we let off fire crackers, well they were firing like mad and it was all very dramatic watching that. And then I don't know what my thoughts were coming to the thing I just took things as they came, whatever was coming up, you know. It was one thing, you've got just friends either side of you and it's not just you, well we are all in this together

21:30 So away you go. Well when we landed at Lingkas, some jumped out in mud and others climbed the wall, the wooden wall, and when we got over the top of that we were to take a place called Tank Knoll. Well at Tank Knoll all the tanks were there but they were absolutely flattened. Anyway going up through Tank Knoll

22:00 which... well if you just visualise sort of slightly undulating hills and tanks, big oil tanks all over them. Well I think one was still standing, it was blown apart on the side, none of them had any oil left in them, and they were all just flattened on the ground so we were rendering our way through there and it was there that the first

22:30 enemy shots came and it wounded a fellow, can't think of his name now, he was a Western Australian I know that. And there was no Japanese defence to meet us when we landed down on the beach area. Now that's understandable of course, they weren't silly, they weren't going to stay down there with all that bombing and rocket ships going on, so of course naturally they moved back. And I suppose

23:00 they had been there for a couple of years, thought about all this sort of thing, and they understood how Americans blasted places before they land, so they had their pill boxes and tunnels and connecting trenches, which they made all the natives over the years, they made them dig all these trenches and tunnels.

23:30 After this fellow was wounded nothing else seemed to happen and I remember stopping there for awhile and the CO came up and they were all having a talk about things. And then of course the order was to advance further, which of course we did and advancing further, well our platoon anyway, all of a sudden got into a lot of trouble. Then advancing up there of course we started to come up to bush then,

24:00 not tremendously heavy jungle just yet, but bushy like jungle area. And our forward scout was an English chap in the Australian Army, who was English, he was only young, Gordon Reeves, I remember his name and he'd come out from England. I'm not sure whether... he maybe had been sent out when he was younger in the exchange bit

24:30 or they came out to get away from England in the war. And Gordon was of course the forward scout, all of a sudden there was a machine gun blast and Gordon Reeves was shot and killed there and then. Then as I remember we saw of course it was a pill box and we tried to go around and do a flank movement.

25:00 Now see, the jungle here it wasn't so thick here, and you could move around to the left but as we went to do that all of a sudden a few more gun bursts and we lost Corporal Fisher. Now Corporal Fisher had been through all the other campaigns and a terrific leader and he was hit just below the heart and my section leader was a fella called Jack Rice from Gippsland. Both of those fellows have since passed on. When Fisher was hit just a bit below the heart, and our section leader, who I was just a little bit behind,

25:30 the bullet went through the side of his mouth and came out behind his ear and you know, goodness me, you thought, he must be dead and anyway of course he hit the ground and we didn't want to leave him there so a fellow named Bluey Brooks, he was from Ororoo

26:00 in South Australia, he was a Bren gunner then, he just went forward with the Bren gun and just swept the whole area while we pulled Jack Rice back and Jack was.... stretcher bearers arrived and Jack Rice was taken out and lived to tell the tale. Really never the same, Jack wasn't, he couldn't do anything too physical and really he died far too young

26:30 you know. He lived in Maffra and went to Maffra and he had the hotel there for a while. And after the war some of the fellows found out about it and up they'd go. I don't know whether Jack was too happy to see them or not, Tommy Porter and a couple of others moved in for the weekend. And anyway at the same time he was up there he was coaching, he was a great sports fellow in his good day, played in the Ravenshoe area, played in the football team.

So Don what's going through your mind

27:00 **while this was happening, you're a young man...?**

Gee, I don't know. Those are the things that I really can't remember. I think what's going through my mind there is keep your bloody head down, find some hole to jump into or something you know. I think that must be going, I mean self preservation comes into these things and I certainly wasn't the hero, I'm not one of these fellows... now I thought Bluey Brooks did a marvellous thing by going with a Bren gun

27:30 to get Jack Rice's body, well as I say, Jack Rice was taken away and lived to tell the tale. So I feel that after that perhaps our platoon, I don't know whether the whole of A company but we were given... it was a while before we were really put into any fierce action. I don't know how to describe it really

28:00 because the whole time we were on Tarakan.....this is why some fellow some years ago wrote a book called Tarakan: A Personal War. Well by jove he was just so right because all the time we were there for those three months we were there, they were never out of sight. Well I'll correct that; the jungle was so thick you couldn't see them most of the time,

28:30 but they were always nearby. And for that whole time, in all that three months, we got taken out two days once, had two days rest, but all the rest of the time... Now I say that because you know, when the enemy are nearby all the time, it's very nerve racking and well there were more peaceful times when they were further away than other times and that sort of thing.

But I guess you wouldn't have known that, how close or how far they were?

29:00 A lot of the times you didn't you see, and this is why, I mean you had 'stand to' every morning and in the evening, every evening at sundown because they were two great attacking times. Now that was if the Nips were going to conform to most warfare which they didn't. So one thing they were very active at night attacks. Now that really...

29:30 that really is you know, a bit of a devastating thing at night time and why it is so much is that when you set up at night time, you go to camp at night time you set up a perimeter, which is a circular perimeter and if they break into the centre of the perimeter and get through the centre, you can't turn around and fire at them

30:00 because you're likely to shoot one of your fellows on the other side, unless of course he is well, in some position, you can see that he is in a position high up or something like that, then you can shoot him and I can explain a situation where that did happen.. So that made night attacks you know very...when you set up a perimeter at night of course, you had your booby traps

30:30 around the perimeter. Now they consisted of all sorts of things, mostly you had an empty jam tin or bully beef tin or whatever it was, anyway as long as grenade would get into. Now a grenade, I don't know if you saw a grenade, they just fit into your hand like that, has a handle, pin in the top, so you pull the pin out, then slip the grenade into the tin, that would have a very fine wire going to the next one, the next one. So that if anyone came in they only had to hit that wire and pull the grenade out of the tin

31:00 and the lever flew off the grenade and it exploded. So you had those all the way around.

So were they ever set off?

Oh yes they were set off. Well one night, one of these attacks was when we had a tank in the centre of the perimeter, say that perimeter was a fair size 'cause we had a tank and a crew in the middle of it. And the Nips seemed to be very

31:30 very hostile to tanks, they always seemed to... bad news tanks were, lovely news in the day time where they could get if you were on an open area or road, because jungle they couldn't come in at all, but on an open area, and I'll explain where one was so marvellous, but this night the tank was in the centre and a Nip patrol, a fighting patrol led by a Japanese officer,

32:00 came down an open drain which was sort of formed something quite like a trench you know, down this open drain. Then they all of a sudden charged forward yelling out and throwing grenades themselves. Now this night, I looked up and a Jap had gone on top of the tank

32:30 and I could see he was going to throw a grenade because with their grenades they are shaped a bit like a small Chinese lantern and had a brass thing on the top and they'd hit that. Now a lot of times they'd hit it on their heel or they might hit it on anything. Then he got up on top of the tank this fella and

threw a grenade and it killed Wally Smith, very nice

- 33:00 chap one of our fellas named Wally Smith. Now I don't know whether Wally if he stood up, anyway he was killed, and the Nip was shot because he was silhouetted, not being right in thick jungle, he was silhouetted and was of course he was a pretty easy shot, to shoot him off the top of the tank. Matter of fact, about
- 33:30 I think there might have been about, not sure, 6 or 8 Japanese on that patrol and it was led by a Japanese officer, of course he had his samurai sword on. Now when it comes to souveniring luck, we had a sergeant whose name I can't remember, he was a reinforcement sergeant, only been with us for a couple of days and he was nearest and may have killed the officer himself
- 34:00 I am not sure, but anyway he was nearest to him you see, and I am not sure whether he took the sword that night or in the morning probably, because I don't think anyone could really settle down and sleep that night, we thought they might have another lot coming. And so he got this samurai sword, which was a marvellous thing to get, a souvenir, people always loved to get them. Of course the Americans pay people a fortune for them. So this... I can see him now, this short thick-set, red headed fella
- 34:30 and all of a sudden, I am not sure if it was the same day it might have been the next day, it came through that he was to be released because he was in a protected industry, which means of course that even though you were needed you had come in the first place, but there was great shortages happening in Australia in industry and agriculture and you know, I think I mentioned earlier, a couple of these shearers that were in the sheds when I was 16, were released
- 35:00 from the army to go to the shearing season in New South Wales. Well anyway so this sergeant, off he went, he said "Cheerio fellas!" and off he marched with this samurai sword, everyone's saying, "Oh all we've been through, we haven't got a samurai sword." So things just went along like that, not too often. Another night attack,
- 35:30 we were bedded down or dug in, that's a better word, we'd taken the old Dutch barracks. And that night at the old Dutch barracks, they attack there. And I was in rather a forward position by myself, and they came in all of a sudden and to me they seemed to be either side of me and in front of me. Now I was up a bit higher
- 36:00 in the high ground in front of the barracks, out a bit in front, quite a bit, in high ground. Anyway I threw a grenade over and I didn't hear a response and after that I heard other movement about, so I thought I'd better freeze. So you know well you can understand what freeze means, there they are, just there don't move. So I just more or less
- 36:30 stayed like that. Well it felt like hours to me, but I 'spose it was 10 minutes but all the time I was like that, mosquitoes were all over my hands biting me, biting my hands like mad and I thought well can't, I am not gonna move. And a day's rations just a bit to my right in the next dug-in just a little way next to me. Dave was killed, so it proved to me that they were about,
- 37:00 so after that I had these terribly swollen hands, terribly itchy and swollen. But I thought, as Tommy Porter my section leader said, I'm sorry about that but it is better to have swollen hands, I told him I froze; well he said, "It is better to have swollen hands than to be shot." I agreed with that, I thought it was. But something else came to mind then about those barracks and the attack there
- 37:30 I've just forgot. I had some other thing in mind to tell you about that I've just forgotten about that.

So you threw a grenade and it didn't go off?

Of yes, it did go off, oh my word. Oh yes I heard it go off. But you see, it was in pitch dark and I was up high. And I don't know, you see I don't know whether it got anybody or whether it didn't but if they weren't quite in range of it or something

- 38:00 they were back not long after the grenade went off. So it was just one of those things that sort of happened all the time.

So did you take turns sleeping or how did you..

Every night, yeah. So when we were moving, and we moved, mostly we moved every day. We'd move forward every day in the jungle, we moved everyday, Now that means, when I look back now at my age and I looked back at it, so every night when you stopped,

- 38:30 you dug up a hole, a trench that you could fit into. Now I'm 6 foot. And when I think... if I go out to the garden and have to dig a hole I think, "Oh my God I have to dig a hole." and well, we'd come home every night and Ernie Carter and I, who was.. I was with a few different people, but Ernie Carter and I were together, mainly on Tarakan and Ernie would say, "It's your turn, your turn tonight."
- 39:00 I said, 'What, I'm not going to do it all by myself, you give me a hand.' so anyway, we'd dig a trench. I mean you'd be silly if you didn't because if an attack came in you'd go into the trench, you'd put up your rifle out the top and it was a good start. But it was very dark all the time but your question was... yeah... So there was two of us and if possible you'd put up what they called a duvet up behind you. Now that was just a two-man tent and you put that up behind the hole, if you possibly could. And

- 39:30 one would go to sleep and one would be on watch all the time and so that went right around the perimeter, you see. All in pairs. Now the night at the barracks when I was out was most unusual, and Tom apologised to me, ages after. He said, "I shouldn't have stuck you out in the front there." I said, "Well thanks Tom." Pity he didn't think that...anyway, it's all over. And so Ernie Carter and I and that's what you did, you had this trench in front of you
- 40:00 and that's when you came in. Now night times don't think that they are all quiet.

Tape 5

00:35 **So Don, you say the nights were often noisy?**

Yes well a jungle night and to think there you are, under the canopy, but the jungle noises.... there are all sorts of birds and creatures, they make all these noises and of course there are lots of pigs there. And I am sure many a pig was shot because they would make

- 01:00 a rustling coming through the jungle, you see and this rustling, lots of pigs. And other things there were lots of, although pigs were at night time and they were night time noises I was talking about, I mean I don't know how to explain the night time noises, they were all so odd...whether they were frogs, I 'spose there were frogs, and some were other sort of insects. But at nights there was so much noise

01:30 **Were they spooky?**

Well I suppose they were spooky because the thing.. you're never too sure. Were the Nips up to some sort of a trick? And now when these pigs would rush through... now for instance there were a number of monkeys shot. Now that might not have been night time, that might be daytime, they'd break through the jungle and of course a fellow's not going to argue so he just shoots and you get there and it was a monkey, because some of them are quite big.

- 02:00 Now there are a lot of monkeys and the thing is that there were two things in the jungle you can hear coming. One was rain. When it rained, and you know it really rained, you could hear rain coming ages before it got to you because it would be hitting the canopy of the jungle you see and another thing, these big sandy coloured monkeys, I don't know what they are called. And when they came, they came in what do you call not herds what do you call monkeys? Anyway

- 02:30 there could be a dozen of them.

Not orang-utans?

No not orang-utans. Those that were shot, were mostly orang-utans because they were more likely to come down low, walk or swing down. But these ones kept up in the top of the canopy of the jungle, these big sandy coloured ones, and they would swing through the leaves. You could hear them coming a long way off. They were rather entertaining actually, the way they could jump from a vine and swept through one after the other.

- 03:00 And you could see them mostly. And you got to realise that in the jungle it is very dark. Now when I say very dark not as dark as night time, but quite dark, I mean you had to be very careful when you stepped out of the jungle. If you're going out on a fighting patrol and you came out of the jungle or something into an open area, you see. Because

- 03:30 here and there was we'll say road width, tracks along which they could get vehicles which they had for I don't know, logging and that sort of thing, I 'spose. And if you stepped out on one of those, you had to step out, you had take it easy, just step out quietly, because your eyes had to get adjusted to all of a sudden coming into bright light. And I mean if you rushed out there and the enemy were out there and you couldn't see, well of course they would bob you off. So that was another thing you had to be careful of.

- 04:00 And on fighting patrols, now just getting on to fighting patrols, well you know there were reccy [reconnoitre] patrols, reccy patrols is what we called them, you'd go out and see, sound out to see how close they were. And then there was a fighting patrol where you really went out to make contact. A fighting patrol well I wore I think a green band around my head,

- 04:30 to cover the top, that must have been a bit of a mosquito net. And you had... that's what I wore, most of them just put a band around their heads on a fighting patrol. And then you had a bandolier of bullets going across here. And two grenades there. And that was how fighting patrols would set out.

