Australians at War Film Archive

Wallace Thompson (Thommo) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

01:44 **Thank you very much for talking to us this morning, Wal, and if you could begin by giving us a summary and where you were born and when?**

Right.

02:00 A lot of people always find it a bit humorous that I still barrack for the Broncos [Brisbane Broncos football team] even though they are losing this season. But I was born in Queensland and I always feel a loyalty to them. Our attempt to get back onto the land lately comes from a long line of people on the land right back to foundation days. And

02:30 I was born just across the border in Queensland. We had a sheep and a few cattle and a few horses.

Whereabouts?

Mungindi just across the Queensland boarder. At that time a lot of the squatters were sending their boys down to boarding school at Hurlstone Agricultural High. So at the age of fourteen I was finished with primary long before, two years before, and I was sent off down to

03:00 board at Hurlstone Agriculture.

Where did you do your primary schooling?

At Mungindi. At Hurlstone Agriculture by the time we were eighteen the war [Second World War] was well and truly on. Our diggers [soldiers] were all over the North Africa. Our air force was fighting in Britain, and our navy was everywhere they were required. So a team of us in our

03:30 fifth year of high school went down to the corner of Palmer and Plunket Street, I think it was, in Sydney to join the 'Blue Orchids' [air force]. So they put us through our medical and

What year was that?

That was 1941. Some of us had turned eighteen by then. We went down and joined up. Well, unfortunately after we had done our medical and were feeling very fit and ready to go off, one of the

04:00 doctors said to me, "Well you're pretty solid. Anything else wrong with you that we didn't find?" I said, "I've got a crook right shoulder that as soon as I tackle some bloke in rugby union, I play, it slips out of joint." So they put their fingers into the joint and they roughed it around and they said, "We won't take you as air crew but we'll train you as trainee group five, which could be anything on the ground or mechanics or anything like that." So I was supposed to be in the air force.

04:30 Those of us who were away from the country got odd jobs in Sydney to fill in time until a call up came for the air force. And unfortunately, well not unfortunately, really fortunately I suppose, I got a call up from the army in May 1942 to say you can be examined and see if you are fit enough to go to war.

05:00 Well, believing that it was only a formality I went down and said to the boss, Sid Graves, Crown Crystal Glass, that I'd be back next day and doing my job again, and he was a little bit sceptical. And he was right because when I got into the army they said, "You're not going to wait to get into the air force. You're in." So they marched me off down to Sydney Showground where the big barracks were. I had a medical and sooner or later went

05:30 off to Tamworth to begin my military training. From Tamworth to Bonegilla, the 1st Australian Signal Training Battalion. I did training there and headed for Adelaide River because Darwin was well and truly bombed in February '42, and they were believing that the Japanese were going to land in the Northern Territory. So they sent a crowd of us up to the Adelaide River and then on to

06:00 Winnellie outside Darwin. Later on we did a signal training course again there. They believed we hadn't learned enough down south. They wanted to teach us all over again.

Which division were you with?

No division at that stage. It was just training. But that became the 17, NTL of C Sigs [Northern Territory Line of Communication Signals]. I joined up there. Yes.

What does the LFC stand for?

17,

06:30 did I say LST? NTL of C, Northern Territory Line of Communication, of course. Northern Territory Line of Communication. Later it became 17 Line of Communication after another year or so. So I was sent back after training, back to Larrimah.

07:00 **Sorry. How long were you up there before you started this course?**

Oh we weren't up there more than perhaps a month, I suppose. Had Christmas at Adelaide River in 1942. Then after training I went down to Larrimah. The junction where the overland truck transport gave way to the train going North from Larrimah, really from Birdum in the old days but it went

07:30 from Larrimah for the army up to Darwin. So troops and provisions and ammunition and that sort of thing went on the train. After eighteen months up there they sent us south again to go on forty-two days leave and I spent twenty-one days of that leave up around Katoomba, because that was the thing to do in those days, to go to Katoomba because nobody had any money to

08:00 buy a car, and there was no petrol anyhow because petrol was rationed, so everyone if they had any spare time would to go Katoomba to the Homesdale or the Clarendon, a couple of others, the old Burlington for a week at a time. After that I was ready to go back, I thought, to the Northern Territory, it looked as though we'd go to. But I had a short stay in hospital, which I'll skip over.

08:30 I only spent a day in hospital and they said I wasn't very sick at all for something or other that I had. They heaved me out. I managed to get instead of one day leave from that venture, extra leave. I got four days extra leave, so that when I went back to LTD [Language Training Detachment] Marrickville to say I'd be ready

09:00 to go back to the Territory, the draft had gone. They had gone two days before. So they didn't know what to do with me. I was an odd bod so they sent me down to do some more training at Bonegilla, the 1st Australian Signal Training Battalion, but here we were learning some new procedure, procedures like shorthand where you have just letters meaning a group of words. For instance, QSA might mean, it was the new

09:30 'Q Signals from the Americans'. So we should have suspected that we were going to be working with them at that stage even. QSA might mean I have no more messages for you. QRU might mean 'signing off', and dozens and dozens of abbreviations like that. Well they weren't really abbreviations. They were just symbols. So stayed there then training until almost Christmas in

10:00 1945. No, it couldn't be. 1944. I can't remember much about the Christmas there. I remember the one in Larrimah. But the Christmas we had there and the previous one to that of course was Adelaide River. Anyhow just straight after Christmas, the 29th I think it was of December we were heading north again on a troop train up to Brisbane

10:30 and out to Yeerongpilly for the big army camp there. After Yeerongpilly we went out to what is now quite a little city, Logan City. In those days it was Logan Village on the muddy shallow Logan River. There were about half a dozen houses there in those days. So we went to a camp there that had been vacated by the Americans. We took over,

11:00 crowds of us, hundreds of us, and stayed there for a little while before going on north again to the Atherton Tablelands. We headed for Kairi, I did, I was a lonesome one that time because all the others had been split up and gone in all directions for reinforcements. I was heading for 12 Light Wireless, a little independent group, and they were camped with 7th Div [Division] Signals.

11:30 We were always working in with them but we were never part of them. We were an independent group. A top heavy little group because I suppose there would only be about fifteen of us. There was a lieutenant, two sergeants, three corporals, an instrument mechanic fellow, a couple of drivers for the jeeps and about five, I think, wireless operators.

What was your rank?

I was just one of the wireless operators.

12:00 So that was our little independent group. We could move off quickly and we could perform anything asked of us, they believed. We didn't know what we were going to have to do. So after months, about four months I suppose up on the Atherton Tablelands, we went down to the coast again. Down to Red Lynch. We went aboard the Jefferson Davis,

12:30 an American Liberty ship, all steel, steel decks and in the big jungle boots you'd skate on the decks when she heaved. We went across to stay the night in Port Moresby for safety because we were on our

own. We were quite a defenceless little ship loaded up with troops. And then on to Biak for another night. And then up to Morotai.

13:00 At Morotai we hung about not knowing what we were going to do. We couldn't understand why all our wireless sets hadn't arrived. We had everything else but no wireless sets. How were we going to work without our wireless sets? We had our Jeeps and all and the other equipment still. But the mystery was cleared up by about the beginning of June when

13:30 we discovered that we were going to Balikpapan for signallers to watch the seventh div going in at Balikpapan. Now about, our lieutenant was a fellow we called 'Ace'. I can't remember his other name because we only just called him Ace, and he was hardly any older than us and he wanted to be one of the boys. So did most officers at that stage

14:00 wanted to be on friendly terms, really friendly terms with all their men. So we group of about six of us then were taken aboard this American flagship to go to Balikpapan to lead the attack on the Japanese there. Across then past the Celebes, down to Wallis's line, down to

14:30 Balikpapan and on the 1st of July it was F Day. The first waves went in and it was our job was no longer taking Morse receptions from all across the ocean. Our job here was to listen to plain language, and pick up what was being said ashore so that it could be transferred to the ops [operations] room

15:00 and they could make the necessary adjustments on their outline of the land ashore. Moving different ones forward as they got our messages in. I imagine there would have been others bringing messages in as well. And all of the pips, all of the brass stood around and made the necessary adjustments every time a new message came through. Not easy this time because you'd have people talking flat out ashore.

15:30 You could always copy Morse code down easily as fast as anyone would send it but you couldn't always get every word that some excited young person was saying when they were attacking somewhere ashore. So anyhow that finished up. After three days the people in command said, "We think that they're all safely ashore. They are doing a wonderful job there." The Warsash, the American ship we were on,

16:00 is going back to Balikpapan. What am I saying? It's going back to Morotai. We're going to leave Balikpapan. So on the 4th of July then it was a big celebration on the ship. We were already under sail and they decided to initiate anybody who had come aboard since the trip up into the Philippines. Even all their young blokes who might have crossed the Equator several times already, as we

16:30 had done, getting to Morotai and then coming back down to Borneo. We'd already crossed but that didn't seem to make any difference. They said everybody who wasn't on board when we were in the Philippines, and they got a bit of a pounding up there too, they are for it. So they gave us these initiations. They went through this initiation ceremony. So after the initiation they made us so welcome again as they had done all

17:00 the way through. They had made us so welcome, all the things they had done to make our lives a happier place to be. Excuse me. So back to Morotai and one of the officers that was there on the Warsash had said that they thought they'd be able to use us again. By this time, of course, we were on the American

17:30 payroll. We had been consigned to them and we were ship's company.

Who were you with at the time, the Australians?

Only about six Australians I think altogether on the ship, but the rest were all Americans.

From the Light Wireless?

From the Light Wireless. The other groups split in halves and some went on the Westralia and some went on the Kanimbla and that took care of all of us in our little group. So back to Morotai,

18:00 and we were waiting thinking well sooner or later they are going to take us aboard again. We were still under American control there, camped beside the Liberator strip. Sooner or later we will be going to, we thought Singapore was going to be the next stop. The Americans that were camped just near us were very friendly. They offered to show us how to play softball. Well most of our fellows had never seen

18:30 a softball before and they brought out this, they said they would supply all the equipment. So they brought out one glove for the pitcher and one glove for the catcher and a ball and we had to make the bases with a stick on the ground. We decided we'd give them a run for softball. Well they just ran all over us of course. They were hitting the balls all around us and

19:00 when they sent us in to bat we got nothing. They went in and all had a dig and then they sent us in again and we still got nothing. So we sent them in again and one of them got a bit sick of pussy footing around with us, so he decided to show us how the Americans really hit a softball and he belted one as hard as he could, and I was fielding right in at short slip, short stop they called it,

19:30 and instead of letting it go I thought I'll show these buggers and I caught it. The next morning they X-rayed my hand down at the 2/5th Hospital and the metatarsal was snapped and out of place in my hand.

A silly thing to do.

You should have given them a game of cricket.

Yes. That would have shown them. Well I was in the 2/5th Hospital. At that stage I was writing to three young ladies and

20:00 they were wondering if I was going home. I didn't think I'd be linking up with any of them after the war and I began to wonder about that, what they expected of me when I got back. In the meantime our little group were going to go to, they weren't going home. Some were going to, we were going to Ambon, a little group of us. Another group was going back to Balikpapan,

20:30 and a third group was going, I just forget where, some other island up there. We were going to start up communications, something to do with their communications. So that was the setting. So I thought this is a good stage to write to the three girls and say, "I won't be coming home so I don't expect you to be waiting on the wharf if ever I get there." And so I finished that off under

21:00 the understanding that I'd be off to Ambon. But instead of that, after my hand was completely renovated again they came along, the old major, the doctor, and said, "We are trying to get as many fellows home as we can. I think we'll put a plaster back on your hand and we'll send you south," which they did. So it changed my life completely because instead of going to Ambon

21:30 I went home. We flew six hours I think it took to Darwin, and then we flew overnight and then came home on Mascot Airport. Kingsford Smith they used to call it in those days, Kingsford Smith Airport. So that was the beginning of a new life then, to be back in civilisation. Out to Concord Military Hospital, in those days it was,

22:00 and then out to Ingleburn where you went to recuperate if you had been sick. Then to Oatlands where the army had a set up on the golf course there, what had been the golf course. That was a little bit of a reward for years away because I think there was about two fellows there and about

22:30 about fifty AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]. So it was quite a change in our lifestyle there for a little while. Then back to Middle Head to assist in the orderly room then for the people being let out of the army. It was a case of first in, first out, so I was well down on the list for getting out because I had only come in in 1942, whereas the old fellows there had been in from say 1939 and

23:00 onwards. So after I'd got out of the army I did have a scholarship lined up from the teachers college, the New South Wales Teachers College. So when I came out of the army I finally joined up with that. I did a teachers college course for two years then at night after

23:30 working in the day as a teacher I went to the uni at night to get a degree. Years later I did another one through Armidale. So I became a teacher and both my wife and I were teachers but we still had that feeling that we'd like to get back to the country a little bit, so before we retired we bought land at Meroo Meadow, half way between Berry and

24:00 Nowra, New South Wales on the east coast, and we set up a little farm there. It is an area mainly of hobby farms and dairies. No shops or anything, but a pleasant lifestyle there. And first of all we took on Angora goats and that was a great interest because it was like belonging to an Australia wide club. We'd go either to sales or

24:30 to shows everywhere from Yass, Goulburn, Moss Vale, down the coast to Milton and up the coast to Albion Park and Berry. So we went all over the place to all these either sales or shows and it was a pleasant lifestyle until the

25:00 price of mohair dropped so much that we decided that we'd sell the goats off and sell the stud. So we went in more for cattle for a while. Just lately all we have left is a few sheep, which will go with the place when we travel on.

When did you get married, Wal?

We were married in 1949. Late 1949,

25:30 just as soon as I finished my teachers college course.

How many kids did you have?

We had five all together. One is deceased. One is going back to uni now at Orange. He has been overseas for about nine years to Kenya. He has been into agriculture there, showing them how, and he has decided to come home and take

26:00 up horticulture. He is doing another degree on sustainable agriculture now. I believe he will go off overseas again once he gets through with Orange. I've got a daughter in Nowra who is a lawyer or solicitor. Another one in Wollongong who's in the TAFE [Technical and Further Education] there, a director of studies or something. And another daughter in Sydney and she is married

26:30 to a developer. He develops units, buys up old places and renovates them and knocks them into flats,

that sort of thing. She's a schoolteacher as well. And I did have another fellow but he was a victim of the drugs and so he died. So up until the present that's about it.

27:00 **Have you got grand kids too?**

Oh yes, we have grand kids here. There are three girls here at Culburra and another, the daughter in Wollongong has a little girl. The daughter in Sydney that is married to the developer, they have three, yes, three children. One's just got back from Oxford. He got a scholarship to Oxford for two years. The other one's

27:30 sort of a psychiatrist idea. She interviews people who have been hurt in sport and tries to find out to what extent they are damaged for the firm who pays compensation. The other one's still doing the high school certificate this year. So that's mainly the grand children.

That's great. Thanks very much. That's a very good summary. We've got plenty of things to go back over now, and we will go back

28:00 **to Mungindi.**

To Mungindi.

And I know Mungindi a little bit. I was up there in February. It's not a bad little town.

Well you're one of the few people I've known who knows where Mungindi is.

I know where Mungindi is. I spent some time knocking around up that way, and it's a pretty interesting little place but it couldn't have been too big back when you grow up there?

No. No. When we got there, well, half of my ancestors were convicts and the other half were farming people anyway so

28:30 there was a drift up. In the convict days the governor, Governor Macquarie [Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales] especially, was very liberal in giving ex-convicts grants of land along the Hawkesbury. But if you went north by about 1960, still in 1960 there were huge bits of land up there available. My other grandfather, the Thompson side, I think he was shunted up there after his experience

29:00 with the outlaw, I can't think of his name. But they brought up one of his children when his companion died, the yellow woman. She was half Chinese and I think a little bit of Aborigine too. But she died, whereas my grandfather's mother was a midwife to the convict girls before. And they brought her,

29:30 my grandfather reckons that he just stumbled across them up in the mountains. They found where their cave was and the woman was dying and they brought her down to his mother's place and they produced the baby. Now it's not generally known that the baby survived. In fact I don't think everybody knows that there was supposed to be a baby, but she kept the baby stayed alive and she had ten of her own, but the baby became another Thompson. So

30:00 years and years later one of the grand daughters of that union, Thunderbolt [a well known bushranger prominent in the northern New South Wales and southern Queensland], Thunderbolt and his wife. A grand daughter of that first baby came to us in Mungindi and said, "I'm your cousin." We couldn't work out for a while who she could possibly be, but so he was there I think to get him away from the influence of Thunderbolt when he was only about fifteen or sixteen, up to his brother-in-law's cattle station on the Mooney.

30:30 So that's how he came to be in Queensland.

So that was your grandfather?

That was my grandfather. In about 1872 he would have gone to the gold diggings up on the Palmer River, he and his brother Charlie. Charlie had a few narrow escapes from the Aborigines too. But on this trip my grandfather had been with the Aborigines long enough to know the sign language. And even though they spoke different dialects all the way

31:00 up through Queensland he was able to put on a friendly face to all the Aborigine tribes they met. They came back from the diggings pretty wealthy men. They set up a pub and a string of houses and a shop. We had a little place ourselves, my Dad.

31:30 And then away to school.

Was your dad in the First World War?

No. He was a farmer at the time running his own place so there was nobody to take over from him.

It was all cattle up that way then?

We had sheep. Before that time my grandfather was on two different cattle runs, in his youth. Not only in his youth but when he was a young man, up till when he was about twenty-two and he want up to the gold fields. But we

32:00 only, sheep were our main sauce of income. And we had some hard times. We went on the long paddock at one stage when it had been drought for about two years. We were cutting scrub, lopping trees that would grow again of course, but lopping the branches so the sheep would have something to eat. When we were getting very desperate it rained further north on an uncle's property and he said,

32:30 "Bring your sheep up here." So we went on the long paddock up to him.

How many in your family as you were growing up?

In my family, two girls and two boys.

So the whole lot of you went on the road?

No. Only my Dad and I. So we went north and when the drought was over we came south. And as luck would have it one of these things where your life changes one way or the other,

33:00 my Dad's best bale of wool topped the Sydney market at twenty-three pence three farthings and he said, "I can afford to send you away to school now." So that's how I came to go down to Sydney to go to Hurlstone.

When you were growing up in Mungindi were you at school or were you mainly helping to run the farm?

I was at school for six years or five years really because I jumped a class. But

33:30 when I turned eleven I had to leave sixth class. I'd left sixth class. So that meant I was too young to leave school legally but there was no real schooling for me. So I went along to the public for two years and we filled in the time there supposed to be doing years seven and eight but really we just copied things out of text books to fill in the time and in between I'd go and help

34:00 my Dad with the scrub cutting.

It is a little bit unusual that your father wanted to send you away. He would have possibly considered

He couldn't have afforded it at that stage. We were in the middle of a drought.

Did you not want to stay and help our on the farm and become a

Yes, yes, but once it rained and he everything was fine they said, "You're off to go to Sydney and go to Hurlstone.

Can you tell us a little bit more about your home out there?

At Mungindi?

Yes.

Well we lived on the Queensland side as I said before,

34:30 and our property had about two mile of the Barwon River on the Queensland side. And two of our blocks had been old soldier settlement blocks from World War I. Now each of those blocks, they'd only be a square mile. Six hundred and forty acres. Nobody could possibly make a living on six hundred and forty acres up there in that climate. Yet, these two fellows had tried

35:00 and been sold up and then my grandfather bought them up after the bank sold them up. It was added to our place. We had a little weir to the north of us. It ran through the back of our property. And each of those main paddocks had what you'd call a dam and for water from rain it used to fill up and the sheep would drink it from the dam. When things

35:30 got really bad the dams all dried up and the sheep were getting bogged in the mud and we had to bring them in, every second day I think it was, we had to bring them in from those back paddocks to the river to let them get a drink otherwise they'd have all died. Things were really tough up there at that stage. You'd wonder however the Department of whatever decided that a

36:00 square mile was big enough for a soldier settler to live on.

What did you enjoy most about growing up in Mungindi?

Well it was a free and easy life. The kids were, nobody had much. We went to school bare-footed and with big patches in the seats of our pants because they were always handed down from big brother to little brother or from cousin to cousin.

36:30 It was so free that you could swim on the way going home. We lived out of town but you could walk home and you'd have a swim in the river as you went. So it was a very easy laid back life.

Did you like your horses or?

Oh yes. I liked my horses. I got a, I had one particular

37:00 evil one that used to throw me at the drop of a hat. I couldn't hold him. He'd been a trotter. His mouth was so hard from the reigns from being a trotter that I couldn't hold him when he was about eight years old. He threw me several times and once going by he lashed out and kicked the pony I was riding and me and they put me in hospital to get it stitched up for a while. But we did like our horses but most of them

37:30 were pleasant creatures, and our cows. I learned to swim in a hurry. First of all when I was about six I suppose we went up to milk the cows, up in the old cow yards, and I was playing around on a tree that hung out over the water. The erosion had washed

38:00 all the soil away on one side of it. I crashed down in and was able to grasp a root and work my way around the exposed roots to get back to the bank. Another time, well I didn't really learn to swim I suppose. I nearly learned to swim another time when something similar had happened. I was showing off I guess and there were oranges floating by. I got out of my depth trying

38:30 to collect some of these oranges and got swirled around the back of a little island, and once more hanging on to a root of a tree to survive. So you get some narrow escapes at times. But all these turning points in your life. I was watching a movie on an American ship about "Shane", the cowboy, the gun-slinger in America, and the little boy was watching this

39:00 rider, loan rider come towards him and the loan rider pulled up at the fork in their road deciding whether he'd come their way towards their farm or go the other track going north. He stopped there for a while and rolled a cigarette apparently and while he thought about it. Then he came there way. Well, life is full of these little changes of mind or variations where you go one way

39:30 or the other, and so often you do it without thinking.

Was there a moment, we might just stop there.

Alright.

I'll go on but I might just change the tape.

Tape 2

00:47 **The one that you can recall from that time?**

No, I must

Life's turning points. What was one of them in particular in Mungindi?

01:00 No, I can't think what I had in mind there. But perhaps I could, you were talking about our entertainment, that sort of thing, or our hobbies. The big thing in the year was when it came Easter time. The kids would be told they could have half a holiday in the afternoon, and everybody, well just everybody who could manage to

01:30 go went fishing up and down the river to provide fish for Good Friday. There was always tons of fish that was caught, Murray Cod, Yellow Belly, catfish, and you would go out all night so it was a great adventure for the kids. The kids would have a blanket or an overcoat and the dads would take a bottle of something to keep them warm, and you'd be out on the river

02:00 with set lines and it was a great entertainment. I remember one night a fellow, Lexi, Alex or Alexis, anyway Alexi someone or other was singing this song, "I'm going back to that dear old shack where I spent many day by the sea," and then he'd yodel.