Don earlier when you were talking about your sleeping arrangements and setting up the perimeter with grenades in jam tins, was that stuff you'd been taught how to do,

05:00 **or did you improvised when you got there?**

I don't know, there's a thing. We always did a lot of training in the bull-ring, pulling guns down and putting them together blind-folded and all that sort of thing, but I really don't remember putting jam

tins around with grenades in them when we were practising. I don't even remember doing that when we were at Morotai. I don't know, I think it just must have been the things that the old hands knew, you see.

05:30 Tommy Porter had been my section leader since Jack Rice had been shot and Tom was just a marvellous little fellow, great friend and oh he could smell Nips. He could smell them, he was just amazing. He would go like that, and you'd flatten down you know, and would have to get all prepared for them, but see, a fella like Tom and other fellows, had been in New Guinea

06:00 and I think that, it must have just carried on from there. They say, "We'll set up the perimeter." and our platoon commander said, "Right-o set up these perimeters." and these fellows knew exactly what to do and showed you what to do and you were only too pleased to do it.

It must have been a great comfort to have those more experienced soldiers there?

Oh yes absolutely, no doubt about it. Well I think I said to you before as McAlorum and I were having the argument on

06:30 the General Butner about who was it worse for. I mean he said, "It was worse for me, going back into action." I said, "It's worse for me I don't know what I'm going to." But he said, "I do." And I think I said to you before, he was right. He knew what he was going to, and of course they still went. I mean, look at the originals; they went one campaign after another.

And how do you think they kept going?

07:00 **I mean, how did you keep going, it was very nerve racking as you've said?**

It was very nerve racking. I've often said, I'd never do it again. ... well not only that, the dirt, you were dirty all the time and well I hated that. But you couldn't do anything about that, you were dirty all the time. Water was short and it was brought up by the boongs...gosh, you can't say those things these days.

07:30 **Alright, it was brought up by...?**

Yeah, the natives brought up the water. In charge would often be a Salvation Army man, and they'd be carrying water on their shoulders and other food, bread up to the front. And while I'm on that, no wonder ex-servicemen always give to the Salvation Army because Captain Pearson and his Salvation Army team, well they were just... they were

08:00 just amazing you know. Up around the front and they'd say, "One at a time, slip back there a bit, Pearson's here." and you'd go back there and there'd be coffee and that sort of thing you know. You be given a couple of biscuits, not army biscuits that ricochet off the table and killed a mate of mine, real... some sort of lovely biscuits, biscuits from home. And anyway the Salvos were just terrific,

08:30 as they are in civilian life. So anyway, so it went on and someone was killed and if you were up in the jungle, he was wrapped in a blanket. Now not a job I could do, but my great friend Jack Slogger Collins whom I mentioned before, Slog was just amazing you know, I mean he could help, put a fellow in his blanket and that's what they were buried in.

09:00 And you dug a hole and the body was put down there when you were up in the jungle somewhere and a map reference was taken of that. And the map reference was sent back and when you cleared that area, when we moved away from the area, the people that would come up, come up and get them. I'm not sure, I don't suppose they were from war graves then, but anyway someone was organised to do that, come up and get

09:30 the body and it was taken back ... well at that time it was taken to a little cemetery by some crossroads, down in Tarakan. Very dusty area too. As a matter of fact, pilot officer Latham who was an air force chap, came upon this little cemetery one day because he was in.... the air force was in Tarakan too. The main thing of going to Tarakan was to take the airstrip

10:00 and I am afraid, it was just bombed, it never got used. Well not until the latter part of the campaign, the purpose was to take the air strip and that was going to be a great landing for other campaigns further on. So this Latham wrote a poem about the little cemetery, 'Will you come with me where the crossroads meet...'

Could you recite it for us?

Well I could read it to you.

10:30 **Alright, well maybe in the break you can.**

Yes would you like me to do that?

That would be great.

Yes I've got it, I've always kept it. We've got it up at our museum, and a photograph of the little cemetery that was there. So this is where your friends or whoever were killed and when they were taken out of these temporary graves where they'd been buried in the jungle, they were brought down to

this cemetery. And well it was a marvellous little area.

Could you tell me about those burials

11:00 **those jungle burials, would you recite anything?**

Yeah, Padre Udy. Yeah Padre Udy would be always contacted and somehow Padre Udy would get up there and stand there around the graves, such as it was. And Padre Udy would always come up there and have a graveside service, marvellous, marvellous little fellow. Padre Udy was our Protestant Chaplain

11:30 and a great big man named Father Bryson was the Catholic Chaplain. I mean it couldn't always work that way, you know, they would do a service over anybody whatever religion if it was necessary. But they would try and work it out so that if a Catholic was killed, Father Bryson would come and Father Bryson was a great big man. And Bluey Udy was a short, thick-set, Methodist minister, both in army uniform of course. They were given the rank of Captain.

12:00 And I can see them now on a jungle path, big Father Bryson leading and this little figure coming along behind him and they'd have some sort of a walking stick, they'd be plodding their way along. And other times, you'd see little Bluey would be leading and Father Bryson would be behind him. But they were both terrific characters you know. And Bluey, we became very friendly with him. And we didn't see him for years after the war and then

12:30 eventually one of our fellas named John Leber from Coffs Harbour who used to organise our city reunions and so on met Father, Padre Udy one day, well so we didn't let him go after that. He came and spoke at reunions in Albury. And he is still going well today, he is well into his 80s, and his wife had been blind for years so he always looked after her. And so that was how it was done.

13:00 And Padre Udy did lots of services. I mean if one likes to read a book about Tarakan and you'll see I think in Tim Blue's book, he'll mention Padre Udy and today he buried so and so and then he went on to somebody else and so on see because he covered... I'm not sure, I think that the two of them covered the whole brigade. Anyone who was killed in the campaign anywhere, they were sent for and if they could get out on the road

13:30 they were taken by jeep to where the other fighting was and everything. And that's it with fighting. When I read about Tarakan later and all the things that were going on everywhere, you're getting on with your own fight in your own area. I mean there was 2/24th battalion on one side of us and the 2/48th and they were fighting all the time and getting on with it. Because see, the Japanese were Japanese Marines

14:00 and they weren't just going to hand anything to you, they were terrific fighters and of course the old hari kari bit came into it you know, I remember on patrol one day, this big fella of ours called Corporal Bert Lucas, great big chap, and Bert went forward himself I remember. I mean ... there was always a forward scout which was probably one of the worst things in action in the war.

14:30 I mean I know it must be a thing being a pilot by yourself or in a submarine, but a forward scout is no picnic. So you're just there you are, you're leading and when you're in the jungle, you can have the company behind you because they can't just.... what is the word ...deploy to each side like you can

15:00 in the open and say, "Right-o we'll go around them." Rarely did it happen, it did happen sometimes. So a forward scout was it and I mean who is the first person who is going to come to the enemy and if the enemy are waiting for you, and as they spot someone they let go a blast? Well the forward scout would be the first bloke to cop it, unless of course you know...you had to be very quiet. That's the problem with being a small man. Most small men were marvellous

15:30 forward scouts and they got the job and they were marvellous a lot of them. And another fellow Shepherd, can't think of his first name now, "Oh right-o, I'll do it." Well he was very light on his feet. He was very quick and he would do it. Now I remember one day when I was doing it and the story about Bert Lucas I got off it, but anyway I was with Bert one day and forward scout. And all of a sudden the fellow behind me, the second bloke behind me, he just tapped me, he didn't yell out, he just tapped me on the back and I turned around

16:00 and he gave me a thing like this you see, so I went back and I went back to.... Bert Lucas was the Corporal in charge that day, I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "You're making as much noise as a bloody elephant, you'll get us all killed, for Christsake come and get back here and we'll send Shepherd up." I said "Good. That suits me Bert, that suits me." I think he must have thought, oh he goes out there and tramps on sticks so he'll make a noise so I'll bring him back. But anyway

16:30 forward scouting was very very nerve racking, you're wet sometimes from the rain but you were wet from perspiration too.

Were you hot all the time?

Hot all the time, hot and wet all the time. Or sticky and dirty.

Getting bitten?

Well there were lots of things, now scorpions were quite big out there and I can remember throwing a ground sheet down one night and the ground sheet all of a sudden

17:00 got a sort of a groove in it and the groove went, you know like that. We pulled it up and there was a scorpion, now scorpions I believe take years to develop to get very big. Now they really looked like yabbies, you know Australian yabbies, except at the back, they have this tail and of course that's where they poison you. And they tell me that they take, they are very old anyway

17:30 when they get to the size of an Australian yabbie. Well this one was about the size of Australian yabbie and I said, "Oh it must be about 100 years old." Well of course, who was it Sam Johnson was with me, and said, "I don't care how old it is, I'm bashing it." So of course he killed the thing and just as well. So there were scorpions there. Leeches on the odd occasion, well we had, Canungra had everything, they made sure they had everything. And when you did your training in the jungle

18:00 up there, they had some very big jungle up there. And when you did you went over to Lamington National Park in those days. And as I mentioned earlier Mount Tamborine was very thick in those days, when we went up there. So as I said before about Canungra, one thing about it, you were pretty well trained to go into action after you'd been to Canungra.

I'm guessing that the one thing they couldn't train

18:30 **you for was the fear?**

Yeah, no I suppose they couldn't really, no. Well a lot of the time I don't suppose... well I said to you before when we were coming into land I didn't feel anything, well I was bloody frightened. I mean the unknown, the unknown is always frightening.

Well the unknown and the possibility of being wounded or being killed.

That's right and when you see

19:00 your friends... and how they run a campaign like that is that all the knolls and the razor backs... Margy had some razor backs on it, I told you that Margy was the highest feature but there were a whole lot of other features like Helen and Frieda, I can't quite remember all them now...

They were all names of features?

They were all names of different features that had to be taken. Someone was going over there and they were taking Helen and then you'd take one place

19:30 and you were moving on to so and so.. Essex was another one you see. And you went up and endeavoured to take these features as quickly as possible and I say for a while there we were moving so well that we were having to dig a hole every night. There were fighting patrols; there were reccy patrols, just moving together.

So how did you think you were able to over come that fear, what kind of kept you going?

20:00 Well I suppose really, there's all your mates, you're all doing it together and it's just got to be done. You volunteered to do it and so you got yourself into it really. So you think, well you got to press on with it. And I don't know whether it came into .. an aspect might have come into your mind, you know...A great thing was the Anzac spirit.

20:30 And I told you the house I came from and you know what the diggers did in the First World War and that sort of thing. Also the battalion I joined, had tremendous praise, or the whole division, the 9th division had had such tremendous praise for what it did in Tobruk and you know, the Rats and there I was, fighting with the Rats. They were some of my mates, Tom and these fellows fought in Tobruk,

21:00 and Alamein. And they had kept the name of the Anzacs going from what they had done in the Middle East and in New Guinea, Finschhafen, Sattleburg and all these places they'd been through. Slogger, one of my great friends and still is today, lives up at Sussex, in a village up there at Sussex Inlet. And you looked at fellows like Slogger who had been through all those things... well you patterned yourself on them I suppose and Tommy Porter was

21:30 such a great little corporal. On the parade ground, not worth a crumpet, always getting into trouble. But boy when it came to, when the chips were down as they say, Tommy was great, always knew where to put you and what to do. I told you about the bayonet charge, he was only a corporal but he wasn't going to have a bar of it.

Could you tell me a bit more about that, where were you when you were ordered to make the bayonet charge?

Well I've got an idea that it might not have been long after,

22:00 I can't remember was it quite the first day, might have been after Reeves was killed and this Lieutenant who I said I wouldn't name, thought that evidently it would be a good idea to fix bayonets and charge. Now being in his situation and we didn't do it anyway, I'm not sure his mind... it couldn't have been just to charge the pill box, I mean surely. That was clear ground as I told you,

22:30 where he was killed that day. Whether his idea was that we were to go around either side, I don't know that. All I could say, thank God it didn't happen you know, because I might not be being interviewed today. We'd be wounded and all that sort of thing wouldn't we? So you know that was all another part of it.

So he gave the order and your corporal..

Yeah Corporal Porter he

23:00 looked around and we were just his section and he said, "I tell you what, we're not gonna be in this, we're not gonna be in this." he said. And we said, "Well he's a Lieutenant..." and I used to say to him afterwards, "How you weren't charged Tom. You countermanded an order." And he did really, but it spread too and I don't know whether he talked to another section leader or not and anyway, I think what happened was his sense prevailed.

23:30 This Lieutenant hadn't seen the action that Tom and Slogger had seen for instance, and I think that the sense that Tom said to him, "You'll get us all killed." (or something like that), "If you do that." and I think that sense prevailed and he didn't say another word about that, about fixing bayonets and charging. But I mean you know, I said to Tom once, "You probably saved our blooming lives." and I think he did. And

24:00 another occasion too I remember saying to him about something else but just can't bring it to mind. But anyway he was just very trained and sensible, I don't know. He had senses, Tom, about action, what would happen and how to go about it.

Sounds like he was someone you could really respect?

Yeah someone you could really respect,

24:30 that's right. Well you had so many of them as I just explained, I mean, what they'd been through a lot of them and there they were, still going. I don't know about Tom seeing about action, I think he might have been a reinforcement in the Middle East but I mean, he'd seen a lot of action, he'd been right through to New Guinea and Slogger Collins, my friend had been right through Tobruk and Alamein and Tel-El Eisa and shall we keep going. And came back and went right through the New Guinea campaign. The 9th Division saw more action than any other division.

25:00 So that, sense of history and the sense of mateship and trust you had in your comrades that obviously sustained you a lot?

Yes, no doubt about it and the thing is too you know, Tom was quite a bit older than many, as many of those original fellows were... Slogger wasn't much older than me because he went to the Middle East when he was 16, but they were older men too you see. And well I don't know, I think Tom and I got on so well

25:30 because there was a bit of the fatherly aspect I suppose, "Stay there." He'd say to me, and this sort of thing and out on patrols with him and so on. Being older, I suppose, I was 20 and I don't know, Tom must have been 8 years older, Tom might have been 30 I think. And you know in those days, 20 to someone being 28 or

26:00 30 was quite a big difference. I mean he was sort of a bit of the father figure I suppose you would say. He couldn't have with the age of 10 years difference but you see what I mean.

Sounds like you felt he would look after you, look out for you?

Well I did, yeah yeah. Well I thought Tom was a fella to be trusted. And another day I told you Ernie Carter and I, and I remember I think it was the feature Essex, and we went up through the jungle and

26:30 down below there was a road going back and I remember this Lieutenant Les Shaw, who was another one because our original Lieutenant... and see this is other thing that happened to A Company, we lost our Platoon Commander, he was hit through the ear, and had to go out.

27:00 I don't know whether I should give that story or not. We had a great big stretcher bearer named Stag, Stag Trevorrow, great big fellow and in the band he was our bass drummer. And he used to have a leopard skin over the front and play the bass drum and most of the band, when it came to action, they were stretcher bearers. And so Stag as I say, he was a bandsman

27:30 and when we went into action Stag was a stretcher bearer and a very good one to have too, because he was a big, strong fella. And I remembered this day, I won't mention this lieutenant's name and anyway, our lieutenant was wounded. Now I think I can't quite remember now if that was the day that we lost our two sections leaders, Rice and Fisher. I'm not sure if it was that day or not, but someone else was in a very bad way, 'cause they were very bad, you can imagine, through the heart

28:00 and through the face. And when this lieutenant was hit through the ear well of course he was screaming over the field phone at the time to our officer in command, the OC of A company. Walkie talkies, walkie talkies I think they called them, I think they were about this big in those days, and they were talking

28:30 so loudly the Nip got a bead on him and luckily it missed the middle of the face but went right through his ear. And he sat down on the path and of course he was going on like this. 'Cause the other people

were very badly hurt, came Stag with other stretcher bearers and this lieutenant said, "Who's gonna carry me out, who's going to carry me out." And Stag... I can't use the language...

You can.

If you don't f***n walk,

29:00 you'll stay right where you are mate." So that Lieutenant thought, well I better follow him and Stag picked up the bloke who was badly wounded, put him on the stretcher and of course the Lieutenant did walk out. But anyway he went out then. And then on the other end of this walkie talkie was our captain anyway. At that time he was commanding the company

29:30 and I think they got a bead as well. It was just ridiculous the noise that they were making over these walkie talkies to each other. I'm sure they could've heard each other if they took the thing down, they were talking so loudly and they shot him, the captain, through the leg. So off he went. And then new chaps came to take over and that's right-

30:00 Captain Matthews came then and took over there and stayed to the end but there were replacements like that all the time but you have to expect that in the infantry. But the first day they started off in the Middle East, after the first day they were in action, there were reinforcements that day and so it went on. I think I said to you before, our battalion was 800 but 3,000 went through it because of all things.

30:30 **And Don you mentioned what you thought kept you going, were there men who couldn't keep going? Did you ever see people just break down under that pressure?**

Yes well only one really and he'd been a bit of a strange fellow even beforehand. Well beforehand he was a big noter, he used to go down to

31:00 local dances when we were on the Tablelands, I don't know where he got them but he had medals on, and he hadn't been anywhere at this stage. And he'd go down there with the girls and where he'd been and all this sort of business. No I won't name him, I could but I won't. Anyway you know when we got there that was it; he all of a sudden screamed and stamped his feet

31:30 and jumped out and ran the other way. And the lieutenant was entitled really to shoot him of course, but anyway he didn't. And then he.... I don't know what happened to him, he went back and lived to I don't know. Surely that would knock the pretentious bit out of him, saying he'd done that and done this, but I don't know what happened to him. He was a Western Australian, whether he went back there or not I don't know. That was it

32:00 and there were other cases of course, you know when you come face-to-face with the enemy it's... it's a bit devastating you know, They were... of course with Australians no doubt... well of course it was kill or be killed that's one thing. And the other thing, being Japanese in those days,

32:30 the hate was so great for us because we heard all the atrocities, you know we knew all about the atrocities. I mean while we were there we didn't know this but of course once we landed at Tarakan and the death camp or the big camp at Sandakan and they heard we landed they thought, "Well here they are." and they don't want us to see that camp, so that's when they put on that march which I think was from Sandakan to Ranau, which I mentioned, 260kms.

33:00 Well of course the condition those men were in, they couldn't have walked any distance and if they fell out on the two marches, they were shot. And so with all that in your mind, not about being shot on that march, but we knew about all the other atrocities. We learnt that of course as we went on in Tarakan. Those sort of things I mean,

33:30 bringing hate into your mind, it made it that way we didn't mind shooting them. It seems terrible doesn't it? And you know I think we have to remember today that the Tojo military regime that was in control in Japan in those days, was just so different than the country the Japanese now live in. So that was all of that business that kept you going, I 'spose.

Did you ever see a Japanese person

34:00 **face-to-face?**

Yes I saw them face-to-face. And I was very fortunate that... that a couple of times, they nicked off which pleased me greatly, because you know I mean, it's difficult shooting somebody and on other

34:30 occasions well you know, if they're behind in jungle and bushes and you're all firing, see what I mean, you're all firing at them, it's better than if you got one in front of you. And of course there were some blokes who got into the situation where they bayoneted them. But they would think that it was only right

35:00 when you heard the Japanese tied, they tied some of our fellows up and then bayoneted them.

Did you see evidence of that?

No I didn't see any of that, but I mean that had gone on. That had gone on when they cleared Japanese out of some places where they held prisoners and that sort of thing. Not only had they done it to their

own soldiers but they had done it in some of these camps

35:30 during the war where they caught civilians.

So Don I'm intrigued that you're talking about two different types of encounters with the enemy. There's the one where there is your group against their group and you're firing at each other. But then there's the one where you're face-to face with an individual. And you're saying that in that situation, even with all the fear and the terror and the hatred that you felt, you still had qualms about killing a man?

Yes but you did.

36:00 Well you did because self preservation came into it you know, you got to be first didn't you, so you would shoot somebody right in front of you. And that's what came into your mind, self preservation. And if you don't shoot him, he'll shoot you. And I suppose every blooming war is an awful business.

'Cause there was no taking any prisoners

36:30 **in those days was there?**

No, well orders came through that you were to try to. So there were a couple instances that we took some prisoners. But it was difficult with these big marine fellas, and they weren't small these Japanese. They were, you know, they were from a certain, most of these marine fellas were from a certain part of Japan, I've forgotten now. Was it Formosa?

37:00 Anyway they were marines you know and they had the cap with the anchor on it. I don't know whether you noticed Japanese boots, army boots, they were peculiar. They were canvas and they were split, the big toe stuck out by itself. And all the other toes were together. Funny things to put on, like gloves with just two compartments, one for the big toe and one for the rest. But another thing when I mentioned Les Shaw

37:30 and there was Tommy Porter, and I think we were up on Essex and I was saying to you there was a road going back towards some of our other fellows; anyway Shaw said somebody has got to go down that road and make contact with, I've forgotten what company it was, whether it was B Company or whoever was on the other side of us. But the thing was that the road had never been... the engineers had never been along. Now one of the big things

38:00 on Tarakan and one of the terrible things about it was when they thought an invasion was imminent the Japanese buried everything and made them into mines, even sea mines were buried. You know how small sea mines were with just a little bit sticking up to trip over. Mines were everywhere, hence there were 669 wounded on Tarakan. Now it was a three month campaign or not quite, 669 wounded was a tremendous

38:30 amount. And that's what a lot of it was, mines. And they were frightening to a degree. Like in an opening one day, Joe Lantere, just thinking about how far going back, I was back there, and Joe was over there and he trod on a mine. Now there was nothing, well all there was... I remember there was some sort of telegraph wire going on and a bit of a shirt, his shirt was hanging

39:00 off it. That's all. Now those sort of things were, mines were very scary when you moved into an open area. And gosh, I know, he chipped me about water on the LCT about using some water or something, Lieutenant Trickett. Well this day, it wasn't to do with our platoon, I don't know how we came across Lieutenant Trickett and he said

39:30 "We'll be okay just to take a short..." now it was a piece, an area just jutting out area. As I see it now there was just a tree on that, not much growth, and you could cut across it to get to another road. So he said, "Oh we'll be okay, I'll cut across there." Well he cut across there and got halfway across I think and he was just blown away.

40:00 And a funny thing looking back on it, and I can't understand how this would happen, it didn't happen with Joe Lantere, I can't understand how the word help came out of that area, help.. Now whether he just saw it as he went to put his foot down and it was too late or whether

40:30 it was attached to.... there was only one tree as I remember, attached to something I don't know. But anyway mines were everywhere and quite frightening. Only just after the landing some of those Americans got carried away, as I say they were souvenir mad, and they rushed up Anzac Highway it was called going into Tarakan and they rushed into some huts there you know and they touched something, well you know the Nips had

41:00 mined the huts. I don't know how many sailors were in there, about three American fellas, grabbed something and they were killed just like that.

- 00:32 Right I was saying earlier to Rosemary about the little cemetery by the cross-roads that after they had been brought down from their emergency graves in the jungle they were brought down to this little cemetery and Flying Officer Latham was walking around
- 01:00 there one day and he saw this little cemetery. So the air force were on Tarakan too and he saw this little cemetery and he was so taken with it he wrote this little poem. May I read some of it to you, or all of it or whatever?
- Please do.**
- He titled it, War Graves: Tarakan... This poem refers to the temporary cemetery formed at two crossroads during action on Tarakan and prior to the formation and dedication of the Tarakan war Cemetery:-
- 01:30 \n[Verse follows]\nWill you walk with me in the heat of day\n
- Til we come to the crossroads on the way\n On a dusty road on Tarakan\n To a scene in the scheme of the war's mad plan.\n There are soldiers there in a little square\n Who will breathe no more of the dust filled air.\n On the trails they died, by the road they rest\n With the foreign soil on each manly chest\n On the crosses which mark the arid mounds,\n
- 02:00 Are the tales of courage which knew no bounds.\n
- Killed in action, died of wounds\n But the wasted lives are the war's worst ruins.\n You'll see their mates at the grave sites stand\n Quietly slouch hat held in hand.\n And you may grieve as they will too\n For the hopes and dreams not come true.\n In death these men have but simple needs\n No separate tracks for different creeds.\n
- 02:30 For the soldiers which are never cold in life\n
- Are together in death as they were in strife.\n You may gaze at the flag which hangs from the mast\n To honour the men who are staunch to the last\n And fancy you hear a quiet voice say\n "Australia my country, will you repay?\n Will you warm my heart, give daily bread\n
- 03:00 To the hungry mouth which once were fed\n
- \n[Verse follows]\nThrough the sweat and toil of a fallen man\n Who sleeps by the road on Tarakan?"\n
- So when you return by the dusty road\n You may bear your share of a sacred load\n With the pride whose flame ignited then\n Will burn for sound of the last Amen\n
- Flying officer R. T. Latham RAAF
- 03:30 So as he explained there it was also temporary. Not long after that, soon as the war was ended, the Tarakan War Cemetery was built. To which I and many others went down to the opening ceremony. A lot had gone home by then, the five-year plan had come in. Now my dear friends like Tommy Porter and Slogger Collins,
- 04:00 as I said had been in the battalion, since its formation in Albury in August 1940. They got out on the five-year plan, so some of them even at that stage just as the Tarakan campaign was drawing to an end, they were taken out and sent home and deservedly so. And so not everyone was there at the opening of it, but all those that were there and that still was a lot of us, went to the opening of that. Now just while on that,
- 04:30 I mean if anyone thinks that they can go there today and it was a very nicely, well-formed cemetery, and with a lovely entrance to War Cemetery written on the top and designed and done by War Graves Australia, who are just marvellous, but everybody killed on Tarakan, well not only Tarakan but the whole of Borneo, now that's taking in some 2000 people altogether because you've got to remember those who died as prisoners of war and the Sandakan death march, anyone
- 05:00 who was killed, Balikpapan, Labuan campaigns, these are the other campaigns that took place in Borneo as well as Tarakan. They were all moved after the war and a big cemetery was made at Labuan Island. Now when I was lucky enough to be selected to go back in 1995, being 50 years after the war, of course one of the things was, we visited all these different cemeteries. Like we went to Changi
- 05:30 in Singapore and I could read out the rest, I've got books there of everywhere where we stopped. They wrote a service, a story about that particular place while we were there. Like for instance at Changi in Singapore, I was very interested to see the graves of the sisters that were killed. You remember with Sister Bullwinkle on Bangka Island where they were all herded into the sea and machine gunned down by the Japanese. And of course Sister Bullwinkle was the only one to survive that.
- 06:00 She only just died 18 months ago. But you know, that was a sad piece of the Singapore cemetery but then of course there was so many more. I mean all those that died in Changi and all those other campaigns. We only went away for six days and they were very emotional and I must admit I came home a bit worn out. But it was marvellous because we went to Tarakan and we were at the landing beaches again. And we went up to Margy

- 06:30 which took so much. I don't think we really covered.... Margy as I say was the hardest feature to take. And well there is a road going up to Margy, which was quite a shock. We saw you know, when we landed at the airport, there was the feature Rippon at the edge of the airport and I remember Rippon took so much taking, not to mention the airport itself at Tarakan which was taken by the 2/24th
- 07:00 battalion but they got into trouble. And I remember we were sent all of a sudden and other troops to go down and reinforce them because somehow some of them were caught in the middle of this airstrip. The 2/24th once again they had some big casualties at the airport at Tarakan. But anyway as I say anyone who was killed on Tarakan or over at Labuan, all the beautiful cemeteries
- 07:30 and Labuan island itself was very modern and very up with it. It's like a small Singapore really, very nice. And I must say that when you think of going back to Borneo and it used to be all rough but you go to Balikpapan and the hotel we stayed at there, you would not believe the hotels and the price of them but of course thank heavens it was all on the government. You had to twin share and I had to twin share with a fellow
- 08:00 called Max Parsons who was an original of the 2/12th artillery regiment. Max and I we got on just so well. I had known him before through our Associations but never to sleep with him so to speak and we shared these rooms and when I say rooms, my God, they were just tremendous. I said to Max, "What about that bathroom it's as big as my whole flat!"
- 08:30 But you know people think of Borneo but by jove, that was a beautiful place.

It sounds like going back was a real highlight for you.

It was just marvellous, just marvellous. And to be selected and because my association was good enough to put my name into the ring, and about 30 people were selected, so it was marvellous. We were treated royally we went from here to Sydney and at Sydney we took a trip down the harbour...

How did you feel stepping foot on the landing beaches at Tarakan again? Did it take you back?

- 09:00 Yeah it did, yeah. It was just an amazing feeling really and the other feelings were really, when you got on to the soil at Tarakan and well of course it got very emotional because you could see people that were killed there and all that sort of thing. But I was so struck with Tarakan that it hadn't changed much.
- 09:30 When we went to Balikpapan and so on, they were quite modern and with it. That was the 7th Division that landed at Balikpapan. We went there for their services, the 7th division lost so many fellas over there and then the 9th division again did another landing with one of their other brigades at Labuan.
- 10:00 But anyway on that, I've forgotten where I was now, that cemetery on Labuan and the trip and the landing on the beach, yeah it was... it was a marvellous ordeal really and we were given lunch there at the Plaza Hotel Tarakan. Boy-o-boy. Now I would recommend staying there.