02:30 After he had done this half a dozen times somebody further down the river would shout out, "Why don't you go tonight, Lex?" And that shut him up. But next morning, we kids supplied the bait. In our lagoon was tons of fresh water mussels. So you'd walk in there in your bare feet until you found the mussels and you'd get them out of the mud. They were great bait, and another bait of course was the yabbies, crayfish. You caught them

03:00 on a string with a little bit of meat on the end of it. And another was shrimp that you caught in a kerosene bucket with holes in it and a bit of rotten meat or old bones in it. You put it down in the water and lifted it up suddenly after about half an hour and you were sure to have lots of these little shrimps. They were like prawn only they had little nippers on them. Now that was one of the things to look forward to each year, to be going fishing

03:30 at Easter time.

What was your mum like?

A city girl really. Her dad had been a, what do you call it? Makes saddles. A saddler. Her dad was a saddler and he travelled all through the north west and up into Queensland with his wagon going from

farm to farm fixing up their bridles and all their

04:00 harness equipment and their saddles. So even though that was his life I suppose he came back to Sydney and then sometimes the family went with him in his wagon. But she still wanted to get back to the city always, which in the end she did when in the war years my Dad got TB [Tuberculosis]. Well, he had it before that. He got it, two of the Aborigine girls,

04:30 young Alice and Clara, they both died of TB when they were only very young women and they used to be his nursemaids when he was very small, when he was a baby. He was quite in with the Aborigines. They didn't own the cattle run but they were managing it and when he was a baby the story was that

05:00 the girls were carrying him around, down to the tribe on the river, the Mooney. If he was starting to make a fuss they'd take him to one of the old Lubras that was nursing a baby and give him a suck to make him happy. So they were very close to the aborigines. There were all sorts of stories of his early days and things he saw as a part, because he felt part of them and in with them. The same as my grandfather

05:30 could go all through Queensland knowing the sign language.

What was your contact with Aborigines at Mungindi?

Only at school. I used to walk to school with a couple of kids every morning who came. When we went across to the New South Wales school, Queensland only went to sixth class, but these two Aborigine boys and I used to meet at the bridge and go across into New South Wales together and go to school together. So we were quite friendly.

06:00 One of them has, I think he has died lately. He was something to do with the Mungindi RSL [Returned and Services League], and his brother. They were both prisoners of war in Changi. They were very, they weren't pure Aborigines but they were black. They were happy kids. And

What

06:30 **was your big step out of Mungindi?**

The big step was when I joined, let's see. When I went away to school I went back for holiday time. We always had a train pass to go back for every holiday. But we never, my Dad got sick before I went to, before I had finished at Hurlstone. He went to Boddington up in the

07:00 mountains to recuperate and the family moved up into town. Then they went to Sydney for a holiday and a whole row of our houses and our shop on the Queensland side was burned. It was all weatherboard of course and it was old. It would be forty or fifty years old, and it just went up, puffed. The whole street was gone. So we had

07:30 no house to go back to because our property down the river, out of town, had been let while Dad was in hospital. So there was no reason to go back any more. So as I finished up high school we went straight into the army and I got a call up and that was it. We didn't go back.

Can you recall for us the time you were first going to Sydney and seeing the big smoke for the first time?

08:00 The first time I went to Sydney I would have been four years old. I can remember standing at Central Station, down on the footpath where the busses go along, and looking up and my Grandmother said, "That's one of the new trains that goes into a tunnel up there like a rabbit." It was a new electric train that had just come onto the market. That would have been 1927.

08:30 We went down to Paddy's Market and my grandmother was shouting watermelon. And the strange thing about this stall was that there was a fellow there with golden hair running this little watermelon stand and he was slicing up this watermelon and you'd pay him to give you a piece. But the thing was that both his arms were cut off below the elbow.

09:00 He was the first World War I victim I'd seen that I can remember, but he was running a stall in Paddy's Market in those days.

What did you know of the First World War as a young man?

Songs mainly. Even though it was six or seven years that I could remember, where my memory goes, after the war I can still remember the songs that they sung. Like my mother used to sing a song to my

09:30 baby brother about poor little Baby Bunting. Have you heard that one?

No. Tell us that one.

"Poor little Baby Bunting, mothers darling, four years old, sat on his rocking horsie like a little soldier brave and bold. Mama and Baby sweetheart, a pretty little blue-eyed miss, hear him say, 'I'm off to battle," and mother says goodbye with tender kiss. Captain Baby Bunting of the rocking horse brigade,

10:00 at home your mother's waiting with a pretty little witty blue eyed maid. Little Soldier when it's over

may your glory never fade. From Captain Baby Bunting of the rocking horse brigade years were not long in passing, duty called, he marched away. Sadly they read the war news telling how he's saved the day. Tramp, tramp the troops returning,

10:30 loving eyes with tears near blind, see a horse without a rider. Who's the missing hero left behind? Captain Baby Bunting of the rocking horse brigade, at home your mother's waiting and the pretty little witty blue eyed maid. Little Soldier, now it's over may your glory never fade. Captain Baby Bunting of the rocking horse brigade." And songs like that that they used to sing still

11:00 when I was a little fellow.

That's great. What about your, what sort of young fellow were you?

A real rogue, a real urchin. It worked out that my grandmother was living in town. My grandfather died when I was only about two. My grandmother was living on her own and needed support and I used to spend some of my

11:30 time sleeping at night up at her place and most of my time back at Bonnie Doon , our little property. So they would never know where I was through the day or on holiday time. I could be with my grandmother or I could be at home. But neither of them would be sure where I was so I could get into quite a lot of mischief and get around with the great rogues. Also

12:00 there was a lot of fighting in those days among kids. Some big kid would line another little kid up at school and say, "That bloke over there reckons he can do you." And he's say, "Yeah?" "Yeah. He reckons he could take you easily." If the kid had any sense he would tell the big fellow to go to buggery but most times it would end up in a brawl, in a fight after school. This would often happen. So we were suckers for these big fellows who wanted to see a bit of entertainment.

12:30 **How well could you look after yourself?**

Well pretty well I thought but this carried over into the army. We did a lot of boxing at Hurlstone. As well as, like our sports were rugby union in the winter and cricket in the summer. We played all the main schools, Sydney High, Canterbury High, Parramatta High. All these schools that

13:00 brought in their present day teams I suppose. This was the basis of them. North Sydney High. As well as that we did a lot of boxing in the gym on weekends when there was nothing else to do. It carried over into the army. I had the reputation that I could fight and I couldn't. I could box but I didn't have a punch. So if anybody had taken me on seriously at times then they'd have had a win I'm sure.

13:30 **You had to use your wits as well?**

Yep. Oh yeah.

Did you miss Mungindi? How badly did you miss Mungindi?

No, because going straight from school into the army

I was thinking when you first came from Mungindi to go to boarding school?

Oh yes. I missed it at first. But you did get more or less isolated with going away like that because the old kids who you knocked, the rough and ready ones, they didn't know how

14:00 to take you at that stage because you were so different with a school blazer on when you came home for holidays. They thought God, what's this come up?

Did you enjoy school?

Oh yeah. Every minute of it.

What did you enjoy most about school?

All the sport. We went away to one of those other schools every second week, second Wednesday, and the other Wednesday they came to us. So there was sport all the year round and you could go into Sydney too on the weekend. You could get a

14:30 pass to go to Sydney to go to a movie or to the Glacierium. It's gone now but in those days you could go ice-skating. And the thing was that you went as a bunch and this same carried over into the army, that everything you did was done as a group, and you had this, I mean you'd have great friends in your tent for a couple of months and they'd move

15:00 out and no sooner had they moved out somebody new would move in and you were great friends with them in five minutes. It's ready acceptance always.

Were you in the cadets at all?

No. I didn't go in the cadets. They were on at my time but I don't know why. I just was, some of my mates were in the cadets.

What were you more interested in?

Oh, we used to swim. We used to catch

15:30 fish. Swim in the nuddy of course in those parts. There was a creek near the school where you could go swimming in the water hole there. And over to the river. The, it runs through Liverpool. I can't think of the name of it now but you could swim there and I'd sooner go swimming than be marching.

Who was the most influential person in your life when you were away in Sydney away from home at

16:00 **boarding school?**

Influential? No, that's a hard one to take on. I can't think of

Teachers, your grandmother, your friends at school?

Yes. You always had friends. You always went everywhere with them. I suppose the grandmother would have been a big influence too.

16:30 I used to go there for weekends from school and stay. A cousin there down from the bush used to stay there so that he could go to the doctor over in Sydney.

Did you have a developing interest in literature at the time? You obviously have a very good memory for

17:00 **ballads, bush ballads and things like that?**

Not till I was aboard the Warsash and you'd spend hours on duty but you wouldn't be writing all the time. On the trip from Morotai to Balikpapan you'd be listening. You weren't able to reply to signals coming in. It was silent, like on a silent number where

17:30 we'd be writing down Morse code and somebody way away in Leyte, say, would be answering whoever was sending it and saying, "Repeat such and such a line". But you couldn't reply. Radio silence. You had to be silent. The same when the actual Balikpapan was on. We didn't send any messages out as we were

18:00 accustomed to do at Larrimah. We only listened and wrote everything down and handed it in to the ops room to be acted upon. So I'm getting off the track aren't I?

I mean obviously you must have a good memory for lines and things like that?

Oh yes.

I was wondering how that developed at school? How you got

Yes. I wrote a few things for the school magazine,

18:30 a few short stories and poetry. But all the years, that's what I was saying. On the way to Balikpapan then the Americans made us so welcome we had full run of their library. I don't know whether the ordinary seamen had a go or not. We could go to their library any time and get books out and you might be sitting for half an hour before you heard your call sign coming over the air. So you had lots of time to read and we

19:00 read. I did read lots of books during that period. "The Plateau of Parmea" was one, and a whole string of them I've got written down there somewhere that I was able to get from, but the Americans, I'm drifting now, aren't I? But the Americans made us so welcome right from the very start.

19:30 I suppose we were a rare sort of creature to them because they hadn't seen any Australians up to that point on the ship. And they'd, for instance we had full use of their PX [American canteen unit]. They did all of our washing for us. Our army socks would come back like booties after they had been through their washing machines because army socks were wool. They would shrink. But the thought was there. And the food,

20:00 God, the food on that ship, and us poor fellows were ashore eating bully beef and "goldfish" and artificial egg and here were these fellows with a, like a cafeteria it was, down below. All the food you could imagine. Ham and beef and fish and every kind of tinned vegetable that we hadn't even seen in

20:30 Australia at the time. Even olives, the first time I had seen olives. And the great cooks, American cooks, Negroes with these big tall white hats and white clothing on, and giving cheek. Happy, cheeky fellows. They gave us a time.

It must have been pretty good after all that bully beef and rationing in Australia?

It was amazing food. Amazing.

Well,

21:00 **as you were growing up did you have a strong nationalist urge? How aware were you of being**

part of the British Empire?

Yes. My grandmother was full-blooded Scottish. Even though she was born in Australia both her parents were Scottish. They had come via Canada in the Hudson Bay Company and settled up near Muswellbrook I think they went first and they

21:30 grew, but they were very strong, very pro-British. And my grandfather's grandfather had been a cavalryman at Waterloo before he came to Australia. So they were pretty pro-British. There was a strong feeling there. We've grown a bit away from it these days of course.

Did you feel British or did you feel Australian when you were growing up?

22:00 I felt Australian. But we still had all these poems at school about the 'Mother Country' and Britain and we still thought they were pretty good.

Any in particular that stick in your mind?

Yes. "Far far away across the sea a grand old island lies, Its seas they say are blue and green and blue and grey its skies.

22:30 There somebody lived and something folk, and men who came from Rome. Grandfather lived there lone ago. Grandfather called it home," and it finishes up, "So I call it home". So there were patriotic songs and poems in the schools. Of course on Empire Day was a big day when you learned a different song from each of the British companies. There's be the from Wales, "Men of Harlic, say.

23:00 There'd be another one from Ireland. I don't know whether the Irish got a look in there. I suppose they did. And the British poems themselves, and the Scottish poems or songs rather. On Empire Day you all got up and sang all these songs and the ladies in each town put on a picnic for lunchtime and all the kids went and had sports and this big spread for lunch

23:30 which was something to look forward to in those days when many people were on the dole. On the dole then was not money. It was just a voucher to get food so they really looked forward to these spreads.

What was your impression of it growing up in the Depression?

Well we always had mutton. We always had our own sheep which Dad killed whenever we needed them. We grew some of our own vegetables.

24:00 So we didn't do too badly. But I know other kids at school, kids would come with big thick slices of bread with no butter on and perhaps apple in it as a filling, and that's all they'd have for their lunch. Everybody went bare-footed in summer especially. And no boots and big patches in their pants where

24:30 somebody had handed them on to them. So things were hard, very difficult. But as I say we were relatively well off so we didn't feel too bad about it, even though I don't know what we owed the bank. The Bank of New South Wales was up there in those days and every now and again my Dad would be off to see the bank manager about their credit I suppose, paying off the place. But we didn't do too badly in the Depression.

25:00 **How aware were you of the Anzac tradition and how did you see it, practise, going to?**

No. I can't remember Anzac Day up there. I don't know whether they stressed Anzac Day.

What about when you were at school in Sydney?

Oh yes. They were very patriotic there. They would all have their songs and their speeches for Anzac Day.

Did you ever get along to a dawn service?

25:30 Not in Sydney. No. I have out here at Greenwell Point. They have one each year.

But as you were growing up?

No. Not as I was growing up. No.

How happy were you to leave school, or did you want to go on in school?

I was raring to get into the army or into the air force, better still. I was really waiting for school to, we just sailed through our last year and our exams

26:00 without a thought. It didn't matter a bit. We were going into the air force.

You were also an apprentice though, or you were working in a glass factory? Is that right?

I was just for about a few months while we were waiting for our call up. I was an invoice clerk. I used to compare the bills that they sent, Crown Crystal Glass, with the docket from down below where they had been delivered.

26:30 So the two had to match. Whatever they had charged us for it had to match with the bill of what had

come into the glass works. So that was a simple job. I used to put the two together and stamp it and sign it to say they'd arrived and they'd pay the bills.

A hypothetical question, if the war hadn't come along and been there what were you planning to do when you left school?

Well, I suppose with the scholarship

27:00 waiting there, see, knowing that we had joined the air force, the teachers college said that they wouldn't take us until after the war. But I was a bit lucky when you think of it not to have joined the air force in the long run because at least three of those fellows who went in to join up when we were in fifth form, three of them were shot down over Germany before I'd even finished my

27:30 rookie training. So it was a short and a happy life in the air force in those times.

The war interrupted your aspirations to become a teacher. Where did that desire to be a teacher come from, do you think?

Oh, I don't know. I think my mother stressed that more than anybody because after years up there in the north west and having droughts and hard

28:00 times I think she wanted to get me out of the country life. To get me with something definite, some job where I'd be paid definitely rather than depending on the wool clip going or the fat lambs going down to Sydney to market. Something where you could be certain that you wouldn't be wanting. So she wanted me trained in something. I applied for a teachers scholarship and

28:30 got it, and that was waiting there. But not till after the war, they said when we all joined up.

Why did you want to join the air force?

It was glamorous. It was the thing. It was the Blue Orchids and everybody wanted to be in the air force. Especially anybody who had had schooling up till the leaving certificate. They all thought they were a little bit better than the average person. Just being

29:00 in the army wasn't quite as romantic and glamorous as being in the air force. So that was their aspiration.

Can you tell us about the time that you heard that war was declared?

No, not the actual time. I remember what happened, that Hitler invaded Poland and the story was that he'd

29:30 shot some of the Poles on the frontier and dressed them in German uniforms and then he accused Poland of shooting down his soldiers and said, "What could they expect but to be invaded?" That was the story at the time.

But at the time how much were you aware that this might change your life?

30:00 No. You didn't sort of worry about those things. Here was life ahead. Good times with the air force and the other fellows and be trained. This was the thing to do, and there was a great deal of pressure there on the community that this was the thing you must do. I can remember going to the pictures. A group of us used to go to the pictures in Liverpool from school each Saturday

30:30 and we were coming out of the pictures there one day and up comes this old bag and she hands one of the boys a white feather, which of course was the signal of cowardice in the First World War. And he looked at the white feather and laughed. He said, "What's she doing this for?" He was only fifteen years old, that boy, and here's this old hag accusing him of being

31:00 afraid of going to war. So there was a lot of pressure from what the community expected and of course once the Japanese bombed Darwin the pressure was really on then. I think that's the reason why the old major wouldn't let me swap back to the air force because the pressure was there. They knew that the Japs, well they thought that the Japanese would invade

31:30 any time, and they weren't going to let anybody start training all over again. It was imperative that they get as many trained as possible, ready for it.

Can we just stop there for a sec? Did you have any older friends of relatives who joined up early on before you did in the war?

Not really

32:00 because apart from the friends at school, see I was sort of more isolated in my later years of high school. I was more isolated, especially when we didn't go home to Mungindi any more. I was isolated then in the city. But lots of fellows there that we knocked around with for months there, trips to the Glacierium for skating or over to Harbord for weekends

32:30 for a couple of shandies and into the surf. It was the best little surfing beach along that side of the coast there at Harbord. There was a lot of things to do. Go to the wrestling at Leichhardt, Chief Little Wolf

with his American strain. He was from America of course, Chief Little Wolf. His specialty was the Indian Death Lock where

33:00 he would have one foot behind the other on the adversary and knock him flat on his back. He'd have him at his mercy with this death lock, just the intertwining of the legs. There was just no way out of it once he had them. There's Pat Meehan, the big wrestler. He was always the good guy. And they always had to have a good guy and a bad guy for the wrestling at Leichhardt Stadium.

Was that

33:30 **real wrestling? What kind of wrestling was that?**

No. I think it was a put up job. I remember one night they threw the villain. The other fellow picked him up and threw him right out of the ring and he landed just in front of the close seats, and I think it was Pat Meehan who picked him up and thrown him out, and he was the nasty guy for that night. And Pat Meehan and Mother hopped up

34:00 with her umbrella and she beat the fellow across the back with her umbrella all the way until he got back in the ring. He didn't even look around. He didn't notice it. It was all good fun. Some blond woman would scream out, "Get him by the Christmas hold." It's a not very elegant things the women would come out with. So it was a pretty rough lot that went there but it was great fun even if you thought it was going to be a put up job.

34:30 You didn't mind that.

Where was that held in Leichhardt?

At Leichhardt Stadium. I don't think it's there anymore. It's probably a block of flats or something these days.

The West's Tigers play there, don't they? Is it the same Leichhardt Oval?

I don't know. It wasn't an oval there in those days I don't think. It was just this huge building with wooden platforms all around that you sat on. The ringside seats were better. They were decent seats.

35:00 The rest were just platforms. So it was a great entertainment for Saturday nights.

Was that a venue just for the wrestling?

Just for the wrestling. Yes.

Can you tell me a bit, you mentioned the Glacierium but that's not their anymore either? Can you tell us about that?

No. That's gone. Yeah. The attraction of the Glacierium was that we'd go as a group from school and there'd be all sorts of older young ladies who

35:30 could skate beautifully and they'd always come and pick you up and take you around and make sure you didn't keep falling over. It had an attraction there for meeting people. None of us could skate very well but it was a good days outing just the same.

Can you explain the set up there to someone who doesn't know about it?

Yes. You could hire your boots. Go in and

36:00 hire your boots, hire their boots rather. And as well as getting on the edge and hanging on or being assisted by some young lady, they'd have speed times when only the really good skaters would get on and there'd be racing around at a hundred miles an hour. So in that case the slow learners would just keep out of the way. Just stay in their seats

36:30 while that went on. I didn't see any ice hockey there. Not like the American style, which is pretty rough. But I suppose when the ordinary people weren't there there would be ice hockey matches there. You know, through the week they'd be needing to make use of it. Not only through the weekend. But we'd only be there on weekends.

Where was it exactly? Can you describe it?

It was back towards Broadway. You know Sydney? Well,

37:00 if you go down towards Broadway, off Broadway somewhere there.

Not far from Central Station?

Not far from Central. You could walk easily from Central Station.

Did you go dancing or other things like that at the time?

Yes, at the time in those few months while I was waiting to be called up. I went to a Summer Hill dancing place where

37:30 just a few ladies would get you up and teach you a step and then they'd get one of the young ladies who was also learning and they'd put the two together and make a match out of it. So that was quite a pleasant occupation.

How were you with the ladies?

A little bit stand-offish because we were so isolated at Hurlstone from them,

38:00 all boys. Hurlstone now is coeducational. Girls board there now too. In those days it was all fellows so you didn't see much of the ladies, only at the pictures at Liverpool on the weekend you usually sat with some of the girls, etcetera. There was one very beautiful girl learning to dance at the same time as I was and I

38:30 noticed that the old ladies conducting it, after they'd given me a walk around or a waltz around they kept on putting us back together as though they thought they were making a match. And before I got around to ever asking her to go out to a movie or to come to the beach with us on a weekend, I was going to work one Monday morning and there she was still in a school uniform.

39:00 Now I'd left school about three months. But I thought I couldn't be going out with a girl who was still wearing a school uniform. That's crazy. Thinking about it later, I thought why, this doesn't make sense. I thought I had been liberated from school and here I was dancing with a schoolgirl.

You were waiting to be called up at this stage. Can you explain the process through which you joined the air force,

39:30 **or attempted to?**

Yeah. We went down to the corner of Palmer and Plunket Streets, down around the Quay [Circular Quay], not the Quay but round towards Woolloomooloo somewhere, and we were put through out paces. Stripped down to underpants and all sorts of tests. Then the final promise that it we go back to school and finish the final year they'd call us up early in the New Year.

40:00 So we left, except that, as I said before, I was droob enough to tell them I had a slipping right shoulder and so I was cut out of aircrew possibilities.

Let's stop there to change the tape.

Tape 3

00:35 **Can you tell us a bit more detail about the tests, the medical tests that you had to do when you went down to Woolloomooloo?**

Well they would have taken blood pressure of course, and I don't know whether they gave us any exercises to

01:00 carry out. They said we were very fit. No. I can't remember now just what went on.

What did they do when you told them about your shoulder?

They immediately started to press and they were pushing their fingers up under there, and then after a while they said that I wouldn't be accepted as

01:30 aircrew, that I'd be called up as training group five, which I got later on when I was up at Tamworth training for the army.

What was your reaction to that news?

Well, I wasn't happy at all because I had set my mind on being with a lot of our other fellows in training for the air force. I mean it was quite pleasant company in Tamworth, but just the same I'd set my mind on being in the air force. It

02:00 was the glamour show of the time.