Did you walk out to the jungle?

No, worse luck.

- 10:30 I would have liked to have gone up some of the tracks, especially Snags Track which we could view because it led to Margie. A lot of men were lost taking Margie, and one of my dear friends who has been crippled for the rest of his life, because... Teddy Wood was forward scout at the time and going up Margie, they opened fire and they caught him right across the back.
- 11:00 And at the time he was taken out, they wanted to take Ted's leg off, which today's the size of that but he's still got it, he kept it. But carrying you know, such bad wounds through the war, it just dragged him down; anyway Ted is still going. He's at a nursing home at Rosebud. And we were always great friends ever since the war

Sure.

Just after the war

- 11:30 when Valda and I got married in 1952... and we eventually built a house in East Brighton and one night there was a knock at the door and, Valda opened the door and there was a fella standing there with six bottles of beer under his arm, and he said, "Does Bluey Tibbits live here?"
- 12:00 And she said yes. "Well you tell him that Ted Wood is here." Well of course you know, she came back and said, "Ted Wood is at the door, who's Ted Wood?" I said, "Who's Ted Wood? Bring him in immediately!" So the funny thing was then Ted just built in the next block because it was just a new area then, there were very few houses there and a dirt road and all that sort of thing. And so that rekindled our friendship then since the army see. I wasn't far from him; I can see him going out now,
- 12:30 he was just lying on his back and going out on the stretcher. And I said, "Good luck to you Ted." and I don't know whether Stag Trevorrow took him out, put a smoke in his mouth and having a smoke. And his lieutenant had given him morphine immediately, which they did if they possibly could for a bad wound. And off he went. And there are some interesting stories there and that was one. So he found me and then we bought a motor mower and we shared it and every second Sunday I go and collect it

13:00 from him and so he'd say, "You better have a beer." And the next week he'd come over to me and say, "I've come for the mower." and I said, "Oh good Ted, you better come in and have a beer." So this sharing the mower was the greatest thing we ever did. Anyway with Ted when he came home just to tell a story about him, I don't think he, I don't think he'd mind me saying this, but to do this what we are doing now, this interview like this, I don't think he could do it now, I don't think he would want to actually. Anyway as I say he was so

13:30 badly wounded. When he came home he'd been in Heidelberg hospital after multiple operations and he was sent out to Glenferrie Road, to a big repatriation home ... Stoneleigh... Stonnington, Stonnington see, and Stonnington is still there. So anyway I think Ted had been there for two years, you see and all of a sudden the Matron called

14:00 him in one day and Ted went down you see. As I said he limped very badly the rest of his life and suffered pain all his life, anyway he went into there she said, "Well Ted, I've got some great news for you." And Ted said "What's that Matron?" She said, "Ted, you can go home." And he said, "Well my face just fell and I stared at her and I said, 'But Matron, I am home.'" "Oh." she said.

14:30 "Oh no Ted, I mean you can go home to your family." and he said, "Well to me I was just shocked, my God where was I going?" So anyway, of course, he left there but after being there for two years and he was with other fellows who were in the same condition more or less as he was you see and he was just stunned when he was able to go home. He felt as if he was leaving home, anyway he went on, got on with life and he married the nurse that looked after him.

15:00 **Oh really?**

Yeah and we've been friends ever since and of course, still are. So that was just a bit of a sideline to one of my friends who was wounded and how we met afterwards and so on.

Don was he the one who fell down, who wasn't found for a few days or was that a different Ted?

No that was a fella called Snowy Wilson. Do you know about that?

Yes I think you referred to it earlier.

Oh did I? Well yes he was

15:30 quite badly wounded and in action anyway we just had to pull back and worse luck we left him, we had to leave him and I don't know, I think it might have been three days later when we were able to push the Nips back and come to the area where Snow had been wounded. And the thing was he had crawled

16:00 under a log and they hadn't found him and what had saved him were flies you know, the blow flies.

How was that? How could the flies have saved him?

Oh I hate to say it really, well his wound was blown and they would take all the poison out of it, what flies do to things like that, the blow flies got to it and the leg

16:30 had been poisoned and had been kept reasonably clean.

So the flies kept the wound clean?

Yes, yes what they laid kept it clean. I can't say the word I'm afraid. Because there are other instances of that. Anyway so that's what they did to it. So he lived. Now while we're talking about him, he was really lucky. I mean there was a tremendous amount of luck in war as you can imagine.

17:00 Well as I told you about Trickett and Joe Lantere, they walked through there, I could have easily but they did, you see. There is so much luck in war. You were standing here and the bloke over here got shot or whatever. So there's luck in war. Now in the luck I was going to speak of now...

So this bloke was hit in the leg?

Yes about Snowy, so he was hit then he was saved

17:30 and he was sent back to a hospital back at Morotai. That was where the big hospital was, at Morotai. Now my very good friend Johnny McAlorum who I've mentioned, John McAlorum was hit through the ankle and I remember saying to him just after that, "Oh John you've got a 'homer'." and he said, "Never mind about a bloody 'homer', its hurting like buggery, I'll tell you that."

18:00 I said, "Yeah, John don't think I am not sorry for you, I am." And we got a medic tending to him and then of course he was taken out. And I said, "I'll see you back home." Of course that didn't come to pass because strange things happen. John of course was taken back to Morotai and as I said so was Snowy Wilson and when the day came

18:30 for taking them back to Australia and they were flown back on the old Gooney Birds, you know the old DC3s. They took about six and they were just the beds like stretchers and there were about six of those in each side and then there was the sister on board and of course two pilots or a pilot and navigator.

And the day that

19:00 the doctor said that Wilson could go back to Australia he decided he wasn't well enough to go and so he said, "Oh well, you're next McAlorum, you can go." So Johnny was I imagine, pleased, so John was loaded onto the DC3 and took off at Morotai and I was going to say was never heard of since. 25 years later, so you see Wilson missed it

19:30 and the plane took off and that was the second time with Wilson. He missed it and 25 years later I think it was December the 11th, I kept the paper for years and years until I gave it to the Albury Museum, on December the 11th 1970, some mountain climbers were climbing in New Guinea. Now the plane left from Morotai but on its way back to Australia, it used to take a course straight over the top of New Guinea.

20:00 And these mountain climbers found the wreck of a plane and that was that plane. And all of them of course had been killed on impact. Anyway after that they took photographs of the wreck and it was all the front of the Herald, December the 11th or 12th and all the names. And there of course was Johnny McAlorum's name on it and of course I was well back in Australia by that time. It was terrible. I just got such remorse.

20:30 I never went to see his mother and of course you know they were from Brisbane and just after the war.. I suppose you...don't know... I was getting a job and getting settled down again and eventually I got in touch with Mrs. McGill who was John's sister and I said to her, "Look, I'll never forgive myself." And she told me and she said, "My mother

21:00 always said we'll find out what happened to John, we'll find out one day." Well she died a month before they found the plane and of course never having been to see her, I'll never get over having not seen her, 'cause I'm sure he would have seen mine. So anyway as I was saying earlier about John, you know all he lived for, he was a cattle drover and all he could live for was to get back to this cattle droving and spend the nights under the stars. 'Cause in those days they had big drives. They have just re-enacted one I think

21:30 this year in fact, where they used to take them right down from the Northern Territory and drive them down to Adelaide for sale in those days but those big drives I think, they've gone now, they herd them to the ports now and put them in ships and send them overseas I think. Anyway...

So he was a good mate?

John was a marvellous friend, yeah. He was the great army mate. And so there you are, that's just to do with luck see.

22:00 And Wilson, well I mean you know, so he lived on to come to reunions. I am sure he is deceased now I haven't seen him in years, but that was a situation yeah.

But that was incredible isn't it, you'd think having a bad leg wound and lying in a ditch for three days, you'd think you'd have no hope, wouldn't you?

Yeah wouldn't you, that's right. Yeah well we found him again and there he was and then just not being well enough the day that plane left, was just amazing. And it's bad luck for John you know.

22:30 Well like most of us you know who reinforced the battalion, John was only 20 but there were so many killed there on Tarakan. And when I went to Labuan Island, I took photographs of all the most emotional things I did really, Labuan Cemetery when I went back after 50 years, was the most emotional for me because that's where all our fellas were buried. And I tried to take as many photographs, and I did take a photograph of every grave and then I put the names in

23:00 Mud and Blood, our quarterly paper, which you've seen out there that Valda and I produced, all the battalions say "Oh yes isn't it marvellous that he's got Valda to help him." I think its reverse actually, I help Valda. Anyway you see what they are like that one out there.

So in Labuan you were photographing all the graves...

Yes, yes I took photographs. And I put them in our magazine, saying anyone, any family and you see, I got quite a few requests; you have to remember many families had never seen the graves. So that was a great thing to do and it is just amazing, there is a lot of interest now from grandchildren and sometimes from children, I said children.... in their 50's and grandchildren. Now just about a fortnight ago I sent photographs off to Mrs....oh can't think of her name, lives in Nowra anyway... Mrs. Tout,

24:00 as I always thing of trout without the 'r', Mrs. Tout and her brother who was Corporal Chicken...Ray...

Corporal Chicken Trout?

Well her maiden name you see was Chicken yeah. Oh well they were very famous military family. She sent me a whole history of their family. Anyway Ray, he was killed

24:30 on Tarakan, a lovely fellow. And anyway, she just found out lately, when I say lately only a few months ago and I have a very long letter from her requesting...anyway well, we gave her a history. I don't know

if you've seen our history, our book, we just reprinted our history. And one of our members who first contacted her said, "I sent the money down and I wish to give her a history." So then we sent her

25:00 what we call a roll call and a lapel badge, which we have, lapel badges with our T colour patch on it and also I sent her a photograph of this grave. So after all this time the photographs are still being recorded. I was so pleased because I did get our bus leader, rather excited, she kept coming and saying, "Look, the buses are waiting." I said, "Look I've only got two graves to go."

25:30 or something and I think I was crying, oh God. So anyway that was taking photographs of graves at Labuan and I'm so glad I did, I've still got the negatives in case anybody wants one, you know if any one of our people wants one.

Sounds worthwhile Don.

Yeah it was really worthwhile, yeah. So anyway..

Don, I'm still wondering when your friend Johnny went missing when did you hear about that, you might not have heard about that for quite awhile afterwards?

Oh not for years, no one knew.

No, when did you find out that his plane had gone missing?

26:00 Well I just can't quite remember, not long after the war because I started making inquiries about him and wanted to go and see him and then I don't know, somebody told me that John didn't get home, the whole plane load, the plane crashed and they imagined, they always just imagined it went into the sea you know. Well that'll just be the end of it; it'll probably never be found and probably went into the Pacific somewhere. So no one expected to ever know the story.

26:30 **You talked a little bit about the jungle burials, but at least with the burial there is that kind of giving the respect to the dead, there is some kind of a mourning process.**

My word, yes there is, yes.

But then the people that you're unable to bury its...

Sad.

It's a different thing again isn't it?

Yes well, that's the terrible thing for his mother you see, and well of course family always

27:00 wants to know. And you still see it today don't you, we want to know where our child is buried, or father or whatever relation it is as a rule. Well this is why Mrs. McAlorum of course was always hoping that they would know and hoping.. well we'll hear one day what happened to John. Was most unfortunate. I got such a shock when... I think it's

27:30 Margaret was his sister's name, it is a long while since I've spoken to her, anyway when she told me the story about her mother, dying just before they found the plane and specially it was that long, just 25 years after the war. So that write up anyway in the front page of the Herald is at our section of the Bandiana Army Museum where the 2/23rd's got it's own area up there, that paper's on display with the story of John on it,

28:00 with many other stories of the exploits of the 2/23rd

So do you think there was anything that kept you lucky?

Tommy Porter.

That was skill wasn't it?

Yeah. I think it was a whole lot of luck to it too. I was going to say earlier we were up on this feature Essex and as I told you our lieutenant had been wounded and gone out, we got a Lieutenant Shaw, Les Shaw,

28:30 ex- 6th Division fellow, very nice chap, seen a lot of action. Very nice chap and then I remember that they said somebody's got to go down this road and make contact with our forces further down the road or B Company whoever it was, make contact with them, and he said, "Worse luck, the engineers have never been over it with their mine sweepers." You see they used to go over the road and find the mine and you see you always try and let them go first. And he said, "I'm sorry they haven't been down here, I'm sorry but we have to make contact

29:00 and I want three volunteers." And he said, "Porter, it'll be you." and then he pointed, "You, you and you." That was me and my friend that I shared a lot of it with, Ernie Carter and Tommy Porter. So Tommy Porter was to lead being the corporal, and Ernie and I were to follow him. And I tell you what; Porter was trying to do little light steps all the time down the road,

29:30 being very careful and I thought well I'll try and put my feet where his feet have been in case of mines there, but just as luck would have it, it was an area that they hadn't mined so heavily and we got down

and made contact with whoever it was, I've forgotten now. And so you know a bit of luck there, a bit of luck there.

What about your watch?

Yeah well this watch as I think I told you earlier, was given to me by a friend and I wore it through

30:00 the Tarakan campaign. I don't know whether you can see it with the camera but during the campaign you see, when all the dampness, with all perspiration and rain, the poor old thing went green. But you can wind it up now and away it goes. So it's just amazing and it's got my dear friend K. W. Evans on the back of it who was killed in bomber command when he went anyway. So I just could never

30:30 get over it. I was going to ask the museum I don't know if they would want it or not, but I thought I'd put it up with the story about how it survived living in the jungle, you know. So it's just another...

And still works...

And still works, yes, you wind it up and it still works, I'm amazed. Even the centre, the big hand seems to have lost its centre but yeah it still goes.

I'm wondering if your weapons still worked in all that damp and mud and so on?

Yeah we always had

31:00 our little oil bottle with us. When you got a .303 rifle there is a little trapdoor in the back of the butt. And up there you have a pull-through, what they called a pull-through. Its a long piece of rope with the weight on the end and you thread a bit of two by two as they called it, which is little bit of cotton cloth through a loop at one end and then just drop the weight down and just pull it through. That's the pull-through. They used to call some fellas pull-through who were very thin. And so

31:30 you pulled that and that cleaned out the thing. And also in there was a little brass oil bottle about that big so you were expected to keep your rifle clean, you'd be stupid if you didn't. And so I think I explained earlier when it came to automatic weapons of course the Bren gunners just had to keep... make sure they kept their Bren guns going well, which could stand a fair amount. I mean when you think the dust of the desert and the jungle too, but,

32:00 the winner of the whole lot of course was the Owen gun, which was designed in Australia you know invented by Owen, can't think of his first name and well-designed and they were just marvellous. I mean you could just drop them down in the mud and pick them up and they would fire. Now the American Tommy gun, fired a 45, which was a big bullet like that and they used to, when in training, they told you that the Tommy gun had great stopping power.

32:30 Well what they meant by that was if the enemy was coming towards you if you hit him, you'd certainly kill him, blew a big hole in him, but if you hit a tree beside him, or anything else, it would just shatter it. And so that's where they had great stopping power I mean you know, a Tommy gun bullet. But the only problem with the Tommy gun was if you dropped it or it got dirty, you didn't have to have much, it would jam and wouldn't go. Now the Australian Owen gun which was such a simple looking thing too, it was just marvellous

33:00 but it wasn't as shattering as a Tommy gun, but of course it killed you. Five bullets.

Now Don I can imagine that while you were training and taught to fire these weapons and so on, you would have been thinking about, gee what is this gonna be like, will I be able to do this ...

Yes I agree.

33:30 **And so on, now when it came down to it and you found yourself actually firing at other human beings, did you still have those hesitations?**

No, no.

How did you feel afterwards? Did you ever see an enemy you know fall in front of you?

Yeah, oh yeah, we'd see them fall in the jungle and mostly they were left to lie there too. Not ours, not ours

34:00 of course but the Japanese. It was probably because they didn't get much of an opportunity to come out and bury theirs or take them back if they want to.

So would you come across the bodies of...?

Oh all the time yeah. Well we had one fellow...oh...God I'm trying to think of his name... anyway he was a happy-go-lucky, very nice fellow. I'll just say Roy,

34:30 I won't say his surname and he said to me one day, "Look at this collection I've got." I said, "What of Roy?" I looked in his hand, it was gold teeth. Yeah Roy went out...I am sure this is well known anyway, we all carried little spades on our backs you know, so you could dig trenches every night and they were at the back of the pack and Roy would either use the spade or some other, perhaps his bayonet to knock

them out

35:00 nicely. See because they had tons of gold teeth, all gold in their teeth. Roy was having a lovely time. I don't know when he came back how he cashed it in or all what he did I'm not sure. But anyway that was one of his things. So yes we saw a lot we'd been in all sorts of visions which... I really can't say about that....

It was pretty horrifying?

35:30 Yeah. It was... well just one particular instance where bodies, well I'll just say with bodies and... flies... and blow flies. I really can't...don't want to dwell on that. Anyway, saved Wilson didn't it? So those were yes, there were a lot of dead bodies about all the time,

36:00 on the tracks and so on.

Made you feel pretty sick?

Yeah they did and it was very upsetting, the conditions... terrible...

And did you ever get used to that or was it just as shocking every time?

I never got used to that, I never got used to that no, I never got used to that. And well you'd go; you know, go past and look away, something like that.

36:30 I was never one for going through pockets but some did and I know my great friend Teddy Woods who is still alive today. Ted one day showed me a lot of photographs, "Look all these photographs I got from..." "Oh Ted you should be ashamed of yourself." But there will be something about it one day, there are families in Japan. Oh Yeah.

37:00 Well now my friend Ted was a Weary Dunlop. Now I told you how badly wounded he was, talk about Weary Dunlop or even Jesus Christ, Ted turned the other cheek. He was amazing. He was so badly wounded. That some years after the war he did send those photographs back and he did send them back to a league in Japan something like our RSL [Returned and Services League]. And they did find the family of the dead

37:30 Japanese he'd taken it from. And corresponded very much with him. As a matter of fact, I think the Ambassador out here even got in touch with Ted. Now out of that Ted heard, at his home at Rosebud, that so-and-so was coming down here for business from Japan and I don't know if he was a member of the family that Ted had sent photographs to or from their league.

38:00 I'm thinking he was from their league. And he wished while in Australia to meet Ted Woods and thank him very much for the personal things he sent back, I think there were a couple of other things as well as the photographs. So Ted was very taken with that and he said, "Yes by all means, as a matter of fact you can come and stay with us." Well I will never get over it. I thought perhaps he's having them down there so he can clobber them but anyway not the case. Ted had him down there to stay

38:30 and gave him a marvellous time. And I thought to myself after what they did to you, if that isn't turning the other cheek. And anyway then after that, not long after that, Ted went to Japan and so did his daughter and his daughter stayed and learnt to speak Japanese quite fluently and while Ted was over there, she knew a family and Ted stayed with the Japanese family over there. And they were marvellous to him

39:00 and so they should have been in my opinion. But anyway you know it's an amazing thing what comes out of war, isn't it? You know I mean well you go back to the First World War and ourselves and the Turks now, I mean, and the way at Christmas time they called it off. And even with the Germans and so on and after the war, what the Japs did to Ted, he just forgave and sent back the things, had them stay at his house

39:30 and so on. And I said to him one day, "There is no doubt that you're a Christian alright." It was really a great thing to do after what they did to him, and well Ted looked and he said, "The thing was," he said to me, "I was doing my job and the fellow that shot me was doing his job." And I said, "Ted I suppose that's one way of looking at it and I suppose come to think of it," he

40:00 said, "If I don't shoot that Australian he'll shoot me." So that's how it went and anyway as I said, Ted's still going today, in the nursing home.

Tape 7

00:35 **From what you said the war on Tarakan was a constant affair?**

Yes that's right, a personal war they called it. I mean really, well I said to you before we had two days off in all that time, and I said before the enemy were always...no I corrected myself about saying in sight before but they were always nearby

- 01:00 I mean they couldn't be in sight when you're in the jungle because in some areas you know, it was just so thick. And mostly they were nearby; I don't mean all the time at your elbow but not far away all the time. And as I said to you, one of the older blokes who had been in the campaign said, "That's the trouble with this place." he said, "It's worse than New Guinea here." he said, "Because you never get away from them here." he said, "Too personal."
- 01:30 Bert Lucas said to me, "That's the trouble, they're always here." And I'm repeating myself I'm sure that's one of the things that made it rather nerve racking all the time. It was really one of the longest times that troops were let's say, within action more or less with the enemy you know, for all that time
- 02:00 **So you were on alert?**
- For three months, the whole time, that's right. I remember they took us back for two days once. Now one time towards the end, I was rather fortunate because I think I went out, it might have been a week before they went out. I hadn't had, a lot of us hadn't, but this is what happened to me. I hadn't had my shoes and socks off
- 02:30 for days. It might have been going towards a week. Anyway we got an opportunity to do this and the skin of the instep of my feet came off in my sock. So good old stretcher bearer who you know, would attend to anything at the time when you're at the front, and good old... if I can only remember his name, he came from Warrnambool, he died just a while ago at the age of 80, marvellous feller... anyway marvellous stretcher bearer, marvellous chap, in the battalion right from the start
- 03:00 and why I can't think of his name because I used to speak to him at reunions and we used to have the talk so often as I say, "Thank you so much for sending me out... there is no doubt about you." I used to say to him. So he said, "Well you can't get boots back on with that, I'll wind some stuff around them and we'll just see if we can get your boots on anyway and you'll have to go down to casualty clearing." So anyway I got down to there, and I remember now it was just a tent
- 03:30 and there were three of us in it and I think it was evening anyway and we were lying back on these stretchers, we were going to be moved down further to.. I don't think I'd seen Doc Minnis at this time. You always had a doctor, you know, the battalion had a doctor and it was Doc Minnis in this case, oh wild man, anyway.
- 04:00 So I think there were three of us, the other two I don't know what happened now but anyway they were wounded, but they were in what we call the casualty clearing station's tent, and we're lying back, having a yarn and all of a sudden a bullet went straight through the roof of the tent. Well it was funny, the automatic-ness of it I couldn't get over it, we were all like we were on a spit roast. Because as soon as the bullet went through we all went... turned straight under the stretchers and lying on the ground. That was one thing about being in the army
- 04:30 of course, the poor navy or air force, nothing to dig into when you're on that sea or in an airplane there is nothing. That's one thing about the army, I used to think was terrible, but at least you had terra firma there. So we started to move on there and even started to dig I think. A funny thing, nothing happened after that. I don't know, must have been a stray Nip going past and he thought, "Oh well, I might let a shot off." see. So anyway from casualty clearing then I saw Doc Minnis and I didn't go back
- 05:00 in. So as I say, every reunion I used to thank...oh I'm so wild I can't remember his name, I can see him now and I used to thank him always so much for..."You're good, you sent me out and I got out of the front a little bit early." ...I don't know if I went to the hospital, perhaps I did. God, talk about
- 05:30 the hospital, you know, when you were going to land on Tarakan, all the days before were 'P' day. Like when you left Morotai it was, well I think it was...I've got it written in a little calendar, we left there on the 20th . We landed on the 1st so that was 10 days we were in the LCT and...what brought me up to that and going back onto that was the...
- 'P'day.**
- 06:00 Oh yes yes 'P' day, , and as you went along 'P' minus six , 'P' minus 4 then 'P' minus one and then the day we landed the boat was 'P' day. So yes 'P' day. So when you're given a briefing, you're given a briefing before you land you see. Now this is how it will all go. This is what always tickles me when you read about wars today. Like we'll walk into Iraq and we'll have it all taken in seven days. Well all those things, they always tell you those sort of things.
- 06:30 So the troops will think, don't worry, it'll be a breeze you see. So in our briefing, "'A' company, you'll be at the hospital, you will have taken all the ground in front of the hospital and you'll have taken the hospital." It was built by the Dutch originally, cause they were there you see, they were there originally, and that's who the Japs took it from. Indonesian people everywhere but of course the Dutch controlled them you know.
- 07:00 "You'll be at the hospital by two in the afternoon." Well of course another fairy tale you see. Ten days later after those people I've explained to you, were killed and wounded and so on, ten days later after fighting our way there, we got to the hospital. Now I mean these are the sorts of things that go on and that's one of the things...

So why do you think they represented it to you as if it was going to be so easy?

I'm never sure whether they mean it

07:30 or whether they don't mean it or their intelligence is not good enough to tell them the number of forces that were on Tarakan. I think that might have been the case really because I think if they realised that there were 2,000 odd Japanese there, who had been there for all that time to get dug in and everything, they would have landed more than a brigade. And I mean that was often our thought and I can even hear an American say, "We're not putting a division in here." Well I think that would have been overdoing it, but I think we could have had more.

08:00 Well I bet the 2/24th think that because as I was telling you earlier, they had a terrible time you know. They'd take a place and the Nips would circle around eventually and get back on the particular knoll, you know...

So Don all that time you're on the move, you're in the jungle, what do you eat?

Well food came up on those boong trains as I was saying and with water and we did have what they called, I can't remember what they called them....

08:30 emergency rations I think they called them, and they were in a tin and some of the things were very hard but very good, sustaining sort of thing.

Now earlier you mentioned a ration biscuit that was so hard it ricocheted off the table and killed a mate of yours, is that a true story?

No it used to be a rhyme you see. There was a rhyme, I can't remember it all now but they used to say, The bloody coffee tastes like iodine

09:00 the army biscuits, I threw one on the table,
it ricocheted and killed a mate of mine.

I can't remember the whole poem, but you can picture what the coffee was like and what army biscuits were like. And of course, it was amazing what you did with Bully Beef, when you could get it, Bully Beef was really good and Bully Beef and army biscuits, you put them in your pannikin and get a bit of water on the biscuits. Well a bit of water's right

09:30 you'd leave them there as long as you could and mix some Bully with them and heat it over, well not a fire anyway for a start. What you had was a tin of what they called canned heat, and canned heat, it was really marvellous stuff, canned heat. It was in a tin about this big and you prised the top off it and lit it and the flame came out, it was smokeless flame, you see. You couldn't light a fire naturally otherwise the enemy would get a bead on you. And it was smokeless flame

10:00 and you could heat things on that, we carried billies, each person, and naturally I mean boiling the billy as often as you possibly could, have a cup of tea. I suppose the big things really were a cup of tea and a fag, and I'm afraid they didn't say, the Sergeant Major didn't say, "No boys you mustn't smoke." because usually as soon as a fella was wounded,

10:30 the first thing you did was put a fag in his mouth you see. So things like that you know, I mean they didn't say, "Now boys you mustn't smoke because it's bad for you." I don't know if they had it linked to lung cancer then, they had got that far with that sort of thing you see. And then of course, the Sergeant Major never said, "And now boys before we go into the bull ring today you can take your shirts off if you want to." the bull-ring was a round ring which we used to train in like we'd take down machine guns

11:00 and all this sort of thing and get instruction on map reading, that would happen in the bull-ring. And he'd say, "Take your shirts off boys if you want to it's such a lovely day." but he never said, "Now don't forget to use your sun cream." So you see, no wonder after the war... I mean I've had nine dug out myself. Some fellows of course, it very badly affected them, you'll see they have their nose missing or a big lump off their cheek.

From skin cancer?

From skin cancer,

11:30 yeah. I've been lucky. I've had a big one taken out of here but Ms. McEwan who I'll name her, the specialist, and she did all mine and she was just so marvellous you wouldn't know would you? So she was so marvellous and I was lucky.

So Don you mentioned that the native people used to bring them up. So what did you think of them, it was the first time you've really seen foreigners?

Well at Tarakan there were refugees, they poured back

12:00 from the areas where we had taken over or as soon as the Japanese were so occupied with what they were doing, they came towards us, and of course we welcomed them. And they went through to other villages, other parts of Tarakan and so on because they knew the place where they were going and they all smiled and we all went on like this you know.

So they were happy to see?

Oh very happy to see us, very happy to see us.

- 12:30 Well the Japanese had made them work. Also in a lot of pill boxes were women's clothes, they made use of their women in every way. And so they were very pleased to see us and you know we were given a book on their language before we landed, you were supposed to study up a bit, which I did. Now all I can remember now is
- 13:00 'teda' was good and 'bagus' was no good so you said to something 'teda' or 'teda bagus? Good? 'Teda'? 'Teda bagus' and all this sort of thing and I go on to that because after the war I went to Morotai I found out that they were very keen on buying watches, watches you couldn't get, I mean they were even hard to get at home, but it was worth a try. So I wrote down to Saunders in Sydney, could you please send me a watch
- 13:30 or two if you possibly can, one for my friend, must have water-proof on it. This is after the war because every time they'd come to buy they'd say, "Water-proof? Water-proof?" And if it didn't have water-proof on it they wouldn't buy it, they wouldn't bother at all. So anyway I must have got about 3 or 4 from Saunders so they sent them but I put down a tenner or something you see
- 14:00 and sold them up there for guilders, for 100 guilders or something you see. Now guilders were Dutch currency, all Dutch currency you see, and a funny thing, I can see myself and another friend and before we left to fly home, I flew home from Morotai, and they said, "No good, no good to take any of that home. You can't exchange it, banks won't change it, there's no exchange for that." So fellas who were still staying on, I sat on the edge of the bed, "Here you go Harry,
- 14:30 here you go Jack.". Bernie the fellow I think I came home with, we landed at Darwin, stayed at Darwin, 'course we were in a Gooney bird you know, flying home, and all of a sudden one motor started to put out smoke and all this sort of business. So the pilot said, oh the pilot I can see now, smoking, "We're gonna land here fellas, gonna land here."
- 15:00 he said, you see, "One of you fellas are in a panic about that motor out there." Well we looked out and I was in the panic. So anyway we landed the Gooney bird at Ambon, so I can say I've been to Ambon. Now Ambon of course was quite a terrible, infamous place.