At about that time though the army was increasing its presence in Australia?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Can you tell us about the atmosphere in the country around 1942 when the Japanese came into the war?

There was panic. People were selling or moving out of all over Bondi way for instance. They were vacating flats and houses there for fear that there was going to be an attack there.

02:30 I think it must have been when I had a weekend leave from Tamworth they had an American or a Japanese torpedo, a little boat, a one-man torpedo on the Quay at Sydney Harbour. It had tried to blow up an American ship in the harbour but had missed it and had blown up a ferry instead.

03:00 It had come in under the net. They had a net across the Harbour to stop this sort of thing in case a submarine tried to get in. There were a lot of American ships in the Harbour at the time and our ships too. And they had a net across but there was a gap in the net, and this little one-man submarine had come in as a ferry

03:30 was coming from Manly to Sydney. It had come in underneath the ferry and found its way in that way. Then it tried to blow up an American ship and missed and blew up the ferry. But they had it on the wharf there. I don't know how they blew it up. It must have been a depth charge or something that they'd put in because it was ripped open and they had it lying on the wharf for people just to go and see.

What did it look like?

Well, it was

04:00 like an extra large bullet, you might say in shape, and it was only big enough for one man to fit inside it and guide it. He would have been like the Kamikaze pilots that they found up in the Philippines, and these poor fellows who are prepared to risk their lives today. Not risk their lives, kill themselves because they are Muslims and they believe that they are in the right.

04:30 It would have been the same thing there. It was certain death to blow yourself up inside one of those. The people were worried. All the way along the beaches there were barbed wire entanglements. Even, we had a little holiday place that I built, around not far from here, around on the river. There were the remains of old barbed wire entanglements there in case the

05:00 Japanese tried to come up the river and then land. And on the beaches you'd have to go through a barbed wire maze to get to the water because they were expecting attacks any time. But why they'd attack down here when there's be hundreds of miles of coast where they could attack unhindered I don't know. But that was the theory, stop them getting into the city.

05:30 But they were all certain it would come. There was one report I heard later, much later, not while the war was on but after, that the Thai people were invited or asked or pressured by the Japanese to assist with an attack on Australia. The people in Thailand said no but they'd help them if they wanted to attack the British in India.

06:00 But they would not help them attack Australia because it had always had good relations with the Thai people. But that was after the war that that came out in a report. But when I was at Larrimah for instance you'd see lots of plain languages going through, and there was a "sit rep". It might have only been a monthly turn out but it was a summing up of all the action that had taken place

06:30 around Darwin and off the coast there of all the numbers of ships that had been sunk and the numbers of planes that had been shot down there. A "sit rep", a situation report. So you'd be in touch with that as you handed it on. Our line there, of course, ran from Alice Springs all the way to Adelaide River. So you had all those stations, Banka Banka and Elliott, Larrimah, Mataranka,

07:00 Pine Creek, Ninimar I think, and then Adelaide River. So you were all on one line and you were sending Morse code in your turn. You had to wait for your turn unless it was a priority message. You had to wait your turn to get your messages away.

What was the situation in Darwin when you joined the army?

The situation was that it had already been blown in February 1942.

07:30 The main damage had been done. When we first went in to have a look at what was left there were three banks on three corners and they were blown, all shattered and blown to pieces. No roofs on any of them. You could walk through and look up and you'd see the clouds floating over you. And there was a

08:00 call box, a phone box nearby and it was just covered in bullet holes. The hotel over where the walls were all cracked, on the wall of the hotel was written, "Women wanted. No experience necessary." And in the toilet there was a little rhyme, "Some come here to write their wit.

08:30 Some come here to have a sit. But I came here the truth I'll tell, I came here from work to have a spell." So all sorts of things like that would be written up. Further along was the old picture show in Darwin. It was shattered, literature all over the floor, piles of, you'd be looking in the banks, you'd look through thinking you might find a cheque or two but you'd realise a thousand other fellows had already gone through the remains

09:00 and there was nothing left of any value. There was, I mentioned before, a great bomb hole in the main street, and there was also a mangy donkey walking around the main street looking for something to eat. But the fellows out of town up there, I'm getting off the track now.

We'll talk about Darwin now and then we'll go back and fill in the gaps.

The fellows out of town, originally they had been in Larrakeyah Barracks. That was the signallers' headquarters.

09:30 With the bombing they'd taken up everything and moved down to Adelaide River so that became our NT, Northern Territory line of communication headquarters. But the fellows that were there, left in the sig office there, they slept in houses that hadn't been destroyed by the bombing, out of town, and they had all sorts of comforts, all sorts of good beds to sleep on and mattresses and

10:00 sheets and blankets because the people who had been seeing the here and there with the bombing going on, they just left everything behind and had gone for their lives. So these fellows lived in comfort. Also all their houses were fibro and corrugated iron rooves, and around the bottom, there were cement floors, around the bottom between

10:30 the bottom of the wall and the floor was an air vent covered with gorse all the way around to let the fresh air get in to keep them cool at night. But they did live in comfort. We couldn't get over it because we had been used to living in tents.

What were you doing when you arrived? What were you there for and where did you come from?

At that time

11:00 we were at a sig school. They thought that we hadn't learned enough down south in all the months that we had been training so they'd give us a bit more training before they, see, fellows had been up there two years and more and they were just waiting to go home on leave. So we were well received by the people who were there.

11:30 Out at Winnellie where we were there were still regular raids but they weren't after us. They were after the airstrips at Gorrie and Fenton Field. They used to get bombed regularly and we'd only catch the shrapnel from that. What amazed us was the way the

12:00 radar people with their searchlights could pick up the planes. Bombers would be coming in and there'd be just one searchlight that would flash straight onto a plane, pick him up straight away. And as soon as that one searchlight picked him up they'd crisscross from all directions and pin him, and then the ack-ack would take up and then this barrage would go up. But it was so skilful we always thought,

12:30 whoever they were running those lights, how the first bloke picked them up in no time. There was a raid there, about my second raid there was on the 28th of January 1942. I always remember that because I just turned twenty that day. So it was a birthday to remember. But they did get

Can you describe that raid for us? What did you see and where?

We only would see the

13:00 planes, and they would be tiny little planes. They would be so high up that the old timers reckoned that the only reason the ack-ack went after them was to make them stay high so they couldn't bomb accurately. But they'd be like tiny silver little planes in formation, and then the searchlight would take to them and the ack-ack would come up and just cover the air with these puffs and explosions. It would pass on and then

13:30 we'd have to dive for cover as all the shrapnel fell all around us.

What does the ack-ack firing look like from the ground?

I said it. Can I read something?

Yeah, if you've got a description.

I wrote this one sometime after.

This is a poem that you've written about it?

This is a poem about my first raid. Yes.

14:00 **Describing your raid in Darwin?**

Yeah. Sorry. It's called "Darwin Knights" with a K for the knights. "The full moon was rising and all in rare beauty a flight of Jap bombers came in from the sea. As I strolled back and forth on my first picket duty aware of the trench that was nearest to me.

14:30 It was dark as the haunt of day dodging night owl, but it hadn't the slightest attraction for me. Besides there were mozzies that called in a low growl, "Come this way tired stranger if you seek safety." I paused in my stride as I sized up the Nippos, around whom ack-ack burst in red bubbles of glee and I scoffed loathed mozzies, we take it, we Aussies. 'Twas then the flack rained like hail around me.

15:00 One leap and I lay where the flack mightn't fret me, the mozzies [mosquitos] caroused like a hoar on the spree. A shrap passed me by but those 'squitos near ate me, and thus passed my first raid in North Territory." But they did get Winnellie, where we were, six months later. They were a line of corrugated iron sheds and they blasted it right off the face of the map in, I think it was June that year.

15:30 So they came back for it.

Was it a frightening experience? Can you describe what you felt like?

No. It was exciting, sort of. Just excitement. All those young blokes felt that they were indestructible, other blokes might cop a bullet or two but not them. You just had this feeling that you were safe but excited.

16:00 **Where were you at this stage? Just go back. You were in Darwin for a little while and you moved back to the signal position?**

Yes. After that I went back down to Larrimah.

Before we go there lets talk a little more about Darwin. When you gained your impressions of Darwin did you see down by the harbour and the water?

Yes. There was a couple of American ships, at low tide too, lying on their sides right out of the water.

16:30 Well the bottom half side only was covered by water. And the wharf was smashed in a couple of places and somebody had put planks where you could balance your way and walk across still, but great holes in the wharves. And the fellows at Larrakeyah told us that after that first lot of bombing the bodies washed up along

17:00 the shore were mainly Americans from the American ships. And they had to go down and there was nothing else for it but to bury them on the spot. So they buried all these Americans sailors along the beach. I suppose the Americans would have come and dug them up later and took them to a grave home but it was the only way to get rid of them for the time being, and in that climate they wouldn't stay whole for long.

What did those graves

17:30 **look like?**

Oh, they just dug a whole and flattened it out. Put them in, not very deep, and then just flattened them over and left them there.

Was everybody aware what they were?

Well, the next high tide would smooth is all over. There was huge tides up there, very high tides and low tides.

Who was in Darwin at this time?

Well,

18:00 all branches of the army I guess and the air force. We'd see the air force come home at evening and if they'd had a kill, 'Bluey' Truscott [Squadron Leader Keith W. Truscott, Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar] was their hero. They had a fighting system whereby Bluey was supposed to do the killing and the other air force fellows would give him protection by flying behind him to make sure that another Jap [Japanese] didn't get on his tail. And if he came home

18:30 and he had been successful, he'd shot somebody down, you'd see him wobble his wings to indicate to the people below that it had been a successful day.

What about civilians?

The civilians went for their lives apparently. All, hundreds of empty houses there where they'd just taken whatever they could carry and gone. Somebody said that if you could

19:00 find a couple of gallons of petrol your fortune would be made. People would give anything to get petrol and get going. They didn't stop until they got to Adelaide River.

What was the atmosphere like in a town with so many servicemen and no civilians?

Oh well, it was a free-for-all and people went through houses to take any little things that were available. So that there was no possession of anything any more,

19:30 if you were lucky enough to find something. Not that I was there at the time when that was possible. By the time we got there the houses would have all been well done over.

What was the most memorable thing that you saw that might have been left over from the bombing raid?

No, only the wharves.

20:00 They were shattered. Apart from all the destroyed buildings that was it. It was just a mess.

What did this impress upon you about the Japanese and what was happening in the war, seeing Darwin like that?

Well, we thought that the Japanese were certain to be going to land.

20:30 The best place was to be ready to drop back to Adelaide River and that's where most of the units had made their headquarters by this time. The river was, by December, we had Christmas Day at Adelaide River in 1942, and that's before I'd gone further up to Winnellie. And you could have a swim

21:00 in the river there but it was dangerous to swim in the harbour apparently in Darwin. There were some sea creatures there that might attack, jelly fish of some kind I think. But at Adelaide River your greatest concern might have been a crocodile. There was one little bloke there, they called him Fanbelt because his tongue never

21:30 stopped wagging, and he'd bash your ear a treat. Always bragging about the things he'd done and where he'd told blokes to get off and what he was going to do, and everybody made a joke of him. I think he'd put his age up to get into the army, as some did. And always skiting and he told us that he was going to become a corporal shortly and he'd show all you bastards what's what when he gets

22:00 a corporal and he gets two stripes, he'd fix us all. So this went on for a little while as he was waiting, but the job he was going to get as a corporal was to clean out the toilets. Every morning they would pour, they were pit toilets and they'd pour a mixture of oil or diesel and petrol down them and throw a match down and let it all burn out. And there were all sorts of yarns

22:30 about the different adventures people had after it hadn't gone off and they'd come back at another time and dropped a match down it and sat on it. This fellow was going to fix everybody when he got his corporal stripes. And then one day when it was a rest day and everybody was lying around a bloke came up from the river and said, "Jesus, there's a big bloke lying in the reeds down there." Well Fanbelt took off, grabbed his rifle and a round of ammunition,

23:00 slapped it into the rifle and he took off down to do battle with the big crocodile. And so we thought we'll go over to the edge of the bank and watch him and see how he gets on. And next thing he was in among the reeds to size him up and there was a shot and he was shouting his head off. So we all thought perhaps it's got him. We'd better go down and investigate.

23:30 The whole crowd of us went charging down the bank and there was poor old fanbelt. He'd stumbled on a big log and shot himself right through the foot. No sign of the crocodile. So we carried him up to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and they kept him there for a week before they flew him south to have his metatarsals renovated. And we often wondered whether he got his stripes and we also wondered

24:00 whether it had ever been anything but a puff of wind in the reeds on the afternoon that he shot himself in the foot. He went south.

Lets go back south ourselves for a minute. I want to talk a bit more about the signalling and what you were training to do before you got up there. You first arrived at Tamworth,

24:30 **was that the place that you did training in the army?**

That's right. Yes.

Can you tell us a bit about Tamworth?

Tamworth was a little bit sick of having so many troops invade it I think at the time because you rarely came in contact with the civilians. I suppose they thought you were only there for five minutes and then you'd be gone. So you didn't have much to do with them. When you went to town

25:00 the pubs closes as six o'clock I think it was in those days. So you went to the canteen that they had and you'd get coffee and biscuits and a singsong around the piano. That was about all, and nearby there was another group parked, and they were the armoured divvy. Boggo Road was the place where they were camped. They felt themselves a little bit tougher than the sigs and they used to be

25:30 always advising when they did meet in the pub, that any time a sig picket came to town the Boggo Road boys, if they were in town they'd do them, they'd clean them up. So a mate of mine, John Carl, was picked one of these nights, and of course if you are only nineteen or twenty and they say, "You and you. You're on picket duty tonight." This is your corporal, he mightn't be much older. You had to go in and keep order in the streets with all these

26:00 different ones floating around. So this night when John was on picket duty in town the Boggo Road group came up and they were going to tear all these young fellows apart. Well luckily for them then a truckload of Provos [Military Police] came cruising around the corner and they set to work to grab these blokes. Well most of them just

26:30 disappeared around the corner and into the dark. But one particular character who was the gang leader by the look, decided he was going to fight everybody, take everybody on. He was shaping up so a couple of Provos grabbed him, one by each arm so he wouldn't be able to do much damage, and he upped with both feet and crashed them through a plate glass window. Well at this stage they thought he'd

27:00 better be protected, he'd better be calmed down for his own protection. So they lifted him suddenly and laid him flat on the pavement and one of them bumped his head on the pavement a few times, just to

calm him down. Well after that he decided that he had had enough and they put him in the paddy wagon and carted him off to the goal for the night. But I myself didn't ever get picket duty so I wasn't sorry.

What was

27:30 **reputation of the Provos?**

They weren't popular. Not popular.

Did you ever have any run in with them yourself?

Only round the streets of Albury later. We went AWL [Absent Without Leave] into town there one day and we were going to go around one corner and we could see them right down at the other end of the block. And just as

28:00 we saw them, they saw us and they shouted to us so we had to take off round the other side of the bloke in a great hurry. One bloke nailed me once up on the Tablelands [Atherton Tablelands] at Kairi, where we were camped beside the 2nd Div. I wasn't wearing gaiters. I thought it was a pretty lousy thing to charge me with but I realised later that the gaiters were useful

28:30 because apart from keeping the dirt and stones out of our boots, up in the Tablelands and the jungle there were tiny little red mites that spread some disease. I can't think what it was now. But you would see them. They were like tiny red specs. In the jungle you'd see the crawling on your boots. So I suppose he thought he was doing me a good turn in saying, "Look, young bloke,

29:00 this is dangerous." He didn't explain it that way of course but this was the thought, that if you weren't wearing gaiters they could crawl up into your boots more easily and you were more likely to pick up this disease. So they are the only times I have been with them.

How did you respond to army discipline in general when you started training in camp at Tamworth?

Oh, really well because we'd been five years at high school and getting up when a bell rang in the morning and going

29:30 to bed when they said, "Lights out," at night, and controlled really all day. Preparation at night after tea, go for two hours prep and you didn't speak to anybody while you were in prep. You did your homework or did your study. So it was an easy swing over to army discipline.

What were the biggest differences then about being in the army?

Different food I think. We had good food at school.

30:00 See it was agriculture and we had all our own milk and our own eggs, and really good three meals a day. So the army food was a little bit harder. But still I didn't mind. I accepted that.

What about your accommodation in Tamworth?

In Tamworth we were in tents and we had duckboards on the floor. There was one area

30:30 set aside that they called Siberia and as you went through the training you were gradually rotated until you got to Siberia, and of course the Siberia blokes always felt very superior because they'd been in training for a number of weeks at that stage and they felt that they were above the rest. They had tents for everybody then except the cookhouse of course was corrugated iron,

31:00 and your showers corrugated iron. Your eating place, dinning place was corrugated iron with wooden seats, sapling made seats. But it wasn't bad tucker. Of course a lot of it was artificial. Well not so much artificial as, for instance dehydrated potato. It

31:30 had been in a floury form and they'd put water with it. The same with eggs. Food that they called goldfish. It was herring out of tins. What you would do there though, it was the one place where they provided you with a copper full of hot water where you could get a shave.

32:00 All the other camps I was in later you generally tried to get a mug of black tea if it wasn't too cold by the time you finished, and use that for a shave. But at Tamworth it was really a home away from home. Our Major Lewis was a really great old guy, and before we left Tamworth he got us a weekend leave to Sydney. So

32:30 we went up on a Friday night on a troop train. Well, went down on the troop train. Spent the weekend in Sydney and then came back Sunday night, sleeping on the train both ways. We were already to go on parade again on Monday morning. But it wasn't just signal training in Tamworth. You had bayonet practise, all that sort of thing, rifle practice and training, marching practice.

33:00 There was a fellow, he was a bit older than us. We thought he must have been middle aged. He must have been in his thirties but anyone that age was middle aged to us, and he taught us a marching song. We even had a Scottish bagpipe band there that used to train with us and they only knew about

33:30 three tunes at the most, but you'd march to these tunes. But when they weren't with us later Dave had

taught us the words to this song, and we marched to the words of this song. I don't know whether you've ever heard it. It's called "The good ship Venus". Have you come across it?

Give us a rendition.

"We sailed on the good ship Venus.

34:00 By hell, you should have seen us. The figurehead was a whore in bed and the mast was a raging penis." And the chorus, everybody would come in, "Tiddly boom, tiddly boom, tiddly boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. We sailed from Buenos Aires, we thought we'd meet some fairies. But at Teneriffe we got the sift, and crabs at the Canaries. Tiddly boom. Now the captain's name was,"

34:30 I get that mixed up. "The captain's name was Crugger, an evil-minded bugger. He wasn't fit to shovel grit upon the old sea lugger. Tiddly boom, tiddly boom. The captain's wife was Mabel, she did what she was able to adulterate the second mate upon the galley table. Tiddly boom. The captain's lovely daughter went swimming in the water. Erotic squeals revealed that eels

35:00 had found her ticklish quarter. Tiddly boom". Oh, the rest is just not repeatable. It gets worse. The whole crew…

What happened?

It goes through the whole crew, the boson and the cabin boy, the first mate.

When would you sing this?

As you marched. You'd go out on route marches and sing this to keep in step. It made it so much easier. That's when the

35:30 Scottish band wasn't with us. It was when we went out on long marches perhaps. That was at Tamworth we picked that up.

How else did they train you? Route marching was one thing you did?

Morse code and radio theory on the Appleton Layer, and like the skip distance. The idea of signals hitting one of these layers and bouncing back to earth and

36:00 how the reception would be better where it bounced back to earth rather than say in between somewhere.

What equipment was this using?

We had a little radio. A little set about that long, like that, and you'd have and aerial and you'd have to tune it to a

36:30 frequency. You changed your frequency every day so that you'd be getting away from the Jap. He wouldn't be able to follow you day after day. Also, accept on the landline when we worked up and down from Larrimah, north and south, on wireless you changed your frequency every day and your call signs too so that they wouldn't be able to pick you up and follow you up. But talking about frequencies at Larrimah

37:00 there was a radio station set up by the Japanese used to come to us and it was the most beautiful Morse code. It was all sorts of Japanese propaganda in Morse code. They thought that they would be influencing us as we were listening to it. But it was a joke. We only thought about it as a joke. But the thing about it was you'd be practising your Morse code speed. Generally we worked at about

37:30 twenty-five words a minute but you'd find yourself doing well over thirty words a minute as you took this beautiful Morse code. So they were training all the Australian troops long distance with the Radio Domei it was, D-O-M-E-I. Doing us a good turn really without so knowing. But in slack times of course you could talk to anybody up and down the line in Morse code particularly when there were AWAS down at Alice Springs.

38:00 So in slack times you'd be out yarning away in Morse code. Used to give you time to think too, to think of what you were going to say next because it was a bit slower than speech.

When was the first time you were introduced to Morse code?

At Tamworth. We started there and the training in marching and bayonet practice and

38:30 parade ground manoeuvres. But at night time I generally did the Morse code.

How did you take to the Morse code? It's a new language almost.

It was, yes. Yes. You started off very slowly of course. Everybody was listening to and taking the same clatter. Everybody worked along and some would find it easier than others.

39:00 We found it best to stay a word or two words behind the code. Otherwise you would start guessing. If you tried to write it as it was coming over you'd be trying to guess what was next and you'd make

mistakes, so if you got a few words behind the sender then you didn't guess any more. You just copied down what he was saying. Our sig office in

39:30 Larrimah, we were there one evening and I was sending a message. It was one of these old post office clatter, clatter, clatter sort of things they used to use, rather than Morse code but instead of making a beeping noise like wireless it was a clatter clatter thing. They called it a sounder. I was working that probably to Alice Springs or somewhere and sending a message

40:00 and in the sig office there we had our electricity. It came from the headquarters where they had a generator, so we had electric lights. We had a switchboard that went out to all the different units in the area. And a cipher officer where all the fellows, when you took something in numbers of just letters of the alphabet, then they'd turn it into a message and find out what it was all about. So they'd decipher it.

40:30 And I was sitting there in the middle of sending a message and the next moment I found that I had my nose pressed hard to the table and my eyes clenched tight and my hands over my ears in pitch darkness. The lightning had struck our aerial above the wireless. Everything went out, all the lines. We couldn't communicate with anybody.

41:00 The telephone lines were all out. We could have used wireless but we wouldn't have known who we were, see, you didn't know who you were working to with wireless. All you are working to is three letters of the alphabet. So there we were but it took about over an hour, an hour and a half, before they got the lines working again. It spoiled everything just in one flash.

Was that dangerous?

Well it didn't hurt anybody.

41:30 It certainly put all our equipment out of use. But nobody was hurt by it.