Just going back a bit please Don, I want to take you back to Tarakan before the war ended, were you getting in news from home? Were you getting any letters?

Yeah, yeah.

You were getting letters. Did you think much about home?

Yeah. Thought how I'd like to be back. Funny thing you know...

15:30 Did you share those feelings with your mates, could you talk about being homesick?

No. I don't know that I did really I mean you'd say, blokes would say, "Oh if I was home now I'd be doing so-and-so and doing something rather, oh wouldn't it be good to get to a footy match?" this sort of thing you know. But the funny things you can see

- 16:00 when you're away, the things you took so much for granted. For instance this really started when I was at Canungra, my mother used to make me in a little dish about this big, bread and butter custard or baked rice and that sort of thing. I can see myself now after I had the first course at home saying, "Oh no thanks mum I don't want that." and pushing it aside. Well when I was at Canungra

- 16:30 or in other places like that, this lovely dish of baked rice would come in front of me like that and I used to go, "Oh my God to think I used to push it aside." I wished that she could send me one now or something like that you know. Anyway that was one thing and the other thing was once when we were short of water I can see myself going to the kitchen tap and I would just turn on the kitchen tap like that and get a glass of water.

- 17:00 There were three things, the puddings I set aside, and the kitchen tap just to get water and another thing was, it is a very odd thing, I feel a bit odd doing this one. Our front gate at home there was just this metal latch that would just push down like that, click. And so you'd say, "Oh someone's come through the front gate." Somehow I could see myself going back home to Memagong, which is the name of our place in Elwood, named after the home my mother came from in Young

- 17:30 and I can see myself pressing the thing and they'd say, "Oh there's someone at the gate." and then pushing the gate open. And it's just a small thing.

Hearing the click.

Yeah the click of the gate and I always thought, won't I be happy to click that gate down. She foiled me though, she swapped our house with the house across the road but anyway I went through another gate, anyway I was pleased to get home.

Don now just a week after you landed in Tarakan the war in Europe ended.

18:00 Yes it ended May 8th , that's right.

And you were told about that? You knew that?

I can't recall that actually. Oh we must have we must have, the news must have come through that the war ended in Europe, which was VE [Victory in Europe] day.

Did that boost morale you think?

Oh I think it did, I think it did yeah. We kept saying well it can't be long now , they'll send more forces over here and of course at that time, we didn't know anything about the atomic bomb

18:30 which was going to fix up everything and of course that's the controversial thing isn't it, about... I think if they hadn't dropped it, would I have got home? How long would the war have gone on?

Well so Tarakan... you just mentioned the atomic bomb, they also used napalm in Tarakan, it was one of the first uses

Yes and may I go up and show you the painting done of Margie done by one of the 2/4th Commando fellows,

19:00 it's an original painting of Margie...

So that was pretty...

Very, very effective. Now Margie was covered in jungle, thick jungle and it was so hard to take, so we withdrew a bit and the air force came over and dropped napalm bombs. Well you have no idea of the effect it had. It just flattened all the jungle just like that.

So you saw that?

Yeah just after, I'd come in after it yeah, yeah. I saw it before and after.

19:30 And I've got this marvellous painting up there. And do you know that even after that, Japanese were still alive and still able to fight. I admit, many of them were pretty dazed but they could still come out and they could still fight.

So they were a pretty determined enemy?

Oh my word they were determined, fought doggedly right to the end, very determined enemy. And of course you know you have to remember their beliefs, which were that

20:00 they go to a better place when they die. So with a belief like that, and their code was, if you must go, take where possible, the enemy with you. And I was gonna say about Bert Lucas earlier with a Nip behind a tree. It was the funniest thing because Bert Lucas was a big bloke, a bit of trouble getting behind a tree and he was dodging out like that and the Nip was going out like this. They were doing this sort of business for a while and the Nip came out from behind a tree with one hand up you see, one hand up.

20:30 So that didn't do you see, the other hand was like this. And he was bowing to Bert and going like this trying to get as close as he possibly could to him and then of course, Bert shot him. And just as well of course, he had a grenade behind his back. He was just going to tap the top of it and as soon as he got close to Bert, take him with him. Well that was you know, I suppose that was their doctrine in a way, that you've got to try and take as many of the enemy with you as you can.

21:00 But having that belief about going somewhere higher made them fight to the very end because they thought; well even if I'm killed I'm going to a better place.

But we have that belief as well don't we I mean..

Well I never got the belief that if I get shot I'll go straight to heaven, ... I'm afraid. I mustn't tell Padre Udy that, it'll be okay if I get shot, I'll sprout wings and I'll wing my way to heaven, and see him.

You weren't convinced of that?

No

21:30 I wasn't convinced of that. I wasn't convinced and I'm still not actually so anyway...

Now Don, you've talked a bit about some of the difficulties of the you know terror, the fear of being in the jungle and being surrounded by, next to the enemy all that time, can you tell me what was the worst part of it for you?

Night. Night. Night raids, very scary and I don't know

22:00 I mean I have never been psycho-analysed about it, I don't know whether it's a thing now for instance, Val'll come in to pull blinds down and make the room like it is now for instance. I leave blinds up until the last bit of daylight. Now I don't know I'm not sure whether there's a connection or not here, but I just used to dread night so much you know, because you were just so handicapped really when they came in.

22:30 I mean they hit the trip wires and that could happen but when they got in and like the night I'm talking about when the tank was inside, I mean what can you do and they were behind you when they came. Unless of course it came to hand to hand fighting, and you fight him hand-to-hand, which didn't happen to me, thank God, but it did with a few.

That must have been very...

Very, very scary see. Well you asked earlier about the fellow who really couldn't face them at all

23:00 and he turned around right from the first action went out, but there were other things...I'm just trying to think of the name of the fellow now... anyway in his slit trench, all of a sudden a Jap jumped in with him and this fellow almost froze when there was a Jap right beside him like that, but luckily a fellow named Stackville came up and he...I think it was Stackville anyway who shot him,

23:30 but he had to be sent out. He was a Melbourne bloke but I never saw him since, but I know that his family had a hotel in Melbourne.

Why did he?

His nerves went to pieces after the Nip was in beside him I think because he thought... and luckily the Nip didn't explode a grenade with him. But look

24:00 he was just a fellow that was a very nervous sort of a person you know, I mean, more so than a lot of us probably. And so they sent him out and it was probably just as well because his nerves were shot to pieces after that. Now when I say that there are a lot of blokes like Stacky who shot him and said, "Yeah I shot the bastard." Just all so different you see. There's no trouble at all, he never thought a thing about it.

It also seems, it seems like for you that the darkness of the jungle and the night..

The night that's right.

24:30 Noises and the darkness and there might be an attack any minute, I don't know, and you know combined with the night that they got in, when we had the tank in the centre and the tanks always drew the crabs [artillery] and I didn't care for them. Now I said that I didn't care for them but there had been instances of course in open area and where there were roads, and there were roads on Tarakan, and we were stuck in a cutting once. Now when I say we, well I know that Captain Rowe

25:00 was there because he was the only person I've discussed it with since, 'cause I can't remember where we were in this cutting, and why were we caught in this cutting. Now we were caught in this cutting because they had a force forward of it so it was best to go back. So there was an open area on the road until we got to another cutting on the other side, and it was decided that it was best to go back. So one fellow said, "Well I'll

25:30 give it a test." or he was ordered to I can't remember. Anyway whatever, he ran down and he got to the cutting. Now another fellow, the next fellow who ran down, there was a sniper in the tree and he got a bead on the second fellow and missed him but the bullet went right alongside him see. So then we tried twice more and we found then that the sniper had time to get a bead on or lineup

26:00 with his rifle, every second man. So everyone said, "Right-o you can go first." and anyway when only a few had gone down the road it might have been just four I think and Captain Rowe said, "I think we'll settle here for a moment in this cutting and devise what we are going to do about this fellow." you see. And so a tank came up the road

26:30 and when it came up the road it conversed...well I don't think I spoke to them, but Rowe might have done it with his walkie talkie to the commander of the tank, but whatever, the big turret turned around like that and faced the tree and my God, it was a marvellous shot, blew the top right out of the tree. So of course I said to the fellow next to me, "They're not so bad after all."

They have their uses.

Blew the top out of the tree and of course killed the sniper, so then of course we went

27:00 out of the cutting and everything was right. That was a funny day that cutting bit because Captain Rowe's gone now, and he was about the only fella that's ever said to me, "Do you remember the day of the cutting?" and I said I can't think of was his name was, we called him by his name anyway, very top of the Education Department after the war, but I remember one day at a reunion I talked to him about it and he is about the only fellow I talked about it to, like the bloomin' [HMAS] Kanimbla bit really.

27:30 **So Don where were you when you heard that war was ended?**

Well now that was May 8th.

No the war in Europe, the war in Japan, the war in the Pacific?

Yeah war in the Pacific, I was down in Tarakan at a camp, I was watching Deanna Durban, 100 Men and a Girl, never forget the name would you, 100 Men and a Girl, and poor girl anyway,

28:00 she was a singer, a marvellous singer, you would never remember the name, she married the most famous composer and orchestra conductor in the world... say his name and that's who she .. I can't think of that. Anyway she was a Hollywood actress, plain girl with a most beautiful voice and that's where we were, , some people would say that the Nips would come down and sit in the hills and watch the film with you. Anyway

28:30 so there was still mopping up going on. Now the last man I told you, now I think Gordon Reeves would be the first one to get killed on the island, he was with us. Now another one of our fellas, we were settled then at a place called Djoeta, Djoeta was surrounded by oil fields and I didn't get there on my return visit worse luck. They didn't give us enough time. Bruce Ruxton said to me one day, "Did you feel that you had enough time on the trip back to Tarakan?" and I said, "No Bruce I didn't."

29:00 He said, "You didn't even get out to Djoeta did you where you were camped?" I said, "No, no I didn't , didn't have time." So I don't know, Bruce probably did something about that. 'Cause he did a lot about that Sandakan death march area, he turned that death march camp... people don't know what he's done. It was he that was the instigator, turning that Sandakan Death Camp into a memorial gardens which they are today and the year we went in '95, amongst all the ambassadors and people that signed that agreement between the Australian Government

29:30 and the Malaysian Government to keep that park, Bruce's signature's there. And he started that off about '74 or something like that. Anyway so that's taken my mind off that and I was really onto...

When you heard the war was ended.

Yeah so I think we were at that. Now I said I'd think that Reeves was the fellow, Gordon Reeves was the first fellow to get killed, now the last man I say was a lovely fellow named

30:00 Huey Boyle. Lovely fellow Huey. And Huey Boyle, gee, I did look up the date of this... I think it was about...the end of the war came on the August...July, August, well anyway I think

30:30 it might have been June 27th....anyway, we were doing mopping-up patrols right around the islands and this patrol went out with Huey Boyle in and I can't remember the other fellas, doesn't matter, and the cookhouse cut them some sandwiches, they were doorstep sandwiches, like the patrol would go out for a day or whatever it was and off they went on this patrol.

31:00 Now going out, they did the usual thing with the forward scout and being very quiet as they went out you see. Now when they went out on a patrol they didn't see any Nips at all, they didn't find any. And at halfway on the patrol, they stopped to have their lunch and they ate a lot of the sandwiches but they threw crusts that they didn't eat on the ground. Now there were Nips about and the Nips came down and were eating the crusts when they were coming back on the patrol

31:30 not being so careful you see, talking on the way back and so on you know and so there were the Nips. And of course they opened fire and killed Huey Boyle and I think Huey would've been one of the last fellas killed in our battalion, but anyway I could look up the date easily.

So your friend Ernie survived the war?

Ernie Carter, my word. I hadn't seen Ernie in years and Valda and I went to Perth two years ago and I got in touch with Ernie and said,

32:00 "Ernie I'm coming to Perth." "Oh I'll come down and see you." So I told him the dates. When we arrived at the hotel, he and his wife were there, I said, "Oh you're down here to meet us." "Not only to meet you but I've booked in too." He had booked into the same hotel. So we ... everything we did in Perth, Ernie and... Shirley, we did it together.

Fabulous. So what was the mood when you heard that the war in the Pacific was over, and the Japanese had surrendered?

32:30 Well there was terrific noise went on you know, all the ships in the Harbour blew their whistles and there was tremendous noise. And trucks, anyone was in a truck, made a hell of a noise, and all the people seeing Deanna Durban in 100 Men and A Girl, we all jumped up and down and thumped our boots on...I don't know what it was under there. There was some sort of...don't know if we took an empty tin or something, I don't know what we sat on. They might have put form seats I think,

33:00 did amazing things. And of course there were Americans around, now if you wanted amazing things done, the Americans did amazing things, I mean God, all of a sudden they...well they brought a screen and a movie machine to show and bought films along, my God can you believe that, so early peace.

And were the local people happy as well?

Yeah they were pretty happy, yes they were all pretty happy as I can recall.