We just have to stop there and change the…

Tape 4

00:30 **Before we go on can you explain a bit more about the technology you were using because it's something that I've never seen and something that certainly people in the future will never have seen?**

Yes. Well, each day you'd have a different frequency if you were doing wireless. At Larrimah, up and down that line, it was right away from the Japanese control or observations, so

01:00 you kept the same call signs all day. Larrimah was LAA and F Bank was FB or something. Alice Springs I suppose was AS, because that didn't matter because it was a safe circuit up and down the line. But when you're on radio or wireless then you need to change every day. You get to know your frequency. Like before we left Morotai we knew our frequency

01:30 for every day, and you knew your call sign every day but of course we didn't have to reply. They sent us a J, they'd say it would be a J signal, or QJM I think was the signal to say, "You will not make any reply at all," and so you'd tune, well now here I

02:00 go again, I'm diverting because on the Warsash you didn't have to touch these huge, they were big as a piano, these huge radio sets that they had. The technician would come and line it all up for you. All you had to do was put the earphones on. Then you had a fine tuner. You would be close to the frequency and your friend,

02:30 whoever was sending to you, would send you a signal. He'd just press his key. He would identify himself with his call sign. That was three letters of the alphabet. That was his call sign for the day. Then he'd send you a single signal, and you'd adjust your vernier, would it be? I think they called it a vernier. You'd adjust the knob to bring that signal in perfectly so

03:00 that you got the clearest sound. Then it was just a case of putting the switch in one direction if you wanted to listen further, or putting it in the other direction if it was a case where you were able to send out signals. So it worked, usually you'd have three stations and a control, and those three stations would have to take notice of

03:30 what control. The control might say, send a signal "piano". Now piano means radio silence. You will not make any more broadcasts until you are told to, so keep off the air. It was for the case of secrecy I suppose. So each of those three stations had a different call sign and

04:00 control would tell each one when it was their turn to send or receive messages.

What would you be hearing over the headphones?

Most of the time Morse code, and you wouldn't know what any of it meant. You'd copy it all down and as

I said in the case of going to Balikpapan there'd be some bloke way down in Leyte [Gulf]

04:30 I think it was, the fellow who would be sending messages back to control saying it was too loud or too soft of he'd missed certain, because of static, certain parts of the message had been obliterated. Would he repeat such and such? But you wouldn't be saying anything. You would just be copying it as though it was supposed to trick the Japs. It didn't trick them much I don't think. They'd come in and try to drown you out with just a continual

05:00 pressure on their key on your frequency, and of course that needn't only be the Japs. On one of the nights at Balikpapan, the American fighters, there were four of them, Macadar and M2 and something else. They were chasing Jap planes and they were on our frequency so we were trying to listen without indicating that we were

05:30 missing anything, because you couldn't say anything. And these fellows were talking their heads off and saying, "Look out, he's on your tail," and going on with great excitement all around us. But that was just one of the hazards. They weren't to know what our frequency was. It was only supposed to be us who know what we were on.

In what situations would you have voice over the airways?

Only when, see,

06:00 voices, anybody can here them. At Bonegilla where we trained in Victoria, there was the 25th Tele Op Section. They were girls, AWAS, and their job, they were on huge sets too, huge, and all they did was listen in to all the other people on different frequencies on the air and if they heard,

06:30 whatever they heard had to go on to, first of all to a cipher perhaps or to security. They would follow it up to see what had been said. So that was their job. No, I can't ever remember ever being able to speak openly because when it's on the air it can be picked up by other people too. So almost always it would be

07:00 in either groups of five letters or four numbers. That was the form that it took.

Can you take us through some of the call signs that you were taught? Piano was one that you mentioned.

Piano was radio silence, and also J or in plain language on the air, if we had to use it,

07:30 jig, J-I-G. That was do not reply. Do not continue on this frequency. But see, They were changing. I see what you mean, yes. The Q signals would stay the same all the time. They were just like a shorthand to say I'm signing off or I have a message for you. I have some messages for you.

08:00 **What other equipment did you use? You used the wireless set almost all the time in your signalling work?**

The landline of course. More went over the landlines in Australia itself than ever went over the wirelesses. But

Was that equipment different? Can you describe a little bit about

08:30 **the landline equipment?**

Well it was just a Morse key from our point of view, and you'd just tap our your Morse code. At Larrimah it went through the repeater station which was attached to the overland telegraph. And the overland telegraph only had five lines. It was a steel

09:00 or iron structure because the white ants would eat the wooden posts away. So it was steel all the way through from Darwin right down to Adelaide. And yet all our messages up and down and all our speech with people on the telephone was going along those five lines. They must have been doing it at different frequencies because there were so many of them involved.

09:30 Ed Muller was our go between there. He used to control our connection with the overland telegraph. But we didn't know much about that side of it because all we did was come on duty and work. It was a bad set up. Well, not bad I suppose, but a tiring set up first off

10:00 because you'd work six hours on work and then you'd have twelve hours off and six hours on and twelve off, so you were coming backwards around the clock for you sleeping every day, and you stretched it out a bit. If somebody wanted a day off well somebody might work a double shift. Like one night after I'd had my shoulder

10:30 dislocated, I couldn't work because I send Morse with my right hand so they put me on the switchboard. And then, because I was nearly better, feeling alright again, I'd double up. I'd take the switchboard all night, from twelve o'clock to eight in the morning, plus any messages that came along the landline in Morse code. So you'd do things like that. It was the only way you could get a day off

11:00 from this six on and twelve off. So you double up readily. You might want to go on an excursion somewhere. Like we went to Mataranka at one stage to see the Ellerslie Cattle Station . It's quite

famous, “We of the Never Never” and all that. And a nice girl, Jeannie Gunn. And we saw the banyan tree. But to make that possible someone would have to do your shift for you

11:30 and double up on their own shift. I was doubled up on a shift like that one night doing the switchboard as well and as the landline, and I was having a, you’d put your groundsheet on the floor and then a blanket on that and you could lie down and switch everything off except the alarm bell on the switchboard and have a snooze in between times in the early hours. And one night there was a call on the board and

12:00 somebody was getting through to Daly Waters, somebody from Adelaide River. So I switched them through and waited until they had finished and pulled out the plugs and was settling down to sleep again and I could see a fellow standing in the doorway in the moonlight. Well I thought he can’t see me. I can see him because the moonlight’s behind him but he can’t see me. So we just stood there or I lay there for a while and sat up.

12:30 He stood there and stood there and stood there. At last I said, “Are you looking for something, mate?” “Yes,” he said. “I am. You might have heard about me. I’m the fellow who was getting married this afternoon.” I said, “Oh yeah.” He’d come from, an allied works council had teams of people up in the Territory working for the government on road building and that sort of thing and airstrip building, and he was one of them.

13:00 They got a lot more pay then we did for being in the tropics. But apparently he’d been down at the hospital. They’d admitted him to the army hospital down south a little way, and all the army blokes had kidded him on that there was a nurse there that was mad about him. I suppose she’d just been pleasant to him and he’d believed it. He thought that he was,

13:30 and he was telling me just when he thought that they’d be getting married this afternoon, they said, “And they discharged me. I have got to get back down and go and see her. I must see her.” By this time he was he was howling his eyes out. I thought well, all these army blokes in hospital have been having him on a treat, the poor devil, but there is nothing I can do at this stage, at two or three o’clock in the morning to say what, or tell him

14:00 about it. So I though the best thing I can do is unload him. So I said, “You’re up near Mataranka, aren’t you?” He said, “Yes.” “Well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll ring up and get somebody to come down and pick you up. Because you can’t do anything at night. You won’t be able to get near the hospital at night time. So leave it till tomorrow.” He seemed a bit more cheerful then so I put a plug in the switchboard and rang

14:30 and the bloke didn’t like being woken up. I said, “Now, listen,” I said, “Shut up and listen for a minute. I know, I know, I’ve got a bloke here and he’s from the allied works council and he was supposed to get married this afternoon and he has been in hospital. So somebody had to come and get him.” So they came and got him but the plug didn’t go into the allied

15:00 works council. It went into the Provos slot and two Provos turned up in about five minutes and took the poor devil away. Well when he found out where he was I could hear him across the road screaming his head off for hours because he’d been dudded. But I thought I had to get rid of him. I couldn’t have him around because there had been Vary rockets going up over near our BIPOD. BIPOD is Bulk Oil and Petrol Depot.

15:30 And where they had these forty-four gallon drums of petrol hidden away under the trees and these Vary rockets had been going up the week before. So we did think that there might have been some fifth colonists on the make up there because it came to nothing, but just the same I wanted to get rid of the bugger.

How had you heard the story about him before he turned up?

I hadn’t. No. It was just a surprise to me but by the way he rambled on

16:00 I thought these blokes in the hospital, they’ve been having him on. The soldiers had.

Did you ever hear any more of that story?

No. No. I think they would have flown him south though, anybody who goes ‘troppo’ like that. There was my friend on Morotai went troppo later, went completely.

We’ll get to that because that’s something I want to talk about. Before we do, you mentioned the switchboard. That’s another piece of technology I’d like to go through.

16:30 **Yeah. I think it had forty lines and A and B. A little flap will drop down with a number on it and the two holes are below that number. But the flap drops down, you answer in B. So the flap drops down and you put a plug in B. The bloke comes across the line and tells you who he wants to talk to so you look for that unit further along the line**

17:00 **and plug in**

You answer in B and call in A. You press a little gadget that rings and if you reverse it you’ll ring in the

caller's ear. So you've got to be careful not to do that. You could also listen in to, well, you had to check to see if they are getting through. So you can throw the switch the other way and that lets you listen in without them being aware that you are listening to what goes on. So, entertaining

17:30 it was at times.

Were there any particularly entertaining stories you heard over the switchboard?

Oh yeah. When my red headed girlfriend in Alice was chatting up a bloke up in Mataranka or somewhere. I wasn't happy. I met her when I was going through and we were good friends. What else? It's just gone from

18:00 my mind. Oh, on Christmas Eve I was taking over the switchboard from somebody to give him a break and let him do something and a nurse from the hospital rang up and she insisted on singing the anniversary waltz to me. But I think she was so sozzled that she didn't know who she was ringing up. I think she just wanted to sing to somebody.

18:30 But you did hear all sorts of interesting things going on. You'd get a better idea than looking at cipher messages.

Before you got to the Territory [Northern Territory] you went down to Bonegilla?

Bonegilla again, yes.

What was happening down there?

See, that was one of those, did I say how I came to go to Bonegilla? I think I did. Instead of going back to the Territory I

19:00 went to Bonegilla but what had happened I'd had, after all my forty-two days leave, I had a slight ailment I won't go into and they sent me out to the hospital at Sydney Showground. Well, by mistake they put me into the Jack Ward where the blokes with venereal diseases

19:30 were all in bed. So along came the doctor and he abused me for even being there, that there's nothing wrong with me, that there were blokes out on the streets wandering the streets every night in a worse condition than me. So they discharged me the following morning. But I would have got one day's leave out of that through being sick. Another day added to my forty-two days.

20:00 But I'd been mucked around for three or four days waiting to get to this specialist at the showground and I was able to get four days on my discharge from the hospital paper instead of one day. So that when I got back to LTD Marrickville, where all the bunches, groups of men, when they were sent off to join the unit,

20:30 our group had gone. They were already half way to Adelaide and they didn't know what to do with me. It was one of these cases where you can go this way or that way. In this case I went South to Bonegilla and that changed the course of my life I'd say. All the other fellows who I've met since went back to the Territory. We have reunions now and then. And so I went down to Bonegilla and started

21:00 to learn the American shorthand, the Q signals, which was new.

This was after your training in Darwin but before you went back to Larrimah?

I didn't go back to Larrimah you see. I should have gone back.

So this is after you'd been in Larrimah?

After I'd been up there for eighteen months or so, yes.

So you stayed up there for eighteen months before you came on leave?

Yes. Then we came back on forty-two days leave and

21:30 as I say, instead of coming back again as the other fellows' group did, I went down the other way to Bonegilla again. It was a different place then of course because there were hundreds and hundreds of AWAS there and there was a wet canteen that we didn't have before. It only opened at night time after tea, after dinner. And a dance every week. There's be a

22:00 dance in another big hall that they had built. AWAS and other ranks and anybody else of course. And the pictures, the movies, once or twice a week. So it was a new place. A home from home really but we had a few bivouacs but they were mainly in those times we were driving in big radio vehicles.

22:30 A bit like a tank only not so well fortified.

Protected?

Yes, they weren't so, there were three of us in the tank. One driving, one on the radio and one looking out. And all the time then we would be talking

23:00 plain language over the air on your radio and someone back in Bonegilla camp would be acting as control. There were several of these vehicles out on the run testing different distances and they'd be in touch. But of course when we got to the little town of Bright it was like a little English village in those days. When we got to Bright we sort of lost contact because there was a real little English style pub

23:30 there where you could sit down and drink beer in comfort. And we always drooped off there on our trips around, down to Rutherglen. But we did go to a couple of same tough style bivouacs. I can remember the Kiewa River on one stage and it was after the snow was melting on Snaffle Top and

24:00 I can't think of the other area. The Bogongs, and the snow was melting and the river was freezing cold. I don't know whether the corporal in charge of our group knew that we had to cross the river to get to our, we were doing compass reading in those times and finding our way by compass bearings, and we came to the river

24:30 and of course it was a surprise to everybody and some old blokes reckoned that they couldn't swim and they weren't going into that freezing water for any reason, whoever told them. So everybody sat down and had a smoke for a while and then the corporal asked for volunteers to see how deep it was. So a few of us stripped off then and waded across. It was just up to our armpits in the deepest part but it was running like a torrent with all this snow melting

25:00 up top and it runs off into the Hume further down. So a few of us then rolled up our gear and carted it across, and then went back and these old fellows still weren't going to go into that water so we took their gear and their rifles and holding it above your head, we walked across. Then we came back and made a human chain

25:30 right across and at that stage the corporal was able to kid them into coming into the water. So they worked from one bloke to the next, up above us so that they wouldn't get washed away. So we got them across but that was a toughening up bivouac. Yes. We went out near Allans Flat. A friend in the army at that time,

26:00 Bottles, Glass. He came from Allans Flat. He was a farmer's boy, a really slow spoken old bloke. So he was in our tent. It was marvellous at Bonegilla how people would be coming, they'd be training and they'd go and yet in no time there'd be new fellows in your tent and you'd be just as friendly. I remember when two or three longstanding mates

26:30 went off and a bloke came into my tent was a big red-faced freckly looking bloke but everybody liked him. He was one of those outgoing characters. He knew a few ropes to pull. Across from the camp, across the main road to the Hume Weir was a home from home. A little restaurant type thing.

27:00 with three or four, three, plump little waitresses. Now, no one below the rank of sergeant was allowed to go across the road and go and have a meal there. Well, Bluey somehow or other found his way over there and got chatting. And he knew that any time he went over there and paid for his meal he could get his meal in the kitchen. So next thing

27:30 we both went over. We'd go down along the barbed wire fence where there was a gully, and you could crawl under the gully and get across into the home from home, go around the back and have your meal with these chatty little waitresses and they'd be coming out laughing about what some of the officers had said or some of the sergeants had said. And we'd go home the same way.

28:00 And old Bluey would always insist on late in the night when everybody should be bunked down he would insist on singing "Sweet Angelina, the Cow Punctures Whore," on and on and on. But it was like that. You'd no sooner loose one set of friends when somebody new would come and it didn't take any time to become friends. Everybody

28:30 sort of accepted everybody on face value.

Who were your greatest mates from that period?

A little bit earlier was Derney and, what did they call him? Crasher. Derney and Crash. Crash was a married bloke but he got on

29:00 well with the AWASs there and we used to go in to the dances at Albury. Albury in those days seemed to be just a, the main street would be a line of pubs or chemist shops or restaurants and in any of the restaurants they had these, all restaurants had these juke boxes where you could put in a coin and it would play a tune for you.

29:30 The tune then, the most popular one the first time I was down there was Bing Crosby singing "San Antonio Rose". That's not very popular. It didn't last long on record but it was a great song we thought. And then there'd be community singing in the town on Sunday. That's where we saw our first game of Aussie Rules,

30:00 at the park in Albury. It hadn't extended up towards New South Wales so far at that stage. It was only in later years it came north. So you could go and see the Aussie Rules in the park or generally on Sunday there was the community singing. And there'd be, in those days people weren't frightened to get up and put on an act.

30:30 This happened several times, that for instance a red-headed AWAS got up on stage and her song was “I Don’t Want to Set the World on Fire.” And of course one mimic up the back yells out, “And you won’t my love. You’ll never.” Another bloke got up, a different, more serious vein and he was obviously of Italian

31:00 descent. He was dark and slightly built and he got up on stage and everybody could see that he must have had Italian parents. He said, “We might be at war with Italy but we’ll never be at war with their music.”

31:30 And everybody shut up and he sang, “O Solo Mio,” and they cheered him and cheered him because everybody knew that Italy didn’t want to be in the war. They’d proved that they were fighters two thousand years ago with the Romans. So they didn’t want to go to war. They didn’t want to back Hitler. It was only Mussolini and his mob that forced them into it. There’d be,

32:00 you’d get cartoons, for instance in Smith’s Weekly there was a cartoon of a fellow in North Africa, a lone soldier walking along and lines of prisoners as far as you could see disappearing over the sand hill there and disappearing behind, and one little bloke walking along behind the soldier carrying the soldier’s rifle, and

32:30 soldier saying, “Oh shut up Guiseppe, or I won’t let you carry my rifle.” They were so friendly apparently in that respect. People knew that. The Italians didn’t want to fight. It wasn’t their war. Just the same as later on we might say it wasn’t out war over in that part of the world either.

While we are talking about Albury and Bonegilla I might just hand back

33:00 **over to Rob [interviewer]. Did you get to the Regent Cinema ever in Albury?**

I would have, yeah, and there was dances there every Saturday night in the big hall there. And the strange thing, they had these like big wide boards and all the time that the dance was on the big wide boards were pulled back and forth and they were a cooling system instead of fans. They were the pre-runners

33:30 of fans I suppose. And this seemed to be over the whole ceiling, going back and forth at night to cool everybody off while the dance was on.

Extraordinary. Did you get down to the Murray River at all?

Oh yes. You could swim in the Murray. It was backed right up and there were a whole lot of trees out in the water where the backwater had, when they dammed it, it had backed right up and

34:00 flooded all that area. So we used to go swimming there. Go for a route march up to the Hume Weir after tea just to toughen you up. Give you something to do at night. We had one lot there. They were the tough sigs, they thought. They were going on a Middle East draft but it was all over before they got away. They had a lieutenant there, I won’t mention him, but he was a

34:30 tough boy. He’d shout at them, “If you drop your rifle beat it to the ground, or if you draw your bayonet draw blood.” Because he thought that the idea was to say you don’t play around with these things. This is serious. If you don’t want to have a

35:00 bayonet and play around or you might hurt somebody. So just think of that, and the same with your rifle. You don’t drop your rifle unless you’re deadbeat yourself or you’ve been shot. So he really toughened them up, he thought. But I think they went off to New Guinea, because the Middle East, they bought them home. The 7th and the 9th, they bought them back when New Guinea was in such trouble.

How were you feeling

35:30 **about being so far away from the war?**

Well in the second part when I went to Bonegilla I was thinking that this is my break to get to the war, that Darwin had been a few air raids but that was nothing really compared to what was going on in New Guinea. So we were just waiting to go. Waiting to take our turn.

36:00 **How were you keeping track of the war at this stage?**

Well, they didn’t tell us much. There would be radio broadcasts, but they kept some of the bad things quiet. They didn’t tell us how many people had been killed in Darwin, how many troops died there.

Were you able to talk about that? Having been there and seen it first had, were you able to talk freely about what you had seen

36:30 **in Darwin when you got back down south?**

Yes, you could. But it was months old by then so it wasn’t so important. It had gone out of people’s minds. No. Everybody was trying to make the best of things, especially in Sydney. Especially with all the Yanks [Americans] that were there. God, the place was overrun with Yanks and sailors. And

37:00 the Yanks were such big spenders too. They really dazzled the ladies. They’d turn up for a dates in their outfits. They’d look like generals with the kind of clothing they wore.

What had you had to do with the Americans up to this point?

Only at Birdum. At Birdum in the Territory, it's not far down from Larrimah, and there was a Yank, I think they must have been

37:30 a building group for building roads and telephone lines and that sort of thing. And some of their lines went through out switchboard, so we were quite familiar with them, and we always had an open invitation to go to their sixteen millimetre movies. So we saw quite a bit of them. There'd be at least one movie each week and if you weren't on duty

38:00 you'd miss your sleep that night and go and watch the movie.

When you were on your forty-two days leave did you see much of the Americans in Sydney?

Well, you didn't see a lot of them because they had their own places where you go for amusement. What do you call it? For like where you go

38:30 and have a drink and get coffee? Recreation parts. So we weren't welcome to go into theirs. So we had our own of course, but by that time there was no canteen in ours. And it was a different set up when you were up in the Territory or up in the islands

39:00 later with the Americans when you were up there, and a different atmosphere down south when they had all this money and they were spending it lavishly on all the women and taking them to movies and taking them to dance at the Trocadero. It was just about packed out with Americans, the Trocadero, and their women.

Did you ever get to the Trocadero?

No. Never. I didn't get there. But I believe that the Americans had it

39:30 all to themselves. And they'd take them out to Chequers. They'd arrive first of all with a little posy for the lady to wear on her frock and they'd take her to town in a taxi and go to a show and then they'd bring her home in a taxi. And the old Australian, he'd meet her at Wynyard or Martin Place and you might get time to pop into Reppins for a quick coffee, but then you'd go to a show and after the show was over you'd go home on a tram.

40:00 So it was quite a different outing for the women, whether they went with an Australian or whether they went with an American.

What does this say about the nationalism of the Australian womenfolk then?

Yeah, it's true. There was a bloke, I remember at Alice Springs. It was a staging camp. You'd come up by train as far as Alice Springs and you'd camp for a couple of days in the camp and then you'd go on by olive coloured canopied

40:30 trucks going north up to Larrimah before you got out. Anyhow it was one of these situations where in the canteen part they'd have a stage and any fool who could get up on the stage and put on an act. You'd either cheer or hiss him, but it didn't matter. So this young bloke got up one night at Alice Springs

41:00 and there was a song at the time. It has probably gone right out of people's minds now, but it was "When They Sound the Last All Clear." It was an English song. "When they sound the last all clear how happy, my darling, I'll be. When they turn up the lights on those long lonely nights, will be but a memory." This young bloke got up and he sang, "When they

41:30 send the last Yank home how happy, my darling, I'll be. When they turn up the lights on those long lonely nights, will be but a memory. Never more I'll be alone, we'll all have a girl of our own. No more guys in flash clothes who talk through their nose, when they send that last Yank home." Of course he was cheered. I think he must have made that up because I've never heard it before or since.