33:30 **Now you had to wait quite a while before being moved off Tarakan, didn't you?**

Yes, well as I told you earlier before it was under the five year plan, those fellas started to move off and then we were told that we would be leaving shortly, but that wasn't until I think we left there on

December 11th , a troop ship full the Kanimbla was full of troops. Now mind you, the Glory had been in there before that,

- 34:00 which was an aircraft carrier, it had taken a lot home and some other ship had taken some home. Anyway the Kanimbla came and when we got on board the Kanimbla it was December the 11th and sailors were saying, "All we gotta do boys is get you home for Christmas, you'll be home for Christmas." So we were all very elated about that, you see. Anyway the Kanimbla got going and all of sudden, a message came through the Kanimbla is to be diverted
- 34:30 and it is to go to Morotai and it is to pick up...we are to get off and it is to pick up a lot of troops on Morotai because they've complained and marched on headquarters and all that sort of thing, that they had been there for years and they should all go home, you see. Well of course we were up in arms about this because the one thing, they might have been there for a while, but they weren't in the infantry, you know. And gosh it's not being very modest saying that, but you know infantry....
- 35:00 **You thought you deserved to go home.**
- Yeah we did the confrontation bit all the time. So Ford was the Minister for the Army at the time and that was the message he sent through. So the Kanimbla pulled in, get them all off and put these troops in that were complaining. Now in some instances you got out on so many points you see, from when you joined the army. And a lot of them they maintained that they had higher points
- 35:30 than we did. Now a lot of them may have, but then a lot on our ship still, they had high points too. I mean they might have had higher points than me, because I've forgotten what my points were now, I think 100 because of the time I'd been in the army and I'd only been in the army for three years I think. And so anyway, that was the order, get them off. Well of course, that went down to the hold down below and the hold was full of Australian troops, holds full of them.
- 36:00 I was lucky, I got a job in the kitchen. I had a bunk up near the top, wasn't it marvellous. It was for the short run between Tarakan and Morotai. So anyway all the fellas onboard said, "I tell you what, we're not getting off, we're not getting off this ship, fellas don't go out of the hold." because you see there's strength in the numbers, "Don't move we're staying onboard." Well all the red caps
- 36:30 came on, they're brigadiers and all that sort of people in the army, and they talked and they appealed, no good, they got off and this went on, well it went on for 24 hours the whole thing. And I think they said, "You've got to take them home." the army red caps you see. And so the navy said, "Hand it over to us." after all it was a naval ship, hand this over to us.
- 37:00 So the Captain made a speech over the loudspeakers, if any officers went down to the hold to speak or anything as soon as they opened their mouths, everyone sang Waltzing Matilda see. We didn't know what the officer was saying, his mouth was just... and everybody was singing Waltzing Matilda at the top of his voice, couldn't hear what they were saying. So anyway it was handed over to the navy and the Captain of the Kanimbla said
- 37:30 "I'll take you fellas home." and you understand that this in the navy, this is classed as mutiny and immediately we get home, you'll be tried for mutiny and the least you'll get is 8 years. Still a lot of blokes sang and that and then some one yelled out rudely to the Captain, which was a very silly thing to do, told him to get out, which was a very silly thing to do, but anyway I 'spose
- 38:00 he was determined about what he was gonna do. And a thing like that is all on or all off. In all this, meantime all the blokes onshore have come forward and they are all down on the wharf screaming, "We'll get you, go on." So our blokes, we're on the decks going, "Oh yeah come on, come on." "We'll drag you off!" "Oh well come on, come and see." And all this was going on, all these words were going on and there was an accident.
- 38:30 Someone dropped a bottle down and someone was badly injured, one of the fellows down on the wharf. And so anyway it was handed over to the navy and the navy blokes said this and some started to get off and I knew the names of the first two to get off, can't think of that now, doesn't matter. I remember he was one of our Regimental police. Each battalion had Regimental police, a few fellows to handle anyone who got a bit stropy and so that was it, some started to get off.
- 39:00 And in the finish, they got us off. But as the leader of the push said, "If you get off here, this is December, if you get off here, you'll be here for six months." and boy was he ever right. I was there, we got off in December and I didn't leave there until next June. And I got a job all the time I was on Morotai. Anyway after the war I got a medal, I got the 45/ 75 medal, for staying on and working after the war,
- 39:30 a beautiful medal. And so on Morotai, some would be leaving all the time but I was sent to an engineering...

00:31 **So Don what were you doing on Morotai for all that time?**

Well anyway just to finish on that, that was known as the mutiny on the Kanimbla, but you never heard much about it. So as you see we all got off. I was sent to an engineering company that had been on Morotai for sometime evidently and they... well I suppose they did things for Tarakan.

01:00 Everything was shipped over or something like that, you know eight people behind one man at the frontline, eight people it takes to keep him there. So they were doing that sort of thing and anyway, I wasn't very pleased about it and neither were other blokes with my same points and as I say, some were higher, well we were displeased and anyway we had to settle in and do the job. And there we were, so you may as well make the best of it. So we did sort of engineering jobs and then I was put in

01:30 charge of watering the ships that called in. Now I can always remember... there were these great big water tanks going back from the wharf and the wharf was that all-steel floating wharf invented by Mountbatten, you know he did some marvellous things in the war. And these things are one of his inventions and they pushed these great rafts of metal in like that and joined them together and the ship had a wharf to come in to. There's a name for those, it's silly I can't remember it but anyway. As well as Mountbatten

02:00 designing that, he designed the pluto, that pipe under the channel to put petrol and oil into the allied forces. So anyway they'd pull into these things you see and these water tanks were back a bit and they ran up like this, big water tanks. And it was my job to water the ships and there were these great big hoses and the ship dropped over a big hose just the same. And there were these big couplings that went around, one like this

02:30 and you joined the ship and then you let the water go from the top. Well the first ship I ever did, I never forget, it was the Clarence and the engineer came down, "Alright you alright there?" "Oh yes alright here." And he said, "Right-o well we're all connected here. Let her go." well I'm darned if I know what happened to my connection. And anyway we let the water go and you've never seen anything like it, the wharf and the engineer, water went all over the place. So I'm waving my hands....

03:00 we've got a couple of Boongs that are working for me up there. And also another feller from another unit who was a reverend's son, God blimey, talk about hard to control and eventually we got this right and that was the job. And I was in charge of these water tanks at certain times you know. I might be on at daytime, another time I was on at night time. They always had it because ships would pull in and ask for water.

03:30 American ships and all sorts of ships.

So you had native people working with you?

Yes there was Panji and ...I can't remember the other one's name who always said, "As soon as you go..." they were under the Dutch of course, "As soon as you go we're going to take this country, we are going to have control." Now as you know I can't get over it, it took so long, they were always talking about it and it took 30 years before Sukarno came in you remember and kicked the Dutch out, 30 years after the war,

04:00 before they had Indonesia.

1947 they achieved independence.

Did they?

Yeah, under Sukarno, yeah.

Did they really, I thought they had 30 years before they got independence.

No, then they had a change of government in '65.

Oh yes.

Yeah so you might have been thinking of that.

So Sukarno got it only two years after the war, well wouldn't be surprised they were always talking about the Dutch.

And were you sympathetic with that?

Well the Dutch were hard masters; oh they used to march around Morotai as though they won the war,

04:30 these big black boots marching up and down. One night there was a terrible fight with the Australians, weren't going to take any of this marching around and big boots, giving orders and the Aussies got in and there was a hell of a fight one night. I think there were a couple of people killed. You can see the thing too, the island was taken by Americans, run a tremendous amount by Australians and all of a sudden they arrive, marching up and down yeah that's right, here we are,

05:00 we're the Lord and masters, and my God when they governed the place. Although I've got to say, when we met teachers, they did bring education and that sort of thing, like the English did for so many

countries. But anyway that's as it may be...

So was that a good experience working with the local people?

Yes well it was a good experience. It's a funny thing after the war ... we had Japs, Jap prisoners all around the place

05:30 and they were in a big compound of their own and I think the Dutch had to do with controlling them as well. But they used to come down to the wharf, I never had a team of them really, but there were teams working on the wharf, loading and unloading things, and there were Australians who were guards. And the Nips were just working all over the place. They were extremely clean which was different as we found them in action. Down here where they were in the compounds

06:00 they got water, they were extremely clean. They were always washing and this sort of thing, but anyway, some of them were a bit arrogant. But on Morotai I was so pleased because I had one that used to look after me, and call me master. And my God I'd gone from private to a master, and he used to appear every day...

This is a local person or a Japanese prisoner, sorry...?

Japanese, a Japanese prisoner used to call me master and I never forgot and he used to do my washing and all sorts of things

06:30 So I don't know what he did during the rest of the day because I had to go and do things. He didn't come down to help me with the water, but he must have done other things you know, there was a bloke in charge of the camp where we were at this engineering place, and they'd be given other jobs. But anyway to me he came and tended to me every day and did my washing that I put out and that sort of thing. And..

And by then were you..oh sorry go on.

I just remember writing a letter to my sister and her saying

07:00 "Don, do you think you could bring him home?" I thought what a good idea. My mother wasn't in too good health and Betty was working and doing everything else and she thought oh what a marvellous thing, you can bring home a servant.

Did you have any contact with former Australian prisoners of war, were they being brought into the hospital at Morotai?

No, I didn't have any contact with them worse luck.

07:30 I mean the other part of the 9th division that went up to Brunei were of course the relievers of them. There was a film, years ago with Claudette Colbert called Three Came Back and they ran a plantation in Borneo. And you see the way they were split up. I mean she was taken one way with the Japanese and her husband went the other way, but in the finish when you see them relieved in the camps, it's by order of

08:00 General Wooten, GOC [General Officer Commanding] 9th division. Now that was spot on, that was exactly right and so they did relieve all those blokes and see what they were like. But no I never saw them, never saw them. And I mean did they go back through Morotai? They may have but I didn't see any of them. Anyway they'd go to the hospital there

08:30 and I can't remember having anything to do with the hospital there, although all our fellas, Ted and all the chaps I've mentioned, all went through the hospital at Morotai. But no I can't remember I can't place them there at all, I must have known it.

They might not have gone there.

They may not have but they were let out, they were relieved there.

Now before you left Morotai, you had to destroy all the vehicles, this is what Brad said to me, can you tell me about that?

Did he really yeah well this is true army form,

09:00 there were lots of vehicles on Morotai and trucks and jeeps and even tank carriers which were big loaded things, and an order came through one day that all the vehicles must all be done up, painted and got all ready to be taken back to Australia so everybody got working on that you see. A big occupation for the mechanics and this sort of thing and got them ready to go back to Australia.

09:30 Well no sooner had they started to get trucks running in beautiful condition and everything, an order came out that no trucks or jeeps will be taken back to Australia, they have got to be destroyed. And this is how it will be done. Well what they were gonna do is run them over a cliff and all the vehicles were called in, which was marvellous because they lined them all up and they left them there to take them off sections at a time.

10:00 Well they left a truck and a couple of jeeps, and my friend Bernie McLaren he said, "They've got all

these jeeps lined up there, we could do with a jeep." I said, "We certainly could." so down we went that night and we relieved them of one jeep. But we weren't the only ones, the next morning there was you know, a truck, a jeep, gap, gap ,

10:30 gap, truck. Everybody is getting around in jeeps, they were getting frantic the military police, there was traffic all over the road. Anyway Bernie and I had a marvellous time in this jeep while we had it. As a matter of fact just on that, we could have brought them back to Australia, for 80 pounds they said but you'd have to have them converted, they were American you see the steering the other side.

11:00 Oh no well we won't bother with that, Bernie and I decided that we won't take one back, but how stupid. We got back to Australia of course people are bursting to get a car, can't get a car or a truck. Anyway that's beside the point, they decided that these trucks would be run over a cliff and these dare devil drivers would drive them up towards a cliff and then jump out before it went over. Oh some of them would drive as far as they could before they jumped and then they jumped out. But I can see a sergeant saying, "Now when you get your taxation,

11:30 when you get back in Australia you think of this, and there is all the tax payers' money going over the cliffs." Now the thing that happened, they didn't know about beforehand, they were to throw them over a cliff and then the idea was that they would set fire to them, terrible isn't it? So not long before that, a week or so before that, the air force had been told to get rid of their bombs, take them out

12:00 to sea and drop them in the sea. Well evidently some air force blokes said, "Why go to all that trouble?" he must have said to himself, "We'll just take them to an edge of a cliff and drop them over the cliff, just leave them there." So anyway the fellas who were putting these trucks over and I 'spose they thought, oh look here is a nice clear area, we'll just follow this and put the trucks over. So then evidently later on they set fire to the thing. Well I was back in my tent at the camp at that time

12:30 and I'd just laid back on the bunk and all of a sudden there was, this explosion was just enormous. The whole island rocked with this explosion. So I turned around and said, "My God it's an earthquake!" you see, "We're in an earthquake!" Well of course it was solved. Where they put those trucks over those cliffs, they put them on top of the bombs and then they set fire to them, then all these 500-pound bombs exploded. Well it rocked the island, my God, it gave everyone a hell of fright but that's what it was.

13:00 But the wrecking of these trucks and everything was absolutely terrible and I mean you know, I think when I had to pay my taxation bill, all I could see were those trucks, first of all being done up, I mean you don't want to go throwing trucks away unless they are in nice condition so God isn't that true army form , do it all up and then throw it all away?

So Don in the end you were flown home?

Yeah I was, landed at Ambon because the plane went wrong and

13:30 then we came to Darwin and I must say that the flying across the Pacific was just marvellous especially in a Gooneybird because they fly at top height of 8,000 feet. So when you look down as you're going over the islands, you see all the coral reefs and everything that moves undersea, because the sea is so clear. But landing at Ambon was something because we knew of the atrocities, you know of the 1100 that landed there, only 300 came out alive, the Japanese atrocities.

14:00 So anyway then we landed at Darwin and I'd never been to Darwin before, wasn't able to have much look around, we only stayed one night. And then we flew all day and after flying all day we are at Charters Towers. I can't believe it, see those days, she only did 150 miles an hour.

And then eventually they flew home to Melbourne did they?

Yeah they flew me down to Brisbane and they said that's where you can exchange your foreign currency and Bernie and I can see ourselves and all the money that we made from the watches and so on.

14:30 And then we were flown from Brisbane to home and home, it was just marvellous. I must have landed at... I can't remember where I landed... at Essendon or RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base at either Point Cook or Sale or somewhere. I think it must have been Essendon. And so I was taken home and absolutely delighted.

15:00 My mother nearly fainted. I think when I got home my sister was at work, she took on a wartime job as I told you earlier and so it was a great delight. Then I was told to have a fortnight off and report back for my discharge, another army shock.

Just before we get to there you didn't get to take part in any of the victory parades, because you were still overseas?

That's right no I didn't get anywhere.

How was it coming home?

15:30 Well it was marvellous, absolutely marvellous, it was all so unbelievable really that the war was over; I mean to think that the war is over. I mean I'm gonna get out of the army and stay home and then of course what am I going to do? Well I had a fair idea what I could do because I was in the wool trade

before I left and I already started to do a course, correspondence course while I was on Morotai to...

16:00 the questions on the whole paper were sent to me from a Technical College.. where the big one was in Sydney, I can't think of it's name. They sent out these things and I did all this homework so to speak and then sent it back to the college.

So you were very enterprising.

Well that was to do with the wool trade and I applied to go to the wool school again which I may have told you before, I was going to every Saturday when I was

16:30 working as a wool sampler with Elliot and Dibb and anyway that was okay. I passed that so I could go to the wool school when I came home.

Now Don I just want to ask you when you came home, you know, you are obviously pleased to be home, delighted to be home...