That's a good one.

Tape 5

00:30 **You were talking about the girl in Alice Springs with red hair, and you were chatting to her in Morse code?**

Yes. In Morse code.

How did you maintain this relationship in Morse?

Well it wasn't very emotional I'll give you, but just the same it was passing the time. Especially if you wanted to stay awake in the early parts of the morning and you wanted to do something other than smoke. You used to roll a cigarette every quarter of an hour to keep you awake. You'd smoke that through and

01:00 by the time it was finished it would just be another quarter of an hour ready to roll another one. But that was one way of staying awake. But if you dozed off you'd immediately wake when you heard your call sign. The others could be chatting away, sending messages, but when you heard your call sign you'd snap out of it.

What was your call sign?

Larrimah was LAA. Because it was a safe landline it never changed while I was there.

Did you have individual call signs?

01:30 Oh, no. This was only for the station, for the sig station.

Did you have a phonetic alphabet in the war?

Able, Baker, Charlie sort of thing. Yes.

Can you say the phonetic alphabet for us?

I don't think I can. Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy, Freddie, George, no. I've lost it. Lost it.

02:00 It was too long ago now.

It's pretty good though.

But the Americans have changed it since then. They've got the new one now.

I just thought the World War II one was an interesting one because it was unique to that period of time.

Yes.

You were training up, you went up to the Tablelands. Can you tell me a bit about, you mentioned that you got into some two-up games up there and got involved in some gambling?

02:30 That's right. Yes. We went out a bit, but before we got to the Tablelands we were at Logan Village, an American show there that had been there before us and they moved out and left their cooking, their refrigerator and their stoves and their sinks so it was a really elegant place to have a camp for us. There had been paratroop trainers before that, but it was too far from Brisbane I think for them. They took

03:00 off and we moved into their camp. Now they used to put on a keg for us, but you had to buy it. We made our own drinking utensils there. If you took a big, the old sized bottle of beer. Not the little stubbies now but the bigger one, and you soaked a chord in petrol and you put it around, just below the neck of the bottle, you

03:30 set it alight and as soon as it had flared then you dipped it in cold water and the top broke off, if you were lucky, without splitting any of the rest of the bottle. You might have to do a few before you got a good one. Now if you ground that in the sand then you made a decent sized drinking glass out of this beer bottle. We called them 'Lady Blameys'. And if there was a keg on and the other blokes only had

04:00 little glasses or mugs then you were a little bit lucky with this great big, more than three-quarters of a bottle, to get the same amount for you. We used to have a two-up game as well as the grog there.

Oh, before you do that, why did you call them Lady Blameys?

Just as a mark of respect for old Blamey, the general, General Blamey [Sir Thomas Blamey, Australian General].

What was the connection between a mug of beer and Lady Blamey?

None at all really.

04:30 No. They just picked on Blamey and said, "This is a Lady Blamey," and there was a big two-up game up there. One of the fellows that I was with in training and then up in the Territory, Jackie Sob, was a great gambler but I think they had a lot of money, his family. I think they had furniture warehouses somewhere around Brisbane. So money was

05:00 nothing to him and we were down at the two-up game one night and another friend from Allans Flat, down in Victoria, his name was Glass, so his natural name was Bottles. Bottles was one side of him and I was the other and Jackie was backing the tail and he had this run of luck to start with and it was piled up so he kept on going.

05:30 He'd back the centre and he backed the sides as well, and in the end he was backing just about the whole game because anybody who spun would be backing for heads and he'd cover them with his, whatever they need in the centre. You know the rules of the game of course?

Not as well as I probably should.

These days, or in the war years you played with three

06:00 pennies, not two. It wasn't two-up. It was three-up because you got an immediate result. You were either tails out or you were heads, but you didn't have this one on one that you have with two up. So it was a quicker game.

What did you call it then?

It was still called a two-up but it was three-up. And it was run by a boxer and his rouseabout.

Why did a boxer have to run the two-up?

06:30 Because he sat on a box I suppose. Not a true boxer, not a fighter, no. He'd generally have a little box to sit on and he'd put a, let's say you bet five pounds. You'd put it in front of him and nobody could bet around the ring until that five pounds was, or somebody had covered it. And once the centre was set then you could have all your side bets who wanted to back heads and who wanted to back tails. So

07:00 Jackie was piling it up. So I was collecting the notes on one side of him and Bottles on the other side and we were piling it up and piling it up, and then his luck changed and it just went out and out and he lost the lot. But he got up and said, "Well, a quick game is a good game," and that was that. So years later when I was putting my memoirs together I wrote this little

07:30 tale about it, but not quite the same. "A half note on his tail I says, a half note on his tail. I couldn't have raised another sprat if I'd been after bail. A regular on the other side gives me a cunning grin, ashamed to take the dough he thinks, I'll get the sucker in. You're set, he says, and slaps it down. I cover with my ten. The pennies flicker high above and tails she is again.

08:00 I'll back the tail a quid, I says, it could be my lucky night. Me mate, he covers me again and then it's tails are right. Well, after that I sure was in, I couldn't seem to miss. I'm thinking how your luck can change when you stay off the piss, and then the spin comes round to me, yeah, just the fiver mate, and shag me if I didn't head the baldies thirteen straight. By now the ringer is all my way,

08:30 he sees a sling in view. This man will back the tail, he says, for another quid or two. Now things are looking mighty fine, I'm thinking hell I'm slow, I should have bought my bloody hat to carry home the dough. I satch the centre every time of twenty on the side. A bloke does three heads in a row, but lets the centre ride." You must do three at least before you can collect any money out of the centre. "But lets the centre ride. I cover him and sets the side

09:00 for fifteen quid [pounds] or more. God, strike me down, my side bets now are over half the floor. The lady's coming into play, just watch them raining tails, and sure enough he nicks in three and in the money sails. She's all piled up before me now, the sight near takes my breath, but suddenly I feel two hands near shaking me to death. I don't know what the hell goes on, most like I'm in a blue or some snakes are after all my dough. It might be Provos

09:30 too. But by and by I sees this shape like something in a mist. I recognises Bottle's draw, my china says I'm pissed. Snap out of it you bloody org. You called yourself a mate. It could have been our lucky night, but no, you couldn't wait. The minute I turns my back you gets back on the grog [alcohol]. That's right, just go on dozing there like some marsupial frog,

10:00 you are you know, you drongo mutt, the lowest louse I've been with. Why did you lose our last ten bob [pounds]? We've not a sprat to spin with." The 'baldies', of course, you had to play with these kinds of coins. You couldn't just pick modern pennies. They were supposed to be badly weighted or maybe it was just prejudice. The baldies were pennies with the head of Edward VII [King of Britain] on it and the ladies were the pennies

10:30 with the head of Queen Victoria and unless you had some of these coins you couldn't run a 'swy' game. Well, he lost the lot but no worries. So that was at Logan village.

That's a great story. You called it swy. Is that the other name for it?

Yes. I think they take it from the Americans. I think they called it swy.

Did you ever play the American swy?

No. I think they

11:00 played mainly with their dice. Their dice, the ones were snake eyes, the two sixes were boxcars, and I think you were trying to spin two the same. But there were all sorts of bets. I never quite followed them all in the American game. But they used to just throw them up against a

11:30 piece of board or something to stop them rolling and the result would be there. So there wasn't much chance of you roguing with them because you had to throw them along the deck say.

Can you just take your glasses off because it effects the

Oh. yes.

What's roguing with them? What do you mean by that?

Roguing means that you are putting something over. There wasn't much chance in swy or in dice to do

that,

12:00 unless you had dice that had a weight on one side.

What about in swy?

I think that's swy.

Sorry, in two-up. Was there any roguing in two-up?

Well you hear stories of double-headed pennies but I've never seen one. Supposably you've got a head on both sides and you can't go wrong then.

I

12:30 **can imagine that you've got a big ring of blokes, and**

You've got salvolatile [spirits of ammonia – used as smelling salts] tins with kerosene in them and a bit of wick poking out the top, and that was your lighting around the circle. You had about four of those tins, salvolatile, and I don't know where they got the kerosene. They must have been able to buy it from the cookhouse or somewhere.

And there's one bloke who picks up the coins and tells you the result

13:00 **and you've got to rely on him. If he sees there's a lot of money riding on it, and if someone calls it wrong and quickly grabs them?**

Yeah. And they keep saying, "Watch your bets mate, watch your bets," especially at somewhere like Larrimah or anywhere for that matter where there's a game going on if somebody's crook when they come in they might just snatch up someone else's bet and go off with it. There was that risk.

13:30 The ruling was of course that when you bet you had to leave your money in the centre for three throws. At the end of three throws you can take as much as you like, whether you take the first thing that you bet with or you can take the lot for that matter. Or you might decide you'd leave it there for four throws. But you can't pull it out for less than the three. A lot of people then think that they're

14:00 winning and they throw two and then they'll spin out on the third. They'll throw tails.

Can you tell us the names you gave the particular individuals? The bloke who was running it and the person who was throwing it and were there names for these people?

No. I can't remember who they were.

No. I don't mean the people but what you'd call them.

Oh, what you'd call them. Well the bloke in the centre, you call him spinner

14:30 because he actually hands them to the person who is going to spin. If you are putting down say five dollars and you're going to be the bloke who's setting the centre or putting the money in the centre, somebody has to put five dollars down on that before you start spinning. As soon as that's done everybody around the sides can start betting each other heads or tails. The spinner

15:00 is the bloke who looks at the pennies and he puts them on a kip, a little bit of wood that is long enough to take three. They must turn over and over in the air because anybody who has put on a bet can say, "Bar toss," and all the bets are off if they think they are not doing that, not turning over and over. Also

15:30 if it hits anybody's foot, anybody who has money betting can say, "Bar toss," and all bets are off, or if it goes off, they've got a square of tarpaulin, we'll say, and it if runs off over the side anybody can say, "Bar toss." I saw a fellow, I was no sooner in the army at Tamworth when there was a dispute

16:00 over the coins, over the betting, and this bloke reckoned that he said, "Bar toss," before the pennies landed because it bumped somebody and everybody else reckoned that he was making it up. But he grabbed his money and was off. So they got to him later and he was such a mess. His eyes were closed right over and his nose was flat. The blokes who thought he had taken their money

16:30 worked him over. They generally called the bloke who sat with the bets the boxer, and he generally sat on a little low stool or anything and put the money that was bet down in front of him. When all the side bets were finished the bloke in the centre would say, "Well I'm bringing him in. Come in spinner," and up would go the pennies. Then he'd call out the result, "Heads are right," or, "Tails she is."

17:00 That finished the round.

Were they the only two options?

I'd say, yes, yes. Heads are right, heads she is, tails are right, and from time to time the boxer would call out in the case of Jackie Sob, "Any of you tailies doing any good?" Because he only gets money from heads. See heads, that's what I forgot to say. At the end of the third spin

17:30 the boxer can take the first amount you put down on the floor. That's his little break off for running the show. So he can go on all night winning in spasms and he can end up with quite a lot of money, whereas other blokes are losing their money. So he never loses. He always makes a profit.

How much money in

18:00 **one, would ride on, what's the most amount of money you've seen riding on one throw?**

Oh, somebody generally, most fellows would only start with a pound, or as I said in this case it is only ten bob, half a pound. But you might get somebody being a bit flash and putting down a fiver. Double that after the first. You'd get somebody else's fiver so there's ten dollars in the centre.

18:30 Someone would cover the ten so there's twenty dollars in the centre. Somebody has to cover the twenty and that's forty dollars in the centre. At that stage the ringer or the boxer takes out the first five dollars as his part of it. Now the bloke who is spinning decides whether he'll take the rest of it for himself or whether he'll feel lucky and go on spinning, or whether he'll just halve what's there and say, "I'll take my profit and I'll spin for the rest."

19:00 Pretty fair though.

Did you end up with big mountains of cash in the middle while this was going on?

No. He's got a little box or something that he puts his cash in. You don't see what he's got. But do you mean the ringer?

If you've got lots of, how many people would be around this ring, say at a big game?

You might have thirty or forty people, and all betting across at each other and putting their money down

19:30 and trusting each other not to swipe it away.

So how much money is lying on the floor at those big games?

There could be a couple of hundred dollars I suppose when you've got everybody there, a big night.

The bloke who's running it, how is he organising it? How is he advertising it?

He's got the pennies, and he's got the salvolatile lights. He's got a tarpaulin and at Larrimah

20:00 they used to sit around on these, instead of having, what do you call it under the railway lines? These sleepers made out of wood as they do down south. The sleepers were all out of iron, pieces of steel I suppose, because otherwise the white ants would eat them. So

20:30 they'd put them around in a circle on the railway track because the trains only went up in the day and perhaps only three trains in the day would go north. So that's where they sat. At Logan village, of course, they just sat on the ground. There were no facilities such as that there to be seated.

How would word go out that there was a big two-up match being organised?

21:00 Just by word of mouth because it was on just about every night at Larrimah and Logan Village. So people would get to know and they'd say "We'll go down and try our luck at the swy." That would be the only way, by one fellow telling the other bloke we're coming down for the night.

And was it an enlisted man sort of game or was it officers?

Yes, if they took their pips off.

21:30 Nobody wanted them there if they had their pips or their sergeant stripes on. If they took them off or wore a coat over them then they were free to come in and take part too. Generally we were far enough away from the main camp that the Provos would feel like they didn't have to interfere. They could let it ride without making a fuss or trying to break it up.

But was it illegal?

22:00 Yes. It was illegal but one of these things that they were allowed. Even on Anzac Day now they could still run a swy game or a two-up game. They run one out at Greenwell Point across the way here for the RSL. It's for charity.

Do you do it?

Oh no, no. I haven't been for years and years now.

When you were doing it at the time did you ever have any big wins or losses?

Never any big wins, no. A few losses though. A little bit like the poker machines. You don't

22:30 win for long. It generally goes around.

Pretty fair game though?

It's a fair game and they play it honestly. There's a bloke at Yeerongpilly, out of Brisbane. We were waiting to head up to the Atherton Tablelands and he and I had knocked around for a while. We came up on the train. Once more I missed the draft.

23:00 I missed the draft to the Territory and we were coming up from Bonegilla to Albury and we were going to head north to Sydney and then head north to Brisbane, and we were on one of these, it wasn't like the old cattle trucks that we had in the Northern Territory that used to carry cattle for Vesty's meat works. They were all stinking, but these were proper carriages with platforms out each end. Real old timers, but

23:30 proper seats in them that you could sit on. The cattle trucks didn't have seats. You sat on the floor. And we were heading north, heading from Albury up, and it was late, the 29th, not quite the 29th of December but late in December when we left Bonegilla. And now usually speaking the troop trains had to be shunted off to let the

24:00 normal passenger trains go through with their thirty-six, their big engines, and so we were shunting off onto sidelines and the next thing we would be back on the track and going for our lives. The blokes were all sitting out on these platforms at the ends of each carriage and dangling their legs over the side. It was a hot day so they were out for a bit of fresh air. A fellow called Curly Hoyle

24:30 was sitting there and suddenly the passed either a signal box or a post of some kind and he must have been swinging his legs out, and the next thing he was gone. It hit him and spun him. And somebody was shouting out, "Curly's gone. Man overboard. Pull the chain you bloody drongos." So somebody inside pulled on the chain which brought the train to a sudden halt. And next thing down comes

25:00 a lieutenant wanting to know who pulled the chain, who did that, and nobody would own up, and what happened. And somebody in the carriage shouted, "A fellow fell off." "Who saw him fall off?" And all his mates who had been sitting there with him for, they were probably sleeping with him in the same tent and boozing with him for weeks, not one of them would own up to say that they saw Curly fall off. So it goes on for a while, and, "Right," says the lieutenant, "If

25:30 nobody saw a man fall off, nobody fell off. We're going." So at that stage I thought somebody better tell him, so I sang out and said that I saw him fall. "Right, come down here." So I get off the train and come down and another little whipper snipper says he saw him fall off too. Down we go and the guard comes up running up with his lantern and says, "Look, there's no more sidings between here and such and such

26:00 and there's an express going to come through in about ten minutes time. If we're still here in that time we're sitting ducks. It will be roaring through and bang." So the lieutenant said to him, "Well you take it away, mate. Take the train and get going. It's not worth risking a crash." So we two suckers and the lieutenant had to go back walking down along the line to try to find Curly.

26:30 But already he'd been able to get up. He had a broken collarbone and covered in little cuts all over him from the gravel on the side of the train line, and by the time we got back and walked another mile he'd already found a signal box, further down. So he was alright. We took him, an ambulance came from the RAAF station at,

27:00 I can't think of the name of the place, but a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] station was nearby so they took us in for the night and they fixed Curly up as best they could. And a little girl, a little WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], who was a nurse, came with us on the train and Curly and I and the WAAAF went off. So I lost the draft again. Got to Sydney and they were gone. But they sent me after them

27:30 this time. This fellow I was telling you about I was mates with for many weeks if not months after that, we were up at Yeerongpilly, just out of Brisbane and he got a word from some friend, his great friend, to say that his wife had been going out with somebody or other down south. So he went straight, as they always did, to the officer in charge, and said,

28:00 "Look I had this vile letter reckoning something about my wife. I'd like to go down and investigate." And they said, "Oh no. We're on our way to the Atherton. You can't possibly be spared at this time. Forget about it. It's all lies anyway." But he wanted to go and he didn't have any money so a group of us who all knew him well all put in ten pounds for him to go. So away he went and within a couple of days he was back again to say that it

28:30 was all lies. He had a fair idea who had send the poisoned pen letter to him because not everybody would be able to get an idea of his number and where he was located. So that was alright. They put him in the American stockade there, one of these big tall buildings with barbed wire all around and the guards sit right up in the crows nest. They put him there until we were going to move out. And he wouldn't have a cracker, they took all the money out of his pay book.

29:00 And the night before we were going to move out they let him out and gave him a bit of money to go and get some tobacco. I saw him down one end of the canteen and I felt embarrassed and so did the other fellows because we knew he owed us all this little bit of money that we had all thrown in and we knew that he'd just been in clink, and so we were more or less avoiding him when he shouted out from right

29:30 down the other end, “Hey, come here,” and he pulled out a roll of notes big enough to choke an elephant and says, “There’s your ten dollars, mate. I went down to a swy game last night and was it my lucky night. He had this great roll of notes and he was able to pay. That’s how honest these fellows were. Just basically honest. So I lost touch. I was with him in Brisbane later but I lost touch then.

30:00 These blokes would come and go in those days. Yeah.

What was the rest of the trip up when you left barracks there?

Yeerongpilly?

Yeah.

Yeah, we went back into Brisbane and we had about two days in Brisbane. On the second day we heard that there was beer on. There’d never be any beer on at the pubs

30:30 or if it was, it would be on for an hour to an hour and a half or two hours. They were selling it out the back door, especially to the Yanks, so we heard there was going to be beer on that afternoon. So we went into this pub and already there was an old bloke there on crutches standing right in front of the door. He wasn’t going to be left out of it. Gradually as we got close to

31:00 time the mob built up and built up until there was a great crowd of fellows all there waiting to get in. Finally, the publican, we could hear a rattle of bolts at the side and the publican opened the door and it was like a Bondi wave. Crash grabbed one side of this bloke and I grabbed the other and he lifted his crutches and we were just forced by the mob right up. If we had let him go he would have gone down and they would have run right over the top of him.

31:30 So we slapped him up against the bar. He was right. He got his beer. Well that was our last beer in Brisbane because after that we headed up to Cairns and then up over the winding railway track. In those days the, above Red Lynch the Barron Falls were spectacular. The amount of water coming over would almost challenge Niagara. Great gushing tons of it. But

32:00 I believe they’ve dammed it off now. Last time I went up there there was hardly anything running over the falls. They were damming it up and sending it back over to the tobacco growers and cotton growers I guess. So you wound slowly up to the Tablelands and headed for Kairi. At this stage I was on my own. All the other fellows had gone to different units but I was the only one going to 12 Light Wireless. It was camped on the edge of the jungle

32:30 on an old, it must have been an old cricket ground, or football ground. It was reasonably flat and the jungle had been cut away and pushed right back. And it was jungle in those times up there. I’ve been back years later and where it used to be pure jungle it is farms. Not a tree to be seen. They’ve cleared it right off. Anyhow, this was where the 7th Div [division] were camped

33:00 on the oval and we cleared a space against the jungle, the 12 Light Wireless, and the 40 Light Wireless had the same set up as ours. They were next door to us. But we weren’t part of 7th Div. We shared everything with them. I played football in their team, basketball against other units, and on one occasion I shared

33:30 guard duty with them. Now the guard hut would have been once on the edge of this cricket ground. It was probably where the ladies prepared afternoon tea for the cricketers or footballers. It was brush sides, corrugated tin on the top, piled high with branches to keep it cool in the summer time. At night time you could hear the mice and rats scuttling about and

34:00 the sliding noise of the carpet snakes after them. So it was pretty much alive up top. One time I copped the guard duty there. It was the only time they possibly had a bloke in the guardhouse. Like my other mate with the ten dollars this bloke had got a personal putrid letter about his wife playing up down south. Naturally

34:30 he went to the adjutant and said, “What about letting me go on a quick trip down, go on leave to sort it out before we go away?” He said, “No, we could be going any day. We’re just waiting for the word to go. I couldn’t possibly let you go.” So that’s what he thought. So next minute old, I’ll call him Snowy. Snowy’s gone. He goes down, sorts it out with his wife, comes back and says he’s pleased to be back.

35:00 and he’s in the guardhouse confined to there for the rest of the time we are on the Tablelands. Well the night I was on guard duty, as I said earlier I think, most of the officers were so keen to be on friendly terms with the men and it was different all together to when you were down south. There was our own little bloke, Ace, and I don’t know what his other name was. There was Ace and there was the donah lieutenant.

35:30 He tried me for not having glasses on and it was only a farce because he said, “I consider myself severely reprimanded.” So he was a really great guy, one of the boys too, and most of the officers were like that. Except for one and we’ll call him Dumpy. He had another name. And he’d pop out any time in the night from the officers’ mess and do his rounds to see if all the guards were on duty

36:00 and all standing there. All the pickets rather. The officers I believe laughed at him and said, “Wait until you’re in an area that is in combat areas before you start this business of getting tough on the men all

the time." But no, he had no time. His own men, if they met him anywhere during the day they'd have to salute him. I think that we have company.

36:30 **Better stop and explain what's going on then.**

Tape 6

00:30 **OK, we'll pick up there. You can recap up a little bit.**

Well as I was saying, I copped one guard duty with 7 Div sigs, and the fellow was being held until such time as we moved off down to Cairns again. So this night I was just inside the guardhouse. First of all there was his bed, where he slept,

01:00 and he had a wooden box there with a kerosene lamp on it, and he'd been reading when I came on at midnight. So I said, "How about getting some sleep now," and he said, "Yeah, I think I will." So he put the kerosene light out and got organised and apparently went off to sleep. There was a chair made out of this loya vine that grows in the jungle. It is like cane but it has spikes all over it.

01:30 If you run into it you've got to back off otherwise it will dig deeper and deeper into you. So I was sitting. I thought well I'll just sit for a minute in this chair and relax while he's having his sleep, and I'd be relieved at two o'clock. So I'm just settling down and the next thing I knew I'm sound asleep. I've leaned my rifle on the side of the hut. I dozed off

02:00 and after a while I hear this voice saying, "Hey Tommo, are you awake? Mate, get cracking." What did I call him? 'Dumpy'. "Dumpy's on the war path." So without having to think I was automatically standing up at the guardhouse door, with a rifle in hand at ease when along came Dumpy and all the rest of the poor old pickets. So they wouldn't get any

02:30 more sleep between then and two o'clock. So he comes up to me, "Name?" "Sig Thompson." "Did you see anybody go by?" "No sir." "Right," and away they go again. I said, "What do you reckon all that's all about, Snow?" Buggered if I know mate." So away they go and

03:00 I stayed awake then till two o'clock and at two o'clock the relief came on and told us what it was all about. Dumpy had been searching all the beds in all the tents. He had decided to make his rounds earlier or he would have caught me asleep and somebody had stepped out of the shadows of the cookhouse and belted him one and knocked him down. So he was on the war path. He was going to find out who,

03:30 but they went all around and they couldn't find anybody in the tents. Everybody was in bed, asleep, except the pickets. This fellow told us at two o'clock. So I went off at two and I came back at six o'clock after a bit of a snooze, and Snowy and I, I took him down to the latrine, first of all and then to the washhouse to have a wash and then we went to the cookhouse

04:00 to have some breakfast. He had to be accompanied, and I said, "What do you reckon that was all about last night Snowy? "Yeah," he said, "Somebody really clocked him, didn't they? They reckon he's furious." I said, "Yeah." Then I thought now how did he know that Dumpy was on the warpath when he was supposed to be asleep. He saved my bacon. I said, "Gee Snow, if anybody,

04:30 you know, if you knock an officer down you're on court martial, and the terrible part is you can't go on telling anybody and that's the fun of it, isn't it, to be able to skite somebody and say what you've done. But he won't be able to open his mouth." "No," says old Snowy, "Not unless it's a mate and he can't put you in because he be in trouble himself," and with that he looks down and closes his fist and three of his knuckles have skin off them.

05:00 Well he never told anybody and I never told anybody because I was in it for going to sleep as much as him in letting him go wandering in the middle of the night. So when we went back down to Cairns to go overseas Snowy was back in favour again. He was released from the gaol house and he went with us. So we got onto the

05:30 Jefferson Davis then, down at Cairns, a troop ship but down below it had jeeps and barrels of petrol and in the storm that followed the second night out, some of the barrels broke away and they rolled up and down, crash, crash, and you only needed a spark and we'd have been blown right back to Cairns. Because

06:00 it was an hour or more before anybody went below and tied them down again. Everybody was as sick as dogs in the storm that followed, and down below fellows had little stretchers and with the swaying of the ship the stretchers had broken and some were lying flat on the floor and some with their head part broken down and their head down on the floor and their feet up on the other end of it, and too helpless

06:30 in their seasickness to help themselves get out of it. They just lay there in their mess. It was no place to sleep because in all that smell you'd be sick yourself very quickly, and the smell of the petrol fumes from down below. So a couple of us went up and there were rope ladders over stores on the deck, and there

was also a little lean to where they dished out our food. They brought it up from the galley down below and

07:00 served you up on deck into your dixie. So we went up there and made a spot on those rope ladders. Not rope ladders rather, rope nets that went right over the stores. But in the gale that followed that night half the stores were washed away and the little cookhouse annex thing, it was washed away and our temporary showers on deck, they were all washed away. Everybody below

07:30 had a very bad night.

Were you seasick?

No. Up the front of the boat, now we were on our own, that little ship because we had no escort. We had four of these little pom pom guns and the sailors on guard all the time on them just waiting for trouble. But none came from the air, which they would have been used for. So

08:00 we were all up the front of the boat. Now because we were on our own and we were worried about submarine attack all the time, every half hour the boat changed course so it was zigzagging through the ocean to avoid, they'd say it would take more than that time for the submarine to get a line on you. So a crowd of us were up the front and that is the best place to be when the seasickness is in the air, when you get plenty

08:30 of fresh air and you can look at the horizon and it helps. And she changed course suddenly into the waves and a great wave came up over the top and instead of hanging on we all stepped back, not knowing how big it was going to be. It came right over and lifted everybody and sent us all sliding down the decks. They ended up hanging onto some of the rope ladders further down.

09:00 In my case I didn't get that far. I found myself hanging on to one of these stanchions where they tie up the boat when it is in port. Hanging on with my left hand because my right shoulder had crashed against it as the wave slid me down and it had gone out of joint. So normally I would have been able to time it, between the waves, to let go and race down to join the others but I couldn't afford to because I thought well it I

09:30 let go and another one comes over, which they kept on doing, I'll be in real trouble.

How was this connected to your original football injury?

Oh, same thing. Same shoulder slipping out of joint easily. So finally a bloke from 7 Div sigs was hanging onto the ropes and he sang out was I alright, and I had played football with him up on the Tablelands and I sang out, "Yes,

10:00 but my shoulder's out. We finally got a myopic, short-sighted, doctor up and he gingerly worked his way along the railing on the ship up to where I was and I explained to him how the best way to get it in would be because at Larrimah an old major had shown me how. And he got me back into shape and away we went. So I thought if anybody

10:30 got washed overboard at that time, it was just on dark, there would be no stopping. With submarine scares all the time they wouldn't go back looking for him, would they? No one had gone overboard. Well by the morning half the stores had been washed away and the little cookhouse turnout where they brought the food up to dish it out to the troops had gone. And the makeshift shower

11:00 part was gone. So they had to rig up a new shower, not the shower itself, but a new partition out of the tarpaulins where you could still go and get a salt-water shower. We stopped one night in Port Moresby for protection because we were on our own.

This was the first time you had been overseas from Australia?

That's right.

How were you feeling embarking on this voyage?

Very

11:30 keen still, yeah. We were all very keen. All these young blokes think that there's only good times ahead.

What did you know of what was going on in the war at the time?

We knew that it was over in Europe at that stage. It was only the Japanese to be dealt with now, and seeing that we had come to grips with them on the Owen Stanley's and held them right

12:00 there, and seeing that they had been turned back at the battle of the Coral Sea, then we were pretty cocky at the time. We thought we'd easily fix them once we got up there.

What was your opinion of the Japanese?

The only ones I saw at close range were prisoners of war on Morotai. They had been on a Red Cross ship flying a Red Cross flag, and an American

12:30 battle ship had pulled them up for inspection and taken the bandages off and miraculously they were all cured. So they brought them all to Morotai and interned them there. The Sikhs, there were a bunch of Sikhs on Morotai and they were part of the guard duty a lot on Morotai for the Japanese. But you hear all these stories of them committing hari-kari. I think that might only be for their officers

13:00 because these blokes were as cheerful and as cheeky. You'd see these blokes going out for work parties in the morning and they'd be shouting out, I suppose it was abuse at us. I didn't know what it was, and they seemed so happy. So it could only be a special privilege to be able to commit hari-kari because that was the general opinion.

Were they looking after you on this boat when you went

13:30 **out of Cairns?**

Oh, the food wasn't bad. They'd bring it up each day from down below and dish it out. On Port Moresby then the Aborigines, not the Aborigines, they aren't, the natives came out in lacatois and they'd ask for money or Australia kie-kie, Australian food.

14:00 If you threw two bob over they'd dive for it. But we noticed that if you threw flat money into the water, it doesn't just sink like that. It floats. So that would give them plenty of time to dive for it and catch it before it gets too far down. So they were great at diving off their lacatois and regaining these coins. Further, we headed into the Coral

14:30 Sea, going east to go around the far eastern tip of New Guinea. At that stage two things we noticed. The water at night would be lit up with these little fluorescent creatures, whatever they happened to be, and you'd see down the side of the ship and in the wake all these little miniature lights, silver, in the wake with these

15:00 little things being disturbed. It seemed to give off this florescence. And the other thing is that the Coral Sea is the only time I ever saw flying fish by the thousands and thousands. And they'd skim along the top of the water with their dorsel fin just cutting the tops of the waves and the next thing down they would go. But every time they went down there'd be plenty more coming up. As far as you could see were these flying fish and it was the only time I ever saw them.

15:30 We went round the eastern end of New Guinea and then up north and down past the Celebes. The Celebes, well I'm getting ahead of myself there, aren't I? Up to Morotai, and camped on Morotai. A couple of us were detailed to watch them bringing our stores off the ship. Each different division, or company, or platoon even, had

16:00 its own colour scheme. Ours was red, white and blue so you could look first of all for boxes with red, white and blue stripes and then you'd look at the number and see that it was for you and not for some other signal unit. We were supposed to be watching them as the night wore on. My mate, Harry somebody, got appendicitis. So the Provos who were also on

16:30 deck carted him away to hospital and I was there on my own looking for signs that it was our own material. So by morning I was getting worn out so I left it for a while. There was an American camp nearby so I crawled under a tent out of the rain for a little while and had a couple of hours snooze. So when I went back in the morning to the wharf, Red Beach,

17:00 all the stuff had been taken off and there were dumps belonging to different units here and there but no more for the sigs. And later in the day I went back to find out where, that's right, a fellow, Bullocky, came in his jeep, one of our jeeps, to pick me up and take me back. But we still didn't have accommodation. They were still trying to flatten out, there were these huge hillocks and the Americans had said,

17:30 "That's not a bad a place, you can camp there," and they gave us two of those square American style olive-coloured tents that don't have a tarpaulin over them like ours do. Because they've already been seasoned with some kind of oil that stops the water from draining through. So they said, "You can have that area there and we'll send up a bulldozer to flatten it out for you." Well they started to dig it up but they were old piles of

18:00 Japanese bodies that had just, in the middle of the battle for that area, they had just been piled up and bulldozed into a big heap. So we couldn't sleep there. We didn't have anywhere at that stage. See, the Yanks had only taken the peninsula on Morotai and the rest of the island, the bigger part of the island, was held by the Japs. The Americans had put in a perimeter and that was defended night

18:30 and day at all times. You'd hear them firing away all the time there.

Were there any battles between the Japanese and the allied forces on Morotai?

Not at that stage. All the battles had been. All they wanted, the Americans, was to take that much only and use it as a jumping off place because we started this idea of island hopping. Not taking a complete island, just taking enough to put in their defences and then moving on. They thought it was a quicker

19:00 way to get to Tokyo.

I'd just like to go back to the Liberty ship for a little while. Was this the first time you'd been on a big ship?

Yes.

What was it that impressed you about this particular ship?

Well, I can remember when she rolled, we had what they called jungle boots with all these big nails in them and you'd slide. You'd go skating on these steel decks.

19:30 Then down below, the size of the huge holds, but there would only be one little ladder going up. So we decided early in the piece, quite apart from everybody being sick everywhere, that the best place to be if we were going to get torpedoed was up on deck. So two or three of us staked our position up on these rope nets that

20:00 were covering the stores. And we just slept up on like on a hammock almost and we slept up there all through the voyage after that.

What were the bathroom facilities like on the ship?

You could have a shower. That was it.

What about toilet facilities? Can you remember the toilet facilities?

I can't remember. There must have been, but I can't remember where they were. No.

How much contact with the crew did you have

20:30 **at this stage?**

Very little because there wasn't a very big crew. They were on duty on the pom pom guns, the four of them, all the time. Later on the Warsash they depended on their radar. On the Warsash there was this huge dish and it was searching the whole time. Sometimes it would pause for a minute or two, or a second or two only in one direction, and then it would move on again but it was rotating the whole time

21:00 looking for attack.

What was your impressions of arriving in Port Moresby the first time?

Port Moresby. Well we were surprised to see these little crinkly headed fellows in their boats begging for Australian food, Australia kie-kie. But there weren't too many lights at night. Now this was the contrast between

21:30 Port Moresby and when we got around to Biak. Port Moresby was Australian and we were the same as we had been down south in the cities, where we couldn't show a light at night. All streetlights were off and all houses had to have a blind over them or a blanket so that you couldn't see the light through for fear of being attacked by Jap aeroplanes. But up there

22:00 on Biak, or on Port Moresby it was all blacked out at night, but on Biak it was a blaze of lights. And we couldn't get over this. How they felt that they had nothing to fear from the Japs. The island was a real wreck. All their plantations were smashed. Just stumps of coconut palms where once there had been plantations.

What did you know of your purpose

22:30 **of the voyage at this stage?**

We didn't know. We didn't have a clue. And this is why when we got to Morotai and our wireless sets didn't turn up, and everything else, even jeeps of our own, were turned up. We didn't have a clue because we thought, now how can we go to work without our wireless sets? And there was an inkling right back on the Tablelands, on the Atherton Tablelands,

23:00 we were at Tolga one day and we were tying up walkie-talkies. They were a little two-way radio where you could talk to people, the forerunner of the little telephone that you carry with you, a mobile. But much bigger of course. You'd wrap them in grease proof paper or better than grease proof, it was really thick tared paper. You'd wrap them in a certain way and tie them up with the

23:30 twine. And then you'd dip them in these big tubs of melted bees wax, and you'd set them out on big racks to dry then. I believe they would have dipped them again at a further date so that when we got up to the Pacific later they'd be quite OK. At the same time we were in this huge shed and there were some of these colossal looking radio, no, wireless sets. And

24:00 I remember saying to one bloke, "Do you reckon you could tune one of those great so and so's?" And we were looking them over and the officer standing by must have known what was going to happen because he said, "You mightn't have to." And it was true, when we went on the Warsash going to Balik [Balikpapan]

24:30 we didn't have to tune anything. We came on duty, a technician had already set our frequency for the

day. We already knew our frequency and also our call sign for the day, and what you'd be listening for. But you could put your earphones on and tune it just slightly to bring the best signal in. But apart from that they did everything for us. So he must have known even back at Tolga on the Atherton Tablelands where we were going. And I'm sure Ace didn't know or he'd never be able to keep it

25:00 to himself. So he never said either.

I might just pull you up there. You were explaining what your role was to be when you were on the Warsash?

The Warsash.

On the Warsash on your way to Balik. What was your role on that ship?

Our role was to listen for our call sign. Make no reply.

25:30 Normally if somebody calls you you reply and reply with your own call sign and there's and tell them to go ahead with whatever they've got to say. But here it was "piano". It was do not break radio silence, and the fellow down in Leyte who was dummying

26:00 for you, he would make all the replies. Sometimes there'd be bad atmospherics and static. Sometimes the Japs would come in by just pressing his key on your frequency and drowning part of it out. But you couldn't do anything about that. So you just copied down all the, it was always, on the way to Balik it was always in cipher, either letters of the alphabet or numbers and you just copied it

26:30 all down and sent it in to the cipher room. It wasn't the big guns around the table at that stage. It hadn't started. They would turn it back into plain English and give it to whoever was responsible. So you didn't know what was going on at that stage, what it was all about. It was all highly secret to you.

What did you think of this kind of work?

Well I was used to it.

27:00 Lots of our work back at Larrimah had been in cipher. They thought it wasn't fit for the regulars to know what was going on, so they put it in cipher just for safekeeping. And especially anything we took over the wireless at Larrimah used to be always in cipher. So it was just routine, just part of our job. But of course once we got there it changed and we had to do

27:30 plain language. We had to copy all that down from the shore. And the fellow's advancing.

While you were taking these cipher messages you would have had some time to yourself?

Lots of time. Because as I said earlier we had free run of their library, the Americans. They were so good in so many ways. For instance before we left Morotai someone said we were used to sleeping on deck.

28:00 So next thing an officer invited us to go down to the PX and collect some stretchers. And in between times, when we were not working, we were able to sleep on deck. There was one night off Morotai there was a Red Alert and the Jap planes were coming over. The radar had picked them up and said, "Action stations, action stations," over their loud speakers.

28:30 The fellows who manned the guns came running up and they just steeplechased us, went straight over the top of us, jumped over our beds on the way to man the guns. But they didn't bomb us, they bombed somebody else. They bombed one of the airstrips on shore, which were their main targets, the airstrips.

What did you have to do with the Americans on board during that trip out to Balikpapan?

29:00 Get to know them and they were, also I don't think they'd seen other Australians before. They'd just come down from the Philippines where they had been in action and they were full of stories about what had gone on up there, about Kamikaze pilots that would try and bomb them and therefore kill themselves at the same time. One had just slivered off. Another one had slid down the deck. It came in at an angle,

29:30 slivered down the deck and took away all the side rail without exploding. Neither of them exploded on the Warsash. So they were eager to show you where this had all happened and eager to talk to you. I remember four main people on the trip. Four main Americans, one was Bill Morse, and he, reluctantly on the side when nobody else was about, he would explain to you that his

30:00 parents or grandparents, they had been English too but you never sort of admitted this to the Americans, that he was a descendant of the English. He was a friendly old fellow but he could never understand why we didn't have self-government in Australia, why we didn't break away like the Americans did and run our own government. At first we worded him up, but he was under the impression that we were governed by the House of Commons in England

30:30 still. So that was Bill Morse. Another young bloke who was so friendly, he was in one of those pictures, one of those photos there, was the young Italian, what do you call it? They mend clothes or design clothes.

Tailor?

Tailor. Tailor's the word. I starting to forget words. Yes. He was

31:00 more than friendly always. Always on the lookout for a yarn. The other little bloke was Ken Lareau. He was from North America, well up. He was half Indian and half French. With a name like Lareau, I suppose that was the French side of him. He was such a friendly, he was quite popular with all the crew. But he was always wanting to talk with the Australians and hear about Australia.

31:30 His brother, he said, had been a runner up for the Golden Gloves back in the States. He never wanted to box with me. He was always wanting to wrestle. But he was friendly with everybody, and when it came time for initiation he preferred to run with us, rather than with the other young Americans. There was only one other bloke that we didn't have much to say with, and he was a silent American.

32:00 He had very little to say. It was the night before the first landing on the 1st of July and he came aboard and I went off shift and went down below. And he was sitting there half asleep sitting against the bulkhead, against the wall, and he wanted a cigarette so I got a cigarette and lit it for him. But he had about two puffs and dozed off. Now the strange thing about him was he wasn't dressed like any of the sailors.

32:30 He was just dressed in jungle greens more like the Australian troops. And so by the time I got back off shift of course he was gone. Someone from security had come down and taken him away to give him a decent bed somewhere and a decent nights sleep. And it turned out that he had been behind the Japanese lines on Borneo for more than a fortnight. They just brought him in and they debriefed him and he came down for a rest

33:00 down in our hold. But I never saw him again. But he was a silent American, you might say. He had very little to say. Of course he was so tired that he wouldn't want to be having too much to say either. But the others aboard, General Morshead we discovered was aboard the first day. I don't know how he got there. He wasn't on board earlier in the piece, so somebody dropped him off. And we had an

33:30 air force officer, also, not a brigadier, a colonel. An Australian colonel and an air force officer and then General Morshead. They were our only officers. And of course Ace, but Ace meant nothing in that situation. They'd all be standing around with a whole pack of American officers.

34:00 They'd be standing around this table they had with all these landforms in miniature on it and the names of the different battalions and platoons and so on that were ashore. As our messages came in about what was happening they'd move something accordingly on their big sand tray.

Where was the operation room set up?

In a huge cabin. It was forward on the ship

34:30 because at this stage we weren't down in the office wireless room. We were down in a little cubbyhole up on deck. But we were quite handy to the ops room. There were two of us and each time one of us took a message he'd give it to the other bloke and he'd take it in or we'd keep swapping around because it was hard going doing all this quick writing of plain language.

When was it that you became

35:00 **aware of what was going to be going on?**

Not until a week before we first became part of the crew. Ace came around. He didn't know, I'm sure either. He came around one day all excited and he said, "Well chaps. This is it. We're going to Balikpapan." Some, I think about six of us were on that ship. Others of us were on the Westralia and others on the Kanimbla. That took

35:30 up all of our little group. I think the 40 Wireless, who were our neighbours for most of our time on the Tablelands, I think they would have gone to Tarakan with the 9th Division and done a similar job to what we were doing. It was what we were both apparently being trained for and we didn't know.

What was your role

36:00 **then during the landing at Balikpapan? What were you doing?**

Only to stay and take all these messages as they came over the air, and to send them in to the ops room.

How much did you see of what was going on in that operations room during the battle?

Well it was so close you didn't think much about it. You just wrote like mad all the time. There were different ones coming in all the time on that frequency. So you'd have to, I suppose, have a rough idea which

36:30 one you were dealing with before you sent it in. But we didn't get ashore. By the third day, the whole ship, during that period, would have been shut off. All the oval doors right through would have been locked and a there'd be a sailor on guard at each door so that only people with a real good reason would we be able to pass from one part of the ship to another. They stayed at their

37:00 possie and slept there. The cooks brought them around food, and for three days they had to stay on guard there, but once of course, the idea was that if you were hit by a torpedo then you've got a better chance of not sinking if all the apartments are sealed off. So that was the idea of it. On the third day then or the

37:30 night of the third day, they decided that the 7th Division was safely ashore. They were doing great. There would only be mopping up operations to go. So the Warsash could go back about its other duties. So it was going to take us back and drop us off at Morotai. So on the 4th of July then American Independence day suddenly dawned and nobody had any trouble

38:00 about, worries about being, we didn't get to shore of course for that reason because they decided to go straight back. But we were relieved of our duties because we had no more wireless work to do all the way back. So we were going to have a great holiday we thought, until on the morning of the 4th of July a group of press gang, white Americans,

38:30 black Americans, and Mexicans suddenly appeared down below in our area where we slept with the other Yanks. And they said, "Everybody strip off." We said, "Not us. We've heard about you wanting to initiate these poor fellows who haven't been across the equator before but we've been across twice." "Never mind that. Anyone who wasn't in the Philippines with us is going to be initiated."

39:00 And they had short lengths of rope and towels with knots in them. They were looking very threatening. So everybody stripped off, even to their socks. Right, up the companionway, we had to all go up.

I'll just stop you there before you tell this story because I don't want to miss it. We're about to run out of tape.

Tape 7

00:36 **OK. So there was some history to do with the crossing of the equator and initiations?**

Oh yes. It was a common thing to have some indication if you hadn't crossed it before then you had to be initiated.