Very, I was very yellow and I was very pleased. Atebrin sent you yellow you see. We took them for malaria. But we were very lucky you see. When I said, I must just qualify this, when I said I was so bitten all over my hands and my hands were so swollen

17:00 from the mosquitoes, why didn't I get malaria? Because the anopheles mosquito luckily was not in or on Tarakan and not in Borneo either I don't think, well not on Tarakan anyway. You see in New Guinea, once you got bitten like that, you got malaria. Mind you, we took safeguards against it all the time.

By then you had time to you know reflect a bit what you had been through in the war and so on,

17:30 **did you feel like the war, the conflict on Tarakan, did you feel like those battles were justified?**

Well yes I did, at that time I did. Now it's been well so analysed since the war and they've come out and said well it was just terrible

18:00 those men shouldn't have been lost because they just could have cut the Japanese off in that island, they couldn't have got anything anyway, which the Americans had started to do, and that could have been done there. I see it could have been done there and so you would not have lost... I don't know on Tarakan, 300 men odd killed. So yeah it wasn't the best. But I'll tell you the only reason

18:30 I'm against all that analytical stuff and they're findings, I always think that all that stuff is terrible for the parents of the boys that were killed there. I mean when they read that all that action needn't have been, and their son is still lying there, I think it must be devastating myself. And even when it came out in the first books,

19:00 I was the editor of our magazine Mud and Blood never would I have mentioned a thing like that, not even after it came out. Now Andrew Ollie who was a famous ABC broadcaster, he did a show one night and I must say it was marvellous on Tarakan. He did it at the Victoria barracks because the war room in Victoria barracks was just as it was, where everybody sat and maps.... just everything was the same. Now Andrew Ollie did that show from down there, he did it all about Tarakan. And not many

19:30 people ever mention Tarakan, and it was very good indeed. But I think again after that show, the finding was that it shouldn't have happened, and I think there are books now.

That must be quite hard for someone like yourself to hear?

Yes I thought it was awful to hear, but as I say, not so much for myself but for the people who lost love ones there, you know, it seems terrible

20:00 for them to think that why did they do it and all that sort of thing. And I 'spose a fair enough question to ask, why did they? But it was a MacArthur move and he felt it should be done.

Because the airfield never got used.

Never got used, that's right. That was the big thing, I suppose, the airfield first, oil second. Of course it was the other way about for the Japs because it was the oil they were after and I suppose by shutting it down,

20:30 I can't really say if they were stopping the Japs from use of their war machines, it was for a long while, but by that stage it might not have been. But that's right, it was just a disaster that airfield and so I don't know if you read up, there were many squabbles after it. I mean they blame the air force tremendously you know that was supposed to be the construction crowd and everything but...

21:00 **Do you think people in your battalion and yourself feel bitter about that, that we shouldn't have been sent there?**

No, no, I don't think so, I don't think so, I mean you know, I look at it now, it's okay, it's all right to go back in hindsight, but I don't know whether we shouldn't. If we hadn't been there you know, it's no good saying well if we hadn't landed at Tarakan...

21:30 we'd have landed somewhere else wouldn't we? You see and it wasn't over and the last amphibious landing was on Balikpapan when the 7th division went in and that was on the 1st of July, then there was another brigade of the 9th division at Labuan.

Don we're running out of time so I'll

22:00 **just have to skip ahead. You weren't discharged like you thought you were going to be and instead you were sent to guard...**

Prisoners of war, Italian and German prisoners of war at Murchison.

So could you tell me a bit about that?

Well at the time when the shutters were put down and I was told with a few others, I'm sorry but we need guards at Murchison or other prisoner of war camps, and I am afraid soldier, that's where you're going, well of course, disappointment,

22:30 I couldn't believe it. Anyway well then that's where we went and I was so disappointed and rather hostile at the time too. But when I look back on it now and things have come into my life through it, it was a marvellous experience. And you've got to remember too, it was just like a prisoner of war camp that you see, we had the towers and the catwalk around it and a big road through the centre and big gates on that, big gates on this side the Italians went in, and big gates on this side the Germans.

23:00 And one has got to remember that they were getting to the end of their tether you see, all those Germans and Italians had been taken right back in '40-'41 and there they were still there and I might add that they didn't get sent back to their own countries until 1947, they were there all those years. Now there are ways of looking at it. The Italians went out and worked very happily on farms everywhere. Some of them didn't even go back.

23:30 The Germans were a bit different, they went out and they did work, wood cutting and other things, but the difference in the races was just amazing. I mean for instance Aussies being terrible bastards that they are, there was a six-foot line in the fence. Now if a ball or something went into that line in their camp and they moved to get it, but if they dallied and didn't pick it up

24:00 or move out reasonably quickly, you could put a shot down, you see, as a warning. Now when you did that to an Italian... I don't know if you have ever trodden on an ants' nest like that, all the ants go like that, don't they? Well if you put one down like that to an Italian, not only did he go at a 100 miles out of the thing, but the whole camp and they were in huts, just the same as ours, but all you'd see was this... for about a minute and then all the doors of the huts would go bang, bang, 'cause there wouldn't be a soul in sight. They'd just disappear.

24:30 Now if a German... you would put a shot down, as I say it wasn't necessary, but some frightful buggers would do it for entertainment, and you put a shot down to a German, well he would stand there. The ball would stay on the ground and he would stand there and look up at you as if to say, "Well you're very big up there aren't you? Well you're very big up there with a gun, but you come down here to me." And then after he stopped and stared at you, he would pick up the ball and stroll out. And the way they spent their life, they spent their life

25:00 exercising and jumping horses and keeping fit, all this sort of thing, most of them, most of them. But the Italians they had beautiful, beautiful paintings on the side of those huts; they should have been taken off and preserved somewhere. But anyway then some of the fellows in the prisoner of war camp were from the Kormoran, you know the story of the Kormoran, the Kormoran that sunk the [HMAS] Sydney and [Captain] Detmer used to come to the camp quite often. He was in a big home

25:30 Dhurringile, which was a big old mansion up in the area. And that's where the officers were put, the Italian and German officers were in Dhurringile. But he'd come over and visit the camp every time and he looked as though he stepped off the bloomin' Kormoran. He had a batman and his leather jacket was in beautiful condition. How he saved it from being on the Kormoran, I'm sure I don't know. But of course they got off in lifeboats didn't they and so on, whereas Sydney was...nothing...I mean nothing, it was just the most incredible thing. The Sydney was that great big ship with how many people did

26:00 we lose 619, disappeared like that? Anyway the Kormoran group was there and I suppose they were questioned and questioned, but all that ever came out really was that the Sydney let them get too close. And of course, they were an armed merchant but you know they flew a foreign flag. I think they were flying a Dutch flag at the time. Then when they got close of course, they dropped the Dutch flag and put up the German swastika.

26:30 But they say if I go into this for a minute that the German merchantmen probably had torpedo tubes underneath, as soon as they got close to the Sydney, they let it go and the magazine hit it and of course the whole thing was gone, and nothing was ever found of it. So anyway, it was a big experience and I look back on it now, it was a marvellous experience because lately I've been up to the Tatura

27:00 Prisoner of War and Internment Museum at Tatura, which anyone should go to, it's marvellous. And it tells the whole story of the Sydney and the Kormoran and so on and also it's got all the stories of all the internees, like people who had German names were all interned. And I had a marvellous jewel box made

by a German, he made me two actually, and I thought well what will I do with this, so I just rang up the Tatura paper and said, look

27:30 have you any museum or anything there that might be interested, and the woman at the local paper said, "Yes I'll put you in touch with Lurline Knee and Arthur." they run the museum.

How fabulous, so now Don we are just about to run out of tape.

So it was marvellous, I got there and I gave it to them.

That's great, it sounds like you did a lot of work after the war with museums, that sounds really important.

Well the biggest one I did was my own, because nothing was ever done at Glenrowan

28:00 and Valda and I went off...well there was nothing in Australia. There was certainly nothing in Glenrowan, people were too frightened. And we went over to Kelly country, took over the Kelly Country Motel, which was there, it was a small motel of seven units and then we bought an old broken down place that had been a restaurant and opened the Glenrowan Tourist Centre, which told the story of the Kelly gang.

28:30 And I suppose you'd call it a... ..a folk museum type of place, but we told the whole story. And I've had things collected for years. It was marvellous... ten years

Don I just wanted to ask you, you know, with the benefit of sixty years of hindsight, what would you want to say about the war?

Don't go. As I said to you earlier, I say to Val, "God I'd never do this again."

29:00 "Oh yes you would if the bugle blew." "I don't think so." Well you know, it's just, from my time on Tarakan and I mean all those other blokes that saw you know, friends blown into pieces. Then you've got Alamein and Tobruk and all those other places it happened. I mean Tarakan was bad enough for me, I mean there was enough death and dirt and maiming and all that sort of thing for me to see, thanks. And I never want to see it again.

29:30 And I hand it to... I mean this is why I hold in such high regard my friend Slogger Collins who went through every campaign. And I am so grateful that he's a friend of mine and wants to be a friend of mine, because we fought together at Tarakan when he'd done all the other things. Now also I've been the President of my association, I've been in it since 1956, I've only just resigned as President after sixteen years of Presidency and the last thing I wrote

30:00 I thanked them for my being able to bask in the glory of the 9th division because that's really what one is doing because the 9th... won such a marvellous name and to become a part of it was just at terrific honour, still is...so it still is and I'm so wrapped up in the museum, our section

30:30 at the Bandiana Army Museum, which is the biggest outside of Canberra and we have got our own section there, the 2/23rd and it really is marvellous. And I hope I'll keep being involved in it and getting things for it and going to it for the rest of my time.

So can you tell me a bit about this, on one hand it feels like you never want to go to war again, it was a dreadful thing to go through, and on the other hand, it's been very important to you to

31:00 **memorialise what you've done.**

Yes. I hope always. We don't want them all to be forgotten and what happened.

So that's about remembering those who didn't come back?

Absolutely. I mean people say such stupid things they say about Anzac Day sometimes. You get together and it's all just remembrance, all those great fellows that you knew and I mean you remember them as you're doing it. I'm sure we all do.

31:30 And now and again we don't talk about war when we go to a reunion, but naturally, names come up, "Do you remember so and so?" Now when I go and see Slogger Collins on Sussex Inlet, which I am going to do shortly, he and Tommy Porter were just like that, they were just great mates. Now when I go to him, we talk tremendously about Tom. And we've probably said the same things over and over again. But I mean, he was just such a good soldier, he was just a great

32:00 little fellow. And you know, I was friendly with him until the day he died when he went to live at the Tallangatta Caravan Park, I used to go and see him up there. Well it was just those friendships that you're never going to forget are you, because you just became so close under those circumstances. And we were all so different. I mean Tom was so different to my upbringing and Slogger was, I mean we were all different things. Slogger was

32:30 a butcher in Albury.

And given that remembering those people is very important, have you talked to your wife, to your children about the war?

No, I don't suppose I've talked to my children a great deal about it. I mean, my children know quite a deal about it because they became terribly involved. I mean years ago when I was the President of the association, the meeting was always at the President's house.

33:00 So my son could name, he could name all the fellows. He remembers them, he remembers Lofty Ladlow, he remembers Tom because they all came to the house for committee meetings and so on. And when Tom didn't come, and he heard there was a committee meeting on, he'd just come down and drink my wine. One night he found a bottle of Drambuie or something. "My God." he said, "I mightn't be in the committee but I'm coming to your place." "Right-o Tom come." And so we had committee meetings at houses and each time

33:30 **That was a power cut out wasn't it?**

Yeah, that stopped did it?

It's still going.

Yeah? Oh good.

Do you still dream about the war?

Sometimes, only rarely. Sometimes I do.

How's that?

Oh well I wake up and get up and walk about or think very hard about something else, something else. I mean I never think

34:00 of something that I wouldn't mention to you. Never. I try not to and then of course you hear the word comes out now and again and I turn it off anyway.

So there are still memories that you can't, you can't let in?

Well there is that in particular but mostly you know I've gone back over so many things today, you know, gosh, things you think

34:30 you've forgotten. And I must show you that painting of Margie after the napalm bombs before it goes to the museum. Just as a matter of interest, I'll show it to you.

So is there anything else that you'd like to put on record now, I mean that particular incident that you say you still dream about, this is your last chance now to put it on the record?

Oh well I don't think so it's just you know dead bodies I think. It's the best way

35:00 of.. no I don't wanna think about it... really. Especially when you had to walk through them and they had been there for long while and all that sort of thing. And I mean, mind you, you see, all those men that I have mentioned, you've got to remember the friendships. You see, there's good sides to war, isn't there?

What's your best memory from the war?

You see there's bad sides and good sides.

So what's your best memory of the war?

35:30 Actually of wartime itself? I don't know. I mean the friendships that came out of it, these deep friendships.

Have you ever formed friendships like that since?

Oh well yes, I have childhood friends you see. I've mentioned my friend Gordon Stooke who was a pilot in the 460 Squadron.

36:00 So he was a lifelong friend you know, we were born down here in Martin Street, the end of the street here and lived down there until you know until.... we mixed all of our lives really. He came back after being a prisoner of war in Germany, he was in the air force and he was shot down there and taken prisoner and had just an incredible story,

36:30 incredible story. Because he was taken when he was shot down and he got in with the underground and they took him right back to the Paris Railway station. Which was an experience because at the start they got him and he was taken to 4B Prison. And so anyway he was a lifelong friend so a friendship like Gordon and I had, we were just in touch with each other all the time. Not all the same interests. I was a member

37:00 of the Royal Brighton Yacht Club but he was a great sailing member and I would go out on nice days, that's the type of sailor I was. But he was an intrepid sailor I mean you know, he went backwards and forwards to Tasmania, that sort of thing but I was doing other things at the time, but always we you

know, we came together at least once a week or at other times. And then we went away together with them, stayed with them and holidays and all that sort of thing, so they were terrific friendships. But my army

37:30 friendships are very deep too and I think that perhaps they are closest, I mean McAlorum didn't come back, we would have been very close, I think I mentioned Ted Wood, I didn't know that I was building a house around the corner from him at the time and, does Bluey Tibbits live here and of course we have been away with them quite often.

Alright Don, we are going to have to leave it there, the tape is just about finished.

Oh is it, thank you.

So thank you, it's been a wonderful interview,

38:00 **it's been really fantastic, you're a really entertaining speaker, fantastic stories.**

Thank you and they're all true I hope, as I remember it. They're all as I remember it.

And you know you've really shared a lot with us so you know, thank you.

Thank you and thank you to DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] and the people who thought of doing this and Mullion Productions and everybody else involved with it and you girls too, you've done a marvellous job and you've had to put up with

38:30 listening to all that.