Had you heard of that before?

Oh yes.

When it happened on the 4th of July were you completely taken by surprise?

Oh, we were because we thought we were being

01:00 badly done by. But there was no arguing with these big blokes so they whipped us along the deck and we came up on deck and there was one fellow, we found out later it was the second mate, and they had him swinging from a yardarm. It was not about his neck but his hands were tied behind his back and they had him in a kind of jacket with ropes so that he just swung. I don't

01:30 think it was hurting him. And as the ship rolled he just slowly turned around and around and you could see him up there putting up with it. I suppose he couldn't argue. And that was the second officer, so they were pretty cheeky. They hunted us along and as we went along the deck we got more and more young Americans, all in the nuddy [nude], being hounded along by the blokes with the ropes and the towels. We came into two long

02:00 lines with this channel up the middle of American sailors, all similarly attired to help us on our way. We raced up to the forward part and of course Lareau was running with us, and we realised that everyone knew him and so they all trying to give us an extra belt along because of Lareau giving them cheek. So we set out flat out as fast as we could go to avoid too much mall treatment. Up this double row of sailors

02:30 until we got to the main part where it was all going to take place.

Who were you with? Lareau, and yourself but who else were you with?

A few Australians but a crowd of Americans behind us. Young Americans, eighteen years old, nineteen years old. Up the front of the ship there was the captain of the Warsash in a way that they would probably never see him again. They had a big mattress on the floor and they had piles of pillows all around

03:00 him and he was squatted there cross-legged in his underpants and they had plaited a crown out of seaweed and that was on his head, and he was King Neptune. And we had to be taken before King Neptune to be tried. Now there is a fellow in that photo, he is reading out the charge that we were land-lubbers, that we had no right to be aboard the ocean and how did

03:30 we plead. Of course we all had to plead guilty. So that's our General Morshead standing by, not doing anything to help us of course. But he wasn't in it and Ace wasn't in it either. They didn't initiate the officers. So we went before the captain and one huge bloke grabbed us one at a time, grabbed us by an

arm each and forced us down and we had to kiss the captain on the belly

04:00 to acknowledge that he was the real captain of the ocean. He was King Neptune. So after we had been introduced to the captain and he said that we had to be initiated, we were taken and placed in a chair which was a barber's chair or a dentist's chair. I don't know which.

04:30 But it was one that leant right back. They sat us on it and then pushed us back flat so you were almost lying there. And then these two fellows that were taking over now, they were in white coats like surgeons and they had tall like gumboots on. And first of all they had a good look at our

05:00 hair and they decided that, they were shaking their heads and looking at the audience and acting up a treat. The tailor that we thought was our friend provided them with a huge pair of tailor's scissors and they began just cutting chunks out of our hair, here and there, until they decided that it looked much better and then they put on an act to show that it was pretty good. Then they decided to look at out tonsils. Open wide.

05:30 Right up big. And they were looking down our throats and one of us grabbed us by the teeth and he starts to make out that our teeth are bending backwards and forwards, just by the movement of his hands. Now and then he'd throw a tooth away and put on an act for the mob who were just standing around. And then he decided to look further down our throat, and as he was going to do this and pulling our chin down, his mate said quietly,

06:00 "Hold your breath," and the next thing he'd shoved a big syringe full of Atebrin [antimalarial drug] into our mouths, into my mouth anyway, he did it for everybody, and quirted all this Atebrin. Well, we took Atebrin every day but it was a little pill that we could swallow easily. But apparently they had it in liquid form. They filled my mouth full of this Atebrin and it was nearly choking me and as he pulled his syringe

06:30 away they up ended the chair and it sent me flying forward onto what would have normally been part of the deck. At this time it was a specially prepared little, we'll say a bed, and it was made up of gravy, mashed potato, frothed up skim milk

07:00 and little bits of sausage from the tinned sausage. All sorts of stuff from the cookhouse that they had brought up and prepared this little bed of it. And at the end of it there was a little, like a tunnel, and it was indicated to you that the only way out after you'd landed in this slop, the way out for you is through the tunnel.

07:30 You couldn't crawl through the tunnel because it was too low so you had to slide and you slid along on your stomach through all this muck and you came out at the edge of this little bath that they made to hold all this in and it wouldn't get all over the deck. And it was only about a canvas edge, about eighteen inches high all around you. You came out then and stood up and the bloke was waiting there for you with a big pot

08:00 of grease or black oil and he dipped a waddy in that and put it on the back of your head, and he told you, "Just in case you try to come back for a second run around we'll know that you've been through before. You won't have a chance." So then they decided that they'd better give us a wash, that after initiating us we were right. "Come around down the deck here and we'll give you a wash," and there they were waiting with

08:30 fire hoses to give us a wash, and they really washed us down. After that with the compliments of the captain they gave us a bit of soap and a towel and said, "You can go below and there are warm, freshwater showers down there." Surprising how much fresh water they had. It was being supplemented all the time by air-conditioning and down below in the

09:00 kitchen, I think I explained where the cooks were working away, the steam was taken off all their cooking with this air-conditioning and took the steam straight up and through an exhaust. And so it was they got all this steam, not steam, but all this moisture from the atmosphere, because they were in the tropics, and they got I suppose hundreds of gallons of fresh water out of it in their air-conditioning system.

09:30 So there was always water. They'd even have fresh water bubblers around in certain parts of the ship so you could just give yourself a cool drink now and again as you were going about. So it was all mod cons there. So we were initiated then, we were prepared. On American ships they didn't have alcohol for the crew. Not like the British and the Australians where they got

10:00 a toddy of rum every day I think it would have been. But the Americans would only let them cut loose when they were near an island somewhere and they were out of harm's way and the sailors who weren't on duty could go ashore and they'd provide all these, it was the first time we'd seen these little bottles, slightly smaller than the ones that we have these days in Australia. Little green bottles of beer. But we didn't get that far because by the time we got back

10:30 to Morotai they hadn't struck the right island at that stage. They still had them promised. All the crew were waiting for the opportunity. And so we had to go ashore without having the privilege of going to the islands with them and getting inebriated.

Did your treatment on board the ship change once you had been initiated?

11:00 Oh, no. They were always friendly. It was only on that particular day that they suddenly turned foul. But apart from that they were always really friendly.

Was this the same for all the young Americans, what you just described they did to you?

Yes. They all went through the same treatment.

Was there a presentation of some sort of award?

No. A couple of days later after were cleaned

11:30 up, see, we were just relaxed now. There was no work for us. We were just cruising around. They gave us that little card that I have there to say that you are now a trusty shellback and King Neptune had taken you into his fold and all that sort of thing. And then before we left the ship finally they gave us that diploma that I have in the glass case that I have out there as a remembrance. There would only be

12:00 perhaps, well, there could only be about four or five of those in Australia because there were only that many Australians. Ace couldn't have got one. He didn't go through it. We were the only four or five that would have received that diploma, if you could call it that.

Was Ace your commanding officer?

He was our Lieutenant.

What was his role on board the ship?

I don't see that he did anything. I can't remember him ever having any.

12:30 We knew our routine before we left Morotai. I suppose he could say he worked it all out for us before we left Morotai. And of course he would have to work up with the fellows in the signals room. We were only one small part of their signal room on the way. There were these big, huge sets all around and somebody said that Australians only liked tea, that they

13:00 didn't drink coffee, and there was like a little stove there for them to keep their coffee hot. So that any time of the day or night there, when they were on duty, they could go and get a drink of coffee. So somebody saying that Australians only liked tea, they had a big pot of tea for us and it was sitting there stewing away hour after hour. But the idea was good. But it shows how keen they were to make

13:30 everything easy for us.

What happened to General Morshead?

I don't remember him after about the second day. You'd see him strolling down. He was a friendly old fellow, but he never stopped to talk to you but if you passed him on deck and you'd give him a salute he'd look at you and you'd think, you don't have to, but he'd give you a half salute back again. A really friendly old guy.

14:00 Whereas Blamey, you always thought of him as a ferocious big so and so. But I didn't have much to do with Blamey. I only saw him when he signed the peace treaty with the commander of the Helmaheras later.

We'll talk about that in a minute. But just going back to Balikpapan, how close to the landing were you, or the role on the Warsash?

Well you could, we were close enough to the shore to be able to see

14:30 houses in the distance and especially at night it would be all lit up with fires because the Japanese were burning out some oil wells on their way as they retreated and great columns of flame and smoke would be going up all at night time. But you couldn't see the troops in action so much as just the firing of the guns going off

15:00 and the rattle from when they were firing close in on shore.

What did it sound like when the battle was going on from that far out?

Well, it was continuous. It was all the time. Oh, I don't know. We were so busy writing all that time. We were going flat out all the time so we didn't have much time to notice, accept you could see

15:30 what they were doing to the place, how the Japs were burning it as they retreated.

Was there any fire directed at the ships in the harbour?

On the way over first of all we had an encounter. The radar picked up a submarine, but a Liberator and two fighters came through and they dropped depth charges. But apart from that, then there

16:00 would be night fighters. At night time some of the Japs, you could here them. As they crossed our frequency we could here there American pilots, very excited because they were trying to protect each other, watch each other's tail. But then a great Liberator I think it was, was hit over land and it came slowly out to sea, out towards the ships,

16:30 and it just sank slowly into the water. So I guess they had time. It wasn't in a hurry. It just seemed as though it was landing on the water but it wasn't. It was just going down. So I guess the crew got out alright if they weren't damaged already.

Can you explain how many other ships there were around and what they were doing?

Yes. When we came towards Balikpapan

17:00 you could look out towards where you had come from and there would be a string of ships going back over the horizon. And I've got a, could I just run over some of the points for that day?

Yes. We can stop for a moment while you check something if you like. We'll just stop the camera.

The account of the last stage of the voyage comes directly from my diary. Convoy streaming back over

17:30 horizon. Warsash slightly ahead of Kanimbla, Westralia and other Australian transports. Destroyers scout sweeping ahead. Five hour shifts on wireless all day. First of Celebes, like mountains in the ocean. Volcano smoking on starboard side. Japs announce we are coming. Claim some troops already landed. Ocean smooth as a lake. Communications to corps

18:00 bad. Too much interference and other stations on same frequency. Flat tops are waiting ahead of us to join us. Jammed on wireless by a Jap operator on the third night out. Celebes proper low on horizon, fourth day. Submarine sighted by watch early this morning. Two carriers and two cruisers join convoy. Fast destroyer delivered navy mail by flying fox method

18:30 daily. About a hundred and twenty craft in sight. More below horizon. Constant speed about eight knots. First day Balikpapan. Shore has been pounded by destroyers and bombers for fifteen days. O7:00 hours, zero hour. Destroyers in semi-circle around beach began to shell Jap positions while troops in LSTs [Landing Ship Tanks], LCTs [Landing Craft Tank], LCIs [Landing Craft Infantry] and

19:00 SLI [?] and all available small craft made for the beach in a first wave. Recce [reconnaissance] planes in direct communication with the destroyers advised ranges for firing and made sure shells went well ahead of our troops. A few shore batteries returned fire but were soon silenced. Ack-ack [anti aircraft gun] bursts in spots around our planes, no enemy planes sighted, and hit a P-38 Lightning, which was safe, and one of our

19:30 fighters shot down later in the day. One destroyer badly damaged but still afloat. Troops met very little opposition on beach. Japs making firm stand on ridge of hills between the beach and the city. That's the first day. And small houses and steel masts from the oil wells visible from the ship. Smoke pouring in clouds from city all day. Reflections crimson on clouds all night.

20:00 Red glow and gunfire flashes on hills. All tanks, artillery, etcetera, safely on shore. The second day. Japs trying to get Scotty to work to him on a wireless. Congrats to us from colonel. Done a slatting job. Liberator shot down, big shot dead. Two Lightnings and second fighter shot down. They were ours. Flanking movement going on ashore. Air fields ours by dusk. Destroyers still pounding the shore.

20:30 Only answer is mortar fire at inshore craft. Destroyers along side us to get fuel. Monkey's fist thrown across with a light line attached before dragging over heavier fuel hoses. Parastars sent up by Japs at night. Torpedo boats about, which were ours. A Dutch destroyer low in ammunition but nearest supply base was Ceylon.

21:00 ABC at home gives us a build up. Fire still burning. Clouds of grey white smoke. Flames leaping at night glow on clouds above and across water. Flashes and fires to north where encircling movement is taking place. Sleeping on deck where possible. Japs still jamming our frequency. The American fighter planes, Pardoner, C4, C5 and Macadar.

21:30 The American fighter planes were causing trouble when close because they were on the same frequency as us. Third day. Jap planes about last night. All cleared off at first sign of our night fighters, except one which continually changed altitude to evade our night fighters radar equipment. F6, F Hellcat shot him down fifty miles south. More destroyers after fuel

22:00 along side us. Laundry still doing our washing. Clothing store and canteen still closed. Sailors relieved from GQ, General Quarters, for first time since the night before the landing. They have been sleeping and eating at their posts. Intercom doors now open. Probably library too. No more paper plates and cups. Radar frame still revolving, pausing now and then but no alarm.

22:30 7 Div sigs were established ashore. Our job complete. No chance of us getting ashore now. Balloon up for meteorological report. Pipe to dinner. Amplifying system effective all over ship. And the retreating Japs setting fire to remaining oil wells.

That's great. There's some very evocative imagery there. Just take

23:00 **off your glasses again, just for the lights. Were you writing other things on board as well or was it just your diary?**

Oh, just my diary. Yes.

Were you already a bit of a writer at that time?

No, Not really, no. I just thought that I'd keep a diary of those years. I started when I was in the Territory and kept on. I used to write a lot of

23:30 letters. I wrote to a whole lot of fellows and also to quite a few girls. But not a writer in the sense of writing stories, except in school. We used to have every year, they called it the "Harvester" at Hurlstone. I had a few articles in that but of course there's quite a lot of kids who'd have articles in that.

Although they were just diary entries some of the imagery there is very kind of poetic. Did you use that

24:00 **later on to write some poems?**

No. Not really.

Who were you writing letters to?

Fellows who were already in the army. Fellows who I had trained with. One fellow was up in the, two fellows had gone overseas in the air force. Another bloke was up where they are having all the trouble now

24:30 in the northern Pacific there. Not quite northern. A fellow who was in the air force. Girls that I'd met on holidays. So I would have been writing regularly to about half a dozen, at least,

25:00 people.

Were there any serious relationships among those girls you mentioned?

No. I think in the end before I found that I wasn't, when I thought I wasn't going home then I wrote and made is clear that I didn't want any serious relations. Because at that stage I thought I was going on to Ambon after the war was all over. We'd still be setting up a communications system.

25:30 So I wrote to them then and said not to be waiting for me, that I was waiting on and it might be a year or more before I got back. So let's part happily. So back on Morotai.

Just a couple of things from your diary entries that I didn't, you mentioned a monkey's fist. What's that?

26:00 Yes, a ball of, I suppose it would be lead, and to set up communication between two ships first of all you get this ball of lead on a thin rope and you swing it and you let it go and it flies right across the gap and they grab it over there. It lands and they grab it, and then they pull it. If they are getting fuel, as in this case, they seemed to get fuel from us. We must have had nothing but fuel down below in the

26:30 holds. And they just pulled the hose across from one ship to the other and join it up and they'd pump fuel across to the other ship.

You also mentioned ABC broadcasts. How were you picking those up?

See, we had wireless sets and we could listen in when we weren't on duty. You could listen in to other frequencies.

27:00 And also on the island, and I suppose it was rebroadcast on the ship, on the island of Morotai you had a little wireless station, WVTL, 'the voice of the Malacca's', fourteen eighty on your dial. And it was run partly by GI Jill with her GI Jive. So all sorts of news from America and Australia on Morotai was being broadcast, and

27:30 mainly new music from America. But she was, or made herself out as a real sweetheart. She loved all the boys and she hoped they'd all get home soon. That sort of build up to lift their morale. On the night that peace was declared, or peace was offered by the Japanese, the whole island went crazy. GI Jill and her GI Jive was on the radio begging them,

28:00 "Let's all get home alive, fellows. Don't start going on silly." Trying to stop them because they went crazy. They were letting off all their rifles, paraflares were going up. The big guns were sending out all of their star shells, and it looked as though you'd imagine that they were wanting to use up all their ammunition

28:30 on one night. It was just crazy, the noise. And the fellows out on the perimeter where the Japs were still prepared to fight, they didn't know about any peace offerings. They were still prepared to fight still, and the Americans out on the perimeter thought that with all the firing going on the Japs must have got around behind them somehow and flanked them. So they turned round and started firing back towards the camps.

29:00 Of course the number of Americans who were shot by their mates just varied with the person who was telling the story. So many of them were supposed to have shot each other. This is why GI Jill was so

concerned that they wouldn't all go home alive.

Where were you that evening?

I was in hospital that evening.

What was the scene there?

29:30 Everybody was so pleased. They all thought they would be home in no time. It was the Kanimbla, a couple of hospital ships were supposed to be in port at the time and everybody was so hopeful that they'd be given the first trip home. And yes.

30:00 Sorry. About that, just before that time they had the preamble to the America's Cup on Morotai. When the bomber planes, the Liberators would go on long distance trips to bomb they generally took a fighter escort to protect them. Now the fighter escort wouldn't have the capacity to hold petrol

30:30 as much as the bombers. So they carried a little tubular looking, like the shape of a bullet I suppose you'd say, a petrol tank underneath them as a spare tank. If they got to their destination and they got in a fight then they'd drop the tank to make their own plane more manoeuvrable. But if they didn't get into a fight or if they felt that they were safe enough,

31:00 then they'd return. They'd use up the petrol on the way home to Morotai and they'd drop off the tanks on Morotai near their landing field. By putting two of those tanks together you could make a kind of catamaran. And so they'd lash two together and they'd put up a mast and a sail and it would be a sailing boat. So, I think it was the 26th,

31:30 after the peace was declared, the 26th of July, they said this is the day for the America's cup. Anybody could enter if they'd like to. But they suggested that you have some sailing experience. Now our fellow, his name was Thompson also. He was a sergeant. And Ecka, Eric, so they called him Eck,

32:00 he'd been sailing up in Brisbane in his day. None of the rest of us ever had. Eck and a couple of fellows put together a catamaran and they had this big sailing race. And they'd mapped out a course from island to island sort of thing around certain islands. But the trouble was that all of them knew how to sail before the wind but very few of them knew how to tack.

32:30 So away they went. Betting was really, the Yanks were very big betters there. They were betting on who would win and out of the eleven boats that took off only four came home before sunset. Ecka was in the fourth one. He was in fourth place. But the others got underway but they didn't know how to come back. So they were spread all around the area in all these islands. And of course

33:00 some of these islands could have been occupied by Japs still. So the Americans spent the next few days in powerboats racing around trying to find them. But to dampen things a little bit, the day before the Americans had this race, our tent mate Eric went into hospital into the troppo ward.

33:30 Now Eric had been with us quite a long time, all through the Tablelands. Except when we went to Balikpapan he went on another ship, but we were back together then on Morotai. I can remember him. He had a hard time in New Guinea because he was one of the chocos. Now the chocos were the chocolate soldiers. They were only agreeable to

34:00 fight anywhere on Australian soil or in Australian territory, protectorates. So they were downgraded, they were made to look less than fighting soldiers. And he and his brother had been up on the Kokoda Trail when the Japs were coming over, and one night, it wasn't a static line, sometimes they'd advance and sometimes

34:30 they'd fall back. But one night Eric took the signal to say that you'd better drop back from up there. The reinforcements in the Jap lines are coming over so come back and we'll consolidate. So he gave the message to the sergeant and then his young brother was also in the same platoon. So he wondered where his young brother was. So he was wondering around calling, "Hey Joe, are you there Joe? Joe?" And everybody seemed

35:00 to fade and the next minute there were Jap voices all around him laughing and shouting, "Joe, Joe, are you there? Joe, Joe." It scared the daylights out of him. He fell back and luckily enough his young brother was back with the main platoon when he got back. In a couple of days they advanced again. They found that the Japanese, they had left a whole lot of food behind in their hurry to get away, the Australians, and they had bayoneted all these tins of bully beef

35:30 that they had to leave them behind. They couldn't carry them, and retreated. When they came back a few days later there were Japanese all around them with these tins of bully beef and they had poisoned themselves. They'd got Tomain poisoning because the bully beef had gone rotten. They were starving. This is one of the reasons why we were so successful on the Owen Stanley's because their line of communication was too long. And they had died there eating the Australian putrid food.

36:00 So Eric had a lot of worries that we, he was a bit older and we younger ones weren't possessed by. One of his worries was his girl down in Victoria in Melbourne. Because he was a really holy fellow. He used to read bits of his bible every day, and it really played on his conscience that when he was down there last they had been intimate,

36:30 and he couldn't reconcile this with his bible studies. And I can remember him saying to me one day, "What would you do, Tommo, if the girl you were making up to suddenly took your hand and put it there?" And of course being Eric I didn't know what to say because anybody else I could have given them some good advice. Being Eric I thought,

37:00 I think I just said, "She doesn't have a younger sister, does she?" Something silly. But he was really worried. So when I went up to see him in the hospital a couple of days later after the American boat race, I went to see him in the hospital and he was still very very worried.

37:30 And he was different, and I said, "What? Are you going to have your little op? He said, "Yes. Haemorrhoids, I've had them ever since I was in New Guinea," and I said, "Well, that's easily done these days. They'll probably fly you south anyway after you've had it." "Yeah," he said, "but that's not all. When they get me on that operating table they're going to whip out my agates at the same time." "Oh, don't be silly,

38:00 all these people around?" But he was convinced that because he'd been in evil ways as he imagined in Melbourne that he deserved punishment, and he believed that somehow they were going to punish him in this way. Before we went very much further, I knew I'd never convince him, the sister came along with the lozenges for all the people in the Troppo ward, and she gave,

38:30 they are like a giant sized jellybean. So she gave them all one at a time and stood their while they drank it down and by the time he'd drunk his down he could hardly, it was a knock-out drop and he could hardly get back into bed under the mosquito net. So I helped him back into bed and tucked him in. Tucked the mosquito net in all around and said to the sister what does she reckon.

39:00 She said, "Well, he really needs that operation badly but he's not in a fit state to go ahead with it at the moment." So they did fly him south in a couple of days. Got him away down south to, and I suppose he went into a troppo ward for a time down there. But this is what it does to some fellows who went through it.

How many blokes were in this troppo ward?

39:30 Oh, there'd be about ten or fifteen I suppose. Just all around, all in beds. So they were big tents, great big tents. The same as the hospital I was in, the 2/5th. They were great big long tents and quite close to the seashore. Almost like here, you could just walk down to the beach without any trouble.

What symptoms were these other troppo cases showing?

I don't know. I didn't talk to any of them, but

40:00 they'd all be very cagey I should think. Unless they knew you they wouldn't want to talk to you. Unless they were ratbags.

We'll just stop there again and change the tape.

Tape 8

00:30 **Before we get to the end of the war, you must have been in Morotai when news of the atomic bomb came through?**

Yes.

What can you tell us about that?

This is when they offered the peace, on the 15th of August I think it was.

Was that the first you'd heard of the bomb on Japan?

Yes, yeah.

What was your reaction, not just to the news of the end of the war, but to the bomb?

Everybody cheered. Everybody thought it was wonderful. Later on the opinion was that

01:00 we were beating them anyway. We were pushing them. With this island hopping instead of having to stay and wait until you defeated a whole island you just took a small part of it. On Morotai we were only on a peninsular, all the mountainous and the bigger part was, so they felt, they jumped the gun but everyone was so happy to think that it was over. But just the same, it was later on that we felt that, when we heard that the Russians

01:30 were also advancing through past China up to the north, to Mongolia, that they thought the Russians would beat them in there and so they had to do something desperate. They had the bomb ready so they decided to drop it and finish it off. But everyone was so happy to think that they had finished it off even though their consciences were smiting them.

Were you aware of that

02:00 **larger plan, the island hopping strategy and MacArthur's [Douglas MacArthur, United States General] plan for the war in the South Pacific when you were involved in it at the time?**

We were, yeah, because we knew that we were only taking part of Morotai and then we'd go on. They'd already taken part of Morotai. There were still the foxholes there that had been burned out with flamethrowers. They'd warn you never go down because there could be booby traps down there still. But this was announced as what they were up to, that

02:30 they wouldn't try to take a whole island any more. They were on their way to get to Japan in a hurry.

How did the Australian troops or the American troops that you were with respond to the idea that maybe those actions weren't completely necessary at the end of the war, the island campaign?

Yeah, you don't get a lot of news and you only get the news that they think is good for you. So

03:00 we wouldn't have been so up with the success. We knew that we were pushing them, well because we were pushing them up through the Pacific. I think we wouldn't have been so much aware of how we stood with it.

Was there ever any talk, as there has been since, that those campaigns were a little bit unnecessary in some respects?

03:30 Not at the time. No. We were not aware of the whole picture at the time. We'd have thought that they would have just pushed on. As I said, we thought we were going to Singapore next.

Did you have visions of yourself having to land in Japan?

No. I never thought I'd get that far.

When you were injured and went to hospital was that disappointing for you? What were your feelings on that at the time?

It was

04:00 disappointing. Also it was disappointing when I visited the fellows back at camp I was all in plaster. I visited the fellows back in camp and I found out that the night the Japs offered on the 15th of August, the night the Japs offered to call and end to the war they'd drunk my ration of beer for the last few weeks. We used to dig a hole in the

04:30 coral. It was coral sand in the bottom of our tents to raise us above the slush, and we had holes dug and the beer in and covered over to keep it cool. But they assured me that they had drunk my health in the meantime. But seeing I was a walking wounded they reckoned I'd probably get back to Australia any day and I'd get all the beer I wanted there. So why not be a sport about it?

05:00 **Was there a beer ration in the hospital on the night of the celebrations?**

No. No beer in the hospital.

Can you tell us about your witnessing the surrender being taken by the Japanese general?

I'll give you the two versions. One version is picked up,

05:30 one version is a leaflet I got over at the War Memorial in Melbourne. This is the version I got from the War Memorial. It says, "Morotai Peninsula 9th of September 1945," and this is Blamey speaking. "I do not recognise you as an honourable and gallant foe,

06:00 but you will be treated with due and severe courtesy. I recall the treacherous attacks at a time when your authorities were making the pretence at ensuring peace. I recall the atrocities inflicted upon prisoners of war and internees. I will enforce most vigorously all orders issued to you. So let there be no hesitation in their fulfilment. Address by General Sir Thomas Blamey, CNC [Commander in Chief] of

06:30 the Australian Army to General Toshima Fusa Tako who came to Morotai to sign the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Forces in the Malacca's and Helmaheras." Well, from what I wrote in my diary

Where did your own account come from, your own diary of the day?

I was there. I was standing by.

Your recollections?

"It was on the 9th of September 1945 that the Japanese commander of their second army,

07:00 representing their forces in the Malacca's and Helmahera areas came to Morotai to hand over his sword and sign the unconditional surrender to the allies. Those of us who were mobile in the hospital walked

down to the corps oval to see the show. Platoons of our troops in full battle dress were lined up to receive him. General Blamey, in full control, sat at a table with the documents for signature before him.

07:30 General Morshead stood by. Soon the Japanese commander was driven up in a jeep by his aid. We could only assume that the Americans had flown him in or brought him into Morotai by boat. Our troops were brought to attention as he arrived. He stepped from the jeep, saluted Blamey, who was obliged to return the salute, and handed over his sword as a token of his defeat. Then he bent over to sign the document of surrender.

08:00 We stood among the wild banana palms and watched from the sidelines. It was all very formal up to this point but when the Japanese stepped back a pace to prepare to retire, Blamey exploded. He was accepting this admission of defeat not from an equal, not from a valiant enemy he told him, but from a member of an inferior cruel race devoid of all normal moral values. The tirade if this abuse was cut short

08:30 by the commander's salute. When an officer is saluted he must turn the salute which Blamey was forced to do. He couldn't bellow and salute at the seme time. The Japanese made a perfect, regimental about face, clicked his heels together, strode to the waiting jeep, stepped aboard and was driven off from our parade ground, perfectly composed, looking neither to the right nor the left, sitting in dignified isolation,

09:00 his back as straight as a poker. In our opinion, and our humble opinion, Blamey had blown it. The Jap had all the composure of a Roman consul calmly observing a barbarian invader sacking his noble city," and so on. So it's slightly different.

It's a very very interesting perspective.

Well, that's what I wrote down anyway, at the time or soon afterwards.

How did you come to be at the ceremony?

09:30 Well, I could walk about the hospital because I only had my arm in plaster. So anything that was going on, I could go and see the fellows back at camp if I could get a lift. Or I could go down along the beach or move about freely. So others were going, they heard about this signing of the treaty, so others were going and we all walked down. It wasn't that far from the 2/5th hospital. We all walked down together

10:00 and stood in the sidelines while the show went on.

And what was the crowd made up of?

All soldiers, and then the platoon of soldiers who stood to attention while the fellow arrived and went away.

What were your, the other troops around you, was their opinion the same as the one that you have just read to us?

I don't know. I mean that's the way I felt, that

10:30 Blamey was not being very gracious in winning. He should have been quite happy to think that we'd won, and you know, not been so tough, but that was Blamey. Morshead didn't say a word. He just stood by. So he had no real part in it really, just to be the, almost like second in command.

What did you know at the time about the Japanese atrocities

11:00 **and the prisoners of war?**

Yes. We did know that they were quite brutal. But then again it was suggested that they treated their own soldiers, the officers did, just the same as they treated out blokes. So that was the Japanese way of life.

What did you see of our treatment, the Australian and American treatment of the Japanese prisoners of war?

I didn't see. On Morotai

11:30 we had these Japanese prisoners that came off the hospital ship, but they were mainly looked after by some Sikhs with their turbans and all. I don't know how the Sikhs happened to get there, part of the British Forces, but they did most of the control of the gaoling of the Japanese. So we'd only see them when they took them out for work parties. I suppose they'd be building

12:00 roads or digging coral sand to put on the roads or the bottoms of tents too. Because it was all slushy and boggy that, we didn't have much of a peninsular, so we used to build up the bottom of your tent with coral sand so you'd be out of the mire.

There were a lot of troops in Morotai who had to wait a considerable amount of time to come home?

12:30 That's right.

What did you do in that period?

Well, I was in hospital right to the last when I was going to come home because at that time I thought I was going to Ambon. So we just hung about, went for walks down the beach. But I think it was at that time I started to realise what an easy time I'd had in the whole war. Here were all these fellows being brought in by

13:00 LSTs, Landing Ship Tanks. They had been brought in from Balikpapan and it was the first time I'd really come close to what the war was all about. I mean there was one fellow just a few beds up from me, old Pop, and he'd been shot in the stomach on mopping up operations. And he fell down flat and lay still for quite a while and there was a tree quite near him

13:30 and he knew which direction the shot had come from by the way he was facing. So he thought if he could just grab that tree and pull himself across a little bit towards that tree he'd be safer. But as soon as he moved there was a second shot. It hit him again. And he did that three times before he decided that he was as good as dead. This bloke, the Japanese waited for him each time as soon as he moved he put a bullet into him. So Pop then

14:00 was lucky to get out. But the smell of him. The sisters would come in each morning to dress his wounds and all of us, if we could walk, we'd leave the ward. The sister would be turning her head away while she was trying to clean him up. The smell was atrocious. Another fellow opposite me was the Snowman, they called him. He was in plaster from his neck to his hips, to his

14:30 bottom, and he'd been shot a number of times and it had broken some of his bones so he had to be in plaster to keep himself together. Fellows would come around who could walk and play cards with him. They'd prop him up on his pillows and he'd try and play these cards like the rest of them. One night he said would they get him down. And he couldn't move himself. He was

15:00 helpless. Would they get him down, he felt a bit faint. And they pulled back the bedclothes to slide him down and he was sitting in a big pool of blood because something had come adrift inside the plaster and they had to race him down to the emergency ward to give him a blood transfusion. Another fellow was a warrant officer. It must have been a come-down in the world for him. Both his hands were shot up from a grenade. And if you

15:30 happened to be out near the toilets in the morning he would call out to you because he couldn't wipe his behind. He would depend on anybody going by to come in and wipe it for him. There was a young Curly next to me, but he was a walking wounded. He wasn't so bad. He was on Morotai, no, Balikpapan, in the mopping up operations and he

16:00 was going along with his rifle and a Jap rushed out of a thicket. Now the Jap had obviously used up all of his ammunition so all he had was a spear that he had made. Just sharpened a long stick. Curly stood facing him and calling out, I suppose, to surrender. Instead of that the Jap rushed for him. Curly had a little automatic rifle and he just let everything he had go into the Japanese but the Jap kept on coming

16:30 till he got right close, threw the spear and fell dead at this feet almost. The spear went through his hand. They'd taken off his middle finger, but he was a walking wounded, he was relatively good. There was a little boy they brought in from the islands, a little native boy, and they brought him in a lacatoi, for four days they'd rowed, because he was on a Japanese island when he picked

17:00 up a grenade. It had blown off one leg and one arm and he was blind and they hoped they'd save the sight in one eye. But he just lay there on the bed or on his back all the time. And at first he thought the sisters were Japanese trying to harm him when they tried of fix up his wounds. He would scream and shout and try to fight until they brought in an

17:30 interpreter who had been through the university up in the Philippines. He could speak three or four different local languages and a couple of European languages as well. He was this big coffee-coloured fellow, they brought him in and he was able to explain to this little boy that these were his friends, they weren't trying to hurt him. They were trying to get him better so he could go home. Well all these, when you're seeing all these other things too,

18:00 you think, well God, I haven't really been right in the war. I've only been looking on really in my job, and how lucky I am. What's going to happen to these fellows after they go home? The maimed and the injured and the blind? What will happen to them when they get back to Australia? Will they still be heroes in ten years time or will that be their problem and nobody will be very worried at all?

What was your reception when you arrived back in Australia?

18:30 I arrived back at Mascot at about seven o'clock in the morning. It was raining. We got off the plane. There wasn't a soul anywhere.

It was a plane?

It was an American Liberator. They had taken out all the bomb bays part, and those of us who were walking were wrapped, we'd been wrapped in our blanket inside the plane. It was freezing cold besides.

19:00 And so we got out of the plane at Mascot and we walked to the terminal, and busses came to take us out

to the hospital at Concord. It was a military hospital.

Was there anyone?

No. Nobody. Nobody came to say good day or wave, or say, “You poor buggers, don’t you look miserable,” or anything. No, no reception.

How did that make you feel then, to be home but not to be welcomed?

19:30 I felt that I was wishing at that time that I was back with Bullocky and Twivy back on Ambon. That’s the first thing that came into my mind when I got off that plane. I thought, here I am, not trained for anything, twenty-two years old now. I’m an old man and what hope is there for the future now. So I wasn’t really pleased.

How long did that sort of disappointment last?

Oh, not long.

20:00 **What was the thing that got rid of it for you?**

Well I went to see my relatives first of all, and then a few of the other fellows came back. We got together again and we used to go down town and have a few drinks. So it did pass. I did get used to being back, and pleased to be back, pleased to be back in one hundred percent condition.

How was it to see your parents and family again?

Oh, they couldn’t believe that I was back because you never

20:30 could indicate anything you were doing like that in those days. I wouldn’t have known anyway until the day before I flew out of Morotai. But you couldn’t. All your mail was, not ciphered?

Censored?

Censored is the word, yes. So all your mail all through the war would be censored so you couldn’t say too much.

21:00 **What was the first moment you saw them again?**

Well, I went out to Homebush and I was so pleased to be walking down the station from North Strathfield to the part of Homebush where my grandmother lived. There was a wonderful smell of Arnott’s Biscuits backing. Arnott’s was a great big factory in those days, an Australian biscuit factory. And this was really like coming home, this smell of biscuits again

21:30 which I’d smelt for many a year coming and going to my Grandmother’s place. But I wasn’t right out of the army at that stage. I had to go to Middle Head, first of all over near Parramatta and that was a great spot for a sig because there were all, two of us I think. Two fellows

22:00 and about fifty AWAS. So we had a real happy, I think that might have snapped us out of any despondency, all these eager girls to make you life happier. And then of course to Middle Head to help in the orderly room with the people who were being taken out of the army, who had been in longest. It was a case of first in,

22:30 first out. So you had to wait your turn. And I was an orderly room clerk there to assist with people getting out.

Were any of the AWAS as eager as she who tormented your friend Eric?

Not obviously. No.

Was that a good time for you?

Except that I can remember

23:00 tossing a coin with the donah and he won and he went to hospital with the jack in the following week. So they were friendly, yes.

Were you happy to be in the army or were you anxious to get out at that stage?

Oh yes, I was anxious to get out but then again having stayed in so long I couldn’t pick up my teachers college scholarship until the

23:30 following year. That was 1948. I spent a year, not doing very much. I took a job gardening at one stage to fill in time because I missed the early part of the year, so I had to wait till the following year to start teachers college. After that as soon as I finished teacher’s college

24:00 Margaret and I were married, and first of all we went to the Hern Bay housing settlement. That was an old American Army, really they were hospitalised people. It was an American Hospital at Hern Bay. It was supposed to be up the north coast somewhere at Herm Bay but they said they made a mistake and put it there instead. So

24:30 the people were just rushed in after the war was over and the Americans went home. There were all these empty huts so people just flocked there and took over for somewhere to live because all the years of the war they hadn't been building new houses or new flats and when the soldiers all came home and their wives said, "We can't go on living with Mum and Dad forever, what are we going to do?" So they started looking for alternative accommodation and

25:00 they flocked down to Hern Bay. So the next thing they wanted to use one of the huts for a school. So my wife went there for a start for one year and then the following year, when I had finished teacher's college, I went there and that's where we started teaching. They were great little kids too. I can remember some of them still after many a year, '49 it was.

How well did you adjust from

25:30 **being in that regimented situation in the army to just coming out and being in teacher's college, being a teacher, being a married man?**

I think pretty well because there were a whole crowd of boys from Hurlstone who had already been in the army or the air force and they were at teacher's college when I was there, so we had a wide group there of friendly fellows that we knew so well and it made things easier.

26:00 **How did you take to married life?**

Very easily. Although it was hard getting accommodation in those days. We lived in several sub-standard flats and in really restricted areas, and they were hardly flats. In one case, the first case, it was just a veranda closed in at one place, and sometimes you'd have to share the accommodation because they didn't have much new giving out.

26:30 So it was hard enough in that respect but we were quite happy in ourselves, the two of us. We built our own house then. It was still Hern Bay. We built our house on the other side of the railway line over towards Peakhurst. And after ten years, I went to Uni at night then, just to get a degree,

27:00 and after ten years in that area we went out west to a little town out in the Pilliga Scrub called Baradine, and I was principal there for five years. And it only went up to the intermediate, and I was a little bit stressed there. They sent me out as principal so I had to make the best of things. I had to teach

27:30 the senior years in maths and biology, which I knew very little about either of them. So it was a case of read it all up in the book the night before and then go along the next day and teach it because my other secondary teacher, she could only teach English and history. She knew nothing about the rest of it and neither did I but

28:00 I had to go her way to keep her happy. So after ten years then we came down to Nowra. First of all to Nowra High School and then Bomaderry High School, and five years before we retired we built our little house out at Maroo Meadow. That's half way between Berry and Nowra, a little farming area, and went in for breading angora goats

28:30 which was a very pleasant way of life because the mohair price, the French were buying all our mohair at that stage and the prices were good. But when the prices went down we sold off our stud and then we went in for cattle and then for sheep. And that's out situation at present.

You were teaching for a long time? What was it that made you a good teacher?

I don't know if I was a good teacher.

29:00 **What made you able to stick at it for so long?**

Yeah. With a family you think it's my income and as they get older, when a lot of people say, "I would have jumped out at that stage," they are going to have to go to university, each of them. They all went. So you think if I get out at this stage, what will I take on? The steady

29:30 income is just about all that gets you in. It's not a case of it's a wonderful job. It's a case of a hard working job because there is so much that you do outside the school hours. It's not just a nine to three job.

Did the feeling you had when you got off the plane at Mascot ever recur, that maybe you'd had your youth stolen from you?

No, I don't think so. No, I lost contact with all those fellows in 12 Light Wireless

30:00 because most of them were Queenslanders. The only fellow from New South Wales is dead, and there were two fellows from Tasmania and a couple of fellows from Victoria. So I had no close contact with them once the war was over.

Was there ever a feeling in your career later on that maybe you'd had some good years of your life taken away from you?

Oh, yes. There was too.

30:30 **And how did that make you feel?**

Well, it was just bad luck. I couldn't do anything about it. That was life. You did feel that others who had not had to, because of their age perhaps, who had not had to go through that, would have had better advantages in life in the same profession as you had. People who had perhaps rapid promotion because

31:00 of their youth. You felt that you were still slowed up from the war years, that you weren't functioning as well as you might. So you did feel a little bit resentful I suppose.

What other ways did those war years come in and come up in your later life?

Well I joined the RSL of course and in later years in Nowra, ever since we've been in Nowra,

31:30 which is about '46 onwards. No, wait a minute, no, that's jumping the gun, '65, from '65 onwards I've been in Legacy, but I've just retired. On reaching the age of eighty I've retired from legacy. But helping

32:00 war widows, widows whose husbands had been in the war and who could talk with you on a family basis. I helped them for all those years then, while we've been in Nowra until I turned eighty this year. So I thought it's about time to give up and let the younger fellows from Vietnam take over, which they are doing fine. Doing a great job

32:30 because they are so much younger than all the oldies. They are able to handle it well.

How do you feel about, well for example Vietnam? The wars since the Second World War?

Well, I just wonder whether Australia's place is there. Should we really have been expected to go?

33:00 Because where the Japs, not the Japs, the Vietnamese from the north, were they going to keep coming? They had the domino theory that if they toppled each nation in turn they'd keep on coming until they were knocking on our door. But you can't help wondering whether that was so, whether we were really needed. Just the same as you can't help wondering whether it was essential that

33:30 we go to Iraq. Was it just a desire to please America because we wanted a trade agreement at that particular time? We needed a trade agreement, free trade was talked about. Did we say, well, we must stick to America if we are to be big trading neighbours in the years to come? So you wonder about that too.

34:00 **Does this ever give you cause to think about the war that you took part in? I mean this was supposed to be, at the very end, that this would end war for a long time, but it didn't work out that way. How does that make you feel?**

No. Well, they said that the same as World War I. It was the war to end all wars. But we've always had wars, I think, and the old Japanese for instances, did they feel any different when they believed they deserved to have an empire and spread across into China

34:30 and down as far as, for instance, they've been arguing about their oil rights in Timor right from 1931, I've read somewhere. The Japanese wanted to cash in on the oil wells in Timor because the Americans and the Britains and the Australians and the Dutch were all making a lot of money in Timor. And the Japanese said, "Well why not us? Everybody else has colonies and empires to get their raw materials.

35:00 It's now our turn."

How do you feel about the nation you went to war for and the ideals behind that?

Australia?

In the years that you've seen it change since?

Well no, at the time I really believed that the Japs were going to keep on coming. It was Australia's war. See I was still at high school when they were fighting in Europe so that didn't concern me really. But

35:30 after 1942 when they bombed Darwin in February it was really our problem. If they kept coming then we would be in trouble. So yes, I think we felt then that we were justified in going to war.

And how do you feel about the nation that you ended up protecting? What has happened to it since then?

Well, I think it is the greatest nation in the world, Australia. I don't think you'd get better

36:00 conditions anywhere in the world. And the way we have so many groups of people who are prepared to spend their time for comforts of some kind for other in Australia, it's amazing. I wonder sometimes if the same can be applied to any other country. Every week there is some charity asking for funds for someone to help them

36:30 out.

You've seen that country change a lot I'm sure in your lifetime?

I have, yes.

How do you feel about that, about those changes?

You wonder just how far they can go. Because in the past twenty years the way technology has changed, what would it be like? It's sort of a creeping thing but it's going on and on. What will it be like in even ten years the way it,

37:00 the galloping process we've got?

This brings me to the last question that we've asked everybody we've put in this archive. The idea about it is to put it ahead for this future. How do you feel about this future and is there anything you could say to someone who might be watching this in a hundred years time?

No. I don't think it will be better. I think our legal system, for instance, over the last

37:30 twenty years, we'll let's say twenty just as a rough estimate, it's being eased in favour of the criminal and I suppose this will happen to other parts of our society, that other things will be changing so rapidly. It seems to be all out of focus.

38:00 The people who are getting huge handouts from the legal system for things that have happened to them and so often it's their own fault. It's not the fault of say, the employer or other people or other companies. It's their own fault and yet the employer is being fined. So I think that's just one example of how things have changed over the last twenty years, that everybody

38:30 is out to get compensation for something.

Is there anything, maybe a message that you've learned over your life experience in this last century, that might be of use to someone in the future? It's a difficult one.

It is a difficult one. I'd say be tolerant and don't jump to conclusions too quickly until you know all the facts.

39:00 It's easy to fly off the handle and make a quick decision without seeing here it's going to lead you. So be cautious.

That's a very good point to end it on. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much.

It's been a pleasure meeting you.

My pleasure.

We'll stop the tape.